

“Regent’s,” as I knew it.

AS long as I can remember, I had wanted to be a minister and a preacher like my father. And, as he had been a *Stepney* man, I never entertained a thought of any other College for myself than *Regent’s*. So when, in 1880, fifty-six years ago, after seven years in illustrious *Blundell’s*, and two years’ teaching in a boys’ school, I was admitted into *Regent’s*, I knew how gracious all the stars in their courses had been to me.

The College itself was so satisfying, with its environing park, its ample garden, its domed entrance-hall, its east and west, its dining-room, its stairways and statues, its libraries and paintings and treasures, its immediate football field, and its nearness to the centre of London.

Then the thought of the men who had preceded us, so many of whose portraits adorned our Common Hall, was a constant inspiration—John Pulsford, Alexander McLaren, Samuel Cox, Charles Vince, Luscombe Hull, George Rouse, Vincent Tymms, William Medley, Frederick Goadby and F. B. Meyer, seven of whom were still at that time rendering great service with undiminished power. We knew into what an apostolical succession we were entering.

Then I was soon enabled to realise—even in those days of Joseph Parker and Canon Liddon and Hugh Price Hughes—that we Baptists had London preachers of our own of transcendent personality and power : Spurgeon, of the golden tongue, sovereign, unrivalled ; John Clifford, of the trumpet-voice, the clearest-eyed prophet of the new time ; and Archibald Brown, a very prince of expositors. Two others, to my reckoning, seemed of the rarest quality and charm, although not known to the multitudes—I mean Charles Stanford and S. A. Tipple. The former I was fortunate enough to hear early in my course, in Dr. Landels’ lordly pulpit, whither I saw him led in his blindness by a deacon. His body was in darkness, but his mind was full of light. I was blest that S. A. Tipple was one of my father’s most intimate friends. So I was soon one of his rapt listeners in his eclectic congregation in Norwood. His was never, in the strict sense, a great evangelical ministry, but it was spiritual to a very deep degree. I had never before heard a preacher of such insight and intensity, of such refinement and power. It meant a great deal to me to be admitted, for my father’s sake, into his friendship. These five, who were so diverse—Tipple, Stanford, Brown, Clifford and Spurgeon—made me aware again what a company of the elect and the mighty we students were joining. They also helped me to catholic appreciations and judgments.

Then, I suppose, we had in Alfred Henry Baynes the most forceful of London’s missionary statesmen of that time, the

“builder and maker” of our new Congo enterprise, which I watched from its beginning, and which made the issue of every *Missionary Herald* of those days an exciting event. I had only been in *Regent’s* five months when—first of all white men—our Crudgington and Bentley looked upon Stanley Pool from the west. And, one great later day, W. H. Doke, one of our very selves—alas! so soon to fall—together with George Grenfell, piloted us in the *Peace* from Westminster to Chiswick on the first of her trial trips. And again, a little later, Percy Comber, the youngest of the immortal family, joined us in *Regent’s* himself. The inauguration of the Congo Mission, with its early staggering toll of dedicated lives, filled all my college years with romance.

Those were the years, too, of the *Revision of the Bible*. The New Testament and the Old were severally completed at the beginning and at the end of my college span. I bought each volume on the very days of their issue, and have nourished my life on them ever since. We were proud and happy that amongst the scholars engaged on both those tasks in the Jerusalem Chamber Baptists held places. We often saw our own Principal, Dr. Angus, going thither or returning.

As to our *Regent’s* fellowship itself, we were never less than forty-two, the two being lay students, to the liberal education of the rest. C. M. Hardy and J. H. Shakespeare were the two first senior students of my time—Hardy, of the pretty wit, the ripe wisdom and the perfect gentlehood; and Shakespeare, of the tense personality, the born debater and leader, coming events surely casting their shadows before them. Two of my contemporaries I counted as men almost of genius—Walter Friend, still living, who became the most eminent Congregational preacher of South Africa, and William Austin Grigg, who died in New Zealand from tuberculosis, before he could reveal to more than a very few the force that was in him. My first biographical endeavour was a brief story of him. Life had gone hardly with him, but had helped to make him our deepest-going thinker. He knew his Shakespeare and Carlyle and New Testament by heart. He had once seen Carlyle himself in Chelsea, and had dared to offer him his reverent praise.

Then we had a constellation of Missionary students—Arthur Sowerby and Arthur Jewson, Alfred Teichmann, Andrew Sims, Doke, Tregillus, bearded Philip Davies (of whom I could a great deal tell), Shorrocks, Percy Bruce and Percy Comber. That was rather a galaxy, was it not? Only two of them are left. I also hoped for Indian service, but the gates of opportunity closed. More than a fourth of us were designated to the overseas’ peoples, which greatly contributed to the thrill of our comradeship.

My own year had, I think, its quite fair share of merit—John Arthur Jones, Blomfield, Carey, Sims, Willis, Morgan and Stembridge. Jones was our senior, so English in wise counsel, so Welsh in pulpit fire; Blomfield, the slogger and academician; Sims, the mathematician, the one man I know who enjoys discussing Einstein; Willis, of the steady-going excellence; Arthur Morgan, the orator; and Stembridge, the humourist, who dared twice in the classroom to make Dr. Angus the victim of harmless practical jokes. We were a decent average year. Five of us captured the senior Greek Testament prize in five successive years.

Of the fellowship of the "House" in Common Hall, what shall I say?—of the set Friday evening debates, and still more of the ever up-bubbling impromptu discussions at our three daily refectory sessions, with no official to overawe us? What jest and what earnest! How men revealed themselves, and how they developed! The most nervous among us, of whom I was undoubtedly the chief, had the chance of acquiring something like confidence and ease. I can never be thankful enough. There could scarcely have been in London at that time any camaraderie more inspiring.

But when I turn from all this to recall and consider our academical conditions, I weep and wail and, as well as I can, I gnash my teeth. We were born too soon. It makes me mad to think of all we missed. For of the golden chances of to-day we had nothing; nothing, in fact, nor in known prospect. No association nor standing with London University! Of all of us theological men, Shakespeare alone contrived to attend classes in University College, and passed on his notes very generously to Blomfield and myself. There was no theological Senatus; no B.D. so much as dreamed of; no Baptist Union Scholarship; and the gates of Oxford and Cambridge still locked for us Free Churchmen. Many of you will scarcely be able to imagine yourselves in such bareness.

As for our Staff, we went twice a week to New College to Dr. Newth for elementary maths.; but for everything else we were dependent on a young tutor and an old. The young was, of course, S. W. Green, who was just at his beginnings. For Greek and for Hebrew we had him in—dare I say?—his adolescent zeal, himself an ideal blend of Hebrew and of Greek, of religion and of culture. The old, the aged, was the Principal, Dr. Angus. How aged he was you may judge from this, that my father, when only eighteen, entered *Stepney* from Mill Hill, and in his fourth *Stepney* year Dr. Angus became its Principal, and through the whole intervening thirty-one years between my father's college life and my own he carried the burden. I salute

him for his steadfastness. I salute him for the many handbooks he published, which helped a multitude of beginners on the road to valuable instruction. They were dull to look at, but packed with worth-while stuff. Also, that he had earned a place amongst the New Testament revisers; also, for the funds he used his wide influence to gain for the endowment of *Regent’s*; and, most of all, for the Baptist Library, which his erudition and patience gathered, to which I have so often in my own research work owed incalculable debts.

But by my time he was very aged. His years and his life-long strain made it impossible for him to feel the pulsation of the recent and the contemporary blood-stream. He could not help it that he was dwelling in a vanishing yesterday, whilst we were very conscious of the rush of our own day. The findings of Darwin were penetrating and affecting every sphere of thought. Robertson Smith’s Encyclopædia Britannica Article on *Hebrew Language and Literature*, which cost him his Edinburgh Chair, and which was published the very year I entered *Regent’s*, faced us with undreamed-of fresh Old Testament investigations. Samuel Cox, one of our very selves, together with Dean Farrar, was thrusting us upon intensely moving re-study of the teachings of Jesus concerning the judgments of the Hereafter. In every realm of enquiry the established axioms and postulates were challenged. It was unreasonable to expect that our veteran, overburdened Professor would be able to bring us, under such conditions, much convincing guidance. We had to go exploring truth’s mountain-ranges for ourselves. The search was often a very lonely one, but the truths we found became at least our very own.

In vivid recollection of all this I greatly rejoiced when *Regent’s* found partial and experimental lodgment in Oxford, and still more when, this last year, it was determined that it should be its single and not far distant home. I cannot but think that the keenest seniors from all our other Baptist Colleges will gravitate thither for their completing courses, and be upborne there on a stream of University life in a city that still has power to exercise its ancient spell.

And I delight that we *Regent’s* men of the past are to be privileged to build and furnish the destined Common Hall, which will become the forum of the future fellowship, and will bring to men the most formative forces of their lives. It has, indeed, been of the exceeding mercy of God, and a clear demonstration of His purpose, that Dr. Wheeler Robinson is available to make this great contribution to the equipping of our future Christian leadership.

S. PEARCE CAREY.