

# ACCORDING TO MINE HEART

The Collected Correspondence of

*J. M. Lophman.*

Edited by Matthew J. Hyde

ACCORDING TO MINE  
HEART



*Your affectionate pastor  
J. Lopham.*

# According To Mine Heart

The Collected Letters of  
James Kidwell Popham

Edited by Matthew J. Hyde

2010

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### **Abbreviations:**

Throughout this book the following abbreviations have been used:

- Memoir and Letters*     J. H. Gosden (1937) *Memoir and Letters of J. K. Popham*.  
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# Foreword

by Mr J. R. Broome

Having reprinted J. H. Gosden's biography of J. K. Popham, *Valiant for Truth*, in 1990 and some of J. K. Popham's *Polemical Writings* in 2006, it is encouraging to have inspired one of our younger authors, Dr Matthew Hyde, to research and publish a comprehensive edition of J. K. Popham's letters, with an extensive introduction and footnotes. Much research has gone into this.

Though born in J. K. Popham's lifetime, I did not go to Brighton until 1939, two years after his death. Our family stayed for a week in August of that year in Surrenden Road at the guesthouse of Misses Morris and Evans, who attended his Church. On the Sunday we went to Galeed and saw the large congregation that had sat under his ministry and were still mourning his death.

Mr Popham's name was a household word in our family, since he had been a close friend of my late grandfather, J.W. Walley, who was for fifty two years deacon of Bethesda Chapel, Southampton, where Mr Popham had come for many years prior to his death in 1937 to take the Anniversary Services in July.

In my student days, through my parents, I came to know his deacons, S. F. Paul and H. P. Banfield, who often stayed in our home with their wives. After Mr Popham's death, J. H. Gosden took Bethesda Chapel's July Anniversary until his death in 1964. We had therefore plenty of opportunity to hear the name of J. K. Popham mentioned by those who knew him well. My grandfather counted him one of his closest friends.

When we published *Valiant for Truth* we asked his deacon, H. P. Banfield to write a Preface. We cannot do better than quote his own words regarding his late Pastor:

"That he was revered, loved, and feared by us all is certainly true, in varying degrees, perhaps according to individual ages, but there was about him that nobility of presence, which true grace always confers upon a human being, which commands respect and can never be imitated.

“Mr Popham was very much a Victorian and believed in class distinctions and possibly at times found it difficult to unbend... Like all born in the Nineteenth Century, we accepted this attitude without offence. Today it would cause much resentment. However he was a man made truly great by God. His work and his memory is still appreciated and honoured by all touched by the sacred Flame.”

We hope that the reading of these letters, which allow us to see the man in the faithfulness, wisdom, teaching, love, kindness and care of his pastoral duties, will be made a blessing to future generations as they were to those to whom he wrote them.

J. R. Broome  
Trowbridge, 2010

# A Brief Biographical Note of James Kidwell Popham

by Mr S. F. Paul

James Kidwell Popham was born in Lancaster on December 20<sup>th</sup> 1847, but his parents shortly after removed to Nottingham. They were worldly and had no place for religion in those days. On one occasion however his mother while in the Royal Theatre in Nottingham became suddenly convinced of sin and feared she would fall into hell before she could leave the building. This resulted in her attending a Mission Room and her son James also, who although only seventeen was engaged to speak at these Missions, his sentiments being at that time Arminian. But it pleased the Lord to send the Holy Spirit to arrest him and teach him the way of God more perfectly, which he relates as follows: “On a never to be forgotten day as I was walking along a road the word, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God’, was borne in upon my heart with an amazing power and penetrating light. The view of divine holiness then given me filled me with consternation and alarm, and I stood still at that spot near the market in Nottingham and inly said: ‘Where that God is I shall never be’. It laid fast hold on me, for in that awesome sight of divine holiness I saw the uncleanness of my heart; then His divine justice flashed into my conscience and I saw my sins; the sorrows of death and the pains of hell took powerful hold on me. I tried to keep the law, as who would not being ignorant of the gospel? I was miserable, tried to get happiness but failed and grew constantly worse. I flew to more strenuous working, but my soul was filled with a sense of the nature of God and His fire burned up all my works.”<sup>1</sup>

This sharp dealing brought him out of the world and from his Arminianism, although there was a hard struggle with the latter; for when the doctrine of election was one day mentioned, the enmity of his carnal mind so rose up that he said: “If the God you speak of is the God of heaven, I neither want to know Him nor to be where He is” (*ibid* p. 6). This terrible speech cost him a great deal of bitter sorrow afterwards and for

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<sup>1</sup> *Memoir of J. K. Popham* by J. H. Gosden, pp. 3-4

some time he dare not attempt to pray, until he was encouraged by the words: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men". A remarkable providence at this time, although insignificant in itself, was made the means of bringing him into contact with the Strict Baptists, with whom he was to be so usefully connected throughout his life. He was going to visit a certain friend one evening, when under a sudden impulse he turned in the opposite direction to another friend's house, and this led to his being asked to preach at a Congregational Chapel at Lubenham. His objection availed nothing and he was constrained to go the next Lord's day. His preaching however was too Calvinistic for the people, with the exception of a Mr and Mrs Morton who took him to their house. Arising from this new friendship there came an invitation to preach at a room at Clipston, and a number of Strict Baptists from Lutterworth attending on this occasion introduced him to that denomination and afterwards to Mr de Fraigne, Pastor of the Strict Baptist Chapel at Lutterworth, who was the means of instructing him in the doctrines of grace, and eventually baptized him on July 5<sup>th</sup> 1868.

In the meantime he was brought earnestly to seek to be assured that Christ was his Saviour, and at length he obtained his desire as he thus relates: "I went to my room one night with a fearful sense of despair. As I locked my door I felt my heart moved to pray and soon found a peculiar liberty in confessing my sin and all my sins. How I justified God should He carry out His severest sentence! While I was thus engaged Paul's word concerning the mercy of God to himself fell on my soul with power, life, and light: 'But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief'. By the power of that marvellous word my soul was filled with a gracious energy in prayer for the same mercy. Soon it came; it seemed almost immediately, I could not quite tell. But the mercy, the full pardon of my sin, of all my sins, was conveyed by the word of Peter: 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed by corruptible things as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'. My conscience was filled with peace and comfort, and as I lay my head on my pillow that night I said: 'Now it would be as easy for me to die as it is for me to put my head upon this pillow'."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid* p. 10.

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Just previous to this he had received the first intimation from the Lord that he was to preach, the words in Isaiah 52: 11-12 being spoken to him, and this call to the ministry was approved by Mr de Fraine, so that he frequently preached at Lutterworth, Walgrave, Clipston, and other places. In 1869 he received a further confirmation about the ministry from the words, "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul" &c., which were given him when asking direction about going to preach at Langton, in Dorset. Accordingly he went, and his first sermon there was blessed to the deliverance of a woman who had been going about to hear and crying out in great distress. He went for several years to Langton and in 1871, when he had to baptize in the sea at Swanage Bay, he was given a remarkable view of the glory of God in baptism from Matthew 3: 16-17.

In November, 1869, Mr Popham was married to Harriett Adcock, and shortly afterwards they moved to Wigston Magna, where he preached regularly for about three years, although never accepting the pastorate.

In 1873 he received a Call from the Church at Shaw St. Chapel, Liverpool, which eventually led to his being appointed Pastor in May, 1874. While he was there he was favoured with a revelation of the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, for which he so earnestly contended in later years.

Mr Popham's introduction to Brighton came through a letter sent by some friends at Wigston Magna to Mr Marshall, one of the Galeed deacons, and this read before the Church resulted in an invitation being sent to Mr Popham to preach at Galeed for two Lord's days in June, 1881. In the meantime his ministry in Liverpool seemed to be drying up, and this was attended with a sharp temptation that he was not called to preach. While still suffering under this heavy fear the time came for his visit to Galeed, and on the morning of the first Lord's day as he heard the clock strike ten he said: "Lord, one hour more and the people expect me; I cannot go like this and I will not". But the Lord in great compassion spoke powerfully the promise, "I will be with thee". He says: "I knew the voice, felt the power of it, and falling on my knees I adoringly said, 'Lord, I believe it.'" What a change this wrought in him so that he longed to go to the pulpit and was favoured with a blessed day!

Following this there came an invitation to supply at Galeed with a view to the pastorate, which he felt able to accept, and before the period of

probation was ended he was appointed the Pastor in September, 1882. Under his ministry many were convinced of sin and brought into deep concern, and in course of time delivered into gospel liberty. At almost every church meeting fresh candidates for church membership were brought forward. They were good days when the work of the Lord was abundantly manifest, and the chapel was usually filled to capacity. One can remember when as a lad there was at times a difficulty in obtaining a seat. Indeed a vacant seat would often signify to the Pastor's discerning eye that one of his usual hearers was absent, and a pastoral visit would soon follow to ascertain the cause.

Mr Popham was not however without his trials as set against these encouraging signs. Under the searching nature of his ministry some left the chapel after he first came, and there were disappointments in the defection of others calling for discipline, together with losses by death. Some of these losses were especially painful, as when the stalwarts to whom he came – gracious and able deacons, were taken to be with the Lord; also some in his own family – his youngest daughter in 1911 and his beloved wife in 1914. He was afflicted himself at times with illnesses, and all together made up a path of tribulation which was much sanctified. He was married again in 1916, but also outlived his second wife who passed away in 1934.

Mr Popham's labours were not confined to Galeed, but he was called to supply at many other Strict Baptist Chapels, and a record of the pulpits which he occupied amounts to 182. In addition to his ministerial labours he served from 1874 upon the Committee of the Gospel Standard Societies, being appointed Chairman in his later years, and was also Editor of the *Gospel Standard* from 1905, and of the *Friendly Companion* from 1919, until he had to relinquish both of these through failing strength in 1935. His first volume of Sermons was published in 1907, while in 1909 a monthly series was commenced and continued until a few years after his decease, a second bound volume having also been published in 1922. For some years he gave an annual address at the local meeting of the Trinitarian Bible Society, and was also active in connection with the Sovereign Grace Union.

In October, 1932, Jubilee Services were held in commemoration of his fifty years' pastorate at Galeed. As this chapel was not large enough the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel in Brighton was hired for the occasion,

when about 1,500 people attended from all over the country and from Scotland. Mr J. H. Gosden preached in the afternoon and Mr Popham in the evening, and presentations were made both from Galeed and the Gospel Standard Societies.

By 1935 it was noticeable that his health was gradually failing, causing occasional absences from the pulpit, until in the early part of 1937 he was unable to be out for some months. But to the surprise of all he came to Galeed on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and preached a short time in the morning and once or twice afterwards, the last time being on May 30<sup>th</sup>. After this he began to fail more rapidly, but was favoured in his soul in view of the approaching end. On June 12<sup>th</sup> he exclaimed with a radiant countenance: "Happy, happy, happy! O I cannot express how happy I am! Tell my dear Galeed people with my deep love, my black sins, as black as the confines of hell, are all forgiven. Luther said, 'Seas, rivers, oceans of black sins'; and my black, black sins are all washed away in the precious blood of Christ. 'Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly'. O how I love Him, and now I shall soon be with Him who has loved me from all eternity!"<sup>3</sup> He was kept in this blessed frame anticipating being for ever with his Lord and Saviour. On June 14<sup>th</sup> he was able to converse with about twenty godly friends who paid him a parting visit, but on the next morning he became unconscious and passed away to eternal rest and peace on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937, in his 90<sup>th</sup> year.

(Reproduced from: *Sermons by J. K. Popham* (1969) GS Trust, Harpenden. Vol 1, p. i-v)

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For further information on Mr Popham, the reader is directed to the very full biography of Mr Popham: *Memoir and Letters of J. K. Popham* (1938) by J. H. Gosden. This was reprinted as *Valiant for Truth* (1990) by Gospel Standard Trust Publications, with a lengthy introduction by J. R. Broome.

Other short biographies of Mr Popham appear in the Sovereign Grace Union memorial volume: *James Kidwell Popham: a brief biography and addresses*

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid* p. 272.

*delivered in connection with the Sovereign Grace Union (1938) and in History of the Gospel Standard Magazine 1835-1985 (1985) by B. A. Ramsbottom, Gospel Standard Trust Publications.*

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**1. Mr Popham circa 1907.**

About the time he completed 25 years as Pastor at Galeed Chapel, Brighton.

# Introduction to the Letters

In some ways these letters need no introduction. The memory of Mr Popham is still dear amongst the Lord's people who are able to remember his public ministry, although these grow fewer year by year. The stamp Mr Popham left upon the Gospel Standard churches is still evident today, over 70 years since he died. The vital truths for which he stood and the doctrines he preached, perpetuated by Mr J. H. Gosden and Mr S. F. Paul, his sons in the faith and successors in the editorship of both the *Gospel Standard* and *Friendly Companion*, have been a blessing to several generations of Strict Baptists and continue to be so today. That said, we believe three things in this volume of Mr Popham's letters, are worthy of the reader's notice:

**Firstly, Mr Popham was a pastor at heart.** Mr Popham's pastoral calling is a reoccurring theme throughout these letters and the reader will find frequent expression of concern over his labours in the pulpit, study and amongst his congregation. His exercises over the members of his congregation, from youngest to oldest, in both their providential and spiritual standing are found in nearly every letter. Furthermore, Mr Popham had high views of the pastoral calling, realising the solemnity of such a position in the Church of God<sup>4</sup>. It reminds us of the promise of God, spoken by His prophet Jeremiah: "I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3: 15). In reading this correspondence it is evident that Mr Popham was, despite his faults, a pastor of whom the Lord says was "according to mine heart". O what a blessing it is to have such a pastor!

In the bringing forth of a pastor after the Lord's heart, a divine call must first be given. It is certain that Mr Popham had no half-hearted call to the ministry, or to the office of pastor. While his exercise regarding the ministry was not protracted over several years, as some men have been, it was sufficient to bring him to the work. Not only that, while the manner in which he was sent out to preach is not that normally expected amongst Gospel Standard churches today, his call was not just an exercise with him, but it had that threefold nature which cannot be easily broken. In addition

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<sup>4</sup> For evidence of this, see Appendix 5, which gives Mr Popham's address to Mr Jesse Delves on taking the pastorate at Ebenezer Chapel Clapham in 1935.

to his personal exercise, the Lord's people were evidently exercised over his call and he was evidently blessed with gifts necessary for the office. Indeed, that Mr Popham possessed exceptional "gifts" for preaching cannot be doubted. Mr Popham's ministry received notice in national newspapers for this very reason. Sir William Robertson Nicholl wrote in the *British Weekly* (21<sup>st</sup> May, 1914):

Mr Popham is in his way a great preacher. He uses not a scrap of notes. For the most part his hand lies on the page of the open Bible; very rarely he raises his voice a little, and with it his hand. But he pursued a long subtle argument without any faltering or any slip, verbal or grammatical. It was a fine discourse, containing a complete system of theology. Mr Popham rose to his best when he spoke of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ...

Yet we know Mr Popham's gift was not merely natural. Perhaps one of the most precious records of Mr Popham's ministry is that written by Rev. Thomas Houghton, editor of the *Gospel Magazine*, in which he clearly shows from whence Mr Popham obtained his pulpit gift:

Though over 80 years of age he [*Mr Popham*] was enabled to preach without a note. His sermon was most searching and impressive. We were specially struck with his deep sense of the enormity of sin, of the majesty of God; though almost motionless, his clear and Scriptural utterance, his comprehensive setting forth of Gospel truth in unfaltering language, riveted the attention of his hearers, and we could not help but thank God that He had raised up such a man to hold forth the Word of life in Brighton for well-nigh fifty years. To the Lord alone, however, must the sole glory be given. This esteemed minister whom we regard as a friend and brother in the Lord has absolutely nothing that he did not receive. He and the rest of us, therefore, have not the smallest ground of self-congratulation. By the grace of God alone we are what we are. We dare not for a moment cherish any thoughts of pride in our hearts. In our God we live and move and have our being, He giveth to us life, and breath, and spiritual knowledge, and the power to think, and to speak and to glorify Him. Debtors to His mercy alone we all are, and we must unreservedly give to Him the glory for any bodily, mental or spiritual powers we possess. "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 11: 36)

(*Gospel Magazine* 1930 p. 145-146)

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But of more importance to the Lord's people is to find the ministry made a blessing to their souls. Above the natural eloquence of Mr Popham's pulpit labours, we know that the blessing of the Holy Spirit attended his ministry and made it for the good of many of the Lord's people. The numerous obituaries that appeared in the *Gospel Standard* both during his lifetime and afterwards, which speak of the blessings received by the Lord's people under his ministry, testify that Mr Popham's ministry was not the fruit of natural gifts, but that he was one of the Lord's sent servants.

Mr Popham was to pass through much exercise regarding the ministry, he was tried by the ending of his pastorate at Liverpool, had trouble in the church during the early years of his pastorate at Galeed and saw some of his church members defect and leave the chapel, not only to go to another chapel, but at times to give up attendance on the means of grace altogether. Yet these trials were evidently used by the Lord, not only to keep Mr Popham humble, that God alone may have the glory, but also to make and form under the almighty hand of God, a chosen vessel fit for the Master's use, a pastor according to God's heart. Having walked these paths Mr Popham was well fitted to later counsel his sons in the ministry – Mr J. H. Gosden and Mr J. Delves – regarding the work, as well as others (for an example of this see letter 154).

Mr Popham's foremost desire was to lead the flock over whom he had been set by God into green pastures and beside still waters, yet this was no easy path. These letters reveal to us some of the trials and troubles of a pastor. Mr Popham writes to his closest companions in tribulation of his concerns over his flock. We read of the exercise he was brought into when he felt the Lord withdrawing His gracious hand during his labours at Liverpool (Letter 13). Surely this is a sign of an exercised pastor! When a shepherd sees his ability to feed the flock drying up, how he fears for their welfare – what concern of mind he is brought into! So it is with a pastor who faithfully watches over his flock.

Mr Popham suffered frequent bouts of ill health and at times this necessitated separation from his congregation for a period of convalescence. The pain of these separations is evident in these letters (see letter 72). When he was unable to minister to them it was of utmost concern to him that they should still be spiritually fed by a faithful ministry. He was evidently jealous

with regard to the ministry maintained in his absence at Galeed (see letter 70) and the frequent letters of gracious instruction and teaching he sent to the church while absent from them (see letter 64 for an example) are very clear proofs of this.

Some may feel Mr Popham went too far: he advocated the reading of sound sermons by a deacon over the preaching of sermons by a minister of doubtful standing. He wrote in the *Gospel Standard*:

We think ministers would be discharging their duty to God and the churches if they exercised more godly caution in mentioning supplies. We have known of a minister, in response to the request of deacons to recommend some preachers, mentioning Dr Owen, Dr Goodwin, Bunyan, Philpot, and others, saying he was sure they would render assistance if requested. We think the recommendation good, and we repeat it to our pastorless churches.

The duty of churches is to be jealous of God's glory in respect of their pulpits; to try the spirits; to seek to walk by 1 John 4: 1-3; to endeavour to discover whether the ministers they get have received a revelation of Christ, then whether they have had a distinct call – distinct, we mean, from their call by grace – to the ministry, and whether there is really any gracious authority, that is, unction and glory, in their ministry.

*(Gospel Standard 1950 p. 176)*

While we acknowledge that the preaching of the Gospel is a divine ordinance and must not be displaced from the centre of worship – for it is through the “foolishness of preaching” that the Lord has purposed most shall be brought to conversion (1 Corinthians 1: 21) – and that reading services must be regarded as second rate, nevertheless, we wish we saw more concern in the hearts of some pastors and deacons today over the ministry they allow into the pulpit. Any stockman only wants the best for his animals that they may grow in the most appropriate manner: why then should pastors be half-heartedly concerned over the spiritual food set before the members of their spiritual flock? None can accuse Mr Popham of not jealously guarding the souls he was set over as pastor. O that there were more pastors with the same concern today!

Not only did he guard the pulpit, he also guarded the Church. Mr Popham, while he baptised many during his years at Galeed, was not one to

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“usher” members of his congregation into the Church. Where he saw a work of grace in a soul he undoubtedly prayerfully watched over it and sought its nurture that in the Lord’s time it might bring forth fruit. Where he was assured of a work of grace he was not afraid to drop a word against holding back from the ordinances of the Lord’s house<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless he spoke out against those who fail to uphold the standard of the Church in the admittance of members<sup>6</sup> and it may perhaps surprise some today to read the advice he gave to the denomination on the matter:

It is, however, to be feared that with the decadence in spiritual life, power, and godliness among us, the ordinance [*of believer’s baptism*] is too lightly observed, that many are baptised not discerning the awful importance and implications of the ordinance. A return to the ancient practice of instructing for a time the candidates – called catechumen – before baptism, would be for the good of the candidates themselves and the churches to which they are afterwards admitted. Baptism and church membership appear to be too little considered; hence much church trouble follows, and a falling away from the profession made and practice as the result.

*(Gospel Standard 1932 p. 6)*

Within his church Mr Popham maintained strong discipline, even if it was at times with a heavy heart. Two of the faithful letters in this volume were penned to communicate the decision of the Church to separate from the addressee (see letter 18 and 25). When under what was possibly the greatest pastoral trial of his ministry, Mr Popham was brought to see that he was in the wrong and was given the grace to apologise and acknowledge it, even though his flesh rebelled under such a course of action<sup>7</sup>. While he ruled the Church, in the fear of the Lord, using discipline where necessary, we believe he did so out of love for souls and a tender conscience before the Lord. Today when Church discipline is sometimes sadly absent, we cannot help feeling that the lack in this regard is a solemn mark against our churches and will ultimately not work for the good of souls.

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<sup>5</sup> See the case of Benjamin Hunt, later Mr Popham’s deacon, for an example of this: *Friendly Companion* 1961 p. 69ff.

<sup>6</sup> See the *Gospel Standard* 1929 p. 123f.

<sup>7</sup> See *Memoir and Letters* p. 56f.

As a man Mr Popham is often conceived as being austere, and is often thought of as being aloof from his congregation. Mr Popham lived in a day when the ministerial office was treated with utmost respect and this created a natural barrier at times between pastor and people, perhaps rightly so, particularly when we see the sad effects of the lack of reverence, the familiarity and contempt, with which not just the Lord's servants as men, but also the solemn office of the ministry, are treated by many today. It was this barrier, together with the class system which held particular sway in the Galeed congregation, which we feel has largely created the impression of austerity.

However, Mr Popham's concerns over the spiritual welfare of his congregation in these letters only display warmth in the heart of the pastor. Many of these letters were written to members of his congregation. Some are letters written to souls waiting to come before the church with their testimony of the Lord's work in their soul (see letter 88), others are to men exercised about the ministry (see letter 109), while the vast majority are written to individuals in some distress. Perhaps one of the outstanding examples in this volume is the letter of sympathy to the Jacques sisters, who were bereaved of both their mother and sister within a short period of time; to them Mr Popham writes:

Yesterday afternoon I received the sad intelligence of your sister's departure... It is well with your departed sister. She has left forever a sin-polluted body and a troublesome, sorrowful path. O what a weight of trouble, what piercing sorrow has she left! It is well with her now, for she is in the blissful presence of Him whom, as I have often witnessed, she sought with many tears, and whose absence was her greatest grief... And, dear friends, it is no less well, though far less happy, with you. It is well in this trial, for an ever-gracious God, a tender Father has done it. Infinite goodness and wisdom and faithfulness are in this great affliction. Oh, may the eternal Spirit say to your souls, "It is well." Well now, though not comfortable. Well, because the God of all grace will manage for you, because an Almighty God will strengthen and keep you, and because a promise-performing God will bring you through all to Himself. May He work sweetest submission to His will. Our vile nature can do nothing but rebel; may grace reign.

*(Letter 12)*

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Furthermore, Mr Popham's love for the young people of his congregation, and indeed the Gospel Standard churches at large, is apparent in these letters. Mr Popham edited the *Friendly Companion* between 1919 and 1935 and while his monthly letters to the young may be considered today a little above most children and contain what are today unpopular teachings at the time they were well received (see Appendix 5). Who cannot but be touched by the fatherly instruction in the letter of thanks to a small girl in his congregation who had sent him a bar of chocolate (see letter 140) or his letter to three young men of his congregation going to fight in the Great War (see letter 102)? One of the longest letters in this book was written to a young person (aged 18 years) deeply exercised in spiritual matters (see letter 7). Today, when the younger generation have been brought up without letters and few pastors write letters to the young of their congregations as Mr Popham did, we cannot but feel we are poorer for it. Mr Popham was perhaps ahead of his times also by occasionally preaching a sermon directed at the young. One such example preached from the text Ecclesiastes 12: 1: "Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth," which has been printed several times in the *Gospel Standard* in the ensuing years<sup>8</sup>.

Mr Popham's watchful eye in the case of Arthur Smeed, a poor orphaned butcher's boy is recounted in the diary of Benjamin Hunt (later a deacon at Galeed) and it is heart warming to read how Mr Popham watched over and encouraged the growth of grace in the soul of the lad.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The sermon was preached on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1910 and was published in the *Gospel Standard* 1916 p. 197, 1961 p. 12 and 1991 p. 33. When Mr J. H. Gosden published this sermon in the *Gospel Standard* in 1961, he prefaced it with these remarks:

The following Address was given by our late beloved friend and pastor in 1910. The fifty years since elapsed have witnessed vast changes and unthought-of declension in many places. Mr Popham's real concern for the young prohibited his trifling with their souls by urging them into activities for which they were not qualified, as is so often the case to-day (mercifully not at Galeed). We prayerfully reproduce the salutary teaching for the benefit of the youth of our congregations who are surrounded as never before with evil examples and false teaching on every hand. (p. 12)

<sup>9</sup> See the *Friendly Companion* 1961 p. 69ff.

One more especial example of his concern over the youth can be found in the words spoken to a young man baptised at Galeed, while a student at university:

Your present life is full of difficulties. College life is a snare, must always be. The society, the life of a student is a different life, never more difficult perhaps than it is today. I hope God will give you grace to be very careful of your walk there. Beware of being too ready to speak. Be slow to speak, swift to hear. Your difficulties as they are sanctified will lead you to the throne of grace to ask God to teach you how to walk, how to think, how to pray, how to read His Word and to increase you in the knowledge of Himself, in the knowledge of Jehovah, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

(See Appendix 4)

However great his concern for the young, Mr Popham was careful it did not run away with him. He realised his calling was not just to preach to the young. He writes:

Why the modern distinction of love for the young? If the Holy Spirit should be copiously poured out – O that He might be! I venture to say that the glory of God would be our first concern, and then all the ages of our hearers would die out of our thoughts and only their precious souls would be present with us.

(*Gospel Standard* 1906 p. 540)

As in the life and experience of the child of God there are two parts, that of providence and that of grace, so in the pastoral office. The concern of Mr Popham did not just extend to the spiritual welfare of the Lord's people, but also their natural needs. When Mr Popham had not been a minister long, he received an invitation to preach at Langton in Dorset. Desiring a word of direction from the Lord as to whether he should accept the invitation or not, the following word laid hold of him: "And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." (Isaiah 58: 10-12) Of this occasion Mr Popham says:

Instantly I felt it was God's word bidding me to go to Langton; and not only so, but confirming my whole ministry. Those promises have always appeared to me almost too great to receive, and have been a source of much exercise, that they might be fulfilled.

*(Memoir and Letters p. 13)*

This exercise, coupled with the fact that Mr Popham had himself known considerable poverty and hardship during his early ministry (see letter 33), gave him the ability to sympathetically help his flock with regard to their temporal needs. Whatever class system existed at Galeed, Mr Popham shows care over the least of his flock. This charitable spirit is seen in the letter written to Mrs Piper, enclosing some money to help her during a period when her husband was unwell and she had just had another child (see letter 33). Yet in all this, Mr Gosden could say of Mr Popham:

Providential trials and deliverances he experienced many, but he ever avoided two extremes: the making of salvation from temporal blessings, and the unbelieving disregard of God in his providential dealings.

*(Memoir and Letters p. 284)*

This is a narrow line. Many have had a religion built upon providences, yet the world can also stand amazed at the wonders of providence – or as they may horribly term it “fate”, “luck” or “fortune”, desiring not to acknowledge the hand of God in all things – and we come to realise there is nothing saving in just noting providences. We need that which Mr Popham strongly contended for – a personal work of grace in the soul. As such Mr Popham did not deal in generalities with his flock, he dealt with them as individuals, he watched over them each, he laboured over each in prayer, he waited to see each brought to a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. Mr Gosden writes:

The Person and work of Christ was always his theme, always with insistence upon the need of the Holy Spirit's application. The fashionable religion of ‘generalities’, he eschewed perforce of inward experience as well as from a solemn sense of the value of immortal souls. How he would warn us that “we may be as much lost in the ‘generalities’ of religion as lost in irreligion”!

*(Memoir and Letters p. 285)*

As such, Mr Popham's ministry was discriminating, to the point that one could say: "If you have any religion at all that man's ministry will find it out, and if you have none you are made to feel it"<sup>10</sup>

Writing to the churches of the Gospel Standard "denomination" in 1931, Mr Popham said:

The [*office of a pastor*] is from the Lord Jesus Christ, Ephesians 4: 11; its standing and power for usefulness, He bestows, Revelation 1: 16, 20; the felt insufficiency of the minister is met by faith turning to the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3: 5; the matter of the ministry is from heaven and is found in the Person and work of Christ, 1 Corinthians 2. In a word, the whole sphere of the pastor's work is given in Ephesians 4: 11-16; Revelation 2 and 3. Surely every pastor who sees and feels, in the unction of the Holy One, the position he occupies, the work for which he is set apart, for whom he is a labourer, even the Lord, the Head of His own house; to whom he must go and speak, even his fellow men and fellow sinners, the very weight, the awfulness of the whole, must cause him to realise his need of divine teaching, and of grace to "...take heed unto himself, and unto the doctrine"; to "continue in them," believing that in so doing, he shall both save himself and them that hear him, 1 Timothy 4: 14-16. To be able, by the grace of God, to say two words at the close of his ministry will be much coveted by him: "Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God", Acts 20: 26, 27, and God's testimony concerning His servant Job, Job 42: 7. This will be an unspeakable blessing.

(*Gospel Standard* 1931 p. 9)

Truly, when Mr Popham's pastorate was brought to a close by his death on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1937, it could be said of him that he was clear from the blood of all men and that he had spoken that which was right concerning the Lord. As Mr Popham says – what greater blessing (or epitaph) can be coveted by any minister of the Gospel than this?

**Secondly, Mr Popham was a leader amongst the churches.** We live in a day, as Mr Popham did, when many churches do not have pastors set over them. In some cases it may be feared this is partly due to a lack of exercise on the part of the churches, for the Lord expressly promised

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<sup>10</sup> See *Memoir and Letters* p. 283

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“whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.” (John 14: 13) But we also realise that there is a lack in number of God-sent ministers of the Gospel to fill the pastoral office. This should be of concern to the churches. Mr Popham writing in 1931 shows the solemn position of a church without a pastor <sup>11</sup>:

Having seen in the light of holy Scripture that there are two offices created in the church for her good [*the pastorate and the deaconate*], and seeing that one of the two – the first and most important [*the pastorate*] – is all but vacant among us, a solemn enquiry comes before us, viz., Why has the Most High God, who is jealous for Zion, left this small part of her desolate in that particular? Surely we must have grieved the Holy Spirit. Surely there must be some things which He, in whose gift and hand are the pastors, sees “not perfect.” “Who is the wise man, that may understand this? and who is he to whom the mouth of the Lord hath spoken, that he may declare it, for what the land perisheth and is burned up like a wilderness, that none passeth through” (Jer. 9. 12).

It will be objected that many of the causes are too small and poor to support a pastor. True. But an enquiry may here be made: What has reduced them? Why did the Lord who made them walls and built upon them palaces of silver, and enclosed them with boards of cedar, remove them. Who raised the seven churches in Asia? There was a reason for the raising up of adversaries against Solomon. So with our decayed, in many cases decaying churches.

(*Gospel Standard* 1931 p. 9)

May these letters stir up an exercise in the hearts of our churches today that we may be found repenting over where we have turned from the faith once delivered to the saints. O that there may be found, in the midst of repentance, again a desire that the walls of Jerusalem may be built anew and an aspiration in the pastorless churches of today that the Lord would yet grant them pastors according to the heart of God.

Nevertheless, while pastorless churches remain, it is only natural that these churches should be found looking to pastors of other churches and to other of the Lord’s servants for advice, for direction, for protection and warning. To many churches Mr Popham filled such a role. He was a leader

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<sup>11</sup> See also the *Gospel Standard* 1924 p. 123.

of the people locally, taking the oversight of several pastorless churches, among them Priory Chapel, Maidstone, over which church, in time, he was to see his own son in the faith, Mr John H. Gosden, placed as pastor. In the case of another church he had the oversight over, Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, he was to shepherd the people during a period of considerable upheaval when the chapel they had met in for 200 years was condemned and they had to find new accommodation. His wisdom was sought by these churches on diverse matters, and letter 86 is one example of the advice he gave, in this case concerning the election of a new deacon.

He was also approached for advice on a level outside the local church. One such case is found in letter 109, which is the reply to a man who had written to Mr Popham concerning his exercise regarding the ministerial office. Another is letter 59, where he had been approached about how to lead the service in the absence of a minister.

A further, very different, example of Mr Popham's leadership amongst the churches, is the letter sent by the Church at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, although obviously penned and most probably initiated by Mr Popham, to the young men of the Gospel Standard Churches fighting in the Great War (see letter 107). Similar leadership is shown in his letters calling the churches to collective prayer on behalf of the nation during the national crisis which arose from the Great Depression in 1931 (see letters 135 and 136).

It can be said wherever the Lord's people were found Mr Popham had a concern over them. Mr Gosden comments "He knew the strait and narrow path and he taught it."<sup>12</sup> This is most clearly seen in the alarms Mr Popham sounded against errors creeping into the Church. In prefaces to the Gospel Standard Trust reprints of Mr Popham's *Memoir and Letters* (renamed *Valiant for Truth*) and his *Polemical Writings*, Mr J. R. Broome highlighted the faithful stand Mr Popham took inside and outside the Gospel Standard Churches in warning against error. In particular the teachings of the American evangelists D. L. Moody (1837-1899) and I. D. Sankey (1840-1908), the Keswick teaching of Dr W. G. Scroggie (1877 – 1958), who held pastorates at Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh and later the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London and the blasphemy of R. J. Campbell (1867 – 1956), who after

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<sup>12</sup> See *Memoir and Letters* p. 279.

being pastor at the City Temple, London, left the Congregational Church to become a minister in the Church of England.

Mr Popham also stood with his predecessors in the editorship of the *Gospel Standard* in their caution over C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), the well known Baptist minister and pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London. Unlike Mr Popham who had written against the Moody and Sankey evangelistic campaigns, Mr Spurgeon joined Moody and Sankey at their meetings.

Opinions of Mr Spurgeon have always split “Strict Baptists” (in the loosest sense of the term) into two groups: those who accept him and those who reject him<sup>13</sup>. The *Gospel Standard* mentions Spurgeon but little. It may perhaps be said that the editors of the *Gospel Standard* have been eloquent in their silence, but where they have spoken, while perhaps not totally condemning him, they have spoken to condemn the leaven of lightness and levity which runs through his writings, which coupled with error in his ministry, as Mr Popham says, cannot be overlooked for the sake of the little which seemed right (see letter 38).

Mr Philpot<sup>14</sup> commented at some length on Spurgeon’s Fast Day Sermon, preached on 7th October 1857 at the Crystal Palace, of which he said: “We could find in it neither Law nor Gospel.”<sup>15</sup> In fairness to Mr Spurgeon, he was at this stage but a young, and perhaps somewhat inexperienced, 23 year old. Later, responding to a correspondent in the *Gospel Standard*, Philpot wrote:

You have written to us again and again, wishing us to explain one or two extracts from a sermon by C. H. Spurgeon. We are not Mr Spurgeon’s

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps one of the best Strict Baptist critiques of Mr Spurgeon’s ministry is found in Witts (Undated) *The Autobiography of Thomas Witts*, Part 2. Kirby, London. p. 202ff; for a more recent critique see *Calvin vs. Hyper-Spurgeonism* (1995) Williams and North Ed. Berith Publications.

<sup>14</sup> Although Spurgeon commented highly on Philpot’s Sermons and reviewed highly his *Advance of Popery*, he commented he was “not at all enamoured of the peculiar school of theologians which gathered beneath his wing.” (*Sword and Trowel* (1880) December issue.) John Gadsby commenting on this comment of Spurgeon’s says: “We should be surprised were it otherwise; for the views of the *Sword and Trowel* and those of ‘the peculiar school’ referred to are, in some respects, as wide as the poles.” (*Christian’s Monthly Record* 1881 p. 53)

<sup>15</sup> *Gospel Standard* 1857 p. 379

interpreter, nor do we feel called upon to expose every contradiction either of himself or of the Scripture which may be sent us from his sermons or anybody else's, as we might soon fill our pages with useless controversy. Indeed... if you know anything of the truth experimentally for yourself, we wonder that you yourself cannot see its inconsistency, without wanting us to explain it to you.

One extract which you give runs thus: "If any man shall be shut out of heaven, he himself shuts the door." Now compare with this assertion what the Lord says of himself: "I have the keys of hell and death;" (Revelation 1: 18) and again: "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." (Revelation 3: 7) It cannot, then, be true that a man himself shuts the door of heaven, for that would make him a keeper of the key, and not Christ... In fact, all such expressions and assertions as you have sent us show an experimental ignorance of the awful depths of the fall and the sovereignty of superabounding grace.

(*Gospel Standard* 1867 June Supplement p. 1)

Mr John Gadsby<sup>16</sup>, Philpot's successor as editor of the *Gospel Standard*, was more than prepared to stand up for Spurgeon where he felt able, particularly over his stand in the Down-Grade Controversy<sup>17</sup>. When after his death Spurgeon was accused of being "dramatic to a degree that was sometimes barely reverential"<sup>18</sup>, Charles Hemington (editor of the *Gospel Standard* for three brief periods during the years 1881, 1882 and 1884) wrote to the *Devizes Gazette* to publicly refute the charge against Spurgeon and Gadsby similarly defended Spurgeon against the same charge in the *Christian's Monthly Record*<sup>19</sup>.

Nevertheless, where Mr Gadsby considered Spurgeon to be in error he was not afraid to say so. Gadsby criticised Spurgeon on several occasions,

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<sup>16</sup> Mr John Gadsby lectured for Mr Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on the manners and customs of the Holy Land on four occasions and often heard Spurgeon preach in his latter days, (*Christian's Monthly Record* 1892 p. 79). John Gadsby's personal copy of C. H. Spurgeon's *Morning by Morning* (1865) is still extant, signed on the flyleaf "To my esteemed friend Mr Gadsby, with the sincere regards of C. H. Spurgeon."

<sup>17</sup> *Christian's Monthly Record* 1888 p. 7-8

<sup>18</sup> *London Standard* quoted in *Christian's Monthly Record* 1892 p. 72

<sup>19</sup> *Christian's Monthly Record* 1892 p. 72

perhaps most fully in the *Gospel Standard* wrapper, February 1877 p.xiii-xiv, where having given some examples from Spurgeon's ministry states: "This drives the Arminians out of breath. Yet Mr Spurgeon calls himself a Calvinist".<sup>20</sup> Writing in 1888, Gadsby said of Spurgeon:

Should he be led to give up preaching offers of grace, duty-faith, and the practice of open communion, his popularity might be less, his congregation smaller, and his friends fewer; but we are persuaded he would have more of the truth of God on his side; and truth and a good conscience are the best friends a good man can have.

*(Christian's Monthly Record 1888 p. 8)*

Mr Gadsby always spoke highly of a time hearing Spurgeon preach on the similitude of the Shepherd in John 10, but he was quick to expose Spurgeon's "moderate Calvinism" stating that Mr Spurgeon believed that "God had an elect people, but man was not saved if he would not believe... This is the very opposite of Calvinism. We know it is the popular religion of the day, but, in our view, it is making the will of the creature more powerful than the sovereignty of God".<sup>21</sup> Despite the friendship Mr Gadsby had with Mr Spurgeon they certainly would not have seen eye to eye over the content of the *Gospel Standard* Articles of Faith nos. 26 or 32-34.

In 1874 the Annual Address in the *Gospel Standard* (probably written by Mr Hemington) commented on one of Mr Spurgeon's sermons as follows (the whole address is worthy of being read):

In a sermon entitled the "*Signs of the Times*," [*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (1873) Sermon 1135, Vol. 19. p. 553f.] we meet with the following remarks as being part of an appeal to the unconverted: "Why does the Lord commission ministers without number to proclaim his mercy to sinners, if he does not wish to save them? Come to Jesus, sinner. By the love that spared you, I entreat you, come to Jesus. Perhaps at this moment you feel some quickening of your conscience, sinner! You say, 'I wish I were saved!' Take these desires as marks of favour to you. Yield to the mysterious impulse; quench not the Spirit of God! Bow down now while yet there is some life in you, ere evil days of hardness come."... Now we consider the

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<sup>20</sup> Comments also appear in the *Gospel Standard* 1874 p. 410 and wrapper December 1875 p. xii

<sup>21</sup> *Christian's Monthly Record* 1892 p. 80

preacher of this sermon to be the cleverest and ablest preacher of the duty-faith system of this day; and yet, with eternity before us, and sincerely desiring that our views of God's truth should be right, we must say that the preacher's remarks to us are a regular jumble, a flat contradiction, too, of many of his own statements, as put forth in some of his better sermons; and no less subversive of the gospel of the Son of God.

(*Gospel Standard* 1874 p. 11)

Later, Mr J. H. Gosden and Mr S. F. Paul (Mr Popham's successors as editors of the *Gospel Standard*) held a similar view of Mr Spurgeon to their predecessors<sup>22</sup>.

Whilst in these instances Mr Popham may be seen taking a stand against error outside the Gospel Standard churches, within our churches, Mr Popham also took a stand when only a young man. He was appointed to the Gospel Standard Aid Society Committee for the first time (he held two periods of office) in 1874<sup>23</sup>. During the following years Mr Popham was to give firm support to Mr John Gadsby, the editor of the *Gospel Standard*, and the Aid Society Committee in their stand against the errors of Mr Septimus Sears. This controversy was to see Mr Popham's first published letter in the *Gospel Standard* and him come to prominence within Gospel Standard circles for the first time. (This letter has been included in this volume, with background information, in Appendix 1).

Mr Popham was also called to take a stand for the "added articles" of the Gospel Standard Societies, especially articles 32-34 which deal with the manner of the preaching the Gospel. Mr Popham wrote at this juncture two pieces which appeared in the *Gospel Standard*<sup>24</sup>, defending the truths we as a denomination stand for regarding the manner of preaching. He

<sup>22</sup> See: *Gospel Standard* 1954 p. 32 c.f. 1964 p. 381

<sup>23</sup> See: *Gospel Standard* 1874 wrapper September p. 380A.

<sup>24</sup> The first article: *Preaching the Gospel* appeared in the *Gospel Standard* 1906 p. 529 was originally published as a pamphlet and an abbreviated form was published in the *Gospel Standard* at the request of the Gospel Standard Committee. The second article appeared as part of the *Annual Address* in the *Gospel Standard* 1908 p. 15-19 and gives an example of faithful preaching of the Gospel without apostolic exhortations, offers of grace, or recourse to duty faith teaching. Both these articles were republished as a pamphlet *Preaching to the Unconverted* (1908) and are included in *Stand Fast – The Polemical Writings of J. K. Popham* (2006) Gospel Standard Trust Publications.

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demonstrated the power of such ministry in the second of these articles – a singular example of the preaching so beloved by our churches. These pieces have become important doctrinal statements of our churches and are often regarded as the “official” explanation of the “added articles”. Of all these controversies and stands for the truth, Mr Gosden says,

“Controversy he [*Mr Popham*] engaged in of necessity, not with a view to pre-eminence but out of desire, first, to guard the truth of God, to set forth warnings against the rocks and shelves of erroneous doctrine; and, secondly, he entered upon controversy for the love he had for immortal souls. He minded not the frowns, he courted not the smiles of the world.”

(*Memoir and Letters* p. 280)

Here was no fear of man, but a fear of God and a fear concerning the state of never dying souls. O to be driven by the same gracious considerations!

Within the Gospel Standard Churches it may be said that amongst the many stands for truth that Mr Popham made during his ministry, the one which may be classed as his greatest legacy to the Church was his contention for separation between the “Gospel Standard” and “Earthen Vessel” churches. Of this stand, Mr Popham writes in his last New Year’s Address to the readers of the *Gospel Standard*:

Throughout my long term of office, my aim has been to maintain the position our churches took under the ministry and writings of J. C. Philpot, and to keep open the original difference between us and the denomination from which God brought us out by his instrumentality. That is my purpose and aim to-day; and as long as I am at all able to continue, I shall, by the help of God, keep wide open the gulf which was made between our churches and those from which we came.

(*Gospel Standard* 1935 p. 6)

Yet when this matter finally came to separation in 1934, Mr Popham was 86 years old, but this had no bearing on his stand. Unlike so many, who as they get old begin to waver or weaken, no such spirit was evidenced by Mr Popham, despite much personal fear and trembling he was to the end “valiant for truth”.

As background to the stand made by Mr Popham, it is important to understand that when he was appointed Editor of the *Gospel Standard* in July

1905, two separate groups amongst “Strict Baptists” had been in existence for several years. These two groups had become known by the names of the magazine with which they were associated, either the *Gospel Standard* or the *Earthen Vessel*. The initial separation between them arose during the “Eternal Sonship Controversy” of the 1850s, the history of which is fully recorded in *History of the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists* by S. F. Paul (1945, reprinted in 1961). It was this controversy which led to the publication of J. C. Philpot’s treatise: *The True, Proper, and Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ* (1861).

As the years went by, particularly following the end of the Great War, increasing attempts were made by the “Earthen Vessel” churches to smooth over the doctrinal differences which separated them from the “Gospel Standard” churches, with the aim of forming one “Strict Baptist Denomination.” Mr Popham and the Gospel Standard Committee resisted this on the grounds that both in doctrine and practice the two groups of churches were distinctly separate.

Matters came to a head during 1934 in what has become known as the “God Honouring Movement”. At a public meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1934, in the Memorial Hall, Farrington Road, London, the resolution was put by Mr J. C. Fookes (pastor at Bethel Chapel, Luton), that “The Gospel Standard Churches should continue as a separate body from all other Strict Baptist Churches.”<sup>25</sup> The resolution having been addressed by several well respected ministers in the “Gospel Standard” churches the resolution was carried with 407 votes for and 28 against. It should be noted that a number of godly ministers were not happy with this movement and made a stand against it (this is dealt with more fully in Appendix 2). Nevertheless, since the God Honouring Movement in 1934 the “Gospel Standard” churches have continued as a separate body from all other Strict Baptist churches. Later, when the *Gospel Herald* (incorporating the *Earthen Vessel*) and the *Christian’s Pathway* were absorbed into the *Grace Magazine* in 1970, the *Gospel Standard* continued to stand distinctly separate from the Strict Baptist churches which associated with it to form the Grace Baptists.

Sadly, today the words written by Mr Popham regarding the controversy in 1926 seem very appropriate:

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<sup>25</sup> See the *Gospel Standard* 1934 p. 257f.

The generation which knew Philpot, and the controversy and the necessary division of the churches seemingly one, holding one faith, which the controversy discovered to be hopelessly divided on the fundamental question of Christ's Person, has passed away. Those essential divisions brought into being two denominations; and to this day they continue. And the churches which held the foundation truth of Christ's Eternal Sonship had rest. But there is reason to fear that the rest has degenerated into sleep in many cases, with regard to that which is necessary to their being. Here is grave danger. Nothing can countervail the damage done to a church, or an individual person, when the nature and trustworthiness of the foundation becomes an indifferent matter. Yet irreplaceable damage is done if the Eternal Sonship of Christ is either denied, or regarded as non-essential. And where such views of our Lord's highest glory are held, we may expect carelessness with regard to the building itself.

(J. C. Philpot (1926) *The Eternal Sonship*. p. 5-6)

We live in a generation which knows nothing of the God Honouring Movement and little of the Eternal Sonship controversy of the 1850s. Many of the young people in our denomination associate with churches which hold this doctrine in a very loose way<sup>26</sup>, indeed few are committed to it today as Philpot, Popham and the *Gospel Standard* were in past days. Contention for this vital doctrine – *the Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ* – is at a low ebb and many, as in Philpot's day, appear to count it a "little error". Yet it was this error which called us forth to be a separate denomination and as

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, of recent years some "Reformed Evangelicals" in the UK, including the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, have shown a regrettable lack of clarity on the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of Christ. This fact has been evident in their interest in the ministry and writings of Dr Robert Reymond, an American theologian. Dr Reymond in his *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* argued against the commonly held doctrine of the Eternal Generation of Jesus Christ, as set forth in the Nicene Creed. While Dr Reymond has somewhat altered his arguments in the second edition of his *Systematic Theology* (1998, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, USA. p. 317-342), he still argues against the Scriptural proofs given by Philpot for Eternal Generation. Those that stand with us in our view of the Eternal Sonship have sought to clearly show where Dr Reymond (and those who align themselves with him) deviates from the truth (see for example, J. E. North (Ed.) (1997) *The Eternal Sonship – Special Edition. The Sinner Saved*. p.1ff; Dr J. R. Tallach (2006) *The Eternal Sonship of Christ. The Free Presbyterian Magazine*. (111) p. 45ff; Dr R. Beckwith, (2001) *The Calvinist Doctrine of the Trinity. Churchman*. (115) p. 308f)

will be seen from the letters in this volume, was to cost Mr Popham a great deal of trouble, temptation and sadness.

In publishing this volume of letters and remembering the stand made by Philpot in 1861 and by Popham in 1934, all members of the “Gospel Standard” churches would do well to heed what Mr Popham said in 1926:

O people of the “Gospel Standard,” poor and feeble though you be in many respects, seek grace to hold fast the divine, the essential doctrine of our Lord’s eternal Sonship. It is our only hope. The incarnate Son is made known in the infallible Scripture. The Person of Christ, the integrity of the adorable Trinity, the suitableness and ability of Christ for the work He was sent by His Father to do, the foundation and hope of the church, of every believing soul, *rest on His eternal Sonship*. Therefore “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3), and have no fellowship with the denial of your foundation; nor with that profession of the doctrine of eternal generation which yet practically destroys it by regarding it as a non-essential; that is to say, by making it of such small importance that you may say to the inspired apostle Jude, “You are wrong and harsh in your exhortation.”

(*Gospel Standard* 1926 p. 123)

In case any reader should think that the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship was the only grounds on which Mr Popham called for separation between the “Gospel Standard” and “Earthen Vessel” churches, it should be emphasised that it was not.

The “Earthen Vessel” churches had, by 1934, become characterised by an easiness and familiarity within their worship. Choirs and organs had become common place, voluntaries were used in worship and the ministers were played in and out of the pulpit; there was an overbearing emphasis on that which pleased the flesh in worship. In prayer there was much familiarity too; God was addressed as *Father* in a light and easy manner. The brethren were referred to as *brother this* and *brother that*. The preaching tended towards dry exposition and the experimental ministry upheld by the *Gospel Standard* was sneered at. Furthermore, a number of the churches would not countenance the “added articles” of the Gospel Standard Societies, instead tending towards “duty faith” and “free offer theology”. On a personal level, women began to cut their hair short, clothes were after the latest fashion

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and the radio became common place in the home. The *Gospel Standard* and its adherents viewed these changes with dismay. Indeed, Mr Popham exclaims in his Annual Address for 1932: “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! The crown is fallen from our head; woe unto us that we have sinned! For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet, as with the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship, today these things are again counted as “little things”, of no importance, arguments of a by-gone age and therefore things to be forgotten. Truly, what Mr Popham said of the “Gospel Standard” churches in 1929 is true of us today: “All our ancient landmarks are in danger of being removed, our standards are low, even moral standards!”<sup>28</sup> O that we might again be found turning towards the way wherein we went, seeking again to set up the ancient landmarks! May we heed the words of a dying pastor to his church:

Now, my brethren, as your old Pastor, I bring these things before you. Regard them. Do not say: “O well, in these days we cannot be expected to be so particular as our fathers and leaders were.” Why not? Does time make a commandment less divine, less important, less imperative? No; hold it fast. You are not to be loose in your profession or tolerate error.

(Mr Popham, quoted in the *Gospel Standard* 1961 p. 242)

These letters provide a window on these controversies and the final separation. In this respect these letters form an important part of our “denominational heritage”, particularly as they shed light on our distinctive position. It is our desire that the reading of them may stir us up again to seek after these ancient landmarks and that godly leaders may be granted unto us to guide us as churches. The Lord has said: “In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” (Isaiah 30: 15) Yet we are at ease amongst the churches. Not in the rest the Lord has promised, but our case is described again by Isaiah: “Many days and years shall ye be troubled, ye careless women: for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come. Tremble, ye women that are at ease...” (32: 9-11) We see no need for repentance and returning. We are solemnly

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<sup>27</sup> See the *Gospel Standard* 1932 p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> See the *Gospel Standard* 1929 p. 16.

hardened in our ways and left to ourselves can only slide further and so we shall remain except the Spirit be poured upon us from on High (v 15).

O to be brought to repentance, first personally and secondly as churches; to be heard again bemoaning ourselves as Ephraim: “Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.” (Jeremiah 31: 18) To be found by the Spirit’s influence following the Lord’s exhortation to his backsliding people: “O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.” (Hosea 14: 1-2) In this may we be encouraged, for it is left on record: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD.” (Ezekiel 36: 37-38) What a prospect for a repenting and returning people!

**Thirdly, Mr Popham was a man.** We are apt to place men on pedestals. Such a spirit rises from the effects of the fall. Where men have been given special gifts, either of preaching, as the Lord’s servants, or as leaders of the people, this may be a very easy trap. But, we should ever remember that they are but men and poor sinful men at that. These letters allow us to see that Mr Popham was a man, whatever his position in the Church of God, however highly he was thought of, he had to pass through the same experiences which are common to all of the Lord’s tried and exercised people.

These letters demonstrate that although Mr Popham was “valiant for truth”, and that without wavering, he was not without his fears, temptations and doubts concerning his standing. Writing in 1897 he said: “I am exceedingly feeble in conflict, holding fast is what I seem never to attain to; nor can I ever set forth my sinkings.” (Letter 60) He was to further write:

Viewing my long pastorate, many feelings by turn fill my heart: shame, pain and fear. Shame at the remembrance of my half-hearted ministry; pain at the sight of my neglects; fear of provoking the Lord to withdraw from me. Oh, my sins in the ministry! How infinitely longsuffering has the Lord

been towards me in the face of my lacks, my want of zeal for His glory, for the beauty, fulness, steadfastness, and eternity of His truth; of the glory of the Trinity, of each person therein; of salvation, edification, strengthening, and upbuilding of His church.

(J. K. Popham (1932) *A Humble Memorial to the Lord*, p. 14)

What a different light is shed on his public ministry and stand for the truth – it makes us realise, it was not of man, but only as the Lord strengthened him and gave him sufficient grace.

As with all situations where the Lord works, the devil will not be far behind. Having gone forth in the ministry in 1869, subsequently taking the pastorate at Shaw Street Chapel, Liverpool in 1874, Mr Popham was to be brought into considerable trial. This trial was in two parts, the first arose from the attacks, by professors of religion, on account of his stand against error in the Christian Church, the second from the felt lack of the Holy Spirit, both in pulpit and pew, in the latter years of his Liverpool pastorate. In the midst of these trials Mr Popham was tempted that he was not sent to preach, but in the mercy of the Lord he was delivered from the temptation and strengthened to preach the everlasting Gospel for another 55 years. In this Mr Popham had to prove what John Kershaw delineates in a sermon preached at Coventry in 1867:

Many of God's ministers spend as much time, if not more, in earnest prayer, supplication, and wrestling with the Lord in reference to their call to the work of the ministry, than they do in reference to their call by grace. The poor worm in the pulpit, who has stood on Zion's walls more than 50 years, had more exercises and wrestlings with the Lord in reference to his being sent of God to preach the gospel than he had with respect to his effectual call by grace.

(*Gospel Standard* 1875 p. 185)

Few today have any realisation that behind any real success in the ministry there will be trials, temptations and much prayer on the part of the minister. Instead many place an emphasis on the necessity of study and on preparation of sermons for success in the ministry. This lack of understanding is perhaps due to the fact that few have the opportunity of living with a minister when he is not in the pulpit. These letters as it were, give us a glimpse of Mr Popham outside the pulpit. Here we can read what

Mr Popham wrote to his son in the faith, John H. Gosden shortly after he had been sent out to preach:

You will find in this work [*the work of the ministry*] the truth of Luther's words: "Temptation, meditation, and prayer make a minister." O it is heavy! Yet it is blessed beyond all words. You may be in bondage often, but will prove that the Word of God is not bound. You will grow in a trying sense of insufficiency, but that will be to make room for a sweet experience that your sufficiency is of God. You may sometimes think you were almost a lunatic to have ever entertained a single thought of being a minister of the gospel, then you will have a discovery of the glory of God in choosing the foolish, the weak, the base things, "yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Corinthians 1: 27-28).

(May 1918 - *Letter 108*)

What light is shed on his ministry, the many sermons he has left behind<sup>29</sup> – "he being dead yet speaketh" – the realisation that what appears eloquent, what appears full of the Gospel, what appears to us as being clothed in liberty and power, may well have been the fruit of heavy labouring – "in bondage often" – on the part of the minister!

Time and time again in his letters Mr Popham has to bemoan his insufficiency in the ministry. When he accepted the call to preach with a view to the pastorate at Liverpool in 1873, he wrote:

Deeply sensible that I am not sufficient of myself for the very solemn and important work of the ministry, I do pray that I may continually find that my sufficiency is of God, and if the will of the Lord that I should come to labour amongst you, may He condescend to be with me, to make me as His mouth to your souls.

(*Letter 2*)

Despite what was written of him in the press, the Lord taught him well his total inability in all things, the lusts of the flesh and the pride which

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<sup>29</sup> We believe Mr Popham is, after C. H. Spurgeon, one of the most published ministers. There are sermons preached by Mr Popham extant today, comprising of in excess of 850 published sermons (compared with 419 by Mr J. C. Philpot) and several hundred unpublished typescripts. A full index is in an advanced state of preparation and we have recently embarked on an attempt to publish a series of 199 of the unpublished typescript sermons.

lurked in his heart, and in doing so he was kept in his rightful place – always willing to ascribe all the glory to the Lord. His humility is seen in his surprise when the Lord used his ministry to the blessing of a soul, he says writing in 1935:

In D.'s case the Lord honoured me by speaking the quickening word to him, and what He has done will stand. Cannot the Master choose and use instruments as and when He will? It has deeply humbled and instructed me. Surely in using me He exemplifies 1 Corinthians 1: 27-28. To stain the pride of all human glory He hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise... the things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. It is astonishing to me that the Most High God should humble Himself to behold such a sinner and make a little use of me in His Church.

*(Letter 160)*

Such a low view he had of his own ministry, he states in a letter to a friend in 1932 concerning his Jubilee sermons at Galeed: “My text was Romans 1: 16-17. My standard for preaching I never reach, so I failed as usual.” (see letter 139) While his friends were concerned lest his Jubilee should inflate Mr Popham with pride, the poor man was evidently kept very low. He writes:

“This [*his Jubilee*] has brought much exercise on me. My fear is that God will not be Alpha and Omega. How I have asked Him not to permit us to provoke His Fatherly jealousy. What a blight such a sin would bring on us! May the power of God preserve us from it; may His holy fear, which seems to include all worship, be powerful in me and all concerned. In this matter we need Christ to be made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. May prayer be given to you for us, and to us all.”

*(Memoir and Letters p. 219)*

Later he wrote: “What prayers I spent last night, unable to sleep, in seeking mercy, grace, wisdom, strength for that day.” “I was, and am, honest before God in saying I am unworthy of the kindly notice taken of me [*at his Jubilee*]... I am weary, weary of self, of men, of not praying, of wrong praying, of a barren heart and a barren life in and out of the pulpit.”<sup>30</sup> Yet

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<sup>30</sup> See *Memoir and Letters* p. 220.

Mr Popham also had to realise circumstances cannot humble a man, only grace can. In 1936 he wrote:

A desire and a design to do whatsoever we do to the glory of God can only be in our hearts by the grace of God. What painful proof one has of the self-seeking, pride, arrogance, and evil of every sort! O the blessing of humility! But to be truly humble we must be humbled; humbling circumstances alone are insufficient. The “mind that was in Christ” must be breathed into us by the good Spirit of Christ. Thus favoured, a sinner can do all to the glory of God. An old man is an old sinner. By grace, he may be also ‘a little child’ and ‘die an hundred years old’. O if it may be so with me! I wish there might be less and less folly emerging... O that Christ would come and dwell with us all and always!

*(Letter 166)*

Mr Popham also had to wrestle with unbelief. Nearing the end of his earthly pilgrimage he still had to confess:

I am seeking yet clearer manifestations of the Lord of life and glory, and the sanctification of the Spirit through belief of the truth, and faith to persuade me that what the Lord has promised He is able to perform... But unbelief – “of all my sins the chief” – greatly prevails. Often the words of the Lord have spoken reprovingly and helpfully, “How long will it be ere ye believe me?” Oh what debtors to sovereign grace we must increasingly be! But how far are we from walking becomingly before Him whose goodness is like Himself – infinite!

*(Letter 168)*

To some it may come as a surprise to find Mr Popham, after all the blessed heights of doctrine he soars to in his sermons, confessing unbelief. But we believe it was such temptations, such afflictions, which were to make his ministry so blest to the souls of the Lord’s people. It was this experience and teaching which the Lord used to make his ministry discriminatory, bringing forth the precious from the vile, encouraging to the poor, doubting, struggling child of God, while cutting down the carnal and legal professor.

We could go on, but we close with this consideration: “according to mine heart” – in these letters Mr Popham writes from experience, from the depths of his heart, to encourage his reader with the things he has tasted,

handled and felt. The letters therefore come with power, with the teaching of the Spirit and have a gracious vein of life which seems to run through them. True we acknowledge it runs more freely in some than in others, but there are few, if any, which can be said to lack it entirely. As an illustration:

Your letter came to hand this morning and I thank you for it. It was very welcome. I like its tone; I know how you have obtained the knowledge and experience about which you write, – not as school boys learn that two and two make four, but in and out, up and down, through fire and water, lifting up and casting down, sorrow and joy, heaviness for a season, manifold temptations, – by these you have lived, learned, lost and gained. “O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.” A desperately wicked heart, full of all manner of evil, is no small part of my sorrowful path; by its powerful workings I learn in some measure how low I am lost, how unwilling to part with evil for good, with self for God, with sin for holiness, with the pleasures of sin for a season for eternal blessedness. O how free and invincible must be the grace which overturns my plans, overcomes my heart, and makes me willing to be saved by grace!

(Letter 52)

**Finally, a personal note.** About 3 years ago now I read Mr Gosden’s *Memoir and Letters of J. K. Popham*. While I had dipped into it before, I had never previously appreciated the contents of the book as I did then. The letters, both those published in the section of letters and the extracts contained in the main memoir, were especially blessed to my soul. In several cases, picking the book up and reading them, Mr Popham could have been personally writing to me at that juncture, delineating my case and giving me sound and gracious advice. I assumed at the time, possibly due to the thoroughness with which Mr Gosden had written the book, that the volume contained all Mr Popham’s extant letters.

It was therefore with some delight that a few months later I came across a slim volume in the Gospel Standard Library, titled *Letters of James Kidwell Popham*. While it contained several letters found in the memoir, a sizeable proportion of them were not to be found in *Memoir and Letters* but were drawn from old magazines, such as *The Gospel Standard* and *The Gospel Banner*. I made enquiries at the time as to its publisher but drew a blank, later discovering it had a very limited print run and that it was out of print.

Having found Mr Popham's letters a blessing and help to my soul on several occasions, it became a desire that these letters may be made more widely accessible to the Lord's people.

Once republication of these letters was under consideration, it became apparent there were still letters which had not been included in either of the two previously published collections. These previously uncollected letters were located mainly in *The Friendly Companion*, but a few were tracked down in *The Gospel Standard* and *The Gospel Banner*. Furthermore, a statement in an old *Gospel Standard*<sup>31</sup>, suggested that there were extant in the collections of the Gospel Standard Library, some manuscript letters by Mr Popham. Further searching, not only in the library, but also at Galeed Chapel and through personal papers, has enabled inclusion of several unpublished letters of Mr Popham in this collection. By publishing them in this manner it is hoped to have aided the preservation of their contents for future generations of the Lord's people.

Some people may question the selection of letters included. The principal aim has been to collect together the extant correspondence of J. K. Popham and thus all those where access has been permitted are included. Some of these letters are of greater spiritual value than others, this is acknowledged; however, the path of a pastor has a certain balance. There are two sides of the congregation and church to be dealt with, the spiritual aspect and the everyday issues that arise in life. A pastor will neglect one or other at his peril. The intention in this volume was to provide to the Lord's people the letters of a pastor according to the heart of God. With this in mind, we have not held back any letters from publication on the basis of content.

As with many old letters there were references to people and places which time has made obscure. The number of people who knew Mr Popham or his acquaintances is rapidly declining as they are being removed by death; therefore the opportunity to preserve our church history by recording these references is decreasing. By approaches to the surviving members of Mr Popham's congregation at Galeed and others who knew the Galeed congregation well, many of the people and places associated with

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<sup>31</sup> *Gospel Standard* 1987 p. 161

these letters have been identified. Where appropriate for reasons of discretion, identities have been left hidden.

Publishing Mr Popham's letters has provided the opportunity to include some rarer portraits and photos of Mr Popham. As with many men, Mr Popham's portrait has been perpetuated by a few select images, while others are rarely seen. Through access to portraits and photographs in the possession of Galeed Chapel, the Gospel Standard Library and private ownership, nine pictures of Mr Popham have been located which have not been previously published. While formal photographs of Mr Popham are all in profile<sup>32</sup>, the advent of the "personal camera" in the 1920's has given us several "full face" photographs of Mr Popham which are included in this volume. Through the assistance of Miss Marion Hyde and the Brighton and Hove Reference Library, Mr Popham's three homes in Brighton<sup>33</sup>, from which the majority of these letters were written, have been located and photographs of them are included. None of Mr Popham's recorded addresses in Liverpool are still standing.

Finally, acknowledgement must be given for the much help and encouragement that has been given in this venture. This volume would not have seen the light of day without the considerable assistance of my aunt, Miss Marion Hyde, the librarian at the Gospel Standard Library and a member at Galeed Chapel. She has tracked down numerous references, searched high and low for pieces included here, driven me round Brighton locating Mr Popham's homes, proof read and commented on the final manuscript and provided considerable encouragement. I could not have included several of the pieces without the co-operation and assistance of the Deacons and Church at Galeed Chapel, who have allowed me to borrow several manuscript items of Mr Popham and also to view the Church Book covering his long pastorate. Similarly, the reminiscences and answers to numerous questions provided by Mrs R. Poole and Mr J. A. Hart, both sometime members at Galeed have been invaluable. In the midst of much sadness at Galeed, it is my desire that this volume may be found a help and

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<sup>32</sup> Mr Popham chose to have profile portraits in order to hide his ocular strabismus.

<sup>33</sup> Mr Popham's addresses in Brighton were: 1882-c.1905, 6 Beaconsfield Villas; c.1905-April 1926, "Normandien", 51 Surrenden Road; April 1926-1937, "Normandien", 10 Harrington Road.

an encouragement to my friends there and that in due time they may again have another under-shepherd to preach regularly amongst them who will be one with the mind, spirit, example and ministry of their previous pastors.

When I originally considered this venture, it was Mr J. R. Broome who encouraged me to make a start; his comments since and for writing the preface to this volume requires my thanks. Likewise, Mr H. Sant, Mr H. M. Pickles, Mr B. A. Ramsbottom and Mr J. A. Hart have all given helpful suggestions and willingly read and commented on the manuscript. Appreciation is due to Rev. H. M. Cartwright of Edinburgh for his information and assistance regarding Mr Popham's connection with the Lord's people in Scotland. I also have happy memories of the times spent in the company of the late Dr D. R. MacSween (Glasgow) at the Struan communion season, when his conversation with us "Sassenachs" would frequently turn to Mr Popham and his friendship and communion with Dr MacSween's fellow countrymen. The staff at both the British Library and the Bodleian Library have been helpful in obtaining and allowing copying of background material for this book. I would like to thank Miss Deborah Field for her help with the proof reading and stylistic comments. To my parents for bearing with my many projects, for their encouragement, whilst also reminding me that there are other things to be done than the things I enjoy doing, I owe more than I can repay.

Finally, I would like to thank the Gospel Standard Trust for agreeing to publish this book and to Mr John Kingham for all his hard work on it. All opinions, mistakes and shortcomings in the book are those of the editor alone.

Matthew Hyde  
2010

# The Letters



**2. Shaw Street Chapel, Liverpool, where Mr Popham was Pastor 1874-1882.**  
The chapel was sold in 2000 and converted into flatlets.



**3. The Interior of Shaw Street Chapel.**

## Section 1 – Letters 1870-1879

[1]

*To the Church at Wigston Magna Strict Baptist Chapel*

Dear Friends,<sup>[1]</sup>

When I received your invitation to the pastorate of this church, I felt it to be a most solemn and weighty matter, requiring much prayerful consideration, and now after seeking unto God for His direction, and endeavouring to weigh all the circumstances of the case, I feel unable to accept your invitation. During the time that I have laboured among you as a supply, I have painfully felt the want of that blessing of the Lord upon my poor labours which is needful to encourage me to hope that it is the Lord's will I should settle among you as your pastor. I would therefore propose that I continue this year, 1873, as your supply, to watch the hand of the Lord to see whether He will be pleased to make manifest that He has sent me. This I think is better than my hastily accepting the pastorate, and after a time, not finding the blessing of the Lord with us, having in grief to resign it.<sup>[2]</sup>

There is one question, my dear brethren, I wish to ask you: Do you hold the principle of Strict Communion?<sup>[3]</sup> Your answer will greatly affect my mind in considering the acceptance or refusal of the pastorate should you ever again be led to offer it.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified:

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

James Kidwell Popham

7<sup>th</sup> January 1873

Wigston

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 19)

[1] Mr Popham had moved to live in Wigston in early 1870, shortly after his marriage to his first wife, Harriett Adcock. Mr Popham preached regularly at Wigston during the next 3 years, and at a church meeting held there on 8th December 1872, it was unanimously resolved to invite Mr Popham to the pastorate. This is the letter of reply. Mr Popham never

saw his way clear to accept the pastorate at Wigston, instead accepting the pastorate at Shaw Street Chapel, Liverpool in 1874. (See *Memoir and Letters* p. 12 and 19).

[2] Mr Gosden, in *Memoir and Letters* (p. 19), comments on this phrase:

Thus weightily did the solemn work of the ministry rest upon the heart of the twenty-five-year-old preacher, already owned of God in many instances. It was indeed to him an inexpressibly serious matter to stand up before the people and be as God's mouth.

[3] The rules of the church at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, where Mr Popham was later pastor, give a clear definition of a Strict Communion church: "A Strict Communion Church... on no account suffers any person to sit down with them at the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper who has not, on an open confession of his or her Faith, as feelingly and experimentally believing in the Articles of Faith here to prefixed, been baptised... 'by immersion in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'" (Rule IX)

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## [2]

### *To the Church at Shaw Street Chapel, Liverpool*

To the church of Jesus Christ meeting for divine worship in Shaw St. Particular Baptist Chapel, Liverpool<sup>[1]</sup>. Grace, mercy and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Dear Brethren and Sisters,

Having, I hope, prayerfully considered the invitation you have given me to supply your pulpit for the first three months of next year, I have decided, I hope in the fear and by the direction of the Lord, to accept it. Deeply sensible that I am not sufficient of myself for the very solemn and important work of the ministry, I do pray that I may continually find that my sufficiency is of God, and if the will of the Lord that I should come to labour amongst you, may He condescend to be with me, to make me as His mouth to your souls.

Now, brethren, I beseech you for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may come among you in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ – that your hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love and brought unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ,

in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2: 2; Romans 15: 30); and also that others may be gathered unto Him beside those that are gathered.

I am, dear brethren and sisters,  
Your Friend and Servant in the Lord,

J. K. Popham

29<sup>th</sup> October 1873  
Wigston

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 24)

[1] This letter was written by Mr Popham in reply to the invitation from the Church at Shaw Street, Liverpool, to preach for the first three months of 1874 with a view to the pastorate. The letter of invitation can be found in *Memoir and Letters*, p. 23.

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### [3]

#### *To the Church at Shaw Street Chapel, Liverpool*

To the church of Jesus Christ worshipping in Shaw St. Chapel, Liverpool.<sup>[1]</sup> Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Brethren and Sisters in the Lord,

I received by the hands of your deacons your invitation to become the pastor over you in the Lord, and have endeavoured to wait upon the chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls to ask direction and counsel at His mouth, that I might return you an answer according to His holy will. And now in humble dependence upon Him for all I need for and in the great and solemn undertaking, I do accept your invitation.

The words of the apostle Paul have been much upon my mind while considering this matter, and in the spirit of them I desire to come among you, – “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4: 5)<sup>[2]</sup>.

The Lord permitting and enabling, I shall commence my labours among you on the 17<sup>th</sup> May next ensuing. “Brethren, pray for us.”

I am, dear brethren and sisters,  
Your humble faithful servant,

J. K. Popham

16<sup>th</sup> March 1874  
Crown St., Liverpool

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 28)

[1] This letter was written by Mr Popham in reply to the invitation from the Church at Shaw Street, Liverpool, to the pastorate. The letter of invitation can be found in *Memoir and Letters*, p. 27.

[2] Mr Gosden, in *Memoir and Letters* (p. 28), comments on this phrase:

We cannot forbear noting the significant observation in this letter: “I desire to come among you in the spirit of the words, ‘We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake’ (2 Corinthians 4: 5).” What is miscalled “experimental” preaching our dear friend eschewed: he emphatically did not preach himself. Anecdotal sermonizing he knew to be profitless. But in accord with an unusually rich experience in his own soul of God’s solemn teaching and leading, he preached Christ Jesus, the Saviour of the lost, the Friend of sinners. That he was so signally owned of his Lord and Master is a reply to the many adversaries he encountered throughout his long ministry. At Liverpool he profited through painful experiences of affliction and persecution, and many of his hearers derived benefit in consequence.

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#### [4]

##### *Extract of a letter*

...Many times have I sought the Lord about the matter<sup>[1]</sup>, He alone knows the fear, searching and pain I have suffered lest I had injured the holy Word of God. Oh if the Lord will enlighten my blind mind and move my dead heart to seek His glory in and among the churches before I die! I desire the good of our people and the glory of God. Poor Zion!... I feel a mere vile nothing and unworthy of consideration, but since He who condescends to love, choose, and bless worms and use them for His own glory, has

sovereignly laid His right hand on me and made some little use of me, I desire so to live and walk as to please Him and hurt none of His people...

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 201)

[1] Mr Gosden informs us in *Memoir and Letters* that the letter this was extracted from was written about 1875. In 1875 Mr Popham had written a little tract entitled *Moody and Sankey's Errors versus The Scriptures of Truth*, which received a favourable review in the *Gospel Standard* (1875 p. 211). Moody and Sankey, the American revivalists, had been visiting the United Kingdom on a preaching tour in 1875 and had made a visit to Liverpool. Sadly, professedly reformed, orthodox ministers (such as Charles H. Spurgeon, Horatius Bonar or Andrew Bonar), had gladly embraced the unorthodox free will teachings of the Moody and Sankey campaigns and joined with them. Liverpool was no exception and the Church of England Bishop of Liverpool, John C. Ryle, also happily received them. It has to be said, that although some of Ryle's books (e.g. *Light from Old Times*) have been justifiably well received in reformed circles, he was an Amyraldian and Mr Popham received little support from him in his stand for the truth. John Gadsby wrote in the *Christian's Monthly Record* concerning Ryle's stance over Moody (1883 p. 122. c.f. *Christian's Monthly Record* 1881 p 276-280).

Due to his public contention for the truth at this time, Mr Popham was to suffer persecution, being called 'an unregenerate blasphemer', and indeed continues to do so, as hinted at in this letter. This division, we believe, was to lay the foundation for Mr Popham's separate stand for the truth. For further information on this subject see *Memoir and Letters* p. 29 and *Stand Fast*, Ed. J. R. Broome, GS Trust, 2006 p. 8.

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[5]

*To Mr John Ashworth*

My dear Friend,<sup>[1]</sup>

I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long for a reply to your kind note of February 27<sup>th</sup>. My apology must be ill health. For some time past I have been suffering from much exhaustion both physical and nervous, and have found myself quite unable for writing. In regard to my coming to Heywood, I can only say that if the Lord is pleased to strengthen me, I shall be pleased to serve His people there in the gospel some week evening in June. Earlier I could not come, as D.V. I leave home next week for Holland<sup>[2]</sup> for a change and rest; what the doctor says are the only likely means to do me good... May a kind and gracious God grant us to feel our times are in His hands and also enable us to commit our way and ourselves unto Him, in well doing.

A spark of divine life and a grain of living faith in the soul are worth more than a world, but how often is the former languishing and the latter ready to give up! Then we prove that “no man can keep alive his own soul”; and that faith, both in its being and actings, is the gift of God. The right path is and ever has been a rough one, but it leads to a “city of habitation”.

With Christian love and best wishes,  
Yours faithfully,

J. K. Popham

9<sup>th</sup> March 1877

6, Jasmine Street, Everton, Liverpool

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 32-33)

[1] For details of Mr John Ashworth, see Biographical Notes.

[2] Mr Popham visited Holland several times during his life for rest and change. He formed a firm bond with a number of Dutch Christians. Their godly letters to him can be found in his *Memoir and Letters* p. 34 and the *Gospel Standard* 1938 p. 205. Two letters in this book were written by Mr Popham whilst staying in Holland with friends (Letters 11 and 12).

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## [6]

*To Mr John Ashworth*

My dear Friend in the Truth<sup>[1]</sup>,

...As you know, I have been away from home for a time for my health... I now therefore hasten to say that if an evening in June would suit you, I would like to come on from Bolton... Through the goodness of the Lord the change was very beneficial to me and I am now, though not very strong or robust, able to go on preaching.

“What are these, and whence came they?” Tribulation of some sort and to some extent we must have if we are sons and not bastards. How often have I felt the verse you quote in your letter:

Bastards may escape the rod, etc.<sup>[2]</sup>

What an amazing escape it will be to escape a richly deserved curse and hell, and O what a wonder to find and enter a freely-given heaven!

With Christian love,  
Yours very truly,

J. K. Popham

3<sup>rd</sup> May 1877  
Liverpool

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 33)

[1] For details of Mr John Ashworth, see Biographical Notes.

[2] By William Cowper (1731-1800), Hymn 282 in *Gadsby's Selection*.

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## [7]

My dear —, <sup>[1]</sup>

While wondering how to spend the day on which so many thoughtlessly celebrate the birth of our blessed Lord, it occurred to me that perhaps I could not better spend some part of it than in writing to one in whose heart I have often prayed He might be formed the Hope of glory. All true Christians desire to have Christ in their hearts. Paul was not able to rest until He was again formed in the Galatian's (4: 19). The Holy Ghost begets in the heart living desires after Jesus, He enables the hungry soul to "follow on to know the Lord", He makes everything else empty, void, and waste to the soul, He breathes that prayer, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." This prayer, Spirit-wrought, never wholly dies away; it is tried, discouraged, damaged by sin, weakened by guilt, and faint by reason of delay, but its Author again and again revives and strengthens it. Satan blows up the wretched mischief in our hearts till we are ready to conclude that it is useless to continue praying, for the Lord will never hear; then the Spirit presses our needs upon us so that we must cry, even though it be only in sighs: "Hear me, and attend unto me; for I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise" (Psalm 55: 2). The soul's many, many needs, and the sweet suitableness and fulness of Christ, together with the Spirit's secret promptings, forming a

happy junction in us, keep us alive in prayer. Little helps, secret encouragements derived from some Scripture resting on the mind, something dropped from the pulpit, and from comfortable feeling in prayer, make us feel we will never give up until the needed and desired good comes. Then guilt rolls over the soul and rests upon the conscience, hardness of heart, distracting fears of being deceived, the inward workings of sin, and the suggestions of Satan, that cruel devil, greatly depress and discourage. We then begin to fear we were presumptuous in our earnest pleadings produced by the encouragements above mentioned, we fear we shall never find the Pearl of great price.

But all these changes keep the soul alive, render more and more unsatisfying all earthly good. The fear of presumption forces the soul to cry to be well searched and delivered from every false way; and the tormenting fear of never obtaining that which is so needful, (and, in the desire, so precious,) makes the soul violent. That we may have no false ground, the Lord makes the soul sink in deep mire where there is no standing, and that Jesus may be all in all the Spirit again and again discovers the hidden evils of a fallen nature. While this is being done the soul thinks every fresh discovery of indwelling sin and feeling of sinking into the mire, is a token of divine displeasure. But when again the fulness, mercy, compassion, and power of Christ are seen a little by faith, there is a sweet encouragement felt. All this spiritual labour results in the formation of Christ in the heart the Hope of glory.

I have run on a long way before acknowledging your letter. I was very pleased to read it. I have read it over and over, and each time have felt satisfied that you were under divine teaching. The Lord will not break the bruised reed, and the smoking flax shall He not quench; He shall send forth judgment unto truth (Isaiah 42: 3). It is a mercy for you to fear taking too much encouragement, this will keep you from taking what does not belong to you, it will make you look well to the nature and source of any comfort that may be offered you. By this godly fear you will depart from evil and from the snares of death. "The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath" (Proverbs 15: 24). Spiritual honesty makes its possessor fear deceptive comfort as much as any other snare. But it is very difficult to walk in this uprightness and not, at the same time, refuse to be

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comforted. I feel thankful to perceive that you were made afraid of presuming, and yet enabled to receive what I believe is your own. "The kingdom of God cometh not by observation" (Luke 17: 20). You will find many sweet influences upon your mind unaccompanied by a word. Your heart will be drawn after Christ, your affections will be heaven-ward, earthly things will appear in their proper light – "unsubstantial stuff", sin will be hateful and dreaded, you will pray for salvation from it. You will from time to time have such an insight into your fallen nature as will make you cry to God for help and flee to Christ for refuge. Not your own but His righteousness will you seek to be clothed in.

Now all these teachings and influences may be resting upon you without any distinct Scripture. Yet, though unaccompanied by the Word, if enabled to search the Word you will find them all confirmed by it. This will teach you that the kingdom of God is not in word only, but in power. Many boast of Scriptures coming to them, in whom we perceive but little, if any, fruit of divine teaching and power.

When it may please the Lord to speak to your heart a word suitable to your case, you will thank Him for it; it will sweetly instruct you, help and confirm you. But when you are feeling the want of that good word, pray to be enabled to observe very narrowly all the motions of your heart. And while you will perceive many motions which will bring sorrow and shame, you will, as under divine teaching, find others which "go upward round about" as did the Lord's House (Ezekiel 41: 7). This will instruct you in the difference between flesh and spirit, between the old man and the new (Song of Solomon 6: 13).

When the Lord is "getting to Himself a glorious Name", He will not allow the soul to "make an experience". But we ought to be very careful in our intercourse with young Christians lest we "strike the dying dead". However, you will suffer no real damage by the fear the remark induced and which still lives in you. All the work is the Lord's: "Thou, Lord, wilt ordain peace for us; for Thou also hast wrought all our works in us" (Isaiah 26: 12). Despise not the day of small things; if the Lord "gives you your life for a prey" and delivers you from the sword and from the enemies of whom you are afraid (Jeremiah 39: 17, 18), you will require an eternity to praise Him for His rich undeserved mercy.

I have not seen the book you name, consequently am not able to speak fully to the case you mention. But if there are no qualifying remarks made upon it, I should say it is a little unguarded. How to distinguish between false and real religion is a very large and important question. May the Lord enable me, not darkening counsel by words without knowledge, in simplicity to shew some of the main distinctions. To begin, then, with the case you quote. The person had convictions of sin. This is very likely, as no doubt thousands have who are not born again. These convictions are only natural. Natural conscience in some is tender, and generally such persons become what is called religious. Religion is with them a necessity. But in these cases, so far as I have observed them, the trouble is more about the loss of the birthright than the sin of first despising and then selling it. In other words, the conscience seems to say, "You have sinned, you will sink to hell." The trouble is more about hell than sin, more about the consequence to the sinner than the dishonour to God, against whom sin is committed. Natural convictions usually constrain those who are under them to betake themselves to religion to soothe and ease them, and they soon succeed in healing their hurt (Isaiah 50: 11).

Spiritual convictions make a person know that all religion but that which God works is worthless! When Cain's conscience smote him, it was because of his punishment and the fear of being slain; but when secured by the Lord from that danger he went and builded a city (Genesis 4: 17). But when the Lord smote Saul of Tarsus and he became blind and had to be led by others, he inquired, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and he obtained no relief until the Lord sent a direct message to him. When Samuel convinced king Saul of disobedience he fell under it in a way, but thought more of being degraded before the elders of the people than of being a rebel against God (1 Samuel 15: 30). But when David was divinely convinced of his sin he fasted and went in and lay all night upon the earth; and the elders of his house arose and went to him to raise him up from the earth; but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them (2 Samuel 12: 16-17).

Natural convictions are like light in a man which the Lord says is darkness (Matthew 6: 23); spiritual convictions bring the soul into felt darkness and the shadow of death. The former are general, and cause a person to look more especially, and with awful self-pity, upon himself; the

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latter reveal both the miserable state of the sinner and a holy sin-hating God; and when he feels self-pity he hates himself for it, while the other has no perception of the sin. True conviction is lasting and constantly deepens, and the more mercy is manifested the more the sinner hates himself. Fleshly conviction is quickly removed by the various remedies which are applied, and the deceived one breaks out into a liberty and a confidence nowhere found in the Word of God. The former is never permitted to lose a sense of his sinfulness and weakness; the latter, having no supplies of life and light from heaven, moves on smoothly in the light of his own fire until he lies down in utter darkness (Isaiah 50: 10-11). Spiritual convictions convince not only of sin but of the necessity of the Lord saving the soul; they not only make a person know himself to be a sinner, but a lost sinner, lost beyond all creature help and remedy, and that if ever he is saved it must be first and last of God.

I believe natural convictions never sink as deep, never penetrate as far as this in all its branches, as total blindness, entire corruption, absolute weakness and folly, entire want of will as well as of power; and these are not passing thoughts but more or less abiding, humbling, abasing convictions. While natural convictions compel a person to take up a religion, spiritual convictions make their subject afraid of touching, much less taking up, religion; and while the one is soon satisfied with his religion (Isaiah 58: 2), the other is only more and more stripped of everything, and is again and again brought in guilty before God (Leviticus 13: 44-45).

These, my dear young friend, are some of the distinctions between natural and spiritual convictions. I hope you may find something in them to set your mind at rest on this important point, if it please the Lord. With regard to the person E.H. speaks of as feeling some sweetness in divine things, I would remark that it is no new or uncommon thing. The stony-ground hearer lives still (Matthew 13: 20). But please observe that there had been no plough driven through the stony place, no breaking of the fallow ground, consequently there was no affliction in which to receive the word (1 Thessalonians 1 : 6). Having some natural convictions, a general notion of salvation, of heaven, would at once, without searching of heart, be received with joy; but the word that brings reproof, compunction, that lays in the

dust, that brings with it a yoke and a daily cross of self-denial and other things, is unknown to such persons...

I must hasten to say a word upon your next question. The Scripture you ask me about is 1 Corinthians 12: 3. The passage teaches that we cannot spiritually call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost whose covenant work it is to glorify Christ. Every believing look a poor sinner casts toward Jesus, every spiritual view he has of His Person and work, every new beauty that the soul sees in Him, every sweet time of pleading His Name and merits wherein boldness and freedom are felt, the soul has by the almighty influence of the eternal Spirit (John 16: 14). And when the needy and undone soul is enabled to say: "My Lord, and my God," it is by the sweet persuasive power of the Spirit. I know well your feelings of inability to plead that dear Name, and also the softening of your heart so that you were enabled to plead for mercy through Him. Go on, and prize every such feeling, and, as enabled, follow after Him, who, though He may seem to turn away from you, will eventually tell you all His Name and open His heart of love and mercy.

I am thankful that your mother and sister are now acquainted in some measure with your feelings; embrace every opening there may be to communicate to them how you fare, it will be a great comfort to them and, in the end, a mutual benefit...

Never fear to ask any question you may desire; it is no trouble. My only fear is that I may fail to give you the satisfaction you require. However, I will assist you according to the ability God giveth...

Yours very sincerely to serve in the gospel,

J. K. Popham

25<sup>th</sup> December 1877  
6 Jasmine St., Liverpool

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 38-44; *Letters* No. 92)

[1] Mr Gosden informs us in *Memoir and Letters* (p. 38) that this letter was written to a young 18-year-old seeker, who died in the Lord just 2 years later.

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## [8]

*To Mr John Ashworth*

My dear Brother in the Lord,<sup>[1]</sup>

... I am glad to hear that your prayer meeting is well attended. It is a good sign. I think the late Mr Tiptaft<sup>[2]</sup> said the prayer meeting was the gauge of the Church. It has often cheered me more than an increase in the Sunday congregation, and if I see a slackness in the prayer meeting my mind is soon sensible of some gloomy feeling about the people.

It gives me pleasure that you approve of my little publication<sup>[3]</sup>. To live a lazy life is my dread, and many have been my petitions against it. "Occupy till I come," is a word I would wish ever to be mindful of. 'Tis but a little one can do, but this has been a comfort, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

I hope you find the Lord with you both in your own soul and in preaching. The first is of the first importance, for without it, in some measure and at some times, preaching must be dead profitless work. To preach in a warm living manner there must be some tasting, handling and feeling of the Word of Life. But why do I presume to write thus to you? You know so much more about these solemn and weighty matters than I do. Excuse it; out of the abundance of feeling in my heart about preaching, its awful weight and solemn nature, I have penned these few words. The Lord help each of us and make us good ministers of Jesus Christ.

With Christian love to yourself and Mrs Ashworth.

Yours very truly,

J. K. Popham

13<sup>th</sup> May 1878

Liverpool

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 45)

[1] For details of Mr John Ashworth, see Biographical Notes.

[2] William Tiptaft (1803-1864), friend of J. C. Philpot, he seceded from the Church of England, becoming pastor at Abingdon Strict Baptist Chapel. For further information, see *The Seceders* by J. H. Philpot (1931) and the *Memoir of William Tiptaft* by J. C. Philpot (1867).

[3] *Thoughts on Regeneration*, published by Mr Popham in 1878, was reviewed in the *Gospel Standard* 1878 p. 228. Sadly today no extant copy of this tract is known. See *Letters and Memoir* p. 44ff. and *Stand Fast*, Ed. J. R. Broome, GS Trust, 2006 p. 11.

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## [9]

Dear Friend,

I hope you may be enabled to believe for yourself – Hebrews 12: 6. I say enabled, for I well know how impossible it is in a time of affliction without the Spirit. The Lord loves His people too well to let them alone; but how hard to regard divine chastisement as the “privilege” of a saint, the portion, or a part of the portion of a son. But so it is, and the comfort of it the Lord will give in His own time. The “third part” is the Lord’s portion, and that part He will bring through the fire (Zechariah 13: 9). There He will refine them. O heavy painful work! Specially when, as in refining silver, the dross first rises and appears; when the depravity and defilement of our fallen hearts are seen and felt. But He who sitteth as a refiner and purifier of silver not only sees the dross, but also knows what silver there is in the sons of Levi.

But this is not all. In the fire they shall – from necessity by divine teaching – call upon My Name. How unspeakably great is the mercy of being made a praying person! There are none such by nature. Then, further, there is a most gracious promise: “And I will hear them”; which means, I will answer them. As we read: “I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn and the wine and the oil.” This most merciful promise the Lord makes good in drawing self, even in the dark, in reviving hope, in giving some assurance of a good issue, in working sweet resignation to His holy sovereign will. O blessed answer! Answer of which my dear friend is not, I hope ignorant.

There is yet another word: “I will say, It is My people.” Blessed comforting recognition! Where now are all the cruel suggestions of the father of lies? Where the thousand misgivings of an unbelieving heart? Who could have expected such a resting-place in the fire? “Certainly,” said the Lord in another case: “I will be with thee.” And here in the fire, the fierce

fire which has destroyed many hopes, burnt up much hay, wood, and stubble, and has left only a naked needy soul, the Lord comes and says: "Thou art Mine. I will bring thee through this fire." What a sweet effectual work is this! It enriches most abundantly the person who is favoured to receive it.

The same blessed enriching work the Spirit describes under another figure. The Lord promises the church her vineyards from the valley of Achor. From that valley of trouble comes peace; out of the wilderness vineyards grow. Who would go into the wilderness, to the valley of Achor – that gloomy vale – to look for a vineyard? But trouble, conflicts, divine chastisements, painful discoveries of our deep depravity by the Spirit, greatly enrich the soul in godly fear, in living desires to know, love, and be found in Christ; in earnest prayer, in cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, in deep feelings of nothingness in self, and in high esteem for Christ and all He has for poor persons, and in a full enjoyment of heavenly things. And when the last word comes: "It is My people"; back then flies the response: "The Lord is my God!" Not earlier could the confidence be found to say so great a thing; now it cannot be restrained. Better wait till the Lord says that before we say this. I do hope, my dear friend, that you may find a quiet resting-place in Jesus, and be favoured to feel that:

It is the Lord, whose matchless skill,  
Can from afflictions raise,  
Matter eternity to fill,  
With every growing praise<sup>[1]</sup>.

My pen has run on rapidly. I hope you may find some help and comfort from the word upon which I have hurriedly written a few hints. I beg you will not think of answering this; no, not by the scratch of a pen while you are weak. It is not worth an answer; it is but the utterance of a few thoughts which perhaps you may find somewhat suitable to your present case.

I remain, yours very truly in hope of eternal life,

J. K. Popham

14<sup>th</sup> March 1879

Liverpool

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 47; *Letters* No. 50; edited versions of this letter also appear in the *Gospel Standard* 1880 p. 364, 1959 p. 152 and 1998 p. 221)

[1] By Thomas Greene (? - ?), Hymn number 261 in *Gadsby's Selection*.

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## [10]

*To Mr John Ashworth*

My dear Brother in the Lord<sup>[1]</sup>,

On my return I was taken ill and have remained an invalid ever since. Our thoughts are not the Lord's. Last Lord's Day by riding to chapel I was able to speak for about half an hour. In how many ways does the Lord try His people! The mercy is not to escape the cross, but to be bettered by it. For the most part I have been low in mind during this affliction; indeed much of it consists in prostration of the nervous system, and Satan is well skilled in playing on weakened nerves. Just at the worst, hymn 7<sup>[2]</sup> was very helpful especially verse 4.

When sore afflictions on me lie,  
 He is (though I am blind)  
 Too wise to be mistaken, yea,  
 Too good to be unkind.

I hope you are favoured with the best of earthly blessings, health; but above all that your soul is in health and prosperity. You kindly hope I am favoured with many tokens, in my ministry, of the "good will of Him that dwelt in the bush". My dear friend, one of my greatest trials is my barrenness in the ministry. I dare not say I am quite left, but O to my sense of things I am so poor, so empty and sapless! How is it with you? Do you find the people searched, humbled, broken, comforted, lifted up, and built up under you? And are there any deliverances wrought, any clear conversions? I hope you find the Lord with you both in your own soul and in the preaching. The first is of the first importance, for without it in some measure and at some times, preaching must be dead and profitless work. To preach in a warm lively manner there must be some tasting, handling, and

feeling of the Word of Life. But why do I presume to write thus to you? You know so much more about these solemn weighty matters than I do. Excuse it; out of the abundance of feeling in my heart about preaching, its awful weight and solemn nature, I have penned these words.

What a loss has the Church sustained in the death of dear Covell!<sup>[3]</sup> Without exception, in my judgment, the most living, solemn, weighty preacher in our connexion. What life there was in his simple, unlettered utterances! He has gone. Our mercy is the Lord liveth. The Lord help us each, and make us good ministers of Jesus Christ!

With Christian love,  
Yours in the truth,

J. K. Popham  
5<sup>th</sup> December 1879

53 York Terrace, Everton, Liverpool<sup>[4]</sup>

(Source: *Memoir and Letters* p. 33; *Letters* No. 30)

[1] For details of Mr John Ashworth, see Biographical Notes.

[2] Samuel Medley (1738-1799), a hymnwriter and Mr Popham's predecessor in the pastorate at Liverpool. Medley was pastor at Byrom Street, Baptist Chapel, Liverpool, from 1772 till his death in 1799. This couplet is from the hymn "God shall alone the refuge be", number 7 in *Gadsby's Selection*. In 1847, the Byrom Street Church moved to a new building in Shaw Street where Mr Popham was pastor 1874-1882. For more information see *Further History of the Gospel Standard Baptists*, Vol. 4. p. 185ff. The Church retained Samuel Medley's pulpit until Shaw Street Chapel was sold and the congregation removed to Birkenhead in 2000. An oil painting of Samuel Medley still hangs in the vestry at Birkenhead Chapel, the story of which is told in Ramsbottom (1978) *Samuel Medley – Preacher, Pastor and Poet*. Fauconberg Press. p. 12.

[3] Francis Covell (1808-1879), the pastor at West Street Chapel, Croydon. For further details of his life see *Six Remarkable Ministers*, Ed. B. A. Ramsbottom (1994) p. 139ff.

[4] York Terrace, which had been built by the philanthropist James Atherton around 1810, no longer stands, having been redeveloped, although the road "York Terrace" still exists, just off St. Domingo's Road in the Everton district.

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