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TRANSACTIONS

CONGREGATIONAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THE CONGREGATIONAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Editorial

The Editor was unable to sit, listen and assess the Society's last annual lecture as he had to give it. However, Wilfred Biggs kindly provides the following note for us.

John Taylor has put us considerably in his debt by his careful editing of *Transactions*. This indebtedness was increased when he lectured to the 72nd Annual Meeting on May 12th. His theme, 'The Survival of the Church Meeting 1691-1901', was both topical and thought-provoking, and it attracted a large gathering of members and friends. We learned with some surprise that not a single article had appeared in *Transactions* on Church Meeting. It was with perhaps less surprise that we heard of the vicissitudes of this prized feature of Congregational Polity.

The lecturer gave glimpses from a selection of church situations, and presented his story with zest, clarity and humour. He did not claim to have given a definitive account of his theme. Indeed, he specifically asked us to search out our local Church Books and other documents, and to let him have the results of our own research. By this means the picture can be made more complete.

Meanwhile, we are grateful for a stimulating and illuminating survey of what Church Meeting meant to our forefathers both in theory and in practice.

At the time of going to press it is too early to say whether the United Reformed Church will come into being or not, but there seems to be an air of hope. What will then become of the two historical societies? Should there be, as logic would suggest, a new society Congregational/Presbyterian? The Presbyterians and ourselves have begun thinking along these lines; further conversations will take place early in 1972 and we hope to present a report of some importance to the next Annual Meeting, which might prove to be the last we hold as part of a May Assembly.

Dr. Edwin Welch will be our lecturer that day and he has chosen as his title "A Forgotten Strand in Congregational History — the Calvinistic Methodists". Dr. Welch has been an officer of our society for some years and we are grateful for the archivist's special knowledge that he has brought to our counsels, so it is with mixed feelings that we have had to release him as he took up residence in Canada where he has become Associate Professor of Archive Administration at the University of Ottawa.

At the C.C.E.W. Assembly in May of this year it was with great pleasure that we saw Charles Surman honoured on the platform for his life-long service to the churches (and to this society) in historical matters. When such a thing was last done we do not know; in itself it made history.

An interesting and unusual book has been edited by Dr. J. H. P. Pafford, who was until recently Goldsmith Librarian of the University of London. This is Isaac Watts: *Divine Songs attempted in easy language for the use of children.* It contains facsimile reproductions of the first edition of 1715 and an illustrated edition of c. 1840, with an introduction and bibliography by Dr. Pafford. It is published by O.U.P., at £2. Dr. Pafford says he found the bibliography interesting but difficult to prepare, which one supposes is better than finding it difficult and not very interesting, which has been the experience of some weary workers at the end of their task and their tether.

Gordon Tibbutt has sent us the October/November of *Life* (strictly speaking, *Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire Life*), a 'coffee-table' type magazine of the kind found all over the country nowadays, in which he has an illustrated article on John Howard. Two pictures show the interior of Howard Congregational Church, closed this year, and its predecessor, The New Meeting, 1775, reproduced from an original water colour. Mr. Tibbutt has seen to it that the Howard treasures have gone to the Bedford Museum and various original letters of Howard and the extensive records of the church have been placed in the County Record Office at Bedford.

In this issue we are pleased to include another extract from the unpublished thesis on Doddridge by the late F. W. Harris.

Our apologies to readers that this issue appears late, due to having to change our printers. The article on Quaife in the last issue was by Lindsay Lockley, not Lockyer, and we are very sorry for that error.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE CHURCH MEETING 1691 - 1901

For more than seventy years these lectures have come and gone, and this year we begin the 21st volume of *Transactions*, yet in all that time there has never been a contribution on the church meeting. Today, all we shall attempt is to prime the pump for others with, we hope, more time, ability to travel, experience and competence than your lecturer possesses; many people could help: they may preserve old records, read them, and some may attempt to interpret them. To save time we are going to assume that we all know what a church meeting is and where it stands in the spectrum of Church government.

1691 is a convenient year with which to begin, the year of the Happy Union between Presbyterians and Congregationalists in London. It is a generation removed from the classic Congregationalists, the Fathers with whom our President has as intimate an acquaintance as anyone could have this side of the grave: John Cotton, Philip Nye, William Bridge, the Goodwins, and the celebrated John Owen. By 1691 the harsh winter of persecution was passing; James's sun had set in blood in Ireland; at home, William and Mary symbolized toleration and sweet reason. Everywhere masons and carpenters toiled on meeting houses, while ministers and members urgently solicited subscriptions.

Obviously it was a time to minimize differences. The popular, pragmatic approach is charmingly revealed in a sermon of Richard Mayo.[1] He tells the story of an Independent, a Presbyterian and another, who is neither, who asks them what the difference is 'betwixt those two Sorts', and they are caught out. At length the Independent ventures that they are stricter about the admission of members (which was so); but this the Presbyterian denies, declaring that he knows people whom his church rejected for their 'scandalous Conversations' whom the Independents welcomed. This, says Mayo, threw 'Oyl on the fire', and the questioner had to hush them up, saying that there always would be differences between particular churches.

Charity, expediency, common sense brought together the 'two Sorts'. The United Brethren in London set down their pattern in *The Heads of Agreement* (1691). This left Independents free to hold church meetings without obliging Presbyterians to do so. It seemed then, as it still seems to many, the sensible solution. But here a caveat: what they meant by a church meeting and what we mean are very different. They meant no more than church members having the privilege of consenting to the will of the church officers. They were not meant to offer advice. This is apparent because in an earlier

[1] Richard Mayo, *Two Sermons* (1695).

document, which had served as a basis for discussion, *An Essay of Association*, members had the right to tender advice, and this had been struck out. You may ponder the fact that the Union was worked out by ministers alone without a single layman.[2]

Probably neither ministers nor laymen were much interested in denominational differences. Who can blame them after civil war and persecutions?[3] Instead they were busy building new structures, not only of bricks and mortar but organization: subscribers, committees, trustees. It does not seem to have occurred to them anymore than it did to the busy organizers of the evangelical revival later on, that the new structures might present a threat to the old, to the church meetings. Often, like Hannah, the church meeting was going to weep, provoked by her fruitful rival.

You will begin to suspect, I fear, that the church meetings of the eighteenth century were often sickly and declining, and you will be right. For the uninitiated I must explain that old church books rarely answer the questions you want to put to them. They do not contain anything we would dream of passing as minutes today. For example, Dr. Guyse of Girdlers Hall, who was a foremost Independent in his day, left a church book which makes one gasp. He explains, 'The Church Book not coming into ye pastor's Hand for several years he cant recollect the following Transactions of ye Church till ye year 1739'. There follow some scraps of information.[4]

If, however, you ask when they met and what they did together, we can answer that they met monthly in the week before Sacrament Sunday, as we do now, for the obvious reason that the church meeting held the keys to Communion; that there was preaching and prayer, singing maybe, and the business: the admission and dismission of members, disciplinary cases, news of sister churches, and so on; and occasionally, on red-letter days, elections, of deacons for life, and pastors, who as often as not stayed for life. Should you go on to ask what attendances were like, you would make me frown. At Bury Street, for example, in Isaac Watt's time, despite the church's sound Congregational tradition, having had Owen and Chauncey as pastors, the church meeting was no more than an occasional appendage to the Friday afternoon devotional meeting. Members were asked to 'tarry a little for that purpose', when there happened to be business.[5] Or let us look at a lesser known church in London, Nightingale Lane, though apparently prosperous enough, for it employed four pew-

[2] Roger Thomas, *An Essay of Accommodation* (Dr. William's Liby, 1957).
[3] It is interesting to note, for example, that the Forbes Library (now at Toronto University) has hardly any books on such subjects; also note Isaac Watts's slender interest.
[4] Ch. bk., (Greater London Council Records Office). Lost 1730-39.
[5] Bury St. Ch. Records, C.H.S. *Trans.* vi. 336.

openers and a pew-rent collector at £6 p.a. This church could muster but nine men for a critical meeting in 1726, and thereafter it held meetings after Sunday worship when important decisions were to be taken, an expedient common then and not unknown since.[6]

We see, then, a declining, dessicated, rather than dedicated Congregationalism, yet there were places where there still were lively church meetings. Probably the most significant was Rothwell, Northamptonshire, famous for its 'premature' evangelical revival under Richard Davis, who settled there in 1691. According to Calamy, Davis held 'odd notions'; according to Davis's successor it was merely that he was zealous for the 'Congregational way' and well-versed in Hooker, Cotton, Owen and Goodwin.[7] Davis shocked local ministers and the shock-wave travelled to London and disturbed the Happy Union. A 'Most Horrid and Dismal Plague' was what a local writer called Davis's activities: his emotional services, itinerant preachers and Independent ordinations.[8] Maybe, but not every minister adds over 150 persons to his church roll in his first year in a church, and very few can go on to claim 795 in 25 years.[9] Admittedly, the ages of some were on the young side. There was Anne Durden who gave the church 'a heart-affecting relation', aged 13. Three other girls were 12, but the prize goes to Mary Tebbutt who was nine. Indeed, there is a discernable juvenile content to the spate of disciplinary cases on the church meeting agenda following the revival. A girl is in trouble for defying her parents; another for staying out at night. Brother Hoby and his sister seem uncontrollable — he jumped 'for wagers in a way whereby his life was endangered'. Love, courtship and marriage figure largely. Brother Campion appears for 'proferring love to a Sister, when engaged to another'. Case after case concerns the kind of amusements young people enjoy: dancing, card-playing, games like cudgels and nine-pins, music such as fiddling and singing vain songs. It is as if a church swallowed a youth club whole.

Rothwell church meetings would have frightened Isaac Watts out of his wits. No less than 33 meetings were held in Davis's first year, and in several places. There were new causes to found, lay-preachers to examine, besides a stream of candidates offering their 'experiences' and being subjected to the 'glorious martyrdom' of interrogation. A break was held for refreshments, for meetings seem to have gone on rather late. The meeting 'continued to midnight, it being a very

[6] Ch. bk., Guildhall, City of London.
[7] Calamy, *Account of the . . . Ejected*, (1713) under Thomas Browning. Matthias Maurice, *Monuments of Mercy* (1729), pp. 102ff.
[8] P. Rehakosht (John King?), *A Plain and Just Account of a Most Horrid . . .*
[9] cf. Norman Glass, *The Early History of The Independent Church at Rothwell* (1871).

pleasant night to most there'. No, these were not old people! Nevertheless, the pace was too hot for many, and the following year the church was asking 'why so few come to the Assembly of the Saints, especially the Church meeting'.[10]

Down to Kettering to hold an inquiry into this phenomenon came Dr. Daniel Williams on behalf of the United Brethren. The young enthusiasts of Rothwell were not overawed. In their opinion the inquiry was against both the Word of God and the principles of Congregational churches; their pastor should not comply with the summons to appear before it; nor did he. Now it was the handling of this affair that distressed and alarmed Isaac Chauncey and fellow Independents in London, with the result that they parted from the United Brethren, set up their own Fund in 1695, and that was the end of the brief Happy Union.

Chauncey now knew where he stood. He devoted himself to the defence of Calvinism and Congregationalism, of Christ's Elect and the gathered, covenanted, disciplined society. There is no hesitation about the title of the book he published in 1697, *The Divine Institution of Congregational Churches*, or in the contents. The 'Keys of Government' belong to the local church; he dismisses any universal and visible Church, and denies that there is any 'Representative Church in all the Pastors' when they assemble.[11]

But what can one small book do in an age of indifference? Once, long ago, a boy's small gift of bread and fish was instrumental in saving a multitude from hunger. So now we must pursue a long trail through the whole of the eighteenth century and more than half of the nineteenth. Isaac Chauncey was studied by a band of Christians who had broken away from David John Owen's church at Henllan, because it was too Baxterian, too lax, and were forming a new one. Among them was a theological student, Matthias Maurice. This is where Rothwell turns up again, for he became Davis's successor in 1714. Now Maurice has only been dug up recently. Entirely ignored by Dale and Dexter, he comes to the surface in *Visible Saints* and Tudur Jones, and especially W. T. Owen's *Edward Williams*.[12] Maurice published anonymously the most fascinating book on Congregational church life that has ever appeared, *Social Religion Exemplify'd*. Many writers, particularly those who have attempted the subject of church polity, would envy the ten editions his book enjoyed between 1733

[10] Ch. bk. (transcript loaned by H. G. Tibbutt); also M. Maurice, *Social Religion Exemplified* (1733) 'You are called now into the greatest Honour next unto *Martyrdom*: to confess Christ', p. 182.

[11] Op. cit., pp. 20ff.

[12] W. T. Owen, *Edward Williams, D.D.* (Cardiff, 1963), pp. 31-34; G. F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints* (Oxford, 1957); R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962* (London, 1962), pp. 132f.

and 1860. Dr. Owen describes its influence upon influential people such as Angell James and Pye Smith, not forgetting Williams himself, who esteemed it so greatly that he abridged it and re-issued it in 1786. What is the secret of the book? In an age when novels were banned by strict dissenters, Maurice, like Bunyan, weaves his doctrine into a story. It is supposed to be about a London church in ancient Britain, but it breathes the air of Judaea and even more, of Wales, after the manner of William Blake's imagination. It bustles along, peopled with diverse characters shepherded by Dewi (a portrait of Davis or Maurice?). These are folk who hunger for sermons, thumb their Bibles more than we do telephone directories, argue as only Welshmen can, and whose chief pleasure in life is the church meeting. Dr. Owen says that the principles which Dr. Nuttall has shown to be characteristic of the Congregational way in *Visible Saints*, 'Separation, Fellowship, Freedom and Fitness', are all there in Maurice, save that he lays the stress on discipline. Yet it was this very emphasis which attracted Williams, who felt that the evangelicals were allowing it to be 'trampled upon'.

With Williams the theologian of moderate Calvinism we are not here concerned; we are concerned with him as a Congregationalist. He illustrates the pilgrimage which a multitude made in those days from formal Christianity, often Anglicanism, through Methodism of one sort or another, to Independency. Worldly Anglicans shocked him, emotional Methodists repelled him; but Congregationalists, with their discipline and church meetings captivated him. In a Carr's Lane church book one may read of the decision taken one Sabbath to hold monthly church meetings at seven o'clock on the Thursday before 'the ordinance of the Supper', and beneath, a signature in a surprisingly simple hand, 'E. Williams Pastor'. That was 1794. Unhappily Williams did not stay long enough to make a lasting impact.[13]

Williams was one who knew what he wanted, but many another pilgrim travelled on 'not knowing whither he went'. Such a one was John Clayton of the Kings Weigh House church. According to Wilson he was converted to Independency by reading Michaijah Towgood's *A Dissenting Gentleman's Letters* (1746-8).[14] That such a polemic should convert anyone may surprise us; but the interesting fact to note is Towgood's background, which was Axminster, another ancient Congregational cause like Rothwell, which had also refused to bow the knee to Baal — Baal in the shape of the Exeter Assembly.[15] When Clayton came to the Weigh House in 1778 it was a typical old-fashioned Presbyterian place. His call was sent him by the Committee of Gentlemen from Cole's Coffee House. A few years previously they

[13] Ch. bk. Birmingham City Library.
[14] Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches*. I. 202f.
[15] G. F. Nuttall, 'Councils and Assemblies' in *Studies in Church History* (Cambridge, 1971).

used to meet in the cheerless atmosphere of the vestry, where they comforted themselves with a roaring fire and a couple of bottles of wine, a scene I wish Hogarth had recorded for us. In an age of revolution, Clayton was certainly a revolutionary, though whether from prudence or preoccupation, he moved at the speed of the tortoise, not the hare. It was six years after his settlement that the church decided to switch its annual contribution from the Arian Presbyterian Fund to the Congregational, at last ending what Clayton called a 'disgraceful inconsistency'. That same year a bold subscriber turned up to a church meeting and immediately Clayton saw danger and had it established that 'mere subscribers to a Minister's support' had no right to be there, and the man had to withdraw. This is exciting, but just as we are becoming fascinated the minutes dry up. We are faced with something resembling a cut in an old film, for when the picture is restored, we are in the 90s, the elders and gentlemen have disappeared and deacons are being elected, the 'brethren holding up their hands' and, feminists please note, 'the Sisters by rising from their seats'. Revolution, 1795, not in Paris but London. If one compares the situation at Carr's Lane, for example, one discovers that women had no vote until 1872; at Dale's church meeting members sat with 'the Males on the right and the Females on the left hand of the Chair'. But to return to Clayton. Twenty years passed before church discipline ruffled the surface, and then there were but three cases and all became smooth again. As for regular church meetings, he never got that far; that change came in Binney's time. Indeed, years passed without a single meeting, all the affairs of the church being dealt with by quarterly deacons' meetings.[16] Therefore, one cannot call Clayton or his church truly Congregational, merely Independent, though one realizes how far they had come from the old Presbyterianism. In the end one is left wondering what the proportion of Independent to Congregational churches was in those days.

Whilst there were, then, courageous Calvinists, evangelicals, who tried to restore order to the churches, following the example of Williams, there were others less concerned, even impatient with it. Such a one appears to have been Thomas Wilson, officially treasurer of Highbury College, in practice the archtype of moderators, a man addicted, like Louis XIV, to putting up grand buildings. He erected Paddington Chapel to seat 1400: 'when it was opened in 1813 I did not know of a single individual who would attend'. Modesty was not his most obvious characteristic. However, he was not disappointed; there were over 100 within three years. Mark you, 'he did not approve of requiring a written statement of religious experience', let alone

[16] The Kings Weigh House church records (Dr. Williams's Liby.) and see E. Kaye, *History of the Kings Weigh House Church* (London, 1968), chapter iv.

appearing before the church meeting.[17] And in the long run his view prevailed. How the admission system of the churches was transformed is beyond inclusion here, but a new spirit was abroad. In *The Eclectic Review,* 1868, in an outspoken dialogue between the Rev. Elias Oldways and the Rev. Erasmus Newlight, LL.B., the latter rejoices that 'large tides of people flock into our churches . . . numbers receive the ordinance who are not in communion and such freedom is, to my mind, very beautiful'.[18]

Not the stoutest and most skilful of defenders stood any chance against the spirit which was overrunning discipline. When John Campbell went to the Tabernacle in 1828 he complained that 'discipline was laughed at and set at defiance'. This is borne out again and again. It languished at Fetter Lane, Spitalfields and New Broad Street, all old Congregational causes, while new ones such as Wilson's Craven Chapel (1823), near Carnaby Street, ignored it save for a rule about attendance at the Lord's Supper. Discipline probably lingered longer in the provinces, though there one notices churches delegating the responsibility to a committee: my old family church at Southampton did so in 1805, so did Poole in 1807, and even Carr's Lane, 1840. Discipline ground to a halt in place after place. Numbers grew stronger, but corporate feeling got weaker, whilst individualism rose more often to register its protest.[19]

Late in the day, 1863, Edmonton and Tottenham attempted to discipline Alex Johnson, a member who could not control himself at church meetings. He sprang to action at once, wrote to the church demanding justice, and then got 25 members to requisition a meeting to see he received it.[20] Even at so large and well led a church as Carr's Lane, discipline was screeching to a stop. In 1862 there was the Graham case. A deacon and a member were at loggerheads over the building of a house. After hours of meetings, the church realized that it had bitten off more than it could chew, and handed the whole matter over to referees who called in architects and accountants to assist, an expensive recourse; thereafter the church was never enthusiastic about discipline, although Dale managed to pen some lame lines on it in his *Manual.*

We all know that discipline received the *coup de grace* from liberalism, but in reading the cases which occupied so large a part of the time of the Calvinists' church meetings, one begins wondering whether there was not another contributory cause: whether the church meeting was really fair, really competent to judge. Take for example,

[17] Joshua Wilson, *Memoir of Thomas Wilson* (1849), p. 312.
[18] *Op. cit.*, p. 290.
[19] Ch. bks: located at GLC Record Office except Southampton at Southampton City Records Office, and Carr's Lane at Birmingham City Liby.
[20] Ch. bk., at GLC Rec. Office.

the case of Ann Pitts of Kimbolton who was cut off for lying. She 'feigned herself a lover, told his name, trade, place where he served his apprenticeship and pretended him to be godly, and feigned words of Scripture whereby he was converted, & c. And several other storyes which she owns all to be false'. This Cinderella was required to stand all alone before the meeting, with no friend beside her. She did what so many did, failed to turn up.[21] Not that church meetings were hard. How many people were readmitted to fellowship! Churches took their pastoral duty very seriously. Who will not sympathize with Castle Gate, Nottingham, wrestling year after year with a brother of 'stubborn and litigious temper' 'till we were perfectly tired out with him', yet all in vain?[22] Again, sympathy may deteriorate into permissiveness. There is the case of Mr. Seagar of 'Rotherith' who came before Nightingale Lane. He confessed to 'having a child by a serving maid', which they 'dropt in the Night' (the Night-cart which used to empty the middens). The meeting, all male, was 'unwilling to show Severity to their falen (*sic*) Brother', and the tricky situation was resolved by his resigning.[23] Probably the church meeting as a court, a 'vehmic tribunal', Newlight called it, was doomed. One suspects it owed more to medieval society than the New Testament; in any case it proved impracticable in large urban situations.

Having surveyed rapidly the decline of the old, we must now look at the development of the new, at the weight of new organization and the accompanying spirit of voluntaryism, which the evangelical revival brought in its train, none of which gave poor Hannah, the church meeting, one shred of comfort. It will require no effort of imagination to picture the churches of the age of industrial revolution as hives of industry. So they were, and so they were encouraged to be by their leaders. Angell James had the ear of the people and he set before them the ideal of the 'thoroughly working church' where members were like 'bees of a hive, all busy'. Carefully note his next words, 'each in his own department, and all adding to the common stock'.[24] These men believed in voluntaryism; the very word is said to have been coined by a Congregational minister, Dr. James Matheson.[25] Its relative, the better known phrase, *Laissez faire*, explains G. Kitson Clark in his *Making of Victorian England*, points beyond economic doctrine to 'a very widespread objection to all Government interference', 'distaste for what was called "centralization",' coupled with 'a profound reverence for the rights of private property'.[26]

[21] Kimbolton Ch. Bk., (transcript by H. G. Tibbutt) Dr. Williams's Liby.
[22] A. R. Henderson, *Hist. Castle Gate Cong. Ch. Nottingham, 1655-1905*, p. 95.
[23] Ch. bk.
[24] James, *Earnestness in Churches*, p. 177.
[25] R. Tudur Jones, *Cong. in England* (London, 1962) p. 213.
[26] *Op. cit.* p. 97.

In church life this meant departmentalism — 'each in his own department' — and it added not one cubit to the stature of the church meeting. The Sunday school provides a fine example. Rarely does one come across, as one does on an occasion in 1804 in the Edmonton records, the church meeting electing teachers for the Sunday school. Indeed, James himself complained, 'How common it is to leave the whole school to its own self-management'. A speaker at a conference in 1881 said he was horrified at the all too common attitude of teachers, 'You mind the Church and we will look after the school'. He pleaded for churches to take an interest in the children and elect the teachers.[27] Of course, many pastors and members were involved in both church and school, but that is not the point. In fact, too many church meetings did keep to their own blinkered business and never got beyond discussing the organ and choir, pew-rents and free-will offerings, unfermented wine and individual communion cups.

If many church meetings for most of the last century were given little rein to discuss church activities, including church finance, nor were they accustomed to consider the wider church or the nation. Thus, voluntaryism could not take the Congregational Union too seriously. Whereas in ancient church books we find constant references to sister churches and to sending and receiving 'messengers', how scant is mention of the county and the national unions in Victorian times until the 'democratic age' of Congregationalism late in the century. Arguments from silence are notorious: it would be patently untrue to aver there was no interest whatsoever in things outside the local church. Yet one has to try to explain how it was that when Thomas Binney was Chairman of the C.U.E.W., his church book does not mention it; and when Dale was Chairman, all his book says is that 'Mr. Morris gave an interesting account to the meetings'. Again, there is more silence about national affairs than there used to be. All ancient books speak of fast-days and thanksgivings over national affairs. They had died. Apart from the charitable collection, say for the unemployed in Lancashire, or a few murmurings about church rates, we find little on national affairs. A great church like the Weigh House, did send a petition to Parliament in 1830 about the slave trade, and Carr's Lane appointed ten men to attend the national education conference in Manchester in 1871; but these are exceptional instances. It cannot have been that people did not care for we know they did; it is more likely that voluntaryists felt such things were not proper church business.[28]

We are in the graveyard. The church meeting, no longer much concerned with admissions or discipline, prevented by departmentalism

[27] James, *Op. cit.*, p. 182. C.Y.B. 1881, pp. 325ff. The whole debate is to the point — The S.S., says another speaker, is a 'little republic of its own'.
[28] cf. The Anti-Corn Law Movement; but also see Dale, *Life of James*, p. 349; *Ecl. Rev.* (1863) II 226.

and voluntaryism from having much say on anything, seems tottering towards oblivion. In many church books of the time one reads 'no business', or merely 'a word of exhortation and prayer'. Perhaps this is the time to mention attendances at church meetings in the last century. Admittedly it is difficult to know the facts because attendances were very rarely recorded and we have to go by hints; but I fear that we cannot find evidence to support the high attendances which folk-lore likes to attribute to the good old days. One is mildly surprised, however, that a church the size of the Weigh House, with 432 members, with attendances in the region of 1,350 and 700 on Sundays, could only produce 24 at a well-publicized meeting to send their minister on a much needed holiday in 1845.[29] Maybe money had something to do with that and other poorly supported church meetings. James and Dale were for ever lamenting poor attendances. Dale could get 833 to an annual tea but only approximately 60 to an election of deacons at a time when there were 221 male members.[30] The tea meeting was the last resort. The pastor at Clapham (1855) 'animadverted' on the idea of the tea meeting, we read, which was 'to bring the humbler members together . . . there appearing no other method by which that end could be accomplished'.[31] One book raised my hopes, however: Edmonton mentions 200 at church meeting, 1878. 'Never in the Church's history had more numerously attended meetings been held'. But the reason proved to be a running battle with the trustees.

In my view the nadir of the church meeting was reached, strangely enough, in the 1830's, the early days of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. One of its first tasks was to issue a series of tracts and challenge the formidable Tractarians. It was a feeble effort and quite the feeblest of all comes in the tract on *The Duties of Churches,* which contains the faintest praise of the church meeting to be found in any official document. Its extent is 3½ lines: church meetings are an 'important means of promoting harmony and peace, the purity and usefulness of churches'. Small wonder that Dale shook his head over the men who met at the Congregational Library.[32]

How then did the church meeting survive? First, tribute is due to those churches with lively meetings, and those ministers whose leadership was purposeful in this regard. It seems that William Roby and Samuel McAll's work in Manchester was of this character.[33] Henry

[29]Ch. bk. Figs: Mann's Census, Binney's return (1851) (he was away sick, incidentally), Record Office, Chancery Lane.
[30]Ch. bk. Calculation based on votes cast.
[31]Ch. bk. Grafton Square, Clapham.
[32]Dale, *Hist. of Eng. Cong.*, p. 704.
[33]Cf. W. G. Robinson, *William Roby* (London, 1954); Alex. Mackennal, *Life.*

Winzar of Roxton is an example of an insignificant minister in an ordinary church, who yet loved the ideal of the gathered church and did his best to put it into practice.[34] Doubtless there were many others; but one who must be mentioned is that remarkable man, Edward White, who could hold an audience of academics or artisans equally well, and who took over a deserted Countess of Huntingdon chapel in Kentish Town in 1851 and made it thrive.[35] White held advanced views; he wrote on conditional immortality; yet in ecclesiastical polity he stood for primitive Congregationalism. His church, Hawley Road, was formed with an agreement, virtually a covenant, at a time when such forms were disappearing like barges from the canals nearby; the members promised to 'bear one another's burdens' and to 'watch unto prayer that, as a Church, we may bring forth fruit unto holiness'.[36] There were then, men and churches which provided a foundation for the reconstruction of the church meeting.

Next, the growth of radicalism profoundly affected men and churches. People were becoming conscious of their rights. Milton's England once again was waking up after sleep, as Wordsworth discerned. George Hadfield, M.P., who made a virtue of awkwardness, who carried through the litigation over the Lady Hewley Trust, together with his better known journalist colleague, Edward Miall, must have alerted many people to their privileges.[37] There sprang up many a local conflict between church members and trustees, and occasionally ministers. Had we time we might amuse ourselves with the comic stories of Pavement Chapel's squabble over their building programme (1845) or Edmonton's fight for their working men's club (1877). What we will do is to make brief mention of one dispute between minister and people, just a taste of this litigious age, which gave publicity to the rights of the church meeting. This was *Cooper v. Gordon* (1869). Samuel Gordon was a newly ordained young man from college, co-pastor with the elderly William Legg at Broad Street, Reading. After a year or two there was unrest at his preaching and eventually he was dismissed by the church meeting, a decision he was foolish enough to resist. He went so far as to mount the pulpit and attempt to conduct worship; moreover, he got a friend to go round gathering pew-rents for him. Thus provoked, the church felt obliged to go to Law. His defence, however, was far from paltry, that he had been called by the church for life; but the judge, Vice Chancellor Stuart, rejected it, remarking that if the majority of a church did not want its minister then he would become minister of the minority, which would be against the trust deed. It was therefore held that 'G. was duly dismissed, and injunction accordingly'.[38]

[34] H. G. Tibbutt, *Roxton Cong. Ch., 1808-1958* (Bedford, 1958), pp. 7ff.
[35] F. A. Freer, *Life and Work* (1902).
[36] Ch. bk., GLC Rec. Off.
[37] James Griffin, *Memories of the Past* (1883), pp. 277f.
[38] Equity Cases, VIII, 249-59.

The interest people began to take in renewing the church meeting also appears in its procedure. As dissenters became enfranchised, participating in government, national and, even more important to a multitude, local, so the church meeting enjoyed reflected glory. Here there is opportunity for anyone to look in old church books, searching for tell-tale changes. When did the chairman start signing the minutes? Were there ballots? When was the first church secretary appointed? Our Society will be interested to know what is discovered. All we have time for now will be two of the points. The first person we noticed regularly signing minutes after they had been read and confirmed was a popular preacher, Caleb Morris, of Fetter Lane, in 1838. At Carr's Lane one suspects that the young Dale persuaded Angell James that they should both sign together; that was 1855. The Weigh House did not follow the new pattern until 1885, despite the presence of that towering personality Samuel Morley, M.P. At Clapham, it must be confessed, Guinness Rogers, champion of Congregationalism as he was, like the proverbial school boy, showed promise in his first year, signing regularly, but then fell away and never did so again; but the minutes there were petering out, only a few words, sometimes but five, including the date.[39] Secondly, ballots. Bentham, who fathered ballots on the British people, did not publish a word before 1780, which is eight years after we find balloting at Clapham! By 1800 ballots seem common enough in our churches.

Such matters are hardly weighty, though no less interesting than a man's handwriting; but it is when we examine the growing agendas of church meetings that we perceive the influence of democracy. In the 1850's enterprising churches such as Craven Chapel were debating home and overseas missions, day schools, and the organization of sick visiting; by the eighties they were dissipating themselves on church magazines, bazaars and raffles. New churches with developing fellowships, like Markham Square, Chelsea, and Dulwich Chapel, discussed many topics from stipends to decorations. What happened at Wycliffe in the East End when the aristocratic, autocratic Andrew Reed passed on was surely repeated elsewhere, for the church meeting heaved an eulogistic sigh and fell to devouring every possible subject with pent-up excitement. Democracy was not inevitably fruitful, however, as we observe in the minutes of Park Crescent, Clapham: 'There being no business . . . prolonged conversation took piace which issued in nothing useful'.[40]

By the end of the century church meetings were beginning to resemble what we know today. What a revolution in fifty years, since Algernon Wells, the C.U.E.W. secretary, horrified at the way some

[39]Ch. bk.
[40]Ch. bks., GLC Rec. Off.

ministers were wooing the working classes, flatly denied that Congregationalism was in any way democratic.[41] In the 80's and 90's Congregationalists are advertizing their democratic wares openly, proudly. Albert Spicer, who was to be a Liberal M.P., backed by his delighted Clapton Park church meeting,[42] rejoices that Congregationalists are 'thoroughly in harmony with the spirit of the times'. He blesses Edwin Hatch for his Bampton Lectures (1880) when he took for his subject 'The Organization of Early Christian Churches'.[43] This Anglican scholar is forgotten save for the hymn, 'Breathe on me breath of God', but his theme that the 'early churches were, more or less, democratical' was a heaven-sent gift to our great-grandfathers, enabling them to hold high their heads and say, 'You Romans and Anglicans laud your heritage, your hierarchy, your apostolic succession; well, we belong to the democratic tradition, that of the early churches, with roots in Athenian democracy, 500 BC'. The Hatch emphasis, acknowledged or not acknowledged, appears in the books to do with church polity published in these decades. The theologians, in contrast to laymen, were too well trained to rely on the dubious word 'democracy', and too evangelical not to base their argument on the N.T.; they fostered the word 'Ecclesia' on the churches, to be followed by the more communicable term 'brotherhood'. The church is a 'self-governing fraternity, where all are 'free and equal', say Pierce and Silvester Horne, the founders of this Society.[44] No longer was there any fear of the church meeting fading away. Nevertheless, discerning Congregationalists had unhappy reservations. George Barrett criticized its secularization. His telling phrase, 'barren meetings' was echoed by Charles Berry.[45] But no one could produce an acceptable remedy. Barrett's idea of the church meeting as an adult Christian Endeavour was a barren suggestion. R. F. Horton of Hampstead had to confess at the end of the day that his people did not know what a church meeting was. 'In fifty years I have failed to touch them'.[46] So then, we are left wondering how far the true church meeting had survived after all.

The last figure to pass before us is Joseph Parker. It is the custom to tell stories of Parker, so here is one about him and his church meeting. Relations between ministers and their church meetings are like those between husbands and wives, good bad or indescribable. Which this is we shall leave aside. Parker overstayed a vacation at Beecher's invitation in the U.S.A., and the City Temple felt badly

[41] C.Y.B. 1847, p. 47.
[42] C.H.S. *Trans.* X. 274.
[43] C.Y.B., 1894. 29. Bamp. Lects (1880), pp. 213-15.
[44] W. Pierce and C. Silvester Horne, *A Primer of Church Fellowship* (Lond. 1893), pp. 38, 30, & c. Founders of C.H.S., see C.H.S. *Trans.* I. 1.
[45] Barrett, *I.C.C. Authorised Record* (1891), p. 204(i); Berry, C.Y.B., 1898, pp. 40ff.
[46] A. Peel and J. A. R. Marriott, *Robert Forman Horton* (Lond. 1937), p. 186.

treated. When A.O.B., was reached at the next church meeting, the doctor told the members that he wanted to hear the criticisms expressed in the open. "This is the one opportunity for members to vent their feelings". Some bold spirits took the opportunity. "We have ten minutes yet", continued Parker, and another spoke up. "We have yet two minutes", and one more spoke. Then there was intense, expectant silence. Parker rose; he pronounced the benediction; and that was that![47]

1901: Parker Chairman of the Union. He spent himself — he died the next year — arguing, pleading for a new United Congregational Church. He explained that he himself did not want change, but as he looked to the future he realized 'we have to deal with new conditions, indeed with a new England and a new world'. Absolute independence: 'Is it something to boast of?' he asked.[48] Such thoughts were echoed by P. T. Forsyth: 'granular autonomy is not equal to the vast problems and tasks that the Church has to face in modern civilization'.[49] How long it has taken ordinary mortals to perceive it! 1901 is the year we end with, partly because of Parker's prophetic words, partly because it was the end of a great reign, and partly because it is just before the full blizzard of typewritten papers hit and transformed us.

It seems inappropriate at this meeting not to conclude upon a different note, even if it tends towards moralizing. It is well-known that a Congregationalist may come to loathe and despise church meetings; as one said, 'they are meetings for the transaction of formal business in which no rational man can feel any intense interest'. On the other hand a Congregationalist may feel swept heavenwards in the church meeting; one remembers the words of Dale, 'I breathe a diviner air. I am in the new Jerusalem'. What may surprise you is that Dale wrote the other quotation too![48] To be sure, church meetings can only be as good or as bad as we make them. Yet to Dale and his younger colleagues who founded this Society we all owe a great debt. They put the church meeting clearly on the Congregational map. Therefore, as a tribute to them, let us end with two short quotations from Dale's *Manual*: the first is about the agenda of the church meeting, and the second about its power. The church meeting has 'to make provision for the maintenance of Christian worship, for the instruction of its own members in Christian faith and duty, and for the propagation of the Christian Gospel among those who have not yet received it.[49] (Worship, training and mission.) Lastly, an ever-timely admonition on its real power: 'It is His presence which confers upon the meetings of the Church their dignity and authority'.[50]

JOHN H. TAYLOR

[47] W. Adamson, *Life* (Lond. 1902), pp. 152-3.
[48] Dale, *Essays and Addresses*, p. 141; *Addresses, Joint Assembly of Bapt. and Cong. Unions* (1886), p. 20.
[49] *Manual of Cong. Principles*, Chap. iii. II. (II).
[50] *Ibid.*, Chap. ii. I. (II).

GEORGE VINTER
A Seventeenth Century Weather-cock ?

George Vinter of Cowfold and Rotherfield in Sussex has the unusual distinction of having been pilloried both by Calamy and Walker. Calamy was concerned with Vinter's many changes of ecclesiastical allegiance; Walker charged Vinter with malice and venality.[1] The writer has considered Walker's charges in particular elsewhere and this article is concerned with Calamy's account of Vinter as 'a most remarkable Apostate'.[2] This comes in the account of the ejection in 1662 from Lindfield of John Stonestreet:

> It was his observation that no Man appear'd there with a greater show of Seriousness and Zeal than Mr. Vinter, Minister of Covewald in this County, who was afterwards a most remarkable Apostate. He was once a Zealous Ordaining Presbyter, and an Associate of Dr. Cheynel's, whom he in a little time much contemn'd. Next he was as warmly Congregational. And when the Times favour'd that way, he became as vehemently Episcopal. Nay, he advanc'd a farther Step, and when in the Days of King Charles II, things looked most favourably towards Popery, he did not stick to say, that he would not have thought there was so much to have been said in favour of Popery, as now he found there might. There never certainly was a greater Weather-cock set upon a Steeple, as he was in the Church.[3]

Vinter himself has proved elusive and there are many gaps in an account of his early career in Sussex.[4] He was born in 1617 or 1618.[5] He matriculated at Magdalen, Cambridge, as pensioner in 1634, proceeding to B.A., in 1637/8 and M.A., in 1641; he was ordained deacon (December 1639) and priest (March 1639/40) at Peterborough.[6] There is no firm date for Vinter's arrival in Sussex; it could have been as early as 1641-42. John Woodward, Rector of West Grinstead, Walker's correspondent (1711), alleged that Vinter had turned George Heath out of West Grinstead in 1643; that he was 'the Chairman of y^e^ Committee in these parts.[7] There are no known detailed records of the work of the Sussex County Committee and there are glimpses

[1] J. Walker: *An Attempt . . . the Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England,* 1714, under George Heath.
[2] In *Sussex Notes and Queries,* vol. XVI, No. 5.
[3] E. Calamy: *An Account . . . of the Ejected,* 1713.
[4] The Rev. Charles E. Surman and the Rev. Roger Thomas suggested various sources and gave other friendly assistance to the writer.
[5] Memorial tablet in Rotherfield Church: "3 mo. Januarii Anno Christo 1691, Aetatis suae 74".
[6] *Alumni Cantabrigiensis,* ed. Venn, 1927.
[7] Bodleian: MS. J. Walker, c. 5. Also note the reference, in Owen's letter quoted later on, to 'preaching strenuously for Church and King' which must have been not later than 1642 in the local circumstances.

only of it in the *Registers* of the Committee for Plundered Ministers extant for 1645-47; Vinter's name does not appear.[8] There is no need, however, to question Calamy's description of Vinter as 'an Associate of Dr. Cheynel's for Cheynel was taking the lead in changing the religious organization of Sussex (c. 1643).[9] Clearly, Vinter was active in Sussex long before the first firm date that exists for his connection with Cowfold: his entry in the Cowfold Parish Register, 'This booke was kept from me from Anno 1649 in mense April to this 6th September, 1651, then brott to me by William Willett'.[10] John Downes presented Vinter to Cowfold, where he was inducted on 7 January 1651/2.[11] Downes was one of the most prominent Parliamentarians in Sussex: landowner, M.P. for Arundel, Colonel of Militia, member of the Council of State in 1651, eventually a Regicide.[12] Widely-known as an able opportunist, he was attacked as a shifty character. Vinter can hardly be blamed for this, but he must have been well aware of Downes' reputation as an opportunist.

A picture of Vinter's changes of allegiance, remarkably close to that drawn by Calamy, is to be found in a letter of 23 May 1716 written to Walker by Richard Owen of Iford, near Lewes.[13]

> Six and twenty years ago, I officiated in a place called Twineham in Sussex, and boarded with two ancient yeomanly People, of a good character. They sometimes talked much of the famous M^{r}. Vinter, w^{m} they knew originally. In the beginning of y^{e} Rebellion, he acted y^{e} zealous Loyalist, preaching strenuously for Church and King, till matters going as they went, he changed notes, and tacked about to the strongest Side. Upon the Restauration, my Landlady affirmed that she heard him deliver himself thus in Cowfold Church close by Twineham: It is said the Common Prayer must be read again in our Churches; but I do assure you, y^{t} if there was a Gallows erected in that place and y^{e} Common Prayerbook laid in this Desk, I would chuse to be trussed up on that Gallows before ever I would read the Common Prayer. Being a leading man in the Party, many of the neighbouring Ministers consulted him in that juncture about y^{e} Articles of Conformity, from w^{ch}. he zealously diswaded y^{m}. all, and they followed his Advice, and by name M^{r}. Fish, who wants not his red Letters in M^{r}. Calamy's Calendar. Yet M^{r}. Vinter himself conformed, kept Cowfold, and together with it got in time y^{e} fat Benefice of Rotherfield, where in his old age, in K. James 2 Reign, he was

[8] British Museum: Add. MSS. 15669-71 and *C.S.P.(Dom.)*.
[9] *D.N.B.*
[10] *The Parish Registers of Cowfold*, Sussex Record Society, vol. 22.
[11] *ibid.*
[12] *D.N.B.*
[13] MS. J. Walker, c. 5. Owen's letter arrived too late to be used by Walker for the *Sufferings*.

preparing for another Turn, even to Rome itself, if times had held, & previous to it, began to give out, He never knew before, y^t y^e Papists had such good Reasons for their Religion. This the Gentlemen of Mayfield parish adjoyning, told me for truth, in M^r· Vinter's Life time.

But was Owen drawing on Calamy's account? Owen had read Calamy, yet he knew that Walker had too, and that Walker had in the *Sufferings* already taken up a hostile attitude to Vinter. Owen dated his stay at Twineham as 1690, or thereabouts, which was a good many years before the first publication of Calamy's version. It seems much more likely that Owen was genuinely quoting local recollections of Vinter.

There are now to be considered the important questions of the time and the circumstances of Vinter's change from 'Zealous Ordaining Presbyter' to 'as warmly Congregational'. There is no direct and unequivocal evidence to determine these questions. That Stonestreet and others present at the Savoy Conference with Vinter were impressed with his 'show of Seriousness and Zeal' might be accounted for by the man's powers of dissimulation and adaptability. If this was the case, why should Vinter have thought it of material benefit to himself to appear openly as a Congregational in 1658? The Rev. Roger Thomas has mentioned to the writer the possibility that Vinter, having for some reason attracted the attention of Cromwell's *Triers*, felt it prudent to show himself as a Congregational.

Despite all the strong appearances against Vinter's sincerity, there is still room for an alternative explanation of his conduct at this time. May he not have had a genuine change of heart before 1658? This is not mere conjecture for there are two clues pointing this way, though one should not press it too far without further evidence. First, Owen's letter refers to the folk at Twineham speaking of Vinter's vehement preaching against the Prayer Book in Cowfold Church *after* the Restoration, with all that this must have implied about his attitude to the Church of England. If Vinter's change to Congregational had been simply a matter of expediency, is it likely that he would have been so imprudent in his preaching *after* the Restoration? Such behaviour seems altogether out of line with the instinct of a hardened *Trimmer*.

Second, there is a clue about changes in the outlook of the congregation at Cowfold around 1656-57 which also suggests that Vinter's own outlook could have undergone a genuine change. This is to be found in an account by Friends of the following episode at Cowfold in 1657:

In this year the Parishioners of Cowfold, being to elect a Minister, to supply their Cure then vacant, publick Notice was given that if any would object against the Life or Doctrine of the Person proposed for that Office, they should appear at the Steeple-house

> at the Day appointed for the Election: Accordingly Margery Caustock went, and offered to prove that the Person proposed to be unsound and corrupt both in Life and Doctrine: But they refused to hear her, and carried her before a Neighbouring Justice, who committed her to Prison, where she lay above half a Yeare.[14]

This account does not name Vinter, but it points plainly to the election at the Parish Church though there is no doubt about Vinter's continuing tenure of the Cowfold living during the 1650s.[15] By 1657, Vinter's congregation may have included a large number of people who wished to constitute themselves as a 'gathered church' and to call a minister to serve them without the sanction of 'Ordaining Presbyters'. Vinter may have put his appointment as minister in the hands of the congregation without having first resigned his living. It may have been unusual for a Congregational minister to continue as the regular incumbent of the Parish, but this was not unknown; Sussex Nonconformity has so often gone its own way.[16]

The Friends' account does suggest that Vinter had at least shown himself sufficiently in sympathy with the people to be acceptable to them as their called minister. It has to be admitted that Vinter would have had a material interest in seeking to hold the Cowfold living without having to face the strains of open conflict with a substantial number of people formed into a separatist congregation in the village. If this is a correct reading of these clues, and the Congregationals of Cowfold became a gathered church in 1657 with Vinter as their minister, this would account for his 'Seriousness and Zeal' when he appeared at the Savoy Conference in 1658.

Vinter's conduct in having 'zealously diswaded' others, including Fish, from conforming in 1662 and then conforming himself was inconsistent with his preaching after the Restoration.[17] Nothing has come to light to explain this conduct. All one can say is that Vinter may have failed to realize what sacrifice was entailed. Vinter had a wife and at least two children at the time and these responsibilities may have proved the deciding factor, as they did in other cases.

[14] A. Besse: *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers*, 1737.

[15] Judged by Vinter's continuing entries in the Cowfold Parish Register, including his entries of the baptisms of two of his children in 1655 and 1657.

[16] The case of Gwalter Postlethwaite of St. Mary's, Lewes, points to a somewhat similar arrangement; *vide* A. G. Matthews: *Calamy Revised*, 1934.

[17] Robert Fish, ejected from Nuthurst in 1662, of whom Calamy wrote: "A Pious Man, of great learning, and great Probity . . ." — *Account*.

Having conformed and made his fourth change of denominational allegiance in twenty years, Vinter remained at Cowfold until 1673. His conformity did bring him material gain for on 1 March 1672/3 he was presented to the Rectory of Rotherfield and on 7 March he received dispensation to hold Rotherfield with Cowfold.[18] He was inducted to Rotherfield on 3 April 1673 and soon afterwards removed there from Cowfold which he continued to hold until his death.[19] Rotherfield was a particularly rich living with a manor house and 366 acres.[20]

Vinter's alleged preparation for a further shift 'even to Rome itself' seems only too plausible. His patrons had strong Roman Catholic sympathies and connections and stood well with James II.[21] The Revolution changed the situation for Vinter; he would hardly have been minded to become a Non-Juror and he appears to have remained quietly at Rotherfield until his death there in January 1691/2. The memorial tablet in Rotherfield Church draws a discreet veil over his remarkably varied career.

This closer look at George Vinter has shown that the account given by Calamy was generally well-founded. The best that it can do for Vinter's reputation is to suggest that he might well have had a genuine change of heart when he became a Congregational, and that his preaching at the time of the Restoration was not that of a man solely actuated by self-interest. It was George Vinter's lot that his shortcomings should be recorded in print at a time when those of other men passed swiftly into oblivion.

N. CAPLAN

[18] Index of Sussex Ministers, in the Library of the Sussex Archaeological Society.

[19] T. W. Horsfield: *The History . . . of the County of Sussex*, 1835.

[20] *ibid.* and also Catherine Pullein: *The Story of Some Wealden Manors*, 1929.

[21] Vinter had been presented to Rotherfield by Charles Shelley and his wife, Lady Mary Abergavenny; in the charges brought against John Large, Rector of Rotherfield, in 1643 one was that he had associated with the Papists including the Abergavenny family. It is particularly interesting to note that Walker received more accounts from Sussex about Large's sequestration which included the accusation that Cheynell and Vinter had conspired to oust Large. (MS. J. Walker, c. 3 and c. 5.) Walker received this material too late for inclusion in the *Sufferings*; all he could do was to note in the Preface (p. xliii) that: 'The Causes of the Sequestration of Mr. *Large* from *Rotherfield* in *Sussex* are very much misrepresented'. Had Walker been able to draw on this material for the *Sufferings*, he would have been even more savage in his attack on Vinter.

PHILIP DODDRIDGE ON ELDERS' DUTIES

Extracts from a 'letter of Philip Doddridge to the Rev. Mr. Evans, the Rev. Mr. Orton, and Mr. John Brown, Elders of the Church of Christ at Northampton, under my Pastoral Care ; together with Mr. Hayworth, their associate in that good work'.

First, the great, common, and ordinary duty, which you owe to the Church in general, and which must indeed be the foundation of all the rest, is that you carefully inspect them, and for that end that you visit them; for, without that care, it will hardly be possible to judge thoroughly of the state of religion amongst them. For the better regulation, therefore, of this important affair, I would humbly offer you the following advice. Get a list of all the heads of families at least, and, if you can, of all other persons belonging to the Church. I present you with such a list, together with this letter, and I desire that each of you would transcribe it, and sometimes review it, suppose once a year, that you may recollect what notice is taken of the several persons who stand upon it, and it will be easy for you to make proper additions to it as new members are admitted among us.

2ndly. Let this be distributed into different classes, and each class assigned in a more particular manner to one of you, not as the only persons you are to regard, but as those of whom you are to take the chief care. This should be done by mutual consent, and a catalogue of them written out by the Elder, to whose special care they fall. And I think it would be proper this should be done on a sheet of paper, in such a manner that there may be room to write over against every name the time when the person was solemnly visited last, and, perhaps, some little memoranda concerning further business to be done with or for him . . .

3rdly. Let the families and persons thus taken upon the list of each, be visited as you have opportunity, taking the most important first, but on the whole neglecting none, and endeavour to make your visits as serviceable to them as possible. For this purpose call the heads of families apart; inquire of them how it fares with them and their families as their religious state; give them such exhortations, instructions, and admonitions as you judge proper; and, especially, endeavour to engage them to a strict observation of family worship, and a spiritual care of their children and servants.

4thly. Observe how they are furnished with good books, and especially with Bibles, and what provision is made for teaching the children and servants to read.

5thly. Take an opportunity of addressing the children and *servants* of the family with some short but serious exhortation, and endeavour to impress your own hearts with a deep sense of the importance of their character. For be assured that, under God, the children of godly

parents are the greatest hope of the Church for future generations. Remember, therefore, that they are committed to your charge, and that you, as well as I, are to feed the lambs of Christ, if we would approve our love to him. And in this view, if you and the Deacons were to visit the Charity School at certain times, to talk to and pray with the children, it might, perhaps, turn to good account.

6thly. Conclude your visits with prayer where you can do so conveniently, and this not merely in ignorant, or less considerable families, but even when you come to the families of those who are most eminent in religion. It will quicken your own hearts, and may quicken theirs.

7thly. When you return from visiting your brethren, recollect their cases, consider what petitions are to be offered up to God for them in the next return of secret duty, what care is to be taken of them, and particularly what information it may be proper to give me concerning anything encouraging or otherwise, which you may have observed in them or their families.

I would now remind you of some of the more particular duties of your office with relation to those whose case may require a distinguishing notice, and here —

1st. Take notice of those who are under any serious impressions, or any spiritual distress, and make your visits to them more frequent; remember that these are tender times, and that it is of great importance to work together with the Holy Spirit when he seems to begin his gracious operations on the soul.

2ndly. When you judge any are prepared by divine grace for *Church membership*, and are not yet come to the Lord's table, visit, and exhort them to an approach; endeavour to remove their difficulties and discouragements, and inform me that I may put their names on the list which I keep of such persons.

3rdly. Visit and pray with the sick, and deal seriously with them about their eternal interests. And here stay not always to be sent for, but go and *offer your services* where you have reason to think they will be acceptable; and, as it will not be probable that you can see them so frequently as their case requires, endeavour to engage some pious neighbour to visit them, so that they may be seen *every day* while their illness continues extreme, and, if I am informed and be near them, I shall always be ready to join my labours with yours on this occasion.

4thly. If any are under remarkable afflictions, or have received remarkable deliverances, make them a visit upon the occasion. And I have sometimes thought that if those who have children to be

baptized were visited by an Elder a little before, with some serious admonition, it might turn to valuable account.

5thly. When you hear any behave in a disorderly manner, make an immediate application to them and where any are offended and come to you with their complaints, do not immediately engage yourselves in the quarrel, but put them upon proceeding regularly according to the wise direction of our blessed Lord . . . And as debates in a Church meeting are dangerous, if not managed with great prudence, I think, in such cases, all the Elders and the Pastor ought to be previously acquainted with the facts, that they may take counsel together, and ask farther counsel from the Lord, who, in that case will I hope, guide us in judgement. But as for cases of public scandal, I think the offender ought to be publicly admonished . . .

6thly. I think it incumbent on the Elders to take notice of the *temporal necessities* of those whom they visit, and to give proper information to the Deacons, and also to give them such exhortations relating to the discharge of their duty from time to time, as may be subservient to the good of the whole . . .

7thly. The Elders should cultivate an intimate friendship with each other. Remembering that the whole Church is in some degree the province of each, and proper times should be assigned, in which they and the Pastor may consult together in cases of difficulty and importance . . .

8thly. As the Pastor is with special care to watch over the Elders, and to admonish and exhort them, so are they likewise, in the spirit of humility and love, to watch over him in the Lord. And I do hereby entreat and charge you, my brethren, that if there be anything in my temper and conduct, which appears to you to give just and reasonable offence, you would remind me of it plainly and faithfully, and I hope you will always find that I shall receive advice with meekness, and endeavour to be an example to others of a readiness to reform as God shall enable me.

And thus, my dear friends, I have laid before you, with all freedom, a variety of hints relating to your office, I would not be an *idol* shepherd, and I would not have you *images* of Elders . . .

F. W. HARRIS

REVIEWS

Pulpit in Parliament: Puritanism during the English Civil Wars 1640-1648, by John F. Wilson (Princeton University Press, 1969, £4.75).

At first sight, a collection of about 240 printed sermons might seem unpromising fare. But when they are sermons preached before Parliament during the 1640's they take on a new significance. It is commonly recognized that the faith of the Puritan preachers was an important element during the English Civil Wars, but the precise character of that faith and its political implications have not always been clearly assessed.

Professor Wilson has analysed this series of sermons originally preached by invitation to members of the Long Parliament at periodic fasts and occasional thanksgivings. He includes three valuable appendices: 'Calendar and Checklist of Humiliations, Thanksgivings and Preachers in the Long Parliament'; 'Calendar of Printed Sermons Preached to members of the Long Parliament'; 'Sermons Preached to Sundry of the House of Commons, 1641'. He carefully describes the origin and practice of this phenomenon, seeks to draw out the significance of the individual members of Parliament who sponsored particular preachers, and analyses the specific personalities and theologies of the preachers themselves. He examines the 'style' of the sermons (the 'plain style' as opposed to the 'witty preaching' of the Stuart court), and also the selection of texts (the preference for the Old Testament is understandable in view of the plainly political setting of the preaching).

The book's final chapters seek to draw out the doctrine underlying the sermons. 'In certain respects emphasis upon the anticipated new "age" — explicitly millenarian or not — was the most striking and fundamental characteristic of the formal preaching before the Long Parliament . . .' (p. 195). 'In advocating their doctrines they were explaining their times' (p. 196).

A. HARDING

P. T. FORSYTH AND THE CURE OF SOULS, an Appraisement and Anthology of his practical writings, by Harry Escott (George Allen & Unwin, £1.25).

This is an old book with a new title. It was first published in 1948 as 'Peter Taylor Forsyth: Director of Souls'. It now appears with a few corrections, improvements and additions. The new title is given because 'The word *director* has sacerdotal associations which were anathema to a protestant mind such as Forsyth's'.

It is a book to keep beside you, to go back to, to relish the phrases. It may also serve as an introduction to Forsyth, making you want to

know more of him and his writings. It is modern yet curiously Victorian in parts, with dignity of language alongside freedom of expression.

The Appraisement says only a little of his life, but gives a good impression of Forsyth and serves as a background to the selections from his writings. The Anthology consists of eight parts, under the headings: The Plight of Man, The Power of God, The Perfection of Faith, The Soul of Prayer, The Crisis of Death, Eternal Life, Virginibus Puerisque and Pastoralia. Perhaps the least happy choices are those in various parts of the book coming from his Pulpit Parables for Young Hearers. While these show his wonderful use of language and his insight, one has some sympathy with the children!

There is no development in the selections apart from that which is revealed in the titles of the eight parts. The selections vary in length and the best introduction is to quote some of the sentences that jump out from the text.

'We go far, but do we go deep?'

'The more the Gospel says to us, the more we are impressed with its silence'.

'We need not only the risen Christ but the returned Christ'.

What he says on Prayer may prove for many among the best selections:

'Write prayers and burn them. Formulate your soul. Pay no attention to literary form, only to spiritual reality. Read a passage of Scripture and sit down and turn it into a prayer, written or spoken'.

Many have said this; it comes with particular force from so searching a theologian.

As a commentary on the title, the final part is the best. Here are quotations from addresses to students and ordination charges. There is nothing trivial here, and as you read you feel the passion and loving concern of the Principal, yet it is a sympathy which always challenges.

'A minister's life is terribly difficult, and this is where the difficulty lies — every preacher has to be the greatest dogmatist and the humblest man in his church'.

I want to read it all again to work that one out!

R. J. HALL

ALSO RECEIVED

The English Separatist Tradition, by B. R. White (O.U.P., £2.75).

The Correspondence of John Owen (1616-1683), ed. by Peter Toon (James Clarke, £1.50).

The Oxford Orations of Dr. John Owen, ed. by Peter Toon (Gospel Communication, Linkinhorne Ho., Linkinhorne, Callington, Cornwall, 60p).

WILLIAM DELL, Master Puritan by Eric C. Walker (W. Heffer, Cambridge, 1970, £3).

A portrait of an unknown puritan worthy hanging on a wall at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, presented a challenge to Dr. Walker, who was a history scholar of the college at one time. The enigma remains though the presumption that it is of William Dell, the unorthodox Master of the College, 1649-1660, is strong. Despite the courageous, laborious investigations of the author Dell remains but the outline of a figure shrouded in the mists of time. There is so little evidence about the man, his career, his character. We begin with uncertainty about his origins: 'I have found nothing certain to show Dell's birthplace and the family roots'; it continues in his student years: 'Dell's personal history at Emmanuel is obscure'; what he did at Yelden, save for publishing a tract entitled, *Christ's Spirit A Christian Strength,* or when he joined the New Model Army and what life he led in it, apart from preaching at Marston, no one knows; and of his time at Gonville and Caius the college historian, Dr. J. Venn remarked that 'his career seems an almost entire blank'. Such unpromising materials out of which to construct a biography would have vanquished anyone less persistent than Dr. Walker. It has meant, however, that quite a large proportion of the pages are devoted to colouring in the circumstances and situations in which Dell must have found himself. The meat is found in the discussion of Dell's publications, eighteen in number. The chapter on his sermon to the House of Commons which he impetuously published without permission and got himself in trouble, and his controversy with Christopher Love, who preached the same day, is a valuable contribution to the story of Independency versus Presbyterianism. Dell 'appeared to offer a panacea of freedom from many pressures and shackles'. Dell's curious views on education, coming from the Master of a college — he had no time for degrees and seems to have written off most learning as 'mere sophistry and deceit' — are handled well and critically by the author, who manages to reveal also Dell's reforming insights. This is another good chapter, but the last chapter on a subject in which the author has specialized 'Religious Enthusiasm' has too small an ingredient of Dell material to make it a successful conclusion.

The Story of the Dorset Congregational Association by Lionel Brown (Dorset Cong. Assn., 11 Nursey Gardens, Bridport, Dorset, 15p).

The price might suggest that this was a slight production; it is not. There are nearly a hundred packed pages describing in loving detail the missionary calling and labour of the Dorset churches associated since 1795. It is well written though lacking an index.

JOHN H. TAYLOR

GLASS SLIDES IN PUBLIC CUSTODY

The Management Committee of Crossways Church, London, has deposited with the G.L.C. Records Office a number of high quality glass slides made early in the century. The reproductions are to be transferred to film and copies of prints will be available. Here is a brief list of the subjects. The numbers refer to the number of different views available.

CHURCHES: Anerley (1), Barbican (2), Barnet (1), Bromley (1), Chelsea — Markham Square (1), City Temple (1), Clapton Park (2), Craven Chapel (1), Crouch End (4), Eccleston Square (1), Edmonton — Lower (1), Eltham (1), Falcon Square (1), Hare Court, Mr. Webb's (1), Highbury Quadrant (1), Ilford — Little (1), Jewin Street, Mr. Woodgate's (1), Kingsway House, Eastcheap and Duke Street (2), Little St. Helens (1), Lock Chapel (Hyde Park) (1), Moorfields — Whitefields Tab. (1), Old Jewry Meeting House (1), Orange Street (2), Poultry Compter (1), Salters Hall (1), Southwark Meeting House (1), Spa Fields Cha. (1), Stepney, Mr. Brewer's, Mr. Fletcher's, etc. (9), Stoke Newington, Abney (1) and Raleigh (1), Stratford (1), Tolmers Square (2), Tottenham Court Road, Whitefield's (1), Tottenham Court Road (1), Upton Cha. (1), Wood Street, Compter (1), Wandsworth Meeting House (1), Westminster Bridge Road, Christ Church (1).

ACADEMIES, COLLEGES, ETC.: Cheshunt (2), Coward (2), Homerton (4), Highbury (2), Wymondley (1), Mill Hill Grammar School (1).

MISCELLANEOUS: Memorial Hall, Fleet Prison, Bridewell, Star Chamber, Lambeth Palace, Tower of London, Corpus Christi, Artists' impressions of the execution of Congregational martyrs, etc., Communion Plate of Hare Court Chapel, Samuel Morley, M.P., etc.

OUR CONTEMPORARIES

We are grateful to sister societies for sending us their publications and we regret that we have not space to say all we would like about the contents. It is not easy to know what would be of particular interest to our readers but we will draw attention to a few articles. Dr. Payne examines the religious education question in *The Baptist Quarterly*, XXIV 8. Our President has 'The Letter-Book of John Davis (1731-1795) of Waltham Abbey' in XXIV 2. Stephen Frick deals with Friends and the Crimean War in *The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, 52.3. Edwin Welch's lecture on congregations established by marine engineers appears in *The Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England*, XIV 4. In *The Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XIV 4, A. M. Hill contributes 'The Death of Ordination in the Unitarian Tradition'. *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, XXXVIII 2, commemorate the bicentenary of Francis Asbury's sailing to America with a pithy article by Maldwyn Edwards on John Wesley's turbulent relationship with him.

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