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Secession From the Established Church in the Early Nineteenth Century

Harold H. Rowdon

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The spectacular growth of Methodism has long been recognized, and the revival of existing forms of dissent in the early part of the nineteenth century is beginning to receive the attention it deserves.¹ An aspect of dissent during this period which has remained almost unnoticed is the contribution made by clergy who seceded from the established church. What follows is an attempt to explore this territory and, in doing so, to suggest some lines of demarcation within it.

One area which will not be explored, mainly because it is sufficiently large to merit separate attention, is the contribution which seceders made to the emergence and development of a radical form of dissent which emerged during the period—the movement which was dubbed ‘The Plymouth Brethren’.² One other limitation to this study—in addition to that imposed by the scarcity of source material—must be mentioned: that of time. The period covered will end with the 1830’s, partly because of limitations of space, largely because, with the development of the administrative reform of the Church of England and the flowering of the Oxford Movement, secession began to take on a slightly different character. In the period under review, secession was largely Calvinistic in complexion and was not uncoloured by concern over the administrative and disciplinary abuses which evoked such clamour against the Church of England in the early part of the nineteenth century.

I

In 1815, an Irish evangelical clergyman, the Rev. Peter Roe, published a volume bearing the title, *The Evil of Separation from the Church of England*.³ This consisted of a number of letters written by evangelical clergy in Ireland and England⁴ against new forms of dissent which had appeared in recent years. A second, enlarged edition appeared in 1817. Roe contributed an introduction and a conclusion which, unfortunately, did not specify the new forms of dissent but merely asserted that ‘a revolutionary spirit has appeared in the religious world’, analogous to the

¹ G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England*, 1962, 184.

² At least ten or a dozen clergy and several who were about to take Orders seceded from the established church in England or Ireland and played a major part in giving the Brethren (the epithet will be dropped hereafter) a distinctive character.

³ 1st edition, 1815; 2nd edition, corrected and enlarged, 1817.

⁴ It has been stated that Charles Simeon and Legh Richmond were among the contributors. S. Madden, *Memoir of the Life of the late Peter Roe, A.M.*, 1842, 260; G. T. Stokes, ‘John Nelson Darby’, *Contemporary Review*, October, 1885, XLVIII, 539. Their names were not specified in either edition of Roe’s volume, though they may have been among the unnamed contributors. Another of these was probably Dr. William Marsh. Cf. *The Life of the Rev. William Marsh, D.D. By His Daughter*, 1867, 114.

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revolutionary movement in France.⁵ This had found expression in what he called 'Sandemanian separation'⁶ and a revival of the opinions of Robert Browne.⁷

The letters written by the evangelical clergy against these new separatists enable us to form a fairly full picture of their views. They exposed the alleged unscriptural basis of the Church of England,⁸ with special reference to the fact that it was established.⁹ They objected to crown appointments,¹⁰ deprecated the defective discipline of the established church¹¹ and disallowed the joining together in worship of believers and unbelievers.¹² This last was described as

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'their favourite principle'.¹³ They also disliked the liturgy.¹⁴ The church practices of the separatists were evidently based upon the idea of the gathered church, and included the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper and the practice of mutual exhortation without distinction between ministers and congregation.¹⁵ The introduction of the kiss of peace¹⁶ shows their fervent desire to follow the letter of the New Testament, even in its minutiae.

Although Roe gave no clue as to the identity of the separatists whom he was opposing, it is clear that they included the followers of John Walker. The religious body which Walker established accepted the name of Separatists,¹⁷ and the views held by him fit the picture drawn in Roe's volume.

Walker was a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, and a classical scholar of some repute.¹⁸ A staunch Calvinist, he published in 1802 *An Expostulatory Address to the Members of the Methodist Society in Ireland* which involved him in controversy with Alexander Knox, at that time an upholder of Methodism.¹⁹ In the course of his disquisitions, Walker expounded a view of faith calculated to correct the Methodist emphasis on the emotional side of religion.²⁰ Although

⁵ *Op. cit.*², 209.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 209n. For the Sandemanians, see J. Adams, *A Sketch of All The Denominations of the Christian World*, 1811¹², 206-209.

⁷ P. Roe, *op. cit.*, viii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 32 ff, 43 ff., 73 ff.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 ff., 37 ff., 46 ff., 76 ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64 ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14, 68 f., 91, 108, 113.

¹² *Ibid.*, 61 ff., 72 f., 79 ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53 ff., 212 ff., 124, 68.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 211n.

¹⁷ [J. Walker], *Letters on Primitive Christianity; in which are Set Forth the Faith and Practice of the Apostolic Churches. By a Member of the Religious Body commonly called Separatists*, 1834. The first letter is headed 'Dublin, Jan. 15, 1819'.

¹⁸ *DNB*.

¹⁹ Knox replied to the *Expostulatory Address with his Remarks* which Walker answered in seven lengthy Letters.

²⁰ *An Expostulatory Address*, 1804³, 29, 30.

he tried to safeguard his view against misrepresentation,²¹ it gave rise to the charge against him that he held that a mere profession of belief constituted faith.²² This may be reflected in the phrase 'Sandemanian separation', used by Roe,²³ since the Sandemanians are said to have held this view of faith. According to his own account, Walker became concerned at the poor moral qualities of professed evangelicals by comparison with what he knew of the behaviour of the early Christians.²⁴ Early in 1804, he joined with a few others who agreed 'to walk as one body',²⁵ following Christ and His Word and obeying apostolic injunctions 'in their true meaning'.²⁶

At first, Walker did not contemplate secession, though Canon Overton was mistaken in saying that neither he nor his followers withdrew from the established church.²⁷ As a result of his deepening conviction that the constitution of the Church should rest upon Apostolic teaching alone, he cut himself off from associations which he felt to be unauthorized. He offered his resignation to the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin,²⁸ but instead of accepting his letter, the Provost expelled him on 9 October, 1804.²⁹ A week later, he sent letters of resignation to three religious societies with which he was connected, couched in the following terms. 'Sir, Being led to see that the Scripture calls me to separate myself from all religious connections, except with those whom it authorizes me to walk with, as disciples of Christ united with me in the truth of the Gospel; and being convinced that their body in any place is a Society for promoting, under the regulations of his word, every good object for which your society has professedly been formed;—I beg to be considered as no longer a member of your body, and to have my name taken off your books'.³⁰ For some time, Walker continued to read and expound the Scriptures in Bethesda Chapel, an unconsecrated building used by evangelicals in Dublin,³¹ but excluded hymns and prayers since he felt unable to engage in any form of worship that was open to a mixed company of believers and unbelievers.³²

In private, Walker and his followers practised the Breaking of Bread (as they called the Lord's Supper) on the first day of the week, engaged in teaching and admonishing one another,

²¹ *Letters on Primitive Christianity*, 4.

²² J. Haldane, *Strictures on a Publication upon Primitive Christianity*, cited in A. Haldane, *The Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey and of His Brother James Alexander Haldane*, 1855⁴, 476, 477.

²³ *Op. cit.*, 209n.

²⁴ J. Walker, *An Address to Believers of the Gospel of Christ on the Conversation which Becometh It*, 1804, 37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁶ [J. Walker], *Letters on Primitive Christianity*, p. 1102. Strangely, though Walker held that the greeting with a holy kiss must be done literally (*ibid.*, 98) he allowed that the true meaning of feet-washing is the service of love which includes feet-washing 'whenever that is really a service of love' (*ibid.*, 102) and that so-called 'community' of goods means no more than willingness to give to those in need (*ibid.*, 26 ff.).

²⁷ J. H. Overton, *The English Church in the Nineteenth Century (1800-1835)*, 1894, 314, 315.

²⁸ J. Walker, *An Address*, 51, 52.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52. Cf. the account given in Roe's letter of 118 October, 1804. S. Madden, *Life of Roe*, 141, 142.

³⁰ J. Walker, *An Address*, 53.

³¹ 'Thomas Kelly', *Julian's Dictionary of Hymnology*.

³² J. Walker, *An Address*, 58. This attitude made Walker notorious. [W. Braidwood], *Letters on a Variety of Subjects, Relating Chiefly to Christian Fellowship and Church Order; Intended as a Refutation of Certain Principles Respectively Taught by Mr. Walker of Dublin, Mr. Ewing of Glasgow, Mr. Ballantine of London and Some Anonymous Writers*, 1808, 31-46; G. T. Stokes, art. cit., *Contemporary Review*, XLVIII, 539; W. B. Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, 1901, 27.

apparently without any distinction between clergy and laity, exercised discipline and introduced the use of the holy kiss.³³ Walker

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urged the view that, as in Apostolic days, there should be one church in each place, but denied that he believed that his church in Dublin, and those associated with it, comprehended all the true disciples of Christ in the country. He insisted, however, that 'they do comprehend all, whom I know or can acknowledge as such'.³⁴ A true church, in Walker's estimation, was a 'collection of disciples; who are gathered together into one body by their agreement in that Truth, who unitedly confess it, walk under its influence, and are regulated by its influence'.³⁵ Since it must be an 'insulated body', its members must withdraw from unbelievers (2 Cor. vi. 14, 15), heretics (Tit. iii. 10, 11) and disciples who walk disorderly (2 Thess. iii. 14, 15).³⁶ Though he distinguished between those who realized the error of maintaining their existing church connections and those who did not,³⁷ Walker looked for the drawing together of all true disciples in separation from both the world and the false church.³⁸ In this, there were eschatological undertones: Walker denied that the Christian gospel was intended to improve the condition of the world³⁹ and directed hope to the second advent of Christ to the earth.⁴⁰ On the issue of baptism, Walker was undecided, though he seems to have leaned towards a view of believers' baptism.⁴¹

It is not easy to estimate the spread of Walker's ideas and practices. Madden's *Memoir of Roe* suggests that they were carried to Waterford, Kilkenny, and, possibly, Cork.⁴² The 1834 edition of Walker's *Letters on Primitive Christianity* claimed churches in London, Leith and Dublin.⁴³ Prof. G. T. Stokes thought that separatist groups had been formed in several cities in the west and other parts of England, and stated that some, as in Birmingham, Dublin and a few other large cities, had survived to the time when he was writing (1885).⁴⁴

Walker's churches may not have been the only element in the new separatism which alarmed Roe. An article in *The British Quarterly Review* for October, 1873, referred to Dublin as 'a

³³ [J. Walker], *Letters on Primitive Christianity*, 34, 35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24, 5. Braidwood accused Walker of denying the visible Christianity of all who are not members of pure churches. *Op. cit.*, 5-13.

³⁵ J. Walker, *An Address*, 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25, 26.

³⁷ [J. Walker], *Letters on Primitive Christianity*, 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32, 92.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14. He thus took issue with the dominant eighteenth century view that the return of Christ will take place at the end of the millennium which will be brought about as a result of the preaching of the Christian gospel. For the 'Whitbyan' idea of the post-millennial return of Christ see L. E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols., 1946-1954 II, 651 ff. Braidwood charged Walker with denying the possibility of the conversion of the Jews as a nation. *Op. cit.*, 13-30.

⁴⁰ [J. Walker], *Letters on Primitive Christianity*, 96, 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 87, 103. For Walker's views on justification, sanctification and union with Christ, see *An Expostulatory Address*, 27 and *Letters on Primitive Christianity*, 21.

⁴² Pp. 140, 256 f.

⁴³ P. 107. Walker lived in London for a while. *DNB*.

⁴⁴ *Art. cit.*, *Contemporary Review*, XLVIII, 539 f.

powerful focus of separatist movements all through the early years of this century', and specified Kellyism as well as Walkerism.⁴⁵ Thomas Kelly was born in Dublin in 1769 and was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. His father was a judge of the Irish Court of Common Pleas and he commenced legal training. However, after experiencing an evangelical conversion, he was ordained in 1792. His forthright preaching in Dublin, in company with Rowland Hill, caused Archbishop Fowler to inhibit him. Eventually he seceded and built places of worship at Althy, Portarlinton, Wexford and other places in Ireland.⁴⁶ From correspondence between Archbishop Power le Poer Trench and Kelly in 1820, it is clear that, although Kelly rejected the idea of a national church, he felt no urge to work for its overthrow.⁴⁷ W. B. Neatby described the church practices of the Kellyites on the basis of information from a friend, who, about 1840, was a member of one of their churches.⁴⁸ Baptism was administered on profession of faith; ordination was rejected and some opportunity seems to have been given for extempore speaking in the congregation, though arrangements were evidently made for specified persons to exercise ministry. Neatby portrayed the Kellyites as more amiable than the Walkerites and instanced the story of their refusal to agree to terms of union with the latter since they insisted on adherence to the article of belief 'that John Wesley is in hell'.⁴⁹

II

Another obscure separatist movement of the early nineteenth century which

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may not be altogether unconnected with the foregoing, was known as the Western Schism, though its leading figure, James Harington Evans, ministered for more than 30 years in a London chapel. Evans was born in 1785 and was educated at Wadham College, Oxford, of which he was fellow, 1805-1810.⁵⁰ He was ordained in 1808, and during his first curacy in Staffordshire became one of the many whose lives were transformed by reading Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion*.⁵¹ In 1805 or 1810, Evans took a curacy at Milford, Hants. There, a parishioner gave him a volume of sermons by the Rev. John Hill which served to strengthen the evangelical note in his preaching. A small-scale religious revival occurred, though not without intense opposition. As a result, in the spring of 1815, the rector gave him orders to quit within six months. Before the notice had expired, Evans seceded.⁵²

⁴⁵ Reprinted separately under the title, *Plymouth Brethrenism: Its Ecclesiastical and Doctrinal Teachings: with a Sketch of Its History*, 1874, 6 and n.; S. Madden, *Memoir of Roe*, 255.

⁴⁶ This account is taken from Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*.

⁴⁷ J. D'Arcy Sirr, *A Memoir of the Honourable and Most Reverend Power le Poer Trench, Last Archbishop of Tuam*, 1845, 728-731.

⁴⁸ W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.*, 5, 6.

⁴⁹ The fact that Archbishop Trench pleaded with Kelly to return to the established church is evidence of the esteem in which he was held, even after his secession. J. D'Arcy Sirr, *loc. cit.* 60.

⁵⁰ J. S. Reynolds, *The Evangelicals at Oxford 1735-1871*, 1953, 166.

⁵¹ J. J. Evans (ed.), *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. James Harington Evans*, 1852, 18; W. H. Bennet, *Robert Cleaver Chapman of Barnstaple*, n.d., 23. The book was given him by his rector.

⁵² J. J. Evans (ed.), *op. cit.*, 21 ff.

According to the writer of his Memoir, it was 'the baptism of infants, the union of the Church with the State, and what he considered to be the consequent absence of holy discipline in that Church' that caused him to secede from the established church.⁵³ It is probably no coincidence that in 1815 Bishop Mant published extracts from his 1812 Bampton Lecture asserting the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.⁵⁴ This can hardly have failed to disturb a man who was convinced that his spiritual 'rebirth' had occurred subsequent to his ordination, and, added to the fact that his rector had opposed what he felt to be a work of the Holy Spirit in Milford and surrounding district, must have caused him to question the validity of a church of which such men were dignitaries.

In January, 1816, Evans left Milford with his family, and spent some months at Walford House, near Taunton, the home of George Baring, lately curate of the Rev. T. T. Biddulph's country parish of Durston, which the latter held with St. James's, Bristol.⁵⁵ Baring was one of several clergy in the west of England, evidently all aged between 30 and 40, who seceded at about this time.⁵⁶ Among them were Thomas Snow,⁵⁷ the Rev. Mr. Bevan, said to have become a convert to Baring's system,⁵⁸ and, possibly, the Rev. T. C. Cowan.⁵⁹ Little is known about this Western Schism.⁶⁰ It is clear that the seceders received believers' baptism, but there seems to be no extant material from which to form any idea of the church life they may have developed, except in the case of Evans.⁶¹

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁴ R. Mant, *Two Tracts Intended to Convey Correct Notions of Regeneration and Conversion...*, 1815. These were extracts from Mant's 1812 Bampton Lecture which had been published under the title, *An Appeal to the Gospel...*, 1812. An anonymous pamphleteer writing as a member of the Church of England, but in opposition to the practice of infant baptism, stated that 'the publication of Dr. Mant's tracts on the subject of regeneration occasioned a remarkable revival of the spirit-trying controversy respecting baptismal grace in the Anglican church'. *An Examination of the Practice of Infant Baptism*, n.d. (post-1822), v. Among the replies to Mant published in 1815 or 1816 were pamphlets by J. Scott, 1815; T. T. Biddulph; G. Bugg and G. Nicholson, 1816.

⁵⁵ J. J. Evans (ed.), *op. cit.*, 32; C. Hole, *A Manual of English Church History*, 1910, 391, 392.

⁵⁶ *A Reply to a Letter Written by the Reverend John Simons, Rector of Paul's Cray, Purporting to be on the Subject of Certain Errors of the Antinomian Kind, Which have Lately Sprung Up in the West of England. By Thomas Snow, Seceder from the National Religious Establishment*, 1818, 3.

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*

⁵⁸ R. H. Carne, *The Proper Deity of the Holy Spirit Vindicated*, 1818, vi. Two years later Carne himself seceded, but was careful to dissociate himself from the Western Schism in his *apologia*, *Reasons for Withdrawing from the National Establishment*, 1820, 74-144. Carne appears to have been a somewhat independent thinker of the Calvinistic school. He gave three reasons for his secession. 1. The violence to conscience done by the Church of England. (The Bishop of Exeter had refused to license him to a lectureship at Marazion, Cornwall.) (12-36). 2. Unwarranted invasion of the rights of private judgment. (The 39 Articles, Book of Common Prayer, Canons and Homilies are enforced in cases of a doctrinal character—despite the sixth Article on Holy Scripture—but the 75th Canon against card-playing—to take one example—maybe broken with impunity (37-63)). 3. and probably the heart of the matter, Carne cannot accept that our Lord descended into Gehenna (63-74).

⁵⁹ *Loc. cit.*

⁶⁰ It is named in J. S. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 166 and is briefly referred to or implied in the following: J. J. Evans (ed.), *op. cit.*, 32; C. Hole, *op. cit.*, 391, 392; E. Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, 1, 1899, 281 n.; *The Life of the Rev. William Marsh*, 115, 116 (letter of 20 January, 1817, to Sir Thomas Baring).

⁶¹ J. J. Evans (ed.), *op. cit.*, 32; C. Hole, *op. cit.*, 392.

A pamphlet published by Snow in 1818⁶² enables us to discern the main lines of their doctrinal position. Like Walker, they laid great emphasis upon objective truth. Thus, Snow affirmed that 'from the truth itself we obtain life and hope when we believe it';⁶³ the Holy Spirit gives comfort to the believer 'through the revelation of comforting truth';⁶⁴ holiness is 'a positive separation to God by the power and influence of the truth'.⁶⁵ While laying this great weight on objective truth as opposed to subjective feeling, Snow taught that it was a mark of carnality to follow any legal code in the hope of gaining life by so doing.⁶⁶ It was undoubtedly this which gave rise to the charge of antinomianism that had been brought against the western seceders.⁶⁷ Snow and his associates stressed the union, not only between Christ and individual believers,⁶⁸ but also between Christ and believers as a body.⁶⁹ They appealed to the Scriptural metaphors of the vine and its branches, the head and the body and the husband and the bride, and on the basis of John xvii. 21 asserted that

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this union should be made visible through 'unity in faith and order'.⁷⁰ It would appear that they, like the other separatists, were exponents of a form of the gathered church idea.

Towards the end of 1816, Evans removed to London and sought a sphere of Christian service. He preached in *l'Eglise Suisse*, St. Giles, and, after a period of ill-health, engaged a chapel in Cross Street, Hatton Garden, where he formed a church. His preaching attracted much attention, and Henry Drummond, the helper of many evangelical enterprises, built a chapel for him in John Street, Grays Inn Lane, where he commenced his life-work in 1818.⁷¹

Harington Evans was a diligent preacher and pastor of souls.⁷² He looked for evidence of 'vital godliness' as well as knowledge of the truth in those who applied for church membership. Though baptized as a believer, he did not enforce believers' baptism on any who were not convinced of the need for it. He did not look in the New Testament for a specific model for church life, but only for 'the truths, principles and discipline by which it is to be moulded and influenced'. The Lord's Supper was held every Sunday evening, but Evans found that the majority of members were prepared to attend only on the first Sunday of the month. Though he

⁶² *Op. cit.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42. Cf. J. Harington Evans, *Sanctification by the Truth*, 1821, 45, where it was asserted that 'the truth is the medium of all sanctification'.

⁶⁶ T. Snow, *op. cit.*, 15 ff.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 ff.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 ff.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 68 ff.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁷¹ J. J. Evans (ed.), *op. cit.*, 33-35.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 63-71. The details in this paragraph are based on *ibid.*, 59 ff. Evans imbibed unorthodox views on the Trinity, soon after coming to London, but made a full retraction in 1823. *Ibid.*, 34-55: This may lend point to Carne's allegation that leaders of the Western Schism held Unitarian views said to be associated with those of Mr. John Marson, a London bookseller. R. H. Carne, *op. cit.*, v, vi.

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greatly valued the free exercise of spiritual gifts in church meetings,⁷³ Evans was deterred through fear of becoming identified with Irvingite aberrations, and therefore little was done to implement this conviction. Similarly, he saw a plurality of elders to be Scriptural, but found it difficult to secure. However, the church was divided into 'districts', according to the locality of the members' homes, under the care of 'visitors', each of whom was responsible to a deacon. The members of each district met on appointed evenings for prayer and Bible-study, and Evans attended by rotation.

Harington Evans gained the respect and esteem of a wide circle of friends. One of these, George Muller of Orphan House fame, wrote in his journal for 3 March, 1835, 'This evening I preached comfortably in John-street Chapel for Brother Evans. I never preached in any place where I so much felt that he who stately ministers was more worthy than myself':⁷⁴ Muller was associated with the Brethren, and one of Evans's own congregation, a young solicitor named Robert Chapman, who left London to act as a Baptist minister in Barnstaple, became an honoured figure in the same movement.⁷⁵ It is not without significance that Evans was followed at John Street Chapel by the Hon. the Rev. Baptist Noel who for more than twenty years had been minister of St. John's Chapel, Bedford Row, hard by John Street. Undoubtedly influenced by Evans, Noel seceded. He preached his farewell sermon on Sunday, 3 December, 1848, published his apologia, *An Essay on the Union of Church and State*, early in 1849, and, after a period of hesitation, was baptized in John Street Chapel on 9 August, 1849, and began his ministry there in September, 1849.⁷⁶

III

On 6 February, 1831, the University of Oxford was electrified by a sermon preached in St. Mary's Church by the Rev. H. B. Bulteel, curate of St. Ebbe's and university preacher. In his sermon, which was printed⁷⁷ and ran through six editions before the year was out, Bulteel followed a bold assertion of Calvinistic doctrines⁷⁸ with a fearless indictment of the Church of England, mainly on

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account of her unworthy ministers, her subjection to the state and her denial of the Calvinism which, he claimed, was professed in her Articles. He warned the established church of the

⁷³ Cf. A. Haldane, *op. cit.*, 333.

⁷⁴ *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, written by Himself*, I, 1881¹¹, 122.

⁷⁵ W. H. Bennet, *Robert Cleaver Chapman; F. Holmes, Brother Indeed*, 1956.

⁷⁶ *Alumni Cantabrigienses; DNB*. There may have been a short interregnum during which the church in John Street was in the care of a Mr. Charles Shepherd. 'A Book of Remembrance' or *A Short History of the Baptist Churches in North Devon*, 1885, 22. Shepherd subsequently ministered in a church in Henrietta Street. Anon., *Letters of the late Robert Cleaver Chapman*, n.d., 109 n.

⁷⁷ H. B. Bulteel, *A Sermon on I Corinthians II. 12 Preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's on Sunday Feb. 6, 1831*, 1831.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-42.

judgment which was about to fall according to the terms of Romans xi and asserted that, if Rome was the Aholah, the Church of England was the Aholibah of Ezekiel xxiii.⁷⁹

Henry Bellenden Bulteel was born in 1800 and educated at Eton and Exeter College, Oxford. He was a fellow of Exeter, 1823-1829, and curate-in-charge at St. Ebbe's from 1826.⁸⁰ A Plymouth man, he came under the influence of Dr. Hawker, the celebrated Calvinist preacher there,⁸¹ and experienced an evangelical conversion, probably in 1827.⁸² He exercised a powerful ministry at St. Ebbe's and numbered W. E. Gladstone among his undergraduate following.⁸³ According to B. W. Newton, an Exeter man and a great admirer of Bulteel at the time, the university authorities put St. Ebbe's out of bounds, so out of favour were the Calvinistic doctrines that Bulteel proclaimed.⁸⁴

Such was the situation which Bulteel resolved by his university sermon. This was defended against the strictures of Dr. Burton, Regius Professor of Divinity, by J. N. Darby, himself a seceder and one of the foremost leaders of the Brethren, in a lengthy pamphlet entitled, 'The Doctrine of the Church of England at the Time of the Reformation, of the Reformation Itself, of Scripture, and of the Church of Rome, Briefly Compared with the Remarks of the Regius Professor of Divinity'.⁸⁵ As for Bulteel, he embarked on a preaching tour of the west of England in company with the Rev. W. Tiptaft, vicar of Sutton Courtney, Oxfordshire, another discontented clergyman.⁸⁶ The two men fearlessly exposed what they considered the abuses of the Church of England. Tiptaft pointed out in a letter that Bulteel was well-known on account of his sermon and so, he added, 'whoever opens their pulpit doors is aware of what doctrines we preach'.⁸⁷ Bulteel preached in such churches as were opened to him, in the open air and even in nonconformist chapels.⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, Bulteel's licence was revoked by Bishop Bagot soon after the conclusion of his tour. For several Sundays he preached in his garden to a large congregation, but soon bought land for a chapel which was known, first as St. Ebbe's Chapel and later as Commercial Road Baptist Chapel.⁸⁹

On 25 October, 1831, Tiptaft visited Bulteel in Oxford and learned to his dismay that he had been to London and come under the influence of Edward Irving, and that he had accepted the Irvingite contention that the Pentecostal gifts of the Spirit had been given again and had rejected the Calvinistic doctrine of particular redemption.⁹⁰ Tiptaft tried to talk Bulteel out of his new

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 42-53.

⁸⁰ J. S. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 162.

⁸¹ *Fry MS.*, 99. The *Fry MS.* is an unprinted volume containing the reminiscences of B. W. Newton, one of the early Brethren.

⁸² J. S. Reynolds, *loc. cit.*

⁸³ *Loc. cit.*

⁸⁴ *Fry MS.*, 135.

⁸⁵ W. Kelly (ed.), *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, III (n.d.), 1-67.

⁸⁶ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *The Seceders* (1829-1869), 1930, 58; cf. 164-169. Three volumes were published under this title, but as the first is not so denominated, it will be cited as *The Seceders*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 165 (letter of 11 June, 1831).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 164 (letter of 11 June, 1831).

⁸⁹ J. S. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 162.

⁹⁰ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 173 (letter of 25 October, 1831); *Fry MS.*, 95 ff.

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views, but to no avail.⁹¹ By 25 February, 1832, the friendship between the two men had come to an end.⁹² Bulteel later renounced his Irvingite opinions, but the breach was never healed.⁹³

Another seceder who came under the influence of Irving was Edward Hardman, a greatly respected clergyman in Ireland.⁹⁴ Hardman was a curate at Westport, Co. Mayo, who during a period of retirement due to ill-health wrote a two-volume commentary on the New Testament which became widely used. He removed to an easier curacy at Ballincholla to which he was licensed on 18 November, 1831.⁹⁵ About this time, he became acquainted with J. N. Darby and the new dissenting groups with which he was associated,⁹⁶ but, like Bulteel, he came under the influence of Irving and embraced his views on the

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restoration of supernatural gifts.⁹⁷ Towards the end of 1834, he published a pamphlet on 1 Corinthians xii-xiv as a corrective to his own treatment of that passage in his commentary. Archbishop Trench of Tuam called on him to withdraw the tract or resign, and on his refusal served him with official suspension and withdrawal of his licence. Hardman became an evangelist and eventually served as 'angel' of the Irvingite congregation which was formed in Dublin.⁹⁸

IV

Seceding clergy served not only to launch or support new forms of dissent, but also to strengthen longstanding bodies. In particular, the Baptists received fresh accessions of strength in this way during the early nineteenth century. Undoubtedly the most significant secessions of this type were those of Tiptaft and Philpot.

William Tiptaft was born on 16 February, 1803, and was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he graduated in 1825.⁹⁹ He was ordained in March, 1826, and after serving as curate at Treborough and Stogumber became vicar of Sutton Courtney, near Abingdon, in February, 1829.¹⁰⁰ In May of that year, he first met the Rev. J. C. Philpot, perpetual curate of Stadhampton, seven miles south of Oxford.¹⁰¹

⁹¹ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 177 (letter of 16 November, 1831).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 184 (letter of 25 February, 1832).

⁹³ J. C. Philpot, *Memoir of the late William Tiptaft*, 1867², 58 ff.

⁹⁴ J. D'Arcy Sirr, *Memoir of Trench*, 419.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 419-421.

⁹⁶ Darby described him as 'Hardman, a dear brother in the Lord, a clergyman'. Anon., *Letters of J. N. D[arby]*, I n.d.², 27 (letter received 19 August, 1833).

⁹⁷ J. D'Arcy Sirr, *op. cit.*, 421.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 422, 423.

⁹⁹ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 33, 35, 36; *Alumni Cantabrigienses*.

¹⁰⁰ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 37, 41.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4. 30.

Philpot was a few months older than Tiptaft, having been born on 13 September, 1802.¹⁰² He was an Oxford man who gained a first in classics in 1824. He spent 1825 and a great part of 1826 in Oxford as a private tutor, waiting for a fellowship to fall vacant in his college, Worcester.¹⁰³ He then went to Ireland for 18 months as tutor to the two sons of a wealthy gentleman. There, early in 1827, he passed through a spiritual experience which was to alter the whole course of his life. It began when the parents refused him the hand of the sister of one of his pupils with whom he had fallen in love. The household was that of Sergeant Pennefather, later Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, who was brother-in-law to J. N. Darby, and it seems likely that it was through Darby's influence that Philpot returned to Oxford a convinced Calvinist.¹⁰⁴ He was ostracized by many of the fellows, denied the public tutorship which he was expecting and was told by the Provost that he would be excluded from every college office.¹⁰⁵ He therefore seized the opportunity to become perpetual curate of Stadhampton and withdrew from Oxford.¹⁰⁶

Through contact with Philpot, Tiptaft embraced Calvinistic doctrines¹⁰⁷ and created a sensation by preaching before the mayor and corporation of Abingdon an uncompromising sermon on Matthew i. 21 in which he expounded the doctrine of particular redemption.¹⁰⁸ Both Tiptaft and Philpot came to regard Scripture as their sole authority,¹⁰⁹ and it was not long before they began to entertain scruples regarding the established church. Without doubt they were influenced by Bulteel's sermon and it is not surprising that Tiptaft wrote in a letter of 14 March, 1831: 'In the baptismal service we thank God in the surplice for regenerating children, and then put on the black gown, go into the pulpit, and tell them in plain terms that they were not born again. Our Liturgy makes every baptized person a member of the true Church, and we have to address them as such when we know to the contrary by their fruits. And the catechism is so full of errors that no one with a glimmering of light will teach children it'.¹¹⁰ On 25 October, 1831, after the tour with Bulteel, Tiptaft wrote: 'I cannot hold

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my living and a good conscience too.... I believe [the Church of England] to be an unholy system, from an undergraduate in preparation at Cambridge to the Archbishop of Canterbury'.¹¹¹

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 14, 15. He was fellow of Worcester College, 1826-1835. *Alumni Oxonienses*.

¹⁰⁴ W. G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby*, 1944, 13, 17, 45 f.

¹⁰⁵ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 28 f. B. W. Newton had a similar experience at Exeter College. *Fry MS.*, 98.

¹⁰⁶ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 30 f.

¹⁰⁷ J. C. Philpot, *Memoir of Tiptaft*, 17 f.

¹⁰⁸ W. Tiptaft, *A Sermon Preached in the Great Parish Church of Abingdon, on Christmas-Day, 1829, at the Appointment of the Masters and Governors of Christ's Hospital*, 1856⁵. The sermon opened with the dramatic words, 'I stand before you this evening either as a servant of Christ or a servant of the devil'. It contained some 167 Scriptural quotations in support of the doctrine of particular redemption. The printed version included an appendix in which Articles X, XI, XII, XIII and XVII were cited in support.

¹⁰⁹ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 45, 29 respectively.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

Tiptaft resigned his living on 24 November, 1831,¹¹² and published his letter to the bishop giving the reasons.¹¹³ These relate mainly to the almost total lack of church discipline and the connection between church and state. He preached to large congregations in a borrowed chapel at Sutton Courtney and elsewhere,¹¹⁴ but before long he had built a chapel at Abingdon which was ready for occupation by 25 March, 1832.¹¹⁵ About this time he was harassed by correspondence from the proctor to the Bishop of Salisbury alleging that his renunciation of orders was invalid, and threatening proceedings, first for preaching doctrines inconsistent with the principles of the established church and then for preaching in unconsecrated places. Tiptaft's most effective reply was to publish the correspondence with a preface.¹¹⁶ Needless to say, he continued as a dissenting minister and forged links with the Strict Baptists.

It was several years before Philpot followed Tiptaft. His health was poor, and secession would mean, in his own words, 'parting for truth's sake with the kindest friends after the flesh, as well as with all my prospects in life, an independent income, good name and respectability'.¹¹⁷ He was reluctant to take the step, and wrote on 11 October, 1833, 'I would sooner be turned out than go out'.¹¹⁸ Towards the end of 1831, the Rev. J. C. L. Brenton, only surviving son of Vice-Admiral Sir Jahleel Brenton, who had taken charge of Stadhampton while Philpot was away from the parish in an effort to recover his health, refused to read the burial service over the parish clerk, a drunkard who had died uttering oaths and curses.¹¹⁹ Brenton published the sermon in which he justified his action¹²⁰ and seceded.¹²¹ Strangely enough, this made it harder for Philpot to secede, for he felt it his duty to return to his flock and, encouraged by the return of physical strength, continued for some time yet.¹²²

At length, however, he gave notice of his secession in a sermon preached on Sunday, March, 1835.¹²³ Six days later, he resigned his fellowship in a letter to the Provost of Worcester College which was duly published and ran through twelve editions before the end of 1836.¹²⁴ Philpot

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 87, 174, 177.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 177, 182. An edition of 3,000 copies was exhausted by February, 1832. In all, nine editions were published (*ibid.*, 61) including an unauthorized edition by a Southampton printer. W. Tiptaft, *A Letter to the Bishop of Salisbury*, 1832.

¹¹⁴ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 63 f.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61; cf. 178 (letter of 29 November, 1831).

¹¹⁶ *A Letter to the Bishop of Salisbury. By William Tiptaft....Seventh Edition. To which are Added Three Letters from the Bishop to Mr. Tiptaft ... ; and Mr. Tiptaft's Answers*, 1834².

¹¹⁷ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 97.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 264. The context was the information he had received that complaint was to be laid against him before the bishop, concerning remarks he had made against clergy taking out shooting licences.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94, 95; cf. 181 (letter of Tiptaft of 30 December, 1831).

¹²⁰ L. C. L. Brenton, *A Sermon on Revelations [sic] XIV. 13. Tending to Show the Absurdity and Impiety of the Promiscuous Use of the Church Burial Service, Preached in the Parish Church of Stadhampton, Oxon. on Sunday December 11, 1831*, 1831.

¹²¹ Brenton, later Sir Charles Brenton, subsequently found a spiritual home among the Brethren. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.*, 177. He translated the Septuagint into English. J. C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint Translated into English*, 2 vols., 1844.

¹²² J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 263 f. (letter of Philpot of 11 October, 1833).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 104; cf. 274, 275 (letter of Philpot of 30 March, 1835).

¹²⁴ J. C. Philpot, *A Letter to the Provost of Worcester College, Oxford, on Resigning His Fellowship and Seceding from the Church of England*, 1835³.

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deplored the confusion arising from the doctrine of baptismal regeneration,¹²⁵ the union of church and state,¹²⁶ and the spectre of unregenerate ministers.¹²⁷ He concluded that there was hardly a single mark of a true church in the Church of England¹²⁸ and did not exempt evangelical clergy from condemnation.¹²⁹

Philpot found a home with a Mr. and Mrs. Parry of Allington, Wiltshire, and became minister of the Baptist chapel there.¹³⁰ Though attracted by no existing denomination,¹³¹ Philpot felt drawn to a number of obscure Baptist ministers with little or no formal learning—Henry Fowler of London, William Gadsby of Manchester and John Warburton of Trowbridge¹³² by whom he was baptized as a believer on 13 September, 1835.¹³³ Soon, Philpot became a contributor to *The Gospel Standard*, the magazine which served as a focus for the group of Strict Baptists with which he had become associated.¹³⁴

In 1836 Philpot defended his secession in a pamphlet entitled, *Secession from the Church of England Defended* in the course of which he cited an estimate that during the past five or six years in different parts of England, between 40 and 50 ordained clergy of the Church of England had seceded.¹³⁵ Of this number,

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fully ten or a dozen became associated with the Brethren, and some have been mentioned already. Among the rest was John Kay of Lincoln College, Oxford,¹³⁶ curate to Sir George Robinson, rector of Cranford, near Kettering. Having heard of Tiptaft, doubtless through his pamphlets, he followed his example in 1834, and sought refuge with him. Philpot described him as a somewhat eccentric and helpless individual. Ostracized by his relatives, he was befriended by Tiptaft who housed him for 14 years until a rich uncle left him a handsome legacy. Kay became an occasional contributor to *The Gospel Standard*.¹³⁷ Another seceder was a Mr. Cole of Highbury Park who kept a school and preached as opportunity offered: Tiptaft opened his pulpit

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-16; cf. 18 f.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, 20.

¹³⁰ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 128 ff.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 118.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 118, 132.

¹³⁴ He became co-editor. J. H. Philpot (ed.), *The Seceders* (1829-1869), II, 1932, 17 ff.

¹³⁵ *Op. cit.*, 1836³, 7. This pamphlet was a reply to one by C. Jerram entitled *Secession from the Church of England Considered in a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1836), which was itself an answer to pamphlets by five seceders, including Philpot.

¹³⁶ *Alumni Oxonienses*.

¹³⁷ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 52 f.; J. C. Philpot, *Memoir of Tiptaft*, 99-102.

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to him.¹³⁸ Husband, another with whom Tiptaft and Philpot were acquainted, licensed his house at Appelford, near Abingdon, and preached there.¹³⁹

Further seceders, who seem to have had no connection with Tiptaft and Philpot, include William Morshead and John Peters. Morshead, a graduate of Cambridge, was ordained in 1830 and held curacies at Bodmin (1830-1831) and Queen's Square Chapel, Bath (1832). He seceded in 1832¹⁴⁰ and preached in the Masonic Hall in Bath (1832-1842). Subsequently he removed to Liskeard where, for a time, he was master in the Grammar School (1849-1850). He then resumed preaching, first in the Independent Chapel (1850-1863) and then in the New Union Chapel (1863-1874).¹⁴¹ Peters was also a Cambridge man. He was ordained in 1814 and was rector of Quenington, Gloucs. (1822-1834) and vicar of Langford, Oxon. (1825-1834).¹⁴² In the latter year he seceded¹⁴³ and moved to Cirencester with his family. His wife died and he subsequently married Miss Mary Bowly, who wrote a number of hymns,¹⁴⁴ some of which found their way into Brethren collections.¹⁴⁵ It is not clear what denominational affiliation these two seceders formed.¹⁴⁶

Others, outside the immediate period, 1830-1836, are known to have become Baptists. Roger Hitchcock who seceded c. 1826 became the minister of a Baptist chapel at Devizes.¹⁴⁷ Frederick Tryon, vicar of Deeping St. James, Lincs., resigned his living in 1839 and built a Baptist chapel where he ministered for more than 60 years.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 91 (letter of Tiptaft of 15 January, 1830).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 96 (letter of Tiptaft of 5 December 1833); cf. J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, If, 1932, 93. Husband may have been one of the 'two more ministers of the Church of England... in this neighbourhood' who seceded in the early autumn of 1833, J. C. Philpot, *Memoir of Tiptaft*, 93 (letter of Tiptaft of 11 September, 1833). It is not clear whether one was the unnamed seceder mentioned by F. W. Newman in *Phases of Faith*, 1850, 17.

¹⁴⁰ Morshead's *apologia* was apparently entitled *Is the Church of England Apostate?* It drew forth replies from J. R. Page, (*Anatomy of the Rev. Wm. Morshead's 'Christian Minister's Protest'*, 1832) and H. R. Slade (*An Endeavour to Answer the Protest Made by William Morshead*, n.d.). Both authors argued that though there were abuses in the Church of England they were not sufficiently serious to justify separation.

¹⁴¹ *Alumni Cantabrigienses*.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ His secession pamphlet was reviewed in *The Christian Witness* I, 1834, 300-310. The reviewer, probably B. W. Newton, welcomed the secession and expressed the hope that Peter (as he called him) and other seceders would not become entangled in any other ecclesiastical system (309). *The Christian Witness* was the first Brethren organ.

¹⁴⁴ E. E. Cornwall, *Songs of Pilgrimage and Glory*, n.d., 62 f.; Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*. The account in *DNB* (art. 'Mary Bowly') is garbled.

¹⁴⁵ E.g. *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 1842.

¹⁴⁶ Morshead established a church in Bath under the leadership of elders as 'a fold wherein with a clear conscience and comfort to our souls we may tabernacle until [Christ's] appearing'. W. Morshead, *Sectarianism. A Call to the People of God in Bath*, 1833, 13. Morshead rejected paedobaptism as 'a perversion of Baptism, obscuring the type, and disobeying the command'. Idem, *The Baptism of the Redeemer and the Redeemed*, [1833], 2.

Peters described himself as 'Minister of the Gospel at Quenington, Gloucestershire'. J. W. Peters, *A Letter to Charles Jerram, A. M., Rector of Whitney, Oxon.*, 1836, title-page.

¹⁴⁷ J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.*, 182; II, 93.

¹⁴⁸ T. R. Hooper, art. 'Frederick Tryon of Deeping', *Baptist Quarterly*, New Series Vol. VI (1932-1933) 367-370; [M. J. Tyron], *A Small Momento of Frederick Tyron*, 1904.

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V

Secessions continued to occur in the eighteen forties. In addition to Baptist Noel, the names of Andrew Jukes,¹⁴⁹ Robert Govett,¹⁵⁰ and A. A. Rees¹⁵¹ might be mentioned. Enough has been said, however, to show that the contribution to dissent made by seceding clergymen was significant in terms of numbers. A detailed survey of their activities after secession would probably show that their contribution was weighty by reason of character and influence.

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¹⁴⁹ H. H. Jeafresson (ed.), *Letters of Andrew Jukes*, 1903, xxi ff.

¹⁵⁰ E. J. Poole-Connor, *Evangelical Unity*, [1941], 152-155.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 149, 150.