

AN ANSWER

TO THE QUESTION

WHO ARE THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN?"

BY

(MRS. H. GRATTAN GUINNESS.)

FANNY E. GUINNESS

✂

PHILADELPHIA :

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1861.

AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION,

“WHO ARE THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN?”

SOME degree of interest having been excited in this country, as to the doctrines and practices of the “Plymouth Brethren,” a slight sketch of their origin, rise, and progress, as well as of their present condition and principles, may not be unwelcome to those who wish to form a fair estimate of this body. As one who has for many years been intimately acquainted with them, both in England and Ireland, who has a personal acquaintance with, and high regard for, many of their leaders, and who approves most of their distinctive views, the writer may be able to give a clearer account of the peculiarities of these “Brethren,” than any that has yet appeared in the public papers. It will be seen that though they differ materially in practice from many of their fellow Christians, and hold some views as to secondary truths, at variance with those commonly received, yet that on the fundamental truths of the

gospel they are one with all evangelical denominations. Strange and exaggerated statements have been made with regard to them, and an erroneous impression seems to prevail, that their views are sadly heterodox, and their practices somewhat fanatical. Were both better known, Christians would regard them differently, and though they might not agree with their views, would be constrained to award to them the Christian regard due to men who are devoted servants of God, diligent students of Scripture, who have, many of them, suffered much for conscience' sake, and who have made no small sacrifices to bear what they deem faithful testimony to the truth.

About thirty years ago, a movement took place in various parts of England and Ireland, produced it can hardly be questioned by the Spirit of God, in the direction of greater simplicity and godliness of life, greater spirituality of worship, and a higher degree of personal consecration to Christ. The movement would in this country have been called a revival, for it commenced among Christians, but in its progress affected the unconverted, numbers of whom were brought to God by means of it; it was simply a repetition of the struggle after "the higher Christian life," which has at different times led to

attempts at reformation, attempts which, alas! have often degenerated into mysticism on the one hand, or fanaticism on the other. From both these extremes the movement alluded to was happily preserved, by the safe direction it took from the first. A diligent and prayerful study of the word of God characterized it, and the desire to know and do the will of God more perfectly, led many to throw aside educational prejudices, and to come in a docile spirit to the Scriptures, by them both to form their opinions and regulate their practices. These men were not exclusively scholars and theologians, nor exclusively the reverse; they were simply earnest Christians of various classes and denominations: nor was the movement limited to any one locality, for simultaneously, in different places and quite unknown to each other, little bands of such men were drawn together for the study of the Scriptures, and gradually led more or less to the same conclusions. In England, Scotland, and Ireland, as well as on the continent of Europe, individuals and groups of individuals assumed a new and previously untried position, and then found, to their surprise, that other Christians elsewhere had, from conscientious conviction, done the same. This naturally drew them together, and they soon came to be regarded as one body; but

such was the origin of this body, that it could not fairly be said to be founded by any one individual, though in some parts of the continent of Europe especially an individual's name has since been attached to it, owing to his zealous and successful labors in preaching the gospel and teaching the truth of God in those localities. About this time a gathering was convened, in a noble mansion in Ireland, by one whose name will long be remembered, and lovingly cherished by many a heart; an "elect lady" indeed, who, though possessing both rank, wealth, talents, and influence in the world, counted all loss for Christ, identified herself with his people, and set her affections on things above. Those who have read her life and letters, need no further assurance of the deep-toned piety, sweet spirituality, and heavenly-mindedness which characterized the late Lady Powerscourt. Under her roof assembled a band of earnest Christian men, to read, study, and confer over the word of truth: light from above was sought and obtained, and, what was far better, "great grace was upon them all." Many of the number reached conclusions which led to sacrifices that were hard to the natural mind, but such sacrifices were cheerfully and promptly made, and according to the promise "he that will do His

will, shall know of the doctrine ;” convictions thus conscientiously acted out, led to further knowledge of the truth. A clear and definite perception and presentation of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, especially of a finished redemption, as the sufficient ground of assurance of faith, characterized the subsequent preaching of these men. In their various pulpits many of them spoke with a power and fervor which astonished their hearers; while others by the wayside, on the sea-shore, proclaimed the glad tidings of salvation through Christ. Their doctrine was Calvinistic, and their preaching simple and expository in its style; many sinners were converted and many Christians roused to greater devotedness and holiness of life. As yet no name was assumed, and no separate position taken. Many of these men still remained connected with different religious bodies, and though mourning over the errors, deadening forms and ceremonies, and worldly practices around them, they did not as yet feel constrained to bear witness against these things, but rather for the truth. By degrees, however, they were conscientiously led to resign their connections with systems which they learned to consider unscriptural, and which fettered them with improper restrictions. Severed thus from old associations,

they naturally drew more closely together, and were helped by their mutual faith, both to do and to suffer the Lord's will, in pursuing what they believed to be the path of obedience. One little band thus gathered at Plymouth consisted of men of marked character, talent, and influence; they were full of devotion to God and zeal for the work of Christ, and very active as teachers and preachers of the word. In this place they first received the name of "Plymouth Brethren," a title since applied to all those who have held similar views, though not recognized by them as a body. They called themselves by no other name than that applied to the early church, "Brethren," or "Christians." Others, however, for distinction sake, named them by the place where they were first publicly known. Earnest and diligent as evangelists, these Brethren were in labors more abundant than most; they preached the word in season and out of season, and the Lord blessed their efforts. Many of them had given up much for Christ's sake—rank and office, income and ease, social position and worldly influence. But they gained more than they lost; for grace, strength, spiritual power and light, with abounding joy in the Lord, richly rewarded them. Their testimony was a very bright one, reminding many of the accounts

of the early church, in the opening chapters of Acts ; there was no mistake about whose they were and whom they served ; they had such love one to another, that men recognized them as disciples of Christ ; their usefulness was extensive, and their views became rapidly diffused. Hundreds in various places were led to receive and value the truth they preached, and other Christians acknowledged that they gained light and help from their teaching and example. As the movement proceeded, noblemen, gentlemen, clergymen, naval and military officers, merchants, mechanics, laborers, churchmen, dissenters, Quakers, and others were embraced by it ; meetings of the Brethren became common, and their numbers rapidly increased. It cannot be asserted that they now retain all the unction and fervor which characterized them at the first, though they still continue a useful, simple, happy body of Christians, and, walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, are multiplied. It is not altogether easy to define their views, as they have no written creed or confession of faith, and differ among themselves on many points. This is no matter of surprise, as they feel strongly that the bond of fellowship between Christians ought not to consist in unanimity of opinion as regards minor points of belief, but in the

possession of a common faith and life in Christ. Any ground of union or association more narrow than this, they regard as sectarian; any basis of church fellowship more broad than this, as latitudinarian—and both as unscriptural. They consider that Christ himself is the centre round which Christians ought to gather, rather than any creed however true, or any doctrine however important. Consequently they receive and acknowledge all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, who are sound in the faith, and consistent in practice, without requiring agreement on non-essential points.* Thus many among them, perhaps the majority, hold the doctrine of believers' baptism by immersion to be scriptural; others hold infant baptism, and some even consider, like the Quakers, that the baptism of the Holy Ghost supersedes the necessity of the ordinance of water baptism at all. Such differences do not hinder brethren dwelling and worshiping together in unity. There are also differences between them on other questions, such as prophecy, ministry, discipline, church government, etc., etc. But on all such points, they leave every man to be fully

* They reject none but those whom the Lord has commanded them to reject on account of heresy in doctrine, (Titus, iii. 10.) or disorderly walk, (1 Cor. v. 13.)

persuaded in his own mind. In stating therefore the views, or some of them, by which the Brethren are distinguished from other Christians, the writer must not be understood as implying that such views are essential to church membership among them, but merely that they are entertained by most of them, and regarded by others as characterizing the body.

In a season of revival in the church, some one special truth long lost sight of is often reasserted with power; it was so in this case, as the following remarks may explain. There are three main positions in which the Lord Jesus Christ may be contemplated with respect to his people—past, present, and future. Christ as a crucified Saviour on earth, accomplishing the work of redemption from which results the salvation and justification of individual souls; Christ as a risen and exalted Saviour, in heaven, head of a body, the church, sending down from heaven the Holy Ghost the comforter, to form and to dwell in that body till his own return; and Christ as a glorious and manifested Saviour, coming again to receive that church to himself, “to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.” Now the first of these, Christ crucified and justification by faith in him alone, was clearly and prominently brought out in the reformation of

the sixteenth century; the other two, though perhaps held as doctrines, were practically ignored. Salvation by faith instead of works was preached by the reformers, and souls were consequently converted and saved. But Christ as head of, and ruler in the church, and the Holy Ghost as its life and power, were not clearly seen or taught, and thus, though delivered from the headship of the pope, the church fell under the civil magistrate, the king or emperor as its head. The hope of the Lord's return was lost sight of also. This blessed event, the proper hope of the church, was still confounded with the general thought of a day of judgment, so as to become practically powerless as a motive for separation from the world, or as a comfort in the midst of tribulation. Now that which specially characterized the ministry and testimony of the Brethren was a clear development of, and a deep value for, the two latter doctrines, *i.e. the headship of Christ over the church, with the consequent presence of the Holy Ghost in it, and the personal return of the Lord Jesus to receive the church to himself*, as its proper hope. From the first of these truths they deduced further, the unity or oneness which becomes the church, as being the body of Christ; and from the second, the separation from this present evil world

befitting her, as being the bride of Christ. Comparing the state of things in the system around them with the Scripture theory of the church, and with the records of the early church, "Brethren" saw, or thought they saw, that things were sadly out of course, that the church had departed from her original ground, and was not constituted according to the scriptural model. They earnestly sought to recover primitive simplicity, power, and purity, to lay aside everything that appeared to have had its source merely in human tradition or worldly expediency, and to retain that alone which was divinely appointed. Perhaps this view of the nature, calling, constitution, and position of the church is the root of most of their distinctive opinions. Believing that the church of Christ is, and can be, but *one body*, the habitation of God through the Spirit, they deem that it ought to appear one body in its visible manifestation on earth; one body, into which all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are baptized by one Spirit; one body, the head and the only head of which is Christ, a risen Saviour in heaven, "from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto

the edifying of itself in love." They think further, that the precept, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," renders it incumbent on them to try to manifest this oneness, and not to sanction any tests or limitations which interfere with it. They feel bound, therefore, on the one hand, to own none but a believer in Christ as a member of the church which is his body; and on the other, to own every true believer as such, whatever may be his peculiar religious opinions; to hold fellowship with him because he is a Christian, not because he entertains such and such views; to receive him, in short, simply because Christ has received him. They feel that they cannot make a person a member of the church, nor can he make himself such; that the Holy Spirit alone can introduce into the body of Christ, and that their part in the matter is to own and recognize his previous action, never to anticipate it. They believe, consequently, that a national church errs on the one hand, and all sectarian denominations on the other. The one by receiving into its fellowship those who have not been baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, embracing in its ample arms all alike, whether converted or unconverted, obliterating, in fact, the distinction between the church and the world; the

others by excluding those whom Christ has received, making that essential to membership in their church which he has not made essential to membership in his body. They think that while the former fails to recognize the one true bond of union in the church, (*i.e.* common life in Christ,) the latter superadds other bonds, (doctrinal tests, etc.,) so that while one system does not maintain the character of the church at all, the other interferes with the manifestation of its unity. Believing then that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin," and that according to the light given them they are responsible to obey God, "the Brethren" stand separate in position from the evil they see on both sides, though not separate in spirit from any true believer's on either side. As regards the church's fundamental constitution, they recognize neither the principle of the union of church and state with parochial arrangement, nor that of voluntary association, on a basis too narrow to admit all Christians; while in the appointment of ministry they acknowledge neither the fiat of worldly authority, (as in the Episcopal Church of England,) nor the choice of the people, as among dissenters, nor the authority of a conference or presbytery. They consider that in all these systems man is too prominent, human authority paramount; whereas

that in the church of God, Christ's authority by his Holy Spirit ought to be paramount, and the source, power, and guiding energy of all ministry. As regards this latter point of ministry they consider further, that the New Testament gives no sanction to the idea of any sacerdotal class; that the distinction between clergy and laity is nowhere countenanced in Scripture, and that the simple rule of the word of God on the point is, "as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God; if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, that God in all things may be glorified." They leave, therefore, free course for *the exercise of any gifts God may have bestowed* on any individual for the edification of the body; they disallow all *merely* humanly appointed ministry, but they do not reject that which is divinely bestowed. They fully recognize a stated ministry as scriptural, and thankfully enjoy it as a gracious provision of the Lord for the comfort and edification of his church. What they disapprove is an ecclesiastically appointed ministry, which sets aside, as contrary to its order, all exercise of gift in those who have not been ordained to the ministry as an

office. They think that now, as in apostolic times, none can really minister to the benefit of the church, however much trained, educated, and ordained, however learned and talented, unless they are called and gifted by God through the Holy Ghost for the purpose; and that wherever, on the other hand, a person is so called and gifted, though he may neither have been educated for the office nor ordained to it, that he is not only free to exercise his gift, but responsible to Christ to do so. They deny that Scripture authorizes what has been termed a "one-man ministry," *i.e.* the assumption that in each congregation one man and one only is to minister to the rest. They consider it an infringement of the prerogative of the Spirit of God, to distribute to "every man severally as he will." They believe that God may bestow various gifts on one man, or on various men, as he pleases, but that it does not follow because a man has one gift, that he has all; that a pastor or ruler is not necessarily qualified to be an evangelist or a teacher; that a variety of gifts is needful for the perfecting of the saints and for the effectual accomplishment of the work of the ministry; and that God did in the primitive church, and does still bestow this variety of ministers or servants on his church, when he is looked to for such a blessing.

These views they deduce from such portions of Scripture as the twelfth and fourteenth of first Corinthians and the fourth of Ephesians ; and their own experience for the last thirty years has happily illustrated the possibility of carrying out such views, and the blessed results which flow from simple dependence on Christ, in all that concerns the edification of his body, the church. Having no ordained or specially educated ministry, few bodies of Christians, in proportion to their numbers, have been so richly blessed with devoted, earnest, spiritual ministers. Evangelists or preachers of the gospel to the unconverted, pastors or watchful shepherds of the flock, teachers deeply instructed in the mind of God as revealed in Scripture, rulers, elders, deacons, all have been and are found among the Brethren, and are owned and acknowledged as gifts from the Great Head of the church. In some congregations many, in others fewer, as the case may be, work harmoniously together for the good of the body. The flock is not limited to the services of one individual, nor is one minister oppressed with the weight of meeting all the various requirements of an assembly. (Rom. xii. 3-8.) The Brethren obey those that have the rule over them; esteem very highly in love those who labor among them; count worthy of double honor

the elders who rule well, especially those who labor in word and doctrine. As regards the support of the ministry, their view is that the work ought never to be undertaken for the sake of earning a livelihood or increasing an income; yet they quite hold to the scriptural rule, "they that preach the gospel should live of the gospel." It often happens that those who minister among them are men of independent fortune, or, perhaps, engaged in some lucrative occupation, which renders assistance from others needless. In such cases the pastors may be able to give not only spiritual but temporal things also to the poor of the flock; and so they often do generously and liberally; for, as a general rule, having food and raiment, the Brethren are therewith content, and care little for wealth or luxury. On the other hand, if one who ministers to them in spiritual things is known to require assistance in carnal things, known to be poor in this world's goods, Brethren are glad to meet his need, and each one according to his ability to contribute to his support. Stated salaries they do not give, nor would their ministers accept; nor do they, any more than Paul, who wrought as a tent-maker, think it at all inconsistent with the office of the ministry that a man should work either with his head or his hands, in

other ways to support himself or his family. Thus among their ministers there are not only noblemen and gentlemen of various professions, but merchants, shopkeepers, farmers, mechanics, and laborers, all evidently called and capacitated by God for the work of the ministry, and all accepted by the Christians among whom they labor. If, however, a man feels himself called to devote all his time and energy to preaching the gospel, and wishes to give himself wholly to this work, the Brethren would quite consider him justified in throwing aside any profession or business which might be a hinderance to him, and in casting himself in faith on the Lord for support. They would gladly assist such a one, and feel it a privilege so to do, for they know that the laborer is worthy of his hire, though they think all service in the church should be rendered not of constraint, but willingly for Christ's sake, and of a ready mind. They think that a servant of the church is responsible, not to the church, but to Christ in all that regards his service; that the under shepherds hold their commission, not from the flock, but from the Chief Shepherd, from whom they hope to receive "the crown of glory that fadeth not away," and to whom they will have to give an account of their stewardship.

Their public worship differs from that of other Christians, principally in being more simple and more spiritual. They have no forms and no regular plan in their meeting; no organs, no choirs, no pulpits, no pews. A simple room, large or small, as the number in the congregation may require, furnished with plain seats, answers every purpose. Sometimes it may be literally an "upper chamber," sometimes a capacious chapel—always, however, perfectly free from ornament or decoration of any kind. Here they assemble to worship God in spirit and in truth, and they think they can do so as well, or indeed better, unassisted by any of those means which appeal only to the outward senses. Consequently they have no instrumental music, though they sing the praises of God, and sing them with the spirit and the understanding. Their selections of hymns are generally choice and spiritual, and their own productions in this line need only to be known to be appreciated; they are full of truth as well as poetry, and give sweet and appropriate expression to the higher emotions of Christian worship. In the singing at their meetings, a fastidious taste may sometimes be offended by want of harmony, or displeased by false time; the uncultivated voice of some warm-hearted worshiper may occasionally jar

upon the musical ear, but they would rather the connoisseur should suffer from the defective music of their psalmody, than that the happy worship of any heart should be checked in its utterance, or the ear of God offended by the offering of mere music instead of heartfelt adoration. For congregational singing they consider there is ample New Testament warrant; for instrumental music in public worship, none: and they would not accept the Old Testament practice in the temple, etc. as an example, or authority, believing that in that bygone age outward worship was ordained and accepted by God, whereas in this present dispensation the true worshipers must worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for such alone does the Father seek to worship him.

The assemblies of the Brethren have various characters and various objects. The following are the principal: *Meetings for worship*, that is, when true believers, Christians, come together to worship God and to break bread in remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are usually held on Sunday morning, though sometimes in the afternoon or evening of the Lord's day. The unconverted are by no means excluded from these services; on the contrary, numbers of them are generally present; they

do not of course partake in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, nor is the ministry in any way especially adapted to them. It is an assembly of believers, the primary object of which is in the breaking of bread to remember the dying love of Jesus, "to show forth the Lord's death till he come;" according to the passage, "upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread," which, like many others, indicates, the Brethren consider, that the breaking of bread should be the main object for which they assemble on that day, and that they should come together for that express purpose, every "first day of the week," not merely on the first Sunday in the month, quarter, or year. It was evidently the custom of the early church so to do, and they see nothing to justify them in departing from this ordinance of the Holy Ghost for the saints. Like the brethren at Troas and at Corinth, they assemble *to break bread*, not to hear a sermon, not to receive instruction, (though they may do both,) but to remember Jesus, by the ordinance he appointed "the same night in which he was betrayed." They consider that while Scripture does not prescribe that this ordinance shall be observed only once a week, it does not certainly contemplate a less frequent observance of it, the apos-

tolie practice being to meet for this purpose on "the first day of the week," the Lord's day. At their meetings there may be prayer and singing, reading of the Scriptures, and possibly exposition of them; one or two or more may speak a word of comfort or exhortation or instruction, or there may be nothing of this kind; quiet pauses of silent worship, of longer or shorter duration, usually intervene between the exercises; all is left quite open, remembering that the Lord Jesus Christ is, according to his promise, in their midst: the Brethren endeavor to leave the conduct of their meetings to his Spirit. They believe that the worship, whether of the character of prayer or praise, can only be true and acceptable as prompted by the Holy Ghost, and they leave it therefore to him to preside in their assembly: no one is leader, no one is minister;—as brethren they gather, to remember their Lord, around his own table, and the bread and wine are, after prayer, silently passed from one to another. It may be supposed that such an absence of arrangement would lead to disorder, that many who ought not to speak would do so if the way were open, and that there would be confusion and want of harmony in the meeting. It is not so practically—very much the reverse; of course spiritual order can only be

preserved by those who are really spiritually minded ; in these meetings it may occasionally be infringed upon, by individuals who are not walking in the spirit ; but such cases are rare and exceptional. Brethren believe that if they in faith resign the ordering of their worship to the Spirit of God, he will not fail to regulate it, and in this they are not disappointed.

On other occasions, Sunday afternoon or evening, or both, they hold meetings, the special object of which is to *preach the gospel to the unconverted*. Those who have the gift of an evangelist, at such times proclaim the glad tidings of salvation, and expound the way of reconciliation to God, addressing themselves exclusively to the hearts and consciences of those who know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Brethren especially designate *preaching*, and they draw a broad distinction between this and *teaching the church*. The former they regard as the church's mission in the world, "preach the gospel to every creature;" the latter, as the privilege of Christians among themselves, "comfort yourselves together and edify one another," "exhort one another daily," etc. The object of the one is to save sinners; of the other, to edify saints. The

elementary truths of ruin and redemption must be the main burden of the evangelist's testimony ; but the whole range of the deep and various mysteries of God, is the portion of the church. They think that other denominations are losers by not sufficiently recognizing this difference ; the ministry to the church being too much confined to mere evangelization, "laying again the foundations" of elementary doctrines, instead of advancing to the deeper things of God, "going on to perfection." In these meetings for *preaching*, they do not leave it open for any one to speak ; it is understood that some individual who has the gift of an evangelist will conduct the service, and he generally does so unassisted, though others may sometimes engage in prayer, etc. The Brethren also preach much in the open air, and often hire public buildings, halls, etc. for the purpose. Sometimes after having met together for worship on the morning of the Lord's day, two, four, six, or eight from one meeting will go in different directions, in the after part of the day, for this object, sometimes two and two, more frequently alone. Country villages, and the crowded streets and lanes of large cities, afford ample sphere for all who have time and heart for this blessed work. Open air preaching is now common in England : from the

Episcopal bishop to the Wesleyan local preacher, all sections of the church practice it; but long before this was the case, Brethren were in the habit of going out into the highways and hedges, and the streets and lanes of the city, to carry the message of mercy. Besides the above, they hold also meetings for *prayer and conference*, similar to those usual in this country, and for *expository lectures on Scripture*, delivered by teachers who are competent to instruct and enlighten their brethren; and *Scripture reading*. On these last occasions a portion of Scripture is read, prayerfully studied, and freely discussed by all present, those who need light asking questions, those who can impart it answering them, and all feeling free to express any view or sentiment they may entertain. These meetings may partly account for the fact stated in some papers, that "the Plymouth Brethren are all, men and women, most diligent readers of the Bible, and wonderfully expert in finding proof in Holy Writ for all their views." This is perfectly correct; it may be questioned whether as a body any denomination more closely and habitually "search the Scriptures" both in public and in private; and as they seek to deduce all their opinions and all their practices from the word of God, it is no matter of

surprise that they should be "expert in finding proof for them in Holy Writ." Besides these public meetings, they have frequent social reunions at each other's houses, and rarely or never come together without spending the greater part of the time in prayer, and in the consideration of some passage of Scripture. An evening party or social gathering of any kind among them without this, is most uncommon; they find so much pleasure and enjoyment as well as profit in such communion, that their intercourse without it would appear to them comparatively uninteresting. As a body they do not frequent any places of public amusement, and take little part in politics, or worldly enterprises, feeling that as Christians they are not of the world even as Christ was not of the world. They deem that their only or main business on earth is to bear witness to the truth, to be "burning and shining lights," "epistles of Christ known and read of all men;" and they seek consequently to be not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of their minds. They hold and teach strongly the doctrine of *the heavenly calling*, and feel that when it is not clearly apprehended, and acted upon, there cannot be a true and elevated standard of Christian morality. They see that

whereas God blessed the Jews with earthly blessings, he blesses Christians with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," so that while it was lawful for the Jews to set their affections on things on earth, Christians are told to set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth; that whereas the Jews were to fight against enemies in their land, Christians are told that the weapons of their warfare are "not carnal but spiritual," and that the only sword they are commanded to take, is "the sword of the Spirit, the word of God;" that whereas the Jews had one particular place in the land, and one dedicated building in it, where alone they could worship God, Christians are told that wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, he is there in the midst of them; that whereas the Jews might take vengeance for injuries done them, Christians are directed not to avenge themselves; that whereas riches were a mark of God's favor to the Jews, it is said a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven, and "not many noble are called;" that while the Jews were to be at home in Canaan, Christians are to be pilgrims and strangers here, remembering that their home is in heaven, and that the world lieth in the wicked one. They think, therefore, that while

patriotism was right and lawful in a Jew, it is wrong in a Christian, who should regard this world as a "strange country," and desire a better, that is, "an heavenly." All these and many other points of dissimilarity between the earthly and the heavenly callings, the Brethren feel to be of great practical importance, and, according to the grace of God bestowed on them, they seek to walk worthy of the heavenly calling, the vocation wherewith they are called. They do not consider themselves as citizens of this world; while in it, they feel they are not of it, that their "citizenship is in heaven," their treasure in heaven, and that their names are written in heaven. So they never assume civil offices, they never vote at elections, they do not act as magistrates, they do not go to law, they *submit* to the powers that be, but do not seek to *hold power* or to *enforce law* on others. Standing in *grace* themselves, they seek to *act in grace* toward others, they "take the wrong" and suffer themselves to be defrauded, rather than "resist evil" and "avenge" themselves. They conceive that as God dealt with the Israelites on the ground of law, it was perfectly consistent for them to deal with one another on the same principle, but that as God now deals with Christians on the ground of grace, it is inconsistent and utterly inadmissible in them to deal

with one another on any other principle. They think that Scripture abounds with authority for this view—precept, parable, and example being used both by the Lord and his disciples to enforce it. Power, then, or rank in this world, riches or honor, name or fame, they feel to be all objects unworthy of being sought, accepted, or even retained, by Christians; they would covet rather fellowship with Christ's suffering and rejection, knowing that if they were faithful, the world would hate them even as it hated their Lord, for the "disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord." The brother of low degree rejoices that in Christ he is exalted, and the brother of high degree that he is made low. All believe that in the church of Christ the rule should be, "let him that would be great be the minister, and he that would be chief be the servant of all, for one is their master even Christ, and all they are brethren." As regards wealth they feel that it involves only the greater responsibility of stewardship; that none of the things they have are their own, but to be used for the glory of God, and the good of his people; many among them thoroughly carry out this conviction in their manner of life: their houses, furniture, table, dress, and general habits are extremely simple; and in the earlier times of their history were

perhaps still more so. In those days many Christians even considered that they went quite too far in non-conformity to the world, in these respects; but it may well be questioned whether the change which has latterly and gradually taken place among them, in the abolition of some of these peculiarities, is not rather a deterioration than an improvement. They do not even now conform to the fashions or customs of the world, in such matters, and on the whole, preserve to a very considerable degree an unworldly simplicity and godly sincerity in their manner of life.

Numbers among them have been reduced from affluence to poverty, by sacrifices made for the truth's sake, and cheerfully endure privation and discomfort, to keep a conscience void of offence toward God. A recent case occurs as an example: The incumbent of a country parish, who had long enjoyed his comfortable income and snug parsonage house, in "a living" which was his for life, and who had the prospect of further "church preferment" from influential relatives, became uneasy in conscience, under a sense of the radical errors and deep corruptions existing in the established Church of England. He received the views of the Brethren in many respects, and felt he could no longer retain a

position which he clearly saw to be unscriptural. The struggle between conscience and interest was hard; he had no resource to turn to, his age and education rendered it difficult for him to pursue any other avocation; a delicate wife and a numerous family must be maintained,—and how was he to support them? Friends and relatives expostulated, blamed, utterly condemned him—no help was to be hoped for from them; but faith in God enabled him, having counted the cost, to make the sacrifice. The living was resigned, the future was left to the Lord, and confidence that he would provide sustained the heart of his servant. And the Lord did and does provide, and the peace and joy which flow from a happy heart and a clear conscience more than make up for all that is lost, though the change involves poverty, discomfort, and much that is irksome and trying to the natural mind.

Dozens, scores, not to say hundreds of such cases might be mentioned, nor of such only; in other professions, other scruples lead to the same sacrifice of station and income for the Lord's sake. The son of an earl, who bears a name, than which none stands higher in the military archives of Britain, held a commission in the army, and saw before him as fair a prospect of advancement as heart could wish.

Young, ardent and ambitious, with the glorious example (as the world would consider it) of a noble and illustrious kinsman before him, he was converted, brought to count all his advantages loss for Christ, brought to see the evils of war and its irreconcilable inconsistency with the gospel of peace, to feel that he could not serve two masters,—the Prince of peace, who said my kingdom is not of this world, and who forbade his servants to use the sword, and the Queen of England, whose kingdom is of this world, and must be defended by the sword. He felt he could not love his enemies and yet kill his enemies, and he aspired to a nobler destiny than even to be commander-in-chief of the British forces. He laid aside his sword, resigned his commission, turned his back upon the world, and became a preacher of the gospel. He has now lived for many years a humble and consistent Christian, in the utmost plainness and simplicity, giving his time, talents, and energies to the work of winning souls to God, enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and not encumbering himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier. His noble and wealthy connections of course account him a fool, but he is willing to be esteemed a fool for Christ's sake, and remembers that "that

which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God." A very large number of naval and military officers have acted similarly; some have adopted less objectionable occupations, and others, having gifts for the work of the ministry, have addicted themselves to it.

Family persecution has been the portion of others, for the prejudice against dissenters, still strong in England, was much stronger formerly, and the Brethren were peculiarly obnoxious to it. Sons have been disinherited by their fathers, daughters turned out of doors and disowned for long years, cut off from all intercourse with their friends and relatives, and in other cases confined for months to one apartment, to prevent their contaminating other members of the family, and to secure cessation of all intercourse with those in whose sentiments they agreed. Beautiful instances of patient grace and forbearance, combined with unflinching firmness of purpose, have occurred in many such cases, and been instrumental in turning the unbelieving parents from darkness to light, winning them not only to God, but to the very views they once so bitterly opposed. Whole families have thus been converted by means of one member; and their histories strikingly illustrate the truth of the saying, "if any man serve me, him will

my Father honor." The annals of the Brethren would furnish touching and instructive episodes of this kind, but the limits of this article forbid their introduction. The remarkable case of that honored and faithful servant of God, George Müller, of Bristol, is becoming more known in this country, though his character can hardly be appreciated, in all its features, from a mere acquaintance with his writings. The magnitude and variety of his undertaking have given notoriety to his name in connection with the power of faith, and a life of trust. None even among the Brethren have acted for so long a period, with equally strong faith, or received such numerous and unequivocal answers to prayer, in connection with earthly things. But in other ways and measures many of them have trodden the same path, and can bear the same witness to the faithfulness of God, in supplying every need in answer to prayer.

Missionaries have gone abroad to give themselves to the Lord's work among the heathen, in the energy of individual faith, unconnected with any board, unsustained by any committee; under the burning suns of India, in the unhealthy climate of Demarara, in China, and the West Indies, and many other places they have labored in the vineyard, looking only to

the Lord of the vineyard for present support or future reward. Many of them have been blessed and successful as missionaries, have gone through much suffering and privation, but have found the Lord supply all their need, through the love and fellowship of Christians at home, as well as through other channels. Others have labored in the dark parts of their own country; others have opened houses to show hospitality to Christian strangers, high or low, who needed it, and they have continued this course for years, without having any ostensible means of support, seeking help only from Him to whom the silver and the gold belong. The Brethren are not much in the habit of organizing societies or associations, for the purpose of carrying out objects connected with the glory of God or the good of man. They fear the danger of mixed motives in such arrangements, detracting from the value of the service in the sight of God, and feel that it is better for each one to act according to his own faith and ability. They strongly disapprove of Christians *uniting with the world* for such objects, or seeking its pecuniary assistance. They think the precept, "be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," forbids all such combinations, and they therefore rarely join or subscribe to religious societies so con-

stituted; they feel they must not do evil, even that good may come. Their efforts in such matters are more private and individual, and the results consequently less known; but they are by no means idle, and without any machinery or any publicity perhaps accomplish more, in proportion to their numbers, than most. What they do is, at any rate, done to the Lord and not to men, for no motives but individual faith, love, and zeal are likely to operate, where the right hand knows not the deeds of the left.

The writings of the Brethren are not so generally known, as from their intrinsic value they deserve to be. This fact is to be regretted, but it may be easily accounted for. In *matter*, instructive and interesting, calculated to enlighten students of Scripture, and to edify and comfort Christians of all classes; in *manner*, they are sometimes singularly unattractive, occasionally, indeed, readable only by those who are willing to bestow close attention and some study on the perusal. Few of the Brethren have presented their thoughts to the religious public in a form likely to insure them fair consideration. Their gospel tracts are admirable, and have received very wide circulation, but their other writings will seldom attract the cursory reader; those who really desire help in the understanding of the truth of God will,

however, find much assistance from their expository works on many parts of Scripture. They are not found much in this country, but can be procured from any London bookseller. G. Morrish, 24 Warwick Lane, Paternoster Row, or W. Yapp, 71 Welbeck St., Cavendish Square, for instance, would supply their publications on any subject. Their works are rarely controversial in character; when, some years ago, circumstances called for explanations and justifications of their opinions, several such treatises were published. But, as a general rule, their writings are directly explanatory of Scriptures. Those who would like to know more of the Brethren and their teachings, or to examine the Scripture grounds on which the views above stated are maintained and justified, can consult the following works: "The Heresy of a Human Priesthood," by Beverly; "The Church of England Examined," by Beverly; "The Way of Truth in Evil Times," by Dorman; "Five Letters on Worship and Ministry in the Spirit," by Trotter—also a variety of smaller pamphlets and tracts on the same subject, by various authors. "Discipleship, or Reasons for Resigning His Naval Rank and Pay," by P. F. Hall; "On Worship," by Harris; "Lecture on Puseyism," by Howard; "Memoir of Norris Groves, Mission-

ary to the East," by his Widow; "Notes on Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus," by Mackintosh, (very valuable;) "Notes on Romans, Ephesians, and Hebrews," by Pridham; "The Four Gospels," by Jukes; "Notes on the Offerings," by Jukes; "Recollections of an Evangelist," by Gribble; "The Lord's Dealings with George Müller," by himself; "The Tabernacle," by Soltau, (a valuable work, published by Bagster.) The above are comparatively small, inexpensive books, except the last, which has plates, and the price of which may be about \$7 or \$8. "The Christian Witness," "The Present Testimony," "Things New and Old," and "The Evangelist," are periodicals devoted to the elucidation of Scripture and the spread of gospel truth. Many of the Brethren have devoted much attention to the study of prophecy, and their writings on the subject are valuable and interesting, less speculative, and more spiritual and practical than many prophetic treatises. They very generally hold premillennial views, but quite apart from the fanaticism which has so much accompanied them in this country. They believe that though no man knows the day nor the hour of the Lord's second advent, yet that the right attitude, both for individuals and the church at large, is, "having turned to God from idols, to be

servicing the living and true God, and *waiting* for his Son from heaven," saying with Paul, "our conversation is in heaven, from whence also *we look for* the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." Diversity of view prevails among them on the detail of prophetic interpretation. The following are a few of their writings on the subject: "Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects," by Trotter; "Thoughts on the Apocalypse," by Newton; "Eight Lectures on Prophecy," by Trotter and Smith; "Prophetic Charts," and Hymns and Poems," by Sir E. Denny; "Hopes of the Church," and "Studies on Daniel," by J. N. Darby, etc. etc.

On the subject of discipline in the church, there has also been some diversity of opinion among the Brethren, and, unhappily, it has latterly occasioned them no small amount of controversy. They are not free from human imperfections any more than others, and there are some among them who, like Diotrophes of old, love to have the pre-eminence. This has caused them trouble and sorrow, and where controversy waxes warm, Christian charity is apt to be interfered with. The reception and exclusion of church members among them is not the act of one

or two individuals, but of the whole congregation, and much godly care is exercised in both these respects. They are specially desirous of not receiving mere professors to the Lord's table, feeling that want of caution here must necessarily lead to coldness, weakness, formality, and deadness in the body. It is very unusual for an unconverted person to be in church fellowship with them. Cases requiring excommunication do occasionally occur, and then the utmost solemnity attends the step, which is only taken when other modes of discipline have failed to restore the soul. They resort even to this final measure with a view to ultimate restoration, believing that when taken in prayer and faith, it will generally be effectual for this object, as in the case recorded at Corinth of old, and so it commonly proves. They are careful to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; but knowing that grace is by no means hereditary, never receive them into church membership, unless a decided work of conversion has been manifested. When, however, this is the case, they are sometimes received to the Lord's table at an early age.

As regards the numbers of this body, the writer has no means of information at hand. Gatherings of them exist, varying from a very small number to

many hundreds, in most of the cities and large towns of England, Scotland, and Ireland, also in remote country districts and villages. In France, Switzerland, Germany, and Sardinia there are also many congregations, as well as at Cape Colony, Australia, New Zealand, and in Canada. They are not active in proselyting to their peculiar views, though very desirous of spreading the gospel and a knowledge of evangelical truth. Their opinions being of anything but a popular character, and their practice having in it nothing to attract the natural mind, it is only those who are desirous of finding and walking in the most scriptural path, that would be likely to take their place among the Brethren; it is a very rare case for a person who has once found his way among them, ever to resign the position he has assumed.

In conclusion, the writer would claim for these dear people of God the brotherly love and Christian regard of "all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," by whatever name they may call themselves. Dear friends, are we not all "Christian brethren?" are we not all one body? ought we to allow our different views, about minor matters, to produce any feeling of coldness toward our Father's children, of prejudice against any who are with us

members of the body of Christ? From what has been stated, it can hardly be questioned that these Brethren are "beloved of God, called to be saints;" by their fruits ye shall know them! Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles! Ought we not then to include in the embrace of Christian affection all who are "in Christ Jesus," endeavoring, whereunto we have already attained, "to walk by the same rule, to mind the same things," and trusting that God will yet reveal to us the truth on those points on which we are not like minded? The Brethren have warm feelings of brotherly love, and a strong sense of the family bond among themselves, it is true; but they extend the same to all the Lord's people, and while deeming some of them in error on many points, love them none the less. If we are the children of one God, if we are redeemed by one Saviour, if we are indwelt by one Spirit, if we are charged with one mission, if we are on our way to one heavenly home, and hope to unite by-and-by in one song of praise to Him who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, ought we not to dwell together in unity now? There is but one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism! What a pity there should appear to be

more than one body in consequence of the sectarian distinctions and divisions which the father of discord and confusion has contrived to introduce into the church! The Lord Jesus prayed for his disciples that they might be one, and if we made that only essential to fellowship with us which Christ makes essential to fellowship with him, (*i.e.* faith in and confession of his name,) we should come nearer this unity than we do. At this the Brethren have aimed; they may have partially failed in the attempt: honor them at least for the endeavor. They do not profess to have attained perfection; they regard themselves still as learners in the school of God; they desire not to stereotype any form or system, saying, "this is the way, walk ye in it;" they feel that as regards all these things they know only in part, and are willing to admit light from all quarters; and to modify their views and their practice, where either can be shown to be inconsistent with Scripture. To that infallible test they seek to bring every opinion—"search the Scriptures" is their motto, and happily one carried out into practice. Would that as much could be said for all Christians! The writer cannot better conclude than in the words of the memorable address by Mr. Robinson, to the Pilgrim Fathers of New England,

on the eve of their immigration to the New World in A.D. 1620: "Brethren," said he, "we are now quickly to part from one another, and whether I may ever live to see your faces on earth any more, the God of heaven only knows. But whether the Lord has appointed that or no, I charge you before God and his blessed angels, that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveal anything to you by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am verily persuaded, I am very confident, the Lord has more truths yet to break forth out of his holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of these reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go at present no further than the instruments of the first reformation. The Lutheran cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of his will our good God has imparted and revealed unto Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it. And the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented, for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of

God; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light, as that which they first received. I beseech you be ready to receive whatever truth shall be made known to you from the written word of God. But I must here withal exhort you to take heed what you receive as truth. Examine it, consider it, compare it with other Scriptures of truth, before you receive it. For it is not possible that Christians should come so lately out of thick anti-Christian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once. ‘Search the Scriptures.’ ‘Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.’”

Postscript.—Since the above pages were penned, the writer has found with pleasure that there are small gatherings of Christians holding the above views, in various places in the United States. One such exists in Philadelphia, meeting on the Lord’s day in a public room in Tenth Street, above Arch. There is, in addition to this, a meeting in Philadelphia, presided over by one who was formerly associated with Brethren in England, but whose connection with them has been long since dissolved; and who holds and teaches views on “the non-eternity of punishment” which Brethren consider decidedly heretical.