

THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

*Some Essential Differences
between Open and Exclusive
Brethren considered
Scripturally and
Historically*



BY

G. H. LANG

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Other additions are in square brackets []

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Of the Author

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"Exclusive"* Brethren considered Scripturally
and Historically*

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL

AND the people served Jehovah *all the days of Joshua*, and all the days of the *elders that outlived Joshua*, who had seen all the great work of Jehovah, that he had wrought for Israel. And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of Jehovah, died. . . . And also *all that generation were gathered unto their fathers*: and there arose *another generation after them*, which *knew not Jehovah*, nor yet the work which he had wrought for Israel. And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baalim: and they forsook, Jehovah, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, *of the gods of the peoples that were round about them*, and bowed themselves down unto them: and they provoked Jehovah to anger (Josh. xxiv. 31; Judges ii. 7-12)†

Joshua and Caleb, the two who had come out of Egypt, had been dead many years. So also had died the leaders trained under them in the wilderness, and who had shared in the conflicts and victories in the Land. The generation now in possession of that goodly inheritance had acquired it by birth without struggle or cost. They troubled not to master the lessons of history, departed from God's ways for His people, and conformed to the less exacting life they found around them.

Thus early does God show that the Bible is His Book, by giving in one outline picture the inner history of all following ages. History repeats itself because the human heart is alike in all times.

The apostles and elders who had known the Lord, died; Timothy, Titus, Stephanas, and the rest trained by them died; and forthwith, as sub-apostolic literature shows, new principles

* For the sake of intelligibility, I am unable to avoid the use of these terms, as I would greatly prefer to do.

† The R.V. is almost always used.

of church order were instilled and adopted. In principle the worship of Baal commenced, for the name means lord, master, possessor. New conceptions and new principles of guidance for the house of God, the church, were permitted to rule, and shortly clerisy, ecclesiasticism, centralization, organization, externalism were supreme. Roman Catholicism followed by natural growth, and Baal, under a Christian nomenclature, was master, was worshipped. The church became like that which was around it, save, blessed be God, for a small remnant who clave to His Word, similar to the earlier remnant in the earthly Israel.*

Such is the position of Brethren to-day. About one hundred and thirty years ago God drew together the hearts of a few Christians on the sole basis of their oneness in Christ, uniting them by the sole power of brotherly love, guiding them by the sole principle of obedience to His Word. They were men of personality, fine scholarship, theological training, qualified for leadership. At great cost of positions, associations, prospects, they left behind their ecclesiastical past, and were led by the Spirit into liberty, victory, enjoyment of much of the true, heavenly portion of the church of God. A picture of those earliest days, as seen in the first such assembly in England, that at Plymouth, is given in Appendix A. It is taken from my life of A. N. Groves.

They have died, long since; so have the leaders trained under them. The present generation of Brethren finds itself in possession by the easy process of birth, the new birth out of the world by conversion from a worldly life, or by the same new birth in the holier sphere of Christian upbringing. The same situation has developed the same failure, departure from the Word and will of God.

This departure, as in the early church, co-exists with much true devotion and much strenuous service; and because God, in His grace, owns and uses what is of Him, His gospel, therefore many deem all else is well. Yet works, even unto toil, patience, unwearying endurance, with the searching out of false teachers, may co-exist with heart departure from the first love (Rev. ii. 4). Again, Ignatius of Antioch, who first exalted episcopacy, thus starting the church on a fatal decline, right willingly gave his body to the beasts in the amphitheatre, proving at once that devotion to Christ is not sufficient

* For the detail on-working of this throughout the centuries see *The Pilgrim Church*, by E. H. Broadbent (Pickering & Inglis, Ltd.).

guarantee that one's church principles are of Christ. It was in less than twenty years only from the death of the last apostle that the devoted Ignatius had thus departed from apostolic church order ! It was within twenty years from the start of Brethren meetings that the first divisions came, and upon questions of church order !

The present generation troubles little about past history ; partly because the Satanic rush and strain of modern life leave little leisure, energy, or taste for serious reading ; partly from that self-sufficiency, natural to youth, which breeds independence of mind and confidence that the present can be well ordered by ourselves ; partly, perhaps, by a perverse use of the truth that the Word of God is enough, and there is little need to learn from our predecessors. By such neglect of the danger boards of history we may easily miss the road at the same point as our fathers, and fall into the same bog. Now, as ever, the miserable state thus reached is likeness to what is around us, unlikeness to the divine pattern : " They followed the gods of the people that were round about them." The spirit of self-pleasing and frivolity rampant to-day makes this course a particular peril. *Leichtfertigkeit und Unvorsichtigkeit*

The first general division among Brethren, in 1848, came about thus : The leading teacher in the meeting at Plymouth was the well-known Benjamin Wills Newton. In the year 1847 it was found that he was teaching fundamental error as to our Lord's relationships as man, first to Adam, and consequently toward God, His Father. This being scriptural ground for excommunication, it was necessary and right to decline fellowship with the teacher thereof, and if discipline had been limited to refusing Christian intercourse with him, and with any other individuals who were found to support the error, good would have resulted. But discipline was pressed far beyond this, and by persons having no just reason for taking disciplinary action, seeing they were not in personal contact with the teacher or his error.

That individuals should publish exposures of any error publicly advanced may be good service to the people of God : that they should pass ecclesiastical judgment upon a person with whom they were not in direct contact, and should prescribe general church discipline for all assemblies, was wholly unwarranted by Scripture and caused wide division. But this was done by Mr. Newton's opponents (who came to be known

as Exclusive Brethren), urged thereto by the equally well-known and honoured John Nelson Darby.

As I must make clear that in matters ecclesiastical I differ considerably from Mr. Darby, I would say at once that nevertheless I esteem him highly as one greatly devoted to the Lord Jesus, richly taught in the deeper meaning of Scripture, and in the purposes of God, and used as few have ever been to influence his generation. Indeed, I share the opinion that, on the evangelical side, he was one of the greatest instruments employed by the Holy Spirit in the nineteenth century, as, on the opposite side, John Henry Newman was probably the most potent agent for spreading spiritual darkness and corruption. But while freely and thankfully acknowledging Mr. Darby's greatness and worth we may not forget that he was not infallible.

The position taken was that all persons in a meeting were necessarily defiled by the presence there of error, even those individuals who were personally free from error, and perhaps did not even know there was error taught, and that no communion could be allowed with anyone coming thence without communion being thereby had with the error. Therefore any assembly receiving any person coming from the meeting at Plymouth was held to have thereby endorsed the wrong doctrine, even though the individual received did not understand the error, or was, perhaps, actually opposed to it; and the assembly receiving him was declared out of fellowship; and, in turn, no person connected therewith could be received.

[That this has remained the Exclusive view is seen in Napoleon Noel's *The History of the Brethren*, a work written in 1936 definitely from the Exclusive standpoint. In Vol. I, pp. 231, 232, he says:

That the very presence of evil, moral or doctrinal, *does defile* the congregation or Assembly of God, is clear from both the Old Testament records, and the New. . . . But why did the appeal [in 1 Cor. i. 2] connect "all in every place that call on the name of the Lord" with Corinth? Because there is no such thing *recognized* in Scripture as *local independency*; the whole Church of God "in every place" was involved, by the presence of *that one unjudged sin* in the Corinth Assembly, and this is the principle of collateral defilement. . . . [footnote, 232]. That is, one local Assembly becoming defiled, all other local Assemblies remaining indifferent to the evil, become defiled thereby; because they are not independent, but *are all one*.

He proceeds to show the application of this to the Bethesda church by quoting J. N. Darby's Leeds circular of August 26, 1848, calling for general separation from Bethesda. I quote this with the italics as given in Blair Neatby's *History of the Plymouth Brethren* (162-164). Noel's italics differ; but I suspect Neatby to be the more careful transcriber. I have not at hand Vol. 4, Doctrinal, of the *Collected Writings*, to check this. The letter begins :

I feel bound to present to you the case of Bethesda . . . [there follows Darby's view of how Bethesda, as he alleged, condoned the false doctrine of B. W. Newton] . . . I do call upon brethren . . . to set a barrier against this evil. . . . I plainly urge upon them that to receive anyone from Bethesda (unless in any exceptional case of ignorance of what has passed) is opening the door now to the infection of the abominable evil from which at so much painful cost we have been delivered. *It has been formally and deliberately admitted at Bethesda under the plea of not investigating it (itself a principle which refuses to watch against roots of bitterness), and really palliated. And if this be admitted by receiving persons from Bethesda, those doing so are morally identified with the evil, for the body so acting is corporately responsible for the evil they admit.* . . . For my own part, I should neither go to Bethesda in its present state, nor while in that state go where persons from it were knowingly admitted.]

It had been demanded of the assembly meeting at Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, that it should pronounce judgment upon the question then in progress at the Plymouth meeting. But the equally celebrated George Müller, and his associates at Bethesda, answered, in effect, that they had nought to do, as a local church, with condemning another assembly as an assembly, their only responsibility being to deal with the actual beliefs and practices of any individual who might seek fellowship. It has been the strict adhering to this important principle of church action that alone has saved the Open meetings from those universal divisions which have so often rent the Exclusive circles.

[It is important to observe the words of Darby in the first brackets above. No one was to be received from Bethesda "unless in any exceptional case of ignorance of what has passed." What else is this than acceptance of the principle of reception he had just reprobated, even that the state of the individual seeking fellowship should determine for or against reception?]

For taking this position, so declining Darby's principle of discipline, he cut off that whole church from fellowship, saying that "their gatherings would be really a trap laid to ensnare the sheep." Yet in the same circular, of August 26th, 1848, he admitted that he did "not charge Mr. Müller with himself holding Mr. Newton's errors," and said of Henry Craik, the other principal leader at Bethesda, "I have no reason to say that he is not sound in the faith." In my life of A. N. Groves (215-217) it is shown how richly God was blessing this church at the very period that Darby was denouncing it.

Shortly after, necessity having arisen, the church at Bethesda did examine the doctrine in question, and on December 11th, 1848, resolved "that no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts should be received into communion;" but they did *not* resolve that a Christian personally sound in faith and godly in walk should be refused simply because he came from the Plymouth meeting.

Exclusive brethren continue to this day to press the action of the Bethesda church at that time as sufficient ground for wholly refusing fellowship with Open brethren, alleging that Bethesda thereby condoned Newton's error, and therefore all who walk by the same principle of church action, though it be over a century later, similarly condone that error, even though the vast majority of them to-day do not even know what that error was.* Therefore it is most important to understand that the cause of that lamentable division was not false doctrine, but a false principle of church order and discipline. The doctrine *all* parties condemned, including almost immediately the teacher thereof. Darby and his followers

* [The exception made by Darby above quoted, that ignorance of the facts of Newton and Bethesda might permit one from Bethesda to be received to fellowship, was held, at least in theory, by him and some other leaders as applying to Open brethren in general. It was affirmed by William Kelly years after. How often it was acted upon in their days I do not know. Already there was objection to it, and it is certain that the objection came to rule. In sixty years I have never heard of such a case among the English adherents to Darby's circle, but have known of definite rejection of Open believers just because they were such. Indeed, I have myself been thus rejected, on that ground and no other. It is regularly required that an Open brother must "judge the question." If Exclusive Brethren to-day would admit that ignorance of Newton and the Bethesda question would justify the reception of godly Open believers they could receive nine tenths of them and so end the division.]

condemned it ; the Bethesda church, by the church resolution quoted, condemned it ; while already, nearly one year before—in November, 1847—Newton himself had condemned it, and had withdrawn and disavowed all writings of his in which it was to be found.

In chapter v is the full text of Newton's " Acknowledgment." Few Exclusives (or others) ever saw this. One who joined that Party in 1858—only ten years after the division—and who lived in London at the heart of Exclusivism, sixty years later maintained the old bitter hostility to Newton, but had never seen this " Acknowledgment," nor knew its contents even by report. It amply sufficed for him that J.N.D. had rejected it ! Thus too often the sacred duty of forming a sound personal judgment in the fear of God has been guiltily surrendered through slavish homage to a great man.

The important thing is to see clearly that it was the question of church procedure, and not the Newtonian doctrinal error, that was the cause of the conflict. This is evident from the fact that seven months after the Bethesda church decision quoted, in July, 1849, Darby called upon Müller and said, " As you have judged Newton's tracts, there is no longer any reason why we should be separated." But when Müller said that Darby's own conduct in the controversy must be faced, the latter went away to press relentlessly the war against Bethesda, and " to enforce to the last letter the decree he had just declared obsolete." (Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, 176.) In Appendix B this interview is reviewed at length.

The following pronouncement upon those events, written as late as 1923 by W. H. Dorman, a survivor from that former century, is of great significance. As a revised judgment, after a lapse of seventy-five years, its importance is manifest. In his open letter to " The Brethren " headed " Philadelphia and Laodicea " (p. 5) Mr. Dorman said :

I am persuaded that brethren do not apprehend the real character of the Plymouth-Bethesda trouble of 1845-9.

The testimony to the cardinal ecclesiastical truth of the Unity of the Church was the duty committed to the " Plymouth Brethren." It was the divine remedy for the sectarianism that had paralysed every attempt to conform to the New Testament teaching as to the Church since Reformation times. It became, therefore an object with the Lord's Enemy, by any means, fair

or foul, to destroy that testimony, and he laid a most crafty plot to effect this. His objective was not to introduce clerisy, or "system," or *false doctrine* (however welcome as a *side issue*), as was *generally supposed*, but was the wrecking of the Testimony to Unity and the kindred truths.

Now that the lapse of time allows us to view the events more nearly in their true perspective, the subtlety of his scheme appears amazing. He first stirred up trouble at Plymouth and aroused a certain degree of angry passion and personal feeling. Then, when men's minds were thus prepared he brought the heresy into view. Those brethren that had opposed Newton rushed rightly enough to the defence of the assailed truth as to the Lord's Person. In his "rôle" as an "Angel of light" (II Cor. xi. 14) he inflamed the controversy to the utmost. It may be said he would not stimulate saints to defend the truth; but it must be remembered *he is quite capable of stirring up godly men in fierce zeal* to defend the Lord's *honour*, if by that means he can make them *forget to keep His WORD* (I Sam. xv. 22). This he did so effectually that the contest ended in those who were once fervent witnesses to the Unity separating into two sects. His end was gained. The Testimony was destroyed, and as for the heresy, *it had served its purpose and was heard of no more.*

But Philadelphia had lost its crown.

[The italics in the above quotation are mine.]

The church position adopted by Bethesda was stated by them at the time in this form (*The Letter of the Ten*, para. 6) : "Even supposing that those who inquired into the matter had come to the same conclusion [that is, as Newton's critics] touching the amount of positive error therein contained [that is, in Newton's tracts], this would not warrant us in rejecting those who came from under his teaching until we were satisfied that they had understood and imbibed views essentially subversive of foundation truth."

Thirty-five years later, in a letter dated from Bristol, December 19th, 1883, James Wright re-affirmed this by saying :

The ground upon which we receive to the Lord's table is soundness in the faith and consistency of life of the *individual* believer. We should not refuse to receive one who we had reason to believe was perfectly sound in the faith and consistent in life *merely* because he, or she, was in fellowship with a body of Christians who would allow Mr. Newton to minister among them; just on the same principle that we should not refuse a person *equally* sound in faith and consistent in life simply be-

cause he or she came from a body of Christians amongst whom the late Mr. J. N. Darby had ministered.

Those assemblies which adopted this principle of church action became known as Open brethren. Darby went to such excess of statement as to declare the principle worse than a State Church, which merely shows how prejudice may warp the judgment of a truly great man (*Col. Writ. Eccl. iii, Vol. XIV, 457*). About the year 1928 an Exclusive brother defined the situation distinctly :

The Open Brethren represent the principle that each local assembly stands independently by itself, so that the action of one assembly has no binding force for another. Again, it may be that not all assemblies of Open Brethren (or not in all cases) act upon this principle, but it *exists* and will be acknowledged as right ; whilst *we are persuaded* that the truth of the "unity of the body" is thereby practically denied, and the exhortation to apply ourselves earnestly to keep the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" *will not be responded to*.

The last sentence is to be noted as a statement of the Exclusive conception that the "body" is a *visible universal* corporation, composed of the aggregate of local assemblies. This was set forth by Darby in a letter dated February 19th, 1864 :

The assembly in London weighed, and I with them, the case, and counted him as either excommunicated or in schism. I put the two cases, for I only speak of the principle. I take part in this act and hold him to be *outside the Church of God on earth*, being outside (in either case) what represents it in London ; I am bound by Scripture to count them [? him] so. I come to Sheffield ; there he breaks bread, and is—in what ? *Not in the Church of God on earth*, for he is out of it in London, and there are not two churches on earth, cannot be, so as to be in one and out of another [*italics mine*].

In support of this view, reliance is placed chiefly upon the text above used : "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. iv. 3). It is to be observed that the expression connected with it, "the unity of the body," is given as a quotation, but it is not in Scripture, which speaks only of the "unity of the Spirit," and the "unity of the faith" (Eph. iv. 13). This expression, "unity of the body," is employed, without distinct explanation, as meaning the sum total of local churches viewed as one whole united corporation on earth, and that this forms the body of Christ.

This is necessarily involved in the argument, as it is presented, for example, in the quotations just given ; for the argument is that the unity of the body is denied unless all assemblies everywhere act together, all accepting the decisions and actions of each.

Now the hard fact is that the assemblies of Brethren, not to speak of the rest of Christendom, have been divided and divided ; which, according to the argument, implies that the body of Christ is susceptible of perpetual and ever more minute sub-division. The falsity involved in the argument is that the body of Christ and the sum total of local assemblies are one and the same.

It has been too much overlooked that the term " body " is but a figure of speech, used to illustrate a relationship, a relationship subsisting between the Head in heaven and His members on earth. The relationship is actual, a fact with all indwelt by His Spirit ; the picture of it is a picture, just as such terms as " branches," " bride," " city," are pictures of the same feature of relationship. It is harsh and misleading to force the term " body " to yield a rigid, mechanical sense, as if the body of Christ must be composed of just so many members, neither more nor less, or is something visible on earth in the aggregate of a circle of assemblies. Was the body of Christ maimed by the excision of the wicked brother at Corinth ? Is it permanently cut to pieces by the divisions of Exclusive brethren or others ?

The stress of the exhortation by no means lies in such a theoretical, external idea of the body of Christ. It has to do with something that believers are to " maintain practically by a walk according to the Spirit of grace " (Darby, *Synopsis*, in loco). It is the " unity of the Spirit " which is to be kept, not any corporate, external unity of churches, and this is to be done, and can only be done in " the uniting bond of peace " (J.N.D.). How, then, can that sense of the passage be correct which, being applied, has habitually caused the severest disunity of spirit and the utmost strife and division ?

It is individual action that is contemplated, as the verses preceding show. Assemblies as such are not " called with the calling " through the gospel, nor can as such manifest " all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." These are individual graces and conduct. Were each and every individual of an assembly so to walk there would naturally be no strife therein, and were it thus

with a neighbouring assembly also there would come no strife between them, but to transfer the exhortations into the realm of universal church politics and make them a rule of inter-church discipline is quite unwarranted. Another has well said : " It is true that ~~St.~~ Paul anxiously promoted friendly intercourse and sympathy between the scattered Ecclesiæ ; but the unity of the universal Ecclesia, as he contemplated it, does not belong to this region : it is a truth of theology and of religion, not a fact of what we call Ecclesiastical politics " (see p. 31).

This much used passage has, therefore, no bearing upon the questions of assembly constitution or discipline, or the corporate relationship of assembly to assembly. With passages and truths (such as that of the body of Christ) which have no direct connection with ecclesiastical action made the basis thereof, is it any wonder that the assembly experience of Exclusive brethren has been lamentable, or that " Mr. G. V. Wigram, ere he died in 1879, bitterly lamented the fact that Brethren had been ' blowing ecclesiastical bubbles ' and ' playing church,' and that he felt God could not go on with them in such folly " ? (Ironsides, *The Brethren Movement*, c. vii).

Here then, is the vital difference : Open brethren hold that the Lord intends each assembly to stand and to act for itself, according to His Word, directly responsible to Himself ; having to deal only with individuals presenting themselves for communion ; neither responsible for nor bound by the church action of another assembly, but testing this by the Word when an individual therefrom presents himself, otherwise leaving it alone. Whereas Exclusive brethren hold that all assemblies together form an outward and visible unity, and that consequently the receiving or the rejecting of a person by one assembly is binding upon all assemblies.

CHAPTER II

THE DIVISIVE FORCE OF THE DOCTRINE THAT THE CHURCH IS A UNIVERSAL VISIBLE BODY

THE practical outworking of these two principles should be traced.

Darby was at variance with Newton prior to the discovery that the latter was teaching fundamental error. In 1845

Darby considered that clerisy and a false system of prophetic teaching (that is, one contradicting his own) were obtaining in the Plymouth meeting. Now Darby had no local responsibility for that assembly. If anyone had come thence seeking fellowship with him it would have been proper for him to have inquired as to that person's views, and to have refused communion had he felt bound by the Word of God to do so. That would have been the principle acted upon by Open brethren. But, on the contrary, he went to Plymouth, provoked a dispute with Newton, bringing against him moral charges that were declared on investigation to be unfounded, divided the assembly, and formed another gathering. Neatby justly remarks that, "From the moment he decided to come [to Plymouth] Brethrenism was doomed" (*History*, 103).

It is profoundly and painfully important that eight years later, in a letter dated November 23rd, 1853, Darby openly confessed that in so dividing the assembly he had acted precipitately, and did not have the endorsement of the Lord. He wrote :

I desire to state, feeling that God leads me to it, the one point in which, in my own judgment, I may have erred in the Plymouth matter, and in which in my own mind I have not the consciousness that I was led of the Spirit of God . . . I speak of the historical facts, in one of which I have felt I might have acted otherwise . . . It was this : Mr. H. was absent at the time I left Ebrington Street . . . Before he finally left Ebrington Street, he found it to be in such a state that he refused to minister any longer . . . Just before his return I left it [the meeting]. Now what I judge might have been done by me was, to await the effect of his resigning ministry there . . . leaving before his return (just about when he refused to minister) the effect it might have produced I could not act upon, supposing I did not know it ; still, if guided of the Lord in that point, I might still have been there, the effect of which I cannot tell.

I have sometimes said that the only point on which I had not the consciousness of having God with me was one others knew nothing of . . . I cannot now recollect whether I knew of (H's) act ; but God knew of it, and, if guided by Him in this point, I should have had the benefit of His knowledge.

. . . I state for His glory and my own conscience's sake where I could not securely say I was acting in the Spirit, or that the flesh had no part.

Upon this J. L. Willis, of Shanghai, commented as follows :

This [the evil then in the assembly at Ebrington Street] Mr. Darby resisted, rightly, no doubt. The point raised in his letter

is not should he have resisted the evil, but should he have left when he did. The fact, as he confesses, was that he left without having the Lord's mind. This is a most serious consideration. We believe that when a person is in a place where God has set him, he should stay in that place, and maintain his position in the power of the Lord. In resisting the evil he had the Lord with him, and, in time, it would have been overcome. In leaving, the Lord stood by him, but he failed to hold the position for the Lord. Had he waited a little longer, the evil doctrines that were afterwards discovered would have been brought to light, the consciences of the saints would have been aroused, as many afterwards were, and "he might still have been there."

That is, the lamentable division he caused might not have occurred.

But the question we have raised, whether it was of the Lord at all that Darby went to Plymouth at that time, remains.

Dr. Robert Cameron has put on record the following significant incident (see "Perilous Times," April, 1917) :

Over forty years ago, at my own table in New York City, Mr. Darby called Mr. Newton "dear brother Newton." I expressed my deep surprise at the use of such an endearing term concerning the one who had been freely called "that dangerous man," "the arch enemy," "the fearful blasphemer," and other equally harsh terms. At once Mr. Darby replied: "Mr. Newton is the most godly man I ever knew." I said, "Well, then, what was all this trouble and condemnation about, if Mr. Newton is such a godly man?" He answered promptly, "Oh, but Mr. Newton had taught blasphemous doctrines about the person of our blessed Lord, and these had to be dealt with." "But," I said, "Mr. Newton withdrew the tract on which this charge was made and afterwards published another tract that is the clearest, most scriptural and most reverential treatment of that delicate question that has ever been published." "Yes," said Mr. Darby, "but there never was any adequate repentance for the sin!" Here the conversation ended, because dear Mr. Darby (for I loved him) was too old and too venerable a man to admit of my giving "adequate expression" to my indignant feelings.

This conversation was apparently about thirty years after the first strife in 1845, when Darby was over seventy years of age. His emphatic tribute to his opponent's character is much to his credit, but it raises startling questions as to his own sincerity in challenging Newton's integrity at that time, and it involves him in the palpable inconsistency that the

“ most godly man ” he ever knew never adequately repented of the great sin of blasphemy ! The reader of chapter v can judge of Newton’s sincerity.

Concerning the conception of the church as one universal body, I wrote thus in my pamphlet on church order* :

In even so seemingly unorganized a community as the Exclusive Brethren the same principle has worked disaster. For an organization exists in men’s mind before and independently of a written constitution, and indeed its principles may be quite effectively worked without ever being reduced to formal propositions.

The apostolic conception was that each regenerate person, indwelt by the Spirit of life, was a member of a living, universal, invisible society, having no universal, visible, organized exhibition, but was also a member of such local, visible assembly as existed where he might be. Consequently a local assembly could shut out the individual from its fellowship ; and if it did so on divinely warranted grounds that decision would be ratified in heaven (Matt. xviii. 18), and should of course, be accepted by all other assemblies fully aware of the facts. But the responsibility of such excommunication was with the local assembly only, and the endorsement thereof was by each other local assembly separately, if and when the one excommunicate presented himself for fellowship.

But the Exclusive Brethren developed discipline a stage further, even that if assembly B did not ratify the excommunicatory sentence of assembly A, the latter assembly must excommunicate the former assembly as such ; and thus arose the cutting off by assemblies not only of the individual, which is scriptural, but of an assembly as a whole, for which practice no example or warrant is found in Scripture.

Now, whilst the individual, being in fact a member of the local assembly, could be cut off from that body, out of what body could an assembly as a whole be excised ? Something cannot be cut off from nothing ; the part implies a whole ; and it is obvious that corporate excommunication of this sort involves the conception of all the assemblies being in their aggregate a body corporate, or there would be nothing out of which to remove an assembly. So that the non-Biblical notion of an affiliated, universal, visible church underlies, as a working conception, the unhappy world-wide divisions of these devoted Christians.

* *Church Federation, a study in Church Life and Order, with special reference to Denominational Federating, now out of print.*

Let us watch the sad outworking of this divisive principle.

In 1860 the Exclusive meeting at Islington, North London, excommunicated a certain person. The Walworth-Peckham meeting, in the south-east, demurred, asking, "What sin, or sins, according to Scripture, of an excommunicable character" the brother had committed. The reply was that they were "of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture"! The fact was that no question of faith or morals was involved; it was a matter of the giving of ministry not welcomed—an offence, we may remark, common to all the prophets! Further objection led to the London central oversight meeting issuing an official notification that the disaffected Peckham gathering, and its sympathizers, could not be "accredited at the Lord's table." Let it be repeated that no matter of doctrine or moral practice was involved; nothing but a demurring to an act of discipline. Now, had the Peckham meeting not inquired about the act of the distant Islington meeting, no trouble would have followed; but their regarding themselves as organically one, and bound by, the act of the other meeting gave opportunity for dissension.

A member of this excommunicated meeting (Mr. G.) applied for communion at Sheffield, and the brethren there, with full knowledge of the circumstances, received him. This led the neighbouring Rotherham gathering to write as follows:

I am requested to say, that inasmuch as you have now placed yourselves in the same position as Mr. G., viz.: outside the communion of the 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.

The reader will notice the exact agreement of statement with the letter of an Exclusive quoted above (p. 13), an agreement the more significant of the fixity and universality of the Exclusive view that the latter was written long after, and by a Continental Exclusive.

It was this action at Sheffield that led to Darby's letter of 1846 before quoted.

It must be again remarked that no reason personal to Mr. G. mingled in the difficulty. His only defect was that he came

from a meeting which other meetings had interdicted. The system forbade that the Sheffield assembly should receive him on the ground of his personal fitness. Thus the principle caused first a division in London, then between Sheffield and London and Sheffield and Rotherham, and then universally.

More recently a quarrel in the Minneapolis (U.S.A.) assembly as to the location of the meeting room, led to the suspension for a time of the Lord's table. The majority, finding the one minority brother irreconcilable, presently recommenced the breaking of bread. But grieved at heart, and perhaps dubious of their ecclesiastical whereabouts, they referred the trouble to the brethren gathered in conference at Chicago, many hundreds of miles away. The four meetings there at first decided against the majority, and refused to recognize their table. But, later, three of those meetings altered their judgment, whilst the other adhered thereto. Thus there ensued division in Chicago. But, as everybody goes to or from that centre, brethren from all over the country had to decide with which of the Chicago groups they were to be in fellowship. Consequently, the division spread throughout the United States. Then a sister moved from a remote village of the States to London, so now London had to decide whether her meeting was one with which they were in fellowship. Difference of judgment arising about this, division ensued in London; and as all England goes to or from London, and all the world is in touch with England, the assemblies throughout the earth were duly separated on account of that miserable dispute in a remote American town.

Such sad divisions have occurred repeatedly among Exclusive brethren, and all this sorrow and reproach is the inevitable outcome of the principle that all assemblies are corporately united, all bound by the action of any one of them.

The still later Glanton division of 1908 further illustrates the position. The assembly at Alnwick, Northumberland, had been broken up by personal strife. For two years its meetings and the Lord's supper had not been held. Then the neighbouring Glanton meeting, feeling that these scattered sheep needed shepherding, commenced to receive to the breaking of bread individuals from Alnwick, who had long attended at Glanton, and who were known to be walking godly. Thus they received believers as individuals, without pronouncing judgment upon the controversies at Alnwick. Plainly this was acting upon

the principle followed by Open brethren. Newcastle and other neighbouring meetings approved of the course. But the powerful London group condemned them, and forced a division throughout the country and the world, one of its chief leaders saying at the time, what I have just said, that the Glanton brethren were acting on the principle of the Open brethren.

Yet the Glanton action in receiving individuals personally suitable was no other than a return to the first principle of Brethren, and strongly advocated by Darby himself in a letter dated February 26th, 1839 (*Coll. Writings*, vol. xiv, 285-351). He said :

But our principle is this, sir : Whenever the first great truth of redemption—in a word, whenever Christ has received a person—we would receive him. That false brethren may creep in unawares is possible. If the church be spiritual they will soon be made apparent, but as our table is THE LORD'S, not ours, we receive all that the Lord has received (333/4) . . . We do, then, receive on the one great truth of Christ's salvation all that through divine grace believing it are converted to God. (335).

And again in the same volume (xiv, 432, 433) :

They [the so-called Plymouth Brethren] can meet on the ground of the unity of the body of Christ, if only two or three, and find Christ in their midst according to His promise, glad to see any child of God who is walking godlily, who calls on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart. They cannot compel unity, but they can act on it.

It is evident that the Open brethren, in this matter, follow the original principle and practice of the first Brethren, whereas the Exclusives abandoned it.

How fearfully potent a weapon for dividing Christians is placed in Satan's hands by the federating of churches is seen in the following quotations from Begbie's *Life of William Booth*, vol. i, c. ix. It is exceedingly striking that in the very years, 1848, 1849, that Brethren first divided upon this question, so also did Methodism upon the same question. The same Enemy attacked by the same manoeuvre, with the same success in dividing the people of God. The italics are mine.

In the year 1848 dissatisfaction with the government of Wesleyan Methodism had gathered considerable force. Men felt that the Wesleyan Conference did not fairly represent the churches, that *this Conference exercised unjustly a tyrannous*

despotism over local churches in the connexion, and that salvation lay in a democratic extension of local government throughout the whole field of Wesleyan Methodism. The real question at stake was : Connexionalism or Congregationalism—*the supremacy of the Conference* as the final court of appeal, or *the court of the individual church* . . . A large number of secessions from the mother church took place . . . The loss of membership . . . amounted in the course of a few years to not less than a hundred thousand.

Thus a dispute concerning the government of a church, *because of the unlovely spirit in which it had been conducted—stubbornness, that was neither free from malice nor nice in its choice of weapons*, awakened resentment, and, human nature, being what it is, led inevitably to retaliation—broadened into *one of those heresy-hunting expeditions upon which no church can enter without exhaustion and disaster*. The simple matter of dispute, as Sir Thomas Browne has warned all disputants to expect, wandered at once from the particular to the general ; and, in this case, was soon obscured by the publication of *a series of slanders in which little respect was shown for age or long service or purity of motive*. In the end, exhausted by this pitiful conflict, and rent by schism, the Methodists set themselves to recover the simple faith of their origin—belief in conversion, and a methodical attention to religious duties.

Excepting the last clause, it reads like the history of Exclusivism.

On the other hand, the maintenance of the principle of the independence of each local church has preserved the Open brethren from any such catastrophes. The saving power thereof was well seen in the nineties by the failure of the "Needed Truth" irruption to effect general division among the assemblies.

A most important secondary consequence and contrast is that the bitter, exhausting controversies of Exclusives have largely destroyed their efforts in the gospel. Soul-saving seems no more a steady object with all too many of the true Exclusives ; though happily of late there has appeared to be some revived zeal in a few places known to the writer. Whereas, free from the drain of recurring, widespread strife, and in spite of very much confessed failure and weakness, the Open brethren have long been, by the great grace of God, one of the most universal and virile orthodox evangelistic forces.

To such, the word is, "Be not highminded, but fear."

2 Timothy ii. 19-22, is a passage generally urged by Ex-

clusive brethren as demanding their drastic discipline. They say that a man is thereby commanded to purge himself from vessels unto dishonour if he would be fit for the Master's use. The whole passage is as follows :

Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His : and, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness. Now, in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth ; and some unto honour, and some unto dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work. But flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Upon this Mr. Darby (*Synopsis*, V, 187) comments : " The Christian cleanses himself personally from every vessel which is not to the Lord's honour ; " and so other writers also. No interpretation of Scripture is accurate which mars the figure of speech employed. How a *man* can cleanse himself from *vessels* is incomprehensible. But in any case, the exhortation has no bearing upon *assembly* action. Mr. Darby himself is clear enough upon this, at least, that the individual Christian is alone viewed as acting.

The critical point is—What is meant by " these " in the sentence " if a man purge himself from these " ? " These *vessels* " yields no possible sense, but makes the picture absurd. Is not the true antecedent to be found in the words " wood and earth " ? Such baser elements are in every man by natural birth, but by the heavenly birth the precious qualities of the divine nature—the " gold and silver "—are imparted. Now, the new-born man may " live according to flesh " or " according to spirit ; " he may remain predominantly earthly in mind or become increasingly and manifestly heavenly (Rom. viii. 3-13). If the former condition prevail he still is in the " house," a utensil purchased by the Head of the house and used for necessary but unhonourable purposes.* Whereas the Christian who " by the spirit makes dead the doings of the body " shall thereby more and more be seen in the purity and beauty of the heavenly elements of character alone, and thus shall be a vessel not relegated to inferior uses

* Is not the positive " dishonourable " a little too strong to be exact in this place ? I have therefore said *unhonourable*, as corresponding to the primitive, *a-timia*, without honour.

by inferior persons, but such a utensil as the Master of the house shall keep at his hand for personal use. "All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold" (2 Chron. ix. 20). Here falls the full stress of the exhortation—"fit for the Master's use."

This sense agrees well with the injunctions which immediately go before and follow: "Depart from unrighteousness," and "flee also youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace."

Having for many years so understood the passage, I was glad to read in Bloomfield: "the Apostle . . . admonishes them to keep themselves pure from the aforesaid *evil principles* and *practices* ;" and in Moule :

Touched by the Lord at the springs of *will* and *love*, the man takes humble care to "cleanse himself from part and lot with all *thoughts* and *tendencies* which condone sin and minimize the Lord . . . Lord and Master . . . we are altogether Thine. Enable us as such so to "cleanse ourselves from" complicity with *evil within* and *without* that we, when Thou requirest us for Thy purposes, may be found by Thee *handy* [author's italics] to Thy touch, in the place and in the condition in which Thou canst take us up and employ us in whatever way, on the moment, for Thyself (2 Ep. to Tim., R.T.S., 96, 97, italics mine).

This sense corresponds closely to the similar passage by Paul in 1 Cor. iii. 10-15, where are used the same elements of the metaphor, employed differently but to enforce the same lessons. The believer's character and life-work are compared to a building, a house or temple, into which he may build valuable or perishable materials, *gold*, *silver*, costly stones, or *wood*, hay, stubble, and he is exhorted to reject the latter and use only the former, since these alone will be approved by Christ, our Master.

With the rejection of the hopeless incongruity of a *person* purging himself from *vessels* the Exclusive sense of the passage lapses, and the powerful plea it contains for individual purifying of heart and walk is recovered.

The fact that a brother has been excommunicated ought certainly to arouse great caution and provoke careful inquiry, but it ought not to be accepted as decisive, since an assembly may err, or the casting out may be the work of a Diotrephe; and in any case a decision in one assembly is not legislation for another, or otherwise all assemblies ought to provide themselves with the logical conclusion of this process, a central

oversight such as dominates one party of London Exclusive meetings, or a synod, or a Pope. That John the apostle did not bow to the act of the church led by Diotrephes is clear (3 John 9. 10). "To idolize assembly judgments as necessarily right is condemned by the Lord's Word" (W. Kelly—statement on the Ramsgate division).

This principle was very definitely set aside, and the Exclusive principle maintained, by an esteemed friend, himself formerly an Exclusive, who afterward ministered among Open meetings, who wrote: "Apart from his [Mr. —] doctrine (of the serious error of which I have no doubt), the fact that so many assemblies have felt it needful to refuse him should, I think, have weight with *all* Christian assemblies. . . . By receiving him you bring yourself in principle into Second Epistle John, verse 11.* . . . If, then, there is still the open door for Mr. —, I must regard it, much to my regret, as closing the door at — for me."

Here it is maintained that *even were the matter of doctrine an open question*, and therefore the justice of the excommunication also open to doubt, yet it ought to be acquiesced in by all assemblies, and that any person or assembly not bowing thereto ought to be refused fellowship. This is that rule of common exclusion which Hatch remarks was recognized by the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and later, that is, in the period of general degradation of the church of God by its joining itself to the State. But it was not of apostolic origin. It practically assumes what Hatch rightly deprecates, even that "God is always on the side of the majority: and that when the confederation was once formed, whatever the majority of its members resolved upon was binding *de jure divino* [that is, as by a divine decree] upon the minority."†

The possible danger of a person not fit for fellowship finding access to one or more assemblies (which danger contentious Exclusives greatly magnify), is not for a moment to be

* Observe this parallel. Because the devoted Anthony Norris Groves did not accept Darby's position against Bethesda, "in June, 1849, Dr. Cronin wrote to Norris Groves forbidding him the house, on the ground that Groves had made himself 'a partaker of other men's sins, and become obnoxious to the prohibition of 2 John 10'" (Neatby, *History*, 189). Thirty years later Dr. Cronin reaped what he had sown by being himself, in old age, excommunicated by his brethren. Matt. vii. 2 is still in force.

† *Organisation of the Early Christian Churches*, see next chapter.

compared in seriousness to the ecclesiastical bondage and the inevitableness of general strife attaching to the Exclusive principle. Here is a specimen from a letter by a leading Exclusive dated February 3rd, 1925 : " On the principle of open communion, that is, receiving all who come along professing to be Christians, we might receive Christian Scientists, Christadelphians, Swedenborgians, Seventh Day Adventists, Unitarians, Mormons, and every other kind of unclean bird."

In answer it may suffice to say that, during sixty years of ceaseless moving amongst Christians practising open communion, in many countries, I have never once startled any one of the unclean birds named nesting in such a meeting. I *did* once, by a strong statement of the eternal wrath of God, discover in one of the meetings a person born, reared, and baptized an *Exclusive* and yet *unregenerate*. That individual I had the joy of leading to personal salvation.

My beloved father, an Exclusive of more than sixty years' experience, asked if I did not think that the practice of Open brethren brought the risk of receiving to the Lord's table some who ought not to be received. I inquired whether, in the present weak and confused condition of the church of God, we were not compelled to take risks in one direction or another, and whether it was not more according to love to risk receiving one who ought not to be received than to risk refusing one who ought to be received, because Christ had received him. After some moments of quiet thought he said that perhaps I was right.

Darby's before quoted words indicate the true means of meeting this peril : " That false brethren may creep in un-awares is possible. *If the church be spiritual they will soon be made apparent* " (my italics).

And this leads me to quote from a letter to me of February, 1929, from an Exclusive brother of gracious, generous spirit, who says :

I often feel that no views of brethren as to order, etc., are the key of the present position. It is far more a question of state, and this is my chief trouble. I confess I have not much heart for the business of maintaining that " I " or " my view " is right, when the sheep are scattered, and those who know the most seem most unconcerned about the need of saints and *sinner*s.

Surely this is a sad yet very significant confession to come from the heart of Exclusivism, and points the apostle's words

that " Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up " (1 Cor. viii. 1) ; for the Exclusive practice of ruthless, wholesale exclusion grieves the spirit of love ; unavoidably, if almost imperceptibly, hardens the heart ; and so hinders the building up of saints in love and the seeking of the lost.

CHAPTER III

THE ADMINISTRATIVE INDEPENDENCE
OF EACH LOCAL CHURCH

UPON the fact of the original, administrative independence of each Christian church let us hear some competent witnesses whose ecclesiastical position in such a highly organized and national system as the Church of England makes their testimony the more important.

Dr. Edwin Hatch's* Oxford Lectures, of 1880, on *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* Sir Robert Anderson described as " one of the greatest theological books of the age " (*The Bible and Modern Criticism*, 199, note). He remarked that " it appears to be boycotted by High Church and Low Church alike." The reason no doubt is that it shows that *no* federated church of any complexion is apostolic, or even sub-apostolic. Dr. Hatch says :

For although it is indisputable that our Lord founded a Church, *it is an unproved assumption that that Church is an aggregation of visible and organised societies* (pref. xii) . . . the theory upon which the public worship of the primitive churches proceeded was that *each community was complete in itself*, and that in every act of public worship every element of the community was present (p. 79).

He indicates that the combining of churches is *not apostolic* by saying (pp. 170, 171) :

In the course of the *second* century the custom of meeting in *representative* assemblies *began* to prevail among the Christian communities . . . the result of the deliberations of such a conference was expressed sometimes in a resolution, sometimes in a letter addressed to other churches . . . But *so far from such letters having any binding force on other churches, not even the resolutions of the conference were binding on a dissentient*

* Reader in Ecclesiastical History in the University of Oxford. The italics in the quotations following are mine.

minority of its members. Cyprian [Bishop of Carthage, North Africa, martyred 258 A.D.], in whose days these conferences first became important, and who was at the same time the most vigorous of early preachers of catholic unity—both of which circumstances would have made him a supporter of their authoritative character if such authoritative character had existed—*claims in emphatic and explicit terms an absolute independence for each community.* Within the limits of his own community a bishop has no superior but God. “To each shepherd,” he writes, “a portion of the Lord’s flock has been assigned, and his account must be rendered to his own Master.” The fact that some bishops refused to re-admit to communion those who had committed adultery is *no argument*, he contends, *for the practice of other bishops*; nor is the fact that a number of bishops meeting in council had agreed to admit the lapsed a reason why a bishop who thought otherwise should admit them against his will.

Before this the disastrous departure had taken place of a single “bishop” superseding the apostolic plurality of elders in the rule of the local church.

Now, seeing that the marked set of the times was away from independence towards church federation, this “absolute independence” must have been a survival of not a departure from the apostolic conditions; and it is specially to be observed that the vital matters of reception to and exclusion from the church are explicitly reserved for settlement in each church, and that the practice of one church has no binding force upon another church. And again, Dr. Hatch says:

The *paroikia* [sojourners: used in Acts xiii. 17; 1 Pet. i. 17] of early days [i.e. apostolic and sub-apostolic days] was neither a parish nor a diocese, but the community of Christians living within a city or district, regarded in relation to the non-Christian population which surrounded it. Every such community seems to have had a complete organisation and *there is no trace of the dependence of any one community upon any other* (195).

To the same effect Dr. F. J. A. Hort, in his Cambridge Lectures, *The Christian Ecclesia*, or *The Early History and Early Conceptions of the Ecclesia*, speaking of the dogma (Greek), the “decree” of the apostles and the church at Jerusalem given in Acts xv, says (pp. 82, 83):

The New Testament is not poor of words expressive of command, *entellomai*, *epitasso*, *prostasso*, *diatasso*, *diastellomai*, and

their derivatives, to say nothing of *keleuo* and *parangelo* : yet none of them is used . . . *The independence of the Ecclesia of Antioch had to be respected*, and yet not in such a way as to encourage disregard either of the great mother Ecclesia, or of the Lord's own Apostles, or of the unity of the whole Christian body. Accordingly we do not find a word of a hint that the Antiochians would have done better to get sanction from Jerusalem before plunging into such grave responsibilities [that is, of settling for themselves a matter *thoroughly fundamental to the gospel*]. But along with the cordial concurrence in the release of Gentile converts from legal requirements there goes a strong expression of opinion, more than advice and *less than a command*, respecting certain salutary restraints. A certain authority is thus implicitly claimed. *There is no evidence that it was more than a moral authority* ; but that did not make it less real.

That gathering is no precedent for a general council, nor of a meeting of delegates, nor of brethren drawn together from various districts ; it was strictly a meeting of one local church (Acts xv. 4, 12, 22) to answer an inquiry from another local church. And it is of the utmost possible importance to remember that the then Jerusalem church having passed away, no other church, not even the succeeding generation in that same church, could possibly occupy the same position as being the original Christian community. Nor was the prestige of being such as great as may easily be imagined, for the most momentous fact concerning it was the enduement with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and in that enduement each other church shared equally, thus elevating all churches to the one level of spiritual privilege and possibilities. Also, the apostles and first elders having died, no other persons could possibly take their place as having received doctrinal communications and apostolic commission direct from the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh. Hence, the only way by which Christians since have been able to follow the example of the church at Antioch and to "go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders" about any question, is to consult their writings. By so doing we obtain exactly the decisions which they gave, and would still give, for men divinely inspired will not hold variable opinions. The absolutely irreconcilable controversy is between, on the one hand, the sufficiency and finality of Holy Scripture, or, on the other hand, the figment of apostolic succession and the falsehood of there being an unwritten apostolic tradition ; or thirdly, the assertion of the continuous

inspiration of the Spirit being granted. This last is denied by the Lord's promise that the apostles should be taught *all* things, be guided into *all* the truth, and be taught the things of even the distant future (John xv. 26 ; xvi. 13). This having been duly fulfilled, there necessarily can be no more truth that God has to reveal to men, nor, as to the fact, has there been any subsequent utterance that the spiritual will for a moment rank with Holy Scripture.

The common declaration of nearly all communities that aim at opposing modernism is signally, crucially faulty. The usual assertion is that Holy Scripture is the *supreme* authority, which allows that creeds, synods, councils, prayer books, confessions have *some* authority, though lesser. The only true and safe position is that the Word of God is the *sole* authority. The alternatives being, as above, tradition or continuous inspiration, and these might as well vest in the Pope of Rome as in anybody else.

Again, Dr. Hort, after detailing by what moral considerations the *spiritual* oneness of the churches was to be maintained, says :

By itself each of these details may seem trivial enough : but together they help to show how *St. Paul's recognition of the individual responsibility and substantial independence of single city Ecclesiae* was brought into harmony with his sense of the unity of the body of Christ as a whole, by this watchful care to seize every opportunity of kindling and keeping alive in each society a consciousness of its share in the life of the great Ecclesia of God (122).

So that the "unity of the body" was of a spiritual nature only, maintained by moral measures, and was not a visible inter-church organization maintained by ecclesiastical measures. This is fundamental and vital to the true working of the church of God. For administrative purposes each assembly was autonomous, that is, self-governed.

The learned Lecturer we are quoting declares this explicitly in the following comments on the great church epistle to the Ephesians :

. . . *it is important to notice that not a word in the Epistle exhibits the one Ecclesia as made up of many Ecclesiæ. To each local Ecclesia St. Paul has ascribed a corresponding unity of its own ; each is a body of Christ and a sanctuary of God : but there is no grouping of them into partial wholes [that is, into*

a church of a province or a country] or *into one great whole* [a universal organization]. *The members which make up the One Ecclesia are not communities, but individual men.* The One Ecclesia includes all members of all partial Ecclesiæ; but its relations to them all are direct, not mediate [that is, the believer is a member of the church universal, the body of Christ, by virtue of his relation to Christ, by faith, through the indwelling Spirit, not by virtue of membership in a local church]. It is true that, as we have seen, St. Paul anxiously promoted friendly intercourse and sympathy between the scattered Ecclesiæ; but *the unity of the universal Ecclesia as he contemplated does not belong to this region: it is a truth of theology and of religion, not a fact of what we call Ecclesiastical politics* (168).

These university historians and theologians are cited, not only for the truth of their interpretation of the New Testament, but that it may be seen that the administrative independence of each assembly is not a peculiar notion of a few unscholarly folk, but has been taught by men of the highest scholarship, whose own ecclesiastical position was denied any basis in the Word of God by their honest dealing with the New Testament. By faithful exegesis they reached the truth indicated symbolically by the churches being shown as seven separate lampstands (Rev. i. 12), in contrast to Israel which, being a visible national unity, had in its temple but a single lampstand with seven branches conjoined.

Two other unlikely testimonies to the same effect may be cited. Speaking at the Old Catholic Congress, Berne, 1925, upon Anglican and Old Catholic Problems, the Rev. J. A. F. Ozanne, Rector of St. Pierre du Bois, Guernsey, said:

. . . if one gazes back through the vista of the ages it is of more than passing interest to observe the state of Christendom during the fifth and sixth centuries. One notes that at that period Catholic Christendom was divided into three groups, that is to say, the church of the East, whose centre was at Constantinople; the church of the West, whose centre was at Rome; and the church of the North-west, whose centre was in Ireland. The churches of the East and of the North-west, had this in common, namely, each church was, as it were, composed of a group or body of local churches, each local church autonomous in itself, but in intercommunion with the others. . . .

One submits that these principles of autonomy and intercommunion are not only of apostolic origin; but that their observance persisted throughout the sub-apostolic age and

only waned as the power of the papacy increased. (From the official Congress Report, 51, 53.)

Cardinal Newman's *History of My Religious Opinions* in his *Apologia*, has the following significant passage.

Writing in 1864 of his Oxford studies, and of his opinions and writings in 1839, six years before he joined the Church of Rome, he says (c. v.) :

I contended that the Roman idea of Catholicity was not ancient and apostolic. It was, in my judgment, at the utmost only natural, becoming, expedient, that the whole of Christendom should be united in one visible body ; while such a unity might be, on the other hand, a mere heartless and political combination. For myself, I held with the Anglican divines, that, in the Primitive Church, there was a very real mutual independence between its separate parts, though, from a dictate of charity, there was in fact a close union between them. I considered that each see and diocese might be compared to a crystal, and that each was similar to the rest, and that the sum total of them all was only a collection of crystals. The unity of the Church lay, not in its being a polity, but in its being a family, a race, coming down by apostolic descent from its first founders and bishops. And I considered this truth brought out beyond the possibility of dispute, in the Epistles of St. Ignatius, in which the bishop is represented as the one supreme authority in the Church, that is, in his own place, with no one above him, except as, for the sake of ecclesiastical order and expedience, arrangements had been made by which one was put over or under another.

So that even in sub-apostolic times there was no visible universal Christian Church, and how much less in the days of the apostles. In the period of which Newman speaks, that of the Primitive (not apostolic) Church, change and corruption had set in strongly. The dominance of the local church by a single bishop, and the combining of several local churches into a see or diocese under a single bishop, are indicated by him. Thus no appeal to church fathers or councils can lead to any certain knowledge of the mind of God for His church. They can only shew us the facts and opinions of their times.

The whole ruinous controversy in the Church of England initiated by Newman, which has brought that church to its present dangerous pass, together with all the lesser manifold evils resulting, turns largely upon the question whether Romanism or Anglicanism represents to-day the original, visible, universal (catholic) church, outside of which (they say)

man cannot be saved. Which whole controversy, and many such preceding it, and more, it is to be feared, to follow, never would have defiled the church of God with the din and dust of battle, and garments rolled in blood, if the apostolic separateness of each local church had continued. Controversy on this point between such church corporations is as if two negroes should contend as to which of them represents the first white race of men.

When it is asked by what means, in spite of the known fact of the apostolic distinctness of churches, it is sought to justify the existence of visible Church corporations, the answer is by the doctrine of Development. By this specious plea any man or any system can justify any desired reversal of New Testament principle and practice. Newman himself by it was finally carried to Rome. He says :

All this time I was hard at my essay on Doctrinal Development. As I advanced my view so cleared that instead of speaking any more of the "Roman Catholics," I boldly called them "Catholics." Before I got to the end I resolved to be received—

that is, into the Roman Church (*Apologia*, Ed. Dent, 212).

There is no safe standing save in a *thorough* and *practical* submission to Holy Scripture as the ONLY authoritative utterance of the will of God to-day ; which means denying *authority* to *any* other statement, Protestant equally with others. In this matter the Church of England is hopelessly faulty. As to what is necessary to *salvation* it indeed makes Holy Scripture the only authority (Article VI), but as to church rites, ceremonies, and traditions, it puts these definitely upon the basis that man has *authority* therein, so long as he ordains nothing actually contrary to the Word of God. Therefore, it is held, these may rightly be increased, varied, or abolished by any particular or national church, leading to endless variety and interminable controversy. And in these matters it refuses, under penalty, any private liberty, thus going so far as to attach legislative and penal authority to human rules, almost inviting schism by intolerance (Articles XX and XXXIV). The result in theory is that in church order and worship human tradition and preference have equal authority with Holy Scripture, while in practice they displace it. Might not the Son of God say : "But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as their teachings the precepts of men" ? (Matt. xv. 9). The one secret of rest of heart is that of the

psalmist : " Great peace have they that love Thy law, and for them there is no stumbling block " (cxix. 165). And to him God's " law " was His " word " giving His " words " (vv. 162, 161, etc.).

But that Holy Scripture is our only rule may be set aside in practice otherwise than by formal official declarations. It is sadly certain that many Exclusive brethren adhere to that system not because of a sincere, enlightened conviction that its church principles are of God, but because of a slavish reverence for J. N. Darby, or because of an undefined, but real and truly terrifying, fear of one another and of excommunication. The spirit of divine love to all saints alone can cast out this dread. It is perfect love that casts out fear. Many such beloved fellow saints know indeed that " fear hath punishment," and that " he that feareth is not made perfect in love " (1 John iv. 18).

The doctrine of Development, in its practical aspect, is that conditions change and the Church, to remain effective, must change its methods and institutions to suit the conditions.

It was on this ground that the Revised Prayer Book was pressed. It was urged that this twentieth century differs from the sixteenth, and that the rules of the Church and forms of worship should be brought into harmony with the modern mind.

What else but an application of this doctrine was Darby's theory that the church is in ruins, that there are no apostles or apostolic men to effect restoration, and therefore the apostolic church order, such as recognized elders in each church, cannot now obtain? Thus is set aside the permanency of the authority of the New Testament as providing a pattern for the whole present age. This point will be discussed a little later (pp. 39-44).

Again, this fatal doctrine has at last appeared among Open brethren also. In reference to methods for the spread of the gospel it has been urged that " the missionary finds himself in circumstances very different from those disclosed in the New Testament," and that consequently " The methods of the Apostle Paul were the then methods of the Spirit of God, but there would be no missions to the heathen to-day had those methods remained unchanged " (*Echoes of Service*, April, 1928, 67).

For these statements the Editors of that magazine were, of course, alone responsible. They have been strongly and widely repudiated, as not being according to fact, there being no essential conditions to-day unknown to those apostolic days, and as setting aside the New Testament as not providing a permanent guide for gospel service, as by the preceding theory for church order. The issue in the one case and the other is that seen in the Book of Judges, division and chaos by "every man doing that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. xvii. 6; xviii. 1; xix. 1; xxi. 25). There is necessity that we face afresh the question of the permanent, binding authority of the Word of God, and settle our *practical* attitude toward it. This vital issue I have discussed at length in c. xiv of *Anthony Norris Groves*.

CHAPTER IV

MINISTRY AND OVERSIGHT

LET the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discriminate. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence. For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, that all may be comforted (1 Cor. xiv. 29-31).

The picture here given of ministry in an apostolic gathering excludes the presiding officer of whom we read as arising in the second century. It shows (1) that in the church there were several persons known to have been chosen by the Holy Spirit for the ministry of the word of God; (2) that each and all of these had power and right delegated from the Lord to address the assembly; (3) that the control of their utterance was (a) by the Holy Spirit direct, Who, while one was speaking, might give to another a message for the assembly; (b) by the prophet himself, who retained control of his own spirit, even though energized by the Holy Spirit, and could resume silence.

The control of the assembly by one man was thus unknown. The Lord Himself, by His Spirit, was as really present as if He had been visible. Indeed, to faith He *was* visible; and Himself being there, what servant could be so irreverent as to take out of His hands the control of the worship and ministry.

But, on the other hand, most certainly it was not the case that *anybody* had liberty to minister. The liberty was for the

Holy Spirit to do His will, not for His people to do as they willed. The notion that every believer had an equal right to speak was not allowed. Everyone had right who was chosen, qualified, and moved thereto by the Lord the Spirit, and no one else had any right. All *rights* in the house of God vest solely in the Son of God.

The post-apostolic church quickly departed from this pattern. It has been seen and adopted only occasionally throughout the centuries, notably in seasons of powerful revival. A hundred years ago it was rediscovered by the first Brethren, followed for awhile with almost apostolic blessedness, and has been, and is being very considerably forsaken, with great spiritual loss.

The spiritual energy which accompanied Brethren in their first years is little appreciated to-day. Robert Govett deemed that period the mightiest movement of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost, while the writer of the article "Plymouth Brethren" in Blackie's *Popular Encyclopædia* says that it "seemed at first to be a movement great enough to threaten the whole organization of the Christian church." In the light of Holy Scripture we may with profit study their experience as a practical and modern example, of both encouragement and warning.

That most accurate of men, Dr. S. P. Tregelles, has left precise first-hand information as to the original practice of Brethren in several localities, including Plymouth (the first such assembly in England), Exeter, Bath, and London. He united with the Plymouth assembly as early as 1835. In 1849 he wrote :

Stated ministry, but not exclusive ministry," has been the principle on which we have acted all along here. . . . By "stated ministry" we mean that such and such persons are looked on as teachers, and one or more of them is expected to minister, and they are responsible for stirring up the gift that is in them ; but this is not "exclusive ministry," because there is an open door for others who may from time to time receive any gift, so that they too may exercise their gifts.

This was then the principle acted on in Plymouth before there was any other gathering for communion in England When such meetings did arise in other places, there was no thought, at least for several years, of setting up liberty of ministry in the sense of unrestrainedness (*Three Letters*, 8, 9, 6, 7). Liberty of Ministry . . . was intended to signify that all who were fitted by the Holy Ghost might minister ; it was as needful for

such to *shew* that they had fitness, as it was for those who wished for fellowship to exhibit to their brethren that they were really taking the stand of Believers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tregelles continues :

I am well aware that some years ago there were introduced in London very democratic views of ministry—utterly subversive of all godly order, utterly opposed to subjection to the Lordship of Christ, and contradictory to all Scriptural doctrine of the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on individuals . . . when these democratic views were circulated he [Mr. G. V. Wigram, the principal leader, after Mr. Darby, among the latter's followers] published a tract (in 1844, I believe) of four pages, entitled, *On Ministry in the Word*. I extract two of the questions and answers :

“ E.—Do you admit ‘ *a regular ministry* ’ ?

“ W.—If by a regular ministry you mean a *stated* ministry (that is, that in every assembly those who are gifted of God to speak to edification will be both limited in number and known to the rest), I do admit it ; but if by a regular ministry you mean an *exclusive* ministry, I dissent. By an *exclusive* ministry I mean the recognizing of certain persons as so *exclusively* holding the place of teachers, as that the use of a real gift by any one else would be irregular. As, for instance, in the Church of England and in most dissenting Chapels, a sermon would be felt to be *irregular* which had been made up by two or three persons really gifted by the Holy Ghost.

“ E.—On what do you build this distinction ?

“ W.—From Acts xiii. 1. I see that at Antioch there were but five whom the Holy Ghost recognized as teachers—Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Doubtless, at all the meetings it was only these five, one or more of them, as it pleased the Holy Ghost, who were expected by the saints to speak. This was a *stated* ministry. But it was not an *exclusive* ministry ; for when Judas and Silas came (xv. 32), they were pleased to take their places among the others, and then the recognized teachers were more numerous.”

“ These statements,” adds Dr. Tregelles, “ are sufficiently explicit ” (*Three Letters*, 12, 13).

Referring to 1 Cor. xiv. 29, 30 (which shows how primitive assemblies were ordered), Dr. Rendle Short well said to a large gathering of Sunday School teachers and workers, in November, 1924, that

We spoil God's workings, and we starve our souls, if we depart from this principle.

Someone may say, "But will not things get into dreadful confusion if you seek to follow out these practices? In those days they had the Holy Spirit to guide them, and shall not we go wildly astray, and have dull, confused, unprofitable, perhaps even unseemly meetings, unless we get someone to take charge?"

Is not that practically a denial of the Holy Spirit? Do we dare deny that the Holy Spirit is still being given? The Holy Spirit is at work to-day as much as He was at work in those days, and we may all join in that creed of all the churches: "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

Please do not think that what is sometimes called the "open meeting" means that the saints are at the mercy of any unprofitable talker who thinks he has something to say, and would like to inflict himself upon them. The open meeting is not a meeting that is open to man. It is a meeting that is open to the Holy Spirit. There are some whose mouths must be stopped. Sometimes they may be stopped by prayer, and sometimes they have to be stopped by the godly admonition of those whom God has set over the assembly. *But because there is failure in carrying out the principle, do not let us give up the principles of God (Young Believers and Assembly Life, 13, 14. Pickering and Inglis.)*

I very gladly quote this re-affirmation of primitive principles, and earnestly beseech all saints courageously and dutifully to practice the same, with faith in the Spirit of God, giving heed to the above closing exhortation I have put in italics.

The divine method just indicated of dealing with unprofitable talking is effective, without departure from the vital principle of the Lord directly prompting ministry. Paul instructed Titus that the mouths of certain teachers "must be stopped" (Tit. i. 10-14). The word is strong, and means to put on a bridle or muzzle, which was to be effected by "reproving them sharply;" no doubt privately when possible, but publicly if necessary, and always graciously. In the first days of brethren this was practised. Tregelles says:

Liberty of ministry was recognized amongst those who possessed ability from God; but it was considered that ministry which was not to profit—which did not commend itself to the consciences of others—ought to be repressed.

And this was the sense in which the phrase "liberty of ministry" was used . . . On one occasion Mr. Newton had in the assembly to stop ministry which was manifestly improper, with Mr. J. N. Darby's and Mr. G. V. Wigram's presence and *full concurrence*: a plain proof that they *then* fully objected to

unrestrained ministry . . . there was restraint, not upon edifying teaching, but upon that which was unedifying ; advice and exhortation *in private* were generally resorted to, but *when needful* the case was met in a more public manner . . . I have had pretty much acquaintance with several localities, and I may specify Exeter and London as places in which it was believed to be right to judge whether ministry was to edification, and to put a stop to that which was considered to be not so. In London this was done *repeatedly*—far oftener, to my knowledge, than ever in Plymouth (*Three Letters*, 6, 8, 9).

One who was present told me that, long years ago, at Salem Chapel, Bristol, an untrained brother announced he would read two chapters ; but upon his early making mistakes in reading, George Müller interposed with : “ Dear brother, as it is very important that the Word of God should be read correctly, I will read these chapters for you.” And he did so.

I well remember at a large conference a good man so mishandled a certain text that the whole assembly was quickly restive. After perhaps ten minutes W. H. Bennet rose and said, sweetly but decidedly, “ Beloved Brother, I think it is the general feeling of the meeting that you have said enough upon this subject.” The speaker at once desisted.

But so delicate, invidious a duty requires for its discharge men of *spiritual* wisdom, weight, authority, men to whom, because the unction of the Holy One is upon them, others bow. It is simpler, though unspiritual and worldly, to resort to the pre-arranged platform ; but let us clearly understand that not even the germ of it is in the New Testament : it is a departure from the apostolic method, and from the ways of the early Brethren ; and every departure leads towards a barren “ far country.”

This directs our thoughts to another departure. In each apostolic church there were elders, men qualified for ruling and caring for the house of God. Who they were in each church was known. They could be distinguished from the general body of a church and from its deacons (Phil. i. 1), and could be summoned as a company to a given place (Acts xx. 17). They were set in office (*tithēmi*) by the Holy Spirit (Acts xx. 28) ; sometimes appointed* by those who were used

* *Cheirotonoeo*, Grimm (Lex) : “ with the loss of the notion of extending the hand, to elect, appoint, create : *tina* Acts xiv. 23.” The Revisers acted honourably in changing the “ ordained ” of the A.V. for “ appointed.” There was no ceremony such as is involved in a clerical “ ordination.”

of God to found the local church in question (Acts xiv. 23) ; sometimes only recommended to the church without formal appointment (1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16 ; 1 Thess. v. 12, 13) : sometimes appointed by one sent by Paul for the purpose. But *there they were*, known and acknowledged, with duty, right, and power to rule the house of God for its well-being and for His praise therein.

At the very first Brethren followed this pattern. Dr. Tregelles says :

At Plymouth Mr. J. N. Darby requested Mr. Newton to sit where he could conveniently take the oversight of ministry, and that he would hinder that which was manifestly unprofitable and unedifying. Mr. J. N. Darby addressed Mr. Newton by letter, *as an Elder* : I have seen a transcript of such a document made (apparently for circulation here) in the handwriting of Mr. G. V. Wigram ; it was written by Mr. J. N. Darby, from Dublin, and it is addressed to *B. Newton, Esq., Elder of the Saints Meeting in Raleigh Street, Plymouth (Three Letters, 7, note)*.

But after fifteen or so years, by 1845, " Darby had taken up very strong views against the formal recognition of elders."* It was in that year he found himself frustrated by the elders of the Plymouth assembly in his desire to prosecute his war against Newton *within* that assembly. This at once suggests one of the chief reasons for having " elders in every church " (Acts xiv. 23): they are a garrison to keep out disturbers. Such an arrangement, had it existed everywhere, would have largely thwarted Darby's measures of universal excommunication. Here is seen the wisdom of the divine arrangement and the folly of departing therefrom.

The grounds alleged for this disastrous departure were two. First, a theory that the church is so utterly in ruins that restoration of its original order is quite impossible. Both Darby and Newton agreed about this, and their combined influence gave to the phrase " a day of ruin " a sanction amongst Brethren scarcely less than that of Scripture itself.

But *what* is in ruins ? The invisible church, composed of all Spirit-baptized persons, is indefectible, it cannot be ruined ; against *it* " the gates of Hades shall not prevail." The local assembly may indeed be sadly ruined ; but *it* can be restored, as, by the grace of God, has been seen times without number—

* Neatby, *History*, 108.

at Corinth, for example. The only other institution in the question is that agglomeration of sects which is called Christendom. But *that* is unrecognized by the New Testament, is not of God at all, and that *it* is in ruins is no matter for regret. Hence this specious phrase does but cover a very misleading fallacy. Again it was the undefined notion of something universally visible that allowed of the theory that that something was irreparably ruined as to external form. The only visible body known to the New Testament, the local church, *can* be maintained by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Upon this vital matter Anthony Norris Groves in 1847 wrote the following decisive sentences, which fix the issue precisely :

Of this I think I can now feel practically convinced (as I ever have in theory) that recognized pastors and teachers are *essential* to the good order of all assemblies, and as such are required and commanded of God ; and though I should not object to unite with those who had them not, if it were the result of the Lord's providence in not *giving* them any, I should feel quite unable to join *personally* those who rejected them as unnecessary or unscriptural. If the question were put to me (as it often has been), do you consider the Spirit unequal to the task of keeping order in the way we desire to follow ? [that is (presumably), without recognized rulers] my reply is simply this : Show me that the Lord has promised His Spirit to *this end*, and I at once admit its obligation in the face of all practical and experienced difficulties : but if I see pastorship, eldership, and ministry recognized as a settled fixed service in the church to this end, I cannot reject God's evidently ordained plan, and set up one of my own, because I think it more spiritual.

D—— [doubtless J. N. Darby] seems [? feels] justified in rejecting all such helps as the way of obtaining proper subordination in the assembly of God's saints, by saying the " Church is in ruins ; " this is his *theory* ; but neither in the *word*, nor in my own experience or judgment, do I realize that this state of the church, even though it existed to the full extent that he declares, was to be met by the overthrow of God's order, and the substitution of one so exceedingly spiritual (if I may so use the term) as it seemed not good to the Holy Spirit to institute, when all things were comparatively in order " (my *Groves*, 202, 203 : ed. 2, 159, 160).

The other opinion by which the assertion was supported that elders cannot now be appointed, was that none but apostles, or apostolic commissioners, such as Timothy or Titus, could make such appointments. The obvious defect in this theory is that it makes more of the first servants of the Lord than of the Lord

Himself, it puts *Him* to a permanent limitation for want of *them*; the Holy Spirit indeed abides with the church for ever (John xiv. 16), but in this matter He is permanently inefficient for lack of certain of His own agents. And it leaves all local assemblies since that first generation under perpetual deprivation and danger. It also sets aside apostolic practice as not being for permanent guidance, and nullifies those parts of the New Testament in question. We, on the contrary, maintain that in these matters of church order, as in all others, the New Testament and the apostolic example are of abiding import and value, and ought to be followed. From Mark xiii. 34-36 and Luke xii. 42, *et seq.*, it is clear that the Lord contemplated both His "house" and the "servants having authority" as continuing right on to His return.

Apostolic succession of elders (bishops) by continuous ordination from apostles by Christ's authority is a figment. It cannot be proved *historically*, for there exists no line of bishops of which it can be proved that the first of the line was ordained by an apostle. That the first bishop of Rome was ordained by Peter is wholly an invention. There is no *first* link to the chain, not to speak of other and later missing links. And the notion breaks down utterly when tested *Scripturally*. (1) There is no evidence that the Lord ever ordained any as *elders* (bishops). He appointed certain men as *apostles*, a completely unique office. They became elders by the natural circumstance that the rule of churches they founded necessarily devolved upon them first, *not* as apostles, but as *founders of those congregations*. So that not only is there no *known* first link in the chain, but there *never was* any first link. (2) There is no evidence that the Lord ever spoke to the apostles concerning the appointment of elders. (3) There were elders in the original church, at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 2). There is no evidence how or by whom these men were appointed, or that they ever were "appointed." (4) There is no evidence of the appointment of elders in the first church outside Judea, that of Samaria. (5) There is no proof of any appointment of elders in the first Gentile church, that at Antioch. These facts do not alter the fact that there were "elders in every church," and always elders, never a single elder to rule a church, but they show that the extraordinary emphasis put upon ordination or appointment of elders (bishops) is unwarranted by Scripture. The gospel was to be preached to the Jews, Samaritans, and the Gentiles (Acts i. 8). The time

and manner of the elders attaining office in the very first churches among Jews and Gentiles is not stated, and as to the first church in Samaria its elders are not even mentioned. (6) There is no proof that Barnabas ever was "ordained" or was an "elder." He and Saul were fully in the ministry of the Word before their fellow prophets and teachers laid their hands on them (Acts xiii. 1). Yet he is called an apostle and took part in appointing elders (Acts xiv. 14, 23). Hence it is clear that no episcopal succession was involved, and that it was as founders of the churches, not as apostles or bishops, that such men appointed elders; and so (7) No apostle is shown to have ordained elders in any other churches than those he himself had been used of God to form. (8) Paul laboured a whole year and a half in Corinth and gathered a large church (Acts xviii. 10); yet he appointed no elders, but later wrote to the church *to treat* certain brethren as their rulers (1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. See the similar passage 1 Thess. v. 12, 13). So that elders (bishops) could be in oversight without any formal appointment by elders (bishops), but by manifest qualification by the Holy Spirit and dutiful acknowledgment by the believers. Thus not only the fact of episcopal ordination by one previously ordained, but the necessity for it, is plainly set aside by Scripture, and thus the way was left open for the raising up by the Lord of elders in each church, and their being recognized by the saints, all through this age.

Of the evangelists who are used of the Spirit to commence a church, thereby becoming its first rulers, and of these in due time recognizing others as elders raised up by the Lord, the following is a modern instance.

When, in 1832, the Lord sent George Müller and Henry Craik to Bristol, He used them mightily to the commencing and building up of a church on simple, primitive lines. I heard Dr. Pierson remark that the Bethesda Church, Bristol, was one of the two truly apostolic churches he knew. The other was the church at Boston, U.S.A., where A. J. Gordon ministered. Mr. Müller and Mr. Craik were as necessarily the first rulers of that church as any apostolic evangelists were of churches they founded. But as the fellowship multiplied, and they saw the Spirit qualifying other brethren for oversight, and moving them to addict themselves thereto of their own will (1 Cor. xvi. 15 : 1 Tim. iii. 1), they invited such formally to join them in the eldership, and then announced to the assembly the names of those thus invited, which followed the

example of Paul's exhortation regarding Stephanas. Thus there was no *selection* of rulers by the ruled—a principle contrary to the divine order, according to God's mind, since all authority is by delegation from God, the Sole Fount of authority, not by conferment from below, from the subjects ; but there was *recognition* by the church, with opportunity for stating any valid objection to a brother entering that responsible position. This method continued, with real advantage to that assembly. Instrumentally, in 1848, it was the spiritual wisdom and energy of that body of elders that saved the Bethesda church from disintegration in the Darby-Newton controversy. They were the sea wall that kept out the tidal wave of Darby's divisive principles. There was never any Scriptural reason why this plan should not have been followed in all other cases when brethren were used of God to commence churches. Following the precedent in Acts vi. 3, the church at Bethesda always itself selected deacons to attend to business affairs.

If it be urged that such God-equipped leaders are few, the answer is swift : " Ye have not because ye ask not." The Head of the Church has hands ever full of gifts and a heart most willing to bestow them where they are " earnestly desired " (1 Cor. xiv. 1). If any assembly, however young or small, is honestly prepared to forswear the democratic spirit of the age and to submit to God-given rule, He will give the rulers, if believing prayer be offered. There is no reason on the Lord's side why churches should be evermore dependent upon outside ministry. The history of Brethren meetings has itself often afforded proof of this. But it is one more impoverishing departure from the New Testament that it is generally held that the supernatural conferring of gifts is not now the will of God. As one elderly brother boldly asserted in a large conference : " I ignore the possibility until the return of the Lord ; " and only one voice spoke to the contrary.

It has been noted above (pp. 11-14) that the Exclusive teaching sets forth the church of God as composed of a visible circle of assemblies. A chief peril to be pondered is the undue influence that this tacit affiliating of churches always puts into the hands of a few masterful men.

The domination by the Jesuits of the hundreds of millions of Romanists is the chief modern example. But all the established churches illustrate the point. For the chief

officers of these organizations being appointed by the heads of State an effective State control is easily maintained. Of recent years this has involved painful conflict by believers against attempted domination of churches by several European governments.

The Nonconformist bodies reveal the same dangerous feature. At the first, truth-loving disciples formed into congregations for the godly end of upholding and spreading the faith of the gospel, and then it was well indeed. Persecuted and reproached they flourished spiritually, and the work of God prospered. Presently delegates from such churches met for conference and business; inter-church organization resulted, and now, as in earlier times, was the great Enemy's opportunity. For stealthily and steadily there have been introduced into chief places men of capacity and learning, but not devoted to the Lord and His truth; and to-day few are the Nonconformist bodies that as such are faithful to God and His Word, save perhaps in the formal retention of a disregarded or misexplained creed!

Under the apostolic arrangement a designing leader or a false teacher must have visited, either personally or by delegates, each assembly separately so as to gain its adherence to his cause or doctrines. Even under these hampering conditions danger was not wholly avoidable (Gal. : 2 Tim. i. 15); but at least landslides so rapid and extensive as have been seen to-day were all but impossible. The fatal instrument has been church affiliation, with the resulting central organization, from which streams of thought, suggestion, and personal influence flow out at once to all parts of the affiliated body.

This conception being adopted by Exclusive Brethren, amongst them also it resulted that a few powerful personalities and writers dominated the whole circle of their assemblies.

A further, and by itself all-sufficient reason against inter-church federation is that it is the certain occasion of division. Given the administrative separateness of churches, a cause of strife in one need cause no division in another; but bind them into a body corporate and in due time general strife will be inevitable.

To hinder this a spiritual autocracy will presently arise, seeking to control and hold together the whole organization. It may be a formal bench of bishops, a committee elected by an annual conference, or a "brothers' meeting," as among

Exclusive Brethren. But the issue will always be the spiritual bondage of the community to these few leaders and the regulations imposed. Against this there will duly come revolt, and then division.

It was through J. N. Darby and his friends acting upon this principle of corporate inter-church connection and responsibility that the Brethren were first divided in 1848, and that his followers have suffered their many later and deplorable universal divisions. On the other hand, those of the Brethren who have refused this dangerous principle and have acted ecclesiastically upon the principle of the administrative distinctness of each local church have been thereby preserved from general division, and have been able by the grace of God to increase in numbers and in gospel labours.

The Exclusive London Central Oversight (or Care meeting) is an acute example of the danger here in view.

What is the key position in a battle may be learned from the persistency and variety of the enemy's attacks upon any one point. The independence of each local church was one of the very first matters upon which Satan assaulted the church of God. Another form of this attack is to be seen in this central oversight of a city. The theory of Darby and Wigram was that all believers dwelling in one town or city form one church, no matter in how many centres they may for convenience worship. For administrative purposes, therefore, brethren from each meeting assemble regularly and settle all cases of reception and exclusion for the whole of London, and all other matters connected with the assemblies can be there surveyed. Theoretically, the meeting does not claim jurisdiction, but any gathering not submitting is liable to be cut off.

There is reason for thinking that this theory originated in early days, and was maintained for increasing the authority of the bishops, and that out of it developed the obnoxious practice of the reservation of the sacramental elements for use away from the congregation. (See Hatch, *Organisation*, 196.)

The unspirituality, the mechanical nature of the scheme, is easily seen. It was shown long since by the late Andrew Miller, formerly an Exclusive. Woolwich and Islington are some eight miles distant, on opposite side of the Thames; Woolwich and Plumstead adjoin: but because the two former happened to be in the civil administrative area called London, the believers in those assemblies formed one church, whereas because Plumstead was just outside that arbitrary

area, the saints there were not of that church and not directly subject to the decrees of the Central Oversight.

The practical working of the scheme was, that because in so large a city but few, comparatively, could attend such a meeting, it followed that control passed into a few hands ; and, further, that a still smaller number of earnest, determined persons were the real masters of all the London meetings. And since London is the centre of the English world, it necessarily followed that decisions reached there carried almost universal authority. Thus the Central Oversight was a ready instrument for world-wide despotism, and a certain occasion of world-wide division.

My father was a Christian of fine quality, a slum worker, a soul-winner, a builder-up of believers and churches. For sixty-five years he maintained an undimmed testimony at the heart of London's commercial life. He found assurance of salvation through attending Bible readings in the house of a well known Exclusive, Dr. Morrish, joined them in 1858, and continued at the centre of Exclusivism till his death, in 1922. For many years he was lessee of the room in Cheapside where this " Saturday Night Brothers' Meeting " (as *they* called it) met. In 1921 we spoke together of this meeting and its working. My father said : Since I have been shut away in this room the past twelve months with my Bible, I have seen that the whole thing was a mistake ! I suggested that the plan must have been attended with decided inconveniences. How, for example, could the brethren at Finsbury Park, on the far north, form a right judgment as to a case of discipline at Greenwich, miles away in the south ? He replied : Exactly, and what I have come to see is that the brethren at Finsbury Park *could not " put away from among themselves " a person who never had been amongst them.* I gave God thanks that my honoured father had advanced so far, even though too late for the change ever to develop in his case its just consequences ; but I silently marvelled that so acute a mind as his should have taken sixty years to see something so self-evident.

This tendency to coalesce the meetings of a civic area is a revival of a movement which powerfully influenced and changed the primitive church ; even of churches forming into groups according to civil areas, resulting in the church of a provincial capital dominating all the churches of the province, the bishop of that church becoming metropolitan bishop, with

priority of all bishops, and, finally, the bishop of the imperial city, Rome, becoming universal bishop, Pope, whose toe must be kissed or it will kick one to perdition. A Roman controversialist has said :

“ When we call St. Peter and his successors the Vicars of Christ we mean that they take the place of Christ as His Vicars, and only as the *visible* heads of the Church on earth. Do not dream that the Pope and every priest and bishop does not adore Jesus Christ as the head of the Church and the foundation of the Church and the Rock. But *if there is to be a visible Church on earth* [italics mine] with teaching authority, common sense says you must have a head, you cannot do without it ” (*The Wimbledon Debate*).

Solomon’s metaphor (Prov. xvii. 14) may thus be applied : The beginning of slavery is as when one letteth out water (at first a mere trickle) : therefore leave off centralizing before there be a flood of tyranny and persecution.

That affiliation affords impetus and momentum is certainly true ; but what if the direction be wrong ? The uniform experience of long centuries and colossal experiments is a lighthouse not to be disregarded. There must be some reason why, in the affairs of the church of God, no one has sailed this sea in safety. There must be abundant reason why the infallible Head of the church rejected the plan with its attendant advantages. And if those reasons still seem obscure, this gives greater occasion for caution : the hidden reef is the more dangerous. Let the Lord’s servants be wise enough to keep well within the channel shown on His chart. This warning is needed in some centres where several Open assemblies exist. A tendency is observed to create a central oversight for all the assemblies in the area.

CHAPTER V

BENJAMIN WILLS NEWTON’S

“ ACKNOWLEDGMENT ”

THE following is Mr. Newton’s “ Acknowledgment,” mentioned on page 11 :

A Statement and Acknowledgment respecting Certain Doctrinal Errors

In the year 1835, it will be recollected by many that various false doctrines, which had been introduced by Mr. Irving and others, were becoming widely disseminated amongst Christians.

Those who were concerned in the controversy with Irvingism, will remember that that doctrine attributed to Christ a sinful humanity, and set aside the union of the two natures—Divine and human—in His one Person. The following quotation from a paper of mine, published in 1835, written in confutation, will explain the nature of their doctrines. "If Christ had been (as Mr. Irving wrote) 'troubled by every evil disposition which inhereth in the fallen manhood,' and if He could have said, like the Believer, 'not I, but sin that tempteth me in my flesh,' how was not Christ personally a sinner? There are only two ways in which this question can be answered by those who maintain these doctrines. They must either deny that the evil propensity is *in itself sin*; or, consider the human nature of the Lord as something distinct from Himself *personally*. The last is, very plainly, the doctrine maintained in the 'Treatise on the Human Nature' (Mr. Irving's). I suppose a hundred quotations might be made therefrom, in which the name Christ is given not to Jesus, as being God and man in one person, but to the Word, acting in and surrounded by the flesh as by a garment. The whole purport of the book appears to be this: to represent the Incarnation as the Imprisonment, so to speak, of the Eternal Word in sinful flesh, against which He had continually to struggle, just as the Holy Spirit in us is *separate* from, and struggles against our evil nature. The flesh of our Lord, to use Mr. Irving's illustration, stood to Him in the same relation as a pit to the person who is in it, or as a garment to the person whom it covers, and thus the true doctrine of the Incarnation is denied." (*Doctrines of the Church in Newman street, considered, in the Christian Witness*, 1st edition, vol. II, p. 118.)

In order to meet the statements of Irvingism, it was argued, that the true doctrine of the Incarnation is: that Christ is God and man in one Person; that all His actions were not those of God *simply*, nor of man *simply*; but of God and man united in one Person never to be divided; and that if holiness pertained to the Eternal Word, holiness equally pertained to that nature which He had taken into everlasting union with Himself.

To this it was objected, that we, in a sense, deified the humanity of Jesus, and virtually denied that He was really man. Many passages were quoted by the defenders of Mr. Irving's doctrine, to prove that Jesus was not only man, but man in weakness, that He had a mortal body unlike to that

which Adam first had in Paradise ; and they added that the cause of His body being mortal was that sin (as they said) inhered in it.

Many minds were deceived by these statements. They had been so accustomed to regard the body of the Lord Jesus, as resembling that which Adam had before he sinned in Paradise, that when they began to think of the Lord Jesus as "in the likeness of sinful flesh," they were so interested by what they felt to be a new and important branch of doctrine, and it seemed to open to their minds so much of the Scripture, which they had not before considered, that many were carried away into great excesses of both thought and statement—and were disposed to palliate, if not to receive, the evil conclusion above referred to, viz., that the cause of His body being mortal was that sin inhered in it.

In order to meet this, it was felt to be a solemn duty to endeavour to own, as far as possible, the truth that might be mingled with the error, and to seek to disentangle it from its evil connections. It was on this account that I wrote a preface, and made some additions to the paper above referred to ; and in an attempt to meet, as far as possible, the minds of others, I have gone too far, and myself transgressed by overstepping the bounds of truth.

In allowing that the Lord Jesus had a body different from that of Adam in Paradise, I was right. I was right, also, in saying that inherent corruption is not the originating cause of mortality, but the one sin of Adam ; "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ;" I was right also in stating that the Lord Jesus partook of certain consequences of Adam's sin, of which the being possessed of a mortal body was one.

It was this that first introduced Rom. v into the controversy, as showing that death of the body resulted from that which one man had done ; and if due care had been taken to discriminate between the mode in which the consequences of Adam's transgressions reached mankind through federal headship, and the manner in which the Lord Jesus took certain of those consequences upon Himself, but not through federal headship, the error which I now have to confess would have been avoided.

If I had watched this I should have carefully avoided the referring that part of the fifth of Romans to the Lord Jesus, and I should have stated that His connection with these

consequences, was in virtue of His having been made of a woman, and thus having brought Himself into association with a race on whom these penalties were resting. In other words, that when the Eternal Word became flesh, He thereby voluntarily placed Himself in association with those on whom certain penalties, such as loss of Paradise—hunger—thirst—exhaustion—and pain had come, as consequences of the fall ; and that in virtue of such association He partook of those consequences—even all the consequences in which He could share, unconnected with personal sin.

I have invariably used the truth of His being the Son and the fact of His Divine conception, as the reason of His necessary immunity from all taint, even though born of woman—and also as the reason of His freedom from all penalties that would, if they attached, imply personal sin—and of His personal title (whenever He might, according to the will of the Father, please to assert it) to immunity from all penalties of any kind whatsoever—but I ought never to have connected Him with Adam as a federal Head ; He—being what He essentially was—was free from this, though partaking of all the common properties and infirmities of man's nature, sin only excepted.

My error in this resulted in my holding that the Lord Jesus, while perfectly free from all, even the slightest taint of sin, either original or actual, yet was under Adam, as a federal head, and thus was exposed by His position to the imputation of Adam's guilt, as is taught respecting mankind in the fifth of Romans. I saw it to be distinctly revealed that the Lord was subject to hunger, thirst, weariness, sorrow, etc., which things we know are consequences of the fall ; and I erred in attributing His participation in these afflictions to a *federal* relationship to Adam.

Recent circumstances having necessitated a careful review of the whole subject, I have been led, as I above stated, to see that I was distinctly in error in holding that the Lord Jesus came by birth under any imputation of guilt or the consequences of such imputation. I see that results altogether contrary to Christian doctrine are involved in, and may fairly be deduced from this error, which I now desire explicitly to renounce, and I desire to acknowledge my error in having thus held and taught on this subject ; and I hereby withdraw all statements of mine, whether in print or in any other form, in which *this error, or any of its fruits*, may be found.

The doctrine in question was, I believe, first stated by me in a part of the tract above referred to against Irvingism, entitled, *Doctrines of the Church in Newman Street, considered*, published in 1835, which tract was inserted in a second edition of the *Christian Witness*, in 1837 or 1838. I request that this may be considered as a withdrawal of the erroneous parts of the above-mentioned Paper, and I also desire that any statements of mine, whether in notes of Lectures taken by others, or in any communications of my own, in which this doctrine occurs, may now be considered as withdrawn—that they may not be regarded as now containing my sentiments, and that they may no longer be circulated.

With regard to the two Tracts recently published by myself on *The Sufferings of Christ*, I also request that they may be withdrawn for reconsideration.

In acknowledging the before-mentioned error, I wish explicitly to state that I do not ascribe any of Christ's living experiences to the imputation of Adam's guilt, nor ought I to have made any statements or used any words which did ascribe *any* of His sufferings to anything imputed to Him ; nor yet that He had by keeping the law or by anything else to deliver Himself from such imputation or its consequences. Every such deduction must necessarily fall with the wrong doctrine on which it is based.

I do not now enter into a statement of the limitations by which this doctrine was guarded in my own mind and in my teaching : I had supposed that the limitations which I had employed were sufficient to prevent the deductions which have been recently drawn—and that, in many cases legitimately : deductions, which I abhor as thoroughly as those can by whom they have been drawn ; I trust that I can appeal to any of my writings in which the person and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus are spoken of, as well as to persons who have known me as a Christian or a teacher, for proof that deductions which go to involve the fitness of the Lord Jesus for His blessed work of atonement, could never have been contemplated by me ; and that they are directly opposed to and contrasted with, the whole current of my teaching and aim and thoughts.

I wish to state distinctly, that I hold the perfectness of Christ's person and the completeness of His one sacrifice, to be truths so solemnly unquestionable, that every doctrine and opinion must be subordinated to, and guided by these leading and foundation truths ; and every statement of mine on the

relations of Christ, whether in my recent tracts, which I have now withdrawn, or in any other place, I wish to subject entirely to these primary truths : I desire that every statement with regard to such subordinate truth should be strictly guarded with the limitations which the aforementioned foundation truths supply.

It is not my desire to extend the present remarks. I would merely state that I do distinctly hold that there never was anything in the personal, relative, or dispensational positions of Christ, which could have prevented His being at any one moment of His life, the perfect and unblemished sacrifice, and that not one suffering, whencesoever originating, ever came upon Him, except because of and for the sake of *others*.

I would not wish it to be supposed that what I have now said is intended to extenuate the error which I have confessed, I desire to acknowledge it fully, and to acknowledge it as sin ; it is my desire thus to confess it before God and His Church ; and I desire that this may be considered as an expression of my deep and unfeigned grief and sorrow, especially by those who may have been grieved or injured by the false statement, or by any consequences thence resulting. I trust that the Lord will not only pardon, but will graciously counteract any evil effects which may have arisen to any therefrom.

Plymouth, November 26th, 1847.

B. W. NEWTON.

Reflections upon the Foregoing

If it be asked why so thorough a confession and withdrawal did not end the controversy, the answer must be that Mr. Newton's opponents had ceased to walk in love, and therefore carnal influences, such as bitterness, ambition, a party spirit overcame them. A solemn warning to us to-day.

It is to be remembered that this humble document was the work of a distinguished scholar and theologian, a Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford. It shows how the grace of God can preserve from pride, by enabling one to humiliate himself publicly over public failure. A very needed and yet encouraging lesson for us to-day.

Mr. Newton's failure shows that scholarship of the highest order does not render a teacher infallible. Hence, we should not slavishly follow any man, however eminent or godly. This applies as fully to Mr. J. N. Darby and Mr. Newton's other opponents as to himself. While ready to learn from all,

and thankful for all true knowledge, we must follow the Lord and His Word only.

But still more emphatically do these remarks apply to not following men *uneducated* and *untrained* in the difficult problems of theology, for such are still more likely to miss the way. We must not worship education, and much less ignorance. Brethren to-day should remember that the group of men whom God chose that He might commence by them this powerful spiritual movement formed a brilliant galaxy of classical and theological talent and acquirement.

There is a spiritual intoxication (comparable to the physical), from hero worship, pride of an inherited past, and self-satisfaction, which causes men to cease to regard the work of the Lord and the operation of His hands, and the penalty of which is that His people go into captivity for *lack of knowledge* (Isa. v. 11-13). Not a few among Brethren to-day look with suspicion upon fine education. Ought we not rather to pay regard to that working of the Lord just mentioned, that is, His choice of scholars as His instruments? And if men do *not* regard His work it is solemnly announced that "He shall break them down and not build them up" (Ps. xxviii. 5). Has not this been too largely fulfilled in the history of the Brethren? Let us who have but little education bear in mind that it has pleased God we should be wholly dependent upon first-class scholarship for the very translations of His Word by which we nourish our souls and preserve ourselves from being misled by *false* scholarship.

The retraction of the admitted error Mr. Newton repeated in print in July, 1848, in his *Brief Statements*, and again in the same year in *A Letter on Subjects connected with the Lord's Humanity* (pp. 29-33), and again in August, 1850, in *A Letter to a Friend* (p. 7). It has been alleged that these repeated, if more cautiously, the error he had withdrawn. I can only say that I read them with what critical care I could command and did not find it there. It is still more to the purpose that no less competent a man than J. G. Bellett, author of *The Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ* and *The Son of God*, himself a close friend and follower of Darby, wrote a letter signifying his satisfaction with Newton's *Letter on Subjects connected with the Lord's Humanity* (Neatby, *History*, 150). Two earlier Tracts, which contained errors derived from the above primary error, Newton had withdrawn in November, 1847, as above shown, and they were never re-issued. Later he substituted

for these views a doctrine concerning the sufferings of Christ in life which his opponents could not but allow was orthodox, though they disliked it. "That Mr. Newton's ultimate position was one of ultra-orthodoxy is of course notorious . . . Some attempts on the part of Exclusive Brethren to prove the contrary are simply not worth noticing" (Neatby, *History*, 136).

[It has been strongly asserted that Newton did not really abjure his error, for it is said to be implied in his statement above that "the Lord Jesus partook of certain consequences of Adam's sin, of which the being possessed of a mortal body was one." It is certain that frailty and mortality did not attach to the body of Adam before his sin, but resulted from it. Thus they are an effect of sin. But inasmuch as Christ knew no sin and did no sin, how came it that His holy body was frail and mortal, exposed to hunger, thirst, and weariness?

Those who wish to pursue the inquiry, and to learn in what sense Newton spoke of the body of the Lord as mortal, should study his later work, *Ancient Truths respecting the Deity and True Humanity of the Lord Jesus*. This was issued in 1857, and appears to have been designed to answer various objections and errors. He did not mean by "mortal" the obnoxious ideas that some have thrust upon his words. As to whether his views on this were heretodox or orthodox it must suffice here to say that he quoted as teaching the same as himself the Belgian or Dutch Protestant Confession, the Confession of Scotland, the Bohemian or Waldensian Confession, together with Augustine, Calvin, Owen, Thomas Scott, and at considerable length that standard work on Protestant divinity, Pearson *On the Creed*, Article 4. If Newton was unorthodox upon the matter of the body of Christ being mortal, so were all these named, Pearson most emphatically so. He will be a hardy critic who will maintain this.

By quoting Neatby's remark that "Mr. Newton's ultimate position was one of ultra-orthodoxy" I do not imply that I accept every phase of his opinions. I do not. I differ on some aspects of prophetic outlook, and I do not accept the view he held in common with many other competent evangelical theologians that the *life* of our Lord was substitutory and atoning as well as His death. To me Scripture confines atonement to the work on the cross. But no competent person will regard these matters as inconsistent with the faith of the gospel.

It is known that George Müller was not satisfied with Newton's doctrinal position as he left it in 1847. It is therefore of weight that he formed the highest regard for his later writings, which supports Neatby's statement. He wrote :

I consider Mr. Newton's writings to be most sound and scriptural, and my wife and I are in the habit of reading them, not only with deepest interest, but great profit to our souls. His books are certainly most valuable, for they exalt the person and work of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ to the very utmost. If anyone honestly wishes to know what Mr. Newton's views really are, let him carefully and attentively read some of his principal writings through, such as *Salvation by Substitution : Atonement and its Results ; Gospel Truths*, from which he will clearly see, not only that Mr. Newton is sound in the faith, but also that his teaching is of a most valuable character . . . I regard Mr. Newton as the most accurate writer on religious themes of the nineteenth century. (Quoted from *Watching and Waiting*, August, 1930.)]

These facts are given, not in defence of Mr. Newton, but to support the view stated on pp. 10 and 11, that it was not his error that caused the division of 1848. From the end of the preceding year it had ceased to be a just cause of controversy. As Dorman well says : " The Testimony [to unity] was destroyed, and as for the error, it had served its purpose and was heard of no more."

CHAPTER VI

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

A. OPEN BRETHREN

IT is twenty-six years since this book was first issued in 1929. In both spheres, Open and Exclusive, there remains by grace that which is of God and which therefore He can own, but in both there has been spiritual deterioration which calls for repentance and humbling, with return to His spirit and ways, as shown in His Word. Failure to follow the directions of the Word of God must ever bring decline and weakness ; and beneath this failure lies a lack of faith that He will make His ways effective for His ends.

Among Open brethren this has been brought about largely by unspiritual men taking the lead and exercising authority

in the house of God. The false idea that it is not possible now to have recognized and acknowledged elders in the local assembly took hold of Open as well as Exclusive circles and has proved disastrous to both ; for in both the way was left open for unsuitable men to gain control and to rule by unspiritual measures. Far too often it is the case, especially in larger assemblies, that naturally-minded men, commonly of business ability, and often with money, now dominate.

Another weakening feature has been the *undue* place and emphasis given to separate meetings for young people. When assemblies were becoming weak and their gatherings of less profit, it was recognized that young Christians were not getting the help needed in soul. The proper cure for this was that the life and tone of the local church should be quickened, so that young and old should again find all they needed in the family circle. But this demands spiritual energy, and too many concerned tried to meet the situation by special meetings for the young, apart from the gatherings of the church. By natural consequence it has resulted that too many youthful believers have not grown up into the assembly as their spiritual sphere.

Catering for the young on the natural level, instead of the heavenly, has led to elements in the gatherings which are a cause of spiritual decline. When young Christians, from say fifteen years and upward, are caused to spend perhaps thirty or forty minutes shouting choruses they are simply being trained to a poor use of precious time and to indulge a natural appetite instead of a spiritual. The effect is inevitable : they mostly do not become spiritual in mind and ways, but remain natural, even carnal.

The natural mind cannot order life and work by the principles and ways of the Spirit of God ; but on no other lines can His divine unction be secured, and without this unction there can be only a fair and deceptive show in the flesh, though outwardly affairs may seem large and prosperous. The test will come in the day of Christ, if not in some serious earlier situation.

When thirty years ago I wrote my earlier books, *Church Federation* and *Departure*, I pointed out that the young people's meetings then beginning were ordered on worldly lines, with a chairman, selected speakers, and a programme, and that this must needs train them to a type of meeting led by man, and could not educate them to love or sustain gather-

ings ordered on the Scriptural plan of the immediate leadership of the Spirit of God. Under the influence of the type of leader first mentioned, and through the false training of the rising generation, the result has been as forewarned. Throughout the kingdom, and farther afield, there are now very few annual or special gatherings left to the control of the Head of the church by His Spirit ; almost all are ordered by man on man's lines. Only in a few centres is the Lord trusted to supply ministry : usually one must go to the countryside, with its smaller gatherings, to find the Spirit given His true place and honour.

The men who now mostly manage these matters are not spiritually strong enough to deal with those who may abuse liberty and weary the saints ; nor are the saints usually strong enough to bear patiently with such tests and profit by them. Hence the resort to the closed platform as a supposed convenient meeting of the difficulty. But spiritual profit is not to be thus secured, as the general decline in faith and heavenly-mindedness proclaims aloud to those who have ears to hear.

In addition, ministering brethren may fall into the snare of preferring the closed platform, for then they are sure of opportunity to speak, and perhaps of some pecuniary acknowledgment to follow.

In all too many Open churches the morning meeting alone is left to the ordering of the Lord. Too often the prayer meeting scarcely counts in the life of the church, here again especially in large towns. And the morning meeting has been subtly neutralized by many leaders through (1) insisting that the only theme must be the cross of Calvary, so excluding the wider range of truth equally needful to full spiritual development ; and (2) by deprecating ministry before the bread has been broken ; and (3) by this last being put off till late in the hour, so that real exposition of Scripture is made impossible. The result is general starvation and weakness, one sign of this being that too much time is filled out with hymns, while few have the spiritual energy to lift the saints near to God in worship. Thus, in such places, even this meeting is not really left to the ordering of the Lord, but only nominally and outwardly : the actual ordering is by unwritten rules imposed by unspiritual leaders who dominate.

This process of controlling ministry is well served by the common plan of often one brother inviting speakers for the ministry of the word and to preach the gospel. For he takes

care that only such are invited who minister to his liking. Should he be a man not having the mind of the Lord he sees to it that no one shall come whose message challenges practice and troubles the conscience.

The New Testament does not show the plan of speakers being invited. Its supposition is that each local group of believers shall be "enriched in all utterance and all knowledge" so as to "come behind in no gift" (1 Cor. i. 4-8); being "full of all goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Rom. 15. 14). The local elder was to be "apt to teach . . . to labour in the word and in teaching" (1 Tim. iii. 2; v. 17); and so able "to exhort in sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers" (Tit. i. 9). In heart he must be a shepherd, not a lord over God's heritage; one who visits and tends the flock, giving them a good example, as a shepherd going in front of the sheep (1 Pet. v. 1-4).

By gifts direct from the Head of the church each local group was thus to be supplied with food convenient from within its own circle. And when needful the Lord sent outside ministry as He saw fit. We are shown Peter going "throughout all parts," guided by the spirit now to Lydda, now to Joppa, then to Cæsarea (Acts ix. 32; ch. x). We read of Paul going "through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches" (Acts xv. 41). At times he had with him younger brethren whom he sent here and there as need required. But they were not his *servants*, but *sons* who served with him as a father in the business of the heavenly family (Phil. ii. 22).

Such a system required that the Lord should be the actual real Controller of His churches and servants and their work. This demanded that the saints should have an equally real confidence in the Lord to order His affairs and theirs. The plan proved equal to the intense strain of prolonged periods of persecution, and no other plan can meet such times. Man's arrangements break down under wide public disturbance. This was seen in England during the great War, when transit from place to place was not available or dependable. But in the cities, and largely in the country districts, churches and preachers at once returned to their own ways directly this became possible. This shows how little real confidence there is in the Head of the church and how little deep respect for His Word as our guide and rule.

The leader in a certain assembly was speaking of the low state that the church had reached. I said that it looked as

if they needed that the Lord should send them a Timothy or a Titus to set in order the things that were wrong. He answered that that would be very good ; but he was dumb when I asked what could they do with Timothy were he sent next week ? for, as I said, " I suppose all your services are booked up with speakers for the next six months," which was the case. Thus is the Lord crowded out of His own house, with consequent poverty, weakness, and disorder. How few Christians or churches know the riches included in that word of Solomon, " the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God " (Eccles. ix. 1). They know it not, because they keep their works in their own hands, which is neither right nor wise.

This painful condition is of course reflected in the widely scattered spheres abroad to which Christians from the assemblies of this land have taken the gospel. Here also the Lord has graciously owned richly what is of Himself in devotion and the spread of His truth. But in those spheres also the condition is very different from what it was in the century preceding this. And the change has been brought about by human plans and organization having largely superseded the ways of the Lord revealed in the New Testament.

As I have shown in my life of Anthony Norris Groves, he was the pioneer of the modern return to apostolic principles and ways in church life and the spread of the gospel. Having himself adopted whole-heartedly the principle of following in the things of God the apostolic ways shown in the New Testament, he wrote in India in 1834, " I long to see some one Mission carried on in unison with the principles I feel to be right." But it was, and it is, impossible for a " Mission " as such to work on New Testament principles, for the New Testament knows nothing of a " Mission," that is, of an organized Society for gospel work. Therefore of certain brethren whose connexion with a Society was terminating, Groves wrote in 1836 : " I trust they will show that Societies are not *needed* to *carry on* very extensive missionary work, any more than to begin it." And in the course of years this was shown very definitely and widely.

To-day in those spheres which set out to follow Groves the situation is considerably changed. There are formal Government-recognized " Missions," with the organization and human control involved. In India there is The Godaveri

Delta Mission : in the Belgian Congo The Garanganze Evangelical Mission ; in England, at the very heart of this worldwide gospel work, there is Christian Missions in Many Lands, the formal registered Society connected with the magazine *Echoes of Service*. And associated with this are also property Trusts, Stewards Company, Limited, Continental Lands Company, Limited, and the Western Counties Evangelization Trust.

Thus the very feature that the Lord sent Groves to prove unnecessary and harmful has duly gained ascendancy in the sphere that professes to be in his succession. In 1925 in my book *Departure* I challenged this growing system of operations as being unscriptural, and gave warning of the further spiritual degeneration that would follow. The Editors of *Echoes of Service*, being thus challenged, were compelled to face this issue and responded with their declaration cited at the close of Ch. III above. Pained at this open abandonment of what was formerly avowed by all Brethren, even that the Scriptures are the sole rule for Christians, I wrote at great length to the Editors, discussed the subject with some fulness, stressed the evil effects that were bound to follow their adoption of the principle of expediency in the things of God, and begged them to reconsider the matter and return to the true principle. Their reply was a very few lines declining to discuss the matter. They have more than once reaffirmed their principle, and it has been consistently followed by them and their later co-opted Editors.

E. H. Broadbent had for many years been their Associate Editor. He opposed their declaration of 1928 and they terminated his connexion with them, as I showed in my Memoir of him. He had pressed upon them, among other matters, that the New Testament knows nothing of central property Trusts controlling buildings in many parts of the world. Their reply, dated October 12th, 1928 (which I read), said that if workers and others found the plan of service in the spread of the gospel it seemed to them (the Editors) to be "mere trifling" to quarrel with it because there was no such thing in apostolic days. This was wholly consistent with their principle of being guided by expediency, but what a sad instance it is of the spiritual decline that must needs follow abandonment of the Scriptures as the only rule of life. For these brethren, the very appeal to apostolic precedent had become "mere trifling."

One result of this line of practice has been the accepting of Government grants towards educational and medical work. An inevitable accompaniment has been that the wishes of State officials must be regarded, the curriculum in schools must be raised to their standards, and the equipment of hospitals also. By this the pressure on the time and strength of workers is intensified, the purely spiritual side of their work must suffer proportionately, and the whole service loses that simplicity which is a first requisite if it is to be *spiritually* efficient. Governments are very pleased to share in and help such enterprises. They are glad that missionaries should do the earlier and harder work of the first stages among backward peoples, in preparation for the time when the State will merge it into their own scheme. This has already taken place in a vast area of South Africa, as it may be expected to do in other lands.

The very plan of accepting Government money shows lack of working faith in the Lord to develop and finance His cause, as well as that the line of demarcation between the church and the world has been abandoned. In principle it is the course the church took in century four by accepting the patronage of the State. History has ever repeated itself when there has failed an active faith that can defy and defeat the world (I John v. 5).

I shall not largely open up this subject, the object here being to indicate the present general state of affairs among Open brethren, with its declension and tendencies. Two details will suffice to illuminate the matter. In one large sphere in British South Africa there is a Christian Council, to which almost all Missions send representatives, and which deals with Government upon school and medical work. On the official List for 1952 a certain worker was named as "Representing the Christian Mission in Many Lands." Official papers show quite clearly how the Government is exercising steady pressure to unify and centralize all work, in view of the time when their own schemes will take it all over.

So deep a grip has Christian Missions in Many Lands obtained that in the area just mentioned the native churches have been brought to regard themselves as part of the Mission. Before me is a sample of their letter paper headed "Christian Missions in Many Lands," and also a printed Letter of Commendation is headed "Christian Missions in Many Lands." This Letter distinguishes between a "Christian in Church

fellowship ” and a “ Christian not yet in Church fellowship.” This may be convenient, but it implies that not all Christians belong to the church of God, and that a person may be publicly acknowledged as a Christian without associating with the church. Further, in this Letter spaces are provided for signature by an “ Elder ” and a “ Missionary.” Thus the “ Missionary ” is regarded as an official of the church distinct from the Scriptural office of “ elder.” The commendation of the elder will not suffice ; it must be countersigned by the “ missionary,” a non-scriptural official and title.

All this shows how surely surrender of the Word of God as our sole rule is followed by a state of things quite unapostolic ; and (which is the solemn and dangerous consequence) there arises an ousting of the Lord from His position of absolute authority, the exalting of human opinion to take His place, with the decline of spiritual life that must unavoidably follow.

It is no wonder, but matter for thanksgiving, that some who know these things find themselves compelled by faithfulness to the Lord to refuse to have their names continued on the List of Workers issued by the Editors of *Echoes of Service*, and that yet others find grace and faith to go forth apart from that Mission.

Another factor in the present decline is that, as years have passed, not a few Exclusive brethren have had their eyes sufficiently opened to leave that sphere and to come among Open brethren. But unfortunately they have not always left behind the Exclusive outlook and spirit, so that they have furthered the advance of a narrow mind and conduct. In several lands nominally Open meetings take a really Exclusive course because Exclusive at heart. I know well an assembly where the rulers have announced that no one shall speak in any meeting at the hall unless he is connected with an Open assembly ; and that no one shall be commended in prayer unless it is to an Open hall that he is going to preach. This implies that there is a certain circle of Christian churches that can be recognized and that with these alone there can be intercourse. It is pure sectarianism. It is open decline from the principles of the earlier Brethren and from the largeness of heart that genuinely loves and embraces all the children of God. It is definite abandonment of the practice that once ruled, that every godly person, when received at a gathering, is, as a matter of Christian *right*, entitled to exercise any gift

that the Lord has given to him for the good of the whole church, the body of Christ. And it is a flagrant violation of the right and duty of the Lord's servant to go wherever His Master may send him in His service. All the older leaders, Open and Exclusive, were emphatic that no church or body of elders had the slightest right to interfere with their personal service to the Lord, nor would they tolerate such interference.

How far, far removed is this present conduct from those first blessed days of which we learn, when they would have the Lord's Supper, with open ministry and worship, on a Monday night, so that clergymen and others who could not come on Sunday might attend and be helped.

This unhealthy sectarian spirit rules in many assemblies in various parts of the earth. It received a significant exhibition in connexion with Christian Missions in Many Lands (Canada) Incorporated. One who wished to go to another land with the gospel had been unable to get an exit visa because he was not affiliated with any Denomination. Explaining this at a public meeting a speaker said that, to overcome this obstacle, a number of brethren came together and formed themselves into an incorporated Society (C.M.M.L.), and he added these exact words. "I don't see why we [Open brethren] can't have the same privileges as the other denominations." Thus he abandoned openly the claim that Brethren made, that they repudiated denominationalism and paid regard solely to the whole church of God. In this he is not alone.

The pattern set by *Echoes of Service* has been copied in Canada, the name of the Mission, as just given, being used by express permission of the Editors. In the United States also there is Stewards Foundation, the name also being borrowed from Bath. This incorporated Society issues a leaflet which begins, "Stewards Foundation affords an opportunity for Christians to invest their savings at a good rate of interest—5% per annum." Yet the One they call "Lord, Lord" has distinctly directed His followers not to lay up treasures on earth; as Wesley justly said, It is a thing as plainly forbidden by Christ as adultery or murder. The Foundation then lends money to assemblies to build or renovate halls, capital and interest to be repaid regularly. Thus assemblies are distinctly encouraged to disregard the injunction to "owe no man anything" (Matt. vi. 19: Rom. xiii. 8).

The American *Echoes* is called *The Fields*, its sub-title being "Tidings of Christian Missions in Many Lands." In 1946

it issued a supplement which announced, "This article was prepared by a pastor of Christian Missions in Many Lands." Thus is the Mission openly acknowledged and it has its "pastors" like other such Missions.

There is a similar organization in New Zealand.

Thus has the leaven spread from Bath to all parts. And yet they ask us to believe that their work is not a Mission. It were happier that they should acknowledge the true situation, and no longer profess to be following A. N. Groves in his principle of conforming to the New Testament alone.

According to the grace of God that was with me, for fifty years, in this and many lands, I have laboured to found or to strengthen assemblies on the New Testament lines. It has been a great privilege. As a result, in dealing with the matters here surveyed, I speak that which I do know and testify that which I have seen. Yet, while thus giving a further warning as to decline and its principle causes, I do not forget that the Lord has still in the Open assemblies very many who follow on quietly on His lines, as well as many assemblies who seek to obey His Word. As in Judah of old, so now, there are good things found to which God, in His grace and righteousness, can have regard; yet even when He acknowledged this He reproved the pious king of Judah for his sin and folly in con-sorting with what was *not* of God (II Chron. xix. 2, 3).

The way to deal with this unhealthy decline is for the few who cry and sigh to meet together to seek the Lord for mercy and reviving. When they do this perseveringly He will work; but it may not be in assemblies thus weighted with wrong leaders and ruled on false principles. If I rightly discern His present workings it is in the moving of small groups here and there to return to simplicity and obedience to His word, much as He moved in the beginning of what we now call the Brethren. It is going on in this land on a small scale; it has been seen on a large scale in some Eastern lands. But too many leaders in established Open spheres refuse to recognize these workings of the Lord; they dilate on features they do not approve; and it may be that they will find themselves like vessels left on the shelf, while the Master of the house uses others better fitted for His purposes.

B. EXCLUSIVE BRETHERN

It has been mentioned above that the Exclusive meeting at

Glanton acted on the Open principle in receiving as individuals persons known to be godly. It seems to have been tenderness of heart that moved them, and a result was that a further enlargement of heart was the reward of those who acted thus. "To him that hath to him shall be given." Consistency led them on to receive godly Open brethren who were duly accredited, even as they would receive a godly member of, say, the Church of England. Happy instances of this have come to my notice. This course involved that they abandoned the events of a century ago, connected with Newton and Bethesda, as a reason for declining fellowship to godly Open believers of to-day.

By corresponding moral necessity those who hardened their hearts against receiving scattered sheep as individuals became more rigid than ever before against Open brethren as such. They may happily show genuine Christian kindness to an Open brother personally but will resolutely refuse him church fellowship.

A certain James Taylor of New York presently gained a remarkable and dominating ascendancy over them, which continued until his death in 1953. In the year 1929 he advanced the opinion that the relationship of Father and Son did not, as far as we know, exist in the Godhead before Christ became incarnate. This met with opposition, and there were secessions. To arrest this the position was taken that the dogma should not be pressed as essential and the orthodox view might be held. But by the great majority it was accepted and often spoken of as "new light." If James Taylor or others really thought it "new light" they were either ignorant of early church history or allowed their followers to be misled. The idea was taught as early as the third and fourth centuries by followers of the heretic Sabellius. It was further taught in century four by Marcellus, Bishop of Ancyra, and his pupil Photinus, probably Bishop of Sirmium. Both were deposed from their office by the Synod at Sirmium in A.D. 351. Therefore it is not new light but ancient error. (See Neander's *History of Christian Dogma*, ed. Bohn, i, 167, 302.)

C. A. Coates wrote a paper to maintain this doctrine. It is unconvincing, but it does make clear that he, and those who thought with him, upheld the truth of the three Persons in the Godhead, co-eternal and co-equal; only they denied the relationship of Father and Son until the incarnation of the second Person. Thus far they remained orthodox, unlike

those ancient advocates of the opinion, whose notions of the Godhead were false.

It is of interest that Taylor, and those who accepted his teaching, had on this subject to throw over the great Exclusive teachers, such as Darby, Kelly, Bellett, Grant, and Raven, who all wrote against the view. Darby was emphatic: "It is of immense import, because I have not the Father's love sending the Son out of heaven, if I have Him not as Son before born into the world" (*Coll. Writ.*, vol. XXX, 340. See also *Synopsis*, vol. V, 15). Two decisive scriptures may suffice here.

Mark xii. 6. This is Christ's parable of the wicked husbandmen. When the servants who were first sent for the fruits had been ill-treated or killed, our Lord (according to Luke's account, ch. xx. 13) makes the lord of the vineyard to say to himself, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him." The very ground of the hope that the husbandmen would be awed was the sonship of the one to be sent. Mark's narrative shows that our Lord made this most distinct and emphatic. It says of the Owner that "He had yet one, a beloved son." It is unreasonable to say that He became the son only when He reached the vineyard, as unreasonable as to say that the servants became servants only when they reached it. Nor would it be merely unreasonable to say this: it would be flatly contrary to Christ's statement in the past tense, "He *had* . . . a beloved son."

Heb. i. 2. "God hath spoken to us in one who is His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds." The word "also" teaches that the making of the worlds was additional to the appointment as universal heir. Therefore the appointment preceded creation. Now the divine and universal rule is "if children, then heirs" (Rom. viii. 17). So the relationship of Father and Son preceded creation, or the Son could not then have been already heir.

Perhaps one other statement by Christ may be noticed.

John v. 26. "For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son to have life in Himself." "Life in Himself," independent existence, is an essential fact in Deity. All other beings are dependent upon Him for their existence, but He is self-existent. This essential quality the Father imparted to the Son: He "gave" it to Him. To Whom? to "the Son." When? If He became Son only at incarnation,

it must have been given then, for it was to Him *as Son* that it was given. In this case the second Person of the Trinity did not possess self-existence before incarnation, and so was destitute of this *essential* attribute of Deity, and therefore was not God at all. This will deny the whole Christian doctrine of God. It is clear that the doctrine that the Sonship is not eternal, even when held by such as intend to maintain the true doctrine as to the Godhead, skirts perilously near to the abyss of Unitarian thought, as did its ancient advocates.

A further development has been a special line of teaching as to the priesthood of believers. James Taylor was agitating this question at least as early as 1933, shortly after the matter of the eternal Sonship was brought forward. The sum of it seems to be that, while all believers are potentially priests, not all are so in present spiritual condition. That this is so is, of course, painfully certain. But the line was taken that such "priestly" brethren ought to be "taken account of," that is, be owned as suitable to minister the word or to distribute the bread and cup at the table of the Lord. It will not be questioned that it is desirable that only such brethren should do these public acts; but then, who is authorized to determine which brethren are so fitted? No priestly caste was formally created; any brother might assay to render these services; but if he did not approve himself he would soon be restrained from so acting. Thus the actual effect must be the arising of a class of recognized "priestly" persons, a reality, though not formally "ordained." This will become evident later when the feature of "accredited ministry" is reviewed.

It is commendable to endeavour to maintain at high level the public ministries in the house of God, but the matter was taken beyond this. To inculcate the teaching as to the Sonship and the title Son of God the "Little Flock" hymn-book was thoroughly revised so as, among other matters, to exclude all suggestions of the Sonship being eternal. Meetings were held to explain the changes. Before me is a booklet entitled "Jottings of a Reading at Paignton with reference to the revision of the hymn-book, at which C. A. C. [oates] was present." The explanations were given by one of the Revisers, A. E. Myles. There was a further such meeting at Redland, Bristol, on March 5th, 1932. A.E.M. there said (pp. 10, 11, 12):

Our purpose is to break bread ; if the Lord comes in we meet Him, but that is His movement, not ours. It is not that we, having come together, automatically He comes in. He comes in as Head, and headship suggests a movement on His part. When we come together He is not here, He is absent from the scene. In His absence we come together to recall Him . . . we are recalling the Lord in the emblems.

One interposed the remark :

It has been the custom to connect our coming together to break bread with Matt. xviii. 20 : " Where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them " (New Translation).

A.E.M. replied :

Yes, I think we have to learn that we cannot so definitely link that verse up with the morning meeting. The setting in which we come to the Supper is that the Lord is absent . . . I desire just to distinguish between the Lord being present and being absent . . . It is in the breaking of bread that we express the sense that we miss Him.

When the hymn-book was issued in 1932 an explanatory paper was circulated entitled *The Hymn-book Revision*. In this the above teaching was made clear and emphatic. As to hymn 233, the line " In Thy presence break the bread " is described (p. 12) as " incongruous," and it is added :

He is present spiritually as He is recalled in His appointed way ; but this is *after* the bread is broken, not before. (Italics in original.)

According to the foregoing, Matt. xviii. 20 applies to a gathering for prayer, which the context shows. *Then* the Lord is present from the start of the gathering. But this is not so when believers meet to break bread. *Then* He is not present at first, but only comes in after the bread has been broken. This gives to the breaking of bread quite a special character. Putting it all together the situation arises that (1) certain brethren are priestly in quality ; not all believers are so. (2) When one of these " priestly " men has given thanks for the bread and cup, then the Lord becomes present in some sense which was not before the case.

Roman *transubstantiation* means that by consecration by a priest the elements cease to be bread and wine, save only in appearance, but are actually changed into the veritable body and blood of the Redeemer, whereupon the partaker eats and

drinks of Christ's body and blood unto eternal life. I do not doubt that Exclusives repudiate this.

Lutheran *consubstantiation* rejects this change in the substance of the elements, but asserts that after consecration by a priest the Lord does become present in the elements.

The Exclusive view as stated does not attach His presence to the elements in particular, but carries the same conception that the absent Lord becomes present when the elements have been blessed by a "priestly" person. This is close to transforming the breaking of bread into a priestly sacrament, and indeed a ministering brother among them in London, of long and good standing, wrote to me in 1936 using the very word. He said: "How much saints lose by supposing that the Supper is only commemorative. . . . Surely there is the sacramental aspect, as well as the monumental."

A third and later change of sentiment and practice is that it is now ruled and required that worship be addressed direct to the Spirit of God. This conforms to the general practice of the Churches. There are plenty of hymns so addressed. But where is the warrant in Holy Scripture?

Numbers xxi. 17 is employed: "Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it." This is a misuse of the figure employed. In Scripture it is the *water* that is a type of the blessed Spirit, as in John vii. 38, 39, "rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit." Now as Christ is the Giver of the Spirit, the well is a symbol of Him; for the water rises from the well. The Song in Numbers is addressed to the well, not to the water, which points (if indeed there be any typical meaning intended) to application to the Son to give the Spirit.

Sometimes Ezekiel xxxvii. 9, 10 is used to justify the practice: "Then He said unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, thou son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Come from the four winds, O breath . . . So I prophesied as He commanded me." This makes no suggestion that Ezekiel worshipped the wind or addressed to it a prayer of his own mind. He acted as a prophet, not as a suppliant or a worshipper, and simply repeated words put into his mouth by God. It was *God* acting, even as it is the Father and the Son who send forth the Spirit (John xiv. 26; xvi. 7).

The weakness of a case is evident when its advocates are driven to hard shifts for support. It is further urged that Abraham's servant, sent to find a wife for Isaac, represents

the Holy Spirit sent to win the church to be the bride of the Lamb, and that as Rebekah spoke to the servant we are warranted in addressing the Holy Spirit. But Rebekah did not worship and thank the servant. What will be typified by the servant asking Rebekah about herself and her family? Moreover, her relatives also spoke to the servant: who do these represent in the matter of the Spirit seeking the church? Again; the servant bowed himself to the ground and worshipped Jehovah Who had guided and protected him in the way. Does the Spirit worship the Father for divine aid in His activities on earth?

This confusion is built upon the pure assumption that the servant represents the Spirit of God. The true antitype to the servant is shown in John the Baptist acting as "the friend of the bridegroom," the agent, common in the East, who searches for a damsel to become the bride (John iii. 26-30). Paul presents himself in the same activity of espousing souls to Christ as to a lover, with the view of presenting them to Him on the coming bridal day, and exercising the utmost care that these betrothed virgins should not be diverted in heart from Him during the journey of life, even as the servant watched over Rebekah till he could hand her to Isaac (II Cor. xi. 1, 2).

The importance of this matter is, that the Holy Spirit is now on earth dwelling in the saints, and He is not here to turn our hearts inward to Himself, but upward to Christ at the right hand of God: He is in us to lead us to glorify the Father and the Son, to enable us to lift up our hearts to heaven and to set our minds there, not here (Col. iii. 1-3). The essential and hurtful element in mysticism is that it directs men to seek God within ourself, whereas the Spirit leads us to acquaintance with God in His own realm above. The difference is momentous in both its nature and its effects.

As a consequence of this view and practice there has come a human order into the meeting to break bread. Before the bread has been broken hymns and prayers may be addressed to Christ as absent. This opening period is short. Then the bread is broken and it is considered that the Lord has become present; whereupon He becomes the Leader of the praise, first to the Holy Spirit, so that He may have His portion. The Spirit then leads worship to the Son, which advances into worship to the Father. Finally a new idea enters as a climax,

even worship to the Father, Son, and Spirit conjointly, God as God without distinguishing the Persons. This has become a required ritual, the one order of worship considered proper and to be everywhere observed.

Thus as elsewhere, including some Open meetings, human ideas regulate, to the restricting of the Holy Spirit as the Inspirer of worship and the Orderer of gatherings of saints. There is much speaking to God, but not much, if any, speaking by Him through the Word. Yet this is the more edifying to the saints and glorifying to Him : " To hearken is better than the fat of rams " (I Sam. xv. 22).

It lies in human nature that the few will dominate and the many submit. James Taylor was an American, and it seems that in this religious circle, as in politics, dominance has passed from England to America. It was first proposed that the last edition of the Hymn-book should be produced in England, as were all former editions. But leaders in America wished the matter expedited, so the work was done there, though, as I am informed, it involved the unbrotherly feature that the intended English publishers were left with a loss of not less than £2,000 on paper already purchased for the purpose.

Dominance over the many was seen in this further feature. The Hymn-book was produced in the various languages needed, copies were forwarded to all parts of the world, but with the strict direction that the Book was not to be used anywhere until an appointed Sunday, when its use was to begin simultaneously in all the assemblies. This was not merely a piece of pretty sentiment : it was very well calculated to foster the two ideas of an universal society and of submission to authority.

The creation of any universal community offers of itself temptation to men who love rule to acquire power. This was seen in the second century and onward. When independent local churches gave place to the great Confederated Church, this demanded a body of capable officers who could order the vast interests that arose. This developed into the clergy, who soon contrived to dominate the laity. In due course there followed stern repression of all opposition to their rule, bringing suppression of individual liberty and of conscience. The climax was the Inquisition, the stake, and ruthless massacre.

The process is well advanced among the Taylorites. Printed reports of meetings show that they now speak of an " acce-

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

Some people will not accept the fact that they cannot get everything by Scripture themselves. We must get things from a man of God . . . I have met people who will not accept any thought except one which they see for themselves in the scriptures . . . Take the "token" [the "token" is a strip of ribbon which it is now obligatory that a woman must wear on her head as sign that she is under authority] ; many sisters and brothers do not understand this. It is enough for me that a man of God opened it out. I cannot understand the Greek ; I must be subject to the man of God ; he is the vessel of the Spirit . . . I am not capable of myself of understanding Scripture without the teaching of the Holy Spirit and the man of God.

Here is the exact teaching of the Church of Rome that the laity cannot by themselves understand the Bible and must accept what the priest teaches. It is no wonder that one who dissented from this doctrine wrote as follows on May 31st, 1954, in a printed paper :

At this time, and at the subsequent Care meetings, other points were raised which I had to say I did not agree with. Most were based on the fact that it was said that the ministry of the late Mr. James Taylor, and also of certain leaders amongst us to-day, was *authoritative* and *binding*, and to refuse, reject, or not to bow to it was *evil*, as it was not accepting divine instruction given by the Holy Spirit.

To my mind this teaching is leading the saints into bondage and into the position of the fear of man, and is little different to that taken by the Church of Rome, whose teaching includes, as I understand, that the words of the Pope are authoritative and binding, even when openly conflicting with Holy Scripture.

It is a healthy sign that such opposition has developed ; it is equally unhealthy that the chief leaders have refused resolutely to allow it, and that on account of it meetings have been cut off from fellowship and individuals have been "withdrawn from," that is, excommunicated.

On November 9th, 1954, a meeting of the whole London assembly, that is, of all meetings within the approximate area of Greater London, was held to deal with a Mr. A.J.B. His offence was simply that he demurred to the modern teaching and practice as regards worship being directed to the Holy Spirit and to God as Father, Son, and Spirit combined. He did not reject the teaching absolutely, but asked for clear support of it from Scripture, and meanwhile he was waiting for light.

Upon this the oldest and most respected English leader said :

There has been continuous and sorrowful opposition to what the Lord has so manifestly confirmed universally, which has been reached in temple enquiry and in divinely given communications.

Mr. B. is called on to repent. How gladly would the brethren afford him forgiveness if there was the slightest indication that he had judged himself in connection with his proposing something on his own account—not acquired in the temple—this opposing thought to which he holds at the expense of all that his brethren universally have so thankfully embraced. . . .

The brethren have much grief about it, but the grief of the brethren is little to the divine resentment to the attempt to supplant what God has so manifestly supported for an alternative and darkening doctrine of his own. . . .

II Tim. 2. 19. It is manifest that this is a matter of iniquity . . . Iniquity is the mind of man in spiritual things. Leprosy in the head is descriptive of our brother's state. He ignores the very crux of the rich ministry that has come to us of late.

Another leader added :

And now our brother will persist in this claim (about lack of Scriptural support). He says he is still searching the Scriptures regarding using the blessed name. It is a wicked thing, and I fully confirm what has been said—that we cannot walk with Mr. B.

Thus is absolute submission demanded to the "accredited ministry," to the alleged "universal" concurrence, to the "new light" shining in the "temple," to "divinely given communications." Appeal to Scripture is "iniquity," "wickedness," "leprosy," it provokes, moreover, "divine resentment," and demands the extreme discipline of excommunication. Thus is conscience disregarded, individual judgment reprobated, and the voice of the church, as declared by its senior men, is made supreme.

It is said that a well-known atheist of the last century was asked what Church he thought he might have joined, if he had ever joined any. His reply is given that it would have been either the Roman Catholic Church or the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren. It shows that even two generations ago a keen critic had detected resemblance between the two systems.

The demand for unconditional obedience pervades the whole circle. There is an earnest Christian who, with his wife, welcomed to their home soldiers from a near-by camp. This brought him into intercourse with Christians from various Churches. His wife's parents had left Open brethren and joined the Taylor party. Presently she was persuaded to do the same. The husband, for the sake of amity, and perhaps from not having sufficiently definite convictions on church matters, accompanied her to the meetings. This was tolerated for a time, but shortly he was told plainly that it could not continue. He must break off all association with Christians outside the Taylor party and confine his fellowship to their circle. The largeness of his heart made him demur, whereupon he was told without any ambiguity that if he did not do so his wife would take the children and go to live with her parents. That most sacred of human spheres, a Christian home, was to be ruthlessly broken up to enforce submission to their church rules. This is a recent case (1954, 1955) within my personal knowledge.

The baneful effect of all assemblies on earth being regarded as one community has received further painful illustration. Early in 1954, in a fairly large assembly in Surrey, two brethren were not clear that worship should be directed to the Holy Spirit. The great majority of the assembly were ready to be tolerant of the conscientious convictions of these two, and to exercise forbearance until their minds should be satisfied, especially as they made no objection to the practice by others. But a minority were not willing to be tolerant. They regarded the two in question as challenging the "accredited ministry," as being insubordinate to authority, and as refusing teaching lately recovered and universally accepted. This minority accepted a protest read at the Lord's table by one of their number, unitedly left the gathering, and commenced to break bread elsewhere in the town.

In any region where the separate responsibility of each local

church is recognized, the matter would have stood thus and have been left for local solution ; but the assembly in the nearest town promptly took up the matter, and on April 7th, 1954 decided to withdraw from fellowship with the majority of the other meeting and acknowledge only the minority who subscribed to the new doctrine and upheld the general ruling. With no loss of time their decision was set forth in a printed circular, dated April 12th, which was posted to all assemblies in the English-speaking world. Thus the issue of tolerance of individual conviction or of enforcing submission to the authority of dominant men was forced upon all assemblies everywhere. The education and discipline of the previous hundred years prevailed generally, and most assemblies bowed to authority and endorsed the circular. But not all : not a few assemblies, and many individuals, threw off the yoke and either withdrew from the Taylor circle or were withdrawn from, that is, were excommunicated.

Essentially the same attitude to Holy Scripture has been taken by others. In his Manual, *The Doctrines of the Salvation Army* (pp. 110, 111), for instruction of Cadets, William Booth claimed that God still speaks by His Spirit through prophets, and he complained that this living inspiration by the Spirit had been generally set aside and a " dead book " put in its place. Perhaps this explains why in the Army personal testimony prevails and there is little solid Bible exposition.

The position needs defining. When the Spirit gives the genuine gift of prophecy the utterance will of course be inspired, and the exhortation must be heeded, " despise not prophesyings," for that will be to " quench the Spirit " (I Thes. v. 20). To balance this there is the further powerful exhortation and warning, " Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God : because many false prophets are gone out into the world " (I John iv. 1). Among other tests the apostle adds this : " We are of God : he that knoweth God heareth us ; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error " (ver. 6).

There were genuinely inspired prophets in the assembly at Corinth. Were the saints to accept implicitly all that these might say ? On the contrary, they were told that two or three prophets might speak in a gathering " and let the rest discern " (I Cor. xiv. 29). The hearer therefore had a duty

to "discriminate" (Greek, R.V. mgn.). He was not to accept implicitly all that even a prophet said. And Paul adds the similar test to that of John: "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. xiv. 37).

The church is indeed built upon the foundation of facts and doctrines laid down at first by prophets as well as apostles (Eph. ii. 20); but the before-quoted passages show that it was by the utterances of the apostles that the prophets were to be tested. This for later generations has of necessity meant appeal to the writings of the apostles, as indeed it did at the time that Paul wrote, "the things which I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

The solemn and fatal attitude of independence of Holy Scripture can be traced back to before the first general division among Brethren in 1848. It is shown on page 88 that when J. N. Darby was declaring his intention to cut off from fellowship everywhere the church at Bethesda, Bristol, he was asked at Plymouth for Scripture authority for cutting off an assembly as such. He replied: "I grant there is none. But if some Godly men meet together to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they may expect that guidance, although there be no scripture whatever for the course they consider they have been led to take."

Again, in 1860, in connection with the first general division among Exclusives, a meeting in south London asked a meeting in north London what sin or sins, according to Scripture, of an excommunicable character had been committed by a brother who had been put out of fellowship. The significant reply ran that they were "of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture!"

In 1954 the full-blown fruit of the seed Darby sowed appears by it having become an excommunicable wickedness to check by Scripture the utterances of "accredited" ministers. This Darby would have sternly repudiated, but the "evil that men do lives after them," and they cannot undo it.

Such development and degeneration is sorrowful indeed, tragic in the extreme. "How is the gold become dim!" (Lam. iv. 1): "I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes!" (Isa. v. 2).

The teachable will be instructed and the humble warned by observing that, in spheres in some respects so opposed as are Open and Exclusive Brethren, the same tendencies are at work, producing the same result, even the following of human ideas and preferences, involving setting aside of the Word of God and limiting of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the centuries this has accompanied and hastened the corruption and apostasy of Christendom. The same cause will always produce the same result. The process may be slow, but it is sure. And it is only fire, hot fire, that can arrest the decay of leaven ; it is only fire, hot fire, that can purge gold of dross.

Let each Christian search his own heart, test his own practice, and prepare himself to face the purifying fire as ordered and tempered by Him Who says, " As many as I love, I reprove and chasten : be zealous therefore, and repent ! " (Rev. iii. 19).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

IT seems desirable to give a simple point blank denial of certain statements long diligently and widely spread by Exclusive brethren concerning Open brethren. I have met these not only in the United Kingdom, but in such remote places as Eastern Europe and Upper Egypt. The result of these mis-statements is always division amongst saints and hardness of heart.

It is not true :

1. That B. W. Newton was the founder of the Open brethren. He had no more to do with Open than with Exclusive meetings. After the 1848 strife he took an ecclesiastical course separate from both and acknowledged by neither. And obviously his history and writings later than 1848 do not affect the division of that year.

It is not true :

2. That Open brethren ever accepted Mr. Newton's erroneous teaching as to the Lord Jesus. From the first they repudiated it, and it never has been taught or held amongst them, nor would be tolerated.

It is not true :

3. That *any* fundamentally false doctrine is taught among

Open brethren. By the grace of God they ever have been and they remain uncompromisingly hostile to any variation from the apostolic faith set forth in the Word of God.

It is not true :

4. That Open brethren practise the re-baptism of persons that have been baptized. What they say is that no rite performed on unregenerate persons, younger or older, whatever its form, is baptism according to the Scripture, and therefore that after such a person has been converted to God he should be baptized, as not having been Scripturally baptized.

It is not true :

5. That Open brethren caused or maintain the separation between themselves and Exclusive brethren. At any gathering acting upon "Open" principles any Exclusive brother is perfectly welcome as a child of God to break bread whensoever he pleases. The alienation is entirely from the side of the Exclusive brethren.

The leading Exclusive brother in another land invited me to call upon him, which I did very gladly. But upon my entering his room and greeting him he rose and said : " I am sorry, there has been a mistake. I did not know you were connected with Open brethren or I should not have asked you to call." I replied : " Dear brother, I did not come to discuss our differences. Let us sit down and have some fellowship concerning our Lord Jesus." " No," he replied, " I cannot receive you : it would be misunderstood," and he would not offer me a seat. Upon leaving I said : " My brother, if you are ever in England, and in my town, and you think well to visit our hall, because we shall know you to be a brother in Christ, you will be most welcome to break bread with us. And I say this that you may feel that all the alienation and bitterness are upon your side, not ours."

This is by no means the only occasion when my friendly overtures have been thus repulsed. Yet happily it is not always that one is so treated. Many beloved Exclusive brethren have welcomed me cordially to their hearth and table, but even these, a few hours later, would refuse to sit with me at the Lord's table. They do not recognize that a brother who is not fit to be at the table of the Lord must not be received at our own tables (I Cor. v. 11), and conversely that a brother fit to be at our tables ought to be received at the Lord's table.

But it is the part of us so rejected to show love, and to accept love as far as it is extended, according to the words : " Let love of the brethren continue . . . let all that ye do be done in love " (Heb. xiii. 1 : I Cor. xvi. 14). This is our privilege, and it will be approved by the Lord. And it will do more than anything else to heal dissension. As Darby well said, " We cannot compel unity, but we can act upon it," and thus " give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace " (Eph. iv. 3).

It is matter for thanksgiving to God that He is exercising many of His saints to-day on the subject of Christian fellowship, and is causing many to review with horror the process of wholesale excommunication of assemblies in which they have either acquiesced, or of which they have been the victims through a refusal to recognize as binding the action of an assembly when it was but abusing that authority which the Lord has committed to the local church for dealing with erring individuals only. It is also a cause for gratitude to the Lord that where there has been grace to own this failure and to seek to walk according to Scriptural truth a time of blessing has resulted.

On the other hand where Exclusivism prevails—really sectarianism—what is often found is barrenness and a cold legality of thought. Yet we do not doubt that in holding the varied decisions of their brethren as though they were of divine authority our beloved brethren believe that they are doing God service, as did the apostle in even his unregenerate but deeply religious days.

It may be asked what is the true path for the Christian in the midst of the present confusion? The answer must not be sought in the tradition of either Open or Exclusive brethren, but in the Word itself. " Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst " (Matt. xviii. 20). The characteristic of those truly so gathered will be divine love : " By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples [the *My* is emphatic : disciples to Me, in contrast to any other teacher], if ye have love one to another " (John xiii. 35). And it is blessed when *every* name can be disowned save the Name which is above every name, especially the appellations " Open " and " Exclusive ; " and when brethren are *that*, and nothing else, toward one another.

The local assembly should receive all whom Christ has received, irrespective of any sectarian name they may have

ignorantly attached to themselves. The latter will be abandoned as far as is at all practicable, as the Word becomes known ; though in answering inquiries from the world or from uninstructed believers, or in discussions such as the present, the complete realization of this ideal may be impossible.

There is no necessity that a meeting determining to act henceforth upon this principle of reception should go over bodily to a meeting already doing so, should one be in its district, though sometimes this course may be wise and happy. In general it is better that there should be many smaller gatherings than one large assembly. It is enough if both churches walk in love toward one another, both welcoming believers upon the same Scriptural principle, and the attenders at each being ready to break bread with the other assembly as occasion may offer.

Exclusive brethren must disabuse the mind of the false notion that in having fellowship with an Open brother or meeting they thereby become responsible for " Open brethernism " as a system. No such system exists. They become responsible only for association with the individual or the local assembly they actually touch at any given time, and no further, and at no other time than while such contact continues.

It has been asserted that Open meetings appoint speakers to minister the Word at the table of the Lord. I can only say that I never heard of this being done. In a very few places there is an arranged preaching service before or after the Supper, but always distinct from the latter.

At the first all the Brethren acted upon three paramount principles :

1. That each assembly is to act separately in direct dependence upon the Head of the church present by His Spirit. It does not appear that the theory of a local church being bound by the act of another local church was insisted upon before the division of 1848.

2. That every believer walking godly is entitled to the full fellowship of the local church. There should be no suggestion of " joining " the assembly, for being already " joined to the Lord " he belongs to His church and is already a part of its local manifestation.

3. That every gathering of saints is to be under the immediate control of God the Holy Spirit, according to His

regulations in the Word, since He alone is able to inspire worship acceptable to God and ministry profitable to man.

It is greatly to be desired that all saints at all times should act upon all three principles.

By any abandonment of the third principle stated the *power* of the Spirit is restrained ; by an abandoning of the two former the *love* of the Spirit is grieved. Where all three are heartily upheld there will be grace from on high, as there always has been. For the Head of the church is the same to-day as yesterday, and will renew His former mercies to the humble.

A beloved Exclusive brother wrote to me and graciously signed himself, " With you a fellow-heir and fellow-member and fellow-partaker of His promise in Christ by the gospel." In reply I asked : " As, by great grace, I am all this, why will you not break bread with me ? Try and find a *Scriptural* reason." Oh, that every Christian would act upon the truths once plainly taught by all Brethren, as, for example, by William Kelly in these weighty words :

If Christianity gives the deepest importance to the individual with God, the assembly affords the largest scope to the affections of the members of Christ as His one body. And Satan hinders in all possible ways the happy interchange of what is so sweet and holy, the mind and love of heaven enjoyed among saints on earth (*Thessalonians*, chapter ii, page 21).

According to the divine plan, if I am a member of the church at all, I am a member of the church everywhere. If I go to any quarter of the world where saints call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, I am a member, not by permission nor by courtesy, but by the universal recognition on the part of believers of the title which grace has given me. Baptized by the Spirit, I am a member of Christ's body, wheresoever I may be.

In apostolic days that membership, and none other, was known throughout. There might be differences of view. There might be need of the word, " Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Some might eat herbs, and some might eat meat, but the Spirit said, and says, " Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

Now the glory of God is identified, not with some, but with all the members of the body of Christ. If the weakest member, therefore, were excluded, save in case of necessary scriptural discipline, so far would that glory be forgotten or despised ; and those guilty of such exclusion ought to be avoided, as causers of divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned (*Selected Passages of W.K.*, 52, 53).

And when any one sets out to walk by these principles let him remember his own imperfectness, and he will find reason to bear with the weakness of others. One told another that he was not now connected with any church because he had failed to find a perfect church; to which was given the pertinent answer: When you do find a perfect church, you go and join it, and *then it won't be perfect any longer!* And to another who feared that the devil was in a certain fellow-member, and he would not be able to continue in that church, the same man of God wrote: Bear, bear, bear; forbear, forbear, forbear; fight the devil, and love the deacon; love him till he is lovable!

Certainly we ought thus to act towards every believer, seeing there is already something lovable in every one in whom there is anything, however little as yet, of the Altogether Lovely One. Let us, then, give more earnest obedience to this voice from an ancient prison-house:

I, the prisoner in the Lord, exhort you therefore to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love; using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace . . . and be to one another kind, compassionate, showing grace to one another, so as God also in Christ has shown grace to you. Be ye, therefore, imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, even as the Christ loved us, and delivered Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Ephes. iv. 1-3, 32: v. 1, 2. Darby's *New Translation*).

APPENDIX A

(see page 77)

W. H. COLE'S STATEMENT

Concerning the following paper Mr. E. H. Broadbent wrote: "A really instructive document. Mr. Cole was one of our first visitors after we were married: a delightful man."

The printed copy I have is prefaced as follows: "The manuscript of this book was given to me by my beloved friend Mr. W. H. Cole. He was, from his entry into the first meeting at Plymouth to his death at Norwich, a capable, constant and gracious servant of the Lord. His ministry and example were of great value and much esteemed.

Beaumont,

E. B. ROCHE, M.D."

Sheringham, Norfolk.

REMINISCENCES OF THE PLYMOUTH MEETING OF
" BRETHREN "

Through the great mercy of our God, I was converted to Him in early youth in Plymouth, my native town, soon after which I was led to see the blessed truth of the personal coming again of our Lord from Heaven to take His church to Himself and personally reign over the millennial earth. And [I] was brought into fellowship with those, who I learnt, assembled upon principles taught in the Word of God, where no sectarian wall of division was acknowledged, and where there was the liberty of the Spirit of God, to minister the truths of Scripture by those who were gifted by Him for that purpose. At that time all was happiness and peace, unruffled by personal questions, undisturbed by jealousies or ambitions. The distinctions between rich and poor were lessened by holy, loving fellowship and unity which characterized their intercourse. Their social meetings, where rich and poor were alike the welcomed guests, were for the study of the word, and religious converse. The homes of the wealthy were plainly furnished, presenting an air of unworldliness and making them more homely for their poorer brethren and sisters. Their dress was plain, their habits simple, and their walk distinguished by separation from the world. The meetings of the assembly were calm, peaceful and hallowed ; their singing soft, slow and thoughtful ; their worship evinced the nearness of their communion with the Lord ; their prayers were earnest for an increased knowledge of God, and for the spread of His truth. Their teaching showed their deep searching of the scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whilst the exercise of the varied ministry, under the power of the Spirit, testified to the blessedness of the teaching of God's word on each important subject. It was into this scene I was privileged to enter in the year 1843. At that time the church had grown to a larger number. It began in a small house in King Street, Plymouth, and soon grew in numbers, and finally settled in Ebrington Street [the copy reads Elerington Street] where there was accommodation for 1,000 in fellowship, and about 400 others. This was a large plain building, erected according to their own plans, without a gallery. The large table was placed in the centre, as the most prominent object, around which were ranged the seats on a gentle rise from the floor, so that everyone could look upon it. There were no pews, but plain and

comfortable benches. The acoustic properties of the spacious hall were, however, very deficient, so that those who spoke, unless possessed of very strong voices, were compelled to stand at the table, and even Mr. Darby, on returning from the continent, had a desk placed upon it, that he might be the better heard. (See p. 102, Mr. Neatby's *History*.)

The leading ministering brethren were Mr. B. W. Newton, Mr. J. L. Harris, Mr. H. W. Soltau, Mr. J. E. Batten, Mr. W. Dyer. Dr. Tregelles, Mr. Clulow, Mr. McLean and others ministered occasionally, while several others, qualified for leading in worship and prayer, took part in the gatherings. Mr. Newton, who in King Street could only at first speak with diffidence to a small number for a few minutes, could afterwards hold, for two hours at a time, the interested attention of a mixed audience of from 1,200 to 1,400 persons from the sects around. He was the principal teacher of the church. His leading subjects were prophetic, yet by no means confined to these, for he had a large grasp of scripture, and seemed deeply acquainted with every part of that mighty volume of truth. He always dealt with high subjects, momentous to the mind, and sacred to the heart. His delivery was calm, orderly, lucid, captivating, such as became a great scholar, one deeply taught in the word, and anxious to lead others on in the knowledge of that which he had himself learned from its close study.

The line of teaching pursued by Mr. Harris was of another kind. He was a very powerful exponent of the doctrines of grace, of the nature of worship, and the revealed counsels of God; an enthusiastic teacher of the Gospel, and an earnest exhorter of believers as to their daily walk. A man of rich and ripe experience in the things of God, he was a wise and loving pastor of the flock, whose interests seemed ever on his heart.

Mr. Soltau was the first, I think, who taught the meaning of the types and sacrifices of the Old Testament, and as he unfolded the teaching of those symbols concerning the manifold perfection of the person and work of the Son of God a peculiar awe brooded over the assembly, impelling to the silent worship of Him of Whom he discoursed. The strain was solemn, calm and clear; his voice a deep tone, yet melodious, as it seemed almost to sing of salvation and the glories of the Saviour. He was withal a great preacher of righteousness.

Mr. Wm. Dyer (elder brother of Henry) was a mighty man in the Scriptures. Mr. Clulow spoke only occasionally, but

always as though the matter was fresh from the fountains of his loving heart ; and others, whenever they addressed the meeting, impressed one as speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who was present to call into exercise the special gifts He had distributed for the edification of the body.

The exhortation of these several teachers was to a holy life in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, to the cultivation of love, to a walk worthy of our heavenly calling, and to animate the blessed hope of our Lord's return ; that, in short, as we were called heavenly, and made heavenly, we should seek grace to walk in responsibility as heavenly.

I breathed what appeared to me the pure element of love ; I was in the enjoyment of the liberty of home ; I was enlightened by its teachings, cheered by its joys, comforted by its hallowed fellowship, strengthened by godly companionship, and encouraged by those who were over me in the Lord. Those were delightful times, so sweet for their simplicity. The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22) were in evidence. Whatever under-currents were at work they threw nothing to the surface. But it was too fair a scene for Satan to contemplate, and he must by some means mar its beauties and desolate its loveliness.

This devastating work began soon after Mr. J. N. Darby's return from the continent in 1845. I was told that, when he left Plymouth for his mission there, he commended Mr. B.W.N. to the assembly as one qualified to lead on the saints in truth (although that ability had been abundantly proved), and to watch over, and guide them in all spiritual matters. But, when he returned he found him in a position of great influence, attracting to his teaching believers from various parts of England, many of whom took up their residence in Plymouth, to benefit by his teaching and that of others. What were the feelings this popularity stirred ? It would not perhaps be difficult to suppose ; but a personal attack was soon made, and the disastrous strife of the two great teachers, who then became rivals, broke up the peace of the assembly and almost stopped the progress of the work. The particulars of this sore contention have been partly set forth in Mr. Neatby's " History of the Plymouth Brethren " so that they need not be repeated. But no account, gathered merely from pamphlets, could describe the distress of mind, the poignant sorrow and heart-grief produced by Mr. D. as he ruthlessly pursued his course against his former friend. There was no question of evil doctrine in

this antagonism, but only of ecclesiastical practice. I deeply regret to have to record that strifes, jealousies, wraths, factions, parties, works of the flesh, took the place, in great measure, of the fruit of the Spirit, and loving fellowship of the saints.

About two or three years afterwards Mr. Newton's false teaching concerning the humanity of Christ came to light, and was exposed first by Mr. J. L. Harris, then by Mr. Darby and others. Mr. Neatby expressed his opinion that Mr. Newton did not trace out to their legitimate conclusion the inevitable results of his teaching, and that he would not have held any view which to his mind was derogatory to the person of the blessed Lord. I endorse that opinion most fully, and will give an instance. I had attended all his lectures on the psalms when these new views were stated, but contrary to his former mode of teaching he was abstruse and ambiguous, and I was unable to grasp his meaning. Being in a town in Cornwall at the time of his visit there, I waited upon him, and desired he would give me, as briefly as possible, an outline of his teaching. This he did. I replied that his views in my estimation, dishonoured the person of Christ. He answered that on the contrary, in his mind, it greatly exalted Him; and that he would on no account think or say anything that would in the least detract from His honour and glory who was ever the delight of the Father, and who could, notwithstanding His relative position, as man, to God and men, which He took in grace, at any moment rightfully take His place in the glory with His Father. This short explanation gave me the clue to his teaching, for, although I had heard his lectures, and had copied for circulation the notes, taken by a sister, of these lectures (and if those notes could now be discovered, I believe they would be found to be in my handwriting) yet my mind was in a state of confusion, and could not clearly grasp the nature of his teaching; but when the mist was cleared away, I saw his error and repudiated his doctrine, and to this day I abhor it.

There are a few discrepancies in Mr. Neatby's book which, with your permission, I will make good from personal knowledge. Between July, 1848, when "The Letter of the Ten" was known, and December, when the Brethren of Bethesda decided on a new course, Mr. Darby was in Plymouth and gave his opinion that anyone coming from Bethesda should be held

under suspicion of holding Mr. N's teaching, or, to use his own simile, as the authorities treated ships coming from Alexandria, putting them into quarantine until it was known that they were in a healthy state. But after December, when Bethesda had declared "that no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. N's views should be received into communion" he again visited Plymouth when he laid down another principle touching Bethesda, which I will explain presently. He had visited Bethesda, and having expressed his approval of their later course, demanded that "The Letter of the Ten" should be withdrawn, and that a statement of that withdrawal, and their more recent action toward the false doctrine, should be published, so that the circulation of it might be commensurate with the publication of "The Letter of the Ten." The Brethren of Bethesda declined this for the reason that they did not publish anything; that both letters were written merely for the guidance of the Church of Bethesda, and were so far private: That the former letter was published without their consent, and that he was welcome to publish the later letter if he wished. Upon this refusal being firmly adhered to, Mr. Darby threatened to make it a test of communion everywhere. This is what I want to make clear and prominent, that, upon that demand and refusal the division was made, and has continued to the present. That was the point of cleavage, although subsidiary matters might have contributed to it. On his visit to Plymouth, alluded to, he forced this test on us in order that we should have no fellowship with Bethesda. Many of us felt that that church had done all that could be reasonably claimed from them. I asked him what spiritual [[?] scriptural] authority there was for cutting off a whole assembly of God's people. He replied to the effect "I grant there is none. But if some Godly men meet together to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they may expect that guidance, although there be no scripture whatever for the course they consider they have been led to take." (Is not that the dogma which the followers of his discipline have taken as their rule ever since? Hence their many separations. They would have division then, they have reaped divisions in abundance since.) We had several meetings on the subject, and at last a division in Plymouth was forced and that solely, I repeat, on the question of the duty of Bethesda to withdraw "The Letter of the Ten." That was the issue, and division on division, upon that flimsy pretext,

went on throughout this country and others. I allude to this as showing that this awful separation was made not on a question of doctrine, for that had been settled, but only on the question of subservience to an imperious demand. Can it possibly be of God? or is it not the work of the Adversary of Souls who has for centuries made havoc of the church? And now, because we who are called "Open Brethren," refuse to acquiesce to such a destructive course, we are unrighteously charged with holding Mr. Newton's errors which we abhor, or of being in fellowship with those who do, which is equally untrue.

Mr. Neatby's book is called *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*. It seems to me that it would be more correctly termed the history of Darbyism, as Mr. Darby and his way are the theme of his book, and he almost ignores the position of those called "Open Brethren," or he says a good deal to belittle them. Now the principles we profess are those originally taught and maintained by the early "brethren" in Plymouth; from which Mr. Darby, and consequently his followers, departed, if not previously, certainly in 1848. We have simply continued to act upon these principles. We have not learnt them from, and do not imitate, Darbyism. We have gathered them from the pure fountain of truth; and the longer I live, and the more I know of the scriptures, the more sure I am that those principles are of God. I am thankful to say that they are still being carried out by thousands of the Lord's people all over the world. The testimony raised by the Spirit of God in the early part of the century has not therefore wholly failed, although much weakened by the strife; and we trust it will continue to be upheld by us in all humility and godly sincerity; with the fixed purpose of, by grace, following the mind of the Spirit, and obeying the commands of our Risen and exalted Lord, to the honour of His word and the Glory of His great name. Oh! for a return of the loveliness and simplicity of the former days: but if that might not be, yet there is a path for the lowly and obedient heart. Let us therefore earnestly endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace, doing our work of building up ourselves on our most holy faith, and seeking to gather in from all nations those who shall be the joy and rejoicing of our ever blessed Lord in the day of His glory.

Note 1. On pages 10 and 11 above, speaking of the 1848 strife, I have said :

. . . it is most important to understand that the cause of that lamentable division was not false doctrine, but a false principle of church order and discipline. The doctrine *all* parties condemned, including almost immediately the teacher thereof. Mr. Darby and his followers condemned it; the Bethesda church, by the church resolution quoted, condemned it; while already, nearly one year before—in November, 1847—Newton himself had condemned it, and had withdrawn and disavowed all writings of his in which it was to be found.

Also, in ch. xiii of *A. N. Groves*, written before Mr. Cole's paper had come to me, I had said that Open brethren are the real continuators of the first principles and practice of the Brethren, and that Exclusivism was a surrender of most of them.

It is important that these two views are confirmed by Mr. Cole, seeing that he had personal knowledge of the meetings before the strife arose, that he went through the conflict at its centre, and then watched the outcome for over fifty years.

Mr. William Collingwood, of Bristol, bore personal testimony to the same effect. He united with Brethren in 1844, before the first disruption, and after fifty-five years wrote in 1899 as follows regarding those who followed Mr. Darby :

They have taken a position as far removed from the original ground as they are separated from actual fellowship. As to either, they retain nothing in common with those they have left, except that they still have the same custom of "breaking bread" on the Lord's day, and an open ministry. The latter being to the popular idea the distinguishing mark of the "Brethren," the two classes, different as they are in all other respects, remain confounded in the minds of those who see only the external form (*The Brethren*, 22).

Mr. Cole remarks that Darby departed from the original principles in 1848 "if not previously." In fact, the departure commenced within eight years of the commencement of the meetings, as was shown by Groves in his letter to Darby of 1836 and by Lady Powerscourt's statement therein quoted (see *A. N. Groves*, ch. ix, 222, 225 : ed. 2 172, 175).

NOTE 2. Mr. Cole's remark, "They *would have* division then" (in 1848, 1849) is to be noted as the estimate of a contemporary actor in the then affairs. But the imputing of

intention to another is ever serious. Had he warrant in this case? The following confirmation came to me quite unexpectedly. It is an instance of how facts from nearly a century ago may be transmitted reliably.

Mr. Whiting was a grocer at Nailsworth, Glos., and an Exclusive. He was a great friend of Mr. William A. Jones, who was born in 1831 and died in 1915, and was a respected public official, merchant, and Christian of the neighbouring town of Minchinhampton. Mr. Whiting told Mr. Jones that a commercial traveller calling upon him had narrated that he was present at a meeting at Plymouth when, after the breaking of bread, Mr. Darby in his hearing had said that, if Mr. Müller did not deal with the Newton matter as he desired, he (Darby) *would divide every meeting in the world over it*. Now at that very time Mr. Cole was in the Plymouth meeting with which Darby was associated, as is shown by his narrative above, and he may very well have heard, or certainly heard of, Darby's statement made thus openly.

My present host and informant was a grandson of Mr. Jones. The latter often explained to him as a young believer his questions concerning Brethren, and more than once he mentioned to his grandson this remark by Darby. Mr. Jones's daughter writes to me that to her also her father spoke of this and never ceased to deplore Darby's statement. Though, like many of us, he esteemed Darby in some aspects, yet his comment to his grandson was: "If that was not Satan working upon the flesh in Mr. Darby, I don't know what it was."

It should be observed that the unnamed brother was evidently at the meeting at Plymouth with which Darby was associated, or he would not have heard the words he quoted. At that period Mr. Cole also was with that meeting. Mr. Whiting too was an adherent of Darby. Thus the statements before us come from members at that time of Darby's own circle, not from opponents.

This testimony confirms Henry Groves' statement that

Shortly after the reading of "The Letter of the Ten" to the church, Mr. Darby came again to Bristol, and held an interview with both Mr. Müller and Mr. Craik, in which he again urged the taking up of the tracts by Bethesda, and passing a church condemnation on them . . . finding their judgments were not to be changed, he sought to intimidate by the threat of separating from them all those believers in other places, with whom

for years they had held Christian fellowship (Neatby, 161; *Darbyism*, ed. 2, 42).

With what characteristic energy and determination Mr. Darby carried through his already formed intention history sadly proved. The Bethesda church did not accede to his demands, and he forthwith divided assemblies everywhere against them.

Surely the child of God needs ever to bear in mind the exhortations "Take heed to your *spirit*" (Mal. ii. 15), "Be renewed in the *spirit* of your mind" (Eph. iv. 23), "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your *spirit*" (Phil. iv. 23).

APPENDIX B

(see page 11)

THE DARBY-MÜLLER DISPUTE

One other incident shall be reviewed, utterly crucial to Exclusivism, and resolutely disputed by Exclusives, that is, the interview between Müller and Darby in July, 1849, when, as is alleged, the latter admitted that the reason for his separation from the Bethesda church no longer existed.

The following is the history of the matter, as far as I can learn.

1. On June 29th, 1848, "The Letter of the Ten" was read to the church at Bethesda and sanctioned, defining their attitude to the controversy at Plymouth.

2. Shortly thereafter Darby visited Bristol and further urged Müller and Craik to get Newton's tracts condemned by the Bethesda church. As they still refused he threatened to divide other assemblies against them, and in August he issued his Leeds circular to that end. See H. Groves' statement just quoted, p. 91.

3. In December of that year, on account of fresh circumstances, the Bethesda church condemned the tracts, and decided that "no one defending, maintaining, or upholding them" or the views they taught should be received into communion.

4. The following July (1849), as is asserted, Darby saw Müller and made the statement in question. No other person was present. Any account of what passed depends therefore upon the statements of one or other of them, and as these are irreconcilable we may believe one or other, but cannot both.

5. Fifteen years later, in 1864, Henry Groves wrote the first draft of his *Darbyism* above quoted. In his preface he tells that he read this to Henry Craik, who agreed with what was written, and it was then read by Müller. The latter therefore accepted the statements as to the interview now in question. The book was published December, 1866, again in September, 1876, and there was a third edition undated. The account of this interview is unchanged, thus continuing Müller's acceptance of it. It reads as follows :

The last occurrence that need be noticed in connection with this part of the subject is the interview that took place between Mr. Müller and Mr. Darby in the summer of 1849. We might not have alluded to this, had it not been that untrue statements have been in wide circulation in reference to it, some denying that such a meeting ever took place, others denying the tenor of the conversation that passed between them. The following is Mr. Müller's account of what took place : Mr. Darby called on him at the New Orphan House, No. 1, ten minutes before one o'clock, and Mr. Müller, on entering the room where he was, shook hands with him, and Mr. Darby said to the following effect : " As you have now judged the tracts, the reason why we should not be united no longer exists." To this Mr. Müller replied : " I have only ten minutes now free, having an engagement at one o'clock, and therefore I cannot *now* enter upon this subject ; for you have acted so wickedly in this whole affair, that many things have to be looked into before we could be really united again." On this Mr. Darby rose and left, and thus ended their last interview.

6. Upon this account Neatby commented thus :

Of all the incidents in Darby's ^{Vesta's} chequered ^{wretched} career, this is distinctly the most damaging to his reputation, for he left Müller's presence only to enforce to the last letter the decree that he had just declared obsolete, [that is, his Leeds letter] (*History*, 176).

But Neatby does not mention Darby's denial as to the conversation, nor J. S. Oliphant's paper giving that denial. Either he did not know of these, or he did not think the veracity or accuracy of such a man as Müller could be justly questioned.

Similarly Ironside did not know of Darby's denial, for in *The Brethren Movement*, issued in 1925 and 1926, he says, after quoting Müller :

There is no way of getting Darby's side of this regrettable incident, as he had departed to be with Christ two years before the letter was written,

that is, Müller's letter of 1883 as below.

7. But before Groves published his book, in 1866, the interview was already known, for by 1864 H. W. Soltau had mentioned it to Oliphant, a devoted partizan of Darby, who submitted the statement to Darby, and the next year published his reply in his *Bethesda Fellowship*, and mentioned it again in his second edition of 1871.

In the 1929 edition of *The Local Assembly* I cited the incident from Neatby. An elderly Exclusive, whose memory went back to Darby's time, wrote privately some *Remarks* upon this as follows :

In 1865 Mr. J. S. Oliphant published his *Bethesda Fellowship* in which is given in full Mr. Darby's comments on this allegation. He therein says : " It is a total and absolute falsehood in every part and parcel of it . . . I can only esteem it, as I do, a deliberate falsehood on the part of Mr. Müller. It is too precise and totally contrary to everything to the truth to be anything else." This denial was repeated in a second edition in 1871.

And in a letter from Exclusive Brethren in Switzerland, France, England, and Holland to certain German Brethren, dated March 15th, 1938, it is said upon this matter :

Now here is J.N.D.'s own reply to this unfounded assertion : " As regards the statement of my interview with Mr. Müller, I had heard it before, and I have only to say : it is a total and absolute falsehood in every part and in all its details."

See Noel's *History of the Brethren*, vol. i, p. 270, quoting from H.S.'s tract.

This American *History*, dated 1936, does not mention Müller's letter of 1883, with its categorical reaffirmation of his account of the interview, though this is given by both Neatby and Ironside.

The continued and one-sided use of this incident by both schools shows the need for the present attempt to set out the facts more fully.

8. Oliphant's paper, *Bethesda Fellowship* (1907), repeats what he stated in 1865, that in 1864 he had an interview with H. W. Soltau, of which he says that

his [Soltau's] excuses for Bethesda and for the neutrality to Christ in the proceedings there, were of such a character that I

was forced at the close of the discussion to refuse him the right hand of fellowship. He then wrote me a letter, saying that Mr. Darby went to Mr. Müller to say that he was satisfied with the decision arrived at by the Saints at Bethesda, and that they might consider all differences at an end. That Mr. M. refused to have the matter made up so easily, as he had questions with Mr. Darby himself. That on this D. went away in great dudgeon, and set Bethesda up again as a mark of attack. I sent this letter to Mr. Darby, and it is due to him to publish the reply which I received.

This account of the interview must have come originally from George Müller, and it agrees with that of Henry Groves in the particulars (1) that there was an interview; (2) that Darby expressed himself to the effect that separation was no longer required; (3) that Müller raised the question of Darby's personal conduct; (4) that Darby thereupon left. It adds the assertion that Darby was much offended, which has not been otherwise asserted.

Oliphant then gives Darby's reply to him, which ran:

DEAR BROTHER,

I send back S's letter. It is all of a piece, the same egregious self-sufficiency which has always misled him. As regards the statement of my interview with Mr. Müller, I had heard it before, and I have only to say: *it is a total and absolute falsehood in every part and parcel of it.* I do not attribute it to Mr. S., but being given as coming from Mr. Müller, and having no reason to think it a pure invention of *the relater, Mr. Müller* and I having been alone, I can only esteem it, as I do, a deliberate falsehood on the part of Mr. Müller. It is too precise and totally contrary in everything to the truth to be anything else. You are at liberty to repeat my judgment if you wish. I am afraid sometimes that things are a great deal worse than I was ever inclined to think. The less you have to do with personal questions with them the better. Affectionately yours in the Lord. J.N.D.

It is not surprising that some have taken these strong and explicit words to mean that the interview itself never occurred. Moreover, H. Groves's statement in 1866 shows that some had denied the fact of the interview, and this is how a critic of Oliphant at the time of the first issue of his paper in 1865 understood both him and Darby. See paragraph 9.

But in view of other evidence on the point I prefer to take Darby's words as admitting the interview. To deny this he

should have said: "the statement of my *having had* an interview," and "Mr. Müller and I, *as is asserted*, having been alone." The statements as they stand mean properly that the interview was a fact, and the denial is of that having been said which Soltau declared.

It is pertinent to observe that Darby did not give the least intimation as to what passed at the interview. It would have been natural to have used this easy occasion given by Oliphant. Why did he not do so then, or on any other occasion that is known publicly? If his statement to Müller did not commit him adversely why did he not make it public?

Mr. Oliphant continued:

For further information as to J.N.D's sentiments about "Bethesda" and its supporters, those who desire to know the truth may refer to his letters published by G. Morrish.

I might quote from several private letters which I received from Mr. Darby in 1864-65, but it is sufficient to say that, before I printed and published my letter in October, 1865, entitled *Bethesda Fellowship*, I sent it to Mr. Darby who returned it to me saying, "I have read your paper and return it without engaging you to change anything." In both editions of this letter published in 1865 and 1871, I made public the denial by Mr. Darby of what was alleged to be his statement to Mr. Müller in 1849.

9. From the dustheap of a packet of ancient and controversial pamphlets I recovered the following statement upon this old yet still living issue.

Upon Oliphant's paper being published "W.C.B." issued three leaflets criticizing it, of which I have numbers 1 and 3. These show that the writer knew and conversed with Oliphant, as well as other persons prominent in those controversies. In tract 3 he wrote:

Mr. Soltau, it appears, told Mr. O. that a meeting had taken place some time ago between Mr. Darby and Mr. Müller, in which the latter objected to matters being made up without confession; and Mr. O., having written to Mr. D. about it, gets for his reply: "It is a total and absolute falsehood, in every part and parcel of it." A total and absolute falsehood! And yet, I myself have seen a letter, in Mr. Darby's own handwriting, admitting the interview, and giving his own version of it. Now, which is true? Mr. D's letter that I saw, admitting the interview; or Mr. D's letter to Mr. O., saying, the report is "a total and absolute falsehood, in every part and parcel of it!" I should like to have a really authentic account of this interview; for interview *there was*, let Mr. O. write what he will.

This puts beyond question that the interview took place, and establishes the truth of that item of Müller's statement; for "W.C.B." would scarcely have dared to put in print his statement as to having seen a letter by Darby, if it were false, seeing that Darby was alive to deny it.

10. As to the accuracy of George Müller's memory, it was almost phenomenal. I myself heard him speak in Bristol two or three years only before his death, when he was about ninety years of age, and for one hour and a quarter he gave a *résumé* of his whole life, travels, and works of faith, with precise figures as to countries visited, orphans supported, Bibles and books distributed, funds received, even down to farthings on various accounts, and all without notes. It cannot, therefore, be argued that he was cloudy in memory as to a so specially critical, yet only brief conversation of but sixteen years before Groves wrote his book, and which indeed he had not previously kept to himself, for Darby had heard of it, and Craik accepted the account of Groves before it was referred to Müller.

Moreover, Darby himself gives no possible room for the idea that Müller was merely incorrect in details, for he affirmed categorically that the *whole* statement was "a total and absolute falsehood in every part and parcel of it . . . and in all the details . . . [and] a deliberate falsehood. . . ."

On the other side, Darby's memory also was too fine to allow the supposition of a complete and utter failure to remember such an interview, which he himself had sought, or what took place at it. Had he been uncertain on either point he would not have been in the position to offer so unequivocal a denial or bring so serious a charge of gross lying. Moreover, his letter mentioned by "W.C.B." shows that he did have clear remembrance of the interview having taken place.

Noel (*History*, 237-240) gives a letter by Darby dealing with the actings of Bethesda leaders at that time. He said: "All I did was to write and visit them, till *he refused to receive me as a brother.*" This, it seems, can refer only to the present interview, for Müller had never before refused to receive Darby and they never met again, as is shown in Müller's letter next quoted. The words underlined by Darby speak of a personal interview, "he refused"; and they agree with the other accounts of Müller's attitude on the occasion under discussion.

11. The desire of "W.C.B." for an account of the interview was answered, from Müller's side, in the year of his leaflet by H. Groves' book. Further, in 1883, the year after Darby had

died, an inquiry as to the matter reached Müller, to which he replied as follows :

Breslau, Germany, April 30th, 1883.

DEAR SIR,

On my way back from a missionary tour in Russia and Russian Poland to England, your letter of April 6th has been forwarded to me to this place. The reply to your question is this :

In July, 1849, Mr. Darby came to me to the New Orphan House, No. 1, on Ashley down, Bristol, and said :

As you have judged Newton's tracts, there is no longer any reason why we should be separated."

My reply was, " I have this moment only ten minutes' time, having an important engagement before me, and as you have acted so wickedly in this matter, I cannot *now* enter upon it, as I have no time."

I have never seen him since.

Yours truly,

GEORGE MÜLLER."

A facsimile of this letter is before me, with the following guarantee :

" 73 Ludgate Hill, London, January 21st, 1907.

The above is a Letterpress Print from a " Process " block—made by us by photographic process from an original letter placed in our hands, signed by George Müller.

A. Bourne and Co."

and with the following also :

" NOTE.—The original of this letter is held by Mr. H. C. Crawley, of Buxton."

12. In 1885, E. K. Groves, younger brother of Henry Groves, issued his *Conversations on Bethesda Family Matters*. In ch. vi, on the " Family Sorrow," that is, the 1848-9 controversy, he repeats what we have quoted from his brother's book. In the prefatory Note he says that, while he alone is responsible for the book, yet this chapter vi " has been examined by four of those who passed through the Family Sorrow." Their names are not given, but George Müller was then only eighty years of age, and he was in the United Kingdom from June 6th, 1884, to November 4th, 1885, the year the book was issued. (See *Preaching Tours, etc., of George Müller*, ed. 2, 1889, " Contents ".)

13. There is one further testimony known to me, and it is of much weight.

William Kelly was with Brethren before and during the 1848 strife. From the first he was intimate with and devoted to Darby, and was later the editor of his *Collected Writings*. In *The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdaism* he deals with this matter. When this was first issued I do not know. I quote from a New Edition dated 1906, the year of his death. A footnote to page 13 reads :

As much is made of J.N.D's visit to G.M. after these meetings [that is, those when Bethesda condemned the tracts of Newton], it may be stated that Mr. D's hopefulness was not shared by his brethren, who knew that Bethesda never owned its sin in receiving Mr. N's partisans, and never repented of the false principles in the Letter of the Ten (adopted by a formal vote of its constituents). Even after the seven meetings it never so much as noticed the sin of receiving back two of the Ten who had gone out and publicly supported Mr. N. before all Bristol. In the face of grave facts like these, what was the value of theoretic censure of the doctrine? Mr. M's rude repulse only compelled Mr. D. to feel, as others already felt, the hollowness of Bethesda throughout. Mr. D's power lay in expounding the word, not in disciplinary action, as he used to own freely throughout his life.

The last remark shows that the statement was written after Mr. Darby's death in 1882. The whole statement admits

- (1) That the interview took place.
- (2) That it was about the time Müller said, that is, soon after the tracts were condemned by Bethesda.
- (3) The fact that Darby went with "hopefulness" implies that what he meant to say was conciliatory. This agrees with the *tenor* of what Müller declared Darby said, though it does not guarantee the words. Yet Darby asserted it was positively "*contrary*"* to the truth.
- (4) The mention that Müller "repulsed" Darby likewise confirms Müller's statement as to the *character* of his answer to Darby, and it agrees with Darby's statement, "he refused to receive me as a brother."

Thus four essential features of Müller's statements are here implicitly confirmed by Darby's most illustrious friend and supporter, who was in his confidence at the time of the event. This by no means maintains Darby's sweeping and unrestricted assertion that Müller's statement was a "deliberate falsehood" and "*totally** *contrary* in *everything** to the truth." It rather bears in the opposite direction.

* My italics.

Again we observe that Kelly also gives no direct report of what Darby did actually say, though it is highly probable he had learned it from him, seeing he knew how Müller answered. Alternatively, if it was from Müller's side he learned this last, still he admits the truthfulness of that part of Müller's statement, though Darby had said it was false.

This recital establishes the following series of facts

(1) That at least as early as 1864 Müller had given his account of this interview, for Soltau had mentioned it, and Groves gave it in his book, and Darby had heard of it.

(2) In 1865 Darby denied the account absolutely and charged Müller with deliberate lying as to it.

(3) In spite of this denial, indeed, because the incident was being challenged, the next year (1866) Groves published the account of the interview which had been passed by Müller.

(4) Five years later (1871) Darby's follower Oliphant republished his book with the denial.

(5) Five years thereafter Groves republished his book.

(6) It was thus that Darby allowed the matter to remain at his death six years later, in 1882.

(7) The next year (1883) Müller categorically and in writing repeated his assertion.

(8) And two years later again (1885) it was once more published, by E. K. Groves, one of the Bethesda church where Müller was.

(9) Thus the matter remained during the following thirteen years, and thus it stood when Müller died in 1898.

(10) Between 1882 and 1906 William Kelly tacitly admitted the essential elements in Müller's statement.

14. The reader has now before him material for forming an opinion upon this controverted matter. The painful, yet seemingly inevitable alternative which Darby forced by his charge is, that, in this matter, either George Müller was a deliberate and maintained liar, or if not, then Darby was. The Searcher of hearts knows which was the fact, and before His judgment seat they both have ere now appeared.

On the one hand, my esteemed Exclusive correspondent says:

God only knows the truth when two brothers' conversation, when alone, is called in question ; but that J.N.D. should have said privately to Geo. Müller the precise opposite of his every

known word or deed during many years, is strong and overwhelming presumption that what G.M. alleged he said is false.

On the other hand, George Müller was the most renowned man of faith and prayer of later times, upon whom the seal of God's approval rested publicly. Explaining the conditions of success in prayer he used to emphasize Psalm lxxvi. 18, 19 : " If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear ; " yet indisputably the next clause was true of him, " but verily God hath heard, He hath attended to the voice of my prayer," and this on a magnificent and increasing scale all through that very period of thirty-four years from 1864 to 1898. Could this have been so if God had known that through those same years he was cherishing in his heart, and spreading by books and letter, what he would have well known to be deliberate and detailed falsehood involving another? Must not such hypocrisy, deceit, and persistent lying have been a secret cancer to destroy his unction and testimony? But these the Spirit of truth maintained undiminished to the end of his life.

But clearly the issue is far larger than the personal character of either Müller or Darby. If the former told the truth as to the interview, then the whole attitude and course of the latter, in relation to the Bethesda church, from July, 1849, and onward, was self-condemned in advance. It is this that makes the incident a vital issue still, or it would be happy to let the dispute fade and die. Hence this examination, and also because the important contribution to the facts of " W.C.B." is newly recovered and unknown, nor, I think, has the matter been before surveyed and set forth comprehensively and from both sides.

15. If a biographer were telling Darby's life-story he would rightly have much to say other than comes into this present book. Here Darby enters only in his relation to the original principles and practices of the Brethren, which is the least attractive aspect of him. Another could justly describe the lover of children, the warm-hearted friend, the man of simple habits and utter self-abandonment to the cause of Christ. He would portray the strenuous traveller, with his portmanteaux not unpacked for thirty years, as is said, and the earnest seeker of souls and feeder of the sheep of Christ. And he would speak of the classical scholar and faithful translator of the whole of the Book of God into German, French, and English.

But Kelly's words last quoted singularly confirm the impression that may be gained from these pages. It is Darby's

confidential and life-long friend that tells us that " Mr. D's power lay in expounding the word, not in disciplinary action, as he used to own freely throughout his life."

Now it was precisely his measures of discipline that forced the 1848 and 1849 strife. I have read all his letters on Bethesda to which Mr. Oliphant referred his readers, and I say simply yet plainly that all his statements, and those of his followers, that Bethesda shielded error are, in my opinion, contrary to fact. The leaders of that church then and later were at least as devoted to Christ, and to the true doctrine of His person, as their assailants. Though never formally connected with that church, yet from long residence in Bristol I speak from personal intimacy with some principal leaders who grew up under George Müller's influence, and whose knowledge in some instances went back into the middle of the last century. To write as Darby did in 1864, " The evil at Bethesda is the most unprincipled admission of blasphemers against Christ, the coldest contempt of Him I ever came across " (*Letters*, ii. 254), was sheer misrepresentation. Only the second year after, he was writing to the quite unrepentant Craik, then on his death-bed, in the most brotherly strain. He called him his " dear brother," and desired that " though ecclesiastically separated from him " he might be blessed with every blessing as the Lord might see he needed in his present circumstances. (See *A. N. Groves*, 217 : ed. 2, 171.)

The question in 1848 was *not* the false doctrine which had been taught elsewhere : *all* parties had condemned that : but the question was *how to deal* with the situation that had arisen. The Bethesda leaders took one line and Darby demanded another. It was the forcing of his method of discipline that compelled the division, and it was he compelled it, not they. The strong man certainly revealed that discipline was indeed not his strong point ; yet he insisted on his ideas of discipline being enforced, to the general disaster and at the price of fellowship. Hence in this sphere of his activities, and in this paper, the ecclesiastic and controversialist are prominent. I doubt not that an account of him in other aspects and activities could be profitable for the people of God, if both the material and the writer were available, though as biography it would be like a life of David without his mighty wars.

In 1837, before contention's withering blast had begun to blow, he wrote :

Rise my soul ! Thy God directs thee ;
 Stranger hands no more impede ;
 Pass thou on ! His hand protects thee,
 Strength that has the captive freed.

Though thy way be long and dreary,
 Eagle strength He'll still renew :
 Garments fresh and foot unwearied
 Tell how God hath brought thee through.

When to Canaan's long-loved dwelling
 Love divine thy foot shall bring,
 There, with shouts of triumph swelling,
 Zion's songs in rest to sing,

There no stranger God shall meet thee,
 Stranger thou in courts above !
 He, Who to His rest shall greet thee,
 Greets thee with a well-known love.

And after his death, forty-five years later, these lines were found :

Behind my back I fling,
 Like an unwanted thing,
 My former self and ways,
 And reaching forward far,
 I seek the things that are
 Beyond time's lagging days.

Oh ! may I follow still,
 Faith's pilgrimage fulfil,
 With steps both sure and fleet ;
 The longed-for good I see,
 Jesus waits there for me,
 Haste ! haste ! my weary feet.

(Anon.)

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