

The Gospel MAGAZINE

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THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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"JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOR EVER."
"ENDEAVOURING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE."
"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD."

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EDITORIAL

Words, like currency, can become devalued so that they do not have the same value as they once had. They are still used but there is a false ring about them, for they are not being used in their original sense. Such a word is 'fellowship', which today is attached loosely to any kind of contact between Christians. It has come to mean little more than a friendly coming together, often at a very superficial level.

But fellowship in its original usage in the New Testament spoke of a much deeper relationship rooted in a common experience of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Having been renewed by the Spirit and having received the very life of God in our souls, we are knit together with all those who have enjoyed the same miracle of the grace of God. 'We are', writes Paul, 'members one of another' (Eph. 4 : 25). Like limbs in a body joined in an organic unity by their common membership of the same body, so we are one because we are in the one body of Christ.

This means that in that visible manifestation of the body of Christ which we see in the local church, a healthy fellowship is a matter of vital concern. A healthy body is one where all the limbs are working in harmony. The tragedy of a spastic child is that the limbs do not co-ordinate and so normal life is seriously impaired. It is the same in the body of Christ. If there is to be the healthy life which the New Testament envisages, all the members must be functioning harmoniously together.

This will show itself in a mutual sensitivity. We will be as keenly aware of weakness or failure in a member of the church as we are when we have sprained an ankle or pulled a muscle. This means a

deep interest in our fellow members, that we may know how they are progressing spiritually. But because spiritual progress is often affected by material circumstances, our concern will extend to the various trials and afflictions which beset God's people.

Such an interest will never be at the level of mere curiosity. The busy-body is not really interested in other people for their own sake. Their troubles are simply grist for his own mill! The interest of the Christian in his fellow-believer is one which leads to sympathy. He wants to know how other Christians are getting on because he wishes to 'rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep'.

This sympathy will show itself in practical ways. Pure religion, says James, is 'to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction' (James 1 : 27). The call of Hebrews to practise hospitality (Heb. 13 : 2) and the injunction of Paul to do good to all men and 'especially to those who are of the household of faith' (Gal. 6 : 10) point in the same direction. Nor will such concern for the brethren end at the boundaries of the local church, witness Paul's efforts to encourage the Gentile churches to minister to the needs of the impoverished saints in Judea. Fellowship is like the ripples in a pond in which a pebble has been dropped, for the influence reaches far and wide.

In such fellowship, especially at the level of the local church, there is a place for silence. If a brother or sister has failed spiritually, it certainly does not promote fellowship if we retail their failure for the idle gossip of others. It is, of course, a different matter if we meet to pray for an erring brother, for earnest prayer has a way of humbling those who pray so that scathing criticism passes into sympathetic concern.

But fellowship generally is expressed by speaking, for the simple reason that speech is the basic means of contact between humans. Those described by Malachi as fearing the Lord 'spake often one to another' (Mal. 3 : 16), sharing together in their experiences and hopes. So Christians will speak together and will pray together.

Yet often it is sadly true that our fellowship does not really plumb the depths. Indeed, at times we are content to engage in the chit-chat which characterises the conversation of ordinary people in the world. How frequently the value of a sermon is lost in the idle chatter of those who seem to view the blessing at the end of a service much as an athlete views the starter's pistol—an opportunity to be off! How often Christians who look critically at those who desecrate the Lord's Day are guilty in their own homes of idle or flippant chatter on that same day.

But even when we rise above the trivial conversation we still do not always reach true fellowship. We may discuss doctrine together, but it may be a merely intellectual discussion. We may discuss the present situation and the ecumenical movement, but we may do it merely as two unbelievers might discuss politics or sport. Or we may reach real fellowship, which means a true sharing at a deep level in the things of God. To share one with another our hunger for God; our failure to attain; the glimpses we have had of Christ; particular experiences of God's mercy; new light shed by the Spirit on the Word—these and such-like themes lie at the heart of real fellowship. May God lead us into such communion with each other in all our churches.

H. M. CARSON.

Tenderness in judgment, unwillingness to believe evil, grief if we are forced to do so, eagerness to believe good, joy over one recovered from any slip or fall, unselfish gladness in another's joy, sorrow in another's sorrow, readiness to do anything to help another—all this, and much more, is included in that wonderful word—love.
—AMY CARMICHAEL.

Let us shine with Christ's light. The moon rises and shines, but not with her own light—she gathers all from the sun; so do we. Let us shine in such a way that Christ shall have all the glory. They shine brightest who feel most their own darkness, and are most clothed in Christ's brightness. Wherever we go let us make it manifest that our light and peace and joy all come from Him as the Source; that our holiness all comes from union with Him.

—R. M. McCHEYNE.

Be resolute in prayer. Make any sacrifice to maintain it. Consider that time is short and that business and company must not be allowed to rob thee of thy God.—ADONIRAM JUDSON.

PREVENIENT GRACE

C. H. SPURGEON

'When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me.'—Galatians 1 : 15.

You all know the story of the apostle Paul; he had been a persecutor, and went armed with letters to Damascus, to hale men and women, and drag them to prison. On the road thither he saw a light exceeding bright above the brightness of the sun, and a voice spake out of heaven to him saying, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' By this miraculous interposition he was converted: three days he spent in darkness; but when Ananias came to tell him of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there fell from his eyes as it were scales. He was baptized, became the most mighty of all Christian teachers, and could truly say that he was 'not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles'.

Paul's conversion is generally considered so very remarkable for its suddenness and distinctness, and truly it is; yet, at the same time, it is no exception to the general rule of conversions, but is rather a type, or model, or pattern of the way in which God shows forth His longsuffering to them that are led to believe on Him. It appears from my text, however, that there is another part of Paul's history which deserves our attention quite as much as the suddenness of his conversion, namely, the fact that although he was suddenly converted, yet God had had thoughts of mercy towards him from his very birth. God did not begin to work with him when he was on the road to Damascus. That was not the first occasion on which eyes of love had darted upon this chief of sinners, but he declares that God had separated him and set him apart even from his mother's womb, that he might by and by be called by grace, and have Jesus Christ revealed in him.

I selected this text, not so much for its own sake, as to give me an opportunity for saying a little this evening upon a doctrine not often touched upon, namely, that of PREVENIENT GRACE, or the grace which comes before regeneration and conversion. I think we sometimes overlook it. We do not attach enough importance to the grace of God in its dealings with men before He actually brings them to Himself. Paul says that God had designs of love towards him even before He had called him out of the dead world into spiritual life.

I. To begin, then, let us talk for a little while upon THE PURPOSE

OF GOD PRECEDING SAVING GRACE, AS IT MAY CLEARLY BE SEEN DEVELOPING ITSELF IN HUMAN HISTORY.

You generally judge what a man's purpose is by his actions. If you saw a man very carefully making moulds in sand, if you then watched him take several pieces of iron and melt them down, and if you further noticed him running the melted iron into the moulds, you might not know precisely what class of machine he was making, but you would very justly conclude that he was making some part of an engine or other machinery—a beam, or a lever, or a crank, or a wheel, and according to what you saw the moulds in the sand to be, you would form your idea of what the man was intending to make. Now, when I look at the life of a man, even before conversion, I think I can discover something of God's moulding and fashioning in him even before regenerating grace comes into his heart.

Let me give you an illustration of my course of thought. When God created man—we are told in the book of Genesis—He made him 'out of the dust of the earth'. Mark him beneath his Maker's hand, the framework of a man, the tabernacle for an immortal soul; a man made of clay, fully made, I suppose, and perfect in all respects excepting one, and that soon followed: for after God had formed him out of the dust, then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Now it strikes me that during the early part of the history of the people whom God means to save, though they have not received into their hearts any spiritual life, nor experienced any of the work of regeneration, yet their life before conversion is really a working of them in the clay.

Let us endeavour to bring this out more distinctly. Can you not perceive God's purpose in the apostle Paul, when you think of *the singular gifts with which he was endowed*? Here was a man, a rhetorician, so noble that there are in his works passages of eloquence not to be equalled, much less excelled, by Demosthenes and Cicero. As a logician, his arguments are most conclusive as well as profound. Never had man such an eagle-eye to pierce into the depths of a matter; never had man such an eagle-wing to mount up into its sublimities. He argues out questions so abstruse, that at all times they have been the battle-grounds of controversies, and yet he seems to perceive them clearly and distinctly and to unfold and expound them with a precision of language not to be misunderstood.

All apostles of Jesus Christ put together are not equal to Paul in the way of teaching. Truly he might have said of them all, 'You are but as children compared with me'. Peter dashes, and dashes gloriously, against the adversary, but Peter cannot build up, nor instruct, like the great apostle of the Gentiles; he has to say himself

of Paul's writings that they 'contain some things hard to be understood'. Peter can confirm, but scarcely can he understand Paul; for where intellect is concerned, Paul is far, far above him. Paul seems to have been endowed by God with one of the most massive brains that ever filled human cranium, and to have been gifted with an intellect which towered far above anything that we find elsewhere. Had Paul been merely a natural man, I do not doubt but what he would take the place either of Milton among the poets, or of Bacon among the philosophers. He was, in deed and in truth, a master-mind.

Now, when I see such a man as this cast by God in the mould of nature, I ask myself—'What is God about? What is He doing here?' As every man has a purpose, so also has God, and I think I see in all this that God foreknew that such a man was necessary to be raised up as a vessel through whom He might convey to the world the hidden treasures of the gospel; that such a man was needful so that God might speak His great things by him. You will say, probably, that God reveals great things by fools. I beg your pardon. God did once permit an ass to speak, but it was a very small thing that he said, for any ass might readily have said it. Whenever there is a wise thing to be said, a wise man is always chosen to say it. Look the whole Bible through, and you will find that the revelation is always congruous to the person to whom it is given. You do not find Ezekiel blessed with a revelation like that of Isaiah. Ezekiel is all imagination, therefore he must soar on the eagle's wing; Isaiah is all affection and boldness, and therefore he must speak with evangelical fulness. God does not give Nahum's revelation to the herdsman Amos: the herdsman Amos cannot speak like Nahum, nor can Nahum speak like Amos. Each man is after his own order, and a man of this masterly order of mind, like the apostle Paul, must have been created, it seems to me, for no other end than to be the appropriate means of revealing to us the fulness and the blessing of the gospel of peace.

Mark, again, *the apostle's education*. Paul was a Jew, not half Greek and half Jew, but a pure Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, speaking still the Jews' native tongue, and not a stranger to the ancient speech of Israel. There was nothing in the traditions of the Jews which Paul did not know and understand. He was educated at the feet of Gamaliel. The best master of the age is selected to be the master of the hopeful young scholar, and the school in which he is placed must be a Rabbinical one. Now, just observe in this the purpose of God. Paul's life-long struggle was to be with Jewish superstition. In Iconium, in Lystra, in Derbe, in

Athens, in Corinth, in Rome, he must always be confronting the Judaising spirit; and it was well that he should know all about it, that he should be well schooled in it; and it does strike me that God separated him from his mother's womb on purpose that he might go forth to proclaim the gospel instead of law, and shut the mouths of those who were constantly abiding by the traditions of the fathers, instead of the gospel of Jesus Christ. All this, remember, was going on while as yet he was unconverted, though he was even then, as we see, being prepared for his work.

Then observe *the spiritual struggles through which Paul passed*. I take it that mental struggles are often a more important part of education than what a man learns from his schoolmaster. What is learned *here* in my heart is often of more use to me than what can be put into my head by another. Paul seems to have had a mind bent upon carrying out what he believed to be right. To serve God appears to have been the great ambition, the one object of the apostle's life. Even when he was a persecutor, he says he thought he was doing God service. He was no groveller after wealth; never in his whole lifetime was Paul a Mammonite. He was no mere seeker after learning—never; he was learned, but it was all held and used subject to what he deemed far more highly: the indwelling grace of God. Even before he knew Christ he had a sort of religion, and an attachment, and an earnest attachment, too, to the God of his fathers, though it was a zeal not according to knowledge. He had his inward fightings, and fears, and struggles, and difficulties, and all these were educating him to come out and talk to his fellow-sinners, and lead them up out of the darkness of Judaism into the light of Christianity.

And then, what I like in Paul, and that which leads me to see the purpose of God in him, is *the singular formation of his mind*. Even as a sinner, Paul was great. He was 'the chief of sinners', just as he afterwards became 'not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles'. There are some of us who are such little men that the world will never see us; the old proverb about the chips in porridge giving one pleasure either way, might apply to a great many people, but never to Paul. If there was anything to be done, Paul would do it; ay, and if it came to the stoning of Stephen, he says he gave his vote against him, and though he was not one of the actual executioners, yet we are told that 'the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul'. He would do all that was to be done, and was a thoroughgoing man everywhere. Believing a thing to be right, Paul never consulted with flesh and blood, but girded up his loins and wrought with the whole powers of his being, and that was

no mean force, as his enemies felt to their cost. Why, as I see him riding to Damascus, I picture him with his eyes flashing with fanatic hate against the disciples of the Man whom he thought to be an impostor, while his heart beat high with the determination to crush the followers of the Nazarene.

He is a man all energy, and all determination, and when he is converted he is only lifted into a higher life, but unchanged as to temperament, nature, and force of character. He seems to have been constituted naturally a thorough-going, thorough-hearted man, in order that when grace did come to him he might be just as earnest, just as dauntless, and fearless, in the defence of what he believed to be right. Yes, and such a man was wanted to lead the vanguard in the great crusade against the god of this world. No other could have stood forward thus as Paul did, for no other had the same firmness, boldness, and decision, that he possessed. 'But', I hear someone say, 'was not Peter as bold?' Yes, he was; but Peter, you remember, always had the failing of being just where he ought not to be when he was wanted. Peter was unstable to the very last, I think; certainly in Paul's day, Paul had to withstand him. He was a great and good man, but not fitted to be the foremost. Perhaps you say, 'But there is John: would not John do?' No; we cannot speak in too high terms of John, but John is too full of affection. John is the plane to smooth the timber, but not the axe to cut it down. John is too gentle, too meek; he is the Philip Melancthon, but Paul must be the Luther and Calvin rolled into one. Such a man was wanted, and I say that from his very birth, God was fitting him for this position; and before he was converted, prevenient grace was thus engaged, fashioning, moulding, and preparing the man, in order that by and by there might be put into his nostrils the breath of life.

Now what is the drift of all this? A practical one; and to show you what it is, we will stay a minute here before we go on to anything else. Some of the good fathers amongst us are mourning very bitterly just now over their sons. Your children do not turn out as you wish they would; they are getting sceptical, some of them, and they are also falling into sin. Well, dear friends, it is yours to mourn; it is enough to make you weep bitterly; but let me whisper a word into your ear. Do not sorrow as those who are without hope, for God may have very great designs to be answered, even by these very young men who seem to be running so altogether in the wrong direction. I do not think I could go so far as John Bunyan did, when he said he was sure God would have some eminent saints in the next generation, because the young men in his day were such gross sinners that he thought they would make fine saints; and when the

Lord came and saved them by His mercy, they would love Him much, because they had had so much forgiven. I would hardly like to say so much as that, but I do believe that sometimes in the inscrutable wisdom of God, when some of those who have been sceptical come to see the truth, they are the very best men that could possibly be found to do battle against the enemy. Some of those who have fallen into error, after having passed through it and happily come up from its deep ditch, are just the men to stand and warn others against it. I cannot conceive that Luther would ever have been so mighty a preacher of the faith if he had not himself struggled up and down Pilate's staircase on his knees, when trying to get to heaven by his penances and his good works. O let us have hope. We do not know but that God may be intending yet to call them and bless them.

Who can tell, there may be a young man here tonight who will one day be the herald of the cross in India, in Africa, and in the islands of the sea? Remember John Williams wishing to keep an appointment with another young man who committed a certain sin. He wanted to know what time it was, and so just stepped into Moorfield's Chapel; someone saw him, and he did not like to go out, and the word, preached by Mr. Timothy East, who still survives amongst us, fell on his ears, and the young sinner was made a saint; and you all know how he afterwards perished as a martyr on the shores of Erromanga. Why may there not be another such a case tonight? There may be some young man here who has been receiving a first-class education, he has no idea what for; he has been learning a multitude of things, perhaps a great deal which it would be much better if he did not know, but the Lord is meaning to make something of him. I do not know where you are, young man, but O, I wish I could fire you tonight with a high ambition to serve God! What is the good of my being made at all if I do not serve my Maker? What is the use of my being here if I do not bring any glory to Him who put me and keeps me here? Why, I had better have been a piece of rotten dung strewn upon the field, and bring forth something for the farmer's use, than to have been a mere consumer of bread and meat, and to have breathed the air and lived upon God's bounty, and yet to have done nothing for Him. O young man, if such an army of you as we have tonight, could all be led by divine grace to say with the apostle Paul, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ', why, there would be hope for Old England yet. We would yet fling Popery back to the seven hills whence it came. Oh that God would grant us this blessing; but if He should not be pleased to call all of us by His

grace, yet may some here live to prove that they were separated from their mother's womb to do God's work, and set apart that they might have the Son of God revealed in them, and might proclaim His gospel with power. We will now leave this point, but shall continue the same subject in another form.

II. You would, perhaps, say that all I have talked about as yet has been providence rather than grace. Very likely, but I think that providence and grace are very near akin; at any rate if providence is the wheel, grace is the hand which turns and guides it. But I am now about to speak of GRACE PRECEDING CALLING IN ANOTHER SENSE.

It strikes me that it is impossible to say, concerning the elect, when the grace of God begins to deal with them. You can tell when the *quicken*ing grace comes, but not when the grace itself comes. For know, in one sense, grace was exercised upon the chosen

‘Before the day-star knew its place,

Or planets ran their round’.

I should say that there is what I cannot call by any other name than *formative grace*, exercised upon the vessels of mercy at their very birth. It seems to me to be no small mercy that some of us were born of such parents as we were, and that we were born where we were. Some of us began right, and were surrounded by many advantages. We were cradled upon the lap of piety and dandled upon the knee of holiness. There are some children who are born with a constitution which cannot escape sin, and which at the same time seems as if it inevitably led them to it. Who can deny that there are some whose passions seem naturally to be so violent that, notwithstanding almost any and every restraint, they run headlong into sin! and often those failings may be distinctly traced to their parents. It is no small blessing when we can look back and thank God, that if no blue-blood of nobility flows in our veins, yet from our very childhood we have not heard the voice of blasphemy, nor strayed into the haunts of vice, but that in the very formation of our character, divine grace has ever been present with us.

This formative grace many of you, I have no doubt, can trace in the examples and influences which have followed you from the cradle through life. Why, what a blessing to have had such a Sunday-school teacher as some of you had! Other children went to schools, but they had not such a teacher, or such a class as yours. What a privilege to have had such a minister as some of you had, though perhaps he has fallen asleep now! You know there were others who went to places where there was no earnestness, no life; but that good man who was blessed to you was full of anxiety for your soul, and at the very first, before you were converted, his

preaching helped to form your character. Why, it strikes me that every word I heard, and everything I saw while I was yet a child or a youth, had a part in the formation of my after-life. Oh! what a mercy it is to be placed where a holy example and godly conversation tend to form the man in a godly mould. All this may be, you know, without grace. I am not speaking now of the work of effectual calling, but of that prevenient grace which is too much forgotten, though it so richly deserves to be remembered. Think, too, of the prayers which brought tears to our eyes, and the teaching that would not let us sin so deeply as others, of the light which glowed in us, even in our childhood, and seems to have dispelled something of our natural darkness. Think of that earnest face that used to look so steadily on us when we did wrong, and of that mother's tear which seemed as if it would burn itself into our hearts, when there had been something amiss, that made mother anxious. All this, though it did not convert us, yet it helped to make us what we now are, and unto God let us give the glory.

Furthermore, while there was this formative grace, there seems to me to have gone with it very much of *preventive grace*. How many saints fall into sins which they have to regret even after conversion, while others are saved from leaving the path of morality to wander in the morass of lust and crime! Why, some of us were, by God's grace, placed in positions where we could not well have been guilty of any gross acts of immorality, even if we had tried. We were so hedged about by guardian-care, so watched and tended on every side, that we should have been dashing our heads against a stone wall if we had run into any great or open sin. Oh! what a mercy to be prevented from sinning, when God puts chains across the road, digs ditches, makes hedges, builds walls, and says to us, 'No, you shall not go that way, I will not let you; you shall never have *that* to regret; you may desire it, but I will hedge up your way with thorns; you may wish it, but it never shall be yours'. Beloved, I have thanked God a thousand times in my life, that before my conversion, when I had ill desires I had no opportunities; and on the other hand, that when I had opportunities I had no desires; for when desires and opportunities come together like the flint and steel, they make the spark that kindles the fire, but neither the one nor the other, though they may both be dangerous, can bring about any very great amount of evil so long as they are kept apart. Let us, then, look back, and if this has been our experience, bless the preventing grace of God.

Again, there is another form of grace I must mention, namely, *restraining grace*. Here, you see, I am making a distinction. There

are many who did go into sin; they were not wholly prevented from it, but they could not go as far into it as they wanted to do. There is a young man here tonight—he will say, how should I know—well, I do know—there is a young man here tonight who wants to commit a certain sin, but he cannot. Oh! how he wishes to go, but he cannot; he is placed in such a position of poverty that he cannot play the fine gentleman he would like. There is another; he wants to be dancing at such-and-such a place, but thank God he is lame; there is another, who, if he had had his wish, would have lost his soul, but since his blindness has come upon him there is some hope for him. Oh! how often God has thrown a man on a sick bed to make him well! He would have been such as he was even unto death if he had been well, but God has made him sick, and that sickness has restrained him from sin. It is a mercy for some men that they cannot do what they would, and though 'to will is present' with them, yet even in sin, 'how to perform that which they would they find not'. Ah! my fine fellow, if you could have had your own way you would have been at the top of the mountain by now! So you think, but no, you would have been over the precipice long before this if God had let you climb at all, and so He has kept you in the valley because He has designs of love towards you, and because you shall not sin as others sin. Divine grace has its hand upon the bridle of your horse. You may spur your steed and use the lash against the man who holds you back; or perhaps it is a woman, and you may speak bitter words against that wife, that sister, or that mother, whom God has put there to hold you back; but you cannot go on, you shall not go on. Another inch forward and you will be over the precipice and lost, and therefore God has put that hand there to throw your horse back on its haunches, and make you pause, and think, and turn from the error of your ways. What a mercy it is that when God's people do go into sin to any extent, He speaks and says, 'Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further; here shall thy proud sins be stayed!' There is, then, restraining grace.

We shall get still further into the subject when we come to what Dr. John Owen calls *the preparatory work of grace*. Have you ever noticed that parable about the different sorts of ground, and the sower of the seeds? A sower went forth to sow, and some of the seed fell on stony ground; you can understand that, because all men have stones in their hearts. Some fell on the thorns and thistles; you can comprehend that, because men are so given to worldly care. Another part of the seed fell on the beaten path; you can understand that—men are so occupied with worldliness. But how about the 'good ground'? 'Good ground'! Is there such a thing as 'good

ground' by nature? One of the evangelists says that it was 'honest and good ground'. Now, is there such a difference between hearts and hearts? Are not all men depraved by nature? Yes, he who doubts human depravity had better begin to study himself. *Question:* If all hearts are bad, how are some hearts good? *Reply:* They are good comparatively; they are good in a certain sense. It is not meant in the parable that that good ground was so good that it ever would have produced a harvest without the sowing of the seed, but that it had been prepared by providential influences upon it to receive the seed, and in that sense it may be said to have been 'good ground'.

Now let me show you how God's grace does come to work on the human hearts so as to make it good soil before the living seed is cast into it, so that before quickening grace really visits it the heart may be called a good heart, because it is prepared to receive that grace. I think this takes place thus: first of all, before quickening grace comes, God often gives an attentive ear, and makes a man *willing to listen to the Word*. Not only does he like to listen to it, but he wants to know the meaning of it; there is a little excitement in his mind to know what the gospel tidings really are. He is not saved as yet, but it is always a hopeful sign when a man is willing to listen to the truth, and is anxious to understand it. This is one thing which prevenient grace does in making the soul good. In Ezekiel's vision, as you will recollect, before the breath came from the four winds the bones began to stir, and they came together bone to his bone. So, before the Spirit of God comes to a man in effectual calling, God's grace often comes to make a stir in the man's mind, so that he is no longer indifferent to the truth, but is anxious to understand what it means.

The next mark of this gracious work is *an ingenuousness of heart*. Some persons will not hear you, or if they do they are always picking holes and finding fault, they are not honest and good ground. But there are others who say, 'I will give the man a fair and an honest hearing; I will read the Bible; I will read it, too, honestly; I will really see whether it be the Word of God or not, I will come to it without any prejudices; or, if I have any prejudices I will throw them aside'. Now, all this is a blessed work of preparatory grace, making the heart ready to receive effectual calling.

Then, when this willingness and ingenuousness are attended with *a tender conscience*, as they are in some unconverted people, this is another great blessing. Some of you are not converted, but you would not do wrong; you are not saints, but you would not tell a lie for the world. I thank God that there are some of you so excellent in morals, that if you were proposed to us for Church membership

we could not raise any objection to you on *that* ground, at any rate. You are as honest as the day is long: as for the things of God, you are outwardly as attentive to them, and as diligent in them, as the most earnest and indefatigable Christians. Now, this is because your conscience is tender. When you do wrong you cannot sleep at night; and you do not feel at all easy in being without a Saviour—I know some of you do not. You have not come to any decision; the grace of God has not really made you feel your thoroughly ruined state; still you are not quite easy. In fact, to go farther, your affections, though not weaned altogether from earth, yet begin to tremble a little as though they would go heavenward. You want to be a Christian: when the communion table is spread, you dare not come downstairs, but I see you looking on from the gallery, and you wish you were with us. You know you have not believed in Jesus Christ, and the world keeps you back from doing so; but still there is a kind of twitching in your conscience; you do not know what it is, but there is a something got into you that makes you say at times, ‘O God, let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his’; yes, and you even go farther than this, and ask to live the righteous man’s life, too. Now, remember, this will not save you: ‘Ye must be born again’. But for all this the Church of God should feel deeply grateful, for they have seen in themselves that this is often God’s preparatory work—clearing away the rubbish and rubble, and digging out the foundations, that Jesus Christ might be laid therein, the corner-stone of future hope and of future happiness.

Another work of grace is the *creation of dissatisfaction with their present state*. How many men we have known who were consciously ‘without God and without hope in the world’. The apples of Sodom had turned to ashes and bitterness in their mouth, though at one time all was fair and sweet to their taste. The mirage of life with them has been dispelled, and instead of the green fields, and waving trees, and rippling waters, which their fevered imagination had conjured up in the desert, they can see now nought but the arid sand and wasteness of desolation, which appal their fainting spirits, and promise nothing; no, not even a grave to cover their whited bones, which shall remain a bleached memorial that ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity’. Multitudes have been brought to see the deluge of sin which has covered even the high places of the earth, they find no rest for the sole of their foot, but as yet they know not of an ark, nor of a loving hand prepared to pull them in, as did Noah the dove in olden time. Look at the life of Augustine, how wearily he wanders hither and thither with a death-thirst in his soul, that no fount of philosophy, or scholastic argument, or heretical teaching could ever

assuage. He was aware of his unhappy estate, and turned his eye round the circle of the universe looking for peace, not fully conscious of what he wanted, though feeling an aching void the world could never fill. He had not found the centre, fixed and steadfast, around which all else revolved in ceaseless change. Now, all this appetite, this hunger and thirst, I look upon as not of the devil, nor of the human heart alone, it was of God. He strips us of all our earthly joy and peace, that, shivering in the cold blast, we might flee, when drawn by His Spirit, to the 'Man who is as a hiding-place from the storm, a covert from the tempest, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land'.

Of course, I have not gone fully into this doctrine of prevenient grace, but I trust I have said just enough to waken the gratitude of all the saints who have experienced it, and to make them sing with greater emotion than they have ever done before—

'Determined to save, He watched o'er my path,

When, Satan's blind slave, I sported with death'.

III. And now we come to the last point, which is, PAUL'S ACTUAL CALLING BY DIVINE GRACE.

All preparatory work of which we have spoken, was not the source or origin of the vital godliness which afterwards distinguished that renowned servant of God—that came to him on a sudden. Beloved, there may be some here tonight who cannot discern anything in themselves of God's work of grace at all. I do not wonder at this. I do not suppose that the apostle could discern it in himself, or even thought of looking for it. He was as careless of Christ as is the butterfly of the honey in the flowers. He lived with no thought of honouring Jesus, and no desire to magnify Him: but with the very reverse passion, glowing like a hot coal within his soul; and yet in a moment He was turned from an enemy into a friend! Oh! what a mercy it would be if some here tonight were turned from enemies into friends in a moment: and we are not without hope but that this will be the case.

You have hated Christ, my friend; you have hated Him boldly and decidedly; you have not been a sneaking sort of adversary, but have opposed Him frankly and openly. Now, why did you do it? I am sorry for your sin, but I like your honesty. What is there in the person of Christ for you to hate? Men hated Him while He was on earth, and yet He died for them! Can you hate Him for that? He came into this world to gain no honour for Himself—he had honour enough in heaven, but He gave it up for the sake of men. When He died, He had not amassed a fortune, nor gathered about Him a troop of soldiers, nor had He conquered provinces, but He died

naked on a cross! Nothing brought Him here but disinterested affection; and when He came, He spent His life in deeds of holiness and good. For which of these things can you hate Him? The amazing lovingkindness of Christ Jesus towards sinners should in itself disarm their animosity and turn their hatred of Him to love. Alas! I know that this thought of itself will not do it, but the Spirit of God can. If the Spirit of God once comes in contact with your souls, and shows you that Christ died for you, your enmity towards Christ will be all over then.

Dr. Gifford once went to see a woman in prison who had been a very gross offender. She was such a hardened reprobate that the doctor began by discoursing with her about the judgments of God and the punishments of hell, but she only laughed him to scorn and called him opprobrious names. The doctor burst into tears, and said, 'And yet, poor soul, there is mercy for you, even for such as you are, though you have laughed in the face of Him who would do you good. Christ is able to forgive you, bad though you are; and I hope that He will yet take you to dwell with Him at his right hand'. In a moment the woman stopped her laughing, sat down quietly, burst into tears, and said, 'Don't talk to me in that way; I have always been told that I should be damned, and I made up my mind to be; I knew there was no chance, and so I have gone on from one sin to another: but oh! if there is a hope of mercy for me, that is another thing; if there is a possibility of my being forgiven, that is another thing'. The doctor at once opened his Bible and began to read to her these words, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanseth us from all sin'; the greatest brokenness of heart followed. In subsequent visits the doctor was gratified to find that she was brought to Christ; and though she had to undergo a sentence of transportation for many years at the time, yet in after days the godly man saw her walking honestly and uprightly as a believer in Jesus Christ.

Sinner, I wish that thought would bring thee to Christ! O that thou wouldst know that He hath chosen thee, that He hath separated thee for Himself, and to be His even from thy mother's womb! Ah! thou hast played the harlot, but He will bring thee back; thou hast sinned very greatly, but thou shalt one day be clothed in the white robe, and wear the everlasting crown. Oh! blush and be confounded that thou shouldst ever have sinned as thou hast done. Thou hast been a thief and a drunkard; thou hast brought thy mother's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, but her prayers are going up even now to heaven, and thou shalt be brought in yet. O stubborn sinner, my Master means to have thee. Run as thou wilt,

thou wandering sheep, the Shepherd is after thee: yield thee, yield thee, yield thee now. O prodigal, thy Father's heart is open, arise, go thou to thy Father. Thou art ashamed to go, art thou? Oh! let that shame make thee go the faster; let it not keep thee back. Jesus bled, Jesus wept, Jesus lives in heaven. 'Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, let him buy wine and milk, without money and without price.' 'Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.' There is no sinner too black to be forgiven. There are no iniquities that can damn you if you believe in Jesus. All manner of sin and iniquity shall be forgiven you if you believe in Jesus. All manner of sin and iniquity shall be forgiven unto him who puts his trust in the shadow of Jehovah-Jesus. Look to Him, He dies, He lives; look, He rises, He pleads above! 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.' I trust that the whole of your past mysterious life, my dear fellow-sinner, will be explained to you tonight, by your believing in Jesus. That will be the golden key which will open the secret, and you will say, 'Now I see it; I could not tell what that mysterious hand was that kept me back from doing a certain thing; I could not understand why I was led into such a path, but now I know that it was to take me to the feet of the blessed Saviour, where I might be happy for ever'. As you look back, and think of all the dealings of divine grace and providence with you throughout your life, you will sing—

'Ah! who am I, that God hath saved
Me from the doom I did desire,
And crossed the lot myself did crave,
To set me higher!'

I must give one word of warning to those who are afflicting themselves with a notion that in order to true, real conversion, they must have a long course of agonising soul-conflict. Saul of Tarsus calls Him Lord, and it is only three days that darkness rests upon him. This is the longest case recorded in the Bible—and how short a time in darkness and anguish that is, compared with the experience of some, whom you are regarding as models on which God must act in your case. He may lead you at once into joy and peace, as Nathanael, who said as soon as he saw Christ, 'Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel'. God may, and doubtless has been blessing you through His grace from your birth; but He needs not to plunge you many days in the cold, dark waters of conviction, to wash away your sin: the blood of Christ at once can cleanse from all sin, if you confide your soul to Him. Believe, therefore, and you are at once justified and at peace with God.

A Nation's Debt to Calvin

S. M. HOUGHTON

Education and religious observance have combined to give to the average twentieth-century Englishman a consciousness of his country's historical past. To a limited extent he realises that the manner of life he lives in the nineteen-sixties is profoundly influenced by, and indeed determined by, events and movements, religious, political and social, extending over hundreds of years. His personal recollections may go back little further than the second world war, but his education and even his daily newspaper will remind him continually that his national history, which is not merely 'past politics', has done much to shape the life he now lives in the flesh. To a considerable degree also, his outlook on 'the things of the Spirit of God' is determined, humanly speaking, in like manner. We cannot separate ourselves from our past. Paul the Christian, while 'separated unto the Gospel of God' by the tremendous experience on the Damascus road, whereby he became for ever and ever a 'new creature in Christ Jesus', remained nationally a Hebrew of the Hebrews, though willing to become all things to all men for his Lord's sake. So far as the things of this world are concerned, our present is largely fashioned by our heritage from bygone years.

As with individuals, so with nations, the harvest which is reaped is determined by the seed which is sown, and, for good or for ill, the results of the sowing may by no means be terminated in the third or fourth generation following. Britain in particular, among nations, able as she is to look back on some two thousand years of national history and progress, has been characterised by a hatred of revolutionary change and a reluctance to set aside institutions which have been the growth of centuries rather than of years.

'It is the land that freemen till,
That sober-suited Freedom chose,
The land, where girt with friends or foes
A man may speak the thing he will:

'A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.' (*Tennyson*)

Clearly the history of Britain is an important subject of study.

Yet to the student of history it is abundantly clear that certain historical periods are of greater and more fundamental importance than others. Not all events have the same relative value. The stream of national life has sometimes run so slowly as to come perilously near stagnation. The significance of events has seemed trivial and almost negligible: all has seemed 'bound in shallows and in miseries'. At other times the 'genial current' (as the poet Thomas Gray might have termed it), or the turbulent loud-sounding flow, seems to move in almost tragic haste towards an unpredictable bourne.

It would be erroneous to speak of the Middle Ages as constituting a period of stagnation in all departments of national life. It was in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the system of trial by jury took its rise, replacing trial by ordeal. At the same period Parliament as a potential instrument of legislation and government was founded. By the sixteenth century it was becoming a body which monarchs had to take seriously into their reckoning. But in matters spiritual, a vast host of powerful clerics kept men's minds in subjection to a church which mechanised the way of salvation and hid from men the key of knowledge. An outward obedience and subservience replaced obedience to the Gospel as in the sight of God. The clerics entered not heaven themselves, and them that were entering in they hindered. They failed to bring to an untimely grave the man whom God raised up to combat them, but long after his death they dis-interred Wycliffe's bones and scattered his ashes in the stream which ran close to his tomb.

In the providence of God the sixteenth century witnessed the beginning of the Englishman's emancipation from ecclesiastical tyranny and falsehood. Old things passed away and, nationally, many things became new. The rebirth of learning, which was well under way by 1500, illumined matters worldly, while the Reformation which followed it challenged, not unsuccessfully, the power and claims of an apostate church, brought the nation back to the Word of God, re-asserted the authority of that Word, gave defiant proclamation to the doctrine that 'there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus', declared the sacrifice of masses to be 'blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits', and asserted that the bishop of Rome had 'no jurisdiction in this realm of England'. In brief, it taught the truth as in Jesus as it had not been taught in England since the early centuries, save by John Wycliffe and the Lollards, and contributed vastly to the true glories of the Tudor period.

God chose to put the British people in trust with the Gospel of His Son. It is not without significance that when William Wordsworth looked back into history, he found special reason to glory in 'the tongue that Shakespeare spake' and in 'the faith and morals' that Milton held. He judged that these, above all else, furnished the 'titles manifold' in which he rejoiced; and tongue and faith alike were profoundly influenced, if not indeed actually shaped, by the 'form of doctrine' to which England was delivered in and after the Tudor period.

It is a matter of daily observation that the 'broad rivers and streams' of national life are fed by numerous tributaries, many of which, such as politics, are necessarily almost wholly secular. Others, for instance, education, may be regarded as partly secular and partly spiritual, the ultimate verdict depending upon whether it is viewed simply as a training for earning a livelihood or alternatively as a tempering of the 'spirit of man that is in him'. Again, other tributary sources, though powerful in their influence on the secular, are altogether spiritual. 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father' is the most important stream of all. Its waters are altogether different in character from the cistern-waters of politics or of commerce or of secular literature. They are 'living waters', proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Its streams make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. In the vision of Ezekiel, the river brought life and fertility to lands which otherwise would have been given over to barrenness: which thing is a parable.

Tudor England was, to begin with, a spiritual wilderness, a land of the shadow of death. The Bible was a book unknown to the great mass of the people. When William Tyndale (eternal honour to his name!) resolved to translate the Bible into the vulgar tongue so as to cause even the boy who drove the plough to delight in its message, there was no place in England which could afford him a refuge. He fled abroad to the Rhineland, and commenced an exile which was only terminated by his martyrdom. The lines (in Latin) beneath his portrait preserved in Hertford College, Oxford, express his noble resolve:

'That light o'er all thy darkness, Rome, in triumph might arise,
An exile freely I become, freely a sacrifice.'

From the Continent in due course the New Testament came over to England, to suffer, like its translator, all the pains and perils of persecution. As the authorities could not, for a time, lay hands upon and burn Tyndale himself, they burned his work. But Bible circulation was of God, and none could stay His hand. The entrance of His

Word gave light, and when in later days Latimer and Ridley and others demonstrated their love of the truth by giving their bodies to be burned, it was but the outward and visible sign of the influence of a Word which had converted and illuminated their souls. To them it was given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His sake.

The 'form of doctrine' which was delivered to Englishmen of Tudor times (and to which, in a sense, they were delivered: Romans 6 : 17 may be read either way) came, like Tyndale's New Testament, from the Continent of Europe. Martin Luther's writings had influence in England, for which reason no less a person than Henry VIII had written against them: hence the title of *Defensor Fidei* (Defender of the Faith) conferred upon him by the Pope. But a far greater influence than that of the great German reformer was exerted by a pale-faced scholarly Frenchman resident at Geneva, a man whose impact upon church and world alike has conceivably been greater than that of any other man since the days of the apostles.

Born in North-east France in 1509, John Calvin was gifted with a mind cast in no common mould. At the age of 26 he had written a treatise which deservedly ranks among the greatest books of all time. 'It may be doubted', says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'if the history of literature presents us with another instance of a book written at so early an age, which has exercised such a prodigious influence upon the opinions and practices both of contemporaries and of posterity'. Calvin's *Institutes* (i.e. Instruction in Christianity), as the book is called, sets forth with marvellous clarity the system of Christian doctrine now known as Calvinism, and it is advisable, and indeed essential, that all who seek to know what Calvin actually taught should turn to this book for themselves. It constitutes an unsurpassed exposition of Bible theology.

Not the least of the reasons for turning to it is that John Calvin is a supreme example of a man blessed because men have said all manner of evil against him falsely for his Master's sake. He has been the most vilified of Europeans; yet it may well be the case that, of those born of woman since the early days of Christianity, there has not risen a greater than the Genevan reformer. The influence of his teaching has been immense. Entire kingdoms have been moved by his message. Under the ministry of one of his greatest 'disciples', Scotland passed from darkness to light, and received in its national character an imprint which time has not been able to efface. The simple and artless piety described by Burns in *The Cotter's Saturday*

Night is the legitimate offspring of the work of John Knox two centuries before.

'The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
 They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
 The sire turns o'er, wi' patriarchal grace,
 The big ha'Bible, ance his father's pride;
 His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
 His lyart haffets¹ wearing thin an' bare;
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
 He wales² a portion with judicious care;
 And, "Let us worship God!" he says, with solemn air.

'Then, kneeling down, to Heaven's Eternal King,
 The saint, the father, and the husband prays:
 Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing
 That thus they all shall meet in future days:
 There ever bask in uncreated rays,
 No more to sigh or shed the bitter tear,
 Together hymning their Creator's praise,
 In such society, yet still more dear:

While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere.'

But not in Scotland only was Calvinism a dynamic force. Under the same stimulus the United Provinces of Holland maintained an unequal struggle with a monarch who swore that he preferred to rule over a wilderness rather than over heretics, and emerged victorious. The Duke of Alva, one of the Spanish viceroys in the Netherlands, boasted that he had tamed 'men of iron' and would have no difficulty in taming 'men of butter'; but to his intense chagrin he discovered the impossibility of the task.

Less spectacular, perhaps, but equally potent was the influence of Calvinism in England. The Reformation in England in Henry VIII's reign did not begin as a Calvinistic movement. It is perhaps a matter for thanksgiving that Henry cannot by any stretch of imagination be claimed as a Calvinist. Theologian though he fancied himself to be, he was no ornament to Christian doctrine. To the end of his life he remained merely a Romanist who had repudiated the Pope's authority. But under his son and successor, the regrettably short-lived, Bible-loving Edward VI, Calvinism made rapid strides, and when, under Thomas Cranmer's guidance, Articles of Religion were drawn up for the liberated church of England, they showed un-

1 Grey temples.

2 Selects.

mistakable signs of the influence of Calvin's teaching. The doctrine of predestination finds an honoured place in Article XVII. Fallen man's inability, in his own natural strength, to 'turn and prepare himself to faith and calling upon God', is defined clearly in Article X, and it is stated to be essential that the pre-venient (i.e. going before) grace of God should work in man a good will, and work with him when he has that good will.

This adherence to Calvinism was no mere passing phase. Augustus Toplady, editor of the *Gospel Magazine* and the renowned author of 'Rock of ages' and other hymns, some of which are in danger of falling into undeserved neglect, wrote in the latter half of the eighteenth century a scholarly and virtually unanswerable treatise entitled 'Historic proof of the doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England'. Admittedly, in the seventeenth century a new doctrine, commonly called Arminianism, was embraced by some clergymen—Archbishop Laud favoured the doctrine and gave every encouragement to its growth—but the great mass of Englishmen, Anglican and Nonconformist alike, remained staunchly Calvinistic in their beliefs, and in general it may safely be claimed that for at least a century and a half (approximately 1550-1700) England was wedded to Calvinism.

In the seventeenth century Puritanism and Calvinism were all but synonymous terms. With very few exceptions, Puritans were admirers and followers of the Genevan reformer. They believed that his *Institutes* and *Commentaries* set forth accurately the true Christian doctrine as found in the pages of Scripture. Archbishop Laud was of another mind, and as he believed it to be within his power to suppress Puritanism he drove many into nonconformity. Already, before Laud became a shaper of royal policy, James I had refused the requests of the Puritan party in the established church: hence the departure of the Pilgrim Fathers for North America in 1620.

Be it noted that the quarrel which the Pilgrim Fathers had with their Mother Country was not that they held a different creed from that professed by the king and the bishops: all alike were Calvinists. Their difficulty was that in England they lacked the freedom to worship according to their personal convictions which would not permit them to observe the forms and ceremonies required of them by the Anglican Church. The King's word to them was that they must conform or he would 'harry them out of the land'. The faith of the pilgrims was robust because it was firmly rooted in the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God, and the supremacy of the Word of God in the conscience of the individual believer.

of salvation given to God, so that it became impossible for the flesh to glory in His presence. They were not prepared to render unto Caesar one iota of the things that belonged to God, and in consequence they proved doughty opponents when, in their view, Caesar claimed to act beyond his divinely-appointed rights. The sixteenth-century Englishman might possess, and in many cases did possess, the quality of iron, but the Calvinism of the seventeenth-century Puritan rendered his soul and will like tempered steel, and when he resolved that his duty involved opposition to the arbitrary rule of a misguided king, he entered upon the conflict with a sternness of resolve that proved irresistible.

Oliver Cromwell was the incarnation of political Puritanism. Strong Calvinist as he was—his Letters and Speeches, edited by Thomas Carlyle, give ample proof of this—he believed that he was but pursuing, though often unwillingly, his predestined earthly track in opposing the rule of Charles I, and setting up in its place a rule more acceptable to the Most High. Doubtless Cromwell laid himself open to the charge of acting harshly and even inconsistently. Opinion will always be divided on the issues at stake in the civil war between King and Parliament. The times were stern, and stern men came to the fore. But there was little doubt that the ever-to-be-regretted conflict was a means of consolidating, if not of actually laying, the foundations of the liberty which every subsequent generation of Englishmen has enjoyed. These were, in the words of M. Guizot, the French statesman-historian, ‘the downfall of absolute monarchy, the assured preponderance of the Commons, and the permanence of religious freedom’.

It is a further point of political interest that the conflict waged by Cromwell and the Puritans achieved temporarily the union of Britain and Ireland. In Commonwealth Parliaments sat members from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and (for the first and last time) the Channel Islands, thus pointing the way to the later Parliamentary unions achieved, in the case of Scotland, in 1707, and of Ireland, in 1800. It must be conceded that Scotland and Ireland were brought into the Commonwealth arrangements by military conquest, which accounts in part for the short-lived nature of the experiment; but that the experiment was made at all suggests that Cromwell was possessed of considerable political vision, and that in this, as in his policy of general religious toleration, he was more far-sighted than other leaders of his age. To bring the three kingdoms into the mould of a single state was a work which later statesmen only effected with arduous labour.

If Cromwell lived the Puritan life, he died, too, the Puritan death.

Carlyle graphically describes the exercises of his soul 'as he lay a dying'. 'He spoke much of the Covenants, which indeed are the grand axis of all in that Puritan universe of his. Two Covenants, one of works . . . one of Grace and unspeakable mercy. Two; and by Christ's death they have become one: there for Oliver is the divine solution of this our mystery of life. "They were two", he was heard ejaculating, "Two, but put into one before the foundation of the world. . . . It is holy and true, it is holy and true . . . Who made it holy and true? The Mediator of the Covenant. . . . Faith in the Covenant is my only support; and if I believe not, He abides faithful". And again, "All the promises of God are in Him; yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God by us—by US in Jesus Christ. . . . The Lord hath filled me with as much assurance of His pardon and His love as my soul can hold. I think I am the poorest wretch that lives, but I love God, or rather, am beloved of God. I am a conqueror and more than a conqueror through Christ that strengtheneth me." ' Such were the dying words of the Lord Protector of England: Puritans certainly died well.

The hundred years ending with Cromwell's death form one of the watersheds of British history. In the spheres of politics, law, and finance, the Commons of England claimed and achieved a power which succeeding monarchs challenged at their peril. Steps were taken to establish the liberty of the individual subject. Religious persecution died with the seventeenth century. It ceased to be a penal offence for an Englishman to worship God according to his conscience. The Baptist, the Presbyterian and the Independent were ere long accorded a position in the state little inferior to that enjoyed by the Anglican.

And be it here stated that Baptist and Presbyterian and Independent were in the great majority of cases confirmed Calvinists in fundamental doctrine. Differ as they might, and quarrel as they did, over church order, they normally agreed in holding the doctrinal tenets of Calvin. Here the Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford, the Independent Oliver Cromwell and the Baptist John Bunyan were heartily at one. Election and predestination, atonement by the blood of the Cross, effectual calling, justification by sovereign grace, the final perseverance of the saints, mercies in covenant—all these and other correlated truths were the joy and rejoicing of their hearts. Not all Puritans by any means agreed with Calvin's form of church government, which was Presbyterian, but they drew a clear and necessary distinction between the fundamental teaching of Scripture on the subject of salvation and the relatively less important (though certainly not unimportant) matters of church order. Failure to

realise this distinction leads to confusion of thought on seventeenth-century problems. Its recognition assists one to understand how Christian friendship and esteem can overleap denominational barriers.

Christian esteem, even where denominational barriers existed, was greatly fostered by the steady output of the religious literature for which the Puritans were noted. Their literary zeal was prodigious. Many of their folio productions have long been forgotten, and will probably never be read again except by the keen theologian. Thus a certain Joseph Caryl produced a massive commentary on the Book of Job. The 1676 edition consists of two folio volumes, the first of which contains 2,281 columns and the second 2,410 columns. The famous Victorian preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, has the following interesting comment on Caryl's book: 'Caryl must have inherited the patience of Job to have completed his stupendous task. It would be a mistake to suppose that he is at all prolix or redundant: he is only full. In the course of his expounding he has illustrated a very large portion of the whole Bible with great clearness and power. He is deeply devotional and spiritual. He gives us much, but none too much. His work can scarcely be superseded or surpassed'. The Puritans were nothing if not thorough!

(To be continued)

What mean these despatches from the battlefield? "Last night fourteen souls were under conviction, fifteen were justified, and eight received full sanctification." I am weary of this public bragging, this counting of unhatched chickens, this exhibition of doubtful spoils. Lay aside such numberings of the people, such idle pretence of certifying in half a minute that which will need the testing of a lifetime.—C. H. SPURGEON.

False doctrine and heresy are even worse than schism. If people separate themselves from teaching which is positively false and unscriptural they ought to be praised rather than reprov'd. In such cases separation is a virtue and not a sin. . . . The old saying must never be forgotten, 'He is the schismatic who causes the schism'. —J. C. RYLE.

Missionary Panorama

South America

You sometimes forget the difficulties that precede a harvest. In Sisa you hack down a piece of jungle, wait a month or so, for it to dry, then burn it off. Round the blackened stumps you squat, clearing the weeds with your machete. Sweat, thorns, bites—then you can start to plant! If your fence is weak wild animals and pigs will eat the new shoots, later the birds will come for the ears, and the fruit. To realise the harvest you have to carry it for two hours, 170 lb. of it, on your back to the merchants. Then you may lose all, the price has dropped, and you get a handful of unwanted goods in place of money.

The spiritual harvest came to Sisa in the same way, years of faithful labour in prayer, preaching, sacrifice of time, health, and money. Victor Cenepo, Quechua pastor of Sisa, went and lived with a group of men, worked with them, and at night as they sat round the smoky lamp, made from a Nescafe tin, he explained the Gospel. God also spoke to some by dreams, to others who scorned, in judgment; yet others were healed in mercy.

Now comes the care of the fruit of that harvest. In this year of Evangelism in Depth we aim to equip God's people for work in His service. Some are already ministering their gift. One started a class to help others to read the Bible; another a scripture memory class. Two more walk three hours to give the little they know to another group; four have promised to go as 'missionaries' to another region to preach in Quechua there for two weeks. So, when you pray that God will thrust labourers into His harvest field, remember that the best labourers for the Quechua of Sisa are—the Quechua!

The tractor and plane have brought change to Sisa. Before the road and airfield, Quechua and Spanish lived separate lives, both separated from 'modern' life by at least two days' walk. Life was the landowner, the chacra for work, the fiesta for pleasure, the brujo (medicine man) for ills physical, and the priest and the spirits for religion.

These two machines changed that. Now you can buy clothes and dishes more easily than you can make them. Your children can go to a school made of cement and aluminium roof, all brought in. You can change the rulers in the town by using your vote. You can

get drunk on imported beer. You can visit a real doctor and dentist, and as for religion—well, that's for the past.

Preaching in the 'regions beyond' is not now so difficult geographically speaking, the 'regions beyond' now are social; not two separate cultures but many. There is the student, the illiterate, the one who has moved deeper into the jungle, the ones that have bought radios and motorbikes. It is a time for changing gods, spiritism for materialism; also to change to the only True God and Saviour. We have now the responsibility of teaching believers to triumph in Christ in all these new situations. We aim through Evangelism in Depth this year to bring the gospel to all these new strata of life.

The machines are neutral. Change is neutral. Help us by prayer to use the changes, that we might be made all things to all men that we might gain some.

West Pakistan

Our bus pulls in at the stand by the pavement tea stalls, in the middle of a busy little bazaar. The passengers scatter in search of tea or cold drinks. Food vendors swarm round the bus windows encouraging those of us still sitting inside to enjoy their *kebabs* (tasty rissoles cooked over a charcoal fire on an iron skewer), a delicious speciality of that area.

A voice makes itself heard above the crowd: 'Honoured passengers! Please give time to listen. In this little bottle is the medicine for all your ills. It has many virtues. First, if you feel tired and run down, this will give you strength. Secondly, if you have pains in your head, this is guaranteed to bring you relief. Thirdly . . .' His voice merges into the general hubbub as he relates the wonders of his cure-all in the little yellow bottle which costs only Rs.2/-. Medicine is a good line of appeal. Its offerings are varied and easily available! As most people have need of some medical help, it is a money-making business, even if your client must then go on and seek help elsewhere, perhaps from an equally unreliable source.

A wandering beggar of the 'holy man' variety takes the platform next and appeals loudly, in the name of the Prophet Mohammed, for alms. There is a clink of coins in the metal bowl, and those who have given believe they will obtain merit. The beggar looks healthy and thoroughly able to work if he had a mind to; his eyes are bright and impish. He is one of many who manage to evade the call to hard work and discipline which constantly goes out to the nation.

A young boy ambles along selling books, not popular magazines,

though the latter have a wide appeal and can be found on all the bookstalls. This boy has what he thinks should appeal and hopes everyone will want. Here is a book of prayers: prayers to say on entering the mosque and on leaving it, prayers to say at the entrance to a graveyard, instructions on the correct method of doing ablutions before praying. It also includes quotations from the Quran, in Arabic, with translations, so that even the boys and girls of the family can understand—all this for only four annas. Islam is not only a personal religion here, but it is *the* factor that holds the country together. The two wings, East and West Pakistan, separated by about a thousand miles of Indian territory, have very little in common apart from their religion. Islam is the basis of appeal for effort and for unity. In a real sense it is the life of the nation. Even the bus bears witness to it, for written in Arabic above the driver's seat are the words: 'God our protector' and 'Oh Mohammed'.

In this setting, and where they are in a minority of about 1 per cent, many educated Christians feel there is no place for them, and they seek to go overseas 'for the sake of our children's future'. No one can blame them for that; but the Church misses them. Others feel a sense of oppression, but are resigned to the situation. And then there are those who sense the challenge to 'shine as lights in the world', and one thanks God for them.

Burma

It is a joy to learn that, although foreign missionaries were expelled from Burma during 1966, Burmese Christians still have opportunities for using Scripture Gift Mission Scripture portions. One friend writes: 'Scriptures are widely and effectively used among non-Christians, especially among radio listeners. Letters of appreciation, mentioning how much the programmes and the Scriptures mean to the listeners, are coming in regularly. Recently I received a letter from a young Buddhist monk. He wrote: "I listen regularly to the religious broadcast from Manila. My friends and I are very eager to read the Bible. Please send me a copy with any other literature that you publish".'

This same friend writes that he was able to distribute Scriptures among two hundred Christian students in a local university, and mentions that these strengthened the Christian life of the young people.

From another Burmese city comes news of a small group of university students who meet each week for Bible study and discussion. Our correspondent wrote: 'We try to help them develop

their own spiritual lives. Your publications will be of great help to them.'

Angola

There are still many problems for Protestant workers in Angola. Nevertheless, the S.G.M. is in touch with several foreign missionaries who report blessing in the midst of adverse circumstances. One Englishman, who has been in the country for a number of years, wrote of a series of treks he had made to remote parts, some of which had not been visited by missionaries for five years. 'You can imagine how warmly the people welcomed me and how keen was the demand for literature, especially S.G.M. publications. On one trip I met African soldiers in the Portuguese army. They received Portuguese booklets gladly . . . In ten days I visited twenty-three outschools and preached forty-two times. I rejoiced at the trail of literature I was able to leave behind. It was a critical area which I may never have the privilege of visiting again. Every copy of the Scriptures was carefully placed.'

A veteran missionary tells of strong pressures which come upon Angolan Christians from many quarters. Those who are literate often find extra pressure being put upon them by opposing sides. Eight evangelists were shot and another beaten to death by anti-government forces. He reported that Portuguese troops were continually on patrol and that often there were opportunities to give them S.G.M. booklets in their own language. 'The books are received gladly and are read. These men have practically no literature of any kind.'

Recruits

The vast increase in world population and the consequent enlargement of the missionary task should have highlighted the continuing and increasing need for reinforcements. Apparently it has had no such effect. Most societies report a decline in recruitment, and our society is no exception. For more than ten years the normal annual intake was fifty or more. In the past year the number is thirty-four, and these barely replace those who reach retiring age or leave the field for health and other reasons. In a recent five-year period there was no increase in the total missionary force in East Asia.

It may well be asked whether the growth of the national churches and the increase in national missionaries has not sharply reduced the need for workers from Western lands. The answer is that the

demand for *missionaries of the right type is increasing*. One authority on missions estimates that 7,500 new missionaries are needed to meet present demands. Last year one large society was able to assign only thirty workers to meet eighty-three requests, and this is no unusual picture.

A recent survey conducted among 339 young people revealed an almost unanimous opinion that the missionary force is inadequate. so youth today is impressed with the need for more workers. Then why are they not forthcoming? Ninety-eight gave materialism and unwillingness to sacrifice as the reason. Ninety-one indicated a simple unwillingness to go, and seventy-four a lack of dedication. Sixty-four said they were disinterested and unconcerned. Of the remainder, finances, lack of encouragement, lack of qualification and lack of a call were cited as reasons.

The opinions of young people about themselves are more likely to be correct than our own assessment. Their expressed motivation or lack of it, is both illuminating and challenging. Our Lord's prescription is still relevant: 'Pray ye . . . the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers'.

France

At the beginning of February I was invited to speak at a mission near Haguenau. There we witnessed the grace of God at work in a remarkable way. The local pastor and his wife, whose guest I was for that week, were amazed at the unusually good attendance from the first evening. There were about 60 people—quite a lot for a little country place. During the course of the week more and more people came. Quite a few also came from the surrounding district, although there had been no special publicity. The risen Lord was in our midst and they were fed with the Word of Life. Near the end of the week every seat in the little hall was occupied. I asked the pastor how many chairs there were and he said '180'. We knew it was the Lord's doing. He was answering prayer.

One afternoon, when on my way to pay some visits, a woman saw me from her farmyard and called me inside. Country people are usually shy and reserved but not so when the Holy Spirit awakens them. This woman (who had been in the meeting the evening before) was deeply distressed, not being ready to meet her God. It was a joy to clarify some doubts on the basis of God's Word and to pray together. Later, the pastor wrote telling me that another man, also a member of his church, had trusted the Lord for salvation.

God willing, I shall have another mission in the neighbouring parish this autumn.

Thanks be to God, there are a few pastors in the State Church who are not for the Ecumenical Movement because of its liberal theology and its compromise with Rome, but these friends find increasingly serious opposition from their colleagues and superiors. That being so, we have also found it difficult to arrange tent missions for this summer, as it is practically impossible to have a tent mission in a district where the pastors are not co-operating with the ecumenical trend.

I heard at a missionary conference at Sarrebourg about a well-known evangelist who was going to have a mission across the border in Germany. At the start of the preparatory meeting he was asked his opinion about ecumenism and, because he was not in favour of it, the invitation for him to participate was withdrawn. But the Lord seems to impress on my heart the words which He spoke to seven of His disciples in John 21 : 6: 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship'. In other words, cast it down just where you are right now.

FOOTNOTE

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Reputation and Reality

H. M. CARSON

*A sermon preached in Westminster Chapel
on Sunday morning, 1st January, 1967.*

'And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.'

Revelation 3. 1 - 2.

'Thou hast a name (or a reputation) that thou livest, and art dead.' Obviously a reputation is not of necessity a bad thing; in fact in the Scripture a good reputation is something to be desired and something at which we are to aim. Ecclesiastes reminds us in the Old Testament that 'a good name is more precious than ointment' and in the New Testament the Lord Jesus Christ encourages His disciples so to live that they shall acquire a good reputation; 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven.' The apostle Paul is concerned about the condition of the church in Corinth because the repute of the church before the world outside is dropping, because of the unholiness and the ungodliness within the church. He is concerned that the church of Christ should have a good reputation. When he writes the pastoral epistles, when he gives his directions as to the kind of man who is to be chosen as a bishop, the sort of characteristics that are to be found in such a man, one of them is that he should be well spoken of by those who are without. And Paul sums it up in his own aim as he writes to the Corinthians, he says he aims to 'give no offence that the ministry be not blamed.' So I say, it is perfectly right that the Christian should desire for himself, and for the church of which he is a member, a good reputation. But quite clearly a reputation brings with it many perils. It is something that we have to handle very carefully. This word of rebuke to the church at Sardis is a solemn reminder of the great danger of having a reputation which is no longer justified by the actual situation.

What then are some of the dangers to which the Christian is prone, and to which a church is prone, because of the reputation which it bears? Well, there is the first and obvious peril of that

Christian or that fellowship becoming proud. Now obviously we are not called to indulge in that stupid exercise known as false modesty. If God has blessed us as Christians, if we have seen some maturity in spiritual experience, if we have begun to exhibit some holiness of life, if we are showing a concern for the truth of God, quite clearly it would be ridiculous to try to pretend that we are in a backslidden condition. Likewise, if the church of which we are members is one where the gospel is being preached, where people are being converted, where the truth is being maintained, again it would be quite ludicrous to suggest that that church is in a completely sorry plight. This would be false modesty, and false modesty is really basically dishonest, and it certainly is not glorifying to God. The true attitude of the Christian is surely one of humble praise. In other words, we recognise what the Spirit of God is doing in us individually, we recognise what the Spirit of God is doing within the fellowship, and we give God the praise. On a day like this, the first Sunday in the new year, we may look back over the past year and we may see evidence of the way that God has blessed us and for that we give God the praise and the glory, but obviously it is very, very easy to slide almost imperceptibly from a thankful acknowledgement that God has been at work in us, to a self assured condition in which we are very proud of the position we have attained. We are orthodox, we maintain the truth in days of general apostasy, we are concerned with reformed doctrine in days when people seem to be so woolly in their thinking and so on, and before we know where we are, we become very, very proud of the position which we occupy, and such pride is not only pernicious but it is extremely dangerous.

Having a reputation can lead to another attitude, the attitude of the one who is censorious as he views his fellow Christians. Obviously we are called to exercise a spirit of discernment. The New Testament reminds us that we are not to accept everything that is presented in the name of Christ; we are to assess whether it is the true gospel. We are not to accept everything that is presented to us as a work of the Spirit; 'believe not every spirit but try the spirits'. We are to be discerning. But there is a great difference between true discernment and the hard Pharasaic spirit which feels—I have arrived and therefore I can stand in judgment upon every other Christian and dismiss them very peremptorily. I am reminded of the saying attributed to D. L. Moody when he was under attack; he said, 'I prefer my way of doing things to your way of *not* doing things.' There is a great danger in our getting to the position where we are so sure of ourselves, that we detect the flaws in other people's messages and the defects in their methods, instead of looking at

ourselves and asking, What are *we* doing about it? It is so easy to see that other Christians are doing things wrongly but the question is, Are *we* doing things rightly?—indeed, sometimes the question is, Are we doing anything at all? I say there is this peril of becoming spiritually censorious.

There is also the peril of a spirit of complacency and this I would say very easily accompanies a reputation. You get it in many realms. If you have had any dealings with university, you will know that there is the kind of don who has made his name by the time he is forty. He has written his book; he is well known; and he settles down, and he does not produce anything fresh for the rest of his academic career, but just drifts on until the time comes to collect his pension. We are familiar with some of the strictures that are being offered in these days about many of the industrial concerns in this country. They are living on the past, they are complacent and as a result, in the fierce world of economic competition today, they are losing out. Well, it is sadly possible for a Christian, sadly possible for a church, to have a great reputation and yet to be simply in a condition of complacency and spiritual stagnation, living on past capital and failing to meet the situation that confronts us at the present time.

Now as John writes here to this church in Sardis, he is drawing a contrast between two conditions which may characterise the church; and obviously both of them cannot characterise the church at the same time because one is the condition of life, the other is the condition of death. You will notice that he is not using these terms in an absolute sense because he speaks to this church, which he says is dead, and he calls upon this church to do something. So quite clearly, it is not dead in an absolute sense, in the sense that God is not present among them. As yet, the presence of Christ is there; Christ is among the lampstands; but there is a paralysis, a deadness which is in danger of snuffing out the light completely. What then is this contrast which he is drawing between life and death? Well life, in the Bible, means essentially communion with God and acknowledgement of God. When you go back to Genesis, to the account of man's creation, God takes the dust of the earth, God breathes into his nostrils the breath of life and man becomes a living soul, Man becomes a creature, not only capable of reasoning and thinking, not only knowing right and wrong, but above all, knowing God and living in fellowship with God. And when the Lord Jesus Christ speaks about the new creation, the new birth, the new man, how does He describe this eternal life? 'This is life eternal that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' Life is essentially in terms of this direct awareness

of God, this communion with God, this knowledge of God. And death, in Scripture, by contrast is in terms of alienation from God. So God says to Adam, 'In the day thou eatest thou shalt surely die.' And what does death mean for Adam? Well you see him flying as a fugitive, expelled from the Garden of Eden, expelled from God's presence. So life is knowledge of God and communion and fellowship with Him. Death is alienation, the absence of the presence of God.

Now the apostle John is applying this to this particular church situation but lest we should be so foolish as to imagine that this is merely historical treatment in which we are engaged, that we are looking at one church in Asia Minor in the first century, I would remind you of the constant theme of these chapters—'He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith *to the churches*.' This is a word for the church in every age. This is a word for this church and congregation this morning. So John is looking at this church at Sardis and he is looking for signs of life but alas so much of what he sees speaks not of life but of death. What are the signs of life? How do you detect whether a church is alive or not? Remember that this was a church with a reputation. This church had a name: 'you have a name that you are alive'. Well let us look at the church and see what constitutes true life.

There is one obvious indication that a person is alive and that is that their pulse is beating, that there is warmth in their body. There is a difference between the body with life coursing through the veins and the coldness of a corpse. There is a like difference between a church which is full of the presence and the power of the Spirit and a church which is spiritually dead. In a living church there is warmth, there is a warmth of love for the Saviour. Men and women are not concerned simply with their own affairs. They are not even concerned merely with doctrinal argument or pontificating on this and that issue, but above all else they are concerned with God Himself and there is a warmth in their love for Him and in their concern to know Him. In a living church men and women are bound together by this great concern to know God more intimately than they have yet come to know Him. And it is a warmth which of course finds expression in their attitude one to the other; their concern for each other; not simply with the particular group with whom they have special links but they are concerned with other members of the fellowship. They are on the look out for the shy ones and the lonely ones; they are on the look out for those in particular need because their hearts go out with the warmth of the Saviour, so that the whole life of the fellowship is suffused with the

life of heaven itself. And from such a fellowship, as a result, there goes out a warm hearted concern for those who are outside, without God and without hope in the world. A living church is an evangelising church, a church which shows its concern for men and women who are lost. Warmth, life—this is what John looked for in Sardis and did not find.

Another characteristic of life is power. Take a healthy baby and what is one of the comments you inevitably make? It is, 'What a powerful pair of lungs he has been equipped with!'—and of course a healthy child is a powerful person. He is, as he grows up, a lad bursting with energy, bursting with animal spirits. Power is one of the basic characteristics of life as we know it. A living church, a church which has not simply a reputation to be alive but a church which is truly alive, what kind of church is it? It is a church surely in which the power of the Holy Spirit is not merely a theme for a discussion meeting, but the power of the Spirit is something that is so evident that when God's people meet on the Lord's Day they know that the heavens are open and that the Spirit is in power among them. When they meet for prayer, it is not merely a time of eloquent peroration, it is in terms of men and women being burdened by the power of the Spirit and pouring out their hearts before God. It is in terms of the Word, whether preached from the pulpit or going from the lips of those who go out every day to share the gospel, that Word going in power and demonstration of the Spirit—this is a living church.

It is a church too that has aim and direction. Again look at a growing child, a living child, and how do you find him? He is asking questions all the time; his mind is beginning to open. He is pressing on. There is a restlessness and he is wanting to know more and wanting to advance. When a child is not interested, when a child is listless, then he is sick and you are concerned about him. Well, a church which is alive is a church which is pulsating with this holy restlessness. A church which is constantly pressing on, a church which wants to know God in a new way, wants to experience a fresh incoming of the Holy Spirit—this is a living church. And John as he looks at Sardis is saying sadly, 'Well, you know, this is the kind of reputation you have. You have the reputation of being alive but,' he says, 'I do not find you alive; I find so many things that are characteristic of spiritual death.' Instead of this warm pulsing life, instead of this powerful worship and this powerful witness, he finds weakness and barrenness and deadness and coldness. Of course there may well have still been a measure of orthodoxy; doubtless the services continued, things may have been quite efficient as far

as the administration was concerned, but as far as the life was concerned, this was the thing that troubled John and, even more, this was the thing that troubled the Lord of the church as He speaks to Sardis. A reputation, a name, a living church? 'No,' he says, 'your reputation is simply not justified by the situation.'

Now it is important, I think, that we look at this whole matter of how we acquire a reputation and especially how a reputation continues when it is no longer justified. Quite obviously a reputation does not normally emerge completely without justification and there must have been some reason in Sardis that they were known as a live church. Why was it that they had this name? They were known as a live church but they had moved from that position and the reputation was no longer justified, and surely it is because of one thing on which we have already touched this morning. A reputation can easily refer to something that belongs to the past. There are many Christians who, when you talk to them about their spiritual experience, inevitably go back to their conversion. Clearly it is right that we should go back and rejoice that God brought us to Himself but the tragedy with so many is that they go back to their conversion and they never move from that point. The question is not simply, What did God do for you five years, or ten years ago, but what is God doing for you today? The same thing applies to a church. It is so easy for a church to live on its past. I remember this being brought home to me particularly in the case of the church in Wales. I had not visited Wales and did not know anything really about the spiritual situation there, and in my ignorance I largely imagined (because I thought in terms of the 1904 revival and the great names of the past) that Wales was still a bastion of evangelical truth. I remember sitting in the lunch room behind the chapel talking to one of the leaders in the evangelical movement of Wales as he disabused my mind of that idea, and on subsequent visits I found how true his verdict really was. You see my misunderstanding was due to the fact that I was looking at a reputation based on great blessing in past days when God had moved in that land, but it was all a thing of the past and in so many parts the reputation was hollow with no longer any reality. Well, this can be characteristic of many a church. The reputation is there, the name is there, but we have to ask ourselves, Is it a name for something that happened in past days or for something that is still happening?

There is another reason for this reputation and a reason for the persistence of the reputation even when it is no longer justified; you discover it I believe in the fact that in Sardis in this sorry condition, there were still godly people. There were people whom the Lord

accepted and indeed for whom He had a word of warm commendation. Now obviously if you had only met those people, your impression about the church in Sardis would have been because of what you saw in them, and you would have been completely wrong. Had you met a few of them, had you been in one of their homes when perhaps they were having fellowship together, had you heard some of them praying, you would have said—Well they must come from a fine church. It must be a live, warm fellowship that produces this kind of Christian. Here are men and women of God, men and women who love the Lord, men and women who are desiring to go on with Him, but you would have been completely mistaken because a church does not consist of one man or one group of people. A church is a total fellowship, and while there were some in Sardis who quite clearly exhibited the fruit of the Spirit, who had not defiled their garments and for whom the Lord has a warm word—they did not represent the general run of the fellowship, so that the word of commendation for the few does not mean that the Lord withholds His word of firm rebuke for the rest of the fellowship.

There is a final reason for this persistence of an unjustified reputation and that is because of the shallow observation that is made upon the situation. I have noticed that already in the fact that if you formed your judgment on the basis of what you saw in this godly minority you would have been mistaken, because the on-looker looking from the outside does not really see things as they are. He sees the people gathered on the Lord's Day; he may be there as an occasional visitor; he may know some outstanding Christians from the fellowship but he does not really know the life of the church. But the bigger tragedy is that sometimes the members do not know what the life of the church is because it is impossible to be a member of a church, to be one of the fellowship and yet to be so taken up with the general pattern that goes on from week to week, to be concerned with the size of the congregation and the nature of the offerings and the efficiency of the general goings on, that one fails to probe and to ask these kind of searching questions: Is there life there? Is there power there? Is the Spirit mightily at work there? I say, this shallow observation would lead you to the conclusion that Sardis was a living fellowship but you would have been sadly mistaken. Said John, 'You have a reputation that you are alive but in God's sight you are dead.'

Now what is His word to the church at Sardis? What is His word to us this morning? He says, 'Awake, strengthen, repent.' 'Wake up' he says, 'arouse yourself and realise what the situation really is.' And I believe, in many of our churches (and I am talking now

about evangelical churches, churches where the gospel is preached, churches where the orthodox faith is maintained) we have got to arouse ourselves and to realise what our true situation is. Sometimes we suffer from a very foolish attempt to try and maintain our reputations because we feel that if we admitted what we really were, we would give cause to the liberals and the others to point a finger of scorn at us. So we try to live behind our facade, we try to pretend that things are really well among us, whereas it would be far more honest and we would be much more on the way to knowing the blessing of God, if we were prepared really to look at ourselves, to be perfectly frank and honest. So we must look at our services, we must look at our prayer meetings, we must look at our gatherings for fellowship, and we have got to ask the kind of questions we have been considering this morning—this whole matter of warmth and life and power. Do you find the prayer meetings in this church full of people longing for God, crying out for revival, burdened for souls? Is this the kind of prayer meeting we enjoy? Do you find people going out from this church with a passionate longing to find the lost and to bring them to Christ? Do you find a stream going out from this place to the far ends of the earth, taking the gospel to men and women who live and die in the darkness without God and without hope, while we sit with our book-stalls full of reformed literature? Do we know anything of this power and this life? I believe we have got to awaken ourselves, to arouse ourselves and no longer to persuade ourselves that all is well in our churches. We need to look at ourselves very soberly and realistically with the appraisal that comes from those who have been enlightened and humbled by the Spirit of God.

Awake to the situation, and awake I believe to the kind of situation that there should be. You see our trouble is that so often we use the wrong standard of comparison. We compare ourselves with churches that are dead and with churches that are apostate. Certainly in these days we have plenty of such standards of comparison. You do not have to go very far from the doors of this church before you find buildings where the very fundamentals of the gospel are denied. If we stand alongside such a church, we can of course say we are orthodox. We can go to buildings where there will be hardly anyone present and the whole thing is dead and lifeless, and we may feel that by contrast with that, things are well among us. But we are not called to stand alongside that. The standard for judging life is not death but life itself, life as it should be. So if we are to understand the kind of church we ought to be, we do not look at the state of affairs that we find in this

country today, but we go back to the Acts of the Apostles. We look at the churches there and we see these men in their prayer meeting in Acts 4, we see the Spirit poured out upon them, we see them pleading with God and God moving in mighty power. We see the Lord adding daily to the church such as are being saved. We see the characteristic of their life—the joy unspeakable and full of glory. We see them rejoicing with them that do rejoice and weeping with them that weep. That is the kind of standard by which we are to judge ourselves—and by the standard of the church in times of revival. It is not by the present decadent situation that we are to assess ourselves. We are to go to times like 1859, to times like the 18th century; we are to look at the churches then, and then to look at ourselves, and we must ask—not do we measure up to some of the decadent conventicles in London at the moment, but do we measure up to true living gospel spiritual churches? This is the test and it is the acid test.

But there is an even more searching test. Awake—not merely to the situation as it is, not merely to the pattern of church life as you find it in Scripture but awake to the fact that you are confronted by the Lord of the church. How is He presented to us in these opening chapters of this Book of the Revelation? It is the risen Christ, the One who stands in the midst of His churches; His eyes are like a flame of fire; His voice like the sound of many waters; out of His mouth goes His word like a sharp two-edged sword. This is not the Lord who is fobbed off with our petty excuses. This is not the Lord who listens to us as we plead our situation and our circumstances. This is the Lord who searches the heart. This is the Lord who can speak in such scathing terms to a church as He did to Laodicea; 'Because you are lukewarm,' He says, 'I am disgusted with you; I will spue you out of my mouth.' This is the Christ with whom we have to deal, and when we are assessing the life of our church today, it is not alongside someone else; it is in the presence of this One with His flaming eyes and with the word of chastening and of judgment coming from His lips.

'Awake,' He says, 'arouse yourself, and strengthen what remains; strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die.' What did He mean? Surely He is simply saying this: Wherever you find in the fellowship the Spirit at work, be there. Do you know of those who are concerned with the present situation? Do you know of other Christians who are burdened at the condition and are longing for an outpouring of the Spirit? Well, seek fellowship with them; make opportunity for praying with them; seek to provoke them, and to stimulate them, and to be stimulated by them. Strengthen the things

which remain. Move from the position where you are and think in terms of progress and advance.

But there is another word. He says, 'Repent'. Remember what God has done for you, remember God's past blessings, and look at your present situation, and repent. We talk very glibly about repentance. We think of the churches which need to repent because they do not preach the gospel any longer. We think of churches which need to repent because there is blatant worldliness among them. We think of churches which need to repent for this, that and the other reason, but the great tragedy so often is that we fail to see that repentance is demanded from us. How we need to be taught by the Holy Ghost.

We stand at the beginning of a new year. It is very easy to become sentimental—a new year beginning, an old year gone, but let us make it this morning, by God's grace, a time of solemn assessment. You have a reputation—of course this church has a reputation. This church has a reputation that is worldwide; it is known right across the globe; but let us be very frank and honest with ourselves and ask, Is that reputation justified? Have we got life and power? Is the Spirit really at work among us? Are the heavens open and the blessings of God poured down among us? I am sure that we are soberly making an appraisal of the situation, we will have to acknowledge that we are in sore need of something such as we have not known. We need nothing less than a visitation from heaven. But the pathway to such a visitation is often the pathway of humbling and repentance. The more we cling to our reputation, the more liable we are never to achieve anything. It is when we are ready to listen to the Lord of the church rebuking His church, when we are prepared to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, it is only then that we may expect to find God exalting us and using us. O my friends, may God deliver us from the complacency which so easily besets us. May God awaken and arouse us in this desperate hour to our own needs. May God so humble us that there may come among us a great new hunger and a thirst for Himself. May there be a crying in our prayer meetings, such as we have never known before, for God to rend the heavens and to come down in power that this church may be known, not simply among men as a place of orthodoxy and great preaching and all the rest, but may be known in the course of heaven as a place where the life of the Spirit, the warmth of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, is evidently manifest. May God in His mercy thus humble us and may God in His mercy thus visit us with His salvation.

BOOK REVIEW

WARNINGS TO THE CHURCHES. By J. C. Ryle. Banner of Truth; pp. 171; 5/-.

That there ever was a book by Ryle bearing this title is improbable. The present volume consists of separate papers from different parts of his works collected together under a single cover for the first time. The selection, however, is judicious and the title appropriate, for each of these sermons deals with some aspect of church life which has caused trouble right down the ages.

Each paper is based on a single text and is for the most part an exposition of it with pointed application to the church in past history and in Ryle's own day. But to us the book is more than that. Ryle is unconsciously prophetic and the things he warned of in his own day as trends and tendencies have become stark reality one hundred years later.

Liberalism was beginning to become popular in non-conformity and ritualism in the Establishment and Ryle speaks out plainly against both several times in the book. He gets to the heart of the matter, denouncing the Ritualists as modern Pharisees and the Liberals as modern Sadducees. He also warns against these things in his chapters on 'Not corrupting the Word', 'Divers and strange doctrines', and 'The Fallibility of Ministers'.

The ecumenical movement had scarcely begun in seriousness in his times, yet he saw the trend and wrote, 'Unity in the abstract is no doubt an excellent thing: but unity without truth is useless. Peace and uniformity are beautiful and valuable: but peace without the Gospel—peace based on a common Episcopacy, and not on a common faith—is a worthless peace, not deserving of the name. When Rome has repealed the decrees of Trent, her additions to the Creed—when Rome has recanted her false and unscriptural doctrines—when Rome has formally renounced image-worship, Mary-worship, and transubstantiation—then, and not till then, it will be time to talk of re-union with her. Till then there is a gulf between us which cannot be honestly bridged. Till then I call on all Churchmen to resist to the death this idea of re-union with Rome. Till then let our watch-words be "No peace with Rome! No communion with idolaters"' (p. 165).

Ryle was a bishop in the Church of England and it was with the Establishment he was most concerned. He foresaw what the trends of his times would lead to—"I am no prophet. I know not where

we are drifting. But at the rate we are going, I think it quite within the verge of possibility that in a few years the Church of England may be re-united to the Church of Rome. The Crown of England may be once more on the head of a Papist. Protestantism may be formally repudiated. A Romish Archbishop may once more preside at Lambeth Palace. Mass may be once more said at Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's. And one result will be that Bible-reading Christians must either leave the Church of England, or else sanction idol-worship and become idolaters! But God grant we may never come to this state of things! But at the rate we are going, it seems to me quite possible' (pp. 166-167).

One wonders what the post-Keele Anglican Evangelicals will make of this book. Ryle is often appealed to as an example of what an Anglican should be. But Ryle put the truth of the Gospel before the Church of England—'It is useless to expect attachment to the parish church, when the minister of the parish is ignorant of the Gospel or a lover of the world. In such case we must never be surprised if men forsake their parish church, and seek truth wherever truth is to be found. If the parochial minister does not preach the Gospel and live the Gospel, the conditions on which he claims the attention of his parishioners are virtually violated, and his claim to be heard is at an end' (p. 109).

On the question of union with Rome he wrote—'Rather than be re-united with the idolatrous Church of Rome, I would willingly see my own beloved Church perish and go to pieces. Rather than become Popish once more she had better die' (p. 165).

One cannot help posing the question—if Ryle had attended Keele, would the report have been different? If so, how?

G. E. LANE.

For the true Church of Christ I have no fears at all. But for the Established Church of England, and for all the Protestant Churches in Great Britain, I have very grave fears indeed. The tide of events seems running strongly against Protestantism and in favour of Rome. It looks as if God had a controversy with us, as a nation, and was about to punish us for our sins.—J. C. RYLE.

Young People's Page

THE STOLEN MONEY

Many years ago an old widow living in her own cottage used to value the regular visits of the Vicar's wife. Reading to herself was a difficulty, and it was a great pleasure to her when Mrs. Cowan called to read a chapter from the Bible.

One morning Mrs. Cowan found a rosy-cheeked girl cleaning the step of the cottage door. She sprang up to usher in the visitor, and at once brought the large Bible and placed it on the table. Evidently she knew what to expect. 'How long have you had a little maid?' asked Mrs. Cowan. 'Only a few days,' replied the widow; 'Mary is come on trial—she is quite ignorant, and has to be told everything.' 'If Mary is willing, she will soon learn,' said Mrs. Cowan kindly; 'can you read, Mary?' Mary blushed, and her mistress said, 'Oh no, she doesn't know a letter of the alphabet.' Mrs. Cowan said she would gladly take Mary into her class of girls; and so it was arranged.

Every time after that when Mrs. Cowan called, Mary always contrived to be doing something in the room—dusting the plates or cleaning the fireplace. It was awkward, because she made such a noise; but her mistress did not seem to mind, so Mrs. Cowan carried on as usual with her reading.

One day Mary did not appear until Mrs. Cowan was leaving. Then as she opened the gate for her, the Vicar's wife saw how red-eyed and miserable she looked. When she asked what was wrong, the girl burst out crying and ran into the kitchen. Mrs. Cowan went back into the parlour to ask if Mary were in disgrace. 'No, not at all,' said the widow; 'but the last day or two she has been crying half the time, and won't speak a word.' 'Send her round to see me tonight,' said Mrs. Cowan, and the widow agreed thankfully.

The time arrived, and Mary with it. Mrs. Cowan welcomed her kindly, made her sit down, and asked what her trouble was. No answer. 'You are not in love, are you?' Mary shook her head. 'Is there some trouble with your people at home?' Another shake. 'Are you unhappy in your work?' Another shake. 'Is it that you have done something wrong, Mary?' Mary began to sob, clasping her hands together nervously. Mrs. Cowan felt sure she was on the

right track. 'Poor girl,' she said gently; 'I can feel for you, for I have sins to weep over, too.' 'Oh, not like mine,' said the girl fervently. 'Tell me about it,' said Mrs. Cowan; 'perhaps I can help you.' 'Oh, I daren't,' said Mary; 'you're the only friend I've got, and you'd hate me if you knew.' 'Oh Mary, I couldn't hate you, I know the sin of my own heart too well to do that,' said Mrs. Cowan.

Finding that she could not get Mary to say more, Mrs. Cowan suggested that they should kneel down and pray for forgiveness. Mary was greatly disturbed; how could she be forgiven? 'Christ can save to the uttermost,' said Mrs. Cowan. 'God knows my sin,' said Mary, 'and *you* know I have sinned—how can I tell you?' and covering her face with her hands, she sobbed out, 'I'm a thief!' 'The Bible says, "Let him that stole steal no more." If you really want it, there is pardon even for you.' 'But even if I don't steal again,' sobbed Mary, 'what shall I do with this sin? It's such a dreadful load on me!'

Mrs. Cowan told Mary that Christ had made a full atonement on the cross for sin, and that He would cleanse all who go to Him. 'How shall I go to Him?' said Mary. 'Prayer is the appointed means of drawing near to God,' said Mrs. Cowan. 'I don't know how to pray,' said the girl, 'but since you taught me to read, I've wanted to pray, so I picked some verses out of the Bible, and said them to God. Will He be angry with me for doing that?' 'Which verses were they?' asked Mrs. Cowan. Mary showed her the fifty-first psalm.

Mrs. Cowan was filled with thankfulness for what she felt must be the work of the Holy Spirit. She asked Mary to kneel with her whilst she put into simple words of prayer what seemed to be the girl's feelings, getting her to repeat the words as she said them. Then she told Mary that, if she were really sorry, she should confess her theft and make restitution. 'Oh I would,' said Mary, 'but it's too late—she's dead!'

Now the whole story came out. Five years before, when Mary was only eleven, she had been sent to service from the workhouse. Her clothes were so coarse and ugly that the other servants laughed at her, and the poor child was very unhappy. She had no hope of being able to buy new clothes, for she had no wages, receiving only board and lodging for her services.

One day Mary was told to go to one of the drawers in her mistress's bedroom to fetch some tape. In the drawer lay some loose silver. In a moment Mary slipped it into her pocket as she took the tape. Presently she was sent into the garden to gather fruit. Hiding in the shade of a tree she counted the money—fourteen shillings. She thought she was quite hidden, and was startled to hear a voice

call out from over the hedge: 'My pretty maid, do you want anything from my pack today?' 'Yes, I do,' said Mary, trembling all over; 'I want some print for a frock, and a pair of Sunday shoes, but I've only got fourteen shillings.' 'That's just right, my dear,' said the Pedlar; 'you can take the print at once, and I'll bring you the shoes tomorrow.' Mary gave him the money, chose the first print he showed her, and told him not to come till one o'clock the next day, the servants' dinner-hour.

Now began a wretched time for Mary. Afraid to take the stuff indoors, she hid it in a holly-bush. Then she was so worried lest somebody should find it that she looked quite ill, and the children's nurse sent her to bed. All night she tossed and turned, thinking of the plight she was in. Perhaps the gardener would find the print in the bush. Perhaps someone would see her get it out of the bush. How was she to make the frock without questions being asked? At dinner-time she flew out to the appointed place; the pedlar was there and handed her the shoes. Mary was pushing them into the holly-bush beside the print, when the sound of footsteps made her peep through the hedge. A poor old woman was gathering sticks. 'Are you very poor?' said Mary. 'Yes indeed, child,' said the woman, 'I'd be glad of anything.' The girl threw the print and the shoes over the hedge, and rushed away.

After this Mary lived in such constant fear of discovery that a few weeks later she gave notice, and soon found a place far away from the scene of her theft. It was no sense of guilt that had made the child miserable, for as soon as she felt herself safe from discovery, she entirely forgot all about it. 'I never once thought of it again till I came here,' said Mary. 'But what brought it to your mind again?' asked her friend. 'It was hearing you read the Bible,' said Mary. 'My mistress looked forward to it so much that I wanted to hear, too, and I always took care to be in the room while you were reading. I liked the stories at first, but then I got frightened because I found that God knew everybody's secrets.' She began to feel the burden of her sin, and felt that there could be no hope for her. Then having learnt from the story of Zacchaeus that she ought to make restitution, she began to save up her mony. She asked the carrier to find out whether her mistress still lived in the same place. To her great distress he brought back the news that she was dead.

'What *shall* I do?' sobbed Mary; 'shall I give you the money to buy Bibles with?' But Mrs. Cowan said that Mary ought to take the money to her former master, and confess the theft to him. Greatly distressed, Mary begged Mrs. Cowan to write a letter explaining, and then she would take it to him and ask for pardon.

In fear and trembling, Mary made the journey, presented the letter and the money to her master, and received his forgiveness. She came home greatly encouraged; she felt that so far the Lord had blessed her in hearing her petition. Confessing her transgressions to the Lord and casting herself upon His mercy, she was able to believe that for the Saviour's sake He had forgiven the iniquity of her sin, and the peace of God filled her young breast.

When Mary's work at the little cottage came to an end, Mrs. Cowan was able to find her a place in a farmhouse where Mary was allowed to go to church regularly. She grew in grace, and after some years married a good Christian lad. The two lived happily for many years, bringing up their eight children in the fear of the Lord.

DAMARIS.

SCRIPTURE ENIGMA No. 166

The whole: A lake well known to the Lord Jesus.

1. This Arabian despised Nehemiah.
2. 'Of great authority under Candace.'
3. His son 'made Israel to sin.'
4. About the time that Saul of Tarsus neared Damascus.
5. Jacob hid them under the oak by Shechem.
6. With her husband she kept back part of the price of their possession.
7. Moses' father-in-law advised him to provide such men.
8. With food and thus we are to be content.
9. An Ethiopian who interceded for Jeremiah.
10. James says that the devils believe, and this.

SOLUTION OF No. 165

The whole: Multitude.

1. Myrrh (Gen. 37 : 25).
2. Understanding (1 Cor. 14 : 20).
3. Lattice (2 Kings 1 : 2).
4. Talitha cumi (Mark 5 : 41).
5. Interpretation (Dan. 2 : 4).
6. Tentmakers (Acts 18 : 3).
7. Understanding (Prov. 3 : 5).
8. Danced (Matt. 14 : 6).
9. Ephraim (Gen. 48 : 14).