

John Fawcett,

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No. 13 ONE SHILLING & THREEPENCE

one-day campaign, took place on the only snowy day in the winter of 1960-61, and was successful in spite of the inclement weather. Sometimes a Leeds man has been able to take a service for an unfortunate brother who has been horizontal. (This word means 'lying down ill', as opposed to 'standing up well', as in vertical.) Leeds men have also displayed their prowess in the field of sport. Three of them, we are proud to say, had a large share in the victory over Manchester at football this year. But whether we play or not, we all show enthusiastic support for Rawdon's sporting achievements, few though they be.

As I leave Rawdon this summer I shall carry with me many happy memories of my time spent here and of the fellowship of this Rawdon Brotherhood. There are many other things I could have told you, but space and censorship forbids. May I close by saying a sincere 'Thank you' to all who have made my stay here so enjoyable.

* *Leeds man — a friendly parasite of the Varsity species, well known for its coming and going, and often for its large appetite. This animal is now increasing in number and is found mainly around Rawdon in fish and chip shops.*

A YORKSHIRE PIONEER

John Fawcett, the "Father" of the Northern Baptist Education Society.

by DAVID MILNER

"O EARTH, earth, earth! hear the powerful voice of the preacher moved thousands of his hearers to tears at a great open-air meeting in Bradford. In the crowd was a serious-minded apprentice of sixteen who listened eagerly to the sermon on John 3. 14. He said afterwards, "As long as life remains, I shall remember both the text and the sermon," and he wrote in his diary, "It pleased God graciously, and more particularly than ever before, to work upon my mind and give me a deeper sense of my lost condition by nature."

This was in September, 1755, the preacher was George Whitefield and the lad was John Fawcett who became a Baptist leader in the North and a pioneer in the training of ministers. He heard Whitefield preach again the following year to a crowd of ten thousand and followed him to Bristol where twice that number gathered.

At first Fawcett attached himself to the Methodists in Bradford. Often he walked ten miles to Haworth Parish Church to hear William Grimshaw, one of the leaders of the Evangelical Revival in Yorkshire and a friend of Whitefield.

At this time many who were attached to Whitefield and attracted to Calvinism left the Methodist societies and consequently were no longer subject to Wesley's rules which enjoined an adherence to the Church of England. Fawcett and some of his friends in Bradford were among these. After an attempt to start an Independent church had failed, Fawcett attended services of the new Baptist church in Bradford, formed by members from Haworth and Rawdon, and after reading the Scriptural evidence became convinced of the Baptist position and was baptised on March 11th, 1758. The pastor was William Crabtree, a convert of Grimshaw.

In the following year he married Miss Susannah Skirrow, a member of the church. Her father was a Methodist in Bingley, but along with some friends he was expelled from the society for holding Calvinistic views and they were later baptised by Fawcett. Thus the foundations of the Bingley Baptist Church were laid.

We see from his Diary that in spite of long working hours Fawcett rose very early for prayer and meditation and sometimes to attend an early morning prayer meeting for revival in the church. He was very diligent in his reading in a variety of subjects. An entry at the beginning of his diary reads, "In my worldly circumstances I am at present a little in debt, which I have principally occasioned by laying out money in books." For some time he considered entering the ministry and prepared to this end. In November, 1761, he writes: "I have been, among other things, studying the languages in which the Holy Scriptures were originally written," and later, "To my great joy I have this day procured a neat Hebrew Bible; this acquisition has stimulated me to greater diligence in my studies." Always conscious of his unworthiness it was only after much heart-searching and prayer that he acceded to the persuasion of the church and many Christian friends to preach.

In 1764 Fawcett became the pastor of the church at Wainsgate, near Hebden Bridge, which had been founded as a direct result of Grimshaw's labours, and of which Crabtree was a founder member. The church had thirty members when he arrived, and the population was small and scattered. We read of the inhabitants that "their tempers, dispositions and habits partook much of the wildness of the country."

It is interesting that about the same time Dan Taylor arrived in the same district and gathered together a congregation of General Baptists later becoming a leader in that denomination and a founder of the New Connexion — a protest against the drift to Unitarianism. The two were the best

of friends and spent considerable time studying together with an Anglican curate.

In the face of many difficulties Fawcett laboured on, touring the district, preaching in homes wherever the door was opened to him. There was a considerable revival in his congregation, particularly amongst the young people, so that a gallery had to be built in the chapel. Some came from Rochdale, 14 miles away, and eventually a church was formed there. He also helped to form the churches at Bingley and Lockwood.

In 1769 he baptised John Sutcliff and helped him to prepare for entry to the Academy at Bristol for training for the ministry. Sutcliff travelled the 200 miles to Bristol on foot in the depth of winter to begin his training. This was the beginning of Fawcett's efforts to provide a trained ministry for the churches in the North.

In 1773, knowing of several young men who had offered themselves as candidates for the ministry, he sent a circular letter to ministers and others asking for assistance in this work of training "pious young men for the ministry." "The grand design we have in view," he said, "is to furnish the churches of Christ with lively, zealous, judicious, disinterested ministers of the Word. We need not say how much they are at present wanted. The youths to be admitted are such members of Baptist churches as appear to have promising abilities for the ministry. We are conscious that no literary advantages, without the above, will constitute a minister of Christ . . . ever remembering that those who live nearest to God are the most likely by their labours to bring others to Him." Little support was forthcoming but he enlarged his house and took in a few students. Later younger pupils were accepted and he moved to a more convenient home at Brearley Hall three miles away.

In 1777 a new meeting house was built in the valley in the now populous town of Hebden Bridge, the pastor and most of the congregation moving there. The work in the town

flourished, and here, only six years after the start of the Sunday School movement by Robert Raikes, Fawcett opened a Sunday School.

Besides his other interests Fawcett was a prolific writer. After a serious illness he published a book, "The Sick Man's Employ", which was well received, his "Advice to Youth" was very popular and an "Essay on Anger" came to the notice of the King. For four years he ran his own printing press and issued a monthly paper, "Miscellanea Sacra". He is widely known of course as the author of the hymn, "Blest be the tie that binds."

It is not surprising that in 1787 when the Lancashire and Yorkshire Baptist Association was formed he was one of the leaders and at subsequent annual meetings he frequently delivered memorable sermons and wrote circular letters.

Fawcett had turned down an invitation to succeed Dr. Gill at his church in London in 1772, and in 1792 two gentlemen from Bristol visited him to invite him to become the principal of the Academy there, but he declined, his roots being too deep to move now and wishing to finish his work in the North.

The formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 aroused his interest and he quickly caught the holy flame. It must have been pleasing to him that one of the founders was John Sutcliff. In the following year he published a pamphlet called "Considerations relative to sending missionaries among the heathen". A meeting was held in Halifax to form an auxiliary society of which he was appointed secretary, Crabtree also supported it, and £200 was soon raised and sent to Andrew Fuller.

In 1796 he moved his establishment again to Ewood Hall, a large mansion in the neighbourhood, which afforded better facilities for his seminary. He trained a number of faithful pastors, but two of his most famous students were John Foster, the essayist, and William Ward, the famous companion of Carey. The latter's missionary ardour led him to preach and distribute

tracts in hamlets in the district wherever he could collect a congregation.

Despite the lack of support in 1773 Fawcett didn't give up the idea of establishing an institution in the North for training men for the Baptist Ministry. Mr. James Bury, of Blackburn, shared his interest in such a scheme and eventually offered to give £500 to open a fund for the project. At the next Association meetings, appropriately at Hebden Bridge, in 1804, Mr. Langdon of Leeds preached a sermon on "The importance of a trained ministry." At the close resolutions were passed for the formation of the Northern Baptist Education Society. In August a large meeting of subscribers was held when Robert Hall delivered what Fawcett thought was "one of the best and greatest" discourses he had ever heard. There was now a marked enthusiasm for the scheme, money was given and promised and premises secured at Horton in Bradford. In 1805 the first principal arrived, being attracted by the deep need of the North. Fawcett's dream was accomplished.

In the eventide of his life Fawcett wrote a commentary on the whole Bible — the "Devotional Family Bible." In spite of ill-health he completed this work which filled 8,578 pages of manuscript. He preached his last sermon on February 26th, 1816, from Nahum 1. 7, "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him," and on the 25th July in the following year, which was his 77th, he passed to his rest.

The Education Society adopted a resolution recognising him as the "Father of the Society, to whom it is indebted for its very existence." The need in the North today is just as great and the work which he started goes on. As we look back at this man of fervent devotion, who for more than half a century preached the unsearchable riches of Christ, we are reminded that we are "to be followers of them who do now through faith and patience, inherit the promises."