

persons totally unknown to one another. There was no penny post, no telegrams then to carry the message, from hand to hand. But a greater Power sent forth the cry, **“Behold, the Bridegroom; go forth to meet Him.”** All heard it and all awoke — all left without excuse — all had time to trim and to get oil. Edward Irving was one of those whose heart was deeply stirred. All went to the Acts of the Apostles, or as we might more truly call it, the Acts of the Holy Ghost, for their instruction as to the first principles of Christianity. This study of the Acts taught them that they were in the confession of the death of Christ. His death had passed sentence on all the world for them, on themselves, and on all that belonged to them as men on earth. They had no place or standing here where Christ had died; nothing to show before the world but His death. Accordingly, they said, **“We announce the death of the Lord until He come.”** And on that ground they met together in their own houses to break bread, as the Lord said, **“in remembrance of Me”**.

In 1827 (just one hundred years after the Fetter Lane company began) they took a room in Dublin in a back street, in order that the poor might be more free to come than they were when they met in their private homes and those of the rich.

In 1827 the Archbishop of Dublin gave a charge to his clergy to petition the government for protection against the Roman Catholics who molested them in their parochial work, etc. Mr. Darby was then a clergyman in County Wicklow, and he was greatly distressed at asking protection from the world in the work of the Lord. Like Ezra, he was ashamed to ask for horsemen from the King (Ezra 8:22)! He wrote a paper and sent it to all the clergy in the diocese, but as he poured out his soul in secret like Nehemiah of old (Neh. 1:6) confessing the state of the church and of its ministers, of whom *he was one*, the Lord showed him the truth that had been hidden by “much rubbish” for ages, that He was the Head of the Church, and that the Church was His body united to Him now by the Holy Ghost. He learned that *he* was a member of that mystic body now. He learned it in the sanctuary, and from the Lord Himself. Then he said, “If I am a member of Christ, He must have other members here. Lord, help *me* to find them.”

At this time Mr. Daly was the pious and enlightened rector of Powerscourt. He was having clerical meetings to which all the young clergymen were invited, to encourage them in zeal and devotedness, and in seeking after truth. Lady Powerscourt opened her house to them and entertained them for the week. Mr. Darby was always present, and was referred to as one of the chief, if not the chief student of Scripture among them.

There were very good clergymen in those days, real men of God, as was said of one, that “his life, as well as his teaching, made Christ attractive to souls.” — This was happily true of some both in England and Ireland, and there was an exchange of pulpits, for it was one church then. They came from all parts to Powerscourt. Mr. Irving was there and Mr. B.W. Newton, both valued friends of Lady Powerscourt to whom the thought of the “Church of God” opened out a new world of glory, and her heart seemed to have room for nothing else. They also studied prophecy, but in connection with the Church and as showing that everything on earth was for Israel — the Church called from heaven, for heaven and to heaven. This gave them great separation of heart from the world which prophecy showed them was under judgement. As Lady Powerscourt said, “Let us put by our playthings, for the world is in flames.” The coming of the Lord was not a “mere theological idea”, but an actual waiting for the Christ they knew with hearts ready to receive Him.

But already the enemy was sowing tares. Mr. Irving insisted on the necessity of another Pentecost, and believed that the Lord was giving “gifts” as at the first. This was a denial of the fact that the Holy Ghost was here actually in residence in this evil world, and that all through the dark ages He had never given up His “witness” to the absent One. It was a great trial to Lady Powerscourt to feel a doubt as to Mr. Irving’s teaching. She went to London to hear him, and had misgivings there, feeling that the way in which *women* were made the vessel of “gifts” was not quite according to Scripture. When Mr. Irving found that his pupils leaving the Establishment made him less popular, and crowds began to drop off, he told them not to leave the system they

belonged to. This was expediency, not faith, and contradicted his own teaching as to the Holy Spirit alone for ministry and “gift”.

In 1833 the meetings at Powerscourt seemed to be more open to laymen. Mr. Daly became bishop and was not present. Mr. John Synge of Glanmore Castle took the chair, a layman! That year Mrs. Elwood (1) shut up her house in the country and took a cottage in the Powerscourt demesne to be near the meetings. There she met J.B. Stoney, Mr. Wigram, Sir Edward Denny, Captain Hall and others among whom she became as a “mother in Israel” until her death in 1864. Mr. Bellett, of course, was also there.

The truth that came out there at these meetings decided many that they could no longer go on with any human system. Mr. Darby’s greatest friend said to him, “I mean to stick to the old ship.” “The old ship is going to Rome,” Mr. Darby said, and it was a prophetic word, as we see to-day. It was a time of real suffering in heart and conscience, especially to Lady Powerscourt and friends, a wrench that was worse than death to be divided in the things of God, and things of supreme value to them *both*. The worst of all was giving pain to Mr. Daly, the one God had used to bring Lady Powerscourt into salvation, and who had been a comfort and guide to her through years of sorrow such as few pass through. He took it beautifully, seeing her conviction was so true, but he felt it as he feared it would lead others, less taught of God, to forsake the church where alone in those days the Bible was upheld and taught in Ireland. His being moved to Cashel in 1834 made it easier in a way, though he was often at Powerscourt and Glanmore after that.

When the young heir came into residence at Powerscourt, though Lady Powerscourt still lived there, it was no longer her house, and she thought it better to have the meetings elsewhere... So Lady Powerscourt took an Hotel and invited all as usual, but the meetings were open to all who wished to hear.

By this time all the little companies in England and Ireland who were breaking bread in their own houses had come to know one another, and had learned that the “name of the Lord” was their only Centre and control in amid the ruin and confusion around and wherever they met they broke bread together simply as members of Christ and brethren to one another. Everyone who loved Him was welcomed; in fact, it was felt that no one who was not thoroughly enjoying the truth they set forth would desire to throw in his lot with the despised few in their out-of-the-world position, unrecognised even by the religious world!

The last of these meetings was held, in Dublin in 1836. Major Lancy and many others date from that time. Lady Powerscourt died that year and in 1837 Mr. Darby went to Switzerland, where he found groups of believers everywhere remembering the Lord’s death and looking for His coming; and he was greatly used to show them the peculiar calling of the Church, and that the test-imony of the Holy Spirit here to the absent One at the Father’s right hand, was the only Power for gathering or for ministry, and He was indwelling each one and forming bridal affections and preparedness of heart to say: **“Come, Lord Jesus.”** This teaching spread all over the continent where little groups were feeling after the truth for themselves, and in each of the places where the martyrs had suffered for their protest against Rome, little meetings were formed to wait for God’s Son from heaven. In India, also Australia, and Africa the Lord had His “twos” and “threes” who, by degrees, found each other and were drawn together by the same Lord.

In 1865 Mr. Darby wrote, “I have been profoundly moved in seeing on reading over old tracts, all the principle on which the fate of the world and the church now turns, brought out from 30 to 39 years ago! God was in it in a way I did not know, though I felt it personally to be God’s truth. But what a solemn thing! It has made me feel the responsibility of bringing it all out, systematically before the professing church... What progress in disruption has been made since then.”

It was scarcely 20 years from the first breaking forth of the light as to the presence of the Holy Spirit and His awakening the heart of the redeemed to look for God’s Son from heaven, until the enemy came in like a flood to sweep away the testimony that was given to “brethren.”

¹ Miss A.M. Stoney’s grandmother.

Mr. Newton was a man of great natural gifts, of striking appearance, eagle face, and as teacher, impressive, attractive and convincing. He took up the subject of prophecy as a kind of speciality, reminding us — as all church history does — that to be occupied with one truth is always a danger. Every “sect” that has arisen has come from good men taking up one truth even as Irving, occupied with the Spirit’s work, lost sight of Christ and His work.

All the intellectual and religious people of Plymouth and even from distant places flocked to his lectures. He taught that the kingdoms of the earth were to be re-arranged under one Head; that Christ was coming to take up His kingdom, to go through a time of trial in sympathy with His people Israel, and to bring in everlasting blessing to both Jew and Gentile. The Church of Matt. 16:18, having no place in prophecy, and never heard of until revealed to Peter as something to be known *outside of “flesh and blood”*, had no place in his prophetic system, but this omission led to his presenting Christ as a Godly Jew who kept the law and fulfilled righteousness, etc., as an example to men. But he never saw the truth of John’s Gospel or his epistles — of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost as a divine revelation to his soul — so that even in treating of His place as Son of David, he lost the divine royalty of the Son of the Father’s right hand... Mr. Newton did not see the heavenly calling, of the Church, consequently he opposed the thought of her being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. He was so occupied with the earthly kingdom and the thousand years of millennial blessing — an entrancing subject which the mind of man could take up — that he could not see that as the Man out of heaven, **“whom the heavens must receive,”** was received up into heaven, so His Church of the firstborn (ones), written in heaven, must also be “received-up” before the glorious **“Head of every man”** returns to earth to receive His rights on earth.

Mr. Newton did not own the presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly except as the source of “gift” to one to teach it. Hence he went back to “one man ministry” as they called it, and believed that he himself was appointed of God to be the teacher at Plymouth.

Mr. Darby said “You are going back to *what we have both left*, “clericalism”, and it was on *this* ground at first that J.N.D. separated from him, because it was a denial of the presence of the Holy Spirit if He must only speak by one man. The poor and illiterate brothers were not permitted to take part. Mr. Newton said that Plymouth was to be a model church.

Here I will quote from one(2) who was a little before me in point of time, and in personal acquaintance with those who took part in the first great conflict to preserve the truth of the Church, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the Coming of the Lord — the three facts revived by “brethren”.

«1844-45. Mr. Darby was abroad. Mr. G.V. Wigram wrote to him that he feared there was mischief working as to Mr. Newton at Plymouth. (I am not sure whether I have remembered the *words* correctly. Of course these letters were not seen at the time, but a correspondence between Messrs. Darby, Wigram and Bellett was found by Mr. Darby’s executors and copied and shown to a privileged few, among whom I was.) Mr. Darby replied, “I am not uneasy about Newton, I fear more the worldliness getting in amongst us.”

Later, Mr. G.V. Wigram wrote to him, “Whenever I go to God about B.W. Newton two things come before me with grief to my spirit — the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit*.” Subsequently Mr. Darby came over with (as he said) an undefined fear of something wrong. He took lodgings at Plymouth and went in and out among the saints, visiting the poor and ministering at the meetings. He became more and more dissatisfied with the state of things. (He used to come to our house — Mrs. Elwood’s — often in the evenings, and pour out his fears and exercises about it to my mother.) He found that Mr. Newton was forming around himself a school of doctrine based on his prophetic views of which he made everything, as the special truth for the last days. These views were woven into a system, and in it the special place of the Church was denied, as he identified it with the Old Testament saints and the Jewish remnant, and pressed that the Church would be in the tribulation, and much more that was contrary to scripture. So that the heavenly calling of the Church was

² Miss F.J. Elwood, Miss A.M. Stoney’s aunt.

lost, and besides this, a ministerial element — clericalism — had come in. Mr. Newton and those brothers who supported him being virtually the ministers.

Mr. Darby waited for months, sometimes leaving Plymouth and returning again and going through great anguish of heart. In speaking to my mother of his rooms — lodgings — he said the Lord only knew how much he had suffered in them. He asked for an Assembly Meeting, but Mr. Newton said it was not scriptural to make the saints a “deliberative assembly”.

One Sunday morning, after the breaking of bread, Mr. Darby stood up and said, “I have been here for months — (six or nine) seeking to awaken the consciences of the saints to what is going on... *God is displaced here*; I must leave.” He burst into tears and left the room. He was then staying at Mrs. Eccles. They told us that on his return there he threw himself upon the sofa, as he thought, to die; said his work was done! A few left with him, I think about half-a-dozen.⁽³⁾

Some came from the country to see what was happening and left before Sunday, not wishing to commit themselves! Mr. Wigram and Captain Hall came down and stood aside with Mr. Darby fully supporting him, but it was not until months afterwards that there was breaking of bread.

Mr. Wigram had prayer meetings at the Mechanics’ Institute, inviting all that were exercised to join in prayer. Those who were most spiritual, especially Mr. Wigram, felt that bad as things were, something worse was underneath and were praying to the Lord to manifest it so plainly that the weakest might see it. Mr. R. Chapman came from Barnstaple and called a meeting for humiliation to which we all went. I remember his prayer and that of Mr. Harris of Plymstock expressing such depths of contrition, “**We strip ourselves of our ornaments**,” etc. Then Mr. Newton uttered a beautiful prayer, *as to words*, but very sad in the circumstances, for instead of humiliation, he gave thanks for “the wonderful truth God had given” — evidently meaning what he had received himself.)

My mother was so grieved at it that she left the room before he had finished. Some month later, Mr. Harris, who had left Plymstock, was paying a visit to Exeter, when he saw some MSS. notes lying on the table, which he took up to read. (There were sisters at Plymouth who busily took down notes of Mr. Newton’s ministry and sent them all over the country as “very blessed truth”. Mr. Newton said to one of them, “In every visit you pay, every conversation you enter on, every letter you write, you should present this truth!” — that is, his scheme of prophecy.)

Mr. Harris was horrified at what he found in the notes about the Lord, as to His experience under the governmental wrath of God during His life and before the cross. The doctrine was that though personally holy He was relatively sinful from having in grace identified Himself with the nation of Israel, who were under the curse of a broken law, and this from His birth. That He looked forward to John’s baptism, in which He emerged from that state of curse and he applied to Christ all the experiences expressed in the Psalms.

Mr. Harris exposed this and then Mr. Darby took it up in power, showing how if what he said of Christ was true, He could not have been a sacrifice for sin. Mr. Newton defended himself in print, but only disclosed how deep-rooted in his prophetic system the poison was. The greatest number of those who were with him now took alarm and left his meeting. His two special supporters Mr. Soltau and Mr. J.E. Batten wrote confessions, but Satan, so far foiled, put forth another device to nullify the testimony against this evil doctrine.

Those meeting in the Bethesda Room at Bristol — Mr. Müller and Mr. Craik being leaders — avowed that though they did not hold Mr. Newton’s doctrines as to the Lord’s, yet they would still receive from those in fellowship with him. When this was remonstrated against, ten of the brethren there wrote a letter setting forth their principle as to fellowship and reception. This celebrated “Letter of the Ten” was the origin of Open brethernism.

Mr. Darby then wrote a circular warning the saints against the principle of neutrality as to the Person of Christ, and saying that he would neither break bread at the Bethesda meeting or at any meeting which received from those

³. In later years, Miss A.T. Eccles told a brother that she, as a young girl, saw Mr. Darby leave the meeting in tears.

that professed this neutrality. This they called the “Pope’s Bull,” and oh! the venom burst forth against him on all sides, and even from those who before would have “plucked out their eyes for him.” They said he was making a new ground of fellowship.

We went through the conflict in Dublin and there it was terrible. It was brought on by Lord Congleton who was passing through Dublin, and was allowed by the brethren at Brunswick Street (where we all met) to break bread there.

The sorrow of it nearly killed Mr. Bellett who was deeply attached to the Dublin brethren and they to him, and he could not bear to part with them. We were greatly distressed about him, and before it was over he left Dublin for England, broken down in body and in spirit. But after a while he got clear and decided. He wrote to my mother, “The Lord has restored me,” and returned to Dublin to support and build up those who had separated for the truth’s sake; his ministry being marked by increased power, especially as to “the unity the Spirit,” and the holiness of its associations. I remember how delightful his readings were and he said himself to us with what freshness and clearness these truths had come to him.

This gave joy to Mr. Darby who had feared for him. I should think that the greatest number all over the country drifted off in this conflict. Mr. Darby called it a “break-up”, and Mr. Wigram said at the time that we must be prepared to have sifting after sifting, and that at every sifting the sieve would be finer. What he, Mr. Wigram, had foreseen in secret with God, before there was any suspicion of the evil at work, had thus been verified in this first and deadly attack by the enemy on the testimony committed to brethren, (The Son and the Holy Ghost) and the Lord in His grace delivered us from it and preserved to us the truth of the “**unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God**”. Not only as to the gross form in which the evil came out at Plymouth, but in the covert way in which the seed of it was continued in Bethesda. Through the evil doctrine as to the Lord’s Person was subsequently repudiated, the whole thing gave birth to an open ground of fellowship and unholy associations which have continued ever since.

Years after this — about 29 — when Mr. Darby wrote his beautiful “Paper on The Sufferings of Christ”, the ground taken by those who opposed him and even by some of those who loved him and had stood with him in the conflicts with Mr. Newton and Bethesda (as poor Captain Hall) — (Mr. Darby felt deeply the separation from him) was that he was putting forth Mr. Newton’s doctrine in what he brought out as to “The third class of sufferings” (not atoning) which the Lord went through at the close of His life here, before the cross. But the difference was immense and fundamental.

Mr. Newton identified Him in His position and experience with the ungodly nation of Israel, suffering governmental wrath under the curse of a broken law. Mr. Darby showed that, in *this* class of His suffering, He was in holy sympathy with the repentant remnant of the latter days; furnishing holy experiences and utterances for those who, in integrity of heart, will feel the sin of Israel in the light of the holiness and government of God.

Very few separated on this question, but I am sure that the mass did not enter into what Mr. Darby taught on the subject. I remember that he said that the saints were not ready for it, but rather than give it up or cause any division on the question of the Lord’s sufferings, he would stand aside. He wrote this to J.B.S. On this, seven prominent brethren (I forget who they all were, but G.V.W. and J.B.S. were two) wrote to him jointly, to say that they entirely repudiated the opposition to the truth in question, which was stated in a bad tract of Mr. Ord’s, and fully went with the truth in Mr. Darby’s papers and they earnestly besought him not to stand aside. To this he bowed.

The Lord thus rebuked the storm and there was a “great calm” which allowed us (or any who were ready for it) to feed on the precious truth of His personal sufferings, which He had confided to His beloved servant, and enabled him to bring out as counter to the lie of the enemy at Plymouth.»

Miss A.M. Stoney (1839-1936), only daughter of J.B. Stoney.

An account of early days

About 200 years ago, when the zeal and ardour of the Reformation had died down, men were no longer called upon to lay down their lives for the truth, they had no longer to “**buy it**” dearly, so it seemed to lose its value in their hearts. Men thought more of pleasure and of gain in this than of possessions in the Home above. Liberty of conscience was allowed; a time of ease ensued, and all went to sleep, and put away thoughts of the future.

Then God stirred up hearts as He did long ago with His people Israel when they were captives in Babylon. God raised up men who felt the need of *salvation* for themselves, and having found it by faith in the work of Christ upon the cross, they were filled with a burning desire for the salvation of others. In the beginning of the 18th century men went everywhere preaching the good news which had “**turned the world upside down**” 1700 years before. “**Through this Man**” — the Lord Jesus Christ — “**is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins**.” The Hon. and Rev. Walter Shirley, when no longer able to preach out of doors, made his sick chamber his pulpit, and many heard and received the good news from the lips of the dying man, in whose soul the knowledge of the Saviour was a well of water springing up unto eternal life (John 4:14). The Shirley family was marked in those day by their devotedness to Christ in Whom they believed. Lady Selema, who became the Countess of Huntingdon, was one of them and perhaps, the best known in her day (1707). She was a central figure in Society. It was then that Whitefield, John Wesley and other were speaking and preaching to everyone they met of salvation through the precious blood of Christ, shed for sinners. Lady Huntingdon and her friend Lady Margaret Hastings, were brought to God by their preaching, and these two devoted women spoke of Him to all their acquaintances (see Life of Lady Huntingdon 1836).

Many in high life despised and scorned them, but many more rejoiced at their words and followed their example. So that all classes heard the good news of a Saviour Who died for them. It seems to have been God’s way to begin with the upper classes, to raise up a testimony before Kings and Rulers. It was so at the time of the Reformation: the most learned and leading men in all countries were those who received the truth and who laid down their lives for it. Both men and women of the “**upper classes**,” (Acts 17:12 N.Tr.) were marked by their zeal for the truth and by their devotedness and separation from all that was contrary to it around them. It was the same in the time of the preachers two centuries ago. Whitefield found access to those about the Court and many of those who heard him turned to God from their “vanities” “**to serve the living and true God, and to wait His Son from the heavens**”.

The hierarchy has always opposed Grace; the free giving of God is not subject to their ordinance. They were displeased to see the crowds flocking to hear the preachers instead of themselves, so they denied them the use of their pulpits. At that time there was no thought of seceding from the Church of England; they were all professedly churchmen, but in the year 1728 they took a place in Fetter Lane, London, to hold meetings in. There they met chiefly for prayer — often lasting till the early morning hours — and to encourage one another in devotedness. Whitefield’s favourite pulpit was the open air under the eyes of the God he knew and loved with “a whole heart”. His personal faith in the Lord Jesus gave great simplicity to his life, and impressed his hearers with a sense of the value of the One he presented to their faith. They were converted to Christ, and not to any dogma...

But Christianity has always been sown in tears, in the sufferings of the Christ and the glories that shall follow and so the world looked with scorn on those who did not uphold its frivolities... and the ways and habits of Christianity were found among the humble and the country-folk chiefly.

The closing years of that century from 1790 to 1800 were marked by the birth of men and women who were destined by God to be used by Him to hold forth His testimony to His Son in a way that, perhaps, it never had been since Apostolic times, and again we find the call out is to the “upper classes”... A sort of simultaneous movement all over the world began among