

The Early Relations of Horton Academy and Rawdon College with Lancashire.

A paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Baptist Historical Society, held at Liverpool, on May 8th, 1930.

FOR the present generation of Baptists, Rawdon College is so closely associated with Yorkshire, that an effort of the imagination is required by all, who are not antiquarians, to realize that in its early days its associations with Lancashire were equally firm and strong. Our Society was founded in 1804 at a time when the churches of Lancashire and Yorkshire were united in one Association. It was not until 1838 that the two counties divided into separate Associations, owing to the growth in the membership of the churches. It was not until 1866 that Lancashire had a College of its own. When, therefore, the leaders took the bold step of establishing an Academy for the north, it was at first an open question where it should be located; but it was axiomatic that it should serve Lancashire as well as Yorkshire. The earlier reports state the object of the Society as being "the education of pious young men, as Ministers of the Baptist Denomination, in Yorkshire, Lancashire and the adjacent counties." It was not until 1831 that all reference to Yorkshire, Lancashire and the adjacent counties was quietly dropped.

The effort to supply the Northern counties with qualified ministers began as early as 1773. Bristol, the only Baptist Academy existing at that time, was too far away. Dr. John Fawcett, therefore, established a *private* academy and received a few young men into his own family to train them for ministerial service. Fawcett was then minister of the church at Wainsgate. His son says that it was from Liverpool that Fawcett received "the first and principal encouragement for forming a private seminary." Apart from all other considerations, Fawcett is worthy of immortal memory as the teacher of John Sutcliff of Olney, Foster the essayist, and William Ward of Serampore. Fawcett, however, was not content with his private academy, and often discussed with such northern leaders as Langdon of Leeds, and Littlewood of Rochdale, the desirability of establishing an Academy. The institution was actually begun in Yorkshire in

Fawcett's house, but of the three who were responsible for the beginning, two were Lancastrians—Littlewood, minister of what is now the West Street church, Rochdale, and Mr. James Bury, a calico printer, of Sabden. The three were discussing the subject of an Academy. At last Bury said, "We want action rather than words." "Well," said Littlewood, "I will give £20 to begin." "And I will do the same," said Fawcett. Both expected Bury to respond at once, but his silence was so long continued that at length Littlewood asked him what he proposed to do. He said he would give £500. So, to a Lancashire minister belongs the honour of being the first donor, and to a Lancashire layman the honour of being the first of a long line of laymen who have been princely givers. Fawcett, the Yorkshireman, bred and born, was just a fraction of a second too late. I must leave you to decide whether the characteristics of the two counties are revealed by this incident and to imagine what the author of *The Good Companions* might have made of it.

Soon after this historic private meeting, the Association which, as I have said, included the two counties, held its Annual Meeting at Hebden Bridge in 1804. Yorkshire took the honours this time and Langdon of Leeds preached a sermon, "On the Importance of the Christian Ministry." At the close a series of resolutions was passed, among them one to the effect "that we form ourselves into a society, under the denomination of the Northern Education Society, for the purpose of encouraging pious young men, recommended by the Churches to which they belong, as persons of promising abilities for the ministry." But before the day closed two honours went to Lancashire, for Bury was appointed treasurer and Littlewood secretary. Lancashire scored again when next the field was set. In the following August the first meeting of the subscribers and friends of the infant society was held in Rochdale with Robert Hall as the preacher. Evidently no one in Lancashire or Yorkshire was regarded as an adequate preacher for such an occasion, though at the risk of arousing Yorkshire's pride I may mention that Fawcett had been appointed to preach if Robert Hall failed. The same day the Committee was appointed and Lancashire won again, but by the smallest possible margin. Seventeen men were put on the Committee; of these nine were Lancastrians and eight hailed from Yorkshire. £1,185 17s. was promised that day, and Bury's £500 gave Lancashire the lead. The meeting requested the treasurer "to place all monies exceeding the sum of £50 in Messrs. Jones and Co.'s bank at Manchester."

Two questions were left open on Wednesday, August 1st,

1804; the location of the Academy, and the choice of tutor. The second question was the first to be settled. After several ministers had declined the Society's invitation, William Steadman of Plymouth Dock accepted the presidency, and settled in Bradford as pastor of the Westgate church and president of the Academy in October, 1805. Before Steadman accepted he came north in June, 1805, and spent nine weeks in the two counties, visiting the principal churches. Steadman had been informed how matters stood with regard to the vexed question of the location of the Academy. There were some who wanted it at Bradford, where the Westgate church was without a pastor, owing to the resignation of William Crabtree who had ministered to it for fifty years. But Manchester was also putting in its claims. As Steadman says, "I had not then learned that the hostility between the houses of York and Lancaster had not entirely ceased." Steadman spent four Sundays in Bradford, preaching three times each Sunday, and frequently on week evenings. As a result he received an invitation from the Westgate church, but the Lancashire friends asked him not to decide until he had visited Manchester. The rest had better be told in Steadman's own words. "From Halifax I went to Rochdale and Manchester. At the latter place, the size of which exceeded expectations, but where the Baptists had, during the interval, obtained a pastor, I met several gentlemen who united in their wishes and efforts to prevail upon me to consent to the fixing of the Academy there. They pleaded the size and population of the town, the very degraded state of the Baptist interest in it, and in the surrounding neighbourhood. They engaged themselves to guarantee a salary of £150 per annum, in addition to whatever the church could raise, or the seat rents produce—to procure or build a place of worship, and to form a church. . . . After thanking them for their very liberal offer, I assured them . . . that I could not see it my duty.¹ My object was the Academy; and it must be seated where the conducting of it would be practicable. That at Manchester there was a place of worship to build; a congregation to collect, a church to form; all of which would, I knew from experience, be impossible with the care of an Academy. But that at Bradford all these requisites were provided; together with premises at a reasonable

¹ The 1649 Church had moved to a new site on what is now called Dyche Street, and had called William Gadsby. Several members objected to him, and continued in the old Coldhouse chapel. When they failed to obtain Steadman, they built on New York Street, and presently called William Stephens from the 1633 London church, then at Prescot Street. These two churches are now known as Rochdale Road, and Moss Side.—EDITOR.

price, well adapted to the purposes of the Academy; not to insist upon the strong prejudices that prevailed in Yorkshire against its being fixed in Manchester. On these accounts I could not but decide for Bradford; in this, though reluctantly, they acquiesced." Thus it came about that the Academy was located at Horton, then a salubrious suburb of Bradford, and Manchester's quite legitimate aspirations were thwarted. Practical work began in 1806 when Steadman commenced with one pupil.

Though Lancashire in general and Manchester in particular were baulked in their desire to have the Academy located in their midst, Steadman continued to have the happiest relations with Lancashire Baptists.

One important and interesting link with Lancashire was Steadman's secretaryship of the joint Yorkshire and Lancashire Association from 1816 to the year of his death in 1837. As a matter of fact he was the first secretary, as up to his appointment no regular minute-book had been kept by the Association. As Association preacher he was in frequent demand, for our fathers sometimes had four preachers at their Association Meetings. Steadman was also twice Moderator. His successor at the Academy, Acworth, was Moderator of the Joint Association once, and Moderator of the Lancashire Association after the separation into two county Associations, no fewer than seven times. That the Principal of a College in Yorkshire should be Moderator of the Lancashire Association so many times is in itself clear proof of the close association of the college with the county of Lancaster. When Acworth passed away and Green reigned in his stead, the latter frequently attended the Lancashire Association Meetings. Of this close connection between Rawdon and Lancashire there is an interesting survival which continues to this day: the members of the Rawdon College staff are *ex-officio* members of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association. If they do not attend its meetings as regularly as their predecessors, it is because the life of a college tutor is more exacting than it was a century or even half a century ago, and class-work to-day is conducted with the regularity which characterizes University work.

To return to Steadman for a moment. It should never be forgotten that he was a great evangelist and often undertook preaching tours in Lancashire, as the following extract from his diary for 1808 will show. "The first week in July went into Lancashire, and have now spent six Lord's-days in that county. The first at Preston, where I preached morning and evening, in the Baptist meeting-house, which had been some time shut up;

and in the evening, out of doors, at Church Town, a village eleven miles off, on the Lancaster road. The second at Sabden, otherwise called Pendle Hill; the third at Colne; the fourth at Accrington; the fifth and sixth at Manchester. During the intervals, preached at Blackburn, Accrington, Huncoat, Whalley and Padiham. At the two last places, out of doors, to considerable numbers; as also at Huncoat. Went also to Higham the evening of the Lord's-day I was at Sabden, and to Harwood the Lord's-day I was at Accrington, and preached in the street to nearly a thousand people. Went in the course of one week to Lancaster, and from thence over the sands to Tottlebank and Ulverston, and preached at all those places. My strength and spirits were in general low, occasioned by the heat; so that I could but just bear the fatigue of travelling and go through my services; and enjoyed less liberty in them than in the common course of my labours at home." After that extract we need not wonder that the one thing Steadman demanded of all his students was that they should be laborious. In 1835 when he was over seventy he was preaching in Heywood, Liverpool, Manchester and Hill Cliff. Steadman also sent his students to work under the Itinerant Society in which he took a deep interest. It was started in Byrom Street, Liverpool, and again Littlewood had a share in promoting a good cause.

In December, 1815, Bury of Sabden died. This Lancastrian was virtually the Father of the College, and the Committee at his decease gratefully record his generosity and his £500 with which the Society was launched. Now it was the time for a Yorkshireman to come forward. In 1817 Thomas Key of Water Fulford, near York, gave £1,271 to purchase the rented premises hitherto occupied by the Academy. At his wish the term "Baptist" was inserted into the title of the Society, and from that date our official title has been "The Northern Baptist Education Society."

The year 1818 saw the passing of Littlewood, the Secretary of the Society and Pastor of the West Street church, Rochdale. He had been a tower of strength and did splendid work in Rochdale. I must, however, add that he was born in Yorkshire. He was an extremely generous-hearted man and given to hospitality. He put down the first £20, you will remember. He had a large family and did what so many Baptist ministers of that day did, he kept a school. "This enabled him," says an old writer, "to maintain his family without being dependent upon the Church, and to sustain those enterprises of Christian love, the introduction of which distinguished the latter period of his life." Time would fail to tell of other

Lancastrians who rendered the Academy yeoman service. It must suffice to mention their names: Foster, who succeeded to Bury's calico-printing business at Sabden, Kelsall and Kemp of Rochdale and many others.

As illustrating our early connection with Lancashire, mention may be made of the following minor points. The Committee meetings were sometimes held in Manchester and Rochdale as well as Bradford. At a meeting "holden at the White Lion, Halifax, on September 25th, 1811," it was decided "that it will be most for the general interest of the Society, that the annual meeting be always holden at Bradford; but the Committee meeting at Christmas be always holden at Rochdale or Manchester."

To Liverpool belongs the honour of making the first provision for securing that necessary functionary for every Academy—a classical tutor. In 1817, Samuel Hope of Liverpool engaged himself to subscribe £50 annually "with a view to enabling the society to procure a classical tutor as an assistant to its president." Such an assistant was certainly needed, for the president was often away from home on one of his begging tours on behalf of the Academy. The first classical tutor was Jonathan Edwards Ryland, the son of the President of the Bristol Academy. The second was Dr. Benjamin Godwin, but during the interregnum a Lancastrian officiated for some time. He was Joseph Harbottle of Accrington.

J. B. Wilson, of Liverpool, splendidly seconded the generosity of the Liverpool Hopes. One blot, however, must remain on Liverpool's fair name. C. M. Birrell had promised to preach the sermon at the Annual Meeting in August, 1848. He failed to turn up and at the last moment a substitute had to be found. The following note appears in the Report. "The Rev. C. M. Birrell, of Liverpool, was fully expected to preach the Annual Sermon. As much to his own vexation, as to the regret of the friends assembled, he failed, as he has since apprized the President, to fulfil the appointment, through a miscalculation of the time."

Something should now be said about a curious episode in the history of the College in the course of which we all but came to Manchester instead of going to Rawdon. At the Annual Meeting in August, 1854, a resolution was passed to the effect that Horton was not as salubrious as once it had been, and the Academy's premises were neither healthy nor convenient. The Trustees were, therefore, authorized to sell them. That raised, once more, the old burning question as to the location of the Academy, and sharpened the rival claims of the two

counties. It need hardly be said that the matter was delegated to a sub-committee; Birrell, who managed to turn up in time to preach in 1855, was put upon it. Evidently opinion was pretty strongly divided, for in 1857 they report that "it was all but unanimously resolved, that with a view especially to profiting by the literary and scientific facilities supposed likely to accrue from a recently originated educational establishment in the city of Manchester, known as 'Owens College,' one branch of the institution be located in that city, and that the other—to be restricted wholly to English theological studies—be conducted on the present premises, arranged and adapted accordingly." In accordance with this resolution a set of premises in Victoria Park, Manchester, was purchased at a cost of over £3,500. Difficulties, however, arose. The Manchester premises were re-sold at considerable loss, and donations towards their purchase were returned "to the friends disposed to reclaim them." Thus was the cup dashed from Lancashire's lips, for it was decided to "recommence measures for providing the Institution with a new abode in the vicinity of the existing one." In the end seven acres of land were secured at Rawdon, and the present splendid buildings erected at a cost of over £12,000, and opened on September 7th, 1859. Liverpool again came in, for Hugh Stowell Brown preached the sermon in Westgate chapel, Bradford, on the preceding evening.

The long-standing rivalry between the two counties was now soon to come to an end. In 1866 an Academy was established at Bury with an old Rawdonian, Dowson, at its head and not long after it was moved to Manchester, where it flourishes to this day. But with such a history behind the two existing Colleges, none will be surprised to learn that some Lancashire churches still look to Rawdon as their daughter, while some Yorkshire churches, who practise close communion, look to Manchester with maternal pride.

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