

"THE BRETHREN:"

(COMMONLY SO-CALLED)

Their Origin, Progress and Testimony.

"THE BRETHREN", (COMMONLY SO-CALLED)

“THE BRETHREN”

(COMMONLY SO-CALLED)

A BRIEF SKETCH

By

ANDREW MILLER

(Slightly Revised and Abbreviated,
by G. C. Willis)

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.”—Isaiah 59.19.

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NOTE

"Some have raised objections to the title "The Brethren", as giving the idea of a sect; others as arrogating to a particular community that which is equally true of all Christians. Such thoughts never occurred to me while writing the book, and were not suggested by those to whom I spoke of it. Expressions such as "the writings of Brethren," "the meetings of Brethren," &c., are in common use among themselves; which simply mean a convenient designation, and one which cannot be misunderstood. In no other sense is it used here. To be obliged to make use of a *description* instead of a *name* would greatly encumber the style and embarrass the writer."

A.M.

PREFACE

Some beloved saints of God have asked that this little book, long out of print, be republished: and as we believe it may be a real blessing to the saints of God, it is a joy and privilege to be permitted to undertake this little service.

Andrew Miller, the Author, was one of the well known early brothers. He wrote a number of other books, including "Short Papers on Church History;" "Meditations on the Song of Solomon," recently republished by Bible Truth Publishers; "Meditations on the 23rd and 84th Psalms;" "Meditations on the Christian's Standing, Vocation, Warfare, and Hope;" "Meditations on the Beatitudes and Christian Devotedness;" and various pamphlets. I believe he also wrote the Preface to the various volumes of C.H.M.'s "Notes on the Pentateuch."

The present book on the Brethren was, we suppose, published first about eighty years, or more, ago; and many changes have come in during those years: changes which make it unsuitable to reproduce without some revision and omissions. These have, I trust, been done in the fear of God, and with the hope that the usefulness of the book will

not be in any way impaired.

The first part of the book is not only deeply interesting to those who delight to trace the work of the Spirit of God in teaching and guiding the Lord's people: but also may be profitable to guide the footsteps of some in the paths He has marked out for them. The letter describing the meeting for Breaking of Bread, on Pages 53 to 60, though written about the same time, was not in the original book, and is by a different writer.

The truths set forth both simply and clearly in the second portion of the book will, we trust, be of blessing to the souls of many, especially amongst the younger saints.

The book is sent forth once again with the hope and prayer that the Lord may graciously use it for His own honour and glory, and for the blessing of His beloved people.

G.C.W.

Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia,
October, 1963.

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THE BRETHREN:

(Commonly So-Called)

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THEIR ORIGIN, PROGRESS
AND TESTIMONY

INTRODUCTION

It is always a relief to the mind, in studying the history of the church, to be able to trace with any measure of certainty the *silver line* of grace, and the operations of God's Spirit in those who have taken a prominent part in its affairs. This was a rare privilege during the long dark night of the middle ages; but with the dawn of the Reformation the working of the Holy Spirit became increasingly manifest. The word of God was appealed to as the only authority in matters of faith and salvation; and the great christian doctrine of "Justification by faith alone" became the foundation and cornerstone of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. By means of this truth the power of popery was subverted, and the nations of Europe delivered from its tyranny.

Every right-minded Christian, who has studied the great revolution of that period, will certainly not fail in thankfulness to God for the mighty work which was then accomplished by His grace, through the faith and the endurance of the Reformers.

We must ever honour with admiring gratitude those faithful witnesses who laboured to spread the pure light of the gospel in opposition to papal superstition, infidelity, and immorality, backed by the power of the civil sword, and in the face of imprisonment and death. The awakening and the agitation of mind were so general, and all in the direction of truth and holiness, that the most unbelieving must own that such a Reform could only have been produced by causes more than human, and of the most powerful efficacy.

But the leaders of that great movement overlooked many of the most important doctrines of the word of God. The vital truth of salvation through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, without the merit of good works, was so startling, so overwhelming, to those who had been educated in the superstitions of Romanism that they seemed to think no further truth was needed. They taught that the atoning work of Christ satisfied the

justice of God, reconciling Him to rebellious man, and that all who had the full assurance of faith in this truth were saved. It does not appear that they ever laid hold of the precious truth that it was God's love to sinful man which led Him to send His Son to die in their stead, that *they* might be reconciled to Him. This is the grand foundation truth of all gospel testimony. Had there been no love, there would have been no Saviour-Jesus, no salvation, no glory. But "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3.16).

God never was the enemy of man, and needed not to be reconciled, though He did need and did provide a propitiation for our sins. Many sweet thoughts flow from this blessed truth; the child of faith can fall back, not only on the work of the cross as his resting-place, but on the heart of God who loved him and sent His Son to die for him. In 2 Corinthians 5 we read, "That God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The first word we hear from an offended God after man had sinned, is, "Adam, where art thou?" Man was lost—

God was seeking him. This was the first action in the work of redemption; indeed, the grand feature of redeeming love.

The Reformation of the Nineteenth Century

We must now notice a very special work of God's Spirit in the early part of last century, and in the British Isles. It pleased God, in the riches of His grace, about that time to awaken in many minds and in different parts of the country a deep desire for the study of the sacred Scriptures. By this means many of His children were led to a renewed examination of the "sure word of prophecy," and others were led to see the importance and blessedness of what He had revealed in His Word respecting the church, the body of Christ. This was something entirely new in that day. To speak of the church as the body of Christ, of which He is the glorified Head in heaven, and of its being indwelt and governed by the Holy Ghost, were new truths in the ears of Christendom.

It would be difficult to find in the theology of the Fathers or the schoolmen, of the Reformers or the Puritans, the doctrine of the church as the Elect Bride of Christ, separated from the world to wait for His

return from heaven as her only hope, and knowing the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as her only strength and joy. From the end of the first, down to the beginning of the nineteenth century, no theological writer seems to have brought these precious truths before the church. Even the simple gospel was so completely overlaid and mixed up with human feelings and doings, that hardly anyone ever expected to know in this world the certainty of salvation. Hence we find some of the most holy living and spiritual teachers who have been in the church, praying on their death-beds that they "might not take their sins and iniquities to the judgment-seat." And this state of mind is by no means rare even in the present day, though the light and truth which have been spread abroad during the last hundred and thirty years have given many such a surer hope and a brighter prospect. The full efficacy of redemption, according to Hebrews 10, was, and is, comparatively little known. There we read, "Because the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." This does not mean—no more conscience of sinning but *no more conscience of sins*. The precious blood of Christ has cleared the conscience of the

believer for ever. "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." There is no need of the Mass to perpetuate the sacrifice, nor of human feelings and doings to add to its value. When this truth is understood, the full forgiveness of sins, and acceptance in the Beloved become the happy condition of the soul.

The difference between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of God was also one of the important truths recovered at this time. The question is fully discussed by the apostle in Philippians 3. Its ramifications, especially in Puritan theology, are so wide, that we will not attempt to follow them here, but only give the apostle's conclusion:— "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Every Christian ought to know that He who knew no sin was made sin for us, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." The feeblest believer in Christ stands before God in a righteousness absolutely complete, divine, and everlasting. Christ is our righteousness. In place of taking "his sins and iniquities to the judgment-seat," the

moment he is absent from the body, he is present with the Lord, and in all the completeness of Christ Himself.

Prophetic Truth

It pleased the Lord to revive in many minds during the first quarter of the last century, a deep interest in the restoration of Israel to their own land, and the consequent glory of Messiah's reign. Several books were published on this subject between the years 1812-25. But the one which created the greatest interest is entitled "The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty," by a South American Roman Catholic priest, Emmanuel Lacunza, who adopted the *nom-de-plume* of Ben-Ezra, a converted Jew. This work was originally written in Spanish, and first published in Spain in 1812. It was translated into English, and published in London in 1827, with a long preliminary discourse by the Rev. Edward Irving. His powerful eloquence was now employed to arouse his congregation, his brethren in the ministry, and the whole professing church, to the study of this great and comparatively new subject. The prophetic description of the glory of the millennial kingdom gave him

ample material for his glowing orations. The circulation of these new books, and fresh papers constantly appearing in the magazines awakened a fresh interest in the subject, and many, both lay and clerical, became diligent students of prophecy.

These studies led to the establishment of what were called "The Prophetic Meetings," which for some years were held in Albury, Mr. H. Drummond's seat, Surrey, and at Powerscourt Castle, in Wicklow. Clergymen and private gentlemen came freely to those meetings at first; but after a while they were attended, at least in Ireland, chiefly by the Brethren. It was then, we believe, that the midnight cry was raised, "Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." And since that day, the number of those who preach the second coming of the Lord has greatly increased. The cry has been heard in every land throughout Christendom, and still it rolls on, and must do so until He come and call His bride away. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22.17.

The Effect of Church Truth

The first effect of discovering from the Word of God what the calling, position and

hopes of the church are, must be a deep sense of the contrast between what man calls the church, and what the church really is in the light of the New Testament Scriptures. So it was with a few christian men in Dublin in the early part of the last century. The Lord, we doubt not, had been dealing with their souls for some time, and preparing them for the reception of many truths which had been long lost to the children of God. They were, no doubt, worthy members of their different communities, sound in the faith, devoted, and unworldly; but they began to see, in the clear light of God's Word, that to remain where they were would be a practical denial of what the church is. Thus were they led of God to separate themselves from the existing religious systems with which they had been severally connected, and bear witness to the heavenly relations of the Christian, and to the nature and unity of the church of God. Unlike the mere *abstractions* of the ascetics, it was a *moral separation* from the world and from the religion which it sanctioned. Even the confessors at an early period of the church's history, and the Reformers and Puritans at a later, had no wish to leave the communion of the Established Church, provided she had agreed to

reform abuses. Most of them were excommunicated; but when a change of government brought religious liberty, they gladly returned to their pulpits and benefices.

When this book was first written many of those who had taken this place of separation from existing religious systems were still alive, so the author needed to do little more than state the origin of this community, or company of Christians, and give a brief outline of its progress. Just what that 'community' held to be true and precious, may be judged by what has appeared in print, and been written by themselves; and of this we may freely speak. Their writings, in the form of books, tracts, and periodicals, are widely spread over the face of Christendom, so that their views may be easily ascertained. We shall not quote the opinions of their enemies as a fair estimate of their character, any more than we would accept the opinion of a bigoted Roman Catholic about the character of Luther.

CHAPTER I

"THE BRETHREN"

In the winter of 1827-28, four christian men, who had for some time been exercised as to the condition of the entire professing church, agreed, after much conference and prayer, to come together on the Lord's day for the breaking of bread, as the early Christians did, counting on the Lord to be with them; these were; Mr. Darby, Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Cronin, Mr. Bellett, and Mr. Hutchinson. Their first meeting was held in the house of Mr. Hutchinson, No. 9, Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin. They had for a considerable time — along with others who attended their reading meetings — been studying the Scriptures, and comparing what they found in the Word of God with the existing state of things around them; but they could find no expression of the nature and character of the church of God, either in the National Establishment, or in the various forms of dissenting bodies. This brought them into the place of separation from all these ecclesiastical systems, and led

them to come together in the name of the Lord Jesus, owning the presence and sovereign action of the Holy Spirit in their midst, and thus endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Matt. 18.20; Eph. 4.3,4.

They continued to meet for some time in Fitzwilliam Square, and others were gradually added to their number.

The circumstances which led these earnest men to read the scriptures and come to the decision above described were evidently of the Lord. One of the four, a clergyman from the county Wicklow, having met with an accident which injured his foot, came to Dublin for care and treatment. Before this happened, however, he had passed through much exercise of conscience as to his position in the establishment, and had determined to leave it. Some of his friends in town, like himself in the country, had been similarly exercised, and feeling the absence of spiritual life and christian fellowship in the denominations, were really thirsting for something which could not be found there. Thus the Spirit of God was working in many minds, and in an especial way, at that time. He had created a felt need in the heart which grace and truth alone could satisfy. In this

state of mind they agreed to study the Word together, and look to the Lord for light and direction as to their future path.

Interested friends, and the survivors of those who were early connected with this movement, have raised the question as to whose heart the Spirit of God first visited and moved on the important subject of the unity of the church, and separation from existing religious systems. But without attempting to answer such a question, we would simply reply that the thought was God's thought as it was His truth, and the leader in the work was His chosen instrument. History has to do not with theories, but with facts, in so far as they are known.

The Overruling Hand of God

Here we have to notice before going farther, the existence of a small meeting with a measure of intelligence as to the church of God being one body, previously to the meeting of the four in Fitzwilliam Square. They had been independents; but it does not appear that they left that body so much from principle as from dissatisfaction with their ways. Nevertheless, God was working in their hearts by His grace and

overruling the discipline of that church for their spiritual blessing. And how often this has been the case with individuals in all similar movements, of whom it may be said, "they went out, not knowing whither they went." But the Lord was guiding, and their dependence was in Him. It happened in this way:—

A young man, a medical student — afterwards Dr. Cronin — had come up from the south of Ireland to Dublin for his health, about the year 1826. He applied for communion as a visitor, and was readily received at the tables of the Independents; but when they learnt that he had become a resident, this liberty was refused. He was then informed that he could no longer be admitted to the table of any of the congregations without *special membership* with some one of them. This announcement made a deep impression on his mind, and was no doubt used of God to turn his attention to the truth of the one body. If, he thought, all true believers are members of the body of Christ, what can that strange expression mean, *special membership with the Independents*? He paused, and after much exercise of conscience and prayer, he refused to submit to their church order. This forced him outside,

and exposed him to the charge of *irreligion* and *antinomianism*. He remained in this outside place for several months, feeling deeply his loneliness and separation from many that he loved in the Lord. It was a time of trial in its way, and might have proved most injurious to his soul; but the Lord overruled it for blessing. To avoid the appearance of evil he used to spend the mornings of the Lord's day in secret. These seasons he found to be of great blessing spiritually, and also of deep exercise as to his future path. Such is the Lord's way with the instruments He is preparing for future testimony and service.

The young student was at length publicly excommunicated by name in a chapel, of which the Rev. William Cooper was the minister. This greatly affected him: he found it no light thing to be thus publicly denounced and avoided by those he esteemed as Christians. But the church had gone far beyond its proper jurisdiction. She has authority only from her Head in heaven to cut off those who have proved themselves to be *wicked persons*. "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." (i Cor. 5). Thus the church in so acting received the deeper wound herself. One of the deacons,

Edward Wilson, secretary to the Bible Society, was constrained to protest against this step, which led to his leaving the Congregational body.

These two brothers, Messrs. Cronin and Wilson, after studying the word for some time, began to see their way clear to come together on the Lord's day morning for the breaking of bread and prayer. They first met for this purpose in the house of Mr. Wilson, Sackville Street. They were joined in a short time by two Miss Drurys, who left Mr. Cooper's chapel, where they were members; and also by a Mr. Tims, bookseller, Grafton Street. Mr. Wilson leaving soon after this for England, the little meeting was transferred to Mr. Cronin's house in Lower Pembroke Street, where several were added to their number.

The existence of this meeting, it may be said, was the result of circumstances, not of divine conviction. We believe both concurred. They were no doubt forced into the place of separation by the mistaken conduct of the Congregational body, but they also were led to fall back upon the sure word of God, to act under their divine instincts, and the unerring guidance of the Holy Spirit. This little meeting never formally broke up,

but they united at once with those who began to break bread in Fitzwilliam Square; the accomodation was greater, and the principles of meeting substantially the same.

We now return to what may be fairly called the first meeting of "the Brethren," held in Fitzwilliam Square.* Deep impressions of the truth may have been abroad upon the hearts of many at an earlier period than this, and that without conference; but with respect to the community of Brethren, so-called, we must start from this point. And here we have something more definite and positive, something more to be relied upon than general report or personal recollections.

The Brethren's First Pamphlet

In the year 1828 Mr. Darby published his first pamphlet,* entitled, "The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ."† We may

* I think actually the *first* pamphlet was one written in 1827, entitled, "Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy Who Signed the Petition to the House of Commons for Protection." This was sent privately to the Archbishop and Clergy, "having been written some time before it was printed, and withheld, from anxiety as to the justness of the step." See Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Vol. 1, Page 1.

† I think later Mr. Darby would have written "the Church of God," as I do not think we find the expression "Church of Christ in the Scriptures.

consider this tract as a statement of what the young community believed and practised, though not in the form of a creed or confession; and, further, as presenting the divine ground on which they acted. It may also be considered to contain nearly all the elements of those distinctive truths which have been held by Brethren from that day even until now. Not that the writer thought anything of this at the time; he was simply making known for the help of others what he had learnt from the Word of God for himself. But who could question the guidance of the Holy Spirit in such a production? Surely He was leading His chosen instruments by a way which they knew not, that the blessing which followed might be seen to be of His own rich grace and truth.*

As this paper was the first public testimony of a movement which was so rapidly to produce such blessed results in liberating souls, we will here give for the convenience of the reader a few extracts, chiefly as to the unity of the church.

“We know that it was the purpose of God in Christ to gather in one all things in

* See a reprint of the original in the Collected Writings of J.N.D. Vol. 1, Second Article.

heaven and on earth; reconciled unto Himself in Him; and that the church should be, though necessarily imperfect in His absence, yet by the energy of the Spirit the witness of this on earth, by gathering the children of God which were scattered abroad. Believers know that all who are born of the Spirit have substantial unity of mind, so as to know each other, and love each other as brethren. But this is not all, even if it were fulfilled in practice, which it is not; for they were so to be all one, as that the *world* might know that Jesus was sent of God: in this we must all confess our sad failure. I shall attempt not so much to propose measures here for the children of God, as to establish healthful principles: for it is manifest to me that it must flow from the growing influence of the Spirit of God and His unseen teaching: but we may observe what are positive hindrances, and in what that union consists. . . .

"In the first place it is not a formal union of the outward professing bodies that is desirable: indeed it is surprising that reflecting Protestants should desire it. Far from doing good, I conceive it would be impossible that such a body could be at all recognised as the church of God. 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. Whatever plans may be in the order of providence, we can only act upon the principles of grace; and true unity is the unity of the Spirit, and it must be wrought by the operation of the Spirit. . . .

"If the view we have taken of the state of the church be correct, we may adjudge that he is an enemy to the work of the Spirit of God who seeks the interests of any particular denomination; and that those who believe in 'the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ,' ought carefully to keep from such a spirit: for it is drawing back the church to a state occasioned by ignorance and non-subjection to the Word, and making a duty of its worst and most anti-christian results. This is a most subtle and prevailing mental disease, 'he followeth not us,' even when men are really Christians. . . .

"Christians are little aware how this prevails in their minds; how they seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ; and how it dries up the springs of grace and spiritual communion; how it precludes that order to which blessing is attached, the gathering together in the Lord's name. No meeting, which is not framed to embrace all the

children of God, on 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. . . .

Accordingly, the outward symbol and instrument of unity is the partaking of the Lord's supper; 'for we being many are one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.'

And what does St. Paul declare to be the true intent and testimony of that rite?

That, whensoever 'we eat of that bread and drink of that cup, we do shew the Lord's death till He come.' Here there are found the character and life of the church — that into which it is called — that in which the truth of its existence subsists, and in which alone is true unity. . . .

Am I desiring believers to correct the churches? I am beseeching them to correct themselves, by living up, in some measure, to the hope of their calling. I beseech them to shew their faith in the death of the Lord Jesus, and their boast in the glorious assurance which they have obtained by it, by conformity to it, to shew their faith in His coming, and practically to look for it by a life suitable to desires fixed upon it.

"Let them testify against the secularity and blindness of the church; but let them

be consistent in their own conduct. 'Let their moderation be known unto all men.' While the spirit of the world prevails, spiritual union cannot subsist. Few believers are at all aware how the spirit which gradually opened the door to the dominion of apostasy still sheds its wasting and baneful influence on the professing church. . . . I do believe that God is working by means and in ways little thought of, in 'preparing the way of the Lord, and making his paths straight' — doing by a mixture of providence and testimony the work of Elias. I am persuaded that He will put men to shame exactly in the things in which they have boasted. I am persuaded that He will stain the pride of human glory, 'and the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man shall be brought low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. . . .'

"But there is a practical part for believers to act. They can lay their hand upon many things in themselves, *practically inconsistent with the power of that day* — things which shew that their hope is not in it — *conformity to the world which shews that the cross has not its proper glory in their*

eyes. . . . Further, unity is the glory of the church; but unity to secure and promote *our own interests* is not the unity of the church, but *confederacy* and denial of the nature and hope of the church. Unity, that is of the church, is the unity of the Spirit, and can only be in the things of the Spirit, and therefore can only be perfected in spiritual persons. . . . But what are the people of the Lord to do? Let them wait upon the Lord, and wait according to the teaching of His Spirit, and in conformity to the image, by the life of the Spirit of the Son. . . .

“But if any will say, if you see these things, what are you doing yourself? I can only deeply acknowledge the strange and infinite shortcomings, and sorrow and mourn over them; I acknowledge the weakness of my faith, but I earnestly seek for direction. And let me add, when so many who ought to guide go their own way, those who would have gladly followed are made slow and feeble, lest they should in any wise err from the straight path and hinder their service though their souls may be safe. But I would earnestly repeat what I said before — the unity of the church cannot possibly be found till the common object of those who

are members of it* is the glory of the Lord, who is the Author and Finisher of its faith: a glory which is to be made known in its brightness at His appearing, when the fashion of this world shall pass away. . . . The Lord Himself says, 'That they all may be one: as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.' John 17.

"Oh! that the church would weigh this word, and see if their present state do not preclude necessarily their shining in the glory of the Lord, or of fulfilling that purpose for which they were called. And I ask them, Do they at all look for or desire this? or are they content to sit down and say, that His promise is come utterly to an end for evermore? Surely, if we cannot say, 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the

* In later writings I think Mr. Darby would have written "members of His body", rather than, "members of it", (referring to the church).

glory of the Lord is risen upon thee,' we should say, 'Awake, awake, put on thy strength, arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, as in the generations of old'. ... Will He give His glory to one division or another? or where will He find a place for it to rest upon amongst us?

"I have gone beyond my original intention in this paper; if I have in anything gone beyond the measure of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, I shall thankfully accept reproof, and pray God to make it forgotten."

The Effect of This Pamphlet

The effects of these statements, so plain, so solemn, and so scriptural, were immediate and great. They found an echo in many a Christian's heart. Earnest men in various places, feeling it all but impossible to go on with the existing state of things in the professing church, welcomed the truth thus brought before them, and left their respective denominations. Pamphlets and books, with still more clearness and fullness, followed in rapid succession. In those days of virgin freshness and simplicity souls grew rapidly in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and His truth. Many wondered

whereunto all this would come. But the Lord was working, and numbers followed His leading.

"Amongst those," says Mr. Mackintosh in a letter to a friend, "who separated from the various organisations were some men of considerable gift, moral weight, intellectual power and intelligence — clergymen, barristers, solicitors, military and naval officers, physicians, and men of high position and property. Their secession, as you may suppose, caused a very considerable stir, and drew forth much opposition. Many a link of friendship was snapped; many a fondly cherished companionship was broken up; many sacrifices were made; much sorrow and trial were encountered; much reproach, obloquy, and persecution had to be endured. I cannot attempt to enter into details, nor have I any desire to do so. It could serve no useful end, and the record would but give needless pain. All who will live godly — all who are determined to follow the Lord; all who will keep a good conscience; all who, with firm purpose of heart, will act on the authority of holy scripture — must make up their minds to endure trial and persecution. Our Lord Christ has told us that He came not to send peace but a sword. 'Suppose ye

that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather *division*. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.' And He tells us that 'a man's foes shall be they of his own household.'" Luke 12.*

Many thought that the movement would soon come to nothing, as they had no definite organisation, no clerical order, no confession of faith, no visible bond of union, no president, nor ordained minister. But the Lord Himself was with them; true to His promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And there the Lord was to the joy, blessing, and edification of His beloved people. If we allow Him His proper place at the table, He will not only take it, but His presence will fill our hearts with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Thus were they strengthened, and thus the good work of the Lord went on. The gospel was preached with clearness, fulness, and power. Books and tracts were written, and widely circulated. The grand doctrines of the church, the operations of the Holy Spirit, the blessed

* Things New and Old, Vol. 18, p.426.

hope of the Lord's speedy return, were brought out with great freshness and power, to the uplifting of many hearts, and to the eternal blessing of hundreds of precious souls.

But we must return for a moment to our true starting-point, Fitzwilliam Square.

When these things were noised abroad, great interest was awakened in many minds as to the real character of this movement. Those who ventured to their meetings were struck by the fact of hundreds of people assembled together without a minister so called, and yet there was no confusion, but "all things were done decently and in order." One and another, becoming affected by the truth, were, after due examination as to soundness of doctrine and holiness of life, received into communion. The numbers so increased, that in little more than a year the house of Mr. Hutchinson was found to be unsuitable for the meetings.

The First Public Room

Mr. Parnell—afterwards Lord Congleton—who appears to have united with the Brethren in 1829, hired a large auction room in Aungier Street for their use on the Lord's

day. His idea was that the Lord's table should be a public witness of their position. This was their first public room; there they commenced first breaking bread about the spring of 1830, if not in the winter of 1829. This strange-looking place for the holy service of the Lord may be taken as a sample of what such rooms have been in all parts of the country ever since. In order to clear the place for the meeting on the Lord's day morning, three or four of the brothers were in the habit of moving the furniture aside on Saturday evening. One of these active brothers, referring to their Saturday night work, after a lapse of nearly fifty years, says, "These were blessed seasons to my soul—J. Parnell, W. Stokes, and others, moving the furniture, and laying the simple table with the bread and wine—and never to be forgotten; for surely we had the Master's presence, smile, and sanction, in a movement such as this was." We have heard some describe the strangeness of their feelings on their first visit to this room, having been accustomed to all the proprieties of "church and chapel," but what they heard was entirely new to them, and is remembered to this day. Such persons love to speak of the peculiar freshness, unction, and power of the

word at that time.

The Brethren afterwards engaged the room entirely for themselves, and continued to meet in it for several years; so that it became well known in Dublin as "the Brethren's room."

A. N. Groves and the Brethren

One of the Brethren's earliest visitors from a distance, whose name has become connected with their beginnings, was the late Mr. Anthony Norris Groves. From the scantiness of dates, even in his Memoirs, it is difficult to ascertain with certainty when he first met with the Brethren in Dublin, or how often. After doing our best by comparing the dates of letters, we believe the following to be substantially correct.

This dear devoted man was a successful dentist in Exeter; but from an early period of his life his heart had been fixed to go abroad as a missionary. The following conversation, as told by himself, shews a heart of almost ascetic devotion to its object. "Mr. Bickersteth," he says, "came down, and in our dining parlour at Exeter I related to him my circumstances. I told him I had offered myself to the society ten years ago; and that

my whole desire was to do the Lord's will, and the greatest good to the church at large, but more especially to that object to whose interests I had pledged myself—the cause of missions. But this, I said, may be done in two ways: first, *by giving one's means*; secondly, *by personal exertions*. In the first point of view I have an increasing professional income, and have this year received nearly *fifteen hundred pounds*, and dear Mrs. G., on the death of her father, will most probably have ten or twelve thousand pounds more; the whole of which, with my present views, will of course vanish, the moment we take the contemplated step. Mr. Bickersteth's answer was, 'If you are called of the Lord to the work, money cannot be set against it; it is men whom the Lord sends, and He stands in need of men more than money.' I thought his judgment a wise and holy one, and I do so to this day."*

Although we have no date as to when this conversation took place, we gather from a letter to a friend that it was not later than March, 1827. Writing under date April 2nd, 1827, he says, "The death of Mrs. G.'s father, about three weeks ago, has rendered our

* Memoirs of A. N. Groves, p. 23.

path in some respects much easier; but it has put some of that deadly corrupter of the human heart—money—in our way, under circumstances we have no control over. Pray for us, therefore, that we may glorify Him with every farthing of it.”

But as the Church Missionary Society required that all their missionaries should have a college education and be duly ordained to the ministry, Mr. G. had to give up his professional duties and turn his attention to the study of theology. It was not necessary, however, that he should reside in Dublin during his studies, but that he should appear at the university there two or three times a year for examination as to his attainments. It was during some of these periodical visits that he became acquainted with the Brethren. As a Christian he broke bread with them in Fitzwilliam Square, the meeting being at that time in existence. This was the extent of his connection with the young community. Indeed he never agreed with their ecclesiastical principles, nor the ground they had taken in separation from all the religious systems around them. In the year 1828 Mr. G. had a lengthy conversation with some of the Brethren on the subject of Missions and the Church, but as to the nature of the latter

they could not agree. Mr. G. warmly contended that the tares were to grow in the church to the end, which the Brethren strongly resisted as unscriptural, and necessarily opposed to all wholesome discipline; "the field is the world," not the church.*

This was probably the last time they met previously to his sailing for Bagdad. During these visits to Dublin a great change had taken place in his mind as to the necessity of a college education, and of a ministerial ordination, for the work of the ministry. He abandoned his connection with the college, thought his preparations and visits to Dublin a waste of time, and recommended all missionaries going abroad to avoid the dictation of the cold formalities of a committee. Mr. Groves and his party sailed from Gravesend for Bagdad on the 12th of June, 1829, and arrived after a most perilous journey on the 6th of December.

Although we think that the self-denying whole-hearted devotedness of Mr. Groves, for the spread of Christianity among the heathen, is well worthy a page in all church histories—and no pen could adequately write of the singleness of his purpose—yet

* See this subject considered, the writer's Church History, vol. 1, p. 22.

this is not our object in the present instance. In several hurried and inaccurate sketches of the origin of Brethren which have come before us, Mr. Groves has been spoken of as the one who first suggested the idea of coming together to break bread without the presence of a minister. From this alleged suggestion some have called him the "founder" of the Brethren, and some the "father;" but this conclusion is not at all borne out by facts. It is quite possible that some of the early Brethren may have profited by his intercourse with them, especially as to the Establishment and ordination; but they had been meeting for worship and communion before Mr. Groves knew them, and we are fully assured that he never had any real sympathy with the ground they had taken.

We now return to trace a little, though with scanty materials, the spread of these truths.

CHAPTER 2

READING MEETINGS

Mr. Darby, who seems from the very first to have had a great love for carrying the truth of God from place to place, soon after the formation of the meeting in Fitzwilliam Square, found his way to Limerick. This was the first place he visited; and in a truly apostolic spirit he went steadily on for fifty years, and never more so than during the last ten or fifteen years of his life.

In the good providence of God he had a most interesting visit to Limerick; the Lord opening the way for the ministry of the word. He held reading meetings to which many of the gentry and clergy came, and the truth found its way amongst them by the blessing of God. Mr. Maunsell, who lived there, worked with him, and was the active brother for a long time in that place. As reading meetings from that day until now, have been a principal means employed by the Brethren for introducing and spreading the truth, we may briefly notice them before going further.

From their earliest history it is evident that **reading meetings**, so called, have been a mode of teaching which has been universally practised; and, beyond question, they have been greatly used of the Lord for giving both an accurate and an extensive knowledge of the divine Word. Many Christians both in the Establishment and among Dissenters, who would go to a friend's house, it might be in the forenoon or the afternoon, to read and study the Word of God, would object to enter any place of public worship save what would be considered their own. In this way the Word of God is closely read by small companies of twenty, thirty or more; and, any one being free to ask a question, difficulties are removed and the true meaning of the Scripture more clearly seen. Such being also considered **instruction (not church) meetings**, all are free to state what light the Lord may have given them on the portion under meditation.

In this way each one soon finds his level, for it is he, and he only, who knows most of the Word that rises morally. The archbishop of Canterbury would find no advantage from his official dignity in such a meeting, but would have to take his place

according to his knowledge of the pure Word of God. Speaking generally this is necessarily and always the result. The spiritual discernment of the meeting, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, is so sensitive that merely human opinions or reasonings are most offensive, and carry no conviction; but the moment that the true meaning of the Word is given, a chord is struck which vibrates through the meeting. Although the truth is not its own power, it is used of the Holy Spirit to make the waiting soul feel its divine authority. It is the sword that cuts when He wields it, and the wine and oil for the wounded conscience when He applies it. No other kind of meeting, it will be seen, so stimulates the Christian to study constantly his Bible; and this may account for the proverbial saying that, "Whatever may be the faults of the Brethren, they are at home with their Bibles."

And the true secret of their knowledge of the Bible is their knowledge of Christ. The Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth, connects everything with the Person and work of Christ. It is merely human, they say, to handle any particular truth as a subject. In such cases the *mind* takes the lead in learning the truth of God, and, as a consequence,

everything is darkened and unsettled. It is not by means of human learning, or by the power of the human intellect, that the glory of Christ is seen, but by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. One ray of that sacred light will do more to enlighten the soul as to the Person, work, and glory of Christ, than the workings of the human mind for a thousand years. And herein lies the mighty difference between a reading meeting conducted under the direction of an appointed leader, however sincere or spiritual, and one under the acknowledged guidance of the Holy Spirit. The individual state of mind is very different in the one meeting from the other. In the former it partakes more of an intellectual turn—disposed to discuss, to infer, to draw conclusions, and build upon them. In the latter, when the soul is subject to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the conscience is exercised before God, and the affections are engaged with the blessed Lord Jesus. It is no question now as to either party being true, devoted, unworldly Christians, but as to who is looked to as leader of the meeting. We have had ample experience of both kinds and can speak with certainty on this subject.

But there is another, and an important point held in connection with all such meet-

ings; namely—that peace with God is necessary to edification. All experienced Christians will admit this, for, until the soul has settled peace, it will be occupied with itself in place of Christ. Doubts and fears will harass and perplex, but God would have His children to be without distraction. This peace implies the full assurance of pardon and acceptance in the Beloved. Before God in the full unsullied light of His presence, being one with Christ, God has nothing against us. And as Christ is our peace, and always there, and we in Him, this peace is settled and eternal: or, as it is briefly given by the apostle, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5.1,2.) These four things—being justified, having peace, standing in grace, waiting for glory—are considered as primary truths of Christianity, necessary to happy fellowship as saints, and to progress in the divine life. And we have often thought from personal conversation with individuals that such knowledge is common to the community. Persons who would be considered dull and ignorant on everything

else are clear and sound on the subject of peace with God, and answer with the greatest certainty. That there may be exceptions to this general rule we would not question, but we believe there are not many.

But why, it may be asked, are such attainments, and such precious knowledge, as many would say, common to a community composed of such a variety of age, intelligence, and condition in life? Certainly not because they are better than other Christians, but because the Holy Ghost is owned as the leader and teacher in their assemblies, and that by whomsoever *HE* will, not whomsoever *they* will. (i Cor. 12.11.) There may be failure on the part of some in not realising this truth, and a measure of hindrance to the action of the Spirit; nevertheless it is His presence which constitutes their assemblies, and characterises them as Christians. In place of clericalism in its least offensive form, they believe in the presence and sovereign action of the Holy Ghost, and this according to the word of the Lord. "Nevertheless," says Christ, "I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you Howbeit when he, the Spirit of

truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." (John 16).

This is the grand central truth which characterises the meetings of these believers, gathered to the name of the Lord, and reckoning on the Holy Spirit in accordance with the revealed Word. So firmly do they believe that the exalted Lord sent down the Holy Spirit to work in and guide His assembly, that they would not think it right to be present at any meeting of the assembly when a person occupied the chair as leader. But the Brethren themselves did not at first see this truth clearly; for some time they thought it necessary to make some arrangement, or have some understanding amongst themselves, as to who should break the bread or give an address. Their early prejudices were too deeply rooted to be eradicated all at once; and the Lord in tender grace ruled that it should be by degrees. They were on the right ground and moving in the right direction, and God had patience with them as He always has with honest ignorance.

Our Recollections of the First Reading Meeting We Attended

The working and middle classes, not having time for such meetings during the day, availed themselves of their leisure time in the evenings for the study of the Word. We well remember the first, or one of the first, of such a class that we attended. Being invited by a Christian friend to meet a few Christians at his house for a social tea and reading, we accordingly went on the evening named. In observing the friends as they assembled, to the number of about thirty, we were struck with their plain appearance as to dress, and the absence of ornaments. The subjects of conversation before tea seemed only to concern themselves, or rather, the Lord's work in their different meetings. As for general news, nothing was said, and the mention of politics would have seemed sheer profanity. **The Brethren, as a body, do not qualify, and they never vote at elections.**

But the tea is ready; and the whole company drop into a profound silence. Some brother, after a short, but distinct pause, asked the Lord's blessing. All were very free and cheerful during tea; some were

sitting and engaged in conversation, others were moving about for the purpose of speaking to as many as possible. This was a very happy part of the meeting, and lasted till about seven o'clock—fully an hour. When the tea was over and the time for edification had arrived, everyone found a seat, with Bible and hymn book in hand. All came provided with both. Again there was a pause, and perfect stillness. After a little waiting a hymn was sung, and prayer was offered for the Lord's presence in light and blessing.

The head of the house now stated, "that if any brother had a portion of the word on his mind that he would like read, he was free to say so." This seemed a very responsible part of the meeting, and there was a long pause. At length a chapter was named, and all turned to it. The portion was read, and a free interchange of thought as to its meaning, connection, and importance was kept up till about nine o'clock. Nearly all the brothers had something to say on some part of it: others contented themselves with asking questions; but it soon became apparent who was the most richly instructed in the Word, as the questions in

time were addressed to him. After a hymn and prayer, the company dispersed about ten o'clock. But there was a distinct pause between each part of the service, leaving the Holy Spirit free to use whom He would, though it was not an assembly meeting.

From about half-past five till half-past nine, we seemed to be in an atmosphere purely spiritual, which had a great effect on the mind. Whether all felt it to be so, we have no means of knowing; we only speak of what we experienced. [&]The Bible from this time became like a new book, prayer like a fresh thing, nearness to God a reality more so than ever, though we had known the Lord more than twenty years, and been happy in Him and in His service all that time. There was no need of a president in such a meeting; the sense of the divine Presence was such, that the least impropriety, or any appearance of the flesh, would have been intolerable. The spiritual sense of those so gathered would have marked its disapprobation in a way unmistakable to the intruder.

This may be considered a fair sample of such meetings at that time—more than a century ago. Now the numbers may be greater, and we fear that a greater element of the world may be seen in their meetings, however much

we may deplore it. But even to this day many of the tea and reading meetings would bear comparison with the one described above. Still, we have to say of some individuals as a brother said of one long ago, "Moulting time is not yet come."

Having said so much about reading meetings and their value, it seems necessary to add that there are many in these gatherings of great moral weight, who might not be able to take much part in such meetings; but the godliness of their lives, their service as shepherds of the flock, and their Christ-like spirit, commend them to the esteem and affection of all. We must further add, though with deep sorrow, that such meetings have been used for the worst purposes by the enemy. A company carefully selected may be brought together and evil doctrine may be insinuated by a specious false teacher, and notes being taken by partisans, it may be circulated far and wide. But what good thing is there that the enemy will not seek to corrupt, if he cannot upset; or that the flesh may not abuse even in a Christian? Even in the days of the apostles there was a 'Diotrephes,' who loved to have the pre-eminence: and such men still exist. (3 John 9.)

The Prayerful Study of the Word of God

In thus giving our recollections of a reading meeting, we have a two-fold object in view. 1. To present a true and faithful account of how the Brethren gave themselves up to the prayerful study of the Word of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and apart from all their preconceived theological views. We could not speak of the amount of blessing which flows from such meetings. Not that reading meetings are always profitable; on the contrary, unless there be real subjection to the truth they may be very trying. Poor, weak, restless nature may occasionally display itself in the meeting, and make it anything but happy and profitable. But this is failure and infirmity, notwithstanding the presence of the Holy Spirit, just as an individual Christian may fail though the Holy Spirit dwells in him. We speak of reading meetings as they ought to be.

2. To draw attention to the difference between such meetings, and those with which we were formerly acquainted. And this we would do, in all love, and with the most sincere and earnest desire that dear Christian friends may honestly consider which is

most in accordance with the mind of the Lord. Next to conversion the greatest blessing that a soul can receive in this life is to be led of Him to divine ground for communion and worship. Of those meetings we formerly knew, that which comes nearest the meeting described above is called a "Fellowship Meeting". This may consist of a dozen or more serious christian men of the same denomination, and living conveniently to each other, agreeing to come together once a week, or month, for prayer and reading the Word. A president is chosen, who gives out the hymn, prays, reads the portion for the evening, and makes a few remarks by way of opening up the Word; the first twenty minutes may be occupied by him. The others are now expected to give their opinions and all remarks to be addressed to the chairman.

This kind of meeting tends, we have no doubt, to nourish both Christian fellowship and personal piety, but it lacks the living light and power which reveals Christ to the soul, and transforms it to His image. The Holy Spirit, though unintentionally, is practically displaced, and the mind is left in the darkness which the lack of simple dependence on the Lord causes. As the portion is

announced for the forthcoming meeting, and the president named he is expected to study it well.

The only other meeting we would name is the "Social Tea Meeting". The guests are selected, and invited by the brother, in whose house they meet. Sometimes there may be a mixture of rich and poor, according to the fancy of the host. After tea the conversation may be general, or some conversing and others having a little music. No one thought of taking a Bible or hymn book with him, but about 9 o'clock family worship was observed. The large Bible was placed on the table, and someone was asked to officiate, generally the minister if he were present. A chapter being read, and prayer offered up, all resumed their free and easy attitude and general conversation until called to supper. The breaking up depended a little on the liveliness of the meeting or the heartiness of the host. This could scarcely be called a spiritual meeting; yet its object was good, in as much as it brought the members of a Congregation socially together, and cultivated a brotherly feeling towards each other.

Those best acquainted with such meetings will readily testify that we have put the best possible appearance and construction upon

them; there is nothing farther from our thoughts than to say a word that would pain the most sensitive mind. Our object is not to praise the Brethren, but to seek the Lord's glory in the blessing of all His people, and to set forth and press upon all Christians the adoption of these means which He has so richly blessed for edification. The blessing of God evidently rested most abundantly on those who were thus gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus.

The Various Means of Spreading the Truth

Besides the prayerful study of the Word of God, these believers were most zealous in preaching the Gospel to sinners; and from their increased knowledge of the finished work of Christ, and the riches of divine grace, it was preached with clearness, fulness and power; and many in different places were brought to know the Lord. So zealous were they in spreading the glad tidings that in some places almost every brother became a preacher. Teaching or giving lectures on Scripture to Christians was also greatly practised by the better instructed. The important distinction between preaching the Gospel to the uncon-

verted and teaching Christians, as thus practised, was altogether new. The gift and work of the evangelist are perfectly distinct from those of the teacher; but the distinction had, always excepting the Apostolic age, not been acted upon in the church generally. Special gospel services in public rooms began to be held soon after the great Revival in 1859, and they have never since ceased. The gospel mission of Messrs. Moody and Sankey to this country in 1873-5, was an offshoot of the American Revival; but, strange as it may appear, this mission took more the form of evangelising the denominations than the outsiders.

Another means adopted for spreading the truth was writing and circulating books and tracts. This was done to a large extent. As they received fresh light from the Word of God on any important subject, it was immediately embodied in a tract and sent forth. In this way not only *instruction* but *food* was supplied for the soul, fresh from the exhaustless stores of divine truth. In a comparatively short time people had in their hands, and at a small cost, the means of becoming acquainted with the Word of God; especially those truths which were then engaging the attention of thousands. We

might speak of many tracts which were written, and appeared from time to time on the grand doctrines of the church, the heavenly calling, the operations of the Spirit, ministry, worship, prophecy, the efficacy of redemption, the heavenly relations of the Christian, the coming of the Lord, the rapture of the saints, the first and second resurrection, &c., &c.

In this way, and by these means, the truth was rapidly and widely circulated. These believers evidently possessed a great advantage over the popular bodies by what is called *lay ministry*. Ordination being absolutely essential to the exercise of ministry in these bodies, the work was necessarily limited to the authorised few. The Brethren have always maintained that this system of ministry is opposed to the truth of God, and in many instances, ruinous in its operations. An educated man, for example, though destitute of spiritual gifts, and it may be even of spiritual life, yet, if duly ordained, may exercise every branch of ministry in the denomination to which he belongs; but, on the other hand, if a Christian possesses the most decided gifts for preaching and teaching, he could not exercise either within the jurisdiction of the church, unless sanc-

tioned by human authority.

Happily for them, for the church of God, and for the souls of men, they found the true source of ministry, in all its branches, in Christ Himself the glorified Head in heaven. "To every one of us," says the apostle, "is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4.7-12.) Here we have the true basis and the only source of all ministerial gifts — the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross, and His ascension to God's right hand in heaven. Christ as the Head of the church is the Giver of these gifts; nothing is said of human authority or of human ordination. The professing church has suffered immensely from her traditional ideas of ministry, regarding it as an honourable profession among men, and as giving a certain *status* in society; whereas the ministerial gift is here called *grace*, which is surely possessed by all who love the church and care for its

members, or seek to win fresh souls by the gospel.

Before we close this chapter, I would like to let you see a letter written at about the same time as the rest of this book, though not by its author: a letter that describes the meeting that is dearest of all to the heart of the Lord's people, gathered unto His Name alone:

"Porice Park,
Nov. 27, '91

"Dear Brother—

Yours 22nd came last night and is very welcome. . . . Now as to the subject you speak of, it has long been on my heart too.

I feel strongly about it, but do not know that I can rightly express what I do feel. There are meetings which are among my most precious memories, when one could almost see or touch the One present with those gathered to His Name. I remember one when the spirit of worship so filled us that while singing a hymn of worship, the voices ceased one after another, until but two were heard at the close of the verse, — hearts were too full to speak, and the emotion beyond physical control.

But how often we leave the room and hour of worship with a sense of disappoint-

ment. We have "enjoyed the meeting," as we say, and it may have been we were edified — yet, something was lacking, and that "something" was what was due to God, and what we did not render. It is difficult to speak of it, — but not to feel and recognize. As in a bouquet, or in fruit, a fragrance or aroma may be wanting, which the eye cannot see, yet all the beauty displayed to the eye cannot make good the loss.

Now I will give you my thoughts about worship, and about the morning meeting, which I trust are from His Word, but I will not always give passages, and leave you to bring to them, if they please you, the delicacy of fragrance, — the savour of the four "principal spices" that were for God only — the composition we cannot make for ourselves, but it is "holy for the Lord." But note, we make the "composition" for Him. The ever blessed Lord Jesus it surely is — God's own Son, — but the incense rises when the *priest* puts it upon the fire drawn from the brazen altar, this four-fold perfume, — beaten small, and burned upon the golden altar next to the veil.

Put the symbol in New Testament terms and you have the gist of the answer to your question. Perhaps the rest of my letter will

comprehend it. Let me first make a kind of dictionary of terms, — starting with our side, or our approach to God, — from “sinners saved” to our standing before God “in the holiest.”

Before that point it is “all of self,” and none of God: but when we are worshippers it is all of God and nothing of us.

But when “born again” we get a sense of need, and we ask for what we want, that is, we *pray*. Then as His mercies abound, and we become conscious of His loving recognition and supply of our need, we *thank* Him for mercies received.

Learning more of our God, — the Father of the Son, through the Spirit, we recognize “His greatness — His glory”, — the glories of creation and of redemption, of preservation too, and we *praise*. There is yet another elevation, — we are consciously “in the holiest by the blood of Jesus” and before us is *God*. We bow before Him (the word *worship* means primarily a genuflection or prostration, as Matt. 2.11) for what He is in Himself, — self is forgotten, so that we do not pray or thank, — we adore, we *worship*. It will be our glad employment in heaven, — in our weakness here we rather aspire to, than reach it. Our *worship* here will be

mingled with *praise*, its nearest companion, and often too with remembrance of self — what He has done for us, and so we *thank* also: and lower still with *prayer*, — but if our thoughts have moved together, we will distinguish one exercise from another. The Cross, that is the brazen altar, is the ground of all. ‘To this the priest comes and takes from it the fire, that is the judgment of a holy God on sin, as borne by His Son, our Saviour. Upon His own intrinsic holiness the fire can be safely laid, and upon it the incense is placed, and the perfume thereof is God’s portion. And when on the one great day, the High Priest went within the veil, his hands full of beaten incense, (filled hands means consecration), its smoke protected him from the judgment of Israel’s Holy One, while he presented Israel to his Jehovah.

Just to apply these to our morning meeting. But first, as a scriptural example, look at Psalms 28, 29 and 30, and couple the first with prayer, the next with worship, and the 30th with praise.

We come to remember the Lord Jesus, — the symbols are a reminder of Him, — manna, — His flesh, — His blood, — are symbols He uses of Himself. He takes also the loaf and the cup, — and breaks the loaf,

— separates the cup from the loaf, and bids His disciples divide it among themselves. These acts make these symbols to be reminders to us, not only of the Lord Jesus in His person, but the eating the broken loaf, and dividing the cup, shew forth His death. So that the Lord's Supper is the remembrance of our Saviour, — of our Lord Jesus, in His death. This is the primary thought of the meeting, and nothing should interfere with, or cloud it.

But we cannot think of His death without associating with it the purpose and results of it, and these in relation to God, and to us. Can we do better than follow our Lord Himself in the 22nd Psalm, and the 102nd? He suffers under the hand of God, but He glorifies Him, He praises, but as Leader in the great congregation; the final results are yet to be displayed in His Lordship on the earth, and the blessing of its peoples.

We have no rules given us for the meeting, only as taught generally by Acts 20 and i Corinthians 14, — so that our spiritual senses must be aroused and alert to do whatever is meet and comely or orderly for us to do. If we have in mind the *purpose* of the meeting, and are conscious of the unseen Presence, and subject to His Spirit, (by *we*,

I mean each one present), we will be together at the appointed hour, — waiting upon the Lord. The *assembly* will praise or worship, by voicing together in a hymn of praise or worship, or by one voice in audible expression.

The Gospel of His grace, unspeakably precious as it is, will not come to mind. The trials of the way, our pilgrimage, will be forgotten. We have no needs, no wants. The heart is *filled*, is *over-filled*, — the assembly *must* praise or worship, — it may be in silence, or in voice: it matters not. There is but "one heart, one mind glorifying God." Jesus is before us — His Person — His death — our "hands are filled with" Him — beaten small — for the apprehension of one may be greater than of another — no matter now, — it is no question now of *how much* of Jesus I can receive, I am full, little as I can hold of Him. The aged, tried saint, who has walked for years with Jesus, and knows Him intimately — the "father" — is filled: the babe who has just started on his way is filled, — it is not capacity now: — it is *Jesus* Who fills every capacity, be it great or small. Oh! how my heart longs to be in that meeting now! Can there be a *rule*, — an order of exercise for such a

meeting? A hymn, — a voice uttering the worship of the assembly, a portion of His sweet Word that makes us enjoy the more the consciousness of His presence, these may or may not precede the solemn performance of the one rite that is enjoined. Now we “give thanks” — all of us — the assembly — as one stands to speak them for us. I do not know what one — if any is gifted, let him hesitate the longest, lest he interfere between the Holy Spirit and His choice of spokesman.

If the Holy Spirit is left free to move the assembly, He will choose that aspect of Jesus, — for we cannot see Him now in *all* His glories at once — that is meet. Then hymn — Scripture — expression of the assembly’s worship, will all be in harmony with the theme chosen. No pre-arrangement is needed — only true waiting upon Him. And the after-meeting will also be in harmony — the word, if any is spoken, for edification, or exhortation, will not jar upon any heart. But it is ever a meeting towards God, hence no place or time for the exercise of gifts — far less for a long harangue or sermon.

If I have rightly outlined it, we will not get into a rut of long-continued form or

procedure. Nor is there any rule in addressing the Father or the Son at the table, let it be as the Spirit leads. There is but *one* rule, and that is to be subject to the Spirit. Then all things will "be done decently and in order." He will use the one He chooses, God will be worshipped — our Lord Jesus remembered, and the saint will leave the spot as one who has had a foretaste of heaven.

But how rare such a meeting — for if there be one in it who is not "in tune" to the theme of the Spirit, the harmony is marred, perhaps spoiled. Especially if that one takes audible part, — gives out a hymn unsuited or an unsuited portion of Scripture, or prays, since he cannot worship.

Then what will the worshipper do? Naught but possess his soul in patience — join when he can do so, and when he cannot, abide with God alone.

.... In the love of Christ to you

C.H.H.

CHAPTER 3

THE ORIGIN OF THE TITLE—"PLYMOUTH BRETHREN"

Amongst the many meetings which sprang up all over the country in these early days, the one at Plymouth became the most prominent. "About the year 1831," says Mr. Darby in a letter to a friend, "I went to Oxford 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 long began to break bread. Though Mr. Wigram began the work in London, he was a great deal at Plymouth."

Their first meeting-place was called "Providence Chapel," and as they refused to give themselves any name, they were called in the town "Providence People." When the brothers began to preach the gospel in the open air and in the villages around, no small

curiosity was awakened to know who they were; there was something new in their preaching and in their way of going to work. But as they belonged to none of the denominations, they were spoken of as "Brethren from Plymouth." This naturally resulted in the designation, "The Plymouth Brethren," which has been applied to them — sometimes in derision — ever since. "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren;" here we have the title the Lord Himself gives His disciples. (Matt. 23.8). As the numbers increased, the little chapel was bought and considerably enlarged.

A strong opposition was soon manifested against the new movement, especially on the part of the clergy and ministers of all denominations. Nor need we wonder: the ground these Christians occupied was felt to be a standing testimony against their whole state and practice, and many were stirred up to say hard and untrue things against them, with the view of neutralising the blessed work which God was doing by their means. But these efforts of the enemy — as they usually are — were over-ruled to increase the general interest in the new preachers, and to attract numbers to their various meetings. The blessing of God

evidently rested on their labours at that time; many were led to separate from the various denominations of the day, and gather round the new centre, the Name of the Lord Jesus; though on the part of some, it may have been with very little intelligence, or exercise of conscience, compared with those who originally took that ground. But they were dissatisfied with what they had been going on with, and longed for something better.

There was great freshness, simplicity, devotedness, love and union, among the Brethren; and such features of spirituality have always a great attraction for certain minds; and many, of course, who united with them had very undefined thoughts as to the nature of the step they were taking. But all was new: Christ was owned as their only centre, and the Holy Spirit as their only teacher. Thus they gave themselves to the study of the Word of God, and experienced the sweetness of Christian communion, and found the Bible — as they said — to be a new book. It was, no doubt, in those days, a most distinct and blessed work of God's Spirit, the influence of which was felt not only throughout this country, but on the continent, and in distant lands.

The Effect of Separation From the World

It was no uncommon thing at this time to find valuable jewelry in the collection boxes, which was soon turned into money, and given to the deacons for the poor. But this quiet way of disposing of a little finery did not satisfy the devoted spirits at Plymouth. They parted with all that was considered worldly in dress, books, and furniture. These free-will offerings were collected, and when the stripping time seemed nearly at an end, the accumulation was so great that it was necessary to sell them by auction.

Many will now be disposed to inquire, What were the motives that led the young community — scarcely nine years old — to make such a surrender of their worldly goods? As some, then in communion, were still alive when this book was written, the author made every possible inquiry as to the origin and object of this remarkable instance of devotedness. The following quotation is from the last letter received, and given on the testimony of more than one witness. "Respecting the quantity of goods, jewels, books, furniture, &c., given up and sold during early days at Plymouth, there was no

call of any particular kind, no special need for which it was done. It was done quite simply and freely, as desiring to express their then indifference to the world, their separatedness to the Lord, and their waiting for His coming from heaven."

"It would be no lack of charity, notwithstanding this testimony, to believe that some who had thus stripped themselves, may have merely followed others, or acted under the general feeling, and afterwards regretted what they had done; but from all we can learn, the general movement seems to have been the holy action of the Spirit rather than the excitement or sympathies of nature. Although we have no wish to make more of this instance of indifference to the world than Christian prudence would suggest, yet we would desire to speak of it as an illustration of the power of the Spirit when the heart is separated to Christ and waiting for His coming from heaven. There are no doubt numbers of individual cases of a similar character constantly occurring, only with less formality and publicity. It was the simultaneous movement of the whole meeting, and in the most open and positive way, that makes the Plymouth case remarkable.

The Spirit of Clericalism

It is painful, deeply painful, to reflect on a scene of such wonderful freshness, simplicity, and genuine devotedness, being blighted and desolated by the subtle wiles of Satan, through a false but influential teacher. The Spirit of God had wrought mightily at Plymouth, and produced the most marvellous fruits of His gracious operations; but the arch-enemy had his evil eye on those who were bearing such a bright testimony to the truth and church of God, and found, within their own gates, a ready instrument to do his ruinous work. "It now appears," says one who passed through the sifting, searching period from 1845-8, "that almost from the very first there were elements of evil introduced by the enemy, very slowly and gradually manifesting themselves for a time, but in the end assuming a distinctness and working with an energy which left no room for doubt as to whence they came and to what they tended."*

As it was in the beginning, when the kingdom of heaven was preached, men slept

* *The whole case of Plymouth and Bethesda*, by William Trotter. Now published under title: "The Origin of (so called) Open Brethrenism."

and the enemy sowed tares where the good seed had been sown; so it was at Plymouth. In the very midst of the Brethren themselves, and by one of their principal leaders, the enemy was early and steadily at work. Mr. Newton, a man of grave manners and of considerable influence over a certain class, and one of the earliest labourers at Plymouth, was observed by some, almost from the outset, to isolate himself from the other Brethren. "He held reading meetings, and would not allow the labouring brethren to be present, saying it was bad for the taught to hear the authority of the teachers called in question, as it shook confidence in them." This was the beginning, the creeping in of clericalism, which gradually grew up into a definite system. But no one at that time seems to have suspected any serious evil springing from it, and for years no voice was raised to arrest its progress. "I sorrowed over this unhappy trait of isolation," says Mr. Darby, "and love of acting alone, and having his followers for himself; but I had no suspicion whatever of any purpose of any kind, bore with it as a failing of which we all had some, and left perfect individual liberty complete and

entirely untrenched on. 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. At the Clifton meeting Mr. Newton, speaking of ministry and the points connected with it, told me that his principles were changed. I replied that mine were not, that I felt I had received them from the Lord's teaching, and with His grace I should hold them fast unto the end.

"As to the teaching I heard in Ebrington Street from Mr. Newton, the one undeviating object seemed to be to teach differently from what other Brethren had taught, no matter what, so that it set their teaching aside. This was so marked in many cases as to draw the attention of others besides myself."*

Those who have carefully marked the origin and early days of Brethren, will have no difficulty in seeing the craft of Satan in the system thus introduced by Mr. Newton. "That which characterised their testimony at the outset was the coming of the Lord as the present hope of the church, and the

* For lengthy and minute details see *Narrative of Facts* by J.N.D., Collected Writings vol. 20.

presence of the Holy Ghost as that which brought into unity, and animated and directed the children of God; and they avowed their dependence upon it. The distinct condition of the saints of the present dispensation, as having the Spirit abiding with them, and risen with Christ, marked their teaching, while the great truths of the gospel were held in common with other true Christians, only with the clearer light which God Himself directly, and these other truths, afforded. The distinct heavenly character of the church was much insisted on."†

The Character of Mr. Newton's System

We now return to the details of Mr. Newton's system and here we prefer to quote from the writings of one, who, previously to the mischief coming before the public, knew something of its secret workings behind the scenes. In the following paragraph the writer, Mr. William Trotter, probably refers to the appearance of things from about the year 1841 to 1845, when the numbers in communion had reached to nearly a thousand, including Davenport and Stonehouse.

"Such was the course pursued by Mr.

† Narrative of Facts, Old Ed. p.19.

Newton, that it issued in all the other Brethren who had laboured there leaving Plymouth to work elsewhere. Mr. Darby went abroad, Captain Hall to Hereford, Mr. Wigram to London, and Mr. Newton was left almost alone at Plymouth. A beloved brother, Mr. Harris, who was not identified with the movement at first, became associated in labour with Mr. Newton, and those identified with him. His presence for several years was the only hope that Brethren elsewhere had of any check being put to Mr. Newton's course. However, at a very early period of the present trouble he withdrew from association with Mr. Newton. The system thus introduced, and most speciously disguised for a time, was directed to the undermining of all the truth by which God had acted on the souls of Brethren, and to the setting up afresh in other form all that had been renounced.

"The coming of the Lord as an object of present hope or expectation was denied, and there was substituted for it the expectation of a train of events, many of them nowhere foretold in scripture, and only existing in Mr. Newton's imagination. The real unity of the church as one body indwelt and governed by the Holy Ghost was denied; and instead of

it the doctrine was asserted of a kind of independent churches — so independent indeed, that when division took place at Plymouth, and godly, experienced brethren from Exeter, London, and elsewhere went down to aid by their prayers and counsel, Mr. Newton and his party peremptorily rejected them; and on the ground that they were not of Plymouth, and had no right to interfere. For the present and sovereign rule of the Holy Ghost in the church was substituted the authority of teachers, and the authority claimed *for them* and *by them* was so absolute, that when Mr. Newton was charged with untruthfulness, and it was sought by one and another that the charge should be investigated before the whole body of the brethren, this was steadily refused on the ground that he could not be tried, but by those who with him were the teachers and rulers there, and as *they* acquitted him, there was no further appeal and no remedy.

“Besides this there was the steady systematic absorbing of all ministry in the Word, or even participation audibly in public worship into the hands of one or two, with the effectual exclusion by one means or another of all others. There was also the zealous unwearied endeavour to form a party

distinguished by Mr. Newton's views of prophecy and church order, to which the appellation, 'the truth,' was arrogated, and means were found to keep away from Plymouth any brethren whose views were known to be adverse to these. Such were the leading features of the system which silently grew up at Plymouth, and I was quite aware of its existence and of the concern felt by many brethren respecting it from the time that I became acquainted with the Brethren between six and seven years ago."*

The first question which seems to have been raised at Plymouth as to Mr. Newton's teaching, was on the ground of its *sectarian* tendency. Nothing more serious was at first charged against him. Several of the leading brethren waited upon him at different times, and remonstrated, but he answered them with the greatest violence, and "declared that we were destroying the fundamentals of Christianity; that he was justified in what he was doing against us, and should continue."

Some time after this, Mr. Newton agreed to meet a few of the brethren to inquire

* The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda. (Now published under title: "The Origin of (so called) Open Brethrenism").

whether secretarianism had been introduced into the meeting. There may have been about eighteen in all. Mr. Darby, who had been urged to return to Plymouth, was present. He was asked to state what he objected to at Ebrington Street. He replied, that, "As to an inquiry into sectarianism, any could inquire as well as he; that he would not enter on the prophetic question as a doctrinal thing; that was a moral question with him; what he objected to on the present occasion was sectarianism."

"Mr. Newton 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, and that he trusted to have at least Devonshire and Somersetshire under his influence for this purpose; and that it was not the first time Mr. Darby had thwarted and spoiled his plans." After this declaration of Mr. Newton's from his own lips, there was no further need to inquire into his sectarianism. Several of the brothers present so expressed themselves; and Mr. Darby called upon them all to say, "If this was what Plymouth was to be; as, if it was, I should not go next Sunday."*

* *Narrative of Facts*, p. 45 Old Edition.

The Division at Plymouth

Mr. Darby having laboured for several months within the meeting at Plymouth, "and using what means he could to awaken the consciences of Brethren, was obliged to withdraw from the assembly." Mr. Newton and his friends, in attempting to meet the charges which were brought against them, acted in so unscriptural and so untruthful a manner, as to decide many of their former friends to separate from them. About a hundred or more withdrew from communion at Ebrington Street, and began to break bread first in a private house, afterwards in Raleigh Street; and thus the division was completed at Plymouth.

Brethren from all parts of the country, on hearing of these events, flocked to Plymouth; many of them were friendly to Mr. Newton, and nearly all of them thought that Mr. Darby had acted rashly and prematurely. But they had not been inside the scene, and so knew but little of the real state of things there. When a meeting was spoken of for investigating the charges, Mr. Newton strongly objected to any interference on the part of Brethren from a distance, and would only consent to an investigation on the

principle of arbitration, he appointing four of his friends and Mr. Darby appointing four of his. Mr. Darby objected entirely to the worldly principle of arbitration: this, he felt, would be taking the case out of the hands of God and His church, as well as making himself the head of a party. He offered at the same time to meet Mr. Newton before the whole assembly, or, if it was preferred, before a number of the most grave and experienced brothers. To none of these would Mr. Newton consent, and to no other tribunal would he allow the case to be referred, save to the arbitration proposed. Many of the brethren who had gone down to Plymouth, with the godly intention of trying to heal the breach, finding things so much worse than they had any conception of, separated from Mr. Newton and his party, and the division extended to other parts of the country.

Meetings were held in London and other central places for common humiliation and prayer. Many pamphlets were published on both sides; many fondly cherished friendships were broken up; much sorrow and trial were endured both by individuals and families for more than two years, when this mournful history assumed a new and still graver aspect. Not merely was the ecclesias-

tical fabric assailed, but the very foundations of Christianity by false doctrines concerning the blessed Lord Himself.*

* For minute details, see *The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda*, by William Trotter.

CHAPTER 4

FALSE DOCTRINE DETECTED

After the secession from Ebrington Street, as spoken of above, the adherents of Mr. Newton were reduced to a comparatively small number, but these for the most part were zealous partisans. Copious notes were taken of his lectures and readings, and were "as regularly circulated among a select few in various parts of England, as books in a reading society." A package of such notes fell into the hands of Mr. Harris in the year 1847; and in the following way. A sister in Exeter lent them to his wife, as being Mr. Newton's teaching, from which she had found much interest and profit. Mrs. Harris, not understanding the meaning of some of the author's expressions, referred them to her husband. "I then," he says, "looked into the manuscript myself, and (on perusing it) felt surprised and shocked at finding such unscriptural statements and doctrine, which appeared to me to touch the integrity of the doctrine of the cross." Having carefully examined these statements, he published a

tract, in which he exposed and brought to light that system of false doctrine which Mr. Newton had been diligently teaching to his chosen few for years.

Such an exposure, as may be supposed, produced great alarm among Brethren in all parts, and naturally brought a reply from Mr. Newton. Two pamphlets speedily appeared, in neither of which did he disclaim the doctrine asserted in the lecture thus reviewed, but stated it more at large, though in a less offensive form, and then defended and supported it. The doctrine of this lecture on Psalm 6 by Mr. Newton, and published in a tract entitled, "The sufferings of Christ, as set forth in a lecture on Psalm 6, considered by J. L. Harris," are no doubt the most truthful expression we have of the author's mind. It was delivered in the presence of his friends, calmly and deliberately for the benefit of note-takers, so that we may fairly infer that the real sentiments of his soul flowed out freely without disguise and without reservation. But finding something like universal indignation excited by his blasphemous doctrines, and even his own friends ready to desert him, he agreed to withdraw his offensive tracts for reconsideration, and confessed he was in

error on one point relating to Christ's connection with Adam as federal head.

Were it not that even this brief sketch might be considered incomplete if we did not say something of the heresy, we would be glad to pass it over in profound and perpetual silence. We shrink from transferring to our pages the subtle and mystical expressions in which the deadly error was taught. The blessed Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, was represented as born at a distance from God, involved in the guilt of the first Adam, because He was born of a woman, and under the curse of the broken law, because of His association with Israel.*

Thus, alas! according to these doctrines, we are bereaved of the true Christ of God—the Christ of the New Testament. There is no need to enter into details. If born at a distance from God, under the curse, and an heir of death, He is utterly disqualified for becoming the Saviour of others. He had to deliver Himself from those relations in which He stood from His birth; and this, it is said,

* For a summary of Mr. Newton's evil teaching, see a summary in eight points, by Mr. J. E. Batten; to be found on p. 24 of "Open Brethren Their Origin, Principles, and Practice," by H. S. May be had from "Bible Truth Publishers", 239 Harrison St., Oak Park, Ill., U.S.A.

He did. It was admitted that He was free from taint in His person, and by His perfect obedience to the law and in all things even unto death, having delivered Himself, was owned of God and accepted by Him. But all this being due from Him to God, where is the sinner's substitute, the sinner's surety, the sinner's sacrifice, the sinner's gospel, the sinner's Saviour? And where are the doctrines of grace, and where is the church of the living God, and where are we individually? And what of the finished work of Christ, or what means the conqueror's cry—"IT IS FINISHED"?

The folly of this theory is as glaring as its blasphemy, though characterised by the depths of Satan. In result it is as ruinous as Arianism or Socinianism, though less logical. It is self-contradictory and savours more of the author's vanity and love of distinction than of honest conviction. It had only to be brought in to the light to be seen and detected. This was the great mercy of God: it was not allowed to go on. For, most assuredly, a false Christ was preached at Plymouth, and the presence of the Holy Ghost was denied. But, with the exception of a small party, chiefly Mr. Newton's personal friends, the great body of Brethren

were agreed, after due investigation and prayer, that the doctrines which Mr. Newton had been teaching and privately circulating, were fundamentally heretical, as to Christ, and utterly subversive of all that is essential to Christianity. The false doctrine was almost universally condemned; but they were not of one mind as to the principle of dealing with it and of separation from it.

Bethesda and Her Rulers

In the year 1848, while Brethren from all parts were holding meetings in different places for prayer and humiliation because of the sad work of the enemy, the rulers of Bethesda received to the Lord's table several of Mr. Newton's devoted friends and partisans who were known to hold his heresy. This rash and most unhappy step on the part of these rulers, and their deliberate defence of it, proved most disastrous; it rent the Brethren asunder, entailed indescribable sorrow and trouble on individuals and families, many of which are not healed even unto this day, besides the great damage done to the cause of truth, and dishonour to the name of the blessed Lord Jesus. This is the real source of the strife, divisions, mis-

representations, heart-burnings, and evil surmisings, which many Brethren still feel, and which has put so many weapons in the hands of their enemies. Mr. Newton and his followers might have been easily disposed of; but the complication of Bethesda was hopeless. And this act, apparently so regardless of the christian feelings of others, was not the result of accident or of ignorance, but was done deliberately in spite of the remonstrances of godly brethren among themselves, and of others at a distance, who warned them of the character and views of the persons in question.

Seeing things had taken such a decided form, a few faithful brethren on the spot, members of the Bethesda meeting, protested, and entreated that such doctrine should be examined and judged, and its teachers put out of communion. But, their remonstrances being unheeded, they were obliged, in order to avoid fellowship with what they knew to be evil, to withdraw from the communion at Bethesda. This they did; one of them printing, for private circulation, a letter to the leading brethren, explanatory of his reasons for seceding. This brought forth a paper, signed by ten chief persons at Bethesda, vindicating their conduct in receiving Mr.

Newton's followers, and in rejecting all the warning and remonstrances which had been addressed to them.*

As the question of fellowship was first raised at Bristol, and from thence extended to almost every place on the face of the earth where there happens to be an assembly of Brethren, it may be well to look for a moment at the antecedents of this meeting. It was simply what is known as a Baptist congregation, presided over by Mr. Muller and Mr. Craik, and meeting for worship in a chapel called "Bethesda" in Bristol. Some years previous to this testing time, this entire congregation was received into fellowship with Brethren—received as a body. "The whole assembly," says Mr. Mackintosh, "professedly and ostensibly, took the ground occupied by Brethren. I do not mention names or descend into minute details; I merely give the great leading fact, because it illustrates a most important principle.

* This paper, known as "The Letter of the Ten" may be seen in full in the pamphlet "The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda" by Mr. W. Trotter. p. 55. This is now published under the title, "The Origin of (so-called) Open Brethrenism," by Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, 2 Upper Teddington Road, Hampton Wick, Kingston-on-Thames, England.

"It has been my conviction for many years, that this reception of a congregation was a fatal mistake on the part of Brethren. Even admitting, as I most heartily do, that all the members and ministers may have been most excellent people taken individually; yet I am persuaded that it is a mistake in any case to receive a whole body as such. There is no such thing as a corporate conscience. Conscience is an individual thing; and unless we act individually before God, there will be no stability in our course. A whole body of people, led by their teachers, may profess to take certain ground, and to adopt certain principles; but what security is there that each member of that body is acting in the energy of personal faith, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and on the authority of the Word of God? It is of the very last importance that, in every step we take, we should act in simple faith, in communion with God, and with an exercised conscience.

"The fact is, Bethesda ought never to have been acknowledged as an assembly gathered on divine ground; and this is proved by the fact that, when called to act on the truth of the unity of the body, it completely broke down."*

* Things New and Old, vol. 18. p. 318.

"The Letter of the Ten"

The main object of what is commonly called "The Letter of the Ten" was to vindicate the conduct of those who had received the followers of Mr. Newton and adopted a neutral position with regard to the solemn questions which had come before Brethren generally. While the signers of the letter, severally and jointly, disclaimed the doctrines taught by Newton, they strangely say, with reference to communion, "Supposing the author of the tracts were fundamentally heretical, this would not warrant us in rejecting those who came under his teaching, until we were satisfied that they had understood and imbibed views essentially subversive of foundation-truth." The only ground of rejection is thus plainly stated: "That no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts, should be received into communion."*

* In the Foreword to the book, "Teachers of the Faith and the Future," (no date found, but probably about 1959) Prof. F. F. Bruce speaks of himself as "a member of the Plymouth Brethren," and says that Mr. Newton was "a teacher whose whole career proclaims his absolutely uncompromising orthodoxy." This shows where the followers of Bethesda stand today. (Ed.)

Such was the ground taken by the most intelligent men in Bethesda, according to this remarkable document, and that before the error in question had been judged. They refused to judge it. "What," they said, "have we at Bristol to do with errors taught at Plymouth?" Nor would they agree to any extracts being read to the congregation from Mr. Newton's writings, or remarks made on his doctrines, until the letter had been adopted by the church. A meeting of the church was called for this purpose in July, 1848; but, as some of the members objected to the congregation sanctioning a paper which had not been explained and was not understood, Mr. Muller rose and said, "The first thing the church had to do was to clear the signers of the paper; and that if this were not done, they could not continue to labour among them; and the worse the errors were, the more reason they should not be brought out." Thus were the people required, under pain of losing the labours of their pastors, to assume a position of neutrality between the author of the tracts and his adherents, and those who utterly rejected them as unsound and heretical. The majority acquiesced: by standing up they declared their approbation of this paper

of "the ten," and assumed a neutral position as to the great question which then agitated the minds of all Brethren both at home and abroad.

The Division

About fifty or sixty of the congregation, rather than sanction such a loose principle of communion, withdrew from Bethesda. A positive division now existed. The question was now fairly raised as to whether Brethren were really gathered on the ground of the unity of the church, or merely as independent congregations. Bethesda had deliberately given up the ground she professedly occupied in fellowship with Brethren, had adopted independence, and openly avowed it. All who adhered to the principle of the "one body," as the only true ground of Christian fellowship, were directly opposed to this independency. Several meetings throughout the country followed the example of Bethesda, while others firmly maintained the position they had previously occupied. Brethren everywhere had now to face the question. It had to be looked at straight in the face. The testing time was come, and there was no backing out of it. To all who

had not taken in the true idea of the church of God, it proved a terrible stumbling-block. Personal feelings, and affection for favourite teachers and friends, misled numbers. In many instances the abstract question was listened to and seemed right; but the moment the principle was applied to some particular person, the arguments were set aside by the hasty conclusion, "Oh! that principle of fellowship can never be right that would exclude such a dear, godly man from the table." It was difficult, with feelings so fresh and strong, to take an unprejudiced view of the question: unless the soul was delivered from persons and their influence, and steadily fixed on Christ alone and on what is due to Him, no divine decision could be reached. When things merely natural were allowed to operate, the spiritual vision became clouded, the mind more perplexed than ever, and most likely yielded to the pressure of circumstances.

As it was then, so it is now. When we think of what is due to persons, we come to a wrong conclusion. When we think only of what is due to Christ, all is clear and simple as the elements of truth itself. When the blessed Lord takes His place in the church of Philadelphia, He reveals Himself in the

character which is to form the standard of reception to the table and of the public walk of those received. He says, "I am he that is holy, he that is true." What could be more simple than this? Christ is there is His moral glory as the Holy One and the True; and we must look for more than intelligence—or cleverness in answering questions; we must look for *holiness* and *truth* in those whom we receive to the Lord's table. Nothing short of separation from all known evil, and soundness in the faith will suit His presence. We have ever to remember that He says, "there am I."

At first sight, and to many minds, it does seem more gracious, more loving, to receive to the table those that we believe to be true Christians though they come from an assembly where some of the members hold false doctrine, while they themselves are sound. Is it right, such will say, to cut off a whole meeting because of two or three unsound members? The answer is, None should be cut off but "wicked persons;" but the scripture also says, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." This is not cutting people off, but departing from them; having nothing to say to them so long as they are mixed up with

iniquity. Surely the heresy of Mr. Newton is iniquity; it would leave us without Christ, the only foundation and centre of union. It is worthless to talk of communion at all unless we have the true Christ of God. But let such true Christians as you refer to judge themselves of the known evil in God's sight, wash their hands completely of the defilement, and then they will be received with open heart and arms at the table of the Lord. Our first thought in reference to the table must always be, not what suits this brother or that brother, or what seems more loving and charitable, but what suits Christ as the Holy One and the True. When the eye is single, the whole body is full of light; there is no darkness or perplexity in the path.

It is also said, we know, that the *Exclusive* Brethren—as the protesters against Bethesda's course were now called—will receive persons to the Lord's table from the church of England, where much error is held, but refuse the most godly saint from a Bethesda gathering. This is true and often most painful and distressing to those who have to do it. Nothing but fidelity to Christ and His word could give them firmness in the face of the appeals that are made, and the subtle pleas that are urged. The

explanation is this: strange as it may appear, the *Neutral Brethren*, as they were now called, professedly assembled on the principle of the church of God as before the division, and professed to own the presence of the Holy Ghost in their midst. Several things might be noticed which appear to us inconsistent with this position; still, as this was and is the ground taken, the gatherings must be dealt with as one body. By acknowledging the presence of the Holy Ghost in this way they profess to be one body though many members: therefore, in receiving a single member from a body that professes to be a *unity*, the whole body, sound or unsound, is, in principle, received. (See 1 Cor. 12). But in the church of England and in the various forms of dissent, no such position is assumed. They meet on the ground of a particular system; it may be Episcopacy, Presbytery, or Independency; and the members of the different systems remain as so many individuals, and ought to be dealt with as such. The ecclesiastical position of such is entirely different from that occupied by the Bethesda gatherings so-called, and each individual must be dealt with according to the ground he professedly takes. There may be much sympathy and

friendliness amongst the denominations, but there is no such thought as unity; nevertheless, to refuse a godly Christian from the church of England because he may think the Establishment right would be to make light or intelligence a title to communion, denying the unity of the body and form a sect. It is not a question of *degrees of light*, but of *holiness and truth*.

Bethesda Professedly Clears Herself

As the pressure from without became greater, and Bethesda began to discover that her conduct had stumbled thousands of God's saints, and was giving occasion to so much division and controversy, a meeting was held in that chapel, October, 1848, for the purpose of clearing the assembly of all charges of fellowship with Mr. Newton's false doctrines or the holders of them. On this occasion Mr. Muller gave his own individual judgment of the tracts. He stated that the writings of Mr. Newton contained a system of insidious error, not here and there, but throughout; and that if the doctrines taught in them were followed out to their legitimate consequences, they would destroy the foundations of the Gospel, and over-

throw the christian faith. According to these doctrines, he repeated, "the Lord Himself would need a Saviour as well as others." Still, while giving so strong an individual judgment as this, Mr. Muller added that he could not say Mr. Newton was a heretic, that he could not refuse to call him brother.*

After the lapse of thirty years and quietly looking at these recorded facts, we think them strangely inconsistent. The author of doctrines that would leave us to perish without the Christ of God is surely a heretic; and how could we call him brother? And how could there be a brotherhood? At the same time, Mr. Muller was most careful in maintaining that what he said was not the judgment of the church, but his own individual judgment, for which he alone was responsible. As to the paper of "the Ten," and all the steps connected with it, he justified them entirely, and said that, were they again in the same circumstances, they would pursue the same course.

But the general feeling was now become so strong, that the leaders saw it would be necessary to go more fully into the question;

* The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda, p.43 (Old Ed.); and Things New and Old, vol. 18. p.321.

and although they had stated at the beginning of the troubles that it would be wrong for them to investigate and judge the false doctrine, and so get entangled in the controversy, they were now forced to own it was needful and right to examine the tracts. But the sad mischief was done: fifty or sixty godly brethren had been forced out of Bethesda from the leaders positively refusing to judge the false doctrines, and numbers throughout the country were thrown into a state of perplexity, sorrow, and strife. In November and December of 1848, seven church meetings were held, and Mr. Newton's tracts were examined. The conclusion come to was, "That no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts should be received into communion." But this conclusion left the door as wide open as ever to those who were in avowed fellowship with Mr. Newton, provided they did not *defend, maintain, or uphold* his views or tracts. Few would have the frankness to acknowledge they do this, though many at that time were tainted with his heresy. "The letter of the ten" remained unrepealed and unrepented of, and continues to this day as the studied and deliberate statement of the real ground of Bethesda fellowship.

CHAPTER 5

DIVIDED

The Brethren were now divided. Those who remained firm on the ground originally occupied by Brethren were more decided in their testimony than ever. Pamphlets full of strong feeling and strong expressions, rapidly appeared. The rulers of Bethesda were gravely charged with having ensnared the congregation into a course of *neutrality* with regard to the heresy, with *independency* as to the church, and, consequently, with *indifference* as to the Person and glory of Christ.

Having made these charges the Brethren could not consistently receive to the Lord's table from the Bethesda gatherings without being satisfied as to repentance on these points. But much grace and compassion are needed in dealing with such applications now, as many are honestly ignorant of what took place some hundred and thirty years ago. The paper of "The Ten," however, on which the charges were founded, has never been withdrawn. Hard terms were used on

both sides; but some remained faithful to their principles, or rather, maintained the truth of God, as they had hitherto preached and published it, at all cost. Still, the cry of *exclusivism* was raised against them. While this term was no doubt meant as one of reproach, and intended, or used, to frighten the timid, as it is to this day, it is unquestionably in accordance with the word of God. In i Cor. 5, we learn that the assembly must be exclusive if it would maintain a wholesome discipline, and keep the house of God clean enough for His presence. Surely the church is solemnly responsible to judge the doctrine and ways of all who present themselves for communion, and to refuse those who would bring evil into the assembly; and to put away those who have fallen into error or immorality, though their faith in Christ may not be doubted. This is exclusivism.

This was the principle on which the Brethren acted from the beginning; so that they were not more exclusive after the division than before it. The change was all on the other side. The new motto on the standard of the Open, or Neutral, Brethren was, "The blood of the Lamb is the union of the saints." Certainly there could be no

union without the precious blood of God's spotless Lamb, but the scripture teaches that the blood is the ground of peace, not the centre of union: the roasted Lamb, the Christ that had passed through the holy fire of divine justice for us, now risen and glorified, is the centre of union. (Ex. 12). And are there not many who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb that are unfit for the Lord's table from their evil associations and 'ways? But were this motto to be thoroughly carried out, then, on no ground, and for no reason whatsoever, could anyone be excluded from the Lord's table who is believed to be a child of God and washed in the blood of Christ. Discipline would be at an end, and, as it was in Israel when there was no king, every man doing that which was right in his own eyes. Because of this wide and open door to the Lord's table, the Bethesda gatherings have been called "The Open Brethren." So that for the sake of distinction, and to give the least possible offence, we will adhere to the terms, "The Brethren," and "The Open Brethren."

The Testimony

From this time the path of each has been

perfectly distinct and widely apart. The Open Brethren have fraternised with the denominations and in many things come so near to them that they have escaped persecution. Indeed the bitterest attacks against the Brethren have come from them, so that in this many of them are one with the denominations, and have helped them on in their opposition. But, thank God, they have been zealous in the work of the gospel; and by this means many of their meetings have been increased by simple believers who know nothing of the past troubles, or the present ground of fellowship. May their hearts in simplicity be nourished with Christ and with the truth as it is in Him!

The division seems to have increased the ministry of those who stood fast. Their books and tracts on the most important and vital truths of scripture were widely spread over this country, and indeed, over all Christendom, carrying divine light and blessing to thousands of precious souls. It was also observed that there was more clearness, fulness, and definiteness in their teaching after the division than before it, especially as to the heavenly relations of the church, the union of Christians with Christ in the glory, the rapture of the saints before

the tribulation, &c., &c., for although all these truths were held in principle, they had never been preached with the same freshness and power.

The Results of the Testimony

The effect of this testimony was felt everywhere. Many earnest Christians in various places, feeling the dead state of things around them, were led to read these books and to search the scriptures as to whether the new doctrines were in accordance with the word of God. Numbers were convinced of their soundness, left their different denominations, and united with the Brethren. And as it was generally the most spiritual, earnest, and intelligent members who did so, their secession was the more conspicuous, and the more irritating to their ministers. This has been the source of many bitter attacks, which are not necessary for us to speak of now. The work is of God, and vain is man's puny arm stretched out against it. Grievous as it is to say it, their own quarrels have done far more harm to them, than all the attacks of the enemies. But we believe it is God's own testimony in these last and evil days, and notwithstanding

the terrible failure of those who seek to carry it on, God has not forsaken them.

For several years after the division, they seem to have been more occupied with practical truth for Christians than with the gospel for lost souls outside. This, we believe, was of God. Like the apostle who "went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia, in order, strengthening all the disciples," they believed it was their bounden duty to strengthen the souls of the disciples after the shaking and unsettling through which they had passed. Still the gospel was preached, and souls were blessed, and the open-air work went on well.

About the year 1854-5, a very blessed work of God's Spirit began in the conversion of the children of His saints in London. There had been prayer for this special work for some time, and the Lord answered it in manifested blessing. In some cases the whole household was converted, both children and servants; and many young people in many families were brought to know the Lord. The reality of the work at that time was most happily proved by not a few of those who were then converted becoming earnest preachers of the gospel, and sisters as well as brothers, have turned out hearty

workers, and have thereby brought others into the field. The work of the gospel was greatly helped during the Revival of 1859.

The Opinion of a Less Prejudiced Writer

Mr. Marsden, incumbent of St. Peter's, Birmingham, in his "Dictionary of Christian Churches and Sects," says, in part, of the Brethren, (not later than 1854): "Professing neither to teach nor practise anything but the religion of the gospel in its primitive simplicity and purity, their aim is, naturally, to shew that other churches are more or less in error, trusting chiefly for the defence of their own peculiarities to the letter of the New Testament.

"The Brethren equally object to the national church, and to all forms of dissent. Of national churches one and all of them, they say, 'that the opening of the door to receive the whole population of a country into the solemn acts of worship and christian fellowship, is a latitudinarian error. Dissenters, on the other hand, are sectarian, because they close the door on real Christians who cannot utter the Shibboleth of their party. In a word, the characteristic evil of the latter is, that they do not treat as Christians many

who are known to be such, whereas the equally characteristic evil of the former is, that they do treat as Christians many who are known not to be such at all.' The one system, they affirm, makes the church wider, the other narrower than God's limits; thus, in either way, the proper scriptural idea of the church is practically destroyed, dissent virtually affirming that it is not one body but many, while nationalism virtually affirms that this one body is the body of Christ.

"That which constitutes a church is the presence of the Holy Spirit. 'It is the owning of the Holy Ghost as Christ's vicar — the really present, sole, and sufficient sovereign in the church during our Lord's absence, which is our special responsibility, and ought to be a leading feature in our testimony.' Scripture, say the Brethren, never prescribes a human commission as necessary for the christian minister. Doctrine, not ordination, is the divine test of rejecting or receiving those who profess to be ministers of Christ: and every christian man who can do so is not only at liberty, but is bound to preach the gospel. The parable of the talents, in Matthew 25, teaches the danger of waiting for other warrant than the possession of the necessary gift: 'and to doubt the grace of

the Master, or to fear because one has not the authentication of those who presumptuously claim and trifle with this right, is to bury his talent in the earth, and to act the part of the wicked and slothful servant.' For the Lord of the harvest alone has the title to send forth labourers.

"We have only to add that the doctrines held by the Plymouth Brethren agree in all essentials with the Church of England and other churches of the Reformation. Their worship is conducted in the simplest manner. Circumstances apart, any brother is competent to baptise or to 'break the bread,' that is, administer the Lord's supper. They deny, however, that all Christians are ministers of the Word, or that they undervalue a christian ministry. 'So far,' say they, 'from supposing there is no such thing as ministry, Brethren hold, and have always held, from Eph. 4.12,13, that Christ cannot fail to maintain and perpetuate a ministry so long as His body is here below.' Their printed books and tracts, their teachings in private and public affirm this as a certain settled truth; insomuch that it is as absurd to charge them with denying the permanent and divine place of ministry in the church on earth, as it would be to charge Charles I. with denying

the divine right of kings. Wherever it has pleased God to raise up pastors after His own heart, they gladly, thankfully own His grace, and esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

"We infer, that a minister is received as such when the Brethren are satisfied of his fitness for the office; but that he then obtains no other distinction or authority than that of a teacher or exhorter. It has been recently said that they neither pray for the pardon of sin, nor for the presence and influence of the Spirit, and carefully exclude such petitions from their hymns; but this statement, which we transcribe from a recent account of 'Christian Sects in the Nineteenth Century,' is extremely unjust. It is only true, so far as this: the Brethren, regarding themselves as, in theological language, in a state of grace, do not ask for blessings they have already received, but rather for an increase of the gifts of which they have already a portion."

The reader will do well to put himself in possession of a tract, entitled, "One Body and one Spirit," by Mr. W. Kelly. It is from this paper that Mr. Marsden has gathered all his thoughts and information respecting Brethren. And though we may not agree

with all he says in the article as a whole, we cannot fail to notice the fair and gracious spirit in which it is written: very different from some others from which we might quote.

PART II

CHAPTER 6

GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BRETHREN

As there is much confusion in the minds of many as to the teachings of Brethren, we think the best thing we can do is to give a selection from their own books, many of which have been before the public for many years. They seem to have written on most subjects connected with the Person, work, and glory of Christ; the faith, duty, and blessing of His people; indeed, we may say, they have written on many of the subjects in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, so that confusion or ignorance as to their teaching is, in a sense, inexcusable. But in the selections chosen we will endeavour to confine ourselves to that which is practical, in the hope that it may be helpful to general readers.

Lay Preaching

Notwithstanding the opposition of most of the denominations to what they call "lay" preaching, the Brethren have advocated the

practice from the first, and have set the example to the blessing of many souls.

"The question is not," says Mr. Darby, 'whether all laymen are individually qualified; but, whether as laymen they are disqualified, unless they are what is commonly called ordained. . . . But I confine myself to a simple question — the assertion that laymen ought not to preach without episcopal or other analogous appointment. My assertion is, that they are entitled; that they did so in Scripture — were justified in doing so, God blessing them therein; and that the principles of Scripture require it, assuming, of course, here, that they are qualified of God; for the question is not competency to act, *but title to act if competent*.

"Let us see what Scripture says upon the subject. The question can only arise as to their speaking *in* the church or *out* of the church. This admitted, all anomalous cases will readily be agreed in. And first, *in* the church. And here I remark that the directions in i Corinthians 14 are entirely *inconsistent* with the necessity of ordination to speak. There is a line drawn there, but it is not 'if ordained or unordained.' 'Let your women keep silent in the churches' — a direction which never could have had place,

were the speaking confined to a definitely ordained person, but takes quite another ground; and which implies directly, not that it is right for every man to speak, but that there was the preclusion of none because of their character as laymen. Women were the precluded class; there the line was drawn. If men had not the gift of speaking of course they would be silent, if they followed the directions given. The apostle says, 'Every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation.' Does he say none ought to speak but one ordained? No; let all things be done unto edifying! that is the grand secret, the grand rule. . . .

"We have then a distinction, not of ordained and unordained, but of those who from their character — *women* — are not permitted to speak, *and the rest are*; and directed in what order to do so, and the ground of distinction stated. And this is God's plan of decency and order. For the rest they were all to speak, that all might learn, and all be comforted; not all to speak at once, not all to speak every day, but all as God led them, according to the order laid down, and as God was pleased to give them ability, for the edifying of the church. I

apply all this simply and exclusively to lay preaching; and I assert that there was no such principle recognised as that they should not, but the contrary.

"It will be said, I know, that these were times of extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. . . . But the case was not one of the prerogative of spiritual gifts, but of order; for women had spiritual gifts, as we read elsewhere, and directions are given for their exercise; but they were not to use them in the church, because it was out of order — not comely.

"The first general preaching of the gospel, which the Lord blessed beyond the walls of Jerusalem, was by laymen; or, however, the church knew no such distinction. It had not entered into their minds then, that they who knew the glory of Christ were not to speak of it, where and how God enabled them. There all the Christians preached — *they went everywhere preaching the word*. (Acts 8.4). And 'the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.' Paul preached — without any other mission than seeing the glory of the Lord and His word — in a synagogue, too, and boasts of it. And he gives his reasons for Christians preaching elsewhere — 'as it is written; I believed, and therefore

have I spoken; we also believe and *therefore* speak.' Apollos preached, knowing only the baptism of John. At Rome many of the brethren, waxing bold by Paul's bonds, preached the word without fear. Nor is there such a thing mentioned in Scripture as ordaining to preach the gospel. I call upon anyone to produce any scripture positively, or on principle, forbidding laymen to preach, or requiring episcopal or other analogous ordination for the purpose. . . .

"The time calls for decision; and the only thing which will withstand evil and error is truth, and truth wielded as a common cause against error and self-will by the saints under the Spirit; and then God can be wholly with them, instead of being obliged to withdraw His countenance from them when they are opposed to their brethren and rejecting them, when *He* must justify them, when it is the order of His glory, and all their blessing to do so. May He by His Spirit guide us into all truth!"*

Ordination

Much of the bitterness which the clergy have manifested has sprung from the ques-

* The Collected Writings, Ecclesiastical, vol. 1, of J.N.D.

tion of ordination. It is the great pillar on which the whole system of clericalism rests; therefore, it must be jealously guarded. Do away with ordination and the clergy become as other men. Then they could only rise to their own moral level. But there is a charm in the fiat of ordination which gives them to feel that they are of a different caste, that they are superior to all other men. They must not be spoken to, questioned, or dictated to as other men are. Their dignity must be maintained at all cost. And so real is this charm over the human heart that it rarely loses its effects even after the office is given up as unscriptural. The gown, it has been said, may be rolled up and put into the pocket, but some corner of it is often visible.

The question is a vital one as it deeply affects the operations of the Spirit, the sovereignty of God, and the ministry of the Word, which is the food and refreshment of the divine life in the soul. To insist on a certain ceremony through which a man must pass before he can be recognised as properly a minister of Christ, is the crowning sin of Christendom. It places human authority above the call and gifts of the ascended Lord and Head of the church. "If a man possessed all the gifts of the apostle Paul

himself, he dared not teach or preach Jesus Christ, unless he were licensed or authorised by man; whereas, on the contrary, though destitute altogether of spiritual gifts, nay, even of spiritual life itself, yet, if authorised, ordained, licensed or approved by man, he might teach and preach in that which professes to be the church of God. Man's authority, without Christ's gift, was quite sufficient. Christ's gift without man's authority was not."*

Surely we cannot, as Christians, be too deeply impressed with the importance of the servant's individual responsibility to the Master Himself. It must be a very serious thing for a servant of the Lord who has been entrusted by Him with the gift of preaching or teaching if he refrain from exercising that gift until he be authorised to do so by man. We nowhere read in Scripture that such gifts ever needed man's sanction. May the Lord awaken His people more generally to their responsibility in this matter, lest they should hide their talent in the earth during His absence, and have a sorry account to give of their trading at His return.

The apostle Paul, who is in many things

* Things New and Old, vol. 18. p.262. C.H.M.

the model man of the christian dispensation, is especially so in the matter of ordination. There were those in his day who sought to discredit his apostleship because he had not been with the Lord Jesus when He was down here. This leads him to vindicate his divine call without human appointment in the most energetic way. Writing to the Galatians, he says, "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." It was not of men as a source, nor by man as a medium in any way, "but by Jesus Christ and God the Father."

"Nothing could have been more easy than for God to have converted the apostle in Jerusalem; it was there that his first violence against the Christians broke out. But when God met him, he was away from Jerusalem, carrying on his hot persecution of the saints; and there, outside Damascus, in broad daylight, the Lord from heaven, unseen by others, reveals Himself to the astonished Saul of Tarsus. He was called not only a saint, but an apostle; and to make it more striking, when he was baptised, whom did the Lord choose to make the instrument of his baptism? A disciple who is only this once brought before us, as a godly old man,

residing at Damascus. God took special care to shew that the apostle, appointed to a signally important place, the most momentous function of any man that ever was called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel — that St. Paul was thus called without the intervention, authorisation, or recognition of man in any shape or form. His baptism had nothing to do with his being an apostle. He immediately goes into Arabia, he preaches the gospel, and God at once owns him as Christ's minister in the gospel, without any human interference. Such, indeed, is the true principle of ministry, fully illustrated in the call and work of Saul of Tarsus, henceforth the bondman of Christ.

“It may be objected, however, by some that we do read of human setting aside and laying on of hands in the New Testament. We own it fully. But in some cases it is a person who had already shewn qualifications for the work, set apart in a formal manner by apostolic authority to a local charge, and clothed with a certain dignity in the eyes of the saints, perhaps because there was not much gift. For the elder, it will be observed, is not said to be a ‘teacher,’ but simply ‘apt to teach.’ In Acts 14.23 we read, ‘And when they had ordained elders in every church, and

had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.' This proves that not the church, but that they — Paul and Barnabas — chose and ordained elders in the churches. In no case is the church invited to select them. The fact is, people confound eldership with ministry. Elders were appointed by those who themselves had a higher authority direct from Christ; but there never was such a thing as ordaining a man to preach the gospel. In scripture, the Lord, and the Lord only, calls men to preach the gospel. As He says, 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit.' And of Paul He says, 'He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.' John 15.16; Acts 9.15.

"In apostolic days there never was such a thing as a person appointed a teacher any more than a prophet. But among the elders there might be, some of them, evangelists, teachers, &c. Therefore it is said, 'Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.' The presbyters, or elders, whose business it was to rule, even if

they were not teachers, were in danger of being despised. They were to be honoured as a class, and especially they who laboured in the word and doctrine.

"The case of Timothy is, no doubt, peculiar. He was designated by prophecy to a certain very peculiar work — that of guarding doctrine. And the apostle and the presbyters laid their hands upon him, by which a spiritual gift was communicated to him which he did not possess before. It is evident that there is no man now living who has been similarly endowed and called to such work. See 1 Tim. 1.18; 4.14; 2 Tim. 1.6.

"It may also be said that, in the case of the apostle Paul, there was putting on of hands, which we have in Acts 13. What does this shew? Not, certainly, that he was an apostle chosen by man; for the Holy Ghost declares that he was 'an apostle, *not* of men, neither *by* man.' That which took place at Antioch was in no sense ordaining him to be an apostle. It is evident from many scriptures that for several years before hands were laid on him, he had been preaching, and was one of the recognised prophets and teachers at Antioch. I believe that the point there was the setting him and

Barnabas apart for the special mission on which they were just about to go out — to plant the gospel in new countries. It was purely and simply a recommendation to the grace of God, for the new work on which they were about to enter. » Some such thing might be done at the present day. Supposing a man, who had been preaching the gospel in England, felt it much laid on his heart to go and visit Japan, and his brethren felt that he was just the man for that work, they might, in order to shew their concurrence and sympathy, meet together with prayer and fasting, to lay their hands upon the brother who was going thither. This, in my opinion, would be quite scriptural; but it is not ordaining. What I believe to be unscriptural, and indeed positively sinful, is accrediting a number of men who are *not* ministers of Christ, and discrediting a number of men who *are* His ministers, because they do not go through this traditional innovation.”*

Ministry

Though the subject of ministry has already been noticed, it seems to claim a

* See *Lectures on the Epistle to the Galatians*, pp.5-11; also *One Body and One Spirit*, by William Kelly.

passing glance in connection with the kindred subjects of Lay-preaching and Ordination. Besides, it was one of the earliest subjects of controversy with the Brethren. They were accused by the clergy of denying ministry altogether, because they denied the validity of episcopal orders. This exposed them to many bitter attacks, but the Lord overruled these accusations to bring out an amount of truth on the subject of ministry which seems to have been overlooked since the days of the apostles. They were, we believe, the first to point out clearly the difference between *priesthood* and *ministry*. Hitherto they had been confounded in men's minds; but when the distinction was made plain, a flood of light was thrown on the interesting subject of christian ministry.

The Levitical Priesthood and the Ministry of the Gospel

"The consequence of the position of the Jewish nation was very simple. A law, to direct the conduct of a people already existing as such before God; and a priesthood to maintain the relations which existed between this people and their God — relations which were not of a character to

enable them to draw nigh to Him without mediation. The question was not, how to seek and call those without; but to *order the intercourse* with God of a people already recognised as such.

"As we have already seen, Christianity has an entirely different character. It considers mankind as universally lost, proves them in reality to be so, and seeks, through the power of a new life, worshippers in spirit and in truth. In like manner does it introduce the worshippers themselves into the presence of God who there reveals Himself as their Father — a Father who has sought and saved them. And this is done, not by means of an intermediary priestly class who represent the worshippers, because of the inability of the latter to approach a terrible and imperfectly known God; but it introduces them in full confidence to a God known and loved, because He has loved them, sought, and washed them from all their sins, that they might be before Him without fear.

"The consequence of this marked difference between the relations in which Jews and Christians stand as toward God is, that the Jews had a *priesthood* — and not a ministry — which acted outside the people; while Christianity has a *ministry* which finds

its exercise in the active revelation of what God is — whether within the church or without — there being no intermediate priesthood between God and His people, save the Great High Priest Himself. The christian priesthood is composed of all true Christians, who equally enjoy the right of entering into the holy place by the new and living way which has been consecrated for them — a priesthood, moreover, whose relations are essentially heavenly.

“Ministry, then, is essential to Christianity, which is the activity of the love of God in delivering souls from ruin and from sin, and in drawing them to Himself.

The Source of Ministry

“ ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; *and hath committed to us the word of reconciliation.*’ These are the three things which flow from the coming of God in Christ. ‘Reconciling,’ ‘not imputing,’ and ‘committing unto us the word of reconciliation.’ Without this last, the work of grace would have remained imperfect in its application; and the crowning of this glorious work of the grace of God was to commit to

man 'the word of reconciliation,' according to His own power and good pleasure. There were thus two elements contained in ministry: first, deep conviction and a powerful sense of the love displayed in this work of reconciliation; secondly, gifts to declare to men, according to their necessities, the riches of this grace which animated the hearts of those who bore witness of it. . . .

"As the mainsprings and sources, then, of all ministry, there are these two things: the *love* produced in the heart by grace, the love which impels to activity; and the sovereignty of God who communicates *gifts* as seems good to Him, and calls to this or that service — a call, which renders ministry a matter of faithfulness and duty on the part of him who is called. It is to be observed, that these two principles both suppose an entire freedom from man, who cannot interfere, as either the source or the authorisation of ministry, without, on the one hand, neutralising love as the source of activity, or, on the other, infringing on the sovereignty of God, who calls and sends; and whose call constitutes duty. There is no christian source of activity but the love of Christ and the call of God.

"This ministry of Jesus, this active

energy of the love of God in seeking the lost, the testifying to the work and victory of the Saviour, who alone is worthy to be thus glorified, receives all its power, and has its only source in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. It is the ministry of the Holy Ghost in the choice, and employment of His servants. In all this God is sovereign. The exercise of the gifts bestowed by Him is regulated by the Holy Spirit, who acts sovereignly in the church. The proofs and examples of this are found in the Word. As a source of ministry, or as authority for its exercise, man interferes only to sin.”*

The Forgiveness of Sins

In an article to which our attention was directed some time ago, it was stated that one of the doctrinal points with the Brethren is,—

“That it is not lawful to pray for the pardon of our sins, because, if we are real

* See a most valuable tract, by J.N.D., on the nature, source, power, and responsibility of ministry; *The Collected Writings, Ecclesiastical*, vol. 1. p.315. It might be well for those who are in any bondage as to the details of their public service, to consult this bold and free unfolding of the truth here, on the *liberty and responsibility* of the servant.

Christians, they were forgiven nineteen hundred years ago upon the cross."

No authority is given for this statement; therefore we cannot compare. The cross, we all believe, is the only ground of pardon, but it is never said to the sinner who believes in Jesus, "Thy sins were all forgiven when Christ shed His blood on the cross." The divine order seems to be, that Christ *put away* sin on the cross, and that we are *pardoned when* we believe, not "nineteen hundred years ago." "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." And to the chief of sinners penitent at His feet, the blessed Lord says, "Thy sins are forgiven." Thus we learn that sin was put away on the cross according to the claims of the divine glory, so that the Father is free to run and meet the returning prodigal, embrace him with the kiss of reconciliation, invest him with the best robe, and seal him with the ring of His eternal love. At the same time, if we want to see our sins *put away*, we must look back to the cross; it is nowhere said that the Lord puts them away from our hearts; only on the cross. Those who look to their hearts in place of the cross, to see their sins put away, will be

bitterly disappointed. We only know that our sins were "put away," "made an end of," on the cross, and forgiven when we believe. The word of the Lord is the only ground of the full assurance of faith. However correct our experience may be, we cannot build upon it; the Word of God is the soul's only resting place. The words of the hymn sweetly express this truth:—

"My soul looks back (not, within) to see
The burden Thou didst bear,
When hanging on th'accursed tree,
For ALL my guilt was there."

As to the other part of the alleged doctrine of the Brethren—"That it is not lawful to pray for the pardon of our sins." We are well aware that much has been made of this report. But, alas! it is the sacred truth of God that is turned into ridicule. On nothing do their reviewers shew more incompetency to revise and correct their writings than on the elementary subject of forgiveness. They have evidently no proper thought of the completeness of redemption, or the privileges of relationship. Hence they teach that Christians must pray to God daily for the pardon of their sins, and come to be cleansed afresh by the blood of Jesus, as if we might be lost and saved every day.

"The words of the apostle John," says one, "are evidently meant for believers." (i John 1.7). "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth (not *has* cleansed, but *is* actually cleansing) us from all sin." Brethren as a body would pronounce this doctrine most unsound and inconsistent with the context, and with all Scripture, especially the gospel. The apostle is speaking of believers walking in the light as God is in the light, not even according to it, but in it. How could this be, if their sins were *not* cleansed away by the blood of Jesus? He is not speaking of a *continuous*, but of an *absolute* cleansing from all sin, suitable to the unsullied light of God's presence.

The Brethren, certainly, are not in the habit, at least in public, of praying to God for the pardon of their sins. Not because they think it "unlawful," or because they were pardoned nineteen hundred years ago, or because they do not sin, but because it would be unbelief, as they are not in the position of sinners before God, but of children before the Father. When a sinner is converted—born again—he changes ground; he leaves, and leaves for ever, the ground of the natural man, and is henceforth on the new ground of eternal life and

salvation; so that it would be unbelief, in the most inexcusable way, to go back to the old ground and ignore the gracious work of God in the new birth. "Verily, verily," says the blessed Lord, "I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." "For ye are all the children of God," says the apostle, "by faith in Christ Jesus." (John 5.24; Gal. 3.26). But if they do not pray as sinners to be pardoned, they confess their faults as children according to the mind of the Lord. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (i John i.9). Here, it is not said that God will be *gracious* and *merciful* to forgive if we pray to Him, but that He will be *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins if we confess them. That is, He is faithful and just to Christ, who died for us, put away our sins on the cross, and whose blood is sprinkled on the mercy-seat; ever, as it were, before the eye of God. Surely, in the light of this text, we could not pray to God to be "faithful and just," that we know He must ever be to the finished work of Christ; but we could not too fully

or freely confess our sins, and this in the deep sense of what they are in the sight of that blood which was shed for them, and in the presence of His holiness, whose children, though unworthy, we ever are. It is a thousand times more searching for a child to confess the details of his failure, than merely to ask—it may be mechanically—to be pardoned.

Thus we see that the Word of God is more consistent than the theology of men, and thrice happy the Christian who is content to walk in the light of that truth, though he should be misunderstood and misrepresented. The day is coming when the Lord will vindicate those, who, though having but little strength, kept His word, and denied not His name.

The following quotation may be accepted as the testimony of Brethren in general on i John 1.7.

“If sin-cleansing by the blood of Jesus, in i John 1,7, is assumed to be only going on, it would falsify the same apostle’s language in Revelation 1.5, where we are said to be already washed by His blood, and this comes out more strikingly in any exact rendering, like Dean Alford’s version: ‘unto him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in

his own blood.' His love is constant, but the washing, or loosing, us from our sins is set forth by a participle of that tense which expresses an action simply past, excluding duration. John could have used no such form, if we had to come before God for daily cleansing by the blood of Jesus; for in this case it would be correct to employ, not the aorist, but the imperfect tense, which precisely expresses a continued or repeated action.

"How, then, did the apostle use the present? Was there laxity in his expression, when he said, 'The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from every sin'? On the contrary, the tense is just as exact in i John 1.7, as his use of distinctive participles in Revelation 1.5. A little learning is proverbially dangerous; and in the exegesis of Scripture, voluminous commentators are apt to go astray, no less than their followers. But to give an opinion on such a question hardly becomes people ignorant of the fact, that the present in Greek, as in most languages, is in no way limited to an incomplete action yet in course of performance; for it no less correctly expresses an absolute present, as in general propositions, doctrinal statements, apothegms (terse sayings), and

descriptions of manners, customs, or matters of frequent occurrence. Just so, in English we say, 'Food nourishes the human body; poison kills.' The idea intended is not continuance of the act, but the quality of each material, or their opposite effects on man. Almost every chapter in the epistles furnishes instances. Take a plain and kindred statement from i John 2: 'He is the propitiation for our sins.' Does the present here mean that He is actually now atoning for our sins? Clearly not; such an interpretation of the present would incontrovertibly overthrow the atonement. It is here evidently used in its absolute sense, without reference to any definite moment, for expressing the great and blessed truth of His propitiation. Just so in our text the notion of continuous cleansing would distinctly contradict the grand doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and of the gospel in general. It is therefore the gravest error.

"We have seen, then, that continuous cleansing by blood cannot be meant, not merely because it has no just sense in itself, but because it opposes other scriptures which treat the effect on the Christian as complete. Scripture cannot be broken. Re-

peated application of Christ's blood the Word does not countenance anywhere else, even if the Word here implied it, which it does not. It remains, therefore, that we must fall back on the only possible sense of the present here open to us, namely, that the apostle states, in an absolute way, the cleansing of believers by the blood of Jesus, expressed (as it regularly is in such propositions) in the present, but abstractedly, without reference to time past, present, or future, as one of the main characteristics of their place or standing. Hence it is no question of this or that sin, when confessed: His blood cleanseth from every sin. Details are not before us, nor restoration after failure. It is the proper and divine value of His blood. Consequently, if it were the design of the Holy Spirit to reveal this absolutely, the present tense was the one exactly suited to the apostle's hand, as we see it now before us. The effort to limit, or even apply the expression 'cleanseth', to the *continuous* force of the present, is therefore mere ignorance, or worse. The doctrine of the clause, the context, and Scripture in general, declare unitedly and unequivocally for the absolute usage of the present in the closing verb of i John 1.7."*

* *Bible Treasury*, March, 1879.

The Provision of Grace for the Family of Faith

Much of the darkness, confusion, and uncertainty, which prevail throughout Christendom on the subject of pardon and the assurance of salvation, can only be accounted for—strange as it may appear—by the rejection of truths which scripture teaches, and for which Brethren are denounced by their reviewers as heretical. The leading teachers of the various Protestant schools seem to have overlooked entirely the perfect provision of God in the economy of grace, for every need of the whole family of faith. This provision is plainly revealed by the blessed Lord in John 13.

Jesus had now taken His position with His disciples as one going away. He "knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father." But His entrance into glory would not take His heart away from them, nor even from attending to their wants. In illustration of this, He girds Himself for service, and takes water to wash their feet. The effect of this service is, that the Holy Spirit, by the Word, takes away practically, all the defilement that we gather in walking through this sinful world.

They had been regenerated—born again: that could never be repeated; but they must be maintained in a condition of spotless purity befitting the presence of God, and the relationships into which they have been brought by their oneness with Christ in heaven. The priests who served God in the tabernacle were washed all over at their consecration. This washing never was repeated. They washed their hands and their feet every time they drew near to God in service. The Christian having been washed, or bathed, "needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." What a word from the lips of eternal truth and holiness! Ye are clean, clean every whit but not all, for He knew who should betray Him. The feeblest believer, or the youngest lamb in His flock is kept spotless in the presence of God—where His finished work has set them—by His own gracious ministry on high, and by the power of the Holy Spirit who abides with His people here. Thus the Lord looks after their interests in heaven, and the Holy Ghost on earth, so that they are well cared for, well provided for. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins." This

advocacy is based on righteousness and propitiation, and the Holy Spirit ever acts in harmony with the mind and work of Christ. i John 2.1,2.

This line of truth, so liberating and elevating to the soul, abounds in nearly all the Brethren's writings, especially in the writings of the elder Brethren, so that it has been taught in public and in private, and widely spread by their books for many years. We cannot help thinking that those who have endeavoured to bring them into ridicule in the eyes of the christian public for not praying for the pardon of their sins, "because they were forgiven nineteen hundred years ago on the cross," are guilty of the veriest trifling, if not positively sinning, in the holy things of God. Take the following extract from one of their monthly magazines.

"Jesus occupies Himself with a new service, the removal of the defilements of His own in their walk as saints through the world. This is the meaning of what follows. 'Then he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.' Be it carefully observed, that it is the question here of water, not of blood. The reader of John's Gospel will not have

overlooked that he makes much of 'water' as well as 'blood.' So did the Lord in presenting the truth to His own, and no one shews this more than John. His first epistle also characterises the Lord as 'He that came by water and by blood; not by water only, but by water and blood,' He purifies us as well as atones for our sins. He employs the Word to cleanse those who are washed from their sins in His blood. The apostles, Paul, Peter, and James, insist on the power of the Word, as John does. It is disastrous and dangerous in the highest degree to overlook purification by the washing of water by the Word. If 'the blood' is Godward, though for us, 'water' is saintward to remove impurity in practice, as well as to give a new nature, which judges evil according to God and His Word. Out of His pierced side came blood and water. John 19.

"As to this grave and blessed truth, Christendom remains, I fear, as dark as Peter, when he declined the gracious action of the Lord. Nor did Peter enter into the truth conveyed by that most significant dealing till afterwards, that is, when the Holy Spirit came to shew them the things of Christ. On the occasion itself he was wrong throughout. And so are men apt to be now,

even though light divine has been fully afforded. They still perversely limit its extent to teaching humility. This only Peter saw, and hence his mistake; for he thought it stooping down excessively, that the Lord should wash his feet; and, when alarmed by the Lord's warning, he fell into an opposite error. We are only safe when subject to His word in distrust of ourselves 'He that is washed (bathed) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.' The Lord 'suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.' By His 'one offering' we are not only sanctified but perfected in perpetuity. Is there no failure in the saint afterwards? Alas, there may be. What then is the provision for such? It is the washing of water by the word which the Spirit applies in answer to the Son's advocacy with the Father."*

* *Bible Treasury*, January, 1878.

CHAPTER 7

CHRISTIAN POSITION

The important question of christian position naturally flows from the one we have been considering—the forgiveness of sins. Unless the conscience be cleansed from all sins there could be no enjoyment of the divine presence. This is the turning-point between the Brethren and their opponents; and this being the very threshold of Christianity, we must not wonder at the former being considered in error, seeing the latter do not understand their position as Christians, or rather, christian position. They are on different ground and look at divine things from different points of view. The thoughts of the one are formed and their statements governed by the particular school of theology in which they have been trained; while the thoughts and statements of the other are governed by Scripture only.

Of course theologians would say that their different bodies of divinity were fair and honest deductions from Scripture and supported by it. Well, suppose we admit

this; but how much of the truth of God is left out in such standards? Where should we find the doctrine of the church of God as the body and bride of Christ? the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth and His varied operations? the coming of the Lord to receive us to Himself? the rapture of the saints? the heavenly relations of the Christian? the first resurrection, and the millennial reign of the saints with Christ for a thousand years? (i Cor. 12; Eph. 4; Rev. 21; John 14; 15; 16; John 14.1-3; i Thess. 4.13-18; i Cor. 15.51,52; Eph. 2.4-6; Col. 3.1-4; Rev. 20.5,6). These blessed and precious truths are plainly and abundantly taught in Scripture, and characterise the teaching and writings of the Brethren. But in what system of theology are they to be found?*

Individual Christians, we know, there are in the various denominations who hold and teach some of these truths, especially of late years; but we are speaking of those systems of doctrine which are intended to guide

* When this book was written, perhaps about 85 years ago, these truths were largely unknown among most of the denominations. Now, through the mercy of God, some, such as the Lord's coming, are well known and faithfully preached in many places.

young men in their studies, and on which they are examined before being licensed, and by which they will be judged if they should ever after become the subjects of discipline. They must only preach those doctrines which are within the limits of their system if they would not be called in question. How then, we may ask, can those who have been so trained, and still adhere to their system, be competent to weigh in the balances of the sanctuary, the truths which constitute these teachings seeing they do not understand them, but merely judge them by their own theology?

The Testimony of Scripture

We shall now see what the Word of God says on the subject of christian position in connection with forgiveness.

The apostle John in his first epistle says, "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is

in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (i John 1.5-7). In verse 7 we have the three great features of our christian position, looked at as men walking down here. John is not describing some special class among the faithful, but all true Christians whoever and wherever they may be. We walk in the light as God is in the light, where all sin is judged according to Him with whom we are in fellowship. Next, what the world knows nothing of, "we have fellowship one with another," that is, we have the same divine nature, and the same Holy Spirit dwells in us; so that there must be fellowship. This we may see every day and wherever we may be. When traveling, it may be, we meet a perfect stranger; a word is dropped — Christ's blessed name, or that which conveys to the heart the sense of His grace, and we have communion with that man, just because the divine life is there. This is only natural in the new creation of God, all being indwelt by the one Spirit. But besides these, we are cleansed from all sin — "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." This is not brought in here as a provision against our failure, as some say, and for our daily res-



toration. The apostle is speaking of the position in which the believer is set by the grace of God from the beginning of his christian course, and which remains unchanged right through.

We are in the light as God is in the light; we have fellowship together; and we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ — the ever-abiding power of the blood of Jesus which knows no limits.

“These are the three great principles of the christian position. We are in the presence of God without a veil. It is a real thing, a matter of life and walk. It is not the same thing as walking according to the light; but it is in the light. That is to say, that this walk is before the eyes of God, enlightened by the full revelation of what He is. It is not that there is no sin in us; but, walking in the light, the will and the conscience being in the light as God is in it, everything is judged that does not answer to it. We live and walk morally in the sense that God is present. We walk thus in the light. The moral rule of will is God Himself; God known. The thoughts that sway the heart come from Himself, and are formed upon the revelation of Himself. The apostle puts these things always in an abstract way:

thus he says, "He cannot sin, because he is born of God;" and that maintains the normal rule of this life; it is its nature; it is the truth, inasmuch as the man is born of God. We cannot have any other measure of it; any other would be false. It does not follow, alas! that we are always consistent; but we are inconsistent if we are not in this state; we are not walking according to the nature that we possess; we are out of our true condition according to that nature.

"Moreover, walking in the light as God is in the light, believers have communion with each other. The world is selfish. The flesh, the passions, seek their own gratification; but if I walk in the light self has no place there. I enjoy the light and all I see in it with another, and there is no jealousy. If another possess a carnal thing, I am deprived of it. In the light we have fellow-possession of that which He gives us, and we enjoy it the more by sharing it together. This is a touch-stone of all that is of the flesh.

"We feel the need there is of the last thing; — the blood which cleanses from all sin. While walking in the light as God is in the light, with a perfect revelation to us of Himself, with a nature that knows Him spiritually, as the eye is made to appreciate

light, we cannot say that we have no sin. The light itself would contradict us. But we can say that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses perfectly from it.”*

Those who know their place in association with Christ as risen from the dead, know that they have eternal life, and that in resurrection; death, an empty grave, the world, sin, and Satan, are all behind the Christian. The grave of Christ is the terminus for every foe. “But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are — not will be, but are — saved). and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2.

The Results of Redemption

Before leaving the Epistle of St. John we will briefly notice the teaching of the three witnesses in chapter 5. “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness,

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 5. p.456.

because the Spirit is truth. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one." John has his eye on the cross. It was from the pierced side of Jesus that the blood and the water flowed forth; and that to which they bear witness is that God has given us eternal life through the death of His beloved Son. "It is the judgment of death pronounced and executed (compare Romans 8.3) on the flesh, on all that is of the old man, on the first Adam. Not that the sin of the first Adam was in the flesh of Christ, but that Jesus died in it as a sacrifice for that sin!" In that He died, He died unto sin once! Here we have the blood that atones, the water that purifies, and the Spirit that dwelleth in us, bearing witness to their efficacy. We belong to the new creation of God; we possess life in resurrection. The blood of propitiation cleanseth us from all sin, the water of purification maintains us as spotless as the blood has made us, and the Holy Spirit is the power in applying these through faith in the Word, giving us the joy of both, and bearing witness because He is truth.

That to which the three bear witness is made plain and interesting by the following

quotation:

"He came by water — a powerful testimony, as flowing from the side of a dead Christ, that life is not to be sought for in the first Adam; for Christ, as associated with him, taking up his cause, the Christ, come in the flesh, had to die: else He had remained alone in His own purity. Life is to be sought for in the Son of God risen from among the dead.

"But it was not by water only that He came; it was also by blood. The expiation of our sins was as necessary as the moral purification of our souls. We possess it in the blood of a slain Christ. Death alone could expiate them, blot them out. And, Jesus died for us. The guilt of the believer, no longer exists before God; Christ has put Himself in his place. The life is on high, and we are raised up together with Him, God having forgiven us all our trespasses.

"The third witness is the Spirit — put first in the order of their testimony on earth; last in their historic order. In effect it is the testimony of the Spirit, His presence in us, which enables us to appreciate the value of the water and the blood.

"We should never have understood the practical bearing of the death of Christ, if

the Holy Ghost were not a revealing power to the new man, of its import and efficacy. Now, the Holy Ghost came down from a risen and ascended Christ, and thus we know that eternal life is given us in the Son of God.

"The testimony of these three witnesses meet together in this same truth, namely, that grace, that God Himself, has given us eternal life; and that this life is in His Son. Man had nothing to do in it — except by his sins. It is the gift of God. And the life that He gives us is in His Son. The testimony is the testimony of God. How blessed to have such a testimony, and that from God Himself, and in perfect grace!"*

The True Ground of Peace

Any who are strangers to quiet, settled peace with God would do well to read the writings of these Christians on this subject. They give no uncertain sound. The "doubts and fears" which have so long harassed and perplexed even the most godly among the denominations, have not entirely passed away, though of late years many Christians

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 5. p.426.

have been more clear and certain than formerly. Many of the most illustrious names in past ages might be given as having been frequently troubled all through life as to their pardon and acceptance. Real peace was unknown.

But peace with God is the heritage of all His children — as the legacy left by Christ to His disciples. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." It was in the midst of this world with all its trials and conflicts that He gave them His own peace — the peace which He Himself had with the Father as He walked in this world. But why is it that so few enjoy this character of peace with the Father as He did? It is ours! He left it to us! No reason can be given but unbelief. We cannot enjoy a blessing before we believe it. And He meant us to enjoy it in this world, and in spite of it, as He did. He is also our peace in heaven, so that it is perfect in the light as well as in the world.

Ponder the following quotations on this all-important, personal question, and the reader must judge of the teaching.

"Our peace is not merely a thing of enjoyment within us, but it is Christ outside of us: 'For he is our peace' — a most won-

derful expression. And if souls only rested upon this, would there be anxiety as to fulness of peace? It is my own fault entirely if I do not rest in and enjoy it. But even so; am I to doubt that Christ is my peace? I am dishonouring Him if I do. If I had a surety whose riches could not fail, why should I doubt my standing or credit? It depends neither on my wealth, nor on my poverty. All turns on the resources of Him who has become responsible for me. So it is with Christ. He is our peace, and there can be no possibility of failure in Him. Where the heart confides in this, what is the effect? Then we can rest and enjoy peace. But I must begin with believing it. The Lord in His grace does give His people betimes transports of joy; but joy may fluctuate. Peace is, or should be, a permanent thing, that the Christian is entitled to have always: and this because Christ is our peace.”*

“It is most needful to be simple and clear as to what constitutes the ground of a sinner’s peace, in the presence of God. So many things have been mixed up with the finished work of Christ, that souls are

* *Lectures on Ephesians*, by W. Kelly, p.103.

plunged into darkness and uncertainty as to their acceptance. They do not see the absolutely settled character of redemption through the blood of Christ in its application to themselves. They seem not to be aware that full forgiveness of sins rests upon the simple fact that a full atonement has been offered, a fact attested in the view of all created intelligence, by the resurrection of the sinner's Surety from the dead. They know that there is no other way of being saved but by the blood of the cross; but the devils know this, yet it avails them nought. What is so much needed is to know that *we are saved*. The Israelite in Egypt not merely knew that there was safety in the blood: he knew that *he was safe*. And why safe? Was it because of anything that he had done, or felt, or thought? By no means: but because God had said, 'When I see the blood I will pass over you.' He rested upon God's testimony. He believed what God said, because God said it. 'He set to his seal that God was true.'

"And observe, my reader, it was not upon his own thoughts and feelings, or experiences, respecting the blood, that the Israelite rested. This would have been a poor sandy foundation to rest upon. His thoughts and

feelings might be deep or they might be shallow; but deep or shallow, they had nothing to do with the ground of his peace. It was not said, 'When *you* see the blood, and value it as you ought, I will pass over you.' This would have been sufficient to plunge him in dark despair about himself; inasmuch as it was quite impossible that the human mind could ever sufficiently appreciate the precious blood of the Lamb. What gave peace was the fact that Jehovah's eye rested upon the blood, and that He knew its worth. This tranquillised the heart. The blood was outside, and the Israelite inside, so that he could not possibly see it; but God saw it, and that was enough.

"The application of this to the question of a sinner's peace is very plain. The Lord Jesus Christ, having shed His precious blood as a perfect atonement for sin, has taken it into the presence of God, and sprinkled it there; and God's testimony assures the believing sinner that everything is settled on his behalf — settled, not by his estimate of the blood, but by the blood itself which God estimates so highly, that, because of it, without a single jot or tittle added thereto, He can righteously forgive all sin, and accept the sinner as perfectly righteous in Christ.

How can anyone ever enjoy settled peace, if his peace depends upon his estimate of the blood? Impossible! The loftiest estimate which the human mind can form of the blood must fall infinitely short of its divine preciousness; and, therefore, if our peace were to depend upon our valuing it as we ought, we could no more enjoy settled peace than if we were seeking it by 'works of law.' There must either be a sufficient ground of peace in the blood *alone*, or we can never have peace. To mix up our estimate with it is to upset the entire fabric of Christianity, just as effectually as if we were to conduct the sinner to the foot of Mount Sinai, and put him under a covenant of works. Either Christ's atoning sacrifice is sufficient, or it is not. If it is sufficient, why those doubts and fears? The words of our *lips* profess that the work is finished; but the doubts and fears of the *heart* declare that it is not. Everyone who doubts his full and everlasting forgiveness denies, so far as he is concerned, the completeness of the sacrifice of Christ.

"But there are very many who would shrink from the idea of deliberately and avowedly calling in question the efficacy of the blood of Christ, who, nevertheless, have not settled peace. Such persons profess to

be quite assured of the sufficiency of the blood, *if only they* were sure of an interest therein — *if only* they had the right kind of faith. There are many precious souls in this unhappy condition. They are occupied with their interest and their faith, instead of with Christ's blood and God's word. In other words, they are looking in at self, instead of out at Christ. This is not faith; and, as a consequence, they have not peace. An Israelite within the blood-stained lintel could teach such souls a most seasonable lesson. He was not saved by his interest in, or his thoughts about, the blood, but simply by the blood. No doubt, he had a blessed interest in it; and he would have his thoughts likewise; but then God did not say, 'When I see your interest in the blood I will pass over you.' Oh, no! *THE BLOOD*, in all its solitary dignity and divine efficacy, was set before Israel; and had they attempted to place even a morsel of unleavened bread beside the blood as a ground of security, they would have made Jehovah a liar, and denied the sufficiency of His remedy.

"We are ever prone to look at something in, or connected with, ourselves as necessary, in order to make up, with the blood of Christ, the groundwork of our peace. There is a

sad lack of clearness and soundness on this vital point, as is evident from the doubts and fears with which so many of the people of God are afflicted. We are apt to regard the fruits of the Spirit *in* us, rather than the work of Christ *for* us, as the foundation of peace. The Holy Ghost is not said to be our peace, but Christ is. God did not send preaching peace by the Holy Ghost, but by Jesus Christ. (Compare Acts 10.36; Eph. 2.14,17; Col. 1.20.) My reader cannot be too simple in his apprehension of this important distinction. It is the blood of Christ which gives peace, imparts perfect justification, divine righteousness, purges the conscience, brings us into the holiest of all, justifies God in receiving the believing soul, and constitutes our title to all the joys, the dignities and the glories of heaven. See Romans 3. 24-26; 5.9; Ephesians 2.13-18; Colossians 1.20-22; Hebrews 9.14; 10.19; i Peter 1.19; 2.24; i John 1.7; Revelation 7.14-17."*

The Righteousness of the Law, and the Righteousness of God

The question suggested by the above heading has given rise to much bitterness

* *Notes on Exodus*, by C.H.M., p.129 (Old Edition).

by many good people. Yet it is difficult for an onlooker to conceive why christian men, who believe in the plenary inspiration of scripture, should contend with such tenacity for the theological term, "the righteousness of Christ," in place of the one used in the Bible, "the righteousness of God." The former — in the theological sense — is never used in scripture, while the latter is used many times. The passage that is so often quoted, "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," does not refer to Christ's connection with the law at all, but is a summing up of the native tendency, on the one side, of Adam's one offence, and on the other, of Christ's work, without going into details.

It is affirmed that the ground of our justification is Christ's keeping the law for us, in order that this should be accepted in place of our failure. This, says modern theology, is the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to the believer for justification — His wedding garment. His transgressions are pardoned by blood-shedding. The former is called the *active*, the latter the *passive*, obedience of Christ. When told that the Spirit of God invariably uses the expression, *righteousness of God*; true, they reply, but Jesus is God.

The Brethren have written so much on this subject, and expounded so many scriptures in unfolding it, that we have great difficulty in making a selection. But we would recommend those who are interested in the question to see the originals.*

"I believe," says Mr. Darby, "and bless God for the truth, that Christ is our righteousness, and that by His obedience we are made righteous. It is the settled peace of my soul. The important point here is the contrast between the death and sufferings of Christ, as winning our forgiveness, and His obedience as our justifying righteousness. . . . What is, then, the righteousness of God, and how is it shewn? How do we have part in it? How is righteousness reckoned to us? We are said to be the righteousness of God in Christ. (ii Cor. 5.) The apostle speaks of having the righteousness of God. (Phil. 3). But it is not said God's righteousness is imputed to us. Nor is Christ's righteousness a scriptural expression, though no Christian doubts He was perfectly righteous. Still, the Spirit of God is perfect

* *A Treatise on the Righteousness of God*, by J.N.D. *The Righteousness of God; What is it?* by W. K. Broom; *The Brethren and their Reviewers*, by J.N.D.; *Lectures on Ephesians* by W.K., p.104.

in wisdom, and it would be wonderful if that which is the necessary ground of our acceptance should not be clearly spoken of in scripture. One passage seems to say so. (Rom. 5.18). But the reader may see in the margin of a Bible, which has references, that there it is 'one righteousness.' There cannot be the least doubt that this is the true rendering. But the expression, 'the righteousness of God,' is used so very often, that it is not necessary to quote the passages. Now, it is not in vain that the Holy Ghost, in so important a subject, never uses one expression, that is, the righteousness of Christ, and constantly the other, that is God's righteousness. We learn the current of the mind of the Spirit thus. Theology uses always that which the Holy Spirit never uses; and cannot tell what is to be made of that which the Holy Spirit always uses.

"The great evil of the whole scheme is, that it is a righteousness demanded of man as born of Adam, though another may furnish it. The thing furnished is man's righteousness. If Christ has done it for me, still it was what I ought to have done. It is meeting the demand on me. In the doctrine of the Epistle to the Romans it will

be found that *the whole ground-work* of our justification and every blessing, is laid in the death, not in the life of Christ on earth. 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.' Who is just? God. Here is an all important principle: the righteousness of God means, first of all His own righteousness—that He is just. It is not man's, or even yet some other's positive righteousness, made up of a quantity of legal merit, put upon him. The righteousness spoken of is God's being righteous ('just' is the same word), and yet so declared, that He can justify the most dreadful sinner.

"But it will be said that there must be a ground for this, which makes it righteous to forgive and justify. Righteousness has a double meaning. I am righteous, say, in rewarding or forgiving; but this supposes an adequate claim which makes it righteous that I should do so—merit of some kind. If I have promised anything, or anything be morally due to righteousness, I am righteous in giving it. Thus, that God should be righteous in forgiving and justifying, there

must be an adequate moral motive for His doing so. In the sinner, clearly, there was not. *In the blood of Christ there was.* And, God having set Him forth as a mercy-seat, faith in His blood became the way of justifying. This shewed God's righteousness in forgiving. Thus accepted, I stand before God on the footing of His righteousness."

It has often been said of Brethren that they make nothing of the *life* of Christ; that they pass it over as if it were of no value to man or glory to God. It is quite true that they do not make the life of Jesus before His death the groundwork of our justification; for He Himself says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." But it is untrue to say that they pass over the life of Christ as being nothing to us.

"Here, again," says Mr. Kelly, "let us understand each other. Do we deny for a moment the subjection of the Lord Jesus to the law of God? God forbid! He did fulfil the law, of course; He glorified God in every possible way in the fulfilment of it. This is no matter of controversy with christian men. He is no believer who supposes that Christ in any act of His life failed, that He did not

entirely and blessedly accomplish the law of God, or that the result could be of small moment to God or man.

“Do I deny that the ways, the walk, the life of Jesus, the magnifying of God in all His ways, are anything to our account? God forbid! We have Jesus wholly, and not in part; we have Jesus everywhere. I am not contending now at all against the precious truth that, Christ being our acceptance, we have Christ as a whole. We have His obedience unbroken through His entire life, and its savour unto God is part of the blessing that belongs to every child of God. I believe it, rejoice in it, thank God for it, I trust, continually. But the question is wholly different. God does use for His own glory, and for our souls, all that Jesus did and suffered.

“The true enquiry is, What is the righteousness of God? It must be settled, not by notions, feelings, fancies, traditions—not by what is preached or received, but by what is written; by the Word of God. Here is God’s answer. ‘Now,’ it is said, ‘the righteousness of God without the law.’ No language can be more absolute and precise. What the Holy Ghost employs is an expression which puts the law entirely aside, as far

as divine righteousness is concerned. He has been speaking about the law, and the law condemning man. He had shewn that the law required righteousness, but could not get it. This is another order of righteousness—not man's but God's—and this, too, absolutely exclusive of law in any shape. How suitable a time to say, had it been the good news of God, that Jesus came to obey the law for us, and that God substitutes this as His righteousness for every man to stand in? Why is it not said then? Because it is not the ground, nor character, nor nature of the righteousness of God. That righteousness is wholly apart from law.

“Accordingly, this is what is here said: ‘But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.’ Observe the exceeding accuracy of the language. The law and the prophets did not manifest the righteousness of God; yet the law in various forms pointed to another kind of righteousness that was coming; the prophets brought it out, if possible, still more clearly in respect of language. The one furnished types, the other assumed that Jehovah's righteousness was near to come. But now the gospel tells us it is come—divine righteousness is a

revealed fact. . . . Redemption is the righteous groundwork. The blood of Christ deserves at God's hands that the believer should be justified, and God Himself is just in justifying him.

"It is not God's righteousness apart from Jesus; it is the righteousness of God apart from law. He has set forth Christ as a propitiatory. Christ became the true mercy-seat. God gave Him up as a sacrifice for sin, that through His body offered once for all, every soul that believes on Him might be sanctified—nay, more than that 'by one offering perfected for ever.' It is done in His death. He came to do not merely the law, but the whole *will* of God, by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

"Here then we have the righteousness of God developed in the simplest and clearest way. It means that God is just, and justifies in virtue of Christ. He is just, because sin has been met on the cross: sin has been judged of God; it has been suffered and atoned for by Christ. More than that; the Lord Jesus has so magnified God, and so glorified His character, that there is a positive debt now on the other side. Instead of the obligation being, as it were, altogether

on man's side, God has now interposed, and, having been so magnified in the Man Christ Jesus, in His death, He is now positively just when He justifies the soul that believes in Jesus. It is consequently the righteousness of God; for God is thus approving Himself righteous to the claims of Christ."

Subjection to the Word of God

The one great cause of disagreement, between the Brethren and the denominations on the leading doctrines of Christianity, arises from the difference of their standards. Both profess to be guided by Scripture, but the one submits to the naked simplicity and authority of the Word of God, the other to doctrines deduced from it, and, they believe, in accordance with it. The one may be as sincere as the other, but their standards of appeal are not the same. Hence they never can agree, or see divine things in the same light. The one must hold the other to be in error. The question is, Which has the true standard? "All human statements of truth," say Brethren, "must be inferior to Scripture, even when drawn from it, but supposing everything to be right that is in their creed, it is like a *made tree* instead of a *growing*

one. The Word gives truth in its living operations. It gives it in connection with God, in connection with man, with conscience, with divine life, and is thus a totally different thing."

There is an evident shrinking from the plain Word of God on the part of the Brethren's adversaries in this controversy. When the results of absolute subjection to the Word of God are seen, there is hesitation, an unwillingness to submit to the fair conclusions of the truth. Are there not many Christians in the denominations who believe that Brethren are right as to Scripture, but, to unite with them would be to lose a position in society, which they are not yet prepared to abandon. Still, the conscience may be troubled; but the mind, reasoning, says, Would it be right to give up such a sphere of usefulness as I now have? Could I do the same good were I to unite with Brethren who are everywhere spoken against? Such reasonings have more weight with some, through the power of Satan, than the plain Word of God. But such forget, that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." And as the prophet says, "Cease to do evil;" this is to be the first step when we find ourselves in a wrong position.

Light will be given for the second when the first is taken in faith, "Learn to do well." Then the apostle says, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Here the language is much stronger than in the prophets, because Christ is in question. We are not merely to cease from evil, but to abhor it; and not merely to hearken and learn, but to cleave to that which is good. i Samuel 15.22; Isaiah 1.16, 17; Romans 12.9.

There need be no hesitation as to our path when we have discovered that our position is wrong. The Word of God is plain, "Cease to do evil." But there are not many "overcomers"—not many who are prepared to overcome the difficulties of the family, the congregation, and the social circle. This is the true reason why many stand aloof from Brethren, and try to find some error in their doctrine, or inconsistency in their ways, that will justify their having nothing to do with them. With some the world is the difficulty, as it is a giving up of the religious as well as the social world. A moral chasm, deep and broad, separates divine ground from human. To cross it is to leave the world and the religion which it sanctions behind us. The one is on heaven's, the other on earth's side of the grave of Christ. And unless the

step be taken in the power of a faith that reckons on the living God, it should never be taken. But the Christian that is accustomed to walk in communion with God will look to His Word for guidance in everything. He has nothing else to count upon. The teaching of men may instruct him, but faith can only rest on the Word of God. Whether it be a question of doctrine or practice, of service or worship, he must go to the Word, and if he cannot find directions there for what he proposes, he must pause until he do. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (ii Tim. 3.16, 17). If the work we are engaged in, or purpose doing, be good, we shall find directions for our guidance in the Word of God.

"As to the authority of the Word, it is of the deepest interest to see that, in the consecration of the priests,* as well as in the entire range of the sacrifices, we are brought immediately under the authority of the Word of God. 'And Moses said unto the congrega-

* *Notes on Leviticus*, by C. H. M., p. 148.

tion, This is the thing which the Lord commanded to be done.' (Lev. 8.5). And again, 'Moses said, This is the thing which the Lord commanded that ye should do: and the glory of the Lord shall appear unto you.' (Lev. 9.6). Let these words sink down into our ears. Let them be carefully and prayerfully pondered. They are priceless words. 'This is the thing which the Lord commanded.' He did not say, 'This is the thing which is expedient, agreeable, or suitable.' Neither did He say, 'This is the thing which has been arranged by the voice of the fathers, the decree of the elders, or the opinion of the doctors.' Moses knew nothing of such sources of authority. To him there was one holy, elevated, paramount source of authority, and that was the Word of Jehovah, and he would bring every member of the assembly into direct contact with that blessed source. This gave assurance to the heart, and fixedness to all the thoughts. There was no room left for tradition, with its uncertain sound, or for man, with his doubtful disputations. All was clear, conclusive, and authoritative. Jehovah had spoken; and all that was needed was to hear what He had said and obey. Neither tradition nor expediency has any place in the

heart that has learnt to prize, to reverence, and to obey the Word of God.

"And what was to be the result of this strict adherence to the Word of God? A truly blessed result, indeed. 'The glory of the Lord shall appear unto you.' Had the Word been disregarded, the glory would not have appeared. The two things were intimately connected. The slightest deviation from 'Thus saith Jehovah' would have prevented the beams of the divine glory from appearing to the congregation of Israel. Had there been the introduction of a single rite or ceremony not enjoined by the Word, or had there been the omission of aught which that Word commanded, Jehovah would not have manifested His glory. He could not sanction by the glory of His presence the neglect or rejection of His Word. He can bear with ignorance and infirmity, but He cannot sanction neglect or disobedience.

"Oh! that all this were more solemnly considered in this day of tradition and expediency. I would, in earnest affection, and in the deep sense of personal responsibility to my reader, exhort him to give diligent heed to the importance of close — I had almost said, severe — adherence and reverent subjection to the Word of God. Let

him try everything by that standard, and reject all that comes not up to it; let him weigh everything in that balance, and cast aside all that is not full weight; let him measure everything by that rule, and refuse all deviation. If I could only be the means of awakening one soul to a proper sense of the place that belongs to the Word of God, I should feel I had not written my book for nought or in vain.

“Reader, pause, and in the presence of the Searcher of hearts, ask yourself this plain pointed question, ‘Am I sanctioning by my presence, or adopting in my practice any departure from, or neglect of, the Word of God?’ Make this a solemn personal matter before the Lord. Be assured of it, it is of the very deepest moment, the very last importance. If you find that you have been in any wise connected with or involved in, aught that wears not the distinct stamp of divine sanction, reject it at once and for ever. Yes, reject it, though arrayed in the imposing vestments of antiquity, accredited by the voice of tradition, and putting forward the most irresistible plea of expediency. If you cannot say, in reference to everything with which you stand connected, ‘this is the thing which the Lord hath commanded,’ then away

with it unhesitatingly, away with it for ever. Remember these words, 'As he hath done this day, so the Lord hath commanded to do.' Yes, remember the 'as' and the 'so'; see that you are connecting them in your ways and associations, and let them never be separated."

CHAPTER 8

THE CHURCH OF GOD

According to the old Catholic principle, it was the *church* that made the Christian. There was no pardon of sin, no salvation for the soul, outside of her communion. No matter how genuine a man's faith and piety might be, if he did not belong to the holy Catholic church and enjoy the benefit of her sacraments, salvation was impossible. On the Protestant principle, *Christians* make the church. One result of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and that which characterised it, was the transfer of power from the church to the individual. The idea of the church as the sole dispenser of blessing was rejected; and every man was called upon to read the Bible for himself, examine for himself, believe for himself, as he must answer for himself. This was the new-born thought of the Reformation — individual blessing first, church formation afterwards.

So far, the Reformers were right. But they forgot to look into Scripture as to how the church was formed. The true idea of

the church of God, as the body of Christ, livingly united to Him by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, was completely overlooked, though abundantly taught in the epistles. The Lord's own place and work in the assembly by the Holy Ghost being thus lost sight of, men began to unite and build churches, so called, after their own minds. A great variety of churches or religious societies speedily sprang up in many parts of Christendom; but each country carried out its own notion as to how the church should be formed and governed: some thought that church power should be vested in the hands of the civil magistrate; others thought that the church should retain that power within herself; and this difference of opinion resulted in the national and innumerable dissenting bodies which we see everywhere around us. Individual faith, as the grand saving principle for the soul, was insisted upon, thank the Lord; and men's souls were saved and God was thereby glorified; but that being secured, men might combine and make churches to suit their own mind. Great Sardis was the result; of which church the Lord says, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." This is the condition of that which is known

as *Protestantism*, after the days of the first Reformers. A great name to live — a high profession and appearance of Christianity, but no vital power.

Nothing is more manifest to the student of church history with his New Testament before him than these painful facts; and nothing seems to us more plainly or more largely taught in the epistles than the doctrine of the church. For example, we read in Ephesians 4, "There is *one body* and *one Spirit*;" but according to Protestantism we should read, "There are *many* bodies and one spirit." There can only be one, however, of divine constitution. Again, we read, "Endeavouring to *keep the unity of the Spirit*."

This plainly means the unity of the Spirit's forming—the Holy Ghost being the formative power of the church which is Christ's body. Christians are the *units* formed by the Holy Spirit into a perfect unity. This we are to endeavour to "keep," to maintain, exhibit, carry out in practice; and not to think of some new organisation, for some new company of Christians, as has been the case ever since the Reformation. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body: so also is

Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." i Corinthians 12.12, 13.

After what has been given from Mr. Darby's first pamphlet on "The Nature and Unity of the Church," it will be unnecessary to say much on the subject under this heading. Besides, this truth, with that of the Holy Spirit identifying Himself with the believer and the church since the day of Pentecost, is closely interwoven with the whole of this "brief sketch." Still, a few passages from the Word of God may be helpful to those who wish to do His will.

And first of all we would notice the one which touches the heart most deeply. "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5). This revelation of a Saviour's love ought to make us all feel the unspeakable importance of that which is called the church, and of meeting the whole mind of the blessed Lord towards it in our

practical ways. It is the special object of His affections, of His care. It is redeemed at the cost of His blood, of His life, of Himself. And He will ere long present it to Himself a glorious church without the least thing unbecoming His glory, or that might offend the eye or grieve the heart of the heavenly Bridegroom. What a privilege to be a part of that "glorious church" then, and what a blessing to act as a member of the "one body" now!

Christ Himself is the first to announce the commencement of the church. "Upon this rock I will build my church." (Matt. 16). The building was not then begun. Christ recognised as the Son of the living God, was to form the foundation of this new work, and the declaration, that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," shews plainly that it was to be built on earth, not in heaven, and amidst the storms and persecutions which would assail it through the craft and power of the enemy.

The next thought that we have of the church is its *unity*. According to the involuntary prophecy of Caiaphas, Jesus was to die for the Jewish nation; "and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in ONE, the children of God

that were scattered abroad." There were already children of God, but they were scattered—isolated; like stones prepared and ready for the building, but not joined together. By the death of Jesus the great work was accomplished, on which are based the future hopes of Israel, and the actual gathering of God's scattered children into *one*—the church which is the body of Christ. John 11.50-52. 7

This took place, through the power of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven on the day of Pentecost. The fact of its existence is declared in Acts 2. "All that believed were together, and had all things in common. . . . And the number of them was about three thousand. . . . And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." He thus added the saved remnant of Israel to the christian assembly. The union and unity of the saved ones were accomplished as a fact by the presence of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven. They formed one body upon earth, a visible body, owned of God, to which all whom He called to the knowledge of Jesus were joined by the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

We may next notice a remarkable development of this unity in connection with

the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a new instrument of the sovereign grace of God. (Acts 9). Saul never knew Christ personally after the flesh; now he sees Him for the first time in heavenly glory. This was a new revelation of the Son. Most blessed and gracious truth for the heart! Though the Lord of glory, He declares Himself to be Jesus. "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*"

Nothing could possibly be plainer than this as to the union of the Lord in glory with the members of His body upon earth. The saints are Himself—His body. But who can speak of the innumerable blessings which flow to the believer, to the church, through this union? One with Christ! Marvellous, precious truth! One with Christ as the exalted Man in the glory; one with Him in position, in privilege, in the Father's love, in endless glory. And what a great light is thrown by this truth on the details of salvation! What of pardon now? Faith answers,

I am one with Christ; my sins are as far removed from me as from Him. What of justification? I am one with Christ; righteous as He is righteous. What of acceptance? I am accepted in the Beloved. What of eternal life? I am one with Christ; there is not a different life in the head from what there is in the hand. What of glory? One with Him in the same glory for ever and for ever.

But is there no danger of falling away from such a position? some will ask. There is constant danger of losing the just appreciation of it, and the enjoyment of it, but there is no danger of losing the thing itself. This union can never be broken. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. The Holy Spirit, who unites the believer on earth with Christ in heaven, can never fail. But there is much less failure with those who live in the power of this truth, than with those who are in legal bondage, and harassed with doubts and fears. The mind being at perfect rest, it enjoys Christ more, and cares less for the world and the things of time. Grace is our only power for walk, as Paul says to Timothy: "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." 2 Tim. 2.1.

The Practical Working of the Assembly

As the teaching of the epistles on the doctrine of the church, especially in i Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, has already been noticed, we may pass on to the practical operation of the assembly. In Matthew 18, the blessed Lord gives us an insight into this, attaching to it the authority of heaven itself, though but two or three should thus form the assembly. Whether for discipline or for making requests to God, the Lord lays down this great principle, that "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Thus met, it is an assembly meeting. Nothing could be more simple, more encouraging, more blessed: Christ the centre, the Holy Spirit the gathering power to that centre, with these words of inexpressible assurance to the heart, "There am I." (The better translation is, "gathered together *unto* my name.")

To a mere onlooker, the meeting may seem a poor one. Only a few Christians met, it may be, in a very humble room, with no appearance of marked gift amongst them; but, to faith, it has not been a poor meeting, nor ever can be. The Lord was there; and could we call that a poor meeting, where

He—the blessed adorable Lord—is?

At the same time, we admit that, to those who are accustomed to all the style and grandeur of popular meetings, it must have a poor appearance. But to those who know the happy liberty, the heavenly joy, the peculiar blessedness of simply meeting in the Lord's name, the most perfect human arrangements would be utterly intolerable. The difference between the two meetings must be experienced to be known and appreciated; language cannot describe it.

But we do meet, some will say, in the name of Jesus, and we have the gospel faithfully preached, and there are many earnest godly men amongst us. So far that may be the case; but good preaching and good people do not make the meeting to be the church. No community of saints, unless assembled in obedience to the Word of God, and subject to the Lord Jesus by the energy of the Holy Spirit, is really on divine ground. This is the question; are we on the foundation of God's Word? Have we no centre, no name round which we gather, but the name of our absent Lord; no uniting ruling power but the Holy Spirit, and no standard of action but the veritable Word of God? The moment we begin to gather people—though

all may be true Christians—round a particular person, or unto some view or system, we are only forming a sect. But those who hold fast to Christ as the centre of the Spirit's unity are no sect, and never can become one, so long as they embrace in principle everyone belonging to Christ on the face of the whole earth.

The breaking of bread—observed upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)—is the highest expression of the church's unity. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." i Corinthians 10.16,17.*

Prophecy

Since the revival of prophetic truth in the early part of last century the study of Prophecy has made some progress, though

* For lengthy details on various aspects of the church, see *The Present Testimony*, vol. 1 *The Synopsis of i Corinthians and Ephesians*, J. N. Darby. *Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, by W. Kelly. *A Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, by C. H. M.

with some it has not become a subject of general interest. Large sections of the professing church still reject it as speculative and unprofitable. This is deeply to be regretted, though not surprising. Various schools of prophecy have sprung up and have sought to publish their views, but most lack the one thing needful to give them consistency, and make them interesting and profitable to a spiritual mind. Christ is not the centre of their systems as He always is of God's—the centre in which all things in heaven and earth are to be united. Not seeing the mind of God as to the judgment of the nations, the restoration of Israel, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom on the earth in power and glory, they have not known what to make of the prophetic Scriptures. Many have taken refuge in the principle of interpreting prophecy by history, alleging that it can only be understood when fulfilled. Take one example of this school as judged by the word of God.

“The ten horns. What is the providential history of these horns, taken as usually applied by commentators? Scourges, which continued some one hundred and fifty years, from first to last, working the overthrow of the Roman Empire, as previously settled, and

establishing themselves as conquerors in all its western territory. Take the prophetic account. A beast rises out of the sea with ten horns, all full-grown, after which a little horn rises up; and the beast, horns and all, are the subjects of God's judgments, not the executors of it. This is prophecy; that was providence."*

This mode of interpretation, it will be seen, leads the mind away from Christ, to search for persons and events in history that will in some way answer to the features of the prophecy. But if it is necessary for Christians to study Roman and other histories in order to understand prophecy, how few of them have the means of doing so! Surely this principle condemns itself as not of God. Many prophecies, we doubt not, have had a partial, but not a complete, fulfilment in the providence of God. "For," as the apostle says, "no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation . . . but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." "The meaning is, that no prophecy of scripture is of its own insulated interpretation. Limit a prophecy to the particular event that is supposed to

* *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Prophetic*, vol. 9, p. 67.

be intended by that scripture, and you make it of private interpretation. For instance, if you regarded the prophecy of Babylon's fall in Isaiah 13, 14, as the sole meaning of this scripture, you make this prophecy of private interpretation. How? Because you make the event to cover the prophecy—you interpret the prophecy by the event. But this is precisely what scripture prophecy is made not to be; and it is to hinder the reader from this error that the apostle writes as he does here. The truth, on the contrary, is that all prophecy has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of Christ; and if you sever the lines of prophecy from the grand central point on which they all converge, you destroy the ultimate connection of these prophetic lines with the centre. All prophecy runs on to the kingdom of Christ, because it comes from the Holy Ghost."*

In the same connection the apostle speaks of the bright scene on "the holy mount," in a remarkable way as to prophecy. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise

* *Lectures Introductory to the Catholic Epistles*, p. 281, by W. K.

in your hearts," (ii Peter 1.19). It is a most blessed foreshadowing of the coming, and kingdom of the Lord Jesus, according to that which the prophets had given the people of God to expect—a beautiful picture of millennial glory and blessedness, confirming as with the divine seal its certainty, though the time had not yet come for its manifestation. The dead saints were represented as risen in Moses; the changed living—who had not passed through death—were seen in the person of Elias; besides, there were saints in their natural bodies represented by Peter, James and John; and there was the blessed Lord, the Head and Centre of all glory, familiarly conversing about the decease which was to be accomplished at Jerusalem.

Good heed is to be given to the prophetic word, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn; but the Christian has something better than the lamp of prophecy. He belongs to Christ, who is to dwell in his heart by faith, as the bright and morning star—the proper object of all his hopes until He come.

The Three Spheres of Christ's Glory

In i Corinthians 10.32 the apostle furnishes us with a classification of mankind

which greatly helps not only to the understanding of prophecy but of the whole Word of God. "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God." Here we have the three great spheres in which the glory of Christ is displayed. As it respects man's condition before God in reference to eternity, there are but two classes, the saved and unsaved—those who have been really born again, and those who are still in nature's darkness and unbelief. But with regard to God's government of the world there are three classes—Jews, Gentiles and the church; and no one can rightly divide the Word of God who overlooks this division. To trace through Scripture God's purpose concerning these three classes is the surest way to ascertain the order of God's dispensations, and the harmony of all portions of the holy Scriptures with each other. At present we can only refer to a few passages of Scripture by way of introducing the reader to this three-fold purpose of God.

1. "The Jews." In Gen. 12.2,3, "The Lord said unto Abram. . . . I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless

thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." We have a further development of this purpose, in chapter 13. "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." In chapter 15, the boundaries of the land are defined. In Deut. 28, we have the blessings promised them in case of obedience, and the curses denounced against them in case of disobedience. But, alas! the highly favoured people proved themselves a disobedient and stiffnecked race. "God exercised great forbearance towards them; but after they had rejected and stoned the prophets, His servants, whom He sent unto them, He sent His Son, the heir of all things. Him they crucified and slew, and thus filled up the measure of their iniquities, and sealed their doom. On this account wrath came upon them to the uttermost; their city and temple were destroyed: their country pillaged, its population put to the sword, or else carried away captive; for nearly two thousand years they have been monuments

of God's displeasure against sin, suffering the aggravated and complicated woes denounced against sin."*

2. "The Gentiles." From the time that Abraham was called to be the father of God's peculiar people, God did not deal directly with any nation upon the earth, save the Jews. Until Nebuchadnezzar's time God's throne and presence were in the midst of Israel. From the time that the Jews were carried away captive into Babylon, "the sovereign power in the earth ceased to be immediately exercised by God, and was confided to man, among those who were not His people, in the person of Nebuchadnezzar. This was a change of immense importance, in respect of both the government of the world, and God's judgment of His people. Both led the way to the great objects of prophecy developed at the close—the restoration, through tribulation, of a rebellious people, and the judgment of an unfaithful and apostate Gentile head of power."

We have an account of this great change,

* See a valuable tract, *God's Threefold Purpose*; also, *Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects*, by William Trotter, an exhaustive book, we may say, on the subject of prophecy—invaluable to the student.

in the prophet Daniel (chapter 2), "Thou, O King, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the heaven, hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold." The times of the Gentiles begin here. The power which was thus bestowed on the Babylonish king, descended to the Medes and Persians; from thence it passed into the hands of the Greeks, and then to the Romans, the last kingdom represented by the image. The Roman empire, though after a while it was broken up into a number of separate kingdoms, continued its name in these kingdoms, and will continue it till the coming of the Lord. It is by this power that the Jews have been so fearfully wasted and oppressed. At the end of their seventy years' captivity a portion of the Jews returned to Jerusalem, but they were mere tributaries to the Persian king, they never afterwards had any independent government of their own. They were under the Roman yoke when Christ appeared amongst them, and they could not put their Messiah to death without the consent of the Roman governor, and the assistance of Roman

soldiers. A second time their city and temple were destroyed by the Gentiles, and the Saviour Himself declared that Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Luke 21.24.

But these times will not last for ever. God hath not cast off His people whom He foreknew. He will fulfil in due time the covenant of grace that He made with Abraham their father. They will yet be a great nation, and the head of all other nations—the centre from which blessing shall flow out to all the nations of the earth.*

Even in our day we may see the beginning of God's restoring grace to His people, in giving them back much of their land, and part of their ancient city: and this makes us look forward the more eagerly to a complete fulfilment of all the promises made to the fathers.

3. "The church of God." The church, it will be seen, is something altogether distinct from both Jews and Gentiles. Christ came to the Jews—His own people, but they received Him not. He was despised and rejected of men. Jews and Gentiles united in accomplishing His death. By this act of crowning wickedness the condemnation of

* For details as to the order of events by which this great change in their position is to be brought about, see Mr. Trotter's book as noted above.

both was sealed. But God overruled all in richest sovereign grace. The blessed Jesus, rejected by men, having accomplished the great work of redemption, was raised from the dead, and placed at the right hand of power where He now waits till His enemies be made His footstool. So long as He is seated at God's right hand, repentance and remission of sins are to be preached through His name in all nations. Whosoever of all these nations receives this message—believes the gospel—is pardoned, saved, and becomes associated with the rejected One of earth and the glorified One in heaven. In God's sight, the moment the Jew receives this message of mercy, he ceases to be reckoned a Jew; and the moment the Gentile receives it, he ceases to be reckoned a Gentile. This is a point of immense importance in the dispensational ways and dealings of God. The Jew, when he believes in Christ, dies to all his liabilities or privileges as a Jew, and to all his fondly cherished hopes of an inheritance in the land. The Gentile dies to all share in the earthly power which, for a while, is lodged in Gentile hands.

What then, it may be asked, are they? They form a part of the true church, and the world has no place for it. They are but strangers and pilgrims now in this world. Their home is on high. They are called to share their Lord's humiliation on earth

during His absence; they will share His glory when He returns.

Another truth of great practical importance now appears very plain; namely, that the church of God, the body of Christ, had no existence in fact till after the death, resurrection, and glory of Christ in heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It is not true, as many suppose, that "the church of God consists of all saved persons from the beginning to the end of time."*

* In a very refreshing book which we have just been reading—*Records and recollections of Brownlow North*, the Evangelist, by Kenneth Moody-Stuart, we find such expressions as "the Jewish synagogue, on the model of which our Presbyterian church is founded. . . . The constitution of the Jewish synagogue, in rule and worship, was the model of the early christian church. We find there ordination, call, commission from the church throughout the Acts of the Apostles granted to ministers as at the present." (P. 135-136). The writer speaks of the Old Testament church and the New, as if the one were a continuation of the other. But scripture speaks of Jewish and Christian blessings as contrasts, the one earthly, the other heavenly. Jewish blessing is spoken of as 'all temporal blessings in a pleasant land.' The church is *now* 'blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' We notice this as it has accidentally come before us, and supposing it to be a fair expression of the ecclesiastical views of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland at the present moment. (It must be remembered this was written, about the year 1890, or earlier Ed.)

The saints who compose the church, we readily admit, have many things in common with the Old Testament saints; such as, being quickened by the same Holy Spirit, justified through the same precious blood, preserved by the same almighty grace, and destined in resurrection to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son. But the wondrous distinction of being Christ's body, His bride, baptized by the Holy Ghost, and thus one with Him as the exalted Man in the glory, are blessings peculiar to the church. In place of the church consisting of all believers from the beginning to the end of time, it is limited in scripture to the assembly of true believers from the day of Pentecost—when it was formed by the Holy Ghost come down from heaven—to the descent of the Lord Jesus into the air, to receive it to Himself in the Father's house of many mansions.

It was by the cross that the middle wall of partition was broken down, that Jews and Gentiles might be formed into one body. "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain (Jews and Gentiles) one new man (not a continuation of the old, nor an improvement

of the old, but **ONE NEW MAN**), so making peace." **Ephesians 2.14,15.**

The Coming of the Lord and the Rapture of the Saints

It is a matter of unfeigned thankfulness that the truth of God respecting the coming of the Lord and the rapture of the saints has been very generally received of late years. The many pamphlets issued on this subject, and the overwhelming amount of Scripture produced, has wrought, with God's blessing, a considerable change in the minds of many Christians. The old and common objection to this truth, that, "the death of each individual is virtually the Lord's coming to him," has been relinquished by many students of Scripture. But as there are numbers by whom it is still urged we will notice a few plain Scriptures on the point. Selection, with limited space, is the difficulty. Every book in the New Testament but two—Galatians and Ephesians—specifically and distinctly present the coming of the Lord as the known and constant hope of the Christian. The Galatians had fallen from grace, and the apostle had to travail again with them in birth as to justification by faith. In

Ephesians the church is seen already seated together in heavenly places in Christ. All the other books either teach the coming of Christ *for* His saints, or His appearing in glory *with* them to judge the world. What characterises the Christian is the hope of Christ's coming, the waiting for God's Son from heaven. It enters into every state, thought, feeling, and motive of christian life, and is also the great moving power in evangelisation.

But to return to our argument.

There is no instance in the New Testament in which death is spoken of as the coming of the Lord. The two events are spoken of rather as contrasts than as identical. When we die, our spirits, separated from the body, go to Jesus—absent from the body, present with the Lord. By death, the believer is separated from his fellow-Christians on earth: when the Lord comes all believers will be gathered together to Him in heaven. The dead will be raised in glory and the living changed into His likeness, and all caught up to meet the Lord in the air. i Thess. 4.13-18.

We will now turn to Paul's first Epistle to the Thessalonians as most convenient for our present purpose. In chapter 4 we have

a special revelation, not only as to the Lord's coming and the rapture of the saints, but also as to the order in which these events will take place. Nothing can be more manifest than the fact that the coming of Christ is the central doctrine in both epistles. It was an important part of the truth to which they had been converted. The Person of Christ as the proper object of their hope was constantly before their minds, and waiting for His return the effect of their conversion. "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven." (Chap. 1.9, 10). Their one hope was Christ's coming; they had not been told of some event that must take place before His return, and so they were waiting for it as though it might be at any moment. Indeed, so full were they of the Saviour's coming that they had never thought of any of them dying before He came, so that they were in great trouble when some of their brethren had been removed from their midst by death. They had not been instructed as to how the dead saints could be with the Lord when He comes and share His glory. This was their great

trouble. They were very young in the faith, we must remember, had only been converted a few months, the New Testament was not then written, and the apostle was not allowed to remain with them because of persecution. But their testimony was remarkable. The very world talked of the great change which had taken place in these Gentiles, and gave its unconscious testimony to the power of grace in their conversion to God. (Chap. 1.8-10). Still, they needed further instruction as to those who had fallen asleep in Jesus, and it is on this point that the apostle now gives them the mind of the Lord.

It is a revelation of great importance. Modern theologians say of those who have this hope today, that they are too much occupied with this peculiar view; that a number of events must necessarily occur before the Lord comes. But we find not a single word from the apostle's pen to moderate or cool down the too-ardent expectations of these warm-hearted young believers; or that they were to look for a train of intervening events. He rejoices over his beloved Thessalonians, and nourishes their zeal by a remarkable glimpse of the consummation of all their hopes and his own. "For what is

our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." They were still to look for the Lord in their lifetime. He places no circumstance, no event, between their hearts and the object of their hope. And he assures them that all who had fallen asleep in Jesus will equally have their part in the glory with those who are alive at His coming.

The first thing that the apostle does is to fix the eye of the sorrowing Thessalonians on Jesus — on Him who died and rose again. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, *even so* them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." In Jesus we see victory over death and the grave — we see the One who died, was buried, rose again, and is now in glory. Mark the words "*even so*." He is the believer's life. We triumph in like manner — "*Even so*." What heavenly comfort for a bereaved and sorrowing heart! All who have fallen asleep in Jesus will be raised and leave the earth precisely as He did. "There is this difference," says one, "He went up in His own full right; He ascended. As to us, His voice calls the dead, and they come forth from the grave, and, the living being changed, all are

caught up together. It is a solemn act of God's power, which seals the Christian's life and the work of God, and brings the former into the glory of Christ as His heavenly companion. Glorious privilege! Precious grace! To lose sight of it destroys the proper character of our joy and of our hope."*

From verse 15 to 18 is a parenthesis, which accounts for what is said in verse 14. "even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." When the Lord returns in glory, all the saints will be with Him: but previously He has awakened the sleepers, changed the living, and translated both to heaven. Verses 15-17 explain to us how this is done. The Lord Jesus rises from His throne, He descends from heaven, He gives the word Himself, the voice of the archangel passes it on, and the trumpet gives a well-known sound. The imagery is military. As well-trained troops know the orders of their commander by the sound of the trumpet, so will the army of the Lord answer instantly to His call. All the dead in Christ shall rise, and all the living shall be changed; and they shall all enter into the

* *Synopsis*, J.N.D., vol. 5, p.90.

cloud, and be caught up together, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall they ever be with the Lord. This is the first resurrection, the rapture* of the saints. Before a seal of judgment is broken, a trumpet blown, or a vial poured out, the saints are gone, all gone, gone to glory, gone to be with the Lord for ever! What a thought! What an event! Not a particle of the redeemed dust of God's children left in the grave; and not a believer left on the face of the whole earth. All caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and be conducted by Him to the Father's house of many mansions. But who can think, who can speak, of the happy reunions on that morning of cloudless joy? Doubtless the Person of the Lord will fix every eye, and ravish every heart; still there will be the distinct recognition of those who, though long parted from us here, have never lost their place in our hearts. And as all will perfectly bear the image of the Lord, we can never lose sight of Him. Though everyone will have his own identity, and his own

* The word 'rapture' is not found in the English Bible. The Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning: "Act of transporting a person from one place to another (especially, heaven)."

special joy, yet all will be like the Lord, and the joy of each will be the common joy of all. But chiefest of all our joys that morning, and from which all our other joys shall flow, will be to see His face, hear His voice, and behold His glory; or, as St. John says, and sums up all blessedness in two expressions: "*We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*"* i John 3.2.

"Hark to the trump! behold it breaks
The sleep of ages now;
And lo! the light of glory shines
On many an aching brow.

Changed in a moment — raised to life,
The quick, the dead arise,
Responsive to th'archangel's voice,
That calls us to the skies.

Undazzled by the glorious light
Of that beloved brow,
We see, without a single cloud,
We see the Saviour now!

O Lord, the bright and blessed hope,
That cheered us through the past,
Of full eternal rest in Thee
Is all fulfilled at last."

(Sir Edward Denny)

* See a tract, "The Coming of the Lord, with Illustrative Diagram" by Charles Stanley.

CHAPTER 9

THE MILLENIUM

Here it may be well to pause for a moment, and notice the order in which the important events of this period occur. We have seen the saints caught up to meet the Lord according to His own promise in John 14. They pass into heaven, and, all things being ready, the marriage of the Lamb takes place according to the vision of St. John. (Rev. 19). "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." He presents her to Himself a glorious church, holy and without blemish. What a day that will be! What a day even for heaven, so long accustomed to glory. But this will be a new glory, the bridal glory of the Lamb! As the bride ranks with her Bridegroom, and the wife with her husband, so will the church rank with Christ on that day of wondrous, transcendent glory!

The marriage scene and the marriage supper being over, the blessed Lord, or the last Adam, with His beloved Eve, the glorified saints, and the angelic hosts prepare,

for His appearing in glory, and to take possession of the earth. ~ But during the interval between the "coming" and the "appearing," God's love has been active in gathering out His own, and the earth has been ripening for judgment. When the true church has left the scene of testimony, and the merely nominal part has been rejected for ever, the Spirit of God begins to work in the Jewish remnant; and they, as the missionaries of the new testimony, preach "the everlasting gospel to them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." The judgment of the living nations in Matthew 25, discriminates as to the results of this mission. And Revelation 7 shews us the saved multitudes of both Jews and Gentiles by means of "the everlasting gospel," as preached by the Jewish "brethren" of the blessed Lord. But while the love of God is thus active, and the power of the Spirit thus manifested, Satan is exerting all his power, and bringing up all his forces, to corrupt the whole earth, and dispute its possession with the Lord's Anointed. But the hour of their judgment is come.

"And I saw heaven opened," says the apostle, "and behold a white horse, and he

that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." (Rev. 19). The Lord is coming; He is on His way. Heaven is open; but He comes not alone; the armies of heaven follow Him. He comes to take vengeance on them that know not God, and them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." Apostate Christendom, and the Jews who have returned to their own land in unbelief, and formed an alliance with Antichrist, will be the special objects of judgment, but a remnant of Israel shall be saved. The heavenlies cleared of Satan and his angels; the earth cleared of its wicked kings; the beast and the false prophet cast into the lake of fire, and Satan bound in the bottomless pit; the whole scene being thus cleared by judgment, and victory complete, the blessed Lord takes the kingdom. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." (Rev. 11.15). The spared remnant of Israel and their offspring, and the remnant of Gentiles which survive the awful judgments, with

their posterity, will form the population of the earth during the millenium, while the church reigns with Christ her Head and Bridegroom in heavenly glory. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Revelation 20.4-6.

The Past and Present State of the Professing Church

We can never be sufficiently thankful to the Lord for reviving by His Spirit the blessed truth of the coming of the Lord, and for giving it, in these last days, such prominence in the teaching of so many of His people. If this truth be overlooked, only a very small portion of the Word of God can properly be understood. The first resurrection, for example, and the millennial reign of Christ with His glorified saints, with other collateral truths, must be entirely lost sight of. Formerly the thought that the coming of Christ was at the close, not at the commencement, of the millenium was almost universal. The idea was, and in many parts perhaps still is, that the world, or Gentiles,

will be converted by means of the Gospel; after that, "all Israel shall be saved." Then intervenes a spiritual millenium before the Lord comes. But in all this the purpose of God concerning the church is overlooked, which is an *outcalling* from Jews and Gentiles. We cannot be too zealous as to the spread of the gospel, the commission being, "Preach the gospel to every creature." But each conversion is an addition to the church, which will be translated to heaven before the millenium.

If, as is often said, "Christ will not come till after a thousand years of blessedness on the earth," what has the believer to look for now? Necessarily for death as the end of his course, and for the fulfilment of the predicted events, while his body lies slumbering in the grave during the earth's great jubilee. What a prospect for the true spouse, the beloved bride of the heavenly Bridegroom! True, the souls of believers would be with Christ, but their bodies would be in the silent grave, while all earth was rejoicing under His so-called spiritual sceptre. Every true believer should reject this theory as utterly opposed to all Scripture. In place of looking for death and a thousand intervening years before his Lord.

comes, he is looking for Him as the sustaining, consoling, comforting hope of his daily life. The true effect of conversion — unless the convert is blinded by false teaching, — is to wait for his Saviour from heaven.

When the Lord comes, as we have seen, the church meets Him in the air. She is ushered into heavenly bridal joys, and into the endless blessedness of the Father's house. Then will follow — when judgment shall have cleared the scene — the peaceful glories of the kingdom. All that psalmists have sung, and prophets predicted of the blessedness of the earth during that joyous period shall be fully accomplished. Satan and his hosts, the evil angels banished from the heavens and the abodes of men, Christ reigning, and His risen saints associated with Him on the throne of His heavenly and earthly glory, must essentially distinguish the millennial period from all preceding dispensations. Then shall come creation's day of boundless exultation and universal gladness in the Lord's presence, so constantly spoken of in the Old Testament. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the

presence of the Lord of the whole earth. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity." Psalms 97 & 98.

Beautiful beyond all description are the holy strains of triumphant joy which flow from the lips of Old Testament seers in anticipation of this day of gladness. All nature is called upon to swell the chorus of universal joy. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water. The mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk and honey. The wild beasts of the field — shorn of their ferocity — shall become gentle and harmless as the lamb, and warfare and strife shall cease from amongst the children of men. Thus will God reverse the history of man; He will heal his sorrow, relieve his misery; crown him with health, peace, and plenty, and spread joy throughout the restored creation, according to His estimate of His beloved Son. In that day it will be seen and acknowledged that the cross of the Lord Jesus is the

foundation of the widespread scene of millennial glory and blessing.* Col. 1.20; Isaiah 11; Psalm 72.

“Kings shall fall down before Him,
And gold and incense bring;
All nations shall adore Him,
His praise all people sing.

Outstretched His wide dominion,
O'er river, sea, and shore;
Far as the eagle's pinion,
Or dove's light wing can soar.”

The Great White Throne

Nothing can be more humiliating to man than what we find at the end of the millenium. God will then shew that a thousand years of manifested glory will not convert the human heart without His saving grace. The moment Satan is again free, and exercises his power, the unconverted portion of the Gentile nations is deceived by him. He gathers them together in rebellion; but fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them utterly. And this brings us to the last and closing scene in the history of

* *Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects*, by W. Trotter, p.481 (Old Edition). See also, *Eight Lectures on Prophecy*, by Trotter and Smith.

man — the eternal judgment. "And I saw," says John, "a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the heavens and the earth fled away; and there was found no place for them." There need be no difficulty on the reader's part in distinguishing between this last sessional judgment, and the judgment of the living nations. (Matt. 25). When the Lord comes at the beginning of the millenium, the earth, as we have seen, is universally blessed under His reign for a thousand years. But such is not the case here. It is the resurrection and judgment of the wicked dead at the close of the millenium. The general idea that Christ will not leave the heavens till the end of the millenium, when there will be one general resurrection and one general judgment of the righteous and the wicked, is utterly without the least foundation in Scripture; and not only so, but is directly opposed to the very nature of Christianity and the purposes of God in Christ Jesus.

At the commencement of the millenium, the risen saints are seen sitting upon thrones in association with Christ. "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (Rev. 20.4). This was their time of public reward for service or for suffering with

Christ during His absence. "The time is come," says the seer, "that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, small and great." (Rev. 11.18). But on the great white throne Christ is seen alone. While it was a question of governing the millennial earth, the saints governed with Him. Now it is a question of eternal judgment, and He acts alone. Stripped of every false covering — no purple, no mitre, no crosier, no mantle of mere profession to screen their guilt now — each one is seen in his real character, and with all his sins; not one has been blotted out — all must be there. "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it: and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to his works." The depths, the unseen world, are forced to deliver up their miserable prisoners, that they may hear from the lips of the once-rejected Jesus their final sentence.

All are now gathered, and time is no longer. The created heavens and earth are fled away; nothing is now to be seen but the great white throne of dazzling brightness, and the glorious majesty of the Son of man.

The awful sentence, uttered amidst the

dreadful silence of that solemn scene sends back the wicked into the depths of hopeless woe. But the glory and beauty of the Saviour Jesus, whom they despised in time, and the myriads of happy saints who surround Him, can never, no, never be forgotten. Thus closes the history of man and the events of time. Eternity begins — the wicked judged, the righteous blessed, and all the ways of God for ever vindicated. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him (the once lowly Jesus), and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2.9-11). This done, love creates new heavens and a new earth, as the future dwelling place of the redeemed; and God comes down to dwell among them. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell among them; and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." Revelation 21.1-7

Conclusion

The foregoing pages were written, we believe, more than eighty years ago: and it

is with shame and sorrow we look back over these years: worldliness, strife and divisions have come in, amongst those so-called "Brethren" during this time, so we can only take our place alongside of Daniel, and with him pray and make our confession. We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly; neither have we hearkened unto Thy servants. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Thy servant, and his supplications, and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy people, for the Lord's sake: for we do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousnesses, but for Thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God; for Thy people are called by Thy name.

The Author of this book gives a closing word of warning: What the people of God have chiefly to watch and pray against is the world. It is difficult, we know, to maintain

a steady walk in the path of rejection outside the world, but this is the only consistent path for the saints of God. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17). Death, resurrection, and ascension, separate Christ from the world; this is the believer's measure, and the believer's responsibility. And it is this we are apt to forget, and to lose sight of in the innumerable details of daily life. But the believer is one with Christ, united to Him in heavenly glory, though still here, and ought to be diligent and attentive to all his duties, for the Lord's sake. But thus to live here while we cherish the spirit of our heavenly citizenship, requires watching and prayer in communion with the Lord. The trial and difficulty will be, in maintaining that place of separation and rejection which the blessed Lord so plainly marks out for them in His prayer to His Father. But if He gives them His place of rejection on earth, He at the same time gives them His own place of acceptance in heaven. When we enjoy the latter, it is not difficult to accept the former.

Having thus spoken plainly, we can retire into the sanctuary, and pray for all who love the Lord, by whatever name they are called. We feel as if we must say, *Be united; abound*

in prayer, in united prayer, and in the full confidence of brotherly love. We would only further add — and that from the depths of our hearts — in the earnest entreating language of the apostle, **"I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, THAT YE PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY, ACCEPTABLE UNTO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR REASONABLE SERVICE; AND BE NOT CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD: BUT BE YE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, THAT YE MAY PROVE WHAT IS THAT GOOD, AND ACCEPTABLE, AND PERFECT WILL OF GOD."** Romans 12.1,2.