

Selections from the Diary of William Newman

WILLIAM NEWMAN (1773-1835) was pastor of the Baptist Church at Bow and a successful schoolmaster. He became the first president of the Stepney Academy, later Regent's Park College, and his diary is a most important document for the historian of the early days of the academy. Several volumes survive. The one used here deals with years of transition and decision in Newman's life and reflects events and sketches personalities of considerable interest. He lived in the age of philanthropic societies. The war with Napoleon was at its height, although the diary ceases before Waterloo. But perhaps of most interest is the picture of the man. Old in mind while still young in years, scholarly, emotional, dedicated, a penetrating critic of his fellows and a stern dealer with his own soul.

It is almost unbelievable that Newman was not able to secure admission to a dissenting academy in view of the intellectual achievement recorded modestly in the diary. The entries mention, incidentally, that he had the opportunity of entering one of the ancient universities but would not do so as it would involve subscription to the Articles of the Church of England. A note (17.12.08) suggests the respect in which he was held for his scholarship. "Trace *bapto* in the New Testament where the ordinance is not referred to, in the LXX, in the Classics, in Philo, in Josephus, in the Greek Fathers. See Dr. Gale's reply to Dr. Wall; Dr. Ryland's *Extracts from Josephus*." He knew Hebrew and was able to review a book published in Arabic. It was his custom to read from his Greek Testament every morning at seven. He was greatly admired by Andrew Fuller and an entry (11.10.13) says, "Mr. Fuller wants me to examine the connection between Baptism and the Lord's Supper". He made a translation of at least part of the New Testament, although this was probably not intended for publication. "I wish I had translated the New Testament for myself as though it had never been done before."

His sermon preparation was usually done on a Saturday and he frequently records that he was most at liberty in the evening service. Comments on his own preaching gleaned from the diary speak for themselves.

"My heart was inflamed."

"On the whole a good day . . . yet much disappointed with my sermons."

" . . . very lame, confused; shreds and rags."

"Much confusion; I wonder that anybody comes to hear me."

"Great fluency, but alas! it was too much the effect of hurry and fever."

"Expounded I Thess. The Rise, Reign and Ruin of Antichrist."

"Hughes says I must be a glutton indeed if I am not satisfied with the praises of my sermon which are given in the Baptist magazine less would have pleased me more. Not knowing the writer, I do not know how much they are worth—*laudari a viro laudato* is worth something. O my God! to Thee be all the praise."

"Levity, self-confidence alarmed me."

"How great is the goodness of God to me. I have not been hindered from attending public worship on a Lord's Day for 25 years. More than 20 years I have been preaching, generally three times a day. Have never been laid aside one whole Sabbath that I can recollect." (4.8.11).

"Could not find a text (sure sign of a bad state); at last preached with some freedom, almost extempore."

"Preached at Austin's, Fetter Lane, on the means to be used for the conversion of ungodly relations—the sermon was delivered without much comfort, after much labour bestowed on it; the pulpit was so enormously high . . . in the evening I was at home."

Throughout his years of service Newman remained a faithful pastor. The demands of the school and later the college, the committees, the need to maintain his reading might well have swamped this part of Newman's ministry but it was never neglected.

His references to Church business meetings could be echoed by most ministers. One was "cold, dull, heavy". Others he describes in happier terms. His notes of their proceedings contain more references to discipline and excommunication than we are accustomed to. His pastoral work included visits to folk with smallpox and to a woman who had attempted suicide. Another woman was visited when she was dying. "Quite unconscious that she is a sinner. 'Did you never offend your Maker?' 'No, not to my knowledge'. 'Did you never feel a conviction of guilt before God?' 'No, never'. And this woman told me she was one of my hearers!" In the margin he notes that the woman afterwards became a penitent.

The spiritual progress of John Ivimey, the black sheep of the

historian's family may be traced in occasional remarks in Newman's diary. "At nine came John Ivimey. He wept like a child; told me his fears with great simplicity; that his religion was nothing more than nature might produce; that he should deceive himself; that his convictions were not strong enough; that if he opened his mind to his brothers they would think him a hypocrite." But the interview and others bore fruit. Three months later (22.3.09) he came "to propose himself for baptism". In April we read that "John Ivimey prayed for the first time, with fear and trembling" at the weekly prayer meeting. Later that month he gave an account of his Christian experience to the Church as was required of all candidates for baptism, and in May he was baptized.

Briscoe, one of the first three students at Stepney who later proved to be very unstable, told his pastor of his desire to enter the ministry. "I catechized him very closely on the motives which led him to think of the ministry." (2.3.09).

Most pastors will testify to his experience of visiting the sick. "Visited a Miss Boys with Miss Humtley. One of the most interesting interviews I ever had with a sick person. I shall not soon lose the savour of it."

The more intimately personal references in the diary come very close to the varied feelings of the minister. He speaks of his few recreations, bathing, gardening and walking. He notes his anxieties about his school and takes care to speak from time to time to his pupils about the state of their souls. Other personal passages speak for themselves.

After a reference to the death of several friends. "And I am still spared! O that it may be for much good. If I am soon to die may I be well prepared. After having preached successfully to others, shall I be cast away?" (3.10.08).

"Lord prepare me for new trials and support me under one which I have long endured" (20.11.08).

"Alas, what a poor creature I am! How weak in body; how imbecile in mind. How slender my literary furniture. I feel ashamed to be treated with so much respect by my brethren at the Coffee House" (7.12.08).

"Spent most of the morning in reading the memoranda I have preserved of this whole year . . . In my studies I have read Ovid's *Metam* and several of Cicero's *Orations*. I have made a little improvement in composition. In the school I have been successful. The church and congregation have considerably increased. My heart is more warmly engaged, I trust than ever in the work of the Lord." (30.12.08).

"This month labour to improve in English." (1.2.09).

Reference to death of Richard Gough. ". . . he was much grieved when my Mother took me to the Meeting House; would have in-

roduced me to the University if I had been disposed to take orders in the Church" (28.2.09).

"My time is cut up into a thousand little pieces, frittered away; and how shall I rectify this?" (27.3.09).

"O for a heavenly unction! When shall I rise to self-possession and that sublime order which some appear to feel?" (31.3.09).

"I must be careful or I shall lose private prayer and reading." (5.7.09).

"Pierced with a thousand petty thorns." (10.10.09).

Referring to a dinner for the poor. "Mrs. Newman and myself provide for the Sunday School 238 buns and 9 gallons of ale." (23.10.09).

"Afternoon—attempted 20 things; could not succeed in any."

"Dear Eliza much perplexed about taking a third servant. Mem. Contrive to order things better on a Saturday." (17.2.10).

"This is my ordination day, 16 years ago. O Thou great Shepherd of Israel, help me to feed the sheep and lambs that increase under my care." (15.5.10).

"Gathered our large pears. One of them weighed $\frac{3}{4}$ lb." (20.10.10).

"Very unsettled . . . read a great deal to little profit . . . flitted from thing to thing." (27.7.11).

"I am in danger of being distressed by an endless variety of pursuits." (21.3.12)..

"Knew not what to do with myself. Alas I have no self-sufficiency; I cannot make myself happy. 'All my springs are in Thee.' Attempted to pray; attempted to read; could not bring my mind to writing; revised and burnt old sermons; preserved a few. O my God undertake for me!" (23.6.12).

"From committee to committee all day long." (18.8.12).

"This week my study has been my delight . . . but my poor body hardly keeps pace with my spirit. Two things to be lamented. My prayers have been too languid. My study of the scriptures has been almost entirely official." (19.9.12).

Advice given to a younger minister. "I recommended to him:—

1. A common-place book.
2. A waste-book for hints of reflection, conversation, reading, etc.
3. An experience book for the state of his own soul, progress in study, etc.
4. A sermon book for texts and sermons in different states of forwardness.
5. An account book including income and expenditure." (25.12.12).

"Have I not too much neglected prayer and private meditation

on the scriptures? Do I not too generally read for others rather than for myself?" (14.8.13).

"Heavy laden with the business of the house. Long discussion on the propriety of wearing a black gown in public ministrations." (25.8.13).

"I have taken pains today to settle my notions on the personality of the Deity." (23.10.13).

"I would not change my pulpit for any throne in Europe." (29.5.14).

"Sent a barrowful of cabbages and lettuces to the penitentiary." (11.7.14).

He had hard things to say about his own preaching and he brought a scarcely less critical mind to the preaching of other men. He was generous in praise and scathing where there was any hint of arrogance or slackness. One can guess how he must have treated his students in sermon class! A list of comments must suffice.

"A pious soliloquy. Would have done well in a good man's closet."

"Stephens addressed the pastor and people—outrè, waspish, coarse, low." Another sermon by the same man was "very puerile."

Other sermons were described as "a shocking perversion of scripture"; "remarkably superficial"; "a very neat sermon but was stiff and cold"; "a few flippant flourishes . . . more puerile than I expected"; "most ludicrous affair". Most damning of all perhaps, "Ward gave the charge or should have done so."

"Very pathetic; sweet simplicity, but it was the simplicity of a great mind."

"Bryant on the plagues of Egypt, very learned, curious, amusing, instructive; throws great light on the holy oracles."

"Cheered and charmed me. Simplicity, favour, solemnity, self-possession; sweetness of manner surprised me. At 3 o'clock it must be a sermon of no common merit that could engage so strongly our attention just after dinner."

"I sat next to Philips. He says Mr. Hall spends half the day in prayer; that he lives in the spirit of supplication; that as he uses his voice, they heard him completely." (6.6.11).

Of Hutchings at Eagle Street. "Very brilliant, but it was the brilliancy of lightning amidst volumes of smoke and peals of thunder."

There are passages of interest to the Baptist historian. A few entries speak of the still youthful missionary enterprise in India. The birth pangs of a new Baptist periodical are hinted at.

"Coffee-House; large company. Andrew Fuller came in with good tidings from India; very reviving. He says Abraham Booth was the first Counsellor in our denomination, now John Sutcliff."

He told us many things concerning Robert Hall; very pleasing; that he has given up his duality notion with reference to the divine nature that he is no longer hostile to the doctrine of total depravity. Once he quarrelled with Fuller on this. 'Sir, you blackguard human nature.' 'Sir,' replied Fuller, 'Don't you blackguard me'." (30.8.08).

"Prospectus of a new Baptist magazine handed round." (20.10.08).

"At coffee-house, a violent altercation between Dr. R(ippon) and Gutteridge concerning the new Baptist magazine." (1.11.08).

"Burditt and Button selling away the new Baptist magazine; never saw such a demand for a new publication." (31.12.08).

"Discussion of the magazine renewed; Gutteridge is very sore still." (10.1.09).

"Mission meeting at the Dutch Church. Mr. Fuller preached on Romans 1 . . . Dr. Ryland on Isaiah . . . Dinner meeting very large. This has been a glorious day." "Meeting at Carter Lane to form a Union. Hinton's address very pretty. Dr. Ryland preached for our Institution at 12 at Devonshire Square . . . I never saw two such days in London before." (24, 25.6.12).

"News of a dreadful fire in the Mission House at Serampore." (14.9.12).

"At 11 went with Fuller, Gutteridge and Burls to see Lord Liverpool on the question of toleration in India. I never was more struck with 'the human face divine' He said but little." (12.3.13).

And there is the wider background. Newman records a heat-wave in 1808 and an eclipse of the sun the following year. In 1811 a spell of sultry weather leads him to wonder if it could be due to the comet that had appeared recently. He shares in the typical non-conformist respect for the Hanoverian monarchy which had brought them considerable freedom after the restrictive measures of the Stuarts. But even the loyal Newman could not ignore the scandalous behaviour of the King's sons. He would have quarrelled with Shelley's description of George III—"An old, mad, blind, despised and dying king" (Sonnet: England in 1819) but might have given grudging agreement to his words about the Prince Regent and his brothers—"Princes, the dregs of their dull race . . ." In other passages he notes the assassination of Perceval, the apprehension of a notorious murderer, a disastrous fire at Covent Garden. And in the second group of quotations given below he traces the events of the Peninsular War.

20.2.09. Mrs. Clarke's examination occupies the House of Commons. The Duke of York appears in a most disgraceful light.

25.10.09. Grand National Jubilee. This day the King enters into the fiftieth year of his reign. Henry III died in the fifty-seventh—Edward III in the fifty-first year—beside those two instances

there is no other since Egbert our first Saxon king almost 1,000 years ago. Fine beautiful morning. Preached from *Psalm 72: 1*. "Give the King thy judgements, etc." At the new school room distributed buns and ale to 279 Sunday School children.

28.6.11. Jackson conveyed us to Windsor. At 7 p.m. saw the King on the Terrace. We were much affected with the sight of our venerable and beloved sovereign, now blind, walking up and down cheerfully, conducted by two of his daughters." (Next day). Went to morning worship with the King in his domestic chapel. He appears to be truly devout. (On the 30th). Went to morning worship with the King; saw him ride out again. Afternoon, returned home. In the coach was a lady who, many years ago, kept the King's dairy at Windsor. She related some anecdotes of the King that were very affecting; his reading the Olney hymns, "How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds," etc.

25.10.10. Jubilee Day. Our King has completed the fiftieth year of his reign. Such a day I shall never see again; perhaps no man ever will in this country.

18.3.13 Most scandalous exposure of the separation between the Prince and Princess of Wales.

The War

9.11.08. Most dreadful expectation of Bonaparte's fury in Spain. He has threatened to crown his brother in Madrid before Christmas.

28.1.09. Read the account of Sir John Moore's death at Corunna.

8.6.08. News of Bonaparte's defeat near Vienna.

14.8.09. All the European continent has been on fire. Every country has been recently engaged in war and (except perhaps Russia) has been the seat of war. How wonderful is the exemption of this island! Holland is now distressed by an expedition. If (as Mr. Booth used to say) there are more godly people in Holland than in England, allowing for the difference in extent and population, how alarming to us. We are not surprised that God should visit the Catholic countries. Oh! may Britain hear the warning voice!

27.10.10. Great anxiety about Lord Wellington. The fate of Portugal, perhaps of Spain, of Europe depends on a general battle . . . May our brave army be preserved. Are there not some pious men in it praying day and night?

23.12.10. The French are retreating from Moscow, grievously harassed by the Russians.

5.7.13. Illuminations for Lord Wellington's victory at Vittoria.

10.7.13. Read at the Ship, Canning's brilliant speech of thanks to Lord Wellington.

24.11.13. Guns fired twice in one day for a victory of Wellington in France and for the re-taking of Dresden.

19.3.14. Great anxiety about Paris, whether the allies will reach it; whether peace will be made with Bonaparte or not; whether the allies will encourage the Bourbons or not.

9.4.14. Revolution in Paris.

10.4.14. News of Bonaparte's dethronement, almost overwhelming. Afternoon, read Daniel 5, "They deposed him from his kingly throne and took his glory from him."

28.7.14. Met the deputation at 1. Gutteridge and Meyer lent their coaches. About 20 of us went to Carlton House with an address of congratulation on the peace. Lord Sidmouth was very remarkably attentive to us. The Prince received us very graciously; we kissed his hand. The Duke of Kent and several of his brothers stood by; the Prince looked ill. I think we shall not see him again unless we have another address soon. I was struck by the splendour and magnificence of the rooms, exceeding by far everything I had ever seen. The day was fine and the levée was exceedingly thronged. The Bishop of Exeter sneered and expressed his surprise that we did not appear in Court dress. He seemed to despise us because we had not on the "Wedding garment." We afterwards dined together at the New London and Dr. Rippon (who read the address in a very tender manner much impressed with the presence of the Prince) presided with much good humour. No sleep that night.

But the passages of most interest in Dr. Newman's diary to Baptists are those which relate to the founding of the Stepney Academy. These are given here in chronological order with the minimum of comment.

23.11.08. Revolving in my mind the necessity and importance of a Baptist Academy in London.

25.11.08. Wrote to Sutcliff . . . to Miss Tomkins on the subject of the Academy.

23.2.09. Mr. Gutteridge stated that we might have an Academy, if applications were made. We could now provide for fourteen students.

13.12.09. Gutteridge asked me if I would take charge of our Academy if they can get the premises at Stepney—of which he had the terms in his pocket.

29.12.09. Committee of the Education Society. Mr. Gutteridge reported that Mr. William Taylor had made a present of £3,600 for purchasing premises at Stepney Green . . . for our new Academy. Walked home in silent, sweet meditation.

2.1.10. Gutteridge reported to the Education Society the donation of Mr. Taylor. Agreed to unite his object with ours.

20.3.10. Kinghorn proposed for a tutor . . . Some unknown

friend has sent a £500 bank note to Tim. Thomas for the Academy. (Note in margin—This was Miss Tomkins!)

24.4.10. Very judicious letter from Mr. Kinghorn opening his heart.

5.6.10. Breakfast with Mr. Dore. He told me I must take the charge at Stepney. I told him I had two grand objections; one is, I have not body enough; the other I have not mind enough.

17.6.10. Relieved by hearing that Kinghorn is likely to come to Stepney. Dore proposed me last Tuesday.

24.7.10. How much were we surprised to hear a letter from Mr. Kinghorn stating that he declined coming to Stepney.

7.8.10. Fuller said my sermon was the best he had ever heard; that he thought the denomination would look to me in confidence at Stepney. Sutcliffe said he would come all the way from Olney to vote for my election if he had a vote. Is it possible that I stand so high in the estimation of my brethren and fathers?

24.8.10. This afternoon and evening my thoughts have been running over Stepney Green. O my heavenly Father! suffer not my fancy to prevail over my reason; suffer me not to disgrace my profession by any unworthy conduct; suffer not a word to escape that may dishonour thee; suffer not my thoughts to sin!

4.9.10. If the Committee should press it, I should find it the greatest trial I ever had, that I felt many objections.

1. As to myself, I cannot persuade myself that I am competent.
2. I fear that the removal might affect Mrs. Newman's comfort.
3. I feel with regard to the Church that I should become a merely nominal pastor. I am but little better now and I cannot bear the thought of giving up a people so long and so justly endeared to me.

4. With regard to the school . . . must I make a sacrifice of all the pecuniary advantages of my present situation?

5. If I fail I fear I shall not be able to make a good retreat. They told me they had opened the matter to the committee and that it was probable that I should receive a very cordial and unanimous invitation.

19.9.10. Letter from Timothy Thomas advises me to resign every thought of the Academy on account of the discordance of the committee. I feel relieved for myself but more burdened than before on account of the Institution. I had fondly hoped that it would have united all hearts and all hands. A dark cloud hangs over us as a body.

20.9.10. Dore told me that Cox was the person now in view.

16.10.10. Timothy Thomas in the committee informed them that he was authorized by me to put an end to the conversation . . . he thinks it a question whether they will not now send me an invitation!

13.11.10. Ivimey told me that Dr. Ryland assured him that he should feel perfect satisfaction if I were chosen to the office of domestic tutor.

27.11.10. Dined with the Thomases. They gave me a copy of the unanimous resolution of the committee.

1.12.10. . . . Dan Taylor; he expressed his high satisfaction in my being invited to Stepney; remarked that it was a great work and that a man must be very conscientious to have peace in it.

24.12.10. The tutors at Homerton told me I need not be alarmed. I feel much relieved. They gave me their book of laws and regulations.

26.12.10. At 11 came Mr. Kinghorn and stayed with us till 3. We entered largely into the business at Stepney; he encourages me to proceed.

8.1.11. At 11 met the committee; read my answer accepting the invitation with more composure than I had expected.

(NOTE.—Visit to Dr. Ryland at Bristol in January 1811.)

22.1.11. The mighty men of Bristol have inspired me with new vigour.

29.1.11. At 12 met the committee. Was called to the presidential chair.

25.3.11. Removed from Bromley to Stepney—wagon and six carts full!

8.4.11. Came John Paul Briscoe, John Vickers and Samuel Jones to live with us. O that their coming may be a blessing. Gave them many directions and cautions . . ., gave them 1 Cor. 2 : 2 for the scheme of a sermon next Saturday.

9.4.11. The bell rang at 6. Business at 7. Lecture on the article and the five declensions; reminded them, however, that my department is theological. Family worship at 8. Met them at 10. Rehearsal; heard them read the first Psalm, parsing the words of the first verse. Dictated a few lines to be written on the slate to see their orthography, etc. They appear very attentive. Left them soon after 11. My soul is concerned for these young men who seem to be pious. O that I may be the instrument of much good to them. Met them at 2 p.m.; examined in the five declensions.

21.4.11. Dr. Ryland and Waters called for an hour. O for wisdom to direct. The Dr. gave us some galling specimens of ill behaviour among the students.

24.8.11. Bartholomew Day. My pupils read each a sermon on "the value of religious liberty."

Four years—theological department.

1st year. Grammatical theology. Grammar and biblical criticism.

2nd year. Historic theology, including all the facts of the Bible.

3rd year. Systematic theology, including evidences and doctrines.

4th year. Pastoral theology, including all that relates to preaching, Church fellowship and Church government.

26.10.11. At 11 my pupils read their sermons—"the supreme authority of the scriptures derived from their inspiration." Poor Jones lost his temper!

4.11.11. At 8 Mr. Fuller gave my pupils a very serious and affectionate lecture from 1 Thess. 2 on the spirit of their office. I could scarcely forbear weeping.

25.11.11. We have 461 churches in the Baptist Magazine list and 72 without pastors. Surely we need more academies.

24.12.11. At the Fund meeting Gutteridge unfolded the will of Mr. Taylor. He has bequeathed a noble legacy to the fund and his name will be held in everlasting remembrance.

13.1.12. This day my pupils have begun to learn Hebrew.

3.3.12. Fund meeting rather cold. Gutteridge made an address, very tender and pathetic. It appears that Mr. Taylor has left £16,000 or £17,000 to this fund. How great was Mr. Booth's influence! How happy that he had no prejudice against "that Institution."

7.11.13. Our Committee requested Brother Cox to lecture in Mathematics, etc. for three months.

27.1.14. My first lecture on the Greek Testament—a new version of Acts 1 with annotations.

In 1821 Newman's health showed signs of a serious decline and he became non-resident colleague to Solomon Young who had been appointed to help him at Stepney in 1814. But this exchange of positions was not very satisfactory and in 1826 Newman resigned completely. He died in 1835, leaving his valuable library to the college and £1,000 to the Baptist Building Fund, Dr. Newman's Loan Fund.

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