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William Hawkins, 1790-1853

IN THE "Wilkin Papers", a collection of letters belonging to St. Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, and deposited with the Norfolk Record Office,¹ are a number of letters written by William Hawkins to Joseph Kinghorn. Those written between 1814 and 1816 describe his attempts—ultimately successful—to settle as pastor of a church, later ones mainly relate to his difficulties in effecting changes in his sphere of ministry. These letters give a view of the denominational situation as he saw it in several parts of the country and illustrate the peculiar difficulties of a Baptist minister wishing for a move in the early years of the nineteenth century.

William was a son of Thomas and Martha Hawkins, born over his father's grocery shop at the corner of Queen's Street and Tombland in Norwich, opposite the gate of the Cathedral Close. The Hawkins family were intimate with Joseph Kinghorn from the time of his coming to Norwich in 1789 to his death in 1832 when his body was laid to rest in a vault they had provided under the vestibule of St. Mary's. William in due course became Kinghorn's pupil, and when he grew up aspired to follow the vocation of his minister rather than the respectable and lucrative trade of his father. He was baptized at St. Mary's in October 1808 and in the following year went to Edinburgh to study with a bursary from Dr. Ward's Trust. We learn from the registers of Edinburgh University that he attended classes in Literature, Philosophy, Greek and Chemistry and was admitted to the degree of Master of Arts in May 1813.

Dr. Ward's Trust considerably provided for the support of its students for a year after the completion of their studies to allow them time to find posts. So William Hawkins set about seeking a pastorate. He preached at Lynn and Godmanchester. He went to London and saw William Gutteridge, the Treasurer of Stepney Academy, who having failed to secure Kinghorn as Principal was now anxious to engage his pupil as Tutor. Mr. Gutteridge, Hawkins said, behaved in the handsomest manner and when he learned that Hawkins intended preaching at Plymouth said he should defer proceeding till he heard whether or not he was likely to settle there. The Stepney appointment did not appeal. Hawkins wrote from Plymouth on 4th August 1814: "I should prefer going anywhere rather than to Stepney. . . . Preaching the gospel is much more congenial to my feelings than teaching Latin and Greek". At Plymouth he was preaching in a large building to a small congregation, chiefly middle class, with scarcely any poor, "which is rather unusual". Many of them were intelligent and friendly people; Mr. Saunders, the principal person in the place, was very amiable and not at all overbearing. Although

Hawkins had almost too much to do with three Sunday sermons, an address at the Monday Prayer Meeting and a weekly lecture on Tuesdays he liked the place and hoped to settle there. His hopes were disappointed. At the end of September he wrote that all idea of settling at Plymouth was done away. The church had given an invitation to Mr. Morgan, a preacher above the common run, with whom he could not hope to compete. Joseph Hughes, who had helped in getting his bursary from Dr. Ward's Trust, had visited Plymouth for the Bible Society meetings. He was persuaded that Hughes could now have helped him to an recommendation to some vacant pulpit, but no, "he is so dazzled by the great folks with whom he is concerned, that he cannot see the little ones". William Winterbotham had also been at Plymouth and was more helpful, a friendly open-hearted man who told him of vacancies at Cheltenham and Trowbridge. Despite all this he was still preaching at Plymouth at the end of November when he wrote: "I am once more out at sea. I leave Plymouth at the close of the year". The congregation had trebled since he came but he conjectured that the church still hoped to attract Mr. Morgan and felt his continuance an obstacle. After he had left Plymouth he reflected that the people were fickle and fastidious. Their taste had, he thought, been depraved by the influence of Dr. Hawker,² the High Calvinist Vicar of Charles Church, Plymouth, who had preached soothing sermons dwelling exclusively on the promises of God to the church. Hawker's command of language was wonderful, his voice musical. No harsh unpalatable truths were dispensed by him, no rousing exhortations to duty, repentance or faith, no address to sinners save a prayer that the Holy Ghost would take pity on them and renovate their minds. As Winterbotham had said, "It will do a man good to be at Plymouth for a while that he may afterwards value more highly the ease and comfort of some other station".

Where was Hawkins to go now? Penzance was vacant—"but then that would be a sort of banishment from everything". At Olney in Buckinghamshire John Sutcliff had recently died. Would Kinghorn please write to Fuller and make enquiries about Olney for him? To Olney he went, writing from there on 15th January 1815:

"The town is neat and clean. It consists of a long street in which are many good houses. The principal people of the town are dissenters—the most respectable and most wealthy. I have a larger congregation than at Plymouth but the house is not so elegant nor the congregation so genteel. I have to preach three times on the Sabbath and once in the week. Mr. Wilson the deacon is a hair-dresser, a very respectable and a very sensible man and he has accumulated some little money even in his business. He was the friend of Cowper as well as his hairdresser and details many anecdotes of his private life and character and possesses some of his unpublished pieces. Almost all the people here are lace-dealers. . . . There is a very good house appropriated to the use of the minister. Our largest congregation is in the afternoon—then I

suppose we have between five and six hundred—many from the neighbouring villages.”

He felt himself under a disadvantage here. Mr. Yates,³ who had since gone to India, had preached for a month at Olney and the people wanted him to give up the mission field and settle with them. Then came Mr. Symonds⁴ on his way to Edinburgh to study at the University—him also they tried to persuade to stay. Then came Mr. Young.⁵ They were pleased with him too but his health prevented him from staying and he had gone to Stepney as Classical Tutor. The Olney situation which seemed pleasant enough in January was sadly clouded by April. Sutcliff had been a disciple of the American divine Jonathan Edwards, of whom the *Dictionary of American Biography* says, “Venerated for the saintliness of his disciplined character, he was bitterly hated because of a pitiless logical consistency that trampled life”. As Hawkins put it: “Mr. Sutcliff was a great admirer of the Transatlantic divinity, and drank deep into their theory”.

The results of this doctrine, Hawkins thought, had been unfortunate. Only about a dozen members had been added to the church in the last decade, though the weight of Sutcliff's character had kept down every rising of dissatisfaction. Prudently and tactfully, as he thought, Hawkins steered clear of discussing the peculiar doctrine that had preoccupied his predecessor. The greater part of the Olney Baptists were well satisfied but a minority led by deacon Wilson deplored his failure to preach the “Transatlantic theology”. “These are they who worshipped Mr. Sutcliff and they object to me that I do not preach about the Law—only the Gospel.” The affair became the talk of the town. Hawkins had preached at the Independent Meeting and spoken in the parish church on behalf of the Bible Society with the result that even Independents and Anglicans took sides on his behalf. He fled from the consequent turmoil, accepting an invitation to preach at New Hall Street, Birmingham, to some people who had separated from Isaiah Birt at Cannon Street. He feared Kinghorn might not approve as he thought they were “on the mixed plan”—that is to say, practising open communion.

On 1st May 1815 he wrote from Birmingham. He was staying with Josiah Emes, the deacon of the church: “The chapel is one of the neatest and most elegant I ever was in—more so than St. Mary's but not so shewy. Will seat 500.” He found that after all they did not practise open communion and was not sorry “for though I am inclined that way I am not mad for it”. He was quite sick of going from place to place and felt that he would soon have to betake himself to another calling and conclude that God had not designed him for the work of the ministry. After four months in Birmingham he wrote in the September after Waterloo that things were not likely to turn out well there. The cause was in its infancy and wanted something more noisy and popular than he could give. He had not filled the Meeting which was what they wanted, though he had increased the membership, having baptized five candidates. When a vote was taken 52 were

for his staying, 17 against and 6 neutral. Mr. Emes told him he could not vote for his remaining as he thought the prospects not sufficiently encouraging. Simon Wilkin, his old schoolfellow, paid him a visit and reported in a letter dated 27th September 1815: "He gave in his refusal to accept the call of $\frac{2}{3}$ of the church because of one man—and the whole congregation so to speak were in tears at parting". Hawkins had other reasons for wishing to leave. He wrote to Kinghorn a fortnight later: "There are not many intelligent people at Birmingham. They are mostly money-getting people. I should like to be at a place where I could have a good library to resort to and opportunity of seeing new publications".

Where should he go? He would like, he wrote, to preach to about 500 people with a few intelligent persons among them with whom he could associate with pleasure and profit. Actually he went to supply Burslem for the month of October—an interest begun seven years since by Thomas Thompson, proprietor of a cotton mill at Newcastle-under-Lyme. There were 40 members and an afternoon congregation of 150 in a place holding 200. Mr. Thompson, with whom he stayed, wished to be relieved of pastoral responsibility. Burslem he found a smoky place and too far from Norwich; Newcastle a disagreeable place and a barren soil for religion. Derby was open but said to be in a sad state. Mr. Littlewood wrote from Rochdale asking him to supply at Bacup where there was a congregation of 1,000 but Hawkins understood they were "an uncouth, uncultivated set and rather high in sentiment". His quarrel with Sutcliff's theology still dogged him. When he applied to Dr. Ryland for advice he received a sarcastic reply. The Doctor confessed that his own principles were as irrational as dear brother Sutcliff's which might expose him to the contempt of all young divines in the kingdom.

In January 1816 Hawkins went to fill a vacant pulpit at White's Row, Portsea. Here he met with an unqualified welcome. The cause was much reduced but the people who had remained faithful had looked forward to his coming with keen anticipation and many prayers. On the first Sunday the Meeting was well filled. His ministry prospered and the church soon called him to the pastorate. In June Joseph Kinghorn and Joseph Ivey journeyed to Portsea for the ordination. From Portsea Hawkins wrote in December 1819 to interest Kinghorn in the case of John Hartnell, a young man from that locality who was settling at Ipswich. Hartnell, he said, had not had the advantage of education but had done much to improve his mind. Like all "Dockmen" his manners were rough and uncouth. He had not been respectful to Hawkins but he forgave him and hoped Kinghorn would go to his ordination as this would give him weight with other ministers. As Ipswich Baptists were very high in sentiment, Hartnell stood almost alone there.⁶

After five years at Portsea Hawkins moved to Weymouth and took up a pastorate there. By 1824 he had taken a wife, a Portsea lady. In the summer of 1825 he was anxious to move again: "In my present

station I have had to contend with many difficulties arising partly from the dissipated character of the town and partly from the pecuniary difficulties of our place of worship—the burden of debt presses so heavy that the necessary expenses can scarcely be met”. He accepted an invitation to preach for six Sabbaths at Byrom Street, Liverpool, but in January 1826 he was still at Weymouth and was looking back to Portsea where his successor, Mr. Mileham,⁷ was ill and talking of resignation, and Mr. Miall,⁸ minister of the other Baptist church, at the age of 77 was visibly in decline. Young people with a superior taste and education inclined to go off to the Independents where the preaching was more attractive. “Our own relations,” wrote Hawkins, “are entirely in Mr. Miall’s church and would be glad to see me there and this is the wish of many others.”

Nothing came of this idea. In January 1827 Hawkins was in London seeking appointment as Classical Tutor at Stepney—the appointment he had turned down thirteen years earlier. Kinghorn had written to Gutteridge on his behalf. He had seen several members of the committee who were all friendly but he feared the position might not be comfortable owing to their divisions. “Unhappily there is no bond of union among the Baptists in London but so many little jealousies and animosities as greatly to retard the prosperity of the Denomination”.

Nothing had been settled in April when Gutteridge wrote to Kinghorn suggesting that it would be helpful if he would reiterate his recommendation of Hawkins. Matters were decided in July. Hawkins wrote on 25th July giving a sorry account of what had happened. He had been asked to meet Dr. Smith at Fen Court at 10 o’clock; the committee was to meet at noon to hear Smith’s report. Dr. Smith had called in Mr. Evans, an Independent minister and a first-rate scholar, to assist in the examination. Books of Cicero and Homer were produced and opened at random. Hawkins had been required to read passages from them and to analyse every word. He had been so agitated that he made several blunders. He told the examiners that he had not had his books about him for the last fifteen months and had not been able to pursue any regular course of study. In the end Smith and Evans both advised him to decline the situation, considering him not equal to discharging its duties. He had had to agree and must now start again to enquire for a destitute church.

Later in 1827 he settled at Agard Street, Derby. The impression given to the Stepney Committee had not been as unfavourable as he had feared, for they asked him to take into his home, as C. M. Birrell tells us,⁹ detachments of students preparatory to their course in Stepney College. Hawkins wrote on 17th May 1830 about such a group. They had read six books of Caesar’s Commentaries with strict attention to grammar and syntax and were then in the second book of the *Aeneid*. The senior student, who had much general information and more maturity of character and depth of thought than the others, had little aptitude for language and found the going hard. He aspired

to missionary work and Hawkins thought he might be useful in the West Indies. This was apparently James Griffiths who in fact went to Jamaica in 1831 but died in the same year. William Payne had been sent a month after the others. He was extremely uninformed. Hawkins had been obliged to take him by himself but he was now making "a little way". Besides Latin, Greek and Algebra the young men were a good deal engaged in preaching and his people were much pleased with them. Birrell tells us that besides the two mentioned above this party included "the gentle and refined" James Cubitt, Charles James Middleditch, a future secretary of the B.M.S., and William Brock, whose account of the Derby establishment he quotes:

"I soon found myself at home in our present quarters at Derby, quite ready for any work that Mr. Hawkins might require me to undertake. We were at once informed of his plans for our studies: he intended to take us through a series of exercises in English, to instruct us in the Latin and Greek grammars, to acquaint us with Algebra, and to confer with us as opportunities should arise, on various matters preparatory to our study of theology. We might work together or separately in learning the lessons or in getting ready for examinations, but he would meet with us as a rule in class. The necessary books were at hand; suitable directions were given, and we were told to bring any difficulty which perplexed us to our tutor with the kindly assurance that his help was always at our service.

"On Saturdays we were to employ ourselves in sermonizing and . . . each of us in our turn was to prepare a discourse and to read it before Mr. Hawkins and all our fellows.

". . . Mrs. Hawkins used her influence, which was most kindly, for the improvement of our manners, and Mr. Hawkins left nothing within his power undone for the improvement of our minds. . . . I left Derby more thankful than I was able to tell to Mr. Hawkins as my tutor, my pastor and my friend. He had evinced great wisdom, great patience, great faithfulness, and great Christian love. He had aimed to put me on the right course of study, to induce the right habits, and to inspire me with the right spirit."

With Kinghorn's death in 1832 the correspondence came to an end. None other than William Brock was chosen to succeed him. Hawkins came to Norwich to preach at Brock's ordination. According to the *Baptist Manual*, he was still at Derby in 1840 but, his health failing, he resigned the pastorate and removed to Bristol where he died after a protracted illness in 1853.

NOTES

¹ Wilkin Papers, Norfolk Record Office MS4281 (T142B).

² Robert Hawker, D.D. (1753-1827), see *Dictionary of National Biography*.

³ William Yates, B.M.S. India, 1815-1845.

⁴ Son of the Rev. John Symonds, Baptist minister of Wigan (R. W. Dixon, *A Century of Village Nonconformity at Bluntisham, Hunts.* (London 1887) p. 271).

⁵ Solomon Young, M.A., Classical Tutor at Stepney 1814-1826, Principal 1827.

⁶ John Hartnell, ordained pastor of Salem Chapel, Ipswich, 1819, died 1825 (A. J. Klaiber, *Story of the Suffolk Baptists* (London 1931) p. 156).

⁷ C. H. Mileham, first Moderator of the Southern Association, 1824 (W. Fancutt, *The Southern Baptist Association and its Churches 1824-1974* (Andover 1974) p. 7).

⁸ Daniel Miall, minister of Meeting House Alley Baptist Church, Portsea (*ibid.*, pp. 7-8).

⁹ C. M. Birrell, *Life of William Brock, D.D.* (London 1878) p. 54. Birrell was himself a Stepney student of this period.

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Bible Bibliography, 1967-1973: Old Testament. Edited by Peter R. Ackroyd. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1975. Pp. x, 506. £10.

This volume is a continuation of two previous publications, namely, *Eleven Years of Bible Bibliography* (covering the years 1946-1956), edited by the late H. H. Rowley (The Falcon's Wing Press, 1957) and *A Decade of Bible Bibliography* (for the years 1957-1966), edited by G. W. Anderson (Basil Blackwell, 1967). The present volume contains seven annual *Book Lists* (1967-1973) of the British Society for Old Testament Study, which have been reprinted and brought together into one handy volume, comprising the works and contributions of some 1700 authors from many different countries and languages.

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The use of this compilation is greatly facilitated by an index of authors, and the value of this publication can hardly be overestimated. It is an indispensable aid for biblical research, giving a fairly comprehensive and critical survey of books on the Old Testament and related fields. In a sense these bibliographical lists are supplemented by the *Internationale Zeitschriftenschau für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete: International Review of Biblical Studies: Revue Internationale des Etudes Bibliques*, which provides mainly summaries or reviews of articles from various periodicals and which are not included in the above *Book Lists*. Thus together they offer a well-nigh complete review of current scholarly work in the Old Testament field.

The excellence of the *Book Lists* of the Society for Old Testament Study is well attested by their international recognition as well as by the high quality of the reviews. The present volume is to be recommended to all engaged in biblical studies, in general, and to those in Old Testament work, in particular.

A. A. ANDERSON.