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978-1-108-00837-2 - A Memoir of the Rev. Henry Watson Fox, B.A. of Wadham College, Oxford: Missionary to the Telugu People, South India

George Townshend Fox

Excerpt

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A MEMOIR
OF THE
REV. HENRY WATSON FOX, B.A.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH—EARLY EDUCATION—REMOVAL TO RUGBY—CORRESPONDENCE
WHILST THERE.

HENRY WATSON FOX, son of the late George Townshend Fox, Esq., of the city of Durham, was born at Westoe, in the county of Durham, on the 1st of October, 1817.

The history of his childhood furnishes no circumstances worthy of being mentioned: his disposition was naturally amiable and tractable; his early education was conducted under his parents' roof, and at the age of eleven, he went to the Durham Grammar School, where he continued till his removal to Rugby, in February, 1831, at which time he was thirteen years old.

The remainder of his education he received at Rugby School, where he continued for six years, until his

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removal to Oxford, and thus enjoyed the benefit of Dr. Arnold's instruction and example, during the most vigorous period of his valuable life; that instruction was not thrown away, nor that example without its influence, as will appear in the course of the following correspondence. During his residence at Rugby School, and especially towards the latter part of it, when he had the privilege of coming into closer contact with Dr. Arnold, he contracted the greatest affection and reverence for his character; whilst the simple Christian instruction, which he so faithfully delivered in the School Chapel, produced a strong and abiding impression upon his heart; so that it may truly be said, that the classical knowledge and intellectual development which he acquired at school, were the least of the blessings he there received: for though other influences were co-operating during that period, yet the controlling power of Dr. Arnold's mind in forming his Christian character was of the highest value, and to the end of his days was ever remembered by him with affection and gratitude.

I may here mention that my brother enjoyed the advantages of a careful education at home, as well as those which have been referred to as arising from his connection with Rugby School. Much seed had been sown in days of childhood, and thus a good foundation of religious knowledge had been laid—such knowledge as can be received before the Holy Spirit has taken of the things of Christ and shown them to the soul. And no influence was so happy, or proved of such lasting benefit, as that which his eldest sister exercised over

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him during his holidays ; when he was in the habit of reading with her regularly, and of receiving instruction, which, though for a season it lay dormant, and seemed to produce no impression upon the heart, yet in due season sprang up and brought forth fruit.

The first communication of a religious character which I can remember having held with him, took place in the year 1833, and is still vividly impressed upon my memory. I well remember the discouragement which I felt at finding, as I imagined, no response, after having read to him, one Sunday, and conversed with him about the value of his soul and the duty of serving God. He appeared uninterested, and made no reply ; but, as the following letter afterwards informed me, his countenance had not been a fair index of his heart :

Rugby: Nov. 10, 1833.

MY DEAR GEORGE,

As you wish me to write to you before I go home, and as I have both opportunity and will to do so now, I shall set about it. I did not indeed know or expect that you were so near me, and I could have wished that you had come to see us ; but it is, as you say, best perhaps that you did not, as you would certainly derive more pleasure from Mr. Gisborne's society, than from coming to see us. * * Perhaps you recollect a conversation you had with me one Sunday at Durham ; that conversation did me most inestimable good, for which I have to thank you ; for before that, I had become almost, I may say, callous, or at least lukewarm in religious matters. But that first roused me, and it being followed by reading with Isabella at Cullerecoats, I have become alive to my

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situation : I see how great is sin, and to what extent I have sinned, and hope that God will now forgive me ; but still I feel myself constantly led away by temptation, in one shape or another, and still have a great repugnance to looking back on the actions of the day. I now follow a practice which — advised me to, and from which I feel great benefit ; that is, before I leave my room in order to go to the bed-room, to pray heartily to God, instead of, as I used before to do, merely saying my prayers before I got into bed ; and if in these I was disturbed by other boys talking, I used to go to bed and to sleep, without offering up any prayer from my heart, and without having even asked forgiveness for the sins of the past day. I have been this evening reading one of Dr. Whately's Essays, on comparing the life of a Christian with that of children, wherein he shows how little we know of God, and in how confined a sphere ; what low and earthly ideas, our very best must be, concerning the Divine Being. We have lectures from Mr. Price on a Sunday evening, and partly from what he said, and partly from my own thoughts, the following idea arose, which, though new to me, has undoubtedly occurred to most persons, namely—that an additional reason for turning to God early in life is, that as the faculties of the body are more developed by exercise, even to the last period of one's life, so a person, the longer he lives in the fear and love of God, the more righteous and more fit for heaven he becomes. I must leave off now for want of time : which though generally an idle excuse, is not so in this case, as it is now nearly bedtime, and I shall have no time to finish this letter next week, so now—Good night !

Your affectionate Brother,

H. W. Fox.

Some religious impressions had been made upon his mind, however, at an early period, as the following

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letter to a school-fellow will show. It seems that being confined to a sick-room, this boy had spoken to him seriously; but at that time, as too often happens under similar circumstances, the counsel, instead of being gratefully received, was unthankfully rejected, and caused rather a breach of friendship. His friend having removed to Harrow, it led to a correspondence, of which the following letter forms a part:

To M. BUCKINGHAM, Esq., DR. LONGLEY'S, HARROW.

Rugby: Oct. 30, 1834.

MY DEAR BUCKINGHAM,

You will, no doubt, be much astonished at receiving a letter from me, so long after our correspondence had closed; and especially as I was the party who put an end to it. I now write to ask your pardon for so doing, and to express my sincere sorrow for it. Do not think these expressions are feigned or exaggerated; for though our acquaintance was but very short, yet it was blessed by the hand of God, and you were made by Him the first instrument to call me to Him: at first, as you may remember, I obeyed the call, but after you left I fell away again, and on your writing to me—as religion was *then* a disagreeable subject to me—I did not answer your letters, and so the correspondence broke off. I now beg of you, that, if you can forgive me, you will be so good as to renew it. I recollect you told me that you were brought to the knowledge of God by an elder sister, and this has been my case: about a year ago my eldest sister and brother took great care of my religion, and have, by God's blessing, bestowed on me the best gift they could have given me; or rather not they, but God. I have often thought of you since you left, but more especially lately, and have intended for some time to write to you, but have had no opportunity before this; and now, though

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later, I hope you will not reject this letter. Since you went away from here, nearly three years ago, great changes have taken place in myself, my friends, and the school. From the "shell" I am now advanced to a high place in the "sixth," and my mind and faculties have had a great change;—but this is too egotistical and boasting. Again and again, as I go on writing, I constantly think how you will receive this, and am afraid that you will not take it well; but pardon what is amiss, and believe me

Your affectionate Friend,

HENRY W. FOX.

I may here observe how greatly they err, who mistake naturally amiable dispositions for Christian principle. My brother, as a boy, was of a very kindly and endearing temper; but for all this his heart was as thoroughly alienated from God as other persons'. This sad disease of human nature exists in every heart, till it has been changed by the Holy Spirit; and though the symptoms may be modified, and its deformity sometimes concealed by a fair outside, or by amiable dispositions, yet the malady remains, and man's heart, in its relations towards God, is all wrong and all corrupt, till Divine grace shall work the change.

The following letters will furnish abundant illustrations of this, showing that whenever an attempt is made by any one to bring his own heart into obedience to God, there a struggle and a spiritual warfare will spring up,—there inward toil and difficulty must be encountered,—there the heart will show its enmity to God, its alienation from Him, its unwillingness to love and serve Him.

It may seem to require an apology for publishing

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the letters of so young a person, at a time when his mind was imperfectly developed, and his Christian experience of the most juvenile character; but I have ventured to do so under the impression that more instruction may be derived to those who are of like age, and under similar circumstances, by tracing the early workings of God's Spirit upon a school-boy's heart, than by having the character of a mature and experienced Christian presented to them.

The feelings, the sympathies, the affections of a school-boy are more likely to be enlisted by a record of the trials, temptations, and spiritual progress of another school-boy, than by the example of an older person, with whom he can have no fellow-feeling, and few sentiments in common.

I would fain hope that there is a better spirit abroad in our public schools at the present day,—that there are more of what Dr. Tait so well terms “thoughtful boys,” whose minds are opening out under right influences, early to realise the great ends of their being; and I shall greatly rejoice if I am permitted to furnish any instruction for that very important and interesting part of the community—the boys of our public schools; by presenting to them the spiritual progress and career of grace, of one who, like themselves, was a boy at a public school. It is for their sakes chiefly, that I have yielded to the importunity of friends, and have sacrificed my own feelings, by venturing to spread out before the public eye, much that was of a private and domestic character—thus invading, as it were, the sacred precincts of the social hearth.

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[More information](#)*Rugby : Wednesday, Feb. 19, 1834.*

MY DEAR ISABELLA,

I received your kind letter by Robert, for which I am much obliged to you. Now that I am come here, I have fallen into such a vortex of temptation, that I scarcely know what to do, and they chiefly come on so insinuatingly, that I can scarcely perceive them at first. The two greatest are, I think, pride of heart, in thinking myself better than others, in comparing myself with others ; and though in my understanding I see how wicked I am, yet my heart is so sinful that it is with difficulty I find means of repressing such thoughts. The other temptation is, wasting time, which comes on by little and little, but which I hope soon to be able, with God's assistance, to overcome. I find myself so sinful, that were it not for Christ's blessed promises, I could scarcely fancy He would hear me ; but He has felt the infirmities and temptations of man, and from thence I derive my comfort. And on account of the very temptations I meet with here, I ought to rejoice and be thankful to God, that He has given me such opportunities of becoming more perfect and patient than I could otherwise hope to be ; but I, as well as you, am anxious and fear greatly lest I should fall. During the day I feel myself clinging to this world too much, and if it were not for my devotions—evening and morning—I feel I should quite forget my Maker : I intend therefore to read the Bible several times during the day, for there is such a blessing in the Holy Scriptures, that they always inspire one with good thoughts, and set me forward afresh to follow the precepts laid down in them. Oh, if they were taken away, how could man exist ? I often follow the plan of Wilberforce Richmond, of reading the Psalms and praying over them ; I find them so full of beauty and comfort, so full of holiness, that they quite refresh my soul. I constantly wish I was with you, but God's will be done :

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if He will it, we shall meet again, when I shall be able to talk to you and learn from you many good things. I pray for you continually.

There is a very interesting case here. There is a little boy about fourteen years old, in other respects a nice little boy, and one whom I was rather fond of: but, the other day, in talking with him, I discovered he never read his Bible; in short, he knew nothing of the Christian religion. I have been endeavouring to impress on him the awfulness of his state, but he seems scarcely to care whether he is lost or saved. He understands neither heaven nor hell, nor that he is born for any other state than this,—that is to say, he does not *feel* it to be the case: he has apparently been completely neglected at home with respect to religious matters. Now I want to know how to proceed with him—how to open his mind—for I think when he once perceives in his heart, how wicked he together with all others are, that he will be more able and willing to understand the truths of the Gospel. When I have got him to do anything right rather than what is wrong, I generally discover it is done merely because I asked him; and this doing what he thinks I wish, together with other points, shows that he has naturally a good heart, but that it wants cultivation. Oh, how thankful I ought to be to God that He has given me such good and kind parents, and brothers and sisters: for, as Sumner says, we should be thankful that we were not born in an heathen country, and that we are placed in a land where the Gospel is preached, for it is by no merit of our own that we are not condemned to darkness and ignorance. Dr. Arnold, in his sermon on Sunday, used a simile I thought particularly beautiful. In talking of those who seek God in this world,—they are, he said, like those foreign plants which we see here flourishing, but not having flowers or fruit; we see that this is not their proper place, and that they must have some other place where they come to full ripeness. Both Robert and I con-

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stantly make use of the books you wrote out for us, in which we find great use. That God may requite to you the good you have done us, is the constant prayer of

Your affectionate Brother,

HENRY W. FOX.

Rugby : March 1, 1834.

MY DEAR GEORGE,

When I returned to school this half I was wofully disappointed. I had a great friend here ; and though I had spoken but little on religious points with him, yet I expected that on that subject our hearts would be knit together, but alas ! I find that he is little actuated by Christian principle : not that he is a bad boy, in the eye of the world, but it is almost only when duty and pleasure run together that he follows the former. The following verse struck me the other day on this point ; “ Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, hath lifted up his heel against me.” Psalm xli. 9. Not that I mean that he is no longer an acquaintance, but I find that I can no longer make him my friend ; our two grand pursuits being so different. So that, besides my own family, there is not a human being who is my *intimate* friend. It is in this situation that I find how kind God is to me, He is my all to me : while I am here I am separated (except for Robert) from all (whom I know at least) who seek the same God as I do, who run along with me ; I am here a solitary being, but still I am happy, because God is with me.

Your affectionate Brother,

H. W. FOX.

Rugby : Thursday, March 6, 1834.

MY DEAR ISABELLA,

* * * I am glad to be able to say that I was partly deceived in my old friend who is here, for I thought he was