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AND THE CHILDREN'S TEETH ARE SET ON EDGE

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St Paul's Church Caton

Photo E. M. Ropschitz

AND THE CHILDREN'S TEETH ARE SET ON EDGE

**ADAM HODGSON & THE RAZING OF CATON
CHAPEL**

A Tale of Slavery and Abolition in a Lancashire Village

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In Memory of the Liverpool Abolitionists.

“The voice of censure cannot pierce the grave, nor flattery soothe the ear of death”
James Currie M.D.

“Mr. Goodchild concedes Lancaster to be a pleasant place. A place dropped in the midst of a charming landscape, a place with a fine ancient fragment of castle, a place of lovely walks, a place possessing staid old houses richly fitted with old Honduras mahogany, which has grown so dark with time that it seems to have got something of a retrospective mirror-quality into itself, and to show the visitor, in the depth of its grain, through all its polish, the hue of the wretched slaves who groaned long ago under old Lancaster merchants. And Mr. Goodchild adds that the stones of Lancaster do sometimes whisper, even yet, of rich men passed away--upon whose great prosperity some of these old doorways frowned sullen in the brightest weather--that their slave-gain turned to curses, as the Arabian Wizard's money turned to leaves, and that no good ever came of it, even unto the third and fourth generations, until it was wasted and gone.”

“THE LAZY TOUR OF TWO IDLE APPRENTICES”
Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins

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Introduction

This is the story of the destruction of the medieval Chapel of Caton and its replacement by the Victorian Neo-Gothic Church of St Paul. On the face of it, this would seem to be an unsurprising event, given the Victorian mania for church building and all things Gothic. However, in the case of the razing of Caton Chapel, there is more to the story than meets the eye and it begins with a bequest of £50 for the purchase of a small memento, by a man whose family changed the face of a small rural farming community in the valley of Lonsdale for a hundred years or more.

The rebuilding of Caton Chapel was largely financed by contributions to the Adam Hodgson Memorial Fund. Adam Hodgson was a director of the Bank of Liverpool and a leading Tory evangelical, prominent in the social and political life of Liverpool from about 1810 until his death in 1862. In his early life he played a prominent role in the movement to abolish slavery in the British Empire, alongside James Cropper whose contribution is rather better known. His working life began in partnership with William and Richard Rathbone trading as Hodgson, Rathbone & Co. and in 1824 he published a book narrating his impressions of the United States of America which he visited on behalf of the firm in 1821. His deep abhorrence of slavery and his evangelical views become abundantly clear in his account.

The origins of his detestation of the institution of slavery are not hard to understand when it is realized that his father, Thomas Hodgson, was a prominent Liverpool slave merchant who learned his trade apprenticed to Lancaster's most notorious slave trader, Miles Barber. His early career was spent on the coast of Africa as Miles Barber's agent which enabled him to accumulate sufficient capital to return to Liverpool and form his own slave trading operation with his brother John Hodgson in about 1771. The outbreak of the American Revolutionary War had profound effects on the slave trade and the Hodgson brothers seemed to have profited mightily from the operation of privateers. By 1781 Thomas Hodgson was able to marry the wealthy heiress Elizabeth Lightbody and to begin building a series of cotton mills in his native Caton and to greatly expand his slaving operations.

By 1787 the slave traders' activities were under attack from the abolitionists and Thomas Clarkson's visit to Liverpool that summer caused a considerable commotion. The Liverpool abolitionists' own plans seem to have been thrown into disarray by his activities. The leading Liverpool abolitionists of the day, James Currie and William Roscoe, were almost certainly personal fiends of Thomas Hodgson. Roscoe acted for him in legal matters and Currie corresponded with his wife's sister, Hannah Greg, the wife of Samuel Greg, the Manchester cotton

spinner. None of this seems to have deflected the Hodgsons who continued in the trade and even acquired their own slave factory on the African Coast from a bankrupt Miles Barber.

However, when war broke out again in 1793 this time with Revolutionary France the Hodgsons were seriously exposed. There was a credit crisis and a French Squadron cruised down the African coast picking off slave vessels at will. The Hodgsons lost on their own voyages and on those on which they acted as underwriters. One such voyage was that of the *Tom* which was crippled when it struck the sandbar at the mouth of the River Cameroons. The voyage to the West Indies took six months instead of six weeks and the slaves starved to death. The owners tried to recover their losses, suing the Hodgsons in the process in August 1795. They were forced to raise money by mortgaging their Caton properties and in November 1795 Thomas Hodgson's wife died as a result of childbirth. When he wrote his will in 1797 he was unable to leave more than £100 to his eldest son.

They were forced to fall back on their mill operations in which Kitty Wilkinson, founder of Liverpool's first public bath and wash houses, was apprenticed after first working as a maid servant to Thomas Hodgson's mother in law. However trading conditions were poor during the long Napoleonic Wars and the Hodgsons fell into the hands of their creditors. Thomas's eldest son Isaac became involved in running the mills but further financial difficulties led to the mills falling into the hands of his uncle Samuel Greg. Thomas's second son Adam joined the Rathbones and travelled to America. In 1824 they parted company and he formed the cotton broking partnership of Hodgson and Ryley which continued throughout his life. Despite his involvement in brokering slave grown cotton he was a founder member of the Liverpool Anti-slavery society in 1822. In 1832 he chaired a momentous series of debates on the issue in the Liverpool Amphitheatre. Hodgson was also a founding member of the board of the Liverpool to Manchester Railroad and of the Bank of Liverpool.

He resigned from the railway board over the issue of Sunday working and this evangelical piety was reflected in the many philanthropic organizations in which he was involved. He was appointed a magistrate for the county and became involved, alongside the son of the blind Liverpool poet Edward Rushton in many of the leading issues of the day including the suppression of the chartist risings and the re-organization of the Liverpool workhouse which became briefly notorious as the Biggest Brothel in England. He also committed himself to the Health of Towns movement whose efforts to improve the living conditions of the poor in what was then the unhealthiest town in England were derailed by the huge influx of Irish Poor into Liverpool during the Irish Famine.

The famine in turn led to a currency crisis and Adam Hodgson became involved in the debates over the basis of the currency. It also resulted in the Rebellion of the Chartists and Repealers which Hodgson and Rushton were active in suppressing. The prominence of the Irish Question and the attempts to disestablish the Anglican Church led Hodgson to become increasingly associated with the Rev Hugh McNeile's ultra-Tory anti-catholicism. Following the liberation of the Empire slaves in 1838 both he and McNeile ceased to attend anti-slavery meetings.

The final act of the story began in 1861 shortly before his death with the outbreak of civil war in America. The blockade of the south led directly to the cotton famine in Lancashire in the years 1861-1865. It was the need to provide relief

to the unemployed cotton workers and to stimulate the Lancashire economy which led to many public and private works being undertaken. One of these was the rebuilding of Caton Chapel. Seen in this light the church of S. Paul's, Caton, with its monuments to Thomas Hodgson and his wife and its rebuilding with money raised in memory of Adam Hodgson at the time of the war to end slavery can be seen as a significant national monument to both slavery and to the abolition movement. This is the story which is told in these pages.