

Some Samuel Pearce Documents

THE story of Samuel Pearce (1766-99), of Birmingham, is one of the great stories connected with the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society. A Plymouth boy, he had dreamed—six years before Carey's famous sermon—of accompanying the first convict ship to Botany Bay and then crossing to New Zealand to evangelise the Maoris. As the young minister of Cannon Street Church, he eagerly joined those in the Midlands who were leading their congregations away from the narrow introverted Calvinism of the mid-eighteenth century. Once the Missionary Society was formed, Pearce became, in the first few years, its most ardent and effective advocate. He longed to join Carey in India, but the committee rejected his pleas—largely, it would seem, because they felt he could be more useful to the cause in this country. Pearce was sought after as pastor in London and in Dublin, but he remained faithful to Birmingham. Then, when only thirty-two years of age, he was stricken with consumption and, after a year of weariness and suffering, passed away—to the lasting grief of all who knew him. There was a rare quality about him. Fuller, with his sledge-hammer personality, Ryland, learned but rather stiff, Sutcliff, cautious in judgment, Carey, with his vision and persistence—all found themselves irresistibly drawn towards one who was younger than any of them. "Seraphic," Ryland called him.

Fuller's *Memoirs* of Pearce appeared in 1800. The book was widely read and several times reprinted. In 1831 it was somewhat enlarged by Pearce's son, William Hopkins Pearce, who had achieved his father's ambition of missionary service in India. Then, more than eighty years later, S. Pearce Carey, who had Pearce as well as Carey blood in his veins, re-told the story of this great-grandfather of his, as a kind of prologue to his more famous and substantial study of Carey. *Samuel Pearce the Baptist Brainerd* went through three editions. It is a glowing book and—with the correction of a few minor errors regarding early B.M.S. affairs, which the author came to know better as he delved deeper into the sources—might well be reprinted.

Recent decades, however, have brought to light a number of new letters and documents. Some years before his death, Dr. Pearce Carey (1862-1953) entrusted me with two bundles of faded and

rather tattered papers, saying that I must one day look through them and decide whether they should be preserved. This I have only now been able to do. To the present article I append a list of the documents, which I am depositing in the Angus Library of Regent's Park College. They are not of great historical importance, though of considerable personal interest. Many of the letters from Samuel Pearce to his wife, and from Sarah Pearce to her sister, are of so intimate a character that to read them, even after the passage of so many years, makes one feel an intruder.

It is obvious that the documents were not in Dr. Pearce Carey's hands when his life of Samuel Pearce was prepared. I think it likely that it was from these papers that he extracted the handful of letters which he printed in the article "Love Letters of Samuel Pearce" (*Baptist Quarterly*, VIII, April, 1936), though the letters there reproduced are not now in these bundles. The only covering is an Eastbourne envelope, bearing the date 11 November, 1916, and the name "Harris." This suggests that they came from a descendant of the Mrs. Harris of Birmingham who was, I believe, Sarah Pearce's sister, Rebecca. To her several of the letters are addressed, including ones from W. H. Pearce and Anna Pearce, who called her "aunt." Presumably, the earlier papers came into her possession on the death of Sarah Pearce in 1804. Two or three of the letters must have been in the hands of Fuller, but probably only two or three of them. He must have had Pearce's important statement of October 8th, 1794, outlining his position vis-a-vis service in India—either this actual document or a fair copy of it.

Pearce Carey states (p. 161) that this document is to be found in Fuller's *Memoirs*. This is not quite accurate. Fuller himself indicates that he had omitted Pearce's reply to the objections that might be urged against his going to India. This is in many ways the most revealing and moving part of the statement. No apology is now needed for reproducing it. Pearce was an extremely tender husband, as well as a devoted pastor. These paragraphs cannot have come easily to his pen.

He has quoted Melvill Horne's remarks that in order to justify a man's undertaking the work of a missionary it is necessary that he be qualified for it, disposed heartily to enter upon it, and be free from such ties as exclude such an engagement.¹ Others, Pearce says, must judge the first requirement. He has himself no doubt about the second. He then continues :

"But the third thing requires more consideration and here alone I hesitate. I have formed three connexions, each of which has its plea.

1. I am at the Head of a little Family. My wife is a pious woman. She says, could she see it her *duty*, she hopes she should not object, but she scarce doubts of its being my duty to stay at home. Now I believe she speaks the honest sentiments of her heart, but then I do

¹ See Melvill Horne, *Letters on Missions*.

also think that she is insensibly biassed by her affection for her friends in Europe. Were some of these in the grave I do not think she would have any powerful objections left but let the reason of her reluctance to go be what it may, I seriously enquire whether *her* thoughts are to be my guide? If in this part of ministerial conduct, then why not in all? Where would such arguing lead but to the subjection of every married Preacher to female caprice—and thus a man of God must relinquish all his own views, however just, and designs, however good, unless like Mahomet he can first make a convert of his cadigha.

Mr. Horne thinks it unlawful to divorce oneself by leaving a wife behind. I respect that excellent man's tenderness for the softer sex, but I cannot reconcile his idea with our Lord's remark (*Luke* xiv. 26) or his promise (*Matt.* xix. 29, *Luke* xviii. 29)—If (saith Christ) a man forsake not *wife*, &c. he cannot be my disciple—and if any man *hath* left *wife* &c. for the gospels' sake, he shall receive more in time and life everlasting.

It is certain that if leaving a wife for Christ's sake be a divorce, it is not only justified by the laws of Christianity, but in certain cases is essential to true discipleship, and what case can be more plain than that in point. If anything will justify divorce of this kind surely it must be the case of a man who cannot prevail on his wife to follow him when he is going on an errand of mercy to his fellow men! And in case she *refuses* to go, the guilt must be at her door for the woman is not the head of the man, but the man of the woman.

Should it therefore appear clear to me in other respects, this I hope would (as I am sure it ought) not prevent my entering on the work, for though I believe few connexions have been marked with such uninterrupted mutual satisfaction as ours, yet I dare not call myself a disciple of Christ if I could not burst every earthly attachment for His sake. But such a trial I have not in prospect. My wife says she will accompany me if I go, though reluctantly, and at times she has owned she herself feels as though she could be willing to take a part in the work, particularly on last Lord's day afternoon whilst I was preaching about "living wholly unto Christ" from *Phil.* i. 21, and I have such confidence sometimes in prayer that the Lord will incline her heart as quite encourages me to hope that she will in a short time have no objection left.

As to a family of children, that I think advantageous. It will make a man feel himself at home, the natives will treat him less like an alien, and his children may prove very serviceable to him when he grows old, as Paul Egede assisted his father in Greenland. 2. It has pleased God to make me useful in obtaining pecuniary support for the missionaries already there. Should I desert this post? I think, first, that the mission is now become so popular as to need very little of my help, and secondly, if it did need human help, he that inclined my heart to make application for money and gave me favour in the eyes of so many persons can easily raise up a more active and accessible and successful person than I am, for hath he brought to the birth and will he not give strength to bring forth? 3. My chief difficulty lies with my church in Birmingham. Here it is urged:

1. You have been very useful in England. Why should you risk a certainty for an uncertainty? I reply:

1. My *future* usefulness *here* is as great an uncertainty as it is abroad.

2. I ask, Is *uselessness* at home a necessary qualification for usefulness abroad? Mr. Horne, I think judiciously, observes "That from what a man has done in the ministry in England

he may form some guess of what he is likely to do abroad." If so, the argument returns on the objector and the more useful the man is in bringing souls to God in England, the greater his encouragement to make an effort for the spread of truth and holiness in a foreign clime.

2. It is objected The Church has no one to look to when you are gone. It will certainly fall to pieces. I answer:
 1. There's ground for encouragement from a recent fact. What prospect had the church at Leicester when brother Carey left it? They knew of no minister at liberty, yet they cheerfully acquiesced when God inclined his heart to visit Bengal, and the great Head of the Church has abundantly smiled upon them since in giving them a suitable minister and making considerable additions to their number.

I reply:

2. That were even the congregation to be dispersed, I do not think the cause should be given up abroad, because the Gospel is preached in so many places at Birmingham that all who are disposed have opportunity to hear it, while in Hindostan millions are perishing for want of having an opportunity of learning the Word of Life, so that the prospect of doing good abroad is greater than of occasioning evil at home supposing even the worst to take place. And indeed every objection which can be urged against my removal from Birmingham might have been with equal force against Paul's leaving Antioch and Ephesus, yet he forbade their remonstrances and chode their unbelief and reluctance to part with him, saying, Why mean ye to weep and break my heart? I am willing not only to be bound but to die for the Lord Jesus."

The completion of this document is the most important find among these papers, but a few quotations may be given from some of the letters. Apart from two brief notes to Samuel Pearce from his half-sister, Anna Maria, the earliest of these letters was written from Alcester the week of his marriage to Sarah, who was daughter of Joshua Hopkins, a grocer, and grand-daughter of Dr. John Ash, of Pershore, a well-known Baptist minister of the eighteenth century.

"Wednesday," writes E. Hopkins (her stepmother?) to Sarah's sister, Rebecca, then at Bridgnorth, "we attended your dear sister and Mr. P. to the altar of Hymen and completed their present felicity. . . . We met before eight, Mr. Rooker attended in due time, and after drinking a cup of chocolate proceeded to church as little noticed as could be wished. The important ceremony ended, we returned to breakfast and about half past 10 set out for Mosely. Your dear Father and myself, truly happy in the pleasing prospect of the future felicity of the young people, went to the Portway and, after partaking of cake and negus, with our best wishes took our leave and returned to dinner. Your brother and cousin Joshua accompanied them to Mosely, where our common friends Mr. and Mrs. Harwood received them with every mark of affectionate friendship, and about 4 o'clock attended them to their destined habitation in Paul's Yard."

John Harwood was a generous Cannon Street deacon, whose house in Mosely, then a village, was frequently used for services.

Four months later, in July, 1791, the same correspondent had sad news to send about the affairs of the Harwoods. They had suffered in the mob violence in Birmingham and neighbourhood, now usually known as the "Priestly Riots," from the name of the most notable victim. Samuel and Sarah Pearce were then on a visit to Plymouth. Their house and possessions had also been in danger. E. Hopkins writes to them :

"We did not hear till the alarm was nearly over that your house had been in the least danger, so that it was not in our power to devise means for the security of your property, but we have been informed that Mr. Porter and some other friends were so kind as to take every necessary precaution to remove what was thought proper of your furniture and interfered to preserve the house from the cruel depredations which threatened its destruction. You may now make yourselves quite easy respecting it as the tumult is appeased and every exertion made for the future peace and security of the town and its environs. . . . Our dear friend Mr. Harwood has suffered much. . . . They were obliged to quit their habitation and leave it to the merciless rage of an incensed and cruel mob who endeavoured to make the desolation more terrible, but by the exertions of the servants they were prevented from destroying the barn, stable and ricks of hay to which they set fire several times. . . . It is almost impossible for imagination to picture a scene so awful and distressing as that in which our good friends were involved last Sabbath day instead of going as usual to the sanctuary of God to worship Him. . . . They were witness to the destruction of their house and property by the devouring flames. They left it on Saturday and went to Miss Turner's, but were alarmed very early on Sunday morning when they removed all the furniture they could, but I fear they will find much of it wanting. . . . Our good friends with the three little girls set out for Bridgnorth after sending the two little boys to the school they intended them to go to after the holidays. . . . We were alarmed Sabbath day evening with various reports of their coming hither and threatening to burn the Presbyterian meeting-house and Mr. Cheston's, but happily their designs (if they had such) were prevented."

There is also special interest in the group of letters covering Pearce's lengthy visit to London in the late summer of 1795. He was primarily concerned with getting Grigg and Rodway off to Sierra Leone, but was also able to attend some of the gatherings which marked the founding of the London Missionary Society.

"I preached yesterday morning in a Methodist chapel," Pearce writes to his wife on September 28th, 1795; "in the afternoon to a mixed communion church and in the evening for Dan Taylor, the champion of the General Baptists. I rejoice to find and *feel* that Christians of different names agree in the essentials of our blessed Religion . . . a Religion whose Author and whose spirit is love. There have been six sermons preached in town at the institution of the Independent Mission Society. I attended on three. The rest though I longed to hear I could not through the affairs of the mission enjoy. It was a most glorious time. Between 2 and 300 ministers of various denominations were present. At the last meeting, Mr. Bogue, of Gosport, looked round the place and said: 'We are come to the *Funeral of Bigotry*. I pray God it may be buried deep and never rise any more.' You, my love, will join me in a hearty Amen to so evangelical a wish."

On a visit to London two years later, Pearce visited William Winterbotham, the Plymouth minister, who had been imprisoned in Newgate for a sermon wishing success to the French Revolution. The 1796 letters from Dublin throw useful light on the Baptist situation there.

The letters of 1799 make sad reading. They are the record of the dying man's progress from Birmingham via Bristol to Plymouth, to and from the village of Tamerton, where he had spent much of his boyhood, then back to Birmingham. These faded papers fill in and correct the details of those months of alternating hopes and fears, of which Fuller and Pearce Carey provide the outline. On one corner of his first letter from Bristol, Pearce wrote :

"I borrowed a shilling of Mr. Showell last Lord's day to give to a poor woman. Don't forget to pay him again."

The Harwoods accompanied the sick man to Plymouth. Sarah Pearce, with the children—Louisa, William, Anna, Howard and baby Samuel—went to her relations in Alcester, but the letter of May 17th is endorsed in her hand : "The last I received. Having not patience any longer, I set off for Plymouth." The children were left with various friends in Birmingham, but after a few days—smallpox being prevalent—Rebecca Hopkins carried the baby back to Alcester. Sarah Pearce was a brave as well as a devoted woman, but her anxieties cannot have been much eased when, after the return of her husband and herself through Bristol, Dr. Ryland wrote that it was the will of Christ

"that those whom the Father hath given Him should be with Him where He is to behold His glory, and *we* must not complain if He will confer that blessedness on you sooner than we expected."

To add to Sarah Pearce's troubles, Anna developed whooping-cough and it was necessary to leave her loved baby Samuel with his aunt in Alcester.

A long consolatory letter to Mrs. Pearce from John Newton shows how widely the young Birmingham preacher was mourned. Letters from his father, William Pearce, the Plymouth goldsmith, show what had to be done in those days when there was no central denominational or national provision for widows and orphans. The Canon Street church paid Sarah Pearce her husband's salary for one year after his death. William Pearce wrote to his daughter-in-law :

"We are much obliged to him (William Winterbotham) and dear Mr. Gibbs for their kind exertions on your behalf, who have been among friends as well out of the church as in it and have with what they generously do themselves promised subscriptions for upwards of £60—and I am told (for I do not know it for certain) that Mr. Birt will remit it, if he has not done it already, near if not full £100. If other churches who have had a greater share of your dear deceased husband's labours will equally exert themselves, I flatter myself his dear widow and children will be comfortably provided for."

But within a few months the baby Samuel died and Sarah Pearce survived her husband less than five years. The eldest child, Louisa, died when she was nineteen. William Hopkins Pearce (1794-1840), after a boyhood spent in Collingham and an apprenticeship at the Clarendon Press, went to India as a printer, but was only forty-six years old when he succumbed to cholera. Anna, who went to India as a teacher and there married Jonathan Carey (1794-1874), died at the early age of thirty-five. These were the kind of dark shadows that rested over many families in the nineteenth century. Yet by way of Anna something of the ardour and devotion of her father passed over to her own child, Jonathan Pearce Carey (1827-91), and thence to his far more numerous progeny.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

LETTERS

<i>No.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Writer</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Correspondent</i>	<i>Destination</i>
1.	1787? - - -	Anna Maria Pearce	Tamerton	Samuel Pearce	Bristol College
2.	1789? - - -	do.	do.	do.	Birmingham
3.	7.II.1791 - - -	E. Hopkins	Alcester	Rebecca Hopkins	Bridgnorth
4.	21.VII.1791 - - -	do.	do.	Sarah Pearce	Plymouth
5.	1791 - - -	Samuel Pearce	Birmingham	do.	do.
6.	2.XII.1791 - - -	do.	do.	do.	do.
7.	11.VII.1792 - - -	do.	Usk	do.	do.
8.	23.VIII.1792 - - -	do.	Northampton	do.	Birmingham
9.	11.III.1793 - - -	do.	Bristol	do.	do.
10.	1793 - - -	do.	Birmingham	Rebecca Hopkins	Alcester
11.	14.VI.1793 - - -	do.	do.	Sarah Pearce	Bridgnorth
12.	5.VIII.1793 - - -	do.	Uley	do.	Birmingham
13.	1794 - - -	do.	Plymouth	do.	Alcester
14.	13.XII.1794 - - -	do.	Northampton	do.	
15.	25.XII.1794 - - -	do.	Leicester	do.	Birmingham
16.	1795 - - -	do.	London	do.	do.
17.	31.VIII.1795 - - -	do.	do.	do.	do.
18.	7.IX.1795 - - -	do.	do.	do.	do.
19.	28.IX.1795 - - -	do.	do.	do.	do.
20.	4.VI.1796 - - -	do.	Dublin	do.	Alcester
21.	24.VI.1796 - - -	do.	do.	do.	do.
22.	1796 - - -	do.	Northampton	do.	Birmingham
23.	1797 - - -	do.	London	do.	do.
24.	23.VIII.1797 - - -	John Stephenson	do.	Samuel Pearce	London
25.	3.IX.1797 - - -	Samuel Pearce	Northampton	Sarah Pearce	Birmingham
26.	29.I.1798 - - -	do.	Portsmouth	do.	do.
27.	II.1798 - - -	do.	do.	do.	do.
28.	21.II.1798 - - -	E. Hopkins	? Alcester	Samuel Pearce	do.
29.	3.III.1798 - - -	Samuel Pearce	Birmingham	Rebecca Hopkins	Alcester.
30.	2.IV.1799 - - -	do.	Bristol	Sarah Pearce	Birmingham
31.	20.IV.1799 - - -	do.	Plymouth	do.	Alcester.
32.	24.IV.1799 - - -	do.	do.	do.	do.
33.	3.V.1799 - - -	do.	Tamerton	do.	do.

No.	Date	Writer	Place	Correspondent	Destination
34.	10.V.1799	- - Samuel Pearce	Plymouth	Sarah Pearce	Birmingham
35.	17.V.1799	- - do.	do.	do.	Alcester
36.	6.VI.1799	- - Mrs. S. King	Edgbaston	do.	Plymouth
37.	17.VI.1799	- - Sarah Pearce	Tamerton	Rebecca Hopkins	Alcester.
38.	16.VII.1799	- - John Ryland	Bristol	Samuel Pearce	Birmingham
39.	1799	- - Sarah Pearce	Birmingham	Rebecca Hopkins	Alcester
40.	- - -	- - do.	do.	do.	do.
41.	18.IX.1799	- - William Pearce	Plymouth	Sarah Pearce	Birmingham
42.	4.XI.1799	- - John Newton	London	do.	do.
43.	XII.1799	- - William Pearce	Cowes	do.	do.
44.	12.I.1800	- - do.	Plymouth	do.	do.
45.	29.III.1800	- - Sarah Pearce	Birmingham	Mrs. Harris	Alcester
46.	8.VI.1800	- - William Pearce	Plymouth	Sarah Pearce	Birmingham
47.	2.VII.1800	- - do.	Tamerton	Mrs. Hopkins, Sen.	Alcester
48.	11.IX.1800	- - John Ryland	Bristol	Sarah Pearce	Birmingham
49.	23.XI.1800	- - R. Franklin	- - -	do.	do.
50.	8.XII.1802	- - Benjamin Cave	Leicester	do.	do.
51.	17.IV.1806	- - Anna Pearce	Worcester	Mrs. Harris	do.
52.	18.IV.1807	- - do.	- - -	do.	do.
53.	11.VIII.1813	- - William Hopkins Pearce	Oxford	do.	do.
54.	n.d.	- - Samuel Pearce	Birmingham	Sarah Pearce	Alcester
55.	n.d.	- - do.	- - -	do.	Sheffnall
56.	n.d.	- - Sarah Pearce	Birmingham	Rebecca Hopkins	Alcester

PAPERS, SERMON NOTES, ETC.

57. Draft Statement by Samuel Pearce re service in India, 8.X.1794.
58. Notes of 68 Sermons on *Hebrews* by Samuel Pearce.
59. Notes on Sermons on *John ix. 27* and *xiv. 27*.
60. Verses "Hosanna to the Churches' Head."
61. Closing words of Samuel Pearce, 1799; Notes by Sarah Pearce.
62. Copy of Fuller's *Conversations in Heaven, No. 1, Mr. Pearce and Mr. Grant.*