

## A NINETEENTH CENTURY STUDENT- JOSEPH BEVAN BRAITHWAITE (1818-1905)

The departure of a son or daughter to further their education is a frequent occurrence today, but it usually raises fears in parents for the safety and well-being of their child. These fears are the same as those expressed by Anna Braithwaite in the nineteenth century when she sent her youngest son to London to complete his legal education, as her memorandum shows:

“1840 3m. 2nd.

Our dear Bevan left us this day per mail at half past one o'clock to go and live in London. He has been a most affectionate and dutiful son and his mind has long appeared bent on the best things; It is hard to nature to part but I can commit this treasure to the Shepherd of Israel, and I do earnestly desire that he may be the humble follower of a crucified Saviour!<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Bevan Braithwaite was the youngest son of Anna and Isaac Braithwaite. He was born in 1818, in Kendal, Cumberland, where he attended the Friends School and received the usual education for the son of a Quaker businessman. After school he was apprenticed to a solicitor in Kendal but seems always to have intended to follow this profession as far as possible. In 1834 he was in correspondence with a Friend in London, John Hodgkin, asking for advice on which law books to read to increase his knowledge.

John Hodgkin was a barrister with chambers in Lincoln's Inn, and, as a member of the Society of Friends must have been acquainted with Isaac Braithwaite, as they both represented their Monthly Meetings at the Yearly Meeting in the 1820's; possibly they were friends as well. John Hodgkin met Bevan during a visit to the Lake District in the 1830's. Bevan's request for a list of books was fulfilled with a selection of books on "real property" and several more letters of advice.<sup>2</sup> Then, late in 1839 Bevan was offered a temporary place in John Hodgkin's chambers, with the probability of making it permanent.<sup>3</sup> Bevan wasted no time in accepting and set off for London, with his Mother's blessing. In a letter to his "dear Parents" three months later Bevan assures them that he is pleased to be settled with John Hodgkin.<sup>4</sup>

Over the next four years Isaac Braithwaite maintained a steady flow of letters, containing instructions, help and advice, to his son, until Bevan was called to the Bar and afterwards set up his own legal chambers.

Isaac's main concerns were how Bevan was spending the money that he was sent, and on his spiritual and religious activities. On 1m.14. 1840 he sent a draft for £233:8:0 to pay Bevan's Fees, deposit and Bond to John Hodgkin.<sup>5</sup> Bevan had obviously asked for an additional £5:0:0, but this was not forthcoming, until he had given the reason for his need. The Bond, for his good conduct, was for £100, and would be returned on completion of his studies, but by 1843 Isaac was complaining that the amount had diminished.<sup>6</sup>

At first Bevan shared lodgings with his sister, Anna, who kept house, and their brother Charles. Isaac was critical of the hours that Anna kept, which were, presumably, a poor example to Bevan. In 3m.1840 he advised that Anna should be "in bed by 11 so that she will become an early riser".<sup>7</sup> By July Anna had returned home and Bevan had taken new lodgings. He drew up a daily programme for work and activities of which Isaac "entirely approved". Breakfast was to be at 7, dinner at 1 or half past, and a good tea supper at 7, with a little walking exercise, which will be of essential benefit.<sup>8</sup>

As in the case with students today, Bevan had great difficulty in making his money stretch to meet his needs. Throughout his four years of study Isaac despatched bonds and money to London through his banking and trading Friends. The first of these was an order for £20 sent to their cousin James Foster in 3m.1840.<sup>9</sup> This draft was followed at intervals by orders and drafts for small amounts, but it was the major expenditure that worried Isaac.

At the end of 1841 Bevan asked for more money to cover living expenses and books and Isaac was concerned at the drain on his resources. His letter asks when Bevan will have completed his year with John Hodgkin and if it will still be necessary for him to stay in London, or if he can come home and study there.<sup>10</sup> By 1842 Isaac realised that his son would be living in London for some time. However, his expenditure was now acceptable and he was sent funds to put him "in comfortable circumstances again". At the same time, Isaac considered that Bevan had "now been long enough a housekeeper" and should now be able to manage his money properly, so he suggested sending a quarterly amount to cover Bevan's expenses.<sup>11</sup> It seems that this was also for Isaac's convenience as he was having difficulty with his cash flow. As a dyer and salter, presumably Isaac's business was seasonal and a quarterly amount would be easier to budget for.

As with all students, Bevan needed books to study and learn from, and his decision, in 1842, to remain in London is underlined as he

wrote to Isaac about collecting a Library of Law books. His request for £150 to start the Library was regarded as excessive by Isaac who replied: "I can not see where the advantage can be in obtaining £150 of books in one year".<sup>12</sup> Bevan defended himself by undertaking to stay within his estimate as far as possible, but emphasises his professional needs by stating that he does not want an "Amateur Library".<sup>13</sup> Isaac does have a point. In 1829 the University of London Committee allowed only £1,200 to set up a Library for the University itself!<sup>14</sup> However, by the beginning of 1843 Isaac had relented slightly and he sent Bevan £60 to purchase some of the books that he felt he needed.

Apart from the cost of books, Isaac also wanted to know what happened to the £100 Bond that Bevan paid when he started his time with John Hodgkin. His comments on the Law ring just as true today: "Then we want to know what is become of the £100 which we understood was deposited by way of security & would be refunded when thou hast completed thy term. I hear that the £100 had by being subjected to the furnace of the Law, been melted down and under this operation so reduced that probably not more than ten pounds of it could be found. What sort of a heating is this. I should have been surprised if it had come out of the Lawyers hands unscathed, but the idea of seeing a tithe of the sum is rather too bad."<sup>15</sup>

Books continued to be a source of friction; Isaac realises that Bevan requires books, but feels the number and cost is too much for them to be bought all at once. So as not to incur unnecessary expense, Isaac arranges to send a French Dictionary and Grammar from Kendal, to improve Bevan's French, rather than allow him to buy more in London. At some time between this letter in February 1841 and November 1841 Bevan must have returned to Kendal and borrowed extensively from his Father's Library. In his letter of November Isaac requests a proper list of the books taken, including two Greek books which appear to be missing. He also points out that Bevan has left behind a volume of theological tracts which he had intended to take. In the same letter, Isaac shows that he is becoming used to the idea of Bevan remaining in London, he is pleased to hear that Bevan may be able to re-join John Hodgkin's chambers in a few months. However, if Bevan is going to remain in London, his father expects the time to be "usefully employed".<sup>16</sup>

Bevan's progress as a student was noted and approved by his parents. In 1843 Isaac told him that they had received an interesting letter from John Hodgkin who gave a good account of his behaviour, which they were pleased to have.<sup>17</sup> This letter from John Hodgkin helped Anna and Isaac to realise that Bevan was making a success of

his chosen profession. After this there is a more encouraging tone to Isaac's letters.

Three months later Isaac even asks Bevan for legal advice about some Deeds of the Monthly Meeting in Kendal, and accepts and is pleased with the advice he received.<sup>18</sup> Later, in 1844, Isaac asks Bevan to assist "Friend E. Remington who is having trouble with an Insurance Co. re. some Silver" and offers to pay Bevan's fees for the work.<sup>19</sup>

Late in 1843 Bevan, still short of funds, asked again for money. Isaac replied that, if his Landlord calls Bevan may give him an order on his Bankers, but he should not take any money for himself until the New Year. In the same letter Isaac queries a Booksellers Bill, which he considers excessive, and asks whether the Law Reports are published every year, or if the £10 charged will complete the set.<sup>20</sup>

By this time the financial demands made by Bevan were becoming burdensome. An exasperated Isaac wrote to ask "I want to know when thou art in a capacity to work for thyself". The question is emphasised two months later when Isaac again sends Bevan money to cover his expenses and hopes that he will become "responsible and punctual in fulfilling his pecuniary engagements".<sup>21</sup>

Bevan's mother, Anna, was an acknowledged Minister of the Society of Friends and travelled widely in the Ministry, including three trips to America in the 1830's, at the height of the Hicksite controversy. Bevan's own religious life had been established before he left home. He had taken an active part in the issues of the Beaconite controversy. The Beaconite controversy was a difference of opinion within the Society of Friends between those who followed the belief in the "Inner Light" and those who preferred to follow Biblical teaching. One of his father's first letters contained advice to go to Westminster Meeting, as a most acceptable place of worship.<sup>22</sup> A letter during Bevan's earlier visit to London advised him against visiting a Baptist Chapel again, it would be better for him to spend time in reading and meditation.<sup>23</sup> Later in the year it was suggested that he visit Peel Meeting, in the Clerkenwell district of London, where Isaac's business friends and relations were members.<sup>24</sup> By 5m. 1840 Bevan had decided against becoming a Minister, he found it difficult to preach without a Bible, and, as with his career as a barrister, his stutter made public speaking difficult. Isaac was disappointed, he had hoped that Bevan would have been able to "promulgate the glorious Gospel of Life & Salvation through our dear Redeemer", but he was more concerned that Bevan was questioning his membership of the Society of Friends, especially in the light of the resignations of some of his relations after the

Beaconite controversy.<sup>25</sup> Years later Bevan was instrumental in reconciling these differences, but not in persuading former members to join the Society of Friends.

Bevan retained his contacts with his parents' friends and relations in the Society of Friends, but he was advised not to let his visits to cousins interfere with his studies! In 10m. 1840 he visited the Gurneys at Upton House and discussed the release of convicts with Samuel Gurney, a subject that must have interested a lawyer.<sup>26</sup>

Towards the end of 1842 Bevan's legal training was almost completed. He decided to stay in London, to build up his legal practice and continue his religious life as a member of the Westminster Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends. This caused Isaac some sadness, as his fond wish had been that his children should have grown up around him, but he was happy that they could feel united in spirit and able to rejoice in each other's welfare.<sup>27</sup> Bevan's letters home now contained information and requests for assistance in setting up his own chambers. One letter to his father discusses various chambers that are available for rent and explains his decision to take the larger ones, in Bernard Street, Brunswick Square, as they will also provide some living accommodation.<sup>28</sup> Four days later he wrote to his Mother for advice on purchasing furniture for the new chambers. This will only be second-hand to begin with and he hopes that it will cost between £20 and £25; obviously Bevan felt that these details would come from his Mother when his Father was approached for yet more money.<sup>29</sup>

A month later, at the beginning of 1843 Bevan is able to give the good news that John Hodgkin is putting cases his way, a show of confidence that must have been pleasing to his parents, as well as giving them hope that, at some time, Bevan will become self-supporting.<sup>30</sup>

Bevan was called to the Bar in 1843, the end of his legal training, so he could then work for himself and take on pupils of his own. This required the additional expenditure of £5:11:6d to buy a wig and gown. This came from a draft for £20 sent by Isaac, but it seems that the rest of the money was spent on books, again!<sup>31</sup>

The letters after this date express his Parent's interest in his career and progress and contain more local and family news than before. One of the last letters in this collection shows his parents love and approval, Bevan is sent £10 to pay for his journey home and they are so pleased that he will be coming that they are going to walk to Yealand to meet him.<sup>32</sup> By road the distance from Kendal to Yealand is 13 miles. It is to be hoped that Anna and Isaac knew short cuts over fields and by-ways. A walk of 26 miles would seem excessive for

people in their 60's, even if they were hardy North Country Quakers! But this does show that, again, as today, most students get through their studies successfully and, in the end, their parents are proud of them.

J.B. Braithwaite became a well-known and much respected lawyer. His habits of study, formed during his early days in London, on a wide range of theological subjects and languages, as well as the Law, made him a much respected member of the Society of Friends who was considered by Dr. Westcott, Bishop of Durham to be a 'kind of bishop in your church'.<sup>33</sup>

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Notes:

The letters used for this article are part of the Braithwaite Manuscripts (TEMP MSS 403) in the Library of the Society of Friends House, London.

1. 403/25/2/1
2. 403/27/1
3. 403/27/2
4. 403/27/1/3
5. 403/25/3/11
6. 403/25/3/39
7. 403/25/3/17
8. 403/25/3/23
9. 403/25/3/17
10. 403/25/3/30
11. 403/25/3/34
12. 403/25/3/38
13. 403/27/1/10
14. University College London, Administrative Archive:  
CA/UOL/MINS/GENMTGPROP/1
15. 403/25/3/39
16. 403/25/3/33
17. 403/25/3/35
18. 403/25/3/36 & 37
19. 403/25/3/50
20. 403/25/3/48
21. 403/25/3/40
22. 403/25/3/10
23. 403/25/3/12
25. 403/25/3/18

25. 403/25/3/22
26. 403/25/3/28
27. 403/25/3/54
28. 403/27/1/7
29. 403/27/1/12
30. 403/27/1/1
31. 403/27/1/1
32. 403/25/3/60
33. The Friend 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 1905 p.804