

From an Old Box: Some Stepney College Papers.

A FEW weeks ago, in the Strong Room of the Baptist Mission House, there came to light an old wooden box with "Stepney College" painted upon it. It was thick with the dust of years and proved to contain a number of old account books, the Minute Book of the Mile End Church which was at one time connected with the College, and a number of letters and papers. Most of them date from the years 1840 to 1845, during which period Joseph Angus was Secretary of Stepney College as well as Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society; but there are, in addition, the sessional examination papers, both questions and answers, for the year 1868, by which time the College was established at Holford House in Regent's Park with Joseph Angus as its President. The find is of no spectacular value, even to the denominational historian. The Centenary Record of the College, prepared by Dr. Gould in 1910, requires no amendment, though it is not likely that he saw the contents of this box. A number of things among these papers seem, however, worthy of notice.

Dr. Murch was the President of Stepney College from 1827 to 1843, and William Brodie Gurney, the Treasurer for almost exactly the same period. A number of letters to and from the latter are in this collection, and since from 1835 he held also the office of B.M.S. Treasurer, and Joseph Angus became his son-in-law, the close links between the College and the Missionary Society are easily understood. Edward Steane was Secretary of Stepney till 1838 and his letter of resignation is to be found here. Angus succeeded him, and had the assistance first of George Deane and then of Samuel Brawn of Loughton. Their letters of resignation, also, are here preserved. These were years of change and development. There had been extensive alterations and enlargements of the College in 1829, and seven years later adjacent property was secured, in spite of the fact that expenditure was in excess of income. In 1838 there was a demand for additional accommodation, and among these papers is a memorial signed by seventeen alumni promising help in the securing of the money. At a meeting held at the King's

Head Tavern, J. P. Briscoe, the first student of the College, had presided, and the signatories to the resolutions included Samuel Green (first of three generations to be intimately connected with the institution), Charles Stovel and C. M. Birrell, (later Presidents of the Baptist Union), Francis Tucker and Joseph Angus. The extension was satisfactorily carried through and paid for, and a year or so later the College became affiliated with the newly constituted University of London. James Martineau was written to regarding the Royal Warrant which had been granted to Manchester College, and his courteous reply, preserved among these papers, concludes:—

“ I shall sincerely rejoice to learn that you have been equally successful in the application which you propose to make: and cannot but hope that we, Dissenters, may avail ourselves of the improved advantages we enjoy, to advance the state of learning amongst us, as well as to acquire a better civil or professional position.”

These years of growth and promise were, however, followed by increasing financial difficulties. There was suspicion in some quarters of the new educational facilities (other generations have had this tale repeated), and then in 1843 ill-health compelled Dr. Murch to resign. He was succeeded by Dr. Benjamin Davies, who was called from Montreal, where he was in charge of a small college partly supported by the B.M.S. The old box contains a letter from Thomas Crisp of Bristol College suggesting Davies for the position, a letter from the Montreal Committee urging how indispensable he is to the denomination in Canada, and two letters from Dr. Davies himself, the first raising objections and the second accepting the post.

“ I see from the Report,” he writes in July, 1843, “ that the Theological Tutor reads Lectures of his own writing in Systematic Theology. Now for this department of labour I possess no fitness. While a student I never admired the plan, and as a Tutor I cannot follow it. I feel a most decided preference for the method of teaching Theology by means of diligent examinations in some standard work as a text-book, and by exegetical exercises in reading the Bible in the original tongues. To teach divinity in the ordinary sense, requires such a turn of mind as I am fully conscious I do not possess.”

His second main hesitation came from the presence of his friend, F. W. Gotch, on the staff. Gotch was his senior and he shrank “ from assuming superiority ” over him. The reply of the Committee to this letter must have been satisfactory, for

in the following month Dr. Davies wrote agreeing to return to England, and by the end of the year was in residence at Stepney. F. W. Gotch remained Tutor in Philosophy and Natural Science till 1845 when he went back to his old college at Bristol. The box holds a number of his letters, including one, written before his appointment in 1841, giving details of his varied successes at Dublin University, one from 1844 suggesting an increase in salary, and one announcing his acceptance of the post of Classical and Mathematical Tutor at Bristol.

The students of that distant day were, in their own fashion, as bold and revolutionary as their successors. These papers include three letters sent by them to the College Committee. The first, dated February 22nd, 1842, and signed by J. A. Baynes, appeals for an extension of the college course from four to five years.

“Important as this measure must at all times be considered,” say the students, “the present seems especially the period for its adoption, when it is so loudly called for both by the position of the College in reference to the London University, and by the general aspect of the Christian world. Never, we submit, has there been a time when high attainments and sound learning were more essential to those occupying the station of Christian ministers. Never was this necessity more clearly evident or more deeply felt. And, although it may be objected, when this is urged, that the Church and the Denomination are in want of men, we cannot but think that these wants are not so urgent as to demand the premature service of those who, after a short delay, might be more fitted for labour and usefulness. The year spent at College would be more valuable to the student, than the year spent in pastoral service would be to the Church.

“In asking then for five instead of four years, we do so from the firm conviction that the present term does not afford sufficient time for the preparatory study that is necessary. The last year of a Student’s course is invariably and necessarily broken up by his repeated engagements previous to settling: so that the term, though at present nominally four years, is in reality but little more than three. In asking for five we wish to secure four unbroken.”

The last paragraph reads strangely in a day when men sometimes have to wait many months after their course is over before they have a chance of settling.

The second memorial, sent a year later, has reference to the College Library, and has been echoed by other groups of students.

“Owing to many recent additions the order of the books has necessarily been much interfered with, so that the Library needs an entire rearrangement. Farther, that whilst there are several duplicates and many books of little value, others that we daily need are wanting. We allude particularly to works on natural philosophy.”

Thomas Wheeler and Robert Marten sign this letter. In 1845 the Committee was approached on so grave a matter that fifteen of the students put their names to the document. It concerned the College heating apparatus—the bugbear of many authorities.

“We are sorry to say that the extensive alterations made in the Summer have entirely failed to answer the end for which they were designed. The average height of the thermometer during the cold weather of this winter has not exceeded 49 even when all means have been adopted to prevent the admission of cold air. Whenever, by the use of extraordinary means, the temperature has been raised above 50 the smell caused by the pipes has been so offensive as to render it impossible to use the studies.”

Among the signatures to this letter is that of Alexander McLaren.

The most interesting part of these papers consists of the applications for entry to the College, bundles of letters from men themselves and from their referees. Here are to be found the youthful statements of those who afterwards attained influential positions: for example, J. H. Millard, Secretary of the Baptist Union from 1863 to 1877, his successor S. Harris Booth (recently not quite fairly saddled with responsibility for the Down-Grade controversy), Dr. William Pulsford, Alexander McLaren, J. P. Carey, George Short and others.

Alexander McLaren was the son of the Rev. David McLaren who writes of his gratitude to God for his son's desire to enter the ministry. There are recommendations from James Paterson of Hope Street Church, Glasgow, and Joseph Rothery of Hoxton. Alexander himself writes a clear statement under five heads of his reasons for believing himself a Christian, and continues (this is dated June, 1842, and he is only 16½):—

“From about the beginning of 1839 I had serious thoughts as to my soul. These were occasioned by hearing a sermon preached on a New Year's Day on the uncertainty of life. They were afterwards deepened by reading part of Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. This book much affected me. For some time I was very

unhappy, but I did not disclose my feelings, and by degrees my anxiety wore off. I had relapsed into my old state when I again took up Doddridge instead of another book. I began to read, my attention was fixed, and all my former impressions returned. They were once more nearly stifled, when my Mother requested me to accompany her to hear a sermon at a protracted meeting. I unwillingly went, the preacher chose for his subject the conversion of the Philippian Jailor. I sat inattentive until he quoted the passage in I John v. 10: 'He that believeth not God hath made him a liar because he believeth not the record that God gave of his son.' This arrested my attention and sent the arrow home to my heart. I saw all the guilt of making God a liar. I trembled when I thought of it. I heard not another word from the preacher, they fell dead on my ears. I returned home, and that night, blessed be God, I found peace in believing. These events, ever to be remembered by me with devout thankfulness, occurred on the 10th May, 1840, and, on the 17th of that month, I was baptised and received into the church in Glasgow, under the pastoral care of the Rev. J. Patterson."

Also of interest in this centenary year of his grandfather is the application for entry into Stepney of Jonathan Pearce Carey. He writes from Mill Hill School in 1845, then a lad of nearly eighteen. F. W. Gotch, minister at Boxmoor before he became a tutor at the College, had clearly been the decisive influence on his development, but it is Gotch's successor there, Benjamin Pratten, the Hebraist, who commends the young man, as well as H. J. Crump, the Mill Hill chaplain. It is worthy of remark that nowhere in this bundle of papers is there a reference to William Carey, nor to any idea of missionary service.

"I am at present reading in Classics," Jonathan writes, "the Clio of Herodotus, and Livy with the Satires of Juvenal; in Mathematics the first six books of Euclid, Bland's Equations and Hall's Trigonometry. French and German too I have read a little, being just able to translate some of Schiller's Wilhelm Tell. I wish to become a thorough Classic. Though I would pursue with becoming diligence the study of Mathematics, I cannot claim a predilection for them."

It was not till 1839 that a written examination had been held for applicants for entry to the College. A number of papers in this box relate to the tests for the years 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1846. Candidates were asked for the outline of a sermon on a

prescribed text, and were questioned on Robert Hall's pamphlet on *Modern Infidelity*, and later on Leslie's *Short and Easy Method*. There were two questions on doctrine (both dealing with justification by faith), two on scripture history, and a number of general ones, including the request:—

“State the planets in the order of their distance from the sun, and which of them have satellites.”

In 1846 applicants were asked to submit an essay on “The Importance of an Educated Ministry,” and among the attempts that survived is one by George Short, destined nearly half a century later to be President of the Baptist Union.

From this early period there also come letters from J. P. Mursell of Leicester, from C. M. Birrell, of Liverpool, from Charles Stovel, from Samuel Tomkins (for many years a tutor at Stepney), and from Thomas Binney.

The sessional examination papers are nearly a quarter of a century later in origin. There had been many changes in the College. Benjamin Davies' Presidency had been brief, and after a year or so of uncertainty Joseph Angus had been secured, his scholarship and administrative ability raising the College to a position of much greater importance in the life of the denomination. Premises had been secured in Regent's Park, and Benjamin Davies had been called back again from Canada, to which he had returned, to be Tutor in Classical and Oriental Literature, a position for which he was admirably fitted and in which he made great contribution to the life of the College. John Bridge was also on the staff at the time. A list of the papers set in 1868 is of interest: Bible Handbook (Senior and Junior), Hebrew, Syriac, Systematic Theology (Senior and Junior), Logic, New Testament Greek, German, Latin (Matriculation and B.A.), Greek (Elementary, Matriculation and B.A.), and special papers on Chrysostom on the Priesthood, and a part of the Apocalypse. During the preceding years Regent's Park students had won notable successes in London University. A number of the questions are of interest as having been set nearly seventy years ago:—

“What do you gather to be the inspired rule as to women speaking in the Church—what as to Church discipline—what as to dress and personal habits in relation especially to sex?” (Senior Greek Testament.)

“On what grounds might a revision of the English authorised version be recommended?” (Junior Bible Handbook.)

“Shew (and if you can illustrate by example) that *verbal criticism* is an essential help to the understanding of

Scripture; and give rules for deciding the true meaning of the words of Scripture in any particular case." (Senior Bible Handbook.)

"Is depravity total? Explain and answer this question!" (Junior Systematic Theology.)

"What would a candid and intelligent reader naturally gather from the Bible on the doctrine of the Trinity, i. ii. iii?" (Senior Systematic Theology.)

How many students of to-day would care to be asked to "give an intelligible English meaning to the statement in 2 Kings vi. 25:—'The fourth part of a cab of doves' dung was sold for five silver shekels,'" unless it came as part of a prescribed text?

Among those whose answers to these questions have been preserved are William and Edward Medley, Charles Jordan (who became Principal of Serampore), Herbert Smith (who died recently after a long life-time of faithful service as a layman), and F. B. Meyer. T. G. Rooke, who had left college only six years earlier, acted as one of the examiners, and his comment on Meyer's Bible Handbook answers is:—"An excellent paper. Satisfactory in every respect." It is not without interest that 1868 was the year when F. W. Gotch, to whom a number of references have been made earlier, was President of the Baptist Union.

The College, which was once located at Stepney, and later in Regent's Park, has for the last seven years been providing men with the opportunity of courses at Oxford University. In doing so it has been true to its past, for it has always sought to serve the denomination by giving the best available equipment to its ministers. These old papers are a reminder of that, and of the fact that in many fundamental respects students, teachers, and college constituencies do not greatly vary from generation to generation.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

The Inscription on Carey's tomb, quoted on page 168, is word for word as directed in his will. Isaac Watts wrote rather differently, and editors began changing as early as John Wesley. In the 1900 *Baptist Church Hymnal* no note was given that the version was altered.