

# A CAUTION

## AGAINST THE DARBYITES,

WITH A WORD TO THE AUTHORS OF TWO RECENT  
PAMPHLETS.

AND THE TESTIMONY OF LORD CONGLETON.

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# A CAUTION, ETC.

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## THE TERM DARBYITES.

It is possible that the term "Darbyites" may be displeasing to some persons, as it can hardly fail of contrasting strongly with the appellation that has been given by the sect to their meetings in the Metropolis, of "*The one Assembly of God in London.*"\* It is right, therefore, that I should explain that I use the word with the greatest deliberation, as alone fitted to describe those who have (however unreflectingly) constituted themselves the followers of Mr. J. N. Darby.

When this gentleman, after, in the first place, abandoning his position as a clergyman in the Establishment, subsequently left a congregation of Christians gathered together on the principle of the "Unity of the Church," he "went outside everything," to recall the language of the period at which the secession was effected,† or, in more intelligible words, he excommunicated himself:‡ trusting to the effect of his

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\* See the official document of excommunication issued by the Priory meeting, in the case of Mr. Alexander S——.

† See "The New Opinions of the Brethren." Green, London, 1849.

‡ "He had '*left everything when he left Ebrington Street:*' he was, by his own act, outside every gathering that did not go with him." Capt. Paget, in his tract, "Consider, &c.," p. 2.

great personal influence that he should be followed into the same position by those with whom he had been accustomed to meet around "the Lord's table." This result, unhappily, took place accordingly, and "the Darbyites" are those who gather round the table spread by Mr. Darby, and acknowledge his authority, and denounce all who refuse to submit to the authority of the Apostle of the new sect.

#### FIRST PRINCIPLES.

This result, involving in its consequences the total disruption of the body of Christians called Plymouth Brethren, is the consequence of principles brought in as far as I can learn by Mr. Darby, involving much misplaced truth in their foundation, and much error in their superstructure. The foundation I shall express in Mr. Darby's own language. He says,\* "The presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church as one body was (with the waiting for Christ's coming) the grand doctrine on which the whole testimony of the Brethren was founded." This was "the testimony of God specially committed to the Brethren." "The question *now* is the presence and power of the Holy Ghost as forming and embodying the Church in unity."

#### TRUTH AND ERROR.

There is much truth involved here; for if we go back to the formation of the Church at Pentecost, it is undeniable that the Holy Ghost dwelt in the Church as one body: nor is it any matter of doubt or question that where two or

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\* "A Letter to the Saints in London, as to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church," by J. N. Darby, pp. 4, 6, 7, &c. (*read the whole*).

three Christians meet together in the name of Jesus, there He is in their midst—their unity being found as at first in their risen and glorified Head, and by the power of the Spirit. These are heavenly truths which never can pass into oblivion through earthly disorder, and the “grand doctrine.” turns out to be no new discovery after all. But wait a little. It is, according to Mr. Darby, a testimony of God “*specially* committed to the Brethren,” and very much yet remains behind which is not so clear to the uninitiated. Mr. Darby informs us that not only is Christ present with the two or three wherever they meet together, but that the Holy Ghost is now “*forming and EMBODYING the Church in unity.*” This is news, indeed, for it amounts to the assertion that God is engaged in setting up again in its original standing the Church as one *embodied* and *united* whole in its primitive estate of visibility, catholicity, infallibility, and power; for all these things *must* be true, if what Mr. Darby quietly assumes is the fact. The Bride of Christ is arraying herself in her beautiful garments, and after the long night of apostacy is going forth to meet her beloved Lord! Is it really so? Are these magnificent ideas, which are proclaimed also by the Irvingites in reference to their “Church,” and to which I believe even the Mormonites are no strangers, in process of realization? Alas! no; for in looking round the professing Church, we are taught by the same authority to see *ruins*, nothing but *ruins*, in the visible Church. Not only are the Roman and Greek Churches in ruins, not only are the Reformed Communions ruins also, but the efforts of Churchmen and Dissenters to restore and to repair prove that they have undertaken a task which is beyond their strength,

and to which they are by no means competent.\* Man has grieved the Holy Spirit, the Church has lost many of His manifestations, *its practical unity is gone and scattered*, —the wolf, because there are hirelings, has caught the sheep (though not out of Christ's hand), and scattered them, and the ruin is felt.† Mr. Darby has had a large share in further dilapidating these ruins, and, strange to say, also in building together the sect of Brethren meeting together, as they supposed, on the original ground of the Church's standing, although *the practical unity of the Church was gone long before*. Yet "the children of God have nothing to do but to meet together in the name of the Lord."‡ This was no doubt the original principle on which the Brethren met, as is given with greater clearness in the life of Mr. Groves§ than in any other publication within my knowledge. This most amiable and devoted missionary was, it appears, the first who conceived the idea of the system, and one of the first small company in Dublin who met together to carry out the practice of the principles thus defined in the above work. Mr. Bellett said, "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."

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\* See "Reflections on the Ruined Condition of the Church, and on the efforts made by Churchmen and Dissenters to restore it to its primitive order," 1841.

† "A Letter to the Saints in London, &c." by J. N. Darby, p. 19.

‡ "Reflections, &c." p. 20.

§ Or see "Catholic Christianity and Party Communion delineated," in two letters by the late A. N. Groves. Morgan & Chase, London.

To this it is probable the reader will be not unwilling to assent, as the writer does most cordially; but any reflecting person may see how vast the range of questions which must be settled before the beautiful vision could become a practical reality. The terms of communion, defining what is meant by "believers," were at first most latitudinarian, finishing by a not very marvellous rebound to the opposite extreme of exclusive pharisaism.

Then, as to government in the Church (without which no large body of communicants can be expected to prosper), the originators of the system, as far as I can learn, defined nothing at all. It was, therefore, a vineyard without a fence, and without any of those safeguards which Divine wisdom saw meet to establish in the early Church: No wonder that, if even then in spite of this care "grievous wolves entered in, not sparing the flock;" much more in the midst of present weakness grievous wolves should be likely to enter in here; and that if Satan's ministers were transformed into the ministers of righteousness in the Apostle's days, there should be a still greater danger of the same thing now. Our blessed Saviour has forewarned us to "beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them *by their fruits*. Do men gather grapes of *thorns*, or figs of *thistles*?"\*

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\* In the year 1840, Dr. Niblock, a friendly clergyman, and a truly Christian, but discerning, observer of the "Brethren" wrote this to Mr. Dorman—"But why do I write to you? It is to say, and that with real affection, Alas! that so beautiful a theory *cannot* long subsist; it is too unworldly and sainted for our polluted atmosphere. It will do—it has done—much good; but IT WILL FALL (Acts xx. 30)—*Of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them? Woe, woe unto them through whom it shall fall! Mine shall not be

## THE CHURCH ONCE RUINED CANNOT BE RESTORED.

Mr. Darby's caution to the Dissenters, whose organized association he seems to think "denied this presence and guidance"\* (of the Spirit,) is as follows, and the warning may not be very wide of its application to the Darbyite organizations now :

"I know that those who esteem these little organized associations to be the Church of God, see *nothing but mere meetings of men in every other gathering of God's children.* There is a very simple answer on this matter. Such brethren have no promise authorising them to *again set up the churches of God when they have fallen,* whilst there is a positive promise that where two or three are gathered together in the *name of Jesus, He is in their midst.*" (Reflections, &c., p. 24.)

Mr. Bellett seems to have seen that the "Brethren" could not regard themselves as THE CHURCH, since he says,

"We may try our ways most surely by all that is here said to the Churches, but this does not amount to the Son of Man *owning us as His only light in our place.* And our first duty therefore, both in grace and wisdom, is to be humbled because of this, for though we may have much *in fragments* that belongs to the candlestick, yet all that does not give us the standing and privilege of the candlestick, entitling us to set aside as darkness, and as not of the sanctuary, all that is not of ourselves." ("Present Testimony.")

Very true, indeed, and it may be added that a candlestick in fragments is not a candlestick at all ; which scarcely seems to have occurred to the writer.

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the hand to detach even a pin from so goodly a tent ; rather, like my namesake of Arimathæa, I would honour it when others abandon it."—Joseph White Niblock. "A Review, &c., &c.," by W. H. Dorman, 1849, page 3.

\* "Account of the proceedings at Rawstone Street," pp. 6, 7.

Let us look at the fragments of the candlestick a little more closely. I find that:

“Any number of believers has no need to wait *till that power* (the Holy Ghost) *produces the union of all*, because they have the promise that where two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord, He will be in the midst of them; and two or three may act in reliance on this promise.”\*

So there may be, as at Plymouth, two or three, or even six or seven separate and mutually repellent places of communion where the “two or three” may in each talk about the unity of the body, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and yet be manifestly separate, and manifestly coming to different conclusions. What are we to learn from this? that God’s truth has failed? Surely not, but rather that man has failed, and the failure of man brings in evil which man cannot rectify. “*The practical unity of the Church is gone.*”

#### WHAT IS MEANT BY RUINS?

Let me illustrate my meaning by a circumstance which came to my knowledge some years since. There existed on Hamps Fell, near Cartmel, a ruin, fragmentary, but valuable in the eyes of the owner from its associations with antiquity. To the surprise of this landlord, on returning from the Continent, he found that the farmer had pulled down this, to him, unsightly pile, and used the stones for the buildings of his own farmyard. When remonstrated with, he humbly offered to repair the wrong, by building up again the structure he had destroyed. Did the owner thank him, or accept his offer?

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\* “Reflections on the Ruined Condition of the Church,” 1841, p. 25.

I think not; for however well the stones were cleansed, he could never forget that their unity had been once dissolved, and that they had been put to porcine uses; he could never again attach the idea of antiquity or of sanctity to them.

Now Mr. Darby is quite confident that "separation is the first element of unity and union."\* The old ruined church must be pulled down, for "wherever the body declines the putting away of evil, it becomes in its unity a denier of God's character of holiness, and then separation from the evil is the path of the saint, and the unity he has left *is the very greatest evil that can exist* where the name of Christ is named."\*

#### SEPARATION FROM EVIL.

But Mr. Darby can not only pull down, but *build again*, without any difficulty, on the old foundation. "From what we have seen, it is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ on high is the object round which the Church clusters in unity. He is its Head and Centre." Very good indeed! None other can be the opinion of any one of those Churches of "Independents and Dissenters," from whom he keeps himself religiously separate, nor indeed of any right-minded member of the Established Church.

What then is to be the peculiar excellence and spiritual endowment of the Darbyite structure, which shall enable it to speak loftily, as if it were THE Church of God? Simply separation from evil, according to their own ideas of *what is evil*, and *what separation from evil is*. The stones have rolled themselves into the water,† and have come out, in their own

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\* "Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity." pp. 9, 15, &c., &c.

† As in the post-apostolic "Shepherd of Hermas."

opinion, so clean that they have forgotten the scent of their past humiliation.

And this has been the fault of the Brethren, as seen by their fellow-Christians, twenty-five years ago, when it was said, that\* “an overweening conceit of their own extraordinary spirituality and purity is one of the marked characteristics of the Brethren.” It seems to me that this tendency constitutes the peculiarity of the danger of Darbyism to very many, especially young Christians, who have conscientiously renounced some evil, and rightly fear latitudinarian indifference. But let such remember that *thus* saith Jehovah, “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; where is the house that ye build unto me, or where is the place of my rest? But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.” The Darbyites may cast out their Brethren, saying all the time, “Let the Lord be glorified;” but even here the Lord may manifest Himself to the joy of these poor and contrite ones, as in the triumphant death-bed of Mr. Groves, and the accusers may be *manifestly* put to shame, even in this world.

#### HUMILITY THE ONLY SAFE GROUND.

Moreover, it is surely most contrary to scripture, and to the experience of the Church of God, to believe that the real power of the *Holy Spirit* should be especially looked for in the midst of *such* a body of Christians. But unless they could demonstrate the contrary to this, what possible right have the Darbyites to claim authority over other sections on the ground of what the Church *was* in its original unity, in its glorious strength, in

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\*“Reasons, &c.,” J. S., York, 1841.

the fulness of its power, when the apostles could pronounce from the midst of the united Church, "*It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.*"

The Darbyites are becoming a little conscious of this. *They* do not *unitedly* believe in their apostle, nor are they *all* very certain about the rebuilt ruin. I know this, for I am not so far removed from "the one assembly of God in London," as to be out of the reach of its members when they desire sympathy and assistance, under the pressure of "The London Bridge Conference." What this is we shall see presently.

#### PRACTICAL DISBELIEF IN THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE.

When Queen Esther found herself in a crisis of her people's history, she at once recognised the unity of the nation. She said "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I also and my maidens will fast likewise." She believed in God as the protector and guardian of her people, and she believed that He would hear and answer prayer, when thus earnestly and unitedly sought unto.

Mr. Darby considers that a special testimony about the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church as *one body* was committed to the Brethren; but when *he* comes to practical action in the midst of this body, in difficult circumstances, he casts all his *talk* to the winds.

With all his professed value for the above doctrine, when it came to the practical question of the spreading of a second or opposition table at Plymouth,—a step of schism which surely involved the recognition of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the body of Christians, with whom he was acting, requiring prayer, fasting, and humiliation, and the

utmost effort to rectify what was amiss, before taking so solemn and irretrievable a resolution,—we find him throwing aside the judgment even of the Brethren who were then with him, and acting on his *own individual responsibility*. His reasons for leaving that body of Christians, as stated by himself,\* were, first: “*the Church cannot judge evil;*” second: “*the unity of the body is denied.*”† For *these two* reasons he says,‡ “I cannot own a table in Ebrington Street in any way.” “I act then as I acted seventeen years ago,” (I suppose when he left the Church of England), “believing that where two or three are gathered together in Christ’s name, there He is. I do not speak of a second table as regards Ebrington Street, more than I should say a fifth or a sixth, if I began to break bread when there were four or five dissenting bodies already established in a place.”§

## SCHISM UNLIMITED.

Who does not see in this the justification for unlimited division of Christians, on the principle of *each man’s private judgment*, unless Mr. Darby be admitted to be *an apostle*, and his judgment the infallible guidance of the Holy Ghost, so that he could say, “the things that *I* write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” As a private Christian, another teacher may (as indeed I do), believe that the very same accusations hold good against Mr. Darby’s sect, and may spread an-

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\* “Letter to the Saints meeting in Ebrington Street,” p. 5.

† No mention, it will be seen, of heretical doctrine.

‡ “Letter to the Saints meeting in Ebrington Street,” p. 7.

§ He began to break bread “*for his own need!*” and thought that *perhaps* some six persons might unite with him!—a despised remnant, but judging the evil. “Narrative, &c.,” p. 56; also, “A Letter, &c.,” J. N. D.—, p. 22.

other table in opposition to his, for "this power of evil in the Church may be discerned spiritually, and *left* when there is the consciousness of inability to effect any remedy."\* Who shall condemn such a person, as *despising* "the Unity of the Body?" Certainly not Mr. Darby, for he is found acting on Mr. Darby's own published principles.†

Mr. Darby, though acting in a manner and with an authority to interfere with Churches of Christians everywhere in a way which nothing but apostolic commission could justify, and apostolic love render tolerable, is clearly not an apostle, for his own building is found a ruin under his hands, and he is "conscious of inability to effect any remedy." Still "feeble" from the beginning,‡ "a comparison of what the Church was at first when filled with the spirit, led them to the sense of our *present ruined state*," and at the date of the pamphlet in question there was "failure of spiritual power, and therefore of discernment§" amongst the gathered saints. Mr. Darby had in fact to act as he had before threatened to do, and to "begin afresh,"|| much to the surprise of many, doubtless, who like the writer wondered on what this leader could begin, if the old ground was really that of the Church of God; but he was not with-

\* "Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity," by J. N. Darby, p. 15.

† "On Mr. Darby is to be charged the sin of breaking the Unity of the Body, through a *practical denial* of his belief in the truth of the presence and present power of the Holy Ghost to enable the Church to put away error by the Word of God. If he really felt his weakness, surely that was the very reason for *waiting*, instead of precipitating, so serious an evil."—Capt. Paget, "Consider of it, &c.," p. 2.

‡ "A Letter to the Saints in London, &c.," by J. N. Darby, p. 6.

§ Ditto, p. 7.

|| "A Letter to the Saints in London as to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church," by J. N. Darby, p. 22; also, "What Investigation, &c.," p. 10.

held by any doubts as to his competence to act the part of the quasi-apostle\* of a resuscitated Church of saints, and he did begin. † With what result we may see presently, but first let us hear Mr. Darby as to what in 1841 he considered the right path: "How then will the Spirit work? What will be the result of such a one's faith? To *acknowledge the ruin*—to have it present to his conscience—and to be humbled in consequence. And shall we, who are guilty of this state of things, *pretend to remedy it?* No, the attempt would but prove that we are not humbled thereby. Let us rather search in all humility what God speaks to us in His word of such a condition of things; and *let us not like foolish children who have broken a precious vase, attempt to join together its broken fragments, and to set it up in hopes to hide the damage from others!*"

#### THE DESPISED REMNANT.

The "despised remnant" with whom he looked forward to having fellowship ‡ have since learned to speak loftily of their position, which is not simply that of the early Church, wherein there were so great differences of judgment and of practice, that Paul, blessed and proved apostle as he was, was with great difficulty tolerated amongst the saints at Jerusalem; neither is it at all the position of those who first met together as brethren, and who tolerated to the very verge of

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\* Read "The Gifts of the Spirit remaining among the Saints," by J. N. D., for his views of the continuance of apostles.

† The reader will interpret for himself the following Cromwellian sentence attributed to Mr. Darby at the time: "People have no idea that one cannot venture to act without the Lord, and that one has no plan but to do His will, as one may discover it." See "Some Remarks upon the Circular issued on the subject of a meeting for humiliation and prayer, Plymouth, January 29, 1846."

‡ "A Letter to the Saints in London, &c.," by J. N. Darby, p. 22.

possible toleration, all kinds of difference amongst them. It is a new ground, altogether founded on their having "judged the evil," that is to say, having acquiesced in the dictate of their leader as to the cutting off from communion of all the Christians meeting at Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, and with all who have communion with any who have communion with those who have fellowship with Bethesda, and so on *ad infinitum*. This is the unity of the body as Christ's spouse, *separate from evil*. Not separate from evil *morally*. This were far too low an aim, and indeed Mr. Wigram seems to think that even gentlemanly feeling and conduct were to be thrown aside as worldly in the controversy;\* but separate from evil *doctrinally*, and not exactly this either, since, strange to say, similar error may be tolerated amongst them when proclaimed by their chief leader,† but zeal for *orthodoxy* shown by attacking their former brethren with a bitterness‡ to be best explained by their having really identified their brethren in their minds with Satan himself, and then sought to combat the enemy with his own weapons: for as Mr. Groves wrote at the time,§ "Had the charges of Satan's peculiar actings in their

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\* "To the heedless reader I expose myself to the charge of the breach of all gentlemanly feeling." "Plain Evidence, &c., concerning Ebrington Street," by G. V. Wigram: *read the whole*, J. E. H.

† See "Notice of some recent Doctrine," D. W. (Walther, 1862,) and also "A Review of the great Doctrine, &c.," (T. Ryan, Dublin, 1865.)

‡ Even zeal for *orthodoxy* cannot explain such a state of feeling as is shewn in the following extract: "For myself I would rather expose my family circle to the results of the friendly intercourse of *any Irvingite teacher, or a Roman Catholic priest*, than of any one of the five, (leading Plymouth Brethren) though mourning and praying for all of them." To the Meeting in Rawstorne Street, G. V. Wigram, October, 1846.

§ See the Tottenham case, published (1849) by Mr. Groves, p. 4: *read the whole* carefully.

brethren been accompanied with peculiar Christ-like actings among themselves, the wrong done to their brethren, and still more the danger to their own souls, would have been less ; but when they first make this assumption, that *Satan is only on one side*, and then use it as a *justification for departing from all the rules of even natural righteousness towards their brethren*, there is no end to the amount of MORAL RUIN involved." Since this was written, in 1849, the writer has had an abundant entrance administered into the everlasting kingdom, and his words have proved only too exact a prediction of the present state of things.

#### IS MR. DARBY AN APOSTLE ?

Is Mr. Darby then really an apostle, and are his decisions binding on the Church ? He himself mentions that he had received a letter calling him an apostle, and it appears that he disowns the title,\* but it is evident the question had been raised, and the author of "The Church and the Kingdom" says, after speaking of Luther, "it remained for another spirit and a deeper age to bring to light that precious gem which, since the days of Paul, "the dark unfathomed caves of ocean" had hid from human eyes in the great question of the nineteenth century—*What is the Church?* This is in principle the pearl of great price which needed the sagacious eye of a more practised merchantman, and touches of a more skilful hand to appreciate its real worth, and by separating it from the incrustations which deformed and obscured its

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\* "Narrative of facts," p. 19. Few sect leaders in these days believe in *themselves* as their followers are apt to do in them. Mr. Newton, we have seen, recanted ; Mr. Irving published a quasi confession of error. When shall we see the Darbyite leaders humbling themselves as little children, that they may become truly great ?

innate lustre, to set forth the charms of its purity, *unity* and beauty as “the Bride.”

This goes far towards making Mr. Darby an apostle, at least in the subordinate place which he himself points out in the gifts of the Spirit remaining among the saints.\* “In truth the word apostle though now of definite force (he says) had it not formerly; it just amounts to one sent, a missionary. The messenger of the Church is called ‘your apostle in the original.’” He defines, then, an apostle as “one sent from Christ, and *acting from Him on his own responsibility* to Christ, having a given errand and sphere in which to exercise his commission,” &c. Much more of this, and something about “the Star of the Church of Philadelphia,” may be found in the work from which I take the above quotation.† I do not know the birth-place of this *peculiar* testimony. It seems to have been circulated in MS., and the writer calls it in question and thinks that Mr. Darby will hardly accept the title. I believe, nevertheless, that it made the circuit of the world, and if I rightly remember, I heard of it first in connection with M. Favez, in Mauritius, and with a schism either contemplated or effected mainly between the coloured people with M. Favez, who were to be the Philadelphians, and the whites, who were to be “the others.” I suppose all has gone to ruin long ago.

Now when I see Mr. Darby acting so avowedly on his own responsibility, heedless of warning, and despising the unity of

\* “The Gifts, &c.,” p. 8.

† “Notes on some of the Doctrinal Statements, &c., &c.,” Coutanche, printer, Jersey. The MS. gives as the judgment of the writer, that the “angels,” or “stars,” hold a place analogous to “apostles”—that “the seven churches” are “the my.tic history of the testimony of God raised *in the midst of ruins* at successive periods in ecclesiastical times,” &c., &c.

the Church, breaking this up of deliberate purpose,\* to secure his own pre-eminence and the exaltation of his own views and teaching, I must suppose either that he is deliberately guilty of what the scripture terms heresy, or that he is led by some unavowed notion of his own commission thus to act. This is, at all events, the more charitable view of the matter, and to this I adhere. But then what becomes of the unity of the body? The Church is left out of the question when it pleases Mr. Darby to act "on his own responsibility." In fact, he acts from without, and not, as the apostles did, from within.

Where in all this am I to trace the guidance of the Holy Ghost? Would not Mr. Darby's own well-known love of power and intolerance of rivalry have led to exactly the same line of action if left to himself? and what sort of answer have we to "the grand question of the nineteenth century—What is the Church?" The Church is the pearl, and the pearl has many incrustations, and when these incrustations are *all* stripped off, we have Mr. Darby "*alone*, in the essential and infallible unity of the body," a unity which certainly cannot be broken unless it should please this gentleman some time to quarrel with himself; as it was said of one of Cromwell's captains, that if John Lillburn were left alone in

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\* A resolution taken LONG BEFORE, according to "some remarks upon the circular letter issued on the subject of a meeting of humiliation and prayer, Rowe, Plymouth," dated January 29th, 1846. The writer says, p. 10, "If any one ask (as many have asked in ignorance of these facts) what brought our brother D— (Darby) from the scene of his labours *last spring*—I think with the view of such a state of things working fast to their consummation, they can be at no great loss for a sufficient answer. I may give it in the words of another at the time, "He sees P— (Plymouth) is the centre of the influence or *opposition* (I forget which word) *made to his views, and he has come to break it up.*" So much for "the Unity of the Body!"

the world John would quarrel with Lillburn and Lillburn with John.\*

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\* What, then, is the Church? It appears to be, according to Mr. Darby, first the collective aggregate of *national* churches, of Rome, of Greece, of Armenia, Abyssinia, &c., and the Lutheran, the Reformed in Germany and France, and finally the English Church, but apparently not the Dissenters, for he says,

“THE CHURCH is in a state of ruin, immersed and buried in the world; *invisible* if you will have it so; whilst it ought to be as a candle on a candlestick, the light of God. If it is not in this state, then I ask our Dissenting brethren, Why have you left it? If it be, then, confess this ruin, this apostacy, this departure from its primitive standing. Alas! the fact is too evident. Abraham may receive man-servants and maid-servants, &c., but his *spouse* is in the house of Pharaoh.” The poor Dissenters are *nowhere*. But observe, in this case, “the Church,” after being *non-existent* (“its continuance gone”) for 1800 years, must have come into existence again since 1835, when, Mr. Darby being witness, churches did not exist! (read “Character of Office,” &c., Christian Witness, 1835.)

“I cannot think that any, even the most zealous of those persons who, with a desire of which I willingly acknowledge the sincerity, have sought to again set up the fallen dispensation (and David was sincere in his desire to build the temple, although it was not God’s will that he should do so), are in a condition to be able to do it, or that they have *the right to impose upon my faith, as God’s Church, the little edifices* that they have set up. And yet I am very far from thinking that there have not been churches in time past, when God sent His apostles to settle them; and in my opinion he who is unable to discern the difference between these two states, has no very clear judgment in the things of God.” “Reflections on the ruined Condition of the Church,” pp. 11, 14.

There is a second sense in which Mr. Darby used the term “the Church,” which will not detain us long. It is the common usage of describing the whole company of God’s faithful people on earth, “*Christians*—in a word, *the Church* generally.” (Page 8.)—Again,

“They have had their thoughts so fully engaged in their churches, that they have almost lost sight of *the Church*.”

A third sense in which Mr. Darby uses the word Church is that of “the invisible Church,” into the unity of which he withdraws himself when it so pleases him, or if others gather round him in his isolation *they* immediately become the Church, the Bride, for *ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia*.

## THE LEADERS.

Having disposed of the preliminary questions, I now approach the consideration which arises as to how far the concurrence of the two—Mr. Darby and Mr. Wigram, who acted in unison, Mr. Wigram rather as an accomplice after the fact in effecting the schism—could be considered to justify the act itself, or to entitle it to be considered “the decision of the Holy Ghost dwelling *in the unity of the body.*” Two, it may be said, are better than one, but then they must be united in a good cause, and be themselves blameless, or the blame attaching to one will react on the other. I do not wish to believe other than that the chief author of the mischief and his chief abettor are entitled to that forbearance which Christian love must ever dictate, and which would cover a multitude of faults, and all their failure shall not make me forget that “we once took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company;” and, as I believe that Christian love is imperishable like its Author, so I must conclude that they regard me with like feelings. I must therefore omit much that might have been said under this head to strengthen this word of caution.

## NO UNITY AS TO THE SCHISM.

With the exception of Mr. Wigram, it is evident that Mr. Darby failed to carry the judgment of godly brethren with him in this his act of secession, when first completed at Plymouth. I do not enter into details, as there is some difficulty in reconciling diverging statements, but I believe the general result may be stated, without risk of contradiction, in the words of Lord Congleton.\* “It was a *novelty*, a *new doctrine*

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\* “Reasons for leaving Rawstone-street,” page 22.

*altogether*, that people with open communion and open ministry were to be separated from—that is, previously to their having committed, by any corporate act, a breach of discipline, or to their having refused to investigate charges publicly brought before them. And I am persuaded that nothing could have brought this about *but the weight of Mr. Darby's own personal influence*, and a great growth of sectarian feeling. Love to the Church and to its unity had declined generally: people wanted their own leaders, and leaders wanted their own people.”

Such being the state of things, I ask, Where is the evidence of any guidance of the Spirit with Mr. Darby in effecting the schism? Mr. Rhind came to him blaming his beginning to break bread,\* and still earlier in the history † he received a letter from Capt. Hall “pressing on (him) the misery of a second table.” Mr. L. Potter urged him “to assemble a number of the leading Brethren to see into it before (he) broke bread elsewhere;” and Lord Congleton subsequently stated—“I felt so strongly that Mr. Darby's act of making a division at Plymouth, in which Mr. Wigram helped him, is a case of high-handed, unwarrantable proceeding, that I cannot go to any meeting of saints where they are received without their conduct being investigated.” Mr. Wigram's and Mr. Darby's influence were paramount in London, and Lord Congleton left the Brethren there.

Division having now begun, naturally runs on *ad infinitum*; but where do the Darbyites find the authority to state that their *one body* so commenced is any other than *a sect*? There

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\* “Narrative of Facts,” by J. N. Darby, page 56.

† Ditto, page 46, &c., &c.

was no unity of opinion produced by the Spirit in the unity of the body to give birth to any such schism. It must be admitted that the star of the new church of Philadelphia rose above troubled waters, and that the reverse of "brotherly love" was the principle then dominant. The pearl, when cleansed from the incrustations which obscured its brightness, was found to have many flaws in it, but the mischief did not end here.

#### FANATICISM LEADS TO HYPOCRISY.

Fanaticism, or, as Dr. Johnson defines it, *religious frenzy*, was certainly most rampant at this period; but before this has run its course it is pretty sure to give rise to hypocrisy. It is unquestionable that there was much real sincerity of heart amid the many mistakes and false assumptions of that period. I am sorry to say it is not possible to believe this in respect to the subsequent actings of the sect. By saying this I do not impeach this or that individual as a *hypocrite*. God only knows the heart; but I am bound to form a judgment about church *actions* when put forward as claiming my subjection on the score of the peculiar guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is not my purpose to retrace in detail the dreary history of the doings of this sect since the period of the division at Plymouth. Some time subsequent to this event the discovery was made by Mr. Harris of doctrine, derived, as I suppose, from Irvingism, and which, as from\* the first, I reject, and, after what I wrote at the time, cannot justly be accused of extenuating now. I have looked again at my published condemnation of the peculiar system of doctrine

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\* See "The Sufferings of Christ, as set forth in a Lecture, &c.," considered by J. L. Harris, June, 1847.

propounded by Mr. Newton, even before the separation ; and as these published sentiments met with the approbation of Mr. Wigram, and I still adhere to these, the reader need not suppose that I am writing in Mr. Newton's interest. But there is one sentence which I then published, and which I now reprint, as I believe it a word in season to the Darbyites :

“ I used to think that, at all events, since Brethren depended on the Spirit of God, if they followed the usual *downward* course of the Church, all the result would be that they must, like any lifeless body, be decomposed and scattered, since the power of life would be gone. I have now the conviction, there may be a terrible *living death*, in which Satan himself should energeise the mass, as taking the place once held by the Holy Ghost.

“ Something of this kind took place in the decline of the early Church to popery : and it is against such a decline and its results that I wish us now to be on our watch.”

#### HYPOCRISY LAYS OPEN TO DELUSION.

I learn that one of the chief reasons now leading some good men to join the Darbyites is that they think there is *a power amongst them* which they do not find elsewhere.

This would surely suggest the greatest caution to any one at all conversant with the Church of God. Was there no *power* in the delusion of Prince and his followers leading to the Agapemone ? Was there no *power* in Irvingism ? Who is to say that there shall not be a fresh outbreak of Montanism or of some *fresh* delusion in this very quarter ? Why else are we told “ Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.”

For I cannot but believe they have long known better, and that in the charges they have made against their Brethren, whilst claiming for themselves peculiar zeal for the Lord,

they have acted as making the question a party cry—a stalking-horse behind which to fight the battle of their own sect, whilst *knowing* that those whom they accuse are no more guilty of holding or favouring false doctrine than they are themselves.

If this be true, and I only state my conviction as a fallible man, I must think they have gone far on the downward course. I do not judge them. I do not condemn them as a lifeless mass. I do not say they are possessed by a seducing spirit, but I do say that the course of conduct which would merely stamp a political party as devoid of principle is intolerable in a sect making such professions as I have referred to.

For a sect thus cradled in fanaticism and fostered in hypocrisy, the appropriate end would seem to be to fall into strong delusion. The white flag of separation from evil is too neutral, and has moreover been dragged already too often through the mire, to serve their purpose long. They require something more exciting and more attractive. The Lord keep them from “receiving another spirit which they have not received, or another gospel which they have not accepted!”

#### THE WRITER'S EXPERIENCE.

I am not ubiquitous, nor can I boast of having been conversant with all the doings of the Conference from the beginning. I cannot even make out, to the date of my writing this, the *exact* locality of this “Saturday evening meeting!” nor do I know what are its present actings.

What I do know is, that it would have been well for the interests of truth if some of the leaders of the party had been compelled to meet their Brethren before abler judges

and more righteous tribunals than can be found amongst themselves.

I will not, therefore, speak of "things remote," but since the altered position of the writer of these pages, however otherwise unimportant to the reader, throws a not unimportant light on the sectarian character of the Darbyite body, I will ask the reader's attention to the following history.

First it must be said that "seven Church meetings were held at Bethesda, between Nov. 27th and Dec. 11th, 1848. Mr. Newton's tracts were considered. Conclusion, that no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts should be received into communion. Written down by Lord Congleton, from Mr. Müller's lips, in Mr. Müller's presence, Mr. Wakefield of Kendal being also present, Jan. 30th, 1849."

Signed "C." and given me by Lord Congleton himself. This was information given in connection with accusations brought against Mr. Groves, of having been identified with Bethesda: and the reception of this devoted missionary, after being satisfied that neither Bethesda nor Mr. Groves were holding heresy, and the adoption of a Memorandum,\* led happily to the separation of the writer and those with whom he associated from the assembly in London. In connection with this the following letter, which will explain itself, was printed for the private perusal of the Brethren at Rawstorne Street, then the focus of the body in London. It was withdrawn at the earnest request of the brother who had interfered; but I never heard that this act of condescension produced any good. It was as follows:—

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\* See the Appendix.

## TO THE BRETHREN MEETING IN RAWSTORNE STREET.

BELoved BRETHREN,

I feel reluctant to engage your thoughts or my own on a subject calling forth different feelings from that happy contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which we have often been engaged together. Yet a little while, and "he that shall come will come, and will not tarry," and then there shall exist no longer any hindrance to the sweetest fellowship among the saints of God.

In the meantime, whilst walking through the wilderness, God has not given to us the spirit of fear; but of *power*, and of *love*, and of a *sound mind*, to enable us to walk according to His word, and to bear up under sorrows. To the guidance of the Holy Ghost—this blessed Comforter—I commend you with myself.

I have thought it well to inform you that the termination of my services in the ministry of the word on the alternate Tuesday evenings, at Rawstorne Street, is not caused by any cessation of my love towards you, but is the act of one of your teachers, who, on his own sole responsibility, demands this from me. To this I feel quite free to yield; but not at all as thereby admitting the principle involved in this Brother's acts, nor allowing that his having, as he states, asked me to take the Lecture at the first, gives to him, as an individual, power to snap those links which, established by the Lord Himself, ought not to be broken lightly.

The ministry which I have exercised amongst you has not been on the ground of human ordination. If judged unprofitable or injurious by the church, I should have acquiesced in this, as at least a step taken according to scriptural order. But the point to which I mainly direct your attention is the entire superseding the judgment of *the church*, by the judgment of *the leaders, apart from the church*, which of late has been the increasingly prominent feature in your discipline.

I say *increasingly* prominent, because it is now about ten years since I expressed in writing to Mr. Wigram my fears that the Saturday morning meeting would tend towards this very evil; and though my objections were at that time overruled, a document now in my possession of that early date, in Mr. Wigram's handwriting, shews how different were the thoughts cherished in those early days of simplicity, now, alas! past and gone, to those which now animate and guide your leaders.

I believe in the presence, the personal presence, of the Holy Ghost

with the *church*. To supersede the discipline of the body, the church, by the individualized actings of the *leaders*, apart from the church, appears to me to trample this truth altogether under foot.

On this point I *thought*, in 1846, we were agreed; but now find that the very things which were charged as grievous offences on Mr. B. W. Newton are principles on which some among you now proclaim it is the guidance of the Lord that they should act.

Mr. Newton was heavily charged for *interfering* with ministry. Mine amongst you is not only interfered with, but put an end to, by individual authority of a fellow teacher.

This I believe to be done in all sincerity of heart by a Brother with whom I have walked for years in unbroken fellowship till the last few weeks, but who now thinks he is doing God service in this act. The difference is not about doctrine, but about the course of ecclesiastical power!

I have, as you know, strongly objected to the present course of this party. It is not according to my views of righteousness that the character of brethren in Christ, and ministers of the gospel, should be destroyed by printed accusations never proved *before the church*, nor proved *even before the world*, although published before the world without shame and without mercy.

Is it right, brethren, think you, that large bodies of Christians should be defamed—those at Bethesda, for instance—by being corporately accused of “lying and shuffling:” or that those amongst them who are of blameless life and conversations, and sound in the faith, (George Müller, for instance,) should be refused admission to the table of the Lord, until the amount of the submission satisfies your leaders? This love of church power is a sad snare, and it is a passion which grows by indulgence. Thus in the rise of Romanism, the many, the “laity,” were first subjected to the domination of the “clergy,” and the churches in the inferior towns to the see of Rome, the metropolis.

But if you now think all this right, and for the glory of God, I must appeal from the saints at Rawstorne Street in 1849, to Mr. Darby, in his “Account of the proceedings at Rawstorne Street, in Nov. and Dec., 1846.” He (Mr. J. N. Darby) says, “The demon of *popery* is the active demon of the day.” (pp. 37, pt. II.) And then (pp. 5, pt. III.), “To impose a verdict which cannot be debated is the most monstrous thing that ever was heard of. It is PURE UNMASKED POKERY—the clergy dictating to the conscience of the church, which can only register and give weight

to their decrees. Is the conscience of the church to be disposed of thus by others, *be they ever so wise?*" . . . "It is a very different thing to govern, or rule, or guide the church, which is scriptural, and to govern *instead of and for the church, which is POPISH* . . . *and then call the scriptural principles democracy.*" (p. 8.) "They entirely deny the guidance of the body by the Holy Ghost. His practical presence there, the very point as to this, which the brethren were called out of God to bear witness to, against the dissenting and *Popish* principle."

So far I have quoted from Mr. Darby's account of the proceedings at Rawstorne Street; but it may be well for you to read and weigh the whole.

I am not a democrat, but I value liberty of conscience, and am thankful to stand clear of "Popery" in every shape, and not least when it shews itself *self condemned*; for "therefore thou art *inexcusable*, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest *the same thing.*"

I commend these things, beloved brethren, to your prayerful attention. I give credit for a certain kind of zeal towards God, but, as it seems to me, not according to knowledge, in all these things.

My heart is knit with yours in the bonds of Christian love, and in this enduring and everlasting fellowship I bid you farewell in the Lord.

Your brother in Christ,

JOHN ELIOT HOWARD.

May 8th, 1849.

#### THE LONDON BRIDGE CONFERENCE.

I have promised some further information about the London Bridge Conference, so called in 1860, but by Mr. Goodall in 1863, "The Saturday Meeting, Old Bailey."

What this means may well be enquired by those who have read in their leader's words,\* that in opposition to "the dissenters' principle," which "denies the presence and guidance of the Holy Ghost," the Brethren believed this guidance of God could be reckoned on. Hence they *denied* the

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\* Account of the Proceedings at Rawstorne Street, Part III., p. 7.

necessity of the other human extreme—the POPISH one of a *clergy settling the matter among themselves*, and announcing it publicly, and the Church having nothing to do but add its weight by its acts to a decision pronounced by the authority of others, which they were bound to receive implicitly, and as a conclusion arrived at for them, which could not be debated.”

Alas for consistency! Among those who have “separated themselves from evil” there ought not to exist the need of the confession of one amongst themselves, in the year 1860.\*

“Brethren, what is the real character of this Conference? It is with shame I answer this question. The meeting has become a private one, as was lately acknowledged by our Brother, Mr. Lean, at the Hoxton assembly. On a recent occasion, as stated in my previous pamphlet, its doors were guarded and locked, and a cruel assault was committed upon a Brother on his entering. It is difficult to believe this, and yet it is a fact, and the assault is acknowledged.

“Now, Brethren, who are the members of this Conference? There is not, as I believe, any authorized list. Our Brethren Mr. Darby, Mr. Wigram, Dr. Cronin, and Mr. Lean are, I believe, the chief and ruling members. For these Brethren individually I have sincere love and esteem, and I am only now dealing with them in their corporate character. It is in this character I regard the assault, *it being justified*, as I find, *on the ground of the secret character of the meeting.*†

“It is, Brethren, at this Conference, assembled in private,

\* Culverhouse's Observations on the Discipline amongst the Brethren. Pewtress & Co., 1860.

† These *Cretans* should certainly feel themselves very much indebted to me for rebuking them sharply that they may be sound in the faith. I ask from them nothing in return but that they should show kindness to this their “assaulted” Brother, of whom I know very little, except that

that *the functions of the Church are usurped*. Here it is that candidates for membership are proposed and received. 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*." "Now it is evident that this Conference is in fact an inquisition."

This is the statement of one of themselves, who says in the same tract, "Nothing shall drive me from the table." Well may Mr. Goodall say, "*It is Rome in embryo*,"\* For as in the establishment of Romanism advantage was taken of the place of Rome as the dominant city, together with profession of superior orthodoxy, to claim special importance for the Bishop of Rome, and to secure his domination as Pope, so in the Darbyite sect, the metropolitan supremacy has not been lost sight of, and the country gatherings are expected to obey, as may be seen from the Sheffield case.

It will scarcely be believed that the London Bridge Conference above described assumed authority, not only to admit Christians to communion, and to initiate gatherings or Churches, but also to excommunicate both individuals and gatherings or Churches of those who have, like themselves, "separated themselves from evil." Yet so it is. They can indeed speak very loftily: "their tongue walketh through the earth." Thus speaks Mr. Wigram to a "self-willed" Brother, who *would* go to an offending Darbyite meeting at Peckham, which had come to a conclusion different to that of the Conference about a case of discipline:—

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he needs their help. They can *assist him in his business*, and in this way show how superior the Philadelphian Church is to all the sects! I hope this little word in his favour will not be forgotten.

\* See "Letters relating to the recent excommunication of Assemblies," &c., &c. Spurr, 114, West St., Sheffield: *read the whole*.

“If you are sorry for having yourself broken fellowship, and express your sorrow, you might be gladly received; but as to having any title to a place at the table at Kennington, *the table there is scarcely to be owned as the table of the Lord*, so I JUDGE if it owns your title to a place at it, or admits your rights after you have broken communion with it, and taken an adversative position of independency.

“Yours truly,  
“G. V. WIGRAM.”

So easily are Churches made and *unmade* by the authority of these rulers, not of the Vatican, but of London Bridge, or of the Old Bailey. And they can find, as the Pope found, submissive and ready helpers. Take as an instance the following decree of excision, pronounced by the St. Dunstan of one body of Darbyites against another:—

“Rotherham, Nov. 29th, 1863.

“DEAR BROTHER (!)

“I duly received your letter of yesterday, and read it to the Saints assembled this morning around the table of the Lord.

“I am requested to say that inasmuch as you have now placed yourselves in the same position as Mr. Goodall, viz., *outside the communion of Saints gathered together in the name of Christ in London*, the gathering in Rotherham being in fellowship with those in London *cannot possibly receive any statement of the particulars of the matter, either written or by word of mouth*. To do so they feel would be to ignore *the discipline* of THE ASSEMBLY in London (!) and practically to set aside discipline everywhere, as it *virtually denies the unity of the body*, and reduces every assembly to an independent Congregation. Under these circumstances, the Saints at Rotherham are reluctantly compelled to *decline any further communications* until you have been led to retrace this sad step!

“Praying that the blessed Lord may speedily restore you to *His own path*, I am yours in Christ Jesus,

“C. STANLEY.”

That is to say, if I understand aright, C. S., Bishop of Rotherham, excommunicates all “saints” and “dear Brethren” at Sheffield until they submit to London—the Sheffield saints having sinned by receiving Mr. Goodall, a saint, whose sin

was his having belonged to the Darbyite meeting at Peckham, which meeting had been *excommunicated* for acting in "self-will," and not in subjection to the Conference.

Well may the author of "Darbyite Discipline"\* say, "Observe, it is *assumed* that *the Brethren in London acted by the Holy Ghost*, and because their infallibility was questioned, those who questioned are said to be breaking the unity of the body." The Sheffield Brethren say in their official letter to Mr. Goodall, "We are aware that the decisions and judgments of the London Brethren are supposed to be binding on ourselves and *all other country gatherings*, because they are *assumed* to be the acts of the Holy Ghost!"

#### DARBYITE DISCIPLINE.

Such is "Darbyite Discipline." Well may their own members groan under it, and say, "Do not speak of that horrid meeting." Well may they say that "multitudes of the saints have had and have misgivings; and what numbers there are amongst us who have not been and are not fully persuaded in their own mind." The path of escape for all such troubled consciences is clearly indicated by the leader of the sect, in his "Separation from evil God's principle of unity."

"I return," he says, "IF ALONE, into the *essential* and infallible unity of the body, in its *everlasting principles of union with the Head in a holy nature by the Spirit*. THE PATH OF THE SAINTS THUS BECOMES CLEAR." Let all dissatisfied Darbyites return *thus* into "the essential and infallible unity of the body," and there will soon be an end of the sect against which I write, at any rate in London.

In the meantime, it shall no longer owe its existence to any misplaced forbearance of mine. Since 1850 I have not spoken

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\* "Darbyite Discipline, &c.," Dublin, 1865.

out my mind,\* but have watched the course of these Christians with sincere desires for their return to a more truthful and scriptural path; but as the sickly existence of Darbyism has been re-invigorated by young blood from the "revival" movement, it seems now the time to speak; and as my complaint is rather against the leaders than against the mis-led mass of their followers, I do not despair of finding some ears even amongst them open to hear. Would that it might lead them to cast off the yoke!

#### THE POSITION OF MR. WIGRAM.

Mr. Goodall informs us in 1863 that "the London gatherings" were "linked together by the Saturday meeting." "From this meeting, a weekly paper was issued, ostensibly for the purpose of giving information of the names of persons proposed for and received to fellowship; and also for making known acts of discipline, such as rebuke and 'putting away,' of marriages, deaths, &c., in any of the assemblies it represents. It is symbolic of the *unity* which belongs to the gatherings where it goes; where it *does not go* the unity is not admitted, plainly, as you will see, limiting the unity to the fifteen or sixteen gatherings, and the fellowship to the circuit which this paper takes. What the *unity* is, which is thus prescribed, whether of the 'One Body' or of the Brethren, it is for you to consider; and what the fellowship, whether of the Spirit or agreement in externals, it is for you to judge." †

The reader will thus see that the ruler of some sixteen subordinate gatherings (or "corners of the one table") is seated high on a throne of Church Power (differing widely from the

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\* Certain pamphlets which have I believe been ascribed to me are the production of a far more able pen.

† "Letters, &c.," Spurr, 114, West Street, Sheffield, p. 3.

early beginnings in an obscure room in Little Portland Street :) and we may more easily understand the inextinguishable wrath of this champion against his former associates, drawn forth, as he tells us, by a question of *Independency*, for he says :

“ The cause of withdrawal was *not* difference of judgment upon the prophetic question, *neither* was it a question of doctrine : my act of withdrawal took place solely and simply because a new and a human *church system* had been introduced, and one which appeared to screen guilt. I am thankful for this ; because while it forced me to separate from *the congregation*, as such, it left me free to have fellowship with any as individuals in the congregation. **THEY ARE ALL ACCREDITED AS CHRISTIANS, AND I CAN ACCREDIT THEM AS SUCH WITHOUT ANY QUESTION.** The hinge of all is a *new ecclesiastical polity* having been introduced, and acted upon and avowed in Ebrington Street, new, and opposed to what I had known there from the beginning.”\*

He mentions, it is true, in a postscript, but without specifying them, *five* reasons, in some of which the writer probably sympathised, if dislike of “ prophetic system,” &c., be implied ; but *not* as causes of separation. On a review of the whole, I am inclined to think that Mr. Wigram must be believed in preference to Mr. Oliphant,† for quite consistently with the above he states the sin of Bethesda in a letter published in “ The Bath Case,”‡ dated February 2nd, 1849. “ You may depend upon it that the aim of Bethesda is still to make a party **POSITIVELY APART FROM US ALL** (*and apart, I*

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\* “ A Reason for Withdrawing from Ebrington Street, Plymouth,” date about 1846 (?) or 1847.

† See Mr. Oliphant’s “ Assertions,” p. 40.

‡ “ The Bath Case ; or, Who made the division at Bath ?” by Lord Congleton, 1849.

*judge too, from Mr. Newton*), and I doubt not several of the rich in Bath would go with them in this." G. V. W.

It is easy to understand that Mr. Wigram regards as high treason against the central authority in London, and consequently visits with his most severe displeasure, any such independence of his rule as was perhaps contemplated by these "rich" offenders at Bath. What recks he for the Iliad of woes brought on the Brethren, if but the authority of the Central Board be established? But then, what are we to say to the other matter—the furious zeal for the Lord, and against doctrine which, though previously existing, he had not found out to be erroneous till it served his turn to declaim against it?

After accrediting his former brethren as Christians without any question, at the era of the separation at Plymouth, he thus denounces their fellowship in 1848:—

"What is the obligation as to the" (Lord's?) "Table at Ebrington Street? '*Touch not the unclean thing*' is, I am bold to say, the word of the Spirit of the Lord to every humble enquirer. *Rather would I go to the table of the Socinians or of the Unitarians than to it.*"\*

Mr. Wigram, in writing to a friend at the time, said, "The *delusion* is so strong here, and the spirit of misapprehension, that if you meet a friend in the town and say, 'I am glad to see you,' you will be *heard* and reported as having said, 'I wish you were dead.' The observing this increased my natural taciturnity."†

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\* Remarks on a paper entitled "A Statement from Christians associating in the name of the Lord in Ebrington Street, Plymouth," G. V. W.

† See tract "To those who have read Lord Congleton's tract entitled '*Reasons for leaving Rawstone Street,*'" Plymouth, 2nd April, 1847, note to p. 5.

If he had left this astounding statement in the obscurity of a private letter, it might simply have convinced his correspondent that his friend's mind was disturbed, for to say that people at Plymouth were so *mesmerised* as to mis-hear the Queen's English in the manner described, might certainly bear out such a suspicion; but when deliberately brought forward and printed more than twelve months after, with a purpose to frighten weak-minded readers, it leads to a far more serious enquiry, viz., How far such a writer can be trusted as either a careful observer or an accurate recorder of the facts which fell under his own immediate observation?

#### THE LEADERS STAND IMPEACHED BEFORE THE CHURCH.

These two gentlemen stand before the Church as follows: Mr. Darby admits in his own account of the matter that he was looked upon as an excommunicated person, and rightly enough, by the Brethren whom he had acknowledged as "the Church of God," after he had effected the schism. This imputation has never been withdrawn, and a further charge was laid against him by Lord Congleton, and remains in print and unrefuted.\* Further, immediately after the division was completed in Plymouth on December 28th, 1845, by the spreading of a second table, Mr. Wigram came to London, and Lord Congleton publicly charged him with helping Mr. Darby in making it on Sunday, January 11th, 1846, after having gone to him first alone and then with a witness.

These charges have never been cleared away, and, I distinctly say, ought to be investigated by a competent tribunal. All those who join the Darbyites are unknowingly and unintentionally

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\* See "Reasons for leaving Rawstone Street Meeting, London," by Lord Congleton. February 27th, 1847.

making themselves parties to the condoning an amount of evil of which they have no conception.

#### CONCLUSION.

I commend these considerations very especially to the Irish converts, who seem particularly tempted to fall into Darbyism. Have they not in their own land sufficient streams from Rome, that they must needs plunge into those from the Old Bailey Conference.

For the sake of these and of others whose inexperience leads them into this gulf, I have shewn that Mr. Darby, assisted by Mr. Wigram, was guilty of an act of schism in separating from what the latter acknowledged to be unquestionably a body of Christians, and the former owned at the time to be "the Church of God," from which therefore neither had Christ withdrawn, nor was the Holy Spirit absent. The Holy Ghost is one, and the Church of God is one, and on their own principles this act of schism originated a sect, which sect cannot acknowledge the great truth (*ubi Spiritus, ibi ecclesia*), that where the Holy Ghost is the Church is found. The Darbyites adhere to the leadership of Mr. Darby, on the popish ground (*ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia*), that where the authority of their apostle is recognised, there they gather round him as their centre. This, though they may shrink from avowing it, is the meaning of their act in casting out of their communion whole companies of Christians, as "self-willed" and unsubject to their authority. In the meantime, they ought to shew cause why they should not be treated on their own principles as followers of a self-excommunicated leader, and *ipso facto* excommunicate.

March, 1866.

J. E. HOWARD.

## POSTSCRIPT.

## THE BETHESDA BRETHERN.

WHILST occupied in writing on these subjects, a pamphlet has been sent to me, entitled "The Bethesda Fellowship," 1865. John S. Oliphant, as appears by his signature, is the writer, a young Christian, with whom I had some acquaintance in 1862, when he had been rather recently converted. He has since identified himself with the Darbyites, and appears to have become quite a proficient in their school. "It is laid upon me (he says) to warn others *from my own personal experience* that Satan is the principal actor in this scene, that the work was his in 1845 to 1848, is sustained by him in 1865, and is no phantom." How he can have had personal experience of Satan in all the matters among the "Brethren" for seventeen years previous to 1862, is as incomprehensible to me, as how, in the subsequent period, he can have acquired the gravity, wisdom, and spiritual experience requisite to rebuke to the face such men as Müller and Craik of Bristol, Soltau of Exeter, and Lord Congleton of London; but it is to be feared personal humility is a grace as little to be looked for in the school in which he has been educated, as charity or candour, or even common-place truthfulness of statement. I am sorry to say that this pamphlet contains abundant evidence to prove my assertions. First, as to the truthfulness of statement. In page 26, Mr. Oliphant defines "Bethesda ground" to be as follows:—"It does not matter to us where Christians come from, or *what evil they are connected with in the earth*, if they only are believed to be Christians, and we believe them to be individually sound, we receive them." Does Mr. Oliphant mean to affirm this, or is it merely a party statement put forth with a view to mislead? "*It does not matter to us what evil they are connected with on earth!*" I believe Mr. Oliphant's representation of "Bethesda Fellowship" to be entirely false, although I am little conversant with this body of Christians, whilst for more than a quarter of a century I have had much opportunity of knowing the secret history of the Brethren. In common with the whole body of Christians, (always excepting "*the Darbyites*,") I admire the great faith of Mr. Müller, and the well-known learning and Christian character of the late Mr. Craik, but I do not suppose the Christians assembled at Bethesda to be infallible, though I know of no such toleration of evil amongst them as amongst the exclusives.

As to the late respected and honoured Mr. Craik, is it not very sur-

prising to find Mr. Oliphant placing among proofs of "*blasphemous and heretical statements*" of this brother, that "the humanity of the Lord Jesus was free from the slightest taint of moral evil, and His body was *preserved* from all taint even of external corruption?" Mr. Oliphant, by printing the word *preserved* in italics, directs special attention to this as *blasphemous and heretical*. Now it is evident that the writer refers to Psalm xvi., "Neither wilt thou *suffer* thine Holy One to see corruption," quoted by the Apostle Peter in his sermon at Pentecost; so it is clear that according to this new light both David and Peter were heretics and blasphemers! So much for Mr. Oliphant's competence to decide on questions of theology.

Next, as to Mr. Oliphant's *charity* one instance may suffice. In page 11 he thus disposes of the grave and deliberate judgment of some six or seven hundred Christians at Bethesda in the year 1848, and of the retraction of Mr. Newton—"I say there is as total an absence of evidence that it was a work of God's Holy Spirit as there is in the so-called retraction of Mr. Newton; indeed, I only recognise in both cases *the clever expediency of the enemy of souls in bringing about that which he can use to cloak over sin and blasphemy*"!!!

Mr. Oliphant's account of the origin of the division amongst Brethren is most remarkable. His "personal experience" does not seem to have helped him much here. In page 32 he tells us that "Satan commenced the evil at Plymouth by bringing in sectarianism, clericalism, and *lying!*" Page 28 that "Satan had obtained such place and such power through him (Mr. Newton) that it was not possible" (for Mr. Darby) "to get the saints to put him away;" and yet he says (p. 32) that it was "boldness indeed for (Mr. Soltan), one who was most closely associated with Mr. N— at Plymouth," to affirm that *the division began by a personal difference between Mr. Darby and Mr. Newton!* "To tell me" (he says p. 33), and again, "this gross falsehood"!

It is simply requisite to turn from the commentary to the text here, and to take Mr. Darby as his own expositor in preference to the young champion of his views. Especially ponder well what Mr. Darby says in reference to the letter of Mr. Harris, which shewed him that "every barrier was gone at Plymouth,"\* and brought him in hot haste from the south of France, resolved, as I believe, to destroy this "focus of testimony" contrary to his own views. I was with him at Taunton and Wellington at this period, and heard from his own lips the same that he has given in print, and *litera scripta manet*.

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\* "Narrative of Facts," p. 19.

See then if Mr. Oliphant's "gross falsehood" does not turn out the *exact truth*.

"The saints" (as Mr. Oliphant says) were at Plymouth "*entirely under Mr. Newton's power*:"\* they were attached to their teacher, and, right or wrong, preferred him to Mr. J. N. Darby, who could not succeed in getting his own precedence and power acknowledged and Mr. Newton excommunicated. Mr. Oliphant admits (p. 5, note) that "*the original separation from Mr. Newton and his party at Plymouth was before the doctrines were discovered*;" and this admission is ruinous to the whole superstructure which he has built up as "a fair and simple account of the origin of the division amongst Brethren," referring to subsequent events at Bethesda! How could the division among Brethren at Plymouth in 1845 † *originate* in circumstances occurring at Bristol in 1848? or is not the whole a piece of special pleading to try and get rid of the awkward *fact* that the real origin of the division was not in points of doctrine *afterwards* made prominent, but in personal quarrel between the great leaders.

But Mr. Oliphant has constituted himself a Phineas, and yet feels himself scarcely up to the task;\* and yet (oblivious of *grace*) in order to prove that the Corinthian assembly was defiled, and leavened "*by the presence of unjudged sin in its midst, which one person had committed*," he says, FIRST I turn to the Old Testament scriptures. Why *first* to the Old Testament scriptures? when the question is respecting the Church at Corinth: are not the two inspired epistles to the Corinthians sufficient? Truly there is reason enough, for we read two pages further on. "The zeal of Phineas who *acted for God against the evil* is specially commended. *He was zealous for my sake amongst them. He was zealous for his God.*"

Mr. Oliphant is now forming himself upon the model and in the spirit of the exercise of righteous vengeance as shewn in the Old Testament, where the destruction of the sinner apart from all grace was the object, as in the case of Phineas. How entirely *opposite* is the *grace* guiding the exercise of discipline in the analogous case in the Corinthian Church. The object in even the most severe exercise of *Christian* discipline is the *salvation of the individual*, as well as care for the holiness of the Church—"that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This seems to be entirely forgotten by those who

\* Page 28.

† See p. 13. "The Lord pity my weakness," he says, "and grant convincing power," p. 12.

thus turn *first to the Old Testament*; but if they desire to be under the law let them hear the law, for they will subject themselves to a severe reckoning. There is no excuse for "weakness" in those who meddle with the sword of abstract justice. Israel undertook, as we read in Judges, to do justice on the sinners of Gibeah and on the tribe of Benjamin, but there was "weakness," for though they had slain the whole tribe except five hundred they could not find in their hearts to destroy these, and so they resorted to a guilty act of complicity to save them; and some seven hundred years after Hosea tells Israel they had "*sinned from the days of Gibeah*, there they stood, the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them." Now, the Darbyite decree against all communing with Bethesda has been in like manner tampered with through "weakness," and if Mr. O—— wishes to know where this human "weakness" has been manifest, he will have to look to the leaders of his own people, some of whom can dispense with the decree when special persons are concerned.\*

Doubtless Mr. Oliphant stands in need of much encouragement in the work of slaughter, for "to go from gate to gate through the camp, and to slay every man his *brother*, and every man his *companion*, and every man his *neighbour*," must have been very painful work, and however much needed in the present day could hardly be attempted without danger, even in the body to which Mr. Oliphant clings with all the ardour of a first affection, and with sensibilities painfully acute, considering the shocks they are destined to receive.

I now drop Mr. Oliphant, with this word of caution for himself if he will take it, and for others to whom I more especially address myself. The "man-managed congregations" (p. 24) from which he flatters himself to have escaped, *do not present an atmosphere of so much spiritual intoxication as that to which he has betaken himself*, and to the young such an atmosphere is superlatively dangerous. Let him beware how he breathes it. "*Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*"

"IS THERE NOT A CAUSE?" BY PHILALETHES.

I do not feel called upon to notice much in this tract, but read in it with undissembled surprise that some of the Darbyites have been so much wrought upon, I suppose by the force of the unanswerable argu-

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\* As in the case of a lady whom I could name, but that I do not wish to expose her to the wrath of Mr. Oliphant.

ments of their opponents, that "the idea that any body of Christians could assume to be the Church of God, in any exclusive or even complete sense, was publicly disclaimed at large meetings held at Barnstaple and Torquay in 1863." These large meetings were evidently of the Darbyite party, who have so far entirely cut the ground from under their feet, and ought now to surrender their haughty pretensions. If they are not the Church of God in any exclusive or even complete sense, they are at best but a *section* or a *sect*; and this seems to have been the opinion of Mr. Darby when he wrote his "Letter to the Saints in London, as to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church," (p. 20) where he says, "I cannot deny the blessed truth of the Holy Ghost dwelling in the Body. And here I would add *I do not say among the gathered Brethren*. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE as to those is they have acted together on this truth." Then certainly if they are not "the Body," they are not "the Church," and it is no wonder if dislocated or even dissevered members find it difficult "to act together on the truth" of a united Body. Imitation of power is *not* power. The use of holy words will not sanctify unholy actions. The Papists used to repeat, "*Veni Creator Spiritus*," at the burning of heretics. The Darbyites may claim the power of the Holy Ghost, but the "assault" *committed* and *justified* in the London Bridge Conference simply proved the absence of the "police," and the danger of attending a "secret" conclave. It must be humiliating to a body of people to find an individual, whom they have publicly and expressly delivered over to Satan for the *destruction of the flesh*, appearing for that matter not at all the worse after a lapse of years, and moreover walking in fellowship with more sober-minded Christians than themselves. But the very same writer\* forgets all this in page 4, where he says, "It is because they are Christians I am bound to judge them. 'Do not ye judge them that are *within*?' " These persons "whose principles of meeting are diametrically opposed" to those of Mr. Ord, are *within what? the Church of God?* Certainly; for they are "Christians," but as certainly *not* within that *section of the Church* (the Darbyites) to which the writer belongs, and which he himself admits is *not the Church at all in any exclusive or even complete sense*. From henceforth let Mr. Ord look to those who are *within* the pale of *his own* not too well regulated sect. He will find employment enough in instructing his leaders to keep their hands from the throat of an "intrusive" brother, and to respect, according to English law, if nothing higher, both the persons and the reputation of those who are not subject to their sway.

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\* Philalethes.

## LORD CONGLETON'S TESTIMONY.

I conclude with the testimony of this Christian brother, who protested against the Plymouth separation at the time it was effected, and which I have his permission to reprint from Mr. Oliphant's tract.

"Have you tried these Brethren?" (the Darbyites.) "I have tried them (try the spirits whether they are of God), and found them *false* prophets, in every sense of the word *false*. They are *false* in what they say of their brethren, they are *false in doctrine*, they are *false in their walk*."—LORD CONGLETON. See "The Bethesda Fellowship," p. 11.

## MEMORANDUM.

SPECIAL circumstances having occurred in connection with Christians, who, from time to time, are or may be making application to be received as in communion at the Lord's Table, we desire to make known our individual convictions and collective judgment as to the path which we believe to be well-pleasing to the Lord in this matter, and in which we desire to walk.

1. We find our centre of union with each other, and with all saints in Christ, as *one in Him*, and our power of fellowship by the Holy Ghost.

2. We therefore desire to receive to the Lord's Table those whom He has received; time being allowed for confidence to be established in our minds that those whom we receive are indeed the Lord's, and also opportunity afforded for enquiring into and clearing away any imputation or occasion of scandal in any so applying,

3. We welcome to the table, *on individual grounds*, each saint, not because he or she is a member of this or that gathering or denomination of Christians, nor because they are followers of any particular leader, but on such testimony as commends itself to us as being sufficient.

4. We distinctly refuse to be parties to any exclusion of those who, we are satisfied, are believers, except on grounds personally applying to their individual faith and conduct.

Adopted by Brethren at Tottenham, the 4th of March, 1849.