

## PHILIP DODDRIDGE

When Philip Doddridge was born on 26 June 1702 he appeared stillborn. Already out of his 19 brothers and sisters only one, a sister, had survived infancy. Yet a slight movement of the body indicated a breath of life and he survived. Born somewhere in London, Doddridge was taught by a devout mother, so that he was familiar with Bible stories depicted on the glazed Delft tiles of the fireplace long before he could read.

The death of his mother when he was only eight followed by his father four years later left him an orphan. Even his dear uncle Philip from whom his name was derived died in 1715. Taken under the care of a guardian who squandered his inheritance, Doddridge was eventually cared for by the Rev Samuel Clark, a Presbyterian minister from St Albans, who helped him secure a place in the Dissenting Academy at Kibworth in Leicestershire. Doddridge had joined Clark's church at the age of sixteen.

Since the Great Ejectment from their posts of Puritan ministers, university dons and schoolmasters in 1662, many had established schools. These Dissenting Academies brought about a flowering of education with a broad and exciting curriculum. The Kibworth Academy was of high quality and Doddridge relished his life as a student, reading widely and enthusiastically. He established the practice of rising early at 5am to begin the day which he occupied with varied and useful activity; it was a habit which he continued throughout his life.

Once training for ministry was completed in 1723 Doddridge accepted the pastorate in Kibworth then moved to Market Harborough. In an age when death from illnesses such as tuberculosis and smallpox was common Doddridge was soon called upon to undertake the principalship of the Academy itself, as its young principal had died. Agreeing to this and preparing to set up the Academy in Market Harborough Doddridge astounded everyone by announcing his move to the Castle Hill Church in Northampton.

He duly arrived in the town on Christmas Eve 1729 and set up home in the manse in Marefair at the corner of Pike Lane. The academy students were to live in the house with him. Thus began an energetic ministry, ambitious in its scope and remarkable in its effectiveness. Doddridge's ministry had many facets. His work in the Academy later moved to Sheep Street (part of the building still survives) and produced many able ministers, lecturers and others from all denominations.

The rules of the Northampton Academy were copied by the developing universities such as Yale and Princeton in the United States. Students were taught to write in shorthand which itself influenced the development of Pitman shorthand. Doddridge encouraged a school for boys in Bridge Street and had plans for developing education for girls. He was greatly exercised in bringing Scripture into the home, making parents responsible for spiritual teaching, and influencing children and young people to build up the church of the future.

The Castle Hill meeting house saw him in action as a minister who taught with passion and tenderness. Illustrating his sermons with hymns Doddridge became an important influence upon the development of hymnody as a vehicle for the social implications of the Gospel. Influenced by his friend Isaac Watts, Doddridge helped in establishing congregational hymn singing as an acceptable part of worship. Doddridge also published sermons at his own expense in order to influence society more widely.

His daughter died in infancy and he published his funeral sermon for her in order to help other parents who were similarly suffering.

In publishing a pamphlet written by one of his own students who had died of smallpox Doddridge succeeded in changing public opinion in favour of inoculation against disease. It is to Doddridge that Northampton owes the foundation of the General Hospital as well as its defence against the invasion by the Jacobites in 1745. He was a defender of religious liberty and became nationally famous for his defence of the rights of Dissenters to have schools. He was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Divinity by Aberdeen University in 1736.

In the time between getting up at 5am and having his breakfast Doddridge pursued a literary career, writing influential books. Considered one of the greatest works of the 18th century his *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (still in print) influenced many people. One such was the antislavery campaigner William Wilberforce. Another of Doddridge's great writings was *The Family Expositor*, a translation of the New Testament with commentaries and devotional exercises, the first work of its kind, remained popular for over a century. William Carey made use of it when translating the New Testament into Bengali. Carey himself had been baptised in the River Nene, having made use of Doddridge's vestry at Castle Hill because of its proximity to the river. Carey was undoubtedly influenced by Doddridge's passion for overseas mission.

A generation before Carey, Doddridge had preached on *The Evil and Danger of Neglecting the Souls of Men*; such passion was to re-emerge in Carey's famous *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens* and the formation of the BMS in 1792.

Carey by single-minded determination brought Protestant missionary endeavour to global dimensions, yet it was men like Doddridge who prepared the soil and first sowed the little grain of future enterprises.

Doddridge died at the early age of 49 years. Yet he had packed into those years a multitude of service that served as a burning and shining light to all. The Evangelical Movement owes much to his quiet yet far-reaching influence through his writings, teaching and hymns thus reaching all classes and sections of provincial society and transforming Dissent and even the Church of England. His influence lives on.