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978-1-107-43783-8 - Lightfoot of Durham: Memories and Appreciations

Collected and Edited by George R. Eden and F. C. Macdonald

Excerpt

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Chapter I

EARLY DAYS, CAMBRIDGE & ST PAUL'S

JOSEPH BARBER LIGHTFOOT was the younger son of Mr John Jackson Lightfoot, a Liverpool accountant, and was born at his father's house, 84 Duke Street, Liverpool, on April 13th, 1828.

His mother was a sister of Mr Joseph Vincent Barber, a Birmingham artist of considerable repute. Of the three other children, an elder brother William Barber, six years older, took his degree at Trinity, Cambridge (Wrangler, and 2nd Class Classics), and was for many years Head Master of the Grammar School at Basingstoke, and later Vicar of Cartmel Priory in the Diocese of Carlisle.

One sister married the Rev. William Harrison of Pontesbury. The other, Miss Lightfoot, often visited the Bishop at Auckland Castle.

The future Bishop was a child of the North. His father was a Yorkshireman and his mother originally came from Newcastle, where his great grandfather had a notable bookseller's shop next St Nicholas' Church—the present Cathedral—in Mosley Street.

Speaking at the Guildhall, Newcastle, on July 2nd, 1881, Bishop Lightfoot said:

Whenever he came to Newcastle to preside at a meeting, it was always a satisfaction to him to recollect that the name by which he was known in Newcastle—Joseph Barber—was one he had inherited through four generations from a worthy citizen of Newcastle.

Shortly after this he restored the tomb of his ancestor in

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the graveyard of the Cathedral. A new stone was made with the old inscription:

Here lieth the body of

JOSEPH BARBER

late of Amen Corner Bookseller

who died July 4th 1781 aged 74 years

and of Eleanor his wife who died

December 25th 1784 aged 67 years.

The rest of the slab records the names of Mrs Humble “daughter of the above” and her husband and children. The discarded stone lay a yard or two away in the graveyard.¹

As a child Lightfoot was delicate, and took little part in games, though in later life he was fond of walking, and was one of the first to ascend the Jungfrau in Switzerland from Fiesch in the Rhone Valley, with only a local shoemaker as his guide.

His first public education was at the Liverpool Royal Institution under Dr Iliff. After about two years here, he lost his father and moved with his family to Birmingham at the age of fifteen. Even then he was a good scholar—equally proficient in classics and mathematics. He is described as a boy of immense capacity for work, cheerful temper, dry humour, and above all of reverent and disciplined piety. At King Edward’s School, Birmingham, he formed a lifelong friendship with Edward White Benson, who was to become Archbishop of Canterbury,

¹ Mr R. Thompson, Senior Verger, Newcastle Cathedral, writes, Feb. 13th, 1931: “The Joseph Barber gravestone is to be found at the East end of the new Library under the East window. The stone recut by the late Bishop Lightfoot’s instructions is in excellent preservation. The discarded stone which had laid by the side of the grave has been used as a base for the pillars of the newer stone, to prevent them sinking into the ground. This was done in 1926 and will preserve them for many years”.

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and later at Cambridge with Brooke Foss Westcott, who was to succeed him in the See of Durham.

All three owed much to one of the greatest teachers of his day, James Prince Lee, afterwards first Bishop of Manchester, to whose lessons on the Greek Testament Lightfoot confessedly traced his enthusiasm for those studies in which he became pre-eminent.

The reminiscences in *Salpisei*¹ give vivid glimpses of the boy Lightfoot on the threshold of his vast treasure-house of learning. Later as a young Fellow of Trinity he writes:

I recollect when I was placed under his care, Prince Lee's advice to my friends was "Give him the run of the Town Library". We learnt by experience that any knowledge we might acquire would be brought out some time or other to illustrate our school work.

When I told him I would take Holy Orders he replied beseeching me to decide at once, and seek a curacy, or a mastership, or at once to begin to read and edit or write if I looked to Theology, for he added "Virtus in agendo constat".²

At nineteen Lightfoot entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and read Classics with Westcott, who had preceded him, and of whose goodness and help he wrote in glowing terms to Benson whom he had left at school at Birmingham.

He took, as Westcott had done, a double first in honours in 1851—both as a Wrangler in Mathematics, and Senior Classic, and first Chancellor's Medallist in

¹ *Salpisei*. A Memorial Sermon (on 1 Cor. xv. 52) preached after the death of J. Prince Lee, first Bishop of Manchester, 2nd Ed., with appendix containing Memorial Notices of the late Bishop by J. F. Wickenden, etc. London, 1870.

² "At school the power and diligence of the future theologian were brought into view from time to time. We hear of the boys' astonishment, and their master's delight at indications of his private reading, e.g. in the Fathers, which used to come out incidentally in class." "Joseph Barber Lightfoot," *The Cambridge Review*, Jan. 16th, 1890.

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Classics. Next year he was elected Fellow of Trinity, and became a Tutor in 1859. Meanwhile he had been ordained Deacon by his old headmaster in 1854 and Priest four years later. In 1861 he was elected Hulsean Professor of Divinity, but in 1870, when the Regius Professorship fell vacant, he deliberately stood aside, and succeeded in calling his friend Westcott back to Cambridge “to occupy a place” as Westcott testified long afterwards “which was his own by right”.

In 1875, however, he became Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity. From his first Professorship in 1861 began a series of lectures on the New Testament, and especially on the Epistles of St Paul, unmatched for brilliance, thoroughness and clearness of exposition, which eventually burst the bounds of the largest lecture rooms in Cambridge and had to be delivered in the great hall of Trinity College, attended by crowds of undergraduates and many other residents of the University.¹ In these years, together with Westcott and Hort, he inspired and fostered a school of Cambridge theology which has not ceased to influence the religious thought of our day, at home and abroad.

Bishop Moule, who was to follow him at Durham, after Bishop Westcott, recalled the days when he was at Cambridge. In an Inaugural Address to the Durham and Northumberland Branch of the Classical Association² he said:

¹ “The late Master of Trinity was not given to enthusiasm, but once he did wax enthusiastic as he described the passage between the Senate House and Caius College ‘black with the fluttering gowns of students’ hurrying to imbibe in the Professor’s classroom a knowledge of the New Testament such as was not open to their less happy predecessors.” *Contemporary Review*, Feb. 1890, p. 175.

² *My Cambridge Classical Teachers*, Feb. 22nd, 1913. Durham: Andrews and Co.

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CAMBRIDGE

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I transport your thoughts backward over some fifty years. It was at Easter-tide in 1864 that I took my degree of bachelor. Three years and a half before that date in October 1860, I was entered at Trinity College as Mr Lightfoot's pupil. . . I found myself the pupil of men, as I realised better afterwards than at the time, who were as vigilant of the sacred letter of Homer or Horace, of Plato or Tacitus, as ever a Bentley or a Porson could be, but who also saw the immortal authors not only as consummate embodiments of a perfect grammar, but as *men* who felt and thought. . . My college tutor and first college lecturer was Joseph Lightfoot, afterwards, as all men know, Bishop of Durham: mighty master of apostolic and subapostolic literature, strong defender of the faith, shepherd of the people, admirable friend of his friends, illuminative teacher of his young pupils in those distant Cambridge days.

I came first into his presence when in June 1860 I called on him at his rooms—the rooms which had been Isaac Newton's, nearly two centuries before—and asked to be entered on his list of freshmen. Desperately shy was I. And he, if I do not mistake, felt a little shy too, for it was his nature so to be. But though a Cambridge Tutor certainly in those days could not possibly be intimate with all his pupils, he exercised from the very first a very powerful influence on me by the magnetism of the good greatness of his personality, and the truehearted kindness which looked always through his reserve. All through those years, he was laying the deep foundations of his vast theological knowledge, chiefly in the vacations, and (during term time) by night. No man ever loitered so late in the Great Court that he did not see Lightfoot's lamp burning in his study window, though no man either was so regularly present in morning Chapel at seven o'clock that he did not find Lightfoot always there with him.

But to us he was not the divine but the tutor whom we consulted about our questions and troubles and our admirable lecturer in Herodotus, Euripides and Aeschylus. As later, so then, his strong points were unfailing thoroughness of knowledge and unsurpassable clearness of exposition and instruction. He is said to have written his answers and exercises during the long week of his examination for degree without making one solitary mistake: and I can well believe it. A surer mind never worked. And he had withal quite sympathy enough with our less sure capacities to enable his class to follow him with conviction in every daylight step of his teaching. With many a pleasant touch of humour would he gladden our hearts by the way. I

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hear him still expounding that curious passage in Herodotus' account of Egypt where he tells us of the Pharaoh who, by isolating new-born babes from sound of speech, endeavoured to discover the primitive language—Lightfoot illustrated this by narrating a similar experiment tried, I think, by the royal wisdom of James I. And the result, so he informed us, in a grave voice all his own, was interesting: “the poor little children spoke pure Hebrew”.

For some of his classical pupils, he arranged a private evening lecture in his own rooms. The “Agamemnon” was his theme: the Aeschylean Trilogy, I believe, had long been a special study with him. He spent some time on those occasions over the text as well as the rendering in a way striking and suggestive, working out emendations with great felicity. But I cannot forget how “many lights” in that “upper chamber” did sometimes bring sleep to my eyelids as to those of Eutychus of old. My Aeschylus still shows traces of it, in certain pencil notes of imperfect coherency. But the lights, not the lecturer, were to blame.

At intervals we were asked in groups to dinner in those same historic rooms. We had a cheerful and most friendly host: he seemed much less shy with a large company than when one went to him alone.

He preached sometimes in chapel. The power of voice and force of thought always controlled attention. I remember one noble sermon in which he dwelt on the immortality of our powers, and how the intellect trained aright in this life would be used for God for ever amidst boundless interests in the life to come.

A very different environment in which to watch Lightfoot was the towing-path at the Lent and May races. He often ran with the boats with amazing energy. No doubt he really cared for the race, though I do not think he had ever rowed. But I remember his saying later that he frequented the towing-path not least because “You can get a good run there without being thought a perfect lunatic”.

An excellent story belongs to this period, which reveals Lightfoot's chivalry and lightness of touch in dealing with an erring undergraduate. The culprit tells the story against himself:

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I was an active and rather erratic undergraduate of the College. My brother was a great racquet player, and I had arranged to go to London for the day to see him play. The day before I was to go he wrote suggesting that I should dine with him after the match, and stay that night with him in Town. I knew I should not get leave, so I prepared a little plot to cover my transgression. I wrote out this telegram to be sent to my tutor, who happened to be Lightfoot:

“Much regret, have missed the last train am staying with brother”. Arrived at King’s Cross in the morning, I gave the telegram to a porter with strict injunctions to send it off *as soon as the last train had started at night*.

On returning to Cambridge next day, I found a message waiting for me from my tutor. This is what happened when I stood before him. He began “Mr Nemo you were not in College last night”. “No Sir...” I began, but Lightfoot held up his hand, saying “One moment Mr Nemo, before saying any more please look at this telegram and notice *the hour at which it was sent off*”. It had been despatched at 11.45 a.m.!! The wretched porter, having pocketed his tip, had gone straight off and handed in the telegram at once. Most men would have let me convict myself up to the hilt, but Lightfoot was too great a gentleman. I never can forget it.

Meanwhile Professor Lightfoot had been chosen for other appointments outside the University, being (at different times) Chaplain to the Prince Consort when Chancellor of the University, Chaplain to Queen Victoria, and later Deputy Clerk of the Closet. He was held in very high regard by King Edward VII (when Prince of Wales) whose tutor he had been when the Prince was a member of Trinity College in 1861. He also found time to act as Examining Chaplain to Archbishop Tait at both Fulham and Lambeth, and took such an active and able share in University affairs as to evoke the well-known contrast by a shrewd observer between him and his friend and colleague, that “Westcott ought to have been a mystic of the second century—

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and Lightfoot the Chairman of an English Railway Company, and I wish I had shares in it!"

In November 1870 Professor Lightfoot transferred the sum of £4500 to the University to found three University Scholarships for the encouragement of Ecclesiastical History. These are known as the Lightfoot Scholarships. (See Chap. xiv.)

One more great task fell to his lot, to act on the Committee for the Revised Version of the English New Testament. To him a language was an exact expression of the life of a country or a period, and he was one of the first to vindicate the Greek of the New Testament as the genuine *lingua franca* of the Graeco-Roman world of that day, a fact remarkably corroborated since his death by the discovery of the Egyptian papyri. His convictions, published beforehand in a book on the need for such a revision, and still more his insistence, in common with Biblical scholars like Westcott and Moulton and Hort, on the necessity of a thorough examination of the Greek text, and exact and uniform rendering of the words, largely influenced the work of the Revisers. The Revised Version, however, valuable as it is as a more correct rendering of the original Greek, has never become a popular version for the English people.

It is impossible to convey in a few words any idea of the magnitude of Lightfoot's work at Cambridge, as a theologian, a biblical expositor, a historian, or a teacher. It is enough to say of his marvellous output of writings that they arrested the attention of scholars throughout the world, and yet found their way into thousands of homes of clergy and ministers of all denominations.

It was within five years from taking his degree that he first began his work on the Ignatian Epistles, a subject on

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which he was closely engaged for nearly thirty years, and the results of which were published in his edition of St Ignatius and St Polycarp in June 1885. A second edition of this was already called for in 1888. This great work, which reaches about 1850 pages in three volumes, forms practically a complete repertory of information on the whole history and circumstances of the sub-apostolic age. There is scarcely a point in all the Church life of the first half of the second century that is not dealt with.

As an instance of the extraordinary influence of his learning and authority among scholars may be cited the effect of his remarkable essays published in the *Contemporary Review* between December 1874 and May 1877, in criticism of an anonymous book entitled *Supernatural Religion*. This apparently learned book was a vigorous attack upon the credibility of the Christian Fathers, especially those of the second century. A rumour attributing the authorship of this book to a learned Bishop of the Anglican Church, himself a distinguished historian and scholar, Bishop Thirlwall, together with a chorus of praise from the critics of its scholarship and learning, ensured for it a large circulation, and several editions very quickly appeared. It was vigorously answered by more than one distinguished theologian. But, Lightfoot's articles revealed so many gross mis-statements, that the book quickly lost its importance in the learned world. The Dean of Lichfield, who was closely following the controversy at the time, writes:

I remember a conversation, in the early eighties, with a well-known bookseller about Lightfoot's articles and he told me, in his quiet and judicial way, that they constituted the most remarkable phenomenon in the publishing trade that he had ever known or heard of. "When the book *Supernatural Religion* appeared", he said, "it had an extraordinary

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reception. It was emphatically praised by the Reviewers, and its sale was so rapid that the publishers could hardly produce it, in its successive editions, fast enough to meet the demand. But before the series of Dr Lightfoot's articles was even approaching completion, the book was already a glut in the second-hand market".

Meanwhile, after declining in 1867 Lord Derby's offer of the See of Lichfield, he was nominated in 1871 by Mr Gladstone to be Canon of St Paul's, and the appointment brought out his great gifts as a preacher. Archbishop Tait was once speaking about him to a friend, and said, "He did me the honour of being one of my examining Chaplains, and", he added with some hesitation, "we found him—rather heavy. Then he went to St Paul's, where finding himself associated with Canon Liddon, the dullness disappeared, and he became the extraordinarily eloquent preacher that we afterwards knew".

What this intercourse with Liddon meant is well pictured in a pretty scene in the last summer of the Bishop's life. Canon Liddon had come to Auckland to see him, and as he and the Chaplain approached the Castle, they saw the Bishop standing by his open study window. Instantly taking off his hat, Liddon hurried to the window to grasp the hand of his friend.

What the Bishop thought of the Canon is shewn in the dedication of his *Ignatius*:

To Henry Parry Liddon, D.D., to whom God has given special gifts as a Christian Preacher, and matched the gifts with the opportunities, assigning to him his place beneath the great dome of St Paul's, the centre of the world's concourse.

This friendship had great influence on the Church life of the seventies. It was an anxious decade for churchmen. The climax was reached when the Archbishop of