

# Proceedings

OF THE

## Wesley Historical Society

Editor : REV. WESLEY F. SWIFT

---

Volume XXIX

September 1954

---

### BEHIND THE SCENES IN 1841

IT has popularly been supposed that laymen played very little part in the administration of Wesleyan Methodism until the sessions of Conference were belatedly opened to them in 1878. As a matter of fact, throughout the century laymen had been to the ministerial Conference what the wife is to the husband—the power (and the prod) behind the scenes. Then as now the Conference Agenda was based on the reports of connexional committees, and these committees were formed almost equally of ministers and laymen. This meant that the affairs of the connexion were a topic of general conversation much more than might otherwise have been the case; not that laymen are more inclined to discuss the proceedings of committees, of course, but that the potential audience for ecclesiastical gossip thus became far wider and more varied in character. Occasionally there was what might be termed leakage—the careless purveying of information which should have been regarded as confidential.

One is uncertain how to regard the revelations of the letter which will be quoted at some length below. It shows intimate knowledge of recent meetings of the Book Committee and the Theological Institution Committee, yet the writer, William Peterson, was a member of neither, nor can we readily discover anything about him except from internal evidence. The letter forms part of the collection of documents amassed by Dr. W. L. Watkinson, President of the Wesleyan Conference in 1897, and bequeathed by his son to the New Room, Bristol. It seems particularly appropriate in this issue of our *Proceedings* in view of the Rev. E. Gordon Rupp's lecture on "Thomas Jackson: Methodist Patriarch".

Almost certainly the letter was written to the Rev. Abraham E. Farrar of the Bristol (King Street) circuit, and it begins by taking up points raised in one of his to which it is a reply:

48 Ernest Street, Regent's Park.

March 5, 1841.

My dear Sir,

My acknowledgement of your interesting though melancholy letter

has been delayed I feel very long . . . I think I may now say that I shall be in Bristol on the 18th of next month, when I shall be happy to serve you in the way & for the object you mention—I should be glad, however, if one of the appointments were at Baptist Mills, my old curacy.

What the melancholy content of the letter was we do not know, though we may hazard a guess that it had something to do with the trouble with the trustees at the King Street chapel, which was mentioned in the last issue of *Proceedings*. At any rate we discover that Mr. Peterson is a local preacher, with a playful sense of humour, and some previous acquaintance with Bristol.

Peterson speedily turns to his own news, and first to a little literary gossip :

Last Tuesday Mr. Grindrod applied to the Book Committee for a Sub Committee to whom to submit a Digest &c of the Minutes—with Notes & an Appendix including notices of many of the usages of Methodism. A Hundred pages of Charles Wesley's life are printed, but it is doubtful whether Mason will get it out before Conference—according to every account it will [be] the most interesting Wesleyan publication that has appeared for many years, or perhaps I ought to say that has appeared since the death of Mr. Wesley.

The Rev. Edmund Grindrod was a Lancashire man with a well-filled mind, who excelled especially in theology and church administration. Now in his middle fifties, he had served for two years as Secretary of the Conference, and in 1837 had been elected President. The book mentioned was his *magnum opus* (of nearly 500 pages), *A Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Wesleyan Methodism*. Whether the sub-committee was actually appointed we are not sure, but certainly the Book Committee felt unable to take full responsibility for Grindrod's work, even though it was sold at the Book Room. The imprint read: "London: Printed for the author: and sold by John Mason, 14, City-Road, and 66, Paternoster-Row. 1842." The sting of the Introduction, dated "Lambeth, December 10th, 1841", came in its postscript: "The following Compendium is published upon the sole responsibility of the author." This seems, however, to have been one of the occasions when the Book Committee made a mistake, for Grindrod's *Compendium* passed through four editions in eight years.

The Book Steward at this time was John Mason, named above, who easily holds the record for long service in that responsible position. He was appointed in 1827, and remained in office until his death in 1864, aged 82, alert and capable to the end. He was an intimate friend of Thomas Jackson, who had been the Connexional Editor since 1824, and was now engaged on his two-volume *Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*—still the standard work, albeit somewhat diffuse and ill-digested. Even in those days of comparatively speedy publishing it seems that the Book Steward had his troubles from both ends—tardy authors and lethargic printers.

Grindrod died in 1842, and in the same year Jackson passed from editor's chair to tutor's desk, first at the old Hoxton Academy, and

then at Hoxton's successor, the new Richmond College. College education for Methodist ministers was still much of a novelty, even though the *idea* was a century old. The opening of the first branch of the "Theological Institution" at Hoxton had caused much heart-burning, and had even led to a minor schism, but by 1841 the "Wesleyan Theological Institution Committee" was in the thick of preparations for a new branch at Didsbury (opened in 1842) and a new location for the Hoxton branch (opened in 1843). At first it seemed that the new college would be erected between Hampstead Heath and Regent's Park, but eventually a nucleus was acquired in Squire Williams's manor house and grounds in "Royal Richmond". It is at this point that we rejoin Mr. Peterson, eavesdropping on the committee:

You are aware probably of the particulars of the Richmond purchase—about 11 acres with a substantial & commodious house which will be converted probably into two dwellings for the tutors—the Institution House to be erected on the other side of the estate. Price 8000 £. Competent judges say that the site & the ground are particularly eligible. The arrangements contemplated to be submitted to the Conference are for Dr. Hannah & Mr. John Farrar to go to Didsbury, with Mr. Grindrod *Major Duomo*. Richmond, Mr.—or if not unpersuadable—Dr. Jackson & Mr. Jones, M.A., with probably Phillip Turner Governor. Dr. Hannah does not relish leaving the neighbourhood of London, but submits very amiably—as he would to go to Banff, which Mr. Mason told him was in reserve for him. Mr. Jackson, who shrinks from the tutorship altogether, takes the arrangement more deeply to heart.

It will be noted that a little banter was permissible in connexional committees even in those solemn days. Needless to say, Dr. Hannah was not sent to that outpost of civilization, Banff, in 1842, but left his position as theological tutor at Hoxton and removed to Didsbury, making room for "Dr. Jackson" at Hoxton and then Richmond. (The point about the doctorate is elucidated later in the letter.) Other projected appointments did undergo alteration, however. Grindrod did not become the Governor at Didsbury, but Philip C. Turner, who was originally down for Richmond, was appointed, while John Farrar was moved from Didsbury to Richmond. Samuel Jones, M.A. superannuated in 1841, and his place among the tutors was taken by William L. Thornton.

Having set the stage, Peterson returns to the recent Book Committee for the entrance of Dr. Jabez Bunting as *deus ex machina*, snatching "Dr. Jackson" in the nick of time from the clutch of the Book Steward:

On Tuesday last Mason, who clings to Mr. Jackson, observed that the time had arrived when, according to usage, the editorial appointment should be considered, & concluded by moving a resolution requesting the re-appointment of Mr. Jackson. He evidently reckoned on taking the meeting by surprise, & had well-nigh succeeded, but unfortunately for him, just as he had got the subject favourably developed, in walked Dr. Bunting, & learning what was pending he shook his mane, & fell upon him *manibus pedibusque*. Something

between an altercation & conversation ensued, which was protracted long enough to spoil our dinners, & then we adjourned until Thursday.

Yesterday the Doctor proposed a series of resolutions designed to express the high sense of the Book Committee of the value of Mr. Jackson's services, & to secure the best arrangements for the literary department in the event of the Conference deeming it right to transfer his services elsewhere. They were all carried, the last of them recommending (on the above supposition) the appointment, for the term of *three* years on account of precarious health, of Mr. Treffry as Editor, with the understanding that he would have large help if needful from Mr. Geo. Osborne & the re-appointment of Cubitt. In reading the first of the resolutions Dr. Bunting read, "That this Committee being deeply impressed with the faithful, & distinguished services rendered by the Rev. Dr. Jackson" &c, when the modest man rose & with the deepest emotion disclaimed the title, & complained of the Doctor's raising a laugh at his expence among his brethren.

In the event the plans for filling Jackson's place as Editor fell through. The health of Richard Treffry, who was the Governor at Hoxton, was so precarious that he went into complete retirement instead of the comparative retirement of a part-time editorship. Young George Osborn, the fifth of the six preachers in the City Road circuit, was thus not needed to support the failing hands, and moved on to Manchester. Jackson's assistant, George Cubitt, was appointed Editor, with John S. Stamp as Assistant Editor. As usual, the formidable Dr. Bunting had had his way, so that Thomas Jackson became the first theological tutor at Richmond. In passing, it is interesting to note what a galaxy of ex-Presidents and future Presidents are associated in this Methodist "general post"—Grindrod, Jackson, Thornton and Treffry were President once, John Farrar, Hannah and Osborn twice, and Jabez Bunting, of course, four times.

Perhaps, after all, William Peterson was present at the Book Committee, else why his use of "we"? But if present, why is his name not recorded in the *Minutes of Conference* as a member? Was he there in some clerical capacity? Whatever the reason, he certainly enjoyed himself, and through him we also are able to enjoy a little peep behind the scenes. His letter closes briefly:

Please to give my kind regards to your family & to my brethren. Mr. Stanley owes me a letter & I owe him money. I don't mean to pay till he does.

Forgive this long ditty. I am, My Dear Sir,  
Yours affectionately,  
WILLIAM PETERSON.

Jacob Stanley was the Superintendent of the Bristol North circuit—and another future President.

FRANK BAKER.

---

Three years ago the Rev. John C. Bowmer's *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* was published by the Dacre Press, and it was reviewed in *Proceedings*, xxviii, p. 80. Many members who could not afford this excellent book at its original price will be glad to know that it is now available at the reduced price of 7s. 6d., and we hope that advantage will be taken of this bargain offer.