

Edward Elihu Whitfield

# Plymouth Brethren

**bruederbewegung<sup>de</sup>**

Aus: *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*.  
Hrsg. von Samuel Macauley Jackson. Bd. 9: *Petri – Reuchlin*.  
New York / London (Funk and Wagnalls) 1911. S. 95–98.

© dieser Ausgabe: 2008 bruederbewegung.de  
Textfassung und Satz: Michael Schneider  
Veröffentlicht im Internet unter  
<http://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/whitfield.pdf>

**bruederbewegung**<sup>de</sup>

## PLYMOUTH BRETHREN.

### I. History.

Foundation; Record till 1845 (§ 1).

The Newton Episode (§ 2).

Defection of Cronin and Kelly (§ 3).

Further Divisions (§ 4).

Present Status (§ 5).

### II. Doctrines.

**I. History:** The Plymouth Brethren, called by others Darbyites or Exclusive Brethren, and by themselves “Brethren,” are to be distinguished from Bible Christians and Disciples of Christ (qq. v.). They took their origin in Ireland about 1828 after a movement under the leadership of John Walker which was a revolt against ministerial ordination, and in England the origin is connected with the interest in prophecy stimulated by Edward Irving (q. v.). Conferences like those under the Irving movement were held

**1. Foundation;** from 1828 at Powerscourt Mansion, County Wicklow, Ireland, at which  
**Record till** John Nelson Darby (q. v.) was a prominent figure. Prior to this, from  
**1845.** 1826 private meetings had been held on Sundays under the leadership of Edward Cronin, who had been a Roman Catholic and later a Congregationalist, for “breaking bread,” at which Anthony Norris Groves, John Vesey Parnell (second Lord Congleton), and John Gifford Bellett, a friend of Darby, were attendants. In 1827 John Darby resigned his charge and in 1828 adopted the non-conformist attitude of the men named above, prompted by the Erastianism of a petition of Archbishop Magee to the House of Commons, and issued a paper on *The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* (in vol. i. of his *Collected Writings*, London, 1867). This served to swell the ranks of the Brethren, so that in 1830 a public “assembly” was started in Aungier Street, Dublin, which emphasized “the coming of the Lord as the present hope of the Church and the presence of the Holy Ghost as that which brought into unity” and “the heavenly character of the Church,” and used as the golden text Matt. xviii. 20. Through Francis William Newman (q. v.), Darby had become acquainted with Benjamin Wills Newton (a lay fellow of Exeter College) and George Vicesimus Wigram at Oxford. He also visited Plymouth (whence the name for the Brethren), where Robert Hawker had been active in Evangelical ministry, and held meetings there, the outcome of which was the first English gathering of the Brethren (1831). The basis of communion was the acceptance of “all that are on the foundation” and rejection of “all error by the Word of God and the help of his ever present Spirit,” recognizing that “degeneracy claimed service, and not departure.” Before the appearance of Darby’s *Liberty of Preaching and Teaching* (1834), the Brethren had taken their stand upon a free ministry, while other weighty papers by Darby and Newton appeared in the new magazine, *The Christian Witness*, edited by J. L. Harris. Recruits of note were Henry Craik and Georg (Friedrich) Müller (q. v.), coming from the Baptist denomination. The latter had been in the service of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, but became convinced that assemblies should consist only of the converted and joined the Brethren, beginning pastoral work at Bristol in 1832 on the lines of their policy, and developing the other activities for which he became famous. Other noted converts to the denomination were Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (q. v.) and Robert

Chapman. Darby continued his work in London, then went to the continent, where in French Switzerland he promoted the movement by personal and literary activities, opposing a regular ministry as ignoring the privilege of every believer to direct access to God. While there he became aware of a tendency toward isolation manifesting itself in Newton, shown in his revival of restricted ministry together with doctrinal divergencies, e. g., Newton's adherence to the Reformation teaching of justification, inclusion of the Old-Testament saints in the apocalyptic Church, and belief that the second advent would not precede the "great tribulation," to which the Church would be subject. Failing to secure satisfaction from Newton and his adherents, in 1845 Darby started a separate assembly.

Newton remained at Plymouth for two years. The dispute so far had concerned the special "testimony" of Brethren as such. According to notes of a lecture by Newton acquired by Harris in 1847, Newton's position as to our Lord's person was unsound: Christ by his incarnation and as a descendant of Adam entered upon a relation of distance from God, and as an Israelite incurred from birth the condemnation attaching to the broken

law. Tregelles shows that the personal sinlessness was maintained through the seal at Christ's baptism, although lifelong suffering was entailed by his relationship. Newton withdrew the first part of his statement, but did not satisfy Darby, and a definite alienation separated the two men. Newton severed his connection with the Brethren, but contin-

ued till his death (1898) to write on prophetic subjects. Tregelles is reported by Scrivener to have died in the communion of the Church of England. In 1848 the Bristol company did not refuse fellowship to the adherents of Newton, and one of [96] their number, George Alexander, seceded on the ground that "blasphemers were sheltered," taking occasion for this action in a paper intended to apply to the special circumstances but construed as a statement of a general policy. After debate and several assemblies, it was decided that no one upholding Newton's views should be received into communion, and several to whom this applied withdrew, though it appeared that they were afterward readmitted. Darby insisted upon the fundamental of "separation from evil" as "God's principle of unity"; the result was a breach between him and the Bristol company, his followers insisting upon his statement as the watchword, while the opponents' formula was "the blood of the Lamb is the union of saints." Wigram charged Craik with statements concerning Christ's physical ailments which savored of Newtonianism; but Darby sent a farewell message to Craik on his deathbed (1866), which did not, however, heal the breach. A new magazine, *The Present Testimony*, edited by Wigram, became the organ of the exclusives, followed in 1856 by the monthly *Bible Treasury*, for which William Kelly (q. v.) was responsible, and to this also Darby contributed papers on the sufferings of Christ, in which he argued that Christ endured certain non-atoning sufferings, in addition to those borne vicariously in death, due to his voluntary position in Israel (John xi. 51), in fulfilment of prediction of his participation in the sorrows of the godly remnant in the last days. This had no affiliation with the Newtonian doctrine, which affected the whole life of Christ; but some of his followers, unable to distinguish between Darby's position and Newton's, withdrew from fellowship with him. Darby offered to abstain from ministry, but was counseled not to do so by his prominent supporters. Meanwhile he had worked on German soil, where he had met Tholuck, and had visited the United States, Canada, and other British colonies lecturing and writing.

In 1879 a gathering at Ryde, Isle of Wight, failed to deal with depravity in the midst, and Darby's old Dublin associate Cronin, desiring to end the scandal, founded a new "assembly" in the place. Darby regarded this as a breach of unity, and called upon Cronin's home congregation at Kensington, London, to discipline the offender, and to

“judge” his “indiscretion.” Cronin was defended by use of Darby’s avowal that the old assembly was “rotten” and that for thirty years he himself had avoided it. A crusade was nevertheless directed against Cronin by the leaders at Park Street, Islington, and additional matters connected with baptism entered into the controversy. Finally, although Darby had asked only for a stern rebuke, Cronin’s stubbornness widened the breach and he was excommunicated. About the same time there was disruption at Ramsgate, Kent, one of the rival parties at which supported Cronin while the other strongly condemned him, the assemblies at Blackheath, where Kelly resided, and at Islington also taking opposite sides. The result was a split in 1881 at Park Street like that which had occurred in the Bethesda affair. Each side charged the other with “independency,” and Darby described the situation as a struggle between intelligence and the Spirit, by “intelligence” referring to Kelly’s endeavor to give intellectual expression to the policy hitherto pursued and thereby to maintain the “unity of London.” The man who had so long led meditated withdrawing altogether from the Brethren, feeling that the encroachments of the world had marred “the testimony”; but his faith reasserted itself. Darby’s survival of this poignant situation can be counted only by months, as he died the next year. He was little disposed to learn from others, and claimed to have “the mind of the Spirit.” He united Roman Catholic with Evangelical ideas, though his own apprehension of Scripture dominated his mind. He regarded himself as the beginning of the Plymouth Brethren, which was true at least so far as the English branch was concerned. Where he was iconoclastic, it was not, as he expressed it, “with an Edomitic attack but with Jeremianic sorrow.”

The year 1885 was notable for concurrent divisions among Darby’s last associates on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States Frederick William Grant, of Plainfield, N. J., alienated rivals in the Islington party by his candidly independent attitude toward some of their cherished doctrines. He was an ex-clergyman of Canadian origin, a man of much erudition, and highly esteemed in his section. He held that the saints of the old dispensation possessed eternal life, and agreed with the interpretation of Rom. vii. which holds that the apostle there describes the moral condition of believers even after receiving the seal of the Spirit. The English leaders detached their adherents from fellowship with him. At Reading, England, Clarence Esme Stuart, an accomplished Biblical scholar who had sided with Darby in 1881, came into collision with James Butler Stoney, an unbalanced teacher who was no longer held by the restraint imposed by Darby’s presence. Stuart’s primal offense was that at Reading he had not adopted the hymn-book last revised by Darby; second, that he unduly distinguished between the standing and state (or condition) of believers, holding that the Pauline expression “in Christ” sets forth condition alone, and that in this are to be sought such distinctions as obtain fundamentally between believers of the different dispensations. With these doctrinal issues was combined a social breach between him and a local female ally of the Stoney school. Upon this last matter the Reading assembly refused to give judgment, though with some dissent against the order of procedure, supported by the Stoney faction dominant in London, which separated from Reading and carried many assemblies with them. Those in Great Britain who disowned the interference of the London adherents continued to recognize the Grant contingent in America. Stuart gave color to the new departure by shortly afterward emphasizing his view of atonement, according to which Christ, as high priest only after death, made propitiation by blood not on the cross but in heaven, in the interval between death and resurrection. This view was not unknown in theology (e. g., Professor George Smeaton), but was regarded by Stuart’s

critics as a [97] novel inference from Darby's teaching. The year 1890 witnessed a further division among the "exclusives" of the party formed in 1885. Frederick Edward Raven of Greenwich became prominent through teaching doctrines which were reprobated by the old Darbyites. He questioned the claim of believers in general to have had eternal life imparted to them, in doing so seeming, as an Apollinarian, to impair the glory of Christ's person. He held also that Scripture is not as such the word of God but the record of it, to which resort is to be had for confirmation of oral ministry. Reconciliation he regarded, with Calvin, as a continuous process which believers undergo. In the division which ensued a majority of Stoney's associates and a small band in the United States stood with Raven, but the continent of Europe was lost to them. From 1881 to his death in 1906 Kelly continued to be revered as a sound teacher of the first order, possessed of great capacity as a leader and controversialist. He was unremitting in his ministry and in writing, defending the truth as he conceived it against all innovation, in particular against the higher criticism. With him passed away the last survivor of the golden age of the Brethren.

This community has, then, resolved itself into the following sectional fellowships. (1) Brethren fully recognizing the existing congregation at Bethesda (Bristol) and regarding, with Westcott, the primitive unity of the Church as that of a federation; adhering to Baptist views; open in communion; and existing in Great Britain and the colonies, Europe, North and South America, India, and China. It has the largest following. (2) Those who followed Darby more or less closely, in five branches. (a) Brethren chiefly in France, Switzerland, and Germany, with a remnant in England and the United States, committed to Darby's ecclesiastical position as defined since 1881. (b) Associates of Kelly, adhering to Darby's doctrinal views, with the exception of pedobaptism, and to the system prevalent in 1848–81; mainly in England. (c) Associates of Stuart and Grant, loath to abandon anti-Bethesda discipline, but standing for elasticity in doctrine. (d) Associates of Raven, opposed to Bethesda, favoring expansion of doctrine of their own type, but including some independent of this; in Great Britain, the colonies, and the United States. These have since 1908 composed two sections, separated from one another by disciplinary policy and views of evangelization and redemption. On the other hand, there has been for several years a movement, originating in America, for abatement of the alienation between the various types of bodies. Some adherents of Grant have lowered the barriers between themselves and "open" Brethren, while not giving themselves this name; and since 1906 a corresponding movement has gathered force in Great Britain. These "eclectics" repudiate the distinction between "open" and "close," and seek, by a blending of the Pauline and Johannine aspects of the Church, to revive the unity first realized at Dublin untrammelled by formal federation of either open or close types, which is favored by neither element. A hopeful feature of the situation is the absence of a pronounced leadership. No denominational statistics exist for Great Britain. In the United States there are over 300 assemblies with about 7,000 communicants. The denomination has drawn its membership from all ranks of society – the nobility, the army and navy, the judiciary, and scholars in various spheres. It has had notable Evangelists like Charles Stanley and Denham Smith; missionaries like Baedeker and Arnot have propagated its teachings in the world field; while C. H. Mackintosh is the writer whose works are most widely used.

**II. Doctrines:** A full epitome of the doctrine developed among the Brethren could be obtained only from the writings of Darby, who was the chief teacher. So large was his authority in his denomination that for most Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin were mere ciphers. On the Godhead and the person of Christ the teaching is that common

to Catholic Christianity. On human nature it is held that Adam was first sinless, not virtuous or holy; the fall spelled unqualified ruin. The atonement has two sides: Godward it is propitiation; manward, substitution; the purchase of all, the redemption of the believer, and Christ's death under wrath. Predestination is held as the election of individuals, the assured acceptance of believers, together with denial of free will and reprobation. Justification implies the righteousness of God (not of Christ specifically) displayed in the resurrection of the Savior, with dissociation of his life from the process. Sanctification is positive and practical; in the latter aspect it involves self-judgment and confession to God, insuring a sense of forgiveness through Christ's priesthood, which preserves from sin, as his advocacy restores. Cleansing by his blood is once for all, cleansing by the Word continues. Not the law, but the Second Man's risen life is the believer's rule. The Church was primitively one visible, closely organized community. The "assembly," in view of grace, is the body of Christ; in view of government is the house of God; one is the product of the Spirit, the other is the product of man, marked by failure and ruin. National churches are too broad, non-conformity is too narrow. Darby denies what has been suggested by critics – that the "gathering" is held to be coextensive with "the Church of God on earth"; he also repudiates the further assertion that for eighteen centuries there has been no church. The ordinances are (1) baptism, which is required for fellowship. Among the exclusives mutual toleration is practised by baptists and pedobaptists. Darby's view was based on the recognition of privileged position (outward as distinct from inward, essential baptism). Other pedobaptists practise household baptism. (2) The Lord's Supper is observed weekly in the forenoon, at which leavened bread and fermented wine are taken by the members seated. The institution is commemorative only. Participation in this is jealously guarded; in theory it is the privilege of all believers, but in practise the theory is overborne by the notion of full fellowship. The special means of grace are the Holy Scriptures according to the canon of the Reformers. The book is infallible; consequently the idea is condemned that the Church and the Bible stand or fall together. The higher criticism is not recognized; development is disowned, and the truth is recovered by reversion to St. Paul (not, as the Quakers hold, to the "historical Christ"). Since Darby's dying recommendation not to neglect the Johannine doctrine, the center of gravity is increasingly sought in that. The Bible version favored is Darby's own (in English, French, and German); he rejected the Revised Version with the words, "They have not had the mind of God at all." In the matter of the ministry Darby did not begin by questioning the validity of Anglican orders. His conception of the office was service in the Word, the faithful exercise of a special gift, for which the individual is responsible to the Lord alone. A distinction is made between "gift" and "office"; the latter came through apostolic appointment and is no longer available. The "assembly," while not being the source of the ministry, since it is the taught and not the teacher, may or may not accredit the ministry as profitable. Anything beyond the moral influence of the Spirit is regarded as delusion. In theory, all godly men are possibly competent, whether in formal fellowship or not; but in practise such fellowship is presupposed, and the flock is discouraged from "wandering." The public ministry of women is disallowed. Worship is conducted, as among the Quakers, by "waiting on the Lord," and conventional collections of hymns are used in praise and prayer. The Lord's Prayer is discarded, as symbolic of the position and desires of the inchoate Church and typical of the Jewish remnant. The local assembly acts through non-official organs, men of moral weight whose personal influence is encouraged as commanding confidence. As discipline excommunication is practised for grave delinquency and for lapse into fundamental error in doctrine. With the exclusives I Cor. v. 6; II Tim. ii. 19 sqq.; and II John 10 have furnished the rule of action. While this has been the object of criticism, in practise its influ-



ence has been salutary, restraining tendencies to antinomianism. For eschatology, it is held that believers at death go not to Hades but to a heavenly paradise with Christ. Within the present dispensation Christ will at an initial coming gather all his people to his tribunal for reward according to conduct, and will subsequently visit the earth in an appearance for judgment of living nations (Newton denied the distinction between the two and the interval). The second beast of Rev. xiii. is regarded as the Antichrist. No Christian will pass through the great tribulation (Newton expected that Christ will be revealed before the parousia), while the Church with Christ will reign over the earth for a millennium, with Israel, the earthly bride, as administrative assessor. The final judgment is of the wicked dead, with endless punishment of such. So much of the foregoing as Brethren deem part of their special testimony they describe as "recovered truth." The germinant idea is that of the Church's ruin. In their principal points of doctrine they have been anticipated by other bodies or by individual thinkers; but they believe that men such as Darby have presented these with more light and power.

E. E. WHITFIELD.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: For the authoritative literature of the denomination use the writings named in the articles on J. N. Darby, W. Kelly, G. Mueller, and B. W. Newton as their productions, together with the works cited in the bibliographies there appended. A considerable literature, mainly controversial and antagonistic to the Plymouth Brethren, is given in the *British Museum Catalogue* under "Plymouth Brethren." Consult further: W. B. Neatby, *Hist. of the Plymouth Brethren*, London, 1902 (critical and accurate); J. J. H[erzog], in *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, xxxiv (1844), nos. 23–26, 28–33; S. P. Tregelles, *Three Letters to the Author of "A Retrospect of Events ... among the Brethren,"* London, 1849; *Memoir and Correspondence of A. N. Groves*, by his wife, London, 1855; F. Estéoul, *Le Plymouthisme d'autrefois et le Darbyisme d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1858; H. Groves, *Darbyism: its Rise and Development*, London, 1866; E. Dennett, *The Plymouth Brethren*, London, 1871; J. Grant, *The Plymouth Brethren, their History and Heresies*, London, 1875; E. J. Whately, *Plymouth Brethrenism*, London, 1877; T. Croskery, *Plymouth-Brethrenism: a Refutation of its Principles and Doctrines*, London, 1879; J. C. L. Carson, *The Heresies of the Plymouth Brethren*, London, 1883; W. Reid, *Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled and Refuted*, Edinburgh, 1883; J. S. Teulon, *The Hist. and Teaching of the Plymouth Brethren*, London [1883]; *Life among the Close Brethren*, London, 1890; J. R. Gregory, *The Gospel of Separation*, London, 1894; A. Miller, *Plymouthism and the Modern Churches*, Toronto, 1900.