

A HISTORY  
OF THE  
PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

BY

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

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THE present edition is almost an exact reprint of the first. A few trifling misprints and one or two minute inaccuracies have been corrected, but nothing has been done to interfere with the paging.\* I would draw attention to a modification in the wording of the closing sentence of the book. This was misunderstood (strangely, as I think) to imply a denial of what is called the premillennial Advent, that is, the second coming and personal appearing of Christ before the epoch of universal blessedness. I therefore ask the reader to notice that all that I asserted was that the expectation that the Advent would take place within three-quarters of a century from the year 1825 was delusive—which is surely self-evident. The modification I have now made has, however, been chiefly designed to meet another, and I think a more reasonable, objection. The words I used tended perhaps to involve primitive Brethrenism in a general charge of delusion; whereas all that can fairly be said, and all that I really intended to express, is that the delusion in question had a serious influence on the formation of the system. I must beg my readers to keep in mind that my book was not written to exhibit at large my own estimate of the movement that I have chronicled. Possibly the title of my last chapter is misleading. I could wish I had rather called it *Some Leading Features of the Movement*.

The only other modification to which it is needful to call attention will be found on the first page of the Appendix. My notice of Mr. Whitfield's articles might, I think, be understood to depreciate them unfairly. This I should be very sorry to do, for I have a high sense of their value.

I am indebted to the kindness of a friend for the index that now appears for the first time. I regret that it was impossible to compile it

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\* This has been changed in this Tentmaker Edition..

in time for the first edition.

One or two critics have very naturally complained of the absence of statistical information; but the matter is one in which I am powerless. There are practically no statistics of Brethrenism; and an attempt to supply the want could only mislead.

I am indebted to my friend Wm. Soltau, Esq., of the MacAll Mission, Paris, whose father's name occurs very frequently in my pages, for the following interesting criticism:—

“I do not think you bring out clearly enough the great work of evangelisation carried on by the Brethren in the earliest days in and around Plymouth, when a very great deal of activity was shown in direct evangelistic work, in the town and all around, which made the movement in Devon so great a blessing in the ingathering of hundreds of souls to the Lord. Then you do not sufficiently bring to the front the really great work done through the press, in gospel tract work as well as in books for Christians. Mr. Clulow and my father started a tract shop in Plymouth which continued long after they had left, and which was a centre of work for the Lord. The early gospel tracts of Brethren were the first circulated largely in the West. Two my father's tracts, *The Scarlet Line* and *The Serpent of Brass* were blessed, I believe, to scores of unconverted, not to speak of others by various writers.”

This is not the only evidence that has recently come under my notice, not only of a conspicuous zeal and self-devotion, but also of an extensive usefulness on the part of the earliest Brethren, especially in the West of England.

I have to say that a correspondent expresses a strong belief that Mr. Hargrove (page 113) died in communion, not with Open Brethren, but with the Church of England.

I am informed by a prominent adherent of Mr. Clarence Stuart that my account of the attitude of his party towards other sections of the Brethren is scarcely correct as regards the closing fifteen years of last century. It appears that the liberal principle that I define (page 275) is only quite recently beginning to make much headway amongst them. But my correspondent justifies me in concluding from the

documentary evidence that I followed, that a tendency in the direction indicated really manifested itself almost from the very first in some important meetings; though no doubt I represented it as more definite and developed than was actually the case.

A letter addressed by Mr. H. N. Glanvill to the *British Weekly* for January 23, 1902, contradicts the statement (which I only repeated with an express reservation) that "some fifty meetings" were involved in Mr. Fereday's secession from Mr. Kelly's party. Mr. Glanvill limits the number to "some half-dozen". The letter comes too late to allow me to communicate with my earlier informant, or to contemplate a modification of the text. All I can do (and I do it with pleasure) is to give publicity in this way to Mr. Glanvill's very courteous correction.

For permission to use the fine portrait of Mr. Darby that appears as a frontispiece to this volume, I am indebted to Mr. Edward Penstone, of The Studio, 31 Stayton Street, Chelsea, the proprietor of the copyright.

W. BLAIR NEATBY  
*January 1902.*

## PREFACE

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THE present work is partly based on a series of articles that I contributed to the *British Weekly* at the close of last year and the beginning of this, under the title of *Darby and Darbyism*. Perhaps about half the matter of the articles has been incorporated in the book, and the book is about three times as long as the whole of the articles. Readers of the *British Weekly* may therefore count on finding about five-sixths of this work fresh matter.

In the articles, enough narrative was supplied to make the description intelligible. In the book these relations are precisely reversed. An entirely fresh study of all the materials for the history, so far as they have proved accessible, (and the author has had *comparatively* few disappointments), has been made. I am not aware of any previous attempt to thoroughly sift and harmonise them.

Indeed, this book has one great advantage: it takes the field without rivals. No general history of the Plymouth movement has ever been undertaken. In introducing my articles, I argued that there was room for them in the midst of an already voluminous literature; but the plea is now superfluous. Yet it may be worth while to repeat some illustrations that I then gave of a general ignorance of Brethrenism, curiously out of keeping with the interest that it excites.

“A standard work, eminently learned and candid—I refer to Mr. Julian’s Dictionary of Hymnology—contains in its article on Plymouth Brethren Hymnody the following extraordinary assertion: ‘The [hymn] books put forth since the rupture in 1848 contain... a selection... for the unconverted,’ *i.e.*, those who are not in full communion with themselves.” Now, though this is not by any means the only error in the article, the writer has, on the whole, more knowledge of the subject than [many] who have written on it, and he evidently makes his statement with a good faith equal to his confidence. Yet nothing can be more certain than that it is a very great, and indeed totally

groundless calumny upon the Brethren, who have (with some absolutely insignificant exceptions) always used the term 'unconverted' according to immemorial evangelical custom.

"Add to this instance of what we might call a learned error, a single instance of the commoner class of popular errors. I have seldom, I think, conversed with any one not intimately acquainted with the Brethren, but what I have found that he understood Open Brethren to be so called because they admit Christians who are not 'Brethren' to the communion table, and Exclusive Brethren to have earned their title by the exclusion of all who did not belong to their own sect."

It will be seen that I have been very sparing of references to my authorities. This has been partly due to a belief that my readers will in most cases share my dislike to a text encumbered with notes; but partly also to the peculiarities of the special case. The great majority of the authorities are now inaccessible to most readers. I have consulted scores of tracts that very few people could possibly procure. Besides those in my own possession, or in possession of my relatives, very many have come under my inspection through the courtesy of friends with whom my articles had brought me into correspondence. To one correspondent, whose connexion with the Brethren dates back to 1845, I am under obligations that I find it quite impossible to adequately acknowledge. Not only has he placed at my disposal a set of tracts that is, I should suppose, almost unrivalled for the period 1845-70, but he has taken the greatest pains to clear up, by the help of private correspondence, various obscurities that I have submitted to him. For the later period, my own resources have been very ample.

Instead of constant references, I have furnished at the end of the book a sufficient bibliography, chronologically classified. In one or two instances only, I have mentioned books that I have not succeeded in consulting. On the other hand, I have omitted very many that I have not found of much service, and on the sole authority of which I have stated nothing.

There is a class of possible readers that might be led by my name into the very erroneous impression that I had largely drawn on my father's longer, and yet more intimate, personal acquaintance with Darbyism. Indirectly, this is inevitably the case; directly, it is not so

at all. From the time that I first contemplated going into print on the subject of Brethrenism, I have advisedly and scrupulously abstained from consulting my father on any point. I believe there is no exception whatever to this statement, except for two details, *both purely doctrinal*, on which I obtained his opinion as to the teaching of standard Darbyite divinity; and, even in those cases, I gave him no hint of my object. I say this, because I have no right to claim his authority for anything I have written; and yet more because it would be most unjust to him to allow an impression to grow up in any mind that he has some responsibility in connexion with a book of which he has not seen a word (barring, of course, quotations), and with a good deal of which he probably would not wholly agree.

To avoid confusion, will the reader kindly take note that whenever the italics in a quotation are my own, and not those of the author quoted, I have invariably said so. The omission of a statement to that effect always implies that the italics were in the original.

W. BLAIR NEATBY  
*September 1901.*

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# I

## THE BEGINNINGS OF BRETHRENISM —THE DUBLIN MOVEMENT

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TWELVE years ago Dr. Alexander, the present Primate of Ireland, described the warfare of his own church in the following remarkable terms: “The hill up which our little host must march is steep, and the hail beats in our faces. We hear the steady tramp of the serried ranks of Rome round us; the shout of the marauders of Plymouth rises, as they, ever and anon, cut off a few stragglers. We draw close, and grip our muskets harder.”<sup>1</sup> Who and what then are these “marauding” Christians that have the honour to be, by so august an authority, in some sense coordinated with the dominant ecclesiastical power of the country in respect of the apprehension with which the Church of Ireland regards them? It is the aim of the present work to furnish an adequate answer to this question.

But aside entirely from the part that they play in current controversies, the Plymouth Brethren have very strong claims on the notice of the student of contemporary church history. Developing side by side with the three great ecclesiastical movements of the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century, Brethrenism was linked with them all—with the Evangelical, with the High Church, and, strange as it may seem, even to some extent with the Broad Church—by important affinities; and yet it retained unimpaired the intense individuality impressed on it almost from the first by one powerful genius; and it challenges attention now as furnishing a fourth independent conception of the Church—a conception which, comparatively narrow as the extent of its acceptance may be, does

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<sup>1</sup> *Verbum Crucis*, p.161.

nevertheless, by the immense force of its intensive influence, deserve consideration side by side with its more famous competitors.

It is no doubt correct to speak of the Brethren as a small sect, in a relative sense; but this, so far from diminishing the importance of their history, greatly enhances it. The quotation that stands at the beginning of this chapter is in itself a witness that there has been something about Brethrenism that effectually distinguishes it from the multitude of the small sects. Mr. Croskery's inference<sup>2</sup> that it will be short-lived because Sandemanism, Walkerism and Kellyism<sup>3</sup> sank soon after their rise is a most precarious argument, if indeed it does not stand already refuted. It is no doubt just possible that the movement is now destined to a comparatively speedy extinction, but the whole course of its history, or even the hastiest calculation of its past and present influence, must suffice to show the worthlessness of the analogy on which Mr. Croskery relied. To apply a very simple test, which of all the smaller sects of Christendom has enrolled amongst its enthusiastic adherents such a company (to limit ourselves to men that are gone) as John Nelson Darby and Francis William Newman, George Müller and Anthony Norris Groves, Benjamin Wills Newton and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles?

In yet another respect special interest attaches to the story of the Brethren. On their narrow stage there are few of the tendencies of universal church history that have not been illustrated, and not many of its movements that have not been reenacted in little. The Brethren sought to effect a fresh start without authority, precedent, or guidance beyond the letter of Holy Scripture. For them, essentially, the garnered experience of eighteen Christian centuries was as though it were not. Such an experiment in the hands of eminent men could scarcely fail to yield a considerable harvest of interest and instruction; and it has actually shed, if I mistake not, a flood of light on many of the obscurities and incredibilities of the history of the Church.

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<sup>2</sup> *Plymouth Brethrenism* (1878), p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> The party of Irish Christians following Thomas Kelly, the well-known hymn writer and evangelist. "Kellyism" is sometimes used in connexion with the later history of the Brethren in quite a different sense.