

ACCUSERS OF THE BRETHREN.



THE Rev. William Reid, D.D., United Presbyterian Minister, Lothian Road, Edinburgh, has just published a large volume against "Plymouth Brethrenism," and lest our readers should confound the editor of this periodical with the author, he thinks it well to say who wrote it. Besides, I have no hesitation in saying that the serious charges of departure from Scripture truth in this and other similar books attacking Brethren, is rashly made; and from a thorough knowledge of Brethren's works, obtained by reading them over a period of twenty-five years, I am in a position to assure my readers that these charges of heresy are *entirely without foundation*. It would be an easy task to prove, by quotations from Brethren's works, ~~that~~ they hold none of those deadly errors imputed to them. The origination of them is partly due, I

* NOTE. The first seven pages of this is a reprint (revised) of an article in THE BRITISH EVANGELIST, 1874.

believe, to the misconception of their adversaries, who view *theologically* what they express *Scripturally*.

Their writings show that they hold, as firmly as any set of Christians can, many things they are said not to hold, such as—(1) The plenary inspiration of Scripture; (2) The proper humanity of Christ; (3) The atoning death of Christ as the ground of our justification; (4) That by the obedience of Christ believers are constituted righteous; (5) Progressive sanctification; (6) That repentance is not a mere change of mind, but hatred of sin and moral judgment of self by the Holy Ghost; (7) That all are bound to pray to God; (8) That believers ought to confess their sins; (9) That faith is not a mere credence of testimony; (10) That the Lord's-day is of divine authority; (11) The Christian ministry; (12) They repudiate Perfectionism; (13) They hold the Christian's obligation to walk according to all that is morally obligatory in God's Word, "*be it the Ten Commandments or anything else.*"

There are none who write more Scripturally and powerfully against Socinianism, Rationalism, Ritualism, Romanism, and Antinomianism, and all the leading errors of the day, than Brethren; and I grieve to see respectable brethren in the ministry preferring many serious charges against them, which an intelligent perusal of their works ought to have shown to be *utterly groundless*.

They were regarded as the cream of our churches when in them; and their withdrawal from those churches nearly broke minister's hearts. Why, then, should we now ill-treat and slanderously report those we were wont to regard as "the excellent of the earth," for no other reason than that, in fidelity to Christ and conscience, they no longer "follow with us?" Is it fair, generous, or brotherly, to try to fix the stigma of holding all the heresies of Christendom upon our brethren in Christ, whose writings, read with a just and kindly eye, show us, with noon-tide clearness, that they ~~abhor~~ and repudiate

every one of them? They are not immaculate any more than ourselves; and in their controversial writings they have sometimes said things which in cooler moments they would wish they had not said; but, seeing that they manifest a true and honest purpose to serve our common Master, Jesus Christ, His word to us regarding them is—“*forbid them not.*”

Let not our readers be deceived, then, by this outcry against Brethren in the many books written against them. Their practical writings will do you much good, for they are purely spiritual and Scriptural, and are well fitted to show sinners the way of salvation, and to edify believers. Contact with Brethren and their writings, and similar works, made Mr. Moody the thoroughly furnished man of God he is, and mighty in the Scriptures. The reading of the writings of Mr. C. H. Mackintosh, “Notes on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers,” “Things New and Old,” and other Brethren’s works gave

him a start in the knowledge of his Bible which all Scotland has felt the benefit of. (I speak of that which is of *public* notoriety in Chicago.) And the books that did Mr. Moody so much good will do us no harm. Since you have seen such a healthy Christian as Mr. Moody after feasting for a number of years on Brethren's books, and on his Bible, the key to the right reading of which he got from Brethren and in Brethren's writings, don't let your minds be prejudiced by all that may be said or written against them; for it is in effect against Christian progress and the truth that ensures the continued revival of God's work, their opposition is directed. Don't let us adopt that system of legal bondage for the saints which Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians has "*unveiled and refuted.*"

It occurs to our recollection to mention that when Mr. C. H. Spurgeon was preaching in the City Hall, Glasgow, some years ago, he inculcated Christian charity by telling, that having received

much edification by reading a book, he wrote to thank the writer, and the author turned out to be "a Plymouth Brother,"—namely, Mr. C. H. Mackintosh—and the book was "Notes on Exodus." It was a Christian act to write and acknowledge the benefit received, and it was a noble and manly thing publicly to confess it.

On the back of this an excellent elder of the Free Church of Scotland (noted for cheapening good books) sent Mr. Mackintosh's "Notes" among Divinity Students in Edinburgh, and generally throughout the whole country, at half-price, with a printed recommendation from an Edinburgh Professor of Divinity—subsequently withdrawn.

We, too, along with thousands of Christians, can testify that these books are exceedingly valuable as spiritual helps in Christian knowledge and progressive holiness; and we would be wanting in our duty to our readers if we did not earnestly recommend them to read them first, before they read the

writings of the accusers of the Brethren who have so gratuitously condemned them; and it is more than likely they will then have no desire to read them at all,—they will be so filled and refreshed with the things of Christ which the condemned books contain.

While I thus warmly protest against all those unwarranted attacks on Brethren, I have no more connection with them ecclesiastically than the authors of those attacks; but as a man I can judge of fairness, and they are unfair; and as a Christian minister, put in trust with the Gospel and set for its defence, I see in those books the freeness of Christ's gospel assailed; the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity controverted; the position and liberty of God's saints denied, and scriptural holiness endangered; and for these reasons I have written to put my readers on their guard against them.

“There be some who trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ.”

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

The public will get their eyes opened by and by, even through the misrepresentations of their accusers. They have the means at hand every day of their lives for proving the charges of evil doctrine to be false, for they have the condemned people living amongst them and demonstrating to them the impossibility of the correctness of such charges by their high-toned Christian character and holy lives. The Christian public will not be satisfied with anything short of Christ's practical test of "good fruit," or "evil fruit." "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? - Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their

fruits ye shall know them." — (*Matt. 7, 15-20.*)

Who are the false prophets? Those whose teaching produces "good fruit" in practical life, such as all must acknowledge the Brethren, as a rule, are doing? Nay, verily, the false prophets are those, the Lord says, whose doctrine produces evil fruit.

I can testify from experience that those who withdrew from my own ministry were to a large degree the very cream of our congregation as to godliness. They were the best-taught, and our working capital, our praying men, our lay-preachers, our Sunday-school teachers, our tract-distributors, district-visitors, the men and women who attacked sin in its most rampant forms at races, in fairs, and on the streets; the very bone and sinew, blood and heart, of our worshippers, and the most devoted and unworldly men and women I ever met with, precious and holy followers of the Lamb, who are still in my heart's affections, to live and die with; and

whom, although their withdrawal from us well-nigh broke my heart, as it did my health (a heart break it was to them also to go), yet I could not leave without visiting them, by my own request, at their places of meeting, and bidding them a united farewell; and we never knew that we loved each other with so deep and true a love in Christ Jesus as when we poured out our souls for each other before the mercy-seat, our hearts surcharged with sorrow, and our voices almost choking with emotion, until at last we all broke down in a universal sobbing and tears; and the name of the place was Bochim, for there we wept out our sorrowing yet loving farewell before the Lord, who had loved and redeemed us all. Was I mistaken in acting so? Surely it was done in the spirit of Christianity,—but the very opposite of that of modern Ecclesiasticism. They were and are my beloved brethren in Christ—the salt and the light of the city where they dwell; and God is using them still, above many, to

evangelise the city and country around, and he is crowning their labours in the gospel with success. I left that farewell scene, not to condemn them and write them down for not being able conscientiously to remain with us, but to enquire whether we were not guilty of producing such sad divisions by upholding traditional and unscriptural figments, which make it possible for well-taught Christians conscientiously to leave us. The action of Brethren ought to produce a thorough inquiry whether we have the Scriptural basis of Christian association—whether, in short, we or they have the Holy Scriptures under us; instead of the fleshly work of misrepresenting and running them down for heresy and lawlessness, which even their accusers know they have no connection with.

The public are beginning to inquire into the strange phenomenon represented to them, of a people said to be so full of all unscripturalness in doctrine, and yet so very holy, consistent, and scriptural, in their daily lives!

I have met with this.—An elder of one who has lately joined the ranks of antagonists of Brethren said to me the other day that a certain work was securing a good deal of attention; and if the one half were true that was said in it of Brethren, their doctrines were very bad.

“But it is not true,” I replied; “he has, with a considerable show of apparent fairness, entirely misapprehended their views, and consequently misrepresented them. It could be easily shown from their writings that all the heresies (that are so) that he charges them with are not held by them.”

“Well,” he rejoined; “that must surely be so; for I know some of them intimately, and must say their fruits are good.”

“You will find them generally very intelligent in Scripture,” I said.

“Yes; but not only are they very superior to most Christians in that, but there is a something very uncommon

about them both in business matters and in private life, and I cannot reconcile what the books of their opponents say of them with what I know of them from my own intercourse with them, for they are by far the best Christians I know."

"Fruits, then," I replied; "you would consider a fair criterion of doctrine. If the fruit of the doctrine be so very good as you say, the doctrine must be Scriptural, and the books that condemn them must be false."

"That's what I can't get over. I know the people; their fruits are good; and their community's principles and doctrines are fairly judged of by the fruits they produce."

Another said to me, "The craft's surely in danger that the ministers are needing to write so many books against the Brethren. Better agree among ourselves first, for our sects and denominations would puzzle all the Twelve Apostles. With what church could they worship? What sect would Paul join?"
(1 Cor. 1, 10-13.)

Another—"It is a very unchristianlike proceeding to write down Christian people for their belief. Are we not in a free country? Why not live and let live? It seems very like a selfish opposition. In writing down Brethren ministers appear to me to be fighting for themselves." This is how this persecuting ecclesiastical fanaticism is working on the minds of the community. They have overdone it, and are now creating a reaction against themselves.

A Laodicean Christendom is feeling the spiritual incubus of the testimony of our Lord which the Brethren have been honoured to bring out, and not wanting it, and refusing to admit it because it passes sentence on their own departure from Apostolic Christianity, they write down the troublesome intruder without either heart or conscience.

The Lord's people throughout all the churches should rise up as one man and protest in the name of the Great Shepherd of the sheep at the throne of majesty in the heavens against this un-

natural treatment of their dear brethren in Christ at the hands of their ecclesiastical oppressors, and demand that the terrible indecency of representing as heretics and treating as outlaws tens of thousands of the holiest and most Christ like of the saints of God should at once come to an end.

“HAVE THE WORKERS OF INIQUITY NO KNOWLEDGE? WHO EAT UP MY PEOPLE AS THEY EAT BREAD; THEY HAVE NOT CALLED UPON GOD.”—*Psalms 53, 4.*

“I KNOW THY WORKS; BEHOLD, I HAVE SET BEFORE THEE AN OPEN DOOR AND NO MAN CAN SHUT IT; FOR THOU HAST A LITTLE STRENGTH, AND HAST KEPT MY WORD, AND HAST NOT DENIED MY NAME.”
—*Rev. 3, 8.*

Instead of heresy, Brethren's writings contain a vast amount of fresh light on the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, for which we as ministers should give hearty thanks to God.

Brethren live in the Holy Scriptures, and writing in accordance with human theology is a thing outside of their

religious thought ; whereas ministers generally have unfortunately too little Bible and too much human system to judge fairly or scripturally of Brethren's views ; and when any of them who are intensely controversial and not overburdened with spiritual discernment or scrupulosity of conscience, do battle with Brethren, theology and ecclesiasticism are cried up, and Scripture is ignorantly run down.

This is a tremendous evil, and is leading to fearful results ; for in aiming at the daring, impious, and unholy work of stamping out Brethrenism, they are discrediting the Holy Scriptures (which the common people, with Brethren's writings in their hands, see to be on the Brethren's side) — sinning against the Holy Ghost, who has evidently called them out to give His testimony for this day—and they are, by opposing it, sowing far and wide the seeds of a terrible harvest of Laodiceanism, scepticism, and infidelity.

The real meaning of Brethrenism obviously is this : It is a scriptural

protest against traditionalism in religion, and a plea for the restoration of the great doctrines, institutions, and practices of primitive Christianity. It aims at having the Holy Scriptures given their rightful place of supremacy, and at recalling all saints to the enjoyment of the unity, fellowship, and privileges of the Church of God. Should we not learn the lesson God is teaching us by it, instead of treating it as an intruder?

All the books against Brethren absolutely misrepresent them in every way, and consequently, the real truth regarding them not being known, the religious public are misled and prejudiced, to the great injury of Christ and themselves.

From my intimate knowledge of their own works, I am free to say that if the public believe regarding them exactly the opposite of what their adversaries books say they hold, they will have a pretty accurate account of what Brethren believe and teach! Being the Scriptural religious reformers of our day, and determined at all cost to have religion

set on a thoroughly scriptural footing, and everything merely human washed out by the Word, they have nothing else but opposition to expect from the advocates of things as they are. Christendom being sentenced by such a movement must resent it. This has been ever the way with every great work of God's grace for man's blessing. "*Ye do alway resist the Holy Ghost ; as your fathers did so do ye.*"—Acts 7, 51.

Church history in them repeats itself. The virulent opposition to Brethren in our century is just a repetition of the opposition to John Wesley and those who were acting with him last century ; and now, judging of that opposition calmly, as it has taken its place in history, we conclude that those who fought against John Wesley and the Gospel were fighting against God—just the very thing our posterity may be doing a century hence regarding the persecution of Brethren and the Gospel of God at the present hour. Their testimony to Bible Christianity can no

more be put down than Wesley's could, for it has been called forth by God, who will sustain His own truth and cause. Brethren's mission may be to save the Christianity of the country this century just as John Wesley's and his associates' was to save it last century; and lest it should be so, the opponents of Brethren had better take the sound advice of Gamaliel (*Acts 5, 38-39*), and shut up their batteries—"For if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

The string of charges usually brought against Brethren might be appropriately denominated stock slanders, for they have been doing duty for years in all the books written against Brethren. They hold not one of the serious heresies attributed to them, and it is therefore reckless and unprincipled to charge them with such things as Antinomianism, Rationalism, Socinianism, Pelagianism; the denial of Christ's proper humanity; the atonement; the binding obligation of the Command-

ments of God ; the denial that by the obedience of Christ believers are constituted righteous ; the imputing of righteousness in justification ; that we are justified by the blood of Christ ; that Brethren do not confess sin with a view to forgiveness ; that they do not preach repentance as anything but a mere change of mind ; that they hold faith to be only credence of testimony ; that they deny practical and progressive sanctification ; repudiate Christian ministry and ordination, and forbid the unconverted to pray ; deny the divine authority of the Lord's Day, and teach Perfectionism. These and such like charges form the stock-in-trade of the adversaries of Brethren in pursuing their unholy traffic.

I feel deeply grieved for the cause of Christ and His deceived and prejudiced saints, that such unfounded charges are spread and believed by so many Christians ; for, having read their works, I can say honestly before God and the Christian public that they are untrue,

and could be all "unveiled and refuted" by straightforward quotation from their own writings, and for the truth's sake I would not shrink from the task of doing it had I time and strength; and bye and bye I will show by examples how it might be accomplished.

The question is not whether Brethren hold the views which their adversaries would pronounce correct, but whether they are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, and whether the books written against them are reliable and trustworthy. I affirm that these books are not; that they seriously misrepresent their views, and never more so than when professedly quoting from their own works: and that their charges of heresy are due to the misreading of Brethren's books, if not to worse causes. In order to show practically, in two or three instances, the unwarrantableness and unfairness of the charges of "deadly errors" alleged against Brethren, let me give quotations on *Atonement*, *The Humanity of Christ*, and *Moral Obligation*.

All the books against them charge them with heresy on these vital subjects.

1. *Atonement*.—Mr. Darby writes, in vol. vii. of his COLLECTED WRITINGS, p. 224:—"I hold as to expiation or atonement, fully and simply what every sound Christian does—the blessed Lord's offering Himself without spot to God, and being obedient to death, being made sin for us, and bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; His glorifying God in the sacrifice of Himself, and His substitution for us; and His drinking of the cup of wrath.

We come to the atonement with the need of our sins; once reconciled to God, we see the whole glory of God made good for ever in it." What could one wish more? A man who writes with such distinctness on this central subject is not likely to be wrong on others.

2. *Christ's Humanity*.—I read in the reprint from THE BRITISH QUARTERLY what I judge to be bad doctrine. The writer says of the orthodox:—"We

believe that His body was mortal ;” and of Brethren, “ they deny that His body was mortal. . . . His doctrine denies the human nature of Christ.” “ Mortal ” does not mean “ capable of dying,” but “ subject to death.” Is this the doctrine of the adversaries of Brethren ? Then God’s Word says, “ *death by sin.*” This fearful consequence Brethren avoid by affirming that His body was not *mortal*, or naturally subject to death.

But in that article the writer charges a brother with using “ words which plainly signify *that Christ was not possessed of a real human nature.*” In a note he says :—“ Mr. W. Kelly, however, boldly teaches the heresy.” Now I grieve to think that the writer did not pen this grave accusation without having the means of knowing it to be false in his hands, for he quotes on the same page from Mr. Kelly’s CHRIST TEMPTED AND SYMPATHISING, a book written expressly to prove the real, yet holy, humanity of our Lord, Take a few

sentences to show how unfair and false it is to say "he boldly teaches the heresy," "that Christ was not possessed of a real human nature." Kelly says, page 13:—"Human nature was in unfallen Adam; it was in Christ; and we, of course, have it now." But, however really in all, it evidently was in a totally different state in Adam before the fall and in Adam as in us since the fall: in Christ alone scripture pronounces it holy. There are three distinct phases of humanity here below—innocent, fallen, holy. Christ's manhood was in the condition of Adam neither before, nor after the fall.

"Plainly, therefore, the state of human nature is altogether independent of its real existence. The fall altered the condition of Adam's humanity, but humanity remained as truly after that as before. In like manner, the Son of God, the Word, could be made flesh and did become man, though ever infinitely more than man, taking human nature into union with the

divine, so as to form one person ; but the condition of His humanity must be ascertained from the Scriptures which treat of it. Thus in Luke we have seen that, from His conception and all through, Christ's humanity was 'holy' in a sense never said of any other ; not merely that the Holy Ghost was poured out upon Him, but that He was 'that holy thing,' born of His mother and called the Son of God."—He refers to pp. 5, 6. After quoting Luke 1, 35, he adds:—"It is evident, therefore, though truly born of a woman, though deriving human nature from His mother Mary, there was, even in respect to this, a divine action which distinguished our blessed Lord most signally and strongly from all others from His birth. What Rome has lyingly, and as a thing of yesterday, decreed of Mary, is most true of Jesus ; He, not she, was immaculate in His human nature ; and this through the energy of the Holy Ghost (as even the most rudimentary symbols of Christendom confess, I

thank God), the result of the overshadowing power of the Highest. Hence, therefore, 'That Holy Thing' could be its description from the first. He alone of all men was born 'holy'; not made innocent and upright only, like Adam, still less like Adam's sons conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity. He is designated 'That Holy Thing,' it will be observed, when the question was not of what was simply divine (which, indeed, it would be wicked folly to doubt, and needless to affirm here), but of what was human. 'That Holy Thing *which shall be born* [of thee] shall be called the Son of God.'" This puts a nail into the cable of the alleged heresy on the humanity of our Lord.

3. *The Moral Law.*—It is not true that they throw off the moral obligation of the law of God. When they speak of being "not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6, 14), they mean exactly what the Holy Spirit says. That is said of Christians when the subject in hand is not justification but sancti-

fication and a walk in "newness of life." Says Mr. Darby, vol. x., p. 4,—"If I make of the law a moral law (including therein the precepts of the New Testament, and all morality in heart and life), to say a Christian is delivered from it is nonsense or utterly monstrous wickedness. Certainly it is not Christianity. Conformity to the divine will, and that as obedience to commandments, is alike the joy and the duty of the renewed mind." Again, p. 3—"That a Christian should walk according to the precepts of the New Testament, and all the divine light he can gather for his walk from the Old, be it the ten commandments, or anything else, no consistent or rightminded Christian could for a moment deny. I could not own as being on Christian ground one who would. I may not be his judge; but I am bound to judge the principles he professes. I need hardly dwell on it otherwise than to reject it as utterly evil and unchristian. It is one of the distinctive marks between heresy

and any advance in true divine knowledge that *the latter always holds the moral foundation fast*, the difference of right and wrong immovable and fixed, as it is in the divine nature and revealed in the Word the heretic slights and loses sight of it."—Thus far Mr. Darby. He is surely not the man to teach lawlessness, these being his views of the binding obligation of moral obedience to the law of God in its widest sense.

This is a specimen of what I mean when I affirm that all the serious charges of heresy could be disproved by quotation from their own writings. *They hold no deadly heresy whatever, and it is very unchristian to say they do.*

I suppose Brethren are men of like passions with ourselves, and it is likely they may have lost their temper and have used harsh language and done occasionally scandalous things (those they are charged with in their opponents' books are mere myths, a leading brother assures us); but why should we have all the scandalous things

alleged to have been said or done by them over a period of forty years shot down before us in every book published against them? Could their opponents' congregations or denominations show to advantage if all the scandals occurring over a period of forty years were collected and published? (Mat. 7, 1-12), "*Charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*" "Not as long as we are extant,"—the adversaries of Brethren seem to say. "An ungodly man *diggeth up evil*"—(Prov. 16, 27). God says, "*Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more*"—(Heb. 10, 17). What a contrast! *Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man*"—(2 Sam. 24, 14).

An accuser says I have gone over to the adversary, and (always true to the old faggot argument) he wants the ecclesiastical machinery set in motion to punish, **instead** of convincing me that I am wrong by Scripture; but I have, on the contrary, gone over to truth and fair dealing against "the adversary," as

I think readers will see for themselves from the quotations given.

He also complains that I say "*forbid them not,*" even though "the cream of our churches have gone to Brethren, and have almost broken their ministers' hearts by their withdrawalment." Perhaps few have suffered this heart-breaking as I have done, but I dare not hinder, but would rather help, the dear saints of God at such a time when they have told me that their hearts were as sorrowful at leaving me as mine could be at parting with them. How could any tender shepherd forbid Christ's sheep from taking a step which they tell you is prompted by fidelity to Him? What I wrote is, "Seeing that they manifest a true and honest purpose to serve our common Master, Jesus Christ, His word to us regarding them is, '*forbid them not.*'" Is it not so? See His teaching on this head in Luke 9, 50. John says, in verse 49, "Master we saw one casting out devils in Thy Name, and we forbad him, because He

followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us." The whole college of the Apostles would have the irregular brother put down, but the Lord said, *Forbid him not*; so that I am bold to say that though all the ministers of the land be unanimous in their condemnation of the so-thought irregular workers called Brethren, they would be only flying in the face of the plain command of Jesus Christ, "*Forbid him not.*"

But, even regarding it on the lower ground of common citizenship, why should they not enjoy the same liberty that we claim for ourselves of quietly working the Lord's work, and, as the fruit of honest labour, having as many with them as they can fairly gather by the preaching and teaching of the Word? Do ministers dread the full and fair teaching of the Bible, and could they not risk letting their congregations hear fuller teaching than their own, that they resort to the un-

fair means and methods we have been exposing? Why persecute Brethren in this very special manner, and let Romanists, Swedenborgians, and Unitarians go on without a word of rebuke? Where in all this is the sense of the sacredness of religious liberty in this land of Knox and Melville, Erskine and Gillespie, Chalmers, and the noble men of 1843, when their descendants are hunting down as noxious vermin—without regard to common decency, truth or fairness—the truest, holiest, and most devoted of their brethren in Christ?—Matt. 5, 11-12.