

The Early Church at Leeds.

(Continued from page 82.)

Failing health gradually began to handicap the work of so zealous a man. It is melancholy to observe how thoughts of death seem to have occupied his mind for the last ten years of his life. He was obliged to abandon the "Sunday evening lectures" which he gave at Holbeck every third week. By 1820, when he was so ill that his life was despaired of, he was a broken man.⁴⁷ He felt unable to visit his members, the weekly lecture and prayer meeting were held at his house, he was forbidden to breathe the night air; Robert Hall reiterates advice to him to take care on this last point: "I am persuaded your long evening walks are extremely prejudicial. Do, my dear friend, be prevailed upon to give up your evening lectures."⁴⁸

At last it was thought advisable to appoint a co-pastor, and James Acworth being appointed, he was ordained on May 29th, 1823. Acworth⁴⁹ was admitted to Bristol College in 1817, and in 1820 proceeded to Glasgow to finish his studies; the story of his visits to Leeds, reception at the Old Chapel and kindnesses received is best told in his own words. ". . . Near the close of the third year of his student life in Bristol College, Dr. Ryland, his venerable tutor, appointed him to spend the ensuing vacation in Weymouth, then without a pastor. Very soon afterwards Dr. Ryland summoned him into his study, and said, "I have just received a letter from Leeds, intimating that the minister there is becoming increasingly infirm and feeble, and requires assistance. You, I understand, intend to prosecute your studies at Glasgow University. Give up Weymouth, and on your way to Scotland visit Leeds." Accordingly, at the appointed time, he (Acworth) took his place on the outside of the stage coach travelling northwards, and arrived as far as the top of York Road about four o'clock of a Saturday afternoon. Obtaining

⁴⁷ *Memoir*, p. 50 (1817), 56 (1820), 57-8.

⁴⁸ *Memoir*, p. 114 (Jan. 14, 1820), 115, (Sept. 22, 1820), 120 (March 19, 1821). *Langdon's address*. He always lived at some distance from the church. 1798, Woodhouse Lane (Directory); 1817, school given as West Street (Directory); 1820, still West Street (letter to B. Goodman); Infirmary Street is also quoted (Cloth Hall tavern, picture with note by A. Mattison, Yorks. Evg. Post, Feb. 1923).

⁴⁹ Information from Bristol reports, kindly supplied by Rev. Prof. F. E. Robinson. Aug. 6, 1817, Acworth admitted; Aug. 3, 1820, "Dr. Ward's trustees have taken Mr. Acworth under their patronage to finish his studies in Scotland"; Aug. 1821 (report ending June) Rev J. Acworth noted as then at Leeds.

thence his first glimpse of Leeds, and coming as he did from the county of Kent . . . the impression received was aught but favourable. He could scarcely discern the buildings owing to the thick, murky atmosphere that rested upon them. Nevertheless, next day every unfavourable impression vanished. On coming down the pulpit steps at the Stone Chapel, he was greeted in such a manner as convinced him that he was amongst a people very kind, very hearty, and, moreover, very considerate. By their request he continued with them until the time when he should proceed to Scotland. They then paid him the unexpected honour of asking him to remain and settle, but he replied that he was under a pledge, at least to himself, to neglect no opportunity of scientific and literary culture, before entering the ministry. They yielded to his wish, and, without exacting any pledge from them, he said that if they desired it—if in the meantime their minds had not become fixed upon some one else—he would return to them at the close of the University session. . . . He went to Glasgow, and upon his return thence, he undertook whatever ministerial labours the good old man chose to allot to him. Thus they went on for six months, at the end of which time the dear, kind people allowed him to go back to Scotland, though pressing him to stay; and yet again: till, on the last occasion, he said, "You have treated me most handsomely and generously, and if you are disposed to receive me at the close of my curriculum, I throw myself into your arms, to do with me what you like." This was in 1823,⁵⁰ . . . He (Acworth) was then associated with his revered colleague in the pastorate; and no senior could have treated a junior more tenderly, more generously, or more considerately throughout, than Mr. Langdon treated him." For two months he was given leave of absence to accompany a friend on a tour in France, Switzerland, and Italy. "Gradually the Church and congregation increased. At the celebration of the first Lord's Supper, there were some thirty-five or forty communicants. They went on increasing; and it was then said, "It's not fair to allow ourselves to be buried here. Surely we ought to remove." He consulted with Mr. Langdon, who said they would never accomplish it. He asked him why, and Mr. Langdon then mentioned an obstacle which he (Dr. Acworth) thought might be removed, and which he determined to endeavour to remove. Soon after⁵¹ they had a meeting in the upper room of the Old Stone Chapel, and the Friend who was considered the obstacle said, "If there is to be a new chapel, and there is a debt upon it, I won't enter it." Then another Friend said, "Let us see what can be done;

⁵⁰ Acworth's ms. minute book records his arrival at Leeds on Sat., April 5, 1823.

⁵¹ Early April, 1824: for these negotiations, see later.

here's my £500"; and that other Friend instantly said, "And here's mine." The families of these two friends at once promised £250 each, and £2,000 was thus raised immediately.⁵² . . . They soon found they could calculate upon from £3,000 to £4,000. But still bearing in mind the declaration of the Friend who had said he would not enter the Chapel if it were in debt, they strove to get more money. In the meantime he induced a Friend to enter into negotiations for the purchase of the site upon which South Parade Chapel now [i.e. 1876] stands, and the land was secured. Mr. Langdon was still alive, and Mr. Aspin, a well-known friend of the place, took the draft of the conveyance to him for his signature. But before the foundation-stone was laid, God was pleased to take Mr. Langdon to the upper and better world. The foundation-stone was laid in February, 1825. . . . They opened the new chapel with seventy-four members."⁵³ The movement for a new church will be outlined later.

There is little more to tell of Langdon. On the 6th January, 1823, his daughter Mary, aged thirty-one, died after a short illness; it was a heavy blow to the old man.⁵⁴ At the beginning of October, 1824, he became alarmingly ill; on Monday, the 11th, the deed of conveyance mentioned above was read to him; on the next day he was dead. He was buried on the eighteenth of the month in Mill Hill churchyard, Leeds, where five of his children were already laid to rest; Dr. Steadman delivered an address at the old chapel before the burial, and on the following Sunday Mr. Acworth preached on the text, 2 Cor. xiii. 11. The events of that week are dramatic in their intensity and contrast.⁵⁵ Mrs. Langdon survived until December 27th, 1837, and the following children at least also survived him: Caleb Evans, James Brown, Sarah, Susannah, Ann, and Thomas.⁵⁶

⁵²These two friends were Benjamin Goodman, "the obstacle," and Michael Thackray; Thackray soon gave a second £500. G. and J. Thackray gave each £250, as did G. and J. Goodman. The friend who negotiated the purchase of the site was John Goodman. (MS. notes of W. R. Bilbrough; Cash-book; &c.)

⁵³*The jubilee of South Parade Baptist chapel, Leeds, edited by J. W. Ashworth, 1877, pp. 25-9.* Supplementary notes as above ms. cash-book and minutes.

⁵⁴*Memoir, p. 58; see bibliography for her funeral sermon, of which extracts are printed in the Memoir, pp. 61-76.*

⁵⁵*Memoir, p. 86; details of that last week, ibid. 83-7.*

⁵⁶Subscription to the debt, 7/7/1828, Caleb Evans Langdon £10; similar subscription 13/9/1830, the other names each £1; Ann mentioned in list of members c. 1826 and subscription list of 1836. Mrs. Langdon's death noted in minute book, and *Leeds Mercury*, 30 Dec., 1837, Sat., p. 8. The 1834 *Leeds directory* records under Langdon: 1. Mrs. Ann and Miss, day and boarding school, 25, St. James's St.; 2. Caleb Evans, day school, 97A, Park Lane, house at Burley Terrace; 3. James, librarian to the Literary Institution, 25, St. James's St.

After his death a sum of £1,340 was subscribed as a testimonial to his family; of this £338 15s. 6d., collected by M. Thackray and B. Goodman came from the church and congregation, and £275 4s. 6d. was collected from Langdon's old pupils; but exactly half, £726, collected by George Rawson and T. S. R. Reade, was the gift of the public. Could there be a better testimony to the esteem in which he was held by the townsmen of Leeds? The name of Richard Oastler as trustee stands with those of B. Goodman and George Thackray.⁵⁷

There is nothing of the tinkling cymbal or the sounding brass about the life of such a man, and it is not surprising that the world should have forgotten him. The history of the first Baptist church in Leeds is largely the story of his ministry; he came a young man fresh from college to a small, poor cause, neglecting higher offers because convinced that he had a divine call to Leeds. And here he spent his life, a life not of ease or of opulence, a life not without cares and trials, but a life so humble, so serene, so consistent, and yet so zealous, that we can but think that Leeds was divinely blest in him. When he came to die, his little church was no longer an insignificant factor in the rapidly changing town of Leeds: it was a force of prime importance in its religious life.

He was no great scholar, it seems; philological and similar studies⁵⁸ did not attract him; his printed sermons do not savour of the bombast of some of his successors, but are yet sincere and direct. His interests would seem to have been social. Of his friendships something has been said, but not enough to show in what high esteem Robert Hall held him; the depth of their regard is recorded in the letters printed in the Memoir. A man with at least twelve children knows something of the warmth of the family hearth and its gatherings, even if there are some away at school; there were boarders too, at the "academy for young gentlemen" and many of them afterwards entered the ministry, and acknowledged "that their first serious impressions were received whilst listening to Mr. Langdon's Sunday evening conversations."⁵⁹

His own and his family's interests disclose something of the enthusiasms of the church itself. His daughter Mary distributed Bibles to the poor (the Bible Society was exceedingly dear to Langdon); she visited the afflicted; she taught in the Sunday School, which it is said she begun; she collected for the "support of schools for the education of the wretched female children of India." Rev. Andrew Fuller could write shortly after the fire

⁵⁷ MS. cash-book.

⁵⁸ *Memoir*, pp. 95-6.

⁵⁹ *Memoir*, p. 57, the Sunday evening conversations described.

at Serampore, which destroyed the printing presses: "Leeds has done wonders!" Robert Hall in 1819 wrote to him: "Leeds surpasses every place in liberality to the Missions . . ." and in 1824, when Hall preached two sermons at the Chapel, the collections for the B.M.S. amounted to £73 10s. Langdon sent a copy of his circular letter to William Wilberforce in 1792, and received a reply, dated February 23rd, 1792, from him thanking him for his interest in the great cause.⁶⁰

The Rev. Dr. R. W. Hamilton contributed a chapter of recollections to the *Memoir* of Langdon, in which, amongst much rhetoric, is contained Langdon's ministerial outlook. He avowed a "decided Calvinism"; he told Hamilton "that all his hope and comfort arose, not from the general truth of Christianity, but its distinctive doctrines, especially the Godhead and Atonement of Christ." Yet his candour "led him to believe that 'if the life be in the right,' however erroneous the creed, the persons of whom this could be affirmed were, though unconsciously, under a Divine influence, were virtually included in the benefits of the Saviour's expiation, and were, consequently, in a state of safety and acceptance for eternity"; on all this Hamilton was compelled to differ from him. Then there was the question of Open or Mixed communion; "he had incurred some obloquy and inconvenience at an earlier period of life, in carrying the measure of Open or Mixed Communion. In this state of things he greatly rejoiced. He saw in the Christian feast the symbol of love, not the badge of partizanship." Hall wrote to him in 1797, speaking of the Bedford Union: "It would delight a heart like yours, to behold Dissenters, and Methodists, and Church people, and Moravians, blending together their affections, forgetting their differences . . ." ⁶¹

"In all his views of the national policy of party, of jurisprudence, he was a firm but temperate Whig," and that, not always according to the way the wind blew.⁶²

His was a deep humility and a deep sincerity; long afterwards⁶³ it could be written: "the writer only saw him once and

⁶⁰ *Memoir*, 73; an impression of Langdon at meetings of the Bible Society, *ibid.* 96-7; Fuller's letter, *ibid.*, 128, from Serampore, 1806; Hall's letter, *ibid.*, 142; Wilberforce's letter, *ibid.* 151. On Miss Langdon and the Sunday School, South Parade jubilee book, p. 62. On missions, cf. ante. p. 82, 1817 meeting of the Y.F.L., B.M.S. auxiliary. On Hall in 1824, *Leeds Mercury*, 15 May, 1824.

⁶¹ *Memoir*, p. 89 &c. Hall's letter of April 29th, 1798, *ibid.*, p. 145. See the bibliography on this subject.

⁶² *Memoir*, p. 102.

⁶³ *The jubilee memorial of Horton College, Bradford, 1854*, p. 51; historical sketch by B. Evans. Portrait of Langdon prefixed to the *Memoir*.

was struck with the venerableness of his appearance, the gentleness, the blandness and courtesy of the Christian and the gentleman." And that is the impression gained from his portrait.

III.

The Old Assembly Rooms⁶⁴ in Kirkgate, where the congregation first met had been for long the musical centre for Leeds, but from 1777 onwards new and better premises were available for lovers of music and the dance. The Old Stone Chapel was built, opposite an earlier Wesleyan structure, on the west side of St. Ann's Street, also known as Low Street, St. Peter's,⁶⁵ later St. Peter's St. Its position may be accurately established by consulting two maps⁶⁶ of Leeds for 1806 and 1815; in 1781 it was in a good residential district on the edge of the town, near Sheepscar beck, but by 1824 Leeds had expanded so much that the chapel was in the centre of the town, and, more than that, in an undesirable district. A minute of a meeting held in the vestry on April 12th, 1824, puts it thus: "That in consequence of the very obscure, unpleasant, and in other respects disadvantageous situation of the place in which we are accustomed to assemble for religious worship, it is highly desirable to erect a new building in a more eligible spot, provided the requisite funds can be obtained." The old building could have no bodies buried in it, according to the terms of purchase.

The Stone Chapel was opened with a debt of £600, and Langdon himself early made efforts to reduce the debt, but it was long before it was cancelled; in 1797 a collection amounting to £49 Os. 6d. was made to pay "Joseph Sharp an accumulated interest and other expenses"; in 1800, £187 12s. was collected to reduce the debt then amounting to £360, and as late as 1815, so large a sum as £200 was collected to clear the debt.⁶⁷ The effect of this long debt on Langdon and other old members may be ascertained from their opinions when it was proposed to make a move in 1824.

⁶⁴ Thoresby Soc., vol. 28, p. 321, quotations from 1726 onwards. Miss Hargrave, author of the article, could not identify the site. Parsons, *History of Leeds*, I., 136, "on the site of an ancient chantry." *Leeds directory*, 1817, p. 38.

⁶⁵ *Leeds directory*, 1817.

⁶⁶ Thoresby Soc., vol. 11 (*Miscellanea*, 1904), p. 130, p. 281: there is also a map prefixed to the 1826 Leeds directory, but this is less clear. There is a photograph of the exterior at South Parade, and many of the present members saw it before its demolition.

⁶⁷ B. Goodman's cash book, MS. The 1800 collection includes the item £25 10s. 0d. "Collected for Revd. Thomas Langdon in London and other places."

As its name implied, it was a plain stone building,⁶⁸ and it stood back from the street a few feet; the space in front, three feet lower than the pavement, being flagged and fenced in with a low wall having iron railings. Entry was obtained through the middle of this wall, down semi-circular stone steps, enlarging to the bottom, and through the two chapel doors. Inside, at one end, stood a small, square, wooden pulpit; and an oblong baptistery, three feet deep, was to be found "below the floor of the table pew in which the pulpit stood"; in this latter fact Leeds was remarkable, for it was apparently the first baptistery inside a church in Yorkshire; at Bradford, wrote Dr. Steadman⁶⁹ in 1805, "they have baptised in a small stream, the only one near them, scarcely deep enough, muddy at the bottom, and from which the minister and the persons baptised have at least a quarter of a mile to walk along a dirty lane in their wet clothes, before they can change. The place likewise is quite unfavourable for seeing or hearing, and by that means the benefits of the ordinance are lost to the congregation, few of whom ever attend it. Persons of a little more genteel or delicate feeling are quite kept away, under an idea that an ordinance having so many degrading circumstances attending it, cannot be their duty. . . . However, we hope for a reform, as two baptisteries are made: one at Rochdale, the other at Leeds, and we are about to have one at Bradford."

The floor was flagged, and in the centre stood a stove with an upright chimney pipe. On three sides there was a gallery with pews, the rents from which formed the minister's salary; under the gallery were forms, the "free seats"; by 1791⁷⁰ the demand for sittings had grown, and pews were placed along two sides under the gallery and across the front—thirty pews with wooden floors and covered in green baize, fastened with brass-headed nails. An undated, but no doubt a late list of sittings, gives the number, 494, their distribution (number of sittings according to cost, both given), and their total worth per quarter ("rates amount quarterly") £41 9s. 0d., making £165 a year; to that number must be added "the minister's pew, and the two

⁶⁸ Unpublished notes by Wm. Radford Bilbrough, 1904, in the possession of Mr. J. E. Town; his mother, from whom he obtained the details, was Miss Radford, daughter of Wm. Radford (1764-1826), who, though never a member actually, was in fact intimately connected with the chapel, entertaining and giving generously. She knew the old place well: her reminiscences have been quoted already; on Radford, later. Most of the details concerning the exterior are plain on a photograph made about 1900, preserved at South Parade.

⁶⁹ Letter of December 28, 1805, in the *Memoir* of Dr. Steadman, p. 234.

⁷⁰ 1791, collection to seat the floor, £69 5s. 4d.; added to the statement is an item of £94 12s. 6d. paid to J. Theaker.

corner pews in the gallery for scholars, also the singing seat of Richard Doolen."⁷¹

There was⁷² a "fine toned organ," which stood "at the top of the front gallery, opposite the pulpit"; the organist from 1817 at any rate was Joseph Theaker.⁷³ Artificial light, when required, was supplied by candles placed at the sides of the pulpit and at convenient parts of the chapel; but in those days of ill-lit and ill-guarded streets, there was no evening service.⁷⁴

Later, a vestry and offices were erected on one side of the yard in front of the chapel, and in 1821 a subscription of £92 8s. was raised to enlarge the vestry.⁷⁵ The special pews for the scholars have been noted, but little is known of the Sunday School; in 1817 the figures are given as fourteen boys and sixteen girls.⁷⁶

After the Particular Baptist congregation left it, the building was put to various uses; in turn it was a chapel, a boot factory, a Jewish tailoring establishment, and a lodging-house, and finally, about 1910, it was demolished as part of a Corporation street-clearance scheme. Its sale in 1827 brought in £1,000. The register of the Church (1781-1836) was sent on May 1st, 1837, to Somerset House.

⁷¹ B. Goodman's account book, MS. The MS. "contains the church balance sheets from 1820-1880. It also contains a list of members to 1834, various lists of subscriptions from 1791 to 1827, Rev. T. Langdon trust money, the cost of South Parade Chapel, and various notes." Also called the "Leeds Baptist Chapel cash-book," it was the "gift of Benjamin Goodman." It provides a comparison with the new church at South Parade—641 sittings (there were also 100 free seats) at £83 6s. a quarter, or £333 4s. a year.

⁷² *A walk through Leeds*, 1806; *Leeds directory*, 1817. The hymns, it is said, were "lined out." No hymn-book recorded, but perhaps Watts' ? The South Parade archives include several old tune books, but only one (an oblong octavo ms. of anthems and hymns mainly from Watts) that may be dated back to the time of the Old Stone Chapel. Mr. J. E. Town possesses a copy of Watts' *Psalms and Hymns* (a duodecimo of 1792) from the library of Wm. Radford. This was bought for the mission station at Woodhouse in 1838 when it began; cf. *South Parade Jubilee Volume*, 1877, p. 13.

⁷³ Theaker is given as organist in the 1817 directory; in the one for 1830 he is an upholsterer and music preceptor at 26, North Street. The account book records payments of £10 10s. a year from 1821 to 1826 and a free gift as a token of respect for former services, September 1830, of £10 10s.

⁷⁴ *Leeds directory*, 1817, gives services: Sun. 10.40 & 2.40; Wed. 7.

⁷⁵ B. Goodman's account book, where is also entered the item £1,000 for the sale of the chapel (28-3-27).

⁷⁶ *Leeds directory*, 1817; same in Whitaker, *Loidis and Elmete*, appendix, 30. The Sunday School movement was early taken up in Leeds, and the Baptist figures are surprisingly low. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1784, i., 377. A short note on the early Sunday School will be found in the Jubilee volume, p. 62.

Whether the coming of James Acworth and the agitation for new premises happened at the same time as a matter of coincidence or not, it is not profitable to enquire. Some of the events of 1824 have already been chronicled; the month of April was a momentous time.⁷⁷ On the 7th a meeting was held "at Mr. Thackrey's, Burley," limited to the deacons (Thackray, Goodman, Aspin, Doolen) and Acworth, when, after agreeing on the desirability of a move, it was resolved to call a church meeting; this was held on the 12th in the vestry, when it was resolved to move if funds could be found, and to request the pastors and deacons to ascertain the cost and probable support; these resolutions were publicly announced in the church on the following Sunday, the 18th. Reports were presented at a further church meeting on May 3rd, and it was resolved to accept the site chosen by John Goodman, who was then made treasurer of the building committee, with G. Thackray as secretary; at the close of the meeting, donations amounting to over £2,000 were subscribed, as has been already said. At a further meeting on May 10th, it was resolved amongst other things to make the new church "of sufficient dimensions to accommodate eight hundred persons and no more." The trust deed records that the site contained 980 square yards, and the land was bought at £1 a yard; the foundation stone was laid on the 23rd of February, 1825, when Dr. Acworth gave an address; the church was opened for worship on Wednesday, October 25th, 1826, when Dr. Marshman preached in the morning, the Rev. S. Saunders in the afternoon, and the Rev. Dr. Raffles in Queen Street chapel in the evening. The original cost was £5,217 3s. 10d, before the accounts were finally closed in 1830.

⁷⁷ MS. minutes of the South Parade Building Committee; "An account of the proceedings of the church and congregation meeting in St. Ann's Street, Leeds, relative to the erection of a new place of worship. 1824."

(To be concluded)

F. W. BECKWITH.

BAPTIST ACADEMIES.—The account above shows two kept in Leeds about 1797-1834 by the Langdons. Volume IV. mentioned Abraham Booth's school at Sutton-in-Ashfield till 1768, and James Hinton's at Oxford in 1810. Mr. Hewett gave the list of 33 pupils in Sutcliff's academy at Olney, 1775-1814. William Giles junior was like Frankland, moving often; Chatham 1817, Patricroft 1831, Ardwick 1837, Seacombe 1842, Chester 1848; Charles Dickens was his most famous pupil.