

DARBYISM:

Its Rise, Progress, and Development.

BY
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THIRD EDITION, REVISED.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.



I FEEL it necessary to say a few words on the origin of this pamphlet. When I landed from India, about three years ago, my steps were directed to Bristol. From various quarters questions relative to Bethesda were asked in connection with the original grounds of the separation that had taken place. I felt the need of, and sought for, some publication that would answer the questions put, and prevent the effects of the many misrepresentations made; but I sought in vain. This led me to take up the subject, and two years ago the present pamphlet, in its original form, was written. Wishing to be satisfied that my statements and facts were correct, I read it to Mr. Craik, who, while agreeing with what was written, urged me not to print anything till Mr. Müller had seen it. The course pursued by Bethesda had been all along studiously to avoid anything that might appear like self-justification, seeking to leave everything in the hands of the Lord; and I was anxious not to implicate any of the dear brethren in anything I might write. This led me to act independently of them. At Mr. Craik's request, however, I sent the manuscript to Mr. Müller, and after a week or fortnight, met Mr. Müller and Mr. Craik together, by appointment, with reference to it. Mr. Müller's judgment was strong against the publication of anything, lest it should appear indirectly like an act of self-vindication. He urged also the evil effects of these controversies on Christians generally, but particularly on the young, many of whom by this matter had already been driven into the world. The result was, that I determined to let the manuscript remain for the present unpublished; and, but for continuous solicitations on the part of others, it would probably have so remained.

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BRISTOL, *27th December, 1866.*

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.



It is now ten years since the publication of the first edition of this pamphlet; and though at the request of many, it is with sorrow I publish another edition, as the former has long been out of print. Circumstances remain unchanged; the evil spreads and deepens; and a solemn responsibility rests on the teachers of the house of God, to lift up their protest and their testimony against what is dishonouring to Christ, and destructive of those holy principles of doctrine and fellowship, that have their basis in the word of God.

In some parts the pamphlet has been curtailed, while in others it has been amplified, particularly in what refers to Mr. Darby's teachings on the sufferings of Christ, and on various church questions involved in the controversy.

It has been my aim to soften what seemed harsh, when it could be done without sacrificing the truth of God; and I have endeavoured to avoid all judgment of motives. If I have failed in so doing, may the Lord and His people pardon.

I have to express much thankfulness for the many instances in which the first edition has proved helpful to perplexed seekers after truth; and now, commending this pamphlet to the Great Head of the Church, would pray that it may prosper only to that whereunto He would send it.

KENDAL,
September, 1876.

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DARBYISM.

CHAPTER I.

Original Principles.

“I AM the *Way*, the *Truth*, and the *Life*,” said the blessed Lord to His sorrowing disciples; not as three separate statements, but as one. We are ever prone to separate them, but they are indivisible; and if we are on the *Way*, we find a living *Truth*, which, as the *Light of Life*, is the portion of all who believe. Alas for the *Truth* or the *Light* when the power of the *Life* is not there! The Lord while here was the embodiment of living truth, but the *Light* was rejected; and He who was full of grace and truth went back again to the Father who sent Him.

When He rose from the dead he rose not alone. The corn of wheat had died, and brought forth much fruit. Pentecost sealed what the Passover consummated, and with the baptism of the Holy Ghost all who believe were baptized into one body. Thus is “the Church of the Living God” formed, and becomes “the pillar and ground of the *Truth*.” This is the Church’s destiny as the body of Christ, in which He will be glorified, and in which the truth of God will be displayed. Our present responsibility is to know how to behave ourselves in the House of God, and how to comport ourselves as those belonging to the body of Christ, in which the truth of God is to be preserved and maintained. Solemn responsibility!

Had sin not marred nor apostacy corrupted the simplicity of truth, the pathway of the Church would have shone brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. But notwithstanding man’s failures, God has not failed; and the believing soul looks at [2] God’s Christ, and repeats that word of hope, “HE shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth.” The Spirit of God has not failed; the Comforter, the Advocate, the Interpreter, remains still the witness of an ever-faithful God. Much of His truth may again and again be lost sight of in the rubbish that man accumulates over it, but He brings again the forgotten truth to the surface, making it a source of new life to those who lay hold on it, and thereby introducing a fresh element of power, and that in the direction most needed at the time. Truth quickened by the Holy Ghost in the heart is the power of God; and any truth, when it becomes a living reality, is a witness for Christ, to whom all parts of truth bear testimony, as all rays of created light witness to the sun, whence they come.

Truth will, however, meet with many to assail it, and many well-intentioned friends who will often do much to damage it; still, by the grace of God, the truth maintains its ground against the attacks of its opponents, and the misdirected attachment of those who know its name but not its power. Truth in Jesus ever sanctifies those who receive it, and conforms them unto itself; if it does not that, it has lost the end for which it was given. Many chapters on church history might be written illustrating this; but we can extol the wisdom of the great Head of the Church, who, as in the days of His flesh, did not commit the keeping of His sacred person to men, though many believed on Him, because He knew what was in man; so now He does not entrust His name and His truth to any portion of His people exclusively, but has given Himself for all, and His truth to all; and any claim

to the exclusive possession of the heritage of the whole family of God is an assumption which God will not endorse.

Among many truths brought prominently before the Church of God during the last fifty years, we may particularly enumerate the second advent of Christ and the unity of the Church of God. In enforcing the former subject, no voice was more owned of God than was that of Edward Irving, who seemed raised up to raise throughout Christendom the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh;" but his sun set in darkness under the delusion of a "Catholic and Apostolic Church" usurpation, and he died a slave to the system he had reared – a beacon to all who have eyes to see. In connection with the latter, there arose in the hearts of many of the children of God a desire [3] for that Christian fellowship which unites all who love the Lord. The late Mr. A. N. Groves, who felt much the importance of this, thus wrote from Exeter in 1828:

"My full persuasion is, that inasmuch as any one glories either in being of the Church of England, Scotland, Baptist, Wesleyan, Independent, &c., his glory is his shame, and that it is anti-Christian; for, as the apostle said, 'Were any of them crucified for you?' The only legitimate ground of glorying is, that we are among the ransomed of the Lord by His grace, either in ourselves or others. As *bodies*, I know none of the sects and parties that wound and disfigure the body of Christ; as *individuals*, I desire to love all who love Him. Oh, when will the day come when the love of Christ will have more power to unite, than our foolish regulations have to divide, the family of God! As for order, if it be God's order, let it stand; but if it be man's order, I must examine whether or not it excludes the *essence* of Christ's kingdom; for if it does, I remember that word, 'Call no man master upon earth; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.'"*

And in answer to the question whether there were no principles in the word of God which would unite all believers in worship, whatever might be their various views and attainments in the divine life, he replied:

"Yes, there are; we are evidently called to know nothing among our fellow-Christians but this one fact, Do they belong to Christ? Has Christ received them? Then may we receive all such to the glory of God." – *Ibid.*, p. 40.

The unsectarian fellowship here contemplated is that alone whereby the oneness of the Spirit can be kept in the bond of peace. A unity not in a doctrine, nor in an attainment, far less one in external forms and circumstances; but a oneness that owned a common link, in the possession of a common life, and *that* the Eternal Life which is vouchsafed to those that believe, who therein are enabled to stand before the throne, because their garments were washed white in the blood of the Lamb. This was the point aimed after in those days. In a valuable tract, widely circulated at the time, entitled *The Blood of the Lamb and the Union of Saints*, the writer, referring to Rev. vii., says:

"The manifestation of all the saints before the throne will show *in result* the value of the blood of the Lamb. That blood is not to be regarded as having so done its work, as no longer intimately to concern us; for as it is now our title to forgiveness, so eternally it will be our title to [4] glory. It is thus being *the ground on which we shall be gathered there*, that we may well contemplate it as *the gathering-point of saints even now*. In glory there will be nothing looked to, as entitling the gathered multitude to their place before the throne, but their having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This one plea suffices for them with God; and as they are thus, not only to be gathered to Him, but *also to one another*, so do we see a principle of great practical value as to the union of saints. Now we wish to press upon all the children of God, that *the basis of our union in glory* is quite *sufficient for our union on earth*; and even as we shall then be manifested on that ground, ought we now to stand manifestly joined together on that ALONE."

* See *Memoir of A. N. Groves*. Second edition, p. 49. Sold by J. E. Hawkins, 36, Baker Street, and 12, Paternoster Square.

In the epistle to the Ephesians (chapter iv.) the apostle speaks of two unities – “a unity of the Spirit,” and a “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” The latter pointing onwards to the time of the glory, when all shall come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; when the one Body, and the one Head, shall be manifested in the one Christ. Till then it is the “oneness of the Spirit” that we are called to keep – a oneness we have not to *make*, but to *keep* – a oneness that, just in proportion as it is kept, will grow up into a manifested oneness. But this can never be produced by any action from without; it must be grown up into from within, by the hidden power of the Spirit of Life; a life the exhibition of which is Love; for “God is Love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” This life, this love, when implanted, grows up spontaneously into a development which accords with its internal organization, as appointed by God, and not after any rule laid down by man. We hear much about the unity of the body as something to be kept; but what we are called upon to keep is the inner, deeper, unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, which, in proportion as it is kept and maintained, will grow up into an exhibition, even now more or less perfect, of that outward similitude which God shall exhibit hereafter, when He reveals in the Church the glory of Immanuel.

Failing to see this, men have been led, from the apostles’ days downward, to seek a development of the Christian Church after some particular form or other; regarding it as an external unity to be effected by them, thereby going back, in fact, to the externalism and ritualism of a past dispensation. Spiritual unity is a deep reality, and if the enquiries and aspirations of the saints of God had been directed towards its maintenance, instead of towards the enforcement of an outward unity, there [5] would have been no place for aught but those precious fruits of the Spirit, love, mercy, and truth, which would have redounded to the glory of God, wherein all saints would have been growing up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ.

After speaking of this unity of the Spirit which the Church of God is responsible for keeping, the apostle brings before us the sevenfold unity which is kept and maintained by God Himself. Into this we have been brought by virtue of our union in Christ, and in the power of it we are called now to walk; and for the measure in which we have not so walked, we shall have to answer, when we all “stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.” This unity is described by St. Paul as follows: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Eph. iv. 4–6.) This is the great central truth, around which all our Church associations are to gather, and from which all our individual life and activities must proceed; for, continues the apostle, “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ;” wherein worketh that one Spirit, towards “the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” The body is nothing less than the whole Church, the perfect bride of Christ; for which the Saviour prayed (John xvii.), that the members of it might be one, and partakers of His glory.

Opposed to this divine principle of Church unity, that finds its resting-place in heaven, its centre in Jesus, and its life in the indwelling Spirit, is Satan’s counterfeit that seeks an earthly external oneness, guarded by articles and creeds, and man’s devices, thereby to manifest a union in uniformity and not in life. This principle we see in Romanism; but there is more Romanism than that which is connected with Rome, and there are more popes than he who occupies the chair of St. Peter; and there may be bonds designed to maintain fellowship only the more enslaving because the less defined.

Besides the “great mystery” touching the oneness of the Church in heaven, of which the apostle speaks in Ephesians, there is “the mystery of the seven candlesticks,” spoken

of in the Revelation, which concerns the churches on earth. Before the throne there stands the one candlestick, with its seven [6] branches and its seven lamps of fire, as represented in the golden candlestick of the sanctuary; but on earth the candlesticks are seven, each standing on its own base, each separate and distinct, though united in the mystic number seven as having one common centre. Each stands separately under the eye of the Lord, and He whose feet are as fine brass, and His eyes as a flame of fire, walks in the midst of them. The confounding of these distinct mysteries has led to those assumptions of which the Church has been the victim from the earliest days. To stigmatize as independency, heresy, or schism, the exercise of the individual responsibility of each assembly to the Lord, as if it were subversive of the fundamental truth of the *one* Church, has been, in all ages, the effort of those who have divided the true Church of God by arrogating to themselves the name, title, functions, and dignity that belong to the whole.

On this rests much of the question at issue between Mr. Darby and his followers on the one hand, and the brethren from whom they separated on the other. If we turn to the first chapters of the Revelation, we see unmistakably the mind of the Lord revealed to us. We are there brought in vision into the holiest of holies; and in chapters iv. and v., among the things that shall be hereafter, we see the Church of the heavenlies, as figured by the living creatures and the elders, whose position, song, redemption, and dignity, all speak to us of the glory of the bride of Christ. In the preceding chapters, however, we have a picture of that which was visible on earth – the present condition and circumstances of those assemblies who are here awaiting the advent of their Lord, and who are commanded to watch, to fight, and to overcome. The whole scene is one of conflict and of trial, the exact fulfilment of that which the apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders to expect in the visible Church of God; not prosperity and rest, but a constant succession of those two great dangers – the coming in of grievous wolves among them from without, and the rising up of false teachers from within. The object of the one being to destroy, and of the other to lead away disciples after themselves. Both these evils mark the condition of the Apocalyptic churches; and He who holds the stars in His right hand walks amidst the candlesticks according to His promise – “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end,” He is amongst us still, walking up and down amongst the [7] churches; for the seven churches are not descriptive of the then state of the Church alone, but reveal that which will characterize her history all through this dispensation.

These chapters reveal to us what the presence of Jesus amongst His people really means. It is no simple promise of protection; it is a promise of that watchful care and jealous love which, walking among the assemblies, metes out to each its meed of praise and its needed warning. Each church occupies a place of its own, having an individual responsibility to the Son of man, who upholdeth them all, witnessing all that He approves, but with his eyes of fire not overlooking any departure from truth, either in doctrine or in practice. There is no charge laid to the door of one church for not having gone into the concerns of another; there is not the slightest appearance of any metropolitan relationship. The metropolitan centre was above in the glory, and all catholic claims rested there. Metropolitanism has ever been a rock on which, through the pride of man, the hopes of the children of God in Church matters have made shipwreck. The want of this common centre as a visible controlling power, man has ever sought to compensate for by some contrivance of his own. The Church has felt the weakness of her position in the earth, as Israel felt the comparative weakness of theirs among the nations, and were led to ask a king who should go before them. This source of outward weakness in Israel and in the Church was the divinely-appointed means for keeping ever alive that sense of weakness in themselves, and of strength alone in God, which was to produce dependence on God

Himself. This is just that which it is so hard for man to be content with; and in consequence of which the spirit of confederacy has been everywhere fostered, in one way or other. God's purpose appears to have been, to keep every assembly as much dependent on Himself alone as every individual is.

God's principle of individual *dependency*, as illustrated in these divinely instructive epistles, is opposed to man's principle of *confederacy*, whereby he seeks to escape from his weakness or his want of spiritual power. It is man's Babel tower, which he is ever building, that his weakness be not seen: it is his covering, wherewith he seeks to hide his poverty and nakedness.

These epistles seem written by the Lord of grace, as if to meet the very circumstances in which we find ourselves placed, where the pure gold has been dimmed, and the silver mixed [8] with dross. In this, independency is no more a denial of the oneness of the whole body of Christ, than the claim made by each Christian man to stand or fall to his own Master, can be construed into a denial of his individual fellowship in the body; for each knows that he will have to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. The Word hereafter will not be, "To the Church that overcomes;" but, "To *him*" – to the individual saint. It is "to him" that all the glorious promises here are addressed; for all local church standing ceases, when brought into the presence of the Throne, where each will have his place assigned in the body, according to a rule of individual faithfulness, not according to the measure of any collective faithfulness here, except as such bears on individual faithfulness to God, in the local relationships in which His providence may have placed him as a saint.

Such were the catholic grounds on which those called "Brethren" sought to realize a fellowship that should in its largeness be able to receive and welcome "all saints." These were the principles recognised among them at the commencement, and held as holy practical obligations in which they sought to walk, with devotedness to God in themselves, and with forbearance towards others. Each sought to have fellowship, as far as possible, with those from whom he might differ. But it is easy to begin with principles of unsectarian catholicity when those who hold them are few and feeble, and difficult to maintain them when holpen with a little strength. To hold the unity of the saints as a theory is one thing, to walk and act in the daily forbearance of grace required to keep it, is another.

At the outpouring on the day of Pentecost, "all that believed were together," and "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul, neither said any that aught of the things which he possessed was his own," and "great grace was upon them all." But after a few weeks or months had passed away, we read of murmuring in the Church (Acts vi.), as if to give a warning at the very commencement of the dispensation. This is, alas! no uncommon thing; for when the freshness of a new-found principle has passed away, when the joy of a recently discovered truth fades, when numbers increase who come into truth neither in its original love nor power, and [9] often hold it in deference to a favourite teacher, rather than in allegiance to the Lord, maintaining it rather for its own sake than for Christ's, the result inevitably is, that holding the truth out of its life-giving centre, Jesus, all ends in confusion, man ultimately taking the place of God.

To this truth of the one undivided body in Christ, which embraces all saints, we must mention another of equal importance, and that is the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church as the only source of gift, who, dividing to each man severally as he would, fitted each for his destined place in the Church of God, becoming thus the divinely appointed source of all qualification for ministry. This at once sets aside all mere human authority or

appointment in the Church; gives to office as such no place, but makes all title to ministry depend on the qualification vouchsafed by the Spirit, and the appointment as made by Christ, the Head of the Church. He takes those duly fitted, and gives them as gifts to His Church; for we read, "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints," &c. (Eph. iv. 11, 12.) These principles give to the Church a membership open to all who are in Christ, and not otherwise excluded by His express command; and a ministry open to all duly qualified and owned by the Holy Spirit, and from which all others are excluded.

CHAPTER II.

The First Plymouth Controversy between Mr. J. N. Darby and Mr. B. W. Newton.

PLYMOUTH had early become the place in which, from a variety of causes, many of the so-called "Brethren" had collected, and among them were some of those of most esteem and of most power in ministry. There was then much power as well as much grace, as those will certify who remember the earliest days of the Plymouth meetings. But little as it was generally seen, there were not wanting, even at an early period, ominous indications, that humble and unpretending beginnings were growing up into a wall of pride, which, unless watched against, would separate rather than unite the scattered members of the heavenly family. Among those who early saw the tendency of [10] things in Plymouth was the late Mr. A. N. Groves. He had been associated at the very commencement with the carrying out of the principles we have been speaking of, of an open fellowship of saints on the ground of the common life in Christ, and of an open ministry for all qualified of God. He left England in 1829, when a few were meeting in Dublin, and returned to England again in 1835, to find many in Plymouth and elsewhere meeting ostensibly on the same grounds. In moving about, however, he perceived but too plainly that they were becoming exclusive and sectarian. This led to his writing a long letter to Mr. Darby, before leaving England the second time, in which he points out, with an almost prophetic clearness, what the effect of these changes would be. As this testimony is of great importance, we will give an extract from the letter, which bears date March 10th, 1836:

"I wish you to feel assured that nothing has estranged my heart from you, or lowered my confidence in your being still animated by the same enlarged and generous purposes that once so won and riveted me; and though I feel *you have departed from those principles* by which you once hoped to have effected them, and in principle returning to the city from whence you departed, still my soul so reposes in the truth of your heart to God that I feel it needs but a step or two more to advance, and *you will see all the evils of the systems from which you profess to be separated, to spring up among yourselves*. You will not discover this so much from the workings of your own soul, as by the spirit of those who have been nurtured up from the beginning in the system, they are taught to feel the only tolerable one; that not having been led like you, and some of those earliest connected with you, through deep experimental suffering and sorrow, they are little acquainted with the real truth that may exist amidst inconceivable darkness: *there will be little pity and little sympathy* with such, and *your union daily becoming one of doctrine and opinion more than life or love*, your government will become – unseen, perhaps, and unexpressed, yet one wherein overwhelmingly is felt *the authority of men*; you will be known more by what you witness *against* than what you witness *for*, and practically this will prove that *you witness against all but yourselves*, as certainly as the Walkerites or Glassites: your Shibboleth may be different, but it will be as *real*.

"It has been asserted, as I found from your dear brother W— and others, that I have changed my principles; all I can say is, that as far as I know what those principles were, in which I gloried on first discovering them in the word of God, I now glory in them ten times more since I have experienced their applica-

“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 and not ours, we receive all that the Lord has received, all who have fled as poor sinners for refuge to the hope set before them, and rest not in themselves, but in Christ as their hope. * * * * You say, ‘Would you receive a Roman Catholic?’ If a Roman Catholic really extolled Jesus as a Saviour, and his one sacrifice of himself as the sole putting away of sin, he would have ceased to hold the error and delusion by which the enemy has misled some souls who are still, I would trust, precious to Jesus; he would cease to be a Roman Catholic, in the evil sense of the word, and on those terms only could he be with us. I repeat then, that *we receive all who are on the foundation*, and reject and put away all error by the word of God and the help of his ever-blessed, ever-living Spirit.”*

Here Mr. Darby expresses himself clearly of the original and catholic ground on which “Brethren” commenced their blessed service to the Church at large – a service designed to be so loving and so gracious in its dealing with the consciences of others, and in its bearing towards the weaknesses, infirmities, and differences of our brethren, that all might be won over to walk in unsectarian harmony and love, as heirs of the same glory, and partakers of the blessings of the same infinite atonement. Happy would it have been had Mr. Darby carried out the lesson he thus sought to teach.

Notwithstanding these catholic views thus forcibly expressed, it became increasingly manifest in Plymouth that [13] sectarianism and partizanship were becoming developed with fearful rapidity, so that while knowledge had increased, that deepest and most humbling of all knowledge – self-knowledge – had not; for where there is that, there will ever be found that growth in grace, which, as it knows how much there is to be borne with in him who possesses it, makes it easy for him to bear with others as need may require. When there is rottenness beneath the surface, and a falsity within, that denies the outward profession, matters for a while may go on externally as if all were sound; but, sooner or later, the Allwise God will allow circumstances to arise which will break up the surface, and show what lies underneath. These circumstances do not produce the evil, they only make it manifest; for God sees, and will make us to see likewise, that a hidden evil is more deadly in its results to the creature, and more dishonouring to God in the end, than an open evil that bears its condemnation on its face; even as the whitewashed Pharisee is further from the kingdom than the outcast publican. When we are deceived as to our *real* attainment, God in love comes in to detect and point out the evil He would have us to judge. If we learn the lesson and judge ourselves, well; if not, He will come in, in judgment, and put His people to an open shame, selling them as He did Israel of old into the hands of an oppressor; it may be to one of the Canaanitish kings around them, or it may be to one of themselves – an Abimelech, the son of the bondwoman, a true Ishmael, having his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him.

Mr. Darby was during this period little in Plymouth: Mr. Newton’s ministry was permanent, and he gradually drew around himself a large and influential number of those in fellowship. Differences between these teachers had long existed. Their views became more and more antagonistic, and the partizanship of the taught was every year becoming only more apparent. While grace was declining, dogmatism on both sides was on the increase, and, as a necessary result, that forbearance which can alone enable saints long to walk together, grew less and less. One result alone can follow such a state of things, and that took place in 1845. It will be unjust to regard the leaders as solely responsible for the consequences that followed. Where there is no fuel, the fire goes out; and the unholy

* See Mr. Darby’s *Correspondence with Rev. J. Kelly*, pp. 61, 64.

flames that were kindling would have been early extinguished, if the pride and partizan-ship of the body had not added fuel to the fire lighted up by the teachers.

In this melancholy year, that was to test professions of a heavenly calling made and sacred truths held (as it proved, too much in the head and too little in the heart by both teacher and scholar), Mr. Darby comes to Plymouth, and finds Mr. Newton's influence paramount. What an opportunity for grace to shine in! for Christ to triumph in the saint over self! But, alas! self triumphed over Christ on both sides of the conflict, though in different ways; and the schismatic spirit of "I am of Newton," and "I am of Darby," came in and carried all before it, but those who had been really walking before God. These could but sigh and weep for the sin and wickedness carried on in the holy name of Jesus, and keep aloof from that which so dishonoured the Lord. In Corinth, Paul would take no part in the unholy strife that was going on, amongst those who contended to belonging to Paul, to Peter, or to Apollos. He was content to remain the servant, and not to become the master; for he belonged to all, and sought to raise them out of their sectarianism, by telling them that Paul, and Cephas, and Apollos, were alike theirs – theirs to serve in the bonds of the gospel; and in the same spirit the eloquent teacher, Apollos, could not be persuaded by Paul to come among them, as if to keep himself out of sight, that the crucified Lord might eclipse himself as well as Paul.

The result of this acting in grace was, that in the second epistle we read nothing of the divisions that marked the first epistle – grace and forbearance had triumphed over self and schism. The grace of the teachers in Corinth was, however, wanting in Plymouth; and regardless of the unity of the body that had been boasted in, and the command to keep the unity of the Spirit that had been taught, Mr. Darby meets what he considers the sectarianism of another by a sectarianism of his own, which he consummates by making a division among the saints with whom he had been in fellowship from the commencement; and *that*, notwithstanding the remonstrance of most of the brethren who came from a distance to investigate the state of things in Ebrington Street, where till now all had met in fellowship. Having affected the division, he spread a table elsewhere on the last Sunday of that sorrowful and eventful year, which was in future to be exclusively "the table of the Lord," around which himself and his followers were to rally. From this meeting in December, 1845, we must date the rise of Darbyism, and its development into a distinct and self-excommunicated body, separated on grounds subversive of the great truth around which, as opposed to all sectarianism, "the Brethren" had sought to rally the saints of God; namely, that the blood of the Lamb was the basis of the union of the family of heaven: as Mr. Darby expressed it, "to receive all who are on the foundation."

The grounds of this melancholy division were, as we gather from Mr. Darby's narrative,* sectarianism, clericalism, and erroneous prophetic views. There was no charge of heresy;† there was not one Scriptural ground on which the separation could be justified;

* *Narrative of Facts*, pp. 75, 76.

† Mr. Wigram's reasons for joining Mr. Darby in this act of separation are given as follows:

"The cause of withdrawal was *not* difference of judgment upon the prophetic question, *neither* was it a question of doctrine. My act of withdrawal took place solely and simply because *a new and a human church system* had been introduced, and one which appeared to screen guilt. I am thankful for this, because while it forced me to separate from the *congregation* as such, it left me free to have fellowship with any as individuals in the congregation. *They are all accredited as Christians, and I can accredit them as such without any question.* The hinge of all this is a *new ecclesiastical polity*, having been introduced and acted upon, and avowed in Ebrington Street, new, and opposed to what I had known there from the beginning." – See *Reasons for Withdrawing from Ebrington Street*.

but, as if there had been no injunction to mutual forbearance and long-suffering, and as if the blood of the Lamb no longer constituted the sure foundation of all true fellowship here, as it is of all the fellowship in the glory; we find Mr. Darby either excommunicating the saints with whom for so many years he had been in fellowship, or perhaps more correctly, excommunicating himself; in either case, rending the body of the Lord, and saying in fact, as one of old, who had no mother's heart to yearn over the child, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it." Oh for the bowels of Christ Jesus, the heart of the loving Master, that yearned in the apostle, that would have sacrificed self a thousand times on the altar of the Lord for His body's sake! Where was the love that travailed in birth again till Christ was formed in the Galatian churches – the love that gave a mother's solicitude for the people of God that could not cut them off, though in love to them it wished that the false teachers might be even cut off for their sakes. Oh the awful sin of schism! but a [16] brother's sin is our own, ours to bear in priestly power before the altar. Let this be remembered, and a brother's sin will cause grief and not bitterness; and the dishonour to God and the shame to ourselves, we shall seek to bear in tears before our God, as did Daniel and Jeremiah. How clearly these actings prove that real love to the Lord, and value for the unity of His body had declined; that leaders wanted to maintain their own opinions and keep their own followers; and that these followers had made their leaders and their opinions the real bond of their union, instead of Christ Himself, who binds all into the same bundle of eternal life with Himself, the Lord and Master of them all. Alas! how had the fine gold thus early become dim, and the silver turned to dross. "To us belong shame and confusion of face."

It is painful to dwell on these sorrowful events in Plymouth, and the terrible sin that sought to justify the course taken by calumny and slander. Of all this the Lord is judge. As if, however, the more a recognized principle is set aside, the greater the necessity of making a boast of it, we find Mr. Darby, on the 5th of February, 1846, writing, apparently from Plymouth, as follows:

"What I felt from the beginning, and began with, was this: the Holy Ghost remains, and therefore the essential principle of unity with His presence; for 'wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' * * * * *We are not stronger, nor better than others*, dissenters, &c., but we only own our bad and lost estate, and therefore can find blessing. I do not limit what the Spirit can do for us in *our low estate*, but I take this place where He can do it. Hence *government of bodies in an authorised way* I believe there is none: where this is assumed there will be confusion. It was so here [that is in Plymouth], and it was constantly and openly said that *this was to be a model*, so that all in distant places might refer to it. My thorough conviction is, that conscience was utterly gone, save in those who were utterly miserable.

"I only therefore so far seek the original standing of the Church, as to believe that wherever two or three are gathered in His name, Christ will be, and that the Spirit of God is necessarily the only source of power, and that what He does will be blessing through the Lordship of Jesus. *These provide for all times. If more be attempted now, it will be confusion only.* If men set up to *imitate the administration of the body, it will be Popery* or dissent at once."

In these last words – prophetic, alas! of the writer's party – we most fully concur; but what may be the meaning of Mr. Darby when he says, that the "government of bodies in an authorised way" brings confusion and Popery, we may conjecture, but he has not told us. To those who know of no [17] authorised way but the word of God, such an expression sounds strange; for they know and bear witness to the fact that there is an *authorised way* that brings order; for our "God is not the author of confusion, but of order, as in all the churches." We leave it to others to comment on the "principle of unity with His presence" here spoken of in the light of the sad and sorrowful events in Plymouth, which had preceded the writing of these words only a few months. We know that the presence of

Jesus, the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is holy, is to be found – whether in the Church or in the individual – with the humble and contrite spirit that trembles at the word, and nowhere else. It is not for man to bring railing accusations; it is for him to say with the archangel to an adversary, “The Lord rebuke thee,” and to say no more. It is, however, surely our place to point out wherein a teacher in the Church of Christ turns aside from the Lord’s highway of truth, and builds again that which he once destroyed; and this not so much on his own account, as for the sake of many who, in proportion to his influence, will be led by him. Mr. Darby’s remarks on the blinding influence of a wrong course upon the soul deserve to be weighed. Writing of those opposed to him in this controversy, he says:

“There is another work often incomprehensible to one not under its influence, and that is an *incapacity to discern right and wrong*, an incapacity to see evil *where even the mere natural conscience would discern*, and an upright conscience reject at once. I speak of this *incapacity in true saints*. The truth is, the soul when under this influence is not at all in the presence of God, and *sees everything in the light of the object that governs it*. The influence of *the enemy has supplanted and taken the place of conscience*.” – See *Narrative of Facts*, p. 10.

Would that the writer and all saints could remember this “incapacity;” but, alas! we know that when the eye is blinded because they “would not” see, a state is superinduced wherein they “could not” see, after which the fearful sentence at any time may be passed, “they shall not;” and then at the judgment-seat of Christ, where all delusion shall be dissipated, they will see how much has been lost in eternity, by that which commenced in time, with a “would not.”

The course pursued by Mr. Darby and his adherents was viewed by many as subversive of the recognized grounds of Christian fellowship, necessitating a sectarian bond of union, in some truth or truths, rather than in Him who is emphatically [18] the Truth. The whole transaction acted on the minds of the wise as a solemn warning; the voice that had long been speaking in gentle whispers from the sanctuary now spoke in thunder, calling on all to examine their ways. They were led to see the precipice over which their cherished hopes might at any moment be thrown headlong, unless they repented and did their first works. There was much public confession, much private sorrow; the iron had entered into the soul, and many withdrew further and further from that exclusiveness of spirit and narrowness of mind which had perpetrated the evil, or sought to justify the course pursued.

The result was that Mr. Darby, who in 1839 gloried that he could welcome a Roman Catholic and hold fellowship with him at the Lord’s table, if he were on the foundation, ended in 1845 with refusing all fellowship with saints from whom he differed in no vital matter whatever, and saints borne witness to as Christians, even by their opponents.

CHAPTER III.

The Second Plymouth Controversy on Mr. Newton’s Doctrinal Errors.

WHENEVER the enemy has work to be done, he will, if possible, employ the Lord’s people to do it, thereby increasing its power for mischief. Those ever do the greatest mischief to any truth, who, while holding it, do not make the theory and the practice go hand in hand. The object of Satan, in the present state of things in Plymouth, was to bring into disgrace those precious truths of the heavenly calling – the unity of the Church, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – which had formed so prominent a feature in the teaching

of “the Brethren.” For upwards of a year God gave to those concerned opportunity for repentance; but instead of humiliation, there was pride; and instead of confession of sin, the justification of evil; and God again allowed the occasion to arise that should still further develop the evil that remained unconfessed and unforsaken.

The seeds sown by him who “soweth discord among brethren” in 1845 were not slow to bear fruit. In 1847, Mr. Newton, and others with him, were accused of heresy in [19] teaching that in connexion with the person of the Lord which would be subversive of the Atonement. This led to the second Plymouth controversy, in the present instance not, as in the former, touching matters of prophesy and Church order, but of doctrines touching fundamental truth. There had been much taught on all sides on the experiences of the Lord, as gathered from interpretations of the Psalms, that went beyond the truth of God; and unsound statements had been current for years in Plymouth, before that in which Mr. Newton was charged with heresy. As schism had developed itself in Mr. Darby, heresy had developed in Mr. Newton; and we find him placing our Lord, by virtue of His relation to Adam, and not vicariously, under “sentence of death,” and under the inflictions of the hand of God in wrath otherwise than as our sin-bearer. It is painful to reflect how far the truth was departed from in vain speculations on the person of the Lord, which must, if but carried out to their legitimate result, open the way for the denial of those essential verities, which an impartial reader, perusing Mr. Newton’s writings, could but see he held as well as his opposers. That love which alone can enable one to deal rightly with the errors of another was wanting; and Mr. Newton’s erroneous views were taken up, distorted, and exaggerated; and a controversy commenced that, in its character and temper, tended to cast into the shade the erroneous statements of him whom it was sought to withstand. Truth fears no error, and light dreads no darkness: this it is needful to remember, or man will come to fight the Lord’s battles with an arm of flesh. Had the truth been the only thing to have been defended in the present conflict, the antagonists of error would have been content with the “armour of light;” they would not have gone to buckle on Saul’s armour, or to use his sword and his bow; they would have been content with the five smooth stones from the brook of the water of life, and have met the evil in faith, with the sling and with the stone. The object of the war in the mind of him who wages it may ever be judged of by the weapons he makes use of: if the war is undertaken for the honour of God, He will be honoured in the manner of the conflict, as well as in its legitimate end. He who strives for masteries is not crowned unless he strive according to the laws laid down by him who has appointed the conflict. Judging of the controversy by this rule, we see truth and error, right and wrong, so lost sight of in the personal [20] animosities that reigned, that these religious disputes became a byword and a reproach – a lie on the principles professed, and a libel on the name of the Lord and Master.

How far Mr. Darby was the person to come forward against Mr. Newton, after the painful position he had occupied towards him but two years before, or how far he has before or since proved himself guiltless in this very matter, claims to be a matter of serious enquiry. Certain it is, that both before and since, Mr. Darby’s own writings on this very subject of our Lord’s experiences have been such as, to all divinely-instructed Christians, must appear very far removed from the simple statements of Scripture. Of Mr. Darby’s views on this solemn subject of the sufferings of Christ, we shall write hereafter. But when he writes, that “Jesus was for forty days in the wilderness, under the weight of actual separation from God, exactly as on the cross, when under the wrath of God” (*Words of Truth*, vol. iii. p. 364); or that “Jesus took the place of Cain in the earth, the place of the estrangement of the soul from God” (*Ibid*, p. 360); or that Christ entered in exercise of soul into “the sense of guilt under a broken law,” &c. (*The Sufferings of*

Christ, p. 31), we cannot hold him guiltless before God or His people; for in these and similar expressions it has to be borne in mind that Mr. Darby holds rightly that our blessed Lord was sin-bearer only on the cross, so that these expressions are not meant to refer to anything vicariously borne for sin. Mr. Newton, on the contrary, *now* holds the whole of the life of Christ to have been one great sin-bearing till it was consummated on the cross, and therefore explains expressions he may *now* make use of in accordance with this theory. This enables him to say that which, from Mr. Darby's point of view, would be fatal error. While saying this, it does not in the least justify or palliate Mr. Newton's remarks about the person of the Lord in the year under contemplation, holding, as he then did, that sin-bearing was confined to the cross.

The difference between Mr. Newton's views at this time of which we write, and Mr. Darby's views as since more fully brought out, is rather in regard to the time when these experiences became our Lord's, than in the experiences themselves. Both have maintained the spotlessness of the person of the blessed Lord; but both, with Mr. Irving who went before them, sought to bring the Lord within the range in [21] which each thought His full sympathy possible; seeking the fulness of the sympathy of Jesus in His manhood apart from His Godhead. Fallen man, with all his experience of sin, is only able to suffer and sympathize up to his own little measure (*μετριοπαθειν* – see Heb. v. 2 – as the Greek word used would imply); but Jesus, and Jesus only, is able fully and absolutely to suffer and sympathize with (*συμπαθειν*, Heb. iv. 15). We feel this an important point. We all need sympathy, we crave it, and Jesus in divine love has given us Himself and His heart – that heart of God which is and ever was afflicted in all the afflictions of His people; of old suffering with Israel, and now infinitely more so with those who are members of His body. But it is in the fact that He as the God-man suffered being tempted, that we have to look for the full consolation that the knowledge of the sympathy of Jesus gives. Failing to see this, Irving sought to enhance the sense of the sympathy of the Lord by making Him peccable though sinless; and those who followed Him, by giving Him a class of sufferings under the hand of God irrespective of atonement, of which the New Testament knows nothing.

As we have stated, the practical difference between Mr. Newton and Mr. Darby is one of time; the former having regarded our Lord as in grace coming into the circumstances indicated, at His birth, taking them up in His incarnation; while the latter would make it to commence at a later period; but both views equally separating these experiences and sufferings from His atoning work, and from those sufferings that came down on Him as the sin-offering of His people. But what, we would solemnly ask, is it that makes a certain measure of this theory blasphemy when taught by Mr. Newton, and “precious truth” when taught by Mr. Darby? in the one case a heresy so poisonous that contact with it would defile even to a thousandth degree, and in the other a truth wholesome and profitable? for even Mr. Darby himself acknowledges that the New Testament knows nothing of this third class of sufferings. We ask that these things be weighed in an even balance by the saints. God will do so in His own time, and in the meanwhile let none be deceived by fair words and smooth speeches. For ourselves, we would seek to warn all against such unholy speculations in connection with Him whose name is Wonderful, and would earnestly impress on all saints the absolute necessity of our aiming after more adoring [22] contemplation of that great Wonder of all wonders – the God-man, Christ Jesus; and may such contemplations take the place of all those unprofitable, unhallowing theories which in ages past made the Church an arena for everything that was unholy and unchristlike, and which of late years have drawn the minds and hearts of thousands from holiness and love, to strife and profanity.

God in letters of fire has written ICHABOD, on original principles of truth violated; on the command to walk in brotherly love trampled in the dust; but still God is true, though every man be found a liar, and His revealed truths are none the less our guide, because man in his pride has become a fool in his attempt to carry out God's purposes by his own plans in his own wisdom. It is thus that many, like David, have sought to make the ark of God ride on a new cart which has been made for it, and have to learn, as those who had gone before them, that the ark can only be borne on the shoulders of God's consecrated priests, who have to come to the service in robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. These, and these only, come to the great and holy work of carrying out God's thoughts according to the "appointed manner," and for all others a Perezuzza will be found to mark their presumption and their folly.

The result of this charge of heresy made against Mr. Newton was, that not only was the breach already made widened, but, under the plea of a zeal for the honour of Christ, a system of discipline was inaugurated which was destined to embrace under its control all those meetings that recognised Mr. Darby as their leader. Under its authority no assembly of Christians, and no individual Christian, was to be acknowledged or to be admitted into fellowship who did not carry out and endorse the course pursued towards Mr. Newton. Thus the rejection of Mr. Newton, and of all who met with him, without reference to the fact of their holding or acquiescing in his heretical statements or not, became virtually a new test of communion. Very many saw but too clearly whereunto this evil precedent of submission to the authority of man would ultimately lead, and they set their faces to resist it.

CHAPTER IV.

[23]

The Origin of the Bethesda Question.

"A LITTLE leaven leaveneth the whole lump." For this reason the wisdom of God has appointed that the vital power of all union should be found alone in Christ. "Jesus in the midst" is the central attraction of all real fellowship of one believer with another in any assembly, and is equally the only power of union and source of fellowship of one assembly with another.

The result of this divine appointment as to the fellowship of assemblies one with another is, that the relations between them are not so closely drawn as necessarily to involve one in the evils that may have crept into another. On this account Smyrna maintains its integrity, though the neighbouring church in Ephesus, through failing love, was in danger of having its candlestick taken away; and Pergamos was threatened with the sword out of the mouth of the Lord, because it allowed among them those that held the doctrine of Balaam. Philadelphia likewise stands faithful in weakness, though Sardis was ready to die, and Laodicea, through lukewarmness, about to be spued out of the Lord's mouth.

Union amongst assemblies can only be maintained either by a central union in Christ, which is godly *dependency*, or by a collateral union among themselves, which is a human *confederacy*. The former secures unity and harmony in each assembly by a direct dependence on Christ alone. This alone can truly be called walking in the Light, and therefore necessarily involving fellowship one with another (1 John i.); the latter secures uniformity of action by a certain recognised confederation among themselves. In the one case, faithfulness in an assembly will secure blessing, which will indirectly act on all around in blessing as blessed; in the other, unfaithfulness will jeopardize the prosperity of all confeder-

ated with it; and hence, while under the one principle each assembly is healthfully occupied in self-judgment on its own works and ways, under the other principle each is occupied in scrutinizing and judging the ways of others; and is in danger of being more eager to pull out the mote out of the eye of another, than to get rid of a beam from its own.

[24] To avoid these dangers and temptations to which we are ever prone, the churches of the Scriptures have their attention continually directed to their own walk and ways, and the thought of confederate churches acting as a body is as foreign to the apostolic teaching, as a confederation of tribes under a king was to the theocracy of Israel; and to us all may God's word to Samuel be brought home by the Holy Ghost: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." Hence there can be no one board of control over "the churches of God," nor any controlling man-appointed person. Each assembly is under loving obligation to keep the spiritual condition of neighbouring assemblies before its notice, as a matter for thanksgiving or for sorrow, as the case may be; and while this will necessarily affect the measure of its fellowship with that assembly; the action of each assembly as to its approval or disapproval of individuals, and as to its reception or putting away, is limited to such as "come unto" that assembly (see 2 John 10), or belong to it already.

More or less, however, for some years, the notion of a visible corporate standing, and of a confederate action that would bind all to its control, had, with not a few, taken the place of that simple church fellowship once so fully recognised. The result was, that when Mr. Darby set himself to enforce the course adopted in Plymouth in 1845 and 1847 on all associated with them, he found but too many under his guidance and that of others ready to make their rule and measure a church law, to which implicit obedience should be demanded of all individuals and of all assemblies, and without submission to which no Christian fellowship would be allowed. But when a corporate responsibility to man is thus assumed, it will ultimately set aside real responsibility to the Lord, and lead those under its influence to act on the judgment of others, apart from a knowledge of facts or a conscience of right and wrong.

God so ordered it that the anathemas which had divided the believers in Plymouth should fall upon the saints assembling at Bethesda, in Bristol, who had been gathered through the ministry of Messrs. Müller and Craik, with whom up to this time Mr. Darby had held full communion. As Bethesda formed the centre around which the storm was to gather, so was it, in the grace of God, to become the bulwark of the original grounds of fellowship, of receiving all who love Christ. [25] There was an open table for all saints, and an open ministry to all gifted of God; and there was also pastoral oversight and co-operation touching the well-being of the saints.

From the prominence that Bethesda has occupied in these matters, it will be necessary to say a few words in reference to it. The church meeting there did not own its origin in any wise to those who had been connected with Plymouth, though brethren coming from thence found a ready welcome for fellowship and ministry. Messrs. Müller and Craik had come from Devonshire to Bristol in 1832. When labouring together in Teignmouth, Mr. Müller had commenced the weekly breaking of bread connected with an open ministry, more than three months before any thing of the kind was known in Plymouth, and even while the majority of those who afterwards took the most prominent place there, were still members of the Establishment, and when Mr. Darby, who had just arrived from Ireland, was preaching in the pulpits of the "Church of England."

In those early days it will be remembered by some still how Mr. Müller preached the return of the Lord, and inculcated those important principles of entire separation from the world, which then marked the teachings and the life of "the Brethren" generally. There

was also that practical walking by faith, in connection with which Mr Müller remarks in his life, that the example of Mr. A. N. Groves, who had just then gone to Bagdad, had greatly encouraged him. It is interesting to trace the early connection between these men of God, who were subsequently to be united in the flesh, as well as in the Lord, and who were to stand together as helpers in the conflict of 1848, of which we are about to write. Of Mr. Craik it may be well just to observe that he had been between the years 1826 and 1828 in Exeter, under the roof of Mr. Groves, at the time when the mind of the latter was exercised about entering the ministry of the "Church of England," and which he was obliged to give up, as the Lord had revealed to him the real character of Christian ministry, and the true grounds of Christian fellowship. These truths Mr. Groves, feeling deeply the importance of, sought to impress on the minds of those over whom he had influence; so that, as Mr. Craik said to the writer, "it was not at St. Andrew's, it was not at Plymouth, it was at Exeter that the Lord taught me those lessons of dependence on Himself and of catholic fellowship, which I have sought to carry out." On these points Mr. Müller and [26] Mr. Craik were fully in harmony, and which, through upwards of thirty-six years, till the lamented death of the latter, they laboured together to maintain.

While Mr. Müller was at Teignmouth, Mr. Craik was at Shaldon, a village close by, where for some years he had been labouring for the Lord. It was there that they were first drawn together; and when in 1832 it was proposed to Mr. Craik to come to Bristol, he only consented to do so on the condition that his brother and fellow-labourer would go there too. Bethesda Chapel was at that time for hire, and was taken for them by a gentleman who had heard Mr. Craik preach; and entering on its bare walls, they laboured together during a period of more than three and thirty years. This circumstance is mentioned because of the false assertion often made, that the church at Bethesda was originally the remains of a Baptist congregation. These brethren belonged to no denomination, but brought to Bristol with them those views of church-fellowship and of faith which had marked them in Devonshire, and which led to their being considered by both churchmen and dissenters as occupying the anomalous position of belonging to no party, and who without personal resources were content, as it was said at the time, "to minister without salary, and to accommodate their hearers without pew rents." But the Lord whom they served has these many years showed that "those who honour Him He will honour." The Lord has so caused the light of the saints gathered in fellowship to shine abroad, that persons from Holland, Sweden, France, Portugal, and other places far and near, have come to learn the way of the Lord more perfectly, and to know the secret of that *order, harmony, and fellowship* which has for so many years characterized them.

It is further an interesting fact, that there are many assemblies meeting in the North of Ireland, the fruit of the late revival there, which owe their present liberty of church communion and ministry to reading Mr. Müller's *Narrative*; and one who is now with the Lord, and was used as the instrument in the Lord's hand of the awakening in those parts, acknowledged to the writer when he met him at Kells, in 1858, as he did subsequently in Bristol, that the sense of the reality of prayer which he had obtained from reading Mr. Müller's *Narrative*, led him to seek for that faith in reference to the conversion of sinners, which resulted in that remarkable revival which then began in the North of Ireland.

[27] In 1832 the first seven members were received into fellowship in Bethesda. That year cholera broke out, and the Lord wonderfully blessed the ministry of the Word to the conversion of many a poor sinner; and from that small commencement has the Lord been adding continually to the church, till the number in fellowship at present stands about twelve hundred. It will not fail to be noticed by those who have much intercourse with these saints, particularly with the poorer class, how much the paths of practical godliness

and of living faith that have been taught and lived have been owned of God, in leading them to follow in the footsteps of those who have sought to be examples to the flock in daily life, not only “in word,” but also “in behaviour, in charity, in faith, in purity.” Such was the position occupied by Bethesda; and Mr. Wigram, after the disruption, writing in reference to this time, says: “Time was once when Bethesda was Nazarite in character, and derided by the world and by dissenters, and I gloried in fellowship with her reproach.”*

When the troubles arose in Plymouth, in 1845, the Bethesda brethren continued to act on their avowed principles of receiving all saints, and welcomed those who came from Mr. Newton’s meeting and those who came from Mr. Darby’s without distinction, seeking to act in grace towards all.

When, however, the second controversy arose in Plymouth, in 1847, their position with respect to these parties was materially altered. The views advocated by Mr. Newton rendered it necessary to exercise watchfulness and care in receiving those who came from under his teaching; but on the other side, however, there was no sympathy with Mr. Darby’s high-handed and unchristian course. If, however, it was felt needful to keep aloof from Mr. Newton’s teachings and Mr. Darby’s actings, it must not be supposed the brethren in Bristol were idle spectators of the sad events that were taking place in Plymouth. The disruption there had from the first been to the leading brethren in Bristol a matter of the most profound regret, and deep heartfelt sorrow. It was again and again brought before the Lord, in prayer and confession, that, if possible, He would rise on behalf of His people, and heal the breaches Satan had caused. The leading brethren thus stirred up to pray, sought to learn the lesson God would teach, but they earnestly desired, if possible, to preserve the saints with whom they worshipped [28] from having anything whatever to do with the unholy strife that was going on; and for this no one will blame them who knows the withering effect such controversies have on all spirituality and all godliness, and far more so when carried on in the spirit that was manifested in Plymouth.

While this was the desire of the brethren generally, there were a few who sympathized very strongly with Mr. Darby, and from the commencement were earnest in their endeavours to induce the Brethren in Bethesda to take up and carry out his views, and enforce his discipline [sic]; but the Brethren were immovable, determined to meet each case as it might arise in the grace the Lord might give, and not to bring the discussion of the controversy before the saints as a body.

In April, Colonel and Mr. Woodfall arrived at Bristol, and, as usual, desired fellowship, having for years at different times broken bread at Bethesda whenever coming into the neighbourhood. Those acting with Mr. Darby objected to their being received, because they were known to be friends of Mr. Newton, though holding none of his peculiar views. Colonel W. was, however, ultimately received, as he had been lately abroad, while the recent events had been going on in Plymouth; but as the objections against Mr. Woodfall were stronger, it was determined by the leading brethren that he should be visited; and that there might be no supposed partiality in his favour, the three brethren most opposed to his reception were requested to call and see him, so as to satisfy their minds as to the soundness of his views. He was visited, and at length received, on the testimony of those brethren, as they found no scriptural ground for refusing him the rights of Christian fellowship.

* See *Present Question*, p. 35.

At a subsequent meeting of the brethren, however, those three brethren complained that the examination had been put upon them, and further, that the Church had taken the credit of the investigation. To this Mr. Craik, who was present, replied that *their* being appointed to inquire into the matter had been suggested by himself, and he had this comfort in it, that it got rid of the difficulties that would have arisen otherwise. If he himself had gone, it might have been said he had had an intimacy of years with Mr. Woodfall; and even if Mr. Müller had joined him in the investigation, it might have been said that their apprehension of the evil was so inadequate that they were incompetent to deal with it. He therefore felt that [29] when those three brethren went, who were most opposed to his admission, and most awake to its apprehended evils, that if *they* were satisfied, all would be so. Mr. Meredith and another brother present at the meeting confirmed Mr. Craik's view of the matter by saying that they had been satisfied in receiving both Mr. Woodfall and his brother into communion on these three brethren stating that they could not further object.

Besides Colonel and Mr. Woodfall, two others, and two others only, regarded by some as partizans of Mr. Newton, were received, after full examination as to the soundness of their faith, notwithstanding their personal regard for Mr. Newton; and these were a Mrs. Brown and a Miss Hill. On this matter Lord Congleton writes:

“It is manifest that persons *known as holding* Mr. Newton's errors have never been received in Bethesda. Four persons known as friends of Mr. Newton's, and as disallowing that he holds the doctrines laid to his charge, have been received, but *never have any persons known as holding Mr. Newton's errors been received into communion.*”*

This statement, made by Lord Congleton in June, 1849, after having made all enquiries at the time, and confirmed as it is by those now in fellowship, is of importance, because contrary statements have been again and again put forth; but whatever may have been at any time assigned as the ground of complaint against Bethesda, the real ground all along has been their determined resistance to the dictation of man in the things of God. They would not surrender their liberty in Christ, nor subject their views of right and wrong to the rule of another man's conscience, however much he might claim the guidance of the Spirit; especially when the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, truth, were wanting; for the prophet is to be judged of, not by the authority he assumes, but by the fruits he manifests, and by the power and grace he displays.

About the 20th of April, 1848, after the reception of Col. Woodfall and his brother, Mr. Darby came to Bristol, and as usual called on Mr. Müller, by whom he was asked to preach the following Sunday evening at Bethesda. This is mentioned as showing that up to this time no breach between Mr. D. and Bethesda had taken place. In the intercourse between them nothing passed that indicated the course that a few days later [30] Mr. Darby initiated. Mr. Darby stated his inability to preach in Bethesda, having previously engaged to preach somewhere on his road to Exeter. But notwithstanding this friendly intercourse, not many days after, he intimated publicly, at a large meeting of labouring brethren in Exeter, that he could no more go to Bethesda because the Woodfalls had been received. All were not prepared for this hasty manner of withdrawal, and it was asked whether any intimation had been given to those concerned, before so solemn an act as separation took place. This had not been done, though subsequently, on the remonstrance of others, Mr. D. did write a letter from Exeter to Mr. Müller, intimating his decision in

* See *Bristol Case*, by Lord Congleton, p. 3.

the matter, and thus closed the fellowship which for years had been maintained. We are now painfully accustomed to these acts of wholesale schism at the hands of the originators and followers of this Darbyite discipline; but in those days, notwithstanding all that had taken place in Plymouth, it seemed a strange and unheard-of procedure, and led to remonstrances from all sides. But the course had been determined on, and it was evident there would be no drawing back.

The demand made on Bethesda was, that there should be *a church investigation* of Mr. Newton's views, and *a church condemnation* of them; and Mr. Darby expressed his determination to remain in separation from them till that was carried out. Amongst those in fellowship at this time, who were active supporters of Mr. D.'s opinion, we need only mention by name Mr. Alexander, who, with two others, were the three brethren already alluded to. Repeatedly did these three brethren seek to induce the other brethren to meet the demand; again and again was it brought by them before the Friday meeting;* but the more the matter was looked into, the more unadvisable did the step appear, for various reasons which will be stated at length hereafter. These reasons, however, did not satisfy Mr. Alexander and his friends, who still contended that the question ought to be taken up *by the church*, and that they found their consciences compromised if it were not. To this it was replied that they were quite at liberty to call a meeting of the church at any time, and to bring the whole matter forward; but that they ought to respect the consciences of their brethren, and not require of them to [31] join in what they conscientiously regarded as calculated to have a most injurious effect on the minds of the saints at large, leading them into vain and unholy speculations. This proposition, however, was objected to, and at length at their last meeting Mr. Alexander said that he would waive the question, and it was supposed it was given up.

It was with no little surprise that two or three days after, without any intimation of such a course, Mr. Alexander issued a letter addressed to the brethren meeting at Bethesda, and announcing that he had withdrawn from fellowship, while in reference to those from whom he separates, he writes: "I desire to state that I have met none here whom I do not love individually, and desire to love, and cannot be separated from as individuals, and some whom I must ever very highly esteem in love for their work's sake." Did the apostle ever separate from such? Let the whole testimony of the word answer this solemn question; but, alas! how rapidly does the spirit of schism spread as an unholy leaven that mars and defiles all under its influence. That spirit which led Mr. Darby and those with him to separate from Ebrington Street in 1845 leads Mr. Alexander and others to separate from Bethesda in 1848.

The reasons assigned by Mr. Alexander for secession were: firstly, that many of the Lord's people *may* be excluded from fellowship for conscience' sake; secondly, that persons *may* come in from Plymouth holding these doctrines; and thirdly, there *may* be a suspicion of supporting a doctrine that dishonours Christ. He thus withdraws, not on the ground of any thing that *had* taken place, but because he feared one or all of these things *might* take place. This letter was printed, and a copy of it sent to all in fellowship. The result of this was, that the minds of very many were tried, and some were painfully exercised at the charge of indifference to the honour of Christ. This called forth much prayer, and after hours of waiting upon the Lord in the matter, it was deemed advisable that the labouring brethren should state to the church the grounds on which they had acted; and that they might express their *collective* judgment the more unitedly, it was thought advis-

* A meeting at Bethesda for labouring brethren for matters connected with the church.

able to give expression to their views in a written statement, to be signed by all the brethren who had principally taken part in the matter. This document was neither a creed nor a church rule: it was to lay down no course of procedure [32] for the future; it contained no authoritative rule of faith; but was intended only to state the reasons that led those signing it to refuse to bring certain views before the church at large, and to have a formal church judgment expressed on them.

As this letter, designated *The Letter of the Ten*, has been made use of to cause and to maintain a separation among fellow-saints throughout the world, we feel it necessary to give it in full, and to append such observations and explanations as may seem needed. Before going into this matter, however, we raise a protest against the principle involved, that brethren are justified in making an act done or left undone twenty-eight years ago a ground for maintaining a separation now. In the dread of a present danger, many may be almost excused for extreme measures; their fears magnify the danger; but when years have passed, and the danger of complicity has passed away, can a present separation be justified on the ground of a document that with the occasion passed away, which contained no rule for future guidance, and expressed no obligation on the conscience of any, either to approve the past or to enforce concurrence in any similar line of action for the future? The letter may have been right, or it may have been wrong; in neither case can scriptural warrant be found for separation, while those acting on it were acting in all good conscience. We would entreat all implicated in these divisions, and all whose hearts may yet mourn over separation and discord everywhere, that now, for the Lord's sake, after so many years of sorrow, the question at issue be again weighed in its present bearing, and judged of, not in the embittered memories of the past, but in the light of the facts and circumstances of the present.

The letter was addressed to those who were in fellowship, and was read out at a church meeting in Bethesda, June 29th, 1848, as follows:

“DEAR BRETHREN, – Our brother, Mr. George Alexander, having printed and circulated a statement expressive of his reasons for withdrawing from visible fellowship with us at the table of the Lord, and these reasons being grounded on the fact that those who labour among you have not complied with his request relative to the judging of certain errors which have been taught at Plymouth, it becomes needful that those of us who have incurred any responsibility in this matter should lay before you a brief explanation of the way in which we have acted.

“And first, it may be well to mention that we had no intimation whatever of our brother's intention to act as he has done, nor any knowledge of his intention to circulate any letter, until it was put into our hands in print.

[33] “Some weeks ago he expressed his determination to bring his views before a meeting of the body, and he was told he was quite at liberty to do so.

“He afterwards declared that he would waive this, but never intimated in the slightest way his intention to act as he has done, without first affording the church an opportunity of having his reasons for separation.

“Under these circumstances, we feel it of the deepest importance for relieving the disquietude of mind, naturally occasioned by our brother's letter, explicitly to state that the views relative to the person of our blessed Lord held by those who for sixteen years have been occupied in teaching the Word amongst you are *unchanged*.

“The truths relative to the divinity of His person, the sinlessness of His nature, and the perfection of His sacrifice, which have been taught both in public teaching and in writing for these many years past, are, through the grace of God, those which we still maintain.

“We feel it most important to make this avowal, inasmuch as the letter referred to is calculated, we trust unintentionally, to convey a different impression to the minds of such as cherish a godly jealousy for the faith once delivered to the saints.

“We add, for the further satisfaction of any who may have had their minds disturbed, that we utterly disclaim the assertion that the blessed Son of God was involved in the guilt of the first Adam, or that He was born under the curse of the broken law, because of His connection with Israel. We hold Him to have been always the Holy One of God in whom the Father was ever well pleased.

“We know of no curse which the Saviour bore, except that which He endured as the surety for sinners. According to that Scripture, ‘He was made a curse for us.’

“We utterly reject the thought of His ever having had the experiences of an unconverted person; but maintain that while He suffered *outwardly* the trials connected with His being a man and an Israelite, still, in His feelings and experience, as well as in His external character, He was ‘entirely separate from sinners.’”

This preamble shows how clearly those who signed the letter had perceived the *tendencies* of the views in question, and how fully and carefully, as those placed “to guard the sheep,” they had set themselves on their watch to maintain sound teaching touching the person of the blessed Lord, whether as to His perfect Godhead, or spotless and perfect manhood, which had been jeopardized in more ways than one. In this they sought to bring truth to bear on the consciences of the saints, and thus fortify them against the inroads of heresy. One by no means friendly to Bethesda writes that this part of the letter is “in fact a reply to Mr. Newton’s errors *seriatim*.” This was just what this part of the letter was designed to be – a solemn protest against those views which it was not thought expedient to disturb the minds of the saints about as long as it was possible to keep them outside.

The letter further says –

[34] “We now proceed to state the grounds on which we have felt a difficulty in complying with the request of our brother, Mr. Alexander, that we should *formally investigate* and *give judgment* on certain errors which have been taught among Christians meeting at Plymouth.”

This clause tells us what they could not consent to; *viz.*, *formally to investigate* and *as a church pass judgment*; and to this we would give special prominence, because by some the question at issue between the Ten and Mr. Alexander and those with him has been entirely misunderstood. It has been assumed that this letter contained a refusal of the leading Brethren to investigate for themselves the evil doctrines at Plymouth, so as to enable them to keep out the evil should it arise amongst, or come into the midst of those in fellowship. What was demanded was something very different; it was that the matter should be *formally* investigated, and *judgment given* on it. It was THIS and THIS ONLY that was objected to, and this point we will notice again hereafter. It was felt a solemn thing to commit the church to a “formal judgment” on a matter as yet not immediately connected with them, involving an act of excommunication on one or more who had been looked up to as Christians for years. To those who are accustomed to cut off with a wholesale excommunication alike the precious and the vile, this godly sensitiveness may not be understood.

We now take up the nine reasons given in this letter for not pronouncing a *judicial church sentence* on Mr. Newton and his views, and shall append a few remarks –

“1st. We considered from the beginning that it would not be for the comfort or edification of the saints here, nor for the glory of God, that *we in Bristol* should get entangled in the controversy connected with the doctrines referred to. We do not feel that because errors may be taught at Plymouth or elsewhere, therefore we, *as a body, are bound* to investigate them.”

This clause has been objected to, because it is said to deny the unity of the body. That there were no seclusive principles intended to be advocated in this letter, is plain from the desire expressed a little lower down, “to maintain *fellowship with all believers*;” and to

be “*particularly associated with those who meet, as we do, simply in the name of the Lord Jesus.*” The assertion here made is merely that “we in Bristol,” *i. e.* the church meeting in Bethesda, are not *ipso facto* bound to investigate “*as a body*” what is done in Plymouth; and further, that the only grounds on which they could feel themselves [35] justified to take *church action* on that or any matter would be, that it was demanded, either by what was needed for “the comfort or edification of the saints” in Bristol, or for “the glory of God.” There was no desire on the part of the leaders to stand aloof from the trials of many tried ones in Plymouth; but it was earnestly and persistently maintained that evil, and only evil, could result from bringing these matters before the church as long as almost all were in happy ignorance of what had wrought such untold sorrow elsewhere, and brought such sad dishonour upon the Lord. Before it can be demanded of those “in Bristol” to investigate and judge corporately what was taking place in Plymouth, we require proof from Scripture that such a demand is made by Christ upon churches meeting in His name. From the Epistles to the Seven Churches we assuredly gather, that while each church is held responsible most solemnly and earnestly to keep out evil, and to walk in separation to the Lord in life and doctrine, no external jurisdiction is given. The unity of the body is an out-growing of the unity of the Spirit, and every attempt to make the former will end only in confusion, or in lifeless formalism; it will be, as Mr. Darby has already told us, “Popery or dissent at once.”

We have dwelt on this because a valued brother, strongly opposed to the principles he thinks are contained in this letter, writes in reference to this subject, “This is to my mind the main question at issue.” We believe it to be so, and have no doubt that had correct views been held by all concerned, on the relation of one church to another on earth, we should never have seen the counter opinion develop itself into a claim to stand as “the one assembly of God.” We are not surprised that those who have fallen into this delusion should hate a letter that resists that principle on which their claim rests. But the poison of this doctrine has been drunk into more or less by many who abhor its developed manifestation, and who therefore object to the position taken by those in Bristol in this matter.

“2nd. The practical reason alleged why we should enter upon the investigation of certain tracts issued from Plymouth was that thus we might be able to know how to act with reference to those who might visit us from thence, or who are supposed to be adherents of the author of the said publications. In reply to this we have to state that the views of the writer alluded to could only be *fairly learned* from the examination of his own acknowledged writings. We did not feel that we should be warranted [36] in taking our impressions of the views actually held by him, from any other source, than from some treatise written by himself, and professedly explanatory of the doctrines advocated. Now there has been such *variableness in the views* held by the writer in question, that it is difficult to ascertain what he would *now* acknowledge as his.”

The reason here given for refusing a church investigation is the variableness of the views upheld, added to which there was this increased difficulty in ascertaining “what Mr. Newton would NOW acknowledge,” that the tracts had been withdrawn for reconsideration; and this uncertainty as to his exact views was not cleared up till some weeks afterwards, when he issued another tract, in which he re-asserted most of his erroneous views, though in a somewhat modified form. Surely this was ground enough to suspend the giving a *church condemnation of any person*; nay, should it not be regarded as unchristian to deal in any other way under such circumstances, hoping, if possible, the offender might recover himself out of the snare into which he had fallen.

“3rd. In regard to these writings, Christian brethren, hitherto of unblemished reputation for soundness in the faith, have come to different conclusions as to the actual amount of error contained in them. The tracts some of us knew to be written in such an *ambiguous style*, that we greatly shrunk from the responsibility of giving *any formal judgment* on the matter.”

“4th. As approved brethren in different places have come to such different conclusions in reference to the amount of error contained in these tracts, we could neither desire nor expect that *the saints here* would be satisfied with the decision of one or two leading brethren. Those who felt desirous to satisfy their own minds would be naturally led to wish to peruse the writings for themselves. For this many amongst us have no leisure time; many would not be able to understand what the tracts contain because of the mode of expression employed; and the result, there is much reason to fear, would be such perverse disputations and strife of words, as minister questions rather than godly edifying.”

The saints in fellowship in Bethesda had not been trained into a blind acquiescence in the decision of one or more leading brethren, and that which has become a practice and rule of procedure among Mr. Darby’s followers had met with no countenance either among the leaders or in the church at large, – a practice which will ever demoralize those under its influence, by binding the decisions of the few on the consciences of the many, in matters of which they know nothing, and yet on the ground of which they are compelled to act.

“5th. Even some of those who now condemn the tracts as containing doctrine essentially unsound, did not so understand them on the first perusal. Those of us who were specially requested to investigate and judge the [37] errors contained in them felt, that under such circumstances there was but little probability of our coming to unity of judgment, touching the nature of the doctrines therein embodied.”

Let those who allowed Mr. Newton’s views to ripen gradually so long before 1848 answer the question suggested here. Let *them* answer it who would, alas! have been rejoiced to have found him as great a heretic in 1845 as they found him out to be two or three years afterwards. The fact is, Mr. N. was not alone responsible for those views which he first brought into unfortunate prominence, and which have since been matured by Mr. Darby himself in that class of sufferings which he would make the Lord to pass through, of which the New Testament knows nothing, of which we shall speak hereafter.

“6th. Even supposing that those who inquired into the matter had come to the same conclusion, touching the amount of positive error therein contained, this would not have guided us in our decision respecting individuals coming from Plymouth. For supposing *the author of the tracts* were fundamentally heretical, 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, especially as those meeting at Ebrington Street, Plymouth, last January put forth a statement disclaiming the errors charged against the tracts.”

The invariable practice was for persons coming from *known* heretical teachers not to be received except on the renunciation of the errors and the relinquishing of fellowship with the false teacher. This had been the course pursued for the sixteen years before the letter was written, and has been the course pursued ever since. This is confirmed by the following letter from Mr. Craik:

“Bristol, Monday, Nov. 25, 1849.

“MY DEAR BROTHER, – In reply to your letter of inquiry, touching certain points contained in what has been called *The Letter of the Ten*, I beg to remark, that although we did not consider the fact of error having been taught at Plymouth or elsewhere as a sufficient reason for our bringing the matter *before the body here*, yet I fully allow that if we were satisfied that the well-being of the saints here required our investigating and judging any particular form of error, it would be our duty to do so.

“In reference to the objection against our paper, grounded on the statement that ‘even supposing the author of the tracts were fundamentally heretical, 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 unsound,’ I beg to remark that in all ordinary cases, and as a general rule of action, persons coming from a known heretical teacher would not be received amongst us, except on the understanding that they had renounced his errors and relinquished the body amongst whom the false doctrine was taught and maintained.

[38] “During these seventeen years past this has been our mode of acting, neither do I know of a single instance in which persons previously connected with heretical bodies have applied to us for communion, and been received amongst us, without, by that very act, relinquishing the connection with their former associates. This has been the general understanding amongst us during these seventeen years past.

“I am satisfied that the other brethren who labour amongst us accord with the explanations I have just given.

“Hoping that these explanations may be satisfactory,

“I remain, my dear brother, yours affectionately in Christ,

“To T. M., Bath.

“HENRY CRAIK.”

Surely the practice of saints for nearly half a century should be enough fully to satisfy any upright mind, even if in the judgment of some, ambiguity may attach itself to the expressions here made use of; and yet some affirm, that this clause would open the door to Socinianism, or any other form of known heresy! The passage as it stands has an exclusive reference to “*The Author of the Tracts*,” about whose real views there was both uncertainty and ambiguity; and surely the righteous Lord who loves righteousness – He who ever discerns between things that differ, and remembers the “some good thing” found in a son of Jeroboam, would never regard those who held fellowship with Mr. Newton, ignorant of his views, or denying that he ever held what was imputed to him, as he would regard those who went to and had fellowship with an avowed Socinian, whose views they did know. There was in the present case every call for caution and care in connection with Plymouth, and this was not wanting; for the course pursued in Bethesda was to examine all who came from thence on whom any suspicion rested, and more than *that* it was not deemed advisable to do in the present state of the case. To execute a wholesale excommunication needs only a high hand and a hard heart; but it requires much patient forbearance and grace to exercise a holy, righteous, discriminating discipline in the fear of God, treating the saints of God as they are treated by Him, and as He commands us to treat them, not promiscuously as a whole, but patiently one by one: “of some having compassion making a difference,” and “some saving with fear, pulling them out of the fire.”

“7th. The requirement that we should investigate and judge Mr. Newton’s Tracts, appeared to some of us like *the introduction of a fresh test of communion*. It was demanded of us that in addition to a sound confession and a corresponding walk, we should *as a body come to a formal decision* about what many of us might be quite unable to understand.”

[39] It was feared that this *requirement to judge* would become *a test of communion*, and so it has proved in the case of all who have bowed their necks to the yoke of this anti-christian discipline. This result, which was inevitable from the course pursued, Bethesda instinctively shrunk from; and in order to preserve their simplicity as it is in Christ, determined to keep themselves clear of all that the word of God bound not upon their own individual conscience.

“8th. We remembered the word of the Lord, that ‘the beginning of strife is as the letting out of water.’ We were well aware that the great body of believers amongst us were in happy ignorance of the Plymouth controversy, and we did not feel it well to be considered as identifying ourselves with either party. We judged that this controversy had been so carried on as to cause the truth to be evil spoken of; and we do not desire to be considered as identifying ourselves with that which has caused the opposer to reproach the way of the Lord. At the same time we wish it distinctly to be understood that we would seek to maintain *fellowship with all believers; and we consider ourselves as particularly associated with those who meet as we do, simply in the name of the Lord Jesus.*”

This clause contains an unpardonable crime, in the eye of the domineering spirit that prevailed, and that is, the bold avowal of wishing to belong neither to the party of Mr.

Newton nor to that of Mr. Darby. It was too independent a place to be tolerated for a moment by those incipiently aspiring to the exalted position of “the one assembly,” that was to be ruled over by some Diotrephes or other, one or more; while it states in the strongest terms the earnest desire of the brethren in Bethesda, not only for fellowship with all saints, but for particular fellowship with those who meet simply in the name of the Lord Jesus.

“9th. We felt that the compliance with Mr. Alexander’s request would be the introduction of an evil precedent. If a brother has a *right to demand* our examining a work of fifty pages, he may require our investigating error said to be contained in one of much larger dimensions; so that all our time might be wasted in the examination of other people’s errors, instead of more important service.

“It only remains to notice the three reasons specially assigned by Mr. Alexander in justification of his course of action. To the first – viz., ‘That by our not judging this matter many of the Lord’s people will be excluded from communion with us’ – we reply, that unless our brethren can prove either that error is held and taught among us, or that individuals are received into communion who ought not to be admitted, they can have no scriptural warrant for withdrawing from our fellowship. We would affectionately entreat such brethren as may be disposed to withdraw from communion for the reason assigned to consider that, except they can prove allowed evil in life or doctrine, they cannot, without violating the [40] principles on which we meet, treat us as if we had renounced the faith of the gospel.

“In reply to the second reason – viz., ‘That persons may be received from Plymouth holding evil doctrines’ – we are happy in being able to state that ever since the matter was agitated, we have maintained that persons coming from thence, if suspected of any error, would be liable to be examined on the point; that in the case of one individual who had fallen under the suspicion of certain brethren amongst us, not only was there private intercourse with him relative to his views, as soon as it was known that he was objected to, but the individual referred to, known to some of us for several years as a consistent Christian, actually came to a meeting of labouring brethren for the very purpose that any question might be asked him by any brother who should have any difficulty on his mind.

“Mr. Alexander himself was the principal party in declining the presence of the brother referred to on that occasion, such enquiry being no longer demanded, inasmuch as the difficulties relative to the views of the individual in question had been removed by private intercourse. We leave Mr. Alexander to reconcile this fact, which he cannot have forgotten, with the assertion contained under his second special reason for withdrawing.

“In regard to the third ground alleged by Mr. Alexander – viz., ‘That by not judging the matter we lie under the suspicion of supporting false doctrine’ – we have only to refer to the statement already made at the commencement of this paper.

“In conclusion, we would seek to impress upon all present the evil of treating the subject of our Lord’s humanity as a matter of speculative or angry controversy. One of those who have been ministering among you from the beginning feels it a matter of deep thankfulness to God that so long ago as in the year 1835 he committed to writing, and subsequently printed, what he had learned from the Scripture of truth relative to the meaning of that inspired declaration, ‘The Word was made flesh.’ He would affectionately refer any whose minds may be now disquieted to what he then wrote, and was afterwards led to publish. If there be heresy in the simple statements contained in the letters alluded to, let it be pointed out; if not, let all who are interested in the matter know that we continue unto the present day ‘speaking the same things.’”

(Signed)

HENRY CRAIK,	EDMUND FELTHAM,
GEORGE MÜLLER,	JOHN WITHEY,
JACOB HENRY HALE,	SAMUEL BUTLER,
CHARLES BROWN,	JOHN MEREDITH,
ELIJAH STANLEY,	ROBERT AITCHESON.

Happy would it have been for all, had the caution given in the opening sentence of the last paragraph been borne in mind; and henceforth may all remember the Lord’s word to

Moses, when in the presence of His glory in the burning bush, he turned aside to gaze, "Put thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

The letter was read to the church, with full and ample explanations verbally given to clear up any difficulty that [41] might arise. Mr. Wigram afterwards published this letter, with his animadversions, in *The Present Question* – animadversions the tone and character of which we will leave to another, who wrote at the time, to describe:

"We could write much in reference to this paper, *The Letter of the Ten*, and to the notes and comments annexed to it in *The Present Question*; but we cannot trust ourselves to compare the holy calmness and scriptural reasoning of the text with the unhallowed rage and unauthorised dogmatism of the commentator. Suffice it to say that this much-abused letter contains not a sentence on which a candid mind can found the charge of adherence of any kind, or in any degree, to the heresy. Its chief object is to state the causes of the unwillingness of those who signed it to lay the subject before the church. Any one is at liberty to differ from these brethren in judgment, and to think that under the circumstances of the case it might have been better, out of condescension to weak brethren, to resign themselves to the painful task of examining the errors in question; but let it be remembered that these brethren were occupied with far nobler and more useful labours, and that having sat at the feet of that Teacher whose commandment is 'Love one another,' they naturally shrunk from following in the footsteps of those who, beginning with apparent zeal for the honour of the great Head of the church, had ended with heaping abuse on the members of His body, and with bringing some of the bitterest fruits of the flesh – anger, wrath, malice, clamour, and evil-speaking – to a perfection which, happily, is seldom to be found among those who profess to follow Christ."*

Of this letter Mr. Müller writes in Sept. 18, 1866:

"21, Paul Street, Kingsdown, Bristol, Sept. 18th, 1866.

"MY DEAR BROTHER, – With regard to your letter respecting a paper commonly called *The Letter of the Ten*, I send you this as my reply.

"As a body or assembly *we have no standard but the word of God*; no code of laws, or regulations, or church principles, but those contained therein. We desire in all things to be subject to the word of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The paper to which you refer was never intended to be more than a mere statement of facts and explanation of reasons for pursuing the course which the labouring brethren thought to be *right at that time, under the peculiar circumstances of the case*. It is to be regarded as *having passed away* with the occasion which gave rise to it. That paper was never intended for publication, and was read to the church with explanations. It should not have been published without our consent, or without the explanations which accompanied the reading of it.

"I am, my dear brother,

"Yours affectionately in the Lord,

(Signed)

"GEORGE MÜLLER."

To those who complain that the letter was obscure in its meaning, it ought to be borne in mind, as stated above, that it [42] was given to the church and accepted with such explanations as were then afforded, and that therefore those who signed or accepted it are not responsible for what has resulted from the use that has been made of it.

We conclude these remarks with an extract from some notes taken at the time of a meeting, which took place June 30th, 1850, between several brethren from a distance, and Mr. Müller, and Mr. Craik, and the other brethren. In reply to questions put to them, the following answers were given:

"We never published *The Letter of the Ten*. It was read to the church with explanations, and it was unjust to circulate it without those explanations. We deny its being a church standard. It was written because of certain circumstances at a certain time, as stated at the outset, for the purpose of giving

* From a tract entitled *Prove all Things, &c.*, pp. 4, 5, published by Partridge and Oakey, Paternoster Row, London. 1850.

reasons why we had not complied with Mr. Alexander's request, and judged the errors *corporately*. We acknowledge no rule but the word of God. We cannot tell what course we should adopt under particular circumstances, unless it is *definitively pointed* out in the Word. We leave ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit at the time."

Shortly after the reading of *The Letter of the Ten* to the church, Mr. Darby came again to Bristol, and had 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. The reasons already given were repeated, and 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. Those who have learnt to have to do with God alone are not easily to be moved by either the persuasions or the threats of man.

Having failed to induce these brethren to carry out his wishes, Mr. D. started off on his unholy errand. He went from one place to another, seeking to enforce everywhere the adoption of his course towards Bethesda, which has, in its consequences, and in the miseries it has caused, cast into the shade all that had taken place in Plymouth. Assemblies of saints one after another were placed under the ban of excommunication, for no other sin than not being able to see that Mr. Darby was right, and Bethesda wrong. On reaching Leeds, he issued his lithographic circular, bearing the post mark of August 26th, 1848, cutting off not only Bethesda, but all assemblies who received any one who went there. "I," he writes, "should neither go to Bethesda in its present state, nor while in that state go where persons from it were willingly admitted; for [43] this," he adds, "involves the whole question of association with Brethren."

In these actings of Mr. Darby one is struck with the entire absence of all that "corporate action," so demanded of others, and so boasted in. The moment any act of importance has to be performed, the very semblance of a corporate church responsibility is set aside, and the entire guidance of the Spirit is made virtually to centre *in his own individual person*. "I should not go to, nor receive from Bethesda," is quite sufficient, and on this have most of those been acting who would now claim an individual conscience in the matter.

In the primitive church, when a matter touching the welfare of the Church at large was taken up by the apostles, acting under the highest and only commission the Church has ever known, after a solemn meeting of the elders and of the whole church in the name of their Master, they say, "It seemeth good to the Holy Ghost and to us;" but in the present instance, as if Spirit and apostle, Church and council, all centred in one man, Mr. Darby writes in the first person, and says that obedience in the matter involves "the whole question of Brethren." It doubtless involves the whole question of the party who have submitted themselves to his control, but, God be praised, His Church is bound by no such assumption, and gives allegiance to no such decretal.

In this circular Mr. Darby, in the face of all that he knew of the facts of the case, charges Bethesda with "diligently seeking to extenuate and palliate Mr. Newton's doctrines;" with "admitting persons holding them;" with "receiving active and unceasing agents of Mr. Newton, holding and justifying his views;" and lastly, with having "formally and deliberately admitted these doctrines." We have a God to deal with who is emphatically a God of truth, and by Him will all these false statements be weighed. The light of heaven shall be brought to bear on all this fearful untruthfulness at the judgment-seat of Christ, and we shall then know His thoughts and hear His verdict.

[44]

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Newton's Tracts Judged and Condemned by Bethesda.

WE now come to the second stage of the inquiry in connection with Bethesda. The charges made by Mr. Darby and his party were, first, that Mr. Newton's doctrines, and those holding them, had been admitted into fellowship; and secondly, that as a church they had refused to judge and condemn the tracts. The first charge we have shown to have been without foundation; and as for the second, the course taken had been justified for the reasons given in *The Letter of the Ten*. Towards the latter end of the year, however, the aspect of things had altered. By the unceasing efforts of some, the tracts, which in April, May, and June were comparatively unknown, had been so circulated that all had become more or less conversant with the subject of which they treated; and by some the brethren were charged with indifference to the Lord's honour. The result of this was, that the minds of very many were disturbed and perplexed. The discussion of questions which it had been wished to prevent had been introduced by the actings of others over whom the Bethesda brethren had no influence.

In addition to this, in July, 1848, another tract of Mr. Newton's had appeared, in which the erroneous statements of the tracts had been reproduced, only in a somewhat modified form. This removed much of the uncertainty as to the views held by Mr. Newton, and facilitated the investigation of his doctrines. These considerations led Mr. Müller, Mr. Craik, and the other leading brethren, to regard it as needful to bring the matter before the church, and in consequence several special meetings of the church were held, commencing on November 27 and ending on December 11, 1848. At the first meeting Mr. Müller, after prayer, stated the reasons which had led them to call the church together to investigate the painful subject of Mr. Newton's tracts, and explained the altered circumstances which led them then to do what in the middle of the year they had declined doing.

At the first two or three meetings Mr. Müller read from the [45] tracts, page after page, pointing out as he went along what inferences were legitimately deducible from what was read, and which, if they were allowed, would vitiate the atonement; and while these inferences would be disallowed by Mr. Newton, in judging of his views, they must, if legitimate, necessarily be their guide in leading to a decision on *them*. During the remaining four or five meetings, sixteen other brethren spoke, and gave their views as to the tracts, entering very fully into the questions at issue. The result of these deliberations was, that the following conclusion was arrived at: "That no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts should be received into communion." Of this decision Lord Congleton writes: "This conclusion was given out two or three times by the brethren Groves, Müller, and Craik." This public announcement we particularly would bring to notice, because it has been asserted by many ignorant of the facts of the case, that the judgment thus arrived at was merely the private judgment of a few, whereas it was the expressed *judgment of the church* as a whole, which *The Letter of the Ten* was not.

We hear much said of "judging the evil," to use the expression of others, but we would ask whether any one assembly amongst the followers of Mr. Darby has judged it for themselves in the same manner? Whether the thoughts of one in a hundred have ever been intelligently exercised in the matter at all? Whether in most cases those concerned have not merely accepted the statements and views of others? We are bold to say that *more* was done in *Bethesda* to judge and repudiate those views, which had caused so much trouble and sorrow to all who loved the Lord, than by *any* assembly acting under the Darby discipline, and this has been keenly felt by Mr. Newton and his friends. Those

who witnessed or have perused the accounts taken of these godly and prayerful deliberations in Bethesda cannot but thank God, that amidst the turmoil and the strife of those days, there were some who were enabled to maintain their integrity towards God, in an earnest and zealous care for that which in any way affected doctrinally the glory of the person of the blessed Lord, and who, in their zeal against error, desired not to forget their duty towards those who offend; as they were reminded by Mr. Craik, that they should seek to know, "what was the kindest way in which a brother, who had departed from the truth, and [46] those upholding him, should be treated, so as, if possible, to lead them to repentance."

It would have been imagined that the whole controversy between Bethesda and her opponents would have been brought to a close. The investigation which was demanded had taken place, and the conclusion come to, to admit none upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts. The ostensible object had been gained; the real object had not, and that was submission – submission, it was said, to the Church, but in reality to a party. At a public meeting in connection with *The Letter of the Ten*, when these questions were under discussion, it was asked by one of the Bethesda brethren, "Why should we judge a matter that has taken place in Plymouth?" It was replied, "Because the Church has judged it." "And what is the Church?" asked Mr. Müller. The answer given was, "Those who meet as we do." Mr. Müller replied, "That is not my view of the Church;" and Mr. Meredith further remarked, "I should consider holding such a view of the Church as going completely back to Popery." Bethesda had acted for themselves in the matter, before God, and sought to obey His word, but they had not brought their necks under the yoke of man in the so-called "voice of the Church!" and Mr. Wigram writes,* February 2nd, 1849, "You may depend upon it that the aim of Bethesda is to make a party positively apart from us all, and apart, I judge, too, from Mr. Newton." This deserves notice as coming from the pen of one of Bethesda's bitterest opponents, but his charge resolves itself into a wish to stand apart from those to whom he belonged.

In writing of these painful matters about this time, Mr. Craik says, with characteristic grace:

"According to the light I have, both parties are so far in the wrong that I have no wish to be identified with either. I wait for further light, and my prayer is, 'Hear the right, O Lord.' Should it turn out that Mr. Newton's errors are only those of a rash speculative intellectualist, who is yet sound at heart and seeking to honour Christ, it will be no cause of regret that I have refused to have fellowship with those who have been seeking to crush rather than to recover him; if, on the other hand, it should appear that after all his long course of service he is really an enemy to the cross of Christ, it will be no cause of regret that I have been rather too slow to believe so terrible a charge. Until George Wigram be subjected to discipline, I shall not feel it any cause of sorrow to be standing in separation from a body where such a course is tolerated."

[47] That which was demanded in June would not satisfy in December. The spirit of despotism which had been so painfully prominent had grown with its exercise; and sectarianism became the rule. It was not therefore to be anticipated that any other result would follow this step taken by Bethesda, than a more vehement determination to maintain the principle of an ecclesiastical subjection to *a body*, that assumed a right to judge all saints and all assemblies, and that on the same claim submitted to be judged by none. Thus clericalism and Popery, as such claims were called by Mr. Darby when made in antagonism to himself, were submitted to unhesitatingly in the carrying out of his views under the assumed guidance of the Holy Ghost.

* See *The Bath Case*, p. 10.

The following remarks, made by the late Mr. Craik in reference to these separations, written at the time, we transcribe for the instruction of all:

“Since we have been separated from both parties (*i. e.* Mr. Newton’s and Mr. Darby’s), there has been much quietness amongst us; the Lord is present in our meetings; souls are constantly added to the Church. We meddle not with things too high for us; as in ourselves lost and guilty, we make Jesus our only refuge. We meet to exhort one another, and to wait patiently on God; we publish the glad tidings to the world, and the Lord gives testimony to the word of His grace. Far removed from strife and contentions, we are not over-anxious what man may think of us, so long as we can walk in spiritual comfort, and promote the cause of Jesus. The days of our earthly pilgrimage are gliding away; we profess not to be superior in light and attainment to other believers. We know ourselves to be weak; we confess it to God; we do not desire needlessly to talk about it. We seek to enjoy the truth in secret, and to serve Him in conscious weakness; to avoid all heartless, thorny, and unprofitable controversy; to be in fellowship with all who love our Lord Jesus, and who do not require anything which we cannot grant as the price of that fellowship. We would use no hard words or cherish unkind feelings towards any. We know that we have been misrepresented, evil spoken of, unjustly condemned. The day will declare it; but oh, when the soul is really conscious that accusations are false, they are harmless as the roar of the distant thunder! I would rather enjoy the serenity of conscious innocence on any point, than possess the undeserved approbation of the whole Church of God.”

The course pursued by Bethesda all through this painful controversy up to the present hour has been to maintain silence, and to avoid all self-vindication, committing their cause as between them, and those who have cast them off, to the Lord who judgeth righteously; and the Lord has not left them without witness; and in regard to that honoured servant [48] of God, who has been so grievously slandered, and whose work in the Orphan Houses has been frequently termed by members of that party “a work of the devil,” we can say in the words of a dear brother, in hearing of the work of conversion that had been going on among the orphan children, “May this always be the answer God will enable Mr. Müller to give to his accusers.” The Lord will not withhold the honour to him whom He can honour – an honour read not in the light of a party, but in the light of the whole Church of God.

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, and 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 on 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. Mr. Darby’s words prove that the reason of his present course is not because Bethesda is what he asserts, but because he himself will not come forward either to prove or to withdraw the wicked statements of heresy and blasphemy he had made in reference to Messrs. Müller and Craik, and the believers in Bethesda generally, and shows what the present line of conduct is, that would thus sacrifice the honour of Christ, and the unity of the Spirit, to the interests of a party. It is hard to fight against God, and it is grievous to see one professing the name of Christ, plunge into a course so suicidal and false, as that into which Mr. Darby has entered – a course to justify which he is almost necessitated to make

the most untrue and wicked accusations, writing, as he did some time [49] after, that "the evil at Bethesda is the most unprincipled admission of blasphemers against Christ."*

There are, however, those among his own party who join not in this railing against the saints of God. Mr. J. G. Deck, so long associated with Mr. Darby, writes, October 11th, 1872:

"But at the same time that I bear solemn testimony against the principles advocated in *The Letter of the Ten*, and in those many tracts, which take even a far lower stand against evil than Bethesda took – for Bethesda *would not*, as far as I know, *suffer evil doctrine within herself* – (witness the firm stand now made on the question of Eternal Punishment, in which without partiality discipline has been exercised to the putting away of the children of dearest friends) – I would beg Brethren to consider whether 'He who judgeth righteously' would endorse the charge against Bethesda, and especially against G. Müller, of neutrality in the matter of Mr. N.'s doctrines. After 'B. had disallowed Mr. N. as a teacher, and refused communion to all who defended, maintained, or upheld his doctrines or his tracts' (see Trotter's *Whole Case of Bethesda*, p. 46), surely whatever other causes of distrust existed before, decided condemnation of the evil rather than neutrality or indifference characterized her afterwards."†

It is a terrible thing to charge saints with blasphemy, and to call those differed from blasphemers, even when the charge can be substantiated; but when with lightness and levity such solemnly awful words are thrown at those who were eminently owned and honoured of God, and they are thus stigmatised, because they bow not to the idol set up, what remains but to carry out the apostolic command, and have nothing to say to him "who is called a brother, if he be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or A RAILER, or a drunkard, or an extortioner"? But, thank God, our spiritual affections are truer than our heads, and Mr. Darby, who stigmatised Mr. Müller and Mr. Craik as blasphemers, wrote to the latter beloved servant of God on his dying bed, calling him his "dear brother," and wishing that, "although ecclesiastically separated from him," he might be blessed with every blessing, as the Lord might see he needed in his present circumstances.

There are those who, if not blinded by prejudice, would know these charges to be unrighteous and false; but there are those who, on the strength of statements made by others, spread everywhere the slanders they have received; for which God holds answerable both originators and circulators. A slander is welcomed, before it is circulated. Who could but [50] be filled with godly indignation when shortly after the removal of that faithful servant of the Lord, Mr. Craik, he was told "he was a Socinian!" – a man than whom there are few whose views of the blessed Lord's person were more clear and scriptural, and whose heart and soul more adoringly worshipped Christ as his Lord and his God.

The separation from Bethesda, which was commenced after the writing of *The Letter of the Ten*, and maintained the more firmly even after the judgment given at the church meetings in December, 1848, was, as we have seen, not to be confined to those meeting in Bethesda alone. This would have been evil enough; but it was determined to carry out this discipline on all who agreed not to sanction in word and practice this wholesale excommunication. The natural and necessary effect of these separations was, that schism ripened fast; for thereby the elements that stood in the way of absolute sectarianism were eliminated from them. The notion of being "a body," which should comprise all those assemblies who acted with Mr. Darby, became a more and more clearly developed theory from this time. This change in fact (though denied in theory by some), at once manifested

* See Mr. Darby's Letter, quoted hereafter.

† See Introduction, p. xii., to a tract *On Questions Relative to Discipline*, &c. Printed in Christchurch, New Zealand.

those under its influence as nothing but a schismatic body, and presented Darbyism as but another of the many sects that have disfigured the history of the Church of God.

Allusion will have to be made to this notion of a corporately responsible "body" hereafter; for that which is here seen in its earlier stage, will be found to attain a fuller development, before this history comes to a close. This new principle was however necessary in order to carry out the new discipline which had been introduced, and the system and the discipline acted and re-acted on each other. It has been observed that "no very lasting evil arises from the wrong acquittal of an individual, so long as the standard itself, by which right and wrong, truth and falsehood, are measured, is not made crooked." But this is just what this terrible principle does, to which so many, in strange infatuation, have committed themselves, and which will necessarily prove fatal to those who hold it. It measures faithfulness to God in others by an unrighteous standard of its own, by which standard also it measures its own delinquencies. It cries out, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" are we; it casts out their "brethren for the Lord's name's sake," making that holy name the cloak [51] for its unrighteousness, and says, "Let the Lord be glorified." (Isa. lxvi. 5.) For nearly thirty years has this course been run, which has fostered pride, and given a system of discipline, that places acknowledged saints, walking in the fear of God, on a par with the openly vicious, and the avowed denier of the Lord Jesus; for by it both are equally excommunicated. A few remarks are needful here on the subject of *discipline*.

In the word of God a great deal is written about the dangers to which the saints would be exposed from two different sources, – the heresies of some, and the love of pre-eminence in others, each developing a schismatic spirit, the one centering in evil living or false doctrine, and the other in a falsely assumed authority. Both endanger the oneness of the spirit which the Church was commanded to "keep" for the honour of His name, who would show to the world "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," and who pronounces His reprobation on those who sow discord among brethren, and on those who, seeing motes in another's eye, fail to see the beams in their own. The discipline commanded in the word of God is plain and unmistakable. It meets the case of *the evil-doer*, and says, "Put away from yourselves that wicked person." (1 Cor. v. 11–13.) It meets the man "who *brings not the doctrine of Christ*," and says, "Receive him not into thy house, nor bid him God-speed;" showing him to be none other than "a deceiver and an antichrist." (2 John.) It also meets the man who, to serve his love of filthy lucre, or his love of power and influence, comes in as *a schismatic* into the Church of Christ; and it commands distinctly that no fellowship be had with him; for such "are subverted and have sinned, being condemned of themselves." To the apostles' words in Titus iii. 11, Rom. xvi. 17, 18, commanding discipline on schism, the attention of those might profitably be directed, who advocate this schismatic discipline. Let those tremble who use Scripture language, and trample in the dust the precepts of the Lord, casting out the name of brethren as evil, because they bow not to their discipline, either because their consciences are too tender, or their love to Christ too great, to participate in a Jehu zeal against every idol but their own.

In so important a matter as discipline in the house of God, we are not left to uncertain generalities in the teachings of the New Testament, nor to vague interpretations of the types and [52] figures of the Old. The gospels and epistles abound with definite principles and with distinct precepts, in subjection to which will be our only safeguard; and when these principles and precepts are definitely understood, the types and shadows of the Jewish economy will be found to harmonize and agree with them in so marked a manner, that they will give a divine certainty to every seeker after truth. But when, setting aside

New Testament rules, present action is based upon the typical ceremonies and histories of the Old Testament, there will be confusion and misinterpretation. Misapplication of the Old Testament has ever been the resort of those who had principles and actions to maintain which the New Testament knew nothing about. It was so when Christians in olden days fought with the sword for their religious convictions, and cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon;" it is so now with those who advocate this unscriptural discipline, and who when pressed for Scripture, talk about leprosy, leaven, Achan, &c. Our *rule* in the Church of God is the New Testament, and when that is faithfully followed, we shall not fail to gather light from the Old, which under the guidance of the New will lead us aright.

One question, however, we will ask of those who think they gather their ideas of discipline from the Jewish ritual in regard to the leper, Where do they find that he who touched the unclean was ever ranked with the leper himself? The leper was to be put outside the camp, and there to remain all the days of his leprosy; but of him who touched the unclean it is said, "He shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even." There was no command to treat the one who touched the unclean as the unclean one himself. (See Lev. xv. 5–11, &c.) Compare also Numbers xix., where we are told that the man who touched the dead should be unclean seven days, and be sprinkled with the water of purification (*vv.* 11–13); and if he obey not, we read, "That soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean." (*v.* 20.) But of him who touches the unclean it is only said, "He shall be unclean until the even." (*v.* 22.) Surely this savours very little of an indiscriminate discipline, which would treat the man who held intercourse with a leper, as if he were a leper himself. It rather points to that godly discrimination which makes a difference, because [53] God has made it, and does not carry on an interminable discipline, because God has commanded the opposite. It is well further to notice that the acts of washing the clothes and bathing the flesh were individual acts of (shall we call it) self-discipline, of which God alone could take cognizance, and of him who fails therein we are told, that "he shall bear his iniquity," but the congregation had no power to cut him off from among them. The matter was between himself and God, and not between him and the congregation; and it is of the utmost importance that this self-discipline and its sphere, be not confounded with church discipline and its sphere.

All discipline must be in the name of Jesus, and in His spirit and power; and all discipline that violates that name, and all that is antagonistic to the spirit of grace, of truth, and of love, that dwells in Christ, and in him who is born of God, is a discipline that God abhors.

Volumes might be written of the disastrous effects of this discipline on those who enforce it, while to those on whom it has been exercised it has proved a bitter sorrow that has broken many hearts, but still a wholesome lesson, that has proved a most needed warning. In regard to the designs of its originators, it has become before the whole Church of God a signal failure in its effects on others, and a signal disgrace as it regards themselves. Monstrous, however, as this discipline must appear to any whose vision has not been blinded by complicity with its evil, in its reference to the thousands in England who are affected by it, its folly is increased when we see the same discipline forced on saints abroad, in Europe, in Asia, or in America – saints who, but for the discipline itself, would ever have remained in happy ignorance of all connected with the evil it has been attempted to keep out.

There is no holier or more priestly work than that which concerns the maintenance of the holiness of the house of God, a work in which at every step the child of God has to go

for guidance to the Word and to the testimony. But it is a work in which the hands and feet of all who engage in it have to be washed in the laver of the sanctuary, and their priestly vestments kept white. Woe to him who, with defiled hands and unholy feet, or garments spotted with the flesh, or with self-taught principles of his own, seeks to take upon himself a service, for which God's revealed will is the only warrant, and the cleansing of the sanctuary the necessary pre-requisite: on [54] all such, sooner or later, God will execute judgment, and make manifest their folly and their sin. Discipline is solemn work, and when performed *in accordance with the Word*, and *in the Spirit* inculcated, is very holy work; but when instead of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, the pride and high-handedness of the flesh comes in; when the love that covereth is set aside, and the animosity of the carnal heart, helped on and fanned into a flame by the accuser of the saints, takes its place, then God will arise Himself and vindicate His truth and His people.

On this subject we give the following extract from the pen of Mr. Darby, which we do at some length, as it contains much that may well cause some to think as to what that is into which they have fallen; and as written before these embittered controversies had arisen, may be helpful to all for the truth it contains, and will come with some additional force to those to whom the author's name gives weight.*

"We ought to remember what we are in ourselves when we talk about exercising discipline; it is an amazingly solemn thing. When I reflect that I am a poor sinner saved by mere mercy, standing only in Jesus Christ for acceptance, in myself vile, it is evidently an awful thing to take discipline into my own hands. Who can judge save God? This is my first thought.

"Man's will is that which brings in everlasting destruction. It may be modified, but the principle is altogether false. There is no such thing as voluntary action on man's part in the things of God; it is acting under Christ by the Spirit. *The moment I get man's will I get the devil's service, and not Christ's.* This has occasioned a mass of practical difficulty that those abroad do not feel. When I get the notion of a judicial process going on for the trial of crime by certain laws, I find myself altogether off the ground of grace; I have confounded all sorts of things."

After speaking of Matt. xviii. 15–17, he says: "The other kind of discipline is that of Christ, as 'Son over His own house.' The case of Judas is of great value here. It will always be that if there is spirituality in the body evil cannot continue long; *it is impossible that hypocrisy or anything else should continue where there is spirituality.* In the case of Judas the Lord's personal grace overcame everything, and it will always be so, proportionably and practically. The highest manifestation of evil was against this grace. 'He that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up his hand against me.' 'He then having received the sop' (grace thoroughly came out when the evil was shown to be done against Himself) 'went immediately out.' (John xiii.)

"The great body of discipline ought to be altogether aimed at hindering excommunication, the putting of a person out. Nine-tenths of the discipline which ought to go on is individual.

"The question, whether I can sit down with this or that person who is within, never arises. *A person staying away from communion because of [55] another of whom he does not think well being there, is a most extraordinary thing;* he is excommunicating himself for another's sake. 'For we being many are one bread (loaf), and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.' (1 Cor. x. 17.) If I stay away I am saying that I am not a Christian, because another has gone wrong. That is not the way to act. There may be steps to pursue, but it is not to commit the folly of excommunicating myself, lest a sinner should intrude.

"What character of position does Jesus hold now? That of priestly service. And we are associated with Him. If there were more of that priestly intercession implied by eating of the sin-offering within the holy place there would be no *such abomination as that of the Church assuming a judicial character.*

"If that which is done is not done in the power of the Holy Ghost it is nothing.

* Tract on *Discipline*, by J. N. D.

“It is a terrible thing to hear sinners talking about judging another sinner, but a blessed thing to see them exercised in conscience about sin come in among themselves. It must be in grace. I no more dare act, save in grace, than I could wish judgment to myself. ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged: for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.’ (Matt. vii. 1, 2.) If we go to exercise judgment we shall get it.

“The moment power in the Spirit is gone, power in the flesh comes in.”

In this Mr. Darby has well said, that “the moment I get man’s will, I get the devil’s service;” and can he be surprised, if many have seen, and do so see, “man’s will” governing all these proceedings against Bethesda, where, even though there had been failure, there was an earnest, prayerful desire to do the will of God, in circumstances of no small difficulty, the difficulties of which were greatly increased by the unchristian violence and injustice of the course pursued?

Most justly does he say, “If that which is done is not done in the power of the Holy Ghost, it is nothing.” Yes, and worse than nothing; it is “man’s self-will,” and we have been told what that is. Might it not be well to ask ourselves what the proofs of the power of the Holy Ghost are? And as we meditate on this solemn subject, we must all look forward to the time when He will give His verdict at the judgment-seat, as to whether “self-will” or “the power of the Holy Ghost” were most manifested in our actings and our ways. “We must all be made manifest at the judgment-seat of Christ.” (2 Cor. v. 10, Greek.)

CHAPTER VI.

[56]

The Sheffield Case – The Claim of “the One Assembly of God” – Substitution of Conscience for the Word.

“If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another,” is a word of solemn warning, the truth of which is strikingly illustrated in this portion of the history before us. We turn now from transactions connected with Bethesda in 1848, and carry our readers on a period of sixteen years, to contemplate the working of the same principle in the London meetings connected with Mr. Darby in connection with the gathering in Sheffield, which will show the further development of those ideas which have already been under review. It would be pleasant to put into the shade those transactions, which have been publicly brought before the Church of God, so much to the shame of those concerned; but if a confessed sin has to be covered, and the mantle of love cast over it, sin continued in and unconfessed has to be rebuked before all, that others also may fear.

It will not be necessary to enter minutely here into the state of the London meetings alluded to, nor on the character of the means made use of to maintain this discipline among all connected with the then Priory and London Bridge meetings, which appear to have exercised an absolute control over all that which concerns the interest of the party. The writings of Mr. Stewart, Mr. Culverhouse, and others, sufficiently disclose the state of things among the meetings with which the writers were themselves mixed up, and of which enough has been already written to satisfy the minds of those unbiassed, of the real evil at work, and of the character of the despotic rule that had been usurped over the Lord’s heritage, for which, however, those who rule, and those who submit, are jointly responsible before God. We do not however refer to those writers, as if we had sympathy with them in their writings or subsequent course; but they lay bare facts, and with these

only have we here to do. If this centralized rule and discipline had not existed, they would have had leisure to have examined their own ways, and [57] the life and conduct of those in immediate fellowship with themselves; and they would not have become a reproach for “gross sin,” and their meetings a disgrace for “ungodly disorder.” It would not have been needful to allude to these things, or to the painful occurrences at those meetings at the Priory and elsewhere, had they been merely temporary exhibitions of evil, into which every saint, and every gathering of saints, in a weak and evil hour may fall; but it is necessary to do so, because they are the natural and necessary result of evil principles, that the Church of God needs to be warned against, as ultimately subversive of godliness and rectitude of conscience.

Individual acts of evil (while involving those who are guilty of them in the punishment that is due) pass away, and often ultimately lead to a restoration in grace; it is otherwise with a “law” of wickedness. When this becomes dominant, and an evil principle takes possession of the mind, it grows, it ripens, and sows itself wider and wider. Like a devastating torrent, it gathers as it flows, and its course is marked by destruction and misery. It is said of the ungodly, that sin is established by them by a law. (See Ps. xciv. 20.) An obligation to evil is thereby laid upon the conscience, and under a terrible delusion does the sinner act, never asking himself the question, “Is there not a lie at my right hand?” Into this the saint may at any time fall, when wilful blindness (a wilfulness of which God alone is the judge) takes possession of the soul, which produces that “*incapacity of conscience*,” the thought of which may well make the stoutest tremble; in which, however, God leaves not Himself without witness, in the fruits and results that follow. Those who will see may see, and those who will not, will have to answer for having fallen a prey to a blindness, the result of their own self-will. It is this conviction which makes it imperative on all to investigate the *principles* by which they or others are guided, which, if not of God, will carry their advocates into the committing of acts, only often the more evil, because *apparently* the more spiritually directed. There is “spiritual wickedness in heavenly places,” in more senses than one, and the filthiness of the spirit is all the more filthy in God’s sight, because of the apparent or expressed spirituality with which it is associated.

In these pages it has been sought to dwell particularly on the falsity of certain principles maintained and acted on by many. Our remarks will now be directed to pointing out the [58] growth and working of these opinions which have marred so much of the Lord’s work, and brought so much dishonour on His name, adding another to the many sects that already deface the religion of Him who prayed that all His followers might be one. No sooner is the name of “a body” assumed, and “a corporate action” maintained, outside the limited sphere of the two or three who in any one place are gathered into the name of Jesus, those so taking to themselves such corporate responsibilities and powers, become virtually a confederacy, a sect, a body of their own, be the name by which they are called what it may. The leader of the party is never the leader in everything. He points out the way, and those who follow generally outstep their master in those particulars which form the peculiar characteristics of his creed and action, and while he leads as to the direction that views and acts take, he is none the less under the leading influence of the current which, it may be, he has caused; and borne along by influences which he can no longer control, he becomes at once the leader and the slave of his own system.

Notice of the gradual development of the corporate standing assumed by Mr. Darby has already been taken. But those embryo developments already alluded to, and so painfully brought to light years ago, have not lain dormant; the seed has become the full corn in the ear, and, as some of the party acknowledge already, “new circumstances need new rules;” and as new ideas develop themselves, new expressions are needed to embody

them. “*The one assembly of God*” is an expression that first came into use in 1861, as the term whereby to designate those confederate gatherings that acted in unison with Mr. Darby. It is not an expression used once accidentally, it occurs reiteratedly in the ecclesiastical documents of the party, and hence deserves our consideration. It does not appear with whom this presumptuous title originated, but probably it did not originate with Mr. Darby; for it is not likely, deep and grievous as his departure from God’s principle of Church fellowship has been, that he would have been the one to give currency to an expression, which he could not but perceive would tell more against the catholicity he claims for his party, than any other that could well have been used. It recalls similar titles assumed by others, and may henceforth be ranked with “the one Holy and Catholic Church” of Rome, or “the Catholic and Apostolic Church” of the Irvingites, [59] as the party’s designation of itself. The title as assumed, however, can but give to others a clear insight into the workings of the system – a title that is treason to others whose names are also in the Book of Life, and who “everywhere call on the name of the Lord, theirs and ours[”]; and yet still remain, by the grace of God, outside this “one assembly.”

Mr. Darby, however, who has all along held the position claimed, endorses the expression, and gives additional meaning to it, when in a letter written a little later, speaking of one excluded from the Darbyite assemblies in London, he writes, “I hold him to be *outside the Church of God on earth*, being *outside what represents it in London*.” Beyond the pale of an anti-Christian communion, no such arrogant assumption has been made; and it has been reserved for Darbyism to develop a system which, upon the smallest basis, should erect the most tremendous superstructure – a superstructure which, in the intolerance of its claim and the boldness of its assertion, reminds us of the days of Papal power in the middle ages. How has the humble gathering of the two or three in the name of Jesus, from a “church in ruins,” been forgotten and set aside by this new dogma! and instead of it a position taken which is destructive of scriptural church standing. Can it be believed possible, that those who started with the acknowledgment of the individual responsibility of all saints to Christ, should dwindle down into the position here taken, so as to assert, that being outside their small assemblies in London is “outside the Church of God on earth”? That original principles could be so openly repudiated, and former testimony so entirely forgotten? But so it is. These progressive steps in ecclesiasticism it is important to notice, as showing how soon one who excommunicated Mr. Newton in 1845, on the ground of clericalism, should fall into an ecclesiasticism, that embodies in itself worse evils than those condemned in another.

As this letter, above alluded to, is of importance, we will give an extract from it. It was written to Mr. Spurr, of Sheffield, from the south of France, bearing date Feb. 19th, 1864.

“I understood the breach arose between you and Rotherham by reason of your reception of Goodall. With the main facts of his case I am acquainted, for I took part in what passed, and now allow me to put the case as it stands as to him. I put it merely as a principle. He (or any one else) is rejected in London. The assembly in London have 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 [60] 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 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. How can I refuse to *eat* with him in London and break bread with him in Sheffield? have one conscience for London, and another conscience for Sheffield? It is confusion and disorder. I do not apprehend I am mistaken in saying you received Goodall without having the reasons or motives of the Priory or other brethren in London. If you have had their reasons, the case in [sic] only the stronger, because you have deliberately condemned

the gathering in London and rejected its communion; for he who is outside in London is inside with you.”*

From this quotation it will clearly be perceived what Mr. Darby’s principles of church communion are. The rule laid down is, that if one rejected in London is received in Sheffield, the gathering in Sheffield is *ipso facto* excommunicated also, and the fellowship of that assembly with “the Church of God on earth” is destroyed! But what if another assembly were to act in the same way towards the assemblies in London, would they be thereby excluded from “the Church of God on earth”? or do they possess, like the See of Rome, a peculiar commission, and an infallible authority? Well may godly hearts tremble at the blasphemy of thus using the name of the Spirit of our God, to sanction man’s self-will, vindictiveness, mistakes, or follies. This spirit in Diotrephes once cut off the beloved apostle from the church – a love of pre-eminence had filled his heart, and he placed him outside what he might call “the Church of God on earth” (if such folly and wickedness were probable in those days), to which the apostle simply says, “If I come, I will remember his deeds,” meeting the arrogance and sin of another, with the gentleness and meekness of Christ.

The apostolic power of binding and loosing has been often assumed by many professing to be the Church of God, but never were divine principles of truth more subverted, nor higher light more sinned against, than in the claims under consideration. They are not put forward, as many claims in Christendom have been, by men ignorant of God and of His truth; but by those who have made the Word their boast, and Christ their theme. Henceforth may all learn to cease from man, whether saint or sinner, and trust again in God alone.

[61] The rule here laid down is virtually this, that every act of discipline is the act of the Holy Ghost. Let it be asked, “If there is difference of judgment in any cases under consideration, which way does the Spirit side?” The majority are not always in the right, and the strongest have not always most of the Spirit. But what if there has come in that incapacity to judge, of which Mr. Darby has cautioned so wisely in his controversy with Mr. Newton, referred to already? (Page 17.) What if “*an incapacity of ‘conscience’ to discern right and wrong*” has come in upon the rulers of a church? for that which can befall an individual, can befall the many, under similar circumstances? What! if this incapacity has come in upon the members of the Priory? What then? What! if after all, the assumed work of the Spirit of God be the work of men misguided, deluded, deceived? What then? May godly souls who have been associated with perhaps they know not what, pause, while over this awful precipice that lies before them, they contemplate the terrible danger to which they are exposed, of falling into a *fanaticism* that must lead to the most debasing superstition.

Before proceeding any further, let us take a glance at this infallible assembly – “the one assembly of God in London” (as in one document the leaders four times style the confederacy to which they belong), and their proceedings which led to the placing of the assembly in Sheffield outside “the Church of God upon earth.” When the assumption is so great, it will be well to notice the character of the assembly, and the exercise of its powers; for if ever a claim was put forth to the possession of the keys of the kingdom, it is put forth in the power by which saints are locked out of “the Church on earth.” In the chain of excommunications that ended in the exclusion of the Sheffield assembly, the first

* For this letter in full the reader is referred to a pamphlet entitled *Letters of J. N. Darby, &c., with Replies, &c.*, sold by S. W. Spurr, Ellesmere, Sheffield.

link is that Mr. A. Stewart is charged by the Priory leaders with having “grievously violated the Lord’s presence at His table, and the consciences of the saints, by forcing his ministry,” and in “having declared he had nothing to confess;” and consequently the leaders state “to their brethren of the one assembly of God in London,” that “they can no longer have communion with him at the table of the Lord.” He is in consequence put “outside the Church of God on earth.”

On this the Walworth gathering asked of the Priory meeting, “What sin or sins, according to Scripture, of an excommuni- [62] cable character,” he had committed. “Three letters,” say the Sheffield brethren, “were afterwards received from the Priory brethren in answer to the above, assuming throughout that the offence in April, 1860, described as “grievous against the Lord’s presence and His people,” was “*of a character not needing to be determined by Scripture.*” This was not satisfactory to godly consciences becoming alive to the principles at work, and they added to this, in that they “in self-will,” as it was called, removed their place of meeting from Walworth to Peckham. The result of these unpleasant questions put, and of the self-will of going to Peckham without permission, was the following communication: that “those associated with the Peckham meeting, cannot be accredited at the Lord’s table till they are humbled for their course.” The saints meeting at Peckham are therefore also put outside “the Church of God on earth.”

Mr. Goodall, a member of the Peckham meeting, goes to Sheffield. The brethren composing the meeting in that place, after due investigation, considering he had been unrighteously put out of fellowship by the Priory, receive him, and are told as follows: “You have now placed yourselves in the same position as Mr. Goodall; viz., outside the communion of the saints gathered in London.” Thus an assembly of saints in Sheffield is likewise placed outside “the Church of God on earth.”*

The godly heart sickens and saddens, as it reads and examines the grounds for committing the most solemn act of excluding from the fellowship of the church. We find “self-will” charged, “consciences violated,” “want of humility,” “the Lord’s presence at the table violated,” but nothing of God’s word violated, or of His precepts set aside. Let all who unbiasedly read these London proceedings judge where the self-will seems most to be – who have the greatest need to be humbled – who have violated the sacred name, presence, and blood of Jesus, and the consciences of His blood-bought people? Who? The excommunicators or the excommuni- [63] cated? There is no false doctrine charged, nor any laxity of discipline; but there lies at the bottom of all these high-handed actings the same spring, whether the case be that of Peckham, of Sheffield, or of Bristol, and that charge is the one twice given by the Priory rulers connected with these excommunications (pp. 15–30), the charge of “independency.” The aim of “the one assembly,” under the leadership of Mr. Darby and his friends, is to establish a church authority of their own, of which they are to form the centre, in the name of the Holy Ghost; and, in order to maintain it, this wholesale discipline is necessary; and we are told that “to ignore the discipline of the assembly in London,” is “virtually to deny the unity of the body.” These monstrous theories hang together – the unscriptural views of that wherein the unity of the body of Christ consisted being originated, to support an ungodly discipline, which must otherwise have fallen to the ground.

* For full particulars of this matter, we refer our readers to the following pamphlets: *Correspondence of the Walworth and Priory Gatherings; Letters Relating to the Recent Excommunications of Assemblies; and Letters of J. N. Darby, &c., with Replies on behalf of the Sheffield Brethren.* We would recommend these pamphlets to the prayerful consideration of the people of God, that they may trace out the tendencies of this system of church fellowship.

The Church of God is confounded with the many churches that have occupied their places on earth, from which, when the life and power of the Spirit is gone, the candlestick is removed, leaving untouched and untarnished the glory of the Bride of Christ. The individual assemblies on earth, be they small or large, are called to live and walk in the power of the grace of the Church, which is subject unto Him in all things. The Church of the first-born written in heaven is our ensample in our church capacity, and places each assembly in direct responsibility to the Church's head alone. Nothing either ecclesiastical or personal must ever be allowed to come between the soul and Jesus, and so must nothing come between the assembly and Jesus; for, if it does, it makes the Church the servant of man in the things of God.

If there be one thing more remarkable than another in the history of the apostle Paul, it is the place he occupied towards the churches he planted. He never intrudes himself between them and their Lord, either in what concerns their individual consciences as saints, or their collective conscience as a church; but he associates himself with them, and if it be in a matter of discipline, he says, "When ye are met together with my spirit, deliver such an one to Satan." Their consciences were not acted on before their judgment had been quickened; they were not forced to accept an apostolic decree that was above their conscience and their discernment, but both were brought by the grace of Christ in the apostle into healthful exercise, [64] and the Church acting with the apostle, put away that wicked person, who was thenceforth outside the Church in Corinth, and lawfully outside only, because he had fallen into the place of the ungodly, who are outside the gate of the city; "for without that city are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." He therefore ought to be outside every other assembly; and that, not because man had placed him outside, but because by the authority of Christ he was placed outside the Church in Corinth, and was therefore outside the Church of God on earth. Discipline, be it ever remembered, must be an act of obedience to Christ, and not the assumption and exercise of authority on the part of the Church. Our Lord has said, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you." No legislative power has been committed to the Church; her place is the place of subjection, and her discipline must be only an act of obedience, and all else becomes Gentile lordship and fleshly authority.

We would remind those concerned in these London proceedings of which we have been writing, that Mr. Wigram and many others left fellowship with Ebrington Street in 1845, although those in fellowship were confessedly Christians, only because a new ecclesiastical system had been introduced; and we would ask those who commit themselves to these acts in London, whether or not a new ecclesiastical system and nomenclature has not been introduced among themselves, "opposed to what had been known there from the beginning."* We are aware that many among themselves at a distance have repudiated this new assumption; but we ask them whether the evil of this new ecclesiasticism has been judged according to the theory of discipline acknowledged, and acted on by them in reference to others; and whether, if true to the actings that they have held up for universal imitation, they ought not to have treated the new church system advocated by the Darby party in London in 1863 as they treated what they called "a new church system" in Ebrington Street, Plymouth, in 1845? In these matters the different measure measured out to themselves and to others is but too painfully manifest.

* See extract from Mr. Wigram's letter, p. 16.

There is another point in the present exhibition of Darbyism to be noted before leaving this part of our subject, and that is [65] the substitution of conscience for the written Word. This is a matter of vital importance. It seems strange that those who began with the Word as their rule of life, and their guide in church order, should in their church actings speak of the “consciences of godly saints violated,” rather than the precepts of the written Word broken. Need brethren in Christ be reminded that a conscience unguided by or going beyond the Word is the most untrustworthy of all guides? yet direct appeal to the Word is often entirely set aside by the declaration, that there are matters in which conscience alone is to be the guide, and acts of discipline exercised on charges of which avowedly the Word takes no cognizance. Conscience, unguided by the Word, ever has and ever will lead its votaries to ruin.

The infidel sets aside the word of God because his “verifying faculty” cannot receive it; and the Darbyite rejects simple reference to the Word, because “a godly conscience” is to be trusted, the godliness of which the man himself is to be the judge! This may be but the small end of the wedge, but it will sooner or later undermine reverence for the written Word in those who hold it, as certainly as does the setting up of the “verifying principle” in the heart of the unbeliever. The principles are identical, and will not only affect the relations of the party to those outside their own narrow circle, but will foster a spirit of hero-worship among themselves, in the supremacy assumed and allowed of favourite teachers, who will, as a matter of fact, be the instructors of the less instructed, in those things which their own judgment had not been exercised about. The result will be, that a state of necessary dependence on man for instruction in the things of God will be fallen into by the many, and fostered by the few, which is the very opposite of the legitimate position of the child of God. To him the apostle says, “We have an unction from the holy one, and we know all things;” a position wherein the babe in Christ is taught of God, to whom the apostle writes, “Ye need not that any man teach you.” There is a sad self-deception in the thought, that the light of conscience often boasted in, is that of the individual himself as taught of God. That which is learnt is so often not by the individual himself as exercised before God, but is arrived at from the domination of another, or the overruling influence of a party, which brings into its bondage those who ought to stand in the liberty of the sons of God, a liberty that calls no man teacher, and allows of no lording over the conscience of another.

[66] The more the teaching of those who are under the influence of this system is examined, the more plainly is it perceptible that, with strong attestations of adhesion to the Word, its life and power is too frequently lost, and a system of teaching has been advocated in which man is left to deal with the oracles of God as a self-willed conscience may dictate. There is a deeper evil in all this than those accustomed to it are prepared to acknowledge or willing to see – an evil that is only awaiting the development of fresh circumstances and new complexities to bring fully to light. New events will spread this destructive principle more and more. Let him that readeth understand.

CHAPTER VII.

*Mr. Darby's unsound teachings on the Sufferings of Christ –
The Letter of the Nine – His teachings endorsed.*

WE have now to trace schism unrepented of as developed into heresy, and that no longer inadvertently brought in, but maintained and defended. It was, as we have seen, about

thirty years ago that Mr. Darby commenced his attack on Mr. Newton on the ground of heresy, and in 1866 two of his leading followers, Mr. Dorman and Captain Percy Hall, and others, left him for holding views which they regarded as similar if not identically the same.* Erroneous statements had been put forth by Mr. Darby, as has been already stated, but it was hoped that they were rather hastily-written thoughts than firmly-rooted opinions, for the maintenance of which he was prepared to sacrifice his party of "the one assembly." From various quarters for some time had been heard rumours of dissatisfaction amongst his followers, because of views promulgated by their chief and re-echoed more distinctly by others; but we were unprepared for the state of things which the pamphlets written by Mr. Dorman and Capt. Hall brought to light. The pamphlets reveal [67] nothing new in regard to Mr. Darby's own views, to those who had eyes to see what had been going on, and exercised consciences to judge aright statements made, but they reveal a state of things in the party that is sad to contemplate, and show marked advance in the downward path of false doctrine. But God speaks whether we will hear or whether we forbear. But a few years have passed away, and the unrighteous course pursued towards Mr. Newton has not been forgotten by the Holy God, and He who makes those who are wise in their own craftiness fools, permitted the accuser to stand where the accused stood, and Mr. Darby was placed by his own followers in the place of the heretic. His own discipline, righteously carried out, would at once have excommunicated not only him, but all those who maintained fellowship with him.

It is no uncommon thing for the guilty to attempt to conceal their own departures from truth and uprightness by an unusual zeal against the delinquencies of others, supposed or real, and so we find Mr. Darby, while charged with unsound doctrine, writing of Bethesda in the letter to Mr. Spurr already quoted from in 1864, as follows: –

"The evil at Bethesda is the most unprincipled admission of blasphemers against Christ, the coldest contempt for Him I ever came across. All their efforts to examine and hide it only make the matter worse; all who do not abhor the whole system and all connection with it, are already entangled and defiled. It is, I am satisfied, a mere net of Satan, though many Christians may be entangled in it. Every question of churches and unity disappear before the question of Bethesda. It is a question of Christ. Faith governed my path as to it, but I have seen its fruits in America, the West Indies, France, Switzerland, and in a measure in India. I have seen it the spring and support everywhere of unprincipledness and evil, and all who were under its influence turned from uprightness and truth."

The man who here falsely accuses others of admitting blasphemers, is accused by his own followers of maintaining the very same blasphemies, is himself "defiled," and "turned from uprightness and truth," by the showing of his own friends! How easy to charge others with "unprincipledness!" and were it our purpose we could retort the charge accompanied with facts known to some. There is a wickedness in this style of writing, that its parade of the name and honour of Christ only makes the more intensely evil. Those who can lift the veil and read what lies hidden underneath, will loathe and mourn the unholy proximity, into which the Most Holy is brought, in connection with the unhal- lowed and profane actings of human pride; but [68] there are those whose judgment is blinded, and this display of holy zeal at once deludes and deceives. We allude to this, because faith is claimed for the perpetration of actings of the greatest church wickedness

* Capt. Hall, writing of Mr. Darby's views, says: "So like are they to Mr. Newton's doctrines, that even had they not been as bad in themselves as I judge them to be, I should be quite unable to maintain the place of what is called testimony against Mr. Newton while connected with those who hold what I think to be as bad." We hope our brother will soon be led out of his testimony as *against* Mr. Newton or any one else, into a simple testimony *for* Christ, which would clear his path of many difficulties that seem still to encompass it.

(considering the light possessed,) that has darkened the page of church history for many a long year. But God's estimate of the faith claimed is to be read in the light of the delusions of all kinds into which he has allowed him and his followers to be led; into the assumption of being "the one assembly;" into false teaching on the sufferings of Christ; into a proud schismatic discipline, separating from those who bow not down to their idol. It is God who has cast them down, not man; it is God who has hardened and blinded, as He ever will, the self-willed, who refuse to hear and refuse to see. Let the spirit and tone of the extract given be examined in the light of present events and passing revelations, and we shall learn that "he shall have judgment without mercy, that shewed no mercy;" for "mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

It is not our purpose here to go minutely into Mr. Darby's speculations into what he calls "this third kind of suffering," but we feel it needful to give a few extracts from some of his writings, that others may be able to form a judgment in some measure for themselves, on a matter of vital importance to all saints.

Writing on the sufferings of Christ, as unfolded in Psalm lxxix., he says:

"We have clear proof that they are not atoning sufferings; because, instead of suffering in the place of others, so that they should not have one drop of that cup of wrath to drink, others are associated with the Lord here in them. (v. 26.) ... When men are wounded too, when Christ is the companion with them – not a substitute for them – then *atonement is not wrought*, nor the wrath of condemnation endured. *But God has smitten and wounded*. It is not merely man that has caused sufferings. Man comes in in malice to add to the sorrow.

"Thus we have along with the sufferings from man, at the epoch of the crucifixion (the special object of the Psalm), bringing judgment on man, *the third character of Christ's sufferings*, the *suffering under the government of God*, at the epoch of his final sorrows in which the remnant will have its part ... Deep as is the distress, it has *a character wholly and entirely contrasted with atonement*.*

The following remark, written by Mr. Darby when writing against Mr. Newton, deserves to be pondered by his adherents. [69] He writes: "The system and principle of Mr. N— is to present *a third kind of sufferings of Christ – not vicarious*, not His soul's entering into the condition of those amongst whom He was, and whose cause He had taken up; but *suffering arising from God's relation to Him*, and His relation to God as one of them."†

Again, Mr. Darby writes in his tract, *The Sufferings of Christ*, as follows:

"The sword is to awake against Jehovah's shepherd: 'the man that is my fellow, says Jehovah of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.'"

"I do not find that *smiting is ever used for atonement*" (though atonement also was wrought when He was smitten), "but for the cutting off of Messiah in connection with the Jews. Forsaking of His God is that in which Scripture expresses that work which stands wholly alone ... *The act of cutting off of Messiah is spoken of in smiting, and not the work of atonement*, to which nothing can be compared. The smiting or cutting off of Messiah is used in connection with another subject in Scripture, though He was there wounded for the people's transgressions, and with His stripes they will be healed. But the cutting off and smiting is referred to the setting aside of previous hopes in the flesh, *not* to the securing future ones in promise, though that work, blessed be God, was done then." (pp. 19, 20.)

Again:

"Scripture speaks of the whole of the *last hours of Christ's life, up to and including His death*, as one period, and it is characterized as one event. *It has His rejection and smiting stamped upon it*, and to speak of it so is right. Yet to speak of atonement distinctly, as wrought in the hour of His forsaking of

* *Sufferings of Christ*, second edition, p. 71.

† *Observations*, p. 13.

God, is right too. Smiting, indignation, and wrath, the whole of His rejection, and what was involved in it, attaches itself to the whole period in Scripture language. Yet He was not actually drinking the cup, not actually smitten. In John, who takes the divine side of these truths, even the time of His ascension is included, and so even in Luke as the blessed effect." (p. 26.)

When writing against Mr. Newton, Mr. Darby, speaking of his views, said "that it is *the pure unmingled heresy of wrath on Christ which was not vicarious.*" So quotes Captain Hall* from his *Observations*, and from the same we quote the following. When describing Mr. Newton's errors, he says: "It was, that Christ did come, *was exposed to it all; i. e. to experience God's action proper to a sinner without being one, not vicariously;* and that He preserved Himself from it by faith, prayer, and obedience."†

What is "the smiting from God," which Mr. Darby says is [70] not atonement, and therefore non-vicarious, but the very same doctrine under another form of words?

Abraham knew full well that the righteous God would not treat the righteous as the sinner. The smiting from God, which Mr. D. says is not in atonement, can righteously only come on the sinner, or on one occupying the sinner's place. To suppose aught else, is to ascribe unrighteousness to the throne of the holy God. Can we allow the force of that most solemn passage of the whole Old Testament to be taken away and destroyed? God has said, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" – a passage which our Lord Himself quotes when He was on His way to Gethsemane and the cross, to give up His life's blood, to seal and ratify the new covenant of eternal grace. Mr. Newberry says of these statements: "The theory of atonement contained in the tract in connection with an alleged third-class of Christ's sufferings, styled His 'non-atoning sufferings,' is this: that atonement was wrought wholly and exclusively by 'the drinking of the cup' when 'Christ was forsaken of God,' and that then, and then only, was Christ the atoning substitute for sinners. His death was a subsequent thing," and that therefore the salvation of the redeemed rests "on an *experience*, instead of on the blood of an infinitely precious person;" for, as he writes a little further on, "this is the essence of the theory, limiting that which works atonement to an experience" (*i. e.* Christ's experience of the forsaking of God), "and throwing other sufferings even unto death into a third-class, which is non-atoning."‡

In speaking of Mr. D.'s views of the "smiting" of Christ by God, well does the writer referred to remark: "If Christ were smitten of God, and cut off, but not in atonement, did He deserve it, or did He not? If He deserved it, where is the perfectness of Christ? If He deserved it not, where is the righteousness of God? If all this be true, what becomes of the salvation of the soul? If it be not true, and yet the language of Scripture, what becomes of the truthfulness of the Holy Ghost, the author and inspirer of Scripture? Reader, which alternative will you adopt? There is but one other [71] alternative, and blessed be God there is that! The other alternative is: that Christ is perfect; that God is righteous; the Spirit is truth; the believer's soul is safe; but the theory (advocated by Mr. Darby) is utterly and ruinously false."§

* *Grief upon Grief*, p. 20.

† *Observations*, p. 8.

‡ *Quotations and Remarks*; or, *Conscientious Objections to an Alleged Third-class of Christ's Sufferings under the Government of God, as set forth in a tract entitled The Sufferings of Christ*. London: Haughton and Co., Paternoster Row. (pp. 6, 9.)

§ *Quotations and Remarks*, p. 21.

In all these theories relative to the person and work of the Son of God, there is a strange infatuation in the propounders of them, that for an object so unreal as the association of Christ with a Jewish remnant in the latter days, a character of interpretation is adopted, that jeopardizes the very foundations of our faith, and removes from us the blessed assurance of what we see and know, when He poured out His soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.

These speculations bring the Holy One of God into the moral condition of an unsaved Jewish remnant, under the punishment of that blood-guiltiness, which the nation called down upon itself and upon their children when they crucified their King! Of this remnant Mr. Darby writes: "They are under the law; they do not know what it is to be reconciled to God, but they come into awful conflict with Satan, Antichrist, and the terrors of that day. They will be under the sufferings which come from the full letting loose of Satan upon them, without the knowledge of God's favour resting on them."* Of which passage Mr. Dorman fitly remarks: "It is a strange scene whence to deduce the experiences of the Lord Jesus!" It matters not whether these experiences belong to elect sinners or to others; they are experiences of sinners as such, in moral and spiritual alienation from God; and into these experiences the Son of God, we are told, enters, that He might be able to sympathize with certain persons when passing through judgment for their sins. In the first place, the Son of God needed not to enter into the sinner's condition to enable Him to sympathize. He takes the place of man to sympathize with man, but goes into the place of the sinner only vicariously, and for atonement; and in any case the maker of man knows of what he is made. But the position taken by the blessed Lord was a real one, and not a fictitious one. He stands really as the Holy One, ever doing the will of the Father, ever rejoicing in Him, and ever rejoiced in by Him; and He stood the sin-offering unto God when the judgment of sin came down upon Him, and He was forsaken, and the penalties of a broken law rested on Him as consuming fire, and this He endured Godwards.

[72] All saints acknowledge with more or less distinctness the sympathy of Jesus with His mystic body; for wherein one member suffers all suffer, and in that sense the sufferings of a Father's chastening and of a Father's smiting, that come down on any of His children, can be borne in sympathy by Jesus. In this sense of mystic oneness, we often hear the Lord Jesus, the Head of the body, making allusion to the hand of God as being stretched out. This principle is illustrated in 2 Sam. vii., where, after God says of Solomon and his Antitype, "I will be his Father, and he shall be my son," He continues, "If he forsake my law, and walk not in my covenant, I will chasten him with the rod of men; but my mercy will I not take from him." The former part of this verse is in Heb. i. 5, quoted of our Lord in resurrection, and the latter can only have an application to Him, as the impersonation of the heavenly body, of which He is the Head; or as King of Israel, the Head of His faithful people in the latter day, when the remnant of Israel, having learnt grace, and having the spirit of supplication poured on them from on high, will look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn, worshipping at the feet of Him whom they crucified and slew. This explains that, for the interpretation of which, this third class of sufferings and experiences has been invented, whether by Mr. Newton or Mr. Darby. These false experiences which are attributed to Christ undermine the whole work of the cross in their legitimate deductions. Mr. Newton was doubtless at heart sound, even when intellectually overwhelmed with the subtleties of a speculative teaching, that aroused the attention of godly, sober-minded Christians, and led the brethren in Bethesda to feel justified in the

* *Bible Treasury*, vol. ii. p. 157.

extreme measure of separating from him. And if Mr. Darby and his followers had not excommunicated themselves from all but themselves, that which justified the course pursued towards Mr. Newton in 1848, would necessitate a similar course towards Mr. Darby in 1866. The doctrine is identical in this its main feature, that Christ is *placed under the judgment of God otherwise than atoningly*. This was the real poison in the doctrine of the one, and it is the real poison in that of the other. There are points in which they differ, but here in their worst feature they agree. We do not consider Mr. Newton to have been fundamentally unsound himself, having a reservation in his own mind which kept the noxious doctrine from undermining the foundations of truth in his own soul; the same, we [73] would hope, is true of Mr. Darby likewise; but when we have to examine false statements in doctrine, we have to do so without these reservations; and when it is taught, it will be learnt without them, and herein lies their danger, especially to those who, not having their senses exercised, are unable to discern between the good and the evil, and who will remember but too often what they hear, rather in its novelty of error, than in its truth.

“Exorbitances of doctrine,” writes one, “when advanced by men of powerful or richly-furnished minds, conceal their deformity and evil tendency beneath the attraction of intelligence. But the very same extravagancies and showy paradoxes, when caught up by inferior spirits, presently lose their garb, not only of beauty but of decency, and show themselves in the loathsome nakedness of error.”* The unwary, the uninstructed, the fascinated, seeing the beauty of the garb in which error is thus dressed up, call it “precious truth” – precious only, because they have not dug down to its foundation. This led many godly and devoted saints in 1848 to follow the false teachings of one teacher, and the same has led many since, with far less excuse, to follow the false teachings of another. The result has been the same; and the ultimate tendency of the doctrines will have to be learnt in the teachings of those who have not the power to cover over the nakedness of the error. This is painfully illustrated by two quotations from late periodicals belonging to the party, showing how followers go beyond the originators of error.

In *The Present Testimony*, for August, 1866, we read as follows:

“To Him, too, as an Israelite, the Messiah and King of Israel, the perfect Israelite, the cross (a Gentile death, and a cruel one) must have been far more sorrowful than to the two thieves. They, of course, felt the pain of the kind of death, and the death itself, in a bodily way; but besides feeling much more acutely than they did, His mind, His heart, His zeal for God, His love for Israel, His pity for the sinners and for Gentiles, all gave their tribute to His weight of sufferings. His mother, His disciples, all enlarged its dimensions too. There was too, to Him, *in addition to the pain of the death, the legal curse appended*, by God’s righteous judgment as King of Israel, to the form of death; as it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree.’ But *this curse of the law* was not the same thing as *the wrath*, when He cried out, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ *The thieves bore it as He did*; that thief, too, who went with Him to paradise the same day, and who could go there to be with his Lord, because *He*, the Prince of Life, had borne the wrath due [74] to sin in His own body on the tree. But the cross had been endured by many an unrepentant rebel against man and God; and the cross in itself would not take away sin. Yea more, while the time in which He endured the cross was the period *in part of which the wrath came on Him* (when He endured the wrath of God’s judgment against sin), He only, of the three that were crucified together, could or did bear that wrath; and the agony of that wrath, if His alone of the three then and there crucified, was distinct from, though present to him at the same time as the agonies (infinitely lesser) of the cross of wood.”

There is in this quotation that which is so profane, that we scarce like to comment on it – a linking together of the Spotless One and the malefactors crucified with Him, that the heart shudders in reading it, and cannot but feel that such teaching will fast turn those

* Quoted by Mr. Dorman in his pamphlet, p. 31.

who sit under it to infidelity. The cross to Christ, we are told, must have been far more sorrowful than to the two thieves; for His bodily sensibilities were keener. What an unhallowed way of treating the holy and awful sufferings of the Son of God! It robs the cross of its unutterable glory, and the person of the Sufferer of that reverential adoration which is His due at the hands of those who are healed by His stripes. What was this "legal curse" which "was not the same thing as the wrath, when He cried out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" What is this curse which we are told "the thieves bore as He did"? According to this, the curse He bore was not the sinner's curse, but a legal curse appended by God governmentally to the death of the cross, and the cross becomes no emblem of atoning grace and love, but the emblem of something that thieves endured as well as He! Paul's thoughts of the cross, how different! (Gal. vi. 14.)

In the September number of the *Bible Treasury* for the same year we read:

"Now that which was properly expiation or *atonement was not the pure, however precious, act of Christ's death*. Of course death was necessary for this and for other objects in the counsels of God; but it is what Jesus went through from and with God when made sin, it is what He suffered for our sins not only in body, but *in soul under divine wrath*, that the atonement depends on. Many besides Jesus have been crucified; but atonement was in no way wrought then. Many have suffered horrors of torment for the truth's sake in life and up to death; but they would have been the first to abhor the falsehood that *their sufferings atoned for themselves any more than for others.*"

What means the allusion made to the non-atoning character of the sufferings of others? It is as if it were altogether forgotten, that the atonement of the cross of Christ was not the [75] result of death in the abstract, but the result of the victim being what He was, the Anointed One of God, the only-begotten of the Father. It is hard to conceive where the heart and conscience of any one could be, who could pen the last sentences of the quotation; as if all the merits of the cross arose not out of the wonderful fact, that it was God who was making the propitiation. Had this thought been pervading the writer's mind, could he have written that saints who suffered for Christ would "abhor the falsehood that their sufferings atoned"? Truth has lost its power when such truisms are uttered. The heresies of 1848 left the cross very much untouched – the precious blood remained still the simple and single ground of atonement before God, and the only power of cleansing for the conscience to the sinner. The writer here says "it was not the pure death of Christ that was expiation," but it was what He suffered for our sins "in body and soul under the wrath of God." What can the tendencies of such teaching as this be, but to undermine confidence in those very foundation truths, which are reiterated again and again in the Scripture of truth, where we are ever reminded that it was the blood, and the blood ALONE, which settles every question between the believing sinner and his God.

We will give one quotation more. In the *Bible Treasury* for August, 1867, we read:

"At the cross, I apprehend, there was another thing. He was forsaken of God. He had immediately to do with God, and just wrath against sin, and He in that place, so that love could have no refuge for His soul; and here, too, He was perfect. And having accomplished this ineffable work, His soul *having drunk the cup unmixed, atonement having been made*, He comes forth as heard; and the *act of death is just His own giving up His Spirit* to His father. In the time of peace He had said so; but He was to *pass through death in His soul*, and did, as an offering for sin. But *then, what was death?* It was One that had overcome death, undergoing it in its infinite atoning efficacy, and gives up His soul more than pure, which has put away sin, into the hands of God His Father. What is death here, if the overcoming of Satan made it obedience? The *bearing of wrath gave title to give up life* into the merited reception of infinite favour ... And so through Him is death to us."

Of this Mr. Newberry writes: –

"Here we have clearly, and in sad consistency with the doctrine propounded, *an atonement without death*, and without the shedding of blood, which is the Scripture expression for death. But it is 'the

blood that maketh an atonement for the soul' (Lev. xvii. 11); 'and without shedding of blood is no remission.' (Heb. ix. 22.) Thus, according to this theory, we have an atonement other than that of Scripture.

[76] "Instead of His actual death and blood-shedding, He is said to 'pass through death in His soul;' that is, I apprehend, in experience; for it is distinguished from 'the act of death,' and the 'giving up of life.' Hence the atoning efficacy 'of His death, spoken of just afterwards, is that of a death undergone in *feeling, not in fact,* and the act of death in His soul given up afterwards,' atonement having been made."*

But not only so, the concluding remark of the writer in the *Bible Treasury* nullifies all that Scripture ever says of death in general, and of the death of Christ in particular. Death is not the giving up of the soul into the hands of God as a voluntary act of any sinner, much less of Christ, who stood in the sinner's place, but the judicial demanding of the soul, the exacting of life, at the hands of infinite justice. "He poured out His soul unto death," but not as one having already merited a title to give up life, but as one under penalty of death, as a Substitute for the sinner.

"The bearing of wrath," we are told, "gave title to give up life unto the merited reception of infinite favour." Hence the *bearing of wrath* is not death. What confusion of all the sacred truth of God's word! What fearful unmitigated heresy! If such be the case, well may a writer in the *Bible Treasury* for August, 1866, say, "*The work is so perfectly done, that death is nothing.*" And, as if to make his meaning unmistakable, the writer likens the death of the believer, amidst the peace and joy of atonement made and pardon sealed, with the death of the Holy Substitute, who went down into the deep waters when there was no standing. If there are any two things that stand contrasted in Scripture, it is the death of Christ, and the death of His saints – the one all peace, and joy, and rest; the other all agony and woe. Let not the committing of the Spirit to the Father be ever confounded with the pouring out of the soul unto death, with which it stands in contrast. We would remind our readers of the apostle's words: "He tasted death for every man;" and of our Lord's word, "He that believeth on Me shall never taste of death." Who but God knows what tasting of death means? Well may it be asked, "If a soul that has accepted this theory, and substituted it for the Scriptural truth, were exposed in a season of temptation to the siftings of the adversary, whither could it fly for refuge? Forsaking of God, apart from blood-shedding, is not atonement according to the Scriptures; and the cutting off or death of Messiah is not atonement according to this theory."

[77] When such teachings pass current respecting the death of Christ, the way is prepared for the real death of Christ being ignored, because unnecessary, and if unnecessary unjust; and those holding it will again drift away into darker heresies of bygone days, and Gnostic unreality take the place of the realities and verities of God's word. The advocates of these views see not where they are drifting; they see not their danger. May we who see the danger lift up our voice like a trumpet, that the blood of souls be not laid at our door. "They know not what they do." May our hearts be drawn out in prayer for them, for all saints, and for ourselves.

Let us hear what Scripture says on the bloodshedding and death of Christ. We are told that we are "justified by His blood" (Rom. v. 9); "have redemption through His blood" (Eph. i. 7); that we are "made nigh by His blood" (Eph. ii. 13); that we have "peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. i. 20); that we have "cleansing of conscience through the blood of Christ" (Heb. ix. 14); that we have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." It is to the "blood of sprinkling" that we draw near in the heavens (Heb. xii. 24); and the standing of the believer here is in the same "sprinkling of

* *Quotations, &c.*, p. 26.

the blood of Jesus" (1 Peter i. 1); for he knows that God has redeemed him "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." It is "the blood of Christ, God's Son, that cleanseth from all sin," and before the throne it is the blood of the Lamb that gives title to a place there (Rev. vii.), and that alone. Of the death of Christ it is said that we are "reconciled by the death of God's Son" (Rom. i. 10; Col. i. 21, 22), and the cross is given as that which, being the emblem of sacrificial death, becomes therefore the ground of reconciliation, so that it is said of Christ, "that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross." (Eph. i. 16.) The cross is the watchword of the Church, and the *only* ground of glorying; for we are to glory in nothing else; and Paul looked on those who received not Jesus by faith, as "enemies to the cross."

Remission of sin rests exclusively in Scripture on that which we see and know, and nothing added to it. It is this which, blessed be God, we *know* on His own testimony, and not any thing that came down on the soul of the Holy Sufferer, of which we *know little*, that is to us the ground of the atonement wrought out on the cross. Mental sorrows there [78] doubtless were, soul agonies of which God has said very little to us, but in the typical records of the book of Psalms. Our peace, our rest, our hope is on the ground of what we *see* on the cross. To this John alludes when, having witnessed the death of Jesus, he wrote under the teaching of the Spirit as follows: "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." Wherefore this reiteration, so unusual in God's word, but to show that all atonement rested on what God here bears witness to by His Spirit? Over all the exercises of soul of the blessed Lord during those three hours of darkness, God has drawn the impenetrable veil of a miraculous darkness, when the Son of man entered into the "horror of great darkness," out of which He was to rise in resurrection, Himself the sun shining in His strength. God has drawn the veil, and this veil profane hands would lift, but it will end in their confusion. Is there nothing to be learned from the fact that the sun was darkened, thereby casting the mantle of a supernatural midnight around the sin-offering, hiding from view all that was passing within and around? Well may we tremble as we contemplate what we cannot fathom, and ponder on that, into which even in thought we cannot enter – the Victim alone with God, bound by God, smitten by God, and the sword of God entering into His soul; and when thus smitten and forsaken, God's face turned away from Him, who had ever walked in the sunshine of His countenance, and whose countenance had till then ever shone upon Him. But it was God the Judge of all who hid His face in the day of the judgment of the cross, and though saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" His first and last utterance on the cross began with "FATHER," in the fullest confidence of all that name involved of love and approval.

What have these teachings given us for our confidence as to atonement, when the sole visible ground of confidence borne witness to by the Holy Ghost is taken away from us? When the gracious word, "When I see the blood I will pass over you," spoken by God, can no longer satisfy the burdened soul; when the fact of the cross and the death upon it is removed as the sure and certain, because the *only* ground of peace and rest, what, we ask, do these writers give us instead? They say the death was necessary, but that it was not enough; [79] they say the atonement rests in this, that Christ suffered *in soul*, as well as in body, *under divine wrath*. This suffering in *soul under divine wrath* is thus made a necessary component part of the atonement, and if so, the poor sinner needs to know it, ere he can rest in peaceful assurance that atonement has really been made. But of this we read not a syllable in the whole of the New Testament, where, if anywhere, it would be found. Some, who say that atonement was effected before death, seek to prove it by the

utterance on the cross, "It is finished." But if so, John xvii., where Jesus says, "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do," would prove atonement was effected before He came to the cross at all. The consciousness that sin had been laid on Him, took not away from His soul the sweet assurance that the Father was well-pleased, or for a moment brought the thought to Him that the wrath of God rested on Him other than vicariously. It could not. It was impossible. He stood there obedient unto death, even the death of the cross – obedient to the will of the Father who sent Him.

Well may Captain Hall write, in contemplating these departures from sacred fundamental truth, "The cross, the awful yet glorious symbol of divine love in its heights and depths, and of an eternal redemption from the curse and wrath justly due to us, is taken from us altogether; it ceases to be the symbol of the *first* class of our Lord's sufferings, atoning sufferings for our sin, received and accepted by all Christians, and is used as the symbol (and confirmation) of a third class of sufferings under an unatoning curse and wrath. Alas! they have taken away my Lord, and I 'know not where they have laid Him.'"*

One thing excites one's surprise in regard to these third-class sufferings of Christ, and that is that the authors of them should have ventured on such speculations, on such a subject, without adducing one passage from the New Testament in support of their views. Mr. Darby, writing against Mr. Newton, felt this, and writes:

"We may do well to consider what the New Testament does say as to the sufferings of Christ. Mr. Newton's theory is based on the principle that this kind of sufferings of Christ are not found in the New Testament, but only in the Psalms. But surely a doctrine of such immense importance as the subjection of Christ to the wrath of God, previous to the cross and [80] not vicariously, whether up to John's baptism, as he sometimes states it, or up to His death as at others ... A doctrine, I say, of such importance as Christ being under wrath, would be found in the epistles, in the way of comment on the history."†

And yet in his own case, with reference to his own views, he is himself constrained to admit that they are not to be found in the New Testament at all. Should not such an admission be enough to stagger any single-minded Christian?

But how easily does confidence in man supplant allegiance to God, even in upright hearts who know not that it is so. Mr. Dorman, Captain Hall, Mr. Newberry, and others who have since left the Darby party, had heard for years painful rumours of unsound teaching. To this Mr. Newberry refers in the introduction to his pamphlet alluded to before. He writes:

"When the statements of the doctrine of the third-class of Christ's non-atoning sufferings first appeared in the *Bible Treasury* in 1858, the discovery of its nature was to me overwhelming, and for years I could not allow myself to admit that the writer really meant what he said. I put it from me as best I could. But when in 1866 the subject was publicly agitated, I was compelled thoroughly and honestly to examine the matter, and this I did ... And the result has been a deep and growing conviction that the doctrine of the tract (*The Sufferings of Christ*) which is here considered is unfounded and untrue, and utterly contrary to Scripture teaching."

May these remembrances restrain hard thoughts of persons led into error, even while there be allowed no compromise with the error itself, knowing that small errors in doctrine, as men may think them, often lead to the saddest departure from the truth of God.

We would again warn all of the delusion into which any may fall, who are contented to seek a protection and a safeguard from heresy, in the spirituality of much else that is

* *Grief upon Grief*, p. 51.

† *Observations*, pp. 57, 58.

taught at the same time. God has shown that teaching is to be judged of by fruits, and not by words; and let none seek a shelter from evil and false doctrine in the uncertain, fallacious argument of beautiful teaching, which may only be the more delusive because the more beautiful. God teaches us, by permitting errors to arise, that we must cultivate not an ideal and pictorial Christianity, but one that makes all its lovely pictures living figures. The Church has to learn that the belief in any doctrine is a dead thing going to corruption, unless it be brought into the living activities of obedience. It becomes us all to [81] bring the principle of justification by works, as spoken of in James, more practically to bear on *all* that we believe. It concerns every act in the life of him who is born of God: for by the living actings of a living faith we are told, "the scripture was fulfilled which saith, He believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." That which is reckoned for righteousness needs to become a fruit fulfilled in righteousness, and thus the act of Abraham's faith recorded in Genesis xxii. fulfills the announcement of God concerning him in the fifteenth chapter. The Lord enable us to seek after having all that we believe fulfilled in us, and then shall we stand before the Church of God and before the world, as the friends of God, and the second chapter of James will be fulfilled in the fifteenth of John realised.

We cannot close this subject without a few remarks on the open endorsement of Mr. Darby's views by the leaders of his party. He had frequently been spoken to, by those of his followers who had courage to do so, on the similarity between his views, and those held formerly by Mr. Newton. This was alluded to at a meeting in Portsmouth some years ago, when Mr. D. replied, that those who could form such a comparison, were either "fools or knaves!" Mr. Dorman tells us how again and again he brought the subject before him, and he seems at one time to have received "assurances of his willingness to correct any faulty expressions in the writings complained of;" but whatever promises may have been held out, they were not to be realized. Strong representations had been made to Mr. Darby while abroad as to the painful effects his teachings had had on the minds of many in fellowship with him, but when he returns to London from the Continent, in 1866, rather than retract or alter anything he had written, he determines to leave his party if necessary. This they could not allow. The result was that *the whole question was hushed up*, there was *no examination, no retractation*, and the doctrines in question virtually received the sanction of the leaders of the party, nine of whom, including Mr. Wigram, wrote the following letter in reply to remonstrances made by one of their number, against the tacit consent given to Mr. Darby's views by the leaders of his party:

"DEAR BROTHER IN THE LORD,

"We have read and considered your letter to our brother Mr. J. N. Darby, and his letters to you. We are not aware 'that the subject of the [82] sufferings of Christ is everywhere rife, or at least in many places or in many minds.' So far as we know this statement is unwarrantably strong. Here the state of things is the very contrary, and we cannot be content to allow our brother J. N. D. to withdraw himself from us under such plea, to us not true, in the place where we are. We know not of any consciences so troubled, *nor is there anything in the writings referred to which has affected our own consciences.*

"Signed for the Nine,*

"G. V. W. C. McA."

* The following are the names of the nine: E. Cronin, George Owen, C. McAdam, Butler Stoney, Wm. Kelly, E. Denny, Andrew Miller, H. McCarthy, and G. V. Wigram. (See *Cause of Withdrawal*. Sold by Caswell, Birmingham.)

Those who had been waiting anxiously for some acknowledgment of error – some modification of statements that had been made, now saw but too clearly that nothing was to be expected. The evil had been wrapped up, and stereotyped on the party. Of this Mr. Dorman writes:

“Instead of any modification of the doctrine or its withdrawal, as I had hoped, or any correction of the faulty statements, which had been solemnly promised, I found that now all was to be maintained. In addition to this I learned that nine of the leaders in London had, in effect, countersigned the whole doctrine, and had thus sent it on accredited, as far as their names could accredit it, for currency among those who acknowledge Mr. D.’s rule.”

It was, indeed, scarcely to be supposed, that one who had been submitted to so implicitly by his followers hitherto, and been helped by them in carrying out what Mr. Dorman calls “his unrighteous decree,” would, when it came to the point, yield himself either to their entreaties or their dictation. He had become a necessity to his followers, and they could not lose him; and the threat of leaving them not only led them to leave the matter uninvestigated, but to endorse the doctrines advocated; for “they had not found anything in the writings referred to, which had affected their own consciences.” Thus have the London gatherings of the party given their sanction to that, for which these twenty-eight years they have been pursuing their brethren with “fire and sword.” The question evidently is not, “What is the doctrine?” but, “Who teaches it?”

Mr. Dorman writes, p. 36:

“This doctrine, whatever its character may be proved to be, is no barren metaphysical dogma: Mr. D. knows it well. The living, inexorable law of discipline which guards the grounds of fellowship of all who are especially associated with him, took its rise eighteen years ago in the rigid [83] exclusion of the one doctrine; and it will be hard to show how it can be righteously maintained, in conjunction with the acceptance and maintenance of the other. At any rate it is impossible for *me* to regard any longer this law of exclusion as having anything whatever to do with *purity of doctrine*; on which ground it was at first ostensibly inaugurated. ‘The brethren’ *κατ’ ἐξοχήν* have now, strange to say it, completed a circle. Eighteen or nineteen years ago their polity and position were *entirely remodelled* on the ground of separation from ‘Bethesda’ on account of alleged laxity in dealing with false doctrine. They are now themselves in a position to be separated from on the score of the reception and sanction of false doctrine amongst themselves, and that not on some other point of Christian truth, but on the very point from which what they condemned arose.” – *Close of Twenty-eight years of Association with J. N. D.* Houlston and Wright, London.

Some, following the London leaders, and the signers of the letter of the nine, endorsed these doctrines; while others determined to follow the injunction given by some, “Do not touch it;” “Have nothing to do with the matter.” The former are not chargeable with inconsistency. But in seeking to carry out their exclusive discipline, they embrace within their own bosom the very evil it was originated to keep out.

But what shall we say of the sincerity of the latter – of those who determine that they will not look into the matter – of those who, when Mr. Dorman proposed to have a church examination of the doctrine, replied, “It will be disastrous.” Mr. Dorman withdrew because he would not “introduce the element of strife amongst them.” All wished to keep the discussion of these matters, if possible, from those with whom they were in fellowship. But do not those who refused investigation now, remember that the opposition to Bethesda arose out of *the refusal of the leaders to do the very thing then, which it is now thought would be disastrous* to do in Orchard Street? What then becomes of the decree that established the Bethesda test, and which originated the meeting with which until lately Mr. Dorman was connected? If it was right to refuse an investigation in 1866, when the evil doctrines in question had crept in and were being propagated, was it wrong for

Bethesda to refuse an investigation in 1848, when the teaching was confined to Plymouth?

Mr. Dorman, in justification of his course of separating from Orchard Street, writes:

“My heart instinctively shrank from the thought of bringing abstruse speculations on the solemn subjects of the cross and the sufferings of Christ before young and immature minds. I could not bear to do what I was assured would only gratify that natural pruriency of many, which at [84] all times I have sought to repress instead of awaken; and most especially when Christ’s person was in question. It was this which led me to retire in silence from my ordinary fellowship with the meeting at Orchard Street, Bristol; contenting myself by saying, in an informal way, that the doctrines of Mr. D. had compelled the step I had taken. I had then made up my mind to encounter any obloquy on account of my course rather than incur the responsibility of bringing on indiscriminate discussions, which I am satisfied would have *resulted only in blighting the best and holiest feelings of the heart toward Christ* and His suffering and cross. And besides this, I was anxious not to hinder Mr. Mackintosh’s labours in the gospel, by collision with him, as I knew that he took a contrary part.” (pp. 60, 61.)

How far Mr. Dorman was justified in leaving Orchard Street as he did, without bringing the matter in question to the front, or seeking to deliver those whom he had been so largely instrumental in bringing and in keeping where they were, we leave it to his own conscience to decide; yet we read, “Those that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.”

Thus ends this sad chapter in the history under review, and may God give repentance to all who have departed from the simplicity of the truth, and lead to repentance all who have sinned, especially those who have led others astray.

CHAPTER VIII.

Concluding Observations.

IN bringing this narrative of facts to a close, for the sake of explicitness we would notice briefly the chief elements of evil that present themselves to us in this ecclesiastical system which we have had under review; and we will name them in the order in which they have come before us in the narrative.

1st. *Railing, evil-speaking, and false accusations.* These sins of the tongue, we know whence they come; for “the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it *defileth* the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (James iii. 6, 8.) These things come out of the heart of man, and by our Lord are ranked with adulteries and murders, any of which defile the man (Matt. xv.); and under Darbyite discipline, consistently carried out, not one now among them would be eligible for church fellowship; for the railer, and he who consorts with him, would be under the same sentence. [85] Had this been remembered, there would have been less readiness to charge on others “defilement,” “neutrality,” “blasphemy,” “indifference to the honour of Christ,” and greater readiness manifested to maintain that love which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; and to avoid a spirit that bore nothing, believed nothing, hoped nothing, and endured nothing.”

Satan is called the diabolus; that is, the accuser or slanderer of the brethren; and to slander God’s saints by evil speaking and false accusation is to act in a diabolical manner. But if we would have our lips kept, we must keep our hearts with all diligence.

2nd. *Schism*, in separating from godly saints, as, according to the confession of the Separatists themselves, those were from whom they separated. Notwithstanding the

knowledge and the gifts among the Corinthian Christians, the apostle called them “babes,” because they were carnal in their schismatic spirit; but what would he say of those who, in their professed zeal for God, would cut off the righteous and the wicked, valuing a brother more by his adherence to the views of a party, than by his faithful allegiance to Christ? Surely this is weighing things in other balances than those found in God’s sanctuary.

3rd. The establishment of *an unrighteous system of discipline*, which sets aside all discrimination, and stamps with the brand of heresy the faithful follower of Christ, if he accepts not the discipline, because in his judgment contrary to the word of God; and which follows with unrelenting severity all contact, even to the thousandth remove, with a particular character and form of heresy, and yet accepts those who may come and go from any sect or system in which may be taught ritualism or materialism, Socinianism or non-eternity of punishment, or any other of the varied forms of error which abound, if the system be not actually founded on a heresy, as Unitarianism or others of the same stamp. Had they demanded uniformity of opinion, as the Glassites and others have done, they could have claimed consistency; but the discipline as carried out is unequal, and therefore unjust, as well as unscriptural.

4th. The setting up of a *new and sectarian bond of union*. We have already stated what the original principle was that guided the reception of believers. And such it is in theory still; but theories usually linger long after the practice has [86] belied the theory. *Now*, the question asked of one seeking fellowship among the seceders (or exclusives, as they prefer to be called) is not, “Have you fled to Christ simply?” but, “Where do you come from?” Holding the Head in godly sincerity is not any more a sufficient commendation, but the applicant is asked as to his having taken “the ground of the body.” “Jesus in the midst,” and “Jesus only,” is no longer the sufficient ground on which to gather. Whenever this is the case, a sect arises, because it adds something to God’s centre of union and fellowship.

5th. *False teaching on the sufferings of the Lord*, in the heresy of non-atoning suffering under the wrath of God. This is the more inexcusable inasmuch as the church discipline of the party was originated to keep out this very class of error. That these false teachings have not been idle, in their leavening influences among them, we have proof, in teachers having been silenced, for going beyond the orthodoxy of the party to which they belong.

Before concluding we will give a few extracts from Mr. Darby’s pen in 1845, when justifying his separation from Mr. Newton, at the time when he tells us his followers were “set down and discountenanced as Darbyites.” We give them here that they may be read in reference to the development of the system under review. It will be seen how history repeats itself, and how prone we all are to slip back by a by-path, into the principles that we think have been left behind; and under another outward form, *the institution* will be the same, whether it finds its habitation in a cathedral or in an upper room.

When remarking on the various characteristics of Satan’s workings, he writes of one of its forms:

“In this orthodox truth is in general maintained. Any pretension to *the possession of spiritual power is based on Church position, not on any particular manifestation of power*, and thus seems to honour the institution of the Church, and Christ in it. God is alleged to have set there (in that institution) the seat of blessing, and this also is an acknowledged truth, and the *unity of the body of Christ is thereon connected with the institution*. But the sovereign operation of *the Spirit of God is set aside*, and that which *acts outside the actually formed institution is condemned* as denying the authority of God’s institution and schismatical sin. Thus the actual *possessors of the power of the institution*, in its then state, *really take the place of God*: His power is vested in them as far as it acts on earth. Divine condemnation

attaches to all who act independently of them. *Direct dependence upon God is unallowable*. And thus, *whatever puts individual faith to the test* (for going with the crowd under authority [87] does not) *is condemned as self-will* and presumption. The system which so judges is alleged to maintain the unity of the Church ...

“The first of these works of Satan, then, *is the pretence to the extraordinary operation of the Spirit*. That is ephemeral. It is suited to the ill-directed but righteous cravings after that manifestation of spiritual power which was and is the only true source of living blessing on the earth when that power has faded away. The other is the orderly *establishment of men in the place of that power*. This lasts. It is suited to unbelief, as in its full development it always generates it. Montanism is past. The spiritual pretensions of Irvingism are in fact passed. The system of men and ordinances set up by it abide.” (pp. 6, 7.)

Have there been no pretensions used on *Church position*, and not on a manifestation of *power*, since these lines were penned? Have no possessors of the power of the institution taken the place of God? Has there been no setting up of men in the place of the power of the Holy Ghost? No calling of direct dependence on God, self-will? Let God judge.

Speaking of the early growth of evil, Mr. D. writes:

“Those most conversant with history, and most spiritual, know how much spirituality it requires to detect its commencement and early growth, and that it *sprung really from the best persons, and* most apparently *godly principles* that appear after the record of Scripture was closed; so that, though there were counteracting principles which Protestants can justly cite, yet full-grown Popery can quote the earliest fathers to establish in principle her claim, and support her pretension. The blessed and perfect word of God reveals in one word this history: *they began in the spirit and ended in the flesh*. If you enquire who were the persons who laid the basis of this amazing evil, it will be found that it was *those who insisted on good order and unity*; but it was *not in the power* of the Holy Ghost, but in arrangements which attached to office, the authority necessary to maintain it ... Hence the effect produced by the power – the *institution* itself – the *Church as an ordered system* (not the Church redeemed by Christ). [sic] became the object presented, and was made the guard as an institution, instead of being guarded by spiritual care ...

“The *first sign of weakness is the gathering itself becoming the object* of attention, instead of their being a people enjoying the blessedness of their position by the relationship and position it gave them with *Christ who was their abiding object*, revealing withal God the Father ... You will find holy spiritual affections broken and set aside to give place to the *claim of the institution*; and so are even natural affections; whilst the latter are given all their natural force and weight in practice to hold persons in the institution, and even largely used for this purpose. The activity and *zeal will be for the system*. It will be *to make proselytes*, and to establish them in what will keep them there, *not to save souls, or lead them to Christ*. There will be a *good deal of acting against, or a depreciation of others who even hold the faith of Christ*. *Paramount importance will be attached to the views which distinguish that institution, not to what saves or to what brings faith to the test* of the revelation of Christ ...

“With this will be found the *attributing to* those who hold the truth [88] *every kind of doctrine they abhor* when there is influence enough to have their statements believed. Popery is the plain example of this. Another mark, whatever the apparent devotedness, yea, and real devotedness, sometimes is, that the spirit of the world is acquiesced in ... The influence of females, and of money, will be largely employed.”* (pp. 8–10.)

These remarks on the *institution* deserve calm consideration by all; and surely many may well examine their ways when the gathering becomes *the* object rather than Christ, when zeal to proselytize takes the place of zeal to save sinners, when acting against others, and depreciation of good in them, takes the place of what brings faith to the test. May the writer and his followers, and others too, lay these words to heart in the consciousness

* From *A Narrative of Facts*. By J. N. Darby. Published in 1845 by Campbell, Warwick Square, London. The italics are our own.

of how far these signs of weakness have developed themselves, and how with many what is here given as indications of weakness, have with boasting pride been taken as indications of strength and matters of glory. When this is the case with any, they have travelled far towards Laodicea, and its warning may well be sounded, "Be zealous and repent, lest," says Christ, "I spue thee out of my mouth."

Our great preservative is a broken and a contrite spirit, and a trembling at the word of God; for with those who are such God will dwell. The presence of God puts our pride and our high thoughts in the dust, and we say with Job, "Now mine eye seeth *thee*. Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes." Let us hold the truth of Christ, in the presence of God, and Satan will not touch us.

But the more heavenly the doctrines, the more terrible will be the delusion to which those are exposed, who cease to abide in daily humble dependence on the person of Christ and in the power of His Spirit. The path opened up in the Scriptures of truth, and entered on by many well-nigh fifty years ago, was through much affliction and joy of the Holy Ghost, but it has led through a tempestuous sea. Thus it was, however, that Paul contemplated the history of "the Church of God purchased with His own blood." Her path was revealed to him as beset with dangers, from opposition from the world without, from the misleadings of false brethren from within. It was thus that Peter was drawn away into hypocritical actings in Antioch, and by the same, that Paul himself was misled through the influence of James and others in Jerusalem. But [89] these failures thus early manifested are placed on record, that no man should trust in man, even in an apostle, whether a Peter or a Paul, but in God Himself alone; for, alas! it is so much easier to trust in a teacher whom we see, than to seek the guidance of the only infallible Teacher whom we see not.

The turmoil and confusion which have come in have *not arisen from God's principles*, but by man's departure from them, or by his seeking to maintain them, in the power of the flesh, and not in that of the spirit.

We need therefore to be on our guard that God's truth be not discarded, because the human medium through which it is presented, proves itself unworthy of the treasure committed to its trust. Rather must it be remembered, that God has put His treasure into earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of His people. And what, if ever and again the earthen vessel is broken in pieces? It does but show of what the vessel is made; and while looking at the broken fragments the people of God may mourn, they rejoice that that which is of God abideth for ever. To some these years may appear fraught only with evil, but when looked at in the higher light of God's wisdom and mercy, and when over the havoc and the storm the guiding star of infinite love is seen, the clouds are found big with blessing, even though human pretensions have been unmasked, high-sounding words sifted, and lofty claims brought down. For all this God is to be praised; though many have proved themselves guilty, the measure and degree of which we leave Him to decide who makes no mistakes, and who shows no partiality.

This period has, however, been marked with the busy handiwork of Satan. Roots of bitterness have been matured into trees of unrighteousness, seeds of discord have sprung up into a luxuriant harvest of unholy weeds, that have marred and choked much of the good seed of the kingdom; dormant evils have ripened into active agencies of Satan; and much that in the sowing was thought to be of God, has been proved in its fruits, to have been of the flesh, and confusion and corruption have been the result. But is this *manifestation of evil* an evil? Is it a misfortune that what has been working amongst the Lord's people has been seen, that the poisonous berries are no longer hidden and rejoiced in as precious fruits of the Spirit, but manifested in all their native character, no longer able to

deceive those who do not wish to be deceived? By no means! [90] Faith can look upwards, and, though with sorrow and in tears, can still lift up her eyes trustfully towards heaven, and say, "Father, I thank Thee;" for that is still revealed to the babes, which the wise and prudent ever have and ever will fail to see. The Lord amidst the candlesticks has been walking and speaking; and He who was in Ephesus, in Smyrna, in Pergamos, has been in Plymouth, in Bristol, in London, and the messages He has been sending to those whom they may concern are not less plain. The approving word that says, "Thou art rich;" and the word of reproof that says, "Repent, or I will fight against thee," have alike been heard, and are still heard amongst us; but there are whispers of God that the wise can hear and the chastened soul understand; and there are voices in thunder that the unwise often read backwards to their own confusion.

We have seen that when principles of evil come in, the Lord scatters, that all may not be defiled, thereby enabling the scattered ones the better to keep their garments, so that they may walk with Him in white. Thus He scattered at Babel, and thus He scatters still, when man thinks to make himself a name, and to build a tower for his pride. In the present instance, that foreseeing God, who knew full well whereunto this Pharisaic exclusiveness in the holy name of Jesus would tend, has, by the divisions made by Satan, graciously shielded thousands from its influence, who otherwise might have been led away; and by the very opposition those principles met with from the brethren in Bethesda and elsewhere, have the eyes of multitudes been opened to see the magnitude of the evil in which they might have been involved.

These events happen not in the Church of God for the individual instruction of the few, but for the saints at large; not that any should boast, but that all should fear and find matter for self-judgment. God triumphs over man's weakness and wilfulness, but in such a way that those who wish not to see, will fail to see His working. God forces not conviction, even on His children: if they know not the time of their visitation (as they are ever responsible for doing), they will reap the bitter consequences, in broken projects here, and in lost blessings hereafter.

Many need to be cautioned against casting away truth, because truth is troublesome. So will it ever be as long as we are in the body; for the truth bears upon the natural depravity [91] of the natural heart, and, like the little book to John, the truth of God will be sweet in the mouth, and bitter in the belly. (Rev. x. 10.) We know that "where no ox is the crib is clean, but much strength is in the labour of the ox." Truth has to be looked at in the light of the Word, and not viewed through the weakness of the creature, so that no failure in the instrument can justify the rejection of that which God has revealed. Amidst all the confusion and noise of the conflict, a conflict ever going on between light and darkness, God's voice is heard, and truth triumphs in the truthful soul now, as it will triumph before all when He comes, to make the crooked things straight, and to set all to His line and to His plummet. Let there be no hope of rest in anything but in the truth according as it is in Jesus, in all its fulness and in all its minuteness. There may be slumber; but there can be no rest found but in following Jesus, and in His bosom. We dare not give up even the smallest truth (smallest only in our estimation), because the path is not so plain and easy as it at first appeared. Had Abraham acted thus, when in obedience to the command "Get thee out," he went to Canaan, and was there met by "a famine in the land," he would at once have gone back to Mesopotamia, assuredly gathering he had made a mistake. Nor yet must we with that holy man go to Egypt, because in the place to which God has sent us, there is trial and disappointment, for God will be with us there. Our well-springs are in Himself, and not in His Church; and if this is forgotten, it is a lesson that God will find many opportunities of sorrow to teach over again. The way has not been

missed, because clouds darkened the sky, and the enemy has slain many in the struggle; the way is where it ever was, and what it ever was, the King's highway of holiness and peace, where none can hurt those who follow the footsteps of the Master, though thousands fall all around.

Many have dreamed of a fellowship of saints on earth that would lead calmly and smoothly heavenward. They came into church fellowship, and found to their dismay that church fellowship meant, that they were called to bear and to forbear. It was not like Christ's own fellowship, not like His holy, faithful love; and so, instead of finding rest, they found a heavy burden laid upon them. Thus their hopes were blighted because ill-founded, and some have sought a refuge elsewhere, where they might find less to bear. They mistook the character of the path they had to tread; they found they had got into [92] a place where they had to follow the example of their Master, and bear the burdens, the weaknesses, and infirmities of others; they had not counted the cost of thus following Christ, into a closer fellowship of saints, whom they would have to minister to, and not to be ministered unto, and whose feet they would have to wash; and where that most difficult and most blessed lesson (taught in the life and ways of Christ) has to be learned deeply, inwardly, and practically, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

May we possess in this more of the mind of Christ, and then we shall find God to be our shield and our exceeding great reward, and *receive* His "well done" for all that has been suffered for Christ and for His Church.

NOTE. — As some of the quotations in this pamphlet have been sought for in more recent editions of the tracts and books referred to, and in one or two instances have not been found, I would here remark that the quotations are made from the original editions. This remark has particular reference to a quotation from *Words of Truth*, in page 20 of this edition, which has been omitted in a subsequent edition of that periodical.

