

# EARLY DAYS

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A series of letters showing how the Spirit of God led  
in the recovery of various great truths relating  
to the Church, some ninety years ago.



NEW YORK  
LOIZEAUX BROTHERS, BIBLE TRUTH DEPOT  
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# EARLY DAYS

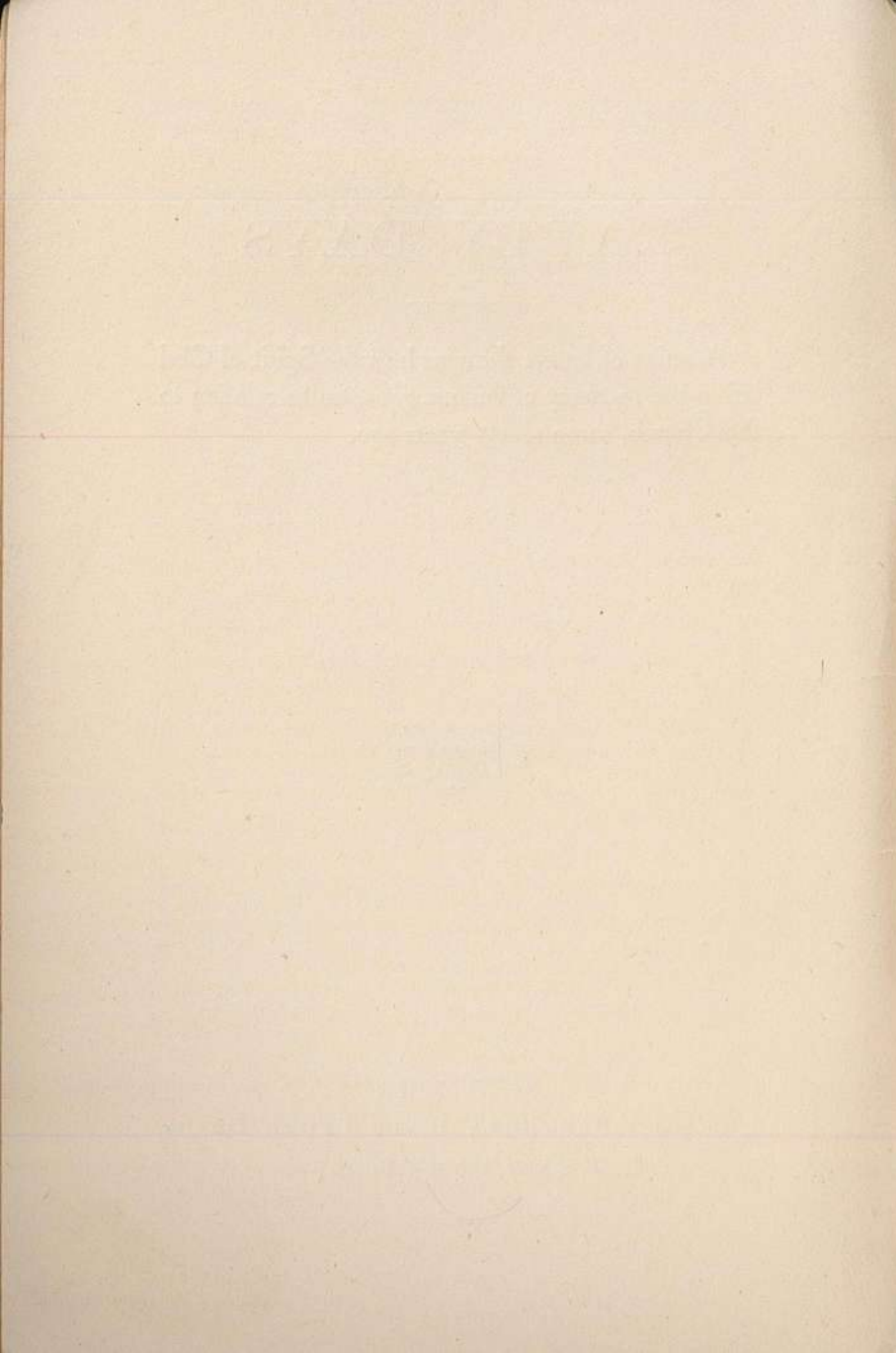
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## FOREWORD.

A desire has been expressed that certain letters written many years ago in connection with the gracious movement of the Holy Spirit in the nineteenth century, might be put in print for wider circulation.

This is done not to eulogize the men of God who were used to recover precious truths long lost sight of in the professing Church, but to kindle in our hearts the devotedness and piety manifested in them. May they lead to self-examination before God, to see if the truth has that hold upon our hearts which divine truth demands. It may be that many, in these easy-going days, influenced perhaps by relationships, or friendships, or other causes, outwardly occupy the position spoken of in these letters with but little apprehension of what these "recovered truths" really are, and what they meant to those who separated from long-cherished connections to walk in obedience to and in fellowship with Christ, like those Hebrew Christians, "going forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13).

These early brethren made no claim to anything more than what is the common privilege and portion of all true believers, but they *received* the truth, felt the *power* of it, and *walked* in it.

Ecclesiastical claims and party banners have since been raised, alas! to the dishonor of Christ and the truths professed, but in no wise does it

affect the truths that were then recovered. They remain true to faith as ever, to be maintained in love, with godly fear, remembering the Lord's words to Philadelphian saints: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

The reader will see that the Movement spoken of was the result of godly exercise in many persons, and in places distant from one another. It is also true that, though not first in the early meetings, Mr. J. N. Darby became the principal instrument to unify and establish the spiritual movement upon the solid foundation of the Word of God. Three great truths were prominently set forth through his instrumentality:

The perfect acceptance of the believer "in Christ" before God.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer and in the Church to energize and direct it.

The Lord coming for His own as the hope of the Church—His body and His Bride.

May God the Spirit engraft these things in *our* hearts, that we may individually and collectively be here as the chaste virgin espoused to the Beloved—true to Him, while waiting for Him. [Ed.]

## EARLY DAYS

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*Copy of Letter from Mr. Bellett to Mr. J. Macallister:*

When I call to mind some of the early facts connected with the history of so-called "brethren," as for distinction I will call them, I am impressed with the sense of there having been at that time a very independent and original teaching of the Spirit of God. I do not doubt that, however they may have aided one another afterwards, or grown together in the understanding and enjoyment of much common truth, earlier impressions had been abroad in the minds of many without conference or suggestion, which, however, led them readily to run together once they did confer. I believe the earliest time of our history, both in England and Ireland, might exhibit this.\* I may fail in accuracy

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\*Sometime between 1812 and 1820, correspondence on these lines was carried on between a company of Christians in New York and other Christians in Great Britain. They deplored the formalism and the mixture of the world with true Christians in their congregations, and questions and suggestions were made as to coming together for edification in simplicity, very much like that mentioned in these narratives. It is an additional evidence how the Holy Spirit was moving the hearts of saints to the same end. [Ed.]



of recollection, and of course, I may mistake when I was not so personally engaged, but I will follow on just as my memory suggests to me, bethinking myself, of course, as I proceed, praying the Lord to guide in all simplicity and truth.

It was in the year 1827 that the late Archbishop of Dublin, in a charge delivered to the clergy of his diocese, recommended that a petition should go up to the legislature seeking increased protection for them in the discharge of their ministerial duties, as the teachers of religion in these lands. John Darby was then a curate in the County of Wicklow, and often did I visit him in his mountain parish. This charge of his diocesan greatly moved him; he could not understand the common Christianity of such a principle, as it assumed that ministers of Christ in doing their business as witnesses against the world for a rejected Jesus, should, on meeting the resistance of the enemy, turn round and seek security from the world. This greatly offended him. He printed his objections to such a principle in a pretty large pamphlet, and without publishing it or putting it on sale, sent copies of it to all the clergy of the diocese. All this had a very decided influence on his mind, for I remember him at one time a very exact Churchman (as I may speak), but it was evident his mind had now received a shock, and it was never again what it had been. However, he continued in his mountain curacy, at times, as a clergyman, visiting different parts of the country, either to preach sermons or



to speak at some meeting of the religious societies.

In the beginning of 1828 I had occasion to go to London, and there I met in private, and heard in public, those who were warm and alive on prophetic truth, having had their minds freshly illuminated by it. In my letter to J. N. Darby, at that time, I told him I had been hearing things that he and I had never talked about, and I further told him on my return to Dublin what they were. Full of this subject as I was then, I found him quite prepared for it also, and his mind and soul had traveled rapidly in the direction which had thus been given to it.

I continued, however, in Dublin, and he was more generally in the County of Wicklow, but he had introduced me to dear H. Hutchinson, whose memory is very dear to me and much honored by me. He and I found we had much in common. Dissatisfied as I was, we went occasionally together to the dissenting chapels, but we had not much sympathy with the tone prevalent; the sermons we heard had generally, perhaps, less of the simplicity of Christ in them than what might be heard in the pulpits of the Established Church, and the things of God were dealt with more as for the intellect and by the intellect than, as we judged, suited the proper cravings of the renewed and spiritual mind. I believe I may say this for him as well as for myself, so we held on, loosely as it was, by the Established Church still.

A short time before this, Mr. Groves, a dentist

in Devonshire, had offered himself to the C. M. S., and in order to fit himself for its service had entered our college (Dublin). I knew him soon after, and he occasionally stayed with us, on coming here to pass his quarterly examinations. In a way perfectly independent of all that had been pressing in the minds of others, he had been taught to see that college education for the work of the ministry was not the thing, and that he was wasting time in Dublin attending his examinations. By the entrance of these thoughts the whole question was raised in his mind, so that he not only abandoned his connection with college, but viewed as he had never done before the whole matter of the Established Church, and the claims of dissenting bodies. At the close of 1828 he visited Dublin. Though he had seceded from the college, he preached at Poolbeg Street at the request of dear Mr. Egan, then in connection with the little company found there, of which Mr. R. Pope, well known in Ireland at that time, was one. Talking one day with him as we were walking down Lower Pembroke Street, he said to me, "This I doubt not is the mind of the Lord concerning us: we should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or minister, but trusting the Lord would edify us together by ministering as He pleased and saw good from the midst of ourselves."

At the moment he spoke these words, I was assured my soul had got the right idea. I remember that moment as it were but yesterday, and

could point you out the very place. 'Twas the birthday of my mind, dear James, if I may so speak, as to "brethren?"

Edward Cronin had been by profession an Independent and a member of York Street, but his mind at the same time was under a like influence, which, I may say, was that of us all. In a private room we had the Lord's Supper with, I believe, three others, while I was still going to Sandford Chapel, and J. Darby was still in the County Wicklow, as a clergyman.

In the summer of 1829 our family was at Kingstown, and dear H. Hutchinson at Bray; we saw each other occasionally and spoke of the things of the Lord, but where he went on Sunday at that time I cannot tell. I attended the Scotch Church at Kingstown, where all who were understood to be new born were welcome. But on returning to Dublin in November of that year, H. Hutchinson was quite prepared for Communion in the name of the Lord, with all, whoever they might be, that loved Him in sincerity, and proposed to have a room in Fitzwilliam Sq. (at his house) for that purpose. We did so, designing, however, so to have it, that if any were disposed to attend the services in the parish churches and dissenting chapels they might not be hindered, and he also prescribed a certain line of things, as the services of prayer, singing and teaching that should be found amongst us each day. E. Cronin was prepared for this fully; I joined, but not at all, I think, with the same liberty and



decision of mind, and several others also were ready, and just at this time we first knew Mr. Stokes. Thus we continued from November 1829.

Some time before this I had become acquainted with J. Parnel, (now Lord Congleton), and in that month, November, 1829, and through the spring of 1830, he was occasionally in Dublin, and frequently amongst us. He became very familiar with E. Cronin, and in the month of May, purposing to let the Lord's table in the midst of us become somewhat more of a witness, he took a large room in Angier Street, belonging to a cabinet-maker, where the meeting was transferred during that month. This tried me still more; the publicity of it was too much for me; I instinctively shrank. H. Hutchinson, as I remember, would also rather have continued in the private house, so that I believe I did not join them for two or three Sundays, and I am not sure that he did, but the others were there at once: J. Parnel, W. Stokes, E. Cronin and a few sisters, and shortly several were added.

In the summer of 1830 the mission party to Bagdad was formed. Mr. Groves had been there some months previously, and E. Cronin and his sister and J. Parnel, with one or two more, were desirous of joining him. It was in the month of September they left us, sailing for France, and purposing to reach Bagdad across the desert from Syria. J. Hamilton, whom some of us had known for two or three years, was also of the party.

He had with many others become dissatisfied with the existing order of things in the churches, and was very much of one mind with us all; and giving up other occupation, was ready to join the mission party to the East; and I rather think he was another witness to the independent energy of the Spirit of God which was abroad, as I have said, at that time.

They sailed, and we continued in our room in Angier Street. It was poor material we had, dear James, and we had one or two solemn and awful cases of backsliding; there was but little spiritual energy, and much that was poor treasure for a living temple. But we held together, in the Lord's mercy and care; I believe advancing in the knowledge of His mind.

The settled order of worship which we had in Fitzwilliam Square gave place gradually, teaching and exhorting being at first made common duties and services, while prayer was restricted to two or three who were regarded as elders; *but gradually all this yielded, and in a little time, no appointed or recognized eldership was understood to be in the midst of us*, and all service was of a free character—the presence of God through the Spirit being more simply believed and used.

In the year 1834 many were added, and that year, J. N. Darby being in Dublin, it was a question with him whether he should come and help us in Angier Street, as God might give him grace, or preach as he had been invited at the

Asylum in Lessor Street; he was all but detached from the Church of England. He visited several places either that year or the next, and amongst them Oxford, Plymouth, Cork and Limerick, ministering wherever he might the truth that God had given him from His Word; and I do not doubt, from what I remember, he found in all those places other evidences of the *independent work of the Spirit of God* on the hearts and consciences of the saints of whom I have spoken. In Limerick and Cork occasionally preaching in the pulpits of the Established Church, he also met Christians in private houses, and his ministry was greatly blessed; light and refreshment visited many a soul, and that of an order to which they had before been strangers. Going by invitation from Oxford to Plymouth he found the same there, so that in those distant places, which perhaps had never been combined before in one kindred influence, this grace was magnified; and happy, promising little groups of saints, who sought relief from their weariness, were joined in those places.

Much about the same time, dear Lady Powerscourt had begun some prophetic meetings; her mind also had taken the same direction as that which was among us all. Some of us were invited by her, and some from England, and these occasions greatly helped us. It was then I first knew George Wigram, Percy Hall and others. The meetings were truly precious to the soul, and night after night did I return to my room



at Powerscourt House with a deep sense of how little an one I was in Christ, in the presence of so much grace and devotedness as I judged I had been seeing around me during the day. Thus it was in those days, dear James, and in Angier Street we were pursuing our way, many being admitted to us, and some who are to this hour in Brunswick Street among the many who are to be loved and cherished there.

We were occasionally hearing from the party that went to Bagdad, and occasionally were visited by brethren from Cork, Limerick and other places, where the same influence had by this time been known. But I might mention dear and honored J. Mahon as another instance of the independent work of the Spirit of God of which I have spoken. I remember E. Cronin visiting him at Ennis—it might be, I think, in 1828—and on his return telling me about him; and I have reason to believe that even before we had any table in H. Hutchinson's house, there had been Breaking of Bread somewhere in the town of Ennis, by means of one of his family, if not by himself. This was altogether independent of any doings amongst us, and so I might say was it in England, as I might prove to you.

Having occasion to visit Somerset in 1831 or 1832, and being at Sir E. Denny's, he asked me to give him an idea of the principles of "brethren." We were sitting around the fire, and the daughter of a clergyman was present. As I stated our

thoughts she said they had been hers for the last twelve months, and that she had no idea that anyone had them but herself. So also being at ——— shortly afterwards, a dear brother, now departed in the Lord, told me that he and his wife, and his wife's mother, were meeting in the simplicity of "brethren's" ways for some time before he ever heard of such a people. His brother and the lady I mentioned at Sir E. Denny's, as soon as occasion allowed them, were in full fellowship with us, and she continues to this day in County Down.

I like to trace these circumstances, for they help to assure us that the *Lord's hand was independently at work*, designing to revive another testimony in the midst of His saints. I feel that I have great evidence at command of the existence of this *independent energy of His Spirit*.

Among other instances of this, nearer home, I mention that dear Groves revisited Ireland after an absence of two or three years, and I remember well his telling us of a very important movement in the *southern part of the Indian Peninsula* which indicated a mind quite in harmony with that which had been leading us in our position in England and Ireland.

The English brethren year after year visited Ireland, not only Dublin, but the country places. J. Harris, once a clergyman near Plymouth, was among them. G. Wigram for a long-continued time was in Cork, and all the time J. Darby was

in the two countries by turns, occasionally with us in Dublin, but more generally either in Plymouth or Cork, and the gathering multiplying in England to a very great number, became known by the name of "Plymouth Brethren," and in this country were called *Darbyites*.

I do not know that I need follow the history beyond this, dear James, as your enquiry was rather about the beginning. I could not doubt but a fresh purpose of God, and a fresh work of the Spirit were put forth in the call of the "brethren"; such things have been from time to time and under various characters, though with a kindred spirit, during the dispensation. The dispensation almost suggests such a thing, or makes it necessary; this is not the ordered system of things linked with the earth, or with flesh and blood, as was the former thing in Israel. The call of the Church is to be apart from the world, to do service in the light and strength of the Holy Spirit, and to maintain, in living spiritual grace, a testimony to a heavenly and rejected Jesus. All current within us and around us is contrary to such a call; such a dispensation can be upheld and maintained only in the direct grace of the Spirit ministered to elect vessels, and filling them with the freshness and apprehension of truth. No ordered service or course of fleshly ordinances can at all answer this end; no *transmitted* or cessational office can at all fill out and discharge its duties; no such authority is



owned by it. In man there is ever a tendency to the mere warp of nature and to the course of the world; and in order to sustain a thing spiritual and living like the Church, the natural way, yea necessary way—save that God is sovereign—is by a fresh putting forth of light and power to revive it again and again, that there may still be a testimony to the power of God and the ways and services of a living House, so that the coal may not be quenched. Such revivals may each of them have their peculiarity, while partaking of the kindred Spirit, or of the common witness that the same Holy Spirit is working.

The Reformation is always acknowledged as having been marked by a clear and fervent witness of justification by faith—the very truth then needful for the deliverance of souls long held in captivity. Other energies and revivals had their character in like manner; and whether they have ever, or not, become the subjects of history, faith knew of them, and the souls of the elect were edified and thankful. I do not doubt that the work of God by and with “brethren” had its special purpose also. It seems with certainty to present the separatedness of the Church from the world, and a distinct witness to the heavenly calling and peculiar dignity, as also to assert the precious truth that nothing else is worthy the House of God, though the House be in ruins—as surely it was known and felt to be in a dispensational sense.

And further, the “brethren” aided the testimony.

which was rising again, to the Coming and Kingdom of the Lord, with some heavenly apprehensions connected with that great mystery, which were consistent with their separated and heavenly position, and with that only. For there are prophetic truths which must be ever felt to be more or less at variance with any church system that links itself with the world.

Thus, in simplicity, as my mind led me, I have done as you wished, dear James. I will not speak as to the result of this call of the "brethren." It would be painful, and it is needless. Each heart among us knows many and many a secret cause of humiliation, which the present distracted condition in which we are found tells of itself. "When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" May such experience be more deeply and richly felt to be ours.

Believe me, dear James,

Ever your affectionate brother,

J. G. Bellett.

*By Dr. Edward Cronin:*

Having a very definite remembrance of things that took place anterior to all that is written by our beloved J. G. Bellett concerning the ways of God towards us in the beginning of this movement, I would add a few remarks.

I had been sent from the south of Ireland to Dublin for my health, and was a dissenter (Independent); and a visitor was received by all the dissenting bodies there. This liberty was continued till it was found that I became resident in Dublin. I was then informed that I could no longer be allowed to break bread with any of them without special membership. This left me in separation from them for several months, and then feeling unable to attend their meetings, from the growing feeling of opposition to one man ministry, I was left exposed to the charges of irreligion and anti-nomianism.

This affected me to such an extent, that it was a season of deep exercise of heart, and separation from many that I loved in the Lord; and to avoid the appearance of evil, I spent many a Lord's Day morning under a tree or a hay-stack during the time of their services. My name having been publicly denounced from one of their pulpits (Rev. W. Cooper's), one of their deacons, Edward Wilson, (assistant secretary to the Bible Society), was constrained to protest against this step, which led ultimately to his leaving also.

Thus separated, we two met for breaking of



bread and prayer in one of his rooms, until his departure for England.

Then I was not alone. The two Misses Drury, my cousins, were led into the same path, and also left Rev. C.'s chapel, where they were members; also Mr. Tims, (bookseller in Grafton Street), and met with me in the back parlor of my house in Lower Pembroke Street. It then became noised abroad, and one and another became affected by the same truth, which was the oneness of the Body, and the presence of the Holy Ghost was also seen by us very clearly. Here H. Hutchinson found us and offered us the use of his large room in FitzWilliam Square.

At this time J. G. B. and J. N. D. were more or less affected by the general state of things in the religious world, *but were unprepared to come out in entire separation, and looked suspiciously at our movement*, still able to attend and minister in the Church of England, as well as to come occasionally to our little assembly.

We soon began to feel, as humbler brethren were added to us, that the house in FitzWilliam Square was unsuited, which led me to take a large auction room in Angier Street for our use on the Sundays, and, oh! the blessed seasons to my soul, with J. Parnell, Wm. Stokes and others, while moving the furniture aside and laying the simple table with the bread and wine on Saturday evening—seasons of joy never to be forgotten, for surely we had the Master's smile and sanction

in the testimony of such a movement as this was.

About this time G. V. W. paid us a visit from England, having some intention of joining the Mission party to Bagdad. From that time to my leaving Dublin (1836) there were continual additions of Evangelical Christians, all of us with very little intelligence as to the real character of God's movement among us.

Special membership, as it is called among dissenters, was the primary and most offensive condition of things to our minds, so that our first assembling was really marked as a small company of Evangelical malcontents. We all felt free up to this time, and long afterwards, to make arrangements among ourselves as to who should distribute the bread and wine, and take other ministries in the assembly. We were also, from ignorance or indifference, careless as to conscience and godly care one of another. I am led the more to make this observation owing to the frequent way in which some of the early brethren who are now in separation from us accuse us of departure from first principles in our present actings. Nevertheless, I am convinced that even at that time we would no more have tolerated false doctrine than now. The comfort of many who loved us, but never met with us, was our staunch orthodoxy as regards the mystery of the Godhead and the doctrine of Grace and Godliness.

I would remark here a feature in the ways of

God in the beginning of this movement, how in and through obscure individuals, and in distant places and diverse positions, the substance of His grace and truth dwelt in us; and though, as I have said before, with little intelligence, led us in paths more or less agreeable to the mind of God. It is striking that those able and honored brethren, J. N. D., J. G. B. and G. V. W. did not constitute the embryo of it, while God has used, and continued to use them, in divine intelligence and development of principles as to His Church, etc.

I have repeated somewhat on this point, owing to the charge alluded to above; whereas God's ways with us were, and are still, a gradual unfolding of His truth, discovered to us in various practical details. So that what in the beginning was no bigger, as it were, than a man's hand (when we were few in number, and weak and defective in understanding), has expanded itself to meet the necessities of thousands, gathered on the same principles and to the praise and glory of His grace.

Edward Cronin.



*Remarks by Mr. Stoney:*

I first knew the "brethren" in 1833. I had an anxiety to serve the Lord, and had given up going to the bar, in order to take orders, thinking it the only true way of doing so. I at first very reluctantly went to hear at Angier Street, a Mr. Clarke, taken by my chum in college, who was a constant attendant (since gone over to Irvingism).

I eventually was much interested in the teaching there. I particularly remember Mr. Darby, on "being accepted in the Beloved," and Mr. Bellett, on Mark 7, but I did not think of joining them. I was expecting great things from Mr. Irving, and Mr. Bellett brought in B. Newton to see me in my rooms in College, in order to disabuse my mind of Irvingism.

I was constantly hearing J. N. D., and at length heard him on Joshua 7th, "Wherefore liest thou on thy face—up, sanctify the people," etc. Get rid of the evil first. God can not be with us until we are separated from evil. I was broken down. I felt for the first time the immense step of leaving the established order for the unsightly few in Angier Street. This was in June, 1834. I asked Mr. Darby to let me come until I saw something better, for I was not quite sure he was right, but I was convinced the Church of England was wrong. At that time Mr. Stokes used to read regularly some portion of Scripture every Lord's Day; and in Plymouth, where I was in

1838, it used to be arranged beforehand who should break the bread and do official acts.

I was at the meeting at Lady Powerscourt's in September. Mr. John Synge was in the chair. Mr. Synge called on each to speak in rotation on a given subject. Mr. Darby spoke last, often for hours, touching on all that had previously been said. Mr. Wigram sat next him, Capt. Hall, Mr. Geo. Curzon, Sir Alex. Campbell, Mr. Bellett, Mr. Thos. Maunsell, Mr. Mahon, Mr. Ed. Synge were there. There were clergymen present and Irvingites. The prayer meetings in the mornings at 7 o'clock were particularly striking to me. Every one praying that God would give them light, and grace to act on it.

There was great feeling against J. N. D. when I came out because of the secessions at Oxford at that time, so much so that it was notified to me that both Dr. Sadler and Dr. Singer (?) had conferred on the propriety of taking my rooms from me, because I had asked Mr. Darby to lecture in them. Those with Irvingite tendencies gradually drew away from us, and their society was avoided.

James Butler Stoney.

July 12, 1871.

*Letter from Mr. J. N. Darby, dated 1868.*

Beloved Brother:

We began in Dublin. . . . It was not dissatisfaction with Apostolic Succession of the English National Episcopal body. I had found peace to my own soul by finding my oneness in Christ, that it was no longer myself as in the flesh before God, but that I was in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, and sitting in heavenly places. This led me directly to the apprehension of what the true Church was; those who were united to Christ in heaven. I at once felt that all the parish was not that. The tract I then published was not an attack on any one, but upon the *unity* of the Church of God. When I looked around to find this unity, *I found it nowhere; if I joined one set of Christians I did not belong to another.* The Church of God was broken up and scattered among various *self-formed* bodies. I found membership in Scripture was not membership of a voluntary association on earth, but membership of Christ, a hand, a foot, etc. And as the Holy Ghost had formed *one* body on descending on the day of Pentecost (I. Cor. 12), *so ministry was those whom He qualified for such and such service.* . . . At the same time Acts 2 and 4 made me feel how dreadfully far we had all got from the true effect of His presence.

I found, however, that wherever two or three were met in Christ's Name, He would be in the



midst of them, and acted upon the promise with three other brethren, and the wife of one of them—never thinking of going beyond meeting the need of our consciences and hearts according to the Word. God was doing a work I had no thought of, and it has spread over the world.

It did not commence at Plymouth till 1832, where I went at Mr. Newton's request, then a fellow of Exeter Coll., Oxford. It began in London about the same time through one I met in Oxford. It was in no way opposition which led me to Switzerland in 1837, but a report of a brother who had been there, and stated there were meetings like ours.

After that I began to work there; then in France; then Germany, where the work had begun by another; then in Holland.

The coming of the Lord was the other truth that was brought to my mind from the Word, as that which, as sitting in heavenly places *in* Christ, was alone to be waited for, that I might sit in heavenly places *with* Him. Isaiah 32 brought me the earthly consequences of the same truth (though other passages might seem perhaps more striking to me now); but I saw an evident change of dispensation in that chapter, when the Spirit would be poured out on the Jewish nation and a King reign in righteousness.

I have merely stated facts and dates as they occurred. Mr. Newton has now a Chapel of his own in London, and has nothing to do with

"brethren." He was among them, but for years set aside their principles, and since 1845 has had no connection with them. In 1846 his teaching as to [some] relationship of the Lord Jesus to God became a ground of total separation.

Mr. Muller's was a close Baptist church when "brethren" began to make progress in Bristol; he gave this up, and took in measure the form of "brethren." This was transferred (I think unadvisedly, though with the best intentions) to his meetings. Since 1848 he has returned to, not close Baptist principles, but open Baptist principles, and his is a regular dissenting church with slightly modified forms.

There never was any seminary with us for training missionaries. I had a dozen young men staying with me at Lausanne for a year. I was there at their own request, studying Scripture with them. Most of them are now working as evangelists in France, two in Switzerland. I am not aware of any other material fact to state or correct, which is the only object I have now.

What I judge to be essential, is that the Holy Spirit is on earth, as come down on the day of Pentecost, and His forming the saints into one body. We also wait for God's Son from heaven according to the Word.

J. N. D

A LETTER FROM MR. DARBY  
*in answer to a brother's inquiry.*

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*(Translated from the French.)*

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*Dear Sir and Brother in Christ,*

I have been continually on the move, so that it has been difficult for me to prepare the account which you desired to receive. The best way will be for me simply to mention the various circumstances as they transpired, in so far as I was personally concerned, at the time when this work of God first commenced. You will understand that numbers of others have labored in that field, and many with much more devotedness than I, and with far more marked result as regards the blessing of souls. But my concern now is with the work of God, not our labors; so that you may gather from the account what will suit your purpose.

I was a lawyer: but felt that, if the Son of God gave Himself for me, I owed myself entirely to Him. I felt that the so-called Christian world was characterized by deep ingratitude to the Lord, and I longed for complete devotedness to His work. My chief thought was to get round amongst the poor Catholics of Ireland. I was induced to be ordained. I did not feel drawn to take up a



regular post, but, being young in the faith, and not yet knowing deliverance, I was governed by the feeling of my duty towards Christ, rather than by the consciousness that *He* had done *all* and that I was redeemed and saved; consequently it was easy to follow the advice of those who were more advanced than myself in the Christian world.

As soon as I was ordained, I went among the poor Irish mountaineers, in a wild and uncultivated district, where I remained two years and three months, working as best I could. I felt, however, that the style of work was not in agreement with what I read in the Bible concerning the Church and Christianity; nor did it correspond with the effects of the action of the Spirit of God. These considerations pressed upon me from a scriptural and practical point of view.

While seeking assiduously to fulfil the duties of the ministry confided to me, working day and night amongst the people who were almost as wild as the mountains they inhabited, an accident happened which laid me aside for a time. (My horse was frightened, and I was thrown against a door-post.) During this time of solitude, conflicting thoughts increased; but much exercise of soul had the effect of causing the Scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over me—though I had always owned them to be the Word of God.

When I came to understand that I was united to Christ in heaven, and that, consequently, my

place before God was represented by Christ's own place there, I was forced to the conclusion that it was no longer a question with God of this wretched "I"—which had wearied me during six or seven years, in presence of the requirements of the law. It then became clear to me that the Church of God, as *He* considers it, was composed only of those who were so united to Christ; whereas Christendom, as seen externally was really the world, and could not be considered as "the Church," though with the responsibility attaching to the position which it professed to occupy—a very important thing in its place. At the same time, I saw that the Christian, having his place in Christ in heaven, has nothing to wait for but the coming of the Saviour, in order to be set, in fact, in the glory which, as "in Christ," is already his portion.\*

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\*The following extract, taken from a pamphlet which he wrote about this time, or shortly after, gives us a glimpse of the depth of conviction and trust in God's Word which he then experienced. [Ed.]

"As I have spoken of myself (always a hazardous thing), I add that at the same period in which I was brought to liberty and to believe with divinely given faith in the presence of the Holy Spirit, I passed through the deepest possible exercise as to the authority of the Word: whether if the world and the Church (that is, as an external thing, for it yet had certain traditional power over me as such) disappeared and were annihilated, and the word of God alone remained as an invisible thread over the abyss, my soul would trust in it. After

The careful reading of the Acts afforded me a practical picture of the early Church, which made me feel deeply the contrast with its actual present state, though still, as ever, beloved by God. At that time I had to use crutches when moving about, so that I had no opportunity to make known my convictions in public; and as the state of my health did not allow me to attend worship, I was compelled to remain away. It seemed to me that the good hand of God had thus come to my help, hiding my spiritual weakness under physical incapacity. In the meanwhile, there grew up in my heart the conviction that what Christianity was accomplishing in the world in no way answered to the needs of a soul burdened with guilt under the sense of God's holy government in connection with the law.

In my retreat, the 32nd chapter of Isaiah taught me clearly that, in God's ordering, there was still an economy to come; a state of things in no way established as yet. The consciousness of my union with Christ had given me the present

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deep exercise of soul I was brought by grace to feel I could entirely. I never found it fail me since. I have often failed; but I never found it failed me. I have added this, not, I trust, to speak of myself—an unpleasant and unsatisfactory, a dangerous thing—nor do I speak of any vision, but because, having spoken of the presence of the Holy Ghost, if I had not brought in this as to the Word, the statement would have been seriously incomplete”.

*From Collected Writings, Vol. i, p. 58.*



heavenly portion of the glory, whereas this chapter clearly sets forth the corresponding earthly part. I was not able to put these things in their respective places or arrange them in order, as I can now; but the truths themselves were then revealed to my soul, through the action of His Spirit, by reading His Word.

What was to be done? I saw in that Word the coming of Christ to take the Church to Himself in glory. I saw that the Cross, the Divine basis of salvation, should impress its own character on the Christian and on the Church in view of the Lord's coming; and also that meanwhile the Holy Spirit was given to be the source of the unity of the Church, as well as the spring of its activity, and indeed of all Christian energy.

As regards the Gospel (the foundation of the Christian faith), I had no difficulty as to its received dogmas. Three persons in one God—the divinity of Jesus—His work of atonement on the cross—His resurrection—His session at the right hand of God, were truths which, understood as orthodox doctrines, had long been a living reality to my soul. Not only were they truths, but I knew God personally in that way. I had no other God but Him who had thus revealed Himself, and Him I had. He was the God of my life and of my worship, the God of my peace—the only true God.

The practical difference in my preaching, when I began to preach again, was as follows: When

a parson, I had preached that sin had created a great gulf between us and God, and that Christ alone was able to bridge it over; now, I preached that He *had* already finished His work. The necessity of regeneration, which was always a part of my teaching, became connected more with Christ, the last Adam. I understood better that it was a real life, entirely new, communicated by the power of the Holy Spirit; and, as I have said, more in connection with the person of Christ and the power of His resurrection, combining the power of a life victorious over death, with a new position for man before God. This is what I understand by "deliverance." The blood of Jesus has removed every stain from the believer—every trace of sin, according to God's own purity. In virtue of His shed blood (the only possible propitiation) we may now invite all men to come to God, a God of love, who has given His own Son for us. The presence of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven to abide in the believer as the "unction," the "seal," and the "earnest of our inheritance," as well as being in the Church; the power which unites it in one body and distributes gifts to the members according to His will; these truths developed largely and assumed great importance in mine eyes. With this last truth was connected the question of ministry. From whence came this ministry? According to the Bible, it clearly came from God by the power and action of the Holy Spirit.

At the time I was occupied with these things,

the person with whom I was in Christian relation locally, as a minister, was an excellent Christian, worthy of all respect, and one for whom I have always had a great affection. He was subsequently appointed to be archdeacon. It was the principles, however, not the persons, which acted on my conscience; for I had already given up, out of love to the Saviour, all that the world could offer. I said to myself, "If the apostle Paul were to come here now, he would not, according to the established system, be ever allowed to preach, not being legally "ordained"; but if a worker of Satan, who by his doctrine denied the Saviour, came here, as an ordained man, he could freely preach, and my Christian friend would be obliged to consider him as a fellow-labourer; whereas he would be unable to recognize the most powerful instrument of the Spirit of God, however much blessed in his work of leading multitudes of souls to the Lord, if he had not been ordained according to the system." All this, said I to myself, is false. This is not mere abuse, such as may be found anywhere; it is the *principle* of the system that is at fault. Ministry is of the Spirit. There are some among the clergy who are ministers by the Spirit, but the *system* is founded on an opposite principle; consequently it seemed impossible to remain in it any longer.

I saw in Scripture that there were certain gifts which formed true ministry, in contrast to a clergy established upon another principle. Salvation, the Church, and ministry, all were



bound together; all were connected with Christ, the Head of the Church in heaven; with Christ who had accomplished a perfect salvation, as well as with the presence of the Spirit on earth, uniting the members to the Head, and to each other, so as to form "one body," and He acting in them according to His will.

In effect, the cross of Christ and His return should characterize the Church and each one of the members. What was to be done? Where was this unity, this "body?" Where was the power of the Spirit recognized? Where was the Lord really waited for? Nationalism was associated with the world; in its bosom some believers were merged in the very world from which Jesus had separated them; they were also separated from one another, whilst Jesus had united them. The Lord's Supper, symbol of the unity of the Body, was now united with the world—that is to say, exactly the contrary of what Christ had established. Dissent, no doubt, had the effect of making the true children of God more manifest, but they were united on principles quite different from the unity of the Body of Christ. If I joined myself to these, I separated myself from others everywhere. The disunion of the Body of Christ was everywhere apparent rather than its unity. What was I to do? Such was the question which presented itself to me, without any other idea than that of satisfying my conscience, according to the light of the Word of God.

A word in Matthew 18 furnished the solution.

of my trouble: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This was just what I wanted. The presence of Jesus was assured at such worship; it is here He has recorded His name, as He had done of old in the temple at Jerusalem for those who were called to resort there.

Four persons who were pretty much in the same state of soul as myself, came together to my lodging; we spoke together about these things, and I proposed to them to break bread the following Sunday, which we did. Others then joined us. I left Dublin soon after, but the work immediately began at Limerick, a town in Ireland, and then in other places.

Two years later (1830), I went to Cambridge and Oxford. In this latter place, some persons who are still engaged in the work, shared my convictions, and felt that the relation of the Church to Christ ought to be that of a faithful spouse.

By invitation I went to Plymouth to preach. My habit was to preach wherever people wished, whether in buildings or in private houses. More than once, even with ministers of the national church, we have broken bread on Monday evening after meetings for Christian edification, where each was free to read, to speak, to pray, or to give out a hymn. Some months afterwards we began to do so on Sunday morning, making use of the same liberty, only adding the Lord's Supper, which we had the practice of taking every

Sunday. Occasionally it has been partaken of more often. About that time also some began to do the same in London.

The unity of the Church, as the Body of Christ, the coming of the Lord, the presence of the Holy Ghost here, in the individual and in the Church; an assiduous proclamation of the truth, as well as the preaching of the gospel on the ground of pure grace and of an accomplished work, giving the assurance of salvation when received into the heart by the Spirit; practical separation from the world; devotedness to Christ, as to Him who has redeemed the Church; a walk having Him only as the motive and rule; and other subjects in connection with these—all this has been treated of in separate publications as well as by means of periodicals; and these truths have been largely spread abroad.

A good many ministers of the national church left nationalism in order to walk according to these principles, and England became gradually covered with meetings, more or less numerous.

Plymouth, being the place where most of the publications originated, the name "Plymouth brethren" became the usual appellation given to such meetings.

In 1837 I visited Switzerland, and these truths began to be known there. I returned there more than once. The second time, I remained a considerable time in Lausanne, where God worked in conversions, and gathered a number of children



of God out of the world. There were already, in Switzerland, Dissenters who had suffered faithfully for the Lord during twenty years previously. But their activity had declined considerably, and it even seemed that the movement was about to disappear. The work of the brethren has, to a certain extent, by the goodness of God, filled the country; conversions having been numerous. In German Switzerland, the work spread to a much less degree.

On two occasions of my spending a protracted time in Lausanne, some young brothers who desired to devote themselves to gospel work, spent nearly a year with me in order to read the Bible. We also partook of the Lord's Supper together every day.

At the same time (quite independently of what was going on in Switzerland), a brother, who was laboring in France, had awakened an interest in a considerable district where the people generally were plunged in infidelity and darkness. Some also of the young brothers of whom I have spoken, and two or three others whose acquaintance I made, but who never stayed with me, went to work in France. Other laborers, belonging to societies, believing that they would be happier working under the Lord's immediate direction, and not as subject to committees, gave up their salaries—considering such arrangements to be unknown to the Scripture, both in fact and in principle; since their very existence attri-

buted to money the right to direct the work of the Lord. These began to work in simple dependence on the Lord, trusting to His faithful care. God raised up others also, though it still remains true that "the harvest is great and the laborers are few." God has blessed these laborers by numerous conversions, thank God, especially in the south of France.

From the beginning I visited these countries, and shared with joy the troubles and fatigues of these brothers; but it is they who have actually labored at the work. . . .

At nearly the same time, in the eastern part of France, a like work had begun, independently of this one. It has extended from Basle to the Pyrenees, with a gap in the districts of which Toulouse forms the centre. The country is more or less covered with meetings, and the work, by God's grace, is still going on.

I ought to say that I have never meddled in any way with the calling nor with the work of the brethren who studied the Bible with me. As regards some, I have the conviction that they had not been called to it, and they have, in fact, gone back in ordinary occupations of life. As to others, I only helped them in the study of the Bible, in communicating to them the light which God had given me, but leaving entirely to themselves the responsibility of their calling for the work of evangelization or teaching.

We had the custom of gathering together oc-

casionally for some time, when God opened the way for it, to study Scriptural subjects together, or books of the Bible, and to communicate to one another what God had given to each. During several years, in Ireland and England, this took place annually in large conferences which lasted for a week. On the Continent, and latterly in England, they have been less attended; and with fewer numbers, it has been possible to spend a fortnight or three weeks studying some books of the Bible.

My elder brother, who is a Christian, spent two years at Dusseldorf, where he has been blessed to souls, and in the neighborhood of Dusseldorf. These, in their turn, have spread the light of the gospel and the truth, and a number of persons have been gathered in the Rhenish provinces. Tracts and various publications of the brethren have been translated and largely distributed; and light as to the soul's deliverance, the true character of the Church, the presence of the Holy Ghost here below, and the Lord's return, has been disseminated.

Two years later, helped, I believe, by the knowledge of these truths, but entirely independent of this work, a movement of the Spirit of God began at Elberfeld. There was in that town a "Brotherhood" which employed twelve laborers, if I am not mistaken, whom the clergy sought to forbid from preaching or teaching. Enlightened as to the ministry of the Spirit, and moved by



love for souls, they would not submit to this interdict. Seven of these laborers, I believe, and a few members of the "Brotherhood" detached themselves from it, and certain of them, with others whom God raised up, continued their gospel work, which spread from Holland to Hesse. Conversions have been very numerous, and many hundreds assemble at the present time to break bread. More recently the work has begun to get established in Holland, as also in the south of Germany. By means of other instruments, two meetings in Wurtemberg already existed.

The gospel preached by emigrants from Switzerland and from England has led to the formation of some meetings in the United States and Canada. Others in Jamaica and Demerara, as also amongst the natives of Brazil. The English colonies of Australia and New Zealand have also meetings. But I will not enlarge, as this brief sketch will be sufficient for your purpose.

Brethren do not recognize any other body or Church than the whole Church of Christ. Also, they recognize every Christian who walks in truth and holiness, as a proved member of Christ. Their hope of final salvation is founded on the Saviour's expiatory work, for whose return they look, according to His Word. They believe the saints to be united to Him already, as members of the body of which He is the Head, and they await the accomplishment of His promise, expecting His coming to take them to Himself in the

Father's house, so that where He is, there they may be also. His person is the object of their faith, His life the example which they have to follow in their conduct. His Word, namely, the Scriptures inspired of God, that is to say, the Bible, is the authority which forms their faith; it is also its foundation, and they recognize it as that which should govern their conduct. The Holy Ghost alone can make it effectual both for life and practice.

*A Note by W. Scott.*

JOHN NELSON DARBY was the youngest son of John Darby, of Leap Castle, King's County, Ireland, and a nephew of Admiral Sir Henry Darby, Commander of the *Bellerophon* in the battle of the Nile. He was educated at Westminster, and Trinity College, Dublin, where he was Gold Medallist in 1819; and was called to the Irish Bar, but subsequently took Orders in the Church. When about 27 years of age (1827), deploring the evils and divisions in Christendom, and discovering from God's Word the blessed and practical truth that "there is One Body," and that every true believer on earth is a member thereof, and further, that Scripture recognizes no other membership, he severed his connection with the National Church, and gathered with others to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone (Matt. 18:20). It was a movement, in its inception and progress, at home, in the colonies, and on the Continent for many years, distinctly marked of God—a movement even more spiritual in character, if not of such a public nature, as that under Luther in the sixteenth century. Mr. Darby was, perhaps, the most voluminous theological writer of the nineteenth century.

The following from the pen of Francis Henry Newman, who openly avowed infidelity (brother



of the late Cardinal Newman), may be read with interest. It is entitled:—

“THE IRISH CLERGYMAN.”

“This [John Nelson Darby] was a young relative of his, a most remarkable man, who rapidly gained an immense sway over me. I shall henceforth call him the ‘Irish Clergyman.’ His ‘bodily presence’ was indeed ‘weak.’ A fallen cheek, a bloodshot eye, crippled limbs resting on crutches, a seldom shaven beard, a shabby suit of clothes, and a generally neglected person, drew at first pity, with wonder to see such a figure in a drawing-room. It has reported that a person in Limerick offered him a halfpenny, mistaking him for a beggar; and if not true, the story was yet well invented. This young man had taken high honors at Dublin University, and had studied for the bar, where, under the auspices of his eminent kinsman, he had excellent prospects; but his conscience would not allow him to take a brief, lest he should be selling his talents to defeat justice. With keen logical powers, he had warm sympathy, solid judgment of character, thoughtful tenderness and total self-abandonment. He, before long, took holy orders, and became an indefatigable curate in the mountains of Wicklow (Ireland). Every evening he sallied forth to teach in the cabins, and roving far and wide over mountains, and amid bogs, was seldom home before midnight. By such exertions his strength was undermined, and he so suffered in his limbs that not

lameness only, but yet more serious results were feared. He did not fast on purpose, but his long walks through wild country and amongst indigent people, inflicted on him much severe deprivations; moreover, as he ate whatever food offered itself (food unpalatable and often indigestible to him), his whole frame might have vied in emaciation with a monk of *La Trappe*. . . .

"I was at first offended by his apparent affectation of a careless exterior, but I soon understood that in no other way could he gain equal access to the lowest orders, and that he was moved, not by asceticism, nor by ostentation, but by a self-abandonment fruitful of consequences. He had practically given up all reading but the Bible; and no small part of his movement soon took the form of dissuasion from all other voluntary study. In fact, I had myself more and more concentrated my religious reading on this one book; still I could not help feeling the value of a cultivated mind. Against this my new eccentric friend (having himself enjoyed no mean advantages of cultivation) directed his keenest attacks. I remember once saying to him: 'To desire to be rich is absurd; but if I were a father of children, I should wish to be rich enough to secure them a good education.' He replied: 'If I had children, I would as soon see them break stones on the road as do anything else, if only I could secure to them the gospel and the grace of God.' I was unable to say Amen; but I admired his

unflinching consistency, for now, as always, all he said was based on texts aptly quoted and logically enforced. He made me more and more ashamed of political economy, and moral philosophy, and all science, all of which ought to be 'counted dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.' For the first time in my life, I saw a man earnestly turning into reality the principles which others professed with their lips only. . . .

"Never before had I seen a man so resolved that no word of the New Testament should be a dead letter to him. I once said; 'But do you really think that no part of the New Testament may have been temporary in its object? For instance—What should we have lost if St. Paul had never written, 'The cloke that I left as Troas bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments?' He answered with the greatest promptitude, 'I should have lost something, for it was exactly that verse which alone saved me from selling my little library. No! every word, depend upon it, is from the Spirit, and is for eternal service.' . . .

"In spite of the strong revulsion which I felt against some of the peculiarities of this remarkable man, I, for the first time in my life found myself under the dominion of a superior. When I remember how even those bowed down before him who had been in the place of parents—accomplished and experienced minds—I cease to wonder



in the retrospect that he rivetted me in such a bondage."

It has been the experience of most men brought into personal contact with Mr. Darby, that the influence exercised over them has been almost overwhelming. His marvelous power in grappling with principles and tracing their application to their legitimate results; his simple and unaffected piety, combined with the ripest scholarship and unequalled ability in expounding the Word of God, accompanied by a generous appreciation of the good and excellent outside the ecclesiastical sphere in which he moved, fitted him to become, as he undoubtedly was, a recognized leader in the church of God.

Mr. Darby's polemical writings in English, French, and German are numerous, cover a large field of enquiry, and are characterized by an intimate and scholarly treatment of their respective subjects.

Mr. Darby was a keen and able controversialist. His critical acumen in detecting principles where others, perhaps, would have dealt only with details, was truly marvellous. This character of mind led him on all controversial subjects treated of to lose sight of his opponent, and shun personalities, in order to present the subject on hand, in a broad, full, and comprehensive manner. The weakness of an opposed argument was soon apparent, and the truth got more firmly established.

The strength of that mind consecrated to the defence and maintenance of Christianity is never more powerfully exhibited than in his "Examination of the Essays and Reviews" and in other works of a similar character.

In private life he was kind and gracious and characterized by a simplicity which endeared him to the young, and especially to children. His habits were simple. He was an indefatigable worker and traveler, and bore in his spirit and ways the distinct mark of a stranger here. His personal love to Christ was intense. But no more need be said. His record is on high.

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