

Robert Hawker part II

Completion of the Old Testament section of the Poor Man's Commentary 1812

While Napoleon marched on Moscow and experienced devastating defeat, Robert Hawker brought to completion the Old Testament section of his commentary on his 59th birthday April 13, 1812.

The completion of this work on his birthday marked the beginning of the practice he sought to continue to the end of his life, that is of sending some work to the press, or commencing some good work, on the day of his birthday by means of a thank offering to the Lord for past mercies, and acknowledgment of "hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

Before starting on the New Testament, he prepared and published, *The Poor Man's Concordance and Dictionary to the Sacred Scriptures both of the Old Testament and the New*

Formation of the Corpus Christi Society September 26, 1813

Dr. Hawker had already founded as we saw earlier the Misericordia Society, for the relief of poor destitute strangers. This society however as its name suggests, Corpus Christi Society, was founded for the help and benefit of church members who had fallen on hard times. It was based on the concept in Acts 6:3 - 6, where the seven deacons, men of honest report be chosen to distribute alms for the relief of poor Christians.

At the same time he entered into a friendly controversy with the Rev. J. Stevens Minister of York St., Chapel, London on the matter of the free - existence of the human soul of Christ, " which doctrine our worthy friend thought to be erroneous."

The same writer challenge Dr. Hawker justified his reasons for staying within the established church. Hawker gave him this reply.

I do belong to the Church of England. For indeed and in truth, amidst many things in her liturgy and discipline which would admit of much improvement, the soundness of faith in her articles of homilies is such, as without giving offense to any order of orthodox professors whatever, I may venture to say, is exceeded by none. And where I disposed to leave the establishment, because mingled with sound doctrine because there are errors in it I should be as a loss to know what class of dissenters to join, when nothing of equal incorrectness is discoverable!

Moreover, if I do not greatly err the Lord hath blessed me and my poor labourers where I now am I was born in the establishment, and newborn in it; and have witnessed the new birth of others in it also. Until, therefore, I see the pillar of cloud going out before me, I should not think myself justified in departing. Every servant of the Lord ordained by the Lord to his ministry, is like a sentinel on his post. And it is death, by the military law, for a soldier to leave his station, before that he who planted the watch comes to relieve him. I need not tell you who it is that access the bounds of his peoples habitations.

In regard to the question of the pre- existence of the human soul of Christ as advocated by the Rev. J. Stevens, Robert Hawker firmly rejects this teaching. Williams his biographer does not go into detail in regard to his reply but we might quote from the Articles of the Gospel Standard Societies who themselves had to deal with this issue as indeed other denominations at this time, in respect to this question.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, being set up from everlasting as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and having engaged to be the Surety of his people, did, in the fullness of time, really and truly assume human nature, and not before, either in whole or in part. And we believe that though he existed from all eternity as the eternal Son of God, the human soul of the Lord Jesus did not exist before it was created and formed in his body by him who forms the soul of man within him, when that body was conceived under the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And we believe that Christ's human nature consists of the true body and a reasonable soul, both of which, together and at once, the Son of God assumed into union with his Divine Person, when made of a woman and not before, that this human nature was not sinful, peccable, or mortal, though capable of death by a voluntary act, but essentially and intrinsically your and holy; and that in it he really suffered, bled and died, as the Substitute and surety of his church and people, in their room and stead, and for no others; whereby, together with his holy, spotless life, he fulfilled the law, and satisfied all the claims of justice, as well as made a way for all those blessings which are needful for his people, both for time and eternity.

Article Five of the Gospel Standard Strict Baptist Churches

Another criticism of Dr. Hawker levelled at him by the Rev. J Stevens, was that he stayed within the Established Church because of the financial benefits of such a position.

Hawker replied:

I am an old man, and lately brought back from the border of the grave, and now every day hastening fast toward it again, may I be credited when I say, that had the love of money preponderated with me, many a year since I might have quitted the Church of England on very advantageous terms of worldly profit. Neither on this ground hath the temptation been small. For, although I am a man of little expense, yet never, in any one year since I into the ministry, hath the income of my labours being competent to cover the maintenance of my household and, but for all the resources, I must have been poor indeed!

Williams points out that on one occasion Dr. Hawker was offered £2000 by a dissenting cause to leave the Established Church and become their minister. Hawker refused this princely sum replying that the Lord had placed him in the Church of England as a sentinel until the Lord removed in the dare not leave it.

Though Hawker clearly was a faithful Church of England pastor nevertheless he did not conform to

what at that time was the Church of England norm, in several respects.

He was unusual for this time in preaching extempore. It was also not the norm in the Church of England at this time to sing hymns in church. The Church of England only sang psalms until hymns were gradually introduced in the 1830s. Hawker quoted from the 39 Articles, Article 37

For the comfort of such as delights in music, it may be permitted, that at the beginning or end of common prayer, either morning or evening; that maybe someday I him, all such like son, to the praise of Almighty God, in the best melody in music that may be conveniently devised, having respects that the sentence of the hymn may be understood and perceived.

Poor Man's Commentary New Testament section complete 1816.

This was completed and sent to the press April 13, 1816 being the occasion of his 63rd birthday.

Again he stated the purpose of the work to be... *"To hold up and to hold for the Lord Jesus Christ as God's Christ, and us the sole perfection of all his people.*

Controversy over his views denying progressive sanctification

He freely admitted that the whole tide of Biblical commentaries were against him in this opinion.

His biographer seeks to explain his views as follows:

To sum up in a few words his view of this interesting subject, it is this: – that the child of God is when regenerated only renewed in the spirit of his mind; that the body is still a vile body, a corrupt body, and will remain so till it be so a natural body and raised a spiritual body; that the believer is enabled to mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost; that the keeping of the body and subjection, the mortifying of the flesh with all its vile affections and the gracious fruits of the Spirit which appeared in the believer's life, is not his sanctification, but the sweet testimonies and happy effects of his sanctification.

Notwithstanding he maintains that the body is not renewed, nor so sanctified as to be free from corruption and sin, he considers it, by the indwelling of the Spirit at Temple consecrated to God, or of vessel like that of the sanctuary, set apart for the Masters use, and ought not to be used for unhallowed purposes. If by progressive sanctification anyone understand, that a believer continues more or less through the indwelling of the Spirit to evidence his sanctification by the fruits of the Spirit, or at least by some signs of spiritual life, he by no means denies this; but maintains it, though the believer may sometimes for wise purposes be stripped a like a tree of both fruit and leaves, and his spiritual life be only known by the peeling of the bark, if I may so speak, that is to say, by an investigation of the inward man; yet when the Holy Spirit (as the life that is in him proceeding from the root) puts forth his strength, the believer shall again flourish in all his vigour, verdure, and fruitfulness. If by progressive holiness, others may understand the Christian pilgrim's continued progress in the Kings highway of holiness he by no means denies this, though he shows that he has no holiness of his own; for his very best dress of this description is indeed a poor tattered garment, nay, nothing but filthy rags. He acknowledges

that the least deviation from the right path humbles and grieves him. But, by progressive holiness anyone understand, that this body, the flesh, become holier and holier, this he denies; although as a proof of his sanctification in the Spirit, the body be kept in subjection. He denies the sanctification of the fleshly body, either in whole or in part, though of vessel set apart for the Masters use; and this vessel, as far as it is cleansed, is not so by virtue of any inherent holiness in itself, but by the subject with an restraining influence of the Holy Ghost. In relation to church members, "walking honestly towards them that are without", it were a reproach to the name of Christ if the ungodly had any charge to bring against them. Very sweet to this purpose is that comprehensive exhortation by the Holy Ghost to the church, that whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure all, lovely, and of good report, believers in Christ are expected above all men to be eminent in the practice of these things."

Williams page 143 - 144

In 1820 another publication was sent out to the publishers again on his birthday April 13th.

This was the Poor Man's Prayer Book. It was formed from Scriptural passages and prayers, the intention being to give help in forming the believer's prayers and to give substance to the contents of those prayers.

The book also gives encouragement in prayer, derived from Dr. Hawkers own experience in dealing with difficulties in prayer and advice on how to experience enlargement in prayer etc.

Again on the same date as his birthday, this time April 13, 1822 he sent one of his most remarkable works to the press.

This was his, Scripture extracts, accompanied with notes and observations from some of the most striking historical parts of Scripture.

One of his reviewers suggested that the title might also have been, *Scripture Portraits*. Another comment was, *among these Scripture Portraits, there are some beautiful sketches of the Lord Jesus himself, together with some prominent object of his benevolence, as originally set forth by the unerring pencil of divine truth. In all these portraits the outlines are admirably depicted, in which there is strength without harshness, and boldness blended with the finest touches of his masterly skill.* (Williams)

This work was intended to be a supplement to two books of daily readings which came to be called, The Poor Man's Morning and Evening Portions, Hawker added: *for the use of the poor of this world, who are rich in grace, and heirs of the Kingdom of God.* This publication has become and remains probably Hawker's most well- known and enduring work.

Other books followed such as a work on The Lord's Supper, and another which he produced in his 70th year, Zion's Pilgrim from the Age of Seventy. These were accompanied by his continued production of numerous tracts.

We turn now to 1823, when he joined in the fight to bring about the abolition of slavery in the English Colonies.

He produced first a work entitled, *An Appeal to the Common feeling of Mankind, on behalf of the Negroes in the West Indies Islands.*

He set up a Society where the plan was to buy land in the West Indies, that is land on which the purchaser became also the owner of all the slaves on the plantation. His proposal was having purchase such land to change the status of the slaves to that of employees in that they were paid a regular wage. At a later date he then proposed to offer them their full freedom.

Because of various prohibitions on charitable institutions buying such plantations this scheme never properly materialized.

Publication of his Poor Man's Prayer Book April 13, 1820

These were prayers based on Scripture passages. The idea was to help to supply words and themes to assist in prayer and communion with God. The book also included notes giving encouragements to pray and advice on dealing with difficulties in prayer and how to achieve enlargement in prayer etc. He commented that this work is intended to be a supplement to the little work, sent out some time since, entitled, the poor Man's Morning and Evening Portions, mentioned above.

Another interesting practice he engaged in was that of selling cheap bread to the poor. Hawker at this time had produced a small tract or pamphlet with the lengthy title:

Bread Selling to the Poor Half Price, a Sweet Memorial of the Bread of Life, which is given to the Poor of the Lord's People without Money and without Price.

These were hard times and in winter, money was in short supply, and the poor went hungry. Hawker decided that something must be done. He began to take up collections after the Sunday morning service for the purpose of providing the poor with cheap bread. He did not intend to give the bread away. He set up a stall in the churchyard where 6d loaves were sold for 3d. It was based on sound business sense for he knew that by ordering a 1000 loaves from the bakers he could sell them at much reduced price and still partly cover his costs.

The churchyard was crowded with eager purchasers, and he was pleased to see how happy they were at such an opportunity being given to them. At the same time, he lamented that they were not so keen to receive the Bread of Life freely.

In 1824 he embarked upon a major work involving a great deal of research and learning. This was his... The Portrait of an English Bishop of the 16th Century.

Williams comments:

It furnishes the reader with many interesting particulars in the public and private history of all most learned and devoted bishops, about the time of the Reformation and in the following age. It is replete with general information, and can scarcely be read by anyone without benefit and is well worth the proposal of the young the clergy. Though written after he had passed his 70th year, it shows the author to have been in the full vigour of his mental powers. Not one of all his productions exhibits a greater variety of reading, or embodies more matter in smaller compass. From what we may judge of this specimen, he would've shown as an ecclesiastical historian. "It may be demanded," he said, "why give the portraits of a bishop of the 16th century, rather than that of any other century? The answer is at hand. This was the era which in reference to the religion of this country, might well be called the Golden age of the church." The man so, title page exhibits a miniature sketch of the office design. It is the character of Archbishop Leighton, by Bishop Burnet. In the prelates of that century, there was a close resemblance to the apostolic pattern. "And what's summed up and put a beautiful finish to that whole character, they live what they preach, and taught only what they themselves practiced. Some men talk well of God by books; but those men spake from the heart. The general feature of the Saints of God corresponded to what Jerome said of Nepotianus, who by frequency none remixing meditation of the Scriptures as his mind so stored with them, that the father called him, "a magazine of knowledge, and the library of Christ."

p. 227 Williams

His declining years

At the beginning of the year 1827 we find Dr. Hawker increasingly troubled by an inflammation of the lungs and a violent cough. His doctor recommended a period of convalescence.

He was unable to preach again until 18 March, when in fact he preached on that day it was to be his last sermon in the Parish Church of Charles. He preached both morning and evening on with tremendous liberty and power and the sermons on both occasions lasted for one hour and a quarter.

However, the following Lords Day found himself unable to follow up his ministerial labours. He said to his daughter, on hearing the sound of the church bells. *"These bells, my dear child, which are calling others to tread the courts of the Lord's house, are not calling me. I cannot go to the house of the Lord; but "this also, cometh of the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel excellent in working – wisdom and power are His."*

He became increasingly weaker in the following days and on the Wednesday he proposed visiting his daughter in Totness believing that the change of air would do him good. The following morning, he left home for Totness leaving the church in the care of his curate the Rev. Septimus Courtney.

He left for Totness on the morning of Thursday, March 29, 1829.

After less than a week he found no improvement in his health and asked to be taken back to Plymouth. He returned to the city of his ministrations on Friday April 6. On the Friday morning he rose early and ate and full breakfast before setting out. He arrived back in Plymouth at about 3:15 in the afternoon. By the end of that day his earthly pilgrimage had ended and he had entered heaven and the place his Saviour had prepared for him.

The account of his final hours, and funeral are recorded here in the words of Williams his biographer. pp 258-261.

On his arrival at his dwelling, at about 3:15 in the afternoon, he was assisted from the carriage; but he had not entered many minutes before he called his household together, and set up his Ebenezer of praise; for, as his family testify, he seemed to have done with prayer, as if he had nothing more to ask. It was all praise, thanking the Lord for his mercies in taking him out and bringing him home; and raising his voice to give emphasis to his last words, he said, "Praise be our God, for his mercy in jewellery for ever." To his family he said, "I shall not be long with you, I am leaving you; but God will be still with you." Very shortly after, he was removed to his chamber, but was able to assist in undressing himself for bed. After being a little composed, and raised with pillows to a sitting posture, he repeated from memory a part of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians from the 6 to the 12 verse: as he proceeded he enlarged on the verses but dwelt more fully on these words, "to the praise of the glory of his grace;" and very sweetly on these," in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace." His medical friend, Mr Dunning, and Alden eminent practitioner who was present, said he never witnessed such a death before.

Had he lived he would have completed his 74th year. This day of aerial was his day of birth. 10 clergyman attended his funeral; and the usual service was read by his "fellow labourer in the ministry," the Rev Septimus Courteney. Many thousands were present, and the scene was truly affecting, and the language of everyone seemed to be - "surely, there is a great man fallen in Israel!"

His body lies interred in the parish church of Charles, in the same vault with his wife and mother, about 30 feet from the south door in the aisle on the left-hand; and a marble monument is being erected to his memory in the chancel of the said church. Over the tablet, which bears the following inscription, is a marble bust of the venerable author: -

MEMORIAL—TO BRING TO REMEMBRANCE,

Psalm xxxviii. 70

IN ORDER TO FERPETUATE THE LIVELY
REMEMBRANCE OF HER BELOVED FATHER,

ROBERT HAWKER,

AMONGST THE POOR OF THIS PARISH,

IN WHOSE WELFARE HE WAS EVER

DEEPLY INTERESTED,

MARY GRANVILLE HODSON

HAS INVESTED THE SUM OF £250 STOCK,

3 PER CENT REDUCED ANNUITIES,

IN THE NAMES OF TRUSTEES,

THE ANNUAL DIVIDENDS WHEREOF TO BE

PAID INTO THE HANDS OF THE VICAR OF THIS

PARISH, FOR THE TIME BEING, AND TO BE BY HIM

GIVEN AWAY IN BREAD TO THE POOR THEREOF,

ON THE 13TH DAY OF APRIL NEXT, AND ON THE

LIKE DAY IN EACH SUCCEEDING YEAR FOR EVER.

March 10, 1829

A PUBLIC TRIBUTE
OF AFFECTION AND RESPECT TO THE
MEMORY OF THE
REV. ROBERT HAWKER, D. D.

WHO FOR NEARLY HALF A CENTURY WAS
THE FAITHFUL AND LABORIOUS MINISTER OF THIS PARISH,
SIX YEARS AS CURATE, AND FORTY-THREE YEARS AS VICAR.

THE ELEGANCY YET SIMPLICITY OF DICTION,
THE LIVELINESS AND BRILLIANCY OF IMAGINATION,
THE PERSPICUITY AND VIGOUR OF THOUGHT,
THE DEPTH AND COMPASS OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE,
WITH WHICH HE WAS TALENTED AND BLESSED,
(THOUGH THE LIVING ELOQUENCE BE NOW SILENT)

ARE STILL EXTANT IN HIS
SERMONS ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST,
AND ON THE DIVINITY AND OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY GHOST,
IN HIS ZION'S PILGRIM,

AND OTHER NUMEROUS WORKS OF POLEMICAL, PRACTICAL,
AND EXPERIMENTAL DIVINITY ;

BUT ABOVE ALL, IN
HIS POOR MAN'S COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE,

IN WHICH HE RICHLY DWELLS
ON GOD THE FATHER'S ELECTING LOVE,
ON GOD THE SON'S REDEEMING BLOOD,
AND GOD THE SPIRIT'S REGENERATING GRACE,

AS THE SOLE CAUSE
OF ALL HEALTH AND HAPPINESS
TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

HE ENTERED INTO REST, APRIL 6, 1827, AGED 74 YEARS.

" BEFORE HIS TRANSLATION,
HE HAD THIS TESTIMONY THAT HE PLEASSED GOD "

Heb xi 5

Here Zion's warrior brac'd his armour on,
Fought the good fight, and many a victory won.
But whence his prowess ? whence his arm of might ?
The Lord of hosts equipp'd him for the fight .
His was the shield of faith, the sword of flame ;
From heaven's own armoury his weapons came.
His campaign ended—all his conflicts o'er—
He rests pavilion'd on the glory-shore
In yonder vault his mortal harness lies,
Till th' archangel's trump shall bid him rise,
And gird it on anew—to triumph in the skies !

AN ELEGY
ON THE
DEATH OF THE REV. ROBERT HAWKER, D.D.
VICAR OF CHARLES, PLYMOUTH,
WHO DIED ON FRIDAY, THE SIXTH DAY OF APRIL, 1827.

"The memory of the just is blessed"—Prov. x. 7.

BY JOHN KENT.

Forgive the muse, illiterate and obscure,
Who thus attempts in feeble verse to raise,
Tho' void of learning, yet with motive pure,
A monumental stone to HAWKER'S praise !

'Tis done ! the conflict's o'er, the spirit fled,
Borne on seraphic pinions to the skies,
Where Jesu's face ten thousand glories shed,
And pleasures—everlasting pleasures rise.

HAWKER is dead ! that herald sent of God,
To make to man his great salvation known ;
Let Zion's offspring weeping kiss the rod,
And gird their robes of deepest sackcloth on.

From coast to coast the doleful tidings spread !
Weep ye, who love the gates of Zion well ;
HAWKER'S no more ! he's numbered with the dead—
This day in Israel's host a champion fell.

Gone down to dust, yet his immortal fame
The sacred annals of the church shall shew,
And long record a HAWKER'S honour'd name,
Till day and night no more their course pursue.

Call'd up to celebrate with harps and songs,
The marriage-nuptials of the Lamb above ;
Where hallelujahs from ten thousand tongues,
Shall swell the triumphs of redeeming love.

Dismiss'd to glory with a kiss of love,
He bade the lagging moments swifter roll ;
Death was to him as harmless as a dove,
While floods of glory overwhelm'd his soul.

From Pisgah's top, by faith's celestial ray,
He did the land of pure delight explore ;
The blissful regions of unclouded day,
Where sin ne'er enters, and where death's no more.

Blush ye, who from the pulpit or the press,
At him your arrows dipp'd in venom threw ;
He lov'd the holy gospel, and no less
With holy Paul, the righteous precept too.

Go ye, nor with contaminated breath
Dare brand the saint with mental errors foul ;
And witness bear, while in the arms of death,
How sweetly did his dying moments roll.

Yet one there was, who wrote for nobler end—
Who for the faith with him in meekness strove ;
To truth and the Redeemer's interest friend,
Who, through the contest, nothing meant but love.

No more the hallow'd fane of Charles shall hear
Salvation flow from his melodious tongue ;
Christ, in his glory, was exalted there,
While the vast area crowding thousands throng.

There did he preach to man's apostate race,
While in his breast divine affections glow,
The glories of Jehovah's sov'reign grace,
-And awful glory of the fiery law.

Through Britain's isle, to climes beyond the west,
Such pastors, O thou God of Jacob send ;
Who, with the spirit of Elijah blest,
Shall for the faith delivered thus contend !

A thousand blessings did his hands bestow ;
He ne'er unpitied heard the orphan's cry,
But sought the haunts of wretchedness and woe,
To wipe the tear from sorrow's weeping eye.

Were there no heaven wherein the just shall dwell,
Such was his sympathetic love to man ;
Or were the penal fires extinct in hell,
Still to do good would HAWKER'S feet have ran !

Witness his care of that unpitied race,
Abandon'd harlots—victims to their sin ;
How did his ardent zeal procure a place,
From error's path their roving feet to win !

In sure and certain hope, his flesh to dust
Commit, and ask—where is thy victory grave ?
To wait the resurrection morn august,
In which the upright shall dominion have.

Faithful to death, he now receives the crown,
And does the victor's palm in triumph wave ;
Is now with Jesus on his throne sat down ·
Such honour shall the saints in glory have.

Farewell, farewell ! till round the throne we meet,
To sing with thee the never-ending song,
And cast our crowns at the Redeemer's feet,
While everlasting ages roll along.

