



JOSEPH BRYANT ROTHERHAM.

# Reminiscences

Extending over a period of more  
than Seventy Years,

1828-1906.

By

Joseph Bryant Rotherham,

Translator of "The Emphasised Bible,"  
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Compiled, and with Additional Notes by his Son,

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## Foreword.

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IN the concluding chapter of his "Reminiscences" my father says:—

"One thing more. With memory undimmed, and—but for some small infirmities—with health unimpaired; with winsome studies awaiting me; and attached friends and loving relatives ready to welcome any service I can yet render them—there is but one word that offers itself for the close of these 'Reminiscences,' and that is the unromantic word

'UNFINISHED!'"

This was written in 1906, and in order to make the biography as complete as possible I have added some details regarding the remaining years of my father's life, with such additions in other portions of the narrative as seemed likely to be of general interest.

This expansion of my father's "Reminiscences" has involved some research and a good deal of correspondence, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to those whose names are mentioned in the following list and to others whose names may not appear, but to whom my thanks are due.

For the loan of *Harbinger* volumes for the years 1854-1856 I am indebted to Mr. R. W. Black, of London, and for the loan of *Christian Advocate* volumes to Mr. J. Brooker, of Uckfield. Thanks are tendered also to Mr. J. T. Burton, of Liverpool, for the sight of Francis Hill's diary and for some voluminous notes regarding articles written by my father in the above-mentioned magazines.

To Mr. William Crockatt, of Glasgow, I am grateful for some very interesting notes regarding my father's labours in Scotland.

To Mr. Davies, of Wem; Mr. Phillips, of Newtown; Mr. Peter Stephen, of Mollington; Mr. D. Williams, of Crickieth; Mr. Fleming, of Bathgate; Mr. W. Abercrombie, of Beeston; Mr. Robb, of Perth; Mr. Ford, of Bath; Mr. Flisher and Mr. C. Green, of Manchester; Mr. J. Coop and

Mr. F. Coop, of Southport; and Miss Brownlee, of Kirkby, I am under obligation for information kindly supplied.

To Mrs. Batten, of Southport, thanks are due for the loan of a photo of her father, the late Robert Black, of London.

The tribute recently received from Dr. Campbell Morgan (and incorporated in the section of the work in which reference is made to the Westminster Bible School) will be read with much interest, and thanks are tendered to Dr. Morgan for his kindly words of appreciation.

To the writers of the "Tributes" which appear in the Appendix to the work cordial thanks must also be expressed.

Mr. Hesketh, of Messrs. Bradbury, Agnew, and Co., has sent me some valued notes regarding my father's printing office experiences; Mr. Peek, of Catford, has made useful suggestions; and to my friend and colleague, Mr. H. Coleman, I am indebted for kindly help in matters relating to the printing of the work.

To Mr. Albert Brown and the Publishing Committee of the Churches of Christ my acknowledgments are made for kindly co-operation in the printing of the early chapters of the work in the *Christian Advocate*; and this acknowledgment should include also thanks to the printers of the work (Messrs. Hudson and Son, of Birmingham), for care and skill in their part of the undertaking.

It is hoped that this endeavour to give a connected view of a strenuous life, marked by concentration of purpose and, even in extreme old age, by somewhat unusual willingness to learn, may prove of interest to those who knew personally the author of these "Reminiscences," and also to the ever-increasing company of Bible students on both sides of the Atlantic, and in many other parts of the world, who find in my father's printed works stimulus and help in their Biblical studies.

J. G. R.

29 Ardoch Road,  
Catford,  
London.

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# Reminiscences.

## CHAPTER I.—BIRTHPLACE, PARENTAGE, AND EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS.

My birthplace was New Buckenham, Norfolk, a compact little village of about six hundred inhabitants, fifteen miles south-west of the city of Norwich. Here lived my paternal grandfather, Mr. Joseph Rotherham, and my maternal grandfather, Mr. Richard Bryant; the former being a Wesleyan and the latter a Particular Baptist; and here, in 1828, I was born.

My father was born in 1802, and when quite a young man became a Wesleyan Local Preacher: in that capacity rendering excellent service for upwards of forty years. He was an acceptable preacher, who owed something to Matthew Henry's Commentary, Blair's Sermons, and Young's "Night Thoughts"; still more to the thorough preparation of his sermons which he made, notwithstanding onerous business claims. Probably I owe something to his habit of questioning me while I was quite young, on his return from his Sunday preaching appointments, as to the sermons I had heard at home: what were the preacher's texts, how he treated them, and the like. It is impossible for me to say how much more I owe to the nobleness of his life; for he was a man of principle, ready to help in any good cause, and prepared to suffer for righteousness' sake.

I recall his saying at a time of sore trial—

"The darkest day—

Wait till to-morrow—will have passed away!"

My mother was born in 1796. Her piety was of the unobtrusive and practical type, which delighted in doing good to her neighbours. She was accustomed to conduct our devotions at the family altar when my father was from home, and I listen once more to her voice telling me on what proved to be her death-bed of my father's ungratified wish to be spared to bury her; and repeating to me in her blindness (which in all lasted about ten years) those verses of Wesley's:—

“Good Thou art, and good Thou dost,  
 Thy mercies reach to all:  
 Chiefly those who on Thee trust,  
 And for Thy mercy call.  
 New they every morning are,  
 As fathers when their children cry;  
 Us Thou dost in mercy spare,  
 And all our wants supply.”

She died at the age of 84, my father having predeceased her by about three years.

In 1834 my father, mother, and the rest of the family removed from New Buckenham to Feltwell, in the west of Norfolk. I well remember going to our new home—in particular riding in the cart with my father behind his grey mare, across the extensive rabbit-warren stretching about half-way between Thetford and Brandon. Away westward from Feltwell stretched the flat, low-lying Fen, extending to Cambridgeshire, and giving a good view in clear weather of Ely Cathedral, about twelve miles distant. In the Fen my father had the right to cut 12,000 turf a year.

My father and mother being Wesleyans, it is naturally around the small Wesleyan chapel that my religious memories cluster. A leading recollection of life in Feltwell has reference to the Wesleyan Sunday School, which figures brightly in my memory for several reasons: one of the most precious being this—that some of my teachers found a way to my heart by a personal form of appeal to which I was not accustomed in my home, notwithstanding the mighty character-forming influences which abounded in the latter.

Sunday School teachers might take note of this. Some of the children, who could possibly teach you, are just needing that gentle touch of the springs of action which it is your sacred privilege to supply. Do not needlessly expose yourselves to the light opinion of your scholars through your lack of Biblical knowledge lying near your hand; but at the same time remember how rich a reward awaits you, not only from the scholars who are unconsciously waiting for you to lead them to Christ, but from grateful parents also, who, if they never know in this world, will learn some day how you supplied “the missing link” which had been left unforged. It is yours to help to lead, not hurry their lambs into the Saviour’s fold.

## CHAPTER II.—THE ACCESSION OF QUEEN VICTORIA.

*More about the Feltwell Wesleyans—The Prayer Meetings—My first Confession of Christ.*

I recall our village celebrations on occasion of the accession of Queen Victoria. I was but young at the time, and, of course, quite unable to enter into the political elements of the situation. But I well remember how deeply I was impressed by the look on my mother’s face—of immeasurable relief and satisfaction when it was announced that not a certain prince of the royal blood, whose accession would have meant unimaginable evils to the land, but the pure maiden Victoria, would ascend the throne. I also feel anew, as I think of it, the pulsation through the whole community of an intense, harmonious joy; showing itself for once in perfect unity of sentiment; so that for the time we were no longer Churchmen and Dissenters, Whigs and Tories, but simply English people, witnessing the dawn of a new era.

It may seem strange to say so, but our prayer-meetings at the Wesleyan Chapel, Feltwell, left deeper impressions on my mind than any other of our services. I can scarcely tell why; unless it was that several of our men, in society membership, were really gifted in prayer.

Amongst those who regularly took part in the weekly prayer-meetings there was Banham Shackles, a farm bailiff out of the Fen, who, kneeling down on the floor of the pulpit-pew, was accustomed to pray with such fervour that we used to wonder how his knuckles bore the blows which in rapturous unconsciousness they were made to endure; and there was another good man, whose surely recurring phrases were culled from John Bunyan; as when he omitted not to ask that in his dying hour he might be able to say, “Be of good cheer, brother; for I feel the bottom, and it is good.” These were mostly farm-labourers in smock frocks. It abides with me as a fragrant memory to recall how, in their brave battles against the drowsiness inevitable after a week’s outdoor toil, they

would stand upright in their places in chapel sooner than miss any of the sermon. I would sooner stand with them than slumbrously screen myself behind the pillar of a gothic edifice.

From the rank and file of members in Methodist "Societies," with their class leaders, the transition is easy to the "Local Preachers and Exhorters" appearing on the "Circuit Plan"—a position to which none are admitted until after trial and examination had.

When it is remembered that by the aid of a band of, say, thirty local preachers, two circuit ministers would suffice to keep a score of chapels open for two services every Lord's Day, with Sunday School and class-meetings attached, some idea may be formed of the immense debt of gratitude which England and Wales especially owe to Local Preachers—a debt immeasurably enhanced in moral weight when it is remembered that this noble band of Christian workers knew nothing whatever of financial reward. My father, I know, never received more than hospitality to himself and his horse in acknowledgment of two sermons, and a journey of six to four-and-twenty miles, in his own conveyance, on a Sunday, extending to an average of forty Sundays in the year.

Alluding once more to my father in his capacity of Wesleyan local preacher, I should like to add that never elsewhere did I feel so deeply during a "watch-night" service as once in Feltwell, when it fell to my father to officiate. I presume he delivered the customary address, but of that I recollect nothing. What I do remember is the solemnity of the silent moments before the clock struck twelve; and how it seemed like a voice out of the invisible when, at the stroke of midnight, he gave out the startling words:

"The arrow is flown! The moment is gone!  
The millennial year

Rushes on to our view, and eternity's here."

Assuredly we did not critically ask whether the "millennial" year and "eternity" were destined to rush on to our view simultaneously; though we have since deemed it worth enquiring whether the Wesleys had come to that conclusion. What we did in our juvenile way apprehend was the unutterable solemnity of the transition into the unknown.

Well, it was in this atmosphere that I made my first public avowal of decision for Christ. It came about thus. One of our Sunday School teachers, Mr. Hardman Prior, one Lord's Day in 1842, when I was fourteen years of age, tapped me on the shoulder, saying, "Joseph, I have consented to lead a class for young people: will you come?" Now to begin "meeting in class" is the first stepping-stone to membership in the Wesleyan Methodist "Church," then commonly called "Society." To this invitation I readily consented; and, in view of meeting in this "class," I began in earnest—after various earlier futile private beginnings and the burning of my diary of lone juvenile experiences—sought and found peace, through faith and prayer; and was thus able to make a cheerful commencement to the "class meeting" practice of telling my "experience" from week to week. Not long after I began engaging in prayer amongst my "class-meeting" associates, of which fact, I remember, the older members of the "Society" heard with pleasure.

For a while my experience as a young Methodist ran smoothly and happily on; but, after something more than a year, my mind came under a cloud; I can now see, for the simple reason that my "peace" was really based on feeling, and this quite naturally evaporated by the mere force of mental growth, in the course of which the reasoning powers became developed and emotionalism was gradually thrown into abeyance.

The mental darkness into which I entered lasted not less than a year and three-quarters. No praying, no struggling of spirit, no class leader's counsel, no sermon-hearing, could dispel it. Early and late, in business and out of it, on weekdays and Sundays, I sought "the pearl of great price," but found it not.

Of course, I now see that it was all wrong, because so needless. I can further see that it was the result of defective teaching and mistaken guidance. And, let me say it without offence to my pædobaptist friends, nine-tenths of the mischief was caused simply by one error: namely, that I was not in my fourteenth year immersed into Christ on my personal confession of faith in Him. Had that been done, I should

have been brought into covenant relation with the Saviour; by simple faith and intelligence I should have known that the promises were mine, apart from changeful feelings; and—always assuming a dutifully, godly walk—my feet would have been on a rock.

I can now assume an attitude towards the defective teaching which was morally impossible for me to take then. It was not possible for me then to diagnose my own condition or trace my trouble to its true source. My reverence for my Wesleyan teachers, and my profounder reverence for my beloved parents, utterly forbade it. That my Wesleyan leaders were earnest and honest is undoubted, but truth claims that "the weakness of God is stronger than men," and that those who know any divine teaching with assurance are bound to speak it out at all hazards and at all costs.

My deliverance came after nearly two years' bondage. Precisely how it came I am now unable to say. Probably a chief factor in bringing about the welcome transition was nothing more mysterious than improved health.

While yet in my teens, and in membership with the Wesleyan Methodists, I felt that I had received a Divine call to preach the Gospel. This impression I confided to my class leader, Mr. Gunstead. His reply, as I look back on the incident, causes me some amusement. For, amongst us Methodists, "a call to preach" was considered a very solemn thing; and the conviction was general amongst us that if a man had been called to preach at all, why, then, he had been so called from all eternity. Judge, then, of my surprise at the time when Mr. Gunstead replied: "Well, Joseph, if you are not, I have no doubt you will be."

At any rate, my class leader entered sympathetically into the situation, and became my intermediary, through whom I was in due course invited to preach my first sermon at the hamlet of Methwold Hythe, about three miles from my home. I well remember the journey to fulfil this my first appointment, Mr. Gunstead walking on one side of the grassy lane and I on the other, both in reverent silence; I, in all probability, looking over my manuscript once or twice, and filling up the intervals with ejaculatory prayer. It comes to me instinctively,

as the understood thing, that although the sermon was thoroughly prepared and probably fully written out, yet the MS. was allowed to rest in my pocket during delivery. The one thing I am certain of is that *it was not read*. That, in those days, would scarcely have been considered to be "preaching." I well remember my text: "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians iii. 8).

Owing to ill-health, my preaching lingered; but it was probably in 1848 when I filled a number of appointments in the Ipswich Circuit, on one occasion walking out to Hadley, ten miles distant, preaching twice; and returning, still on foot, in time to attend the evening service in the Wesleyan Chapel, Ipswich.



## CHAPTER III.—THE WESLEYAN METHODIST ASSOCIATION.

*Brief stay and examination in Manchester—The Woolwich and Stockton-on-Tees Circuits—Important change of mind on Baptism.*

The year 1848 was made further memorable by the fact that it was in that year that I first met Miss Emma Moore, daughter of Mr. J. G. Moore, of the city of Norwich, who, in 1852, became my wife, and who continued for over thirty years to be to me a true helpmeet.

I left Ipswich for Kettering, and it was while there that I was induced to put myself into communication with the Rev. Robert Eckett, of London, a minister eminent in the Wesleyan Methodist Association.

The result of my visit to London, my stay with the Rev. Robert Eckett, and preaching before him, was that in about May, 1850, I proceeded to Manchester as an assistant to the Rev. Mr. Buckley. In this capacity I appeared in the Association's "Tabernacle" pulpit in Grosvenor Street of that city—a sufficiently trying ordeal for a young man from the country, aged only two-and-twenty.

The one incident connected with this short engagement which calls for record is one which took place in the vestry of Lever Street Chapel, where another young man and I were "examined" as to our fitness for the Connexional ministry. I believe we both acquitted ourselves creditably in our answers to the questions propounded to us, saving that, in one particular, I failed to satisfy the Rev. John Peters, a fine, eloquent, but rather warm-tempered Irish gentleman.

The ground over which the questions of our examiners conducted us was naturally extensive; and it is not to be supposed that we were equally well primed at all points of the theologico-ecclesiastical compass. However, I am not sure that the answer I gave to a question as to the proper "subjects" of Christian Baptism—namely, "Believers and their seed"—did me any discredit, when judged of from the pædobaptist point of view, with Dr. Ralph Wardlaw, of Glasgow, as I now know,



JOSEPH BRYANT ROTHERHAM AND HIS WIFE.  
*Wesleyan Minister 1852. Age 24.*

leading the way, at least among modern theologians. I surmise that my examiners foresaw a practical difficulty to which my answer was likely to conduct me, in the matter of ascertaining, before baptizing a babe, whether its parents really were "believers." Questions being put to me, as to how I would solve this difficulty, and my answers being given, the Rev. John Peters warmly observed: "I'm astonished at your ignorance!" This, of course, stung me to the quick, and made me resolve that, as soon as practicable, I would take good care not again to give occasion for such terms of reproach. In the course of two or three years from that time this resolution was acted upon, with what results the sequel will show.

My first Circuit appointment was to Woolwich and Charlton (1850-1851), where two small chapels were under my care. It was while here that I first read through Milton's "Paradise Lost." From here I once or twice visited the Great Exhibition of 1851; here that I used to have a few "Red Coats" to listen to my preaching; and here that one of our senior brethren seriously advised me not to trouble about the ordinance of Baptism, as it was "a watery subject." It was in the Charlton Chapel that I heard sung and played with a will a fine tune to that grand Wesleyan hymn beginning:—

"How weak the thoughts and vain,  
Of self-deluding men!  
Men who, fixed to earth alone,  
Think their houses shall endure;  
Fondly call their lands their own,  
To their distant heirs secure."

(Cp. Psalm xlix).

My appointment at Stockton-on-Tees (1852-1853) was destined to be eventful. In the first place, it was here I commenced in earnest to learn Greek. I had made futile attempts before, without tutorial assistance. But there came to Stockton from Edinburgh a candidate for the Presbyterian ministry, who had already passed through his classical curriculum, and was now sustaining himself in the capacity of schoolmaster before returning for his "Divinity" course. Besides ordinary school-keeping, he put out circulars offering his services as private tutor of languages, including Greek. I saw my opportunity, embraced it, and applied myself at the very moderate pace of

one hour's instruction per week for the unbegrudged fee of ten shillings per quarter. This arrangement supplied just the needed help and impetus. The direct tutorial assistance was, of course, invaluable. But the impetus also served a most useful purpose. Engaged, as I was, in preaching and pastoral duties all the week long, I often found the precious hour with my teacher drawing near and I myself unprepared. There was nothing for it but to put other duties aside and get ready for my tutor. In this fashion I was permitted to hold on for five months, when circumstances brought the pleasant relation of teacher and taught to a close. In parting, my instructor was pleased to assure me that I had made as much progress in five months as many young men in the University did in two years. I cannot be sufficiently thankful for the encouragement thus given. It inspired me with confidence. Thenceforward I could continue to apply myself without misgiving: could return ever and anon from enforced neglect to my grammar, dictionary, and New Testament with renewed zest and unabated assurance. The moral is: Young men! before giving up in despair, by all means procure tutorial assistance.

The next thing of importance which befel me at Stockton-on-Tees was to find time and books for the fulfilment of my purpose of reading up on the subject of Christian Baptism.

My dear wife, who was a practical and experimental philosopher, had an instinctive apprehension of what the result would be. She, though still a Wesleyan, was, like my mother, the daughter of a Baptist; and those Baptists have a way of counting with confidence on the consequences likely to follow on investigation. Her own mind had, by early training, become prepared ground for the seeds of truth; and as together we studied the Word with new light, her forecast came true—with important results.

The books which fell in my way to begin my schooling on this subject were, first, "Carson on Believers' Immersion," after reading which I said, "If the other book cannot effectually answer this, then I must become a Baptist." The other principal book on the opposite side was by Dr. Halley, of Manchester. I soon found that Halley was no match for Carson. If I am asked whether there were not other influences

conducing to a change of mind, I reply that the only thing I can recall is a conversation with a seaman's wife at Hartlepool, out of which, as it appears to me on reflection, I had not come so triumphantly as I expected, if again the question is put to me whether I am not familiar with Mr. C. H. Spurgeon's practice of handing a New Testament to an enquirer as the best book on Baptism, my answer is, "Perfectly; but I do not think it suits all cases, and am satisfied that it would not have met mine."

The natural force of many New Testament texts and incidents is so blunted by the reiteration of teaching of an opposite kind that in many cases the truth has little chance to gain access to the inquirer's candid judgment. Of this examples could easily be given, if this were the fitting place for the attempt. But my object is to tell my story, and let it speak for itself.

Suffice it to say that I shortly after made up my mind in favour of Believer's Immersion, and was, in 1853, publicly immersed in Stockton by the Baptist minister of that town, being shortly after followed by my wife in rendering that act of obedience to Christ.

But before this event took place an incident occurred in Hartlepool, to which I used to make fortnightly visits. My stay there was nearly ended without a hitch in the smooth flow of public events. There remained the Monday evening service only before my return to Stockton; and I was beginning to felicitate myself that so far no untoward incident had occurred, as I keenly felt that my mind was as yet too doubtful of the issue of the inquiry to render any testing occurrence in public other than most undesirable. However, the unexpected does sometimes happen, and so does the unwelcome.

Until the service that evening had begun there were no signs of the apprehended ordeal which would be precipitated if a babe were brought in to be sprinkled. But just as I was closing my eyes in prayer at the beginning of the meeting there entered the chapel, and came into the pulpit-pew in which I was standing, a mother, daughter, and daughter's child-in-arms. I instinctively guessed the purpose of their advent. Those about me, apprehending no trouble, permitted me to block up

all avenues of information by rapid transitions from one part to another of the introductory service, and so forward into the delivery of my sermon. If, before I began my discourse, the baptismal intent of the visitors was made known to me, I can only infer that I instantly plunged my head into the sands of oblivion by proceeding with my sermon without delay.

My impression is that it was during the singing of the closing hymn, after sermon, that I was privately informed of the presence of a "little babby" to be sprinkled. I tried to make my dilemma understood; but the hymn was ended, and there was no alternative but publicly confront the situation at once. So I told my audience that I had long promised myself a thorough investigation of the subject of Christian Baptism—that, in fact, I was now prosecuting it; that I had come into a state of uncertainty, which forbade my further committing myself until my doubts were settled one way or the other; that they were not to run away and report that I had become a Baptist; but that, though sorry to disoblige, at all events I could not baptize the infant before me.

The scene that followed was indescribable. A deacon remonstrated with me, protesting that, if it did no good, it certainly could do no harm; to which I replied that, if the rite had been to be performed in the name of Brown, Jones, and Robinson (actually using their own names), I could have administered it; but as it must be done in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I could not. I can still see the tall form of a pilot's wife across the chapel, extending her long arms and evidently holding forth to a group around her on the strange sight they had been witnessing. There was a talk of writing to the "President" of the "Annual Assembly," informing him of the facts, and requesting him to send a substitute to take over the charge of the disturbed congregations (for, of course, that in Stockton also was involved by the conduct of the young minister). However, I took time by the forelock, having no by-ends to serve, and myself communicated the facts to our Connexional President.

Another incident occurred at Hartlepool, just about the same time, which, although apparently of a private character, was fraught with public consequences destined to influence the

remainder of my life. On my arrival at Hartlepool one Saturday evening, I entered a bookseller's shop, and while waiting to speak to the principal took up a bound magazine called "The Millennial Harbinger," edited by a Mr. James Wallis, of Nottingham. The book so interested me that I borrowed it, sat up that night as long as a halfpenny candle would enlighten me, and was thereby introduced into a new theological world, chiefly through articles found in that magazine from the pen of a Mr. Alexander Campbell, of Bethany, Virginia, U.S.A., which I found wonderfully fresh and interesting. The volume was duly returned, after many of its contents had been devoured, and their influence unconsciously stored for a future day. Meantime my change of mind on Baptism, mediated mainly by "Carson," passed into action, quite as though I had not seen and read that volume of "The Millennial Harbinger."

My return to Stockton was rapidly followed by the decision on Baptism above chronicled, by my immersion, and by the inevitable dislocation of my domestic arrangements—in fact, by the break-up of my little home. And so was brought on another of the trials of my life.

It was probably at this time that I received from my father a caution not to become one of those who are "given to change." A very natural caution, surely, for a Wesleyan father, under the circumstances, to tender to his son. At the same time it is obvious that those who can renounce the Baptism of their infancy may, not unnaturally, do some other things besides. Virtuous age must ever be honoured; but age cannot hope to continue to the end leading the young. "One generation passeth away, and another cometh," and in the transition there must of necessity be a changing of places. My father's caution was respectfully received, but it could not stay the natural progress of events.