

DR. DODDRIDGE.

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THERE is a danger that to the present generation some of the greatest of the eighteenth-century divines—men who were “burning and shining lights” in their day—will soon be little more than names familiarly associated, it may be, with a well-known hymn or notable religious treatise. The late Bishop Ryle in his *Christian Leaders*, and Mr. Balleine in his fascinating *History of the Evangelical Party*, have familiarized many of us with the wonderful work accomplished by the men of God who inspired and carried on the great Methodist and Evangelical revival, but we know of no such popular records of the lives and influences of other equally eminent Christian divines and teachers which fell outside that great movement. Probably few, except diligent students of Church history, know much of the life and character of the saintly Nonconformist scholar and divine whose most popular work is supposed to have led to the spiritual awakening of the great anti-Slavery champion, William Wilberforce. Philip Doddridge (1702–51) was probably the most prominent and influential of the Nonconformist divines of the first half of the eighteenth century. We know little about his ancestry except that his great-great-uncle was knighted and made a judge of the Court of King’s Bench under James I, while his grandfather was ejected from his living of Shepperton in 1662. His father, Daniel Doddridge, was in the oil trade in London, and Philip was the youngest of his twenty children. His mother was the daughter of a Hussite clergyman who was exiled from Bohemia on account of his faith in 1626 and settled in England and kept a school at Kingston-on-Thames. Philip, who had been at first cast aside as lifeless at his birth, was always of a frail and consumptive constitution. From 1712–15 he went to his grandfather’s old school at Kingston, where he gained a reputation for his diligence and piety. His father died in 1715 and his mother apparently shortly afterwards. Philip then went to a private school at St. Albans, but owing to the careless mismanagement of his guardian and trustee all his father’s fortune was lost, and had not his friend, Dr. Samuel Clarke, a prominent Dissenting minister, come very generously to his assistance, young Doddridge would

have been unable to continue his studies. He left school in 1718 and shortly afterwards, through the influence of an uncle, who had been steward to the Duke of Bedford, he received an offer from the Duchess to defray all the expenses of his education at the University and make future provision for him in the Church, if he would consent to take Anglican Orders. Doddridge, however, already felt that he could not conscientiously conform to the Church, and was therefore obliged to decline this very tempting proposal. His prospects for fulfilling his great ambition of entering the Ministry were now so small that Dr. Edmund Calamy advised him to turn his attention to something else, and for a time he seriously thought of studying law. It was while he was in this state of indecision that his friend Dr. Clarke came forward with a generous offer to provide for his training for the Ministry, and so in 1719 he went to an Academy at Kibworth, in Leicestershire, kept by the Rev. J. Jennings, a learned Dissenting divine. The very strict and careful rules which young Doddridge drew up at this time for the guidance of his student career show how fully in earnest and entirely consecrated his life already was in his Master's service, and what a high standard of Christian perfection he aimed at.

Doddridge commenced his ministerial career at Hinckley in July, 1722, when only twenty years old, and his first sermon was the means of the conversion of two people. In 1723 he accepted the call to the pastorate of a small country congregation at Kibworth, which gave him ample time to continue his studies. In 1729 he was chosen assistant minister to an Independent congregation at Market Harborough, having previously refused several other more tempting offers to larger and more important town churches. In the same year, under great pressure from numerous friends and brother ministers, Doddridge consented to open an Academy at Harborough for the training of students for the Ministry. Only a few months later he received a pressing invitation to the pastorate of an important Independent Church at Northampton, which, however, he at first declined to accept. A deputation of the young people earnestly besought him to reconsider his decision, and he regarded this intervention as a Divine call and went to Northampton in December, 1729. A very serious illness delayed his Ordination and the commencement of his work there till March, 1730, when, after making his Confession of Faith and Ordination

vows, he was solemnly set apart by prayer. The anniversary of his Ordination Doddridge always observed with special solemnity in his private devotional exercises. Dr. Stoughton, writing in 1878, tells us that the "old square meeting-house" in which Doddridge ministered for over twenty years, remained then the same externally as in 1750 with "five windows and two doors in front each surmounted by a penthouse, and just under the dripping of the main roof a square sundial" (*Religion in England*, I, 342).

Doddridge was soon greatly esteemed for his fervid and sympathetic style of preaching, and he frequently preached in the villages round Northampton. When we recall that the decline in evangelical preaching at this time was so general that Sir W. Blackstone could assert, after hearing every notable preacher in London, that "he did not hear a single discourse having more Christianity in it than the writings of Cicero," Doddridge's popularity, considering his zeal for Gospel preaching, is all the more remarkable. "The Gospel," he declared, towards the close of his ministry, "is a great thing or it is nothing. I am more and more convinced of keeping to the good old evangelical and experimental way of preaching and look upon most of the new-fashioned Divinity as a kind of Quackery, which bodes ill to the health of the soul."

Doddridge paid special attention to the young people of his congregation and lamented the neglect of the practice of catechizing the children in church, a course which he regularly pursued. He also promoted the formation of Young Peoples' Societies on lines somewhat similar to our modern Christian Endeavour movement. He was very zealous in his pastoral visitations, but finding it impossible to visit all the families of his scattered flock, in 1737 he set apart four Elders to assist him in this branch of the work. He was also instrumental in establishing a Charity School at Northampton, a sum being raised sufficient to clothe and educate twenty boys, who were taught to read, write and learn their Catechism and attend public worship regularly. Doddridge soon became very greatly beloved by his congregation, the membership of which was considerably increased during his ministry. He consistently refused other calls to larger and more influential churches in London and elsewhere.

In 1730 Doddridge married Mrs. Mercy Maris, of Worcester, and he had five children, but to his great grief he lost his eldest daughter

when quite young. In 1737 Aberdeen University conferred on him the degree of D.D.

During the whole of his ministry at Northampton he acted as Principal of the Academy which he had started, and for which he soon needed the help of an assistant tutor. This training College soon obtained considerable reputation, men coming to be under his tuition from Scotland and even Holland. It was mainly a theological seminary, since of the 200 pupils who were under his care in twenty-two years 120 entered the Ministry. Scotch Presbyterians and even Churchmen were included amongst his students. From the account of his biographer the curriculum at the College was most comprehensive, and if all of the subjects studied were at all thoroughly mastered his Academy must have been noted for its specially high standard of scholarship. Certainly the reproof of an unlearned ministry could not be applied to Doddridge's training. During their three years' course the ordinands included in their studies classics, mathematics, science and philosophy, as well as Civil Law, Natural History, Anatomy and Jewish Antiquities, besides their special Divinity lectures! The students rose at 6 a.m. in summer and 7 a.m. in winter. During Family Worship, morning and evening, Doddridge expounded a chapter of the Old and New Testaments from the Hebrew and Greek, the rest of the morning he lectured on other subjects. He, himself, well describes the great aim which guided all his tutorial labours: "It is my heart's desire and prayer to God that not one may go out from me without an understanding enlightened from above, a heart sanctified by Divine Grace, quickened and warmed with love to a well-known Jesus and tenderly concerned for the salvation of perishing souls." He earnestly prepared his students for an intelligent grasp of the privileges connected with a sincere approach to the Lord's Table. To this end lectures were suspended on the day preceding Sacrament Sunday and the time occupied with serious devotional preparation.

In spite of his teaching and ministerial work Doddridge found time to become a fairly prolific writer. Besides a popular *Life of Col. Gardiner*, he published numerous sermons and theological treatises. He also revised the Expository Works of Archbishop Leighton, whom he described as an "adept in True Christianity." Most of his works were translated into foreign languages and published abroad in Dutch, French, German and Danish. He is,

however, best remembered to-day as the author of *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, a work undertaken on the urgent solicitation of Dr. Watts. It is a treatise on Practical Divinity and Christian Experience, and it was received with very great esteem by many eminent clergy and laity and quickly passed through many editions. Doddridge received numerous testimonies from England, Scotland, Holland and America to its usefulness in leading to the conversion and edification of many of its readers. Another, and at the time even more famous work, was his *Family Expositor*, a paraphrase of the New Testament with critical notes in six volumes, on which he had been engaged since the commencement of his ministry. The last three volumes were published after his death, as was also a volume of his Hymns.

Although Doddridge is not nearly so famous as a hymn writer as Charles Wesley or Dr. Watts, yet the Christian Church would be greatly the poorer for the loss of his poetic genius. As Dr. Stoughton well says, "there is a sweetness and tenderness in Doddridge's versification on devotional subjects, in admirable harmony with his amiable character, which has made him a favourite with all denominations, and has given him a place in the hymnology of English Christendom which he is not likely to lose" (*Religion in England*, I, 343). Many of his hymns are still included in our Collections, such as "Eternal source of every joy," "God of my life through all my days," and "Ye humble souls that seek the Lord," but certainly the two most universally used and loved are "O God of Bethel by whose hand" and "Hark, the glad sound! the Saviour comes," probably the most popular of all our Advent hymns.

Doddridge carefully studied the question of conformity to the Church, and was convinced of the lawfulness and expediency of separation. "I look upon the Dissenting Interest," he wrote, "to be the cause of Truth, honour and liberty, and I will add in a great measure the cause of serious piety too." He possessed, however, a catholic spirit and was very tolerant and charitable towards all who differed from him. He earnestly prayed for a closer union amongst all Protestants and longed, like so many Christians to-day are doing, for the happy time when the "Question would be, not how much may we lawfully *impose*, and how much may we lawfully *dispute*? but on the one side what may we *waive*, and on the other what may we *acquiesce in*, from a principle of

mutual tenderness and respect, without displeasing our common Lord." In his "Correspondence" he records the informal and abortive discussions which took place between Samuel Chandler and Bishops Gooch and Sherlock on a possible compromise to bring the Dissenters back to communion with the Church. He lived on terms of warm friendship with Archbishop Herring and Bishop Warburton.

The objection to what was regarded as the "irregular" method of street preaching was so widespread at this time that such celebrated Nonconformist divines as Daniel Neal and Isaac Watts actually censured Doddridge for inviting George Whitefield to occupy his pulpit. Doddridge, however, while wisely endeavouring to regulate the zeal and correct the errors of some of the early pioneers of the Revival Movement, definitely championed the despised "Methodist" clergy and their itinerant practices. "A Man had better," he affirmed, "be a sober, honest, chaste, industrious enthusiast than live without any regard to God and Religion at all."

The record of Doddridge's extraordinary diligence is amazing. Every spare moment was filled with useful work and he was scrupulously conscientious almost to a fault about the employment of his time. One of his pupils usually read to him even while he was dressing and shaving! Besides his daily morning lectures and his regular ministerial work he often preached several times a week in the outlying villages, while he maintained a very large correspondence with pupils, guardians, brother ministers, and a wide circle of friends. In addition to all these active duties, he spent many hours in secret communion with God, in fact his intense piety almost resembled the asceticism of the cloister. He certainly "practised the presence of God" in a very special manner. Sometimes whole days were definitely given over to prayer, while he had regular hours in which he retired to his vestry to review his life and work and to plead earnestly for his family, his people, and the Church of God.

It is not therefore surprising that he seldom allowed himself more than six hours' rest, but when urged to take a little more relaxation for his health's sake he replied: "I seldom know what it is to be weary."

His piety, his zeal, his unselfish and lovable character soon

gained for him a wide esteem and reputation amongst all classes and creeds. A good evidence of this was forthcoming during his last illness, the expenses of which were defrayed by a fund eagerly subscribed by his many friends through the active interest of a Church clergyman.

He was never jealous of the success or popularity of others, his one ambition being "to live and die striving for the Faith of the Gospel, for the conversion of souls, for the good of my friends, my neighbours and countrymen, and the whole world." There is little doubt that his zealous unremitting labours prematurely exhausted a constitution which was naturally delicate. A cough contracted in the winter of 1750 developed latent lung trouble, but it was only when utterly unable to continue his work that he consented, too late, to try a rest and change of air. A stay in Bristol to take the waters and eventually a voyage to Portugal were all in vain, and he died and was buried at Lisbon on October 26, 1751. Some lines composed by himself probably best sum up his character and career, which abundantly testify how strenuously he endeavoured to live up to his family motto of *Dum vivimus vivamus* :—

"Live, while you live"; the epicure would say,
 And seize the pleasure of the passing day,
 "Live while you live," the sacred Preacher cries,
 And give to God each moment as it flies.
 Lord, in my views let both united be;
 I live in pleasure, when I live to Thee.

C. SYDNEY CARTER.

