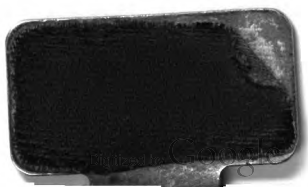

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

<http://books.google.com>



LIENNE I



139

bb 38

THE
PLYMOUTH BRETHREN:

*THEIR RISE, DIVISIONS, PRACTICE,
AND DOCTRINES.*

A LECTURE

BY

EDWARD DENNETT.

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1870.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

1A
1

4139. bbb.

THE
PLYMOUTH BRETHREN:

*THEIR RISE, DIVISIONS, PRACTICE,
AND DOCTRINES.*

A LECTURE

BY
EDWARD DENNETT.

R

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1870.



P R E F A T O R Y .

THE following Lecture was delivered as one of an ordinary winter course to the Lecturer's own people. Yielding to urgent representations he now consents to its publication. He does so the more readily, as there is no single publication (as far as he is aware) that aspires, however humbly, to cover the whole ground of Plymouth Brethrenism.

Dr. Carson and many others have done good service in exposing and refuting the heresies and procedures of the system. But the author is not acquainted with any tractate, like the present, which a minister, for instance, could place in the hands of any of his people who might have been disturbed by the insidious assaults of the Plymouth Propaganda—as dealing with the whole question. He is, therefore, not without some hopes of its usefulness. Many deficiencies

and faults will be observed, but, after considerable deliberation, it was determined to print the Lecture as delivered, excepting a few verbal alterations, in preference to a revision which would have involved considerable labour without any corresponding advantage.

E. D.

March, 1870.

THE RISE, DIVISIONS, PRACTICE AND DOCTRINES OF "THE BRETHREN," COMMONLY CALLED, "PLYMOUTH BRETHREN."

THE subject of my lecture to-night is "The rise, divisions, practice, and doctrines of the Plymouth Brethren." The object proposed is not to excite controversy, but to give information concerning a denomination of Christians, who, though they have existed nearly forty years, and are most active in the dissemination of their peculiar views, and have, for this purpose, created a special literature of their own, are yet but very little and very imperfectly known. The ground they take throws upon us the responsibility of examination; for we are told that all denominations have utterly gone astray, that they alone occupy the true Church position, that, in fact, they alone make the Scriptures the foundation of their doctrines and the guide of their practice and worship. Now it was to test these claims that we entered upon the task proposed this evening; but we had no idea of the labour thereby involved, for there is no *single* publication which contains their views, and hence we have had to read a host of pamphlets, to wade through shoals of their controversial writings, to sift and winnow the chaff from the wheat, to apply to "Brethren" themselves for information, in fact, to adopt any and all possible means to arrive at an accurate knowledge of the subject.

Whether we have been successful or not the lecture itself must tell. One thing, however, we may premise. We have had but one object—the promotion of the truth; and we can, therefore, venture to give the assurance that not a single statement has been made without a most conscientious investigation of all the means of information placed within our reach. All, therefore, that we ask from your hands is a patient hearing and an unbiassed judgment, for, as the Apostle says, speaking on the authority of Divine inspiration, “we can do nothing against the truth—but for the truth.”

THE RISE of “*the Brethren*” is almost, though happily not quite, lost in obscurity. Somewhere between 1828 and 1830 a number of good and devout men became very much dissatisfied with the existing state of things in the Church. Schism was dominant, and lifelessness was almost the normal condition of professing Christians.

The few who were pining after a higher life, and after a brighter manifestation of the power of the Spirit in their practical walk, belonged to no particular denomination, but were scattered through all. They yearned after a closer union, for they saw that the Lord Himself had prayed that His followers “might be one;” but existing ecclesiastical organisations were, as they thought, barriers in the way of this unity. At this time Mr. A. N. Groves, of Exeter, who had been wonderfully taught of the Spirit to renounce all things for the service of Christ, was at Dublin University preparing for “orders” in the Establishment. While in residence, as we gather from his memoirs, “he became acquainted with many sincere Christians, chiefly members of the Establishment, who with him desired to see more devotedness to Christ, and union amongst the people of God. To promote these objects, they met continually for prayer

and reading the Word." One day, Mr. Bellet—afterwards a prominent "Brother"—said to a lady, "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 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. . . . This was the beginning of what has been erroneously termed Plymouth Brethrenism."* There was not the slightest intention, at the outset, of passing condemnation on either the Establishment or the churches outside the Establishment. They carefully abstained from such a question, confining themselves to their right to meet on the foundation of a common faith in a common Saviour. Many of their number, indeed, were clergymen, and all continued to meet for worship at times with those bodies of Christians with whom they were associated, and claimed the right to meet with all. Mr. Groves, for example, distinctly asserts this principle. In 1829 he left England for Persia, in the bonds of the Gospel, and returning, for a time, in 1836, he found, to his sorrow, that the foundation on which "the Brethren" had met before his departure had been subverted during his absence. So keenly did he feel this, that he wrote a letter of remonstrance to Mr. Darby, in which he assures him that he is no way estranged from him, "though," he goes on to say, "I feel you have departed from those principles by which you once hoped to have effected them (his purposes), and are in principle returning to the city from whence you departed. Still, my soul so reposes in the truth of your heart to God that I feel it needs

* *Memoir*, pp. 38-39.

but a step or two more to advance, and you will see all the evils of the systems from which you profess to be separated, to spring up among yourselves. . . . I ever understood our principle of communion to be the possession of the common life or common blood of the family of God (for the life is in the blood); these were our early thoughts, and are my most matured ones. The transition your little bodies have undergone, in no longer standing forth the witnesses for the glorious and simple *truth*, so much as standing forth witnesses against all that they judge error, have lowered them in my apprehension from heaven to earth in their position of witnesses."

He also vindicates his right of worshipping with all Christians. "We were free," he says, "within the limits of the truth, to share with them in *part*, though we could not in *all* their services; in fact, as we received them for the life, we could not *reject* them for their systems." He makes the personal application: "Some will not have me hold communion with the Scots, because their views are not satisfactory about the Lord's Supper; others with you, because of your views about baptism; others with the Church of England, because of her thoughts about ministry. On my principles I receive them all; but on the principle of witnessing against evil I should reject them all."*

Such were the principles of the Brethren at the beginning. Soon after the meeting at Dublin, which had its origin in 1828 or 1829, one was commenced also in Plymouth—the meeting which has given its name to all the rest, and may be regarded as the parent of most of the forms of Brethrenism that now exist.

My authority for this statement, as far as the date is concerned, is Dr. Tregelles. He says:—

* *Memoir*, pp. 539-42.

“I know something of the early days of the Brethren in this and in other places. I believe that I have a general acquaintance with the facts connected with those who have assembled for communion at Plymouth. I was associated with the Christians meeting here, when they were about eighty in number, in the early part of 1835. From those who were then united in fellowship I received much information as to what had taken place *during the four previous years.*”

He then gives the principle, as stated above, of their meeting.

“Those Brethren who assembled in Plymouth for communion, in 1831, had the thought prominently before them, that the Word of God gave them the liberty of meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for fellowship, in obedience to His word, ‘Do this in remembrance of Me.’”—*Three Letters, etc.*, p. 4.

In this simple way “the Brethren” sprang into existence. There are two names connected with the movement that cannot be omitted—Mr. J. N. Darby and Mr. B. W. Newton. Mr. Darby was, we believe, a clergyman, and Mr. Newton was a Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford. They were both diligent students of the Bible, and being both singularly gifted as expositors or teachers, and taught to regard themselves as responsible to the Lord for the exercise of their gifts, they devoted themselves to the ministry of the Word among “the Brethren.” Mr. Darby seems to have been peripatetic in his labours, though at the outset he was more constantly at Dublin; while Mr. Newton is found, soon after the commencement of the meeting, resident at Plymouth. Both obtained great influence with “the Brethren,” and were, not unnaturally, consciously or unconsciously, looked up to as leaders, as well as teachers. Other prominent names are often found associated with Plymouth, such as Mr. Wigram, Mr. Harris, Mr. Soltau, &c.; but, it must be remembered that all the teachers circulated

more or less through the various meetings that were gradually established, and thus are found sometimes in one place and sometimes in another.

We must guard ourselves from supposing that this meeting in Plymouth was conducted after the present type of such gatherings. As we have explained, the foundation of their gathering was their common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They met, "to break bread," and certain brethren, acknowledged to be teachers (not any who chose to do so) ministered—one or more, as the case might be—in word and doctrine. In addition to this *there was one presiding elder*, Mr. B. W. Newton, who took the oversight of the ministry and was expected to hinder that which was unprofitable and unedifying.* This office Mr. Newton seems to have held for three or four years; and Dr. Tregelles informs us that he saw a letter from Mr. Darby to Mr. Newton, which was addressed B. Newton, Esq., Elder of the Saints, meeting in Raleigh-street, Plymouth.

From these statements you will be able to form a tolerable conception of the rise of "the Brethren," and the mode of their original meetings.

THEIR DIVISIONS.—If we now trace their divisions, we shall see how they gradually modified or expanded their first principles, and how it is that their meetings have assumed their present form. With some few slight disputes and controversies, "the Brethren" continued to meet without much alteration, until the year 1845—when the first open division or disruption occurred.

Its cause was the same as that which has operated in every age of the Church—in every schism and dissension which have rent into a thousand fragments its visible unity—viz., divergence of opinion, or diversity of doctrine. Mr. Darby and Mr. Newton occu-

* See *Three Letters*, by Dr. Tregelles, p. 5.

pied, undoubtedly, the most influential positions in the community of the Brethren. But, as in the Church at Corinth, so here there were some who looked upon the one, and some upon the other, as their chosen leader and teacher.

This was of little moment, so long as they were (if they ever were really) in substantial accord. It was, however, soon discovered that they held widely opposed views, especially upon the prophetic Scriptures. Mr. Darby, with his followers, held and proclaimed the secret coming of the Lord and the rapture of the saints before the manifestation of Antichrist: Mr. Newton, with his followers, held and proclaimed the manifest coming of Christ for His people after the development of Antichrist. With these widely divergent views—and their still more widely divergent consequences—entertained and spoken of, there could not be much real harmony between the two sections. Still, with the avowed principles on which the Brethren met, there could be no justification for division, neither could any charge of heresy be fastened upon what was after all only a difference in interpretation. There can be no doubt, however, that this difference of opinion was “the little rift within the lute” that very soon “made the music mute.” The opportunity seemingly sought and waited for came, or was made, at last. In April, 1845, Mr. Newton, alarmed at the progress of error, as he deemed it, amongst the Brethren, published a number of “Propositions” in which he sought to embody the cardinal truths of Redemption, and at the same time to oppose the heresies then being propagated.

This occasioned mortal offence. As early as 1835 Mr. Newton had published a paper in the *Christian Witness* on the subject of “Our Lord’s Humanity,” with the special design of counteracting and refuting the errors of Irvingism. This paper met with so

much acceptance that it was reprinted, with additions, and for ten or twelve years the Brethren, without a note or expression of disapproval, circulated it in hundreds almost throughout the world. But there were some unguarded expressions in that paper. There were two or three sentences which seemed to imply a federal relation on the part of our Lord with Adam. Thus he says, "The Lord Jesus was as free from indwelling sin as from actual transgression; yet, nevertheless, He was a member (so to speak) of the exiled family, and was, therefore, born subject to their penalties. But He was made under the law, and, being essentially holy, He was able to fulfil the law, and so to rise above the penalties to which He had become subject on account of Adam's guilt." There is one other sentence of like import. These were now—after the lapse of twelve years, and after the publication of the "Propositions"—laid hold of and denounced as heretical. Mr. Newton's attention being called to the expressions, he at once saw that they had been somewhat carelessly written. He immediately withdrew the papers for re-consideration, confessing that erroneous deductions might have been drawn from his statements, although he himself had never made those deductions. He even went so far as to publish a confession of error, and to confess it as sin—at the same time reiterating his belief in all the doctrines concerning our Lord's person and work which have ever been held orthodox in the Christian Church. But nothing availed. Separation was determined upon, and it was accordingly effected. Meetings were held to attempt, after explanations, reconciliation—but in vain; and from that day to this Mr. Newton has been considered and denounced as the arch-enemy of the Church of Christ—and of the Brethren in particular. Thus Mr. Darby said in one publication, "I have not the least doubt, from

circumstances I have heard lately, of the authenticity of which I have not the smallest doubt, that Mr. Newton received his prophetic system by direct inspiration of Satan ;” and, speaking of his teaching concerning our Lord, he says, “ I reject Mr. Newton’s doctrine as blasphemy, as I ever did.” I do not propose to lead you through all the controversy—if controversy it can be called, for it all proceeds from one side—for I confess that after some little knowledge of the disputes that have arisen in the Church, I have never met with language so strong and harsh, so uncharitable and rancorous, as is found in connection with this subject. And there is this remarkable feature in the case. Mr. Newton withdrew the expressions complained of, and has never repeated them, yet to this day he is dealt with as if he had stood by them, and declared them to be in accordance with his views. His confession is treated as null and void ; and the Brethren have not only refused fellowship with him, but they refuse to allow any one to break bread with them, unless they repudiate Mr. Newton and his supposed doctrines.*

We pass now to the second division. The names of Müller and Craik are familiar to all—as familiar as household words. These saintly men had been led, in the providence of God, to minister at Bristol, and, from the very first, God abundantly blessed their work.

* We cannot express too strongly our sense of the injustice with which Mr. Newton has been treated on this question ; or our admiration of the manner in which he has borne his lengthened persecution. Assailed by false charges as to doctrine, maligned on all sides by “ the Brethren,” he has never once been betrayed into an angry expression, but has calmly endured for righteousness’ sake. Avoiding all controversy, he has contented himself with expounding the truth on the questions involved. We may refer our readers to his “ Suffering Surety,” and “ Foundation Truths,” as among the clearest and ablest statements of the verities of the Gospel that have come under our notice.

They also—although differing much from Mr. Darby and his followers upon points of doctrine and practice—were regarded as Brethren, and Mr. Darby frequently visited Bristol and ministered at “the gatherings.” In April, 1848, after the condemnation of Mr. Newton, he came and called as usual on Mr. Müller, who asked him to preach on the Lord’s-day evening. Mr. Darby declined, on account of a previous engagement on the way to Exeter, but said nothing to indicate that he was about to separate from the Brethren there. To the surprise of Mr. Müller, therefore, he heard a few days after that Mr. Darby would not come to Bristol again unless they refused fellowship to two Christians who had recently met with them, and unless they condemned Mr. Newton’s views. “The demand made on Bethesda was, that there should be a Church investigation of Mr. Newton’s views, and a Church condemnation of them, and Mr. Darby expressed his determination to remain in separation from them till that was carried out.”* The Brethren at Bethesda refused compliance with this demand on the ground that they were not called upon to condemn opinions which had not come before them in their Church capacity. Refusing to obey, they were separated from, and remain outside of, the favoured few until this day. And as another example of the feeling with which Mr. Darby and his followers conduct their controversy, we may cite the following extract from a letter by Mr. Darby to Mr. Spurr, of Sheffield:—

“The evil at Bethesda is the most unprincipled admission of blasphemers against Christ, the coldest contempt of Him I ever came across. . . . All who do not abhor the whole system and all connection with it are already entangled and defiled. It is, I am satisfied, a mere net of Satan (though many Christians be entangled in it). I have found

* Pamphlet by H. Groves, p. 31.

persons unknown to each other, and strangers to our conflicts in England, unite in testimony that they could get nothing honest from those who were connected with it, or who did not openly reject it all.*

Strong enough, you will admit, especially when you remember those godly men, whose praise is in all the churches— Craik and Müller—and also that nothing honest can come from us if we do “not openly reject it all.” Reject it all! God forbid! Mr. Craik was my Hebrew examiner at college. I had opportunities of hearing him preach, and looking upon his saintly piety. And Mr. Müller, too—that man of faith and prayer! Reject it all! Again I say, God forbid! for the one is now before the Throne, and the other is a standard-bearer, who cheers many a faint heart by his simple faith and valiant courage. God has received them; and who art thou that condemnest another man’s servant? To their own Master they shall stand or fall. Yea, they shall be holden up; for God is able to make them stand.

And, that you may not think the citation we have made a mere casual expression of the moment, I note that in a new edition of one of Mr. Darby’s works the same sentiments are found. He says “I reject Bethesda as wickedness, as I ever did.” Again, “I broke with Bethesda, and I reject it still.”† Nor is this condemnation spoken only of the system. Mr. Groves tells us in the pamphlet cited above, that by one of Mr. Darby’s party, Messrs. Craik and Müller were spoken of as “the two blasphemers at Bristol,” that others called the Orphan Houses “a work of the devil;” and that Mr. Craik was said to be “a Socinian.” From another pamphlet published at Bristol, entitled *Shibboleth*, I might easily collect stronger (!) language, but I forbear. I will only add that the acts of “the Brethren” of the Darbyite party have corresponded

* *Christian Obedience, etc.* p. 23. † *The Sufferings of Christ*, pp. 9-10.

with their words ; for to this day they refuse fellowship to any who are connected with "Bethesda." They treat them, equally with those who are in any way connected with Mr. Newton, as publicans and sinners.

The other divisions must be summed up in fewer words.—The next was in connection with a meeting at Peckham. Some "Brethren" there who had families, and found it too far to walk to the meeting at Walworth, commenced one at Peckham. It was known beforehand to be their intention to do so ; but still no act of condemnation was passed, and the meeting was formed. But "the Brethren" there had not obtained the approval of the Leaders. They were Christians, and as such, had the right to meet in the name of Jesus—*i.e.*, if the Leaders among "the Brethren" approved, not otherwise.

Still, the meeting was formed, whereupon the following notice was sent simultaneously to all the meetings in London, dated November 2nd, 1862 :—

"Some brethren who have long been out of fellowship in spirit with the gatherings in London, although breaking bread at East Street, Walworth, have at length, in self-will, opened a meeting for breaking bread at Hill Street, Peckham ; a considerable number in fellowship with us (*i.e.*, those who had met at Walworth) have in consequence withdrawn from East Street, and meet this morning for prayer and guidance."

The explanation of this notice is found in the fact that those who remained at East Street are regarded as one with those at Peckham, because they assented to the course the latter had adopted.

So things went on until one of the recalcitrant "Brethren," being one Lord's-day in the neighbourhood of Kennington, went to the meeting in that locality. This was a grievous sin, and the next

Lord's-day the following encyclical was read at all the "gatherings:"—

"Mr. Ogilvie having intruded himself, on the 12th of April, at the Table at Kennington, and having, when remonstrated with, stated his determination to continue to do so, it is judged necessary to give notice that those who composed the East Street meeting, and those associated with Peckham meeting, cannot be accredited at the Lord's Table till they are humbled for their course."

Thus a body of Christians were cut off from fellowship,—and for what? Because they thought it more convenient to worship at Peckham than at Walworth. This was a grievous sin, demanding contrition and humiliation before they could be received at the table of the Lord.

Out of this third division the fourth grew, and was consummated. A brother from Peckham went to Sheffield. He was well known to "the brethren" in this place, and highly esteemed, and hence, as they altogether disapproved of the action which their leaders in London had taken, they allowed him, as on former occasions, "to break bread." Such an act of contumacy could not be tolerated; consequently, that whole assembly was also placed out of communion. "The Brethren" at Sheffield remonstrated, but ineffectually. One of the leaders in London wrote and said that in commencing the meeting at Peckham "the sin of Korah was acted over again." He adds, "Nothing has appeared in my eyes more deliberately wicked since I have known brethren," and he cites the Scripture as applicable to the case, "God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie." It was no wonder, therefore, that he upheld the action taken.

Mr. Darby was appealed to, and after mature deliberation he wrote as follows:—"I take part in this act, and hold him to be outside the Church of God on

earth, being outside what represents it in London. I am bound by Scripture to count him so. I come to Sheffield. There he breaks bread, and is—in what? *Not in the Church of God on earth, for he is out of it in London, and there are not two Churches on earth, cannot be, so as to be in one and out of another.*”* We will not stay to remark upon the assumption and inconsequence of this utterance, as the subject will recur, but we cannot forbear asking whether any loftier claims or pretensions have ever been put forth even by “the Church” of Rome. “The Brethren” at Sheffield were thus declared outside the Church of God on earth because they had harboured one who was said to have acted over again the sin of Korah.†

We hasten on to the last division.—Strange to say, Mr. Darby himself, as if proceeding from a *lex talionis*, was its occasion. Having adopted a peculiar mode of interpreting the Psalms, he endeavoured to force the life and the facts of Christ’s life into accordance with the views at which he had thus arrived. Consequently, he propounded some novel views respecting the sufferings of our Lord. He divided them into three classes, and “the third class sufferings,” as they have been termed, were said to be from the hand of God, but not atoning; they were on behalf of the Jewish remnant that is to be restored towards the end of the age.

The period of these sufferings is said to be from the time He entered the garden of Gethsemane up to the Cross, *and on the Cross* until the time that He cried, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Mr. Darby thus says: “Till forsaken of God, the work of atonement, the wrath that worked it out in

* *Christian Obedience, etc.*, pp. 7 and 22.

† The Jersey case, connected with this and that at Peckham, the grossest of all, if we may judge from the pamphlets issued, we purposely omit, as taking place out of England.

the forsaking of His soul, *was not yet in accomplishment*.* It is no wonder to us that this new doctrine completely horrified some of his followers. In utter consternation and alarm they now remonstrated with him, but he held to and reiterated his new views. They then called upon "the Brethren" "to judge" this evil. They said, "We judged Mr. Newton, and here is our chief leader propounding similar heresies to those we were taught to believe that he held. In very consistency we ought to judge Mr. Darby." They did not know what they asked. "To judge Mr. Darby" was to destroy the very existence of that section of Brethrenism, and hence the leaders turned a deaf ear to all their appeals. The result was that many left, and tractate after tractate appeared in justification of the step. Mr. Dorman, until then a prominent man, published one entitled, *The Close of Twenty-eight Years of Association with J. N. D., etc.* Mr. Harmar Smith wrote another called, *The Link Broken*; another appeared with the title, *Divers and Strange Doctrines Stated and Examined by Tertius*; another, *Grief upon Grief, by P. F. H., etc.* We have read most of these, but we cannot recommend our readers to follow our example, for, unless in pursuit of the truth of the question involved, a minute analysis and discussion of the sufferings of our Lord do not tend to edification. We are bound to add, however, that the tractates just mentioned were a necessity of the case, and are a most valuable protest against what they deemed, and what we also deem, to be heresy.

We have now followed "the Brethren" in their divisions until the present time, and we see that "Brethren" pure and simple are the Darbyites, *i.e.*, those who hold to the teaching and are in fellowship with Mr. Darby. For they reject as evil the Bethesda section—as they do all Christians who meet in any

* *The Sufferings of Christ*, p. 112.

other way. For the rest of our lecture, therefore, we shall confine ourselves to this supreme section—those who, for the sake of convenience, are called Darbyites.

The next thing, then, that falls for consideration is their Practice.—Under this term we are compelled to include the grounds on which they meet, as well as their modes of worship, and the manner in which they propagate what they consider the truth.

(1.) *They claim to be "the assembly of God;"* that they alone represent on earth the Church of God. This may seem to many a monstrous assertion; and certainly it is one which needs undoubted proof; and the more because they have not always advanced this claim. At the outset they professed to be witnesses of the low estate of the Church, and they loved to express their view of this low estate by the phrase, "The Church is in ruins." They then met simply as Christians. But as time advanced, and their numbers increased, they were possessed with another spirit, until they brought themselves to believe that their "gatherings" alone represented the Church of God on earth. This belief has found most distinct expression in a book written by Mr. Macintosh, of Bristol, and circulated by the Brethren in thousands throughout the land, entitled, *The Assembly of God*. The grounds on which Mr. Macintosh advances the claim are, as far as I understand him, that the Brethren alone meet in the name of Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Ghost. I beg pardon for using the word "meet:" he expressly disclaims it. Let him speak for himself: "As Jesus is the only centre, so the Holy Ghost is the only gathering power. The one is as independent as the other. It is 'where two or three are gathered.' It does not say 'where two or three are met.' Persons may meet together round any centre, on any ground, by any influence, and merely form a club, a society, an association, a com-

munity.”—P. 35. This argument is either true, or not true. If true, it is exceedingly important; and I am not ashamed to confess that I felt its power when I first read it. Judge, then, my surprise on taking my Greek Testament to examine it for myself, when I found that the very same word is used for the assembling of the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees, to take counsel against our Lord (See Matt. xxvi. 3, compared with Matt. xviii. 20.) Must we not then conclude that it is not true? Another question presents itself—if the Brethren do not meet, but are gathered (i.e., by the power of the Spirit) how is it that, like other Christian people, they are always “gathered” together at exactly the same time—eleven o’clock on the Lord’s-day morning? A moment’s candid examination of the question shows that for the assumption there is not the shadow of a shade of foundation in the Word of God, or in the facts of experience and observation. The only matter of astonishment is that any one should have ventured to publish such a statement as that we have just read. The point, however, is of so much importance that I venture to quote what another has written respecting it. He says:—

“One would hardly have conceived that so much moral truth depended on this nice distinction between two phrases so near akin, as being ‘gathered together’ and ‘met together,’ as that the one should make a company of Christians (for he is talking about Christians and church position) nothing but ‘a club’ or ‘a society,’ and that the other should constitute them ‘the assembly [Church] of God!’

“As to the criticism, I may say that the verb employed is the commonest in the New Testament for assembling, or being assembled together; and is used in every variety of latitude as to *motive*, and *object*, and *gathering power*. It is alike employed in reference to the Scribes and

Pharisees coming together to plot against Christ ; and the eagles being gathered together to the carcase ; and gathering together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“ In strictness, it may be conceded that it is ‘ *gathered*,’ and not ‘ *met*.’ But when he says, in regard to this distinction, ‘ The Holy Ghost *gathers* souls to Jesus on the ground of salvation ; and this, wherever convened, is the assembly of God,’ he is guilty of importing into the midst of our Lord’s words an element which is foreign to them, and which utterly subverts their character and force. He mistakes the whole power and grace of the passage. There is nothing either expressed or implied in it about ‘ the Holy Ghost’s gathering.’ This is a mere creation of the imagination. Neither is there any reference to something being ‘ *convened* ’—he does not say what—in order to make it the Church. All the *gathering* and all the *convening* found in the passage is, ‘ If two of you shall agree,’ etc.

“ In truth, his observations, as in so many other instances, are simply an abuse of the popular mind. He may be unconscious of it,—but ‘ if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.’

“ The whole force of the text on which he comments, as uttered by the Lord, is concentrated in the words *εις το εμνονομα*. He does not in any sense point his disciples to the gathering by the Holy Ghost, but only to their recognition of the value—the authority—the prevalency with the Father—of His own most precious name.”*

We cannot say that Mr. Dorman’s language—and for twenty-eight years he was with “ the Brethren”—is a whit too forcible. For it is not often that one meets with an argument so untenable and so speciously put ; nor outside of the so-called Church of Rome are we accustomed to meet with such pretentious claims.

(2.) *The second point in their practice to which we advert is their worship and ministry.*—And we shall most satisfactorily deal with this, if we touch upon their component parts. (1.) *Every Lord’s-day they break bread*—according, as they allege, to apostolic

* *High Church Claims, etc.*, by W. H. Dorman, Letter iv., pp. 6-7.

practice. Now we do not deny that it is probable that this was the practice of the early Church. Indeed, we go further than this, and contend that it was the *daily* practice of the Church at Jerusalem. For we read that "they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness," etc. (Acts ii. 46). And from other sources we gather that in the first century the remembrance of the Lord in the breaking of bread was a daily custom. Seeing then that "the Brethren" claim to be "the assembly of God," and that they alone have the authority of Scripture for their arrangements and procedure, I should like to ask them two things. First, Why they only break bread on the Lord's-day? and, secondly, Why they break bread in the morning? for, strange to say, the only mention we have of it, otherwise than in the Pentecostal Church, describes it as held in the evening, and after preaching. (See Acts xx. 11.) The language of Paul, also, to the Corinthian Church implies that the Lord's Supper (which I may observe in passing is a Scripture expression), was held in the evening.

If, then, yielding to the solicitations of "the Brethren," I meet with them for the sake of following Scripture more closely, I find that in this simple matter I am as far away from it as I was before.

(2.) *Worship and ministry is held to be under the presidency of the Holy Ghost.*—Each one gives out a hymn, reads a chapter, or teaches as he is led by the Spirit at the time. This is a cardinal point. Thus Mr. Macintosh says, "We have often been asked to adduce Scripture in proof of the idea of Divine presidency in the assembly. We at once reply, 'There am I;' and 'God is the author.' On these two pillars, even had we no more, we can triumphantly build the glorious truth of Divine presidency—a truth which

must deliver all, who receive and hold it from God, from every system of man, call it by what name you please."

Let us, then, examine these pillars, for if these are strong and well-grounded, then the superstructure raised upon them is safe; otherwise it must fall to the ground. The first, then, is hewn out of the passage we have already commented on—"Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst of them." Is this to take the presidency of their proceedings? After the resurrection this promise was fulfilled, and Jesus did come into the midst of His disciples, and manifested Himself to them; but there is no word about the presidency of the Holy Ghost.

There is not a trace of it in any of the assemblies recorded, nor is the idea so much as hinted at in any part of God's Word. Let us examine the second: "God is the author." We turn to the passage (1 Cor. xiv. 33), and—would you believe it? the word "author" is only found in italics, the indication of insertion by the translators. It reads exactly as follows:—"God is not of confusion, but of peace;" and the Apostle makes that statement to urge the prophets to keep their spirits in subjection—not to Christ, but to themselves. For he says, "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." As far, therefore, as these pillars are concerned, instead of being granite they are clay, and crumble beneath the touch, and thus the whole superstructure is destroyed. We may concede, however, that a man's cause may be better than his argument. Let us, then, suppose that there is a Divine presidency. If there is such a thing, I want to ask a few questions.

First, if there is this Divine presidency—and, therefore, there should be no human presidents—how is it we find Paul carefully directing Titus to appoint elders in every city? That he tells the elders of Ephesus

that the Holy Ghost had made them overseers (bishops) of the flock? That he urges the Hebrews to remember them that had the rule over them? That he salutes the Church at Philippi, with its bishops and deacons? And that he was instructed to leave on record in the pastoral epistles the qualifications of bishops and deacons for the future guidance of the Church?

Again, if there be this Divine presidency, and this is sufficient for the needs of the assembly, why does the Apostle rebuke the proceedings of the Church at Corinth, and add, "The rest will I set in order when I come"? Had the Christians there not the Divine presidency, if "the brethren" have? Wherefore the need then of the apostolic rectification? Of his telling them how many should speak at a time, and what special gifts they should cultivate?

Once more, if there be this Divine presidency, we ought, surely, to expect order. We are told again and again that Jesus is Lord over His own house, and that He exerts His authority in the Assembly. If he does we shall surely see its effects. Or, to put it in another way, He either does or does not rule in the Assembly. If he does, it will be an effective rule; but if there be no signs of this, then it is certain that He does not rule through the presidency of the Holy Spirit. Is there order, then, in "the Assembly of God"? To answer this question we will cite from two quarters. First, from Mr. Macintosh himself, who is a stronger pillar of Brethrenism than either the passages adduced by him is of the Divine presidency. He says, first of all—and I wish the observation to be noted—"Let us only confide in Him (Jesus), and the order of our Assembly (I thought it was wrong to say *our Church*) will be as perfectly provided for as the salvation of our souls" (p. 25). The comparison is strong; for since the salvation of our souls is a

complete work, the slightest confusion in the Assembly would render the order imperfect. But we will not take advantage of a word. Let us, then, now hear from his lips as to what is often seen when "the Brethren" are gathered together. He says, "Alas! alas! we often see men on their feet, in the midst of our assemblies (that word *our* will creep in), whom common sense, to say nothing of spirituality, would keep in their seats. We have often sat and gazed in astonishment at some whom we have heard attempting to minister in the Assembly. We have often thought that the Assembly has been looked upon by a certain class of ignorant men, fond of hearing themselves talk, as a sphere in which they might easily figure without the pains of school and college work" (p. 29). But if the Holy Spirit speak by whom He will, who is Mr. Macintosh to condemn? Hath not God chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise? And does the absence of grammar (for that, I suppose, is meant by the allusion to school and college) indicate the absence of the Spirit? But he speaks again:—

"If an Assembly" (he tells us on page 10 that we ought not not to say member of a Church) "be troubled by the intrusion of ignorant and foolish men—men who have never yet measured themselves in the presence of God—men who boldly overleap the wide domain over which common sense, good taste" (are not these carnal expressions?) "and moral propriety preside, and then vainly talk of being led by the Holy Ghost—restless men who *will* be at something, and who keep the assembly in a continual state of nervous apprehension, not knowing what's to come next." [*Sic* in original.] "Should any assembly be thus grievously afflicted, what should they do? Abandon the ground in impatience, etc.? Alas! this is what some have done, thus proving that they never understood what they were doing, or, if they understood it, that they had not faith to pursue it. May the Lord have mercy on such, and open their eyes, that they

may see from whence they have fallen, and get a true view of the Assembly of God in contrast with the most attractive of the systems of men."—P. 31.

Judging these confessions by the usual laws, the conclusion is inevitable that the theory of divine presidency has no foundation in fact, just as it is seen to have no foundation in Scripture.

I cannot forbear to add to this a statement of a lady, who has just retired from "the Brethren," in connection with the same points. She says:—

"In common with most of you, I have thought that in the many-men ministry the rule of the Holy Ghost was acknowledged—that in the one-man ministry it was set aside. This, I say, was the *theory*, though with it our experience accorded not at all; and I shall have the sympathy of many hearts when I say that calls for the patient endurance of unprofitable ministry are more frequent than for the thankful acknowledgment of blessing received. Exceptions there are, of course, as to this: and in our own little company I have often listened with pleasure to short and simple addresses from gracious and godly brethren, who, generally from the Gospel of John, drew refreshing remembrances of Christ for our souls. But is it not true that we have assumed too much?—that with us there has been a counterfeit of spiritual power—a pretension to what was not real—and are we not conscious of disastrous results both to speakers and hearers from many a vain talker, exhibiting rather the forwardness of the flesh than the unction of the Holy One? But not only had I the strength of long cherished feelings to overcome, and warm personal affection to many dear and true hearted saints from whom the very thought of severance was most painful, but the still stronger fear of grieving the Spirit of God. Thus I went through a conflict which has only ended now, and delayed taking the step which no less than three times I meditated."*

* *Letter to the Saints Meeting at Moscow Hall, etc., from M. A. Hull, second edition, pp. 4-5.*

Testimonials of a similar import might be multiplied indefinitely, if necessary, and none stronger than from Mr. Darby's *Narrative of Facts*. But there are few who will not accept the evidence already adduced as sufficient to show that the idea of a Divine presidency in the Assembly is, as we have said, unwarranted both by facts and Scripture.

But we have other questions. The next I have to ask is this—Exalting Christ, as they profess, beyond other Christians, and receiving their gifts of ministry through the direct agency of the Holy Spirit, the teaching in the Assembly—notwithstanding the failures they lament—must bear some marks of its Divine character? In other words, since, meeting as they do, the Holy Spirit ministers by whom He will, they must have some very remarkable ministries.

No doubt the answer will be in the affirmative. Still, I cannot help quoting the testimony of one who was long honoured among “the Brethren” as one of their teachers. He says:—

“That there are Divinely-gifted men amongst them I do not doubt, as there are also elsewhere; but then they were Divinely-gifted as clergymen and ministers of other denominations, before they were connected with this exclusive Church; and almost all besides are persons who have had at least the advantage of a collegiate training, apart from the body in which they have subsequently ministered. Of those that have been formed by the system, I would rather not say anything, although godliness and earnestness will always be in their measure owned by the Lord.

“As to anything like Divinely-authenticated ministry, with all their boastful claims, the Brethren have no superiority over other Christians; and in regard to rule and order, it will appear to every one competent to form a judgment that they are inferior to most, because they have rejected human order, and have not substituted in its place that which is Divine. That which obtains amongst them in this character is at best the expressed judgment of one

or other of their leaders, which is carried out by others in the spirit of blind subjection, without so much as an appeal to Scripture as the ground of authority, though their action is professed to be the rule of the Spirit.”*

Other questions crowd upon me, but must be put in fewer words. They appeal to 1 Cor. xii., xiv., as the warrant for their proceedings. Do they, then, claim the gifts of the Spirit as there described? If they do, why do they limit the Holy Spirit by a man-made hymn-book, and a hymn-book in which the hymns have been largely altered by themselves? In the Church at Corinth, I find that they sang as well as taught by inspiration. “When ye come together,” says he, “every one of you hath a *psalm*, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation” (1 Cor. xiv. 26). To be consistent, therefore, demands the laying aside of the hymn-book as well as the “man-made minister.” But if I am told that these gifts are not now claimed—and Mr. Darby, in *Brethren and their Reviewers*, expressly admits that some are not continued at the present time—then, I ask, is it not to throw dust in simple people’s eyes when these chapters are adduced in justification of their position? The fact is “Brethren” know as well as we, that the gifts of the Spirit were the especial accompaniment of the laying on of the Apostles’ hands (See Acts viii. 17; xix. 6, etc.), and in their exercise filled up the void which the lack of the New Testament—at least, the Epistles—occasioned. They also know that “liberty of ministry,” as it is named, is an empty sound; that if there are Brethren whose ministrations are unacceptable—such as those deplored by Mr. Macintosh—private representations are made to induce them to cease,† that if Mr. Darby,

* *High Church Claims, etc.*, by W. H. Dorman, letter vi., pp. 22-23.

† See *Narrative of Facts*, by Mr. Darby, in which he constantly alludes to this practice.

Mr. Kelly, or Mr. Macintosh should be present in any of the "assemblies," it is very seldom, indeed, that any other brother is moved by the Spirit to teach or exhort—that, in fact, they have regular, we might say stated, ministers (excepting in those places where there is an utter absence of teaching power) as much as any other denomination of Christians. Liberty of ministry is, to speak the truth, nothing but a high-sounding phrase, which conceals an order of ministers who put forth claims to authority, and even infallibility, which would not be tolerated in any Christian community outside the Church of Rome.†

(3.) *Terms of Communion.*—These are very rigid—so much so that the common title assigned to the Darbyite section is that of "Exclusive Brethren."

At the outset, as we have stated, all who were believed to be Christians were received, on the ground that they could not reject those whom the Lord had received. But now—though the rule is relaxed in places where "the leaders" have retained the original spirit—the condition is annexed of "separation from evil;" which means, practically, separation from all other denominations of Christians and union with "the Brethren." Before, therefore, you can be permitted "to break bread," you must have formally separated from other systems and thereby "judged" the error they contain. It thus happened to myself on one occasion that I desired, in the exercise of Christian fellowship, to break bread with "the

† It is not forgotten that the favourite reply of the Brethren is, The failure of a principle, or failure to carry out a principle, does not affect the principle itself. The answer is, The Presidency of the Spirit is not a "principle." It is a *fact*, or it is *not a fact*. Show that it is not a fact, and you demolish at once every argument that can be adduced in its support. They also love to say, the sins of a Christian do not contradict the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Conceding this, the reply is, We know, on the authority of Scripture, that the Holy Ghost dwells in the believer; but Scripture says nothing of His Presidency of the Assembly, which makes all the difference.

Brethren." I spoke to one who was prominent among them, and said, "I might be with them on Lord's-day; could I break bread?" His reply was "I fear not; personally, I should have no objection—but there are others who would object strongly." "On what ground?" "Not," he replied, "that you are not a Christian, but because you are connected with evil." "But," said I, "you would be allowed to commune with us." "I could not do that," he answered. "For what reason?" "Because you are an ordained minister." "No," I hastened to say, "I never have been in any way ordained—you, therefore, might come." "No," he replied, "I could not, for we do not see eye to eye." Two ladies, also, whom I know, were refused on the same grounds: grounds, indeed, which are boldly avowed by the Leaders of the Darbyite section. So that, forgetting the apostolic exhortation, "Whereunto we have attained let us walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing," they demand our seeing eye to eye with them; not, indeed, on all the articles of their creed, but upon all the things they reject and refuse to believe, as a condition of fellowship. The consequence is that they are the strictest, closest, and narrowest of all the sects comprised in the Christian Church. They are the "Exclusive Brethren."

(4.) *Their mode of advancing what they deem the truth demands our consideration.*—As to preaching the Gospel, this is left to individuals as they may feel themselves called upon to engage in the work. As a community, they make no provision for evangelisation, and, as far as I can gather, never dreamt of sending a missionary to the heathen. "Brethren" finding themselves in a foreign land might engage in preaching the Gospel in their individual capacity; but, as a body of Christians, they own no responsibility in this matter. Thus, Mr. Macintosh says,

“There is a very material difference between those occasions on which the Assembly is gathered for worship and the special services of Brethren. In these latter the Evangelist or the teacher, the preacher or the lecturer, serves in his individual capacity, in responsibility to his Lord. Nor does it make any difference whether such services are conducted in the rooms usually occupied by the Assembly or elsewhere. The members of the Assembly (I cannot but note that we are condemned for saying members of the Church) may be present or not, as they feel disposed” (p. 49). On the other hand, they feel very differently in regard to the advancement of the views which characterise them as Brethren. The same author says: “Our business is with the saints in those systems, to seek, by every spiritual and Scriptural agency, to get them out into their true position in the Assembly of God” (p. 27)—which means, when translated, by any and all possible means make them “Brethren.” And, unless you are acquainted with them and their literature, you can have little idea how zealously and persistently they keep this object in view. They have numbers of tracts written for this special end, and, after having read a large number of them, I am compelled to acknowledge that they are most ingeniously and cleverly written. But, somehow or other—from ignorance I do not doubt—the principles, views, and proceedings of other Christians are most systematically misrepresented. In support of these statements, I may cite the fact that very recently a lady—a “Sister”—hearing I was to lecture on this subject, sent me a pamphlet, that I might be the more correctly informed as to their views. For her courtesy I was exceedingly obliged, but on the second page I found a passage to this effect—that no Christian would be received by the so-called Dissenting Churches unless he adopted all their peculiar views, and I have met with this assertion again

and again. But, as you know, there is not a word of truth in it. Again, it is often their practice to class "the Church" of Rome, "the Church" of England, and "the other systems" together in a sentence; and then, speaking of the gross corruptions of the first, the simple reader is beguiled into the belief that these corruptions are found in all. Again, they are very apt in the quotation of Scripture—but if you will take the trouble to examine the passage with its context, you will often find that it has no reference to the subject in hand. Mr. Dorman has given a striking instance of this. He says—

"I take as an illustration of what I have said of this writer's use—or misuse—of Scripture, the very first passage which is quoted by him. His question (p. 4) is a practical one. It is about '*church position*.' He first tells us how diversified and conflicting are people's thoughts upon this subject. From this he concludes that all cannot be right; and yet that there must be something right. And then he adds, 'There is a path (quoting from Job xxviii. 7), blessed be God, though no fowl knoweth it, and the vulture's eye hath not seen it.' And having asked, 'Where is this safe and blessed path?' he says, 'Hear the Divine reply,— "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."'" But was the Spirit of God in Job speaking of *church position*? Let any one read the twenty-eighth of Job, and he will see that the subject of enquiry is, 'Where shall *wisdom* be found? and where is the place of *understanding*?' The Divine answer to which, as regards man—*i.e.* if *man* seeks for the wisdom that is above him—is this: 'Unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, *that is wisdom* [not the path to it], and to depart from evil is *understanding*.' And if anything more definite be looked for in the passage, than the abstract perfect wisdom of God, its reference is to Christ as the wisdom of God, and to the mystery of His death and cross, which is 'to them that perish foolishness, but to us who are saved it is the power of God: because the foolishness

c

of God is wiser than men.' Hence the expression, 'Destruction and death say, we have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof.' But as regards man, this is *wisdom*—divine wisdom—'the fear of the Lord;' and divine understanding *in man* is 'to depart from evil.' But let me ask you, what clue is there here to guide to a solution of his difficulty about *church position*? About which, after all, there is no difficulty, if people will take the plain guidance of New Testament Scripture. But when people have some dogma to propound which they are conscious that plain Scripture knows nothing about, the invariable resort is to some mystical principle which lies beyond the vulgar ken."*

This is, by no means, an unfair example of their method of quotation on most of the subjects on which they write. The consequence is, that since there are very many who do not trouble themselves to verify the references, simple minds are often seduced into doubts concerning their own position, because they have been told that it is condemned by Scripture. Again, they are very careful in their modes of attack to conceal their own distinctive beliefs. They single out the weak points in other systems for attack—and they ask, Can these be justified? Thus, on one occasion, "brethren" stationed themselves at the entrance of all the places of worship in a certain town, and gave a tract to all, entitled, *Twenty Questions for Plain Christians*. Some of these were difficult to answer; but, if I had drawn up twenty questions for "the Brethren," I must have repeated some of these, and they could not have answered more easily than ourselves. But it is their business by every *spiritual* as well as Scriptural agency, to get us into our true position in the assembly of "the brethren." Ah! that word *spiritual* covers a great deal, and is made to serve, in this case, some very unspiritual uses. I

* Letter iii., pp. 12 and 13.

ask you to note the contrast between their activity towards sinners and saints. We are admitted to be saints; and yet all their resources are to be brought to bear upon us, to bring us into their fold. But we are warned that towards sinners, lost souls, they have no corporate responsibility—that whoever seeks to save them, does it in his individual capacity. I am content to add one word, “By their fruits ye shall know them.”

(5). *Their government.*—This is a most strange puzzle. They meet “in the name of Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost,” and hence they say, “Jesus is sufficient to keep order in His own house.” But they also maintain that all their “gatherings” form together, for example, “the one assembly of God in London.” There were churches in Galatia, as Paul teaches; but since London is not a province, only a town or city, there can only be one assembly in it. Here comes the difficulty. As they meet in different places there cannot be uniform discipline, government. But this difficulty has been met. A Saturday evening meeting has been established, which is attended by “the leaders” of the respective “gatherings,” and this meeting is their practical supreme power. They issue simultaneous notices to the different parts of London—announcing admissions to fellowship, the exercise of discipline, etc. You will not fail to observe that this meeting is a sad confession of the utter insufficiency of their doctrine, and a plain contradiction to all their professions. But it is a necessity, and hence it is yielded to, though not without disapprobation, I am informed, on the part of many of their number, who maintain that the freedom of the assembly is completely overridden by the Saturday evening conclave. The following extract will support this statement:—

“It is, Brethren, at this Conference, assembled in ‘private,’ that the functions of the Church are usurped. Here

it is that candidates for membership are proposed and received. Here it is that members are put away and received back. Here it is that accusations are made and tried. . . . The mischief that results to the Church from this Conference it is impossible, as I feel, to calculate. . . . It is evident that this Conference is, in fact, an 'Inquisition.' . . . On a recent occasion its doors were guarded and locked, and a cruel assault was committed upon a Brother on his entering. . . . It is, I find, the subject of general enmity and condemnation by the saints, who, I believe, long for deliverance from its power."*

THE DOCTRINES of the Brethren must, in the next place, occupy our attention. Some of these have necessarily been touched upon in reviewing their practice; but we proceed now to explain what may be termed their theological dogmas.

(1.) *The secret advent of the Lord.* The holders of the pre-millennial coming of Christ have, for the most part, been divided into two classes. The one have maintained that the Saviour will return for the destruction of Antichrist and for the salvation of His people, at the same time, in manifested glory; the other, that there is a secret coming of Christ for His people before even Antichrist has appeared on the earth, and that He comes manifestly with His people when He destroys the Man of Sin with the breath of His lips. The Brethren maintain this latter view, although no direct passages of Scripture can be adduced in its support. On the other hand, there are many that seem to render it utterly untenable. For we read of some who, during the reign of Antichrist, "were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and the Word of God." These, however, we are told, are not Christians, not members of the body of Christ, but Jews converted after the rapture of the saints.

* Culverhouse's *Observations on the Discipline amongst "the Brethren,"* pp. 5-7.

(2.) This will be better understood—for the two things are connected—if we proceed to *their doctrine of the Church*. According to the Brethren, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Joshua, Samuel and David, and all the Jewish saints, have no part in the Church of Christ. The Church “was formed by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.”* What the precise standing of the Jewish saints might be is not declared; but they do not share in the peculiar blessings of the Church,—are not members of the body of, and, therefore, are not one with, Christ. The Church commences its existence on the day of Pentecost,—or, according to some, not till the death of Stephen (being “Jewish” before that time),—and concludes her earthly career when she is caught up to meet her Lord in the air. Those that lived before, and those that live after—(for, according to the Brethren, the especial time of the tribulation comes after the Church is rapt silently and secretly away,) may be believers; but since the Holy Ghost was not given before Pentecost, and departs with the Church, they cannot be regenerated in the same sense and way as Christians of the present dispensation. It is true that the Saviour says, “that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. viii. 11); also “that there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God,” &c. (Luke xiii. 28); that Paul is directed to say that “they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal. iii. 9); but, on the authority of Messrs. Darby and Kelly, you must not believe that the patriarchs are of the Church, for the kingdom of heaven means one thing, and the kingdom of

* See *The Rapture of the Saints*, etc., by J. N. Darby; also “The House of God,” etc., in *Present Testimony*, Vol. xi., p. 40.

God means another, and the Church means another. Still, I confess that, to me, no language could more plainly show than that cited the identity of the blessings of the patriarchs with those we enjoy; that they, with ourselves, are members of the mystical body of Christ.

(3.) *Their doctrine concerning the Scriptures is again connected with that of the Church.*—A large portion of the Gospels is Jewish,—was never intended for the Church. Thus, if Matthew xxiv. is cited to show that God's people will be on the earth during the last troubles, you are at once told that this chapter belongs to the Jewish Remnant. The phrase, "Jewish Remnant," indeed, is the key to their hermeneutics.

The Psalms all treat of this, though, of course, it is conceded that there are moral applications to ourselves. According to the Brethren, indeed, the sacred literature of the Church is scarcely more than the epistles, or, rather, some of the epistles, of Paul. Hence, too, the apostolate of Paul is deemed to be of a higher kind than that of the other Apostles. A specimen of the manner in which certain Scriptures are depreciated I take from *Present Testimony*: "This epistle (the Hebrews) is rather a discourse, a treatise, than a letter addressed, in the exercise of apostolic functions, to saints with whom the writer was personally in connection. The author takes rather the place of a teacher than of an apostle."* There is great advantage (to "the Brethren") in this mode of treatment. Press home upon them some argument from the Scriptures, and you are told that you are ignorant of its application. Like Marcion of old—and, indeed, the Sadducees of other date—rejecting, or assigning to a lower place, what does not suit them, they find it easy to fortify their position from their own revised

* Vol. xi., p. 348. J. N. Darby is, I believe, the author of the paper. I may also refer generally to *Kelly on the Gospels*, etc.

Bibles. But the danger of such a course cannot be concealed. For if, on their authority, certain Scriptures are not applicable to us—though there is nothing in the context to indicate it, and though, in many cases, they contain words spoken by the Saviour to His Disciples—then, on the authority of the rationalist, I must also omit certain others, and I have launched on a sea of uncertainty and confusion. Perversion of Scripture is as dangerous as rejection.

(4.) *On the human nature of Christ.*—Their opinions and teaching on this important subject differ from the views of other Christians. That the Saviour was a man they, of course, admit, but they frequently term Him a “heavenly” man.*

It is very difficult, as Dr. Carson’s controversy with Mr. Macintosh has shown, to obtain from them an exact definition of the meaning of this expression. Still, they would concede that they do not hold that the Saviour’s humanity was in all respects like ours, sin excepted. That Mr. Darby holds the same views is clear. Referring to the expression, “Bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,” he says, “We, the Church, are bone of *His* bone, and flesh of *His* flesh, now that He is glorified and the saints united to Him who is on high. The thought is a totally different one, and does not refer to His incarnation, but to our union with Him when glorified. *As incarnate, He abode alone.*”† They do not believe, therefore, that the Saviour’s human body was mortal. They have thus altered many of their hymns which contained the word “mortal” as applied to Christ. This new doctrine is the key-stone of a large superstructure, and, of necessity, alters their whole conception, as we shall see, of the work of Christ. As an example,

* See *Notes on Genesis and Leviticus*, by C. N. Macintosh.

† *The Sufferings of Christ*, p. 75.

Mr. Darby says, "Christ was tempted in every way apart from sin."* This surely, is not the equivalent of the Scripture statement that "He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." Mr. Darby implies that sin played no part in the temptations to which the Saviour was subjected; the Scriptures teach that Jesus endured every possible human temptation, and overcame them all, and thus was without sin—two very different statements.

(5.) *The Third-class Sufferings of Christ.*—To these we have alluded, and now do not feel disposed to enter into them at any length; for, as we have before said, it is not a subject for analysis and dispute. The points of this doctrine have been summed up by W. H. D. as follows:—"First, Atonement is not by the Cross of Christ alone. Second, Atonement is not by Christ's enduring the curse of the law. Third, Atonement is not in Christ's being smitten by God on the Cross. Fourth, Atonement is not simply by Christ's death."† Passages are adduced from J. N. D.'s writings in support of these statements. It may be added that this doctrine has been developed from J. N. D.'s peculiar views of the Jewish Remnant and the Saviour's identification with them in His sufferings, so as to be their Redeemer and Messiah in the future.

The 26th verse of the 69th Psalm is the foundation more or less of these views. ‡ If correct we never ought to sing again—

"Gethsemane can I forget,
Or there Thy conflict see,
Thine agony and bloody sweat,
And not remember Thee?"

For we have no part in His sufferings there; the cup

* *Present Testimony*, Vol. ii., p. 376.

† *A Solemn Appeal*, etc., by W. H. Darby, p. 9.

‡ See *The Sufferings of Christ*, etc., by J. N. Darby, p. 71, *et seq.*

from which He drank was not what we have supposed—the cup of wrath for sin. Still, spite of Mr. Darby and his followers, Gethsemane will be enshrined in our hearts and be our loved resort, especially in times of sorrow and grief.

But a darker consequence of these woeful teachings is their declarations concerning the death of Christ. That in itself was nothing. They say, “He entered into all the darkness and all the wrath of God; but before He went out of the world He had passed through it all, and went out in perfect quiet. The work is so completely done that death is nothing.” Again, “Now that which was properly expiation or atonement was not the pure, however precious, act of Christ’s death.” Once more, “Many besides Jesus have been crucified; but atonement was in no way wrought there.”* We had thought that the essence of the atonement lay in the fact that His body was broken for us and His blood poured out on our behalf, and that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” But it seems that we have been mistaken—and that for the future we must have less regard for the death of our Suffering Surety. Comment is useless; for I am sure that there are but few of us who do not at once recoil from teachings like these, teachings which in our estimation, are as unholily as they are unscriptural.

(6.) *Justification by Faith.*—The value of the work of Luther lay mainly in recovering for the Church the doctrine of Justification by faith only. And the sense in which he held that truth, and in which it was held by the Reformers, and in which it is held by Evangelical men at the present time, is that on the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ the sinner is completely justified, *i.e.* made righteous before God. And he is made

* Cited from *The Present Testimony* and *The Bible Treasury*, by Mr. Dorman, Letter v. p. 12, and Letter vi. p. 6.

righteous before God—first, in that the death of Christ procures for him the remission of sin, and the obedience of Christ a perfect righteousness. In other words, on the exercise of faith the blood of Christ cleanses him from sin, and the obedience, the merits of Christ imputed to him, constitute him as a righteous person before God. Our hymns are full of this doctrine, as for example :—

“Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress.”

But according to “the Brethren” we have all been mistaken, and they utterly deny the imputation of the obedience of the Saviour’s life—His righteousness to the believer. His life on earth was, they say, in no sense vicarious. This doctrine of theirs, as stated in the writings of Mr. Darby and Mr. Macintosh, has been popularised in a tract by C. S. (Mr. Stanley) entitled, “Justification in a Risen Christ.”

They maintain that through the Cross is the forgiveness of sins—nothing more; and that it is by passing into a new state, a state of oneness with the risen Christ, that we are completely righteous.

First, I cite from Mr. Darby, “He that is dead is freed from sin. But Christ died: He then is freed from sin. But whose? Ours, ‘who believe in Him.’ It is all gone, gone with the life to which it was attached, in which he bore it. . . . Our place, our standing before God, is no longer in flesh. It is in Christ. Christ, as man, has taken quite a new place that neither Adam innocent, or Adam sinner, had *anything to say to*. . . . Christ has taken this place consequent on putting away our sin, on having glorified God as to them, and finishing the work. He has taken it in righteousness, and man in Him has got a new place in righteousness with God.”*

* *Sufferings of Christ, etc.*, pp. 117—119.

necessitates a distinction between the life of Christ here and the life of Christ above. He therefore says :—“The life which He had in this world as such He laid down, and never took it again as such. . . . He took life again, but not the life He lived here in the flesh, to which I still rightly say sin attached, not as if He had any in Himself, but as made sin and bearing it, and that is what is said” (p. 118, note). Now, one word of Christ destroys all this reasoning :—“Therefore doth my Father love Me, because I lay down my life that I might take *it* again” (John x. 17). We now turn to C. S. He says :—

“I must confess, I do not see how God would be righteous in reckoning the breaker of the law righteous because another kept it; nor do I see this taught in Scripture, far from it. But through the precious atoning death and justifying resurrection of Jesus, I do see how God is perfectly righteous in justifying the believer. The law could not be made more honourable than by the death of Jesus Christ the Lord. God did not justify sin, but punished it in His Son. The sentence was executed to the utmost. The old creation thus came for ever to an end in the grave of Christ: but in the resurrection of Christ, God gives me a NEW LIFE in perfect everlasting righteousness. Now, though He could not be righteous in any way in justifying my old man, yet He is everlastingly gloriously righteous in justifying me as a new creature in Christ risen from the dead. And being thus justified in the risen Christ, He gives me His Holy Spirit for positive righteousness of life and walk. (See Rom. viii.) So that whilst on the human plan, as put under law, I should only break it; yet, on this Divine plan, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” *

It is no part of our purpose—for the time allotted to a lecture will not permit it—to enter upon a refutation of all these unscriptural teachings.

Dr. Tregelles has done this in his *Five Letters on*

* *Justification in a Risen Christ*, by C. Stanley, p. 11.

recent denials of our Lord's Vicarious Life, and we must refer you to him; but we cannot but lament the pernicious consequences of such doctrines. Already they sing—

“There is *death* for a look at the Crucified One.”

And the Cross, concerning which Paul prayed that he might never glory in anything else, is spoken of, if not contemptuously, yet as occupying a very low place in comparison with the Resurrection. But some of you may say, “Do not the Scriptures teach that Jesus was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification?” Undoubtedly; but the meaning of the word “for” is the same in both clauses, and exactly is, “on account of.” To read “in order to,” as you must with “the Brethren’s” view, makes nonsense: He was delivered “in order to” our offences, and was raised again “in order to” our justification. On the other hand, read “on account,” or “because of,” and you have the clear Scriptural statement of the nature of the death and the resurrection of Christ. You will naturally ask one more question,—If it is so clear, how could there be any difference of opinion about it? That I cannot tell; but I know this, that the merest tyro in Greek would tell you that “on account of” is the proper translation; hence, I fear, it is but another example of “the Brethren’s” method of using Scripture.

(7). *The law not a rule of life.*—This is one of their distinctive teachings. In this case there are, no doubt, many passages of Scripture which seem to favour their view. As, for example, “Ye are not under law, but under grace;” but a candid examination of the context shows that what the Apostle means is, that Christians are not under the condemnation of the law, that in Christ they are pardoned and accepted, and hence under grace. For, if we

are under no obligation to keep the moral law, why is the Apostle so careful to show, in Romans xiii., that all the commandments are comprehended in the duty of loving one another? Or why does James so carefully point out that whosoever "Shall keep the whole law, and offend in one point, is guilty of all"? Or say "If ye fulfil the royal law according to Scripture 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' ye do well"?

I know that it is said, James was writing for the Jews, and not for the Church; but we cannot be expected to admit such a plea, especially when we remember that, though Jews, they were believers, and that in the Church the Saviour has broken down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, and made of the twain one new man, so making peace. After all, however, it is only a dispute about words. Christ is the law of our life, they would say, as well as we; but Christ is our law of life because He is perfectly righteous—is, therefore, in one sense, the embodiment of the law. If this were pointed out we could hardly take exception to the teaching; but proclaimed, as it is, in a dogmatic and negative form, it leads to gross Antinomianism. And there are many of the godly among the Brethren who lament this practical effect of the doctrine.

(8.) We might proceed in our enumeration, but we have neither space nor time. On the question of *Baptism* "the Brethren" are divided. Mr. Darby practises infant baptism. Mr. Groves alludes to this in the letter we read at the commencement. Mr. Darby has not written on the subject, but the principle on which he justifies it is clearly laid down in a paper in *Present Testimony*. Its title is, "The House of God—the Body of Christ;" and he maintains that these two things are essentially distinct. He thus says, "If the Body and the House are the same

thing, then all that are in the House, *be they adults or infants*, have part in the privileges which belong to the Body.* According to this view, infants may be in the House, which, be it remembered, is the Church of God, and not members of the Body of Christ. To plain people this will not be very intelligent. Again, *infallibility in interpretation* seems contended for. This, indeed, is a consequence of their doctrine of the Divine presidency in the Assembly. For, as Dr. Carson has noted, if the Holy Ghost speaks by those who minister in the Assembly, the utterance must be infallible; and the Doctor gives a quotation from *Present Testimony*, on the authority of Mr. Govett, from a paper by Mr. Darby, in support of this view. "It is not sobriety, says Mr. Darby, as a Christian, to overlook or deny the present direct guidance by the Lord, through His Spirit, of His Disciples as being something over and above the written word." Argument, therefore, is impossible, for "the Brethren" have this guidance and you have it not, and so they tell you, in answer to your citation from the Scriptures (this has happened to me again and again), "You are in darkness—this is to be received." But where the difference between this "guidance" of "the Brethren" and the inner light of Fox, and the verifying faculty of Colenso and the Rationalists, and the infallibility of Rome? In any case the Bible ceases to be a light to our feet and a lamp to our path; and if I want to know the truth I must go, not to the feet of my Lord and Saviour, but to the feet of "the Brethren," who have that special guidance which is wanting to other denominations of Christians.

We have not specified all the doctrines of "the Brethren." There are a few they hold in common with others, and in some particulars they have done valuable service. But, as Dr. Carson says, "The

* Vol. xi., pp. 40, 41.

great danger to be feared from the Plymouth Brethren is, that they have ingeniously mixed up some very important truths with the most pernicious and fatal errors. This is often done in such a guarded manner that ordinary readers are not very likely to discover the combination till they have actually imbibed the poison."

This witness is true, for when they are seeking to convince other Christians of their error, their own peculiarities are kept in the background until their converts are introduced to their fellowship, and then, as several have confessed, their hearts have died within them as they discovered that they have connected themselves with worse evils than those they had abandoned. The effect has been diverse. Some, for very consistency's sake, have kept their ground, but have sunk back into formality and lifelessness; some, content to take their views from others, and gratified with the authority and influence they enjoy as assumed teachers—those "restless men who *will* be at something," whom Mr. Macintosh so pathetically describes—have been filled with ardent zeal to propagate a system from which all their importance is derived; some, losing faith in all forms of Christianity, have abandoned even the Christian profession, and are seen in all parts of England, swelling the number of that saddest of all classes of men—backsliders; while a few have gone back to the churches whence they were seduced, and rejoice to-day at their escape from the bondage of a system which was fast destroying the peace of their souls.

A minister thus wrote to Dr. Carson on the appearance of his tractate:—

"Allow me to express to you the great pleasure I have had in the perusal of your pamphlet, and my deep conviction that you have laid the Church under great obligation by its timely appearance. . . . Allured by the appearance

of their deep piety, I went among 'the Brethren;' and though I remained among them little more than six months, I saw quite enough. Among all the Christians I ever met, I never saw such intolerance and bigotry, such denial of the right of private judgment, and such miserable oppression as among this sect. From *personal contact* with many of them, I *know* that the Plymouths do hold the errors you have so well exposed."*

That there are sincere and good men among the Brethren no one will attempt to deny. But when we see good and devout men—men whose practical walk reflects so much of the image of Christ—our sorrow is the deeper that they should be associated with errors in practice and doctrine which have tended so much to destroy the unity of the Church, and thereby to dishonour their Lord.

But our task is done. We have spoken to wise men, judge ye what we say; and judge it by that only true and infallible standard—the Word of God. If we have spoken in accordance with it, then you have the responsibility of accepting what we have said. If we have not, then it is your instant duty to reject it and to show, in order to destroy, our error. The times are dark and threatening, and the darker they become the more important it is to take heed to God's Word. "To the law and the testimony." Let this be the Ithuriel spear wherewith we detect the subtle presence of the Evil One—nay, rather let it be the sword of the Spirit, wherewith, trusting in Divine strength, we may overcome the tempter and win the battle for the Lord. The times *are* dark, but we look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, before whose presence the darkness shall flee away, because, as "the morning without clouds," He will usher in an everlasting day.

* *Heresies of the Plymouth Brethren*, by Dr. Carson, pp. 81, 82.



B

