

F.F. Bruce as a Friend

G.C.D. Howley*

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There are many excursions into the pleasures of a friendship. Each fresh experience deepens the friendship and reveals its potentialities for enrichment of mind and spirit. Some friendships develop gradually; others seem to blossom quickly. But there can be no true friendship without a mingling of affection and respect. Where such exists, it is something to be greatly prized.

I write merely as one of a wide circle of friends and well-wishers of F.F.B., but it is a privilege to be able to represent them by this tribute to what this friendship has meant to me. I know sufficient of his friendships with others to realise that exactly the same qualities that have marked our friendship mark his with other people. Ours began gradually: first contacts with him in his Cambridge days were few, yet they left their mark on my mind; and later meetings with him drove home to me the depths behind the quiet exterior. Correspondence between us was occasional, yet led to the ripening of the link. My wife and I were always struck with his essential simplicity of heart. This was shown in his interest in the most ordinary matters in the home. He was never one with a great element of small talk,

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yet at home this ranged to mundane and domestic matters, the detail of living, which makes him an easy guest. We recall an occasion when he stayed with us while food rationing was still in force after the war. He refused a second helping of meat, saying, 'That'll do nicely for shepherds pie tomorrow'!

The growing extent of his work never dulled life's intimacies. This interest has been seen in our family affairs. When our elder son was born, F.F.B. made the remark that, were we in different ecclesiastical circles, he would probably be Peter's god-father. When our younger son was baptised, he wrote: 'Thank you for sharing your joy with us; we are delighted to know of Robert's forthcoming baptism, and pray that it will be a blessing to him and to you all'.

We have known the strength of a prayer-bond between us, and this has been expressed at different turning-points in our lives, as when we went to Australia as a family in 1952, for a two-year period of ministry; and my first visit to U.S.A. brought this letter: 'This is a short note to wish you Godspeed on the eve of your departure for U.S.A. I shall be remembering you from time to time during your visit there, and I hope that you yourself will have a refreshing time, as well as being a blessing to others'. We were charmed when a letter in September, 1954 said: 'An early copy of this volume must go to you, for reasons which an examination of page 5 will disclose'. We then found his thoughtful dedication of his volume on the English Text of The Book of Acts, 'To Cecil and Robina Howley'.

We have shared in some of his plans, as when he sent us an early intimation of his invitation to his present Chair in Manchester University. Even that letter showed, however, his ready

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contentment with the task he then pursued at Sheffield. 'I found some difficulty in making up my mind, as I am thoroughly content here; but at last I decided to say Yes. The invitation was completely unsought, and indeed unexpected, on my part'. References to his own activities (however important they might be in themselves) are referred to quite naturally in sharing them with us.

His comments on men and matters are pithy, and without malice or rancour. I recall him sending his greetings to a certain gentleman who was at the time making a sharp (and totally unjustified) attack on him. His balance has been shown in his sense of perspective. He can see how others may be 'off', yet without allowing this to get him out of sorts; he remains unruffled... and this has been an example to many, including the writer. His helpfulness is an outstanding element in his make-up. Ready always with replies to queries, and responding with sage counsel when it has been sought, he is meticulous in attending to dead-lines. He remembers the commitments of other people, and is always on time so that they will not be held up in the fulfilment of their responsibilities. And in this I write as one who has had much assistance from him over the sixteen years of my editorship of *The Witness*.

The friendship of which I write has been to my wife and myself a source of great pleasure and encouragement in our Christian life. And today, each fresh 'excursion' into the joys of such friendship brings its return, not merely on the earth plane, but with an increased desire for the glory of God in all of our lives.

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