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A table of contents for *Vox Evangelica* can be found here:

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## ***Spiritual Renewal and Social Reform: Attempts to Develop Social Awareness in the Early Keswick Movement***

**Ian M. Randall**

[p.67]

### **INTRODUCTION**

The British holiness movement which came to be known as the Keswick movement began in the 1870s and by the end of the nineteenth century was a crucial element in world-wide evangelicalism. On 1st May 1873 sixteen people who shared a common concern for a fresh appraisal of teaching about holiness met at the Curzon Chapel, Mayfair, one of them being Evan Hopkins, who was to be the formative influence on the theology of the new movement.<sup>1</sup> The Wesleyan emphasis on sanctification as a decisive experience was part of the evangelical mosaic in Britain, but it had little influence in other denominations and it was as a result of the visits of American speakers that British evangelicals began to reconsider their view of the holy life.<sup>2</sup> Following the May 1873 meeting, a two-day conference 'for the promotion of spiritual life' was held in January 1874 at Mildmay Park, and further gatherings were convened later in the same year at the Hanover Square Rooms. Prominent evangelical laymen such as Sir Stevenson Blackwood, Lord Farnham and Sir Thomas Beauchamp played a leading part in this enterprise. 1874 saw a number of other key events. About one hundred invited guests met in July 1874 at Broadlands, the home of the future Lord and Lady Mount-Temple, to hear the Americans Hannah and Robert Pearsall Smith; Samuel Morley MP, hosted a series of breakfasts which 2,000 ministers (in groups of thirty or forty) attended, and from 29th August to 6th September 1874, 1,500 people attended a conference at Oxford 'for the promotion of scriptural holiness'.<sup>3</sup> The movement had gone public.

This study examines some of the ways in which, from the 1870s to the 1920s, the leaders of the British holiness movement centred on Keswick, addressed social and political issues. Since the primary focus of the holiness message was on internal spiritual renewal within evangelicalism, the movement was rather reluctant to be drawn into discussion of the problems of the world 'outside'. Nevertheless, views on socio-political matters did emerge and, because of the widespread influence of the Keswick ethos on evangelicalism, necessarily affected evangelical

[p.68]

opinion on such issues. The effect of a concentration on inward spirituality and caution about social questions on the part of many Keswick teachers, contributed to a tendency among evangelicals in the early decades of the twentieth century to withdraw from active social or political involvement. There were Keswick leaders, however, who attempted to combine spiritual renewal and social awareness.

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<sup>1</sup> W. B. Sloan, *These Sixty Years: The Story of the Keswick Convention* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1935), 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), ch. 5, esp. 164f.

<sup>3</sup> F. B. Meyer, *The Christian*, 8 January 1925, 5f.; J. B. Figgis, *Keswick from Within* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1914), 23; H. W. Webb-Peploe, *The Life of Faith*, 13 July 1898, 332.

## A RENEWAL MOVEMENT

The revival of interest in the subject of holiness in the later nineteenth century came about in response to a felt need. Older evangelical teaching, that the holy life was achieved by active effort, had left many of its adherents with a sense of failure.<sup>4</sup> There was, therefore, an eager reception of tantalising concepts which began to be widely talked about in the 1870s, such as 'Victory through Faith' and 'Deliverance from Sin'. Despite the fact that addresses by Americans like the Pearsall Smiths (who were Quakers by background) were rather anecdotal and often lacking in serious exegesis,<sup>5</sup> the effect of the new emphasis was profound. A storm was, however, about to break out in evangelicalism over whether or not the doctrine of complete victory, or sinless perfection, was being taught by the holiness leadership.<sup>6</sup> F. B. Meyer, who was to become a major Keswick figure, was present at the huge holiness conference in Brighton in 1875 (when about 8,000 attended and recalled, years later, that 'unguarded statements' had been made.<sup>7</sup> Keswick's inner circle of early leaders—T. D. Harford-Battersby, E. H. Hopkins and H. W. Webb-Peploe—were present at Brighton in 1875, and the announcement was made there that a convention was to be held in Keswick, in the Lake District, in the summer of that year. Only 600 came to the first 'Keswick', an indication, in all probability, of the fear that 'higher life' teaching was fraught with danger.<sup>8</sup> Articles critical of the convention appeared in the Church of England evangelical weekly, *The Record*, and Harford-Battersby was initially cold-shouldered by many of his Anglican colleagues. Yet by 1907 attitudes had changed so dramatically that *The Record* could report with satisfaction that the numbers attending Keswick each year for the convention, had grown to 5-6,000.<sup>9</sup> By this stage many mini-Keswicks were being held both in other parts of Britain and overseas. The Keswick movement had entered into the evangelical bloodstream. For many Christians the offer of holiness through 'resting faith' rather than 'works', had proved to be irresistible.

Keswick was ultimately successful not simply on account of the perceived relevance of its themes, but because it was able to present its message in respectable dress. Evan Hopkins worked hard in the early years to provide a Keswick theology of sanctification and power which would be acceptable to British evangelicals and in particular to the

[p.69]

Anglican constituency. Any notions associated with Wesleyan perfectionism were repudiated. Harford-Battersby brought, from the beginning, a tone which was 'sober' and 'free from extremes', and when Handley Moule, later bishop of Durham, publicly committed himself to Keswick in the mid 1880s, the battle over theological acceptability was seen to have been largely won.<sup>10</sup> Many Nonconformists remained concerned, however, that Keswick embodied a form of escapism. For the holiness movement to be credible as an expression of an authentic

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<sup>4</sup> J. Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 345; D. W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> R. Brown, 'Evangelical Ideas of Perfection: A Comparative Study of the Spirituality of Men and Movements in Nineteenth-Century England', Cambridge PhD (1965), 178.

<sup>6</sup> Figgis, *Keswick from Within*, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Meyer, *The Christian*, 15 January 1925, 5.8

<sup>8</sup> Figgis, *Keswick from Within*, 35, 53; S. Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1952), 52.

<sup>9</sup> *Memoir of T. D. Harford-Battersby* (London, 1890), 163, 175; *The Record*, 2 August 1907, 679.

<sup>10</sup> *Memoir of T. D. Harford-Battersby*, 184; A. Smellie, *Evan H. Hopkins* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1920), 121-24.

spirituality which was available to all, it had to transcend denominational barriers. 'All One in Christ Jesus' was, after all, the convention slogan. In 1887, when F. B. Meyer spoke at Keswick for the first time, it was clear that an important breakthrough had been made. For a period of fifty years, until his death in 1929, Meyer was probably Nonconformity's most outstanding representative on the Keswick platform and the movement's best known international representative.<sup>11</sup> In 1895 Prebendary Webb-Peploe complained that he and Handley Moule would lose their influence in the Church of England if the trend continued for Keswick speakers to be Dissenters.<sup>12</sup> Anglican hegemony was, in fact, never in doubt. Although Meyer brought holiness teaching to bear on his own Baptist denomination through the creation of a Prayer Union along Keswick lines, most Free Church leaders continued to view the other-worldliness of the convention atmosphere with a degree of mistrust.<sup>13</sup> The business of Keswick, though billed as 'practical', was unashamedly 'spiritual business', with concentration on individual sin and a promise that in the life of the Christian such sin, though never eradicated, could be 'perpetually counteracted'.<sup>14</sup> Keswick's individualistic and conservative doctrine of sanctification had the effect of undercutting both the social radicalism of Nonconformity and the 'eradicationism' to be found in some elements of the older holiness tradition in America and Britain. Caution was crucial to Keswick's growth.

A further aspect of Keswick which ensured its effectiveness as an agent of renewal was its capacity to respond and sometimes to adapt, albeit slowly, to changing moods. This can be illustrated by the way it dealt with the challenges of mission and revivalism. During Keswick's early years the leadership steadfastly opposed the introduction of a missionary emphasis. Missions, it was argued, inevitably meant missionary secretaries arguing over the proceeds of collections. It was, in any case, unthinkable to allow any distraction from the main purpose of Keswick, which was meeting with God.<sup>15</sup> In 1886 and 1887 permission was given, as a result of lobbying by Reginald Radcliffe, an evangelist, to use the convention tent for a missionary meeting, provided it was not an official convention event. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the interdenominational 'faith' mission, the China Inland Mission, who had spoken at Keswick as early as 1883 (though the convention report did

[p.70]

not mention his name), made his presence felt in 1886, and by 1888 the convention was not only taking up an offering for missions but was talking about sending out a 'Keswick missionary'.<sup>16</sup> Meyer reinforced the change of direction. In 1892 he could, with a rather revisionist approach to the history of the convention, speak proudly of the 'resistless energy' which came out of Keswick and which had produced what he saw as a remarkable missionary movement.<sup>17</sup> J. R. Mott and the Student Volunteer Movement, with their slogan 'The

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<sup>11</sup> See W. H. Griffith Thomas in C. F. Harford (ed.), *The Keswick Convention: Its Message, Its Method, and Its Men* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1907), 233; Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 186.

<sup>12</sup> J. C. Pollock, *The Keswick Story* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), 111.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the comment in *The Life of Faith*, 1 September 1890, 169-71, that Nonconformist leaders were holding aloof from Keswick and that no more than ten Congregational ministers were present, and *The Baptist Times*, 14 July 1905, 509. For examination of this area, see my thesis, 'The Career of F B Meyer', CNAA MPhil (1992), chs. 4, 5 and 6.

<sup>14</sup> E. Stock, 'Fifty Years Ago', J. S. Holden (ed.), *The Keswick Jubilee Souvenir* (London, 1925), 10; E. H. Hopkins, *The Life of Faith*, 1 April 1889, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 150f.; Sloan, *These Sixty Years*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Sloan, *These Sixty Years*, 32, 34f.

<sup>17</sup> Meyer, *The Life of Faith*, XIV, 157 (1892), 7. For Keswick and mission, see A. Porter, 'Cambridge, Keswick and Late Nineteenth-Century Attitudes to Africa', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 5,1 (1976).

evangelisation of the world in this generation', received significant impetus from Keswick; Amy Carmichael became the first Keswick missionary, and Hudson Taylor could claim that two thirds of his CIM missionaries had been recruited as a result of Keswick.<sup>18</sup> Mission which sprang from renewal became part of Keswick's new self-identity.

Having completed one metamorphosis by the end of the century, Keswick was then faced, in 1904-5, with the prospect of having to absorb a new revivalism. The challenge came initially from Wales. At Meyer's suggestion some young Welsh ministers who were seeking personal revival had attended a 'Keswick-in-Wales' at Llandrindod Wells in 1903 and had received a decisive spiritual empowering.<sup>19</sup> Meyer's own preaching had considerable impact at this convention, but he later rejected suggestions that he had claimed to initiate the revival. Indeed, when Meyer reported on 'manifestations of the Divine power' in evidence at meetings led by Evan Roberts (the principal figure in the revival), he admitted to feeling like a little child in the school of the Holy Ghost'.<sup>20</sup> A contingent of about 300 came from Wales to Keswick in 1905 and were given 'free play for their enthusiasm'. Meyer felt that the revival represented a 'Pentecostal overflowing' and the report about it which he took to Los Angeles in 1905 contributed to the beginnings of Pentecostalism. But Keswick as a whole was doubtful and in 1907 a correspondent remarked approvingly that the convention that year had been 'quiet and solemn'.<sup>21</sup> Keswick was consistent in its belief that there was very limited scope for radical expressions of spirituality and it had, accordingly, set the boundaries of revivalism. In so doing it both reflected, and helped to shape, the spiritual mood of early twentieth-century evangelicalism.

### KESWICK'S SOCIAL STANCE

'In the past', said W. B. Sloan in 1919, writing in Keswick's mouthpiece, *The Life of Faith*, 'it was possible to present the call and claim of the Gospel with little or no reference to the surrounding conditions of human life and God's government of the world'.<sup>22</sup> Sloan explained that in the early years of Keswick the only objective was to impart truths which helped a Christian in his 'personal walk with God'. Holiness was essentially an internal matter and therefore the practicalities of every-

[p.71]

day living could, to a large extent, be passed over.<sup>23</sup> Even concentration on Christian activities could, in Keswick thinking, be a dangerous diversion. When, as a result of a Conference of Evangelical Churchmen in 1889, it was argued that there was a crying need for men and women who were united in Christ to insist on (Christian) work, *The Life of Faith* retorted that it was not

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<sup>18</sup> See C. H. Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 114f., 123-25, for Mott at Keswick; A. T. Pierson, *Forward Movements of the Last Half Century* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 159; Sloan, *These Sixty Years*, 38, 40; Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 152.

<sup>19</sup> R. B. Jones, *Rent Heavens: The Revival of 1904* (London, 1931), 27f.; B. P. Jones, *The King's Champions* (Cwmbran, Gwent: B. P. Jones, 1968), 48f., 86; B. P. Jones, *The Spiritual History of Keswick in Wales, 1903-1983* (Cwmbran, Gwent: B. P. Jones, 1989), 7f., 11; E. Evans, *The Welsh Revival of 1904* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1969), 31f.; *The Life of Faith*, 12 August 1903, 572.

<sup>20</sup> Evans, *Welsh Revival*, 169f.; *The Daily News*, 2 January 1905, 3; *The Christian*, 12 January 1905, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Figgis, *Keswick from Within*, 151; Meyer, *The Christian*, 26 March 1925, 5; F. Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles* (Los Angeles, 1925), 11; R. M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Oxford, 1979), 64-66; *The Record*, 2 August, 1907, 679.

<sup>22</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 5 March 1919, 247.

<sup>23</sup> See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 175f.

'work' which would put Christian people right spiritually. There was, it pronounced, a need to deal with the spiritual 'root of the matter' in order to 'do God's will both in work and walk'.<sup>24</sup> In the same issue there were, however, calls for Christians to use their efforts to lessen Sunday drinking. Later in 1889 it became impossible to avoid comment on the London Dock Strike. *The Life of Faith* disapproved of the strike because of its 'cruel consequences' and ventured into the realm of economics, describing the disruption which had been caused to the 'great machinery of supply and demand', the danger that future commerce in London would be adversely affected, and the possibility that with the increased wage (of 6d per hour) 'hundreds of fresh hands' would be attracted to the docks and would 'throw out of work the inferior men now employed'.<sup>25</sup> Alongside the incoherence of this economic exposition, one theme was consistently echoed: what ultimately mattered was to bring people to Christ. In the light of this, 'feeding the body', 'cultivating the deadened intellect' or, logically, taking industrial action, were 'feeble' weapons, substituting social for spiritual remedies. The Keswick of the 1880s could see little hope for human improvement apart from conversion.

Warnings against social involvement continued to be a feature of Keswick up to the end of the nineteenth century. Although *The Life of Faith* carried many advertisements appealing for financial help for work among the destitute, and Evan Hopkins, the editor, was indebted to the example of William Booth of the Salvation Army, concern was expressed, in December 1892, that social reform might be thought to be more important than salvation.<sup>26</sup> 'The work which lay nearest to the heart of our Divine Lord was', it was argued, 'not the feeding of the hungry but the saving of the lost'. Surroundings and circumstances might be harmful, but the real trouble was deeper. In the following year the question was raised: What can be done for the rich? Work among the poor was seen as 'comparatively easy' compared with reaching the rich.<sup>27</sup> Keswick's social conservatism may well have been reinforced by ignorance. When *The Life of Faith* entered into the debate on working men and the church, it did so by suggesting that working class people were not under-represented in terms of church attendance.<sup>28</sup> Such a statement flew in the face of all the evidence that the churches had failed, on a massive scale, to reach the working classes. Significantly, when confronted with the claim that the Brotherhood and Pleasant Sunday Afternoon meetings for men had been successful in drawing men under religious influences, *The Life of Faith* was instinctively

[p.72]

dismissive, wondering what signs there were of spiritual work. Were men being converted? Yet at the same time, in 1893, as these questions were being asked, Meyer was leading a Brotherhood meeting (of 800 working class men) and claiming many conversions.<sup>29</sup> Keswick was not yet ready to affirm social ministry of this kind.

A change of mood became evident as a result of the war in South Africa in 1900. At first the war was used as an object lesson to exhort the Keswick community to enthusiastic warfare

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<sup>24</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 1 July 1889, 127.

<sup>25</sup> See *The Life of Faith*, 1 October 1889, 223f.

<sup>26</sup> Missions which appealed for help included the London Orphan Asylum, the Surgical Aid Society, and missions among the disabled, widows and the young. For Hopkins, see Smellie, *Evan H. Hopkins*, 40-43. For the *The Life of Faith* comment, 28 December 1892, 476.

<sup>27</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 8 February 1893, 108.

<sup>28</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 16 November 1892, 357.

<sup>29</sup> For questions by *The Life of Faith*, see 29 March 1893, 234. For Meyer, W. Y. Fullerton, *F. B. Meyer: A Biography* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1929), esp. ch. 10 on the Brotherhood.

against the devil, but soon a *Life of Faith* editorial was asserting that the war was 'making the nation one' and was confident of 'our supremacy'.<sup>30</sup> Many letters on the subject of the war were received, but editorial policy (as stated on 14th February 1900) was to publish only 'communications from Christian men who have personal and direct knowledge of South African matters'. As it happened the sole letter on the war published in that particular issue was from a woman—Agnes Weston at the Royal Sailors' Rest.<sup>31</sup> It seems that war opened up the political horizons of Keswick. By the time of the First World War, *The Life of Faith* had shifted its ground to such an extent that it could declare: 'We do not hesitate to say that a man should be a better and more aggressive social reformer after he has entered into the secret of Keswick.'<sup>32</sup> Keswick's trustees had been blamed for not encouraging prohibition or not outlining a policy for the relief of the Congo, but Keswick's critics had invariably overlooked the 'practical application of the message'. The Keswick policy had been clear. It was to proclaim the message of holiness in general terms and to leave it to Christians to implement the details in their own situations.

### THE ROLE OF F. B. MEYER

Although Meyer was to become Keswick's leading international speaker, his entry into the movement was hesitant. He was at Broadlands, Oxford, and Brighton in 1874-5 but it was not until 1884 that he had an experience of consecration which meant that the Keswick organisers recognised him as 'equipped to take his place on the Keswick platform'.<sup>33</sup> He was booked to speak in 1887. Prior to delivering his first message, Meyer had a further spiritual encounter in which, on a Keswick hillside, he said to himself: 'As I breathe in the air, so my spirit breathes in the fullness (to my capacity) of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>34</sup> Despite the fact that he often referred to this event and explicitly preached a doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Meyer was wary of subjectivity and strongly opposed any dependence on feelings. In 1903 he asserted, at Keswick, that there were 'scores of people in this tent' who had 'never distinguished between the fact and the experience of the fact'.<sup>35</sup> The fact was that if the blessing of the Spirit's power had been 'claimed' by faith, then it was a reality, regardless of the subjective

[p.73]

consequences. Meyer was known as the 'chief apostle' of the idea of the 'claiming of the blessing', and he could go as far as to say of his own experience of filling that he did not 'feel it' and had 'no joy of it', but was depending on 'naked trust'.<sup>36</sup> His concern was to spell out in severely practical terms the steps to the blessed life. What he had known for himself was normative. As he explained at Keswick in 1921, there were three stages. Conversion was followed by consecration which was followed by the anointing of the Spirit.<sup>37</sup> It was a line of teaching from which he never deviated. Meyer helped to keep Keswick from extreme introversion.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 3 January 1900, 10; 24 January 1900, 47; 31 January 1900, 59.

<sup>31</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 14 February 1900, 89, 92.

<sup>32</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 12 January 1916, 795. Evan Hopkins ceased to be the editor-in-chief in 1913.

<sup>33</sup> Sloan, *These Sixty Years*, 33. Hopkins insisted that Keswick speakers must have experienced what they taught: see Smellie, *Evan H. Hopkins*, 118. For Meyer's experience, see Fullerton, *Meyer*, 57f.

<sup>34</sup> *The Keswick Week*, 1902, 180. The Keswick Week was the published annual record of Keswick addresses.

<sup>35</sup> *The Keswick Week*, 1903, 70.

<sup>36</sup> N. C. Macfarlane, *Scotland's Keswick: Sketches and Reminiscences* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1916), 174; *The Keswick Week*, 1903, 147; *The Keswick Week*, 1922, 117.

<sup>37</sup> *The Keswick Week*, 1921, 17.

Meyer's emphasis on 'practical holiness' or, as he defined Keswick teaching, 'practical mysticism',<sup>38</sup> was firmly within the ethos of Keswick. What was most controversial was his application of holiness to social issues. There was 'slight perturbation' in some quarters when Meyer was first invited to speak at Keswick, since he was known as a Gospel Temperance campaigner.<sup>39</sup> No doubt aware of the fact that his socio-political concerns were not on Keswick's agenda, Meyer allowed his passion for the practical to focus on the steps to holiness and the baptism of the Spirit. From about 1900, however, he seems to have felt able to broaden his message. Using the example of a wealthy man who went to Keswick for eighteen years but had, in his business, a 'grinding disposition', Meyer told his Keswick audience in 1900 that there were friends of his who viewed 'specimens of Keswick' as poor advertisements for the movement.<sup>40</sup> Meyer's aim was to challenge the individual Christian. He urged his Tuesday evening Keswick listeners in 1903 to give attention to things that were wrong in their lives. If they needed to make financial restitution they should immediately write a cheque, with interest, and similarly letters of apology should be written, said Meyer, 'tonight'. Following this, the fire of God would come. On the Wednesday evening Meyer was able to report that people had responded and had told him about it. Marriage relationships were being put right. By Thursday evening Meyer was revealing that engagements to be married 'which ought never to have been made' had been broken off.<sup>41</sup> From Jamaica a correspondent noted in the same year that Meyer's visit there had brought a working Christianity, suited for the world in which people lived.<sup>42</sup>

In marked contrast to the reticence of Keswick as a whole on social issues, Meyer was, by 1900, a nationally known social activist. His ministry in Leicester during the 1880s had included large-scale initiatives on behalf of, for example, ex-prisoners, and from 1892, as minister of Christ Church in Lambeth, Meyer built up a vast network of organisations dedicated to transforming the life of the neighbourhood. The fact that Meyer worked tirelessly (and ruthlessly) on behalf of 'social purity', achieving the closure of 7-800 brothels, drew admiration from the Archbishop of Canterbury, among many others.<sup>43</sup> There is little doubt

[p.74]

that Meyer's commitment to holiness acted as an important motivating force in this area, although he also appears to have viewed sexuality, even within marriage, in a fairly negative light.<sup>44</sup> Meyer's reputation was as a 'blunt purity lecturer' and the effect of his address on sexual temptation, given at 'Keswick' meetings in Hong Kong in 1909, was reported to be that many men were 'in the way of conquering' who had previously been 'succumbing'.<sup>45</sup> Meyer was deliberately attempting to focus Keswick teaching on human realities.

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<sup>38</sup> *The Christian*, 22 July 1925, 9. Meyer commented on the controversial nature of his definition.

<sup>39</sup> F. S. Webster, *The Life of Faith*, 25 July 1917, 813.

<sup>40</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 1 August 1900, 495f.

<sup>41</sup> *The Keswick Week*, 1903, 66, 97f., 146.

<sup>42</sup> *The Life of Faith*, January 1903, 15.

<sup>43</sup> *The Times*, 22 June 1907, 12; E. H. Jeffs, *Princes of the Modern Pulpit* (London, 1931), 114. In some quarters Meyer's work on behalf of social purity was the facet of his career which was best known.

<sup>44</sup> F. B. Meyer, *A Holy Temple* (London, 1901), 10f., 23. Meyer warned that this was a book 'for men only'.

<sup>45</sup> E. J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977), 131; *The Life of Faith*, 14 July 1909, 472.



## TENSIONS

When the other-worldly spirit of Keswick encountered the full force of Meyer's crusading zeal, tensions were bound to arise. Meyer was committed to such causes as temperance, the Free Church movement and the Brotherhood, while during the Boer War he tended to the pro-Boer position.<sup>46</sup> But it was the Education Bill of 1902 which was to prove a particularly sensitive issue. The Bill proposed aid from the rates for Church controlled schools, and a number of Free Church leaders mounted a campaign of 'passive resistance', encouraging objectors to what was seen as a state-church imposition to deduct an appropriate amount from their rate payments.<sup>47</sup> Keswick evangelicals were, on the whole, either indifferent to, or supportive of, the legislation.<sup>48</sup> At first Meyer was afraid that the crisis would renew old feuds between the Established and Free Churches and he tried to play a reconciling role through discussions which involved five bishops, key Nonconformists and Webb-Peploe, who was in favour of the government's proposals.<sup>49</sup> The attempt at mediation was abortive and in June 1902 Meyer, having decided where his sympathies lay, denounced the government's policy as 'absurd and retrograde'.<sup>50</sup> The strength of Meyer's feeling came as a surprise. Having embarked on his course, however, Meyer was determined to continue. In 1903 he helped to lead a demonstration of 140,000 people in Hyde Park against the Education Act, and in September 1904 he appeared before the magistrates as a passive resister.<sup>51</sup> Although this was a well orchestrated and widely publicised event, *The Life of Faith* chose to ignore it, noting only Meyer's advocacy of the Bible in schools, while generally deploring the presence of 'extreme elements on either side' of what it called the 'sad strife'.<sup>52</sup> Meyer was, in fact, in favour of Bible teaching in schools only if it was strictly non-denominational, and he told a Free Church audience that he would rather see the religious element eliminated from schools than accept the Act as it stood.<sup>53</sup> Deep political tensions were increasingly in evidence within Keswick over this issue. Nevertheless, it was clearly still the hope that there might not be open cleavage.

As national president of the Free Church Council in 1904-5, Meyer's political statements were particularly pronounced. His presidential

[p.75]

address, in March 1904 at Newcastle, was sharply critical of the Conservative administration and produced a highly charged atmosphere.<sup>54</sup> Although Meyer highlighted a 'spiritual glow' at Newcastle, which reminded him of Keswick, some of his Keswick colleagues probably failed to glow when they discovered that in the same statement Meyer described the Evangelical Party in the Church of England as 'narrow', by contrast with the 'free air breathed by Nonconformists'.<sup>55</sup> Anglican frustration with Meyer finally came to a head in January 1906 when, in the run up to the General Election, Meyer took to the campaign trail on behalf of the

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<sup>46</sup> *The British Weekly*, 1 August 1901, 373; *The Christian World*, 15 October 1908, 9.

<sup>47</sup> See J. E. B. Munson, *The Nonconformists: In Search of a Lost Culture* (London, 1991), ch. 9.

<sup>48</sup> I. Sellers, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 35.

<sup>49</sup> *The British Weekly*, 15 May 1902, 113; J. E. B. Munson, 'A Study of Nonconformity in Edwardian England as Revealed in the Passive Resistance Movement against the 1902 Education Act', Oxford DPhil (1973), 166.

<sup>50</sup> *The Christian World*, 12 June 1902, 3.

<sup>51</sup> *The British Weekly*, 28 May 1903, 164; *The Christian World*, 15 September 1904, 14.

<sup>52</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 31 May 1905, 440, 460; 12 July 1905, 559.

<sup>53</sup> *Free Church Year Book* (London, 1904), 24f.

<sup>54</sup> *The British Weekly*, 10 March 1904, 576.

<sup>55</sup> *The British Weekly*, 17 March 1904, 611.

Liberals and, under the guise of talking about moral issues, lampooned the Tories with such tales as the story of the man who had been a Liberal but suffered a fall and cracked his skull, after which he became a Conservative.<sup>56</sup> This was too much for respectable middle and upper-middle class Keswick voters. There had been 'on both sides', some 'very deplorable methods of political controversy' complained *The Life of Faith* on 17th January 1906, and it expressed sympathy with those who felt tempted to have nothing to do with politics.<sup>57</sup> It bemoaned the 'strife' of the political arena, and gave an indication of Keswick's political sympathies when, in the following week, it did not mention the landslide Liberal victory, referring instead to the possible 'far-reaching results' of the election of fifty working men as Labour members.<sup>58</sup> While Meyer was jubilant, Keswick discerned ominous signs.

As a result of Meyer's high profile political stance, significant numbers of his supporters felt sufficiently alienated to stop buying his books. Meyer admitted on 1st February 1906 in *The Christian World* that many evangelical Anglican clergy had turned against him, although he suggested, somewhat unconvincingly, that he was not blameworthy since he had never spoken 'unkindly' of the Church.<sup>59</sup> With the election over, Meyer's political statements soon softened, to the extent that he was calling, in March 1906, for 'strong compensating influences' after the recent politicisation of the churches, and the summer of 1906 found him apologising to Keswick for any way in which he had 'most unintentionally' wounded any Anglican clergy.<sup>60</sup> No doubt Meyer was under considerable pressure to withdraw his statements, but he was careful to express regret only at the way in which the strong things he had said on 'great political issues' had caused hurt, while stressing that he wished to advocate his principles, albeit 'in a spirit of love and tenderness'. Keswick was satisfied with this measure of repentance and Meyer received an 'Amen'.

## VISION FOR A NEW CENTURY

Although the attempts to integrate a socio-political dimension into Keswick's teaching were fraught with difficulties, the new century did see developments which seemed for a time to signal some change of

[p.76]

direction. In 1900 Handley Moule, Keswick's ecclesiastical heavyweight and then a Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, joined the Christian Social Union; some years later, in his position as Bishop of Durham, he commended a book by John Wilson, a Labour spokesman and the MP who represented the Durham miners.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps more significant for the future was the emergence of John Stuart Holden as a new Keswick leader. Holden had been converted while a bank employee in Liverpool, had studied for the Anglican ministry at Cambridge under Handley Moule and in 1901, at the age of twenty seven, married the daughter of a shipping magnate.<sup>62</sup> In 1905 Holden became the Vicar of St Paul's, Portman Square, which he

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<sup>56</sup> *Baptist Times*, 12 January 1906, 30; E. H. Jeffs, Press, *Preachers and Politicians: Reminiscences, 1874 to 1932* (London, 1933), 116.

<sup>57</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 17 January 1906, 60.

<sup>58</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 24 January 1906, 79.

<sup>59</sup> *The Christian World*, 1 February 1906, 5.

<sup>60</sup> *The British Weekly*, 22 March 1906, 667; *The Keswick Week*, 1906, 60.

<sup>61</sup> For Moule and general background, see E. R. Norman, *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970: A Historical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 221; J. Wilson, *Memories of a Labour Leader* (London, 1910).

<sup>62</sup> Pollock, *The Keswick Story*, 145.

established as a leading London evangelical church and which he served until his death in 1934. It is likely that Meyer provided Holden with a model of spirituality which was both other-worldly and this-worldly. Holden was baptised by Meyer in 1896 and the ethos of Portman Square, with its emphasis on local and world-wide mission, training, and social endeavour, was remarkably similar to Meyer's approach.<sup>63</sup> Like Meyer, Holden was an effective and highly popular speaker at Keswick and at D. L. Moody's Northfield Conferences. His first appearance as a writer in *The Life of Faith* (in 1905) indicated his concern to apply holiness teaching to the world of everyday life. Each week Holden invited readers, 'especially young men', to put questions to him. One inquirer was told that he need not have any scruples about selling his dairy products to hotels and stores merely because of their connection with the drink trade.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, an artist was advised not to produce advertisements which promoted either the drink trade or the theatre, since consecrated talent should not assist 'the devil's interest'.<sup>65</sup> Smoking was judged to be self-indulgent, but not wrong, while a Burmese idol (bought presumably as a souvenir) could quite safely be kept as a reminder to pray for Burma.<sup>66</sup> Whatever the merits of his ethical counsel, Holden exuded a confidence in handling the issues raised about living as a Christian in the world which seemed to point to a way out of Keswick's traditional caution.

As a social commentator within Keswick circles Holden had certain advantages over Meyer. First, he was an Anglican, whereas Meyer belonged to Nonconformist and Baptist communities which had sometimes criticised Keswick teaching for its lack of practical content. Second, Holden came to prominence in Keswick in a period when it had achieved not only acceptability but a significant measure of power among more conservative British evangelicals. The battles of previous decades no longer needed to be fought by the time Holden became a Keswick speaker in 1902. Freedom from the insecurities of the past offered an opportunity to map out an enlarged scope for the future. Third, Holden consciously aimed at a younger generation of Keswick devotees and, as a younger man himself, related well to them. Finally, Holden could seem like a successful businessman, since he had an estate

[p.77]

in Scotland and a chauffer-driven Rolls-Royce, and this made him an attractive model for those in the commercial world.<sup>67</sup> Meyer was, however, very far from being a spent force. His enormous energy and ability were still being directed, in the early years of the century, into leading Christ Church, which had become one of London's largest churches, into international convention ministry and into Free Church affairs. His hope that the more practical and the more pietistic emphases in evangelicalism could be brought together was illustrated during his period, from 1907 to 1909, as national itinerant overseer of the Free Churches. He expressed his unambiguous commitment to dealing with the causes, as well as the symptoms of injustice, but he also stated that his main mission was to lead the churches to their spiritual source, using to

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<sup>63</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 14 January 1914, 48f. Holden's baptism by Meyer was recorded in *The Christian*, 17 September 1896, 17. It was in keeping with Meyer's strongly baptistic line, but must have been controversial if Holden had already been baptised as an infant.

<sup>64</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 4 October 1905, 833.

<sup>65</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 25 October 1905, 886.

<sup>66</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 15 November 1905, 957. Holden was later replaced by Charles Moore who took a very cautious line in answer to ethical questions. For example, he considered cremation was not a suitable subject for discussion: *The Life of Faith*, 19 February 1908, 176.

<sup>67</sup> Pollock, *The Keswick Story*, 146.

the full his own inspiration and help.<sup>68</sup> In 1910, when Meyer became the Secretary of the National Free Church Council, it was recognised that he would put the 'religious side' first.<sup>69</sup> Thus in the years before the First World War fresh attempts were being made by two holiness leaders, Holden and Meyer, to seek to connect the Keswick message with society.

Unfortunately for Keswick, the time when it might have been able to respond in a more relevant way to questions being asked in the wider world was also the time when the questions themselves were changing. As early as 1892 *The Life of Faith*, reflecting on the 'rather shocking news' that one and a quarter million people were out of work, suggested that there was a need to deal with the cause of 'this great evil'; but this fairly radical call was toned down by the comment that unemployment was partly inevitable in a 'complex state of society'.<sup>70</sup> An optimistic belief persisted that Christian leaders were 'no doubt' seeking to address the problems, but Keswick was unprepared when faced with the challenge of the rise of socialism as a major political force. Meyer was convinced, by 1906, that collectivism was looking over the shoulder of individualism and *The Christian World* referred to him in the following year as 'Comrade Meyer'.<sup>71</sup> Others took a dramatically different line. Musgrave Reade, who had been one of the founders of the Independent Labour Party in 1892, was converted to Christ in 1900. He then spent a number of years pursuing what he termed an 'Anti-Socialist crusade', arguing that the 'menace' of socialism was being spread through such agencies as the Brotherhoods and PSAs.<sup>72</sup> He maintained that only those with a superficial knowledge of the Bible tried to harmonise socialism with God's will. According to Reade, Christ dealt with man as a unit, not collectively. Holden, though not sharing Meyer's commitment to movements like the Brotherhood, viewed a negative attitude to social change (like Reade's) as having little credibility. Young men at Keswick, said Holden, must go back to their offices, colleges and factories to 'work out' their experience.<sup>73</sup> The new century did see a shift in Keswick's stance on society. A correspondent writing to *The Life*

[p.78]

*of Faith* in 1905 said that when attending the convention in 1896 he had appreciated the 'Scriptural and searching teaching' but felt that the addresses failed to 'point out a way to practically five out in home circles, or in business circles, the ideals of an overcoming life in the power of the Holy Ghost'.<sup>74</sup> That lack seemed to have been remedied in the course of the following ten years. It was, perhaps, too little and too late.

## THE IMPACT OF WAR

On 24th July 1914 Stuart Holden delivered the closing message at Keswick. What he said was later regarded as prophetic. After touching on the situation of businessmen who were finding it difficult to make a profit and for whom the 'pathway of the cross' was 'heavy', Holden went on to expand his application, saying that people might be going from Keswick to a future 'dark

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<sup>68</sup> *Free Church Year Book* (London, 1907), 82; *Free Church Year Book* (London, 1908), 168.69

<sup>69</sup> *The British Weekly*, 8 September 1910, 539.

<sup>70</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 9 November 1892, 336.

<sup>71</sup> *The British Weekly*, 4 October 1906, 629; *The Christian World*, 7 February 1907, 24.

<sup>72</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 26 February 1919, 221.

<sup>73</sup> J. S. Holden, 'Young Men at Keswick', C. F. Harford (ed.), *The Keswick Convention: Its Message, Its Method, and Its Men* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1907), 207.

<sup>74</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 9 August 1905, 678.

with the mysteries of God's dealings' and to 'perplexing experiences'.<sup>75</sup> At that point war did not seem to be a possibility, but on 4th August 1914 war was declared and Holden's words took on a new significance. It was recalled that servicemen were among those who had heard Holden at Keswick. Religious expressions of patriotism soon entered Keswick circles. Holden's pulpit at Portman Square, for example, was draped with a Union Jack and there was enthusiasm about the level of recruitment for the army.<sup>76</sup> Speaking of General J. D. Crosbie, *The Life of Faith* said that 'our dear brother' was a better defender of the empire because he 'gave his sword to Christ before he lent it to his country'.<sup>77</sup> In 1915 the convention included not only prayers for sailors and soldiers but the singing of two verses of the national anthem.<sup>78</sup> The 1915 Keswick messages stressed, however, that the world needed an 'increase in the knowledge of the ever victorious Christ'. Typically, Meyer launched himself into frenetic activity connected with the war. His projects included provision of accommodation for military personnel, the production of the *Service Messenger*, a Christian paper for servicemen, and efforts on behalf of Conscientious Objectors.<sup>79</sup> Graham Scroggie who, as a leading Baptist at Keswick, took on something of the mantle of Meyer, said of the 1916 convention: 'The messages recognised more largely than in former years our national needs and responsibilities.... The war has widened our horizon, and increased our sympathies, and is leading us not to a new message, but to a proper adjustment of the old message to the new condition of things.'<sup>80</sup> Keswick was responding to the world in an unprecedented way.

Following the war, the new perspective continued to be evident. *The Life of Faith* of 5th March 1919 was a 'Reconstruction Number' which attempted to address social issues. The message of Keswick, wrote W. B. Sloan, must meet the needs of the hour and motivate 'workers in the field of reconstruction'.<sup>81</sup> There was, however, some divergence over

[p.79]

what this reconstruction might mean. One contributor, W. M. Clow, queried the idea of 'equal wages for equal work' since it was necessary, he argued, to look at the quality of the work and the moral standing and social obligations of the workers. Jesus, it was suggested, in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard 'commends inequality'.<sup>82</sup> The same reluctance to evaluate social structures critically was a feature of the convention at Keswick three months later. Handley Moule was asked if the new age demanded a gospel of social action and in reply he came down firmly in favour of a message which took Christ and the Spirit as its themes.<sup>83</sup> Charles Inwood, a respected member of the Keswick platform, did venture to talk about God and the nation but despite the fact that he ended his message on a traditional Keswick note at least one person left in disgust.<sup>84</sup> The mood after the war was reflected in the 'Letter of Invitation' to Keswick in 1920. It combined a feeling of disillusionment—which Keswick

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<sup>75</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 12 August 1914, 981f., 990; H. F. Stevenson, *Keswick's Authentic Voice* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1959), 363-68, 252.

<sup>76</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 26 August 1914, 1019; 16 September 1914, 1091f.

<sup>77</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 12 January 1916, 795.

<sup>78</sup> Sloan, *These Sixty Years*, 73f.

<sup>79</sup> *The Times*, 12 November 1915, 9; 25 November 1915, 9; *The Life of Faith*, 28 March 1917, 318; 16 May 1917, 525; 8 August 1917, 879. For Meyer and the Conscientious Objectors, see J. Vellacott, *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (Brighton, 1980).

<sup>80</sup> Sloan, *These Sixty Years*, 74.

<sup>81</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 5 March 1919, 247.

<sup>82</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 5 March 1919, 243.83

<sup>83</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 23 July 1919, 840.

<sup>84</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 30 July 1919, 878.

shared with the wider society—that the war had not brought about a new social order, with a belief that only a 'new outpouring of the Spirit' could solve the problems of moral confusion and religious indifference.<sup>85</sup> Whereas in 1916 the editor of *The Life of Faith*, Kennedy Maclean, had hoped that Keswick speakers in that year would not be 'side-tracked into giving a message to the nations', he had become convinced, by the end of 1919, that the convention was 'passing through the crucible' and that it was imperative to grapple with the social context.<sup>86</sup> Maclean's goal was not to be achieved to any significant extent in the few years that followed.

## UNCERTAINTY

Meyer probably expressed the experience of many evangelicals when he described himself as living, during the war, 'in the joint of two ages'. Although Meyer's hopes of a 'Golden Age' were dashed in the period following the war, he continued to look for signs of hope, declaring, in a provocative statement in 1920, that the 'axioms of the Labour Party' were 'uttered by the Founder of Christianity'.<sup>87</sup> At about the same time Kennedy Maclean was voicing, in an equally outspoken fashion, his anxiety about the hostility of organised Labour to the churches. Over the course of three articles, Maclean first of all suggested that the 'workers' were living in a different world from that of Keswick, were speaking a different language, and were dismissing meetings promoting holiness as irrelevant. Keswick adherents, on the other hand, were ignorant of the sufferings, aspirations and qualities of working class people. When employees looked at Christian employers, the evidence they expected of holy living was 'fair wages' and 'human sympathy'. What employees often found in practice was 'indifference' and a preoccupation with the Lord's return rather than with present justice.<sup>88</sup> From this hard-hitting beginning the editor proceeded, in the next

[p.80]

article, to recommend that church leaders, such as bishops, attend conferences with trade union and Labour leaders. 'We venture to suggest', he growled, 'that they will learn more about the failure of the Church of England in thirty minutes than they gain in several sessions of the Church Congress'.<sup>89</sup> Too often, Maclean asserted, the church was seen as the 'chosen instrument of the capitalist class to chloroform the workers and make them contented with their lot'. But he considered it significant that one preacher, presiding at a demonstration during the railway strike, was able to lead twice in prayer. What was required, to achieve this kind of breakthrough, was to meet working people 'as a comrade'. In a final article, state socialism was recognised as a 'legitimate theory' and the Keswick constituency was exhorted to discover the social message 'in contrast to the purely individualistic note'.<sup>90</sup>

There were other influences in the 1920s which could have directed Keswick into a broader path. F. C. Spurr, who had been a ministerial colleague of Meyer's at Regent's Park Chapel, might have contributed in this way, but he became the object of a theological vendetta by James Mountain, a Keswick hard-liner. Despite efforts by Meyer and Holden to defuse the situation,

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<sup>85</sup> Sloan, *These Sixty Years*, 79.

<sup>86</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 12 January 1916, 795; 29 October 1919, 1235.

<sup>87</sup> Jeffs, *Princes of the Modern Pulpit*, 122; *Free Church Year Book* (London, 1920), 14.

<sup>88</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 29 October 1919, 1235.

<sup>89</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 5 November 1919, 1271.

<sup>90</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 12 November 1919, 1299.

Spurr withdrew as a speaker from the 1921 convention.<sup>91</sup> W. Y. Fullerton was a Keswick speaker in the mould of Meyer, taking up the leadership at Melbourne Hall, Leicester, which Meyer had founded, but Fullerton never became a shaping influence at Keswick. There was, however, one dominant convention personality in the 1920s. The period has been described by J. C. Pollock as 'the age of Stuart Holden'.<sup>92</sup> Holden became Chairman of the Keswick Council in 1923 and supervised the Jubilee celebrations in 1925. Largely because of Holden's inspirational leadership, the number of young people at Keswick rose dramatically, from about 250 to well over one thousand. In 1921, at the time of the coal strike, Holden had emphasised his social vision by speaking about the demands of the miners as 'righteous' and by alleging that the church had 'assisted the privileged classes to keep Labour in chains'.<sup>93</sup> Yet there were two powerful forces which threatened Holden's expansive mission. The first was Fundamentalism, which tended to engender a ghetto mentality. It was implacably opposed to a gospel for society, or a 'social gospel', which was understood as both theologically liberal and as a dangerous substitute for the traditional evangelical gospel. The Fundamentalist spirit was not nearly as prevalent in Britain as in America, largely due to the moderate stance of Keswick leaders such as Holden, Meyer, Campbell Morgan and Scroggie, but it was a pressure on British evangelicalism.<sup>94</sup> A more telling counter to large-scale social endeavour came, however, from another source: the inexorable rise of premillennialism.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the premillennial view of the return of Christ grew in importance in British

[p.81]

evangelicalism.<sup>95</sup> On 2nd November 1917 the world of prophetic students was electrified by the announcement that the British government was prepared to establish a home for the Jews in Palestine. God's programme for the end of the age was being fulfilled. Meyer had already been laying the groundwork for a new prophetic movement, and together with a number of other key leaders (mainly Keswick names) such as Campbell Morgan, Holden, F. S. Webster, Webb-Peploe and H. E. Fox, he produced a premillennial manifesto which was published in the Christian press on 8th November 1917.<sup>96</sup> In spite of opposition—P. T. Forsyth, the formidable Congregational theologian, commented icily that as far as he recalled no-one holding the premillennial position 'ever did the New Testament the honour of being a recognised scholar in it'<sup>97</sup>—the Advent Testimony movement, as it came to be known, had notable successes, and premillennialism became an explicit part of the orthodoxy of Keswick. Because premillennialism saw the world as becoming steadily worse before the return of Christ, it was wary about social reform and tended to be generally pessimistic on social issues. The monthly

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<sup>91</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 6 July 1921, 746; D. W. Bebbington, 'Baptists and Fundamentalism in Inter-War Britain', K. Roberts (ed.), *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America, c.1750-c.1950. Essays in Honour of W. R. Ward* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 316.

<sup>92</sup> Pollock, *The Keswick Story*, 145. Chapter 18 is entitled 'The Age of Stuart Holden'.

<sup>93</sup> *The British Weekly*, 18 March 1920, 544, cited by D. W. Bebbington, 'The Decline and Resurgence of Evangelical Social Concern since the First World War', in a forthcoming book on evangelicals and society.

<sup>94</sup> For Fundamentalism and evangelicalism, see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 181-228, and G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>95</sup> For background, D. W. Bebbington, 'The Advent Hope in British Evangelicalism since 1800', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, 9, 2 (1988).

<sup>96</sup> See Fullerton, Meyer, 156-61. The manifesto was published in, for example, *The Christian World*, 8 November 1917, 7.

<sup>97</sup> *The Christian World*, 15 November 1917, 7.

journal *The Advent Witness*, the mouthpiece for Meyer's premillennial movement, regularly carried virulent denunciations of socialism, the 'red terror of communism', evolution and modernism. Optimism, it concluded in 1926, was foolish.<sup>98</sup> A similar belief in the virtual inevitability of the collapse of civilised society was expressed, in the same year, in a series of articles in *The Life of Faith* by G. H. Lancaster. Under the heading 'Prophecy and Preparation', Lancaster outlined the way in which two unlikely bedfellows, Moscow and the 'international Jew', were plotting together against capitalism, the British Empire, the Christian faith and 'all that is dearest to the ideals of our race'.<sup>99</sup> While insisting (somewhat unconvincingly) that he was neither anti-Semitic nor political, Lancaster explained how the 'Protocols of Zion' incorporated a scheme for revolution in Europe. Also in 1926, Christabel Pankhurst, a former leader of the women's movement but now a spokesperson—largely as a result of Meyer's strategic management—for adventism, was showing that there was no hope for the world apart from Christ's return.<sup>100</sup> Within the holiness strand of evangelicalism, there was a growing consensus that society was doomed.

The confidence which launched Keswick in the 1870s was in marked contrast to the uncertainty which characterised the 1920s. There was still an expectation of spiritual revival in this period, and in 1922 Keswick saw extraordinary scenes as between 2,000 and 3,000 people dedicated their lives to God.<sup>101</sup> But the other-worldliness which had been a feature of Keswick from the beginning was reinforced in the 1920s and beyond by the general post-war mood and by the impact of an increasingly vocal premillennialism which tended to discourage any hope for this world. Withdrawal was the approved course of action. In 1949 Fred Mitchell, a Keswick speaker who consciously modelled himself on Stuart Holden,

[p.82]

related how he had recently seen twenty-five girls charged with prostitution at a local Police Station and had realised that he had been living in a world in which he was unaware of such things.<sup>102</sup> Mitchell's description of how his heart had been broken for months afterwards, and the challenging call he issued, went through Keswick like an electric shock. H. F. Stevenson's comment that Mitchell was returning to the climate and atmosphere in which Keswick had been born is partly true in that at the time of Keswick's birth evangelicals were more socially aware than they were in the decades after the First World War. But those within Keswick who argued that the gospel had a social dimension were always a minority, and Keswick's socially cautious approach gradually became a hallmark of the conservative wing of evangelicalism. In 1923 even Meyer was proposing that in the face of the encroaching evils of society, such as the loosening of family ties, Christians should simply 'wait for the clarion-call' of Christ's return.<sup>103</sup> Resignation, tinged with conservatism, were the ruling attitudes. Meyer himself never repudiated his social vision but he came to the depressing conclusion in 1926 that no ideas for the future were being generated.<sup>104</sup> The combined effect of a concentration on inner spirituality and on the return of Christ was apparently the creation of an evangelicalism which, when it looked at the world, was characterised by little other than deep foreboding.

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<sup>98</sup> *The Advent Witness*, September 1926, 113.

<sup>99</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 26 May 1926, 113.

<sup>100</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 10 November 1926, 1262.

<sup>101</sup> *The Keswick Week*, 1922, 114.

<sup>102</sup> H. F. Stevenson (ed.), *Keswick's Triumphant Voice* (London, 1963), 63 (and 15f. for comment).

<sup>103</sup> *The Advent Witness*, December 1923, 135.

<sup>104</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 10 November 1926, 1262,



## CONCLUSION

The period which has been the focus of this study has been the first fifty years of Keswick. For about its initial twenty five years Keswick was subject to a double pressure. It could succeed only if it became acceptable to the evangelical community, especially the Anglican evangelical segment. Since this community was generally conservative and cautious, Keswick had to place severe limits on some of its innate radicalism. It did this by restricting its challenge to the area of individual holiness. Social change was not on the agenda. The second pressure was that of keeping the message distinctive. Again, the answer was a narrow concentration on personal obligation to live a holy life. To feed and clothe children through the NSPCC, observed *The Life of Faith* in 1893, seemed a 'Christian thought', but it warned against the danger of destroying individual responsibility.<sup>105</sup> From about 1900 to the mid 1920s there was more openness at Keswick to the social implications of the message. Leaders like Meyer and Holden made specific application to the problems of everyday life.<sup>106</sup> It was Holden who could issue warnings, in 1912, about wealth creation, using the story of the businessman who said the devil had taken him up a high mountain and shown him ten per cent.<sup>107</sup>

Having established itself as an integral and highly influential part of

[p.83]

the evangelical scene, Keswick could afford to be more adventurous. This sense of branching out into new territory was heightened by the war, but a decade later it had gone. In 1929 Meyer died and Holden, now out of favour for his wider theological sympathies, was in the same year replaced as Chairman of Keswick. For at least the next twenty-five years many evangelicals who drew their spiritual inspiration from Keswick would, when they viewed the society around them, tend to see it not so much with the eyes of faith and hope, as through the spectacles of fear. Recent decades have, by contrast, seen a new awakening of evangelical social awareness and of the belief that spiritual renewal and social reform do indeed belong together.

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<sup>105</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 15 February 1893, 126.106

<sup>106</sup> Sellers, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity*, 34, says that some of the Nonconformist promoters of Keswick, like Meyer, managed to reconcile its pietistic impulses with an active social concern. In fact, Meyer was the only one of note. R. Brown, 'Evangelical Ideas of Perfection', is wrong in saying (249) that Meyer never mentioned social questions during Keswick addresses.

<sup>107</sup> *The Life of Faith*, 7 August 1912, 864.