

St. Mary's, Norwich.

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V.

JOSEPH KINGHORN, 1789-1832.

A CHANCE contact brought about the most notable ministry in the history of St. Mary's. Richard Fishwick, of Newcastle, paying a business visit to Norwich, heard of the death of the Rev. Rees David and of the Church's need, and recommended to them Joseph Kinghorn, formerly a clerk in his lead works and now, with his help and encouragement, just completing his course at the Bristol Academy. So Kinghorn was invited, and came to Norwich. The need was met. This frail young man fitted exactly into a situation which might have been most difficult to fill. His keen intellect and fine scholarship appealed to the progressive element of well-to-do citizens which had been fostered by Rees David and now formed the Church's leadership; while his deep religious conservatism satisfied the members of the old school who were still the backbone of the fellowship, and his amiable disposition endeared him to all. Still true to the cautious habits of a vanishing age, the Church made no hurry to settle with their new minister. He came to Norwich in April, 1789, but it was not until the following December that they met to offer him the pastorate. For the first time in the Church's history the women were allowed to vote on the proposal, which was carried by a large majority. Kinghorn accepted the offer, and the ordination was arranged for the following May, when his father, the Rev. David Kinghorn, came from Yorkshire to take part in the ceremony, together with veteran Edward Trivett of Worstead, and William Richards of Lynn. After the day's solemnities the company adjourned to the "Labour in Vain" for the ordination dinner—its sign depicting a woman scrubbing a black boy, doubtless providing golden opportunities for the after dinner speakers.

Many faithful pastors have left their mark for good on the church at St. Mary's, but no name in its history is so revered as that of Kinghorn. The reasons for this fact are interesting. He was a great scholar, one of the foremost Hebraists of his day, but it is not as a scholar that he is remembered. His *Magnum Opus*, his edition of *Clavis Pentateuchi*, is now only a curiosity, interesting because of its connection with him. He was a leading figure in the Denomination, the chief of the conservatives in thought on the Communion question, and his own church was to win the victory for the liberal view which

he had opposed. As a preacher he was probably never so popular as his predecessor had been. The description his college principle gave to the Church held good all through his life :

“A sound scholar, an able though not what may be called a brilliant preacher, and of the most amiable disposition in the world.”

His greatness lay in a character of saintliness and unswerving devotion to God and God's people. He was a puritan. He described himself as a “perpendicular man”, swaying neither to right nor left. But there was no hardness in his puritanism; he had “the most amiable disposition in the world.” He was a pastor *par excellence*. Much of his work was in the homes of his people. He loved social intercourse, and such intercourse was never divorced from his religious and intellectual interests. Card playing he hated as “a dead stop in rationality, pleasantry and everything else that is important”—it would rob him of the conversation he loved, the fun as well as the deep exchange of thought and experience. He was fortunate in having among his members some who were able fully to share his interests. Intellectual pursuits were fashionable, and the well-to-do tradesmen who formed the aristocracy of Norwich found time to study languages, discuss literature, and debate questions of religion and philosophy. His friendship, however, was not confined to such. He was equally at ease in talking with a royal prince as with the humblest member of his congregation. Living through a time of revolution, war and change, in his habits as in his character he was unchanging—seeming to symbolise in himself the timeless truth for which he laboured. From the first his people loved him; towards the end of his long ministry they almost worshipped him.

A rigid and uncompromising Baptist, he was a saint of the Church Universal. Inevitably the grace of his personality overflowed the bounds of his denomination. We find him helping a young Anglican missionary enthusiast to a post under the C.M.S., and co-operating wholeheartedly with Quakers and paedo-Baptists in support of the Bible Society. A Norwich boy who remembered seeing his slender form wrote, “If anyone had told me Mr. Kinghorn had been one of the apostles I should have believed him.”

During his long pastorate Kinghorn kept no Church records other than a register of members and a register of births of their children. We have therefore little record of the corporate life of the Church. The period is lit up by Kinghorn's correspondence, lovingly preserved by his ward, Simon Wilkin. Much of this was published in *Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich*, by

Martin Hood Wilkin, and some of it later passed into the possession of St. Mary's. The letters throw a vivid light on Kinghorn's life and his relationship to his members, his many Norwich friends and the leaders of the Denomination. His first Norwich contact was with Thomas Hawkins, the Deacon and Treasurer of the Church, who met him in the inn yard as he stepped out of the Expedition coach on his arrival. Hawkins belonged to an old Norwich family which claimed to be connected with that of Archbishop Parker. He was a grocer, living over his shop in Tombland with his wife Martha and their growing family. He served the Church nearly sixty years as deacon, and more than half the time as faithful treasurer. He was mindful of his civic duties, too, and served as a Common Councilman when the offices of Mayor and Sheriff were still closed to Nonconformists. For years Kinghorn took Sunday tea with the Hawkins family, whose children learnt to frame his name before they could talk. Young William later became his student, and after entering the ministry, his lifelong correspondent. A successful man of business and a valued administrator in the Church, Thomas Hawkins was also a man of spiritual power. On one occasion, when Kinghorn was away from Norwich, Hawkins sent him an account of the unusual action of the Church in celebrating the Lord's Supper without the assistance of a minister.

"Last Lord's day I had the resolution after the morning service to desire the members to stop and all of them fill up their places as I had no less important resolution to make them than whether we should, under our present circumstances, attend to the Lord's Supper amongst ourselves. When met, I requested if anyone had any objection to make it; no objection was made. Mr. Watson proposed that I should take the first prayer and break the bread and pour the wine; I proposed Mr. Theobald should take the second prayer; also that Mr. Watson should give such reasons for our conduct as struck his mind. Each willingly took his part, and all, I trust, was done decently and in order."

Thomas Hawkins introduced Kinghorn to W. W. Wilkin, who became one of his closest friends. He was a farmer and miller, living in the village of Costessey, a man of fortune and culture. He and Kinghorn were both interested in mechanical pursuits, and spent many hours together in the workshop at Costessey, fitting up a measuring wheel and other scientific instruments with the aid of a local locksmith. Wilkin was a gentleman of the old style. He belonged to the eighteenth

century, and could scarcely have been at home in the changing world of the nineteenth. Providence cut short his life, and in 1799 he died, leaving his eight-year-old boy, Simon, in Kinghorn's charge.

Another family with which Joseph Kinghorn was on terms of intimacy was that of Theobald. John Theobald, with his wife and their eight children, had come to Norwich in 1778 from Lowestoft, where their home had been a centre of Nonconformist influence. They joined St. Mary's, but in 1786 withdrew to the Independents. Kinghorn won them back, became their close friend, and later baptized three of the children. John Theobald was a man of firm faith. His daughter recorded of him :

" My dear father, when any national troubles arose, always said, ' The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.' "

Letters give us a picture of Kinghorn at the Theobalds' house writing to young Thomas, who is on a business visit to Germany. Sally comes in with a letter from a young lady in London asking her love to be sent to Thomas by the next letter. Kinghorn promises to do any mischief Sally sets him upon, and " dresses up " the story. Ann now comes in, and the letter is read out, to the party's mirth, and despatched to Germany. Thomas returned a month later, bringing a score of books for Kinghorn.

With the coming of a new century many new names began to be added to the Church roll. Some of them are notable. James Cozens was transferred from Yarmouth in 1804. He became a deacon, succeeded Thomas Hawkins as treasurer, and for many years gave out the hymns from the box under the pulpit. One of his great-nephews became the first Lord Cozens-Hardy. In 1805 John Culley joined the Church, a grandson of the first pastor and benefactor of Worstead Baptist Church, and the first of a family which has probably contributed more members to the Church at St. Mary's over a long period than any other, and has rendered notable service. In 1806, Thomas Theobald and Jeremiah Colman, who had married one another's sisters, were baptized together. Jeremiah Colman belonged to a family with Baptist traditions. He and his nephew James, who later joined the Church, were founders of the famous flour and mustard milling business. Both were deacons and devoted servants of the Church throughout their lives. All these families represented new ideas which were to become dominant in agriculture or industry. They were leaders in secular affairs as in the Church.

Rigid Baptist and strict Communionist as he was, Kinghorn always advised paedo-Baptist friends to join a Congregational church where they could enjoy full communion. Nevertheless the success of his ministry and the enlargement of the membership

of his Church made it inevitable that his congregation was increased by paedo-Baptists who, attracted by his ministry or by family ties, found their spiritual home among the Baptists. Among these were Thomas Brightwell, solicitor, who married Mary Snell Wilkin, the sister of Kinghorn's ward, and later was the first Nonconformist to hold the Mayoralty of Norwich when that office was opened to dissenters by the Municipal Corporations Act, and John Crome, the great landscape artist.

Twenty years of Kinghorn's ministry had resulted in the Meeting House at St. Mary's becoming overcrowded, and it was resolved to rebuild it. Simon Wilkin, who, with Kinghorn's other pupil William, son of deacon Hawkins, had been baptized in 1808, was chosen treasurer; and on a memorable Thursday he and Thomas Hawkins went round and collected more than £900 in cash from members and friends, and banked it in Gurney's. Simon gave £800, his brother-in-law £350. Nearly £900 came from members of the Culley family. Thomas Hawkins, James Cozens, Thomas Bignold, Thomas Theobald and the Colmans were also large subscribers. John Crome gave £15, and many small gifts made up a final total of £3,650. During the period of the demolition and rebuilding, St. Mary's enjoyed the hospitality of the mother church at the Old Meeting, Kinghorn preaching alternate Sundays with the Rev. William Hull, the minister of that church. Communion services were held separately by the two churches in accordance with Kinghorn's strict views. In March, 1811, Kinghorn laid the foundation stone of the new building. A crowd assembled on the mound of bricks and earth which occupied the site. The minister stood in a space excavated for the foundation. As he concluded the ceremony with his arms uplifted in prayer, William Taylor happened to be passing, who afterwards said the scene strongly reminded him of the benediction of the people by the Pope, which he had witnessed at Rome.

The new building was opened in June, 1812, Kinghorn preaching in the afternoon and Hull in the evening. Wilkin proudly described the chapel:

" . . . with handsome iron palisades and gates; its imposing front of white bricks, with Grecian portico and an ample flight of stone steps—altogether, both within and without, one of the handsomest Baptist Meeting-houses in the kingdom: free, however, from all popery and popish adornments of Gothic within and Gothic without, as well as from all vestiges of popish canonicals."

The outside plan of the building was almost square. Within, the pulpit, approached from a vestry behind, stood against a

flat wall, while the gallery opposite and the interior wall behind it were semicircular. The ceiling was of plaster in the form of a ribless vault, elegant in appearance and of considerable accoustical value. The chapel has been several times enlarged, and the interior was destroyed by fire in 1939. The street front, with its palisades and portico remains, and the plaster vaulting has been restored.

During Kinghorn's ministry a development of vital importance in the life of the Church took place—the beginning of a Sunday School. It cannot be said for certain that the room over the vestry at the pulpit end of the chapel was erected in 1812 for this purpose, but this seems probable. Kinghorn was on terms of close friendship and co-operation in religious activities with Joseph John Gurney, who was instrumental in founding the Norwich Sunday School Union in 1815.

There was no Baptist Union in the modern sense in Kinghorn's day, but the Baptist Missionary Society had begun to provide a centre of denominational co-operation. From its early days Kinghorn played a part in promoting the interests of the Society. In 1793, he and a few friends sent a small subscription, and from that date the Church at St. Mary's made increasing contributions. He served on the Committee of the B.M.S., and made two notable journeys to Scotland on its behalf, preaching in kirks and meeting houses and collecting funds.

In 1816 Joseph Kinghorn entered upon the controversy which made him the recognized leader of the Strict Communion party in the Denomination by publishing *Baptism a Term of Communion at the Lord's Supper* in reply to Hall's *Terms of Communion*, Hall, of course, advocating the admission of paedobaptists to the Lord's Table in Baptist churches. The controversy covered a period of twelve years, during which time Kinghorn issued four books, distinguished by cool and unruffled logic as against the warm and impetuous advocacy of his opponent. While Kinghorn's logic was correct, the peculiar circumstances of the Baptist denomination in its relationship to other evangelical bodies in England made his position impracticable, as his own Church later proved. It may, however, be noted that in America, where Baptists are predominantly strong, and on the continent of Europe, where there are few others with whom Communion would be possible, strict Communion is the common practice.

In 1822 David Kinghorn, who had lived with his son during the twenty-two years of his retirement, passed away. Kinghorn told his Church :

"I am now loosened from every earthly tie, and have no other care but you. Henceforth you, the members of this

Church, shall be my brother and my sister, my father and my mother."

From this time his relationship to his members was even closer, resembling that of a benevolent patriarch to his family. He had been an untiring worker, and his body was always frail. His members were quick to detect a declension in health which could not be attributed to advancing years alone. In 1828 Thomas Theobald wrote beseeching him to recruit his strength by doing less work.

"To communicate and enforce Christian truth is really all that you ought to attempt. I strongly recommend you to select sermons from your extensive and valuable hoard instead of incurring the unnecessary labour in writing others: to allow a proposal for the discontinuance of the Afternoon Service on the Lord's Day during the summer months and of the Lecture on Wednesday evenings till you shall have recruited your strength."

Needless to say, this advice was not heeded. On Sunday morning, August 26th, 1832, the congregation gathered at St. Mary's for worship as usual. When the baize door behind the pulpit opened, a strange figure entered—it was William Knibb, of Jamaica, then in the height of his anti-slavery campaign. Kinghorn had come down to breakfast that morning with the shorthand notes of his sermon, but fever forced him to return to bed. He died on the following Saturday evening at his house in Pottergate.

It was a fitting tribute to the catholic spirit of one whose adherence to Baptist convictions had always been so uncompromising, that when his people looked for the most suitable man to conduct his funeral they chose no Baptist but his friend, the Rev. John Alexander of Prince's Street Congregational Church. Quaker J. J. Gurney also addressed the mourning congregation. His remains were laid to rest in the vestibule of the chapel which he had built.

Such is the influence of a saintly character that, though Kinghorn had never taken any part in public life except in matters directly concerning evangelical religion, it could be said by a Norfolk clergyman on hearing of his passing, "If half Norwich had died the loss would not have been so much felt."

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(To be concluded.)