

The Experience of John Ryland.

DR. CULROSS, in his interesting little book on *The Three Rylands*, made use of this autobiographic record, but it does not seem to have been published hitherto. I have transcribed it from the manuscript bound up with a book bearing the name of "William Button," one of Ryland's schoolfellows mentioned in the story. The volume also contains the manuscript "Account of the Rise and progress of the two Societies at Mr. Ryland's and at Mrs. Trinder's Boarding School in Northampton," of which a part was printed by Dr. Culross, who aptly calls it "An Anticipation of the Christian Endeavour Movement." Amongst the points of interest in the present narrative may be mentioned:—

- (1) The intense reality of this religious experience of a boy of fourteen. We may feel that some of it is morbid, and some of it trivial; but there can be no doubt about the earnestness of the search for God, which rebukes the lethargy of to-day.
- (2) The Bible is treated as an "oracle" in a way that must frankly be called superstitious; its authority is too external, and too dependent on chance happenings.
- (3) We see how the Calvinistic doctrine of election still leaves the problem of religious assurance much where it was before; there can be no absolute proof of "assurance," nothing that prevents the recurrent doubt whether the believer is indeed one of the "elect."

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55, ST. GILES, OXFORD.

THE EXPERIENCE OF Jo/N R. L. D. JUNR AS
WROTE BY HIMSELF IN A LETTER TO THO.s
R. T. DATED FEBy. 23: 1770.

Almost a Year before the time of my first Convictions the Lord had called B.B. .n & Ray by Mastr C. .s's Death and I think about Whitsuntide (whether a little before it or a little after I know not) B.B. .r was awakened by my papa's talk to the Boys on Saturday Night; now these three B. .n Ray & Brewer made a practise of conversing about their souls while walking

up and down the Yard by Mr. Roses Wall¹ the day before the Races (I remember the time because of the Boys having Holidays and going out a walking and besides I kept a Diary a few months after) I was talking with Ray about something or other & the time coming for their Conversation he left me whereat I was very much offended and the next Morning Sept. 23, 1766 I wd not speak to him but told him he had fell out and wou'd not speak to me the last Night but he told me he had not fell out and added, "But I wanted to talk with B. . . n & Brewer I hope we were talking of Something better." *Something better* thought I what could that be; this stuck with me. I guess'd what it was and walked by them (that is just within the posts as I well remmember & I listened to them and tho' they were very shy of speaking to me then because Y . . . g had made a profession and had gone back yet I soon found that this something better was Jesus Christ and the salvation of their souls; this I hope the Lord blessed to my soul. I thought they were going to Heaven and should I stay behind? the Lord showed me what a Wretch I was, I was convinced that I was undone, I felt it, I knew it in a manner before for those who know how I was educated cannot suppose but I had head knowledge of these things but now I trust I knew it indeed and I endeavoured to pray for Mercy, I read Allens Alarm, Baxters Call, Bunyans Grace Abounding, &c. I pray'd twice a Day besides as before getting up and going to Bed—Convictions grew stronger and stronger—one Night in particular I yet well remmember about a Week after this I had very strong Convictions & went into the Garden. O I now remmember how I felt walking up and down in the Cross Walk next² Mary Street where there lay a long ladder and under the Nut trees I hope I prayed pretty earnestly so I went on for a little while—sometime after my papa bought me a little Desk which I was much pleased at but then I was very much frightened I fear'd the Lord wou'd not hear me, but was going to give me earthly pleasure and a portion in this World, I prayed that I might have Jesus rather, than worldly Comforts, but ah how soon did this pass away. my Convictions wore off by little and little till they were almost quite gone, I neglected prayer, was much assaulted with pride, and violent passions especially against Mr. Trinder, I hated him like a Devil O 'tis horrid to think off—however the Lord at length delivered me by little and little from this temptation & towards the end of November and beginning of December he gradually reviv'd his

¹ N.B.—There was a wall in the Yard which parted Mr. Roses Garden from Mr. Rylands Yard.

² N.B.—There was a Walk in the Garden which lead directly up to a Wall which parted a Street called Mary Street from the Garden.

Work and I hope he blest even this Backsliding to show me more of the vileness of my own Heart. I attended the Means on Thursday Night but was often very careless—Haskey (?) being left now to play the Devil was made useful to me to shew me the Devilish pride of my own Heart—At last I joined the Society after they had met once or twice (I often have thought since how if the Lord had not now called me about this time and I had found out of their Meeting I shou'd have troubled and persecuted them like a Fiend) they did not now pray any of them but Mr. Wykes, Mr. Austin & Mr. Rogers, the Boys did not pray till after Christmas—as yet I had no Comfort—Dec. 12. 1766 I was at the Church meeting and saw Mrs. Bibwell, Mrs. Boyce & Nanny Brice taken in, I sat in Mrs. prats pew as they came by me I thought I felt a very great Love to all the Lord's people and had a little hope—but never had a promise till Dec. 15 I remmember the time because two Days after this I begun a Diary but tho' without this I shd have forgot Dates I well remmember most of these things as I do this I know the place were these Words come into my Mind which rang in my Ears all the Day “my prayers are all in vain, and all in vain my Tears” O how distress'd was I, but at Night I was in the Dining Room standing by the hollow in the long Desk against the Wall lay a large Bible, I thought I'd look at it but where sh'd I read I thought read in Hosea 13 & 14 I did not know why I sh'd look there I never saw the words before but the 13 & 14 jingled in my Ears, I look'd, I read “I will ransom /m from the power of the Grave, I will redeem them from Death” I hope they were applyed, I had Comfort (ay and I found pride too) I went and prayed & had a good deal of Joy and again the next Morning at Reading I was comforted from these words in Revelations, “I will be his God and he shall be my Son” it follows, But the fearful and Unbelieving &c. shall have their part &c. this latter frightened me & made me affraid to refuse the Comfort as before I was going to do—in the Afternoon I was tempted to pride therefore the Lord withdrew & I fell a doubting—next Day at Noon I had this Text “For a small Moment I have forsaken thee in a little Wrath, but with great lovingkindness I will gather thee” which gave me exceeding great joy and at Dinner I walked up and down the Dining Hall rejoicing and humming over a Verse I then made

No Joys upon Earth can compare,
 With those in Religion we find,
 'Tis Jesus alone that is fair,
 'Tis Jesus alone that is kind.

after this I was sometimes Cold, sometimes doubting, sometimes midling for awile nothing very particular happened, once the

Devil had the Impudence to tell me Christ could not save me
Ans. He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to him.
Obj. But he can't make you come. *Ans.* Thy people shall be
willing in the Day of thy power. But says he A'int this Day past
Ans. Now is the acceptable time Now is the Day of Salvation,
so the Dog turned his Tail and made off Jan II. Mr. Bradbury
(a Man who will ever be dear to me) preached from Hos. I
will allure her and bring her into the Wilderness & speak Com-
fortably to her. O my God what a Day was that I was as full
of Joy & as full of Assurance as I could hold but this wore off,
but Comfort return'd next Sabbath; who preached I forget, not
having writ it down; the Day after my Birth Day when I was
14 Years old Mr. Wykes preach'd in the summer house to us,
from "Not far from the kingdom of God." When I heard the
Text I expected to be proved an Hypocrite but he turned it
otherways & it was blest to my very great Comfort, after this I
was mostly in the Dark for somewhat but once reviv'd by
reflecting on past Experience, & another time from "Gad, a Troop
shall overcome him but he shall overcome at last" In February
a very queer stupid looking Man come along with Mr. Billing,
My papa desired one of them to preach they settled it that this
Man should, and I was vex'd for I thought he looked like a poor
Fool that could not say a Word, I had a great mind not to go,
none of the Boys being to go but those that chose it, but Mr.
Wykes persuaded me & I went expecting nothing, the man
began stammering from Rev. 21. 6 but when once he got into it
he went on most sweetly indeed, he mentioned many sweet
promises which were precious Comforts to my soul especially
Zach. 4. 9—after this I got doubting woefully, the Chief Cause
was, I was afraid I was not a Child of God because I did not
grow in Grace more. I write thus in my Diary, the 2d Sabbath
in March in the Afternoon "miserable, dull, doubting, fearing,
sorrowfull, weeping, O what shall I do, have I begun or no?
Mr. Austin, Mastr. Everard, my Mamma & dear Mastr. Ray tried
to Comfort me but in vain for Jesus dont speak Comfort and I
fear I shall never have any Joy any more" But at Night going
to the Evening Lecture leaning on Ray these Words came Ps. 42
why art thou cast down O my soul, why art thou disquieted
within me, trust in God, for I shall yet praise him for the help
of his Countenance. & to second this in comes Mic. 7. 19 directly
after "He will turn again, he will have Compassion on us, he
will subdue our Iniquities & cast all our sins into the Depths of
the Sea" This was about Supper enough for the Night; how-
ever I ask'd Ray where the Words was, he told me and I read all
y/e 42d psalm & a sweet Night I had—after this I was sometimes
doubting but mostly midling till the end of April when I was

suffered to backslide much being left to quarelling & Levity which was followed by doubts & Darkness when I begun to turn part of the 3rd of Revelations into Verse beginning I am the Man, the Man of Grief To whom ye Lord denies Relief. &c. Apr. 28 I went to Barten & Woolaston & at Barten my papa preached from "Bread shall be given him, and his Water shall be sure which revivd and Comforted me very much—after this being very dead and fearing I was a stoney ground hearer I was much Comforted the 17 of May my papa preached from Deut. He found him in a Desart Land &c.—after this Mr. Edwards of Leeds, Mr. Hall of Arnsby & my papa talked together one Night & my papa said He had been 12 Yrs in the dark, Mr. Edwards 4. Mr. Hall 6. O thought I if there be such thinge as these in the way how shall I go on. but next Morning Mr. Hall preached at 6 oclock from Ps. 71. I will go on in the strength of the Lord, making mention of his Righteousness, of his only which encouraged me very much, but the next Day I began Doubting & the last of May I was sure of going to the Devil, & I stood near the Coachhouse and Bro. B. came and told me he had been talking wth. Watson and Arnold Haywood & he had hopes of them (I had sent him to them Sam Hayward having told me that they were upstairs at prayer) & I was very glad, thinks I I'll rejoice & I'll spite the Devil as much as I can before I go to him then I reflected why sure then I love Christ's Cause & he has lov'd me, but tho' this give me a little hope 'twas soon gone & next Day the 1st of June 1767 I well remmember I was very dead, very low and full of horrible Doubts fearing all past Experience was a mere Delusion till after School in the Afternoon when I went into the Summer house to pray & cou'd not go on & so stopt & sat down in a Chair in a Corner opposite the Desk & said 'twas in vain for me to pray all was a Delusion or to that purpose however I thought I'd e'en take up my Bible & read but I had some Mind not for I thought 'twas not for me however I read a promise or two but could not take them but I turned accidentily to Isa. 50. 10 "Who is there among you t/t feareth the Lord and obeyeth the Voice of his Servant that sitteth in Darkness & hath *no* Light, let him trust in the Name of the Lord & stay himself upon his God" this gave me some hope I thought I wd not despair but wait & as I continued meditating the Lord comforted me more and more—I still turned over the Bible & I light on these Words. Hos. 1. 10. "And it shall come to pass that in the *place* where it was said unto them ye are not my people there shall it be said unto them ye are the sons of ye living God" which was very Comfortable to me & it is remarkable that this Comfortable sense of my Adoption began in the same summer-house, in the same Chair & the Chair standing in the same

place wherein I sat & began to be troubled wth. this last doubting frame a few days before—In the Holidays I was mostly poorly tho' not very doubting but got a little Comfort when Mr. Danl. Taylor preachd & when Mr. Bradbury preached from "Faint yet pursuing" & some other times but a few Days after the last mentioned Sermon I was very low indeed fearing I had never anything but common Convictions which were now wearing off and false Comfort & y/t I was a deluded Hypocrite & God wd soon take away what I seemed to have & I should go back certainly should go back and thereby prove all to have been nothing. several Scriptures were brought to Mind by the old Fox (who once in vain played the same Trick wth. my Head) especially that "He shall send them strong Delusions that they may believe a Lye" when I went to Meeting O how did I wish to get out for I thought of that Text "To the Wicked God saith what hast thou to do wth. my Sabbaths & my solemn Feasts" O thought I I've no Business I am only come to increase my own Damnation—what Horror was I in that Day? I had a great mind to burn my Diary as a Delusion—next Day July 20. 1767 I was still as bad or worse. as I went along & saw my pigeons I wished I was in their case, O happy then thought I, O that I was like them & had no Hell to go to O that I never had been born, I could shew the exact spot in the Garden where I stood & wished I was a stone or wishd I was a Devil, I thought I wd gladly change my hotter hell for his—I was horribly bad but resolvd to tell nobody. In school time I was very sorrowful my papa ask'd me if I was sick I said no, Did my headach? no, so he thought I was sulky—and at last was angry about somewhat; sure thought I you need not be angry, I had not need be tormented here I shall be in Hell in a few Days & be tormented enough there, so I burst out a crying, he not knowing the reason sent me out of school—my Mamma came to me & as[k]'d me the Reason so seeing I must be charged wth. a fault when innocent I told not why I was so sorrowful I at last told her she and my papa then tryed to comfort me & I got a little hope which insensibly increased to considerable Confidence so I went on midling till I was proposed to the Church after which Mr. Whitefield preached at Mr. Hextall's from Isa. 61. 10 which was a very good time to me—3 Days after that I joined the Church with Bror. B & Everard not without some opposition at first on account of our youth but the Lord at last made all willing to receive us & Sept. 13. we are baptized but being affraid I should cry out and bring a Disgrace on ye Ordinance it hinder'd my Comfort in it save yt I was much affected in ye water my papa lifting up his eyes to Heaven & crying out Thanks be to God for this Boy" I shall never forget that sound while I live, at the Lord's Supper was

but dead and cold also then I was much affraid of future fears & that tho' the Lord wd. save me he wd. leave me to Darkness here but from this I was delivered by Matt. 6. 34. Take no thought for tomorrow sufficient for the Day is the Evil thereof & as thy Day is thy strength shall be"—tho' this has plagued me since then often times—in Novr. I being low had part of some Wds. given me in a Dream which was Comfortable both sleeping and waking (viz.) "say not I am a Dry tree for to thee will I give a Name & place in mine house" I got another good Dream in Decr. I thought the Day of Judgment was come & I was in the Kitchen & at first felt no great Emotion therefore I began to question if my State were right but before the Doubt cou'd well pass thro' my Mind I was filled wth. Joy unspeakable I shouted & cry'd wth. all my Might "My God My God My lovely God," at last I run into the Dining Room there I saw a bright opening in the Sky over All Saints¹ Tower, it then lessened; I thought I was very impatient to see my Jesus come, I thought of nothing else, so that I knew not nor cared for the crouds about me but stood crying out "my God" at last the opening grew bigger & my Lord was just coming but I awaked & I found myself still in this purgatory—one Monday I was much comfort'd talking wth. revd. Mr. Thomasin & hearing him complain of Deadness & stupidity like me—I had many good times when he preached. Feb. 1. 1768.—I was revivd by "Call upon me in the day of Trouble & I will deliver thee & thou shalt glorify me" after this I called all in Question & thought of those wds. "Zion saith the Lord hath forsaken me, my God hath forgotten" ay thinks I that's my case but I recollected what follow'd. "Can a Woman forsake her suckling Child &c. which comforted me but it was soon over—at Mastr. Yallowley's funeral and at Mr. Brook's I was extremely joyful indeed but Mar. 12 after the Lord's Supper I was very low, I writ down my Reasoning then & now transcribe some "Well what can I do here I have been at the Lord's Table many times & never had any Comfort, however not much—I pray for more Love but I never can be heard as I see, O what shall I do, surely if I belong to the Lord I shd never be so, I am not his, I shall be damned—but yet I desire to love him and Ministers say that's a sign of Love & therefore he must love me for I should not love him if he did not love me—well Ministers are Lyars—nay but the Scriptures confirm it—well may be I dont desire to love him—but I am sure I do—no, may be God has sent me strong Delusions that I may believe a Lye—but this is no Delusion I felt I desire to love him—well if I do desire to love him its in vain, I dont see that God hears

¹ N.B.—There was a Church which cou'd be seen out of ye Dining Room window called All Saints Church.

prayer however he dont hear mine—well may be he will by and by, I dont know when—O what shall I do surely Religion's a Delusion—but I know it a'int—I know I have felt the power of it, God has had Mercy—if he has he'll cast me off—but that's impossible—well if God loves me what's the meaning of my being thus—why he is offended at my offering to come into the Church—well if I ever feel so little Love at the Lord's Table again, I'll go there no more that I never will—but does not God know best when to give me comfort—God hates me I ha'nt had a good Sabbath ever such a while—but I had Comfort when Mastr. Yallowley & Mr. Brook were buried—I had Delusions rather—Is not this Unbelief—Is not what I call Faith Presumption? that's most likely—Everard was in the Dark this Morning & had Comfort at the Lord's table, why did not I?—I did not deserve it—shall I murmur against God? Mr. Wykes said he never had Comfort at the Lord's table for two years—Nonsense! he cd. not be as dead as I am—Well there is not one promise in the Bible for me—no? why did not Abraham Abbot who was taken in this Morning mention some such wds. as these “I will cleanse their Blood which I have not cleansed” and does not our Lord say “God will verily avenge his Elect tho' he tarry long”—Ay the Devil is ready enough to stir up presumption I have no Business wth. these wds—I am undone I shall never have any more Love as I see—well I shall try by & by—I hardly know that—however I want love in this World—if God lov'd, me he'd give me more Love to him here”—so I went on reasoning, I pray'd had no Liberty—at last I thought I'd look in the Bible—but there is nothing for me—I know God wont give me any Comfort—well I'll try—I opened on the 3d of Jeremh: & got some not much—next Day I was very sorrowful no Scripture wd. suit me I thought, at last I got Comfort from Heb. 10. “Cast not away your Confidence which hath great Recompence of Reward for ye have need of patience after ye have done the will of God that ye might receive the promise for yet a little while and he that shall come will come & shall not tarry”—in May after prayer in the Summer house I opened a Quarto French Testament & saw in Capitals FIDELE & VRAI. Faithful and true, in Rev: which encouraged me much—soon after this I had a very good time meditating in Mrs. Trinder's Garden one night by myself. she & Mrs. Churchill being busy they sent me there & I'm sure I found Christ then in that Garden—The last Sabbath in May 1768 was a sweet Season. My papa preach'd from “Ho every one that thirsteth &c. I had a like Opportunity 2 or 3 Days after, he preaching at Kingsthorpe from “Comfort ye, Comfort ye my people &c. about this time I was in general freed from Doubts, I have had some slight Attacks of that kind since but for these

last 2 Years I have hardly ever absolutely doubted of my state, & as I have been freed from violent Doubts & almost freed from all Doubts of my state I have not been fed wth. Spoon Meat nor did the Lord give me a promise home but sent me to hunt my Venison where I could—once I feared I had been deluded & I was going to resolve I wd. not be Comforted more till the Lord sensibly forced me to be Comforted whether I wd. or no that so I might be sure it was him that did it—but then I thought what if God should save me at last but leave me to keep to my Resolution & I get no Comfort & he not force me to be Comforted & so I go sorrowful all my Days for nothing, thinks I. I shd be then in a fine Hole, so I had best get Comfort while I may—Once the Devil advised me to doubt because I had no Doubts, this advice seem'd absurd so I wd not be ruled by the Fool—I had a rare time in Aug. 1768. when I went one night with my papa & Mrs. Trinders Boarders to Abingdon I came back by myself—verily I had Communion wth the Father & the Son yea & Spirit too—I have had a many good times but I think I have been large enough—& I have had many bad ones for whatever you may think I promise you there may be Assurance & yet be trouble enough—but say you wd. not Assurance give power over Enemies & raise above all Trouble? I answer, Assurance is twofold, one is from Faith the other is from Reason, both may be well grounded but the latter may be in the same person who finds Temptations & Troubles, seeing it springs not from immediate Acts of Faith or particular manifestations of Christ which wd. have the effect you speak of but it arises from Reason which may Convince a Believer when not made a Fool of by Satan & made to contradict his own Feelings & Senses that he loves God & was belovd. of him—Now it's trouble enough not to love him better whom I know has loved me and by how much the more I know he has loved me by so much the greater will the Trouble be that I can't love & serve him—I have had much Deadness, often stupid as the Beast & yet at the same time proud as the Devil, this is Trouble bad enough tho' I know I shall go to Heaven, to feel myself so little heavenly—I have had many Temptations and terrible ones too—I have more Corruption in my Heart than you can concive or I believe than any other has beside—I have Unbelief enough, it works some ways when it dont others, Unbelief has more games than one to play—I may know my state safe if there be a God & question whether there be or no—I have done so—I have a World of Atheism in my Heart—The Fool hath sd. in his Heart there is no God—I am yt Fool—I have been tempted to doubt of every thing in Religion from the Existence of a God down to Church Government & true Baptism.—I find wth. Hussey "Tis as natural for me to be an Arminian as it is

to breathe—I have been within this last Year very much troubled at the Doubts of others as bad almost as if they were my own souls Troubles—especially my dear young Bretheren here—about ye time of the Meeting of Ministers I was much troubled wth. evil Questionings about ye Self-origination & personality of Christ so that I could not tell what to do but while Mr. Hall preachd I was freed from this Temptation by these words “The Lord rained fire from the Lord” & by ye first of Hebrews “To the Son he saith “thy throne O God is for ever & ever—I have never been so plagued since, I then heard Mr Hall wth exceeding delight—but I must stop I’ve been long enough & I do not know who else I’d do this for hardly—but you desired it so much—but I charge you let none see it but that one whom I gave you leave for—& do both pray hard for ye vilest of Creatures but I trust your affectionate tho’ very unworthy Bror. the vile, the proud, the sinful

J.R. d

Northton. Feb. 23. 1770

Sandwich, Shallows and Margate.

JOSIAH THOMPSON gathered in 1770 some information that may amplify the paragraph on page 187 of our second volume. The Particular Baptist church at Sandwich had as its pastor Thomas Feckenham, from Worcester apparently, between 1687 and 1696. He went over to Ramsgate for a debate with Pack, an Independant, and published his sermon: if anyone can trace it, we shall be glad. Before the century closed, Mr. Shallows bought some land two miles from Margate, and built there; at one end of the premises was a Baptist meeting-house; he died in 1706. Richard Godfrey was in charge till his death in 1724. John Howe then gave pastoral care from his home in Folkestone for thirty years: a new meeting-house was built (in Sandwich or at Shallows?) and then in 1736 the Shallows group separated. Jervis, an apothecary, bequeathed a manse and some money. After Howe’s death in 1750 came Yielding, then Stone, who died 1762. Jonathan Purchis came in 1762, and started a new era by opening in Margate morning and evening.