

# John Moore and "The Dying Experience of Alice Rawson," Heaton, 1697.

## INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH there is still much that it is desirable to know about the missionary activities of William Mitchel and David Crosley in the West Riding of Yorkshire, especially in their earlier days, yet discoveries may be expected from time to time, and in recent years several gaps in our knowledge have been filled in.<sup>1</sup> An interesting sidelight on this early missionary work, valuable as showing in a personal and concrete fashion the influence of these pioneers in the late seventeenth century, was revealed by the chance discovery of an old confession printed in a long-forgotten magazine. The labours of Mitchel and Crosley are mentioned in it, but it is the influence of John Moore, their disciple and co-worker, which comes to light more particularly.

In his *Manningham, Heaton, and Allerton*, one of a trilogy on the history of Bradford, William Cudworth noted the "first dated mention of the Baptist preaching house at Heaton,"<sup>2</sup> quoting a document of 1697 as his authority.

The document in question is entitled "The dying experience and advice of Alice Rawson." There is a scholars' adage which counsels the constant verification of references; it is an old and sage piece of advice. For Cudworth refers the reader to the *Cottage Magazine* of 1826 for this legacy of Alice Rawson's that he quotes; but an attempt to find it there will be without reward. Yet it does appear in that magazine, only in the fourth volume, issued in 1815, pages 188-196; it is not easy to see how this inexcusable and misleading error has arisen.

The document is preceded by a statement from the anonymous contributor to the effect that it was found "among some old manuscripts" and had "never appeared in print." The present location of this manuscript is unknown. It is not without interest to note that in 1815 the magazine was printed in Bradford, and its editors were to be communicated with at Leeds. Presumably the item was contributed locally. There can be little

<sup>1</sup> e.g. in *The Baptists of Yorkshire* (1912); *Baptists of North West England* (1913); F. Overend, *History of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Bacup* (1912); articles by Dr. Blomfield and the present writer in the *Society's Transactions* (Vol. III., 1913) and the *Baptist Quarterly* (N.S., VIII., 1936).

<sup>2</sup> (1896), p. 236.

doubt of its genuineness; it bears its own marks of authenticity. Nor is there any reason to question its date, which was so fortunately appended—November 13, 1697. It is evident that it is printed in full.

## TEXT.

“To my beloved brethren and sisters,” it begins, “my near and dear relations according to the flesh. A word from your poor dying sister, Alice Rawson, being a brief account of the Lord’s dealings with me, his unworthy handmaid, together with a few words of Christian exhortation and advice, which I desire you all to peruse and seriously weigh in your minds, and that you all may do so, I desire that some of you take that pains to write it over, that every one of you may have a copy hereof by you, or however [sic] to send this to one another.

November 13th, 1697.

“Grace, mercy and peace be abundantly multiplied to you all . . .” So she writes to show “how the Lord hath been pleased to begin and carry on his own work of grace in my poor soul, in casting me in the first place into deep horror of conscience, and again in enlightening, enlivening and raising me up to behold his reconciled face in Jesus Christ, and to live in the enjoyment of his soul-ravishing love . . .” She goes on to describe how “it is many years since the Lord was pleased to begin to work upon my soul by way of conviction . . .” until she saw herself the vilest of sinners, burdened with sin, terrified in her conscience “with guilt and apprehension of the fierce devouring wrath of a sin-avenging God,” so that she spent her days “for a long time in mourning, heaviness and bitterness of spirit.” She saw her insufficiency, emptiness and nothingness. Then she found peace, and in raptures of praise pours forth her soul.

“And I cannot but acquaint you, my dear relations, that the Lord hath been pleased to make use of William Mitchel, David Crosley and John Moore, chiefly and above any else, as instruments in his hands for the comforting and cherishing of me. But yet I have not walked all along in a comfortable, lifted-up frame of spirit, till of late, though I was scarce ever under the sound of their ministry, but the word was sweet and came with a lively efficacy to me, to the raising up of my soul: although when I was from under the word, the sweet reviving and comforting property thereof did not abide with me, but I frequently spent my time more in darkness and under clouds, in a low and humble frame: yet still adhering to and depending on God’s everlasting mercy and unchangeable goodness in Christ: and the Lord hath been pleased to support and bear me up all along, putting his everlasting arms under me: giving me some

comfortable measure of contentment and patient submission to his will, in the many crosses, troubles and difficulties that I have waded through. Yet, blessed be God, I have continued in a sweet heavenly and comfortable frame all along, since April last, that I heard John Moore preach at Heaton upon Rom. v. 1.

“The quickening power and reviving, and the refreshing comfort which then sweetly distilled upon my soul have remained with me: and I have had a lively sense thereof ever since, to this present hour. O that peace with God! how sweet is it. He shewed from that text, that God’s justified children have peace with God the Father through Jesus Christ, declaring among other sweet truths the nature and properties of this peace—that it is perfect, pleasant, and comforting—sure, heavenly, everlasting—and the blessedness of those that partake of it. Much comfort likewise was the Lord pleased to administer to me by another sermon of his, not long after this, in his opening and discussing upon that parable of the great supper in Luke xiv. 16, 17. Whence coming to the close of the 17th verse he shewed that all things that make for the justification and comfort of poor sinners here and for their eternal glory and happiness hereafter, are richly provided and made ready by God in and through Jesus Christ. Grace is ready—peace is ready—pardon is ready—a complete righteousness for their justification and acceptance with God is ready—heaven is ready—salvation is ready—and withal he bids them come! Yea he earnestly importunes and solicits them to come and feast their souls upon these things. Oh! what inward lively refreshings did I feel and do still enjoy from these sermons. Thus the Lord hath brought me out of the horrible pit and set my feet upon the rock . . .”

She proceeds with the rapturous expression of her joy in a style very reminiscent of Mitchel’s “The difference betwixt Egypt and Canaan.”<sup>3</sup> “Oh! what love is this: that God should have thoughts of good-will towards me even from eternity! for whatever some may say (as I have heard some argue) against election, yet I am fully satisfied that there is an election of grace, as Rom. xi. 5. Yea, and in humility be it spoken, that I am one of God’s elect: though I have been much troubled in mind about this very thing, and could not for a long time be satisfied.” She concludes with a series of final exhortations.

#### Alice Rawson.

Who was Alice Rawson then? The surname is not at all uncommon in the district, and pedigrees of various branches of

<sup>3</sup> *Baptist Quarterly*, N.S., VIII., pp. 167-173, 217-222. Articles by the present writer.

the family have been printed from time to time.<sup>4</sup> Local records yield many references to the name at this period. But Alice Rawson is elusive. In the assignment of a "colemine and colemynes" dated May 28, 1684, a John Rawson, of Denholme, collier, and Alice Rawson, "of the same, widow, late wife of Christopher Rawson, deceased, father of the said John . . ." are mentioned as granting a lease;<sup>5</sup> but both sign with a mark, which would seem to betray an illiteracy hardly according with the able powers of composition exhibited in the document above. The only Baptist Rawson discoverable is a William, who signed the Rawdon Trust Deed of 1712.

Her experience may usefully be compared with that recorded by William Mitchel himself in a letter of his, dated July 13, 1691, to some friends at York who had enquired about his welfare.<sup>6</sup> In answer to their third query, "How I have proceeded in the work of the ministry," he quotes the following personal testimony: "Yea, the last Sabbath day, one who had long been bound of Satan and kept in hellish horror, many times concluding there was no mercy nor help for her in God, but that hell and damnation would be her portion, the Lord was pleased in His abundant loving kindness to look on her and pour His grace and Spirit into her desolate soul and bewildered, mournful heart, which gave her such comfortable satisfaction that, after the exercise was over at night she declared with wet cheeks and many tears, before many people, what satisfaction she that day had found under the ministry, and what assurance she had of God's love." The lady's name is not mentioned, and it is unlikely that she will ever be identified with certainty, but Alice Rawson's mental conflict bears a striking similarity to that recorded by Mitchel.

Now in the registers of the neighbouring parish of Bingley, an entry of February 7th, 1666 (-7) records the marriage of Jonathan Rawson and Alice "Marciall." If it may be assumed that this lady is none other than the Alice Rawson in question (and it is a fair, if unproved, hypothesis), a highly interesting probability emerges for consideration. The name of Marshall is as well known as that of Rawson in the particular neighbourhood under discussion; indeed, it has been said, referring to Rawdon and Yeadon, that the Marshalls constitute "the oldest

<sup>4</sup> e.g. for the Bradford branch, J. Foster, *Pedigrees of the County Families of Yorkshire*; J. James, *History and Topography of Bradford; Genealogist*, N.S., XIII.; and for the Sheffield branch—J. Hunter, *Hallamshire*, ed. A. Gatty (1869), pp. 386 and 450; J. Eastwood, *History of the Parish of Ecclesfield* (1862), pp. 391-4.

<sup>5</sup> Bradford Historical and Antiquarian Society; Local record series, II.; *West Yorkshire Deeds* (1936), p. 57-8.

<sup>6</sup> Overend, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

family in these parts." But for the purposes of local Baptist history the records of the various Marshalls are of the greatest importance. Some reference to those of the name who were connected with the Rawdon Baptist circle will be found in an article by the present writer in the *Baptist Quarterly* for July, 1936 (VIII., 3, p. 171), and although it is unnecessary to repeat the information there given, one or two relevant facts may perhaps receive a new emphasis. The application which was made for the registration of the house of "John Moore of Rawden . . . for a publick meeting place for Protestant dissenters" includes the names of three Marshalls: Josias, Jeremiah, and John. It is to the care and thought of John Marshall that the Rawdon Church is indebted for such a full record of its earliest years, and no less than eight Marshalls signed the Rawdon covenant in 1724. The question which remains to be solved now is, how nearly, if at all, was Alice Rawson related to this Marshall family which figures so prominently in the infancy of the Rawdon Church? The mention of Bingley is also suggestive, for in his short account of the Baptist cause at that place Horsfall Turner begins by asserting that "amongst the pupils of Mr. W. Hustler at Bingley, about the year 1675 was John Moore, a native of 'Oakworth Hall, near Kighley,' born 1662. Heaton and Bingley are some three miles apart on the same bank of the Aire; Rawdon is on the opposite bank, a little farther away from both places.

Altogether then, it is not improbable that we are back among that earliest group of pioneers, already vaguely known and identified, from which, in the early eighteenth century, there was to emerge out of the Rossendale group an independent, fully fledged Baptist Church identified with Heaton and Rawdon.

#### HEATON AND JOHN MOORE.

It will doubtless be remembered that "a short epitome of the Faith and Gospel order of a few persons usually meeting at Heaton and Rawden in the west riding of Yorkshire," is one of the earliest records contained in the Rawdon Church Book (MS.). By 1697 there is no doubt that Mitchel, Crosley and Moore were Baptists, and they are honoured as the mainspring of the churches of the West Riding, but it is a matter of debate whether there was a Baptist church organised here as early as 1697;<sup>7</sup> although, of course, meeting houses for Baptist dissenters are spoken of before that date, e.g. at Horton, Bradford, in 1672.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Haslam noted a registered place at Heaton in 1689.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Overend, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> J. H. Turner *The (Northowram) Nonconformist Register* (1881), p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> *Baptists of Yorkshire*, p. 115.

Heaton was one of the places where it is known Mitchel and Crosley preached in the last decade of the seventeenth century, and to their labours must now be added John Moore's. It was presumably at "James Garth's new building" at Heaton, mentioned in the records of the Pontefract sessions of April, 1695,<sup>10</sup> that they preached. In this very year 1697, Mitchel expressly mentions Heaton in a letter to Moore:<sup>11</sup> "Our discourse was about the meeting place at Heaton; for, indeed, as it was in David's mind to build for the Lord the house, so I, being desired by many (whom in Christ I love) resorting thither, had it in my mind to have come every 6 weeks that I might through grace have been a help to the poor of the flock, upon whom my heart chiefly is; for the fat and strong God Himself will deal with." He was in a very despondent mood, for he goes on, presumably referring to Heaton all the time, to speak his sorrow, neatly tabulated under six headings, the sum of which was that he had been wasting his time and had laboured among them in vain.

John Moore<sup>12</sup> (1662-1726), convert and particular friend of Mitchel (as their letters reveal), is less well known than Mitchel and Crosley. He figures often in the letters printed by Overend, to which frequent reference has been made; and it is worthy of remembrance that it is really due to Moore that the valuable Mitchel-Crosley correspondence has been preserved at all, for it is from Moore's manuscript copy that Overend derived the documents he printed in 1912. In the name of John Moore, houses were registered at Rawdon (1689), Guiseley (1695) and Horsforth (1697), all places in this neighbourhood.<sup>13</sup> In June, 1711, when he had been already ten years and more out of Yorkshire, Moore returned to preach a sermon<sup>14</sup> "at the old meeting house at Heaton"; this, together with two other sermons of his preached at Great Woodhouse, Leeds, in August 1703 and June 1719 (the former, it has been calculated, must have taken three hours to deliver) were printed in 1722 as "Some Gospel truths

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> Overend, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> Some account of him will be found in a pamphlet of Dr. J. Haslam entitled *A Sketch of the Early Baptists and Yorkshire Baptist History, 1707-1907*, (1907), pp. 25-9. See also D. Glass in the *Baptist Quarterly*, N.S. III., 182.

<sup>13</sup> *Baptists of Yorkshire*, pp. 75, 114, 134. J. H. Turner, *Nonconformity in Idle*.

<sup>14</sup> *Baptists of Yorkshire*, p. 129. H. Dowson, *The Centenary*, p. 27. Cudworth, *op. cit.*, p. 236 (title of the sermon, "Christ the Mediator").

plainly stated . . ." and re-issued in a new edition, "with some account of the author, by J. A. Jones," in 1854.<sup>15</sup>

In 1853, Henry Dowson wrote<sup>16</sup> that "the old Heaton Chapel stood about one hundred yards from the present one: a burying ground was attached to it, but the site is all that remains; other buildings have displaced the former edifice." But the small Baptist community at Heaton did not long flourish separately; it either merged into the Rawdon Church, as was seen above, or it died out until 1828, when it was begun again, only to be dissolved twelve years later. In 1868 it was once again, and this time firmly, established.

Alice Rawson stands before us, then, a storm-racked soul, tortured with doubt, but one whose search for spiritual "comfort" seems to have been satisfied by the particular doctrines of our West Riding patriarchs; and if her sensibility should seem to us somewhat morbid, surely her state can be paralleled among many a contemporary autobiography. Her confession shows a power of rhetorical expression hardly to be suspected in an average worshipper among the Baptists of the time and place. Evidently she was "no ordinary woman"—unless, of course, her account was written up for her by someone who had that power. It reveals something of the influence which these early preachers wielded over their hearers, and something of their hard, clear, Calvinistic doctrine (she had no doubt of her election); and from the very style of the confession may we not perceive also, in the echoes of their fervent language, not a little of the passionate earnestness and urgency of their preaching?

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<sup>15</sup> Haslam, *loc. cit.* J. H. Turner, *Ancient Bingley*, p. 166, gives instead of 1719, the year 1712. See also Dr. Whitley's *Baptist Bibliography* (16-722) and the British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books. ("God's matchless love to a sinful world . . .")

<sup>16</sup> *loc. cit.*