

LETTERS FROM ROBERT HALL

TO JOHN RYLAND

1791 - 1824

Preserved in the Library of the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, is a collection of letters from Robert Hall to John Ryland, together with a sermon, a sheet of notes on passages in the New Testament, and a letter from Robert Hall senior from Arnsby, dated 8/29 February 1788. These three documents are respectively the last, the seventh and the first in the collection. Robert Hall's thirty-nine letters have been numbered mainly but not entirely in chronological order. With some rearrangement they may be listed as below. Dates bracketed are sometimes from the postmark, sometimes from an endorsement. A few of the letters, or extracts from them, were printed, with omissions and sometimes with alteration of the dates, in Olinthus Gregory's edition of Hall's *Works* (second edition, 1833, vol.V). The unhappy relations between the missionaries and the committee at home are sufficiently well known: see further the forthcoming history of the Baptist Missionary Society by Dr Brian Stanley, who has seen these letters. I have added a few notes of identification. I am grateful to the Revd Norman Moon and the Revd Sidney Hall for help with those relating to Bristol Baptist College, and to the successive Librarians of the Selly Oak Colleges Library for access to the manuscripts.

2. 1791 April 7, Cambridge.
Transmits 'the united request of our family' to publish the sermon preached at Arnsby on the death of his father, with 'a little historical sketch of my dear Father's life and character'.¹
3. 1791 May 16.
Discusses contents of the proposed narration of his father's life.
4. 1801 May 25, Cambridge.
Hears Fuller has been at Bristol and Plymouth: 'if he is not more careful he will be in danger of wearing himself out before his time. His journeys, his studies, his correspondcies must be too much for the constitution of any man.' 'Mr Estlin² has treated me uniformly with so much personal respect that I should be sorry to give him uneasiness'; but he will 'feel some embarrassment about preaching at Lewinsmead' when in Bristol, since he is 'very loth to take any step that may appear like a countenancing the socinians in sentiments which I hope I shall never fail to consider to my dying day as the last corruption of christianity.' Approves Ryland's reply³ to Mr Rowe just received, and suggests emendations.
5. 1801 October 6 (Plymouth).
Requests Ryland to supply a student at Bridge Street.⁴
6. 1805 October 21.
Includes critical remarks on manuscript on New Testament texts. Not to Ryland, to whom he sends remembrances, but endorsed by Ryland, 'Transcribed for Marshman Jan.3. 1806'.
8. 1808 July 15, Enderby.
Seeks to discourage Ryland from encouraging division in the church at Cambridge, 'which must not only interrupt Christian harmony, but greatly impair the credit of the dissenting interest in the eyes of a great University'; it did not originate 'in a difference of principle' or in disapproval of Mr

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Coxe⁵ for 'his attachment to evangelical doctrines, but merely a dissatisfaction . . . with his abilities and manner of preaching' as 'superficial and declamatory'. 'There are not I am confident above two members of the Church who would not greatly prefer a moderate calvinist to a socinian or an arian.'

9. 1808 October 20, Leicester.
Pendered⁶ of Royston wishes to leave for 'a baptist congregation of calvinistic sentiments where a strain of warm evangelical preaching would be heard with pleasure': 'his views are now truly evangelical and even calvinistical.'
10. 1810 November 17, Leicester.
'I can plainly descry too much heighth & unyielding stiffness in the temper of Marshman. But this inter Nos. They are great & good men & deserve the warmest thanks of the Xn. Church.'
Can Ryland provide a young man to be minister at Clipston? 'The congregation is numerous, consisting of about 600 people . . . most peaceable amiable united people, strongly attached to evangelical sentiments with much genuine catholicism of temper.' The salary would be about £100 a year.
11. 1811 November 26.
'You have been shamefully used by the congregation and by the Academy. You ought in my opinion in your situation to have been able to lay up a hundred a year instead of spending your property.' Will 'promote an annual collection of our Congregation for the Academy' 'in midsummer to keep as far as possible from interfering with the Missionary collection which is made about the new year.'
12. 1812 July 5.
Covering letter for letter to the Bristol Education Society commending John Mack⁷ from the Leicester Baptist church, signed in church meeting on 5 July 1812 by John Purser, John Yates and John Carryer.
13. 1812 December 29.
Clipston wishes Mack to prolong his stay and to come for the next long vacation. 'The people at Clipston are very quiet affectionate amiable and on many accounts much entitled to compassion.' 'There is now . . . a pleasing revival: several young persons appear under serious concern, and their prayer meetings are well attended.'
14. 1813 July 26.
Suggests emendations of epitaph⁸ proposed for Caleb Evans.
15. 1813 August 20.
Is pleased with the changes made by Ryland to the epitaph.
16. undated.
Returns sermon with remarks and alterations. 'N.B. Prayerfulness is not in Johnson's Dictionary.'
17. 1814 October 28.
Defends Mack from charges of levity and of criticising the Academy.
21. 1815 April 10.
Opposes Ryland's intention 'to form an auxiliary society at Bristol, to have public days &c &c &c'. Is grieved that the B.M.S. is about 'to attempt to vie with the London [Missionary] Society in the noise and ostentation of its

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proceedings.' 'That Society has long provoked the spleen and jealousy of the Clergy by their arrogance, and ostentation.'

22. 1815 May 1.

Thanks Ryland for abandoning 'the idea of auxiliary pomp and pride, which I consider akin to witchcraft'. Fuller, who 'cannot last long', strongly recommends Anderson⁹ as his successor: 'I believe Anderson to be [a] very excellent man, but totally unfit for the office': he 'cannot write correctly' and 'is consequential and mysterious', with 'ideas of church government which I believe strongly tinctured with Sandemanian tendencies'. 'Ought not so great a step . . . to be determined by a general meeting of the Committee' or at least 'deferred till after Mr Fuller's decease?'¹⁰

23. 1815 May 9.

Regrets that Fuller mentioned Anderson to his deacons: his nephew¹¹ could leave Kettering without serious inconvenience, but Anderson 'will not long suit'. Regrets that his own name has been mentioned, and considers that Ryland should succeed Fuller as B.M.S. Secretary, with assistance at Broadmead. Discounts the possibility of sending someone to Canada, which 'lies near the United States & it seems to belong to them to evangelise it': 'we have more to do in India, than ever we can accomplish.'

40. undated.

Expresses sentiments similar to those in Letter 23.

24. 1815 June 17. 'My mixed communion¹² will I trust be in about a fortnight I have serious doubts whether strict communion is not a greater error than paedobaptism'.

18. 1815 September 4. With John Yates, commends to the Committee of the Bristol Education Society William Goodrich,¹³ who was suspended, but a change in him has taken place.

19. (1815) October 25. Recommends that publication of J. W. Morris's *Life*¹⁴ of Fuller be deferred for 12 or 15 years, as he fears it will be too laudatory: Fuller's faults, though trivial, were very apparent and 'possessed a certain prominence'.

25. (1816 May 27). Has read Ryland's letters on Robinsonianism¹⁵ with delight and approbation.

26. 1816 June 19. Commends to Bristol Education Society Gutteridge (John Goodrich)¹⁶ of Harvey Lane, aged 24 or 25, married with two children.

27. 1816 July 12, Leicester. Further commendation, signed also by the same three deacons as Letter 12.

30. (1816 August). Is grieved at the conduct of Carey and Yates¹⁷ towards Ryland and himself.

Wishes Ryland could be relieved of Page¹⁸: 'I am really afraid it will shorten your life'.

28. 1816 October 9, Leicester. A letter from India shows very serious grounds of complaint: is not surprised that Carey, Lawson and Yates wish to depend solely on the society in England: otherwise a very serious rupture will take place. But he has not heard a word from Yates, and but once from Carey.

20. (1816 November 2.) Gives details from letters from Eustace Carey and Yates

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- of their controversy with 'the three Senior Brethren of Serampore' and the melancholy 'state of religion in the Church at Calcutta'.
29. 1817 January 28.
Hears that Felix Carey¹⁹ has been beheaded; hopes it is not true.
 31. [1817?] February 12.
Deplores the idea of transferring the seat of the mission to London but sees no method of avoiding it without producing a fatal schism.
 32. 1817 March 19.
Regrets the resolution concerning the subcommittee and Quarterly Meeting; declines to be on subcommittee.
 33. 1817 August 3.
Deplores plan requiring frequent absence of ministers: 'the affairs of the mission will become too cumbrous for the denomination'; 'let us guard against a spirit of rivalry, let us not attempt a race of eclat & popularity with THE [London] Missionary society'.
Is busy with his answer²⁰ to Kinghorn. 'Our place is enlarging': 'we are very conveniently accommodated at the old methodist meeting in the morning, and at the new in the evening.'
 34. 1817 August 8.
'Is it all worth while to come a hundred fifty miles and back again to preach a single sermon?': 'travelling is my abhorrence'. Is happy that Ryland is at last free of Page.
 35. 1817 August 8.
The relation of this Letter to Letter 34 is obscure.
 36. 1818 February 28.
Would not advise replacing Page, but if it seems necessary suggests John Birt of Hull.
 37. 1818 April 2.
Hopes to be in Bristol before the third Sabbath in April, when he will bring a very important letter from Eustace Carey: 'I am afraid our Mission is in a very critical state.'
 38. [1818] June 2.
Defends Mack against charges of impropriety: he is eager to marry, and wants to be in India as soon as possible.
 39. 1818 June 22.
Cannot easily travel.
 41. 1824 August 3, Birmingham.
Is concerned that anything should disturb Ryland's peace, but cannot come to Bristol for the meeting.

NOTES

1. John Ryland, *Salvation finished: a funeral sermon on Robert hall senior* (1791).
2. Cf. DNB, s.v. Hall: 'In 1800 the delivery and publication of his discourse on *Modern Infidelity* made a great sensation. Its substance had already been preached at the unitarian chapel, Lewin's Mead, Bristol, during the ministry of John Prior Estlin'. For Estlin, see also DNB.
3. John Ryland, *The partiality and unscriptural direction of Socinian zeal: being a reply to the Rev. Mr Rowe's letter* (1801), in answer to John Rowe, *A letter to Dr Ryland, in refutation of a*

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- note contained in his sermon, entitled *The first lye refuted* (1801). For Rowe, Estlin's colleague at Lewin's Mead, see DNB.
- An Independent church in Bristol with whose minister, Samuel Lowell, Hall was exchanging: see J. W. Morris, *Brief recollections of . . . Robert Hall* (1833), p.168.
 - Francis Augustus Cox, from Clipston, was invited to succeed Hall in 1806 and did so, but resigned in 1808: 'a variety of unhappy circumstances have conspired to render my situation unpleasant and everyway undesirable.' (Cox in a letter to the senior deacon, printed from the church book in *St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge* (1971), ed. K. A. C. Parsons, p.21. For Cox, see further DNB.
 - William Pendered (1755-1832) had ministered at Alcester and was later at Hull.
 - For John Mack (1788-1831), see E. A. Payne and A. R. Allan, *Clipston Baptist Church* (Northampton, 1932), pp.15-19.
 - The Revd Norman Moon kindly ascertained that this epitaph is now at Downend Baptist church: see its *Short History* (1986), p.2.
 - For Christopher Anderson, see DNB and A. C. Smith, *BQ 33*, no.3 (January 1990), p.236, n.12, 'The spirit and letter of Carey's catalytic watchword: a study in the transmission of Baptist tradition' - an article admirable in its research but misconceived: no preacher (especially one who could assume that the phraseology of Psalm 62.5 ('my soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him') would be resonant in the minds of his hearers as well as his own) would be likely to repeat the words 'from God'; but beyond the bounds of the sermon it would be equally appropriate and almost necessary to add the words; nor was religious reportage of that date concerned with *ipsissima verba*; what is called for is a study discriminating between the purpose and manner of the occasions.
 - Fuller died on 7 May 1815.
 - Hall's nephew, John Keen Hall (d.1829), who had assisted Fuller for three years, was ordained at Kettering on 8 November 1815, when Hall delivered the charge; the church was considerably divided, and in 1824 there was 'an open rupture'; G. M. Barrett, *Fuller Church, Kettering 1696-1946* [1946], p.11.
 - Robert Hall, *On terms of communion* (1815).
 - William Goodrich had left the Academy in 1812 owing to ill health and was readmitted in 1815.
 - J. W. Morris' *Memoir of the life and writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* was published in 1816. For Morris, see DNB.
 - For Anthony Robinson, who in *An examination of a sermon* (1800) had attacked Hall, see DNB.
 - J. W. Goodrich was admitted to the Academy in 1816 and later ministered at Langham, Essex, and for the London City Mission.
 - For Eustace Carey and William Yates, see DNB.
 - Henry Page (1781-1833) spent many years in Bristol as Secretary of the Academy and also as assistant at Broadmead. He died at Boulogne.
 - For Felix Carey, see DNB.
 - Robert Hall, *A reply to Rev. Joseph Kinghorn: being a further vindication of the practice of free communion* (1817), in reply to Joseph Kinghorn, *Baptism a term of communion* (Norwich, 1816). For Kinghorn, see DNB.

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THE C. R. BATTEN LECTURES

Since its Diamond Jubilee in 1966 the London Baptist Preachers' Association has held an annual public lecture in honour of Mr C. R. Batten, who had been a distinguished member of the Association since 1936, its Booth Fund Secretary for many years and the President in 1949. He died last year at the age of 95.

These lectures have been given by eminent preachers, scholars and church leaders of various Christian traditions, and have included Lord Stuart Blanch, Dr Raymond Brown, Lord Donald Coggan, Dr John Huxtable, Dr Rex Mason, Dr David Russell, Bishop David Sheppard, Dr Barrie White and Dr Howard Williams.

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