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NAZARETH.

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JUST after noon, one Saturday near the end of March, a party of us started from Jerusalem for the City of Damascus, about 130 miles, a little north-east of the Holy City. We rode small Syrian horses—tough, wiry, hardy, little creatures, who know just how to pick their way along the stony paths, and scarcely ever stumble or fall. There was not a single good road in all the land and nowhere, even in Jerusalem or any of the cities or villages, a single wagon, or wheeled carriage of any kind. After stopping over the Sabbath in our tents at a place called the Fountain of the Robbers, about thirteen miles from Jerusalem, we visited on our way Shechem, and the old Samaria, and Jezreel, and Mt. Gilboa, and crossed a wide plain, where at almost every step our horses trod on beautiful flowers, and the grass was green, and the whole scene was most inviting. It was the old plain of Jezreel—and winding around some high hills and up a beautiful valley, we came to Nazareth, where we felt most strangely, as at every step we thought *here Jesus used to live*. He looked on these hills, and all along this valley, and up into that sky.

Nazareth is very beautifully situated, just as seen in this picture; it lies right in a valley, and many of the houses are on the side of the hill that overlooks the city. But the streets are narrow and dirty, and the people were ragged and filthy. Nazareth had a very bad name when Jesus was there, and it never has had a much better one since. The Arabs say the devil has his home there, and while he goes abroad over the earth by day, he always goes back to Nazareth to stay at night, and they say he has the people all very much like him in everything.

Just as we went into the place, we saw a large low building of white stone and covering a good deal of ground. It was a Roman Catholic convent. In one of the rooms they show where Napoleon Bonaparte stayed when he was in the Holy Land. Near it is a church, which they say is built over the house where Jesus lived with Joseph and his mother Mary. In one of the rooms they showed us what they said was a bench where he worked as a carpenter, and some of the people believed all this so much, that they fell down on their knees and kissed the floor. All these stories, however, are lies. All that was there

when Jesus was there was destroyed or carried away long ago. But people without the Bible are very easily deceived.

Over at the other side of the town we pitched our tents near what was called "Mary's Fountain," for there, they said, Mary, the mother of Jesus, went for water, and Jesus used to go with her. Perhaps this was so, and we felt strangely when we drank at the same fountain.

Early the next morning we went up to the top of the high hill, right back of the city. It was very high. We could see Mt. Hermon away north, the Mediterranean Sea west, and the plains of Moab east, and the high hill, from which Jerusalem could be seen, in the south. Probably it was from some part of this hill the people wanted so wickedly to throw Jesus down and kill him.

Nazareth has now about 3,100 people—but O! how little they know about the Jesus who came into the world to save sinners. Some good men and women have schools there now, where the Bible is read, and they try to make Jesus known.

THE CHARACTERISTIC TENETS OF PLYMOUTHISM.

BY REV. JAMES HARPER, D. D.

THERE is much difficulty encountered in the attempt to ascertain and state the peculiar principles of Plymouthism. This difficulty arises from at least three concurrent causes; namely, first, the fact that Plymouthites repudiate the use of written creeds and confessions, and have never, so far as our knowledge extends, published any; secondly, the circumstance that on certain points which, in the main, seem to belong to the system, they differ from one another; and thirdly, the fact that in the statement of their views they appear often to indulge in a mystical strain, which to the initiated may be intelligible, but to those that are without conveys little meaning. It may be only an unfounded fancy, but we think we can trace among the minor expositors of the Plymouth faith, a striking resemblance in awkwardness and obscurity of style to that of Darby. Whether it be that the thoughts meant to be expressed are too deep or subtle for human language to convey; or whether it be that the writers have affected the ambiguity of heathen oracles, confident that the very mystery which hangs over their utterances would stimulate curiosity; or whether the fault lies in our own lack of acuteness and receptiveness, certain it is that we have often felt nonplussed to interpret the Plymouthite documents which have come into our hands. Not only have different writers seemed to contradict one another, but the same writer has often appeared to advocate positions irreconcilable with each other. Under the shield of this explanation, we proceed to sketch rapidly what we reckon to be the salient and most distinctive features of Plymouth doctrine.

1. The Brethren hold that the church had no existence before the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was miraculously bestowed, and three thousand souls

were converted, and by baptism recognized as the Lord's people, in conjunction with the little company of disciples who formed the germ of the church. According to this view, it is mere tautology to speak of "The New Testament church;" for there never was an Old Testament church, or a church in the Old Testament dispensation. The words of Christ, "On this rock I will build my church," are supposed to imply that the rearing of the church had not been begun, but was still prospective when they were uttered. It is not denied that some were saved before the advent of Christ; but it seems to be taught that Old Testament saints did not enjoy the continuous or permanent presence of the Holy Spirit, who is an in-dwelling Spirit only since Pentecost, and that they were not formed into a church organization or relation. The people of Israel, it is maintained, were a nation merely, and not a church. In this last point there will be observed a close coincidence between the views of Baptists and those of Plymouthites. By their theory as to the origin of the church, the Brethren repudiate the powerful argument for infant baptism, founded on infant circumcision, and hence it is not strange that the exclusive Brethren, at least, are opposed to the practice of infant baptism.

2. In respect to church government and order, the Brethren maintain that there ought to be close adherence to the pattern furnished in the apostolic church. In determining, however, what that pattern is, they make large allowance for temporary arrangements, which they suppose were designed to last only so long as the apostles lived, or at most, only so long as the age of miracles continued. On one thing they are clear, that, themselves excepted, all Christendom has grievously departed from the primitive model. With Baptists they agree in limiting membership in the church to adults who profess, and are judged, to have been born again. All the Lord's people being priests, it is held that they all alike have the right of speaking in the assemblies of the faithful; the only limitation being manifested incompetence, of which, we presume, the hearers are constituted judges. It is intimated, however, by some who have a right to know and testify, that this "liberty of prophesying" is much more a matter of theory than of practice among the Brethren.

The custom of ordaining men to office, say the Plymouthites, is neither requisite, nor right, for although it existed in apostolic times it was not meant to survive those days. Only the Apostles and those endowed with a special gift of the Spirit were meant to exercise an appointing and ordaining prerogative; yet this, say the Brethren, does not hinder that men possessing peculiar qualifications should take the lead in the gatherings of the church.

The office of pastor and that of evangelist they take to be distinct, and while they admit that the latter functionary is entitled to pecuniary compensation for his services, they deny that the former is.

It is a principle strongly insisted upon by the Brethren that the Holy Spirit presides in the "assemblies," or church meetings, and that no arrangement should be made which might in any way preclude or impede the carrying out of any of the impulses of the Spirit on those occasions. There is reason to think, however, that notwithstanding the pretensions to liberty, and to a direct

recognition of the Spirit's control, there is a great deal of authority exercised by individuals in the management of the meetings, and as much at least of preconcerted action on these occasions, as there is among those who are stigmatized by the brethren as usurpers in the house of God, and stiflers of the Spirit.

The principle that the Psalms of Scripture form a meet and sufficient, and the only authorized manual of solemn praise in the present dispensation, is extremely repugnant to the Brethren. Those Psalms, they think, are so saturated with the spirit of Judaism, are struck in a key so low, so plaintive and penitential, as to be altogether unsuited or inadequate to express the high praises which the Church of God should render. This is certainly the attitude of the Brethren proper toward the Psalms, but there may be some among the non-exclusive Brethren who admit the propriety of singing the Psalms, and perhaps are attached to churches distinguished for using the Psalms alone in singing the praises of God.

It will be seen from this glance at the government and order of the Brethren, that they embrace in their system certain elements of Congregationalism, Quakerism, Antipædo-baptism, with perhaps, a flavoring of Irvingism. It is easy also to see how nearly allied in some respects, Plymouthism is to Mysticism.

3. In regard to the Atonement, Plymouthites hold, so far as I can judge, what is known as the Governmental theory, that is, that the atonement was a contrivance by which such a general display was given by God of his hatred of sin that, without running any risk of seeming to countenance sin, he can pardon and save whom he will. Thus explained, the atonement was a measure of expediency, not primarily or at all, as we believe it to have been, a satisfaction to the retributive justice of God. According to this theory, there is nothing in the nature of God to forbid the pardon of sin irrespective of an atonement, unless his benevolent desire to guard against the spread of sin among his creatures. The atonement is thus of the nature simply of a warning to the intelligent universe, not to think lightly of sin even when God pardons it, and hence the atonement is indiscriminate and universal. Such seems to be the doctrine of atonement which Plymouthites favor; although they do not speak very explicitly on the subject, unless in asserting that the atonement was made equally for all men.

That Christ's obedience to the precepts of the law, his "active obedience," formed any part of his work of atonement or satisfaction, the Brethren stoutly deny. His obedience to the law, say they, was incumbent on him as a man, just as any other man ought to obey the law. In obeying the law, it is true, he set us a good example, and so contributed, it is said, to our benefit; but that he kept the law in our room is pronounced preposterous.

Then again, not even all the sufferings of Christ are admitted by Plymouthites to have been of an atoning nature, but only those which he endured upon the cross. Nay, some of the Brethren deny that all of the sufferings of Christ on the cross were penal in their nature, or atoning in their design, but only those which he endured during the three hours of darkness which preceded the

exclamation, "It is finished." Thus the bold conclusion seems to be reached that even the very death of Christ was not atoning in its design, seeing it occurred after the triumphant utterance just quoted! Some of Mr. Darby's speculations as to the nature and design of Christ's sufferings during his life on earth, I consider to be fraught with danger to the doctrine of atonement which he professes to deem so precious.

4. In respect to justification, it is difficult to discover what the doctrine of Plymouthites is. This, at least, is clear, that their doctrine on this point is not that of Luther or Calvin, of Dort or Westminster. Their theory of atonement gives color and shape to their doctrine of justification. They deny—at least Darby, their chief theologian, does—that the righteousness imputed to the sinner for justification, consists in part of the obedience of Christ to the law throughout his life on earth. "If righteousness," says Darby, "come by law, then Christ is dead in vain; but if Christ has fulfilled the law for me, it does come by law, and Christ is dead in vain." Elsewhere the same writer remarks, "I do not hesitate to say that those who speak of the appropriation of Christ's living righteousness to us for righteousness, and hold the sufferings of his active service to have been penal and vicarious, have in no case a full, clear and Scriptural Gospel."

Mr Darby, and others of his school, impugn the statement that sinners are justified on account of the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, or set to their account, and allege in opposition, that in Scripture it is the righteousness of God that is said to be the ground of our justification. If it be asked, "What is meant by the 'righteousness of God?'" Mr. Darby's reply, in one instance, is this: "God's righteousness is his perfect consistency with his own perfect and blessed nature." Righteousness in this sense is an essential characteristic or quality of God's nature, and if this be the righteousness imputed to us in justification, we are justified on the ground of an essential attribute of God set to our account. In some way not explained, and so far as I can see, inexplicable, unless upon the Governmental theory, the atoning work of Christ was necessary in order that this imputation of divine righteousness might be made.

In some of his multifarious writings, Mr. Darby's teaching in regard to justification seems to be this: That in consideration of the penal sufferings of Christ on the cross, lasting for about three hours, the curse resting upon the sinner is removed by God, acceptance being graciously superadded, just as Christ was accepted and raised to glory. Thus in the final sufferings of Christ, our pardon, or forgiveness, is laid; and in the resurrection of Christ is laid our acceptance. Accordingly, Plymouthites have much to say about "life in the risen Lord," and about the resurrection of Christ as the fundamental truth of the Gospel. Apparently they think that our pardon, being founded on the atoning work of Christ, is granted by God in his *judicial* capacity; but that our acceptance with God and title to glory are granted by God in his *sovereign* capacity, as an unmerited boon, and not as a benefit purchased, or merited in our behalf, by Christ as our representative. Thus the resurrection of Christ appears in the Plymouth creed to sustain virtually the same relation to a

sinner's salvation, which in our creed the Redeemer's active obedience is alleged to sustain to it. The resurrection is not merely the evidence of the Father's approval of the Son's work of satisfaction, but also, according to Plymouthites, the ground of a believer's standing as righteous in the sight of God. I know not what else is the meaning of such a statement as this, which we have from the pen of Mr. Stanley, one of the approved expounders of the Plymouth faith: "Thus, whilst his precious blood clears from all sin, his resurrection brings me into a state of absolute righteousness in him risen." In similar mystical strain, another of the brethren, Mr. Mackintosh, thus writes: "In giving up his life, he gave up also the sin attached thereto, so that it is effectually put away, having been left in the grave, from which he arose triumphant in the power of a new life, to which righteousness as distinctly attaches itself as did sin to that life which he gave up on the cross."

5. The Brethren teach that the believer is not under the law of God in any sense, not even as a rule of life. It is a favorite saying with them that "the law can do nothing but condemn the man that is under it." At the same time they teach that the believer, who is no longer under law, is under obligation to walk as Christ walked; and they seem even to disparage the moral law, as not high enough or sufficiently comprehensive to be a rule or guide to the Christian. Mr. Stanley thus expresses himself: "I do not find the law ever presented as the rule of life or walk to the risen child of God. The law was perfect for the purpose for which it was given. But the new commandment goes much further, 'That ye love one another as I have loved you.'"

Mr. Mackintosh, who occupies a high place among the Brethren, thus discourses: "In a word, then, it is evident that a sinner cannot be justified by the works of the law, and it is equally evident that the law is not the rule of a believer's life." In another place, the same writer holds this language: "Then as to the believer's rule of life, the apostle does not say 'To me, to live is the law,' but 'To me to live is Christ.' Christ is our rule, our model, our touchstone, our all. The continual inquiry of the Christian should be, not, 'Is this or that according to the law?' but, 'Is it like Christ?' The law never could teach me to love, bless and pray for my enemies; but this is exactly what the Gospel teaches me to do, and what the divine nature leads me to do."

The foregoing extracts, which are but specimens of many that might be presented from the writings of recognized Plymouthites, may serve to justify the suspicion that the drift of Plymouthism is toward Antinomianism. To our mind, it is very clear that such is its tendency, although for a time sundry happy impediments may check the native outcome of the system. Indeed, it is asserted by those who have an opportunity to observe, that the practice of the Brethren in respect to the Sabbath, is as lax as the teachings of their leaders would cause us to apprehend. Mr. Mackintosh, in a tract from which we have already quoted, announces in the dogmatic tone characteristic of Plymouthites, that there is no scriptural authority for observing the first day of the week as the "Christian Sabbath," although he goes on to declare his disapprobation of any who do not abstain from ordinary work or recreation on that

day. His readers might naturally ask why he insists that the first day should be kept as the Sabbath, if it is not the Sabbath, as he asserts it is not. He denies that the seventh day is now to be kept as the Sabbath, and maintains that the Fourth Commandment gives no authority for observing the first day of the week as holy. Those who follow him to this extent, will very probably feel at a loss to know on what ground he inculcates abstinence from ordinary work and recreation on the first day, or any other day of the week.

6. As to the important subject of Sanctification, the teaching of the Brethren is somewhat misty. First, they allege that Christ is our sanctification; meaning, we suppose, that in him we have an objective sanctification—in other words, that his holiness is reckoned in law as ours. If this, however, be the meaning, sanctification in this aspect is the same as justification, or at least as that element of justification which we call acceptance. Second, they declare that every believer is endowed with a new and holy nature, and that this nature is as sinless and pure from the outset as it ever can be. In the Christian then there are two natures, one of which is called “the old man,” is incorrigible, and the other, “the new man,” which is absolutely pure. The new nature, it is granted, may develop and grow, but only in the way in which the Saviour, who was from the beginning of his human life altogether pure, grew in wisdom and “in favor with God and man.” The new nature, it is affirmed, cannot sin, while the old nature “is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” There appears to be in this theory some ground for the charge that Plymouthites are Perfectionists. They deprecate, it is true, the Oberlin and also the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection; but they seem to hold that there is a sphere of thought, feeling and outward action, in which the believer is characterized by perfect holiness in the present life, and that also from the first moment of his renewal by grace. Inasmuch, moreover, as the old nature is utterly and irremediably sinful, the Christian is not to aim at improving it, that is, at eradicating or weakening the evil propensities that are in him, but simply to exercise himself in developing the new life which has been imparted to him. It is not very uncharitable to suppose that this doctrine, once accepted, will be apt to produce a feeling of irresponsibility for the pranks of the old nature, on the part of him who considers himself to have been born again. In connection with this, it may be mentioned as somewhat significant, that the Brethren appear to be adverse to ask forgiveness for the sins of their daily walk; the Lord’s prayer even being objectionable to them because it contains a petition for the pardon of sin. The Psalms, also, which abound in expressions of contrition and in fervent supplications for pardon, are for this reason, as well as others, unpalatable to Plymouthites.

Before concluding this imperfect sketch of the peculiar features of Plymouthism, we must mention that the Brethren are strenuous advocates of the pre-millennial theory of the Second Advent of Christ; but as that is a view held by not a few in almost all Protestant denominations, we shall not dwell upon it.