

AN APPEAL TO PRESERVE THE TRUTH IN THE LAST DAYS

The Partial Inspiration Theory

The Ashcroft Division



TRADITIONALLY, Christadelphians recognise that Bible Truth has been revived in the latter days by the instrumentality of John Thomas MD, with the publication of *Elpis Israel* in 1849. He unearthed the Truth from the mountains of clerical nonsense, which had obscured it for many years.

Whilst the revival of the Truth was at the hands of Bro. Thomas, the subsequent *preservation* of it against numerous onslaughts made upon it in ensuing years, is owed in large measure to the unswerving valiant efforts of Bro. Robert Roberts.

In the early years of the Truth's revival, the preaching was vigorous, and all kinds of "fish" were drawn into the gospel net (Mat. 13:47-48). Some were acceptable; others were not. Looking back, it is obvious that the time had come in the providence of God, to test the believers and make manifest their true characters.

The "Reverend" Robert Ashcroft

In 1876, Robert Ashcroft, a Congregational Minister, accepted the Truth and was immersed. He was a remarkable convert. He gave up a popular pulpit, a good salary of 400 British pounds per annum, many friends, and a social position, for his new-found convictions. There is little doubt (as we shall later show) that his faith then was strong and genuine. He was a polished preacher, a man of considerable scholarly attainments, very cultured, a gentleman. Nevertheless he was to be the instigator of the greatest and most bitter division the Christadelphian movement has seen so far in its latter-day history.

Bro. C. C. Walker described him as "*an engaging personality, at that time about 34 years of age, and a man of some eloquence, but without sufficient stability of character to 'endure unto the end.'* That he endured much [in the eight years he was with us — S.S.] is indisputable, and Bro. Roberts felt a great affection for him in consequence, and it was a very great grief of mind when, through stress of controversy, separation had to come" (*My Ways and My Days*, p. 254). Bro. Islip Collyer remembers him as: "*A charming man who would unbend to amuse the children without either teasing them or being silly in the manner of so many who try their hands at entertaining the young*" (*Robert Roberts*, p. 110).

A New Theory

The purpose of this series of articles is to demonstrate that a great work has

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been done on our behalf by the Hand of Providence, to preserve the Truth against all attacks, and notwithstanding the human faults and failings of Bro. Roberts, be they many or few, it is a matter of history that *he has been the one whose actions have rallied the brethren to preserve the apostolic Truth in its purity*. We need to appreciate that through such efforts we still have that purity of teaching with us today, and we need to uphold all faithful efforts to maintain it. All those who opposed him turned a little to the right, or to the left (Josh. 23:6), and sometimes widely away from pure Bible teaching. We intend to closely follow the Ashcroft controversy in this series — but first, let us summarise the contention and its consequences.

The *Inspiration Controversy* for a while eclipsed all other matters in *The Christadelphian* magazine of the time. Ecclesias were split all over the ecclesial world, some losing one third, or one half of their members — and in some cases whole ecclesias went over to the new doctrine. In Birmingham, in Bro. Roberts' own ecclesia, one quarter of the members, were not supporting him in the resulting division. In many cases brethren and ecclesias did not agree with Bro. Roberts' stand over the *implementation of fellowship*, rather than over the Inspiration Question itself. But the result was a lasting division for many years, into what became known as the *Temperance Hall* and *Suffolk St.* fellowships.

Summary of the Division.

We intend to follow this important episode in the history of the Truth, from the first mention of Robert Ashcroft in the pages of *The Christadelphian*. But first a brief overview will acquaint readers with the direction in which we are heading.

For a time, following his baptism in 1876, Robert Ashcroft worked exceptionally well, lecturing all over the country, upbuilding the brethren, and even helping Bro. Roberts in the production of *The Christadelphian* as assistant editor. Intelligence in the magazine showed that he was very active, and that his efforts were exceptionally appreciated in ecclesias wherever he went.

Then, on September 21st, 1884, he was due to lecture at Swansea, and his choice of the title for his lecture was puzzling: *“Inspiration: Its Necessity, Nature and Limits.”* Some brethren were apprehensive, asking as to what are the alleged limits of Bible inspiration?

Events now moved rapidly. In the following month, there appeared the first and only issue of a new magazine, edited by Bro. Ashcroft, titled: *THE EXEGETIST*. It was scholarly, but deadly in its attack upon the total inspiration of the Scriptures of Truth. In this issue, an article appeared entitled: *“Theories in Inspiration,”* and it was this article that did the damage. If this attack of Robert Ashcroft had not been met instantly, and totally opposed by Bro. Roberts, it is doubtful whether the Truth would have been preserved for us today. How can one live a life of faith and trust in Yahweh, such as exhibited by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, etc., if one has the guidance of only a *partially inspired* Bible?

The true nature of the attack was not perceived at the time by many, due to the pleasant personality of the perpetrator. He was *gentlemanly, scholarly*, with culture and eloquence, and they had known him and been thrilled by his discourses, and the arguments presented by him were plausible.

Summary of the Theory

Partial inspiration of the Bible, as propounded by Robert Ashcroft, is the

accepted theory of the clergy today. The report of the *Commission on Christian Doctrine* appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922, p. 29 records: "The tradition of the inerrancy of the Bible commonly held in the Church until the beginning of the nineteenth century... cannot be maintained in the light of the knowledge now at our disposal..." There is no fundamental variance between this clerical understanding of the Scriptures, and that put forward by Robert Ashcroft and his followers.

His proposition was that *only* such parts of the Old Testament Scriptures are divinely inspired as could not *otherwise* be produced; that matters which were within the normal knowledge of the Bible writer (the historical details, for example) were not governed by divine inspiration. It was maintained that "*The Bible is not to be spoken of as the Word of God without qualification.*" Also that "*There is in the Bible a human element*" — by which he means an erring as well as divine element. Again, he stated: "*Inspiration only covers all that may be said to belong to divine revelation proper.*" (*The Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, p. 550).

In the course of these articles we shall look closely at the details of this erroneous teaching, which is, in reality, totally destructive of all authority and power of Scripture, and we shall consider Bro. Roberts' masterly response to the *Exegetist* article appearing in *The Christadelphian*, 1884, pp. 538-554.

Those who did not support Bro. Roberts' position formed a separate meeting, with the establishment of a rival magazine: *The Fraternal Visitor*. Robert Ashcroft had commenced a monthly called *The Truth*, but handed it over to Dr. Thirtle after about six months. Evidently Dr. Thirtle's writings were not acceptable, and when he retired after some three months, a committee was formed, resulting in *The Fraternal Visitor*, towards the end of 1885.

As for the ex-Congregational minister, Robert Ashcroft, he returned to his clerical affiliations and the pulpit, and afterwards drifted into Spiritualism.

The Birmingham Ecclesia endured six months of absolute misery (*The Christadelphian*, 1885, pp. 306-309), until the inevitable division. The ecclesia was dissolved and reconstituted with the greater number under the guidance of Bro. Roberts, and the ecclesia declaring for a wholly inspired and infallible Bible. The basis of understanding was placed at the head of their *Statement of Faith* as:

The Foundation

That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation (2Tim. 3:16; 1Cor. 2:13; Heb. 1:1; 2Pet. 1:21; 1Cor. 14:37; Neh. 9:30; Jn. 10:35).

A Complete About Face

When Robert Ashcroft warmly embraced the Truth in 1876, he expressed the opinion that Dr. Thomas was the greatest man since the days of the apostles (*The Christadelphian*, 1878, pp. 345-346). Yet, in 1884 he "discovered" that Dr. Thomas' knowledge of biblical criticism was so defective, that he, Robert Ashcroft, would feel abashed "to be compelled approvingly to place some of his philological puerilities in the hands of an average college student." He claimed that Dr. Thomas was ignorant "of almost the entire apparatus which must assist in the determination of textual matters in Hebrew and Greek (*ibid*, 1885, p. 33).

What a different story Robert Ashcroft previously confessed in 1879 when, freed at last from (to use his own phrase) “pulpit perplexities,” he wrote of his former ignorance of even the first principles of Bible truth prior to coming in contact with the Christadelphians. He then said of himself, “he can only think with pain and sorrow of the part he formerly took in the crooked ways of the apostasy, when he stood before the people as the professed and salaried exponent of a book whose first principles even, he did not understand.” He went on to say publicly, that of the miseries of the modern pulpit: “They rank among ‘things whereof we are now ashamed,’ and ‘whose end is death’.” (*ibid*, 1879, pp. 146-147). Later in the same year, he wrote: “The writer is made sad by the remembrance that for several years he filled a position which had been created by man’s ignorance of God’s Word... But what glorious things were hidden from us in those days!... Who gave the clergy the authority so entirely to change the terms of the gospel proclamation — to ignore the divinely appointed ordinance of immersion — and to graft their degenerate customs on the stock of Bible phrase?” (*ibid*, 1879, pp. 247-249).

Early Joy at Finding *Twelve Lectures*

Extracts from the diary of Robert Ashcroft, whilst still a Congregational Minister, show his ready appreciation of the Truth when he found it in the writings of Robert Roberts. He wrote: “Several weeks have elapsed since the book entitled *Twelve Lectures* [now known as *Christendom Astray*—Ed] was placed in my hands. Having carefully read it, I feel competent to appraise it... Nor have I stumbled across a single instance of assertion without proof... There is more scripture quoted in [*each*] one of these lectures than I am in the habit of quoting in twenty sermons. I would rather not undertake to defend ‘orthodoxy’ against a Christadelphian. Wonder if any member of the ‘Cloth’ has ever been foolish enough to attempt such a thing! ...I cannot rid myself of the impression that these Christadelphians have sufficient truth among them to entitle them to the name they bear, and that ultimately I shall join their ranks, which, though numerically feeble, are yet defended with what seems nothing less than ‘the whole armour of God’ ...In this remarkable volume there is no evasion of that which is unpleasant to the natural man... no attempt made to get out of a difficulty by ignoring or undervaluing any part of the inspired Word... He [Bro. Roberts] believes Christ and Paul, without disbelieving Moses and the Prophets. How I have longed for such a writer.” (*The Christadelphian*, 1878, pp. 7-9).

The Ease by which Error becomes Accepted

Robert Ashcroft’s early writings show no evidence of a problem with acceptance of a *wholly inspired Bible*. But this was soon to change, and with devastating effect upon the whole of the Brotherhood. This event shows how with a little persuasion, brethren and sisters can be turned aside from the purity of the Truth, and encouraged into a weakened faith — perhaps to a “shipwrecked” faith (1Tim. 1:19). Such occurred in this controversy, which we will demonstrate in our next article.

— Stan Snow.

Next chapter: Bro. Roberts is encouraged in the midst of distressing turmoil, by the support of faithful companions.



ECCLESIAL HISTORY.

AN APPEAL TO PRESERVE THE TRUTH IN THE LAST DAYS

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The Ashcroft Division

OUR previous article outlined the background to the controversy that developed in 1885 as result of the changed teaching of Robert Ashcroft. His activity brought much sadness to faithful brethren at the time. As pointed out previously, his early writings show no evidence of the teachings that he eventually presented to the Brotherhood. He formerly believed in the *wholly inspired Bible*, without reservation.

In a diary written just prior to his baptism in 1876, a young man of about 34, with remarkable abilities in oratory and the presentation of the Word, he stated concerning the Bible: "That the book never contradicts itself, and that no theory be accepted which assumes the contrary, or which would disrate any portion of testimony below the level of writings that have been given by inspiration of God."

In the same record he continued with a reference to his former association as a Congregational Minister: "But this diary will never chronicle my return to bondage, and nothing else is possible to the man the eyes of whose understanding have been enlightened by Jehovah's Word, in the position from which I am struggling to escape." (*The Christadelphian*, 1878, p. 344).

How sad in view of the fact that he *did* later return to the pulpit. Looking back, it would seem that the simplicity of the Truth proved too much for him, and that, in the end, he formed too high an estimate of the "learned" critics.

Another Estimate

In the midst of this distressing turmoil, Bro. Roberts and the brethren with him, were encouraged and gratified by the reaction of Bro. Evans, Professor of Hebrew at Carmarthen College, who spoke out very strongly, stating that the position taken by Bro. Roberts was the only defensible one. This declaration, coming from an able and learned brother, carried weight. Bro. Evans occupied the Hebrew Professorial Chair for many years, and ironically, Bro. Ashcroft had recently been his student! But, unfortunately, the student was now not prepared to listen to his master! (*ibid*, 1885, p. 77).

A Moment of Consolation and Comfort

In this vexatious year of 1885, Bro. Roberts was caused to pen a series of articles which have been a source of comfort to many brethren and sisters down through the years. The comfort he personally found, as expressed in his *Letters to the Elect of God in a Time of Trouble*, were shared through the pages of *The Christadelphian* (1885), and are still providing consolation for readers today. Thus good came out of trouble, in various ways. These writings are available from the *Logos Office* in volume form.

We now desire to trace this truly remarkable story of ecclesial history, from the beginning of the controversy, and provide an exhortation to our generation, to “strengthen the things which remain” (Rev. 3:2).

Background to the Controversy

As outlined in a previous article, in the year 1876, Robert Ashcroft, a Congregational Minister accepted the Truth, was immersed, and departed the Pulpit. This was reported in the *Christadelphian*, 1876, p. 313, under the heading “*A Congregationist Minister Becomes Obedient To The Truth, ‘Un-Revs.’ Himself, And Gives Up A Salary Of 400 Pounds A Year.*”

Robert Ashcroft was a sincere and exceedingly capable brother, and proved to be a veritable sensation, as he toured the ecclesial lecturing circuit. Brother Shuttleworth, himself a brother of considerable ability and experience, said of Robert Ashcroft that he kept the audience spell-bound for about an hour, quoting from pulpit divines, and then contrasting their sayings with Scripture in masterly illustrations, in good appealing tone combined with scriptural argument. “I never listened,” said Bro. Shuttleworth, “to such a discourse before. It was somewhat like Apollos of old” (*Christadelphian*, 1876, p. 383).

On another occasion, the Sheffield ecclesia reported that “The brethren have been cheered and strengthened by a visit from Brother Ashcroft... he also lectured to a very respectable and attentive audience of about 200 people, the subject, The modern Pulpit, etc.... The greatest satisfaction prevailed, and although it was Sunday, yet the audience gave applause by clapping their hands and stamping their feet, as soon as the lecture was finished” (*Christadelphian*, 1887, p. 190).

Bro. Roberts described his case as “an extraordinary one and unique, in our age at all events” (*Christadelphian*, 1876, p. 316). But who could have foreseen the divided Household of Faith that resulted eight years later?

The Story From the Beginning

The first notice we have of this intriguing though calamitous narrative, occurs in the *Liverpool Leader* of July, 1872. There was a sketch of Bro. Ashcroft as he

A Captain Robertson, living in India, was introduced to Twelve Lectures by his brother, who found a copy in a secondhand bookstall in the streets of Calcutta. Captain Robertson read the lectures, and was impressed with their truth.

tame and vapid [no wonder, without the Truth—S.S.]... In doctrine he is orthodox to a fault (*The Christadelphian*, 1877, p. 186).

was in the days of his “clerical bondage,” four years before his acceptance of the Truth. His congregation is said to number between 500 and 600 at Rock Ferry, and are described as being “decidedly fashionable.” The *Leader* goes on to say of Mr. Ashcroft, “his outside popularity bids fair to outstrip that of most competitors in the neighbourhood. Mr. Ashcroft is a young man, not more than thirty years of age (in 1872), stiff and solemn in demeanour, about five feet six inches high with small white hands, finely cut features, a forehead which is high rather than broad, brown curly hair, recently grown whiskers, a deep but not powerful baritone voice of limited compass, and keen small eyes, he impresses us as being a man of business and refinement, who will methodically and judiciously make the most of powers somewhat above the average... As a preacher, he is plain, practical and earnest... His voice is melodious, clear and pleasing in effect when he chooses to exert it, and his diction is faultless in precision and expression; but in manner he is

The Entrance of Truth

Extracts from Bro. Ashcroft’s diary, whilst still operating from the pulpit, describe his reaction when first presented with a copy of Bro. Robert’s *Twelve Lectures* (now published as *Christendom Astray*). The manner in which he came across the book is interesting. A Captain Robertson, living in India, was introduced to *Twelve Lectures* by his brother, who found a copy in a secondhand bookstall in the streets of Calcutta. Captain Robertson read the lectures, and was impressed with their truth. Later, upon his return to England, he settled at Rock Ferry, about three miles from Liverpool, on the other side of the Mersey. He found himself attending the congregation led by the “Rev.” R. Ashcroft, to whom he gave the *Twelve Lectures* to read. Like Captain Robertson, Mr. Ashcroft was immediately convinced of the truth of the exposition.

Extracts from a diary kept by Robert Ashcroft at this time, later published in *The Christadelphian*, are very telling, describing how his preparations for the Sunday sermon were seriously interfered with “by the arrival of a volume of lectures by a ‘Christadelphian’.” He wrote, “I find great difficulty in laying these lectures down... here appears to be a system which promises to appeal as strongly to my reverence for the Scriptures, as to my reason. The writer has evidently had a long experience in biblical studies, and shows a command of the pen which indicates great practice in its use. His style is wonderfully chaste and piquant... The conclusions arrived at are staggering, at first, to one who has been trained in the ways of traditional theology, but no writer I have ever seen either makes such strong assertions, or brings forth half so much scriptural logic to back them up. I... feel melancholy in the extreme. If the thoughts they have generated are deepened by further study of the Scriptures, there will be but two courses open to me — either I must give up Congregationalism, or abandon the Bible... These lectures... convince me that in the course of intervening centuries the system of

truth proclaimed by the apostles has undergone so great a change that but few of its original outlines are now discernible... I am resolved to see what these Christadelphians have to say for themselves" (*Christadelphian*, Dec. 1877, pp. 536-538).

The Truth's Outworking

Mr. Ashcroft began to introduce his newfound Bible truth into his sermons, which raised enmity in the members of his congregation. Afterwards he perceived baptism as a duty, and prevailed upon Baptist friends to assist him. This increased the hostility in his church, to the point where he was resolved to resign. Two thirds of the congregation wished him to stay, offering to build him another chapel, allowing him to teach as he thought fit. However he left the church, maintaining that he would never again preach for hire, and in communication with Bro. Roberts, let it be known that he desired to make his acquaintance. Bro. Roberts wrote to him, exclaiming "I need not say what pleasure it gives me thus to make your acquaintance with pen and ink. Your case is an extraordinary one and unique, in our age at all events..." (*Christadelphian*, July 1876, pp. 314, 316).

Bro. Roberts Searches Out Mr. Ashcroft

Having dispatched the letter, Bro. and Sis. Roberts decided to visit Rock Ferry incognito to hear for themselves the "Rev." Ashcroft, who was addressing the public at various venues in the area. They attended the evening "service" and sat and listened, without Mr. Ashcroft being aware of their presence. Bro. Roberts described the occasion as follows: "There was a large company (perhaps 120) of ladies and gentlemen. A hymn was given out: they sang: Mr. Ashcroft read two selections: then prayed: then gave out another hymn; then proceeded to discourse on the words 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables.'... It was delivered in a calm, impressive manner, with considerable inflexion of voice and animation of gesture. The hearers were listening to a decidedly good speaker, an intellectual looking man, approaching middle age, of grave aspect, with sonorous voice: a man who could not only marshal evidence, but who by his own evident earnestness and conviction, could impress his hearers with the importance of his words. But there was a clerical aspect to the situation in general which was depressing. The people assembled evidently thought themselves acceptable worshippers of God... and Mr. Ashcroft appeared to be confirming them in their delusion instead of letting them know that all men are unjustified sinners without hope, apart from the belief and obedience of the gospel. Did Mr. Ashcroft understand and recognise this?"

At the close, Mr. Ashcroft came towards the door, and Bro. and Sis. Roberts were introduced. A brief and hurried interview was all that transpired, but sufficient to confirm the concerns felt by Bro. Roberts. Captain Robertson explained that it was Mr. Ashcroft's intention to establish an "unisectarian" position and that he would never identify himself with the position taken by the Christadelphians.

Bro. Roberts later wrote "The Editor and sister Roberts *returned home sad.*" After a disturbed night pondering the matter, Bro. Roberts sat down the following morning and wrote to Mr. Ashcroft to show him the way of Truth more perfectly (*Christadelphian*, July 1876, p. 317).

Unexpected Success

Brother Robert's letter to Mr. Ashcroft was forthright, courageous, tactful, and Christlike. He addressed Mr. Ashcroft as "an honest man," and one who had "begun nobly in giving up at a great sacrifice" his clerical profession. He told him to "Come out in a straight, clear, and unmistakable manner. Let the people know that there is but one safe way and that they are not in it." He referred to Mr. Ashcroft's repugnance to "sectarianism," and pointed out to him that the believers at Pentecost "who submitted to these commandments could not help being a 'sect' — a sect which was every where spoken against" (Acts 28:22).

The letter was typical of the force and logic that came from the pen of Bro. Roberts as he wielded the Sword of the Spirit so masterfully, yet with such gentle tact. His concluding paragraph included the following: "I commiserate with you exceedingly. As my wife expressed it last night, on reaching home, we felt as if we could cry, and we would not have been ashamed of our tears. It is so rare to see a man of intellectual parts honestly lay hold of the Truth with full purpose of heart... yet we could not shut our eyes to the peculiar embarrassments of your present position, tending to prevent your full recognition of the Truth... Nor could we help realising the temporal adversities to which a faithful course will expose you. I pray God He may open your way" (*Christadelphian*, July 1876, pp. 317-319).

Bro. Roberts could scarcely have anticipated the success of his letter of entreaty. The next day Mr. Ashcroft came to Holylake to see Bro. Roberts, and a long interview followed. Mr. Ashcroft admitted he had been groping his way, and that the Editor's letter seemed to shed the light he wanted, and that he had made up his mind to take the course recommended and to identify himself with the brethren of Christ. After considerable pleasant discussion, Mr. Ashcroft stepped in the train to depart, making the remark, "You may rely on my being faithful to the Truth, with the help of God" (*Christadelphian*, 1876, p. 320).

— Stan Snow.

Next Issue: The Truth Acknowledged, and the Work Begins.

The Partial Inspiration Theory



ROBERT ASHCROFT, having approached Bro. Roberts to discuss matters of the Truth, confirmed that he would remain faithful to the Truth now believed (see page 224). From this point on, Bro. Roberts addressed him as “Bro. Ashcroft.” He further informed Bro. Roberts that he would distribute large numbers of the copies of *The Declaration* to his Congregational Church, at his final parting address to them, entitled “What is the Truth?”

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After the delivery of the address, in the afternoon of the same day, in his own bathroom, and in the presence of witnesses, Robert Ashcroft, at his own request, having felt that he had advanced in knowledge of the gospel, was baptised, following a confession of The Faith. At the same occasion, a William Reuben, formerly a member of the same congregation, having given a good confession, was also baptised (*The Christadelphian*, July 1876, p. 329. * Note the following references to *The Christadelphian* magazine shown as “TC”).

In the August issue, p. 383, Captain Robertson’s baptism was announced, and that of his niece on the same evening. Then in the October issue, p. 478, Bro. Ashcroft announced the baptism of his sister-in-law, Annie Ashcroft, and that his brother-in-law was very interested in the Truth. On the same page, the editor reported that Bro. Ashcroft had opened a shop at Waterloo, dealing in white coopery and fancy goods, with the comment that “with a brave heart in the desire, with his own hands, like Paul, to provide an honest livelihood in the sight of men... with the hope that the leisure... will enable him to qualify himself for the service of the Truth.”

The Truth’s Work Begins

On Sunday, July 23, 1876, Bro. Ashcroft “delivered an excellent and telling lecture to a large audience on the reasons which led him to abandon the Congregationalist ministry,” at the Birmingham Ecclesia (TC., Sept. 1876, p. 428). In the issue for Feb. 1877, pp. 94-95, the Editor reported the difficulties Bro. Ashcroft was encountering with the shop at Waterloo, and concerning his work in the Truth, Bro. Ashcroft states, “It is a much more onerous matter to represent the Truth in public, than I ever found it to deal in the platitudes and inanities which please an orthodox congregation. To do all I can, and to do it for

nothing, is a cherished ambition of mine.”

Bro. Ashcroft’s sincerity, zeal, and applied ability began to bear fruit, and in *TC* for April, 1877, p. 190, it is reported that his public lectures at Liverpool every Sunday for three months, contributed to a number of immersions and sustained interest in others. But this was associated with a personal cost to himself, for: “It has been very hard work for Bro. Ashcroft, because, as you know, he has had to change his residence, and besides that, he has had to earn his bread by his new business. Nevertheless his lectures have been forcible and convincing.”

Bro. Ashcroft’s influence for good at that time is further seen in *TC*, May, 1877, p. 233, where Bro. Ashcroft writes, “I have to report to you the following instances of obedience to the Truth, viz: — Samuel Ashcroft (25), banker’s clerk, my brother in the flesh, until recently organist in the Congregational church, Rock Ferry... His obedience is the result of protracted and thorough investigation of the things most surely believed among us... Our former acquaintances were sorry to lose him, his musical talents being of a very high order.”

Influence at Birmingham

The Christadelphian, July, 1877, p. 329, reports for Birmingham: “The feature of the month’s proceedings has been a visit and three lectures by Bro. Ashcroft of Birkenhead. The event has been a source of much gratification to all the brethren. Bro. Ashcroft spoke at the Saturday evening Garden Room meeting... There were large audiences at all the lectures... Bro. Ashcroft’s fitness for the work of the Truth has impressed all who have heard him; and has originated a strong desire to help in the opening of his way... he has made the effort to provide a livelihood by shop-keeping... the effort has only been a partial success... The question, what is to be done? starts itself... those who feel any sympathy with the object and would desire to participate in the promotion of it may become enlightened by application to the Editor for a private circular which has been prepared on the subject.”

Then in *TC*, August 1877, p. 381, it was reported that “At the quarterly meeting, held July 5th, it was unanimously resolved to invite Bro. Ashcroft to visit Birmingham four times in the year — an invitation which Bro. Ashcroft has signified his intention of accepting... Other places are contemplating something of the same sort. In this way, Bro. Ashcroft’s services will be utilised for the general benefit...” Special collections were taken up to defray expenses.

Looking Back in Hindsight

At that time the brethren embraced Bro. Ashcroft with “open arms,” and rightly so. How could any man know that he would precipitate one of the greatest ruptures in the history of the Christadelphian movement? that he would bring on the greatest division the Truth’s revival has seen? At that time Bro. Ashcroft’s labours in the Truth were sincere, zealous, true, in fact, sensational. How could any know that Bro. Roberts would be caused to report in *TC* eight years later: “We have been made acquainted through the printer, with Bro. Ashcroft’s desire that we should no more refer to him in any way, in the pages of *The Christadelphian* or otherwise. We promise compliance after the appearance of the present number of *The Christadelphian* (We shall hold ourselves absolved from this promise should Bro. Ashcroft take the course proposed in his letter to the printer). We meanwhile deem it a duty to the brethren to report to them that it was

publicly announced in the Exchange Assembly Rooms, Birmingham, Sunday, Sept. 13th, that Bro. Ashcroft had quitted connection with the Christadelphians, and had resumed association with the Congregationalists under an arrangement by which he will occupy a pulpit in connection with them in the neighbourhood of Liverpool. We have information from other sources of the truth of this announcement. Any other solutions in the present number were written before the knowledge of his letter" (*TC*, Oct. 1885, p. 468).

— *Stan Snow.*

Next issue: The Herculean effort put forth by Bro. Roberts to answer six personal grievances made against him by R. Ashcroft, and to preserve the Truth for generations to follow — our generation! May each reader be a faithful and wise "Antipas" (Rev. 2:13) in the days which remain.

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The Partial Inspiration Theory



BECAUSE of extremely unfair accusations made against him, in his distress, Bro. Roberts was constrained to write in *The Christadelphian*, August 1885, p. 384, as follows: “That I should be accused of having a ‘real object,’ as distinguished from my ostensible and avowed one, is one of the greatest trials of my life (*and he was subject to many — S. S.*) but I have for 26 years endured it, and must endure to the end, in the recollection of Peter’s words: ‘It is better if the will of God be so that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing.’ With love to all that are valiant for the Truth in the earth, faithfully your brother, Robert Roberts.”

These words were penned at the height of the **Robert Ashcroft** controversy, when Bro. Roberts answered six personal grievances made against himself in a four page tract, entitled “*Brother Ashcroft; in self-defence.*” These grievances were made public in this circular, and Bro. Roberts, at the request of Bro. Shuttleworth, perceiving that in absence of explanation, the cause of the Truth could be injured, answered them in *The Christadelphian*.

Painful as these events were, it has been pointed out by subsequent writers that it was a good, and not a bad thing for the Truth — and that it needed a rough blast like this to wake Christadelphians up to a sense of their responsibilities (C.C. Walker, *Robert Robert’s Autobiography*, p. 250). Certainly, in the century and more that followed this controversy, the total inspiration of the Scriptures has not been challenged in Central Fellowship and we have this foundation clearly

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spelled out at the head of our Statement of Faith.

Continuing the Story

In our last article we left Bro. Ashcroft, with a standing invitation in July 1877, to visit the Birmingham ecclesia four times in a year. Brother C. C. Walker later wrote in *The Christadelphian*, July 1929, p. 317, stating that: "It struck me at the time that the Christadelphians made too much of the ex-clergyman, and that he, in turn, would have done well to confine his 'introductory addresses' to a few words."

But in 1877, the "Intelligence" reports in the magazine evinced great appreciation of Bro. Ashcroft's labours in the Truth. The Edinburgh Ecclesia stated: "The principal event of the month has been the delivery of a course of four lectures, by brother Ashcroft... On the first night the hall [750 seats — S. S.] was comfortably filled." *The Daily Review* newspaper wrote, "Close attention was paid to the speaker, who possesses more than ordinary gifts of eloquence." Edinburgh's intelligence continues, "The brethren have been much cheered and strengthened by the visit... It would seem as if God had raised him up in this end of Gentile times to cheer and strengthen His people in their waiting for the Son of God (*The Christadelphian*, Oct. 1877, p. 478).

As we follow the story of Robert Ashcroft, we do well to remember, as previously pointed out, that his quitting of association with the Christadelphians in later years, precipitated a division into *Central* and *Suffolk St.* fellowships which lasted for many decades. The method of implementation of fellowship, as well as the Inspiration question itself, was the cause of this distressing division.

Brother Ashcroft And His Course

Under the above heading, an article appeared in the October *Christadelphian*, 1877, p. 464. In this, Bro. Ashcroft replied to a former associate, who maintained that the Truth was not wholly with Dr. Thomas, and made certain false statements against Bro. Ashcroft, who responded: "I have not allowed any man to shape my beliefs for me. I am convinced that the whole apostolic Truth was brought to light by Dr. Thomas... The oasis of fellowship among the people called Christadelphians, I took great pains in acquainting with, and should never have thought of seeking their recognition in the absence of a perfect agreement with their teachings."

He then replied to accusations relating to pecuniary matters, and finished with "I do certainly hold one belief now which I did not entertain at the time I gave up 400 pounds a year..." and went on to lament the untruths of former associates.

The Diary

We have already made reference to a fascinating diary kept by Robert Ashcroft whilst still a Congregational minister. They show him to be a *thinking, sincere, honest-to-himself* man, searching, yet still ignorant of the Gospel Hope. The diary excerpts commenced in the September *Christadelphian*, 1877, p. 400. Consider the sincere admission to himself, of his situation, in his as yet unenlightened state concerning Bible teaching, notwithstanding the fact he was paid to teach others! He wrote, "**Monday** — having thought over my discourse of yesterday, on Heb. 11:8-10, I have concluded that great credit is due to the congregation in their patience in listening to it... I am not conscious of ever having treated a subject in so unsatisfactory a manner, yet it was the best I could

do... Not the the slightest help to be got from the *Commentaries*... It is plain that Abraham never got the *land* that was so explicitly promised him. Was he following an illusion? Did God promise him one thing and give him something else instead? So the people expect me to teach... It would greatly have simplified the subject if the land had not been promised to Abraham *himself* but merely to his seed... Everything must be made to square with old established ideas. And the passages that will not yield easily to this process, must be passed over in silence” (*Christadelphian*, Sept. 1877, p. 401-402).

These extracts from the diary give an insight into the mind of this paid clergyman who is painfully aware of the inconsistencies in his preaching. In his next extract, he muses upon the attitude of his fellow clergymen, and his diary reads: “Today, having been led by a variety of circumstances to ponder my position in life... I hear of one who preaches all the commonly accepted dogmas, but privately declares that he has no sort of faith in much that he declaims about... he says he is ‘paid for *preaching* these doctrines, but not for *believing* them! The whole thing seems sometimes a huge pretence.”

In the same extract he states: “Notably is this the case with the soul’s immortality, about which I have been a good deal shaken of late. The silence of the Scriptures on the subject I have never yet seen satisfactorily explained on any theory that supposes the doctrine true. Our church may be said to be built upon it.” He continues, “There is to be a ‘christening’ at the end of the service... Not thoroughly understanding the import of the ceremony myself, I am not likely to furnish a very lucid explanation of it to others.”

Continuing with the same extract, he writes, “*Tuesday* — Today I have been much exercised about the ‘Evangelical’ theory of the death of Christ. It defies my comprehension. There appears to me not a particle of Scripture evidence in support of the view which represents this affecting occurrence as an exhibition of God’s wrath poured out — not on the offender — but on a substitute. This however, is what I am hired to preach... the substitutionary theory. If that theory be correct, then Christ ought never to have resumed the life he laid down, since he was the substitute of those who were condemned to perpetual loss of being. No wonder that our congregations prefer to live on in happy, contented ignorance of all such matters” (*Christadelphian*, Nov. 1877, pp. 488-492).

The Ashcroft Influence

With extracts such as these appearing in the *Christadelphian*, it is no wonder that the brethren were thrilled at such a providential exposure of the impostures of the clergy. There is no doubt that Robert Ashcroft was the means of bringing many into the Truth, and for eight years, he was a powerful influence in persuading men and women to be called out of the Gentiles as “a people for His Name” (Acts 15:14). His lectures from the Christadelphian platform were reported in the magazine, and he readily told the world that, upon joining with the Christadelphians: “The designation gives him an acknowledged connection with

There is no doubt that Robert Ashcroft was the means of bringing many into the Truth, and for eight years, he was a powerful influence in persuading men and women to be called out of the Gentiles as “a people for His Name”

operations, that in some neighborhoods have harassed and tormented 'the Clergy' *more than anything they ever encountered in their lives;* and all because the shot and shell have come from behind the impregnable battery of God's truth."

The brethren were understandably excited that a champion for the Truth had arisen, from the ranks of the clergy, who clearly appreciated the mighty work of Bro. Thomas, and stated from the public platform: "How long was the long buried Truth, as announced by them [*the apostles*] to be exhumed from its sepulchre? Who was sufficient for this thing? It needed a man the like of whom is not to be met with in the streets any day... Fidelity to the long lost faith of the apostles, required that someone should be bold and confident enough of the Truth to affirm it against a world of scoffers... There has been such a man [*he spoke, of course, of Bro. John Thomas*]... The present writer has reason to rejoice and give thanks that in the mercy of God, he ever found this perfect solution of many of the great questions to which modern sectarianism is dumb. He would never have done so of his own accord... *R. Ashcroft — Birkenhead*" (*Christadelphian*, May 1878, pp. 214-215, 217).

A Weary Pilgrimage

In his diary entry for December 5th, 1880 (*Christadelphian*, Jan. 1881, p. 10), he wrote: "Felt somewhat depressed on awaking to discover where I was, and what for. But this was only a transient sensation." He had travelled to Glasgow at the invitation of brethren to lecture there. In the same diary extract he wrote: "This leaving home is dismal work, but I am not my own" (p. 9). He continued: "It is dreary work — this of proving that man is mortal; but there is always comfort and refreshing to be derived from the texts of Scripture... (p. 14). The same year, 1881, in the February *Christadelphian*, p. 54, his diary continued with: "Had our Christadelphianism made any difference in the attitude of our friends towards us? Of course, all the difference in the world. It had produced estrangement more complete and hopeless than anything else could have done... It is a constant pain and grief to feel compelled to stand apart from enterprises in which most of our kindred after the flesh are zealously embarked, and to be *cut off from the refinements and intercourse of educated society* (Not that friends of the Truth are to be considered ill-mannered always, and without education of the highest order)." — emphasis mine, *S.S.*

These comments give an insight into the sacrifices Robert Ashcroft was making for the Truth's sake, as he now worked as a piano tuner for his daily bread. His diary continued on p. 55: "'This is a great change for you,' said an old pew holder of mine the other day, in whose house I was on a piano-tuning expedition — 'and all for conscience's sake.'

"'Yes,' said I, 'I have no doubt I am considered an amiable fool.' 'Well,' quoth he, 'upon my word, I don't think a man with a family is justified in considering his conscience as you have done. There are lots of these parsons who don't believe what they teach, and I don't blame them for sticking to their posts — It's a living for them'... However this particular Gentile paid me as much for tuning his piano as he would formally have done for his seat in the church."

Here was a man making sacrifices for the Truth, and doctrinally sound. The *Christadelphian* for May, p. 202, contained an address he delivered to the Birmingham's Mutual Improvement Society, where he encouraged the young

men with: "I should say the Scriptures are too obviously divine to permit the suggestion that they are in some particulars unreliable — there is no real discrepancy — the Scriptures cannot be broken — hosts of reputed inaccuracies have been satisfactorily explained, and all the rest are capable of a satisfactory treatment when the knowledge of the investigator is equal to the occasion."

Can this be the same man who, three years later, took a totally contrary view toward the inspired Word of God, and then, towards his brethren?

Can this be the same man who, three years later, took a totally contrary view toward the inspired Word of God, and then, towards his brethren?

Changes at Birmingham — First Sign of Distress

In the July *Christadelphian*, 1884, p. 325, Bro. Roberts wrote to allay concerns of some, over changes at Birmingham: "there is nothing in 'the matter,' though it would seem as though there were. By an extraordinary co-incidence, three removals [from the Birmingham *Christadelphian* office — SS] have come into question at one and the same time without in the least manner being connected with one another. The first is that of Bro. Ashcroft, as to whom alone it is necessary to say anything in particular. In a note to the Editor, he complained of sleeplessness, stating that he could not endure the constant incapacity that afflicted him, and asking the Editor to regard it as a probability that he would have to cease literary effort altogether... All who have been in close relations with Bro. Ashcroft are aware of the agonising efforts which all his services have cost him, whether in speaking or writing... in the note conveying his final decision against going to America, he said, 'My sense of personal inefficiency will probably never be entirely overcome, and I may have to regard this as the temptation which is in my flesh'." Bro. Roberts went on to say, "It represented an actual physical disability with which Bro. Ashcroft had to contend even in the days of his pulpit ministrations."

The literary efforts mentioned by Bro. Ashcroft, referred to his work in the capacity of Assistant Editor to Bro. Roberts. It came as somewhat a surprise, to see two months later, in the September *Christadelphian*, 1884, p. 427, that Bro. Ashcroft's business prospects in Liverpool, to which he was transferring, had evidently fallen through, and he reported in *The Christadelphian*: "I have resolved upon a monthly publication to be entitled *The Biblical Exegetist*, which I intend for circulation mainly among scholars and students of an alien type... But my project is not of a character that will necessitate the production of much original matter, but will simply require an industrious collation of existing materials ready to my hand in the Liverpool Picton library... I regard the enterprise as a purely business matter, just as I would an appointment on the gentile press were I gifted for such a position." Bro. Roberts commented that: "Bro. Ashcroft's publication, while intended for the general public, will be introduced to the brethren by circular... We cannot but wish the project God-speed, and shall rejoice in its success."

Trouble on the Horizon

One month later, in the October *Christadelphian*, 1884, p. 477, the "intelligence" from the Liverpool Ecclesia reported that Bro. Ashcroft lectured to the title "*The Attitude of Modern Thought in Relation to the Scriptures.*" Then,

in November (p. 534), the Swansea ecclesia reported a lecture by Bro. Ashcroft entitled "*Inspiration; its Necessity, Nature and Limits.*" Brethren were puzzled — what could these limits be?

The *Christadelphian* for December 1884 was essentially devoted to defending the truth that the Scriptures are wholly given by inspiration of God, a fact now denied by Bro. Ashcroft. His lecture, and the issue of his magazine, caused a furore. It was an ecclesiastical bombshell! On the inside front cover of *The Christadelphian*, Bro. Roberts explained: "This number of the *Christadelphian* is out a week before its time, on account of the circumstances to which its contents mainly refer." In the same place he answered a correspondent: "No doubt the 'daughters of the Philistines will rejoice' at the trouble that has come upon us, but that is no reason why we must shirk the conflict for the Truth. Their joy is inevitable; the responsibility will rest with those who have caused it." He answered another correspondent: "We sincerely wished the *Exegetist* well... In this confidence we gave Bro. Ashcroft access to every name and address we have in the office. Those who insinuate unfriendliness do so in ignorance of the facts." He answered another: "We do not, and never have, doubted the reality of the business prospects that led Bro. Ashcroft to separate himself from the office... At the same time there was a mystery (felt by nearly everyone) in the sudden change of front which is now explained by the manifest divergence of principle, aim, and sympathy." Bro. Roberts answered another correspondent; "Our disclaimers some months back, of anything being amiss at Birmingham were perfectly sincere. We have to confess there was more amiss than we knew. We had cause for uneasiness for some time, but... believing the best as long as possible, we shut our eyes to all unfavourable indications. Nothing but Bro. Ashcroft's own hand could have opened our eyes to the full extent of the developing antagonism."

"Be Swift to Hear, Slow to Speak, Slow to Wrath" (James 1:19).

The present writer firmly believes that the Truth was unearthed, and then preserved by brethren Thomas and Roberts, and that it was not a matter of whim or caprice, but the work of Providence. Though helped of Yahweh, neither man was divinely inspired. That was not necessary. However a Christ-like disposition seen in the actions of these men when facing an adversary, is something for this generation to *emulate*.

In the inside front cover of *The Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, Bro. Roberts answers yet another correspondent, in a way which exemplifies the advice in James 1:19. Bro. Roberts was not precipitous, or unduly hasty, in dealing with this matter. He advises the concerned brother: "Refrain from premature action. If the inspiration of the historic scriptures is denied, there truly lacks a principal element in the basis of fellowship: but you must give everyone ample time to consider the matter. Many who do not at first see where the new doctrine leads to, may realise it fully if they have time; but if you deny them this by instant withdrawal, you shut them up into a false position, from which they will have a difficulty in extricating themselves. Patience may see us through the difficulty. It may even see the obnoxious principle withdrawn and cancelled, which would be an unspeakable relief."

—Stan Snow.

Next Issue: The circumstances which divided the Household for half a century into "Central" and "Suffolk St." fellowships.

AN APPEAL TO PRESERVE THE TRUTH IN THE LAST DAYS — 5

The Partial Inspiration Theory



IN this article we examine the erroneous theory of a *partially inspired Bible*, and the attendant circumstances of its introduction to Christadelphians in 1884 by Bro. Robert Ashcroft, a former Congregational clergyman.

In our previous article we related how Bro. Ashcroft introduced his ideas in a lecture at the Swansea ecclesia, England, on September 21st, 1884, and in the first issue of his new magazine, *The Biblical Exegetist*. Virtually the whole of *The Christadelphian* for December 1884, was devoted to exposing this false teaching. Bro. Robert's opening words (p. 537) were: "These circumstances have become known to our readers since our last issue. An issue has been raised in a very unexpected manner, as to whether the Scriptures are wholly or only partially inspired — involving the further problem whether, if they are only partially inspired, they are of any real value to us at all as a guide to eternal life. The circumstances are painful... God rules in the ecclesias... He has arrested the startled attention of the whole brotherhood to a subject, the full apprehension of which may be necessary for the development of the right type of saintship in an unbelieving age like ours... there is only one course for faithful men, and that is *to maintain, at the hazard of all consequences the absolute divine authorship of the Bible throughout*" [emphasis mine — S. S.].

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The Human Element Theory Summarised

On p. 550 of *The Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, Bro. Roberts summarised the false theory from the *Exegetist*.

1. That only parts of the Old Testament Scriptures are inspired, viz., such parts as could not otherwise be produced.
2. That the Bible is not to be spoken of as the Word of God, without qualification.
3. That there is in it a human (i. e., erring) as well as a divine element.
4. That historical infallibility is not to be conceded to everything recorded in the Bible.
5. That inspiration only covers "all that may be said to belong to divine revelation proper: by which is to be understood everything in the Scriptures that may have been beyond the power of man to discover for himself."

6. That subordinated features “may have been introduced into the Bible” with which inspiration has nothing to do, and that such things form “legitimate topics of critical inquiry.”
7. That inspiration does not teach that which is otherwise ascertainable.
8. That except where Christ expressly ascribes a divine authority to particular predictions, we are not to regard his allusion to particular books of the Bible as proving the inspiration and authority of those books: such allusions being merely proof of the notoriety of the books at the time and of their reception by the Jews.
9. That it is unreasonable to suppose “that the attestation which Christ and the apostles gave to the divine mission of Moses and the prophets, extends to every point and portion of the Jewish history” or proves the circumstantial truth of every narrative of the Old Testament.
10. That the apostles did not regard the very words of all the Hebrew Scriptures as the product of inspiration.

Bro. Robert's further summarises Bro. Ashcroft's article, which teaches that the Bible needs to be saved from those who stand up for its absolutely divine character, “who are (alleged to be) too little acquainted with its history, and with the embarrassments which beset the theory they entertain of its origin and contents.”

A Complete Turn-around

Readers of this series of articles in *Logos* will recognise the complete change of face Bro. Ashcroft now demonstrated. Previously he had written: “I should say the Scriptures are too obviously divine to permit the suggestion that they are in some particulars unreliable — there is no real discrepancy — the Scripture cannot be broken — hosts of reputed inaccuracies have been satisfactorily explained, and all the rest are capable of as satisfactory treatment when the knowledge of the investigator is equal to the occasion” (*Christadelphian*, May 1881, p. 202).

Here was a man who, only a few years earlier, had said in his diary: “I would rather not undertake to defend ‘orthodoxy’ against a *Christadelphian*. Wonder if any member of ‘the cloth’ has ever been foolish enough to attempt such a thing” (*Christadelphian*, Jan. 1878, pp. 7-9). Well, he was about to find out. This was a challenge to the Word of Yahweh of which the Psalmist says “For Thou hast magnified Thy Word above Thy name” (Psa. 138:2). The reply by Bro. Roberts to this challenge to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures is masterly, and we shall summarise it now.

The Old Testament Challenged

Robert Ashcroft's challenge related to the Old Testament Scriptures, and the inspiration of the New Testament was conceded, inconsistently enough on his part, as investigation showed. Bro. Roberts got to the nub of the matter immediately. He characteristically went straight to the fundamentals of the argument. He wrote: “Christ stands related to the subject. If he rose from the dead, his views of it are true, and the views also of his apostles, who were in that case illuminated by the Spirit.” Bro. Roberts proceeded to ask several questions, the first of which was:

Question 1 — *What was the estimate of the Old Testament entertained by Christ and the apostles, as to its origin and character?*

This subject is of vital importance, being related to current trends which elevate the supposed "gifts of the Spirit" to be as effective in salvation as the Word of God itself

Christ's Estimate of the Old Testament

Bro. Roberts began his defence of the Old Testament by pointing out that Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, held the Old Testament Scriptures as unquestionably inspired, and for which the nation had always been ready to die, if necessary. That Jewish captives had frequently been seen to endure "racks and deaths of all kinds upon the theatres, that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws and the records that contain them" (*Josephus*, 5. Ap. Book 1, par. 8).

Bro. Roberts pointed out that Christ alludes to the Old Testament under various names — viz., "the Scriptures," "Moses and the Prophets," "the Word of God," "The Things that are Written," etc., and always recognises their divine authority. He summarises Christ's estimate under three

headings:

A. *Christ makes the fact of a thing being written in the Scriptures as always a sufficient reason for its reception as divine.*

Bro. Roberts quotes in full the following passages which clearly demonstrate this: Mat. 4:10; 11:10; 21:13, 17; Jn. 6:45; Lk. 18:31; 24:46. All these quotations contain the phrase "*It is written,*" or "*Thus it is written,*" etc., and they are only a sample of many others spoken by Jesus that could be produced, using this phrase. Bro. Roberts wrote: "The use of it could not be accounted for, except on the principle that he regarded the Old Testament as a divine document. His references in the form of this phrase extend from Moses to Malachi, taking the historical books and Psalms between."

B. *His statements concerning the writings of Moses and the Prophets, are all of a character that recognise them as divine.*

Bro. Roberts wrote: "He accused his disciples of being 'slow of heart to believe *all* that the prophets have spoken' (Lk. 24:25), which would not have been a ground of accusation unless 'all that the prophets have spoken' were divine." Bro. Roberts also quoted the following passages with explanatory comments: Mat. 5:17; 11:13; Lk. 16:29; 24:27.

C. *Jesus constantly evinced a reverence for the Scriptures of the Old Testament and an anxiety that men should understand them, which cannot be understood unless he recognised them as of divine origin and authority. We may go further under this heading, and say, that he referred to them as the source of divine knowledge of an authority so great that he plainly said that they could not be broken.*

Bro. Roberts commented: "In his argument with the Sadducees he said 'Ye do greatly err, *not knowing the Scriptures*' (Mat. 22:29). What is this but saying that the Scriptures are an unerring guide to divine Truth? and how could they be so if they were not wholly divine?" Bro. Roberts also quoted Luke 24:45, stating "Why should he (Jesus) be so anxious for them (his disciples) to understand the Scriptures, if the Scriptures were in any degree, of human origin?" He further quoted Mat. 21:42; Mk. 14:49; Jn. 7:38, and the declaration of Jesus that "THE SCRIPTURES CANNOT BE BROKEN" (Jn. 10:35).

What the Apostles Taught

Under this heading, Bro. Roberts wrote: "Christ has placed the authority of the apostles on an equal footing with his own, saying, 'It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you' (Mat. 10:20), and 'He that heareth you heareth me' (Lk. 10:16)... The fact of a thing being written in the Scriptures was with them an end of all doubt' (Lk. 1:69-70; Jn. 2:17; 12:16; Acts 3:18; 13:29; 24:14; Rom. 4:17; 11:26; 15:9, etc.)... Paul's custom was to reason out of the Scriptures (Acts 17:2)... If they were divine, this is intelligible. If there was a human (i. e., an erring) element in them, it would, to that extent, not be so. Apollos 'showed by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ,' which he could not have done unless they were of divine authority... 'If any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God' (1Pet. 4:11... Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12. This designation — the Oracles of God — of itself excludes the supposition of a human (i. e., an erring) element having entered into their composition." (*Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, pp. 539-543).

Bro. Robert's second question was:

Question 2 — *Does the Old Testament itself bear evidence of the correctness of that estimate (i. e., Christ and the apostles' estimate) or otherwise?*

He addressed the question as follows:

Why the Old Testament is the Word of God

"On this point we are not left to speculation... If we take the information in its simplest form, we have it thus from Paul: 'ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD' (2Tim. 3:16)... The subject in hand is 'The Holy Scriptures' with which Timothy had been acquainted from a child. These are the same Scriptures of which Jesus said 'they cannot be broken'... his statement, even in the mildest form to which philologists would like to reduce it, would amount constructively to an assertion that, the Scriptures with which Timothy had been acquainted from childhood [*i. e., the Old Testament — SS*], were God-inspired... (Rom. 15:4)... If we take for example the five books of Moses, Moses wrote them... but Moses was not a man of merely natural function. The Spirit of God was on Moses... (Num. 11:17)... Now if Moses on whom the Spirit of God rested for the performance of God's work, wrote by God's command, was not that writing necessarily a Spirit-regulated or 'God-inspired' performance?"

The arguments of Bro. Roberts are masterful in their logical force — simple yet irresistible logic, backed up by Scripture. In his earlier work, *Christendom Astray* he quoted the case of David. "All this, said David, *the Lord made me to understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern*" (1Chr. 28:11-12, 19), and continued: "What is true of the five books of Moses is true of the historical and other books... The Spirit of God is visible upon the scene in an unbroken line throughout... Thus *Joshua* is, by God's declaration 'a man in whom is the Spirit' (Num. 27:18). In *Judges* we see the 'Spirit of the Lord come upon them' (Jud. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29), etc." Similarly Bro. Roberts quotes the examples of inspired prophets such as *Samuel* (1Sam. 3:20-21), *Elijah* and *Elisha* in *Kings* (2Kgs. 2:9, 15-16), whilst in *Chronicles* the Spirit of Yahweh is visible (1Chr. 12:18; 2Chr. 15:1; 20:14; 24:20). In *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, we have "all them whose spirit God had raised" (Ezra 1:5).

Treating of the books from *Isaiah* to *Malachi* he writes: "we have the writings

The inspiration of the Scriptures is the only guarantee of expressed Truth, and as such must be upheld today as much as formerly

in which the preface to almost everything that is written is "Thus saith the Lord." Bro. Roberts continues under the heading:

Inspiration of the Old Testament a Necessity

"Now, the Spirit of God being actively and visibly present in the house of Israel during all the time covered by the authorship of the books of the Old Testament, and that activity being particularly connected with the men who had to do with their production, it follows that what the New Testament declares to be the fact, must be the fact, and is reasonable, viz., that they are 'God-inspired'."

Bro. Roberts then makes a further point: "That He has done so is manifest from the composition of the books themselves. They are not in the style of human books anywhere... There is a brevity — a conciseness — a chasteness — a majesty — an unsparing impartiality — leaving out matters of mere human interest — keeping of God forward — that are to be found in no writings of men in any country or any age, so far as they are known... That it should not be left to the will of men, but should be the work, as Jesus and the apostles testify it is, the work, of the Spirit of God by the hand of the chosen writers." (*Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, pp. 543-546).

Brother Roberts had much to say upon this matter, and we are merely bringing forth salient extracts at this time. For example, he wrote: "He [God] spoke to them [Israel] for many generations by the direct Word of inspiration in His prophets. The Bible is the literary consolidation and continuation of His work in their midst, and now to all nations; is it reasonable that He should leave this to human hands? He told Moses to be careful to see that the tabernacle was made according to the pattern shown him. As a double safeguard in the matter, He put His Spirit upon two men in the congregation — Bezaleel and Aholiab. If he was thus careful about the type, is it not according to the analogy of things that He should be at least similarly careful in the composition of His written Word... it is needful that it should be so. Man could not be trusted to write divine history... And in all cases, he would be liable to err in his representations, and therefore he could not be trusted to give us a writing on which the children of God could rely." (*Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, p. 546).

In the next article, we intend to give Bro. Roberts' *summary* of the evidence for a *wholly inspired Bible*, and continue the saga of events that finally divided ecclesias in England and elsewhere for over fifty years. Yet, for all this we are supremely grateful that the Truth has been preserved to this present day.

— Stan Snow.

The Partial Inspiration Theory



IN our previous article we examined the erroneous theory, introduced to Christadelphians in 1884, by a Bro. Robert Ashcroft (a former Congregational clergyman), that the Bible is only partially inspired. We presented an epitome of the “*Human Element Theory*,” and considered Bro. Roberts’ masterful reply.

We now look at Bro. Roberts’ summary of the evidence for a wholly inspired Bible, and continue with the events that transpired in the brotherhood at that distressing time. His extensive and comprehensive arguments were focused thus:

1. Christ rose from the dead: therefore, whatever view of the Old Testament Scriptures was entertained by him and the apostles must be correct.
2. The view which Christ entertained and always expressed was that the Old Testament was of divine authority, “and could not be broken.”
3. The same view was held by the apostles, and illustrated by them in all the uses to which they put the Old Testament, and allusions they made to it.
4. The ground of this view was their conviction that these Scriptures were God-inspired — a conviction which they declared in terms without qualification.
5. The inspired character of the Old Testament Scriptures is evident from their non-human style of composition, and from the nature of the topics which they select for presentation, whether in history, contemplation, or prophecy.
6. This divine inspiration was a necessity for the objects divinely proposed in the writing of the Scriptures (whether in its historical, perceptive [*i.e.*, *rules of conduct* — *S.S.J*] or prophetic departments). A reliable exhibition of any of these elements would not have been possible without it.
7. That the analogy of God’s whole work with Israel requires that the writing of the Scriptures should be His own work.
8. That they are, in fact, owned by Him as such.
9. That His authorship of them is not interfered with by the fact that human writers were employed in their literary fabrication — His spirit controlling and supervising their performance in a manner that secured the exhibition of His mind, and His mind alone, whether in the utterance of a prophecy,

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or the quotation of a blasphemer's document.

10. That there are no insuperable difficulties in the way of this attested and inevitable view. Apparent discrepancies are mostly susceptible of explanation: and where they are not it is for want of the knowledge of some element of the case that would supply the solution (*Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, p. 549).

The New Crisis

Bro. Roberts concluded *The Christadelphian* for 1884, setting the challenge before the brethren and sisters, when he wrote: "The foregoing article stands related to a new crisis that has arisen among the friends of the Truth. The question they have to decide is, Is the Bible a partly human or a purely divine book? ... Everyone must act for himself as in the sight of God. The editor of this paper is not careful about his answer, or about the consequences that may come of it... From a child he has treasured the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God, and with eyes now open, and reason now mature... he will rather go to his grave than be a party in the least degree to their corruption or dishonour... The subject and the situation have evoked many letters. It would more than fill *The Christadelphian* to publish them. We select only a few for notice, viz., such as present objections, and then such as say striking things on the situation. The writers of all others... please accept our thanks for their expressions of sympathy, which are somewhat of a comfort in the evil times that have befallen us (*Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, p. 555).

Objections Answered

In the same issue, Bro. Roberts addressed objections submitted by readers, who had a difficulty with a wholly inspired Bible. He selected twelve of the more "striking" or consequential matters raised. We give several here, along with Bro. Roberts' succinct and satisfactory answers.

Objection: *That the compilers were uninspired is proved by the fact that Matthew (correctly, according to Dr. Thomas) quotes a prophecy from Jeremiah, which the compilers have placed in Zechariah.*

Answer: The last six chapters in Zechariah are not said to be the writing of Zechariah, as are his other chapters. They are bound up with his book. The Spirit of God in Matthew virtually tells us they were written by Jeremiah... Compilation is a mere placing together. What was placed together was the Word of God, by His servants — Jesus and the apostles being witness. It would be the Word of God wherever placed.

Objection: *That copyists were not inspired is evident from the "later hand" we read and from the fact that the copies differ.*

Answer: It is not necessary to contend for the inspiration of copyists. They were erring fallible men... they would do so in a work undertaken with almost superstitious scrupulosity... the copyists were a check upon one another in many ways, not only by revision, but by comparison. This comparison in our own day is the best guarantee we could have of the substantial accuracy of the text forming the basis of our translation. It is shown by the nearly absolute agreement of their manuscripts in all the languages and in all parts of the world. There are variations... but they are slight, upon which no truth wholly hangs.

Objection: *Does not the apostle make a distinction between inspiration and*

his own judgment in 1Cor. 7:6, when he says "I speak this by permission, not of commandment" ... "To the rest speak I, not the Lord..."

Answer: Doubtless Paul makes a distinction in these cases, but the very making of that distinction proves the inspiration of the ordinary run of his composition: for what need would there be for the singling out certain utterances as human, if all his utterances were of the same character? Is not the making of this very distinction the result of the guidance of the Spirit of God?

Objection: *Can it be that the writer of the book of Job was moved by the Holy Spirit, seeing that God says to Job, at the end of the book, that his three friends had not spoken of him the thing that was right? Could what these three men said be the work of inspiration?*

Answer: The case is on a par with the blasphemous proclamation of Sennacherib, or the wicked oppositions of the Scribes and the Pharisees. The Bible gives us a true, because Spirit-guided, report of what they said. What they said was their own, but the Bible record of their sayings is a God-inspired reproduction of it, which God has made and given to His children for their guidance. (*Christadelphian*, Dec. 1884, pp. 555-559).

Letters of Support and Encouragement

Bro. Roberts closed this section of his remarks, with the publication of samples of letters showing great concern and decided support for the position taken by him in this crisis. Brethren who wrote to him included brethren Armitage and Barraclough of Heckmondwike, Bro. Lothian of Kelso, Bro. Clement of Mumbles, Bro. Alexander of Stowe, Bro. Warn of Falmouth, Bro. Money of High Wycombe, Bro. Gale of Swansea, Bro. Todd of Tranent, Bro. Atkins of Bideford, and Bro. Clements of Falmouth.

A sister wrote: "This is the third upheaving for the making white and purifying of the household. First Dowieites; second Renunciationists; third, the 'Apparatus' party, for adjusting the Scriptures to suit all parties, especially the rich and learned classes. There is always a man needed to head up the smouldering disaffection... We did not think Bro. Ashcroft was to be the 'tool.' Many will grieve at the revelation... His words will act as a separating apparatus, and bye and bye the valiant for the Truth will be made manifest... You as a faithful watchman on the tower have sounded an alarm; the whole congregation are now attent; God will guide the battle."

Bro. Stainforth of Bristol wrote, "...It is difficult to speak so calmly about (what is, after all an *infinitely* smaller affair), Bro. Ashcroft's uncalled-for attack on Dr. Thomas. He who touches Dr. Thomas, does touch the apple of our eye. Neither he, nor anyone for him, ever claimed the possession of anything more than a love for the Truth for its own sake, and a determination to sell all that he had if necessary, to secure it. His knowledge of Hebrew and Greek may or may not have been unimpeachable [*yet I have found it to be remarkably sound and discerning — S.S.*] but we find that it was amply sufficient for his purpose, for the result proves it, since he has left nothing, as far as I have seen, for his successors to do but to reproduce, as well as they can, his teachings; the difficulty being how to do so, and avoid mere watering of them down... I shall read with considerable less interest the announcement of another 'Rev'd.' obeying the Truth" (*Christadelphian*, 1884, pp. 559-562).

1885 — A Year of Tribulation

The *Christadelphian* closed for 1884, with the editor's reply to twelve objections to a *wholly inspired Bible*. The magazine opened the new year with Bro. Roberts' answer to further objections numbering thirteen to forty-one. His comments on the cover show an optimism for the new year, when he wrote: "We crave the forbearance of readers... The present number is nearly monopolised by the subject of inspiration... We hope next month to commence a return to the natural state of things, in that diversity of feature and topic which is both pleasant and profitable."

Alas, he was mistaken. It was to be a year of appalling tribulation and upheaval for the brotherhood!

Bro. Roberts prefixed his answers with a quotation from the Jewish historian, Josephus, who wrote of the exceeding scrupulous care, with which the Jews have transmitted their Scriptures down through the centuries, intact and unaltered. Josephus adding that "*No one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them*" [*and this has been verified in our own day by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls — S.S.*].

Objection forty-one, along with Bro. Roberts' answer, is important, and we reproduce it here. It relates to The Foundation of our *Statement of Faith*.

Objection: *To make this matter a question of fellowship would be to add a new item to the basis of belief amongst us. It does not touch the foundation of the faith; the foundation is the resurrection of Christ.*

Answer: It may be a "new item" to some. It will not be so with those whose connection with the faith goes far enough back. The inspiration of the Bible has been the foundation of all statements of faith and bases of belief. This seemed so much a matter of course as to have been taken for granted in many cases... What sense would there have been in appealing to a book in proof of the divinity of a doctrine or statement if that book were not of divine authorship? If the Bible is not inspired, it is not a reliable standard. If it is a human composition, it may be erring in anything it affirms... True it is that the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the faith... Faith cometh by hearing the *Word of the Lord* (Rom. 10:17); and if you say that the Bible is not the Word of the Lord, but the word of man, you make faith ultimately impossible, because there is nothing in that case on which we can implicitly trust. Viewing the Bible as the (possibly erring) word of man, we should stand on a morass, instead of on a rock" (*Christadelphian*, Jan. 1885, p. 23).

The truth of Bro. Roberts' remarks were sadly confirmed, when, with the passage of time, Bro. Ashcroft returned to the "pulpit perplexities" (his own term), then drifted into Spiritualism, and finally, long afterward, died an *agnostic* (*Christadelphian*, July 1929, p. 318).

The Ecclesia in Turmoil

The *Ecclesial Visitor* reported from Birmingham in the January 1885 issue of the *Christadelphian* (p. 38), that "the ecclesia is settling into a quieter state as the issues of the inspiration question begin to be more clearly seen... Whether we shall escape division altogether, remains to be seen."

Bro. Ashcroft authorised Bro. Evans (Professor Evans, who was Bro. Ashcroft's Hebrew tutor), to seek a meeting with Bro. Roberts. Bro. Roberts

replied that, "I will rejoice and come and do my best to make peace," providing Bro. Ashcroft disavowed the false theories of other writers, concerning the possibility of error in the Hebrew and Greek originals of the Scriptures. Bro. Evans replied as to the "very just and right" request of Bro. Roberts, but also as to the hopelessness of acquiescence by Bro. Ashcroft (*Christadelphian*, Feb. 1885, pp. 60-61). In the same issue of the magazine, on p. 74, Bro. Evans wrote "There should be no compromise in the Truth. I have done what I could to bring about a reconciliation, but you see that the parties don't wish it, and I can see very clearly what their object is. I have seen a good deal of this sort of thing in my day."

On p. 77, Bro. Evans' support was reported, where he, as a professional teacher of the Hebrew language, spoke out strongly and with no uncertain sound, declaring that the right translation of the apostle Paul was, that all Scripture was *God Inspired*. He said that "when the clippers up of the Bible had fully done their work, only a few tattered shreds would remain," and that the position that Bro. Roberts had taken, was the only defensible one.

Our next article will continue the saga of Bro. Roberts' indefatigable, resolute, yet patient efforts to avoid a division, but, at the same time, and more importantly, to uphold the Truth at all costs.

— *Stan Snow*.

AN APPEAL TO PRESERVE THE TRUTH IN THE LAST DAYS— 7

The Partial Inspiration Theory



IN 1884, a Brother Robert Ashcroft (a former Congregational clergyman) introduced to the Brotherhood a theory that the Bible is only *partially inspired*. In our last article we followed events to the beginning of the year 1885, which saw the ecclesias everywhere in turmoil over the matter, as Brother Roberts, editor of *The Christadelphian* magazine, strongly contended against this new issue.

In the February issue of *The Christadelphian*, Bro. Roberts commenced a series of *Letters to the Elect of God in a Time of Trouble*. These letters, though penned for this particular crisis in the Brotherhood, have been a source of comfort and inspiration for every generation of Christadelphians since that day. If only Bro. Roberts could have known the consolation these letters would afford to so many in subsequent years. One day he will know it.

The Turmoil Continues

In the May issue of *The Christadelphian*, 1885, p. 123, Bro. Ashcroft declared his "last deliverance" on the subject. He refused to endorse the resolution adopted by the Birmingham ecclesia "if it is intended as a disavowal of the *Exegetist* article," which it was. It was also reported that two Nottingham brethren (Sulley and Kirkland), without Bro. Roberts' knowledge, waited upon Bro. Ashcroft and pressed upon him the scriptural obligation to see Bro. Roberts privately and singly, with reference to any personal grievances. They did this because Bro. Ashcroft refused to lecture at Nottingham until sympathy with Bro. Roberts was repudiated by Nottingham. Bro. Ashcroft refused to take the scriptural course incumbent upon him (Mat. 18:15-17).

Special Meetings and Strong Feelings at Birmingham

The subject engaged much attention at Birmingham Ecclesia. Special meetings were held on 2nd and 12th February, 1885, when resolutions were put, and met by counter propositions. Bro. Roberts reported in *The Christadelphian*, p. 124, that the meeting on the 12th was "a dreadful meeting," and so he addressed a circular to every brother and sister through the post, because he felt the issue was becoming obscured. He set forth the real issues with his characteristic clarity, so that brethren and sisters could know for what they were

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voting. Bro. Roberts could see the dire consequences of this disputation, and the final result was, in fact, heartbreaking. As we have reminded *Logos* readers, and repeat again: a division in the Brotherhood was impending. The split was to separate *Central* and *Suffolk St.* into two different fellowships, which was to last for over half a century.

A "joyful relief" was experienced at a Tuesday tea meeting, when a "black and mournful coming together was turned into joy and gladness." But this "joyful relief" was only temporary. A misunderstanding over the implementation of fellowship had divided the Birmingham meeting. It had been supposed by some that a wholesale and instant fellowship exclusion for those now supporting the ecclesial motion was intended. The change of a few words removed the objection, and gained practically unanimous acceptance of the ecclesial resolution. Bro. Roberts wrote of the severe trouble, shown by "sleepless nights and wet eyes in many houses" (May, 1885, pp. 125-126).

The Birkenhead Resolution

The Birkenhead Ecclesia, of which Bro. Ashcroft was a member, passed the following resolution, reported in *The Christadelphian*, April 1885, p. 166, as follows: "That this ecclesia feels it to be its solemn duty to the cause of Christ to denounce the attempt at disturbing the peace and unity of the churches, as now agitated by the Editor of *The Christadelphian*, on 'Theories of Inspiration' (or any other theory) and hereby records its determination to resist interference with its ecclesial affairs, of any self-constituted authority..." The resolution went on to call for a conference of ecclesial delegates.

Bro. Roberts answered the charges, point by point, succinctly and without rancour. He also reprinted an article by Bro. Thomas on the inadequacy of conferences to settle such matters, as well as quoting section 44 of *The Ecclesial Guide*, which treats of "Fraternal Gatherings from Various Places."

Charges of "Obsequious Deference"

A brother, Dr. L. Edwards, a contemporary of Dr. Thomas, wrote in strong support of Bro. Roberts' stand on the inspiration question. His letter included the following: "It grieves me to see that Bro. Roberts is charged with selfish jealousy, superciliousness, unexampled arrogance, spiritual pride, and the like; and that some of his brethren, who happen to agree with him in his advocacy of Bible truth, are moved by a personal obsequious deference [*yielding to flattering — SS.J.* Bro. Roberts knows, as well as the rest of us, that if these charges are true, he ceases to be a Christadelphian, and it would take quite an amount of credulity to enable me to believe that the author of *Seasons of Comfort* and other works of 25 years, much of which has spread to the four corners of the earth, would, at this late hour, sell his Christadelphian birthright for such a mess of pottage" (*The Christadelphian*, 1885, p. 172).

Difference of Opinion in Birmingham's ranks

Not everyone agreed with Bro. Edwards. Bro. Roberts reported that "A section of the brethren made the unhappy mistake of inviting Bro. Ashcroft to lecture outside ecclesial arrangements... This has not helped to smooth matters, but otherwise. Still, we must not despair... Believers in the complete inspiration of the Scriptures have no alternative but the unhappy one forced on them by those who propose to tolerate the corruption of the Word of God in their midst. No

interference with the foundation on which we stand can be submitted to. The coming of the Lord will justify this determination" (April 1885, p. 181).

Ecclesias Begin to Declare Their Position

In the May 1885 *Christadelphian*, ecclesias in sundry places declared their acceptance of a totally inspired Bible. The following ecclesias avouched this position, in rejection of Bro. Ashcroft's theory: Liverpool, Birmingham, Mumbles, Cannock, Kilmarnock, London (Fulham), Aberdare, Devonport, Huddersfield, Peterboro, Sowerby Bridge, Swansea, Nottingham, Lincoln, Keighley, Falmouth, High Wycombe, Elland, and some Halifax members.

The Nottingham Ecclesia reported on p. 239, that Bro. Ashcroft refused to lecture there, which he had done for several years past, because Bro. Roberts was on Nottingham's list of lecturing brethren. It was pointed out to Bro. Ashcroft that his personal grievance with Bro. Roberts, and Bro. Shuttleworth, should be settled in the way of Christ's commands in Mat. 18. But Bro. Ashcroft would neither go and see Bro. Roberts, nor would he consent to Bro. Roberts coming to see him, which Bro. Roberts had expressed his willingness to do so.

Bro. Roberts Writes a Letter to His Enemies

In grief of mind, Bro. Roberts published a letter to his detractors in the June issue, 1885, p. 248. "I will not mock you with 'sentimental twaddle,' Nor... with smooth words of compliment and congratulation regardless of truth." The heartfelt letter ran to seven pages, and he signed off with the following: "Your sincere friend and well-wisher, who never grieves so much as when compelled to appear in the attitude of apparent unfriendliness, Robert Roberts."

The Meeting for Action

In the July *Christadelphian*, 1885, p. 306, a report was made of "a meeting for action" on June 12. This was a momentous meeting for the Birmingham ecclesia and the Brotherhood in general. The result was that about 330 brethren and sisters resolved to *dissolve* the Birmingham Ecclesia, and start afresh with a revised constitution on the basis of a totally inspired Bible, which, of course, is what had always been believed. About 140 brethren and sisters abstained, who now either believed or tolerated the doctrine publicly promulgated by Bro. Ashcroft, and publicly endorsed and defended by Bro. Chamberlain, that the Bible is only partly inspired, and contains an element of merely human authorship, liable to err.

A letter was written to those left behind, expressing regret at parting with so many among them, and inviting as many as were able to unite themselves with Bro. Roberts and the majority. This majority, numbering 330 brethren and sisters, met together as a separate group for the first time in their usual venue, the Temperance Hall, on Sunday June 14th, 1885. Bro. Roberts felt it necessary to use tickets of admission for convenience of separation, an action for which he has been severely criticised by some ever since that day. About 140 of the abstainers attended, and took their place in the gallery as a "silent protest" against the action of the others.

— Stan Snow.

Next: Ecclesial Management: A Better Way?

AN APPEAL TO PRESERVE THE TRUTH IN THE LAST DAYS— 8

The Partial Inspiration Theory

Ecclesial Management — A Better Way?



IN the August *Christadelphian*, 1885, p. 364, Bro. Roberts called for suggestions to improve or refine the **Ecclesial Constitution**: “*Under special circumstances, the ecclesia has suspended its constitution, and has resolved not to re-adopt it till the question of revision has been considered... We shall be glad to receive suggestions on the subject, brief and to the point... It is a question not particularly affecting small ecclesias, which can almost dispense with formal organisation. But it has some importance for large bodies... The discussion can do no harm and may yield suggestions that may be of some value in our future operations.*”

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Explanation Asked and Given

The controversy dragged on, and in the same issue, page 383, Bro. Roberts felt constrained to give explanations at the request of Bro. Shuttleworth, to a circular issued by Bro. Ashcroft. It was a four page tract, full of complaints against Bro. Roberts. Sufficient to record here Bro. Roberts' concluding comment: “That I should be accused of having a ‘real object’ as distinguished from my ostensible and avowed one, is one of the greatest trials of my life, but I have for 26 years endured it, and must endure to the end...”

Upon reading through the list of personal grievances brought against him, one could only describe them as being of a worldly, mundane, materialistic and temporal nature, quite out of character with the spiritual mind of Bro. Roberts. In fact, it is quite out of character with the mind expressed by Bro. Ashcroft in the previous eight years. A change had overtaken Bro. Ashcroft for the worse, having now being subverted (Tit. 3:11).

Disagreement Over Fellowship

In *The Christadelphian*, 1885, pp. 385-389, Bro. Roberts *re-considered* the doctrine of **Fellowship**. He admitted that the principal cause of the troubles was a divergence of view. He wrote: “Many who have allowed the entirely inspired character of the Scriptures, have not been able to see the necessity for insisting upon that truth in our basis of fellowship.” He summarised the matter in proposition nine on p. 388 as follows: “A man himself believing the Truth, but

willing to wink at its denial among those in fellowship in any of its essential elements, becomes, by this willingness, an offender against the law of Christ, which requires the faithful maintenance of the whole..."

The brethren who were separated from the main body at Birmingham, now met in the Exchange Assembly Rooms in New Street. This was reported in the *Intelligence* for the same month, September, on p. 426, along with the hope that the two bodies may yet find harmony and come into working agreement with one another.

A Final Separation

As far as Bro. Ashcroft was concerned, all hope of reconciliation was gone, with the report in the October *Christadelphian*, p. 468, as follows: "We have been made acquainted, through the printer, with Bro. Ashcroft's desire that we should no more refer to him in any way, in the pages of *The Christadelphian* or otherwise. We promise compliance after the appearance of the present number of *The Christadelphian*. We meanwhile, deem it a duty to the brethren to report to them that it was publicly announced in the Exchange Assembly Rooms, Birmingham, on Sunday Sept. 13th, that Bro. Ashcroft had quitted connection with the Christadelphians, and had resumed association with the Congregationalists under an arrangement by which he will occupy a pulpit in connection with them in the neighbourhood of Liverpool..."

In the same October issue of *The Christadelphian*, p. 479, Bro. Roberts published an open letter to "The Friends of *The Christadelphian*." The crisis in Christadelphian affairs estranged many subscribers to the magazine, as anticipated by Bro. Roberts, and he issued a call for financial help in various ways. After stating the details of the situation, and making his plea, he wrote, "There are those who would rejoice in the stoppage of *The Christadelphian* and in the overthrow of everything and everyone connected with it... I have

Forty-five years ago, an ex-"Reverend" joined our ranks.

His admirers declared "*his voice is melodious, clear and pleasant; his diction is faultless in precision and expression.*" But he proved to be an enemy of the Truth. He it was who introduced "Partial Inspiration" in our midst; he it was who one day was received back into the *Fraternal Visitor* fellowship, and who within two days appeared with seven other "reverends" in a Liverpool church to bless the flock and to receive a testimonial and cheque for 100 guineas (*Ormskirk Advertiser, Oct. 10th, 1889*). Let us be on our guard. The brethren of Christ have but one thing to offer to the world — *The Truth as it is in Jesus*. They cannot compete with the world in the matter of learning, eloquence and polish. Their work is not to render the Truth as palatable to the outsider as possible, nor to impress an audience by wealth of learning or neatly-turned phrase. They are to contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints, which faith has again and again been lost through laxity and "broad-mindedness." They must make a distinction between the things of God and the tradition of men. With infidelity and rank apostasy without, with laxity and "broadmindedness" within, it is not enough to clothe ourselves with grace, beauty and dignity. Who will lead us to the battle?

— F. G. Jannaway (1921).

made the matter a subject of deep and constant prayer..."

Letters of Encouragement and Discouragement

In the November 1885 issue, p. 505, a letter of encouragement from Dr. Thomas' daughter, expressing, "*our grateful appreciation of your work of faith and labour of love, in your earnest, untiring and able defence of the oracles of the Deity. Upon the foundation of a wholly inspired, infallible Bible, faith and hope have been instilled into our minds, and nourished and fed by its living power...*"

On p. 513, it was sadly reported that: "The Attempted Reconciliation — As this is now a failure..." Letters were then published that had passed between the disputing parties. The brethren meeting in the Exchange Assembly Rooms, who were now disenchanted with Bro. Roberts, and the main body meeting in the Temperance Hall, wrote: "That this ecclesia having carefully considered the letter from the brethren meeting in the Temperance Hall, are unable to see in it any recognition or repentance of the unscriptural action taken by them on the 12th of June last, when in private meeting assembled, they decided to cut us off from their fellowship..."

Letters went back and forth, all of which were published in full in *The Christadelphian*. The net result was total failure to reconcile the respective positions of the two parties. Here is an extract from Bro. Roberts' report on page 520, upon the reconciliation efforts: "Two parties are now existing in Birmingham, one in Temperance Hall, and one in Exchange Assembly Rooms, and both claim the recognition and fellowship of the brethren throughout the world... The position of affairs is now one which calls for action... The lines of cleavage have become perfectly distinct during the months that have elapsed... no one can remain any longer in doubt which answer to give to it now. For myself, I commend the position and attitude of the Temperance Hall brethren."

A New Magazine Commences in Opposition

The brethren and sisters who would not support Bro. Roberts' stand on fellowship, in the Inspiration question, met temporarily in the Exchange Assembly Rooms, afterwards moving to the Masonic Hall, where they remained until May, 1911. Being out of fellowship with Bro. Roberts and the Temperance Hall brethren and sisters, they were excluded from *The Christadelphian* magazine. Bro. Ashcroft had started a monthly, styled *The Truth*, but handed it over to a brother, Dr. Thirtle, after about nine months (*The Christadelphian*, July 1929, p. 317). The writings of Dr. Thirtle were unacceptable to the brethren, as he was teaching "Immortal Emergence," and so this magazine ceased with issue number nine, September 1885, and the next month, October, saw the emergence of a new magazine, the *Fraternal Visitor*, edited by a brother J. J. Hadley, chief reporter on the *Birmingham Daily Post*. He continued as editor for 27 years. This became the recognised magazine of the Suffolk Street fellowship.

Final Words

This completes our story of the unhappy and unexpectedly long-lasting division which beset the brotherhood in 1885. The final words of Bro. Roberts for 1885, found upon the back cover of the December *Christadelphian* for that year, are salutary for all contenders for Truth in any age. He wrote: "It is true that the Truth is great and will prevail; but the maxim is misapplied if it is made a reason

for not opposing error and contending for the faith. The Truth will not prevail in the absence of Christ. Its fortune has been to be prevailed against for centuries; and this will substantially continue to be its fortune until he come. It is not with the idea of changing the situation that faithful men observe a strict policy, but of merely performing the part to which all men have been invited who wish the approbation of Christ when he returns.” — *Stan Snow.*

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away THE SIN of the world”
— John 1:29

Much confusion on the subject of sin and its effects is currently evident. Our pioneers and former brethren were clear on the matter. They understood that “the sin” spoken of relates to the sinful condition of the flesh as the following quotations relating to Jn. 1:29 show.

This God-given Lamb was to take away “the sin of the world.” This is a statement which calls for careful reflection. What sin was Christ sent to take away? And how would his death accomplish its removal? “Sin is transgression of the law.” How could transgression, a sinful act, be removed? A deed once done cannot be undone. The only way, therefore, in which sin can be taken away is by the removal of its consequences — actually experienced or threatened. The consequences of sin are a nature which sins and dies. When this nature is redeemed, sin and death will be no more — the sin of the world will have been taken away. — *H.P.M. (The Atonement, p. 230).*

The mission of the Lord Jesus Christ was to “destroy that having the power of death, which is the devil;” or Sin’s Flesh; in other words, to “take away the Sin of the world;” and to “destroy the works of the devil,” of Sin (Heb. 2:14; Jn. 1:29; 1Jn. 3:8). In consummating this “the Woman’s Seed bruises the Serpent’s head.” The “short time” at the end of the thousand years is the epoch when the work is finished. — *J.T. (Eureka, vol. 5, p. 323).*

Religion being the divine remedy for sin, it is evident that when the sin of the world is taken away, religion will be abolished. So long as sin exists in the earth, so long will there be separation between God and men; for it is sin, and that only, which interrupts man’s fellowship with God and His angels, as it obtained before the fall. When sin is eradicated from the world, there will be no more death; for death and sin are boon-companions; as it is written, “the wages of sin is death.” The abolition of death presupposes the extinction of sin in the flesh; and consequently that the *animal nature* of man has been transformed (not evaporated, but changed) into the *spiritual nature* of the Elohim. — *J.T. (Elpis Israel, p. 168).*

[*To the serpent*] I will put the enmity (Rom. 8:7) of that mode of thinking thou hast elicited in Eve and her husband against My law, between the powers that shall be hereafter, in consequence of what thou hast done; and the faithful, and unblemished corporation, I shall constitute: and I will put this enmity of the spirit against the flesh, and of the flesh against the spirit (Gal. 5:16-17; 4:29), between all who obey the lusts of the flesh, which thou hast excited; and those of My institution who shall serve Me: their chief shall bear away the world’s sin (Jn. 1:29) which thou hast originated; and shall destroy all the works (1Jn. 3:8) that have grown out of it: and the sin-power (Jn. 19:10) shall wound him to death; but he shall recover it, and accomplish the work I now pre-ordain him to do. — *J.T. (Elpis Israel, p. 112; see also p. 101).*