

Transport and the Churches.

ONE of the evidences of the vitality of our fathers' faith was their readiness to travel for it when travelling was much more difficult than it is to-day.

When the founders of Norfolk nonconformity returned from their exile in Holland in 1642 "after ye glad tidings of a hopefull Parliament," and formed themselves into Church Order, they settled their church at Yarmouth. The members who lived at Norwich had to make the twenty-mile journey to enjoy their church fellowship. Two years later the Norwich members were strong enough to form a church of their own, but even after this separation there were so many country members of the Yarmouth Church that the town members had to make special arrangements to give them hospitality.

In the eighteenth century many strong churches were settled in remote positions and were resorted to from great distances. Such was the church at Meeting Hill, Worstead, Norfolk. Its chapel is still the centre of its own tiny village in the midst of open country. Despite its lonely situation, the church had a large membership and at one time used to provide stabling for as many as forty horses and donkeys and accommodation for those who brought their picnic meals to eat between Sunday services.

A similar case is the church at Bluntisham. At the close of the eighteenth century and in the early years of the nineteenth century, numbers of vehicles of all sorts and people on horseback and afoot assembled for its services. One old gentleman regularly walked from Chatteris, nine miles distant, and others came by gigs, chaises and carts, distances of twelve and fifteen miles. One member of the church, Mrs. Maria Marshall, actually used to ride on horseback twenty-five miles from Parson Drive, though she was so deaf that she had to sit on the pulpit stairs to enjoy the sixty-minute sermons then in vogue.

Difficulties of transport hindered the movement of ministers and were an important contributory cause of the long pastorates which resulted in the building up of so many strong churches. When Rev. Diodate Hore came to St. Mary's, Norwich, in 1740, the cost of his move from Plymouth came to nearly one-third of his annual salary. Neither churches nor ministers could often afford expenses on this scale. A young man seeking a pastorate could not preach in a different pulpit every week, and often had to give the congregations he visited a few months of service.

Thus William Hawkins, after completing his education at Edinburgh, preached at Lynn, Godmanchester and Plymouth in 1814, spent the first four months of the following year at Olney, then five months at Birmingham ("there are not many intelligent people in Birmingham," he wrote), then three months at Newcastle, and in January of 1815 went to Portsea, where he did receive a call to the pastorate and where he was ordained six months later.

The letters of Joseph Kinghorn provide many interesting accounts of journeys on church business. In August 1784, he set off from home for Bristol College. Starting from York on a Tuesday, he took an inside place in the coach to Leeds and thence an outside place to Sheffield, where he hoped to catch the Birmingham connection. Three miles from Sheffield going down a hill one of the horses fell, and the passengers had to walk into town, where they arrived at 4 a.m. to find the Birmingham coach already gone. Kinghorn breakfasted at the inn, entered his box for next night's coach, and set out on foot with his pack and wide coat. He walked twenty miles to a stage Inn, where he slept, and caught the coach which was carrying his box, reaching Birmingham on the Thursday evening and Bristol the following day.

After his settlement in Norwich, Kinghorn made a number of journeys to see his parents in Yorkshire. These were attended by peculiar difficulties, as they involved crossing the Washes. There were no regular coaches, and the innkeepers who managed the business of passenger transport were often unwilling to risk hiring horses to cross the Washes. Once or twice he made the journey by sea from Hull to Lynn or Yarmouth, but the sea voyage had the added danger of capture by hostile French vessels.

When Kinghorn was absent from home, the deacon in charge sometimes had difficulties in arranging supplies. On one occasion he sent a man on horseback to go from one minister to another to the number of four. The first three could not come, but the messenger managed to engage the fourth and reached home safely after forty miles' riding.

The introduction of Lord Sidmouth's Bill to Parliament in 1811 threatened the liberties of nonconformists and created great indignation throughout the country. Joseph Kinghorn and Simon Wilkin were entrusted with the Norwich petition of 784 names, which had to be taken post-haste to London. In order to reach the House in time it was necessary to hire four horses for the last stage—greatly to Kinghorn's discomfiture. They accomplished the journey safely and delivered the petition to Lord Holland. The Bill was duly rejected.

Formidable journeys were undertaken on behalf of the

B.M.S. in 1818 and 1822 when Kinghorn, in company with others, travelled to Scotland and toured that country preaching in kirks and meeting houses and collecting for the Mission. Each of these journeys occupied about six weeks, and their arduous nature may be gauged from the fact that the party had to endure thirteen hours' continuous coaching to cover the eighty miles from Aberdeen to Perth.

At the close of Kinghorn's life the first railways were being built. He was not impressed.

"I confess," he wrote, "I am not much taken with the tremendous strides of this march of intellect. For recollect how many good coals are burnt in this scheme of whizzing from place to place, and nothing finite can last for ever. Besides, how many good and loyal subjects of His Majesty are slain by the accidents attending these steam improvements; for when anything happens there is no selection of victims. I do not say this in mere jest altogether—seriously, I think such an excessive destruction of coals must be felt in comparatively a little time; and instances of dreadful destruction of life we often hear of. And if this system goes on, what effect it may have on the general systems of agriculture and manufacture is, in my apprehension, beyond calculation, but I am apprehensive it is like a stimulus, it excites—but does it not weaken?"

For all Kinghorn's apprehensions, the change was to come. Its effect on the general systems of agriculture and manufacture was certainly beyond his calculations. Nor could he anticipate that it would prove the precursor of other and even more startling developments—the telephone—the petrol engine, with its much larger "destruction of life" and terrible potentialities in warfare, and the radio. He could not have dreamed that in one hundred years after his death his successor would preach in the chapel he had built and his voice would be heard in India, then six months distant.

Times change and men change with them. We are subject to two great dangers. We may cling to the past and die with it, or in our enthusiasm for the present we may forget the gains of the past and easily let them turn to loss. Kinghorn and his successor at St. Mary's were as different from one another as two men could be. In appearance Brock was rugged where Kinghorn had been refined, in manner hearty where he had been reserved. He had not Kinghorn's deep scholarship, but he had a sympathetic understanding of his times to know what Israel ought to do. Kinghorn looked forward with foreboding to the railway era. Brock belonged to it. His great friend, Sir Samuel

Morton Peto, was a key man in railway development, playing an important part in the construction of railways not only in England, but on the Continent and in North Africa. His surplus energies, with much of the large fortune he earned, were spent in Baptist extension. He built Bloomsbury and induced Brock to become its first minister. When the new railway was building at Norwich—his own parliamentary constituency—he built a mission hall for the navvies which he placed in the care of St. Mary's and the Norwich City Mission. This building was later known as Sayer's Street Chapel. The mission work carried on there a little later on under the auspices of St. Mary's by George White was so successful as to result in the formation of a new church—now Dereham Road Baptist Church. A pioneer of a great modern development, Samuel Morton Peto belonged to an era which has completely passed away. He built himself a great country house at Somerleyton—providing also a chapel for the local Dissenters—and when in London used to drive to Bloomsbury Chapel in his "omnibus"—which carried the family in one part, the female servants in another, and the men servants on the box. At chapel he occupied a pew from which his domestics were under his eye.

Developments in the resources and habits of the society in which we live inevitably have their effect on the church and on the denomination. Modern transport has affected us in many ways. It has made us conscious of our national unity as a denomination—the Baptist Union could never have achieved the position it holds in the life of the churches without the railway and motor car. It has greatly aided us in realising our world unity as Baptists, a factor which may one day have quite as important a bearing on history as the war which now occupies our thoughts as such an overwhelming event.

The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of the light. We are consequently more conscious of the ill effects on church life of modern advances than of the good effects. Yet every advance in the material realm rightly used may be turned to the advantage of the church as well as the advantage of the world. May God give us a vision that shall be equal to our times.

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