

The Brethren since 1870

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Publishers Note

This book was originally written as a sequel to Andrew Miller's little volume which had shown the "brethren" in their origin and subsequent division into "Open" and "Exclusive" groups. The object of writing the sequel was to give the then current generation (1965) an understanding of how we came to be meeting as we meet, a humble explanation of the divisions which had occurred and with the desire that we should avoid the pitfalls previously encountered in our history. Its writing has been updated to deal with the reunion which was consummated in 1974.

This reprint has in mind that there is now a new generation which has arisen since the reunion exercises of the years to 1975, that there are enquirers from previous sad divisions amongst brethren and from the denominations as well as some in fellowship who would benefit from a clear and precise presentation of the situation as it is now.

Some have advised that this history could be updated in relation to the defining of a doctrine of "Local Autonomy" amongst "Open" brethren and the disintegration of Tunbridge Wells and ex-Taylor groups, but we feel that the need is to show the situation of those who understand the scriptural imperative that the only ground of gathering for the saints of God is the one body of our blessed Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, in separation from evil giving unhindered fresh communion with the Father and the Son. This the history achieves as originally written.

It is felt that the correspondence during the period of coming together (appended to the history in 1975) is a beautiful picture of the Holy Spirit's exercising of hearts concerning the honour of the name of the Lord Jesus. The various groups had been exercised about the dishonour to the Lord because of the separation of brethren who all maintained the truth of the UNITY of the body of Christ. The letters should be valuable for those who have been taught that such a reunion could not be scriptural, and also to show that scriptural principles were strongly upheld. There was not compromise in order to gain unity.

The author was brought by the working of the Holy Spirit as a young man to see the truth of the one body and our responsibility to walk in that pathway. He has proved the blessedness of giving the Lord His rightful place in the assembly through many years and was personally involved in the reunion exercises, so that he writes from personal exercise before the Lord. We commend it to our readers.

A Word Of Explanation

At the Grove City conference in August 1969, there were a number of meetings for prayer and discussion concerning the fellowship matters facing us, particularly our separation from the so-called "Kelly-Mory" brethren in this country.

Not being able to arrive at any substantial agreement, it was the consensus that we make these matters the subject of earnest prayer, individually and collectively, so that we might know the mind of the Lord.

Following these meetings, a number of brethren indicated that they did not have copies of the reports and correspondence, since in most cases only one copy had come to each assembly, and this over a number of years. It was felt by many that this information should be available to every concerned brother if there was to be intelligent prayer.

With this in mind, the material following has been collected and reprinted for the benefit of all. We have purposely avoided private correspondence and excerpts which might be misinterpreted. All of the material has been previously available to all in the gatherings.

It might also be well to mention that prayer meetings specifically regarding the fellowship matters are being held on a regularly scheduled basis in Detroit, St. Louis and Charlotte. Should there be others holding special meetings on this basis, we would be glad to know about it, and will seek to make it known in the future.

As matters develop further, we will (D.V.) seek to have any pertinent papers reproduced on special sheets for insertion in this binder, so that all who are interested may have a fairly complete, up-to-date folio.

CONTENTS

1. THE OPEN BRETHREN	3
Division in the Open Brethren - "Needed Truth"	
2. THE EXCLUSIVE BRETHREN (SO-CALLED) EARLY DEPARTURE	7
Early Departure	
The Kelly Division of 1881	
3. ECCLESIASTICISM TIGHTENS ITS GRIP	10
The Grant Division of 1884	
The Stuart Division of 1885	
The Lowe (or anti-Raven) Division of 1890	
The Doctrines Involved	
4. ECCLESIASTICISM ESTABLISHED	16
The Glanton Division	
The Downward Course of the London Party	
5. THE SCATTERED REMNANTS	21
The Scattered Remnants	
The Tunbridge Wells Trouble	
The "Lowe-Kelly" Re-union of 1926	
Further Troubles	
More Healing of Division	
"Little Glanton"	
6. THE PRESENT POSITION	27

Chapter One

The Open Brethren

The story of the Brethren, as told by Mr. A. Miller, closed in the 1870's and nearly a century has passed since then (1965). All the great movements of the Spirit of God have suffered much decline in the course of 100 years, and the Brethren have certainly been no exception. That which is committed to human responsibility always fails, but the Truth abides. The foundation of God stands sure, although iniquity may abound.

In the following pages it is desired to trace briefly the history of the Brethren up to the present day. We will try to avoid paying unnecessary attention to details of controversies long dead, and rather concentrate on those matters, painful though many of them are, which have relevance to us in the present. A. Miller's History left the Brethren divided into two camps - the "Open" and the "Exclusive".

The Open Brethren, from their beginning took the line that all meetings were independent units. Discipline and administration were the responsibility of the local gathering alone and each assembly managed its own affairs according to its own standards before the Lord, and had no right to judge or interfere in the management of a neighbouring assembly. This principle had the advantage that it was easy to follow and did not lead to much exercise of conscience. If two meetings ceased to have fellowship with one another, or one meeting split into two opposed parties (and this often happened) the other meetings could continue in exactly the same relationship with both factions, and receive from either. If an offender were justly disciplined by his meeting, he might go to a neighbouring assembly and be received. The decision of the second meeting would be its own responsibility and would not concern the first. The offender could then travel round the gatherings with a letter of commendation from the second and would not be affected by the discipline of the first meeting at all, while that meeting would not consider it a matter for their own exercise of conscience unless the brother they had disciplined came back to them, which he would not be likely to do. It could happen on the other hand that a brother might be put out of a meeting unjustly. He would then be readily received by neighbouring meetings, but the decision of the unjust meeting could not be challenged, nor would the spiritual judgment of those in neighbouring meetings be used to put the matter right in his own locality.

A teacher of serious error might be refused by other meetings, but his local gathering could not be disowned. Hence those who were defiled by remaining in his meeting could still be received, providing they did not themselves hold or teach his views. The principle of independency must, of necessity, be in opposition to the scriptural principle that association with evil defiles.

We do not desire, however, to be unduly critical of the Open Brethren, and must acknowledge that most of them are godly and faithful believers. We can thank God that they have not lost the Gospel, and their zeal in that direction has produced much fruit for the Lord. Large numbers of their missionaries have gone to other lands, pioneering independent meetings there. These brethren go out in dependence on the Lord and He does not fail them. The missionary magazine of the Open Brethren is called "Echoes of Service" and the Editors act as a channel for gifts. Consequently Open Brethren missionaries are often called "Echoes of Service" missionaries.

As regards the British Isles, about 20 full-time evangelists go into villages with their tents and equipment, and hold Gospel Campaigns in places where there is no evangelical witness. They are supported by a trust known as "Counties Evangelistic Work". Also 'Mobile Units' have been purchased by gifts from assemblies. These are vans equipped with loudspeakers and other suitable apparatus, for use in towns, mainly London, and manned by Gospel preachers that volunteer for open air preaching in the evenings after their daily work.

In addition to this, in Great Britain, there are at least 35 full-time evangelists and teachers, and also a good number in Northern Ireland, who go round the assemblies and in faith rely on the Lord's provision alone depending on gifts from believers as the Spirit moves, with no central fund or committee dispensing financial aid. Such work is highly commendable and we cannot criticize it in principle or practice, except perhaps that these full-time workers must wait to be 'invited' by assemblies to take meetings which would not be necessary if they arranged their own itinerary. Very few of these workers are fully aware of their origin or of Newton's heresy. We are confident that the Lord has used these evangelists, and will still use them mightily, for the salvation of souls and the extension of His Kingdom.

There are at least five Open Brethren magazines in the British Isles. The 'Witness' and 'Harvester' have the largest circulations but they are of the interdenominational school of thought, the Witness having become so during the last few years. The other three are "Precious Seed" mainly for brethren in the West of England; "The Believers Magazine" mainly circulating in Scotland, and "Assembly Testimony" circulating in Northern Ireland.

These three magazines, especially the last, seek to maintain a separation from the sects of Christendom, but they still teach firmly the principle of independency.

A. Miller wrote in his book that comparatively little in the way of written testimony had issued from the press of the Open Brethren. This cannot be said in the twentieth century, and they have had many sound and gifted writers who have produced useful works of the conservative evangelical kind.

Nevertheless, although they have the truth of the Gospel, we must maintain that they have lost the truth of the Church and have become a system of independent gatherings quite contrary to the truth of the One Body "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth". This perversion has not failed to be the author of confusion and the meetings of Open Brethren vary in every kind and degree from the tight gatherings which will not receive anybody unless he first separates himself from everybody else, to those which are in effect interdenominational movements of the present day, and receive any stranger without question to the breaking of bread. Between these two extremes there are large numbers of meetings that are - locally- run on fairly sound New testament lines.

Rather unexpectedly in view of their great diversity, there is one doctrine and practice which is held by all Open Brethren assemblies - except perhaps by one or two of exclusive origin - which is that baptism must be only for believers of a responsible age on confession of faith. Most meetings refuse to allow a person to break bread unless he has been baptized as a believer, and if he was baptized as an infant it does not count in their eyes. The doctrine of household baptism is rigidly rejected and no teaching of it would be allowed. Some meetings might tolerate an individual who held such a view, but he would have to keep quiet on the subject.

The majority of the gatherings practice the "closed oversight" system. There are a number of brethren in each meeting who are the elders, and this group is called the "oversight".

These elders are appointed to the office and when a vacancy occurs in the oversight, a brother is invited by the remaining elders to fill it. Those who are not elders have no voice in this appointment. We believe this departs from the scriptural order. In the early days of the church some elders were appointed by apostles or their delegates, but since apostles have ceased, there is no mention of apostolic succession and this therefore no longer applies. It is plain, however, that where there was no definite apostolic ordination, the Holy Ghost still raised up overseers (Acts 20:8) and that the assembly was told to "know" or recognize them as such (I Thess.5:22).

The qualifications of a bishop (elder) are found for our guidance in I Tim. iii: 1-7. The one who is moved by the Holy Ghost will take up the office of a bishop on his own spiritual exercise and the brethren will become aware of the fact and acknowledge it. Needless to say, the person who in fleshly pride desires the pre-eminence will not be "known" by a spiritual gathering. The practice of a "closed oversight" often leads to the appointment of a good "party man" to the office, while the true overseer is overlooked and left outside the inner circle.

It is worth noting that a common practice is, in effect, to recognize two fellowships. A person may break bread as a believer for a time and then be asked if he wishes to become a member of the assembly. Often a letter of commendation is not desired until the believer asks to be put on the list as a member. Thus there are two memberships (1) membership of the Body of Christ, (2) membership of the local meeting, and one can infer that in practice membership of the second needs higher qualifications! When one membership is possible without the other there can be no clear perception that a local gathering should be no more and no less than an expression of the whole body.

It was a very strong point amongst the early "Brethren" that the Holy Spirit should be allowed to have full control in the various gatherings. This principle has been gradually let slip amongst Open Brethren. Now an opportunity for 'open ministry' is very rare, and readings have been abandoned in many places. Even where Bible readings are held, they are often controlled by an appointed chairman who introduces the subject or chapter by a talk of varying length and then leaves the meeting open for discussion or questions.

Pre-arranged ministry is the custom in some places at the Breaking of Bread. Although the early brethren abandoned the Judaistic practice of using the natural senses as aids to worship, organs or pianos are now being introduced in rapidly increasing numbers at the Open Brethren morning worship meetings. The way has been paved for this, as for a great many years, the organ has been used at their Gospel meetings.

Many Open Brethren meetings, especially in Scotland, call themselves the "Christian Brethren" and label themselves as such on their notice boards. There has been a tendency in England lately for some of their places of worship to be changed from being called 'halls' to 'chapels', and a few have begun calling their meeting places "Evangelical Churches". Interdenominational activities have been much increased since the war. Their almost universal participation in the "Billy Graham Campaigns" gave this tendency a powerful impetus. These interdenominational activities lead directly to unscriptural practices such as prayer meetings where sisters take audible part with their heads uncovered.

Division in the Open Brethren - "Needed Truth"

There can be no clear-cut division amongst those who practice independent principles. Obviously a thing which already has no cohesion cannot be divided. Pass a knife through a pile of sand and it remains as before. Apart from local incidents Open Brethren cannot

separate from one another and this appears on the surface to be a good thing. It is often forgotten that independency makes separation from evil impossible also.

The only way a division is possible amongst Open Brethren is for a group of meetings to forsake independency and separate from those who practice it. In other words, this means that they cease to be Open Brethren altogether. For, suppose there were two groups of meetings, both practicing independency, then, according to their principles, one meeting cannot be less independent of another in the same group than it is of one in the other group. In any case, independents profess not to recognize groups or circles of meetings.

Some talk of a division between "Closed-Open" and "Wide Open" meetings, but this is not accurate. It is true that most of the meetings in Northern Ireland and many in Scotland and Northern England are "Closed-Open" and they would be horror-struck to attend the "Wide Open" meetings such as are found in large numbers in the South and West of England. But they are still independent gatherings and are all included in the directory of "Assemblies in Britain and other parts" published by Pickering & Inglis Ltd. They have different practices but are in the same fellowship.

There has, however, been one break away from Independency and this occurred in 1889. Certain brethren formed another party and this has been called the "Needed Truth" company after the name of their magazine which is now obtainable from the Needed Truth Publishing Office, Assembly Hall, George Lane, Bromley, Kent. As early as 1876 questions were published and answered in the magazine "The Northern Witness". This was the first sign that many were becoming uneasy concerning the loose condition of a large number of meetings. By 1889 this course of teaching, started twelve years previously, had obtained a good number of adherents and many of the meetings were calling themselves the "Church of God" in their locality and claiming that no other company of Christians was a church of God in a true sense at all. They rejected the doctrine of independency, but instead of the true scriptural unity which is brought about by the Holy Spirit, they instituted a man-made unity brought about by human organization, by means of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. First there was the oversight of a city; next came the County Oversight and over them was the National Oversight consisting of the brethren ruling over all the "Churches of God" in the country. In 1904, a dispute between the Scottish Overseers and the oversights of England, Wales and Ireland made an international oversight necessary. Such ideas, of course, are quite foreign to Scripture, although similar to the system of government in most denominations. It is in effect, the substitution of an earthly head for the Head in Heaven. As has occurred in other tight, sectarian circles, a serious error was introduced and forced upon the simple believers by the overseeing caste. Needed Truth Brethren were told that they must not address the Lord Jesus in worship, as worship had to be addressed only to the Father. This rule is still enforced amongst them and must be regarded as a grave departure from God's will "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." (John 5:23). Worship is the expression of this honour and therefore must be paid to the Son in like degree as to the Father. So far as can be ascertained, the Needed Truth brethren have much decreased in numbers since their beginnings, and their few meetings are predominantly in Northern England.

Chapter Two

The Exclusive Brethren (so-called)

Early Departure

Andrew Miller's book "The Brethren", has shown us the happy and flourishing state of those who had rejected the "Open" principles and had carried on in the old paths. We have seen something of their unworldliness, hunger for the Word alone and zeal for the Gospel, and how the Lord blessed them by giving light as to the truth, increase in numbers and a harvest of precious souls. It should be noted, incidentally, that the term "Exclusive" was first applied to them by their opponents. They accepted the description gradually, because they said it was a right thing to be exclusive of evil, but no well-instructed brother would have agreed that it was the name of the company. They knew no name but Christ - so they were Christians. They had no desire to be called by the name of any merely human person or any system of doctrine. They were `brethren' no more and no less, than all other Christians. The very use of the capital B in "Brethren" is not strictly accurate, as it implies a brotherhood distinct from other believers.

Yet in a history such as this it is necessary to use certain terms in order to avoid long and tedious circumlocutions of words in describing believers who gathered in various ways and places. One apologizes for this, but it is due to the ruin that has come in.

The story of the "Exclusive Brethren" is a very sad one. One can see the activity of the enemy of souls, working secretly while men slept, working as an angel of light and even latterly as a roaring lion. With our eyes opened after the event, we can see how even the most godly and discerning men did not perceive what he was doing, until the harm had become cumulative and obvious to all but the blinded.

It is plain that some of the pristine purity and unworldliness of these brethren was becoming tarnished by the 1870's. Many had come in who had not experienced fully the original exercises. Mr. G.V. Wigram who died in 1879, observed "we had to pray out the truth upon our knees in persevering prayer, but now it can be bought up cheaply."

Because of the great increase in the numbers of meetings, further light was being sought as to the Scriptural principles in the practical administration of the assembly. It was observed - firstly it is believed by G.V. Wigram - that Scripture always speaks of the church (singular) of a town regardless of the number of gatherings in it, but the churches (plural) of a province or country. From this it was inferred that the local church of a town consisted of all the true Christians in that town, and were to be regarded as the local gathering for the purposes of administration. The different sects and systems made this impossible, but those gathered out of these systems must obey the true scriptural principles for themselves, and act as the whole local church would have acted if failure had not come in. So it was put into practice that all meetings in one town were to regard themselves as a single unit for purposes of reception, discipline and other administration.

Now this, no doubt, was based on true scriptural precedent, but they did not take account of the vast difference between the ancient towns and cities in the Scriptures and the conurbations and giant towns of today. A lot of argument and difference of opinion developed as to the practical problems relating to the meetings in the huge town of London. In New Testament times, cities were small enough for a man to walk from one end to the other in 10 to 15 minutes, while between the cities there was such poor transport that a visit to the neighbouring town would take a lot of traveling time. It was quite natural,

therefore, that the Christians in a single town would consult together on everything, regardless of the fact that they may have met in different houses for the study of the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship breaking of bread and prayers.

J.N.Darby, by then aged and greatly revered, was very keen that the church in London should regard itself as one unit, although he advocated that the meetings in outlying districts such as Croydon, which were not in the geographical boundaries of London, should be pruned off. He said that they had been allowed in the "parent body" while they were small and new, but should now become churches in their own right. He seemed to regard any attack on the conception of one local church in London as advocating independent churches. It is not clear why he thought so. Could not the single unit have been the church in a borough?

The outcome of all this was that brethren representative of some 26 London meetings used to meet regularly on Saturday nights in a room at London Bridge and later at 145 Cheapside. These meetings were meant to be channels of communication only. As they were not the local church, but only representative brethren, they were not expected to bind or loose anything but merely to pass on and receive information to and from their respective gatherings. But they soon began to recommend decisions, even if they could not ratify them, and in practice a decision taken at Cheapside would be accepted without question, especially on minor details.

Also the Park St. meeting at Islington, being the most central of the gatherings and containing a good number of the most influential brethren, began to acquire an unrecognized and unofficial power and authority. There was a monthly brothers' meeting at Park St. for all the London meetings, where all important administrative decisions were made. It was the seed of an ecclesiastical hierarchy that would become full-grown one day. We shall see how it developed as we continue our history.

The Kelly Division of 1881

On August 22nd. 1879, the meeting at Ramsgate, Kent, divided into two factions. This local division was the focal point of the general division of 1881, and we would like to have spared our readers all the details that led up to the Ramsgate spilt. Nevertheless, to get a true picture, we feel that some explanation of the quarrel at Ramsgate must be attempted so we give the following account of the events that preceded it. The meeting at Ryde, Isle of Wight, was reputed to be in a poor spiritual condition. In 1868 they received a brother T.C. who had previously evaded the English law of the time and, by residing in France for the required period, married there his deceased wife's sister. Years later this became known in other meetings, and many being unhappy about the unrighteousness of this brother's act, the Ryde meeting in 1877 censured T.C. and stopped his ministry. He withdrew from fellowship the next year but was not put out. Many (including Mr. W. Kelly who made his views quite plain) felt that the Ryde meeting should have cleared itself by declaring T.C. out of fellowship.

Some seceded from the Ryde meeting and set up another table at the Masonic Hall. This, however, was considered a divisive act by the other meetings in the Isle of Wight and they continued to recognize the original meeting at the Temperance Hall.

Now aged Dr. E. Cronin who broke bread at the meeting in Kennington, London, and had been one of the original brethren who broke bread at Dublin in 1826 when a medical student, got it into his head that he would force brethren to recognize the meeting at the Masonic Hall. Accordingly on February 8th 1879 he went down to Ryde and broke bread with

the Masonic Hall brethren and, against the advice of his great friend, J.N.D., again did so on March 14th. One wonders why he thought this would move the brethren to change their minds and be inclined towards the Masonic Hall. It certainly did not do so, and many in London called upon Kennington to discipline the aged doctor. This Kennington was unwilling to do, but they disavowed all association with the Masonic Hall, Ryde.

One feels surprised at the demand that was made by the leaders in London to excommunicate Dr Cronin in view of his age and previous godly walk. Surely some concession should be made to old age in view of the scriptural command to honour white hair. It is well known that some in extreme old age get obsessions and small delusions even though their intelligence does not seem otherwise impaired. Surely love and respect should pass over the indiscretions of aged brethren, even though they would not be excused in younger men. There seems to have been a lack of love in the attitude towards Dr Cronin. One feels that a declaration that Dr Cronin's course made no difference to the judgment of brethren as to Ryde, should have been sufficient to maintain godly order.

When Kennington has hesitated to put out Dr Cronin for several months, on Tuesday August 19th 1879, a meeting of the assembly at Park Street was held in which the brethren decided that Kennington assembly had been apathetic too long and declared Dr Cronin out of fellowship thus disowning those who sympathized with him. This declaration was posted immediately to various country meetings in the surrounding counties including Ramsgate. However, on that very same evening, another meeting had been held at Kennington, in which it was decided to put Dr Cronin out of fellowship, quite without knowledge of the decision at Park St. at the same time. Consequently at the Cheapside meeting on Saturday, it was accepted that the Park St. declaration was annulled and Kennington was still in full fellowship as before.

Thus sadly did Dr Cronin end his long association with his brethren. The Lord took him to Himself in February 1882 at 81 years of age.

Now after all these details we can explain the Ramsgate split.

On the next Lord's Day, Ramsgate had received the Park St. declaration but had not received the news that this declaration had been annulled owing to the simultaneous action at Kennington.

A difference of opinion arose and many of the brethren there, feeling that they must act immediately in line with Park St., left the dissentients and began to break bread apart. Those brethren who separated in line with Park St. became known as the Guildford Hall company, and the others as the Abbots Hill company. When the Guildford Hall faction heard of the annulment of the Park St. declaration they desired reunion, but the faction at Abbots Hill would not forgive their secession and insisted that they must be received back as "individuals". This condition the Guildford Hall brethren were not willing to accept.

We will not weary readers with the fourteen face-saving proposals and counter-proposals put forward by the two companies during the next two years. It is sufficient to say there was clear evidence of fleshly pride working on both sides. Finally Guildford Hall commended a brother to Park St. hoping thereby to obtain recognition. Park St. thereupon decided that they were forced to investigate and come to a conclusion as to which faction should be recognized and three meetings were held in April 1881 in which representatives of both Abbots Hill and Guildford Hall stated their respective cases. Guildford Hall was eventually

recognized as the "true company", which could have been predicted, as Guildford Hall had made the division through its loyalty to Park St in the first place.

William Kelly of the Blackheath meeting, however, together with many others, was by no means happy about this decision as he favoured Abbots Hill. It is clear that Mr. Kelly had been sympathetic to Dr. Cronin. So the "Park St. Judgment" became a test of communion and all who could not subscribe to it were outside.

Now, from this distance of time, it seems plain that Park St. had set itself up, in practice, to be the head of the Brethren, thus usurping the authority of the Head in Heaven. Not only did it come to a decision about events not in its district, ignoring the 35 meetings in Kent, but it insisted that all meetings must obey that decision or be out of fellowship. If some refused to accept the judgment they were said to be acting independently. They surely failed to see that unity must be by the Spirit and not by enforced human authority. Those who could not toe the line were not acting independently but were resisting ecclesiastical presumption. Yet both sides accused the other of independency! It is doubtful whether Mr Kelly and his supporters would have realized when they accused Park St. of being independent that actually their error was just the opposite. They were trying to set up a manmade unity. Mr Kelly did object, however, to the "regimentation" of the Park St. judgment. He said in "Christian Unity and Fellowship" "It cannot seriously be expected that those who compose the church of God should forego the character of a family with its fathers, young men and babes, to imitate an army under martial law. Regimental order is as far as possible from that which the written word prescribes to God's church, where, instead of a regulation standard, the utmost variety prevails, high and low, strong and weak or even uncomely."

J.N.Darby wrote in a letter dated Nov, 26th 1881, "It was necessary to come to a decision, because all means during several months had been used to induce the opposing ones to humble themselves, but without fruit". Yes, a decision was certainly necessary but had Park St. any right to make the decision for the whole body? The Holy Spirit makes true unity, and we cannot do so, but we are exhorted to keep the unity which is already made by the Spirit on His own basis. This is not to advocate independency. These acting on independent principles would have recognized both companies, ignoring the disunity and thus covering up the evil. Those who desire to keep the unity of the Spirit cannot recognize that which produces disunity, but will not rest until there is restoration at the seat of trouble and the evil of self-will expurgated. Such restoration is not produced by edict, but only by "prayer and fasting". And those primarily responsible for the final recognition of a restored and self-judged company, (although that company may prove to be a remnant) are those who are near the scene itself, that is the neighbouring companies, not an eminent company of gifted brethren who are a great way off. One would desire such a restoration to be speedy, but long suffering knows no time limit.

It is perhaps necessary to stress that there was no fundamental cause for local division at Ramsgate other than self-will. Where there is a clear cut case of fundamentally evil doctrine or gross moral evil it is not a question of reconciliation between brethren, but of individuals and companies being clear of the defiling evil.

Chapter Three

Ecclesiasticism Tightens its Grip

The Grant Division of 1884

The Park St. Judgment of 1881 was generally accepted in America, perhaps for the simple reason that J.N. Darby was very well known and beloved in America while Mr Kelly was relatively unknown outside the British Isles at that time.

A very gifted teacher and exponent of the word had emerged in America named Mr. F.W. Grant of Plainfield, New Jersey. In 1881 he was 47 years of age and already well known. His forthright ministry was, however, causing some resentment amongst the leading brethren in England who were centered around Park St. London. He had written an article named "Unity of the Church in a City" in which he attacked the rigid line that a local church was one unit within the boundaries of a city or town. He pointed out that this was regulating spiritual matters according to the arbitrary geographical boundaries of secular authorities, and that London was as vast as, and more populated than, a province in Roman times. He objected to the London Brothers' Meeting that passed decisions for the huge London church. This, as can well be expected, did not please the leading brethren in London.

A doctrine had developed in England about this time that the reception of Eternal Life did not usually take place until a period of time had elapsed after new Birth: that this period of time might be considerable and that the sealing of the Spirit (i.e. the reception of the Spirit) occurred at the time of this later receiving of Eternal Life. J.N.D. in his old age seems to have accepted these views. In a conference in Croydon, England, in 1881 when F.W. Grant was visiting the country, he had a disagreement with Mr. Darby, but the aged J.N.D. broke off the discussion and refused to continue what was developing into an argument. Regrettably, Mr. Grant then left the room.

Briefly, Mr. Grant taught the following:

- (1) He claimed that every believer in the Lord Jesus was sealed with the Holy Ghost; that he might have the Holy Ghost and yet be in bondage, not having peace or being sure he was justified. London Brethren maintained on the other hand, that nobody was sealed until he fully understood the Gospel.
- (2) That the experience of the seventh chapter of Romans was the record of a saved man seeking holiness and fruit for God, and not of a sinner seeking peace. London brethren maintained that the man in Romans 7 did not yet have the Holy Spirit.
- (3) Eternal life was given to a person at New Birth, from the first moment of quickening.
- (4) That Old Testament saints were possessors of eternal life as well as those of the present dispensation, and this life was in the Son, although it was not manifested until the Son came. He guarded against the idea, however, that the O.T. saints were in the church. London brethren taught that eternal life was a dispensational thing, exclusively the portion of the church.

In September 1883 F.W.G. sent to the leading brethren in America and Europe a tract called "Life and the Spirit" and invited their comments. He revised and enlarged this tract and published it in 1884 with the title "Life in Christ and Sealing with the Spirit".

Now an English brother, Lord Adalbert P. Cecil was, accompanied by Mr. Alfred Mace, on a preaching tour of America in 1884, and began a concentrated attack against F.W. Grant, speaking against him in many gatherings in U.S.A. and Canada. All the opposition to F.W.G. came from him, and he claimed that he and Mr. Mace were acting this way in America as the representatives of the English brethren. It is clear that he knew he had the full backing of the leading brethren in London.

A.P.C. and Alfred Mace got a firm footing in the Natural History Hall meeting at Montreal, for they more or less dominated the assembly for three months, causing a local division, and pressed hard for the rejection of F.W.G. In November 1884 Mr. Grant (perhaps unwisely) came to Montreal hoping to prevent division and his views were discussed from Nov. 15th to 25th. On the 29th day of November a circular signed by 38 brethren in Montreal rejected F.W.G. as a teacher. On December 12th a "last admonition" signed by three brethren was sent to F.W.G. who was then in Ottawa. F.W.G. refused it and stated that it was only from a section of the meeting in Montreal. On December 17th a paper was read out three times to the assembly at Montreal, declaring F.W.G. out of fellowship as a heretic, and each time 40 dissented, but in spite of this dissent the declaration was stated to have been passed and F.W.G. was put out on a slender, majority vote! The dissenters next Lord's Day (it would have been better if they had waited) broke bread at another meeting place in Craig Street in fellowship with F.W.G. Of course, the Plainfield assembly where Mr. F.W.G. resided, rejected the Natural History Hall meeting and so did the majority of American assemblies.

So the leaders of the brethren in London had managed to engineer the exclusion of F.W.G. although all admitted that his errors (if they were errors) were not fundamental, and the complaint against him was only that he had formed a party by publishing his tracts! How many brethren have published tracts not quite in line with the thoughts of their brethren, and have not been disciplined! But there was no mercy for F.W.Grant.

By this time then, London had got rid of all British brethren who were not willing to follow their lead in the Kelly division of 1881, and all American brethren who did not bow to them in 1884. The brethren of the Continent of Europe as yet were undivided in fellowship with London. The Grant brethren were mostly confined to U.S.A., Canada and the Bahamas.

Alfred Mace confessed in later life that he had acted wrongly towards Mr. Grant, but Lord Cecil was drowned at the age of 48 while still campaigning against him.

Further details of the Grant division can be read in the booklet "Matters relating to Montreal".

The Stuart Division of 1885

Mr. Charles Esme Stuart, a scholar and teacher, descended on his father's side from the royal house of Stuart, his mother being a maid-of-honour to Queen Adelaide, as Duchess of Clarence, was a Christian in the meeting at Reading, Berks. He had some eccentric doctrinal views, maintaining that Christ made propitiation in heaven after death but before His resurrection while He was not in the body. This belief was based on Old Testament types. He agreed that the Blood was the sole basis of atonement, but said that, before the atonement was complete, it was necessary for the Lord to present the Blood to God in heaven, after it had been spilt on earth. This was to conform to the type, as the blood was

sprinkled on the mercy seat in the holiest after the animal had been slain outside. This view was rejected by all brethren of note. We are sure that, if no division had been forced, the doctrine would have died with him, and it was not fundamental to the faith. Before this Mr. Stuart had brought out a pamphlet called "Christian Standing and Condition" which produced criticisms from J.B. Stoney and D.L. Higgins.

There were two sisters in the Reading meeting called the Misses Higgins, whose brother was a prominent leader in London (D.L. Higgins). They fell out with Mr. Stuart on a personal matter and accused him of malice. The meeting at Reading investigated the charge and found it baseless. A few, including the Misses Higgins, withdrew from fellowship.

The brethren in London, beginning to feel their role as arbiter and regulator of all disputes among Brethren, in July 1885, called a large meeting to discuss Mr. Stuart and only London brethren were expected to speak. This meeting decided to refuse Mr. Stuart and the Reading gathering and support the few that had withdrawn. However a few meetings, including a small meeting in London, disowned the decision and continued with Mr. Stuart. Also many meetings in New Zealand continued in the Stuart fellowship

The Lowe (or anti-Raven) Division of 1890

We now come to a division that does not fall into quite the same pattern as the previous three. Up to this time, all the divisions had been caused by brethren being forced out of fellowship by a central authority in London which had been arbitrarily assumed. In the 1890 trouble however, we find that a large number of meetings withdrew themselves on their own initiative. Most of these meetings were on the Continent which had been unaffected by previous cleavages.

Firstly we will present the simple history of events in this division and then discuss the doctrines and principles involved.

Before 1890, a teacher named Mr. F.E. Raven had risen to prominence. His meeting was at Greenwich, London, and he had attained a considerable eminence among the brethren in the Metropolis and elsewhere. During the two years from 1888 to 90, much concern and bewilderment arising over Mr. Raven's doctrine, he was questioned in readings and correspondence by many brethren such as Mr. Christopher McAdam, Dr. Cotton, Dr. C.D. Maynard, Mr. W.J. Lowe and others. They were not satisfied by the answers.

In February 1890, Mr. J. Corbett charged F.E.R. with false doctrine and withdrew from the meeting at Greenwich. In May he published a circular letter giving his reasons. Greenwich meeting affirmed their fullest confidence in F.E.R.

In the same month (May) F.E.R. commended one of his supporters, G. Boddy, to the Bexhill meeting although he knew his teachings were strongly opposed there. The Bexhill meeting refused the letter and requested Mr. Boddy to sit back until matters were investigated. The Greenwich meeting then wrote to Bexhill enquiring why a letter was refused which was signed by a brother in whom they had the fullest confidence (i.e. F.E.R.) Bexhill replied to this on June 8th stating their reasons. Greenwich, meanwhile had excommunicated Mr. J. Corbett for printing a "false and slanderous paper".

Greenwich answered Bexhill a fortnight later saying that "The question of the teaching of any particular brother is scarcely a matter to be discussed between assemblies". (Surely the principle of Open Brethrenism here!) Bexhill replied by rejecting Greenwich as an assembly (What haste!).

All the assemblies one by one decided whether they should support Bexhill or London and the division was consummated before the end of 1890. Mr. W. J. Lowe, who was greatly esteemed on the Continent, judged F.E.R. to be fundamentally in error and a large number of the continental meetings followed his lead.

The Doctrines Involved

Now the errors alleged against Raven in 1890 can be put simply and briefly as follows:

- (1) The denial that every true believer in Christ necessarily has eternal life as a present possession
- (2) The denial of the Unity of the Person of Christ.
- (3) The denial of the full humanity of Christ.

We can say quite emphatically that if these allegations had been clearly true, Bexhill's action would have been fully justified; also we are sure that nearly every meeting in the world would have rejected Mr. Raven and any supporters he might have collected.

The fact is, however, that the doctrines of Raven, especially on the subject of eternal life, were by no means clear, and a student of the orthodox doctrine of the Person of Christ will see at once that (2) and (3) are opposite errors which could not appear together in any consistent scheme. Mr. W.J.Lowe, writing in February 1890 to Mr. Bradstock said, "It is no easy thing to find a way, as you seem to have done, through this intricate maze." So we are brought against the difficulty immediately that the issue in this division was an "intricate maze". Few could find their way through it, yet in a few months every believer in the assemblies was forced, whether he was simple or profound, well-taught or only a beginner, to decide whether Mr. F.E.Raven was in fundamental error or not. There can be no doubt that a large number of meetings on both sides followed their leaders blindly or maybe restricted their investigations to a few well chosen quotations from F.E.R.'s writings.

We had in mind to consider some of the quotations to show that Raven could have meant something other than alleged, but have decided not to do so as it might only stir up controversy now nearly dead. It is sufficient to say that no supporter of Raven defended the errors alleged against him (so far as the 1890 division is concerned) but always sought to show that he did not teach them.

Now it must not be supposed that the writer of these notes is a supporter of F.E. Raven and it will shortly be shown that he is not. Nevertheless Bexhill and their supporters cannot be left without the criticism that their action was hasty and premature. Many who have studied Raven's writings have come to the conclusion that (in 1890) he was misunderstood and misrepresented. This was the opinion of C.H. Mackintosh, J.B. Stoney and other well known and godly brethren of the time. In fact it can be shown that one of Mr. Raven's opponents when writing on the Unity of Christ's Person, carelessly leaned towards the error of Eutychianism and suggested that the Lord's manhood and deity could not be distinguished from one another. Those who claim to be separating from heterodoxy should be careful that they are thoroughly orthodox themselves.

When we read the correspondence between F.E. Raven and his questioners, we may notice that Mr. Raven was far more interested in pressing his opinions than in satisfying the questioners' fears, and that his views were presented in a complex manner. Surely the sign of a good teacher is that he is able to present the truth in a clear and simple manner so that the hearer can understand. A man who is abstruse is not a good teacher. Now Raven had already built up a reputation for ministering the Word and had shown he was a man of clear

mind and speech. Why then was he so confused when on the subject of eternal life, between the years of 1888-90?

No doubt it was because he himself was confused for he referred later to "defective statements he had made on the road to light" but did not state what the defective statements had been, and he said his ideas had become "gradually clear". There was a more sinister reason, however, in that, consciously or unconsciously, Raven and the London "hierarchy" were indifferent, or even pleased, that certain brethren who were not prepared to be 'yes-men' to the party line, should withdraw from fellowship.

The practical effect of their secession was that Raven was established as the teacher and leader of the dominant faction in London. From that time until his death nobody could challenge his supremacy, although some of his doctrinal statements became wilder and more suspect. His teachings had a tendency towards the mystical, and the fiction had grown that only the spiritual would understand him because the things he taught were spiritually discerned. So the dissatisfied were quietened, not wishing to appear unspiritual. This was the seed of the deplorable mystical teaching that produced such sad degeneration amongst the 'Ravenite' brethren in the next two generations.

The forming of a vocabulary and system of teaching which is only understood by the elite, is very satisfying to the flesh, but one has no doubt Raven would have got nowhere before the spiritual deterioration amongst the Exclusives had allowed the insidious emergence of centralism. Raven had confidence in the backing of the important brethren in London and had no need to be careful in his speech. A brother of such stature as C.H. Mackintosh suggested in 1890 that Raven should cease from ministering until confidence was restored and without London's backing he would have been obliged to give way to the moral weight of such counsel. It is apparent, however, that the London Party saw their authority at stake in the challenge to Raven and he was urged to stand firm and elevated as their figurehead.

Some of Raven's statements made from 1895-1903 can be shown to be definite errors of a serious character. As brethren cannot see into the future, such statements do not justify a division made in 1890, yet many will ask how it was that so many godly brethren could remain in fellowship with Raven even after such statements were made. We will suggest two reasons. Firstly, these brethren had supported Raven in 1890, sincerely believing that he had been badly treated, and it would take a lot of evidence to make them reverse that decision. Secondly, these statements were not pressed as part of any systematic scheme of false doctrine, the major part of his ministry being sound and good, and therefore were largely unnoticed by his followers. They caused an uneasiness in some discerning brethren but no decisive opposition.

Chapter Four

Ecclesiasticism Established

The Glanton Division

Amongst those who had remained with Raven (still a world-wide communion) there were many who were concerned about the school of teaching that was establishing itself in those who looked towards London for leadership; also brethren of an evangelistic mind, who were exercised to present the Gospel to perishing souls were not pleased at the restrictive influences that were increasing.

We come now to the fifth of the major divisions of the Exclusive Brethren. This event, known as the Glanton division of 1908, enabled the unofficial headquarters of Brethren in London, finally to cast off its camouflage and openly commence its rule. From 1908 onwards the London Exclusives marched like an army, obeying orders from headquarters even down to the small details as the times of meetings and the wording of notice boards! So quickly had the ideal of spiritual unity changed to man-made uniformity and organization.

The Glanton division was the final test of strength when the London Brethren threw out - on a point that really amounted to a technicality only - all those who would not bow to their will.

For some years previous to 1905 the meeting at Alnwick, Northumberland, had been suffering from divisive undercurrents. During the last week of 1904, Mr. Thomas Pringle and three other brethren drew up a notice secretly, which claimed to exclude four brothers from fellowship on the ground that they had been the leaders of these divisive influences and had held "opposition" gatherings. This notice was read to the meeting on Jan. 1st 1905, and caused great confusion. Mr. T. Pringle and his followers then announced that they would break bread elsewhere in future and, as Mr. Pringle owned the hall (Green Bat Hall) he locked it so that the four excluded brethren and their fifteen sympathizers could not break bread there. At the same time Mr. Pringle sent copies of his notice to eleven Northumbrian meetings including Newcastle. On Jan. 4th 1905, the nineteen brothers who had been locked out, sent letters to Glanton (the nearest meeting) and other surrounding gatherings asking for advice as to what they should do. Mr. Pringle sent letters next day to the same gatherings saying that he and those with him would break bread in future in the Town Hall.

On Jan. 15th the Glanton meeting wrote the following letter to both the factions at Alnwick.

"We decided last Lord's Day, that in view of the sorrowful division at Alnwick we cannot at present break bread with either party; but would ask you, in love, to seek the Lord's face, that He may put you right with Himself and with one another."

Copies of this letter were also sent to surrounding gatherings and Glanton received general approval for its decision. On March 6th the "nineteen" brethren wrote to the Northumbrian meetings asking if they could now break bread in fellowship with them, but got no encouragement for such a course at that time.

There were many attempts at reconciliation but the "Pringle Party" refused to have any discussions unless the original notice excluding the four brethren was first acknowledged to be a righteous act. This condition could not be accepted. A large meeting for prayer and humiliation was held at Glanton and attended by brethren from nineteen other meetings in Northumberland.

In February 1906, two brothers who had been with Mr. Pringle and had signed the exclusion notice, judged they had been wrong and urged the withdrawal of the disciplinary order. They then separated from the Pringle meeting and became identified with the 'nineteen'. This caused the Pringle faction to cease breaking bread owing to decreased numbers. From February 1906 to February 1908 there was no gathering for breaking of bread at Alnwick. During this period, about twelve brethren came to Alnwick to reside and finding no meeting there, they traveled to Glanton to break bread every Lord's Day.

In February 1907 several of the brethren at Alnwick judged themselves and confessed their faults in the general misbehaviour that had led up to the open rupture in January 1905. They then turned to Glanton and asked if they could be received. Glanton then decided that the time had come to consider individual cases and called a prayer meeting on the subject for April 27, 1907, in full consultation with surrounding gatherings. These gatherings expressed their confidence in the Glanton meeting's competence to receive individuals who had judged themselves and become reconciled to one another.

Accordingly some of these brethren were received to the Lord's Table at Glanton. Later, on February 23rd. 1908, twenty of the saints living at Alnwick, twelve of whom had come to reside there after the 1905 break up, ceased to take the journey to Glanton and commenced to break bread at Alnwick in fellowship with Glanton and other Northumbrian gatherings.

In the meantime certain brethren in London and Edinburgh expressed an exercise that the Glanton meeting, in assuming the dissolution of the meeting at Alnwick and receiving individuals from there, had infringed the principle of local responsibility. Feeling they had the backing of powerful men in London, certain of the brethren in Edinburgh seceded, and began meeting at 12 Merchiston Place in separation from the other four gatherings in the town, because these four meetings had refused their demand that all the Northumbrian meetings should be "shut up" as a leprous house. This meeting, started on August 2nd 1908, immediately commended a sister to London, this being the expedient to bring the London body into the fray in full force.

So a large meeting of brothers gathered at 57 Park Street on August 16th and again on August 18th and came to the decision (after strong urging by their leaders) that Glanton and all those in fellowship with them, should be cut off from fellowship. However, 225 meetings in several countries (counting the two's and three's in some places) refused to bow to this cruel and autocratic ruling and remained in fellowship with Glanton.

Now if the new residents at Alnwick, who had been breaking bread at Glanton (a right which nobody could deny them) had first started to break bread at Alnwick and then, as the meeting there, had received the repentant individuals, there could have been no objection that the principle of local responsibility had been broken. Yet the end result would have been the same. This demonstrates that the merciless edict of London was pressed on account of a mere technicality of procedure. Where, too, is the principle of local responsibility in the idea that a complete and final ruling can be made in London, 300 miles away from the trouble? Surely the Northumbrian gatherings had more local responsibility than London, and their decision should have been respected.

The hypocrisy of the whole thing is seen, in that Mr. Pringle and six others started a meeting on October 11th 1908 at Alnwick and the London Brethren immediately recognized them!

The Downward Course of the London Party

Those who had, in practice, rejected the leading of the Holy Spirit and substituted the rule of an ecclesiastical clique, soon began to show signs that they were adrift from the truth. After Mr. Raven died in 1903, a Mr. James Taylor of New York rapidly rose into prominence. From 1905 to 1908 he issued six books, from 1909 to 1920 twenty-six more, and from 1921 to 1929 he issued forty books - seventy-two in all! And there have been many more after this. Every word in the readings he attended was taken down and printed in magazine or book form. His followers hung on his every word. The centre of authority was soon transferred from London to New York, and difficult matters of discipline were referred over there for adjudication. No longer was it possible for local troubles to cause general division. If a meeting divided, Mr. J. Taylor's decision was law and brethren bowed to it or were "out".

Very serious error began to circulate in the meetings. It was denied that the Lord had a human spirit. This was not pressed upon all as compulsory belief, but it was not purged out as leaven. Fanciful theories were put forward such as the idea that the Lord was not present in a meeting until a brother broke the bread. Consequently it was necessary to have the breaking of bread very early in the meeting. In 1920 a godly and much respected ministering brother -Mr. J.S. Giles - withdrew from the meetings because of the mystical teaching of J. Taylor. Such was the hold that J.T. had over the fellowship that only 25 small meetings withdrew with him. So far as one knows they have all now died out.

A notion was put forward that the assembly should heed the word of spiritual men as much as it heeded the written word, as God had placed them as gifts to the church and they were moved by the Holy Spirit. It was further stated that the words of these spiritual men "did not need to be put to the test of Scripture and that they might be moved to state God's mind without any scripture to back them". So the road to destruction was formed. Who is to judge who are the spiritual men? Certainly they are not the men who teach without scriptural authority. Sunday Schools were abolished and a tight grip was placed on the Lord's servants. There was an accredited list of ministering brethren and any brother who 'offended' could be struck off the list by the overseeing brethren led by J.T. It was openly taught that God took up one vessel at a time to bring forth the truth: first it was J.N. Darby, then J.B. Stoney, then F.E. Raven followed by James Taylor. So there was an acknowledged pontifical succession. One is intrigued to wonder what J.N.D. would have said of such a thing!

In 1929 Mr. James Taylor brought out his most serious doctrinal error in a reading at Barnet, Herts, when he denied that the Lord's Sonship was eternal and taught that he became the Son of God at His Incarnation. This was not a denial of His deity, but of His eternal relationship as Son with the Father. So strong was J. Taylor's dominance over his followers, that this fundamental error produced little opposition from within, and very few seceded from fellowship. A fourth revision of the Little Flock Hymn Book was brought out in 1932 from which all reference to the Lord's eternal sonship was expunged.

After the Second World War a teaching began to be heard that the Holy Spirit should be directly addressed in worship. Hitherto, in all sections of Brethren, it had been held that the Holy Spirit brought about worship to God by subjective guidance and therefore He was not to be addressed objectively. It has been pointed out that there is no example in the Scriptures of anybody addressing the Holy Spirit in prayer. The Holy Spirit dwells within and bears witness with our spirits (Rom 8: 16); that is to say He works alongside our renewed minds, guiding our spirits with worship to the Father and Son which are viewed as outside ourselves.

J.T. was old and probably more under the influence of the other leaders of the party than formerly. However, it was eventually pressed that worship should be addressed to the Holy Spirit and it was made a condition of fellowship that all should accept the ruling. The worship of the Holy Spirit is quite general in Christendom and cannot be called fundamental error. The serious wrong in this matter was to force the new idea as a condition of fellowship. This would have made the Taylorites into a sect, if they had not been obviously a sect already! Another revision of the hymn book was made and a few seceded from the meetings or perhaps we should say more accurately, they were put out.

When James Taylor died, a rivalry for the leadership began which resembled the struggle for power in the Kremlin after the death of Stalin. Eventually the field narrowed to two men - Mr. James Taylor (Junior) of New York, the son of the late James Taylor and the late Mr. G.R. Cowell of Hornchurch, Essex, England. In the current ministry of the time, emphasis was being laid on the scriptural injunction that a person who was excommunicated should be barred from social fellowship with members of the assembly also. ("With such a one, no, not to eat") 1 Cor. 5:10. The point evaded was that Scripture only envisages a person being put out for gross moral or doctrinal evil, whereas the Taylorites had been putting people out for any deviation from party lines. The conclusion they began to move towards was that members of their meetings should not eat with any professing Christian in another fellowship. This led to cases of members of families eating in different rooms. Many, refusing to do this, were put out of fellowship.

A second cause for many being put out of fellowship at this time was a tightening up of their misuse of the scriptural instruction - "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers". This was now applied compulsorily, to partnership with Christians not in their sect, membership of professional or trade associations etc., so that many preferred to go out of fellowship rather than lose their livelihoods. Those now coming out of the Taylorites, therefore, often had no other motive than unwillingness to suffer material loss.

Mr. G.R. Cowell was beginning to see that things were going too far, and he wavered and drew back. James Taylor Jr., however did not waver at all. He began to contend with Mr. Cowell, especially on an issue which was very important. It was now held that children of the saints, being already on "Christian ground" could be received into fellowship at an early age and must come into fellowship by the time they were twelve or suffer the new discipline and not eat with their parents! G.R. Cowell insisted that they must first have a definite experience of conversion, but J.T. Jr. maintained that their willingness to come into fellowship was enough. J.T. Jr. feeling he had the greater weight of authoritative men behind him, summarily excommunicated Mr. G.R. Cowell and all who went with him and became the undisputed dictator of all those who were left!

It will be seen from all this that the "Ex-London" or "Outs" as they sometimes called themselves were in the outside place for many motives and reasons. It is not surprising that some went into the denominations, some went nowhere and others went everywhere. They seemed as sheep without a shepherd and many showed that they had no idea of the True Centre of Gathering or the original principles of the brethren. Many of these "Ex-London" brethren have now taken some form as a fellowship of meetings, but even some of these seem to have little stability and they are only a small proportion of those who were forced out. Also it should be noted that they still hold the "Temporal Sonship" heresy.

The state of the ecclesiastical party who call themselves the original Exclusive Brethren, and are known by that name to the world outside, is now truly dreadful. The children of those in fellowship are forced to break bread under fear of ostracism, being compelled to seek

fellowship by the time they are twelve years old, whatever their state of soul. It is clear that in another generation they will become a community of unregenerate professors, and any doctrine may be introduced and received by the spiritually dead. They may become quite a powerful religious sect as they are well organized, and their increase is assured by natural generation.

Mr. J.T. Jr. has made his authority felt, and recently he made absurd edicts that no-one was allowed to keep an animal for a pet, or display flowers in the home. Terrible things have been happening amongst them. Wives have been instructed to leave their husbands and children, and husbands told to leave their families. Many homes have been broken up, and cases of suicide as a result of these heartbreaks have been reported. The daily newspapers have published many details of their madness, even denouncing the "new sect" in their editorials. Questions were asked in Parliament and an attempt was made to bring in a private members' bill to make it an offence to preach any doctrine that advocated the breaking up of family life. The name of the "Exclusive Brethren" has been blackened beyond remedy.*

From this sad story we can learn our lessons. There are two opposite and false theories of assembly administration, independency and ecclesiastical centralism. Independency leaves evil in various localities unchecked, and there is bound to be spreading of evil. Nevertheless, the spread of a specific evil in independent assemblies is slow; the result of independency is confusion rather than systematic heterodoxy. There are a large number of miscellaneous evils going on simultaneously in various localities which do not much affect one another. On the other hand, ecclesiastical centralism (while it develops under a plea that evil must be judged universally and unity preserved), when the earthly centre itself is affected, actually produces an instantaneous acceptance of evil by all companies and is much worse in its results than independency.

The True Unity is that produced by the Holy Spirit and not human authority. It is not an easy path to follow as the flesh is always striving against it. One who was still amongst companies that had resisted both independency and centralism said on one occasion, "In the Open Brethren you can do what you like, in the London Party you do what you are told, but amongst us it is all difficulty and exercise".

* Since this account was written (1965) a large secession from J.T. junior's leadership took place, due to an incident of immorality under the influence of alcohol on the part of J.T. junior when he was in Aberdeen. Sub-divisions among the seceders have also occurred, so there are now quite large parties of "Ex-Taylor" brethren. The original party under the leadership of J.T. junior continued, though in greatly reduced numbers.

Chapter Five

The Scattered Remnants

Now we have traced to the present day the story of both the "Independents" and the "Centralists". It remains to tell of those who had not departed to either extreme. We have seen that by 1908 there were no less than five sections of brethren who had, for various reasons and at different times, been separated from the London brethren, namely, Kelly, Grant, Stuart, Lowe and Glanton. All these gatherings still held to the same original principles, striving to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace meeting on the ground of the One Body, gathered to the Name of Christ alone. Yet they were apart! Such is an obvious anomaly, for those meeting on such principles must, if they are known to one another, be together.

The next year, in 1909, there was an exercise to heal the breach between the "Glanton" and "Stuart" companies, and at a conference in Brighouse, Yorks, most of the Stuart brethren agreed to have fellowship with Glanton. A few Stuart meetings in England and Scotland and all in New Zealand remained apart. Also present at the conference were four brethren from the "Grant" company in America: Messrs S. Ridout, P.J. Loizeaux, Wm. Banford and C. Crain. By 1911 most of the Glanton and Grant meetings had come together in America (there had been only about a dozen Glanton meetings there). Some difficulties were expressed by a few Grant brethren in America as to whether full intercommunication should be allowed with the Glanton brethren in Great Britain. In 1921 a correspondence took place between Messrs A.E. Booth, B.C. Greenman, C. Knapp, A.H. Stewart, W. Shaid, F.B. Tomkinson and T. Bloore, on the one hand and Messrs F.B. Hole, J. Wilson Smith, A.J. Pollock and James Green on the other, which satisfied most.

The Tunbridge Wells Trouble

We reluctantly turn aside to consider a cleavage which took place in 1909 among the "Lowe" section. This division was healed in 1940 in the British Isles, but as just a few of the Tunbridge Wells meetings remain separate, as well as a large number in the SA, we will take a look at the principles involved.

In September 1908, a brother, Mr. C.S. was declared out of fellowship by the meeting at Tunbridge Wells. Mr. C.S. was a 'ministering brother' who traveled round and seldom attended his home meeting at Tunbridge Wells, especially in view of the ill-feeling which he had experienced there for years. The reason given for his excommunication was that he had absented himself from the Lord's Table at Tunbridge Wells, although he had been breaking bread regularly in meetings that were in full fellowship with them.

It is extremely doubtful whether the exclusion of Mr. C.S. was justified, and a few at T.W. dissented from the decision. The leader of the action against C.S. was Mr. W.M.S. and many felt there was a personal dislike at the root of the matter. Nevertheless, in June 1909, they sent forth a notice that in future they would break bread in separation from all those who broke bread with C.S. or were otherwise associated with him. They refused all remonstrance against this.

Thus the meeting at Tunbridge Wells forced a division and tried to establish a principle that the disciplinary decisions of a meeting were infallible and binding upon all. As usual, anybody who opposed such an idea was accused of independency.

Now the principle that a local gathering's decision on discipline is infallibly binding upon all, is based on a wrong inference from Matt. xviii: 15-20. Here the Lord declares that where two or three are gathered together unto His Name, He is in the midst of them, and whatsoever they bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever they loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. This, in the context of the church's judgment on a brother's sin, seems clearly to refer to discipline, and, if the decision of the "two or three" is ratified in heaven, surely it must be acknowledged by every local assembly on earth!

So far, the argument is sound. If two or three are truly gathered unto the Lord's Name, any decision they come to must be right for heaven acknowledges it as such. The converse of this, however, is also true; which is that if those gathered together come to an unjust and unrighteous decision, they cannot be gathered unto the Lord's Name.

Now a group of Christians may be professedly gathered to the Lord's name but their hearts and wills may be turned to some other centre, such as a dominating brother. In that case they come to a wrong decision. This may be a temporary lapse, and the prayers, exhortations and loving rebuke of their brethren, as moved by the Holy Spirit, may bring them to repentance. On the other hand, there may be such obstinacy that the brethren in the neighbouring assemblies may have to institute an enquiry as to the facts and actions connected with the dispute. The findings of such an enquiry should be respected. There is no need to bring a leading brother from a distance. Even those who are least esteemed in the Church are competent (I Cor.vi:4) providing they are amenable to the Spirit's leading and not prejudiced by any special interest such as Barnabas had towards his nephew Mark. Those who are nearest to the scene of the trouble have the greater responsibility.

If, in spite of all godly remonstrance, a meeting of Christians sticks to an unjust decision, it will be apparent to all that such a gathering cannot be recognized. Such an unhappy conclusion, however, will be rare if patient and prayerful care is shown by the brethren near to them and, in any case, a hasty division is avoided.

So, we have now come across three forms of ecclesiastical error. Let us pause and consider how each false system would act when a meeting exerted harsh and unjust discipline on a brother.

Independency. It would be assumed that the unjust meeting had a right to do as it chose in its own sphere of responsibility, and there could be no interference or enquiry into its decisions. Nevertheless, the wronged brother would be freely received by neighbouring meetings and the unjust meeting would carry on in the same independent fellowship as before.

Centralism. The issue would be referred to "headquarters" whose decision would be binding.

Local Infallibility. The judgment of the local assembly would have to be accepted by all, whether right or wrong. The wronged brother, therefore, would have no redress. One feels that this last system is not likely to gain many adherents for long, as it leads to situations which are contrary to ordinary standards of justice.

The Tunbridge Wells brethren had four divisions within 20 years and seemed to be disintegrating. We are happy that most of them resumed fellowship with the Lowe Brethren in 1940 and only about a dozen small meetings in the United Kingdom and some elsewhere - (mainly in America where there are about 100 gatherings) - remained apart.

The "Lowe-Kelly" Re-union of 1926

In 1926, some of the work of Satan was undone, and the "Lowe" and "Kelly" brethren re-united. About the year 1920, there began considerable exercise amongst individuals about the continued and (as they believed) unnecessary separation between them. Correspondence took place between some interested brethren. In March 1926, the ground having been prepared in this way, the "Kelly" brethren in the meeting at Blackheath, London, sent a letter to the "Lowe" brethren at Woodstock Room, Finsbury Park, London, to invite them to a fellowship meeting to be held on March 13th. This was gladly accepted and the first fellowship conference was most encouraging. It was next proposed that a general meeting for prayer, humiliation and confession of common failure should be arranged which was accordingly done on July 10th. It was a solemn meeting and the presence of the Holy Spirit was deeply felt.

Two further meetings were held on September 11th and October 16th. These were for conference and interchange of thought and they enabled both sides to gain full confidence in each other. The final meeting was at Peckham, on November 13th., and a circular letter was issued as a result of this, signed by 57 brothers, which indicated that unity was complete. There were a very few individuals who left for various reasons, but this was too small a number to affect the unanimity of the decision to re-unite together.

A new hymn book was compiled in 1928 for use by the united company. This was really a revision of the 1881 edition of "Little Flock" and a great many of the hymns remained under the same numbers. The title "Little Flock" was dropped, however, and the book called simply "Hymns Selected and Revised in 1928".

So occurred the first major healing of Brethren. Although the "Grant" and "Glanton" brethren had come together some years previously, it had been a mutual recognition of circles of meetings in different countries with an ocean in between (not that the reality of fellowship was in any doubt because of that). This was the first time that two circles of meetings, each in the same countries, and in many localities in the same towns had unanimously decided to seek fellowship with one another. There had been a partial reunion between "Glanton" and "Stuart" in 1909, but this had not been unanimous and a Stuart fellowship still continued.

Care must be taken not to confuse this coming together with the ecumenical movement that is growing in Christendom and will end eventually in Babylon. This was not an amalgamation of sects. If two sects, run by two organizations, come together, so that there is one governing organization, then it makes one big sect instead of two little ones. It is no less sectarian than before. But if meetings gathered to the Lord's Name alone with no earthly centre, begin to have fellowship with one another, they are simply owning in practice a unity which already exists. It is the unity of the Spirit, not made by man but by God - a unity which we cannot make but which we are enjoined to keep.

Some oppose any coming together in this way as they confuse it with mass reception. They remember the dire results of the mass reception of the Baptist congregation of Bethesda Chapel, in Bristol, which led up to the "Open-Exclusive" division of 1848. C.H.Mackintosh rightly stressed that the only correct kind of reception was individual. Bethesda Chapel was leaving one ground of gathering and being received to another*. In the case of the "Lowe" and "Kelly" brethren, however, they realized that they were gathered on the same ground already - the ground of the One Body with Christ as the Head - and therefore there was no receiver and no received, but mutual recognition of each other. It was not a case of one company being received by another.

* Actually the facts in this matter are doubtful and Henry Groves in his account of the matter published in 1860 (approx) states that Messrs Muller and Craik started renting an empty Baptist Chapel, the congregation having dispersed, and that the assembly they built up as co-pastors was never called a Baptist congregation.

Further Troubles

Even while this happy re-union was taking place, further confusion was being fomented amongst the "Grant" brethren in America. It would appear that a spirit of looseness had been growing among many in that communion, who were looking for wider fields, and their eyes especially lingered on the fertile plains of the Open Brethren. This desire for fellowship and intercommunion with the Independents was being checked by their stricter brethren, but it was causing a restlessness that erupted in 1928.

Two brothers, C.A. Mory and C.J. Grant, had formed a business partnership in 1920. Both these brothers broke bread in the assembly at W. Philadelphia. In 1925 C.A.M. brought charges of dishonesty against C.J.G. who appealed to the assembly to investigate. This they did, and found that C.J.G. had acted in an irresponsible and sometimes unrighteous manner, but they had divided judgment as to whether there had been intention to defraud. The majority decided that the case would be met if a "letter of admonition" were sent to C.J.G., which letter was accordingly sent in March 1926.

C.A.M., however was not satisfied and continued to agitate against C.J.G., so that other brethren were appealed to. A conference was called two months afterwards in Philadelphia. At this conference C.J.G. confessed his weakness with tears before all. Therefore, the majority of his assembly decided that the matter was closed. C.J.G. had been admonished, he had confessed and things had been put right as far as possible. C.A.M. and his supporters, however, continued to press for C.J.G.'s excommunication.

A second trouble arose about the same time concerning doctrine. Mr. Andrew Westwood (Sr.) had been put out of fellowship by the New York meeting in 1925, for teaching that the Lord had no human spirit. In combating this error, a Mr. F. Allaban wrote in a tract that "Christ became a creature and was subject to pain and death", and thus over-reached himself into error on the other side. Everything which has had a beginning has been created. Christ had no beginning and, therefore, He could never be called a creature. His manhood had a beginning but He Himself had no beginning. Orthodox Christians have always taught that He took a created nature, that is manhood, but that does not mean He Himself became a creature.

At this time a "Glanton" brother, named J.Boyd, was staying in Philadelphia. He was a teacher of the Word who was highly respected and greatly beloved in Great Britain for a long life-time of ministry, and had reached 77 years of age. This brother took up the cudgels against F. Allaban on behalf of Andrew Westwood (whom he knew personally) and wrote a tractate in which he said the Lord had no human spirit but was "Himself the Spirit of His Own Body". When this caused an immediate reaction and was obviously leading to division, J.B. withdrew the tract as he said it had "opened a door for Satan to come in", but he did not withdraw the doctrine. The division therefore took place, and about one-third of the Grant meetings (which we will henceforth call the Grant-Mory group) separated from C.J.G. and J.B. It is plain that they considered the struggle against looseness, which had irritated them so long, had at last come into the open and that they were separating from a definite and serious evil.

Now that they had been relieved from the restriction of so many "exclusive-minded" brethren, the "Open" school began to make its influence felt amongst those who were left. They began to demand the right to have occasional fellowship and communion with Open Brethren and many assemblies began to practice this. Others, however, were unable to accept the departure and so another division took place and the Grant brethren became divided into three: "Mory-Grant", "Booth-Grant" and "Independent-Grant".

The "Mory-Grant" brethren believed that they had truly separated from serious moral and doctrinal evil. They were in fellowship with neither Glanton nor Open Brethren.

The "Booth-Grant" brethren (so-called because a brother named A.E.Booth was prominent amongst them) believed that most unjustified harshness had been shown towards C.J.G., that the decision at Philadelphia closing the matter should have been accepted, and that to force a division over it was schismatic. They considered the J.B. affair to be a secondary matter although they repudiated his false doctrine utterly, and as he had now returned to England, they left the handling of his case to the brethren over there. They remained with Glanton but refused fellowship with Open Brethren.

The Independents allowed fellowship with Open Brethren, and before long began to be merged with them. By the time of writing, they have lost their distinctive existence and are wholly identified with the Independent or Open Meetings. It is no more possible for a circle of meetings to retain a distinctive status while being in fellowship with Open Brethren, than for a glass of milk to retain its properties after being thrown into a pond.

It may be argued at the present time that the Open Brethren should be treated as any orthodox sect and that an Open Brother known to be godly in walk and doctrine should be received as a believer only. While exceptions may be made for those young in the faith or genuinely ignorant (not willfully) of the issues involved, once an individual is allowed to come and go amongst Open Brethren as an accepted custom, it becomes intercommunion, and any distinctive witness to true assembly character must inevitably be lost.

When J.B. returned to England, correspondence soon began to flow between American and English leading brethren. The leading Glanton brethren in England were shocked that this beloved and esteemed brother should, in his old age, have fallen into such a serious error as, until then, he had always been sound in the faith and much used as a teacher. A meeting was arranged between J.B. and other leading brethren in F.B.Hole's house at Bath. J.B. made a half-retraction and promised not to speak publicly of the error again. A conference of brethren was called at Weston-super-Mare and J.B.'s doctrine was unanimously repudiated. J.B. was not excommunicated as he did not press the doctrine and many felt he would be persuaded to withdraw it completely. They desired to give time for repentance, especially in view of his past record, but he wavered for two years and appeared to withdraw the doctrine at times and then reaffirm it when challenged in correspondence from America. This wavering was not typical of the man and it was probably due to extreme old age. In January 1932, a statement from James Boyd was published in Scripture Truth as follows: "Anyone, if even a little acquainted with the Word, is not likely to deny body, soul and spirit to our blessed Lord. But supposing this were denied it would be easy to turn to Luke 23:46 'And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice He said Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit; and having said this He gave up the spirit'. In Matt. 26:28 He says My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. In Heb. 10:5 He says A body hast Thou prepared Me".

No expression of regret for his past deviation from this line, nor any reference to it, was made.

More Healing of Division

In February 1931, a conference of the "Mory-Grant" brethren met in Philadelphia and agreed to send a letter to the "Stuart" brethren in England and New Zealand expressing regret for having ignored their entreaties in the past and for uniting with "Glanton". By 1933 the "Mory-Grant" brethren were fully in fellowship with the "Stuarts" in England and New Zealand.

In 1936 the "Mory-Grant-Stuart" brethren and the "Lowe-Kelly" brethren held a united meeting for prayer and humiliation at Passaic, N.J. There were high hopes that reunion would take place, but these were not realized until 17 years later, in 1953. In Britain about a dozen small gatherings of "Lowe-Kelly" - including two of their three meetings in Scotland - were unable to accept this reunion and seceded.

As we have already seen, meanwhile a healing between "Lowe-Kelly" and most of "Tunbridge Wells" had been effected in 1940. So by 1953, the Lowe, Kelly, Mory-Grant and a large number of Tunbridge Wells brethren had come together as believers gathered to the Lord on the principles of the One Body. The only brethren of any numerical strength on the same ground, who were still left out of this happy healing of wounds caused by Satan's wiles, were the "Booth-Grant-Glanton" brethren. So by this time there were only two major groups that were unnecessarily apart.

"Little Glanton"

In 1938 a sorrowful disagreement occurred amongst the "Glanton" brethren which caused some meetings to secede. Although this was really only a minor split, we put it in this history as a few of the seceding meetings still exist. They are sometimes known as "Little Glanton".

In the meeting at Kingsland, London, the leading brethren were large-hearted with a marked love for all the saints and zeal for the Gospel. This, however, was not balanced by care in administration, and many were concerned by the laxity in reception and service there. The issue came to a head in 1938 when a brother who had been disciplined at Coniston, Lancs, was received at Kingsland before a proper understanding had been reached with the Coniston brethren. Some in the Kingsland meeting, feeling that they had the support and sympathy of all the Glanton brethren, seceded and broke bread in another place. Thus they presented the brethren with a "fait accompli" and expected they would be universally owned and the Kingsland brethren repudiated. The majority of the meetings, however, were not happy with this act, believing it to be hasty and independent. Although they had little sympathy with the meeting at Kingsland, they thought the matter should have been handled with far more patience. The result was that the seceding brethren found they had little support and the Kingsland meeting was still recognized although regarded with disfavour.

This affair was most unhappy and the Glanton brethren lost some very godly and gifted brethren as a consequence. However, the seceders did not prosper numerically, and now they are reduced to a handful of small meetings.

Chapter Six

The Present Position

In 1948 overtures were made by the "Glanton" brethren to the "Lowe-Kelly" groups of meetings. United gatherings were held at Bradford and London but the brethren were not ready for healing at that time.

As a result of a conference of "Lowe-Kelly" brethren in London on November 18th 1961, a letter signed by 16 brothers was sent round the Glanton meetings which desired to explore the possibilities of further joint gatherings to dispel doubts and suspicions that lingered between the two companies. Then some local disagreements amongst the Lowe-Kelly brethren about matters connected with this overture delayed things for two years. When these had been settled a letter dated 3rd March 1964 signed by 13 Glanton brethren earnestly desiring that the exercise should not be dropped, was sent to the Lowe-Kelly brethren.

As a result of this, many local united gatherings for prayer and discussion were held and a conference of representative brethren took place in London on Oct. 10th 1964. Behind these moves there had been much prayer by brethren everywhere that the Lord might graciously lead to a better understanding.

At the conference it was found that there was general agreement on essential points of doctrine about which there had been suspicions in the past. Most brethren there were satisfied that there was no present cause for division, whatever there may or may not have been in history. A few wanted to insist on agreement of historical questions and the degree of blame to be attached to certain individuals long since dead, but this was resisted by the many. Much humiliation was felt at the breakdown in the testimony which the Lord had committed to them. Following this meeting it was agreed that a memorandum should be sent round the meetings, signed by eight representative brethren (four from each group) in which the measure of doctrinal agreement attained at the conference was to be stated. Accordingly there was drawn up a memorandum of doctrines from which there had been divergence (real or suspected) in the past, and replies were requested from all the assemblies as to whether this agreement could be regarded as basis on which further progress towards unity could be built. On March 6th 1965 the signatories of this memorandum met together again to consider the replies. They found that there had been universal agreement on the doctrines on all important points, an a very substantial majority earnestly desired healing. They circulated their report to this effect.

A meeting for prayer and humiliation was called for February 19th 1966 and many brethren from both sides attended, representing meetings in most areas of Great Britain. There was such an experience of the Spirit's leading and such a spirit of repentance for past evils that it was generally felt that the Unity of the Spirit was there and no barrier should continue. It was accordingly intimated to the brethren in America that such was the state of feeling that existed in Great Britain.

At first there appeared to be an impasse so far as the American brethren were concerned. Their wounds were more recent, the division of 1928 being very much in living memory. However, although it took eight years, that which seemed impossible came to pass and the brethren that had been rent asunder by the work of the enemy became re-united by Oct. 1974.

A very few brethren in America seceded, but the change of heart by the many was seen by them all to be a remarkable work of the Holy Spirit.

So now all the so-called Exclusive brethren are united except for those with a "Taylorite" history and a section of "Tunbridge Wells" brethren which are mainly found in America. Some may enquire as to the possibility of an understanding with the many groups of "Ex-Taylorites". The fruits of the false system of "centralism" are still with them, and in particular there is no hope of healing while the Temporal Sonship heresy is condoned.

Brethren give the praise for healing to their blessed Lord and Saviour. It is in no spirit of self-congratulation that they come together, for it is with much weakness and poverty. The Lord's hand has been heavy upon them in chastening because of their pride and lack of watchfulness. The Lord said "Watch and Pray" and even if they prayed, they did not watch. There has been a marked decline in numbers amongst the brethren in Great Britain, due to the influence of the modern ecumenical spirit. When difficulties arise it is easy to give the truth up, where there is little conviction as to the principles of the assembly and the value that the Lord Himself places upon them.

Perhaps some would prefer that a history such as this should not be written. "Why wash the dirty linen again?" they say. "Forget the shameful past." But is that not to despise the chastening of the Lord? Let us remember the past, and then we will not fall into these traps of Satan again. Not that we are any better than our fathers - far from it - but "surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (Prov.1:17). Neither let us faint under chastening and say the path is too difficult to follow. For the simplest believer the principle is still as clear as at the beginning. Like the man born blind in John ix: 35-38, he comes out from all false systems, though many true saints are still there, and approaches the True Centre, bows the knee and worships. He does not look round to see how many, or how few, are gathered with him. His eyes and heart are towards his Lord, Who gave him sight and salvation.

W.R.Dronsfield.