

South Parade, Leeds, 1836—45 (2)

CONTROVERSIES

TO the public at large the name of Giles soon became familiar from its involvement in controversy. Hardly had he settled down before he circulated a four-page *Address to the Inhabitants of Leeds* (July, 1836) in which he asked believers and unbelievers alike to think again about Christ: it posed questions, supplied scriptural answers, and looked all innocence. It was sufficient to rouse the spirit of a "retired solicitor," one Thomas Wainwright,³³ who seems to have been a rigid Baptist of the old school. In a *Letter* occupying twenty-three pages of rambling prose he castigated the leaflet and its author as heretical; Giles, he said, was virtually a Wesleyan, had abandoned particular redemption³⁴ and "preventing" grace, and was more modern than scriptural in his views. For the rest of his stay in Leeds, Giles, who speedily took his place as a leading public figure, was never clear of controversy.

On December 22, 1836, a meeting was held in Leeds to urge the abolition of compulsory church rates. The grievance was not a new one, and a long and tedious campaign lay ahead before it was remedied.³⁵ Already in the 1820's Edward Baines the elder had attacked the rate in Leeds and with his henchmen succeeded in so reducing it that the parish church was virtually upheld by voluntary means by 1836. The dissenters of Leeds had thus plenty of sympathy to spare for fellow sufferers elsewhere. In the meantime Baines had been elected Liberal M.P. for Leeds and in his first session (1834) had taken part in a debate on Althorp's Bill, a measure ostensibly designed to relieve dissenters of the impost; the Bill was dropped after opposition by dissenters themselves, who found it wrong in principle, as, though it reduced the amount the Church was to receive, it merely transferred the burden to a levy on the land tax. The grievance was further discussed at a conference on May 15, 1834, when Baines undertook to lead a deputation to Lord Althorp. He was back in Leeds for the meeting of December 1836 and no one was better qualified to lead the opposition; the meeting was more than a mere discussion, it was a preliminary to action once again. It fell to one of Giles's congregation to propose the first resolution, denouncing the impost as unjust in principle and a violation of the sacred rights of conscience. This was Alderman Goodman, of whom more will be heard. In a temperate speech he argued that the Church was well able to support itself and had nothing to fear. He was answered by the highly respected Henry Hall, a devout Anglican and leader of the Tories, who said it was the duty of a Christian government to make provision for the due

celebration of religious services; the voluntary system was not enough by itself; and the poor must be provided for.

This and the like sentiments from other Churchmen roused Giles to answer that, if these gentlemen had not taken a purely religious view of the question, as concerned for the glory of God, he would not have spoken. Let Hall and the others show a single precept or example from the New Testament of any attempt to take money from men contrary to their wishes, or consent, for the purpose of supporting religion. Churchmen should do as they were done by; would they contribute to a fund for a Catholic cathedral? As for the *regium donum*, which had been mentioned as an example of public support given to dissenters, he and most nonconformist ministers abominated it, and as to provision for the poor, they had found out where to go, doors at dissenting chapels were open, collections were made once a month for them, and in any case dissenters bore their due share of the poor rate.

A resolution to accept Althorp's plan of modified relief was defeated in spite of concessions by Anglicans that the rate in its present form should be abolished. At the close of the meeting another of Giles's congregation was asked to join a committee to superintend the signing and forwarding of a petition; this was Thomas Morgan, who will re-appear in the story.

In the course of his speech, Giles had been subjected to much interruption, and he was not left alone after the meeting. One "R. H. J." called him to account in *The Leeds Intelligencer* of January 7, 1837, to be answered by Giles the week after with a letter on "tribute money." "R. H. J." was not easily shaken off, however, and continued to harry Giles. In the meantime there had been, first, a great meeting on the subject at the London Tavern on February 2, followed by, second, another Parliamentary debate in March, in which Baines took a prominent part, producing a mass of statistics to support his arguments. Although the motion to abolish compulsory church rates was approved, the majority vote was not large enough to be encouraging for the immediate future.

The matter was not dropped outside the House. It was but natural that *The Leeds Mercury* should continue its agitation. On March 18 and 25 it provided long leading articles as preliminaries to another large meeting in Leeds, held on March 28.³⁶ Six or seven thousand people attended, and again Giles was there to move the second resolution, which approved the government measure. His arguments were virtually the same as he had used before, but his speech was full of popular shafts against his opponents. John Goodman, well known at South Parade, took part, and Sir William Molesworth, the Liberal candidate, closed the

proceedings. Petitions from both South Parade and the Hunslet church were committed to Baines, who presented them on April 24. A further debate in the Commons on May 22-23 again approved the ministerial plan but with a majority so small that a Tory victory was conceded.

Baines had made another long speech during this debate, and at home supplemented his advocacy by regular reports in his newspaper of any suspected instance of ecclesiastical oppression. The government's virtual defeat led not to resigned silence but to a move for a Select Committee on Church Property. Parliament, however, was shortly afterwards prorogued, and the papers were full of news and comment on the forthcoming elections. But not so full that Baines could not find room for an account of the annual vestry meeting at Leeds in August for settling a church rate. By that time Dr. Hook had got to work in Leeds and had refused to allow the use of the vestry of his church for secular purposes. His decision made not a scrap of difference to the opposition, and a vast meeting of two or three thousand people was held elsewhere. Hook was present. A rate of a mere halfpenny was proposed as sufficient for the needs of the church, but even so it was promptly opposed by Darnton Lupton, a Unitarian magistrate, with the backing of Giles. The usual tactics of adjourning the meeting to that day twelvemonth were successfully adopted and the rate was thus not agreed to.³⁷ Baines thought so highly of Giles's speech on the occasion that he reprinted it whole the following week.

South Parade continued to express its feeling about the rate year after year. In May 1839 the deacons lamented the "alarming insults recently offered to the cause of religious liberty by imprisonments and fines for church rates, and the disgusting disposition to religious tyranny manifested by ecclesiastics in spiritual courts." In June 1840 they alluded "to the disgraceful imprisonment of that faithful servant of Christ, Mr. John Thorogood," and in March, 1841 resolved, after receipt of a communication from the Voluntary Church Association in Leicester, that a petition for the extinction of church rates, the abolition of ecclesiastical courts, and the release of Mr. William Baines of Leicester from prison, be drawn up for signature immediately. The latter resolution was amended, however, and was followed in May by an exhortation, on the eve of the elections, to promote civil and religious liberty by all means and especially by standing aloof from candidates who would not pledge themselves actively to serve the interests of dissenters so far as at least concerned the rate, the courts, the release of Baines and also the prevention of church extension at national expense.

From this local example it can be seen how nonconformist opposition to the establishment was extending step by step. Supporters of the Establishment were correct in their deduction that the church-rates question was but one aspect of a greater campaign for disestablishment. If, by the end of the century that struggle had faded into the background of politics, enthusiasm for separating church from state was high in the 1840's. Protests at the interference of dissenters in elections were loud. The West Riding Association of Baptist Churches set up a special committee to consider "civil questions" and Giles was a member of it; annually it passed resolutions on "civil matters." In 1841, for example, the Association recommended that candidates for Parliament be asked the very points raised by the deacons at South Parade in May, and Giles was asked to send the resolution to the Leeds candidates. The year before, he and Acworth had been sent as delegates to interview Lord Palmerston and the Marquess of Normanby. A further resolution of the Association in 1841 welcomed the appearance of *The Nonconformist* newspaper, and with the names of that paper and its editor we are at the heart of the "dissidence of dissent."

Thorogood's case became a classic; that of William Baines was taken up by the minister of his church. The minister was Edward Miall. He it was who founded *The Nonconformist* and began to take vigorous political action on behalf of dissent. An aggressive spirit, stimulated by other events in which dissenters felt their interests vitally affected (some of them will be referred to presently), culminated in the foundation of the British Anti-State-Church Association. Organization of this body was made difficult, especially in the provinces, by the law which prevented "corresponding" societies, and to a smaller extent by the shyness of many sincere nonconformists towards it. But the West Riding Association of Baptist Churches promptly welcomed it in 1844. In January of that year Giles was unanimously elected by his deacons to attend a meeting of the new Association in London, backed by resolutions on the duties of such a body. He was back in February to report on his attendance and in April the deacons passed a long resolution supporting it.

In anticipation of a Convention to be summoned in London later in the year for favouring the separation of church and state, the Leeds Sunday School Union asked Giles to give a lecture on that topic in February also. This he did at South Parade in a "long and effective address," punctuated throughout by warm applause from a crowded audience.³⁸ It was a fervent exercise in root-and-branch radicalism, which sought an "entire and eternal separation," accompanied by an expropriation of all the emoluments, honours, powers and titles of the church, and demanded complete

equality. Publicity and pressure were essential, he said; let the world know the sordid story of the Establishment, and let there be incessant agitation for its abolition. Unable to finish his lecture because "out of voice," he completed it the following week; the *Leeds Mercury's* full report provides what must perhaps remain the best example of Giles's oratory we have.³⁹ He arraigned the "system" at the bar of Scripture, proving it a worldly mockery, the result of an adulterous union, and not yet ceasing to yield examples of hateful oppression.

The Convention was duly held and reports from local delegates, of whom, naturally, Giles had been one, were received at a public meeting held in Leeds on September 4, 1844.⁴⁰ That the meeting was not well attended did not prevent it passing the expected resolutions.

In the same month of September, 1844, Giles had taken a minor but unfortunately a provocative part in the meetings of the Leeds Branch of the L.M.S. Recent French outrages in Tahiti, where the L.M.S. had its oldest station, had been commented on. Giles expressed the view that it was wrong for a missionary society professing peace on earth to appeal to the British Government for forceful action, as the L.M.S. had done; rather should it have appealed to the justice and humanity of the French government. Clearly in a distinct minority on this point, Giles sought further to defend himself in a letter to the *Leeds Mercury*, to which the editors drew attention in a short leader.⁴¹ The chairman of the meeting, his friend Rev. R. W. Hamilton, replied, and letters began to pass to and fro in the pages of the *Mercury* until the end of October, interrupted by a visit to Scotland by Giles.⁴² Hamilton dragged in references to the approach made to the King of Denmark by the B.M.S., in which Giles had played a part, to Giles's church-and-state activities, and to other not very relevant matters, in the manner of newspaper disputants.

Meanwhile Tract No. 90 had made its appearance (1841) and during the next few years Leeds was to become a storm-centre of Puseyism. In the autumn of 1842, Bentley published one of the numerous ephemeral three-decker novels of the time under the title *Doctor Hookwell*. Local references in it were ostentatiously obvious: Dr. Hookwell himself was, of course, Rev. W. F. Hook, Vicar of Leeds, but among others who figured in it was a "Rev. Eustace Gill," on whom, said the *Leeds Mercury* reviewer,⁴³ "a vulgar and malignant libel" had been perpetrated. Although the book was trash and its intrinsic merit nil, he went on, it provided further evidence of the crafty policy of the Tractarians, who were now striking out along a new line.

Miall's biographer⁴⁴ explains how the political awakening among

dissenters in 1843 was encouraged by two events; the Scotch secessions and the Factories Bill. Little is recorded about South Parade's reaction to the former question. It was at South Parade itself that a public meeting had been held in April, 1838, with Joseph Town in the chair, to receive a report from Revs. Thomson and Robson, a deputation from the Scotch dissenters, on the Scotch Church Endowment proposals. They sought support in a campaign against the attempt of the Scottish establishment to get additional endowments from national funds. After the meeting petitions signed by members of all the Baptist and Congregational churches in Leeds were presented to the Commons by Baines in May. In 1843 the West Riding Association passed a resolution rejoicing at the separations in Scotland. Incidentally it may be noted that two years later it also passed a resolution on the Maynooth affair, at a time Giles was still a member of the Association's committee for civil rights. On the Factories Bill the church had much more to say.

EDUCATION

Some members of South Parade, the Goodmans, for example, and John Wyld, a deacon, had long supported the Lancasterian School in Leeds. In 1839,⁴⁵ Giles made a long speech at a meeting called to promote the cause of scriptural education in connection with the British and Foreign School Society: he moved a resolution that no system of national education could be satisfactory which did not recognise the daily reading and teaching of Scripture as part of the "usual order of occupation in the school." The vexed question of voluntary versus endowed education came to a head in 1843 over the educational clauses of Sir James Graham's Factory Bill, first formulated in 1841.⁴⁶ A new opposition party standing for Voluntaryism sprang into existence with *The Leeds Mercury* as its mouthpiece, and it was now the turn of Baines's son to carry on his father's work.⁴⁷ Agitation against the bill as regards education drew to a climax at the meeting of the Congregational Union held at Leeds in October, 1848, and there the great guns of Congregationalism, Dr. Vaughan, Edward Baines, John Kelly and A. Wells, roared. But two large public meetings had already been held to rouse local opinion at Leeds, on March 23rd and April 11th, at which all classes of dissenters were united in opposition to the new proposals.

It had been perforce necessary to summon the meeting of March 23rd in great haste after hearing at the last moment that the Bill was to have its second reading that week. Baines was in the chair and explained the objects of the meeting, counselling absolute

reprobation of the bill but leaving detailed arguments against it to be provided by his friends. The most important of these friends was Rev. Thomas Scales, Independent minister at Leeds, who gave a full analysis of the relevant clauses. He was followed by a Wesleyan and a Unitarian minister, and then came the turn of Giles for the Baptists. He moved the third resolution, and his speech was punctuated at almost every sentence with signs of approval. The bill was a piece of trickery and jobbery scarcely to be credited in the nineteenth century, he explained, and Graham had out-Grahamed Graham the tyrant.⁴⁸

At the better-arranged meeting of April 11th,⁴⁹ the mayor, H. C. Marshall, a Unitarian factory owner, was in the chair. The first resolution, proposed by Rev. R. Winter Hamilton, celebrated Independent minister in Leeds,⁵⁰ naturally opposed the educational clauses. Then followed what was often to be a well-known South Parade "double act." The resolution was seconded by George Goodman and supported by Giles. Other speakers were J. Holdforth (Catholic), Hamer Stansfeld and Rev. C. Wicksteed (Unitarian), Roberts and Fraser (Chartists), Joshua Bower (Methodist New Connexion), and others, including a churchman, F. A. Payne.

Goodman attacked a bill which, he said, would cripple the energies of the people and take away their rights. While he rejoiced as much as anyone to see Church schools on voluntary principles, he strongly repudiated all compulsory measures for extending the Church's influence. He advocated the free exercise of rights of conscience to all sects and parties. He contrasted the state of education in the manufacturing and the agricultural districts, to the manifest advantage of the former. He complimented the mayor on having built a spacious school for the instruction of the children at his factory and for doing what he could to promote their happiness. He called on the meeting to show by voice and vote that it did not intend to let Parliament pass this unjust bill into law.

Giles rose amid great applause. Experience had taught him, he began, that no cause was too unjust to lack supporters; they should not be surprised to find themselves condemned for expressing discontent with the measure. He had found by various instances in the public press an expression of great astonishment that dissenters should have been so presumptuous and so factious as for a single moment to express dissatisfaction. Those friendly to the bill allowed, he went on in a magnificent rhetorical flourish, that there was to be ex-officio a clerical trustee, who was to choose two other trustees, to be president of the trust and to have a double vote; that the other trustees were to be chosen by the magistrates and

that the bishop was to have a veto on all proceedings; that dissenters were to contribute to support the scheme and the wages of little children to be stopped for its support; that parents were to be liable to a fine of from 1s. to 10s. a day for not sending their children; and that poor rates were to be swelled for its support. These supporters then said that dissenters had an option if they did not like the system whereby schools were to be established and superintended by clerical trustees; ministers of other denominations might be allowed to instruct children belonging to the various religious bodies, and children might be sent to the Borough Road school, if there should happen to be one, and if, at the same time, it should happen that these schools had been approved by a government inspector and the Committee of Council on Education.

Like the Irish drummer boy receiving three hundred lashes, the dissenters were not pleased. When encroachments on the rights of conscience were made, and liberties trampled on, they *were* discontented. Suppose the case reversed, would there not then be heard the loudest of protests from John o' Groats to Land's End? Dissenters would protest. Was he not an Englishman, and did not the blood run as red and hot through his veins as through those of a churchman? Had not dissenters done as much as churchmen for education at home and the spread of the gospel abroad? They even had church support at this meeting. They had come not simply as dissenters but as men of all opinions, and sympathetic Conservatives, Whigs, Radicals, Chartists and Complete Suffragists were present. In preparing for the meeting they had arranged for mutual concessions to be made and had framed their resolutions on that principle, so as to accommodate all parties. At the same time it had been understood that all were free to express their own opinions, and he for one begged to differ from the chairman. He opposed the measure not because he hated some of its clauses, but because of its great principle, the right of government to interfere in the education of the people. Such interference was unnecessary. He found no one reluctant to send their children to school, but they could not afford to send them; if the government would give threepence a week instead of stopping an amount out of their wages to send them to a particular school, many would be willing to send them. But what was there in the history of prelacy that it should be entrusted with the education of the people—with its associations with Star Chamber, High Court of Commission, Spiritual Courts and Sir Jenner Fusts? And what of recent examples like those of Baines and Thorogood in the spiritual courts? The government could not educate the people; a child might be sent to their schools, but could they make it learn? Government could do it neither impartially nor effectually.

The argument did not end there: the controversy dragged on and on. In 1846 it reached heights which made two Leeds men national figures in it, Dr. Hook and Sir Edward Baines. The West Riding Baptist Association expressed concern for education in 1844. But the further developments are beyond the scope of this paper.⁵¹

(To be concluded)

NOTES

³³ Wainwright's oddity re-appears in another of his disputes, *Leeds Mercury*, August 17th, 1837, advertisement on the front page.

³⁴ Cf. the doctrines proclaimed year after year on the title page of the West Riding Baptist Association's report.

³⁵ For an amusing and instructive account of the struggle, see F. Warre Cornish, *The English Church in the Nineteenth Century*, Part I (1910), chapter viii. There is a long report of the Leeds meeting in *The Leeds Mercury* for December, 24th, 1836.

³⁶ The day after the Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty had met in London and duly protested.

³⁷ The relevant passage in W. R. Stephens's standard life of Dr. Hook (2 vols., 1878), I, 376, is not accurate. The meeting was held on August 17th, not 19th, which is neither here nor there. It is then asserted that, after some crushing words by Hook to Giles, the rate was passed, as if Hook had gained a resounding victory. He did not, the rate was not passed, and any victory went to Baines and Giles. The legend of Hook's victory is repeated in, e.g. W. G. Addison, *Religious Equality* (1944), 65.

³⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, March 2nd, 1844.

³⁹ *ibid.*, March 9th, 1844, calling its long report "only an imperfect outline." His observations appeared in pamphlet form: *Two Lectures Explanatory of the Anti-State-Church Conference Delivered at Leeds* (32 pages).

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, September 7th, 1844.

⁴¹ September 28th, 1844, where the meeting is also fully reported.

⁴² *ibid.*, October 5th, 19th, 26th, and November 2nd, 1844. See *post* for the reference to the King of Denmark episode.

⁴³ October 1st, 1842, wrongly giving Colburn as the publisher. See also, *Athenæum*, October 15th, 1842, pp. 888-89, for a long notice, and *Literary Gazette*, September 3rd, 1842, p. 615. The author of this rare anonymous work was Rev. Robert Armitage: *Notes & Queries*, 7th s., VIII, 165, 235 (1889).

⁴⁴ His son, Arthur, *Life of Edward Miall* (1884), chap. VI.

⁴⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, September 14, 1839. Incidentally Giles referred to disturbances at a meeting held the week before on behalf of the British and Foreign School Society, when local Chartists and Socialists were very rowdy.

⁴⁶ On the education controversy of 1843 and subsequent events, see R. W. Dale, *History of English Congregationalism* (1907), 645ff., which is strong on the Parliamentary aspect; Dale quotes Baines at length. See also J. T. Ward, "A lost opportunity in education: 1843", in *Researches and Studies* (University of Leeds, Institute of Education), No. 20, October, 1959. Dr. Ward puts the crisis in its historical setting and provides valuable references to sources. The theme is, of course, well-worn, and almost any text-book on the history of education in nineteenth-century England refers to it.

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