

James Foster, D.D., 1697-1753.

JAMES FOSTER claims a merited page and a half in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. His contemporary fame in London is well known to those who find an interest in the history of nonconformity during the eighteenth century, and he is still remembered from the reference that Pope made him in the Epilogue to the *Satires*¹

Let modest Foster, if he will, excel
Ten Metropolitans in preaching well,

and by Johnson's qualifying remark thereon,² while the curious may also know him through the proverbial observation reported by Hawkins³ that those "who had not heard Farinelli sing and Foster preach, were not qualified to appear in genteel company." Sir Leslie Stephen, besides writing the article on Foster in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, devoted a section to his importance in his *History of English thought in the eighteenth century*, and latterly Dr. Whitley has indicated his position in the history of the Baptist denomination. Now-a-days he is overshadowed by his namesake John, with whom he is often confused.

His contemporary fame outside England has not apparently been appreciated. A growing literary cosmopolitanism, especially a growing Anglomania, on the continent during the eighteenth century is shown by the number of learned periodicals in French which reviewed the works of savants belonging to the northern European countries. Numbers of these journals were published in Holland, handy small octavos and duodecimos, providing summaries of the best works of the day, with a bias towards theology and science; there is a series of Anglo-French reviews extending almost unbroken from 1717 to the end of the century, and it was one of these latter that inspired the *Bibliothèque germanique*⁴ and the *Nouvelle bibliothèque germanique*. Most of them were conducted by French Protestant refugees. It is from these journals that the following information is derived, but it should be noted that

¹ I, 132-3.

² For this and other references to Foster by English men of letters, see Johnson's *Lives*, edited by Dr. G. B. Hill, 1905, vol. 2, p. 387.

³ *History of Music*, 1776, V, 321.

⁴ Cf. I, preface, iii.

although the French language is used, it does not follow that they were chiefly known in France.⁵

There can be no doubt that Foster was of English Baptists the best known abroad, although it was as a philosopher-theologian rather than as a Baptist that he received attention. Altogether I have found 586 pages of matter devoted to him in these French journals, a corpus of criticism which, assembled, would make a not inconsiderable volume. Casual observations in the reviews of Foster's works will also show what idea a foreigner might gain of English Baptists in general.

On his death in 1753, an "Eloge" of Foster, compiled chiefly from funeral sermons, was published in the *Journal britannique*,⁶ a journal printed at the Hague and conducted by Dr. M. Maty, afterwards principal librarian of the British Museum. Foster, he says, "a été comme Tillotson estimé hors de cette isle, distingué comme lui par ses talens pour la chaire et malheureusement également attaqué par des frères intolérans." Maty proceeded to sketch the career of Foster, adding stray thoughts of his own; early a Presbyterian, "ce fut une des sectes les plus méprisées en Angleterre qu'il préféra et à la sienne qui le persécutoit et à l'église dominante qui lui tendoit les bras"; taken by a friend as a private chaplain, he drew down upon himself the maledictions of an anonymous tract. "Je voudrois pouvoir cacher qu'un ecclésiastique est fortement soupçonné d'avoir été cet anonyme," added Maty. He then recounts the story of his accidental discovery by Dr. Mead, sheltering from the rain one day, and observes, "qui dans une église anabaptiste eût cherché l'ennemi du fanatisme et le modèle de l'éloquence?" On his reputation Maty quotes Pope: "Laissez l'humble Foster par ses sermons divins surpasser s'il le veut dix métropolitains." C'est à peu près ce que dit de ce prédicateur un poète qui n'accordoit point son suffrage au préjugé: c'est pour dire plus la voix publique non seulement des habitans de cette isle, mais encore des étrangers qui ont lu ces discours, et de ceux même qui n'en ont vu que les traductions. Ces derniers ne peuvent cependant qu'imparfaitement juger des beautés du stile."

His reputation abroad rested largely on his *Sermons*, less so on the *Usefulness, truth and excellency of the Christian revelation* and the *Discourses*. The *Usefulness*, however, takes precedence in time. Maty said that Foster was already known

⁵ "L'extreme difficulté que nous avons en France de faire venir des livres de Hollande, est cause que je n'ai vû que tard le neuvième tome de la Bibliothèque Raisonnée. . . ." Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, Rouen, Jore 1734, p. 186, 26th letter. The *Bibliothèque britannique* hardly sold at all in Paris. See my article in *The Library*, June 1931, p. 81; and one in the *Baptist Times*, 11 June 1931.

⁶ Tome XII, 281-303, nov.-dec. 1753.

abroad by extracts in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*, and in truth, this journal devoted a large amount of its space to Foster's works. In 1731-2 it reviewed the *Usefulness, truth and excellency of the Christian revelation*, second edition, 1731, and gave to it three separate "extraits," as the reviews were called; in the first of these only chapter one was dealt with, in the second, chapters two and three, and in the third, chapters four and five and the "postcrit." On arriving at the treatment of the positive institutions of Christianity in the last of these articles, the reviewer makes the following noteworthy preliminary comment on the rite of baptism: "Ici je dois, avant toutes choses, faire connoître le caractère et la profession de notre auteur, dont on n'a vu encore que le nom, comme il n'y a que le nom dans le titre de son livre. Les lecteurs qui n'en savent pas autre chose, c'est à dire à peu près tous les lecteurs François, ne se seroient pas avisez, je pense, de donner cet ouvrage à un *ministre anabaptiste*. Tel est pourtant Mr. Foster, mais on doit savoir aussi, que, nonobstant cette difference de communion, il est si fort estimé des *Presbytériens* de Londres qu'ils l'ont souvent fait prêcher dans leurs églises. Ceux qui auront lû ce livre ne s'étonneront pas. Tout y marque un caractère de candeur, de modération, de modestie, de probité, et de piété sincère, jointes avec une pénétration et une force de raisonnement peu communs qui ne peuvent que charmer des esprits et des coeurs bien faits. On conviendra au moins, qu'il est bien éloigné d'avoir la moindre teinture de fanatisme, comme quelques-uns pouroient se l'imaginer sur le simple prejugué du nom disgracié de sa secte."⁷ So far, the adjectives applied to the denomination are "méprisée" and "disgraciée." This quotation is followed by a translation of remarks on the value of public baptism, nothing being found about the baptism of children or baptism by aspersion, and of remarks on the Lord's Supper. The work was mentioned briefly in 1733 by the *Bibliothèque britannique*,⁸ which also noted the appearance of a third edition.¹⁰

The *Sermons* were not only reviewed abroad both in the original and in translation, but were thought worthy of importation by a Dutch bookseller in their English form.¹¹ The but containing reviews written in London, anticipated the *Bibliothèque raisonnée* in its treatment of the *Sermons* and the

⁷ Tome VII (2), 291-329, oct.-déc. 1731; VIII (2), 243-302, avr.-juin, 1732; IX (1) 5-65, juill.-sep. 1732.

⁸ IX (1), 39.

⁹ II, 65-6.

¹⁰ IV, 232.

¹¹ *Journal britannique*, VII, jan. 1752. "Catalogue of new English books lately rec: vid (sic) from England by H. Scheurleer F. Z.", including J. Foster's *Sermons* on several subjects, 4 v. 8vo. London, Marked 11-11-.

Bibliothèque britannique,¹² a journal published also at the Hague controversy arising out of them. Two articles are devoted to volume one. The journalist begins by explaining who Foster was, a "ministre anabaptiste de Londres, ce qui ne doit pas prévenir contre lui les personnes qui se font peut-être des idées trop désavantageuses de sa secte," a man of great reputation attracting all manner of distinguished people by his preaching, and known already abroad by the extracts in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*. In the first extract the reviewer makes much of the current abuse of freethinking; to reason on his faith is an advantage to the Christian, liberty of thought is a most precious gift, but "jamais le déisme ne fut plus répandu que dans ce siècle éclairé où chacun se pique de juger des choses par lui-même. D'où peut venir cela? . . ." So different, so interestingly and so singularly treated are these "treatises, rather than sermons," confesses the reviewer, that too much space has been spent on this first extract, and in the second, far less is given; but it was out of a sermon reviewed in this second extract, that the controversy with Stebbing arose.

In this second extract of volume one, the reviewer selects for discussion, the sermons on mysteries, heresy, and schism, and he is in perfect agreement with Foster in his opposition to persecution and all uniformity except of charity. In 1735, Stebbing's *Letter* to Foster appeared, and was promptly reviewed in the *Bibliothèque britannique* together with Foster's *Answer*.¹³

It was not until the following year, 1736, that the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*¹⁴ reviewed volume one of the *Sermons* in the edition of 1733. "Voici des Sermons Anglois et à l'Angloise. La réputation que notre prédicateur s'est acquise en Angleterre, et qui lui attire une foule d'auditeurs de tout parti, n'a rien perdu par la publication de ces Sermons. Leur beauté solide est indépendante de tous les agrémens de la prononciation. Aussi sont-ils fort estimez; et on peut, à mon avis, les compter entre les meilleurs que l'Angleterre ait produits." The journalist did not wish, he said, to make two extracts of the book, however short some of the analyses of the sermons might be; ten of his pages were devoted, nevertheless, to the sermon on schism. The reason was that he promised, later in the article, to reserve treatment of the sermon on heresy for a further review which should include the controversial pamphlets. This was done in the next volume of the journal;¹⁵

¹² II, 65-103, 1733; III, 365-400, 1734.

¹³ Tome V, 370-377, and 377-387, 1735.

¹⁴ Tome XVI (i) 40-81.

¹⁵ Tome XVII (i), 5-47.

Stebbing's *Letter* and Foster's *Answer*, both in a second edition, were treated in a manner favourable to Foster. "I say, advisedly, that I am dealing with the first two pieces in this dispute," remarked the journalist, "for the antagonists will assuredly not stop here"; and his surmise was correct. The dispute is followed step by step, beginning with an extract of Foster's sermon (on Titus iii. 10-11), and starting the controversy proper by a specimen of Dr. Stebbing's style of arguing. The reviewer adds two or three pages of his own. Later, in the same year, this journal¹⁶ gave no more than an announcement of Foster's second *Answer* to Stebbing's second *Letter*, and of Tipping Silvester's second brochure against Foster. The *Bibliothèque britannique*¹⁷ had, late in 1735, also merely announced Stebbing's second *Letter*, Silvester's *Critical dissertation*, and an anonymous tract by Caleb Fleming, *Saint Paul's heretick*, at the same time noting the appearance of the third edition of Foster's *Sermons*; and late in 1736¹⁸ announced Foster's reply to Stebbing's second *Letter* after a year's wait, to which Stebbing replied with *A true state of the controversy*. Foster, "contre l'attente du public," quickly replied to this last work by *An answer to Dr. Stebbing's true state*, and a review of this was promised.¹⁹

The unfavourable review given to Foster's opponent, Stebbing, in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*, tome 17, prompted a friend of the latter, to write a letter, signed A.L., to the *Bibliothèque britannique*,²⁰ "touchant la dispute de Mr. le Dr. Stebbing avec Mr. Foster sur le sujet de l'hérésie," accusing the *Bibliothèque raisonnée* of negligent omission of all mention of Stebbing's arguments in his second *Letter*. The *Bibliothèque britannique* could hardly be expected to deal with this *Letter* of Stebbing's in its review in tome 5, because it had not yet appeared; but the other journal had no such excuse, for the *Letter* had been in print for six months when their review appeared in the issue for July-September 1736, tome 17. Who A.L. was I have no evidence; he may have been A. Le Moine, who did contribute to the journal. At the end of the letter, Foster was given an invitation to reply in the pages of the *Bibliothèque britannique*.

The second volume of the *Sermons*, announced in the *Bibliothèque britannique* of April-June 1737,²¹ was not

¹⁶ XVII. (1), 470, oct.-déc. 1736.

¹⁷ VI. 218, oct.-déc. 1735.

¹⁸ VIII. 230, oct.-déc. 1736.

¹⁹ VIII. 434, janv.-mars, 1737.

²⁰ VIII. 346-404, 1737. For Le Moine as a contributor to this journal, see British Museum Sloane MSS., 4284ff, 94; 102.

²¹ IX, 219.

reviewed by that journal until the issues²² for April-June and July-September a year later; in the first of these extracts only sermon one was dealt with, but in the second extract the remaining fifteen sermons received treatment, the titles only of the eight to sixteenth being given. At the conclusion of his review, the journalist made the following statement: "Tous ces sermons sont très beaux . . . Il n'y a qu'une voix là-dessus : mais une chose qui fait de la peine à bien des gens, c'est que l'auteur prend partout à tâche de réduire toute la religion chrétienne à la seule moralité. Il n'insiste nulle part sur les dogmes, et je ne sçais si dans tout ce volume il y est dit un seul mot de notre rédemption par Jésus-Christ. Ce sont pourtant les dogmes, et celui-ci en particulier qui distinguent le Christianisme de la religion naturelle: et il semble que Mr. Foster auroit d'autant mieux fait de s'expliquer sur cet article, qu'il a été publiquement accusé de n'en rien croire." Foster is mentioned once more in this *Bibliothèque*²³ in a letter specially contributed, but anonymous, on a suggested new translation of Deuteronomy xxix. 29; he is quoted as denying mysteries. The *Bibliothèque raisonnée* did not review this volume until January-March 1739.²⁴ In 1739, also the French translation of a selection of the *Sermons* was published.²⁵

A German translation of the *Sermons*, with a preface by A. F. W. Sack, was announced in 1750 by the *Nouvelle bibliothèque germanique*:²⁶ "cet ouvrage sera très bien exécuté à tous égards." In the following year this translation was reviewed in the same journal,²⁷ and in the course of the review the journalist mentions a previous translation, by which he means, it should be noted, the French one. "S'il y a une réputation bien établie quant à la solidité et à la force de raisonnement, c'est celle que Mr. Foster, prédicateur ordinaire des *Mennonites* à Londres s'est acquise depuis longtemps par ses sermons. Dès l'an 1739

²² XI, 141-163: XI, 213-241.

²³ XXIII, 125-140, 1744; at page 130 the writer refers to the *Bibliothèque britannique*, II, i. 66.

²⁴ XXII, 5-32.

²⁵ *Sermons sur divers sujets, traduits de l'Anglois sur la 3e édition* (by J. N. S. Allamand). Tome 1. 8vo. Leyde, C. J. Luzac, 1739. No more was published of this selection. Cf. Quérard, *La France littéraire*, art. Foster; *Biographie universelle*, 1816, XV, 320. There is no copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The *Nouvelle bibliothèque germanique*, VIII, 260; 1751 refers to it in a quotation made in the next paragraph of this article.

²⁶ Tome V, ii. 457, oct. 1748-déc. 1749, published by P. Mortier at Amsterdam, 1750.

²⁷ VIII, ii, 260-292, avr.-juin. 1751. *Herrn Jacob Fosters Reden*, &c. 2 vols., 8vo. Frankfort and Leipzig, Weidmann, 1750; vol. 1, with preface by Sack on the utility of sermons, pp. 400 plus dedication, preface and table, vol. 2, pp. 378.

il en a paru un volume traduit en *François*, de l'imprimerie de Jean Luzac à Leyde: et tout le monde a été surpris de ne pas voir le continuation de cet ouvrage qui n'auroit pas été moins bien reçu que les volumes de *Tillotson*, de *Scherlock*, &c. Il étoit arrivé à peu près la même chose en Allemagne. On y avoit depuis dix ans ce premier volume traduit, sans avoir été suivi d'aucun autre. Les *Allemands* se sont réveillés les premiers et apparemment les *François* les imiteront. Voici deux volumes à la fois qui seront suivis au moins d'un troisième. Le Traducteur a travaillé sur nouveaux fraix, pour donner de l'uniformité à son ouvrage; et quoique la première traduction fût estimable, celle-ci l'emporte à divers égards. Le premier volume de l'ouvrage que nous annonçons contient précisément les mêmes sermons qui se trouvent dans le tome français." The reviewer gives a list of subjects and texts, and rather than give a fragmentary account of them all, he gives a full extract of one, the first sermon of volume II., "Sur le bien et le mal moral," on James i. 17.

It will be seen that our author's reputation abroad, or at least in the eyes of those who wrote for a foreign public, was, by the middle of the century considerable. When Dr. Maty began his *Journal britannique*²⁸ in January 1750, the very first work he chose for review was Foster's *Discourses on the principal branches of natural religion and social virtue*, volume I. Maty was aware that his choice was not a chance one, for he mentions in his extract of volume II., that he could not but speak feelingly of one who in some way had opened his journal's "career." In this first extract, Maty tires before the end, and on chapter seven he says, "Mais je n'ai pas assez d'espace pour m'étendre sur des sujets aussi obscurs, et mes lecteurs s'appercevront aisément que je parcours en tremblent et à la hâte un terrain qui m'est suspect." Volume II. of the *Discourses* was reviewed by Maty in 1752,²⁹ and the review begins by a charming reference to Foster. "Un écrivain, plus respectable encore par la bonté de son coeur que par la justesse de son esprit, m'ouvrit en quelque sorte la carrière de ce journal. Il m'étoit doux de le commencer par un ouvrage destiné à rappeler aux hommes leur divine origine et leurs premiers devoirs. Je me montrais, si je l'ose dire au public, sous les enseignes d'un ami des hommes, d'un disciple de la vérité et je sentois que ma plume dirigée par la sienne ne pouvoit qu'intéresser à mon début les esprits délicats et les âmes sensibles. Peu d'ouvrages assurent à un journaliste d'aussi grands avantages et de pareils lecteurs." He speaks of the illness which

²⁸ Published at the Hague by Scheurleer, 12mo. I, 3-32; I, 49-74.

²⁹ VII, 363-387, avril 1752. Announced VII, 352, mars 1752.

retarded its publication, the satisfaction at seeing it appear, the disturbing thought that it will be the last gift of the author to mankind, and in a note he adds that there is little hope of his recovery from his "épuisement et l'anéantissement de ses facultés." His matter may not be new, he concludes, but the excellence of his work is in its manner and style. Later, in the "Eloge," Maty apologises for the fact that this last work is "plus diffus et moins précis" than his others by "l'affoiblissement de l'auteur, et la nécessité de faire un gros livre (car malgré la générosité du siècle on ne donne une guinée que pour un certain nombre de feuilles) . . ." ³⁰

In 1747 appeared at Amsterdam, anonymously, the following work in translation by Foster: *Mémoires de la vie du Lord Lovat, Relation de la conduite du comte de Kilmarnoch après sa sentence prononcée.* ³¹

Finally it should be observed that his name was bound to be met by any reader of Pope's Satires in translation; these are included in the "Oeuvres complètes" of Pope of 1779, 1780, and 1796.³² The couplet on Foster runs, "Que le modeste Foster prêche infiniment mieux que dix Evêques, s'il le juge à propos," but no note on Foster is given as is done for other persons mentioned. Can it be that he was already forgotten?

F. BECKWITH.

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY,
LEEDS.

³⁰ Journal britannique, XII, 301.

³¹ Duodecimo. Querard, *La France littéraire*, art. Foster. Barbier, *Dictionnaire des ouvr. anon.*

³² Translated into French by various authors, edited by J. de La Porte. 1779, 8 vols., 8vo. Paris, veuve Duchesne. IV, 342 1780, 8 vols., 8vo. Paris, Durand neveu. 1796, 8 vols. 8vo. Paris, Devaux et Chaigneau. Three almost identical editions. Compare this quotation with Maty's noted on page 315, which, it will be observed, is in verse. There was an earlier German translation of Pope's complete works, which I have not seen. On Pope in German (especially through French) see J. H. Heinzelmann in *Modern Philology*, 10, 317-364, 1913.

See the accomplished orator appear,
Refined his language, and his reasoning clear.
Thou only, Foster, hast the pleasing art
At once to charm the ear, and mend the heart.

SAVAGE.