

Home call

Frederick Albert Tatford (1901–1986)

The HARVESTER, under that title, has been in circulation now for 64 years. For nearly two-thirds of its lifetime it was edited by one man—Frederick Albert Tatford—and his nearly forty years of editorial ministry (1933–1972) saw it grow from an evangelistic news bulletin of restricted appeal and circulation into an internationally esteemed journal of biblical literature. This was but one of many services which he rendered to the Christian good of this and other lands during his long life of 85 years, which reached the end of its earthly phase on June 14.

Dr. Tatford lived a full and many-faceted life, and there are some aspects of it which others must appraise—for example, his long and distinguished career in the civil service, culminating in the Directorship of Contracts and Stores for the U.K. Atomic Energy Authority, from which he retired in 1966. The aspect on which I have the necessary experience to say something is his oral and written ministry, in both of which I have been associated with him, to my great and lasting profit.

I first heard him address a Christian meeting in Panton Hall, Cambridge, a few months before he began to edit the HARVESTER. I have heard him frequently since then, and on several occasions have shared the ministry with him—the most recent occasion, I think, being in 1971, when we occupied a platform together at a conference in Preston. His ministry was always first-hand and fresh; he had a keen sense of the right word in the right place. There was never anything slovenly or half-prepared about it: he knew what he wanted to say, and said it. I have never failed to be impressed by his ability to master a subject and its presentation, and then to speak on it eloquently and without apparent effort, with no sign of a written note to aid his memory. If he had chosen the law as his profession, he would have made a very effective barrister. (Indeed, I am told that among his professional colleagues he was recognized as an authority on the law of contracts.)

But it was not the technical finish of his spoken ministry that made the deepest impression on his hearers; it was the spiritual power that lay behind his words. They felt the force of what he said because he felt it



himself. He was a man who got his priorities right in his early days, and he stayed that way throughout. Many who listened to him became aware that God was addressing them through the words that they heard. The ministry of the Word was something from which he never retired. In the HARVESTER for June 1986 there is a list of his public engagements for that month. It goes on to June 22 and 24, and no doubt there were other engagements in later months. But in the wisdom of God they were not to be fulfilled; he had other work for his servant to do.

As for his written ministry, it is a matter for constant wonder that he was able to produce so much of high quality during the years when his time was so occupied with his professional duties. He was editor not only of HARVESTER but also, for several years, of *Service* (the journal of the Civil Service Christian Union) and, at a later date, of *The Prophetic Witness*. It is of his editorship of HARVESTER that I can speak most knowledgeably, for during the last twenty years of his editorship I was responsible (at his invitation) for its 'Answers to Questions' page. His characteristic courtesy and grace were evident in the fact that he never attempted to censor any expression of opinion on my part which differed radically from his own published judgment—on prophetic interpretation, for example, or

on the quality of certain modern Bible versions. He must have received many letters of protest from aggrieved readers about some of the things I said (for such readers would send their protests to him rather than to me); some of those letters he passed on to me, if they contained material for a supplementary or qualifying question, but I imagine there were many which simply went into the editorial waste-paper basket.

He paid special attention to the interpretation of biblical prophecy. I think the first address I ever heard him give dealt with the seventy weeks of *Dan. 9:24–27*. Later he was closely associated with the Prophetic Witness Movement International: he was its general secretary from 1965 to 1969, and its director and chairman from 1969 onwards. Some of his best-known books deal with this subject—notably *Prophecy's Last Word* (on Revelation) and *The Climax of the Ages* (on Daniel).

He was keenly interested in Bible lands, and repeatedly led parties to Israel and other parts of the Near East. His knowledge of those parts was made available in his book, *Lands of the Middle East* (1969).

In recent years his major literary understanding has been the production of the series of ten volumes under the general title *That the World May Know*, dealing with the history of worldwide missionary activity associated with the journal *Echoes of Service*. Volume I (*The Restless Middle East*) appeared in 1982; Volume X, the last of the series (*The Islands of the Sea*), is due to be published shortly.

In 1924 he married Grace Vince, with whom he enjoyed fifty-one years of wedded life until her death in 1975. (Their son Brian, a well-known minister of the Word in his own right, has served the Lord in France for over thirty years.) In 1983 he married Sylvia Dale, whose companionship and care have added greatly to his comfort and happiness during his last three years. With her, and with Brian and his family, we express deep sympathy in their bereavement; with that sympathy is coupled a tribute of thanksgiving to God for one to whom so many, right round the world, owe an immense spiritual debt.

F. F. BRUCE