

# THE BIBLE CHRISTIANS

THE  
BIBLE CHRISTIANS:

*Their Origin and History.*

(1815-1900.)

BY  
F. W. BOURNE.



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## FOREWORD.

THOUGH the story in this book started in 1815 and has long since been forgotten, it is a story that needs to be told again. It's the story of the Bible Christian Methodists founded in Devon and Cornwall.

The spiritual and moral state of these counties in the early part of the nineteenth century was very sad indeed. The Church of England, generally speaking, was without a living ministry. It was dead and lifeless. The social conditions were no better. The working men were little more than slaves. The lack of education and the meagre pittance received for their labours contributed to the sense of hopelessness in which they spent their lives. It was into this situation that a man of God came; his name was William O'Bryan. Converted when eighteen years of age he immediately began to do the work of an evangelist for which he was eminently equipped. Eighteen years later he became the channel of revival and the chief instrument that led to the formation of the Bible Christian Methodists. Under his ministry a group of men and preachers were raised up: men like Billy Bray and others whose hearts the Lord had touched.

In many ways, they were ordinary men with all the shortcomings of fallen humanity, but they were different. People meeting them and hearing them were introduced to a new spiritual dimension and could never be the same again. It's this difference that makes their story worth telling once more.

I'm truly grateful that Tentmaker Publications are making this possible and especially at this present time of spiritual barrenness and moral decadence in our land. The reprint of F.W. Bourne's book *The Bible Christians; Their Origin and History*, will help many to come to an understanding of true revival and of the reality of what God can do in and through lives that are placed utterly at His disposal. It also reminds us that God's greatest gift to any generation is not a major breakthrough in science and technology, but a man sent from

God; a man with a voice of eternity, calling men from the paths of sin to walk with God.

I am also thankful to the publishers for allowing me to dedicate the reprint of this book to the memory of my late, beloved wife Mildred, who for the thirty-four years we were together, exhibited the spirit of those early Bible Christian Methodists.

“In word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”  
1 Timothy 4:12

Rev. N. Green  
PRESBYTERIAN MANSE,  
BLACKBURN.  
*June 2004*

*To the*  
*FRIENDS AND FELLOW-WORKERS*  
*who have been associated*  
*with me*  
*during my fifty-five years' Ministry*  
*in the*  
*Bible Christian Connexion*  
*this Volume is affectionately dedicated.*



JAMES THORNE,  
1816-1872.  
*b.* Sept. 1795.  
*d.* Jan. 1872.



F. W. BOURNE,  
1850-  
*b.* July. 1830.



WILLIAM O'BRYAN,  
1815-1829.  
*b.* Feb. 1778.  
*d.* Jan. 1868.



J. HICKS EYNON,  
1826-1888.  
*b.* May 1801.  
*d.* March 1888.



JAMES WAY,  
1826-1884.  
*b.* Feb. 1804.  
*d.* Jan. 1884.

## PREFACE.

ONE of the chief of the many indirect results of the great Methodist Revival of Cornwall in 1814 was the formation of THE BIBLE CHRISTIAN CONNEXION. This was the best known and most characteristic embodiment of a religious movement which had several springs of a distinctly evangelical and revival type, and which in the course of years became gradually modified and heightened by well-directed and persistent efforts on the part of its leading ministers and laymen to

Unite the pair so long disjoined—  
Knowledge and vital Piety.

Not only did James Thorne and William Lyle in the county of Kent, Mary Toms and William Bailey in the Isle of Wight, Mary Ann Werrey in the Scilly Islands and in the Isles of Guernsey and Jersey, Catherine Reed and Henry Freeman in London, Francis Metherall and Cephas Barker in Prince Edward Island, John Hicks Eynon and Paul Robins in Canada, James Way, James Rowe and Samuel Keen in South Australia, John Orchard and William Ready in New Zealand, gloriously succeed in prosecuting their work, but so also did their colleagues and successors, in exact proportion as they were faithful to the original mission.

I sincerely hope that in re-telling the story of the Bible Christians at this time of general expectation of a wide-spread religious awakening, fresh interest may be kindled in the subject.

I wish to offer a sincere apology for the unavoidable delay in the completion of the work. When half-way through I had a serious nervous break-down, and my memory, on which I had been accustomed to rely, failed me for the time. For a while I was wholly incapacitated, and when I was able to resume my task, which I had got to love as if it had been wholly self-imposed, I could not proceed except at brief intervals, with the assistance of friends.

Will my readers oblige me by pointing out any errors of fact, or serious omissions, that they may be rectified at once in case a further edition should be required?

11, WOOLSTONE ROAD,  
Catford.

*June, 1905.*

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# THE BIBLE CHRISTIANS:

## *THEIR ORIGIN AND HISTORY.*

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### CHAPTER 1.

1815-1820.

“More than we know of the living water that flows through the world of humanity like a river has its source in springs that have been dug in waste places.” To find and open springs in waste places is so great and good a work that, in the absence of the skilled workman and the proper tools, nobles and princes have gladly “dugged” and “delved” with their “sceptres” and “staves,” while the people have chanted the song, “Spring up, O well” (Numbers xxi. 17, 18).

A large district in the north-western part of the lovely and romantic county of Devon was emphatically, in a spiritual sense, one of England’s waste places less than a hundred years ago. There was but little religious life either in the Establishment, or out of it. The national teachers were for the most part “blind leaders of the blind.” One clergyman was said to be the best hunter in the district, and another the best boxer. In one parish three hard-drinking clergymen in succession had the cure of souls. It goes without saying that the services in the churches were generally formal and slovenly, and though there were scarcely any other places of worship to which the people could go, the parish church was, as a rule, well nigh deserted.

p. 2 The price of wheat or cattle, the wrestler’s skill and success, the prospects of the harvest and kindred subjects were eagerly discussed just outside the church door before and after the service, and not infrequently while the “passon” was mumbling the prayers or droning his mocking message within. A single service a day both preacher and people regarded as enough, and when two services were held, an adjournment after the first to the nearest public-house was not an uncommon occurrence. On one such occasion when the bells struck

out for the afternoon service, the clergyman urged his companions to remain behind, saying, "I will soon be with you again," and having hurried through his distasteful task, in about fifteen minutes he rejoined the convivial party, with whom he continued drinking and carousing until a late hour in the evening. One recalls a passage in Wesley's Journal, written half a century, earlier, so slight was the change in the character of the clergy and the habits of the people which had occurred in the meantime.

*Wednesday, Sept. 4(1765).*—I rode on to North-Tawton, a village where several of our preachers had preached occasionally. About six I went to the door of our inn; but I had hardly ended the psalm, when a clergyman came, with two or three (by the courtesy of England called) gentlemen. After I had named my text I said, "There may be some truths which concern some men only; but this concerns all mankind." The minister cried out, "That is false doctrine, that is predestination." Then the roar began, to second which they had brought a huntsman with his hounds: but the dogs were wiser than the men; for they could not bring them to make any noise at all. One of the gentlemen supplied their place. He assured us he was such, or none would have suspected it; for his language was as base, foul, and porterly as ever was heard at Billingsgate. Dog, rascal, puppy, and the like terms adorned almost every sentence. Finding there was no probability of a quiet hearing, I left him the field, and withdrew to my lodging.

"It was a common opinion that Jews and heathens needed conversion, but that those who were born in a Christian country, and had been baptized and confirmed," were already in the way to Heaven, and that only enthusiasts and fanatics pretended to know that their sins were forgiven, or that they had experienced a new birth unto righteousness. The doctrine of justification by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was neither truly understood nor generally taught, and yet it was denounced as licentious in its tendency. It is freely acknowledged that there were well-educated clergymen of good character, but even these "taught morality without perceiving that, in order to be genuine, it must be the fruit of conversion." The best kind of preaching then in vogue seriously erred by defect; when not positively erroneous, it was altogether inadequate. Soul hunger cannot be satisfied with the mere husks of truth. When men need the bread

of life, to offer them a stone is but idle mockery. The clergyman who could construe the large and gracious words, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," into an invitation to the Lord's Supper, could scarcely have had even a faint glimpse of the truth that Jesus alone can "speak peace and pardon to the heart and set the soul at liberty."

Another kind of preaching was common—that directed against separatists from the Established Church, who were compared to "Korah, Dathan, and Abiram." Ludicrous as such comparisons were, they appear to have answered the purpose for which they were used, and produced a kind of "wholesome terror" in the minds of many.

The Rev. Cradock Glascott, one of Lady Huntingdon's itinerants, was, it is true, settled at Hatherleigh; but he was, it is believed, the one solitary clergyman shining as a light in a district which embraced a large number of parishes. He held his Devonshire living for nearly fifty years, and after making "full proof of his ministry" in winning

p. 4 many souls for Christ, he departed this life on the 11th day of August, 1839, in the 89th year of his age.

"Devonshire contributed a noble quota to the ejected ministry of 1662," the distinguished John Howe among the number, but Puritanism as a vital force had at this time almost ceased to exist. Mr. James Thorne says, and no more competent witness can be cited, that "Dissenting chapels were few and far between. From Exmoor to Boscastle—a distance approaching 70 miles east and west,—from Hartland Point to Plymouth—a distance of more than 40 miles,—and from Newton Bushel to Minehead—nearly an equal distance—there were scarcely any Nonconformist chapels." The sacred flame in the little towns of Torrington and Bideford, where the seraphic Howe and the exemplary and devoted Lavington had ministered the

p. 5 word of life, had lost much of its brightness and in Torrington it seemed in danger of being extinguished. The evidence is incontestable that towards the close of the eighteenth century Nonconformity had almost died out in Torrington.

The original Howe Chapel, in Well Street, was falling into ruins, and the pulpit was supplied by occasional lay preachers from Barnstaple. In 1807, however, Mr. Thomas Wilson, of London, feeling a great interest in the

place, at his own expense sent down a young student, Mr. Ephraim Jackson, to minister to the congregation. Mr. Jackson remained for nearly 40 years in the town, and succeeded in sustaining the languishing cause.<sup>1</sup>

The danger from lukewarmness Howe himself had clearly foreseen. "I fear," he says, "religion hath long been gradually *dying*, and, spiritually, diseases that have this tendency are both *sinful* and *penal*."



Torrington Church

Bideford, though it did not wholly escape, was more fortunate. When Richard Knill joined the Church in this place, of which the Rev. Samuel Rooker was the minister, the "better times" which he earnestly desired were near at hand. The accession of Knill and a friend of his gave an impulse to the little community of the happiest description. "Meetings for devotional purposes, which had subsided into formality, were revived; and 'there was,' says a contemporary, 'an earnestness, an unction, and a breathing after holiness in Mr. Knill's prayers which

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<sup>1</sup> Methodism in North Devon, pp. 83-4.