J. C. Ryland as Schoolmaster.

THE best education of the eighteenth century was given by Dissenting ministers. In nearly every country town they were the teachers, often the proprietors of schools. The Church of England had done much with charity schools, but the main work of teaching fell to men like Poynting of Worcester, Fawcett of Brearley Hall, and others whose lives are usually studied from the pastoral side. We may be thankful when materials are available for seeing how they taught the young.

In 1769 John Collett Ryland drew up a list of the boys he had taken as boarders, and he continued it for four years. It shows that apart from day-boys he had had in twenty-five years 345 lads under his care. The list belongs to the trustees of College Lane, who allowed it to be printed in the Northamptonshire Notes and Queries.

Ryland inherited fine traditions of learning. One Riland had been a Fellow of Magdalen, ejected by James II. The branch from which our man descended joined the Baptist church at Hooknorton, which in 1655 sent to Moreton-in-the-Marsh to found the Midland Association. In 1694 John Ryland was transferred thence to Alcester, whence he was sent as delegate in 1712 to the Association at Leominster; eight years later he had passed away. Among his eight children was Joseph, who settled at Lower Ditchford in the parish of Stretton-on-the-Foss; this Foss-way would lead south to Moreton-in-the-Marsh, Stow-on-the-Wold, and Bourton-on-the-Water, places swarming with Baptists. Presumably Joseph was a member of the church formed by members in these places; he certainly married Freelove Collett, who lived at Slaughter, close to Bourton, where John Collett had been pastor jointly with Joshua Head in the days of Charles II. She was descended from Colet, the famous master of St. Paul's school. In October 1723 they had a son, whom they named John Collett Ryland.

After a sprightly boyhood, he was baptized on 2 October 1741 by Benjamin Beddome, pastor at Bourton, who at that time was adding forty members to his church: it had members in a score of parishes, having already established a fine reputation for evangelizing. Beddome was the son of John Beddome, who from 1697 to 1724 conducted a good boarding-school at Henley-in-Arden, where the bell for rising hung long after his removal to Bristol. Benjamin had studied at that city under

Bernard Foskett, and believed strongly in education, sending one son to Edinburgh and Leyden, training another for medicine. He therefore gently guided young Ryland to Foskett's care, the first of six men whom he thus led into the ministry. What Ryland afterwards thought of Foskett we know, and as we know what he thought about most of his own pupils, we think none the worse of Foskett; it would be interesting to know what that tutor thought of this turbulent young scholar.

He supplied at Pershore and was desired as pastor; but it was his fellow-student, John Ash, on whom the church compromised, so obtaining in their midst another renowned boarding-school. He supplied also at Warwick, and after four years' probation, they ordained him in 1750. But he had started his life work before then, prompted by the need of supporting a wife, Elizabeth Frith, a member of that church, whom he married in December 1748.

It was in that year that he took seven boarders. The first was Joshua Head, descendant of the pastor at Bourton; the second was a Yarnold from Bromsgrove. Next year he secured fifteen more, and we perhaps trace boys from Luton, Stow, Coventry, Leicester and Birmingham; one at least afterwards entered the ministry in Essex. In 1750, the year of his ordination, seven more entered, and he had tapped Leominster, Alcester, Tetbury. There was a fine clannish feeling among Baptists, and the Association meetings gave fine opportunities for pushing a school. When in 1751 we see a lad from Northampton, the shadow of a coming event is cast before, while Colletts next year betoken the family connection. Evesham, Nantwich, Westmancote, contributed to his increasing family. The school was conducted in the Rectory, which was far too large for the need of the incumbent, but Ryland's hiring it gravely disturbed some churchmen.

His energy was tremendous, but he could not do everything single-handed, and by 1751 he enlisted the help of Guy Medley. When he was estimating the strength of Baptists in all England, he even put down Medley as his assistant minister; but probably he was really assistant in the school, for the church has no record or tradition of his ministry. It is not surprising that in the school holidays, both midsummer and midwinter, Ryland himself took holiday with James Hervey, rector of Weston Flavel. Nor is it surprising that the church at Warwick did not feel a very warm attachment to their pastor, and that when the thirty members at College Lane, Northampton, appreciated him in 1748 and asked him to remove, it was a very cool letter which dismissed him.

School premises were found in the Horsemarket, at the south corner of Mary Street: there seems to have been a good garden, with a summer-house. It is not clear how many boys Ryland brought with him from Warwick, but in 1760 he had fourteen fresh entries. Also one girl came, conceivably the sister of a boy who started the year before. As co-education was not popular, the demand for a good school where girls might be sent was met by Mrs. Trinder opening a parallel institution. Two years later he made another bold experiment, taking in Othello the negro. The school flourished, as many as thirty entering in 1767, and not only was Ryland's son John employed as assistant, but other ushers also were needed. The discipline was probably Spartan, for Ryland himself rose at four, and spent three hours in study before prayers.

John Ash broke new ground in 1766 with a Grammar, which ran to several editions. Ryland had hitherto written only short pamphlets, but this tempted him to issue "An easy introduction to mechanics, geometry, plane trigonometry, measuring heights and distances, optics, astronomy, &c." Next year he edited Lange's "Easy and pleasant Latin conversations."

Now in 1764 the Baptists in Pennsylvania had secured a charter for a Rhode Island College, and Morgan Edwards, whose course at Bristol had overlapped Ryland's, came back to collect funds. Like a good many new universities, this first Baptist college showed its gratitude by honorary degrees; and in 1769 Ryland was adorned with a A.M. It seems quite possible that the list of scholars was compiled in connection with this honour, that the Public Orator might have some facts whereon to found his speech.

As we look down the list, which unfortunately gives no addresses, we can recognize names from the district of Ryland's people and the Bourton church. Here and there we see boys who may have grown into ministers; Samuel Green, Joseph Hughes, Richard Pain; ministers even from London seem to have trusted him with their sons, Button and MacGowan; while Pewtress, Coles, Lepard, Sandys, Middleditch, Brodie, are suggestive. Guy Medley's son Samuel, after a naval career, found his way also into the Baptist ministry.

Three essays on the Advancement of Learning, and similar topics, appeared at frequent intervals. Then in 1775 came "The Preceptor, or general repository of useful information." This was evidently a popular form of school-book; Mrs. Mangnall's compendium was in use a century later.

In 1773 the record of new entries was dropped, though the book was by no means full. Young Ryland, now twenty years

old, was a fine scholar, being able to read Hebrew before he was six years old. He easily passed from being pupil to being assistant, and struck out a new line by his sermons to the boys. In 1775 Robert Hall of Armsby was advised by Beeby Wallis of Kettering to take his eleven-year-old boy Robert, who has recorded a gruesome conversation between his elders as he cowered by the fire. From Hall's biographer we hear how Ryland was a fair Greek teacher, but capital at mathematics, which he dealt with practically, forming a "living orrery" in the playground.

Once Ryland had tasted the delights of authorship, he could not resist the temptations of the press. Deserting the remunerative field of school-books, he essayed a Body of Divinity, and several volumes oddly named Contemplations, which rambled widely. Despite a list of subscribers that filled twenty-four pages, he seems to have overstrained his resources, and in 1781, when his son was ordained co-pastor, he concentrated his energies on the school, and even so, felt embarrassed. So in 1786 he resigned wholly from Northampton, and removed the school to Enfield near London, where it took a new lease of life.

Being now sixty years old, he confined himself henceforth to the business side, and to the religious instruction. Among his assistants were John Clarke, Joseph Wells, and William Newman; all of them in after days kept up the traditions he implanted. But his own superintendence here was not long, for he passed away in July 1792. Perhaps his son had written to him how fifty days before, a schoolmaster he had baptized in the Nen had quickened the conscience of Fuller; but he could not foresee how, with another schoolmaster from his own Broadmead, the tradition of teaching should be transplanted to India by Carey and Marshman.

It is to be wished that we could have particulars whereby to estimate this kind of work that Dissenters were steadily doing. Their schools were private, family affairs. Sometimes we can with pains get glimpses at William Giles in Chatham, Eccles, Wallasey, Chester; or at Pilkington in Rayleigh. If their stories were set forth and known more widely, people might realise how great is the debt that England owes to the Old Dissent, in the education both of the villager and of the middle class.

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