

# Outstanding Literary and Human Factors of My Life

(Concluded).

## HUMAN FACTORS<sup>1</sup>

OF these I must place first my mother, of whom I have already written. As I was a very delicate child, often compelled to stay at home instead of going to the ironworks, I saw more of my mother than any of my brothers, and at this time, forty years after her death, she seems to me far the most affectionate human being I have known, and intellectually one of the ablest, though it was in the Sunday School alone she was taught. Her influence upon me was general, but it was great and good.

My eldest brother, William, who entered the Pontypool Baptist College in August, 1863, played an important part in my early life, for he encouraged and guided me in my first endeavours after knowledge. He was always ready to advise me as to what books to read, what subjects to study, and what steps to take when I set my mind on the ministry. Moreover, his naturally refined and deeply spiritual nature exerted upon me in boyhood an influence for good that can hardly be exaggerated. He has now retired from the ministry—thanks to the generosity of his four prosperous sons, all of them prominent Baptists and Temperance workers. During his ministry of over forty years he has never been prominent or held a single important pastorate, but for high character, wide knowledge, and sheer intellectual ability he stands far ahead of the average prominent minister in England and Wales.

Rev. David Lewis, now retired at Llandilo, was my pastor at Witton Park from 1862 to 1867, as at Maesteg he was subsequently the pastor of John Thomas of Liverpool. It was during Mr. Lewis's ministry that I resolved to become a professed disciple of Jesus, and he baptized me in the river Wear on the 2nd day of August, 1863, when I was just over twelve years old. By his thoughtful preaching and his excellently conducted Bible Class, my mind was open to the beauties and deeper meaning of the Bible, and my subsequent studies of the Bible, pursued more vigorously now than ever, owe much to the stimulus received from Mr. Lewis's teaching. Rev. John Thomas and I had many a chat about our old pastor, and we agree that in character and abilities

<sup>1</sup> Continued from p. 81, *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. xv., No. 2 (April, 1953).

Mr. Lewis deserved a far better pastorate than he has ever held. My brother William and he, long neighbours in Pembrokeshire and bosom friends, have suffered through life for excess of modesty; others, vastly their inferiors, morally and mentally, have pushed themselves to the front, the churches, often at least, assessing them at their own exaggerated valuation.

When I was a boy from about eight to ten I used to attend what was called a "Children's Society," conducted in the old Welsh Wesleyan Chapel (Old Row), Witton Park, by the late Rev. Isaac Thomas. Though the local Welsh Wesleyan Minister, he always spoke to us children in English, and his simple talks interested and helped me greatly, and there was great mourning in the village, when he left for the States in 1862. His son, John Lloyd (see *Who's Who in America*), successful alike in business and Christian work in New York, paid me a visit in June, 1911, after a separation of nearly half a century.

I should like to make honourable mention of one man, many years my Sunday School teacher, Mr. Simon John, paternal uncle of the Rev. B. D. John, "Periander." Simon had an extensive library, prepared carefully for his class, and got us to his home to show us his books and tell us of their contents.

Edmund Lewis, a Welshman from Cardiff, converted through the Primitive Methodists at Witton Park, became a local preacher and temperance speaker, and was about the most earnest man I have ever known. He and his gifted and consecrated wife started a Band of Hope in the Co-operative Hall, Witton Park, and invited all the children of the village to join. I joined and was soon made to take my full share of the work, first in reciting and then in giving short speeches. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis used to take me to their house, which was one of great refinement. Moreover, Mr. Lewis became vice-president of the local Mutual Improvement Society, so that in later years I came under his influence in a different way. Another Primitive Methodist local preacher, Mr. Benjamin Spoor, was also vice-president of the above Society, and a local leader in all good work; to him also I owe much. But I must in particular acknowledge my indebtedness also to the Rev. Thomas Jerman Jones, Calvinistic Minister, subsequently so successful as a missionary among the Khassia Hills, India. In the Mutual Improvement Society of which he was President, he taught us English grammar. I remember quite vividly the admirable way in which he cleared up the mystery of the cases and expounded the doctrine of English syntax; I had no other guidance than his in this subject up to the time I was received into Pontypool College. Besides this he got us to read essays and take part in debates, correcting our blunders and making invaluable suggestions for our improvement. He had what appeared to me then an immense

library, much the largest private collection of books I had ever seen, and he used to invite us to his study where he would describe books likeliest to interest us and offer to lend them us that we might read them and then ask questions about them. I shall always be grateful for the wise words which this man of God—saint and scholar—spoke to me in these, the most formative years of my life.<sup>2</sup>

But up to my going to College in 1872, I am not conscious of having come under the influence of any master mind or any overmastering book. At Pontypool College my tutors were the Rev. Thomas Thomas, D.D., the President and Professor of Theology, and Rev. Mortimer Lewis, M.A., who taught all the subjects prescribed for an Arts degree. Dr. Thomas was an ideal president, the finest I have known. His discipline was firm but wise; his teaching sound and careful; while his own punctual and methodical habits supplied us with an almost perfect pattern of what the Christian gentleman should be. His ideals were always lofty and he did his utmost to make ours lofty too. He urged every diligent student to extend his course and, if he had the capacity, to go in for his degree. That Pontypool College was for many years the only Welsh Baptist College having among its past pupils graduates was due in the main to the high ideals Dr. Thomas placed before his students and the encouragement he gave them to realise the same. Even up to the present time this College is the only Welsh one to produce College Presidents, for the two Presidents of the Welsh Baptist Colleges and a former President of the Nottingham Baptist College are old Pontypool men. In the middle of my third college session the Crane Street Church at Pontypool approached me with a view to the pastorate as successor to Dr. Thomas. The Principal saw me in private and urged me to go on with my degree work, adding that apart from this he would like to see me succeeding him in the Church.

Mortimer Lewis was the soul of kindness and he was an admirable teacher, but as he met the students only some three hours a day on four days of the week it was impossible for him to give instruction in more than, say, half the London Matriculation subjects. Unfortunately his health gave way about the middle of my course, and for what was called the 1st B.A. examination I had practically no help, and I am often amazed that I passed the first time I sat for this examination (June, 1876). But with all my admiration for my Pontypool teachers, neither of them influenced my mind except in a superficial way. I have spoken in an earlier place of the ineradicable change of mental attitude

<sup>2</sup> See the Welsh biography of Mr. Jones by the Rev. R. I. Williams (Caernarvon, 1911). In chapter v I give a full account of Mr. Jones's life and work at Witton Park.

wrought in my inmost soul by the reading of books by Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. But it is only fair to add that the influence of my Regent's Park College tutors was hardly deeper than that of my Pontypool teachers, though they were all more scholarly and helped me to aim at greater accuracy in all my work and a more careful attention to the niceties of language. Baptist professors in those times lacked the thorough preparation in a single subject which characterises University professors, and the same is largely though less true at the present time. They are chosen for having taken a general degree as I was, and the many tasks they have to perform (preaching, etc.) makes specialisation on an extensive scale out of the question. The first two teachers to lay firm hold on my mind were acknowledged masters in the subjects they taught, but neither was a Baptist; I refer to W. Croom Robertson, Professor of Philosophy at the London University College, and Dr. James Martineau, Principal and Professor of Philosophy at the Manchester New College, now removed to Oxford. "Croom" as we lovingly called him, taught his own philosophy instead of piloting us through a text book. One may describe his philosophy as a combination of the teaching of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer. He taught that our knowledge and feeling come by way of experience, but the experience is racial, not merely individual. In Ethics and Logic as well as in Metaphysics he had views of his own, and he read so widely and thought so independently about all the problems he discussed that he spoke as one having authority and not as the Baptist teachers at whose feet I had sat. This teacher made me think, just because he had thought himself. Never man spake to me before as this man. I began to feel I could think; that I had a mind to appreciate philosophical problems and, in a measure, to cope with them; but in a sense I owe this feeling to Croom Robertson. The second year of my stay in London, having been awarded the first prize in Croom's class of thirty at the end of my first London session, I joined the class for which Dr. James Martineau gave lectures on what he called "The Ground Truths of Philosophy and Religion," but which have since been published under the title "A Study of Religion." Here once more and for the second time, I came under the sway of a master-mind, one very different from that of Croom, but equally subtle and penetrating. In Dr. Martineau I saw always the earnest Christian philosopher seeking to establish securely the great fundamental principles of religion. Theories of causation came rapidly under review and were discussed and disposed of with acumen and in the choicest language, until he reached his own doctrine of an absolute intelligent personal cause, which he defended with the intensest earnestness. As a strenuous advocate of the theistic

interpretation of nature and of intuitionism in philosophy, Dr. Martineau's lectures made a most suitable addition to those of Croom Robertson. Their methods of teaching differed greatly. Croom used to chat to us in a free and easy way, using humour in abundance, and at times rising to a high pitch of eloquence. Dr. James Martineau wrote out every sentence with the utmost care and his style ranks with the best in the language. There was no humour, and I never saw a smile on his face; he was in dead earnest, wrestling with matters of life and death. He was the seer, the Old Testament prophet; Croom was more like the Greek philosopher. But both were profound thinkers and moved their pupil's mind as only such thinkers can.

After a pastorate at the High Street Church, Merthyr Tydfil, of rather less than two years I was, without application, invited to become Classical tutor at the Haverford West Baptist College and for exactly eleven years I was the colleague of the late President, the Rev. Thomas Davies, D.D. Through my intercourse with one of the shrewdest of men, a born leader, apt at teaching and preaching, I learned much that has served me in excellent stead in subsequent years. He was as much the natural gentleman as Dr. Thomas of Pontypool; but he had much more humour, a greater flow of language and he was more genial, though he could not be more genuine or dignified. It has often struck me as remarkable that in those days the Baptists of Wales could command as presidents two men of such unusual culture, preaching gifts and personal charm as Doctors Thomas Thomas and Thomas Davies.

I started life at Haverford West with my newly married wife, Miss Moore, the only daughter of Henry Moore, Baptist deacon and the most perfect Christian gentleman I have known. Far the most potent influence, and the most substantial help in subsequent years came to me from my dear wife, a woman of great culture, the purest of the pure and the kindest of the kind. God took her from me in July, 1910, after she had been for nearly thirty years my closest friend and companion.

In the spring of 1886 an article by myself in the *Atheneum* advocating and outlining a proposal for the establishment of a British Hebrew Institute elicited very kind letters from Professors A. H. Sayce, D.D. and Canon Cheyne, D.D., of Oxford, which in both cases commenced a friendship which remains and has been of great importance in my life's development. But the friendship thus begun became in the case of Dr. Sayce so intimate and stimulating that I have no hesitation in saying that it has been the most potent social factor of my life. At the time, I had been working hard amid many difficulties at Arabic, Assyrian, Hebrew and Syriac, but far away from great libraries and centres of learning. I had not met one distinguished Semitic scholar except

the late Professor Bickell, D.D., of the University of Vienna, whose genial company I had at dinner in the house of the Rev. Hermann Gollancz, M.A., D.Litt., Jewish Rabbi, now Professor of Hebrew at the University College, London, successor of my first Hebrew teacher, Professor D. M. Marks, D.D. Contact with the great is always stimulating and helpful in forming high ideals. One result of the correspondence with Dr. Sayce was that I spent the long holidays of 1886 at Oxford reading Assyrian daily at Queen's College, dining there often in the evening and thus meeting not only the dons of this college but also those of other colleges whom the Professor was kind enough to ask to meet me. Besides, many scholars from other places and even countries visited the Professor, as they do still. It was at his rooms that I first met Dr. T. G. Pinches, the eminent Assyriologist; Professor Carl Bezold, Heidelberg; the late Rev. W. Houghton, M.A., the great authority on the Natural History of the Monuments and of the Bible; H. G. Tomkins, M.A., author of *The Times of Abraham*; Sir John Rhys, and many others. Many of the Oxford scholars I met at Professor Sayce's dinners invited me to their College or their home, so that the weeks spent at Oxford were the most distinguished socially I had lived. I do not think I lost my head in the exalted company I now mixed with; rather I felt my inferiority in many ways, though the kind words spoken to me by Professor Sayce and others as to my work made me feel I had in me some possibilities of Semitic scholarship, and I resolved more than ever to press on with my special studies. After dinner at Queen's College, Sayce's talks about books and subjects were most interesting, informing and inspiring. He is known to be one of the very best living conversationalists, and I had never up to the summer of 1886 listened to such talks as his. He is now regarded as a great bulwark of Old Testament Orthodoxy, but—at that time he was a rather vehement upholder of advanced views. I remember well how he startled and rather shocked me by advocating the late authorship of Daniel, of large parts of the Pentateuch and of most of the Psalms. I think I still see him stamping his right foot as he said with thrilling emphasis: "These are purely literary questions and must be decided as such, unhampered by theological prepossessions." At that time I was as "sound" in these questions as the late C. H. Spurgeon, and to me Sayce appeared as much on the "down grade" as Dr. Clifford did to the great London preacher. But in the end I came to see that Sayce was right; that in deciding the date, authorship and drift of a Biblical book we must in the first case use literary criteria. This change in point of view has made all the difference in the world to me in my later investigations. Dr. Sayce remains my constant friend and regular correspondent, and we have on several

occasions visited each other. No one man I have known has done so much to encourage and help me in my higher work, and all that he has done, even when I dined at his expense almost nightly at Queen's College, Oxford, has been done without fee or reward of any kind.

When I accepted the Presidency of the Midland Baptist College, Nottingham, in the fall of 1891 it was on the explicit understanding that I should be allowed to spend the Summer Semester (April to August inclusive) as student at the Berlin University. Accordingly at the beginning of April, 1892, I settled at Berlin and for five or six months worked harder probably than I had ever previously done, for I had twenty-nine class hours a week during which Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis and criticism were taught—and very thoroughly taught. I can never be too grateful to Doctors H. L. Strack (Post Biblical Hebrew), Edward Sachau (Arabic and Syriac), J. Barth (Arabic and Syriac), Hugo Winckler (Arabic) and Dieterici (Arabic), for the invaluable assistance they gave me in the subjects they taught; but the one teacher who wrought—upon my whole being a revolutionary influence was August Dillmann, who lectured daily on Old Testament Exegesis and Biblical Archaeology. His scholarship was so extensive and yet exact; his lectures were so carefully prepared and his reasoning so close and restrained that listening to him was to me a revelation; I had heard no such teacher on the Old Testament. Apart from the immense knowledge and subtle thought of the lectures, the professor delivered his message with a warmth and energy which impressed me enormously. It made me very much ashamed of my own teaching, but I resolved there and then that I would with God's help, work harder than ever so that my own teaching of the Old Testament might be as much like Dillmann's as I could make it. I had talks with the great man in the class room and especially in his own study in No. 11, Schill Strasse. But my contact with the brilliant teachers whose lectures I attended at Berlin in the spring and summer of 1892 inaugurated a new era in my life and led me to aim at higher things than I had dreamt of. Then I found the libraries at Oxford, and Berlin priceless boons, and I used them very largely. But it is the men I met at Oxford, at Berlin and other German Universities that have done far more than any amount of reading to stimulate and guide me in my advanced studies.

During my year or so at Leipzig, I sat at the feet of many eminent teachers, but one man far more than any other left his mark on my life as a student—I mean Albert Socin, Ph.D., the Professor of Arabic. He was the worst-tempered teacher I ever knew or heard of, but he never lost his temper except when a student blundered in scanning an Arabic poem or construing an

Arabic sentence or explaining a hard form. As a rule the blundering that angered him was such as, with careful preparation, could have been avoided, but it was not always so. The very fact that Socin would not tolerate slovenly work made us study with the utmost exactitude the texts we had to read, so that when it came to our turn we should be able to read, translate and parse with accuracy and precision. No man could pass through Socin's classes in Syriac and especially in Arabic without having his instinct for accurate work greatly sharpened and his perception for the niceties and beauties of the language strengthened. He was also sociable and kind. Often we were invited to his house for supper and occasionally we spent the evening in wandering about the city and its neighbourhood. His large library was always at our disposal, though he usually demanded a receipt for every book he lent. He died at about the age of sixty, greatly lamented by his pupils and friends, though he had as many enemies as most men. He was unfortunately too fond of intoxicants and his premature death was probably due to this habit. To my other teachers:—Buhl the successor of Delitzsch, Paul Schwartz, Hans Stumme, and especially Gustaf H. Dalman, the Aramaist, I owe much. That I did not go to Germany to study for my degree is proved by the fact that I studied in that country almost as much after having become Ph.D. as before. I took the degree, submitting to the prescribed examination by the way, as I found others doing so who, to say the least, did not know their work better than I. I spent the entire Summer Semester of 1899 (five months) at Strasbourg mainly to profit from the teaching of Theodor Noldeke, the greatest living Semitic scholar. I attended his classes in Syriac and Ethiopic and found them intensely pleasant and helpful. Noldeke was more generally learned in Semitic matters than Socin and his knowledge of Syriac was incomparably greater. More than any Semitic teacher I have studied under, he knew his rules and examples without having to refer to lexicons or grammars and to conscientious and able students he could render more valuable help than Socin. But for students with less knowledge and with a tendency to take things easy, Socin, notwithstanding or rather on account of his frequent ebullitions of temper, was a more valuable teacher. Noldeke has a habit of sitting at his table a quarter of an hour before class to answer questions any student may put to him, and I found his talks on such occasions most helpful and always delightfully pleasant. The personality of Noldeke is of the finest. Modest to a fault, he is kindness itself, and never grudges answering questions promptly and fully which former pupils care to send him. Of the many who wrote to me of the loss of my dear wife in July of last year, no one wrote a more beautifully sympathetic letter than he. There is not alive a writer or scholar more



universally loved than Noldeke; I never heard one syllable of disparagement even in Germany, where scholars are more jealous of one another and hate each other with a more perfect hatred than those of any other country.

At Strasbourg I attended the lectures on Schleiermacher's Theology by Dr. E. W. Meyer, the Professor of Systematic Theology, and found them absorbingly interesting. One result of this course of lectures is that I have taken a deep interest in the life work and writings of the great thinker and preacher, Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher (died at Berlin in 1834). With Professor Meyer I formed a rather close friendship which continues to this hour, and some four years ago it was my privilege to welcome him and his accomplished wife to my Bangor home. In Budde's and Nowack's classes on the Old Testament, I learned but little as the ground had become by that time fairly familiar; but their kindness I valued, and I found the visits to their homes instructive as well as delightful. Budde is of course a very old friend, and once spent with me at Nottingham almost a week.

I spent over a month in 1903 at Gottingen attending the classes of Eduard Schurer, the New Testament scholar, and those of Rudolf Smeud and the celebrated Julius Wellhausen, the well-known writer on Old Testament subjects. I have heard lectures at Berlin for over six weeks by the late Friedrich Baetgen, the great Psalms commentator; at Giessen by Gunkel and at Marburg by Hermann the Ritschlian and by August Klostermann at Kiel. Individual lectures by well-known scholars I have heard at most of the German Universities, and in nearly all cases I found the Professors glad to welcome me to their homes and willing to open their whole heart to me on the subjects they teach. With all that I have learned from books, and I have been and am a hard reader. I have received far more impetus to thought and independent work from contact with living men. I have visited students' parties and learned much from them. My advice to ministers and professors is: get away among surroundings different from your own. Go abroad if you can, and mix among the people. This will bring you out of yourself and enable you to look at things from points of view different from your own.

T. WITTON DAVIES.