

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

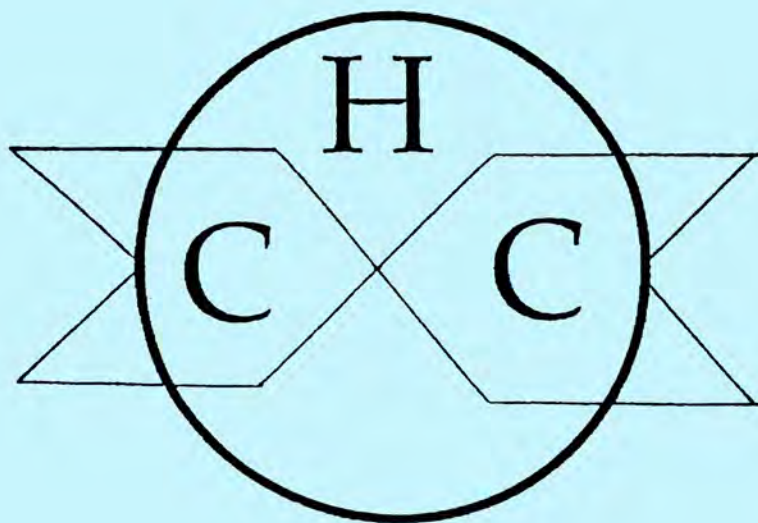
---

A table of contents for the *Congregational History Society Magazine* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_congregational-history-circle-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_congregational-history-circle-01.php)

# Congregational History Circle

Volume 4 Number 1



Spring 1999

The Congregational History Circle  
Magazine

Volume 4 No 1 Spring 1999

Contents

Editorial .....	2
News and Views .....	2
Chapel Tour by <i>Peter Young</i> .....	5
Elsie Chamberlain: The Early Years 1910-1947 by <i>Alan Argent</i> .....	7
John Curwen, Coward College and the Tonic Sol-fa Movement by <i>Yvonne Evans</i> .....	32
Some Puritan Associations with Shrewsbury by <i>Trevor Watts</i> .....	47
Robert Tutchin and the Beginnings of Newport Congregational Church, Isle of Wight by <i>PD Hooper</i> .....	53
A Man of the Word and the Nation. A Personal Tribute to the Rev Dr R.Tudur Jones by <i>Richard Cleaves</i> ....	56
Book Reviews.....	66
Our Contemporaries .....	85

## EDITORIAL

Our magazine brings together several themes - women's ministry, music, Wales and seventeenth century Nonconformity. Elsie Chamberlain keenly supported the development of music in all her churches. She would have been interested in the story of John Curwen and the tonic sol-fa movement. Tudur Jones, as with every Welshman, appreciated music also and as the historian of Welsh Nonconformity would have followed closely the history of Newport's Congregational beginnings. We welcome Dr Paul Hooper as a contributor. He is a retired general practitioner and has recently published a history of the Isle of Wight "Our Island" in War and Commonwealth - The Isle of Wight 1640-1660 (Cross Publishing, Chale, Isle of Wight).

## NEWS AND VIEWS

### Publications

The Chapels Society has recently produced Miscellany I, an occasional publication, ISSN 1357-376 (London, 1998), containing articles by Anthony Rossi, Christopher Stell, and N D Wilson. Clyde Binfield, the outgoing Chapels Society's president, explains in his introduction that this is to be the first of occasional volumes of papers which aim at informing and enlarging the understanding of members of the society. The three papers cover Norwich Roman Catholic Cathedral, Great Meeting Houses, and the work of the Wesleyan Methodist and Architect, William John Hale (1862-1929). The second paper by Christopher Stell, who served for thirty-four years with the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments as an

architectural investigator, reveals his encyclopaedic knowledge and his well-informed opinions. He covers meeting houses in Crediton, Chester, Coventry, Manchester, Derby, Gloucester, Cirencester, Norwich, Ipswich, Bury St. Edmund's, Taunton, Shrewsbury, Great Yarmouth and Leicester. All three papers are accompanied by references and diagrams while photographs adorn the first and third papers. Those wishing to learn more of Miscellany I may contact the Hon. Editor, Joy Rowe, at Haughley Grange, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 3QT or Hon. Secretary of the Chapels Society, Christina van Melzen, Rookery Farmhouse, Laxfield, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP13 8JA.

### **For Your Information**

The United Reformed Church History Society is holding a study day on Saturday 25th September 1999 at Union Chapel, Islington, in the centenary year of the formation of the Congregational History Society. Dr Elaine Kaye, the URCHS president, has invited members of the Congregational History Circle to join them on this occasion. Dr Clyde Binfield is to offer some reflections on the last 100 years, among other papers and activities. The CHC has combined successfully with the URCHS in recent years, especially with the production of joint supplements. It would be good to have an encouraging response from the CHC to this welcome invitation.

The Congregational Lecture is to be held at Dr Williams's Library, Gordon Square, London WC1H 0AG, on Monday 4th October, 1999 at 5.00pm. Dr Alan Argent will speak on the subject "Isaac Watts: Poet, Thinker, Pastor". All are welcome.

We have been asked to include details of the conference, planned by the Association of Denominational Societies and Cognate Libraries, to be held at Westhill College, Selly Oak, Birmingham on

26th-29th July 2000. Thirteen papers will be given under the umbrella title of "Protestant Nonconformity in England and Wales in the Twentieth Century: A Retrospect". Speakers will include David Bebbington, Keith Robbins, David Jeremy, Alan Sell, David Cornick and Clyde Binfield among others. Subjects to be discussed range from the architectural legacy of twentieth century Protestant Nonconformity to Protestant Nonconformists and mission overseas, and cover the peace question, the world of business, Huguenots, ecumenism, theology, biblical scholarship, Wales, and historians of Nonconformity. The full cost is not yet known but it is expected to be in the region £162 plus £10 conference fee for three nights B&B and all meals, or £64.50 plus £10 conference fee excluding B&B. All enquiries should be addressed to Howard Gregg, 44 Seymour Road, London SW18 5JA (telephone 0181 874 7727).

The secretary of the CHC, Colin Price, has written to remind members of the 400th anniversary of the birth of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658). Colin has produced an events calendar for this year, copies of which may be obtained from him directly. It is also to be found on the Congregational Federation website - [www.congregational.org.uk/historycircle.htm](http://www.congregational.org.uk/historycircle.htm).

Rev Dr William McNaughton asks if any member of the Congregational History Circle would like to receive a free copy of his book The Scottish Congregational Ministry 1794-1993 (Glasgow 1993) ISBN 0 900304 06 5. He has some copies to dispose of and hopes that they will go to individuals interested in Congregationalism or to libraries. Contact him at 9 George Street, Kirkaldy, Fife, KY1 1UP.

Northern College, Manchester is launching a new book on the college's history, For the Work of Ministry: Northern College and its Predecessors. Contact the college at Northern College, Manchester, Luther King House, Brighton Grove, Rusholme,

Manchester. M14 5JP or telephone 0161 224 4381. The charge for the book is £15 to former students and £30 to others plus £2 p&p.

### **Chapel Tour 1998**

On 8 May CHC members gathered at North Street Congregational Church, Taunton. We were given a guided tour of the chapel and the halls and shown memorabilia from Princess Diana's attendance at a baptism there. After lunch we were met by Brian Kirk, retired minister of Paul's Meeting, who led us the short distance to the parish church of St Mary Magdalene. Whilst preparations went on for the funeral of a member of the fire brigade, we learned of the vicar during the 1650's, George Newton, and his assistant from 1655, Joseph Alleine. Although both were ejected in 1662, the parish church contains memorials relating to them.

Continuing to Paul's Meeting (now United Reformed Church), we paused to note the oldest house in Taunton. This had been the home of Sir William Portman who escorted the Duke of Monmouth to London to be tried and executed for treason, after the rout of his forces at the battle of Sedgemoor in 1685.

George Newton and other ejected ministers preached to the Nonconformist church at a meeting house in Paul Street. However, in the aftermath of the Monmouth rebellion, persecution was severe in Taunton and in 1685 the mayor ordered the meeting house to be pulled down. After an interval the present building was erected. We were shown the chapel, the library, and also portraits and paintings of the local area. We learned how the church split over the election of a new minister, leading to a secession of members who founded North Street Congregational Church in 1843. However the newly appointed minister of Paul's Meeting, Henry Addiscott, and the minister of North Street, Henry Quick, became friends. They encouraged their members to work together, and in concert with another minister and eight

businessmen they set up The West of England Dissenters Proprietary School, founded in 1847, now known as Taunton School.

Around the corner we came to the Unitarian (formerly General Baptist) chapel, a feast of dark wooden panelling, with a gallery on three sides, and two huge wooden pillars, rising from the floor to the ceiling. From here we proceeded by car, about a mile eastwards to Bishop's Hull, noting that Newton had been vicar here in the 1630s. The church is now in joint membership with Paul's Meeting and has a history similarly stretching back to 1662, and a collection of church plate. The members treated us to a welcome cup of tea.

Taking leave of Brian Kirk, we proceeded to Taunton School whose present site (since 1870) is north-west of the town centre, having been built in open fields to the north of the Great Western Railway. We were met by John Brown, author of the school's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary history Independent Witness. A modern languages teacher, he had an infectious enthusiasm for the school's story. Opened in 1870, one part of the building had been converted to a small, modern theatre. Although the school was founded on non-sectarian lines, the majority of the original pupils attended either Paul's Meeting or North Street, and continued to walk to their respective chapel after the 1870 removal from the town centre. In 1906 Lord Winterstoke (W H Wills of the tobacco firm) laid the foundation of a chapel, a gift to the school in memory of his late wife, saying that he had asked Dr Whittaker, the headmaster, what the school needed. The reply had been "a chapel". We saw the science laboratories, constructed as a war memorial to the dead of 1914-18, and the modern gymnasium. We were also shown some of the archives laid out in a classroom for our visit.

Finally we crossed Taunton to the village of Stoke St Mary, just outside the town. We were given a cup of tea made in their recently constructed kitchen and enjoyed singing some of our favourite hymns. This was a rewarding day for which we thank those who gave their time and energies.

Peter Young



## **Elsie Chamberlain: The Early Years 1910-1947**

Elsie Chamberlain was blessed with exceptional ability and courage and used these gifts and graces in her various roles as a Congregational minister, an RAF chaplain, and as a broadcaster. Although a pioneer in women's work, she was not the first woman to be ordained as a Congregational minister but was the first to become chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, in 1956-57. Without courting controversy, she nevertheless discovered it by falling in love with an Anglican clergyman and, despite objections at the highest possible level, many years later marrying him. Thus she was the first minister of another denomination to marry a beneficed cleric of the Church of England. She made headline news also when Lord Stansgate, as Minister for Air, refused to yield to pressure from the Archbishop of Canterbury to withdraw her appointment to the RAF. Her seventeen years at the BBC revealed her outstanding talents in broadcasting and gave her a national celebrity. This experience and fame she brought with her in 1972 when she, surprisingly, shunned the overtures from the promoters of the United Reformed Church and joined the Congregational Federation which she served loyally, until her death, having simply ignored retirement.

Elsie Chamberlain was, therefore, a brilliant individualist who had enough confidence to go her own way, led along it, as she believed, by the Holy Spirit. In so doing she encountered and overcame frustration, opposition and relative isolation. Throughout, her life was informed by a warm Christian faith which she communicated easily to others and by a sense of liberating joy. Yet she combined these with a devastating need to cut through all humbug, even offending some who resented her ruthless honesty in her pruning of their work.

## Early life

Elsie Dorothea was born on 3 March 1910 in her parents' home in Islington, north London. Her mother had had four other children - firstly twins, of whom only one, Sidney James survived, then Ronald Arthur, then Irene who was sickly and died in infancy. Elsie was therefore to receive the doting attention of both older brothers and parents.

James and Annie Chamberlain had married in September 1897 and moved to Canonbury Park North in 1904. There they lived in a large house with Annie's mother and two unmarried sisters occupying the top floor. In addition the family had a maid who slept in the attic. Elsie's father was a keen chorister at the parish church yet her mother, a Congregationalist, took the children with her to Islington Chapel, in Upper Street, whose building had been erected in 1888. They would attend both morning and evening services and the children went to the afternoon Sunday school also.

The minister 1897-1912 was Joseph Graham Henderson (1860-1938), a warm and respected man who keenly supported the London Missionary Society. The chapel gained a reputation for friendliness towards rich and poor who were equally welcome. Its only danger, according to its historian, was that "the genial warmth and undisturbed peace" would result in "a drowsy dullness and a monotony, which can prove so terrible in organized religion". The chapel provided free breakfasts for 200 homeless people four mornings a week. It held a Sunday evening children's service with over 100 poorer children and, in the Edwardian period, a Boys Brigade company was set up. However the drift increasingly was away from the chapel and in 1912 Henderson resigned the pastorate.<sup>1</sup>

Two short-lived ministries followed and in 1926 Joseph Shepherd (1880-1929) became minister. He had served as an army

---

<sup>1</sup> L Dixon Seven Score Years and Ten. The Story of Islington Chapel during 150 years 1788-1938 (no date, prob 1938). 55-58, 67-69. Congregational Year Book (1939) 699.

chaplain during the First World War at Gallipoli and in Egypt, and was minister of Claremont Congregational Church, Cape Town 1922-25 before returning to England. He inspired affection and on several occasions led broadcast services, being adept at talking to children. After his death his brother Robert Shepherd (1883-1953) became the minister at Islington in 1930. Robert was a "scholarly preacher", also attentive to the young. Six of his younger church members entered the Congregational ministry, including Elsie Chamberlain.<sup>2</sup>

Normally Annie Chamberlain read aloud from the Bible during breakfast although Elsie later confessed her attention was on her food rather than the scriptures. Annie's character was crucial in the upbringing of the children. She was intelligent, self-willed and a strict abstainer from alcohol. She "never had to do housework", employing the maid to clean the house, while Annie's mother cooked, washed and ironed. Annie shopped, supervised the meals and taught the children to read and write. Music was encouraged. Ronald took to the piano and Elsie to the violin. Sidney served in the Royal Flying Corps during the 1914-18 war while Elsie followed her father and brothers in attending the Dame Alice Owen School where in 1919 she was described as "good but talkative". In 1920 she moved on to Channing School for girls in Highgate, a Unitarian foundation which took day girls alongside the boarders. Elsie was proud to be a Channing girl and, when older, would make occasional detours "just to look at the place". The headmistress 1921 - 52 was Miss Haigh, a Unitarian from Oldham with a Master's in history from Manchester University. She was an extrovert who encouraged discussion and welcomed fresh ideas but could be "outspoken and autocratic". Channing School grew during the 1920s in buildings, playing fields, and pupils (about 140 in 1925) and a new music room came into use.<sup>3</sup> Elsie knew Miss Haigh

---

<sup>2</sup> Dixon *ibid*, CYB (1930) 245-6, (1954) 521.

<sup>3</sup> EM Saunders A Progress. Channing School 1885-1985 (Saxmundham, Suffolk 1984) 35-37, 110. J Williams First Lady of the Pulpit (Lewes, Sussex 1993) 10-15

could be a dragon but had great respect for her. Elsie became form captain and a prefect and, excelling on the playing field, was vice-captain for netball and games and hockey captain. She always enjoyed music, attaining certificates for violin playing and singing, as well as elocution and diction, poetry reading and matriculation.

In 1927 Elsie left school and gained a music Diploma, qualifying her to teach the violin. She studied dress design part-time and found employment as an assistant designer in a clothing factory. On her father's retirement in 1933 he bought a car for his wife and daughter as consolation for their not visiting South Africa with him. Elsie, so active a motorist in later life, was taught to drive by her brothers and in those days was not required to take a driving test. She became increasingly involved in the life and work of Islington Chapel where her mother had become church secretary in 1929, and her brother, Sidney, and his wife were secretary and treasurer of the missionary work. At this time Robert Shepherd urged Elsie to consider the ministry as a calling. He taught her Old Testament Hebrew and she made enquiries about ministerial training. Her father felt anxious on her behalf, realising that opportunities for women ministers were few. Yet she decided that she could always return to dress designing if she could not find a church.<sup>4</sup>

Elsie's overtures to those colleges associated with the Congregational churches were initially discouraging. Mansfield College, Oxford had trained the first woman ordained as a Congregational minister, Constance Coltman (nee Todd) in 1917, and she was followed there by a small number of women. The Congregational Union of England and Wales had been prepared to recognise suitably qualified women ministers since 1909. Also in 1917 Maude Royden (1876 - 1956), an Anglican, became assistant preacher at the City Temple in London, remaining until 1920 when she left to found with Percy Dearmer the Fellowship services at Kensington and in 1921 the Guildhouse. Maude Royden's life, work and publications

---

<sup>4</sup> Williams *ibid* 16-19, Dixon *op cit* 97.

were very influential in making women's ministry acceptable. She was awarded the Companion of Honour in 1930. In 1936 the CUEW's commission on women's ministry reported that, since 1917, seventeen women had been ordained. Elsie's decision to train for the ministry must be seen in this context. The report stated that 200 Congregational churches were served by secretaries who were women, including, of course, Annie Chamberlain at Islington Chapel.<sup>5</sup>

The principal of New College, London, Sydney Cave was reluctant to accept women students, realising the formidable obstacles they would confront on leaving college. Cave preferred women students to have a private income, thus releasing them from financial reliance on a call to a pastorate. Nathaniel Micklem, principal of Mansfield College, interviewed Elsie and was happy to accept her as a student, after she had become a university graduate. Encouraged by this, she entered King's College, London in 1936 to study for a degree in theology. King's was overwhelmingly Anglican then, being used by the Church of England to train ordinands. She was among a small minority of women studying theology. She faced criticism in this setting also for her Congregational beliefs. At that time King's had an average of 225 theology students per annum, only 76 of whom were studying for the Bachelor of Divinity degree. The remainder studied for a diploma. The number of full-time women students varied from eight to thirteen, although there were about twenty female occasional students also. In her second year Elsie was awarded an Exhibition or scholarship which she received on the production of a certificate of good conduct and of progress, signed by the dean. In her third and final year she was awarded a bursary.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> E Kaye Mansfield College, Oxford. Its Origin, History and Significance (Oxford 1996) 161-2, 181, "Constance Coltman - A Forgotten Pioneer" in Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society IV, No.2, May 1988. Who Was Who, 1951-1960. RT Jones Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962 (1962) 409.

<sup>6</sup> Information supplied by the archivist of King's College, London.

The theological department at King's boasted some notable scholars. The Dean of King's College from 1932- 45 was Revd Richard Hanson who maintained the traditions of his predecessor, Dr W R Matthews who had aimed at a broad tolerance of views, alongside sound scholarship and "true religion". Prof W.O.E Oesterley's impressive publications on the Old Testament were read by Elsie and she heard Prof Maurice Relton lecture on Christian doctrine. Prof Clement Rogers, who taught pastoral and liturgical theology and who spoke every week at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, was popular with the students. A younger member of the teaching staff was Eric Jay whose New Testament Greek: An Introductory Grammar has been used by successive generations of theological students.<sup>7</sup>

Among Elsie's fellow students was John Garrington, a high church Anglican, who had felt a call to the ministry as a boy of seven. He had worked in his father's tailoring business in Aberystwyth and in journalism and had an interest in psychology. He entered King's in 1933 and in Elsie's first year served as president of the theological students. They met when Elsie attempted improperly to place notices for the women students on the men's notice board. A compromise was reached and, although the two felt no initial attraction, they recognised strength of character in the other. Such respect grew to admiration and they became engaged to be married before Elsie graduated BD from King's in 1939 with a pass degree. John had left two years earlier, having gained his Associateship of King's College. He was ordained in St Paul's Cathedral and served as a deacon at St Martin's Church, Kensal Rise.

## **Liverpool**

In her last year at King's, prior to sitting her finals, Elsie attended a conference at which Muriel Paulden gave a memorable

---

<sup>7</sup> G Huelin King's College, London 1828-1978 (1978) 167, 168-9, 170, 172, 236. FJC Hearnshaw The Centenary History of King's College, London 1828-1928 (1929) 471.

address. She was attracted to Miss Paulden and to her commitment and vision of ministry. Elsie wanted to learn more from Miss Paulden who had trained for missionary work 1915-19 at Carey Hall, one of the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, but was then serving as a Congregational minister in Liverpool. This seemed more attractive than a course at Mansfield College.<sup>8</sup>

Muriel Olympia Paulden (1892-1975) had hoped to work in south India but, failing her medical test, because of a slight hunchback, became assistant tutor in Old Testament and social work at Carey Hall instead. In 1919 she moved to Liverpool to become superintendent of the Berkley Street centre where she organised training courses for Sunday school teachers and workers among young people. The centre opened formally in March 1920 and in 1922 she reopened and became the minister of Berkley Street Congregational Church. Muriel Paulden was the first woman minister in Lancashire and served as chairman of the Lancashire Congregational Union in 1945. Her ministry at Berkley Street continued until retirement in 1960. She wrote in 1923 of how a “downtown” church could be used both for worship and as a “social institute”. In that year the centre had about 100 students.

During the 1920s and 30s the training centre developed into a night school for biblical studies, Christian worship, social study, principles of education, and youth and children’s work, organised in three terms of eleven weeks and mainly serving the churches of Liverpool and its neighbourhood. The course of study lasted four years in all and Miss Paulden benefited from a number of assistants, mostly women. By 1945 over 2000 students from Lancashire and Cheshire had completed some training at Berkley Street, of whom some, after

---

<sup>8</sup> Williams op cit 21-22. D Watson Angel of Jesus. Muriel Paulden of Liverpool 8 (Wimborne, Dorset 1994) 14-19. King’s College, London archives. Those studying for the AKC were required to cover many of the subjects studied for the BD but at diploma rather than at degree level.

further studies, became ministers and teachers. Muriel Paulden's unique work was recognised as “novel and pioneering”.<sup>9</sup>

The eager Miss Chamberlain learned that Muriel Paulden needed an assistant and she enquired about the position. Miss Paulden visited the Chamberlain family at their home which resulted in Elsie's travelling north to preach at Berkley Street and, after the necessary consultations, Elsie being offered the vacancy. However Elsie had not specifically trained for the ministry but had at this stage only completed a degree in theology. If she went to Liverpool, as she was keen to do, would the course at Mansfield be postponed or abandoned? If the latter, how could she be recognised by the CUEW as a minister? She knew that, as a woman, she would face obstacles in her ministry. Surely she should avoid adding to those obstacles by not receiving the accepted form of ministerial training.

Yet Muriel Paulden taught and organised practical training for church work and she herself had been ordained after her studies for missionary work, not after ministerial education. Elsie could be expected to receive on-the-job training in Liverpool while the traditional colleges still were oriented towards training men, although women students were not necessarily uncomfortable at them.<sup>10</sup>

In the summer of 1939 the threat of war loomed ominously, as Dr Berry and other CU officials were aware. They may have foreseen the disruption of the life of the colleges, as occurred at Mansfield when, on 24 August, Micklem received a telegram announcing that the college buildings were to be requisitioned for

---

<sup>9</sup> Watson *ibid* 16,18,20,21. United Reformed Church Year Book (1976) 305-6. WG Robinson A History of The Lancashire Congregational Union 1806-1956 (Manchester 1955) 149,174. MO Paulden “How to use a Down-town Church” Congregational Quarterly (1923) I, 91.

<sup>10</sup> Williams *op cit* 22.



government work on the following day. Such factors must have weighed on the minds of those deciding Elsie's future.<sup>11</sup>

Sidney Berry, secretary of CUEW, listened to Elsie's arguments and, understanding her mind was practical rather than reflective, took her case to the relevant committee. Muriel Paulden's reputation as a successful educator surely stood in good stead with the committee members. Indeed Miss Paulden's concern for the training of women resulted in 1945 in her founding St Paul's House in Liverpool, to provide training exclusively for women called to the ministry and full-time service in the churches. This training was "intensely practical" and not "overloaded" in theology, just that experience-based grounding which Elsie Chamberlain found at Berkley Street. Elsie recognised that Muriel Paulden "showed her how to bring the Bible alive and she never forgot the lessons". Miss Paulden gained support for St Paul's House, not only from the Merseyside churches and the Lancashire Congregational Union, but also from CUEW, the Reconstruction Fund and churches in the USA. St Paul's House was regarded as "one of the historic acts of modern Congregationalism".<sup>12</sup>

To her relief Dr Berry informed Elsie that her work in Liverpool would be considered part of her preparation for the ministry. In August 1939 Sidney Chamberlain drove his sister to Berkley Street with her belongings. She had a study in the church's basement and she ran a nursery school. One month later the Second World War broke out and Elsie took rooms in a hostel to her parents' chagrin. They concluded that their daughter needed their immediate support and simply moved home to be with her.<sup>13</sup> They took a flat in a large house in Aigburth and held a party for the young people of the church. Elsie

---

<sup>11</sup> Kaye Mansfield College 211.

<sup>12</sup> Williams op cit 22-23, Robinson op cit 149-150, 182. The Independent 20 April 1991. E Routley The Story of Congregationalism (1961) 99. St Paul's House closed in 1965. The Reconstruction Fund raised £550,000. RT Jones op cit 397-398.

<sup>13</sup> Williams ibid 23.

invited many of these young people to join the choir at Berkley Street and she led it in singing four part harmony and became its conductor. The children of the area were evacuated soon after the outbreak of war in 1939 so the Sunday school suffered for a time. .

Elsie was very involved in the pastoral care of the young people, organising outings and activities, like rounders in Sefton Park. She cycled around on her “old sit up and beg bike” but, during the blitz and the blackout, was escorted to her home by the young people on their own cycles. They called her the “church police” because she would regularly visit their homes on Monday if they were absent from church the previous day. Several members of the youth group were shortly to be called up for military service and Elsie's support was welcomed. She left her mark on the folk at Berkley Street where she was greatly admired, as a later minister there recalled. She is remembered as always bright and encouraging, revealing a fine Christian spirit. Her sense of humour was evident and also her intolerance of humbug. Her experiences in wartime Liverpool convinced her of the need always to strive for peace. Elsie knew Muriel Paulden to be a “remarkable woman” to whom she felt a lifelong debt.<sup>14</sup> Miss Paulden and Elsie visited the children in their new homes in the country to reassure their parents and themselves that they were comfortable and well placed. However by March 1940 most had returned to the city, finding the quiet of the country disturbing.

The war transformed the church's weekly routine. Refreshments were served to the soldiers stationed nearby who also used the schoolroom for table tennis, billiards and writing letters. Student numbers declined as travel became more difficult. Liverpool was subject to fifty days of repeated bombing from the Luftwaffe in 1940 resulting in public shelters and the Mersey Tunnel becoming crowded. Berkley Street was only just over one mile from Liverpool docks, a prime target for enemy bombs in 1940 and 1941. Church activities came to include visiting the shelters to bring comfort and

---

<sup>14</sup> The Times 12 April 1991.

deliver hot drinks. Muriel Paulden hired a large house in Llandegla in Wales for six weeks, to provide holidays for families. In the summers of 1940 and 1941 Elsie helped to run camps for Berkley St's children.<sup>15</sup>

John Garrington also endured enemy bombing in 1940 and 1941. Alongside his work as curate of St Mary Abbot, Kensington he became an air raid warden, putting out fires and freeing those trapped under rubble. His courtship of Elsie was not welcomed by her parents, especially her mother, who often forgot to give Elsie his messages. Under such strain in 1941 she broke off her engagement to John whilst in that same year she was ordained to the Christian ministry. She was admitted to List A of the roll of ministers, as recorded in the 1941 Congregational Year Book, by resolution of the special committee of CUEW. Both Sidney Berry and Sidney Cave sat on the committee, as did also A E Garvie , A J Grieve, Sir Arthur Haworth, T T James and J D Jones - all distinguished men. They deemed Elsie's essentially practical training under Muriel Paulden satisfactory.<sup>16</sup>

### **Friern Barnet**

On 17 August 1941 Elsie Chamberlain preached at Christ Church Congregational Church, Friern Barnet, north London. The church there had been vacant since its former minister, Herbert Cecil Pugh, had joined the RAF as a chaplain in October 1939. Pugh had served as Christ Church's minister since 1927. On 5 July 1941 he was on board a ship bound for west Africa when it was torpedoed in the Atlantic. Learning that several injured airmen were trapped in the hold, he insisted on joining them, although this meant certain death. He disregarded his own safety, believing his duty as a minister was to be with his men and thus, "in the best tradition of the service and of a

---

<sup>15</sup> Watson op cit 39-41, Williams op cit 24-26. Private information supplied by James Jones, Philip Robinson and Alice Platts.

<sup>16</sup> Williams ibid 25, CYB (1942) 17,34.

Christian minister, he gave up his life for others". In 1947 he was posthumously awarded the George Cross.<sup>17</sup>

The Moderator of the London Congregational Union 1935-42, R J Evans, had forwarded a number of names, each accompanied by a thumbnail character, to the deacons at Friern Barnet but many of these declined second invitations to preach and several have found alternative positions. In June 1941 Evans stated baldly that he had "nobody... to meet our needs" and the church contemplated a temporary appointment. The difficulty was that the church was only offering an annual stipend of £250 without a house, £50 less than that recommended by the LCU. In addition London was, like Liverpool, a prime target for enemy bombing - a disincentive to men with families.

On 22 August, five days after Elsie's first visit, a letter from the moderator was read, at Friern Barnet, praising Elsie "very highly". She was seeking a full charge and doubtless a return to London was welcome. The committee unanimously decided to invite her to visit the church again and to preach "with a view". Elsie's letter to the church was considered "most businesslike". Her attitude was at one with the church members in regard to "Bible study, fellowship and inter-denominational co-operation". She was "very easy to get on with, a good visitor as well as preacher, and keenly interested in young people's work". She understood the church's financial position but stated that this would not be a determining factor in her decision making.<sup>18</sup> On 27 September, the proposal to recommend to the church meeting that Revd Elsie Chamberlain be invited to become the minister was passed unanimously. The church meeting was also unanimous and Elsie's letter of acceptance was read aloud at the services on Sunday 9 October 1941. Her parents moved to London

---

<sup>17</sup> A Peel The Noble Army of Congregational Martyrs (1948) 77-78, Kaye op cit 213, Christ Church Friern Barnet - ministerial committee records.

<sup>18</sup> CCFB church meeting minutes 1938-1950, 3 September 1941, JH Taylor LCU Story 1873-1972 (1972) 34,37.

with her, buying a house in Friern Barnet. Christ Church is situated on Friern Barnet Road, and was opposite a large hospital which specialised in mental illness. The induction service was held on 29 November with R J Evans presiding and with Mr Fletcher Hunt, the secretary of Berkley Street, giving the commendation. The charge to the minister and the church was given by Revd R Angel Wakely. 400 people attended the induction and were invited to stay for tea, despite wartime rationing.<sup>19</sup>

Elsie worked hard in her first ministry. At Easter 1942 she was off to Bangor to lecture to a young people's conference. She arranged The Messiah to be performed on Good Friday at Christ Church. However by April the deacons were convinced that she should take "a full week's holiday at the earliest opportunity". They were concerned about her health. She planned to be away at Leigh on Sea but was keen to return by the following Sunday, although the church meeting urged her to take "all the leave necessary to ensure her full recuperation". In June 1942 the minister was "informally congratulated" by the deacons on her first six months at Friern Barnet. Elsie had ideas on how to improve life at Christ Church. In June 1942 she told the deacons to join her five minutes before the services for prayers. Her "demand for an effective local church life and personal spirituality had been nurtured" in Liverpool.<sup>20</sup> In July appreciation was expressed of the minister's work among young people which resulted in their "growing interest" in the church. That same month she made proposals to raise money towards the CUEW's Reconstruction Fund appeal for £500,000. In September 1942 a "sacred concert" given by the organist and choir of Hampstead Garden

---

<sup>19</sup> CCFB ministerial committee minutes, 4 May, 22 August, 27 September, 9 November 1941, deacons' meeting minutes 1935-1948, 29 June, 27 July, 23 October 1941.

<sup>20</sup> The Guardian 15 April 1991.

Suburb Free Church raised £8 15s 6d. In 1943 a stall for borrowing books was placed in the church.<sup>21</sup>

Elsie gained a wide reputation at Friern Barnet. She attracted the attention of the press in October 1942 when The Evening Standard commented favourably on her work. Elsie had stated that many “gifted women” were “unable to exercise their vocation in their own church” and she praised the work of Miss Belfield, the organiser of the Society for Equal Ministry.

In February 1943 the church membership stood at 166 of whom the greater proportion was active. During the war the Finchley and District Congregational Group was founded and the church meeting minutes proudly record that there was “an unlimited opportunity for service under the leadership of our minister. The Front against Evil was the Christians’ unending duty and privilege, and the work of the church was needed more than ever to bring in a better world”. With Elsie Christ Church discovered a sense of purpose.<sup>22</sup>

Given the straitened circumstances of the church’s finances it is interesting that Elsie in January 1943 was reluctant to accept an increase in her stipend. She asked that the amount of the proposed increase should be retained in the funds, available if a change in her situation should lead to heavier expenses. Since Elsie’s arrival at Friern Barnet several applications to become church members had been received, many from women. In February the minister expressed a concern that “more men should be attracted to the church, and particularly the husbands of new members”.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> CCFB deacons’ meeting minutes 1935-1948, 29 December 1941, 23 February, 27 April, 1 June 1942 church meeting minutes 1938-1950, 29 April, 29 June, 1 July, 9 September 1942, 3 February 1943.

<sup>22</sup> CCFB church meeting minutes 1938-1950, 8 October 1942, 13 February 1943.

<sup>23</sup> CCFB deacons’ meeting minutes 1935-1948, 12 January, 2 February 1943.

The church members realised how dedicated their minister was and advised her in 1943 to take “an adequate holiday for her own good”. Her ceaseless activity continued. On 1 September the church meeting was attended not only by thirty four members but also by twelve prospective members. All were there for the “shorter studies of Congregational principles” which Elsie intended to run. Later that month ten new members joined the church. In January 1944 Elsie was persuaded to accept an increased stipend, as long as it proved not to be burdensome. She arranged that the choir sang The Messiah on Good Friday for the fifth successive year and Stainer’s Crucifixion on Sunday, 2 April 1944. In March Elsie had invited the notable Methodist minister, Leslie Weatherhead, to preach for the anniversary. On 7 June 1944 the church remained open for prayer, following the allied invasion of Europe on the previous day.<sup>24</sup>

Among the ministers preaching in 1944 at Christ Church was Revd Dorothy Wilson, since 1938 assistant minister to Leslie Weatherhead at The City Temple. In August 1944 the minister announced that she had suggested to Danbury Congregational Church, near Chelmsford, Essex that she might be able to serve there as minister for one week in each month. The churches at Danbury and neighbouring Little Baddow hoped to call a minister at some future date. Christ Church members were relieved in September when Elsie reported that her help for Danbury would not go ahead. Elsie’s eccentric desire to help churches geographically far apart would surface again late in her ministry.<sup>25</sup> In 1940 the church had decided that every three years a review should be held of the ministry and,

---

<sup>24</sup> CCFB church meeting minutes 1938-1950, 30 June, 1 September, 29 September 1943, 5 January, 19 January, 7 June 1944. Deacons’ meeting minutes 1935-1948, 28 February 1944.

<sup>25</sup> CCFB church meeting minutes 1938-1950, 30 August, 27 September 1944. For Dorothy Wilson see E Kaye Mansfield College Oxford (Oxford 1996) 182, A Clare The City Temple 1640-1940 (1940)280-1.

therefore, in November 1944 Elsie's work was considered. Forty-one members attended this special church meeting - thirty women and eleven men. All comments recorded favoured Elsie - her "leadership had led to the work prospering", "an inspiration to young people", "inspired leadership.... could not be bettered", "remarkable". In February 1945 the members stated that Christ Church is seen as "a living, vital force in the district". In November 1944 the deacons had discussed the desired proportion of men to women deacons, deciding to leave the ratio at the existing three women to seven men.<sup>26</sup>

In November 1972 Elsie's outstanding work at Friern Barnet was noted in the general synod of the Church of England. In a debate on the proposed ordination of women the bishop of Chelmsford, whose diocese had voted overwhelmingly in support of the motion in 1971, drew attention to "a suburban parish in north London where the downtown end had been dominated by a Congregational church where the minister was a woman, namely the Revd Elsie Chamberlain, who became in time the president of the Congregational Union".<sup>27</sup>

In August 1944 the new LCU moderator, Alan Green, had reported that 190 of the 210 Congregational churches in London had been damaged by German bombing. The following month the deacons discussed the needs of the Reconstruction Fund, as promoted by its chief commissioner, Alec Glassey. London was not the only city to suffer damage to its Congregational church buildings. Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Southampton, Swansea had all suffered. The Reconstruction Fund had been launched in October 1941, with the hope that £500,000 would be

---

<sup>26</sup> CCFB deacons' meeting minutes 1935-1948, 27 July, 28 August, 27 November 1944. Minutes of special church meeting 1 November 1944, 3 February 1945.

<sup>27</sup> J Field-Bibb Women Towards Priesthood. Ministerial Politics and Feminist Praxis (Cambridge 1991) 122. Elsie was never president of CUEW. She was chairman of CUEW in 1956-1957 and president of the Congregational Federation 1973-1975.



raised in three years.<sup>28</sup> The deacons decided that the church should aim to raise £300. By spring 1945 almost £320 had been collected.<sup>29</sup>

In November 1945 change was in the air at Christ Church. Elsie reported that she had been offered the post of Woman Secretary of the London Missionary Society in succession to Joyce Rutherford who had held that office since 1931. Elsie had taken “a difficult decision” but intended to continue as pastor until a new minister could be found. The letter from Dr A M Chirgwin, LMS general secretary 1932-50, was read aloud and the deacons advised Elsie to be cautious. If the LMS work was as she visualised it, then they felt that she should accept the job but if it was merely of a “secretarial nature” then she should refuse. Her going would be “a heavy loss”. In January 1946 the minister reported that on the day she had accepted the LMS offer, she had been asked to consider an appointment which Lord Stansgate, Secretary of State for Air, “had been striving to have made”, ie a woman chaplain. The matter was of the “strictest confidence” but this appointment was a high-profile position which put both Elsie and women's ministry into the news. Congregationalists have traditionally been wary of involvement with the state. The records do not reveal that Elsie shared this suspicion of the state's interest in church affairs. She stated in January 1946 that she hoped her successor would have a regard for young people and expressed regret at leaving a “happy ministry”<sup>30</sup>

She was presented with the parting gift of a cheque for £40 on her last Sunday at Christ Church in March 1946. In June among the various invitations to preach was one sent to Lady Stansgate. She was

---

<sup>28</sup> RT Jones op cit 397-8.

<sup>29</sup> CCFB church meeting minutes 1938-1950, 30 August 1944, deacons' meeting minutes 1935-1948, 25 September 1944, 28 February, 29 October 1945.

<sup>30</sup> Deacons' meeting minutes 1935-1948 26 November 1945, 28 January 1946. Special church meeting 30 January 1946. N Goodall A History of the London Missionary Society 1895-1945 (1954)546, 624.

not seen as a possible minister but was to preach at both services on 22 September. On 30 June 1946 Squadron Officer Revd E D Chamberlain conducted the services. In November the church secretary reported that he had learned that Elsie Chamberlain was to be discharged from the RAF on grounds of ill-health. Would she be willing to return as Christ Church's minister? Exact details were uncertain so no action was taken.<sup>31</sup>

### **R A F Chaplain**

Elsie Chamberlain first met Margaret Stansgate at King's College and they remained firm friends. Lady Stansgate was an occasional student at King's, with a particular interest in Hebrew. On the Labour Party's landslide victory in 1945 Viscount Stansgate was appointed by Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister, to run the air ministry. Margaret Stansgate took her opportunity to further the cause of women, on the day when her husband went to 10 Downing Street to answer Attlee's call, and she broached the question of women chaplains. During the Second World War she had worked with the chaplains department among women in the forces. She detected an "urgent" need for women chaplains. The Church of England had no women priests at this time and could be expected to oppose the appointment of a woman chaplain.

Margaret specifically recommended Elsie Chamberlain to her husband before he left to see Attlee that morning. Lord Stansgate (1877-1960) was a man of both principle and courage, serving in the First World War with distinction and in World War II rising to the rank of Air Commodore in the Royal Air Force. He was noted for his sincerity, freedom from malice, natural modesty and "profound ethical conviction". In 1945 he completely agreed with his wife over Elsie's becoming a woman chaplain.

---

<sup>31</sup> CCFB ministerial committee 12 June, 19 July, 22 August, 18 November 1946. Special church meeting 29 May 1946.

Margaret Eadie Holmes (1897-1991), the daughter of a Liberal MP, had married William Wedgwood Benn (created Viscount Stansgate in January 1942) in 1920. As the daughter, wife and mother of Members of Parliament she was an active campaigner in political affairs. Her support for women's causes, especially the ordination of women, led to inevitable conflicts with successive Archbishops of Canterbury.<sup>32</sup>

Lord Stansgate, anticipating objections to his proposals, made a courtesy call on Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace to acquaint him with Elsie Chamberlain's expected appointment. Geoffrey Fisher invited his wife, Rosamond, to join them. Finalising the appointment proved difficult, taking some nine months to complete and meeting "intense "opposition at every stage.

Geoffrey Fisher (1887-1972) had served as bishop of London from November 1939, establishing a metropolitan area reconstruction committee which included all denominations and the Jews. In 1944 William Temple's sudden death led to Fisher's elevation to Canterbury in January 1945. He was out-spoken on contemporary political and social issues, like homosexuality, marriage, lotteries and premium bonds (which he opposed). In November 1946 Fisher preached in Cambridge, famously inviting the Free Churches to "take episcopacy into their own system". He always maintained cordial relations with the other church bodies. His wife was, like Fisher himself, the child of an Anglican minister. Indeed Fisher's father, grandfather and great grandfather had all served the same rural parish in Leicestershire 1772-1910. Rosamond Fisher understood the Church of England's traditions with regard to the ordination of women very well. She had six young sons to care for and keenly supported the Mother's Union, serving as its president.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> M Stansgate My Exit Visa. An Autobiography (1992) 198, 234. Williams op cit 28-29. Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>33</sup> Stansgate *ibid.* 198, E Carpenter Archbishop Fisher - His Life and Times (Norwich 1991) 3, 27, DNB. Fisher's great grandfather held the

Margaret Stansgate made little of the doctrinal objections to Elsie's appointment - "purely a matter of Anglican prejudice against women priests, for Elsie was an experienced minister". She argued that there were "women doctors who were members of the RAF, like male doctors, but the chaplains would not have a woman chaplain". Elsie was eventually to become a full chaplain in the RAF, with the rank of squadron officer in the WAAF. On 20 March 1946 Fisher wrote to Lord Stansgate in response to the announcement of Elsie's appointment in The Times. The letter was given the title of "the Archbishop's stinker" by the politician's family. The Times caption read "Woman Appointed an RAF Chaplain" and simply described Elsie's task. "She will perform the ordinary duties of a Royal Air Force chaplain and be commissioned as a Squadron Officer in the WAAF." This notice was placed modestly towards the foot of the page although her photograph was placed more prominently on another page.

Fisher's letter explained that Elsie's being described as a chaplain "will certainly bring me enquiries". He wanted an assurance that she would not "exercise her ministry or take services for Church of England personnel". He praised the army's different attitude - an "admirable example" to follow. In the army she could have been "appointed as a Chaplain's Assistant", far more satisfactory to the archbishop. However the Royal Air Force Annual listed her as a welfare worker. Lord Stansgate rebuked the editor, whose motives he saw as "pure prejudice", and insisted that the printed lists in their entirety should be pulped and the whole list be reprinted, with Elsie's name placed among the chaplains. This was duly done.<sup>34</sup>

---

loving of Higham on the Hill in 1772 and was followed by his son, Fisher's grandfather, in 1832. Then in 1868 Fisher's father became the incumbent, serving there until 1910. Rosamond would have gone to Africa as a missionary but this was prevented by her marriage in April 1917.

<sup>34</sup> Stansgate *ibid* 198-200, The Times 20 March 1946.

Fisher's attitude to Elsie's appointment as an RAF chaplain, and to woman's ministry in general, was influenced by concern felt in Anglican circles at a problem thrown up by the exigencies of war. Bishop Hall of Hong Kong in 1942 had licensed Sister Florence Li to take charge of a congregation of 150 at Macao which had received holy communion monthly from his assistant bishop. As no other priest could reach them under Japanese occupation, Hall ordained her so that the congregation would not be deprived of the sacrament. Many complaints were received at Lambeth about Hall's action at the point that Fisher became archbishop. Fisher regarded this ordination of Florence Li as very irregular and saw no need to delve into doctrinal niceties. He was drawn into the controversy by the Anglican communion's refusal to accept Hall's initiative (although Hong Kong was not subject to Canterbury). In July 1945 Fisher advised Hall to suspend Li from all priestly functions but Hall had a conscientious difficulty in doing so. Fisher's "firm line" was echoed in the regret expressed by the synod of the Anglican church in China in March 1946 at Hall's "uncanonical action" over Deaconess Li. In April 1946 the Church of England issued a press statement that she had resigned her priestly ministry.<sup>35</sup>

Such a controversy, and all the ramifications of Bishop Hall's action, prompted by pastoral concern, must have been in Archbishop Fisher's mind in 1945 and 1946 when Lord Stansgate's insistence on Elsie's appointment was made clear. Fisher's attitude was informed not only by his own views and prejudices but also by his necessary care for worldwide Anglicanism. Lady Stansgate herself was aware of Florence Li's unique situation. She later recalled a meeting at her home at which Bishop Hall spoke of the "enormous pressure" he had been under at this time.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Carpenter op cit 659-663. Aware of the stresses on her bishop Florence Li's resignation effectively silenced Hall's critics who had demanded his censure and resignation.

<sup>36</sup> Stansgate op cit 200.

Certainly in the RAF Elsie had a particular advantage in that she had access to the women's quarters which were simply out of bounds to her male colleagues. She was uniquely placed to understand the women's problems in the services although at first she found officiating, at parade ground prayers, intimidating. Initially she served at RAF Cranwell where the officers' training college was located and then, in August 1946, she moved to St Athan, in south Wales. However there her health declined and she was diagnosed as suffering from "infective arthritis" in September 1946. Her poor health was the subject of correspondence in November between Geoffrey de Freitas, the Under Secretary of State for Air, and Elsie's brother, Ronald who was MP for Norwood, in Lambeth, 1945 - 50. Elsie recuperated at home with her parents in Friern Barnet and there received a letter from Sidney Berry, the CUEW secretary.

Dr Berry was relieved to hear that Elsie was at home, "out of the hands of RAF medical authorities and all that sort of business". However he regarded her as still as "a bit of a crock" and stated frankly his hope that she would fail her coming "medical". He feared that any recurrence of her illness might "permanently damage her health" but was "certain" that there would be "another big job" for Elsie. This last point he underlined emphatically. "I have no doubt in my mind about that". Coming from Berry with his obvious authority this amounted almost to a promise. He reassured her that she had already "established the principle which Lord Stansgate was determined to carry through". He concluded by urging her "to keep as patient as you can, and the way to the future will open".<sup>37</sup> Elsie's poor health led her to leaving the RAF in July 1947 when she relinquished her commission on grounds of medical unfitness. She continued to suffer from the illness until 1951, being treated on a special diet of lemon juice, recommended by her mother.

---

<sup>37</sup> Williams op cit 33-35. Ronald Chamberlain (1901-1987) also served as a Labour councillor on Middlesex County Council 1947-52. Who Was Who 1981-1990.

## Marriage

Just three days before her discharge from the forces Elsie eventually married John Garrington. He had contracted scarlet fever in 1939 when they first expected to marry and marriage then would have been acceptable to the Anglican authorities. Unfortunately once she had begun training for the Congregational ministry, and after her ordination in 1941, the situation had changed dramatically. John Garrington's intended marriage to a woman minister would not receive the ready approval of his bishop. Therefore he not only encountered the opposition of Annie Chamberlain but also that of his superiors in the Church of England. That his fiancée should have acquired such a high profile did not make the matter any easier, although of course the principle remained the same.

An Anglican incumbent's wife was informally required to be active in the parish and, of course, to be a confirmed Anglican herself. John had to overcome great hurdles before finally obtaining a living. He refused to accept that his engagement to Elsie was finally over and his letters to her in the war years were very passionate. She agreed to marry him after he had obtained a benefice of his own. His endeavours to find a parish met with frustration at every turn.<sup>38</sup>

John applied for posts as far afield as Guernsey, Falmouth, Dunmow, Birmingham, Chester, Shrewsbury, Canterbury and Gloucester. He became desperate, both in waiting for a parish and for marriage to Elsie. She herself directly approached the Bishop of London, Dr J W Wand (1885-1977), assuring him that she was willing to resign her pastorate on marriage and would even accept confirmation from the bishop. Letters between them were exchanged on a weekly basis and sometimes within a matter of days. Dr Wand was unmoved by Elsie's declarations because, as he wrote in October 1945, confirmation requires "a complete readiness to accept whatever is involved in the service with the heart as well as with the mind and

---

<sup>38</sup> Williams *ibid* 36-38.

there is such a thing as an Anglican ethos” with which she would need to become familiar. Wand advised her again in December 1945 that it would be “impossible” for John to find a church while she was still serving a “Free Church Pastorate”. Elsie in turn accused Dr Wand of “Anglican autocracy” and “holy blackmail”, realising that any hopes they had of having children were receding.<sup>39</sup>

Wand, an Anglo-Catholic, was from Grantham in Lincolnshire and, although his parents had both been confirmed in the Church of England, his father had played the harmonium at a chapel on Sunday mornings, regularly taking his three sons with him. This left a deep impression on Wand who never forgot these early experiences of “undiluted Calvinism from the inside”. In reaction he became a confirmed Anglican at school. Could the personal distaste he felt for the religion of his father and the chapel of his childhood have influenced his dealings with John Garrington and Elsie Chamberlain? Did he entertain fears that Elsie would drag her future husband into her own Protestant faith and away from Anglican truth, as he saw it? Wand was supported by Archbishop Fisher, formerly John Garrington’s bishop, in his opposition to John and Elsie’s marriage, as Fisher himself admitted to them both on a happier occasion.<sup>40</sup>

Lord Stansgate’s intervention in 1946 brought a positive change to the situation. He spoke to his colleague the Lord Chancellor, Lord Jowitt, who had within his gift certain Church of England benefices. In only a matter of days John accepted the living of All Saints Parish Church, Hampton, Middlesex, being formally instituted in May 1946.<sup>41</sup> Later that year Elsie was diagnosed as suffering from arthritis yet was able at last to plan for her wedding which finally

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid 38-44, DNB. Wand succeeded Geoffrey Fisher as bishop of London when Fisher moved to Canterbury in 1945.

<sup>40</sup> Williams *ibid* 46-7, DNB. At a Lambeth Palace garden party some years later Archbishop and Mrs Fisher spoke to John and Elsie and Fisher stated that he had tried to keep them apart.

<sup>41</sup> Williams *ibid* 44.



occurred in July 1947. She and John had been engaged for ten years! The wedding was held at Christ Church, Friern Barnet and was widely reported in the newspapers. Anglican priest marries Congregational minister, the first woman chaplain in the armed forces! They lived together in the vicarage at Hampton. In September 1947 Elsie became the minister of the Vineyard Congregational Church, Richmond where she had first preached in June that year.<sup>42</sup>

In 1947 Elsie was 37 years old. She had followed her calling into the ministry in which, as a woman, she had encountered difficulties, occasional embarrassments, blind prejudice, and downright hostility. She had proved herself in Friern Barnet, after an apprenticeship amid the blitz in Liverpool. It is true that both Christ Church, Friern Barnet, and Vineyard Congregational, Richmond had initially approached men who had refused to serve as their ministers, in part because the stipends offered were low. Was Elsie acceptable because, as a woman minister, the opportunities for her were few and far between? If so, she confounded her critics with her industry, style, dynamism and sheer force of character. As a minister she was always seen as a singular blessing to her churches - as preacher, pastor, musician, youth worker and inspirer.

By 1947 she had made a name for herself. She had confronted the considerable obstacles to her becoming a forces' chaplain and had overcome them. Similarly, she had shown resolution and grit in her dealings with the Anglican authorities who opposed her marriage. In this too she had gained the victory without surrendering any ground. She was still actively engaged in serving as a Congregational minister and she had become a well-known name in and beyond church circles. As Sidney Berry had indicated to her, a bright future beckoned.

Alan Argent

---

<sup>42</sup> Vineyard Congregational Church, Richmond, church meeting minutes 29 June, 27 August, 18 September 1947.

## John Curwen, Coward College and the Tonic Sol-fa Movement

John Curwen (1816-1880), the “originator of the tonic sol-fa movement”,<sup>1</sup> first attempted to teach music to the children of his Sunday school in 1838, when assistant minister at Basingstoke Congregational Church. An exceptional teacher who had made a study of educational principles, he knew nothing of music, and his initial efforts to teach it failed. His later activities as a music educationalist were occasioned by circumstances rather than natural inclination.<sup>2</sup> In 1841 Sunday school teachers of all denominations met in Hull to discuss singing in church. John Curwen spoke about the valuable techniques of teaching music which Miss Sarah Glover, a clergyman’s daughter, had used at her school in Norwich. Curwen wrote that “the Chairman, the Rev Thomas Stratton<sup>3</sup>, charged me very solemnly and I accepted the charge” of helping young and old to learn music and singing “for the service of God”.<sup>4</sup> This commission he took seriously. His acquaintance with Pestalozzi’s<sup>5</sup> principles led him to reject as misguided the ‘continental’ method with a ‘fixed’ sol-fa, then used in

---

<sup>1</sup> Manchester Guardian 28 May 1880

<sup>2</sup> H C Colles, P W Jones, B Rainbow “Curwen Family” in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (Grove) ed S Sadie (1980) vol 5, 103-104 .

<sup>3</sup> Congregational Year Book (CYB) (1855) 238f - T.Stratton (1793-1854) minister of Fish-Street, Hull 1832 until his death. Student at Hoxton. Declined to become theological tutor at Hackney college. Interested in children’s work.

<sup>4</sup> CYB (1881) 337; J S Curwen Memorials of John Curwen (1882) 201.

<sup>5</sup> Chambers Biographical Dictionary (1990) J H Pestalozzi (1746-1827) Swiss educationalist.

London by John Hullah.<sup>6</sup> Curwen advocated instead the techniques of Sarah Glover in which the ‘doh’ was always in the major tonic<sup>7</sup>, as in her Scheme to Render Psalmody Congregational (Norwich, 1835). Teaching himself to read music from this book, he dedicated his life to perfecting a system based on her ideas, bringing music within the reach not only of children but also of poorer people with no musical education. His aim was both musical and religious.

Later in 1841 appeared his The Little Tune Book Harmonised. He developed his ideas in a series of articles in the Independent Magazine in 1842<sup>8</sup>, and in 1843 published Singing for Schools and Congregations. Other publications were further improvements on Sarah Glover’s work.<sup>9</sup> After 1844 Curwen printed his own publications, sustaining losses which involved considerable hardship. In 1851 he began to edit a periodical called the Tonic Sol-fa Reporter. The venture proved unsuccessful and only two numbers were issued. The publication of several of his articles in Cassell’s Popular Educator in 1852 attracted thousands of pupils to tonic sol-fa, and Curwen’s work began to be recognized. In 1853 he again published and edited a journal, the Tonic Sol-fa Reporter and Magazine of Vocal Music for the People. A breakdown in health, due to overwork, obliged him to resign his ministry temporarily in 1856. A further breakdown in 1864 led to his final resignation after which he devoted his time to tonic sol-fa and to his publishing firm J Curwen & Sons which he established in 1863.<sup>10</sup>

John Curwen was born at Heckmondwike, Yorkshire, on November 14, 1816, the son of a Congregational minister, Revd Spedding Curwen (1790-1856), then of Lower Chapel,

---

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* 744. Hullah 1812-1884 English composer and music teacher. Grove loc cit and B. Rainbow “Tonic Sol-fa” in Grove vol 19, 62.

<sup>7</sup> B Rainbow “Sarah Ann Glover” in Grove vol 7, 454.

<sup>8</sup> DNB.

<sup>9</sup> Grove vol 5 loc cit.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*.

Heckmondwike, who, having eschewed Oxford and the Church of England, was educated at Rotherham Academy.<sup>11</sup> The family came from Cumberland.<sup>12</sup> John's grandfather, Thomas Curwen, formerly a corn merchant with a Mr Spedding, later became surveyor of mines in Middleton, near Leeds<sup>13</sup>. John was baptized on March 11, 1817 at Upper Chapel, Heckmondwike by the minister, Thomas Hale (1762-1821)<sup>14</sup>. His mother, Mary, a teacher, both before and after marriage, was a keen Congregationalist. She died, leaving John and his younger brother, Tom, in September 1822. John never forgot her. He wrote to Tom in 1878, "Remember our mother's blessing is on us two. It was in the text she chose for her funeral sermon".<sup>15</sup> John's childhood, after his mother's death, was spent in Hackney (his father served the Barbican Chapel, London)<sup>16</sup> and after 1828, in Frome where his father had exchanged pastorates with Dr Arthur Tidman<sup>17</sup>, becoming minister of

---

<sup>11</sup> Evangelical Magazine March 1856, 121ff.

<sup>12</sup> B Nightingale The Ejected of Cumberland and Westmorland (Manchester 1911) 988, 1197-8; DNB Surman suggests that William Curwen 1590 -1685 the sequestered vicar of Ravensworth, Westmorland may have been of the same family. The Spedding family came from Whitehaven, the Curwens from Workington. The Medieval Fortified Buildings of Cumbria In 1380 Gilbert de Curwen IV whose family had owned the manor since the early 13cent was given a licence to crenellate. Workington Hall passed out of the family in the 1930's. N Micklem The Box and The Puppets (1957) 15 relates the Curwens to Gospatric, Earl of Northumbria, and to Malcolm II of Scotland.

<sup>13</sup> Curwen op cit 1 seems to have named his son after his partner.

<sup>14</sup> B Nightingale Nonconformity in Lancashire v 240.

<sup>15</sup> The text was "The God which fed me all my life long until this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them" Curwen op cit 5.

<sup>16</sup> Spedding Curwen CYB (1857) 173f.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Tidman CYB (1869) 281f.

Zion Chapel.<sup>18</sup> His early education was at Ham, in Surrey, and Frome. He recalled his teacher at Frome, Revd J. Poulter and “the sweet fellowship” of the chapel, where he became a member when nearly sixteen.<sup>19</sup> In December, 1832, aged sixteen, he went to Wymondley Academy to prepare for the Congregational ministry.<sup>20</sup> This was one of the establishments funded by the Coward Trust.<sup>21</sup> William Coward, a London merchant, who died in 1738, left monies whose benefactions became a major source of funding for the education of Congregational ministers.<sup>22</sup> In 1832 Curwen was old enough to benefit from the trust. However in 1833 Wymondley Academy, renamed Coward College, moved to London where the students also attended the new university (now University College, London).<sup>23</sup> Curwen was to remain there until 1838.<sup>24</sup>

Initially in 1738 the Coward trustees supported men, studying with Doddridge in Northampton and with John Eames<sup>25</sup> (whom Isaac Watts considered the most learned man he knew)<sup>26</sup> whose academy in Moorfields was supported by the Congregational Fund Board.<sup>27</sup> The Coward trustees closed Hoxton Academy in 1785<sup>28</sup> and John Horsey’s Northampton Academy in 1798. Horsey explained.

“It was become a Seminary for Triflers and Socinians. The

---

<sup>18</sup> CYB(1857) loc cit.

<sup>19</sup> Curwen op cit 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> Manchester Guardian loc cit.

<sup>21</sup> J H Thompson The History of the Coward Trust (1997) 42.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid* 1.

<sup>23</sup> The Times 29 May 1880.

<sup>24</sup> DNB; CYB (1881) 366ff.

<sup>25</sup> see DNB for Doddridge and Eames.

<sup>26</sup> E Price “The Dissenting Academies” Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society ii 46-7.

<sup>27</sup> Y Evans “Thomas Gainsborough: The Congregational Inheritance” CHC Magazine vol 3 no 5, 37.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* 33.

principles of the original Institution were adopted ... not by a single Pupil ... none bid fair to become Evangelical Pastors. The Trustees understood this and ... resolved to annihilate the whole fabric.”<sup>29</sup>

The academy opened in 1799 at Wymondley, near Hitchin, Hertfordshire, where Curwen stayed briefly before its closure, but the “taint of Socinianism” lingered so that the students “were dreaded by ... the congregations to which they were sent”.<sup>30</sup> The appointment of Thomas Morell as divinity tutor at Wymondley in 1821 changed that.<sup>31</sup> Dale notes that within eighteen months “Morell’s firm wisdom” largely restored order and the students became much in demand.<sup>32</sup> After the Unitarians had become a separate denomination, the Congregationalists formed a more theologically cohesive group, for whom the Coward trustees wished to provide “a gifted and learned ministry”. The University of London had opened in 1828 with no religious bars, unlike Oxford and Cambridge. The trustees believed that they could improve the education they offered, “while maintaining its vocational nature”, by closing the academy and sending the students to London.<sup>33</sup>

Coward College was to be housed in a terrace of three houses in Byng Place (now the Quaker International Centre), near Gordon Square, built by Thomas Cubitt,<sup>34</sup> for the Duke of Bedford, whose estate auditor was not keen to let premises to students.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> *ibid* 40.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid* 47.

<sup>31</sup> A Peel The Throckmorton Trotman Trust 1664- 1941 (1942). CYB, (1853) 216ff obit Stephen Morell (1773-1852) brother of Thomas and John.

<sup>32</sup> R W Dale History of English Congregationalism 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (1908) 596ff see also f.26.

<sup>33</sup> Thompson *op cit* 56.

<sup>34</sup> T.Cubitt (1788-1855) DNB.

<sup>35</sup> Thompson *op cit* 57.

“I don’t understand what he [Cubitt] means by young men who having been educated at Hertford come to finish their education at London University .. My opinion is that a boarding house .. under no regulation or control would be a very bad neighbour.. It seems an arrangement at much risk and nothing but a strong desire to help Mr Cubitt’s large speculation would make it to be entertained.”<sup>36</sup>

The Coward trustees bought the houses in February 1833, deciding against installing the fashionable gas lighting. The last examinations occurred at Wymondley in June 1833, after which the students were asked if they wished to transfer to Coward College. In July eleven, including Curwen, applied by letter and two new students asked to join them. Cubitt advised on the transport of the library (including the former Hoxton and Northampton libraries)<sup>37</sup> and also on painting the exterior of the buildings.<sup>38</sup> Coward College opened in October 1833. William Bengo Collyer (1782-1854), the senior trustee (1814-1849), preached on the Christian ministry, reminding his hearers of references in Coward’s will to the “true Gospel doctrines”, as in “the Assembly’s Catechism” and to “that method of Church Discipline which is practised by the Congregational Churches”. The move to London clearly signalled that heterodoxy among students at Coward College would not be tolerated.<sup>39</sup> A chapel was set aside within the college for morning and evening ‘family’ prayers which, with the Duke of Bedford’s consent, was open to the public both for the Friday lecture and Sunday evening service. Curwen and the other students in London had the benefits of both university and ministerial training.

The students went to London University for all non-theological studies - mathematics, science, literature, and Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Morell was the president and sole college tutor, teaching

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> New College ms L53/4/26.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Thompson op cit 58; Portrait of a young Collyer at National Portrait Gallery.

theology, a more onerous task than at Wymondley, as he was responsible for the exegesis of Old and New Testaments.<sup>40</sup> Samuel Newth commented that “it was inevitable that the Theological tutor would now be judged by a very different standard than that employed in former time ... A totally new order ... was inaugurated, and Mr Morell unhappily was unable to adapt himself to it”.<sup>41</sup> Curwen found the change stimulating, recalling the vigorous atmospheres of both Coward and University Colleges with affection.<sup>42</sup> He enjoyed at the university the debates which John Stuart Mill<sup>43</sup> and other celebrities attended. He appreciated the teaching of Prof White in mathematics, of Prof T.H. Key in Latin, and of a fellow student, Henry Griffith.<sup>44</sup> Those “lessons... were living powers” all his life, teaching him to think. Griffith recalled his delight (“we used to say idolatrous”) in “our semi-Platonic divines ... Bates, John Norris, Jeremy Taylor and Dr. Thomas Browne”<sup>45</sup> and how, until he was eighteen, “he knew absolutely *nothing of music*”. Henry Griffith wrote that he and a friend, Thomas Parry,<sup>46</sup> taught Curwen to sing.<sup>47</sup> Andrew Reed,<sup>48</sup> also a fellow student, wrote, after Curwen’s death, that he was loved by all

---

<sup>40</sup> Thompson op cit 58-9.

<sup>41</sup> G F Nuttall New College, London and its Library (1977) 24, quoting S Newth ‘Memorials Of Coward’s Academies’ New College ms CT12.

<sup>42</sup> Curwen op cit 11ff.

<sup>43</sup> Chambers Biographical Dictionary (1990) 1013.

<sup>44</sup> Henry Griffith(s) F.G.S, 1811-1891 Welsh speaker, sometime president of Brecon college. Wrote Faith, The Life Root of Science. CYB (1892) 175f .

<sup>45</sup> William Bates (1625-99) and others DNB .

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Parry (1811-1844) served three pastorates, dogged by ill health, died in Dover after 9 years of ministry. B Nightingale Lancashire Nonconformity ii 64; Evangelical Magazine (1845) 337.

<sup>47</sup> Curwen op cit 17-18.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Reed CYB (1900) 211f, son of Andrew Reed and brother of Sir Charles Reed.



for “his cheerful sympathy and amiable sociality”. When Reed caught smallpox, Curwen, heedless of his own safety, “established” himself in the patient’s room until ordered home. Reed wrote of his enthusiasm in the debating society at Coward College for Jonathan Dymond and his Quaker view of peace and non-resistance <sup>49</sup>,and his interest in the Barbican Sunday School under Alderman Thomas Challis(1794-1874). <sup>50</sup> He was “sometimes visited by his brother Tom,<sup>51</sup> whose quieter and gentler manner covered a no less firm and righteous spirit”.<sup>52</sup> Until 1847 the trustees, no longer dependent on sponsors’ assurances of the academic abilities of the applicants, paid students’ matriculation fees (matriculation was required of students at London University). Some found university life not easy.<sup>53</sup> In 1836 the trustees wrote of their fears that “ the Scientific and Literary attractions of the University of London” might cause students of Coward College to lose sight of “the paramount importance of Theological studies”. They sent a questionnaire<sup>54</sup> to the students, of whom thirteen replied, including

---

<sup>49</sup> Charles William Dymond F.S.A. Memoirs, Letters and Poems of Jonathan Dymond (1907) 1. Some of the Dymond family, members of Society of Friends since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. J. Dymond 1796-1826. His parents were both ministers.

<sup>50</sup> Curwen op cit 12-13; The Times 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1874; J J Baddeley The Aldermen of Cripplegate Ward (1900); International genealogical index, London and Middlesex (1984); Guildhall Library ms 6443/13. B.1794, father Thomas, butcher, mother Mary, baptized at Barbican Independent Chapel, later deacon. Married 1819 Mary Ann, Alderman of Cripplegate Ward 1845 until death. Lord Mayor of London 1852-3. Liberal MP for Finsbury 1852-57.

<sup>51</sup> Micklem loc cit - Thomas Curwen’s daughter, Ellen Ruth, was mother of N. Micklem (1888-1976), principal of Mansfield College.

<sup>52</sup> Curwen loc cit.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson op cit 59; New College mss L53/4/16,17,18,20.

<sup>54</sup> New College mss L53/4/95.

Curwen.<sup>55</sup> In July 1836 the trustees, having received some unsatisfactory answers, withheld the usual award of five pounds “lest .. it .. be considered a matter of course”.<sup>56</sup> At the outset absences from lectures and family prayers were common, the latter particularly conveying “a Melancholy impression” to the trustees.

In November, Morell wrote to James Gibson, treasurer of the trustees, about the conduct of three students, Isaac Mummery,<sup>57</sup> John Curwen and William H. Griffith.<sup>58</sup> Mummery had complained of being “passed ... over” in the preaching list. He and Curwen were to “wait on the trustees” and offered to make up the preaching list themselves. Curwen had been absent without leave on two nights and, when Morell commented on this to the other students, he was informed that Curwen had gone to Sutton, Surrey, to preach. On his return he apologised to Morell, but Gibson did not believe that Curwen just forgot to ask permission.<sup>59</sup> Griffith was unruly in lectures and, when asked why he had not preached in chapel recently, he replied that he “didn’t have” a sermon, and when made to do so, he read from The Pulpit<sup>60</sup> the exact same sermon that he had used previously.<sup>61</sup> Griffith (1815-1885), however “unruly”, gained his London BA in 1839 and, when headmaster of Taunton School, an MA in 1861.<sup>62</sup> He was tutor of classics at Western College, Plymouth 1854-7. The ill health, which dogged Curwen and led to his early retirement from the ministry in

---

<sup>55</sup> New College mss L53/4/100.

<sup>56</sup> Thompson loc cit.

<sup>57</sup> CYB (1892) 234f. Isaac Vale Mummery claimed Huguenot descent. His son, Alfred Williams Momerie, educ New College London, conformed, ‘brilliant but erratic fellow of St. John, Cambridge’, later Prof at King’s College, London.

<sup>58</sup> New College ms L53/5/24.

<sup>59</sup> New College ms L53/5/25.

<sup>60</sup> The Pulpit was published weekly 1823-76.

<sup>61</sup> New College ms L53/5/24.

<sup>62</sup> CYB (1886) 173f.

1867, seemed to have first appeared at this time. He wrote on September 2, 1837, from Frome to the college.<sup>63</sup> “Five weeks ago I engaged to preach for Mr Watson of Westbury,<sup>64</sup> and while in the pulpit .. I was seized with violent spasms, which terminated in inflammation of the bowels. My medical attendants had recourse to bleeding and calomel,<sup>65</sup> which induced langour and weakness to such an extent, that although it is now a month since I was removed from Mr Watson’s roof, I am not yet off the Doctor’s hands.”<sup>66</sup>

On September 9, 1837, two days after Curwen’s second letter, he was allocated study 19 at Coward College, which was confirmed in October. On November 16, 1838, the trustees, students and tutor celebrated the centenary of the Coward Trust, with a dinner.<sup>67</sup> It was an epoch-making decision of the trustees to come to London. Curwen was justifiably proud of having a university education.<sup>68</sup> Morell became ill soon after the celebrations, dying at Coward College two years later in February 1840.

On leaving college Curwen became in 1838 assistant minister at the Congregational church at Basingstoke, where the failed venture of teaching children to sing took place. With a yearly salary of £50, he gave one tenth of his gross income away. From 1862 he increased his giving to two tenths. He became engaged to Fanny Vanner but she and her younger sister, Nelly, soon died of tuberculosis. In 1841, he published a children’s book, Nelly Vanner, concerning the child’s life and death, which was very popular, going through fourteen editions. His desire to make the Sunday School more “attractive and useful to

---

<sup>63</sup> New College ms L53/5/73.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph Spencer Watson 1787-1861 CYB (1862) 268f. minister Upper Meeting, Westbury 1826-61.

<sup>65</sup> Mercurous Chloride (Hg<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>) extensively used as a purgative from 17th century - Kingsley’s The Water Babies (1878) 229 - OED.

<sup>66</sup> New College ms L/53/5/73.

<sup>67</sup> Thompson op cit 61.

<sup>68</sup> The Times loc cit. John Curwen CYB 1880.

children” developed into a lifelong dedication to teach children to sing.<sup>69</sup> Also in 1841, on becoming co-pastor at Stowmarket, Suffolk, it was here, through a book lent to him by Elizabeth Reed, the wife of Dr Andrew Reed, his Coward College friend’s father and “the Congregationalist philanthropist *par excellence*”,<sup>70</sup> that he learned of the teaching method of Sarah Glover. He found it “the most easy to teach and the most easy to learn” and visited her schools, adopting, with certain modifications and improvements, her principles and methods.

Guido d’Arezzo (c.995-1050) who developed new forms of musical notation, replacing letters with notes, written on four lines of a sheet of music, also introduced the syllables do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, still used in Latin countries as the names of the notes from c to a.<sup>71</sup> Before then melodies were learned by heart, since symbols used to notate them were imprecise, only serving as aids to memory. As there was no musical notation to indicate the exact pitch of a voice, music had to be learned by ear. He taught singing by sight. He noticed that the first note of each line of a certain hymn began a note higher than the first note of the previous line, as in the following.

Ut-que art laxis -is                      Re-son-are fi-bris

Mi-ra ge-to-rum    Fa muli- tu-or-um

Sol-ve polluti                              La- bi-i re- a-tum

Sancte Johannes

Ut Re Mi Fa Sol La

Once singers had learned this hymn tune they could sing any note at the correct pitch. Ut was later changed to Doh (the Italian form) as it was easier to sing. Te was added later to produce the eight note scale.

---

<sup>69</sup> Mem. Curwen op cit 21 ff..

<sup>70</sup> A Peel The Congregational Two Hundred (1948) 132, DNB, CYB.

<sup>71</sup> Abstract of ms, Stadsbibliotheek 528 Bruges, Folios 54va-58va late 13th century.

The notation spread throughout Europe, particularly in cathedrals and monasteries. After modern scales developed, it fell into comparative disuse, as there was no provision for naming sharpened and flattened notes.<sup>72</sup> “The moveable doh” meant that names were given, not to particular notes, but to the relative position of notes in the scale whatever the key. Thus sol-fa could be used again for singing, with greater effect. Later, with others, Curwen founded the Tonic Sol-fa Association (1853) and the Tonic Sol-fa College for the education of teachers (1862).<sup>73</sup>

With the latter’s closure in the 1970s the surviving archives were deposited at the Royal College of Music. A portrait of John Curwen in 1857, by William Gush, was given by his son, Spedding Curwen, and by his daughter, Mrs Lewis Banks, to the National Portrait Gallery, in the 1890s. Edgar Williams’ portrait of Curwen, once at the Tonic Sol-fa College, is now missing, although the Royal College has a photograph.

In autumn 1841 Curwen with his friend, (later Sir) Charles Reed,<sup>74</sup> Andrew’s brother, visited Yorkshire to lecture on Sunday School methods of teaching. Reed wrote later that Curwen “had resolved to render his schools an example of a brighter and more attractive institution than Sunday Schools generally were”. He continues that, in Scotland, Curwen met David Stow (1794-1864)<sup>75</sup> and became interested in his method of training teachers. Both Curwen and Reed benefited from the new methods of teaching Sunday school children and Curwen used them to reform the school at his next pastorate. Curwen had invented a look and say method of learning to

---

<sup>72</sup> Oxford Junior Encyclopaedia (1953).

<sup>73</sup> A Dictionary of Hymnology ed J Julian (1908) 274. Surman notes his death as May 25.

<sup>74</sup> DNB.

<sup>75</sup> Chambers Biographical Dictionary (1990)1406 Scottish educationalist, pioneer in co-education, and abolition of prizes, and corporal punishment in school.

read whilst at Basingstoke.<sup>76</sup> Now he added Miss Glover's method of teaching children to sing. Leaving his pastorate, he went to stay with his father at Reading because of ill-health and the "mental anguish and harrowing cares to which a dreadful bereavement (the death of Miss Vanner) ... have exposed me".<sup>77</sup>

After a year with his father, in May 1844 he became minister of Plaistow Independent Chapel in West Ham. In 1845 he married, against her parents' wishes, Mary Thompson, daughter of a Manchester cotton merchant, whom he had met in June 1842 when lecturing on Sunday schools. Their son, John Spencer Curwen, in 1882 founded the Stratford music festival which still continues.<sup>78</sup> Nathaniel Micklem (1888-1976), principal of Mansfield College, Oxford 1932-53, recalled his mother, Ellen Ruth Curwen (1857-1952), playing the organ and singing from Our Own Hymn Book which was compiled "by my grandmother Curwen" and was dedicated to her grandchildren.<sup>79</sup> Micklem wrote of his first funeral at Highbury Congregational Church, Bristol, being that of a woman who had been baptised in Reading by his great-grandfather, Spedding Curwen.<sup>80</sup> At Plaistow, Curwen developed and promoted his Tonic Sol-fa method of teaching to sing. He wrote:

"For some years I kept under this music mission as of third or fourth-rate importance. As a young minister I had first, my church; second, my Sunday-school; third, my day-school. All these came before my duty to music. I was even so jealous of myself that I would not learn the piano, lest I shall be tempted to waste time. But looking back, I see that I have been gradually forced, sometimes by strong

---

<sup>76</sup> Curwen op cit 46.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid* 42.

<sup>78</sup> J S Curwen Old Plaistow recently republished by After the Battle Books. Grove 5 loc cit.103 He gave up the ministry to train as a musician and help his father.

<sup>79</sup> Micklem op cit 16-17.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid* 56.

encouragements, sometimes by misfortunes, and more often by the sharp stimulus of opposition, to put music in the front.”<sup>81</sup> In Plaistow he was also active in politics. He was opposed to church tithes and state education, partly from a spirit of old radicalism which suspected the government in everything, and partly as “a religious voluntarist”, opposed to government support for religious teaching. He wrote for Cassell’s Popular Educator a series of papers on Tonic Sol Fa.<sup>82</sup> Curwen’s workload caused an attack of rheumatic fever, affecting his heart and ultimately resulting in his death. Through this illness he became an ardent homoeopathist.<sup>83</sup> He resigned the pastorate at Plaistow in November 1855 but, at the church’s request, was persuaded to take a long holiday instead.<sup>84</sup> In April 1856 he set off to visit Germany and Switzerland, his letters being published in 1857 as Sketches in Nassau, Baden, and Switzerland. On returning to pastoral duties at Plaistow, he continued his campaign to raise the standard of music teaching, by studying harmony and publishing a book on the subject. At the outbreak of the American civil war, Curwen supported the North, organising the first Freedman’s Aid Society in England. In 1863 the Revd J W Combs became co-pastor but in 1867 failing health necessitated Curwen’s resignation, when a new chapel was being built. Although he would not preach, he continued to attend and support the activities of the church. In October 1867 Sarah Glover died whom he saw, with her sister Christiana, as the founders of the Sol-fa notation. After another rest, with his health partially restored, Curwen devoted his energies to the Tonic Sol-fa system. In 1869 he founded the Tonic Sol-fa College, which opened in 1875, with pride of place given to a painting, from a photograph, of Sarah Glover. In 1876 he opposed the decision of the School Board at Plaistow, under a directive from Whitehall, to dispense with mixed schools. Mary, his wife, died in

---

<sup>81</sup> CYB (1881) 368.

<sup>82</sup> Curwen op cit 103.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid* 104.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid* 115.

January, 1880. She had supported her husband's pastoral work and the advancement of Tonic Sol-fa. She appeared before the board of Guardians to plead for the poor of Sun Row, near her home, who were mainly Roman Catholic Irish agricultural labourers.<sup>85</sup> In May he met for the final time his old college friends at "a gathering of Coward Students under the hospitable roof of Dr Reynolds, at Cheshunt"<sup>86</sup> at which Henry Griffith and he agreed to spend a fortnight the next month at Llandrindod Wells. However it was never to be. He died soon afterwards, five months after his wife, on May 26<sup>th</sup> whilst visiting a sick relative.

John Curwen in March 1874 had been deeply moved by a visit to the Jewish Free Schools in Spitalfields and the singing, by 300 boys with covered heads, of "Handel's Hallelujah chorus in the Hebrew language".<sup>87</sup> Although the Tonic Sol-fa movement is now out of favour, the John Curwen Society - funding body of the Curwen Institute- survives. Curwen's best epitaph is that many millions throughout the English-speaking world have learned to appreciate music and to sing by using the system he advocated. His singular contribution lies in the promotion of Tonic Sol-fa which profoundly influenced the development of amateur choral singing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Yvonne A Evans

---

<sup>85</sup> ibid 225ff.

<sup>86</sup> ibid 282. H.R.Reynolds 1825-1896 CYB (1897) 213, President of Cheshunt College 1861-1894.

<sup>87</sup> ibid 200.



## Some Puritan Associations with Shrewsbury

The town of Shrewsbury is situated on the west bank of the River Severn. The river encloses the town in a horseshoe pattern, forming a rough division between England and Wales. The ancient British and later Welsh settlement is believed to have been formed within the loop of the river and on the hill on which, at the Norman Conquest, Roger Montgomery built the castle. On nearby raised ground the court of the princes of Powys stood and is today the site of the ruins of old St Chad's Church, where the dissenters John Bryan, Job Orton, Jonathan Scott and others are buried.<sup>1</sup>

The ancient name was Pengwern "Top of the Alders", immortalised in the poetry of Llŵarch Hen, in which the suffering of tribes at the hands of the marauding Saxons is recorded. According to the tradition, Llŵarch Hen had left the north of Britain and settled down in Powys. His sister, Heledd, who on Cynddylan's death, mourns his loss in the poem:

"Ystafell Cynddylan ys tywyll heno  
Heb dan, heb wely;  
Wylaff wers,tawaf wedy "  
(freely translated)

Cynddylan's Hall is in darkness tonight.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Bryan, Job Orton, Jonathan Scott. DNB. Jonathan Bryan (1629-99) was ejected from St Chad's Shrewsbury in 1662 A G Matthews Calamy Revised (1934) 83, 474. In 1672 he was a licensed as a Presbyterian. Job Orton (1717-1783) was the friend and biographer of Philip Doddridge. Jonathan Scott (1735-1803) - M Watts The Dissenters I (1978) 453.

Without fire, without bed  
I'll weep awhile, and then be silent.<sup>2</sup>

The high fort site of the British Celts was probably judged vulnerable by the Romans so they chose a wide expanse some four miles from the town near the river on which to build the Roman town and garrison. This has survived and may be the largest Roman town and garrison to survive after London, St Albans and Cirencester. When centuries later the garrison site was destroyed, the stonework was used to build domestic dwellings, and evidence of this is a common feature locally, in particular in the structure of St Andrew's Church nearby.

This little church is noteworthy in that it is alleged that Richard Baxter attended here when at school at Donnington, near Wroxeter, along with other pupils, including Richard Allestree. Allestree, a Royalist, went to Oxford, and later became Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford and eventually Provost of Eton.<sup>3</sup> Baxter was born 12<sup>th</sup> November 1615 at Rowton and Allestree at Atcham. Baxter went to live with a relative after his mother's death. He later was sent to try his fortune at Ludlow, where the Council of the Marches sat. In the seventeenth century, Shrewsbury was a centre for rural trades, with the drapers' guild supporting the woollen trade and its offshoots. The woollen and associated activities explain the influx of tradesmen from Leicestershire and Derbyshire who brought radical religion with them to the Welsh border. George Fox tells us that his teachings met with a positive response in 1648 in those counties, "I had had some service in these parts... and some tender people were convinced". Such people of faith settled in Shrewsbury and encountered the town's Welsh population, particularly those involved with the woollen trade.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Llwrach Hen Dictionary of Welsh Biography.

<sup>3</sup> DNB.

<sup>4</sup> G. Fox The Journal (1998) ed. N. Smith, 2.

At Shrewsbury Baxter met men of this mind who sought to know the will of God. He heard the fiery preaching of Walter Cradock, a native of Usk, in Gwent, who had been to Oxford and had been the curate of St Mary's, Cardiff, but was suspended for refusing to read the Laudian Book of Sports later in 1634. Cradock exercised a powerful ministry as curate in 1639 at Wrexham but had been forced to flee from there also. Cradock assisted William Wroth at Llanfaches, also in Gwent, the first Independent Church in Wales, where Wroth's preaching, Cradock tells us, was like "a fire set to a thatch." Cradock had been set alight with that fire and Baxter and others in turn were deeply moved by his preaching. The call was to defy the authority of king and bishops and bring Christians to form themselves into "gathered churches" after the pattern they saw in the New Testament. In those days Baxter, still only twenty years of age, was ready to conform to the Church of England. Cradock was concealed at the school in Shrewsbury run by Richard Symonds, himself a suspended clergyman from north Wales. That group with their "fervent prayers and savoury Conference and godly lives" left a deep impression on Baxter. Proof of this are Baxter's words, found in a tract published in the last year of his life, when his thoughts returned to the excellent Christians in Shrewsbury, whom the bishops' severity against "private meetings caused..... to meet secretly for mutual edification, when I was twenty one". That year was 1636 when the king and William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, were bearing down on the Puritans.

Baxter's many published works, in the words of Judge Jeffreys, "were enough to fill a cart". Among them are the hymn "Ye holy angels bright"<sup>5</sup>, The Saints' Everlasting Rest (1650) and The Reformed Pastor (1656). His Reliquiae are indispensable as a mirror of the times and as the life story of a Puritan saint. Two others at Shrewsbury then were George Fawler, chaplain of Bridewell Hospital,

---

<sup>5</sup> G F Nuttall Richard Baxter (1965) 11-15.

London 1643-62 and Michael Old who, Baxter states, was “for zeal known through much of England”.<sup>6</sup>

Baxter was ordained at Bridgnorth and later moved to Kidderminster, and also became a chaplain to the Parliamentary army. He became increasingly critical of episcopacy but, after the Restoration, was briefly chaplain to Charles II. He became a Nonconformist, being prosecuted under the notorious Judge Jeffreys in 1685 and put in prison for two years. The last four years of his life were spent in honour and peace.

While at Kidderminster Shrewsbury's need of a minister was pressed upon him. Baxter wrote to Francis Tallents (1619 - 1708), then at Lichfield, suggesting that he serve as lecturer and curate at St Mary's, Shrewsbury. The letter was conveyed by Dr Thomas Hill of Magdalen College, Cambridge and was dated late 1652.

Tallents in 1652 settled down as minister of this Shrewsbury parish. Baxter in his letter admitted that Tallents would suffer “discouragements” but he would have the compensations of ministering to a godly people “who did not lack Christian charity”. Tallents served the church with distinction, though on account of prejudice against the ministers of the Commonwealth period, his name is omitted on the list of incumbents. Instead the words “no priest” appear under the dates 1652-62. In 1662 Tallents was on several occasions imprisoned in Shrewsbury Castle for unlicensed preaching. Yet Tallents' ministry in the town was praised by his contemporaries, justifying the report of his first schoolmaster “that he had not only silver but golden talents”.<sup>7</sup>

In 1635 Francis Tallents became tutor to the sons of the Earl of Suffolk and in 1642 visited the continent with them. In 1670 he returned to France, taking with him John Hampden (son of Richard Hampden) and Theophilus Boscowen whose death is related in the postscript to Tallents' Journal, prepared as an obituary for the bereaved

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 12-13. CR 19.

<sup>7</sup> CR 474.

parents, on his return. The account closes with a description of the scene at the sick bed and the efforts made to combat the smallpox. The funeral service occurred at Saberne, sixteen miles from Strasbourg. The disease took seven days to run its course and Tallents supplied Sir Hugh Boscowen with all the details. The potions and cordials, with the diet, are described under each day, and related to the bereaved parent-“tokens of repentance and of the work of God in him, in this, his sickness”. He was surrounded by his close friends and pastor having received the ordinance of communion from his tutor's hand, being made the subject of his most earnest prayers, and supported by the tender consolations of Christian faith.

It was a chastened party which returned home, sailing from Calais to Dover on the 25 July 1673. The coach travelled via Canterbury where he wrote of the Walloons “great church and congregation, under a part of the Cathedral”! He took the coach through Rochester, coming that night to Gravesend where the town was full of soldiers. In late July he wrote “We set out by boat for London and met his Majesty in his barge going to see his soldiery and the Fleet, Seeing as we passed the ruins in Wapping made a little before by a bad fire, when some hundreds of houses had been destroyed, which I hope may be raised again out of their ashes, and made like those stately buildings we saw everywhere when we entered into the City.”<sup>8</sup>

He made further visits to France during the years of his ministry at High Street Chapel, Shrewsbury which opened in 1691. There he was assisted from 1700 by the Welsh scholar, James Owen Rees (1654-1706), his fellow minister for some years. Indeed Owen removed the academy he had founded at Oswestry to Shrewsbury and

---

<sup>8</sup> For the postscript in Tallents' Journal 1670-73 see CHC Mag vol 2, no 4, May-June 1988 36-42.

continued teaching there. Tallents died in 1708 and was buried at St Mary's Shrewsbury on 15th April.<sup>9</sup>

Ministers like these brought their faith to Shrewsbury and nurtured the town's Nonconformist churches. Their influence was carried westward into Wales and was felt along the Marches. The history of Shrewsbury and its environs testifies to the strength of their achievements, the impact of which may still be traced.

T Watts

---

<sup>9</sup> CR 475. For James Owen (1654-1706) see DNB and Dictionary of Welsh Biography. H .McLachlan English Education Under the Test Acts (Manchester 1931).

## **Robert Tutchin and the Beginnings of Newport Congregational Church, Isle of Wight**

In 1642 Newport was part of the parish of Carisbrooke and was served by St Thomas', the daughter church of St Mary's Carisbrooke. Alexander Rosse was the rector of Carisbrooke and had under him a curate in Newport, William Harby, and another at Northwood, John Church.<sup>1</sup> In December 1645 Rosse was "sequestered" and moved to London, leaving the vast parish of Carisbrooke without a rector, and a move began to "make the Borough parochial", i.e. a parish in its own right. (This was not achieved until two centuries later). About the same time William Harby moved to Gatcombe leaving the Borough "as sheep without a shepherd and destitute of food for our souls". From then on for about nine years the borough was without a settled minister and "filling the pulpit" was a real problem. Ministers from other parishes helped out and were paid about ten shillings per service (perhaps £50 in present money). "To Mr Barnade for preaching two sermons 12s 6d". In 1652 Mr Robert Nicholson "was preaching upon trial" but was not admitted. In these nine years eight ministers came and went, but early in 1654 two burgesses went to Dorchester, a very Puritan town, to open negotiations with Mr Robert Tutchin.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Tutchin was ordained deacon in Bristol 1625 and priest in 1627. By 1642 he was lecturer in Bridport, and became rector there in 1646. We do not know how long he was there, or where he was until he was elected minister of Newport on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1654 where he stayed until his death in 1671. Between 1656 and 1660 he was

---

<sup>1</sup> A G Matthews Walker Revised (1948) 189, and for Rosse (1591-1654) see Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>2</sup> Calamy Revised 498. Also see under John Tutchin (1661?-1707) Dictionary of National Biography.

assisted by William Bicknell. Then a Puritan and probably a Presbyterian, he would have used the Presbyterian order of worship - the Directory - instead of the Book of Common Prayer and worn a black gown instead of a surplice. The communion table would have been placed in the nave of the church, not railed off at the east end if the chancel was an altar; the people would have taken communion standing or sitting around the table, and would not have been required to bend the knee at the name of Jesus. We can see him as a "painful" (painstaking) minister, preaching regularly at each service, giving the Wednesday lecture in the Church, instructing his flock, visiting the sick and caring for the poor of whom there were many. He was much loved. But he was strict. The parish clerk, one William Hayles, did not match up to Tutchin's high moral standards; he was "notoriously scandalous". Tutchin tried to get him removed "but through the malignancy of some in power, Hayles is kept in as clerk which much obstructs reformation". Tutchin appealed to Cromwell with success and John Ledger "a pious and godly man" was elected clerk. After the Restoration Ledger was put out.

With the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the atmosphere changed, and godliness became obsolete. In 1662 the Act of Uniformity ordered that unless a minister used the Book of Common Prayer, accepted the 39 Articles, renounced Presbyterianism, swore allegiance to the Crown and was re-ordained by a bishop he could no longer have a living. The act came into force on St Bartholomew's Day 1662, when approximately two thousand ministers were ejected, Robert Tutchin among them. But he stayed in Newport and continued to minister to his flock. "He was so well beloved of the inhabitants that when he was turned out they allowed him the same stipend as when he was their minister ". He probably held services in private houses. Then in 1664 the Conventicle Act prohibited five or more people from meeting for worship (except in the parish church) and the next year the Five Mile Act forbade any ejected minister or schoolmaster from coming within five miles of the town where he had held office. Tradition has it that Tutchin met his flock in a field near Godshill each



Sunday (they walked there) for divine service. Such was the first minister of the Nonconformist church in Newport, whose tradition lives on today. O God to us may grace be given to follow in his train.<sup>3</sup>

He died in 1671 and was buried in the parish church on 1<sup>st</sup> September: the funeral sermon was delivered by the then vicar, Matthew Goldsmith; clearly they were one in Christ.

P D Hooper

---

<sup>3</sup> Tutchin's three sons John, Robert and Samuel, were also ejected from their livings at Fowey (Cornwall), Brockenhurst, Boldre, (Hampshire) and Odiham (Hampshire) respectively. John and the younger Robert were licensed as Presbyterians in 1672 while Samuel served as a chaplain for the East India Company and died at Fort St George, Madras in 1674. CR 498-9.

## A Man of the Word and the Nation

### A Personal Tribute to the Rev Dr R.Tudur Jones

*“The ‘Congregational Way’ emerged as a distinctive and powerful expression of the Christian faith in England and Wales in the tempestuous years that followed 1640 but its pre-history extends back over the previous ninety years.”<sup>4</sup>*

At first sight the opening sentence of R.Tudur Jones’<sup>5</sup> major history of Congregationalism in England 1662 - 1962 seems dry and reserved. Yet the story that emerges in the following paragraphs is “distinctive ... powerful ... tempestuous.”

Much the same could be said of the man who wrote this classic history of English Congregationalism. At first encounter, and to those who did not get to know him better, R.Tudur Jones could appear dry and reserved, austere even. Nothing was further from the truth, as might be suspected from the guffaws of laughter, emerging from the staff room at coffee time at Coleg Bala Bangor as Principal Tudur Jones and Prof. Alwyn Charles met for their regular, much loved break together.

1962 saw the publication of Congregationalism in England and also marked the beginning of that tempestuous decade which saw the creation of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and then the United Reformed Church. As the debates got under way it became

---

<sup>4</sup> R.T. Jones, Congregationalism in England 1662 - 1962 (1962) 13

<sup>5</sup> Robert Tudur Jones, theologian, church historian, preacher, teacher, writer, politician, nationalist, Christian; born Llanystumdwy, Sir Caernarfon, 28 June 1921; minister at Aberystwyth 1948-1950, professor of Church History, Bala Bangor Theological College, 1950 - 1966, principal 1966-1988; married 1948 Gwenllian Edwards (two sons, two daughters and one son deceased); died Bangor, Gwynedd 23 July 1998.

apparent that Tudur Jones was not simply fascinated by the history of Congregationalism but very much committed to the future of the Congregational Way. So it was that when the newly formed Congregational Association called a public meeting to discuss the Congregational Way at Caxton Hall during the May Meetings in 1969, Tudur Jones was the speaker. He gave, as my father later said, “a masterly survey of our glorious history and the basic principles our Fathers had enunciated and maintained.”<sup>6</sup>

In the next ten years Tudur<sup>7</sup> became a good friend, not just to the Congregational Association and then to the Congregational Federation, but also to my father and my family. In moments of despondency and heartache Tudur was a constant source of encouragement to my father and a tower of strength ... in more ways than one!

The keynote speaker at the 143<sup>rd</sup> Congregational Assembly in 1974, the Federation’s second, organised by Highbury Congregational Church, Cheltenham, he took as his theme “Jesus Christ the Liberator”. A brief summary of that speech captures very much the spirit of the man.

*Faith is freedom. We are servants of God’s movement of liberation.*

*Freedom towards God: we are set free from the trammels of unbelief and agnosticism, so that we can believe in God. God says to us, “You may believe, dare to believe, do not be afraid to believe.”*

*Freedom towards God’s people: the Church is the liberated society of the people who have open access through Christ to the*

---

<sup>6</sup> R.W.Cleaves, Congregationalism 1960 - 1976 - The Story of the Federation (Swansea, 1977) 42.

<sup>7</sup> Tudur was known not by his first name Robert nor his surname Jones, but by the name Tudur, adopted by his sons as their family name. It is important to realise that the Welsh u is pronounced as the letter ‘i’ in the word ‘did’.

*throne of grace. Jesus Christ is the unity of His Church. All God's people have direct access to the head of the Church.*

*Freedom to bear testimony in the World: this is what we exist for. Christ has called us so that we might be free to serve our neighbour.*<sup>8</sup>

Tudur's fine peroration to that address gave my father the inspiration for the cover design of his account of the story of the Federation. Tudur Jones closed by quoting from the preface of Matthias Maurice's Monuments of Mercy (1729). Maurice mentions one who made the boast, "*I have rooted Independency out of Kent, and I am resolved I will root it out of Essex.*" And then Maurice makes the rejoinder, "*But alas! All will be in vain; so long as the Root of it is in the Bible it will grow again.*"<sup>9</sup>

Since those early days Tudur gave practical support and encouragement to the Congregational Federation. He played a full part in the life of the International Congregational Fellowship, helping it to get started, and 1981-85 presiding over its affairs. He served as Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council of England and Wales 1985-86. Many will remember his hospitality during the meetings of the International Congregational Fellowship in Bangor. Tudur's lifelong commitment to ministerial training has left its mark on the Federation too. Not a few of the ministers who have had a college training since the beginning of the Federation went to Coleg Bala-Bangor and valued the personal interest Tudur took in their ministry. His positive encouragement and the interest he took have left their marks. At the same time he served first the Ministerial Training Board and in more recent years the Training Board, as external examiner for the module on Congregational History and Principles. With grace he served the Federation in a significant, but little noticed way.

Tudur had time for people, showing in small but practical ways his commitment to them. He had a remarkable gift, all too rare, of

---

<sup>8</sup> Cleaves op cit 110

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 110f.

making you feel that you really mattered. The welcome he and Gwenllian gave to all at Bala-Bangor made us feel as if we belonged to their extended family. His enthusiasm for study, and its relevance for the church and the world, were infectious, leaving a mark, not only on those who studied under him, but at one remove on their congregations too. It was particularly moving for me, when Dr Tudur and Mrs Jones supported my family, not only when my father died but at my mother's death too. I am only sorry I could not return the compliment when I was prevented from attending the service in memory of Tudur at his very sudden death in July 1998.

My personal remarks might end there although I have hardly begun to tell the 'distinctive ... powerful ... tempestuous story' of Robert Tudur Jones. That story warranted lengthy obituaries in the Guardian, Independent, Telegraph and Times.<sup>10</sup> Few on our roll of ministers have had such standing. Yet it speaks of Tudur's modesty that we were mostly unaware of the treasure in our midst.

"Among the intelligentsia of Wales the name of R. Tudur Jones belongs to the most distinguished Church historian and theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He was a prolific writer on both religious and political subjects, whose work is characterised by meticulous, wide-ranging scholarship, immense intellectual gifts, forthright judgements and, particularly in the case of his writing in Welsh, a profound sense of the beauty of language."<sup>11</sup>

The opening words of the Independent's obituary give the key both to his stature and to our ignorance of Tudur. On the one hand, his immense output of academic works and journalism place him among the few theologians and church historians who command respect not only in the university, but also as a popular writer. Estimates suggest that he wrote 1,750 articles and reviews, and altogether published 3,500 pieces. So effective was he with his articles for the popular

---

<sup>10</sup> To these obituaries by Meic Stephens and Densil Morgan among others, I am indebted for the outline of Tudur's life and work.

<sup>11</sup> The Independent 27-7-98

press that he was offered a permanent post at the Daily Express for three times the salary of a theological college principal! Needless to say, he turned the offer down, preferring the less lucrative but ultimately more rewarding task which he considered to be the calling of God.

Where is this immense scholarship? We who live on the wrong side of Offa's Dyke know little about Tudur for it is in Welsh libraries and on the shelves of Welsh speakers. In addition to numerous reviews, a weekly column in the Welsh weekly, Y Cymro, he published a major work almost every year and usually in Welsh. His magisterial work on the History of Congregationalism in England was followed in 1966 by an equally authoritative history of Congregationalism in Wales, Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru. Then came in 1975 Yr Undeb: Hanes Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg 1872 - 1972, a major work on the history of the Union of Welsh Independents.

Born in the picturesque village of Llanystumdwy, just outside Criccieth, the birthplace of David Lloyd George, Robert Tudur Jones grew up in Rhyl where his father was a railway worker and his mother kept lodgers. Although a more English speaking community than Llanystumdwy, at Rhyl Tudur's family treasured Welsh culture, the Welsh language and the Nonconformist traditions of Congregationalism. Scholarships and prizes were the order of the day for Tudur at the County School in Rhyl and at the University College of North Wales in Bangor. As was customary in the theological colleges, he first studied for a B.A. in the university, in 1942 taking a first in Philosophy. He then studied for the B.D. at Coleg Bala-Bangor, in Bangor, and in 1945 took a double distinction in Theology. At Mansfield College, Oxford he was awarded the D.Phil. for a thesis on the Welsh Puritan Vavasor Powell.

That fascination with Welsh Puritanism and scholarly attention to detail stood Tudur in good stead always. His publications on the early Welsh Puritans made him a world authority. Many articles on Welsh church history and Congregationalism in the New International

Dictionary of the Christian Church are the work of Tudur Jones.<sup>12</sup> One critic stated that “he was quite simply the most prolific and important writer on religion in Wales in Stuart times”.

From Mansfield there followed two semesters at the Protestant Faculty of the University of Strasbourg. This played an influential part in Tudur’s life in different ways. He keenly traced the roots of his understanding of the Church and Christian faith, not just to the history of dissent in Wales and England, but also to the continental reformation. A follower of Calvin, much taken with Karl Barth, he kept the works of Luther and the commentaries of Calvin on the shelves in the staff room at Bala-Bangor. Tudur valued the studies of Calvin which Alwyn Charles was undertaking at Bangor, though sadly his untimely death prevented their publication. Tudur published one of the finest, popular introductions to the Reformation in English. Carefully speaking of ‘reformations’ in the plural, he regarded “The Protestant Reformations” as “a momentous revival of Christianity, the greatest since the age of the apostles.”<sup>13</sup>

Passionate about the principles of Protestantism, Nonconformity, Congregationalism and Dissent, Tudur’s evangelicalism, with its commitment to the authority of the Bible, was yet open to the best in all traditions. His graciousness allied him to a commitment to unity in diversity which marks the Congregationalism he espoused. Among the last honours he received was to be elected an honorary president of the Evangelical Alliance.

Those years in post-war Strasbourg, 1947-48, left their mark in other ways. Tudur was a lover of Europe and its nations. At Bangor he had married a fellow student, Gweallian Edwards. A French teacher who taught French through the medium of Welsh, Gweallian shared Tudur with everyone else for eleven months of the year.

---

<sup>12</sup> J.D.Douglas (ed), The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (1974)

<sup>13</sup> R.T. Jones, The Great Reformation - From Wyclif to Knox - two centuries that changed the course of history (1985) 261

August was for the family and when she kept her French up to scratch. Tudur delighted in the opportunity to spend a long holiday with the family in France. The August routine was quite clear - a week 'ar y maes', on the field at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, and then France.

He loved the diversity of European culture, particularly expressed in the small nations. To outsiders Welsh nationalism can seem very insular. That was not how Tudur understood it. One of his most significant books, which should be compulsory reading in the year that Wales and Scotland each gain an assembly, and when the euro was launched, was published in English in 1975 as The Desire of Nations. A member of Plaid Cymru, twice a General Election candidate, and briefly editor of their journal, Y Ddraig Goch, Tudur here outlined the political and theological foundations of a gentle, warm-hearted, internationalist nationalism. It's a book I should love to re-read, if only the person I lent it to would return it!<sup>14</sup> It is a Christian world view which needs to be understood.

On his return from Strasbourg, Tudur was ordained at Seion, the Welsh Congregational Church, in Aberystwyth in 1948. Generations of students were subsequently regaled with his experiences. He was full of rich anecdotes, drawn from those days. He had no time for the judgementalism which easily creeps into church life. His convictions were held with grace. I remember a heated discussion in which some rejected the church as moribund, citing a tiny congregation of well-to-

---

<sup>14</sup> An influence upon Plaid Cymru and its understanding of nationalism within Europe was the Polish writer, Leopold Kohr, see his analysis of nationalism in Europe The Breakdown of Nations (1978). Kohr's philosophy was popularised by E.F.Schumacher in Small is Beautiful (1973). Study Kohr's Breakdown of Nations, Schumacher's Small is Beautiful and Tudur's The Desire of Nations in the context of Congregationalism's commitment to the autonomy under God of the local church and to unity in diversity, and in the context of Plaid Cymru's commitment to small nations in a united yet diverse Europe.



do women in hats. Tudur listened quietly as the conversation grew more intense. He then began to describe vividly chapels he knew in rural Wales, through his weekly itinerant preaching, where the few elderly women seemed to be there just for appearances. One woman, an elderly relative, Tudur attended at her bedside shortly before she died. Movingly he told us that in those moments he glimpsed a rich, strong, humbling faith which only God would see in all its glory. "Who are we to judge by appearances?" Tudur asked, in that imperious way which was so formidable to those with whom he took issue. Our task is to share the Gospel. God has most certainly not asked us to judge!

In 1950 he became Prof. of Church History at Bala-Bangor theological college. That involved a commitment to the inter-denominational school of theology of the University of Wales in Bangor, of which Bala-Bangor was one constituent body. Tudur became principal in 1966. After the amalgamation of Coleg Bala-Bangor with Coleg Coffa in Aberystwyth in 1988, Tudur continued his involvement with the university, lecturing in Christian thought and church history. His lectures on the history of Christian thought caught the imagination, as he enthusiastically related the Christian story twice weekly, in Welsh and in English.

Contextual theology had not been heard of in those days and never did enter the curriculum at Bala-Bangor. Yet Tudur's approach to study, church life, and ministerial training was supremely contextual. His two-volume study of religion and society in Victorian and Edwardian Wales, Ffydd ac Argyfwng Cenedl, (1981 and 1982) shows by its title an awareness of the inseparableness of faith and action, theology and politics, religion and society - "Faith and the Crisis of a Nation".

Alongside the lectures came the weekly column in Y Cymro, the widely read Welsh newspaper, dedicated to the issues of the day, often political, always with a Christian perspective. His pacifism was expressed in direct action when called for. When the first of the great reservoirs to serve the cities of midlands England threatened the

destruction of a Welsh community, Tryweryn, Tudur joined those sitting in the road to prevent the contractors moving in.<sup>15</sup> His support of the Cymdeithas Yr Iaith, in its campaign to introduce bi-lingual road signs, led him into conflict with the authorities, as he defended the students spearheading that campaign from Bala-Bangor. An English speaker arriving in Welsh-speaking Bala-Bangor, I mistakenly imagined that the numerous English signs, found in various nooks and crannies in the college, were out of deference to me. The campaign for the language and culture bore fruit not just in bi-lingual road signs, but in the strength of Welsh language schools, and Welsh language broadcasting.

The plaudits continued to the end of his life. He was awarded a D.Litt. by the University of Wales in 1986, the year when the festschrift Y Gair a'r Genedl - the Word and the Nation - was published. The festschrift's title captures the two sides of the coin which was Tudur's Christian commitment. He was truly a man of the Word and the Nation. His love for his own language, with its wonderful poetry, shines through the book, published last August at the National Eisteddfod, a week after his death. The title of this collection of essays is Grym y Gair a Fflam y Ffydd - Densil Morgan, writing in the Guardian, suggests the translation "The Power of the Word and the Flame of the Faith". I prefer to retain the alliteration, translating the title as "The Weight of the Word and the Flame of the Faith!"<sup>16</sup>

Tudur was a very private person, refusing an entry in Who's Who. As much as his faith and his nation, he treasured his family. All those privileged to know Tudur were equally privileged to be drawn into his extended family. Gwenllian was there for all the students of Bala-

---

<sup>15</sup> This incident was lovingly portrayed at the last Assembly of the Union of Welsh Independents, attended by Tudur in Dolgellau in 1998.

<sup>16</sup> An anthology of nonconformist texts awaited publication at the time of his death.

Bangor. Our thoughts, prayers and thanks are with Gwennllian, Nest, Geraint, Meleri and Alun, particularly recalling Rhys who, like his brothers, entered the ministry, but sadly died only two years before Tudur.

We began with the opening words of Tudur's History of Congregationalism in England. Perhaps we should finish with the closing words of that book.

*For almost four centuries, Congregationalism has nurtured in its churches men and women who walked all their days in the fear and love of God. That is the greatest contribution any Church can make to the life and the history of the nation in which it is set.<sup>17</sup>*

Tudur was one of the finest of those men and women.

Richard Cleaves<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Jones, op cit 465.

<sup>18</sup> I studied under Tudur at Coleg Bala-Bangor 1974-77 and he supervised my thesis.

## BOOK REVIEWS

**A Town of Two Bridges: Searching for God in Newport Pagnell.** By Marilyn Lewis. Pp 120. 1999. The New Rectory, 81 High Street, Newport Pagnell, Milton Keynes, MK16 8AB. £7.50 each. £9.00 including p and p.

This series of six essays on Newport Pagnell's past aims to put local people, institutions and events into a wider context of English church history. Marilyn Lewis sets before her readers the hospitals of medieval Newport Pagnell, one for lepers and the other becoming an almshouse for the poor, under the rule of St Augustine. She writes of the Easter sepulchre in Newport Pagnell parish church where the consecrated host would be kept between the liturgy of Good Friday and dawn on Easter day. Thomas Whatley was a local official who co-operated with Thomas Cromwell to bring about the dissolution of the monasteries, especially dealing with Tickford Priory and Lavendon Abbey. Francis Presse supported King Charles I during the English Civil War and, therefore, suffered ejection from the rectory of Moulsoe at the hands of parliamentary authorities.

Mrs Lewis then turns her attention to the Newport Pagnell Academy 1782-1850 which, as she writes, is largely the story of three generations of the Bull family who educated young men for the ministry of the Congregational churches. This is the longest of her chapters and provides useful information on the dissenting academies, as well as the Congregationalism of the period, whilst concentrating on this institution at Newport Pagnell. William Bull provides a link to his friend Rowland Hill of Surrey Chapel, and the Clapham Sect, Charles Simeon and William Romaine. He was on good terms also with John Newton of Olney and the poet William Cowper. Prompted by John Clayton, minister of the King's Weigh House, London, Bull opened his academy in 1783. He was succeeded by Thomas Palmer Bull as tutor until he, in turn, was joined by his son Josiah in 1831.

Lastly Mrs Lewis offers her reflections on the nature of history and its links to Christian faith. She states that for a "Christian historian, the study of the church's past can be a discipline closely akin to prayer". And in loving past Christians "as our neighbours, we become aware that their lives are not confined to the past". Clearly in these essays she betrays her own love for Newport Pagnell and its people of faith. Her own warm faith finds expression in part through her historical studies.

The book results from deep interest in the town as well as detailed research. Each chapter is accompanied by a separate bibliography citing primary and secondary sources. Marilyn Lewis has now written four volumes on the history of Christian faith and experience in Newport Pagnell. Anyone interested in these subjects and this town should consult her work.

**Zion Congregational Church, Llanhilleth: A Brief History of the church's life** by Vivienne Nicholls. Pp 43. Obtainable from the author, 7 Maesycnew Terrace, Llanhilleth, Abertillery, Gwent, NP3 2RR. 1997, £3.00 plus postage.

**The English Congregational Church Carmarthen: "This Beautiful Little Place of Worship"** by Nan Evans and Ken Gravelle. Pp.viii, 73. Obtainable from Mr E Fretten, Aberclettwr, Llandysul, Ceredigion, SA44 4RA. 1998. No price.

These two churches provide evidence of the continued vigour and faith of Congregationalism in south Wales. They are both English speaking although, of course, there are obvious differences. Llanhilleth is situated among the eastern valleys in the former south Wales coalfield. This is an English speaking area which has experienced in the twentieth century great industrial unrest and, especially in recent years, considerable unemployment among its male population. Carmarthen is an ancient town, associated with the Arthurian legends as the town of Merlin, and was 2000 years ago a Roman settlement. It

is set among the western Welsh who are much more likely to be Welsh speakers. Immediately opposite the English Congregational chapel in Lammas Street, Carmarthen is a Welsh Independent chapel emphasizing the two communities. Carmarthen is not an industrial centre, like the varied townships of the Gwent valleys, but rather an administrative centre, a market town, amid the farms of the Tywy flood plain.

Zion arose out of a fellowship which began meeting in 1874. The first building opened in 1877 and now survives as a schoolroom. Those individuals who gave money had their names inscribed on the foundation stones, some of which are still visible. The first minister, the Rev J W Jones, served 1882-5 before going to Australia on grounds of health. On his return in 1929 he and Mrs Jones were given a welcome home tea in their honour. Clearly Zion's hospitable folk had long and grateful memories!

In 1874 Llanhilleth was an agricultural area but by 1900 the collieries were an established local fact and the population was increasing rapidly. Zion played its part in the making of this new community. Its minister from 1903-1920 was Rev S D Williams who presided over a membership which exceeded 250 at a time of religious revival in Wales. Williams witnessed bravely to his Lord, giving his coat to a tramp on a cold winter's night and consequently dying of pneumonia.

The growth in numbers made a new building necessary and in 1909 the present chapel was opened at a cost of £1,107. The debt took 25 years to clear. During the General Strike of 1926 Zion housed a soup kitchen to feed the community; serving bread, cheese, and corned beef sandwiches, as well as soup and tea.

In the 1940s Zion acquired its pipe organ from a bombed church in London and it remains a prized asset. Dinners and dances were held in the schoolroom during the war. Many walked from outlying hamlets three times on a Sunday to attend worship. Zion's membership declined with the fall in the local population and the closure of the colliery.

Vivienne Nicholls tells a good story in this little book. As pastor of the church she is well placed to know the facts but modestly she says little of her own contribution. Certainly there is a bias towards recent years but this worthwhile history was written in part to support those efforts to raise finance. All proceeds from the sale will go towards the church roof fund.

The history of Lammas Street English Congregational Church, Carmarthen is a more ambitious production. It contains twenty-six photographs and is broken up into sections dealing with different aspects of the church's life. Eric Fretten, the current pastor, in his foreword describes the history as a "warts and all account", skilfully combining anecdote and cameo to tell its tale. This is true but the authors relate their story to the history of the town and of its churches as a whole.

Incoming English families in the mid 19th century led to plans for the new Congregational cause being made in 1861. A moving spirit behind the scheme was Dr Thomas Nicholas, a Congregational minister, who had come to Carmarthen in 1856 to teach theology and philosophy in the Presbyterian College there. The foundation stone was laid in July 1861 by that ubiquitous benefactor of Congregationalism, H O Wills of Bristol, and the church opened for worship in May 1862. Sermons were preached by Henry Allon (not Allan as printed on page four) and Newman Hall, both of London, and also by Caleb Morris, all of them well known. This launched the church in some style, fine English and Welsh preachers at the outset. Indeed 1862 marked the bicentenary of the Nonconformist ejections and in tribute the church formally constituted itself in August that year.

Dr Nicholas left Carmarthen in 1863 to add his voice to those advocating the cause of Welsh higher education which led, to the founding of the first university college in Wales, at Aberystwyth in 1872. The first church members, twenty in all, came from different walks of life - a merchant, two drapers, a domestic servant etc. Two transferred from Kentish Town and one from Islington, in London,

while nine moved across the road from the Welsh Congregational chapel.

In 1875 W H Williams of Brynamman, a student at the Presbyterian College, became a church member. He had been a collier for twenty years and in 1879 became a teacher at Llangadock. He is famous still wherever Welsh is spoken as Watcyn Wyn, a bard and hymn-writer of great distinction.

The church's minister in the early 1870s was David Rolands (Dewi Mon) who left in 1872 to become a tutor at Brecon College where he served as principal from 1897 until his death in 1907. Other ministers, the building's interior, financial worries, the maintenance of the fabric, the purchase of the first manse in 1945 are all discussed, as is also the manse's being struck by a thunderbolt in 1968, and the fight against the perennial enemy, dampness.

The church's close link with the Presbyterian College, war-time developments and the Sunday School are described, including a full account of the 1898 Sunday School outing to Llanstephan. Notable among the members was Judge J Lloyd Morgan K.C. who joined the church in June 1888 and was still active in the 1940s.

Falling church attendances were a feature of the 1960s and 70s. Although like Zion, Llanhilleth, the church decided not to join the United Reformed Church in 1972, its minister left in 1973 to serve the new denomination. The book also tells the story of developments in the 1980s and Eric Fretten's involvement with the church and the upturn which it has experienced with his ministry.

Neither of these accounts is objective for they are both written by loyal friends and members of their churches. Yet they are worthy and informative. Certainly the stories of these households of faith deserve to be better known and the authors should be commended for their efforts.

Alan Argent



**Under God's Good Hand by D Cornick, London, United Reformed Church of UK. 1998 Ppviii +214. £12.95. ISBN 0 85356 175 9**

Many moons ago (as it now seems) those hoping to train for the Congregational ministry at Lancashire Independent College were required to sit an entrance examination comprising a number of papers, one of which was entitled 'The History and Principles of Congregationalism'. For this the set books were Albert Peel, A Brief History of English Congregationalism (1931), and Ernest J Price, A Handbook of Congregationalism (1924). The fourth impression of the former appeared in 1960, a new edition of the latter in 1957. Daniel Jenkins and the late Erik Routley are among those who have subsequently written on the polity and history of Congregationalism; others have written on Presbyterianism and the Churches of Christ, but thus far the United Reformed Church has lacked its 'Peel' and 'Price': handy volumes - yet sufficiently substantial - which might be offered to ordinands and church members, or to those pondering membership; or which might at least serve as the basis of discussion in membership classes or in ecumenical circles. Now, at the end of the first quarter of a century of its life the URC has its 'Peel'. Principal David Cornick of Westminster College, Cambridge, has faced the daunting task of telling the story of the three traditions (Congregational, Presbyterian and Churches of Christ) which comprise the URC in reasonable compass, and in such a way as to reach readers of many types and backgrounds. Only a person who really knows his field can see the wood for the trees in the way required; only a gifted communicator can engage the required audience with material of this kind. Cornick is more than competent in both respects, and his book will meet a real need for many years to come.

There is no need here to rehearse the contents of the book in detail. Suffice it to say that we set out from the continental Reformation, proceed through the English Reformation, and then meet the Separatist harbingers of Congregationalism and Thomas Cartwright

and those of the Presbyterian party. There follows an account of the religious wars of the seventeenth century, of the Act of Uniformity and its successors, and of the period leading to the Toleration Act of 1689. The varied fortunes of the Dissenters during the eighteenth century are discussed, and the evangelicals in their several varieties are introduced. Landmarks in the nineteenth century include the rebirth of English Presbyterianism and the formation of the Churches of Christ. We come finally to our own century, with its wars, its ecumenism, the birth of the URC, and an account of the new church's first twenty five years. In a postscript the general theological and ecclesiological character of the URC is delineated.

The book is most attractively printed (though the top line of p197 has been transferred to the bottom of p 190); it is enhanced by generally good illustrations (and whether the illegibility of the reproduced page of the Westminster Confession is symbolic of anything I know not!); it is furnished with suggestions for reading (the name of the distinguished historian R Tudur Jones being misspelled), and with references and an index. There are useful time-charts, though from the pictorial representation of "The story so far..." with which the book opens, the formation of the Churches of Christ is omitted, and the Separatists are less helpfully described as Independents. By the time I had finished reading, a few pages were beginning to come loose. I suspect that some readers would welcome a glossary of terms: for example, "predestination" (here introduced without definition) is, for good or ill, not part of most Christians' familiar discourse.

At many points Dr Cornick shows himself abreast of current scholarship. This comes out especially in his balanced treatment of the Reformation, his judicious handling of the thorny question of the turn of eighteenth century English and Welsh Presbyterianism towards Unitarianism and his remarks on the state of the Church of England in the same century. Again, while no "mere number cruncher", Cornick understands that his story cannot be told without reference to its socio-political and wider ecclesiastical context, and he skilfully locates the three traditions in their times.

In the hope that this work will run to as many reprints as its predecessors, I should like to make two comments. First, it is unhelpful to say (p 110) that “by the 1880s most Congregationalist scholars had abandoned their belief in the inerrancy of Scripture” (a) because the impression is wrongly given that up to that time Congregational scholars had generally been biblical inerrantists, whereas “inerrancy” is a nineteenth century coinage, and (b) because the term has come to signify a range of biblicist views which emerged concurrently with and, in some writers as an aspect of, twentieth-century biblical fundamentalism.

Secondly - and this is more important: it is staggering that there is no discussion of the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order of 1658 - especially of its appendix on Congregational polity, which remains of considerable ecumenical significance. Related to this is the omission of a reference to the moderate Calvinism of the 1833 “Declaration of Faith of the Congregational Union of England and Wales” - itself a stepping stone on the way to RW Dale’s assessment of the theological situation, which is noted (p 110). From the twentieth century pages, I miss a reference to the Congregational project, “The Next Ten Years”, launched in 1958, which stimulated what must surely have been the most sustained, productive and inclusive example of corporate theologising undertaken by any Free Church denomination this century, and which, *inter alia*, yielded a “Declaration of Faith” - one of this century’s most substantial productions of its kind. It also led to the transformation of the Congregational Union into the Congregational Church - an event significant both as facilitating progress towards the URC, and thus prompting the denominational parting of the ways with those who, for a variety of reasons, felt they could not go forward in this way. Some of these latter may be tempted (and if so, wrongly, I feel) to think that their omission from Cornick’s pages signifies that his work is an “establishment” product.

But the last word must be one of thanks to Principal Cornick for a book which will serve the churches well. May it achieve the wider readership it deserves.

Now, who will “do a Price” for the URC?

Alan P F Sell

**Griffith John Apostle to Central China by Noel Gibbard  
Bryntirion Press, Bridgend CF31 4DX Wales. ISBN 1 85049 150X.  
250 Pp £7.99.**

One vigorous feature of nineteenth century Congregationalism was the consistent interest shown in overseas missionary work. Indeed the names of John Williams, Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, James Chalmers, James Gilmour, among others, deserve to be better known in our own age.

Griffith John, like these, was a missionary giant. In the Edwardian period the weekly newspaper The Christian World mentioned him in almost every issue. He was a legendary figure in his own lifetime, with at least six biographies published before his death in 1912 and two more in the following two years. Yet in more recent years, apart from two further lives in 1931 and 1950, he has been largely ignored.

In part this may be explained by the shift away from sending western missionaries abroad and the natural and appropriate development of the younger churches overseas. Nowadays we detect or suspect a link between evangelism and imperialism. Secondly the field of Griffith John's activity, central China, since the late 1940s has been a no-go area for Christian workers from abroad.

Born in 1831 in Swansea, the youngest of four children, John was to suffer the death of his mother from cholera before he was one year old. He felt that this loss rendered him both morally and spiritually sensitive. His local minister was an advocate of the London

Missionary Society which had been active in Madagascar, especially through the work of three Welshmen. Griffith John became a church member at the unusual age of eight years, as the deacons felt they discovered signs of grace in his life. Soon after joining the church, Ebenezer Independent Chapel, he offered his first public prayer and he would occasionally recite scripture during Sunday worship. Griffith maintained that his Sunday School teacher had taught him to think. Ebenezer had a library of Welsh and English books, although most of the teaching was in Welsh. He first preached, aged 14, without great success and did not return to preaching until he was 16.

Sadly his father died in the cholera epidemic in Swansea in 1849 when Griffith was 18. He nursed him during this illness with its pain and vomiting, watching his father turn blue. The young man was greatly helped by his friends at Ebenezer who recognized his promise and unusual ability.

In September 1850 Griffith John began his studies at Memorial College, Brecon. The teaching was in English although the students attended Plough Chapel, where worship was in Welsh. At Brecon he felt called to missionary work and in 1853 offered himself to the London Missionary Society who sent him to Bedford Missionary Academy in 1854. Madagascar being closed to missionaries, Griffith John agreed to go to China. He was ordained in April 1855 and, one week later, married Margaret Jane Griffiths, whose father had formerly served in Madagascar and had influenced John in that direction.

On the voyage to China, Griffith John immersed himself in his studies - Hebrew, Greek, astronomy, mathematics, physiology etc. He arrived in Shanghai in September 1855, thirteen years after the treaty of Nanking ended the opium war, forcing trade in this drug upon the Chinese. Christian missionaries felt that they should take advantage of the open door. Griffith John was appalled at the squalor of Shanghai - "abominable", "a mean place" - but determined to learn the language.

The treaty of Tientsin in July 1858 opened nine further ports to foreigners who were gained the right to travel and trade throughout China. Three further centres, including Hankow, were also opened

while Christianity was to be tolerated. The missionaries worked in uncertain conditions, never sure how local authorities or Chinese listeners would behave. In 1858 Griffith John preached openly in Hangchow and in 1859 he distributed 4000 Bibles there, yet in 1860 the city was closed to foreign and native Christians. The people changed in three months from being respectful and harmless to being "intolerably impudent". He experienced discouragement. "I am finding that I am preaching to stones", he wrote in 1858.

Yet Griffith John persisted in preaching although he also distributed literature. Converts might be turned out by their families and could be shunned by their fellow villagers. Unlike the Roman Catholics, John and his Protestant colleagues, such as Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission, believed God's word should reach as many of the people as possible and for this, only preaching would do.

Griffith John preached God's grace for sinners yet the Chinese had little concept of sin, as the west understood it. The proud Chinese refused to be penitent and Griffith John was frustrated. He preached in the street, in chapel, in boat, and on river beds and felt a special concern for the poor. He also aimed to give as much responsibility as possible to native Chinese Christians, although he felt they needed foreign supervisors, until the nationals could supervise the mission stations for themselves. Griffith John was revolted by the opium houses which were very common in Szechwan and from which trade Great Britain made £14 to £16 million every year. China knew political disturbance during Griffith John's time. The Taiping movement was anti-foreigner, pro-social reform and had strong religious tendencies (with some Christian influence). Griffith John had conferences with the Taiping rebel leaders in order to understand them. Initially he had deep sympathy for the insurgents who fought to maintain their country's finest traditions as they believed, and he, like them, had no love for the Manchu dynasty. Eventually he turned against the rebels because their methods were so violent and destructive.

In 1861 he moved his base from Shanghai to Hankow to pioneer the Christian mission there on the Yangtze river, which, seven

hundred miles from the sea, was still over one mile wide. He preached daily in his house and undertook also to serve the Europeans in the city. By the end of 1863 twenty-two adults and six children had been baptized in Hankow and Griffith John keenly trained those suitable for leadership, setting apart two Chinese as deacons. In 1864 he opened a school and in a few months two more opened. Soon he had two Chinese preachers in the church with others sent as evangelists to mission stations.

Griffith John knew that the Chinese could conceal inner resentment beneath a veneer of external politeness. He reflected upon and prayed about this tendency. He felt impotent to cope with the world of the spirits, yet another obstacle to his work. In 1861, 1862, 1867 and 1870 John suffered the deaths of his infant children, three sons and a daughter. His faith, therefore, was tested severely. With a colleague he spoke to the governor of the province who argued with them about the teachings of Confucius and of Buddhism and Taoism. Griffith John pushed himself hard, travelling from town to town as best he could, and bringing himself close to exhaustion. He and his wife left China on furlough in 1870, reaching London where they found that their two sons did not know them. Visiting friends and family in Wales they found John's recollection of the Welsh language was poor. He addressed the Congregational Union in Swansea in "the most marvellous and thrilling missionary speech ... ever... heard", as it was described. In 1873 they set out to return to China where they longed to be, but Margaret died on the way in Singapore. Griffith John's remedy was to work even harder.

He was keen to further the role of women in the churches. He felt that unmarried women would be too exposed and, therefore, advocated the use of missionaries' wives, in contrast to Hudson Taylor, who even sent women alone into the interior. Griffith John defended the Chinese workers when the LMS directors wanted to lower their salaries. He had known doubt and spiritual depression but was comforted by the widow of an American missionary, Jeannette Jenkins, whom he married in 1874. Following this, Griffith John began to

display a new power in his preaching so that he expected immediate conviction and conversion. His daily prayer meetings and services resulted in many being moved to tears, with congregations groaning under the guilt of sin and many turning to salvation. All this reminded him of Welsh revival meetings. He had never known it in China before.

Griffith John worked well with other missionaries, his colleagues in the LMS, Wesleyans, Hudson Taylor and agents of the Bible societies. He wrote and circulated tracts. At the missionary conference at Shanghai in 1877 he advocated the use of less scholarly missionaries - men of vigour and faith with "grace, gumption and grit".

In 1881 he returned to Britain and spoke at the Manchester meetings of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. There RW Dale commented, "Such earnestness I have rarely listened to". Jeannette John died in December 1885 after suffering for six years considerable discomfort. Also 1885 Griffith John published his translation of the New Testament in the Wen-li dialect of China.

In 1893 Griffith John's own health began to decline and throughout the 1890s he grew weaker. The Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5 humiliated China and resulted in demands for reform which the missionaries encouraged as an advantage to their work. The Boxer revolutionaries and the riots of 1899 brought China to the forefront of news in the west again. Griffith John remained in Hankow where he was safe, although many LMS stations were destroyed. From 1902 Griffith John's frailty grew more acute, yet in 1905 he was hard at work translating the Old Testament into Chinese. 1905 marked his jubilee of missionary work and in that year and in 1906 Griffith John appealed to the Congregational churches for help. The LMS directors endeavoured to raise £12,000 for the work in Hankow.

In 1906 his health finally necessitated his return to Britain. Among his parting words were, "God gave me to China". He died in July 1912 in a nursing home in Clapton, north London. The funeral was held at Ebenezer Chapel, Swansea with vast crowds lining the streets to the chapel and also to the cemetery at Sketty. The Congregational Union of England and Wales elected Griffith John to



its chair in 1888 but he declined the honour. In 1889 he was granted the DD of Edinburgh University and in 1911 the University of Wales similarly honoured him.

In his final chapter Noel Gibbard offers an assessment of Griffith John's character, creed and contribution. A determined, courageous, magnetic, stubborn, little Welshman who was judged by the Chinese in 1905 as one who "has loved us". He was the apostle of central China who pioneered Christian missions in almost every township of the provinces of Hupeh and Hunan.

This well-produced book has two maps and sixteen photographs. It has thirty pages of references, a bibliography and an index. Tudur Jones contributed the foreword, praising Noel Gibbard's meticulous research and fine study. Indeed at £7.99 this is a bargain for which the publishers should be thanked. I heartily recommend it.

However I should have liked more critical analysis. This is a thorough account of Griffith John's life and work. Other missionary methods are discussed, as are Griffith John's faith and theology, but we are given little treatment of his feelings and errors of judgement. Nor do we learn more than an outline of how he was regarded at home, nor how he felt about becoming a celebrity. China, since Griffith John's day, has suffered considerable turmoil and the Chinese Christians have often been suspected of being disloyal and unpatriotic. Gibbard does not deal at any length with the accusation that the gospel followed the gunboat, and that the missionary and merchant seemed indissolubly linked, as Tudur Jones himself has written elsewhere. To the people of the East it may have appeared that the British extended their interests and influence under a smoke-screen of sermons, prayers, and hymn-singing. Yet Gibbard could say truthfully that such ambiguity was not prominent in Griffith John's own work. I wonder at the absence of Norman Goodall's [A History of The London Missionary Society 1895-1945](#) (1954) from the bibliography.

Alan Argent

**The Congregational Lecture 1998. 'The Words of Our Lips': Language- Use in Free Church Worship by David Hilborn, ISSN 0963-181X Pp 43 1998, £2.00. The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1987) Limited, Carroone House, 14 Farringdon St., London EC4A 4EB.**

In this lecture David Hilborn wants "to suggest the English Reformed tradition as a paradigm case for a relatively new approach to liturgical study... which is concerned primarily to analyse worship as something which takes place as a *'speech-event in real church contexts'*". (pp3-4)

What follows, is, in Dr. Hilborn's own words, a "summary of [his] 1994 doctoral dissertation". In this summary, as in his "much larger work", he follows his original plan, moving from "historical reflection to contemporary analysis" (p4).

In his historical reflection he outlines how " 'Dissenting' Reformed worship" has come to be described as "semi-free" or " 'free' in nature".(p6) He traces this development from the liturgical reforms of Luther, Bucer, Calvin and Knox, via the radical emphasis on extemporary prayer promoted by the rise of Puritanism in England, to the ejection from the Church of England in 1662 of those who subscribed to more extemporary approaches. Hilborn then brings us directly to the crux of the matter. Namely, that "this extemporary bias has made it difficult to trace the development of English Reformed worship in detail, as it has been conducted 'on the ground' ". (p6) Hence, "however intense our reading... of 'library-based' studies of this subject...so long as we confine ourselves to the *written scripts* of English Reformed worship, our knowledge of the language actually *used* in such worship will remain partial and fragmentary". (p7) He concludes this section of his lecture by noting the recovery of a "Genevan balance between printed forms and free prayer" (p7) and "the influence of the ecumenical movement on contemporary Nonconformist rites". (p8) But then goes on to observe that although these latter developments "are clearly important... we should not

suppose that they resolve our fundamental difficulty”. (p8) The URC *Service Book* reflects “only one approach to Reformed Church practice” and, although it offers itself as a resource, “it is a resource which is used rather less in local United Reformed Church services than its authors might have hoped”.(p8) For Dr Hilborn, “if we want to gain an accurate, rather than just a hypothetical or anecdotal understanding of the language used in English Reformed worship today, we would be well advised to record and analyse local church services as they take place in context, rather than engaging simply with their ‘idealised’ form in printed service books”. ... “It is incumbent upon English Reformed liturgists to raise their sights beyond the bookshelf, and set them more seriously on the ‘real world’ of worship”. (p9)

This is precisely what Hilborn has done in his research. Before turning to the findings of his field work however, he seeks to explain the “new liturgiological method”. For the *listener* this erudite explanation is formidable. Indeed, for those not familiar with the terminology, this material, presented as a “speech-event”, is tough going! Nevertheless, a careful reading of the written text is worthwhile. Hilborn’s detailed exposition of a “semiotic” and “pragmatic” approach to liturgy does demonstrate how the method might “enhance our understanding of what we *do* as nonconformist Reformed worshippers” (p9) as well as helping us to understand better our theology of worship.

Dr. Hilborn then traces the “pragmatic consequences of Reformed ‘anti-ritualism’ ”. (p18) On the one hand the English Puritans’ insistence on a pure biblical paradigm for Reformed worship “led to a revival of preaching and proclamation for which the Calvinistic wing of the Reformation has become justly renowned”. (p24) But, “as far as other parts of worship were concerned, the drive to ‘inform’ people theologically appears too often to have compromised the liturgical variety, colour and beauty which the Puritans might otherwise have developed”. (p24) The legacy of their doctrinal didacticism has led to an “ ‘overwhelming’ of the ‘worship

dimension' in Reformed church services by the 'proclamation dimension' ". (p24) This is exemplified in the findings of his own researches. Dr. Hilborn notes that "the compulsion to 'footnote, 'editorialize', 'commentate' and 'instruct' through Reformed liturgy is as pervasive today as in early Reformed worship". (p24)

This compulsion is illustrated in the final part of the lecture in which Hilborn focuses on the field discourses. The citations are indeed often "banal and gauche" (p34), but in my experience they do reflect much (though mercifully not all) of what goes on in contemporary worship. However, whether the approach advocated by Dr. Hilborn will actually do anything to change what he rightly calls the "often stultifying effects of 'didactic monologism' and 'over-informativeness' in the extemporary approach" (p35) remains to be seen. Perhaps those engaged in ministerial education and training (both students and teachers!) should be encouraged to listen to the results of Dr. Hilborn's fieldwork.

Kay Nicoll

**F J A Hort Eminent Victorian by Graham A. Patrick, The Almond Press 1988 still available February 1996, paperback £8.95, hardback £21.50, Pp127.**

With a title reminiscent of the earlier vignettes of the Victorians and Edwardians by Lytton Strachey and Piers Brendon respectively, Dr Patrick, a Methodist minister, presents us with the first full story of Hort. Hort is important because he was in the vanguard of the new liberal theology, the development of which had such a profound - and devastating - influence on Congregationalism (so Michael Watts, Why Did the English. Stop Going to Church?).<sup>1</sup> That

---

<sup>1</sup> Friends of Dr Williams's Library Lecture 1995

influence has been traced in its different facets by W B Glover,<sup>2</sup> R Tudur Jones,<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Rowell,<sup>4</sup> Mark D Johnson<sup>5</sup> and Kenneth D Brown.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years it has been mainly nonconformists who have taken an interest in Hort - Graham Patrick, Stephen Mayor<sup>7</sup> and Gordon Rupp. Professor Rupp's inaugural lecture at Cambridge took Hort as its subject.<sup>8</sup>

Dr Patrick takes us through the successive stages of Hort's life from his evangelical upbringing in Dublin and Cheltenham, through his days as a student at Cambridge, as a Fellow of Trinity (a post which he had to relinquish on marriage to Fanny Holland), then as a parish priest near Hitchin and finally back to Cambridge, as a don at Emmanuel and subsequently and successively Hulsean and Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity.

---

<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century (1954)

<sup>3</sup> Congregationalism in England 1662-1962 (1962)

<sup>4</sup> Hell and the Victorians (Oxford 1974)

<sup>5</sup> The Dissolution of Dissent 1850-1918 (Garland Publishing, USA 1987)

<sup>6</sup> A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales 1800-1930 (Oxford 1988)

<sup>7</sup> "Discussion of the Ministry in Late Nineteenth-Century Anglicanism", The Church Quarterly July 1969, 54-62. I am grateful to Dr Mayor for lending me a copy of this article.

<sup>8</sup> Hort and the Cambridge Tradition (Cambridge 1970, not 1968 as Patrick states). Reprinted in G Rupp Just Men (1977). Admittedly, the then Bishop of Ely, Peter Walker, approached his subject, The Anglican Church Today: Rediscovering a Middle Way (1988 - the book is largely about George Bell), via Hort ("The Signs of a New Age - Fenton John Anthony Hort" 18-23). However, Walker's chapter on Hort was to some degree inspired by Rupp. See also Walker's sermon "Hort Recalled", Theology July 1987, 281-288.

During his student days Hort turned from his evangelical position to a High Church one, feeling unhappy about the attitude of the evangelicals towards the sacraments and biblical criticism. However, Patrick has not properly grasped the evangelical doctrine of inspiration (p 49). Hort appears to have been more liberal than Westcott and Lightfoot - the other two of the legendary Cambridge triumvirate.

Lesser mortals like us might perhaps take comfort that, despite his academic prowess, Hort did experience some failures: he failed to secure the Hulsean essay prize and was unsuccessful in an attempt to gain the chair in Moral Philosophy at Cambridge in 1865. But these were minor blips in a most distinguished record.

This latter fact reminds us that Hort's intellectual interests were wide and, while he attained fame as a New Testament textual critic, his interests embraced Patristics (his DD thesis), the natural sciences and work on the Revised Version. That breadth led him to the conviction that academics should not specialise unduly and thence to his opposition to the establishment of a theological tripos at Cambridge. However, a criticism might be levelled that Hort himself spread his scholarly pursuits too widely. That, at any rate, was how his closest colleagues viewed matters. Another of Hort's foibles was his inability to commit himself to print until he had exhausted the subject in question - a trait I remember discovering about him when I was a young student. First Hort published comparatively little.

Hort responded positively to the liberal approach of Essays and Reviews though he felt the authors had insufficient sensitivity to the supernatural; and Hort believed that the Bible had its supernatural aspect. He felt the conclusions of Darwin's Origin of Species to be unanswerable.

Dr Patrick has availed himself of the two volume Life and Letters by Hort's son, Arthur, and it is from this work that the biographical details are largely drawn. As a source for Hort's theology, Patrick has culled the sermons and has discovered Village Sermons in Outline (1901) "which does not appear to have been used previously as

a primary source". Helpful summaries are provided of Hort's works, usually published lectures or sermons, and there are descriptions of his appearance, mannerisms and an analysis of his personality. The book also includes a photograph of Hort which was presented to the author by the late Gordon Rupp.

Of particular interest to readers of this journal will be the reaction of RW Dale to Hort's Hulsean of 1871 which were published as The Way The Truth and The Life. The equally brilliant Dale professed not to understand the work on first reading! Then Hort's Christian Ecclesia (1897) drew conclusions from its New Testament survey which were quite radical in terms of Anglican and especially the High Church traditions. Dr Patrick lists the conclusions on pages 96 - 97 and he offers some contemporary Anglican and more recent Free Church responses on subsequent pages. Even so, in 1885 Hort had opposed the disestablishment of the Church of England (p 89).

Graham Patrick has provided us with a well-researched and judicious study. An index of subjects would have been useful.

Alan Tovey

### **Our Contemporaries**

The Baptist Quarterly (XXXVII no.6 April 1998)

S James "Revival and Renewal in Baptist Life: The contribution of William Steadman (1764-1837)". T Grass "The Restoration of a Congregation of Baptists: Baptists and Irvingism in Oxfordshire".

M Townsend "John Howard Shakespeare: Prophet of Ecumenism". (no.7 July 1998).

F Bowers "H Howard Williams: Preacher, Pastor - Prophet without honour?)" P Shepherd "Denominational Renewal: A Study in English Baptist Church Life and Growth 1901-1906". M Sutherland "Downgrade Down Under: Conflict and Cohesion among New Zealand Baptists".

(no.8 October 1998)

K J Birch "Richard Gay of Haycombe: An exploration of a story and its influence on local Baptist family and community history". G T

Rimington "Baptist membership in Rural Leicestershire 1881-1914".  
D G Turner "The Origins of the St Albans Baptists".  
(XXXXVIII no.1 January 1999)

I M Randall "Arresting People for Christ: Baptists and the Oxford Group in the 1930's". K Hipper "The Johnsonian Baptists in Norwich". K B E Roxburgh "Edinburgh Behind Closed Doors: The Edinburgh and Lothians Baptist Association Fraternal 1947-1987". L P Chambala "The Development of the Baptist Union of Zambia".

The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society (vol.6 no.1 May 1998)

A Argent "Nursed by the Church: The Founding of the Congregational Schools". C Binfield "A Learned and Gifted Protestant Minister: John Seldon Whale 19 December 1896-17 September 1997". D M Thompson "Reformed or United? Twenty-five Years of the United Reformed Church". B L Pearce "Bunhill Fielders" (poem).

Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society (vol.51 part 5 May 1998)

S R Valentine "Significant Inroads into Satan's Seat - Early Methodism in Bradford 1740-60". M W Jones "Those Mad Methodist Magazines".

(part 6 October 1998)

D Carter "Joseph Agar Beet and the Eschatological Crisis". L Wilson "Conversion amongst female Methodists 1825-75".

(vol.52 part 1)

E J Lenton "Primitive Methodist Camp Meetings in Shropshire". P Forsaith "Charles Wesley Junior: A Portrait by John Russell".

Strict Baptist Historical Society Bulletin (no.25 1998)P Naylor "Sit Down Young Man: John Collett Ryland's alleged rebuke to William Carey".



*Entrust your church insurance to  
someone with experience  
— 100 years of it —*

**The Congregational & General  
Insurance.**

*An insurance company old in  
pedigree but modern in outlook.*



- Competitive rates on church and household buildings and contents
- Friendly and helpful staff able to advise you
- Efficient claims service when you need it
- Substantial donations to the Church — over £2.2m to date.

*For a quotation telephone*

**BRADFORD (0274) 733950**

*or write to:*

**THE CONGREGATIONAL & GENERAL INSURANCE PLC  
CURRER HOUSE, CURRER STREET,  
BRADFORD BD1 5BA, WEST YORKSHIRE**

SECOND HAND AND  
ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS

ANTIQUE MAPS AND  
HISTORICAL PRINTS

## **Clifton Books**

John R. Hodgkins, B.Sc. (Econ.), M.Phil.

34 HAMLET COURT ROAD, WESTCLIFF-ON-SEA  
ESSEX SS0 7LX

### ● **WANTS LIST** ●

We are particularly anxious to buy books on the following subjects:

CHURCH HISTORY

BRITISH HISTORY

SOME THEOLOGY

HISTORY OF MISSIONS

BIOGRAPHIES

LOCAL HISTORY

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT

POLITICAL HISTORY

and similar matters

We also buy general second hand books in large and small quantities

We buy bookcases

*Please contact us. We look forward to hearing from you*

**Telephone: 01702 331004**

**T or Shop: 01543 415718** □

## **THE CASTLE GATE**

### **BOOK SHOP**

THE CONGREGATIONAL CENTRE

4 CASTLE GATE, NOTTINGHAM NG1 7AS

Tel. 0115 911 1453 Fax. 0115 911 1462

STOCK A LARGE SELECTION OF BOOKS

FOR GIFTS AND STUDY

*Greeting Cards, Song Books, Books for Children of Bible*

New and recently published books can be ordered on request