

The Brewer Family.

THERE is no antidote," wrote Sir Thomas Browne, "against the opium of time, which temporally considereth all things; our fathers find their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our survivors." The truth of this dictum becomes plain when we try to resurrect figures of the recent past. The Brewer brothers were men of note in their day; there are plenty of people now living who can remember them; yet to reconstruct a small part of their lives involves research into history which has already become dim.

Our knowledge of this family begins with John Sherren Brewer, Senior, who came to Norwich early in the eighteen hundreds to exercise his vocation as a school-master. Here he married Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Kitton, one of a family which had widespread connections throughout Norfolk. Robert Kitton was a member of St. Mary's and in January, 1812, J. S. Brewer was admitted to the membership of the Church, having formerly been a member of the Baptist Church at Amersham. In the following July his wife was the first candidate to be baptised by Joseph Kinghorn in the new chapel which was completed in that year—the same which after several enlargements was finally destroyed in the blitz of 1942. The births of ten children of J. S. and Elizabeth Brewer were registered at St. Mary's and there may have been others, for E. C. Brewer claimed to be one of a family of twenty-one. Those registered are:

John Sherren	-	-	13 Mar. 1809
Ebenezer Cobham	-	-	2 May 1810
William	-	-	12 Dec. 1811
Robert Kitton	-	-	9 Jan. 1813
Henry	-	-	13 Sept. 1814
Julia	-	-	22 Mar. 1816
Anna Maria	-	-	14 Sept. 1818
Susan	-	-	10 Apr. 1820
Lucy	-	-	20 Nov. 1821
Rachel	-	-	30 May 1824

In due time Brewer was successful enough to be able to move out of the city and to set up his school in commodious premises at Mile End House on the Newmarket turnpike, about a mile from the city gates in the parish of Eaton. He issued a prospectus in 1824 which gave some curious particulars of the

school. He had, he said, tried to improve its character by careful study of the new developments in Public Education. The fitness of the situation was acknowledged by all: the salubrity of the air, the extensiveness of the ground to be appropriated for amusement, its complete separation from casual intercourse, the facilities for conveyance by coaches, were rarely equalled. He was erecting a handsome building with additional chambers and a schoolroom forty-eight feet by twenty-seven and fourteen feet high; the latter Mr. Ball had agreed to warm and ventilate by an apparatus which should without any effluvia arising from the decomposition of metal, preserve at all seasons the air of the room temperate and pure. The system of discipline was so correct as to render it impossible for a pupil to be absent longer than ten minutes without detection or to avoid by any artifice the performance of his appointed duties! The course of instruction comprised Greek, Latin, Mathematics, Geography, Arithmetic, Writing, &c. . . Terms which did not include washing and stationery were:— Boarders forty guineas a year or, under twelve, thirty-five guineas; day boarders 16 guineas; day pupils

Something more of the school may be learned from a paper ten guineas.

printed in 1828 by the pupils entitled *Horae Feriatae of a nest of Eaglets lately hatched at Mile End* and dedicated "to Mr. Brewer, our revered master." There were then sixty-three boys including four Brewers. The paper is mainly given up to rhymes which evidently refer to topicalities and are quite unintelligible to us. One seems to give a picture of the school's ideal—

Taught to court the muses fair,
Lightly trips the Eaton lad,
Scorning vulgar sordid care,
Never boistrous, never sad.

One fears the Eaton lad was a bit of a prig!

A glimpse of the family is to be seen in 1831 in the album of Mary Ann Smith, a young lady of some charm belonging to the St. Mary's circle. On January 18th, she took her album to Mile End House where R. K. Brewer (aged eighteen) covered five pages with a waltz of his own composing, and E. C. Brewer (nearly twenty-two) celebrated her attractions in verse. In contrast to the Scriptural themes of almost every other entry in the album these verses are adorned with classical allusions, giving a foretaste of the author's later predilections.

Could I write to thee Miss on the Moon's silver page,
With the stylus of yore like the Samian sage,
This prayer shouldst thou read on that planet engraven
Be thou to the earth what the moon is to heaven.

The album was brought to Mile End House again a month later when W. Brewer, who grew up to be a surgeon and Member of Parliament for Colchester, added another two pages of verse "composed while walking in our garden on the first very cold day in Autumn" comparing female beauty to the lily which the winter inevitably blasts :—

The swarms that crowd your blooming May
Will leave you in your Winter day;
If like the Lily you can prove
No claim but beauty for their love.

The father was a keen and active member of St. Mary's and a staunch supporter of Joseph Kinghorn's strict-Communion views. It is said that when William Brock came to Norwich in 1834 to take up his first pastorate it was no uncommon thing for him to receive a letter in the early part of the week expressing some difference of opinion on his Sunday's expositions and founding its representations on the original Greek or Hebrew which would be quoted at large. Brewer is mentioned as one of the four members of the congregation responsible for these epistles. There was strong feeling in the Church on the Communion question at this time and the fact that the spirit of unity was preserved in spite of this difference reflects great credit on all concerned. In 1835 when Brother Allen was elected a deacon, Brewer proposed to withdraw from the Church as Allen was an open-Communion man, but he was persuaded not to take this step and six years later, when Allen left Norwich, Brewer himself was elected to the diaconate although the majority of the Church was by this time strongly in favour of open Communion. When in 1841 Brock was urged to become Secretary to the B.M.S. Brewer was much in favour of his remaining at St. Mary's and moved a resolution in the Church meeting accordingly. In 1843 he offered to resign from the diaconate owing to his physical infirmities and the distance of his residence from the church, but he was persuaded to continue. He remained leader of the strict-Communionists and in 1844 published *The Communion Question Discussed*, a dialogue of twenty pages proving his case to the author's complete and evident satisfaction. In the next year William Brock started to hold a special Communion service for unbaptised Christians at St. Mary's. This called forth a letter of protest from forty-two members, of whom J. S. Brewer was the first. At the next church meeting Brock read the protest and his reply to it. The whole matter was debated with considerable candour. A vote of censure upon the pastor was moved and seconded but this found no favour with the church, several strict-Communionists entreating that it might be withdrawn. It was withdrawn on condition that the protest be entered in the

church book, the strict brethren agreeing that on this condition they would raise no further opposition. When Brock's minutes of this stormy meeting were read Brewer rose to say that in his opinion they were quite correct, even a *fac simile* of the proceedings taken by the Church.

It is evident from the record above that Brewer was a keen and convinced Baptist and was active as a church-member and deacon in support of his beliefs. It is plain too that his obvious pedantry was redeemed by the Holy Spirit in the discipline of the Christian community, so that he was able to enter into fellowship with people from whom he differed deeply in opinion even when he saw their views increasing in influence at the expense of his own. These things being so, it is curious that he caused or permitted his sons to pursue studies which under the unequal laws of those days involved their conformity to the Church of England. He himself had been brought up an Anglican and had become a Baptist by conviction. Perhaps he thought his sons might follow the same path, but if so it is hardly surprising that he was disappointed and that only one returned to the fold.

In 1828 Robert, who already displayed an extraordinary genius for music, was sent to London to study at the Royal Academy. Soon after, John went to Oxford and Ebenezer to Cambridge. Joseph Kinghorn, visiting the latter University, remarked that he had seen there the best arguments for the Establishment. Whatever the arguments both John and Ebenezer accepted them enthusiastically. Both became zealous members of the Anglican communion and soon entered its ministry.

John Sherren Brewer Junior, who was noted at Oxford for the wide range of his reading, joined the Tractarians and was admitted to some degree of intimacy with J. H. Newman for whom he always retained a warm attachment. This association seems to have caused strong reaction in the family for one of his great-nieces recollects that is used to be said with bated breath that one of their uncles was a "priest"—a term of quite alarming implication in those days.

Ebenezer's churchmanship was of a different brand but equally tenaciously held. He actually came to Norwich in 1844 and gave two lectures in support of the Establishment. He seems to have accepted the orthodox Calvinism in which he had been brought up for he describes his Church as a mountain which cannot be moved against a thousand isms or schisms, among which he enumerates Arminianism. While attacking the Nonconformity of his upbringing he has a blow too for the Tractarianism of his brother: "the spray of Puseyism and the salt fury of Superstition may occasionally dash over the cliffs and injure the cultivation of our beautiful church. . . ." Combatting, as he says,

"without mercy" the opinions of Dissenters he is willing to acknowledge their piety and sincerity. His knowledge of both sides of the question does lead him ultimately to an ecumenical view which he expresses in a striking simile: "So may two mountain torrents from opposite hills dash against each other with the violence of two contending armies. They pour head-long down, they gather strength, they meet, they clash, they repel each other with the vehemence of giants, they spend their fury, they unite in one rich unresisting stream in the valley and go forth along their noiseless way uniting in doing good."

Robert Kitton Brewer's religious life developed very differently. He had a successful career at the Royal Academy of Music. During his last three years he was one of seven students who attended twice a week at the Palace to play before King William and Queen Adelaide. At the age of twenty he received his Doctorate of Music. He was, however, disturbed by the religious atmosphere (or rather lack of it) at the Academy. The worldly outlook of the Chaplain seemed appalling to this impressionable youth who had never known or thought of a less pious minister of the Gospel than the late eminent Joseph Kinghorn. He was obliged to conform to the Established Church, but not finding there the spiritual nourishment he needed, he contrived to attend Nonconformist worship also. In 1833 a serious illness brought him home to Norwich. He told afterwards how some words of Brock in prayer at St. Mary's laid hold on his soul. Thereafter he looked on Brock as his pastor and in due time he left the Church of England and was baptised at St. Mary's at the close of 1834. With him there joined the Church, Emily Brewer, who, we may suppose, was another sister, Elizabeth Kitton, a cousin, Mary Ann Smith, already mentioned as a friend of the family, and her sister Catherine. Another sister, Susan Brewer, was accepted for baptism in 1841 but by 1848 the Anglican influence was in the ascendant and when J. S. Brewer senior died in that year although a deacon of St. Mary's he was laid to rest by the Vicar of Eaton in the village churchyard.

John Sherren Brewer (junior) took orders in 1837, and moving to London became chaplain to a Bloomsbury workhouse. He worked here for eight years taking a deep interest in the unfortunate folk to whom he was called upon to minister. He later published *Lectures to Ladies on Workhouse visiting*. In 1839 he was appointed Lecturer in Classical Literature at King's College where he worked for thirty-eight years, subsequently lecturing on English Language and Literature and on Modern History. His sympathy was always strongly evoked for causes or for men when they were struggling against misconception and

were unpopular, while he seemed to be put upon his guard towards them as soon as they became successful. Thus his interest in the Tractarians waned and he became attached to F. D. Maurice, whom he ultimately succeeded as head of the Working Men's College. In 1857 he was entrusted by the Master of the Rolls with the calendaring of State Papers for the reign of Henry VIII. The task was prodigious. Most of the letters bore no date of year and had to be dated from internal evidence, involving an elaborate study of the whole before any attempt could be made at putting them into order. He worked on this task until his death in 1879, editing four volumes of the Calendar and contributing 1,500 pages of prefaces. It is unlikely that any other student will ever attain such an intimate and detailed knowledge of this period as he had. It is an encouragement to know in these days of rampant propaganda that this great historian "held with unabated confidence to his conviction that the main facts of history and the lessons to be drawn from them are independent of conflicting interpretations of its details." In 1877 he gave up teaching and retired to the Crown living of Toppesfield in Essex, where he threw himself with enthusiasm into pastoral work. Two years later he caught cold when making a long journey afoot to visit a sick parishioner. The sickness that followed caused his death in February 1879.

Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, although in Anglican orders, devoted his life principally to literary work and to the production of school books. The British Museum Catalogue lists no less than sixty-three volumes to his credit. He dealt with History, Geography, Composition, Astronomy, Chemistry, Book-keeping and what not. In 1850 he published his *Guide to Scientific Knowledge in Things Familiar* which enjoyed a phenomenal popularity, a forty-fifth edition being published in 1896. In 1852 he went to Paris where, at the instance of Napoleon III, he brought out a French version of the *Guide*. All this wealth of pedantic literature has passed into history, though some of the books are still remembered by those who used them at school. Dr. Brewer did however produce one magnum opus which has survived him, his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. It was first published in 1868 and has been re-issued as recently as 1948. It is well known to journalists and often provides material for a fourth leader in *The Times* to this day. Dr. Brewer died at his daughter's house at Edwinstowe in 1897.

Robert Kitton stayed in Norwich for a few years helping in his father's school. He had thoughts of entering the ministry. The matter was brought before the church meeting at St. Mary's in June, 1837, and he was requested to preach every Monday evening until the next church meeting in order that the brethren

might form an opinion. The opinion proved favourable and he went to Stepney College with the Church's commendation. After four years study he received a call to Coleford in Gloucester. He remained there only three years, but those years saw a forward movement and the formation of a new church at Cinderford. After a four years pastorate in Brighton he went to South Parade, Leeds in 1847. He found the narrow views of the church there uncongenial and in 1848 he resigned to form, on an open membership basis, what is now Blenheim Baptist Church. Here he ministered until 1864.

In order to provide for his family he had been obliged to open a school. He now felt that with the growing demands of the pastorate he could not fulfil both vocations. He was sorely troubled as to which he should choose. "If I were to choose," he wrote, "I should like to cultivate my talent as a preacher. I have never yet preached as I desire. It is my passion." Yet he felt that the path of duty lay in the other direction. He resigned the pastorate and devoted himself to his school, in which he achieved a fair degree of success. Needless to say the school had a strongly religious atmosphere. Family prayers were an important item of routine. One day the parent of a former pupil came to thank Dr. Brewer because his son, now a doctor, had successfully performed a difficult operation. Brewer disclaimed any credit saying that he had not taught him medicine. "No," replied the father, "but you taught my boy to observe and thoroughly understand all he learned and this has been the reason of his success." In 1872 ill-health caused him to retire from his school and move to London. After a few months rest he took up the pastorate of a small Baptist Church at Shacklewell where he found opportunity to minister especially to men in the humbler walks of life. He also taught at the Missionary College under the Rev. Grattan Guinness. But he never fully regained his strength. In the Spring of 1875 he fell seriously ill and on the day after Good Friday, passed away.

All the brothers inherited from their father a strong interest in things educational. Both J. S. and R. K. were practising teachers and lecturers for a large part of their lives: both E. C. and R. K. brought out school books and on occasion collaborated, R. K. revising E. C.'s *Guide to Scripture History* in 1858. Even William, the medical man, published an address to the Electors of Colchester under the title *Education and Citizenship*, although it really deals with the extension of the franchise.

What did they owe to the church of their upbringing? Much in various ways. No man could have sat under Joseph Kinghorn through all the impressionable years of youth without being affected by his influence. They all acquired a firm faith

in the Christian Gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, a faith which they believed to be consonant with reason and into which they were able to fit all the wide fields of knowledge which they afterwards mastered. Thus E. C. B. was able to write in his *Theology in Science*: "If science is truth, it must prevail and revelation has nothing to fear from the light of truth."

R. K. B. followed Kinghorn in his denominational loyalty, but rejected his strict-Communion tenets. J. S. B. on the other hand carried over the strict-Communion tenet into the Anglican church, joining the Tractarians who have always strongly held to this point of view. Perhaps, too, his early training led him to a strong appreciation of the vital importance of the Scriptures. In his *Life of Erasmus* he projects this notion backwards upon the Medieval Church and writes: "What Pope and Schoolman could never have done—for securing uniformity of belief and worship; for rooting in the hearts of men the grand idea of one Church, one head, one language, binding the old to the new races in unbroken succession, and to Him above all who had the keys of death and hell—was done by the irresistible influence of the Vulgate." Despite his Tractarian affiliations he looked back to his Nonconformist upbringing and could discern the underlying unity of Christendom, writing at the end of his life: "Few of them [Dissenters] venture to depart very widely from the faith and practice of the Church of England."

The influence of every true church must be felt beyond the bounds of its own communion and those who, trained in one denomination, find their spiritual home in another always carry a cargo with them although they may not be conscious of it.

CHARLES B. JEWSON.