

BETHANY
GOSPEL HALL

MY PEOPLE

The History of those
Christians Sometimes Called

PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

Robert D.

The three main problems were the "looseness" referred to above, the form of church government (circle of fellowship versus local autonomy) and mode of baptism (some Exclusives favored household baptism). The objectors felt that the Independents in America were still on the same loose ground as Bethesda in the Darby-Newton controversy many years earlier (chapter 4). There was also considerable loyalty to household baptism and to a federation of churches since these were principles taught by Darby. As we have suggested, the pendulum swung back and forth for some forty-five years until, at last, the majority of the Grant teachers became convinced that their traditional position did not align with Scripture.

In the early part of the twentieth century, one of the key figures in this long and painful process of amalgamation between the two branches of Brethren¹ was Henry Allen Ironside, [Fig. 59] whose father's friendship with Donald Munro was important to the founding of the Independent work in Toronto (chapter 7). By 1886, Sophia Ironside and her two boys were living in Los Angeles. Young Harry made a complete commitment to Christ in 1890, and before long joined the Salvation Army. His intelligence and natural gift as a public speaker advanced him quickly, and he went through officer training and became a captain. Disillusioned, however, with failure to attain "holiness" by his own efforts, Ironside found the truth of the finished work of Christ in a Brethren tract. In 1896 he left the Salvationists to associate with the Grant Brethren, an association that lasted until 1930 when he accepted the senior pastorate at Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. Harry Ironside, probably the most ecumenical of all the Grant preachers, moved in both Grant and Independent circles and was a friend of William McClure and other Independent leaders. By his deep grasp of Scripture he made a convincing case for believer's baptism, and his entire life was a powerful witness against the narrow separateness of the Exclusives.

The merger of the Grant Exclusives and the Independents that took place in the 1930s and 1940s seems to have been precipitated by the ministering brethren on both sides beginning to work to-

¹ This was a painful process because there were bitter conflicts in some Grant assemblies, and certain preachers were ousted. Feelings ran so high that there were even cases of suicide.