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Early Beginnings

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Zuerst erschienen in: *The Christian's Library* 3 (1901), S. 169–185.

Zeichengetreuer Abdruck. Die Seitenzahlen des Originals sind in eckigen Klammern und kleinerer, roter Schrift eingefügt.

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Early Beginnings.

Notes of Mr J. N. Darby's Journey, and an Outline of the Work of the Lord in Germany, Switzerland, and the South of France. Taken at the Tea Meeting at Rawstorne Street, 24th November 1853.

IT is of great importance that we should most deeply feel that the work *God* is doing on the earth, it is *He Himself* that is doing it. It is true that He uses us as His servants in it, but there is always the danger of *SELF* appearing in anything that connects itself with man, who is merely an instrument – but so far as man is hidden, God is glorified, and all goes on well. Therefore, in thus speaking of the wonderful works of God (Acts ii. 11), the trials and difficulties of those engaged in it never appear, and of course cannot be known, for you cannot enter into the details and various shades of the work.

It is quite a right thing that the saints of God should know that the power of God's grace is still working in drawing sinners to Himself, and by the power of His Spirit He is driving away individually the gross darkness that covereth the people. Therefore it is right that the saints in distant places should have such intelligence of the work as to feel fellowship with those who are thus contending against Satan's power in the world. For while waiting for the Lord's coming [170] from heaven to set everything right, our lamps should be brightly burning, and our hearts filled with the consciousness that, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes, whatever things are wrong now will *then* be set right, and *never before*. For Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. And the whole desire and devotedness of our hearts should be set on this one point. It is true that the very thought of souls being brought to the knowledge of the Lord should rejoice our hearts. As the witnessing of God's grace still working in the midst of abounding evil, this stirs up the soul and gives it fresh energy to follow on in the work of the Lord, and besides this it also gives fresh energy to the soul of God's servant, to be found working in *God's line of things*, for God has His own thoughts concerning everything that is now taking place on the earth, but He will work according to the counsels of His own will, and who shall let it?

But still the more we go on we shall feel, and rightly so, as David says: "I have seen an end of all perfection" (Psalm cxix. 96). But when He comes who is perfection itself, then the hearts of such will be satisfied, for if we feel what salvation is in ourselves, having been brought to God, the thought of one soul being brought there is endless joy.

The Lord is working in these last days preparatory to His coming (I fix no time, long or [171] short) in a most manifest way in quickening souls, and in a way more remarkable than ever He did, for while the world is in trouble in various ways, men are thus led to seek their rest elsewhere. Souls are being shaken and disturbed by things around, and are the more cast on Him to find their rest. For without pretending to say when it may be, it is evident that the bonds of everything are weakening, and the men of the world know and feel that all outward bonds are dissolving, not of *evil*, for they are growing stronger, but all ties that held society together in good feeling are daily dying out. Men are meeting in synods and are entirely at their wits' ends to know what is to be done when all their external things are gone. None question that there was a mighty work of God's Spirit at the Reformation,* which has lasted these three hundred years, but there has long since ceased to be that life and energy, so that they do not know what will be done when Ro-

* Many, alas! do now, in 1901. – W. H. B.

man Catholicism comes in in power. Evil has come in, for there is an astonishing reaction of evil principle at work at the present time in Europe – take an instance, that of Romanism (Rationalism?) in Germany. At the same time there exists the full consciousness in the Evangelical Church of the want of energy to keep itself alive.

Then on the other hand it cannot but be seen [172] that there is also at this time a remarkable energy of God's Spirit, producing heavings in the large inert masses of professing Christians, and also working individually, by an amazing energy in one and another springing up among them, and this works for good, and if they are not allowed to work there God takes them somewhere else. For if a man will not work while he himself is out of the evil, God will work by some one in it, for He will have instruments. I have also seen places where, through the slackness and languor of Brethren, the work has been given to others; this has not surprised me, for if you are slack in seeking souls He may discipline in this way. God will not wait to quicken souls till you have energy enough, but will use somebody else, for *God must have souls*, and it is most useful for us to see this, for if this is the way in which God is working, I am most anxious we should all look soberly at it, and lay it to heart, and go to the source of all power for fresh strength and energy, for in the midst of the greatest languor God can arouse and give fresh strength. In speaking to you of the work I will mention the places as I visited them last year on my leaving England, and will endeavour to take you all there with me in spirit.

FRANCE.

PARIS. – Here is a despised little flock of happy, fervent, devoted Christians. The place [173] itself is one of great difficulty from the excessive vanity that surrounds them, and being principally servants, lady's maids, and the like, they have great difficulty in getting to the meetings, but still the number is increasing. They have no one labouring among them in the way of preaching – they edify one another, and God is still adding to their number. There are about thirty or forty of them. After going through deep trials, that we helped them to, for some years, they are now going on better, are very happy, and more united than ever. *Elie Meylan*, who was in England last year, has been at Paris for a little while, and found them happy.

LYONS. – Here the saints have gone through great trials. The place itself is Roman Catholic. It is also the centre of the Evangelical Alliance in France. There is a large Evangelical Church at Lyons, where there is decided blessing in conversions. In this church is a M. *Fisch*, who is well known to myself, and labours with much blessing in this most trying place. M. *Fisch* and another brother with him have a full knowledge of the truth we hold, as – the coming of the Lord, the presence of the Holy Ghost, the union of the Body to Christ, &c. M. *Fisch* is fully convinced that we are right, so that he has been spreading the truth we hold, both outside and inside, yet he himself is very clerical, and has not sufficient courage to break with the position he is in, and leave system altogether. [174] Some half-measures have been taken, that is, they break bread every Lord's Day. But these half-measures will only hinder souls who receive the truth he teaches from coming out and walking with God. The Brethren meeting at Lyons have a brother, named *Vey*, most remarkably gifted, though uneducated, who is ministering among them with great blessing.

NICE. – Here the Lord has been working in a most wonderful way. Three or four years ago people would not have been allowed to take a French or Italian Bible into Nice. On arriving there this year I found the funeral of a brother, who had been a known Catholic, was about to take place. He had got peace through a brother at Nice, named *Boissier*. He

was buried by a club to which he belonged, and several hundred workmen were present. It caused a very great sensation in the place on account of its being a Protestant burial, as there had not been one before. An immense crowd followed him, and as we passed through the town many more were added to the number. At the grave a minister prayed, then a converted priest spoke, and then our brother spoke a full hour with very much power and blessing. The people were most attentive.

MARSEILLES. – This large town is the Plymouth of the south of France. There are forty breaking bread. *Violet* and *Campredon* are working there. The Protestants of Marseilles [175] have appointed deaconesses to visit and care for the sick and poor, and one of these deaconesses came lately to break bread with us, and although she was quite willing to go on with them, yet they have utterly cast her off. She was considered the best deaconess in the place. This circumstance has awakened much attention and persecution at Marseilles. There are vast opportunities for labouring in this place.

THE PYRENEES. – At Pau our brother *Barbet*, who is now laid aside, has worked for many years with much blessing. Then there is much blessing in the neighbouring district. At Orthez and other places fully two hundred are breaking bread in various spots. They have been occasionally troubled by the police. They are gathered together again, and many more have come into communion. There have been, and still are, many conversions there.

Our brother, *Violet*, has been much blessed at Lausanne. When staying there some years since, two brethren asked me to read the Scriptures with them. I hesitated at first, fearing it might hinder me in my other work. However, three more came, who were with a schoolmaster, and had learned so much truth, that he said they might go. They joined the other two, and thus they went on till the number got up to twelve. I read with these daily from ten till one. We then dined together, and we also broke bread together every day after [176] dinner. On the first day of the week we broke bread with the rest of the saints. I had, in the large building, where we met for worship, some rooms where these brethren met. It was no plan of mine, for in truth I was shy of it at first, but the Lord ordered it all, and if I were to attempt to do such a thing now, I could not do it. These brethren are now working in different parts of France and Switzerland with blessing. *Violet* was one of them – it was this that led me to mention these facts – and he has been working in the Pyrenees with blessing. One hundred and fifty or so have been converted. *Carrive*, a nice useful brother, a farmer, lives in this neighbourhood, and does what he can.

BORDEAUX, in the north of the Pyrenees, where there are a good many Christians, but without much energy. Our brother D— is working at a place near where some twenty or thirty are going on happily. An evangelist has been sent into the neighbourhood by the Church of M. *Fisch* at Lyons. At Clairac a little more east, a considerable number are gathered and many conversions. Our brother *Guignard* has been preaching here with much blessing. There is also a Free Church here into which much truth held by Brethren has penetrated. There are about sixty or seventy there.

MONTPELLIER, east of the Pyrenees, quite in the south of France. In this neighbourhood is St Hippolyte. For a long time I preached to [177] one hundred and fifty women and only two men, because the men were ashamed to come; they were such infidels. Our brother *Faves* also had great labour and patience there. I was much struck with the Lord's way in keeping them very low and humble; difficulties pressed hard upon them; they were very much tried with ... for seven years, yet conversions were going on, and the Lord was adding to their number. He chastened them and now they get on better.

At the centre of the south of France the work of God's Spirit is very manifest by others as well as by Brethren. A brother from Lyons, who had been a merchant, but lost all

his property, except £ 150 a year, has devoted himself since to going about as a missionary. He is an upright, zealous, faithful man; his name is *Mourton*. He took his knapsack on his back and went about the country thrashing the people with the law, but had no conversions, as he did not preach the gospel. *Mourton* came into Montpellier, thundering the law, but had no conversions, but still he prepared the ground; for when he was followed by our brother *Sabbatier* bringing the full gospel of the grace of God, many conversions were the result of his preaching, the seed having sprung up. There are about eighty or a hundred breaking bread. At St Laurent in this neighbourhood I was very happy; several have been converted there this year. At St André [178] de Valborgne, a very dear godly brother is labouring amidst much opposition and blessing. At St Hippolyte, a Swiss brother, *Guignard*, has been much blessed. At Montpellier, one by one have been added by a very dear godly brother who is a physician, M. *Parlier*, who lives there and who receives the saints into his house. There are now happy conversions and much activity of life in the different villages surrounding Montpellier. If labourers were there, many doors would be open, the Spirit of God producing the sense of need. At Frisa, one of the villages of St Jean du Gard, it was very uphill work for many years, but there have been forty or fifty converted within the past year; in some cases whole families were brought out. When I was travelling I met the mayor of the place, who was once very much opposed, reading one of my works. I asked him about it, when he replied: "Oh, I don't suppose you will like it." When I told him I was the writer, he said that if I would come and preach there, I should have not only one hundred but twelve hundred to hear me, and so I found it. The meetings were once broken up by the police, but they were resumed again through the husband of one of the sisters, who was a Roman Catholic, and who wrote to the Commissioners and said that his wife had always had such meetings without any evil consequences following, but on the contrary, she got blessing from them, upon which the police retracted, and they [179] have continued these meetings ever since with much blessing, but the room is not large enough and labourers are wanted.

The DRÔME (back of the Rhone). – Here, too, there has been very uphill work. One brother was imprisoned three months for the truth, but now there is much blessing. Thirty or forty Roman Catholics have been converted, and humanly speaking, there would have been more had there been labourers. There appears to be a great awakening amongst them all. Three or four clergymen have been converted who were infidels. The people saw that there was a great awakening, and it so laid hold upon them that the Wesleyan ministers were allowed to preach in the infidel pulpits. The windows even of the building where the preaching was were crowded all round on the outside when I was there, and many could find no room. Twelve women, silk spinners, came to me to speak about their souls the morning I came away. One clergyman, who was an infidel, got into another strain and preached the gospel evidently with another life, leaving his infidelity behind his back, who, if he had been questioned about the inspiration of the Scriptures, might have been puzzled. In fact, the power of the Spirit of God carried them away from their infidelity without their knowing anything about it. In short, the movement of God's Spirit was so remarkable that it seemed to carry persons altogether beyond themselves [180] into a new life. Up the mountains, I suppose, there must be a hundred breaking bread.

ARDÈCHE. – A hundred were converted here last year. One brother came and preached the *law*, and he was followed by our brother *Guignard*, who preached Christ fully, and thus souls got life and liberty in Christ. There have been seven or eight hundred breaking bread. At Montbéliard we held a fortnight's reading, which was greatly blessed. As our way is abroad to set apart a fortnight at a time to read some book of the Scriptures together, as we have lately done at Bath; for, if we are to be teachers of others, we must

be making progress in the knowledge of Scripture ourselves. At Montbéliard and two other places there are very near three hundred breaking bread and conversions going on. Almost the whole village of Colombier-Chatelot is converted. At Besançon, a large popish town, about forty or fifty are breaking bread.

SWITZERLAND.

In Switzerland it is a much older work; at one time many of those who worked here went to France to meet the demand there, but languor has crept in and it had grown cold; but now two clergymen have been lately raised up to work there.

At LAUSANNE there are two hundred gathered; the Lord blessed me with conversions there this year. At Vevey much blessing is going on. [181] One hundred and fifty are breaking bread. In the surrounding country there is much revival, most happy meetings in various places, and many breaking bread, and in the Canton de Vaud violent persecutions. When persecutions arose in Switzerland, the dissenters gave up their meetings in various places, but the Brethren did not; they still went on and the godly ones joined them. The president of the dissenters' meetings is much blessed among them.

NEUCHATEL. – Here there is great blessing and extension of the work. There also lives here a very godly brother, —, a person of consideration in the world. His aunt has built a hospital, according to the custom of the country, and all who go in there get blessing; for meetings are held there. About seventy or eighty converted. Several are now meeting at La Chapelle; also at Berne and Basle there are a few breaking bread.

GERMANY.

FRANKFORT. – Here our sister Miss Whately is and the converted Jewesses, the Misses Stern, also a godly shoemaker who has been much blessed there. I found blessing and was happy there with them. The next I might mention is Tubingen in Wurtemberg, about thirty or forty are breaking bread. At Dusseldorf and Elberfeld, there is a remarkable work of God's Spirit. There has been what is called a Brüderverein set [182] up in this neighbourhood by the Church people, which Brüderverein is a kind of home missionary establishment, where persons get qualified as Scripture readers. Amongst them were evangelical clergymen, very legal, but still Christians, although of a very low standing and worldly state. (*Krumacher* was once here.) When some of these Brüderverein saw their liberty of preaching Christ, and were forbidden by the clergymen of the Society to do so, they united with the Brethren in fellowship and service. Our brother *Von Poseck* got hold of one or two of these Brüderverein who were going about selling Bibles and reading them to others. Through them he circulated amongst them various tracts which he had translated from the English as, "The Hopes of the Church," &c., and some of the Brüderverein receiving truth from these tracts imparted it to others. When they understood that they were to preach Christ, if they had ability, they told it to the clergymen of the Mission, who forbade them and turned them off telling them they might go about their business, and accordingly they went immediately on the Lord's business, which was now their own business. The work thus begun has resulted in eight hundred or more conversions, most of which have taken place during the past year. There are forty meetings in this neighbourhood, but they do not break bread at them all. About twelve brethren are labouring amongst them. They go on foot preaching the [183] gospel as far as the frontiers of Holland and of Hesse in each direction, and are much blessed in the work, the Lord being with them. They have had many interruptions by persecution, and have had their meetings broken up by the police, and then they went elsewhere. They were fined several

times for having what the police called a procession, when it was merely a dozen or fifteen returning home together from a meeting in the country. They were always obliged to give notice before they could hold a meeting, but however, all this has not hindered, but rather helped on the work of the Lord, for the chief of the Burgomasters became converted, and then he called the other Burgomasters to order for hindering their meetings. I trembled much for these brethren, for the danger with them is this – they had formerly been under the influence of the popular preacher, who kept them under law and taught them that to be always on their faces crying to God to help them as poor sinners was a healthful state of soul. When they subsequently got hold of the truth of their being dead and risen with Christ, and were so full of joy in knowing their sins put away, when they saw that they were not to be thinking of their sins, but their eyes were to be fixed on Christ, they said: “Oh, we are dead and risen with Christ, and have nothing more to do with our sins.” Now while the Spirit of God keeps them really looking to Christ, this is most blessed, but what [184] I fear for them is that they should neglect to judge themselves for the sin still remaining in them. I felt the danger from the sudden influx of light in the time of declension. However, I was very happy with them, and spoke to them freely on this point.

In FRANCE the police magistrates require the names and occupations of those meeting. We could not always give a list of names because all Christians are received whose walk is godly. In general the names are given which leads to imprisonment. Sometimes the police have come in when persons have unexpectedly come into a meeting and increased the number, and have turned out the overplus. Thus if twenty-seven had been the number of names given in, the police would turn out into the street all above the twenty-seven. One brother was imprisoned fifteen days for the truth; another three weeks; another was fined £ 12; another was fined for not giving the names of all who came. It is also required to state the principles and objects of those who meet, and thus the Lord’s coming and other important truths are spread before magistrates on all hands. One of the official persons with whom I had an interview when I put before him our objects, said he was thankful that we should edify one another and so forth, but it must be done as authorised by law. There was some difficulty in this, for I felt it would be scarcely honest to ask to be [185] authorised, when I well knew we should meet just the same if not authorised. One Christian officer has had an interview with the present Emperor, in order to present to him some articles belonging to Napoleon Bonaparte. He had thus an opportunity of setting before the Emperor (who had previously been prejudiced against the Brethren, saying they were red republicans) all the principles of Brethren, their separation from politics, &c. &c., thus removing the stigma usually attached to Protestants, who are, in truth, most of them, red republicans, and the Emperor was satisfied. A Prefect was directed to protect the meetings of Brethren through similar representations of a lady, connected with the Minister of the Interior, so that now they let them be quiet, and meetings are multiplied all about the country, and there are twenty or thirty labouring in the gospel.