*Robert Chapman (1803-1902)*

“Robert Chapman - A Biography by Robert L. Peterson”, Loizeaux, 205 pages.

*Love (pp.13-15)*

Robert Chapman

**"My business is to love others and not to seek that others shall love me."**

**He was a brilliant man from a wealthy home, yet he chose a life of poverty. He wanted to live and work with poor and uneducated people. By seeing Christ's love in a person who loved them, they could more readily believe the gospel message.**

**He found himself in the midst of a growing religious movement made up of many men and women with convictions similar to his own. Later he watched with grief as a portion of this movement turned inward and moved away from its initial love and openness. He was not strong enough to stop the wrenching apart, but as one of the few who were respected by many on both sides of the split, he was called upon to heal hurting souls and repair damaged congregations.**

**He became a missionary to missionaries. His home became a retreat for tired and discouraged Christian workers.**

*Growing Up (pp. 17-22)*

**Robert was devoted to his mother and later said that when he was very young he cared little for anyone else as long as she was near him. Perhaps his mother favored him. She confided to a friend, "Robert always has a passion, whether literature or the flute, and whatever he takes up, he pursues diligently."**

**His diligence, earnestness, and passion to enter thoroughly into topics that interested him did not leave as he grew up. The maturing youth demonstrated remarkable ability in languages; he studied a language until he mastered it. English, Danish, and French came to him naturally because they were spoken in the Thomas Chapman household. Robert also became proficient in German and Italian, probably with his tutor's help. After his conversion to Christ he studied Hebrew and Greek so he could read the Bible in those languages. When he became interested in doing missionary work in Spain, he studied Spanish and Portuguese until he could speak them fluently.**

**Robert left home at age fifteen and traveled to London in 1818 to begin a five-year apprenticeship with an attorney. He was intellectually mature beyond his years and probably quite read to leave home. If he was disappointed with this career choice, it is not apparent. He plunged into his apprenticeship with characteristic enthusiasm and determined to become an independent attorney.**

**Perhaps it is not surprising that spiritual concerns also began to occupy Robert's mind. He needed to know where he stood before God and he began to read and study the Bible. During the next few years he read it through three or four times even though he questioned its authenticity.**

**In spite of required legal study and growing religious concerns, Robert has a reasonably active social life. On weekends and holidays he often attended parties in London's fashionable West End. Witty and articulate he had become popular. But his confident manner and engaging smile hid an uneasiness, an unrest of spirit. His pleasant social activities seemed empty. Years later he wrote, "Sick was I of the world, hating it as vexation of spirit, while yet I was unable and unwilling to cast it out."**

**The Bible was speaking to his heart, but he found many of its truths confusing and difficult to understand: God's love and wrath, His rejection of sin and His invitation to man to enter into communion with Himself. Chapman did not want to give up his pleasant life for an uncertain call. He was acutely aware of his great problems in attempting to establish his righteousness in God's eyes. Outwardly happy and at ease, the sensitive young man was in turmoil.**

*A New Life (pp. 23-31)*

**In  *Choice Sayings*, a compilation of Robert Chapman's sayings, we read: "The titles given to the church in Scripture bespeak heavenly unity, such as the body, the vine, the temple of God, a holy nation, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood. Such words set forth the church of God as a witness for Him in the world; but the names which have been invented by men are names of sects, and declare our shame."**

**Chapman very likely developed this attitude many years before the Brethren movement, to which he was a part after 1932, for when he was twenty years old he was brought tot he Lord by an uncommon man who held this conviction. This man was James Harington Evans.**

**Evans wrote to his father in a very tender letter at the end of 1816: "As to John Calvin, I am no follower of his. I desire to follow One indeed whom John Calvin followed, but this is all. Oh! When will those days come, when party names, party distinctions, party separations shall cease?**

**Evans established what became the John Street Chapel near the center of London, England, in 1818. The new congregation at John Street was not affiliated with any existing Christian denomination or organization. As a result of Evan's powerful preaching, which spoke to the people's spiritual needs, the church grew rapidly. The attitude at John Street was one of openness; all believers as well as inquirers were welcomed.**

**In 1823, Chapman attended a meeting at the John Street Chapel. Many people filed into the chapel coming from many walks of life. The service was conducted with dignity by a man of evident culture who expressed every confidence in what he said. Here Chapman heard for the first time a sermon that opened the eyes of his heart. Never before had justification by faith and the atoning work of Christ been so clearly stated to him. As Evans preached, Chapman's intellectual reservations, melted under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. He accepted Christ as God's Son and as the One who had taken his own sins upon Himself.**

*A Developing Work (pp. 35-49)*

**Another man who had an impact on Robert Chapman indirectly was Robert Gribble, a local evangelist who eventually worked with Chapman. Gribble was born into a poor family and received a minimal education. He started his own drapery business, which became substantial enough to support his growing family. Sometime during this period he experience a spiritual conversion ... in 1815 Gribble began setting up Sunday schools in several nearby villages. Gribble was not satisfied with just preaching a simple gospel message. Although he had been fruitful, converting many people, several of whom became missionaries. He paid little attention to Biblical doctrines apart from salvation and had accepted Congregationalist traditions without much consideration. Another brother in Christ, William Hake, challenged Gribble on subjects ranging from the theological (such as the meaning of baptism) to the practical (such as propriety of per rents, which were then commonly used to pay the pastor's salary). Gribble later wrote: "This was a new thing to me, having been accustomed, as many I fear still are, to receive what I had been taught, without taking the pains to examine whether it was in accordance with the Scriptures, the only infallible standard of truth." (pp. 35-36)**

**Anthony Norris Groves had enormously impacted many lives. Born in 1795, Groves a longtime friend of William Hake, had been a dentist with a thriving business in Exeter, but eventually his wealth began making him uncomfortable. After much prayer and contemplation, he and his wife Mary agreed that they should spend the rest of their lives spreading the gospel as missionaries and that they would live in complete dependence on God's provision. ... Chapman must have been profoundly influenced by Grove's story because although he had established a successful law practice, he was quite uncertain that he wanted to continue in his profession. (pp. 38-39)**

**Chapman had decided to make the entire town his parish rather than just pastoring Ebenezer Chapel while at Barnstaple. The pockets of poverty reminded him of the London slums and his heart went out to their residents. But he had yet another goal. In London he had seen and heard about many missionaries and preachers who had become weary and discouraged from overwork, yet had no place to flee to for rest and temporary relief from their responsibilities. Chapman wanted to make his home a resting place for such missionaries and other servants of the Lord. Like Barnabas of the New Testament, Chapman had a gift of encouragement. If he could pray with these workers, talk to them, listen to them, and provide them with a retreat, perhaps they could return to their tasks with renewed enthusiasm. (p. 45)**

**Chapman lived in a poor section of town and he stayed there for the next seventy years. He wanted to live where even the poorest person could come to him without hesitation. Almost as soon as he moved to Barnstaple, Chapman began his tireless work of visitation and evangelization. He talked with people on the streets and at their houses or rooms. He frequently held gospel meetings in the workhouses and talked individually with the homeless and destitute inmates. He often walked great distances to visit and preach in the small villages near Barnstaple, sometimes teaming up with Gribble and Pugsley. (p. 46)**

**Many people today are offended by the preaching of the gospel in public places. They would prefer that such preaching be confined to a church building. But much of Jesus' ministry took place in the open, where the people were. ... It may be difficult for many of us to identify with Chapman. A man of culture and high intelligence from a family of wealth and influence, he now poured himself into the hearts and souls of poor and ignorant people. Having built a successful career and developed stimulating friendships, and being accustomed to the comforts of life, he now ate the food and shared the discomforts of the poverty-stricken. Even some of his colleagues in the work felt that he had gone to unnecessary, even senseless, extremes. But the imitation of Christ was Chapman's chosen way of life. (pp. 47-48)**