

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE “BRETHREN”

By Ian McDowell

This is a full outline of the history of a spiritual awakening and its aftermath from its beginning in 1826 to the present day. It is mostly a collation of relevant quotations from difficult-to-obtain sources. Local church leaders will find many encouragements, warnings and positive lessons in it: "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15).

VICTORY BOOKS

[Title page]

# **A BRIEF HISTORY**

**of the**

# **“BRETHREN”**

Lessons from History for Christian

Brethren Assembly Leaders and Others by Ian McDowell,

Principal, Emmaus Bible School, Australia.

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE “BRETHREN”

### Foreword

Perhaps some will wonder whether it is worth while to spend time on what is, in part at least, “a rather depressing by-way of nineteenth-century church history in England”, to use words of Professor F. F. Bruce.

One justification would be that it makes clear to the uninitiated that those “Brethren” whose vagaries have received such sad publicity in recent years are the successors of but one section of a great movement, and it is very wrong to identify all “Brethren” with them.

Then for the “Brethren” themselves there are important lessons to learn, and the chief, as it seems to the writer, is the folly of putting too much emphasis on minor matters. If only the teaching of Romans 14 had been heeded, the history of assemblies might have been different.

But it was not all dark. We believe that the “Brethren Movement” was a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. There was a great recovery of Biblical teaching concerning the unity of the Church, the coming of the Lord, the priesthood of all believers and the simplicity of local church gatherings. In addition there was enthusiasm for the preaching of the doctrines of grace and for missionary enterprise.

I need hardly say that the term “Brethren” is one that has always been refused as an official designation by those of whom Mr. McDowell writes. They have never claimed to be more than brethren “with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (I Corinthians 1:2).

A great Bible teacher among “Brethren” this century was C. F. Hogg, and one of his favorite verses was I Thessalonians 5:21, which he rendered: “Test all teachings; hold fast that which is good”. Those are wholesome words, for even among “Brethren” in these last days there is a tendency to follow the traditions of men rather than the Word of God. I trust that these notes will help the reader to see some of these traditions in their true light.

I gladly commend this “Brief History”. It is an accurate study, the fruit of wide reading, careful thinking and much experience in assembly life. If the purpose of history is to shed light on present duty, it may help guide us to a true understanding of the Church and the Churches.

T. CARSON,  
Sydney, Australia,  
26<sup>th</sup> March, 1968.

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## INTRODUCTION

The writer collated this brief history from sources in his possession. Most are difficult to obtain and scarcely less difficult to read; hence the value to readers of brief extracts which cover most if not all the essentials. He is ready at all times to receive additional books and pamphlets from interested friends.

Notes of lectures given annually to second year students of the Emmaus Bible School in Sydney, Australia, form the history. The information in the notes helps the students to reconcile in their minds the apparent gap which they observe between the Bible basis and actual practice of local church order. Their emotional stability increases and a positive approach to problems results.

Members of Christian Brethren Assemblies in Sydney have attended the lectures with interest whenever opportunity has offered. Members of Assemblies generally have sustained a demand for copies of the lecture notes from year to year, and the present printing is in response to recommendations from them.

May the events and lessons of this brief history divert our minds from less important issues to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ and to His Church in both universal and local forms as the hour of His return draws near. He is the Head, and all members are Christians. We Christians are members one of another. Let these truths control our corporate behaviour.

## REFERENCES.

These references are referred to in the book by the letters A, B, C etc. This gives authority to statements made. Some indication of contents is given on this page as a guide to further reading.

### 1. The “Brethren Movement” in Relation to Church History.

- A. “The Pilgrim Church,” B. H. Broadhenth (1945).
- B. “The Christian Testimony Through the Ages,” T. W. Carron (1955).
- C. “The Light of the Nations,” J. Edwin Orr (1965).

### 2. Histories of the “Brethren Movement.”

- D. “A History of the Plymouth Brethren,” W. Blair Neatby (1902) (a critical history by a Christian scholar not in assemblies).
- E. “The History of the Brethren,” N. Noel in two volumes (1936) (by far the most comprehensive of the histories – from Kelly-Lowe viewpoint).
- F. “The Story of the Brethren Movement,” T. S. Veitch (about 1930) (a short “Open” history based on earlier books).
- G. “The Brethren, their Origin, Progress and Testimony,” Andrew Miller (about 1871) (an early complete history. Miller went with Kelly in 1881).
- H. “A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement,” H. A. Ironside (1942) (by an ex-Grant-exclusive writer, giving more data on the American scene).
- I. “The Search for the Truth of God,” A. T. Doodson (1959) (a short history from the “Needed Truth” viewpoint).
- J. “All Ye Are Brethren,” W. M. Rule (an unpublished short history from the Glanton viewpoint giving data on the effect of divisions on the Australian and New Zealand scenes).
- K. “Darbyism,” Henry Groves (1876) (from the “Open” side).

### 3. Books Making Substantial Reference to the History.

- L. “The Local Assembly,” G. H. Lang (1955) (a historical investigation of the differences between “Open” and “Exclusive” assemblies).
- M. “Early Days” (a collection of letters of historical interest).
- N. “The Letters of J. N. Darby (three volumes).
- O. “The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda,” W. Trotter (1849) (from the “Exclusive” viewpoint).
- P. “The Recovery and Maintenance of the Truth,” A. J. Gardiner (1951) (a collection of letters with comments by a Taylor party writer saying that the major historical divisions were in the purposes of God for the recovery of truth!)
- Q. “Hear the Right,” W. T. P. Wolston (narrative of facts written at the time of the Glanton Division).
- R. “The Origins of the Brethren,” H. H. Rowdon (1967) (a detailed and very well documented account of the period 1826-49).
- S. “Bethesda Family Matters,” B. K. Groves (1836) (early days).
- T. “Truth for the Times No. 3,” E. J. Thomas (1900) (against Ravenism).
- U. “The Confrontation of James Taylor Junior and His Supporters,” H. Calvey (two volumes, 1966-67).
- V. “The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Ecclesiastical” (four volumes).

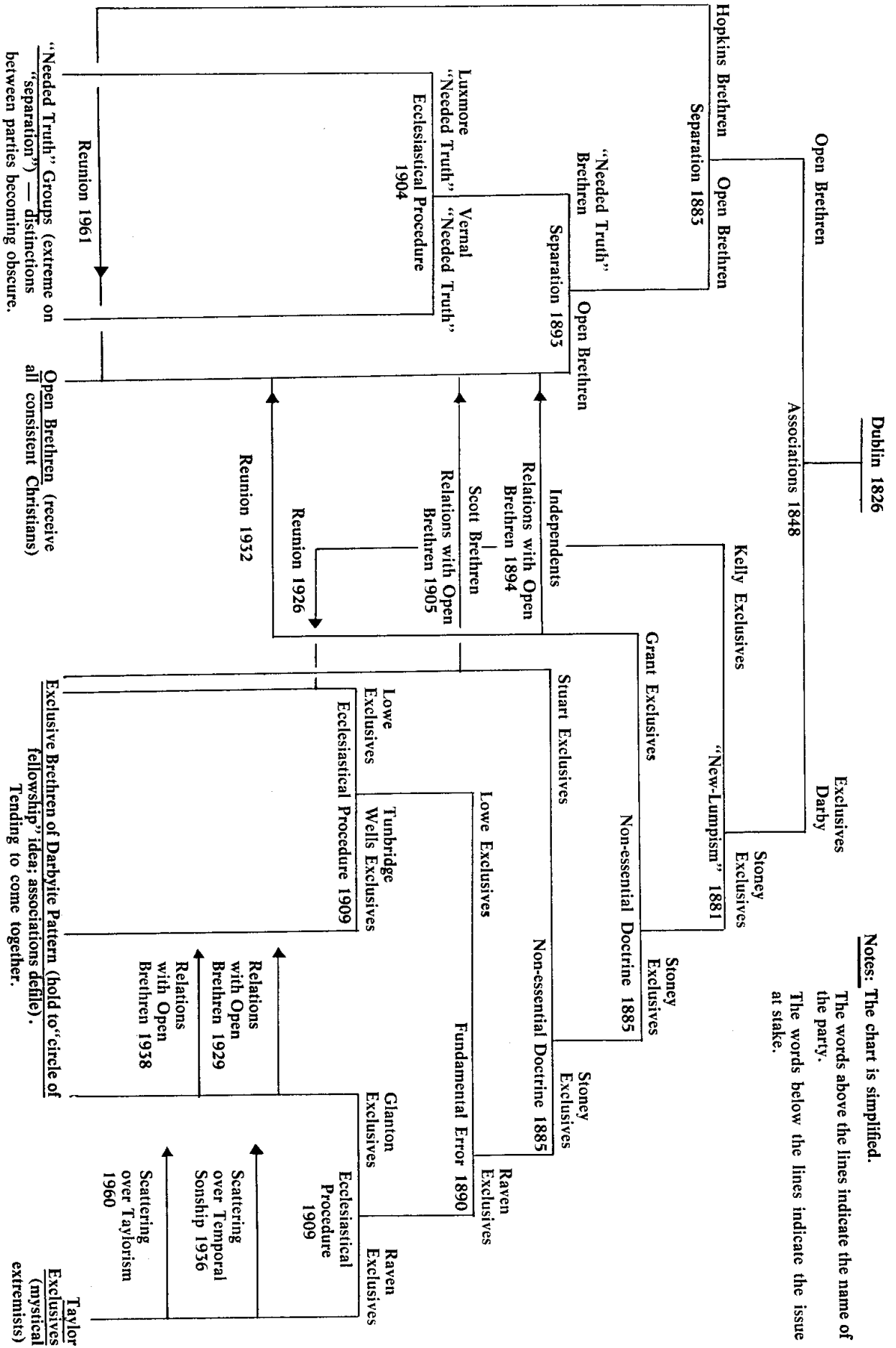
#### **4. Biographies Relevant to the History.**

- W. "Anthony Norris Groves," G. H. Lang (1949) (containing much relevant material including a reconstruction of the Darby-Muller meeting of 1849).
- X. "Brother Indeed," Frank Holmes (1956) (Life of Robert Chapman).
- Y. "Chief Men Among the Brethren," Henry Pickering (1961).
- Z. "brethren," David Beatty (1944) (biographies of leading brethren and histories of individual meetings in the United Kingdom).
- AA. "John Nelson Darby," W. G. Turner (1951).
- BB. "Back to the Beginning," T. Baird (1919) (early missionary history).
- CC. "Go Ye Therefore," A. Pulleng (1958) ("Open Brethren" missions and missionary biographies).

Other tracts and pamphlets from which quotations have been taken are referred to by name.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE "BRETHREN" — CHART OF DIVISIONS



## Chapter 1.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

God sent the Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century to Britain through the Wesleys and others such that:

“This revival of religion has spread to such a degree as neither we nor our fathers had known . . . There is scarce a considerable town in the kingdom where some have not been made witnesses of it . . . In what age has such a number of sinners been recovered from the error of their ways?”<sup>1</sup>.

But Christian leaders had not yet organized their activities in modern-day forms:

“Throughout the major part of the eighteenth century, Evangelical Christianity operated without Bible Societies; its denominations . . . operated without missionary societies; its youth enjoyed no Sunday Schools . . .

“Evangelical Christianity during the eighteenth century lacked the multiple agencies of inter-denominational co-operation which flourished in the latter half of the nineteenth century – such missionary organizations as the China Inland Mission and all the ‘faith’ missionary societies; Home Missions of various denominations; City Missions; the Salvation Army; agencies for the conversion of children and organizations for the rehabilitation of the lost and straying”<sup>2</sup>

Reaction followed revival:

“Trevalyan, in his English Social History, specified the year 1776 in retrospect as the low-water mark in the ebb-tide of infidelity and of laxity of doctrine in England”<sup>3</sup>.

“Tom Paine, a champion of American independence and advocate of French revolution, popularized rationalistic deism as the proper doctrine for emerging democracies.”<sup>3</sup>

“The Brethren movement began at a time of widespread criticism of the established church”<sup>4</sup>.

“The shadow of the French Revolution lay darkly across Europe. Though Napoleon had been defeated at Waterloo in 1815 and an attempt had been made to set the clock back to pre-revolutionary times, the forces of nationalism, democracy and anti-clericalism,

<sup>1</sup> Wesley, quoted Ref. C Page 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. C Page 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. C Page 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ref. R Page 5.

which had been given their head since 1789, could not be held back”<sup>5</sup>.

Times were changing rapidly:

“It was a time of unparalleled world development, during which the population of the earth increased beyond all precedents. That of the British Isles rose from 10,000,000 to 32,500,000 . . . Not only did the whole of North and South America become the home of millions of immigrants, but a new continent opened up in the Antipodes”<sup>6</sup>.

“As a result of the so-called ‘Industrial Revolution,’ England was ceasing to possess a predominantly rural economy, and was being transformed into the ‘workshop of the world””<sup>7</sup>.

Individual preachers led local revivals at many places in the early years of the nineteenth century:

“In 1815 William O’Bryan, a Cornwall Methodist preacher, felt called to go and preach in Devonshire, a country which the Evangelical Revival had not so far reached . . . The outcome of this attempt was the rise of the so-called Bible Christians, who multiplied rapidly in that part of the country . . . They had at first no chapels or meeting rooms . . . But by 1865 they had 750 chapels, 2,000 itinerant preachers and 26,000 members, besides 50,000 who had emigrated, and by whom the Gospel was carried to other lands”<sup>8</sup>.

“Revival in the Church of England flowed in a different channel than that in the Free Churches. Evangelical clergy began to have second thoughts about the results of field-preaching and ministry in unconsecrated places . . . They began therefore to devote their energies to the indoctrination of a body of clergy who would carry evangelical ideas into their parish pulpits and parsonages”<sup>9</sup>.

Evangelical leaders formed some of the great interdenominational missionary societies – the London Missionary Society in 1795, the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810, and many others<sup>10</sup>.

Dissenting churches organized themselves in many ways, some of which resembled the traditional “Brethren” pattern – i.e. every member a true Christian, leadership by elders, ministry on the basis of gift rather than special designation.

“In 1818 a body of Christians, meeting apparently on simple scriptural lines, in New York, wishing to discover other similar companies in other parts, sent out a circular letter couched in the

<sup>5</sup> Ref. R Page 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. B Page 314.

<sup>7</sup> Ref. R Page 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. B Pages 317-318.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. C Page 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. C Pages 41-43.

following terms:

‘. . . Participating in the attention that has been, of late years, excited among the disciples of the Lord Jesus to the consideration of the Holy Scriptures, and the obedience therein exhibited, as connected with the belief of the Gospel, we have been led, by the mercy of God, to separate from various religious connections and denominations, to come together in one body, that in the fear and reverence of His authority, we might walk as a Church of Christ in this city, continuing in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayers’.

“Twenty-two companies replied, mostly from Ireland . . .”<sup>11</sup>

No unifying force appeared, though unity rather than fragmentation of Christians into a multiplicity of denominations was sought by many.

“No church has a right to establish terms of communion, which are not terms of salvation”<sup>12</sup>

“The early Brethren, such as those assembled at Powerscourt in 1833, were deeply concerned at the spectacle of a divided Christendom rent into competing factions”<sup>13</sup>.

Powerscourt Castle in Wicklow, Ireland was the scene of annual prophetic conferences which had commenced at Albury, Surrey, England in 1826. Two factors gave impetus to the studies the unrest of the times, and the yearning of Godly men for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as an answer to rationalistic deism:

“Undoubtedly, the political convulsions of the period of the French Revolution, the unsettlement of the years following 1815, and the renewed political tensions of the period around 1830, gave ground for speculation”<sup>14</sup>

“The striking way in which Christianity had been taken to remote corners of the earth as a result of the missionary movement which commenced in the late eighteenth century stimulated the vision of that time when the kingdom of Christ would be worldwide, and was conducive to eschatological thinking”<sup>15</sup>.

“Haldane Stewart, a lawyer who had been ordained in the Church of England, became convinced that, in order to overcome her disunity and weakness, the Church needed above everything else a deeper experience of the work of the Holy Spirit . . . At the end of March, 1821, Haldane Stewart convened a small meeting of leading men . . . and Edward Irving . . . in the hope of securing concerted prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit . . . The

<sup>11</sup> Ref. B Pages 334-335.

<sup>12</sup> Hall, a Baptist, quoted Ref. R Page 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ref. R Page 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ref. R Page 12.

<sup>15</sup> Ref. R Page 13.

study of unfulfilled prophecy into which Irving plunged about 1826 served to reinforce his moral earnestness . . . At the last of the Albury meetings for the study of unfulfilled prophecy, held in July, 1830, the exciting news of the appearance of miraculous gifts in Scotland was discussed”<sup>16</sup>.

Six men who became well known among early Brethren took part in the Powerscourt meetings – Darby, Bellett, Hall, Newton, Muller and Craik<sup>17</sup>. Their zeal gave rise to the comment that:

“Brethrenism is the child of the study of unfulfilled prophecy, and of the expectation of the immediate return of the Saviour”<sup>18</sup>

The reader will inevitably decide that this is an oversimplification. The study of unfulfilled prophecy gave a partial impetus to the subsequent withdrawal from apostate Christendom, which God would judge, but other factors were at work, as we shall see.

Note that associations of the Pentecostal type were avoided from the first:

“It seems that either J. N. Darby, or G. V. Wigram (or possibly both) investigated these outbreaks (i.e. of ‘tongues’) at the instigation of B. W. Newton. Newton’s reminiscences state that they rejected the gifts . . . The incipient Brethren movement was thus delivered from this first of the snares which waited in its path”<sup>19</sup>

The Irving faction parted company from the developing group of Brethren:

“The quest for miraculous spiritual gifts . . . saw the beginning of its realisation of 30 April, 1831, when the first instance of speaking in tongues occurred in London, and the emergence of what was to become the Catholic Apostolic Church”<sup>20</sup>.

Dr. Edwin Orr, who does not give the “Brethren Movement” a significant place in nineteenth century church history, makes the following general comment:

“The Brethren movement proved an abortive type of ecumenism. In the irony of history, Brethren doctrines (especially eschatology) have provided the main opposition in modern fundamentalism to twentieth-century Ecumenism. Unlike their contemporary movement, the Disciples of Christ . . . the Brethren exercised a powerful influence against the ecclesiastic co-operation of Evangelical denominations”<sup>21</sup>

All these factors explain the emerging movement only in part. The reader may trace their influence through the subsequent history, but he should find it difficult not to sense the hand of God at work in it.

<sup>16</sup> Ref. R Pages 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Ref. R Pages 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Ref. D Page 339.

<sup>19</sup> F. Roy Coad, “Prophetic Developments” C. B. R. F. Occasional Paper No. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Ref. R Page 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ref. C Page 97.

## Chapter 2.

### 1826 AND AFTER – BEGINNINGS AND PRINCIPLES.

The history of the “Brethren” is intensely interesting:

“The Brethren sought to effect a fresh start without authority, precedent or guidance beyond the letter of Holy Scripture. For them, essentially, the garnered experience of eighteen centuries was as though it were not. Such an experiment in the hands of eminent men could scarcely fail to yield a considerable harvest of interest and instruction”<sup>1</sup>.

The need for an evangelical stand against rationalistic deism gave rise to the search for Christian unity. But on what basis?

In 1826 a dissenting congregation in Dublin refused fellowship to a young converted Catholic dentist, Edward Cronin, as long as he refused to settle down permanently with them. He began to “break bread” in simplicity in a home in Dublin with several others, including Mr. Francis Hutchison<sup>2 3 4 5</sup>.

J. N. Darby, John Bellett, Cronin and Hutchison met in Hutchison’s home for Bible reading and breaking of bread in 1827<sup>6 7 8</sup>.

Darby, a brilliant man who took high honours in his law degree but became a high church Anglican curate who severed his connection with the Church of England somewhat later, wrote this account in 1878 in “A Letter to the Editor of the ‘Francais’ ” page 12:

“What is to be done? The Word declares to us that where two or three are gathered to the name of Jesus, He will be in the midst; Matt. 18:20. This is what we have done. There were only four of us to do it at the first; not, I hope, in a spirit of pride or presumption, but deeply grieved at seeing the state of that which surrounded us, praying for all Christians, and recognizing all those who possessed the Spirit of God”.

The exact influence of each man, and the precise order of events, are not settled to this day. Concerning Darby:

“From his own accounts, we would assume that his was the leading role”<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ref. D Page 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. F Page 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. H Page 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 25.

<sup>5</sup> Ref. G Page 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. E Pages 20-22.

<sup>7</sup> Ref. H Pages 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. G page 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. R Page 44.

A. N. Groves, an Exeter dentist noted for his later missionary service and his tract “Christian Devotedness” helped in the following way:

“My full persuasion is, that, inasmuch as any one glories either in being of the Church of England, Scotland, Baptist, Independent, Wesleyan, etc., his glory is his shame, and that is antichristian”<sup>10</sup>.

“Groves has just been telling me, that it appeared to him from Scripture, that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread together, as their Lord had admonished them; and that, in as far as the practice of the apostles could be a guide, every Lord’s Day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord’s death, and obeying his parting command. This suggestion of Mr. Groves was immediately carried out by himself and his friends in Dublin”<sup>11</sup>.

Darby wrote in 1828 in what has been called “the first Brethren tract,” his “Considerations in the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ”:

“We find His death is the centre of communion till His coming again, and in this rests the whole power of truth. Accordingly, the outward symbol and instrument of unity is the Lord’s supper – for we being many are ‘one bread, one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread’ ”<sup>12</sup>

Groves said this in a further conversation with Bellett:

“We should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or ministry, but trusting that the Lord would edify us together, by ministering as He pleased, and saw good, from the midst of ourselves”<sup>13</sup>.

Inevitably brethren compared their organization with that of existing denominations, and sought to avoid either universalism or exclusivism:

“This twofold position was negatively expressed in their favourite dictum that the Church of England was too broad in its basis, and the dissenting churches too narrow.”<sup>14</sup>

Darby wrote on the problem in more general terms:

“The bonds of nominal union are such as separate the children of God from each other; so that, instead of (itself an imperfect state) unbelievers being found mixed up with them, the people of God are found as individuals, among bodies of professing Christians, joined in communion upon other and different grounds; not in fact as the people of God at all”<sup>15</sup>.

Groves wrote in “The Christian Witness” in 1837:

“In refusing to receive their brethren because they are brethren,

<sup>10</sup> “Memoir” Page 49, quoted Ref. W Page 105.

<sup>11</sup> Bellett, quoted Ref. W Page 124.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. V, Eccles. Vol. 1 Page 27.

<sup>13</sup> Bellett, quoted Ref. F Page 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ref. D Page 29.

<sup>15</sup> Ref. V, Eccles. Vol. 1 Page 22.

they have shut themselves out from the blessed privilege of seeking to follow the mind of Christ, as to His desires for the unity of the one body; and have assumed to themselves a power, which Christ never delegated to His church, of legislating terms of communion”<sup>16</sup>

There was also a strong reaction against the situation in which an “ordained clergyman,” whether converted or not, preached and “ministered the sacraments” to the exclusion of all other Christians. Darby wrote the following in his second major tract, “The Notion of a Clergyman Dispensationally the Sin Against the Holy Ghost”:

“If the notion of a Clergyman has had the effect of the substitution of anything which is of man, and therefore subject to Satan, in the place and prerogative of that blessed Spirit exercising the vicarship of Christ in the world, it is clear, that however the providence of God may have overruled it, in the ignorance which He could wink at, it does, when stood upon and rested in against the presence and work of the Spirit, become direct sin against Him”<sup>17</sup>.

“The effect of this system, by which they form part of this great worldly structure, is to deprive them of the opportunity to stir up, or bar the exercise of, whatever gifts God may have made them partakers of”<sup>18</sup>

No doubt there were many Christians throughout the world who thought in this way, and may to some extent have put their thoughts into practice; but the “official” beginning took place in Dublin in May 1830.

“The roots of the Brethren movement in Dublin are to be found in a number of small groups which began independently but soon coalesced to form a single entity”<sup>19</sup>.

“Brethrenism was indeed formed out of a variety of little meetings of a more or less similar character, and these must be accepted as its ultimate elements; but Brethrenism, as we know it, is a synthesis, and the synthesis has a history; and I do not believe that its history can be truly told without locating its original force in Dublin, and in Aungier St.”<sup>20</sup>.

“We soon began to feel, as humbler brethren were added to us, that the house in Fitzwilliam Square was unsuited, which led me (Cronin) to take a large auction room in Aungier St. for our use on Sundays, and oh! the blessed seasons to my soul, with J. Parnell, William Stokes, and others, while moving the furniture aside and laying the simple table with the bread and wine on Saturday evening – seasons of joy never to be forgotten, for surely we had the

<sup>16</sup> Quoted Ref. W Page 108.

<sup>17</sup> Ref. V, Eccles. Vol. 1 Page 38.

<sup>18</sup> Ref. V. Eccles. Vol. 1 Page 49.

<sup>19</sup> Ref. R Page 37.

<sup>20</sup> Ref. D Page 24.



Master's smile and sanction in the testimony of such a movement as this was"<sup>21</sup>

The leaders began to codify the beliefs of brethren. Darby feared exclusivism at that time (1833):

"I do trust that you will keep infinitely far from sectarianism. The great body of Christians who are accustomed to religion, are scarce capable of understanding anything else, as the mind constantly tends there . . . you are nothing, nobody, but Christians, and the moment you cease to be an available mount for communion for any consistent Christian, you will go to pieces or help the evil"<sup>22</sup>.

Two differing principles emerged, each leading to this conclusion. They underlie almost every subsequent trouble amongst Brethren (a third will emerge much later). The first is this: "a shared love for the Lord Jesus Christ is God's principle of unity." Groves stated it:

"I was the first to propose that simple principle of union, the love of Jesus, instead of a one-ness of judgment in minor things, things that may consist with a true love to Jesus"<sup>23</sup>.

Darby's mind ran on different lines. His ecclesiology and eschatology were interwoven; Christendom was doomed, and Christians must stand apart from it, therefore "Separation from Evil is God's principle of unity."

"The world is lying in wickedness, and the God of unity is the Holy God. Separation therefore, separation from evil, becomes the necessary and sole basis and principle, I do not say the power, of unity"<sup>24</sup>.

"Soon, he was to come to the conclusion that it was incumbent upon true Christian believers to withdraw from apostasy. Far from cutting the nerve of all religious endeavours, these convictions were to serve as a goad, urging 'to special labour for the gathering in of God's elect to the knowledge of the refuge, before the scourge sweeps the earth, to preserve them that have believed' "<sup>25</sup>

This was probably not the general emphasis at the time. In "The 'Brethren,' A Historical Sketch," Mr. William Collingwood wrote:

"The chief aim was to exhibit, in a Scriptural way, the common brotherhood of all believers. They recognized no special membership. That they belonged to Christ was the only term of communion; that they loved one another was the power of their fellowship. In principle, it embraced all whose faith and walk showed that they had spiritual life; in practice, all such of these as would avail themselves of it"<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted Ref. H Pages 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> Ref. N Vol. 1 Page 18.

<sup>23</sup> "Memoir" Page 259, quoted Ref. W Page 17.

<sup>24</sup> Ref. V. Eccles. Vol. 1 Page 356.

<sup>25</sup> Ref. R Page 53.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted Ref. W Pages 104-105.

## Chapter 3.

### DEVELOPMENTS 1830-1845.

The young movement was missionary-minded from the outset. Groves took a pioneer party to Bagdad in 1829, and developments followed:

“In the summer of 1832, Mr. Groves was cheered by reinforcements, amongst whom were Dr. Cronin, Lord Congleton, and F. W. Newman”<sup>1</sup>

“From Bagdad, Mr. Groves went to India. After seeing the needs in many parts of that vast country, he returned to England. On returning to India he took back with him from Barnstaple, Messrs. Bowden and Beer, who settled in the Godaveri district. Later, other devoted missionaries followed”<sup>2</sup>.

Darby propagated the new church principles in Europe 1838-1845.

“His principles spread far and wide in French Switzerland, and obtained some successes in Berne and Basle. In the south of France they spread over a considerable district”<sup>3</sup>.

Muller laboured in Germany in 1843 in response to an invitation, and

“began a work . . . which, while not of the same magnitude as that of Mr. Darby in Switzerland, was considerable and far-reaching”<sup>4</sup>.

Meetings began in many places. Notice four in England whose names have become famous – Bristol, Plymouth, London and Barnstaple.

Muller recorded in his “Narrative of Some of the Lord’s Dealings” that on 13th August 1832:

“This evening one brother and four sisters united with brother Craik and me in church-fellowship at Bethesda, without any rules, desiring only to act as the Lord shall be pleased to give us light through His Word”<sup>5</sup>.

It has been claimed that Bethesda was not a true “Brethren” meeting, but a Baptist Church.

“There can be no doubt that Muller and Craik were regarded in Bristol as dissenting ministers”<sup>6</sup>.

But the evidence is against that claim. In 1836:

“Muller decided ‘that we ought to receive all whom Christ has received (Rom. 15:7), irrespective of the measure of grace or knowledge which they have attained to’ . . . Muller and Craik

<sup>1</sup> Ref. F Page 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 98.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. D Page 84.

<sup>4</sup> Ref. F Page 40.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted Ref. W Page 154.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. R Page 120.

were at pains to avoid giving the impression that they regarded themselves as sole ministers”<sup>7</sup>.

“Muller and Craik resolved . . . to ‘invite those who feel called upon to separate from every sectarian system, and to meet where free exercise is afforded for every spiritual gift, to assemble with us at Bethesda’ ”<sup>8</sup>

“On 1 January, 1840, Craik noted that during the seven years and eight months of ministry in Bristol, 573 had been added to the original 68 . . . 475 remained. By the end of 1844, the net figure was 668”<sup>9</sup>.

Muller, distinctively the man of faith, is renowned for his work in connection with the Ashley Down Orphan Homes, “The Bristol Miracle”.

“While the work at Bristol was growing on their hands, Mr. Muller’s heart was led out to care for destitute orphans . . . At the first he had laid down for himself the rule that, beyond making known the existence of the institution, he would never in any way apply to man for help . . . that it might be a witness to all that God is, as ever of old, the hearer of prayer”<sup>10</sup>.

A letter of Darby’s describes the beginnings at Plymouth and London:

“ ‘I met Mr. Newton (about the year 1831), 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’ ”<sup>11</sup>

The well-known designation was fastened on them at about that time.

“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”<sup>12</sup>

Mr. W. H. Cole described developments in his “Reminiscences of the Plymouth Meeting of Brethren”:

“The meetings of the assembly were calm, peaceful and hallowed; their singing soft, slow and thoughtful; their worship evinced the nearness of their communion with the Lord . . . It was into this scene I was privileged to enter in the year 1843. At that time the church had grown to a large number. It began in a small house in King St., Plymouth, and soon grew in numbers, and finally settled in Ebrington St., where there was accommodation for 1,000 in

<sup>7</sup> Ref. R Page 123.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. R Page 127.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. R Page 128.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. Y Page 7.

<sup>11</sup> Ref. P Page 40.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. G Page 40.

fellowship, and about 400 others”<sup>13</sup>.

B. W. Newton became the leading teacher at Plymouth because of his outstanding natural gifts and scholastic attainments. J. L. Harris and the learned textual critic Dr. S. P. Tregelles were also prominent. Cole described Newton in these terms:

“His delivery was calm, orderly, lucid, captivating, such as became a great scholar, one deeply taught in the word, and anxious to lead others”<sup>13</sup>

“J. L. Harris, perpetual curate of Plymstock, forsook the Church of England to unite himself with them . . . His presence greatly strengthened the infant community, whose first organ, ‘The Christian Witness’ was started under his editorship in 1834”<sup>14</sup> (This is a mistake; Henry Borlase was the first editor, but died shortly after the commencement of the paper<sup>15</sup>).

G. V. Wigram was a wealthy ex-army officer who used his money in good works including the production of scholarly writings by Dr. Tregelles.

“The first to appear, in A.D. 1839, of this work, was the Englishman’s Greek and English Concordance to the New Testament’; and it was followed in 1843 by the ‘Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance to the Old Testament’ ”<sup>16</sup>

Robert Chapman, a lawyer, began a work at Barnstaple which evolved from a Strict Baptist congregation to a Brethren Assembly. Chapman wrote:

“A brother who visited me in those days urged me to set aside the strict rule that none but baptized believers should be allowed to break bread. I replied that I could not force the conscience of my brethren and sisters; and I continued my ministry, patiently instructing them from the Word. I knew well at that time that I could have carried the point with a large majority, but I judged it to be more pleasing to God to toil on to bring all to one mind”<sup>17</sup>.

“Chapman also established contact with the Plymouth wing of the movement at an early date . . . He may have been brought into touch with them through common acquaintance with Muller . . . The first certain contact between him (Muller) and Darby was in October, 1832, when Darby preached in both chapels in Bristol”<sup>18</sup>.

The leaders of the early Brethren were nearly all university trained scholars – Darby<sup>19</sup>, Groves<sup>20</sup>, Bellett<sup>21</sup>, Cronin<sup>22</sup>, Harris<sup>23</sup>, Wigram<sup>24</sup>,

<sup>13</sup> Quoted Ref. W Pages 325-326.

<sup>14</sup> Ref. D Page 53.

<sup>15</sup> Ref. R Page 77.

<sup>16</sup> Ref. E Page 59.

<sup>17</sup> Ref. X Page 34.

<sup>18</sup> Ref. R Page 147.

<sup>19</sup> Ref. F Page 20.

<sup>20</sup> Ref. F Pages 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> Ref. F Page 18.

<sup>22</sup> Ref. H Page 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ref. F Page 34.

<sup>24</sup> Ref. D Page 51.

Newton<sup>25</sup>, Tregelles<sup>26</sup>, Muller<sup>27</sup> and Craik<sup>28</sup>. There was no professional ministry, but there was competent ministry from men with properly prepared minds and hearts.

Wigram in 1838 initiated a significant trend with far-reaching results:

“How are meetings for communion of saints in these parts to be regulated? Would it be for the glory of the Lord and the increase of testimony to have one central meeting, the common responsibility of all within reach, and as many meetings subordinate to it as grace might vouchsafe? or to hold it to be better to allow the meetings to grow up as they may without connexion and dependent on the energy of individuals only-”<sup>29</sup>.

“The formation of a London Saturday-evening administrative ‘central meeting’ dates from that year”<sup>30</sup>

“The power of the London Saturday Meeting grew with use, and, as early as 1849, J. S. Howard protested in a letter that it would tend to make the judgment of leaders alone supersede that of the church”<sup>31</sup>.

Groves’ famous letter of 1836 to Darby highlights the progress of the “separation from evil God’s principle of unity” trend:

“The transition your little bodies have undergone, in no longer standing forth the witness for the glorious and simple truth, so much as standing forth witnesses against all that they judge error, has lowered them in my apprehension from heaven to earth in their position as witnesses . . . The most narrow-minded and bigoted will rule, because his conscience cannot and will not give way, and therefore the most enlarged heart must yield. It is into this position, dear Darby, I feel some little flocks are fast tending, if they have not already attained it, making not life the measure of communion”<sup>32</sup>

Controversy over Irving’s teachings continued until late 1834, when

“The crisis was surmounted . . . Subsequent Brethren writers consistently denied the validity of the Irvingite claim to the possession of supernatural gifts”<sup>33</sup>.

Cole made the following general comment in 1843:

“ ‘Those were delightful times, so sweet for their simplicity. The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) were in evidence. Whatever under-currents were at work, they threw nothing to the surface. But it was too fair a scene for Satan to contemplate, and he must by some means mar its beauties and desolate its loveliness’ ”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ref. F Page 33.

<sup>26</sup> Ref. F Page 34.

<sup>27</sup> Ref. R Pages 114-115.

<sup>28</sup> Ref. F Page 35.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted Ref. D Page 60.

<sup>30</sup> Ref. Y Page 51.

<sup>31</sup> Ref. R Page 164.

<sup>32</sup> “Memoir,” quoted Ref. W Pages 173-174.

<sup>33</sup> Ref. R Page 81.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted Ref. W Page 327.

## Chapter 4.

### TROUBLES AT PLYMOUTH 1845-1847.

How would the new principles work under trial?

“The brethren in their first great emergency found themselves absolutely unprepared to grapple with it. They had no constitution of any kind. They repudiated congregationalism, but they left their communities to fight their battles on no acknowledged basis and with no defined court of appeal. If once the sense of fair play broke down, there was no check on the most arbitrary temper”<sup>1</sup>.

The Plymouth Assembly weakened spiritually as it grew.

“In process of time it became very evident that many had been attracted to the position by other motives than those which swayed the brethren who originally took it. Attracted by the manifestation of love and union which they witnessed, or finding more joy and refreshment under the ministry which God raised up among brethren than elsewhere, they assumed a position outwardly, the grounds and nature of which they had never really understood by the teaching of God’s Spirit”<sup>2</sup>.

“As to Plymouth, there was constant labour to reduce the meeting to a clerical form; and to invest certain leaders with the sole direction”<sup>3</sup>.

Darby charged Newton with clericalism (see below), but in fairness to Newton, note that Darby had encouraged some degree of leadership in 1832.

“At Plymouth Mr. J. N. Darby requested Mr. Newton to sit where he could conveniently take the oversight of ministry, and that he would hinder that which was manifestly unprofitable and unedifying”<sup>4</sup>

But before 1845 Darby had taken up his notion of “the ruin of the church”<sup>5</sup>:

“The . . . ground for not recognizing eldership in the churches was a theory that the church of God is in ruins, and that it is not the way of God ever to restore to its former glory that which has been ruined, but that He gives grace to a Nehemiah how to live and act in the midst of the ruin and rubbish. This was Mr. Darby’s special contribution to ecclesiastical thought”<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ref. D Page 121.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. O Page 9.

<sup>3</sup> Darby’s “Narrative of Facts” quoted Ref. E Vol. 1 Pages 180ff.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Tregelles, quoted Ref. W Page 154.

<sup>5</sup> Ref. N Vol. 1 Page 42.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. W Page 156.

“Darby had by this time taken up very strong views against the formal recognition of elders”<sup>7</sup>.

Doctrines considered by Darby’s followers to be different from those dear to them in earlier years were taught at Plymouth.

“The coming of the Lord as an object of present hope or expectation was denied . . . The real unity of the church as one body indwelt and governed by the Holy Ghost was denied”<sup>8</sup>.

“By far the bitterest of Darby’s complaints related to Newton’s alleged systematic effort to band together all the Brethren everywhere, so far as his influence could reach them, in resolute opposition to the school of doctrine of which Darby was the head”<sup>9</sup>.

Newton, on the other hand

“was convinced that Darby’s views were not only erroneous but also highly dangerous, and avowed that they contained a principle ‘that would destroy Christianity if carried out.’ Darby never forgot – or forgave – the expression”<sup>10</sup>.

“From the offhand way in which Darby acted, as well as from his attacks on Newton’s views, Newton naturally came to the conclusion that Darby had come to Plymouth with hostile intent”<sup>11</sup>.

It must have been heart-breaking for Darby to see what he thought Newton was doing and teaching.

“Plymouth is much in my thoughts and prayers (however they may count me careless of them in my absence), that it should flourish as the garden of the Lord”<sup>12</sup>.

“Darby never tired of deploring Newton’s ‘setting aside the proper standing, position and blessing of the Church of God’. Darby’s view of the Church was strongly Pauline”<sup>13</sup>.

Darby returned from his labours on the Continent to Plymouth in 1845 and was immediately appealed to by some<sup>14</sup>. He taught in the assembly and took part in meetings and counter-meetings with Newton and other brethren from mid-April onwards<sup>15 16</sup>. Sad events multiplied.

“There were evidently subsequent meetings which produced nothing but deadlock”<sup>17</sup>.

“On Sunday week (Oct. 26, 1845) I (Darby) detained the assembly; and told them that it was a matter of the deepest sorrow, but that I was going to quit the assembly; I . . . stated the principles on

<sup>7</sup> Ref. D Page 108.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. O Pages 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. D Page 109.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. R Page 233.

<sup>11</sup> Ref. R Page 236.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. N Page 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ref. R Page 239.

<sup>14</sup> Ref. F Page 44.

<sup>15</sup> Ref. R Page 240.

<sup>16</sup> Ref. E Vol. 1 Pages 180ff – “Narrative of Facts”.

<sup>17</sup> Ref. R Page 241.

which I went; and, I felt God was practically displaced; and, more particularly, that there was a subversion of the principles on which we met; that there was evil and unrighteousness unconfessed and unjudged”<sup>18</sup>.

“Darby . . . on November 17 . . . made his first public complaint against Newton’s personal integrity”<sup>19</sup>.

“At last, on the 17th of December 1845, they (the Plymouth leaders) issued a note informing the church that in their judgment the charges had been ‘most satisfactorily answered’, and they believed Newton to be ‘entirely innocent of the imputations’”<sup>19</sup>

“On Sunday 28 December, 1845, the step was taken which could hardly fail to make the break irreparable: Darby and Wigram broke bread apart from Ebrington Street”<sup>20</sup>.

Many writers have pointed out the tragedy of what took place. There was no charge of fundamental error. Both Darby and Newton were the Lord’s gifts to the Church, whose ministry had been greatly blessed. It is difficult to disagree with Mr. Henry Groves:

“Mr. Darby comes to Plymouth, and finds Mr. Newton’s influence paramount. What an opportunity for grace to shine in! for Christ to triumph in the saint over self! But, alas! self triumphed over Christ on both sides of the conflict, though in different ways; and the schismatic spirit of ‘I am of Newton’ and ‘I am of Darby’, came in and carried all before it, but those who had really been walking before God”<sup>21</sup>.

“The grounds of the melancholy division were, as we gather from Mr. Darby’s narrative, sectarianism, clericalism and erroneous prophetic views. There was no charge of heresy; there was not one Scriptural ground on which the separation could be justified”<sup>22</sup>.

Meetings and conferences took place in efforts to right matters. Newton could not be induced to attend them, and questioned their authority<sup>23</sup>.

“Effort was made during the next thirteen months to bring about a reconciliation, but all was in vain. Then in February, 1847, something came to light that confirmed Mr. Darby in his judgment that he had been guided by the Lord and which led many perplexed ones to side with him”<sup>24</sup>.

Harris discovered that sisters were writing out and distributing notes of Newton’s addresses, some of which dealt with “The Sufferings of Christ as set forth in a Lecture on Psalm VI”<sup>25 26</sup> These involved doctrinal errors, which are listed in most of the books, including:

<sup>18</sup> “Narrative of Facts” Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 203.

<sup>19</sup> Ref. D Pages 119-121.

<sup>20</sup> Ref. R Page 247.

<sup>21</sup> Ref. K Page 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ref. K Page 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ref. R Pages 250-251.

<sup>24</sup> Ref. H Page 50.

<sup>25</sup> Ref. H Page 51.

<sup>26</sup> Ref. R Page 258.



“I: That the Lord Jesus at His birth, and because born of a woman, partook of certain consequences of the fall – mortality being one – and because of this association by nature, he became an heir of death born under death as a penalty.

“II: That the Lord Jesus at His birth stood in such relation to Adam as a federal head; that guilt was imputed to Him; and that He was exposed to certain consequences of such imputation, as stated in Romans 5.

“III: That the Lord Jesus was also born as a Jew under the broken law, and was regarded by God as standing in that relation to Him; and that God pressed upon His soul the terrors of Sinai, as due to one in that relation”<sup>27</sup>.

Newton did not know that the notes were circulating<sup>28</sup>. Darby exposed his errors in a tract<sup>29 30</sup> Newton published a retraction, the final paragraph reading (26th November 1847) as follows:

“I would not wish it to be supposed that what I have now said is intended to extenuate the error which I have confessed. I desire to acknowledge it fully, and to acknowledge it as sin . . . I trust the Lord will not only pardon, but will graciously counteract any evil effects which may have arisen to any therefrom”<sup>31</sup>

Other leading brethren at Plymouth published “confessions”<sup>32</sup>. Mr. Newton left Plymouth permanently on 8th December 1847<sup>33</sup>. The assembly was greatly depleted and moved to smaller premises<sup>34</sup>. Efforts were made at the Bath Conference of 10th May 1848 to bring all but those guilty of Mr. Newton’s errors together again, and this seemed successful<sup>35 36 37</sup>.

Note that from the early days of the “Brethren Movement” the effort to magnify our Lord’s person resulted in some teachers “defining the humanity of Christ as to give the impression that it was ‘superhuman humanity’ ”<sup>38</sup>. Dr. Tregelles observed:

“It was said that ‘the Lord was man but not the Son of Adam, and that the name “Son of Man” was simply a title’; that ‘His humanity was something divine’; that ‘it was a spiritual humanity’; that ‘He did not become man by birth, but by some other way’ ”<sup>39</sup>

Newton had reacted against this sort of thing. He never taught his errors subsequently throughout his long life, nor did he influence subsequent “Brethren” history<sup>40</sup>. It appeared that disaster had been averted, and from Bath onwards all would be well.

<sup>27</sup> Ref. 0 Page 24.

<sup>28</sup> Ref. D Page 132.

<sup>29</sup> Ref. D Page 133.

<sup>30</sup> Ref. R Page 259.

<sup>31</sup> Ref. 0 Page 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ref. 0 Page 28.

<sup>33</sup> Ref. D Page 138.

<sup>34</sup> Ref. 0 Page 28.

<sup>35</sup> Ref. D Page 148.

<sup>36</sup> Ref. R Page 260.

<sup>37</sup> Ref. H Page 55.

<sup>38</sup> Ref. R Page 261 quoting Newton.

<sup>39</sup> Ref. D Page 143.

<sup>40</sup> Ref. D Page 149.

## Chapter 5.

### “THE BETHESDA QUESTION.”

Some “Exclusive” assemblies insist that believers from “Open” assemblies who seek fellowship with them “judge the question” before being received. This question is the so-called “Bethesda Question.” Any Christian identifies himself as “Exclusive” or “Open” by his answer. Apparently the problems at Plymouth 1845-1847 were solved with the departure of Newton and the confessions of others, but this was not so.

“In April, 1848, Captain Woodfall and his brother came to reside at Bristol, and asked for fellowship at Bethesda Chapel. They came from the Assembly at Plymouth that Mr. Newton was associated with. Before being received they were visited and carefully questioned as to whether they held Mr. Newton’s heresy. The brethren who visited them were fully satisfied that they did not hold it nor any other unsound doctrine, and that there was no Scriptural reason for refusing fellowship. They were accordingly received”<sup>1</sup>.

Miller claims in his History that the Woodfalls did hold the heresies of Newton, and blames the assembly for receiving them <sup>2</sup>, but he is in error. The brethren who visited them had originally objected to them, so could hardly be regarded as pro-Newton <sup>3</sup>.

“Shortly afterwards, on 20 April, 1848, Darby visited Bristol on his way to Exeter. There he made it known that he so strongly disapproved of the reception of the Woodfalls that he would not go to Bethesda again, until there had been a church investigation and condemnation of Newton’s errors”<sup>4 5</sup>

This forced an investigation on the part of the Bristol Assembly, resulting in the famous “Letter of the Ten”. It is quoted in full in most of the histories. It noticed that individuals came to varying conclusions about Newton’s tracts, and declined to investigate them. It was read to the assembly on 29th June 1848 <sup>6</sup>. This is the most significant paragraph:

“Even supposing that those who inquired into the matter had come to the same conclusion, touching the amount of positive error therein contained, this would not have guided us in our decision respecting individuals coming from Plymouth. For supposing the author of the tracts was fundamentally heretical this would not

<sup>1</sup> Ref. F Pages 50-51.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. O Page 55.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. R Page 261.

<sup>4</sup> Ref. R Pages 261-262.

<sup>5</sup> Ref. K Page 30.

warrant us in rejecting those who came from under his teaching, until we were satisfied that they had understood and imbibed views essentially subversive of foundation-truth”<sup>7</sup>.

This is the “Open” position on reception. But if the Bristol leaders had taken a stronger line against Newton’s errors at that time, the subsequent charges of “neutrality to Christ” against them could not have been made. In Bristol’s defence (concerning the Letter):

“It was manifestly never intended for widespread circulation nor as establishing a precedent which other assemblies were to follow”<sup>8</sup>.

Neutrality to Christ, real or not, filled Darby with horror. Immediately he visited Bristol and urged that Newton’s tracts be condemned there, but:

“Finding their judgments were not to be changed, he sought to intimidate by the threat of separating from them all those believers in other places, with whom for years they had held Christian fellowship”<sup>8</sup>.

“He went from one place to another, seeking to enforce everywhere the adoption of his course towards Bethesda . . . Assemblies of saints one after another were placed under the ban of excommunication for no other sin that of not being able to see that Mr. Darby was right, and Bethesda wrong. On reaching Leeds, he issued his lithographic circular, bearing the post mark of August 26, 1848, cutting off not only Bethesda, but all assemblies who received anyone who went there”<sup>9</sup>

Interested readers may study the circular in Neatby, Noel and Darby’s Collected Writings Vol. 4.

“This circular is one of the great documents of Brethrenism, inaugurating as it does the unique discipline with which Mr. Darby’s name will be associated as long as he is remembered among men”<sup>10</sup>

This quotation indicates the style and language of the circular:

“Woe be to them if they love the brethren Muller and Craik, or their own ease, more than the souls of saints dear to Christ! And I plainly urge upon them that, to receive anyone from Bethesda (unless in an exceptional case of ignorance of what has passed) is opening the door, now, to the infection of the abominable evil, from which, at so much painful cost, we have been delivered”<sup>11</sup>.

Bethesda was stung into action at last.

“A meeting was held in Bethesda, October 31st, 1848, in which Mr. Muller gave his own individual judgment of Mr. Newton’s tracts, stating that they contained a system of insidious error, not here

<sup>6</sup> Ref. R Page 262.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted Ref. H Page 63 and elsewhere.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. H Page 65.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. K Page 42.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. D Page 161.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 236.

or there, but throughout; and if the doctrines taught in them were followed out to their legitimate consequences, they would destroy the foundations of the Gospel, and overthrow the Christian faith”<sup>12</sup>.

“Between 27 November and 11 December, 1848, Muller and Craik, realizing that matters in dispute were now common knowledge, called a series of seven meetings at Bethesda at which Newton’s tracts were thoroughly discussed and the conclusion reached ‘That no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton’s views or tracts should be received into communion’ ”<sup>13 14</sup>

There still seems to be a loophole – what about somebody who believed what Newton taught but kept quiet?<sup>15</sup>. There was a strong reaction even so.

“By the 12th February, 1849, all Mr. Newton’s friends at Bethesda had sent in resignations – Capt. Woodfall, Mr. Woodfall, Mrs. Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Aitchison, two Miss Farmers and two Miss Percivals”<sup>16</sup>.

Note that the two Woodfalls, whose reception at Bethesda precipitated the crisis, took this step. Note also that Aitchison was a signatory to the “Letter of the Ten”. But it cannot be shown that any of them did in fact believe Newton’s errors; they were merely contending for an extremely “Open” position<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, the official position was too “Open” for others!

“About fifty or sixty of the congregation, rather than sanction such a loose principle of communion, withdrew from Bethesda. A positive division now existed”<sup>18</sup>.

Darby was evidently torn between what his head told him was “neutrality to Christ” and what his heart told him was dividing the Body of Christ. In July 1849 he visited Muller in an effort to achieve reconciliation. This is Muller’s account of the meeting:

“. . . Mr. Darby came to me to the New Orphan House, No. 1, on Ashley Down, Bristol, and said: ‘As you have judged Newton’s tracts, there is no longer any reason why we should be separated’. My reply was, ‘I have this moment only ten minutes time, having an important engagement before me, and as you have acted so wickedly in this matter, I cannot now enter upon it, as I have no time’ ”<sup>19</sup>

This ended the interview and all hopes of reconciliation with it. How one would wish that Mr. Muller had thought reconciliation more important than his other engagement! Mr. Darby had a different version, however.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. O Page 41.

<sup>13</sup> Ref. K Page 45.

<sup>14</sup> Ref. R Page 263.

<sup>15</sup> See comments Ref. D Page 173.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted Ref. O Page 43.

<sup>17</sup> Ref. D Page 174.

<sup>18</sup> Ref. G Pages 58-59.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted Ref. W Page 338.

“As regards the statement of my interview with Mr. Muller, I had heard it before, and I have only to say: it is a total and absolute falsehood in every part and parcel of it”<sup>20</sup>.

Yet a few lines further on in the same letter here quoted, Mr. Darby says “Mr. Muller and I having been alone”<sup>20</sup> so there obviously was an interview of some sort. Naturally Darby’s view of it would be different. William Kelly, his staunch supporter, wrote:

“Mr. Muller’s rude repulse only compelled Mr. Darby to feel, as others already felt, the hollowness of Bethesda throughout. Mr. Darby’s power lay in expounding the Word, not in disciplinary action, as he used to own freely throughout his life”<sup>21</sup>.

This admission did not stop him issuing his Leeds Circular, nor enforcing it after the interview.

“Of all the incidents in Darby’s chequered career, this is distinctly the most damaging to his reputation, for he left Muller’s presence only to enforce to the last letter the decree that he had just declared obsolete, that is, his Leeds letter”<sup>22</sup>.

Even had the Bethesda controversy not occurred, division sooner or later over the two opposing principles of unity “shared love for Christ” or “separation from evil” must have occurred, with this result:

“The Assemblies which, in 1848, refused to follow Mr. Darby, and continued to receive all believers who were personally sound in doctrine and morals, became known as ‘Open’ Brethren. While they varied in many ways, they rejected as unscriptural the linking up of Assemblies in circles or confederacies. They welcomed and desired the fullest fellowship of all the Lord’s people, but they believed that each Assembly was primarily responsible to God as to its reception of believers, church order, and discipline”<sup>23</sup>

“Association with evil necessarily defiles the otherwise clean and sound believers. Therefore they would refuse all fellowship with any church or assembly tolerating moral or doctrinal evil. They maintained also that if one were excommunicated for Scriptural reasons by any company of Christians, he was by that act properly excluded from every assembly of saints on earth until by repentance and confession he was reinstated. These were known as ‘Exclusives’ ”<sup>24</sup>

To sum up – did association with Newton at Plymouth defile the Woodfalls? “Open Brethren” say, not, for they were personally free of his doctrinal errors. “Exclusive Brethren” say, yes, for he was ecclesiastically associated with him (i.e. being “one body” with him at Plymouth). This is the “Bethesda Question” and its divisive result.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 270.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted Ref. W Page 339.

<sup>22</sup> Ref. D Page 176.

<sup>23</sup> Ref. F Page 63.

<sup>24</sup> Ref. H Page 67.

## Chapter 6.

### 1849-1881: THE ERA OF DARBYISM AND ITS FALL.

Though the mechanism existed to divide “Exclusive” assemblies worldwide easily, Darby held them together until shortly before his death in 1882.

“The epoch of Exclusivism really derives its whole character, and therefore its sovereign explanation, from the personality of Darby . . . till within a year of Darby’s death, they cohered so perfectly that every minutest act of discipline that was recognised in any part of the world was recognized in every other”<sup>1</sup>.

Both “Open” and “Exclusive” sections expanded rapidly, each taking a distinctive emphasis. Concerning the “Open” assemblies:

“Even J. N. Darby owned that ‘God in His sovereignty has given them much blessing in the Gospel’. Their assemblies multiplied and through the labours of earnest evangelists vast numbers were saved ... Hundreds more, leaving all for Him who had saved them, went forth to the regions beyond”<sup>2</sup>.

The Second Evangelical Awakening broke upon Britain in 1859.

“Henry Pickering’s ‘Chief Men Among the Brethren’ gives the biographies of a hundred leading lights of the movement. It is significant that thirty-five of the forty-five evangelists or teachers born between 1830 and 1860 were either workers or converts of the 1859 Revival, or both”<sup>3</sup>.

“The Christian Brethren gained converts out of all proportion to their numbers”<sup>4</sup>.

“Open” evangelists such as Weaver, Moorhouse, Varley and others are well-known. “Exclusive” evangelists such as Stanley and (later) Mace do not seem to have co-operated with other groups to the same extent. “The exclusive wing of the brethren turned more to occupation with truth for believers”<sup>5</sup>, but their meetings also increased. By 1878:

“they have been marvellously blessed of God in spreading the pure truth of His word far and wide . . . in the United States . . . 91 meetings . . . In Canada, there are 101 meetings. In Holland, 39; in Germany, 189; in France, 146; in Switzerland, 72; in the United Kingdom, including the Channel Islands, about 750”<sup>6</sup>.

Darby’s comments on a matter of excommunication in 1864 illustrate the

<sup>1</sup> Ref. D Pages 192-194.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. H Page 70.

<sup>3</sup> “The Second Evangelical Awakening” (Abridged), Orr, Page 83.

<sup>4</sup> Ref. C Page 166.

<sup>5</sup> Ref. H Pages 70-71.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. G Page 163.

dangerous “divisive principle” of exclusivism:

“He (or any one else) is rejected in London. The assembly in London have weighed, and I with them, the case, and count him as either excommunicated or in schism . . . I take part in this act, and hold him to be outside the Church of God on earth, being outside (in either case) what represents it in London. I come to Sheffield; there he breaks bread, and is – in what? Not the Church of God on earth, for he is out of it in London, and there are not two churches on earth”<sup>7</sup>.

In 1866 Darby taught concerning “the third character of Christ’s sufferings, the suffering under the government of God . . . a character wholly and entirely contrasted with atonement”<sup>8</sup>.

“Several esteemed teachers among the ‘Exclusive’ Brethren were deeply grieved at this teaching . . . which they asserted, if not identical, were at least similar to the heretical teaching of Mr. Newton”<sup>9</sup>.

“In 1866 he (W. H. Dorman), together with Capt. Percy Hall, Thomas Newberry, Jos. Stancomb, and others, left J. N. D’s fellowship, believing him to hold views which they regarded as almost identical with those of Mr. B. W. Newton”<sup>10</sup>.

Darby expressed “his willingness to leave the fellowship rather than retract the teaching”<sup>11</sup>, and his brethren decided:

“We cannot be content to allow our brother J. N. Darby to withdraw from us under any such plea . . . we know not of any consciences so troubled, nor is there anything in the writings referred to which has affected our own consciences”<sup>12</sup>.

How different from the treatment meted out to Newton twenty years before!

Wigram died in 1879. H. A. Ironside comments thus:

“Mr. R. T. Grant told me in 1898 that G. V. Wigram, ere he died in 1879, bitterly lamented the fact that Brethren had been ‘blowing ecclesiastical bubbles’ and ‘playing church’ and that he felt God could not go on with them in such folly. He passed away just as his prophetic words were in course of fulfilment”<sup>13</sup>.

“The principal precursor of ruin was the formation of a party holding tenets that passed under the cant name of New-Lumpism. This party professed to bewail the increasing worldliness of the Darbyites. It regarded the separation of the self-styled “spiritual’ from the unspiritual mass, and the formation of a communion

<sup>7</sup> Quoted Ref. K Pages 59-60.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted Ref. K Page 68.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. F Page 70.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. Y Page 57.

<sup>11</sup> Ref. F Page 71.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted Ref. F Page 71.

<sup>13</sup> Ref. H Page 83.

restricted to persons who gave evidence of sufficient attainments in spirituality, as the only hope for the “testimony” originally entrusted to the Brethren”<sup>14</sup>

Mr. J. B. Stoney, a lawyer, had been identified with the Brethren since the age of 18, in 1833<sup>15</sup>. His ministry had a distinctive character different from that of the works of C. H. Mackintosh and other writers who still enjoy widespread acceptance.

“J. B. Stoney edited ‘A Voice to the Faithful’ and ‘Food for the Flock’, periodicals of a different type, decidedly introspective and subjective, which paved the way for what afterwards came to be known as Ravenism”<sup>16</sup>

Trouble came in 1881. “A very insignificant spark fell into the powder magazine, and Darbyism exploded in fragments”<sup>17</sup>. This is the sad story of the Kelly Division over the Ramsgate Question.

“In the course of the difficulties existing at Ryde, an independent company had been formed in that town by some who previously broke bread at the Temperance Hall, but this independent company was not recognised by brethren generally in the neighbourhood, who continued to extend fellowship to those breaking bread at Temperance Hall. In this state of affairs, Dr. Cronin, who belonged to one of the London meetings (Kennington) went down to Ryde and broke bread with the independent company, seeking by this means to enforce recognition of it. The brethren in London were unduly slow in repudiating Dr. Cronin’s action, though there was much concern among the saints wherever it became known, and in August, 1879, certain of the brethren who broke bread together at Guildford Hall, Ramsgate, felt that in order to maintain a good conscience before God, they could no longer continue in fellowship with those who supported Dr. Cronin, whether at Ramsgate, Kennington or elsewhere. They therefore . . . separated themselves”<sup>18</sup>

The separatists were identified with Guildford Hall to which they returned; the remnant with Abbott’s Hill, their new meeting place<sup>19</sup>. Presentation of letters of commendation from both meetings in London made it necessary to determine which, if any, of the Ramsgate meetings could be recognized. Eventually the Abbott’s Hill brethren confessed their sin, but the Guildford Hall brethren would not accept them.

“The refusal of these . . . confessions was followed by the charge of wickedness against and the refusal of Abbott’s Hill, and the recognition of Guildford Hall at Ramsgate by Mr. J. N. Darby and 57 Park St., May, 1881; which (independent?) recognition in turn

<sup>14</sup> Ref. D Page 284.

<sup>15</sup> Ref. P Page 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ref. H Page 71.

<sup>17</sup> Ref. D Page 285.

<sup>18</sup> Ref. P Page 101.

<sup>19</sup> Ref. E Vol. 1 Pages 305ff.



led to the charge of independency against Guildford Hall and 57 Park St., and the refusal of both meetings at Ramsgate by Mr. W. Kelly and the assembly at Blackheath, and many others”<sup>20</sup>.

Darby met at 57 Park St., Islington. Kelly attached the term “New-Lumpism” to the Guildford Hall party in his “Why Many Saints Were Outside the Park Street of 1881”<sup>21</sup>, and sounded this solemn note of warning to all “Exclusive” brethren:

“Surely our Lord has said, when the preliminaries are done in obedience, ‘Hear the church’; but is this His voice when they are not? Has He not also called him that has an ear ‘to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches?’ To idolize assembly judgments as necessarily right is condemned by His Word”<sup>22</sup>.

But Darby was on his death-bed and others had taken control of events.

“As J. B. Stoney and others left Mr. Darby’s bedside to go to this meeting he pleaded that grace be shown and begged that Kelly be not turned out. But things had now gone so far it seemed impossible to avert division, and when they returned they told him that Kelly had refused to act with them in regard to Ramsgate and was now outside . . . Stoney, and the ‘high church’ party had triumphed”<sup>23</sup>.

There was no charge of heresy; the question was wholly procedural. But a new pattern of behaviour was set – “ ‘Bowling to Park St,’ became a mania amongst Brethren”<sup>24</sup>.

A significant point emerged regarding baptism.

“At the rupture between Kellyites and Darbyites in 1881, though there were exceptions on both sides, the Baptists went nearly solid for Mr. Kelly, and the pedo-baptists for Mr. Darby”<sup>25</sup>.

Obviously the issues at stake were more fundamental than appeared on the surface. The “high church” mysticism has evolved into modern-day Taylorism, still with the claim of being “spiritual.” The “low church” evangelicals have persisted unchanged to the present time.

Notice some of Mr. Darby’s last words:

“Remember that you are nothing and nobody but Christians, and on the day that you cease to provide an available mount of communion for every consistent Christian you will deserve to go to pieces, and help on the ruin of Christendom”<sup>26</sup>.

“I am not aware of anything to recall; little now to add. Hold fast to Christ; count on abundant grace in Him to reproduce Him in the power of the Father’s love; and be watching and waiting for Christ”<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Ref. B Vol. 1 Page 307.

<sup>21</sup> Ref. H Pages 90ff.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted Ref. H Page 91.

<sup>23</sup> Ref. H Page 90.

<sup>24</sup> Ref. D Page 303.

<sup>25</sup> Ref. D Page 237.

<sup>26</sup> “The Christian Witness” January 1939.

<sup>27</sup> Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 49.

A tribute from Mr. F. A. Tatford, heartily endorsed by the writer:

“Whatever one’s opinion of J. N. Darby’s ecclesiastical views and controversies, here was a man among men; one who esteemed the reproach of Christ above all the treasures of this world”<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> “Help and Food” May 1956 Page 31.

## Chapter 7.

### GRANT AND STUART DIVISIONS, AND SUBSEQUENT STUART HISTORY.

The Grant and Stuart Divisions in the Stoney-Park St. party of Brethren took place over non-fundamental issues of doctrine in 1885. The Park St. view of the issues was as follows:

“Mr. Stuart’s teaching failed to recognize the complete termination judicially, in the cross of Christ, of the first man, and the truth that in Christ, God has introduced manhood of an entirely different and heavenly order, in which believers are given part, in the Spirit.

“Mr. Grant, on the other hand, while admitting that in Christianity there was increased light as compared with previous dispensations, taught that the saints in those dispensations had life in the Son, and he put forward views which lowered Christianity to the level of those dispensations”<sup>1</sup>.

The “spiritual” extremists considered these matters grounds for worldwide division between brethren. Ironside, who was for years in the “Grant” fellowship<sup>2</sup>, describes Mr. Grant in the following terms:

“In America F. W. Grant had become by 1880 the leading figure among the exclusive Brethren . . . Many consider him, to this day, the superior of Darby himself in accuracy and spiritual insight, but he always held himself as but a disciple greatly indebted to Mr. Darby. Up to the last, the two were fast friends”<sup>3</sup>.

“F. W. Grant put forth much written ministry, notably ‘Facts and Theories as to the Future State’ which Charles H. Spurgeon said gave ‘the last word on the right side of every question discussed’; the ‘Numerical Structure of Scripture’ and ‘The Numerical Bible’ an exceptionally helpful commentary”<sup>4</sup>.

The “Exclusive” assemblies in North America sided with the “high church” party in 1881. They set out their reason in a document to which Grant was a signatory.

“Our acceptance of the judgment of the Park Street decision is not based on the facts and circumstances connected with it, but upon the ground ‘There is One Body and One Spirit’. This decision we fully receive as having the sanction of the Lord, and therefore must be binding on us, for whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ref. P Page 120.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. H Page 171.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. H Page 99.

<sup>4</sup> Ref. H Page 108.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted Ref. F Pages 78-79.

Grant was to repudiate this later. Brethren in Montreal, Canada, attacked his tract “Life in Christ, and Sealing with the Spirit” in their “Copy of Protest” on 27th November 1884.

“1. Mr. F. W. Grant teaches, ‘That Old Testament saints are “in the Son,” by virtue of being quickened with the life that is in Him; pp. 13, 14 . . .

“2. Mr. Grant teaches, p. 6 line 20, ‘It is maintained in this paper that our place in Christ is the inseparable accompaniment of eternal life in the believer, and his, therefore, from the first moment of quickening . . .

“3. Mr. Grant asserts, page 8, line 12, that Romans 7 is the experience of a saint, already a Christian, already justified, already sealed . . . seeking holiness, power over sin, and fruit for God”<sup>6</sup>.

There is evidence that Grant was himself still seeking light on the whole subject<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless the axe fell.

“The Montreal Brethren formally excommunicated Mr. Grant for heresy on the 4th of January, 1885. They then issued a tract . . . ‘The Assembly gathered to the name of the Lord in Montreal . . . believe the time has come when the only course left is to obey the command of the Apostle given in Titus 3:10: “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject””<sup>8</sup>

The action of this minority party locally<sup>9</sup> gave rise in North America to

“two kinds of exclusives; one known as the Natural History Hall party (from the name of their meeting-place in Montreal), affiliated with the Park Street party in England, and the other known as the Grant party. Approximately three-fourths of the exclusives in Canada and the States refused the Natural History Hall judgment and sided with Mr. Grant, not necessarily endorsing all he taught but protesting against such high-handed methods”<sup>10</sup>.

Neatby and Ironside comment pungently:

“Mr. Grant . . . though substantially a sincere Darbyite . . . sometimes indulged in a little independent speculation; indeed his rejection of London unity should probably have sufficed of itself to arm the Priory cabal for his destruction”<sup>11</sup>.

“Thus the game of ‘playing church’ went ruthlessly on to the scandal of the godly and the delight of the carnal”<sup>12</sup>.

Before studying the “Stuart” Division, meet Mr. Stuart.

“At Cambridge . . . he took his degree of M.A. after gaining one of the earliest of the Tyrwhitt University Scholarships in Hebrew

<sup>6</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 336.

<sup>7</sup> Ref. H Page 100..

<sup>8</sup> Ref. D Page 314.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. D Page 315.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. H Page 108

<sup>11</sup> Ref. D Page 314.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. H Page 108.

. . His earlier writings comprised a book on the sacrifices, ‘Simple Papers on the Church of God’, an article on ‘The Atonement, as Set Forth in the Old Testament’, his ‘Textual Criticism of the New Testament, for English Readers’, and a ‘Review of Robertson Smith’s Lectures on the Old Testament in the Jewish Church’ ”<sup>13</sup>

Stuart, accustomed to precise textual studies, pressed his typical explanations of various details of the Lord’s work on the Cross beyond the point where the New Testament supported them. He held that propitiation was made in heaven rather than on the Cross<sup>14</sup>. The initial attack was concentrated on his tract “Christian Standing and Condition”<sup>15</sup>.

“His offence was that he taught that the ‘standing’ of a Christian is complete through his faith in the Atonement, independently of his personal union with Christ as risen from the dead; that this union is a ‘condition’ of added privilege, and that it had been an error of the Brethren not to distinguish duly between ‘standing’ and ‘condition’. He was attacked with great vehemence by Stoney”<sup>16</sup>. “ ‘Standing’ according to Mr. Stoney was ‘the removal of the first man from under the eye of God’, while ‘condition’ was the Spirit’s work forming Christ within”<sup>17</sup>.

Simply stated, Stoney taught that the Christian possesses all spiritual blessings the moment he has Christ, whereas Stuart taught that some blessings must be entered into. The matter came to a head when the Reading Assembly divided for and against Mr. Stuart. When individuals presented themselves for fellowship elsewhere, London had to judge, but 26 assemblies in London dissented from the judgment<sup>18</sup>

“In New Zealand a goodly number of meetings remained in fellowship with Reading, and one in Brisbane”<sup>19</sup>

The Reading assembly (i.e. Mr. Stuart’s faction) issued this protest on 17th July 1885:

“They do not consider that the charges brought against the company of saints have been proved, but, on the contrary, they feel, to our common shame, that the action of London has been so marked by independency and assumption, and a grave departure from principles clearly set forth in the Word of God”<sup>20</sup>.

Godly brethren in groups cut off by London sought to re-unite, with varying success.

“Those with Mr. Grant in America saw in the high-handed action against C. B. S. a repetition of the Montreal schism and hands were stretched out across the sea to their distressed brethren and

<sup>13</sup> Ref. Y Pages 129-130.

<sup>14</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Pages 445-447.

<sup>15</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 459.

<sup>16</sup> Ref. D Pages 311-312.

<sup>17</sup> Ref. F Page 85.

<sup>18</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 443.

<sup>19</sup> Ref. J mss. Page 8.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 444.

fellowship cemented between them. There was also a desire for inter-communion with the Kelly brethren but differences between W. K. and C. B. S. hindered this; though the American Brethren have always freely received from either of these two parties whenever they presented themselves”<sup>21</sup>

The Stuart section had very little effect on subsequent history. One point of interest centres around Mr. Walter Scott, author of “Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.” He enjoyed fellowship in 1905 with an independent assembly in England of which it was said:

“They require personal proof of soundness before receiving a brother coming from an Exclusive meeting, or, from either Bethesda, or any other meeting”<sup>22</sup>

Scott issued his famous tract “Is the Sword to Devour for Ever?” which closed with the words:

“Let us drop ecclesiastical fetters, leave our respective systems, and gather round once again the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ as at the beginning. Open the doors of your respective assemblies for the free admission of saints”<sup>23</sup>.

Brethren who believed in defilement by association excommunicated Scott, who took a number of assemblies with him<sup>24</sup>.

In 1909 after the Glanton Division (Chapter 8) the Stuart assemblies divided again:

“While most of the Stuarts in England went with the Glantons, most of them in New Zealand refused to do so, with the result that they became separated, and the latter are now known as the New Zealand-Stuart faction”<sup>25</sup>.

Yet another division took place in 1932 over the Raven-type teaching of Mr. James Boyd “that Christ had no human spirit”. This was among the pro-Glanton Stuart Brethren<sup>26</sup>.

But these events are relatively minor. Henceforth we will notice the tendency of the “Brethren Movement” as a whole to crystallize into four groups having approximately these characteristics:

1. Under the mystical teachers, Stoney, Raven and the two Taylors.
2. The “middle exclusive” groups, non-mystical, Kelly-Lowe, Glanton, etc. who hold that associations defile an assembly.
3. The “Open Brethren” who receive all consistent Christians.
4. The “Needed Truth” group with a new basis of fellowship (“obedience to the truth God’s principle of unity”) who are “separated” from all who disagree with them.

<sup>21</sup> Ref. H Pages 115-116.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 489.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted from duplicated copy.

<sup>24</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Pages 448-450.

<sup>25</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 491.

<sup>26</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Pages 493ff.

## Chapter 8.

### RAVEN, MYSTICAL TEACHINGS, AND CONSEQUENT DIVISIONS.

We noticed Dr. Tregelles' warning about incipient denial of our Lord's true humanity amongst speculative teachers in Chapter 4. This chapter deals mainly with the development of what Mr. F. B. Hole (see below) called "Modern Mystical Teachings" in the title of one of his booklets. Here is one of the most solemn warnings from the history of the "Brethren" – error as to our Lord's Person corrupts the society which receives it.

"One of Mr. Stoney's most intimate disciples was Mr. F. E. Raven, an English gentleman, who until his retirement held a position under the government. His mind was even more mystical than that of Stoney, and he was greatly valued as an exponent of the subjective school; but his unguarded utterances soon exposed him to much criticism from the rest"<sup>1</sup>.

The main point of contention was eternal life.

"Eternal life was made a state or condition not a new life imparted. New birth, too, was in order to believe, not through believing. The more Mr. Raven laboured to make his position clear, the more he seemed to involve it in obscurity. Finally, at a large convention in Greenwich in 1890, there was open dissention over it and when some who sided with Mr. Raven went from Greenwich to Bexhill (where there was a very small assembly), their letter of commendation was refused. Bexhill and Ealing assemblies acted together and in June of that year definitely declared Greenwich out of fellowship . . . Park Street . . . exonerated F. E. R. and refused Bexhill's action as schismatic"<sup>2</sup>.

The sort of thing Raven taught is illustrated by this extract from a reading in Canada in 1898:

"It used to be commonly said, I know that I have got eternal life. Why? Because the scripture says 'He that believeth hath everlasting life'. I say you have thus the faith of eternal life, but that does not prove that you have the thing itself"<sup>3</sup>.

And, concerning our Lord, in 1899:

"We shall not know Him as Lord in heaven, we shall know Him as Head"<sup>4</sup>.

"Strife waxed furious, not only in England, but in France and Switzerland, in America . . . (in England) I believe Mr. Raven

<sup>1</sup> Ref. H Page 125.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. H Page 129.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted Ref. T Page 14.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted Ref. T Page 36.

obtained a large majority, but the Continental possessions were lost. I have heard of a certain amount of Ravenism in France . . . while French-speaking Switzerland was gone, I am informed, almost solid against Mr. Raven. This indeed was only what might have been expected; for Mr. Raven's leading opponents were the two men whose influence was paramount with the Darbyites of the Continent. I refer to Major McCarthy and Mr. William Lowe"<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Rule states that "there were not many in Australia who seceded"<sup>6</sup>. This accounts for the relative strength of the ecclesiastical descendants of Raven (the Taylor faction) in Australia today. Here is another statement of Raven's serious errors:

"All this theory, imaginative theory (without any true Scripture support), has ended by substituting, for the well-tested centuries-old orthodox 'formula', viz. 'God and Man one Christ', Mr. Raven's own 'formula,' which never came out more plainly before as it did at a reading meeting with his adherents at Quemerford in 1895, where Mr. Raven, in stating his objection to the phrase 'The unity of the Person of Christ', expressed his formula as, 'In Person He is God; in condition He is Man'<sup>7</sup>.

The Raven teaching resembles the ancient errors of Apollinarius (the Word assumed flesh, rather than "the Word became flesh") and Eutyches (Christ's divine and human natures confused). Raven said:

"Mr. G. appears to me to be in great ignorance of the true moral character of Christ's humanity. He did not get that character by being made of a woman, though that was the way in which He took man's form, but Manhood in Him takes its character from what He ever was divinely"<sup>8</sup>.

As the leaven of corruption spread, the love of souls lessened.

"A tendency already referred to, which made itself powerfully felt in Mr. Darby's time, and to which he opposed his vast influence with only partial success, seems now to be asserting itself triumphantly on all hands amongst the Ravenites. I refer to the tendency to discountenance and to suppress all energetic evangelistic action"<sup>9</sup>.

The truth of this assertion, which was made in 1902, became obvious when world-wide division was forced following the action of the assembly at Glanton in England in receiving ex-members of the nearby Alnwick assembly. There had been trouble at Alnwick for years, wrongly forced but impossible to rectify.

"A joint meeting of the Glanton and other Assemblies in the district was held to consider the matter and see what could be done. In the

<sup>5</sup> Ref. D Page 316.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. I niss Page 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 545.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. D Page 317.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. D Page 321.



judgment of these Assemblies the rupture on 1st January 1905, resulted in the complete dissolution of the Alnwick Assembly. The meeting prayerfully and anxiously considered what should be their attitude to the believers from both parties in Alnwick, who were now truly repentant and reconciled to each other. In view of the fact that all efforts at healing had been unavailing they judged it to be the Lord's will and for His glory that such repentant believers should one by one be received after careful enquiry by the Glanton or other assembly to which they applied"<sup>10</sup>.

There was disagreement everywhere as to the rightness of the action of the brethren at Glanton. Mr. Rule of the Glanton party wrote:

"The agitation went on until in July 1908 a number of Saints in Edinburgh 'stood aside' in protest against Glanton's action and immediately broke bread together thus making Glanton's action a test of fellowship. A month later a sister was commended to London from this meeting, and London brethren decided to fellowship the new meeting at Edinburgh, and thus they cut off Glanton and all who could not see with them that Glanton had transgressed Scriptural principles"<sup>11</sup>

London decided, among other things, on 6th September 1908:

"We feel that there is no other course open to us than to refuse fellowship with those who have thus, in our judgment, dishonoured Christ, by usurping His authority"<sup>12</sup>.

i.e., by not letting Alnwick sort things out for themselves! This was scarcely ground for widespread division; the true issue lay deeper:

"There has been something wrong with the body corporate, and the controversy on Glanton's action is the boil on the surface which shows that the constitution is affected. For several years there has been, as is well known, a divided spirit amongst those walking together outwardly. On one hand were those whose energies and affections found vent more in the direction of the testimony of the gospel to the unsaved and fervent desire for their salvation. On the other hand were those before whose minds that which pertained to the church – its privileges, its blessings, its destiny – loomed much more distinctly, while points of ecclesiastical procedure held great sway. Each perhaps thought, though they would scarcely say it, they could do without the other"<sup>13</sup>.

Mr. J. T. Mawson and others put the Glanton side of the case clearly to assemblies in Australia and New Zealand:

"London brethren charged Glanton with ignoring the principle of

<sup>10</sup> Ref. F Page 90.

<sup>11</sup> Ref. J mss Page 10.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 584.

<sup>13</sup> Ref. Q (typescript) Page 17.

‘local responsibility’ because they felt their responsibility as to Alnwick . . . This side of the matter seemed to be of small moment to London brethren, so obsessed were they with their own artificial and arbitrary interpretation of this much talked of principle, and they afterwards received without confession those brethren whose action had broken up the meeting in the first place”<sup>14</sup>.

As a result there are Glanton Assemblies in Australian capital cities. These have not judged Raven’s errors corporately, but the separation in 1908 was a tacit separation from the mystical teachers as well. Even so, suspicion on this point is the main hindrance to reunion with other non-mystical groups.

Glanton Brethren include many who are sympathetic to the open position, with the result that there have been several secessions. A typical one occurred in 1938. The opposing factions were headed up by English assemblies at Kingsland (open) and Peckham (traditional). The Glanton view is expressed by Mr. Hamilton Smith:

“Very especially they have refused rightly any intercommunion with the Open Brethren system of meetings, seeing that such meetings are all the more dangerous to those seeking to walk in the truth of Christ and the Church, inasmuch as in many ways they approximate to the ground of gathering, by their professed separation from the sects, though by their open reception and independency of meetings, they are as a whole marked by lawlessness and lack of discipline”<sup>15</sup>.

Both Kingsland and Peckham are represented by assemblies in Australia, each with a bookroom in Sydney. The leading teacher of the Kingsland party was Mr. F. B. Hole, whose writings the present writer regards as sound and edifying:

“In the light of Scripture we are persuaded that the only path approved of God for the last days of any dispensation is the return as far as possible to the original principles and practice which characterized the dispensation at the outset”<sup>16</sup>.

Grounds for opposition to reunion with other exclusive groups was expressed recently by Mr. Charles Hendricks:

“The ‘Glanton’ brethren . . . have in the main acted similarly to ‘Bethesda’, i.e. they have treated the evil of F. E. R’s teachings with indifference . . . We have been told that no ‘Glanton’ brethren living today hold to what Raven taught. If this be so, and we most earnestly hope that it is, then they should have little difficulty in clearing themselves from their past evil associations by confession and separation from the iniquity”<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 2 Pages 585-586.

<sup>15</sup> “What Is At Stake” (typescript) Page 1.

<sup>16</sup> “Assembly Principles” Page 16.

<sup>17</sup> “The Ecumenical Movement Among Brethren” (1963) (typescript) Page 7

## Chapter 9.

### GRANT-OPEN AND KELLY-LOWE REUNIONS.

Americans are friendly men. Prior to 1894:

“There developed among the so-called Grant Exclusives an uneasy feeling that their attitude toward Open Brethren was not entirely consistent with the position they themselves had been forced into through the operation of tyrannous ecclesiastical principles unwarranted by Scripture. Evangelists and teachers moving about among assemblies frequently came in contact with Christians from the Open meetings whose piety and general soundness in the faith they could not but recognize as being of a high order. Was it right to go on treating such as wicked persons because they were supposed to be identified by association with something that had occurred in a distant land over forty years ago?”<sup>1</sup>

Over 1,000 brethren, both “Open” and “Grant” met at Plainfield, New Jersey, U.S.A.<sup>2</sup>. The finding was:

“The ‘Letter of the Ten’ has been, from the time when it was put forth to the present, a main hindrance to communion”<sup>3</sup>

Every effort was made to show that the “Letter of the Ten” did not truly represent the “Open” position. Mr. Wright wrote from Bristol:

‘The ground on which we receive to the Lord’s table is, soundness in the faith, and consistency of life of the individual believer. We should not refuse to receive one who we had reason to believe was personally sound in the faith and consistent in life merely because he, or she, was in fellowship with a body of Christians who would allow Mr. Newton to minister among them’<sup>4</sup>.

Mr. John James summed up the main point at issue – associations and their effect.

“The whole question as to fellowship and separation from evil lies in this – the state of the heart. Do I, in my heart, condone evil or not? . . . It is not a question of physical separation, but spiritual”<sup>5</sup>.

But the “Pittsburgh-Dunkirk Circular” of July 1894 hindered reunion.

“The original cause of the whole trouble has never been judged by Bethesda. There have been denials from individuals that the meaning put on the ‘Letter of the Ten’ was ever intended, but Bethesda herself has never spoken as to it, never judged nor withdrawn that

<sup>1</sup> Ref. H Page 145.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. H Page 147.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 361.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 364.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 365.

which has deeply wounded the consciences of multitudes of God's people"<sup>6</sup>.

"Division and dissension spread throughout most of the Canadian and American assemblies. When the clouds had somewhat cleared there was a new party to be reckoned with, known as the 'Independents' who . . . have ever since sought to keep their doors open to Exclusives or Opens alike"<sup>7</sup>.

The end of the story of the Grant meetings is a happy one. Mr. A. G. Knox of Sydney stated to the writer:

"In 1932 practically the whole of the Grant Party went over completely to the O.B. position . . . you have only to study the Emmaus Correspondence Courses that first came out to note that they were the work of ex-'Grant' brethren (specially 'Church Truth')"<sup>8</sup>

"The section of brethren known as the 'Grant Party' renounced the sectarian circle of fellowship principle and opened their doors to full fellowship with those known as 'Open Brethren' "<sup>9</sup>.

"The local assembly will also acknowledge, on the principle of the unity of the body, all other local assemblies gathered in the same way, each assembly being but one of many expressions of an absolute unity – which includes the entire body of Christ"<sup>10</sup>.

"There remains on the West Coast of U.S.A. a tiny section of the Grant Brethren still adhering to the party system. They are known as the Grant-Glanton Brethren. Mr. A. E. Booth was perhaps the ablest teacher among them"<sup>11</sup>

We examine briefly the history of the "Kelly Exclusives" after 1881.

"During all these convulsions Mr. Kelly's followers enjoyed a comparative tranquillity. There were indeed some important defections to the Open Brethren, and elsewhere; but for nearly twenty years there was no disruption, nor any new doctrinal vagaries of consequence. This immunity was doubtless due to the happy survival of the great chief of the party"<sup>12</sup>.

There was no substantial change until the reunion of 1926. Look now at the meetings which refused Raven in 1890. Their best-known teacher was W. J. Lowe, who

"served the Lord with remarkable energy and faithfulness for more than sixty years. He travelled and laboured in His service incessantly, and was well known in the gatherings in Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Spain and Switzerland, not a few of which were the fruit of his own ministry"<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 364..

<sup>7</sup> Ref. H Page 170.

<sup>8</sup> Private communication.

<sup>9</sup> "Help and Food" Dec. 1936 Page 500.

<sup>10</sup> "Help and Food" Nov. 1936 Page 438

<sup>11</sup> A. G. Knox, private communication.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. D Pages 323-324.

<sup>13</sup> Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 123.

A division in the Lowe assemblies occurred in 1909 (not 1906 as Ironside states below, though his remaining facts seem correct <sup>14</sup>).

“The Bexhill party was also divided in 1906 over a question of the jurisdiction of an assembly in regard to silencing a teacher whose ministry was considered unprofitable in Tunbridge Wells and was enjoyed in Acton, England. The one assembly declared the man unfit either to minister or to break bread – the other endorsed him fully – and assemblies everywhere in the Bexhill fellowship were called to side with one or the other”<sup>15</sup>.

Such highhandedness set the stage for no less than four subsequent divisions in the history of the “Tunbridge Wells” assemblies<sup>6</sup>. Subsequently, however, there has been a clear-cut trend to union among the “Exclusive” groups which refused the ecclesiastical pretensions of the Raven assemblies (and their doctrinal novelties) on the one hand, and hold to the notion of defilement by association on the other. The oft-quoted basis is as follows:

“ ‘Association – As to reception and discipline we refuse such principles as leave the door open to evil; thus seeking to preserve the sanctity of God’s House’ ” (against Open Brethren).

“ ‘Congregationalism – Which makes assemblies independent of each other we refuse, as it practically denies the unity of the Body of Christ, reducing the corporate testimony to that of the mere local assembly, or even to that of the individual’ ” (against Open Brethren).

“ ‘Ecclesiasticism – Which unduly exalts assembly action we should guard against. We acknowledge the Lord’s authority by His Word to which the assembly as well as the individual is to be subject’ ” (against the Raven and later the Taylor faction).

“ ‘Liberty of Ministry – We recognise both within and without the assembly, while fellowship and counsel as to it should be regarded, since we are members one of another’ ”<sup>17</sup>

A prime example of this was the “Kelly-Lowe” reunion of 1926. These quotations from relevant correspondence show the spirit of the time:

“The fact of our divided condition is a proof that the Lord has had, and has, a serious controversy with us as to our moral and spiritual state”<sup>18</sup>.

“ . . . meetings for humiliation, prayer and conference, have been held at Clarendon Room, London by brethren who have been walking as separate companies since 1881. We have been together, not seeking to apportion the blame for that division, but rather to humble ourselves before the Lord . . . We came together, not to make terms

<sup>14</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 640.

<sup>15</sup> Ref. H Page 131.

<sup>16</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Pages 655, 684, 6’, 701.

<sup>17</sup> Ref. J mss Page 13.

<sup>18</sup> Letter quoted Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 747.

or find some formula that would unite us, but waiting upon our faithful God for guidance. We, therefore, desire to express our feeling that there is no godly hindrance to our freely and happily receiving from, and commending to one another, as has already been the case in several places”<sup>19</sup>

We rejoice in this but yearn for a wider view allround. Brethren who “meet on the ground of the unity of the one body of Christ, the Church of God on earth”<sup>20</sup> should surely wish to have all who will be in that body in heaven, in fellowship with them on earth, while at the same time guarding their own sphere of responsibility from evil.

A forced union between “Kelly-Lowe” and “Open” assemblies took place in 1937 under Hitler. “Meetings of the ‘Christian assembly’ gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, were forbidden in Germany”<sup>21</sup>. Christians not members of major denominations were organized as “the Union of Free Christians”<sup>22</sup>. Members had to “render an unqualified obedience to the State”<sup>23</sup>. “It is clear that by this scheme the assemblies are placed under the full political control of the State”<sup>24</sup>. Hundreds of assemblies joined; many held off:

“However that may be, the act was not the reunion of two companies long separated, as it was represented by some. The fact is rather that two apostate portions of those companies had come to stand side by side under the shadow of State sufferance”<sup>25</sup>.

Reunion with Stuart Brethren (now numerically insignificant) is steadfastly opposed.

“As we have already written, we believe the Stuart doctrine as to propitiation to be fundamental error, and it follows that if obedient to the Word we cannot receive any holding that doctrine or in association with those who do”<sup>26</sup>.

What force sustains division? The very thing the “Brethren Movement” repudiates – human leadership!

“Divided though the Brethren became, it has generally been leaders who have kept the sheep in the various separate corrals. Left to themselves they would soon flock around the one Shepherd”<sup>27</sup>.

The lesson from all the foregoing is this – when hearts are warmed with the love of Christ on the one hand, and the shadow of the great world church lengthens on the other, wider reunions will be possible. We thank God that there will be but one Leader in Glory, and nothing can prevent happy reunion there.

<sup>19</sup> “Letter issued by the General Meeting” quoted Ref. E Vol. 2 Pages 766-767.

<sup>20</sup> Ref. E Vol 2 Page 772.

<sup>21-25</sup> respectively: W. J. Hocking, “Assembly Affairs in Germany (1937)” p 1, 11, 10, 12, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Circular by W. F. Knapp from London, 30th January 1948.

<sup>27</sup> Ref. H Page 145.

## Chapter 10.

### “THE DARKEST BLOT ON THE HISTORY OF THE BRETHERN.”

This chapter examines the rise of “Taylorism”. “Taylorism” is the result of two trends already noted – centralized dictatorial leadership, and the search for “new light” as evidence that one is “spiritual”. Its history is presumed by its historian to be

“the way the Lord has taken, since the beginning of the eighteenth century, to recover the truth of the assembly given to the apostle Paul”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Cole described the seed of this in his “Reminiscences of the Plymouth Meeting of ‘Brethren’”:

“I asked him (Darby) what spiritual authority there was for cutting off a whole assembly of God’s people. He replied to the effect, ‘I grant there is none. But if some Godly men meet together to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they may expect that guidance, although there be no scripture whatever for the course they consider they have been led to take’<sup>2</sup>.”

A brother was excommunicated during a row in the Darby camp in 1860, and:

“the Walworth brethren asked of the Priory, ‘What sin or sins, of an excommunicable character’ Mr. Stewart had committed. The answer was, that they were ‘of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture’”<sup>3</sup>

This dangerous principle developed until:

“Printed reports of meetings show that they now speak of an ‘accredited ministry’, of ‘approved ministry’, of this ministry carrying the Lord’s authority, that such ministry does not need to be confirmed by Scripture. The ‘accrediting’ seems to be that the ministry has been given in the ‘temple,’ that is, the assembly viewed as the place of the presence of God, and has been generally accepted. So high is ministry ranked that one of the chief leaders, at a Bible reading at their chief centre in England, Park Street, Islington, on March 21st, 1954, spoke as follows:

“Some people will not accept the fact that they cannot get everything by Scripture themselves. We must get things from a man of God . . . I have met people who will not accept any thought except

<sup>1</sup> Ref. P Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted Ref. W Page 329.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. D Page 224.

one which they see for themselves in the Scriptures . . . Take the “token”; many sisters and brothers cannot understand this. It is enough for me that a man of God opened it out. I cannot understand the Greek; I must be subject to the man of God; he is the vessel of the Spirit . . . I am not capable of myself of understanding Scripture without the teaching of the Holy Spirit and the man of God”<sup>4</sup>

Powerful personalities gained control.

“As early as 1897, it could be seen that Mr. James Taylor, of New York, was destined to become one of the leading teachers of the Raven party . . . he came to be regarded somewhat as a second F. E. Raven, and, upon the death of Mr. Raven (1905) as his successor . . . his rise to the leadership of a large section of the brethren was very rapid and spectacular”<sup>5</sup>.

Each step forward in tyranny caused secessions, strengthening the residue in its fanaticism.

“So in the year 1920 some 20 or 25 meetings that agreed with Mr. Giles and refused the new teaching, went out, Mr. Giles along with them; to continue together in what they had before believed and accepted”<sup>6</sup>.

A period of controversy with fearful scattering (rather than division) began in 1929 over what Napoleon Noel called “The Darkest Blot in the History of the Brethren”<sup>7</sup>. In the famous Barnet Readings, Taylor

“advanced the opinion that the relationship of Father and Son did not, as far as we know, exist in the Godhead before Christ became incarnate. This met with opposition, and there were many secessions. To arrest this the position was taken that the dogma should not be pressed as essential and the orthodox view might be held. But by the great majority it was accepted and often spoken of as ‘new light’. If James Taylor or others really thought it ‘new light’ they were either ignorant of early church history or allowed their followers to be misled. The idea was taught as early as the third or fourth centuries by followers of the heretic Sabellius”<sup>8</sup>.

Various writers made obvious comments.

“This puts these meetings entirely off the ground of the early Brethren who considered a true confession of Christ the very first consideration”<sup>9</sup>

“It is of interest that Taylor, and those who accepted his teaching, had on this subject to throw over the great Exclusive teachers, such as Darby, Kelly, Bellett, Grant and Raven, who all wrote against the view. Darby was emphatic: ‘It is of immense import, because

<sup>4</sup> Ref. L Pages 72-73.

<sup>5</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 590.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 598.

<sup>7</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 607.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. L Page 66.

<sup>9</sup> Ref. H Page 131.



I have not the Father's love sending the Son out of heaven, if I have Him not as Son before born into the world' (Coll. Writ., Vol. XXX, 340)<sup>10</sup>

Novelties such as the absence of Christ from the assembly prior to the breaking of the bread<sup>11</sup>, and an elaborate system of address to the various Persons of the Trinity at the Lord's Supper<sup>12</sup>, appeared. This caused difficulties in 1950.

James Taylor Senior died in 1953 and for a time the succession was in doubt. The choice narrowed down to his son, James Taylor Junior, and Mr. G. R. Cowell of London, until at meetings in London in 1959:

"the question of associations came up. There were many professional men and women amongst us, doctors, chemists, nurses etc. who by government decree had to be registered to practise. Mr. Cowell said yes, it is necessary to be free of associations, but let it be done in a decent and orderly way. Mr. Taylor insisted, in an authoritative kind of way, that they must leave at once . . . if Mr. Cowell had been minded to force a division, 90% of the brethren would have gone with him. All this resulted in a period of controversy, which resulted in Mr. Cowell and his wife being 'withdrawn from'"<sup>13</sup>

Then "Mr. Taylor assumed a kind of dictatorship"<sup>13</sup> with terrible results. Mr. C. L. Nunnerley wrote:

"The teaching that all believers should drink alcoholic beverages to prove their Christian liberty has caused many to drink intoxicants with dire results"<sup>14</sup>.

"Much is made, rightly so, of the Spirit's present voice to the assembly, but this is now being identified in brethren's minds with the voice of one man and, combined with the conception of 'authoritative ministry,' has resulted in ministry being given an equal or even greater authority, than the written word of God, thus weakening the latter's absolute authority over the conscience and the soul"<sup>14</sup>.

Australians were astonished at the scandalous reports in their daily papers in 1961 and 1962 about the Taylor assemblies. Some headlines: "Sect Breaks Up Home – Three Girls Ordered to Drink" (2/4/62); "Brethren or Job is their Choice" (6/7/62); "Sect Holds Its Sin Inquisition in Public" (24/4/61); "My Wife is a Robot 'The Brethren Stole Her' Reunion a Farce Says Father" (5/8/62); " 'Families Split' by Edict of Sect's Leader" (8/4/61); "Sect Fight – Husband (T.V. fan) loses his wife, the children and the furniture" (29/2/62)<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. L Page 67.

<sup>11</sup> Ref. P Page 228.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. P Page 229 and Ref. L Page 71.

<sup>13</sup> Article "New Life" (Melb.) 20/4/61

<sup>14</sup> "Recent Developments" (typescript)

<sup>15</sup> Sydney Daily Newspapers.

The Open Assemblies issued a public denial of any link with this, on 17th August 1962:

“Not for more than 100 years have Christian Brethren (frequently known as ‘Open Brethren’) had any association whatsoever with Exclusive Brethren (Associated with James Taylor, Jnr.)”<sup>16</sup>

Other oddities became public knowledge later: “Sect Tells Members to Get Rid of Pets” (7/2/64); “400 Told to ‘Move to City’ – Shock to Brethren” (1/11/63)<sup>15</sup>. The result has been a spate of breakaways throughout Australia, each one seeking to put the clock back to some date (usually 1961) which is decided on the basis that everything taught until that date is acceptable. For example (30th March 1961):

“In nearly all the meetings in Germany there is a great depression. By far the most of the brethren doubt that today’s ministry is confirmed by the Lord, and it seems that the wave of division has now reached Germany, too . . . consciences of the brethren are disregarded, and only present ministry counts and has to be followed blindly and obediently”<sup>17</sup>.

A tract “Whither Bound” published in Melbourne in 1962 lists forty astonishing abuses. One of the worst features is the deception which is practised.

“Mr. B. Hales, of Firth Avenue, Strathfield, a management consultant, was described by the ex-members as the recognised leader of the Australian Brethren. Mr. Hales said last night: ‘I have no comment to make. I am not a leader. The Brethren have no leaders’”<sup>18</sup>

Concerning Taylor himself:

“Beloved brethren have been excommunicated for saying what you yourself dishonestly and for appearance sake now say”<sup>19</sup>

“Mr. Jim is now ministering that nowhere has he taught that husbands are to leave wives etc., but then, as you say, NO ONE BELIEVES HIM IN ANY WAY”<sup>20</sup>.

All this goes hand in hand with teaching on perfectionism.

“It was said that there were certain persons who were examples of absolute sinlessness in walk. Bruce Hales and John Hales were put forward as examples, and of course Jim Taylor had never been known to fail”<sup>21</sup>.

All this is incredible and almost defies belief. The decay began with

<sup>16</sup> Melbourne “Sun”.

<sup>17</sup> Letter of Ernest Beck to James Taylor Junr. (typescript).

<sup>18</sup> “Sydney Morning Herald” 16/4/61.

<sup>19</sup> Ref. U Vol. 2 Page 49.

<sup>20</sup> Ref. U Vol. 2 Page 143.

<sup>21</sup> Letter of John Wood (Melbourne) to E.J.H. 25/7/6 1 (typescript).

error as to our Lord's Person, and inevitably spread to other areas. Why do true believers remain in the system? The writer notes several reasons. There is no Gospel preaching, so growth is by natural increase, and to leave means to sever all family ties. Brethren are linked together in business so that to leave may mean financial ruin. There is almost complete ignorance of what the assembly according to Scripture is really like, so where would a seceder plan to go?

Pray for poor souls enslaved by Taylorism, and flee from trends yet manifest elsewhere, which lead to it.

## Chapter 11.

### THE “OPEN BRETHREN” AFTER 1848.

Chapter 6 described the rapid growth of the “Open Brethren” after 1848, particularly during the 1859 Revival. The missionary emphasis of 1829 with its dependence upon God alone to supply needs continued.

“But before Hudson Taylor, through the China Inland Mission, had set the example in this better way of working, a number of Godly men and women had already found a still better method, that of the Lord and His apostles, and had gone forth in actual dependence upon God for both leading and support. And alongside the development of faith missions there has continually increased a flow of workers of this other order, and the work God has done through them is truly marvellous. Lord Radstock and Dr. Baedaker began that testimony which greatly stimulated the vast Stundist movement in Greek Orthodox Russia . . . F. S. Arnott pioneered vast unknown tracts of Central Africa, and hundreds of churches and thousands of Christians from the heathen testify to the blessing of God. In India, China, the Americas and Europe, in other parts of Africa and elsewhere such servants of the Lord have gone, and the grace of God has been with them in great power”<sup>1</sup>

Some typical developments are:

“In 1850 workers commenced to serve the Lord among the Red Indians in Nova Scotia, and in 1859 a beginning was made in Malaya by Mr. John Chapman from Bristol, who was followed by many others”<sup>2</sup>.

“About the same time considerable interest was aroused in this country (England) in the work going on in Italy. A change of Government in 1857 ushered in a period of religious liberty so that Count Guicciardini and Signor Rossetti had been able to return from exile in this country. Mainly as a result of their ministry many evangelists were raised up and assemblies formed, particularly in North Italy”<sup>2</sup>.

Central organization for missionary publicity and handling of funds was inevitable:

“In 1872 Dr. J. L. MacLean and Mr. Henry Groves commenced the work which has now become familiarly known as ‘Echoes of Service’. The original objects of the editors . . . were . . .

<sup>1</sup> Ref. W Pages 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. CC Page 8.

“ ‘Fellowship in the Gospel’ and in spreading the knowledge of the Lord in other lands’”<sup>3</sup>

Some have pointed out the apparent departure from first principles:

“There is a real power in organization; in magazines which make workers and their needs known to benevolent hearts; in lists of workers which give information about them; in large funds announcing their income and distribution. No one questions that such methods have power to serve certain ends; but they do not demand a persistent, energetic, direct faith in a living God . . . From these methods men like Groves and Muller deliberately turned, so as to give to the disbelieving world and an unbelieving church a fresh proof of the reality and faithfulness of God and the power and sufficiency of prayer and faith”<sup>4</sup>.

The work increased nonetheless.

“In 1881 a youth, F. S. Arnott, left Scotland for South Africa, whence he took the long and most trying journey to the Upper Zambezi . . . as a result of the labours of Arnott and other pioneers, missionaries from assemblies became responsible for evangelizing an immense territory of 350,000 square miles. Today the number of missionaries . . . is 305, and . . . about 350 assemblies have been established, with 22,500 believers in fellowship”<sup>5</sup>

“The interest of assemblies has extended also to South America. A commencement was made in the Argentine by J. H. L. Ewen in 1882; he was followed by W. C. K. Torre and Will Payne in 1890 . . . Today there are about seventy-five assemblies in the Greater Buenos Aires area alone, and probably about 300 in the whole of the Argentine”<sup>6</sup>.

“In 1883 a beginning was made in Algeria”<sup>6</sup>.

“In 1885 the first workers from assemblies went to China to the Kiangso province, and in 1888 and 1898 work was opened up in the Shantung and Manchukuo areas respectively. In 1936 there were no fewer than ninety workers from assemblies in China”<sup>7</sup>.

Notice in passing that the famous “Lammermuir” party of the China Inland Mission sailed in 1866, and one hundred workers went out with C.I.M. in 1888 alone.

“In 1902 God opened a new door of opportunity in the little known country of Laos, French Indo-China; but disease brought early disaster and premature death upon the heroic little band that attempted to place the banner of the cross there”<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. CC Page 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ref. W Page 275.

<sup>5</sup> Ref. CC Page 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. CC Page 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ref. CC Page 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. BB Page 62.

The state of “Open Brethren” missionary activity in 1958 was:

“Today there are at least 1,155 missionaries whose names are listed in ‘Echoes of Service’ Prayer List working in sixty-four distinct areas”<sup>9</sup>

Sad to say, the corresponding figures ten years later are only slightly higher.

From time to time training institutions have been established.

“The Brooklyn Training School for Missionaries . . . has been commenced at 393-395 Third Street, Brooklyn, New York. It is now two years ago (1917) since this School was instituted, and the spiritual success that has attended it has surprised its promoters, and surpassed their highest expectations. Some of the students are already at their posts in foreign lands; others are almost ready to proceed; and many new students are awaiting admission. Only those are accepted in the School who are commended for work in the mission field by their local assembly”<sup>10</sup>.

“Open Brethren” have Bible Schools in various lands – at least one in England, one in Australia, one in Germany, one in Switzerland, one in New Zealand and three in the United States of America.

What is the overall position? The writer has no desire to “number the people” in order to take pride in the position. The following statements are made objectively as a part of a history.

“Whitaker’s Almanac, London 1935, which gives no statistics on this subject later than 1929, says: ‘The Brethren in the British Isles number about 80,000, of whom, five-eighths belong to the “Open” body’”<sup>11</sup>

There is evidence that in many countries of the world including Russia and China there are thousands of meetings of Christians of “Brethren” pattern brought into being by the Holy Spirit independently<sup>12</sup>. These figures deal only with “affiliated” assemblies:

“Assemblies. About 1,000 in the British Isles and more than 10,000 scattered in almost every country in the world”<sup>13</sup>.

Australia has 260 “Open” assemblies with about 12,000 in fellowship and eighty missionaries on the overseas field. New Zealand has 250 “Open” assemblies with 25,000 in fellowship and 185 missionaries overseas. North America has about 1,200 assemblies and about 400 missionaries. The majority of “Open Brethren” overseas missionaries are from United Kingdom assemblies<sup>14</sup>. Dr. F. F. Bruce states:

“The Brethren have always manifested a supreme lack of interest

<sup>9</sup> Ref. CC Page 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. BB Page 73.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 735.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. E Vol. 2 Page 735.

<sup>13</sup> “A Concise Statement Concerning ‘The Brethren,’ ‘The Witness’ 1940.

<sup>14</sup> “World Survey,” Cohn Tilsley, typescript.

in their numerical strength. Their numbers are difficult to assess, partly because no precise statistics are available and partly because there is no hard-and-fast line of demarcation between Brethren assemblies and other independent evangelical churches. A common estimate of their strength in Great Britain and Ireland is 100,000; but this is at best approximate”<sup>15</sup>.

Church historian Dr. J. Edwin Orr sums up “Open Brethren” history from an “outsider’s” viewpoint:

“It appears to any neutral observer of Brethren divisions that the Open Brethren, the truly open, were the inheritors of Brethren first truths and practices. Not only were they loyal to the ideas that motivated the first meetings, but they were fully committed to their significant evangelical programme of evangelism and missions. Their influence grew out of all proportion to their own numerical strength, and they influenced greatly even the Evangelical party within the Church of England, and parties in many denominations. “In practical matters, the Christian Brethren co-operated in assuredly evangelical enterprises, evangelism, revival, missions and philanthropy. They consistently remained evangelical in doctrine”<sup>16</sup>.

What of the future? It is a matter of observation that the prophetic vision amongst “Open Brethren” is largely lost, and unworldliness has given way to materialism; even so, some sense of mission remains:

“The winds of change are blowing. Other men are binding us, and carrying us whither we would not. Shall we pray that in this eleventh hour the Holy Spirit will yet embolden us to be large enough, and bold enough, and our vision clear enough, to grasp the will of our great God, and serve our fellow men? We bring to that service ‘THE FOUR FREEDOMS OF THE BRETHREN’

“The freedom of the Word of God in my thinking.

“The freedom of the Lord Christ in my living.

“The freedom of the Spirit in my worship and service.

“The freedom of the whole Church in my fellowship.”<sup>17</sup>

Allowing for restrictive thinking discussed in the final chapter, this more or less sums up the “Open Brethren” or “Christian Brethren” position and purpose for the present day.

<sup>15</sup> “Who Are the Brethren?” (pamphlet).

<sup>16</sup> Ref. C Page 94.

<sup>17</sup> F. Roy Coad, “The Message of Brethren in the Church Universal” C.B.R.F. May 1963.

## Chapter 12.

### “NEEDED TRUTH.”

Some brethren in “Open” assemblies in the late nineteenth century felt that both “Open Brethrenism” and “Exclusivism” had failed. Their arguments gave rise to a new party.

“But now having seen how rigid Exclusivism has utterly failed to do the very thing it was supposed to effect: that is, to enable believers to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, it may be well to ask: Has Open Brethrenism fared any better? The answer may be both Yes and No.

“Yes – for no such worldwide divisions have taken place among these assemblies as among the Exclusive Brethren. No – because actual organic unity is as far from being manifested among the Open Meetings as among the Exclusives”<sup>1</sup>.

Is “organic unity” necessary? It requires “recognition of assemblies” but the Scriptural emphasis is rather on “recognition of believers”. None-the less, a solution was sought in another direction.

“The unsatisfactory condition of the Open Meetings, and the irregularities disclosed . . . naturally led to much searching of the Scriptures and of men’s hearts relative to what they learnt from them. The system was one of utter confusion to anyone seeking order in the things of God, with the knowledge that God is at all times a God of order . . . this exercise was apparent as early as the year 1876”<sup>2</sup>

“This was the beginning of a new departure akin to the ‘Exclusivism’ of J. N. Darby, but conducted on other lines, supported by a different set of arguments, and backed up by reference to different passages of Scripture. This teaching bore the same fruit among ‘Open’ Brethren as among ‘Exclusive’ Brethren”<sup>3</sup>.

The first actual breakaway took place in Melbourne over a question of reception to the Lord’s Table<sup>4</sup>:

“The split among brethren took place in May 1883 (the source of this information is from notes of addresses given by Mr. John Hopkins)”<sup>5</sup>

The main division took place in the United Kingdom in 1893. The views which caused it appeared in the paper “Needed Truth” after 1888.

<sup>1</sup> Ref. H Page 134.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. I Page 38.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. F Page 96.

<sup>4</sup> Notes of Eyewitness (typescript).

<sup>5</sup> Private communication to writer.



“These new ‘Exclusive’ views were plausibly and persistently propagated in a periodical called ‘Needed Truth,’ which gave the title to the disruption. They emphasised the distinction between ‘the Church’ which is the Body of Christ, composed of all believers, and ‘the Church of God’ as ‘the Fellowship’ (Acts 2:42). The House of God, the Assembly of the Living God, was made up, as they asserted, only of believers who were in the confederacy or circle of Assemblies which accepted ‘Needed Truth’ doctrine”<sup>6</sup>.

“It has been said by many well-meaning but ill-informed brethren, that the brethren who left the Open meetings at the separation of 1893 should have remained where they were and put things right. The desire is a worthy one, but it manifests complete failure to grasp the issues that were at stake in the separation. The fact was that Brethrenism rested on a false foundation”<sup>7</sup>.

The Australian breakaway group was regarded as independent by the “Needed Truth” leaders<sup>8</sup>.

“In 1898 Mr. R. T. H. wrote ‘Occasional Papers’ . . . No. 2, in which he denounced the teachings and practices of certain restrictive aspects of N. T. doctrine”<sup>9</sup>

The long sought-after reunion with “Open” assemblies took place in 1961 in Melbourne after intercommunion for a number of years.

“Needed Truth” maintains its “separate” existence. The main difference between “Needed Truth” and “Exclusive” ideas concerns overseership.

“In contrast to ‘Exclusive’ brethren, the ‘Needed Truth’ leaders laid great stress on the Elderhood. They had different grades of elders: (1) Elders of Israel, with ‘an oversight that was national and comprehensive,’ (2) ‘Elders of the Assembly, whose oversight was congregational’; and (3) ‘Elders of the City, whose concern was local’. They regarded an organised elderhood as the panacea for all Assembly difficulties”<sup>10</sup>.

The Adversary proved equal to this development. This issue arose in 1904:

“Who should deal with an offending elder? Should the local assembly, as represented by the local ‘Oversight,’ or should the County Oversight, or the Oversight of the district?”<sup>11</sup>.

The conference called to decide the matter agreed on the main “Needed Truth” points on the assembly itself:

“I. There is on earth a unique concrete thing (called in Acts 2:42 ‘the Fellowship’) which consists of all those whom God has brought

<sup>6</sup> Ref. F Page 96.

<sup>7</sup> Ref. I Page 53.

<sup>8</sup> Private communication to writer.

<sup>9</sup> Private communication to writer.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. F Page 98.

<sup>11</sup> Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 276.

together in a visible unity; the being in this is conditional. It is quite distinct from the Body of Christ, the Church of Matt. 16.

“II. ‘The Fellowship’ finds its expression in Churches of God; and the Churches are linked together in the Fellowship.

“III. The existence of the Present Fellowship does not admit of a Church of God coming into existence except in connection with the already formed Churches.

“IV. It is the bounden duty of every man exercising oversight in the Fellowship to do his utmost to maintain the unity of the Fellowship”<sup>12</sup>

But they disagreed on the matter of who disciplines an erring elder?<sup>13</sup>.

“There was open rupture resulting in two distinct groups of ‘Needed Truth’ Assemblies, each claiming to be ‘The Fellowship,’ the ‘Vernal’ party being mostly in Scotland, and the ‘Luxmore’ party mostly in England, with odd Assemblies in both lands, and one or two abroad”<sup>14</sup>.

The ‘Luxmore’ party continues virtually unchanged to this day with three assemblies in Australia – one in Sydney and two in Melbourne.

There is one ‘Vernal’ assembly in Melbourne. This came into being in 1932 when a group seceded from the “Hopkins” faction over voting<sup>15</sup>.

“The majority of this assembly . . . returned to the Open Assemblies in 1943. A small remnant of the ‘Green Pasture’ remains at Blackburn”<sup>15</sup>

“The Vernal party was confined mainly to Scotland. This is still the case. At present they have twelve assemblies in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland, one in England and one in Australia. They are no more than 200 in toto. John Montgomerie was by far the ablest teacher and leader among them. He was an evangelist and editor for many years of their monthly publication ‘Green Pastures.’ He died in 1957. After 1904 they continued until around, 1939 (I have not been able to verify the exact year) when the community split almost exactly in half. One half was titled the McCracken company after their leader Robert McCracken who is still alive, and the other the Montgomerie company . . . The McCracken group is also mainly in Scotland and the subject of the divisive dispute is still debated; the McCrackens claiming it to be over the question of whether or not the blood of our Lord is in Heaven, while the Montgomeries maintain that this was a subsidiary issue and that the real trouble lay in a local quarrel in the Aberdeen Assembly . . . Presently they appear to be declining”<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted Ref. H Page 140.

<sup>13</sup> Ref. E Vol. 1 Page 276.

<sup>14</sup> Ref. F Page 99.

<sup>15</sup> Private communication to writer.

<sup>16</sup> Private communication to writer.

Apparently Open Brethren cannot learn the obvious lessons from all this strife.

“There are, both in Canada and the United States many so-called Open Meetings that are in reality Needed Truth meetings without the name”<sup>17</sup>.

This is partly true of Australia. A small group of assemblies in Sydney drifted apart from the main body of “Open” meetings in the early 1950’s, and isolated assemblies elsewhere regard themselves as being “in fellowship” with them. These assemblies do not place the “Needed Truth” emphasis on grades of overseer.

Mr. Alexander Marshall addresses the following “Conclusions” to them:

“I. Every believer is in the only ‘fellowship’ Scripture speaks of, viz., ‘The fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord’ (1 Cor. 1:9).

“II. Because of this fact we are to ‘receive’ or welcome God’s people to all their birthright privileges, including the Lord’s Supper (Romans 15:7).

“III. We receive Christians not on account of their connection with a ‘party,’ ‘circle’ or ‘fellowship’ but on account of their relation to Christ...

“VI. Many confound separation from sects with separation from Christians in sects”<sup>18</sup>.

We may or may not wish to draw conclusions from the study of the history of the “Brethren”.

If we do, it is probable that we will decide that the true and original ground for coming together according to Scripture is a shared love for our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20); that the “Brethren Movement” greatly stimulated coming together on this basis; but that the issue was soon confused. Even so it is possible to walk with God today undenominationally, by maintaining administrative independence in each local assembly while manifesting the unity of the Body of Christ by receiving all who give proper assurance that they are His. Let Mr. G. H. Lang have the last word:

“If I rightly discern His present workings it is in the moving of small groups here and there to return to simplicity and obedience to His Word, such as He moved in at the beginning of what we now call the Brethren . . . But too many leaders in established Open spheres refuse to recognize these workings of the Lord; they dilate on features they do not approve; and it may be that they will find themselves like vessels left on the shelf, while the Master of the House uses others better fitted for His purposes”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ref. H Page 141.

<sup>18</sup> Holding Fast the Faithful Word – Whither Are We Drifting?” Page 52.

<sup>19</sup> Ref. L Page 65.

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