

J. H. Rushbrooke

DR. Payne not only has the gift of writing lucidly, which is essential to any biographer, but he adds to it a historian's knowledge and authority. In his life of Rushbrooke (*James Henry Rushbrooke, a Baptist Greatheart*, by Ernest A. Payne, Carey Kingsgate Press, 5/-), he has taken great care to collect the significant and salient facts and, without overloading the picture with detail, has given us an authentic portrait fit to hang "in the line" in our gallery of Baptist worthies.

The work has been done admirably and the result is a satisfying book that offers us an inspiring record of a forceful personality and assures for its subject an honoured place in the story of the builders of our denomination who, by their labours, advocacy and devotion, have established a world-wide and effective Baptist fellowship.

Writing of Archbishop William Temple, Dr. Iremonger said: "No particular gift or virtue seems to stand out obviously from the rest," yet he made it plain that Temple was a very great man. Something of the same kind might truthfully be said of Rushbrooke. He was a man of parts, endowed with a variety of gifts; yet to single out this, that or the other for special emphasis would distort the likeness. He himself would probably have agreed whole-heartedly that in some ways nature had not helped him very much—a distinction which, if historians are to be trusted, he shared with Socrates and St. Paul. Of medium height, inclined to a "student's stoop" and a full figure, bald, bearded and spectacled, he would have chuckled (he had a real sense of humour) if it had been suggested that, to use an Americanism, he was "the answer to a film-smitten maiden's prayer"! There was nothing glamorous about him. On the other hand, he had a massive, well-shaped head, clear eyes that could twinkle with fun, and a certain indefinable distinction and dignity that is difficult to analyse. Perhaps it came from his deep seriousness and persistent purposefulness. He always seemed to "mean business." He was tenacious of his point of view, frank and vigorous in his expression of it and, at the same time, willing to hear patiently what others had to say. His solid qualities of mind and character were obvious and impressive. His fundamental convictions went deep and remained, I believe, virtually unaltered, though some of his attitudes changed.

My first meeting with him was on a Saturday evening in 1911 when, arrived from Oxford, as a student to preach the next day at his former church in Archway Road, Highgate, my host took me

for a walk across the Heath to see the new church in Hampstead Garden suburb where Rushbrooke was beginning his ministry. There we met him with Mrs. Rushbrooke, who had just laid the foundation stone of the Manse. At that time he was so eager for Christian Unity that he went beyond a great many London Baptists, who were troubled to discover that he had approved, if not drafted, a trust deed for the church, erected mainly with funds from Baptist sources, which permitted either a Baptist or Congregationalist minister and infant as well as believers' baptism. It is only fair to say his action had the full support of some of the most generous donors. Later on, when he was Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, it is, I think, quite clear that he adopted a different view—he was very critical of schemes for re-union and gave little support to the movement. This caused some of his old friends no small disappointment. Yet there is no reason to doubt his sincerity, and any man has a right to change his mind. As time went on he took up a more rigid denominational position and, while he maintained contact with leaders of other communions, his interest and enthusiasm more and more centred on Baptist belief and work.

A General Baptist, with a course of study at Berlin to his credit, a student and devout admirer of Harnack, the theological Colossus of that day, his thinking was along "liberal" lines, though, like his hero, John Clifford, he never lost the real spirit of evangelism. His broad sympathies enabled him in the Baptist World Alliance to get on happily with the more conservative among American Baptists as well as on the Continent.

He was of course eminently fitted for his Continental work. Though he was heart and soul with his own country in the two wars, he loved the German people among whom so much of our European strength lay. His second wife was a very talented and charming German lady. Did he not once take me specially to see the very lamp-post in Berlin where, when they were both students and waiting for a tram, they had first spoken to one another? Whenever he was in Berlin he went there and raised his hat. Knowing Mrs. Rushbrooke, I raised mine, too. They were deeply devoted to each other. Happily they were of one mind during the wars, though understandably they caused Mrs. Rushbrooke great distress.

He was a good traveller and loved the sea. It was a delight to go with him among Baptists in Central Europe. With a splendid capacity for work, he spent himself freely, went to innumerable meetings, groups and committees, often until far in the night. Nothing was too much to do for our fellow-believers, especially where they might be facing special difficulties raised by local or

national authorities or by fissiparous tendencies in their own fellowships.

Dr. Payne tells the story of his efforts for our persecuted brethren. The full story of the Rumanian episodes would take a long time. Every possible force we could raise was mobilised. Our own Foreign Office and Ambassador were brought in. The United States Consul-General in Bukarest represented vigorously, at an appropriate time, the deplorable effect of Baptist ill-treatment on American opinion. Archbishop Temple wrote to the Orthodox Patriarch of Rumania. I myself had an interview with the late Archbishop Germanos who told me frankly how much he regretted the attitude of the Orthodox Church in that country, and would make such representations as he could, but that he had no authority. (So far as authority goes the Orthodox Church is almost as divided as Protestantism). Rushbrooke went out again and again, once taking with him T. R. Glover, who shook the Rumanian minister of state concerned by telling him he belonged to the seventeenth century. And they thought they were so modern! That was the sort of problem that saw Rushbrooke at his best. He mastered his brief. He knew the facts and could present them courteously but firmly. *Suaviter in modo; fortiter in re*. There were some successes and many disappointments. The main thing was that our support heartened our people in their struggle for religious freedom and equality.

I liked to watch him as we sat in conference with local Baptist leaders. Though my knowledge of German was not good enough for me to follow everything in the conversations, I got the gist of them, and he made sure that I should seize the main points. His good humour, common sense and his emphasis on fundamentals and the supreme motives usually carried the day. I came to understand their problems and his. For over twenty years we worked in the same building. When he was home I saw him nearly every day. He liked to discuss points that arose. He would come in with some irritating, but half-amusing story of the gullibility of some of our friends. Money contributed at his request for a specific purpose and sent on by him had been used for something else. They still needed it. What were they to do? He would be stern and rebuke them for misuse of funds, only to be met with a reply that when the money arrived some other necessity appeared more urgent and they thought God would wish them to use it for that. He would spread out his hands and say: "They simply have no idea of what we call commercial honesty. What can I do with them?"

Yet they relied on him. They would refer to him as "our father." He was indeed a father-in-God to them, a bishop in the

truest sense, a trusted and honoured friend in spite of the periodical *kopfwaschung* to which they said he treated them.

Perhaps the sense of the way they depended on him personally made it difficult for him to let others do what they might. In their weakness, sometimes helplessness, they leaned heavily on messengers and advisors from this country. Charles Byford, until the first world war and then his subsequent breakdown in health made his further service to them impossible, had courageously broken much rough ground in the Balkans, Austria, Hungary, Russia and elsewhere. His pioneer work and valourous spirit are not nearly so well understood and appreciated as they ought to be. Everett Gill and W. O. Lewis, too, have been faithful and wise counsellors and had carried relief and a rich sense of fellowship to those who sat in the darkness of the first post-war aftermath. The bonds were more personal than official. Rushbrooke as Commissioner for Europe soon realised this and worked for them as if they were his children. One of his keenest regrets arose from the fact that, though he had tried in two or three brief visits to Russia under the auspices of the Nansen Relief Organisation to help Russians of all classes and creeds, he was never allowed to re-enter Russia. I was with him when he called at the Soviet embassy or consulate in Warsaw expecting to find a permit for us both to go on to Moscow—but on some excuse it was refused. He was bitterly disappointed but his protests availed nothing. It was a shabby return for what he had done.

In spite of the lack of appreciation in some quarters and scant success in others it cannot be doubted that he fell in love with his work and that, when he was appointed Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, it satisfied an immense desire and gave him keen satisfaction. He grew into his task and was proud of it. His contacts with America and his reception there gave him confidence and a feeling of authority. He thought he was speaking for the Baptists of the world, and was at first inclined to regard the Alliance as a world-wide Baptist Union. Those who knew American Baptists were not surprised that this did not go down well at first. They were not having any super-Baptist body or super-denominational official and insisted that he should report regularly and step by step to the secretaries of their various conventions as well as to our own Union. His good sense and scrupulous care henceforth to make sure that he had authority to speak and act enabled him rapidly to acquire the full confidence of all who mattered.

As an administrator he was conscientious and thorough, bringing to his work real enthusiasm and a great ambition for the Alliance as a means of mobilising and expressing Baptist opinion,

disseminating information about our doings, and focusing sympathy so as to make it effective in help to hard-pressed fellow-believers. He was always jealous for our good name and eager that Baptists should have full credit for what they achieved. To some of his friends his zeal sometimes appeared excessive. Though he never became either in conviction or sympathy a narrow sectarian, he fought hard for his own people. When, toward the end of the second world war, I was asked on the initiative of Dr. William Paton, and with the full concurrence of Archbishops Lang and Temple, to become chairman of the Inter-Church Committee for Christian Reconstruction in Europe, which was set up by the Churches of this country and not, as Iremonger in his *Life of Temple* says, by the British Council of Churches, which would not at first accept responsibility for such a task, I found myself not a little embarrassed by the unanswerable plea of Rushbrooke that the large amount of money collected by the Union from British Baptists should be earmarked, except for a small "token contribution" to show our sympathy, for needy Baptists. To some of my fellow-workers of other denominations it seemed strange that, while Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians canalised their generous gifts through our joint committee, the chairman's own denomination should give so little. American Baptists were sending vast sums for Baptist relief to the Continent, and I even had protests that Baptists were getting more than a fair share. I had to do a great deal of explaining but it was not too difficult. Rushbrooke and I were able to co-operate whole-heartedly, even though some of our British Baptists were disappointed that we did not give in the same way as other denominations. Our trouble was, of course, that, with help reaching our Continental friends from United States sources, it would have been hard for them to understand no direct help coming from us. In the raising of our fund I had his close co-operation, and he felt as keenly as anyone our disappointment through the difficulty of exporting money at that parlous time for our national finances. His knowledge of local conditions and needs was of great value to our Continental Committee in our disbursements, which, for the reason given, had to be spread over a long period. He was an admirable committee-man, though not so good a chairman because he was so full of information that he was inclined to treat us to a lengthy speech on every agenda item, and, being in the chair, nobody could pull him up!

When he acted as secretary he gave me much amusement, which he shared, by writing out the minutes beforehand. They then served as the chairman's agenda and later, with a few verbal amendments, were duly entered!

He liked drawing up resolutions, usually an amiable vice. His clear head was of value in making their import unmistakable. He always mistrusted Temple's gift of getting around difficulties by drafting statements or resolutions which brought opposing opinions together, sometimes with the result that varying sections afterwards discovered they meant different things by them. For many years our Council, through the officers, delegated to him and me the duty of concocting resolutions for the Assembly and for other purposes. These I drafted in the first instance, after finding out what other Christian bodies were saying or not saying. They were then sent up to him to be "vetted." We had some lively discussions and a lot of fun. Now and again I would tease him by sending up what I called my "naughty boy drafts," in which, to find his reaction, I would write exactly what I thought and would like to say. He reacted all right! He came bursting into my room, dumped the document on my desk with a "You can't say that!" I knew it as well as he did. He soon saw through my joke and henceforth would laugh heartily when I broke out. My method had at anyrate the advantage of making the issue clear. Then we really got down to the job of writing something which would express the denomination's conviction and at the same time, would get a virtually unanimous vote so that we could follow it up by appropriate action in representations to the Government or the Press.

I cherish with real satisfaction the memories of the times we spent, and the things we did, together. He was good company. Dr. Payne has done full justice to his public work as a minister of the Gospel, which he always way, and as a Baptist leader, to his platform and pulpit abilities and to his published books and addresses. He was an admirable speaker, with a wealth of material. His embarrassment was in selection. His style was plain and forceful, a little clipped in utterance, but he fully realised the value of the "rising inflection." To listen to him was easy, even when he was making one of his lengthy reports to a World Congress. His speeches took more out of him than always appeared, and I have seen him moist and dripping after a major effort, eager to get away by himself (not always easy) and have a bath.

But to know the real man we must see him at leisure. Dr. Payne refers to his reticence. He did seem aloof to most people and I never heard anyone call him by his Christian name. Yet I think I came to know him and his mind fairly well. Given the opportunity he could open out in a wonderful way. Recollections surge as I think back. The intangible barrier would melt like mist before the sun at a touch of affection or appreciation, and he could

speak movingly of the deep things in his heart. I remember a discussion we had on the Holy Communion. It seemed at first as if he took a simply Zwinglian view. I said frankly that, if the service were not something much more and much bigger than an *aide-memoire*, I thought a crucifix more helpful. "This is My body . . . this is My blood" surely means more than remembrance. He promised he would write down for me more fully what it meant to him, but it was near the end of his life and he was very busy. The full statement never came, but his little pamphlet on *Christian Ordinances and Christian Experience* shows that he accepted it as the declaration of the Gospel and an expression of the brotherhood of the Church, a source of gladness and inspiration.

One day he came into my room as I was dictating the programme for one of our meetings. I had no hymn-book by me and I simply gave my secretary the first lines of the hymns I wanted *and the tunes*. He told me to go on while he sat down. When I had done he said: "I wish I could do that." Then he asked me if I had heard the joke about the man with so little ear for music that he only knew the National Anthem because people stood up. I laughed and then he told me that it was literally and accurately true of him. He felt it as a great deprivation because both his wife and daughter, Mrs. Forbes Taylor, were accomplished musicians with a great love for Bach, of whom he had heard me speak with enthusiasm, and he understood not a note and felt shut out.

We were speaking once about immortality and then he told me of his life's great tragedy, the loss of his young first wife, Kate, after childbirth, and the subsequent death of their boy, and the surprising words with which he finished the story were: "Since then I have never doubted immortality and it took away from me for ever all fear of death."

Once I said to John Simon, in his room at the Foreign Office, after he had been tramping up and down like a caged lion, speaking about Hitler and the threat of war: "You seem to care a lot about peace." "Care about it?" he blazed out passionately, "God knows I do!" Then, rather daringly, I said: "I wish you'd speak like that on the platform." He looked hard at me for a long time and then, "Yes, I know. You're perfectly right. But I can't. It may be all this arguing before judges, putting my cases legally, all in terms of reason. The more I burn inside the more I seem to freeze outside."

Was there a bit of that about Rushbrooke? The hidden fires were there but also some inhibition that made it hard for him to glow or melt in public, so that to many he seemed, quite wrongly,

austere and self-contained, the level-headed, shrewd man of affairs.

Looking across the years I feel that perhaps he was more hungry for friendship than he seemed and I wish I had shown him more of the affection I felt. But, except on such occasions as I have indicated, I found it hard to break through. It may be the fault was mine.

I am sure we could have done more to help him if he had given us the chance. In honesty it should be said that he suffered from one defect of his virtues. His extreme conscientiousness combined with his sense of responsibility and his knowledge of the facts of the situation, seemed to make him keep all the strings in his own hands. It appeared impossible for him to delegate work and responsibility to others. It may have been due to the reluctance, common among reticent men, to put burdens upon them. We may be certain his motives were good, but it was a pity, for his own sake, that he never seemed to find the knack of using others to the full. Even when he was no longer secretary, and had become president of the Alliance, someone remarked that he was trying to fill both offices. A few of us have an unhappy feeling that this hastened, and perhaps caused, his lamentable breakdown and death so near what would have been his "greatest hour." Some of us urged that, in the state of Europe in 1947, it would be better either to hold the World Congress in Canada or the United States, or even to put it off for a year or two longer. I imagine two considerations weighed with him. He was in his seventy-seventh year and was anxious to discharge his functions as president. Further, he had already been president for eight years instead of the usual five and probably did not wish to seem to be clinging to office. He set his heart on "Copenhagen, 1947." Mrs. Rushbrooke was no longer at his side to warn and safeguard him, though he had all the loving care that his daughter, with whom he had made his home, could give. With all his might, and relying little on others, he set about the task, immensely difficult just then, of organising a World Conference. He attempted too much for his age and for any man obviously tired after the long strain and frustrations of the war. It might have been possible if only he had been able to let others take over much of the work, but that was not in his nature. We watched him anxiously. For many years he had suffered from a low blood-pressure, but over-work and the weight of the many problems that emerged when travelling and communications were so tiresome took too heavy a toll and quite suddenly he collapsed with a cerebral haemorrhage. Though everything was done that could be done the end came swiftly and he was taken from us within a few months of the event for which he had striven so hard.

Many were the tributes paid to him. Baptists throughout the world knew they had lost a friend as well as a devoted leader, and for a long, long time his memory will be enshrined in their hearts fragrant and sweet, as of one who never spared himself in any task for the protection and succour of them for whose welfare he had accepted a responsibility from God.

Dr. Payne calls him "A Baptist Great-heart" in his sub-title. "Valiant-for-Truth" might be added. He was both, as readers of the book, and they should be many, will easily see.

If I have not dwelt on his work in and for the Baptist Union and the Free Church Council, it is because the book under review has thoroughly covered the ground. It may be warmly commended to younger as well as older readers. A mass of material has been most usefully compressed into a small compass so as to bring it within reach of all. It is a rewarding volume to read, and we are grateful for it.

The author does me the honour to quote some words from a tribute it was my privilege to pay at the Memorial Service held in the Baptist Church House. He "lit new lamps and kept the old burning." They will go on burning, for the fire in Rushbrooke's soul came from the altar of the Most High.

M. E. AUBREY.

A Short History of Rawdon College, by John O. Barrett. (Carey Kingsgate Press, 5s.)

The Northern Baptist Education Society, otherwise Rawdon College, has recently celebrated its terjubilée. To mark the occasion one of its sons offers us here an admirable short history which traces the story of the College from the days of Fawcett at Brearley Hall down to the present time and sets it against the background of social, cultural and religious development in Britain during the past 150 years. To have done this within the compass of 60 pages or so and in such an interesting manner is quite an achievement. Rawdon has sent into the ministry some 700 men, many of whom have distinguished themselves, and it has made an impressive missionary contribution. Others beside Rawdonians will enjoy this excellent brief account of the history of an institution of ministerial education which has ever sought to "unite the pair so long disjoined—knowledge and vital piety."