

W. E. Blomfield.*

WILLIAM ERNEST BLOMFIELD was born at Rayleigh in Essex, the county which gave birth to C. H. Spurgeon. His father, Josiah Blomfield, was the lay pastor of a Baptist Church. The son tells us, "I am a Baptist, owing all I am to a Baptist home and a Baptist Church, and in my early teens I knew that my life was to be given to the Church of my fathers."

He was educated at the Nonconformist Grammar School, Bishop's Stortford, and there the ruling passion of his life began to show itself. One of his former schoolfellows says, "He was the means of my conversion to Christ. He was the leader of a little group of boys who were trying to follow Christ and who used to meet for prayer in a class-room or in the fields. He was already full of promise and showed me at school a sermon he had written on the text 'I have a message from God unto thee.' At the end of his school career he was awarded the Good Conduct Prize by vote of the boys."

Leaving school he entered Regent's Park College. Ever a hard worker, he took the London B.A. and the B.D. of St. Andrews, which later conferred on him its D.D. As evidence of his industry a remark of his own is illuminating, "I instituted a weekly Bible Class, open to all, in the earliest days of my ministry. I did it primarily for my own sake to give myself a bit of hard biblical work outside my preparations for the pulpit."

From College he passed in 1884 to Beckenham. The church at Elm Road, whose premises were built under the auspices of the London Baptist Association, was formed in 1884. Dr. S. H. Booth, then Secretary of the Baptist Union, lived in Beckenham and became its Honorary Pastor. Mr. Blomfield was invited to become his Assistant, and for the first twelve months all went well. It was a time of changing thought, and Dr. Booth became suspicious of his assistant's orthodoxy. Without consulting the Church he wrote him a letter dismissing him. To this the Church objected and both the Church and its young minister passed through a trying experience. A number of Mr. Blomfield's sermons were submitted to examination by the Baptist Union, with perfectly satisfactory results. Still Dr.

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Booth was not satisfied and finally resigned the pastorate, and Mr. Blomfield became the sole minister of the Church. In those early days he entered upon a real experience of the "Friendship of Books." F. W. Robertson, of Brighton, held a special place in his regard, and he read a good deal of poetry. In 1886 he received a call to Turret Green, Ipswich, which it seemed advisable he should accept, but not before he had won for himself a lasting place in the affections of the people. He was already making a position for himself as a preacher.

At Ipswich congregations rapidly increased and the church became too small, while the school premises were crowded. After some three or four years the church building was turned into a school and a new church was built. Though it seated 850 it was immediately filled, and late-comers frequently failed to get in. During Mr. Blomfield's ministry there were large accessions to the membership. Not long after his coming to Ipswich he married Miss Nelly Doble, the beginning of an extraordinarily happy union.

In 1895 Mr. Blomfield was invited to Queen's Road, Coventry, to succeed Dr. W. J. Henderson, and there followed nine very happy and fruitful years. He received a warm welcome and at once made an impression of sincerity, earnestness and warmth. Among the young he was always welcome, while as pastor his firm handshake and keen personal interest made him welcome everywhere.

The Cow Lane Early Morning School for men, meeting on Sundays at 7.30, was a source of inspiration to him and appreciated his addresses. His preaching attracted large congregations and every organisation of the church flourished. The membership increased considerably. Whenever in later years he visited Coventry he was always welcomed by overflowing congregations. He was an example of an earnest, devoted and hard-working pastor, and though he was popular in the Church and in the city, where he took his full share of public work, he never lowered his standards and never played to the gallery. All these years he had been keeping up his studies; Ipswich had seen him become Bachelor of Divinity, Coventry saw him win a Fellowship of the Theological Senate. So though the Church hoped for a long pastorate, in 1904 he was called to what was undoubtedly his life work.

In that year Dr. T. V. Tymms laid down the Presidency of Rawdon College. The Northern Baptist Education Society celebrated its centenary in that year, principally by raising a fund of £5,000. There had been a strong rally of the supporters of the College when the uncertainty engendered by the proposed amalgamation with Manchester and Midland Colleges was ended.

by its collapse. The accumulated deficits of several years had been wiped out. It was in these circumstances that the Committee, after very anxious consideration, invited Rev. W. E. Blomfield to be President. To their great satisfaction he accepted the call and in the Report it is stated, "That he is called of God to this work is our heart-felt conviction. Under his leadership we cherish the highest hopes that all that is best in the Rawdon tradition will be maintained and enhanced." How richly these hopes were fulfilled is now a matter of history. The tide of enthusiasm in the churches the new principal took at the flood. His personality, energy, power of application and of interesting others in his work and plans were placed unreservedly at the service of the College.

He was taking up new and heavy responsibilities, and the labours of a College Principal in those days included not a little of the work of Ministerial Settlement now done by the General Superintendents. Then there was the great mass of correspondence, the burden of which only College Principals know. Yet he found time to get about among the churches, preaching and speaking, and everywhere making contacts which ripened into trust and friendship. In the churches interest was awakened and confidence followed. Partly due to increased investments, but more largely to the rallying of the Churches, it was possible with usually a very small special appeal, to balance the annual accounts, and this with a larger staff.

His relations with the staff were cordial and they made a good, all-round team. When Prof. W. Medley retired, Dr. Blomfield earned the gratitude of the Denomination by bringing into college life Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson. With similar prescience, and with a view to the eventual succession to himself, he sought out Dr. Underwood to follow Dr. Wheeler Robinson. He was on the best of terms with his students, though discipline was always maintained, and his "old men" instinctively turned to him for counsel. He was ever out to raise the standard of the ministry, not only in scholarship but in preaching as well. His presidential addresses bore on this, and at Rawdon his administrative ability and enthusiasm set a higher all-round standard in the college work. Just before he came to Rawdon the old Yorkshire College became the University of Leeds. The significance of this was not lost on him. Long and difficult negotiations followed, and he scored a distinct success when, in 1915, Rawdon became an affiliated college of the University of Leeds.

In 1905, after nearly thirty years' service as Treasurers, Sir John Barran, Bart., died, and for health reasons, Mr. William Town removed. It was a great stroke for the College when Mr.,

later Sir, John C. Horsfall, Bart., accepted the Treasurership. Sir John, besides his many business interests, was chairman of the West Riding County Council. He was a shrewd judge of men, and his confidence was itself a high testimonial. He became keenly interested, and during the war renovated and improved the College inside and out entirely at his own costs and charges to the extent of over £2,000, and later endowed an Exhibition. Two members at a time were appointed to assist the Treasurer, and what diverse personalities Dr. Blomfield got to serve!

Then, when the College re-opened after the War, provision had to be made for men at the University. Dr. Blomfield showed how he had won his way into the confidence of Yorkshire folk, notoriously slow to bestow it, many of them keen men of business. Four University Exhibitions and seven Prizes were founded in 1918 and 1919. A Lectureship in Pastoral Theology was endowed. Two Medical Missionary Scholarships (1919 and 1925) followed. Finally, in 1921, with the active assistance of Dr. Underwood, Dr. Blomfield approached the Trustees of some of the Trust Funds formerly applied to the now defunct Midland College, with a view to the founding of a "John Clifford" Chair at Rawdon. This had the cordial approval of Dr. Clifford himself, and the Trustees made the handsome grant of £260 a year (since reduced by War Loan Conversion) for this purpose. Dr. Blomfield then set himself to the raising of an endowment fund to increase the income of the chair to £400. Over £3,000 is now invested for this purpose. Nor should the many legacies be overlooked. They are all marks of confidence with deferred payment. Outstanding among these is that of Mr. Alfred Bilbrough, who, after giving £3,000 in his life, left a further £5,000. There were others who capitalised their subscriptions. In one way and another the invested funds of the College went up by many thousands of pounds during Dr. Blomfield's twenty-two years. He was a difficult man to refuse, whether he was asking for gifts or service!

Space fails to tell of all his denominational activities. During his pastorates he had taken an increasing share in the work of the Baptist Union, on whose Council he was greatly valued. In 1902 he was chosen to launch the great Sustentation Fund which has so greatly altered the conditions of pastoral life. He was President of the Yorkshire Association in 1910, and of the Baptist Union in 1923, and he did not spare himself in either office.

His sturdy independence of thought and speech gave the clue to his political opinions, which he was not ashamed to own. With all his administrative gifts he was before all a great preacher. All his life he loved preaching, but not to display his

powers. Modelled on the great pulpit forces of his day and yet all his own, his preaching, while always interesting, had a strong evangelical appeal for personal decision. With a wide knowledge of human nature and a dramatic power he had a persuasive voice and manner. One imagines that had he gone to the Bar he would have secured many verdicts from juries. When the College closed during the war he became minister of the Harrogate Church from 1917 to 1919, and there his preaching was very greatly appreciated.

But what his many friends will ever remember him for is the man himself. He was a sincere and humble Christian. The winning of men and women was his aim, and he saw in the training of men for the ministry great scope for reaching that aim. His life and influence were his greatest contribution to the life of Rawdon. He was an enthusiast in the best sense of the word. In his preaching, his conversation, or his letters, he was always interesting, and managed to convey some of his enthusiasm to others. He was very friendly, greatly interested in his fellow men, a vivid personality whose presence and opinions soon made themselves unmistakably felt in any company.

How much Dr. and Mrs. Blomfield were to each other we cannot measure, but we do know that it was a singularly happy union, and that he was inspired and sustained by his life's partner. Alike by her intellectual and her practical gifts, she was able to do her part in the running of a College. Of both of them it may be truly said that they lived for Rawdon.

On Dr. Blomfield's retirement he was presented with his portrait and other tokens of esteem. His best memorial will be the carrying further and better the work to which he so wholeheartedly gave himself.

W. N. TOWN.