

Early Days at Plymouth.

Rapid increase in numbers. Opposition to the New Movement.
Spirituality of early Brethren.

As the numbers in the meeting at Plymouth increased, the meeting room known as Providence Chapel was purchased and considerably enlarged. This chapel was in Ebrington Street. "Amongst those who separated from the various organisations", says C. H. M. "were some men of considerable gift, moral weight, intellectual power, and intelligence - clergymen, barristers, solicitors, military and naval officers, physicians, and men of high position and property. Their secession, as you may suppose, caused a very considerable stir, and drew forth much opposition".

The work rapidly progressed in Plymouth and the West of England, there being in the town named ^{with its neighbourhood} at one time close upon a thousand persons. Mr. B. W. Newton, who was the most prominent and most gifted resident brother, was greatly valued as a teacher and expounder of the Word, notes of his addresses being regularly made and circulated among the saints. "A strong opposition was soon manifested against the New Movement, especially on the part of the clergy & ministers of all denominations. Nor need we wonder," says A. M. in his 'Brethren'; "the ground occupied by Brethren was felt to be a standing testimony against their whole state and practice, and many were stirred up to say hard and untrue things against them, with the view of neutralising the blessed work which God was doing by their means. But these efforts of the enemy - as they usually are - were overruled to increase the general interest in the new preachers, and to attract numbers to their various meetings. The blessing of God evidently rested on the labours of the Brethren at that time; many were led to separate from the different denominations of the day, and gather round the new centre, the name of the Lord Jesus; though on the part of some, it may have been with very little intelligence, or exercise of conscience, compared with those who originally took the ground. But they were dissatisfied with what they had been going with, and longed for something better. There was great freshness, simplicity, devotedness, love and union, among the Brethren, and such features of spirituality have always a great attraction for certain minds; and many of course, who united with the Brethren had very undefined thoughts as to the nature of the step they were taking. But all was new: Christ was owned as their only centre, and the Holy Spirit as their only teacher. Thus they gave themselves to the study of the Word of God, and experienced the sweetness of Christian communion, and found the Bible - as they said - to be a new book. It was, no doubt, in those days, a most distinct and most blessed work of the Spirit, the influence of which was felt in many countries."

* This seems to be an error. Providence Chapel was in Raleigh St. & purchased by Mr. Wigan. The Ebrington St. building was a new & large building which Mr. W. had built, of an ample, the other sort, some time after.