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Robert Chapman

Robert L. Peterson

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no details.

Robert Chapman, the St. Francis of the Brethren movement, lived from 1803 to 1902 (well over twice the years of the medieval saint). Born into a well-to-do family of Whitby, Yorkshire, though his actual birthplace was Helsingor in Denmark where his parents were then living, he qualified as a lawyer in London and after a spell with a firm that is still one of England's top law firms set up his own promising practice. He had been converted at the age of 20 under the ministry of the celebrated James Harington Evans of John Street Chapel and Evans was to remain a strong influence and a close friend until his death in 1850. In 1832, responding to an invitation from Barnstaple where relatives who had been converted under his influence had given themselves to evangelistic and church planting work. Chapman closed his legal practice, gave away his inherited fortune, and settled in that North Devon town which was for the rest of his long life to be the scene of his pastoral and evangelistic ministry except for three evangelistic journeys (largely on foot) to Spain and one to Ireland. But from that obscure situation, the sheer power of his highly disciplined and godly personal life, and of his self-denial and simple trust in God, was to make his home and the guest haven he established a place of pilgrimage and deep spiritual influence throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Robert Peterson, who lives in Boulder, Colorado, has made the study of the life of this outstanding man a labour of real love for many years, and he has travelled widely and carefully researched all he could discover. The result he has embodied in this short and beautifully written biography—no small task, as Chapman deliberately destroyed all his personal papers out of modesty (and no doubt, with his lawyer's professional training, he would have been mindful that he had been a confidant and adviser to countless Christians over a long period and the papers would have contained much of a highly private nature). In so doing he has also unobtrusively corrected a number of errors—particularly over Chapman's early professional years—that have been commonly accepted in earlier histories. To read this book must be a spiritual challenge and encouragement to any Christian: different though today's world may be from the nineteenth-century world that Chapman knew, the testimony and lessons of his life are as powerful as ever.

Roy Coad