

A HISTORY OF THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

BY

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Preface

THE present work is partly based on a series of articles that I contributed to the *British Weekly* at the close of last year and the beginning of this, under the title of *Darby and Darbyism*. Perhaps about half the matter of the articles has been incorporated in the book, and the book is about three times as long as the whole of the articles. Readers of the *British Weekly* may therefore count on finding about five-sixths of this work fresh matter.

In the articles, enough narrative was supplied to make the description intelligible. In the book these relations are precisely reversed. An entirely fresh study of all the materials for the history, so far as they have proved accessible, (and the author has had *comparatively* few disappointments), has been made. I am not aware of any previous attempt to thoroughly sift and harmonise them.

Indeed, this book has one great advantage: it takes the field without rivals. No general history of the Plymouth movement has ever been undertaken. In introducing my articles, I argued that there was room for them in the midst of an already voluminous literature; but the plea is now superfluous. Yet it may be worth while to repeat some illustrations that I then gave of a general ignorance of Brethrenism, curiously out of keeping with the interest that it excites.

“A standard work, eminently learned and candid—I refer to Mr. Julian’s Dictionary of Hymnology—contains in its article on Plymouth Brethren Hymnody the following extraordinary assertion: ‘The [hymn] books put forth since the rupture in 1848 contain . . . a selection . . . for the unconverted,’ *i.e.*, those who are not in full communion with themselves’. Now, though this is not by any means the only error in the article, the writer has, on the whole, more knowledge of the subject than [many] who have written on it, and he evidently makes his statement with a good faith equal to his confidence. Yet nothing can be more certain than that it is a very great, and indeed totally groundless calumny upon the Brethren, who have (with some absolutely insignificant exceptions) always used the term ‘unconverted’ according to immemorial evangelical custom.

“Add to this instance of what we might call a learned error, a single instance of the commoner class of popular errors. I have seldom, I think, conversed with any one not intimately acquainted with the Brethren, but what I have found that he understood Open Brethren to be so called because they admit Christians who are not ‘Brethren’ to the communion table, and Exclusive Brethren to have earned their title by the exclusion of all who did not belong to their own sect.”

It will be seen that I have been very sparing of references to my authorities. This has been partly due to a belief that my readers will in most cases share my dislike to a text encumbered with notes; but partly also to the peculiarities of the special case. The great majority of the authorities are now inaccessible to most readers. I have consulted scores of tracts that very few people could possibly procure. Besides those in my own possession, or in possession of my relatives, very many have come under my inspection through the courtesy of friends with whom my articles had brought me into correspondence. To one correspondent, whose connexion with the Brethren dates back to 1845, I am under obligations that I find it quite impossible to adequately acknowledge. Not only has he placed at my disposal a set of tracts that is, I should suppose, almost unrivalled for the period 1845-70, but he has taken the greatest pains to clear up, by the help of private correspondence, various obscurities that I have submitted to him. For the later period, my own resources have been very ample.

Instead of constant references, I have furnished at the end of the book a sufficient bibliography, chronologically classified. In one or two instances only, I have mentioned books that I have not succeeded in consulting. On the other hand, I have omitted very many

that I have not found of much service, and on the sole authority of which I have stated nothing.

There is a class of possible readers that might be led by my name into the very erroneous impression that I had largely drawn on my father's longer, and yet more intimate, personal acquaintance with Darbyism. Indirectly, this is inevitably the case; directly, it is not so at all. From the time that I first contemplated going into print on the subject of Brethrenism, I have advisedly and scrupulously abstained from consulting my father on any point. I believe there is no exception whatever to this statement, except for two details, *both purely doctrinal*, on which I obtained his opinion as to the teaching of standard Darbyite divinity; and, even in those cases, I gave him no hint of my object. I say this, because I have no right to claim his authority for anything I have written; and yet more because it would be most unjust to him to allow an impression to grow up in any mind that he has some responsibility in connexion with a book of which he has not seen a word (barring, of course, quotations), and with a good deal of which he probably would not wholly agree.

To avoid confusion, will the reader kindly take note that whenever the italics in a quotation are my own, and not those of the author quoted, I have invariably said so. The omission of a statement to that effect always implies that the italics were in the original.

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I The Beginnings Of Brethrenism—The Dublin Movement

TWELVE years ago Dr. Alexander, the present Primate of Ireland, described the warfare of his own church in the following remarkable terms: “The hill up which our little host must march is steep, and the hail beats in our faces. We hear the steady tramp of the serried ranks of Rome round us; the shout of the marauders of Plymouth rises, as they, ever and anon, cut off a few stragglers. We draw close, and grip our muskets harder.”¹ Who and what then are these “marauding” Christians that have the honour to be, by so august an authority, in some sense coordinated with the dominant ecclesiastical power of the country in respect of the apprehension with which the Church of Ireland regards them? It is the aim of the present work to furnish an adequate answer to this question.

But aside entirely from the part that they play in current controversies, the Plymouth Brethren have very strong claims on the notice of the student of contemporary church history. Developing side by side with the three great ecclesiastical movements of the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century, Brethrenism was linked with them all—with the Evangelical, with the High Church, and, strange as it may seem, even to some extent with the Broad Church—by important affinities; and yet it retained unimpaired the intense individuality impressed on it almost from the first by one powerful genius; and it challenges attention now as furnishing a fourth independent conception of the Church—a conception which, comparatively narrow as the extent of its acceptance may be, does nevertheless, by the immense force of its intensive influence, deserve consideration side by side with its more famous competitors.

It is no doubt correct to speak of the Brethren as a small sect, in a relative sense; but this, so far from diminishing the importance of their history, greatly enhances it. The quotation that stands at the beginning of this chapter is in itself a witness that there has been something about Brethrenism that effectually distinguishes it from the multitude of the small sects. Mr. Croskery’s inference² that it will be short-lived because Sandemanism, Walkerism and Kellyism³ sank soon after their rise is a most precarious argument, if indeed it does not stand already refuted. It is no doubt just possible that the movement is now destined to a comparatively speedy extinction, but the whole course of its history, or even the hastiest calculation of its past and present influence, must suffice to show the worthlessness of the analogy on which Mr. Croskery relied. To apply a very simple test, which of all the smaller sects of Christendom has enrolled amongst its enthusiastic adherents such a company (to limit ourselves to men that are gone) as John Nelson Darby and Francis William Newman, George Müller and Anthony Norris Groves, Benjamin Wills Newton and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles?

In yet another respect special interest attaches to the story of the Brethren. On their narrow stage there are few of the tendencies of universal church history that have not been illustrated, and not many of its movements that have not been reenacted in little. The Brethren sought to effect a fresh start without authority, precedent, or guidance beyond the letter of Holy Scripture. For them, essentially, the garnered experience of eighteen Christian centuries was as though it were not. Such an experiment in the hands of eminent men could scarcely fail to yield a considerable harvest of interest and instruction; and it has actually shed, if I mistake not, a flood of light on many of the obscurities and incredibilities of the history of the Church.

¹ *Verbum Crucis*, p.161.

² *Plymouth Brethrenism* (1878), p. 164.

³ The party of Irish Christians following Thomas Kelly, the well-known hymn writer and evangelist. “Kellyism” is sometimes used in connexion with the later history of the Brethren in quite a different sense.

The origins of Brethrenism are not perhaps particularly obscure; at all events, the materials for elucidating them are fairly copious. But the subject has been perplexed by the efforts of prejudiced controversialists. On the one hand, there has been a very natural tendency on the part of the adherents of the movement to invest its first days with the glories of a heroic age, and to magnify the heroes by assigning to individual light and energy a far greater and more decisive part than the ascertained facts at all warrant us in doing. This has even been pushed to the length of claiming the honours of at least a virtual foundership for Darby. On the other hand, by an equally natural reaction, it has been stated far too broadly and absolutely that Brethrenism was formed by the slow aggregation of a large number of little meetings which, quite independently of each other, had lighted almost simultaneously on the same principles of Christian communion and worship. That there is a good deal of truth in this view is sufficiently proved, even if there were no other evidence, by the exceedingly unsuspecting testimony of several of Darby's personal adherents; but it is easy to allow it undue weight in discounting the value of individual initiative.

It is evident that, whatever the number of such little meetings may have been in the years between 1825 and 1832, only three of them—those of Dublin, Plymouth and Bristol—figure in the later history of the Brethren, and that no others can safely be presumed to have contained any power of propagation, or even any element of permanence. Now it will become clear as we proceed that the movement, whether at Plymouth or at Bristol, was not only considerably later than the movement in Dublin, but is to be more or less directly affiliated to it. Dublin must therefore be regarded as the place whence proceeded the great impulse without which Brethrenism, as a definite ecclesiastical system, would, for anything we can see, never have been.

But even if we limit ourselves for the moment to Dublin, we are still confronted by conflicting claims. Three names at least have been put forward in answer to the question, who was the founder, ostensible or virtual, of the new school. These are the names of A. N. Groves, J. G. Bellett and J. N. Darby. In addition to these, the name of Edward Cronin ought to have found some supporters, as his claim is at any rate much better than Darby's. To present a sketch of the development of the new ideas in the mind of each of these leaders in turn will perhaps be the simplest way of clearing up the point.

Anthony Norris Groves was born in the early part of the year 1795, at Newton, Hampshire. He acquired in London an excellent training as a dentist, and was able to support himself by his profession when he was only nineteen. From Plymouth, where he first practised, he soon removed to Exeter and became exceedingly prosperous. From the age of twenty he determined to be a missionary, but the opposition of his wife, whom he married in 1816, kept the project for a long time in abeyance. It was revived about the year 1825 with her full concurrence. Not long before this they had decided to devote their whole property to God, in the sense, apparently, that they should live on a minimum, save nothing, and give away the balance of an annual income of about £1,500. Groves published in this year a tract entitled *Christian Devotedness*, in which it would seem he taught this line of conduct as a plain evangelical duty. This tract engaged the warm sympathy of Dr. Morrison, the eminent pioneer of Protestant missions in China, and exercised a momentous influence on the celebrated Dr. Duff of Calcutta.

A visit from Edward Bickersteth, of the Church Missionary Society, in July, 1825, finally determined Groves to abandon his profession and qualify as an ordained missionary.⁴

⁴ *Memoir of A. N. Groves*, pp. 12, 13, 32. Miller's inability to fix the date (*The Brethren*, p. 23) is due to oversight. His suggestion of so late a date as March, 1827, throws his account of the relation of Groves with the early Brethren into confusion.

With this end in view he entered Trinity College, Dublin, as a fellow-commoner, probably in 1825.⁵

Groves never resided in Dublin, but availed himself of the privilege that Trinity College, unlike the old English universities, allowed, of merely coming up for examination term by term. On these visits, he consorted, apparently from the first, with certain Christians who met together to promote their mutual edification by the study of Scripture and by prayer. Professor Stokes treats these little gatherings as some of “the drawing-room meetings for prayer and study of the Scriptures, which even still take the place of lighter amusements in a somewhat extensive circle in the Irish metropolis, and which were then quite the rage with all serious minds”. Whether this identification is wholly correct, or whether, as Groves’ Memoir states, the friends he found in Dublin were men who already, “with him, desired to see more devotedness to Christ and union among all the people of God,” and were in the habit of meeting more or less definitely “to promote these objects,”—it seems clear that Groves soon led his own company to take a very significant step in advance. The circumstance is related in his Memoir on the authority of his friend, Miss Bessy Paget, a lady afterwards well known among the early Brethren. She had accompanied Groves to Dublin in the spring of 1827.⁶ At one of the social meetings for edification, apparently before the company had dispersed, J. G. Bellett made this statement to her: “Groves has just been telling me, that it appeared to him from Scripture, that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ were free to break bread together, as their Lord had admonished them; and that, in as far as the practice of the apostles could be a guide, every Lord’s Day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord’s death, and obeying his parting command”. “This suggestion of Mr. Groves,” continues his biographer, “was immediately carried out by himself and his friends in Dublin.”

The extraordinary part of it all is that at this time Groves described himself as a “high churchman”. It must of course be borne in mind that the term was used then with a very different meaning from that with which we are now familiar; still, Groves himself illustrates it by saying that he was “so high a churchman” that he “never went to a dissenting place of worship, nor intimately knew a dissenter, except Bessy and Charlotte [Paget]”. His views had no doubt been undergoing a process of modification in Dublin. “From my first going to Dublin,” he writes, “many of my deep-rooted prejudices gave way. I saw those strongly marked distinctions that exist in England little regarded; the prevalence of the common enemy, Popery, joined all hands together.” Still he returned from the momentous visit in

⁵ Professor Stokes (*Contemporary Review*, October, 1885, article “Darby”) says, “about 1825”. A correspondent (H. W. P.) in the *British Weekly* of January 17, 1901 (p. 373), objecting to the influence assigned to Groves in the foundation of Brethrenism, asserted that Groves did not enter Trinity College, Dublin, before 1827, when he was enabled to do so by “a legacy of £12,000 to his wife having set him free from a lucrative business to seek Holy Orders”. The reference is clearly to the fortune that Mrs. Groves came into at her father’s death in March of that year. If H. W. P. will undertake the task of arranging chronologically the mass of information contained in the opening chapters of the *Memoir of A. N. Groves* he will ascertain that Groves had *closed* his connexion with Trinity College as a *fellow-commoner* some time before his father-in-law’s death; that he carried on his professional practice for a time concurrently with his reading for his degree; and that he broke off his connexion with Trinity College entirely in the summer of 1827. The early chapters of the *Memoir* are certainly very badly arranged, but a careful study of them, however laborious, is indispensable to any one who undertakes to dogmatise on the connexion of Groves with the beginnings of Brethrenism.

⁶ Stokes assigns the incident to 1826, but this is not correct. Groves expressly states (*Memoir*, p. 40) that it was on his return from this visit that Miss Paget induced him to take up evangelistic work at Poltimore. In a letter to Caldecott, under date August 8, 1827 (*Memoir*, p. 45), he speaks of this as having happened “since I last wrote”. Now a letter to the same correspondent is published bearing date April 2, 1827 (p.19). But in the summer of 1827 Groves failed to put in an appearance in Dublin, under circumstances that will shortly be related; and he never went there afterwards as a student. We therefore seem shut up to an Easter visit in 1827.

question with a rigidity of churchmanship strangely at variance with the revolutionary mood in which we should have expected to find him.

“On my return with our dearest B., she proposed to me to take charge, on Sundays, of her little flock at Poltimore. I cannot, perhaps, convey to you the repugnance I had; first, because I really disapproved on principle; and, secondly, because I saw that it would stand in the way of my procuring ordination; yet it worked on my mind till I could not but go; and I went. . . . Yet I only allowed this going to Poltimore as a particular exception, in consequence of the notorious inadequacy of the clergyman there. I had never yet gone near a dissenting place of worship.”

In the summer of 1827⁷ Groves’ connexion with Trinity College was broken off. His narrative of the circumstances is very important for the light that it throws on the working of his mind at this period.

“Mr. T., of Calcutta, asked me, ‘Why are you wasting your time, in going through college, if you intend going to the East?’ My reply was, that if I returned disabled, I should be able to minister in England; and here the matter ended. As we walked home, Mary [Mrs. Groves] said, ‘Don’t you think there is great force in Mr. T.’s question?’ I said, ‘I thought there was, but not so great as to prevent my going that time’ On Sunday morning, about three o’clock, we were awoken by the noise of something falling. . . . On proceeding into the dining-room, I found the candles lit, as they had been left the preceding evening, and my little drawers broken open, all my papers scattered about the room, and my money gone. As I was returning upstairs, I met dearest M. in the hall, and said, ‘Well, my love, the thieves have been here, and taken all the money’. ‘And now,’ she said, ‘you won’t go to Dublin.’ ‘No,’ I replied, ‘that I won’t’—and we spent one of the happiest Sundays I ever recollect, in thinking on the Lord’s goodness, in so caring for us as to stop our way up, when He does not wish us to go. Some thought it right; others thought it foolish; it mattered not to us, we had not a doubt it was of the Lord.”

His mind was evidently moving rapidly in its new direction. Little time elapsed before he had definitely renounced all thought of ordination in the Church of England. His friend, Mr. Hake, asked him if he did not “hold war to be unlawful”. The answer was affirmative. “He then further asked,” says Groves, “how I could subscribe that article which declares, ‘It is lawful for Christian men to take up arms at the command of the civil magistrate’. It had till that moment never occurred to me. I read it; and replied, ‘I never would sign it’; and thus ended my connexion with the Church of England, as one about to be ordained in her communion.”

His churchmanship died slowly. “I was still,” he tells us, “so far attached to the Church of England, that I went to London, to arrange my going out as a layman, for the Church Missionary Society; but as they would not allow me to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, when no other minister was near, it came to nothing. My mind was then in great straits; for I saw not yet my liberty of ministry to be from Christ alone, and felt some ordination to be necessary, but hated the thought of being made a sectarian. *But, one day the thought was brought to my mind, that ordination of any kind to preach the gospel is no requirement of Scripture. To me it was the removal of a mountain. I told dearest M. my discovery and my joy;*

⁷ This date is clear from two circumstances taken in conjunction: his letter to Caldecott on November 12, 1827; and his statements (pp. 41-2) that the next visit after that which he missed would have been nine months later, and that he was to have taken his degree “the following Easter”.

⁸ she received it as a very little thing—indeed she had received the truth in such power, that she seemed only to desire to know the mind of God, that she might fulfil it. . . . From that moment, I have myself never had a doubt of my own liberty in Christ to minister the word; and in my last visit to Dublin I mentioned my views to dear Mr. Bellett and others.”

Bellett has left on record, as may be seen below, the extraordinary sensation that the communication of Groves’ discovery occasioned him. To us, whether we think Groves right or wrong, his new point of view has become so familiar that we have difficulty in entering ever so little into the feelings of those to whom it came as a flash of supernatural illumination. This immense disparity between our feelings and theirs is, in great part, a measure of the influence that Plymouth Brethrenism has exercised.

The friend over whom Groves had twice cast so powerful a spell was much the most important figure in the Dublin movement, so far at least as residents there were concerned. We proceed to trace briefly his story.

John Gifford Bellett was born in Dublin on the 19th of July, 1795, and was thus a few months younger than Groves. He was educated at the Grammar School, Exeter, where Sir William Follett, the brilliant lawyer, Attorney-General under Sir Robert Peel’s second administration, was his schoolfellow and friend. At school he gave promise of no small scholarship, and in the early part of his career at Trinity College, Dublin, he carried off the classical prize from all his contemporaries. After this he did little. “It is likely,” according to his brother, the Rev. George Bellett, “that the strong religious feelings which he afterwards, through God’s mercy, so deeply imbibed, may not only have made him indifferent to honours of this sort, but have caused him to look upon them as unlawful.”

When Bellett was about two and twenty a clergyman of the name of Kearney was appointed to the parish in which the country house of the Bellett family was situated, and the young men, to their father’s intense displeasure, came deeply under their new pastor’s influence. George Bellett describes Kearney as “thoroughly unworldly—not a tinge of the world seemed to soil him, nor a desire for the honour which cometh from men to affect him”. It is easy enough to recognise such an influence throughout the whole of John Bellett’s career.

John subsequently studied law in London, where he was deeply impressed by Henry Martyn’s Life, and where also he found his Christian sympathies widened by intercourse with a devout Congregational minister, West of Chigwell. Returning to Dublin about 1822, he was called to the bar, but he does not seem to have practised much, if at all. Probably he was under no necessity in the matter, and his attention was becoming thoroughly preoccupied with religious interests.

His ties to the Church of England were, for a man of his peculiarly fervent family affections, many and strong. Both his brothers were in Anglican orders; and his only sister was married to a clergyman. Nevertheless, he was gradually moving towards a very different standpoint. I can find no definite landmark in the journey earlier than Groves’ suggestion as to the observance of the Lord’s Supper in 1827. The first reference to Darby occurs in a letter dated January 31, 1827. Bellett was afterwards wont to say, “If I deserve any credit it is that I early discerned what there was in John Darby”. Indeed, Bellett was probably the great link between Darby and the Dublin movement in its earliest days.

The study of unfulfilled prophecy was a prominent feature of the movement from the first; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that it was one of the main foundations of the whole system. Bellett had his interest in the subject greatly enlarged during a visit to London in the beginning of 1828, of which he communicated the results to Darby, only to find that Darby’s “mind and soul had travelled rapidly” in the same direction. As Darby still remained in his Wicklow curacy, Bellett found his chief Dublin friend in Francis Hutchinson, with

⁸ The italics are mine.

whom he visited some of the Dissenting chapels. They preferred however the ministry of the Established Church, and still “held on” to it “loosely”.

Then, towards the close of 1828, Groves paid his last visit to Dublin before his departure for Bagdad, and for the second time made a suggestion that marked an epoch in his friend’s life. Bellett has given the following account of the incident.

“Walking one day with him, as we were passing down Lower Pembroke Street, he said to me: ‘This I doubt not is the mind of God concerning us—we should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or ministry, but trusting that the Lord would edify us together by ministering as He pleased and saw good from the midst of ourselves’. At the moment he spoke these words, I was assured my soul had got the right idea; and that moment I remember as if it were but yesterday, and could point you out the place. It was the birthday of my mind, dear J——, may I so speak, as a brother” (*i.e.*, obviously, as a Plymouth Brother).

We proceed to trace to the same point the progress of the mind of that extraordinary man who, more than all his associates put together, stamped the whole movement with his personal impress, and to whom is due almost all the interest with which it has been invested, whether for the general public or for the philosophical enquirer.

John Nelson Darby was born in November, 1800. He was therefore a few weeks younger than Macaulay, and about three months older than Cardinal Newman. London was his birthplace, and “he was thus by accident of English birth, but otherwise was thoroughly Irish”. He came “of a highly honourable family”. His father was John Darby of Markley, Sussex, and of Leap Castle, King’s County, Ireland. From Westminster School, where he received his early education, he proceeded to Trinity College, Dublin, which is thus as much the academic parent of Plymouth Brethrenism, as Oxford of the Evangelical revival a hundred years earlier. He entered at Dublin “as a fellow-commoner at the age of fifteen, and graduated there as Classical Gold Medallist, when little more than eighteen years old [he was in fact nearer nineteen], in the summer of 1819”. Though called, like Bellett, to the Irish bar, he soon abandoned the profession, and accepted ordination to a Wicklow curacy. Archbishop Magee ordained him deacon in 1825, and priest in 1826.⁹

Darby passed through the experience of a very High Churchman. He relates that he at one time earnestly disowned the name of Protestant. “I looked for the Church. . . . I too, governed by a morbid imagination, thought much of Rome, and its professed sanctity, and catholicity, and antiquity.” Elsewhere he says, “I know the system [Puseyism]. I knew it and walked in it years before Dr. Newman, as I learn from his book, thought on the subject; and when Dr. Pusey was not heard of. I fasted in Lent so as to be weak in body at the end of it; ate no meat on week-days—nothing till evening on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, then a little bread, or nothing; observed strictly the weekly fasts too. I went to my clergyman always if I wished to take the Sacrament, that he might judge of the matter. I held apostolic succession fully, and the channels of grace to be there only. I held thus Luther and Calvin and their followers to be outside. I was not their judge, but I left them to the uncovenanted mercies of God. I searched with earnest diligence into the evidences of apostolic succession in England, and just saved their validity for myself and my conscience. The union of Church and State I held to be Babylonish, that the Church ought to govern itself, and that she was in bondage, but was the Church.”¹⁰

⁹ These facts are largely given on the authority of Professor G. T. Stokes, *Contemporary Review*, October, 1885. This article is by far the best single authority I know for the early Irish movement as a whole, especially in its relations with Irish ecclesiastical life generally.

¹⁰ *Analysis of Newman’s Apologia*, Edition 1891, pp. 3, 31.

I doubt if Darby took orders in this state of mind. It is clear from his correspondence¹¹ that he passed through some great crisis of belief in 1825, and it is a plausible conjecture that a remarkable accession of spiritual light, as he deemed, led him to seek ordination. However that may be, Bellett considered him still “a very exact Churchman”; and in his first tract he takes his stand at the point where extreme Evangelicalism and extreme High Churchmanship join hands in the intensity of their common anti-Erastianism. This point remained throughout his life the pivot of Darby’s ecclesiastical position.

The circumstances in which this paper appeared have been often described. The following account is taken from Professor Stokes’ article.

“The Archbishop [Magee] delivered a charge, and the clergy published a declaration addressed to Parliament denouncing the Roman Catholic Church, and claiming special favour and protection for themselves on avowedly Erastian principles. They based their demands simply on the ground that Romanism was opposed to the State, while their own system was allied with, if not even subservient to, it. Darby’s mind revolted against such a miserably low, unspiritual view of the Church. He drew up, therefore, and circulated privately a very vigorous protest against the action of the clergy, a sufficiently courageous step for a young curate of two years’ standing. . . . It is a very interesting document when read in the light of subsequent events, and explains the intensely Erastian tone in the Church of that day, of which the early Tractarian writers so bitterly complained, and against which they so persistently struggled. Darby’s protest was unavailing. The Establishment was everything to Churchmen of that time, the Church of God was nothing regarded, and Darby’s soul was vexed thereat.”

Magee followed up the Charge and the Petition to Parliament by imposing the oaths of allegiance and supremacy on all converts from Romanism within his diocese. “It is,” said Darby in his remonstrance, “on the part of the Clergy a natural consequence of the Charge and Petition; for if they propose themselves as candidates for the favour of the civil government, in order to obtain its protection, and then seek for its aid in the character in which they have proposed themselves, it is at once their interest, and I must add, their obligation to support its interests in their ministry, and bind others to the same system: but how will this consist with their duty to Christ, and the souls which He has purchased with His own blood, and gathering them for Him?”

The words that immediately follow show how far Darby had advanced beyond his earlier High Churchmanship.

“Further the admission [of Roman Catholic converts] is *‘into the true Catholic Church, established in these realms’*. This ends in the same thing; for, instead of bringing them to graft them into the vine, the liberty and security of Christ, to pledge their souls to that which (if the civil Sovereign should choose wrong) would be Popery, and is in fact a denial of union with Christ being the vital principle and bond of the true Church, that general assembly and Church of the first born whose names are written in heaven, which *is* the true Church. . . . Here is true catholicity, and to affirm it of anything else is Popery, however modified.”

By Darby’s showing, these measures of his diocesan very effectually sacrificed the spiritual power of the Church of Ireland to its civil security. “I may mention,” Darby writes thirty-eight years later, “that just at that time the Roman Catholics were becoming Protestants at the rate of 600 or 800 a week. The Archbishop [Magee] imposed, within the limits of his

¹¹ Letters of J. N. D., p.252.

jurisdiction, the oaths of allegiance and supremacy; and the work everywhere instantly ceased.”

The following paragraph from Darby’s pamphlet may be quoted as being perhaps at once the most striking and the most representative of the position he took up against the great bulk of the Irish clergy.

“I quote one passage [from the Charge] ‘The Sovereign cannot prescribe in favour of a system, that maintains a spiritual supremacy independent of civil government.’ There *is* a spiritual supremacy independent of civil government; the spiritual supremacy of Christ, of which the clergy are ministers—not an earthly dominion, but the very contrary. But when our Lord was brought before Pilate and charged with being a King, He did not affirm the harmlessness of His religion, by stating its amalgamation of interests with the State, or that it was merely ‘another aspect of the same body,’ but unqualifiedly assented to the position, ‘witnessed a good confession,’ that it *was* a kingdom, but not of this world.”

The tone of the pamphlet is becoming—firm in its opposition, but neither disrespectful nor unsympathetic. Darby relates that Daly, subsequently Bishop of Cashel, said to him, “You ought to become a Dissenter”. Daly was a most pronounced Evangelical, and the remark may be taken as a gauge of the Erastianism of the Established Church of that day.

It has been stated that Darby resigned his curacy in this year; but Bellett distinctly says that “he continued in his mountain curacy” after these events, and implies that the continuance was of some duration. The resignation may safely be assigned to 1828, and probably to the latter half of the year. But Bellett fully recognises that his friend’s churchmanship had received a shock from which it did not recover.¹²

With the movement in Dublin Darby was already in touch, partly by his own visits to Dublin, and partly by Bellett’s to Wicklow. It may be gathered from Mr. Andrew Miller’s narrative, which was principally based on statements that Darby made to its author, that the first occasion on which Darby observed the Lord’s Supper at one of the informal meetings for mutual edification was in the winter of 1827-8; but the idea conveyed by that narrative, that this particular meeting became a permanent ecclesiastical institution, and a nucleus round which Brethrenism at large gradually gathered, could scarcely be more erroneous. It is evident that Bellett and Hutchinson “held on loosely” to the Established Church through the greater part of 1828, even if it is safe to assume that this state of things was brought to a close by Groves’ remark at the end of that year. Immediately following his account of the extraordinary impression that that remark made on him, Bellett introduces Edward Cronin abruptly, and proceeds: “In a private room we had the Lord’s Supper with, I believe, three others, while I was still going to Sanford Chapel, *and John Darby was still in the County Wicklow as a clergyman.*”¹³

Darby had however, in 1828, published what passes with good right for “the Brethren’s first pamphlet,” under the title of *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*. It was not indeed the manifesto, as Mr. Miller supposed, of a “young community,” for no community as yet existed. It was the expression of a tendency which, though rapidly coming to a head, was as yet a tendency only; and this is just as clear from internal as from external evidence. The tract contains some forcible passages, and attacks the

¹² Darby’s churchmanship did not, in the judgment of such warm friends and supporters as Bellett and Cronin, terminate with the resignation of his curacy. Bellett brings it down to 1834, when, he says, Darby was “all but detached from the Church of England”. This did not imply, in those early days, that he was not also one of the Brethren.

¹³ The italics are mine.

existing order with a good deal of power; but it is strikingly lacking in definiteness of suggestion, and is plainly either the writing of a man who does not yet see his own way clearly, or of one who deliberately prefers to keep his counsel.

Something more will be said of this tract later on, but it is necessary in the meantime to bring up to date the story of the man by whose means a strong Nonconformist element was infused into the new movement.

Edward Cronin was, I understand, slightly Darby's junior. Professor Stokes states that he was a convert from Roman Catholicism. When he came as a medical student from the South of Ireland to Dublin for his health (about the year 1826, it is said), he belonged to the Independents, and was received to occasional communion by various dissenting churches. "This liberty was continued," he tells us, "till it was found that I became resident in Dublin. I was then informed that I could no longer be allowed to break bread with any of them without special membership with some of them. That was the starting point with me. With the strong impression on my soul, though with little intelligence about it, that the Church of God was one, and that all that believed were members of that one body, I firmly refused special membership."

Dr. Cronin's narrative proceeds as follows:

"This left me in separation from their table for several months, and then, feeling unable to attend their meetings from the growing opposition to one-man ministry, I was left exposed to the charge of irreligion and antinomianism. To avoid the appearance of evil, I spent many a Lord's Day morning under a tree or a haystack during the time of their service.

"My name having been publicly denounced from one of their pulpits (the Rev. E. Cooper's), Edward Wilson, assistant secretary to the Bible Society in Sackville Street, where he resided, was constrained to protest against this step, which led ultimately to his leaving also.

"Thus separated, we two met for breaking bread and prayer in one of his rooms, until his departure for England."

The little meeting was transferred to Cronin's house in Lower Pembroke Street. Apparently before Wilson's departure, the two dissidents had been joined by Cronin's cousins, the two Misses Drury, who seceded from the same chapel. A fifth member of the little band was Timms, a bookseller in Grafton Street. Cronin seems to intimate a considerable expansion in his company before it came into touch with the circle in which Groves, Bellett, and Darby were leading spirits.

"It there [*i.e.*, at Lower Pembroke Street] became noised abroad, and one another became affected by the same truth, which really was the oneness of the Body and the presence of the Holy Spirit, also seen by us very clearly. *Here Francis Hutchinson joined us, and as we were becoming numerous, offered us the use of his large room in Fitzwilliam Square.*" (Italics my own.)

This was apparently in November, 1829.

Cronin furnishes a curious account of the attitude of his seniors.

"At this time dear J. G. Bellett and J. N. Darby were more or less affected by the general state of things in the religious world; but were unprepared to come out into entire separation. They looked suspiciously at our movements, feeling still able to attend and minister¹⁴ in the Church of England, as well as to come occasionally to our little assembly."

¹⁴ The ministry must have been confined to Darby, as Bellett was a layman.

This representation is largely borne out by Bellett's own language, as will shortly appear. It involves indeed no disparagement of Darby or Bellett, even from the point of view of the Brethren. It is quite as much the part of the simpler intellect as of the bolder spirit to move rapidly in times of change. But Darby seems always to have grudged Cronin his undoubted priority. Indeed, Darby never shone in any kind of relation of rivalry; and this accounts for his rather ungenerous reference to Cronin's claims. "Five of us," he writes, "met at Fitzwilliam Square—Bellett, Cronin, Hutchinson, the present Master Brooke, who was frightened away by Hutchinson, and myself. As Hutchinson had disputations, I proposed meeting next Sunday. We did, at H.'s house. Brooke did not come. I have read since that Cronin had already met with Wilson and some others, but they had broken up—of that I know nothing. I afterwards went down and worked at Limerick." Information being very accessible, Darby's contented ignorance about the beginnings of a movement that restored, as he thought, so vast a sweep of apostolic testimony to the heritage of the Church is not a little surprising. According to Cronin, as we have seen, his meeting never broke up at all. The spirit of this note of Darby's sheds a good deal of light on the strangely perverted accounts of the beginnings of Brethrenism that afterwards circulated amongst his particular section of the movement.

It is difficult to assign the meeting Darby mentions to its proper place in connexion with Bellett's detailed annals, as they may fairly be called; and we are not helped by Cronin's rigid abstinence from dates. It is probable that it is to be identified with the meeting that Miller places in the winter of 1827-8; but if so, Miller was wrong as to its character, which must have been casual and informal, and not, as he supposed, the stable outcome of special deliberation and prayer.

Cronin's story could scarcely have been broken up so as to end it with the close of 1828. It is from that point, however, that we must now resume the common history.

From his last visit to Dublin up to the time of his departure for Bagdad, in June, 1829, Groves does not seem to have been in contact with these embryonic Brethren. From a passage in one of his letters, to which further reference will be made, it may be inferred that he knew Darby's tract on the Nature and Unity of the Church, and sympathised with it; and it is certain from his subsequent history that he had become well acquainted with Darby in Dublin, and powerfully attracted by him. Throughout 1829 the companions he left behind were gradually working out the fruitful idea that he had propounded. Bellett gives an account of their progress, of which the accuracy may be gauged by the fearlessness of the detail.

"In the summer of 1829 our family was at Kingstown, and dear Francis Hutchinson at Bray. We saw each other occasionally, and spoke of the things of the Lord. But where he went on Sunday at that time I cannot tell. I attended the Scotch Church at Kingstown, where all who were understood to be new-born were welcome. But on returning to Dublin in the November of that year, Francis Hutchinson was quite prepared for communion in the name of the Lord, with all, whoever they might be, that loved Him in sincerity, and proposed to have a room in his house in Fitzwilliam Square for that purpose. He did so, designing however so to have it, that if any were disposed to attend the services of the parish Churches, and Dissenting Chapels, they might not be hindered; and he also prescribed a certain line of things, as the services of prayer, singing and teaching, that should be found amongst us on each day.

"Edward Cronin was prepared for this fully. I joined, but I do not think with at all the same liberty and decision of mind, and several others also were ready, and just at this time, we first knew William Stokes. Thus we continued from November, 1829."

We are at last on solid ground. The meeting thus formed was permanent, and after about six months found a public location in a hired room in Aungier Street. The causes of this important step are variously stated. Boase, apparently following Miller, attributes it to a great increase in the numbers of the Brethren, consequent on the publication of Darby's tract; but of this Bellett and Cronin know nothing. Bellett was averse to the change; Hutchinson was reluctant; Darby was absent from Dublin; Cronin and Stokes were eager for it; but the real initiative lay with a young man of five and twenty, who was destined to play a considerable part in the history of Brethrenism. This was John Vesey Parnell, afterwards Lord Congleton. "He became," Bellett tells us, "very familiar with Edward Cronin, and in the month of May, purposing to let the Lord's Table in the midst of us become somewhat more of a witness, he took a large room in Aungier Street, belonging to a cabinet-maker. There the meeting was transferred during that month."

Cronin adds some graphic touches.

"We soon began to feel as humbler brethren were added to us that the house in Fitzwilliam Square was unsuited. This led us to take a large auction room in Aungier Street for our use on the Sundays, and on [?oh] the blessed seasons with my soul, with John Parnell, William Stokes and others, while removing the furniture aside, and laying the simple table with its bread and wine, on Saturday evenings—seasons of joy never to be forgotten—for surely we had the Master's smile and sanction in the beginning of such a movement as this was! . . . From that to my leaving Dublin [for Bagdad] in 1830, there were continual additions of evangelical Christians, all of us with very little intelligence as to the real character of God's movement amongst us."

The association of Parnell with the company in Fitzwilliam Square was not the beginning of his Brethrenism. In consequence of my earlier articles in the *British Weekly*, a venerable Brother,¹⁵ widely known in the "Open" section of Brethren, addressed to me privately a valuable communication from which I transcribe the following passage:

"What I learned [as to the commencement of Brethrenism] was as follows, my authority being Lord Congleton himself, to whom I repeated the story as I had heard it, and who pronounced it substantially correct.

"About 1825, in Dublin, three friends, of whom Lord Congleton was one, closely associated during the week, but on Sundays separated by their denominations, began to feel the unscripturalness and anomaly of such a state of things, and set themselves to seek some community that would afford a common ground on which to show their oneness as children of God, though differing on matters ecclesiastical. Finding none who would receive them except under conditions which would vitiate their object, and as being under an allegiance to Christ which they did not owe to their sects, knowing no need of a consecrated place or an ordained minister, they saw it right to meet in their own room and break bread thus. Some weeks later, William Stokes, going out on Sunday morning, met Mr. Patterson, a Scripture Reader. 'Where are you going?' asked the latter. 'Going!' was Stokes' reply; 'why you are going one way, and I am going another!' 'Is it there you are?' said Patterson; 'then I'll shew you what will suit you.' He took him to where those three were meeting, joined by two sisters. The movement thus grew, for there were many of Stokes' mind; and many elsewhere about

¹⁵ W. Collingwood, Esq. May I express a hope that Mr. Collingwood, whose association with the Brethren is now of nearly sixty years' standing, will yet give to the public his very interesting recollections of the earlier days of the movement?

that time knowing apparently little of what was going on in Dublin, gathered on the same ground.”

This story is as intrinsically likely as it is well authenticated. It furnishes another proof, if further proof be needed, that the ideas that went to make up Brethrenism were “in the air,” and were extensively obtaining embodiment. It does not alter my contention that the consolidating force of the movement issued from the company that finally gathered at Aungier Street; on the contrary, it obviously confirms it. Brethrenism was indeed formed out of a variety of little meetings of a more or less similar character, and these must be accepted as its ultimate elements; but Brethrenism, as we know it, is a synthesis, and the synthesis has a history; and I do not believe that its history can be truly told without locating its original force in Dublin, and in Aungier Street.

II Causes And Conditions

BELLETT, in his account of the origins, mentions several other little companies meeting in ignorance of one another's existence, and all more or less on the lines of the Brethren. He had reason to believe that before there was any "table" in Francis Hutchinson's house, there was one in J. Mahon's, "somewhere in the town of Ennis, by means of one of his family, if not by himself". It was also his belief that the movement existed in the same independence in England.

"Having occasion to visit Somersetshire in 1831 or 1832, I being at Sir Edward Denny's,¹⁶ he asked me to give him an idea of the principles of the Brethren. We were sitting round the fire, and the daughter of a clergyman was present. As I stated our thoughts, she said they had been hers for the last twelve months, and that she had no idea that any one had them but herself. So also, being at ——— shortly afterwards, a dear brother, now with the Lord, told me that he, his wife and his wife's mother were meeting in the simplicity of the Brethren's ways for some time before he even heard of such people. This brother and the lady mentioned at Sir Edward Denny's as soon as occasion allowed were in full communion with us, and she continues so to this day in the County Down."

All this is, of course, perfectly true, and it is doubtless typical of much more of the same kind; but it is far less miraculous than it appeared to Bellett. A strong and widely-spread revulsion against some of the dominant ecclesiastical principles of that day certainly existed; and many who shared in it were feeling their way more or less vaguely towards a common solution of the difficulty. Nor were there lacking special circumstances in Ireland that tended to turn the minds of the malcontents in one given direction.

The state of things against which Brethrenism was an embodied revolt is described by Professor Stokes in the article to which reference has been already frequently made. He tells us that Darby, after the failure of his protest against the Charge and the Petition, "looked around . . . for some body which might answer his aspirations after a spiritual communion based on New Testament and religious principles, and not on mere political expediency, and soon found it in a society, or rather an unorganised collection of societies, which had been for many years growing and developing, and which under his guidance was destined to take final shape in the sect now called the Plymouth Brethren,"—of which sect Professor Stokes assigns the original formation to Groves and Bellett. "Now to understand," he proceeds, "the principal religious movements of the present age, the Broad Church and the Oxford movements, as well as the great disintegrating movement of Plymouth Brethrenism, we must realise the prominent religious features of the days of the Regency and of the reign of George IV."

In this connexion Professor Stokes lays great stress on the Walkerite movement; and to this the more amiable Kellyite movement ought surely to be added. Walker was a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, and chaplain of the Bethesda Chapel. He was a Calvinist of an extreme, not to say a rabid type, and came to find his position in the communion of the Established Church untenable. In 1804 he seceded and formed a sect that "rejected ordination and an appointed ministry, practised close communion, refusing to admit any, save his own followers, to the Holy Communion, and taught that he could not even pray or sing with any others, as the prayers of the wicked—under which amiable category he classed his opponents—were an abomination to the Lord".

The description of Walker's singularities sounds as if it might be unintentionally exaggerated, as the singularities of the Brethren have often been. But if the story I have been

¹⁶ The famous hymn-writer, afterwards one of the best known of the Brethren.

told (on excellent authority, as I suppose) about the Walkerites is correct, there will be little *à priori* ground for calling Professor Stokes' account in question. A friend, extremely well acquainted with Irish affairs, related that a conference was held between the Walkerites and the Kellyites to discuss terms on which a union between the two communions might be effected. The negotiations were broken off by the absolute refusal of Kelly and his friends to entertain a term of fellowship on which the other side peremptorily insisted. The article of belief to which the Kellyites declined to commit themselves was "that John Wesley is in hell".

Much closer, I should imagine, were the affinities subsisting between the Kellyites and the original Brethren. The Kellyites were the followers of Thomas Kelly, the well-known hymn writer, and one of the most devoted of evangelists. Like the Walkerites, they rejected ordination and did not restrict the ministry to a special class. Ministry in the congregation was not absolutely thrown open, but was exercised by various speakers, according to a prearranged plan, though I cannot positively assert that there was no opening allowed for extempore exercise. Baptism on profession of faith was, I believe, the custom of the sect, as it was also of almost all the early Brethren.¹⁷

Brethrenism cannot in any proper sense be affiliated to either of these movements; indeed, there is not a word in the narratives of any of the early Brethren to indicate that they consciously received any influence from them. But that such movements existed is proof of the wide diffusion of the ideas that went to form Brethrenism, and to which Brethrenism in its turn was destined to give a far more durable embodiment, and a far more extensive influence. On all hands, probably, the prevailing Erastianism was quickening in fervent spirits the aspiration after a pure communion. In not a few cases, also, the jealous isolation of the different sects and their intense preoccupation with denominational interests were kindling an aspiration no less ardent after a genuine catholicity.

These two aspirations were the foundations of Brethrenism. The true idea of the Church was to be expressed. A circle was to be drawn just wide enough to include "all the children of God," and to exclude all who did not come under that category. Of the two the aspiration after catholicity took the lead. Union was the Brethren's avowed object. Purity was an older ideal, and still remained the professed aim of the Independent Churches. The root of both is to be sought in the strictly primary postulate that the true children of God can for all practical purposes be discriminated from the mass of nominal profession. This position, which may perhaps be called the common ground of extreme Evangelicalism, is taken for granted by all the writers of the Brethren, and their polemics ordinarily contemplate only those who acknowledge it.

This twofold position was negatively expressed in their favourite dictum that the Church of England was too broad in its basis, and the dissenting churches too narrow. The charge is too vague to be of much consequence. Indeed by shifting their point of view slightly they might have found that the Church was too narrow and Dissent too broad. The point of the saying is merely rhetorical. What is actually expressed is, on the one hand, the Brethren's abhorrence of national Christianity, with its assumption (as the Brethren understood it) that every Englishman is a Christian; and, on the other, their recoil from the practical assertion of distinctive denominational tenets at the expense of the cultivation of common Christian sympathies. It was, at the first, far less a theory than a sentiment that lay at the root of the new separatism.

Consequently, Brethrenism from the beginning exhibits a certain confusion on the side of theory, and from this confusion it has never altogether worked itself free. Cronin's narrative¹⁸ affords an excellent example of this. It can hardly have been the case that the

¹⁷ My knowledge of Kellyism was derived from a friend who was associated with one of its local churches about the year 1840.

¹⁸ See page 12.

Independents would only have welcomed him to the Lord's Table if he had definitely accepted their denominational position; doubtless they would have granted him "occasional communion," even if he had joined the Episcopalians. It was presumably felt that a local church having full knowledge of its members was able to guarantee that they were living a life that did not discredit their Christian profession. This is so reasonable and so little at variance, it would seem, with the duty of extending the privileges of the Holy Communion to Christians generally, that Cronin's difficulty is unintelligible to most people at the present day. He was scarcely, however, a man to act in a merely factious spirit, and probably there was a very real sectarianism in existence against which he was setting up his standard, however much he might blunder in his manifesto. Whatever the special faults of the Church of to-day may be, it has certainly acquired a wider outlook; and we may have difficulty in picturing to ourselves the narrowed sympathies that were such an offence seventy or eighty years ago to men in whose minds the more expansive instincts of the Christian life were beginning to stir. It is at least clear that Cronin understood all his associates at Fitzwilliam Square and at Aungier Street to share his views. "Special membership," he writes, "as it is called among Dissenters, was the primary and most offensive condition of things to all our minds, so that our first assembling was really marked as a small company of evangelical malcontents."

Cronin's was in no sense a leading mind, but we may turn to Darby himself without mending matters. In 1828, when, as already related, he issued the first document of the new movement, *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*, he failed as signally as Cronin to raise any definite issue. The tract is an appeal to Christian feeling against the divisions of the Church. As such it is far from contemptible. The tone is fervent and lofty, and though the style is not good, there are passages of no little dignity and beauty. The characteristic faults of the author's later polemical writings are scarcely, if at all, to be found. He is not censorious or Pharisaical; he writes in no spirit of detachment from the Church he condemns, and when he speaks of the virtues with which the denominations were adorned he appears to bear his witness with cordiality. But we look in vain either for any thorough analysis of the evil complained of, or for an intelligible suggestion of any possible remedy.

In discussing the evil Darby assumes that the denomination (as, for example, Congregationalism) is the only possible ecclesiastical unit. Now this is a point of view that all the Independent Churches would have disowned. To them the unit was the local church. Yet, if Darby had known or remembered this, it is at least a question whether he could so easily have taken for granted that every existing Church stood condemned by his dictum, that "no meeting, which is not framed to embrace all the children of God in the full basis of the kingdom of the Son, can find the fulness of blessing, because it does not contemplate it—because its faith does not embrace it" (p. 38). He might also have been saved from the smart, but intrinsically poor antithesis— "The bond of communion is not the *unity* of the people of God, but really (in point of fact) their *differences*" (p. 33).

After this, it will not excite surprise that it never occurs to Darby to grapple with the great primary obstacle to that outward expression of the inward unity of God's family on which his heart was set. There are, and always have been, two competing views as to what the visible Church ought to be; and both are widely held amongst those whose vital religion (and whose place therefore in such an external communion as he desired to see) Darby would have heartily acknowledged. There are Christians who hold that the vital profession of Christianity can be distinguished from the merely nominal with so much certainty that the distinction can be made the basis of the communion of the Church on earth. There are those who hold the exact opposite, and believe that every effort to form a "pure" communion only results in a "mixed" one encumbered with the extra drawback, that to the unavoidable inclusion of the

spurious is added the perfectly avoidable exclusion of the genuine. To exhort the faithful to seek an external unity before they have agreed as to what the external unity ought to be is now generally regarded as futile. Yet Darby affirms (p. 36) that “it is not a formal union of the outward professing bodies that is desirable; indeed, it is surprising that reflecting Protestants should desire it. . . . It would be a counterpart to Romish unity; we should have the life of the Church and the power of the word lost, and the unity of spiritual life utterly excluded.” But Darby might have recollected that many Christians hold that if the very scheme he denounces is ruled out, external unity is a chimerical project; and his *ipse dixit* would carry no weight with them.

Mr. Miller represents the tract as having produced startling results, but of this I cannot find any contemporary evidence. If it was so Darby’s appeal must have been strong in the reality of the sectarianism he reprovved, and many devout hearts may have turned hopefully to a group of excellent men who believed they saw their way to a happier condition. In our own day the tract would not receive much attention; the question of which it treats has made too great an advance in the interval. Later Brethrenism leans for support much more upon “the liberty of the Spirit in the assembly”. On this, at the first, the Brethren had nothing to say. It is true that for some years after this, Darby’s tracts are chiefly concerned with lay-ministry; but the subject is not viewed in connexion with the order of worship.

At a later time Darby spoke of this tract as if it had signalled his secession from the Church of England, but his attitude for several years after appeared somewhat vacillating to his friends.¹⁹ Groves, whose mind moved faster, was delighted at this time with Darby, and was in hearty sympathy with the tract, if we can judge from the fact that he makes a sort of rough quotation from it in a letter he wrote in December, 1828.²⁰ Darby had written (p. 47), “So far as men pride themselves on being Established, Presbyterian, Baptist, Independent, or anything else, they are antichristian”. As might be expected, the sentiment appears in Groves’ letter in a softened form. “My full persuasion is, that, inasmuch as any one glories either in being of the Church of England, Scotland, Baptist, Independent, Wesleyan, etc., his glory is his shame, and that it is antichristian” (*Memoir*, p. 49).

Those who have recognised that Brethrenism followed at the first a genuine spiritual impulse in its revolt against a Church crippled by party spirit and deadened by secularity, have perhaps felt surprise that its authors should not have found solace and satisfaction in the circle where the ardour kindled by the revival of the eighteenth century still glowed. But two things must be borne in mind. In the first place, though there was undoubtedly some earnest evangelical ministry within the Irish Establishment, the most fervent elements of the revival in Ireland would seem to have been largely absorbed by Walkerism; and from Walkerism the Brethren were repelled by its intense sectarianism.²¹ Moreover, the later evangelical school, with all its merits, signally failed to answer to the aspirations that were so widely drawing men into the Plymouth movement. In the earlier revival, the line of demarcation between Church and Dissent was certainly liable to become extremely indistinct. John Wesley ended his days in the practice of presbyterial ordination. Lady Huntingdon died founding a nonconforming body. Daniel Rowlands spent his last twenty-seven years as a dissenting minister; and if Grimshaw of Haworth had been deprived, as he fully expected to be, he would have become a Wesleyan local preacher. Most of the clerical leaders of the revival had

¹⁹ If he resigned his curacy in 1828 he might naturally come to regard that as the epoch of his severance from the Church. On the other hand, his friends were impressed by his slowness to break off all association with it.

²⁰ It is of course just possible that both men are quoting from a common “oral tradition” of the first Brethren.

²¹ Groves’ letter to Darby, 1836; see *Memoir*, appendix H.

certainly no objection on principle to preaching in the licensed meeting-houses of Dissenters. But these facts mislead us if we do not keep in mind the great change that came over evangelicalism as it obtained a more assured, even if still but a narrow, footing within the Church of England. John Newton is the connecting link between the earlier school and the later; and he, without in the least sharing Romaine's intense repugnance to nonconformity, was nevertheless considered by dissenting friends to confine himself within the limits of too consistent a churchmanship; and in this particular his biographer, Richard Cecil, evidently approved his line of conduct. Nor was Simeon's attitude very different. Indeed Mr. Stock correctly speaks of "the party beginning to be known as Evangelical, comprising the men who, realising the privilege of their membership in the Church, were willing to bear some disadvantages and restrictions from which those outside were free".²² Whether these excellent men were right or wrong in accepting such "restrictions," their attitude was profoundly unsatisfactory to those who were beginning to think that the testimony *par excellence* for their time was the unity of all true Christians, and that everything that tended even to qualify the expression of that unity was to be spurned as the work of the Enemy.

It will be observed that I lay no stress on liberty of ministry or on the abjuration of all formally recognised church government. I abstain advisedly. These customs, though rightly regarded now as constituting the essence of Brethrenism, had no place in the original scheme. Darby would seem to have persuaded himself that it had been otherwise, but this is only another instance of the abnormal force of prejudice in that remarkable mind. The testimony of his most devoted adherents is explicit and circumstantial. When the meeting that afterwards removed to Aungier Street began in Hutchinson's house in November, 1829, Hutchinson (as Bellett distinctly states) "prescribed a certain line of things, as the service of prayer, singing and teaching, that should be found amongst us on each day".

The same writer records that at the Aungier Street room "the settled order of worship which we had in Fitzwilliam Square, gave place gradually. Teaching and exhorting were first made common duties and services, while prayer was restricted under the care of two or three, *who were regarded as elders*. But gradually all this yielded. *In a little time, no appointed or recognised eldership* was understood to be in the midst of us, and all service was of a free character, the presence of God through the Spirit being more simply believed and used." (The italics in this and the next quotation are my own.)

Cronin bears similar testimony. "We felt free up to this time [evidently 1830], *and long afterwards*,²³ to make arrangements among ourselves as to who should distribute the bread, and to take other ministries in the assembly." Cronin goes on to explain that the Brethren came out gradually into the light, and thus concedes the allegation of those who in 1845 and the following years appealed to primitive Brethrenism in opposition to Darbyism.

In view of this consensus of testimony, the statement that either absolutely open ministry, or the rejection of all ostensible government, existed in the earliest phases of the movement must be pronounced either disingenuous or ignorant. Not that either can be regarded as an alien graft on the original stock. On the contrary, both were its natural, perhaps its inevitable, outcome. Groves celebrated observation to Bellett in 1828 more than foreshadows the state of things in which these customs were conspicuous, at least so far as liberty of ministry is concerned. The rejection of government was more strictly Darby's work, as we shall yet have occasion to observe.

²² *One Hundred Years of the Church Missionary Society*, p. 5.

²³ At least till 1834, by the testimony of the late J. B. Stoney, who also mentions that at Plymouth, even in 1838, "it used to be arranged beforehand who should break the bread and do official acts".

Groves' spiritual history perhaps best illustrates the general state of mind out of which Brethrenism arose. From first to last in his departures from traditional procedure, Groves seems to have been actuated by a conviction that there was a dearth in the Church of a living energy of faith in God. He was far indeed from being such a spiritual egotist as to assume that he could himself supply the lack of it; but he resolved that he would at least act on the principles that its presence would naturally produce. In this spirit, he renounced in the first place all thought of providing for his children; he would give his money to God, and God would care for them. He followed this up by abandoning a lucrative profession without reluctance or misgiving; and when his wife received a legacy of £10,000 or £12,000, he apparently sank it all in the Bagdad mission, and afterwards prosecuted missionary work for many years without the support of a committee at home, and often without visible means of maintenance of any kind. In a similar way he felt himself led, rejecting all human mediation, to derive his right to minister directly from God; and it was by an obvious extension of the same principle that he concluded that it was God's mind that he and his friends should assemble, were it even in the absence of all adequate provision for edification, in the confidence that God could minister by whomsoever he pleased.

So far as Groves' personal course is concerned, any Christian may feel free to allow that it might have been determined by a special operation of the Holy Ghost. In the providence of God, a dormant Church has perhaps not seldom been awakened by measures adapted to the emergency of the moment, and suited to a peculiar energy of faith on the part of the reformer who has adopted them. Whether Groves were right in proposing analogous methods in the worship of the Church, where many persons are involved, and where the average of faith hardly ever rises very high, may well be questioned, even if he had only designed to suggest a passing phase of Christian testimony. Nor would it necessarily be captious to say that Groves might have displayed a more enlightened faith if he had been able to recognise the hand of God, not more in His extraordinary operations, than in the working of those social elements which have no original connexion with the depravity of fallen man—in cooperation and subordination, in the economy of an ordered division of labour, in a variety of prudential arrangements, whether in the inward working of the Church or in its external operations. But it is not open to any one (be it observed in passing) to deny that the simplicity of Groves' faith, the depth of his humility, the energy and purity of his zeal, the fervour and comprehensiveness of his charity, have rarely been equalled in the Church of God.

For better or for worse, it gradually became the law of Brethrenism to disown all regularly constituted authority, all orderly arrangement, and all prudential provision even for emergencies that are bound to arise. How far a now somewhat prolonged experience yields a verdict favourable to such a procedure will perhaps appear in the course of this history.

Very closely linked with what might be called the "haphazardism" of the Brethren is their attitude towards the question of unfulfilled prophecy. Brethrenism may even be held to derive its very existence in part from the new prophetic studies to which the unsettlement of men's minds, consequent on the long agony of the Napoleonic wars, gave rise. Prophetic meetings were established in 1827 at Aldbury Park, Surrey, the seat of the well-known Henry Drummond. At these meetings Edward Irving took part, and to Aldbury Irvingism traces its rise. Lady Powerscourt attended these conferences, and "was so delighted with them that she established a similar series of meetings at Powerscourt House near Bray, in the County Wicklow, which for several years were presided over by the rector of the parish, the late Bishop Daly of Cashel. These meetings lasted till 1833, when the bishop was obliged to retire on account of the extreme anti-Church views which were openly avowed."

If Professor Stokes, whose pen furnishes this account of the Powerscourt meetings, intends to convey that they ceased from the year 1833, he is certainly wrong. Stoney²⁴ has left us a graphic account of one of these conferences that he attended as late as September, 1838.

“Mr. John Synge was in the chair. He called on each to speak in turn on a given subject. Mr. Darby spoke last, and often for hours, touching on all that had been previously said. Mr. Wigram sat next him. Captain Hall, Mr. George Curzon, Sir Alexander Campbell, Mr. Bellett, Mr. Thomas Mansell, Mr. Mahon, Mr. Edward Synge were there. There were clergymen present, and Irvingites.”

Side by side with this description it is worth while to place Bellett’s, for Bellett was no believer in a golden age of Brethrenism, and had a keen sense of the shortcomings of the system at its best.

“Much at the same time dear Lady Powerscourt had begun some prophetic meetings. . . It was there I first knew George Wigram, Percy Hall, and others. The meetings were truly precious to the soul, and night after night did I retire to my room at Powerscourt House in a deep sense of how little a one I was in Christ, in the presence of so much grace and devotedness around me through the day.”

In all this preoccupation with the study of unfulfilled prophecy, the Brethren never in any single instance fell into the snare of “fixing dates”. They strongly opposed all the ill-starred attempts of the kind that many of their fellow-students have made. But they firmly believed in the proximity of the Second Advent, and this belief coloured all their spiritual life, and was profoundly influential on their outward conduct.

In private, it made them for many years markedly ascetic: and it was probably by far the most potent of the influences that withdrew them from all connexion with public life, and that even led them to regard participation in politics as an act of treason against the heavenly calling of the Church. The late Professor Newman’s account of his intercourse with Darby illustrates both tendencies. He writes as follows:—²⁵

“My study of the New Testament at this time had made it impossible for me to overlook that the apostles held it to be a duty of all disciples to expect a near and sudden destruction of the earth by fire, and constantly to be expecting the *return of the Lord from heaven*.

“The importance of this doctrine is, that *it totally forbids all working for earthly objects distant in time*; and here the Irish clergyman [Darby] threw into the same scale the entire weight of his character. For instance, if a youth had a natural aptitude for mathematics, and he asked, ought he to give himself to the study, in hope that he might diffuse a serviceable knowledge of it, or possibly even enlarge the boundaries of the science? my friend would have replied, that such a purpose was very proper, if entertained by a worldly man. Let the dead bury their dead; and let the world study the things of the world. . . . But such studies cannot be eagerly followed by the Christian, except when he yields to unbelief. In fact, what would it avail even to become a second La Place after thirty years’ study, if in five and thirty

²⁴ J. Butler Stoney, who came of a good Irish family, joined the Brethren in 1834. He was then an undergraduate at Trinity College, Dublin, where he had entered with a view to taking orders. He had been powerfully attracted by the meetings at Aungier Street, and a certain address of Darby’s had a decisive influence on him.

²⁵ F. W. Newman, *Phases of Faith*.

years the Lord descended from heaven, snatched up all His saints to meet him, and burned to ashes all the works of the earth? . . .

“However the hold which the apostolic belief then took of me, subjected my conscience to the exhortations of the Irish clergyman, whenever he inculcated that the highest Christian must necessarily decline the pursuit of science, knowledge, art, history, —except so far as any of these things might be made useful tools for immediate spiritual results.”

It is of course possible that Darby would have demurred to some particulars of this representation; but it is at all events a description of Darby’s earliest teaching as it was apprehended by a mind of remarkable acuteness.

A graphic account by the same pen of Darby’s personal asceticism will be more conveniently given in our next chapter. Such asceticism was for very long a leading feature of all Brethrenism, and, so far at least as dress was concerned, it lingered down to a period within the recollection of men who have not reached middle life; and, indeed, many traces of it are still to be found. Lord Congleton, as his biographer, Henry Groves, tells us, though in possession of an independent income of £1,200 a year, took a house in Teignmouth of which the rent was £12, furnished it with wooden chairs and a plain deal table, steel forks and pewter tea-spoons, and wholly dispensed with carpets. The deal table, “by concession to the housemaid, was afterwards stained, because of the trouble it gave in constant scouring to keep it clean”. Carpets seem to have been regarded with singular disfavour by the Brethren. The late Benjamin Wills Newton, I have been told, lived at one time in a large and handsome house in the same carpet-less state. He also was a man of considerable means.

A symptom of the same general condition was a tendency to a kind of Pentecostal communism. It is related of one of the Brethren—Sir Alexander Campbell, if I mistake not—who had property in the West of England, that he insisted on his servants sitting down with him at table. One day, coming in late for dinner, he found that his servants had already made some progress with the meal. They explained that, as he was so late, they thought they had better begin without him.

Amongst the favouring conditions of the rise of Brethrenism, the distinguished social position of its earliest votaries was probably not the least important. It passed for an aristocratic movement, as Darby himself admitted in his Swiss campaign in the early forties.²⁶ A very vehement assailant of the whole school, the author of *Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled and Refuted*, attributes no small part of its influence to that single circumstance (p. 162). In this respect things have changed inevitably, but even yet fashionable people often find it easier to pass from the Church of England to Brethrenism than to any of the older forms of Dissent.

It is an interesting question to what extent the earliest days of Brethrenism may be looked back to as a golden age. So far as the earliest of all are concerned, the answer must be unfavourable. This rests upon the unsuspecting testimony of men who were makers of the sect. Speaking of the time when he and his friends first occupied the room in Aungier Street, Bellett writes: “It was poor material we had. . . There was but little spiritual energy, and much that was poor treasure for a living temple; but we held together in the Lord’s mercy and care, I believe advancing in the knowledge of His mind.” And even the far more sanguine Cronin confirms the report. “We were also, from ignorance or indifference, careless as to conscience and godly care of one another.”

It is surprising that the inauguration of a movement for which its promoters had been content to lose much and suffer much should have been so lacking in the freshness of delight that generally attends the days of first love; nor is such weakness quite what would have been

²⁶ Herzog, *Frères de Plymouth*, p. 82.

expected from the character of the men engaged. We are indebted to their candour for a very interesting fact. As the movement consolidated it began to answer far better to the expectations with which it was set on foot, and for several years it was, with whatever drawbacks, a genuine and potent spiritual force.

III The Expansion Of Brethrenism—The Movement In England

HOWEVER debateable the honours of the foundership of Brethrenism may be, no question can be raised in regard to personal preeminence when once we pass on to the period of expansion and consolidation. One figure stands out unmistakeably; at times it fills the canvas. Brethrenism was destined to exercise a world-wide influence; to establish itself as a force to be reckoned with in every corner of Christendom; to give rise to a most voluminous literature; and to establish, we may surely say, a strong *prima facie* claim to be heard at the bar of history for a long time to come. These destinies lay in the hand of one man. He had helpers of mark; and there were independent workers among the Brethren—Müller, Groves, Tregelles, and others—who achieved great results in other lines of activity. But the maker of Brethrenism as a system, its guiding and energising spirit throughout, was John Nelson Darby. In the grandeur of his conceptions, in the irresistible vehemence of his will, in his consummate strategical instinct; in his genius for administration, and most of all in his immense personal ascendancy, he stands unrivalled amongst the Brethren. His energy was stupendous. He was working for Brethrenism before he was thirty, and when he was eighty he was working as hard as ever; nor had he been known to relax his efforts—efforts put forth up to the full measure of his great strength, and often beyond it—during the whole of the intervening time.

In later days, Darby exercised his ascendancy over men who, though very far in many cases from personal insignificance, were for the most part little known outside their own sect. It is therefore the more important to remember that, at the very beginning of his career, he brought into almost servile subjection the mind of one of the most remarkable men of the nineteenth century. This was Francis William Newman, the younger brother by four or five years of the more celebrated (not, I think, the abler) J. H. Newman, the Cardinal. The younger Newman was a man of prodigious versatility. He took a double first at Oxford, became Fellow of Balliol, and was afterwards Professor of Latin at University College, London, and finally Professor of Political Economy at Oxford; and his writings cover an even wider range than these achievements might have led us to expect. Fifty years ago he was a recognised leader of a phase of strongly theistic free thought, and it was chiefly his books that gave rise to that brilliant polemic, Henry Rogers' *Eclipse of Faith*. It is in the work that traces the evolution of free thought in his mind that his description of Darby, under the designation of "the Irish clergyman," occurs. The passage is a remarkably interesting piece of autobiography, and Newman shall be left to tell his own story.

"My second period is characterised, partly by the great ascendancy exercised over me by one powerful mind and still more powerful will, partly by the vehement effort which throughout its duration urged me to long after the establishment of Christian Fellowship in a purely Biblical Church as the first great want of Christendom and of the world. . .

"After taking my degree I became Fellow of Balliol College; and the next year I accepted an invitation to Ireland, and there became private tutor for fifteen months in the house of one now deceased, whose name I would gladly mention for honour and affection—but I withhold my pen.²⁷

". . . A young relative of his,—a most remarkable man,—rapidly gained an immense sway over me. I shall henceforth call him 'the Irish Clergyman'. His 'bodily presence' was indeed 'weak'! A fallen cheek, a bloodshot eye, . . . a seldom shaven beard, a shabby suit of clothes and a generally neglected person, drew at first pity, with wonder to see such a figure

²⁷ Professor Stokes (*op. cit.*) supplies the omission. Newman's friend was the late Chief Justice Pennefather, at that time a leading Chancery barrister. He had married Darby's eldest sister twenty years earlier. Newman came to Ireland about 1827.

in a drawing-room. It was currently reported that a person in Limerick offered him a halfpenny, mistaking him for a beggar; and if not true, the story was yet well invented. This young man had taken high honours in Dublin University and had studied for the bar, where, under the auspices of his eminent kinsman, he had excellent prospects; but his conscience would not allow him to take a brief, lest he should be selling his talents to defeat justice. With keen, logical powers, he had warm sympathies, solid judgment of character, thoughtful tenderness and total self-abandonment. He before long took Holy Orders, and became an indefatigable curate in the mountains of Wicklow. Every evening he sallied forth to teach in the cabins, and roving far and wide over mountain and amid bogs, was seldom home before midnight. By such exertions his strength was undermined. . . . His whole frame might have vied in emaciation with a monk of La Trappe.

“Such a phenomenon intensely excited the poor Romanists, who looked on him as a genuine ‘saint’ of the ancient breed. The stamp of heaven seemed to them clear in a frame so wasted by austerity, so superior to worldly pomp, and so partaking in all their indigence. That a dozen such men would have done more to convert all Ireland to Protestantism than the whole apparatus of the Church Establishment was ere long my conviction. He had practically given up all reading except that of the Bible; and no small part of his movement towards me soon took the form of dissuasion from all other voluntary study.

“In fact I had myself more and more concentrated my religious reading on this one book; still, I could not help feeling the value of a cultivated mind. Against this, my new eccentric friend, (himself having enjoyed no mean advantages of cultivation,) directed his keenest attacks. I remember once saying to him, in defence of worldly station,— ‘To desire to be rich is unchristian and absurd; but if I were the father of children, I should wish to be rich enough to secure them a good education’. He replied ‘If I had children, I would as soon see them break stones on the road, as do anything else, if only I could secure to them the Gospel and the grace of God’. I was unable to say Amen, but I admired his unflinching consistency. . . . For the first time in my life I saw a man earnestly turning into reality the principles which others confessed with their lips only. That the words of the New Testament contained the highest truth accessible to man,—truth not to be taken from nor added to,—all (as I thought) confessed: never before had I seen a man so resolved that no word of it should be a dead letter to him. I once said: ‘But do you really think that *no* part of the New Testament may have been temporary in its object? for instance, what should we have lost, if St. Paul had never written the verse, “The cloak which I left at Troas bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments”?’ He answered with the greatest promptitude: ‘*I* should certainly have lost something; for that is exactly the verse which alone saved me from selling my little library. No! every word, depend upon it, is from the Spirit, and is for eternal service.’ ”

In after years Darby’s library was not little, and possibly he modified his more extreme views, though he certainly never permitted himself the mere luxury of culture. It is reported that he said, “I read nothing but bad books and the Bible”; and the story, as Newman would say, if it is not true, is startlingly well invented.

“In spite of the strong revulsion which I felt against some of the peculiarities of this remarkable man, I for the first time in my life found myself under the dominion of a superior. When I remember, how even those bowed down before him, who had been to him in the place of parents,—accomplished and experienced minds,—I cease to wonder in the retrospect, that he riveted me in such a bondage. Henceforth I began to ask: What will *he* say to this and that? In *his* reply I always expected to find a higher portion of God’s Spirit than in any I could frame for myself. In order to learn Divine truth, it became to me a surer process to consult him, than to search for myself and wait upon God and gradually, (as I afterwards discerned,)

my religious thought had merged in the mere process of developing fearlessly into results all his principles, without any deeper examining of my foundations. Indeed, but for a few weaknesses which warned me that he might err, I could have accepted him as an apostle commissioned to reveal the mind of God.”

The following paragraph completes the picture, and gives us at the same time Newman’s impressions of his friend’s later course, at a time when an impassable gulf had opened between them. The words were written about 1850.

“In his after-course (which I may not indicate) this gentleman has everywhere displayed a wonderful power of bending other minds to his own. . . . Over the general results of his action I have long deeply mourned, as blunting his natural tenderness and sacrificing his wisdom to the Letter, dwarfing men’s understandings, contracting their hearts, crushing their moral sensibilities, and setting those at variance who ought to love: yet oh! how specious was it in the beginning! he *only* wanted men ‘to submit their understanding to God,’ that is, to the Bible, that is, to his interpretation! From seeing his action and influence I have learnt, that if it be dangerous to a young man (as it assuredly is) to have *no* superior mind to which he may look up with confiding reverence, it may be even more dangerous to think that he has found such a mind: for he who is most logically consistent, though to a one-sided theory, and most ready to sacrifice self to that theory seems to ardent youth the most assuredly trustworthy guide. Such was Ignatius Loyola in his day.”

The picture is life-like, unless it be for one particular. It is hard to believe that “weak” can ever have been an apt epithet for Darby’s bodily presence. Emaciation and neglect could not so have affected the strong, well-formed, rugged features, of a high and characteristically English type, full of courage and inflexible resolve. In old age his habit was still rather spare, and owing perhaps to some peculiarity of figure he gave many people the impression that he was short; yet, as a matter of fact, he was decidedly over the middle height, and of a massive frame. Though he was always abstemious to a degree, and unremitting in his exertions, he probably exercised more prudence after the breakdown to which Newman alludes.

The reader has now the means of forming some adequate idea of the equipment with which “this Goliath of Dissent,” as the biographer of the last Archbishop of Tuam called him,²⁸ addressed himself to a task of extraordinary difficulty. But reference should be made to another peculiarity that must have had a great deal to do with making or marring his influence. He carried his neglect of appearances into his written and spoken composition; and that to such an extent that the style of his writings to the reader of today seems half ludicrous, half disgusting. This peculiarity is almost necessarily fatal to abiding influence; but there may well be something singularly impressive in it at the time. All misgiving as to the teacher’s sincerity—even as to his absorbing earnestness of aim—disappears before it. Darby’s own account of the matter was that he could have equalled the rhetorical flights of great masters, but that he never thought it worth while. Some much more thorough-going admirers of Darby than the present writer have regarded this statement as a proof that the great man was not always superior to a little innocent vanity; but indeed it is hard to read Darby’s better works without fancying that a noble eloquence was really at his command, if only he had chosen to cultivate it. Bad as the style is, it is the badness of an almost incredible carelessness rather than of defective power.

Was it affectation? Probably such a term is too harsh to use in the case of a man of striking general simplicity of character; but the negligence as to all externals, of which this is

²⁸ D’Arcy Sirr, *Memoir of Abp. Le Poer Trench*, p. 344.

only the culminating instance, was perhaps adopted (if not deliberately, yet at least instinctively) as the fitting external form for the inward spirit of his life's mission.

Limerick was the scene of Darby's earliest efforts outside Dublin in behalf of the new cause. It was "after July, 1830," as he says in a note apparently appended to Bellett's narrative,²⁹ that Darby first found his way to Oxford. Wigram, who was then at Queen's College, may have been the means of bringing him over. "Breaking of bread" had already begun. "About the year 1831 [it should be 1830] I went to Oxford," writes Darby, "where many doors were open, and where I found Mr. Wigram and Mr. Jarratt. Subsequently in calling on Mr. F. Newman I met Mr. Newton, who asked me to go down to Plymouth, which I did. On arriving, I found in the house Captain Hall who was already preaching in the villages. We had reading meetings, and ere long³⁰ began to break bread. Though Mr. Wigram began the work in London he was a great deal at Plymouth."

Such were the fair beginnings of several friendships destined to end sooner or later in misery and scandal. For the present, in the common glow of the new enthusiasm, all hearts blended, and latent rivalries were held in profound abeyance. Even the two brilliant and imperious ecclesiastics, whose duel *à l'outrance* fifteen years later shattered the new community and scandalised Christendom, were cooperating with perfect harmony in laying the foundations of the vigorous and aggressive church that was to give its name ere long to the whole movement.

There is really no mystery about the term "Plymouth" Brethren. The Plymouth meeting was the first in England to be recognised as a meeting of Brethren. It had before long a membership of over a thousand, and it attracted the ministry of all the English leaders. Newton was there, whenever his Fellowship at Exeter College did not detain him in Oxford. Hall was resident there for a time. Wigram and Darby worked there frequently. The result was that "Plymouth Brethren" became an almost inevitable designation for the new sect in England. In Ireland, on the contrary, they were known as Darbyites, until the usage of the "predominant partner" at last prevailed.

Darby's letter introduces three men who afterwards played considerable parts in the story of Brethrenism. George Vicesimus Wigram, the twentieth child of Sir Robert Wigram, merchant and shipowner, of London and Wexford, was born in 1805. He came of a clever family, one of his brothers being fifth wrangler and vicechancellor, and another sixth wrangler and Bishop of Rochester. For a short time he held a commission in the army. In 1824 a remarkable spiritual ecstasy left a deep and abiding impression on his life. This probably led to his abandoning the army, and entering at Queen's College, Oxford, in 1826, with the intention of taking orders—an intention never fulfilled. Wigram's fortune was considerable, and he spent it freely on the worthiest objects. It is to his enterprise and munificence that the Church at large owes the Englishman's Greek and Hebrew Concordances. In some respects the part he subsequently played in the history of the Brethren is unfortunate; and it is therefore the more incumbent on us to keep in mind from the first the strenuous, costly, and most disinterested labours by which Christians in general have so greatly profited. He remained for close upon fifty years Darby's most unwavering supporter.

A very different man was Percy Francis Hall, and singularly independent was the course he pursued throughout. He had attained the rank of Commander in the navy, but

²⁹ Miller (p. 40) quotes from a letter of Darby's to a friend, in which the writer says "about the year 1831". This is impossible, for he called upon Newman during this visit, and Newman sailed for Bagdad September 18, 1830. This fixes the visit for August or early September, 1830.

³⁰ Apparently not until the next year (1831) had begun. See Tregelles' *Three Letters*, p. 5.

(apparently about the time of which we are speaking) he resigned his commission for conscience' sake, though he could ill afford the loss of his pay. In a tract entitled *Discipleship* he defended this course. The courage, the conscientiousness, and the devotion of the writer command respect; but some of his views certainly illustrate the extravagant side of Brethrenism. War is nationally authorised murder; and the magistracy is an unfit office for a Christian man.

“For what is a Christian magistrate to do when a brokenhearted man pleads for his wife and starving family, acknowledges the sinfulness of his heart, . . . and prays for pardon? Will he say, ‘No, you are guilty, and I am not the minister of mercy, but of law; you must go to the hulk, or the jail, or it may be to death?’ Would Jesus have done so? Will He do so now? Is this grace? and is such a person a servant of the Lord Jesus *in the act*? is he doing all things for His glory, glorifying his Lord in his body and spirit, which are His?”³¹

A younger man than either of these, but one who quickly took a place of influence second only to Darby's, was Benjamin Wills Newton. This distinguished theologian was born on the 12th of December, 1807, of a Quaker stock, and attained the age of nearly ninety-two. He was less than twenty-three when Darby arrived in Oxford. It has been constantly stated that he was in Holy Orders, but this was not the case. When he met Darby he had already relinquished on conscientious grounds all thought of ordination, and was thus prepared to adopt the new views on ministry and Church order. From this time until his secession from Brethrenism in 1847, he exercised his ministry steadily at Plymouth, except that for a few years, during which he held his Fellowship, Oxford claimed a certain portion of his time.

In 1832 the Brethren of Plymouth obtained a valuable recruit. J. L. Harris, perpetual curate of Plymstock, forsook the Church of England to unite himself with them. This excellent man, who married a daughter of Legh Richmond, was born about the year 1793. His presence greatly strengthened the infant community, whose first organ, *The Christian Witness*, was started under his editorship in 1834.

It seems then clear that Brethrenism in Plymouth had not an origin wholly independent of the movement in Dublin. A stronger case might be made out for the independence of the next centre at which we have to trace the origins. I refer to Bristol, where a powerful and peculiar phase of the movement, destined to a singularly stormy sequel, demands careful consideration.

The new principles were introduced at Bristol by one who may well be called the most illustrious man ever associated with the Brethren. The story of George Müller (1805-1898) is too well known through his own narrative to require to be told again in detail. He was of Prussian birth, and after a youth of precocious wickedness became the subject of a profound spiritual change. Desiring to devote himself to mission work among the Jews, he came as a very young man to London for training. But his mind was independently moving in the common direction of the early Brethren, and connexion with an organised society soon became impossible to him. Groves' early pamphlet on Christian Devotedness fell into his hands, and influenced him powerfully. In 1830 Müller accepted a call to the pastorate of a church at Teignmouth, at a stipend of £55 a year; and it was here that the principles soon to be known as those of “the Brethren” began to take definite shape in his mind.

He became extremely suspicious of “human direction” in “the things of God”. His reading was almost confined to the letter of the Bible itself, and bore fruit, as he believed, in several measures that he took at this time. These were (1) his own baptism by immersion; (2)

³¹ *Discipleship*, pp. 25-26—quoted by W. Reid, *Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled, etc.*, p. 30 (third edition).

his adoption of weekly communion, and (to a certain extent) of open ministry; (3) his abandonment of pew rents and a stated salary; and (4) his relinquishment of all attempt to save money. His adoption of Baptist principles threatened to be rather a serious matter for him, as £30 of his salary was at stake. He confesses that, "at least for a few minutes," he found this a temptation (*Narrative*, p. 68).

It was in the summer of 1830 that he began to adopt a measure of open ministry. "At certain meetings any of the brethren had an opportunity to exhort or teach the rest, if they considered that they had anything to say which might be beneficial to the hearers." It was not "until several years after" that Müller fully adopted the principles that are now considered distinctive of Brethrenism. These he enumerates as follows: "That the disciples of Jesus should meet together, on the first day of the week, for the breaking of bread, and that that should be their principal meeting, and that those, whether one or several, who are truly gifted by the Holy Spirit for service, be it for exhortation, or teaching, or rule, etc., are responsible to the Lord for the exercise of their gifts".

Though he implies that his Brethrenism at Teignmouth was only rudimentary, it must be remembered that there was then no Brethrenism that was anything else. For better or for worse, he was not less advanced than others who were moving in the same direction.

The influence of Groves may perhaps be traced in the following statement:-

"About the same time also my wife and I had grace given to us, to take the Lord's commandment, 'Sell that ye have and give alms,' Luke xii. 33, literally, and to carry it out. Our staff and support in this matter were Matt. vi. 19—34, John xiv. 13, 14. We leaned on the arm of the Lord Jesus. It is now more than fourteen years since we set out in this way, and *we do not in the least regret the step we then took.*"

Before Müller had come to Teignmouth, Groves' tract on Christian Devotedness had given a real impulse to his mind; and his wife, whom he married on October 7, 1830, was Groves' sister. Evidently therefore Groves' influence counted for a good deal in the development of Müller's Brethrenism.

It was at Teignmouth that Müller first met the excellent man who was to be his friend and fellow-labourer through thirty-six years of unbroken harmony—a young Scotchman of the name of Henry Craik. In Craik's case the influence of Groves was direct and decisive. From 1826 to 1828, he was tutor in Groves' family; so that, as he observed long after to the younger Groves, "it was not at St. Andrews, it was not at Plymouth, it was at Exeter that the Lord taught me those lessons of dependence on Himself and of Catholic fellowship, which I have sought to carry out".

In 1832 Müller and Craik removed to Bristol, and there for some eight years exercised their joint ministry at two chapels, severally known as Bethesda and Gideon. At Gideon the privileges of full membership were open to all Christians, no distinction being made on grounds connected with baptism; but at Bethesda full membership was restricted to Baptists, though the Communion was open. This continued till the summer of 1837, when it was decided to adopt the principle of open membership. Fourteen persons of strong Baptist views seceded, the majority of whom, however, ultimately returned. The alteration was made in consequence of a growing conviction that "there is *no scriptural* distinction between being in fellowship with individuals and breaking bread with them". On the other hand, the alternative of close communion was rejected by Müller under the influence of Mr. Robert C. Chapman, of Barnstaple, the present patriarch of the Open Brethren, who has now reached the age of very nearly a hundred, amidst universal respect and goodwill. Up to that time Müller's mind had been "for years" "more or less exercised" on the subject of open communion. Thenceforth

he never wavered in his conviction “that *we ought to receive all whom Christ has received, irrespective of the measure of grace or knowledge which they may have attained unto*”.

In 1840 Gideon Chapel was abandoned. The reasons that Müller assigns for this step show that the principles of Brethrenism were by this time very fully developed at Bethesda.

“We have reason to believe that several of our dear brethren, who have been in the habit of assembling there [at Gideon] for worship, do not see with us in reference to *the great leading principles on which we professedly meet. Ever since the removal of any restraint upon the exercise of whatever gift the Spirit may bestow, in connexion with the practice of weekly communion* at Gideon, there has been dissatisfaction on the part of some. . . . By yielding up to them the use of the chapel we take away all just cause of complaint. . .

“But in addition to those already mentioned, there are a third class of difficulties connected with retaining Gideon. *The present character of the meeting for the breaking of bread there, is very far from fully exhibiting the principles on which we meet together. Unbelievers sitting among the saints, hinders our appearing to meet for the breaking of bread, and renders it necessary that a disturbing pause should intervene between the act of breaking bread and the other part of the meeting*³² . . . To request all who are not in fellowship with us (except those belonging to the families of the saints) to sit by themselves, as is the case at Bethesda, would, we fear, produce increased dissatisfaction.”

The great importance of these extracts lies in the controversies that raged in later years round the ecclesiastical status of Bethesda. It has been called a Baptist congregation associated with the Brethren, or a Baptist church “with peculiarities”. But this is to misconceive the whole character of early Brethrenism. Many conceptions that in later days became distinctive of the system had still to make their way. If the Bethesda Brethren gave their leaders the title of elder—a custom not totally unknown among the Open Brethren of today—the practice of Darby himself in the first years of the movement kept them in countenance,³³ and the eldership, as it existed among them, was essentially connected with the conceptions of the Brethren, and radically distinct from those of the Baptists.

Truth to tell, Bethesda seems to have been rather too closely linked with the Brethren for its comfort. To go back to the preceding year, we find that in February, 1839, Müller and Craik left Bristol for a couple of weeks’ retirement, in order to give themselves to study and prayer in regard to certain burning questions that were threatening the peace of their flocks. The root of the trouble is not indicated, but the topics under consideration are at least suggestive. They included the eldership, its authority and its functions, and a variety of “questions relative to the Lord’s Supper”. “Before brother Craik and I,” writes Müller, “left Bristol for the consideration of the above points, things wore a gloomy appearance. A separation in the Church seemed to be unavoidable. But God had mercy, and pitied us. He was pleased to give us not merely increased light, but shewed us also how to act, and gave us a measure of wisdom, grace, and spiritual courage for acting. The clouds were dispelled, and peace was restored in the Church.”

The conclusions that the pastors reached with such happy results may be summarised as follows: (1) It is “the mind of God that in every Church there should be recognised Elders”. (2) They are appointed by the Holy Ghost, and the appointment is made known to them and to the flock by “the secret call of the Spirit, confirmed by the possession of the requisite qualifications, and by the Lord’s blessing resting upon their labours”. (3) Matters of discipline are to be reserved for *final settlement in the presence* of the church, and *with its*

³² Italics my own.

³³ See below, p. 56.

consent, but (4) the Elders, without the church, are to appoint “the times for meeting,” to decide, “if needful, who are qualified to teach or to exhort, whether a brother has spoken to edification, or otherwise,” and “whether what may be advanced is according to the truth or not”. (5) The Lord’s Supper should be observed weekly, in compliance not with a command of the apostles, but with their example. (6) Liberty of ministry in the fullest sense, comprising teaching and exhortation, prayer and praise, should be associated with the ordinance. (7) Preferably, every individual communicant should break off a piece of the sacramental loaf for himself, rather than that it should be broken up by one of the elders.

During all these years Darby’s influence was continually increasing. If we said that he was steadily drawing closer his toils round the infant community, the expression would not be incorrect, unless it were understood to impute to him a deliberate policy of subjugation. Unconsciously, he was surrounding the various companies of the Brethren with influences that were bound to draw them very far from their original intentions; but there is no ground to question the sincerity with which he at first entered into the designs of his friends in Dublin. Ambition came with success; the opportunity was the temptation; and Darby became the helpless captive of his own triumph. So at least I am disposed to interpret the course of events. In his evolutions, Darby ended at a point exactly opposite to that from which he started. He began, as Rees put it,³⁴ with universal communion, and ended with universal excommunication. He began with the declaration that it would be presumption and impiety to attempt to build up the “ruined Church,” or to restore “the administration of the Body”; and he ended by doing both things strenuously, if there is meaning in words. But it is probable that with the gradual alteration of his standpoint came a corresponding modification in the meaning he assigned to his watchwords, with the not unprecedented result that one and the same set of formulae was applied to the sanction of two opposite courses of action.

Under Darby’s influence meetings sprang up rapidly. The first meeting in London, though not indeed planted by him, was the work of his trustiest lieutenant, G. V. Wigram; and the meeting at Rawstone Street, Camden Town, ultimately became the nucleus of Darby’s metropolitan system of administration, which will occupy a considerable place in the sequel. Of this, the first transient indication occurs in 1838, when Wigram addressed (evidently to Darby) the following letter :—³⁵

“MY DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER,—There is a matter exercising the minds of some of us at this present time in which you may be (and in some sense certainly are) concerned. The question I refer to is, *How are meetings for communion of saints in these parts to be regulated?* Would it be for the glory of the Lord and the increase of testimony to have *one central meeting*, the common responsibility of all within reach, *and as many meetings subordinate to it* as grace might vouchsafe? or to hold it to be better to allow *the meetings to grow up as they may without connexion and dependent upon the energy of individuals only?* . . . truly, provided there be in London some place where the wanderer can find rest and communion, my desire is met; though the glory of the Lord will of course be still to be cared for.

“I am, dear brother, yours in Jesus,
“G. V. W.”

“Oct. 6, 1838.”

³⁴ *Four Letters*. Letter 1. Rees made the remark of the system at large, but the system was moulded by Darby.

³⁵ Reprinted in Henry Groves’ *Darbyism*, p. 11.

This is particularly interesting as containing the first proposal for a federation of the little meetings of the Brethren.

But the document that more than any other sheds strong light on this early period of development is the well-known letter that Groves, weather-bound at Milford Haven on the eve of his second voyage for the East, addressed to Darby, under date March 10, 1836. Groves had landed in England about fifteen months before, and had associated freely with the Brethren in Bristol and Plymouth. The whole letter is well worth perusal for the insight it gives into the characters and views of the two men who played the largest parts in the inauguration of the movement. It will be found *verbatim* in the appendix to Groves' *Memoir*. A few extracts must suffice here.

“I wish you to feel assured that nothing has estranged my heart from you, or lowered my confidence in your being still animated by the same enlarged and generous purposes that once so won and riveted me; and though I feel you have departed from those principles by which you once hoped to have effected them, and are in principle returning to the city from whence you departed, still my soul so reposes in the truth of your heart to God that I feel it needs but a step or two more to advance and you will see all the evil of the systems from which you profess to be separated to spring up among yourselves. . . . You will be known more by what you witness *against* than what you witness for, and practically this will prove that you witness against all but yourselves as certainly as the Walkerites or the Glassites: your Shibboleth may be different, but it will be as real. It has been asserted that I have changed my principles; all I can say is, that as far as I know what those principles were in which I gloried in first discovering them in the Word of God, I now glory in them ten times more since I have experienced their applicability to all the various and perplexing circumstances of the present state of the Church; allowing you to give every individual, and collection of individuals, the standing *God* gives them, without identifying yourselves with any of their evils.”

The following is specially important:-

“I ever understood our principle of communion to be the possession of the common life. . . of the family of God. . . ; these were our early thoughts, and are my most matured ones. The transition your little bodies have undergone, in no longer standing forth the witnesses for the glorious, simple truth, so much as standing forth witnesses against all that they judge error, have lowered them in my apprehension from heaven to earth in their position of witnesses. . . . The moment the witnessing for the common life as our *bond* gives place to a witnessing *against* errors by separation of persons and preaching, (errors allowably compatible with the common life), every individual or society of individuals first comes before the mind as those who might need witnessing against, and all their conduct and principles have first to be examined and approved before they can be received; and the position which this occupying the seat of judgment will place you in will be this: the most narrow-minded and bigoted will rule, because his conscience cannot and will not give way, and therefore the more enlarged heart must yield. It is into this position, dear Darby, I feel some little flocks are fast tending, if they have not already attained it. Making *light* not *life* the measure of communion. . . . Was not the principle we laid down as to separation from all existing bodies at the outset this: that we felt ourselves bound to separate from all individuals and systems, *so far* as they required us to do what our consciences would not allow, or restrained us from doing what our consciences required, and no further? and were we not as free to join and act with any individual, or body of individuals, as they were free *not* to require us to do what our consciences did *not* allow, or prevent our doing what they did? And in this

freedom did we not feel brethren should *not* force liberty on those who were bound, nor withhold freedom from those who were free?”

The Brethren have always been apt to measure their fidelity by the opposition and reproach that they have encountered. Groves believed that the opposition might sometimes be explained in quite a different way.

“I know it is said, (dear Lady Powerscourt told me so), that so long as any terms were kept with the Church of England, by mixing up in *any* measure in their ministrations when there was nothing to offend your conscience, they bore your testimony most patiently, but after your entire rejection of them, they pursued you with undeviating resentment, and this was brought to prove that the then position was wrong, and the present right. But all I see in this is, that whilst you occupy the place of only witnessing against those things which the Divine life within themselves recognised as evil, and separating from them ONLY SO FAR as they separated from Christ, you established them as judges of themselves, and of themselves they were condemned; and at the same time you conciliated their heavenly affections, by allowing all that really was of the Lord, and sharing in it, though the system itself in which you found these golden grains you could not away with. . . . There is no truth more established in my own mind than this; that to occupy the position of the maximum of power, in witnessing to the consciences of others, you must stand before their unbiassed judgment as evidently *wishing* to allow in them *more* than their own consciences allow, rather than less, proving that your heart of love is more alive to find a covering for faults, than your eagle eye of light to discover them.”

An *argumentum ad hominem* follows. It must be remembered that Darby almost alone among the earlier Brethren remained a pedobaptist.

“Some will not have me hold communion with the Scotts, because their views are not satisfactory about the Lord’s Supper; others with you, because of your views about baptism; others with the Church of England, because of her thoughts about ministry. I receive them all and join with them. On the principle of witnessing against evil, I should reject them all I make use of my fellowship in the Spirit, to enjoy the common life together and witness for that, as an opportunity to set before them those little particulars into which, notwithstanding all their grace and faithfulness, their godliness and honesty, they have fallen. . . . I naturally unite fixedly with those in whom I see and feel most of the life and power of God. But I am as free to visit other churches where I see much of disorder as to visit the houses of my friends, though they govern them not as I could wish.”

The closing words of the letter have a great moral beauty. They are also valuable as showing that an observer of no common shrewdness recognised in Darby a moral elevation such as many in the present day are unable to conceive that he possessed.

“You must not, however, dear brother, think, from anything I have said, that I shall not write freely and fully to you, relative to things in India, feeling assured in my own heart, that your enlarged and generous spirit, so richly taught of the Lord, will one day burst again those bonds which narrower minds than yours have encircled you with, and come forth again, rather anxious to advance *all* the living members of the living Head into the stature of men, than to be encircled by any little bodies, however numerous, that own you for their founder. I honour, love, and respect your position in the Church of God; but the deep conviction I have that your spiritual power was incalculably greater when you walked in the midst of the various

congregations of the Lord's people, manifesting forth the life and the power of the Gospel, than now, is such that I cannot but write the above as a proof of my love and confidence that your mind is above considering who these remarks come from, rather than what truth there may be in them."

Whether we agree with Groves or with Darby, or differ from both, it will be hard to deny that this letter is marked by no ordinary combination of faithfulness, delicacy, and large-hearted wisdom. In what spirit Darby received it I have not the least idea, but its practical effect upon him would seem to have been nothing. Indeed, the letter is a sort of last utterance of a vanishing standpoint. Darby carried the day at all points. In later times such a fraternising with congregations of other denominations as Groves pleaded for has been almost as alien from the procedure of the Open Brethren (with some eminent and strongly-marked exceptions) as from that of the Exclusive party itself.

There is no doubt that even at that early date Darby carried the multitude with him. At Bristol indeed the rule of Müller and Craik safeguarded the interests of more liberal principles; and there Groves was amply satisfied. But at Plymouth, notwithstanding that Darby's influence was seriously qualified by the local preeminence of Newton, Groves was grieved to find the narrower views already in the ascendant.³⁶ When the evil spirit of sectarianism is gone out of a man he is very apt to find himself a wanderer through dry places, seeking rest and finding none; and he is fortunate indeed if he does not fulfil his course according to the parable, until his last state is worse (and perhaps incomparably worse) than his first. So at least it certainly was with the great mass of the Brethren. Groves, on the other hand, with his singularly pure, lofty and tender spirit, had no more interest in a sect than he had capacity to form one. He was essentially catholic; and he had to endure the grief—which to a man less pure from the taint of self-seeking would have been the bitter mortification—of seeing another man enter into his labours and convert them to purposes that he abhorred.³⁷

³⁶ *Memoir*, 356.

³⁷ I allow this closing sentence to stand as it originally appeared in the *British Weekly*, because I consider that Groves' priority as compared with Darby, and his actually predominant influence at the first, make the expressions substantially accurate. But I would wish it to be understood that I do not think that any man can, with strict propriety, be spoken of as *the* founder of Plymouthism; though it seems fair to say of Groves that he had a larger share in its foundation than any one else, if we confine our attention to the very earliest period. It is necessary to add a word of warning against the first chapter of *The Brethren, Their Origin, Progress and Testimony*. Its author derived his information largely from Darby, but it may be charitably hoped that he extensively misunderstood his authority. As the chapter stands, *it is putting it mildly to say that it teems with errors*. Refutation in detail would have been equally tedious and superfluous, and I have been content in my own narrative to let my authorities constantly appear. I make these strictures on the book in question with the profoundest veneration for its author, and simply as deeming them imperatively called for in the interests of historical truth. I am also certain that Mr. Miller would never have felt that he had an interest that could be severed from the interests of truth.

IV The Expansion Of Brethrenism—Groves In The East

THE establishment of Brethrenism abroad is primarily due to the zeal of the men who bore the largest share in founding or in consolidating it at home. We must needs limit our attention here to the most important or most characteristic episodes; and, from this point of view, precedence must be assigned to Groves' work in India, Darby's in the Canton de Vaud, and Müller's in Germany.

We follow the chronological order; but Groves' work, though in some respects the most interesting of the three, had less effect than the others in the formation of churches on the new model. The explanation must be sought chiefly in the personal character of the missionary. If Groves had said, "I am not so anxious to form a party as to infuse principles," he would have said with transparent truth what many a sect-maker has said with more or less unconscious disingenuousness. To have a ring of churches looking up to him as their founder does not seem to have had any attraction for him; else he might surely have had it. Nor is it possible even to imagine him trying to undermine the influence of a pastor with his flock. Whatever difficulties his disintegrating principles may have created in India we always find him, whether in conference or in controversy, dealing, with the clergy first of all, and in all things aboveboard. Comparing his conduct, even when we think it ill-judged and unfortunate, with what Brethrenism has too often exhibited, who can refrain from crying, *O si sic omnes!*

The mission to Bagdad, though almost barren of registrable results, is one of the most interesting episodes in the whole of our story. A year after Groves left England a party of seven started to join him. It consisted of Cronin (who had just become a widower), his mother and sister, Parnell, Newman, Hamilton (an Irish Brother), and Cronin's infant daughter. The party was detained for fifteen months at Aleppo. There Parnell married Miss Cronin, and lost her almost immediately by death. Hamilton returned to England, and scarcely had the little company at last succeeded in reaching Bagdad, in the early summer of 1832, when Mrs. Cronin also died.

It is an interesting fact that Wigram was only prevented at the last moment from joining this missionary band. That we thus get a list of almost all the names of men who had taken a leading part in the movement before 1830 is a striking proof not only of the fervour of the zeal of the first Brethren, and of their readiness to stake everything on principles of action that may now appear to us rather visionary, but also of their superiority to any ambition to found a new sect. To follow Groves to Bagdad, on a mission that must be deemed singularly unpromising, was the prevailing passion in Dublin. If the little group there that furnished most of the makers of Brethrenism had the weakness of Quixotism, at least they had its strength and nobleness.

The zeal of the party was tried by heavy and protracted sorrow. When they reached Bagdad at last it was to enter a house of mourning. In March, 1831, the plague had broken out, and within two months more than half the population of the city had perished. The danger seemed to be passing away, leaving the missionary party untouched, when Mrs. Groves sickened, and within a week was dead. She was as saintly as her husband, and the story of her illness and death, as preserved in his journals, is one of the most affecting in the annals of missions. Illness visited every member of the family in turn. In August the baby died, and Groves would have been left with no European company except that of his two boys, had it not been for John Kitto, whom he had befriended many years before, and had finally brought with him to the East. This afflicted young man (he was stone-deaf) afterwards, with great help from his long Eastern experience, attained to eminence in the department of Biblical literature. He has left on record, in many an enthusiastic passage, the gratitude and reverence he felt towards his benefactor. "In the whole world," he wrote at a later day, "so far as I know

it, there is not one man whose character I venerate so highly.” It was some relief to his feelings to have the opportunity to act as tutor to the two boys.

The plague was followed by civil war, and Bagdad was besieged. The suffocating heat compelled Groves and his family to pass the night on the roof, notwithstanding that it was occasionally swept by the bullets of the besiegers.

Groves, though almost overwhelmed, held on his way, and his spirits revived when the friends from Aleppo joined him. A young Armenian, Serkies Davids, who had been bereaved of his last relative through the plague, Groves took into his own house and treated like a son. He became a convert,—the one indubitable convert of the mission,—and a thoroughly satisfactory one. But the work among the Mahometans remained unproductive; the very opportunities of preaching seemed to be withdrawn; and this doubtless disposed Groves to entertain the thought of a mission tour in India. Thither he set out in May, 1833. Contrary to his original intention, he never returned to Bagdad. Cronin and Parnell, with Groves’ sons, did not quit Bagdad for a considerable time after this. Newman had left for England with Kitto, partly to enlist additional missionaries, in September, 1832. But his brief, enthusiastic career among the Brethren was nearly over. He passed to Arianism, and then to Deism. Of his appreciation of the leader of the mission he has left the record in a single epithet—“the noble-hearted Groves”.

“There are two or three objects in going,” Groves wrote, “which I cannot detail, and feel it impossible to write about. One, however, very especial one, is to become united more truly in heart with all the missionary band there, and shew that, notwithstanding all differences, we are one in Christ; sympathising in their sorrows, and rejoicing in their prosperity. . . . My purpose is to visit as many mission stations as I can before I return, should the Lord spare me.” In many respects no man was ever better fitted for the task; but he was hampered by his attachment to views that most of the missionaries were sure to think subversive of all necessary order. The result was that he had a mixed success. He landed at Bombay in July. There he found several friends, “all of them members of the Church of England,” who were deeply concerned at the difficulties that threatened to stop the remarkable work of Rhenius in Tinnevelly. At their “earnest solicitations,” Groves determined to visit Rhenius, and endeavour to encourage him to remain at his post.

By this mission Groves ultimately incurred a good deal of odium in India, and lost many friends. He appeared to others as the enemy of the Church Missionary Society—an imputation that he felt to be very unjust. There were two sides to the question. Mr. Eugene Stock, the latest authority on the subject, has told us³⁸ that Rhenius’ “breach with the Church was due to Mr. Groves’s influence”; but if this statement is to be deemed correct, it must only be understood to imply that Groves’ influence made an already serious breach irreparable. In December, Groves writes of his success in “the great object” of his coming to Tinnevelly—“that of preventing my dear brother Rhenius from going to England, which would, I fear, occasion the separation, or, at least, as far as we can see, the scattering of this most affectingly interesting mission”. The Society had invited Rhenius to England to confer on the great point in dispute—the right, that is, of Rhenius to ordain catechists himself instead of obtaining the intervention of the bishop. Evidently Groves did not anticipate that such a visit would lead to an accommodation; and equally evidently he was glad to see Rhenius in an independent position; but it does not seem that he made it his special object to detach him from the Church of England. In the earlier period of the operations of the Church Missionary Society, the great scarcity of English candidates necessitated a large employment of Lutherans. The ambiguous Episcopalianism of these recruits must have been so far a weakness. On the other hand, the inelastic machinery of Anglicanism was undoubtedly regarded by Groves with considerable

³⁸ *History of the Church Missionary Society*, vol i., p. 283.

disfavour; and, however far he was from making it a primary object to bring his fellow Christians over to his own views on ecclesiastical questions, his influence, if a crisis arose, would necessarily be thrown into the scale of separation. He might therefore very naturally feel himself injured by such an estimate of his conduct as the adherents of the Society might equally naturally form.

The cardinal point with Groves was not so much liberty for ministry within the church (though he was certainly attached to it) as liberty for ministry outside of it. His own liberty to minister in missionary operations without human authorisation was the starting point of his nonconformist career; a similar liberty within the Christian congregations, though he had much to do with setting it up, was merely a natural extension of the same principle. Thus in India, while he certainly contemplated the formation of a church on the "Plymouth" model (though apparently not to be formed at the expense of existing churches, but by evangelistic effort), his great aim was to set free the mass of missionary power that he judged was left unutilised. He delighted to show Christians in the army, and others, apart from all ecclesiastical questions, "the liberty they had in Christ" to preach His Word; and he seems to have done this zealously, without any ulterior object.

This will explain his attitude in the matter of Rhenius. In the abstract question of the ordination of the catechists he cannot have taken much interest. But he probably thought that constant resort to the bishop would interpose delays in the prosecution of the work. He would therefore much prefer to see Rhenius acting entirely on his own responsibility. It does not appear how much further things moved in the direction of Groves' other views. Certainly nothing like a stable church of Brethren was formed, for after the early death of Rhenius in 1838 most of the seceding Christians returned to the Church of England.³⁹

So far, Groves' labours had done little for the extension of Brethrenism as an ecclesiastical system. Subsequently a very vigorous and extensive work, substantially on the lines of the Brethren, sprang up in the north of Tinnevely, under the leadership of a disciple of his, named Aroolappen. This really remarkable Christian, who displayed from early days an energy of faith not unworthy of his teacher, is not claimed as a convert of Groves'. In a letter of condolence, indeed, that he addressed on the occasion of Groves' death to one of the mourners, he speaks of himself as Groves' "dear child in Christ Jesus"; but it is probable that this spiritual relationship was adoptive. Groves seems first to have met him in Tinnevely at the end of 1833, and their close friendship remained uninterrupted for twenty years, and was then only severed by death. The present missions of the Open Brethren, not only in Tinnevely but also in Travancore, are, as I understand, to be affiliated to Aroolappen, and through him to Groves.

More important in itself perhaps, though less to our present purpose, was the influence that Groves seems to have exercised upon English residents over a very wide and varied field in India. In modern phraseology this would be described as a "deepening of spiritual life," and the missionary's qualifications for the work were acknowledged by many who were painfully apprehensive of his influence in other respects. Two remarks made to him in the summer of 1834, just before he sailed to England, are well worth quoting. "I was told," he writes, "I was the greatest enemy the Church of England ever had in India, because no one could help loving my spirit, and thus the evil sank tenfold deeper; but indeed, I do not wish to injure, but to help her, by taking from her all her false confidences." A few days later he records that "the chaplain is most kind in many respects: he says, 'they cannot have too much of my spirit or too little of my judgment.'" The former remark, though not unkind, partakes of the exaggeration of controversy; the latter is perhaps not far from the truth. Norris Groves is one of the Church's great saints; but a solid judgment was not his forte. He had a strong case

³⁹ Stock, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

against many an existing arrangement, but his opponents might be excused for thinking that the almost total abrogation of arrangement would not mend matters. Time, at any rate, has been so far on their side.

Some of the most eminent men in India were sufficiently calm and large-minded to realise that whatever harm, from their point of view, Groves might accomplish was bound to be far outweighed by the good; and they extended to him their cordial friendship. Henry Martyn's friend, Daniel Corrie, the veteran missionaries of Serampore, and above all, the young Scotchman who was to leave so deep a mark on Eastern missions, Alexander Duff, were chief amongst these. In later days, (for, with the exception of occasional visits to England, Groves devoted the last twenty years of his life to India), the honoured names of Fox and Noble, clergymen of the Church Missionary Society in Masulipatam, must be added to the list.

It must also be said that as time went on Groves grew to hope less and less from the movement that he had done so much to inaugurate. From the time that Darby's principles of fellowship gained the ascendancy in England, Groves considered that the downfall of the Brethren was decreed. Though he personally adhered through life to their communion, he evidently ceased to expect them "to work any deliverance in the earth". The disease he had grappled with so hopefully at the first seemed now beyond remedy. Indeed he dreaded the new ecclesiasticism far more than the old, and his later efforts were less directed to diffusing the views of the Brethren than to saving the Brethren themselves from the principles of "impulsive ministry," and the abjuration of fixed pastoral relations.

The best witness to the character of his work in India is Dr. Duff. Duff was bound to him by many ties. He had owed⁴⁰ "his first glow of devotedness" to Groves' early tract; and it may well be that he owed his life to the almost parental tenderness with which his friend nursed him through a very serious illness on their voyage from Calcutta to England in 1834. But their friendship owed nothing to agreement in those tenets with which Groves' name is almost identified today. It was from the standpoint of a firm adherent of the time-honoured Presbyterian forms that Duff, writing to Mrs. Groves with reference to the projected memoir of her husband, describes in the following passage the value of his deceased friend's labours in India. It will plainly appear that if Duff thought Groves sometimes an indiscreet reformer, at least he felt that there was a good deal to reform.

"Before Mr. Groves reached Calcutta, about the middle of 1834, I had heard much of him and his uncommon devotedness to the cause of Christ. No sooner did I meet with him than I felt drawn towards him with the cords of love. He was so warm, so earnest, so wrapt up in his Master's cause, so inflamed with zeal for the salvation of perishing souls, I regarded it as no ordinary privilege that he agreed to take up his abode in my house during his sojourn in Calcutta. . . .

"Well did I know beforehand that there were different points connected with the principles of establishments, church government, and such like, respecting which his opinions differed somewhat widely from mine; but I knew that he was a proved man of God, who had jeopardised his worldly interest, and even his life, in seeking to promote the cause of the Redeemer in the world. . . .

". . . If in our past friendly and brotherly discussions, Mr. Groves was naturally apt to consider me, at times, as unconsciously warped in judgment, through the prejudices of education, and the influence of ecclesiastical habits; so, on the other hand, I was apt to consider him, in his honest zeal, as a reformer of glaring and confessed abuses, as, at times, unconsciously carried away to the opposite extreme, in the suggestion of appropriate remedies

⁴⁰ *Memoir*, p. 295.

. . . . Apart altogether from his peculiar views, or even in spite of some of them, I could not help regarding him as one of the most loving and lovable of Christian men, while the singular fervency of his spirit made it quite contagious; diffusing all around the savour of an unearthly sanctity and self-consuming devotedness. . . . The Lord grant that professing disciples in this luxurious age of self-pleasing and self-indulgence, may at least learn from his example the lesson which they preeminently need, and which he was honoured of God preeminently to teach, and that is, the lesson of real Scriptural self-denial, the divine lesson of taking up the cross, forsaking all, and following the Lord!”

WIDELY different is the spectacle that Darby's work in the Canton de Vaud presents, and of vastly greater consequence in the development of Brethrenism. Darby was nothing if not an ecclesiastic, and all his operations subserved ecclesiastical ends. His work in Switzerland began in the earlier months of 1838, and his very appearance was the signal for an initial success, a permanent meeting being formed in Vevey within the first half of the year.⁴¹ It was some two years later, however, before he got a footing in the far larger and more important town of Lausanne. His arrival there, in March, 1840, inaugurated a most extraordinary movement, of which the influence spread with startling rapidity over the whole of the Canton and far beyond it, yet without sacrificing to the rapidity of its growth any element of solidity and permanence.

Such a result is no common tribute to the skill and determination of the man who ventured on so great an enterprise single-handed. That he met with favouring circumstances is unquestionable; but that was owing to no mere freak of propitious fortune. Darby had a keen eye to favouring circumstances. Where they promised him a footing he struck in promptly; he gained no footing that he did not make good; and he won no victory that he did not convert into a stepping-stone to another. "De succès en succès" is the description left of his campaign by a determined and formidable opponent.

Information is ample and authoritative. On the one hand, the writer just quoted, has left a full account of it in a large pamphlet, entitled *Les Frères de Plymouth et John Darby*. His position as Professor in the State Church's Theological College at Lausanne, and his great eminence as a theologian, lend special value and interest to his polemic. Perhaps no theologian of an equally wide reputation has devoted so much attention to any episode in the history of the Brethren. I refer to J.J. Herzog, the editor of the *Real-encyclopädie*. Herzog writes, as I have said, from the standpoint of an avowed and determined enemy of Darbyism. He is never indeed intentionally unfair, and at times he pays tributes to Darby that he might defensibly have withheld; but his work is still the work of a partisan, and of a partisan smarting under painful blows and heavy losses. It is therefore fortunate that we have in abundance from Darby's own pen the means of putting ourselves at the point of view of the other side. Darby carried on his campaign largely by aid of tracts, some expository and some controversial. These are brought together in an English form in his *Collected Writings*.

Darby came to Lausanne in response to an invitation he had received in the previous autumn from an influential member of the Free Church, who had taken alarm at the rapid spread of Wesleyan Methodism amongst the Dissenters. The intervening months were spent, at least in part, at the important centres of Neuchâtel and Geneva. That he had already earned a very high reputation in Switzerland is amply witnessed by Herzog, who also allows, with a candour that does him credit, that the reputation was in great part well deserved.

⁴¹ The evidence for this date is practically conclusive. I have before me a note in which M. Cavin, a member of the Vevey meeting, notified his retirement from association with it, on account of its acceptance of "the Park Street test". The resignation was "to be read to the assembly of the Brethren meeting together for worship on Sunday, July 8, 1883," and its opening sentence is as follows: "I have belonged to this assembly from its origin, that is to say, for more than forty-five years". The letter goes on to speak of the meeting in question as having "walked in peace during the whole of that time". It is evident therefore that the date is given with care, and an elderly man's recollections of the momentous events of his youth—and the first establishment of Brethrenism must have seemed momentous indeed to a young man who took part in it—are very seldom unreliable. Moreover, in resigning his membership, he was acting in concert with one of the best known of Swiss Brethren, the late J. B. Rossier of Vevey, who had himself joined the Brethren in 1840. Vevey, therefore, is doubtless entitled to the honours, such as they are, of having had the first Brethren's meeting (or at least the first of any importance) in Switzerland, or perhaps on the Continent.

“Such is the man who towards the end of March, 1840, appeared at Lausanne in the midst of the almost broken up dissenting Church. He came, preceded by the double reputation of an able pastor and of a teacher profoundly acquainted with the Bible. People spoke in glowing terms of the devotion of a man who, from love for Christ and for souls, had renounced almost the whole of his fine fortune;⁴² and who displayed in his whole conduct a simplicity and a frugality that recalled the primitive times of the Church. It was also said in his favour that, sacrificing the delights of family life, he spent his life in journeying from place to place to gain souls for the kingdom of God.

“Notwithstanding that Mr. Darby seeks less to convert souls than to unite under his direction souls already converted, we gladly acknowledge that he deserved to a great extent the compliments that were paid him. There certainly is to be found in him a combination of fine and great qualities. His conversion, we have no reason whatever to doubt, was real and sincere. He is capable of much devotion to the Lord’s cause, and he has given striking proofs of it. He is a man of indefatigable activity, and at the same time of great originality and independence of mind. If he had taken a different turn, he might have rendered eminent services to the Church.

“Moreover we must distinguish in him, up to a certain point, the teacher, the head of a movement, and the simple Christian. Christian charity requires us to make such a distinction. Essentially our charge against him is that these three characters are not found in perfect harmony in him. From the point of view of his general Christian character he deserves the most honourable witness. His sermons, as well as his pastoral activity, in so far as they relate to what really belongs to the Christian life, are also worthy of great praise; Mr. Darby can edify very well when he wishes; he excels in treating certain thrilling truths of the Gospel; and both by this means and by his pastoral care he has done many people good, and has been, under God, the means of the conversion of some. But when in his teaching he broaches ecclesiastical questions, when he appears as head of a party, and when he endeavours to unite under his banner souls already converted, then he decidedly falls below his own level.⁴³ Our criticism relates almost exclusively to his ecclesiastical system, and to his position and his proceedings as director of a particular society.”

It would be difficult to overpraise the sagacity that enabled Herzog to form such an estimate of Darby. Darby’s career was still in an early stage. By far the larger half of his public life, and by far the more sensational, was yet to come. With the information that later years and a closer acquaintance afford, we can see, if I mistake not, that both the light and the shade in Herzog’s picture require to be intensified; but in its broad outlines, the picture remains still a most authentic and impressive portrait. If Herzog was sometimes vehement, or even angry, in his denunciations, he at least had not suffered anger to blind his eyes.

Darby’s success in his primary mission was rapid and complete. Methodism vanished before him. His polemic against the Wesleyan view of perfection is unstintedly praised by Herzog, who also does justice to the wisdom with which Darby, avoiding a merely negative and destructive policy, occupied the minds of his hearers with a totally different set of ideas, which he invested with a powerful fascination. It is right, however, to add that Herzog had to take very just exception to Darby’s uncharitable, not to say outrageous, imputation on Wesleyanism that it hardly contained any real Christians, and that it set aside, in its doctrine and its discipline, “all that is most precious in the truths of salvation”. Herzog is surely warranted in saying that such assertions “betray the party man”. Indeed they far exceed the

⁴² Darby enjoyed under his father’s will a very comfortable annuity; but I have heard that he lost a handsome property through his father’s want of sympathy with his ecclesiastical course.

⁴³ “Il est décidément inférieur à lui-même.”

licence to which extreme Calvinists may be said to have a sort of prescriptive title when dealing with Arminians, and Darby's was not an extreme Calvinism.

These blemishes did not hinder the success of Darby's mission. In the spring of 1841, Henri Olivier renounced the Methodism of which he had been "the most ardent champion," and "united his flock to Darby's". Nor was this Darby's first triumph. On the 11th of January, 1841, he writes from Lausanne of three ministers of the State Church that had resigned their office,⁴⁴ and of a meeting at Vevey "to break bread," held on a Monday, at which Nationalists and Dissenters united. "Very happy," is Darby's terse comment. "It is a beginning."

It was in fact the beginning of a great deal. Following English precedent, Darby made the study of prophecy the pivot of his work; and his delineations of millennial glory dazzled the minds of his hearers. There existed in Vaud a certain religious *malaise*, of which the growth of Methodism in an otherwise uncongenial soil had been a symptom. The Free Church had yielded less satisfaction than its promoters had hoped, and the minds of its adherents were prepared to hail the charms with which the certain future—doubtless it was said, the near future—was invested in Darby's prophetic dissertations. He was never "weary," Herzog tells us, "of urging on his hearers this decisive word: 'Prophecy tends to snatch us from the present evil age; that is its principal effect'."

Darby was in some sense the guest of the Dissenters, but he let it be known from the outset that he would make no difference between them and the "Nationalists". The result was that his meetings were largely attended by the members of both Churches, and he pursued a policy that may be variously characterised according to the point of view taken. He would doubtless have said that he spoke the word, as his hearers were able to bear it.

"Persons who had for a long time followed his lectures affirmed that he preached nothing but the truths of salvation, and never allowed himself a word that was hostile to the existing Church. He delivered the discourses of which we have just spoken, equally on Sundays and on other days, either in the place of the former speakers or by turns with them. . . . People said that no one had ever preached in a manner so thrilling, so edifying, so clear and so consistent, the free grace of God in Christ for the salvation of sinners. That, they said, was the characteristic merit of Darby's preaching. We are of the same opinion, without approving of the extravagant eulogising of Mr. Darby. . . . Indeed it would be hard to understand how discourses that shone by no kind of literary or rhetorical merit, and that were addressed to so religious an audience as Mr. Darby's, could have made such a sensation if they had not borne the stamp of a truly evangelical impress."

Great as the revolution in Lausanne was, it seems to have been almost silently effected, by dint partly of the mere popularity of Darby's ministry, partly of changes that he gradually introduced on his own authority. The old effective watchword, Union of the Children of God, was rallying men rapidly to the standard of Darbyism.

"All this was preparing for the ecclesiastical revolution projected by our able doctor; or rather, it was not perceived that the revolution was already partly accomplished. Darby had in effect placed himself of his own accord at the head of the congregation, and had taken to

⁴⁴ Darby's *Letters*, p. 54. If the reader is interested in ascertaining how badly a cultivated Englishman may write his mother-tongue, it will be worth his while to read this letter. I give a brief extract. "Then there are now the old Dissenters, partly Wesleyan, among the women, though having protested as a body against it, some saying the pastor who introduced it, but who now denounces it, is their pastor, and some not — and in the meanwhile the principle of leaving their churches, placing the others in a dilemma how to recognise this body, meanwhile they look on." Surely, in charity to Darby's memory, the editors of his correspondence might have omitted this letter from the collection.

exercising pastoral functions, without so much as dreaming of justifying his assumption of the office of an ecclesiastic by his ordination to the ministry in the Church of England. The ministers whom the congregation had had till then were virtually deposed. It is true that they still at times occupied the pulpit, but the office that the congregation had conferred on them had come to an end, and they saw themselves forced to divide its functions not only with Darby, but even with laymen.

“Mr. Darby administered the Lord’s Supper every Sunday after the ordinary service,⁴⁵ without troubling about the disciplinary rules of the dissenting congregation. ‘He is extremely broad,’ many members of the National Church who had joined him said in his praise; ‘he administers the Lord’s Supper to all without distinction who attend his meetings, and he does not even insist in the least that they should leave the National Church.’ ”

The following is an interesting account of the *dénouement*. It must of course be remembered that it is written by an adversary.

“When he judged people’s minds sufficiently prepared, Mr. Darby proceeded to the realisation, strictly speaking, of his plan. The idea was to explode in fragments organised Dissent as it had previously existed; thus to draw to himself the best energies of the revival in the National Church, and to group them without any kind of ecclesiastical organisation, in congregations absolutely free, that would have no centre but himself. By the suppression of every form of organisation his system gave all the more play to the ascendancy of his powerful individuality.”

Darby followed up his triumph. He established at his house “a sort of little academy, where certain disciples, maintained for the most part at his own expense and that of his English and Vaudois friends, were initiated by him in his way of understanding Scripture”. Provision was thus made to replace him during his frequent absences from Lausanne; and in the supply of the pulpit the ordained ministers, to the horror of Professor Herzog’s ecclesiastical soul, obtained no preference. Herzog, however, had his revenge by hitting off neatly one of the characteristic little affectations of Darbyism. “To forward the ecclesiastical levelling,” as he tells us, “they actually took away the little table on a platform that had served the former preachers as pulpit; and one day when one of the latter had taken it into his head to replace the innocent bit of furniture⁴⁶—‘What’s the good of that chimney-piece?’ cried an ardent disciple of Darby’s, as he entered the hall; and the table disappeared for good and all.”

If the Brothers who took the lead in Darby’s absence were asked how they set to work to keep things in order, they replied, “Very simply; we meet together and discuss what is to be done”. Herzog’s not unnatural comment is that the declaration “was tantamount to an avowal that they fell back, in virtue of the very nature of things, on a first step in ecclesiastical organisation”. All the advantage they had, to his mind, was that the gifts manifested by various brethren “were not regularly recognised, and [that] arbitrariness presided over the whole arrangement”.

During the five years that followed Darby’s arrival in Lausanne, his principles spread far and wide in French Switzerland, and obtained some successes in Berne and Bâle. In the South of France they spread over a considerable district, of which Montpellier was the most

⁴⁵ This expression may be the result of imperfect apprehension of what had taken place. If Darby really *so much as presided* at the observance of the Communion it must have been by concession to the half-enlightened condition of his disciples; and even as a concession, the proceeding would be more easily defended on the ground of its policy than of its consistency with Darby’s principles.

⁴⁶ “Le pauvre meuble.”

important town, though Ardèche is said to have been the scene of their greatest success in those days. The way in which Darby kept in touch with all the ramifications of the work, without for a moment relaxing his hold on his continental metropolis, is admirable. Nor can it be accounted for by any want of strenuous opposition. Two of the best known dissenting ministers of Vaud took the field against him in a series of pamphlets, to which he replied one by one.

Auguste Rochat, pastor of the Free Church at Rolle, a small town about sixteen miles from Lausanne, has not only received the most honourable testimony from Herzog, but is also frequently referred to with high regard by Darby himself. "But for Rochat we should be masters of the country," were the words in which Darby acknowledged an influence that could to some extent qualify even his own. Rochat's first tract against Brethrenism appeared not later than 1841. He followed it up the next year by *A Thread to help the Simple to find their Way*.

François Olivier, a brother of the ex-champion of Methodism, was a man of unquestioned ability. If his personal influence was less than Rochat's, he had the advantage of being resident at Lausanne, and of having attended Darby's ministry there with great interest. Not feeling, however, wholly satisfied with the course things were taking, Olivier began in the winter of 1842-3 to hold meetings independently of Darby. Yet he was so far from wishing to precipitate a rupture that he fixed an hour for his meetings at which they would not clash with Darby's, and abstained, until the end of 1844, from administering the communion. Olivier published his first pamphlet, *An Essay on the Kingdom of God*, in 1843; and his second in the same year, or in the following.

Darby's replies to Rochat are favourable specimens of his controversial manner. He does not indeed always write in perfect taste, but he refers to Rochat with respect, and even with cordiality. "I know no person," he says, "at least so it seems to me, who desires more faithfully to fill it [the relation of a pastor to the sheep of God's flock] than he whose pamphlet has given rise to these pages." In the reply to Olivier the tone is far less pleasant; there is more readiness to insinuate unworthy motives, and the self-sufficiency amounts sometimes to arrogance. The difference may be accounted for, partly by the fact that Olivier was a rival on the spot, partly perhaps by a tendency to severity in Olivier himself—though indeed he seems to have treated Darby with consideration. It must also be remembered that the controversy with Olivier was the later, and the stress of conflict appears to have told on Darby's temper. Some excuse may well be made for a man sustaining singlehanded, year after year, such a large and complicated undertaking. His influence, according to Herzog, declined from the time of a conference of the Dissenters of Lausanne, held in September, 1842, to examine his doctrine of the apostasy of the dispensation. With great difficulty Darby was persuaded to attend, and he went only to protest against the meeting as not having "the approval of God". The following account, if it must be accepted with some reservation as being the statement of an opponent, is at least not wanting in verisimilitude.

"Especially he [Darby] obstinately refused to take part in the discussions; but they pressed him, putting it to him as an obligation of Christian charity to declare himself on matters of such importance. In the end, as if weary of contention, he submitted to the desired conference, but only to astonish his very partisans by the rashness of his assertions, often contradictory; by the vagueness of his expressions, and by his wretched stratagem of jumping off from one subject to another. The discussion quickly lost all regularity, and degenerated into a regular uproar which put an end to the meeting. But however bewildering this strange scene might be, people left it profoundly impressed with the haughty, imperious, peremptory, ungovernable spirit that Darby had displayed. The thoughts of his heart had come to light, and

this discovery of a blemish in the character of a man surrounded until then with so profound a veneration fully opened the eyes of some even amongst his admirers.”

Darby’s pamphlets, against Rochat and Olivier alike, are bewildering to the reader. He says almost nothing explicitly, and we are left to catch glimpses of his meaning as we proceed. Strategically, he may have been quite in the right in adopting a tone of high-sounding vagueness. He had on his side a mass of chaotic impulses, and it was not precise definition that would have given them sympathetic utterance. His strength lay, now as ever, in the reality of the abuses he attacked. Herzog’s view of the ordained ministry is such as most English Evangelicals would now consider over-strained in a Presbyterian church; while even those who are still at the older point of view would at least admit that Darby in his antagonism to it was occupying a perfectly intelligible position. And when, in replying to Rochat, he complained that “there are so many flocks” (evidently amongst the Dissenters) “habitually deprived of partaking of the Lord’s Supper through the want of consecrated pastors,” it is probable that he carried with him the hearts and consciences of hundreds of the Christian people in Vaud. Moreover, in proposing a remedy, there was no need for him to take all the risks of explicitness. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*—the habit of expecting everything from an untried, but much belauded course—was a principle that would not fail to complete his success for him; and Darby was the last man to increase his vulnerability by lengthening unnecessarily his lines of defence.

Both his prudence and his vagueness are illustrated in his central doctrine of the “ruin of the Church”. The vague phrase fell in with the discontent that prevailed amongst men who had separated from the State Church, and had made apparently but a disappointing experiment in Nonconformity. Darby did not offer to define his meaning, nor does it seem to have occurred to any one to request him to do so; but the battle raged all the more fiercely for being fought in the dark. It is not until we have advanced a dozen pages into Darby’s second reply to Rochat, that it is possible to collect in what sense the term “Church” is used in his great formula, and what it was therefore that he affirmed to be ruined. Then he accepts his adversary’s definition as conveying his own thought throughout: “The Church on earth, at each successive period, is thus the aggregate of the elect who are then manifested”. In reply to Olivier, Darby admits that he had “sometimes, perhaps, because every one does it, called the Church, that which is not really the Church,” and claims that in doing so he “was much better understood”. I should rather have said that he had made himself quite unintelligible. But it is satisfactory to reach relatively firm ground at last, and to understand that it was of the Church as the company of the elect that Darby predicated the ruin. Whether this was right or wrong, it was at least startling, and it is no wonder that so strenuous and pertinacious a contention arose over it.

Of course a good deal still depends on the definition of the term “ruin”. No Protestant can dispute that the Church viewed as a single visible organisation⁴⁷ has collapsed; and even a very high Anglican, regarding the Church as conterminous with Episcopal communion, can scarcely ignore the fact that deep lines of cleavage are driven through and through it by mutual excommunications and anathemas. It does not follow, however, that Darby could speak with propriety of the ruin of the Church on the ground of the breaches in its outward frame, unless he considered that the outward frame was of the essence of the Church. If on the other hand he did so consider it, he was bound to explain in what sense he understood the Saviour’s promise that the gates of hell should not prevail against the church He would build.

⁴⁷ Some would deny that there existed such a solid and undivided organisation in apostolic days; but this I pass over, since no such question was raised on either side in the controversy that we are now considering.

So far as Darby's thought can be regarded as definite, there is no doubt that he did treat the outward frame as essential. He made all the characteristic testimony of the Church (and even, it would seem, of Christianity) to depend on the preservation of an external unity. Darby could scarcely even grasp the familiar conception of a transcendental Christian unity rising supreme above all organised expression, and above all organised contradiction. To the end of his days he had no more sympathy with such a view than when he was what might be called a Puseyite before the time. In like manner, his disgust at the distinction between the visible Church and the invisible is so great that he sometimes argues against it in a manner wholly inexplicable, unless he thought "any stick good enough to beat a dog with". "Believers have sought," he says, in the first of his series of Swiss tracts, "to shelter themselves under the distinction between a visible and an invisible church. But I read in Scripture—'Ye are the light of the world'. Of what use is an invisible light? . . . To say that the true Church has been reduced to the condition of being invisible is at once to decide the question, and to affirm that the Church has entirely lost *its original and essential standing*⁴⁸ . . . If it has become invisible it has ceased to answer the purpose for which it was formed." Did Darby think that an invisible lamp can never afford light? The absurdity of the argument would not signify, if it could be attributed to pure inadvertence; but it is only a sample of the confusion that attends Darby's whole treatment of the subject.

The clue to the confusion is to be found in his early High Churchmanship. A slightly different turn in his spiritual experiences when he was five and twenty might have led him to forestall Newman and Pusey, and have made him the terrible leader of a "Catholic reaction". He took instead a Biblical and evangelical direction, but his mind never recovered from its early warp. Though the earlier period of his career as a Plymouth Brother varied essentially from the later, he retained during them both the same vague conception of the Church—a conception formed by a curious blending of Puseyite with ultra-evangelical elements. Accustomed to an unquestioning submission to a presumed Catholic Church, constituted by episcopal succession, he found his spiritual sympathies outgrowing his theory. He felt that the outward had failed to maintain a correspondence with the inward, and he therefore deemed it but a ruin. But Dissent mended nothing. It was an attempt—generally a well-meant attempt—to repair what was irreparable. The substitution of a Presbyterian for an Episcopalian administration, the revision of sacramental conceptions, the abjuration (in some cases) of all connexion with the State, might be improvements as far as they went, but never touched the root of the matter. They could not restore the glory of the Church, for they could not restore its unity, nor gather together the scattered children of God. The only thing to do was to own at once the ruin, and the impotence to remedy it; and in Darby's view, this was his great and distinctive witness.

To put it briefly, the great duty of all Christians is to recognise the ruin of the Church. This being duly recognised, there are two obvious courses that are in fact equally pernicious. The first is to acquiesce in the ruin; this is the sin of Christians that remain in nationalism, or in any other kind of avowedly "mixed" communion. The second is to attempt to re-build; this is the sin of Dissenters, or at least of those amongst them who seek a "pure" communion. These alternatives are the Scylla and Charybdis of Christendom, and between them Darby offered to trace the "dim and perilous way".

His new plan was bound in the nature of things to start as a modified congregationalism, for congregationalism is the only possible *tertium quid*; yet "independency" was regarded as a capital fault, and the federation of the new meetings must needs follow. On the whole it is not to be wondered at that Darby was freely reproached with inconsistency. In condemning every existing conception, he had in fact excluded all the

⁴⁸ The italics are mine.

possible alternatives. There was nothing essentially new for him to try. On the other hand, he would not use the real differentia of his system (that is, liberty of ministry in conjunction with the observance of the communion) as his watchword, because he was determined to base himself on nothing less than a true view of the Church. Indeed it is remarkable that, in giving practical directions as to what “the children of God have to do in the present circumstances of the Church,”⁴⁹ he actually says nothing about liberty of ministry—so resolved is he that it shall not constitute his foundation. Under these circumstances it is not strange that he often took refuge in very vague generalities.

His followers were not likely to be fastidious about the amount of logical coherence in his scheme. Hoping much from a new effort after unity and simplicity made under such brilliant auspices and associated with so powerful a ministry,—and feeling above all things the immense fascination of the man who called upon them to follow him fearlessly along the way on which alone Heaven’s favour rested,—they committed themselves to his guidance with a contagious enthusiasm. Herzog raises the cry that has been raised ever since in every land, that Darbyism robbed the pastors of the *élite* of their flocks; and, though the expression is too general, there is a great deal of truth in it. The fact suffices to show that there had been in Vaud a much greater need of a powerful spiritual impulse than Herzog would allow; and also that Darby, at least to a considerable extent, supplied the want.

This is perhaps only the more evident from the fact that there were conspicuous flaws in the way in which the early meetings of the Brethren were conducted. Olivier, who had watched the experiment for a long time at Lausanne, charged the worship with vagueness and uncertainty; complained of “frequent, prolonged, freezing pauses”; of a “want of Christian dignity in the attitude” of the worshippers, and “especially in the observance of the Lord’s Supper”; of a lack of teaching, owing in part to a scruple about preparing beforehand—a scruple that gave rise, in Olivier’s opinion, to “discourses deficient in compass, offending either by a defect in ripeness and fulness, or by a constant and extremely wearisome recurrence of favourite ideas”. He considered (as many perfectly friendly observers have done since) that the meetings of the Brethren, in order to be profitable, generally required the presence of some persons of commanding superiority. Darby, in reply, did not deny these blemishes; indeed he seems to allow that there was truth in the allegations. But he refused to attach much weight to them, and the refusal may be justified. Flaws are pardonable in a new experiment. Of course the great question stood over,—Would the flaws prove permanent?

In the early months of 1845 the Pays de Vaud was convulsed by a revolution brought about by Jesuit intrigue. The fury of a section of the populace was let loose against the Plymouth Brethren. Darby’s life was in great jeopardy, and he wisely resolved to leave the country. He was not the man to quail in the face of peril; but his presence in Vaud could be of no use, and was probably a principal source of danger to his followers. Commotions continued, however, for some time after his departure.

Such was Darby’s famous campaign in Vaud. Herzog thought the movement would run a short course, so far as Switzerland was concerned. He miscalculated. French Switzerland has ever since remained the stronghold of Brethrenism abroad, and Darby’s personal authority there was maintained till his death, more than forty years after his work began in Lausanne.

Darby’s conduct has been severely criticised. But it is not quite so easy as some have imagined to determine the rights of the matter. Brethrenism in 1840 was far from appearing the total failure that it appears at the present day. It had obtained a rapid and even a startling success, and its supporters were not without excuse if they almost imagined that the problem of Christian reunion had found its solution at last, and that their principal mission, therefore,

⁴⁹ *Remarks on the State of the Church, Coll. Writ.*, vol. i., pp.418-425.

lay among “the awakened in the churches”; and account must be taken of this before we set Darby down as a vulgar ecclesiastical revolutionist.

This, however, does not settle the question of the uprightness of his tactics. If he came to Lausanne with the intention of utilising the opportunity for the propagation of his peculiar ecclesiastical principles, he was bound to give the friends who had invited him distinct warning of the fact; nor is it easy to suppose that he came without such intention. On the other hand, Herzog, much as he blames Darby for his conduct, scarcely goes the length of imputing to him deliberate treachery.

Perhaps, again, Darby underrated the attachment of a large party among the Dissenters to the old forms of their worship. Herzog expressly states that there was in Vaud an extensive predisposition to Darbyism. “People had already begun to regard the Church as destroyed, and its relations with the State as incompatible with the very idea of the Church; to regard the ordination of ministers as a mere matter of human expediency that had no connexion whatever with a divine ordination.” After the revival, special meetings for edification had been instituted, at which there was perfect liberty for any one to take part; and Herzog, while admitting that these meetings had really been useful, considered that a quite undue importance had been attached to them. He rightly deems these tendencies to be much akin to Plymouthism, and it is therefore at least conceivable that Darby was misled by the similarity. Possibly, too, carried away by the evidence of the astonishing influence he was wielding, Darby believed that there would be no destruction of churches, but that the entire dissenting body would embrace his principles, and continue in union, though on what he most sincerely believed to be a far freer, happier, and more edifying basis. His own enjoyment of his meetings was so intense that all he could think of good men who did not like them was that they were under “the curse pronounced upon him who leans upon an arm of flesh,” namely, that “he shall not see when good cometh”.⁵⁰ At all events, Darby was animated, even to the apprehension of his adversaries, by an unwearying, disinterested and self-sacrificing enthusiasm; and this may at least avail to distinguish him in the present instance from the common troublers of churches with whom some would wish to identify him.

At the same time, we must deplore that Darby should have lost the opportunity of strengthening the hands of the men who, in the middle of last century, were effecting such a gallant stand in Switzerland on behalf of the evangelical principles that he most truly loved. Only the lack of a tolerable theological perspective prevented Darby from becoming the welcome and powerful ally of the Rochats and Oliviers of Vaud, and of the more famous, and not less devout, Merles and Gaussens of Geneva. As it was, he waged against them all, in pamphlet after pamphlet, a warfare that left an incurable feud behind it. Happily we may believe that his followers, however self-limited, have really exercised a genuine influence for good on the Continent by maintaining a high standard (as I believe) of devoutness and evangelical simplicity. I understand that their meetings in Switzerland and the adjacent parts of France, twenty or thirty years ago, were very numerous, well attended, and in many cases fervent and spiritual.

A brief account must be added of the formation of the first Brethren’s meeting in Germany. The story is short and simple, and it owes its interest chiefly to the fact that the successful apostle of Brethrenism in this instance was George Müller.

In May, 1843, Müller received a letter from a lady at Stuttgart to whom he had recently been serviceable when she was on a visit to Bristol. During the visit she had adopted Müller’s religious opinions, and on her return to Stuttgart she went to the Baptist Church, was baptised and received into membership. Her letter was accompanied by one from a leading

⁵⁰ *Remarks on the Pamphlet of M. F. Olivier, Coll. Writ.*, vol. i., p.427.

member of her church, “a solicitor or barrister to the Upper Tribunal of the kingdom of Wirtemberg”. He “wished to have upon Scriptural grounds” Müller’s “views about open communion”.

Müller, who was as far as possible from sharing Darby’s predilection for ambiguous verbiage, has left one of his plain and business-like statements to explain his motives in undertaking the mission to Stuttgart. “I knew not of one single body of believers who were gathered on Scriptural principles. In all the States of Germany, with scarcely any exception, the believers are connected with the State Churches, and the very few believers of whom I had heard that they were separated I knew to be close Baptists, who, generally, by their most exclusive separatist views, only confirmed believers in remaining in the Establishment.”

He left Bristol with Mrs. Müller and a German lady, whose story illustrates the principles of these strict Baptists. She and another convert to Baptist views had applied to the little church at Stuttgart to be admitted to baptism. But this was refused them unless they would “promise never to take the Lord’s Supper any more with unbaptised believers or with those who belonged to any State Church”. They declined to enter into such an engagement, and actually undertook the journey of 800 miles to Bristol to be baptised by Müller.

The party reached Stuttgart on the 19th of August. Müller was received by the Baptists with open arms. He was asked to expound at all their usual meetings, and also at extra meetings specially arranged for all the other nights in the week. It is at least clear that he did not obtain a footing among them by false or even ambiguous pretences. Nevertheless difficulties speedily arose. A prolonged discussion as to whether Müller should be allowed to take the Lord’s Supper with them produced so deep a division of opinion that one of the stricter party declared that there must be a separation. “I then,” says Müller, “entreated the brethren not to think of a separation. I represented to them what a scandal it would be to the ungodly, and what a stumbling-block also to the believers who are yet in the State Church.”

Division however was inevitable. One or two of the elders having determined to reject him, a meeting “for the breaking of bread” was started in his private room the same evening. Seventeen persons were present; “of these seventeen, twelve were belonging to this little Baptist church, two Swiss brethren who have learned the way of truth more perfectly through our brother John Darby, one English sister, my wife and I”. Of the separation Müller says, “The matter would be, however, more painful, did I not see it of great importance that the disciples who hold the truth should be separate from those who hold such fearful errors as: The forgiveness of sins received through baptism; baptism a covenant between us and God; regeneration through baptism, and no regeneration without it; the *actual death* of the old man through baptism, it being drowned, so that only the body and the new nature are alive.” It is evident that these views were not generally held before Müller’s arrival, but that they were taught by the principal elders and accepted by the extreme party that had refused Müller the communion.

Müller attributes the unhappy state of the Baptist church at Stuttgart to the want of the settled practice of liberty of ministry, and with more plausibility to the “*undue stress*” that had been laid on “believers’ baptism” and “separation from State churches”.

“Baptism and separation from the State Church had at last become almost everything to these dear brethren. ‘We are the Church. Truth is only to be found among us. All others are in error and in Babylon.’ These were the phrases used again and again by our brother — . . . This spiritual pride had led from one error to another.

“Another thing on account of which the church at Stuttgart is a warning is this: When these dear brethren left the State Church of the Kingdom of Wirtemberg, on account of which they had many trials, they did not meet together in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, but they took some Baptist church . . . for a model. . . . Brother — becomes their teaching elder, and

he alone speaks at all the meetings (with few exceptions). Now, as his own mind laid such an undue stress upon baptism, and as there was no free working of the Holy Spirit, so that any other brother might have brought out at their meetings what the Lord might have laid upon his heart, what could there have been expected otherwise than that after a time the whole noble little band of disciples, who had taken so trying a stand as to be separated from the State Church, should become unsound in the faith. May God grant unto us to be profited by it, dear believing reader, so that in our own church position we do our utmost to give to the Holy Spirit free and unhindered opportunity to work by whom He will!”

This is surely thorough-going Brethrenism; but when Müller was surrounded by the little company that clave to him after his rejection by the Baptist elders, he judged it needful to proceed cautiously in the application of the principle. Yet his account makes it only more and more plain that at that date he held views of ministry scarcely distinguishable from the “impulsive” theory against which Groves waged ineffectual warfare.

“As I had known enough of painful consequences when brethren began to meet professedly in dependence upon the Holy Spirit without knowing what was meant by it, and thus meetings had become opportunities *for unprofitable talking rather than for godly edifying*; and as I felt myself bound to communicate to these dear brethren the experience I had gathered with reference to these very truths since June, 1830: for these reasons, I say, I thought it well to spend evening after evening with them over the passages above mentioned [Rom. xii., 3—8; Ephes. iv., 7—16; i. Cor. xii. and xiv.; Acts xx., 7]. . . . We broke bread, but it was understood, *and I wished it to be understood*, that I was the only speaker. This I did . . . because they knew not yet what was meant by meeting in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. But, at last, after we had for about eight weeks or more spent two evenings a week together over those passages, and others, setting forth the same truths I took my place among them *simply as a brother*. . . . I do not mean at all to say that even then this matter was *perfectly* understood, for a few times still things like these would occur :—A brother read a portion of the word, and then would say, ‘Perhaps our brother Müller will expound to us this portion’. Or, a brother might speak a little on a subject, and then would say, ‘Perhaps our brother Müller will enter somewhat more fully into this subject’. At such times, which occurred twice or thrice, I said nothing, but acted according to the desire of those brethren, and spoke; but afterwards, when we met privately, at our Scripture reading meetings, I pointed out to the dear brethren their mistake, and reminded them that all these matters ought to be left to the ordering of the Holy Ghost, and that, if it had been truly good for them, the Lord would have not only led me to speak *at that time*, but also on *the very subject* on which they desired that I should speak to them.”

Probably open communion was the most important feature of the new start in Müller’s eyes. “There is one brother among us,” he writes, “who through dear John Darby learned the way of God more perfectly in Switzerland, and who often had spoken about it before I came, but who was neither much listened to nor received into fellowship, because he was not baptised.”

Müller’s visit lasted just over six months. At the close of that time there were twenty-five people breaking bread with him. When he left, not only these, but also “nineteen brothers and sisters of the Baptist Church” came to his lodging and bade him an affectionate farewell.

It was the small beginning of a fairly considerable movement, though the work never attained in Germany nearly the same proportions as in Switzerland. The reader has the full means before him of judging of Müller’s motives and conduct. It may suffice to draw attention to the fact that Müller sought to widen a church’s fellowship, and not (as is

commonly the case with modern emissaries of Brethrenism) to narrow it. That he strove to establish the peculiar principles of Brethrenism, and that he attached a profound importance to them, is perfectly plain. The experience of days that shortly followed tended probably to moderate his opinions. At any rate, Müller's name is not associated in most minds with so extreme a view as to ministry. The spectacle of Darbyism ere long in the ascendant undoubtedly gave pause and check to many.

VI The Strife At Plymouth In 1845

ON his return from the Continent, Darby went straight to Plymouth. This place for a long time had been B.W. Newton's sole residence, and the scene of his regular ministry. It had consequently become the one focus of effectual opposition to the theological and ecclesiastical views that under Darby's powerful influence had gained a marked predominance amongst the Brethren generally.

The feud between Darby and Newton was no new thing. Within three or four years of the beginning of Brethrenism in Plymouth, Newton (if we are to trust Darby) had jealously isolated himself from the other Brethren in a spirit that Darby rather self-complacently contrasted with his own.⁵¹ About 1840, if not earlier, Newton circulated some manuscript letters "far and wide," "denouncing" the party that differed from him in prophetic and dispensational matters; and when Darby stated that he "could not see that the Spirit of God had led to or guided in" these denunciatory letters, Newton not only told him that all friendship between them was at an end, but was even with difficulty persuaded to shake hands with his old friend.⁵² "Since then," writes Darby, "the letters were constantly copied and circulated. From that time I was a good deal abroad, though I visited Plymouth. I saw clericalism creeping in, but at first thought it was merely from circumstances. The deaf people were placed round the table, and consequently the speakers were to stand at it. This soon evidently defined them. I saw the tendency, and sat in the body of the congregation, and spoke thence when I spoke. I was remonstrated with, but retained my position. On the last visit before the present one, finding the teachers always breaking bread [*i.e.*, always officiating at the communion table], I urged some other doing it, or this union of the two things would soon be a regular clergy. Mr. H[arris]⁵³ to whom I spoke (but as to all), made no difficulty, and something was done."

Darby tells us that he "felt the Spirit utterly quenched". If he went to the meetings happy, he returned miserable. He spoke to Harris, but got no satisfaction. Harris indeed remonstrated with him. But things were not yet at their worst. The following statement is significant:

"About three or four months before my return to England, I had a correspondence with Mr. H., one of whose letters, from the great change in its tone, convinced me that every barrier was gone at Plymouth; for he had long sought to keep himself free from the influence

⁵¹ "I should not have so acted without my brethren. I should have rejoiced to have my views corrected by them when I needed it, and learn theirs; but there it was, and there for my part I left it." Darby's *Narrative of Facts*, *Coll. Writ. Eccl.*, vol. iv., p.21.

⁵² I cannot guarantee the accuracy of this account. The circumstances in question, and many that follow, are stated on the authority of Darby's *Narrative of Facts Connected with the Separation of the Writer from the Congregation Meeting in Ebrington Street*. It is right to say that some people whose judgment is entitled to respect have considered that this tract is anything but a narrative of *facts*. I am not prepared to speak positively. The tone of the tract inspires no confidence. On the face of it, it is the work of a passionate partisan; and even if the writer had the fullest intention to speak the truth, it is very doubtful that he was in a state of mind to know what the truth was. Any reader of the tract can see for himself that Darby never fails to throw the benefit of the doubt into the scale against his rival; that he attempts to discredit him by dwelling on acts of his supporters with which he may well have nothing to do; that no tittle-tattle is too paltry to be pressed into the service against him. It must therefore be treated as a party-pamphlet, of a more than usually unreliable order; but I am not certain that we have to go further. Even if the tract be positively untruthful, it would not affect my narrative; for I have only followed it where the writer could have no interest in making an erroneous statement; except in a few instances (such as the above), in which I give distinct warning that I am only repeating Darby's statements.

⁵³ See p.29.

that ruled most things there. *From that moment I felt that conflict and trial awaited me, though I knew not what*⁵⁴ but I was satisfied before God that nothing which could be ventured on would be spared.”

It will be observed that Darby implies that things were tranquil at Plymouth. Harris had been a barrier to the rising tide of clericalism, but at last he too was swept away. He still, however, felt able to invite Darby to pay them a visit. This is a totally different thing from Darby being summoned (as some have alleged) by a party of malcontents in the Ebrington Street Chapel. He manifestly came, rightly or wrongly, on his sole responsibility, and came foreseeing—or at least being in a position to foresee—that trouble must follow. As a matter of fact, it followed immediately. From the moment he decided to come, Brethrenism was doomed.⁵⁵

A doctrinal divergence was the root of the quarrel, though ecclesiastical differences followed, and seriously aggravated it. Newton had published (in 1842, it is said) a book on the Apocalypse. Darby criticised it, and a war of pamphlets ensued. Both men wrote with warmth, and each by his own showing was justified in feeling warmly. Newton had “identified the Church and the Kingdom,” (up to a certain point, apparently), and Darby declared that this identification was “of the very worst moral effect to the saint”. Newton not unnaturally considered this a “very strong expression”; but he was quite able to rival it, for he gave out that the foundations of Christianity were gone, if the views of his antagonist prevailed. “Much,” he said, “as I value the light of prophecy, I would rather that the Church should go back into ignorance about it all, than that such a system should take the place of its former deficiency in knowledge.” But Newton, if severe, was decent in tone throughout. Darby’s first rejoinder is perhaps entitled to the same praise, but his second was rather rude; and as usual his too evident anxiety to score points tends to repel the confidence of the reader.

The chief question in dispute was the relation of the Christian Church to the Great Tribulation. Both parties were futurists, that is, they held that the fulfilment of the bulk of the Apocalypse is still future, and belongs to “the times of the end”; and they therefore both maintained that a great and unprecedented persecution awaits the faithful immediately before the revelation of the Son of God in glory. But whereas Newton held that the faithful in question were simply those members of the Christian Church that would be on the earth at that time, Darby insisted that the whole Christian Church would be removed to heaven by a rapture unobserved by the world, shortly before the outbreak of the Tribulation. He accordingly found the victims of the Tribulation in “another semi-Christian or semi-Jewish body,” as Newton put it, who “will be called out as witnesses to God before the end of the age”. Now this dispute seemed of immense practical consequence to men who anticipated the immediate end of the age. Were they to warn their disciples of an impending trial, far more terrible than the worst that the blood-stained annals of the Church record, or were they to

⁵⁴ The italics are mine.

⁵⁵ An anonymous tract, dated January 29, 1846 (conjecturally attributed to Richard Hill, a seceder from Ebrington Street Chapel of Darby’s party), states that Darby came to Plymouth, “it appears with no intention at all”. This quaint phrase probably means “with no definitely formed plan”. The writer was contradicting the assertion that Darby saw that Plymouth was the centre of opposition to his views, and came “to break it up”; and proceeds: “His own remark to me, in disavowing such a previous intention is: ‘people have no idea that one cannot venture to act without the Lord, and that one has no plan but to do His will, as one may discover it’.” This is a rather bold assumption of spiritual superiority, though quite in keeping with a great deal of Darby’s writings. Whether Darby was entitled to make such a claim, the reader must judge from the sequel. It does not seem to me to affect the statement I have made in the text, for it is not likely that Darby should have come with a definitely shaped plan. He came apparently to raise a fresh “barrier” against the tide of clericalism, and also (beyond a question) of Newtonian doctrine. No doubt it was left to circumstances to determine the rest.

comfort them with the assurance of their total immunity from it? Nor was this all. It is clear that the doctrine of the secret rapture is inconsistent with the descriptions given of the Second Advent in the prophetic passages of the Gospels. Darby therefore taught that these descriptions were given to the apostles, not as the founders of the Christian Church, but as the representatives of a faithful remnant in the midst of apostate Judaism,—to which character the witnessing body at the time of the end (composed as it will be of semi-converted Jews) is to answer. This involved a different view of the Gospels from that which had previously obtained among Christians, and materially altered the relations of the Church to the principles declared by Christ during his earthly ministry. A tendency accordingly grew up to treat large portions of the Gospels as “Jewish”. In particular, the law of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount was to a great extent transferred from the Church to the rather shadowy “remnant”. This tendency in turn linked itself with a growing repugnance to associating the idea of law in any shape with Christian standing—a repugnance that has widely given rise to a plausible (though not altogether just) charge of antinomianism against the Brethren.

Darby’s doctrine, exempting the Christian Church from the judgments that both parties agreed in anticipating, was connected with a general disposition to magnify unduly, as Newton thought, the special privileges of the Church as compared with the faithful of the older dispensation. Newton strenuously upheld that Abraham and the rest of the faithful of old would form in heaven an integral part of the Church, the Bride of Christ. Darby resisted this as a view derogatory from the Church’s special glory, and roused apparently against Newton a great enthusiasm on behalf of her invaded prerogatives. Newton answered with tremendous severity. “I believe this,” he said, “to be only another form in which one of the chief poisons of corrupted Christianity will, if the statement be persevered in, be disseminated. I believe it to be setting the Church in a position which pertains to Christ alone. I believe it, therefore, derogatory to the glory of Christ—and I feel assured, too, that the evil results of this have already appeared, and that many minds are beginning to make the Church, and not Christ, the centre around which their thoughts about Scripture, and their arrangements of Scripture revolve.” The closing suggestion was certainly not wanting in shrewdness, as any one subsequently familiar with Brethrenism could testify.

Turning now to ecclesiastical matters, the principal charges against Newton were clericalism and sectarianism. Brethren that had sought to avail themselves of their right under a system of open ministry to address the church had been repeatedly hindered, it was said, by Mr. Newton or his friends. Even the beginnings of a settled order in ministry had been made, according to Darby; for everybody “knew when it was Mr. Newton’s and when Mr. H[arris]’s day: and people took their measures for going accordingly”. This “regular alternation of two,” and discourses prepared beforehand, were principles quite at variance, in Darby’s belief, with “that dependence on the Spirit which characterised the profession of the brethren”. Of course, if Darby referred to the profession of the Brethren in the earliest years, his statement is quite erroneous,⁵⁶ and in view of his use of the preterite tense it is difficult to know what other meaning to assign to his words. His constant appeal to original practice, in his controversy with Newton, is indeed always futile. The Brethren started almost without defining anything, and every man was at liberty to work out the problem for himself. When we read of the Plymouth meeting, and of the Bethesda meeting at Bristol, as not being Brethren’s meetings in the full sense, all that the statement amounts to (supposing it to be in some sense correct) is that Darbyism had gradually become the immensely preponderant principle, and that these meetings had undergone a somewhat different development. Plymouth indeed was plainly the metropolitan church in England, and it was naturally a galling thing for Darby that his

⁵⁶ Chap. ii., p. 20, of this work.

principles, which so seldom sustained a check anywhere else, should fail to make headway there.

Darby also taxed Newton with trying to engross all power within the Church; with having, to that end, “got rid of Captain Hall” many years earlier,—a statement that must, in view of Hall’s independent character, be received with some reserve; with arbitrarily settling every particular in which he felt interested by his own authority, even in defiance of the opinion of all his colleagues,—and so forth. In these accusations there was probably a measure of truth. Long afterwards, amidst wholly different circumstances, Newton certainly showed the arbitrary temper with which Darby charged him. That first-rate men found it difficult to work with him, that he surrounded himself with those that were unable to withstand his imperious will, and with their help carried things at Plymouth with a high hand, cannot be positively asserted when we have little evidence beyond the accusations of his implacable foes; but it is at all events in keeping with his known disposition. Still, all Darby’s Narrative goes to show that the meeting was in a quiet condition. Darby’s comment was that they made a solitude and called it peace; but even this implies that at least there was no open discontent.

Newton, on his part, charged his adversaries with “radicalism”. Darby had by this time taken up very strong views against the formal recognition of elders. If a meeting were in a good condition it would recognise its God-given rulers; what it would do if it were not in a good condition, I am not aware that he explained. The pity is that he could not bring himself to avow frankly his change of principle. Of this characteristic infirmity Dr. Tregelles, discussing the events of 1845 a few years later, took a perfectly fair advantage. He tells us that, in 1831 or 1832, Newton was appointed Elder of the Plymouth meeting, with (he believed) a special duty to restrain unsuitable ministry; that Darby “requested Mr. Newton to sit where he could conveniently take the oversight of ministry, and that he would hinder that which was manifestly unprofitable and unedifying”; that Darby also, writing from Dublin, addressed a letter to “B. Newton, Esq., Elder of the Saints meeting in Raleigh Street, Plymouth”⁵⁷ and that “on one occasion Mr. Newton had in the assembly to stop ministry which was manifestly improper, with Mr. J. N. Darby and Mr. G. V. Wigram’s presence and *full concurrence*”. Speaking from memory, I believe Darby recognised Wigram as occupying a similar position in his London meeting. Evidently then, if Newton prevented ministry much at his own discretion, he did not in that particular depart from general early practice. That Newton exercised his right tyrannically is perfectly possible, and would not surprise me, though I do not think that any proof that it was so is now available.⁵⁸

But by far the bitterest of Darby’s complaints related to Newton’s alleged systematic effort to band together all the Brethren everywhere, so far as his influence could reach them, in resolute opposition to the school of doctrine of which Darby was the head. That such an effort was actually being made, and made strenuously, there is no doubt whatever. Newton was measuring with jealous care the support he might reckon on in pressing hostilities against Darby. He was losing no opportunity to discredit the dreaded teaching. Zealous ladies were circulating manuscript notes of his Bible readings far and wide, and were (it was stated)

⁵⁷ This was the meeting-place till 1840, when the church removed to Ebrington Street, retaining the old room for mission work, prayer meetings, etc.

⁵⁸ Dr. Tregelles gives the following extract from a tract written by G. V. Wigram in (as he believes) 1844.

“E. Do you admit ‘a *regular ministry*’ ?

“W. If by a regular ministry you mean a *stated* ministry (that is, that in every assembly those who are gifted of God to speak to edification will be both limited in number and known to the rest), I do admit it; but if by a regular ministry you mean an *exclusive* ministry, I dissent. By an *exclusive* ministry I mean the recognising certain persons as so *exclusively* holding the place of teachers, as that the use of a real gift by any one else would be irregular.”

making things very unpleasant for all whose zeal for Newton was less ardent than their own. How far, on the other hand, such a course may have struck Newton as mere self-defence it is hard to tell, because of the scantiness of our materials for the fourteen years preceding Darby's fatal visit to Plymouth in March, 1845.

It was on this point that the quarrel came at once to a head. Darby wrote to Newton, objecting to his "having acted very badly towards many beloved brethren, and, in the sight of God". Newton asked for names and circumstances. "I confess," Darby tells us, "I felt this miserable. He had been writing for six years to every quarter of the globe (Mr. Newton boasted of it at last before the brethren who came), saying, the foundations of Christianity were gone if brethren were listened to; sisters had been employed in copying these letters; tracts had been published, declaring that we all subverted the first elements of Christianity! and he asks for dates and circumstances. I replied, it was the sectarianism and denouncing of brethren I complained of. This, he replied, was a *new charge!* And as it involved all the rest at Plymouth in the charge as well as him, he would consult with them about it and meet, but demanded the dates or circumstances of the former charge, or its withdrawal. As I well knew, and any one could see, that it was a mere explanation and enlargement of acting badly towards beloved brethren, I declined further communication unless before brethren; the rather as he alluded very incorrectly to past circumstances, and I thought such correspondence very useless." In such humour as may be guessed from this extract, the rival leaders met with thirteen others, selected on no formal principle, but including sympathisers with each. Darby repeated the charge of sectarianism. Newton's self-control was generally admirable, but for once it seems to have failed him utterly. According to Darby, he "broke out in great anger, saying, that he waived all formal objections, that he did seek to make a focus of Plymouth, and that his object was to have union in testimony there against the other brethren (that is, as explained, and is evident, their teaching), and that he trusted to have at least Devonshire and Somersetshire under his influence for the purpose; and that it was not the first time I had thwarted and spoiled his plans".

This circumstance derived its importance from the use that Darby subsequently made of it. Newton afterwards published, at the request of a friend, a report of what he had said at the meeting of the fifteen. This report contained no geographical details of the kind that Darby mentions. Newton states that the charge preferred against him at the meeting in question was, "*A systematic effort to form a sect, and discrediting and denouncing those who do not adopt the opinions which form its basis*". He allows that he would be open to this charge if he refused to hold communion at the Lord's Table, or if he insisted that all should hold his views of truth before they were allowed to minister; but he affirms that he had never done either the one or the other. He describes the theological position of his opponents, "which," he adds, "I feel bound in conscience to oppose in every legitimate way. . . I desire to produce in the minds of the dear Brethren everywhere, the same strong sense that pervades my own, of the evil of this system—and this is one object of my labour everywhere. At the same time, my hostility is against a system, not against individuals." Newton can scarcely be said to make light of his determination to oppose Darbyism; nevertheless, Darby afterwards felt justified in accusing his antagonist of lying. This was the more remarkable that the opening words of Newton's printed statement were: "You ask me to give you on paper *the substance* of what I said at our recent meeting". (The italics are my own.)

That Newton really made at the meeting a reference to some of the western counties, I have very little doubt. The question of what he had said was one of the subjects of enquiry on the part of a considerable number of leading Brethren at a later stage of the quarrel. Darby asserts that his own account of the matter was then borne out by the witness who most favoured Newton, the "only modification" being "that, instead of saying that he trusted he should have at least Devonshire and Somersetshire under his influence for the purpose, he

understood him to say, that wherever he could get influence in Devonshire, Somersetshire, and Cornwall, he should seek to do the same thing. Mr. N. himself at last said, as I understood, that as everybody said he did, he supposed he did say as alleged. Lord C[ongleton] at last asked Mr. R [Newton's supporter] whether, if he had read that paper, he should say it was an untrue account of the meeting. He replied he must, but that Mr. N. was so angry (so chafed, I believe, was the word) that he did not think he ought to be charged with what he did say."

This is Darby's narrative, and it is possible that Newton, Rhind, and Lord Congleton would all have demurred to the report. But even taken as it stands, it makes the charge of falsehood against Newton ridiculous; and it is amazing that Darby should not have seen how completely he stultified himself by publishing it.

This extraordinary charge was not brought forward without a long delay, and may have been altogether an afterthought. The quarrel dragged out its weary length from March to October. Newton's incriminated letter bore date, April 18. On Sunday, October 26, at the close of the morning meeting, Darby detained the congregation at Ebrington Street Chapel, and told them that he "was going to quit the assembly". He abstained from entering into details, as he puts it. "I . . . only stated the principles on which I went: that I felt God was practically displaced; and more particularly, that there was a subversion of the principles on which we met; that there was evil and unrighteousness unconfessed and unjudged." An allusion to the suppression of a kind of informal committee meeting, called the Friday meeting, followed; and that was all.

Three weeks after his secession, Darby was invited to attend a meeting at Ebrington Street. The object of the meeting, which was held on Monday, November 17, was to enquire into his reasons for seceding; and he then made his first public complaint against Newton's personal integrity. Thenceforward the charge was urged with a pertinacity to which few men would have been equal.

It was accompanied by several others. To some of these Darby himself attached little importance, and we may imitate his example with the most perfect safety; but there was one other on which he laid great stress. In the summer of 1845 Newton had published a letter that had for some time previously been circulating in manuscript. He expunged a paragraph that had "caused pain to some," and inserted two new passages, "negating the two evil doctrines" that Mr. Darby had just been imputing to him. On the first page of the letter *as published* these changes were referred to as follows: "The following letter was written some years ago, in reply to the inquiries of a friend, who resides in Norfolk. It is now published, with some omissions, and alterations, but in substance it remains the same." Newton's defence of this course was that the additions did not affect the substance of the letter, and that therefore the prefixed notification met the case.

Darby, on the contrary, alleged that nearly a quarter of the printed matter was not in the manuscript letter at all; "that the new matter consisted of reasonings *against* the doctrines he was charged with holding now as to the authority of teachers". Darby therefore considered that the published letter made the charges appear "most wanton and unfounded, inasmuch as six years ago the person charged had actually written against the things he was now charged with". There is perhaps some little force in the complaint; and in such delicate circumstances Newton ought certainly to have been perfectly explicit in distinguishing the new matter from the old. But, in view of the notification that was prefixed, the imputation of bad faith was on the face of it absurd. It was also with good right that Newton said in his own defence, "Surely, if there had been any intention on my part to deceive, it would have been a strangely foolish thing to print the letter at variance with the MS. when the MS. was in everyone's hands".

Darby made no attempt to communicate these charges to Newton before advancing them in public. His excuse was that Newton at that time held no communication with him.

This could hardly have prevented his sending Newton a written statement of the charges and requesting an explanation, before publicly assailing the acknowledged leader of a very large Christian community—not to say a personal friend of fourteen or fifteen years' standing—with accusations of a grave moral character, the like of which had never been imputed to him before, by friend or by foe.

These startling events being noised abroad, leading members of the community of the Brethren flocked to Plymouth from all parts in order to investigate the circumstances. The investigation actually began on Friday, December 5, ten Brethren (not counting Darby or Newton) being present. Of this number three were believed to have been invited by Newton; two (Sir Alexander Campbell and Mr. Potter) were invited by Darby; two (Code and Rhind) by Soltau, Newton's principal lieutenant in the trouble that followed, but one who through the preceding quarrel had sympathised in some particulars with Darby,⁵⁹ two (Wigram and Naylor) were uninvited; and one (Parnell, who had by this time succeeded to the peerage as Lord Congleton) was invited both by Darby and Newton. It is a striking tribute to the love of truth and fair play with which Congleton is, I believe, usually credited, that two rivals so bitterly at strife should have concurred in soliciting his presence. He had returned from India with Cronin in 1837, feeling that there was not such prospect of success in the mission as to justify him in remaining.

Of the uninvited men Wigram was, by Darby's own account, "considered an adversary to Mr. Newton," and Naylor was apparently regarded in that light by Newton himself. Sir A. Campbell had formerly belonged to the church at Ebrington Street, but had removed to Exeter. He disapproved of Newton's line of things. Of the other men, Code, long well known amongst the Brethren as "Code of Bath," was the most interesting. As a curate of the Church of Ireland he enjoyed the very high esteem of his diocesan, good Archbishop Trench of Tuam; but in the beginning of 1836, under the influence of Darby and Hargrove,⁶⁰ he resigned his curacy. He was not, however, a pronounced partisan of Darby's, and exerted himself at Plymouth in the interests of peace.

The investigation was a most curious proceeding, and barren of everything but fresh occasions of strife. The functions of the board of investigation were left totally indefinite, and no less so its scope of enquiry. It had certainly no judicial authority, and its almost haphazard constitution should have precluded the idea that it was a board of arbitration. Indeed, before it assembled, Darby's action had ensured its futility. Lord Congleton had arrived in Plymouth some little time before, and on the 26th of November he and three others, at Newton's request, addressed a letter to Darby, suggesting that Darby should choose four brethren to meet an equal number nominated by Newton, "to enquire into and report on the charges said to have been made . . . on Monday the 17th, etc." Darby refused. "I thought it," he says, "a worldly way of settling it. Nor can I yet see that, when a person is charged with sin in the church, it is a scriptural way that he should name four persons to investigate it, and the one who has charged him four more. Indeed I was justified in this by every spiritual person I know before whom it came." Darby was determined to bring the matter before the Church, and consequently attached no authority to the proceedings of the board of ten, though he consented to meet them, presumably for the purpose of enlightening them as to the facts. It

⁵⁹ I follow the *Narrative of Facts*, deeming it on this point sufficiently trustworthy to warrant the statement in the text.

⁶⁰ Hargrove had himself been a most successful minister of the Irish Church. He joined the Brethren in 1835, and died in fellowship with the "open" party in 1869, at the age of 76. He was an advocate of some restriction on open ministry, and was severely animadverted upon by Darby in consequence.

was afterwards a subject of furious dispute⁶¹ to what conclusion the ten investigators had come. As a matter of fact they came to none. It is true that at one time, five of the ten, Campbell, Lord Congleton, Code, Potter and Rhind, signed a statement that “the brethren who investigated matters . . . were entirely satisfied that Mr. Newton had no intention to deceive or mislead in the letters referred to, though through being over cautious on the one hand, and deficient in carefulness on the other, he had laid himself open to accusation”. Wigram, who treated this document with great contumely, could only deny its allegation in so far as it related to himself. He said that he had not known that it was being drawn up, and did not agree with it. This was at most an oversight on the part of the signatories; and indeed it is certain, from Wigram’s own statement, that at one part of the investigation even he inclined to the same verdict. The document was not published, but its suppression was not due to any change of view as to the judgment it expressed. Campbell “said before a hundred and eighty persons, that within three days of the suppression, he felt he could not sign it, and that his judgment is now opposed to its contents”. This statement is Wigram’s, and it was all he could urge; but even this makes it plain that Campbell could still have signed it when it was suppressed; and it does not affirm (indeed it seems designed to avoid affirming) that Campbell denied its allegation. And on the 1st of January following, Campbell sent a letter to the church at Ebrington Street, calling on them to make an investigation corporately; and, referring to a refusal already made to permit such investigation, he says, “I renounce all participation in such proceedings, *not because I judge Mr. Darby’s accusations correct* [italics my own], but, because the only door, by which he could return among you, has been shut”. The language is ambiguous, but it seems designed to convey a disagreement with Darby’s views.

On the other hand, even Darby and Wigram are not able to say that any member of the ten, at the time of the investigation, accepted Darby’s charges as made out. The five signatories, indeed, all resolved to work from within the congregation at Ebrington Street, in the hope of curing the disorders that they conceived (rightly, from the point of view of Darbyism) to exist there,—all of them considering Darby’s secession “a great mistake”.⁶²

The real reason for the suppression of the “verdict” was that the person on whose behalf it was drawn up declined it, doubtless thinking it did not go far enough in his favour. Newton’s conduct in this particular was greatly regretted by Congleton; and certainly, whether it was right or wrong, it was unfortunate in the extreme. It is likely that Newton felt that if it was an acquittal of himself, it was still more an acquittal of his accuser. This was true, and, in my judgment, a great injustice to Newton; but he was pitted against a foe who held a strong advantage, and would use it without mercy; and a prudent course was to be recommended to the weaker party.

It is impossible not to feel for Newton. Darby had refused his very fair and reasonable proposal for arbitration. The investigation of the ten had fallen through. All that remained was Darby’s appeal to a church-meeting at Ebrington Street. This Newton and the other leaders of the church disallowed. An investigation by the church was not, from their point of view, a desirable course; and assuredly it was not one that Darby had the least right to insist on. He had voluntarily put himself outside the communion of the church, and had therefore clearly no

⁶¹ The expression is fully justified by the rabid tone of Wigram’s tracts. I say it with regret. Wigram has left a memory that his friends still cherish with love and reverence, and I have already striven to do justice to the labours and sacrifices by which he conferred eminent advantages on English-speaking students of the Bible; but his numerous controversial tracts between 1845 and 1850 cannot be read without sorrow and shame. It is a bare act of justice to his opponents to make this statement, for their conduct cannot be duly estimated without some idea of the provocation they received. If they had been guilty of all that was imputed to them, it would have been far from justifying the unrelenting animosity, the positive scurrility, with which they were pursued.

⁶² Congleton, *Reasons for Leaving, etc.*, p.21.

claim to be heard before it. Neither was he, as Newton's accuser, entitled to refuse any reasonable suggestion that the accused might make with a view to clearing himself. Newton must have felt that a right of selection lay with himself, and that Darby was determined to secure every possible advantage over the man he had defamed. That this should rouse a spirit of opposition in a man of Newton's temperament may possibly be an occasion of regret, but scarcely of surprise.

But this is not all. Darby's tactics were seldom faulty. Arbitration could not have been of any use to him. A board of arbitrators, properly selected and bound to find a verdict, must have acquitted Newton. But Darby's power over a public assembly, even to the end of his long life, was marvellous. If Newton had consented to argue the question of his character before the whole church, he would have put a formidable weapon into his adversary's hand. Darby would probably have failed to get a verdict, but he could hardly have failed to gain some more adherents; and all that he gained Newton would have lost. If, on the other hand, Darby were refused access to the Church by its leaders, he had now no other means of gaining it. The leaders afterwards took the ground that there was no case to go before the Church. "We were, indeed, most painfully surprised at a brother's extracting such charges from such facts; and we felt that we had nothing to lay before the saints; except indeed we expressed to them what must have been a crimination of our brother Darby." "We hoped," they add, "that his making such charges was nothing more than a result of the strong excitement under which he always spoke of things and persons here;" and they refer to the fact that Newton had been known in Plymouth "during his whole life," but "that hitherto no moral charge had ever been brought against him". Undoubtedly they had high views of the functions of leaders, and the strongest objection to making churches deliberative assemblies. At last, on the 17th of December, 1845, they issued a note informing the Church that in their judgment the charges had been "most satisfactorily answered," and that they believed Newton to be "entirely innocent of the imputations". This was signed by Soltau, and endorsed by Batten, William Dyer and Clulow.

But Darby had them at such an advantage that it would probably have been their wisest course to waive every objection and give the discussion the fullest publicity. Congleton took a very serious view of the refusal. "If Mr. Newton had consented to the proposed *further* investigation, and the result had been division, on no better grounds than what I conceive Mr. Darby stands on, the blame of such division, would have been *wholly* with Mr. Darby; as it is, the blame is *partly* with Mr. Newton, therefore I cannot go with either of them."

Whether Newton were wise or unwise,—even whether Darby were righteous or unrighteous,—may be treated as a secondary question now. The important point is that the Brethren in their first great emergency found themselves absolutely unprepared to grapple with it. They had no constitution of any kind. They repudiated congregationalism, but they left their communities to fight their battles on no acknowledged basis and with no defined court of appeal. If once the sense of fair play (one would be ashamed to speak of spirituality) broke down, there was no check on the most arbitrary temper. The Brethren were never weary of denouncing "system," but they made haste to demonstrate that the worst system can hardly be so bad as no system at all.

Darby had hitherto abstained from observing the communion independently. Soon after the investigation he felt relieved from all scruple. On the 28th of December he "began to break bread, and the first Sunday there were . . . fifty or sixty". Wigram openly supported him.

No time was lost in transferring the strife to London. On Sunday, January 11, 1846, Lord Congleton publicly charged Wigram at the morning service at the Rawstorne Street meeting with helping Darby in making a division at Plymouth. It is pleasant to record that

Congleton had first gone to Wigram privately, once alone, and then accompanied by a witness. The meeting seemed reluctant to take the matter up, and Congleton therefore stood aloof. He was not a supporter of the Ebrington Street Church, for he felt that there was “a sectarian and clerical spirit” there, though “that did not constitute grounds for leaving”. Yet he would not “break bread with them,” because “they did not do all they might have done to prevent the division”.

Wigram continued to exercise his virtual leadership at the Rawstone Street meeting as before. Darby, who was equally involved in Lord Congleton’s charge, was received there without enquiry. In April there was a meeting at Rawstone Street of “brethren from other parts”. Congleton attended this meeting and made a statement “substantially the same as that contained in the last part” of a letter he had sent beforehand to one of the conveners. This was as follows: “I consider that Mr. Darby, after withdrawing from communion, Sunday, October 26, 1845, giving certain reasons, did publicly slander and defame, in Ebrington Room, Monday, November 17, 1845, his neighbour, his Christian brother and his fellow-minister in the word, and thereby caused a great breach and division in that gathering. . . . That Mr. Wigram helped him, etc.” These charges were left uninvestigated.

In October Wigram addressed to the Rawstone Street meeting a violent printed attack on Newton, alleging (presumably as the principal charge) the discrepancy between Newton’s account of the April meeting and Darby’s, and claiming confirmatory evidence on Darby’s behalf. Passionately as the charge is urged, it breaks down ludicrously. Mr. Newton, he tells us, had circulated an explanatory paper, “most specious and artful,” but proving “to any simple mind . . . not untruthfulness only, but a jesuitical mode of acting, which is most painful”. Wigram intimates that he has further evidence in reserve, (a favourite artifice throughout this odious warfare), which presumably was to be produced if the first instalment failed of its effect. As he can hardly be suspected of not putting his strongest points forward in the first instance, we need be at no loss to judge of the rest. He closes with the startling announcement that he “would rather expose” his “family circle to the results of the friendly intercourse of any Irvingite teacher, or a Roman Catholic priest, than of any one of the five,”—to wit, Newton and his four colleagues.

The most significant paragraph in the letter is the following: “But I must add, that the ‘Narrative’ published by Mr. Darby seems to me to put the question upon other grounds, and in some measure, therefore, to neutralise this, because it makes the question not ‘Has ——— told a lie and not repented of it?’ but rather, ‘Is not ——— led by a lying spirit, and, through a lengthened course of actions, trying to bring in something like Romanism?’ ”

Darby, in like manner, held that there was unquestionably at Plymouth “a spirit of delusion from the enemy at work,” and that “terrible as such a thing no doubt is, it is a comfort in one point of view that it accounts for otherwise unaccountable things”.⁶³ This much-needed hypothesis became a notable weapon in the hands of these two ecclesiastics. It helped to make credible their accusations of falsehood against men of notoriously honourable character, and must be pronounced a most detestable device for taking away the rights of an accused person, and for opening the floodgates to indiscriminate calumny.

Dr. Tregelles was at that time prosecuting in London the great work on the sacred text by which he has made all Christendom his debtor, and had been for several years associated with the Rawstone Street meeting. In his opinion Wigram ought to have been called upon “to repent of his sin in publishing such a thing”. It does not appear that he publicly expressed his opinion. At all events nothing was done.

It was deemed however that this “masterly inactivity” should stop short when Mr. Newton’s faults came in question, and in November a letter was sent to him inviting him to

⁶³ *Letter to the Saints meeting in Ebrington Street*, p. 118 (*Collected Writings*).

answer to Darby's charges before the assembled saints at Rawstorne Street. It might be presumed that Newton had at the least applied for communion there, but this was not the case. He had come up to London and had held some private Bible-readings. In conversation he expressed a wish "to satisfy the minds of any brethren as to the charges made against him". It was private explanation that he contemplated; but some of the Rawstorne Street Brethren took the opportunity to propose a public investigation. Newton replied that the ministering brethren at Plymouth, following the ordinary usage of their church in such cases, had published a document exculpating him; and that the ten investigators of the previous December had "all with the exception of Mr. W[igram] declared that" he "was free from the charge of moral dishonesty"; and that "after all this" he did not feel that he could "be properly asked to plead again". He received however a second summons, in a most curious letter, dated November 20, and signed by W. H. Dorman.

William Henry Dorman was one of the ablest and most interesting men ever connected with the Brethren. He had been minister of Islington Independent Chapel, and filled that important post with great acceptance. In 1838, while still quite a young man, he resigned, and cast in his lot with Darby. His accession was important to the Brethren, for they were wont to obtain far fewer recruits from the Nonconformist ministry than from the clergy of the Establishment. At first Dorman worked at the Rawstorne Street meeting; but he was now residing at Reading. This did not hinder him from taking a leading part in all the disciplinary proceedings against Newton. The following passage will give an idea of the position taken up by the London meeting:—

"Let me ask you, therefore, to say whether you are prepared to meet Mr. Darby and others concerned in this question in the presence of the saints at Rawstorne Street: *where your visit and expressions of willingness to meet investigation have brought it on.* I beg to say very distinctly I do *not* write to brethren at Plymouth for any opinion as to the scriptural mode of proceeding in this investigation—not because I despise their judgment, but because the only satisfactory course for me to pursue, if I am charged with evil, is openly and fairly to answer those charges, when I am required to do so by the Church, whose province is to judge the evil: and not to be raising questions about the competency of the tribunal."

It is hard to imagine how a man of Dorman's intelligence came to persuade himself of the propriety of taking up such an extraordinary position. Everything, as a matter of fact, turned on the competency of the tribunal. As Tregelles said, "It is no answer to say that he [Newton] had come within your jurisdiction by reading Scripture at the house of a sister in Pentonville". "Surely the difficulty must have been great," he adds, "before *this* was assigned as a reason."

Can Dorman have held that an accused person was bound to plead before any self-constituted tribunal that might choose to send him a summons? Plymouth Brethrenism, it is true, originally rejected local membership, and held that any Brethren coming from a distance had a full right to enquire into local disputes;⁶⁴ but even this stopped far short of asserting that it was competent to any meeting in the country to summon before it any accused member of any other meeting. It is perhaps not difficult to detect an undertone of misgiving in that sentence of Dorman's letter which I have printed in italics. The pretext could hardly have thoroughly imposed on a much duller man.

⁶⁴ This principle does not seem to have been at any time acted on at Bethesda, Bristol, and Newton's attitude towards it was vacillating, to say the least; but Darby might fairly claim it as an original principle of Brethrenism.

The subsequent course pursued at Rawstorne Street is almost incredible. Dorman had requested an immediate reply on the ground that Darby had been asked to stay in London until it came. Soltau accordingly, on Newton's behalf, sent a short note on the 25th,⁶⁵ intimating that the reply, which he promised to despatch "with the least possible delay," would be a refusal. Dorman actually took advantage of this courteous intimation to withhold the real reply altogether. Without even waiting for it, he informed the Rawstorne Street meeting that Newton had refused; "adding that, without judging upon the charges, a person that refused to meet them must lie under them—that he could not receive reasons for not meeting them; . . . that after what had passed, if Mr. Newton came to Reading or Oxford, he as an individual would not break bread with Mr. Newton". The full reply—a very long document—reached Dorman on the 27th. Dorman intimated to Clulow that it would not be used, and the Brethren at Rawstorne Street took action in ignorance of its contents—that is, in ignorance of Newton's real answer to their citation. If the church knew that such a document was in the hands of their leaders they shared the responsibility of this most highhanded proceeding.

The action took the form of "a last appeal," professing to emanate from the "saints . . . at Rawstorne Street"—the document not mentioning that there were some who dissented. This "appeal" was signed by Gough and Dorman. Newton and his colleagues replied in a courteous and dignified note, giving "the most firm and decided negative". This bore date December 9, 1846.

Four days later Dorman and Gough signed a note on behalf of "the saints at Rawstorne Street," refusing Newton "fellowship at the table of the Lord" until he should recede from his contumacious attitude. Newton's colleagues thereupon issued, on Christmas Day, a *Remonstrance and Protest* respecting the act of exclusion, which they treated as a sentence of excommunication.

One of the many extraordinary features of this affair is that the second citation (according to Tregelles, who appeals to Gough as being thoroughly aware of the fact) and the final judgment (by Darby's own showing) were not unanimous. Yet Darby could express a hearty disapprobation of Dissent for settling things by majorities. This he constantly condemned as a most carnal proceeding; and even in his *Account of the Proceedings at Rawstorne Street*, issued after the conclusion of the whole matter, he is not ashamed to write as follows: "Among the dissenters they vote and a majority determines the matter. . . . It is a mere human principle, such as the world is obliged to act on, because it has no other way of getting out of its difficulties. But the church of God has. It has the presence and guidance of the Holy Ghost." It is instructive to see that this boasted principle was quietly ignored when an irremediable want of unanimity threatened a deadlock in the proceedings against Newton. The course adopted differed from the procedure of Dissenters, only in that the document issued by the majority contained no allusion to the existence of a minority; whereas in the documents of Dissenters a more open course is commonly pursued.

The prosecuting party did not accept the view of Newton and his friends, that the exclusion was tantamount to an excommunication. All that can be said is that if it was not an act of excommunication it was a gratuitous impertinence. Newton had not applied for fellowship, and therefore the church was not under necessity to decide on his case in order to guide itself in an actual emergency. If excommunication was more than the church intended, its decision was merely a totally uncalled-for intimation to Newton that if he did present himself he would be refused. Tregelles was surely justified in saying, "I have no doubt, but that it is supposed that the sentence is to act as an excommunication; but do you expect to find

⁶⁵ Darby, *Coll. Writ. Eccl.*, iv., p. 132, says. "24th".

Christian men in general to acquiesce in such an issue from such proceedings? The whole is null and void, both before God and before His saints.”⁶⁶

About the course pursued at Rawstorne Street, there can be only one opinion; but there is a possibility of rational variations of judgment on the question whether Newton would once again have done better to accede (of course under protest) to the proposals made to him. Yet on the whole a verdict must be recorded in his favour. Whatever his actual motives, a perfectly lawful prudence would have fully justified him in refusing the Rawstorne Street people as his judges. Their proved partiality disqualified them. They had persistently neglected to entertain serious charges, alleged by a man of weight among them, against Wigram and Darby. They had received without remonstrance Wigram’s disgraceful *Address*, in which Newton and all his friends were most recklessly aspersed; and then they proceeded to summon Newton before their tribunal, on his mere appearance at some houses of Brethren in the neighbourhood. What would have been the result of obedience to the summons? Probably, that Darby would have found the very weapon he was seeking—the verdict of an assembled church given against Newton on the moral charges. Once more, Newton was bound to lose whichever way things went. He was fighting his battle against hopeless odds; still, at the juncture in question, there can be little doubt that he chose the less of two evils.

⁶⁶ I here append, as an interesting relic of a great scholar and true-hearted Christian man, a copy of the protest by which Dr. Tregelles dissociated himself from the disciplinary proceedings of Rawstorne Street. The protest was entrusted to Gough, and it is gratifying to learn that it was duly read by him.

“As a Christian long in fellowship with the Christians meeting in Rawstorne Street, London, I do solemnly, in the fear of God, protest against the character, objects, and competency for disciplinary action, of the meeting purposed to be held there to-morrow evening, as being wholly contrary to the word of God, and the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ; so that any disciplinary proceedings issuing from such a meeting, even though professedly in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both before God and as affecting the consciences of saints, would be wholly null and void.

“S. PRIDEAUX TREGELLES.

“14 ALFRED STREET, PLYMOUTH,
“December 10, 1846.”

Darby and Wigram were very angry with Tregelles for his tract on their singular proceedings. However, I apprehend that his character stands far above the reach of their intemperate imputations.

VII The Doctrinal Controversy At Plymouth

THE early summer of 1847 afforded Darby the opportunity of dealing his already discomfited rival a crushing and, decisive blow. A manuscript, purporting to be notes of a lecture by Newton on the Sixth Psalm, was lent to Mrs. J. L. Harris, whose husband, since the secession from Ebrington Street, had openly taken Darby's side. Harris, on reading it, was shocked at the experiences it ascribed to Christ. He addressed to a staunch supporter of Darby's, Mr. Christopher McAdam, a long letter containing very severe strictures on the manuscript, and gave his correspondent permission to print them. They were accordingly published in July, along with the incriminated manuscript. A very surprising circumstance—if anything in this controversy could surprise us—is that Harris did not apply to Newton to know whether he acknowledged the notes as containing a trustworthy report of his lecture. Harris thought that “after making every allowance for imperfect note-taking and misapprehension,” the doctrine was “so clearly defined” as to be “capable of being stated without misrepresenting its meaning”. George Müller was afterwards greatly blamed by the Darbyites for calling Harris's act a “work of darkness”; but surely the term may be justified, however much we regret that so excellent a man as Harris should have shared, in an evil moment, in a policy that denied to Newton the common rights, I do not say of a Christian brother, but of a fellow-creature.

Newton, before making any reply to Harris's tract, issued an authoritative account of his own views, under the title of *Remarks on the Sufferings of the Lord Jesus*. Darby immediately struck in with *Observations on a Tract*, etc. The tone is rude and unfeeling. He endeavours to fasten on Newton the full responsibility for the notes—a responsibility that Newton afterwards disowned. “The person from whom it came, residing in the house with him . . . stated that it was the substance of Mr. N.'s lecture correctly given. One can understand that he could not disown, and that he dared not own it.” Harris's action is justified in the following remarkable passage:—

“A man manufactures poison and distributes it without avowing his name, and disseminates it assiduously in secret to destroy and ruin. . . . Is it not to be labelled, because the poisoner, in order to facilitate his mischief, will not do it? . . . Because he acts secretly and subtilly, am I to keep his secret, if, without any art or even seeking it, I have discovered it by the providence of God? No; I must publish plainly what it is, and who it is.”

The imputation was made in ignorance, for Newton had not yet disclaimed all knowledge of the manuscript, but the passage is a good example of the settled principle of its author,—to condemn Newton unheard on every possible count. After this, we do not expect Newton to receive any quarter in respect of his character as a Christian.

“The ignorance of some things proves there is no knowledge of God. . . . The first tract shews this in the things of God. The second still more (in the effort to save the writer's credit)—entire indifference to the truth and glory of Christ. He declares his value for things, which not to value would discredit him; but fatal error is slurred and glossed over without a regard for the Christ it denies, and fatal ignorance of essential truth displayed. This I shall now shew, as a solemn warning to brethren, not to give heed to this seducing spirit.”

Darby was blinded by passionate prejudice. Whatever Newton's speculative errors may have been, there is not, I am persuaded, a single paragraph in all his writings that would afford colourable ground for charging him with indifference to the glory of Christ. If Darby

had deliberately sat down to devise the most malignant lie that could be told against his neighbour, he could scarcely have done worse. I have not the slightest doubt that Newton would at any moment have laid down his life rather than consciously derogate from the glory of Christ. So, I fully believe, would Darby; but this only completes the horror of the fratricidal strife. It is a signal illustration of how much harder it is to live by Christ's teaching than to die for it.

Newton's *Observations* in reply to Harris appeared on the 1st of September. A calm and dignified forbearance was their distinguishing feature.

"I never saw one line of these notes, nor indeed knew of their existence (though aware that such notes were often taken), until I heard that they were read and severely censured in a meeting convened in Exeter for the purpose. Shortly afterwards they were published, accompanied by the *Strictures* on which I now comment. This was done without any communication having been made to me, and therefore no opportunity was afforded me of avowing or disavowing any of the sentiments, or of rendering any explanation, or even giving any judgment as to the accuracy of the notes."

He explains that the notes were not taken in shorthand, and could not give a full account, or even a fair impression, of what was said, and proceeds as follows:—

"Nor would I wish to cast on others blame, that I may myself perhaps equally or more deserve. That on this and many other occasions, I may have spoken unguardedly and without sufficient precision of thought and expression, and so have given just reason for the present chastisement, I willingly admit; and I desire to mark the rod and who has appointed it. At the same time I increasingly feel, after writing the present tract, that the doctrine intended to be conveyed will bear, as a whole, most rigid examination by the word of God."

In the body of his tract Newton occasionally complains that the notes had misrepresented him, and that his critic had misrepresented the notes; but everything is said with the same total absence of bitterness.

Darby replied in *A Plain Statement of the Doctrine on the Sufferings of our Blessed Lord*. In the introduction he says, "The author, as is his known custom, after making statements which subvert the faith, seeks by modifying, by making statements which are entirely different appear to be the same, or substituting one for the other, smothering up what was said by expatiating on recognised truths, to confound the minds of the simple, and escape the discrediting detection of the doctrines he has taught." Darby leaves "to others to express their feeling as to the hopeless dishonesty of the author". In other respects also, "the author" was by Darby's account in a very pitiable plight. "I have not the least doubt," he gravely observes, "from circumstances I have heard lately, of the authenticity of which I have not the smallest question, that Mr. Newton received his prophetic system by direct inspiration from Satan, analogous to the Irvingite delusion."

The gravamen of Darby's charges is that Newton placed Christ under Divine wrath, apart from that which He endured vicariously in making atonement. By His position as a man and an Israelite, Christ incurred "wrath,"⁶⁷ from which He delivered Himself by keeping the law, and thus obtaining title to enter into life by His obedience. With whatever exaggerations and misconstructions Darby urged the charge, the charge he was urging was at last a true one. Newton was always very zealous in maintaining, in an extreme Calvinistic sense, the imputation of Adam's guilt to all his posterity; and he had actually brought Christ beneath the

⁶⁷ Not "damnatory" wrath, but apparently disciplinary. Cf. Newton's *Observations*, especially section ii., and page 48.

imputation, as coming by His human birth under "Adam's federal headship". He further taught that Christ, as born into Israel when the nation was under the curse, came by this association under the curse in some sense Himself and endured its penalties. At the same time he denied that the sufferings in which the Saviour was thus involved were his atoning sufferings. These he limited to the Cross. If he appealed to standard Protestant divines, his appeal was disallowed, on the ground that the divines in question had held that Christ suffered vicariously throughout his whole life; and that therein lay the vital difference between them and him.

All this is true. On the other hand, Newton repudiated in the strongest terms certain expressions that it was sought to fasten upon him, such as that Christ was "a child of wrath even as others," or that He was "made a curse" before His death on the cross. And undoubtedly his accusers were guilty of a very great injustice in charging him with every heretical conclusion that they felt able to draw from his principles, without regard to the all-important question whether he had himself drawn or foreseen such conclusions. The most offensive tenets commonly charged upon Newton are much more often the unfair constructions, or at best the legitimate deductions, of his adversaries than tenets that he himself ever expressed.

It is of the utmost consequence that Newton from first to last with unfaltering voice affirmed the catholic doctrine of the Person of the Saviour. Christ was to him very God of very God, yet truly man, free from all taint cleaving to fallen nature, having no sin, original or otherwise. Newton never remotely hinted even the abstract peccability of Christ, and the analogy of his system to Irvingism was only fanciful; and when his accusers suggested an affinity to Arianism or Socinianism, they might just as well have suggested an affinity to Deism. It is no less important that Newton constantly affirmed that Christ as man, in the days of His flesh, was always perfectly well-pleasing to God. Suppose that in this he were inconsistent, are we to give full weight (and often much more than full weight) to every exceptionable statement, while we explain his orthodoxies as deliberately designed only to give currency to his errors? This exactly describes Darby's conduct, and remains a deep blot on his reputation.

On the 26th of November, Newton issued *A Statement and Acknowledgment respecting certain Doctrinal Errors*. In this he withdrew, unreservedly, and with many penitential expressions, the doctrine that Christ was born under the "federal headship of Adam". He claimed indeed the benefit of "the limitations by which this doctrine was guarded" in his own mind and teaching; but he acknowledged that many of the injurious "deductions," though he had not drawn them, had yet been legitimately drawn. "I wish," he says, "explicitly to state that I do not ascribe any of Christ's living experiences to the imputation of Adam's guilt, nor ought I to have made any statements or used any words which did so ascribe *any* of His sufferings to anything imputed to Him; nor yet that He had by keeping the law or by anything else to deliver Himself from such imputation or its consequences."

The abjuration was full and evidently sincere, but it was felt by most of the Brethren to be only partial, and not to cover the special error of the recent tracts. This error had consisted in attributing non-atoning judicial suffering to our Lord as a member of the nation of Israel. Not that Newton persisted in this view, for, on the contrary, he withdrew both the incriminated tracts "for reconsideration". Darby, however, without awaiting the results of the reconsideration, hastened to issue a *Notice of the Statement*, in which he set it aside as worthless. He was not without a well-grounded apprehension that he would be "considered relentless," but he thought "of the interest of the Church of God in it, and even of Mr. Newton's own". The charity of the pamphlet however is not such as to constitute Newton greatly his critic's debtor.

It may be well to anticipate here the issue of the controversy as it relates to Mr. Newton personally. The withdrawn tracts were never reissued, but, on the other hand, their teaching was never (so far as I can ascertain) formally repudiated by their author. In 1848 he issued *A Letter on Subjects connected with the Lord's Humanity*, which appeared both to Darby and to George Müller to reaffirm the objectionable doctrine in its essence, though with great modification of terms. Mr. Newton's adherents claim that the ripe results of his reconsideration are contained in a pamphlet published in 1858, under the title of *Christ our Suffering Surety*. That Mr. Newton's ultimate position was one of ultra-orthodoxy is of course notorious,⁶⁸ but it is highly unfortunate that he never explicitly declared his attitude towards the doctrine of the suppressed tracts. In the end he substituted for it a different doctrine, and left the matter there. This may fairly be taken to imply retraction, but to exclude confession; and the inference is that Newton did not consider further confession called for,—or, to put it otherwise, that he deemed that his error had involved infirmity, rather than sin.

The explanation of this is surely very simple. The essence of the error of the two tracts had been the attribution to Christ of certain penal sufferings that were yet not vicarious and atoning. Newton's ultimate position was that Christ actually endured such sufferings, but endured them vicariously and atoningly. This was of course a view that he was able to buttress abundantly by quotations from orthodox Protestant divines; nor did his adversaries, greatly as they disliked it, deny that it was compatible with essential orthodoxy. Now, it doubtless appeared to Newton that the position he had taken up in the two tracts merely marked a stage in the process by which his mind passed to the acknowledgment of a vicarious and atoning character in Christ's sufferings in life. Indeed, there can be little doubt that his mind was taking this direction from 1835 at the latest. Under these circumstances it is likely that he thought it sufficient to formally abandon the position that Christ's vicarious sufferings were confined to the Cross. As early as July, 1848, he was teaching that all Christ's "living sufferings" were vicarious in the sense of being endured "exclusively on behalf of others".⁶⁹ Afterwards he went further, and affirmed vicariousness in the full sense of substitution. It may be said therefore that he did not return to orthodoxy by a retreat, but rather advanced to it, emerging, as it were, on the opposite bank of the stream of error.

Newton's colleagues in the oversight of the church in Ebrington Street were not moving in any such direction; and consequently the recognition of their error was followed by a wholly different line of conduct.

On the 8th of December Newton left Plymouth for good, and took up his residence in London. He went all unaware of the imminent secession of three of the four men that had until that time so steadily supported him; their defection therefore cannot have influenced his movements. Possibly he judged it best for the peace of the church at Ebrington Street that he should withdraw; but a far stronger reason must doubtless be sought in his growing antipathy to every form of Brethrenism. In London he established a church in total isolation from every ecclesiastical body. So far from there being any recognition of liberty of ministry, Newton was the sole speaker; and if he were compelled to be absent, he would allow of no substitute, unless Dr. Tregelles were available. In the absence of both, a sermon of Newton's was read.⁷⁰ From this time therefore we must reckon him as wholly dissociated from Brethrenism,

⁶⁸ Some attempts on the part of Exclusive Brethren to prove the contrary are simply not worth noticing.

⁶⁹ This was a change, *not in Newton's opinions*, but in his use of the term *vicarious*.

⁷⁰ This I heard from a constant attendant, but I am not prepared to affirm that it holds good either absolutely, or yet for the entire period of his London ministry. It suffices in any case to show that the practice of the church was at the utmost possible remove from anything resembling Brethrenism.

although he continued to attend his former meeting, and to take part in the ministry, when he happened to be visiting in Plymouth.

Scarcely had Newton departed when Soltau, Batten and William Dyer surrendered at discretion. By the close of the year they had all withdrawn from the Ebrington Street Church, and had published lengthy confessions of error and sin. Their honesty is greatly to their credit, even if their state of mind were perhaps somewhat morbid. The very unconsciousness in which they had held doctrines involving consequences that they abhorred, tended to unnerve them in the presence of the clamour that rose around them; and they gave themselves up too eagerly perhaps to the luxury of self-accusation. It is no disparagement of these men, who all lived to enjoy high consideration in one section or another of the later Brethren, to say that they lacked the theological knowledge and acumen of their late chief; and not less his dauntless self-possession. In one sense the lack was a great advantage, for it enabled them to sever themselves from the whole system of speculation that was answerable for such sorry fruits; but it had the drawback that it made them less than just to themselves and their former associates, and exposed them to some extent to errors of a new kind.

On Monday, December 13, a meeting of the members of the church, convened by Soltau, was held. Several hundreds were present. Their "minds were painfully affected," Tregelles tells us, "by the picture" that Soltau "drew of the Christ that (he said) he had preached for ten years". The next morning one of his hearers said to him in Tregelles's presence, "Oh! Mr. Soltau, if I had known that you had held such views as you expressed last night, I could not have remained in communion with you". Soltau replied, "I never held these things *in my conscience*". "But surely," was the reply, "you gave us that idea last night!" Soltau answered, "I held what *might have led* to them". (The italics are Tregelles's.) "I cheerfully," Dr. Tregelles proceeds, "bear my testimony to the difference between the actual teaching and preaching of Mr. Soltau, and what, *under great excitement*, he represented it at the meeting in question as having been; all those whom he left can unite with me fully in this testimony."

This general agitation must be borne in mind in examining the various "confessions". The penitent teachers all affirm that they had not contemplated the consequences of their principles, while they justly blame themselves for want of the care due in so sacred an enquiry; yet their language is strong enough to have met the occasion if they had been responsible for all that their adversaries sought to fasten on them. But *there is no confession whatever of moral obliquity* in any one of the three. Darby had just written, "I can only say, not speaking now of Mr. Newton, but of Messrs. Dyer, Soltau, Clulow, and Batten, that I have never met with such wretched trickery, or such bold untruth, as in the printed documents they have circulated."⁷¹ But even in the depths of their humiliation, Dyer, Soltau and Batten have nothing to say that gives countenance to this accusation.

To some extent they justified Darby's charges of "clericalism" and "sectarianism"; and they all plead guilty to party spirit, and to having, in excessive measure, subordinated other duties to the maintenance of the peculiar system that they identified with "the truth". Dyer treats the subject the most fully.

"This led many to charge 'clericalism,' and practically there was something which warranted this charge. Not, I think, from any effort to elevate those who ministered in the word, *as such*, (which, I suppose, would properly be 'clericalism') but from the way in which the ministry of individuals was acted on by the aiming at a special object. . . . Exclusiveness has thus been produced both as to persons and doctrine. . . .

⁷¹ *Notice of Statement and Acknowledgment*, p. 9.

“But I must yet further say, that when I speak of a position which has been assumed, I do not mean that which was held by the gathering, as a congregation of saints—but a position which has been practically slidden into by those most active and influential in that gathering .

“The name of the Lord Jesus was the alone gathering point and foundation; the sovereign will of Christ, the Church’s glorified and blessed Head, and the energy and guidance of the present Spirit, the acknowledged source and power of all ministry. But still, within all this, and often *practically* more powerful than it all, an influence was felt, and a course pursued, which I *now* see was sectarian and intolerant.”

On the 10th of January, 1848, a reply to parts of these Confessions appeared under the title of *A Statement from Christians Assembling in the Name of the Lord, in Ebrington Street, Plymouth*. It was probably drawn up under Tregelles’s guidance, and is certainly a sufficient guarantee of the substantial orthodoxy of the remnant of the Ebrington Street Church. To the calmness and patience of Newton is added a certain tenderness of charity singularly attractive in men that had endured the stormy vicissitudes of the previous three years. It will scarcely excite surprise that they allege that the great majority amongst them were wholly ignorant of the very existence of the specified errors; but it is a very important circumstance in view of the subsequent developments of disciplinary operations against them.

The doctrinal statements are simple and explicit. “We desire to disclaim any and every statement of doctrine which would impute the guilt of Adam, or the curse of the broken law, to the Lord Jesus,—either by federal Headship in Adam, or by birth.” “With regard to the curse of the broken law attaching to the Lord Jesus by birth, we believe that this was not held by any amongst us; whatever indefinite thoughts any individuals may have entertained or do entertain on the subject of His connexion with Israel.” But the most significant statements are those that relate to the question of the mortality of Christ’s body. This question was rapidly becoming paramount over the whole field of the controversy, and we shall often encounter it again. The present statement of belief on the subject should be carefully observed by all who wish to form a complete opinion on the great disruption of Brethrenism. “He thus took a human body which was mortal, by which we mean a body capable of dying. . . . He possessed life essentially in Himself. He was the Holy One of God. He had also a claim to live as the one who in all things obeyed the will of God. . . and besides, he could not die, except according to God’s purpose as the sacrifice.”⁷²

In taking up this ground, the Ebrington Street congregation was not merely standing on the defensive. Some of their adversaries, taking fright at doctrines, that they judged to glance in an Arian direction, were finding refuge in a kind of Gnostic denial of the true manhood of Christ. The following statement by Tregelles may be taken as minutely accurate, not only because of his well-known remarkable memory, but also because there is plenty of corroborative evidence. He expressly states that several of the doctrines he quotes were put forth by men reputed to be teachers.

“The real and full relation of Christ to man and to Israel was questioned by some and denied by others. I will give you a few instances—expressions which *I know* to have been used: it was said that ‘the Lord was *man* but not the Son of Adam, and that the name “*Son of*

⁷² This *Statement* from Ebrington Street was very ill received by some of the Darbyites. The indefatigable Wigram rushed into the fray. It is often hard to distinguish between Wigram’s state of mind and pure hallucination. “What,” he asks, “is the obligation as to the Table at Ebrington. Street? *‘Touch not the unclean thing’* is, I am bold to say, the word of the Spirit of the Lord to every humble inquirer. *Rather would I go to the table of the Socinians or of the Unitarians than to it.*” Quoted by J. E. Howard in *A caution against the Darbyites*, p.36. The italics are not mine; I do not know whether they are Wigram’s or Howard’s.

Man” was simply a title’: that ‘His humanity was *something divine*,’ that ‘it was a *spiritual humanity*’; that ‘He did not become man *by birth*, but in some other way’; that ‘*made of a woman* (Gal. 4), does not mean born of a woman’; that ‘He was not man of the substance of His mother, but that He was of the substance of God, His Father’; that ‘the expression in Hebrews vii., *without father, without mother, without descent*, related to our Lord as man, and that the genealogies BOTH in Matthew and Luke were those of Joseph His reputed father, and not of Mary; so that the Scripture has designedly cut Him off from the family of man, and from that of Israel!’ It has been *repeatedly* denied that our Lord was *mortal*, and when this word was explained as meaning *capable of dying* (not *compelled to die*), it has been said that He had no more capacity for dying than he had for sin.”

It would be unjust to suppose that these speculations became an established part of the creed of Darbyism, but some of them undoubtedly exercised a prejudicial effect on a portion of its doctrinal system. This was especially true of the denial of the mortality of Christ’s flesh. Even to the present day it is sometimes suggested that Newton’s life-long heretical character is proved, if an assertion that the body of our Lord was mortal can be found in his later works. I had long supposed that the two parties misunderstood each other (very culpably, no doubt) as to the sense in which they severally employed the term “mortal”; but further investigation has shown me that such was not the case, at any rate at the first. Both Newton and his friends explained repeatedly that by “mortal” they intended only “capable of dying”; yet their opponents charged them with teaching “mortality” in a sense that they expressly disclaimed. Darby was not deceived. “Mortal,” he says, “is a word used in two senses—being capable of dying, and being actually subject to death as a necessity. Now of course Christ was capable of dying, or he could not die. But the doctrine taught here is that he was mortal as we are.” This was written before the explicit declarations to the contrary (so far as I have observed) were made; but, when made, they availed nothing to mitigate the fury of the persecution. If Darby himself remained unentangled in the ambiguity he had so plainly exposed; it is a great pity that he allowed himself to profit by the ignorant zeal of his followers.

Of this zeal a curious example occurred two or three years later. Newton had written in August, 1850, *A Letter to a Friend concerning a Tract recently published in Cork*. In this letter he was supposed to have reiterated his heresies with regard to the mortality of Christ. I propose to give the reader the means of judging of the positions that the two parties severally occupied. Newton writes as follows:—

“I am thankful to be able to say, that I hold (and so does Bishop Pearson) that Christ, though he did assume a mortal body, was under no necessity of death as we—that he was ever in moral nearness to God, not less so on earth than when He was in Heaven—that He was ever the object of the Father’s complacency, delight, and love,—that whether in the cradle, or in life, or on the Cross, He was alike morally perfect, as perfect as He now is in Heaven—perfect in all His inward experiences—perfect in all His outward ways, and therefore in both, unlike other men—that he never was *as* those for whom and with whom He suffered—that all His sufferings were as the Redeemer—all on behalf of others, and for their salvation. The doctrines of the Apostles’ Creed—the Nicene Creed—and the Athanasian Creed, I gladly accept, as well as the first seventeen articles of the Church of England, as containing the truths for which I would desire to live and die.”

This was not written till 1850; but Newton quotes from his *Letter on the Lord’s Humanity*, published *two* years earlier. Its language is of the utmost importance, for Newton’s alleged heresy in this particular served in after years as the principal buttress of the vast disciplinary system of Darbyism.

“The Lord Jesus was fore-ordained as the sacrifice before all worlds, and therefore it was impossible for Him to die except as the sacrifice; but with the very object of dying as the sacrifice, He was pleased voluntarily to assume a body which, as regarded its natural or physical condition, was as much exposed to death, if smitten by the sword, or deprived of necessary nutriment, as ours would be.

“Yet it was as impossible for Christ to die in consequence of anything to which he might be thus exposed, as for God to be plucked from the Throne of His government. If all nutriment had been withdrawn from Him from His birth, yet God, His Father, would have sustained Him by perpetual miracle, or He would have so sustained Himself, rather than that death should have fallen, in any way, except substitutionally— on the One who deserved only blessing and life.”

In the letter of 1850, not content with citing such writers as Pearson and Bengel, Newton actually called to his aid one of the leading supporters of the attack on the doctrine of his two tracts. This was James G. Deck, widely and honourably known as a hymn-writer far beyond the limits of his own sect. This truly excellent man, who was born in 1802, had held a commission in the army, and had had some pleasant intercourse with Norris Groves abroad. At this time he had long since resigned his commission, and was exercising his ministry at Weymouth. About 1837 he had published his well-known hymn beginning, “Lord Jesus, are we one with Thee?” This hymn had found its way into several collections in use amongst the Brethren. Newton appealed to the second verse:—

“Such was Thy grace that for our sake
Thou didst from heaven come down;
Our *mortal flesh* and blood partake;
In all our misery one.’

The italics are Newton’s.

This was a serious matter, for even by Deck’s admission the hymn had been “long used by godly brethren without consciousness of evil”.⁷³ Accordingly, on the 14th of November, Deck brought up the rear in the procession of faggot-bearers by issuing a *Confession of a Verbal Error in a Hymn*. He had, he said, “meant by the epithet, ‘*mortal flesh*,’ . . . ‘*capable of death*,’” (which, by the by, is exactly what Newton took him to mean), and he had so used the term without having consulted Walker or Johnson, Ainsworth or Riddle, Liddell or Parkhurst, or the Greek Concordance. These authorities had somehow or other convicted him of a serious philological error; and this he confesses with a solemnity that is perhaps a little amusing. I have no wish to turn the conscientiousness of so excellent a man into ridicule, but it is hard to take the matter quite so seriously as he did. Personally, I regret the change he suggested—“Thou didst our flesh and blood partake”. It is a very weakening alteration, and the term *mortal* would not have been so much an open door to the errors that Newton had really taught, as a barrier against those quasi-Gnostic tendencies that from that time always haunted the outworks of the theology of Darbyism.

It is time to return to 1848. The closing act of the long tragedy was the Bath Conference. The conference was open only to such as repudiated the Newtonian errors. I am indebted to the courtesy of a venerable Brother, who was present at the proceedings, for the following graphic description. I have great confidence in giving currency to his narrative. The

⁷³ This is not true of all the Brethren. Some, especially in Ireland, had objected. Darby could not, at any rate at that time, have been of the number, unless he objected merely on the score of ambiguity.

writer was closely associated with many of the leaders in this long strife, and was no partisan of either Darby or Newton.

“The meeting at Bath, May 10, 1848, was held for the purpose of again recognising as faithful fellow-servants the brethren who had renounced Mr. Newton’s doctrines, and also to give these brethren an opportunity of complaining of some statements affecting them personally. . . .

“I think I remember Mr. Harris at the Bath meeting, and as being accorded the place of president, in so far as any such function was recognised.⁷⁴ He ever was, as no other, *universally* respected amongst the Brethren. . . . The meeting was mostly taken up with grievances of the *Plymouth* brethren, in which Mr. William Dyer took an animated part . . . Mr. Darby had some *basis* of fact to give for everything he had said, and his free reference to an evil power may be understood by Mr. Dyer’s saying that he objected to ‘the devil being made the pack-horse’. Mr. Darby frequently added to his explanations that he *might* have done better. It was afterwards very aptly remarked that he never once said that he *ought* to have done better. Mr Chapman had a turn with him too, thinking he was precipitate in making the separation. ‘I waited six weeks.’ ‘Dear brother, if it had been at Barnstaple, we should have waited six years!’ was the reply. I think it was the only time that I well remember seeing Mr. Dorman. He was, in his virile, incisive way, the most strenuous supporter of Mr. Darby’s action. I remember little of what was said by Mr. [Captain] Hall, or Mr. Wigram, but Lord Congleton, who had a case of his own, I shall never forget. Mr. Bellett sat between him and Sir Edward Denny, and with his arm round the latter. Lord Congleton, addressing Mr. Darby with characteristic frankness, was saying, ‘that is to say—that—that—if you were to tell me anything— *I wouldn’t believe you*’. . . . Lord Congleton was the most utterly truthful man, I think I ever met, and he could not tolerate untruth in others. . . . Sir A. Campbell gave his judgment in a few grave and weighty words, quoting as his verdict, ‘Dead flies make the ointment of the apothecary to stink; so doth a little folly one who is in high reputation for wisdom and honour’. During an interval between the meetings he remained in the room, with his legs resting on one of the benches, looking desolate and dejected.”

This account of the conference seriously qualifies the version that has long been current among the Darbyites. William Trotter of York, an ex-Methodist minister, is more highly spoken of by every one that knew him than almost any other Plymouth Brother; and his untimely death, while he was yet under fifty, was felt to be a heavy loss of the kind that Christians can least afford. Such a man is entitled to a charitable judgment if under the impression that the ark of God was imperilled, he was betrayed into an unworthy action in its defence. His *Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda* vies with the *Narrative of Facts* itself in advertising its own untrustworthiness. With regard to the Bath meeting, Trotter states that “the brethren who had been rescued from the doctrinal errors of Mr. N. . . . made further confession, full and ample, as to their implication in the charges made against the untruthful, immoral system of Ebrington Street. *They acknowledged that these charges were just*. One, at least, of those who signed their names to ‘the Plymouth Documents’ . . . confessed that these documents were justly chargeable with trickery and falsehood.” Trotter, who was not present, claims Robert Howard of Tottenham as his informant. He may have misunderstood Howard, but in any case his statement is self-stultifying, and no authentication can help it greatly. He speaks of, “further” confession, but I can find no trace of any made previously; and in saying “one at least,” what did he intend his readers to infer as to the others?

⁷⁴ This would not be very far.

It is not wonderful that the adherents of Darby should have caught at any chance of accrediting his extraordinary *Narrative*. Trotter makes another effort. Not only Howard, but also Andrew Jukes (at that time associated with the Brethren), assured him that “every endeavour to shake” the testimony of Darby’s pamphlets recoiled “on the heads of those who made them”—to wit, of such men as Lord Congleton, and the late Robert Nelson, then of Edinburgh.

I have not assumed that the pamphlets in question are deliberately untruthful; but as for their reliability, let any one read them⁷⁵ and judge for himself. With regard to the effect said to have been produced at the Bath meeting on the minds of Howard and Jukes, it is impossible to attach any weight to it. To pit Lord Congleton against Mr. Darby in a public discussion, without a very strong chairman, was no more likely a way to elicit the truth than any other form of the time-honoured method of single combat.

From this time Newton ceased to take any active part in the history of the Brethren. He survived his separation from them by more than fifty years, standing, until his recent death, at the head of a very small but very devoted band of disciples. His doctrinal errors in the period preceding the separation, are not to be denied; but certain circumstances must be mentioned that more or less extenuate his responsibility, and that also shed light on the early doctrinal conceptions of the Brethren in general.

In the first place, Newton’s greatest error, of which he made such ample confession, had been taught by him in a tract that he printed in 1835, and it had circulated extensively in that form amongst the Brethren for nearly twelve years without challenge.⁷⁶ Moreover, as for the “two tracts,” Bellett, who was not merely one of the best, but also one of the ablest men in the whole community, “acknowledged that he saw nothing wrong in them till it was pointed out to him”; and “subsequently, when the *Letter on Subjects Connected with the Lord’s Humanity* appeared . . . he expressed his approbation of it, and wrote a letter signifying his satisfaction with it”. Nor was Bellett alone in “his slowness in this respect”.⁷⁷ Indeed Darby must have had a share in this slowness, for Newton had evidently taught the worst of his doctrines with no thought of disguise; and yet freely (and, it must be added, malevolently) as all Newton’s doings and sayings had long been canvassed, heterodoxy in fundamental points was never attributed to him until an unauthorised, and apparently highly exaggerated report of one of his lectures came into Harris’s hands. Nor had Darby’s own expressions been felicitous, to say the least. One of Newton’s adherents, who, under the pseudonym of Vindex, wrote a vigorous and caustic pamphlet against Darby and his party, mentions a curious misunderstanding that arose out of a footnote in the earlier of the “two tracts”. Newton had quoted Darby, without naming him, to the effect that Christ (apparently in the Wilderness of the Temptation) “could not take the place of Adam in the midst of all that which would have sustained His soul; it is the place rather of Cain; the place of estrangement from God, in the absence of all sustaining power from without”. Vindex tells us that some people deemed this “the worst thing in the (so-called) Heretical Remarks,” until it transpired that it was a quotation from Darby, when they discovered that “it meant something ‘quite different’ ”.

⁷⁵ *Collected Writings, Eccl.*, vol. iv.

⁷⁶ An effort was made to dispute this fact, which however was fully established in the end. Darby had apparently not met with the tract.

⁷⁷ The quotations are from *The Basis of Peace*, issued in 1871 by a Brother (Mr. Bewley) styling himself Philadelphos. The tract is an Irenicum addressed by an “Open” Brother, who had once been “Exclusive,” to his former associates. He had passed through the great crisis of 1848, and had written against “Bethesda” on the occasion of the disruption recorded in my next chapter. After changing his party he made diligent efforts to extenuate the differences between the two. He was thus a particularly well-informed writer.

Darby himself allowed that “the expression about Cain was unfortunate,” but none the less affirmed in his *Observations* that the quotation of his words by Newton showed “the way in which statements of truth are made to sanction the teaching of error”. Most significant of all is it that, some ten years later, Darby proved totally unable to keep clear of errors that, in the judgment of several of the foremost of his own adherents, were essentially the errors charged against Newton. Most of the early Brethren seem to have chafed at the self-restraint of the four Gospels, and to have been led to seek in the Psalms for personal experiences of Christ that are unrecorded and unsuggested elsewhere. Under these circumstances the wonder is that things were no worse.

Newton’s later attitude towards his former associates was one of intense and somewhat extravagant antagonism. He thought their theology quite as heretical as they thought his. But he is entitled throughout to the credit he claimed for himself in the hapless “letter to Clulow”; his “hostility is against a system, not against individuals”.⁷⁸ The execrations of his adversaries pursued him to his distant grave, but not once in half a century did they avail to provoke retaliation. His name to this day is regarded with absolute loathing by thousands who have never troubled to read a single tract of all that he has written; and there are certainly hundreds, scarcely a whit better informed, who have made it one of their chief objects to perpetuate the frantic prejudice. But none of the leaders of the campaign of calumny, and none of their dupes, have ever, so far as I can learn from an extensive enquiry, been assailed by Newton with one angry word of a personal character, or with one uncharitable imputation. With Newton’s ecclesiastical course I have no sympathy. He contracted the limits of orthodoxy till there can scarcely have been five hundred sound Christians in the world, and he taught principles of church-fellowship that were actually narrower than those of Darby himself. On these points I have myself spoken strongly in the past; if I refer to them now, it is to lend weight to the testimony that I gladly bear to him. As I know not where to turn for a parallel to usage so cruel and unrighteous as that from which Newton suffered, so I hardly know better where to turn to match such extraordinary forbearance as he displayed. If theological animosity could still restrain me from recognising the grace of God in his conduct, I should feel that words were poor to express my admiration either of the dignity with which his path was chosen, or of the steadfastness of self-control with which it was pursued through all its bitter length. It seems to me that Newton ignored, all unwittingly, some of the most sacred principles of Holy Scripture; but the light of one text at least shone steadily on his path. When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he was persecuted, he threatened not: but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously.

The provocation he received cannot be summarily illustrated. An example or two, taken from the writings of the very best of his opponents, may afford some indication of its nature. The following quotation is from Trotter’s *Whole Case*. Let the reader judge if a more

⁷⁸ I desire to withdraw, as susceptible of a very unjust construction, a statement I made in the *British Weekly* for December 28, 1900. I then wrote: “When he [Newton] became ‘the object of a very fierce, and it is to be feared (at least in Darby’s case) rather unscrupulous persecution, he seems to have conducted himself with a great deal of the meekness of wisdom. Subsequently he abandoned the distinctive principles of Brethrenism, and was accustomed to refer to his former associates with a somewhat unnecessary vehemence of disapprobation.” I believe I was at that time unable to imagine that Newton could have reprobated the theological system of the Brethren so vehemently, if personal pique had not been behind his denunciations; and I partially interpreted what I still consider his extravagant language as an expression of personal resentment. I now believe, after the much fuller investigation called for by my present undertaking, that I did him a great injustice; and as I consider Newton one of the worst-used men of the last century, so he is one of the last to whom I would willingly be unfair. Newton, even more than Darby, if possible, seems really to have regarded the interests of the Church of Christ as bound up with the peculiarities of a certain dispensational system, and this is a weakness that must not be forgotten in weighing the conduct of either.

outrageous violation of every principle of justice (one is ashamed to mention charity) has been perpetrated within his experience.

“First of all, notes of a lecture appear, in which the doctrine flows out freely from the author’s lips without reserve and without disguise. Finding the indignation excited by it so very great, he publishes one tract expository of his views, more carefully worded than the lecture, but still plain enough; and another, vindicating those views against the charges of his opponents. Finding his own friends ready to desert him, he confesses his error on one point, and withdraws the tracts for re-consideration. The fruit of this re-consideration is a re-publication of the doctrine; but after months of study bestowed on the subject, who can wonder that the form in which it appears is made as unobjectionable as possible? An acute mind, spending months of study on the stating of the obnoxious doctrine in as harmless and apparently unobjectionable terms as possible, while it is still maintained and asserted as firmly as ever, might be expected to produce just such a tract as this of Mr. N.’s. But who would trust it? Does he hold the doctrines he did when he wrote his former tracts? Yes, unquestionably. Then let us look *to them* to know what those doctrines are; or rather to the notes of his lecture prior to any of them, in which, without a thought of reservation or disguise, he speaks out what was in his soul.”

In other words, the tract in which Newton had embodied the results of his reconsideration gave his persecutors too little handle. It was therefore necessary for them to satisfy themselves at all costs that they were justified in still using against him the tracts that he had suppressed, and the unauthorised lecture-notes that he had disowned; as, otherwise, the prosecution seemed likely to collapse. For the rest, Newton’s conduct was invariably to be explained on the assumption, that he always acted in the meanest and falsest spirit. Yet this paragraph is not the work of a man who had earned a cheap reputation by a sanctimonious deportment; but of one that had cheerfully sacrificed everything to his principles, and who united to a lofty disinterestedness a gracious benignity that won all hearts. I can well believe that I have rarely read a paragraph written by a better man; but I am certain that I have rarely read a worse paragraph. How is it to be explained? I have no admiration for Darby’s resort to the *diabolus e machina*; but it is difficult to resist the feeling that some malignant spell was cast over the mind of such a man, and over the minds of others like him, to make them so far forget, in dealing with Newton, all those principles of humanity and uprightness which they illustriously exemplified in the other relations of life. If Christian men would only lay aside their most superfluous anxieties for the ark of God, the Church would surely be saved nine-tenths of its miseries and scandals.

Some thirty years later, a man as good as Trotter published the following sentence: “Mr. Newton and his friends, in attempting to meet the charges which were brought against them, acted in so unscriptural and untruthful a manner, as to decide many of their former friends to separate from them.” The statement, though moderate from the pen of an adherent of Darby’s, was of course libellous; but it was uttered in a perfect, if in a somewhat inglorious security. It was impossible to put too great a strain on Newton’s magnanimous forbearance.

We cannot choose but admire the rigid adherence to the principle that forbade all appeal to a secular tribunal. This constancy was not peculiar to Newton. Probably all his leading opponents would have done just the same in his place. It did not occur to them that St. Paul’s prohibition assumed that there was an appeal within the Church to a court whose decision would be final. The Brethren made no effort to constitute such a court; and that being the case it becomes a question whether an appeal to secular law would not have been the lesser of two undoubted evils. It is at all events pretty certain that if Newton had sent Darby a lawyer’s letter on the first publication of the charges of lying, there would have been an end of the whole matter, and the Church of Christ would have been saved a very great scandal.

VIII The Strife At Bristol In 1848

AT Bristol the zeal and faith of the Brethren—above all, of George Müller—had erected the noblest monument that any Christians could possess of either their philanthropy or their religion. The orphanages were already rising on the Ashley Downs. It is well known that in these orphanages many thousands of bereaved children have been fed, clothed, trained and put forth in the world, without the help of a penny of guaranteed income. Such an institution, maintained for sixty or seventy years, in which from the first day until now faith has stood in the place of building fund, sustentation fund and endowment, has an unique character amongst the achievements of Christian benevolence. In launching this enterprise philanthropy was secondary in Müller's thoughts. His primary design was to show that there was still a living God on whom His servants might safely count; and perhaps, by the simple fact of his orphanages, Müller became the greatest preacher and the greatest apologist of the last century.

When Darby instituted a second meeting at Plymouth, the Church at Bethesda Chapel remained neutral, acknowledging both the rival communities. This was a possible course only so long as Darby simply denied all ecclesiastical status to Ebrington Street; but when, after the doctrinal controversy, he required the personal excommunication of each several member of the church, neutrality became impossible. The test was forced on Bethesda in April, 1848, when Captain Woodfall⁷⁹ and his brother applied for communion. These gentlemen, well-known friends of Newton's, had been in the habit of communicating at Bethesda Chapel whenever they passed a Sunday in Bristol. Darby had a few firm adherents even within the flock of Müller and Craik, and some opposition was made to the application. Finally, Captain Woodfall was admitted, on the ground that he had been travelling on the Continent and might be presumed to be ignorant of the state of the controversy; but it was determined that Mr. Woodfall must first be visited, and his "soundness" ascertained. At Craik's prudent suggestion the three objectors were appointed as visitors, and Woodfall was eventually admitted on their testimony.

These three men were Alexander, Stancombe (who in after years had cause to rue the day that he became a supporter of Darby's programme), and Nash. They afterwards felt aggrieved that the burden of investigation had been thrown upon them, and discontent continued to smoulder.

"About the 20th of April, 1848, after the reception of Colonel Woodfall and his brother, Mr. Darby came to Bristol, and as usual called on Mr. Müller, by whom he was asked to preach the following Sunday evening at Bethesda In the intercourse between them nothing passed that indicated the course that a few days later Mr. Darby initiated. Mr. Darby stated his inability to preach in Bethesda, having previously engaged to preach somewhere on his road to Exeter. But notwithstanding this friendly intercourse, not many days after, he intimated publicly, at a large meeting of labouring brethren in Exeter, that he could no more go to Bethesda because the Woodfalls had been received. All were not prepared for this hasty manner of withdrawal, and it was asked whether any intimation had been given to those concerned, before so solemn an act as separation took place. This had not been done, though subsequently, on the remonstrance of others, Mr. D. did write a letter from Exeter to Mr. Müller, intimating his decision in the matter.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Called Colonel Woodfall in Henry Groves' *Darbyism*. I follow Lord Congleton.

⁸⁰ The quotation is from Henry Groves' *Darbyism*. Groves read the first draft of his work both to Craik and to Müller. He held it over for a time at their request, "lest it should appear indirectly like an act of self vindication," ultimately publishing it on his own responsibility. Its statements therefore carry great authority as to things that happened at Bethesda itself.

Darby's action doubtless quickened the zeal of his three adherents at Bethesda, who ceaselessly urged the duty of holding a church investigation of Newton's views. The other elders maintained a steady opposition to this proposal.

A great deal of energy was afterwards expended by Darby's party in an attempt to prove that persons holding Newton's errors were about this time admitted to communion at Bethesda. But this was not the case; the principle of personal examination was thoroughly carried out. Both sides were agreed that such admission would have been indefensible. Perhaps from the very first, the Brethren had held themselves bound to exclude for a variety of errors that leave untouched all the doctrines of the three great Creeds. This view of Christian fellowship is therefore not peculiar to Darbyism. It was the boast of Bethesda and of all Bethesda's sympathisers.

In the month of June Alexander seceded without in any way previously intimating his intention, and circulated amongst the congregation a letter assigning his reasons. In this letter he makes no charge against the Church with respect to any actual occurrence. His reasons for leaving are purely hypothetical; such and such things *might* happen, in the absence of the investigation he demanded.⁸¹ It would certainly seem that Alexander was "thoroughly baptised," according to the prayer of the seceding Scotch minister, "into the spirit of disruption".

Alexander's action forced the hand of the elders, and accordingly they summoned a church-meeting for June the 29th. At this meeting the famous Letter of the Ten was read by the elders, and sanctioned by the church.

If this document had been a concise subscription to all the heresies of Christendom from the days of Cerinthus downward, it could hardly have raised a greater tumult of execration. According to Trotter, some of its statements "tell a louder and more solemn tale in the ear of conscience than anything which has been advanced by those whom Bethesda looks upon as her adversaries". Considering the nature of some of the things that had "been advanced" by those whom Bethesda came somehow or other to "look upon as her adversaries," Trotter's statement is a very bold one. It will be best to present a summary of the principles of the Letter.

The writers begin by declaring in the most unequivocal terms the orthodoxy of their own belief on the points raised in the Newtonian controversy.

They allege as their reasons for not having consented to a church investigation of Newton's doctrines, that, in the first place, it was not to edification that people in Bristol should get entangled in the controversies of Plymouth; that, secondly, there had been "such variableness in the views held by the writer in question that it" was difficult to ascertain what he would at that time "acknowledge as his"; that, moreover, "Christian brethren, hitherto of unblemished reputation for soundness in the faith," had differed as to the amount of error contained in the tracts, which were "written in such an ambiguous style" as to make the Ten shrink from the responsibility of giving a formal judgment; that the tracts were likely to be unintelligible to many in the congregation, and that there had seemed to be little probability that even the leaders would have come "to unity of judgment touching the nature of the doctrines therein embodied".

Then followed the most fatal of all the clauses: "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,

⁸¹ The whole letter is printed in Wigram's *Present Question*, p.13.

Plymouth, last January, put forth a statement, disclaiming the errors charged against the tracts.⁸²

They objected strongly to being required to make the investigation, and felt that compliance “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.” The Letter concluded with a warning against “the evil of treating the subject of our Lord’s humanity as a matter of speculative or angry controversy”.

The Bethesda leaders afterwards stated that the letter was read to the Church with explanatory comments, without which, they maintained, it ought not to have been printed. They denied that the Letter was in any sense a formal definition of the ecclesiastical principles of Bethesda; it was only intended to meet a particular emergency. If the Letter really required any indulgence, no doubt the indulgence might fairly be claimed on these grounds.

The following incident rests on the authority of Henry Groves:—

“Shortly after the reading of ‘The Letter of the Ten’ to the church, Mr. Darby came again to Bristol, and had an interview with both Mr. Müller and Mr. Craik, in which he again urged the taking up of the tracts by Bethesda, and passing a church condemnation on them Finding their judgments were not to be changed, he sought to intimidate by the threat of separating from them all those believers in other places, with whom for years they had held Christian fellowship.”

Darby showed characteristic energy in putting his threat into execution.

“He went from one place to another, seeking to enforce everywhere the adoption of his course towards Bethesda. Assemblies of saints one after another were placed under the bann [*sic*] of excommunication for no other sin than not being able to see that Mr. Darby was right, and Bethesda wrong. On reaching Leeds, he issued his lithographic circular, bearing the post mark of August 26, 1848, cutting off not only Bethesda, but all assemblies who received any one who went there.”

This circular is one of the great documents of Brethrenism, inaugurating as it does the unique discipline with which Mr. Darby’s name will be associated as long as he is remembered amongst men. The letter may be read in full in the *Collected Writings*.⁸³ It is a solemn trifling with facts, in the very act of pronouncing a wholesale sentence of excommunication. The least that can be said is that he was at no pains to verify his assertions, and that upon the very loosest (not to say upon an absolutely erroneous) apprehension of the circumstances that had occurred, he based a decree that was to spread strife, misery and shame, like a conflagration, to the remotest bounds of Christendom.

Another point of the greatest importance must be kept in view in reading this letter. Whatever the relation to Newton of the persons admitted at Bethesda, they were admitted at a time when Newton’s teaching was being held in suspense. The principal error had been abjured with expressions of penitence; the tracts containing the lesser errors had been withdrawn for reconsideration, and the results of the reconsideration were then unpublished. Bethesda was excommunicated for suspending judgment in the meantime.

⁸² See chap. vii., p. 71.

⁸³ *Doctrinal*, vol. iv., p.253.

“BELOVED BRETHREN,

“I feel bound to present to you the case of Bethesda. It involves to my mind the whole question of association with brethren, and for this very simple reason, that if there is incapacity to keep out that which has been recognised as the work and power of Satan, and to guard the beloved sheep of Christ against it—if brethren are incapable of this service to Christ, then they ought not to be in any way owned as a body to whom such service is confided: their gatherings would be really a trap laid to ensnare the sheep. . . . The object of Mr. Newton and his friends is not now openly to propagate his doctrine in the offensive form in which it has roused the resistance of every godly conscience that cared for the glory and person of the blessed Lord, but to palliate and extenuate the evil of the doctrine, and get a footing as Christians for those who hold it, so as to be able to spread it and put sincere souls off their guard. In this way precisely Bethesda is helping them in the most effectual way they can: I shall now state how. They have received the members of Ebrington Street with a positive refusal to investigate the Plymouth errors. And at this moment the most active agents of Mr. Newton are assiduously occupied amongst the members of Bethesda, in denying that Mr. Newton holds errors, and explaining and palliating his doctrines, and removing any apprehension of them from the minds of saints, and successfully occupied in it.

“A paper was read, signed by Messrs. Craik and Müller, and eight others, to the body at Bethesda, in which they diligently extenuate and palliate Mr. Newton’s doctrine, though refusing investigation of it, and blame as far as they can those who have opposed it. I do not charge Mr. Müller with himself holding Mr. Newton’s errors. He was pressed to say in public what he had said in private of Mr. Newton’s tracts, and at first refused. Afterwards *he declared that he had said there were very bad errors*, and that he did not know to what they would lead. Upon what grounds persons holding them are admitted and the errors refused to be investigated, *if such be his judgment*, I must leave every one to determine for themselves. I only ask Is it faithfulness to Christ’s sheep? Further, while it is true that Mr. Craik may be by no means prepared to assert that Mr. Newton’s doctrines are *all* according to the truth of God, and that I have no reason to say that he is not sound in the faith, yet it is certain that he is so far favourably disposed to Mr. Newton’s views, and in some points a partaker of them, as to render it impossible that he could guard with any energy against them. The *result* is, that members of Ebrington Street, active and unceasing agents of Mr. Newton, holding and justifying his views, are received at Bethesda, and the system which so many of us have known as denying the glory of the Lord Jesus (and that, when fully stated, in the most offensive way) and corrupting the moral rectitude of every one that fell under its power—that this system, though not professed, is fully admitted and at work at Bethesda. . . . Now, beloved brethren, I see in Scripture that one effect of faith is . . . to make us respect what God respects; I do not therefore desire in the smallest degree to diminish the respect and value which any may feel personally for the brethren Craik and Müller, on the grounds of that in which they have honoured God by faith. Let this be maintained as I desire to maintain it, and have maintained in my intercourse with them; but I do call upon brethren by their faithfulness to Christ, and love to the souls of those dear to Him in faithfulness, to set a barrier against this evil. Woe be to them if they love the brethren Müller and Craik or their own ease more than the souls of saints dear to Christ! And I plainly urge upon them that to receive any one from Bethesda (unless in any exceptional case of ignorance of what has passed) is opening the door now to the infection of the abominable evil from which at so much painful cost we have been delivered. *It has been formally and deliberately admitted at Bethesda under the plea of not investigating it (itself a principle which refuses to watch against roots of bitterness), and really palliated. And if this be admitted by receiving persons from Bethesda, those doing so are morally identified with the evil, for the body so acting is corporately responsible for the evil they admit. If brethren think they can admit those who subvert the person and glory of*

Christ, and principles which have led to so much untruth and dishonesty, it is well they should say so, that those who cannot may know what to do. I only lay the matter before the consciences of brethren, urging it upon them by their fidelity to Christ. And I am clear in my conscience towards them. For my own part, I should neither go to Bethesda in its present state, nor while in that state go where persons from it were knowingly admitted. I do not wish to reason on it here, but lay it before brethren, and press it on their fidelity to Christ and their care of His beloved saints.

“Ever yours in His grace,
“J. N. D.”

On Darby’s own showing he had now receded indefinitely far from the only platform where, as he once held, “the fulness of blessing” could be found,—a “meeting framed to embrace all the children of God in the full basis of the Kingdom of the Son”. No ingenuity in proving that Müller and Craik had made themselves obnoxious to “the discipline of the house of God” could get rid of the plain fact that two Christian leaders, whom all their fellow Christians were at liberty to honour “for their work’s sake,” were to be cut off with their whole flock from the Table of the Lord on ecclesiastical grounds. Leeds gave the lie direct to Dublin as pointedly as ever Geneva gave it to Rome; and this is equally clear whether we agree with Leeds or with Dublin, or with neither.

Two points are specially noteworthy. In the first place, the penalty for neglecting this decree was significantly indicated at the outset,—“it involves to my mind the whole question of association with brethren”. In the second place, at the close of the circular the whole of the subsequent discipline of Exclusivism was expressed *in principle*. The only question that stood over for settlement was whether, in the practical enforcement of the decree, there might be some flinching from carrying it out to its full extent. The early sequel will furnish an answer.

By making this exorbitant requirement Darby put a severe strain even upon his own wonderful influence. In the middle of September some men who were afterwards numbered with his followers were still in a contumacious frame. The Brethren of Bath requested that a meeting might be held at Bristol to enquire into the separation of Alexander, Stancombe and others from Bethesda. This was duly held, Bethesda being represented by Müller, Craik, Norris Groves (who happened to be in England at the time) and several others; the seceders by Alexander, Stancombe and two others; and the Bath meeting by Captain Wellesley (a nephew of the Iron Duke, and a man who had suffered severely for his principles as a Plymouth Brother), by J. G. Bellett, who had come to Bath for a time for the benefit of an invalid son, by Code, and by several more. The result was that the Bath Brethren determined, in palpable disregard of the circular, to receive “for the present” from “both parties in Bristol”.

It will be observed in the circular that Darby felt unable to go the length of stating that Craik was personally “unsound”. In the following October Wigram made a gallant attempt to fill up this unfortunate gap. He lets us know that he acted under a strong sense of duty. “I cannot hold myself guiltless before God or His saints, unless I raise my voice concerning statements made by Henry Craik, co-labourer with George Müller in Bristol. . . I do not accuse himself of being a blasphemer or a heretic; I hope better things. But I do challenge *his statements* as blasphemous and heretical.”⁸⁴

The following is the incriminated passage. It was taken from Craik’s *Pastoral Letters*.

“The ark was formed of shittim wood: the hard, sweet-smelling acacia of the wilderness. The tree from which the sacred chest was made, had grown up and been

⁸⁴ *An Appeal to Saints that remain, etc.*, p. 5.

nourished by the rain and sunshine that sometimes cheered the wastes of the desert; so Jesus, as to his humanity, grew up in the wilderness. He was a root out of a dry ground. He breathed the same air, and was nourished by the same food, by which mere creatures are sustained. The winds of this desert world blew around Him, and as the tender sapling gradually grows to maturity of height and vigour,—so Jesus advanced through the several stages of infancy, childhood, and youth, to a state of maturity in age and stature. The acacia wood is said to have great power of resisting the inroads of corruption and decay; so the humanity of the Lord Jesus was free from the slightest taint of moral evil, and his body was preserved from all taint, even of external corruption.”

To enable the reader to test his skill in the detection of heresy, I have given the passage as it appears to have been originally published, without the use of the italics by which Wigram indicated the most terrible passages. These were, “He was a root out of a dry ground,”—“and was nourished by the same food, by which mere creatures are sustained,”—and the whole of the last sentence, beginning, “The acacia wood is said”.

Wigram laid stress on the fact that by the Letter of the Ten the whole church at Bethesda stood committed to all these heresies. He contended that Christ was as a root out of dry ground only to the eye of an unbelieving world; and “of Henry Craik I still desire,” he says, “to hope better things than that the Nazarene would have been ‘as a root out of a dry ground’ ”. A further complaint was that “where Scripture says HE, referring to *the person* of the Christ, God manifest in the flesh, the statement says, ‘*his humanity*,’—although as a matter of fact the statement says nothing of the kind. The other italicised words gave rise to painful suspicions, but Wigram still entertained hopes of some satisfactory explanation of them.

Wigram added as a makeweight that he had been told, in a letter from Bristol, that Mr. Craik had “said with great warmth the other day, that J. N. D. and his followers made too much of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, and that he believed if the Lord had not been crucified he would have lived to be a shrivelled old man, and have died a natural death”. Wigram had also heard that Craik had said that “if the Lord had taken arsenic he would have died”.

The first point in Craik’s reply to this attack is as follows: “That Mr. W. wrote the tract while living in the neighbourhood of my house, *i.e.*, half an hour’s walk from Kingsdown; *yet never availed himself of the opportunity of personally enquiring as to the fact of certain expressions [having] been employed by me.*” (The italics are apparently Craik’s.) Wigram’s answer is one of the curiosities of literature. He knew Craik, he tells us, to be “under a delusion,” and identified with “a system which makes every one in it to be reckless as to truth”. If he abstained from asking questions it was from charity, since Craik might have been “tempted to the sin of evasion and deception”. He further deemed that it would not have been “*common honesty* to have asked for evidence,” when his judgment was already formed.

Craik admits having made part of the statement attributed to him by Wigram’s correspondent, but positively denies having used the grossly objectionable expression with reference to Christ becoming “a shrivelled old man”. As for the rest of the statement, it had been made “in a moment of excitement,” and “*at the same meeting* confessed as sin before the brethren, and acknowledged as such before God in prayer”. Wigram partially accepts this explanation, though with no great heartiness, but affirms that the incident in question had not been the gravamen of his charge, and lays all the stress on the quotation from the pastoral letter, and on Craik’s reply on that head. By this reply, according to Wigram, Craik was hopelessly committed.

If this were a mere bickering between two men but little known to the present generation it would be unpardonable to allot it any further space in a historical summary like

the present. But it is in reality very much more than that. It defines the battlefield of Darbyism during the whole of the generation following, and even to a great extent down to the present day. Craik, in his reply, had used the following language: "What I asserted was that our blessed Lord, having life in Himself, could have prolonged His life for ever if He had so chosen. Secondly, that He could not by any possibility die but as the sacrifice for sin; but that He was so truly human that poison, or the sword piercing His heart, would have destroyed the union between His soul and His body, had He not put forth His power to prevent the natural result. If this be denied, it seems to me that the faith of the Catholic Church (in all ages) is repudiated; and the necessary inference would be, that the Blessed One did not take our flesh, but flesh and blood essentially different from ours." He also said, "I have ever maintained that He was in all things made like unto His brethren, sin only excepted; that the flesh which He assumed was the flesh and blood of the children; that the physical or chemical properties of His body were the same as ours".

The controversy had now entered on its final stage, and it is important to give it careful definition. The followers of Darby allowed it to be believed that men like Newton and Craik had taught that the ordinary means of destruction would have availed against the life of the Saviour, without respect to His own will in the matter. The truth is that Newton and Craik repeatedly, and in every variety of phrase, affirmed that the issues of life and death for Himself lay, under every possible physical condition, in His own will. They taught that *on the impossible supposition* of His body sustaining an injury that would in the case of another man be mortal, death would have ensued *unless for miraculous intervention*; but that this miraculous intervention lay within His own power as much as within the power of God the Father. For this the Darbyites have treated them for more than fifty years as heretics. I have been told by a very responsible informant that they affixed a further stigma on Craik for saying that Christ was taken into Egypt to escape the sword of Herod. They refused to see that the first Gospel was the original fount of this heresy. To Wigram there was "no reverence in talking of the physical or chemical properties of the Lord's body"; though if there were irreverence in the discussion Wigram should have remembered that it was he that had raised it. He did not see that Craik was merely stating, in opposition to an incipient Docetism, the real humanity of the body of Christ, "sent in the likeness of sinful flesh". Indeed Wigram exposed his total want of the requisite theological knowledge by observing, "A resurrection body will be truly human, yet not subject to such things"; as if a resurrection body were flesh and blood (I Cor. xv. 50), or else as if Christ did not take part of flesh and blood (Heb. ii. 14).

The Darbyites (and indeed the Open Brethren are not clear in the matter) should have considered what their position involved. If Christ's body had not the physiological properties of our own, the statement that he died "the death of the Cross" becomes unmeaning. A year or two ago I heard an address from a Brother of the Open section, who actually taught that Christ did not die from crucifixion, but by a mere miraculous act. The good man was certainly not a responsible teacher, nor did I ever know a man of weight to set Holy Scripture on one side with quite so much definiteness and completeness; but I have heard much that glanced in the same direction. Newton had a sense of this peril, and in spite of his serious errors, he was quite entitled to feel in other particulars that he was standing in defence of the Catholic faith. And if in condemning Newton's errors Craik were (as Wigram implies) slower and quieter than Müller or good Mr. Chapman of Barnstaple, the reason probably was that, being a far better theologian than either, he was able to take account of more tendencies than fell within their narrower range of observation; and judged that too absorbing a preoccupation with errors on the one hand was blinding the Brethren to the approach of errors just as serious on the other.

This feeling is perhaps reflected in the following extract from a letter that Craik wrote about this time:—

“According to the light I have, both parties are so far in the wrong that I have no wish to be identified with either. I wait for further light, and my prayer is, ‘Hear the right, O Lord’. Should it turn out that Mr. Newton’s errors are only those of a rash speculative intellectualist, who is yet sound at heart and seeking to honour Christ, it will be no cause of regret that I have refused to have fellowship with those who have been seeking to crush rather than to recover him; if, on the other hand, it should appear that after all his long course of service he is really an enemy to the cross of Christ, it will be no cause of regret that I have been rather too slow to believe so terrible a charge. Until George Wigram be subjected to discipline, I shall not feel it any cause of sorrow to be standing in separation from a body where such a course is tolerated.”

What did Darby think of Wigram’s latest achievement? Probably he estimated it at pretty much its true value. It is impossible to consider Darby a very precise divine. Though he had undoubted power, it was rather as the mystic than as the systematic theologian. Still, he had plenty of theological learning of most kinds, and could scarcely have been deceived as to the character of Wigram’s hapless performance. At a meeting in Dublin in 1852, as I learn from one who was present, he was questioned about his action in regard to the discipline against Bethesda and its adherents. “When some reference was made,” my informant writes, “to the charges against Mr. Craik, he said, as I distinctly remember, that he knew nothing about it—that Mr. Wigram sent him his tracts, and that he put them at the back of the fire.” This implies that he had some inkling of their contents, even if we are to understand that he did not read them. But it was clearly impossible for Darby to wash his hands of the whole business in that way. Wigram’s charges against Craik became, as every Exclusive (at any rate in my time) knew perfectly well, a very important weapon in the armoury of Darbyism; yet Darby, if he had chosen, could have put an end to them at any time, for good and all. The fact was that Wigram and his like—men that never flinched from doing their chief’s work, however tedious and disgusting it might be—were indispensable to Darby, as such men are to every party leader; and he simply could not afford to disown them. Probably too he thought that they were warring in their blundering way against a real evil, and had better not be discouraged. However that may be, Wigram’s caricatures took a firm hold of the popular imagination; and while Darby was writing to Craik, when Craik lay dying in 1866, “calling him his ‘dear brother,’ and wishing that ‘although ecclesiastically separated from him,’ he might be blessed with every blessing, as the Lord might see he needed in his present circumstances,” Darby’s followers were simply noting the passing of a heresiarch. It is very likely, and much to be hoped, that Darby’s kind note was dictated by some feeling of compunction.

By the month of November the elders of Bethesda found the pressure too strong, and resolved to examine the tracts. Their opponents absurdly took this as proof positive that they had previously been to blame for not examining them. A feeble defence was put forth by their friends, where no defence was needed. It was said that Newton having now issued his Letter on the Lord’s Humanity, it was possible to know definitely what he held. But this does not explain the change of front, for Newton’s Letter had been in circulation for several months when the decision to investigate was adopted. Bethesda has often suffered from a timid and misguided advocacy. The change of conduct does not necessarily imply even a previous error of judgment; it may have depended altogether on the altered circumstances.

The investigation seems to have been laboriously thorough. Seven church meetings were held between November 27 and December 11, 1848.

“At the first two or three meetings Mr. Müller read from the tracts, page after page, pointing out as he went along what inferences were legitimately deducible from what was read, and which, if they were allowed, would vitiate the atonement; and while these inferences would be disallowed by Mr. Newton, in judging of his views, they must, if legitimate, necessarily be their guide in leading to a decision on *them*. During the remaining four or five meetings sixteen other brethren spoke. . . . The result of these deliberations was, that the following conclusion was arrived at: ‘That no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton’s views or tracts should be received into communion’. Of this decision Lord Congleton writes: ‘This conclusion was given out two or three times by the brethren Groves, Müller and Craik’.”⁸⁵

This declaration, on the most charitable construction, was very unfortunately worded. If it merely meant that people defending the *doctrines* that were stated to be found in the tracts would not be received, it declared that Bethesda would do as it was already doing. If, on the other hand, it announced a change of policy, the change could only consist in requiring of all candidates for communion that they should entertain the same opinion as the church at Bethesda, not on the theological points, but on the meaning of Newton’s writings. The Jansenists long before had been willing to condemn the “five propositions”; but this was not sufficient; the Pope required that they should also declare that the five propositions were to be found in Jansenius. It is surely plain that a mere question of fact (revelation apart) should not be made *de fide*.

Nor is this all. Such of Newton’s friends as had been admitted after examination now withdrew. About the end of January, 1849, Captain Woodfall went to Newton’s old congregation, now removed from Ebrington Street to Compton Street, and took the communion there. Now, the statement of that church’s views, issued in January, 1848, had been accepted in the Letter of the Ten as “disclaiming the errors charged against the tracts”. The elders of Bethesda, nevertheless, condemned Woodfall’s act, and a church meeting was called for Monday, February 12. At this meeting “Captain Woodfall read out a resignation on behalf of himself and his brother,” using in the course of it the following expression “We consider the regulations that have been, and will be virtually acted out, do effectually hinder the Christians at Compton Street from even applying for fellowship at Bethesda”. Lord Congleton explains that, apart from this resignation, Woodfall would not have been excommunicated, as he was not known to hold Newton’s errors; but, had he “repeated the act, he would have been publicly reprimanded; and if he had done it a third time he would have been put out of communion”.

One could hope Lord Congleton was mistaken, but he speaks quite positively, and he had every means of knowing. Assuming for the moment that persons actually holding Newton’s views ought to have been excommunicated, as both sides agreed throughout, the earlier principle of the church at Bethesda was the only one reconcilable either with equity or with the principles on which Brethrenism had been inaugurated. This principle had been to receive the “personally sound”. Two considerations called for this individualising treatment. In the first place, in churches where errors of a more or less abstruse character are taught, the bulk of the congregation will generally be found to know nothing about them. In the second place, there are many people who might regard the doctrines with abhorrence, without feeling justified in resorting to a suspension of ecclesiastical relations. In the case now in question, Episcopalians would take such a view almost universally, since the Creeds were not denied, but on the contrary very strenuously upheld. Now Brethrenism had started with scarcely any other definable principle than that all such ecclesiastical differences must be ignored. In the

⁸⁵ Henry Groves, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

confusion that the immense variety of views as to the basis of church fellowship had produced in Christendom, the Brethren had sought to find a platform where all could meet, leaving behind them (were it only for the passing hour) the principles that divided them. The Bethesda congregation, unhappily, seemed now to sanction, up to a certain point, the separatist principle of their adversaries.

Bethesda afterwards fell back on its earlier decision, admitting every person that reached its particular standard of orthodoxy, without regard to his views of what he might (or should) tolerate in his ecclesiastical relations elsewhere. This principle was clearly enunciated by Müller's assistant, Mr. James Wright, in answer to enquiries addressed to him in 1883; and the principle was then accepted by the Exclusive party as evidence of the incurably corrupt condition of his church.

The conclusion of the investigation did nothing to better the case of Bethesda in the eyes of its persecutors. The "independent" principle was still admitted; and (we may surely add) Darby's decree was still refused. Yet Darby himself wavered. In July, 1849, he called on Müller at "the New Orphan House, No.1, ten minutes before one o'clock". They shook hands, and Darby said, "As you have judged Newton's tracts, there is no longer any reason why we should be separated". Müller answered, "I have this moment only ten minutes' time, having an important engagement before me; and as you have acted so wickedly in this matter, I cannot *now* enter upon it, as I have no time". Darby rose and left. They never saw one another again.⁸⁶

Of all the incidents in Darby's chequered career, this is distinctly the most damaging to his reputation, for he left Müller's presence only to enforce to the last letter the decree that he had just declared obsolete.

Müller and two of his colleagues had received in June an application from "a number of brethren at Rawstorne Street, London, and elsewhere," professing to act "as separate individuals," asking for a meeting open to all parties concerned, to be held "either in Bristol or elsewhere". Müller's reply bears date July 18, and may therefore fall either before or after his last interview with Darby. He writes: "We are ready to afford full explanation of the course that has been adopted at Bethesda to any godly enquirers who have not committed themselves as partisans of Mr. Darby and Mr. Wigram, but 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, there can be no fellowship between us and them; if they disapprove of that course, we feel that they are bound first to call to account those who have been manifestly guilty of following a course tending to division, and of grossly slandering their brethren."

Meanwhile the execution of Darby's decree was going rapidly forward. In the preceding spring, a division had been forced at Bath under the influence of Wigram and Sir Charles Brenton, the translator of the Septuagint. Bellett and Captain Wellesley tried in vain to keep up the neutral policy on which the meeting had decided, and Captain Hall paid a visit from Hereford in the interests of peace generally. Wellesley was considered "an exceedingly dangerous person," because though he deemed Newton's tracts erroneous he was not able to see the "extreme danger" in them that some saw. About the same time "it was required of

⁸⁶ I have taken the speech of each of the interlocutors from an autograph letter of Müller's, addressed to Mr. Henry C. Crawley, and bearing date, "Breslau, Germany, April 30, 1883". Henry Groves, who wrote the first draft of his *Darbyism* in 1863, and published the first edition in 1866, gives the speeches with a few immaterial variations.

brethren in Orchard Street, London, that they should *refuse Christians coming from Bethesda*. They declined compliance and were at once separated from by Mr. Darby's followers."⁸⁷

Not a little of the fury of the persecution fell on one whose long services and broken health might have pleaded for exemption. Early in 1849 Norris Groves visited the meeting at Tottenham; and took the communion there. The meeting was one of some importance in the neighbourhood of London, because of the high regard in which its leaders, the brothers John and Robert Howard, were held. John Howard made his mark as a man of science, and was honoured with a Fellowship of the Royal Society. In the days preceding the Plymouth quarrel he had been a well-known preacher among the London Brethren. His judgment was strong against Newton's line, whether in doctrine or in church management, though it is uncertain whether he ever approved of Darby's proceedings. Robert Howard, at the time of the Bath meeting, was probably inclined to go further in support of Darby than either he or his brother afterwards found it possible to do. Indeed Darby's circular alienated many influential men who might have tolerated, even if they could not have approved, his strange course at Plymouth.

When it became known that Groves had been admitted at Tottenham, Dorman wrote to John Howard, intimating that Tottenham came under the ban of excommunication. The ground of action was that Groves was "identified" with the "condition of things at Bethesda". Ere long this would have been quite enough of itself, but as yet a makeweight was still of some value. Dorman accordingly added,— "more especially as he has been challenged on the score of holding and teaching false doctrines, and on other grounds, by brethren whose judgment I feel bound to respect".

To this intimation Howard replied, asking Dorman if he were prepared to substantiate these charges before the church and in the presence of the accused. Dorman replied that he was willing to give account of anything he had said, but "at a proper time and in a proper place". Tottenham could not be such a place, "in my present position towards it," as Dorman euphemistically puts it. He expressed a hope that an investigation might be held at some other place, such as Bristol. Howard's reply was pungent. "Your present position is that of one who brings charges . . . against a brother, which you refuse to substantiate, *raising questions about the tribunal* before which you are summoned, *i.e.* taking the very course you so strongly condemned in Mr. B. W. Newton".

Howard recommended Groves to test the sincerity of Dorman's expression of willingness to confront him at Bristol. Groves followed the advice, but without avail. Dorman informed him that the grounds on which his reception at the Tottenham meeting were objected to were "entirely of a *public nature* connected with Bethesda, and not in any way personal"; and reserved any further answer until a meeting could be held for the general investigation of the Bethesda question. Groves naturally directed Dorman's attention to the distinctly *personal* objections that had been alleged in the letter of excommunication addressed to Howard. "The attempt," Groves now writes, "to mix up your accusations against me, and the consideration of them, with the case at Bethesda, so as not to give me a hearing, till *after* that complicated question has been heard and decided on, I cannot but consider calculated to throw a doubt over the sincerity of your professed wish to have everything clear, by annexing an impossible condition to it."

The closing paragraph is another proof of a curious sagacity in Groves, notwithstanding the somewhat dreamy and enthusiastic turn of his mind. "The time will come when, if you refuse, you will experience the truth of this. 'As you render unto others, so it will be rendered unto you.' " The prediction found a striking, if not a perfectly literal fulfilment. From 1846 onward we have seen Dorman the relentless minister of Darby's despotism.

⁸⁷ *Divers Weights Brought out and Broken*, by D. W., p. 2.

Within twenty years from that date he had fallen himself before the same ruthless stroke. A fate, kindly cruel, gave him the opportunity of redeeming his fame, and well he availed himself of it.

Meanwhile his attitude is not admirable. "I have but little," he says, "to add to my former letter, except to state still more explicitly that I am apart from Tottenham, on the ground of your having been received to fellowship there as one entirely identified with the present condition of things at Bethesda. . . . Therefore, when I meet you, it will be on this solemn ground, and not on a matter of individual concern. . . . You must excuse my adding more, as I have reason to distrust this whole proceeding."

Groves replied with some pardonable heat.

"You conclude your note . . . by saying, 'you must excuse my adding more, as I have *reason* to distrust this whole proceeding'. If you have, why do you not come forward like a Christian man, and prove its character? I believe, so far as you are connected with it, and your friends, you well may distrust it; and when it is all before the Church of God, as it all shall be, I believe they will mistrust it yet more. . . . I again ask you what part of my conduct you complain of. Again, I want to know from *you* where and when I have *taught* the false doctrines imputed to me. . . . I again want to know what your '*other grounds*' include. By this *multum in parvo* phrase . . . what do you mean? What I want is, to meet you and the originators of these slanders and false accusations against me, face to face, for it is time this wholesale dealing in calumny and slander, to ruin the Christian reputations of those who are opposed to you, should be put an end to; and that no shuffling about meeting those who have been thus wronged should be admitted, under the cover of a few sanctimonious phrases, which seem to imply that no one cares for the *honour* of the Lord of Glory and His church but you and your friends. . . . If . . . righteousness has so fallen in the streets that you cannot attain unto the standard of Christian morals, of first communicating a brother's faults privately to himself, before you expose him publicly, at least seek not to sink below heathen morals, by, when you have cast a dishonour on his name, refusing to meet him, either to establish what you have said, or allow him to clear himself.

"I can only say, dear sir, that I deplore the fact that a man of your standing in the church, and one who has so often built up others in Christ, should now by your example in conduct be so acting, as to demoralise and distract the whole of that portion of the church of God to which your influence extends."

Neither Groves nor Craik reached the standard of Newton's almost matchless self-control, but it cannot be said that they exaggerated one whit the evils against which they bore their indignant protest.

IX The Epoch Of Exclusivism—The Supremacy Of Darby

THE ruin of Brethrenism was complete. Ought that to be a subject of regret to us?

The question is not so simple as the partisans on either side might think. In the early days of the movement there were men who, while standing aloof from it on principle, could yet profoundly feel its fascination. In the year 1840 Dorman received a letter from a clergyman who had attended, apparently by his invitation, a meeting of the Brethren. From this letter Dorman published extracts, without indicating the hiatuses; and I have to follow his text.

“I have for some months known a little of you; but it was not till yesterday, at your, I would say *our* Pentecostal festival (for a feast it was to my inmost soul), that I duly appreciated the character of the Brethren who did me so much honour, happiness, and service, by inviting me to attend it, that I know not how to express my gratitude to you and them. My not approving of all things amongst you, does not at all obstruct the current of my Christian love for you and many others whom I need not name. But why do I write to you? It is to say, and that with real affection—Alas! that so beautiful a theory *cannot* long subsist; it is too unworldly and sainted for our polluted atmosphere. It will do—it has done much good; but IT WILL FALL (Acts xx. 30). ‘*Of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.’ Woe, woe unto them through whom it shall fall! Mine shall not be the hand to detach even a pin from so goodly a tent; rather, like my namesake of Arimathea, I would honour it when others abandon it. May my soul be with yours!—Yours in our common Lord,

“JOSEPH WHITE NIBLOCK.”

Dorman, writing in 1849, accepts this letter as “almost prophetic of the course which things have taken”. He was all unconscious that Niblock might have thought the prophecy much more strikingly fulfilled in Darby’s conduct than in Newton’s. Nor does he see that he is by no means entitled to accept the glowing phrases as an unqualified tribute to Brethrenism. What are we to think of the ecclesiastical position in which the atmosphere is so rarefied that a true Christian cannot long walk in it, unless he be endowed with an extraordinary spirituality? Such was not at the beginning the provision of the Lord for His flock. Is it too much to say that, for the luxury of breathing such an ethereal atmosphere, the leaders of the Brethren had neglected divine safeguards that our palpable infirmities have always called for, and had denounced the service of common sense as unworthy of the House of God? Dorman’s own words seem to justify the conclusion. “In this letter,” he adds, “Dr. Niblock has truly, though perhaps unconsciously, stated what ought ever to have been the ‘theory,’ as he calls it, of the brethren’s position;—a position too *heavenly* to be maintained by *earthly* minds; a position based upon heavenly principles, and making its appeal continually to faith: depending for its subsistence every hour upon the exercise of the living power of Christ.” This is magnificent, but it is not the Church of Christ; and no one has seen this more clearly than Dorman himself saw it at a later day. As an ecclesiastical experiment Brethrenism must fall unregretted; but let us spare no effort to preserve the elements of spiritual strength and beauty that it unquestionably enshrined.

The treasure may pass to other keeping, but the shrine was not merely desecrated, but rifled. To the subsequent Darbyism, indeed, the movement owes its most startling features, and a consequent increase of dubious notoriety; but, not less, a hopeless obscuration of its true lustre. Whereas the genuine inspiration of those early years was attested by a remarkable outburst of sublime song, the period following the rupture was singularly barren of great hymns. The strife of petty differences of standpoint, and even of mere personal emulation,

silenced genuine song, whatever power and brilliancy of other kinds might sometimes be displayed.⁸⁸ Yet we shall err if we suffer ourselves to regard even the first twenty years of Brethrenism as a true golden age. Old men who remember those days may see them in such a light, but the evils that have ruined the whole system were at work in it even from the first. Groves' historical letter to Darby is a witness of this, and much confirmatory evidence is available, even if it were possible to regard the scandals of 1845 and the following years as anything but the fruit springing from seed long sown. It was said, as early as 1841, that "an overweening conceit of their own extraordinary spirituality and purity is one of the marked characteristics of the Brethren".⁸⁹ Perhaps it would have been salutary if their early success had been less rapid and startling.

From this time our attention will be mainly focussed upon Darbyism; partly from the necessity of the case, since the Open Brethren—as those that refused to abide by Darby's decree came generally to be called⁹⁰—are in the proverbially happy condition of scarcely having a history; partly because Darbyism has been by far the most powerful and typical phase of the whole movement, and Open Brethrenism is best dealt with as a species of modified Darbyism.

The distinctive feature of Darbyism was of course the discipline it executed against the Open Brethren; and this now calls for a full explanation.

Darby's circular contained everything in germ; but it was only little by little—and even then by dint of unremitting exertions—that the discipline of the circular could be fully enforced. For example, Deck was in England for several years after the circular was issued. He then fled to New Zealand, to escape, it is said, from the controversy. To New Zealand, however, the controversy followed him, if it had not perhaps preceded him; and before long the discipline against Bethesda was executed in literally the ends of the earth.

It is not difficult to see how the system of the Open Brethren would work. As between one local church and another, their polity was simply that of the Congregational churches. Church A might disown church B without church C being compelled to disown either. This plan was to Darby the merest confusion. Every "meeting" to him was as much one with every other as it was one with itself.

In the whole history of Christendom no man has ever entertained so extravagant a conception of sacramental union. If Compton Street Chapel admitted Newton to communion it became itself even as Newton. If Captain Woodfall took the communion at Compton Street, he became as Compton Street, and therefore as Newton. If Bethesda Chapel had even excommunicated Captain Woodfall, but had refused to excommunicate one of its own members that had taken the communion with Captain Woodfall somewhere on the Continent, it would have become in the same completeness identified with Newton. If the Bath meeting, rejecting such a member of Bethesda, had admitted one of the other members to communion, it would have been in Newton's position also; and so would the meeting at Hereford, if it had resolved to refuse everybody from Bethesda but to admit from Bath. To the remotest stage the penalty was exacted. Every one that took the sacrament at a defaulting meeting was excluded from fellowship. This is the meaning of the term "exclusive" as applied to Darby's following, and it is worth while to add that the term means nothing else whatever.

⁸⁸ Mrs. Bevan's sacred poetry constitutes an exception to the statement in the text.

⁸⁹ Quoted in *A Caution Against the Darbyites*, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Professor Lindsay (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, article "Plymouth Brethren") calls them Neutral Brethren, but the term is no longer in common use.

The Exclusives believed that they found Scriptural authority for their course in the injunction contained in 2 John 10, 11: “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine [the doctrine of Christ], receive him not into your house, neither give him greeting; for he that giveth him greeting is partaker of his evil deeds”. The allegation was that Newton had denied the doctrine of the Person of Christ; that those who associated with him partook of his evil deeds, and were therefore (according to this curious argument) in exactly the same condemnation with himself; that those who refused him without refusing all his associates were consequently no better than if they received him himself and therefore no better than he; and so on *ad infinitum*, no matter how incalculably the distance from the original heresy went lengthening out.

It would seem that Darby thought that the conditions of Christian fellowship were to be investigated by methods appropriate to the exact sciences; but even from this point of view some of the links in the chain were weak enough. First of all, it was necessary to show that St. John’s injunction had anything to do with ecclesiastical procedure; and this being impossible Darby’s case broke down irreparably at the very first stage. But this, though enough, is by no means all. A further demonstration was needed that Newton had taught, and still persisted in teaching, a doctrine that denied the Apostolic “doctrine of Christ”; and this also was out of the question, for Newton’s errors were not concerned with the Person of Christ, but with certain relations in which He stood.⁹¹ And again, even if this difficulty could have been surmounted, it was further needful to prove that all who became partakers in Newton’s evil deeds were to be considered equal partners, so as to ultimately compromise people who had never heard either of Newton or of his heresies;⁹² and yet again that, assuming this to be the true interpretation of the passage, all whose exegetical dulness hindered them from seeing it to be so were to be judged as fully partaking in doctrines to which they never gave any quarter in the person of anybody who held them. The fact is that if there was sin in the Open Brethren it was nothing whatever but the old leaven of Congregationalism, and in no sense at all that “indifference to Christ” with which they were so freely charged by their adversaries.

Zeal for the truth, it is to be feared, had a great deal less to do with maintaining the graver charges against the Open Brethren than the exigencies of Darby’s ecclesiastical scheme. The Exclusive Brethren continued after the rupture with the Open section to grant what would generally be termed “occasional communion” to those whom, in the true High Church spirit, they designated as “members of the sects”. Had they done so to members of the Open meetings, it would have been impossible to maintain the distinction between the parties; for the Open Brethren, unlike “the sects,” conducted their worship exactly like the Darbyites, and to go to and fro between Open and Exclusive meetings would have been so simple and natural as to become an everyday occurrence. Therefore if Darby intended to preserve to himself the vineyard that he had reclaimed from the wastes of Neutrality at so much sacrifice to his reputation—and, let us hope, to his best affections—he was bound to find a pretext for

⁹¹ Tregelles pointed this out at the time, in his *Three Letters*. His authority has obtained recent confirmation from the most perspicacious of all the divines of Brethrenism. Mr. Wm. Kelly wrote in 1890, with palpable reference to Newton: “A prophetic theory drew its devotee into anti-christian error, without any direct assault on the truth of the Person; for it was rather an overthrow of Christ’s true relation to God”. The admission is a serious one for Mr. Kelly as a leader of Exclusivism; but it is all the more significant on that account.

⁹² Such persons might be received provisionally, with a “warning”; but if they returned afterwards to their former meeting, either as considering the “warning” to be based on unauthentic information, or as considering that such remote quarrels were no business of theirs and no ground of practical church action, the full rigour of the law was to be put in force against them; that is to say, they had no escape unless they accepted any local exclusive brother that might warn them as an ultimate court of appeal in the history of the case. I therefore judge that the statement in the text does not require qualification.

treating the Open Brethren on quite a different footing from that on which members of “the sects” were accepted.

If this seem to be a harsh judgment of Darby, let the scheme he devised be dispassionately considered, and let us see whether a better construction can reasonably be put on his conduct. He laid down that the Open Brethren incurred a corporate responsibility in respect of any disorders that any of their local communities tolerated, “*because they took the ground of the One Body*”; whereas “the sects,” not taking this ground, could not be corporately dealt with in ecclesiastical matters. Now this was directly in the face of the ceaseless charge against Open Brethren that they had disowned the “principle of the One Body,” and had acted on “independent” (*i.e.*, congregational) principles. If, on the contrary, all churches, no matter what their conduct is, are to be treated according to their claims, do any denominations disclaim the ground of the One Body? It is an extraordinary thing indeed to find a High Anglican of former days like Darby acting on such a supposition. I do not suggest that he adopted safeguards for his sect in deliberate defiance of the truth of the case, since he was doubtless, like all men who are supreme adepts in the art of exciting prejudice, himself the victim of strong prejudices.

The rôle of the ecclesiastic has often had a very injurious moral effect upon the men that have sustained it, and certainly the history of the rampant ecclesiasticism that was now introduced is singularly uninviting. A gross carelessness as to the truth of the case, and an almost cynical disregard of the rights of the accused, have been the central principles on which the persecution of the church at Bethesda has rested. In June, 1849, Dr. Cronin wrote to Norris Groves, forbidding him the house, on the ground that Groves had made himself “a partaker of other men’s sins, and become obnoxious to the prohibition of John ii. 10 [*sic*]”. “This letter of rejection,” Groves writes, “concludes an unbroken intimacy and friendship of twenty-five years.” It is the sadder for the remembrance of the long fellowship in sacred toil, in loneliness, in bereavement, in hope deferred, during their devoted exile in the East. Cronin was a warm-hearted man and a fervent Christian, and he must be credited with acting from a sincere conviction, and at some cost to his own feelings. His act was only an early case of a species of persecution that is still running its baneful course. No sooner is the cry of “unfaithfulness to Christ” raised, than a multitude of good people are ready, almost without enquiry, to take it up and to inflict upon themselves and their friends all manner of suffering in the hope of approving themselves clear in the matter. The history of the execution of Darby’s discipline against Bethesda is an illustration, stretching over fifty years, of the old but as yet unmastered principle that the spirit of panic is the spirit of cruelty.

In 1864, only two years before his fraternal note to the dying Craik, Darby wrote to a Brother in Sheffield, “The evil at Bethesda is the most unprincipled admission of blasphemers against Christ, the coldest contempt for Him I ever came across”. Now this statement was not merely an incalculable exaggeration; it was absolutely false, root and branch, and an excellent instance of smoke without fire. And Darby would have known it to be false, if some sign of a relenting towards Bethesda on the part of certain of his followers had not roused him to frenzy. But statements of this kind were taken on trust by persons who only knew that Darby had been the most potent force in their spiritual development, and saw him in the ordinary course of his life a humane and excellent man; and the results were deplorable. Sometimes, indeed, the cry was met with a calm self-possession before which it fell powerless. Standing in a group of Brethren in Dublin, in 1852, Darby charged them with “acquiescence in unfaithfulness to Christ”. “Dear brother,” replied good Captain Owen, “if you speak of unfaithfulness to Christ, I plead guilty to that every day.” The reply neatly exposed both the vagueness and the possible Pharisaism of the charge.

If assumption be only bold enough there is no calculating its probable success. Remarks of this kind were heard on every hand: “Do not let love for Mr. Müller and his work

blind you to what is due to Christ; Christ must be first—not Christians, however dear”.⁹³ If a leader were too scrupulous to throw dust in simple people’s eyes after some such fashion, he might count on losing thousands of adherents. In equal honour with the name of Captain Owen I would associate the name of Henry Young. Young put forth *A Plea for the Honour of Christ*. The tract was written in opposition to the censorious pretensions of the Exclusive party, and its very title involved a bold counter-claim. The following quotation is in point. “A beloved brother writes me: ‘Is it Christ or persons that engage your affections? The Spirit sacrifices all for Christ.’ My answer is, ‘I own the paramountness of Christ’s claims, but deny the opposition. . . . Does the Spirit sacrifice the Church to Christ? . . . We may presently come to sacrifice Christ in the person of His saints, . . . His BRETHREN—His MEMBERS—looked at collectively—His BRIDE.’ ” Nor can I prevail on myself to omit this fine passage: “Truly it is grievous to see such instances as have occurred of the greatest excesses committed by the rash, the forward, and the inexperienced, in the way of invasion of the peace of gatherings, sanctioned by those who know better; and the table of the Lord, that sweet memorial of LOVE,—love strong as death,—turned almost everywhere by brethren into THE ROD OF THEIR ADMINISTRATION.”

But the epoch of Exclusivism really derives its whole character, and therefore its sovereign explanation, from the personality of Darby. It is scarcely possible to write the story of the Brethren without bearing hardly on them. In their narrow and obscure sphere,—in their life of almost monastic seclusion, and, in ordinary circumstances, of scarcely less than monastic quietude,—they hardly have a history beyond the history of their quarrels. Consequently, they have come before the public in a light that does them a great injustice; and this is peculiarly true of the most remarkable of them all. The time has come for presenting a picture of Mr. Darby as he appeared to those who saw him through many years from within his own community, and perhaps knew nothing, except by distant and uncertain rumours, of the fierce struggles in which he had lost so much of a man’s most precious possessions.

It must be premised that his immense influence, like the influence of other men that have exercised an extraordinary fascination, has a great deal in it that defies analysis. When by a highly expressive metaphor we call it magnetic, we do justice alike to its power and its mystery. No doubt Darby had many perfectly intelligible titles to success. His attainments were great and varied, apart from his classical and theological scholarship. He could write and speak in several modern languages, and translated the whole Bible into French and German. If his ambition had lain in such directions, and if he could have condescended to pay more regard to form, he might have entitled himself to the honours of a philosopher and a poet. But his courage, his administrative genius, and his force of will, had far more to do than all his acquirements with the ascendancy he exercised—an ascendancy that entitles him to no inconspicuous place amongst the born leaders of men.

Other leaders indeed have been equally absolute, but seldom in face of equal obstacles. Wesley, for instance, exercised an unchallenged autocracy over the Wesleyan Methodists of his own life-time, and avowed it with the most engaging frankness. But his followers were, on an average, men of far less striking personality than Darby’s; and his sect, up to the time of his death, was far less widely ramified. Nor was Wesley compelled to exercise the reality of absolutism while disdaining its forms. His frankly voluntary association might adopt what legislation it pleased; but on Darby’s peculiar High Church theory, all legislation for his followers had existed in the first century, and was divine and immutable. His legislation was therefore bound down to the forms of Scriptural interpretation, and he

⁹³ “Put Christ in the first place, and the nice Christians in the second, and you will be all right. . . . Diotrephes is bad enough, but Open Brethrenism immensely worse,” were the published words of a well-known Exclusive.

would have found it hard to produce Scriptural authority for him to imitate Wesley's avowed absolutism.

The result was that he found himself to a very great extent thrown back on his simple personal ascendancy; and this availed for more than thirty years to hold together a world-wide confederacy united by no other bond that was not of the most shadowy description. His followers were in fact without written code or constitution, without denominational history or traditions; they had no national or provincial synods; and they possessed as their distinctive tenet only an ecclesiastical formula of a most subtle and impracticable description. Yet, till within a year of Darby's death, they cohered so perfectly that every minutest act of discipline that was recognised in any part of the world was recognised in every other. This is surely almost a unique fact.

Darby's influence was built up on a base of enormous enthusiasm. We must dismiss from our minds once for all any idea of Darby as a man that availed himself of an enthusiasm that he did not share. Even his overweening jealousy for his own supremacy would naturally clothe itself to his own mind in the guise of zeal for the one institution upon earth that embodied a divine idea. After all, it is nothing very new that a man should be profoundly convinced that he is doing God's work on a great scale, and be filled in the depths of his soul with an answering enthusiasm, yet condescend at the same time to actions that would compromise much less lofty pretensions.

Fundamentally, the conception to which Darby devoted his enormous energies for more than fifty years was a High Churchism that should disdain the common accompaniment of Ritualism, and should borrow from Protestantism an intensely Biblical element. Fully as we must recognise the gigantic failure of the attempt to embody it, we may yet admit that the conception is a striking and original one. But it is certain that nothing less than a monumental enthusiasm could have initiated—or, still more, could have sustained—a movement that aimed at realising so impracticable an ideal.

It has been often observed that, through a life of ceaseless controversy, devotional literature still remained Darby's favourite occupation. It was always natural and delightful to him to turn aside, whether from the pressure of controversy or from the absorbing study of unfulfilled prophecy, to the simple beauties of Philippians, or to the perennial calm of the contemplations of St. John. Of all the hymns of the Brethren—and no one can deny the exceptional beauty of very many of them—Darby's are unequalled (I had almost said unapproached) for depth, force and grandeur; though Darby put himself at a serious disadvantage (especially in comparison with so exquisitely graceful a writer as Sir Edward Denny) by his involved and uncouth style of composition.

I have often heard people who were not blind to Darby's faults say with immense emphasis, "He was *a great man*". If a magnanimous simplicity makes a man great, they were right. He might be a scholar, but he wore none of a scholar's trappings; he might be supreme in his own little world, but his habitual bearing showed no trace of self-consciousness. To his social inferiors and to young men he was genial and hearty, and he kept his well-known brusquerie for more influential people, and especially for his sycophants—who were many. If he was ruthless in his ecclesiastical conflicts, he had at other times a singularly kindly and sympathetic nature. In the act of addressing a meeting he would roll up his greatcoat as a pillow for a sleeping child whose uncomfortable attitude had struck him. I have heard that, on one of his numerous voyages, he might have been seen pacing the deck all night with a restless child in his arms, in order to afford the worn-out mother an opportunity of rest; and I doubt whether many children were more tenderly nursed that night. The incident is the more interesting for the fact that Darby was never married. Was it the breaking forth of this tenderness, deep-hidden in his lonely heart, that bound men to him in so pathetic a fidelity of devotion?

In the hills of Eastern France or of Switzerland he would often on his pastoral tours receive the hospitality of humble mountaineers. When the materfamilias went out to her work in the fields, half his active mind would suffice for his studies, and with the other half he would help the children that sat about him either with their work or their play. We may cease to wonder that the Continental poor, accustomed to resent the *hauteur* of the Englishman abroad, should have idolised the great man who was amongst them so genially “as one that serveth”.

Indeed no one ever took fewer airs. The following anecdote I can vouch for. A certain couple had just joined the Exclusive fraternity, and were receiving their first visit from the great man. They had risen from the supper table, and Darby, kneeling close beside it, was offering a prayer with which his hearers were greatly impressed. But whatever the excellence of the prayer, the lady of the house, an old-fashioned housekeeper, was painfully distracted by the unmistakeable sound of the cat feasting on the remains of the supper. Nothing but awe of her distinguished guest could have restrained her from interfering. As they rose from their knees she cast a glance towards the remains of the cold fowl. His eyes followed hers. “It’s all right,” he said reassuringly; “*I took care that she got nothing but the bones.*”

Another story, which I can relate with equal confidence, illustrates not only this fine simplicity of character, but also the readiness of resource by which he was no less distinguished. He had arrived at the railway station of a Continental town where he was expected to make some little stay, and found himself, as he stepped from the train, face to face with a formidable contingent of the local Brethren. Several ladies of good position were there, all zealous for the honour of becoming his host. Here was a delicate situation, but Solomon could not have been more equal to it. “*Qui est-ce qui loge les frères?*”⁹⁴ said Darby. All eyes turned upon a very humble-looking brother, who had hitherto kept modestly in the background. Darby immediately went up to him, saying, “*Je logerai où logent les frères.*”⁹⁵ And the entertainer of obscure itinerants became the host of the great man himself.

The multitude of petty and carping divines who opened their mouths wide for his words were a cause of no small irritation to Darby. He once overheard a company of them discussing the recent death of Dr. Davis—a young coloured man, known as “the good black doctor,” who after qualifying in London as a surgeon lost his life from small-pox while attending on the wounded in the Franco-Prussian war. The work for which he laid down his life was deemed a sadly worldly piece of philanthropy by the zealots of Darbyism, and the group was actually discussing whether it were not by a judgment mingled with mercy that the young surgeon had been called hence. Darby broke in on the debate with an impatient, “Well, well, God has accepted his service and taken him home”. There are some people so small that all the heroism in the world exists in vain for them. Darby was not of their number; and whatever narrow principles of seclusion from the common interests of mankind he may have taught, he was at least incapable of pronouncing so petty an elegy over the valiant dead.

One of the happiest results of this magnanimous disposition was the extreme simplicity that he observed in all his preaching and teaching, and of which he, to a great extent, set the fashion throughout his special section of Brethrenism. He preached from the Authorised Version, and kept all his Greek out of sight. Prominently identified as he was with a peculiar system of dispensations and prophecy, simple devotional matter was always the staple of his teaching. A certain old woman, a candidate for fellowship with the Darbyites, was “visited” by two comparatively young men, and by Darby himself for the third. She afterwards said that she had no doubt that the two were very clever and learned, but she could not understand them; and she could get on best with the simple old gentleman that came.

⁹⁴ *I.e.*, “Who [generally] puts up the [ministering] brothers?”

⁹⁵ *I.e.*, “I will stay where the [ministering] brothers are in the habit of staying.”

Amongst lesser, but not unimportant, elements of his power must be reckoned his extraordinary bodily strength. He could subsist upon the most scanty and unappetising diet, and in the midst of immense exertions could do with three or four hours' sleep in the twenty-four. Even when there was no particular necessity for it he was as abstemious as an anchorite, though he attached no merit whatever to asceticism, and in no way advertised his frugality. Wesley himself was not more sparing of personal indulgences, and this must have been of the greatest service to him in his pastoral tours amongst the Continental poor, whose habits are so much more frugal than those of the same class in our country.

I have not attempted to conceal Darby's faults, but great as they were I believe they can all be expressed in a single term: he could not brook a questioned or a divided authority. But under the influence of this passion, which domineered (as Macaulay would say) over all his virtues and vices, everything else was forgotten—kindliness, pity, old familiar friendship, and the very magnanimity that seemed to be woven with the warp and woof of his nature.

X High Church Claims Of Darbyism—The Walworth-Sheffield Discipline

SCARCELY was the great disruption consummated when, in the year 1851, a pamphlet appeared that stands absolutely alone for the fearless independence with which it criticises Brethrenism from within. It bore the title of *Unity, a Fragment and a Dialogue*, and appeared under the initials of Captain Percy Hall.⁹⁶

Hall's indictment may be comprised under three heads. He challenged the Brethren's assumption that they alone assembled on Divine warrant; he denied that their ministry was strictly Scriptural or that it was even essentially better than the ministry of other churches; and he charged them with neglect of the authority of the New Testament in their abjuration of all recognised government.

Hall lived to see the conceptions he denounced attain an ever more and more tyrannical sway over the mind of Darbyism; and his strictures are amply confirmed by an acquaintance with the system during the later years of Darby's life. It will be convenient to illustrate Hall's thesis from this standpoint.

The Exclusive Brethren were High Churchmen of the most pronounced type. No Anglo-Catholic could have a greater contempt for such a phrase as "denominational preferences"; and the Anglo-Catholic is a very fortunate person if he ever attains to an equally lofty and serene confidence in the exclusive claims of his own system. The moderation of Protestants has put them at a disadvantage. They have had no substitute to offer for the fascinating claim to an exclusive possession of Divine warrant. But the Brethren, hampered by no such drawback, have confronted the highest claims of High Anglicans with claims at least as lofty, and a confidence much more disdainful.

Not that the Darbyites claimed to be actually the Church of God on earth. If we receive their principles from the teaching of their great leaders, they repudiated such a claim. *The Church of God*, they said, is the aggregate of all believers in Christ; and a local church is a similar local aggregate. This invisible Church cannot, unhappily, be embodied, as things stand; but it may be "expressed," and the Exclusive Brethren expressed it. Their meeting in any place was the sole "expression" of the Church of God there. It was Divinely recognised; nothing else was. It was graced by the promised presence of the Lord to two or three gathering in His Name; no other congregation, however apparently simple, Scriptural and godly, could have the Lord "in their midst" according to the terms of the promise. They allowed that the Lord, in the sovereignty of grace, might grant blessing in one or all of the other orthodox Christian communities, schismatical though they were; but they held that we must guard against supposing that such compassionate treatment was any condonation of their schism. If the extreme Anglican holds that, whatever excuses the "present confusion" may afford, a position outside Episcopal communion is in fact schism, the Darbyite, while not refusing to grant the indulgence of remarkably similar excuses, equally holds that every position (including of course the High Anglican's) outside his own body is schism; and further, that it is schism maintained in the face of God's convincing testimony to the unity of the Church, given in the shape of Plymouth Brethrenism.

The credit that we might be disposed to give to Darbyism for its moderation in not claiming to constitute *the* Church of God on earth must be seriously qualified by the extraordinary circumstance that it claimed the power to exclude from the Church of God by excluding from its own ranks. The theory was that any acknowledged Christian, though he had nothing to do with the Brethren, was inside the Church of God; but that the Brethren had the disciplinary power of the Church of God committed to them, because they alone met "on

⁹⁶ I infer that Hall had not yet cast in his lot with Darby's party, but his complaints apply to both sections of the Brethren.

Scriptural ground". Consequently, any person on whom they pronounced sentence of excommunication, was by that act cast forth outside the Church of God on earth. Their claim in this particular is fortunately perfectly explicit; otherwise my statement might well be deemed incredible. Full proof of it will be found towards the close of the present chapter, in a brief account of a famous case of discipline in the early sixties.

Unhappily, the Exclusive party does not stand alone in the view that all non-Brethrenist worship is schismatic. Among the Open Brethren, a certain section (undoubtedly considerable, though I cannot say what proportion of the whole it constitutes) maintains the same opinion, and denies that any company of Christians meets in the name of the Lord Jesus, except those that practise open ministry. To such people it has proved vain to point out that they unchurch many a company of persecuted saints of evangelical faith, who, in defence of what the Brethren wholly believe to have been the truth of the Gospel, have worshipped in prison-cells, or in "dens and caves of the earth". They refuse to recognise this as a *reductio ad absurdum*, and maintain that between the first and the nineteenth centuries no Christian assemblies had any status "before God".

This was only to be expected. The mass of the Open Brethren, though they rejected Darby's preposterous decree, were in their general point of view the followers of Darby, not only as against Newton, but even as against Müller.

At a conference at Freemason's Hall (evidently in 1869), the late A. A. Rees of Sunderland—who, though not associated with Brethren, often attended their meetings—publicly asked the question "whether those Christians who met without open ministry, met in the name of Jesus". "After a little silence," Rees tells us, "one brother stepped to the front, and replied, 'No; let us never give up our principle on that point'; nor was there any public protest against this answer, though after the meeting several Brethren expressed to me their dissent." At the present time, as I am informed by one who knows the Open Brethren well, those who hold a less illiberal view constitute the majority. I sincerely hope this is so, though I cannot help thinking that in that case the majority sometimes allows itself to be "talked down". At the same time, I am fully aware that there are many amongst them who maintain an unwavering and aggressive witness to more Catholic principles. It would be an interesting experiment if one of these excellent men would try how many subscriptions could be obtained amongst the communicants at "Open" meetings to Captain Hall's explicit declaration,—“I am satisfied that any Christian of the sundry parties around us, except the close Baptists, could say, with a bold and free spirit, I meet with my fellow Christians in the name of the Lord Jesus simply”.

The central point in the system of the Brethren, and that which emboldens them to put in such exclusive claims, is liberty of ministry,—or perhaps I ought rather to say, the association of liberty of ministry with the observance of the Lord's Supper. The want of this as a settled practice disqualifies all other communities. This is the real differentia. Some of the Brethren would wish no doubt to go deeper. They would say that they alone claim a true Church basis, as meeting in Christ's name; and that other denominations are self-excluded by owning their several denominational titles. But this is utterly futile, not only because it is intrinsically absurd,⁹⁷ but also because in exceptional cases of isolated evangelical

⁹⁷ I would not wantonly use a harsh expression; but can anything milder be said of a statement that Baptists, for example, assemble for worship in the name of Baptism, or perhaps of *Baptistism*? The Wesleyans are naturally a more favoured example in the polemics of Brethrenism, and it is assumed as a truism that they assemble in the name of Wesley; but can the Brethren imagine that if they asked any Wesleyan assembly in what name it had assembled, there could be any but one spontaneous, consentient reply, "In the name of Jesus Christ"?

communities, less encumbered with denominational designations than the Brethren themselves, all recognition is equally withheld if liberty of ministry be lacking.

Darby treated open ministry as an inference (vital indeed in its importance) from the deeper principles underlying a right conception of the Church; but, as we have already⁹⁸ partly seen, he never reached any intelligible formula. The following is one of his most interesting attempts.⁹⁹ It occurs in his controversy in Switzerland with R. W. Monsell.

“I do not contest the point, that in Congregationalism there was at first liberty of ministry, but that had scarcely any duration. That liberty has existed and still exists among Quakers; but whilst admitting the liberty of ministry, the work of the [Plymouth] brethren rests on much broader foundations. While taking as a foundation the great truths of the gospel, here are the principles which distinguish it: the unity of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit come down from above, the witness of a perfect redemption, accomplished by Him who is seated there at the right hand of the Father. It is by reason of the presence of this Spirit, acting in the members, that there is liberty of ministry according to the measure of His energy and of His gifts (a liberty regulated by the word).

“This is the first principle. It is on this foundation that we meet, admitting in consequence every Christian.”

I do not stop to enquire in what purely conventional sense the claim contained in the last clause can have been made in the year 1849. But it is to our present purpose to observe that the “distinguishing” principles that Darby specifies were, as a matter of fact, the common possession of Protestants before the Brethren were thought of, and that therefore this formal declaration by the greatest of the Brethren leaves us absolutely where we were before.

At any rate, the Brethren regarded liberty of ministry as the central feature of primitive practice; deeming it bound up, not so much with the prerogatives of every Christian man, as with the rights of the Holy Spirit “within the assembly”. It was exclusively His to guide to the moment for the exercise of any kind of ministry, down to the giving out of a hymn; and except in the case of a hymn or the reading of Scripture He more or less determined the form of each exercise, whether it were worship, supplication, exposition, or exhortation. To what precise extent, however, the ultimate form proceeded from His guidance was left indefinite. The Brethren never expressed an intelligible opinion on that subject; they certainly stopped short of claiming inspiration, and yet they tenaciously held that each speaker ought to receive the word from the Spirit, who would communicate by him.

It is again difficult to discover the *via media* that the Brethren flattered themselves they had found. Darby’s language, if it were the only evidence before us, would justify the conclusion that the Brethren claimed inspiration. “This is the real question, . . . whether I am to look to God or to man—to God’s presence in the assembly, or to man’s competency by acquired attainments. Can I be satisfied with the latter without some very clear proof that the former is not to be sought—that God has abandoned the assembly of His saints? For if there, is He not to make His presence known? If He do, it is a manifestation of the Spirit in the individual who acts; it is a gift, and if you please, an impulse. It is God acting: that is the great point.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Chap. v., p. 47.

⁹⁹ *Eccl.*, vol. ii., p. 210.

¹⁰⁰ *Coll. Writ., Doctrinal*, vol. i., p. 519. The comment of the late R. Govett is just. “So then, if a brother rightly gives out a hymn, it is a *manifestation of the Spirit. It is God’s manifested acting.*” Quoted by Rees, *Four Letters*, p. 13.

Nor were such speculations uninfluential in practice. The notion of a quasi-inspiration took firm hold of the minds of the Brethren generally. If two Brothers began ministering simultaneously, (which necessarily happened tolerably frequently, though not often to any distressing extent), it was always assumed that one at least was to blame for not being “in the Spirit”. A censorious person would doubtless lay the blame on his rival. A humble-minded person would be grievously distressed in his conscience lest it should be he that had marred the harmony of “the Spirit’s action in the assembly”.

Moreover, the Brethren had a horror of discourses prepared beforehand for delivery at an open meeting and even extended their dislike of premeditation to the case of sermons and lectures previously announced. An ex-Newtonian, T. P. Haffner, issued a “confession” about the same time as the other penitents of the same school. In this document he justified Darby’s charge of “the *practical* denial of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church,” alleging that Newton had said to him that “before coming to the Lord’s Table, he [Newton] did not see it at all wrong to be prepared with what he had to say to the saints”. “This, beloved friends,” proceeds the repentant Haffner “shocked me much, very much, at the time, and shook my confidence: but oh! with what humiliation do I now appear in the presence of God, for having so long retained in my bosom the knowledge that our poor brother did thus *practically* deny the *present* leadings and guidance of the Spirit of God, (however much it might have been held theoretically), without having ever called on others to join with me in prayer for him, etc.”

I myself well remember a brother, who had been publicly corrected for a preposterous exposition, consoling himself afterwards by the assurance that “the Spirit had given him the word”. His critic’s comment was that “the Spirit did not give erroneous expositions”. That is to say, the plea of the discomfited teacher was ruled out on merely *a posteriori* grounds, and not as being untenable in principle.

The position of the Brethren has been assailed on two principal grounds. It has been said that the primitive model of public worship and ministry is inapplicable in our situation, and further, that the Brethren do not conform to it. An order suited to the state of churches endowed with supernatural gifts is not, it would seem, obviously obligatory, or even probably suitable, in the case of churches from which all such endowment has utterly vanished. And even in the first ages, and at Corinth, it is urged that no such “present energy of the Spirit” is recognised as a guiding principle; that it rather appears that ministers came to the assemblies already in possession of what they should say (I Cor. xiv. 26), and that the “commandments of the Lord” relate, not to the duty of free exercise of the gifts, but to the restrictions enjoined by the Apostle upon such exercise.

It is clearly unreasonable to deny the weight of these objections; yet, however unreasonable, it was what the Brethren were bound to do, unless they were willing to relinquish their all-excluding claims, and take their place in the crowd of the *religiones licitæ* of Christendom. As this was the last thing in the world to which they could have brought themselves, they were compelled to insist that everything was plain and easy, and that “disobedience” was the only explanation of a refusal to follow their example. And further, in order to cast a rope, in default of a bridge, over the gulf that separated them from the primitive and supernaturally gifted churches, they adopted a vague theory of a Spirit-given ministry, and insisted still on their Christian brethren in every place following suit.

Their claim to be exclusively the recipients of the promised blessing of Matthew xviii. 20 will now be readily understood. No people could be said to meet in Christ’s Name who set Christ’s law aside in His own Church. It never seems to have occurred to them that to confine the Scripture in question to meetings of an ecclesiastical character is a very bold exegetical expedient. They sought, indeed, to help out their interpretation by a quite unwarrantable change in the translation of the words *εις το εμον ονομα*, which they rendered “unto my

name,” and took to import a gathering to Christ’s Name as to a rallying point. Correspondingly, as we have seen, they held that all other Christians gathered to a denominational designation as a rallying point. It was a fine instance of the sovereign efficacy of words.

The extent to which the Brethren carried the principle of liberty of ministry was rather arbitrarily fixed. Most of them (the very few exceptions were strictly confined to the Open Brethren) set apart the entire morning meeting every Sunday for the Lord’s Supper. On this occasion absolute liberty was considered essential; though a person who took unsuitable part might possibly incur subsequent rebuke, and might even, if he persisted in ministering, be told that his “ministry was not acceptable to the brethren”.

As it might be supposed that Scripture is almost ostentatiously silent as to the conduct (from the point of view of ministry) of a communion service, the intensity of the Brethren’s convictions on this subject may well excite surprise. They reached their conclusion in this way. The Lord’s Supper is the witness and bond of Church union, and is thus in a peculiar sense a “Church occasion”. Correspondingly, the Church is the peculiar sphere of the Holy Spirit’s action in ministry. Hence the obligation of associating liberty of ministry with the breaking of bread.

Whether this argumentation be cogent or not, it is plain that it abandons the ground of direct Scriptural evidence for that of comparatively remote inference. But the Brethren knew no misgiving. To refuse their inferences was as bad as to refuse their texts, and equally incurred the penalty of being unchurched.

In some places a special meeting for open ministry was held during the week. Social teas were commonly followed by an open meeting. Bank holidays were often the occasion of open meetings in the morning. Strangest of all, marriages and funerals were conducted on this principle, sometimes with painful results.

But the Brethren held themselves at liberty to arrange for evangelistic meetings of the ordinary form, Bible readings from the pulpit (which they commonly called lectures), and prayer meetings in which, though there was no president, it was understood that the exercises were ordinarily limited to prayers and hymns. The puzzle is to know how liberty of ministry can be so solemnly binding on some occasions, and not at all on others. The ordinary answer is that it is binding on occasions of a “church” character. The application of this principle is easy. When open ministry is desired, it is understood that the Brethren assemble in an ecclesiastical capacity; when it is not desired, the contrary hypothesis is at hand.

Captain Hall had a strong sense that the much-vaunted theory had come short in practice, and required revision. “In almost every case,” he says, “where the Holy Spirit does not act, the flesh does for form’s sake, and as long as two or three or more persons take a part, instead of one, the principle, as it is called, is not invaded, and all are satisfied, whether the thing done or said be good or bad.” In his judgment, the Spirit might be “grieved by carnal liberties . . . instead of being, as in other places, quenched by carnal restraints”. Up to this point then, as between his own community and the other denominations, he seems to suspend judgment; but when he passes to the question of Church government, he assigns a distinct advantage to the older methods. He told the Brethren very plainly that they had arbitrarily chosen certain primitive forms and neglected others; and that they had, moreover, chosen those primitive forms that more than any others depended for their efficacy on primitive enduements. Many another since Captain Hall has stumbled at the same stumbling-block; and no wonder, for the Brethren, who consider it treason to refuse to copy the Corinthian exercise of gifts, utterly refuse to follow the primitive system of government by recognised elders.

They believed that it was the rule in primitive times for a local church to be governed by a plurality of elders. They believed also that the qualifications for the eldership were

exhaustively defined in the Pastoral Epistles; and their writings on this subject, as on most others, display a good deal of exegetical shrewdness. Nevertheless they held that it would be presumption in this case to attempt to resuscitate primitive forms, although in the case of the open meeting it would be rebellion to neglect them.

To do the Brethren justice, they have not been insensible to the need for explanation. They have accordingly taught that all elders were appointed by apostles or apostolic delegates; that apart from such direct or indirect apostolic intervention there could be no valid appointment to the office of government; that there are doubtless still men that possess the requisite qualifications, in which case they will be Divinely guided to exercise a pastoral oversight; but that such men cannot properly receive formal recognition.

With every desire to enter sympathetically into the point of view of the Brethren, it can scarcely be denied that in this respect they are hopelessly inconsistent. If it be presumption to recognise elders without apostolic ratification (direct or indirect), why should it not be presumption to hold an open meeting without miraculous gifts? Indeed it would seem to most people that miraculous gifts have a much closer connexion with liberty of ministry than apostolic ratification with the office of the eldership. Apostolic discernment would not seem to have been at any time essential to the appointment of officers, Timothy and Titus being referred, not to an inner illumination supplied to them for the purpose, but to the plain fact of the possession by the candidate of the requisite qualifications. The Brethren seem never to have suspected that the words they slipped so lightly into their formula—“or apostolic delegates”—might well be regarded as fatal to their whole contention. Yet it is extraordinary that the Brethren, whose views are so high and peculiar with regard to the Holy Spirit’s present energy within the special sphere of the Church, should think that the Church lacks the means of distinguishing men accredited of God as elders or pastors; or that, distinguishing them, the Church is incompetent to give them such recognition as would ensure to them authority over all loyal members.¹⁰¹

I say nothing with regard to a point on which the Brethren might have been expected to lay a certain stress—the uncertainty, that is, as to the extent to which any one form of government obtained in the primitive churches. I have abstained, partly because the Brethren did not really rest their case on that consideration; and partly because they *could* not have done so without shattering the foundations of their system, since it is quite as impossible to prove the universality of open ministry as the universality of government by a board of presbyters. It is indeed a fundamental vice of Brethrenism, for which the habits of its day afford a certain excuse, that its divines never made any serious attempt to discriminate between the transitory and the permanent in the primitive institutions of the Church. The tacit assumption was that everything was permanent.

To what is this rather arbitrary rejection of recognised government to be attributed? Probably to a prejudice engendered in Darby and his lieutenants by their hatred of what they called “religious radicalism”.¹⁰² Authority cannot, they held, come up from below; that is to say, the people who are to be governed cannot confer authority to govern. But neither has any authorising committee, episcopal or otherwise, any credentials. It remained, as it seemed to

¹⁰¹ One of the most curious arguments on the subject I ever heard was that St. Paul, in the Second Epistle to Timothy, contemplating the perilous state of the Church’s declension, made no reference to the safeguard of a recognised presbytery, but committed everything to individual fidelity. This was rather a reckless cutting of the ground from under one’s own feet, since it is equally clear that he made no reference to the safeguard of spiritual gifts exercised “in the present energy of the Holy Spirit,” but rather to the teaching of faithful men, duly instructed beforehand. (2 Tim. ii. 2.)

¹⁰² Newton used the reproachful term “radicalism” in an almost opposite sense. To him it stood for the policy that withdrew the administration from the hands of “leading brethren,” to vest it in the assembled church.

them, to have no recognised authority at all. But in truth neither Darby nor his leading associates would have consented to any formal recognition, even though it were entirely severed from so much as the semblance of ordination. Their *jus divinum* would have at least retreated into the background, since undoubtedly the ordinary congregationalist principle practically tends, be the theory what it may, to democratic authority. Now the leaders of Darbyism were High Churchmen to the core, and the last thing they would have tolerated would have been even a thin end of the wedge of democracy. They ceaselessly insisted that they had more in common with the Church of England than with Dissent; and odd, perhaps perverse, as this sentiment has appeared to most people who have heard of it, there is a sense in which it was true. Cruel circumstances involved them in the loose aggregate of Dissenters, but their abhorrence of Nonconformist radicalism, whether in Church or State, was perfect. They are thus to be ranked as fervent supporters of the High Church conception as opposed to the democratic; and in the great conflict of the two standpoints of which anti-Latin Christianity has for three centuries been the field they fall into line with some very odd associates.

In its entirety this account applies only to Exclusivism. The Open Brethren, in this respect as in some others, resort to a kind of compromise between Darbyism and "Dissent". Many of them believe strongly in having certain brothers recognised as "taking oversight"; but so far as I can learn, these "overseers" are practically self-appointed, and it would be hard to define their authority. The movement in this direction, however, is interesting as a tacit confession that the earlier principle has been anything but satisfactory in its practical operation.

That the plea that only apostolic authority could validate an appointment to office was really an after-thought, whereby the leaders of the movement justified a course to which their strongest instincts impelled them, may be assumed without misgiving. For, if we turn to the prerogatives they claimed for the Church, as "represented" by themselves, we shall find no similar timidity restraining their pretensions. To the "two or three gathered in Christ's Name," as we have already seen, the disciplinary authority of the primitive Church is committed, and the passage that closes with the promise of Christ's presence they regarded as their great charter. No chill doubt seems ever to have struck to their hearts upon the recollection that we have no instance in Scripture of ecclesiastical excommunication without apostolic ratification.

But the Darbyites have always wielded the weapon of excommunication with all the assumption of the Church of Rome itself, and within their little sphere, marvellous as the statement may seem, they have inspired hardly less terror. A young man, just "received into fellowship," once observed to me that if he were ever "put out" he would never lift up his head again. He to be sure was none of the wisest, but his remark reflected the almost universal spirit, and the veterans felt the terror even more than the recruits. Some of their strongest men, possessing the added strength of the profound conviction that they were threatened for righteousness' sake only, shuddered and recoiled before the prospect of excommunication. It was in part a vague spiritual dread that oppressed them. They attached an awful authority to the act of "the assembly". Not that they formally and explicitly claimed infallibility for it; but there was a constant tendency towards the sentiment, if not the tenet, of an infallible "assembly"—or at the least of an assembly whose decisions, so far as "government upon earth" was concerned, were ratified in heaven, and whose ban therefore, even if possibly mistaken, was for the time being sustained by Divine authority. Otherwise, the spectacle would never have been witnessed of good men dreading the discipline of an "assembly" that they knew beyond a doubt to be scandalously in the wrong. Amongst Open Brethren there is probably very little of such a feeling. Darbyism, profoundly wise in its generation, knew the value of mysterious and awful claims.

The force of this spiritual terrorism was felt by people who might well seem to have been fortified against it by every kind of prophylactic,—by high intelligence, great force of character, liberal culture, and not least by eminent social advantages, with all their power to exempt from servile terrors.

But only when the kind of tribunal that wielded this power is considered does the dramatic character of the situation fully disclose itself. It might be a very small and unlettered company, composed of individuals little fitted to inspire awe by any personal qualifications. Such a company could pronounce against a man who might have made his mark on the great world without, a sentence of excommunication that would blast his reputation where alone he had troubled to possess one, deprive him of almost all his friends, and well-nigh make (to outward seeming) an end of his usefulness; and that would create, at least during the anticipation, a vague spiritual dread, worst of all perhaps while it lasted. Even so, the Church of Rome invested the most ignorant of her priesthood with a spiritual power before which the most potent elements of secular strength stood cowed.

I am aware that many will think this picture greatly overdrawn. They will naturally assume that so eminent a man could not fail to make his ascendancy felt over an obscure and uncultivated congregation. But however far this were the case, it would invalidate nothing that I have said. The centralisation of Exclusivism has to be reckoned with. Darby's influence, for example, would have sufficed in the long run to secure the expulsion of any teacher, no matter how honoured a name he bore or how strongly he were entrenched in the love and esteem of the church in which he laboured. And the authority of the "assembly" was the instrument of this astounding despotism. Nor could any man, having once assimilated the genuine principles of Darbyism, despise the unrighteous decree of which he was the victim, except by as real a triumph of the freeborn spirit of Christianity over the servile terrors of superstition as the dying nun of Port Royal achieved when, being refused the last rites of the Church by the malice of the triumphant Jesuits, she exclaimed in the words of St. Augustine, "Crede et manducasti"¹⁰³.

The "assembly" in which these awful powers are vested is very simple in its constitution. The Brethren have of course always been thorough believers in the practicability of a "pure communion,"—that is to say, of a Church embracing all converted people, and to all intents and purposes containing none besides. If they speak of a Christian, they understand a person that can make a profession that is satisfactory to them of having been converted to God. Now it is the view of the Brethren generally, (though doubtless not universally), that is the right and duty of every Christian to associate himself with them. But according to the theory of Darbyism all Christians, whether they respond to this duty or not, are already, by the very fact of their being Christians, in fellowship with the Brethren. Were it otherwise, they say, the Brethren would themselves be only a sect. Though Christians may not prize or even know their privileges, yet every acknowledged Christian has the same *right* to sit at the Table of the Lord as the most venerable Plymouth Brother. The leaders insisted strenuously that there could be no membership with "Brethren" other than membership in the Church of God. The Brethren could grant no additional title.

It is true that a candidate for fellowship among the Brethren was regularly visited by two or three brothers deputed for the task. But when the theory of Darbyism was strictly adhered to (which by no means always happened), this formality would be restricted to two cases: (1) the case of a person contemplating a public Christian profession for the first time; (2) the case of a person accredited indeed as a Christian amongst Evangelical people, but who had no local "brethren" among his acquaintances to introduce him to the meeting in that

¹⁰³ "Believe, and thou hast eaten."

character. Suppose on the other hand that some “brother” introduced a visitor (if for the sake of clearness I may thus condescend to vulgar phraseology) as being notoriously an accredited Christian, though quite unassociated with Brethren, such a person being then and there admitted to communion could not possibly receive, or require, any subsequent recognition.¹⁰⁴

A hypothetical case will perhaps help to set this very important matter in a clear light. Suppose the members of a meeting of Brethren are discussing some delicate case of discipline. A local Methodist whom they have always considered a true Christian walks in. According to the theory of Darbyism such a man has as good a right to sit down and take his place in judging of the question as any Plymouth Brother of thirty years’ standing. Whether he has as good a right to take a leading part in the discussion depends on his personal qualifications. If he had spoken deprecatingly, saying for example, “I am only here as a fellow-Christian, not as a Brother,” the greatest man among the Brethren, if he knew his text, would have replied, “We are all here as fellow-Christians, and as nothing besides; we have no title that you have not”.

But these principles, however essential if the Brethren were not to “fall back into mere denominationalism,” were difficult to practise, and apparently not easy even to grasp. Certainly the rank and file were constantly turning back into Egypt, and put their leaders to no small trouble to inculcate these impracticable sublimities. On the surface the practice of the Brethren would have impressed the onlooker as very similar on the whole to the prescriptive usage of the free churches, conformity to which they so nervously dreaded. Still, their theory introduced some uncertainty and irregularity into their principles of membership.

The theory of course excluded “special membership,” the original bugbear of the Brethren. A visitor from New Zealand, if a communicant, had exactly the same right as a resident to attend and to address a meeting convened to regulate the ventilation, or to decide on the purchase of a new stock of hymn-books. When more serious matters were under discussion the inconvenience of this practice was liable to be keenly felt, and a local membership was perforce practically recognised. Persons who were not “Brethren,” and even in some cases visitors who were, had to be by hook or by crook excluded, if not from debates, at least from voting. Not that a vote was ever formally taken; but practically, of course, voting neither was, nor could be, avoided.

I believe that the Open Brethren pay little or no regard to this theory; but this only renders their claim to be neither sect nor denomination the less plausible. The Exclusives were the more consistent. Had they formed a voluntary association they would have been at liberty, they maintained, to make their own laws and choose their own members; but they had nothing to do with forming anything—their one duty was to own and “express” what God had formed. Therefore they could not acknowledge any man as a member of the Church of God by admitting him to the Lord’s Table, and then proceed to say to him, “We have now some family matters to discuss, and must ask you to retire”. A circle within the circle of the communicants was out of the question, as answering to no thought in the Divine mind. To this theory the great leaders clung, even when the force of circumstances seemed to have made every effort to realise it the merest pedantry; but its importance has never been grasped, except by the leading minds. In addition to all that might very reasonably be urged against it by practical men, it has laboured under the more fatal drawback of a certain speculative

¹⁰⁴ “When a person breaks bread, they [*sic*] are in the only fellowship I know—owned members of the body of Christ. The moment you make another FULL fellowship, you make people members of your assembly, and the whole principle of meeting is falsified. The assembly has to be satisfied as to the persons, but . . . is supposed to be satisfied on the testimony of the person introducing them, who is responsible to the assembly in this respect. This, or two or three visiting, is to me the question of adequate testimony to the conscience of the assembly.

“At the beginning [of Brethrenism] it was not so, *i.e.*, there was no such examination. Now I believe it a duty according to 2 Timothy ii.” Darby, *Letter* dated San Francisco, August 1875.

sublimity that estranges ordinary minds. So effectually have these disadvantages operated that that principle, which may fairly be called the most fundamental that the Brethren professed, is now but little known among themselves, and seldom so much as guessed at by even well-informed outsiders.

Some two years after the appearance of Hall's pamphlet, the most earnest and unwavering opponent of the principles that Darby's influence had imposed upon the Brethren passed to his rest. Anthony Norris Groves died in the house of his brother-in-law, George Müller, on the 20th of May, 1853, in his fifty-ninth year. His mission work in India had exposed him to peculiar trials. For some years he was misled by the idea of a self-supporting industrial mission. This proved a failure, and brought him into long-continued depression of spirits, in which he found characteristic consolation in the reflexion that "to feel ourselves *the Lord's free-born children in the way of holiness*, is a most privileged place, amidst all the bondage of earth's cares".¹⁰⁵ It is worth while to record this sentiment. The peculiar genius of Christianity has not often received more striking expression.

Afterwards he wisely devoted himself exclusively to the ministry. The time of the great disruption found him on a visit to England, and he took, as we have seen, a prominent place in the guidance of the later policy of Bethesda. He had written in India, in 1847, his views on some of the peculiar features of Darbyism, in the following terms:—

"If the question were put to me . . . do you consider the Spirit unequal to the task of keeping order in the way we desire to follow? my reply is simply this, shew me that the Lord has promised His Spirit to *this end*, and I at once admit its obligation in the face of all practical and experienced difficulties: but, if I see pastorship, eldership, and ministry recognised as a settled fixed service in the church to this end, I cannot reject God's evidently ordained plan, and set up one of my own, because I think it more spiritual.

"D____¹⁰⁶ seems [?] feels] justified in rejecting all such helps as the way of obtaining proper subordination in the assembly of God's saints, by saying the 'Church is in ruins'; this is his *theory*; but neither in the *word*, nor in my own experience or judgment, do I realise that this state of the Church, even though it existed to the full extent he declares, was to be met by the overthrow of God's order, and the substitution of one so exceedingly spiritual, (if I may so use the term,) as it seemed not good to the Holy Spirit to institute, when all things were comparatively in order."

Throughout his protracted and painful illness, his frame of mind was singularly peaceful and triumphant. Subjected as he had been to a most unworthy persecution, his friends might well be pardoned if they attached to the fact even more than its real importance. We accept it now as a truism that the life is much more than the death; but in Groves' case the death was of one piece with the life. "I could not cut off one of Christ's" were amongst the last words that he spoke.

In the early sixties a long series of disciplinary proceedings, undertaken by the London Central Meeting, afforded ample illustration of the principles that have been explained in this chapter.

This Central Meeting was the great instrument of Darby's despotism. He found Scriptural authority for it in the fact that the New Testament, though it speaks of the *churches*

¹⁰⁵ Italics my own.

¹⁰⁶ Groves doubtless wrote "Darby". I have to follow the Memoir.

of a province, invariably speaks of the *church* of a town, though it may be presumed that in the case of large towns the church must have been constituted by several local congregations. Now, though Darby was never tired of preaching that the Church was in ruins, and that God would not sanction any effort to restore its primitive administration, he none the less proceeded boldly to deduce that no local “gathering” in London could take any ecclesiastical steps without the concurrence of all the rest. In pursuance of this theory a room was hired in Central London for Saturday evening conferences, at which were settled all the ecclesiastical acts of London meetings for the next day—such as the reception of candidates, or sentences of excommunication against evil livers and people who communicated with Open Brethren.

At a later period, delegates attended from all the local centres, but it would seem that at first (and the germ of the institution may be traced to a period anterior to the disruption) it had a less representative character. A paper was sent out to all the metropolitan meetings, embodying the decrees of this central authority. The number of meetings in London, and perhaps the mere metropolitan prestige of the city, made these decrees supreme in England, and consequently in the whole world of Brethrenism. How tremendous an instrument of ecclesiastical tyranny such an institution could be was not fully proved until the convulsions that issued in the dissolution of Darbyism in 1881; but even twenty years earlier things were bad enough.

It is hard to speak with any respect of Darby’s action in attempting to base the claims of the Central Meeting on Scriptural precedent. His argument literally furnished not even the barest presumption that such a link, connecting the various assemblies within one municipality, had any place among primitive institutions. And even were it otherwise, there is no sufficient analogy between a city of the Roman world and a modern English town to enable us to argue from the one to the other. Darby must have known perfectly that the city of old was a totally different kind of social and civic unit from the modern township. It would be distinctly more reasonable to infer from his texts the principle of national churches.¹⁰⁷

The Brethren, however, followed up the idea with a characteristic absence of misgiving. In 1860 the Priory meeting, Islington, (a centre of paramount importance, because Darby worshipped there whenever he was in town), excommunicated Alexander Stewart, a former minister of a Presbyterian Church, and a man of considerable pulpit gifts. The ostensible ground of the excommunication was that Stewart had “grievously violated the Lord’s presence at His table, and the consciences of the saints by forcing his ministry,” and had further “declared he had nothing to confess”.

The action of the Priory would necessarily be communicated to the rest of London through the Central (or London Bridge) meeting. But some of the London “gatherings” were not enamoured of the Central Meeting. Bad blood had been created by an unfortunate occurrence at one of its sessions. To keep the proceedings private, the doors had been guarded and locked; and a brother who endeavoured to obtain entrance was violently assaulted. No redress could be obtained, the assault being, according to one authority, “justified on the ground of the secret character of the meeting”.

This disaffection may account for the fact that the Walworth Brethren asked of the Priory, “What sin or sins, according to Scripture, of an excommunicable character” Mr.

¹⁰⁷ Mr. Thos. B. Miller, writing many years later, put the “practical difficulty” connected with “the unity of London” very effectively. “The practical difficulty of determining ‘What is London?’ brought the question prominently before us a few years ago. One who took great pains to ascertain the boundaries of London, according to ‘the powers that be,’ told me, incidentally, as one result of his enquiries, ‘Woolwich is London, but Plumstead is NOT’. Assuming this to be correct, it clearly illustrates the principle maintained, viz.:—That there is a divine unity existing between Woolwich, as part of London in the south, and, say Haverstock Hill in the north, which does not, and cannot, exist between two gatherings so closely associated as Woolwich and Plumstead, because one is within, and the other without, the boundary line of London.”

Stewart had committed. The answer was, that they were “of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture”. A request for an investigation by a general meeting met with no better success, and a strained condition of things ensued for several months. The London Bridge Conference eventually found occasion against the disaffected meeting, for the Walworth Brethren actually removed their meeting-place to Peckham without permission. A notice from London Bridge then went the round of London, stating that the Walworth-Peckham meeting had acted “in self-will”. “Subsequently, an individual from the disaffected meeting, presenting himself for fellowship elsewhere, was ‘challenged’ as ‘not in communion’. This led to an official notification from the Presbytery [*i.e.*, the Central Meeting], that the disaffected gathering, and its sympathisers, could not ‘be accredited at the Lord’s table,’ till they were ‘humbled for their course’.”

The matter did not end here. A member of the Peckham meeting, Goodall by name, applied for communion at the Exclusive meeting in Sheffield. The Sheffield Brethren, with full knowledge of the circumstances, received him. Well knowing the seriousness of the step, they wrote to the neighbouring meeting of Rotherham, offering to give an explanation of their reasons. The reply from Rotherham, dated November 29, 1863, is another landmark in the history of Brethrenism. It is also interesting as bearing a signature made familiar by the “C. S. tracts” to a wider circle than the Brethren. The initials denote Charles Stanley, the evangelist.

“I am requested to say, that inasmuch as you have now placed yourselves in the same position as Mr. G., viz.:—outside the communion of the saints gathered together in the name of Christ in London, the gathering in Rotherham being in fellowship with those in London, cannot possibly receive any statement of the particulars of the matter, either written or by word of mouth. To do so they feel would be to ignore the discipline of the assembly in London, and practically to set aside discipline everywhere; as it virtually denies the unity of the body, and reduces every assembly to an independent congregation.”

The following extract is taken from a letter that Darby wrote from the South of France, under date February 19, 1864, to Mr. Spurr, a member of the excommunicated Sheffield meeting. It shows that the penalties of excommunication were no shadowy ones. Darby would not so much as eat with a man who remained contumacious in the presence of the fiat of his Central Committee.

“I understood the breach arose between you and Rotherham [*i.e.*, between the Exclusive meetings at Sheffield and Rotherham] by reason of your reception of Goodall. With the main facts of his case I am acquainted, for I took part in what passed, and now allow me to put the case as it stands as to him. I put it merely as a principle. He (or any one else) is rejected in London. The assembly in London have weighed, and I with them, the case, and counted him as either excommunicated or in schism. I put the two cases, for I only speak of the principle. I take part in this act, and hold him to be outside the Church of God on earth, being outside (in either case) what represents it in London; I am bound by Scripture to count them [*sic*] so. I come to Sheffield; there he breaks bread, and is—in what? Not in the Church of God on earth, for he is out of it in London, and there are not two churches on earth, cannot be, so as to be in one and out of another. How can I refuse to eat with him in London and [yet] break bread with him in Sheffield? have one conscience for London, and another conscience for Sheffield? It is confusion and disorder. I do not apprehend I am mistaken in saying you received Goodall without having the reasons or motives of the Priory or other brethren in London. If you have had their reasons, the case is only the stronger, because you have deliberately condemned the gathering in London and rejected its communion; for he who is outside in London is inside with you.”

It is stated by several contemporary critics of this Exclusive discipline that its London perpetrators repeatedly style their little fraternity “the one assembly of God in London”. If so, they attempted a usurpation from which, even by the very terms of the above letter, Darby aimed at recalling them. In his view, that which “represents” the Church wields the Church’s disciplinary authority, though it is not the Church. It is, however, doubtful if there is much value in the distinction after all.

XI The Theological Position Of Brethrenism

Now that we have reached the full development of Brethrenism as an ecclesiastical system, a brief account may conveniently be given of its theological position. The teaching of the Brethren with regard to unfulfilled prophecy and to various topics connected with the humanity of Christ has been already explained in connexion with the Plymouth controversies. In each case one remark is still called for. In the first place, it is an error to regard vague speculations of a Docetic tendency as constituting an integral part of the ordinary teaching of the Brethren. The non-theological portion of the community would always remain practically unaffected by them. Even in the minds of the leaders such tendencies had probably scarcely any bearing on their spiritual life. To think of the Brethren at large as nourished up upon these miserable questions is to misconceive the whole character of the sect.

With regard, in the second place, to the dispensational and prophetic views of the Brethren, an exactly opposite remark must be made: With very few exceptions (and the exceptions were probably confined to the Open Brethren) they all held the doctrine of the Secret Rapture of the Church; and it would scarcely be possible to exaggerate the extent to which all their ministry and worship, and not less their ordinary life and conversation, have been moulded and coloured by this belief. Even their evangelistic preaching, strange as this may seem, partook largely of it; indeed, great results were expected from its use; nor does it seem to have occurred to them that, as long as the Church was in no sort of agreement on the subject, it was not likely that the doctrine would be widely influential on the world without. In utilising it as a basis of evangelistic appeals, they relied on the affirmation that, from the moment of the Rapture, the day of grace for Christendom will be over. This view is indeed separable from their main doctrine on the subject, but none of the Brethren separated it; and they found themselves in consequence committed to the very precarious inference that the period of gospel probation is to close long before the coming of Christ to judgment.

With a strange want of all theological perspective this was taught, even to the children of the community, as a truth no less certain than the most momentous facts of revelation; and grievous was the havoc that it often made of infantine peace of mind.

Everybody that has a practical acquaintance with the Brethren must have noticed how strong a tendency there is amongst them to substitute for St. James's formula—"If the Lord will,"—a formula of their own—"If the Lord tarry". And more and more the persuasion gained ground that the "tarrying" would not last long, and a suggestion that several years might yet intervene would be disapproved, not indeed as theoretically inadmissible, but as indicating an unworthy attitude of mind towards the great Hope.

But, speaking generally, the doctrines to be discussed in this chapter are those that illustrate the attitude of Brethrenism towards the larger world of evangelical thought. And here it is necessary to begin with a caution. The writers that have made this subject their special province are generally extremely untrustworthy. They are commonly passionately prejudiced against the Brethren. For the most part they make the writings of altogether unrepresentative men the basis of their attack, and even these men they have misrepresented.¹⁰⁸ For example, in the principal book of this class, Reid's *Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled and Refuted*, many quotations are taken from Mackintosh, Charles

¹⁰⁸ I feel bound to express a strong disapprobation of *Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled and Refuted*. The title would lead us to expect an untrustworthy book, and the book certainly does not disappoint the expectation. I believe Dr. Reid's intentions were honourable, but his animus made it impossible for him to distinguish between conclusive evidence and evidence nearly worthless. Perhaps the best gauge of his state of mind is to be found in the fact that he refers with commendatory epithets to Dr. James Carson's book, which is much worse than his own and which I forbear to characterise.

A book of a far higher type is Prebendary Teulon's. I do not think the author always fully apprehends the character of Brethrenism; but he is most honourably distinguished by his candid and conciliatory spirit.

Stanley, and a Dr. Davis, of Aberdeen, for every one taken from Darby or Mr. Kelly. This is not the way to “refute” Plymouth Brethrenism. The real leaders of the Brethren would have called Mackintosh “a popular man,” with a strong touch of depreciation; and their verdict would have been just. Charles Stanley was, if possible, still farther from being a responsible theologian, and owes his reputation to his gifts as a mission preacher, which were very considerable.

Mackintosh wrote vaguely about the humanity of our Lord being a “heavenly humanity,” and exaggerated some of the dangerous tendencies to which reference has been made. Now Mackintosh was the last man to deal in precise meanings, and if his critics had known him they would not have taken him so seriously. As it was, a cry of heresy was raised. Darby interposed characteristically, pronounced Mackintosh wrong, and his critics worse. Mackintosh withdrew the objectionable expressions—in whole or in part, according to the critic’s point of view. All this is quite illustrative of Mackintosh’s status. On the other hand, what Darby or Mr. Kelly wrote may be accepted as the theology of Brethrenism, but with two reservations. In the first place, any peculiarity merely generated by a horror of Newtonianism filtered through scantily, if at all, to the level of the laity; and secondly, Darby’s views on the sufferings of Christ (of which the next chapter will present some account) always remained to a great extent esoteric.

Briefly stated, the theology of the Brethren is the ordinary theology of Evangelicals of a firmly but moderately Calvinistic type; but there are fairly important variations, of which some of the most significant relate to the doctrine of Justification. Darby taught that the Righteousness of God, as spoken of in Romans, is to be understood as God’s personal righteousness, and not as His provision and bestowment of righteousness. This would have been no novelty if it had appeared in connexion with a Rationalistic scheme of justification; but in its evangelical setting it was startling. Possibly Darby was driven back upon it by the force of the reaction against everything Newtonian. However this may be, an impression has arisen in some quarters that his general system was far less evangelical than was really the case. It has actually been suggested that the Brethren sympathised with the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church that justification is partially granted in virtue of an “inherent” or “infused” righteousness in the believer. But even Dr. Reid rejects this preposterous suggestion. Justification by faith only has had no more strenuous upholders than the Brethren; indeed, their tendency was rather towards antinomianism than in the opposite direction.

It is true that the Brethren did not allow that a sinner is justified as being deemed to have kept the law that Christ kept for him, but maintained, on the contrary, that he is justified wholly as being associated by faith with Christ in the expiation of the breach of the law. They insisted that in Romans iv. 6-8 St. Paul identifies the imputation of righteousness with the non-imputation of sin; and they adhered to the literal rendering of Romans vi.7,—“He *that is dead* is *justified* from sin”. To the objection that such a righteousness is merely “negative,” and that a “positive” righteousness must be sought in the imputation of Christ’s law-keeping to the believer, the most moderate of them would have replied that such a view of justification is not contemplated in Scripture, and that the believer in Christ is accepted before God “in *all* Christ’s acceptance”. Perhaps it would be right to say that they sought, not a merely legal, but rather a transcendental justification.

The common sense of evangelical people in general, while perhaps not interesting itself particularly in the dispute, has accepted the position of the Brethren as being solidly evangelical; and certainly any argument leading to a different conclusion would seem to involve a *reductio ad absurdum*. On the other hand, a good many theologians, of whom B. W. Newton was the most eminent, have laboured to fix on the Brethren the stigma of heresy in respect of these views. The Brethren indeed maintained their position, as usual, with something of a disdainful confidence that possibly gave needless advantage to their

adversaries. Moreover, instead of understanding “justification of life,” spoken of in Romans v. 18, as signifying justification that brings life (which would certainly seem most consonant with St. Paul’s argument), they interpreted it as a justification based on the possession of spiritual life. This they regarded as a sort of extra, or supererogatory justification, accompanying rather than supplementing the already perfect forensic justification. Nevertheless, this interpretation lent colour to the accusations of their adversaries; though indeed it had no real organic association with their general scheme, for they stood with the first in upholding the great Protestant principle that justification is no more granted in consideration of works following regeneration than of works preceding it.

It is almost universally charged against the Brethren by their opponents, that they refuse to pray for the forgiveness of sins. A truly liberal divine of the Established Church, the late J. B. Marsden, has given a charitable explanation of their conduct. He says that “the Brethren, regarding themselves as, in theological language, in a state of grace, do not ask for blessings that they have already received, but rather for an increase of gifts of which they have already partaken”.¹⁰⁹ But this explanation does not cover the facts. The Brethren recognised from I John i. that even persons “in a state of grace” require forgiveness of the specific sins of their Christian course; but they escaped the apparent force of this passage by saying that, though our sins require to be forgiven, we are not told to pray that they may be, but merely to confess them to Him who will forgive upon confession. There is certainly here the power of drawing fine distinctions. It seems that we are bound *to confess with a view to forgiveness*, and are bound *not* to ask for forgiveness. In face of this, Marsden’s plea is irrelevant. Still, the Brethren admitted the propriety of both public and private confession of sin; though at the same time it was not prominent in their ordinary meetings.

He would perhaps be rather a churlish Evangelical that would quarrel with the Brethren merely for confessing with a view to forgiveness instead of praying for forgiveness; but their actual tendency to neglect both is a more serious matter. Their hymn-books witness against them on this head. For instance, in *Hymns for the Little Flock*, which (edited by Wigram in 1856, and re-edited by Darby in 1881)¹¹⁰ has been universally used by Exclusive Brethren since its first appearance, I cannot recall any confession of sin whatever. Even hymns of their own writers had to be remodelled to avoid it. Deck, for example, closed a striking hymn beginning, “O Lord, when we the path retrace which Thou on earth hast trod,” with the following stanzas:—

“O Lord, with sorrow and with shame
 We meekly would confess
 How little we who bear Thy Name
 Thy mind, Thy ways express.

“Give us Thy meek, Thy lowly mind,
 We would obedient be;
 And all our rest and pleasure find
 In fellowship with Thee.”

This was altered to the following single stanza:

“We wonder at Thy lowly mind,

¹⁰⁹ *Dictionary of Christian Churches and Sects*, p. 95.

¹¹⁰ The edition of 1856 is sometimes erroneously assigned to Darby. Wigram’s editorship was perfectly well known.

And fain would like Thee be;
And all our rest and pleasure find
In learning, Lord, of Thee.”

Surely nothing could be more significant; and this instance does not stand alone. At the same time such circumstances must be traced to unhealthy habits or instincts, for the theological position of Darbyism did not require them.

Closely related to this subject is the alleged antinomianism of the Brethren. This charge has been based on the tenet that Christians are not under the moral law; but those who have brought the charge have not sufficiently attended to the ambiguity of the incriminated expression. They have inferred that the Brethren did not consider it a binding duty to observe the moral precepts of the law. Now if there were foundation for this charge at all, it lay only in random and irresponsible utterances which Darby and other accredited teachers would have repudiated. They would indeed have affirmed that when St. Paul says that Christians are not under the law but under grace, he cannot exclusively refer to the ceremonial law; and that the same holds good with regard to his statement that through the law we are dead to the law. They rejected as an unwarranted gloss the explanation that we are dead to the law only as to a covenant of works, and interpreted the verse in the light of the principle that we serve now “in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter”. They were far from denying that the duties of the moral law are duties now and for ever, but they maintained the *insufficiency* of the law as a guide to a life lived in the energy and illumination of the indwelling Spirit of God.

On the other hand, there was a certain tendency to lapse into an antinomian habit of mind. It was so to speak the “mission” of the Brethren to emphasise the contrast between law and gospel, to insist on the freedom of Christian service, and to disparage the conception of duty in favour of the conception of privilege. The danger was that duty might slip into a somewhat obscure background of thought, and that people might forget that if a sense of privilege proved an insufficient motive to a right act the obligation to it remained unimpaired. I once heard a local teacher observe in one of their assemblies that it was “better to do wrong than to do right merely from a sense of duty”; but this sentiment elicited on the spot the most determined opposition from his own flock, and would have done the same, I have no doubt, in almost any of the meetings of the Brethren. Yet I would hesitate to say that even so extreme a view may not have been the index of a real peril arising from the general tone of the teaching of the sect. The first three chapters of the Ephesians were far more prominent in their ministry than the last three, and as time went on practical exhortations of a homely and pointed kind were liable to be almost resented in their meetings. Nevertheless it is not fair to call their theology antinomian.

Marsden refers to yet another charge against the Brethren, that they did not pray for “the presence and influence of the Holy Ghost”. The truth of the matter is very simple. They did not pray that they might receive the Holy Ghost, because they had no misgiving that they had already received Him. On the other hand, that they ever questioned the propriety of praying for more of the influence of the Holy Ghost is a statement quite without foundation.

There was only one question of any consequence on which a variety of opinion was practically tolerated. Ostensibly, indeed, all opinions that did not touch the fundamental principles of Christianity (according to the Brethren’s views of what was fundamental) might be held within their ranks; but practically an almost unprecedented uniformity of doctrine obtained. Baptism constituted the solitary exception,—the explanation being that Darby was a pedobaptist. His pedobaptism was rather out of keeping with his general theological standpoint, as Herzog observes, though of course he considers it a happy inconsistency. In respect of this tenet Darby stood for a long time almost alone. In 1838 he obtained a powerful ally in

Dorman. The number of his disciples gradually increased until, within the Exclusive party, they formed a considerable majority. On the other hand, the Open Brethren are, almost without exception, very pronounced Baptists.

Darby professed to require a distinct New Testament precedent for everything. To act without it, even in the details of church government, was the part of semi-rationalism in his eyes. As his followers fully accepted the same starting point, it is not wonderful that they had to take his view of baptism on trust. Indeed the extraordinary diversities existing among them would suffice to show that they yielded their great chief an obedience more devoted than intelligent. One prominent man among them, as I am informed on unimpeachable testimony, said that he would be willing to stand at the street corner and baptise any one that would let him,— a confession of faith being, in this view, uncalled for. Others are reported to have baptised by force children old enough to offer a lively resistance; and others, to have affirmed the propriety of baptising their furniture—a course for which they might no doubt have found a New Testament precedent, though of rather an equivocal kind.¹¹¹ I do not of course suggest that Darby had any further responsibility for such vagaries than that which must attach to a teacher who plentifully exercises dominion over his disciples' faith, and is content to impose doctrines of which he gives no clear and precise account.

Brethrenism professed to offer a platform on which the two schools into which the baptismal controversy has divided the church might meet on a footing of perfect equality. The experiment was an interesting one; unfortunately, it cannot be said that it met with any very encouraging success; for, if respect for Darby kept his opponents quiet, his followers were apt to be a little touchy if the question were raised. Frequent services for the administration of adult baptism were a source of irritation; and a meeting-room in London that had formerly belonged to the Scotch Baptists, and at which baptism continued to be zealously observed along the old lines, was disparaged (to speak from the point of view of both parties alike) as "a mere Baptist Chapel". And finally, at the rupture between Kellyites and Darbyites in 1881, though there were exceptions on both sides, the Baptists went nearly solid for Mr. Kelly, and the pedobaptists for Mr. Darby. Considering that the question of baptism had no connexion of any kind with the subjects then in dispute, this is certainly a very interesting circumstance.

Exclusive Brethrenism, apart from Darby, has no meaning. When Darby's fiat ceased to be law, the party was broken; when Darby was dead, it was scattered like dust. On this the baptismal controversy has a significant bearing. In the existing disagreement on an important question, a manly independence and freedom of speech would have afforded the only happy augury. Instead of this, Darby's opponents, with hardly an exception, submitted to be almost silenced; or, if they expressed their views, expressed them in a semi-apologetic manner; and this though they could claim the high authority of Mr. Kelly. The story goes that a theological lady once asked Darby what Mr. Wigram held as to baptism. Darby, though probably annoyed, had the wit to answer, "Madam, he holds his tongue". The incident illustrates the whole attitude of the Baptist party among his followers. The consequence was that after holding an immense majority they dwindled away to such an extent that the opposite party was ultimately able to cast them forth beyond the pale of Darbyism altogether.

¹¹¹ St. Mark, chap. vii.

XII Darby's Strange Corrective To Newtonianism-The Secession Of 1866

IN the year 1864 another of the makers of Brethrenism passed away. J. G. Bellett died at his house in Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin, on the 10th of October, in his seventieth year. He had followed Darby's standard, slowly, reluctantly, haltingly. It is plain that Darbyism inspired him with no enthusiasm, and but for Darby's immense influence over him his later course might well have been very different. He came to feel that Brethrenism might command the allegiance of its members on the ground of its peculiar share in the deposit of truth; but Brethrenism was far from filling out the orb of his ideal. He had written to Harris on the subject, apparently very soon after the great disruption, in the following terms:—

“What was erected in the midst of us twenty years ago may be a dishonoured ruin—the light then communicated may have become darkness, and the deposit then entrusted be forfeited never to be restored. Still the duty of stewardship is as simple and as abiding as ever.

...

“It is a poor thing indeed to occupy a *pure position*¹¹² with less moral power than those who are on lower ground. I feel this, I believe, beyond every element which now appears in the scene. . . .

“There was, I believe, some light from the mind of Christ conveyed to elect vessels . . . some twenty-two years ago. I do not believe the Lord has allowed that light to be put out in itself, or even withdrawn from the very vessels in which it was then deposited. . . . I am neither to disesteem nor to overvalue it. I deeply believe there are vessels in God's house, made for other treasure, and that such vessels fill their service in both a wide [wider] sphere, and with a more devoted heart. I do not feel myself even under a temptation to undervalue them. . . . When I think of such men as Bickersteth and Hewitson, and of such labourers as the missionaries abroad, as the teachers of the ragged schools in London, or as the clergy in the West of Ireland, I am at once ashamed of myself; and desire to honour both them and their work. But I must let the Lord distribute severally as He will . . . ”¹¹³

Such language as this is surely the relic of a better age of Brethrenism than the present generation has known. But Bellett was a strange Darbyite. He caused some scandal to his fellow-Exclusives by occasionally walking arm in arm with Open Brethren along the streets of Dublin; and he was on cordial terms with the late excellent Denham Smith. No one interfered with him; indeed, Bellett's adherence on his own terms was of some value even to Darby. He is the one great literary figure of Brethrenism. The peculiar position that he shared with the rest of his school in regard to “dispensational truth” will generally be held to discount his value, as it certainly discounts his popularity. But his little works are a valuable addition to any library. For beauty of thought matched with beauty of expression, for frequent depth of spiritual and psychological insight, for an intense and glowing devotion to Christ, his writings have a great and abiding value.

Perhaps no prominent Plymouth Brother ever drew so powerfully the love and esteem of men who had no sympathy with his ecclesiastical position. He and his brother, the Rev. George Bellett, were throughout life singularly closely and tenderly attached. Another

¹¹² *I.e.*, apparently, a position in condemnation of Bethesda, particularly in respect of the Letter of the Ten.

¹¹³ Whatever the effect of this letter upon Harris, he at any rate did not abandon the Brethren. But he could not walk in Bellett's path. He ministered amongst the Open Brethren, occupying an almost unique position of esteem and confidence, until his death in 1877.

clergyman—and he a man of “moderate High Church views”—bore a most emphatic witness in a letter to Miss Bellett.

“How thankful we ought to be to God who gives us every now and again such witnesses as your most dear and honoured father was, to His own glory, love, and character. If the servant were so lovely, what the Master.

“ . . . He was one of the most remarkable and attractive men, if not the *most*, I ever met, and after thirty years, the tones of his voice, the expression of his eyes, and the exquisite utterances of his heart are as vivid as though I only saw and heard him today. . . . Never, never shall I see such an one again.”

Bellett, like Groves, gave the keynote of his life in one of his last words,—“Oh, the Man of Sychar!”

It is natural to think of this good man as “taken away from the evil to come”. At the time of his death a fresh and very serious storm was brewing. In 1858 and the following year Darby had contributed a series of papers on the sufferings of Christ to the *Bible Treasury*—a new organ of the Brethren, destined to run a long course, not yet complete, under the able editorship of Mr. William Kelly. These papers, in connexion with one or two that appeared in other magazines, provoked a tumult of disapprobation on the part of persons unfavourable to Darby’s ecclesiastical action. Prominent among these was Mr. Tom Ryan, an Irish Brother that had been somewhat early connected with the Brethren, among whom he enjoyed a high reputation for scholarship. But the disaffection soon spread to Darby’s personal adherents, and ultimately led in 1866 to a secession of considerable importance.

By a most extraordinary *tour de force*, Darby found himself arraigned on the charge of teaching the Newtonian heresy.¹¹⁴ Naturally he fumed at it, but it is clear at the first glance that no grand jury could have refused to find a true bill. Darby had laid the weight of his indictment of Newton on the fact that Newton had placed Christ (as the expression went) under wrath from God not vicariously endured. That Darby had done the very same thing was now the assertion not only of clever men like Mr. Ryan, who might be considered unfriendly critics, but also of several of Darby’s most devoted adherents. Darby was naturally angry, and publicly declared that people who instituted a comparison between his system and Newton’s were either fools or knaves.

Unfortunately, this summary verdict is not borne out by an examination of the names of Darby’s opponents. Though it was long before they could prevail on themselves to move in the matter, the men who ultimately bore the brunt of the conflict were Percy Francis Hall and William Henry Dorman.

Hall had been for many years a lukewarm supporter of Brethrenism. But for Darby’s tracts, however, he would have “gone on” with his party “in sadness indeed, and with the oppressive conviction that” his “great theory of subjection to the Holy Spirit, as dwelling in the Church on earth, was practically abandoned”. But Dorman had not so far shown any sign of disaffection, although circumstances had probably, unperceived by him, been loosening his moorings to Darbyism. Hall was before his friend in taking action. In 1865, after three years’ uneasy silence, he engaged in correspondence with Darby, but ineffectually. In the beginning of the following year, after prolonged persuasion, he induced Dorman to take up the matter. This initiated a correspondence which was partially published in one of the most interesting

¹¹⁴ In this chapter I do not reopen the question of what Mr. Newton had taught, but simply speak of him from the point of view that the disputants of 1865-6 occupied towards him.

pamphlets in the literature of Brethrenism. I refer to Dorman's *Close of Twenty-eight Years of Association with J. N. D.*

Dorman's first letter to Darby, written in a most affectionate and confidential tone, takes up no decided attitude in regard to the doctrine of the incriminated tracts; and it actually ends with a suggestion that the time had come to undertake "something in the character of an 'Irenicum' in regard to many faithful men" associated with Open Brethren, among whom he specifies Harris and Wellesley.¹¹⁵

Darby replied "with kindness and cordiality". A few more notes passed, and the correspondence closed with satisfaction and hopefulness on Dorman's part. But in a very short time he reopened the correspondence under rather curious circumstances. He had sat down to mark the passages that he judged should be altered, according to an offer he understood Darby to have made. The result was that the whole substance of the tracts impressed him in a new light. For the first time he saw (or thought he saw) that Darby had not merely introduced a new phraseology into his exposition of the Psalms, but a new system of interpretation. "Consequently," he writes to Darby, ". . . I fancied your *words* were perpetually at war with your meaning. . . . Further than this I may add, there reigned in my mind up to this time, a kind of absolute confidence that it was next to impossible that you should really *hold* anything that was wrong. And I daresay I am not alone in this conviction."

The barrier of so influential a prepossession once removed, Dorman's mind travelled rapidly. His letter, which very clearly marks a crisis, lays down that the question raised derives its supreme importance from its implication "with the fundamental principle of our *special* association,"—that is, the association of Exclusive Brethren as such. "It must be," the writer proceeds, "a strange principle of moral righteousness that will allow a man from day to day to go on repelling with unrelenting severity the most distant connexion with an evil, while he is at the same time conscious of being in the very closest association with what he suspects to be but a modification of the same thing. This is no hypothetical case; and I must say that no upright conscience can long bear the strain which is thus put upon it."

The character of Darby's reply must be judged from Dorman's next letter, which affords a glimpse into a controversial method that unhappily is not new to us. It must be remembered that an unbroken harmony had attended the relations of the two men for twenty-eight years; that Dorman had sacrificed all his associations and all his prospects to follow Darby's banner and had all too faithfully served the interests of his chief ever since. The remonstrance that follows, coming from a singularly manly and sober writer, is an eloquent testimony to the strength of the personal tie that bound so many hearts to Darby in a life-long devotion.

"I cannot of course gauge the depth of other people's affection for you, but I know the strength of my own, and how I esteem you for your Master's sake, and for your unflinching, unflagging zeal and faithfulness in His service: but this is nothing, though true. . . . If . . . you think it good to impute influences, which I could in a moment shew you that my heart was inaccessible to, and tendencies the very reverse of which I am conscious, and then quietly tell me I am instigated by the devil in what I am doing, so far as I can see there is no help for it . . .

"Your appeal to my feelings as to the effect of my letters on your spirit and work amidst your overtaxed spiritual energies, my heart must have lost all its sensibilities if it had not felt, and felt with an anguish you perhaps would be little disposed to give me credit for. But at the same time there is, on my part, Christ and conscience to be thought about as well as

¹¹⁵ Captain Wellesley afterwards left the Open party and joined the Darbyites; but by that time Dorman was aloof from both.

on yours. . . . I have kept my sorrows in my own bosom. . . . I have sought to make no faction against you, even if I were able to do so. . . . I was led into this examination, as I have told you, solely by the desire to deliver Hall from what I thought to be a wrong judgment about it.”

The following passage shows that Darby had attempted a very common means of intimidation. It seldom was encountered, unhappily, with such unbending sternness.

“Any talk to me about approaching Newton’s doctrine, because I cannot agree with yours, and drawing towards ‘Bethesda’—and danger of losing my moral integrity in doing so—I honestly tell you is lost upon me. I think such things are unworthy of one Christian to impute to another; and it is the direct way to reduce all the power of conscience to a name.”

It was the direct way, and a sure way, as the history of Darbyism to this very day abundantly witnesses.

Dorman proceeds to give his reasons for identifying Darby’s doctrine, *as to its essence*, with Newton’s.

“The link of connexion between your doctrine and Newton’s, you yourself have forged, so that you need not resort to ‘the devil’ to put the thought into my head. You have done it thus: You make your doctrine and his distinctive of a true and a false Christ. You take the worst features of his (not unjustly), and the best features of your own (not designedly), to shew it; and then you bring the whole force of this distinction to bear upon the severest course of discipline that I think was ever pursued in the church of God. . . . When it is made the sole basis of our differential communion, the sole ground of an unyielding and unsparing discipline, it becomes the conscience, it forces it, to look a little more deeply into the matter.”

The letter ends with another expression of personal attachment, the transparent sincerity of which Darby can hardly have failed to recognise. “I don’t speak of what it costs me to write, but I do say that I would have spared you, at all costs but one, the trouble and pain of reading even a single line.”

This letter bore date March 14. In the hope that something would be done to set things right, Dorman waited for three months. He then found “that all was to be maintained”. “I learned,” he writes, “that nine of the leaders in London had in effect countersigned the whole doctrine, and had thus sent it on, accredited as far as their names could credit it, for currency amongst those who acknowledged Mr. D.’s rule.”¹¹⁶ This of course took away from me every possible court of appeal. . . . What could I longer have to do with a body whose leaders had bound upon them, as their distinguishing characteristic, the dogma of ‘a third class of Christ’s sufferings,’ for which their originator, in terms, acknowledges the New Testament affords no grounds?” These reflexions were the occasion of a final letter, in which Dorman took up a position of strong opposition to the new teaching, partly on the ground of its premises, partly of its practical results.

“I object, *in limine*, that a whole class of the sufferings of Christ based wholly on the theory of a non-existent, future, prophetic Jewish remnant, should be forced on me as divinely taught in Scripture; while the author of them at the same time acknowledges that they have nothing to do with the grounds of the common Christian faith, as taught by the apostles. I

¹¹⁶ The following were the nine: Dr. Cronin, Sir Edward Denny, Major McCarthy, Messrs. Wigram, Kelly, Butler, Stoney, George Owen, C. McAdam, Andrew Miller. There are one or two of these that were scarcely “leaders”.

object to it as the doctrine of *development*, on the most sacred subject, and in the most mischievous form. . . .

“Your doctrine is already bearing its bitter fruits. In one gathering, Christ’s position under God’s governmental dealings, was presented in terms so correspondent to those of Mr. Newton, that the doctrine would have been imputed to that source, only the young man who unconsciously was treading this ground, was known not to have read Mr. N.’s writings, nor to have been ever associated with those who had. And I know for certain also, that some younger brethren in a meeting for their mutual edification lately, in reading the history of the crucifixion, were apportioning out carefully the sufferings of Gethsemane to the Jewish remnant—and those of the Cross to the Church. I know that this will be as great a sorrow to you as it is to me.”

The following passage almost at the close of the letter is far more significant of a change in Dorman than (as he fancies) in his correspondent.

“Allow one who never had a moment’s ill-will towards you, and has not now, but the contrary, to say that you cannot conceive how much you differ from yourself in this, from any other controversy I have known you to be engaged in. If I think of the whole history of it and of your spirit and bearing in it, especially since the Portsmouth Meeting, I cannot see the proofs of the leading or presence of God’s spirit in the matter!”

“This letter,” Dorman tells us, “brought me a curt note in reply, in which Mr. D. declined any further correspondence on the subject. So readily, and as it appears to me, so remorselessly is he prepared to throw off men, no matter how long or how close their association may have been with him, if they once dare to judge or to question the truth of what he has written. But it is in harmony with his declared sentiments. In a letter already referred to he had said, (not to me) ‘I shall come to London and shall see how far the *consciences* of the saints there are troubled; that is to me how far *the enemy* has been at work!’”

I have presented an outline of this correspondence in some fulness, because of the light that it sheds on the Darbyism of the day. No imputation either of arrogance or of pitilessness to Darby can well go beyond what his own published references to this controversy will bear out. Hall had been his friend for thirty-five years; Dorman for twenty-eight. Both were elderly men, sacrificing the friends and associations of a lifetime, when they could have neither the time nor the heart to form fresh ones. In Dorman’s case, as he had lived (at least to a great extent) by his ministry, serious pecuniary loss was added. Yet Darby, in a long introduction prefixed to the second edition of his papers on the *Sufferings*, has not a kindly word for either of them. Of Dorman he says almost nothing, but of Hall a good deal, seeking to fasten on him, by a wretched sophism, an unconscious participation in Newtonianism. This stroke was doubtless adroit, because of the odium it was calculated to excite; but it is hard to think it anything but unscrupulous. Elsewhere he says of his opponents, “I am inclined to suspect that, not being in communion with Christ in the matter, Satan has deceived them by the ambiguity of the word ‘suffering’. . . . But if they had been seeking the truth and edification simply, they would not have been thus deceived.” The devil is constantly in requisition to explain the perversity of his critics. “The attempt to connect my doctrine with his [Newton’s] is folly or worse—an effort of the enemy to palliate or cover his work.” At an earlier date, apparently before even Hall had taken the matter up openly, he had written the following intensely characteristic sentences: “But I do see another hand and mind behind what is going on, of which this pamphlet is a clear sign to me. As an attack on myself, I am glad not to answer it. If I have to take my adversaries up because they still carry on their

warfare, and Satan is using them for mischief, I here declare I will not spare them, nor fail, with God's help, to make plain the tenets and doctrines which are at the bottom of all this."

At no time does Darby's conduct appear less amiable. If he really felt in conscience unable to retract or modify his doctrines, he might none the less have done justice to the motives of such venerable opponents; he might have given them honour and thanks for long and faithful friendship; he need not have cast gratuitous reproach upon their spiritual condition, or have vilified them as men acting by instigation of the devil. This is not, we may all gladly recognise, the Darby of earlier years. It is not the Darby that Groves and Newman loved for his large-heartedness in Dublin; nor even the Darby to whom his enemies bore honourable witness in Switzerland. I suppose it is well-nigh impossible for a man to be treated as infallible through a long series of years by thousands of his fellow-creatures, without suffering grievous moral deterioration; and arrogance and ruthlessness are obviously the qualities most likely to be developed.

On a review of this controversy, the question whether Darby had actually taught what was imputed to him is really of secondary importance. If the seceders had withdrawn on the bare ground that Darby taught doctrines that made him unfit for Christian communion, what he actually taught would have become the all-important question. But the fact was far otherwise; on that point Hall and Dorman are both perfectly explicit. "I have not felt myself particularly called upon," says Dorman, "in this examination to prove that these doctrines are false and heretical," though he evidently thought them so. "It is enough if I have shewn that they make any approach to those formerly held by Mr. Newton."¹¹⁷ And Hall writes "So like are they to Mr. N.'s doctrines, that even had they not been as bad in themselves as I judge them to be, I should be quite unable to maintain the place of what is called testimony against Mr. N., while connected with those who hold what I think to be as bad".

The position of the Exclusives was reduced to an absurdity, apart altogether from the question of what Darby had taught. It was the distinctive basis of their communion to cut off "from the Church of God on earth" all those who had the most remote, or even the most unreal and fictitious, connexion with Newton's old doctrine—a doctrine apparently no longer actually professed by anybody in 1866; while at the same time they harboured a doctrine that two of their very ablest and most respected teachers had to conclude (visibly in spite of themselves and at a great personal sacrifice) to be essentially the same thing. Darby's personal influence availed to smother the question; and in no other conceivable way could it have been disposed of.

As to the minor question of what Darby taught, Dorman frankly acknowledged the difficulty. He speaks of "the whole difficulty of apprehending Mr. D.'s various statements; and the still greater difficulty of reconciling them when they are understood; all the contradictions that so abundantly meet you in dealing with this *third* point". It will not be forgotten that the same difficulty had been alleged by many to attend the investigation of Newton's opinions, although Newton was a far clearer writer than Darby. At the present day there are good men that imagine they can dispose of all charges against Darby's tracts by reading them for themselves in his *Collected Writings*. Occasionally they do read them, and pronounce him innocent. Probably they would read Newton's old tracts with equal satisfaction, if they read them without knowing that Newton had written them. Bellett read

¹¹⁷ Dorman now begins to do Newton rather belated justice. "In justice I am bound to say, that amidst all the apparent confusion and contradictions of *his* statements about the position and experiences of the Lord Jesus in connexion with Israel, his care to guard against imputing to Christ the presence or possibility of actual sin, is a plain proof that, however wrong his doctrines, it was no part of his intention to defame Christ." This was really (and would be still) a remarkable discovery for an Exclusive Brother.

them with approval, and afterwards joined a party that had no rationale for its existence except its “testimony” against the tracts he had approved.

Darby’s followers had his authority for assuming that the essence of Newton’s error was that he taught that Christ suffered Divine wrath otherwise than atoningly. Hall, speaking of his correspondence with Darby in 1865, says, “My correspondence closed with the request that he would print some paper which I could shew, to the effect—that he did not hold, or mean to teach that our Lord was ever smitten by God’s hand, save atoningly, but that he thought such a statement ‘false and heretical’. I asked this only because he told me in his last letter that he did not hold any such doctrine, and I very much wished to believe this, and thought such a statement might clear the way for something better; *he would not consent to do this.*” (The italics are my own.)

Nor could he. Quoting Psalm lxi. 26, he had said, “Here we have evidently more than man’s persecutions. They take advantage of God’s hand upon the sorrowing One to add to His burden and grief. This is not atonement,¹¹⁸ but there is sorrow and smiting from God. Hence we find the sense of sins (v. 5) though of course in the case of Christ, they were not His own personally, but the nation’s, etc.” Dorman also quotes from the Synopsis on Psalm cii. “He [Christ] looks to Jehovah, who cast down Him whom He had called to the place of Messiah, but who now meets *indignation and wrath*. [The italics are Dorman’s.] We are far here beyond looking at sufferings as coming from man. They did and were felt, but men are not before Him in judgment; nor is it His expiatory work, though that which wrought it is here—the indignation and wrath. It is Himself, His own being cut off as man.” In this passage, Darby so abuses his privilege of writing without regard to the principles of grammar that I should be loth to dogmatise as to his meaning; but the meaning that seems to lie the least remote from his words is surely that which Dorman imputes to him.¹¹⁹

These are very far from being isolated expressions. The “third class” of Christ’s sufferings were said to be those that he entered into in sympathy with the Remnant. The New Testament tells us nothing of such sufferings, as Darby seems to have admitted; but we find them in the Psalms. Newton’s enquiry followed similar lines, but it was a serious thing for him that he believed in an “unconverted remnant,” while Darby believed in a semi-converted, but unenlightened one, which might have some very slight tendency to improve matters.

Still it is dangerous work to assign to Christ the inward experiences of a sinful “remnant” of any kind. Darby had written in his *Remarks on a Letter on Subjects connected with the Lord’s Humanity*, “Mr. N. declares that Jesus had ‘the exercises of soul which His elect in their unconverted state ought to have, and which they would have, if it were possible for them to know and feel everything rightly according to God’. Now whatever nonsense this may be (for it is a contradiction in terms, because, if they had such, they would not be unconverted) yet, taking it as it is, what feelings does it give to Jesus?” Though Newton guarded himself by reiterated declarations of the perfect sinlessness of all Christ’s experiences, this severe criticism of his words was not undeserved; but Darby fared no whit better when he ventured on the same perilous quest. He says that “man may be looked at morally in three conditions,” *i.e.*, conditions of suffering. The third of these is the condition of one “awakened, quickened, and upright in desire, under the exercises of a soul learning, when a sinner, the difference of good and evil under divine government in the presence of God, not fully known in grace and redemption, whose judgment of sin is before his eyes, exposed to all

¹¹⁸ There is here a footnote (added, I conclude, in the Edition of 1867), obscurely worded, but not altering the sense of the text, so far as I can judge.

¹¹⁹ Hall (*Grief upon Grief*, p. 20) quotes Darby’s former denunciation of Newton. “It is the pure unmingled heresy of wrath on Christ which was not vicarious.”

the advantage that Satan can take of him in such a state—such suffering, for example, as is seen in the case of Job. Christ,” Darby proceeds, “has passed through all these kinds of suffering—only the last, of course as Himself a perfect being to learn for others; I need not say that he was perfect in all.” This sentence gave great offence, and Darby endeavoured to shield himself by a footnote, which does not greatly alter matters. Dorman’s criticism is just. “His adding ‘as a perfect being to learn it for others,’ is not of the least force; because it involves the absolute contradiction of what is affirmed. For a moral condition *is* a moral condition; and there is but one way of passing through it.” Apparently both Newton and Darby found themselves precipitated by their system on a conclusion against which their heart and conscience cried out. They hesitated, grew confused, and expressed themselves unintelligibly. The important thing is that there should be one weight and one measure for them both.

The question is in itself a wearisome one. Its importance lies in the huge contradiction in which it involved a party committed at once to the persecution of Newton’s obsolete errors, and to the sanction of their recrudescence in Darby’s doctrines.

Dorman refers pathetically, but in no unmanly tone, to the strange trouble that had befallen him, in that he was compelled for the second time to make for the sake of truth the surrender “of everything in the world, which it is in the power of a man to surrender”. He explains his action in the following terms:—

“I cannot any longer pursue to ‘the tenth generation’ people who have no more to do with Mr. Newton’s doctrine than I have, nor any more leaning towards it—merely because they cannot endorse Mr. D.’s decree. . . . My heart has been withered by the necessity of schooling Christians—young and old, ignorant and well-informed—in the mysteries of an act of discipline of eighteen years’ standing, and in endeavouring to shew the present bearings of ‘the Bethesda question’ and ‘the neutral party’—hateful phrases as they have become. At first, of course, all this was pursued as necessary to the maintenance of purity of doctrine and of ‘a true Christ’ . . . and I honestly thought it so myself. But this guise is now utterly and rudely stripped away.”

The following description of Exclusivism is as true as it is forcible.

“What possible correspondence is there between a company of Christians, or ever so many companies, meeting simply in the name of Christ, pretending to nothing, but counting on His presence as the spring and security of their blessing, when so met, and that of an immense ecclesiastical ramification, which is everywhere subject, and in all things, as to its order, doctrine, and discipline, to Mr. D.’s decrees? enforced by a ubiquitous, unseen, spiritual supervision, from which, as there is no escape, so is there no appeal? The one is as wide and as free as the gracious heart of Christ can make it. . . . The other is as narrow and sectarian, and as hard also, as the domination of man can desire it.”

Dorman retired in silence from his “ordinary fellowship with the meeting at Orchard Street, Bristol; contenting” himself “by saying, in an informal way, that the doctrines of Mr. D. had compelled the step”. Whether he acted wisely or unwisely, it is impossible not to sympathise with his motives. “I had then made up my mind,” he says, “to encounter any obloquy on account of my course rather than incur the responsibility of bringing on indiscriminate discussions, which I am satisfied would have resulted only in blighting the best and holiest feelings of the heart toward Christ and His suffering and cross.”

The two leaders were not alone. Among a good many other seceders, the names of Joseph Stancombe and Julius von Poseck may be mentioned. Stancombe had left the peaceful

communion of Bethesda to follow Darby's standard. Like Dorman he had for the second time to sacrifice his cherished associations to the claims of conscience. Von Poseck's was an interesting story. He came of a noble Pomeranian family, and as a young man suffered imprisonment for a refusal to serve in the Prussian army. From prison he addressed to the King an appeal based on the principle of religious toleration. The King, it is said, directed the prisoner to forward to him such publications as would explain the religious principles on which the refusal to bear arms was based. Von Poseck accordingly sent a selection from the literature of the Plymouth Brethren. It is not likely that the Government attempted to master this theology, but a glance at it would show that the prisoner was harmless. He was liberated by the King, on the condition that he should leave the country. This brought him to England, where he exercised his ministry for many years among the Brethren, and was justly esteemed as an interesting and original preacher. Some time after his secession he returned to his allegiance, I believe under Darby's personal influence. In his later years he became a strenuous supporter of Mr. Kelly's cause.¹²⁰

The seceders had occasion to count the cost. Probably scarcely one of their former friends would betray any consciousness of their existence again. It is truly pathetic to catch glimpses of them in their old age, inured to total neglect, or profoundly affected by a friendly message from some old friend less illiberal than the rest.

The cause they had forsaken stood badly in need of any help that terrorism could lend it. Secret misgiving was widely spread. One of "the Nine,"¹²¹ to my knowledge, was never quite at ease about the exculpation of Darby to which he had contributed; and I learned, from private conversation with him, that he had broken entirely away from the principle of applying the whole of even the Messianic psalms to Christ. Nor was he alone in this, even amongst Darby's devoted followers.

It was with a singularly bad grace that Darby continued to take the loftiest ground. With an evident reference to Dorman's suggestion of an irenicum, he writes in the introduction to the edition of his *Sufferings* that appeared in 1867, "I reject Bethesda as wickedness, as I ever did. . . . When the blasphemous doctrine of Mr. Newton . . . came out, *Bethesda deliberately sheltered and accredited it*. . . It is all one to me if it be a Baptist Church or anything else, it has been untrue to Christ, and no persuasion, with the help of God, will ever lead me a step nearer to it." Now the words printed (by me) in italics are not merely untrue, but they simply are destitute of the remotest connexion with truth. If Darby did not know that he was writing a lie, it could only have been that the Bethesda frenzy had rendered him incapable of distinguishing between truth and falsehood. It was only in the previous year that he had written affectionately to the dying Craik, describing himself as "ecclesiastically separated from" him.

Darby had let loose a flood of odious speculation on the sufferings of the Saviour, which, whether it were heresy or not, was certainly sacrilege.¹²² This I prefer to pass over, but an article in the *Bible Treasury* for August, 1866, cannot be so lightly dismissed; for we read in it that Christ "entered into all the darkness and the wrath of God, but before He went out of the world He had passed through it all, and went out in perfect quiet. *The work is so perfectly done that death is nothing.*" (The italics are mine.) Now, whatever the writer¹²³ meant, this is formal heresy. I do not know whether the heresy was ever repudiated; but there is no doubt

¹²⁰ See chap. xiv.

¹²¹ The nine leaders who "countersigned" Darby's new teaching.

¹²² Specimens are given in H. Groves' *Darbyism*.

¹²³ I find that Darby himself was the writer. *Coll. Writ., Evangelic*, vol. ii.

that the whole subject was to a great extent quietly dropped among the Brethren. At that time, as Dorman tells us,¹²⁴ it was “common to hear persons in popular addresses saying ‘the three hours of darkness in which atonement was made’ ”; but the tumult did good, and the brave men that fell did not sacrifice themselves in vain. I do not affirm that evil echoes of this miserable divinity were never heard, but on the whole the public teaching of Brethren in the seventies contained little of it. Probably the leaders did not, to use Soltau’s distinction, hold these principles “in their consciences,” and certainly the rank and file remained quietly evangelical.

Dorman never formed any new ecclesiastical ties. He was present with Hall in 1869 at a conference of the Open Brethren at Freemasons’ Hall, London; and Dorman took a prominent part in the proceedings. Invitations to attend had been sent to all the leading Exclusives, but very few answers were received. Copies of an open letter signed by Stoney, and addressed to “the believers meeting at Freemasons’ Hall,” were distributed at the doors. The letter, which began (rather inconsistently) “Dear Brethren in the Lord,” suggested that the Open Brethren were “occupying the place of Joshua when he rent his clothes and fell on his face to the earth, and that in consequence the Lord had to rebuke him and say, ‘Wherefore liest thou upon thy face? Israel hath sinned.’ ” When Dorman addressed the meeting he took up Stoney’s letter in some excitement, and threw it behind him, saying, “The Achan you are required to get rid of is Bethesda, but the very doctrines about which the division was first made, are now being circulated by all the Exclusive leaders, under the title of ‘advanced truth’ ”. But whatever momentary excitement there might be, it was evident that Dorman was now an utterly broken man. His speeches seemed, singularly contrary to his wont, almost incoherent; and his voice was often inaudible to a portion of the company. He declared, however, with great emphasis that he hated the very name of Brethrenism. Unless he meant Darbyism, the declaration was in questionable taste, but he evidently distrusted the system of the Brethren at large. He had come to attach a decisive importance to the due and formal recognition of elders, and apparently to the regulation of public worship by them.

Dorman doubtless saw that the want of a powerful local eldership was the great negative condition of Darby’s autocracy, and consequently of the whole system of Darbyism. In 1868 he had pleaded the cause of the eldership in a series of six powerful *Letters to Harris*. Mr. Mackintosh had published a book on *The Assembly of God or the All-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus*. If the growing popularity of the writer had not lent his book a fictitious importance it would hardly have been worth Dorman’s while to attack it, for the argument was very incoherent. “The Assembly,” with which Mackintosh was continually confounding the Exclusive community, was a place where God was allowed to rule,—a place from which “numbers” had “departed,” “because their practical ways did not comport with the purity of the place,”—a place in which “you cannot get on . . . if you are living in secret sin”.

Mackintosh sufficiently refuted his own magniloquent phrases by the following instructive passage:—

“Alas! alas! we often see men on their feet in our assemblies whom common sense, to say nothing of spirituality, would keep in their seats. We have often sat and gazed in astonishment at some whom we have heard attempting to minister in the assembly. We have often thought that the assembly has been looked upon by a certain class of ignorant men, fond of hearing themselves talk, as a sphere in which they might easily figure without the pains of school and college work.”

A far weaker man than Dorman might well have given a good account of so feeble an antagonist. Much more important is the powerful and eloquent denunciation of Darbyism.

¹²⁴ *Letters to Harris*, p. 13 of *Letter v*.

Referring to the excommunication of the whole meeting at East Coker “for having received to the Lord’s Table persons who were judged to have implicated themselves with ‘Bethesda,’”—and treating the excommunication as typical of the whole system of Exclusive discipline,—he justly says: “I make no further comment upon it beyond saying that no legal fiction ever went half its length in absurdity; nor was any ground of ‘constructive treason,’ I believe, ever pleaded before the most flagitious court half as unrighteous as this plea of these brethren in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The simplest statement of such a procedure is its deepest condemnation.”

The following statement, however startling, is not satire.

“Whoever gives attention to this subject can see at once the differences of the prophetic theories that gave rise in each instance to this exceptional ‘third class of the sufferings of Christ’; but he will at the same time see that the *position* in which Christ is placed—viz., enduring sufferings and smiting from the hand of God, *not in atonement*—is the same in both. A person voluntarily taking his place with an ‘exiled family’ may be the illustration of the one; and a mother voluntarily taking her place with ‘a son in prison’ may be the illustration of the other: but he must be a *bold* as well as a *clever* person, who will assert that the difference between the two constitutes the *sole* difference (in the case in question) between a ‘true and a false Christ!’

“So that it comes out at last, that when this difference has been calculated (if it can be calculated), the exact amount of the guilt of Bethesda will have been found. . . . This is the exact ground on which a warfare, the most vindictive and unsparing in character, has been carried on against a congregation of Christians, and against all who did not condemn them. . . . This difference alone has been the ground of endless calumnies—calumnies the most base and groundless, during the whole of that period. It has been, too, the occasion of the bitterest animosities, far and wide, between former friends and fellow-labourers in the gospel. It has occasioned in innumerable instances the severing of family ties, the sundering of the truest affections, and the sending many a faithful Christian brokenhearted to the grave!

“ ‘*I reject Bethesda as wickedness, as I ever did,*’ writes the author of these doctrines, when re-asserting them in his preface lately to a second edition of his tract on *The Sufferings of Christ*.

“Such a sentiment (if it were only individual) deserves the severest reprobation on the part of all good men. But when it is uttered in order to give the tone of feeling and the ground of practical action to a whole religious community towards other Christians, the heart revolts from it with unutterable loathing.”

It is a relief to observe how fully the writer felt that he came himself within the scope of his own vehement denunciations. “Here,” he says, “I have to bow my head—*lower it may be than all besides*; still, I will not conceal the truth from myself or others that intolerant dogmas and immeasurable conceit have usurped to a large extent the place which was once occupied by a divine charity, and a living expression, however imperfect, of love and meekness, and a desire only for the glory of Christ.” (The italics are mine.)

J. E. Howard, in a very clever and rather caustic pamphlet that appeared in March, 1866, under the title of *A Caution against the Darbyites*, affirms that “the sickly existence of Darbyism has been reinvigorated by young blood from the ‘revival’ movement”. There is certainly every sign of an increased vigour about Darbyism in the sixties and seventies, especially in respect of evangelistic zeal, for which, on the whole, the system has not been remarkable. In the Ulster Revival two men were associated, (not indeed for the first time), whose long cooperation was destined to produce a very considerable influence on the younger

generation of Darbyites. These were C. H. Mackintosh and Andrew Miller. Mr. Mackintosh had been a schoolmaster, but he subsequently devoted himself exclusively to the ministry. He had very marked popular gifts, both as a speaker and a writer, and became by means of his *Notes* on the Pentateuch the principal interpreter between Darbyism and the Church at large. Unfortunately, he was an interpreter and nothing more. His thought was loose and unsystematic. He was profoundly unoriginal, and carried no compensating weight as an authority. In private life he was one of the most amiable of men, and is now remembered with kindness by all who knew him.

Mr. Miller, a London merchant of Scottish birth, had joined the Brethren about 1852, bringing over to them a chapel that he had built in Barnsbury for his own ministry amongst the Scotch Baptists. For many years he spent nearly half his time in conducting missions at various provincial centres. When in town he ministered regularly in his own chapel. The good accomplished at most of his centres seems to have been extensive and solid, as many still living are eager to testify. His preaching, though theological, was so thoroughly popular that he could hold the attention of any audience throughout a sermon of extraordinary length. With plenty of facility, he was absolutely simple and true to nature. Far beyond any Plymouth Brother I ever met, he played at will (if indeed it were not rather quite without design) on the emotions of his audience. Cynical hearers have wept with the rest. It was a good example of a rare thing—the eloquence of genuine pathos.

The two friends produced jointly, for the benefit of the less instructed class in their community, a monthly magazine entitled *Things New and Old*. It was a carefully and intelligently edited periodical, and ran a long and prosperous course.¹²⁵ Thus Exclusivism, as if to show that not even the followers of Darby could wholly save themselves from the influence of their environment, began to gather converts from without, and to care for their instruction when they were gathered.

Meanwhile, in Yorkshire, a similar work was being successfully prosecuted by a very different man. Charles Stanley, a Rotherham manufacturer, was an evangelist of considerable native ability, who owed little to culture. But a graphic description, or an apt and homely illustration, lost nothing in his lips by the broad Yorkshire dialect in which it often slipped out. As a preacher he was uncertain, but on his day he wielded an indubitable power. The following story I received from one who was well acquainted with the circumstances. Stanley was travelling in a Humber boat. He rose and preached to the passengers, and prolonged his discourse past many stages. In after years there was scarcely a village on that route where people might not be found who professed to have been converted to God by that discourse. This would seem to indicate a happy stability in the influence that the evangelist exercised; but it is only right to state on the other hand that he sometimes showed little sobriety in estimating the results of his missions.

NOTE.—The quotation from Darby's *Synopsis* on p. 123 is taken *verbatim* from Dorman's *Close of Twenty-eight Years*. In the third edition of the *Synopsis* it appears with somewhat different punctuation, and with the following addition after "is here": "if we take it in its full effect on the cross".

¹²⁵ Prosperity must on no account be understood in a financial sense. Even the poorer Brethren seldom reckoned to make much by their books, which were often published at a ridiculously low price. In the present case, there was no need to raise any financial question.

XIII Life Among The Brethren

IT is the crux of ecclesiastical classification to know to what category to assign Darbyism. Is it Protestant? In point of doctrine, yes, emphatically and intensely. But in many respects it is simply a phase of High Church Christianity. Within the strictly ecclesiastical sphere, I have already attempted to show this; and confirmatory evidence of the most cogent character will accrue from a study of the manners and habits of the sect. Not that it is possible to separate sharply between the ecclesiastical and the social where the Brethren are concerned. The two elements blend as the monastic and the military blended in the Knights Templars.

Yet even in this respect Darbyism still defies classification. It remains either a High Church graft on Evangelicalism, or an Evangelical graft on High Churchism, as the observer may please. As, in the ecclesiastical sphere, the Plymouth Brethren were High Churchmen without ritual, so, in the social, they were recluses without slighting family life, and without a thought of merit. It will be convenient to illustrate at this juncture both these points.¹²⁶

Their contempt for ritualistic worship was perfect; indeed, it is open to their opponents to say that it was carried to affectation. Every circumstance that, to an ordinary mind, would have constituted ineligibility in a meeting-room, was apparently an attraction to them. An upper room reached by a narrow staircase, or a loft above a mews, afforded a meeting-place thoroughly to their taste. It would seem to have been generally a matter of necessity if they erected an iron room; and if a wealthy brother built them a plain but comfortable chapel, the company assembling there might find itself chaffed about “going to heaven in silver slippers”. Their communion service often consisted of earthenware plates and undisguised wine bottles (sometimes with the labels unremoved); but decanters were by no means forbidden, and I have even known a very decent pewter service. In such a case as this, however, some local circumstance would probably explain the exceptional splendour. The communion table was generally of common deal, and most meeting-rooms extemporised a pulpit, when the occasion demanded one, by placing a large sloping desk of the same material on one end of the table.

Possibly there was a sort of ritualism in much of this—a rather unnecessary aping of the primitive under wholly altered circumstances. But who shall say that even an exaggerated protest on behalf of evangelical simplicity is unneeded by the Church at large? And it is certain that any one who has once drunk deeply into the spirit of Darbyism, whatever his gain or loss in other respects, must remain for ever independent of the whole paraphernalia of alleged “aids” to worship.

Turning to the social sphere, and comparing Darbyism with the common standards of Protestant practice, we find it Protestant in respect of the loyalty and tenacity with which it cherishes the life of the family; but in its attitude towards national life we must seek all its affinities in the more strongly marked phases of High Church Christianity. High Churchism ceaselessly tends to regard the Church and civil society as competing spheres of interest, and thus to erect an *imperium in imperio*, and to prefer of course the claims of the spiritual imperium to those of the secular. In an extreme form, such as Romanism, it enjoins at times war upon the institutions of civil society; in a much milder form, like Brethrenism, it proclaims a respectful and perfectly submissive neutrality towards them.

I am of course aware that the Brethren would have claimed to stand with the first in vindicating the spirituality of the secular; and their claim is good up to a certain point—but no further. To do the common things of life as under the lordship of Christ, and as so many acts of service to Him, was certainly the ideal of the Brethren, as it was of the Jansenists and of

¹²⁶ The following description professes to delineate Darbyism. Society amongst the Open Brethren presents very similar features, but generally with modifications. Here, as in other spheres, the Open Brethren constitute a very heterogeneous community.

other excellent men whose High Churchism is not doubtful. But the Brethren, like the Jansenists, placed Christian perfection, and indeed Christian duty, in as total a seclusion as possible from the common pursuits of men, even in the case of pursuits that are lawful, and indeed necessary. To the Protestant this view suggests a dualistic theory, and seems hard to reconcile with the Divine origin and authority of civil government—in which, nevertheless, the Brethren very heartily believed. They believed, too, that the existing secular order—the administration of government, of justice, and so forth—was just as much divinely ordained as the Church itself. Christians ought, they said, to be very thankful for it, and to yield it a perfectly passive support; but they should remember that in its administration Christians, as a heavenly people, possessing a heavenly calling and citizenship, could not lawfully share.

The theory of course could not be thoroughly carried out. Some few municipal offices may be imposed on a citizen without his consent, and he may be compelled to serve on a jury. In these cases the Brethren held it not lawful to resist the civil power, from which it may be inferred that they considered only the *voluntary* discharge of civil functions to be sinful. It is a pity that the views of the early Quakers as to the lawfulness of oaths were not equally accommodating. Still, so far as the law left them a bare choice, they avoided all the offices upon which society depends for its maintenance. They filled no civil or municipal office, if they could help it; they never sat in Parliament, and if by some rare self-assertion one of them voted at an election, he was regarded with the most intense disapproval.

There is very little pure theory anywhere, and it is probable that the Brethren were largely influenced by what they saw, or thought they saw, of Christians almost secularised by absorption in political aims. Granting, as we surely must, that this is a real danger, it may be doubted if the Brethren took the best measures to heal the disorder. Total abstinence is not the universal panacea. It may be the best cure for drunkenness, but surely not for gluttony. But to the Brethren their course was clear, as being derived from the essence of the Christian calling; and therefore, in the true spirit of the earliest and most genuine disciples of monachism, they fled into the desert to establish a huge cenobitic fraternity, to pass their days in holy contemplation, and to await the Second Advent.

A very little reflexion suffices to show how complete an innovation such principles in the midst of Protestantism involved. The Quakers, to whom in mode of worship, simplicity of dress, and general unworldliness, the Brethren bore a strong resemblance, seized on the first opportunity of playing their part in political life, and have played it to this day strenuously, to the unquestionable profit of the nation. The same may be said of numerous representatives of all the dissenting bodies, and certainly not less of the Evangelical Church party, to which the Brethren have always been in the habit of considering themselves the most nearly akin. It is strange indeed to think what companions the Brethren threw over in choosing their social part. Sir John Eliot, dying in the Tower for liberties on which the cherished liberties of the Brethren were surely founded, manifesting a spirit as devout as their own in a conversation as edifying, was, according to them, the victim of a gigantic, pitiable delusion in supposing that he could serve God in the Parliamentary activities of his life, or the slow martyrdom of his death. They would have allowed that if his desire to serve God was genuine it would not fail of a gracious recognition from Him; but the political exertions that seem to others to have been evidently blessed by God for the preservation and extension of the Gospel, the Brethren believe to have been under His ban.

Again, the heroic Parliamentary struggle of the “Clapham sect”—of William Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay and their friends—which resulted in the suppression of the slave trade, and ultimately of slavery itself beneath the British flag, was, according to the Brethren, an unholy work. They would have pronounced it “morally excellent,” for they were in full sympathy with its objects, but they thought it work that God had reserved for unclean hands; it was not for heavenly citizens to pass righteous laws for earth. This is all the more

striking, because the inner and private life of the Clapham sect was extremely like that of the Brethren. There was the same social austerity, tempered by the same domestic geniality, the same abstention from most of the public amusements, the same discountenance of novel-reading, the same genuine love of literary culture.¹²⁷

Nor was it merely the employment of political agencies that the Brethren condemned. They held that it was not lawful for Christians to unite in the most strictly non-political efforts to promote popular liberties, the emancipation of slaves, the suppression of drunkenness. These things were as the dead burying their dead; it was for the Christian to preach the Gospel. Philanthropy generally was under their ban. It aimed, as they held, at “making the world better,” and this apparently innocent object was their special bugbear. Of course no body of humane men could carry out such principles consistently; but the Brethren at least avoided countenancing anything that could be called a philanthropic movement. I have heard as good a man¹²⁸ as ever adorned their ranks distinguish between one of their leaders and a well-known philanthropist bearing the same name, but belonging (if I remember rightly) to the Society of Friends in the following extraordinary terms: “Oh, no! not that Mr. X., quite another; a very spiritually-minded man—not at all a philanthropist”. If it were pointed out to them that if all Christians had been of their mind the great bulk of the most terrible wrongs would have remained unredressed, the great bulk of temporal misery unalleviated, they replied that with consequences they had nothing to do; it was merely theirs to obey. Of the real existence of a mandate requiring their peculiar line of conduct they simply had not the shadow of a doubt.

The Brethren nevertheless inferred from the example of St. Paul that a Christian has the right to insist on the privileges allowed him by the political order under which he lives. They appear to have held that the apostolic example entitled them to claim their political privileges and to shirk their political duties; or, to put it otherwise, that the possession of a citizenship in heaven precludes the possession of a citizenship on earth, in respect only of the responsibilities of the earthly citizenship, and not of its advantages.

The same spirit of seclusion determined the views of the Brethren as to the callings that a Christian might lawfully practise. The various trades, except under peculiar circumstances, were admissible; but of the professions, those of doctor and dentist stood almost alone as perfectly lawful. The bar and the services were absolutely banned, and barristers and military and naval officers generally abandoned their careers if they joined the Brethren. Brethren might be solicitors if they confined themselves to conveyancing; some ventured to plead in courts, but they were considered “unspiritual”. The Brethren were not without a professional ministry, but it was exercised under conditions that were liable to be insupportable to a self-respecting man, unless he were buoyed up by no common vigour of faith. Consequently the position of the cultivated youth of Darbyism was not altogether an enviable one. Unless their bent was scientific, a professional career was scarcely possible. On the other hand, the number of doctors amongst them was remarkable.

The reference just made to the existence of a kind of professional ministry among the Brethren suggests one of the most curious topics connected with their institutions. For a minister of the Gospel to receive a salary, or even to derive an income from any specified

¹²⁷ This last was a real mark at least of a certain circle of Brethrenism as I knew it. Darby’s early principles should have led, it would seem, to a different result. He may have modified his views; but I am disposed to attribute a good deal to the broadening influence of Mr. Kelly, whose abilities made him, while he was still comparatively young, an easy second to Darby amongst the Exclusive Brethren.

¹²⁸ It is an interesting circumstance that he was an Open Brother.

sources, was abomination to them. The minister of the Gospel, they allowed, was undoubtedly entitled to live by the Gospel; indeed, it was only by an act of indulgence to the Church that many did not do so; but the minister must “trust the Lord simply for his support”. This principle was embraced by the Brethren with characteristic absence of misgiving. It was accepted as Divine, and hard things were apt to be said of the salaried ministers of other denominations.

It is interesting to glance at the practical working of this principle. In the first place, it was impossible not to see that the institution based upon it was not a *genuine* thing at all. According to the theory, every Brother set apart for the Gospel, unless he had private means, advanced an implicit claim to trust the Lord in a peculiar sense for his daily support. Yet it would indeed be hard to believe that more than a very small minority of them actually did it. Some were practically supported by one or two opulent “brothers”; others manifestly depended on their acceptability with a certain section of the community, with which it was of course commonly said that they were more loth to fall out than was quite consistent with their independence; some even were considered to have become onhangers and parasites, inflicting long visits on benevolent patrons who were too good-natured to refuse them hospitality, but who were wont to retail anecdotes very little complimentary to their unwelcome guests. The result was that “living by faith,” as it was called, became a by-word even amongst many perfectly orthodox Brethren. Tales were familiarly told and laughed over of men who, having failed in everything else, had taken to “faith,” and had succeeded in it so well as eventually to retire upon it. Such tales were of course mere satire, but they indicate the low repute into which the institution had fallen even within the sect of which it forms so prominent a feature.

This is the more remarkable because of the exceedingly high character of many of this ministerial band—men who lacked no recommendation, and who in respect of the great prerequisite of faith were not unworthy to stand by the side of the illustrious head of their school, George Müller. There were several such, of whom the most flippant observer would never have spoken without reverence. The scandals, however, were the inevitable outcome of the system. To require of every man who devotes himself exclusively to the ministry that he should possess a considerable measure of George Müller’s faith can only produce one result. Highly suitable men, who deal too strictly with their consciences to pretend to a faith that they do not possess, will be excluded. On the other hand, a great amount of spurious faith is bound to be manufactured, and light-minded or feebly enthusiastic men will press in on the strength of it.

It made matters worse that in the nature of things there could be no call to the ministry except the inward personal call of the aspirant.¹²⁹ The community was thus liable to find itself saddled with the support of a preacher whose call not a single member of it believed in. A case in point came under my own notice. A young mechanic, of no great gifts as a preacher, called upon a friend of mine, widely known for his liberal support of ministering brothers, to tell him that he (the mechanic) was convinced that he ought to give up his trade and addict himself to the ministry of the Gospel. My friend intimated that he was himself far from sharing his visitor’s conviction. But, as might be expected, the inward prompting was acted upon, and my friend, notwithstanding his disapproval of the whole proceeding, was accustomed to send money to the self-appointed minister, on the plea, “We can’t let the poor man starve”. Yet I presume that the young man flattered himself that he lived in simple dependence on the Lord for daily support.

Another great evil attending the institution was that the coarser-minded members of the community could not see, even in the case of men of approved qualifications, that “faith-

¹²⁹ It is well known that no “minister” among the Brethren was ever called to a local charge, and most of them were actually itinerant to a greater or less extent.

brethren” lived by anything but charity. They therefore felt free to criticise every item of expenditure within the preacher’s family, as if he had not as truly earned his pittance as they their own probably far ampler livelihood. It may be imagined in how degrading a position men who had made large social sacrifices to unite themselves with the Brethren might occasionally find themselves placed.

It is surely uncandid to deny that every scheme ever yet devised for ministerial support is encumbered with more or less serious disadvantages; but it is necessary to record the verdict of experience that deliverance from them is not to be sought along the lines of the well-meant, but eminently ill-conceived, procedure of the Plymouth Brethren.

It will be remembered, of course, that the great bulk of the ministry amongst the Brethren was discharged by men who had no need of any remuneration for their services. This is, indeed, in some points of view, the great outstanding feature of the movement, and must never for a moment be lost sight of when we are considering the institutions of Brethrenism.

Thus secluded from the world, it was of necessity that Darbyism should form a world of its own; and the movement being one of no common power and energy, it formed a remarkably complete one. Indeed, there is nothing more amazing among the phenomena of Brethrenism than its absolute self-sufficingness. It bounded the vision of all its genuine adherents; it comprised within itself all their interests. In the doings of other Christians they seldom evinced more than a languid and transitory interest. Spurgeon and his triumphs were hardly ever alluded to, unless it were to relate how interested he had at one time been in Brethrenism. The great tide of the modern missionary movement rolled by, and left them almost untouched. If a youth amongst them were fired with a zeal to evangelise the heathen of China, his friends would lament that he could not rather occupy himself with the study of Darby’s Synopsis. As for the doings of the great world, it may suffice to say that it was considered more or less a mark of lack of spirituality to read the newspaper.

Socially, they were equally self-contained. They almost limited their friendships to members of their own communion, and to those whom they looked upon as possible recruits. Marriage outside their own ranks was rare, and was deemed blameworthy. Any one who withdrew from them after spending some years in their midst would be pretty sure to lose all his friends at a stroke. If a member of one of their families, as he grew up, abandoned Darbyism, the interest of his relatives in his doings became languid, except in respect of their hope of his restoration.

But within their own limits they provided all the interests that their genuine adherents required. Beyond their mutual entertainment, they desired no social pleasures; beyond the honours that their own community could bestow, they had no ambition. And it must be said that if they seemed on the one hand, to narrow their friendships, on the other they widened them indefinitely. The Brethren were spread over the face of the earth, and wherever one Brother was, there was the friend of any other. To this day, a father whose son is summoned on business to Shanghai, to Brisbane, to San Francisco, ascertains the name of a leading Brother there, and a letter precedes the traveller to his destination. On his arrival, the young man will be met at the landing-stage, or on board ship, by the Brother to whom the introduction was addressed, and in all probability will be invited to make a long stay under his roof. We may link with this the interesting fact that the Brethren entirely keep their own poor, and must then admit that they have copied the primitive in a way that puts to the blush a great party that has the primitive constantly in its mouth; and that if the Plymouth Brother, even in the day of his decadence, is still a power to be reckoned with, he has earned his continuance, in the teeth of many faults that might well have been thought certain to cut his career short, by the zealous practice of some very solid virtues.

It is the same thing with their ambitions. Once the great world beyond was fairly shut out, Brethrenism really offered a *carrière ouverte aux talents*; and, above all, it offered a full ministerial career to capable men who were unwilling or unable to make the ministry their profession. And the great world was very thoroughly shut out by the genuine Darbyite. The world might not value his treasure; but the least insight into it was more than the world could buy from him. The contempt with which others too often looked down upon the Brethren contained a suspicious alloy of anger; but the contempt with which the Brethren too often looked down upon others was serene and perfect. They were dogmatists in the last degree of dogmatism. If they described members of other denominations whose excellence they did not question as “having very little light,” or even as “being very ignorant,” nothing insolent or offensive was usually intended. To them it was the most simple and natural statement of a palpable fact.

That Darbyism shared in the weakness inherent in all monasticism, I have made no effort to conceal. It is therefore the more incumbent upon me to state that it strikingly exemplified monastic virtues. Our generation plumes itself on the liberality that has done tardy justice to the strong side of the earlier monachism, and it would be grossly uncandid to withhold a similar tribute from Darbyism. Indeed it is a simple duty to assert that the virtues of the contemplative life—its elevated standard of personal dignity, its devoutness of tone, its refinement of feeling, its tranquil saintliness—can seldom have been more strikingly exemplified.¹³⁰ It is not merely that the Brethren have had, at all events in the days that are gone by, more than their share of saintly lives, but also that the general level of devoutness has been, after making every deduction, exceptionally high.

The intensely Biblical element that has been spoken of as underlying the ecclesiastical life of Darbyism equally underlay its social life. The minds of the Brethren were saturated with the words of Scripture; they talked of them when they sat in their houses and when they walked by the way, when they lay down and when they rose up. Conversational Bible-readings were their principal recreation, and in the older days an invitation to tea might almost be taken to imply an invitation to social Bible study. Their leaders, and to a great extent many who scarcely aspired to such a title, were thoroughly drilled in Darby’s comprehensive system of divinity, and were prepared to expound without notice any passage on which light might be desired. Consequently, the equally prudent and courteous practice was common of leaving the choice of a subject for a conversational reading to any enquirer or neophyte who might be present. The result of this system was the formation of “a church of theologians”. In the present day, knowledge has greatly decayed, without, unhappily, any corresponding decay of self-confidence; yet even now, measured by the attainments of their neighbours, the knowledge of the letter of Scripture amongst the Brethren is more than respectable.

I am confident that I do not overstate the case for the Brethren; and surely nothing could be more futile than to seek to account for a movement that has exercised an influence so deep and wide, without the frankest acknowledgment that it must have contained elements of high excellence. The problem is to explain how a system, labouring under such great and palpable drawbacks, has for seventy years been draining the churches of a not contemptible proportion of their most spiritual members; and how a system, divided and subdivided in a

¹³⁰ I painfully feel that this statement, confidently as I make it, may seem to be contradicted by much that I have already recorded, and by much that I have yet to record. But no one can make even a beginning in understanding Brethrenism who does not keep in mind that the system as it may be observed from without, and the system as it can only be seen from within, are two totally different things. The present writer knew it from within before he studied its history, and is perhaps on that account the more able to judge its virtues fairly.

series of schisms equally trivial in their causes and embittered in their spirit,—a system presenting a spectacle of sometimes five or six meetings without intercommunion in one moderate-sized town,—is even to this day a force to be reckoned with among the churches. To refuse to acknowledge the virtues of Brethrenism is merely to shirk the problem, or to constitute it insoluble.

In Darbyism itself—in this respect probably representing the original traditions of Brethrenism—the standard of good breeding was very high. It was often remarked how refining an influence association with the Darbyites exercised upon people of an uncultured class. It is a very imperfect explanation to say that the aristocratic infusion was very strong, and gave colour to the whole, although that is true as far as it goes. It was rather a question of the well-known dignifying influence of Calvinism, developed under somewhat new conditions. The heavenly exaltation of the saints in Christ was the constant topic of the conversation of the Brethren, as it was also the sublime theme that ennobled their hymns. Christians have in general been content perhaps to treat this doctrine with a somewhat distant respect; in Darbyism it was the most simple and familiar of truths, and the centre of earthly life. Every individual Darbyite became free of a great esoteric community habituated to this sublime contemplation. Sometimes—and not seldom—it produced its proper fruit of a holy life; almost always it produced the dignified bearing of those who apprehended, with a clearness that has seldom been a common possession in the Church of Christ, that they were called to walk in the world in the conscious dignity of such a superhuman exaltation.

No doubt the salt soon lost its savour. The lofty sentiment only too readily and too frequently degenerated into a mere supercilious contempt for others. But the calm assurance of superiority, whether well or ill founded, seldom fails to ensure a corresponding bearing; and even in their decadence the Brethren have not altogether ceased to exhibit the traditional bearing of happier days.

This loftiness of tone was very happily felt in the severe decorum of many of the customs of Darbyism. A successful sermon was never, within my experience, followed by a flood of fulsome adulation. Social meetings were not degraded by flattery heaped upon the local leaders, or by the attempt to entertain the people with trivial jests. The tastes of the community and its canons of good breeding put such proceedings out of the question.

It can scarcely be necessary to say much of one particular in which the conduct of the Brethren has often been severely assailed. No one can deny that their numerous schisms have been carried through with incredible bitterness and scurrility. In so far as this bore on their social life, a word or two may be added. A suspension of ecclesiastical relations was generally followed by a suspension of social intercourse. It was fortunate if persons closely related to each other were able in some measure to maintain the common intercourse of kinship. Men otherwise amiable and large-hearted would refuse to shake hands with old and valued friends who had differed from them on some of the numerous and intricate questions that commonly formed the basis of their divisions. Somewhat similarly, the spiritual relations of a convert to Darbyism with the Christian friends of his earlier days were usually cold and scanty. The disunion thus introduced into families has possibly contributed at least as much as anything else to the unpopularity of the movement, and it is a particular in which, more than in most others, those who wish the Brethren well find it difficult to allege much in extenuation.

As was only to be expected in a quasi-monastic fraternity, the conception of individual rights was very feeble. No premium was set on independence, and any man whose views came to vary much from the prevalent standard had to keep his own counsel, unless he were prepared to find his place too hot to hold him. The excitement of wielding the thunders of the Church made the practice of excommunication a perilous passion with many. Heresy-hunting developed an inquisitorial watchfulness. For some erroneous idea, a certain Brother in a provincial town was excommunicated. Some relatives of his who lived in a town at some

distance, and whose names had not appeared in the case, were visited and interrogated by some of the judges *on the chance of their faith having been tampered with*. This truly papal disregard of personal rights was one of the most perilous and offensive features of the whole movement.

XIV The Dissolution Of Darbyism—Formation Of Mr. Kelly's Party

IT was the wont of Darby's sagacious eye to survey the whole field of action, and his indefatigable energy enabled him to bring the power of his personal presence to bear wherever it might be needed, even to the ends of the earth. He began a fruitful work in Germany at Elberfeld in 1854. In 1871 he added Italy to his spheres of labour, and his *Meditations* on the Acts were composed in Italian. A long campaign in the United States began in 1872. The year 1875 found him in New Zealand. For a man born just within the previous century these exertions were surely prodigious. In 1878 he was at Pau, engaged still in translation work.¹³¹

On New Year's Day, 1879, Wigram died. He was in his seventy-fifth year. Those who loved him (and they were many) were wont to say, in the months and years that followed, that he, too, had been taken away from the evil to come; for Darbyism was just entering on its long agony of dissolution. Perhaps no leading member of the community left behind him a higher reputation for personal sanctity, unless it were William Trotter. How to reconcile this with many of the plain facts of his history is not at all clear. Doubtless he was constitutionally unfit for controversy, and it was a world of pities that, for the sake of the leader whom he loved "not wisely but too well," he should so often have rushed into it. Yet it is simple justice to him to say that in all his polemical pamphlets, bad as they are, there is never a sign that the writer is fighting for his own hand; nor yet of that assumption of superior spirituality from which Darby's controversial writings are by no means free.¹³² Wigram's character was marked by a fine simplicity; with a singular dignity of bearing he combined a perfect ease and geniality, and whatever his errors may have been it is not to be questioned that he was a devout and earnest man.

Though anxious minds had their forebodings, Darbyism at the time of its downfall presented a successful and flourishing appearance. In 1875 a rather absurd puff appeared on behalf of the Brethren, under the title of *Literature and Mission of the so-called Plymouth Brethren*. It came from the pen of a Scotch minister, who soon after took the only consistent step, and formally associated himself with the objects of his panegyric. This tract contains the following tribute to the prosperity of the sect. "Plymouthism in ruins!" says a foe. Why, they are perhaps increasing even more solidly than any; for their numbers are being constantly augmented by drafts of the most spiritual, intelligent, conscientious, decided, and devoted, from all the churches: a startling fact, especially for ministers."

A good deal must be allowed for the dithyrambic style of this writer; but when all deductions are made there is probably a considerable residuum of truth in his statement. Indeed the undoubted power of Darbyism was often a trial to the rival section of the Brethren. John Howard suggested that the "power" might come from a most sinister source; but we are not reduced to this expedient. The strength of Darby's party lay in its homogeneity. The universal pressure of one iron will ensured a common action. The universal inspiration of one imperial spirit produced a common aim and a common enthusiasm. Discipline was all-pervading and resistless. A party thus equipped for action, and exactly knowing what it wanted, might well be strong; while the Open section was languishing under conditions in almost every respect the exact opposite. But with all this appearance of vigour, Darbyism was

¹³¹ Schaff's *Herzog*, Art. J. N. Darby.

¹³² It is some comfort to learn, on the authority of "Philadelphos," that both Wigram and Darby expressed, about 1871, regret for some of the violent language they had used. "Philadelphos" unfortunately gives us no clue to the amount of this regret, nor to the ground that it covered; but the bare fact that anything was done in this direction is a cause of thankfulness. See *The Basis of Peace*, p. 26.

decaying within. It could not long outlast its chief and was very likely to perish before him. In the end, no blow from without struck it down; no insidious foe undermined it. It went to pieces in virtue of its own inherent and self-acting forces of decay; and when this is the case with any community, its fall may claim sympathy, but not regret.

The principal precursor of ruin was the formation of a party holding tenets that passed under the cant name of New-lumpism. This party professed to bewail the increasing worldliness of the Darbyites. It regarded the separation of the self-styled “spiritual” from the unspiritual mass, and the formation of a communion restricted to persons who gave evidence of sufficient attainments in spirituality, as the only hope for the “testimony” originally entrusted to the Brethren. The new evangelism that had remarkably repleted the ranks of Brethrenism was regarded with profound disfavour by this party, which dreaded nothing so much as the entrance of young converts imperfectly indoctrinated in the principles of Plymouth. This was a curious, but a highly instructive sequel to the movement of fifty years earlier. Darby opposed New-lumpism with all his strength; yet it is very doubtful whether its leaders did not to a great extent make him their catspaw, and involve him before he was aware in the most colossal blunder (I do not say the greatest fault) of his whole life.

It is the old story. A very insignificant spark fell into the powder magazine, and Darbyism exploded in fragments. The meeting at Ryde had long been an eyesore to the Exclusive Brethren, and for many years past it had enjoyed the good word of nobody. Recently, some London leaders with an inclination to the hyperspiritual school had “taken up” the objectionable “gathering”—with a view to making party capital out of it, as their opponents thought. In March, 1877, the majority of the meeting seceded, on the refusal of the minority to visit the contractor of an illegal marriage with excommunication. As the offence was one of many years’ standing, and the marriage was not within universally forbidden degrees, the case for extreme measures was not exactly clear. But the meeting had a bad name for laxity, and a large number of Brethren sympathised with the seceders. No second communion was formed, the party that had withdrawn assembling for prayer, but not observing the Lord’s Supper. Meanwhile the minority (known as the Temperance Hall Meeting) accused Mr. Kelly, who was in no good odour with the New-lump school, of having fomented division. Mr. Kelly’s convictions favoured severity in dealing with illegal marriages, and this lent colour to the imputation.

In the autumn of 1878 a young clergyman of the name of Finch, resident in Ryde, left the communion of the Church of England, and was received into the fellowship of the Darbyites in London. It seems that he made it plain that he would not feel at liberty, on his return to Ryde, to associate himself with the Temperance Hall meeting; but this did not hinder his reception. He began the observance of the Lord’s Supper in his own house, with some that had followed him out of the Established Church. In February Dr. Cronin visited Ryde, and took the communion with Mr. Finch at this private meeting. He repeated the act a few weeks later, and by his advice the meeting was transferred to the Masonic Hall.

Cronin had no thought of making a secret of what he had done. On his return to London from the second visit, he reported his action to his own meeting in Kennington, and he wrote to Darby to the same effect. Darby’s reply should be carefully noted. “I only think you have deceived yourself as to the effect of the step. I shall be delighted if I am wrong. . . . I cannot say that your letter made me unhappy.”

Darby was right. The opposition in London lost no time in declaring itself and within ten days of Cronin’s report to his own meeting forty or fifty brothers there found it advisable to disown all association with the new meeting at Ryde. They reported this act to the Central Meeting at London Bridge. It was not sufficient. A clamour was raised for the excision of the venerable offender, and the Kennington Brethren were given to understand that if they screened Dr. Cronin they would only share in his ruin.

The difficulty is to distinguish in principle between Cronin's act at Ryde and Darby's secession from Ebrington Street thirty-four years earlier. Both steps were taken on purely individual responsibility. Neither carried at the time the approval of the community at large. The Ryde meeting was in much more serious and general disrepute than the Plymouth meeting had been, and Darby himself with characteristic emphasis had spoken of it as "rotten" for twenty years.¹³³ In some respects the advantage in the comparison rests clearly with Cronin; for he found a protesting meeting already in existence, whereas Darby took the responsibility of setting the dissident movement on foot. Yet Darby described his own act as a return, "if alone, into the essential and infallible unity of the Body";¹³⁴ but came ere long to treat Cronin's as a crime.

The opposition to Cronin proceeded mainly from some leading Brethren who have been referred to as lending their countenance to the Temperance Hall meeting. The controversy was already sufficiently exasperated, when a furious letter from Darby arrived in London and put pacification almost out of the question. This letter, technically known as "the letter from Pau," is conceived in its author's worst style. "The course of Dr. Cronin," it says, "has been clandestine, untruthful, dishonest, and profane." The course was clandestine, because Cronin had visited Ryde without giving notice of his intentions; for it could scarcely be said that he had kept quiet about it after it was done. It was untruthful, because Cronin had gone "on the ground that it was notorious that there was no meeting at Ryde; whereas it was notorious that many, and very many, brethren quite as upright as himself, held distinctly that there was;" and it was profane, because the guidance of the Holy Ghost was claimed by the Doctor for such a nefarious transaction.

This opportune letter was circulated with tremendous energy by the leaders of the Priory meeting¹³⁵—a meeting always distinguished by its relentless resort to "discipline" for the enforcement of the highest ecclesiastical pretensions of the sect. These men, who thus used the name of their venerable chief for the prosecution of their own purposes, might have tried rather to save the credit of his grey hairs—a task that they have made it hopeless for any one else to undertake. They did not lack admonition. Mr. John Jewell Penstone¹³⁶ printed an open letter on May 1, a few days after the receipt of Mr. Darby's. "I do not," he says, "criticise in detail the letter; it needs no detailed criticism from any one. Suffice it to say, that the language used in it is as contrary to the laws of the land we live in as it is to the usage and order of the Church of the living God, and surely contrary to His Holy Word. Do, I beseech

¹³³ This was the common report. Dr. Cronin asked him just before his departure for Pau to visit the meeting and judge of its state. Darby replied, "Never will I put my foot into that unclean place. I have known it for twenty years to be a defiled meeting." This rests on Dr. Cronin's testimony. *An Examination of the Principles and Practice of the Park Street Confederacy*, by G. Kenwick, p. 14.

¹³⁴ This expression occurs in a tract that Darby wrote (in October, 1846) entitled *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity*. J. E. Howard's sarcastic comment is worth quoting. "What sort of answer have we to 'the grand question of the nineteenth century—What is the Church?' The Church is the pearl, and the pearl has many incrustations, and when these incrustations are *all* stripped off we have Mr. Darby '*alone*, in the essential and infallible unity of the body,' a unity which certainly cannot be broken unless it should please this gentleman some time to quarrel with himself; as it was said of one of Cromwell's captains that if John Lillburn were left alone in the world John would quarrel with Lillburn, and Lillburn with John."

¹³⁵ By this time removed to Park Street, Islington, and sometimes known by the old name, sometimes by the new.

¹³⁶ Mr. Penstone, who at the time of writing is connected with Open Brethren, is one of the oldest living representatives of Brethrenism. He was first associated with it in Little Portland Street, at least as early as 1839. The letter referred to in the text is dated from Stanford-in-the-Vale, Berks, which was his home for many years.

you, immediately entreat our beloved and honoured Brother, J. N. D. *to withdraw* this dreadful and most humbling document.”

The extraordinary change in Darby’s tone towards Cronin gave rise to painful suspicions. The sudden wreckage of an uninterrupted friendship of more than fifty years undoubtedly called for explanation, and many found it in an unworthy jealousy of Mr. Kelly that had long been imputed to Darby even by some of his most fervent admirers.¹³⁷ It was now alleged that in the interval between the friendly reply to Cronin and the letter from Pau, some officious friends in London had written to Darby informing him that Mr. Kelly (whose hostility to the claims of the original meeting at Ryde was well known) had been the instigator of the Doctor’s action. This at least is certain, that Darby afterwards took Mr. Kelly’s alleged interference for granted; as will appear almost immediately.

It is a great pity that Darby’s wild charges were taken quite seriously by many of his adherents. He was not much deceived by them himself; at all events in his calmer moments. But others used expressions, even after Cronin’s death in the beginning of 1882, that showed that the purely conventional character of the accusations was not understood by them. One said, “He passed away with sin unconfessed on his conscience”; another, “That wicked old man has gone to his account”. Now whether Darby had merely written under strong excitement, and was afterwards withheld by false shame from acknowledging his fault,—or whether he had instinctively fallen back on moral charges as a much needed makeweight, and had accordingly elaborated them in so artificial a manner,—I cannot say; possibly he could hardly have said himself. But the following facts are certain: Darby wrote to Cronin on January 5, 1881,—“If you could give up breaking bread,” (*i.e.* in private), “and own you were wrong in the step you took as to Ryde I should be the first to propose and rejoice in your restoration [to ‘fellowship’] . . . I believe it was false confidence in yourself led you to the false step you took buoyed up by others, not doubting the unhappy influence exercised over you by others.”

That is to say, the charges against Cronin’s moral character were to be tacitly dropped! Cronin’s first reply declined Darby’s terms, and refused to consent to his being “the holder of the keys”. The letter is chiefly important for the solemn declaration it contains that neither Mr. Kelly nor any one else had known anything of the writer’s purpose before the hapless visit to Ryde; but in a further reply Cronin explicitly asks if Darby were prepared to withdraw the “immoral charges”.

Darby replied in a stiff note, in which he attempted no answer whatever to this very natural question. Dr. Cronin’s rejoinder, drawing attention to the omission, apparently closed the correspondence.¹³⁸

Though the letter from Pau placed the Kennington Brethren at a great disadvantage, their reluctance to extreme measures was not altogether overcome by it. At a church meeting held on the 28th of April, it was resolved that “the assembly” had “no fellowship with Dr. Cronin’s act in Ryde,” or “with the Masonic Hall meeting,” and that this resolution was

¹³⁷ If this were mere idle conjecture, I should have been silent about it; but I know it to have been strongly believed in by people who could scarcely see any other flaw in Mr. Darby’s character; and I have in my possession a copy of a letter from Cronin to Darby, in which the writer mentions that he has often asked his correspondent for an explanation of this feeling. There is a good deal of corroborative evidence; and, apart from all this, the charge was so freely brought at the time of which I am writing, that even the most summary account would be organically incomplete without a reference to it.

¹³⁸ I do not know how this correspondence first became public; but as it was freely used in print twenty years ago, I betray no confidence in using it now. The copy in my possession is in a most trustworthy hand, and I have reason to think it was taken from the original.

tantamount to a censure on Dr. Cronin. The resolution was sent to London Bridge and refused, on the ground that it had not been written out during the meeting. A more formal and explicit censure was then adopted at Kennington; but it also was refused at London Bridge, the plea this time being that four local Brethren had protested against it as insufficient.

The monotonous course of this conflict was broken during May by a most extraordinary occurrence. Darby wrote a second circular, to the same general effect as the former, but containing the following postscript:—

“Since this was written, and so far ready to be sent off, I hear that Kennington has blamed Dr. Cronin, and rejects communion with the Masonic Hall in Ryde. I look upon this as a gracious intervention of God, and thank Him with all my heart for it, but the above was not written for Kennington particularly, but for the matter itself, as concerning all the Brethren, the glory of God itself, so that I still send it.”

The “extreme party” actually decided to circulate this letter *without the postscript*. The circumstances having leaked out, a stormy scene ensued at London Bridge.

“At the London Bridge meeting on May 10, the subject was brought up, and in substance referred to in the following terms. A brother rose and said: ‘It is rumoured that there was a postscript to this second letter, bearing on Kennington’s rebuking Dr. Cronin. I wish to ask, Does any one here know anything about it?’ There was a long pause and no reply. Another said, ‘I heard the letter was sent to a Wimbledon brother’. Instantly Mr. X¹³⁹ said, ‘I have received no letter with such a postscript from Mr. Darby, and if Mr. Y. had, I should have heard of it’. The first brother looking direct to Mr. Z. said: ‘Mr. Z., do you know anything of such a postscript?’

“Mr. Z.— ‘Well, yes, there was a postscript.’

“ ‘Would you kindly read it?’

“ ‘I have not got it with me.’

“ ‘Can you give the substance of it?’

“ ‘No, I cannot.’

“ ‘Why was it not printed?’

“ ‘Because it contained a misstatement as to a fact, and because it did not satisfy a brother’s conscience.’ Amid much sensation it was said, ‘We ought to have it: it might satisfy our consciences.’

“ ‘Did it express Mr. Darby’s satisfaction at what Kennington had done?’

“ ‘No, it did not.’

“ ‘If we had this postscript, would it help us in this matter in any way?’

“ ‘No, it would not. I assure you, upon my word, it would not.’ ”

The incident affords a highly instructive illustration of the length to which men will go in the interests of the Church.

Things still moved slowly at Kennington. Considering the pressure brought to bear on that unhappy meeting, the protracted delay is a high tribute to the strength of the attachment subsisting between Dr. Cronin and his fellow-worshippers. But it was a struggle against fate. The delinquent had once and again promised not to repeat his offence; he had agreed to abstain for the time being from the communion; but all compromises were rejected by the inexorable Central Meeting. The “act of independency” called for “judgment”. At last,

¹³⁹ The book from which this quotation is taken (*Epitome of the Ramsgate Sorrow*, p. 8) gives the real initials, which were readily identifiable at the time. I prefer to give no clue to the identity of the persons involved.

Kennington submitted to the hard necessity. On the 19th of August, 1879, a resolution was taken, and transmitted to the Central Meeting, just transferred to Cheapside. It bore the odd direction, "To the Assembly of God in London," and ran as follows:—

"After long waiting and prayerful consideration, and the failure of all previous action by the assembly, and admonition, we are sorrowfully compelled to declare Dr. Edward Cronin out of fellowship, until he judges and owns the wrongness of his act at Ryde. Eph. iv. 3."

A statement follows that "Colonel Langford and five others objected" to the resolution. If I could recover the names of the gallant Colonel's five allies I would gladly publish them with all honour.

The same evening, at the Priory, a small company decided to disown fellowship with Cronin for his "schismatic act"; with Kennington, for its "refusal to judge" Cronin; with all "assemblies" that would not follow suit; and finally with the Central Meeting itself—presumably for its failure to hurry things on sufficiently fast.

The next week, Darby, who had been in the North, returned to London, and brought some sort of order into chaos. He quashed the resolution of the Priory, and compelled the acceptance of the Kennington act of excommunication against Cronin. Some prospect of peace, on the basis of making Cronin the scapegoat, now appeared, and men began to breathe more freely.

The respite was short. On the very day of the Kennington act of excision, and of the wholesale excommunication by the Priory, the meeting in Ramsgate met to discuss the same burning question. Ramsgate was a stronghold of "New-lumpism," and the great majority of the meeting were prepared to go all lengths with the Priory. The meeting was adjourned to the 22nd, by which time the Priory "bull" (as the moderate party called it) had come to hand. It was suggested that the terms of the resolution, apart from the clause disowning the Central Meeting, should be adopted by the Ramsgate Brethren. Only four Brothers dissented. As the four were immovable, all the rest withdrew one by one, saying, "I leave this assembly as now constituted". In the end, there were two rival meetings in Ramsgate, each claiming to be the one only "expression" of the Church of God in the town. They were distinguished by the names of their several places of meeting, the seceders being known as Guildford Hall, and the others as Abbott's Hill.

In very few quarrels is it more impossible to feel the slightest enthusiasm for either party. The manifestoes of both alike are destitute of any trace of a liberal sentiment or an enlarged view of the situation. It was even urged in the defence of Abbott's Hill that it had been as severe as the seceding party in condemnation of Dr. Cronin, deeming that he ought to have been excluded at Kennington on his first return from Ryde. Indeed the demoralising effect of a long subjection of heart and conscience to an irresponsible and oppressive tribunal was for a long time painfully evident everywhere.

The Ramsgate question soon became the absorbing topic of the hour in London. The seceders had many sympathisers; but there were not a few who were offended by the frivolity of the separation, and who mistrusted the ambition for a "clean ground" and a "new lump". Unity, though all had shared in reducing it to a name, not to say to a byword, was still the ideal of many. Moreover, Darby's rejection of the projects of the seceders was peremptory in the extreme. In reply to a letter from their leader, dated September 18, 1880, he wrote, "I have not remarked those who have taken the ground you do have advanced in holiness and spirituality, rather the contrary, and I am satisfied it is the path of pretension, not of faith Were the movement of those you join yourself to, to break up Brethren, your party would I think be the very last I should be with." Nor was this all. In the previous July Darby had written from Dublin with evident reference to the common cry that division was the only

cure,— “As regards division, I am as decided as possible. . . . I have long felt that this party which assumes to be the godly one is the one to be feared. . . . I should add that Stoney wrote in reply, that he was as far from division as I could suppose; but I do not think he knows what he is doing.”¹⁴⁰

Darby was thus at feud with both parties; for on the other side were those who not only considered the moral charges against Cronin preposterous, but who held that his ecclesiastical delinquency had been greatly overstated. They would have said, “An ecclesiastical irregularity,” where others cried, “Schism”. In short, a party was forming that had only partially imbibed the extreme High Church principles of the sect. This party really believed that the Bethesda discipline was imperatively called for in the interests of sound doctrine; and they could view without horror Cronin’s act of communion at an irregular “table” that had not the remotest ecclesiastical relations with Bethesda.

Darby, on the contrary, saw that the very existence of his party was bound up with the suppression of such irregular communion. He had, it is true, at first viewed Cronin’s proceedings without alarm; partly, because Cronin, if he stood alone, was not a man to carry much weight; partly, because Darby himself would very likely not have minded replacing Temperance Hall by Masonic Hall. Ultimately, he was restrained from this by one (or both) of two considerations. He may have apprehended that by disowning Temperance Hall he would be playing into the hands of Mr. Kelly; or he may not have dared to set the ultra-spiritual party at defiance.

It may seem a strange speculation that Darby might be afraid of a party among his own followers; but there is a point beyond which no man can altogether hold in check the forces of fanaticism that he has evoked. After that point, he must follow if he would still lead. Historically, it is clear that Darby at least made a truce with the party of which he had so frankly expressed his dislike, if he did not actually capitulate to it.

For indeed that party could find some basis in his writings for its most extravagant pretensions. He might make Unity his watchword to the last, but the only possible result was that his followers lost all sense of the meaning of unity. When, upwards of thirty years earlier, Darby had initiated his gradual process of resolving Brethrenism into its component parts, he had taken for his device, *Separation from Evil God’s Principle of Unity*. This was a bold attempt to reconcile his principle of universal communion with his practice of universal schism; but what limit could he prescribe to the action of such a formula? If the “New-lumpists” held that the spiritual must form a new communion by forcing out or excising the unspiritual, it was open to them to say that they sought only a further and more exquisite refinement of that mysterious, impalpable “unity” which their great prophet had taught them to seek.

How impassable the gulf between the “spiritual” party and those who still sought for some moral significance in spiritual things, was finely illustrated in a correspondence between two London Brethren who were acknowledged leaders in the advocacy of the principles of their several parties. One of them had made some severe strictures on Dr. Cronin’s schismatical act. The other wrote to remonstrate. The first replied, “If you understood (pardon me saying so) the unity of the Spirit as the *constitutional* bond of the church, the body of Christ compacted together by that which every joint supplieth, you could not . . . have put any moral conduct, even the murder of a wife, as deeper in sinfulness than a persistent wilful denial of the constitution of the Church of God.” This was not the language of a raw disciple of an extravagant school; it was the language of the school’s greatest leader.

In the London community, for months and even for years, the Ramsgate “question” effectually banished all more edifying topics. It became everybody’s duty to investigate the

¹⁴⁰ *Exposé*, p. 29; *Epitome*, p. 26.

local facts. Parties formed rapidly, and their differences threatened once more the disintegration of the whole system. Indeed, to the apprehension of the disputants, Luther had not raised a more important question; for the very existence of the last witness to the Church of God upon earth was at stake.

Unhappily, the question on which so much depended proved very intractable. Discrepancies in the evidence were not unimportant, but the total absence of a judicial spirit in most of the investigators was doubtless a far greater hindrance. I have not the least intention of pursuing the quarrel in detail; it could be of no general interest. It is almost incredible to what depths of pettiest technicality both parties descended. A broad and statesmanlike view of the matter could have appealed to nobody. The Sunday after the secession at Ramsgate, some twenty or thirty people of the minority (which must have rallied in the interval) had come to the door of the meeting-room, only to find that by some mistake it had not been opened. They had accordingly dispersed, and the question was now raised whether by their omission to “break bread” they had not forfeited their character as an “assembly,” even if on other grounds they could be recognised. This involved the discussion of all the circumstances to which the omission to open the room might be attributable. It was even sought to investigate the state of mind of the company that the closed doors had discomfited. In some cases, men made for better things devoted no little dialectical skill to the public elucidation of these momentous points.

It had been reported that one of the leaders of this minority, after the failure to effect the desired entrance, had taken a walk on the sands. This was urged against the claims of his party with great pertinacity by the supporters of the Guildford Hall seceders. Afterwards it was definitely ascertained that the walk on the sands was not taken till the afternoon, and this discovery shifted the stress of the argument.

Some moderate minds were for a temporary arrangement to refuse recognition to both meetings; and this course was actually at one time decided upon at Cheapside. All who knew anything about Darbyism were of course agreed that to acknowledge both was out of the question, since a ban of excommunication lay between the two. To admit to “fellowship” persons coming from both meetings would “identify” the whole community with both, and thus constitute it one huge self-contradiction—for above this petty mathematical conception of unity the mind of Darbyism could not rise.

It was not until April, 1881, that matters came to a head, though the strained state of feeling during the whole of that time made London life amongst Exclusive Brethren almost unendurable to sensitive people. Within the last week in April and the first in May, two London meetings came to a decision by large majorities to recognise Guildford Hall; and they duly forwarded to Cheapside notifications to that effect.

The first meeting to take this action was one situated at Hornsey Rise; the second was the incomparably more important Priory. The Priory, of course, sat merely to register Darby’s edicts. To put this beyond reasonable doubt, Darby announced at the earlier of the two meetings at which the investigation was conducted, that he would immediately leave if Abbott’s Hill were recognised. This was a threat that had more than once stood Darby in good stead during his stormy career. It is interesting to see him now, as an octogenarian, using it still with the same implicit reliance on its efficacy.

In this instance it was probably quite superfluous. There were at the outside only four dissentients when the sense of the meeting was finally taken. According to the principles that Darby had avowed for forty years, a minority of four (or, for the matter of that, of one) was as absolute a barrier against an “assembly decision” as the largest possible majority; but this was not the first instance in which Darby had thought it best to quietly ignore the principle. Indeed, it was a case of imperious necessity, for there was scarcely a London meeting that

could claim to be unanimous on Darby's side; and out of twenty-six meetings represented at Cheapside, five came to a decision absolutely adverse to Guildford Hall.

Abbott's Hill made a qualified submission. It ceased to observe the communion on the 8th of May, in hope that a union with the triumphant seceders at Guildford Hall might in that way be effected. Guildford Hall, however, was in no mood to make concessions, but insisted that the rival meeting should be broken up, and that its members should make individual application for admission, with confession that "the position had been false, the course evil, and the table iniquity". The Abbott's Hill Brethren were sadly crushed and broken-spirited, but these terms, conceived with a magnanimity befitting a people whose preeminent spirituality had been the original cause of separation, were more than they could bring themselves to accept. They resumed the observance of the Lord's Supper on the 12th of June, and lived in hopes of recognition from meetings that were reputed hostile to the "Park Street decision".

Though they obtained this finally, it was not at once declared. The London meetings carried on their discussions into the autumn. Such of them as dissented from Park Street contented themselves with rejecting Guildford Hall, generally without defining an attitude to Abbott's Hill. This was in some measure due to undeniable faults in the conduct of Abbott's Hill,¹⁴¹ but chiefly to a total change of front on the part of Mr. Kelly's following.

Both sides were beginning to feel that the form of the controversy was cumbersome, and as if by a common impulse efforts were being made to simplify the issue. The Kellyites felt that the claims of Abbott's Hill would afford them no strong footing, and possibly thought that in any case it would be wiser and better to find broader ground. They accordingly rejected the Park Street decision as imposing a new test of communion, and so far fell back (consistently or inconsistently) on original principles.

Their opponents also had a new policy. The historical case for Guildford Hall was to a great extent given up when once the question passed from London to the provinces, and it receded further and further from view as the question pursued its way to the ends of the earth. The cry was raised instead that it was the universal duty to "bow to the Park Street decision". It could not, of course, be said with decency that it was a duty to submit to Darby's ruling, and it was therefore necessary to invoke "the authority of the Assembly," which thenceforth became a topic round which a great, and surely (within its limits) a very important, conflict raged.

But, conceding the loftiest views of the authority of the Assembly, there were still two flaws in the claim that the Priory decision settled the question; and Mr. Kelly's followers were not slow to point them out. For one thing, it was of course *de fide* with the Exclusives that no local meeting in London could take any action of a disciplinary character, without the fellowship of all the other metropolitan meetings; and this would surely suffice to deprive the decision of the Priory of any right to give the law to the world. In the second place, the Priory was not the first meeting to announce a decision: the meeting at Hornsey had been beforehand with it; why were Brethren not rather called to bow to the decision of Hornsey? The real answer, of course, was that Hornsey, not being Darby's meeting, was not a name to conjure with, and was, in fact, useless for the purposes of the party.

¹⁴¹ I feel bound to state that on a reexamination of the evidence after the lapse of twenty years I am still of opinion that, according to the common principles of Darbyism, there was absolutely no reason for disowning Abbott's Hill. Some of its measures were liable to censure. The whole question is left on one side in the text, partly because of its intrinsic insignificance and want of general interest; partly because the controversy was ultimately made to turn on wholly different points, as will immediately appear.

The truth, however, could hardly be avowed so bluntly, and the Darby party, unable to defend their position in argument, very wisely determined on reprisals. What alternative, they asked, had the Kelly party to propose? The only answer given to this question was that to refuse communion on the ground of a difference of opinion as to a quarrel at Ramsgate was to impose a new and unheard-of test of Christian fellowship. The retort naturally was, "Are we then to reject both meetings at Ramsgate, thus cutting off the innocent with the guilty from the privileges of the Church of God on earth; or are we to receive both, though one at least must be wrong, thus lending the sanction of the authority of the Assembly to schism?" It is hard to see how either party could answer the other. Each was irresistible in attack, impotent in defence. The deadlock that only Darby's supreme authority had for thirty years held in suspense had come at last with a witness.

Yet so deeply imbued were both parties with the idea of the Divine authority of Exclusivism that comparatively few at that time boldly abandoned an untenable position, and acknowledged the futility of the Exclusive scheme. A universal choice had to be made between the two illogical positions. Those most deeply imbued with the High Church conception bowed to Darby; those that were tinctured with a somewhat more liberal and generous Christianity followed the lead of Mr. Kelly.

"Bowling to Park Street" became a mania amongst Brethren. No devotee of Rome ever bowed to the authority of the chair of St. Peter with more relish. A good deal of hot Protestant blood was stirred, however, by the spectacle, and the cry of "Popery" was freely raised. The Darbyites replied with the yet more terrible cry of "Bethesda". There was some truth perhaps in both charges; unless indeed the distinctive position of Kellyism were, that two meetings separated by a sentence of excommunication might both be recognised by other meetings, so long as no question of heretical doctrine were implicated in the local dispute. Even so, the principle was a new departure in Darbyism; and while we may gladly acknowledge that Mr. Kelly and his friends took a stand for Christian unity and liberty up to a certain point, the Park Street party are entitled to the dubious credit of the greater fidelity to the common traditions of Exclusivism.

The earlier rupture of 1848 had involved a mixed question of doctrine and of discipline. In 1881 no doctrinal question was so much as hinted at. This completed the absurdity of the situation. Before any one can be expected to see his duty, in obedience to Holy Scripture, to associate himself with Darbyism as with the only "expression of the Church of God upon earth," he must form an opinion about the rights of the quarrel in 1848—in which the evidence is voluminous, complicated and difficult to procure; and he must subsequently determine the rights of a tedious, involved and obscure quarrel in 1881—a quarrel that had confessedly no relation to Christian doctrine; and finally, having on these points (presumably through many perils and hairbreadth escapes) reached a conclusion favourable to Darbyism, he must determine the rightness of excluding from Christian fellowship persons whose perspicacity has not been sufficient to bring them safely to the same conclusion. Kellyism of course is partly in the same condemnation. Fancy a reclaimed thief or drunkard being required to investigate some of the most unintelligible and unedifying episodes of modern Church history as an indispensable condition of intelligently taking the only position in which he can have the approval of the Divine Head of the Church! Would to God the case were merely an imaginary one!

The quarrel soon diffused itself over the face of Christendom. On the Continent Darby's name was a more potent spell than even in England, and the difficulties of a Continental campaign might have daunted the stoutest heart. The requisite courage, however, was not wanting. Mr. Kelly's character had been so recklessly aspersed at the beginning of the troubles in England that he had wisely refrained thereafter from taking a prominent part in the controversy. In his absence, a very large share in the resistance to Darby's violent

measures had fallen to a younger man, well known both in London and in Switzerland, Dr. Thomas Neatby. Dr. Neatby now, with the help of M. Compain of Paris, determined to prosecute the cause of Kellyism abroad. Several publications were issued, discussing the curious history with great minuteness. The chief burden of the defence of Darbyism in its Continental stronghold fell upon Mr. W. J. Lowe, a Brother who had been associated with Darby in the translation of the New Testament into French.

The success of the assailants was not great, though they obtained, in the late J. B. Rossier of Vevey, an adherent representing the very origin of Brethrenism abroad. This good man had united himself to Darby in 1840, and had been favourably known as a writer amongst Brethren almost from the first. But even Rossier's name carried no weight as against Darby's. Probably he knew, as indeed all his allies knew, that there was nothing but a losing game to play; but it is impossible not to admire the dauntless spirit with which the gallant octogenarian played it. The claim of plenary authority for the decision of an "assembly" (a claim that was of course not preferred on behalf of "assemblies" that had decided in an opposite sense to Darby) seems to have been even more effectual on the Continent than at home. At Vevey old M. Rossier addressed some remonstrances to the meeting with respect to its support of the Park Street decision, and received a brief reply containing the following words: "The assembly maintains in its integrity the letter it addressed to you, and accepts no kind of discussion on matters settled for the assemblies of God, and so held by every brother who recognises and respects the presence of the Lord in the assembly".

Rossier had sought to sustain his remonstrance by a liberal use of arguments from Scripture, and there was a terrible pertinence now in the following reference to the apostate Jews of Jeremiah's day. In his rejoinder he charges his opponents with teaching that "Christ has placed His authority in its entirety in the hands of the Church, whose decisions are thus raised to an equality with the Word of God"; and proceeds, "You say to me, 'As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us *in the name of the Lord*, we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do *whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth*'".

Indeed this was the position unflinchingly taken up. A French Brother, who, like most Continentals, "bowed" to the simulacrum of the authority of Park Street, and to the reality of the authority of Darby, received from a very close friend of former days, who had taken a leading part in the advocacy of the more liberal views of Mr. Kelly, a letter discussing the situation. The Frenchman answered with a blunt refusal to attend or reply to the remonstrances of a *révolté*—a rebel.

It might have been hoped that the absence of doctrinal complications would have moderated the bitterness of the strife; but if any improvement existed it was scarcely perceptible. The Kelly party indeed, when once things had settled down, showed no wish to persecute; but it was otherwise with their rivals. Perhaps the estimate of schism as worse than wife-murder was widely accepted. At all events, adherents of Park Street again and again refused the proffered hand of old and tried friends. The presence of even near relatives was sometimes publicly ignored. All spiritual relations would be generally suspended, even when a minimum of social intercourse was still admitted. Mr. J. Coupe, a very well-informed writer, gives an example of the prevailing intolerance. It may stand as the representative of many things that I have no wish to perpetuate.

"In the far Western States lived an Exclusive and his wife. They were more than a hundred miles from one of their own meetings and with no other Christians could they hold any fellowship. Far off as they were shoals of conflicting pamphlets reached them. The result was the wife went with John Darby, the husband refused his authority, and from that moment they could no longer remember the Lord's death or worship together!"

This is no isolated case of extravagant bigotry. It is typical of Darbyism.

XV The Dissolution Of Darbyism—The Later Schisms—Open Brethrenism

THROUGHOUT the year 1882 the formation of the rival parties went forward in England. As yet it was only making a beginning abroad.

Almost with the opening of the year poor Dr. Cronin passed away. He died in a frame of mind that any Christian might envy. The following are his son's words: "Nor did he ever allude to the great and sore trouble which had broken our beloved mother's heart, hastened her death and crushed him! I refer to his having been cast out by that body whom he had so loved and laboured for, nearly half a century. . . . He was constantly repeating the names of our Lord." Almost at the last, he sang clearly the verse,

"Glory, honour, praise and power
Be unto the Lamb for ever!
Jesus Christ is my Redeemer!
Hallelujah! Praise ye the Lord."

The simple devotion of these well-known lines faithfully reflected the childlike, fervent spirit by which the dying man had been characterised through life.

Darby did not long survive his old friend. He died at Bournemouth on the 29th of April, from a gradual breakdown of the entire system. He was in his eighty-second year. It is pleasant to know that before he left London Cronin had called uninvited upon him, and the interview had been friendly. It was not Darby's way to acknowledge his faults, but it may well be that he felt some compunction. Another old friend, Andrew Miller, was dangerously ill at Bournemouth at the same time. The recent disruption had severed him from the chief whose standard he had faithfully followed for close upon thirty years, but Darby sent daily to enquire of his welfare. A certain gloom seemed to settle down on Darby from the time that the division became inevitable. Physical decay might account for it, but there were surely other influences at work. He had survived precisely to the tragic moment—just long enough to see his work go to pieces in his hands by his own act. It has been conjectured that he expected to carry his point at the last, as he had so often carried it before; but for once the matchless sagacity that had borne him safely through so many critical junctures betrayed him to his undoing.

It was no question now of a secession limited enough to be negligible. It was the formation of a rival party, at least as weighty in gifts¹⁴² as the party of his own adherents, and not hopelessly inferior in numbers. It was only left to the old man to recognise his defeat in the dearest object of his life, when to retrieve the disaster was beyond all hope.

Not often have men been called to mark the passing of a stranger or more complex personality. The saint of patient, tranquil contemplation, the theologian of deep, mystical insight, the apostle of tireless energy and total self-devotion, the ecclesiastic of restless ambitions and stormy strifes,—all were withdrawn from us in John Nelson Darby.

His end is no occasion for harsh judgments. Those who accept the account given in this work, if they cannot, on a review of his life as a whole, acquit him, will have no wish to condemn him. Startling contradictions in character are no novelty, but we might be pardoned for thinking that they culminated in Darby. One of his leading followers said that there never

¹⁴² I take this opportunity of expressing my admiration of one of Mr. Kelly's principal adherents, the late William Burbidge—a preacher of remarkable power, and truly saintly character. His retiring and self-depreciating disposition long kept him in the background; but Exclusive Brethrenism has had very few to equal him in the pulpit.

was so much of grace as in him, nor so much of unsubdued nature. To some people this verdict seems mere wanton paradox. I, for one, view it in a very different light; and of Darby's life and character as a whole I prefer to say, after the fashion of old John Foxe, "Which matter being too hard for me, I remit it to the judgment of God Almighty".

If Darby had occupied Abraham's position, he might have left behind him hardly less than Abraham's fame. It is easy to picture him dwelling in the land of promise as in a strange country, the contented heir of the promises of the world to come; or communing with God in the night-watches, by the lonely tent and altar that mark the stages of his faithful pilgrimage; or despising the gifts of the King of Sodom, and extending a covenant of peace to the Philistine Abimelech; dispensing meanwhile the blessings of a righteous and benignant rule to a family and household that would never dream of a law that they did not read in his eye. But his lot denied him circumstances so favourable to the exercise of his virtues and to the repression of his one great vice, and cast him on the evil days of the turmoil of sects of the nineteenth century. And it was Darby's supreme misfortune that his single vice, by the irony of circumstances, had perhaps more to do than all his virtues with fixing the character of his life's work. This threatens to result in the evil that he did living after him, and the good being interred with his bones; and the present writer would be thankful if this work should in some measure serve as a humble obstruction to such an injustice.

The older Brethren were fast falling out of the ranks. In 1883 the Open Brethren sustained a great loss in the death of Lord Congleton. In the same year Andrew Miller passed away, at the age of seventy-three. A devoted friendship of twenty-eight years had been rudely severed by the disagreement between him and Mr. Mackintosh on the Ramsgate question. Not that Mr. Miller would have suffered the difference to affect their intimacy, but good Mr. Mackintosh unfortunately felt himself bound by the ordinary discipline of his party. Mackintosh long survived his old friend, dying a very few years ago at the age of seventy-seven.

Captain Hall followed in October, 1884, at an exceedingly advanced age. So completely did his act in "leaving the Lord's table," as it was termed, alienate from him the whole interest of his former friends, that probably few of them had known for many years whether he were living or dead. Yet this old campaigner of the first days of Brethrenism was one of the bravest and most single-hearted men ever found in its ranks. He belonged, moreover, to the small class of theologians who find it easier to suffer for their convictions than to persecute. In the Plymouth schism of 1845 he had laboured to dissuade Darby from forming a fresh communion, and we have seen him shortly afterwards employed in a work of pacification at Bath; while his plea for a more comprehensive spirit towards the older denominations is unique in the story of the Brethren.

After his breach with Darby, Hall had to a certain extent formed new friendships. In 1873 we find him "in fellowship" with a meeting of the Open Brethren that included Mr. and Mrs. Harris and the Bland family. In all the subdivisions of Brethrenism, he could not have found better company. But, unhappily, among the Brethren there was always the other side to be reckoned with. I am informed that a certain Exclusive *declined all intercourse* with his own mother, because she took the communion with Hall.

His old ally was at rest before him. In 1878 Dorman sank gradually, and died at the end of the year. He was buried at Reading, the scene of his labours during a great part of his ministry. An Exclusive sister, Mrs. Butcher, had the courage to rally a few old friends to the grave-side. The incident is a real relief to the gloom of the unpitied loneliness of his closing years.

The Darbyites flattered themselves that they had got rid of the unsympathetic element, and could count on a period of peace and spiritual expansion. Never were hopes more dismally belied. In 1885 the London Darbyite meetings excommunicated Mr. Clarence Stuart of Reading, a Brother whose reputation for learning and piety stood high among them. His offence was that he taught that the “standing” of a Christian is complete through his faith in the Atonement, independently of his personal union with Christ as risen from the dead; that this union is a “condition” of added privilege, and that it had been an error of the Brethren not to distinguish duly between “standing” and “condition”. He was attacked with great vehemence by Stoney and Mackintosh,¹⁴³ who seem to have shared Stanley’s doctrine of “justification in a risen Christ”. Stuart’s teaching, on the other hand, was apparently a partial reaction against this tendency, in the direction of the older Evangelicalism. He writes with scholarship and acumen, which is much more than can be said for his assailants. Indeed, if one of his principal champions, Mr. Walter Scott of Hamilton, is right in saying that many “judged Mr. Stuart to be a heretic on the unproved statements” of two such divines as Stoney and Mackintosh, the circumstances give occasion to the most dismal reflexions on the theological indigence of the party.

From his neutral position, Mr. Kelly passed an unfavourable judgment on Mr. Stuart’s doctrines, but held it entirely unwarrantable (as any man in his senses whatever his dogmatic standpoint, must needs have done) to treat them as offences calling for excommunication. Mr. Kelly’s judgment of the teaching carries far more weight than that of all the Park Street divines taken together, but it must not be allowed too much authority as against Mr. Stuart; for Mr. Stuart scarcely claimed to be other than an innovator, and Mr. Kelly had always been the supreme exponent of the older Darbyite theology.

The Park Street leaders had no scruple about pushing their ignorant quarrel to a world-wide division. Mr. Stuart’s following was fairly considerable in England, and relatively larger in Scotland. The one happy result of this disruption was that the excommunicated party seems to have decided to abandon the Darbyite discipline altogether, and “to heartily welcome any godly member of the body of Christ apart altogether from questions of a mere ecclesiastical kind”. This appears to mean that, while retaining their own list of recognised meetings, and their own internal procedure, they place Open Brethren, Kellyites, and the adherents of whatever other varieties of Plymouthism there may be, on the same footing for “occasional communion” as the members of any other evangelical denomination. This happy example was followed, in 1892, by the Grantites in America.

Almost at the same time, a “discipline,” if possible still more absurd, was being enacted in America under the auspices of two well-known Darbyites, Lord Adelbert Cecil and Mr. Alfred Mace. Mr. Mace was a young evangelist of a good deal of popular power. The connexion of Lord Adelbert Cecil with the Brethren was of longer standing. He was a son of the second Marquis of Exeter, and his adherence to the Brethren had caused some sensation at the first. This was far from having spoilt him, and he was always marked by a particularly unobtrusive bearing, by an extreme simplicity and unworldliness in all his habits, and by great devotion to his work of itinerant evangelisation. His death by drowning in 1889, before he had completed his forty-eighth year, was the occasion of much sincere regret. But Mr. Scott is thoroughly justified in calling both these Brethren “men ministerially unfitted for such work” as the disciplinary proceedings in Montreal.

¹⁴³ These were by no means the only critics of the new heresiarch. One zealous Brother published a review of Mr. Stuart’s tract, *Christian Standing and Condition*, and professed to have examined “in a Berean spirit” the original Scriptures. He exposed himself to the keen retort of his learned adversary that “an essential condition for acting in that spirit is, surely, a little acquaintance with the language upon which one is writing”.

The object of discipline was Mr. F. W. Grant of Plainfield, New Jersey, probably the most accomplished theologian amongst the Brethren of the American continent. Mr. Grant had persuaded himself that he could accept the “Park Street decision,” with the proviso that the unity of London was a fiction. Though substantially a sincere Darbyite, he sometimes indulged in a little independent speculation; indeed his rejection of London unity would probably have sufficed of itself to arm the Priory cabal for his destruction.

The Montreal Brethren formally excommunicated Mr. Grant for heresy on the 4th of January, 1885. They then issued a tract under the title of a *Narrative of Facts which led to the Rejection of Mr. F W Grant by the Montreal Assembly*. This, being an official document “signed on behalf of the Assembly,” makes it easy to ascertain the grounds of their action. “The Assembly gathered to the name of the Lord in Montreal,” as they magniloquently say, “believe the time has come when the only course left is to obey the command of the Apostle given in Titus iii. 10: ‘A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject’.”¹⁴⁴

The grounds on which Mr. Grant was “rejected,” according to this curious interpretation of St. Paul’s meaning, are carefully specified. He had taught (1) that “the O. T. [Old Testament] Saints were ‘in the Son,’ and had ‘eternal life in Him,’ in virtue of being born again;” (2) “that when thus born we are at that moment forgiven, justified, no longer in the flesh, but in Christ, and dead to sin and the law;” (3) “that this new birth gives us the full position of sons of God, and being sons we are sealed with the Holy Ghost, faith in Christ’s work not being necessary to ‘sealing’;”¹⁴⁵ (4) “that Romans vii. is the experience of one who is justified in Christ, sealed, seeking to abide in Christ, and to be fruitful and holy;” (5) “that souls may have peace and not know it, be justified and not know it, have the Holy Ghost and be in bondage.”

Imagine a world-wide division ruthlessly precipitated in order that such shreds of this fragment of a system as might be recoverable after the convulsion should be protected against the doctrines that the saints of old had eternal life, and that the 7th of Romans describes Christian experience!

“Playing at churches,” was the sarcastic comment of a veteran Brother upon the Ryde-Ramsgate disruption. What description can he have found for the events of the years that followed?

It appears that there were forty or fifty dissentients from the Montreal decree, but that this was not held to invalidate it—a fact from which we may infer that the purest Darbyites were by this time seriously contaminated with the principles of “Dissent”.

The year 1890 witnessed a still more extensive division. The occasion was the teaching of Mr. F. E. Raven, a Greenwich Brother, whose previous reputation scarcely marked him out for the leader of a school. It is difficult to ascertain the exact truth with regard to the most serious charges against his doctrine, as some pamphlets that were said to prove them appear not to have been published, and therefore cannot always be procured. The seceders from his communion accused him of denying the orthodox doctrine of the union of the Divine and the human natures in the Man Christ Jesus—not indeed in a Unitarian, but in a Gnostic sense. He clothes his doctrines in a sort of quasi-metaphysical garb, which in the

¹⁴⁴ As this text has been the pretext for innumerable follies in the way of “discipline” in these later years of Brethrenism, the English reader should bear in mind that *reject* in this Scripture has simply the sense of *shun* or *avoid*.

¹⁴⁵ Some of Mr. Grant’s friends demurred to the representation of his doctrine contained in the last clause. The whole enumeration of his alleged errors proceeds of course from his enemies.

present condition of knowledge among the Darbyites is doubtless very imposing, though I must confess myself sceptical as to its covering any genuine thought at all. This at least seems certain, that he promulgated doctrines, or hints at doctrines, that were widely understood, even within his own little fraternity, to be of a Gnostic character; and that he never vouchsafed any intelligible explanation in an orthodox sense.

Strife waxed furious, not only in England, but in France and Switzerland, in America, and doubtless in the ends of the earth. In this country I believe that Mr. Raven obtained a large majority, but the Continental possessions were lost. I have heard of a certain amount of Ravenism in France, but I should suppose it is comparatively small; while French-speaking Switzerland has gone, I am informed, almost solid against Mr. Raven. This indeed was only what might have been expected; for Mr. Raven's leading opponents were the two men whose influence was paramount with the Darbyites of the Continent. I refer to Major McCarthy and Mr. William Lowe.

Whatever uncertainty there may be as to the precise character of some of Mr. Raven's speculations, the imputation against him of heterodoxy as to our Lord's humanity was in no sense gratuitous. Mr. Grant had asked, "Will F. E. Raven satisfy us as to whether he believes that our Lord had, in the humanity He assumed, a true human spirit and soul?" "Mr. Raven's only answer was, 'I decline controversy with Mr. Grant'"¹⁴⁶—a refusal he might very likely have sustained by the plea that he and Mr. Grant were not in ecclesiastical intercommunion. Moreover, Mr. Raven distinctly said, in criticising an opponent, "Mr. G[ladwell] appears to me to be in great ignorance of the true moral character of Christ's humanity. He did not get that character by being made of a woman, though that was the way by which He took man's form, but Manhood in Him takes its character from what He ever was divinely. 'The Word became flesh.' He does not seem to me to have any idea of real heavenly humanity."

Some of Mr. Raven's followers, if not Mr. Raven himself, explicitly taught that Christ was man independently of the Incarnation; and the above extract from Mr. Raven's own pen is unintelligible unless he means that Christ was not man of the substance of His mother, but that He derived from her only the outward form of a man. It is hard to distinguish this from the doctrine that He was man in semblance merely. The Brethren of an earlier generation would have been safer if, instead of yielding themselves to a passionate revulsion from Newton's errors, they had listened to the warnings of such men as Craik and Tregelles, and had soberly set themselves to judge righteous judgment.

Associated with this error, there was a tendency among Mr. Raven's disciples to deny that anything that linked Christ with the bodily infirmities of mankind, or even with its natural human sympathies, could be an "expression" of the Eternal Life. It was commonly said that "the Lord, as a babe in the manger, was not the expression of eternal life, though He was Himself that eternal life". Mr. Kelly, who was induced to take the field by the application of some of the belligerents themselves, mentions that a similar limitation was also expressed with regard to Christ in weariness at the well of Sychar, or weeping at the grave of Lazarus, or commending His mother from the Cross to the care of St. John. A very small amount of spiritual perception, or, failing that, a very slight theological sense, would have enabled these speculators to see that they were frittering away the significance of the Incarnation. It would have been well if they had attempted an answer to the question, Were those acts of Christ which they could not receive as "expressions" of Eternal Life, true expressions of *Himself* or not?

Mr. Greenman, a transatlantic Brother, considers Mr. Raven's doctrines "the direct outcome of Mr. J. B. Stoney's 'higher life,' or 'the Brethren's Perfectionism' ". He adds that

¹⁴⁶ B. C. Greenman, *An Appeal to our Brethren in Fellowship with Mr. F. B. Raven*, p. 3.

“with Mr. Darby’s and other solid teaching off the scene, Mr. R. carries all before him”. The following passage¹⁴⁷ illustrates the point:—

“When a Christian has done with the responsible side of his course down here, it is the end of priesthood; we don’t need it any more as connected with infirmities. That part of our christian course will be over, and we shall no longer want the help of the high priest in that sense. It will come to an end in regard to us. And this is true now in so far as our souls enter on the ground of divine purpose. The priest is known in another light.”

It will be judged that Mr. Raven’s language is not always readily intelligible. On another occasion he thought fit to put his thoughts before his hearers in the following form:—

“G. F.—Would you say a believer then had eternal life in a certain sense?

“F. E. R.—I answer it in a very simple way, he has eternal life if he has it.

“R. S. S.—It is not a very bad way to ask those people who say they have eternal life, what they have got.

“F. E. R.—If I came across any one who asserted it at the present time, I would be disposed to say, ‘If you have got it, let us have some account of it’. Our difficulty in England was that nobody could give any account of eternal life. . . . Everybody claimed to have it, but nobody could give an account of it. Another brother asked me, ‘Have you got eternal life?’ I did not know how to answer it exactly, because he simply meant resting on a statement of Scripture.”¹⁴⁸

Again:—

“J. T.—Is the expression ‘heavenly’ included in the idea of eternal life?

“F. E. R.—No, I don’t think so. I think eternal life refers to earth. I don’t think we should talk about eternal life in heaven.

“J. T.—Only we have it there.

“F. E. R.—I don’t think the term will have much force there.

“J. T.—The thing will surely be there.

“F. E. R.—WE shall be there.”¹⁴⁹

Once more:—

“F. E. R.—In Hebrews vii., where the subject is priesthood, He is made higher than the heavens.

“J. S. A.—And that is where you are in the assembly; that is what you meant, that you touch eternal life in the assembly.

“F. E. R.—In the assembly you are risen with Christ, in association with Him, and there it is you touch what is outside of death.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ F. E. R. in *Truth for the Time*, pt. x., p. 31.

¹⁴⁸ *Notes of Readings and Addresses in United States and Canada*, October, 1898, revised by F. E. R., p. 107.

¹⁴⁹ P. 116.

¹⁵⁰ P. 368.

We read elsewhere (p. 241), “Eternal life is realised only in the Assembly; no one touches eternal life now except in that connexion”.

Probably the long habit of considering themselves the sole depositories of everything beyond the most elementary principles of Christianity had tempted the Brethren to seek to enlarge their peculiar province; and owing to the total cessation of genuine thought among them, they had to fall back on mere jargon. If so, all this absurdity is the retribution for that “folly, conceit, and supercilious contempt of other Christians” with which Dorman charged them only too justly thirty-five years ago. The language just quoted from their most popular teacher can mark nothing short of the dotage of the sect.

Nevertheless, Mr. Raven appears to be in the true succession of Darbyism. He is preeminently the apostle of the inner light. Virtually, though not explicitly, Darbyism had always postulated a sort of inspiration of the “Assembly” in its decrees, and of the individual in his ministry. Mr. Raven, as quoted by such a competent and wary antagonist as Mr. Grant, appears a true successor of the Montanists or of the Wittemberg prophets. Positive truth, according to his scheme, seems to be derived from the inward illumination of the spiritual man. The Bible indeed has a regulative office, and can exercise, I presume, a sort of veto upon an alleged revelation of a prophet. Consequently, if Mr. Raven had his life to live over again, he would, by his own account, read his Bible less, and pray more. This course, I have no doubt, would have resulted in a yet higher development of his peculiar principles.

The secessions from the Priory association on account of this teaching did not all take place immediately. In some cases it was the gradual pressure of Ravenism that forced the malcontents out. Of these lingerers the best known was Mr. W. T. Turpin. Unlike many that left from the same cause, Mr. Turpin did not feel able to join any other section of the Brethren, and ultimately resumed his ministry in the Church of England after the interval of half a life-time. He had been one of the most deservedly popular of the preachers of the Brethren. Few of their leading men have gained the ear of the public of Brethrenism—above all, of its youth—in the same degree; and his loss was a very serious one to the party.

A tendency already referred to, which made itself powerfully felt in Darby’s time, and to which he opposed his vast, influence with only partial success, seems now to be asserting itself triumphantly on all hands amongst the Ravenites. I refer to the tendency to discountenance and to suppress all energetic evangelistic action. Though the Exclusive Brethren have undoubtedly had very powerful evangelists, whose success under the disadvantages that they accepted was remarkable, people who plumed themselves on their spirituality considered that the labours of such men bore a humiliating resemblance to the labours of “the sects”—that is to say, of all evangelical denominations except their own. The leader of this anti-evangelistic movement was naturally Mr. Stoney. Possessing no popular gifts himself he had gathered an esoteric school in whose eyes he stood entirely alone. Amongst these ardent disciples, he systematically depreciated aggressive evangelistic effort. The eccentricity of his exegesis may be measured by a single instance. He said that he had no doubt that Demas forsook St. Paul in order to go on a mission tour, and that it was on this conduct that the apostolic censure was based. That is to say, apparently, that Demas’ love of the present world (αἰῶν) was a love for the souls of its heathen millions. This kind of folly spread far and wide. It has been latterly reinforced by a variety of hyper-Calvinism, and those meetings of the followers of Mr. Raven in which an evangelistic party is still to be found seem generally, as far as I can learn, to be divided into two hostile factions; and in several important instances men of marked zeal and success in mission work have been converted from ultra-fervent supporters of the system into its resolute opponents.

I have not spoken of all the divisions. The secession of Mr. S. O. Cluff and his supporters within Darby’s life-time was perhaps the most important of the lesser schisms. The

Cluffites had anticipated the Stuartites and Grantites in dropping the Bethesda discipline. Mr. Cluff's divergence from Darbyism was doctrinal, and connected itself with some phase of the so-called "higher life" teaching.

Enough, at any rate, has been said to amply illustrate the disintegration of the system. A certain Brother, meeting a friend of former days after the great division of 1881, put the caustic question, "To what section of the disorganisation do *you* belong?" He can little have thought how much additional force the sarcasm was destined to gain within the next ten years.

The contents of this chapter are not satire, but simplest fact. Yet, if I were the enemy of the Darbyites (which I am sure I am very far from being), I should consider that their unvarnished story was a satire to which the genius of a Swift could hardly add point. It is devoutly to be hoped that they may yet themselves attend to the lessons that it teaches.

In the case of many there is good ground for such a hope; indeed, not a few eyes have already been opened. But with some it is far otherwise. While the wiser sort are awaking to a perception that the action of their principles has now made Darbyism a spectacle to Christendom, others are so infatuated that every fresh disruption is hailed as another step in the path of sanctity; and by the time that the number of their sects is literally according to the number of their cities, it is likely that some will see in the perfection of dissolution only the summit of their "path of testimony".

"Let us," says Mr. John James, a Montreal Brother, look at ourselves:—

"Some say I am of J. N. D., others I am of W. K.

"Some say I am of J. B. S., others I am of C. E. S.

"Some say I am of A. P. C., others I am of F. W. G.

"Some say I am of F. E. R., others I am of W. J. L."¹⁵¹

Mr. James is to be mentioned with honour as one to whom this state of things appeared an unmitigated scandal. He quotes from Mr. Grant: "Our shame is public. It requires no spirituality to see that exactly in that which we have professedly sought we have failed most signally. 'The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' is just most surely what we have not kept." Mr. Grant's own efforts to apply some remedy to these scandals—even if we judge the efforts directed from an imperfect stand-point—surely deserve the recognition of all who have the welfare of the Church of Christ at heart.

During all these convulsions Mr. Kelly's followers enjoyed a comparative tranquillity. There were indeed some important defections to the Open Brethren, and elsewhere; but for nearly twenty years there was no disruption, nor any new doctrinal vagaries of consequence. This immunity was doubtless due to the happy survival of the great chief of the party. In *Darby and Darbyism* I made the following observations on Mr. Kelly's position: "At the age of eighty, he stands before us as the only survivor of a remarkable school; and with unimpaired zeal and energy, with no mean statesmanship, and with the genuine theological sense that even outsiders have often acknowledged,¹⁵² he guides the affairs of the little section that still, to his mind, represents the original Brethrenism—or, in other words, that represents the Church of God on earth."

¹⁵¹ I append a list of the surnames in the order of the above table: Darby, Kelly, Stoney, Stuart, Cecil, Grant, Raven, Lowe.

¹⁵² I quote a single instance: "A man who born for the universe narrowed his mind by Darbyism" (Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, p. 164). The severity of the implied criticism on the school enhances the high value of the compliment to the man.

I quote these words with pleasure as a tribute to one who has through a long life, in a most ungrudging and disinterested spirit, devoted his “laborious days” to the cultivation of the highest learning; but I regret to find that they are no longer fully applicable. Quite recently, as I am informed, some fifty meetings have broken off from Mr. Kelly’s lead. Their manifesto is a tract by Mr. W. W. Fereday of Kenilworth, entitled *Fellowship in Closing Days*. Mr. Fereday and his friends, like the parties of Messrs. Cluff, Stuart and Grant, abandon the Bethesda discipline,—a course vainly urged on the Kellyites fifteen years earlier by Dr. Neatby, whose connexion with them was severed from that time.

A short account may conveniently be added here of the relation of Open Brethrenism to Darbyism. A good deal has been said in recent chapters that in its entirety only applies to Darbyism. An attempt will now be made to indicate within what limits the same account holds good of Open Brethrenism.

Open Brethrenism may be best regarded as a kind of incomplete Darbyism. Darby is the prophet of the whole movement in all its ramifications. Newton, for example, represented elements that existed in some strength in primitive Brethrenism, until they were crushed out by Darby; but Newton separated wholly from both sections, and constantly directed the fire of his polemics against the views that they held in common. Both parties alike were heretical in Newton’s eyes, mainly on three points. They denied that the Church would go through the Great Tribulation; they denied the imputed righteousness of Christ, in the sense in which Newton deemed it essential that that doctrine should be held; and they denied that the Old Testament saints formed an integral part of the Church. It is true that on these points there is not the rigid uniformity amongst the Open Brethren that prevails amongst Exclusives; but the immense majority—and a majority that gives its tone to the whole—is as thoroughly Darbyite on these test-questions as Darby himself.

The looseness of the ecclesiastical organisation of the Open Brethren has saved them from the necessity of pushing local quarrels to the point of a universal schism. Each local meeting grants regular communion to such other meetings as it sees fit; and though there is some approach to an understanding amongst them as to what meetings should be generally recognised, there is nothing to prevent two meetings that disown each other from being both alike recognised by the mass of “open” meetings. This has been the great gain of the Open party, and an ample compensation for certain points of decided inferiority. These cannot be denied. For the most part the writers of the Open Brethren are hardly more than an echo of Darby, Kelly, Bellett, Denny and Deck.¹⁵³

The discipline of the Open Brethren in individual cases of questionable doctrine is doubtless variable, according to the meeting before which the question comes; but, in many instances, it would probably not be much less stringent than that of Exclusivism in its earlier and more sober days. But if the Open Brethren have excommunicated persons whose errors might have been more charitably and more hopefully dealt with from within, they have had the excuse that they were always under the malevolent scrutiny of their Exclusive rivals. The least symptom of a disposition to deal compassionately with some form of speculative error (assuming for the moment that the offensive tenets really were in every case erroneous) was eagerly caught at by the Exclusives, through a natural instinct of self-justification; and probably some of the Open party have been too nervously anxious not to give their adversaries a needless advantage.

In July, 1872, some of the “Open” leaders issued a manifesto, professing the ordinary principles of evangelical orthodoxy. With reference to “discipline,” they observe that it “should be restorative in its character; and the solemn act of separation should be resorted to

¹⁵³ It must be remembered that Newton and Tregelles were never in any sense Open Brethren.

only after loving and faithful dealing has failed to reclaim". The honoured name of John Code appears at the head of the signatures.

It would be unsafe to infer that the Open Brethren are a more moderate and conciliatory kind of Darbyites. The truth is that heterogeneity is a leading feature of the Open party. Their variations are at least as remarkable as the proverbial "variations of Popery". Some of them contentedly take their place, on terms of a friendly equality, with evangelical Christians of every name. Others, unhappily, are to the full as narrow and intolerant as the Exclusives at their worst. This party is strongest in the North and in Scotland, but it has a good deal of weight even in London.

The moderate section comprises some who consider open ministry preferable, but not obligatory; and some who, though deeming it enjoined by Scripture and therefore obligatory, regard it as a secondary point on which difference of opinion is admissible. In both cases therefore there is no disposition to unchurch other denominations. This party has, I believe, gained greatly in strength of late years, by the force of the reaction against an extremely fanatical movement known by the name of "Needed Truth,"—a designation taken from the title of its organ. It aimed at imposing a narrower and more exclusive practice than had ever prevailed in any section of the Brethren whatsoever. Happily, after some prospect of considerable success, it was generally rejected. It exemplified the operation of bigoted principles in so unamiable a light that it did much good, as a warning, to the Open Brethren.

With the more liberal meetings other churches of pronouncedly evangelical principles have found it possible to cooperate with cordiality; and in a day when the efforts of good men are increasingly directed to healing the divisions of the Church, such alliances should surely be cultivated to the utmost. This course, even apart from its direct effect, will be fruitful of good; for it will strengthen the hands of those who, within the ranks of Plymouth, are pleading (often very earnestly) the claims of catholicity. They need the support. They confront an influential party that advocates a line of action by which, in many a town and village, the Church of Christ is seriously weakened. Some young fellows entirely careless about religion of any kind are converted among the Methodists of a Yorkshire village, and begin zealously working in the Sunday School or Young Men's Guild. They come under the influence of a Plymouth Brother elsewhere. At his instigation, they renounce all connexion with the worship and work of the Methodists, although there is no meeting of the Brethren in their village. Until they can form one, they must walk over to the nearest town in which one is found. If they are unable to do this, *they must stay at home*. It is the greatest mistake to suppose that the Brother who enjoins such a course is necessarily an Exclusive; he may quite well be "Open". We are bound to give such men the fullest credit for conscientiously holding that all worship except that of the Brethren is positively unlawful; but it is clear that their unenlightened zeal is often a very serious barrier to the union of Christian hearts, and a great impediment to the furtherance of the gospel.

The peculiarities of Open Brethrenism in respect of oversight and local membership have been discussed elsewhere.¹⁵⁴ Its ministry is at least as uncontrolled as that of the Exclusives, and as it is less regulated by any tacit understanding with regard to what is suitable the want of control is liable to be more keenly felt. The exercises of the Sunday morning meeting amongst the old Exclusives were largely moulded upon a sort of unwritten liturgy, which prescribed the acts and the spiritual tone that were suitable to the various stages of the worship. The control of this liturgy over the conduct of the worship necessarily varied with the intelligence of the local leaders, and to a less extent with the aptitude of their followers; and it might often break down altogether. Still, the general influence of a tradition was unmistakeable. No doubt the standard was over narrow and rigid; no doubt too it might

¹⁵⁴ Chap. x.

become as formal and mechanical as any other liturgy, for no form has life, in itself; yet on the whole the action of the tradition was salutary, and the want of it among Open Brethren has painfully affected many who have passed over from the ranks of the Exclusives.

The institution of any kind of semi-recognised eldership is a plain step in the right direction. Still, a self-appointed presbytery with undefined functions could scarcely, one would suppose, impart much stability to a church at a serious crisis. A few of the Open meetings, it is true, go further, but I believe they are very few.

Ministerial maintenance is on much the same lines as in Darbyism, and the principle is encumbered by similar drawbacks. But at Bethesda from the first it has been deemed lawful to place boxes at the chapel doors to receive contributions for the support of the ministry; and some other meetings (I scarcely think many) have followed this example. Open Brethren would probably share, almost to the full, the dislike of the Exclusives to a specified ministerial salary, or even to an income derived from specified sources. Indeed, the dislike is a manifest feature of the original Brethrenism.

Whatever their weaknesses, the Open Brethren have their great and characteristic virtues. Theological learning, it is true, is now at a very low ebb among them. On the other hand, they are emphatically a Bible-reading and Bible-loving community, and are comparatively free from that morbid craving for novelties by which the later stages of Darbyism have been marked. They hold the mystical theories of ministry rather loosely and vaguely, and they talk little of the authority of the Assembly. Furthermore, when we pass from Darbyism to Open Brethrenism, we leave utterly behind us the supercilious contempt for aggressive evangelisation. Both at home and abroad the Open Brethren give themselves to mission work with ardour. Their stations are dotted over the face of the whole earth. They have added at least one, in Mr. F. S. Arnot of Garenganze, to the roll of the great pioneers of the modern missionary movement; and many other names, less famous, but perhaps no less worthy, might easily be mentioned. This is their truest glory. In this respect they have broken loose from the lead of the more powerful branch of their school, to place themselves side by side with the most zealous of other denominations in the great work of the Church.

“PUSEYISM a carcass, Plymouthism a ghost,” was the epigram of Dr. John Duncan. The abjuration of “system” was the special boast of the Brethren, and it has proved their ruin. Lost in mystic contemplations, they dreamed of reproducing on earth such a spontaneous harmony of pure spiritual movement as filled the serene sphere of their vision. The matured results of the experiment are now before us, rendering criticism surely superfluous.

If they had the weakness of mysticism, they had its strength. They did not master the truths of salvation in a logical concatenation; they saw them. Inference was nothing; immediate perception everything. Newton, like many others, said that the Church was seated in heavenly places “representatively”. This, to the genuine Darbyite, was the most frigid of glosses, the most nugatory of legal fictions. The saints were seated “spiritually” in heaven; and so far from the spiritual being akin to the unreal or fictitious, it was the one thing absolutely and intensely real. Where logical Puritan divinity was anxious to explain, Darby only cared to feel. That which can be explained is an insignificant segment from the circle of truth.

This determined the character of the entire school. In systematic divinity they were weak, and their history shows the perilous character of the weakness. But the Bible, in a wonderful way, was a living book to them. It is said that “a closer and more intimate knowledge of the Bible itself as a living book and not as a mere repertory of proof texts, is one of the marks of our time”.¹⁵⁵ It is certainly one of the marks of Brethrenism. A professional man, brought up in an atmosphere of fervent Evangelicalism, and deeply interested in Christian work, once expressed to me his opinion that the episode of the Woman of Samaria would be found in St. Luke. No earnest Darbyite could have perpetrated such a blunder; and he would have avoided it, not merely from the habit of turning to the incident in St. John, but from a profound (even if not always an articulate) sense of its intensely Johannine character.

The system was the reflexion of the mind of its great prophet. Method and logical coherence are no features of Darby’s divinity. Coherence up to a certain point, of course, cannot be lacking where there is genuine insight; but Darby was too impatient to systematise, or even indeed to verify. In his expository writings, he often drops a half-hint that sets in strong light a passage that great commentators have left obscure. Sometimes he seems to explain with the ease and directness of one that had been in the secret of the author. This illumination has exercised a great (in some respects a dangerous) fascination, blinding many to the real confusion in which his mind often moved. To analyse his position is often to refute it. His central principles of the ruin of the Church and of the expression of its unity are cases in point. They will not endure the light of unambiguous language.

Yet Darby was truly great. The late Andrew Jukes is acknowledged as “a true and original mystic,” but there is little doubt that Darby was the fount of his mystic inspiration. For several years Jukes, as a young man, was in Darby’s communion, and tracts that he wrote in those days show that Darbyism was infused into the whole substance of his thought. Another mystic, Mrs. Frances Bevan, found in Darbyism that which met her wants and detached her from the Church of England, notwithstanding the strength of the ties that bound her to it. Turning (perhaps from the disappointments of Brethrenism) to the study of the German mystics, she produced from their writings, in a series of fascinating volumes, a catena of quotations in which the Darbyite is startled by the clearness and intensity of the echo of tones that have become familiar to his ear in such different surroundings.

¹⁵⁵ Principal Alexander Stewart, *Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible* i., 299 b.

Darby's mind is perhaps most simply and efficiently studied through his hymns; and the hymns require study; cursory perusal avails little. I am even reluctant to give extracts, for Darby's hymns must be studied as a whole. But has the effect of the Incarnation often been more nobly conceived than in the following stanza?

“God and Father, we adore Thee
For the Christ, Thine image bright,
In whom all *Thy holy nature*.
Dawned on our once hopeless night.”¹⁵⁶

And if Darby could lay the foundation, he could also place the top-stone. How many hymns on heaven have reached the height of the concluding stanza of his “Rest of the saints above”?

“God and the Lamb shall there
The light and temple be,
And radiant hosts for ever share
The unveiled mystery.”

It was Mrs. Bevan that wrote,

“Christ, the Son of God, hath sent me
Through the midnight lands;
Mine the mighty ordination
Of the pierced Hands.”

This is the perfect expression of Brethrenism on its strongest side. The soul has to do with Christ through no human or superhuman mediation. In direct communion with Him the commission must be received, the work executed, the account rendered. Of course, along with this went the rejection of all “the mediate expression of Christ's authority,” of even the simplest form of constituted government,—with the inevitable result of slipping under the irresponsible yoke of any who combined the power and the will to impose it. “If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth . . . saith the Lord.”

The weak side of Brethrenism is exemplified in the foreign mission work of the Open party. To the devotedness of this service I have already sought to do justice. It is now due to truth to say that the work has been hampered by the fear of “human order”. By the force of the nature of things, a sort of committee has grown up. Three men—all of them justly held in high esteem—“commend” missionaries, receive funds for them, and maintain a correspondence with them. But the missionaries are not answerable to the committee, nor is the committee responsible for the missionaries. Yet it is perfectly inevitable that the existence of the committee should afford some ground of confidence to most of the missionaries, who nevertheless are presumed to go forth “wholly trusting in the Lord”. Now, it can be no breach of charity to say that such “trust in the Lord” as is nominally expected has not been a qualification of one missionary in a hundred anywhere. How many men could leave their native land without acquainting any one in the world with their destination, without a single friend in the country for which they were bound, without a penny towards their first expenses on landing, and yet feel no fear? The danger is great that under this half system people will suppose they

¹⁵⁶ I am indebted for this fine verse to my critic in the *British Weekly* for January 17, 1901—“H. W. P.” The italics, in this and in the next quotation, are mine.

are “trusting the Lord” in some peculiar sense, and will value themselves on their superiority to others who advance no such claim,—while at bottom their confidence is essentially the same as that of their brethren who go out avowedly under the authority of a society.

On the other hand, whatever amount of faith missionaries are bound to exercise, the Church at home is certainly bound to see that they are duly maintained. Now this it cannot do, on any considerable scale, without a thoroughly organised system. If the Brethren disbelieve this, dare they say that their own missions disprove it? The assumption of Brethrenism is that God will work a standing miracle to accomplish that which He has in reality entrusted to the operation of those principles of organisation, subordination, and mutual responsibility with which the very existence of human society is bound up. The refusal to recognise this can only result in needless friction, heartburning, and dissipation of energy.

Account must be taken of two palpable facts. God has not seen fit to qualify every useful missionary to prosecute his work in direct responsibility to Christ, apart from all mediate human authority; and He has not seen fit to qualify every missionary to trust Him for maintenance, positively apart from all mediate human channels of supply. The Brethren of course simply cannot, in the very nature of things, act on the contrary supposition; but in trying to do so as far as they can, they may certainly succeed in introducing a great deal of unnecessary confusion and weakness into their work.

But, indeed, a failure to reckon with the “facts of life” is a very deep-seated disease of Brethrenism. It underlies that narrow and sectarian spirit which (notwithstanding many honourable exceptions, chiefly among the Open party) has on the whole been a feature of the movement. No ray of light from the inductive method has shone upon the mind of Brethrenism as a system. Its doctors have been hopeless mediævalists, constructing their theories in absolute independence of the facts of the world around them. If facts afterwards contradict the theory, so much the worse for the facts.

This is the incurable vice of High Church systems. For example, baptism regenerates; that the baptised have often nothing of the regeneration about them except the name is unfortunate, but it does not touch the theory. Similarly, the Exclusives have styled the Open Brethren a “leprous” community; that the Open Brethren have been much more useful in aggressive evangelisation, and have been at least as holy in their lives, is curious, but is held only to illustrate God’s sovereignty—as if God had no care either to mark His approval of what is good or His disapproval of what is bad. Many Open Brethren fall into the same error when they hurl sweeping accusations against the position of all Christians that are not Plymouth Brethren, while they yet must see that companies of such Christians are at least as favoured as themselves with tokens of God’s approval.

I am far from denying that God may bestow a measure of His blessing where there is a great deal of error and confusion. If he did not I fear there would be no blessing at all for the Church on earth. But I deny that His favours are so indiscriminately bestowed as to constitute no criterion whatever of His approval.

In view of the history of Brethrenism, it is a remarkable thing that it still exerts no mean power of attraction. It is idle to seek the explanation of this outside the real excellences of the sect. The Brethren handle spiritual topics with an absolute fearlessness. There is no apologetic tone,—there is no prudent dilution of the spiritual by the secular,—in their ministry. They may sometimes speak unwisely, illiberally, ignorantly; their system of ministry almost ensures the occasional entrance of the grotesque; but they speak as if religion were the one business of life, instead of allowing secular topics to encroach even upon the narrow limits of time ostensibly devoted to spiritual things. That they often compare favourably with their neighbours in this respect constitutes a main element in their strength.

The open ministry of the Brethren, whatever may be said for it on the side of pure theory, has been a very qualified success indeed in practice. Captain Hall complained of it bitterly fifteen years before his breach with Darby; and Mackintosh, who was its enthusiastic supporter, made (as we have seen) admissions that went far towards justifying Hall's complaints. Yet Hall allows that the system had sometimes answered well.

"I have seen in other days, and thankfully remember it, a more deep and extended manifestation of God's chastening presence, but not for a long time; of late, in the place of the diverse, yet harmonious expressions of spiritual power, one with a psalm and hymn, another with instruction, another with prayer—alike the unquestionable utterances of true hearts, governed and filled by the same Lord—I have listened, in the town where I have lived, to little else (and at times with agony) but to long, wordy, tedious prayers, psalms and hymns out of place, and sung deplorably; false doctrines in teaching, sometimes confused and pompous, and therefore solemn to the vulgar—sometimes confounding truth and falsehood together, and almost all powerless; and alas! in the main, all alike considered good and to purpose, as long as the actors were more than one; and out and out true to this principle of liberty of ministry."

A great deal must be allowed for individual taste. Probably the tone of the Open meeting in most places is far lower than it was in earlier days. Able and influential men abounded formerly, and are very scarce now. Brethrenism has shown itself lamentably incapable of perpetuating a race of leaders. Its characteristic "haphazardism" (if I may be allowed such a term) comes out in this. No provision has been made for the higher studies connected with theology, and now that the contagious enthusiasm that once drew so many highly trained minds into its ranks has waned, Brethrenism is for the most part bereft of well qualified guides. Thirty-five years ago Dorman, while acknowledging the qualifications of some of the older leaders, spoke severely of their successors. "Of those that have been formed by the system, I would rather not say anything, although godliness and earnestness will always be in their measure owned by the Lord."

To expect ends by the miraculous intervention of God, in the absence of those means that He has committed to human responsibility, has been a foible of Brethrenism from the beginning, and its noblest have shared in it. But what I have ventured to call the "haphazardism" of the system is not wholly due to that tendency. Rather, that tendency itself is to be traced to an underlying principle that is strictly fundamental. Brethrenism is the child of the study of unfulfilled prophecy, and of the expectation of the immediate return of the Saviour. If any one had told the first Brethren that three quarters of a century might elapse and the Church be still on earth, the answer would probably have been a smile, partly of pity, partly of disapproval, wholly of incredulity. Yet so it has proved. It is impossible not to respect hopes so congenial to an ardent devotion; yet it is clear now that Brethrenism took shape under the influence of a delusion, and that that delusion was a decisive element in all its distinctive features.

Bibliographical Appendix

GENERAL AUTHORITIES

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CHAPTERS I AND II

A Letter from J. G. Bellett to J. McAlister, freely circulated in manuscript, with additional notes by J. N. Darby, E. Cronin, G. V. Wigram and J. B. Stoney, is the great authority. Hardly less valuable is the *Memoir of A. N. Groves* by his widow. For the original environment of Brethrenism, Professor G. T. Stokes' article, "John Nelson Darby," *Contemporary Review*, October 1885; D'Acy Sirr, *Memoir of the last Archbishop of Tuam. Recollections of J. G. Bellett*, by his daughter, is scanty for the early period, and deals throughout chiefly with Bellett's private life. The first three tracts by Darby, reprinted in his *Collected Writings, Ecclesiastical*, vol. i. F. W. Newman, *Phases of Faith*.

CHAPTER III

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CHAPTER IV

A. N. Groves' *Memoir*, as before. H. Groves' *Memoir of Lord Congleton*. F. W. Newman, *Personal Narrative in Letters, principally from Turkey; Phases of Faith*. Stock, *History of the Church Missionary Society*, books i. and ii.

CHAPTER V

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A. T. C. Campbell, *Letter To the Saints meeting for Worship in Ebrington Street*. Wigram, *A Reason for Withdrawing from Ebrington Street*; *Letter To the Saints meeting to Break Bread in Rawstorne Street*; *Plain Evidence Concerning Ebrington Street*; *Letter To those who have read Lord Congleton's Tract, entitled Reasons for Leaving Rawstorne Street*; *Letter to Lord Congleton*. W. [?Wigram], *Some Remarks on a Recent Letter from Plymouth*. R. Hill, *Remarks on a Portion of a Letter written by H. Soltau*, etc. An anonymous tract, *Some Remarks upon the Circular Letter*, etc., is also sometimes attributed to R. Hill. The above are all written on Darby's side of the controversy.

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CHAPTER VII

J. L. Harris, *The Sufferings of Christ as set forth in a Lecture on Psalm vi*. B. W. Newton, *Remarks on the Sufferings of the Lord Jesus; Observations on a Tract, etc.* (reply to Harris); *A Statement and Acknowledgment respecting certain Doctrinal Errors*; *A Letter on Subjects Connected with the Lord's Humanity* (of this important tract I have failed to procure a copy); "Brief Statements in the form of Answers to Questions"; *A Letter to a Friend concerning a Tract recently published in Cork*; *Christ our Suffering Surety*; *Propositions for the Solemn Consideration of Christians, etc.*, etc. J. N. Darby, *Observations on a Tract entitled "Remarks on the Sufferings, etc."*; *A Plain Statement of the Doctrine on the Sufferings of our Blessed Lord propounded in some Recent Tracts*; *Notice of the Statement and Acknowledgment of Error, circulated by Mr. Newton*; *Remarks on a Letter on Subjects connected with the Lord's Humanity*.

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CHAPTER VIII

Groves' *Darbyism*. W. Trotter, *The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda; Bethesda in September, 1857*. W. H. Dorman, *A Review of Certain Evils and Questions that have arisen amongst Brethren*. Wigram, *The Present Question* (containing a reprint of the letter of G. Alexander, and of the *Letter of the Ten*); *An Appeal to Saints that remain still in Bethesda and Salem, as to certain bad Doctrine; An Answer to Mr. H. Craik's Letter, dated 15th November, 1848*. Lord Congleton, *The Bristol Case, and Divisions in Other Places Connected Therewith; The Bath Case; or who made the Division at Bath?* A. N. Groves, *The Tottenham Case*. "Vindex," *Shibboleth, or, the New Test of Communion amongst certain "Brethren"*. D. W., *Divers Weights Brought out and Broken*. J. G. Deck, *Letter on Receiving or Rejecting Brethren; A Second Letter on Receiving and Rejecting Brethren*. (The second was written to correct the first; Deck's attitude towards the controversy was always extraordinarily vacillating.)

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CHAPTER IX

As for Chapter VIII. and the following: H. Young, *A Plea for the Honour of Christ. Christian Fellowship* (printed statements of their basis of communion from the Open meetings at Torquay, Scarborough, Tottenham, Taunton and Bath). Two anonymous pamphlets on *Darbyism*, attributed to Boardman, give some striking instances of intolerance. Dorman's tracts cited below for Chapter XII. are still the most powerful attack on "Exclusive" principles.

CHAPTER X

The writings of J. N. Darby and W. Kelly are the most reliable testimony as to the ecclesiastical principles of Darbyism. For a comparatively short and thoroughly authoritative account, Kelly's *Six Lectures* is best. From an adverse point of view, Dorman's tracts (see below under Chapter XII.) are best. My chapter has been principally written from personal knowledge, except as to the facts of the Walworth-Sheffield discipline. For these consult J. E. Howard, *A Caution against the Darbyites*; H. Groves, *Darbyism*; and the anonymous *Darbyite Discipline, or a Buoy fixed by a Friendly Hand on a Sunken Rock*. Allusions to the episode are very frequent in the pamphlet literature of Brethrenism for many years. Unfortunately I have not been able to see the *Correspondence of the Walworth and the Priory Gatherings*, and other contemporary correspondence.

CHAPTER XII

J. N. Darby, *The Sufferings of Christ, Collected Writings, Doctrinal*, vol. ii. (The controversial matter will be found in the *Preface*, originally issued with the first reprint, and in the *Introduction*, issued with the reprint of 1867, *i.e.*, after the schism.) P. F. Hall, *Grief upon Grief and Appendix*. W. H. Dorman, *Close of Twenty-eight Years of Association with J. N. D.; High Church Claims of "the Exclusive Brethren"—a Series of Letters to Mr. J. L. Harris*. "Tertius," *Divers and Strange Doctrines Stated and Examined* (well worth reading,—thoughtful, and, though extremely firm, charitable).

A tract in opposition to Darby and his school appeared in 1868, entitled *The Recent Doctrines of the Five*; but it has been justly criticised as unpardonably inaccurate. The literature of this controversy was very extensive.

CHAPTER XIV

The literature bearing on the period of this chapter and the next is still voluminous. A few of the most important tracts are here mentioned. It is impossible to give all the rest that have been consulted, and unsatisfactory to make a further selection. Of the events related in this chapter the present writer has had personal knowledge. A great many private letters, chiefly autographs, have also been utilised.

J. N. Darby, "Letter from Pau," printed and extensively circulated; Letter to H. J. Jull; unprinted correspondence with Dr. Cronin, and other unprinted letters. J. H., *A "Fresh Testimony" Characterised by Fellowship with "Ecclesiastical Error" Incompatible with "Endeavouring to Keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace,"*—a detailed account of the whole subject of this chapter from the point of view of an adherent of the Priory meeting. On the other side, covering rather less ground, is an *Epitome of the Ramsgate Sorrow*. There is a more connected narrative by G. Gardner, P. Compain and T. Neatby,—*Exposé des Troubles Ecclésiastiques de Ryde—Londres—Ramsgate*. This was answered by W. J. Lowe in *Paroles d'Avertissement* (which I have not been able to consult), to which the authors of the *Exposé* replied in *Examen de la Brochure de M. Lowe*.

A great deal of correspondence is given in *Facts and Correspondence Connected with the Withdrawal from Albert Street, Ryde*, and in *Correspondence Ensuing on the Ramsgate Division*.

H. J. Jull's Letter to Darby gives the point of view of some of the "New-lump" party.

Of the circulars issued by meetings that dissented from the Priory, that of Blackheath is the most important. The acts of the Priory are given in the general narratives above cited.

CHAPTER XV

The Reading Schism: C. E. Stuart, *Christian Standing and Condition; Is it the Truth of the Gospel?* J. B. Stoney, *A Letter to the Brethren in the Lord, meeting at Queen's Road, Reading*. C. H. M., *A Letter to a Friend on the New York and Reading Pamphlets*. W. Scott, *The "Reading" Question*. E. R. Wills, *Why I Cannot Refuse the Queen's Road Assembly*. J. E. Batten, *Is It Subjection to the Holy Ghost? or to a Committee?*

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