

# John Trafford

## Principal at Serampore

**J**OHN TRAFFORD (1819-1890) is a man worth recalling, as he served at Serampore for twenty-six years: for twenty-one as principal and earlier as tutor in the English department for five years.

He was born in Bourton-on-the-Water, where there had been a strong Baptist church for many years. When he reached fifteen he was baptised by his minister, the Rev. Thomas Coles, M.A., of Aberdeen (1779-1840). When Trafford applied to enter the college at Bristol, he was commended by his pastor, and also by John Foster (1770-1843) who had lived for a time at Bourton-on-the-Water. He entered college in 1837 when T. S. Crisp (1778-1868) was President. A diligent and painstaking student, Trafford gained the Williams Scholarship, and proceeded to Glasgow University. He took his M.A. with honours in 1843.

Trafford now cherished the hope of teaching at Serampore College and his application was favourably received in 1844. These hopes and plans were frustrated however, as his medical examination proved unfavourable. That same year he received a warm invitation from the church at Weymouth. This he accepted, and soon was able to marry Miss Phoebe Harris, of Arlington, Gloucestershire. He spent eight happy and fruitful years at Weymouth. Moreover, those years by the sea so recruited his health and physical well-being, that when in 1852 he again applied to serve at Serampore, the medical examination was favourable, and at the end of that year he and his family travelled to India. At first he taught in the English department but in 1858, when the Rev. W. H. Denham died, Trafford was appointed principal. Dr. George Smith, who had arrived in India at the same time as John Trafford to edit *The Friend of India*, wrote in his *Life of William Carey*: "When in 1854 a new generation of English Baptists accepted the college as their own, it received a Principal worthy to succeed the giants of those days, the Rev. John Trafford, M.A., a student of Foster's and of Glasgow University. For twenty-six years he carried out the principles of Carey in all things" (p. 410).

A great sorrow befell him, when, after fourteen years of wedded joy, his wife died suddenly of cholera, and was buried at Serampore. For seventeen years Trafford laboured on without any furlough. In 1868, during a short holiday at home, he married the eldest daughter of the Rev. D. J. East, of Calabar College, Jamaica (1816-1903). She, in every way, proved his helpmeet to the end.

In their book, telling the story of Serampore College, Dr. George

Howells and Principal A. C. Underwood, pay this tribute: "Through Mr. Trafford's unceasing application and untiring industry, the college during his principalship attained the greatest success it has ever enjoyed. It was one of the first colleges to be affiliated to the newly instituted Calcutta University, which body Mr. Trafford served in a variety of ways, with conspicuous ability. At Serampore the buildings were kept in good repair, the library was enlarged and catalogued and so became one of the best in India." This is indeed high praise from those who followed after him in the college.

When Trafford's exacting service in India had covered twenty-six years, he retired. Dr. George Smith tells of the farewell meeting in March, 1879, when many old students of the college gathered to bid their beloved Principal farewell. "One last kindness they asked of him was to send his portrait to be hung in the College hall."

Upon his return home in 1879, John Trafford found that once again the pastorate at Weymouth was vacant. Soon he received a very warm invitation to serve the church a second time. This he gladly accepted, and seemed to enter into the various duties with all the zest of earlier days. Both Mr. and Mrs. Trafford won the abiding love and gratitude of the members, which continued long after they left Weymouth in 1885.

They removed to London, where soon Trafford became Secretary of the Bible Translation Society, and in this work he could continue his deep missionary interests. He also became a valued and valuable member of the General Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society. Always he was ready to use his pen in the *Baptist Magazine*. On the 22nd September, 1890, he died, in his seventy-second year. Two years later his widow, with the help of E. B. Underhill (1813-1901), published a memorial volume, *Twelve Sermons by John Trafford*. This contained a short memoir by his friend J. Jenkin Brown (1815-1907).

When I began my ministry at Weymouth in 1920 I soon found myself attracted by a large and very well executed memorial to John Trafford on the wall near the pulpit. This told of his two pastorates, and added a warm tribute to his gracious ministry; yet, no mention of Serampore. So one Sunday morning, I asked my deacons to meet me after the service. As we stood together facing the memorial I said, "You have left out all he did between those two pastorates". "But there is no room to add anything now," replied one practical brother. "Yes there is," I replied, "on the wide plinth at the base". They soon agreed, and some of the elders who had been baptized by John Trafford during his second period, gladly offered to pay for the extra words to be added.

Mrs. Trafford, all her days, maintained a warm interest in the church at Weymouth. Dr. George Smith, who was often present when Trafford conducted worship in English at Serampore, wrote: "His preaching I shall never forget; only his modesty hid its power. Truly his memory is blessed to many"—a disciple whom Jesus loved.

GORDON HAMLIN