



### Thomas Scott (1747-1821): The Force of Truth

When Thomas Scott was ordained as an Anglican deacon in September 1772, he held to no evangelical beliefs. He had been born the son of a grazier, and had met his wife at a christening where he had won her money at cards, but was attracted to her by the way she took her defeat well. She proved to be a sweet tempered woman. At one stage, he had been apprenticed to a surgeon, but was sent home in disgrace for some misconduct. After a long stint as a shepherd, he decided to become a clergyman.

At this stage, Scott believed that he could save himself, that Christ was not divine, and that the Holy Spirit was of no consequence, even assuming that he existed. Like a number of other great evangelical leaders – notably Abraham Kuyper, Thomas Chalmers, and John Wesley – Scott was a Christian pastor before he was a Christian. In his autobiography, *The Force of Truth*, he was to admit: 'As a minister, I attended just enough to the public duties of my station to support a decent character'.

Out of curiosity, Scott sneaked in to hear John Newton preach. To his horror, Newton's text was Acts 13:9-10. Arriving curious, Scott went home startled and disgusted. Although he was in the neighbouring parish to Newton, and although he never read their books, Scott despised 'Methodism'. However, Newton's care for two of Scott's dying parishioners, and then Scott himself during a time of illness softened Scott's attitude

towards evangelicalism. Newton clearly possessed something that Scott did not.

On Good Friday 1777 he preached on Isaiah 53:6, and publicly renounced all his previous convictions and perversions of Scripture. Scott had embraced the evangelical and biblical faith that men and women, as sinners, could never save themselves from sin and death and judgment, but that Christ was sufficient. Scott proclaimed that 'Christ indeed bore the sins of all who should ever believe, in all their guilt, condemnation, and deserved punishment, in his own body on the tree'.

In the providence of God it was Scott who succeeded Newton at Olney – after a short interlude when Newton's immediate successor came and went. Like Matthew Henry, Scott wrote a much-respected commentary on the whole Bible – which took him thirty-three years to complete. Men as far apart as William Carey and John Henry Newman expressed their indebtedness to him. Hannah More recalled hearing Thomas Scott preach: 'With the worst voice, the most northern accent, and very plain manners, sound sense and sound piety were yet so predominant that like Aaron's serpent, they swallowed up the rest.'

Scott lived as a pilgrim for the rest of his life. He warned: 'Whatever we idolize or grow proud of, God will generally take from us, or else convert it into a cross'. His message was: 'Time how short! eternity, how long! life how precarious and vanishing! death how certain! the pursuits and employments of this present life how vain, unsatisfying, trifling, and vexatious! God's favour and eternal life how unspeakably precious! His wrath, the never-quenched fire, the never-dying worm, how dreadful!'

When Scott was dying in 1821, Daniel Wilson tried to comfort him by telling him what a great benefit he had been to the church. Scott stopped him: 'Now this is doing me harm. "God be merciful to me a sinner" is the only ground on which I can rest'.

(Peter Barnes, used with permission)