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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

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in India. He ends the letter: "Your affectionate friend and brother, John Newton".

Thus ends the correspondence of thirty years and the record of a friendship which both men cherished.

L. G. CHAMPION.

George William Gordon: Saint or Sinner?

THE DEATH of William Knibb in 1845 and of Thomas Burcheil in 1846, which marked a change in the fortunes of the Baptists in Jamaica, coincided with the decline of the British Government's interest in the Island's welfare. The lustre of Jamaica had faded. Domestic and European problems were such that Jamaica figured low on the British Government's list of priorities, a fact not unnoticed by a leading Native Baptist, George William Gordon: he suggested to Governor Edward John Eyre that Britain had become obsessed with Oriental conquests and that the spirit which had brought about the emancipation of the slaves was now on the ebb.¹ In fact, for "the next twenty-five years" after 1839 "Jamaican affairs were not a major issue in British politics".²

Political isolation prompted by Jamaica's failure to maintain her profitability could only result in further economic and social decline. The Baptist missionary J. M. Phillippo, of Spanish Town, argued against the general tenor of English Dissent, blaming the economic decline on the British policy of Free Trade; but what angered him most was the fact that the Government, having abolished slavery in the British Colonies, was now quite happy to accept sugar from countries still engaged in slavery because it suited Free Trade policy.³ An American observer, William Sewell, in what amounts to an indictment of British policy in Jamaica, reported to the *New Yorker* in 1860 that "I know of no country in the world where so little trouble has been taken to investigate the causes of the decline, or to remedy the evils that have depressed the colony".⁴

Sewell's proposed social reforms re-emphasised the plea for the end of exploitation and for mutual trust between employer and employed that Knibb and others had advocated before; at the same time, giving the lie to the current excuse that the island's troubles were the direct result of emancipation: "Emancipation," he stated, "has not been wholly successful because the experiment has not been wholly tried". Ellis Fray of Kettering wrote home saying, "Turn wherever you will at present, poverty and distress stare you in the face". Consequently, crime increased, especially theft, which in the words of the Anglican incumbent at Grange Hill, the Rev. W. Clark, was "due to lack of food".

The Baptists suffered not only from the social-economic pressures. but also from increasing problems among the churches. If Jamaicans felt a sense of abandonment by the British Government, many Baptist missionaries felt likewise concerning their relationship to the London Committee. Finance was an embarrassment, debts seemed unending;8 more important, however, was the steady growth of Native Leadership, which led in 1864 to a distinct move away from the Jamaica Baptist Union.⁹ The increase in native pastors was an important factor in the development of the Negro as an independent and responsible being. It was inevitable that some attempt to increase influence and power in the community at large should be made; therefore the Church that encouraged native leadership provided a ready outlet for such attempts. The attempt by Negroes to exercise power in this way was not confined to the Baptists, for the Methodists to a lesser extent also experienced similar unrest. 10 The Baptist Missionary Society was in an anomalous position; an indigenous Church existed, though the majority of its ministers were still agents of the Society, and most of its property belonged legally to the Society.¹¹ Not surprisingly, strained relations produced bitter comment. J. E. Henderson and Walter Dendy both accused the Committee of apathy towards the Tamaican work, 12

This is the context of the question: "George William Gordon: Saint or Sinner?"

Gordon was born on the Cherry Garden Estate, in the St. Andrew hills, near Kingston, in 1820, the son of Joseph Gordon, a wealthy Scottish planter and a Negro slave. 18 When Joseph Gordon eventually married a white woman, George William Gordon and his mother were forbidden entrance to the "Big House". Joseph, however, recognised his son's intelligence, providing not only his freedom, but also books that he might teach himself to read. Self-taught, he became as astute as his father, if not more so, and later surpassed him in wealth and influence. In 1846 he married Lucy Shannon, daughter of an Irish journalist.14 Under the watchful eye of James Daly of Black River, a business friend of Joseph, the young Gordon proved an apt pupil. Enthused with ambition, in 1836 he started his own business in Kingston. At this time he became acquainted with Robert Hill, a leading and respected coloured man, who said of Gordon that "he impressed me then, though young-looking, with an air of a man of ready business habits". 15 By 1842 he was wealthy enough to send his twin sisters to

be educated in England and France, with his future mother-in-law, Mrs. Shannon, acting as chaperon. By 1843, in spite of the continued refusal to allow him to enter the family home, he was keeping his father solvent, for there was, wrote Adolphe Roberts, "a profoundly sentimental and forgiving strain in his character". 16

Gordon's public life began some time in 1850. Jamaica's local politics polarised into two main groups: the Town party, consisting mainly of wealthy coloured people, and the Country party, made up of the plantocracy. Previous Governors had counted on the help of the Town party; Edward John Eyre, however, favoured the Country party—no doubt due in part to his innate fear and distrust of the Jamaican Negro. A member of the Town party, Gordon soon found himself well to the left of his colleagues, because of his concern for the poorer members of society. This interest eventually lost him his seat on the Assembly for a number of years, until his re-election in 1863. Not only did he become a Justice of the Peace and a leading businessman with interests in insurance and a newspaper, the Watchman, but on several occasions he deputised for Edward Jordan during his long term of office as Mayor of Kingston. George William Gordon had become a man of considerable means and influence.

The economic and political drive in Gordon were complemented by his religious zeal. He began in the Church of his father, the Church of Scotland; he then moved, apparently as he progressed in society, to the Anglican Church: finally he found in the Native Baptist Movement a more congenial environment for implementing his own ideas for solving the problems of his people.¹⁷ There is a note of incredulity on the part of W. L. Mathieson when he writes of Gordon, "It is impossible to understand how a man of his social and political standing . . . could debase himself to the level of a native Baptist". 18 He had been baptized by Phillippo who had suggested that he start "an independent cause under his own superintendency". When Gordon did so, Phillippo recorded that he "has occupied himself in preaching and doing good openly and in various ways . . . He has met with much persecution, is denominated a hypocrite, and by some of whom better things might be expected, 'a troubler of Israel'". This independent cause was to play an important part in the case later brought against Gordon, and especially against the man he had ordained as his deacon, Paul Bogle of Stoney Gut.

Social injustice aggravated temperamental incompatibilities, and both elements were present in the conflict between Gordon and the Governor of Jamaica, Edward John Eyre. Eyre neither then nor now lacks his defenders, and one of the more recent of these, Geoffrey Dutton, no doubt is right when he says that the enmity between the two men was partly due to the "bitter inter-denominational hatred of nineteenth century Christianity".²⁰ Gordon represented the radical strain of Dissent, while Eyre stood for the conservatism of the Establishment, political and religious.

Eyre, born in 1815, son of a Yorkshire clergyman, rose from

obscurity to become one of the enigmatic characters of British Colonial history in the nineteenth century. Destined for a military career, at the age of seventeen he opted to make his own way in Australia. He not only succeeded as a sheep farmer, but also gained a reputation as a "Protector" of the Aborigines. However, on his return to England, his reputation was that of an intrepid explorer, based on the publication of his two volume journal Discoveries in Central Australia in 1845. The following year, Earl Grey, Secretary for the Colonies, appointed him Lieutenant Governor of the Southern Province of New Zealand.²¹ His introduction to the West Indies came through a brief spell in Trinidad, and his appointment in 1854 as Lieutenant Governor of St. Vincent; from 1858 onwards he was also Lieutenant Governor of the Leeward Islands. It was after a racial disturbance in St. Vincent that his deep-seated fear of the West Indian Negro became evident; this was, suggests Dutton, his first taste of collective responsibility.²² He could no longer be the carefree explorer, and he found the responsibility almost too much for him. Whilst on leave in England he was offered what was then considered a major post, that of Acting Governor of Jamaica, during the absence of Governor Darling, Hume, his first biographer, sees in this the esteem in which Evre was held in high places, but fails to mention those who were opposed to the appointment. The Duke of Newcastle, who had headed the Colonial Office since 1859, agreed that "He is not strong enough for the place"28 and his period as Acting Governor corroborated Newcastle's judgement. Local opinion in Jamaica, in general, was against Eyre. His confirmation as Governor in 1864, at the time when Edward Cardwell took over from Newcastle, came as a shock to the plantocracy. The Jamaica Guardian, a pro-planter newspaper, wrote that he "was weak, vacillating and undignified in his conduct and character".24

Eyre, unfortunately, came to his task with two fundamental prejudices: first, his innate fear of Negroes-in spite of his Australian reputation he was a member of the strongly racialist Anthropological Society of London;²⁵ secondly, his dislike of Dissent. The Jamaican Negro was predominantly of dissenting persuasion, with a special preference for the more radical sects: even Dutton, in a somewhat ungracious reference to Dissent, says "A devout and strictly Church of England man such as Eyre must have been deeply shocked at having to wade through the surface scum of religion to the elegance of King's House in Spanish Town".28 Two of the men who could have been of immense help to the Governor were beyond the pale for just these reasons: J. M. Phillippo of Spanish Town was a Baptist, while Gordon was both coloured and a Dissenter. With hindsight, C. E. Carrington's judgement does have some substance: "In happier times, with a manageable constitution, he (Eyre) might have been a great colonial statesman and Gordon his right-hand man".27 Alas, times were not happier, and Eyre was not open to advice if it came from Negroes and Dissenters. Gordon and Eyre were in contention right from the start, for Gordon continually reminded the Governor of his

"collective responsibility". Hume points out that as a boy, Eyre could not stand ridicule in any form, 28 compensating by attempting all kinds of physical feats of strength. Hume, in fact, takes forty-seven pages just to make the point, that even as a boy Eyre did not lack physical courage, and that therefore, as Governor, he continued to act with a like courage. 29 To admit one's mistakes and the greater competence of others takes another kind of courage that seems to be missing in Eyre. To have taken advice from Gordon, a coloured man and a Dissenter, would have been intolerable.

Eyre, who was not as wealthy as his predecessors,³⁰ was unpopular for his lack of largess when entertaining socially, and was quickly led into conflict through his sensitivity to criticism—his childhood fear of ridicule never left him. His first clash with the Jamaican Assembly came when he refused to explain why he disregarded their judgement of the misconduct of an official.³¹ Later he attempted to minimize his own gullibility in the matter of establishing a tramway scheme in the island, which turned out to be a deliberate attempt to defraud the Government. Unwittingly, he became a party to it. When pressed to denounce the affair publicly, he offered to prosecute the Constructional Engineer on a charge with which he himself had no personal connection.⁸² All social and political criticism he took personally, hence his first real clash with Gordon.

As Justice of the Peace, Gordon inspected the prisons in his area, and was not afraid to condemn their state and the treatment meted out to the prisoners. Governor Darling, previously, had not been too happy with Gordon's advocacy of prison reform³³ and had threatened to oust him from his office of Justice of the Peace.⁸⁴ Gordon's complaint about the Morant Bay prison and the treatment of the prisoners there, prompted Eyre to fulfil that threat. Eyre wrote to Newcastle, "I believe Mr. Gordon to be a most mischievous person, and one likely to do a great deal of harm amongst uneducated and excitable persons, such as the lower classes of this country. His object appears, not to rectify evils where they exist, but rather to impress the peasantry with the idea that they labour under many grievances, and that their welfare and interests are not cared for by those in authority". 85 Evre had certainly got the message Gordon intended. Gordon was not one to take his dismissal lying down; he wrote direct to the Colonial Office who privately informed Eyre that Gordon had acted within his rights in insisting upon certain reforms, but publicly upheld the Governor. Gordon was also removed from his position as a Vestryman of St. Thomas, on the grounds that he was a Baptist. 86

Angered, not only by the dismissals, but even more by the social conditions prevailing in many parts of the island, he wrote to the Governor's secretary on 9th June 1862, about immigration into the island at a time when there was unemployment and suffering among the indigenous population. He argued that Eyre did not care about the plight of the poorer Jamaicans. Five days later he wrote to Newcastle himself. To attack the local administration was bad enough, to write to

the Colonial Office direct was too much. After that any reconciliation between the two men was out of the question.

With Native Baptist support, Gordon was re-elected to the House of Assembly in 1863, and obtained a public platform for his attack on the system, personified for him by the Governor himself. Vitriolic though many of his speeches were, their object was plain: he wanted justice for his people. Inevitably, his speeches provided grounds for the charges brought against him, especially incitement to rebellion. The underlying reason for wanting him out of the way undoubtedly was his constant attack upon Eyre's inability to govern and insensitivity to the needs of the people. The Governor refused, however, to listen to cries for help; even when deputations came to Spanish Town, he would refuse to meet them.³⁷ It was not difficult for Gordon to make his case

against the Governor at this point.

Gordon's speeches added to the increasing tension, for which Dr. E. B. Underhill, secretary of the B.M.S., who visited the island in 1859, was blamed. Underhill wrote to Edward Cardwell, now at the Colonial Office, suggesting that hardship, poverty and injustice were the ingredients for another revolt; many could still recall the bloodshed of 1831-32. Eyre's reaction was predictable. All was well on the island: if there was any hardship, it was due to native laziness; it was all the imaginings of Baptist extremists.38 Underhill's letter was hotly debated throughout the island, and "Underhill Meetings" became focal points of unrest and political debate at the local level, from which emerged a specific request to the Queen for some positive action towards a just solution. What came back from London was the so-called "Queen's Advice". It was a "masterpiece of Victorian economic prejudice"39 and completely missed the point, making statements designed to incite rather than pacify. Briefly it said: work hard, do as you are told, you are better off than the British labourer. 40 A supposedly unbiased account written by a pro-Eyre man, the barrister W. F. Findlayson, states à propos the "Advice": "Nothing could be more sensible, more just, more reasonable, or more calculated to have a salutory influence in Jamaica". 41 In reality, the "Advice" was irrelevant and politically inept. The exhortation to work harder could only inflame popular opinion in an island of empty stomachs and empty coffers. To Eyre, however, the "Advice" was approval of his policies; he even ordered that "Advice" to be read from every pulpit in the land, although in some pulpits it was deliberately ignored.

Reaction began in the establishment of small guerrilla groups, which met to train in the use of weapons. One such group was formed at Gordon's Chapel at Stoney Gut under the leadership of Paul Bogle. Throughout the area there was a steady build-up of tension and activity. Gordon's speeches did nothing to ease the situation, while a pamphlet printed after the arrival of the "Advice" began with the emotive words: "People of St. Ann's, poor people of St. Ann's, starving people of St. Ann's, naked people of St. Ann's", and continued, "We call on you to come forth . . . protest against unjust

Such an atmosphere needed only a small spark to ignite the explosion. On 9th October 1865, a Negro, Lewis Dick, was tried at Morant Bay for trespass on the abandoned Middleton Plantation, adjoining Stoney Gut. It was an important case, for many homes in the area were being threatened by the claims of a Mr. W. M. Anderson. When Dick was found guilty, Bogle advised him to pay only the fine, but not the costs. The authorities acted foolishly. Instead of warning Bogle, they issued a warrant for his arrest on the grounds that he had been involved in a similar incident two days earlier. The token force of eight sent to arrest him were confronted by a large group of Negroes outside the Stoney Gut Church, and returned, not with Bogle, but with the threat that he and his force would enter Morant Bay the next day. Word was sent to Eyre, who was at Flamstead: immediately he dispatched a warship and a hundred troops, and then returned to his dinner party. 48 Bogle's men marched on the Court House throwing stones, the authorities panicked and gave the order to fire; after that the area around Morant Bay was aflame.44

It did not take long to quell the rebels, and then the reprisals began. For the six volunteers wounded and the six killed, the eight civilians killed and seventeen wounded, it was estimated that 439 Negroes were killed, some six hundred flogged, and a thousand Negroes' homes burnt to the ground. With the memories of the Haitian revolution of 1791 still kept alive, and the Indian Mutiny having occurred only eight years earlier, the officers allowed their men carte blanche in making reprisals. Later defence of such brutality was based on the theory that a Negro rebellion was necessarily, sooner or later, a war of extermination. The Negro was assumed to be a savage kind of animal who could be killed without any qualms. 47

Someone had to take the blame, and Eyre made sure that it was Gordon, even though Gordon was in Kingston at the time. The revolt was led by a devotee of Gordon and had started in Gordon's area. It was reported that he had attempted to buy a Confederate warship and smuggle Haitian refugees ashore for the purpose of setting up a "New West Indian Republic".48 On 15th August Gordon was said to have told the Negroes to resist attempts to stop them attending "Underhill Meetings", even "though their homes were threatened with destruction"; they were to tell their persecutors that "I, George William Gordon, say they dare not do it. It is tyranny. You must do what Hayti does". 49 Earlier that year the Bishop of Kingston wrote to Eyre concerning the "Underhill Letter", in which he conceded that along with every other country, Jamaica was suffering some distress. Unwittingly, he also conceded Underhill's major argument, that the authorities did not care for the poor, for the Bishop wrote, "I know not of one person in this island of any class or colour who deeply

grieves over the suffering of the coloured population as Dr. Underhill says he did in 1860".50 That was precisely Gordon's case also.

To strengthen his case, Evre suggested that Gordon tried to evade arrest, but when Gordon, who was in Kingston receiving medical treatment, heard of the warrant, he promptly gave himself up. On the pretext that it was not safe to keep Gordon in Kingston. Evre at once had him removed to Morant Bay so that he would be tried by Court Martial. The trial was a farce, affording no opportunity for any real defence. The verdict was a foregone conclusion, and Gordon was hanged from the boom of the prison ship on Monday, 23rd October.⁵¹ When later challenged concerning the haste with which Eyre dispatched his foe, the Governor replied, "I can only repeat my conviction that however defective the evidence may have been in a strictly legal point of view, Mr. Gordon was the proximate occasion of the insurrection . . . therefore he suffered justly". 52 The official enquiry which took place failed to substantiate Eyre's accusations, and he was recalled home to face a long period at the centre of a bitter political wrangle. In a strange way, Findlayson's hyperbole is not without some point when he wrote that "the Governor was recalled and he alone suffered",58 for Gordon has now become immortalised in Jamaican history as one of its martyrs.

The clash between Gordon and Eyre illustrates a fundamental issue, namely, does the equality of man before God have any social or political meaning? In other words, we are compelled to examine afresh the Christian doctrine of man. The fact that both men claimed to belong to the Body of Christ, irrespective of their own personal view of the other's churchmanship, heightens the serious nature of the question, which remains unresolved in practice, if not in theory, a hundred and twelve years later.

Depending upon the side from which the question is viewed, Gordon may be acclaimed as either Saint or Sinner. In the case of Eyre, a change of sides did take place, for many who had previously called him "weak" and "vacillating" now claimed him as hero.54 The clash also raised the ever current question as to whether authority's role is to maintain order at any price, even if that price includes dehumanisation. Robert Hall in 1824 argued that slavery in any form degraded man to the level of a thing, making him "a mere appendage to the existence of another, instead of preserving that dignity which belongs to him as a reasonable and accountable person."55 There is a danger of hiding behind the complexities of the political, economic, social and cultural difficulties in any given situation and ignoring the fundamental theological factor, by which Christians at least must measure their actions. I would maintain that the difference between Gordon and Eyre lies in the fact that Gordon did grasp, however dimly, the theological factor. It may be argued that he and his cause had nothing to lose, but everything to gain, in comparison with Eyre whose job it was to maintain the status quo. Nevertheless, Gordon saw his people as being worthy of something better than they were being

offered; whilst Eyre, perhaps more sinned against than sinning, found it difficult to rid himself of the age-old position of treating the Negro as something a little less than human because of the colour of his skin.

Despite his weaknesses and his natural bias, Gordon, as a coloured man, stood "in between" and sought to encourage his people to discover their true humanity. A quotation from David Cairns' The Image of God in Man, a thesis in which he argues that a true understanding of the nature of man cannot be divorced from man's relationship to God, may help us to make up our own minds on the question, "George William Gordon: Saint or Sinner?" Dealing with the dignity of man, Cairns writes that it "depends firstly on the self-giving love of God, who created every man for communion with Himself, and who sent Christ for the salvation of men . . . Every man thus created, whether he is a sinner, greater or less, or in human eyes a saint, has a dignity in our eyes because of the personal being that God has given to him. Having given this dignity of personal being to man, God also values it, though it is all the gift of His grace. And the dignity of man, universal, whether man be a sinner or saint, is also something that we must call good, and which we must value."58 This view of man seems as difficult to accept in full today as it did in 1865. Yet there can be no gainsaving the fact that Gordon died for it.

NOTES

This lecture was delivered at the annual meeting of the Baptist Historical

Society, 19th April 1977.

¹ W. L. Burn, The Age of Equipoise (London 1964), 84-5.

² E. L. Woodward, The Age of Reform 1815-1870 (London 1962), 374.

³ E. B. Underhill, The Life of the Rev. James Mursell Phillippo (London 1886), 150-1. See also E. Williams, British Historians and the West Indies (London 1964), 86.

4 W. G. Sewell, The Ordeal of Free Labour in the British West Indies

(London 1861), 169-70.

⁵ Ibid., 177-9.

⁶ Fray letters, 9 December 1851. West India Reference Library, Kingston: copies of all letters quoted are deposited in the Library of the Bristol Baptist

⁷ D. G. Hall, *Free Jamaica* (New York 1959), 97.
 ⁸ Underhill, 246; also letters of J. E. Henderson and B. Millard.

⁹ R. L. Knight (ed.), Liberty and Progress (Kingston 1938), 18; W. Gardner, History of Jamaica (London 1909), 465.

10 P. Curtin, Two Jamaicas (New York 1965), 36.

11 In July 1969 the B.M.S. transferred the deeds of the property still held by them to the Jamaica Baptist Union.

12 Henderson letters, 12 August 1847, 23 April 1857. Dendy letters, 8 Sep-

tember 1851.

13 A. Roberts, Six Great Jamaicans (Kingston 1952), 24. There is a short memoir by a contemporary missionary, D. Fletcher, Personal Recollections of the Honourable George William Gordon, late of Jamaica (London 1867), which I have not been able to obtain.

¹⁴ Roberts, 27.

- 15 Ibid., 26.
- 16 Ibid., 28.

- ¹⁷ G. A. Catherall, "The Native Baptists", Baptist Ouarterly, XXIV no. 2 (1971), 65-73.

 18 W. L. Mathieson, The Sugar Colonies and Governor Eyre (London
- 1936), 223-4.
 - 19 Underhill, 320-1.
 - ²⁰ G. Dutton, The Hero As Murderer (London 1967), 220-37.
- ²¹ H. Hume, The Life of Edward John Byre, the Governor of Jamaica (London 1867); B. Semmel, The Governor Byre Controversy (London 1962). ²² Dutton, 204.
 - 28 Ibid., 211.
- 24 Facts and Documents relating to the Alleged Rebellion in Jamaica and the means of Repression. Including notes on the Trial of Mr. Gordon: Jamaica Papers no. 1 (1866), 10.

 25 J. W. Burrows, Evolution and Society (London 1966), 118-27.
 - 26 Dutton, 21.

 - ²⁷ C. E. Carrington, The British Overseas: Part One (London 1968), 521.
 - 28 Hume, 10.
 - 29 Ibid., 46-93.
 - 80 Ibid., 109-10.
 - 81 Ibid., 116-17.
 - 32 Semmel, 35-6.
 - 88 Hume, 123-4.
 - 84 Ibid.
 - 85 Ibid.

 - ³⁶ Semmel, 34. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 45. Roberts, 39.
 - 88 E. B. Underhill, The Tragedy of Morant Bay (London 1895).
 - 89 Semmel, 44.
 - 40 Facts and Documents, 9; Semmel, 43; Williams, 116.
- 41 W. F. Findlayson, The History of the Jamaica Case (London 1869), lxxvii.
 - ⁴² Semmel, 44-5; Roberts, 36.
 - 48 S. Oliver, The Myth of Governor Eyre (London 1933), 241.
 - 44 Facts and Documents.
 - 45 P. Sherlock, The West Indies (London 1966), 73.
- ⁴⁶ Facts and Documents, 21; Oliver, 278-9; Semmel, 51.
 ⁴⁷ Findlayson, vi-vii. Hume, 217. Cf. reaction after the 1832 rebellion in Jamaica (G. A. Catherall, "British Baptist Involvement in Jamaica", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Keele Univ., 1970). Cf. also the 1823 revolt in Demerara (C. Northcott, Slavery's Martyr (London 1976)). There are similarities in each case, particularly concerning the attitude of the Governors and the manner of arrest and trial of the "scapegoats".
 - 48 Hume, 185-7.
 - 49 Findlayson, 82.
 - 50 Hume, 145.
 - 51 Facts and Documents, 40-60.
 - 52 Findlayson, 207.
 - 53 Ibid., i.
 - 54 Hume, Appendix F.
- 55 O. Gregory (ed.), Works of Robert Hall, A.M., vol. IV (London 1832), 221.
 - 56 D. Cairns, The Image of God in Man (London 1973), 283-4.

GORDON A. CATHERALL.