

A Yorkshire Manuscript of 1687.

WILLIAM MITCHELL'S "DIFFERENCE BETWIXT EGYPT
AND CANAAN."

IN a volume entitled *Some records of "Ye Chapell of Marsden,"* published at Huddersfield in 1910 and compiled by the vicar at that time, Rev. A. R. Barrett, some account is given of the "treasures of Marsden church," and an entire chapter is devoted to one of these treasures, namely, "An Old Quaker Tract," to quote the author's chapter heading. Through the kindness of the present vicar, Rev. A. V. Sellé, A.K.C., I have been allowed to consult this tract and make the following report on it. It will be the object of this article, first to give a detailed description of the manuscript, for such the "tract" is, and then to indicate its very interesting Baptist associations.

DESCRIPTION.—The tract is a paper manuscript of 112 pages and measures four inches by approximately six inches and a quarter (101 x 160 mm.); the paper has at some period in its career probably suffered from slight dampness (the old Marsden chapel was not innocent of this defect) with the result that the edges of the leaves are very brittle, the top right-hand corners, indeed, having come away altogether on many leaves, without, however, seriously interfering with the text. Otherwise the manuscript is in fairly good condition, and is securely stitched in a binding which comprises part of a leaf of some mediæval Latin vellum MS., the outer face of which is black with age and use. The tract is written in a clear, legible hand typical of the late seventeenth century, but whose the script is, I cannot say; I am inclined to think the book is a copy and not the original MS., but reasons for this opinion will be given later. It has no set title as in a modern book, but in the author's address "to the reader" it is clearly named "A discovery of the soul's travel out or from Egypt to Canaan . . ." and at the beginning of the text proper it is styled "The difference betwixt Egypt and Canaan. The severall steps the soul takes in this weary Journeying. . . ."

The format of the book suggests that it was possibly intended for publication: it is provided with two prefaces, one to the reader, and one to "all Christian friends," and in addition each page has the catch-word at the bottom right-hand corner,

customary in printed works of the period; it is not impossible, on the other hand, that in these things the writer was merely imitating a printed book, and it may be doubted whether it ever really found its way into print at all, the fact remaining that no printed copy has been traced. There is no record of one in the catalogue of the British Museum Library. In his *Baptist Bibliography*, Dr. Whitley has this entry for William Mitchell under the year 1687: "The difference and passage betwixt Egypt and Canaan, or the several steps which the soul takes in its tedious journey," with an added note that it was "written in York Castle whence he was released a few days before the Declaration." But no location of a copy is given, and no indication is made whether the work is printed or manuscript. Dr. Whitley has kindly indicated to me the source of his information, and as a matter of fact he is referring to another copy of the work in question; a manuscript with the title as given by Dr. Whitley was owned by Rev. G. Mitchell, of Bacup, some eighty years ago, and was lent by him to Rev. H. Dowson, who referred to it in his book published in 1853, "*The centenary: a history of the first Baptist church, Bradford . . .*"¹ It has not been possible to ascertain the present whereabouts of this copy, but that it is not the same as the Marsden tract may be inferred from the fact that the preface in G. Mitchell's copy is said² to have been signed by William Mitchell, the author, "from York Castle, April 1687," a statement which is nowhere found in the Marsden MS. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to discover how the church at Marsden acquired its copy.³ It will be noticed that there is also a difference in the wording of the title of the book. As in addition the writing is so very regular and the text has no erasures, corrections or irregularities of any kind, the assumption is induced that the Marsden MS. is a transcript of the original, which, presumably, was the copy owned by G. Mitchell. It is possible that originally a number of copies were made for circulation over this area.

The first five leaves are unnumbered and contain prefatory matter. On the recto of the first leaf (the verso is blank) is the inscription, in part obliterated where the paper has worn away, "Josi . . . [as?] Marshall his booke 1687," together with the

¹ At pp. 93, 94. Compare J. Horsfall Turner, *Halifax Books and Authors* (1906), p. 37. Turner curiously seems to imply that this MS. (he took his information from Dowson's book) was dated 1700.

² Dowson, *loc. cit.* Barrett, *op. cit.*, having no date to go by, suggested the outside limits of 1660 and 1687 for the date of its composition.

³ It may be that it came with a collection of papers of a similar kind presented to the church in 1841 (cf. Barrett, *op. cit.* 41), but this is mere conjecture.

following curious quotation, written vertically along the page, which Mr. Barrett traced to the text of the Codex Bezae :

" not in
 Luke ye 6th.
 that is on ye same day (Jesus) seeing
 a seroton man working on ye
 Sabbath day s, unto him O
 man if yu, didst know indeed
 what yu. dost yu. weart happy
 but if yu. knowest not
 yu. art cursed and a trans
 a transgressor of ye Law."

This is in a script different from that employed in the rest of the book. Sheet two contains the two-page address "To the Reader" signed "William Mitchell, a Preacher of the Gospell." On sheet three begins an address "To all Christian Friends," which continues as far as the verso of sheet five. After that come the ninety-nine numbered pages of the text of the work, followed by three pages which are blank, except for a few figures scribbled on the last. As noted already, there are slight mutilations at the corners of certain pages due to the action of damp: the text is cut into slightly at pages 15-34 and 88-98, and the first two of the unnumbered preliminary sheets have suffered damage.

THE AUTHOR.—As mentioned above, the address to the reader is signed William Mitchell, to which are added the descriptions "Preacher of the Gospell" and Minister of the Gospell." Mr. Barrett built up his theory of Mitchell's identity from internal evidence alone, and unfortunately this evidence is not very extensive; he propounded the Quaker theory on the basis mainly of the following reason which Mitchell gave, among others, for writing the tract, "my being in bonds and deprived of my Liberty in the publick Ministry, not having Liberty to speak that publickly to the world which God spake internally in and to my Spirit." Two facts are deduced from this in favour of a Quaker origin. It was the Quaker sect which suffered hardship for its faith more than any other religious body among Nonconformists during the latter half of the seventeenth century, for one thing; and secondly, it was the same body which believed so intensely in the religion of the Spirit. Further, Mitchell "denounces the doctrine and customs of the Church," says Mr. Barrett, "and in a lesser degree, those of orthodox Nonconformity," the title of the tract sufficiently indicating its purpose. Mr. Barrett recognised that his theory was by no means proved, but concluded with the confident assumption that if not formally a Quaker, Mitchell was at any rate saturated with the peculiar doctrines of the Friends. The one serious objection to the theory was, of course,

that Mitchell uses the word "Minister," and this status is confirmed by an exhortation to the members of a little flock of which he had some kind of oversight.

But from abundant external evidence there can be no doubt that we are dealing with William Mitchell (1662-1705), the pioneer Baptist in the West Riding of Yorkshire. It is clearly unnecessary to trace his biography in any detail here; in indicating a few facts relevant to this note it will be enough merely to summarise what has hitherto been accepted as Mitchell's position as a Baptist.⁴ He was christened in April 5th, 1662, the son of Edward Mitchell, of Heptonstall. When about eighteen years old he felt the stirrings of conscience and was converted, and "about the twenty-third year of his age," wrote⁵ his co-worker in preaching, David Crosley, "he began to preach in the capacity of an itinerant," attracting large crowds of hearers. By the February of 1686/7 he was a prisoner in York Castle, having incurred, not for the first time, the penalties of the Conventicle Act; previously he had been arrested at Goodshaw Chapel, but now he was taken to York from near Bradford. Through the influence of Sir Walter Calverley he was released a few days before the Declaration of Indulgence was proclaimed. Shortly after his release, the joint efforts of Mitchell and his cousin Crosley began, and those efforts were so effective that by 1691 they were serving a loose confederacy of some twenty or more meeting houses spread over a compass of about forty miles.⁶ As yet they were not more than itinerant preachers, they were not pastors, and, it is asserted, they were not yet Baptists.⁶ In 1692 the Rossendale church building was erected at Bacup⁷

⁴ A short account of him will be found in J. Horsfall Turner, *Halifax Books and Authors* (1906), pp. 36, 37. *The Baptists of Yorkshire* (1912) contains a good account of the labours of Mitchell and Crosley, founded on the fuller story as given in Overend's *History of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Bacup* (1912), a work indispensable for Mitchell's biography. Further documents are in *Baptists of North-West England* (1913), pp. 71-99.

⁵ Crosley's preface to Mitchell's *Jachin and Boaz*, published posthumously in 1707, and reprinted by Dr. W. E. Blomfield in *Trans. Baptist Hist. Soc.*, III. (1912-13), pp. 65ff. and 154ff.

⁶ Overend, *op. cit.*, 57. Barrett, *op. cit.* inferred that the tract was written for a particular congregation.

⁷ Dr. Whitley sends the following note on Bacup. "The Bacup building was put in trust, April, 1692, 'first for the purpose of a school-house. Second for the use of Mr. David Crosley and Mr. William Mitchell, both from Yorkshire . . . to pray, preach and worship in.' It was apparently the first building *not being domestic* so to be used. But it was primarily a schoolhouse. It was subject to the rent of a penny a year to the lady of the manor. In October, 1747, it was broken open, to be used in the morning by Henry Lord, a hyper-Calvinist Baptist, and in the afternoon by the curate of Goodshaw. This joint-user continued till

through the influence of these two, and on the tenth day of the sixth month Crosley was baptised at Bromsgrove. Proper church organisation was adopted by the Rossendale church in 1694, but although Mitchell is known to have come over to the Baptist cause by 1696 (his letters printed by Overend show this), the church did not become Baptist for some years yet. Late in the year 1699 Mitchell was dismissed from office at Bacup, and thereafter, for the last few years of his life, he laboured principally at Rawdon. He died in February, 1705. To his influence the early Baptist causes in the West Riding owe an incalculable debt; that debt is fully confessed in the Rawdon church book.⁸ But for our particular purpose it is sufficient to observe that in 1687, when he wrote the tract under review, he was still quite a young man, only just twenty-five years old. He was a strong Protestant dissenter: was he yet a Baptist?

JOSIAS MARSHALL.—Who was Josias Marshall, to whom the tract belonged in 1687? It seems certain that he was that same Josias Marshall who, with six others, petitioned in 1689 for permission to hold a "publick meeting place for Protestant Dissenters" at the "dwelling house of John Moore of Rawden."⁹ Included among the petitioners are two other Marshalls, Jeremiah and John; evidently the family was of some importance in Nonconformist circles at Rawdon.¹⁰ And John Moore, Baptist before 1700, was himself a fellow-labourer with Mitchell.¹¹ In the following year Josias Marshall and four others

Lord left the district, then the Church of England had the sole use till they built their first place in Bacup, 1788. Baptists had put up their own meeting-house in 1746, and built a new chapel in 1812. Then they began a Sunday School, and once again used the 'Old Schoolhouse,' till they erected a new one in 1825. The ancient edifice served for a Mechanics' Institute in 1839, but was wearing out, so was sold for demolition; it surprised many of that generation to learn that Baptists had had the right to use it for preaching, ever since 1692."

⁸ The Rawdon tribute to Mitchell, contained in the first few pages of the Church Book, is too long to quote in full: but it ends with a reference to his death as "a smarting stroke to us, For in him wee lost a minister orthodox in his principles, pious in his life, and indefatigable in his Labours . . ."

⁹ The record as printed in *The Baptists of Yorkshire* (p. 114) is dated from Leeds, January 16, 1689, and reference is made to the original preserved in the Sessions Rolls at the West Riding County Hall, Wakefield. But a precisely similar application as printed in J. Horsfall Turner's *Nonconformity in Idle* (1876), p. 25, is dated from Barnsley, August 1689.

¹⁰ It is interesting to know that the Rawdon church book (MS.) in its early part is largely the work of John Marshall. The name Marshall occurs frequently in records of contemporary nonconformity in the whole district of Rawdon, Yeadon, etc.

¹¹ *The Baptists of Yorkshire*, p. 82. See especially Overend, *op. cit.*

applied for a licence for a barn in the occupation of "Thos. Beeston of Ashold" (i.e. Esholt) in the parish of Otley.¹² Thus in this little book we may find a link with a group of Baptist pioneers at work in the neighbourhood of Rawdon in those stirring days. And a number of questions arise which can never be answered. Were Mitchell and Josias Marshall intimate friends, as it would appear? Did Marshall get his copy of *The Difference* from Mitchell himself? If not, how did he get it? And how has the book fared all these intervening years?

TITLE.—The fuller title of the work as given in the address "To the Reader" is "A discovery of the Soul's Travel out or from Egypt to Canaan, or from selfe and bondage, first to the flesh of Christ for Justification and Liberty, then from the flesh of Christ to the Knowledge and enjoyment of Him in and after the Spirit, and so a passing on from one dispensation to another, as the Lord is pleased to remove the Cloud off the Tabernacle, Isai. : 10, 24 . . ." with the text from Isaiah quoted in full.

The idea of a pilgrimage of the soul was not new in 1687, of course: for one thing, the possibility of an influence by Bunyan immediately suggests itself. It will be evident from the extracts that follow that there is none of the charm of the *Pilgrim's Progress* about Mitchell's work; if there is any influence derived from Bunyan it is from his other and more formidable books. It is curious that an almost identical title had been used some forty years before by William Rabisha in his little book (it, too, had ninety odd pages) published in 1649, entitled "Adam unvail'd, and seen with open face: or, Israel's right way from Egypt to Canaan lately discovered." The extent of the influence of this book, if any, it has not been possible to determine. Nor can I say whether Francis Taylor's "Grapes from Canaan. . ." ("a short, divine poem") published in 1658, or the anonymous book, "The soul's pilgrimage to heavenly Jerusalem" issued in 1650, had any influence.

PREFACE.—"Now Christian Reader, the Form and shew of godliness is become even a common, formall, and customary thing, but the truth, life, and power of godliness and true Religion, as Truths are in Jesus, is most excellent and rare, and that which is hard to bee found: and when we are seeking after it, for the most part we are seeking the living among the dead, and are for seeking Christ for the most part among the strict zealous Scribes and Pharisees, and not among the poor Publicans and sinners, but rather are seeking in the streets and in the broad ways and are saying to the watch-men of the City of Hypocrisy,

¹² *The Nonconformist Register (Northowram or Coley Register)*, by Oliver Heywood and T. Dickenson, 1644-1752, edited by J. Horsfall Turner (1881), p. 149. Quoted also in Turner's *Nonconformity in Idle*, p. 26.

Saw ye not him whom our souls love, but he is not to be found here; all our prayers and requirings upon this account is but like the praying of Baal's Prophets, no voice is heard, nor answer from God. No, if wee will find Jesus wee must pass from these, for they have not heard his voice nor seen his shape, neither have they his word abiding in them, and so have not the tongue of the Learned to speak a word in season to him that is weary: but Jesus is among the Lillies and dwells among them till the day dawn and shadows flee away; hee is among the poor and needy and is helping them, opening their blind eyes, unstopping their deafe ears, cleansing filthy souls like lepers, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, and is doing that inwardly and spiritually which Moses and Aaron did externally and outwardly."

Mitchell gives eight reasons for writing his tract. First, "because of light, life, grace, and love received . . ." and then because a candle should not be put under a bed or a bushel. Third, as previously mentioned, "my being in bonds and deprived of my Liberty . . . [&c.]" Fourth, his longing desire after the good of poor souls desiring greatly their conversion to the truth, "their drawing to Christ by the powerfull draught of the Father's love and so be brought into the Lord's banquetting house, to enjoy the blessed banner of his love and to be satisfied with the fatness of God's house and be made to drink joyfully of the River of his good pleasure, which, saith David, maketh glad the City of our God . . ." Fifth, "my desire to have fellowship with you in the Gospell of Christ." Sixth, "because it's my delight to make known the wonderful works of the Lord . . ." Seventh, because the fathers are to make known to the children the wonders of the Lord (and Mitchell was twenty-five!). Lastly, "I would have all acquainted truly with the workings and dealings of the great God and learn to fear and serve him . . ."

"Now dear Christian Reader, I desire thee to read with an impartial spirit and understanding heart, and consider and understand what thou reads; and when thou finds me speaking so much against forms, men's works, and doings, wisdom, righteousness, zeal and devotion to the flesh, casting it all into the dust, where it ought to be, even under our feet, at present (it may be) it will dash thy spirit; but consider that all these works and forms declared against, are but of the flesh and of the fallen nature, which are corrupted by Satan."

F. BECKWITH.

(To be concluded.)