Pastor and Evangelist

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William Grimshaw was one of those picturesque figures whose lives inevitably acquire legendary associations within a very short time of their deaths. Today he stands pre-eminent among a number of eighteenth-century exhibits on pastoralia, for the edification of modern Evangelicals. But his real importance lies rather in the fact that, placed in true historical perspective, his ministry is seen to have been unique and unrepeatable. Adopting the evangelical doctrines without any contact with the Wesleys or Whitefield; exercising a full ministry both as parish 'priest' and as Methodist itinerant preacher; dying before the new groupings became hard and fast — Grimshaw enables us to understand the circumstances in which Methodism was born in a way which is not paralleled by the life of any other leader, including John Wesley. When all is said, Wesley was himself one of the factors creating tension between the Established Church and the Methodist Societies. If we wish to know how far a Methodist could remain a 'good Anglican' (and what question could be more relevant today?) we must turn to the life of Grimshaw.
The answer has been fully given and a great need met by Frank Baker's recent and excellent biography of Grimshaw. His conclusion is that 'the story mingle with the parishes had been different, he had lived and laboured along with the Wesleys for another thirty years'. This does not mean that the parishes did not move; the machinery were incredibly slow to get moving in the eighteenth-century Church of England. Nor does it mean that the curate of Haworth may only be reckoned irregu-
lar and inconsistent for opening a Methodist preaching-house in his parish and directing the activities of a band of lay preachers entirely outside the jurisdiction of any diocesan bishop. It is easy to feel some ulterior motive must have been at work to make the Methodists continue to give service to the Church of England. Without understanding the life of Grimshaw gives us, it is hard to realize that it was not 'being consistent' for Methodists either to remain or to withdraw into dissent, at any rate before the 1760s. They lived in that intolerable age of old winikins.

**THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

The basic fact of the eighteenth century in England is that just when powerful forces were at work to alter the whole structure of society, politics, religion, the general toleration was accepted that after all the upheavals of the previous century a state of perfection had been reached at last in both civil and ecclesiastical gov-
ernment. Many of the apparent anom-
alties and inconsistencies of the age re-
sulted from the refusal to see any need for change. John Wesley was suspended indefinitely in 1717, the assumption being that no new canons would be needed by the Church. So for the rest of the century this suspension of constitutional per-
fecion was maintained. It is, inci-
dently, significant to note the influence of the American colonies in the eventual dispersion of this dream both in Church and State.

The authorities were not ignorant of the fact that the balance of popula-
tion was shifting; but once again, there seemed no need for any change. It was impossible for people to move beyond the personal and local system. Unfortu-
nately, in Lancashire and York-
shire, where the new industrial towns were beginning to grow, the parishes were among the largest in England. Blackburn, the ancestral home of the Grimshaws, was one of the largest of all with an area of 14 x 10 miles. Grim-
shaw's cures at Todmorden and Haworth were within the parishes of Blackburn and Bradford respectively. More or less independent chappels-of-ease within these old parishes were a poor solution to the problem of population growth. Though they were invariably poorly endowed (although Todmorden is an example of how 'Queen Anne's Bounty' had done much for a situation in which parochialism was often a necessity, to one in which it was an eradicable evil). Then again, the habitual ill-feelings between the parishes of Haworth and the Vicar of Bradford illustrate how disputes over legal rights in this type of arrange-
ment prevented the growth of a healthy local church. It was not many of these chappels-of-ease were new structures built to meet the demands of recent expansion. Grimshaw discovered some of the difficulties of church-building when he set about en-
hancing his church at Haworth.

**THE COMPLEXITY OF THE REVIVAL**

This rigid framework was shaken to the foundations by the revival movement of which Methodism formed but a part. Perhaps Mercurians and the mis-
tent and Dissent all come into the story. 'The revival of religion in the eighteenth century was a complex growth whose origins were not confined to the Wesleys nor even to the British Isles, Nor was it a steady unified process, but punctuated by periodic outbursts in apparently unrelated areas. Frank Baker's observation is important because there has so often been a failure to point out (e.g. in J.C. Ryle's *Evangelical Party*) that John Wesley was not the fountain-head of the whole movement. Some of the early leaders whose names are particularly influenced by Wesley. Once again, the case of Grimshaw is most instructive, not only because the Haworth revival involved Quakers and Baptists as well as Methodists and Inghamites, but also because the leader himself had followed such a solitary path for evangelising. His journey lasted from 1734 to 1742, but it ended with him in ignorance of the Methodists. When John Nelson, a lay preacher, visited Haworth in the last of the century, Grimshaw warned his people not to go near him. Yet Grimshaw was at this time already preaching the same doc
tres and employing in evangelism and organization ideas remarkably simi-
lar to those of the Methodists.

The outbreaks of revival 'in apparen-
tly unrelated areas' are not ac-
counted for solely in terms of the cohesion of the Methodists. But the lack of co-ordination in these conversions is a significant factor. As with Grimshaw, the leaders were engaged in ministry before the death of her child aged five weeks. When this did not work he confessed himself helpless to advise, Such experi-
ences drove many a clergyman to his

knocks. In scattered places men were en-
gaged in the same solitary struggle that Luther knew, and like him they knew not where to turn for advice except to the Scriptures. Some were helped by the gift of friends or books (Wesley, indeed, by Luther himself); but it remained an utterly personal and inner con-
stituent involving the individual's whole iden-
tity, and like Luther they knew not what to make of it, and so, they could not have the

answer, to one way of thinking, was to adopt both surplice and sash-bags with equal comfort. Grimshaw was both guide to a great company of Methodist preach-
ers, and inspiration of such leaders of Anglican evangelicalism as Romaine, Newton and, above all, Venn. Not that even Grimshaw experienced no tensions from his dual role. He did not expect to be turned out of my parish on this occasion, but if I had, I

would have joined my friend Wesley, taken refuge and taken up the work of his poorest circuits.' And then, dur-
ing the dispute over the administration of Holy Communion by lay preachers in 1760, he wrote a defence of the doctrine and future connection with the Metho-
dists.' In the event, however, he was

**METHODISM AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

Once having grasped his vocation as a minister of the gospel, the evangelical clergyman immediately became concerned for the spread of his gospel to those in need. For some, such as Samuel Walker, it meant a new self-
respect and a new message of power in their parishes. But it was difficult to evade the problem of the sheep plainly not being fed elsewhere, or to dissuade those who came from elsewhere from ministering in his parish. Inevitably, therefore, parochial boundaries became a problem. And especially in the North was it plain to Evangelicals that the decision was a most important one, which was not adapted to changes in population. The only answer, to one way of thinking, was to go to the people where they were, preaching in the open air if need be. G. R. Balleine consequently divides the leaders into Methodists and Anglicans on the basis of their attitude to the parochial system.

William Grimshaw perhaps stands alone as a minister engaged fully in both parochial and itinerant work at the same time. There was also John Berridge, who all his life had not made him a Methodist; whereas it is clear from such evidence as the trust deeds of the Methodist preaching-houses that Grimshaw was looked up to as John Wesley's probable successor. How was it possible for a man to be organizer of Methodism in the North of England, and at the same time the fullest parish minis-
ter? Physically the answer lies in the extraordinary character of Grimshaw: how 'Queen Anne's Bounty' had done much for a situation in which it was eradicable evil. Then again, the habitual ill-feelings between the parishes of Haworth and the Vicar of Bradford illustrate how disputes over legal rights in this type of arrange-
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obliged to stand by neither statement. Perhaps insufficient attention has been paid to the question of why Grimshaw and Charles Wesley should have been so sensitive on the question of lay administration, compared with John Wesley's relative equanimity. The issue, however, became larger than any of the personalities involved, and we are left to ask whether 'the Grimshaw phase' must remain for ever unique. Today, with a growing population in a state of almost continuous mobility, largely unreached by the Church, and for whom a permanent church building of any kind will scarcely serve, there is a case for wondering whether Methodist itinerancy might again become the Anglican way.