

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Maze Pond and the Matterhorn.

ABOUT fifteen years ago something that I read hinted to me that Edward Whymper, whose name will always be associated with the Matterhorn, as a youth was in attendance at a Baptist church. At the time attempts to get further information proved unsuccessful.

Five years later, in 1930, Mr. James A. Aldis contributed an article to the *Baptist Quarterly* entitled "Reminiscences of the Rev. John Aldis of Maze Pond." In the course of it he said, "One pew at Maze Pond was filled by the family of Mr. Whymper, a celebrated wood-engraver. One of his sons became even better known as an Alpine climber, he was one of the few survivors of the Matterhorn accident, which mountain he, with his party, was the first to ascend." The details can now be filled in, as the *Life of Edward Whymper* has recently been published, and I have had an opportunity of examining the Maze Pond minute books.

Edward Whymper's name is secure in mountaineering annals, for not only was he the first to stand on the Matterhorn summit, but his *Scrambles amongst the Alps* is an Alpine classic that will be read as long as people climb mountains. In the seventy-five years since the exploit which made his name famous, the man has remained hidden from public gaze, an elusive figure, his personality hardly discernible. The obscurity is now ended, for, in his *Edward Whymper* (Hodder and Stoughton, 21s.), Mr. Frank S. Smythe reveals the man. Mr. Smythe himself is one of the outstanding climbers of our day—he has come very near, and yet so far from final success on Everest—and he is a writer of no mean distinction. Those, whether climbers or non-climbers, who have been denied a visit to the mountains, or, indeed, any holiday in this war-time summer, will find refreshment in this volume, where Whymper's mountaineering exploits and scientific investigations are related with freshness and absorbing interest. Our immediate concern, however, is that the volume contains lengthy extracts from a diary kept by Whymper from January, 1855, to October, 1859, when he was 14½/19½ years of age. The diary has not been published elsewhere, and the extracts add materially to the interest and value of Mr. Smythe's work. These extracts contain many references to Maze Pond, e.g.,

1855, January 28. Went in morning to Maze Pond, to hear Rev. J. Aldis, and in the evening staid at home on account of my cough.

1855, December 30. Went to Maze Pond, morning and evening. Heard Mr. Jones of Folkestone in the evening. It was a most admirable impressive sermon from the text, "All souls are mine, saith the Lord"; and as Mr. Jones said, it would be a great blessing if that text should be ringing constantly in the ears of all those despots who persecute for conscience sake to let them know that though they can persecute the body which they have some power over they cannot alter or destroy the soul which is the peculiar property of the Lord.

1856, March 9. Went to Maze Pond in morning and evening. Heard Mr. Crasweller. Very good in matter, but dreadful bad in style.

1857, July 5. Went to Maze Pond in morning and evening. Mr. Malcolm preached both times. He does not *draw*, nor do I think that he will; his usual effect on me is to make me slumber sweetly, at least in regard to all that he is saying.

1858, January 17. Mr. Cowdy preached both times. I think he will fill the chapel, for he seems a very hard-working, determined man in the cause of his Master. He is, moreover, a civilised man, which is more than all preachers are.

On another occasion he writes, "A regular muff preached"; on July 19th, 1857, he gets well into his stride with "Mr. Armstrong (an impudent, smeary-faced old ass) preached in the morning, and Mr. Watts, an excited, affected young donkey in the evening," while on September 21st, 1857, there is the significant entry, "This evening Mr. Malcolm resigned his office as Pastor of Maze Pond. I am *glad* of it." Among other references which arrest our attention are those relating to Spurgeon, the Surrey Gardens disaster, parties at Mr. Hepburn's and Mr. Beddome's, where Whympers "felt considerably awkward not being used to female society," and a paper, "Ought Christians to resist tyrannical governments?" read by him at Maze Pond on a Sunday afternoon.

In a second edition Mr. Smythe should correct some of the Baptist names—Chown of Bradford is *Chron* on p. 24, where he is described as "a very good preacher but a little too noisy"; on the same page Spurgeon is *Sturgeon*; and on p. 316 Spurgeon's *Temple* should be Spurgeon's Tabernacle.

The church minute books enable us to supplement the biography with further information, particularly concerning Edward Whympers's parents. The first reference is on June 23rd, 1845, when "Josiah Wood Whympers and Elizabeth Whympers

were proposed for baptism and fellowship, and the Brethren Beddome and Burls were appointed messengers to them." The reports being satisfactory, they were baptized, and received at communion on August 3rd. Josiah Whympier soon took an active part in the church life, as within a month he was serving on a committee to take steps to establish an infant school, and on April 19th, 1847, he and the auditors were appointed a sub-committee to advise concerning the church deficit of £104 17s. 10d. On the last day of 1855 he was elected a deacon, and later minutes reveal his activity in this office. For instance, he was a frequent visitor to candidates for membership; he was one of the three messengers to the Particular Baptist Fund; on occasion he addressed his fellow-members on spiritual issues; and he was treasurer of the Home and Foreign Missionary funds of the church. Mr. Smythe records that in July, 1859, in consequence of the ill-health of Mrs. Whympier, the family removed to Haslemere, but Edward, who had opposed the move, did not accompany them, remaining in London, having a bedroom at his father's works. This removal is referred to in two minutes:

17th October, 1859. Brother Whympier then stated that having been removed in the providence of God to a considerable distance from London he felt it would be out of his power any longer to perform the duties of the deacon's office, and therefore begged permission to resign it. The pastor then addressed to brother Whympier some appropriate parting words, and it was resolved: That a resolution expressing the sense which the Church entertained of brother Whympier's services should be entered on the minutes.

Sunday, October 23rd, 1859. Resolved that in accepting brother Whympier's resignation of the deacon's office in consequence of his removal from London, we do hereby record our attachment to him as a Christian brother, and our gratitude for the zeal and consistency with which he has laboured for our prosperity and growth in holiness. We cannot but pray that in whatsoever sphere of duty his lot may be cast, he may still find reason to rejoice in the favour and approval of an ever present and ever smiling God.

The move to Haslemere did not stabilise Mrs. Whympier's health, as the next reference to the family in the minutes records her death. (She was his second wife, not the first as stated in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.)

Died, December 8th, 1859, Mrs. Elizabeth Whympier, the wife of our brother Whympier. She had not only been for many

years a consistent disciple of Jesus and a zealous labourer in the cause of the Church, but in her own neighbourhood had for a still longer period engaged in many works of benevolence which will cause her memory to be widely and enduringly cherished. Her end was sudden, but not without abundant evidence that her assurance for an interest in the Saviour was triumphantly strong.

Although no longer a deacon, Josiah Whympers retained his membership at Maze Pond, and was occasionally present at church meetings until the 13th May, 1861, when, with "much sorrow at the removal of so esteemed a brother," Maze Pond transferred him to Bloomsbury, where he was soon elected to the committee of the Domestic Society and in other ways gave service to the church. His third wife was Miss Emily Hepburn, daughter of Thomas Hepburn, who was for twenty years a deacon and sixteen years treasurer of Maze Pond. She was a member of the church from February, 1851, to August, 1864, when, with the other members of the Hepburn family, she was transferred to New Park Road, Brixton.

The association of the Whympers family with Maze Pond did not finally cease with the transfer of Josiah Whympers, as in 1872 one of his younger sons, Charles, became a church member. Later he was elected one of the trustees of the newly-erected buildings in the Old Kent Road, and remained in membership until September, 1880, when, following the example set by his father nearly twenty years before, he was transferred to Bloomsbury.

It appears that Edward Whympers's association with Maze Pond ceased about the time when his Alpine career commenced, and the question is suggested, "Why did the church fail to win him?" The diary indicates that in his early teens his attendance at the Sunday services was regular, albeit parental compulsion may have had something to do with this. Further, he was present at parties and socials which Maze Pond leaders gave at their homes to the young people of the church. Unfortunately for him, however, in 1855, when he was fifteen and perhaps would have responded to a strong personality, the outstanding ministry of John Aldis closed on his removal to Reading. At that time Maze Pond was one of the leading Baptist churches of London, famed for the excellence of its congregational singing and the comparatively high intellectual and social character of the people. But a most depressing decade followed, and these years covered Whympers's later teens and early twenties. In that decade there was little at the church to attract a young man of independent mind capable of making pointed comments on religious and social questions, whose eyes were straining after Alpine giants. The

building was out of date, and the district of Maze Pond, near London Bridge, was becoming increasingly slummy and down town. A far-seeing church would have realised the need for a forward movement in a new district, but the members loved "old Maze Pond", they in fact had themselves grown old with it, and the thought of selling the old place with its adjoining burial ground was sacrilege. An offer of £5,500 from Guy's Hospital in 1863 was heartily turned down, only to be accepted twelve years later, after many members and prospective members had been lost. Moreover, the church experienced difficulty in filling its pastorate satisfactorily. Definite approaches to J. P. Chown and Samuel Harris Booth and informal approaches to others were unsuccessful. Then, in June, 1857, the church, weary of the interregnum of two years, made a sad blunder. On a vote so acutely divided that it should hardly have been acted on, James Malcolm of Aberdeen was invited to the pastorate, and astonishingly he felt justified in accepting it. Within three months he resigned. A few months later he was succeeded by J. H. Millard, who remained for "five years of disappointment and trial."

That, however, is one side of the story only. A church and its ministers are never solely to blame when they fail to win or hold a young person. Other factors always enter. In the case of Edward Whympier, as with others who have been lost to the Baptist Church, such as Augustine Birrell, R. B. Haldane, Edward Clodd, and, let it be frankly admitted, the sons of some who were the Baptist leaders of the last two or three decades, personal considerations must be faced. Edward Whympier was unsociable as a youth, apparently not desiring the society of those of his own age. He remained within his shell, a self-centred youth, and this trait continued throughout life. Not only in the New Testament do young people turn aside from the highest and accept the second best. Mr. Smythe suggests that to read the boyhood diary is a depressing experience, it reveals "the appalling monotony of the life led by young Whympier." That is not how it will impress all readers. It has to be judged by the standards of the eighteen-fifties, not by the interests and excitements of the nineteen-thirties. Undoubtedly Whympier toiled hard in the years of his apprenticeship to wood engraving, but craftsmanship was held in esteem and the would-be craftsman was prepared to toil. Moreover, the diary speaks of politics, of visits to the Oval, of the Derby, of the publication of Macaulay's *History* and other books, and gives the writer's views on the Crimea, "Sabbath desecration," and various other questions. It would not appear that he found life consistently monotonous. Nevertheless Mr. Smythe is on sure ground when, comparing the

diary of the boy of fifteen with the diary of the man of sixty, he finds revealed "not an atrophy of intellect but of spirit." Whymper never achieved spiritual contentment and happiness, and it must be a lasting regret that Maze Pond failed to awaken his dormant spiritual perceptions. Had it done so it is possible, as Mr. Smythe suggests, that "the name Whymper might have rung down the avenues of political, social or religious history, for his intellectual attainments were brilliant."

In closing this article, I may perhaps mention that among those consulted by me in the early effort to obtain particulars of Edward Whymper's Baptist association was the late Mr. E. Henderson Smith, for many years one of the deacons of Devonshire Square Church, and well known in the publishing world. He knew Edward Whymper personally, but could give me no information on the Baptist question. On the 15th August, 1928, however, he sent me a lengthy letter giving a description of the man, and the following quotations are illuminating:

"Edward Whymper was not a big man. About five feet six inches I should think, and not particularly broad-shouldered or stout. I don't believe he had money, except what he earned by wood engraving. That business was started by his father in the Lambeth Road. The family lived there, and used the top floor for the Engraving Room. No one was ever allowed to enter this sanctum. My idea of Edward Whymper's alpine climbing is that it was a recreation from which he had to return and *work*.

"Do you know wood engraving? It has long since disappeared in place of photo-zinc blocks. Before this, all pictures for books were done on box-wood blocks. These had a finely polished top surface. This was whitened over, and the artist then drew, in pencil, his picture. Some of the best academy *figure* artists began their careers in this way.

"When the artist had drawn his picture, the engraver carefully cut out all the white spaces between the artist's lines. To do this he had to wear, in one eye, a glass like a watchmaker's, and he also had a globe of clear water placed so that the light was focussed on to his work.

"Look at any book of fifty years ago, illustrated with Edward Whymper's engravings. The *Leisure Hour* and *Sunday at Home* had a lot of them. Dr. Manning's *Swiss Pictures* also. When you look at these pictures you will understand the nerve-racking concentration needed by Edward Whymper to produce such work. He never turned out a bad block. I have received hundreds of them from his hands. They were always well and *cleanly* done and every block is a picture of *conscientious cutting*. It does *my* eyes good to look at them after all these years. But it took the life out of him. He smoked a lot. I don't think there

was any other reason for his *moroseness*. You can understand how he revelled in the Alps after the strain of his engraving.

“The last I heard of him was that he was living at Southend, in a tall house. A man and his wife lived on the ground floor and ‘did for him.’ He lived by himself in the top floor, those intermediate being kept vacant that no noise might reach his apartments.”

SEYMOUR J. PRICE.

SEVENTH-DAY BAPTISTS. The Conference in America publishes a yearly Handbook rather more handsome than our B.U., and lodges in our library a copy legally certified. The meetings of 1939 at Milton in Wisconsin lasted six days, celebrating the 137th anniversary of the General Conference. The denomination maintains two colleges and a university; the latter has fine equipment, with the luxury of a splendid carillon of ancient bells from Belgium; more than 120 degrees were earned last year. The Historical Society reports increasing work, and co-operation with the Works Progress Administration of the Federal Government; 289 visitors registered at its headquarters. The London church, which claims the date of 1617, had invited the Conference to meet here in August 1940, but the darkening clouds led to this invitation being postponed. When it is renewed and accepted, we shall hope to let our members know, that we may join in a welcome. There are twenty-eight churches in Germany, five in Holland, two in China, six in British Guiana, and fifteen in Jamaica.

W.T.W.