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Image and Appearance: some Sources for the History of Nineteenth Century Nonconformity (1)

ECCLESIASTICAL history may well be thought to polarize around the two extremes of chapel histories and the chronicles of denominational institutions: somewhere in between lies the story of the people who call themselves Christians. Our denomination has, I think, been well served at denominational level by the writings of Dr. Payne,¹ and at a local level by the writings of an honoured rank of chapel historians. But if in any particular century one were to seek a cameo of Baptist life—the culture, mind, and habits of the people who call themselves Baptists—then one would come across certain difficulties; for we have not, as yet, been as well served in this respect as have our fellow Independents by Dr. Tudur Jones' tercentenary volume *Congregationalism in England*.²

It is with the sources for this kind of national history, and that of the nineteenth century in particular that I am concerned. Immediately one is confronted with a rich diversity of material. Ten years ago, on the occasion of our jubilee, Professor Gordon Rupp put it very appropriately when he described how a visit to an auction sale yielded a chest of Wesleyana—he writes "What a jumble it was, early Methodist sermons and printed hymns, old class tickets, engravings of chapels, photographs of bewiskered Victorian divines and their overflowing quiverfulls of offsprings—and I heard somebody say . . . 'What a lot of old junk' . . . And then I thought how long ago there was a box, very ornate and very elaborate, I know, but still a box, a frame of wood for putting things in: nothing very impressive inside it, for that matter, some bits of wood and stone, and a jar of sticky stuff—a pot of manna, Aaron's rod, tablets of stone—just little items of denominational history, just a church remembering that here and there and here in the past the Living God had touched the earth."³

1. Critical Commentary and Local Study

Here, of course, in measure the evidence of local and national historians overlap and it might be appropriate to say something of their relatedness at this juncture. In the secular history of the nineteenth century, in these days of the common man, the working class has come to assume a kind of monopoly of importance so that any institution, wishing to be thought well of, has to demonstrate its

service to, and acceptance by, what the men of the nineteenth century would have called the 'mobility.' Now the churches, in recent surveys have come out poorly from this reassessment—largely through the influence of Bishop Wickham's pioneer study in religious sociology: *Church and People in An Industrial Society*,⁴ in which he concludes that the twentieth century decline in church membership sees not the loss of the working classes—because they never were in church—but the loss of middle-class adherents. Now if this be true, it is not only historically significant but is, as Wickham clearly sees, theologically disturbing, since it provokes the suspicion that "we must assume a remarkable predilection on God's part for the middle classes, and a singular distaste for, let us say, industrial workers."⁵ This is not the only theological question involved: one gets the very clear impression that in the nineteenth century all the right was with the theology of F. D. Maurice,⁶ whilst traditional Evangelicalism evidently got most of its sums wrong: hence its contribution is played down in the narrative. But the worrying point is that if one looks at K. S. Inglis' book *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*⁷ one sees not only a repetition of Wickham's assumptions but an extension of them to the joint condemnation of dissent and evangelicalism.

So, Inglis argues—"Protestant authors have made claims far beyond their evidence about the hold of evangelical religion, especially in its Methodist forms, on the new population; and they have gone unchallenged by radical historians happy to have support for the argument that 1848 passed without a revolution because evangelicalism had chloroformed the people."⁸

But these kind of generalizations seem to me to be as yet insufficiently evidenced. I find it curious to say the least that Inglis' analysis of Nonconformity and the working classes is briefest where he might have found the richest evidence, namely among the Baptists and among Methodism's own nonconformity. Instead he devotes himself to bemoaning the intensely bourgeois character of the unexpectedly middle-class Wesleyan Methodists and Congregationalists. Miss Heasman in her enthusiastic, if sometimes imprecise, study of evangelical voluntaryism has, deservedly, a different emphasis: "Only the Baptists, whose 'tabernacles' were to be found in the leading thoroughfares of the poorer districts, and the Methodists who appealed largely to newcomers to the industrial areas, attracted large numbers of the working class."⁹ For my part I am sure that Professor Burn is right to point out that at the mid-century the middle-class was too small a unit to have a monopoly of the very considerable church attendances at that time.¹⁰ Secondly, one might make some comments on the analytical method of religious statisticians from Horace Mann to Professor Inglis. The general view has been that the paganization of the masses was a result of urbanization and industrialization. So Professor Inglis: "Among the immigrants were many—we can only guess *how* many—who had worshipped in their own village where

religious practice was a familiar part of the weekly round."¹¹ But ought not Inglis be as cynical of rural religion as he shows himself to be of 'working-class religion' in the towns? Then we find that when the middle-classes are being discussed a criterion of attendance is used, but when the turn of the working classes comes, the criterion is absence. This is where Inglis insistently goes beyond Wickham—Wickham says the Methodists brought the gospel to people "rude, poor and even brutish." But adds Inglis "not to most of the rude and poor."¹² Kitson Clark dealing with the same phenomena gives a more optimistic judgment: "Christian missionaries of a good many styles of Christianity had very great success in the desolate areas in which many of these people lived, but there is always the sense that there were many more people beyond in the shadows with whom no contact had ever been made."¹³

More important than the process of urbanization was the process of suburbanization—as one clergyman put it, the trouble was that "all who made jam lived in one place and all who ate jam lived in another." With Christian leaders in the vanguard of the movement to suburban luxury, the 'down-town' churches were left without the financial resources to maintain the Gothic status symbols called churches that the prosperous left behind them. More serious still was their loss of leadership and the emergence of the socially monochrome community: in which situation the unsatisfactory expedient of the paternalistically organized 'mission' replaced the independent church of the local community.¹⁴ If however you want a well-evidenced description of the impact of suburbanization on the churches you will go in vain to Inglis—the nearest I know of, is Mr. J. H. Taylor's article on 'London Congregational Churches since 1850' in the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* for May 1965¹⁵ in which a good historical atlas of London, the various surveys of religious attendance, and the records of the London Congregational Union are employed to tell a fascinating story.

The significance of Mr. Taylor's article is that his conclusions are well-evidenced—here at last we are beginning to get the fruit of a relationship between local studies and at least metropolitan trends. My point is that until we get a much richer harvest of local studies, national descriptions will lean more to polemic than to history. In other words, one has only to look at the footnotes to test the hypothesis offered. For example, on this same theme of non-conformity and the people, there is a notable article by Dr. Hobsbawm in his book entitled *Primitive Rebels*. It reads well; here is his explanation of evangelical success:—"Visions of splendour, of judgement and of hellfire for the evil men filled those who needed support to bear the burden of their suffering, and the emotional orgies of hellfire preaching, revivals and similar occasions brought diversion into their lives."¹⁶

This is all very well but when his argument is examined it is interesting to see how much it depends for illustration on examples culled from nineteenth century Germany, twentieth century Wales

and North America; an interesting allusion to the 'Walworth Jumpers' is not followed up in any detail.¹⁷ Indeed, his preface to this volume of essays indicated that Dr. Hobsbawm has a conscience about his methodology: but the point is, that notwithstanding this, his conclusions have become a new kind of orthodoxy; at least if undergraduate essays be any kind of test of that commodity. Again, the point is that without a fuller knowledge of many local situations, so many of the speculations on national trends are to say the least premature.

2. *Self-portrait and Caricature*

Victorian England saw the novel enter upon its own, and, with the growth of the railway journey, the three volume variety in particular. For the Victorian Church therefore we have this new and difficult-to-evaluate strand of evidence. On the whole, I think, it has been used more to distort than to portray the life, culture and mind of nonconformity. And this for a very obvious reason. Non-conformity receives a bad press in nineteenth century fiction because on the whole the faithful disapproved of novels: they had not the imagination to see how a novel could heighten truth—for them the plain fact was that fiction was less than fact. To begin with at least, therefore, the image of dissent is drawn by those who are in doubt or who have lost faith and use the novel to show how they have been ill-used by religious folk. Even the Jesuit came out better than the dissenter in Victorian fiction: "If the Jesuit was only too often a nasty piece of work in Victorian fiction so also was the Dissenter. But whereas the Jesuit and his intrigues were at least clever, exotic and exciting, the Dissenter was usually shown as ignorant, drab, provincial and depressing."¹⁸

But it is the image of the novel rather than of, say, the denominational year-books that forms the customary image of nineteenth century dissent. For example, the popular notion that the nonconformist conscience was more sensitive abroad than at home owes more one suspects to Dickens' Mrs. Jellyby (whose dress and home and family perpetuate disorder whilst she devotes herself to her 'Africa duties') than to any more scholarly judgment.

But there was little opportunity for comeback while the novel as a medium remained taboo. Even Silas Hocking, the Methodist minister who sought to use the novel to change the image of dissent, lost his reputation when he engaged himself in this task and subsequently like George Macdonald, his literary mentor, exchanged orthodoxy for a brand of 'benevolent theism.' Joseph Sortain had defiantly to maintain that through the parables of the New Testament, "Fiction has been consecrated, as a vehicle of Truth, by the Divine Founder and Teacher of the Christian Church."¹⁹ The point was taken and through the 'tract,' the Puritan substitute for the novel, fiction entered the life of dissent by the back-door at least.²⁰ The Hockings—there were three of them, Joseph, Silas and Salome—at

the end of the century went the whole journey and wrote robust stories of Methodist life. Dorothy, in *Elrad the Hic*, 1890, is a distinct improvement on Mrs. Jellyby—a missionary's daughter, she tames, converts and marries a wild Arab chief and settles down with him to a life of surprisingly happy domesticity in Beirut.

It was, in fact, the depressing dimensions of the 'Condition of the People Question' which finally mediated between nonconformity and the novel. The most famous was doubtless an American example—Mrs. Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). For the children's market at home came *Jessica's First Prayer* (1866) with its story of how the little daughter of a wicked actress, who pawns everything for gin, is rescued by a kindly coffee stallholder. It sold a million and a half copies and served to acquaint the religious middle-classes with something of the conditions of destitute children in a large city. The same tears that Jessica prompted would flow just as freely for Mrs. O. F. Walton's *Christie's Old Organ* and Amy Le Feuvre's *Teddy's Button*, a story of village life. Even more socially directed were what have been called the Victorian equivalent of 'modern case histories': Catharine Marsh's, *English Hearts and English Hands* concerning work amongst the navvies working in the Crystal Palace, Mrs. Ranyard's *Missing Link* (1860) concerning the work of her trained Bible-women in the slums of St. Giles, and Mrs. Bayly's couplet *Ragged Homes and How to Mend Them*, and *Mended Homes and What Repaired Them* (both 1859) again concerned with the work of lady visitors amongst the poor. These books entered homes, innocent of all knowledge of the blue books, and interpreted to the comfortable the needs of the other England in the context of the religious man's responsibility to take action.

Another area where Puritan inhibitions against fiction were rapidly eroded was the militantly Protestant novel, part of that more general anti-Catholic tradition that runs in British history from early Guy Fawkes celebrations through the Gordon Riots and hostility to Papal Aggression to the more recent activities of Mr. Kensit and the Protestant Truth Society.²¹ The earliest Protestant novel is, I think, M. G. Lewis, *The Monk*, first published in 1795-6 which met the tastes of protestants and pornographers alike: it is interesting to note that it has been republished in recent times with a lurid cover by a paperback company not normally renowned for its protestant conscience. Professor Geoffrey Best outlines one of the most typical of the plots of the protestant novels:—

"Typically this was the story of a lovely innocent warm-hearted girl, lured by friends or relations who were either aristocrats or foreigners and who had the advantage of a Jesuit's aid, to forsake her home and/or her fiancé in favour of the life of the convent; which, after the first flush of zeal subsided, she came to dislike and fear—too late! The Protestant men, sensing her plight, would try to rescue her. She would be secretly removed to foreign parts where, however, she would be glimpsed through that screen, and a hue-and-cry raised

after her. The end of the tale could see her either rescued and taken back to home and husband, or tortured to death in a Calabrian convent.”²²

Other Protestant tales had the intriguing titles *The Female Jesuit: or, the Spy in the Family* (written by Mrs. Jemima Luke, the author of the children’s hymn and step-niece of Rev. Baptist Noel), *Geralda, the Demon Nun; The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*: all of them liberally encompassing intrigue, corruption and judgment. Indeed Dr. Maison gives it as her verdict that “few modern horror comics could equal in crudity, sadism, hysteria and blood-curdling violence the story of Jesuits in popular Victoria fiction.”²³ Now, of course, my concern is not with the historicity of these accounts but with the threatened mentality that they reveal, the legacy of which still seems to trouble an ecumenical world; honesty surely demands that we admit that our imaginative forefathers wrote of Catholic Christendom with, to say the least, less than Christian charity.

And the third kind of dissenting novel that one ought to mention is the novel of doubt and lost faith—often perhaps more accurately the novel of lost orthodoxy for there was amongst the doubters a resolute refusal to give up all faith; faith of some sort remains the possession of both George Macdonald and William Hale White to the end. But the loser of faith is often not the most balanced judge of that which he has rejected or the most tolerant of the old ways. George Eliot in a rash moment said of Spurgeon’s preaching that it was “a most superficial grocer’s back-parlour view of Calvinist Christianity,”²⁴ whilst Mrs. Humphrey Ward has the following description of a young girl’s dilemmas. Lucy Purcell, daughter of the unlovely and unlovable Purcell, the bookseller, says as if by way of total explanation of her misery:—

“Father’s a Baptist, you know—that’s bad enough—but Robert’s a Particular Baptist. I asked him what it meant once when he was pestering me to marry him. ‘Well, you see,’ he said, ‘a man must show that his heart’s changed—we don’t take in everybody like—we want to be sure they’re real converted.’ I don’t believe it does mean that—father says it doesn’t. Anyway I asked him whether if I married him he’d want me to be a Particular Baptist too. And he said, very slow and solemn, that of course he should look for religious fellowship in his wife, but that he didn’t want to hurry me. I laughed till I cried at the thought of me going to that hideous chapel of his, dressed like his married sister. But sometimes, I declare, I think he’ll make me do what he wants—he’s got a way with him. He sticks to a thing as tight as wax, and I don’t care what becomes of me sometimes.”²⁵

But how does one evaluate this: all one can say is, I think, that it tells us more of what people thought about dissenters than how they behaved. But this distinction is not always made: all too often the descriptions of dissenting life and worship in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* are taken as if they were verbatim

descriptions of actual situations, rather than imaginative recreations 30 years after, by a man who on his own confession had gone through many psychological disturbances in the intervening years. It seems to me that Mark Rutherford is a source document for the reflections of the ex-orthodox of the eighties rather than a description of the practice of dissent at the mid-century. But very often serious historians, even church historians, quote Rutherford as evidence without any evaluation of the difficulties of interpreting his writings, and so consequently the Puritan Sunday, the hypocritical Long Prayer, the over didactic and stereotyped sermon and the evangelical experience of conversion are all reproduced to be sneered at.²⁶ His overstatements are monumental. Of his time at Cheshunt, he writes "We had come to College in the first place to learn the Bible . . . I will venture to say there was no book less understood by either students or professors."²⁷ Or take his description of Mrs. Smale, the draper's wife: "a woman I never saw moved to any generosity, and cruel not with the ferocity of the tiger, but with the dull insensibility of a cart-wheel which will roll over a man's neck as easily as over a flint."²⁸ But notwithstanding the difficulty of interpretation the novel can record as no other material can, the full-sided pattern of community life and so, the advantage of studying the novels, but at the same time, the responsibility of evaluating them aright.

3. *Biographies, Sermons and Treatises*

If dissenters felt inhibited in projecting an image of themselves upon society by way of the novel, they had no hesitations at all about using the sermon to proclaim, inform, persuade. The young Arthur Porritt's first assignment as a reporter for the *Manchester Examiner* in 1890 was to attend the Metropolitan Tabernacle. His instructions were: "If Spurgeon preaches just a gospel sermon, there is no copy in it. If he says anything about himself that may make a good paragraph; if he says anything about current questions, give it us in full,"²⁹ which, incidentally, reveals rather clearly where the journalist's trade differs from that of the historian. For the historian must be interested in just those gospel sermons which, useless for copy, explain the adherence of so large a congregation through so many years. As far as the Victorian pulpit is concerned, the main problem of the researcher must surely be the abundance of the material surviving: in all it is a remarkable tribute to a culture and a taste which has almost completely disappeared: even the faithful these days seem to endure rather than to enjoy the sermon. There are many reasons for the decline of the appeal of preaching. Dean Inge once said "We have almost ceased to be a listening people and become a reading people." Many have commented on the lost imperative in the pulpit since hell has been de-colonized: "no one fears God nowadays" reflected R. W. Dale. Alongside which must be set the reduced incidence of premature mortality which had hitherto been a common experience corroborating the warnings of the preacher. Preachers, too, ceased to be civic personalities when they and their congregations

moved out into the suburbs: many of the unchurched thereafter made the assumption that religion too was no longer of central but only of peripheral importance. The pulpit, too, suffered from the general decline of the public occasion on the eve of the emergence of the mass media. Alongside the political meeting the preaching service suffered from the new home-oriented direction of the common life of the people. The new variety of life put the pulpit in a new competitive position. F. W. Robertson who knew his medium so well, declared: "By the change of times the pulpit has lost its place. It does only part of the whole which used to be done by it alone. Once it was newspaper, schoolmaster, theological treatise, and stimulant to good works, historical lecture, metaphysics etc. all in one. Now, they are partitioned out to different officers, and the pulpit is no more the pulpit of three centuries back, than the authority of a master of a household is that of Abraham, who was soldier, butcher, sacrificer, shepherd and emir in one person."³⁰ It is no exaggeration to say that the sermon was the focus of nonconformist life in the nineteenth century, at once the central experience of the church, the imperative to morality, to philanthropy and evangelism—and if an understanding of the behaviour of nonconformists be sought, it would be a foolish man who would ignore what the men of the times declared to be their crucial diet of instruction, stimulation and assurance.

The sermon not of words but of faithful actions finds its reflection in the biographical remains of the age, richer doubtless for the clergy than the laity but still a rich vein of evidence. In some cases one has to make allowance for the filial respects of the authors or, in the case of autobiographies the tricks that memory plays on old age, but on the whole they are well-done and include so much of letters, diaries, and other writings that many of them can be classed as source-material. All through of course it is the historian's task from his accumulated reading to deduce what is typical and what is eccentric. Many, for example, have quoted Edmund Gosse's account of Christmas in a Plymouth Brethren house:—

"On Christmas Day of this year 1857 our villa saw a very unusual sight. My Father had given strictest charge that no difference whatever was to be made in our meals on that day; the dinner was to be neither more copious than usual nor less so. He was obeyed, but the servants, secretly rebellious, made a small plum-pudding for themselves. (I discovered afterwards, with pain, that Miss Marks received a slice of it in her boudoir.) Early in the afternoon, the maids,—of whom we were now advanced to keeping two,—kindly remarked that 'the poor dear child ought to have a bit, anyhow,' and wheedled me into the kitchen, where I ate a slice of plum-pudding. Shortly I began to feel that pain inside which in my frail state was inevitable, and my conscience smote me violently. At length I could bear my spiritual anguish no longer, and bursting into the

study I called out: ‘Oh! Papa, Papa, I have eaten of flesh offered to idols!’ It took some time, between my sobs, to explain what had happened. Then my Father sternly said: ‘Where is the accursed thing?’ I explained that as much as was left of it was still on the kitchen table. He took me by the hand, and ran with me into the midst of the startled servants, seized what remained of the pudding, and with the plate in one hand and me still tight in the other, ran till we reached the dust-heap, when he flung the idolatrous confectionery on to the middle of the ashes, and then raked it deep down into the masse. The suddenness, the violence, the velocity of this extaordinary act made an impression on my memory which nothing will ever efface.”³¹

But one needs to put alongside that the judgment of a critical historian, widely read in Victorian history. Canon Charles Smyth writes:

“ But the real strength of Evangelicalism lay not in the pulpit or the platform, but in the home. To those who believe that the typical Evangelical sermon was about hell-fire, that the typical Evangelical layman is fairly represented by the father of Sir Edmund Gosse, and that the typical Victorian parent was Mr. Barrett of Wimpole Street, this may sound surprising. But to judge from memoirs and biographies, the Evangelical families of England were conspicuously happy families, and it was in hearts of the Victorian mothers that the Evangelical piety won the most signal and the most gracious of its triumphs.

“ The characteristic religious observance of the Victorian home was family prayers, which as the then Archbishop of Canterbury reminded us ten years ago, brought the remembrance of God right into the heart of the home life from beginning to end. . . . And if we are ever to understand the quality of social life in the Victorian Era, we should do well to remember the tribute paid by G. W. E. Russell, himself an Anglo-Catholic, to his Evangelical upbringing. ‘The Evangelicals,’ he wrote, ‘were the most religious people whom I have ever met . . . I recall an abiding sense of religious responsibility, a self-sacrificing energy in works of mercy, an evangelistic zeal, an aloofness from the world, and a level of saintliness in daily life, such as I do not expect again to see realized on earth . . . *Sit anima mea cum Sanctis.* May my lot be with the Evangelical Saints from whose lips I first learned the doctrine of the Cross.’”³²

But problems of interpretation, personal bias, and the lack of sympathy of one generation for that which its predecessor valued most highly, do not exhaust the difficulties which confront the church historian. I contrast, for example, the counsel given to me by a distinguished medieval historian from the University of Louvain—“Don’t write church history, write the history of the Holy Spirit,” with the enquiry of an undergraduate who came to see me to ask if she could do my Special Subject on Victorian Nonconformity but,

"please, could she leave the theology out." There is the problem: the writing of a history that encompasses Pentecost and Theology. The Spirit is by definition trackless, the queen of the sciences less than attractive to the secular man. But in a history of nineteenth century nonconformity, theology cannot be dismissed, nor can works of theology from trivial acts to scholarly theses: nonconformity without its theological mind, despite what radical historians say, is not something which bears relationship to the realities of history, and so there is here another strand of evidence demanding consideration.

4. *Hymns and Liturgy*

The historian must never underestimate what he can learn about the past from the present, and nowhere is this more true than in the sphere of nonconformist history, since nonconformists are very conscious of the fact that they are those who represent the continuation of an historical tradition: they must always be men with memories. We can learn about the past then by looking at present practice and saying "When did that begin?": when for example, did our ministers start to wear clerical collars, when did we begin to sit for the communion hymn, or what do the different forms of Sunday School anniversaries tell us about the rich variation of tradition in different parts of the country? We should be alive, too, to parts of our tradition which are—for better or for ill—dying out: the pentecostal irreverence of the almost extinguished interruptory 'Amen,' the dedication service tagged on as an after-thought to morning service, the singing of the Lord's Prayer which I think is showing itself more long lived in the North than in the South. And would it be too irreverent to notice that in many cases 'Vestry Prayers' tend to bespeak aspirations which once were realistic but which now are woefully unrelated to those who sit in the pews awaiting preacher and deacons alike?

To move on to a more historical plain, one can find plenty of evidence as to the changing views of the sacraments which the last century witnessed amongst free-churchmen. R. W. Dale was only one among many who noticed the change from a high Calvinist theology of the sacraments to a more subjective observance. Speaking of the Congregationalists, he writes:—

"Early in the present century the traditional theory of the objective element in the sacraments still survived, but the subjective theory of their meaning was securing ascendancy. Dr. Pye-Smith and Dr. Halley frankly renounced the earlier position, and they were followed by the overwhelming majority of the Congregational ministers in the last generation. In more recent years there has been a reaction in favour of the central principle of the Savoy theology which insisted on the objective value both of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper, but it is probable that the sacramental article of the Declaration of 1833 still represents the general belief of English Congregationalists."⁸⁸

Indeed the word sacrament with its mystical connotation often gave

way to the word 'ordinance' bespeaking more the obedience of the faithful than the activity of God. But all this for me is put into focus by the fact that from the 1870's onwards you get both the use of unfermented wine in the communion in deference to temperance scruples and the replacement of the chalice by trays of individual glasses, in most town churches if not in the country ones, this, as far as I can see, in deference to the science of hygiene. One old minister reflected upon the sense of loss which came with the advent of these mechanical contrivances, instead of the old and beautiful silver—or good Sheffield plate—chalices, "unbeautiful stacks of trays with minute cups, suggestive of the laboratory of a chemistry class . . . or a doll's tea party."³⁴

The changes in liturgy that take place in the century are themselves witnesses of the changing nature of society: in particular they witness to the technical mastery of the arts of artificial lighting so that evening services, a novelty at the beginning of the century had become nearly universal by the 30's. Later in the century the widespread use of congregational hymn-books witnesses to the increasing standards of literacy: singing was no longer something to be endured rather than enjoyed as doubtless it must have been when each line was announced separately by a precentor equipped with a tuning fork.

More generally the century witnesses a growing concern amongst free churchmen for the proper conduct of worship. Here the influence of the Oxford Movement can be seen as operating in two contrary directions. First, it fortified both the Nonconformity and Protestantism of the Free Churches, intensifying their suspicion of the Establishment and the Catholic Church. Every advance of ritual and sacerdotalism called forth a savage and intense reply from Evangelical dissenters. But some men, wondering whether demagogic rancour was in fact the best defence of truth, began to examine their own tradition of churchmanship and to find in the reformers a fuller doctrine of the church and ministry, the cultivation of which formed a better protest than that of those who shouted loudest. Indeed in his study of Free Church Service Books³⁵—yet another strand of evidence open to us in our search for an understanding of nineteenth century Dissent—Professor Horton Davies shows that this liturgical concern predates the Oxford Movement and stretches back to the publication of *A New Directory* in 1812.

There used to be a Baptist Church in Central Hill, Upper Norwood, where a remarkable minister presided over a remarkable congregation. Of S. A. Tipple, Robertson Nicholl, a frequent member of his congregation, said "There have been two men in my life whose preaching I would listen to twice every Sunday, and these two were Parker and Tipple. I did that with Tipple for years and I never heard him preach a poor sermon."³⁶ Perhaps we ought not to put alongside that remark Arthur Porritt's judgment that Tipple never said a word that led one to think he was a Baptist.³⁷ Ruskin thought him "the greatest master of pulpit prose."³⁸ The services at Central

Hill started at five past eleven to allow the train from Victoria to arrive with the more influential members of the congregation from the west-end: the church was closed for the summer when the minister was not there. Indeed it has been said that this people were not like a church at all and that the Sunday after Tipple resigned the congregation evaporated into thin air. A freak perhaps of the days of pulpit oratory: but the important point for me is that Tipple disliked being reported and therefore more of his prayers survive than his sermons because he could not see the note-taker when he prayed. Some of these were gathered together and published in 1912 as *Spoken Words of Prayer and Praise*. Here then is a different kind of record of the sensitive soul at prayer, and a study of his approach to God will teach us yet more about late Victorian religion: the tone of Tipple's mysticism may perhaps be indicated by the following titles: "Union Amidst Many Differences in Prayer and Praise," a primitive ecumenical cry, "The Intimate God, Whom Seeking to Express in Our Creeds, We Leave Ever Unexpressed," a delicate statement of the superiority of spiritual over credal religion, "Through All and In All," a summing up of Tipple's concern to see the universality of God: there is no word more frequent in the title of his prayers than the word 'all.'

Most particularly amongst the liturgical texts of the nineteenth century are their hymns and hymnaries—and if we are to take Bernard Manning as our guide these are crucial sources for our understanding of nineteenth century nonconformity: "We recite no Creeds" he observed "because our hymns are full of the form of sound words."³⁹ Few Baptist undergraduates at Cambridge who were involved in local preaching can, I imagine, have failed to visit our church at Landbeach where, until well into the second half of the twentieth century at least, the congregation still used *Psalms and Hymns for Public, Social and Private Worship prepared for the use of the Baptist Denomination*. The copy I have is dated 1899—a year before *The Baptist Church Hymnal* was published—but it is I imagine a late copy of the 1883 edition, itself a revision of the first *Psalms and Hymns* published in 1858. Go back beyond that and our denominational hymn books become mere supplements to Watts' own *Psalms and Hymns* which date to the first two decades of the eighteenth century. All of which illustrates the conservativeness of the denomination in the matter of hymn-singing, a practice which was only grudgingly accepted among us in the late seventeenth century. Peruse the hymn books of the nineteenth century and you cannot help but get the atmosphere of historic worship. The 1899 *Psalms and Hymns* is a solid and respectable book: still largely the work of the men of the eighteenth century: Watts, Doddridge, the Wesleys (in fairly small quantity), Cowper and Newton, with the Baptists' own Benjamin Beddome, John Fawcett, Samuel Medley, John Ryland and Anne Steele. It also includes an interesting collection of verses from the improbably named Ottiwell Heginbotham.⁴⁰ There is some

material drawn from seventeenth and eighteenth century Pietism in Germany, some from English Puritanism and some from the Fathers of the Church. More recent compositions are represented by the works of Josiah Conder, George Rawson, James Montgomery, Thomas Binney, Reginald Heber, T. H. Gill, Horatius Bonar—all of them, eminently respectable, urbane and restrained: not until No. 1048 do you get a hymn with a chorus whereafter you get a small rash of feminine repetitiveness from the pens of Frances Ridley Havergal, Anabella Hankey, and Fanny Crosby.⁴¹ Now this is interesting—for Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos* was first published in 1872, introducing the music of the music-hall to the sanctuary⁴² (E. Routley: *Music, Sacred and Profane*, p. 129). Until the present century then Baptists got their 'respectable hymns' from one book and their Sankeys from another. The whole role of the Sankey hymn—its theology, its psychology and its appeal needs urgent attention if we are ever to understand late Victorian religion aright. It is a fascinating piece of evidence as to how even the cause of evangelism, when pursued relentlessly, and in isolation from the community of the church, leads to a dilution of biblical theology in favour of an experience-theology.⁴³ But there is a danger here; first, since Sankey's is essentially an American source, and secondly there is the danger of exalting the written remains, and thereby twisting them: doubtless the researcher's tedious labours are lightened when he comes across, "I should like to die, said Willie," with its commercial fourth verse

"But I'll have to tell the angel when I meet him at the door

That he must excuse my papa 'cause he couldn't leave the store." But how often was it sung? But again, I suspect that the appeal to those who did sing it was the fourth verse: they knew too well the pull of the shop on the street corner. But still I am interested to note how 'Sankeys' tended to continue as the liturgical diet of some Institutional Churches, P.S.A.'s. and Brotherhoods long after those organizations had rejected the cruciality of individual salvation of which the hymns spoke. I am sure that *Sacred Songs and Solos* is an essential and mediating document in the understanding of late Victorian religion.

But look again at what is included in *Psalms and Hymns*—look at the Christian's expectation of death there revealed, look at the patriotism of the dissenters,⁴⁴ and look at the terror and tenderness of its children's hymns⁴⁵ and the logic for early rising on the sabbath:—

"This is the day when Christ arose,
So early from the dead;
Why should I then my eyelids closed,
And waste my hours in bed?"⁴⁶

Look too at the domestic concerns of the church and particularly their concern for deacons and pastors. No. 689, a prayer for a sick pastor has him, struck, smitten, sinking to the grave then restored,

"Back to our hopes and wishes give
And bid our friend and father live."

but then the writer has second thoughts and almost, it seems to me, let's the pastor down, the grasp on life is surrendered and now the prayer is only, 'And guide him safe to endless day,' this hymn being followed by a choice of four others to celebrate the pastor's death.

But perhaps most striking of all is the missionary vision of hymns written up to 80 years before Carey's initiative. Watts' 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun' is dated 1719, and in the original was even more specific than our present version. Two additional verses read:

"Behold the islands with their kings
And Europe her best tribute brings
From north to south the princes meet
To pay their homage at his feet.
There Persia, glorious to behold
There India shines in eastern gold
And barbarous nations at His word
Submit, and bow, and own their Lord."⁴⁷

But until the end of the century what does this mean? Is it yet another example of hypocritical hymnology—good intentions without any practical means of implementing them?

There is a stark antithetical challenge in the mood of these pre-missionary hymns which contrast strangely with the supra-ecumenical spirit of George Matheson's 'Gather us in, Thou Love that fillest all,' which was evidently too comprehensive even for the editors of the *Baptist Hymn Book*. Matheson's exact meaning may be obscure but the impact of a growing awareness of worrying issues in comparative religion is clear: gone is the old claim of uniqueness, and in its stead there is a new charitable tolerance.

Another hymn which reveals the impact of nineteenth century thought is Charles Kingsley's sanctification of both Darwin and the Public Health Movement 'From thee all skill and science flow' written for the opening of a hospital. Kingsley was, of course, a Christian Socialist, whose gospel in hymn form was expressed by Thomas Hughes, author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in the hymn,

"O god of truth, whose living word
Upholds whate'er hath breath";

with its hygienic concern for 'Truth.' The politics of the mid-century came out even more strongly in the work of Ebenezer Elliott a Sheffield ironfounder sometimes better known as the 'Corn Law Rhymer.' Earlier he had been a Chartist, before all middle-class support was alienated from them, and his hymn 'When wilt Thou save the people' dates to his Chartist period: indeed Manning calls it "the agonized prayer of the Chartist."⁴⁸ In a time when—as Kingsley was aware—too few Christian leaders sympathized with the demands of the oppressed, Elliott offers a passionate plea for justice and salvation for the common people. It is, it seems to me, without doubt a conscious but reverent parody of the National Anthem:

As against ' God save our gracious Queen '
 " When wilt Thou save the people
 O God of mercy, when?
 Not kings and lords but nations
 Not thrones and crowns but men!"

These last three hymns did not get into Baptist hymn books until the twentieth century. It was then too that a harvesting of the hymnology of the Catholic Revival took place, though *Psalms and Hymns* had gone some way in this direction—now dissenters without conscience began to sing Caswall and Neale's translations of the ancient Greek and Latin hymns of the Church; the hymns of the Tractarians, Keble, Pusey and Dix, and from Rome itself the hymns of Newman in small number, and to excess, many would claim, the ditties of F. W. Faber, the 'saccharinity' of which many find too sickly. Also from a Roman source rather surprisingly came Professor J. J. Potter's children's hymn, 'Brightly gleams our banner': all witnessing a new tolerance as well as a remarkable similarity of devotional outlook and personal feeling between Protestant Evangelicals and ultramontanes like Faber.

But if there was a new tolerance there was also a new exclusiveness, an exclusion of all which offended against taste—a campaign engaged upon by Barrett for the Congregationalists when he composed his hymnal in 1887.

Bernard Manning⁵⁰ has attacked this sophistication in robust enough terms: I am simply interested in the religious atmosphere which is offended by talk of devils, wild beasts . . . and indeed anything else that prowled:

"How the hosts of Midian
 Prowl and prowl around"
 becomes
 "How the powers of darkness
 Compass thee around."

Or again Manning's judgment that there is in late nineteenth century hymn books "the faint odour of a literary Keatings Powder: a sort of spiritual insect-killer—fatal to worms . . . The elder hymn-writers overdid it. We weary of the metaphor, exact and scriptural as it is. But our delicate-souled editors pursue the worm with a cruelty and diligence altogether beyond its deserts."⁵¹ Once more I think our hymn-books record for us the tensions, as well as the aspirations of late nineteenth century dissent, at once their self-consciousness and their unsureness. But I suppose the classical illustration of the impact of the gentle art of hymn-writing upon the broader canvas of religious history is the Rivulet Controversy, the nearest thing that our Congregationalist brethren knew to a heresy hunt. In 1855 T. T. Lynch, a sensitive Congregational minister of a mystical bent produced *Hymns for Heart and Voice: the Rivulet* to supplement his own congregation's diet of Watts and Doddridge. It was in fact an unexceptional collection of religious verse—indeed most modern

protestant denominations today include in their collections something of Lynch. It must of course be remembered that this book was to supplement Watts; it did not need to give comprehensive treatment to the whole of gospel truth; instead it concentrated on Christian service and the surprising discovery of the presence of Christ in unexpected places. But in a verse like this the dogmatist could not but smell Germany:

Where is thy God, my soul?
Confined to Scripture's page
Or does his Spirit check and guide
The Spirit of each age.

Dr. Campbell the bluff, fire-eating guardian of orthodoxy did not think much to the waters of the *Rivulet*: indeed his delicate nostrils diagnosed the foul fetor of insidious infidelity, and brought the whole life of the Congregational Union into jeopardy through his attacks on Lynch who retaliated with the following ironic verses, which he entitled 'A Negative Affair.'

When sugar in the lump I see,
I know that it is there,
Melt it, and then I soon suspect
A negative affair:
Where is the sugar, Sir? I say,
Let me both touch and see;
Sweetness instead of sugar, Sir,
You'll not palm off on me.
Don't tell me that the sugar lumps,
When dropt in water clear,
That they may make the water sweet,
Themselves must disappear;
For common sense, Sir, such as mine
The lumps themselves must see;
Sweetness instead of sugar, Sir,
You'll not palm off on me.
For instance, Sir, in every hymn
Sound doctrine you should state
As clearly as a dead man's name
Is on his coffin plate;
Religion, Sir, is only fudge,
Let's have theology;
Sweetness instead of sugar, Sir,
You'll not palm off on me.

A petty dispute parochial to Congregationalism? It may have been—but at the same time I think it illustrates the religious mood of the 1850's, a general feeling of unrest, much confusion and uncertainty.

(To be concluded in the next issue)

NOTES

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- ⁴ E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an industrial Society*, London 1957.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 220.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158, 193-4, 228, 250.
- ⁷ London 1963.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ⁹ K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, London 1962, p. 17. cf. E. J. Hobsbawm: *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester 1959, p. 141, S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement*, London 1967, p. 77.
- ¹⁰ W. L. Burn, *Age of Equipoise*, London 1964, p. 272.
- ¹¹ Inglis, *op. cit.*, p. 3-4.
- ¹² Inglis, *op. cit.*, p. 327.
- ¹³ G. Kitson Clarke, *The Making of Victorian England*, London 1962, p. 167. See also W. L. Burn, *op. cit.*, p. 270-274, D. M. Thompson, 'The 1851 Religious Census: Problems and Possibilities,' *Victorian Studies*, September 1967, p. 87.
- ¹⁴ A fatal mistake that needs a more complete documentation.
- ¹⁵ pp. 22-43.
- ¹⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
- ¹⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
- ¹⁸ M. Maison, *Search Your Soul, Eustace*, London 1961, p. 183.
- ¹⁹ Cited M. Maison, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- ²¹ *Vide*, E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, London 1968.
- ²² *Vide*, G. F. A. Best, 'Popular Protestantism in Victorian Britain' in (ed.) R. Robson, *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain*, London 1967, p. 129.
- ²³ M. Maison, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
- ²⁴ Cited in A. Porritt, *The Best I Remember*, London 1922, p. 2.
- ²⁵ Mrs. Humphrey Ward, *The History of David Grieve*, London 1892, p. 420.
- ²⁶ e.g. Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England IV: From Newman to Martineau*, p. 214.
- ²⁷ [W. Hale White], *Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, London 1881, p. 13.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.
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- ³⁴ A. D. Martin, cited by Horton Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
- ³⁵ H. Davies, *op. cit.*, chapters III and VIII.
- ³⁶ T. H. Darlow, *William Robertson Nicholl*, London 1925, p. 378.
- ³⁷ A. Porritt, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- ³⁸ *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, London 1942, p. 136.
- ³⁹ *Vide*, Nos. 79, 81, 85, 515, and J. Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, London 1907.
- ⁴⁰ *Vide*, Nos. 1048, 1065, 1088, 1109.
- ⁴¹ E. Routley, *Music, Sacred and Profane*, London 1960, p. 129.
- ⁴² *Vide*, *Sacred Songs and Solos*, London, n.d. Nos. 12, 99, 110, 303, 343, 371, 380, 415, 579.
- ⁴³ *Psalms and Hymns*, *op. cit.*, Nos. 757-8.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Nos. 947, 946.

(Concluded on p. 14)