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Revival!

Congregational Studies
Conference 2004

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Derek Swann
Cyril Aston
Eric Alldritt

Congregational Studies Conference
Papers 2004

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The papers are printed in the order in which they were given at the Conference; as usual the contributor is entirely responsible for the views expressed in his papers.

Rev. Derek Swann, was for many years minister of Ashford Congregational Church in Middlesex and the Theological Tutor of the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches.

Rev. Cyril Aston was formerly minister of Honiton Congregational Church in Devon and is presently a regional secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches.

Rev. Eric Alldritt has ministered in Hinckley and Newark and is presently minister of Keswick Congregational Church.

Photographs by Dr Digby L. James

Foreword

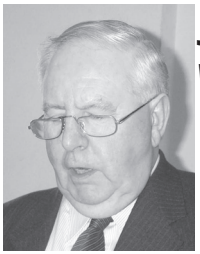
I am sure we were all encouraged by the excellent support at this year's Conference, and we look forward to this being maintained and even growing, despite having to change our very familiar and traditional venue at Westminster Chapel to another of our EFCC churches in London: Highbury Quadrant Congregational Church, for the 2005 Conference. We will outline ways of getting there on the booking form.

Not least, we are again grateful to our three speakers for all the work put in to prepare the papers and for the stimulation they provided. In a day of small things, we need all the reminders of God's gracious and sovereign power in revival that we can get, particularly as an encouragement to prayer. Derek Swann provided us with a judicious assessment of the 1904 revival in Wales, and the part played by Congregationalists in it. It was good to hear that despite the negative attack on Evan Roberts by the Rev. Peter Price, there were others like Keri Evans who warmly supported the work and shared in it. Perhaps a detailed study of Evans' life and experience would be a further help to us.

Cyril Aston did us a great service in resurrecting both the memory and the life of James Montgomery. His talents were many and his output of hymns and poetry amazing. We should surely use more of his compositions in our worship, and at the same time take careful note of the fundamental principles of hymns and hymn-writing which he set down. One can only hope that Cyril's paper will encourage somebody to attempt a full biography.

It was appropriate that we heard something of the origins of Keswick Congregational Church from Eric Alldritt, its minister, in the year that it celebrates its 350th anniversary. It was also good to be reminded of the New Testament principles which distinguish Independency from any state establishment, and to hear again the wise words of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones describing what happens when the Word of God is truly preached in the midst of such a congregation of saints.

We look forward to March 2005 when, God willing, the Conference will have a missionary flavour, as well as considering wider aspects of Christian witness in our own country. The date to put in your diaries is Saturday, 12th March, at Highbury Quadrant Congregational Church.



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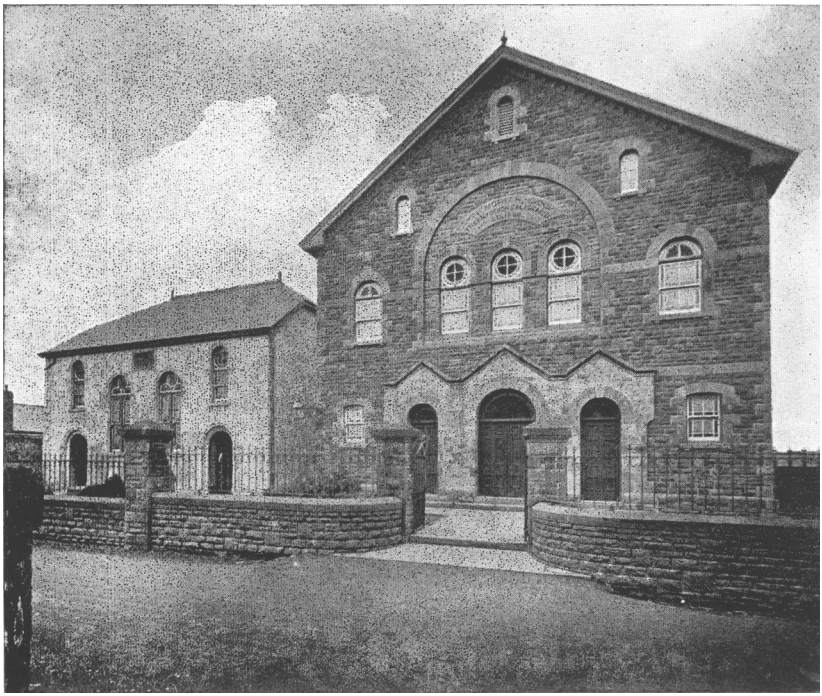
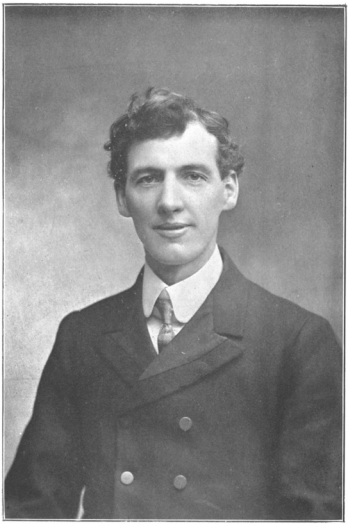


Moriah Chapel, Loughor



Evan Roberts

Congregationalism and the Welsh Revival 1904–05

Derek Swann

In his book *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904–1905,* Brynmor P. Jones wrote:

> Much energy has been wasted in trying to trace the source of the Welsh Revival of 1904–05. Suggestions have included social ferment, educational change, cultural confusions, and even the use of new preaching styles. Jessie Penn-Lewis was sure it came from the world-wide 'chains of prayer', whereas R.B. Jones saw it as a kind of 'holiness' movement and F.B. Meyer claimed it as a spiritual child of Keswick teaching.

Campbell Morgan, who at the time of the Revival was minister at Westminster Chapel, visited the revival scene for a brief period and preached a sermon to his congregation based on his experiences. On the origin of the revival he has this to say:

> 'In the name of God let us all cease trying to find it. At least let us cease trying to trace it to any one man or convention. You cannot trace it', but then he adds, 'and yet I will try to trace it tonight'[!].

No revival is of sudden origin. Prayer undoubtedly played a part. In January 1900, the Carmarthenshire Presbytery urged that the week of prayer should be earnestly concerned with 'a more extensive outpouring of the Holy Spirit'. Caernarvonshire followed suit in April and in November 1901, Merionethshire.

> Keri Evans, minister at Priordy Congregational Church, Carmarthen, wrote: In 1902 an inter-denominational prayer meeting was started by the prayerful members of the various churches … for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The godly Dean David Howell wrote in the December 1902 issue of *Y Cyfaill Eglwysig* (an Anglican periodical):

> The preaching, it is said, is able, scholarly, interesting, and instructive; it is however accompanied with but little unction and anointing—there is no smiting of the conscience, no laying bare the condition of the soul as in past times. The terminology of former ages, such as conviction, conversion, repentance, adoption, mortification of sin, self-loathing, and such like, has become, to a great extent, foreign and meaningless … The authority of the Bible and the fundamental truths of Christianity are being weighed in the balance of reason and criticism, as though they were nothing more than human opinions … But what is the remedy? … A Holy Spirit religion is the only cure for the moral and spiritual disease of Wales at this time … Take note: if it were known that this was my last message to my fellow-countrymen throughout the length and breadth of

> Wales, before being summoned to judgement, the light of eternity already breaking over me, it would be, that the principal need of my country and dear nation at present is still spiritual revival through a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Just at the time when Evan Roberts was contemplating taking steps to enter ministerial training at Newcastle Emlyn, there was a stirring among a number of ministers who longed for revival. Rev. Joseph Jenkins, New Quay, was particularly concerned at the indifference of the young people of his church to spiritual matters, and a Convention was held on 31 December 1903 and 1 January 1904, which did much to deepen the spiritual life of those present. However it was at the beginning of February 1904 that something significant happened. The Rev. Joseph Jenkins preached on 1 John 5:4, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith', at the evening service. Afterwards a young girl, Florrie Evans, was deeply moved and was compelled by her feelings to call at Mr Jenkins's house on her way home. She was unable to utter a word for a while, but eventually she broke out and said to her pastor, 'I waited for you in the lobby, hoping you would say something to me, but you did not. I went to meet you on your way home, but you took no notice of me beyond saying "good evening". I have been walking in front of the house for half-an-hour, and I was obliged to call. I am in a fearful state concerning my soul. I saw the world in tonight's sermon, and I am under its feet; I cannot live like this.' Mr Jenkins spoke kindly to her. On the following Sunday morning, Florrie Evans was present in the young people's prayer meeting, when Mr Jenkins asked them to give their spiritual experience. Several attempted to speak on different subjects, but the minister would not allow that. At last Florrie Evans got up and, with a tremor in her voice, said: 'I love Jesus Christ with all my heart.' The effect was startling and an overpowering sense of God's presence was felt. The fire was ignited and soon spread to Newcastle Emlyn, Blaenannerch, Capel Drindod and Twrgwyn. On 13 September, Evan Roberts would start his studies at the preparatory school in Newcastle Emlyn, but first we must take a look at Evan Roberts himself.

He was born on 8 June 1878. His parents Hannah and Henry were members of the Calvinistic Methodist Church at Moriah, Loughor. Evan was the ninth of 14 children. He attended the local school until he was about eleven-and-a-half, when he left to work underground with his father, who had broken his leg in the Mountain Colliery, and needed Evan to help him out. At the age of thirteen he was received into membership at Moriah, and about this time he was challenged by something spoken by a deacon, William Davies:

> Remember to be faithful. What if the Spirit descended and you absent? Remember Thomas! What a loss he had.

Evan Roberts wrote of his response:

> I said to myself: 'I will have the Spirit'. And through all weather, and in spite of all difficulties, I went to the meetings. Many times, on seeing other boys with the boats on the tide, I was tempted to turn back and join them. But, no. Then I said to myself: 'Remember your resolve to be faithful', and on I went. Prayer meeting, Monday evening at the chapel; prayer meeting, Tuesday evening at Pisgah (Sunday School branch); Church meeting, Wednesday evening; Band of Hope Thursday; class Friday evening—to these I went faithfully throughout the years. For ten or eleven years I have prayed for a revival. I could sit up all night to read or talk about revivals. It was the Spirit that moved me to think about a revival.

He also added that for thirteen years he had prayed for the Spirit.

Having worked in several collieries, in 1902 he left to become apprenticed to his uncle (who was a blacksmith) for 15 months. For a number of years he was aware of a constraint to preach, but now he felt some irresistible influence at work drawing him to commence. He struggled with it, but on 18 November 1903 he wrote a letter to his friend, Mr W.H. Morgan, who was at the University College Cardiff, training for the Ministry, 'I have determined to give up my vocation and join the same calling as you. Will you believe this? I have had quite enough of bodily labour as my soul thirsts for knowledge and a wider sphere of usefulness.'

He then gives three reasons for his decision:

1. A passionate desire of my soul for ten years, which I could not destroy.

2. The voice of the people. While on a visit to Builth, I went to a prayer meeting, and took part. After the service was over, the minister asked me if I were a student. I answered, 'No.' Then he advised me. 'Look here, young man, you have talents for the pulpit. Do not abuse them. It is a matter for prayer. Yes, my friend, pray over it, pray over it.'

3. The infinite love of God and his promise of the Holy Spirit.

On Sunday evening, 18 December 1903, he delivered his first sermon in Moriah (C.M.) Loughor. His text was Luke 9:23. Having then received the approval of the church, his minister, the Rev. Daniel Jones, brought his case before the West Glamorgan Monthly Meeting and from then onwards he had to preach at twelve churches, twice, which he did, and had the approval of them all. After a further exam he was ready to enter the Preparatory School at Newcastle Emlyn, which he did on 13 September 1904. But still he was struggling. On the one hand he had a passionate desire to preach the Gospel, and on the other hand a thirst for knowledge, which meant several years in College.

His arrival at Newcastle Emlyn coincided with a visit of Seth Joshua to hold meetings in the district. Seth Joshua was an evangelist with the Forward Movement of the Calvinistic Methodist Church who, for four years, had prayed (God having

laid it on his heart) that God would take a lad from the coal-mine or from the field, even as he took Elisha from the plough, to revive his work. He prayed to God not to take one from Cambridge, lest it might minister to our pride, nor from Oxford, lest it would feed our intellectualism, but to take a lad whereby human pride would be stripped. For four years he prayed this prayer, and never mentioned the burden of his heart to any man before the morning of the day when Evan Roberts was baptised with the Holy Ghost.

Evan Roberts was unable to go to Seth Joshua's meetings at Blaenannerch at first because of a bad cold; however when he did go he felt God's presence filling the place. The next day he said that his heart was like a flint. It was 30 September 1904 when God met with him in such a remarkable way. Here is his own account of what happened:

> On the way to the nine o'clock meeting the Rev. Seth Joshua remarked, 'We are going to have a wonderful meeting today'. To this I replied, 'I feel myself almost bursting'. The meeting, having been opened, was handed over to the Spirit. I was conscious that I would have to pray. As one and the other prayed I put the question to the Spirit, 'Shall I pray now?' 'Wait a while', said he. When others prayed I felt a living force come into my bosom. I held my breath, and my legs shivered, and after every prayer I asked, 'Shall I now?' The living force grew and grew, and I was almost bursting. And instantly someone ended his prayer—my bosom boiling—I would have burst if I had not prayed. What boiled within me was that verse, 'God commending his love'. I fell on my knees with my arms over the seat in front of me, and the tears and perspiration flowed freely. I thought blood was gushing out. Mrs Davies, Moriah, New Quay came to wipe my face. On my right hand was Mag Phillips and on my left Maud Davies. For about two minutes it was fearful. I cried. I cried, 'Bend me! Bend me! Bend us!' Then 'Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!' and Mrs Davies said, 'O wonderful grace!' 'Yes,' I said, 'O wonderful grace'. What bent me was God commending his love, and I not seeing anything in it to commend. After I was bent a wave of peace came over me, and the audience sang, 'I hear thy welcome voice' and as they sang I thought of the bending at the Judgement Day, and I was filled with compassion for those who would be bent on that day, and I wept. Henceforth the salvation of souls became the burden of my heart. From that time I was on fire with a desire to go through all Wales, and, if it were possible, I was willing to pay God for allowing me to go. A plan was agreed upon and eight of us were to go through Wales, and I was to pay all expenses.

Such an experience was not an orgy of emotionalism, but the true moving of the soul of a man overcome by a realisation of the greatness of the love of God. It led to an overwhelming desire to preach the Gospel, a desire translated into action. When were we so moved?

Soon after this, he had a vision of the awful reality of hell:

> In it he saw a yawning chasm in the form of a fiery, bottomless pit of vast proportions surrounded by an impenetrable wall. For those in the pit it was a place of torment, and all had entered by a solitary door. A voice spoke to him, 'You too would be in their midst apart from God's grace'. The mention of grace immediately changed the scene. He found himself with his back to the door, and coming down an incline towards him were countless numbers of people, a surging mass stretching away to the horizon with their face set towards the pit. From sheer anguish of the soul at the sight of the fearful solemn tragedy enacted before him, he cried with fierce intensity upon God to rescue them. He pleaded that hell's door should be closed for one year so that they might have an opportunity to repent.

Evan Roberts was now consumed with the desire to go through Wales preaching the Gospel. Leaving the preparatory school at Newcastle Emlyn, he returned to his home church at Loughor, convinced that the Spirit was leading him there.

With the consent of the minister and church officers, on Monday 1 October 1904 he met with the young people at their prayer meeting. This was the first Revival service in the strict sense of the word for Evan Roberts to conduct. Sixteen adults and one little girl were pressed into attending, four of his own family among the number. In a letter to a friend he describes briefly what happened:

> On Monday night I explained to them the purpose of my mission, and told them what the Spirit had wrought and was working at New Quay and Newcastle Emlyn. And I urged them to prepare for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

A word needs to be said at this point about Evan Roberts' view of the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit'.

> In his joint work, *War on the Saints* with Jesse Penn-Lewis, he wrote: The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the essence of revival, for revival comes from a knowledge of the Holy Spirit, and the way of co-working with him which enables him to work in revival power … The baptism of the Holy Spirit may be described as an influx, sudden or gradual, of the Spirit of God into a man's spirit, which liberates it from the vessel of the soul, and raises it into the place of dominance over soul and body.

Writing to his sister Mary, he emphasised, 'You must have the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and then work'. Dr Eifion Evans in his book on the revival wrote, 'Roberts' ministry can only be fully understood in the light of this teaching … To admit their reality and authenticity, if not their interpretation, is to allow Roberts a Spirit-enhanced awareness, discernment and power which were at once the inspiration of his programme and the secret of his success.'

Many ministers experienced such 'baptisms' that changed their ministries. There was nothing stereotyped about their experiences, but the end product was always the same: a new awareness of and love for Jesus Christ coupled with power and authority.

J.T. Job, Bethesda, North Wales:

> I felt the Holy Spirit like a deluge of light causing my whole nature to tremble; I saw Jesus Christ—and my nature became as a small drop at his feet; and I saw myself—and I despised it!

R.B. Jones, Porth:

> It was on Friday that Dr F.B. Meyer came to us according to his promise. He said to each of us, 'What is it that you want?' I told him, 'I don't know for certain but one thing I do know—I want the Holy Spirit.' Then he said, 'You want the Spirit; well then, take hold of him. I see you are like the Jews waiting for a sign. Yet all you need to do is to take hold of the Spirit whom he has given to you.' A new world opened up for me. Now I saw it. I went home on Saturday and took the service as usual without telling anyone. Next Sunday I still said nothing, yet they somehow knew that there was a new man in the pulpit.

E. Keri Evans, Carmarthen. Keri Evans studied under Professor Edward Caird at Glasgow, then went on to become Professor of Philosophy as Bangor University, and eventually minister at Priordy Congregational Church, Carmarthen. This was his experience:

> Well, I went to my study one morning before breakfast, going as a matter of will and against my desire, and engaged in prayer with wholly unexpected results. As far as I can recall, the most I expected was some help to overcome my bad temper, or to keep it from troubling me; but instead of that I was baptized with streams of life-giving, cleansing, transforming power for about half-an-hour, that made me feel clean and healthy and joyous to the very depths of my being. And I had no need of tea or coffee to clear my head! It was an experience so wonderfully delightful and refreshing that I sought it again on the morrow, with the same results, and so it continued for twenty years, till my health broke down in 1924. It was sometimes less free, but as a rule it richly rewarded faith and perseverance. I was sometimes kept on my knees for an hour, occasionally for hours, and they were without question the golden hours of the day for me, unutterably more precious and necessary than breakfast. I used to seek the unction unfailingly before preaching. I felt that it would be useless to try to proceed without it. Whenever there was a need I received it abundantly.

To return to the Loughor meetings, Evan Roberts afterwards urged those present to confess Christ. They felt it difficult to comply with his request. Nevertheless, after two hours all stood up and confessed the Saviour. On the Tuesday night six made open confession of Christ. The meeting lasted three hours, several of those who had confessed Christ the previous night testifying to the joy of their new experience. Even at this early stage, the characteristic emphases of his future meetings began to emerge: confession, prayer, and personal testimony. The importance of responding to the Spirit's impulse was impressed upon Roberts and this principle became a prominent (and, at times, controversial) feature of

the revival. On the Wednesday night, he laid down four things which were necessary to revival blessing:

1. If there is past sin or sins hitherto unconfessed, we cannot receive the Spirit. Therefore we must search and ask the Spirit to search.
2. If there is anything doubtful in our lives, it must be removed; anything we were uncertain about its rightness or wrongness, that thing must be removed.
3. An entire giving up of ourselves to the Spirit. We must speak and do all he requires of us.
4. Public confession of Christ.

By Friday's meeting, the congregation was larger than ever, consisting of old as well as young, Baptists and Congregationalists as well as Calvinistic Methodists. Sunday night's meeting was characterised by some remarkable incidents. While Evan Roberts went around the people urging them to confess Christ, one young lad with a bad stutter pleaded, 'Pray for me', and instantly the whole congregation was overwhelmed with tears:

> After the service had continued until it was twelve o'clock, I said I was not satisfied with it, and that we must get the blessing, even if it were necessary to stay down until daybreak. I said that we would have to 'strive with Heaven'. Then the people came down from the gallery, and sat close to one another. 'Now,' said I, 'we must *believe* that the Spirit will come; not *think* he will come; not *hope* he will come; but *firmly believe* that he will come'. Then I read the promises of God and pointed out how definite they were. (Remember, I am doing all under the guidance of the Spirit). After this, the Spirit said that *everyone* was to pray and this is the prayer, 'Send the Spirit now, for Jesus Christ's sake'.

Many that night were filled with the Spirit so the revival gathered momentum. On the Thursday night astonishing scenes were witnessed. Many had come in their working clothes, and at least one had brought the following day's packed lunch with him. Some had travelled far to be present; the whole place had been stirred. People held prayer meetings in their homes, family worship was set up and fellowship meetings held in the steel works.

On 10 November, a journalist from the national daily, *The Western Mail,* was present for the first time, his first report appearing on 11 November and continuing on a daily basis into 1905, as he followed Evan Roberts through South and North Wales. These articles were subsequently collected together and issued in the form of a pamphlet under the title *The Religious Revival in Wales,* a total of seven appearing by May 1905.

Evan Roberts and his band of helpers moved out of Loughor to Glamorgan. Two days at Trecynon, three at Pontycymmer, then on to Abergwynfi, Mountain Ash, etc. Here is a report of a meeting at Pontycymmer, 18 November:

> Evan Roberts will be leaving Pontycwmmer tomorrow morning. Since he came to the village on Wednesday he has revolutionised its religious and social life as no man has ever done before. The effects of his work are visible everywhere. Nothing else is talked about but the revival and Evan Roberts's name is on every tongue. He is surrounded by people wherever he goes. Children follow him and find new joy in life by talking to him or touching his hand. He has had only one hour's sleep since he has been in the village, but his vigour and enthusiasm are undiminished … The whole village if not, indeed, the entire Garw Valley is in a maelstrom of religious emotion … At five o'clock this morning Mr Roberts was at the pithead waiting for the night shift to come up from below. When the men appeared, he shook hands with them all and invited those of them who were not too tired to come to the prayer meeting. Most of them came. Stirring scenes were witnessed, strong men of rough exterior sobbing almost hysterically and bearing testimony in quivering, broken accents … Ostensibly, all this commotion is the result of the plain, simple appeals made by Evan Roberts—the man without the remotest claim to the title of orator. His language, even, is extremely colloquial, and it cannot be truthfully said that what he says is above the common-place. Wherein, then, lies the charm of the man and his power? Perhaps the best answer is that he has an indefinable something in his manner and style. His joyous smile is that of a man in whom there is no guile. His genuineness is transparent and he convinces people that the belief in what he preaches is impregnable … The chapel (Bethel) was crowded and the atmosphere stifling. The people seemed to be piled up in one huge mass nearly an hour before the meeting was due to begin. Seeing that the press was so great at Bethel, Evan Roberts asked that the Tabernacle Chapel should be opened. This was done and the building was filled at once. Mr Roberts addressed this meeting first and the people in Bethel had to wait for him. No-one conducted the service in the orthodox way, but this made no difference. Leadership was not wanted. There was a constant unbroken flow of song, prayer and exhortation from young men alone. The meeting was seething with enthusiasm … Evan Roberts made his appearance at Bethel a little before nine o'clock. Striking scenes were enacted among the hundreds of people congregated outside the chapel. The near four hundred assembled in front of the Pontycymmer Hotel, one of the largest licensed houses in the village, and sang 'Diolch iddo' and other hymns, and the scene was one of great impressiveness …

Campbell Morgan describes his own impressions of the revival:

> It was a meeting characterised by a perpetual series of interruptions and disorderliness. It was a meeting characterised by a great continuity and an absolute order. How do you reconcile these things? I do not reconcile them. They are both there … I have never seen anything like it in my life; while a man praying is disturbed by the breaking out of song, there is no sense of disorder, and the prayer merges into song, and back into testimony, and back into song for hour after hour, without guidance. These are the three occupations—singing, prayer, testimony

> … There is no preaching, no order, no hymn books, no organs, no collections, and finally, no advertising. I am not saying these things are wrong. I simply want you to see what God is doing. There were organs, but silent: the ministers don't preach. Instead they rejoice and prophesy with the rest of the people. Suddenly it seems like everybody is preaching … The whole thing is of God; it is a visitation in which he is making man conscious of himself without any human agency. The revival is far more widespread than the fire zone. In this sense you may understand that the fire zone is where the meetings are actually held, and where you feel the flame that burns. But even when you come out of it, and into railway trains, or into a shop, a bank, anywhere, men everywhere are talking of God. Whether they obey, or not, is another matter. There are thousands not yielded to the constraint of God, but God has given Wales in these days a new conviction and consciousness of himself. That is the profoundest thing, the underlying truth.

The revival was not dependent upon one man. In Tonypandy in the Rhondda since the *beginning* of 1904 there were stirrings of the Spirit. By October 1904 over 600 had professed conversion at Trinity English Calvinistic Methodist cause, over a period of four years. All that happened before Evan Roberts' visit to the place. The slate-quarrying area of the Nantlle Valley had become, before the end of 1904 and independently of Evan Roberts' ministry, one of the leading centres of the revival in North Wales. One of its sons, Evan Lloyd Jones was to be reckoned a northern counterpart of Evan Roberts himself.

There was also a remarkable revival at Bethesda, near Bangor, well before Evan Roberts came on the scene. J.T. Job, a Calvinistic Methodist minister, wrote this impression:

> What!—the Revival at Bethesda? Yes, sure enough: 'That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, and our hearts have felt'—he is here—Jesus is here. Multitudes of young people in this place have been tremendously gladdened by the sound of his feet walking among us!
>
> The adversity of the long strike here had a very great effect on the place, especially on the churches of the district. The saints began to grow restless, and to feel the need for a visitation of the Holy Spirit. There was a quiet but earnest 'chirping' during recent months at the Gate of Heaven. The Free Churches resolved to have a mission here and engaged the services of the Rev. Hugh Hughes (Wesleyan Methodist) to assist us. He preached for four nights … to huge crowds at Jerusalem chapel; and there was a remarkable vigour in the message about Jesus! But most remarkable of all are the prayer meetings—a prayer-meeting lasting an hour before the sermon; a prayer-meeting for young people lasting for quite three hours after the sermon; along with a prayer and experience meeting for sisters, old and young, each day at 2.30p.m. There are around 500 sisters in the latter every afternoon: and Oh! what a sight—women and young girls on their knees pleading for forgiveness, and praying the most remarkable things ever heard. The whole place a flood of tears, and the sighings overwhelming—and the burdens

> cast down at the foot of the cross … 'Thanks be to God' for ever—for remembering poor Bethesda!'

Another minister jubilantly reported

> The policemen tell me that the public-houses are nearly empty, the streets are quiet, and swearing is rarely heard. Things are easy for the policemen here now—I hope they have a glorious holiday, and the district is quite prepared to support them henceforth—for doing nothing!

A newspaper report claimed: 'The results have been most gratifying, especially in the healing of old quarrels and feuds which had been caused by the Penrhyn [quarry] strike.'

One of the most astonishing incidents of the revival took place at Pwllheli in January 1905 when a political meeting, convened for the Member of Parliament and later Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, metamorphosed naturally and irresistibly into a religious service. When the two political speakers walked on to the platform they were hardly noticed. Instead, after opening devotions by a minister of religion, the audience sang a Welsh hymn with unusual fervour, and a blind man led in prayer. In extolling the effects of the revival, Lloyd George compared it to a tornado sweeping over the country and bringing in its train far-reaching national and social changes. Rhosllanerchrugog, a mining district near Wrexham, also experienced revival. Stirrings began in the June of 1904 and continued until the following March. It was reckoned that 2,267 converts had been added to the churches of the district. The revival deeply affected Rhos. Prayer meetings were held in the coal mines, processions of converts were commonplace even among the children, family feuds and quarrels were resolved and the cause of temperance especially was strengthened. As Christmas approached, one converted drunkard resolved, 'I shall spend this Christmas in a different way from all others. I used to think of nothing but getting drunk, but this year I shall drink pure wine from Calvary's cellar.'

The staggering success of the Gospel could not be attributed to the instrumentality of any one man, nor even to the combined efforts of all. This was not the wisdom of man, but the power of God.

It was inevitable that opposition to Evan Roberts would come and come it did with a vengeance. On 31 January the *Western Mail* published a letter from the Rev. Peter Price, minister of Bethania Congregational Church, Dowlais, which initiated a protracted and heated public debate, in which Evan Roberts took no part. The letter is lengthy, and we can only give selected quotations:

> I have come to the conclusion that there are two so-called Revivals going on amongst us. The one, undoubtedly from above—Divine, real, intense in its nature, and Cymric in its form … But there is another Revival in South Wales—a sham Revival, a mockery, a blasphemous travesty of the real thing. The chief

> figure in this mock Revival is Evan Roberts … My honest conviction is this: that the best thing that could happen to the cause of the true religious Revival amongst us would be for Evan Roberts and his girl-companions to withdraw into their respective homes and there to examine themselves and learn a little more of the meaning of Christianity …

Peter Price utterly repudiated Evan Roberts' claim to be under the immediate, sustained control of the Holy Spirit. His criticism was even stronger; 'I have heard people say', he wrote, 'Evan Roberts is led by the Holy Spirit. I say "No"—quite the contrary. Judging from his behaviour and talk, the Holy Spirit is led by Evan Roberts.' A careful study of the accounts of Evan Roberts' meetings from 31 October 1904—31 January 1905 will reveal that Peter Price's criticism is an exaggeration and that such instances were remarkably scarce. What is true is that *after* Price's attack, such direct Spirit-inspired messages became more frequent. Things came to a head with an extraordinary incident at Cwmavon on 21 February 1905. During the meeting, Roberts cried out in agony that there was a damned soul present, and when the congregation began to pray, Evan Roberts stopped them, saying that there was no point in praying as the soul of the person was damned. He further explained that that was the most terrible message he had ever had to deliver. The next day, when he should have been at Briton Ferry, Evan Roberts was in Neath where he remained in complete silence for seven days. The reason he gave was, 'I am sorry to cancel my engagements. It is the Divine command.'

What is perfectly plain is that Evan Roberts was mentally and physically exhausted and desperately needed to rest. Eifion Evans observes:

> The successful progress of his ministry had reached its climax in the middle of January; its arrest and comparatively sudden decline can be traced to the Dowlais meetings and to the open hostility of one of its town's ministers. No small part of the responsibility for the eclipse of Roberts' usefulness must be laid at the door of Peter Price.

By the autumn of 1905 Roberts' influence had waned.

What of the effects of the revival? An NSPCC inspector told a newspaper reporter how in the mining valleys of Glamorgan the Revival had had a marvellous influence on the conduct of parents in a few 'slummy' parts towards children. 'Homes that I have had under observation for some time,' he said, 'have undergone a complete transformation.'

The most notable effect of the revival was the precipitous decline in drunkenness. Convictions for drunkenness in Glamorgan fell from 10,528 in 1903 to 5,490 in 1906.

In terms of numbers, the Calvinistic Methodists received an added 24,000 into membership, the Wesleyans over 4,000, the Congregationalists 26,500 in 1904–1905.

While being interviewed in Canada, Dr Lloyd-Jones was once asked, 'How much is left today [this was 1932] of the result of the great Evan Roberts' revival?' He replied, 'I affirm this—that the best Christian leaders we have in Wales today, a vast proportion of them are the product of that Roberts' revival. The world's departure from the old foundations, in theology, is in large measure the cause, I believe, of the moral wreckage that marks our modern life.'

For further reading

Kevin Adams, *A Diary of Revival* (Farnham: Crusade for World Revival, 2004).
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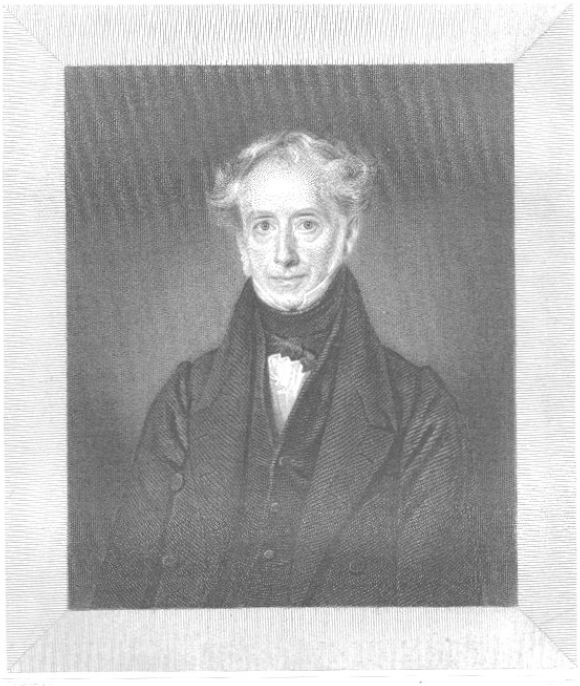

James Montgomery in early and later life

James Montgomery—Sheffield's Sacred Psalmist

Cyril Aston

The name of James Montgomery as a hymn-writer is little known in evangelical churches in these days. Many who regularly sing the hymns of Wesley, Newton, Cowper and Watts have at least some smattering of knowledge about their lives, but when it comes to Montgomery a blank is usually drawn. There is by and large a universal ignorance about his life and work. And yet in his day he was one of the most well-known and loved Christian men in the country; his writings, disseminated through his paper 'The Sheffield Iris', were much respected; his poems such as 'The Wanderer of Switzerland', 'The West Indies', 'The World Before the Flood', 'Greenland' etc. were bought by the thousands; his efforts to improve the condition of his fellow man, especially his strong advocation to the ending of slavery, were widely known and increasingly supported; his enthusiasm for missionary work helped forward the spread of the gospel; and of course the prodigious output of fine hymns made him a household name through the evangelical world of the 19th century and beyond.

There are no doubt many reasons why a well-known figure of one generation can become buried in obscurity in the next. With James Montgomery perhaps it was because he wasn't a preacher—he was never ordained as a minister and as far as I can tell never preached a sermon; perhaps it was due to the fact that his church affiliations were somewhat loose. His loyalties lay primarily with the Moravian church but he was fairly catholic in his adherence to and support for other evangelical causes. As a result he was never that well-known in any particular denomination or group; and it may be because his life was dominated by two things—his poetry and his paper. He was first and foremost a poet, as we shall see, and he was for over thirty years the owner and editor of a newspaper. In other words there is nothing particularly exotic or exciting about him that would send potential biographers and publishing houses rushing to get anything into print about him, so making his name well-known again. Julian in his *Dictionary of Hymnology* sums it up 'There was very little of stirring incident in his life.'[1] Added to this, he was a somewhat shy retiring man who remained a bachelor all his life and never courted too much attention.

1 John Julian DD (ed.) *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (New York, Dover Publications, 1957).

Consequently we see that in modern times there are relatively few, out of the hundreds of hymns he wrote that are sung today. In 'Christian Hymns' we can sing 26; 'Grace Hymns' 21; 'Praise' gives us 15; 'Mission Praise' a miserly 4.

The purpose of this paper is to at least *begin* to extract James Montgomery from the obscurity he doesn't deserve and to show that he *does* deserve to be placed alongside the very best of our evangelical hymn-writers.

Early Days: 1771–1792

James Montgomery came from a godly family—his father John was born in County Antrim in 1733 and was converted under John Cennick's ministry when working as a farm labourer. He became a member of the Moravian church and it was in the Moravian community he met Mary, a member there, and they were married in 1768. They had three sons, the eldest being James who was born on 4 November 1771. His birthplace was Irvine in Ayrshire, on account of his father moving there to take charge of the Moravian congregation, at that time the only one in Scotland. In 1775 they returned to County Antrim to Gracehill, Ballymena before sailing for the West Indies in 1783 to become missionaries in Barbados.

Young James and his brothers didn't sail with their parents, however, because by now the boys had been for six years at the Moravian school and community at Fulneck, near Leeds, which at this time was the chief Moravian settlement in England. In 1777 at the tender age of six he began his education there.

Fulneck was a fine boarding school situated on a large farm surrounded by rough moorland and bitterly cold winds. It was a tough place to be, combining 'ultra spartan training and warm Christian education in which the school excelled.'[2] His father wanted his boys to enter the Christian ministry and his schooling was shaped accordingly. He was taught Greek, Latin, German, French, History, Geography and Music, alongside the studies in the Scriptures, of course. James soon discovered something new, however, which was to become the passion of his life and which was to make him famous.

One hot summer's day, sometime before James's tenth birthday, the schoolmaster took his class of boys into a nearby field and sat them under the hedge to keep cool in the shade. There he began reading some poetry to them. One by one they all fell asleep, bored with the poem and drowsy with the heat. All, with the exception of young James. The carroty headed lad was overcome, not with the heat, but with the beauty of the poetry—he felt every word go to his heart, and it thrilled him! He began writing poetry straight away and within two years had filled two large books with his early efforts.

2 Peter Masters, *Men of Purpose* (London: Wakeman, 1975), p. 103.

This devotion to his newly discovered love had a serious downside to it, in that it affected the rest of his schoolwork which he began to neglect. He became a dreamer and the school diary has several references to him being warned, exhorted and threatened with severe punishment because of his lack of diligence at his studies and his generally unmanageable attitude. Eventually it was decided that it would do him good to 'put him out to business, at least for a time'[3] and so an arrangement was made with a Moravian brother who lived at Mirfield near Wakefield, and was a baker by trade. Montgomery was to serve behind the counter and get some experience and no doubt the masters at Fulneck hoped that the poetic leaven would be purged before it rose too much in his young life. So in 1786, at the age of fifteen, he left Fulneck.

The time at Fulneck was an extremely important period in James Montgomery's life. It provided him with a good education even though he didn't take full advantage of it. He was introduced, even if unwittingly, to poetry and above all he was in an environment of genuine Christian love and care where the Bible was central, the Lord Jesus constantly held out as the Saviour of sinners and the good of the children's souls sought. The foundations of his extensive Biblical and theological knowledge were laid here, as was also that personal love and devotion for the Saviour. In later years he wrote of his time there with great affection and gratitude. 'There is no faith for a young, warm feeling heart like the evangelical faith. I believed; I enjoyed its blessings; I was happy!'[4] and 'I steal a few days once a year to visit Fulneck where I was educated—the dearest place to me on earth.'[5] Someone else summarises—'The good impressions at Fulneck clung to him and kept him clear of immoralities, and amid all his waywardness and wild ambition, the hand of an unseen providence was his guide.'[6]

Life at the bakery, like the bread, soon became stale for this turbulent teenager. Serving bread was no help to his restless spirit and rather than curbing his poetic zeal, the large amounts of free time behind the counter gave him time to write even more and he began to undertake an epic poem on 'Alfred the Great'. He also composed a metrical version of Psalm 113 and wrote other poems. Eventually he couldn't stand the situation any longer and one Sunday morning in 1787 whilst his kind employer was worshipping at the Moravian chapel (where Montgomery ought to have been) he stole out of the bakery to seek his fortune in the wider world. Years later he wrote 'I was such a fool as to run away with just the clothes on my back, a single change of underwear and 3/6d in my pocket.

3 Elsie Houghton, *Christian Hymn-Writers* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1982).
4 Peter Masters, op. cit., p. 104.
5 Ibid.
6 James Montgomery, *Poetical Works* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1873). The *Memoir* included was written by an unnamed author.

I had just got a new suit but as I had only been a short time with my master I did not think my service had earned them so I left, wearing my old one.'[7] Carrying his bundle of verses, he wended his way to the village of Wath near Rotherham. There a teenage lad befriended him and persuaded his father, the village shopkeeper, to provide a job for him. Back behind the counter again, he quitted after a year, with the fanciful idea that in London his poems would be welcomed and published, but the London publishers weren't interested. 'Their cold caution destroyed his golden dream of sudden fame and sent him back, almost broken-hearted, to his work at Wath.'[8]

In 1790, the devastating news came to him that his mother had died on Tobago and in 1791, he also learned that his father had died of yellow fever on Barbados. After they had departed for the West Indies in 1783 he never saw his parents again. Their deaths deeply affected him. 'I am the son of missionaries' he wrote, 'my father and mother laid down their lives in a far country in the service of the King of Kings!'[9] Although they were buried thousands of miles away, in his mind he often visited their graves:—

> 'My father, mother—parents now no more!
> Beneath the lion-star they sleep,
> Beyond the Western deep,
> And when the sun's noon glory crests the waves,
> He shines without a shadow on their graves'
>
> (Departed Days)[10]

Thus far we have seen that this young man was showing little promise in his life or in service for his Lord. His early Christian zeal was waning, he was restless, inconsiderate and in danger of drifting along in life. His fledgling poetic and hymn-writing skills would be lost if his life did not become more disciplined and focussed.

> 'In the hour of trial,
> Jesus, pray for me,
> Lest by base denial
> I depart from thee;
> When thou seest me waver,
> With a look recall,
> Nor, for fear or favour,
> Suffer me to fall.'[11]

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7 Peter Masters, op. cit., p. 104.
8 Elsie Houghton, op. cit., p. 184.
9 Peter Masters, op. cit., p. 105.
10 James Montgomery, *Poetical Works* (London: Longmans, 1851) p. 297.
11 *Christian Hymns* (Bridgend: Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1977), no. 699.

And so it was that the Lord, in His grace, opened up the way in 1792 for James Montgomery, at twenty one, to begin the most important and significant phase of his life.

The Sheffield Years 1792–1854

Chancing one day to flick through a local newspaper in the village store at Wath, his eye caught an advertisement placed there by a Mr Joseph Gales, the proprietor and editor of the *Sheffield Register,* a newspaper published in the city, for a position as clerk and bookkeeper. Montgomery applied and after interview was offered the job, which he accepted. So in April 1792 he brought his personal effects to Sheffield and settled into rooms at the *Register's* office.

The *Sheffield Register,* under Gale's enthusiastic leadership, was a vibrant force to be reckoned with. Its political stance was often anti-government and it was a strong advocate of parliamentary reform. In this situation the young Montgomery at last found the outlet for his energies he had been looking for and plunged into his work with relish. 'I was led into the thickest of the conflict with all the enthusiasm of youth.'[12] It wasn't long before Gales recognised that Montgomery had great literary talent and he was soon made 'personal assistant' to the editor and encouraged to begin making a regular and vigorous contribution to the Register's controversial opinions, and this resulted in the name of Montgomery beginning to be made known amongst the readership. He also started coming into contact and making acquaintance with various people in intellectual circles,—writers, poets and other talented men.

Not surprisingly it wasn't long before the 'Register' came into conflict with the authorities and a warrant was put out for the arrest of Joseph Gales, who decided with some haste to relocate to America and stay there. Montgomery had made such an impression in his brief time at the paper that he was given the opportunity to take it over and offered the finance to buy it by Mr Naylor, a wealthy townsman, which he accepted. So, at the age of only twenty three, in 1794 he became the owner and working editor of the 'Sheffield Register', a position he held for over thirty years until his retirement in 1825. He immediately changed the paper's title, re-naming it the 'Sheffield Iris' and adopted a less controversial approach with the authorities than his predecessor , but still speaking out boldly on the issues of the day with a clear Christian voice.

But almost immediately Montgomery himself got into deep water with the law which resulted in two separate periods of imprisonment at York Castle in 1795 and 1796. It may very well have been the case that the authorities, unable to get hold of Joseph Gales, took the opportunity to get at the new owner and

12 Peter Masters, op. cit., p. 106.

editor so as to clip his wings and, if possible, to discredit and turn public opinion against the 'Iris' which, under its new leader, was becoming even more well-known and popular.

A cash strapped song-seller, wanting to hawk a few more songs on the streets to earn a few pennies was given, free of charge by the generous editor, 150 copies of a ballad that had been lying around unwanted in the office for a while. He thought no more of it until he was arrested some time later and charged with libel against the government. Someone had noticed these lines within the song, which was a commemoration of the fall of the Bastille:

> 'For should France be subdued
> Europe's liberty ends;
> If she triumphs, the world will be free.'

Anti-French feeling was running high in the country at the time and these words were far too pro-French. The innocent Montgomery was brought to the next Doncaster quarter sessions, found guilty after a sham trial, fined twenty pounds and sentenced to three months in prison. The mild mannered editor was branded a 'wicked, malicious and seditious person who had attempted to stir up and excite discontent among his majesty's subjects'.

The second imprisonment in 1796 was, in all honesty, largely his own fault. It arose out of an article he published in the 'Iris' which strongly criticised the behaviour and actions of a colonel of volunteers, a Colonel Althorpe, who used excessive force to disperse a crowd mainly composed of women and children who had become defiant, refusing to move on. Riding into the crowd with his sword slashing, he ordered his soldiers to open fire, with the result that several were killed and injured. The 'Iris' account was written in such a way against the colonel that once again Montgomery was arrested and imprisoned in York Castle, this time for six months.

Prison conditions were tolerable, even fairly comfortable. He had a warm and pleasant room to himself and the food was bearable. The prison governor was so taken with his courteous and friendly prisoner that eventually he let him have possession of the key to his room so he could let himself out into the castle-yard to exercise when he wanted to!

Prison, in all reality, however was a grim and bitter experience for his sensitive nature to endure and during his incarceration several poetic pieces flowed from his pen describing his feelings and emotions at that time. These were gathered together after his release with the title 'Prison Amusements'. 'The pieces were composed', he wrote, 'in bitter moments, amid the horrors of a gaol under the pressure of sickness. They were the transcriptions of melancholy feelings—the warm effusions of a bleeding heart.'[13]

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13 James Montgomery, op. cit. (1851), p. 142.

'Gentle moon! A captive calls;
Gentle moon! Awake, arise!
Gild the prison's sullen walls;
Gild the tears that drown his eyes.'

.....

Cheer his melancholy mind;
Soothe his sorrows, heal his smart;
Let thine influence, pure, refined,
Cool the fever of his heart.'

(Moonlight—Prison Amusements)[14]

Life as owner and editor of the 'Iris' was busy and involved him meeting many people and not all those shared his evangelical and spiritual convictions. The heady mix of his growing influence in Sheffield society, the flattering praises of fellow intellectuals and poets, and increasing wealth did not help him to progress in his walk with God. He began to backslide and suffer bouts of spiritual despondency and for a period of some years he vacillated in his Christian life. It is because of this well-known and documented low state of spirituality, and the fact that he was a great poet and hymn-writer, that parallels have been drawn between his life and William Cowper's (1731–1800). More than once he has been called 'the Cowper of the 19th century' although his condition was never as extreme or low as Cowper's and he eventually came through it triumphantly, living the second part of his life close to his Saviour and bearing much fruit for God's Kingdom.

His imprisonment at York Castle seemed to trigger this period of spiritual declension. He stubbornly refused during his second imprisonment to meet for worship with a band of dissenting brethren who were in prison with him, and after his release he became increasingly spasmodic in his attendance for worship on the Lord's Day. For a while his main friends were Unitarians and he also began writing poetry for the theatre and regularly attending. His diary during his twenties and thirties often reveals a deep tension in his life between his desire to follow the Lord as he used to and the crippling effect his backsliding was having in his life: 'There are three springs of continual unrest perpetually flowing within me; the cares of life; ambition for fame; and most of all—religious horrors.' 'The further I am carried from that shore where once I was happily moored, the weaker grows my hopes of ever reaching another where I may anchor in safety. At the same time, my hopes of returning to the harbour I have left are diminishing. This is the state of my mind.'[15]

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14 Ibid., p. 143.
15 Peter Masters, op cit., p. 109.

At 30, probably at his lowest point, he wrote, 'It is hard to renounce the world and all those pleasures the world deems innocent—yet Christianity requires the sacrifice of them. For my own part I cannot at present take up my cross and follow the despised rejected Man of sorrows. And yet … I carry a heavier cross and bear a deeper shame in my own self-rebuking conscience. I feel the Christian's sufferings without the Christian's hope.'[16]

'There is a winter in my soul,
The winter of despair;
O when shall spring its rage control?
When shall the snowdrop blossom there?
Cold gleams of comfort sometimes dart
A dawn of glory on my heart
But quickly pass away.
Thus northern-lights the gloom adorn,
And give the promise of a morn
That never turns to day.' (*A Filled Flower*)[17]

So ran the thoughts of his troubled mind and soul over this prolonged and difficult period.

During this time, Montgomery received help for his agonised condition. Friends and colleagues at Fulneck came to him with 'seasonable and earnest counsels';[18] one of his brothers, Ignatius, by now a pious Moravian pastor, 'helped to unscale his mental vision'[19] and another older and wiser Moravian minister spoke of his own experience to Montgomery, 'Convinced I was a sinner and stood in need of a Saviour, I flew to Jesus, simply and childlike' and turning to Montgomery he exhorted him, 'O my friend do the same and there you will find rest for your weary soul'.[20] He began attending chapel again and was particularly moved by a sermon of Dr Adam Clarke and at a later date he was overcome by a message preached by William Carey (Carey became a good friend of Montgomery and they regularly corresponded). Being with God's people once again refreshed his soul. Looking back he wrote, 'Never shall I forget the pleasure I felt in chapel meetings, with some of the poorest of Christ's flock. They were the only persons who cared for my soul. A change took place in my spiritual character from that time.'[21] He was also helped by reading some of John Cennick's printed sermons: 'I took up a volume of Cennick's most simple but truly evangelical sermons and

16 Ibid., p. 110.
17 James Montgomery, op. cit. (1851), 'A Filled Flower' p. 275.
18 James Montgomery, op. cit. (1873).
19 Ibid.
20 Peter Masters, op. cit., p. 112.
21 Ibid., p. 111.

opened to one on 1 Timothy 1:15. I read over it most eagerly and was very much moved and comforted by it'.[22] His writings for the theatre ceased as did his attendance.

Although it took some time for him to be extricated from this slough of despond, his faith and trust in Christ began to grow and flourish again, and in 1814 at the age of forty three, for the first time in over twenty years he took communion. He also expressed a desire at that time to become a member of the Moravian church, but as there wasn't one in Sheffield (indeed he was the only Moravian there) he usually worshipped with the Methodists in the city, although to the end of his life he associated with all 'who were the brethren of Christ'. Whether he was too broad in his affiliations is open to discussion but for his part he seemed quite happy with the arrangement.

Montgomery still had periods of spiritual despair that dogged him throughout his life. Even at the age of sixty eight he could write, '… I have suffered so much from mental depression that I have spirit for no undertaking beyond daily occupations—and even these are indifferently performed—so that I am compelled to decline every engagement which comes not upon me as an absolute obligation'.[23] However those times weren't as extreme as when in his twenties and thirties and this 'Prodigal Poet',[24] as someone once described him, never wandered away from the Lord so disastrously again.

In 1825, at the age of fifty four, and after thirty one years at the 'Sheffield Iris' he sold the concern and as he was now financially independent through the popularity of the 'Iris' and sale of his literary works, he was able to devote the rest of his life to the Lord's work and his love of poetry. By now he was held in great affection by all in Sheffield and was considered its foremost citizen. A constant stream of friends and visitors made their way to 'The Mount', a large comfortable house in the city, where he had now lived for many years. To mark his retirement, a public dinner was given in his honour and in 1835 on the recommendation of Sir Robert Peel, he received a royal pension of £150 a year which was later increased to £200. On his sudden death at 'The Mount', on 30 April 1854 at the age of eighty three, he was given a public funeral and a memorial statue was erected in Sheffield cemetery in his honour. At a later date, a Wesleyan chapel and public hall were named after him and he features in a stained glass window in the parish church.

James Montgomery was *respected* for his writing skills and astute political observations in the 'Iris', but he was *loved* for his exemplary life and godliness

22 Ibid., p. 111.
23 Elsie Houghton, op. cit., p. 185.
24 The title of the chapter on James Montgomery in Peter Masters, op. cit.

which was manifested in both his labours for the gospel and for the good of his fellow man, in his poems and particularly in his hymns. So we now turn to briefly examine his achievements in these areas.

Achievements

We have noticed how his early love for poetry caused him to become a dreamer and rather lazy in his studies. Thankfully, although his love for poetry remained and deepened over the years, his indolence did not, and in adult life he was a tireless and zealous worker in seeking to translate his evangelical faith and principles into practical action. This was demonstrated in at least three causes that were very close to his heart:

Firstly, his campaigning for the *abolition of slavery* and the stamping out of the evil traffic of transporting thousands of African slaves to the West Indies to work on the plantations. Britain was one of the worst offenders in this trade and Montgomery was one of a growing number who raised their voices against it. He often used his position as editor of the 'Iris' to write articles describing the wretched condition of the slaves and when at last the practice was outlawed in 1807 he wrote, '… May its memory be immortal, that henceforth it may be known only *by* its memory!'[25] In the same year he was commissioned by Mr Bowyer, a printer in Pall Mall, to write a poem to commemorate the abolition, which was to accompany a set of engravings depicting the slave trade. His deep level of commitment to this cause was seen in his desire to produce a poem to do justice to this story of slavery and freedom. 'It haunted me day and night,' he confessed, 'in the house and in the field, alone or in company … the process of thought and of composition was continually in exercise'.[26] The long poem in four parts, was finally published in 1809 under the title 'The West Indies'. It was well received and sold over 10,000 copies during the next 10 years. Its opening lines read:

> 'Thy chains are broken, Africa, be free!
> Thus saith the island empress of the sea;
> Thus saith Britannia. O, ye winds and waves!
> Waft the glad tidings to the land of slaves.'
>
> (The West Indies)[27]

Secondly, his vigorous opposition to the *'State Lottery'*. For some time he accepted the practice of selling tickets or shares in tickets, the 'Sheffield Iris' being one such centre where lottery tickets could be purchased. At one point he sold

25 James Montgomery, op. cit. (1851), p. 17.
26 Ibid. p. 16.
27 Ibid. p. 17.

a ticket which won a staggering £20,000 in prize money. This immediately had the effect of the public thinking the 'Iris' was a 'Lucky Office' and it was inundated with demands for tickets.

Montgomery became deeply unhappy with this whole idea and he came to regard it as a sin and he was ashamed of his involvement. 'It was the familiarity with it which convinced me of the sin of dealing in its deceptive wares'.[28] The sight of seeing people wasting their money, especially the poor, awoke him. '… they came to buy *hope* and I sold them *disappointment!*'[29] So he put a stop to the selling of tickets and by 1816 wouldn't even allow the 'Iris' to advertise information about the lottery. 'Nor did I ever, for one moment, repent the sacrifice'[30] was his conclusion and he continued to oppose it vigorously. In his 'Thoughts on Wheels' poem of late 1816, he likens the various ills and evils in Britain to that of a great vehicle or Juggernaut rolling across the land. One of the very worst evils is the State Lottery. The final verse concludes:

> 'Hail to the fiery bigot's rack!
> Hail Juggernaut's destructive track!
> Hail to the warrior's iron car!
> But O, be lottery wheels afar!
> I'll die by torture, war, disease,
> I'll die—by any wheels but these!'
>
> (Thoughts on Wheels)[31]

Thirdly, he was greatly concerned with the plight of boy chimney sweeps. In 1807 he co-founded a society for the purpose of 'superseding the employment of climbing boys in sweeping chimneys and bettering the condition of those who were already engaged'. These young boys were virtual slaves, owned by wicked men. They worked interminably long hours in dark and dangerous and dirty conditions. Montgomery's heart went out to them and he fought long and hard to have the practice banned. His 'Climbing Boy's Soliloquies', begun in 1824 and completed in 1834, graphically brought to light the needs of these innumerable young lads:

> 'I cannot coldly pass him by
> Stript, wounded, left by thieves half dead;
> Nor see an infant Lazarus lie
> At rich men's gates, imploring bread.'
>
> (Soliloquies)[32]

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28 Ibid. p. 157.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid. p. 162.
32 Ibid. p. 167.

By 1840, the practice was outlawed, much to his joy.

His genuine Christian love and concern for children was not just confined to their physical welfare, however, and for many years this great man, Sheffield's most important and honoured citizen, known by all the great literary giants of his day, universally recognised as one of the greatest of all hymn-writers, was a humble Sunday School teacher at Sheffield's Red Hill Wesleyan Methodist Church. Some of his finest hymns had their origins in Sunday School events. 'Command Thy blessing from above' was written for the June 1816 Sheffield Sunday School Union Whitsuntide Festival meetings—indeed every year for over 40 years he contributed a new hymn at this event, 'Sow in the morn thy seed' being one of them. His 1818 hymn 'Lord teach us how to pray aright', was written for use in the non-conformist school in Sheffield and 'Stand up and bless the Lord', written in March 1824, was composed for the children of Red Hill Sunday School as part of their Sunday School celebrations. Originally the second line read: 'Ye *children* of his choice.'[33]

Montgomery never forgot he was the son of missionaries. That fact was one of the restraining influences in his earlier years when he was in danger of wandering and it isn't surprising that he had a great concern for missionary work throughout his life. We have already noted he was friendly with and supported William Carey in his work. He took every opportunity of enthusiastically promoting the spread of the gospel abroad, especially through his writings. 'The West Indies' poem takes up the theme of the African slaves' need of the gospel and indeed that of the whole world:—

> Nor in the isles and Africa alone
> Be the Redeemer's cross and triumph known:
> Father of mercies! speed the promised hour;
> Thy kingdom come with all-restoring power;
> Peace, virtue, knowledge, spread from pole to pole,
> As round the world the ocean-waters roll!
>
> (The West Indies, part 4)[34]

His less well-known poem 'Greenland' in a somewhat convoluted way recounts the arrival of three Moravian missionaries in the country in 1733, and his long poem, 'The World Before the Flood', describes the increasingly evil condition of the world, the godly remnant and thus the need of a Saviour for the world.

He also compiled from the original documents the journals of Tyerman and Bennett, who had been deputed by the London Missionary Society to visit their

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33 Material on these hymns taken from *A Companion to Christian Hymns* (CTCH), compiled by Cliff Knight (Bridgend: Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1993).

34 James Montgomery, op. cit. (1851), p. 30.

stations in the South Sea Islands, China and India. These travels took place between 1821–1829 and the journals were published in 1831. Before Bennett left, Montgomery wrote a poem for him which began:

> Go, take the wings of morn,
> And fly beyond the utmost sea;
> Thou shalt not feel thyself forlorn,
> Thy God is still with thee;
> And where his Spirit bids thee dwell,
> There, and there only, thou art well.[35]

But it is in his great missionary hymns that we have the finest and fullest proof of his passion for missionary work. The hymn 'Hark the song of jubilee', written in 1818, was first sung that year at Spa Fields Chapel, London, and was one of several hymns written especially for the L.M.S., with special reference to the renunciation of idolatry and acknowledgement of the gospel in the Georgian Isles of the South Seas. In 1819 it was also sung in Sheffield, at the West Riding annual missionary meetings.

'Hail to the Lord's anointed', considered by many to be his finest missionary hymn and by some to be the best hymn he ever wrote, is a paraphrase of Psalm 72 and was written in 1821. He sent a copy to George Bennett, who was in the South Isles at the time and in 1822 he also recited it to a missionary meeting in Liverpool. Dr Adam Clarke, the famous Methodist theologian and writer of an 8 volume Bible commentary, was chairing that particular meeting and was so impressed with the hymn that he had it printed alongside his commentary on Psalm 72.

Other missionary hymns followed, notably his 'O Spirit of the living God' in 1823, again written specially for a missionary society meeting, this time in Leeds. Even when he was 72 years of age, Montgomery's enthusiasm for the spread of the gospel remained unabated and in 1843, just 11 years before his death, he published 'Lift up your heads, ye gates of brass'. It was entitled 'China Evangelised'. The fifth verse:

> 'Then fear not, faint not, halt not now,
> Quit you like men, be strong;
> To Christ shall all the nations bow
> And sing the triumph song'

originally went:

> 'Then fear not, faint not, halt not now,
> Quit you like men be strong;

35 Ibid., p. 341.

To Christ shall Buddha's votaries bow
And sing the triumph song'.[36]

It would be hard to find a more zealous life-long advocate of foreign missions and Montgomery brought them consistently to the fore in a way few others of his generation were able to, even though he never actually went abroad on gospel work himself.

Poetry and Hymns

During his lifetime, James Montgomery became a well-known poet, not only in his beloved Sheffield but throughout the country, and several of his poems achieved widespread fame. 1806 marked the beginning of national recognition of Montgomery as a poet with the appearance of 'The Wanderer of Switzerland', a graphic account of the invasion of the country by the French. Anything anti-French went down well and the poem shot him to fame almost overnight and remained popular for a long time, earning him £800 over a 20 year period. 'The West Indies' in 1807, 'The World Before the Flood' in 1813, 'Greenland' in 1819 and 'The Pelican Island' in 1828 were his other long poems that were popular, although he wrote many short poems too and brought out several editions of his poetical works over the years. His powerful poem, 'The Grave' was his best-known shorter poem.

One verse reads:

'Hark!—A strange sound affrights mine ear;
My pulse,—my brain runs wild,—I rave;
Ah! who art thou whose voice I hear?
I am the grave!'

Opinions varied as to whether he was a great poet or even a passable poet. 'As a poet he stands well to the front' is the conclusion of Julian in his dictionary of hymnology and another states that he 'secured … a place in the band roll of living English poets'.[37] Others aren't so polite—'His good poetry' according to the Dictionary of National Biography 'is buried in his works among masses of commonplace, which should never have been printed … on the whole he may be characterised as something less than a genius and something more than a mediocrity'. One more objective observer comments, 'He followed no leader in poetry and belonged to no school of thought, but appealed to universal principles and to the elements of our common nature'.[38]

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36 Material on these hymns taken from *CTCH.*

37 James Montgomery, op. cit. (1873).

38 *Great Men of the Church* (London: Moravian Bookroom, no date). Memoir written by unnamed author.

His standing was sufficiently high in the literary world for him to contribute over the years 50 articles to the 'Eclectic Review', and in 1830 and 1831 he gave a series of lectures on poetry at the prestigious Royal Institution in London, which were published in 1833. He also entertained at 'The Mount' in Sheffield many eminent writers and poets of his day who were glad to seek out his company.

Personally, I have greatly enjoyed getting to know his poetry and through gaining just a little more knowledge of him as a poet, I believe I have been able to appreciate his hymns much more.

If views were somewhat divided on the quality and depth of his poetry, there was *universal* agreement that as a hymn-writer he ranks as one of the very best, both of his generation and beyond.

Elsie Houghton in *Christian Hymn-Writers* states, 'His hymns are the productions of a skilled hand and bear traces of the writer's maturity as a poet and a Christian. The most precious truths of Scripture and the widest experiences of the Christian find in them simple but poetic expression.'[39] Other authors are just as complimentary: 'For variety, clearness, strength, suitability of form to subject, they have rarely been excelled'.[40] He is 'notable for glow of evangelical sentiment, condensed pictorial phrase and exquisite rhythm'.[41] '… he ranks in popularity with Wesley, Watts, Doddridge, Newton and Cowper. … He is "the greatest" Christian lay-hymnist'.[42] 'He has laid the church under great obligation by his hymns'.[43]

During his lifetime he wrote over 400 original compositions, some of them being versions of the Psalms. In his 'Songs of Zion', published 1824, enlarged 1840 and devoted exclusively to paraphrases or 'Imitations of the Psalms' as he puts it, there are 72 songs, representing 60 of the Psalms. He didn't follow in the track of previous attempts by others—indeed he thought that some of the attempts that had been made were rather poor and somewhat cryptically remarked, 'It may be said, that the harp of David yet hangs upon the willow, disdaining the touch of any hand less skilful than his own'.[44] In his own efforts with the Psalms he testified, 'I never hesitated to sacrifice ambitious ornament to simplicity, clearness and force of thought and expression', stating he would be 'humbly contented and unfeignedly thankful'[45] if they were of any use. Here is his rendering of Psalm 23:

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39 Elsie Houghton, op.cit, p. 185.
40 *Great Men of the Church.*
41 James Montgomery, op. cit. (1873).
42 Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology.*
43 Elsie Houghton, op.cit, p. 185.
44 Introductory Essay in *The Christian Psalmist* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1846), p. 8.
45 James Montgomery, op. cit. (1851), p. 175.

'The Lord is my Shepherd, no want shall I know;
I feed in green pastures, safe-folded I rest;
He leadeth my soul where the still waters flow,
Restores me when wandering, redeems when opprest.

Through the valley and shadow of death though I stray,
Since thou art my Guardian, no evil I fear;
Thy rod shall defend me, Thy staff be my stay,
No harm shall befall, with my Comforter near.

In the midst of affliction my table is spread;
With blessings unmeasured my cup runneth o'er;
With perfume and oil thou anointest my head;
O what shall I ask of thy providence more?

Let goodness and mercy, my bountiful God!
Still follow my steps till I meet thee above;
I seek,—by the path which my forefathers trod
Through the land of their sojourn,—thy kingdom of love.'[46]

His more general hymns are noteworthy for their breadth of subject and he wrote hymns that covered the whole spectrum of Christian truth and Christian experience. This can be seen by simply looking at 'Christian Hymns'. Even though there are only 26 of his hymns included, by looking at the 'Subject' sections under 'Contents' at the beginning of the hymn-book and then tracing where these 26 hymns appear, we see they appear in the sections 'Worship and Adoration of God' (3), 'The Triune God'(1), 'God the Father' (1), 'God the Son' (3), 'God the Holy Spirit' (2), 'The Church' (10) and 'The Christian Life' (6). This is just a snapshot of 26 hymns—when you look at his 'Original Hymns' in part 4 of the Christian Psalmist, you will see this extraordinary breadth of subject even more clearly illustrated. Although not grouped in any order, it is fascinating to see the subjects he wrote hymns about, from those great themes in the Bible, to very homely and ordinary things such as 'Morning', 'Noon' and 'Midnight' and 'for a Public Hospital'. Not surprisingly, there are also a number written for children, as also some on a missionary theme.

Montgomery was acutely aware that the subject matter for Christian hymn-writers was deeply profound and sacred—they were the 'truths of the everlasting Gospel, the very thoughts of God, the very sayings of Christ, the very inspirations of the Holy Ghost'.[47] He knew that his poetic skills were given him by God and therefore he had to produce good quality—no, the *best* quality hymns. That is

46 Ibid. p. 178.
47 Introductory Essay, op. cit., p. 16.

why he put every effort into his hymn-writing. 'Authors', he wrote, 'who devote their talents to the glory of God, and the salvation of men, ought surely to take as much pains to polish and perfect their offerings of this kind, as secular and profane poets bestow upon their works'.[48] In Montgomery's mind there was no divorce between poetry, as if it were merely a pagan thing, and hymn-writing. 'Hymns may be as splendid in poetry as they are fervent in devotion'[49] and he wrote of the 'possible union of poetry with devotion'.[50]

His thoughts on this subject were condensed into an 'Introductory Essay' heading the 1825 edition of the 'Christian Psalmist', and it is a remarkable piece of writing, being the first examination of its kind on the fundamental principles of hymns and hymn-writing. These guidelines remain as important and helpful nearly 180 years after they were written. These are the elements to be found in a good hymn as described in that 'Introductory Essay':[51]

1 It must be as regular in structure as any other poem.
2 It must have a distinct subject so as to be readily understood.
3 It must have a beginning, middle and end. 'The reader should know when the strain is complete.'
4 It must have a progression in thought which is clear—'Every line carrying forward the connection and every verse adding a well proportioned limb to a symmetrical body'.
5 It must be 'memorable'—'they must leave a trace in the memory, an impression on the heart, haunting the imagination, refreshing the soul'. The best hymns are hymns which are 'remembered without effort', almost involuntarily, and every time they are remembered it is with increasing delight.
6 It must be grounded upon the Scriptures. The Bible provides inexhaustible material for hymns, and Montgomery always saw hymns as being under the authority of Scripture, servants of the Master. In his essay, he says of hymns that they are 'Scripture auxiliaries'—they are there in a secondary role to complement and back up Scripture. Hymns and their singing must therefore never dominate and supplant the Bible in public worship, or in private usage, come to that. In his 2 verse hymn (No. 472, *Christian Psalmist)* entitled 'After Divine Service' he writes:

> 1. 'Again our ears have heard the voice,
> At which the dead shall live;
> O may the sound our hearts rejoice,
> And strength immortal give!

48 Ibid. p. 16.
49 Ibid. p. 10.
50 Ibid. p. 13.
51 The following points are extracted from pp. 14–17 of the Introductory Essay.

2. And have we heard the word with joy?
And have we felt its power?
To keep it be our bless'd employ
Till life's extremist hour.'

The Word of God was the key thing in a 'Divine Service'!

This is only a brief condensing of his long *Essay* and in parts he becomes quite complicated. It shows quite clearly that he was a man thoroughly immersed in and fully cognisant with the nuts and bolts of hymn-writing. A recent examination of two of his hymns, 'Angels from the realms of glory' and 'Forever with the Lord', by an English graduate, brings home the point of just how technically able and skilful he was at writing hymns:

Looking at 'Angels from the realms of glory', which was written in 1816, Gary Aston's 'Poetic Analysis'* reveals the following interesting points:

1. The metre of the hymn produces a quick, buoyant, light effect. Its triumphant lyrical emphasis promotes vigorous singing which fits well with the theme of the hymn, namely the incarnation of Christ.
2. The rhyme pattern remains regular and unbroken throughout and consists of alternate end rhyming, with every first line rhyming with every third and every second rhyming with every fourth. Such a choice is common in hymnology and provides a consistency and regularity conducive to successful congregational singing.
3. Language and theme is skilfully used. He avoids dispassionate story-telling on the one hand, but is not over-sentimental or trite on the other. Juxtaposition is used to good effect. 'It is with clever use of the commonplace and the miraculous that he is able to simultaneously capture the natural and the supernatural elements of the incarnation narrative, *i.e.* in verse 2 and in line 1 we have 'Shepherds in the field abiding'—the commonplace, but in the line's rhyming counterpart, line 3, such a prosaic event is juxtaposed with the divine as 'God with man is now residing'. Therein is captured the transcendent mystery of the incarnation with its historic and material reality.'

The hymn has a logical and planned development with each verse addressing a different group and instructions issued to them—angels (v. 1), shepherds (v. 2), sages (v. 3), saints (v. 4), sinners (v. 5). 'A direct address is made in the first three verses to the main players in the Christmas narrative before the final two verses appeal to potential readers—both 'saints and sinners' … the final challenge of the hymn is to the sinner and is unambiguous and bold—'Mercy calls you—break your chains'. 'Like any good preacher, truth is expounded in this hymn and then applied.' Indeed many of Montgomery's hymns are

sermons in poetry. '… no minister has preached to a wider audience'[52] someone once stated.

The above is a distillation of a much more detailed analysis, which is repeated for 'For ever with the Lord'. Such an exercise, when undertaken correctly, proves conclusively that here was a man who sought to put into practice the principles of hymn-writing outlined in his 'Introductory Essay' and had the ability to do so. That is why it has been universally recognised that as a hymn-writer, James Montgomery was truly a master of his God-given craft, a man of giant talent.

Whilst he strove to write the best hymns possible, he was acutely aware that his best efforts fell far short of his own very high expectations. 'Tried by the standard … set up, every one of them would be found wanting'.[53] He considered his own hymns merely as 'Gleanings' and concluded his essay on this humble note … 'That they will be thoroughly sifted, and the chaff burnt up, and the grain, if there be any, gathered into the garner of the true church'.[54]

He had great admiration for other evangelical hymn-writers and makes brief and incisive comments on some of them: Cowper is a 'Mighty master of the lyre'. Of Watts: his is the 'Greatest name among hymn-writers—his hymns encompass every truth of revelation and the human heart'. Of Wesley: 'Christian experience furnishes Wesley with everlasting and inexhaustible themes'. Of Doddridge: 'His hymns shine in the beauty of holiness' and are 'lovely and acceptable'. Toplady's hymns 'have a peculiarly ethereal spirit in some of them'.[55] Montgomery gathered the best hymns over the years, carefully selecting them for inclusion in the various collections of hymns he had printed. In the 1846 edition of the *Christian Psalmist,* there are 100 of his own 'Original Hymns' and over 450 hymns from other authors—it is a very comprehensive hymn-book!

Conclusion

As we conclude this brief introductory study on James Montgomery, we finish with some closing remarks and observations:

1. What a wonderful God we have! He can take the most unpromising and seemingly useless people and so transform them that they achieve great things in God's kingdom. If God can use the run-away dreamer and restore the Prodigal Poet he can certainly use us!
2. God's gifts to the church are many and varied. Houghton states, 'It was a happy thing that Montgomery early recognised his own bent and saw that

52 *Great Men of the Church*.
53 Introductory Essay, op. cit., p. 33.
54 Ibid., p. 33.
55 All quotes from Introductory Essay.

he could serve the cause of Christ better as a poet than a preacher.'[56] The church still needs gifted hymn-writers producing excellent hymns.

3. He is a good example to us of a Christian with a warm charitable spirit and attitude towards his fellow believers.
4. We can learn much from his lifelong zeal and efforts in the spread of the gospel at home and abroad.
5. His perseverance and doggedness in fighting spiritual and social evils in the country is an inspiration. It took over 30 years of tireless and time-consuming campaigning to ban the use of boy chimney sweeps but he never gave up and eventually won the day.
6. His hymns are timeless and sublime. They were, of course, written to be sung, but they are always profitable just to be read and pondered upon. His best poetry definitely needs rescuing from obscurity, and it would be good in this the 150th year since his death, for a modern definitive biography to be prepared, so that more might benefit from this great and godly man whose 'Life and hymns had one music'.[57]

But let us leave the final word with James Montgomery himself:

> 'He shall reign from pole to pole
> With illimitable sway;
> He shall reign, when like a scroll,
> Yonder heavens have passed away;
> Then the end—beneath his rod
> Man's last enemy shall fall;
> Hallelujah! Christ is God,
> God in Christ, is all in all!'
>
> (v. 3 Hark the Song of Jubilee)

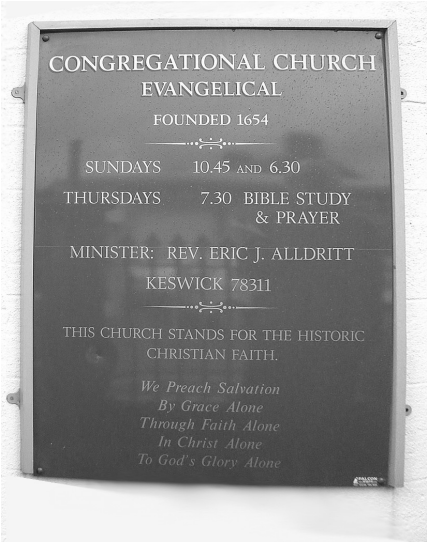
Acknowledgement

* I am grateful to Gary Aston, Student Minister at Pontefract Congregational Church, for providing me with this Poetic Analysis.

56 Elsie Houghton, op. cit., p. 183.

57 The unknown author of the *Memoir* in James Montgomery, op. cit. (1873).

Keswick Congregational Church building and noticeboard



The Greater Excellence of the New Covenant

Eric Alldritt

Thornthwaite, (a hamlet 4 miles north of Keswick), was the venue for believers from the parishes of Crosthwaite (Keswick) and Cockermouth in the early 1650s. The Vicar of Crosthwaite at that time was a Mr Meoles,—a good man with a concern for the Word of God,—and he appointed a Mr Simon Atkinson as expounding preacher at Thornthwaite. Atkinson drew people from a wide area, and when he left he was followed by Mr James Cave, another very much loved preacher. After the Cockermouth people established themselves into a church in 1651, Keswick people followed suit and elected James Cave and ordained him as their minister. So assembled the first properly constituted nonconformist church in Keswick. A researcher of recent times has suggested that Keswick Congregational Church is the oldest nonconformist church in the National Park.

God gave the young church a honeymoon period during the Commonwealth, but Cromwell died in 1658 and they were soon to battle for survival. Together with Cockermouth, they had assented to the Savoy Declaration, but when the monarchy was restored and sequestered clergy returned to their former churches, Keswick's dissenters soon had their faith tested. Their minister was ejected as early as 1660, and members were obliged to meet secretly by night, probably in mountainside quarries and woods as they could. Arrests and fines followed, but still, though few in number, they continued faithful to their newly found understanding of God's Word. Persecution became even more vicious in the 1680s but still they continued, for what God had ignited man could not extinguish. Life became more tolerable under William III and they were able to have their own meeting house, but still they dared not believe that this freedom could be permanent. Nevertheless the church grew and soon 90–95 folk were meeting Sabbath by Sabbath, still staunchly maintaining the doctrines of Calvinism.

As the eighteenth century progressed a people gathered who had not known the days of persecution, nor had they experienced the power of God to strengthen them in such need. The church became settled, and like the Israelites of old, took their eyes off the Lord. By the nineteenth century, there was little to distinguish church members from non-church-goers, except, perhaps, their constant seeking of ways to raise funds. Ministers struggled to encourage a reluctant people to turn to the Saviour. By the end of the 20th century the church had shrunk to a tiny handful of believers, but our Sovereign Lord yet had his gracious hand upon

his creation, and his plans were not to be thwarted. Today we are a small but growing church waiting for the Lord whose name and renown is our desire. 'In the path of your judgements O Lord, we wait for you; your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul' (Isaiah 26:8).

Let us turn to consider what brought such a church into being. *Firstly,* we have the mutual desire of a group of individuals to gather together, drawn by the common belief that the true church is a gathering of believers.

Secondly, the need to have the full exposition of Scripture and its practice unfettered by unscriptural authority. In other words to draw together those who were inwardly renewed by the Holy Spirit in the first place and were persuaded that Holy Scripture was their sole authority. Owen expresses it thus: 'The Lord Jesus Christ himself is the original spring of every union, and every particular church is united to him as its head.' The chief characteristic of their assemblies was the attention given to the preaching of the Word. This resulted in a body emerging which did not conform to the malformed religion which historically was governed first by a foreign, sacerdotal system under the pope, and now by the monarch of the day and his councils.

Matthew 15:1–20 is the Lord's condemnation of his church being ruled by mere human authority with the inevitable consequences of eclipsing his own laws and principles.

> He answered them, 'And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?' (Matthew 15:3)
>
> This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:8–9).
>
> Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit (Matthew 15:14).

What happened in Keswick and Cockermouth was happening throughout the kingdom. This nationwide movement emerged under increasing suffering and opposition but developed into a national religious presence approximating to the primitive New Testament church. The whole was undoubtedly a work of God's Spirit regenerating and illuminating many, thousands of people who wanted nothing more than to worship God in Spirit and to hear his Word in a manner that that Word itself indicated.

Here surely in Keswick was an historic segment of the on-going and unfolding fulfilment of the prediction first made in Jeremiah and then quoted, probably from memory, but certainly, prompted and guided by the Holy Spirit, namely:

> And they shall not teach each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. (Hebrews 8:11)

We turn now to examine these Scriptures whose abiding truths are essential in the life of a Gospel church in whatsoever age she is found. May we be strengthened in the same realities to face the increasing struggle to maintain the truth in our own society today.

Hebrews 8

As we now turn to consider contrasts between the old and new covenants in this Hebrews passage, we cannot help but see the parallel situation that existed in Keswick and elsewhere back in the 1650s. There was the widespread lifelessness of the old national religion which had only partially emerged from the corruption and darkness of the days of popish superstition into the freshly reforming church of New Testament life and light. Surely the struggle of the dying Jewish church with the new born Christian church is played out again as it frequently has been throughout the ages, and so here in the history of Britain at large and Keswick in particular.

The old Covenant made with Israel and his descendants included everything to do with the chosen race from its formation to its settlement in the Promised Land. It created and enveloped a whole nationality of people, not only those who were believers but also the unbelievers. This old Covenant was circumscribed with restrictions ad infinitum concerning food, farming and building. It directed commerce and the judiciary, personal relationships, hygiene and much, much more. And the whole of this controlled national life moved around the hub of the sacrificial ceremonies enacted by an elaborate priestly system. This central religious observation was designed to declare God's economy of Grace to undeserving sinners. It was the outward and visible demonstration of the indwelling presence of Jehovah.

Under this Covenant, they (God's people) were always considered as children in constant need of supervision and direction. So Paul puts it like this in Galatians 3:23–25:

> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

Even while the Covenant was in the process of being delivered through the mediation of Moses, the receiving nation broke it while still at the foot of the Mount of God. This breakdown was to be repeated time and again throughout the course of their long history. Jehovah bewails, 'Even though I was married to them' (Jeremiah 3:14, A.V.).

This old Covenant was described as 'glorious' yet it was not faultless 'For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second' (Hebrews 8:7). For although it was the covenant of God, its 'fault'

lay in the fact that although it could direct the people and their priests concerning God's purposes, it could not imbue them with the necessary power to fulfil its requirements. Paul declares that the law was 'weak through the flesh'. The fault of the Covenant lay in fallen human nature and not with God.

Hebrews introduces the superiority of the New Covenant by contrasting it with the old. The Irish Methodist, William Arthur, in the late 19th century, described it graphically thus:

> Altar and cherubim, sacrifice and incense, ephod and breastplate, Urim and Thummin,—their work was done. Even the most sacred emblem of all, that which was the 'pattern of things in the heavens', the Ark itself, it had been foretold, 'They shall say no more, The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall it be magnified any more'. Of the Temple itself, the Master had said that not one stone shall be left upon another. All the emblems of the old dispensation were for ever superseded.

However, this contrast between the covenants must not lead us to think of them as being in opposition to each other. We are familiar with the well known cry, 'The Covenants, the Covenants, the Covenants are one!'—just as Scripture of Old and New Testaments are one,—united in their revelation of the one and only God, one way, one truth and one end for all believers that are saved by grace through faith alone. What applied under the Old Covenant applied equally in the New:

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

Yet however the sparkling but cold attraction and purpose of moon and stars may be, these pale from sight with the rising light and life-giving warmth of the sun. Or, as one quaintly put it: 'All the necessary ingredients for the cake are stored in the old cupboard and they are correctly ordered and wholesomely presented in the new.'

We must add what Murdo Macleod reminds us of, that, 'The New Covenant Church is not a new church but a multitude of Gentiles grafted into the old':

> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you … For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree (Romans 11:17–18, 24).

The Covenant now is under a new administration. Not only is Christ surpassing, eclipsing and fulfilling the old priesthood as verse 1 shows: '… we have such a High Priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven' … but also this New Covenant is founded on better promises.

From now on it is a covenant in contrast with the old, beginning in the heart as regeneration which endues individuals with the desire and power essential to do 'all his pleasure'. This heart transformation constitutes each individual new born believer as a member of Christ's body enjoying all the benefits of this faultless Covenant. The second, unlike the first, is marked by the quality of eternal duration and was and ever will be the only answer for intelligent, moral, religious, guilty, depraved, unhappy, immortal man. The second alone can meet human nature at this totally complete level. It declares that there will be no need for us to say to our neighbour, 'Know the Lord,' for 'they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest.' This 'Know the Lord' indicates a lack of heart knowledge. Under the old they knew *about* him, but did not know him. How true this was right up to the days of Messiah. Jesus said to Nicodemus. 'Are you a teacher in Israel and do not know these things?' To the Pharisees he said, 'You do err, not knowing the scriptures or the power of God'.

Paul describes them as being 'ignorant of God's righteousness' causing them to go about establishing their own. And Isaiah musically puts it, 'The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light'.

Spurgeon said: 'True knowledge of God is a covenant blessing.' And Zechariah sang that Messiah had come, 'to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins' (Luke 1:67), and this accords here with Hebrews 8:11–11:

> They shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

How surely the power of this truth was being manifest at the time of the formation of these independent churches. They were bodies of believers who knew inward regeneration and understood foundation truths of Holy Scripture. They had no need to speak to their fellow worshippers and urge them to know the Lord for it was their inward knowledge of him which was uniting them together. To know him was to love him and his truth and people.

What a contrast this new fellowship of brothers was to the systems they emerged from, such a mixed multitude both of people and of clergy! There was indeed need to evangelise within that 'church'. The pulpit gave the great opportunity to declare the Gospel, that salvation is in Christ alone through faith alone; yet at the same time declaring that the organisation was certainly not a church in the New Testament understanding of that word. There were indeed many faithful ministers and attenders at their ministrations but the structure itself was a reflection

of the Old Testament system. And if further evidence of this mixed state of things was needed, was it not abundantly given in the appalling ejection from its organisation of 2,000 ministers of the Gospel in 1662?

For anyone to maintain that the church of which they are the minister is the best place to fish from is to show that their congregation is a mixed church and they are, in reality, not so much a pastor of a flock as an evangelist within the bounds of a given parish or district. By definition the church is the congregation of the Lord's people, the sheep of his pasture, the branches united to the Vine, the members one of another, the bodily parts all joined to its Head. It is from the boat of the church that we fish and catch men. We do not need to fish *inside* the boat. We do not evangelise *inside* the church, but *from* the church to those outside. Or, to change the metaphor, Paul in 1 Thessalonians tells how after he had preached the Gospel with power in their company,

> Not only has the Word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything, for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God … (1 Thessalonians 1:8ff).

And that is as it was in the church in the 1650s and indeed later, and how it should be with us, the very body of the people becoming part of the preaching, purveying its living impact on all they meet.

Apostolic preaching was intended to open people's eyes to the truth as it is in Jesus. Paul was totally certain of this purpose,

> (I am sending you) … to open their eyes, so they that may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:17).

As we are so clearly told that all in the New Covenant know the Lord, it must be obvious to us that the church is not the place where we evangelise. It is becoming increasingly popular for men to look upon some religious bodies as an ideal place for preaching the Gospel. This is to confuse the New Testament clarity on what is a church.

Apostolic preaching was designed or intended to open people's eyes, as we saw in Paul's declaration in Acts 26, or in Ephesians, referring to their 'understanding being darkened'. Anyone with closed eyes and darkened understanding is not a member of the church. The effect of the Holy Spirit's *work* in regeneration is that the individual sees. This is the work of the Holy Spirit alone, and the result is the addition of another person to the Body of Christ. However, the Spirit almost always works through means, and primarily through preaching. The eunuch was not saved by reading his newly-acquired scroll of scripture. The Sovereign Spirit directed Philip to ask him, 'Do you understand what you are

reading?' to which he replied, 'How can I, except someone show me?' And Philip preached to him Jesus. This is the function of those whose eyes are opened and who know the Lord, and these alone form the Church of Jesus Christ.

The reason we are here today as members of Christ's Church, and some of us as preachers within that Church, is because we have ceased to walk in darkness, but have been brought together as a people who were once not a people. Anyone amongst us who does not know the Lord as this covenant expounds it, may have his name on a list of members but is not a member of the Body of Christ. Any dilution of this teaching inevitably produces groups of religious people more approximating to the Old Covenant than the New. Our business is to see we maintain the latter.

Experience in Keswick today is unlike any other I have met in the course of 40 years' ministry. We more often than not have more visitors in the congregation than local members, and not infrequently meet good people who know very few of the good historic hymns, and not a few are unaccustomed to the expository and applied preaching of the Word. Some of them are reminded of days which, sadly for them, are past. Unfortunately, a few are hearing such for the first time. This reflects the state of the Christian Church in our islands, where we have forgotten something which is unique to us since the day of Pentecost,—namely the tongue of fire which was also the central attraction and means of expansion for the nonconforming church of the seventeenth century.

The previously mentioned William Arthur wrote a book back in the 19th century entitled *The Tongue of Fire.* It is his exposition of Pentecost and went through a number of editions quite rapidly. This book was the means of an awakening in many churches at the time. His main theme was that the truth of Scripture, clothed with the fire of the Holy Spirit, belonged, and was unique to, the Christian Church.

> In strict keeping with this spiritual stamp of Christianity, was the symbol which, once for all, announced to the church the advent of her conquering power,—the power by which she was to stand before Kings, to confound synagogues, to silence councils, to still mobs, to confront the learned, to illuminate the senseless, and to enflame the cold,—the power by which, beginning at Jerusalem, where the name *of* Jesus was a byword, she was to proclaim his glory through all Judea, throughout Samaria, and throughout the uttermost parts of the earth. The symbol is a TONGUE, the only instrument of the grandest war ever waged: a *tongue*—man's speech to his fellow man; a message in human words to human faculties, from the understanding to the understanding, from the heart to the heart. A tongue of *fire*—a man's voice, God's truth; man's speech, the Holy Spirit's inspiration; a human organ, a superhuman power! Not one tongue, but cloven tongues; as the speech of men is various, here we see the Creator taking to Himself

> the language of every man's mother; so that in the very words wherein he heard her say, 'I love thee,' he might also hear the Father of all say, 'I love thee' (p. 39).

When she (the Church) does not know the experience of this holy preaching she is shorn of her God-given power which makes the preaching effectual. But, with it, she is able to go out making disciples of the nations to a marked degree. There are many other good books available on the subject of preaching but the one which has helped me most is Lloyd-Jones' *Preaching and Preachers.*

Here he begins by saying, 'The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching.' As you know he goes on to elaborate this, giving illustrations and reasons for his assertion. Not least is the point that the Christian message is so impossible to comprehend by the unenlightened man that the only thing to do with it is preach it. God is not up for discussion with people who are darkened in their minds but he must be declared to them in his chosen and appointed way of making himself known and resulting in people being enlightened.

So what then is this preaching, so owned and blest in the New Testament and many times in our history since?

The preacher is a man called to be an ambassador for God, and preaching is the delivery of God's message through him. It is intended to transform the hearer from the inside out, involving the whole person. Only true preaching can bring the hearer to feel that he is being dealt with, challenged, corrected and healed. Yet this preaching is not merely oratorical, or apologetic, or entertaining or topical, but rather God's message preached with the presence and blessing of the Holy Spirit. Lloyd-Jones' final chapter is devoted to his appeal to all preachers to know and seek this demonstration of power.

This ultimate chapter is entitled 'Demonstrations of the Spirit and of the Power' and the Doctor opens with, 'I have kept and reserved to this last lecture what is after all the greatest essential in connection with preaching, and that is the Unction and Anointing of the Holy Spirit.' Now this emphasis has become most unpopular today across evangelicalism and particularly in Reformed circles. A number of reasons may be mentioned which have given rise to such a position being held by many among good brethren. Some hold that the Doctor is weak in his expositions of some of these New Testament passages mentioning the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

We have all had to face the wildest claims and ways of the charismatic movement which have made us highly cautious of anything which may appear to lean in that direction. In addition there are excellent brethren to whom we owe much for their preaching and writing who take issue with Lloyd Jones' appeal to us, on theological and expositional grounds.

Whatever our stand may be, something is missing among us, and unless there is a change in our circumstances as Reformed historic churches, many will, in a little while, become extinct.

I suggest we need to come with a fresh openness to listen again to his arguments and appeals to us on this matter. After all, he was not alone in his understanding either of the Scriptures he cites or the instances and people brought out from history. Men of the Reformation, Puritan and Awakening periods testify to such experience in their ministries.

He first lays out his New Testament base for his appeal to us, starting with John the Baptist's preaching:

> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, 'I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:15–17).

He (Lloyd-Jones) continues with our risen Lord's directions and promise in Acts 1:8, 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'—which couple witness and power together. This is something those New Testament men experienced not once but time and again as occasions demanded (e.g. Acts 4:7): 'And when (the Council) had set them (Peter & John) in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them …'

Stephen's crisis also illustrates this:

> Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:54–55).

Then Paul's experience is brought forward:

> 'But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said …' (Acts 13:9)

and:

> And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:3–5).
>
> Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people

> but their power. For the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power (1 Corinthians 4:18–20).

Of this last text Dr Lloyd-Jones said, 'There is no text perhaps of which we need to be reminded so much at the present time as just that. There is certainly no lack of words but is there much evidence of power in our preaching? It is still the test of the preaching.'

Our weapons are a spiritual power:

> 'For though we walk in the flesh we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ …' (2 Corinthians 10:3–5).

> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. (Colossians 1:29)

> … because our gospel came to you not only in word but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.' (1 Thessalonians 1:5)

Peter tells of the gospel preached 'by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look' (1 Peter 1:12).

We are not dispensationalists, believing that this was confined to the apostolic period. 'The scriptures are meant to apply to us today, and if you confine all this to the apostolic era, you are leaving very little for us at the present time. In any case, how do you decide what was meant for them only, and what is for us also?'

> Take the situation with which we are confronted today. Look at the task, look at the state of the world, look at the modern mentality. Without believing in and knowing something of the power of the Spirit, it is a heart-breaking task. I certainly could not go on for another day but for this. If I felt that it was all left to us, and our learning and our scholarship and our organisations, I would be of all men the most miserable and hopeless. The situation would be completely hopeless. But this is not the case. What we read of in the New Testament is equally possible and open to us today; and it is our only hope. But we must realise this. If we do not, we shall spend our time in 'shallows and in miseries'; and we shall achieve nothing. (*Preaching & Preachers,* p. 315).

Such men as Luther and Calvin in Europe were mighty preachers. And here too in England, men such as Hugh Latimer and John Bradford drew the crowds and surged forward blazing brilliant light into gross darkness. Then there were Robert Bruce and John Livingston in Scotland and others in Wales and Ireland, too many to mention by name. All these men held forth the Word, testifying to the Spirit's unction upon it. But how may we recognise this when it happens? The Doctor gives his own assessment of it:

> 'The first indication is in the preacher's own consciousness. 'Our gospel came not unto you in word only', says Paul, 'but also in power and the Holy Ghost, and much assurance'. Who knew the assurance? Paul himself. He knew something was happening, he was aware of it. You cannot be filled with the Spirit without knowing it. He had 'much assurance'. He knew he was clothed with power and authority. How does one know it? It gives clarity of thought, clarity of speech, ease of utterance, a great sense of authority and confidence as you are preaching, an awareness of a power not your own, thrilling through the whole of your being, and an indescribable sense of joy. You are a man 'possessed', you are taken hold of, and taken up. I like to put it like this—and I know of nothing on earth that is comparable to this feeling—that when this happens you have a feeling that you are not actually doing the preaching, you are looking on. You are looking on at yourself in amazement as this is happening. It is not your effort; you are just the instrument, the channel, the vehicle: and the Spirit is using you, and you are looking on in great enjoyment and astonishment. There is nothing that is in any way comparable to this. That is what the preacher himself is aware of' (p. 324).

Then he goes on to depict the congregation and what happens to them at such times:

> What about the people? They sense it at once; they can tell the difference immediately. They are gripped, they become serious, they are convicted, they are moved, they are humbled. Some are convicted of sin, others are lifted up to the heavens, anything may happen to any one of them. They know at once that something quite unusual and exceptional is happening. As a result they begin to delight in the things of God and they want more and more teaching. They are like the people in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, they want 'to continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and breaking of bread and in prayers' (p. 324).

This is what brought our churches out from death to life and gathered the saints together, all knowing the Lord and making their presence felt in their own communities. He is still able to do more than we can ask or even imagine.

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