

“Why do most Baptists today embrace Arminianism? In this valuable historical work, Austin Walker traces the decline of Calvinism among Baptists to the early nineteenth century, suggesting that this gradual doctrinal erosion was due, in great part, to the life, thought, and legacy of a largely forgotten minister named Robert Hall Jr., a social reformer, spellbinding orator, and preacher of questionable orthodoxy. Walker shows that Hall helped precipitate the abandonment of particular redemption as a central doctrine among the Particular Baptists by defending universal atonement and rejecting creeds, confessions, and theological systems (while inadvertently constructing his own). Walker’s investigation is not only beneficial for Baptists seeking to reconnect with their Reformed roots, but it is also a sobering warning to the church against the perennial snare of separating piety from doctrinal orthodoxy.”

JOEL R. BEEKE

Chancellor and Professor of Homiletics & Systematic Theology,
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Austin Walker has not hidden either his own love for and desire to promulgate the doctrines of the *Second London Confession* or his disappointment in Robert Hall Jr., for his coolness toward Calvinism and his conscientious nonconfessionalism. This posture, however, has not diminished the stringency or thoroughness of Walker’s research, the objectivity of his presentation of the life and witness of Hall, or of his appreciation of Hall’s infectious piety and magnetic oratory. This is an excellent example of the use of historical research in service of doctrinal argumentation. The reader will learn history, biography, doctrine, respectful polemical interaction, and be warned about lukewarm commitment to precise and coherent presentation of all the theological teachings of biblical revelation.”

TOM J. NETTLES

Senior Professor of Historical Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Austin Walker’s *The Theology of Robert Hall* is an important contribution to our understanding of Particular Baptist history. Relying on extensive primary sources, it demonstrates how one of the most gifted ministers of the early nineteenth century, Robert Hall, the son of a Particular Baptist stalwart, drifted away from the careful orthodoxy of his father and opened the door for loose doctrinal views in the following generations. It serves as a warning to those who treat orthodox confessional commitments as unimportant. Great gifts detached from theological faithfulness are a hindrance rather than a help to the church. Let us take heed.”

JAMES M. RENIHAN

President, International Reformed Baptist Seminary

“This is a work that has long been needed. Although Robert Hall is largely forgotten his influence lives on and needs to be addressed. Austin Walker has produced a very important piece of work. Robert Hall possessed outstanding gifts as an orator as well as being a brilliant conversationist. It was claimed that he gave Baptists respectability among the literate classes of his day. A powerful advocate of causes that he chose to support, but a scathing critic of those he rejected, Hall rose to prominence at a time when English Dissenters were attracted by the preaching of experience but were isolating it from its doctrinal roots. Confessional Puritanism which had grown from the teachings of the Protestant Reformers had sought to bring congregations to an experiential knowledge of God grounded in sound doctrine. The churches served by Robert Hall identified as Particular Baptist and were the spiritual heirs of the men who published the First and Second London Baptist Confessions of Faith. Hall was dismissive of confessions of faith and of doctrinal precision. He was a significant promoter of the movement that weakened the distinction between Calvinistic and Arminian Baptists and in the end enervated Evangelical Christianity in the face of Apostasy. I welcome and strongly recommend Austin Walker’s meticulously researched and powerfully written work.”

ROBERT OLIVER

Retired Pastor and former History Teacher

“Austin Walker has produced a fine and much needed account of the theology of Robert Hall Jr., showing both the evangelical faithfulness and piety of the man, but also the doctrinal and homiletical emphases which, Austin cogently argues, contributed to the downgrade of Calvinistic distinctives among Baptists in the nineteenth century. Highly recommended for all interested in Baptist history and in the health and vigour of Baptist churches today.”

ROBERT STRIVENS

Pastor, Bradford on Avon Baptist Church, UK

“Robert Hall Jr. is such an important figure of church history to study and know, both to learn the good to emulate as well as the warnings to heed. There is no better, more skilled guide to capture this balance than Austin Walker. *The Theology of Robert Hall Jr.* is carefully researched, pastoral in tone, and beautifully written and stands to be the definitive work on Hall’s life, ministry, and impact. I commend this work to every pastor who seeks to be scripturally and pastorally faithful in such a way that will stand throughout the generations.”

BRIAN CROFT

Executive Director, Practical Shepherding

“Robert Hall is a shadowy figure in the history of nonconformity in England during the late 18th century and early 19th century. He was a precociously brilliant child, the youngest of fourteen siblings. He grew in confidence and eloquence in his service of Christ. He wobbled in rejection of some basic New Testament doctrines ensuring that the Baptist churches would be confessionally a mixed group and so more vulnerable to the entry of German rationalism during the decades following his death. Three years after that decease Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born. This typically well-written and interesting book of Austin Walker gives the church all it needs to know about Hall. It is a profitable read and further advances our evaluation of the broad church of Baptist history not only in the U.K. but everywhere.”

GEOFFREY THOMAS

Church Member at Amyand Park Chapel,
Twickenham, London

“Austin Walker’s excellent, even compelling, study of Robert Hall Jr. is a cautionary tale for serious Christians, pastors above all, to take to heart. Reformed Christians too readily ignore the influence the intellectual and philosophical atmosphere of the times can have on orthodox Christian faith and practice. The righteous desire to preach the gospel relevantly into the times we live in, can only be too easily shaped by the times. Relevance becomes the compelling desideratum and truth becomes a casualty. Walker’s careful analysis of Hall’s drift from and then departure from foundational biblical truths concerning the work of Christ, truly is a cautionary tale. This is a most readable and engaging piece of historical-theological research. Most encouraging for myself, it is written by a pastor, not an academic. Walker’s work exemplifies Martin Bucer’s conviction (one that Calvin epitomized) that true theology is not theoretical, it is practical. The end of it is living, that is to live a godly life. I am delighted warmly and enthusiastically to commend Pastor Walker’s book.”

IAN HAMILTON

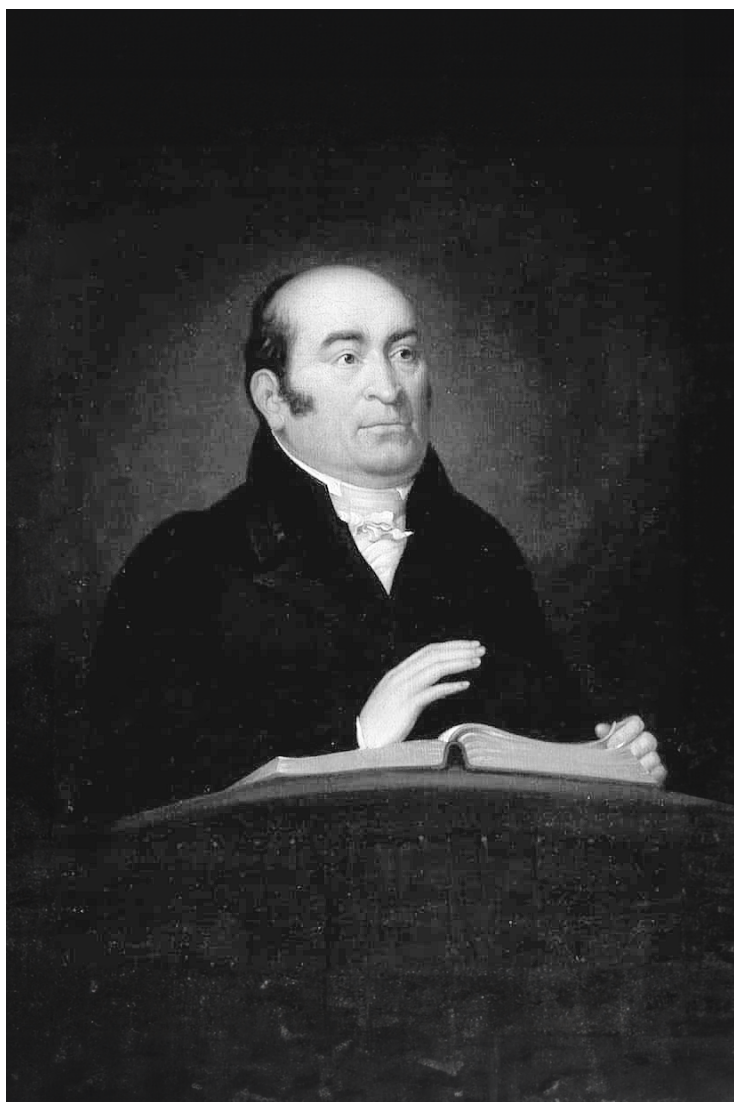
President and Professor of Church History,
Westminster Seminary, UK

“Few today know of the gifts and influence of the great Baptist preacher Robert Hall Jr., the man called ‘the Prince of Preachers’ before Charles Spurgeon was ever born. Eminent Baptist historian Austin Walker has resurrected the life and theology of Hall just as he did Keach in his *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*. Drawing heavily on Hall’s personal correspondence and other primary sources, Walker has argued convincingly that Hall was one of several key influences in the decline of Calvinistic theology among Particular Baptists in England in the early nineteenth century. Surveying Hall’s views on deep doctrines like justification and atonement, and practical doctrines like baptism and the Lord’s supper, Walker has provided a delectable meal for anyone interested in Baptist history and theology. His work is well-researched, readable, and engaging—even gripping at points, and an impressive contribution to Baptist studies. It is also a very practical, pastoral, illustrative, and encouraging book for pastors today seeking to hold firm to the great doctrines of the 1689 *Second London Confession*.”

CODY MCNUTT

Pastor, First Baptist Church Covington, Georgia.

The Theology of Robert Hall Jr.





STUDIES IN BAPTIST HISTORY

THE
THEOLOGY
OF
ROBERT HALL JR.

*The Undermining of Calvinism
among the English Particular Baptists*

AUSTIN WALKER



The Theology of Robert Hall Jr.

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*Dedicated to
Mai, my wife,
my best friend and companion for more than fifty years*

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Foreword

Michael A.G. Haykin

In his day, Robert Hall, Jr. was probably the second most famous Baptist in England. The most famous, of course, was William Carey the missionary pioneer. But Carey had left England for India in 1793, never to return. So, to speak literally, Hall was the most famous Baptist leader of his day who was resident in England. In fact, in today's terms he was a celebrity and renowned for his remarkable preaching abilities. He was probably also an extrovert who loved to regale audiences, large and small, with his wit and endless fund of stories. Given his family background—his father and namesake had published an influential work that provided resources for breaking the hold of High Calvinism on numerous sections of the Baptist denomination—and his circle of friends—men like Andrew Fuller, John Ryland Jr., and John Sutcliffe—he was regarded widely as a trusted heir of the robust experiential Calvinism that had marked his father and his aforementioned friends.

But appearances can be deceiving. In certain key areas, which this monograph by Austin Walker carefully documents, Hall was not as trustworthy a guide as many of that era thought. That there was a declension during the course of the mid-nineteenth century from the theological position of men like Fuller has long been evident. But what were its roots and who were its protagonists? This careful examination by Walker reveals Hall's theology to have been a factor in this doctrinal decline. To be sure, not the only one (I think of the influence of a theological author like John Howard Hinton in this regard), but one that carried much weight because

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of Hall's fame. It is an examination worthy of close study and sobering to ponder. It should make all who love the theology of men like Fuller jealous for its careful transmission.

San Antonio, Texas,

November 17, 2023

(at the 75th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society).

Preface

While Robert Hall Jr. (1764–1831) is today a relatively little-known figure in Baptist history, during his lifetime he was known as an eloquent orator and the “prince of preachers” during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. He was the youngest son of the manse. His father, Robert Hall Sr. (1728–1791), was pastor of Arnesby Baptist Church in Leicestershire. While the younger Hall preached from time to time in London, he never resided in the capital, but spent his ministerial life first in Bristol before moving to Cambridge and then in Leicester. Six years before his death he returned to Bristol.

He rose to fame and prominence during his days in Cambridge when he preached and published numerous sermons that caught the public’s attention. While his sermons dealt largely with political issues of national interest, they nevertheless also displayed a decided religious foundation. Writing cogently and persuasively, Hall’s mastery of the English language earned the admiration and esteem of his contemporaries. He was a gifted orator who could hold an audience spell bound. His fame was all the more remarkable because Robert Hall was a Dissenter and not part of the Establishment. Because Dissenters were still effectively second-class citizens during his lifetime, Hall was denied entrance into both Oxford and Cambridge University and completed his academic studies in Aberdeen. His sermons, both preached and published, helped repair and establish the reputation of Dissenters among both the Church of England and political leaders in Parliament at Westminster.

Robert Hall, Jr. grew up in Particular (that is, Calvinistic) Baptist circles. As a young man, Hall’s father had studied at the

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Bristol Academy, regarded as a bastion of Particular Baptist orthodoxy, under the leadership of Hugh Evans (1712–1781) and his son Caleb (1737–1791). In 1753, he was called to Arnesby Baptist Church, part of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association. As part of the that Association, Hall pastored alongside men of considerable standing like Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), John Collett Ryland (1723–1792) and his son John Ryland (1753–1825), John Sutcliff (1752–1814), Samuel Pearce (1766–1799), and William Carey (1761–1834).¹ In 1807 Hall became pastor of Carey’s former congregation in Leicester.

It is often assumed that Robert Hall Jr. shared the same evangelical Calvinistic convictions as Andrew Fuller. Furthermore, it has often been suggested that the eventual merger of Particular and General Baptist churches of the New Connexion in 1891 owed more to the influence of Andrew Fuller than to any other individual. In his *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists*, Robert Oliver questions the assumptions about Hall’s convictions and the significance of Fuller’s influence in the merger. Oliver suggests Robert Hall as a far more likely candidate than Andrew Fuller. This book examines in detail the evidence that substantiates that claim.

The majority of studies about Robert Hall focus on his preaching and oratorical abilities. Very few have accurately traced and assessed Hall’s doctrinal convictions. There is little doubt that Hall was evangelical, but was he Arminian or Calvinistic? In truth, it is a far from easy task to tease out his distinctive convictions because Hall rarely stated publicly any theological disagreements that he had with other men. Hall was, without doubt, a sober, serious-minded man who sought to walk before God with a good conscience. His life manifested a deep commitment to fervent

¹ See Michael A.G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1995).

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prayer. In many respects, he was a committed evangelical and would satisfy David Bebbington's quadrilateral description of nineteenth-century evangelicalism.² Hall, however, was not a man who can be neatly fitted into any system of theology. Some of the critics of his own day pointed out that he was neither decidedly an Arminian nor clearly a Calvinist. Hall reflected the anti-confessional and anti-creedal spirit of his age and resisted the idea of adhering to any system of theology and any confession of faith. In this regard he differed from his seventeenth-century Baptist forefathers and from Bernard Foskett (1685–1758), the founder of Bristol Academy. Instead, Hall preferred to follow the paths trodden by Richard Baxter (1615–1691) and John Locke (1632–1704). While he claimed to reject all systems, he did of course develop his own system of theology and practice.

With one or two exceptions his views must be gleaned largely from his private conversations, his correspondence, and his biographers. It is often what Hall omitted to say in his sermons that proves to be important. Consequently, it is a difficult task to be definitive about some of Hall's beliefs and to decide when he first adopted or subsequently changed them. Without any doubt Hall's doctrinal convictions shifted during his lifetime. The last few months of 1804 and the early months of 1805 proved to be a major turning point in his life. At the age of forty while he was a pastor in Cambridge, Hall suffered two successive mental breakdowns. He became firmly persuaded that until that time he was an unconverted man, something many of his contemporaries and most of his biographers found very difficult to accept.

Hall was persuaded that the piety of a man was of greater significance than a man's doctrinal convictions. That outlook

² Bebbington argued that the four main characteristics of Evangelicalism are conversionism, activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism. The accuracy of that portrayal of Evangelicalism has been questioned but insofar as it describes some of the characteristics of Hall, it is an accurate portrayal.

encouraged a denigration of the importance of biblical truth. When such an outlook is adopted, in the long term it proves disastrous for the health and well-being of the church of Christ; the nineteenth century bears eloquent testimony to this reality. To Hall's credit, however, he firmly resisted Socinianism, promoted principally by Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), hyper-Calvinism, Antinomianism, and Roman Catholicism. Regarding these matters, he and Fuller were of a similar mind.

Hall freely admitted though that he did not believe in particular redemption. Yet he still regarded himself and the churches in which he ministered as being Particular Baptist. He became a staunch advocate of open communion. As it was increasingly adopted among the Particular Baptists, the practice weakened the resolve of the churches to maintain their distinctive ecclesiology.

Hall was not alone in this undermining process among the Particular Baptists. Despite the profound influence of Andrew Fuller in the early eighteenth century, Calvinistic Baptist orthodoxy was already waning as a major force among English Baptists by the time of Hall's death in 1831, a few months short of his sixty-seventh birthday. The decline of a distinctive Calvinistic theology became widespread across the principal nonconformist denominations despite the efforts of titanic defenders of orthodoxy like Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892). Spurgeon spent much of his energy resisting that change and preached unashamedly all of the “five points” of Calvinism and republished the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (1677/1689) to reassert historic Baptist orthodoxy. By the time of “the Downgrade,” the issues were not simply those of Calvinism but the very fundamentals of the Christian faith. Russell S. Campbell has maintained that the decline of Calvinism was the single biggest change in theology since the days of the Reformation. Examining the ministries of three Baptists who succeeded Hall, Campbell has compellingly demonstrated the way Calvinism lost its place in many Particular Baptist

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churches.³

The failure of Hall to promote a distinctive Calvinistic theology became a major factor in undermining the Calvinism of the English Particular Baptists. The principal purpose of this book is to demonstrate the ways in which Hall's influence and his sentiments significantly changed the face of English Particular Baptists, though it seems few recognised those changes at the time.

I am firmly persuaded that there are important lessons to learn from church history. This study of Hall is not written merely out of academic interest. I was a pastor in a Calvinistic Baptist Church for over forty years—a church that continues to hold to “the 1689,” (*The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*), persuaded that it states in summary fashion what we believe the Bible teaches. In writing this book, I seek to impress upon its readers, especially those who profess to be Calvinistic, the importance of maintaining Calvinistic distinctives and to outline ways in which that can and must be accomplished.

³ Russell S. Campbell, “The decline of Calvinism among British Baptists in the nineteenth century: a study of three ministers” (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2000). Referred to and quoted from with permission of the Modern History Faculty Board, University of Oxford.

Held in High Esteem

When Robert Hall died in Bristol, aged sixty-six, on February 21, 1831, tributes were paid in a variety of places. Accounts of his funeral were widely reported in the weeks following his death. In addition, obituaries appeared in London and in various provincial newspapers. An extensive number of funeral sermons were preached and published and obituaries printed in numerous Christian periodicals. Typical among the obituaries was one by the Rev. William Newlands, published in *The Manchester Times*. Speaking of Hall's preaching Newlands explained:

But for the feebleness of his voice, he would have been, as a preacher, without a rival in Europe. His discourses were premeditated, but not written before delivery. His habits of thinking being philosophical, his stores from reading and reflection being immense, his imagination active and vigorous, his conceptions rapid, and his command of the powers and graces of language astonishingly great, he delighted and instructed his audience by the continuity and logical precision of his arrangement, the magnitude of his conceptions, and the overpowering brilliancy and resistless charms of his eloquence. In the commencement of his discourse, his first efforts were scarcely perceptible, but as he proceeded he increased in splendour, scattering the darkness in his progress, till his subject was enveloped with a flame of light—his utterance at the same time becoming rapid and impassioned.¹

¹ William Newlands, "Character of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M." *The Manchester Times* (March 10, 1831): 510 (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/print/bl/000083/18310319/013/0006).

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This kind of tribute was not unusual. Since his early days as a preacher, first in Broadmead, Bristol (1785–1790) and then at St. Andrew’s Street Baptist Chapel, Cambridge (1791–1806), Hall’s brilliant qualities—his eloquence, in particular—had been recognised by all who knew him and especially by those who heard him. The years Hall later spent in Leicester (1807–1824) at Harvey Lane Chapel, scene of William Carey’s ministry before his departure for the Indian sub-continent, and his final years in Broadmead, Bristol (1824–1831) served to enhance Hall’s reputation as an evangelical preacher of rare distinction.

Preaching in the Broadmead Meeting House, two weeks after the death of Hall, Joseph Hughes (1769–1833), a hearer of Hall’s preaching and one of his former pupils, referred to his mentor as “one of the phenomena of the age.”² James Phillipso Mursell (1799–1885), Hall’s successor in Leicester, preaching on the same day as Hughes, portrayed Hall as “the Colossus of the race.”³ Thomas Swann (1795–1857), pastor of Cannon Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, echoed the opinions of William Newlands and many others, when he spoke of “his princely intellect.”⁴ Later on during the same sermon he related:

His voice was not powerful ... but his appearance was majestic and imposing, his eye was full of benignity and intelligence, his pronunciation was distinct and clear, and when absorbed in his subject, his eloquence was mellifluous and

² Joseph Hughes, *The Believer’s Prospect and Preparation described in a discourse delivered In Broadmead Meeting House, Bristol on Sunday morning, March 6, 1831, on the occasion of the death of Robert Hall, A.M.* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1831), 46.

³ J.P. Mursell, *A sermon occasioned by the death of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M., preached at Harvey Lane, Leicester, March 6, 1831 by J. P. Mursell* (London: Hamilton, Adam and Co., n.d.), 38.

⁴ Thomas Swann, *A sermon occasioned by the death of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M. of Bristol. Preached In Birmingham, on the Lord’s Day, March 6, 1831, by Thomas Swann, Pastor of the Baptist Church, Cannon Street* (London: Hamilton, Adam and Co., 1831), 5.

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fascinating. Its power was irresistible. It made its way directly to the heart, filling the hearer with alternate emotions of penitence and hope, of humility and admiration. One rare excellence strikingly appeared in him. He possessed the happy art, so difficult of attainment, of losing sight of himself in his subject. ... On every attentive hearer he produced a deep impression; but it was the impression of truth in the forms of the purest eloquence.⁵

The author of the obituary in *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Herald* also extolled the virtues of Hall, but perhaps more judiciously than other writers, identified the source of his genius and eloquence. In his opinion it was not a matter of mere human giftedness and ability but the result of God's work of grace and power evident in Hall's life. The obituary concluded, "But his piety, his ardent piety, which led him to walk with God and which baptised his ministry in the Spirit of Christ, was his noblest, his highest distinction."⁶

Robert Hall was a Baptist, a Particular or Calvinistic Baptist, but he was held in great esteem by the Christian world of his day. General Baptists, Anglicans, Congregationalists, indeed anyone with evangelical sympathies held him in high regard. William Newlands regarded him as equal to any preacher in America. The majority of Hall's contemporaries agreed that he was the prince of evangelical preachers in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.

Hall's works and biographies

Immediately following Hall's death, his sermons, letters, book reviews, published works, and various other pieces were collected and published under the oversight of Olinthus Gregory (1774–

⁵ Swann, *Death of the Rev. Robert Hall*, 21.

⁶ Anonymous, "Obituary for Robert Hall," *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* 9 (1831): 159.

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1841). Gregory, a fellow Baptist and professor of Mathematics at the Royal Military Academy, had first met Hall in Cambridge in 1797, and the two had maintained a close friendship for over thirty years. At the request of Hall's widow, Eliza, and the family, a few friends undertook to superintend a complete edition of his works. On Saturday, May 2, 1831, a notice appeared in the *Leicester Chronicle* for the "most interesting letters and tolerably full notes of sermons" of Hall to be sent to either John Foster or Dr. Olinthus Gregory, together with an assurance that they would be returned.⁷

In 1831, Gregory published the first volume. Once completed, twelve editions of these works followed in the ensuing 35 years. With the editorial help of Joseph Belcher (1794–1859), an English Baptist who had emigrated to the United States in the 1840s, Hall's works were also published in New York. The American edition contained several works that were not found in the British edition, including Hall's *Expository Discourses on the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*. Both in America and Britain these volumes were entitled *The Works of Robert Hall, A.M.*⁸

While the collected works contain several memoirs of Hall, including one by Gregory, the most valuable portrait was drawn by Baptist minister and author, John Webster Morris (1763–1836).⁹ Morris had known Hall for forty-eight years and regarded him as

⁷ *Leicester Chronicle* (Saturday 2 May, 1831) (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/print/bl/0000172/18310402/018/0001).

⁸ Gregory, ed., *Works*, 6 vols., will be referred to as Gregory, *Works*, with volume and page number in subsequent references. Gregory and Belcher, eds., *Works*, 4 vols., will be referred to as Gregory and Belcher, *Works*, in subsequent references. These volumes form the principal sources used in this book to assess the life and ministry of Robert Hall, together with other sermonic material and letters that have only come to light in more recent years.

⁹ J.W. Morris, *Biographical Recollections of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.* (First published 1833, reprinted in India, New Delhi: Isha Books, 2013).

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a man of “extraordinary talents and piety.”¹⁰ Since Hall left no diaries and consistently refused to provide information about himself while he was alive, Morris believed that “my own memoranda and recollections might furnish a variety of facts and circumstances that could not well be known to others.”¹¹ Hall himself had not been happy at the prospect of a memoir of his life being written but conceded that if such a memoir was ever produced then Morris would be his preferred author.¹² The American edition of Hall’s works also included the personal reflections of John Greene, who first became acquainted with Hall in 1795 and kept in contact with him all his life.¹³

The publication of Hall’s works certainly enhanced his reputation during the middle years of the nineteenth century. Causes that Hall advocated, like open communion, continued to be debated among Particular Baptist churches throughout this era. Largely through Hall’s influence, open communion became increasingly the practice of English Baptists. The memories of his preaching proved to be indelible in the minds of those who heard him. Writing some fifty years later, Frederick Trestrail (1803–1890), Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, recalled the profound impression made on him as a student at the Bristol Academy the first time he heard Hall preach:

But what most struck me was the *style* of the discourse. I had never before heard such *spoken* English. The remarkable combination of elegance and vigour, the perfect mastery of the most felicitous language, the exquisite blending of argument with metaphor, the marvellous rapidity of utterance, yet withal distinct and clear, gradually acquiring greater

¹⁰ Morris, *Biographical Recollections*, viii.

¹¹ Morris, *Biographical Recollections*, iv.

¹² Morris, *Biographical Recollections*, v.

¹³ John Greene, “Reminiscences of the Rev. Robert Hall” in Gregory and Belcher, *Works*, 4:11.

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depth of tone, ultimately glowing into intense fervour and vehemence, pervaded too, by a pathos that “ought to have been irresistible,” produced an excitement which I had never known before. The subject of the sermon was, “The Ministry of the Gospel, a Divine Appointment,” producing an indelible impression that it was to the noblest end to which the human faculties, however lofty, could be devoted.¹⁴

Something of the respect that he was still garnering late in the nineteenth century can be seen in the fact that on November 2, 1871 a magnificent statue of Robert Hall was unveiled in De Montfort Square, Leicester. Carved from Sicilian marble and placed on a Cornish granite pedestal, it was the work of the sculptor John Binnie Philip (1824–1875). It depicts Hall preaching “in full flow” with his right hand raised, his face animated and alive, and his left hand holding down by his side a Bible with one finger inserted in its pages. *The Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury United*, reported that the statue had been “raised in honour of one of the greatest men ever identified with this town,” where Hall had ministered from 1807 until 1824.¹⁵ At the time of the statue’s unveiling, J.P. Mursell, Hall’s successor in the church in Leicester, was then in his early seventies. He delivered a short speech to the assembled crowd that included the mayor, local members of political parties, and representatives from various denominations including Churchmen and Dissenters, together with surviving family members and others, who like Mursell could still recall Hall’s ministry. Mursell spoke warmly of his predecessor as a remarkable man, unrivalled, who “stood alone in unassumed but solitary

¹⁴ Frederick Trestrail, *Reminiscences of College Life in Bristol during the ministry of Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.* (London: E. Marlborough and Co., 1879), 32.

¹⁵ *The Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury United* (November 4, 1871).

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grandeur.”¹⁶ Quoting Samuel Parr (1747–1825), the vicar of Warwick, Mursell said that Hall, “like Bishop Taylor, had the eloquence of an orator, the fancy of a poet, the acuteness of a schoolman, the profundity of a philosopher, and the piety of a saint.”¹⁷ He also recalled William Jay (1769–1853) of Bath laying a wreath on Hall’s coffin and quoting Zechariah 11:2: “Howl, fir tree, the cedar has fallen.”

Mursell’s tribute also heralded Hall’s concern for the poor. While in Leicester he had taken up the cause of Leicester textile workers who had become destitute due to frequent unemployment. He then briefly commended his catholic spirit and his lack of bigotry. He cited Hall’s friendship with the Rev. Thomas Robinson (1774–1813), the evangelical vicar of St. Mary’s, Leicester, as a prime example in this regard. Mursell concluded his tribute to Hall by saying that Hall was unashamedly a Nonconformist and part of that distinguished group of men in the Midlands that included Andrew Fuller and Thomas Toller, both of Kettering.

How was Hall being remembered forty years or so after his death? Both Mursell and Trestrail place great emphasis on his elegant and animated eloquence. In his address Hall’s successor pointed out that many went out of their way to hear Hall preach in Leicester, among them peers, jurists, and men of the highest distinction. Mursell also stressed the popularity of his published discourses such as *Modern Infidelity*, *The Duties Proper to the Present Crisis*, *The Death of Princess Charlotte*, and his funeral oration for John Ryland. He also predicted that Hall’s writings would be read and studied long after monuments of marble and granite had turned to dust. Mursell praised his critical writings for their judgment, their imagination, which were often laced with wit and

¹⁶ *The Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury United* (November 4, 1871).

¹⁷ *The Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury United* (November 4, 1871).

sarcasm.

However, Mursell's assessment has proven to be too optimistic. While the statue of Hall remains, "now Hall's sermons lie unopened on library shelves."¹⁸ This is in marked contrast to the sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, whose sermons were read by thousands during his lifetime and continue to be published and read to the present day. Nearly two hundred years after his death, very few have any idea who Robert Hall was. People who pass by his statue in Leicester know little or nothing about him, and his writings lie forgotten.

The impact of Robert Hall, his preaching, his writings and not least his life, lasted certainly to the end of the nineteenth century. Gregory argued that once Hall was settled in Leicester and until his death in Bristol in 1831, "Hall became much more known and revered as the correct and eloquent interpreter of the Christian faith, the intrepid asserter of the infinite superiority to all human systems of philosophy and morals."¹⁹ Yet, despite his influence, Hall's fundamental convictions escaped rigorous examination. In 1947, Baptist historian A.C. Underwood noted that while there were a number of small biographies and memoirs which had appeared during the last one hundred and fifty years dealing with his published works, nearly all of them focused on Hall the preacher. Few dealt with his doctrine, his convictions, and practice.²⁰ Only in the last half century have Hall's beliefs and practices been more

¹⁸ A.C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: The Baptist Union, 1947), 169.

¹⁹ Gregory, *Works*, 1:102.

²⁰ The main biographies besides that of J.W. Morris are Gregory, "A brief memoir of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M." Gregory, *Works*, 1:1-157; John Greene, *Reminiscences*, 1832 (also in Gregory and Belcher, *Works*, 4:11-100); E. Paxton Hood, *Robert Hall*, 1881; Graham W. Hughes, *Robert Hall* (London: The Carey Press, 1943). A briefer version by Hughes subsequently appeared by the same author, *Robert Hall 1764-1831* (London: Independent Press, 1961).

Held in High Esteem

thoroughly examined.²¹

No true estimate of Robert Hall's legacy can be made until his "sentiments" (used in Hall's day to describe a man's beliefs) are identified and assessed. Hall's convictions, especially in the early years of his public ministry in Bristol and Cambridge, were not those of the evangelical Calvinism expressed by his father, Robert Hall, Sr., nor that of Andrew Fuller and the other men who were key players in the Northamptonshire Association of Particular Baptist Churches. By examining Hall's sentiments it will be possible to assess how he changed the face of English Particular Baptists, though it seems few recognised those changes at the time.

²¹ Angus Hamilton MacLeod, "The Life and Teaching of Robert Hall, 1764–1831" (Master of Letters thesis, University of Durham, 1957); Cody Heath McNutt, "The Ministry of Robert Hall Jr.: The Preacher as Theological Exemplar and Cultural Celebrity" (PhD Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

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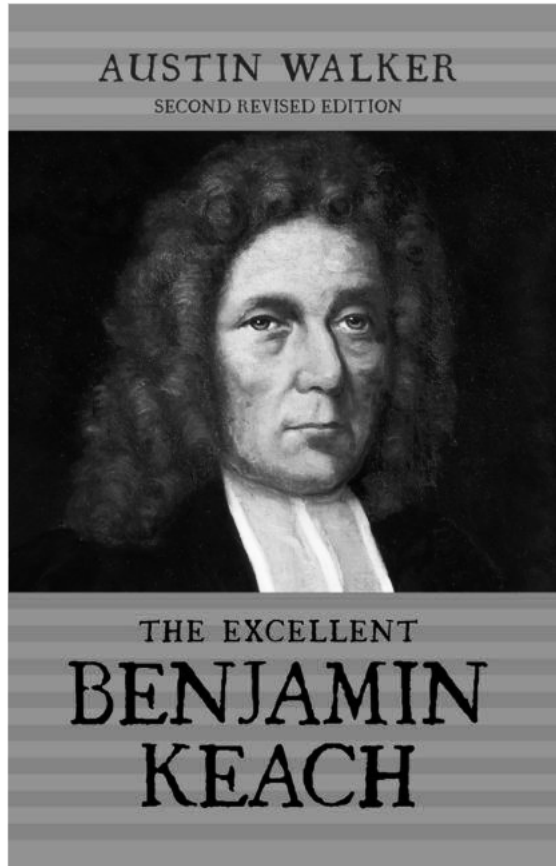
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