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Editorial

In the final issue of our first volume it is appropriate to mention changes which have occurred in our Council. We have a new President, Chairman, Secretary and Research Secretary. Our confidence in them is equalled only by our pride in the service of those whom they replace. It is invidious, but entirely proper, to single out the services of Dr. Nuttall, to whom tribute was paid at our Annual General Meeting, and to whom tribute will continue to be paid.

This issue contains two articles of particular interest. Three of Professor Davie's Clark Lectures, delivered at Cambridge in 1976, have reached a wider public through the *Times Literary Supplement*. We print a fourth. All six lectures are to be published shortly by Routledge and Kegan Paul under the title *A Gathered Church — The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930*. It will be a warm, important, book.

Nathaniel Micklem was the most distinguished Free Churchman of his day. Such statements are not always helpful, but his life encompassed some of the most significant developments in English twentieth-century Free Churchmanship, and we are grateful for Dr. Goodall's full assessment of it.

DISSENT AND THE WESLEYANS

1740-1800'

It is hard to find anyone with a good word to say for the dissenters of the early eighteenth century. Even their fellow-sectaries, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, customarily appeal over their heads to their seventeenth-century predecessors. A curious instance of this is the blue-stocking historian Lucy Aikin in 1828, writing across the Atlantic to her fellow-Unitarian, William Ellery Channing:

As for . . . the Calvinistic dissenters, they had the misfortune of living in one of those middle states between direct persecution and perfect religious liberty, which sours the temper by continual petty vexations, without affording scope for great efforts or great sacrifices — which drives men to find a perverse pleasure in hating and being hated, and to seek indemnification for the contempt of the world in a double portion of spiritual pride and self-importance. 'We can prove ourselves saints', 'being Christ's little flock everywhere spoken against', is the plea put into the mouth of this set by Green, a poet, who was born and bred among them.

Surprisingly, after this contemptuous dismissal of the eighteenth-century dissenters, Lucy Aikin in her very next paragraph pays tribute to the dissenting leader Doddridge, recording how 'my kindred the Jennings, the Belshams, my excellent grandfather Aikin, and his friend and tutor Doddridge, had begun to break forth out of the chains and darkness of Calvinism, and their manners softened with their system'. But more immediately to our purpose is her specifying, as the spokesman of 'this set', 'Green, a poet'. This is Mr. Matthew Green of the Customs House, whose most sustained performance, *The Spleen*, is one of those delightful but not very consequential poems that are continually being re-discovered, but never by enough readers to save them permanently from obscurity. For my generation the re-discovery was effected by F. R. Leavis in some well-considered and valuable pages of his *Revaluation*. That was in 1936, and over the years since, unless I am mistaken, oblivion has claimed Matthew Green once again. But as Lucy Aikin may remind us, Green *stands for* something; his poem articulates a particular moment in the spiritual and intellectual history of one kind of Englishman — a moment which otherwise in our poetry goes unrecorded. It's on these

'We are grateful to Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., for permission to print this lecture, originally delivered as one of the Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1976. The lectures are to be published by them in full, with references, under the title *A Gathered Church — The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930*.

grounds — which were not Leavis's — that we may pluck him back from oblivion once more, and for as long as anyone is interested.

To say that Green was a dissenter is true, but misleading. He seems to have been in fact a lapsed Quaker — which is a very special kind of dissenter, special at any time but particularly so in 1737, the year of Green's death, when *The Spleen* was published; for George Fox, the farouche and irreconcilable founder of the Society of Friends, had died as recently as 1691, and the process by which, over no more than two generations, the English Quaker transformed himself from that stereotype into becoming the banker and iron-master of the Industrial Revolution, represents an adaptation so extreme and so precipitate that it must give pause even to someone who believes that 'accommodation' was the historically necessary and in itself not ignoble duty of Dissent in this period. Accommodation, yes; but at this rate? And on this scale? One thinks the better of those like Matthew Green who could not change so far so fast.

Horace Walpole said of *The Spleen*: 'It has the wit of Butler with the ease of Prior without imitating either.' And the judgment is less facile than it may seem: Butler's *Hudibras*, pillorying once and for all the Old Dissenters and their pretence to 'the inner light', is consistently the presence behind Green's poem, not just as a formal and stylistic mark that Green must steer by, but as an ideological pressure that he must acknowledge and give way before. Hence, for instance, the dissenters of his time, or else of his childhood, unmistakably and excellently pinned down:

Nor they so pure and so precise,
Immaculate as their white of eyes,
Who for the spirit hug the spleen,
Phylactered throughout their mien;
Who their ill-tasted home-brewed prayer
To the state's mellow forms prefer;
Who doctrines, as infectious, fear,
Which are not steeped in vinegar,
And samples of heart-chested grace
Expose in show-glass of the face. . . .

The neat, terse gibes strike home; and yet they are predictable, out of common stock. The figure being assailed is after all a stereotype, a cardboard cut-out. Such knowledgeable and spiteful apostasies from Dissent were common in Matthew Green's lifetime; Samuel Wesley the elder is another example out of many. It is permissible to feel that an attempt like Watts's, to change Dissent from inside, was a more honourable and forthright endeavour.

Certainly, we may infer, it seemed so to Dr. Johnson, who said of Watts: 'Such he was as every Christian Church would rejoice to have adopted'; who specified Watts's *cultural* achievement by saying:

He was one of the first authors that taught the dissenters to court attention by the graces of language. Whatever they had among them before, whether of learning or acuteness, was commonly obscured and blunted by coarseness and inelegance of style. He shewed them, that zeal and purity might be expressed and enforced by polished diction.

Johnson it was, moreover, who apologized for a long quotation from Gibbons's memoir of Watts, by saying: 'If this quotation has appeared long, let it be considered that it comprises an account of six-and-thirty years, and those the years of Dr. Watts.' Johnson it was who concluded his account of Watts by saying: 'happy will be that reader whose mind is disposed by his verses or his prose, to imitate him in all but his non-conformity, to copy his benevolence to man, and his reverence to God'. And it was Johnson who, when the name of Matthew Green was missing from the list of poets whom he was to introduce, made no demur; but who, when Watts's name was missing, insisted that it be included — as he is careful to tell us himself, at the start of his 'Life of Watts'. Johnson's *Life of Watts* is nearer to hagiography than any other of his *Lives of the English Poets*; and if the significance of thus honouring a dissenter is lost upon us, it impressed and puzzled readers nearer to Johnson's time, as we see for instance from Hazlitt's *Conversations with Northcote*.

As regards poetic style, to compare Green with Watts means questioning whether 'conceited' wit, however submerged and subdued — as we can find it in Green but not, except in his apprenticeship, in Watts — can be taken in respect of the eighteenth century, as by and large it can be taken when we deal with the seventeenth, as the measure of imaginative seriousness. *The Spleen* itself supplies evidence that, for good or ill, wit-writing was by 1737 restricted to those parts of a composition that were relatively capricious and irresponsible; for at line 717 Green prepares for his exordium by re-addressing his addressee, Cuthbert Jackson, in the person of 'Memmius'. This signals a shift to a graver tone than the invective banter which has preceded it; and the diction henceforth is nearer to the plain style of Watts than to Marvell:

In one, no object of our sight,
 Immutable and infinite,
 Who can't be cruel or unjust,
 Calm and resigned, I fix my trust;
 To him my past and present state
 I owe, and must my future fate.
 A stranger into life I'm come,
 Dying may be our going home,
 Transported here by angry Fate,
 The convicts of a prior state;
 Hence I no curious thoughts bestow
 On matters I can never know.

This passage, which some readers will think the most moving and the most seriously intended in the poem, is almost entirely free of wit. On the other hand it is a profession of faith so hedged about with saving clauses — consider only that ‘Dying *may be* our going home’ — that it can hardly be called ‘Christian’ at all. Indeed, could it not be subscribed to by any number of nineteenth- or twentieth-century agnostics? And isn’t this the reason why, when — rarely, as by Leavis — we are directed to *The Spleen*, we are able to respond to it so warmly? In any case it is all very well to say (what is true) that in Green’s more vivacious passages we see the urbanity and ease of Andrew Marvell’s octosyllabic couplets persisting into the eighteenth century; but we need to count the cost — that in order to reproduce this alert suavity Green permits himself a flippant or weary impudence about the tenets of Christian belief such as Marvell eighty years before neither could nor would have allowed himself.

Nevertheless *The Spleen* is invaluable, indeed irreplaceable, for giving a lively and highly intelligent account of the state of mind and feelings in which a dissenter of the 1730s might either conform to the Establishment or slide out of Christian belief altogether. There is no denying that in the 1720s and 1730s such defections and apostasies were very common. The numbers of the faithful were falling precipitately; and historians for whom as it were the box-office returns are the ultimate test have no difficulty showing that dissenting leaders like Watts and Doddridge quite manifestly in their generation *failed*. This was the reasoning of Elie Halévy when in 1906 he addressed himself to ‘The Birth of Methodism in England’. Of the Methodist evangelists Wesley and Whitefield, Halévy says that ‘they reanimated, as a side effect of their influence, the other Dissenting sects, which were seemingly dying of old age’. More sweepingly Halévy asserts: ‘after fifty years (1688-1738) of professing religious scepticism England had her Puritan revival, and the date can be established firmly; it was in 1739 that the crisis occurred.’ One does not lightly disagree with an authority like Halévy, and yet on this point he seems to be quite simply *wrong*. Moreover he backs it up with special pleading. Thus, when Doddridge in his *Free Thoughts* asked that the minister be ‘an evangelical, an experimental, a plain & an affectionate preacher’, he was not, as Halévy supposes, an exception that proves some quite opposite rule. Nor do the dissenting sermons of the time bear out Halévy when he declares: ‘The Dissenting ministers should have been able to assume the leadership of the Protestant opinion; they were its chosen chiefs. But betraying the confidence of their followers, they preached a doctrine more and more like that of Aristotle or Cicero, instead of Christianity according to Saint Paul.’ How is it possible to recognize in this description the most famous and influential dissenting minister of the time, the Isaac Watts who wrote that hell-fire sermon in plunging sapphics, ‘The Day of Judgment?’

Hopeless immortals! how they scream and shiver
 While devils push them to the pit wide-yawning
 Hideous and gloomy, to receive them headlong
 Down to the centre!

Is *that* the doctrine of Aristotle or Cicero? We are likely to find it very unaccommodating indeed! And it requires a considerable exertion of the historical imagination to recognize, in the face of such a document, that 'accommodation' (to secular enlightenment and civility) was nevertheless Watts's and Doddridge's steady endeavour — as Johnson realized.

Halévy is not the first to be so dazzled by the massive and heroic figure of John Wesley as not to realize how there could be, and was, resistance to his evangelizing on scrupulous and considered grounds. 'When the Methodists started to preach', he assures us too confidently, 'they were well received by the great majority of Dissenters:'

Was not the religion they preached a revival of Puritanism? But they ran up against the distrust and hatred of the ministers, too enlightened and reasonable to enjoy the doctrine and method of the Awakening. And that is why those ministers were not themselves capable of bringing forth an Awakening; and why the Awakening could not come from the Dissenting Churches.

Even if all this were true, might we not conclude that the congregations failed their ministers, rather than the other way round? That by and large the ministers were too far ahead of their flocks, pursuing a cultural 'accommodation' that their congregations were not ready for? This would avoid having to use 'enlightened and 'reasonable' as words of opprobrium, when applied to such men as Doddridge or Watts or Edmund Calamy; and it would be in the spirit of Johnson's tribute to Watts.

How some dissenting ministers responded to the Wesleyan challenge may appear from a piece of admirably vigorous mid-century prose:

I will take this occasion with great freedom to tell you my opinion of those people who are called Methodists. I have carefully inquired after them; was willing to think well of them; loth to censure them or hear others do so. And I think still there are serious people deluded by them. But after a candid attention to them, their proceedings appear not to be wise and good. Their devotion is unseasonable, irregular and injudicious. Their sermons are low and loose and not at all like what they seem to assume. Their spirits appear to me to be turbulent, unruly and censorious. They practise upon weak men and poor people. They call them up to pray and sing when they should be in their business or their beds. They disturb the peace and order of families. What they pretend above their neighbours, appears to me mere enthusiasm. Their people are rather slothful, mopish and dejected or pragmatismal, than sober, considerate, judicious,

exemplary and regular Christians. And I have no expectation but that Methodism, like other enthusiasm, will promote infidelity and turn out to the damage of religion and the souls of men. Though I judge not their hearts, views and motives, which are secret things that belong to God, yet I thought it needful very lately to warn my hearers of these people's errors and advise them to avoid them.

This is one of the remonstrances that Philip Doddridge endured in 1743 when he had allowed George Whitefield to preach from his pulpit. Others came from Watts, from John Guyse, and from a trustee of the Coward Trust thinly veiling a threat to withhold Trust funds from Doddridge's Academy; and if this makes it seem that Doddridge was more 'liberal' than his fellow ministers, the point is that on this flank he could afford to be — his distrust of 'enthusiasm' was well established, and it was on his other flank that he was vulnerable, where he joined hands with the more or less Arian circles that we have seen Lucy Aikin connect him with. He represented firm and consistent opposition to Methodism from within Dissent — an attitude that we can find for instance in his friend and editor Job Orton up to the latter's death in 1783. And indeed, though it could be said in 1806 that 'the Independents have gone over in a body to the Methodists', there was opposition from Old Dissent to the Methodist New Dissent until far into the succeeding century.

To return to Elie Halévy His theories about the *birth* of Methodism have been overshadowed by his much more startling and influential argument as to its consequences: an argument advanced in his classic work of 1912, *England in 1815*, though in fact it was already firmly formulated by 1906. The argument is that 'England was spared the revolution toward which the contradictions in her polity and economy might otherwise have led her, through the stabilizing influence of evangelical religion, particularly of Methodism'; in other words, that the potentially revolutionary energies of the unprivileged English were syphoned off by the Wesleys and Whitefield into activities not political at all, but religious. This hypothesis in fact did not originate with Halévy; on the contrary, the bare bones of it are to be found not just in several British and French nineteenth-century historians but in Robert Southey in the first decade of the nineteenth century and indeed in the Methodists themselves as they defended themselves against the punitive measures against them proposed in 1811 by Sidmouth, the Home Secretary. Moreover, 'Halévy, like Weber, was suspicious of all efforts to understand history as the product of a single cause, and he saw religion as capable of altering what appeared to be the otherwise almost "inevitable" tendency of the internal contradictions (as both Ricardo and Marx understood them) of the new industrialism to produce Revolution'. Marxist historians are thus uncomfortable about Halévy's hypothesis, with a discomfort that is compounded by the fact that the hypothesis is

rather plainly the product of a speculative and indeed literary intelligence in Halévy, rather than of 'scientific' research. In these circumstances it is remarkable that the hypothesis still stands, and that claims, by Marxists and others, to have overthrown it turn out on examination to be quibbles and qualifications not affecting the central contention, which is that the revolution which ought to have been 'inevitable' was in fact evaded. Accordingly, when a Marxist historian takes over Halévy's thesis, he does so with a specially bitter feeling of mortification.

This is compounded by the historically incontrovertible fact that Wesleyan Methodism springs out of the Moravian movement of Count Zinzendorf, which itself is plainly related to the egalitarian and enthusiastic 'Ranters' of Cromwell's time — a body, or an obscure congeries of bodies, long enshrined in English Marxist mythology as heroic pioneers and precursors. How with equanimity concede that this tradition which should have been, and once was, proto-revolutionary should, in the Wesleys' lifetime and for long after, have produced a movement that was consistently, and at times splenetically, High Tory? Certainly, in the nineteenth century, radicals and trade-union organizers were often Methodists; and in our time some Methodist historians have made much of this. But it is incontestable that radicals like Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt and Cobbett saw Methodism in their day, with reason, as on the contrary a bulwark of the *status quo*.

There is a yet further complication, in the fact that when John Wesley broke with the Moravians it was because of the insistent yet devious and grotesque eroticism which characterized their hymns certainly, and perhaps because of other aspects of their worship also. No one who has looked at the Moravian hymn book of the 1740s will want to deny that Wesley acted with good taste and good judgment in deciding that this would never do. Yet this circumstance is awkward for the Marxist historian when he wants to establish that in Wesleyan hymns 'Love' is private and airless, whereas it ought to be 'social'. Our historian levels the charge none the less:

the cult of 'Love' was brought to a point of poise between affirmations of a 'social religion' and the pathological aberrations of frustrated social and sexual impulses. On the one hand, genuine compassion for 'harlots, and publicans, and thieves': on the other hand, morbid preoccupations with sin and with the sinner's confessional. On one hand, real remorse for real wrong-doing: on the other, luxuriating refinements of introspective guilt. On one hand, the genuine fellowship of some early Methodist societies: on the other, social energies denied outlet in public life which were released in sanctified emotional onanism

. . . . Here was a cult of 'Love' which feared love's effective expression, either as sexual love or in any social form which might irritate relations with Authority. Its authentic language

of devotion was that of sexual sublimation streaked through with masochism: the 'bleeding love', the wounded side, the blood of the Lamb. . . .

We notice how far this twentieth-century authority agrees with the eighteenth-century dissenter, in finding the Methodists 'slothful, mopish and dejected'. But he has in his sights something quite specific, a body of achieved literature, Charles Wesley's hymns. And this being so, the disciplines of the social historian will serve no longer. All sorts of further considerations now arise — notably the tradition in devotional literature of images of the Lamb and Bleeding Heart, at least from the counter-reformation on; and the traditional use of the erotic analogy over the same period. For instance, is Watts's Calvinism of 1710 to be allotted the same socio-historical significance as the Wesleys' Arminianism of the 1750s, because of Watts's unabashed use of the eroticism of the Song of Songs?

And not only sexual organs like the lips are to be ruled out, but liver and lights also, for we are told:

after the Wesleys broke with the Moravian brethren, the language of their hymns . . . had become a public scandal. In the hymns of John and Charles Wesley overt sexual imagery was consciously repressed, and gave way to imagery of the womb and the bowels:

Come, O my guilty brethren, come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin!
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His open side shall take you in. . . .

Not all readers will be sure that they find in these indifferent verses either bowels or womb. But if we do find them, what follows? Are all bodily functions and organs too gross to serve as analogies and imagery in poetry, or in devotional poetry? Whoever is being 'puritanical' in this confrontation, it seems not to be Charles Wesley.

However, what our historian can't stand the sight of is blood. And there is blood all over the place in the Wesleyan hymns 'as if the underground traditions of Mithraic blood-sacrifice which troubled the early Christian Church suddenly gushed up in the language of 18th century Methodist hymnody'. 'The union with Christ's love', Edward Thompson decides (for he it is that I am quoting), 'unites the feelings of self-mortification, the yearning for the oblivion of the womb, and tormented sexual desire', for 'sacrificial, masochistic, and erotic language all find a common nexus in the same blood-symbolism'. And so to the indignant peroration:

It is difficult to conceive of a more essential disorganisation of human life, a pollution of the sources of spontaneity bound to reflect itself in every aspect of personality. Since joy was associated with sin and guilt, and pain (Christ's wounds) with goodness and love, so every impulse became twisted into the reverse, and it became natural to suppose that man or child only found

grace in God's eyes when performing painful, laborious or self-denying tasks. To labour and to sorrow was to find pleasure, and masochism was 'Love'. It is inconceivable that men could actually *live* like this; but many Methodists did their best.

But this is beyond a joke. A very strenuous protest is surely called for — not on behalf of Methodism, nor on behalf of Christianity (though it is Christianity as such, not just Methodism, that is the target of this sort of rant), but on behalf of poetry; for if poets are to be judged in this way, by scraps of verses torn from their context in poems and their larger contexts in iconographic and literary tradition, with a flurry of words like 'masochistic' that have no place in either literary or social history, which of all our poets will 'scape whipping?

Yet the fault lies with our literary historians, for what I remark of the hymns and psalms of Watts — that we look in vain through our literary scholarship for any considered assessment of their intrinsic virtues and their historical significance — is hardly less scandalously true of the more than 6,000 hymns composed by Charles Wesley. Where the literary historians have so shamefully failed to do their duty, one can hardly blame the social historian for rushing in. I would not be misunderstood. The text of the Wesley hymns has been reliably established, and this was no light undertaking in respect of such a bulky corpus; there has been valuable examination of Wesley's metres; and a great deal has been done by way of identifying sources and analogues and allusions. The *editorial* challenge has been met. In particular, like everyone else who has poked his nose into this field, I must pay tribute to Henry Betts's admirable *The Hymns of Methodism*. But it is precisely the 'field' that must be questioned; Charles Wesley's poetry is thought to be a very special field indeed, something *sui generis* or at most to be compared with a few hymns by other hands. One looks for a long time before finding any attempt to place Charles Wesley, or Isaac Watts either, in relation to the more secular poetry of their times — in relation to Pope, or Thomson, or Gray or Goldsmith. One consequence is that the eighteenth century is thought to have produced little lyric poetry, whereas the eighteenth-century lyric is to be found in the hymn books just as surely as seventeenth-century lyric is in George Herbert's *Temple*. The dependence of line after line of Wesley on the precedent of Matthew Prior has been duly noted, but no one has explored the significance, stylistically and historically, of this surprising connection with the suave and frequently improper author of 'Henry and Emma'. Methodism is a sub-culture as Old Dissent is a sub-culture; and the tribal warmth of such a sub-culture, of what Edmund Burke called 'our own little platoon', is so comforting and agreeable that there is no more incentive from within its ranks to relate the sub-culture to the national culture, than there is on the part of the Establishment to acknowledge what manoeuvres the little platoons have been engaged in.

Yet John Wesley, in striking contrast to his fellow evangelist Whitefield, was at great pains not to let his followers cut themselves off from the culture of the national society as a whole, particularly not from the *literary* culture. He used his *Arminian Magazine* for many purposes; but among them was keeping in currency George Herbert and Prior and other writers he valued. He printed there, to the scandal of some of his readers, Prior's 'Henry and Emma', which Johnson the High Churchman found improper. In his late *Thoughts on the Character and Writings of Mr. Prior*, as in such a stray document as a letter of 1764 to the Reverend Mr. Furlley, Wesley was a master of very acute and unprejudiced practical criticism. Moreover his successful battle through his lifetime to keep Methodism within the Established Church is something that tells the same story: Wesley did not want to found a sect, and he distrusted the tribal, the sectarian temper in culture. On this point his brother the poet was even more determined: Charles jeered and mocked when John began ordaining his own preachers; for the brothers were very different, though they co-operated loyally. It was Charles, the poet, for instance, who governed his sex life better, who made a successful marriage and reared a happy family; and it was Charles's household that rang night and morning with music, some of it highly sophisticated.

One literary scholar has lately broken through the sectarian ring that otherwise still walls off Charles Wesley's poetry from English poetry generally. This is Martha Winburn England, in a volume on which ten years ago she collaborated with John Sparrow for the New York Public Library. To this book, entitled *Hymns Unbidden*, Miss England contributes a series of exceptionally erudite and perceptive papers comparing Wesley with his contemporary William Blake. Blake certainly knew Wesley's work: his autograph, dated 1790, appears in a copy of Wesley's *Hymns for the Nation, in 1782*. Written by Charles Wesley when the defeat of British forces by the American colonists was clearly inevitable, *Hymns for the Nation* sees 'America as Sodom, her leaders as murderers and fanatics, the Continental Congress as like Lucifer in its rage for power and its blind fury of insurrection', and the American Loyalists as 'martyrs, persecuted by usurpers and betrayed by weak leadership'. Blake, of course, saw Washington and his colleagues quite differently, 'not as Albion's enemies but as allies of that visionary spirit of liberated energy as it existed in Britain'. But what matters is not that Wesley and Blake drew opposite conclusions, but that they addressed themselves to the same problem, and in the same spirit; for, as Mrs. England puts it: 'What *Hymns for the Nation* has in common with Blake is belligerence, exuberance, excess.' And this is, throughout their careers, the common ground between these two poets: 'Wesley and Blake are comparable in their arrogance, vulgarity, and excess. These traits of enthusiasm entered into all their poetic successes and can be seen with greatest clarity in their poetic failures.' But they

shared also a common intention: 'Their poetry is prophetic and evangelical, the messages are intensely personal and aimed at reformation of the social order. They meant to bring about an inner change, in the heart, the imagination, and hoped that social changes would come about as a result.'

It is against this background, of the temperamental affinity between the two men and their common dedication to a prophetic role, that the differences between them stand out most sharply. And their political differences are among the least important. In the first place, 'Wesley looked upon himself as transmitting a received dogma', whereas Blake 'claimed no connection with any existing orthodoxy'. If Blake can be called Christian at all (which may well be doubted) 'his Christianity has no institutional aspect at all. All his life, he neglected those "means of grace" to which the Wesleys refer most often'. He seems never to have taken communion nor to have attended any services other than his own christening and wedding. Second, 'the authority of academic standards of excellence had no part in Blake's aesthetic. He thanked God he was never sent to school.' Wesley on the other hand was associated with scholarship all his life. Hence, third, 'Blake professed antagonism to empirical philosophy, experimental science, and the lower and higher criticism of the Bible that were an important product of the Enlightenment', whereas Wesley accepted these ideas early in his life, and wrote his hymns in the light of them. Then again, in Miss England's words:

An obvious difference is Wesley's acknowledged obligation to clarity. He wrote in three traditions that demanded it. The Augustan aesthetic demanded it, and he added to that demand his own emphasis on the didactic nature of his writings and the nature of the audience he addressed. . . . None of these pressures operated directly upon Blake. He would not accede to demands for a certain sort of 'clarity', for it involved the writer in those generalizations which seemed to him a blurring of true clarity.

But over and above all these differences, there is one that goes deeper: where Wesley believes in paradox, Blake believes in dialectic. And anyone who attends with proper seriousness to the matters which preoccupied these two nobly dedicated men must, on this crucial issue, side with one of them against the other. R. H. Tawney, who was no worse a theologian and no worse a Christian for being also a historian and a Socialist, remarked:

There is a distinctively Christian way of life. . . . This way of life is not, as appears often to be supposed, identical with what is called 'goodness'; for . . . Christianity is a religion for sinners. It rests on a peculiar — and superficially, at any rate, a highly improbable — view of the nature of the universe. It implies the acceptance of a scale of spiritual values which no rationalisation can make appear other than extremely paradoxical.

'Extremely paradoxical' — just so:

What though my shrinking flesh complain,
 And murmur to contend so long,
 I rise superior to my pain,
 When I am weak then I am strong,
 And when my all of strength shall fail,
 I shall with the God-Man prevail.

My strength is gone, my nature dies,
 I sink beneath thy weighty hand,
 Faint to revive, and fall to rise;
 I fall, and yet by faith I stand,
 I stand, and will not let thee go,
 Till I thy name, thy nature, know.

In these lines, where our social historian would no doubt discover 'masochism', the central paradox of a god who is also man breeds other paradoxes, as that weakness is strength, and falling is rising — as it was for the God-Man who triumphed by being crucified. Such paradoxes are at the heart of Wesley's writing, as of any writing in the centrally Christian tradition; and time and again the laborious clarity of Wesley's verse takes on rhetorical splendour and intensity when paradox is concentrated into its appropriate rhetorical figure, oxymoron. Blake is not so much incapable of this, as profoundly averse to it. This emerges, for instance, when Martha Winburn England compares him with Charles Wesley as regards another of the central Christian paradoxes — that Law is Love: 'Wesley believed law and love were one, paradoxically related in time, but eternally one. Blake . . . saw no sweetness in commandment or statute, no love in any discipline imposed from without'. Paradox is what Blake cannot readily live with, though his 'Tyger' is certainly a splendid exception. His famously *dialectical* way of thought solves and evades paradox by separating it out as it were on a plane surface: love ('Innocence') *leads to* law ('Experience'), as law then *leads to* love (through Revolution). Paradox is multivocal; Blake has to break it down into narrative sequence, into the univocal. Though Blake is commonly thought of — and in part rightly — as an enemy of rationalism, in this defining feature of his thought he is a rationalist all through.

Thus, Blake's relation to English Dissent is tortuous and very far from clear. G. E. Bentley has presented evidence, inconclusive but suggestive, that Blake's father about 1769 joined a Baptist church; and this, if true, would clarify the all but unanimous contention of the early biographers that Blake's parents were dissenters, though no one says of what kind. The question is academic, however, for it has come to seem more and more likely — ever since A. L. Morton's *The Everlasting Gospel* of 1958 — that the Dissent which *effectively*

influenced Blake was that of the antinomian and heretical sects, the Ranters and Muggletonians, who (as is now clear) survived in clandestine fashion among the artisans and petty tradesmen of London, from their origins in the Cromwellian Commonwealth until Blake's lifetime and after. These sectaries are now attracting much devoted and admiring attention. But it is not denied by their most fervent admirers that what they express is socio-political resentment and aspiration thinly cloaked in religious terminology; and that, as specifically religious insights, their ideas are beneath contempt. Thus none of the research currently being pursued into the Muggletonians and others can seriously qualify the impression that in Blake, as D. H. Lawrence a century later, we have a case of an imaginative genius born into a stratum of religious experience too shallow to sustain him.

John Holloway has shown invaluable how many of Blake's 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience' are cast in the metrical, the rhetorical and stanzaic forms of Watts's and Doddridge's hymns; and indeed the connection with Watts was noticed as early as 1806. But it must be emphasized that the theological content that is poured into these moulds is such as Watts and Doddridge would have been appalled by, and would have denounced as un-Christian.

One may think William Blake a great poet, and an exceptionally engaging person, and still regard with alarm, as a very ominous symptom, the veneration which nowadays is so freely accorded him; for what we see, I suggest, as the aristocratic Anglicanism of George Herbert modulates into the Old Dissent of Richard Baxter and Watts and Doddridge, and then is overtaken by the evangelizing of the Moravians and Wesleyans — is a test case, historically recorded, of what happens when a body of difficult but momentous truths is taken 'to the people'. To those who draw from this record the sanguine conclusion that in the process nothing, or nothing important, was lost — I have nothing to say. For those who believe that something was lost along the way, it is very difficult to determine just where, in the process, the simplifications and intensifications became 'too much' — so as to damage just those truths that were to be simplified and intensified. To speak for myself, I am much persuaded by those who point to the excesses of the Wesleyan meetings — the fallings about, the paroxysms, the 'speaking with tongues', and the preachers' perfervid and foolish rhetoric that provoked such manifestations — as clear symptoms of religious sentiment perverted, and doctrine coarsened out of recognition. But then I encounter the wonderful figure of John Wesley himself, who regretted these grotesque distortions and diagnosed them (as in his comments on the Flemish prodigy, Antoinette Bourignon), who none the less tolerated them as a price that had to be paid — Wesley, whose level-headedness and fastidious though heartfelt taste is manifest on nearly every page of his that has come down to us. What does seem to me certain is that,

by the time and to the extent that the process works itself out in Blake, the game is not worth the candle, the price asked (and paid by Blake) is exorbitant. Blake is lamed by this historical process, not — except in the delusory short run — sustained by it; he is not a hero of the democratizing of Scripture, but a martyr to it.

DONALD DAVIE

RICHARD NORMAN SHAW, 1831-1912: A CONGREGATIONAL FOOTNOTE

The *Congregational Year Book* for 1905 includes a description of a thoroughly unexceptionable chapel recently erected at Beacon Hill, Surrey. This was the last of three built in the past decade (the others were Hindhead Free Church, 1895-6, and Hammer, 1903) by John Grover, of Woodberry Down, Finsbury Park, a London contractor who had extended his operations to South-west Surrey. The account contains one interesting statement: the chapels were "all built in general conformity with a plan originally prepared under the direction of Mr. Norman Shaw".¹

Andrew Saint, in his recent biography of Norman Shaw, has cast further light on this. John Grover was head of a Shoreditch firm which contracted for several of Shaw's later buildings, New Scotland Yard chief among them. He was also a Congregationalist and naturally turned to Shaw's office for plans of the three useful chapels which he intended to build in Hindhead. None of them is exciting architecture (although Saint remarks upon the "excellent set of Arts and Crafts benches" at Hindhead Free Church), and the elevations at least of Hindhead Free Church were the work not of Shaw but of his chief assistant, Percy Gingham.²

The precise link with Shaw remains, therefore, uncertain; but it is perhaps sufficient for Shaw to be added to the slim list of notable architects whose work included dissenting chapels, and for it to be claimed that the only such chapels with which his name might be linked were Congregational ones.

CLYDE BINFIELD

¹*Congregational Year Book*, 1905, p. 130 with illus.

²A. Saint, *Richard Norman Shaw*, Yale Univ. Press, 1976, esp. p. 458.

NATHANIEL MICKLEM C.H.

10 April 1888—26 December 1976

When Nathaniel Micklem retired from the Principalship of Mansfield College at the age of 65, his father — then approaching his hundredth birthday — is reputed to have exclaimed, "Drat the boy! I thought I'd got him settled." There were times when other people could have wished that Nathaniel Micklem (or Nath, as he was universally known) had been more settled and less incalculable than he appeared to them to be. There was a mercurial quality about him, a touch of the puckish and impish, which even amidst the weakness and discomfort of his last years would show itself in a remark and a chuckle, especially when he was provoked to a comment on the foibles and frailties of men. There was an unpredictable quality also in his questing mind. In 1956 he wrote, "Through some five-and-twenty years with the erratic course of a butterfly (but without its agility and grace) I have pursued a single theme." In fact, he lacked neither agility of mind nor grace of utterance, to the mingled astonishment, admiration, mystification, and sometimes mortification, of those who would pin him down. To these qualities there was allied a remarkable versatility of gifts, abilities and insights. He was at home in the realms of philosophy and theology, of politics and poetry, of music and the classics, and he knew his way about the ecclesiastical scene. While holding fast to the central issues of the Christian revelation, supremely those concerning his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, it was characteristic of him that in his late eighties he should call his last public confession of faith *The Religion of a Sceptic* (1975). His profound inner certainty was that of a mind and heart for ever searching, launching out into the deep of life's ultimate mysteries and acknowledging kinship with all explorers and adventurers in matters of life and death. In his book *Religion*, published in the Home University Library in 1948, he wrote with knowledge and sensitivity of religions other than Christianity, and in his last years he was much concerned with the relation of the Gospel to other faiths, believing that from some of them, especially Islam, there was much for the Christian to learn and appropriate, with advantage rather than threat or disloyalty to his faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nath Micklem was fortunate in his cultural and Christian inheritance. His father was a Chancery lawyer who became a Liberal member of Parliament in the great landslide of 1906. His mother was of the Curwen family and had studied music in Germany. The home circle was enlivened by many distinguished visitors and friends, and Nath's boyhood contemporaries at Rugby, where he experienced

¹N. Micklem, *The Abyss of Truth*, 1956.

some unhappiness, were mostly of the kind who later won great distinction in the professions and public service. While trying not to boast of this background, Micklem acknowledged that "It is not a little thing to know that through many generations one is descended from those who have feared God and honoured the king. . . 'I' becomes 'we' and 'We don't do that sort of thing' is often a sufficient rule of conduct." There were occasions in later years when the attitude of "We don't do that sort of thing" was conspicuously and sometimes a little chillingly in evidence.

In 1906, after a few months at Marburg as a student of Classical Philology, Micklem entered New College, Oxford, on an open scholarship. He took a second class in Honours Mods and Greats, and like his father before him became President of the Union. This distinction was accorded him a second time in 1919, when the Union was being reconstituted following the first world war. He was a brilliant speaker, subtle and skilful in debate, and with a delectable wit. After considering and rejecting a political career, he entered Mansfield College to prepare for the Congregational ministry. During this time at Mansfield, he won the University's Junior Greek Testament Prize.

Micklem's experience of the work of a local minister was brief. It covered little more than three years and was far from happy. The fact that his ministry began in 1914 and that he was a convinced and outspoken pacifist inevitably produced strains which were a severe test for minister and congregation. The attitude to conscientious objection within the Churches, as well as outside them, was then far more bitterly hostile than during the second world war. In his first pastoral charge as assistant to Arnold Thomas at Highbury Chapel, Bristol, the difficulties were somewhat eased by the presence of his trusted senior, who held a unique position in the Church and the community, but in his second charge at Withington, Lancashire, the atmosphere was harsher and he left after eighteen months.

During these first years of his ministry Micklem was fortunate in being closely associated with two of the most distinguished Free Church ministers of their time — Arnold Thomas and R. F. Horton of Lyndhurst Road, Hampstead, who had played a decisive part in turning Micklem's thoughts towards the ministry. Both these men were of great intellectual and spiritual calibre and not even a Micklem, amply endowed with his own distinctive qualities, could fail to receive from such mentors an understanding of the Christian ministry which would add to his perception of the splendour and responsibility of this high calling. Horton was a family friend of long standing. He was a contemporary of Nath's father at New College, where he was awarded a Fellowship — at that time a rare distinction for a Dissenter. He was one of the most powerful advocates of the Church's

*N. Micklem *The Box and the Puppets*, 1957, p. 15.

world mission and had been present at the historic World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, where he won John R. Mott's esteem. Partly in the interests of the London Missionary Society and also to attend one of Mott's regional conferences on missionary policy, Horton had agreed to go to India in 1912, and he invited Micklem — still in his theological course at Oxford — to accompany him. Some of the seeds of Micklem's subsequent ecumenical enthusiasms were planted at this time.

Micklem left Withington in 1918 and in the following year he was invited to become Chaplain and Tutor at Mansfield College. The opportunity was timely and it also set him upon a course which was to prove his *métier* — the training of a "learned and godly ministry". Nevertheless he relinquished this post sooner than had been expected. The appointment was for five years but after two years, to the surprise and dismay of the College Principal W. B. Selbie, and for reasons which in retrospect Micklem himself regarded as inadequate, he resigned and accepted the offer of a professorship in Old Testament Studies in the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. He occupied this Chair for six years, deepening friendships with colleagues in Birmingham who had long been kindred spirits — Fearon Halliday, H. G. Wood, William Robinson, J. R. Coates and others. But the teaching needs at Selly Oak, which were mainly related to short courses in preparation for overseas missionary service, were very different from the academic disciplines of Oxford, and Micklem found this difference frustrating. In *The Box and the Puppets* (1957) he says that the authorities at Selly Oak had come to regard him with anxiety and were "relieved" when he left.³ This statement did less than justice to the good will with which he was regarded and to the good work which he had accomplished. No one could be a pupil of his, for short or long courses, without being stimulated by the quality of his mind and the depth of his Christian commitment, and there were missionaries in many parts of the world who for years afterwards recalled their debt to him. Nevertheless these years at Selly Oak were not a wholly satisfying period. It is clear that up to this point life had not yet got him settled.

Through all these earlier years, whatever their vicissitudes, Micklem was establishing himself in the minds of many people as one of the most promising Christian leaders of his day. This was partly through his writings, but also through the kind of man he was and his ability, whether in speech or writing, to expound the Faith and testify to its grace with singular persuasiveness. As an undergraduate he was active in the Student Christian Movement and was chairman of one of the great Swanwick conferences of those days. While still a theological student he was one of the liveliest members of a gifted group of men who founded the Free Church Fellowship. These

³*Ibid.*, p. 67.

included Malcolm Spencer, W. R. Maltby, George Darlaston, Morton Barwell and Frank Lenwood. In 1912 he was responsible for drafting the Covenant of the Fellowship, a statement of which he wrote more than forty years later that he still could not read it "without some stirring of the heart".⁴ Though composed of Free Churchmen, the Fellowship was much attuned in its spirit and activities to some comparable movements among Anglicans who shared the confident faith of its members and their zeal for the Church's unity and mission.

From his early days Micklem could wield a skilful pen and during his brief chaplaincy at Mansfield he was the leading spirit in a group of writers who produced the "Christian Revolution" Series. Micklem was editor of the series, which included W. Fearon Halliday's *Reconciliation and Reality*, C. H. Dodd's *Message of Paul to the Present Day* (revised in 1958 as *The Meaning of Paul for Today*), C. J. Cadoux's *The Early Christian Attitude to War*, and Herbert Morgan's *Christ and Caesar*, of which Micklem was co-author. In this series he also published his widely acclaimed book *The Open Light, an Enquiry into Faith and Reality* (1919). A year later there appeared *The Galilean, the Permanent Element in Religion*, which again was immensely influential. With all the differences between these writers, they were representative of a movement which contributed to a renaissance of faith for very many people in the immediate aftermath of the war of 1914-18. They were written with an exhilarating sense of confidence in Christianity, with fresh insights into the understanding of Scripture and the ways of grace, and they were unswervingly centred on Jesus Christ as the way, the truth and the life. Their substance and style brought a sense of liberation from what had come to be regarded as the imprisoning — even deadening — effect of traditional theological language. In this respect Micklem's contributions were supreme in their lucidity and originality. The movement has generally been regarded as an expression of liberalism in theology but labels are usually inadequate and the liberalism which it represented was very different from the kind of modernism against which Micklem fought hard a dozen years later. These Christian revolutionaries had been much influenced by the "Personalism" of John Oman as memorably expounded in his *Grace and Personality*. Years later Micklem began to feel that this notable book did not fathom the full dimensions of the nature of revelation but Oman's *The Natural and the Supernatural* always spoke to him and for him. He prefaced his long poem *The Tree of Life* with Oman's words:

Mystery is not nescience. It is the half-lifted veil of the sanctuary, through which all life's higher meaning shines, and which is the endless challenge to all our enquiries.⁵

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵This phrase from Oman's *The Natural and the Supernatural* is quoted in *The Abyss of Truth*, op. cit. p. 1.

In 1927 Micklem moved from Selly Oak to Canada where for four years he occupied the New Testament Chair in Queen's Theological College, Kingston, part of Queen's University. These were happy years and he found the newly formed United Church of Canada a very congenial home and a stimulus to his own desire to see the union of the English Congregationalists and Presbyterians as a step towards the more complete unity of the Church. He would have stayed in Canada for a much longer period but a summons from Mansfield College to succeed C. H. Dodd in the New Testament Chair and possibly to follow Selbie as Principal proved imperative. Queen's University sent him on his way with an Hon. D.D. and ten years later at the time of the University's Centenary Celebrations the Hon. degree of LL.D. was added.

In 1931 Micklem returned to Mansfield College and, as he put it in *The Box and the Puppets*, "I began the life sentence which was only remitted in 1954, and not even then for exceptionally good conduct".⁶ These twenty-three years covered his greatest achievements, though they included a short period of strain and misunderstanding which caused him and others deep distress. Writing a quarter of a century later of his decision to accept the Mansfield call he said, "I must not say that I have often regretted the decision but many many times at Mansfield did I look back wistfully to easier and less clouded days".⁷ Years earlier, and closer to the difficult episodes, he had been able to express this misgiving in more light-hearted and more characteristic terms when in the *College Magazine* he wrote, "I think I really feel settled at Mansfield now. There have been times, I admit, since my return from Canada when you might have observed me considering the call that I accepted and humming disconsolately —

'Why did I kiss that girl?
Why, oh why, oh why?'"⁸

The chapter in *The Box and the Puppets* headed "*Historia Calamitatum*",⁹ in which he recalls this troubled period in painful detail is, sadly, less than fair to some good people who, while differing from him, were equally distressed and hurt by the conflict, but the fact that he could write like this so many years after the events must be some measure of the pain which he suffered. If he could have written a further volume of reminiscences in his later years — and how welcome it would have been — the emphasis might have been corrected, but this he was never disposed to do.

However frequently the "Why, oh why?" may have recurred, Micklem soon attained in the principalship of Mansfield a position of

⁶*The Box and the Puppets*, op. cit., p. 70.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁸*Mansfield College Magazine*, June 1938.

⁹*The Box and the Puppets*, op. cit., p. 71

great respect and affection within the College and far beyond it. But he had begun his work as Principal at an extraordinarily difficult and bewildering time. The early 1930s were ominous years — economic blizzard, runs on the Banks, mass unemployment and hunger marches, with the first shadows of that darkness over Germany which was soon to engulf the world. Hitler came to power in 1933. Micklem was already in touch with many German theologians and was giving much thought to the fundamental issues which events were posing for the German Churches. In 1937 and 1938 he spent some time in Germany, conferring with the leaders of the Confessional Church, often in secret. "I sometimes think," he wrote, "that no one knows what is the Church of the Living God till he has had fellowship with it in the catacombs".¹⁰

Even before this experience the word "confession" in the sense of an affirmation of belief was becoming central to his thinking. What is the content for a Christian of a confession against which the gates of hell cannot prevail? The more he wrestled with this question the sharper became his misgivings about the churches in Britain, especially those of his own Congregational Order. In the early 1920s, as Editor of the Christian Revolution Series, he had not been ashamed to be counted a liberal in theology. But what was the word "liberal" coming to signify in the theology of the early 1930s? His concern as a writer, teacher and preacher had been to expound and interpret the Christian faith in terms appropriate to the age in which he lived — a concern to which he was still devoting all his powers to the end of his days. But "re-statement" was not then a questionable word in relation to the Christian's witness to the faith. In drafting the Covenant of the Free Church Fellowship in 1912 Micklem had written "We are determined in the light of all new knowledge and scientific method to re-examine and if need be re-express for our own time the fundamental affirmations of the faith". But the validity of the "fundamental affirmations of the faith" was not here in question. The essence of Christianity was not being stated for the first time: it was only being re-stated. In 1930 Micklem was not alone in fearing that in their utterances many of the "liberals", however impressively they drew upon "new knowledge" and used "the scientific method", were either vague about fundamental affirmations of the faith or wrote as though there were none. There were many, of course, to whom these strictures did not apply and who became troubled by some of Micklem's too sweeping charges but there was cause for alarm in a period when a "re-stated" Gospel which lacked the mighty notes of judgement and mercy, the Cross and the Resurrection, seemed woefully inadequate in a world heading for destruction. The intractability of men's hearts and the demonic cruelty of which human nature was once again proving itself to be capable, called for some-

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 106.

thing more than the good example of the Galilean or reliance upon man's inherent ability to perceive and live by the Open Light.

There were other Christian thinkers and leaders who at this time became urgently aware of the religious crisis confronting Europe. Amongst Congregationalists Bernard Manning was proclaiming with great personal and spiritual authority his *Orthodox Dissent*, a term in which both words were operative. John Whale and others were brilliantly championing neo-orthodoxy and a return to biblical theology, and however uncongenial to English tempers was the challenge of Karl Barth his warning bell could not go altogether unheard. Into this situation Micklem brought the challenge which found provocative expression in 1936 in his book *What is the Faith?* Even at this stage he was acknowledging a necessary distinction between the fundamental affirmations of the faith and the language of affirmation. He had not ceased to discriminate between substance and form in the classical Christian doctrines, but the distinction he now conceded seemed more elusive and the general tone of the book made it too easy for many to call him reactionary and authoritarian. Disagreement was sharp and Micklem threw himself into the fray wielding powerful controversial weapons. In a fighting pamphlet *Congregationalism Today* (1937) he naively contended that he was not "tilting at" or attacking anybody, not even Albert Peel whose book *Inevitably Congregationalism* had recently been published; but by the end of the pamphlet he had not left many pages of Peel's book intact, and in other skirmishes, particularly with the members of what came to be known as "The Blackheath Group" of liberal Congregationalists; he was remorseless in his attack on what seemed indistinguishable from Unitarianism.

It was during this period that in Mansfield College there appeared the strains which left unhappy memories. This was partly because the membership of the College in both Senior and Junior Common Rooms included men whose theological position was not that of Micklem. This applied especially to the Vice-Principal C. J. Cadoux, an erudite scholar and voluminous writer and an utterly dedicated Christian whose mind nevertheless moved on a plane far different from that of the Principal. It would be an over-simplification and not altogether fair to say that the difference was between a pedant and a poet, yet there was something of this in it, quite apart from the substance of their theological differences. In Cadoux there was a passion for preciseness, logical and linguistic, carried often to the point of finickiness which could be as irritating to Micklem's poetic mind as were Micklem's imaginative flights and subtle arguments to Cadoux. The situation was not eased by the fact that between the Principal and some members of the College Council, particularly distinguished business men staunchly loyal to the Mansfield of earlier days, something of the same difference of wave-length led to unhappy episodes, not least when Micklem's irrepressible gifts of wit and repartee left

his troubled hearers not amused. As was said of the saintly Keble, he could discharge an olive branch with the force of an arrow.

These years passed and with them some of the clouds. The war years, while producing their own difficulties and tragedies, saw marked changes in the mood of the churches. Theological controversies gradually became less prominent and a hunger for a deeper experience of the authentic forces of the Spirit emerged. There was a new concern about prayer and worship and in this Micklem had already made significant contributions both in the College, where his emphasis on worship and his own distinctive leadership in it were making an unforgettable impression, and beyond the College through his writings such as his *A Book of Personal Religion* (1938), *Prayer and Praises* (1940), and his contributions to *Christian Worship* (1936), which he edited for publication in connexion with the Jubilee of Mansfield College. When in 1944 he was elected to the Chair of the Congregational Union of England and Wales he expressed "incredulous surprise", but as his election and its acclamation showed, this was an inevitable expression of the goodwill which he had steadily been winning. From this point onwards his own denomination as well as others depended increasingly on his leadership.

In his earlier criticism of the theological ambiguity of the Congregational churches he had also pressed fundamental questions about Congregational polity as it seemed generally to be understood. He was no more inclined to repudiate the stand of its Puritan and Independent predecessors than was Bernard Manning but if the local church was to justify its claim to be a focal point of the Church Catholic what should be the marks of its catholicity and how should the integral relationship of local and universal find expression? Reflection on such questions as these was gradually tending towards the change in the structure of English Congregationalism which later resulted in the Congregational Union of England and Wales becoming the Congregational Church in England and Wales. This was finally due to the work of others but Micklem's influence directly and indirectly contributed to it. Concurrently with this change the possibility of union between Congregationalists and Presbyterians began to receive fresh attention. Micklem took part in a joint conference on the subject in 1946 and, though this was not immediately productive, in 1951 the two denominations entered into a covenant relationship with one another. Meantime the question of a wider union of the Churches was once again under discussion and in 1947 Micklem became co-chairman with the Bishop of Derby of the discussions which followed Geoffrey Fisher's "Cambridge Sermon". In 1949 he was also a member of the Free Church group which produced the report "The Catholicity of Protestantism". The creation of the United Reformed Church in 1972 gave him deep satisfaction as did the appointment of one of his most devoted pupils, John Huxtable, to the Executive Secretaryship of the Churches Unity Commission in 1975.

R. F. Horton once said to Micklem, "Your mind must be an extraordinary miscellany". So it was — not of bits and pieces merely but of considerable knowledge in many fields. He had decided against a political career but in 1941 he wrote *The Theology of Politics*, arguing with an informed historic sense and keen political insight that "our political philosophy explicitly or implicitly rests upon our theology". It was with this conviction that for many years he gave practical service to the party of his own choice — the Liberal Party — of which he became Chairman in 1957. In 1952 he published *The Law and the Laws, being the marginal comments of a Theologian*, which proved far more than marginal in its exposition of the basis of jurisprudence.¹¹ In his concern with the German Church conflict he amassed a unique collection of relevant documents, now deposited in the Bodleian Library, and in 1939 at the request of the Royal Institute of International Affairs he published a substantial study entitled *National Socialism and the Roman Catholic Church*. During the war of 1939-45 he was commissioned by the BBC to deliver a weekly "Christian News Commentary" in which he proved to be an ideal broadcaster. To his more substantial writings he added, under the pseudonym of *Ilico*, a weekly article for the *British Weekly*. He maintained this for a period of twenty-five years. This would have been considerable achievement for any professional journalist.¹² Lectures and essays on a variety of topics continued to appear, as in *Ultimate Questions* (1955), *The Abyss of Truth* (1956), *The Place of Understanding* (1963), *My Cherry Tree* (1966), *Christian Thinking Today* (1967), and *The Art of Thought* (1970). Micklem's gift of felicitous speech which won renown in his undergraduate days never lost its touch of perfection up to the last year of his life. He was much in demand on extremely varied occasions, particularly as an after dinner speaker. The organizers of any cause which enjoyed his support could sit back in the comfortable assurance that the evening would be a success when Nathaniel Micklem rose to speak. It was another case of "Sidney Smith coming upstairs". Few men could combine as skilfully as he the wit and grace which evokes hilarity with the marvellously timed appeal to the deepest emotions. When he was at his best and the occasion called for it he could touch on things high as heaven and deep as hell in a single verbal melody which somehow reconciled exuberant delight with the pain of things and the everlasting "Why?".

Alongside all his other activities and publications Micklem gave much time to the writing of poetry. This medium of expression was

¹¹This was based on lectures given in 1949 under the terms of the Wilde Lectureship in Natural and Comparative Religion. Other lectures delivered in the same course were published under the title *Reason and Revelation, a question from Duns Scotus*, 1953.

¹²A selection of these articles was published in 1941 under the title *No More Apologies*.

the one he loved best as being the only one in which words could be so chosen and ordered as to express convictions and emotions which for ever go beyond the limits of language. His range in poetry was as wide as his other interests. He published collections of miscellaneous verse in various styles, grave and gay, notably *A Gallimaufry* (1955) and *Waifs and Strays* (1972) and a singularly moving collection, *Walking Together* (1969), provoked by the most poignant of all his experiences, the death of his beloved wife Agatha. His most complete personal expression of faith appears in this volume together with *The Labyrinth* (1945) *The Tree of Life* (1952) and *The Labyrinth Revisited* (1960). These were Spenserian in form, plentifully garnished with classical allusions and somewhat recondite medieval fancies, but revealing to the like-minded the profoundest deeps of his life-long wrestling with truth, his ever-growing sense of mystery and wonder, and his utter reliance upon Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord as well as the way, the truth and the life. Any who were privileged to hear his farewell speech on retiring from the Principalship of Mansfield or the closing sentences of the *Congregational Lecture* given under the auspices of Memorial Hall Trust, or his last sermon preached in Summertown United Reformed Church will be unlikely to forget either the words or the emotion with which he spoke of his adoring dependence upon his Lord.

Throughout the eighty-eight years of Nathaniel Micklem's pilgrimage had life ever got him settled? At one point for certain; as the last lines of his last published poem said —

Ever a seeker was I, but ever
 in secret a finder
 Dumb and unable to frame words
 to set forth what I found.
 Taught at my mother's knee of a
 world that is grace and forgiveness,
 Power of a saving Name — these
 have I known in my heart.¹⁹

NORMAN GOODALL

¹⁹N. Micklem, *Waifs and Strays*, 1972, p. 28.

REVIEWS

Just Men. By Gordon Rupp, Pp. 182, Epworth Press, London 1977. £2.75

Gordon Rupp is the commemorative historian *par excellence*, and here we have collected the foremost examples of his art, delivered during the decade 1966-1976. Each of these historical sketches is focussed on one person: Rupp describes his life and times, and assesses his achievements. A number were delivered in Cambridge, so the volume is a happy memorial of his tenure of the Dixie Chair, including his Inaugural in 1969 on *Hort and the Cambridge Tradition*. That title immediately illustrates the length and breadth of the collection: length, with regard to the number of periods covered, so that he who made his name with the Lutheran Reformation here covers the centuries from Benedict's to our own; breadth, with regard to his sympathies, speaking of Benedict to the Benedictines, Francis to the Franciscans, Luther to the Lutherans, Knox to the Kirk, Newman to the Romans, and Hort to the Anglicans, always with a sympathy as if he had been born in that tradition, yet also with the detachment which can offer new light on his subject. Length and breadth, but also depth and height — for this wide range of "sketches" is far from superficial; the mastery of detail is impressive, and the fellow-historian who mistook the date of the Diet of Worms is treated to an exposition of the "stuff of history", which "happens forwards but is remembered and recorded backwards", a tension of which Rupp is always aware.

The main feature of the collection is Rupp's interest in human beings; he himself confesses to the pun in his title, recognising both the value of the "just man" for whose sake God spares cities, and the ordinariness which even the greatest share with the rest of us. He himself is just to his subjects in his judgments, going a long way, for example, to re-assess the influence of Samuel Wesley upon son John without disparagement to the recognised influence of Susanna. Above all, Rupp has retained in print his distinctive lecture style, so that we hear again those pregnant asides, which bind us surely to our predecessors — who else would link Matthew Parker, bragging of his small arms to the French ambassador, with "Captain Mainwaring and Dad's Army"?

One piece is lacking from the volume, the Sermon preached before the University of Cambridge at the Commemoration of Benefactors in 1975, on the theme "Men forget, but God remembers". Forget they may, but Gordon Rupp's commemorative powers are almost divine.

J. E. NEWPORT

Early Victorian Methodism: the Correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1830-1858. Edited by W. R. Ward. Pp. xxiii, 440, Durham University Publications, Oxford University Press, 1976. £12.00

This volume completes the publication of selections from Bunting's correspondence begun by Professor Ward in *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1820-1829* (Camden Fourth Ser. 11.) (1972); together with the editor's *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850* (1972) the two volumes of documents represent a major contribution to our understanding of Methodism in England in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Early Victorian Methodism contains 345 letters of some 2,000 which have survived, most of them written to Bunting in that role of manager of Methodism which he exercised either as President or Secretary of Conference, Senior Secretary for Foreign Missions, architect (and President) of the Theological Institution — all this, as a contemporary wrote, on the "emoluments of a curate . . . a furnished house, coals, candles and one hundred and fifty pounds a year". Bunting had moved to his London-based position of leadership from an itinerant ministry in the industrial North of England: his ministry is dominated by two themes — the ambiguous legacy of John Wesley and the turbulence of the new society growing up in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The opening hymn of the Methodist Conference rehearses the "fightings without and fears within" that its members have seen since last they met; for Bunting reports of these fightings and fears came in regularly from his correspondents throughout the country as together they sought to direct the energies of Methodism and shape its institutions. All the issues which tested and divided the movement in this period — the respective roles of ministers, local preachers and laymen in the spiritual and administrative life of the Societies, the training of the ministry, the elaboration of a central administration — are illustrated in the letters, as well as the subtle regional and personal variations in the Methodist experience. The long and gracious continuities of that experience are vouchsafed by the appearance of families in Bunting's world that are still represented in the Church today; Methodism was more than a good thing to get into and a good thing to get out of. This detail is a valuable corrective to the mechanical presentation of "growth" and "decline" in denominations which has dominated much recent historical writing.

When W. J. Noble described Methodism as "the child of a broken home" he had in mind its origin in a country divided ecclesiastically into an Established Church and Dissent. The legacy of John Wesley, with its unresolved tension between a high doctrine of the ministry and the encouragement of laymen in the life of the local Society left the Methodism of Bunting's era with a very unruly family. That he ultimately failed to make certain Wesleyan styles normative in Methodism was due not only to the forces which Methodism itself

generated — the Ranters and Radicals, teetotalers and American revivalists who appear in the correspondence as the disturbers of the Methodist peace — but also to a tension between an ecclesiastical style and the values of the society in which it was being expressed. For Bunting the ministers in Conference were the living Wesley; but a trained ministry, and a growing missionary enterprise, needed resources only available from a laity among whom the copious snobberies of being English were tending to proliferate as they made their way in the world. By the 1840's Bunting's battle for a Theological Institution had been won, at the cost of a major recession. The paradox of the next decade is that the very strength that his centralisation gave to the ministry provoked dissension within that ministry because it seemed to be Bunting's centralization, and *pari passu* it provoked dissension between ministry and laity because there were discontinuities between an aristocratic ministry and a democratic laity achieving identity in local affairs as well as in religious life. It is an irony that Dissent, New and Old, which would have taught Methodism something here, was inhibited from doing so by that Connexionalism and Arminianism which carried forward styles of religious life echoing the disciplines of a Jesuit or Franciscan movement. It was no accident, or romanticising, that prompted a contemporary to see in Bunting's career a pattern similar to that of the general of one of the great religious orders. If the correspondence shows a Methodism intensely preoccupied with its own problems, a later generation was to see in its subsequent movement into the ranks of Nonconformity as false a trail as some of Bunting's strategies; false both for Dissent and Methodism, for neither is really at home amidst the insolence of ideologies.

Echoes of a less rancorous life may be discerned in the comment of a minister stationed in the South West during a period of particularly vicious wrangles in Conference, rejoicing that he was out of it all in Cornwall. The historian's hardest task is to record the goodness that was accomplished by all the Methodists who had something better to do than write letters to Jabez Bunting; that task is not discontinuous with the work of those concerned today with seeing that the Kingdom is done in a naughty world.

A. N. CASS

Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914. By H. E. Meller, Pp. 308, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1976, £7.50.

The respectable chapel historian at last has to grapple with a rash of books written by, and generally for, (hence a problem of communication), social historians about Victorian and Edwardian England. Their distinguishing mark is the prominence given to the Dissenting classes. Thus we have Dr. Fraser on urban politics, Professor Olsen and Dr. McLeod on aspects of London, Dr. Daunton on Cardiff, Dr. Yeo on Reading, Dr. Obelkevich on Lincolnshire and

Dr. Moore on the Dearness Valley miners of County Durham. Here we have Dr. Meller on Bristol.

No study of Victorian Bristol could fail to alert readers of this Journal. With Samuel Morley as M.P., the Willses as statutory grandees and the multi-Thomased pastorates at Redland Park and Highbury (the latter Butterfield's only Nonconformist chapel), it might seem that Congregationalists contributed to the city's life in a way paralleled by few other English provincial capitals. Perhaps only Norwich might compare.

The chapel historian will want to study Dr. Meller's book at three levels: as a background quarry; as an analysis of leisure; and as an account of Dissenters.

There can be no doubt as to its usefulness as a quarry for material about the late Victorian and Edwardian city. It is based on all the proper reading, and can safely be added to the growing list of solid urban studies. As an analysis of leisure (surely the most Puritan of concepts?) it is less successful, perhaps because its undistinguished style masks its perceptiveness. It lacks Stephen Yeo's engagingly tangled sensitivity; it is prone to describe Christians doing their duty as "socio-religious workers".

Indeed, the source of the book's weakness may well lie in the way Dr. Meller deals with our sort of Christian. Bristol had a formidable middle class which remained formidably committed to its city's culture, long after similar patricians had been leaving Manchester for distant suburbs, and unlike Reading's movers and moulders. These people were religiously motivated and there appears to have been a long history of close cooperation between the denominations (or, at least, individuals in them). And here the doubts begin: we are not really told why this was so, and this means that Dr. Meller tends to blur those vexing differences between Evangelical Anglicans and Dissenters, and them all and Unitarians. She tends too easily to lump Bristol's Quakers, Unitarians, Baptists and Congregationalists as "major denominations" (which they were in influence, but there was an important numerical disparity) and she dismisses a little too easily the Brethren as enthusiasts and the Free Methodists and Bible Christians as on Methodism's fiery fringes. When it comes to the influential Tyndale Baptists she apparently fails to distinguish between church and congregation, and to forget that most attenders at even the most prosperous middle class chapel would have belonged only to the fringes of the middle classes. They provided the numbers; the grandees, never more than relatively numerous, merely provided the tone. And a thoroughly useful analysis of the Bristol Y.M.C.A. is marred by being placed in a section on the 'civilizing mission' to the poor, when it was not really the *poor* whom the Y.M.C.A. had in mind.

In a sense these are minor points, but in a changing city whose Dissenters contributed so much to its leisure, they affect the accuracy

of our understanding as to what the concept of leisure was, how it developed, and where (and if) it failed. They do not detract unduly from the book's underlying usefulness, but they remind us that now that Dissent is coming in to its own among social historians, its subtleties are there to be exploited with corresponding care.

J.C.G.B.

Dick Sheppard. By Carolyn Scott, Pp. 253, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1977, £4.95.

'Give the child as much neurosis as he can stand', genially suggested W. H. Auden in the thirties. Oddly it seems to be an admirable recipe for producing the preacher of charismatic power. Certainly three of the most famous preachers of the inter-war years, Dick Sheppard, W. H. Elliott, and Leslie Weatherhead (whose work extended far beyond that period) would give some warrant to the suggestion. None can be said to have had an easy time psychologically. It may be that it is only inner suffering and a desperate quest for adjustment that can make men and women in all their diversity say, in effect, 'This man knows what it feels like'.

Dick Sheppard was martyred by asthma to the point of being constantly disabled for work. Despite his seemingly secure background, not without a high measure of privilege, some serious damage had been done early in his life. Ellis Roberts, his first major biographer, attributed it all to a sarcastic schoolmaster. That may be right, but Roberts's book is perhaps too stylised to be wholly trusted. The attempt to develop an almost schizophrenic division of character in that book was evidence more of artistic ingenuity than sound biographical practice.

Carolyn Scott is a biographer of a different kind. This is a highly readable book, but there is no attempt at profundity. Most of the best stories have already appeared in the Ellis Roberts book which came out in 1942, but the passage of time and the different standards of today enable the author to be more frank about the tragedy of the marriage and the patchiness of Sheppard's achievement as a father.

As well as the neurosis there is the desperate sadness that the man who more than any clergyman of the period made real to the multitude the centrality of love faced failure in the most intimate of all loving relationships. Carolyn Scott combines sensitivity with frankness here. It is plain that Alison Carver — of Congregational stock — whom Sheppard married, was badly spoiled. Certainly she had no inner preparation for the appalling demands of being married to a man who exhausted himself utterly in service of humanity, and lived under an intense spotlight of publicity.

Her life, too, reveals that the uncertain morals of a part of society in the years between the wars infected even Christian circles. (Some readers may have observed how the recent biography of Paul Tillich suggests that the Weimar Republic's amorality went beyond the circle of 'Mr. Norris Changes Trains').

But it is neither the tragedy of the broken relationship nor the distressing bouts of illness that remain in the mind as the story is told again for this generation. (And, by the way, how interesting it is that the publishers have judged that this generation will want to read the story — and that the book has been widely reviewed.) It is the story of a great Christian of wide vision and gloriously over-brimming love for ordinary people. His gaiety of spirit is a miracle when you think of his constant fight for breath. His agonising over war puts him in a different bracket from most popular preachers. His vision of what could be done for men and women through a dying West End church, his perception of what broadcasting could mean for the Christian cause, and his power to relate to sophisticated literary figures while remaining his unique self — these and other features of this remarkable man are brought out with skill by his present biographer.

Miss Scott has some of the inaccuracy of a popular biographer. William Temple is strangely translated to the see of Birmingham. Maude Royden, despite being for a time associate *preacher* at the City Temple, remained a faithful Anglican and never became, as suggested here, a Congregational minister. Bishop Neville Talbot is oddly transformed to 'Gilbert' (his brother who died in the First World War). But these are small blemishes. She has made a great man come alive again. I hope his story will be read not only by nostalgic older folk, but by young men and women. They will learn from it.

KENNETH SLACK

We are pleased to draw attention to these full histories of local churches: —

W. H. Shercliff *Gatley United Reformed Church, A Short History 1777-1977*. Pp. 64, obtainable from Dr. G. Jessup, 462, Palatine Road, Manchester 22, price 50p.

A. A. Smith and D. Lawrence *Victoria Road United Reformed Church: A History of the First Hundred Years*, unpaginated.

H. R. Unwin *A History of Tacket Street Congregational Church Ipswich 1686-1972*. Pp. 28, obtainable from the author, 86, Colneis Road, Felixstowe, price 70p. post included.

J.C.G.B.

Slavery on Trial — John Smith of Demarara and the Emancipation Movement, 1817-24. By Cecil Northcott. Epworth, London, 1976. £1.50.

The Inseparable Grief — Margaret Cargill of Fiji. By Mora Dickson. Epworth, London. £1.50.

The John Smith story last came to the fore in 1933, the centenary of the Emancipation Act towards the passing of which he had, by his death, played a leading part. He was appointed to Le Resouvenir plantation, British Guiana — now Guyana — by the London Missionary Society in 1817. His church seated 700 and his ministry extended to

many other plantations. This book covers his trial on a charge of fomenting insurrection, a charge true only in so far as it was inherent in the preaching of the Gospel. The pretext for arresting him lay in a rumour that freedom was coming for all slaves. The vengeance, born of fear, that was wreaked on the slaves, and the six-months trial of the missionary, are told largely by quotation from contemporary documents.

Parallel action in England is told in the same way and one notes that Smith died in prison well before a royal pardon was granted. He was buried quickly, thus cheating the planters' hopes of seeing his body rotting on the gibbet.

The action which finally put the Emancipation Bill on the statute book is also told by well-chosen quotations. An epilogue brings the story up to date.

Margaret Cargill was a Presbyterian turned Methodist. This account of her life is based on her husband's journal. As pioneer missionaries of the Methodist Society in Fiji their life was both hard and perilous, but also rewarding. Margaret gave the love 'that suffers long and is kind'. She gained both the love and respect of the fiercest cannibals.

IRENE M. FLETCHER

The Malagasy and The Europeans. By P. M. Mutibwa Pp. xvi 411, Longman 1974, £5.75.

This scholarly and well-researched volume is a welcome addition to the Ibadan History Series from Dr. Phares Mutibwa now at Makerere University. It is evidence of the liveliness of this African history school, and also of the richness of the London Missionary Society's archives now housed by London University at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Always fascinated by islands, the Fathers and Founders of the L.M.S. come into the Malagasy story as early as 1817, but the full tide of the "great island's" European connections, described by Dr. Mutibwa, was between 1861 and 1895. This was the period of missionary ascendancy culminating in Queen Ranavalona II's baptism on February 21 1869.

With this baptism Protestant Christianity, of the Congregational kind, moved into a paramouncy and became the established religion, but it was always Malagasy at heart. It was not a European missionary who examined and baptised the Queen but a Malagasy pastor, a shrewd recognition that although they wanted to be European in development and civilisation their Christianity was to be thoroughly indigenous, a fact that has marked the Malagasy ever since.

The European penetration of Madagascar was not led by Pro-Consuls and Viceroys, with the trappings of colonialism, but by dedicated men and women from Welsh chapels and English Congregationalism.

CECIL NORTHCOTT