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**EDITORIAL**

The whole of human life is here from the seventeenth-century Hugo Peter who died on the scaffold to the twentieth-century R.J. Campbell who died a Canon of Chichester. There are four emphases: the pressures, relationships and horizons of ministry; the forging of an ecclesiology; the social and familial continuities which thread the most disparate elements together, and the experimental interweaving of theology and ideology, pulpit, pew and politics. As Geoffrey Nuttall reminds us, the Church Book of a community of Wealden General Baptists illustrates how the Separatist part of our own tradition worked. At the other end of this issue's chronology is R.J. Campbell. He became an Anglican; several of his lieutenants became Unitarians (see L. Smith, "The Great Let-down and its Legacy: The New Theology and the Order of the Brotherhood of the Pioneer Preachers",

*Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, Vol. 21, No. 4, April 1998); Campbell himself was never a good *Congregationalist* but the bond between him and his people in Brighton and London was as strong and as genuine as any in Congregationalism and it needs to be given its due. Rhondda Williams and Newman Hall forged similar bonds with their people. The reality of those bonds is harder for the present generation to understand than the personal toll which pulpit “success” levied on those who achieved it. Perhaps, however, the story’s continuity owes more than we would like to admit to strenuous busybodies like the Wilsons, who managed to combine worldly success and a shrewdness which often slipped into wisdom with a compelling sense that they lived *sub specie aeternitatis*.

We welcome as contributors Professor Sprunger, of Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, Professor Larsen, of Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, and Dr. Hancock, a retired Baptist minister, who lives near Bath.

**A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY:  
HUGH PETER (THE STRENUOUS PURITAN)  
AND HUGO PETRI (THE STRENUOUS FRISIAN)**

Hugh Peter (1598-1660), the English Puritan preacher and revolutionary, moved back and forth from England, to the Netherlands, and on to America, before finally ending on the scaffold in London on 16 October, 1660. The Dutch portion of his life covered seven years, from 1628 to 1635. Peter went to the Netherlands, not by choice but because of his outspoken religious nonconformity. Once over the water, he lived at Amsterdam for a short time and then moved on to a position as pastor of the English Reformed church at Rotterdam, which he tried to transform along Congregational lines. He served there for six years. In 1635 he returned briefly to England and then went westward to New England.

This was the generally accepted outline of Peter’s early life until 1931, when Samuel Eliot Morison, professor of history at Harvard University, published a communication in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, announcing new light on Peter’s Dutch career. Based on a newly-discovered letter of Johannes Hachting, logic professor at Franeker University, dated Calends (1 January) of 1628, Morison reported that Hachting befriended Peter and tried to help him find a job. Thus, Peter must have been in the Netherlands, in the province of Friesland, on or before January 1 of that year.<sup>1</sup> Hachting’s letter was a

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1. Samuel Eliot Morison, “Hugh Peter in the Netherlands”, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 64, 3rd Ser. (1930-32), pp. 109-111. The letter, while not really a new discovery for Dutch scholars, was new and exciting for American historians; it was in the Gabbema collection (“Briefverzameling van S.A. Gabbema”) at Leeuwarden. Morison had a photostat of the letter for study. The library today is known as the Provinsjale en Buma Biblioteek fan Fryslan, Leeuwarden; the shelf mark is 9056 Hs MM. The author acknowledges helpful information from Martin Engels, curator of manuscripts and old printing.

recommendation for Hugh Peter to get a job as schoolmaster at Dokkum, a small town in the far north of Friesland. He did not get the position. For Morison, however, the letter was important because it appeared to give previously unknown facts about Peter's life in 1628, an important transitional year of his life. It showed him in the Netherlands by the first day of 1628, nearly a year earlier than previously believed, and it placed him in the northern province of Friesland.

A few years later in 1934, Raymond P. Stearns, a student of Morison's at Harvard, wrote a biography of Hugh Peter for his Ph.D. dissertation.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, he published it as *The Strenuous Puritan: Hugh Peter, 1598–1660* (1954).<sup>3</sup> Stearns's book was a major contribution to English and American Puritan studies. Moreover, it added further details about Peter in Friesland. In addition to the Hachting letter, Stearns included a report that he had served a Dutch church on the island of Ameland and then worked alongside Dr. William Ames, the refugee Puritan theology professor, at Franeker University. On 18 December 1628, the university curators appointed Hugo Petri (the Latin version of Hugh Peter's name) as supervisor or disciplinarian of students; the official title was *Inspector bursae* (Inspecteur op de burse).

These episodes added some colourful touches to the Hugh Peter biography; and the inspector's job seemed to fit perfectly with the confrontational, strenuous image of Peter. Franeker students had the reputation of being hard-drinking disciples of Bacchus, much given to fighting, and duelling. Stearns humorously portrayed Peter as rushing about – with Puritan zeal – trying “to curb these youthful follies.”<sup>4</sup> Some of the Franeker professors, led by William Ames, aided him by attempting to impose a broad reformation of manners and piety upon the university. It was easy to picture Peter (the Puritan reformer of England and later of America) taking this God-given opportunity to produce his own version of a Puritan reform of Friesland religion.

Although previous histories of the university had noted the existence of an “inspecteur Hugo Petri,” it was a revelation (credited to Morison and Stearns) that the Puritan Hugh Peter and the Franeker inspector Hugo Petri were one and the same. From that time onward, Hugh Peter's biographers usually had a section on his stay in Friesland and some interesting stories to spin. Stearns's graduate

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2. The dissertation entitled “Hugh Peter” (Harvard 1934) was approved by the dissertation committee of Samuel Eliot Morison, Wilbur Cortez Abbott, and Perry Miller.
  3. *The Strenuous Puritan: Hugh Peter 1598–1660* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954), 463 pages. Chapter 3, “Congregationalist in Exile,” told about Hugh Peter's stay in the Netherlands.
  4. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

students at the University of Illinois helped to carry on this information in their own research and dissertations.<sup>5</sup>

In discussing these topics with students, Professor Stearns recalled that while he was a graduate student he had to do some translations of Latin Frisian documents about "Hugo Petri" provided by Morison. He also stated that he had found some inconsistencies in these Hugh Peter stories, since in one case the Frisian sources on Peter referred to him in 1628 as a man of "increasing age,"<sup>6</sup> and in another, as a "former preacher, who because of his great age and weak memory had taken emeritus status."<sup>7</sup> Since Peter at the time would have been no more than thirty years of age, and very vigorous and sturdy – indeed "strenuous" – it did not quite add up. In his book Stearns had stated in a footnote that such contradictory descriptions were "inexplicable,"<sup>8</sup> but since all the rest of the information fitted together so well the conclusion stood that the English Hugh Peter must be the Franeker Hugo Petri. However, there was a difficulty in the chronology of Peter's life as now constructed because it allowed for only a very short Franeker career; the curators appointed "Hugo Petri" inspector on 18 December, 1628, and already on 24 January, 1629, the magistrates of Rotterdam appointed "Hugo Petri" to the position of pastor of the English Church of their city.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, old university manuscripts, now at the Provinsjale Bibliotheek of Friesland, remained quite convincing. The archives included some printed documents about inspector of students "Hugo Petri," and the letter collection has one of 16 November, 1633, from Hugo Petri of Rotterdam, to the curators, requesting financial help for the widow and orphaned children of William Ames. He signed as "Hugo Petri," pastor of the Anglo-Belgic church of Rotterdam.<sup>10</sup> In his published Latin writings the English Hugh Peter used the form Hugo Petri or

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5. The writer of this article was a student of Professor Stearns and wrote a dissertation on William Ames (1576–1633), University of Illinois, 1963. This was published as *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism* (University of Illinois, 1972). The dissertation and book carried forward the Hugh Peter at Franeker story.
  6. The letter of Johannes Hachting, Calends of January, 1628, published in Morison, "Hugh Peter in the Netherlands." pp. 109–111.
  7. W.B.S. Boeles, *Frieslands Hoogeschool en het Rijks Athenaeum te Franeker*, 2 vols. (Leeuwarden: H. Kuipers, 1878–79), 1: 388.
  8. Stearns, *Strenuous Puritan*. 55n.
  9. Notes on Vroedschap Rotterdam resolutien, (Engelsche kerk predikanten) no. 575 (Gemeente Archief Rotterdam); Charles B. Jewson, "The English Church at Rotterdam and its Norfolk Connections," *Original Papers of the Norfolk and Norwich Archeological Society*, 30 (1952), p. 328.
  10. Hugh Peter to the curators, Nov. 16, 1633, in "Stukken en brieven der professoren van de academie te Franeker van't begin tot 1713" (Codex Saecckma), 408 Hs, no. 269 (Provinsjale Bibliotheek, Leeuwarden).

Hugo Petrus.<sup>11</sup> All along, historians of Puritanism could easily accept that Franeker inspector Hugo Petri and English pastor Hugo Petri, with documents in the Franeker archives, were the same person.

As a result, it has taken a long time to untangle the Hugh Peter problem. For example, the Dutch *Biografisch Lexicon* (1978)<sup>12</sup> and the American *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (1984)<sup>13</sup> contained articles on Hugh Peter; both stated that the English Hugh Peter was the inspector of the burse at Franeker. *The Biografisch Lexicon* article, however, also provided an alternative comment from Vriemoet's history of 1758, that the Franeker inspector was Dutch and a preacher from Sneek.

### TWO MEN NAMED HUGH PETER

Now the formerly inexplicable problems in the biographies can be resolved. There were two men named Hugh Peter or Hugo Petri living in the Netherlands at the same time, both with some connections with Franeker University. In fact, when the Fryske Akademy published the quatercentenary history of Franeker University in 1985, the editors pointed out the mistaken identities.<sup>14</sup> The book correctly differentiated between the two, calling one "Hugo Petri, inspector burse" and the other "Hugo Petri, predikant Rotterdam." Below are brief sketches of the "Dutch Hugh Peter" and the "English Hugh Peter."

*The Dutch Hugh Peter* was the older man. In the records, he was Huigh Peters (or Peter), but he preferred the more elegant Latin forms, Hugo Petri or Hugo Petrejus. The name Peters is not an established surname or family name but a patronymic; Peters is short for Peterszoon (Peter's son). By the same system, Hugo's son would have been Hugonis (Hugoniszoon) and so on. Well into the seventeenth century the Dutch method of naming was still in transition and patronymics were often used. A mixture of patronymic and family names was common.

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11. Hugo Petrus in Preface to William Ames's *Lectiones in CL. Psalmos Davidis* (Amsterdam, 1635).
  12. *Biografisch Lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1978), 1:248-49, article by C. van der Woude.
  13. *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth-Century*, ed. Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller, 3 vols. (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1984), "Hugh Peter" by Keith Sprunger, 3: 30-32.
  14. G. Th. Jensma, F.R.H. Smit, and F. Westra, *Universiteit te Franeker 1585-1811* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1985); see the article on "William Ames and the Franeker Link to English and American Puritanism" by Keith Sprunger, with information on the English Hugh Peter, p. 274, note 24 and C.M. Ridderikhoff, "De Franeker los-kop" on the Dutch Hugo Petri, including a copy of his signature, p. 123. The editors, with the help of J.J. Kalma, noted the mistaken identities.

Born at Sneek, Friesland in about 1575, Huigh Peters studied theology at Franeker University and Leiden University. This led to his becoming a minister (pastor) in the Dutch Reformed Church. He married Janke (Jouwer) Rommerts Fogelsangh, and they had at least seven children. One son was named Robertus Hugo Vogelsang; he used his mother's surname rather than the patronymic from his father, and he followed his father's footsteps into the ministry of the Reformed Church.<sup>15</sup> In 1598 Hugo Petri began religious work by travelling and preaching in the neighbouring province of Drenthe where the Reformation was being established, but served there for only one month.<sup>16</sup> He returned to Friesland and became minister of Oosterwierum, located in the vicinity of Sneek, and served from 1598 to 1619; at that point, the Classis of Sneek stepped in and suspended him for scandalous mismanagement of his personal finances and not paying his debts. Because he could not find another pastoral position, he had to take other work, functioning for a while as rector of the Latin school at Harlingen (appointed in 1622). Next, in 1628, he made his unsuccessful application for the schoolmaster's job at Dokkum (which was the subject of Johannes Hachting's letter of 1 January, 1628, reported by Morison). By this time Hugo Petri was not a very promising candidate for any position; even his referees noted that he was getting old and needed quiet, light work.

Providentially, the curators of Franeker University awarded him the post of Inspecteur op de Burse (18 December, 1628), which he held until about 1640; in that year, the university named a new inspector. The burse was a rooming and dining house for students with an inspector to supervise. Before 1628 various professors held the position; thus it was an office of respectable service. The date of death is uncertain, but it was after 1640, perhaps as late as 1650; he probably had emeritus status for some years after leaving the inspectorship of Franeker. His wife requested a widow's pension from the Classis of Sneek in 1652.<sup>17</sup>

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15. The outline of his life is gathered from information from F.A. van Lieburg, *Repertorium van Nederlandse Hervormde predikanten tot 1816* (Dordrecht, 1996), part 1: 190 and other unpublished material provided by Lieburg. I also acknowledge help and suggestions from Ph. H. Breuker of the Fryske Akademy of Leeuwarden; Dr. Breuker provided manuscript notes from the J.J. Kalma collection on Friesland preachers at the Fryske Akademy. The author wishes to thank Dr. Lieburg and Dr. Breuker for their invaluable help in letters and conversation. Dr. Michael Moody of Tuscon, Arizona also made helpful suggestions.
  16. Wiebe Bergsma, *Tussen Gideonsbende en publieke kerk: Een studie over het gereformeerd protestantisme in Friesland 1580–1650* (Hilversum: Verloren; Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1999), p. 499.
  17. Van Lieburg has estimated that Petri got emeritus status in about 1640 and died c. 1650; Kalma proposed the date of death as c. 1650. The burial records of Franeker are lost.

There is no formal biography of the Frisian Huigh Peter to match Stearns's detailed biography of the English Hugh Peter. J.J. Kalma, a scholar of Frisian church history, wrote a short, informative article, "Ds. Hugo Petri wilde het hoofd niet buigen voor de classis," (The Reverend Hugo Petri would not bow his head for the Classis) published in the *Leeuwarder Courant* in 1977. For many years, Kalma gathered material on preachers of Friesland, but only a small part of it has so far been published. His manuscript notes are preserved in the Fryske Akademy at Leeuwarden, including a page of unpublished notes on Petri/Peter. Kalma portrayed Hugo Petri as a contentious and confrontational preacher, not willing to "bow his head" before authority. Like the English Hugh Peter, in temperament and determination he might well be described as *strenuous*.<sup>18</sup> It seems that the two Hugh Peters had more in common than just the name. F.A. van Lieburg's *Repertorium van Nederlandse hervormde predikanten tot 1816* (1996) has considerable information on Peter; in addition to the published materials, Van Lieburg also has an extensive unpublished file of biographical data on Hugo Petri and other Reformed preachers. From an earlier period, there is T.A. Romein, *Naamlijst der predikanten sedert de Hervorming tot nu toe, in de Hervormde gemeenten van Friesland*, published in 1886, with a short article on Petri, but this is rather out of date.

*The English Hugh Peter*, the younger – and more notorious – one, was born at Fowey, Cornwall, England in June 1598. Stearns labelled him the "Strenuous Puritan" in his 463 page biography. For the Dutch career, Stearns called him the "Congregationalist in Exile." About November 1628, he turned up in Amsterdam, seeking employment at the English Reformed Church,<sup>19</sup> but he mainly lived in Rotterdam, where he was pastor of that city's English-Scottish Reformed Church from 24 January 1629 to 1635. He had a tiny Frisian connection because of a close friendship with Professor William Ames, and one can easily imagine some visits to the University of Franeker. However, he had no position at the university and served no pastorate anywhere in Friesland. In 1633 Peter arranged for Professor Ames to resign at Franeker and join him as co-pastor in the Rotterdam church. Their joint goal was to promote a congregationalist, independent type of church. Peter boasted that Ames "left his professorship in *Friezland* to live with me because of my Churches Independency at *Rotterdam*, and charged me often, even

18. J.J. Kalma, "Ds Hugo Petri wilde het hoofd niet buigen voor de classis," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 16 July, 1977.

19. Hugh Peter was mentioned in the consistory register of the Amsterdam English Reformed Church, Nov. 1, 1628, vol. 3: 2 (Gemeente Archief Amsterdam, P.A. 318, no. 3); Alice C. Carter, *The English Reformed Church in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century* (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema, 1964), p. 74.

to his death, so to look to it, and if there was a way of publik worship in the world, that God would owne it was that."<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately for Peter's plans, Ames died a couple of months after moving to Rotterdam. The grief-stricken Peter preached the funeral sermon, dramatically wearing Ames's own cloak, the better to "make himselfe the inheritor of his spirit" and carry on his work.<sup>21</sup> Because the orphaned Ames family was left destitute, Hugh Peter wrote to the Franeker curators asking for a financial subsidy for the family of their recently-departed professor; thus the English Hugh Peter's name and letter entered into the Franeker archives.

Hugh Peter's later career was fast paced. In 1635 he went to New England; in 1641 he returned to England to support the revolution, serving as army chaplain and agent of Parliament. In 1643-44 he made a brief trip back to the Netherlands, being sent by Parliament to use his old contacts to raise money and counteract Royalist influences. He was at the English Church of Amsterdam in November 1643 and January 1644 and in between visited several other English churches. In his sermons of this period, he mixed religion and anti-royalist politics to "dangerous effect." So much so, that Sir William Boswell, royal ambassador, complained to the States General and wanted him to be silenced.<sup>22</sup> Back in England, Peter supported taking up arms against the king and then his trial and execution. During the English Commonwealth and Protectorate he was a firm supporter of Oliver Cromwell. After the restoration of Charles II, Hugh Peter's world collapsed. He was hunted down, tried, and swiftly executed (1660). Thus ended his strenuous life.

Perhaps the two Hugh Peters met at some time at Franeker, most likely through connections each had with William Ames, but there is no record of this. Through misreading of the documents, historians have blended the two lives and reputations into one composite person—larger than life. The story of the Puritan Hugh Peter, officiously striding about Friesland as zealous Puritan disciplinarian, whipping students into shape, will have to be discarded. His biography is in process of revision. While the English Hugh Peter preached and reformed at Rotterdam, the Dutch Hugo Petri handled the discipline and supervision of students at Franeker. Merging the two careers is a case of historical mistaken identities.

KEITH L. SPRUNGER

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20. Hugh Peter, *Mr. Peters Last Report of the English Wars* (London, 1646), 14; Sprunger, *Learned Doctor William Ames*, p. 242.

21. State Papers 16, vol. 250, no. 28 (Public Record Office, London).

22. On this trip of Hugh Peter, in addition to Stearns, *Strenuous Puritan*, see Amsterdam English Reformed Church consistory register, 3: 137; Res. States General, no. 3202, fol. 601 (Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague).

## THE SPELDHURST CHURCH BOOK

We do not commonly draw attention to material for Baptist history, and The Speldhurst Church Book had a perceptive short notice in the *Baptist Quarterly*; but church books are not thick on the ground, and here is one that shows in detail just how a local church operated that stood firmly in the Separatist tradition – a strand in our heritage which the United Reformed Church may not value but cannot discard.

The book is preserved in the British Library, where it is Add. MS. 36709. It is catalogued as the Tunbridge Wells Church Book. This it is, but for much of the period it covers the title is anachronistic. What is now Royal Tunbridge Wells lay in three parishes, Tonbridge, Speldhurst and Frant. Close at hand but not yet a constituent parish was Pembury. The church at the Wells, one of the few dedications to King Charles the Martyr, was merely a chapel of ease to Speldhurst. Tonbridge and Speldhurst (and also Pembury) were in Kent and in the diocese of Rochester; Frant was in Sussex and in the diocese of Chichester.

The situation may look anomalous, but it was not uncommon for Nonconformists to gather for worship on a boundary line, for it could have advantages: it provided both distance from courts of law and an easy escape from pursuivants both secular and ecclesiastical. What the church called itself was The Congregation of Jesus Christ inhabiting in and around Speldhurst and Pembury, or for short The Church of Speldhurst and Pembury. About forty per cent. of the members lived at Speldhurst or Pembury; several were from Tonbridge, and a few from Frant. The church also drew in individuals from neighbouring parishes such as Withyham, Ashurst, Cowden, Chiddingstone, Leigh, Bidborough, Capel, Brenchley, Lamberhurst and Wadhurst.

In the church book it is largely taken for granted that it was a Baptist church. It originated in “a small people of Believers Baptized that did usually Assemble at Bradbourn and at Orpington in Kent for the publique worship of God. unto whome some few in and about Speldhurst did join themselves. And about the years 1648 and 1649 ... began to have like Assemblys in and about Pembury and Speldhurst”. They and their successors remained faithful to believers’ baptism. In January or February 1687 the church book records that “Matthew Calverley was about 84 years old when he was Baptized led out between two carryed in a chair from ye water ...”.

It was also taken for granted that it was a General Baptist church. An undated record reads: “William Burges removed his habitation to Rye in Sussex and there he fell in with Will Mercer imbracing ye Calvenest notion – returned to Tunbridge – became very loose”.

The church book is in much disorder. The names of members listed in its opening pages have had serial numbers attached to them by the transcriber for convenience of indexing, giving an impression of a single consecutive list. What in fact we have is a succession of lists interpreted with other miscellaneous matter, and while these lists are broadly chronological some names are entered out of date-

order. Most names are followed by a date (not always precise), the date either of baptism or of reception already baptized from a sister church; but none of the first 119 names recorded is followed by a date, and though thereafter most names have dates, not all do. The earliest date recorded is 1685, the latest 1766: not all of those whose names are recorded here would be alive at the same time. The last number attached by the transcriber, which is 372, is thus not to be taken as a measure of the church's size.

How large was the church? Three factors make it difficult to give a precise answer. First, we do not know when the various lists were compiled. An entry for 6 January 1695/6 reads "Then paid to Tho Harrison Senr for this book 2s.6d.", and on 24 February 1725/6 it was "Agreed that a list of all the names of ye Members of this church be taken"; but in neither case is there any break, or corresponding note, in the lists of members as they stand. It is plausible to suppose that, since the point at which dates of baptism or reception are first added is 1684 and the date on which fairly regular church meetings are first recorded is 1686, this was also the period (1684-6) when the first list was compiled. The number of names recorded between 1686 and 1706, the year after which church meetings became less regular (or were less regularly recorded) is roughly 100. Most of what follows is the result of a close study of the twenty years between these dates, which are fully documented.

But secondly we do not know how many of the 119 persons whose names are listed before 1686 without date were still alive in 1686. Some will have died; but the third name in this initial list is that of a prominent member still active as late as 1697, Thomas Harrison. It may thus be deduced that the church's size was nearer 200. But the rationality here may be only the deducer's, not that of the compiler, to whom moreover chronology was not a major concern; the compiler's concern was not the size of the church or the number of baptisms but the fact of baptism and the recording of it. Whatever the church's size, some sixty per cent. of the names recorded are those of women, and the names of some of them recur. Though the church's business was normally conducted by the men, women played an active part in its affairs, and on one important occasion, to which we shall return, took the lead.

Thirdly, the church not only received as members those who had been baptized in sister churches, it also from time to time transferred members to sister churches; and when this was done the names of those transferred were not deleted: they were still baptized, and the record of their baptism stood, even though their membership was now elsewhere, with their names presumably recorded a second time in a sister church's list of those received as already baptized. In calculating the church's size at any one time it is not realistic to include both the number of those received from sister churches (about fifteen) and the number of these recorded as dismissed to sister churches (about twenty-six); the latter must be subtracted.

Up to the year 1706 the church dismissed members to Bradburn *alias* Bessels Green (also called Sevenoaks), from which, as we saw, it originated; to Maidstone, Marden and Biddenden in Kent; and to Ditchling, Westfield and Warbleton in

Sussex. It received members in these years from Bradburn, Ditchling and Westfield; and also from churches at Canterbury and Cranbrook. Relations were probably closest with Bradburn and Ditchling.

If the Speldhurst church had a problem which it could not resolve, it might consult the Association of General Baptist churches in Kent and Sussex of which it was a constituent member. But though a distinctive characteristic of General Baptist church life, the Associations played a much more active part in some counties of England than in others, and in Kent the Association was neither strong nor continuous: there was in fact a succession of short-lived Associations, at one point even two at the same time in rivalry. Minutes of a Kentish Association meeting in 1657 at Chatham and Biddenden were copied at some point into the Speldhurst church book, interrupting the sequence of its own later records. Otherwise there is no reference to an Association till 16 February 1702, when a problem arose, and, "for as much as ther is appointed a Quarterly Meeting so called or an Association Meeting to be held of the Churches in Kent to wch also several neighbouring Churches of Sussex were called", the church sent a letter seeking help in resolving the problem "to our Beloved Brors who are Assembled together from several Congregations of or Lord ... according to appointment ... in manner & forme of Ancient Quarterly Meeting". (The Association passed the church's problem to the General Assembly in London, and the General Assembly's recommendation, though not entered in its own minutes, was duly copied into the Speldhurst church book). The fullness and solemnity of the wording here suggests that the action being taken was not in normal course but was a new beginning. Consistently with this the Kentish Association appears for the first time in the General Assembly's minutes of a meeting held in June 1704, at which a representative from Speldhurst was present.

In earlier years, before 1703, the Speldhurst church would seek advice on an *ad hoc* basis from its sister churches, the churches varying with the occasion but in the first place being those with which it was in communication through the reception and dismissal of members. In 1695, when troubled by disagreement over the liturgical use of the Lord's Prayer, it requested the churches at Maidstone, Marden and Sevenoaks to assist at a meeting called to resolve the dispute, and the resulting document's signatures include those of William Maddock from Maidstone, Francis Cornwell from Marden, and James Calverley from Sevenoaks. In 1700 the church sought the assistance of representatives from these churches, with others from Ditchling, Westfield and Warbleton; and in 1701, when the church was unable to resolve a dispute, it agreed to be bound by "ye conclusions of ye neighbouring churches" and sent letters to the same six churches, with those at Horsham, Biddenden and Frittenden. On this last occasion a statement blaming the errant brother for "not applying his self to ye Church according to ye Rule of ye Gospel" includes names of members of Bradburn, Ditchling and Biddenden, and perhaps others of the nine churches whose advice had been sought.

The church's readiness to turn for help in resolving differences and disputes to the Association, or failing the Association to selected sister churches,

counterbalanced any tendency to isolation due to its separation. Because of the frequent use of more than one name for the same church (not to mention varieties of spelling for the same name), the number of General Baptist churches in Kent was not as great as at first appears, but there were very many of them. In addition to those already mentioned, there were churches at Borden, Headcorn, Rolvenden, Stelling, Wingham, the Isle of Thanet, Deal, Eythorn, and Hythe & Folkestone. There were also churches at Chichester and Walden (*alias* Waldron) in Sussex, and at Webstone in Surrey. All of these were "called over" at Association meetings. Most of them were probably small; none of those just named sent representatives to Association save Webstone and Isle of Thanet; but between them they made up a considerable and mutually aware community.

It is none the less true that, as might be expected, the pages of the church book are largely concerned with its own affairs, and pre-eminently with what is commonly known as discipline. Whatever the name, some form of discipline is necessary for any self-respecting community, if only to manifest and preserve its identity: a Roman Catholic communicating at an Anglican altar may be rebuked; a clergyman living in adultery and unrepentant will be expected to resign his living, if not his orders; a member of a team judged by the Football Association to have brought the game into disrepute is "dealt with" (a phrase used in the heading in the Speldhurst church book where its business begins). In principle Separatist discipline is thus not peculiar. But the lines are drawn very narrowly; and in extrapolating from separation from evil to separation from the world and its standards, and from the world to the worldly Church, it goes beyond the discipline practised in most other Christian communities.

This, put rather grandiosely, is the rationale of Separatism, and it is borne out by the Speldhurst church book as a whole. In the hundred years and more between its first entry and its last the assumptions vary little. There is more than consistency, there is an entity that is recognizable. What these pages reveal is the way it is worked out in detail from week to week and from year to year, and the problems that ensued.

The faults for which church members were disciplined may be described as lapses, of two kinds: from the church's fellowship and from Christian morality; lapses, because one hope in exercising discipline was that it would lead to repentance, recovery and restoration.

Lapses from fellowship were manifested by failure over a long period to attend the church's meeting, over a shorter period by attendance at those of another congregation or denomination; and by "marrying out". They were not mutually exclusive.

In July 1695 the church wrote to John Humphrey, "who for longe time has bine absent from ye communion of ye Church desiering him once more in love to grant us a meeting that we might Injoye his company in his making good of his place"; and on 27 June 1696 the church "obtained our desier in injoying him at or Metting and had a hearing of his case". The offences objected against him were:

1. his long absenting of himself from this Congregation to the number of about 12 years not deseiring a letter of Recommendation to any other Church nor yet haveing had any communion at any
2. for going to ye publicke in time of persecution and sence to the presbyterian to hear their preaching & to Join wt them in worshipe
3. for marying of a wife who was not a member of the Baptized Church in all which he gave Reasonable satisfaction with suitable acknowledgements and such profesitions of humility wch in Charity excepted of and according to his desier gave him a letter of Recommendation to or Bros in and about Maidstone under the care of Bro. Madocks & Bro. Brown among whome he hath had his conversation for these years.

Not all "cases" were resolved so easily. At the same meeting in July 1695 the church decided that

or Bro Peter Marten who for many years hath stood at a a distance from ye communion of ye Church for going elsewhere to here (that is to ye Presbyterians) owing and vindicateing it as his liberty so to do... be farther spoke unto and admonished if happily he may be stablished in ye present truth.

but the minutes do not mention his name again.

Marriage to someone outside the fellowship was a very serious matter, the more so because it was inalterable save by death. In the eyes of the church marriage was a union so intimate that the holiness and salvation of one party must affect those of the other. In 1693 the General Assembly ruled that a man might not be an Elder if his wife was not a member. Marriage also brings families together or comes between them, and in this small and tightly knit community many families were already interrelated. Marriage brought responsibility moreover for children's spiritual nurture and preparation for church membership, and how could this be fulfilled unless both parents were members themselves? When after the death of a leader a "character" was drawn up, part of the tribute would run, as for Matthias Copper, "He left a Wife & two daughters Anne and Mary whom he lived to see Educated thro' the dangers of Childhood to the embracing of that Religion he was careful to give them early instruction into the knowledge of", or, as for William Ashdowne, "He left one Son and four Daughters and had the comfort to See them all professors of that Religion which he was always zealous to Promote and to See them walk Soberly in their profession". Behind the four names of Thomas, John, Elizabeth and Mary Harrison, entered together in the list of members, lies a sad but triumphant story: "Mary Jeffery married Joh: Harrison of Chideston [Chiddingstone] both dyed at Grunbridge [Groombridge] and left 4 children viz

Jo: Mar: Eliz: and Tho they were left young but all imbraced truth while in single life”.

Lapses from morality were of the kinds common to humanity: quarrelsomeness and abusiveness; drunkenness; lewdness (hence dancing), fornication, adultery; gambling (hence playing at cards), dishonesty, theft, breach of promise, running into debt, bankruptcy. Granted discipline and the principles behind it, none of this is surprising; but the explicit detail in which it is recorded can be remarkable.

Thus in August 1694 the church withdrew from Joseph Harrison because of his “selling cow dung mixed with graese and tare to ye Coachman to greese ye Coach Wheels they being altogether ignorant of any such matter as cow dung neither did he for such a mixture make any abatement of his usual price”. A year later the church received a letter of “acknowledgement contrition & detraction” from him, in which he confessed he did “mix cow dung with lard & tarr & sold the same compound together at ye same bale as I did before twas thus compounded”, and “by that gospell dishonouring & family grieving practice” did “sin against God”. He expressed his “sorrow for sin”, added “I have with grife laboured under a burden of sorrow but hope I have obtained pardon from God. By this paper I hope all dissatesfied persons will be satisfied”; and he was received back into “full communion”.

After three hundred years this can read rather ludicrously, but only if one misses the convictions and purposes behind it. These are recorded with the same directness and simplicity, but because they are scattered do not attract the same attention. The church believed that discipline was “the way of truth”, undertaken “for ye truths sake”, “the way & order of ye Gospel” according to “the rules of Gospel truth”, “the holy discipline required by Gospel rule & ye example of primitive purity & the counsel & direction of ye Apostles of our Lord & Lawgiver”. Lapses were “a Cause of Reproch & scandall to ye truth”, and “occasion of Reproach & dishonour to ye Gospel”. The gospel *was* truth (a word used similarly by the first Quakers).

The church was also concerned for the lapsed member. When in January 1675 an “Admonition” was sent to Richard Waters “that he may see his evil and endeavour to clear himself” from his “Illddealings”, it was “in love to him & desire of his eternal welbeing”; to another, the church wrote “in love unfeigned and compationate desiers”; to another “O take all in love from us for we dare not but send to thee & do our duty”; to another, “we cannot but account our duty to watch over thee in love”. A drunkard was admonished to “repent from the bottom of his heart and bring forth frute meet for repentance”; otherwise the church could not “tolerate his Church membership or free communion”. For another, whose “Miscarege” had caused it “trouble & grife”, the church’s desire was “that ye Lord would in tender compassion consider him” and “that we may be farther comforted concerning him, so as to Receive him into our Communion”. Only when there was no repentance for evil committed “to ye publike reproach of the truth the transgression of the law of Christ & ye grife of ye Brotherhood”, and admonition had failed, would the church withdraw “in ye publik assembly in ye Lords name

for ye destruction of ye flesh but for ye saving of the spirit in ye day of ye Lord", "delivering up to Satan" (a formula taken from I Cor. 5: 5 and a procedure followed in other churches).

The church sought assistance from its sister churches not only in resolving disputes but also, on occasion, with the Sunday services. In 1700 it sent to Ditchling "for some help & supply in our Lords day Meeting because of ye present distress this church is in through ye silencing of several of her publike instruments by reson of miscarriages", and for a time the Ditchling church duly sent a "supply" once a month and then once a fortnight. The language here may have been less opaque at the time than it is now, when it requires interpretation, and to this we shall return. What is clear is that the Speldhurst church had no minister of its own, in the sense of someone come from outside its own fellowship: those looked to for leadership were drawn from their own members.

This is not to say that the Speldhurst church in any way despised ministry. Quite the contrary: they took it very seriously. They had no accepted doctrine of ministry, and no one had authority to make decisions for them and to require observance. They had to work it out for themselves, and it was frequently under discussion, not without disagreements and "personalities", sharpened through the complex relationships that were the result of endogamy. The case of Thomas Benge illustrates this.

Thomas Benge was ordained an Elder on 2 April 1697, "being before elected by a free choice of this Congregation". He had been baptized in 1686, and his wife had been received by transfer from Bradburn in 1691. Their home was one of those where the church sometimes met on the Lord's Day. Benge himself preached, at least occasionally. The choice seemed a good one.

Unfortunately he got into financial difficulties and ran into debt. This was a serious lapse, and was made worse by his concealing it for several years. He had not only given "great occasion of reproach & dishonour to ye Gospel"; at the time when he was ordained he had been living a double life, and had deceived the church. In 1700 the facts came to light.

Benge made a clean breast of things, "declaring it is his great trouble that he did not declare his circumstances seven years before which if he had done then ye Gospel would not have suffered or men bine indamnified by him as now has fallen out to be", but his heart was "deceived through pride being first ashamed to be counted so poor among men & then persuaded he might be more honourable to ye profession, maintain his famylie better, do more good to his fellow creditors & finally get out of debt if he could escape ye reproach of poverty". "By giving place to these thoughts", he continued, "he soon forgat or at least lost the living sence of his vows & promises", and "new difficultys ... increased from little to more till his heart was filled with ye fear and ceas of his life more than to fulfill ye Ministry wch was committed to his charge so that the Lord was offended & hid his face from him and blasted him in all his endeavours & brought upon him ye reproach wch he feared, & a much greater".

It is a moving confession, and was effectual. The church's initial response was

to declare him to be guilty of breach of promise and fraud, and to issue a "form of publique withdrawalment", recording "we have not nor can have communion with him" till a "setled & remaining" "degree of humility" be found in him. But after only two months it expressed itself satisfied, and a month later, in a document signed by his fellow Elder Thomas Harrison, the two Deacons and eleven other church members, five of them women, it unanimously agreed to receive him back into communion "as a private Member", that so "our dear Bror. Benge" may be regularly eased of that intollerable burden which we conceive him to have been under". This was in 1700. It was not the end, however; the affair dragged on for another ten years.

In 1701 the question arose whether Benge might again take part in "ye publique work of ye ministry" and officiate as an Elder. On this the church could not reach a common mind, and sought advice from sister churches. This is the case mentioned earlier which went on to Association and thence to General Assembly. Without mentioning Benge by name, the Assembly recommended that he be allowed to preach immediately and left it to the church's discretion how soon he might officiate as Elder. It was not until 22 January 1707 that, after further discussion, the church agreed to his restoration as an Elder, the "free full and absolute" ratification of the decision to be entered in the church book: and even then, though the statement is said to have been signed by about fifty members, it was "put a stop to" by Thomas Harrison. There was evidently dissension, or unease: it was "often discussed of and several agreements made", but never put into practice. At last, in 1711, with a reference back to the Assembly's ruling and to the church's original agreement of January 1707, Benge's restoration was once again agreed to, and was again ordered to be "entered in the Church Book as a Church Act". This was signed by thirty-eight members (not including Harrison), more than half of whom were women. "We do agree to break bread next Lords day come two weeks to the confirmation of the above said agreement that Bror. Benge administer the same wch accordingly he did". This time it could not be questioned; and henceforth Benge took a full part in the church's life. When he died on 8 May 1742 the church remembered him as "an able and laborious Minister of the Gospel Zealous for Religion and advancing ye Cause of his Lord & Master"; and he was commemorated as "an Elder of this Church many years", and no mention of either lapse or interruption was recorded.

What was perhaps the most long-running sore in the church's life was a quarrel between Rubin Copus and John Alborne. Initially "they did both jointly agree to refer the matter to Bros then present in defferently chosen by themselves & to stand to their award", and "taking hands each with other ... did profess hearty forgiveness of each other for time past and to live in love for the time to come". But alas the reconciliation did not last, and "there did arise in each of them so great a pasion wch did vend itself with such unChristian reflections hard & unsavory grateing & railing speeches from each to other the Church could do no other than take notice of it", and took the unusual step of deciding that "ye Lott shall be ye final end of ye conteste". This time Sister Copus came into the "difference"

between the two men, and the church specifically required of Alborne “if he yelde to her then to put it to the proper issue but if he oppose her that then it be put to ye Lott & Whom the Lott take to account Guilty”. Despite this decision, the matter was in the event, it seems, not “put to ye Lott”. Sister Copus “utterly refused ye Lott”, perhaps revealing that she was at the root of the trouble. For now “we came to a final conclusion of all the differences between them they freely forgive each other & prommisinge to be in charity one with the other for time to come”; and this time the reconciliation endured: of Sister Copus no more is heard, but the two men both continued in the church’s communion and took a worthy part in its activities.

Basically, the church observed two forms of ministry, named Elders and Deacons, who in each case were ordained. But there was no mystique either about these offices and their titles or about their ordination. “Messengers” to meetings of ministers or Associations provided another form of ministry; they too were, or might be, ordained for the more temporary *ad hoc* purposes of their ministry. Sometimes they were called “representatives”. The term “helpers” (I Cor. 12:28) also appears, at least once.

Ordination had no priestly connotation, no thought of, let alone claim to, apostolic succession. It was the solemn expression of the church’s appointment of one of its members, “by a free choice”.

The work of an Elder was “to feed ye Church of God ... to serve ... according to ye ability he may receive from ye Lord” “In Ministring Spiritual things”. This meant, primarily, preaching, but also pastoral work – “visiting of ye Sicke & seeking after ye straying disciples &c”: the phrase “pastor elder” occurs. Preaching might also be by gifted brethren, but these might not go forth without the church’s “approbation” or “by their own appointment”, especially “to the world” or “to other Churches”. The church’s corporate responsibility for its own members is not questioned, nor its control of them. It thus had ministry, though not a single minister; when the phrase “the Ministers” occurs, it refers to the Elders.

In 1677 the church agreed that “ye ordinance of ye Lord’s Supper should be Administred every month” – in 1718, and again in 1726, every two months – and that “notice should be taken of any that should [be] absent”. It is not said that an Elder, or that only an Elder, should administer it, but this perhaps may be assumed. The church’s concern was not over such matters but that its members should be present when it assembled, at “ye Lords day meeting” as well as at the Lord’s Supper. This was an ordinance, but only one of them. Believers’ baptism was another; and after some disagreement, “that most significant holy & sacred ordinance of washing feet” was accepted as a third, and equally a “duty”.

While the Elders were concerned with “Ministring Spiritual things”, the Deacons’ province was “temporall things”. This meant, primarily, finances. The immediate context of the distinction is the duty to support Elders involved in expense on the church’s behalf (such as through the travel undertaken by “Messengers”). More generally, the Deacons had oversight of the financial need of widows (as in Acts 6), the poor, and members overtaken by calamity. Interspersed

with issues of discipline in the church book are such entries as: "Agreed to pay ten shillings towards Sister Jugs rent next Michaelmas"; "Agreed to pay Bro Herod for Sister Feild her being at his home ... collected in all 1-13-3 and which was paid to Bror Herod upon the account of his trouble and charge in keeping of sister Feild and looking after her in the time of her long illness before her death"; "Agreed that if Sister Chapman cannot stay where she is that the Church should pay half her rent being seven shillings six pence per year and to be at ye charges of recovering her"; "the church taking into consideration the damage Bror Archer suffered in the late dreadful and amazing high winde his hous being much hurt therewith it was agreed the Church ought to assist him some way in the repairing thereof ... and accordingly ther was about 30s. gathered and given to him".

If money was to be dispensed, it must be collected, or (better) be already available through advance agreed monthly "controbutions" for the purpose, with the amounts subscribed entered in a book kept by the Deacons. These subscription lists, which include the subscribers' names, are of interest on several counts. They provide an indication of the "central" figures in the church's fellowship, in commitment or in wherewithal, or both. Some names occur elsewhere, but not all. Several are names that have been mentioned already. But some named were not members; the church was evidently willing to accept financial support from those who only attended its meetings. Some, an increasing number, are the names of women.

This could give rise to a problem. We have seen that the church held that a member might marry only another member. But what was to be done when a woman was baptized who was already married to a man who was not in membership? In June 1697 the church agreed that "no woman whose Husband is not a Member of ye Baptised Churches shall give any more than what she hath free liberty from her Husband except it be out of any money that shee hath by her sallery or some other way given to her by her Husband or some other person to & for her own proper use & behoof".

This is what lies behind the entry in the following month "John Frye for his wife 0-1-0". The modern reader may cry *machismo*, but it seems rather to indicate what was the sympathy of an attender, who with encouragement might come into full communion, and in this case did so; though whether the church actually had in mind what may be called mission is doubtful. For in 1706 we find "Jo: Fry" subscribing 0-1-6 on his own account, and in 1709 "John Fry" heads a list of subscribers with 0-5-0. Does this mean he had become a member? It does, and a valued one. "John Frye of Speldhurst" is entered in the membership list under the date 9.9.1705, and in 1710 in "the Chusing of Deacons" his name was mentioned, though he "utterly declined it by reson of several bodily inabilities".

Emphasis on discipline has tended to give Separatist churches a reputation for narrowness, but alongside this was the breadth of their mutual assistance; ideally, each was part of a larger unity, their devotion in detail to one another's good both in the things that are temporal and in the things that are eternal.



Harford was joint minister with Matthew Warren of Pauls Meeting from 1687 to 1706, when they both died. I preached under Harford's memorial on most Sundays from 1968 to 1996, and when I retired to the village of Stogumber, twelve miles to the north of Taunton, I found that according to the episcopal returns of 1669 ordered by Archbishop Gilbert Sheldon, Harford was preaching to Dissenters in the parishes of Bicknoller, Crowcombe and Stogumber, at the foot of the Quantock Hills. Indeed, I was conscious of further continuities. Thus Isaac Gilling (1663-1725), the secretary of the Exeter Assembly of Congregational and Presbyterian ministers, was born in Stogumber, or so suggests the *Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>2</sup> In fact he was baptized at Bicknoller, a chapel of Stogumber, on 22 August 1663, the elder son of Richard Gilling, baker, and his wife Elizabeth. Isaac Gilling was educated in Taunton by George Hamond, the minister of Pauls Meeting, ordained, and when secretary of the Assembly wrote the minutes in a leather-bound book, sometimes using shorthand.<sup>3</sup>

Warren and Harford also had a great deal to do with the Assembly in their responsibility for the Taunton Academy. The Assembly recommended candidates for the ministry, gave grants and arranged ordinations and settlements.

Harford did not publish anything in his life time, not even a funeral sermon, but in 1725, six of his sermons<sup>4</sup> were published posthumously as *Practical Discourses on Several Subjects*, printed from copies taken in shorthand, as they were preached. Fifteen more sermons,<sup>5</sup> handwritten, can be found in a leatherbound book in the library of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society.<sup>6</sup>

2. *DNB*: Isaac Gilling, (1662?-1725), Presbyterian minister, eldest son of Richard Gilling, baker, was born at Stogumber, Somersetshire, etc.
3. A. Brockett. *The Exeter Assembly*, 1963.
4. Luke 22.20, Col. 3.4, I Chron. 29.18., John 4.16, Luke 22.19., Phil. 3.20.
5. Texts of fifteen sermons. 2 Sam. 23.5., Rev.21.4., Rom. 8.11., Rom. 5.2. Job. 17.1, 1 Tim. 6.12., Eccles. 7.9., Deu. 4.9., Luke 6.36 (2), Col. 3.4. Rev. 22.20 (3), 2 Cron. 16.9
6. The book also contains:  
 The Assembly's Catechism.  
 Mr Thomas Trescot's Catechism concerning ye Lord's Supper.  
 Mr G. Newton's sermon on John 17. 24.  
 Mr J. Allien's sermon on Psa. 4 .4.  
 Mr Balster's sermon 54 Isiah 8.  
 A sermon preached by Mr T. Warrin on 12 Heb. 15.  
 Two sermons preached by Mr Sprake on Can. 1. 2.  
 Two sermons preached by Mr Thomas Saffard on ye 23 Josh. 11.  
 Two sermons preached by Mr William Crumpton on Luke 18. 13.  
 A sermon pchd. by Mr Thomas Tregoss on 16 John 8.  
 2 sermons by Mr Hunt upon a publick fast on 51 Psa. 17.  
 2 sermons pt. by Mr Symons, a welch minister, on 73 Psa. 1.  
 Sermon by Mr John Berry being a preparation sermon before ye sacrament on ye 1 Pet. 4. 8.  
 6 sermons by Mr T. Warren on ye 2 Phi. 12. 13.

Six of these were funeral sermons but in no sermon was the deceased named. None of the sermons was the same as in *Practical Discourses* although one text was the same (Col. 3.4).

A comparison of the handwriting suggests that these were not written by Isaac Gilling. As in *Practical Discourses* they could have first been taken down in shorthand, as after two of Harford's sermons there is some shorthand, as yet undeciphered.

As well as his sermons, the book also contains "Mr. Harford's directions for ye discharge of duties that God requireth of us", (six pages). There are eight directions of which the first is:-

1 dir. Great heed must be taken from what principal we act or what tis that doth put us upon the discharge of any duty as the principal is, such is the action, the stream can rise no higher than the fountain. The Apostle tels us what principals are good in ye I tim. I.5.

And the last reads:-

our obedience must be evangellical as we must have respect to God as our ultimate end, so to Christ as our only Mediator to bring us to God. (finis)

One wonders how Warren and Harford compared as preachers. Palmer<sup>7</sup> says of Warren "His sermons were clear, solid and affectionate. He declined the ostentation of wit, or the indulgence of a luxurious fancy, and aimed to bring what he delivered within the reach of his meanest hearers, preferring the good of souls to his own applause," and of Harford, "His composure were elaborate and judicious, his method natural and easy, his style grave and majestic; and he always comprized a great deal of matter in a few words." This is not terribly helpful but one could ask why the writer of the leather-bound book recorded fifteen sermons by Harford and none by Warren.<sup>8</sup> Why also were six of Harford's sermons published and none of Warren's? The answer is not quite as obvious as it seems for it was Warren who was invited to preach to his fellow ministers by the Exeter Assembly and Warren who preached the funeral sermon for John Glanvil who was ejected from St. James's, Taunton, in 1662. It could be significant that when Harford preached at Hatch he was paid eight shillings, but when Warren preached at Pitminster he was paid ten shillings.

In the period leading up to the Monmouth Rebellion the interior of Pauls Meeting was wrecked and the furniture burnt by the Mayor of Taunton and his henchmen, who suspected (probably rightly) that the church was full of spies wanting to depose the Catholic King James. After the Rebellion, Pauls Meeting

7. S. Palmer, *Nonconformist's Memorial*, 2nd Ed., 3 vols., 1802.

8. There are seven sermons by Timothy Warren but I have not been able to identify him.

was refurbished and Harford encouraged the families of those who had died to have them buried under the floor, so that future opponents would be deterred from desecrating the church. When Warren died he was buried in St. Mary's, but Harford, true to his own advice, was buried at Pauls Meeting. Warren's memorial in St. Mary's has disappeared but Harford's is still above the pulpit.

BRIAN KIRK

## THE WILSON FAMILY AND DERBYSHIRE

He may justly, therefore, be represented as the principal founder of modern Congregational nonconformity in his native county, particularly the southern portion of it...<sup>1</sup>

So said Joshua Wilson, writing of his grandfather, Thomas Wilson the elder, (1731-1794). The younger Thomas Wilson's (1764-1843) contribution to Congregationalism in Lincolnshire was the subject of an article by Geoffrey Nuttall in an earlier issue of this journal.<sup>2</sup> This article will discuss the Wilson family's sponsorship of Congregational churches within their native Derbyshire. It will explore that tension which exists between a sense of tradition and the need to feel that a new start has been made. The Wilson family had both a clear sense of history and a need to create new things. Thomas Wilson the elder was born into the family of a yeoman farmer at Stenson, south of Derby, on 3 January 1731. His father, John (1696-1747), was both a freeholder and a tenant of the Harpur family of Calke Abbey. The oldest son, John (1720-1789), might expect to take over the family farm. The farm was not large, so the younger sons had to shift for themselves. The yeomanry spawned many small enterprises in this fashion, as younger sons took up trades. John Wilson's second son, Stephen (1723-1755), established a ribbon business in London. The first successful silk mill in England has been established in Derby and ribbon making was an obvious opening for entrepreneurs. In 1747 the next youngest son, Thomas, travelled with his father to London to visit Stephen. On the return journey the father died. As an even younger son, needing to make his own living, Thomas first went to St. Kitts. The West Indies was the place to try your luck in the mid-eighteenth century. Fortunes were made there by the few. More found a grave as victims of disease. Most returned having earned a living but seeing no opportunity for transforming their fortune.

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1. [Joshua Wilson] *Memoir of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson Esq. by his son:* London: 1849. This is the source of much of the family information here: hereafter "Wilson Memoir".
  2. G.F. Nuttall: *The Rise of Independency in Lincolnshire: Thomas Wilson and the students:* JURCHS vol. 4, No. 1, p. 35. I would like to thank Dr. Nuttall for his particular help and encouragement in my study of Derbyshire Nonconformity.

Thomas was one of those who came back. He returned to England in 1752 and settled in Coventry, where Stephen had business connections. In Coventry he met and married, in 1754, Mary Remington, daughter of a Dissenting family. The Remingtons were also represented in Doddridge's church at Northampton. The Wilsons of Stenson had no known interest in Dissent. It is true that they lived in a part of Derbyshire where there was a strong tradition of Puritanism and Nonconformity. John Stone and William Tapley licensed houses at Stenson for meetings in 1692 and 1693.<sup>3</sup> Daniel Shelmerdine, one of Derbyshire's most intransigent Nonconformists, was ejected from the Wilsons' parish church of Barrow on Trent in 1662.<sup>4</sup> There was a Dissenting academy at nearby Findern, but no evidence of Wilson connections with any of this Nonconformity has yet been discovered. Joshua Wilson appears to have looked for one and failed, since he mentions their absence in his biography of his father.<sup>5</sup> As tenants of the Harpurs they may not have had the option. What is clear is that the newly married Wilsons exhibited the wife's Dissenting sympathies.

Stephen Wilson died in 1755, leaving a widow and young family. Thomas, who had become his partner in 1754, took over the London business on his brother's death. Biographical accounts of Thomas Wilson and his family now focus on this London life, in which Thomas raised two families in London at the same time as making a fortune from haberdashery. Thomas himself, and his son in turn, did not lose sight of John, the eldest Wilson brother, living at Stenson, bringing up his own family and running the family farm. This was not merely family sentiment. Silk ribbons were the key to Thomas Wilson's business. Not only had commercial spinning of silk begun in Derby – it remained an important centre for the trade. John Wilson's daughter Anne married Ambrose Moore, who, with his son, ran the Derby firm of Wilson, Moore and Robinson, silk throwsters. The same link between commerce and family life can be seen in the next generation. Manchester was a major centre for weaving silk into ribbons. Thomas Wilson's son, Thomas, found his wife there.

We may wish to assume that Thomas Wilson's religious life was steered in the direction of Dissent by his wife. A further powerful factor was his hearing George Whitefield in the Tabernacle when he moved to London. Calvinistic Methodism spanned the Church of England and Dissent. Wilson could embrace the new Enthusiasm and remain a Dissenter, joining the Haberdashers Hall Independent Meeting in 1760 and subsequently becoming a deacon there. Perhaps the Wilsons took Philip Doddridge's own amicable relationships with Methodists as a model. Methodists and Independents did not always mix. However, one notable Calvinistic Methodist, friend and collaborator with Whitefield, was the Countess of Huntingdon. She needed to take advantage of the legal provisions of old Dissent in order to establish her own chapels and ordain ministers.

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3. Cox, *Three Centuries of Derbyshire Annals*, vol. 1, p. 367f.

4. A.G. Matthews [editor], *Calamy Revised*.

5. *Wilson Memoir*.

Shortly after the death of her husband Theophilus, in 1746, Sélina, Countess of Huntingdon, retired to Ashby Place, a house within the walls of the old castle at Ashby de la Zouch, in North Leicestershire.<sup>6</sup> George Whitefield visited her there in 1750 and preached in Ashby. It remained one of her goals to establish permanent preaching in the area. One of the first students from her college at Trevecka, Joseph Glazebrook, was sent to Ashby in 1771. He was ordained deacon on presentation to the parish of Smisby, a Hastings family living just outside the town. This was in spite of the reservations of the Bishop of Lichfield. Glazebrook was a converted collier. By class and education he was not a conventional candidate for ordination. Securing his ordination then exposed the other problem for the Countess. As an ordained deacon in the Church of England Glazebrook could not preach in the neighbouring parish of Ashby without permission. At Ashby Place the laundry had been converted into a meeting house. The little Methodist society in Ashby was split between Calvinists and Arminians in 1771 as surely as were Methodists nationally. Glazebrook was posted just up the road but unable to preach in Ashby or to take charge of the fractious congregation. He proposed that a student be sent, to extend the work in Staffordshire as well. For a short time in 1772 Glazebrook did preach in the laundry but in 1773 he left for Worcestershire.

The Countess of Huntingdon did not restrict herself to Ashby, where local support was weak. The town lies just south of the Trent in that corner of Derbyshire over the river. Calke Abbey is nearby and the Wilsons' parish church of Twyford about two miles north, over the river. Old Presbyterianism still persisted in the Meeting House at Melbourne. The General Baptists were active. Although Melbourne was an old agricultural settlement, surrounded by market gardens, it was a strategic base for preaching to the colliers and potters on the borders of Derbyshire and Leicestershire, around Appleby. What was good for the General Baptists was also good for the Countess of Huntingdon, who stationed Thomas Jones and James Griffiths in the town around 1777. Thomas Jones was one of the six students expelled from St. Edmund's, Oxford, in 1768. James Griffiths had been trained at Trevecka.<sup>7</sup> In 1779 a meeting-house was built on The Connary for the congregation which Thomas Jones had assembled. Melbourne was the base camp rather than the objective. Apart from preaching in the surrounding villages Jones and Griffiths took their gospel to Alvaston near Derby and into the heart of the town itself.

Thomas Ratcliffe Gawthorne was born in Derby in 1765. His father died while he was a child and he was brought up by his grandfather, "one of the easy going church and king men of those days".<sup>8</sup> The Gawthornes had come to Derby from

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6. For the account of the Countess of Huntingdon's activity in Ashby I have drawn heavily on Edwin Welch: *Lady Huntingdon's Chapel at Ashby*: Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society LXVI (1992).
  7. See list of students in S.C. Orchard: *Cheshunt College 1768-1969*: Cambridge, 1968.
  8. Obituary for T.R. Gawthorne: *The Christian Witness*, 1848, pp. 210f.

London earlier in the century and become part of the Whig establishment which ran the town under the patronage of the Cavendish family. The Crompton family, descendants of an ejected minister from Nottingham, founded the local bank and the local meeting house in Friar Gate. Although Gawthorne was later at pains to portray his grandfather as a latitudinarian, his Ratcliffe relations were part of the caucus of Dissenters within the Whig party.<sup>9</sup> The Cromptons were succeeded by the Strutts, also members of the Friar Gate chapel and go-betweens for the Cavendish grandes of Chatsworth. One Sunday in 1779 Thomas Gawthorne and his grandmother came out of service in All Saints Church, Derby, and were told that the Countess of Huntingdon was preaching in the Market Place. The two went to see this marvel, a couple of hundred yards from the church door. What they heard, of course, was the preaching of Thomas Jones, sponsored by the Countess of Huntingdon.<sup>10</sup> From 1778 he and Griffiths had preached in Derby market place on Sundays, advising people of the event through the town crier. The Independent Meeting at Brookside in Derby reckoned its founding from this preaching. This was, it may now be said, the Wilsonian interpretation of the rather more fragmentary and episodic events which followed. Thomas Gawthorne eventually served as Independent minister at Belper in Derbyshire. He was consulted when Joshua Wilson, Thomas's grandson, was collecting information on Derbyshire Dissent in the 1820s. We shall see how Thomas Gawthorne's conversion was woven into the story of how the Brookside chapel had come into being, which was consolidated in the nineteenth century. By 1878, when R.W. Dale preached at centenary services, all published sources were telling virtually the same tale – of a Congregational church shaped from the Evangelical Revival. This is certainly a true reading of events, but it has been simplified. The one exception to the received version is that of William Hutton.<sup>11</sup> His history of Derby is admittedly idiosyncratic but he did come from an old Derby Dissenting family. He reckoned that the Independent congregation was established after a split in the old Friar Gate congregation. He gave the wrong date for this and provided no corroborating detail but he is a source of information quite separate from the Wilsons and their friends. The two accounts are not mutually exclusive. The congregation which was eventually gathered at Brookside may have drawn on several strands of church life

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9. The records of the Derby Mercers Company are in the Bemrose Collection, Derby Local Studies Library. Thomas Wilson collected a list of Mayors of Derby who were Dissenters, reckoning that there were twenty-eight years between 1657 and 1807 when they served, though only seventeen individuals were involved. He also had a list of thirty-five Sheriffs of the county between 1634 and 1817. Congregational Library Hd 7/3.

10. See note 6.

11. "From a difference in judgement in religious points, which will ever happen among men, a separation took place in the congregation of Friargate and the seceders erected a chapel for themselves by the brook in 1785". William Hutton, *Derby* 1791.

in Derby. It suited later historians to emphasise the new beginning of evangelicalism which the congregation represented.

We know nothing of how Thomas Wilson became directly involved with the development at Derby. We know in a general way that he collaborated with the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion in London and Derbyshire. We know that he had interests in the town and that he visited his relations in Stenson every year. He also opened his London home to visitors from Derbyshire.<sup>12</sup> The first glimpse we have of his direct involvement in the Independent congregation in Derby was in 1779, when, according to the received version of the congregation's history, "he undertook to procure ministers to supply the congregation constantly."<sup>13</sup> It was also averred "They that had gladly received the word were regularly formed into a Christian church by the Rev. Mr. Hall, who at that time was pastor of the Church at Ilkeston."<sup>14</sup> This is slightly perplexing because we know that Griffiths and Jones were still active in Melbourne and Derby and were reporting back to the Countess of Huntingdon.<sup>15</sup> The Derby congregation was then meeting in a schoolroom behind the town hall. The 1779 licence for this meeting is in the name of Thomas

12. *Wilson Memoir*.

13. *Congregational Magazine* 1823, p. 277, appears to be the basis of all subsequent accounts.

14. This was claimed by James Gawthorne in 1850, who might reasonably be supposed to have found this out, see note 34. Thomas Hall was minister at Ilkeston from 1779 to 1788. The Independent church there was supported by Castlegate Independent church, Nottingham, from 1770.

15. Cheshunt Archives FI/1845, James Griffiths to Countess of Huntingdon, Derby June 22 1780

Honord Madam

By the last letter I received from your Ladyship I was informd of mine coming safe to hand; in which I indeavoured to inform your Ladyship how matters stood at Melbourne at that time, to all which your Ladyship said, "you could send me answer till your cause was desided; which I understand is now finished; but have heard nothing from your Ladyship. I tould your Ladyship that I would write to Mr Dawson to stop the lease, which accordingly was stoped, and find I am blamed by some for so doing. That the lease should be finished I think is right; and humbly beg your Ladyship to send an answer to that part of the matter, as stated in my last letter (if your Ladyship can) by the end of next week. I have heard that Mr Jones is gone from London to Norwich I feel myself not kindly treated that he has not wrote me a few lines. I was left here alone, and often perplexed with an uneasy people, hardly knowing how to act or what to say.

Mr Platt came to this part last week; sends his duty to your Ladyship, and complains of the want of a great coat. I hope your Ladyship will be so condescending as to write. From your Ladyships most obedient servant, J. Griffiths

Jones and others.<sup>16</sup> New ministers came and went very much in the fashion of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, except that Thomas Wilson appears to have nominated and funded them. For instance, Joseph Thomas, who served for a few months before dying in February 1782, came from the Mile End Academy.<sup>17</sup> The whole enterprise was so precarious that Wilson nearly abandoned it in 1780.<sup>18</sup> There also exists a set of printed rules, from 1781, which presents the church as Congregational. *Peace and Holiness Recommended in a Set of Rules Agreed to be observed by the Congregational Church of Christ at Derby*, was printed in London by W. Gilbert in 1781. In summary they read as follows:

Rule I. 'That none be admitted as Member of this Church who are chargeable with Immorality of Life, or pernicious fundamental Error in Sentiment.' 'earnestly seeking an experimental Acquaintance with [Christ's] Blood and Righteousness'.

II. Members must be proposed at a church meeting and admitted by vote, subject to vetting by the Minister or Deacon.

III. The doctrinal standard is the Articles of Church of England and Shorter Catechism of Westminster.

IV. Provision for worship on the Lord's Day and Monthly Church Meetings.

V. Conversation at private Meetings to be limited to spiritual concerns of those present.

VI. At meetings the subjects are about spiritual progress.

VII. Members are to speak freely and in confidence.

VIII. 'Disorderly walking' is to be reprov'd and if persisting members are to be excluded from meeting and the Table of the Lord for six months.

IX. The discipline procedure.

X. Against tale-bearers; rule VIII applies.

XI. Absence from four meetings or three communions without a sufficient reason leads to rule VIII exclusion.

XII. Provision for the care of the sick or poor.

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16. Application was made on 23 January 1779 by Thomas Jones, William German, Robert Allsop, Samuel Mabbot, George Chetham and Gervais German to register a school, late in the possession of Samuel Congrave, situate in the Common Yard, Derby, as a meeting place for Protestant Dissenters. Quoted in T.R. Rook [editor] *1779 to 1928, Victoria St Congregational Church, Derby*.

17. *Derby Mercury* 7 February 1782 and Rook, *op. cit.*

18. Congregational Library Hd 7/7, James Gawthorne's account of religion in Derbyshire. The papers comprising Hd 7 appear to be materials collected by James Gawthorne for the Derbyshire history published in instalments in *The Congregational Magazine* 1823.

XIII. Provision for Deacons. Assist the minister, deputise for him, call over the names at meetings; read the Rules once a quarter and at the admission of members.<sup>19</sup>

These are clearly rules in the Independent tradition of Thomas Wilson rather than the Calvinistic Methodism of Jones and Griffiths. There is no mention of the Fifteen Articles adopted by the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion or the Book of Common Prayer, which was used in its chapels.

In 1782 the congregation moved to a barn in Cross Lanes (now Macklin St.). Jonathan Scott preached here in July 1782.<sup>20</sup> The license for this barn is interesting.

We whose names are underwritten being Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England living in and about the town of Derby & parts adjacent Do hereby Certify that a Certain House or Barn late in ye possession of Wm. Brentnall Situate in the Cross Lanes in Derby in the County of Derby is intended to be appropriated or Set apart for the Meeting Place of a certain Congregation of Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England under the Denomination of Independents – And we do hereby desire that the Same may be registered by the Clerk of the Peace pursuant to an Act of Parliament made in the first year of their late Majesties King William & Queen Mary – Intituled an Act for the exempting their Majesties Protestant Subjects Dissenting from the Church of England from the penalties of certain Laws.

Witness our Hands the Eighth Day of April in the year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty two.

Jas Edwards, Jas. Bourn, Edward Gadsby, Antho: Wild Junr, George Cay, George Bullock, William Moreton.

The first signatory of this licence, James Edwards, was the fourth of the short-term ministers supplied by Wilson. George Cay, a tailor, subsequently had a child baptised in Brookside chapel. The most interesting name is that of William Brentnall, who relinquished use of the barn to the congregation. William Brentnall was a prosperous innkeeper, landlord of the Talbot Inn, a meeting place for Derby Whigs. He was also a distant cousin of Samuel Brentnall, Presbyterian minister at Duffield to about 1770. Samuel Brentnall himself was related to the Cromptons and the Barretts.<sup>21</sup> More significant still, William Brentnall was the son of Jacob

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19. Dr. Williams's Library: 12.66 14 (b).

20. *Derby Mercury* 11 July 1782 and Rook, *op. cit.*

21. Samuel Brentnall was baptised 9 October 1713 at Sandiacre. His father, also Samuel, had married Abigail Barrett, daughter of John Barrett, ejected from Nottingham, and settled at Sandiacre, from where he ministered in Nottingham and Derbyshire, see A.G. Matthews [editor]: *Calamy Revised*. His grandmother was Mary Crompton.

Brentnall (d. 1762) of Kirk Langley and Margaret Jerome (d. 1765). The Jeromes were minor gentry from Kirk Langley and neighbouring Mackworth. This was Nonconformist territory. Robert Seldon was ejected from Kirk Langley in 1662 and subsequently registered a house for meeting in 1672. The other holder of a licence was Francis Jerram, Margaret's grandfather. Samuel Brentnall held a meeting at Osliston Hall nearby in the 1720s.<sup>22</sup> William Brentnall's name on the 1782 licence does provide one link between old Dissent and new Evangelical Revival, in the way that Hutton suggests, and quite apart from that provided by Thomas Wilson.

Exactly how Thomas Wilson became involved in the affairs of the Independent congregation in Derby may not be known. His commitment deepened when he bought land on Brookside in 1783 and began to build a chapel. The congregation which gathered as a result of the preaching of Jones and Griffiths was a disparate one. In 1782 the volatile minister Thomas Bryson, who had just left the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, took over from James Edwards. When the new chapel was completed in June 1784 the congregation split.<sup>23</sup> Bryson led a small rump in the barn for a few months longer, although most of the congregation moved to Brookside and Wilson's chapel. Jonathan Scott preached at its opening, together with George Burder and Matthew Wilks. Thomas Pentycross was supplied by Wilson for a few weeks but it was not until 1787 that Wilson found a more permanent minister. This was John Smith who, following a trial period in 1786, came from the Mile End Academy in May 1787 and stayed until 1792. He was ordained on 11 October 1787 by James Boden of Hanley, Bullock of Kibworth, Thomas Jones, then at Ashbourne, Dr. Addington, tutor at Mile End, Jonathan Scott of Matlock, who gave the ordination prayer, Calvert of Chesterfield, Plumbe of Nottingham, who preached and James Griffiths of Melbourne.<sup>24</sup> Among the early church members was the young Thomas Ratcliffe Gawthorne. He recollected meeting there with other young men for prayer and mutual improvement. They began preaching in surrounding villages, including Belper. Thomas Wilson supported this development and sent Rice Jones to Belper as minister for a year in 1789, after which he resigned. Thomas Gawthorne was then invited to be a probationer minister there and began on 25 December 1790 but

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22. Osliston is sometimes confused with Osmaston, which is nearer to Ashbourne, or even Osmaston by Derby. Osliston is in the parish of Sutton on the Hill. The Evans list gives Sam Brentnall at "Osleston Hall near Derby". After being unjustly found guilty of coining and subsequently pardoned Brentnall spent many years at Duffield, living in the household of Henry Cope and his successors.

23. *Congregational Magazine* 1823, p. 277.

24. Congregational Library HD 7/12, letter of John Smith to James Gawthorne, November 1819.

he was not ordained until 1794. He also made part of his living from trade for several years after that.<sup>25</sup>

In 1793 Thomas Wilson's life was drawing to a close. Consulted by the Brookside congregation in September about the future of the ministry he wrote:

The mode to be adopted for this end as well as every other Measure that may be thought proper I leave entire to you and your friends; and hope that the Lord will direct you and crown all your measures with his blessing.<sup>26</sup>

It was still his hope that a partnership with the Connexion could be sustained. Affairs there were in flux, following the death of the Countess of Huntingdon and succession of Lady Ann Erskine as its leader. At about this time the Derby church prepared an agreement with the Connexion.

The following are the Rules agreed by the Connection under the Patronage of the Honble Lady Ann Erskine, the members of the Church of Christ and Subscribers, meeting in Religious Worship at the Chapel erected at Derby by Thomas Wilson, of London, Esqr.

1. The place shall be supplied by the Connection.
2. Should the friends make choice of a Student the Connection shall be solicited to permit him to stop as long as he and the Friends can agree; yet he is to be considered in the Connection; and at liberty to itinerate three months in the year.
3. The Minister's salary is fixed at £70 for the first year.
4. A Committee of Nine serious persons to be appointed as Managers of the Temporal Concerns of the Place.

25. Obituary for T.R. Gawthorne: *The Christian Witness*, 1848, pp. 210f.

Branch churches to Belper were eventually formed at Heage, Fritchley and Green Bank. Late in his ministry assistants were appointed. There was a breach in the church shortly before his death, which did not directly involve him. He was corpulent and often had trouble with his legs, needing to sit in the pulpit at one time. An unhealed leg wound was the immediate cause of his death on Thursday 21 October 1847. He was buried on the following Saturday with an address by J. Corbin of Derby. James Gawthorne of Derby, a namesake rather than a relative, preached on Sunday a week after. Thomas Gawthorne was a man of great simplicity and gentleness, Evangelical but no scholar. He moved from hyper-Calvinism to a more liberal view. Gawthorne of Derby said in 1840, at Thomas Gawthorne's jubilee, that he met a man who had left attending Gawthorne's ministry because he was always playing upon one string, "Christ, Christ and nothing else". "Some men's condemnation is the highest praise".

The obituary appears to have been written by R. Wolstenholme, minister at Belper, in February 1848.

26. Rook *op. cit.*, p.14.

5. The Committee shall engage to see that the Minister shall be paid his Salary for the first year.
6. Out of the Committee, two shall be chosen to act as Secretaries; the others to attend to the Tables and Subscriptions.
7. The Books to be Settled Quarterly and lay open a Suitable Time for the inspection of those who subscribe.
8. The Connection shall not interfere with the internal concerns of the Church, but leave its mode of Government to their own choice.
9. All letters of business addressed to Lady Ann Erskine, concerning the Removal or Exchange of a Minister shall be signed by the Committee at large, or the Secretary by their order.<sup>27</sup>

These rules illustrate the difficulty of reconciling an Independent church order with a Connexional one. It is perhaps not surprising that at the end of 1796 the church decided to end this arrangement.<sup>28</sup>

What sort of people belonged to this church? The earliest baptismal register for the 1780s and 1790s records the occupations of fathers of children. There were three joiners, namely, Thomas Ward, John Goodwin, also a carpenter, and Francis Somers, also a cabinet maker. They were matched by three jewellers, Thomas Stone, William Atkins and Thomas Fisher. The two tailors were Henry Lovegrove and George Cay, already noted in Cross Lanes, and the two shoemakers, George Blore and Joseph Holmes. There was a stockinger – Samuel Campean, a ropemaker – Jonathan Mitchell, and a schoolmaster – William Brierly.<sup>29</sup> This looks like a collection of solid tradespeople, with sufficient independence to run a chapel, given that the land and building were already supplied by their benefactor, Thomas Wilson. The chapel also drew in those aspiring to the higher levels of middle-class life. Elizabeth Mansfield was born in Derby on 3 November 1772, and died on 30 May 1847 at Spring Hill, Birmingham. Writing of her life immediately following the death of her father,<sup>30</sup> she reports: “In the Spring of 1795 I went to reside in Leicestershire where I heard the Methodists and General Baptists, whose preaching frequently caused great distress, and my mind never had much peace until a friend lent me Mr. Mason’s ‘Christian Communicant’. My views now became clearer and stronger and on my return to Derby I was admitted a member of the church militant, to be prepared for the church triumphant.”<sup>31</sup> The

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27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

29. The register to 1836 was deposited in the Public Record Office. It is available on microfilm at the Derbyshire Record Office. The entries were copied into a new baptismal register in 1836 but the fathers’ occupations were not included.

30. William Mansfield of Derby, carrier, aged seventy-six, died 26 March 1795 and was buried 30 March at Derby St Werburgh.

31. *Memorials of the Founders of Spring Hill College: George Storer Mansfield, Charles Glover, Mrs Sarah Glover, Miss Elizabeth Mansfield, with a foreward by John Angell James*: nd. “The Methodists” were undoubtedly Calvinistic, successors of Jones and Griffiths and colleagues of John Smith.

church to which she and her sister Sarah were admitted was the Brookside Meeting. In the spirit of Griffiths and Jones the two sisters went to Tutbury to minister to the mill workers. It was there that Sarah met Charles Glover, whom she married, and the story of Spring Hill College, and subsequently Mansfield College, begins.

When John Smith left Derby in 1792, most sources following the *Congregational Magazine* of 1823, say that he went to Melbourne. The difficulty with this is that Melbourne was where James Griffiths and Thomas Jones had preached.<sup>32</sup> Griffiths had a chapel in The Connary, perhaps a replacement for the building on which he had surrendered the lease in 1780.<sup>33</sup> It would seem that there were competing Evangelical interests. Why should Smith trespass on the territory of one of those who had ordained him? However, Smith himself, in a letter to James Gawthorne in 1819, says that when he resigned from Derby he went to Barrow, with Thomas Wilson's support, to preach outdoors there and in Repton, Melbourne and other places round about.<sup>34</sup> Griffiths moved away soon after but in 1794 Jeremiah Garrett began preaching here and in the surrounding countryside for the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. Rather than thinking in terms of settled congregations in buildings we need to visualise a team of missionary preachers, to which Smith and Garrett belonged. At Weston on Trent, says Garrett, the parson "endeavoured to set on some wicked men to kick footballs about while I am preaching."<sup>35</sup> He tried to promote a chapel at Market Bosworth and preached at Coleorton and to the colliers at Swannington.<sup>36</sup> Garrett's activities do not seem to have been turned into institutional growth, whereas Smith helped establish a new Independent Meeting in Melbourne in the old Presbyterian building. This is a very interesting tactic. In 1790 Thomas Wilson had secured the lease on the old neglected Presbyterian chapel at Alvaston, south of Derby, and linked it to Smith's ministry in the town.<sup>37</sup>

How far Thomas Wilson the elder was a product of old Derbyshire Nonconformity may be problematic. His tactic of working with old Presbyterian meetings was to be followed by his son, Thomas Wilson the younger, (1764-1843): Far from the Derbyshire link being weakened by the father's death it persisted and, in terms of the available evidence, was strengthened by the son. The best evidence of this we owe not to Thomas Ratcliffe Gawthorne but to James

32. *Congregational Magazine* 1823, p. 670.

33. See note 11.

34. Congregational Library HD 7/12. John Smith to James Gawthorne November 1819. See also: *Wilson Memoir*.

35. Letter of Jeremiah Garrett to Lady Ann Erskine 17 May 1794, Cheshunt Archives F1/999.

36. Letter of Jeremiah Garrett to Lady Ann Erskine 12 Nov 1794. Cheshunt Archives F1/2331.

37. *Congregational Magazine* 1824, p. 611.

Gawthorne, sent to Derby in 1800 from Hoxton Academy.<sup>38</sup> James Gawthorne was born at Hardingstone, Northampton, on 10 February, 1775 and claimed that his father was a deacon in Doddridge's church there. He was orphaned at seven and sent to the Orphan Working School, City Road, London. He reckoned his conversion from his experience of smallpox as a child.<sup>39</sup> After coming to Derby he remained in correspondence with the younger Thomas Wilson, not just in formal church matters, but also personally and as a researcher for the history of Nonconformity in the county. Perhaps his most interesting letter is when he confesses to Joshua Wilson, the younger Thomas's son, that he missed the opportunity of acquiring the library of Ebenezer Latham, being out of town when the sale took place following the death of Latham's last surviving daughter.<sup>40</sup> Ebenezer Latham, minister at Friar Gate Chapel, Derby, had also run the academy at Findern, where Samuel Brentnall and others had been educated. For all we know, Thomas Wilson may have attended it. Whatever the truth of that, the aspiration to link present Independency with old Presbyterian Nonconformity is a Wilsonian motif, finding its ultimate fulfilment in Joshua Wilson's Congregational Library.

James Gawthorne evidently shared that passion. A man who made sure his obituarists knew of his connection with Doddridge and called himself a "Calvinist" was conscious of tradition.<sup>41</sup> At his ministerial jubilee in Derby in 1850, for he spent his whole ministerial life in the one place, James Gawthorne revealed something of this sense of history in his response to the tributes paid to him. His speech began with a reference to the pagan ancient Britons and their druidical circle at Arbor Low in Derbyshire. Moving through the Christian witness of St. Alban he then turned to Scandinavian idolatry, again represented by a Derbyshire monument, the Odin mine. His next reference is to the diary of Edward VI and the six chaplains in ordinary appointed two for Wales, two in Lancashire and two in Derbyshire. The Derbyshire Protestant martyrs are mentioned and the early Puritans, whom he equated with evangelical religion. The Ejection of 1662, the formation of the Presbyterian chapel and its lapse into Arianism brought him to the preaching of Jones and Griffiths in Melbourne in 1775 and Derby from 1778. He held in his hand as he spoke the set of church rules of 1781, which he said were endorsed in 1782. He recalled that none of the members of the church at the time of his coming were then living in Derby. "Mrs. Glover of Birmingham,

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38. On 10 June 1801 Elizabeth Mansfield wrote: "Mr. Gawthorne, our pastor, was this day set apart to that office." Source as in note 24. Roby of Manchester presided, Jonathan Scott prayed, and Alliott of Nottingham preached. *Evangelical Magazine* 1801, vol. ix, p. 293.

39. Obituary in *Congregational Year Book* 1858 and letter of application to Thomas Wilson 11 January 1797, Hoxton Academy letter book: applications, New College papers at Dr. Williams's Library, 418/16.

40. Congregational Library Hd 7/13 James Gawthorne to Joshua Wilson 24 April 1821.

41. For Gawthorne's self-description see *History and Gazetteer of Derbyshire*: ed. S. Glover, 1828.

and her old and excellent servant, Alice Baxter, and Mr. Smale, now of Nottingham, are the only survivors – all the rest have passed into the eternal world.<sup>42</sup> Gawthorne showed a proper sentimentality in making this address, in his references to people and faith. It is impossible to read it without recognising a man familiar with the Wilsonian view of Nonconformity, but also someone who might have accompanied the Wilsons on visits to their relatives, the Batemans of Middleton by Youlgreave, and even been present when William Bateman opened up a tumulus in his search for druidical ancestors.<sup>43</sup>

The James Gawthorne of 1800 was not the senior minister of 1850, but that historical interest evident in 1850 and 1821 must have had its beginnings in the young preacher. He was part of the Wilson strategy in Derbyshire which has already been outlined, that of reviving old Dissent. Thomas Jones came from Ashbourne to the ordination of John Smith in 1787. He was in Ashbourne at the expense of Thomas Wilson the younger at some time in the 1790s, preaching in the old Presbyterian meeting house, for which Wilson had secured the key.<sup>44</sup> The subsequent history of the Ashbourne congregation lay in Zion Chapel, built by Thomas Cooper, an Ashbourne man made good in London as a wine-merchant, and a member in the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. Cooper tried to keep the chapel out of Independent hands by a trust deed which vested the property in the trustees of Cheshunt College.<sup>45</sup> The early history of the congregation reflects the tension that created. The Independents believed Cooper had acted arbitrarily. He gave away the meeting house in 1801, "but it does not appear that he had any right to do so" says a sour note in Wilson's papers.<sup>46</sup> Yet there was still a collegiality of interests. Jonathan Scott preached at the opening of the Ashbourne chapel at the request of Lady Ann Erskine on 21 May 1801 but with an interest in James Gawthorne's ordination in Derby three weeks later.<sup>47</sup> Roby was present on both occasions.<sup>48</sup>

42. *Jubilee services connected with the presentation of the testimonial to the Rev. James Gawthorne of Derby, September 19, 1850*: Derby: W & W Pike, p. 21f.

43. William Bateman and his son Thomas were significant archaeologists; see *Victoria County History of Derbyshire*, vol. 1, p. 161. William Bateman was married to one of the daughters of Stephen Wilson, brother to Thomas Wilson, the elder. William Bateman's father, also Thomas, was married to the sister of Elizabeth Clegg, and therefore brother-in-law to Thomas Wilson, the elder.

44. Congregational Library 7/1. See also: *Wilson Memoir*.

45. The early documents of the church are published in *Sion Chapel, Ashbourne*, ed. Edwin Welch, Derbyshire Records Society XXV, 1998.

46. Congregational Library 7/1.

47. Congregational Library Hd 7/1 has a copy of a letter of Scott 21 May 1801, from the "Raffles collection of autographs".

48. See above letter and *Evangelical Magazine* 1801, vol. ix, p. 293.

Ashbourne Presbyterian Meeting had been linked with that in Wirksworth. Once again Wilson friends in Derbyshire acted to take over the old chapel. In 1802, when the old Wirksworth meeting-house was repaired, a new trust was established in readiness for its re-opening in 1803 for the use of a congregation of Independents. John Green, William Statham and Joseph Spencer seem to have represented the old trustees, while the new trustees were headed by the Revd. Richard Alliott of Nottingham. The Stathams were an old Dissenting family, active in Wirksworth and Belper in the new Independency.<sup>49</sup> Their relatives, the Needhams, were another old Derbyshire Nonconformist family, self-consciously so.<sup>50</sup> The other new chapel trustees were the Revd. Thomas Ratcliffe Gawthorne, of Belper, Richard Sutton Barrow, William Pritchard, John Clough, John Newman, William Wilson, Jonathan Dunn and Thomas Simpson. Gawthorne we have already met. William Wilson is a common enough name but, bearing in mind that Thomas Wilson's Derby cousin John Wilson was a trustee of the Brookside Chapel it seems perfectly possible that he recruited one of his London cousins for Wirksworth. His long-dead uncle Stephen's children had been brought up with him. The eldest cousin, John Wilson (d.1826) was principal manager of the Tabernacle, London, Whitefield's old church. The next youngest cousin, Stephen (d. 1813) had William Bateman of Middleton by Youlgreave as a son-in-law, often visited by Thomas Wilson.<sup>51</sup> Then there was cousin William (d.1821) who settled at Worton in Oxfordshire and whose daughter Ann married Daniel Wilson in 1803, only to die in 1827 while he was Bishop of Calcutta. Given the failure of Thomas Wilson to control the Ashbourne situation it seems possible that he prevailed upon a cousin to look after the family interest in Wirksworth.<sup>52</sup>

The formal re-opening of the chapel took place on 25 September 1803; it is reported that 400 people attended. Alliott was one of the preachers. The other was Dr. Williams of Rotherham Academy, who took as his text "they that are whole have no need of a physician." (Mark ch2 v17). Further support is given to the proposition that this was a conscious revival of an old chapel by the will of Henry Calton of Bishops Court, Chancery Lane, London, dated 8 December 1805. He

49. For instance a Statham was active in the Dooley Trust of 1749, of which a principal benefactor was the Independent minister of Wirksworth, and a century later, in 1822, the Stathams were providing a Congregational chapel at Green Bank, "built by William Statham and Abraham Harrison for Turnditch and Shottle", J. Robson: *One Hundred years 1847-1947 Derby District Congregational Lay Preachers Association: 1947*.

50. See J.C.G. Binfield: "There was a festival in Rome", the shaping of a Congregational temper: *JURCHS* vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 188-190. I am grateful to Professor Binfield for drawing my attention to this connection.

51. As we have seen, Thomas Wilson was also Bateman's brother-in-law. On a visit in 1822 he preached to the villagers in Middleton before the chapel there was built. *Wilson Memoir*, p. 340.

52. I am indebted to John Creasey for genealogical details of the Wilson family beyond those in Joshua Wilson's biography of his father.

instructed his trustees, "my old friends and acquaintances, Gillingham Eyre and Richard Whitehouse," to invest a sufficient sum from his estate to produce £20 p.a. for the trustees of the "Old Dissenting Meeting House at Wirksworth".<sup>53</sup> The trustees were to apply this income for "the uses and purposes of the Church of God who shall meet for Divine Worship there and toward the better support and maintenance of the preaching of the Gospel amongst them". From the other legacies he made in the Wirksworth area it seems probable that Calton was the son of Henry Calton and Elizabeth Coats, who married in St. Mary's parish church, Wirksworth on 13 July 1723. Neither Calton, nor his executors, seem to have had any belief that the re-founded church of 1802 and its trustees were anything other than a continuation of the old Dissenting congregation. Students of Rotherham Academy undertook the pulpit supply until 24 June 1807, when James Cooper, from the college, became minister for a year. Isaac Lord and Joseph Holmes supplied the church for another five years, before our old friend John Smith, of Derby and Melbourne, became minister from 1813 to 1821.

So far we have seen Wilson influence brought to bear in Melbourne, Alvaston, Derby, Barrow, Belper, Ashbourne and Wirksworth. Where else did the family seek to exercise its patronage for the good of revived Independency? We are largely dependent on the information which James Gawthorne and others collected for Joshua Wilson, some of which is to be found in the Congregational Library, along with Wilson correspondence in the New College Library.<sup>54</sup> The result is that we have rather more retrospective material, from 1820 onwards, than contemporary accounts. It would be easy to assume that Wilson influence diminished after about 1804. However, the later correspondence assumes a continuing Wilson interest, especially in Derby, throughout. To the list of churches directly involved with the younger Thomas Wilson we should add Matlock Bath, Bakewell, Middleton by Wirksworth, Bolsover, and Buxton. Between Matlock Bath and Cromford, a chapel had been built in 1777 for the convenience of the workers in Arkwright's new cotton mills. One of Arkwright's partners, a Mr. Need, of Nottingham, built a chapel and a house for the residence of one of his family. The chapel was opened by the Revd. Mr. Lester, a clergyman of the Church of England, but both Anglican and Independent services seem to have been held there until Need's death, when the chapel was shut. Lady Glenorchy, accidentally (or providentially) detained in Matlock Bath when travelling, found out about the chapel and, early in 1785, bought the chapel and house from Need's executors. She herself died soon afterwards and left the premises to her friend Jonathan Scott, of Drayton, in Shropshire. Scott first persuaded Joseph Whitehead to be the minister but in August 1794 Scott himself came to live in the house

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53. The records of Wirksworth United Reformed Church are in the Derbyshire Record Office but not yet listed.

54. Congregational Library Hd 7 and New College manuscripts, both at Dr. Williams's Library.

connected with the chapel, and continued as minister until he died in May 1807. His widow persuaded John Wilson who had succeeded Scott at Drayton, to accept the pastorate at Matlock Bath in October 1807.<sup>55</sup> The younger Thomas Wilson was involved with Scott at Derby and Ashbourne and was much later involved with finding a replacement for John Wilson and making improvements to the chapel.<sup>56</sup> Matlock Bath lay conveniently on the way to Thomas Wilson's relatives, the Batemans, at Middleton by Youlgreave, and his friends the Mellands at Darley Dale. That the Wilsons were trying to bring an enlivened Evangelicalism to Derbyshire Dissent is neatly illustrated in a letter of Henry Winzar from Matlock Bath in 1829. He comments on the difficulty of finding a successor to John Wilson because of "the old people who would have nothing but doctrinal and experimental preaching and greatly object to a lively and earnest exhibition of the invitations of the Gospel."<sup>57</sup>

The Independent cause at Bakewell also owed something to the Wilsons. A Miss Noton, of Birchills near Bakewell, heard the Independent preachers in Derby in 1788 and wished to start a similar meeting. A building in Fly Hill was licensed for Independent worship in 1791. This may be the same place referred to in Thomas Wilson's papers as a barn made into a chapel in 1793 or 94.<sup>58</sup> The older Thomas Wilson contributed money in 1791-2.<sup>59</sup> Whether, as the presence of a register suggests, this was a continuation of an old Presbyterian congregation is not clear.<sup>60</sup> A new Independent chapel was opened here by Scott, with Boden, of Sheffield, on 15 July, 1804.<sup>61</sup> Wilson may also have had a hand in the chapel opened at Middleton by Wirksworth. The Wilson papers have a note that the "chapel was built here by Captain Scott of Matlock Bath."<sup>62</sup> The return for the 1851 census says that the chapel was built in 1787, which would coincide with the preaching in Derby and Scott's interest in Matlock Bath. At Bolsover there was an old Presbyterian meeting house, where there "had not been a regular service for 30 years" Joshua Wilson was told.<sup>63</sup> In July 1813, it was re-opened as an Independent chapel by a familiar team, Boden of Sheffield and James Gawthorne of Derby. This does seem to be part of a Wilson-inspired strategy, even if the younger Thomas Wilson was not directly involved.<sup>64</sup> The chapel was then taken under the wing of the Masbro Academy as a central station for an Itinerant. "Modern

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55. CM1823, p. 669.

56. New College mss 230/40f.

57. New College ms 334/4 Henry Winzar to Thomas Wilson 26 April 1829.

58. Congregational Library 7d/1.

59. *Wilson Memoir*.

60. Bakewell Register from 1760-1836 in PRO.

61. *Congregational Magazine* 1823, p. 108 and 1824, p. 711. Wilson may have supplied ministers – see Buxton, note. 55.

62. Congregational Library: Gb7/232.

63. Congregational Library: Hd 7/1.

64. For Bolsover see: *Congregational Magazine* 1823, p. 261, 1824, p. 611, 1824, p. 711.

Congregational nonconformity" as Joshua Wilson knew it was clearly coming to Derbyshire. However, his grandfather, and even his father, might not have stated the aim in such terms. Their first concern would have been Gospel ministry, which they believed had been lost from the meeting houses by the Arian heresies of the Presbyterians.

Buxton was an old endowed Presbyterian cause which continued into the nineteenth century. A different strategy applied here. In 1807 some Manchester Independents built a chapel at Buxton by subscription. The land was bought by Arthur Clegg, Thomas Wilson's father-in-law. The chapel was opened on 18 July 1810, by Bradley, of Manchester, Boden, of Sheffield and others. For a few months in 1811 a Mr. Moore, a young man from Hoxton Academy, occupied its pulpit and after his return to London he was replaced by a Mr. Wills, also from Hoxton, until he accepted an invitation to Bakewell.<sup>65</sup> The finger prints of the Wilsons are all over these arrangements. Thomas Wilson was at Buxton in July 1812 and commented on the weakness of the cause there. He almost certainly arranged for Wills to go to Bakewell at that time, for the previous minister had just died and Wilson hoped "his removal will be for good".<sup>66</sup>

The last major enterprise of the Wilson family in Derbyshire was the creation of the London Road chapel in Derby. James Gawthorne, the honoured patriarch of 1850, whose funeral in 1857 was a major Derby event, was the ageing block to progress in the 1830s. R. Bayley, preaching for the Irish Evangelical Society, wrote to Thomas Wilson about his visit to Derby in March 1830. There were only thirty people at the evening service and the membership of 500 did not represent a good proportion of the total population of 25,000 people. Gawthorne's "visibly declining age made him inactive." The Methodists were erecting another chapel. What should the Independents do? Gawthorne, "feeling the more than ordinary advance of age and infirmities upon him, is rather inclined as I have several times heard, to contemplate either the Introduction of another Interest, or the assistance of a young man." The appeal was to Wilson to intervene, since the people did not feel able to do so.<sup>67</sup> One wonders who had been bending Bayley's ear, for a visiting preacher does not normally assemble this much information or act upon it unprompted. Perhaps the answer is to be found the next year when three Brookside deacons wrote to Wilson, proposing that another Independent chapel be built but pointing out that the pew rents at Brookside were not enough to pay Gawthorne, let alone another minister. The three deacons were Mr. Brentnall, Mr. Pike and Mr. T. Boden.<sup>68</sup> Charles Brentnall was a local veterinary surgeon. His father, Charles, had aspired to be no more than a farrier, operating originally out of the stables of his father William's inn, the Talbot.<sup>69</sup> We are back with the barn in

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65. *Ibid.* 1823, p. 163.

66. *Wilson Memoir* p. 330, quoting a letter of 18 July 1812, written at Buxton.

67. New College ms 333/21 R Bayley to Thomas Wilson, 5 March 1830 from Derby.

68. New College ms 230/22 Letter to Thomas Wilson, 15 August 1831 from Derby.

69. Charles Brentnall's wife was Ann Duke, daughter of William Duke, (1762-1803). William Duke came from Winchester, but his mother was Martha Lucas of Portsmouth. The Lucas family were Presbyterians.

Cross Lanes and the inn which Thomas Gawthorne and his grandfather passed on their way from All Saints to Derby market place. Charles Brentnall began to have his children baptised at Brookside from 1821 onwards.<sup>70</sup> Sometimes these baptisms coincided with those of the children of his friend Walter Pike, printer and bookseller. Walker Pike was married to Elizabeth Ratcliffe Gawthorne, daughter of Thomas Gawthorne who from 1817 would come to Derby to baptise his grandchildren at Brookside. It was Brentnall's son, a third Charles, who headed the committee to replace Wilson's and James Gawthorne's old meeting house in 1858, as soon as the old minister had died.<sup>71</sup> Without being disloyal to Brookside these impatient entrepreneurs encouraged Wilson to press ahead with the handsome new classical chapel on the London Road, supported later by James Corbin, Gawthorne's assistant from 1837, and Robert Forman.<sup>72</sup> One of the contributors to the fund was Sarah Glover in Birmingham.<sup>73</sup> Thomas Wilson made a generous contribution but did not live to see the new chapel opened in 1844, a chapel in the modern style with a minister to match – James Baldwin Brown. Brown's father was a friend of Thomas Wilson. Brown trained at Wilson's Highbury College and this was his first charge. He was related to the Raffleses, the Leifchilds and, ultimately, the Wilsons. He shared the Wilsons' reverence for history and he enthusiastically walked the Derbyshire Dales which lay at the Batemans' doorstep. Derby was never big enough to contain him, but it was the proper place for a gifted Wilson protégé to begin.<sup>74</sup>

In September 1850 there were lavish celebrations of James Gawthorne's Jubilee. He had been minister at Brookside, now Victoria St., for fifty years. John Angell James preached. The ladies decorated the schoolrooms with flowers, wreathing the portraits of Gawthorne and James Corbin. A testimonial, amounting to over 500 guineas had been collected and placed at Gawthorne's disposal for whatever

70. Brookside chapel register as in note 26.

71. List of subscribers to the new chapel 1858, with Charles Brentnall as Treasurer, Congregational Library Gb7/60.

72. Robert Forman was a Derby hop merchant and maltster, friend of the Brentnalls. Charles Brentnall (1810-1886), eldest son of Charles Brentnall the vet (1785-1834), entered the same business through the Formans, and became related to them when he married Eleanor Shutes, Forman's niece. The Formans were an old Chellaston family. T.G. Horton, a Derby Wesleyan, joined the London Road congregation and married Robert Forman's daughter, Sarah Ellen Forman. He subsequently became a Congregational minister. They were the parents of Robert Forman Horton, Congregational minister, of New College, Oxford and Lyndhurst Road, Hampstead. Another Wesleyan Chellaston cousin, Henry Forman, said of R.F. Horton in 1886 "he has become very popular and is very clever and good." Unpublished diary in possession of Forman family.

73. Stephen Glover: *History and Directory of the Borough of Derby*, Derby: 1843 gives a list of the largest contributors which includes Thomas Wilson, Robert Forman, Thomas Boden and Mrs Glover of Birmingham.

74. For an appraisal of James Baldwin Brown, with comments on his Derby experiences, see J.C.G. Binfield: *So down to prayers* 1977, pp. 192-199.

projects he wished to support. Robert Forman presided over the presentation. A special hymn was sung and J.G. Pike, the Derby Baptist minister, offered prayer. The speaker was Revd. S. McCall. He referred delicately to the success of both Derby churches under Gawthorne's leadership. He touched on Gawthorne's historical interests, including the fact that as a young man he had spoken with those who remembered the arrival of Charles Stuart in Derby in 1745. He claimed Gawthorne's support for the old Independent principle of toleration, quoting Philip Nye: "By God's command the magistrate is discharged to put the least discourtesy on any man – Turk, Jew, Papist, Socinian, or whatever – for his religion". This prepared the way for him to say how remarkable it was that Thomas Pentycross, "a clergyman of the Established Church", should have been an early preacher at Brookside. It also brought him to Thomas Wilson. "We may be told, perhaps, this evening, how recently this edifice had been erected by the munificence of a Wilson, (and might I utter such a prayer I would say, "God send us twenty Wilsons to renew the face of our country!")."<sup>75</sup> One curious coda to this story remains. The youngest daughter of Charles Brentnall, the vet, Fanny, baptised by James Gawthorne at Brookside in 1833 was married by him in 1854 to George Orchard, a farmer's son from Repton. They named their eldest son Charles (1857-1906), after Fanny's father. Charles Orchard eventually came to live in Derby and become a member of what was by now Victoria St. Congregational Church, opened in 1861 on the site of the old chapel. When Charles Orchard came to marry in that place his bride was no other than Ada Wilson (1862-1926), great granddaughter of John Wilson, farmer of Stenson, nephew of Thomas Wilson the elder and his nominated trustee of Brookside Chapel. Charles Orchard and Ada Wilson were my great grandparents.<sup>76</sup>

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75. *Jubilee Services connected with the Presentation of a Testimonial to the Rev. James Gawthorne of Derby*: Derby: 1850. This was published by W & W Pike, reproducing not only the sermon and speeches but also the reports from their *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*. This was the firm of Walter Pike, son-in-law of Thomas Gawthorne, member of the church and Charles Brentnall's friend.

76. John Wilson of Stenson, nephew of Thomas Wilson the elder, was a trustee of Brookside chapel and still alive in 1835 when James Gawthorne asked Thomas Wilson the younger to replace him. Congregational Library Gb 7/57. The younger of John's two sons, William Wilson (b. 1791), was in business as a brazier in Derby and had three sons, John (b. 1821) a brush manufacturer, Samuel (b. 1825) a plumber, and James (b. 1827) a brush maker. James died in 1855 unmarried. John had two daughters; Sarah (born circa 1859), who married Ernest Binge and whose grandson, Ronald Binge, was a composer, particularly associated with light music; and Ada (b. 1862), who married Charles Orchard and, after his death, Arthur Harfield. Charles Orchard and Ada had a single son, also Charles (1887-1949), whose eldest son, Ronald (1909-1979) was my father. Fanny Brentnall's older brother, Charles Brentnall the maltster (1810-1886), kept up the Wilson tradition, not only making handsome contributions to the new Victoria St church of 1861, but also building a village chapel at Normanton by Derby, where he lived in later years, only a couple of miles from Stenson.

(I would like to express my thanks to the staffs of Dr. Williams's Library, Westminster College, Cambridge, Derby Local Studies Library and the Derbyshire Record Office and to the Revd. Graham Maskery of Central URC Derby for their help in tracing the sources for this article. My especial thanks are due to Dr. Geoffrey Nuttall and Professor Clyde Binfield for suggesting lines of enquiry and encouraging me to persist.)

STEPHEN ORCHARD

### SEX, LIES, AND VICTORIANS: THE CASE OF NEWMAN HALL'S DIVORCE

Christopher Newman Hall (1816-1902) was one of the most celebrated Nonconformist divines of the Victorian age, admired across the denominations. He was perhaps best known in his own lifetime as the author of the gospel tract, *Come to Jesus*. He published it in 1848, and by 1898 he could report that four million copies had been printed, and it had been translated into perhaps as many as forty languages.<sup>1</sup> Also, Hall, using his own home, arranged for influential Nonconformists to meet the leader of the Liberal party and, in our more secular age, when he is still remembered by scholars it is usually for his invitation to come to Gladstone rather than to Christ.

Moreover, in his own day, Hall would have been well known – once again, in circles well beyond the boundaries of his own Congregationalism – from the gossip and publicity surrounding the breakdown and dissolution of his first marriage. These events also have largely slipped out of the official historical record. Hall himself managed to write an entire autobiography – a work of close to four hundred pages – without ever mentioning his first wife or marriage, let alone his divorce. Of course, when his autobiography was published those events were in living memory and were therefore well known, but this reticent retrospective has also served as the principal source for Hall's life for subsequent generations. Indeed, one wonders if he wrote it precisely in order to make a biography unnecessary as any biographer – however sympathetic and discreet – could hardly have ignored a marriage lasting over twenty years altogether. The *Dictionary of National Biography* tersely gives the bare facts in a few sentences – scarcely more than the dates of the marriage, the separation and the series of legal events culminating in the decree nisi being made absolute.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the trial is well worth revisiting, as it provides a rare glimpse into the intimate lives of

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1. Newman Hall, *Newman Hall: An Autobiography* (London: Cassell and Company), 1898, p. 70.
  2. "Hall, Christopher Newman (1816-1902)", Sir Sidney Lee, ed., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Second Supplement, vol. 1, pp. 186-7.

respectable, middle-class, Victorian Nonconformists. Also, the Newman Hall whose fascination with the law occasioned the extraordinary fact that he pursued and obtained a LL.B. from London University whilst engaging in a prominent full-time ministry, gained the dubious honour of being immortalized in legal history for having established the precedent that someone who had withdrawn a petition for divorce was still at liberty to file again on the basis of the same evidence.<sup>3</sup>

Newman Hall married Charlotte, the daughter of William Gordon, M.D., of Hull, on 14 April 1846, when he himself was a Congregational minister in Hull. She was eighteen years old at the time of her marriage, and he was thirty. Various statements were made at the trial regarding her having been spoiled as an only child, and her having been a demanding person whose emotional and physical well-being was easily disturbed, but it nevertheless appears that the couple had a reasonably successful marriage for the first fifteen years. As far as outward actions are concerned, the beginning of the end came in 1863, when Charlotte Hall informed her husband that she could no longer bring herself to have sexual intercourse with him. Mrs. Hall's personal habits also began to change in other ways: she was less inclined to attend public worship and she took up hunting and smoking. The divorce suit which Newman Hall filed in 1873 and then dropped only to file again in 1879 (and succeed) was based on the charge that Charlotte Hall had committed adultery with Frank Waters Richardson, a livery-stable keeper. He was in his early twenties when this affair was said to have begun; she was forty. Richardson's parents ran a hotel in Tring where Mrs. Hall stayed when she went hunting, and when he moved to London in 1868 she began to go riding with him. This relationship became increasingly intense. She had her horse moved from stables near her home to Richardson's stables two miles away, and would change into her riding clothes in his bedroom there. She had Richardson join her on holiday, and even arranged for him to live in her and her husband's home for several weeks. She would stay up smoking with him in a back kitchen until two or three o'clock in the morning with – according to the servants – the door locked. When Newman Hall insisted that she break off his relationship she left her husband and went to Brighton, arranged for Richardson to meet her there, and he stayed in the same hotel as her. From her formal separation from her husband in 1870 until the time of the trial in 1879 Mrs. Hall lived with Richardson's sister and Richardson lived with Mrs. Hall's cousin and they saw each other on a daily basis. Mrs. Hall did not dispute any of the facts presented so far at the trial, save that the door was locked when she was alone with Richardson – and that she was a smoker.

In other words, the crucial testimony was considerably more salacious. A parlour maid – an obligatory character in all such stories – claimed that while Richardson was living in the Halls' home she had seen "Mrs. Hall, when only partially dressed, go into Mr. Richardson's bedroom before breakfast".<sup>4</sup> Mrs.

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3. G.F.L. Bridgman, ed., *The All English Law Reports Reprinted, Revised and Annotated: 1874-1880*, (London: Butterworth & Co.), 1964, pp. 642-3.

4. *The Times*, 31 July 1879, p. 4.

Anne Francis had Mrs. Hall and Richardson as lodgers in separate rooms in her house in Brighton in October 1869. Her testimony was summarized as follows:

They retired to their rooms at a late hour, and one night [the] witness and her husband were awoke several times by noises in the dining room, as if people were tumbling about. The witness went up to the room, and finding the door fastened, knocked loudly. Richardson answered the knock, and when the door was opened the witness observed that Mrs. Hall was lounging in the easy chair before the fire.<sup>5</sup>

The Judge at the trial seemed to find the evidence of the staff at a hotel in The Strand particularly conclusive. Mrs. Jane Crispin Firth, the proprietress, made the most of her fifteen minutes of fame. She particularly excelled at describing the man who told her he was Mrs. Hall's husband:

He had a pepper-and-salt suit. I thought at first it looked rather seedy. I thought he had a High Church curate's face. (Laughter.) I am sure he was clean shaven. He was not a stout man; more inclined to be slight than stout. I should think he was under 30 – about 27 years of age. ... As he went up to the second floor I could see he was not a clergyman from the manner in which his clothes were made. I was struck with his shaven and rather pleasing face. He looked like a man who had seen better days. His trousers were so tight about the knees that I was struck with it and saw directly he was not a clergyman. (Laughter.)<sup>6</sup>

Much more testimony was given in support of Newman Hall's suit, but these few examples should suffice.

Before the crisis in their relationship regarding Richardson, Mrs. Hall had written in a letter to her husband of her "revulsion" at the thought of having sexual intercourse with him. The defence, with a fair amount of ingenuity, presented this as evidence that she was a de-sexualized creature.

He knew his wife's nature, he knew that in her case there was the absence of normal natural inclination, and that what might be temptation and opportunity for others was not temptation and opportunity to her. This was the true explanation of her conduct...<sup>7</sup>

The Judge, however, in his summing up, rejected this line of argument:

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5 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

7. *Ibid.*, 7 August 1879, p. 4.

She has to be judged by those whose experience tells them that a man and woman cannot remain alone together until a late hour at night with locked doors and indulgence in caresses without leading to sexual desire. She has to be judged by ordinary men and not judged by some mystic world of which we have no consciousness and where passion does not exist.<sup>8</sup>

And what of Newman Hall's sexual desires? He was certainly taxed by his wife's cessation of intimacy. Mrs. Hall repeatedly complained during the trial that he used to taunt her continually about this. A letter he wrote in 1867 was read in court in which he confessed that he found regular, morally-sanctioned sexual intercourse "a great help in making a pure mind and a healthy body". He went on bitterly, "You cannot be justified in refusing this, and doing what has driven many husbands into wickedness."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Mrs. Hall, more or less claiming he was so driven, brought a counter-charge of adultery against him. A Miss Mary Wyatt from Shropshire was named as the other party. Interestingly, Newman Hall reported that he had met her in 1863, the same year that his wife's refusal had begun. Mrs. Hall asserted that her husband wrote to Mary Wyatt in a shorthand that others could not read, that he was in the habit of kissing her good morning and good night, that she wore "his portrait next [to] her skin", that they went for walks together, and that he cut short a continental tour in order to come to her when he received word that she was ill. Her legal representatives then dropped this counter-charge, however, so Newman Hall was not afforded an opportunity to re-cast this relationship in another light. For his part, the Judge volunteered in his summing up that meeting the sexual needs of her husband was the "first duty of a wife".<sup>10</sup>

As soon as he had separated from his wife in 1870, Newman Hall sought to escape his troubles through a Cook's tour of the Holy Land. On this trip he spent a great deal of time with Miss Harriet Knipe, the woman who would become his second wife.<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Hall claimed that in 1870, at the same time that a certain advertisement about her appeared in a newspaper, Newman Hall "was enjoying himself, with Harriet Knype [*sic*], the woman he was engaged to."<sup>12</sup> Mr. Willis, Q.C. forced Newman Hall to confess that he wished to remarry and that he and Miss Knipe had more or less come to an understanding:

Have you a person in your eye whom you would desire to marry if you were free?

— I have.

Have you not communicated to her the feelings you entertain towards her?

8. *Ibid.*, 9 August 1879, p. 4.

9. *Ibid.*, 7 August 1879, p. 4.

10. *Ibid.*, 9 August 1879, p. 4.

11. Hall, *Autobiography*, pp. 328-30.

12. *The Times*, 4 August 1879, p. 4.

– Yes.

And do not your friends know of your object and purpose?

–Very few.<sup>13</sup>

According to the defence, Charlotte Hall was de-sexualized; and conversely, Newman Hall was depicted as motivated by his sexual appetite: “at the date of the letter Mr. Hall had an eye only on a Heavenly inheritance; now it was on another and different inheritance. (Laughter.)” And still more bluntly:

Two lines which he (Mr. Willis) remembered from boyhood, and which he never expected to quote in a case like the present, occurred to him, –

“Old folks say there are no pains

Like itch of love in aged veins.”

(Laughter.) But the heyday of life was not yet past with the Rev. Newman Hall.<sup>14</sup>

The stereotype that Victorians were prudes when it came to sexual matters undoubtedly has been overplayed, but it would seem to be a genuine difference between their age and our own that this line of attack was considered so damaging as to necessitate a counter-offensive by his own legal representatives in which Newman Hall was now de-sexualized. The final sentences of the final speech made in support of his suit were as follows:

She who ought to have brought sunshine to the petitioner's house had brought upon it the cloud and shadow of a great sorrow, and had left him to sit alone by the hearth whose ashes were cold and scattered; and now at the close of life, unmoved and uninstitigated by passion, he asked for the companionship which she denied him. In his name and that of justice the learned counsel claimed for him that verdict which would deliver him from a grievous and unreasonable bond.<sup>15</sup>

Apparently a sixty-three year old man was expected to have a content mind and body without the aid of passionate love.

The case of Newman Hall's divorce also presents interesting side-lights on the issues of religion and respectability. Hall's reputation as a popular minister was unavoidably part of the subtext of the case. Hall himself admitted that one of his reasons for withdrawing his earlier suit was that he was in the middle of the fund-raising campaign for that £60,000 Dissenting cathedral, Christ Church, Westminster Bridge Road, and he judged that “under the circumstances, my wiser

13. *Ibid.*, 31 July 1879, p. 4.

14. *Ibid.*, 7 August 1879, p. 4.

15. *Ibid.*, 9 August 1879, p. 4.

course was not to expose my affairs".<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Hall seemed to resent his exalted position, or find it difficult to bear; at the very least it was a source of tension. Undoubtedly it placed tremendous pressures on her such as most wives never experienced. She claimed that her husband had confided to Richardson, "Mrs. Hall is a dangerous woman. I should have been the most popular man in England but for her".<sup>17</sup> A letter from Mrs. Hall to her husband was read during the trial in which she declared, "Your punishment will yet come, and when poverty, illness and unpopularity comes I shall be your best friend".<sup>18</sup> His unpopularity would have been easier to bear than the demands that his popularity placed upon her. The constraints of her husband's profession were felt as such. Mrs. Hall explained that she knew Richardson much better than her husband did because she and Richardson would stay at home together on Sundays whereas "Mr. Hall was away so much preaching the Gospel at his chapel."<sup>19</sup> She reported that her husband had said to her, "I forbid smoking in my house, as it is inconsistent with the position of a minister of the Gospel".<sup>20</sup> Mr. Willis, Q.C., speaking on behalf of his client, Mrs. Hall, said of her:

From an early period of her married life Mrs. Hall was subject to the most dreadful thoughts and fancies. She was never a pastor's wife, and did not, as was the custom in all the Dissenting communities, share with her husband in church labours. A more terrible situation for a man in Mr. Hall's position – a leading minister, a popular preacher, and prominent figure in the religious world – could scarcely be conceived. It would have been better for them if they had parted long before they did, and buried the secret of their relations in their own hearts. Mrs. Hall rode and hunted – a thing unusual with a minister's wife.<sup>21</sup>

Mrs. Hall was alive to issues of respectability. She boasted that after her formal separation from her husband friends from Surrey Chapel still continued to call on her.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, this may have been her Achilles' heel: the fact that she could not bring herself to admit publicly that she was a smoker helped to seal her fate. The Judge noted, in his summing up:

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16. *Ibid.*, 31 July 1879, p. 4.

17. *Ibid.*, 2 August 1879, p. 4.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

21. *Ibid.*, 7 August 1879, p. 4.

22. *Ibid.*, 2 August 1879, p. 4.

Now, with regard to the truthfulness of the lady. Mrs. Hall has said that she has not smoked. It is not of much importance. There are countries where ladies smoke. It is unusual in this country, and I hope it remains so; but while it is unusual it is a matter in which a husband should be obeyed; because it must be remembered that with man and wife the reputation of the one is the reputation of the other. She says that she has never smoked; but is it possible to accept her explanation after passages in her letters of this kind ... 'I have been accustomed to smoke with friends for 14 years' ...<sup>23</sup>

Richardson, on the other hand, the product of a humbler social background, seemed oblivious of middle-class niceties. He cheerfully admitted all kinds of things which Mrs. Hall had denied in her own testimony: that he would drink spirits at her house (she claimed she did not allow drink on the premises), that he was in the habit of putting his arms around her waist and kissing her (she would only admit to a kiss on her birthday), that he was alone with her a great deal (she claimed that she almost always had a lady companion). He seems to have been concerned only about avoiding admitting something actually criminal rather than merely below the standards of polite society. Thus the difference in class and social position between Mrs. Hall and Richardson was another subtext which had a habit of re-emerging during the trial. It was pointed out that he was not a gentleman, that he had only a rudimentary education, that he had been brought up "in no school of strict devotion", that he was much younger than Mrs. Hall. Sir Henry James, Q.C., speaking on behalf of Newman Hall, noted dryly that, given their differences, all Mrs. Hall and Richardson appeared to have in common was "the love of horses".<sup>24</sup> Assuming, as one must, that they really were lovers, one does feel for Charlotte Hall as she carried this burden of notions of respectability – doomed to persevere doggedly year after year with the nuisances of the farce she had constructed; a lover who could only be a day visitor, a live-in chaperone who always had to be near to hand, but not too near. Perhaps the divorce gave her the courage to choose in which world she really wanted to live: afternoon tea with earnest chapel friends or late nights with the smoking set.

Knowing the history of Newman Hall's first marriage sheds a fair amount of light even on his autobiography. Although Charlotte is never mentioned, Newman Hall spends no less than six pages paying tribute to her father, the capstone of which is a sonnet *In memoriam* which he wrote himself.<sup>25</sup> Most of all, there is the heightened emotional tone of the chapter of his marriage with Harriet Knipe, including the frequent references to (unspecified) past trials and sufferings. He reprinted a long and tactfully worded letter of congratulation from the trustees and

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23. *Ibid.*, 9 August 1879, p. 4.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

25. Hall, *Autobiography*, pp. 111-116.

elders of his congregation, Christ Church, on the occasion of his second marriage which referred to "the heavy trouble which had long pressed upon you", and which was unequivocal in its effusive praise for his past and present conduct. Newman Hall was known as "a Dissenters' Bishop", so it was not easy for him to appeal to a higher human authority, but he nevertheless managed to let it be known that his second marriage had the blessing of a Dissenting archbishop: "To Metropolitan Tabernacle ... After a grand sermon from Spurgeon, I introduced her to him. Several times he warmly grasped her hand with benedictions."<sup>26</sup>

TIMOTHY LARSEN

### THOMAS RHONDDA WILLIAMS (1860-1945) AND BRIGHTON (1910-1931)

There are some in Brighthelm Church who still remember "Rhondda" – as he was widely known – with affection, and speak of his ministry there,<sup>1</sup> although they had only been children at the time. In 1947 when one of Williams's predecessors, R.J. Campbell, went to Brighton to unveil a tablet to his memory, he said:

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 331. That was in February 1880. Newman Hall married Harriet Knipe a month later, Easter Monday, at Christ Church. For a quiet wedding there was, by Hall's own account, a large and representative congregation. His old friend, Henry Allon, of Union Chapel, Islington, officiated. A few days earlier, Hall had written to him: "I am hoping Spurgeon, if well enough, may come and close with Benediction". [A. Peel, ed., *Letters to a Victorian Editor*, London 1929, p. 320]. Harriet (Knipe) Hall came from an Evangelical Anglican family; her father had a house in South Kensington and another in Huntingdonshire. If Charlotte (Gordon) Hall's father was, in the context of the 1840s, almost alarmingly Radical ("His Chartism was the upholding of law in constitutional efforts to improve it... [but] he was maligned as a Chartist in the sense of violence": Hall, *Autobiography*, p. 111), her uncle, Sir William Lowthrop, was chief among Albion Chapel's founders, "a former mayor, a chief magistrate, and my senior deacon" (*Ibid.*, p. 65). Thus each marriage was, in both church and social terms, natural and eligible. After the divorce Charlotte Hall moved to the United States.

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1. In June 1968 Brighton Presbyterian Church, the Dials Congregational Church and Union Church combined to form Brighton Central Free Church, worshipping in the former Union Church. In 1985 Union Church, Queen Square, was sold. The site is now occupied by an insurance company. In 1987 the Brighthelm Church-and-Community Centre (the successor to the churches mentioned above), opened in North Road on the former Presbyterian Church's site.

Rhondda's notable ministry brought distinction to the town and his church. His twenty-two years in Brighton constituted one of the most distinguished and fruitful ministries in the country during the century. Typically Welsh in his religious ardour, he conducted a ministry crystal clear in statement charged with earnestness.<sup>2</sup>

### His Early Life

Williams was born at Cowbridge, Glamorgan, on 16 June, 1860; he was one of eighteen children and was named Thomas after his father.

He said that he never knew more than five of his brothers and sisters. His father had various occupations: a commercial traveller, a draper, and a miner. In his spare time he was a Calvinistic Methodist preacher.

Williams went to work in the mine at Penygraig at the age of nine, although his father had tried to prevent him. When he returned home in the evening the boy would be so exhausted that he would have to lie down on the living room floor to recover, before he could even wash or eat. His job had been to fill coal buckets at the face, and then to drag them to the train to unload them. The pit paid his father thirty shillings for his son's work. Williams said that Sunday was the day he "lived for all the week": the services at chapel, Sunday school, and the Band of Hope, all of which he claimed was "the brightest and happiest part" of his childhood. At the age of twelve he became a church member, although there had not been any sudden conversion experience. He said that he "was simply focusing in a definite acknowledgement of the feelings I had always had about it, confirming my step in the direction in which I had always been led by my parents."<sup>3</sup>

Although Williams's schooling had lasted only a short period he did not care for it, and he said that he remembered:

very little ... scarcely anything at all about lessons. I left it so early that it could not have made much contribution anyway. Once in Bradford an old schoolmaster of my early days came to see me. During conversation I said to him: 'What I mostly remember about your schoolmastering is that you pinched my ears, and sometimes gave me the cane.' His reply was 'And what I mostly remember about you is that you deserved it.'

When he was fifteen his mother died at the age of fifty-two. As he stood at her grave he was struck by the minister's prayer, when he referred to those who had:

'fled to lay hold on the hope set before them.' So graphic were his words that I could see my mother rising on the wings of that Divine hope to higher realms of being. With a definite feeling that she was still alive, and that her God would be my God, I went home calm.

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2. A.E. Carson, *Union Church, Brighton* (1954), p. 25.

3. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith* (1938), pp. 1-2, 5-7.

Williams must have been an unusual child because he described his “master-interest [as] listening to great preachers, and my master-passion to be a preacher myself.”

The family was relatively poor: “To have cheese and butter, or butter and jam on our bread was an unthinkable extravagance, and to waste any of our necessities a crime.”<sup>4</sup> At the age of thirteen Williams left home to live with his brother, John Pandy Williams, at Abersychan in Monmouthshire. The purpose was to study with the help of his brother in the evenings for the entrance examination to Bala Independent College. During the day he worked in the steel works; his task was to check the weight of pig iron for the blast furnace. On Sundays he began preaching but as he was unsuccessful in passing the Bala examination he returned home to the Rhondda valley; he worked again in the pit in the mornings, and in the afternoons he had coaching from a retired minister. While he had been away he had become a Congregationalist, so he did not return to his old church but instead joined Ebenezer, Tonypany. The members were caring and they introduced a Lecture to help him financially. With the proceeds (£18) and his own savings he was able to go to a grammar school in Cardiff to prepare for Carmarthen College, which he entered at the age of seventeen with a Dr. Williams’s scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

It was intended that Williams should do a four-year course but as he had received two “calls” at the end of his third year, he decided to leave without the fourth year.<sup>6</sup> Later he wrote: “I have never felt that I lost anything by missing it.”<sup>7</sup>

### **His Earlier Pastorates and the Move to Brighton**

At the age of twenty Williams went to his first pastorate at Bethania, Dowlais – which had 700 communicants – two miles from Merthyr Tydfil, where the industries were steel and coal mining. Williams considered that he exercised a traditional ministry there, because although it was a town of slums he “did not hesitate to promise heavenly mansions to the good, without even seeing any duty in regard to the hovels in which they lived on earth.”<sup>8</sup> After four years there, Williams had the desire to enter the English ministry, and so he left and took a much smaller church, with a membership under a hundred. It was at Neath but later he confessed: “Why I did that I do not know. I suppose I thought there would be wider scope, and I was ambitious.”<sup>9</sup>

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4. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7, 9-10.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 13-15.

6. It was while he was in college that Williams took the name “Rhondda” because there were several other Thomas Williamses there; after that he always used the name. (I am grateful to his granddaughters for this information).

7. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith* (1938), p. 20.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

The membership trebled during his ministry, which again was “on conventional lines”.

Williams’s third pastorate was in England, at Greenfield, Bradford (1888-1909).<sup>10</sup> It was during this period that his theology underwent a complete change. When he read R.F. Horton’s *Inspiration and the Bible* (1888),<sup>11</sup> he became ill over it, and wondered how he could continue his ministry. He consulted K.C. Anderson, who was at Horton Lane, Bradford, (1885-1892). Since he could not “preach things I have ceased to believe ... how can I possibly continue to preach at all? Is it not the honest thing to give up the church?” Anderson advised him not to act hurriedly and felt that his uncertainty was a passing phase. He told Williams: “You have a good type of mind, and you will work your way to a reconstruction, and find yourself in possession of a larger truth than any you have known.”

Later Williams acknowledged that Anderson had saved him for the ministry and proved right. The problem was that he could no longer accept a conservative interpretation of the Bible.<sup>12</sup>

Williams, therefore, got to work to restructure his whole theology. This was a painful process, which he shared with his congregation in a series of lectures subsequently published as *The New Theology* (1907). In the Preface he stated:

The real work of the New Theology is to harmonise religious truth with the findings of science and history, and it is so new that it is not yet half done: we are only at the beginning of it.<sup>13</sup>

It was at Brighton that he really worked it out. In his autobiography he described his call to Union Church in some detail. As far as stipend was concerned there was no guaranteed one, which meant that in the first ten years he was £600-£700 out of pocket, compared with his Bradford stipend.<sup>14</sup> However, a whole new style of ministry was about to open up for him. Union Church stood in the very centre of Brighton, in Queen Square, close to the Clock Tower. Originally it was in the Lanes but during R.J. Campbell’s successful ministry there the congregation had

10. Because my main concern is with Williams’s Brighton ministry this is not the place to go into more details about Greenfield but see Clyde Binfield, “True to Stereo-type? Vivian and Dorothy Pomeroy and the Rebels in Lumb Lane”, Stuart Mews (ed.), *Modern Religious Rebels*, (1993), pp. 185-205.
11. Horton’s Lyndhurst Road, Hampstead, congregation wanted to know how they should read the Bible in the light of higher criticism, and the book consisted of a series of addresses which he delivered, explaining what “Inspiration of Scripture means, as we discover it from the study of the scriptures themselves.” R.F. Horton, *An Autobiography* (1917), p. 85.
12. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith* (1938), p. 48.
13. T.R. Williams, *The New Theology* (1907), p. x.
14. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, pp. 152-6.

outgrown the site and united with the Queen Square congregation, which had diminished, and where there was plenty of room for expansion. Although Williams has often been described as Campbell's successor, in fact there was the intervening ministry of J.G. Stephenson (1903-1908). When he left for Beckenham in 1908 the church wanted to find a man who would stand in the same tradition as Campbell.<sup>15</sup>

Williams's call to Union had been far from unanimous. The trust deed required two-thirds of the votes. On his first visit he had failed to obtain that, and on his second he exceeded it by only seven. Williams had not been surprised: "I bore two obnoxious labels – new theologian and Socialist." Twelve people, indeed, left the church before he arrived: "Nothing better could have happened than to have these out of the way rather than have them remain as sources of discontent."<sup>16</sup>

For Williams Brighton was a completely different environment. Bradford was a woollens and textiles industrial city, with a radical tradition; Brighton was a Conservative-dominated seaside town, which in 1911 had a population of 131, 237.<sup>17</sup>

All religious denominations and all sorts of other sects are here. Humanitarian and philanthropic efforts abound; a vast amount of social work is being done.<sup>18</sup>

The church secretary was Arthur Seamer, who "had a wonderful influence in the church because everybody felt he was so genuinely good with no touch of goodness, and devout with no trace of pietism." The "leading lady" was a Mrs. Singleton whom Williams found a safe confidante. Williams's wife played little or no part in the church activities, for in the early Brighton days she fell sick, and returned to Wales to be cared for by her sisters. Williams's daughter, Dorothy, now cared for her father and took an active part at Union. The granddaughters sometimes visited "Granny Newport" in Wales.

When Williams arrived at Union he said that he had "never known a church so unorganized." Although there were ten deacons they did not hold regular meetings. He got over this problem by inviting them all to supper, "saying jocularly that it would be well for them to know one another." The finance committee also only met spasmodically because "for all ordinary purposes the treasurer managed the finance himself." Williams had no wish to be a sort of

15. A.E. Carson, *op cit.*, pp. 22, 24.

16. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, p. 153.

17. Clifford Musgrave considers that "it was the beginning of a new era in the social life of Brighton" and "yachting, motoring, flying, boxing and the theatre helped to bring about the town's renewal as a mecca of the sporting and theatrical world." The growing popularity of the motor car he regarded as the greatest single influence. C. Musgrave, *Life in Brighton*, (revised edition) 1981, pp. 355-6.

18. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, p. 152.

business manager, and so a church council of thirty-six members was “elected by members and seat-holders, and not obliged to be church members.” It had sub-committees, which reported monthly to the full Council.<sup>19</sup>

Before Williams arrived in Brighton he had written the following message to the church:

... I will submit to you no detailed programme, nor venture upon any predictions. What you and I may be absolutely sure of is this: that God's best things belong to us all, and if we quietly decide in our hearts that our life together as pastor and people shall be a fellowship of divine appropriation, then we shall have a good time, for the life of God in us will go forth in service to our fellow-men. Give me a place in your moments of life – in the praying-time. Send out to me in every public service whatever intellectual sympathy the theme may require, and always the spiritual thought that shall require power in you and in me, and make the message effective...<sup>20</sup>

In many ways that set the tone for the whole of his Brighton ministry – it was to be a partnership between him and his people. He always aimed at a harmonious one, and two years later he could write:

... whatever may be said of us, it must be admitted that we live together sweetly. Old members of the church assure me that there has never been a happier feeling or a more harmonious spirit amongst the people. I am profoundly thankful for it, as, without it, nothing effective could be done...<sup>21</sup>

One change that Williams was keen to make right at the beginning of his ministry was in the place of the offertory at Sunday worship. At his very first council meeting, “it was resolved that in future the offertory be taken after the sermon.” No reason was given but as Williams was both an interesting and attractive preacher was that why?<sup>22</sup> Union Church was never wealthy, and throughout his ministry he had to make special appeals for money to keep the premises in good repair. Financial support for the maintenance of the ministry was almost entirely dependent on the quarterly contributions of the pew holders. It was pointed out that:

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19. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-1. This was similar to the system which he had introduced at Greenfield.

20. Union Church Brighton, *Year Book* 1909, p. 1.

21. *Ibid.* 1911, p. 1.

22. Union Church Brighton, Church Council Minutes 29.11.1909.

No fixed charge is made for sittings: each person assesses himself according to what he thinks right to give ... if they are unable to give financial aid, their welcome is none the less warm, and it is hoped that those who have the means will make up for that deficiency.<sup>23</sup>

### Union Church and its Activities

Like most town centre Congregational churches of the time, Union had a variety of activities throughout the week. Of them all, there were two that Williams considered the most important. One was the Women's Guild, led by Mrs. C.S. Ashton, and the other was the Girls' Club, both of which were founded in 1925. A few months later Williams could report that the Guild had enrolled fifty-four members, and that it "has been already welcomed by several women who were longing for just this kind of opportunity of knowing others." He immediately set them a task "on behalf of the weaker churches", which was to raise £70 in the Spring to cover a fifty-per-cent increase in the church's contributions to the Home Missionary Society. Williams's action was typical of him: he was always on the look out to present new challenges.<sup>24</sup>

Study groups met to consider a variety of subjects, led by an assortment of people including the minister. John Routley, who was church secretary in the second part of Williams's ministry, and whose son, Erik Routley, was to become a notable Congregational minister, discussed various books in his. Williams admitted that he was unable to visit much, and so a monthly congregational social was held. There, he wrote:

I shall deem it a privilege to meet you in a more personal way than is possible in the Sunday services. It is impossible to do adequate visiting of my congregation – it would devour all my time – let me do as much visiting as possible on the evening of June 3rd!<sup>25</sup>

On more than one occasion it was held at the Royal Pavilion. Williams took an active interest in the children's and young people's work. Five years before his retirement he started the Boys' and Girls' Church. On the first Sunday of January 1926 eleven children came, and within a month there were seventy-three. Each Sunday a different child would bring flowers for the occasion, which afterwards were "sent to cheer sick members." By April it was decided by the Church Council to rename it "The Junior Church". This was an early use of a phrase and concept which became popular in Congregational churches.<sup>26</sup> Although Williams is

23. Union Church, Brighton, Calendar May 1912.

24. *Ibid.* January 1926, p. 1.

25. *Ibid.* June 1919, p. 1.

26. *Ibid.* March 1926; April 1926.

remembered by those who knew him in Brighton as somewhat of a Victorian father-figure, his grand-children have said that he was quite at home holding the babies at infant baptism after the morning service. The former loved him, and enjoyed their Saturday afternoon outings with him. He took them to Lyons or Boots in North Street for tea, and bought them bars of chocolate – which did not please their parents. Or sometimes it was a Saturday afternoon walk in the country. When he returned from his many visits abroad (he made, for example, a number of visits to the United States) he always brought them back presents.<sup>27</sup>

On some Saturday afternoons Williams would join the church rambling parties, which he described as “pleasant opportunities of social intercourse.”<sup>28</sup> There was a large young people’s society of about 120 by 1924, which had all sorts of activities, and at which he would sometimes speak. He wrote in the magazine:

We have large numbers of young people attending our services, and many of them are vitally interested in our work. In their hands is the future of the church. It is of importance for us to know what they think and feel about the work itself ... To remember one’s youth is not enough, one must have converse with the youth of the present.<sup>29</sup>

In the first year of his ministry at Union, a social services committee was formed, and he was always a strong advocate for its work. It offered friendly visits and counsel as well as seeking to find work for the unemployed. In the magazines he often made appeals for more money for it. He stated: “It is real practical Christianity, and the Master still says: ‘Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these, ye did it unto Me.’”<sup>30</sup>

He felt that it was vital that the members should be involved in service in the community, and he wrote:

It is no small part of the function of a Christian church in these days to supply inspiration for workers in other fields of social effort... I think a very large part of the work of the church must be done outside the church. Larger and larger areas of life are passing into public management, and it is exceedingly important that the Christian spirit should follow them, and that there should be a true religious faith to sustain the work that needs to be done. Then in the next paragraph he appealed for volunteers for the

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27. I am indebted to Williams’s granddaughters, Mrs. J. Girling, and the late Miss Ruth Parsons. Williams had six children: Ann Mary and Elizabeth Ellen (twins), Edgar, Gwladys, Dorothy and Eric. Gwladys met her husband, James Parsons, in Union Church choir and they had three daughters: Betty, who died 16 October 1988, Joan and Ruth, the youngest, who died 27 August 1997.

28. Union Church Calendar, June 1911.

29. *Ibid.*, October 1924.

30. *Ibid.*, May 1911.

Brighton school care committees, which attempted to find suitable employment each year for some of the 1,800 or so school leavers, "and generally to keep them in touch with friendly influences during the perils of adolescence." Although some from the church were already involved, he hoped the number could be doubled.<sup>31</sup> Williams was keen that the church should take an interest in the Boys' Club in John Street. He wrote:

A club of this kind is doing good work which the churches are not doing, and just for this reason the churches ought to supply workers and money. Yet I am told that the response which the churches make to its appeal is practically nil.<sup>32</sup>

Union supplied the club's warden, Arthur Tyrer. He admitted that he often felt like giving up "but some stirring message from... [the] pulpit that Goodness, Beauty and Love would yet conquer evil sent me back with fresh hope and resolution."<sup>33</sup> In the 1918 General Election, Williams stood as the Labour candidate for Cambridge, "without any idea of winning the seat." First he obtained "the consent and goodwill of the church council" before he agreed to do so. It laid down: "on condition you do not give us up, go."<sup>34</sup> Also it sent a message to the Cambridge Labour Party:

the church welcomes the privilege of helping in some measure the great struggle towards true democracy, by doing all in its power to support the candidature of its minister and friend the Rev. T. Rhondda Williams.<sup>35</sup>

This was remarkable in view of the fact that most of the church council members would have been Conservatives or, at best, Liberals. He returned to Brighton unelected. Twenty years afterwards he wrote: "Drawn as I was into many associations with Labour I am glad, as I reflect, that I stuck to my pulpit."<sup>36</sup>

Williams was a strong supporter of women's rights. In July 1918 he drew attention to the forthcoming Women's Citizenship Sunday:

It is a day set apart by the minister and church council to mark our sense of the religious significance of all true citizenship, and more especially of the recent admission of women to full civic and national responsibility.

31. *Ibid.*, January 1914.

32. *Ibid.*, May 1919. The Calendar for June showed that £20 was collected for the club.

33. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, p. 194.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

35. Union Church Council Minutes, 3.12.1918.

36. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, p. 202.

On that Sunday the chief women's organisations of Brighton would be attending and:

The opportunity of hearing a woman preacher of Mrs. Herman's distinction and scholarly attainments will probably bring us a number of visitors not yet fully convinced on the subject of women in the pulpit. No better occasion for complete conversion could be desired.

One contributor wrote:

Women appreciate to the full the inspiring and energising of the social conscience always characterising the teaching of Mr. Williams. He has helped greatly to lift women's suffrage out of the region of the sectarian and political into the larger atmosphere of the human and the spiritual.<sup>37</sup>

### **An Ambassador for Peace**

"...above all Rhondda Williams made the name of Union church in Brighton synonymous with the advocacy of peace."<sup>38</sup> That is still one of the ways in which Williams is remembered locally by those who knew him. Under his leadership the church was a founder member of the Brighton League of Nations Union, and supplied most of the officers for it. In a sermon he said:

A League of Nations securing the peace of the world, would indeed be to the interest of every nation. If it carried its logical accessories with it – free trade between all communities, open doors everywhere, equal chances and opportunities for all peoples – it would be a splendid thing for every nation in a commercial and economic sense. But the mischief of building unity upon interest is that so many are not content with equality of interest; the desire to go ahead of others, and to snatch advantages, is apt to cause a rupture of relations.

He emphasised that it needed a religious basis, and there were other religions to consider, Jews, Muslims and Buddhists: "One great good God over us all, is a belief common to all religions." He said that:

The evil spirit that has so grievously torn the world and left it bleeding will not be finally cast out until the divine spirit of love and goodwill has occupied the heart of humanity. I believe that if men of all religions would only unite to forget their differences ... there is an infinite reserve of power on which they could draw to re-create the world...<sup>39</sup>

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37. Union Church Calendar, July 1918. (His granddaughters told me that he admired clever women).

38. A.E. Carson, *Union Church, Brighton*, p. 26.

39. Union Church Calendar, May 1919.

Williams referred to the First World War as "The Years of Shadow". He said that while the church took its share in doing things for the soldiers, both active and wounded, it did not "foster war passions or war sentiments". He would never pray for victory because he could not associate the blessing of God with bayonets and weapons of destruction.<sup>40</sup> However, Williams was not the kind of pacifist who would have nothing to do with those in uniform. Military church parades were sometimes held on Sunday afternoons at Union. On one such occasion, 17 September, 1916, it was reported that:

Between four hundred and five hundred volunteers filled the body of the church, and the galleries were without a vacant seat. The Battalion Band, [i.e. the first Battalion Sussex Volunteer Regiment], placed near the pulpit, joined the organ in accompanying the hymns. Mr. Williams conducted the service, and preached a sermon, which the 'Sussex Daily News' pronounced 'worthy of the pulpit of St. Paul's Cathedral on a great historic occasion.'<sup>41</sup>

Williams admitted that war had been inevitable in 1914 because:

our previous living had been making us unprepared for any such stand as that. We perhaps more than any other power in the world had created the idolatry of wealth; no nation had done more to infuse the commercial spirit into the world than we, and it is out of the competition of commerce and the lust for wealth and power that wars arise.<sup>42</sup>

It was a terrible blow for Williams when, in April 1918, he received a telegram to say that his son, Eric, had been killed in action. He had voluntarily enlisted and was eventually commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the 14th West Yorkshire Reserve Battalion: "My precious boy has left the fighting line and joined the Great Unseen Fellowship of Reconciliation. He is working for Peace."<sup>43</sup>

Armistice Day 1923 stood out for Williams because there was a procession from the church to the cenotaph. He wrote: "I cannot convey to you the feeling that surged in me as I walked under the banner 'For World Peace' and realised the great crowd following, all inspired by one feeling that we were standing solid as a congregation for the end which alone can be worthy of our brave dead."<sup>44</sup>

When Ramsay MacDonald was Prime Minister he was, it seems, instrumental in the selection of Williams to preach the League of Nations sermon in Geneva, and

40. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, pp.171-2.

41. Union Church Calendar, October 1916.

42. T.R. Williams, *Three Years of War; what now?* (Brighton 1917).

43. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, pp. 175-7.

44. Union Church Calendar, December 1923.

Williams did so again in 1931.<sup>45</sup>

### Williams as Preacher

If there were only one thing for which his ministry should be remembered in Brighton it would be as a great preacher. He wrote:

There are always many visitors from all over the country, and some often from other lands, so the message ... travels far – if one believes in the truth of what one says, one must regard its propagation with satisfaction.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, he sometimes wondered about the result of so much preaching. He openly confessed this in one of the Calendars, contrasting the preacher with a doctor, who knew whether his treatment of a patient had been successful or not:

But the preacher may fail disastrously and not know that he has failed; he may succeed and not know that he has succeeded. The sermons are made, delivered, and then put away in a chest of many small drawers. There are ten such chests in my study... I often look at them and wonder what has been the result of all this preaching.

The preacher aims at results in the souls of the people, and of course we cannot see souls to know what is happening. Testimonies are sometimes forthcoming, but if one put all the testimonies of a year together they do not amount to a great deal. In the very nature of this work, one has to go on in the dark, just trusting that if one is conscientious the work cannot entirely miss its mark.<sup>47</sup>

After just over a year at Brighton, he stated that he felt quite as free as he had in his Bradford pulpit:

I have said everything I felt it in me to say, without compromise, and I have said it in the way in which I desired to say it... A sensible minister will encourage independent thought in his hearers... The great thing for preacher and hearer alike is to be honest in his own thinking and speaking, and at the same time large-hearted and fair minded in regard to the thinking of others.<sup>48</sup>

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45. When in Brighton MacDonald sometimes attended Union Church on a Sunday evening as did Lloyd George, who in his earlier prime was a frequent visitor to Brighton.

46. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, p. 202.

47. Union Church Calendar, January 1925.

48. Union Church *Year Book*, 1911.

It was his honesty in preaching that people both respected and loved. They felt that nothing was hidden, and that the doubts that he voiced, and faced up to, expressed their own.

One of his sermons, chosen by him, was published monthly in the Calendar.<sup>49</sup> He always had a text, and many of his sermons were of an expository type. In the first few months of his Brighton ministry he dictated his sermons to Dorothy, his daughter, who then typed them. But on his fiftieth birthday the church gave him a dictaphone, which he said he found made a great difference to his work. He reckoned that he could dictate a sermon in two hours and he could hear what the delivery was like – something he strongly recommended to other preachers.<sup>50</sup> He defined his aim in preaching: “A sermon should feed the mind in such a way as to fire the soul”, and he added that he never regarded preaching “as mere intellectualizing”.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless there was always a good intellectual content. He saw the sermon as part of the whole act of worship and stated: “I can only hope that the services of worship are an inspiration to good life.”<sup>52</sup>

When Williams was absent from his pulpit, he took personal responsibility for filling it, and it would be impossible to start to make a list of those who came. Most were well-known names in Congregationalism at the time, but sometimes they were young ministers whom he wanted to encourage. He was always concerned that they should be supported with as good an attendance as he would have had. A summary of one of his sermons is appropriate here. It was preached in April 1922. The subject was “Personal and Social Religion”. Text: 2 Cor. 8:5: “But first they gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God.”

The first thing to aim at is to get the individual to give himself to God. [He said he was thinking of people who had not made any definite self-commitment to these two positions]. If God be what Jesus Christ revealed Him, if the Christian life is the true life for man, and the best for society *what are you going to do about it?* [his italics]... How does my mind react towards the truth presented here?... Do I merely admire, or do I really try to serve? [He said that he recognised that some would stumble “at the outset over questions of theology”, but went on to say:] you need not wait until you can define God with intellectual satisfaction. No one has ever done that yet. To define is to limit, and once you have defined God you have made Him too small for the needs of the soul.

[Williams recognised that some people would say they were made miserable by their thoughts about religion, and this could be explained in

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49. There are 260 sermons in leather bound volumes in Brighton Reference Library. I am grateful to the Library for use of them. The sermon titles show how he tackled all sorts of subjects.

50. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, pp. 186-7.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

52. *Union Church Year Book*, 1914.

terms of psychology]. If your concern about religion is casual, if you only now and then recognise the supremacy of the Christian ideal, if you think of God and recognise His claim in odd moments, and then live most of your life ignoring these things, they go into your unconscious... and there create a complex, a conflict which is the thing that makes you miserable.[He said that the second statement of his text was an important addition to the first]: "And unto us by the will of God." The people who were persuaded by Paul's ministry to personal dedication formed a society that should carry on the work of his gospel in the world... Full religion cannot be cultivated in isolation...The best in personal life cannot be gained without the help of the society. It is so in religion.

[He said he recognised the reserve of the English temperament, which could be carried too far. If only those in church knew the depth of the religious life in the person sitting next to them, it would greatly affect their own religion. Then there was also the need of the world] for this religion and its ideal of life... our religion must be a Christ in the temple of our own life, clearing out all that is unworthy of His presence.

[He went on to say that in many fields, including work for the League of Nations, they had to "change the spirit of humanity". In education a vast amount needed to be done. He called for personal dedication on their part to God, and co-operation with those of like mind]: "to leave nothing undone that can be done for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the world." [He mentioned that if they agreed with him, he would like to know] "for I shall be stronger when you are at my side."<sup>53</sup>

### Williams's Theology

Any paper about Williams would be incomplete without consideration of his theology. As soon as *The Working Faith of a Liberal Theologian* was published in 1914 he became one of the most controversial figures in Congregationalism. However, Union Church remained his great admirer and supporter. What he had written in his book he put into practice in his preaching.As he put it in a sermon on "Finding Christ" (based on *John* 1:41),

To find Christ was to find the spirit that was in Jesus, to find his religion and spiritual value.

Just as thousands of men nourished their lives upon food they could not analyse, "all they know is that is their food, and they live upon it." In theology a great deal

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53. Preached at Union Church, Queen Square, Brighton, on Sunday evening, 9 April 1922. Published in May 1922 Calendar, pp. 1, 6, 7, 8.

of absurdity had been built up. He referred to the two natures of Jesus, which would mean two intellects, two consciences, and two wills: that theory was brought in to explain the richness of the spirit and character of Jesus. "In fact men do believe his humanity and divinity if you don't try to explain them."<sup>54</sup>

With regard to "the infallible authority of the Bible", he said that this theory had now been given up by all intelligent students of the literature but:

there is great need of bringing the use of the Bible in the churches into conformity with the new view of it. Parts of it are still read solemnly to the people as the Word of God which cannot possibly represent the truth for their life, nor appeal to them in any real or vital sense... Passages whose ethical quality is much lower than that of the respectable citizen of today are still read in the pulpit as if they were the Word of God Himself for ourselves. The passage in Corinthians, for example, which declares the inferiority of woman to man ... is still read as if it were the solemn Word of God for the guidance of our life.

He went on to say:

We cannot take the teaching of Jesus as an external authority for our guidance today. The needs of our age are so vastly different from those of the age in which Jesus lived that it is not possible that detailed authority for conduct should be found in His teaching.<sup>55</sup>

Williams maintained that the "pulpit should be quite free to deal occasionally with specific questions of reform, provided this does not degenerate into partisanship", and this he was true to in his own preaching. He wrote:

For example, the pulpit could show the immense importance of the land being so held that all people should have decent living room; it should call attention to the evils of over-crowding; and it should show the relation of these questions to moral and religious issues ... and done in such a way that people would feel that it is a Christian duty to deal with the matter, and that they must find out what scheme is likely to be the most effective. Christianity is not social reform; but justice, brotherhood, and the interests of the spiritual life demand social reform, therefore Christianity must supply the dynamic for it, or it is justly condemned.<sup>56</sup>

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54. Preached on Sunday morning, 26.12.1915 at Union. Published in March 1916 Calendar, pp. 1, 2, 3.

55. T.R. Williams, *The Working Faith of a Liberal Theologian* (1914), pp. 12-19.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 242-3.

### 1920-1931: The Last Part of His Brighton Ministry

At the beginning of 1921 Williams had to have some time off. In the February Calendar he apologised for this:

My account in Nature's nervous energy bank was more heavily overdrawn than I realised. She suddenly dropped further credit and there was nothing to do but to close the works for the time being.<sup>57</sup>

The previous Autumn he had undertaken one of his American preaching tours and, combined with a heavy work-load on his return to Brighton, it had been too much for him. In the States his visit had been much appreciated. As a report from Boston put it:

His public addresses and sermons were quite extraordinary in content, temper and oratory. ... He is alive to every real question among his people as not a dozen men are...<sup>58</sup>

At this time Williams was also involved in appeals for a new church organ. He had always regarded the musical aspect of worship as of the utmost importance. He was pleased that, as the organ building commenced, the church was "helping to keep a number of men employed who, if [it] were stopped, would be thrown on the unemployment market... We have just now a rare privilege of preventing unemployment."<sup>59</sup> As a contributor to the Calendar concluded, when the organ was opened:

Our organ is an accomplished fact, a lasting testimony of a people's effort and glad co-operation, and of their love for a minister, a friend, who they pray may be long with them to share the added beauty to the church, and the spiritual inspiration that Divine song brings.<sup>60</sup>

In April and May 1922 Williams launched a church membership appeal by preaching on the subject (*Romans* 1:11-12) and writing about it in the Calendar. He wanted "to build up a church strong in numbers as well as in consecration to

57. Union Church Calendar, February 1921.

58. Editorial note from *Boston Christian Register*, 30.12.1920, in Union Church Calendar, April 1921.

59. Union Church Calendar, February 1921.

60. *Ibid.*, June 1921.

our ideals.”<sup>61</sup>

Union was not a wealthy church and a notice which appeared in June 1922 drew attention to the fact that because of bad weather on one Sunday in January the collection had fallen to £9; the loss had not been made up since – so there was need for regular giving through the weekly envelopes.

There was a great bond between Williams and his people, and he would often write a letter to the church when he was away on holiday, sometimes ending “God be with you till we meet again.”

In this decade Williams was taking on more and more outside the church. He was in great demand for church anniversaries, but as he was then in his sixties it was beginning to take its toll. At the beginning of 1923 he wrote:

It will soon be fourteen years since I came, and during the whole of that time nothing of an unpleasant nature has disturbed our relationship. In this respect we have no misgivings about the future.

He reported that a large number of new members had been received, and he hoped that this would be repeated.

We want to gather into our ranks all the best-minded men and women to form a solid phalanx ready to advance to the new call of the new age.<sup>63</sup>

At this time, when the Congregational Forward Movement was launched in Sussex, Williams wrote about it in some detail in the Calendar: “although [it] is a denominational effort, it is not for a denominational end.” If it had been he would have had no sympathy with it, for it was his mission to make not Congregationalists but “champions for justice and Christian men and women.” He appealed to Union to raise £1000 over three years, and he drew attention to the ministers in the smaller churches, who were often hampered in their work because of financial anxiety. He gave as an example one minister, who was also a very small farmer; he had one cow and when it fell ill on a Sunday morning the vet had to be called in. Someone had remarked that the minister did not preach as well that day but someone else with imagination thought that it was due to his anxiety about

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61. *Ibid.*, May 1922. The statistics do not show a membership comparable with the influence which the church had in Brighton or consonant with the fact that its building seated 1,000 and was usually full: this can be explained by the large number of adherents and visitors. Membership for the following years:

1910 (when Williams commenced his ministry):	358
1920	340
1930 (the year before he retired)	413

62. Union Church Calendar, June 1922.

63. *Ibid.*, January 1932.

his cow, which would be a great blow to the welfare of his household.<sup>64</sup>

In 1924 Williams went to America for three months. It was then the fifteenth year of his ministry at Union, and he felt that "a change for a time will be beneficial to you as well as me. I think new scenes and intercourse with new minds will be refreshing..." The Church Council had arranged for thirteen Sundays to be filled, doubtless in consultation with Williams.<sup>65</sup> Although he spoke and preached to many different groups of people, in a letter to the church he closed with these words:

You do not need me to tell you that amid all these engagements my mind and heart are often at Harbour View and Union Church.<sup>66</sup>

The next month Williams said how glad he was to be back. He confessed that if he lived the life of the average American minister "I should be threadbare for preaching purposes in less than twelve months. One cannot go to America without learning many things."<sup>67</sup> The tour had been so strenuous that he felt unable to face the winter's work without taking one Sunday off – "I hope we shall go full steam ahead in September."<sup>68</sup> In 1924 Williams was invited to preach the sermon at the CUEW Autumn Assembly. It was entitled "The Pattern Theory in Religion and Life."

On the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday Williams was presented with a motor car from Union. The Mayor of Brighton, Alderman Carden, described him as not only a great asset to the church but also to the town of Brighton. On accepting the gift, Williams replied, "what is most valuable of all is the affectionate regard which the gift expresses."<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately he never really took to driving, and found it a great strain. He would sometimes take his grandchildren up to the Dyke but they were terrified of his driving, and his son-in-law, James Parsons, usually drove him to his Sussex engagements. When he retired he gave up the car.

In 1926, Williams's daughter, Dorothy, who had been such a mainstay to him, apparently lay dying in a Hove nursing home. At the time he had been back to Bradford and then the City Temple to preach. He confessed:

64. *Ibid.*, March 1923. A retired minister at that time could only expect £32 pa. On Williams's last Easter Sunday at Union he said that on Easter morning "We shall have the joy of receiving eighteen new members into the church, fifteen of whom are young people".

65. Union Church Calendar, March 1924.

66. *Ibid.*, July 1924.

67. *Ibid.*, August 1924.

68. *Ibid.*, September 1924.

69. *Ibid.*, August 1925.

My mind did not pay much regard to the movements of the body – it stuck obstinately at home. It could not be otherwise until my darling's ordeal was over.<sup>70</sup>

When conferences came to Brighton, and had special services in a Nonconformist church, it was always to Union that they came. So when the Labour Conference met in the Dome in 1926 Williams invited Ramsay MacDonald to preach at the church's evening service.

In 1927 when religious broadcasting was in its infancy, a service from Union was broadcast on Harvest Sunday. Afterwards Williams received many letters of appreciation. One listener from Croydon wrote: "The whole of your message was surely a much needed spiritual uplift to the nation."<sup>71</sup>

At the Spring 1928 CUEW Assembly Williams was elected Chairman for 1929/30. For some people it was a surprising move in view of the controversial figure that Williams was. The Rev. J.G. Binney, then a member at Union, expressed the church's congratulations:

Those of us who have had the privilege of Mr. Williams's ministry, not only rejoice on the ground of personal attachment... but because the election indicates that official Congregationalism is advancing towards his position in theology, and that it realises the urgent need of his social gospel.

After this election, Williams had spoken in a similar vein:

I have shed none of my heresies, only they do not happen to be heresies now. I hope I may take my election not as an endorsement of any views of mine, but as an endorsement of the attitude I have taken all my life – that the Congregational minister must be free to think and to preach; that young ministers need not play tricks with their own souls.<sup>72</sup>

His year of office coincided with the fiftieth year of his ordination and his seventieth birthday. His Chairman's Address was on the subject of "Christian Belief in the Modern World." He mentioned that the "marvel of Jesus Himself does not grow less with study, but grows greater than ever." He pleaded that his listeners:

cease to yearn for stability and take our place in the divine movement; cease to care for security, and go out on the grand adventures of the faith that knows God to be good, and trust the life that is loyal to Him for

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70. *Ibid.*, July 1926. In fact Dorothy was suffering from appendicitis which in those days would still be regarded as life threatening. She made a good recovery from that and lived for many more years.

71. *Ibid.*, November 1927.

72. *Ibid.*, June 1928.

spiritual discovery... Do not keep your creed as a fence to save you from the precipice: leap the fence and deny the precipice, asserting God.<sup>73</sup>

*The Christian World* said that as his address proceeded "it became abundantly manifest that it was indeed and emphatically a plea for Christian belief – not for less belief but for more."<sup>74</sup>

There followed a lot of correspondence in *The Christian World* about the address. Thomas Wigley of Blackheath said that the more thoughtful young people would welcome it but the elderly minded would find it an offence. He himself found it a critical and constructive utterance, which would "do much to bring back our churches from platitude to reality."<sup>75</sup> J.D. Jones attacked it at some length. Williams, therefore, responded with "A Rejoinder" stating that he knew his address would not represent J.D.'s position "and a good many others in the Congregational ministry." But that had been the main reason why he had been elected to the chair. "So that a great many others might be represented in the chairman's address."<sup>76</sup>

Tudur Jones has disclosed that Albert Peel, after hearing reactions to Williams's address a year later, admitted that some were of the opinion that the Chairman had been "flogging dead horses," and others that he had abandoned the faith of the fathers. "But", remarked Tudur Jones, "Liberalism was still vigorous enough."<sup>77</sup>

As most chairmen before and after him have found, it was a hectic year for Williams. To his own people at Union he confessed that he would be glad when it would no longer be necessary to do:

all this running about. It is not merely that one gets tired, but one's time is so broken up, and one's study habits are so interfered with that a long continued life of this sort would not suit me at all... This year is, of course, an exception, and I mean it to be.

The Union Church Council decided to celebrate his year of office and the twenty-one years of his ministry with them by releasing him from Sundays from 11 May to 31 August 1930, so that he could again visit America and also take a holiday.<sup>78</sup> It was on that visit to the States that the Chicago Theological Seminary conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. It was awarded in recognition of fifty years of service "as an outstanding preacher of the Gospel, a Christian

73. *Congregational Year Book*, 1930, *passim*.

74. *The Christian World*, 9.5.1929, p. 12.

75. *Ibid.*, 23.5.1929, p. 5.

76. *Ibid.*, 13.6.1929, p. 9.

77. R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962*, p. 446 quoting from *The Congregational Quarterly*, 1929, p. 274.

78. Union Church Calendar, December 1930.

scholar, and eloquent ambassador of international good-will and ordered peace." Williams said that he wondered what those at home would think about it and "in the midst of such eager desire to honour a Britisher who advocates peace, I could do no other than accept." However, he was emphatic that at church he wanted his old name used. He told them that if any one of them called him "Doctor" he would have to pay a fine of £5 to the church, but if there were a "second offence" it would result in banishment "from the realm of friendship." The church planned a "Welcome Home Project" to make the church interior "more worthy of the fine services to which we all owe so much". The cost was reckoned at £500.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately Williams was not at all well on his return, and between the end of August and 20 September he had only been able to preach twice. The welcome social had had to be postponed and Williams felt, therefore, that he was failing them. He hoped that he "would be able to go on with full vigour presently." That turned out not to be the case. The Church Council tried to relieve him "of the heavy strain of the Sunday Services" by "inviting front [rank] ministers" to preach on one Sunday a month.<sup>80</sup>

However, because Williams felt unable to carry "the full strain of my work for a much longer period", he called for a special church meeting to be convened on Sunday evening, 14 December, and there he tendered his resignation. Since there was a resolution to ask him to reconsider it, he said he felt obliged to do so,<sup>81</sup> but in February 1931 he wrote to say that his final decision had been made to resign on the last Sunday in May, and he hoped that a successor would soon be found.<sup>82</sup> In fact, when the May Calendar was published he was able to announce that W. Major Scott of Hampstead Garden Suburb had accepted the call to Union and so they would only have eight weeks to wait for him.<sup>83</sup>

In his last letter, June 1931, he wrote:

I have done my best in the preaching and you have certainly been good listeners. One more Sunday, and this chapter of life is closed.<sup>84</sup>

Williams's last Sunday was 5 July. He preached at both services. In his morning sermon he said that he was in good health and he hoped he would have "a wider ministry to advocate disarmament and the abolition of war." *The Christian World* reported:

79. *Ibid.*, July 1930.

80. *Ibid.*, December 1930.

81. *Ibid.*, January 1931.

82. *Ibid.*, February 1931.

83. *Ibid.*, May 1931.

84. *Ibid.*, June 1931.

Thirty-five minutes before the services began on Sunday evening the gates outside the church had to be closed. Every seat in the building was crowded... The evening service was broadcast.

In the closing part of his sermon:

Williams insisted that the best thing about even the greatest and the highest experience of God is its power to distribute strength for ordinary life, to sanctify common connections and relations, to make dark places kindle with the light of new hope ... in other words to build little sanctuaries over the whole area of life. This is the God I have been trying to make real to you in a ministry of twenty-two years in this church, and now leaving you I can pray for nothing better than that you may all find Him.<sup>85</sup>

### Retirement

The church council had been able to provide a life pension for Williams of £300 per annum, which came from the rents of the Air Street shops, which Union owned near to the church.<sup>86</sup> He decided to continue to live in Brighton although he had always felt very strongly that when a minister retired from a pastorate, "especially a long one, he should leave the field entirely clear for his successor, and have nothing whatever to do with the affairs or administration of the Church..." He acted on that and did "nothing more than attend a service of worship when I can."<sup>87</sup>

It had been Williams's ambition to be able to preach again in Welsh, and retirement provided the opportunity. He started to prepare sermons in Welsh, and once it became known in Wales that he was available there were many invitations forthcoming: "during four years I had many opportunities of renewing acquaintance with the religious life of the land of my birth."<sup>88</sup>

In his retirement he also wrote his autobiography, *How I Found my Faith*, which was published in 1938. It was dedicated to his children:

whose love and loyalty have been a strength to my life, and are the solace of my old age.

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85. *The Christian World*, 9.7.1931.

86. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, p. 190. The legal arrangements were made by Leslie Bunker, deacon, solicitor and personal friend.

87. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, p. 261.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 262. He had the habit of putting Welsh records on the gramophone before he went to conduct Union's evening service, although of course, that was in English. Williams belonged to the Welsh Society in Brighton, and at home he often sang in Welsh.

When he was at Bradford Williams had got to know Margaret MacMillan, and he longed to see a Margaret MacMillan Open Air Nursery school in Brighton. A Brighton and Hove Nursery School Association was formed with Williams as chairman, and a school was opened in October 1933.<sup>89</sup> Probably one of the things that Williams most appreciated about retirement was that he had his mornings free from the study. He had always taken a keen interest in civic affairs so he chose to spend three or four mornings a week to meet some of the town councillors for a cup of coffee at Lyons in North Street, which he called "the club". They included Sir Herbert Carden, JP, a Conservative, whom Williams said he regarded as outstanding, although his politics were very different from his own. He felt that no man in Brighton had stirred in him a deeper admiration.<sup>90</sup>

Williams's retirement lasted fourteen years. He died in Brighton on 21 November, 1945, aged eighty-five. In his obituary Glynmor John wrote:

He loved reality, and hated shams and pious phrases that had no meaning in actual living... In his greatness he did not encroach on another's room-to-grow. He sympathized with every effort to establish righteousness in human relations, for everything lovely and honest was of God. He believed in human goodness – not in the sense that all men are good, or that their goodness is ever perfect or that man is self-sufficient – but as evidence of the redeeming God... At tea in the garden amid the roses and in the three rounds of bagatelle before bed-time, we saw his gay simplicity and loved him the more.<sup>91</sup>

But let the last word be from the pen of Williams himself, which his granddaughter confirms summed up his outlook on life, and which he entitled "The All in Each":

The universe throbs in the heart of the flowers  
The winds of the world in the tremor of the trees,  
The mind of Eternity speaks through the hours,  
And time is made by the truth which man sees.<sup>92</sup>

ELISABETH J. NEALE

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89. *Tarner Land Nursery School 1933-83: The first fifty years* (n.d. 1983), p. 21. Williams's granddaughter, Joan, worked there for a while. In 1937 the school was transferred to the Local Authority as it was recognised that it could never be self-supporting. Williams's name was on the foundation stone but this was lost when a new building was erected in 1961.

90. T.R. Williams, *How I found my Faith*, p. 273.

91. *The Congregational Quarterly*, Vol. xxiv, 1946, p. 107.

92. Union Church Calendar, March 1924. This was adopted as a vesper and sung at the end of Sunday evening services (confirmation from his granddaughter, Mrs. J. Girling).

## R.J. CAMPBELL: CHRISTIANITY INTERPRETED AS SOCIALISM

Reginald John Campbell (1867-1956) was in his fourth year of ministry at the City Temple in London when, in the autumn of 1906, he affirmed his new-found faith in socialism. The following year saw the publication of two books written by Campbell. In *The New Theology* (1907) he identified socialism as "... the same Movement as that which, in the religious sphere is coming to be called the New Theology."<sup>1</sup> More particularly in his second book, *Christianity and the Social Order* (1907), Campbell attempted to relate the New Theology to socialism, maintaining that the latter was the only authentic expression of the former.

This paper considers Campbell's passionate espousal of socialism, his theological beliefs, and the relationship between them.

### I

Campbell attended meetings of the newly-formed Christian Social Union whilst reading history at Oxford, where he began his studies in 1892. He also read Fabian essays, but found no time to examine the relevant issues. During Campbell's time at Oxford, Keir Hardie, then MP for West Ham South and architect of the new Independent Labour Party, visited the university. He and his ILP friends got short shrift, being "...insulted, mobbed and finally ducked."<sup>2</sup> Campbell was not attracted to the Fabians or the ILP, and "...knew nothing of the destitute England at my doors."<sup>3</sup>

After an illness which prevented him from completing his finals at Oxford (he answered but one question, and after a special viva was awarded a second-class degree), Campbell began his ministry in 1896 at Union Street Congregational Chapel Brighton. Here he became more aware of social problems, but was not prepared to consider collectivist remedies. He appeared on Liberal political platforms and, increasingly noticed by party leaders (Lloyd George, Augustine Birrell and Campbell Bannerman all heard him preach in Brighton) was approached by Herbert Gladstone about a parliamentary candidacy. Campbell declined and replied in similar terms to Cardiff ILP when, after his conversion to socialism, he was asked to contest a seat on their behalf.

His avowal of socialism came about as a result of an article he wrote during 1904 in the *National Review*. He described the British working-class as lazy, unthrifty, improvident, immoral, foul-mouthed and untruthful. Such people, he affirmed, treated Sunday as "...a day of idle self-indulgence or drunken rowdiness."<sup>4</sup> This gave rise to much protest, and among others John Clifford and

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1. R.J. Campbell, *The New Theology* (Chapman & Hall, London, 1907), p. 14.
  2. R.J. Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage* (Williams & Norgate, London, 1916, p. 133.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
  4. *Baptist Times & Freeman*, 7 October 1904.

R.F. Horton (who had preached at Campbell's ordination) declared their admiration for the intrinsic soundness and natural kindliness of the people attacked by Campbell. The minister of the City Temple was invited to repeat his remarks before a mass meeting of trade unionists organized by the London Trades Council. Here, the main complaint was not directed towards the content of Campbell's article, but there were strong objections to such charges being made by one who was not "a working man". Keir Hardie was at the meeting, but did not speak. He had, however, spoken with Campbell beforehand, and did so again afterwards. These conversations, and Campbell's reception at the meeting, proved to be a Damascus road experience. He had discovered how ignorant he was of the people he had censured and later described Keir Hardie as "...one of the most unselfish and high-minded men I ever met... genuine elements of greatness."<sup>5</sup> Now followed the sermon on Christianity and Collectivism, in which he testified to his new allegiance. Thereafter he was in demand as a speaker at Labour churches, Trade Union meetings and on ILP and Fabian platforms.

A rally was held at Hope Hall in Liverpool to welcome Campbell into the Labour ranks at which he asserted that he had come to put the seal of completeness on his work. Keir Hardie, whilst offering him a warm welcome, made it clear that Campbell and other socialist clerics were to be regarded as fellow-workers in the ILP, and not as preachers or moralists. To this Campbell replied that he saw the Labour movement as a Church in the primitive sense, "...because it is bent on the realisation of a moral ideal..."<sup>6</sup> He added that he hoped he would not be subject to constant diatribes against the churches. Campbell pleaded for a closer relationship between the ILP and the churches, and at this time was supported by, among others, Fenner Brockway and R.W. Sorensen, both of whom were to become Labour MPs. Campbell's prowess as an orator was considerable. His position as minister of the City Temple ensured prominence in the pulpit and on the platform. His rise was described as "...rapid, phenomenal and almost meteoric."<sup>7</sup> He later wrote, "A sort of mythology gathered round my name."<sup>8</sup> Isaac Foot, later Liberal MP for Bodmin, recalled how he attempted but failed to shoulder his way into the City Temple for a Sunday morning service, so great was the crowd.

Campbell supported Pete Curran, the ILP candidate in the Jarrow by-election of July 1907, and was praised by Ramsay MacDonald for so doing. Campbell and Hardie addressed many meetings together, and when the first of the 1910 elections loomed, Hardie asked Campbell to appear on his platform. Campbell had initially promised to speak for George Lansbury on the same day, but replied to Hardie that he, "...must however put in an appearance at your side." He realised that Lansbury "...will hardly be pleased. When he knows it is for Hardie however it will be OK."<sup>9</sup>

5. Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, p. 147.

6. *Labour Leader*, 25 January 1907.

7. *Baptist Times & Freeman*, 27 February 1903.

8. Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, p. 138.

9. Letter from the Revd. R.J. Campbell to J. Keir Hardie, 7 January 1910. British Library of Political & Economic Science, London School of Economics.

At this time, Nonconformity was heavily involved with the Liberal party, and Campbell confirmed that a conspicuous identification with socialism within the Nonconformist community was a lonely station. "My back has been to the wall for years. I am doing my best to destroy the unethical doctrines and ideals of the churches..."<sup>10</sup> Campbell's membership was with the Finsbury branch of the ILP, and he had come a long way from his previous links with Liberalism. With other Nonconformist ministers he had been invited by Campbell Bannerman to discuss the condition of the Liberal party, and was on the council of the Liberal League. He later complained that "On every Nonconformist's platform for the past twenty years I have been accustomed to hearing Liberal leaders and Liberal measures widely cheered."<sup>11</sup> He regarded the Free Church Council as "...a Liberal caucus."<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of his ministry at the City Temple, Campbell gave every indication of being loyal to Nonconformity. He identified himself with the classic Free Church cause of passive resistance to Balfour's 1902 Education legislation, and protested against the Armenian atrocities. A speech at the City Temple on the former subject brought the congregation to a fever pitch of excitement. "Again and again a tumult of applause swept the building."<sup>13</sup> In October 1903 Campbell advocated the use of force against the Turkish government affirming that he would not hesitate to blow Abdul the Damned out of the water. He claimed that his support for the Boer War had been justified by events (he had seen it at first hand) and he would take the consequences of action against the Turks. At this time the attendance at his Thursday meetings was reported as being 2,700.<sup>14</sup>

Yet it became increasingly clear that Campbell's auspicious beginnings at the City Temple masked his true theological position. It was not long before signs appeared indicating that he would depart from orthodoxy and that loyalty would be replaced by loneliness. He had a public difference of opinion with John Clifford at a Liberation Society rally, where he objected to Clifford's remarks which allied the Church of England with the brewers. "I was never forgiven by militant Nonconformists for disassociating myself from Dr. Clifford."<sup>15</sup> In fact the two men maintained a courteous friendship and Clifford was much less stringent in his criticism when the storm broke over Campbell's head in early 1907. When Campbell resigned from the City Temple in October 1915, Clifford described it as one of the heaviest blows that had come to him.<sup>16</sup> Before his commitment to

10. *Ibid.*, 5 January 1907.

11. R.J. Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, p. 40.

12. R.J. Campbell, *Christianity & the Social Order* (Chapman & Hall, London 1907), p. 18.

13. *Baptist Times & Freeman*, 22 May 1903.

14. *Methodist Times*, 5 March 1903.

15. Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, p. 143.

16. In a letter to *The Times*, 13 October 1915. Cited by K. Robbins "The Spiritual Pilgrimage of the Rev. R.J. Campbell", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. XXX, No. 2 (April, 1979). p. 262.

socialism, Campbell had embraced liberal religious views. These were eventually presented in early 1907, and became known as the New Theology.

## II

An address to the London Board of Congregational ministers brought matters to a head. He spoke on "Changing sanctions of popular theology." The meeting was private. As early as 1893 *The Christian World* noted, "It is quite against the rules of the London Board of Congregational Ministers that any report of its proceedings should appear in the press."<sup>17</sup> To use modern parlance, Campbell's address was leaked. A second meeting of the Board was held. "That meeting was really the commencement of the new theology controversy."<sup>18</sup> The two books published in 1907 signified an attempt by Campbell to reply to his critics. They fanned the flames of a conflict raging in the daily press from January 1907.

Campbell chose *The New Theology* as the title of his first book. "New Theology" seems to have been loosely applied to doctrinal views varying from the orthodox. At the time of the Downgrade Controversy between C.H. Spurgeon and the Baptist Union in 1887, John Clifford, elected to the vice-presidency of the Union at the time was regarded by an American correspondent as an exponent. The writer confirmed this to be "...the chief cause of Mr Spurgeon's withdrawal... a sure indication of the number and power of the New Theology men in England among the Baptists."<sup>19</sup> At the May meetings of the Unitarian churches in 1893, a paper was read on "The New Orthodoxy", later described as the "New Theology". The Unitarians claimed that it had little in common with their beliefs. The phrase was again used by Dr Clifford in an 1897 address to the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches.

Campbell based his thinking on two philosophical pre-suppositions. The first was monism. The idea of reality as One was most influentially expounded by Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) to whom Campbell acknowledged his debt. Nothing finite is self-existent. Individuals and entities are adjectival; not things-in-themselves. They are but aspects of the One Divine Being. Evil, according to this view is negation. God is affirmed as the only true reality, and since there is no negation in Him, sin cannot be ultimately real. The second philosophical pillar was mysticism. Campbell was inspired by the third-century philosopher and founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus. The Platonist's moral purity and frequent out-of-the-body

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17. *The Christian World*, 26 October 1893.

18. Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, p. 185.

19. E.A. Payne, *The Down Grade Controversy*. An unpublished paper (January 1955) Angus Library, Regents Park College Oxford. Among Congregationalists T. Rhondda Williams, who was Campbell's successor-but-one in Brighton, claimed that he had been preaching a "New Theology" for years, and so did Bradford's K.C. Anderson.

experiences impressed Campbell who was conscious of a craving for some super-intellectual union with Deity. Even Augustine, who repelled Campbell as a theologian, attracted him as a mystic. "Here was the soil" wrote Campbell "...in which my monism grew."<sup>20</sup>

Space forbids a detailed exposition of Campbell's radically liberal theology founded upon the German school. Early in 1906 he was being challenged about his beliefs. In a question and answer session held in the lecture hall of the City Temple after a Sunday evening service, he affirmed that "...when a critical position is accepted by scholars generally, I accept it without hesitation."<sup>21</sup> F. Schleiermacher (1768-1834), A. Ritschl (1822-89) and A. Schweitzer (1875-1965) were formative influences on Campbell in his early ministry. "From the first day I began my work in Brighton I began to submit myself to the influence of the Germans, more especially in the sphere of biblical criticism."<sup>22</sup> This reminds us that alongside the theologians, the critical historians were working on books of the Bible. Hegel laid down the foundations for a philosophy of history, and this led to the discipline being regarded as the basic method of approaching theology. Visiting his former church in Brighton at the height of the New Theology controversy, Campbell reminded his congregation that they had heard his teaching "...from that pulpit and it did not frighten you very much."<sup>23</sup> He seemed to continue in the same vein at the City Temple. According to two deacons there, no difficulties had arisen in the church, and members were willing to concede that earlier Confessions of Faith "...permit of various interpretations."<sup>24</sup> Campbell's starting point was the immanence of God. God's mysterious presence pervaded and found expression throughout the universe. The unity of all things meant that God and humans shared a fundamental identity. Biblical references hitherto claimed as descriptive of the unique relationship between Jesus and the Father applied to all human beings. Acknowledging that his position endangered freedom of will, and threatened the obliteration of personal identity, Campbell persisted in affirming both, and was equally forthright in denying pantheism.

Sin, for Campbell, was an absence of love. "...the shadow where the light ought to be."<sup>25</sup> Wickedness was equated with selfishness. The General Confession should be replaced with specifics. "I repent of having shares in a business which is dealing unjustly with those it employs."<sup>26</sup> The offence was not against God. It was an ethical failure selfishly injuring others. Campbell's view of human nature was optimistic. Indeed, humanity was divinity unfolding. Christ was the only example of perfect manhood, not because of a unique nature, but because His life

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20 Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, p. 108.

21. *British Weekly*, 1 February 1906.

22. Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, p. 116.

23. *British Weekly*, 24 January 1907.

24. *Ibid.*, 10 January 1907.

25. R.J. Campbell *The New Theology*, p. 43.

26. R.J. Campbell, *New Theology Sermons* (Williams & Norgate, London, 1907). Intro. p. ix.

was never governed by any other principle than that of consistent self-giving love. This made Campbell vulnerable to the charge of Unitarianism, which he firmly rejected. He understood the atonement as a noble life crowned by a sacrificial death. Jesus overcame, by His supreme example, the curse of human selfishness. This example can be followed by all who engage in acts of self-sacrifice. He therefore urged his people to "... go home and practise the Atonement – the making-one of God and Man."<sup>27</sup>

Campbell laid great stress on the Kingdom of God. He regretted that it had been replaced in Christian teaching by the doctrine of the Church. This happened, he claimed, because the early Christians believed, with Jesus, that the Kingdom would come shortly after the death and resurrection of their Master. With the passage of time, the relevant promises were postponed to the next world and the Church assumed a prominence, as the ark of salvation, it was never intended to enjoy. To Jesus, the Kingdom was "...a Commonwealth of social justice and brotherhood."<sup>28</sup> It was the introduction of an ideal social order. Hence the first believers practised a primitive form of communism which quickly disappeared with the gentrifying of Christianity. Campbell's emphasis was on the community; he had no time for efforts towards personal conversion. He conceded that such an approach found "...some support in the New Testament especially in the epistles. Yet they were illusions then and are illusions now."<sup>29</sup>

He rejected all forms of external authority with respect to scripture. The real test of truth is to be found in the response it awakens within the soul. To the charge that this makes each person a Pope, he replied that all truth was a unity, and that people, exercising the principle of spiritual autonomy would "...know and be and do the truth."<sup>30</sup> Campbell advised his people to trust the voice of God within them. Bible study was helpful to some, but the absence of God within the soul would not enable a discovery of Him within scripture.

### III

Campbell's book *The New Theology* makes little reference to socialism. He did affirm however, that socialism was "...in reality the expression of the Christian spirit."<sup>31</sup> and claimed that the New Theology was the theology of the Labour movement. His sermons at the City Temple do not contain clear references to socialism. If they had, it is doubtful whether the crucial sermon preached in the autumn of 1906 would have excited so much comment. The connection mystified many. "It will be a surprise to some people to discover that the logical conclusion of the New Theology is Socialism ... yet this is the position of Campbell in

27. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

28. Campbell *Christianity & the Social Order*, p. 57.

29. *Ibid.*, 142.

30. Campbell, *The New Theology*, p.187.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

*Christianity and the Social Order*.”<sup>32</sup> Campbell perceived common concepts present in his theology and in his socialism. His second book therefore attempted to be more specific about the correspondence between his Christian principles and those of the Labour movement.

His universalism found an echo of the socialist emphasis on brotherhood. His conversion to socialism, he claimed, was hastened when he understood that the first Christian teachers “... did not know of any other gospel than that of universal brotherhood.”<sup>33</sup> He saw socialist organizations such as the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabians, and the ILF as part of an international movement, and claimed that this could not be predicated of the Liberals or the Conservatives. He regarded anything that tended toward brotherhood as being Christian. The task was to bring in the Kingdom and this involved replacing competition with co-operation and collectivism. The Labour movement therefore, with its insistence on brotherhood, was societally applying the Christian ideal.

Campbell also saw the oft-repeated socialist repudiation of theology as akin to his rejection of other-worldism. Believers in New Testament times, he claimed, did not believe in dying and going to heaven, but in hoping for an earthly immortality. The disappearance of transcendentalism would not result in the demise of Christianity. He regarded the ministry of John the Baptist as proof of this. John preached “...pure social ethics.”<sup>34</sup> He was the sort of orator who would have graced a Labour rally in Hyde Park. Although Jesus broadened the scope of such teaching, it was still a social ethic capable of being realised upon earth.

The socialist struggle for justice was interpreted by Campbell as an outgoing example of the atoning principle at work. He noted persons into whose lives the Spirit had come, and who were thus becoming “... saviours of the race.”<sup>35</sup> In a notorious reference to the speeches of Keir Hardie in the House of Commons, he argued that the socialist leader, when pleading for a fair deal on behalf of the workers, was displaying the concept of atonement. Hardie preached the gospel of self-sacrifice as he attempted to rescue those who were victims of the system. Given this understanding Campbell claimed that “... thousands of our fellow-beings... who never dream of going to church are being saved in this way.”<sup>36</sup>

By identifying such theological and political concepts Campbell gave a common identity to the New Theology and socialism. Others made the same equation but deduced a negative and harmful result. Thus the *British Congregationalist*, in an article entitled “The Spirit of Revolt”, asserted that trouble in the churches was due “... to two .. sets of causes ... one is intellectual ... the New Theology ... the other is due to the spread of a vague form of Socialism both within and around the Christian Church.”<sup>37</sup> Campbell’s view of this was to posit the rise of socialism as

32. *British Congregationalist*, 23 January 1908.

33. Campbell *Christianity & the Social Order*, Intro. p. ix.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

35. Campbell, *The New Theology*, p. 194.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *British Congregationalist*, 9 January 1908.

being "... simply the revival of Christianity in the form best suited to the modern mind."<sup>38</sup> He claimed that the introduction of Old Age Pensions, free school meals and free education proved that Britain's "... social organization is gradually becoming moralised in the Christian sense of the word and the result will be the Socialised State."<sup>39</sup> The New Theology was but the religious articulation of the social movement.

Campbell's disavowal of much that went to make up the New Theology, and his farewell to Nonconformity belong to a further paper. We may conclude this account by seeking to elicit some reason for his remarkable claims and assertions. The falling attendances at church services occasioned much anxiety. The year following the publication of Campbell's two books saw J.H. Shakespeare, General Secretary of the Baptist Union, address the Assembly of that Union on "The arrested Progress of the Church." The *Free Church Year Book* for 1906-7 showed a decline of 27,000 members, and a further decrease of 37,000 for the years 1907-10. Baptists were informed that it was due to reaction after the Welsh Revival<sup>40</sup> but further thought revealed unwelcome complexities. Biblical criticism, the decay of expository preaching, growing affluence and "...agnostic if not atheistic Socialism",<sup>41</sup> were all blamed. On the last however, there was disagreement. In the speech referred to, Shakespeare commended the spirit of socialism if not its content. Campbell made an outright commitment to the movement, genuinely believing that renewal lay along the lines of accepting the Labour movement as the coming expression of the Christian spirit. This was Campbell's solution to a problem becoming ever more acute, and which has persisted to the present day. How can churches win the loyalty of the uninterested? The National Free Church Council had run Simultaneous Missions, but for Campbell such an approach was impossible. He held that the masses were not hostile to the religion of Jesus, but to the traditional Christianity of the churches. Let socialism arise, and clothed with the New Theology it will revive primitive Christianity. Even if the churches go under, religion will be saved.

Secondly, once Campbell had embraced socialism, he saw himself as a crusader. He wished to lift the movement on to a higher level. He believed that the "... waggon of Socialism needs to be hitched to the star of religious faith."<sup>42</sup> He had two main anxieties. One was the influence of continental socialism on the British Labour movement. He regarded his efforts as countering socialism expressed in terms of agnosticism, atheism and anti-clericalism. His second concern was that the Labour movement was in danger of becoming too materialistic. He had claimed that socialism rightly demanded the basic necessities for those who were denied them, but not even the workers could live by bread alone. He felt "... a

38. Campbell *Christianity & the Social Order*, p. 17.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

40. *Baptist Times & Freeman*, 3 January 1908.

41. *British Congregationalist*, 6 January 1910.

42. Campbell, *The New Theology*, p. 8.

divine call to further the association of religion with the social movement."<sup>43</sup> He deplored the fact that "... the main current of the great Labour movement should appear to be out of touch with organized religion."<sup>44</sup> Whether socialists appreciated it or not (and many were mystified by Campbell's theological efforts) the New Theology was, for him, the theology of the socialist movement.

W.C.R. HANCOCK

## REVIEWS

*John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines.* By Alan P.F. Sell. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1997. Pp xi + 444. £40.00. ISBN 0-7083-1409-0.

In recent years even secular historians and political philosophers have come to recognise the importance of religion in Locke's thought, leaving only a few conservative Christians mumbling about his secularising influence. Professor Sell does not, of course, fall into the latter group. His concern is rather different. In one sense, this book is not primarily a history of Locke's influence at all. It is a sequel to his 1995 book on the influence of Hegel, *Philosophical Idealism and Christian Belief*, and a prelude to a third book, which will offer an alternative to the Lockean and Hegelian defences of a Christian view of the world.

Professor Sell's approach is to consider five main themes – ideas, knowledge and truth; reason, revelation, faith and scripture; morality and liberty; toleration and government; and Christian doctrine – and in each case to discuss the way in which Locke's ideas were received, both positively and negatively by his contemporaries and immediate successors. Those considered include well-known names such as Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and Bishops Burnet, Butler and Berkeley, and also many lesser names, both Anglican and Dissenting clergymen. All this shows considerable learning.

At times, however, one has to wonder whether everyone was talking about the same person. In part this is a tribute to Locke's many-faceted influence; in part it may indicate that not everyone understood him correctly. Was this the fault of Locke, or his commentators? There is no doubting the readiness of several late eighteenth-century thinkers, such as Richard Price or Thomas Belsham, to claim Locke's support for a position much more exclusively based upon reason than his own. Professor Sell takes the view (with which I concur) that Locke's personal profession of Christianity, even orthodox Christianity, should be taken at face value; he does not believe that Locke was a Socinian, even if his exposition of the doctrines of the Trinity and the atonement was somewhat skeletal – in that it did not differ greatly from many others of that period. He certainly had a greater respect for revelation than many later 'rational' theologians.

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43. Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, p. 150.

44. Campbell, *The New Theology*, p. 255.

Perhaps the crucial questions are, Did Locke realise all the consequences of his defence of the right of private judgement, and the religious toleration it implied? and would he have changed his mind if he had? The answer to both questions is almost certainly No. Professor Sell's book helps us to see why.

DAVID M. THOMPSON

*The Congregational Lecture 2000: Recovering the Book of Revelation.*  
By R.J. McKelvey. Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, 2000:  
ISBN 0-9517710-9-4; pp. 22. £2.00.

Jack McKelvey is a seasoned New Testament scholar and a proven exponent of the Book of Revelation – his *The Millennium and the Book of Revelation* (Lutterworth, 1999) was recently reviewed in this Journal. So he was an apt choice to give the annual Congregational Lecture in millennium year, and he offers a wide-ranging and penetrative analysis of the message of Revelation, as a word for Christians in both the first and twenty-first centuries. The style is concise, direct and clear – deceptively clear indeed, for a very great deal of specialist academic work is mediated, interpreted and made accessible to a wider Christian audience.

McKelvey's approach is one of critical realism. He acknowledges that our standpoint conditions what we see, and that our experience both opens and limits us, when we come to ancient texts. Yet in reading an ancient text we are observing a world far from our own. So we must do all we can to think ourselves into the colonial world of western Turkey, in the '90s of the first century AD, where Christians were subject, along with all their neighbours, to the arrogant claims and seductive PR of the Roman Empire.

Against these imperial boasts, the "overriding theme of Revelation is the sovereignty of God". McKelvey's interpretation "places the emphasis of the book on Christ's redemptive work on the cross rather than on the end of the world". Thus we are offered a message anchored in heaven, but thoroughly this-worldly in the challenges and commitments to which it summons us. Revelation is about worship; honouring the God who is made known from a cross and an empty tomb. It is about witness: upholding the integrity of Christian profession and conduct, in a wealthy, shallow and unjust society. And it is about war: the battle to express and extend the goodness of Christ in his world, a fight that will only be won by humble, sacrificial and costly Christian love.

Idolatry, consumerism, injustice and oppression are with us still, says McKelvey. Revelation confronts us with the counter-claims of Christ, and with our responsibilities as sinners and saints. "The Book of Revelation is not only a vision for the future but an agenda for the present".

This little booklet is packed with insight and information, with sense and sensitivity. I commend it warmly, as a brief but substantial guide to a difficult corner of scripture, and a gentle but urgent invitation to serious and discerning Christian discipleship.

JOHN PROCTOR

*Seeking God's Kingdom. The Nonconformist Social Gospel in Wales, 1906-1939.* By Robert Pope. Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1999. Pp. xiii, 194. £25.00 ISBN 0-7083-1568-1.

Some books reviewed in this *Journal* cover ground likely to be familiar to members of the Society, shedding new light on well-known issues; and sometimes not. Dr. Pope's book deals with figures little-known outside Wales: David Miall Edwards, Thomas Rees, Herbert Morgan and John Morgan Jones. They were advocates at once of strongly liberal theology and the social involvement of the churches.

One question which arises, and with which the author deals, is whether this represents one stance or two; were these men protagonists of the social gospel because they were disciples of Ritschl, or vice versa; or were they riding two horses at once? On the whole he sees their liberalism primary and their social involvement derivative. In any case his enthusiasm for their position is rather lukewarm. He sees both their liberalism and their social gospel as superficial, crumbling under the pressures of war and economic crisis and the onslaught of neo-orthodox theology.

The four men did not hold identical views, and Dr Pope distinguishes between them. But perhaps rather than spell out these distinctions some more general considerations may be useful here.

Let it be said that this book is clear and persuasive; and it goes without saying scholarly. The topic is both interesting and important. If it is true that most of us will meet Messrs. Edwards, Rees, Morgan and Jones for the first time why have we been ignorant of them hitherto?

Is it because they are Welsh? Offa's Dyke appears surprisingly deep: on the English side we are regrettably unaware of developments which have been specifically Welsh; perhaps the converse is true? At any rate there is little here about any connections with the labour movement or with theological radicalism in England or Scotland; not by some lapse on the author's part, but because the links were in reality limited. Only R.J. Campbell makes a significant entrance on the theological wing, and his performance in the liberal role was brief. Certainly the quite notable tradition of High Anglican Christian Socialism is a world away from that of Welsh Nonconformity. Bishop Gore no doubt knew as little of what went on in the valleys as their denizens did of him.

Or are these figures little better known in Wales to-day than in England? Their social views look remarkably dated as we move into a new millennium, and their brand of theological liberalism was already unfashionable by the 'thirties of the last century. Dr. Pope writes of the impact of Barthian theology and refers to one or two Welsh theologians affected by it, but the liberals treated it simply as reversion to a more primitive age. Only eighteen years separated the English translation of Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christentums* in 1901 and the original appearance of Barth's commentary on Romans in 1919, but for the Welsh liberals it was a theological pilgrimage too long to undertake. Interestingly, Edwards preferred Von Hügel, but the Catholic Modernists in general do not seem to have affected them.

It has to be said that to a later generation their views seem naive. They saw Christianity as essentially “following Jesus” and trying to live out his teaching. Albert Schweitzer does not appear in the book, and consequently no indication that they faced the challenge of his eschatological version of the New Testament, nor the scepticism of later generations about our ability to know much about the historical Jesus.

Their social and political ideas suffered similarly. They saw much social deprivation and insisted that it should be put right; they did not ask how moral demands should be worked out in the technicalities of political power and economic theory. Characteristically they were not clear whether they were radical Liberals or committed to a new Labour Party, nor if the latter, whether the social change they sought demanded Socialism. In this respect they were indeed in much the same case as English Christian Socialists.

This book is a thorough study of a dead world; a haze of nostalgia hangs around the theological and social radicalism of the early twentieth century.

And yet... The wheel of social and theological convictions turns. Do they, with all their limitations, seem more remote from the Christian scene to-day than their contemporary critics and the conservative theologies which came after? The radical Christians of the twenty-first century are unlike those of the early twentieth; but are they more unlike than grandchildren to their grandparents?

STEPHEN MAYOR