

A Treasurer and his College.

CHURCHES and societies owe much to the gratuitous service of ordinary members, who are often neglected in telling the story. It is only when some descendant finds a diary, or gives reminiscences, that their great value comes to light. Such an instance is afforded in the life-work of James Smith of Melbourne and Nottingham, 1764-1847. He earned his living as a joiner and cabinet-maker; he gave his money and his thought chiefly to the Academy of the New Connection.

He came of good stock. His father Francis was founder of the churches at Kirkby Woodhouse and Melbourne. When he married Elizabeth Toone in 1753, Abraham Booth was one of the witnesses, and when Francis was chosen pastor at Melbourne seven years later, Booth ordained him. He was a journeyman, and out of his scanty wage, gave eightpence weekly to the church; when a legacy of £5 fell in, that went the same way. So James had a capital start at home.

A few years later, Francis became acquainted with a Yorkshireman of kindred tastes, a stone-mason, Dan Taylor. At a farm called Hurst, in Wadsworth near Hebden Bridge, Taylor was running a day-school; and the friends of Francis Smith helped him by sending about fifteen of their sons to board at Hurst. An arithmetic exercise-book of James when he was twelve years old has been given to our Baptist Historical Society by Mr. B. B. Granger, of Nottingham, a descendant. It testifies to the goodness of the teaching, perhaps in this department by an assistant, Ingham of Heptonstall Slack; also to the neatness and accuracy of the lad.

His brother Robert was called to the ministry at Loughborough, was one of the earliest preachers at Nottingham, and became the first pastor of the church in Stoney Street. Robert had a great baptismal service in the river, just above Trent Bridges, on 30 July, 1786, when thirty-two people confessed their Lord. His joy must have been great in that James was one of these, a declared Christian at the age of twenty-two.

Abraham Booth had gone to London, but his brother Robert Booth still lived at Kirkby Woodhouse, often visiting Nottingham, where his son, also named Robert, built the first hosiery warehouse, and another son Abraham was first to stock boots and shoes ready-made. James Smith would naturally frequent their houses, and there he met their sister Mary, who agreed to cast

in her lot with him. While James' parents had been married in a Baptist chapel without the intervention of any official of Church or State, the law had been altered soon afterwards, owing to the scandals caused by bankrupt clergymen in prison marrying people off-hand. It was now necessary for banns to be called thrice in the parish churches, unless an expensive licence were bought to speed up matters. So James and Mary were wedded at St. Peter's Church in Nottingham on 12 October 1788, she being two years younger than he. Thus they entered on a happy life of twenty-four years together.

At Stoney Street they were good members. James followed in his father's footsteps so far as to be called to the ministry, though he never accepted a pastorate; in our modern phrase, he was an accredited lay preacher. He often had the joy of baptizing his own converts.

In 1795 the church for the first time invited the Association to meet at Nottingham. It proved a turning-point in the career of James Smith. No doubt the official centre was the Swan Inn on Market Hill, but equally without doubt James and Mary were glad to show off their four-year-old Mary to as many guests as they could fit into their little house. There was a fine exhibition of corporate life, church after church reporting. At Melbourne, though father Francis was "now advanced in years and infirmities," yet the place was crowded with hearers, was about to be enlarged, and a branch opened, so that an Assistant minister was working, of whom we shall hear again. Mary however heard a less encouraging account from Kirkby Woodhouse. Nine problems were brought up from the churches, and counsel was given in each.

Next year the question of an Academy to train young ministers came decisively to the front. Even when James was at Taylor's school in Hurst, his master had put on paper his convictions, and with the help of a poor blind brother there, had tried them out. But the New Connection preferred to have united action, and it was at last decided to recognize officially what had been going on privately. Although Nottingham people were hard at work building a new meeting-house, James Smith figures at once in the first list of subscribers for the Academy, with a guinea. No account was published how the capital fund of £360 was raised.

The Academy was run with economy. At the beginning there were three or four young men at a time: the total expense for their board and Taylor's tuition was £161 for the year. Many a college treasurer to-day may be envious of the good old times. Taylor laboured with energy, acquired a place in Red Cow Lane at Mile End, which they worked together. But on this side of

their preparation there was no permanent result. Nottingham sent young Hurst to be trained, and he presently went to revive Louth. It must have been pleasant to read that when Barton, the mother church of the whole Connection, sadly wanted a young, wise, active, consoling Boanerges, then Mr. Cameron of the Academy was mentioned as likely to be suitable.

Nottingham church was flourishing extremely, with many preachers and stations: father Francis had at last gone to his reward. James therefore transferred his energies to Melbourne for a few years, and was sent thence to the Association meetings. Though members were emigrating, there were six or seven stations worked from this mother-church, mostly attended well. Almost at once, three friends at Melbourne were induced to subscribe to the Academy. As Nottingham in turn experienced peculiar trials, James transferred back again for a year or two, then reverted to Melbourne.

In 1807 the Association came again to Nottingham, when the White Lion Inn must have been much edified by its guests. Whether Mary Smith had as many, we may doubt, for the worth of James was becoming well-recognized, and he was chosen one of the three Scribes. With his brother a Moderator, and his old teacher in the Chair, we get a glimpse at the happy family conditions of the whole Connection. His entries as minute secretary ended with the remarkable note:—It having been stated in this Association that Mr. Walworth had unhappily addicted himself to the study of Astrology and other arts connected with it, this Association think it proper and necessary to express their decided disapprobation of anything of that nature.

There was a falling-off of interest in the Academy; it is not clear that any student at all was left that year, and none had entered for two years. The subscribers however were full of faith, and paid up as usual, augmenting the capital fund, while Hinckley sent John Preston, who afterwards developed a gift for starting new causes or resuscitating dying churches. There had long been some misgiving as to the students being trained in London, while most of the churches were Midland:—the committee was strengthened this year by James Smith and other laymen, whose point of view was steadily maintained. A year or two later, when churches wanted pastors, a list of eight eligible men was published, and only two were at the Academy.

With 1811 John Earp settled at Melbourne, and James transferred again to Nottingham. When he threw in all his energies at the great town, we hear at once of a Sunday School rising, to teach 400 children. The church was the largest in the Connection, outshining even Barton, Loughborough and Melbourne; more than twice as large as Dan Taylor's in London, and it was

contemplating a new church at Sheffield. But James Smith was now called to wider service, as Treasurer of the Academy.

This precipitated a change. The subscribers met at Loughborough, and requested Taylor to move into the Midlands. He felt that at seventy-five he was too old to shift, and he resigned, receiving thanks for all he had done. The subscribers then strengthened the position of the Academy, asking the Association as such to be responsible. This was an original idea. Neither in the Church of England, the Presbyterians, the Independents, the Baptists, was there anything like a college managed by the denomination. The familiar plan was to found bursaries or scholarships, tenable at approved universities or with approved tutors; in Baptist circles there were still such students under Ward's Trustees and under the General Baptist Assembly of the Old Connection. Academies at Bristol, Bradford, Abergavenny and Stepney were all governed by private subscribers. The idea of a college belonging to the New Connection seems quite a new departure; and that James Smith was at once appointed Treasurer suggests that he was a foremost advocate of the policy; his brother Robert was Secretary.

Funds did not permit a whole-time tutor, nor does it appear that such an idea was ever mooted. In medicine, the best teaching is from men who practise, and that policy was continued here. Joseph Jarrom was a man ten years younger than James, from the same district, an early student under Taylor, and now for ten years a most successful pastor at Wisbech. It was decided to entrust him with the Academy under its new auspices.

James Smith showed great energy. He got in back subscriptions, and wrote to a member of the Quorndon church who had gone to New York; Richard Raven was now keeper of the prison there, and such experience made him so tender-hearted that he at once became the most liberal supporter, and in later years increased his subscriptions. James appealed to his own relations, and Miss Mary Smith figures for £4: was this really a delicate way of indirect help, in the name of his young daughter?

This reminds us of the sad changes in the family circle. At the end of 1812, Mary his consort died, and he was left with children needing care. Now Maria Earp, a girl eleven years younger than himself, had married Edmund Whitaker, his father's assistant, who also had died in 1808. The rules of the Connection bade members marry in the Lord, and after awhile, James took Maria in the place of Mary; she seems to have mothered the children well, though she had none of her own.

The Academy took first place in the thought of James, and we can imagine his feelings when one young man drew back,

preferring a post as usher at a school, to a training for the ministry. But an Itinerant Fund was already in being, and the two fitted together well; James Smith supported it, and within ten years a score of places had profited, including Apperley Bridge below Rawdon in Yorkshire. We wonder whether he paused to contrast this Connectional system with the spontaneity of his father's days, and to question whether mechanization were altogether good. One great link with the origin was snapped, with the death of Dan Taylor in 1816.

Soon afterwards there was grave trouble in the church at Nottingham, owing to the misconduct of an assistant. There was already a new building on Broad Street, where Mary Smith's body was laid to rest; and the solution was that a third of the members made that their home, with James and his brother Robert, so long the pastor; two-thirds remained at the old home. Once the internal strain was over, each church succeeded in winning new converts.

Then James hit on a new idea, gathering a library for the Academy. He originated a fine method, appealing to the Ladies, quite an anticipation of the Baptist Women's League. It is however brother Robert who is responsible for the wording of the appeal, recalling numerous instances from the Scriptures of piety and benevolence in the fair sex, avowing the ignorance of man respecting the Female character, and appealing to the liberality of the Female lovers of the Lord Jesus Christ in our congregations in the year 1816. He offered to lay out, as far as propriety would admit, each Lady's gift in some distinct work; and he also solicited valuable books as a donation, since these might often be parted with without any inconvenience to the possessor. Quite so, Baptists did not collect first editions, but read eagerly the poems of John and Samuel Deacon and other honoured craftsmen.

Nottingham also took the lead in Foreign Missions. There had been unanswered offers to co-operate with the Particular Baptists, and a sad acknowledgement in 1802 that by themselves they could not do anything worthy. After much talk, Nottingham opened a subscription, induced the Nottingham Conference to urge the idea, so that in 1816 a Society was duly organized. This he duly supported, but continued to concentrate his attention on the Academy.

Constitution, rules, a doubled subscription list, an annual visitation, showed the advantages of his fostering care. In the list of students, we can trace some from the families he learned to know forty years before when at school in Yorkshire. In the list of subscribers, we see his own contribution doubled, and his son beginning with a modest half-guinea, also a handsome

donation of £10 acknowledged, with the hope that it might become an annual subscription.

Presently the capital fund received attention. It had apparently been lent on notes of hand, and as he had long ago been taught at school, the Laws of England did not permit a rate of interest higher than five per cent. He therefore persuaded the committee to call in the notes, and to buy two houses on Hyson Green for £150, with nine at Carrington, re-named Academy Row, for £650. It may have seemed a good stroke, for one debtor had failed, though formerly the mayor, and paid only a dividend; but another was F. Boot: if only the Academy had held on, and become a Foundation member of some Pure Drug Company, what might the income have been? As it was, the income certainly leaped up at first; but the expenses of cottage property are high, and subsequent accounts are curious reading. James Smith junior did well, with all the contracts for repairs, and a commission on the rents collected; but the Academy found the net result not materially greater. However, the trustees included young James, young John Earp of Melbourne, young Richard Ingham of Heptonstall, with Hurst of Nottingham: the ties between all active members were many, and strong.

All this time there had been another James Smith in the Connection, a minister at Thorne, Kirton-in-Lindsey, Sutterton, Tydd St. Giles, Sutton St. James. It has needed some care to keep his traces distinct, and the more so as he too was generous, re-building a meeting-house mainly at his own expense. About this time he retired to Lutton, and the Connection took a sad farewell of him as gone "to a Socinian congregation at Long Sutton." His place was promptly filled by a student from the Academy.

The same year help was given to Joseph Wallis of Loughborough, to go to the university of Glasgow; a policy well justified by results a score of years later. Communications were also opened with the fund started about 1726 with the eager support of Thomas Crosby, which had come to be known as the General Baptist Fund. From that day onwards there were friendly and profitable relations.

In 1829 James Smith suffered a double loss, and laid Maria to rest beside Mary in the Broad Street chapel, where his brother Robert had been buried four months earlier. He continued at the helm of the Academy four years longer, and then retired with the thanks of the Association for his long and gratuitous service. His successor and the auditors presently disclosed that for years he had paid all manner of expenses out of his own pocket.

He lived on to the ripe age of eighty-three, no longer in

Mary Gate, but above the market-place on Tollhouse Hill; which a later age has re-named Derby Road. In 1815 his daughter Mary had married John Granger, and she too passed away in 1873, in the same house. To their children John gave his wife's family names. James Granger imparted much family information to our first treasurer, James Ward, who incorporated it in his fine work centering round another church, Friar Lane. Elizabeth Smith Granger inherited the arithmetic book which prompted this study, and used it as a denominational scrap-book; she survived her mother six years.

The Broad Street chapel was sold in 1903, but from its vault there were reverently removed the coffins of James and Mary and Maria, to the general cemetery. The church in a new home on Arkwright Street inherits the traditions of its first pastor Robert, and his brother James.

His life-work was the Academy. Its later story has been told by W. J. Avery in our first volume. But we are grateful to the family which enables us to see something of its early struggles, from an unusual standpoint. We may now have more sympathy with college treasurers: debts, defaulted notes, light gold, low interest, bad tenants, have their counterparts still in other forms; ability to canvass, to organize, to help select the best men as tutors and students; courage to send away past the tutor to a university—such qualities are needed still. The Ladies Library that he collected became the nucleus of a fine selection, and by the generosity of the trustees, everything of an historical nature has passed to our Society: we must examine the book-plates, and see whether any gift of a Deborah or a Lydia or a Priscilla may yet recall his winsome appeal.

W. T. WHITLEY.