

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

Editor:

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Incorporating the Protestant Beacon and The British Protestant

"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

The final disastrous chapter of Judah's history, as the nation plunged rapidly towards the ultimate tragedy of the exile, may seem to be remote from our situation. As a result the prophetic message to a nation under judgment may also seem to be less than pointed as far as we are concerned. But in fact we are much closer to that situation than perhaps we realise, and we do well to learn the lessons in time before events overtake us.

Is it alarmist to speak of national judgment and disaster? Not if we have any awareness of the holiness of God and of His wrath against ungodliness and unrighteousness. The religious apostasy of our day, with its accompanying moral decadence are fingers beckoning to heaven to respond with judgment. Indeed, if we assess things by the teaching of Romans 1 we will recognise that the present immorality, endorsed as it is by so many supposed leaders in church and state, is itself a condition of judgment. God gave Judah up to their uncleanness before He judged them, and He has given our nation up in the same way.

But there are tokens of the more active judgment of God. I write in the midst of the continuing turmoil and destruction of Ulster. Surely we are under God's judgment. I write in the wider context of a nation reeling from one economic crisis to the next. What the future holds for us we do not know, but one thing is clear—we need to listen carefully to what God is

In the decline and fall of Judah God did not leave Himself without a witness. For years Jeremiah, with rugged persistence, had warned and pleaded. Habakkuk stood on his watchtower to hear what God had to say. Even when the blow fell and the exile was a grim reality, God had His men in Babylon where Ezekiel and Daniel brought God's Word to a broken people.

What was their message? It was rooted in the basic conviction, often repeated, that the Lord is King. Men may assert themselves, but God alone is sovereign. Babylon might seem to be the invincible scourge of the small nations of the Middle East, but she was in fact the rod of God's anger. Nebuchadnezzar himself had to learn that 'the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men'. And when Babylon fell and Persia rose to ascendancy it was God who moved Cyrus to restore the Jews to their land. So today power resides neither in Washington nor in Moscow, but in heaven. The finger on the trigger of the hydrogen bomb has a higher sovereignty with which to reckon than either the Pentagon or the Kremlin.

But there was another element in their message. This sovereign God is a holy God. Indeed it was His holiness which was the explanation of their plight. Why had national disaster come? It was because of their sin which had persisted in face of prophetic warnings, so that in the grim words of 2 Kings 24 : 4, 'the Lord would not pardon'. The chronicler put it like this: 'But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy' (2 Chronicles 36 : 16).

Here again is a message which needs to be sounded out. We need it in Ulster, where with our evangelical traditions and our gospel heritage we see materialism and ungodliness growing—one of the shops which was burned down in the recent fire blitz on Bangor had a display of girlie magazines which would have competed with Soho. In Britain as a whole, where the Lord's Day is for man's pleasure, where the Word of God is forgotten, where the law of God is flouted, we need to tell men that God's wrath blazes fiercely against all this. The nation needs this rather than the sentimental message of the sticker epidemic—'smile, God loves you'.

But there was a further message. It was one of mercy. Amid the blatant ungodliness and unrighteousness of national life there was a godly remnant. They had seen a gleam of light in the brief period of Josiah's reformation, but they had lived to

see that light lost in the darkness, and in Babylon you hear them crying out in agony of soul. 'By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.' And their grief was intensified by their agonised questioning: 'O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture' (Psalm 74 : 1). The righteous had suffered with the unrighteous, the godly remnant had faced the horrors of invasion, conquest and deportation like the ungodly. But this was not the whole story. Suffering there might be. Pain, sorrow, loss, all these might be multiplied. But God was still the Lord of the covenant, and He would be faithful to His pledged word.

So Ezekiel sees God's triumphal chariot throne as the Lord comes to the aid of His people. Daniel rises to superb heights as he sweeps his eye across the panorama of history and unfolds the purposes of the sovereign God. We may turn to the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel's vision or to Habakkuku's watchtower, and we get the same message. The word of the Lord and the Spirit of God shall yet bring healing and life where there was only the hopeless prospect of death and decay. The prophet on the watchtower can turn his eyes from the barbarities of Babylon to the glorious consistency of God and re-affirm a confident faith. 'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines: the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation' (3 : 17-18).

The Old Testament prophets could pierce with the vision of faith through the cloud of despair which had settled on the nation. They saw the day when the ransomed of the Lord would return with singing to Zion. So we, with a fuller message and with the sure hope of Christ's return may look beyond the thickening clouds which cover the horizon with a sullen uncertainty. We can see the first glint of the dawn of eternity in the heavens. We can detect the first notes of the trumpet which shall in God's time sound its final imperious blast. The coming of the Lord draws on. We can lift up our hearts. It is not an hour for complacency or for indolence. Neither is it an hour for fearfulness or despair. It is a day rather to be faithful, to be diligent in service and in witness.

H. M. CARSON.

When God humbles

H. M. CARSON

*A sermon preached in Hamilton Road
Baptist Church, Bangor, Co. Down, on
Sunday morning, January 10, 1971.*

'And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill Paul: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

'Then the disciples took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket.'

Acts 9 : 23-25.

There is a tremendous contrast between the apostle's approach to Damascus and his exit from the city. When he came to Damascus he came with authority from the chief priests in Jerusalem. He was a man to be feared. He had already been responsible for a great deal of pressure on the church in Jerusalem. He had been responsible for those who had been thrown into prison where some of them had faced the ultimate penalty and had died for their faith. Now he was coming for the exact same purpose. He was going to root out this Christian heresy, as he viewed it. He was going to deal quite ruthlessly with those who belonged to what he considered to be the sect of the Nazarenes, a sect which was undermining the faith of his fathers. So when he arrives on the road to Damascus he is a man with authority, a man of whom the Christians might well have been afraid, a man who was very sure of his position, the emissary of the Jewish authorities. I say, you cannot imagine a greater contrast than when you see Saul of Tarsus' ignominious exit from the city of Damascus. He is let down over the wall in a laundry basket and he makes a rather hasty departure to avoid capture.

Now this incident, which may seem to us to be rather trivial, obviously made a tremendous impression on Paul's mind. That is why I read this morning from his second letter to the Corinthians, in which he is facing a barrage of criticism at Corinth. You do not have to read very much between the lines to discover that the apostle Paul did not have an easy passage; indeed he sometimes had a very rough time as far as criticism was concerned. Here in 2 Corinthians 11 he is replying to his critics and he is pointing out something of

what he has suffered for his testimony and for his preaching of the gospel. At first sight it might seem as if Paul ends in grievous anticlimax. He speaks first of intense suffering—five times he had received the thirty nine lashes, three times he had been beaten with rods; once he had been stoned and that time his followers had thought it was the end as they thought he had been killed; then there were all the other hardships and dangers which he had faced. However, having recounted this staggering catalogue of suffering he then recalls how the governor of Damascus kept the city guarded to try and arrest him but, he adds: 'I was let down in a basket and escaped his hands'. Now you might feel this was a rather tame ending to a tremendous statement of suffering. But quite obviously to the apostle Paul the humiliation of this ignominious exit had deeply burnt itself into his mind and he could never forget it. So he lists it in the catalogue of what seem to us to be the real sufferings.

As we come to this incident this morning, we want to ask—what was the Lord teaching the apostle through this experience? We then have to ask—what is the Lord teaching us and how do we apply this lesson to ourselves? When the Lord appeared to Ananias, the disciple who was commissioned to go to Saul of Tarsus and to baptise him and to welcome him into the Christian fellowship, the Lord said to Ananias, speaking about Saul, this one time persecutor of the Christians who was to become the apostle of the Gentiles—'I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.' Later on the apostle was to echo that same statement when he reminded some disciples that we must 'through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God'.

There was something essential about Paul's suffering. There is still something essential about the suffering and the trial through which the Christian is called to pass. The Lord, in other words, was beginning to teach Paul how he must suffer for the sake of the gospel. John Calvin, in a comment on this passage, very aptly calls this 'Paul's apprenticeship to suffering'. He was beginning to serve his time and his apprenticeship was to lead him on into a hard school in which he would suffer greatly for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. But right at the outset the Lord was teaching him how he must suffer. And here in Damascus the reason for his departure was the hostility of the Jews and the plot they had laid in order to kill him so that his preaching might be cut short, and that they

might be rid of what they had considered to be a great source of strength but had turned out to be a source of trouble.

Why does the Lord bring His servants through trouble and trial? It is because it is His purpose to chasten us. Well, you say, why does He need to chasten us? Hebrews 12 is a reminder that in an ordinary family there is chastening, there are punishments, there is discipline. A spoilt child is not only a menace to himself but he is a menace to everyone else. A child growing up needs discipline and, says Hebrews 12, we as God's children need discipline. When God disciplines and chastens us, it is not because He doesn't love us—on the contrary, it is a clear indication of His great love for us. As I have said before, God is much more concerned with our character than He is with our comfort.

So God is prepared to chasten us and to take us through difficult times, in the first place in order that He might draw us to a life of holiness. When the sky is blue and when everything is going ahead reasonably well, when we have days of prosperity and there are no particularly great problems confronting us, it is very easy to become spiritually slack. Spiritual slothfulness is a constant risk which we face and before we know where we are we are beginning to drift spiritually. Easy days are not of necessity profitable for the Christian, and sometimes the Lord in His mercy and goodness, because He sees this complacency, because He sees this spirit of sloth and indolence, deals quite practically with us. He leads us through some bitter experience—the precise form of that experience will obviously vary, but He leads us through times of trouble, when problems crowd in upon us, when we face major disappointments, or sickness comes, or sorrow, whatever it may be—the Lord brings us through a time of great trouble. But we find that in such times we are driven, as perhaps we were not before, to cry to God. You get this in the psalms—how the psalmist cries to God in times of trouble!

But you also learn in such an experience as this that while you may begin because of the trouble to seek God in a new way, as a result of seeking Him in the immediate situation where you are, you begin to hear His word of rebuke in your heart, and you begin to realise that you have not been walking in such close fellowship with Him as you should. As a result, instead of simply a cry to God for help in this particular situation which is very unpleasant, you begin to learn the meaning of repentance and confession of sin, and humbling

yourself before the Lord and seeking His face. You discover in fact that the Lord is working out His purpose.

There is another reason why the Lord brings us through times of trouble. It is in order that we might understand what it means to be in close fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is this Saviour of ours? How is He presented to us in Scripture? He is presented as a 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief', and right through His ministry, apart from the temporary enthusiasm of the crowd (and He did not set much store by that because He knew how quickly the enthusiasm would evaporate), there was constant misunderstanding, even by His own disciples. There was misrepresentation—His enemies twisted His words in order to try to catch Him out. No matter what He might do in terms of helping others, a false interpretation would be placed upon it. Right to the end, in the agony in Gethsemane and the ultimate agony of Calvary, He was a man who knew suffering.

Now when the apostle Paul later on wrote the epistle to the Philippians, he spoke about his great desire to know fellowship with Christ—to know Him. Jesus Christ was not simply a figure of recent history a few years before his time, but the One to whom he had come as a sinner, from whom he had received forgiveness, in whose service he was spending himself. He says—My great ambition is to know Him, to know Him with this directness of knowledge, this intimate communion and fellowship. But he goes on in these terms—'that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings'. Many of us want to know the power of Christ's resurrection when we face temptation or when we face some difficulty or problem, but intimately allied to this experience of the power of His resurrection, is the fellowship of His suffering. We are often much more reluctant to experience this. We may talk in a pious way about it or even sing in an even more pious way about it, but how much do we really understand of fellowship with Christ in His sufferings?

Sometimes God in His mercy to us, because of our comfort-loving attitude, comes to us and knocks away many of the props. He takes away many of the things on which we depend. He strips us down, and brings us disappointment and trouble. And when we go through such experiences with the accompanying darkness of spirit, our minds begin to turn to One who went through such darkness, who went through such

trouble, who indeed could reach the point where He could cry out, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' So the Christian who is going through this experience of dereliction, with a sense almost of being forsaken of God, begins to learn, in a very faint measure admittedly, but he does begin to learn something of what the Lord passed through in Gethsemane and Calvary, and he finds himself being drawn into fellowship with Christ. Isn't that why you find some Christians who have gone through bitter experiences and they thank God afterwards because the experience proved such a blessing to them. Many of you will have read Pastor Wurmbbrand's record of his appalling suffering during fourteen years in a Rumanian prison for his testimony. You may recall how he said he would not have missed it for anything. Humanly speaking that is a fantastic statement, because those sufferings were quite unbelievably terrible. But the point was this surely, that through these sufferings he had learnt to walk in communion and fellowship, in a very intimate way, with Christ. This is why the Lord lets us go through such times of trouble.

There is a further reason why He does it, I believe, and that is in order to detach us from this world. If you see a gardener getting ready to transplant some young plants to another bed, he doesn't just pull them out, he loosens the soil around in order that he may take them out and transplant them. And the Lord, through trial and trouble, loosens the soil around the roots preparing us for transplanting. By nature we are very comfort-loving and by nature we tend to get our roots very deeply into the soil of this world. We tend to think of this world as home, we tend to think of it as our permanent abode. We may talk as Christians sometimes do about heaven. We may even talk about desiring to be there. But when we are really honest with ourselves we have to admit that all too often our affections are set, not on those things which are above, but on those things which are very material and very earthly. So the Lord at times takes us through an experience in which the very things which seem to mean so much to us, the very possessions which we treasure are taken away, in order that we may realise that here we have no abiding city, that our commonwealth is not here, but is in heaven. We are sojourners, we are pilgrims, we are foreigners, we are the church militant on the march. We are looking forward to that glory which is yet to be, and when we are inclined to settle down, the Lord comes to us, and sometimes He comes in an uncomfortable way to remind us that ultimately we do not belong here, ultimately our home is heaven.

So it was God's purpose to chasten the apostle, to teach him what suffering meant. But He did it in a particular way on this occasion. It was His purpose also to humble the apostle and this obviously was why it so stung him—so much so that years later he could still refer to this incident and put it on the same level as being beaten and stoned and so on. Why did he need to be humbled? Well it was because of his background. Saul of Tarsus was a Jew and he was more than an ordinary Jew; he was a Jew brought up in the strictest sect of his religion, he was a Pharisee. He was not only a Pharisee, but a Pharisee trained to be a rabbi, and quite clearly he would have been a great rabbi judging by the intellect of the man for he had many natural gifts on which he might pride himself, so the Lord begins to deal with him and to remind him that all his gifts are as nothing, that ultimately his dependence for his ministry must be on the Lord and on the Lord alone.

Not only that, his commission was to be the apostle of the Gentiles. It is very easy to say that in so many words, but what a tremendous thing this was for a Jewish rabbi. We have got to appreciate the atmosphere of the first century. The Jews hated the Gentiles and of course their hatred was heartily reciprocated. They didn't just hate them, they despised them. They looked down with contempt on the Gentile world. The whole idea of having any contact with Gentiles was absolutely anathema—we discover that later when we see how reluctant the apostle Peter was to have any contact at all with Gentiles, and how it was only a vision from God that persuaded him that the Gentiles were to be received into the fellowship of the church. Well this was Saul of Tarsus' background. If he is going to go to Gentiles and to meet them, not in some paternalistic way, not with a patronising approach; if he is to meet them as man to man, and if he is going to associate as a brother with brethren from the Gentiles in the church, Saul the Pharisee, Saul the Jewish rabbi, must be humbled. And God humbled him in this way. The great Saul arrives in Damascus to persecute the Christians and is smuggled out in a laundry basket over the wall! It was a painful and a humiliating experience and he never forgot it. But what a salutary experience it was. We do not enjoy it when our pride is humbled; we do not like humiliation. Yet often God uses these experiences because it is so vitally important that we should learn the meaning of true humility.

Now we must be clear at this point. There is a difference between humility and false modesty. False modesty is pretending that you have not got gifts when quite clearly you have, and this is really quite ridiculous. Not only that, but it is reflecting on the goodness of your Creator. If the Lord has given you gifts of mind or skills of hand, it is sheer deception to say that you have not got gifts. Realism means that you acknowledge that you have your gifts, but humility means that you do not take the credit for those gifts to yourself, you ascribe all the glory to God.

It is because pride is such a pernicious thing that God deals with it. And pride is pernicious as far as God's estimate is concerned! We, however, are very slow to appreciate this. How quickly people will stand in judgment on others because of some lapse, and at the same time the one who is standing in judgment may in the sight of God be utterly nauseating because of his pride. When the Lord Jesus was dealing with men and women He was very gentle with the prostitutes and with the tax collectors who were a dishonest crowd. The Lord did not gloss over their sins, for He called them to repentance, but He was gentle with them. He was not so gentle however with the Pharisees! His words were like lashes as He dealt with them. The Lord hates pride. It does not mean to say that He loves immorality—of course He does not; it is an abomination to Him. But pride is even more of an abomination, it is utterly pernicious. And the trouble is that it so easily pervades every part of us and we suddenly wake up and discover that at some point we were reacting in a particular way simply because of our pride.

The Lord deals with us as He dealt with the apostle Paul. He brings us through an experience of humbling in order that He might strip us of our pride. Why is it so important? Well because of the damage that pride does to us ourselves. 'Pride goes before a fall!'—It is very true spiritually. When a man thinks he has arrived, when his assurance ceases to be a humble awareness of how much he is in debt to God, when it becomes a glib statement of his self assurance spiritually, he is in a perilous state. Paul says, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.' When a man can preen himself because of his spiritual attainments, or when he can look at his achievements and feel that he is getting on rather well spiritually, he is in a perilous condition. And the Lord sometimes deals drastically with us at that point lest we should be overwhelmed by our pride and meet a really serious fall.

Pride is serious also, not only because of the effect it has upon us as individuals but because of the effect it has in our relationship to others. It is pride after all that produces the censorious attitude, and how ready we all are to stand in judgment on each other. How quick we are to notice the flaws and the defects and the inconsistencies of others and how slow we are to see our own inconsistencies, our own sinful failures. What lies behind this? Well, it is pride that blinds us as to what we are and it is pride that opens our eyes so that we can see so clearly and in such precise detail the failures of others. Pride enables us, so we imagine, to do more even than notice their inconsistency, we can even look behind their actions and detect the motives which lie behind what they do—we become almost omniscient with pride, or so we imagine.

It is also why Christians sometimes get into a complaining frame of mind. Why is it that within a church fellowship people get hurt because they are not accorded the position they think is due to them? Why are they rubbed the wrong way? Why do they react because of what other people have said, or because of the imagined attitude that someone else has taken, even when that person has not taken that attitude at all although it has been attributed to them? Ultimately, let's face it, it is because of this ugly sin called pride. We get hurt and we react in a hurt and complaining fashion because our pride has been hurt and we think that we ought to be treated in a different way. But when we begin to look at ourselves as we are in the sight of God, when we reach the point that the apostle reached when he could say, 'By the grace of God I am what I am', well then we look at other Christians in a different way, indeed we look at the man outside in a different way. No longer is it the Pharisee standing in judgment on others. It is the sinner saved by grace acknowledging—'There, but for the grace of God, go I'. Instead of the attitude which is indignant because of what people have said or done, we are inclined to say—Well if they really knew me they would say a great deal more than they have said. If they really knew the depths of my heart, if they knew my inner inconsistencies, if they knew my lack of discipline, if they knew my lack of love for the Lord, well their criticism would be even more incisive. It is good to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. It is good for your own soul and certainly it is good for the fellowship, for if pride corrupts the life of the Christian, pride is the great blight and curse within the fellowship of God's people.

But its supreme trouble is this—pride leads us into a condition where we fail to give God the praise and the glory. A Christian who has been infected by pride will be very perfunctory in his thanksgiving. He may say grace before meals, he may give his dutiful word of thanksgiving when he prays, but the welling up of praise and thanksgiving in which he praises and adores his God for all God's blessing to him, this will be foreign to him, and when he tries to do it he will feel as if he is almost laying on an act before God. Pride does not lead to praise and thanksgiving. Pride leads rather to self sufficiency, self reliance and self confidence of the wrong kind. But the Lord will not give His glory to another. The Lord will bring us to the point where we will realise that everything we have and everything we are we owe to Him. Have we got health? It is because God has been good to us. Have we got a good home? It is because God has provided for us. Do we enjoy friendships? It is because God in His providence has led us into contact with these folk. Are we saved? Are we Christian people? It is not because we were rather different from others and we registered a decision that they failed to register. God has had mercy on us and we need constantly to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God that we might give to Him the praise and the glory which are His due. Even the apostle Paul, at the very outset of his ministry, had to learn this lesson, that pride is a corrupting influence in the life and in the fellowship, that pride is quite deadening as far as one's communion with God is concerned. So Paul is humbled, and it was through this humiliation that he was brought low and learnt to give all the praise and all the glory to God.

But God had another gracious purpose in that incident at Damascus. Admittedly it was to chasten the apostle, it was to teach him what suffering meant, it was to humble him and to break his pride, but it was also to protect him and to guard him. These Jews had formed a deliberate plot and twice it says they were determined to kill him. This was no make believe, it was not sham fighting, for they really meant business. If they had had their way that would have been the end of Saul of Tarsus. As far as they were concerned it would have meant one more trouble maker eliminated. But God intervened, protected and delivered him. So Paul was to learn that while God chastens and humbles and brings you through dark days, all the time He has His restraining hand around you. It is rather like the story of Job in the Old Testament. Job suffers intensely; he loses his children, he loses his property, he loses his very health, but the Lord has His restrain-

ing hand. The devil may go a long way as he tries to destroy Job. But there is a point at which God says, 'Thus far and no further'. This is the comforting aspect of it. God may discipline. God may seem to be stern and severe with us, but there is always a point where there is the restraining hand of our heavenly Father.

We are in the hands of the Lord God if we are Christians. It is a reassuring note to strike to say that we are in His hands. But it does mean at times that it is not too comfortable an experience because the Lord has us in His hands to work out His purposes in our lives. Like the refiner of silver with his crucible, heating the metal until it becomes molten and then removing the dross and the scum which floats to the surface until he can see his face reflected in the molten metal, so the Lord refines and purifies that we might bear the reflection of Christ, that we might be prepared ultimately for God's glory and for enjoying His presence for ever.

THE ABIDING PRESENCE

'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the age' (Matthew 28 : 20).

'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what men shall do unto me' (Hebrews 13 : 5-6).

"It is impossible to conceive words more comforting, strengthening, cheering and sanctifying than these . . . Let all true Christians lay hold on these words and keep them in mind. Christ is with us always. Christ is with us wherever we go. He came to be 'Emmanuel, God with us', when He first came into the world. He declares that He is ever 'Emmanuel', 'with us' when He comes to the end of His earthly ministry and is about to leave the world. He is with us daily, to pardon and forgive; with us daily, to sanctify and strengthen; with us daily, to defend and keep; with us daily, to lead and guide; with us in sorrow and with us in joy; with us in sickness and with us in health; with us in life and with us in death; with us in time, and with us in Eternity. What stronger consolation could believers desire than this?

J. C. RYLE.

Doctrinal Definitions

PAUL TUCKER

PRAYER I.

Turn to Genesis 17. Every true Christian has a prayer life. We have a public life, a private life, a business life, a social life. The great question is, have we a prayer life? Is our prayer life as real as all these other aspects of our life? Prayer is not only a privilege but a duty, an obligation resting upon every Christian. Luke 18 : 1, 'Men ought always to pray and not to faint.' You can tell the spiritual health of a child of God by the pulse beat of prayer. With some of us prayer is a very weak point. With others it is something fitful and erratic and irregular. How many of us are strong and consistent and rhythmic in our prayer life? Prayer is a sign of spiritual life. The Christian life begins with prayer and the Christian life also ought to end in prayer. And all the way through the New Testament we are taught to continue instant in prayer.

I. THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER.

1. *Its place and importance in the Scriptures.* It begins in the Old Testament. The first real reference to praying is in Genesis 4 : 26. 'At that time men began to call upon the name of the Lord.' Abraham is one of the greatest illustrations of a man of prayer. There seems to be a definite development of the doctrine in his life and experience. In Genesis 17 : 21, 22 it appears that prayer started as a sort of conversation. In Genesis 18 : 23-33 prayer seems to have evolved into something even more meaningful than a dialogue, it has become intercession. But then prayer seems to have developed into something very personal and intimate between him and God. See chapter 24 : 12, where Abraham's servant prays very personally about a certain matter. So I think the final development of prayer in the life of Abraham can be summed up in the word 'communion' because three times over in Scripture Abraham is called the friend of God. He knew this real living fellowship with God.

2. *It had such a pre-eminent place in the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.* We can reverently say that Jesus was a man of prayer. Mark 1 represents a typical day in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice what our Lord does after a busy day like that (in verse 35). You and I often say that we are so

busy that we have not the time we ought to have to pray. I think the short answer is that none of us can ever be so busy as the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet He found time to pray. Those acquainted with Luke's gospel will know that in that gospel our Lord's humanity is brought very much to the fore and there is great reference to our Lord's prayer life. On no less than seven different occasions in that gospel we find the Lord Jesus Christ giving Himself deliberately to prayer. Apart from His example, we have His teaching and parables. See Luke 18 : 1-7; 11 : 5-13. There is this emphasis everywhere upon the importance of prayer.

3. *The neglect of prayer is very grievous to God.* In the Old Testament we find God expressing displeasure at the failure of His people to seek His face. See Isaiah 43 : 21-22. Then we find (Isaiah 64 : 7) a great complaint. Isaiah could complain of the people of his day and say that there were none who stirred up themselves to take hold of God, and that was why their iniquities like the wind had taken them away. Also Hosea 7 : 7, 14.

4. *Many evils in life are to be attributed to prayerlessness.* Many evils that come upon a nation, upon a Church, upon an individual believer, can be attributed to a lack of prayer. See Daniel 9 : 13, 14. It was because of their prayerlessness that they found themselves in their wretchedness and misery. The old hymn is quite right. 'O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.'

5. *The Apostles and the first Christians regarded prayer as the most important employment that could engage their attention.* See Acts 6 : 3, 4. Now the Apostles are not saying here that the other things do not matter. They do matter, but what they are saying is that for them it is now a question of priorities. If they would do the work God had commissioned them to do properly, then others must deal with certain material matters so that they can the more give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Notice that the Word is not mentioned first. Prayer is mentioned first. And I think the reason is that they were concerned at this point about the ministry of the Word, not the Bible aspect, but the preaching of it, the expounding and declaring of it. They knew they could not declare and minister that Word in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit so that there would be conversions unless they steeped their ministry in prayer. Prayer would bring down the power.

6. *We are expressly commanded to pray.* Our Lord tells us 'Men ought always to pray and not faint'. The Apostle Paul makes much of it. See Colossians 4 : 2; 1 Thessalonians 5 : 17.

The second may seem to be an impossible injunction. I see that the Greek word here means literally 'to pray incessantly'. Now the Apostle Paul is saying we should pray again and again, and again, and never give up. The highest form of praying is when a man's life itself becomes a prayer, by his very demeanour and deportment, and humility and conscious dependence upon God, his whole life becomes a poem and prayer.

II. THE REAL NATURE OF PRAYER. We talk much of it and hear much about it, but what is prayer? It seems that this question ought to be answered negatively and then positively.

1. *Prayer is not forcing our way into God's presence.* There are some circumstances in life when we have to withdraw ourselves from other people who are engaged in conversation. If we butted in we should be intruding and should be forcing ourselves into their presence. We must never think of prayer as an intrusion into the presence of God, because God always takes the first step in this matter of prayer. It is God who invites us to come. 'Call upon me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things that thou knewest not, and thou shalt glorify me.' It is God who says, 'Draw nigh unto God and He will draw nigh unto you'. It is God who through the lips of the Lord Jesus says, 'Ask, seek, knock'. The invitation that God Himself has given is always open at all times, in every situation.

2. *Prayer is not wringing an answer from a reluctant God.* In fact, as we turn to the Scriptures we find that we are encouraged to come, and not only encouraged but we are told that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Or in the language of an ancient prayer, 'He is always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and He wants to give us more than either we desire or deserve'.

3. *Prayer is not a breaking in upon the laws of the Universe.* There are sceptics who say there is no point in this objective intercession. The Universe is controlled by certain fixed laws, therefore what is the good of praying? These inflexible laws are in operation and they will operate whether you pray or not. But when we come to the Word of God we find that prayer itself is a law. All the laws of the universe work in with other laws and it would be true to say that prayer is just one of the laws of God. The Lord Jesus Christ says, 'If ye ask, I

will do'. There you have cause and effect coupled together. Scientists are discovering in the realm of space travel that as soon as they conquer one law there is still a higher law that they have to master or co-operate with. Now prayer is one of the highest of God's laws. It does not cancel out any other laws. Therefore all other laws are in subordination to and co-operate with God's great law of prayer. And all God's blessings come to His people through prayer. Yes, the universe is controlled by laws, but God is the great Law-giver and therefore He can manipulate His laws as He wishes. Prayer belongs to the higher order of God's governing and it is perfectly consistent with a rational and ordered universe.

4. Prayer is not informing God of things He does not know.

There are some people who seem to think that they have to give God a lot of information. God is omniscient. He is perfect in His knowledge. You and I cannot acquaint Him with anything He does not know, we do not have to inform Deity. Remember how David speaks in Psalm 139 : 1-4? There is nothing hidden from God. Our Lord twice over in Matthew 6 reminds us that the Heavenly Father knows our needs. See verses 7, 8, and then verses 31-32. I want you to notice that the very argument that the atheist gives for not praying, the Lord Jesus Christ gives for praying. If He knows what you want, why do you bother to pray? It is a waste of time! That is the reasoning of many so-called atheists and agnostics, yet the reasoning that they use is used by Jesus Christ in order that we *should* pray. And notice that in Psalm 139 David opens by telling the Lord that He has searched him, yet at the end of that very Psalm he asks God to search him. See verse 23. Why does he ask God to search him when God has already searched him? Obviously David is now bringing himself into conformity with the mind and will of God for his life. He says he wants to be exposed and to be frank with God and he wants His will to be wrought out in every part of his life. God is our Heavenly Father, and though He knows what we need before we ask, He loves us to come. He wants fellowship with us. By coming to Him and telling Him ourselves simply and artlessly many of the things which He already knows, by coming and making our requests known unto Him we are brought into conformity with His mind and will for our lives.

5. Prayer is not an attempt to alter the mind of God. It is not that I am here and I pray to God there, and I do all in my power to change God's mind so that He will do for me what I think at the moment He is not willing to do. Now prayer

cannot change the mind of God, simply because God is unchangeable. 'With Him there is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning.' I know there are references in the Old Testament where we read of God repenting, but after all it is human language coming down to our limited understanding. Very often there is a change in God's attitude. Instead of assuming an attitude of mercy when a man wilfully rebels, there comes a moment when He adopts an attitude of justice and wrath, but God's fundamental mind and purposes do not change. Prayer is not so much that we change the mind of God, but rather that our mind is brought into harmony with His mind. See 1 John 5 : 14.

Prayer means that we come into the presence of God and through meditation upon His Word, and considering who and what He is, we seek to know His mind. In other words, we pray in the Name of Jesus which includes praying in the nature of Jesus, with the same attitude as the Lord Jesus Christ who prayed, 'Not My will but Thine be done'. It is as if we come to see that God is ready and willing to bless us if only we will submit ourselves to His good and perfect and acceptable will. God does not say, 'Ask and you will persuade Me to change My mind'. He says, 'Ask and it shall be given you'. He does not say, 'Seek and you will persuade Me to come out from hiding'. He says, 'Seek and ye shall find'. He does not say, 'Knock and you will persuade Me to open the door at last'. He says, 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you'. This is the believer in the exercise of prayer, not changing God's mind, but coming to that position where he is in obedience to God's will and in harmony with God's purpose for his life. I finish by giving you a positive definition of what prayer is. This is by Thomas Watson: 'It is an offering up of our desires to God in the Name of Christ for things agreeable to His will'.

To snatch a brand from the burning is better than to warm your own hands; to feed a hungry soul with the bread of heaven is a far higher deed than to eat the fat and drink the sweet yourself. There is more joy in plunging your arm up to the elbow in the mire to find a jewel for Christ than in washing one's idle hands with the scented soap of respectable propriety. Oh to get clean away from all idea of self-seeking in religion. We are first of all saved by grace like drowning mariners snatched from the deep, but afterwards we are taught to man the lifeboat ourselves for the rescue of others from destruction.—C. H. SPURGEON.

PSALM 121

A Meditation

H. P. WOTTON

The writer of this psalm was remarkable for his determination. He says, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills' (verse 1). He was a man in a thousand, for in every age few appreciate the value of spiritual things. They rise no higher than the earth, and spend their thoughts and lives traversing the corridors of time, opening one door and shutting another, going from one room to another, some apparently empty, others a picture of joy and riches, but a picture only, for after having traversed the corridors and entered the rooms of earth and time, the considered opinion of many is that of Solomon, who said, 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity' (Ecclesiastes 1 : 2).

Why did the man of the psalm, among so many who looked down, look up unto God? The answer is that the Spirit by Whom he was led was different from the spirit by whom they were driven. He was a child of God, and so his interests were not in the things of earth, among the sticks and straws of time, but in the high and lofty places where dwelt the great God, his omniscient and omnipotent Helper.

So the psalmist says, in an alternatively punctuated rendering, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth' (verses 1, 2).

The psalmist was a reasoning man. So we may imagine him arguing thus with himself: 'If this great God is the Maker of heaven and earth, then there is nothing that He cannot do for me'. Heaven alone is enough to fill him with wonder at the glory and power of God. He who upholds all things by the word of His power is surely able to help a man in his every need, whose wisdom it is to lift up his eyes to God.

The teaching of this psalm, then, is that he who does this is a *kept man*.

CONSTANTLY KEPT

Verses three and four indicate that the kept person is constantly kept: 'He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep'.

There is a sense in which our feet follow our eyes. The thing we spend most time looking at is that which governs our affections and, consequently, our feet. If our thoughts are more concerned with the world than with heaven, we have reason to conclude that we are of the former. But if, with the psalmist, our affections are, for the most part, with God, His people, and His word, we walk with God, for we love what He loves.

We may not be called to do anything that is seen to be great in the eyes of men. Neither did Enoch, as far as we know. But what he did was great in the estimation of God, who alone is able to value our actions in scales that are truly just and righteous. He walked with God. And he did it so closely and well that God honoured him by taking him to heaven without seeing death. What a wonderful walk—right into the arms of God! ‘Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him’ (Genesis 5 : 24). ‘By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God’ (Hebrews 11 : 6).

The person who walks with God wants some assurance that he will be enabled to continue to do so. You have perhaps walked with God today. But what about tomorrow? This is where the promise comes in, ‘He will not suffer thy foot to be moved’. That is, out of the wonderful way in which by grace He has enabled you to walk, to walk in another direction, which no doubt you would soon do were not God to keep you constantly walking in His way, for just as we need God’s sustaining power to continue our physical life, so we need God’s sustaining power to continue our spiritual life.

‘He that keepeth thee will not slumber.’ A person who is asleep is temporarily unable to look after his own affairs, let alone the affairs of those who may be in his care. A sleeping person is out of touch with reality. It is unthinkable that God should sleep. Were He to do so, the whole universe would be in danger. But God neither slumbers nor sleeps, and so He is able to constantly keep His people by day and by night.

PERSONALLY KEPT

God’s people are also personally kept, as we learn from verse five: ‘The Lord is *thy* keeper; the Lord is *thy* shade upon *thy* right hand’.

In the first two verses of this psalm the psalmist uses the first person singular—‘*I* will lift up *mine* eyes unto the hills’.

But from verse three to the end of the psalm he uses the second person singular, from which he assumes that the person to whom he is talking has done what he has done, that is, that he has lifted up his eyes unto God, from whom comes his help. This help is a personal promise that belongs to the person who habitually lifts up his eyes unto God. The psalm is yours if you do this. I may say confidently of you that 'the Lord is *thy* keeper; the Lord is *thy* shade upon thy right hand'.

'The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.' Most people use their right hands more than they do their left. Many people are not able to use their left hand as they do their right. And so the right hand is a symbol of personal strength and power, of self-sufficiency and confidence in our ability to do things, even the things of God.

But the Lord has put a shade upon the right hand of those who lift up their eyes to Him. He has shown them that this right hand is not the brilliant self-sufficient thing they once thought it to be. The Lord has put a shade upon it to show them that the right hand of strength is an impotent thing apart from the strength imparted to it by the Lord.

In such personal dealings as this the Lord shows His people individually and personally that He is their keeper, that He keeps them in His way, and enables them to continue to lift up their eyes unto Him from Whom comes their help.

TEMPORALLY KEPT

From verse six we may understand that the believer is temporarily kept: 'The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night'.

We must not confuse *temporally* with *temporarily*. The former means all the time we are down here, while the latter means only a part of the time. The psalmist is saying all the time, day and night, and every day and every night.

'The sun shall not smite thee.' We do not expect the sun to do us harm, but we know that it can. There is such a thing as sun-stroke, and many people suffer agonies from sunburn in their efforts to become brown. But perhaps it is legitimate not to take the word *sun* too literally. When we are prosperous in our temporal affairs we use the imagery of the sun to describe our circumstances, and perhaps say that we have made hay while the sun shone. But surely this sort of thing will not do the believer harm, but rather good!

The answer is that he is in greater danger of departing from his God when everything in his temporal garden is lovely than

when it is not. Many have found this to be a fact indeed. I believe that it takes more grace to be a faithful affluent believer than to be a faithful poor believer. There are dangers in both circumstances. We read in the book of Proverbs that the godly man Agur prayed, 'Two things have I required of Thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain' (Proverbs 30 : 7-9).

The man who lifts up his eyes unto God may be sure that the sun of temporal prosperity shall not harm him. But what of the moon by night? I have little to say about this, but I have read that 'in the cloudless skies of the East, where the moon shines with such exceeding clearness, its effects upon the human frame have been most injurious'.

'The sun by day and the moon by night' is an expression to cover everything that may concern us by day and by night. And none of these things are outside of God's loving purposes for His people, for 'all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose' (Romans 8 : 28).

MORALLY KEPT

The one who lifts up his eyes to God is also morally kept, for in verse seven we read that 'the Lord shall preserve thee from all evil'.

This no doubt refers to moral evil, for we are all subject to natural evils such as illnesses and accidents. The Lord then has promised to keep His people from the evil of iniquity. This does not mean that He will enable them to attain unto sinless perfection in this life, for it will always be true of us here that 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John 1 : 8).

How, then, will the Lord keep us from the evil of our iniquity? He will do it by enabling us to depart from it continually. This is not the work of a day but of a whole life-time. Sin tried to entangle me yesterday, and it will do the same today. This is true of every yesterday and of every today. Iniquity does not tire of trying to win us to its side, and so we must never tire of departing from it.

But how do we depart from iniquity? We do it by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He sheds light on the dark places and shows us the inner recesses of hearts where lie the

secret things. He brings to light the hidden unbelief, the evil nature of pride and vanity, of self-love and jealousy. He causes us to hate the things we once loved, for we may be sure that we will not depart from iniquity as long as we love it. The Lord puts His fear into the hearts of His people, for 'the fear of the Lord is to hate evil' (Proverbs 8 : 13), and 'by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil' (Proverbs 16 : 6).

'The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil.' We are the Lord's preserves. When things are preserved they are separated and sealed, so that they will not fall into corruption, and so the Holy Spirit separates and seals His people for Himself.

SPIRITUALLY KEPT

In this psalm we also have the promise that the believer will be spiritually kept, for the latter clause of verse seven says that 'He shall preserve thy soul'.

This is a promise that the soul shall be kept in a state of spiritual activity.

In the spiritual life God has made most of His promises conditional, but such is His method of dispensing grace that He provides for His children the condition as well as the blessing that follows it. For instance, our entrance into salvation is dependent on faith. But if we pat ourselves on the back and say, 'Yes, I supplied the condition', we rob God of His glory in a most important part of His work in the accomplishment of our salvation. The scripture says, 'By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2 : 8).

The definition of a beatitude is 'a saying ascribing blessing to the possessors of particular virtues'. God preserves the souls of His people by implanting in them certain virtues, and by promising to those who possess them further blessing. For example, take the beatitude, 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled' (Matthew 5 : 6). God creates hunger and thirst in the souls of His people by showing them their own unrighteousness, the righteousness and loveliness of Christ, and what it means to be filled with the Spirit. He enables us to taste and see that the Lord is good, that we may earnestly desire to know more of Him, and the desire of the righteous is sure to be granted in due time.

EFFECTUALLY KEPT

In verse eight of this psalm we may read the promise that the believer shall be effectually kept. 'The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in.'

Just as the people of God are effectually called to a knowledge of their eternal salvation in Christ, so they are effectually kept by the power of God in all their going out and coming in.

The believer cannot always be shut in with God in the sanctuary, in his home, in his Bible reading, or in private prayer. He has to go out into the world among men and women who do not love the Lord, and we know that the spirit of the world is different from the Spirit of Christ. It is 'the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience' (Ephesians 2 : 2).

A. W. Pink refers to the world as 'the organised kingdom of the carnal mind'. It is a world naturally at enmity with the believer because it is naturally at enmity with God. If ever the believer needs to be effectually kept it is here, for without the keeping power of God he is bound to be conformed to the moral—or, rather, immoral—environment in which he finds himself. But the Spirit Who is in him is greater than the spirit that is in them. And though there are bound to be conflicts and temptations, he will overcome because he is kept by the power of an omnipotent God. Though the believer is weak and impotent, everything will fall before his God Who works 'all things after the counsel of His own will' (Ephesians 1 : 11).

The believer's life in this world is a continuation of going out and coming in. He goes out in the strength of his God, and he comes in to renew his strength by prayer and feeding on God's word, that he might go out again and live for God in the midst of an alien world. And in all his goings out and comings in he is effectually kept as he lifts up his eyes unto God, from Whom comes his help.

ETERNALLY KEPT

Finally, we may learn from this psalm that the believer is eternally kept, for the complete reading of verse eight says that 'the Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore'.

'This time forth and even for evermore' is a wonderful word. There are a number of reasons why the people of God will be kept eternally. It is the eternal purpose of God that they should be. We were chosen not for good in ourselves, but in Christ before the foundation of the world, regardless of,

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The Personal Return of Christ

S. M. HOUGHTON

The Messianic hope is the greatest theme of the Old Testament. It was long in fulfilment but the fulfilment was infallibly certain. The glades of Eden echoed with the first of the promises: 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head', even though in the process Messiah's heel was to be bruised (Genesis 3 : 15). 'Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me' (Psalm 40 : 7) was Messiah's own confirmation of the pledge, though it is not to be forgotten that the writer of the Hebrews who quotes it (10 : 5-7) ascribed the saying to the time 'when He (Messiah) cometh into the world'. Not until the fulness of the days had come did God send forth His Son. An infant of days was the 'unspeakable gift' which answered so wonderfully to the promise. Later came the three-and-a-half years of ministry during which was perfected the work given Him by the Father. At the appointed season came its climax. The Christ of God suffered, as it was written of Him, and entered into His glory.

The New Testament fulfilment of the age-old word of promise was itself accompanied by a further promise. Before Christ went back to His Father's house, He pledged His own word that He would return to earth at a time appointed by and known only to the Father. 'I will come again' (John 14 : 3) was the promise as expressed in its simplest terms. 'The Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him; then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory (or His glorious throne)' is one of the texts which supplies elaboration (Matthew 25 : 31). Of the day and hour of the event no hint is given; we are told not to expect it; the secret lies hidden in the Father's heart (Acts 1 : 7). 'Enough the promises reveal, Wisdom and love the rest conceal.'

In this matter our ignorance is our bliss. Lack of knowledge often contributes to our happiness even in earthly matters, and in this aspect of the Second Advent it is divinely appointed. The promise of itself should give the Christian 'joy unspeakable and full of glory'. Christ will come again, glorious beyond all our conceptions. On His head will be many crowns; an

innumerable company of angels will be His attendants. Every elect angel will be found in His retinue, for He Himself declared that 'all the holy angels will be with Him' (Matthew 25 : 31). Their glory, the Father's glory, and His own glory, will be united in His Person at that day of days (Luke 9 : 26).

It will be a surpassingly 'excellent glory' before which all other glory will be no glory. 'The glory that excelleth, O Son of God, is Thine.' As certainly as the Lord went away in order to 'prepare a place' for His own, so certainly will He return to receive them to Himself, and to bring them into the eternal abode prepared 'against that day'.

It is significant that confirmation of the Saviour's promise was given immediately He left the earth: 'This same Jesus shall so come in like manner' (Acts 1 : 11). 'Same', 'so', 'in like manner' are words that should engage our close attention.

Sorrow had filled the hearts of the apostles when it was made clear to them that the ministry of miracle and love which they had daily witnessed was about to end. But twin promises, marvellously suited to their need, were spoken for their consolation. The one spoke of a second advent, not in a manner akin to the first when they saw their 'God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man', but after a fashion that would fill the heavens with splendour and the whole earth with His glory. The other spoke of the coming of 'another Comforter' who would abide with them, not for a season, but for ever, and minister in Christ's stead to their every need.

Would the interval of time during which the 'heavens received' the risen Saviour (Acts 3 : 21) be long or short? It was not given to the apostles to know. There were indications that it might be long; but its termination would coincide with the 'restitution of all things', and with the public overthrow of evil on a scale of which earth had never seen the like. 'The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with the angels of His power, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Thessalonians 1 : 7-8); or, to use Old Testament language, 'His enemies shall lick the dust' (Psalm 72 : 9). When the session at the right hand of the Father reaches its prophesied terminus, His foes will be made the footstool of His feet' (Psalm 110 : 1; Matthew 22 : 44; Mark 12 : 36; Luke 20 : 43; Acts 2 : 34; Hebrews 1 : 13; 10 : 13).

The view is sometimes stated that the fulfilment of the Lord's promise to return to earth took place (as described in Acts 2) when the Holy Spirit descended ten days after the

Ascension. But it was made clear in the closing days of the Lord's earthly ministry that the Holy Spirit and He Himself were two distinct Persons and that both would not be on earth simultaneously. 'If I go not away,' said Christ, 'the Comforter will not come unto you' (John 16 : 7). Only when Christ was glorified was the Spirit given to dwell with men (John 7 : 39). 'If I depart I will send Him unto you,' said the Saviour, who went away for His people's sake as truly as He came for their sake. It was more needful after His death that He should be in heaven as their representative than that He should prolong His stay upon earth; more needful, too, that the indwelling Holy Spirit should be with them than that His localised presence should be perpetuated.

Nor is the death of the believer an aspect of the Second Coming. As well might we describe Christ's departure after death and resurrection as His second coming. The departure of the believer to be with Christ (which is far better than to remain on earth) is in no sense the equivalent of Messiah's return. The return necessitates His vacating His Father's throne where He now sits, and literally returning to earth.

But the vacating does not take place until His foes are made His footstool, and clearly this act of subjugation has not yet taken place. Yet the believer, who has died 'in the Lord', does not thereby forfeit his part in the 'blessed hope', for when Christ comes back to earth, 'them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him' (1 Thessalonians 4 : 14). That is to say, their glorified souls will, together with the angels, be in His glorious train. They will participate in the advent in a double sense (1) as just explained (2) as their redeemed bodies are raised from their graves at 'the trump of God' (1 Thessalonians 4 : 16; 1 Corinthians 15 : 52).

Apostolic ministry after Pentecost makes it abundantly clear that neither the coming of the Holy Spirit nor the death of the Christian constitute, either together or apart, the fulfilment of Second-coming promises. Christ is personally involved:

'Surely He cometh, and a thousand voices
Speak to the saints, and to the deaf are dumb;
Surely He cometh and the earth rejoices,
Glad in His coming who hath sworn, "I come"!'.

Twice in the closing chapter of Scripture are we assured that He is coming, and coming quickly, and it is Christ Himself who gives the blessed assurance (Revelation 22 : 12, 20). He accompanies it with the sealing word 'Surely', the same word which in Revelation 1 : 7 and latter part of 22 : 20 is

translated 'Even so'. 'Quickly' sums up the urgency of the command to watch and wait and to be as men that are on the look-out for their coming Lord, the One who at His first coming came 'for sin' but at His second coming will 'appear to them that look for Him, without sin unto salvation' (Hebrews 9 : 28). If creation, as described in Romans 8 : 19, 'waits with outstretched head' for the manifestation of the sons of God, much more should this be the attitude of those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, whose souls have already tasted the bliss of salvation, and who wait for the adoption, 'to wit, the redemption of the body', at the Lord's return (Romans 8 : 23). Signs of the advent are promised, of which the appearance is intended to whet the believer's expectation to razor sharpness. 'When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh' (Luke 21 : 28).

Three words are used of this 'momentous event', of which two have been taken over into the English language: the 'parousia', or the 'being beside' (i.e. the presence brought about by the second advent), the 'epiphany' (the outshining of the glory), and the 'apocalypse', or the unveiling and revelation of Christ. One remarkable text speaks of the 'epiphany of His parousia' which will 'destroy that Wicked (one)' (i.e. the anti-Christ who will be 'revealed in his time' (2 Thessalonians 2 : 8).

The word used of the coming as an event in prospect is 'the Hope'. Christ Himself is called 'our Hope' (1 Timothy 1 : 1).

Hope is prominent in the Old Testament; the promise of the Messiah produced hope in the hearts of believers. But remarkably, in the four Gospels 'Hope' is virtually absent (the word occurs but rarely and in very minor usages), for the very good reason that 'the Hope of Israel' was in the midst of His people, the long-expected One. 'Hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?' (Romans 8 : 24).

We are not surprised, therefore, at the absence of Hope from the four Gospels. Faith and Love are there, but Hope is absent. But immediately the Lord returns to His Father Hope reappears. He Himself becomes 'that blessed Hope' (Titus 2 : 13), whose glorious appearing we await with expectancy, knowing that 'He that shall come will come and will not tarry' (Hebrews 10 : 37); that is to say, He will not delay His coming beyond the appointed day and hour. When the fulness of the time has come, He will be manifested to the joy of His saints

and the confusion of His foes. Frances Ridley Havergal puts the matter delightfully:

'Coming! O my glorious Priest,
Hear we not Thy golden bells?
'O the joy to see Thee reigning,
Thee, my own beloved Lord!
Every tongue Thy Name confessing.
Worship, honour, glory, blessing,
Brought to Thee with glad accord—
Thee, my Master and my Friend,
Vindicated and enthroned,
Unto earth's remotest end
Glorified, adored and owned!'

PSALM 121—*concluded from page 120*

and in full view of what our character would be, and this choice cannot be made void. Those given by the Father to the Son are the Son's for eternity, and none shall pluck them out of His hand, for, says the Son, 'My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one' (1 John 10 : 29, 30).

Again, the honour of God is concerned in the eternal preservation of His people in this world and in the next, for He has promised to the believer eternal life, and this life is in His Son, to Whom He has given each believer. 'All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out' (John 6 : 37).

The Lord is unchangeable in His character and in His purposes. 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever' (Hebrews 13 : 8). To every child of God the message is the same: 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee' (Jeremiah 31 : 3).

Were there an end to everlasting love, everlasting love would be a contradiction in terms. But there is neither end nor beginning, for 'God is love' and eternally has been and will be love to His people. How, then, can we be anything but kept to arrive safely in the kingdom of our Father?

J. C. RYLE

Bishop of Liverpool

J. M. SMOUT

Liverpool had first been granted a charter by King John in 1205. By the time Ryle arrived in 1880 it was a city teeming with people and bursting with life. The population of 77,000 at the beginning of the century had reached nearly 400,000 fifty years later and had almost doubled by the end of the century. Gradually it had become the first port in the country. It was like 'a vast whirlpool which sucked all trade towards itself'. In 1850 its trade was double that of the port of London and dealt with half of that of the whole nation. While the nations of Europe were fighting among themselves and the United States was still at the pioneering stage, the city established itself amongst the top two or three ports in the world. At one stage it was reckoned that one out of every ten ships in the world came from Liverpool. Cotton was king in the city. By 1841 there were 90 cotton firms and the establishment of the Cunard steamship company in 1840, with the consequent reduction of the Atlantic crossing to a mere six to eight weeks, meant that the cotton trade prospered. Not even the American Civil War was able to damp down this prosperity. In 1857 the Dock Board was formed and soon the riverside was dominated by $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles of docks, packed with huge warehouses and cranes. But it was not only cotton that made Liverpool what it was. Its underwriting and insurance interests dominated the world; it controlled the world's manufacture of, and trade in, sugar, soap, salt and oxygen! Of no little help was the coming of the railway. The first railway ran from Liverpool to Manchester. It was made even more of a historic occasion because William Huskisson, M.P. for the city and Chancellor of the Exchequer, somehow managed to get himself killed when he was run over by George Stevenson's engine on the opening day.

The rapid growth of population brought many problems in its wake. Attempts at their solutions forced Liverpool into taking the lead in municipal reform. The people were very cosmopolitan. During the potato famine of 1845-6 nearly 400,000 Irish fled to Liverpool. This led to a number of disorders and, at one time, 20,000 men had to be sworn in as special police and 2,000 soldiers were camped on the heights

of Everton. By 1850 there were also around 40,000 Welsh people in the city, many of them speaking no English. Liverpool became the 'capital' both of Ireland and of Wales. Just to add to the flavour there were considerable numbers of Scots, Chinese and Jews. Housing conditions were appalling and in the middle of the century it was estimated that there were 14,000 families living in cellars. The expectation of life was just 32 years. There were also reckoned to be 1,300 brothels. None of these figures was guesswork, but came from the researches of the man who was chiefly responsible for bringing the situation to public notice.

His name was Dr. William Duncan, a lecturer at the School of Medicine. Besides producing a report on the moral condition of the town in 1836, he also analysed the housing conditions. He said that half of the working population lived in narrow closed courts and that there was a population density of 100,000 people to the square mile. For his pains, Duncan was made Medical Officer of Health, the first in the country.

Mid-century Liverpool presented a sorry scene. 'There were no public latrines, no municipal service for cleansing the stinking privies that oozed excrement over the undrained courts, no municipal water supply for household use, no lighting in the narrow, noisome passages that led to the courts, and only one public park for a population of more than 300,000 souls. . . . In the worst of these slums the Irish crowded without distinction of sex, diseased and half naked and so repulsively filthy that the better class of English worker would not dwell near them.'

Much of the reform carried out was facilitated by the passing of the Municipal Reform Act of 1835, which set up effective town councils. Local Building Acts were pushed through Parliament in the 1840s to ensure adequate sanitation. This was a priority because four out of every hundred people were dying from typhoid or cholera every year. In 1847 thousands of the inhabited cellars were condemned and filled in. An adequate water supply was next ensured. Up till the middle of the century the supply was in the hands of two private firms. Most courts had one pipe providing water for 100 families. To make matters worse, it was on for only half an hour a day. So families would often be forced to go two or three days without fresh water. The Corporation intervened and bought out the two firms. Then in 1857 a reservoir was opened at Rivington, and 23 years later another one, in the heart of Wales at Lake Vyrnwy.

Other necessary facilities were made available. In 1842 public wash-houses were started, followed ten years later by the opening of a public library. The great new St. George's Hall was opened in the centre of the town. The names of the wealthy public benefactors began to appear. In 1873 the Art Gallery was presented by A. B. Walker, the brewer. In 1860 the William Brown Library was built, and added to in 1879 in commemoration of Sir William Picton, a local quantity surveyor and historian. Mindful of the need for open spaces for recreation, the Corporation, in 1868, created the large Sefton, Newsham and Stanley Parks at a cost of £670,000. As far as education was concerned, in 1835 only half the children in Liverpool had schooling of any sort.

For our purposes, 1880 is the most significant year, for not only did Liverpool become a city; it also became a diocese. And the first bishop of that diocese was John Charles Ryle.

There had been no fully established church in Liverpool until 1356, when St. Nicholas' was built down near the waterfront. It replaced a small chapel of St. Mary del Quay, which had been there since the early 13th century. It was only three years later that its graveyard was crowded with victims of the Black Death. Another notable, if sad, occasion in its history came in 1810, when the spire collapsed and twenty-two girls were killed. In 1699, by Act of Parliament, a Liverpool parish was carved out of the parish of Walton. This was necessary because the ancient parish church of St. Mary, Walton, was some miles distant from Liverpool itself. The Act made Liverpool a separate parish and the town council was given the right to appoint two rectors and build an additional church. St. Peter's, built in 1704 at a cost of £3,500, became the parish church. The money was raised by the selling off of the pews to the people who were going to attend. St. Peter's and St. Nicholas' were eventually united in one benefice in 1738, when the former's patronage was purchased from Lord Molyneux, the patron of Walton. It was vested in the Corporation of Liverpool until 1836. It was then sold to John Stewart, the rector of St. Nicholas'.

The Roman Catholics met a deal of opposition and in 1759 there was a riot in protest against their activities. But, in spite of this, all in all, religious tolerance was the order of the day. With the great influx of Irish Roman Catholics in the middle of the nineteenth century, sectarian conflict was greatly increased. The 12th of July could always be guaranteed to bring with it disorders in the city. This was the day on which the Protestant Orangemen marched through the streets to cele-

brate the victory of William of Orange at the battle of the Boyne in 1690. Naturally enough, the local Roman Catholics always took this as a personal insult and were not slow to make their feelings known. Religious divisions also affected the political scene. On the one side the Church of England supported the Conservative party, and the Roman Catholics and Non-Conformists lined up on the side of the Liberal party. This was a different situation from other cities, like Manchester where the battle was that of Dissent against the Anglican Establishment. Whenever there was a Conservative victory the bells of St. Nicholas' and St. Peter's were pealed in celebration. As Burke commented, 'Liverpool dislikes moderate men'. Typical of the Catholic and Protestant confrontations was the opposition aroused when in 1836 two of the Corporation schools were opened to Roman Catholics. Hugh McNeile, the Protestant Vicar of St. Jude's, formed a Bible Association to force the Catholics out again. Eventually the council enforced the use of the Authorised Version of the Bible in the schools. This effectively meant that the Catholics withdrew their children. The Whig Council which had perpetrated the original calamity was replaced by a Tory one which remained in power continuously until 1891. This was the extent of Protestant dominance in the city.

The men who were mainly responsible for creating the material wealth of 1750-1850 tended to be Nonconformists. A number of them were Unitarians whose ancient chapel in Toxteth had been built in 1618. For about 200 years many of the leading citizens worshipped here and at another chapel built at Gateacre in 1700. Liverpool had supported the Puritan cause in the civil war, and consequently when eighteenth century Puritan Presbyterianism declined into Unitarianism it had strong Unitarian leanings, which continued into the nineteenth century. The William Rathbones, father and son, were both of that persuasion. The Domestic Mission, opened in 1836, became one of the leading centres of social work in the city. A Quaker Meeting House was built in 1706, followed by the Baptists in 1718 and the Methodists in 1764. To serve the interests of the Scots exiles, John Gladstone paid for the building of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in the 1820s. The Welsh went further than this. Not only did they build their own churches, the first one in 1787, but also held their services in their own language. The Welsh Presbyterian Chapel in Princess Road was known as the 'Welsh Cathedral'.

As the nineteenth century wore on there was an increasing move in the Church of England for more bishops. When a

bishop had a large diocese to cover, he tended to be a remote figure sitting in his palace. The clergy wanted a man who could get to know them personally and could also be a real leader of the diocese. It was reckoned that in 1868 every diocesan bishop in the south of England was too ill to work, either because of old age or just sheer overwork. The clamour was partly yielded to when the first two suffragan bishops were created in 1870. But this was soon seen to be inadequate. Consequently, due to the efforts of the Home Secretary, H. L. Cross, who was a keen Churchman, a new diocese of St. Albans came into being in 1875 as well as one in the West Country, Truro. Still more were needed, and an Act was passed bringing into existence the dioceses of Liverpool, Newcastle, Southwell, and Wakefield. This Additional Bishops Act was in 1878, and the dioceses actually came into being in the following years: 1888 Wakefield, 1884 Southwell, 1882 Newcastle. But it was two years earlier still (1880) that the dream of a diocese of Liverpool became a reality.

Gradually over the years the number of churches and chapels of ease had increased in the Liverpool area. It was becoming obvious that Chester diocese, which had been carved out of that of Lichfield, just could not cope. It covered not only Cheshire, but stretched up into Lancashire and even into parts of Wales. This had been the situation since 1541 and it had not been until 1847 that the situation had been relieved to any extent with the introduction of the diocese of Manchester. Also it was felt increasingly in the Liverpool area that such a thriving and prosperous commercial centre should be graced by its own bishop and diocese. There was already a strong religious life, but there was little doubt that as far as the Anglican church was concerned it was an uphill task. One of the main problems was that there were large areas of the ever-growing city where there was a grave shortage of churches. The Corporation had stopped building them back in 1821, and even though a Building Society had been formed in 1839, it was hardly adequate to face up to the huge need that confronted it. If buildings were in short supply, there was not quite such a shortage of brave and hard-working clergy, although more were needed. Outstanding amongst them was Canon Hume, who was vicar of the huge working-class parish of Vauxhall from 1847-1884. Besides being a fine minister, he was also a notable social historian who has provided posterity with much information about the period. Nearby worked Canon Postance amongst people 'lying as a kind of sediment along the edge of Queen's and Brunswick Docks'. There

seemed to be every justification in seeking separation from the 'relic of outworn mediaevalism' of Chester.

The dream was brought to reality by the efforts of John Torr, M.P., with the help of Edward Whitley and Christopher Bushell, leading Liverpool churchmen. Torr exerted his influence by being a member of the Additional Bishopsrics Committee, strongly pressing the case of Liverpool. Under the 1878 Act, the condition of the setting up of the new dioceses was that that could provide endowments estimated around £100,000 which would give the bishop a minimum income of £3,500 a year. Liverpool was the first to fulfil this condition. The Liverpool Bishopric Fund had been started in December 1876, even before the Act had been passed, such was local enthusiasm for the project. Although John Torr died early in 1880, the necessary money was well on its way to being raised. When the Bishop of Chester chaired a meeting of the Bishopric Fund Committee in February of that year, A. B. Forwood was able to report that almost £89,000 had been promised, £72,000 of which had already been invested. They felt now that they could ask the Bishopsrics Committee in London to take steps to establish the bishopric of Liverpool.

The diocese was established by an Order in Council of the 24th March, 1880, to come into effect on the 9th April. It stated firstly that the annual value of the bishopric endowment fund plus the £300 transferred from Chester reached the necessary figure of £3,000 a year. Also that further contributions promised would raise the bishop's income to £3,500 in the following five years. This being so, the bishopric was now established and St. Peter's would be the cathedral church. The new diocese was to comprise 'the whole of the hundred of West Derby in Lancashire with the exception of Leigh, at Chat Moss, adjoining the hundred of Salford. It also includes the township of Aspull, which is part of the parish of Wigan although actually in the Salford hundred'. In such formal terms the diocese of Liverpool became a living reality. It only remained now to find a bishop.

As we have already seen, that man was to be John Charles Ryle. When he preached his farewell sermons at Stradbroke he preached in his episcopal robes, because he had already been consecrated as bishop at York Minster by Archbishop Thomson on June 11th, St. Barnabas' Day. The Archbishop had been willing to consecrate in Liverpool itself, but because St. Peter's was not considered big enough to hold the numbers who would want to attend, York was settled on instead. In fact it was Ryle who made the choice. Speaking after the service,

he confessed that 'it is an easy matter to criticise the actions of the bishops, but it is a far more difficult thing to be a bishop and to enter upon the responsibilities of the appointment'. These words were prophetic indeed, for the man who had always been outspoken in his views of the bishops was soon to find himself involved in a legal dispute which was to cause him no little anxiety and perplexity. Neither could he have imagined the problems that the following years were to bring when, having looked out over the beautiful minster crowded with people, he expressed the wish that he could transfer it to his own diocese. Since that was not possible, he said that he felt certain that the 'merchant princes' of the city of Liverpool would rise to the occasion and provide the necessary cathedral. Again, in the coming years, he was going to find himself somewhat disappointed on this particular matter. A Liverpool clergyman on a voyage abroad at the time of the consecration prayed that the new bishop might remain close to God. 'There is no doubt,' he wrote, 'but that as the clear, light, bright air of the East affects the whole disposition and manner of life, just so does the worldly atmosphere of ecclesiastical dignity influence the soul. He must be a strong man in himself who can fling from him the sunny enchantments of high places.'

On the first day of July, the new Bishop was duly enthroned in his pro-cathedral of St. Peter's. A few days previously to this, an order in council had established the Archdeaconry of Warrington. J. W. Bardsley was appointed to fill the post. This was no surprise to anyone, since he was not only an evangelical, but an old friend of Ryle's. Later on in July came an order giving the Bishop power to constitute his courts and appoint his diocesan officers. Besides this transfer of jurisdiction from Chester, the Bishop also received a small amount of patronage and the right of making 24 honorary canons, if he so desired. This latter transfer was done under a supplementary order of August 3rd. The final landmark in Ryle's establishment as first Bishop of Liverpool was his first ordination service in September, when William Adams, afterwards Vicar of St. Augustine's, Shaw Street, was the first of many men to be ordained deacon and priest over the next twenty years.

There is no doubt that Ryle was well provided for from a financial point of view. Efforts were made to make sure that his income kept on increasing by using part of the endowment money to be invested in buying the advowson of Walton Parish Church, which was one of the best livings in the

diocese. In 1882 an Act was passed by which the advowson was bought for £28,000 providing that when the Vicar of Walton died the income would go to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. They were then to pay out enough money to raise the bishop's income to £4,200. What was left over was to go for 'the better spiritual provision of the parish of Walton'. The Vicar died in 1890 and Ryle received his rise in income. This income, plus the fact that the palace was bought for him in Abercromby Square, meant that the bishop was quite well off financially. On the other hand, he faced the spiritual task of making the gospel of Christ relevant to a million people who were mainly outside the reach of the churches. His job was more concerned with bringing spiritual wealth to his diocese than amassing material wealth for himself.

From 1881 to 1896 Ryle gave a triennial charge to his diocese, in which he spoke of the Anglican situation in Liverpool in particular and in the country in general. The charge he gave at the pro-Cathedral in 1881 set the scene as he found it in Liverpool and gave his hopes for the future. The new diocese was the smallest in area in the country, with the sole exception of London. This had its advantages in that, with the help of the excellent railway system, the bishop could reach any part of the diocese in about an hour. On the other hand, this small area was closely packed with people largely uncatered for by the churches of any denomination. Ryle was impressed not only by the density of the diocese's population, but also by its cosmopolitan character. 'Perhaps there is hardly a district in Great Britain in which you will see such an extraordinary variety of classes!' he said. 'In Liverpool itself you have an enormous body of inhabitants connected with our docks and shipping and an incessant stream of emigrants from the Continent to America. You have smoky manufactories and squalid poverty at one end of the city, and within two or three miles you have fine streets and comparative wealth. In Wigan, Warrington, St. Helens, Widnes, and the districts round these places, you have swarms of people employed in collieries, iron foundries, cotton manufactories, glass-houses and chemical works. Around Ormskirk, Sephton, Hale and Speke you will see admirable farming. In no part of England, perhaps, will you find such a variety of callings, and all are followed with a restless activity.' He saw it as the task of his church to provide a spiritual aspect to this 'restless activity'. It had to be done with the same zeal that the Church of Rome was carrying out on a similar task. Ryle firmly stated the principle upon which all his work in Liverpool was based. 'If the Established

Church of this country claims to be "the Church of the people", it is her bounden duty to see that no part of "the people" are left like sheep without a shepherd. If she claims to be a territorial and not a congregational church, she should never rest until there is neither a street, nor a lane, nor a house, nor a garret, nor a cellar, nor a family, which is not regularly looked after, and provided with the offer of means of grace by her officials.'

Throughout his episcopate, Ryle put his principle into practice by means of a three-pronged plan. Firstly he looked more for what he called 'living agents'. He placed more importance on getting men out into the parishes than he did on building church buildings. For him the church was primarily made up of people, and the time to put up a building was when a number of Christians had been gathered together. He pressed the need for more ordained men in the diocese. On his arrival there were 180 incumbents and 120 curates amongst one million people. He felt this compared badly with somewhere like his old diocese of Norwich, which had 1,160 clergy amongst a population of 660,000. Although he valued the work of the Scripture Readers (who were paid lay helpers), he saw their work as different from, although complementary to, that of ordained men. He had come to the conclusion that 'the lay agent may do excellent service by sowing the seed and cutting down the corn. But if the crop is not to rot on the ground, the sheaves must be bound up and stored away in the barn, and this is the presbyter's work. The Scripture Reader may gather together recruits, and persuade them to enlist in the King's Service. But the presbyter must drill and train and discipline them and show them how to act together, move together and form an efficient regiment'.

Ryle's emphasis upon full-time workers did not mean that he saw no need for church buildings. He was determined to build more and to have smaller parish units for his men to work. His aim was for parishes of no more than 5,000 people, for he felt that when it got over that number 'you might as well send out of the Mersey a Cunard or White Star steamer, with a crew of only 20 men all told, and expect her to cross the Atlantic and reach New York in safety'. When he spoke of buildings he did not just mean parish churches, but also mission-rooms, which he considered 'an indispensable part of parochial machinery without which no hard-working clergyman can ever work comfortably'. The bishop continued to bemoan the hardness of the situation in Liverpool Diocese in the following years. He was saddened by the fact that Liver-

pool had one of the greatest disproportions between the number of clergy and people in the whole country. In 1890 he pointed out that of the four dioceses created under the 1878 Act, Liverpool was the worst off in its numbers of clergy. He was always conscious of the fact that the diocese did not attract men with high academic qualifications, but he put this down to the fact that there was never any chance of offering curates 'anything worth calling a living'. He was not in any position to help in this matter because he had only five livings in his own gift and a few in which he presented alternatively with the Crown. Nonetheless, although he realised that 'districts like Lancashire are not so popular with young men as Middlesex, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hertfordshire and the sunny South Bank', he claimed that his clergy were in no way inferior in quality to those of any other diocese.

In spite of these deficiencies, some progress was made and 42 new churches were built plus 48 mission halls. The number of incumbents rose by a total of 36 and that of curates by 110. Confirmation numbers had risen from 4,500 to 8,300 and the number of Sunday School scholars was around the 100,000 mark. Of course spiritual success can never be summed up in statistics, but it is at least a sign of some advance that more and more people began to attend church. In 1881 and 1891 the *Liverpool Daily Post* organised a religious survey of Liverpool. It collected comparative numbers at both morning and evening services for all denominations. Naturally this sort of survey can never be exact because of such imponderable factors as differences in the weather and the impossibility of estimating how many people attended both services. In one sense there could be no cause for complacency, for although in the ten years the total numbers attending every type of church had risen from 147,000 to 165,000, this was only just about keeping pace with the rising population of something over 500,000. This left getting on for a quarter of the population still outside the churches. As far as the Anglican Church was concerned, numbers of attenders rose from 54,000 to 66,000. It could not be considered that shortage of churches was in itself the answer to the problem, for the Liverpool city area covered by the survey was served by over 70 Anglican churches plus a number of mission churches attached to the parish church. With the inclusion of the Roman Catholic, Non-Conformist and Independent churches, the number stood at well over 200. It is little more than a historical myth to think that the Anglican churches in those days were full. With one or two exceptions, such as St. Nathaniel's, Windsor, most

were round about half full, while some, especially in areas of high Roman Catholic density, were almost empty. A church in one of the poorer districts had a congregation of only 18 in a building which would hold 800. It was reported that 'a damp smell pervaded the church'. One observer came to the conclusion that 'it would seem as if the better-to-do part of the population of Liverpool goes to church while the poorer go nowhere'.

Ryle was deeply hurt by remarks made by William Gladstone in the House of Commons regarding Liverpool. Speaking on a bill to create a new bishopric in Bristol, he took Liverpool as being a strong argument for not creating new bishoprics. For a city where the influence of the Church of England was so strong he considered that 'the religious census of Liverpool was a disgrace to Liverpool and to the country'. He said it was a city notable for its non-worshippers and Sabbath-breakers. This was not calculated to endear him to the Bishop any more than did his calling Liverpool a 'Dead Sea'! Ryle replied by complaining that people were expecting too much in too short a time. 'I saw the difficulties before me, and came to my post prepared to face them and bear patiently the unkind remarks that would be made.' His defence was that his position was like that of the 'captain of some huge steamship who is suddenly called upon to start a voyage across the Atlantic with half the crew, half the engineers and half the coals the ship requires'.

The majority of the clergy were dedicated hard-working men who presented Christ as being relevant not only to spiritual but also to bodily needs. As well as preaching the gospel of salvation, they also helped to relieve the material poverty of their parishes, especially in the working-class areas of Toxteth, Everton and Kirkdale. Liverpool produced a number of outstanding philanthropists in the nineteenth century, in the days before paid social and community workers. Typical of them was Kitty Wilkinson, who died in 1860. A working woman herself, during a cholera epidemic in 1832 she did all she could to help the victims. At one stage she spent 23 hours at her mangle cleaning the fever-infected clothes of her neighbours. At the other end of the social scale were people like Margaret Beavan, who did a tremendous amount of work on behalf of crippled children. But this work of outstanding individuals was complemented by the day-to-day steady toil of the parish clergy. Outstanding amongst Roman Catholics was a priest called Nugent. A flamboyant character, his work ranged from helping unmarried and destitute mothers to schools for

poor children and prison work. Perhaps outstanding amongst the Anglicans was Major Lester, who became vicar of St. Mary's, Kirkdale, in 1855, where he remained until his death 48 years later. During this time he founded three other churches in Kirkdale. The final one, St. Lawrence's, was the cause of a disagreement between Major Lester and Ryle. Ryle wished it to remain a chapel of ease, in spite of the fact that it had 400-500 weddings a year. It took from 1884 until 1893 for Major Lester to persuade the Bishop to consecrate it as a parish church. But he was best known for his social work. He founded Ragged Schools, which were heralded as 'a triumph of Christian philanthropy. They are the only schools of the kind in the city or in the country'. Besides this he started a Girls' Home and got a public library for Kirkdale. He was also responsible for the opening of Stanley Hospital in 1871. Although he worked so hard that at one stage he was forced to take a two-year rest, he became known over a wide area and letters used to arrive addressed simply to 'Revd Major Lester, Don't know his private address'.

Across the city, another evangelical, Richard Hobson, had become vicar of St. Nathaniel's, Windsor, in 1864, although the church itself was not consecrated until five years later. The parish of 4,500 was known as the 'little hell', because of the atrocious conditions under which the people lived. Hobson started from scratch, holding his first service in a cellar with a congregation of 'three women, one man and a little fellow who sat on a creaky stool'. From this small beginning the work rapidly grew, until in 1875 the annual report could state 'there are four services in church on Sundays, attended by over 3,000 worshippers'. Hobson was an indefatigable house-to-house visitor who, by this means, came to know people's problems and needs. He was perhaps drawn closest to his people when, during an epidemic, he was willing still to go to those who were ill, even at the risk of contracting the disease himself.

The high church clergy were just as devoted to the people in their parishes, a fair example being St. Margaret's, Princes Road. Fairly typical, too, was St. Chad's, Everton Valley, opened as a mission room in 1880 and consecrated in 1885. Here the vicar, J. W. Rhodes, a moderate high-churchman, showed an active concern for the poor of the parish, amongst other things opening a clothing store for them.

At the centre of the diocese, Ryle built a strong team around him. Although he distributed his canonries to men of all shades of churchmanship, his archdeacons were always evangelicals. He inherited his first Archdeacon of Liverpool, John

Jones, of Christ Church, Waterloo, from the previous regime, but he was succeeded by William Lefroy, Vicar of St. Andrew's, Renshaw Street. Lefroy was made Dean of Norwich in 1889, causing Bishop Wilberforce to comment how surprisingly fast keen evangelicals became good Anglicans when they became part of a Cathedral Chapter. His place as Archdeacon was taken by W. F. Madden. When John Bardsley, Archdeacon of Warrington and Vicar of St. Saviour's, Falkner Square, was appointed Bishop of Sodor and Man, he was followed in turn by Benjamin Clarke, of Christ Church, Southport, and Thomas Madden, of St. Luke's, Bold Street. The Bishop felt the need of more assistance as time went by and his physical energy began to fail. In 1891, rather than ask for a suffragan bishop, he appointed Bishop Royston, who had been Bishop of Mauritius, to assist him in his duties. During Ryle's episcopate, the clergy of the diocese produced two diocesan bishops from its ranks, namely John Sheepshanks, Vicar of St. Margaret's, Anfield, who became Bishop of Norwich in 1893, and J. W. Diggle, Vicar of Mossley Hill, who, in 1896, became Archdeacon of Westmorland and later Bishop of Carlisle.

Supporting the work of the 'living agents' and the churches was the third prong of the tripod, the diocesan machinery. Right at the beginning, the bishop founded five institutions which he felt were of prime importance. They were for the building of churches and mission rooms, the augmentation of small livings, aiding church extension and meeting church expenses in large poor parishes, for promoting and assisting education, and for maintaining the Warrington charities for the widows and daughters of the clergy. Ryle was disappointed at the financial response he got from the diocese to support these causes. In 1885, for example, he pointed out that 80 parishes were making no contribution at all. Two years later, on the same question, he expressed the hope that when asked to preach in a parish he would not have to reply, 'I cannot give you a sermon if you do not have an annual collection for Diocesan purposes'.

Gradually, under Ryle's leadership, other societies were established. Amongst them were the Liverpool Bible Women's Society, the Diocesan Girls' Friendly Society, the Diocesan Waifs and Strays Society, the Voluntary Lay Helpers' Society, The Mothers' Union, and the Diocesan Temperance Society. In this latter one, the bishop had a particular interest. Not only was he the President of the Branch, but took an active part in

petitioning the Liverpool Licensing Bench to restrict the sale of drink to children and other similar matters.

The financial position of his clergy was always of major concern to their bishop and he took active steps to provide for their needs. There was already a Diocesan Finance Association when he arrived in Liverpool. This had been inherited from Chester, where it had been started in 1873. But Ryle improved upon it and added to it a sustentation fund. He had got the idea from the Free Church of Scotland and its aim was to help those clergy in poor livings. Ryle started it in 1891 and by the end of the century it had an income of £1,000 a year, from which it made 17 grants. The idea was a new one to the Church of England and was eventually copied by other dioceses. So at least in this realm Ryle was something of an innovator. The critical *Liverpool Review* did not think too much of his efforts. It felt that some clergy 'got a great deal more than they were worth', rather cynically adding a reference to the bishop's own income. But he was not only concerned to help his clergy when they were working, but also when they retired. To this end he introduced the first clergy pension scheme in the country. He was able to start it because of the generosity of Mrs. Charles Turner, of the Dingle, who donated £20,000 in 1886. Her late husband had been a wealthy man and a keen Christian, and she had decided to use his fortune for Church purposes. Four years previously, she had given £40,000 to provide a hospital for incurables.

The final area of expansion in diocesan work was in the realm of education. Although the bishop did not believe that it was essential to have free education, when the passing of the Free Education Act made this compulsory he did his best to put it into effect. He was greatly in favour when in 1897 a grant of five shilling per head was given to the voluntary schools. He was instrumental in the forming of a Diocesan Church Schools' Association to distribute this grant. He did not become a member of the Association's board because this was limited to school managers, and it was also the practice of the bishops not to have anything to do with the distribution of the money. The strength of the church schools increased considerably over the bishop's twenty years. In 1881 the diocesan inspector, J. W. Watson, reported that he had examined 378 departments. In them were 140 qualified assistant teachers, 261 ex-pupil teachers, 543 pupil teachers, 168 stipendiary monitors, and 57,966 children. Eighteen years later, F. F. Grensted examined 455 departments in the 243 schools in the diocese. He found 504 qualified assistants, 673

ex-pupil teachers, 552 pupil teachers, 263 stipendiary monitors and 88,315 children.

Besides strictly diocesan matters, Ryle was always interested in other Christian activity in the area. He admired the work of the Mersey Mission to Seamen and was chief speaker at the opening of its institute in Hanover Street in 1885. The bishop supported the visits of Moody and Sankey to Liverpool in 1875 and 1883. Canon Hobson recorded of the first visit that it was 'not without some hesitation did I sign the invitation sent to them, but when they came and I heard Moody preach the gospel and Sankey sing it, I recognised that the blessed Spirit of God was using them'. During the second visit Ryle remarked that 'I am one of those who thank God extremely for Mr. Moody' and emphasised that 'there is nothing sensational, no beating of drums and blowing of trumpets'. The *Liberal Review* was not so enthusiastic about the American evangelists. It concluded that 'the Bishop of Liverpool seeking the assistance of Mr. Moody is in the position of a properly qualified physician calling in the aid of an unauthorised practitioner who, in medical phraseology, would be termed a quack'.

In 1896 the Student Volunteer Missionary Conference was held in Liverpool and amongst its members were such future missionaries as Donald Frazer and Douglas Thornton. The bishop was asked to give the opening conference address. In his usual forthright terms he told the students, 'If you go forth in the name of the Lord Jesus, armed with the Word of God, and holding the truth of God, lifting up the Cross and saying to all to whom you go, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world", I cannot doubt that the good seed will bear abundant fruit, although you may not live to see it'. One thousand students attended the five-day conference, including 77 from overseas. Ryle and Bishop Royston made themselves available for counsel and advice.

Because of his family connections and his admiration for their founder, Ryle gave a special welcome to the Wesleyan Conference when it came to Liverpool, entertaining its leading members at the Palace. But it was not only on such official occasions that the bishop was in evidence. He believed in getting out and letting the people see him. He paid regular visits to the fish markets and the docks and would give a farewell talk on board ship to emigrants who were leaving the city for overseas. The bishop felt this to be an important part of his ministry. Speaking to a meeting of bishops, he once said, 'I think that every parochial clergyman from whose parish

emigrants are gone, should open early communication with the clergymen at the emigrant port . . . in order that suitable arrangements may be made for the reception, accommodation and general care of the emigrant until the hour that he sails'. Under the auspices of the Diocesan Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge there were six clergy working full time in Liverpool amongst the emigrants, and 50 boarding houses were provided to cater for their needs.

It is evident from what we have seen that Ryle needs to be given more credit for what he achieved in the realm of diocesan work than either his detractors or he himself were willing to give. Given the fact that he was starting a new diocese and that he had come from years of country ministry, it is difficult to fault the energy and vigour with which he tackled a difficult job in a primarily industrial area, the sort of area in which the Church of England has always been notably weak. The judgment of history on the bishop has tended to be clouded by the two issues which gained him most publicity, which in the main was critical. It is these two matters we shall look at next, that of his failure to build a cathedral and, more important still, his involvement in the prosecution of Bell-Cox, Vicar of St. Margaret's, Princes Road.

Although Ryle spoke at his consecration at York of his desire for a new Liverpool Cathedral to be built, the idea had been first mooted by Sir James Picton some three years previously. Picton suggested that St. John's Churchyard, behind the St. George's Hall, would make a good site for it. This was prophetic, because the same conclusion was reached seven years later. Following Picton's suggestion, it was announced in 1878 that Mrs. Turner was willing to give £5,000 towards the cost of a cathedral as well as £5,000 towards the establishment of the bishopric. However, nothing came of this offer. Probably it was not taken up because the pressure of work involved in the forming of the diocese left no time to consider the building of a cathedral. When St. Peter's was appointed as the pro-Cathedral, Harmood Banner, one of the churchwardens, suggested that it would be better to demolish it and build a new cathedral on the site. Architecturally, in fact, St. Peter's was an ugly church of barn-like proportions. However, in view of the lack of a suitable alternative, £576 was spent on the church to make it as suitable as possible to act as a temporary cathedral. Unfortunately it was not quite as temporary as most people thought.

The bishop made his position plain as regards the cathedral right from the start. In his charge to the diocese in 1881 he

recognised that there were good reasons for building a cathedral, but warned that the cost had to be counted. Whilst other cathedral cities had the advantage of either a church fit to be a cathedral or endowments, Liverpool was not quite in that position. Truro had been quoted as a diocese where they were getting on with the job of building a cathedral, but Ryle pointed out that Truro diocese 'hardly needs another church to be built on it, and . . . can easily concentrate all (its) efforts on a cathedral'. He had no objection to a cathedral, but made it clear 'my first and foremost business, as bishop of a new diocese, is to provide for preaching the Gospel to souls now entirely neglected, whom no cathedral would touch'. His position during the following years remained 'new churches before a cathedral'. However, he tried to keep an open mind on the matter, and in the same year invited Dean Hanson of Chester to read a paper at the diocesan conference stating the case for a cathedral.

A committee was formed in 1883 to discuss possible sites. At last it seemed that something might be done. Various possibilities were discussed—St. Peter's, Monument Place, St. James' Mount and St. John's Churchyard. At length the last-named was decided upon, not without dissent, and in 1885 the Liverpool Cathedral Act received royal assent. The bishop was in favour of the site agreed upon. He realised that 'not a single site could be found which would not be open to the most serious objections', but considered that at least St. John's had the merit of being in the city centre. Then his optimism revealed itself. 'As to the capabilities of the site for the erection of a building worthy of the second city of the empire, I shall not trust myself to give an opinion. I will only say it is declared to be such by one of the most experienced architects of the day.' He felt that there were wealthy families in the diocese who could put down £100,000 and hardly miss it. He concluded, 'I am quite content to leave the whole affair in the hands of Him who has all hearts under His control. If we mean to have a cathedral it is our duty to begin work, and if we do not live to see it completed, I believe those who come after us will place the top stone upon it'. The Committee held a competition for the best design, which was won by William Emerson. His plans 'showed a Gothic building with a large dome reminiscent of Brunelleschi's dome at Florence Cathedral'.

But the plans were never put into operation. Even though Sir Andrew Walker donated £10,000, there was little support for the project. This was partly because so many thought St.

John's a bad site because the cathedral would be obscured by St. George's Hall. The other factor was that the city was going through a time of commercial depression which made the manufacturing class more reluctant to untie their purse strings. The net result was that the three years during which the Act was operative ran out, and the whole scheme was dead.

There were various opinions over Ryle's approach to the cathedral. His successor, Bishop Chavasse, speaking soon after his death in 1900, said, 'Bishop Ryle's episcopate is a magnificent record of the building of churches and mission rooms, and the augmentation of our poorer livings. He worked up to a cathedral, and his policy has brought its erection within the range of practical politics. In his wise organisation of the diocese lies the machinery by which the work can be accomplished'. This was a generous conclusion, but perhaps he could have said little else in the circumstances. According to Sir William Fulwood, who was closely connected with the cathedral for many years, 'the bishop did not help the cause, for though in a way he was anxious that a cathedral should be built, he freely expressed his opinion, both in public and in private, that additional churches and mission halls would be more useful. In his heart I do not think he was ever enthusiastically in favour of the cathedral scheme'. Sir William was near the truth. Down the years the bishop continued to raise the question of finance. 'I have grave doubts whether we shall get it,' he said in 1896 about the cathedral. 'Our many critics, from Mr. Gladstone downwards, appear to forget that the sites, the fabric, and the endowment of a new cathedral would cost at least half a million of money. The diligent committee which fifteen years ago I regularly attended at the Town Hall, spent twelve weary months in considering the whole subject and found that the estimate of the three designs offered to them for a cathedral alone was £400,000 each.' But if the enthusiasm had really been there in the first place, Ryle would surely have got the money together. The reason it was not was that he had concluded from the very start that 'a cathedral is a luxury, and not a necessity'. Again he confessed, 'I cannot make an idol of a cathedral, as some people seem to do. I do not think it a primary object in such a diocese as ours, where more churches and living agents are the first things wanted'. His opinion was backed up by such men as William Groves, a leading Merseyside layman, who in 1882 gave £10,000 for the building of new churches in the diocese. He did this because he felt it 'more important to provide pastoral superintendence and spiritual instruction to those perishing multitudes

than to erect a material building, however splendid. to justify the tastes and wishes of a few'. The bishop had his priorities right. Many saw a cathedral as little more than a status symbol. Something which no diocese should be without. Ryle was concerned first and foremost with giving his clergy the tools to do the job and of taking the message of Christ into the farthest parts of the diocese. Presenting the claims of Christ to each person was of more interest to him than the building of a cathedral, even if it was supposed to be to God's glory. He left this task for a following generation to commence. It took a long time to finish it.

When it became evident that the building of the cathedral would remain a dream in his time, Ryle turned his attention during his last few years to the building of a much needed Church House. As the organisation in the diocese grew, so the existing diocesan rooms in Commerce Court became more and more inadequate. The situation was so bad that the official diocesan papers were kept in Chester. The subject was brought up at a number of diocesan conferences, but nothing practical was done until 1896, when Archdeacon Madden suggested to the bishop that some leading clergy and laity should meet together to discuss the matter. From the meeting a committee was formed. They were to find a place which, according to Ryle's instructions, was to be 'in a central position and contain one or two large committee rooms, a diocesan registry, a room for bishop's interviews, offices for some of our chief societies, and a reading room where Churchmen can meet one another'. He estimated the cost at £50,000. The following year a suitable site became available in the centre of the city and was bought. The foundation stone was laid by the Countess of Derby in 1899. When Ryle died in the following year he left his huge library to found a theological library in Church House. The first part of the building was eventually opened by the Archbishop of York in 1901 and the complete unit by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1912.

(To be continued)