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THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF ROBERT HALL, 1764 - 1831.

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS

IN THE

UNIVERSITY of DURHAM

IN FULFILMENT of the REQUIREMENT for the

DEGREE of MASTER of LETTERS.

BY

ANGUS HAMILTON MACLEOD.

1957.

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PREFACE.

G. M. Trevelyan has described the reign of George III (1760 - 1820) as "an era of great men"[1], for it was the era of Nelson and Wellington, of Fox and Pitt, of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Scott and Byron, of Wilberforce and Carey, and many more. Should Robert Hall be included in such a list? Many of his contemporaries would have had no doubt about the answer. A leading journal of the time referred to him as "perhaps the greatest of modern English preachers"[2]. A judge of the High Court affirmed, "I can truly say, that I have never in the pulpit, or in the senate, or at the Bar, heard anything which has led me to doubt that he was the greatest orator of his time"[3]. Sir James Mackintosh declared that no dissenting minister surpassed Robert Hall in talent and that none approached him "in taste and elegance of composition"[4]. The philosopher, Dugald Stewart, said, "He who would read the English language in perfection must acquaint himself with the

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1. G. M. Trevelyan : History of England (1945),p.508.
2. Edinburgh Review. Oct.1840, Vol.72, p.81.
3. Mr. Justice Mellor quoted in The Hall Family by R.H.Warren, p.73.
4. Gregory's Memoir, p.130.

writings of Robert Hall".[1] Hannah More, the philanthropist and reformer, remarked, "There was no one in the church, nor out of it, comparable in talents to Robert Hall".[2]

With such a reputation it would natural to expect the name of Robert Hall to be almost as widely known as Wesley, Wilberforce or Carey. The truth is very different. His name means little to the overwhelming majority in the modern world. Even within his own denomination, he is largely unknown. From a group of fifty young Baptists in the North of England in 1954, including a good proportion of University students, only three had ever heard the name of Robert Hall, and these knew nothing about him except that "he was a famous Baptist". This seems typical of the denomination as a whole. To all intents and purposes the fame of Robert Hall died with his own generation and there is a sad contrast between his once widespread renown and the obscurity which now surrounds his memory.

The primary object of this thesis is to find out whether Robert Hall was as great a man as his contemporaries believed; and whether his influence on history was so negligible as to

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1. Quoted by J. P. Mursell in Robert Hall, his Genius and his Writings (1854), p.15.
2. J. Cottle : Early Recollections. I.p.104 (note).

warrant the present ignorance concerning him.

Apart from the memoirs written by his contemporaries, only two biographies of Robert Hall, of any length, have been published. These are: Robert Hall by E. Paxton Hood, published in the "Men Worth Remembering" series in 1881; and Robert Hall by Graham W. Hughes, published by the Carey Press in 1943. Both of these biographies are of a popular character and do not claim to be based on an exhaustive study of the sources.

The major sources used in this thesis are as follows:

A. ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT MATERIAL.

1. Minutes, letters and other documents in the possession of St. Andrews Street Baptist Church, Cambridge; Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol; Westgate Road Baptist Church, Newcastle-upon-Tyne; and at the Carey Cottage, Harvey Lane, Leicester.
2. Unpublished letters and other documents in the Bristol Baptist College Library.
3. Extensive notes by John Ryley - a member of the Harvey Lane Baptist Church, Leicester - of sermons preached by Hall at Leicester. The bulk of these notes are in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, but a few are in Bristol Baptist College Library.

B. CONTEMPORARY PUBLISHED WORKS etc.

1. The memoirs and reminiscences of Hall's friends: Olinthus Gregory, John Greene, J. W. Morris and Frederick Trestrail.
2. Sermon notes published by Thomas Grinfield and John Greene.
3. The WORKS of Robert Hall, in six volumes, edited by Olinthus Gregory.
4. Eight sermons, largely biographical, published immediately following Hall's death.
5. The Hall Family by R. H. Warren, printed privately in 1910. This is a particularly valuable source because it contains extracts from private family papers not published in any other work.
6. References to Hall have been found in a variety of memoirs and correspondence of such contemporaries as John Foster, Sir James Mackintosh, William Wilberforce, etc.

C. NEWSPAPERS, JOURNALS, etc.

The local papers at Bristol, Cambridge and Leicester have been examined as well as reports of Hall's preaching in various magazines and journals. A particularly thorough examination

has been made of the Baptist Magazine and the Missionary Herald.

In the course of this research, I have visited the main centres of Hall's ministry at Arnesby, Cambridge, Leicester and Bristol. I have also consulted the materials concerning Hall in the following libraries:- the library of the British Museum, London; the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; the local collections in the public libraries of Bristol, Cambridge and Leicester; the library at Baptist Church House, London; Dr. Williams' Library, London; and the libraries of Regent's Park, Rawdon, Manchester, Glasgow and Bristol Baptist Colleges.

In this thesis, except where otherwise stated, all quotations from Hall's writings are taken from the 7th. (1841) edition of The Works of Robert Hall (6 vols.) edited by Olinthus Gregory, and the original spelling etc. has been retained throughout.

S P E C I A L N O T E

In the course of this research I have traced the present generation of the Hall family, and am specially grateful to Mrs. Robert Hall Warren and Mr. Nigel Warren of 49 Canynge Road, Bristol, 8, for their kindness in showing me some old portraits and family papers in their possession.

These documents consist of some of the original manuscript letters of Robert Hall used by Dr. Gregory in his Memoir and by Robert Hall Warren in his book The Hall Family.

As these documents have been extensively quoted in these works it has not been necessary in this Thesis to quote from the original manuscripts.

PART I.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS.

1764 - 1785.

I. THE BACKGROUND of the AGE.

Robert Hall lived in what E. A. Payne has called, "one of the most significant periods in all human history."[1] It was the era of revolutions - the Industrial Revolution, the American Revolution, the French Revolution - when rapid and fundamental changes took place in the pattern of English life.

Abroad, Wolfe's victory in Canada and Clive's genius in India which seemed to have established England in the forefront of the nations, were counterbalanced in a few years, by the loss of the American colonies and the rise of revolutionary France. For twenty years England was at war with Napoleon. She eventually emerged the victor, and the strongest and most powerful nation in the world; but to the ordinary people of England, victory abroad was clouded by serious trouble at home. In 1815 the country seemed on the verge of revolution.[2] Throughout the war

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1. E. A. Payne: The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England, p.88.
2. See J. H. Plumb: England in the 18th. Century (1953), p.214.

and for years before it, the Industrial Revolution, stimulated by scientific invention and a rising population, had been slowly changing the face of the country. New towns were rising, canals and roads were being built, and factories were being established, especially in the midlands and north of England.[1] Such was the revolutionary nature of the change that the political structure of the nation began to crack under the strain. Reform became an urgent necessity and the growing working classes began to fight for political recognition. The situation was aggravated by a series of bad harvests, which together with a post-war depression in trade, seriously reduced the living standards of the working classes. Threatened with starvation they began to wreck the machinery which seemed to be causing all their misery; and the government, without vision or foresight, repressed these outbreaks brutally.[2]

Parallel to this industrial and social turmoil, there was a revival in the religious life of England. During

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1. See G. M. Trevelyan: English Social History (1946), chapters XV and XVI.
2. See A. Bryant: The Age of Elegance (1950), chapter 11.

most of the 18th. century the churches had been declining and had little vital impact on society; but the evangelical awakening, under the leadership of John Wesley, jolted the Established Church out of its complacency and resuscitated a barely tolerated, and almost dying, Dissent. Partly as a result of this revival, and partly as a result of the principles underlying the American and French revolutions, a new spirit of philanthropy inspired men. There was a growing interest in education and social reform, and the beginnings of a concern for the victims of industrialization. The modern missionary movement rapidly developed and a variety of religious and humanitarian societies flourished.[1]

The Baptists had been slow to share in this revival. For a long time they viewed with suspicion the progress of the Methodists and many of them remained enmeshed in extreme calvinism; but by 1792, thanks to enlightened men like William Carey and Andrew Fuller, they were moving forward with new life and enthusiasm. They pioneered the new missionary advance, and along with other dissenters,

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1. E. A. Payne: Op. Cit., chapter 6.

championed civil and religious liberty. Their evangelistic zeal, as the census figures for 1801 and 1851 show, resulted in a marked increase in their numbers.[1]

It was into this world of change and tumult, of revival and reform, that Robert Hall was born.

II. THE HALL FAMILY.

Hall's ancestors had lived for generations on a farm in the Northumberland village of Black Heddon, twelve miles north-west of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.[2] The earliest records concerning them go back to the period 1692-1705 when, in the accounts, receipts, etc. concerning the tenants of Black Heddon, the names of Robert and William Hall are mentioned.[3] His grandfather, Christopher Hall, a member of the Church

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1. A. C. Underwood: A History of the English Baptists (1947), p.201.
2. Black Heddon was then a small village with a population of about 50. For further details see the County History of Northumberland, Vol.XII, p.279.
3. IBID, p.335.

of England,[1] died in 1740, and his father (usually designated Robert Hall, senior, or Robert Hall of Arnesby to distinguish him from his son) was brought up by an uncle who farmed at Kirtley, three miles from Black Heddon.[2]

The story of the conversion of Hall senior is reminiscent of John Bunyan and many another dissenter. He was taken by his uncle to a local Presbyterian meeting, where, under a grimly calvinistic ministry, he heard "some awful things respecting future punishment". Such preaching filled the lad with despair. He was obsessed by his own guilt before God and felt himself trembling on the brink of perdition. Then one day, while riding, he was thrown violently from his horse and for many months endured great suffering as a result of broken bones in both arms, a dislocated shoulder and smashed collar bone. Such was the state of his mind that in this severe accident he saw the hand of God reaching out in judgment against him. In an agony of mind he made frantic efforts to work out his own salvation, but, as he said later, the doleful sound of "damnation,

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1. The Hall Family, p.6 (note).
2. J. W. Morris: Memoir of Hall of Arnesby (1828), p.14.

damnation" sounded continually in his ears. Eventually, at the age of twenty-two, after careful study of the Scriptures, he experienced conversion. He then left the meeting where he had heard only the message of doom and sought out a meeting five miles away "where the gospel was preached".[1]

In the meantime, his elder brother, Christopher, had shocked the family by joining the Baptists at Hamsterley. This was in 1745, and, to add to the scandal, two years later he married the sister of a local Baptist leader, William Angus,[2] and began preaching for the Baptists. Hall was greatly concerned that his brother should have embraced such Baptist heresies, and one week-end, accompanied by two student friends, James Rutherford and William Peden, he called on David Fernie, the leading Baptist preacher of the district to discuss with him the question of baptism. After hours of argument the trio were placed in such difficulty that they were glad of an excuse to leave.

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1. IBID, pp.14-16.
2. F. G. Twitchett: A Short History of Rowley Baptist Church (1952), p.19.

Hall, however, was determined to find out the truth, and, collecting all the books he could find in defence of infant-baptism, set out to answer Fernie's arguments. But the more he studied, the more he became convinced that Fernie was right. Swallowing his pride, he therefore went to Fernie and was baptised by him on January 5th.,1752 and was added to the little church under his care at Juniper Dye-House.[1] His friend, James Rutherford, thanks to "information received from Robert Hall" also became convinced of believers' baptism and was baptised.[2]

Juniper Dye-House, then belonging to William Angus, had been licensed as a meeting-house in 1749 and it was here that the new convert first displayed his talents as a preacher. Within a year, Hall (now twenty-four years old and married to a local girl, Jane Catchaside) was invited to engage in the work of the ministry.

Meanwhile in the village of Arnesby in Leicestershire,[3]

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1. Douglas: History of the Baptist Churches in the North of England (1846); see also Morris: Op. Cit., p.18.
2. James Rutherford: Thoughts on Believers' Baptism.
3. Population about 300. See County History of Leicestershire (1955), Vol.III, p.160 ff.

the Baptist church was having difficulty in finding a minister. One of the chief reasons seems to have been concerned with the manse attached to the meeting-house. The property had been bequeathed to the church, along with several acres of land, by a former minister, Benjamin Winkles; but during the vacancy following the death of his successor (Daniel Hill), one of the trustees occupied the manse, "in a manner which created much suspicion". The vacancy continued for more than two years, and the trustee, who had obtained the title-deeds, established himself in the house. This was the situation when, in 1752, Christopher Hall visited Arnesby and preached for two Sundays. During his visit he mentioned that he had a younger brother, Robert, who might fill the vacancy. An invitation was therefore sent north to Robert at Juniper Dye-House, but his brother said nothing about "the discouraging circumstance of the trustee being in the possession of the house and premises". Robert, however, felt he ought to accept the call and in June 1753 came to Arnesby with his wife and child. So began a notable ministry lasting thirty-seven years.[1]

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1. J. W. Morris: Memoir of Hall of Arnesby (1828), p.20ff.; see also W.Bassett: History of the Baptist Church at Arnesby (1856), p.7 ff.

To be Baptist minister at Arnesby was no sinecure. The trustee refused to give up the church property and for six years the congregation was obliged to worship in a private dwelling. Nor did the stipend of under £15 a year make for a life of comfort. Even for that age it was a poor sum on which to keep a wife and family; but Robert and his wife resolved, "we would not run into debt, let us live as hardly as we might". To complete the dismal picture, the services were often interrupted by villagers pressing round the windows of the house where Hall was preaching and vigorously disturbing the worship. Such a combination of circumstances would have been too much for most men, but Robert Hall of Arnesby was able to write: "It appeared pretty evident to myself and my wife that we were placed where God would have us be".[1]

Eventually the hostility of the villagers faded, the meeting-house and manse were returned to the church, and in 1757 Hall was officially licensed as a preacher. The licence reads: "At the General Quarter Session of the Peace holden for the City of London, at the Guildhall, within the said city on Monday the eighteenth day of April in the thirtieth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord

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1. J. W. Morris: Op.Cit., p. 23.

George the second, King of Great Britain .....
Robert Hall, a minister, preacher or teacher of a congregation of protestants dissenting from the Church of England who scruple the Baptizing of infants, commonly called Baptists, came into this court and in pursuance of an Act of Parliament ..... did make and subscribe the Declaration mentioned in a statute made in the thirtieth year of the reign of King Charles the second".[1]

III. CHILDHOOD.

The manse at Arnesby was a comfortable building of one storey attached to the meeting-house by a corridor. A garden and adjoining graveyard, together with a few acres of land, completed the property.[2] It was in this manse that the fourteenth child was born on May 2nd. 1764, and was

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1. The Hall Family, p.8.
2. The manse can still be seen at Arnesby. It dates from 1700 and is listed as a building of "Architectural and historic interest" under the Local Government, Town and Country Planning Act, 1947.

named Robert after his father. It is a sad commentary on the medical knowledge of the time that only six out of the fourteen Hall children survived infancy. Robert, the youngest, only just survived. At one time the child was so weak that death seemed inevitable, and as the mother anxiously watched over him, she called out in an agony, "He is gone - the child is dead!" But he rallied and for two years was so weak that a nurse had to be employed to look after him. She proved an excellent choice and Nancy soon became almost a part of the family.[1]

Her methods of building up the health of the sickly infant sound strange to modern ears. Sometimes she carried him close behind the plough in the field, believing that the smell of newly turned earth had a beneficial effect. Another of her remedies was to deposit the child close by the sheep in the fold where the atmosphere was thought to be specially salubrious.[2] Despite such treatment the child survived and by the time he was two, was able to crawl around the garden and graveyard.

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1. Morris' Recollections, p. 26.

2. Gregory's Memoir, p.2.

It was in the graveyard, where the inscriptions on the tomb-stones were his text-book, that Nancy taught him to read. She did her work so well that within a short time, young Robert was reading incessantly and asking innumerable questions.

His first regular schooling began before he was six years of age, when he was placed under the care of Dame Scotton and later, Mrs. Lyley. Even at this early age, reading was his delight and in every spare moment he would slip off to the graveyard, lie on the grass and read his father's books.

In 1770, as a lad of six, he was sent to Wigston village, four miles away, where Mr. Simmons had a school. At first, he and his elder brother John walked the four miles, morning and evening, but severe pains in his back (which were to trouble him all his life) proved too much of a handicap, and, despite the help of his school friends who often carried him along the road, he had to give up the daily journey. Because of this, his father arranged lodgings for the boys at a friend's house in Wigston village, so that they could travel to school on Monday mornings and return to Arnesby the following Saturday.

Robert was taught by Mr. Simmons until he was eleven years of age, but the schoolmaster then complained that he had to sit up half the night preparing lessons for his brilliant pupil and could no longer stand the strain. The boy was certainly precocious. Hall, in later years, admitted that his youthful learning was unusual.[1] At seven years of age he was composing hymns.[2] At eight, his father was teaching him Latin and Greek.[3] At nine, with the help of the village tailor, a member of his father's congregation, he was reading such works as Butler's Analogy and Jonathan Edwards on The Will and The Affections. At ten, he was writing religious essays.[4]

As a backcloth to this rapid intellectual advance, there was the home life at Arnesby. His father obtained a pony for him and the boy accompanied his father on many of his journeys round the villages. At other times he

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1. Morris' Recollections, p.29.
2. IBID, p.44.
3. J. Greene: Memoir prefixed to Exposition of the Philippians (1843), p.XXIII.
4. Gregory's Memoir, p.3.

wandered into the hay fields and became a favourite with the labourers who were fascinated by his conversation. But the peace of Arnesby was shattered one March night in 1773. It was about 1 o'clock in the morning. The Hall household were all asleep. Suddenly the piercing cry of "Murder" rent the air and a terror-stricken neighbour appeared at the manse covered in blood. He had been brutally attacked by a thief and had only escaped by crashing through the window. This experience seriously affected Mrs. Hall who had been feeling depressed for some weeks. From this time forth she could not sleep properly and kept waking up in the night in fear and trembling. She began to feel that God was angry with her and that hell was her inevitable lot. Her husband wrote of her, "She was rendered as completely miserable as perhaps anyone in this world was ever known to be", and added, "from this time forward, she took no delight in her family, and her domestic concerns, in which before she was remarkably diligent, became her aversion". Such was the state of her mind that she attempted suicide on several occasions. For more than three years she had to be

watched and cared for by her family.[1] Friends were very kind. Hall, senior, records in his diary:

"Nov. 25 1775 Satturday. Received to my great surprize from Mr. Newton of Olney £10. 0. 0. do. from Mr. Trinder £5. 0. 0. remitted to me in a £15 Bank bill. This is the Lord's doing and Marvellous in my eyes. O to be found worthy of favour. The above was to enable me to take my afflicted wife to London."[2]

Despite such kindnesses Mrs. Hall did not improve and death became imminent, but in the autumn of 1776 when at death's door she had a vision of Jesus coming to her as she lay ill in bed. With delight she called out "My sweet Jesus is come, is come, is come!" and the peace of mind which so long had eluded her, comforted her dying hours. Calling her children around her, she told them, "You have been good children to me. You have behaved tenderly and well to me in all my troubles -

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1. These details are taken from Mercy Manifested (1777) by Robert Hall of Arnesby, p.3 ff.
2. The Hall Family, p.17. "Mr. Newton of Olney" is the well-known hymn-writer, John Newton.

regard the advice of your dear father who with you, has had much trouble with me". She died not long after, on December 21st., 1776.[1]

The tragedy of his mother greatly affected young Robert Hall. He was to remember it all his days, but it made him lean all the more on his saintly father who was becoming a well-known figure in the Baptist denomination. He had been instrumental in forming the Northamptonshire Association of Particular Baptist Churches in 1764,[2] and had always encouraged every effort towards fellowship between churches and ministers. The inflexible hyper-calvinistic theology of the day, which was suffocating his denomination, found him an able antagonist. His sermons and Association letters were only a voice in the calvinistic wilderness but they prepared the way for William Carey and the missionary enterprise of the nineteenth century. His sermon at College Lane Chapel, Northampton, in 1779, was later expanded into a book

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1. Mercy Manifested, p.10-13.
2. Morris: Memoir of Hall of Arnesby, p.28.

which became a classic in Baptist circles. This was Help to Zion's Travellers (1781), of which William Carey wrote, "I do not remember ever to have read any book with such raptures."[1] Carey's worm-eaten copy is in the Bristol Baptist College Library. Andrew Fuller, Carey's right hand man on the home front, described Robert Hall, senior, as "my father and friend till his death".[2]

It was from such a father that young Robert learned the rudiments of the faith and received the breadth of vision which was to characterize him in later years. "He would not have been the giant he was," says a modern writer, "if it had not been for his venerable father",[3] and it is a remarkable fact that three of the greatest figures in the Baptist life of the next generation - William Carey, Andrew Fuller and the younger Robert Hall - all owed an incalculable debt to the lowly minister at Arnesby. The character of Hall, senior, forged in his

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1. G. Smith: Life of William Carey (1913), p.12.
2. John Ryland: Life and Death of Rev. Andrew Fuller (1816), p.56.
3. Graham W. Hughes in an article on Hall, senior, in the Baptist Quarterly, Vol.10, p.446.

Arnesby experiences, shines through the advice he gave to a young minister at his ordination:

"Many storms may attend you while employed for your Master which you cannot avoid without incurring His displeasure; you are not to leave your labour when it becomes disagreeable to the flesh but 'in all things approving yourself as a minister of God, in much patience, in affliction, in necessities, in distresses, by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on thy right hand and on thy left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report.' If you adhere closely to truth, you will be censured as an antinomian and by others as an arminian. The hard speeches and malicious reproaches of mistaken professors and virulent opposers will try your spirit and exercise your patience. The servant of the Lord is not to strive, strike and to brawl but to be gentle unto all men, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves. Some you are to reprove sharply but never sourly. Make it evident that your reproofs arise not from a captious, peevish

temper, but from a consiencious regard for purity and truth."[1]

It is natural that such words should come from a man deeply concerned with the spiritual welfare of his family. Hall, senior, longed to see his family "growing in grace". He was constantly in prayer for them, but, like many ministers, found it harder to speak on spiritual things with his family than with his congregation. In his diary he expresses this feeling. He writes, "May I have more freedom with my family in divine things".[2]

Young Robert, however, must have delighted him, for the lad was showing obvious signs of spiritual growth. By the time he was twelve years of age he was taking part in the church prayer meetings[3] and Nancy, the nurse, used to say, "I will answer for it that my dear Bobby knew the

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1. WORKS (of Hall, senr.), p.226/7: "Sermon delivered at the ordination of Rev. George Moreton" (1771).
2. Morris: Memoir of Hall of Arnesby, p.25.
3. Newton Bosworth: Discourse on the Death of Robert Hall, p.21.

Lord before he was seven years of age".[1] But despite every pleasing sign, the question of the lad's future weighed heavily on his father's mind, and, feeling the need of guidance, he decided to go to Kettering and consult his friend Beeby Wallis, a deacon of the Kettering Baptist Church.[2]

Father and son therefore rode to Kettering and Hall, senior, confessed to Beeby Wallis that "his son Bob was a strange sort of a boy, and he did not know what to do with him".[3] Beeby Wallis' first impressions were not favourable. The lad looked pale and weak, but with characteristic generosity, Wallis suggested that he should stay with him for a few weeks in the hope that a change of air would do him good. This was agreed upon and young Robert stayed in Kettering. It soon became clear to his host that the lad was unusually talented and he was asked, like a circus performer, to entertain visitors.

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1. Morris: Recollections, p.27.
2. Andrew Fuller had a great regard for Wallis and wrote the epitaph on his tomb. See Ryland: Life of Fuller, p.194 (note).
3. Morris: Recollections, p.30.

Many years afterwards Hall looked back on these occasions with mingled feelings. "Mr. Wallis," he said, "was one whom everybody loved. He belonged to a family in which probity, candour, and benevolence, constituted the general likeness: but conceive, Sir, if you can, the egregious impropriety of setting a boy of eleven to preach to a company of grave gentlemen, full half of whom wore wigs. I never call the circumstances to mind but with grief at the vanity it inspired."[1]

IV. NORTHAMPTON.

He was only at Kettering a few weeks and it seemed to suit his health; so, on the advice of Beeby Wallis, Robert was sent to the school conducted by John Collett Ryland (1723-1792) at Northampton. Dissenting academies were then mostly run by Presbyterians and only a few were owned by Baptists. In London, Joseph Stennett, John Ward

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.4.

and Nathan Bailey had good schools[1] and a school was run at Bristol by William Foot, whom Southey's biographer rather unkindly describes as "a Baptist minister, old, inefficient and brutal" of whom young Robert Southey "was too terrified . . . . to learn anything".[2]

Ryland was a staunch calvinist who, in 1759, had come to College Street Baptist Chapel, Northampton from Warwick where he had opened a boarding school. He transferred it to Northampton where for a quarter of a century it was an important feature in the life of the town. Its greatest asset was the outstanding personality of Ryland himself. He kept a detailed register of his pupils which gives some idea of the man. It ends in 1773 and so does not contain Hall's name but it contains entries like this:

" 3. Thomas Jones, in London, Develish and Beastly.

7. John Oram, at Coventry, Mad,a rakish

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1. Whitley: A history of British Baptists (1932),p.238.
2. J. Simmons: Life of Southey (1945), p.13. See also Fuller: Rise and Progress of Dissent in Bristol, p.238 (note).

infidel.

18. Thomas Hudson, Sensible, worthy, wise man.

21. John Hands, a True Honest Christian. "[1]

A later minister of the church at College Street said of him: "From every relic that we have, from the margins of books where his genius has expressed itself, from the orations that he delivered, from the books that he wrote, from anecdotes circulated respecting him, from all the traditions and everything we can gain, he seems to have been a man with enough stuff in him, and vigour of brain, and fiery energy and real genius, to have made many men".[2]

Young Robert Hall was very afraid of John Ryland and not without cause. His father, who had often met Ryland at Association meetings, brought his boy to the school and stayed for the evening to chat with his old friend. Robert was able to hear the preachers discussing the American War of Independence which was then causing much

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1. S. A. Swaine: Faithful Men (1884), p.55.

2. Quoted by E. A. Payne: College Street Chapel, Northampton (1697-1947), p.14-15. See also James Culross: The Three Rylands (1897) and Baptist Quarterly (1928), p.141 ff.

debate. Many dissenters felt the war to be a crusade against the liberty and rights of their fellow-men and, with many others, sympathised with the Americans.[1] Hall, senior, kept himself well informed of the events in America. His account book records: "October 17 1775 Two books on American matters 0 : 3 : 0 "[2] and his diary for January 9th. 1776 states that he "read London Evening Post and according to undoubted authority and exact calculation the Nation's loss through the American Quarrel amounted to twenty seven Millions sterling".[3]

Ryland, like Hall, strongly sided with the Americans and as the discussion progressed he warmed to his subject and burst out, "Were I the American commanding officer, I would call together all my comrades and brother officers; I would order every man to bare his arm, that a portion of blood might be extracted, and mixed in one basin on the table. I would then command everyone to draw his sword and dip the point of it in the basin, and swear by the great Eternal never to sheathe the consecrated blade, till

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1. Whitley: A History of British Baptists, p.233-5.
2. The Hall Family, p.12.
3. IBID, p.18.

he had achieved the freedom of his country. If after this anyone should turn coward or traitor, I should feel it a duty, a pleasure, a luxury, to plunge my weapon into that man's heart".[1]

Robert Hall never forgot that. Ryland terrified him. In later years he told his friend John Greene, "Only conceive, Sir, my situation; a poor little boy that had never been out of his mother's chimney corner before, Sir, sitting by these two old gentlemen, and hearing this conversation about blood, Sir. I trembled at the idea of being left with such a bloody minded minister. Why Sir, I began to think he would no more mind bleeding me, after my father was gone, than he would of killing a fly. I quite expected to be bled, Sir."[2] Nevertheless, John Ryland inspired young Hall with such a love of liberty that it remained with him throughout his life.

Despite his passion and enthusiasm, Ryland was an excellent teacher. His maxim was, "Simplify and repeat,

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1. Morris' Recollections, p.31. There are slight variations between Morris' account of this incident and Greene's report of Hall's account, but they are of little importance.
2. Greene's Reminiscences, p.94.

simplify and repeat" and his text books were often ingenious and effective.[1] The new boy at Ryland's school proved to be rather absent-minded and was at times the source of much amusement to his companions. His intellectual powers, however, were soon recognized and Ryland thought so highly of his pupil's essays that he sent some of them for publication.

Meanwhile, at home in Arnesby, life continued as usual. Hall, senior, carried on the work of the ministry and attended the business of the church and farm. His account books and diary show the variety of his interests. He notes for example a powder to be used for his horse:

"To cure a very bad bruise and sore through the saddle pinching the weather-skin. Take old shoe soles (viz. leather), burn them to ashes, sift the ashes and mix them with the same quantity of burnt alum and quick lime. Do this powder on ye sore every day. This I know to be exelant. R. Hall"[2]

At the New Year he writes in different vein:

"O that this year Jany 1 1777 may be a year of mercy

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1. E. A. Payne: Op. Cit. p.15.
2. The Hall Family, p.15.

to my Person, my Family, the neighbourhood (whose souls I long for) the Church and the State. Lord keep me pure, make me fervent in Thy Work, faithful to Thy Cause and active in it. Prepare goodness for me and mine. May we have peace with Thee and with one another . . . . . Bless Thy Word O Lord in the villages this year. May the church at Arnesby prosper, be fruitful and peacable, Holy and Humble. Lord work by Thy poor instrument. R. Hall."[1]

His son at Northampton wrote home regularly. On September 30th., 1777, he writes, "Honored Sir, - I take this opportunity to inform you that thro' the Goodness of God I enjoy a good state of Health" and after asking his father to come to Northampton concludes, "Please to give my love to my Brother and Sisters and all my Friends. Mr. and Mrs. Ryland send their Respects. I am, honored Sir, Your dutifull son, Robert Hall."[2] A few months later the letter has a seriousness which reflects his religious upbringing.

"I hope," he writes home, "I shall improve in every

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1. IBID, p.20.
2. IBID, p.38.

part of useful knowledge so as to become a comfort to you and all my Friends and especially in the knowledge, love and likeness of God to which all other is merely subordinate. I am sorry to hear of the death of Mrs. Brian's child. I hope this instance of the frailty of human nature may excite me more seriously and repeatedly to consider my latter end."[1]

Between attending classes and writing letters home, the students at Ryland's school were often able to hear visiting preachers. The one who made the most impression on Young Hall was the Rev. Thomas Robins from the neighbouring town of Daventry. In after years, Hall remembered the experience and wrote, "Among many other mental endowments, he (Robins) was remarkable for delicacy of taste and elegance of diction; and, perhaps, my reader will excuse my observing, that the first perception of these qualities which the writer of these lines remembers to have possessed, arose from hearing him preach at Northampton on a public occasion."[2]

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1. IBID, p.39.

2. WORKS IV, p.306. See also Gregory's Memoir, p.5.

After eighteen months at Northampton where he "made great progress in Latin and Greek,"[1] Robert returned home to Arnesby where he now stayed during the summer months receiving added instruction in the faith from his father. The Church Book continues the story:

"On Lord's day, August 23, 1778, Robert Hall, youngest son of our pastor Robert Hall, gave a very distinct account of his being the subject of spiritual grace. He was only fourteen years of age last May, and has appeared to be serious from his early childhood. He was baptised on Lord's day, Sep. 6th., and the same day was added to the church."[2] A month later a new stage in his education commenced.

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1. The Church Book of Arnesby . . . quoted in Morris' Recollections, p.45.
2. The Church Book of Arnesby . . . quoted in Morris' Recollections, p.36.

V. BRISTOL.

John Ward (1679-1758), the professor of rhetoric at Gresham College, London, a few years before his death, bequeathed £1,200 in Bank of England stock, the interest from which was to be used to educate students for the christian ministry. The students were to be between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, sons of protestant dissenters (Baptists by preference) living in England, who must "have made a good proficiency in Latin and Greek". After continuing for two years or less in some good grammar school "for their further improvement in the said languages and their gaining some knowledge in the Hebrew tongue", they were to be sent to a University in Scotland, "to reside there for the space of four years in order to their still greater improvement in the knowledge of the Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages, together with their course of such other studies, in which, according to the usage of such University, Students are employed who are designed for the profession of Divinity either as Ministers or Tutors."[1]

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1. E. J. Tongue: A history of Dr. John Ward's Trust (1951) p.7.

In October, 1778, Robert Hall was admitted to this trust. He was the ninth student to be accepted since its foundation, and, as he was only fifteen years old, it appears he was the youngest student ever to have been accepted. This meant he could attend the Baptist Academy at Bristol, which was then the only college in the country for the training of Baptist ministers. The Academy had been founded in 1679 through the generosity of Edward Terrill, one of the elders of Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol. In his will, dated 3rd. June, 1679, Terrill left the bulk of his property to support a minister at Broadmead, "well skilled in the tongues, to wit, Greek and Hebrew", who, for three half-days a week was to devote his time to "the instruction of young men, not exceeding twelve, members of any baptized congregation in or about Bristol, for two years at most".[1]

After a century of service, some reorganisation of the Academy became necessary and a circular was sent out, appealing for subscriptions "to establish a Society under the name of the Bristol Education Society for the enlargement of the number of students in the seminary and their more

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1. Bristol Baptist College 1679-1929, p.13.

effectual and permanent support".[1] The circular was accompanied by a manifesto arguing the matter of ministerial training. This was necessary because many Baptists were prejudiced against what were called "man-made ministers". Some still remained who would have agreed with the Bridgewater Baptist Church who proposed to the Western Association of Particular Baptist Churches in 1707, the question "whether it be not a dishonour to the Holy Spirit to raise up a ministry by human learning, or to send them to school who have gifts to preach the Gospel".[2]

Hall of Arnesby had no such prejudices and was delighted when his son was accepted as a student at the College in the autumn of 1778. The Principal (and pastor of Broadmead) was Hugh Evans who shared the teaching with his son, Caleb Evans, and with James Newton, the classical tutor. Students were required to be recommended by some Baptist Church as persons of good character and promising

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1. IBID, p.21. See also H. McLachlan: English Education under the Test Acts (1931), p.91.
2. J. Ivimey: A History of the English Baptists IV, p.264 (note).

ability and, once accepted, were merely asked to submit to simple College regulations. There was no credal test and students from "dissenting bodies" received both board and tuition free. There were about twenty students in residence when Robert Hall arrived in 1778. The College buildings at that time formed part of the Principal's house in North Street and here Hall gained a reputation both as an early riser and as a zealous student. His text books included such volumes as "The history of the Gallic and Civil Wars in Caesar's Commentaries. The first six books of Virgil's Aeneid. Two books of Grotius on the Truth of the Christian Religion. The three first orations of Cicero. The four Gospels in the Greek Testament."[1]

His first year at Bristol was a happy one and he made a lasting friendship with one of his fellow-students, Thomas Langdon (1755-1824).[2] For the vacation he went home to Arnesby where he frequently preached for his father at the Sunday morning services and accompanied him on his

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1. Bristol Baptist College 1679-1929, p.23.

2. A Brief Memoir of Thomas Langdon by his daughter (1837) p.11. See also Baptist Quarterly, April 1932, vol.VI, p.72.

journeys. In July, for example, he went to a ministers' meeting at Clipstone which was on the same day as the ordination of a new minister at the Clipstone Baptist Church.[1] Hall, senior, was to give the first address and in the evening the preacher was to be Benjamin Beddome (1717-1799), the Baptist minister at Bourton-on-the-Water. He was a calvinist of the best type and was revered as a saint, hymn-writer and preacher. John Collett Ryland of Northampton, who in his younger days had been won for Christ and calvinism by Beddome, wrote in his diary:

"Surely Mr. Benj. Beddome is an instance of the Existance of God and the Truth of the Christian Religion. Wt. Could Change his Heart, and induce him to leave his Profession or Trade - which was much more Profitable - and what could move him to Stay at Bourton rather yn go to Exeter, to which he was strongly sollicited - what is it yt moves him to preach, Pray and be so active? is it not ye Delight he finds in ye Work - 'Tis plain that tis not Worldly Interest."[2]

It was this revered pastor - now over sixty years of age - who, after conversation with Hall, senior, and his son,

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1. This was a man named Skinner.

2. Quoted by Wheeler Robinson: The Life and Faith of the Baptists, p.56/7.

suggested that the boy (then fifteen years old) should preach in his stead at the evening meeting. Hall, senior, opposed the idea on the grounds that the ministers had travelled far to hear the preaching of well-known men not the efforts of a mere boy, no matter how unusual. But Beddome was so impressed with young Hall, that he brought into play all the arts of quiet persuasion which he had acquired by long experience, and at the evening meeting it was the boy who ascended the pulpit. His text was, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). No doubt out of deference to his father, the congregation was less critical than usual, but on the whole, his sermon produced the keenest interest. The boy was obviously unusually talented.[1]

After the summer break, Hall returned to Bristol for the second session. Hugh Evans was no longer able to carry on as Principal and his son Caleb took over the office. Robert Hall seemed to find the change congenial for he wrote home, "Dr. Evans is a most amiable person in every respect; as a man, generous and open-hearted; as a christian, lively and spiritual; as a preacher, pathetic and fervent; and, as a

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1. Gregory's Memoir, pp.8-9.

tutor, gentle, meek, and condescending. I can truly say that he has, on all occasions, behaved to me with the tenderness and affection of a parent, whom I am bound by the endearing ties to hold in everlasting honour and esteem".[1]

Hall appears to have joined in the students' fun with the others. In later life he told John Greene, "When I was at the Academy, some of us were very unruly Sir; we plagued Dr. Evans sadly."[2] In one of his escapades, he climbed into the chimney of a room occupied by a quiet Welsh student. It is not quite clear what was the object of his climb, but he certainly gave the Welshman a fright, for, on entering the chimney-top, he slipped down several yards and was almost suffocated by soot. He was fortunate to get out with only a few cuts and bruises. Many years later Hall was asked to confirm the story and replied: "The tale is true enough except that it was no part of my design to disturb the inoffensive Welshman."[3]

Such student frolics were however the background to hard study. Hall continued his habit of early rising and, before the others were awake, would put in some hours of extra work at

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.6.
2. Greene's Reminiscences, p.164.
3. Morris' Recollections, pp.40-41.

his Greek and Latin. He also gained a reputation for absent-mindedness. This had followed him from Ryland's school and from Arnesby. Sometimes when he was preaching for his father, he failed to turn up on time or would sit too near the fire and burn his coat-tails, to the amusement and sometimes annoyance of his friends.[1] At Bristol, he was no better and in the mornings he would unwittingly pick up the books, pens and even the clothes of his fellow students. Caleb Evans, realizing that he had an exceptional pupil, granted Hall the use of his private study in the mornings. Unfortunately Hall's academic success began to make him proud and arrogant, but this was knocked out of him one Tuesday evening at the preaching class in the vestry of Broadmead Baptist Church. At this class, the students took it in turns to preach before the others on some prescribed text. When his turn came, Hall, as expected, began well, but to the surprise of the class, and to his own astonishment, was forced to stop dead. Covering his face in his hands he exclaimed in a panic,

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1. IBID, p.39. There is a letter (undated) in the Documents Book, folio 90, at Broadmead Baptist Church, signed by Hall, apologising for losing some papers sent to him.

"Oh! I have lost all my ideas," and sat down. This humiliating failure was repeated the following Tuesday and on this occasion, he hurried from the vestry and went to his room saying, "If this does not humble me, the devil must have me!"[1]

In June, Robert heard that his father, who had been a widower for four years, had married again. His second wife was a widow from Northampton, Mrs. Elizabeth Swan, a reserved but gracious Christian lady, whom Robert was able to meet during the summer vacation of 1780. It was a delight for him to be home, for his father meant much to him. In a letter home he had written, "It is the height of my ambition, that, in some happy period of my life, my lot may be cast near you, when I may have the unspeakable pleasure of consulting on different subjects, you, whose judgment I esteem not less than an oracle."[2] His father took a keen interest in his son's studies and in the Arnesby account book there are frequent notes of collections, averaging about eleven guineas per annum, for the Bristol Education Society.[3]

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.8.
2. IBID, pp.6-7.
3. The Hall Family, p.21.

On this vacation, as the Church book at Arnesby declares, Robert Hall, "on Aug.13th. 1780 was sent out to the ministry by this church, being sixteen years and 3 months old . . . . . he was examined by his father before the church, respecting his inclination, motives, and end, in reference to the ministry, and was likewise desired to make a declaration of his religious sentiments. All which being done, to the entire satisfaction of the church, they therefore set him apart by lifting up their right hands and by solemn prayer."[1]

He returned to Bristol for his final session, preaching at Birmingham en route,[2] and again proved himself to be a hard-working and brilliant student. He had, by this time, recovered from his earlier humiliation at the preaching class and was now showing considerable talent as a preacher. One of his addresses was entitled, An Oration on Ambition. Olinthus Gregory, Hall's biographer, disapproved of this oration and would not include it in his edition of Hall's Works, on the grounds that "the sole species of excellence recommended to be pursued was superiority

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1. Quoted in Morris' Recollections, p.45.
2. T. Swan: Sermon on the Death of Hall (1831), p.15 note.

of intellect."[1] Certainly Hall stresses the intellect rather than the conscience. "Never let us think we have learned enough," he pleads with his fellow students, "let us always enlarge our prospect 'give ourselves sea-room' and stretch our view to those boundless regions, those untrod tracts of science which lie before us . . . . Let us be ambitious to outstrip our fellow creatures and leave them leagues behind."[2] But Hall insists that such ambition must never be for selfish ends - that would be "stripping the Almighty of His prerogative, a daring attempt to dethrone Him and take His seat."[3] It is refreshing to hear of such zeal for knowledge in a Baptist student of the day, for it was an age when Baptists were slow to realize the value of education, and the dark ages had hardly passed, when, as Whitley, the Baptist historian, says, "There were not ten learned men by whose reputation the denomination might be redeemed."[4] No doubt Hall's oration was given with the exaggerated zeal of youth

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.7.
2. The text of this oration is appended to The Hall Family, pp.107-120.
3. The Hall Family, p.113.
4. W. T. Whitley: A History of British Baptists (1932), p.258.

(he was only sixteen) but the pastoral responsibility of a church, later restored his spiritual balance.

Completing his Bristol studies in 1781, he returned to Arnesby to prepare for the long journey to Aberdeen which, by the terms of Dr. Ward's trust, was to be the next stage in his training for the ministry.

VI. ABERDEEN

The reason Dr. Ward insisted on a Scottish University as the finishing school for dissenters was not because he had specially warm feelings towards Scotland nor even because he believed Scottish Universities were superior to their English equivalents. The real reason lay in the restricted opportunities for the higher education of dissenters in England.

The Toleration Act of 1689 had brought a measure of religious liberty to the English dissenters. It became no longer compulsory for them to attend the services of the Church of England and they were able to worship by themselves provided they did so behind unlocked doors and registered their meeting-houses. But there were still many restrictions. They had no

scope in civil affairs and Army, Navy, Church, Bar and the Universities were the preserve of the Church of England.

In Scotland, however, no such restrictions prevailed and the Universities, for example, were open to all. Many English dissenters, therefore, availed themselves of this opportunity and crossed the border to complete their studies. This was a decided advantage, for the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were in a very low state. At Oxford, by 1770, no serious examination was held for a degree and Cambridge was not much better. G. M. Trevelyan says that they gave "so bad and so expensive an education to those whom they deigned to admit, that their numbers shrank to miserable proportions."[1] The Scottish Universities were, at this time, of a much higher standard and the dissenters profited accordingly.

Hall went to Aberdeen University at the end of September 1781, accompanied by two other students, Joseph Stennett and John Powmall. The trio arranged to rendezvous at Leeds and then travel the rest of the way together. On the Sunday morning, Hall preached at a chapel in Leeds, and "after soberly enjoying

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1. G. M. Trevelyan: English Social History (1946), p.365.

themselves for a few days,"[1] they went on to Edinburgh where Hall and Stennett had letters of introduction to Dr. John Erskine, minister of the old Greyfriars Kirk. He was a friend of the Baptist leaders, Andrew Fuller and John Ryland,[2] with both of whom he kept up a frequent correspondence. In his diaries, Fuller refers to him as "an excellent old man"; "made up of kindness and goodness"; "a cordial friend".[3] Dr. Erskine not only welcomed the students but introduced them to his colleague at Greyfriars, the Principal of Edinburgh University, Dr. William Robertson, whose History of America was then widely read.

They were both impressed by the English students and in a letter to John Ryland dated 2nd. November 1781, Erskine writes, "I had the pleasure of your letter by Messrs. Stennett and Hall last week. They appear to me pleasant young men and I should

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1. The Hall Family, p.43.
2. This John Ryland (1753-1825) was the son of John Collett Ryland of Northampton. In the remainder of this thesis when John Ryland is mentioned, the reference is to this man. For details of his life see Underwood: A History of the English Baptists, p.168.
3. J. Ryland: Life and death of Fuller (1816), p.269/70.

have been happy to have had further opportunities of showing my regard to the children of so worthy parents than their short stay here allowed." As they left Edinburgh, Erskine gave them letters of introduction to friends at Aberdeen and commended them "to the watchful care of the great Head of the Church."[1]

Aberdeen University was divided into two Colleges, Kings and Marischal. For many years the students lived in lodgings in the town and merely attended the lectures, but new regulations in 1753 declared, "that for the future, all the students shall lodge in rooms within the College and eat at the College table during the whole session." Two servants were appointed, "to serve the students in their rooms, make their beds, wipe their shoes, fetch them water, carry their linen to and from washing."[2] This was the situation when Hall arrived at Aberdeen. He did not settle in easily. Bristol Baptist College seemed to have a monastic calm compared with this Scottish University. He wrote home, "I am not at all in love with the doctrines or the manners of the people of Aberdeen, but detest them both," and with puritanical horror adds, "the profligacy and the lives of

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.11.
2. R. S. Rait: The Universities of Aberdeen (1895), p.200.

the students exceed all description and conception, a very few excepted. Almost all of them are prophane, most of them debauched."[1]

Divinity had quite a minor place in the curriculum. In letters home, during his first year, he tells of "reading select passages in Xenophon and Homer" and says "I have privately read through Xenophon's Anabasis, and Memorabilia of Socrates, several books of Homer and some of the Greek Testament."[2] Life in the College was spartan compared with modern standards. Five days a week the students had beef and broth for dinner with some oat bread and a pint of ale. The menu was varied on Sundays with eggs, potatoes and bread, and on Fridays with fresh fish. Breakfast and supper consisted of half a scone of oat bread with a pint of milk.[3]

At the week-ends, the students were able to hear the preachers in the Aberdeen churches, but Robert Hall could only say of them, "Deliver me from such frosty-spirited Calvinists - But, Oh, how glad should I be to hear some good savoury preacher.

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1. The Hall Family, p.47.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p.12. The original letter, dated 25 March 1782, is in the Bristol Baptist College Library.
3. R. S. Rait: The Universities of Aberdeen (1895), p.205.

The meanest who preached Jesus Christ and him crucified would be sweeter than the honey or the honey-comb."[1] Such a comment must have delighted his father back in Arnesby. He also became friendly with Alderman Cruden's family in Aberdeen who welcomed the English students into their home. He wrote of them: "This is an extremely genteel family, and they treat us unspeakably kindly."[2]

He continued to work hard at his Greek and Latin and, in private, he studied with James Mackintosh with whom he was very friendly. These two were the most brilliant students in the College. Mackintosh wrote, "During one winter we met at five o'clock in the morning to read Greek in the apartments of Mr. Wynne, a nephew of Lord Newburgh, who had the good nature to rise at that unusual hour for the mere purpose of regaling us with coffee. Hall read Plato and I went through Heroditus."[3] They argued incessantly and formed a student debating society which became known as "The Hall and Mackintosh Club." Here they debated such controversial questions as the duration of future punishments.

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1. The Hall Family, p.48.
2. IBID, p.48. Hall specially mentions the kindness of "Miss Cruden, the sister of the author of the concordance."
3. R. J. Mackintosh: Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh (1836) I, p.14.

They were so often in each other's company that their fellow students used to point at them and say, "There go Plato and Herodotus."[1] The friendship begun at Aberdeen was to continue until death even although the two students were to have very different careers.[2]

Unfortunately Hall's student life was often interrupted by agonizing pain in his back. John Pownall, a fellow student, wrote in a letter home, "I have frequently seen him (Hall) reclining on the carpet in Mr. Stennett's room, rolling about in great agony."[3] This cross of suffering was to be with Hall for the rest of his life. Yet he did not make himself out to be a martyr to suffering. What characterized him, as a student friend wrote later, was "plainness, sincerity, an ardent piety, and undeviating love of truth."[4]

During his vacations he visited both Bristol and Arnesby. There was great excitement at Arnesby during his 1783 vacation.

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.14.
2. James Mackintosh (1765-1832) was knighted in 1803 for his work as Recorder of Bombay. He entered parliament in 1813 and was a member till his death.
3. The Hall Family, p.22.
4. R. J. Mackintosh: op.cit. I, p.15. Hall's student friend was W. Jack, later Principal of King's College, Aberdeen.

His sister, Ann, under romantic circumstances, was about to be married to a certain Colonel Cotton. It had all begun when the Colonel had been passing through Arnesby. His horse had given trouble and he stopped in the village to have it reshod. While he was waiting, Ann Hall passed by and the Colonel promptly fell in love with her. Eventually they were married and on July 2nd. 1783, her father jotted down in his diary, "Mr. Cotton and daughter set off for London on Wednesday" - presumably on their honeymoon.[1]

After all the excitement had died down, Robert made his way back to Aberdeen calling in at Newcastle en route. Here he stayed for a week with Joseph Kinghorn (1766-1832), whose father had often visited Arnesby. The two young men - Kinghorn was seventeen and Hall two years his senior - were later to be involved in a long controversy about the Lord's Supper, but at this stage they chatted amicably about College life.[2] Hall then journeyed on to Aberdeen where he resumed his studies.

Not long after he arrived, a letter reached him from Bristol. It came from Broadmead Baptist Church, inviting him to become assistant minister to Dr. Caleb Evans. This rather overwhelmed him, and in his reply on December 4th. he wrote, "Young and

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1. The Hall Family, p.22.

2. M. H. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich (1855), p.55/6.

inexperienced as I am, I tremble to think of engaging in so arduous a work . . . . To plunge into the midst of life at so tender an age, with so little experience and so small a stock of knowledge, almost terrifies me."[1] Never the less he accepted the call with the understanding that, until he completed his studies at Aberdeen, he should only act as assistant during the summer vacation of 1784.[2]

His final year at Aberdeen was very different from the others. The fun of "The Hall and Mackintosh Club" was at an end, for Mackintosh had graduated the previous year; and with the prospect of the work at Broadmead awaiting him, Hall devoted himself to the study of Greek, philosophy and theology, working alone, and taking very little part in College activities. In a letter to his father signed "Bobby Hall" and dated 20th. November, 1784, he writes, "I now find retirement prodigiously sweet, and here I am entirely uninterrupted and left to my own thoughts."[3] He graduated M.A. on 30th. March 1785 after delivering an impressive Greek oration.

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1. WORKS V, p.405.
2. Broadmead Records I, p.312.
3. The Hall Family, p.52. See also Gregory's Memoir, p.16.

The years of preparation were now at an end. The future lay open before him. To meet it, he had acquired a thorough grounding in the classics and in theology; Ryland at Northampton had shared with him a love of liberty; Mackintosh at Aberdeen had sharpened his mind in debate; and above all, his father at Arnesby, by precept and example, had given him a sympathy for the poor, a sense of the fellowship of believers and a wide vision of the grace of God. With these qualifications he set out for Bristol.

P A R T II

BRISTOL : 1785 - 1791

I. TUTOR

Broadmead Baptist Church, founded in 1640, had endured many persecutions and trials, but by the Toleration Act of 1689, a measure of relief was granted to the hard pressed Baptist community. The church had an "open" membership; that is, the membership was open to all believers whether they had been baptized as infants or as adults. In practice, however, so many members were baptized as believers, that in 1757, a small group of the congregation, not prepared to accept believers' baptism, separated and formed a group known as the "little church". This existed for almost a century and during that period no paedo-baptists joined the larger church. The "little church", however, was allowed to worship in the Broadmead premises.[1] This was the situation when the new assistant came to Broadmead. His preaching quickly attracted attention. In the previous year, Andrew Fuller, one of the Baptist leaders, had noted in his diary: "Heard Mr. Robert Hall, jun., from 'He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.' (Ecclesiastes 1 : 18) Felt very solemn on hearing some parts:- The Lord keep that young man!"[2]

The early promise was fully borne out at Broadmead where the congregation noted the enthusiasm and, at times, the indiscretion,

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1. Sir. John Swaish: Chronicles of Broadmead Church, Bristol, p.2.
2. Gregory's MEMOIR, p.18.

of his youthful preaching, (he had only just turned twenty-one). A few months after he had begun his ministry, the annual meeting of the Bristol Education Society was held, at which it was resolved, "at the motion of the president, seconded by Mr. Newton, that the Rev. R. Hall, M.A., be invited to take part in the tuition of the pupils patronized by this institution, and that Francis Bull, John Harris, Joseph Tomkins and William Tomkins, Esq., be requested to inform him of this resolution, and report his answer."

The answer reported was that "Mr. Hall esteemed it an honour to be called to so respectable a situation, and would exert his best endeavours to discharge the duties of it in an effectual manner."[1]

The students he had to teach for the next five years included Joseph Kinghorn, James Hinton, Joseph Hughes, William Steadman and Samuel Pearce, all of whom were to become well-known among the Baptists. Kinghorn did not think highly of his fellow students. "It does not appear to me," he wrote home, "that there is much genius among them in general, and there are two or three . . . . who by the levity of their tempers, give great offence to us all, and for these reasons we generally shun them."[2] William Steadman had much the same opinion. "Of the students," he wrote, "I cannot say much. The selection did not appear to me desirable. The majority were

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1. S. A. Swaine: Faithful Men, p.133.

2. M. H. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich, p.77.

from Wales, many of whom laboured under great disadvantages, not understanding the English language."[1] To this mixed group, Hall endeavoured to instil some knowledge of Greek, Latin and Mathematics.

He was an exacting tutor but a bright pupil like Kinghorn found this to be an advantage.[2] Xenophon, Homer, Virgil, Horace and Juvenal all had their place in Hall's curriculum and these studies were interleaved with New Testament by Dr. Evans and regular preaching classes in the evenings.[3] But although Hall was an exacting tutor he was a popular one. He mixed well with the students and was free with his advice and encouragement;[4] and although at times he could be devastatingly sarcastic, he was young, clever and witty, and a daring preacher. Many of the students treasured up some of his remarks, both the wise and the witty, for many years. On one occasion, there was to be a public execution in Bristol and some of the students, with a sadistic but understandable curiosity, were keen to see the sentence carried out. They approached Hall for permission to go,

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1. T. Steadman: Memoir of Rev. Wm. Steadman, p.37.
2. M. H. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich, p.90-91.
3. T. Steadman: op. cit., p.37.
4. See S. Pearce Carey: Samuel Pearce, the Baptist Brainerd, p.82; M. H. Wilkin: op. cit., p.107:113; Andrew Fuller: Memoirs of Samuel Pearce, (1816), p.6.

urging that the man had repented at the last moment (or so the rumour ran) and would probably deliver an appropriate speech from the scaffold. To their surprise, Hall replied, "Certainly gentlemen, that is a most important consideration, and I therefore allow you to go," but then added sarcastically, "You may learn from his example how to conduct yourselves on such an occasion."[1]

Floggings and executions seem to have been quite a feature of Bristol at this time. Five women and two men were publicly flogged on 30th. November, 1785 and after the spring Assizes of 1786 no less than nineteen criminals were executed in the district, mostly for highway robbery. Another source of municipal excitement was cock-fighting. In Hall's first year at Bristol one of the greatest cock-fighting tournaments ever held, took place at the Angel Inn Cockpit, Redcliffe.[2]

For the more cultured members of Bristol society, Handel's "Messiah" was regularly performed in the town.[3] Although Hall had little ear for music he found the "Messiah" a deeply moving experience. He was present in Westminster Abbey at a commemoration performance of the "Messiah" before George III. At one part of the performance, the

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1. Morris' Recollections, p.52.
2. J. Latimer: The Annals of Bristol in the 18th. Century (1893), p.469.
3. IBID, p.480. ("Judas Maccabeus" was also performed in Sept.1787.)

King, greatly moved, stood up with tears in his eyes, and Hall said later, "It was a great act of national assent to the fundamental truths of religion."[1]

The reputation Hall gained among the students for sarcastic repartee had unfortunate repercussions. Warming to student applause, the young tutor turned sarcasm into one of his most potent weapons in debate. His friends encouraged him by joining in the merriment when he turned his biting satire on some unfortunate opponent; but as his reputation for satiric wit grew, so his popularity declined. No one knew on whom he would turn next. His weapon was too sharp and, without realising it, he sometimes wounded deeply; so that many of his friends, while admiring his wit, shrank from his acquaintance.

About this time, his father visited Bristol to preach at King Street Baptist Chapel[2] and he may have given a few words of advice to his son. At any rate, from this time onwards Hall realised that his

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1. The Hall Family, p.97.

2. J. G. Fuller: The Rise and Progress of Dissent in Bristol (1840), p.247. On this visit, Hall senr. had to put up with a High Church lady who sometimes "would open her window and bawl at them and then come out into the street and abuse those she saw going to the meeting." She so vehemently attacked Hall that he declared "he had never met with such scurrilous treatment in his life."

satire was no longer popular, and, what was more to the point, for a minister of the gospel, it was unchristlike. He wrote an essay to confirm his mind. He called it The Character of Cleander.[1] It is really a self-portrait. Cleander is described as a man who "surveys the course of his past life with a view to remark the false steps he has taken in it". He turns his sarcasms on "his friends and enemies with indiscriminate severity," but comes to his senses in time, realising that "the attachments of friendship . . . . are too valuable to be sacrificed to a blaze of momentary admiration". The essay is an act of confession, a portrait which his friends must have easily recognized and which gave them the opportunity to quote his own words if at any time his remarks should be too wounding. Hall never lost his wit or satire, but from this time he did his best to keep it in check.

He wrote another essay while tutor at the Academy which was published like Cleander in Felix Farley's Bristol Journal. His second essay was entitled On Poetry and Philosophy. It sets out to be a comparison between the task of the poet and that of the philosopher and he says, "The end of the poet is to give delight to his readers . . . . the philosopher purposes merely to instruct".[2]

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1. WORKS III, p.458 ff.

2. WORKS III, p.480 ff.

After such an opening the reader would expect a neat counter-balancing of argument, but in fact, most of the essay is a discussion of poetry, and the philosophers, after the first paragraphs, are ignored. John Milton is obviously a favourite with Hall as is Homer whose poetry Hall says, "fills and delights the mind". This short essay neither advanced nor detracted from Hall's reputation, but it shows that the easy flow of speech and clarity of thought, which were later to distinguish him, were even now developing.

II. CONTROVERSY

As a preacher Hall immediately attracted attention. The annual sermon for the Bristol Education Society was usually given by some well-known and established preacher, but when he was only twenty-two, Hall was invited to preach. His sermon impressed all who heard it and Joseph Kinghorn, for example, especially referred to it in a letter home.[1]

John Ryland (then minister of College Lane Chapel, Northampton), was another who praised Hall's preaching. He notes in his diary on June 8, 1785, "Robert Hall jun. preached wonderfully from Rom.VIII,18"

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1. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich (1885), p.91.

and again on June 15th, he writes, "Rode to Clipston to attend the ministers' meeting. R. Hall, jun., preached a glorious sermon, on the immutability of God, from James 1,17."[1]

The students at the College supported the services at Broadmead when they were not preaching in the neighbouring villages, and they too were greatly impressed by Hall. Joseph Kinghorn, for example, wrote home that he had heard Mr. Hall whose preaching "came home in such a manner to the conscience, as one would think would make every one say 'Where am I going?'"[2]

The crowds soon began to flock to Broadmead. The news quickly spread that there was a fine young preacher among the Baptists. J. W. Morris, one of Hall's biographers, says that often the church was crowded to excess, and even at this early stage in Hall's career, well-known and distinguished visitors came to hear him.[3]

But trouble was brewing, for not all were pleased with Hall's preaching. There were many who began to suspect he was veering towards the unorthodox. In a letter dated 30th. December, 1785, to his father, he writes, "On account of one or two sermons I have preached, several I understand have taken offence, and have charged me with not preaching the gospel . . . . whatever disatisfactions of

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.18.
2. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich (1885), p.91.
3. Morris' Recollections, p.51.

this kind may arise, they will give me no great uneasiness, for as I was never bent upon coming to Bristol, I can with the less reluctance leave it."[1] The fact remains, however, that some members of the congregation began to suspect the orthodoxy of his doctrine.

It all began innocently enough. Hall had expressed in private his sympathy with the famous Presbyterian, Dr. Joseph Priestley, at that time one of the foremost scientists in England and a fellow of the Royal Society. Priestley was not only a good scientist but an outstanding dissenter who stood for free enquiry, tolerance, reform, liberty and justice. Unfortunately Priestley's theology was considered heretical by the strictly orthodox Baptists. He was a socinian[2] and socinians denied the divinity of Christ. That, in the eyes of the Broadmead Baptists, tainted all their thinking. But with the zeal of youth, Hall rashly expressed in public his sympathy for Priestley. He had been invited to preach at Birmingham (where Priestley lived) and, in the course of his sermon, it became clear that he "entertained a high opinion of the talents and integrity"[3] of that famous advocate

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1. The Hall Family, p.55.
2. See article on "Socinianism" in Hastings Encyclopoedia of Religion and Ethics. The movement derived its name from its founder Socinus (1539-1604) an exiled Italian who lived most of his life in Poland. Its primary tenet was to deny the divinity of Christ and, with it, the doctrine of the Trinity. Socinianism was the forerunner of modern Unitarianism.
3. Morris: Recollections, p.54.

of socinianism. This caused quite a storm among the Birmingham Baptists. John Ryland heard about it and felt it his duty to write to Hall. He begins, "My very dear Friend." And in a firm but kindly way says, "My fears and grief were never excited to such a degree concerning you as they now are . . . . It gave me extreme uneasiness to hear, this week, of the general disgust you have given to your former friends at Birmingham on your last visit." Then, after pointing out the iniquity of Priestly's heretical theology, he rebukes Hall's rashness and concludes, "Receive this as a proof of the affection with which I am - 'Your faithful friend, J. Ryland.'"[1]

Hall's reply was couched in the most respectful terms but he emphatically declared, "You seem to suspect I am far gone in Socinianism; but in this, my dear friend, give me leave to say you are utterly mistaken."[2]

This should have ended the matter, but the damage had been done and malicious gossip soon spread the news that the brilliant young preacher of Broadmead was supporting the socinians. Hall did not help matters by saying that he respected Priestley "for his private virtues, for his scientific acquirements, his patriotic and decided attachment to the principles of civil and religious liberty," and then fanned the opposition flames still more by describing one of Priestley's friends,

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.19/20.
2. IBID, p.20.

Dr. Price, as an "ardent and enlightened friend of his country".[1] To make things still worse, Hall became friendly with Robert Robinson, the Baptist minister at Cambridge, who was then a close friend of the socinians.[2] It was Robinson who wrote of "that bloody Calvin who burnt Servetus, the learned, the benevolent, the pious, the generous Servetus; I cannot forgive the rascal for this barbarous deed."[3] To be friendly with a man who held such sentiments was almost an unforgivable sin to the orthodox calvinists and Hall was condemned accordingly.

But they had misunderstood Hall. He did not agree with every detail of Priestley's theology or of Robinson's, but he refused to let differences of opinion about theology blind him to the many excellent qualities which these men undoubtedly possessed. His friendship with Mackintosh at Aberdeen was too recent an experience to let him forget that disagreement about theology need not lessen mutual respect and Christian fellowship. Unfortunately many of his Broadmead congregation were unable to accept his viewpoint and from this time onwards, an opposition party grew up in the church, criticizing his theology

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1. Morris: Recollections, p.56.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p.21/22. Hall even attempted to imitate Robinson's style of preaching but gave up the attempt after a short time.
3. Robinson's WORKS (1861), p.233.

and making life very difficult for him. To what extent were their criticisms of his theology justified? Was he, in fact, veering away from orthodox calvinism? To answer these questions it is necessary to consider the development of his theology up to this point.

III. HALL'S THEOLOGY (1764 - 1791)

In England the Baptists were divided into two main groups:- the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists. The former, as the name suggests, were distinguished by their belief in "general" redemption, i.e. that Christ died for all men. The latter insisted on "particular" redemption, i.e. that Christ died only for the elect. During the first half of the 18th. century both groups declined in number. The General Baptists became permeated with arianism and socinianism; the Particular Baptists, among whom Hall was brought up, gradually adopted the more extreme forms of calvinism. Many of these hyper-calvinistic preachers believed that as Christ died only for the elect, then it was useless to invite all men to repent and believe on Him. It was said, for example, of Dr. John Gill, the minister of the St. Albans Particular Baptist Church, that he "never

addressed the ungodly ".[1] The withering effect of this theology was soon evident in the dwindling number of Particular Baptist churches.[2]

During Hall's boyhood at Arnesby the first stirrings of new life were appearing after this winter of hyper-calvinism. In 1770 the Northamptonshire Association of Particular Baptist Churches issued a circular letter which hinted at a more moderate view of election.[3] Nine years later (when Hall was fifteen years of age) his father preached a sermon against hyper-calvinism, which was later expanded into Help to Zion's Travellers (1781), a book which was widely read among the Particular Baptists.[4] This was followed in 1784 by The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, a book by Andrew Fuller, the Baptist minister at Kettering. Fuller was anxious to guard the main points of calvinism including the doctrine of particular redemption, but he argued that this was not incompatible with preaching the gospel to all men. Fuller's teaching was severely criticized, but "fullerism", as it came to be called, quickly made headway and virtually brought to an end the reign of hyper-calvinism among the

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1. Quoted by A. C. Underwood: A history of the English Baptists (1947), p.135.
2. For details of this decline, see Underwood: op.cit. Chapter VI.
3. IBID, p.160.
4. IBID, pp.160-161.

Particular Baptists.[1]

It was in this period of reaction from hyper-calvinism that the theology of young Robert Hall first took shape. As a lad he had studied calvinism with his father at Arnesby and with his tutors at Northampton and Bristol. He had also read thoroughly the works of Jonathan Edwards, the New England calvinist, whose writings played an important part in the revival of Baptist life and thought during this period.[2]

When he went to Aberdeen, however, Hall began to question the calvinism in which he had been brought up. Long discussions with his friend, James Mackintosh, and wider reading introduced doubts in his mind about some of the traditional doctrines. This is reflected in his letters home. In one letter he described some Aberdeen ministers as "frosty-spirited calvinists",[3] and in another he expressed doubts about an argument used by Jonathan Edwards concerning

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1. G. Laws: Andrew Fuller (1942), p.35ff. See also Underwood: A History of the English Baptists (1947), p.164.
2. This has been carefully studied by D. E. Edwards in a dissertation presented to the University of Oxford entitled "The influence of Jonathan Edwards on the religious life of Britain in the XVIIIth. century and the first half of the XIXth. century."
3. The Hall Family, p.48.

the freedom of the will.[1]

This process of reaction, begun at Aberdeen, was continued in his pastorate at Bristol. Here, his unorthodox opinions and his approval of Dr. Joseph Priestley so alarmed some of the members of Broadmead Baptist Church that they were prepared to demand his resignation. To clarify the issue Hall wrote a letter to the Church in December, 1790 giving a frank statement of his views.[2] This is almost the only record of his theology during this period of his ministry and it shows that Hall's reaction from calvinism had gone further than many of his friends realised. His father sensed this and on several occasions warned him "to abandon the vague and dangerous speculations to which he was prone".[3]

In his letter to the Church Hall said, "I am not a calvinist in the strict and proper sense of that term". By this he meant that while accepting much of the teaching of John Calvin (he expressly affirmed his acceptance of the divinity of Jesus Christ, the atonement and justification by faith alone), nevertheless, he was not prepared to accept some of the commonly held doctrines.

The first of these concerned original sin. The calvinists asserted that the sin of Adam was conveyed to his posterity by the

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.12.
2. IBID, p.26ff.
3. IBID, p.30.

natural process of generation,[1] but Hall emphatically denied this. "I do not maintain the federal headship of Adam, as it is called, or the imputation of his sin to posterity . . . . I believe we have received from our first parents, together with various outward ills, a corrupt and irregular bias of mind; but at the same time, it is my firm opinion that we are liable to condemnation only for our own actions, and that guilt is a personal and individual thing." Hall does not elaborate this statement and we are left without further evidence of his views on the subject, but he is obviously trying to face up to the difficulties in Calvin's teaching. If sin is essentially a failure of will, as Calvin asserted,[2] how could it be transmitted by the act of generation? This was Hall's difficulty and, for his part, he rejected the orthodox teaching.

The second doctrine which Hall rejected was that of double predestination. The calvinists believed that "by the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated into everlasting life and others foreordained to everlasting death . . . . and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished".[3] In answer to this, Hall

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1. Westminster Confession VI 2-3 : Calvin's Institutes II, i, 6.
2. Institutes II, ii, 8.
3. Westminster Confession III 3-4 : Calvin's Institutes III, xxi, 1.

writes, "I believe in the doctrine of the Divine Decrees, and of course in the predestination of all events, of which the number of the finally saved is one. But this appears to me a very different thing from the doctrine of absolute election and reprobation." Hall again does not elaborate his views but he is clearly unhappy with Calvin's uncompromising language on the subject. He was prepared to accept predestination to salvation - The positive evangelical assurance that our salvation is the act of God's sovereign grace - but he refused to follow the unflinching logic which brought Calvin to his doctrine of double predestination. Hall felt that this was going further than the Scriptures warranted. His viewpoint, however, was not shared by the calvinists of Broadmead Baptist Church who still held to the traditional doctrine.

The third point at issue concerned the nature and destiny of man. The calvinists believed that "the bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption, but their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them."[1] Hall rejected this. He confessed that he was a materialist, believing that "the nature of man is simple and uniform; that the thinking powers and faculties are the result of a certain organization of matter and that after death he ceases to be conscious until the resurrection." Hall never preached this doctrine and always considered it a "mere

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1. Westminster Confession XXXII 1 : Calvin's Institutes I, xv, 2.

metaphysical speculation",[1] but some of his friends became anxious when they heard his views on the subject and often argued with him about it. J. W. Morris, for example, knowing the respect in which Hall held his father, arranged a meeting between them at which he introduced the subject of the materiality of the soul. Hall, senior, brought out all the orthodox arguments, but his son was too clever a debater to be easily convinced. The discussion became heated and the younger Hall left the room in great agitation. His father then turned to the discomfited Morris and said "Sir, I must beg of you never to lead me into another controversy with my son, Robert, for, to tell you the truth, though I wish him not to know it, he is the only person I am acquainted with that I should dread to meet in argument."[2] Despite all the efforts of his friends and family, Hall remained unconvinced of the orthodox teaching and was a materialist till the end of his pastorate at Bristol.

In these matters of doctrine, Hall, like most young men just out of college, was trying to cut a way for himself through the intellectual jungle. His aim, he said, was to find a middle was between "the rigidity of calvinism and the laxness of arminianism,"[3] but he veered much further from calvinism than most Particular Baptists were prepared to allow. This was probably due to the influence of Dr. Joseph

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.27.
2. Morris' Recollections, p.55.
3. IBID, p.59.

Priestley for whom Hall freely expressed his admiration. Priestley, like Hall, had been brought up in calvinism but had rejected many of the traditional doctrines including those of original sin and predestination and had written a book in defence of materialism.[1] Yet although Hall admired Priestley, he was not prepared to accept all his teaching and infact openly repudiated Priestley's socinianism. "Since I first began to reflect" Hall told his friend John Ryland, "I do not recollect a time when I was less inclined to Socinianism than at present."[2]

During his Bristol pastorate there were two other points at which Hall showed his reaction from what most Baptists then considered orthodoxy.

The first concerned the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. At this period Hall began to doubt "the doctrine of the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit".[3] The calvinists asserted that, "in the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."[4] But Hall rejected this. His opinion was that the Holy Spirit is to be regarded as "a divine energy, or agency, instead of a personal subsistence".[5]

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1. See section on Priestley in B. Willey: The eighteenth Century Background, Chapter X (1949 edition).
2. Gregory's Memoir, pp.20-21.
3. IBID, p.52.
4. Westminster Confession, II iii. : Calvin's Institutes I, xiii, 14-19.
5. WORKS VI, p.166 (note).

His viewpoint found little support among the Baptists of Bristol.

A second point of debate concerned the doctrine of baptism. As far as the doctrine of believers' baptism was concerned, there was no division of opinion. "I am, both in respect to the subject and to the mode of this institution, a Baptist," Hall wrote. "To apply this ordinance to infants appears to me a perversion of the intention of this sacred institution; and the primitive, the regular, and proper mode of administration, I take to be immersion." He went on to say that he would not himself baptize in any other way than by immersion, but declared, "I should not think myself authorized to re-baptize anyone who has been sprinkled in adult age."[1] This view, wrote one of Hall's biographers, "had given much pain to some of his Baptist friends".[2] They considered immersion to be essential to true baptism. The typical Baptist view was expressed by Andrew Fuller when he said, "I believe it is essential to christian baptism that it be by immersion or burying the person in water, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost."[3] But Hall could not agree with this. "It appears to me," he wrote, "that sprinkling, though an innovation, does not deprive Baptism of its essential validity."[4] In other words, for Hall, the mode of administration of the rite is quite subordinate to the principle that it is

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.27.
2. IBID, p.25.
3. J. Ryland: Memoir of Andrew Fuller, p.97ff.
4. Gregory's Memoir, p.27.

to be administered to believers only. In this he is reverting to the view of some of the earliest of the Baptists[1] and he would have agreed with a modern Baptist, H. Wheeler Robinson, who wrote, "The essential principle of Believers' Baptism does not stand or fall with the form which that Baptism may take."[2]

Hall's plain statement of his views did not pacify his critics. In fact, they considered he had condemned himself out of his own mouth and their opposition increased. But to Hall, truth was nore important than popularity and he bluntly declared, "For my conduct in the ministry I make no apology. I have adopted that strain of preaching and selected those topics which I thought most conducive to your good, forming my own opinions without fear or control, and commending myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. The calm recollection of this is my only support and I need no other."[3]

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1. H. Wheeler Robinson: Baptist Principles (4th. edition), p.73. See also H. Cook: What Baptists Stand for (1953), p.205 (note).
2. H. Wheeler Robinson: op.cit., p.16.
3. Morris' Recollections, p.71.

IV. THE FINAL BREAK

Once the wheel of controversy had begun to move, there was no stopping it; and when argument failed, there was always criticism to be made of Hall's personal habits which were inclined to be eccentric. The news went round the congregation that he had been seen, "walking through the city without his hat, or . . . . going to meet a genteel party with only half a shirt upon his back, large holes in his stockings, worn inside out, the calf drawn down to supply the place of a departed heel, and his bare toes protruding through his shoes." Hall brushed aside this kind of criticism saying that "such trifles were not worthy of any notice."[1]

To add to his trouble, when the controversy was at its height, he had an unfortunate love affair. It is difficult to uncover all the details because Hall was naturally reticent about the matter. It seems, however, that he met a charming and accomplished young lady by the name of Miss Steele,[2] and if the essay he published about this time is any guide, he fell deeply in love with her. "Love," he writes in the essay, "lies hid betwixt the keys of a harpsichord and is shaken out with a few touches of the fingers. It flounces in an apron and is trailed along with a flowing robe . . . . . it will steal upon us when we are least

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1. Morris' Recollections, p.60.

2. IBID, p.83.

upon our guard. It hides itself in a lock, and waves in the ringlets of the hair . . . . a glance or a gaze are sometimes equally fatal." He goes on to speak of the "miseries of love", of the lover's "frivolous and tormenting desires" and rather pessimistically reflects that love is "the certain forerunner of poverty." Only a lover could have written A Reverie.[1] William Pendered, the Baptist minister at Tuthill Stairs, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was so delighted with it that he asked if he could print 500 copies.[2]

As the months went by Hall's love remained undimmed. In 1788, he went so far as to rent a house in anticipation of marriage and his sister, Mary, came from Arnesby to act as housekeeper until the wedding.[3] Then without warning, Miss Steele broke off their engagement and married a man of wealth and influence, leaving Hall to nurse a bitter disappointment. Salt was poured in his wounds by the rumour that the opposition party in the church had been chiefly instrumental in persuading Miss Steele to desert him.[4]

All through these difficult days Caleb Evans had stood by his assistant. He had vouched for his orthodoxy and had remained friendly and helpful. In a statement to the church in November 1790, Hall

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1. WORKS III, pp.464-479.
2. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich, p.113.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p.23.
4. Morris' Recollections, p.84.

agreed that Dr. Evans' "friendship for me has continued through every vicissitude unshaken."[1] But even this friendly relationship crumbled and it soon became clear that harmony no longer prevailed between the two ministers. The affair became a topic for gossip throughout the city. People took sides and the unity of the church was seriously threatened. It is difficult to unravel the facts. Accusations were made and denied. Gossip and misunderstanding distorted the issues and there were obviously faults on both sides. Hall, still bitterly disappointed in love and smarting under unfair accusations about his preaching, doctrine and manners said many foolish things in that sarcastic way which could be so wounding. Caleb Evans, according to Joseph Hughes,[2] was jealous over the preaching popularity of his assistant and, conscious of his age and position, determined to put Hall in his place. There were some angry scenes, in one of which Hall turned to Evans and said, "You have done too much ever to permit us to act together as colleagues with unanimity and confidence."[3] Mr. John Harris, the Mayor of Bristol and senior deacon at Broadmead, tried to reconcile the opposing parties. A meeting was arranged at the Mansion House - the Mayor's home - on December 13th., 1790, but the parties separated as alienated as before.

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1. Morris' Recollections, p.71. For the whole controversy see Broadmead Records II, p.96ff.
2. The Hall Family, p.53.
3. Morris' Recollections, p.80.

In the meantime Hall sent in his resignation. In the autumn of 1790 when the controversy was at its height, he had been invited to preach for a month in Robert Robinson's church at Cambridge (now vacant owing to Robinson's death in June 1790). He accepted the invitation and was warmly received. So much so, that the invitation was extended for a longer period. Hall accepted it and told the Broadmead congregation that he held himself "engaged in honour as a probationer for six months to a respectable society at Cambridge."[1] At the end of this period the call was renewed and Hall accepted it on July 23rd., 1791. In his brief letter to the Cambridge church he wrote, "I am truly sensible of the honour you have done me, in inviting me to the pastoral office among you. I am convinced of my inability adequately to discharge its arduous duties . . . . but . . . . I will attempt it to the best of my power, and beg an interest in your prayers . . . . that I may be able to commend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God."[2]

Just before the final curtain came down on his Bristol pastorate, Hall received disturbing news from Arnesby. His father had for some time been declining in health. In December 1790, he had written in his diary, "On the Lord's day I preached but never with such difficulty

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1. For details of this call see Baptist Magazine, March 1832; Gregory's Memoir, p.28ff.; and the Minute Books at Cambridge (Oct. to Dec., 1790).

2. WORKS V, p.409.

before. I then administered the Lord's supper. Breath short. Pain so very great that most thought I should have died among them."[1] The old pastor lingered on for a few months, but on March 13th., 1791, he died at the age of sixty-three. Andrew Fuller and John Ryland preached at his funeral and great crowds paid tribute to his gracious manner and holy life. To his son, fresh from the bitterness of controversy, it was a severe blow, for his father meant more to him than any other person. In a short sketch of his father, appended to Ryland's funeral sermon, Hall wrote of his father's "deep devotion and unaffected humility", and, no doubt, thinking of the tragedy of his mother, he tells of the "uncommon succession of trials and distresses" which marked his father's life and of the "exemplary patience" with which he met them.[2]

On a later visit to the Arnesby manse, Hall's mind was so filled with thoughts of his father that he went by himself into the parlour and, falling on his knees, prayed fervently. He then slowly walked into the graveyard and laying his hands on his father's grave, prayed once more with great passion.[3] This experience of the loss of his

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1. Morris: Memoir of Hall of Arnesby, p.32. See also Rippon's Annual Register (1791), p.226ff.
2. WORKS IV, p.262ff.
3. Morris' Recollections, p.94; See also F. A. Cox: Sermon on the death of Hall (1831), p.34. The gravestone can still be seen at Arnesby.

father enabled him to sympathise with others in a very real way. He wrote to an old friend in 1804 saying, "I well know the desolating, the withering sensation, which pervades the heart on the loss of an affectionate father."[1]

His father's death, coming just as he concluded his work at Bristol, was to be an important factor in his new pastorate. He often said in later life that he "buried in his father's grave" his speculations about "the materiality of the Soul",[2] and it seems clear that the memory of his father, of his simple faith and prayerful spirit, enabled the son to keep his feet in the many currents of thought which were then swirling round the Cambridge Baptist Church.

But the unhappy dispute at Bristol was fanned into flame again a few months later. In May 1791, Caleb Evans was seized with a paralytic stroke. It was followed by another in August. He lost his power of speech and went into a coma from which he never recovered. He died on August 9th., 1791. To many of his friends it appeared that his death had been accelerated by his dispute with Hall and much of the old bitterness came to the surface.[3] Hall was at Cambridge when he heard of the death of his old colleague and at once expressed his regrets. Writing to his brother-in-law, Isaac James, he said, "I think you and

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1. WORKS V, p.428.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p.30.
3. J. G. Fuller: The rise and progress of dissent in Bristol (1840), p.196/7.

all my friends ought now to bury all that is past . . . . and our best improvement of the death of this useful servant of God, will be to imitate his excellencies and forget his errors."[1] In this spirit the breach in the church was slowly healed. Later Hall was asked to write the inscription on a memorial to Caleb Evans and was invited back to preach at Broadmead, but the family of Dr. Evans were understandably bitter about this for many years. It seemed to them that Hall was being permitted "to triumph over the ashes of the deceased".[2]

At Bristol, Hall had had a difficult initiation into the ministry. Much of the trouble was undoubtedly his own fault and of his own choosing, but he came out of the experience a better man. His preaching had matured; he had been forced to clarify his faith; he had lost much of his youthful pride and had learned in some measure to bridle his sarcastic tongue. If it is true that at Bristol Hall made his mistakes, it is also true that he learned his lessons and was never again to have such an unhappy experience with a church.

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p.25.
2. The Hall Family, p.55.

PART III

CAMBRIDGE 1791-1806

I. THE CAMBRIDGE CHURCH

Cambridge was to be for Robert Hall both a place of fame and of tragedy. It was here that he built up his great reputation as a preacher, writer and wit, and won for himself renown as a defender of liberty and justice. But his fame was, within fifteen years, to be so clouded by physical pain and mental affliction that not only had he to give up his pastorate but it was doubtful if he ever would preach again.

Cambridge had long been associated with dissenters and the Baptists had gained an early footing. After the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence eleven Baptist meeting-houses were registered and by 1699 the Bishop of Ely was complaining of at least five Baptist conventicles.[1] The St. Andrew's Street Baptist Church, of which Hall was now minister, had been founded in 1721, but with the other dissenting bodies in the town had greatly declined and, in fact, had become an object of general contempt. The meeting-house was in the Stone Yard in the parish of St. Andrew. It was originally a barn which had later been turned into a stable and, when Robert Robinson took over the pastorate in 1761 he described it as "a damp,

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1. Victoria History of the County of Cambridge, Vol. II, pp. 187/8. See also B. Nutter: The Story of the Cambridge Baptists (1912), ch. xii.

dark, cold, ruinous, contemptible hovel."[1] The minister before Robinson had been a man "of violent temper, a lord in his church, a tyrant in his family, and a libertine in his life," and the church was notorious for "strife, instability and slackness of discipline."[2] The membership in 1761 was only thirty-four, but they chose well when they invited Robinson to be their pastor. His learning, ability and sincerity commended the church to a better class of people, and many of the more prosperous and intelligent citizens of Cambridge came to hear him. By 1764 it was decided to demolish the old meeting-house and build a new one. This was done and within a year the church was worshipping in a new building costing five hundred guineas and seating six hundred people. Within a few years this building was filled at both services and included in the congregation men of the calibre of Dr. John Randall, professor of music at the University, and Ebenezer Hollick, lord of the manor at Whittlesford.[3]

Robinson continued to build up the church. He preached in the villages, studied at the University and stood firmly for liberty and truth. Unfortunately, this gifted man veered

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1. W. Robinson Memoir of Rev. Robt. Robinson (1861), p. xxx.
2. G. W. Hughes With Freedom Fired (1955), p. 16; and W. Robinson Memoir of Rev. Robt. Robinson, p. xxx.
3. Details from W. Robinson: op.cit. p. xxx f.f.

away from orthodoxy and in his later years was considered a socinian. He told Dr. Priestley that he believed "the doctrine of the Trinity an absurdity,"[1] and in 1780 wrote in his diary, "The common, popular notion about a Trinity is a relic of the old popish idolatry."[2] He also lost his hold on the doctrine of the atonement, and with it much of his peace of mind. His biographer says, "He was like a noble vessel broken from its moorings, and drifting out to sea amidst fogs and rocks, without a compass or a rudder."[3] When one considers his long association with a prominent group of Rational Dissenters, his distaste for Calvin and his circuitous spiritual pilgrimage along the roads of Anglicanism, Methodism, Independency and the Baptists, it is not difficult to sympathize with this attractive and talented minister; but his lapse had a most serious effect on the Cambridge church. In later years, Robert Hall criticized Robinson "for leaving his church a wilderness, and bequeathing his successor a bed of thorns."[4]

When he first went to Cambridge, Hall found that attendances had greatly declined. Instead of a crowded church, the gallery was half-empty and there were many empty pews in

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1. Ibid, p. lxxi.
2. Ibid, p. lxxv.
3. Ibid, p. lxxvii.
4. The Hall Family, p. 57. See also Gregory's Memoir, p. 37.

the main body of the church. It is true that there was a good representation of well-to-do merchants, but the poorer people were few and far between, and "not a student or member of the University was to be seen in the place."[1] To add to the difficulty there was little harmony among the church members.

The right wing was led by the senior deacon, Mr. Foster, who had opposed Robinson's socinian tendencies and speculative preaching, and, along with some of the congregation, was on the point of demanding Robinson's resignation when his death made the demand unnecessary.[2]

The left wing was composed of a small influential group who supported Robinson's unorthodox sentiments and were prepared to leave the church if his successor did not preach socinianism.

In between these two extremes the majority of the congregation were neither convinced of orthodox calvinism nor were they assured that socinianism was the only alternative. They needed a pastor who would give them a clear intellectual lead and who would guide them into a richer spiritual experience. Robert Hall was the answer to their need. He came a sadder and a wiser man after his Bristol experience and decided at the very beginning to make his theological position

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 2.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 28.

clear. In a letter to Isaiah Birt, an old college friend, he wrote: "On the first Sabbath of my arrival I preached in the morning on Hebrews ix, 13 - 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, Who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God', etc. - an entirely controversial sermon in defence of the atonement."[1]

His sermon was given a good hearing by most of the congregation, but one of the left-wing party waited behind after the service and told Hall, "This preaching won't do for us; it will only suit a congregation of old women." He went on to say that it was only fit for "people tottering upon the brink of the grave." Hall quietly replied, "Thank you, sir, for your concession. The doctrine will not suit people of any age, unless it be true; and if it be true, it is not fitted for old women alone, but it is equally important at every age."[2]

His rejoinder did not pacify his critics and in a short time about twenty-four withdrew from the congregation and began meeting in a private house under the guidance of William Frend, a tutor at Jesus College and an ardent socinian. This meeting faded out within a few months.[3]

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1. Works V, p. 408.
2. Gregory's Memoir, pp. 30-31.
3. Ibid p. 31. Frend was later expelled from the University on a charge of sedition. Hall refers to this incident in a review. Works IV, p. 183.

Once this initial difficulty had been overcome, Hall's ministry was much easier and slowly the congregation and minister were welded together into a happy fellowship which was to stand the test of fame and remain unshaken in tragedy.

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II. THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

At the beginning of Hall's ministry at Cambridge, the nation was in a ferment because of the French Revolution. Many Englishmen supported it, believing that it was a just judgment on the tyranny and oppression of the French aristocracy, and they hoped it would stimulate parliamentary reform in England. The dissenters were especially pleased. For years they had suffered under many grievances. They were technically excluded from Parliament, from civil offices and from municipal activity by the Test Acts. Appeals to Parliament had been made again and again; yet another was made in the very year of the Revolution but, like the rest, it failed. Now the victory of the French Revolution spurred them on to greater efforts and they were glad to count themselves among its supporters.

In November, 1789, for example, Dr. Richard Price (1723-1791), one of a group of leading Rationalist Dissenters, publicly congratulated the French National Assembly on the victory of liberty and justice over arbitrary power, and in his Discourse on the love of our country - which one writer claims to be "perhaps the most famous sermon of the century"[1] - he summons his hearers "to behold kingdoms starting from

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1. A. Lincoln: Some political and social Ideas of English Dissent, 1763-1800 (1938), p. 129.

sleep, breaking their fetters and claiming justice from their oppressors."[1]

The agitation for reform in England, coupled with the support of the French Revolution, gave rise to many clubs and societies in sympathy with the French and with Reform. In London the most popular were the "Corresponding Society" and the "Society for Constitutional Information". In Manchester a "Constitutional Society" was formed. Sheffield had its "Reform Society". Derby had a "Society for Political Information". Birmingham had a "Constitutional Society" and there were others in the growing towns of industrial Britain.[2]

But many Englishmen began to have doubts about the much publicised "glorious" Revolution. Stories of cruelty and barbarism in Paris began to filter through to England, and many supporters of the French changed their allegiance. The protests of the opposition were voiced by Edmund Burke. He was a passionate lover of England as he found her - the England of the Establishment, the England of the Whigs, ruled by men of station with leisure and tradition. He saw all this being threatened by the new foreign theories and revolutionary spirit, and framed an answer which was published as Reflections on the French Revolution. For him, the

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1. Sermon contained in A. C. Ward: A miscellany of Tracts and Pamphlets (1927).

2. See P. A. Brown: The French Revolution in English History (1918), p. 59 f.; also Baptist Magazine May, 1838, p. 197.

Revolution was a destructive attack on the sacred institution of monarchy. To support such a revolutionary régime as that of France was, for Burke, to align oneself with the enemies of England and to strike at the roots of her life.

The resulting controversy was echoed and re-echoed in every town and village. There were riots and mob violence. The worst example of this occurred at Birmingham, where Dr. Joseph Priestley had his laboratories. He had written a series of essays called Familiar Letters addressed to the Inhabitants of Birmingham and in one of them had used a phrase about "laying gunpowder under the old building of error and superstition". A "Church and King" mob fastened on this phrase and alleged that Priestley and the dissenters meant to blow up the churches. To make matters worse, a dinner had been arranged by Priestley on 14th July, 1791, to celebrate the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. A mob collected and proceeded to plunder the dissenting meeting-houses, after which they headed off to the house and laboratory of Dr. Priestley and burned it to the ground while Priestley paced the roads within sound of the shouts and roaring of the flames.[1] After two days the terror ceased. Losses were estimated as high as £100,000. Many strongly disapproved of this attack and were not slow in declaring it; but in

1. For a detailed report of these riots see The Christian Reformer May, 1835, pp. 293-304.

official circles there was a strange reluctance to bring the offenders to book, and not a few in authority secretly rejoiced. The Lord Advocate of Scotland, for instance, hoped that the good people of Edinburgh would serve their unitarians in the same way,[1] and it was said that George III wrote to Henry Dundas: "I cannot feel better pleased that Priestley is the sufferer for the doctrines his party have instilled."[2]

At Cambridge the controversy was as heated as in most other English towns. Olinthus Gregory, Hall's friend and biographer, says that the town was "split into the most violent party divisions, and the public were deluged with sermons from the pulpit and pamphlets from the press."[3] There were two sermons which particularly aroused the ire of Robert Hall. The first came from John Martin, a London Baptist minister, who said in a sermon that dissenters were "disaffected to the state", and he appealed to them to submit to their rulers and cease agitating for reform.[4] His sermon was followed by another from John Clayton, minister of the Weigh House Chapel, London. He also impeached the loyalty of his fellow dissenters and exhorted them to abstain from political activity. He even insinuated that the outrage at Birmingham was merely

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1. Edinburgh University: Laing MSS No. 294.
2. Quoted by Langford: A century of Birmingham Life I, p. 477.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 31.
4. Morris's Recollections, p. 107.

the "reaction of those violent passions" which Priestley himself had inculcated.[1]

These attacks from within the dissenting fold provoked Hall's anger. He wrote: "The religious tenets of Dr. Priestley appear to me erroneous in the extreme; but I should be sorry to suffer any difference of sentiment to diminish my sensibility to virtue, or my admiration of genius."[2] This was stated in his reply to Clayton which he published in September, 1791, under the title Christianity Consistent with a Love of Freedom. It was written when he was only twenty-seven years of age[3] and created considerable interest; but he would not consent to its re-publication because he felt it was too severe and caustic in tone. He was certainly severe on Clayton. "A more striking example of political ignorance," he wrote, ". . . has scarcely ever been exhibited." He speaks of Clayton's "natural relish for absurdity" and describes one of his assertions as "a notion as extravagant as was ever nourished in the brain of the wildest fanatic."[4]

But these caustic comments were but the background to Hall's main thesis which was freedom of religion. He pleads

1. Morris's Recollections, p. 103.
2. Works III, p. 28.
3. E. A. Payne is not accurate when he says that Hall "was then in his early thirties", c.f. The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England, p. 93.
4. Works III, pp. 21, 52, 40.

for "a full toleration of religious opinion and the protection of all parties in their mode of worship." He attacks the Test Acts which proscribe "a whole party, as unfit to be trusted by the community to which they belong."[1] The principle of freedom, he believes, is a right "founded on the constitution of human nature,"[2] which ought to be cherished by every Christian.

In all this, Hall is following the line already set by the Rational Dissenters, Price and Priestley, and, like them, he supports the French Revolution which promises, he asserts, "a firmer establishment to liberty than any recorded in the annals of the world."[3]

His pamphlet was welcomed by those already convinced and opposed heartily by those who detested the very idea of reform. Years later the Quarterly Review dismissed it as "full of contradictions" written at a time when "the energies of his mind were scarcely under his control."[4] This is as biassed a judgment as that of Hall's biographer, J. W. Morris, who said that it contained "the severest strictures that were ever exhibited against any court sycophant or political traitor since the odious reign of the Stuarts."[5]

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1. Works III, p. 52.
2. Ibid, p. 9.
3. Ibid, p. 30.
4. Quarterly Review, October 1832, Vol. 48, pp. 101-102.
5. Morris's Recollections, p. 103.

The truth is that, stripped of its controversial background, this pamphlet stands as an effective plea for freedom of religion. It was Hall's first serious publication, written with all the vigour of youth and showing the strength of his convictions and his growing ability as a writer. Yet it was but the spearhead for another work which was to be published two years later on the same theme. This time, however, the situation was very different. News had begun to filter through from France of the September Massacres and the Reign of Terror. Then in November, 1792, the French Convention issued a decree that it would give "assistance and help to all those peoples who wished to recover their liberty."[1] A wave of horror swept Britain, and a panic reaction set in. The government, greatly alarmed, cast suspicions on the reform societies which had sprung up throughout the country. The cartoons of James Gillray reflect the government attitude. He made reformers appear fools and the supporters of revolution traitors.[2] To confirm their suspicions, the magistrates of London made a systematic collection of the publications of the reform societies, and government spies were infiltrated into their meetings. It was exaggerated reports from these sources which so alarmed

1. Cambridge Modern History, Vol. 8, p. 297.
2. The Caricatures of James Gillray (1851). Among his most famous was one entitled "Smelling out a rat - or The atheistical revolutionist disturbed in his midnight calculations".

the Prime Minister, William Pitt. He immediately took steps to suppress the undercurrent of revolution which he felt was developing. In 1793 Bills were passed subjecting immigrants to police supervision. The Corresponding Societies Act suppressed most of the reform meetings. In 1794 Habeas Corpus was suspended, and, the next year, a new Treason Bill was passed.[1] At Manchester tavern keepers were warned to close their doors to any reform societies. At Cambridge politics were forbidden in public houses and landlords were instructed to report the names of all those with "republican" sympathies. An official heresy hunt was set on foot and many injustices resulted. The trial of Muir and Palmer in Scotland aroused widespread interest, and one dissenting minister, William Winterbottom, after preaching a political sermon, was arrested and sentenced to a heavy fine and four years' imprisonment. Tom Paine was outlawed for his popular Rights of Man, and the "Crown and Anchor Association" was formed to suppress seditious publications and protect the public from republicans and levellers. In Cambridge, riots and mob violence proved so dangerous that Charles Simeon, the vicar of Trinity Church, had to close down his evening service because of the "tumultuous proceedings" in the town.[2]

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1. See W. T. Selley: England in the 18th Century (1949), p. 144 ff.
2. W. Carus: Memoirs of Charles Simeon (1847), p. 87. See also P. A. Brown: The French Revolution in English History (1918), p. 59 ff.

In this atmosphere of violence and heresy trials many unjust accusations were made. One of them arose in Parliament and concerned a friend of Robert Hall and a leading Cambridge evangelical. This was W. Peet Musgrave, a wealthy tailor and woollen draper. (His son, Thomas Musgrave, became Archbishop of York in 1848). He, it was alleged, was spreading sedition, and fully deserved an attack made on him by a Cambridge mob.[1]

When news of this statement reached his friends there was an immediate protest. At a meeting of the Cambridge Book Society[2], which was supported by Hall and some of his congregation, it was unanimously resolved to answer these charges and to present a clear-cut exposition of the principles for which the supporters of freedom stood. Hall was the obvious man to write such a reply, but he was very reluctant to do so, and it was only after some shrewd persuasion by Alderman Ind that he at last consented. "I went home to my lodgings," Hall said, "and began to write immediately; sat up all night, and, wonderful for me, kept up the intellectual ferment for almost a month; and then the thing was done."[3] Thus was written his Apology for the Freedom of the Press and for General Liberty, a work which, as one reviewer

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1. Works III, p. 101 (note).
2. It was commonly called "Alderman Ind's Club" from the name of its zealous treasurer. See Gregory: Memoir, p. 33.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 33. A first edition of the Apology is in the Leicester Public Library.

admitted "required no small courage at that period."[1]

In the meantime, another opponent of dissent and reform appeared in the national arena. This was the Bishop of St. Asaph, Dr. Samuel Horsley (1733-1806). He was a Fellow of the Royal Society, an authority on the works of Sir Isaac Newton, and an ardent supporter of the Establishment. On 30th January, 1793, preaching before the House of Lords in Westminster Abbey, he made a sweeping attack on dissenters, in which he denounced their conventicles and Sunday schools as places of sedition and atheism, and described dissenters and reformers as "miserable men in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."[2]

Hall felt that he had to reply to Horsley, but his Apology was now in the process of publication. He, therefore, wrote some "Remarks on Bishop Horsley's Sermon", which he prefixed to his main pamphlet.[3] He did not spare the Bishop, to whom he ascribed "venom", "meanness", "malice", "sanctimonious hypocrisy and priestly insolence", and, with the old familiar sarcasm, adds "characters of his stamp, like a plague or a tempest, may have their uses in the general system, if they occur not too often."[4] It is not

1. Baptist Magazine, April 1832.
2. Works III, p. 78.
3. See H. Townsend: The Claims of the Free Churches (1949), p. 150 ff.
4. In later editions of the Apology Hall left out the more caustic remarks, c.f. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 28 (note).

surprising that a reviewer considered that Bishop Horsley had been "blasted by Hall's wrath".[1]

The Apology itself covers a variety of subjects, all hinging on the great question of liberty. "I am endeavouring to establish," Hall says, "the liberty of free enquiry." He protests against the restrictions on open discussion, and insists that "when the right of unlimited enquiry is exerted, the human faculties will be upon the advance." As far as politics are concerned he has no doubts that "free enquiry will never endanger the existence of a good government". And in the realm of religion he feels sure that liberty "will issue in the firmer establishment of truth, and the overthrow of error". As if to make his point doubly clear he goes on to say, "whatever alarm, then, may have been taken at the liberty of discussion, religion, it is plain, hath been a gainer by it".[2]

It is this insistence on freedom which prompted W.E.H. Lecky to state that "probably the ablest modern advocate of what may be termed the Biblical aspect of liberty was Robert Hall".[3]

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1. Quarterly Review, October 1832, Vol. 48, p. 106.
2. Works III, pp. 92, 85, 93, 89, 88.
3. W.E.H. Lecky: The rise and influence of Rationalism in Europe (1910), Vol. II, p. 178. Hall intended to write a fuller reply to Bishop Horsley and the opponents of liberty. He tells of this in a letter to J. Phillips dated 26th May, 1801. The work was never completed and only fragments remain. These were published in Hall's Works, Vol. III, p. 327 ff. under the titles "Defence of Village Preaching", "The impolicy of Intolerance" and "On Toleration".

There are, of course, other themes emphasized in the Apology besides liberty. Hall attacks, for example, the government-sponsored associations which aimed at the suppression of all criticism of the State. He calls them, "An admirable expedient for transforming a great and generous people into a contemptible race of spies and informers", and he warns his readers that "the bounds of tolerated opinion will be continually narrowed, till we awaken under the fangs of a relentless despotism".[1]

Reform of Parliament is another of Hall's themes. In this he was echoing the sentiments of many dissenters who saw no chance of admission to full civic rights except by Parliamentary reform. They believed that if once the rotten borough system were abolished, their electoral strength would compel Parliament to redress their grievances. For analogous reasons the clergy and supporters of the Established Church became the determined opponents of parliamentary reform which they feared might lead to disestablishment. Hall, in his Apology, is strongly in favour of reform. He compares "the opulent towns of Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds", which had no parliamentary representation, with "the decayed boroughs of Cornwall", which had a multitude of representatives; and he advocates a radical reform. He goes further and says that

1. Works III, pp. 97 and 104.

"every householder in town or country" should be entitled to vote, and suggests that annual parliaments be established.[1]

No essay on liberty by a Baptist would, of course, have been complete without a reference to the position of dissenters. Hall devotes a whole section to the subject. He defends their patriotism and asserts their belief in "the rights of conscience against all human control and authority." For the Church of England as an institution he has little patience. He admits that there are many members and clergymen of the Church who are "splendid examples of virtue and talents", but he believes that the idea of establishment is unbiblical and dangerous. "Turn a Christian society," he writes, "into an established church, and it is no longer a voluntary assembly for the worship of God; it is a powerful corporation, full of such sentiments, and passions, as usually distinguish those bodies; a dread of innovation, an attachment to abuses, a propensity to tyranny and oppression."[2]

Such straightforward writing did not win him many favours from the supporters of the government and the Established Church. His Apology was later described as a "monument of self-contradiction", and his views were dismissed as "the

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1. Works III, pp. 105, 107 and 111.
2. Ibid, pp. 142, 148 and 145.

unripe speculations of his youth".[1] On the other hand, the supporters of reform and dissent united in praise of Hall's essay. Morris, Hall's biographer, declared that "of all the writers who have exposed the evils arising out of the alliance of Church and State no-one had done it so effectually and with such invincible arguments as the author of this celebrated pamphlet."[2]

This was the view of most of the Cambridge dissenters and they bought up Hall's pamphlet with such enthusiasm that three editions were called for in less than six months. Later, many pirated editions were sold when it became known that Hall did not wish to republish his essay. The Apology was also circulated in America.[3]

The success of his pamphlet brought Hall into the public eye and involved him in political affairs. On one occasion he attended a county meeting, headed by the Duke of Bedford, to appeal for the dismissal of Pitt's government. On the way home the young Baptist minister acted in the unusual rôle of escort for the Cambridge party who were endangered by a "Church and King" mob.[4]

On another occasion a strongly-worded attack on dissenters was made by Charles Simeon, the vicar of Trinity Church,

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1. Quarterly Review, October 1832, Vol. 48, p. 105.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 119.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 34.
4. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 23.

Cambridge. For some time Simeon had been anxious about the drift to Dissent from the Established Church, and even organized a campaign to visit his congregation so that he could learn "whether any were in danger of being drawn away by the dissenters".[1] Now, in a sermon, he accused dissenters of exploiting the political situation to their own advantage. Hall indignantly replied in a "Letter to a Cambridge Clergyman", which was published on 8th August, 1795, in the Cambridge Intelligencer. Such was the interest that the letter was re-printed the following week. A heated debate ensued, and for a while relations between the neighbouring clergymen were very strained.[2]

But Hall's conscience began to trouble him, not so much because of the disagreement with Simeon, in which he felt himself to be in the right, but because, in the growing heat of political debate, his pastoral work was suffering. He decided, therefore, to have done with politics and to concentrate on the work of his church. During the next few years he, therefore, busied himself with preaching, study and pastoral visitation, and left politics severely alone.

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1. W. Carus: Memoirs of Charles Simeon (1847), pp. 45 and 138; see also B. Flower National Sins Considered (1796), p. IV.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 133 ff. For details regarding the Cambridge Intelligencer see County History of Cambridgeshire, Vol. II, p. 416.

III. PASTOR

Until 1803 Hall lived in two rooms belonging to Mr. Lucas Ray in the Petty Cury. The sitting-room and study formed one large room with two fine windows.[1] He concentrated at first on pastoral work, and study was given a very minor place. This was partly due to what he called "my natural indolence"[2] and partly to the pains in his back, which were at times very severe. The young minister was a well-proportioned, athletic figure, whose cheerful manner and winning frankness made him a welcome visitor in the homes of his congregation. With the ever-recurring pains in his back, it would have been understandable if Hall had been a moody, ill-tempered man. In actual fact, as one observer declared, "his infirmities, which were increasing, he concealed with dexterity,"[3] and not only that, he was a cheerful personality who loved a joke and could share in an evening's hilarity to the full. In front of strangers he was more reserved, but from personal experience his friend, Olinthus Gregory, wrote of his "buoyancy and playfulness when among his select friends" and later added "such was his prevailing cheerfulness that he seemed to move and breathe in an atmosphere of hilarity".[4]

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 6.
2. Works V, p. 421, Letter to Rev. J. Phillips.
3. Quoted in Gregory's Memoir, p. 37.
4. Gregory's Memoir, p. 39 and p. 41.

It was his rule, during the early years, to visit every member of his church once a quarter. These visits were usually paid in the evening about 8 o'clock so that he could meet the whole family. He often stayed until 11 o'clock, and gained a reputation for tea-drinking. The advance in popularity of tea throughout the country at this period had already roused the wrath of one patriotic Englishman, who had not only declared it to be "the curse of this nation" and "the height of folly" but had bravely asked "were they the sons of tea-sippers who won the fields of Cressy and Agincourt or dyed the Danube's stream with Gallic blood?"[1] Hall had no such qualms and continued his tea-drinking. Thirty cups of tea a day was his average. He told a friend his method was "to visit four families and drink seven or eight cups at each".[2] In this and other customs he imitated the famous Dr. Johnson, and later admitted, "Yes, sir; I aped Johnson, and I preached Johnson, and I am afraid with little more of evangelical sentiment than is to be found in his Essays, but it was youthful folly, and it was very great folly."[3]

Like Johnson he enjoyed good conversation and witty

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1. J. Hanway: An Essay on Tea (1757) quoted in M. Dorothy George England in Johnson's Day (1942), p. 160.
2. The Hall Family, p. 57. See also Gregory's Memoir, p. 38.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 35. Boswell says of Johnson, "I suppose no person ever enjoyed with more relish the infusion of that fragrant leaf". Boswell's Life of Johnson (Everyman Ed.), Vol. I, p. 190.

tea-table talk and so found it a special pleasure to visit the more intelligent and well-informed members of his congregation. Being fond of children, he often went an hour earlier than expected to play with them before they went to bed, and then he stayed on to talk and drink tea with the parents. He became a welcome guest in many Cambridge homes.

This did not mean he neglected the poor of his flock. On the contrary, they were given special attention. With his Arnesby background he knew what poverty meant and could understand the poor better than most ministers in the town. He visited the poor regularly and was not too proud to share their frugal meals and take their children on his knee. In order to save embarrassment he tactfully let it be known that he liked only a bowl of milk for his supper. Another of his thoughtful actions was to carry tea and sugar with him on his visits. He took good care that there should be more than was necessary so that he could quietly leave the balance in the house.[1] This was typical of his generosity, and whenever he met real need he at once met it from his own slender resources. If more was still required, he had no qualms about approaching the more wealthy church members, saying tactfully, "Poor Mr. . . . is in great distress: some of his family are

1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 40 (note).

ill, and he cannot supply proper necessaries. Lend me five shillings for the poor fellow: I will pay you again in a fortnight, unless in the meantime you find that the case requires your help, and then the donation shall become yours."[1]

This gracious art of giving had no doubt been learned in Arnesby, where his father was often similarly helped.[2] Hall was always embarrassed by the thanks of the poor people and would say hastily, "Thank you, thank you; you have said more than enough. Remember God has sent into the world a more powerful, and more noble sentiment, than even gratitude."[3]

For meanness in any form he had little patience and was not afraid to say so. He described one wealthy church member who refused to help a needy Christian as "a mountain covered with perpetual snow" because he only lent "a distant ear to the murmurings from the vale beneath".[4] Of another mean character a friend remarked "Poor wretch! you might put his soul into a nutshell", to which Hall replied, "Yes, sir, and even then it would creep out at a maggot-hole".[5]

He encouraged his people to meet regularly in each other's houses for prayer and Bible reading, and made a point of joining them whenever possible. These cottage meetings,

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 49.
2. See The Hall Family, p. 17 and p. 19.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 40. . . . The Account Book for the Poor of the Church at. St. Andrew's Street Church shows that an average of over £30 per annum was given to the poor of the congregation.
4. Ibid, p. 49.
5. Ibid, p. 49.

together with the Thursday night meetings at the church, he considered "the best thermometer for ascertaining the religious state of his people".[1]

Like his father before him, Hall took a keen interest in any young men with evangelical leanings, and in this way he befriended John Greene, Newton Bosworth, Olinthus Gregory and Joseph Howlett (1765-1837), who all joined the Cambridge church as young men. It was Hall who encouraged Howlett to enter the ministry and who helped him in his pastorate at Stretham in Ely.[2] Another young lad, Claudius Rich,[3] owed his advancement in India to Hall's letter of commendation which he sent to Sir James Mackintosh. Rich eventually became Mackintosh's son-in-law.[4]

A man with friends is always fortunate, and Hall had many. Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, Isaiah Birt, Thomas Langdon and Joseph Kinghorn were among his intimates among the Baptists; but the friendships Hall made at Cambridge were not confined to his own denomination. He was well acquainted, for example, with Dr. Mansel, the Master of Trinity College,

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 40.
2. Baptist Magazine, July 1838, p. 286.
3. Claudius Rich became, later, a famous orientalist. His collection of ancient manuscripts is in the British Museum. See S. Hutton: Bristol and its famous associations (1907), p. 340.
4. Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh (1836), Vol. I, p. 200 and p. 370.

whom he had met at various functions in the town. Another of his friends was the Bishop of London, Dr. Beilby Porteus (1731-1808). The Bishop took a keen interest in the growing evangelical movement in the Church and, unlike many of his colleagues, was favourably disposed towards dissenters. "I have certainly always treated them," he said, "with gentleness and courtesy, considering them as they certainly are, fellow Christians, fellow protestants, and fellow members of that Holy Catholic Church, that Universal Church of Christ."[1]

Hall first met the Bishop through his chaplain, John Owen (later secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society), who had invited him to visit the gardens at Fulham Palace. While they were strolling around them, they met the Bishop, who was introduced to the Baptist preacher. They chatted for some time, Hall was invited into the house, and, before he left, had promised to come for dinner with Dr. Porteus.[2] This was the first of many meetings, and their friendship became quite a family joke. Hall's brother-in-law, Isaac James, was prompted to write:

> "And so I hear that Beilby Porteus
> To Robert Hall is very courteous,
> Strange that an anabaptist writer
> Should thus be honoured by the Mitre!"[3]

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1. R. Hodgson: Life of Bishop Porteus (1811), p. 271. See also M. Jaeger: Before Victoria (1956), p. 37.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 109.
3. The Hall Family, p. 80 and p. 93.

As a token of his regard Dr. Porteus presented Hall with a handsome polyglot Bible, which became a treasured possession in the Hall family. It was inscribed as follows:- "These volumes are presented as an appropriate intimation of that applause, veneration and gratitude that are due to the acute detector, perspicuous impugner and victorious antagonist of the sceptical, infidel and anti-Christian sophists of the present day."[1]

Another of Hall's friends in the Established Church was Charles Simeon of Trinity Church. Their earlier controversy had long since been forgotten and by 1801 Hall was writing in a letter, "Mr. Simeon and I are upon very friendly terms. I lately dined with him at his own rooms, and have repeatedly met him in company, in which the conversation has been very agreeable."[2] Occasionally, when he was free, Hall attended the evening services of Simeon at Trinity Church. The curate of that Church, Thomas Thomason, was also friendly with Hall and when, for health reasons, Hall moved to Shelford, a village five miles from Cambridge, they often rode together into town.[3]

These friendships that Hall made with members of the Established Church gave rise to many rumours. It was hinted

1. Charles Badham: Selections from Robert Hall (1840), p. XVII note.
2. Works V, p. 422.
3. Baptist Magazine, May 1832, p. 179.

that he had been offered a high position in the Church of England if he would be ordained. Olinthus Gregory said it was Dr. Mansel "through the medium of a common friend," who "endeavoured to induce him to enter the Established Church."[1] R. H. Warren said that Dr. Porteus told Hall that if he entered the Established Church "he should be promoted to the bench of Bishops".[2] John Greene said that Hall "declined very high preferment in the Church from Mr. Pitt and Dr. Barrington, Bishop of Durham".[3] Thomas Swan asserted that Dr. Barrington had made the offer to Hall[4], and this seems to have been the most persistent rumour; but perhaps J. W. Morris is nearest the truth when he says that Bishop Barrington (who admired Hall's writings) was merely heard to say "Mr. Hall would be a great acquisition to the Church, where his splendid abilities would meet with a more ample recompense than is generally found in the stipend of a dissenting minister".[5]

Whether any direct invitation was ever made is doubtful, but, in any case, such an invitation had not the slightest hope of success. The Establishment had never appealed to Hall and, humble as his own denomination might be, he remained unshaken in his Baptist views. The Baptist Magazine had the heart of the matter when it stated, in May, 1831, that if an

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 67.
2. The Hall Family, p. 94.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, 27.
4. T. Swan: Sermon on the death of Hall, p. 28 (note). See also The Annual Register, 1831, pp. 228/9.
5. Morris's Recollections, p. 112.

offer had really been made to Hall, then "the prelate who made such an intimation was totally ignorant of his character".[1]

While at Cambridge, to his delight, Hall renewed acquaintance with James Mackintosh, who was then (1799) working at Cambridge in preparation for a series of lectures he was to deliver at Lincoln's Inn. They often met in the evenings, recollecting the past and discussing current events. Dr. Samuel Parr was also in Cambridge at this time, and he was introduced to Hall. They were at once attracted to each other and Mackintosh, Parr and Hall, along with some members of the University, used to meet regularly in the evenings, arguing and debating on a wide variety of subjects. Dr. Parr had won for himself a reputation as the "whig Johnson" and had held many influential positions, from tutor at Harrow to headmaster at Norwich. His correspondence was enormous, and he was friendly with many of the leading men of the day.[2] He had a high opinion of Hall, and in his notes to a sermon delivered before the Lord Mayor of London in 1800 he attributed to Hall "the eloquence of an orator, the fancy of a poet, the acuteness of a schoolman, the profoundness of a philosopher, and the piety of a saint".[3] Their friendship,

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1. Baptist Magazine, May 1831, p. 192.
2. Dr. Samuel Parr (1747-1825). Among his friends were Lord Holland, Sir Francis Burdett, Dugald Stewart, the philosopher, and Charles Fox, the Whig leader.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 131 (note B). See also Greene's Reminiscences, p. 29.

established at Cambridge, continued until Parr's death in 1825. In his will he left a ring to be given "to the Reverend Robert Hall . . . as a mark of my reverence for his exemplary virtues and my admiration of his sublime and hallowed eloquence".[1] It was from Dr. Parr that Hall learned to smoke. Up to this period he had persistently opposed the habit. Why, then, did he begin now? Olinthus Gregory declares it was a matter of self-defence. Parr, an inveterate smoker, used to puff away at his pipe from morning till night, and seemed perpetually hidden behind a dense cloud of smoke. "No person," says Gregory, "could remain in his company long without great inconvenience, unless he learnt to smoke in self-defence. Mr. Hall, therefore, made the attempt, and quickly overcame every obstacle."[2] Hall himself used to say jokingly that he first learned to smoke "in order to qualify himself" for his first interview with the famous Dr. Parr.[3] There is probably an element of truth in both of these explanations. Certainly from this time Hall was seldom without his pipe.

Some of his friends disapproved of his new habit, and even his friend Gregory tried to persuade him to give it up. He loaned him a pamphlet by Dr. Adam Clarke entitled

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1. The Hall Family, p. 87. See also Greene's Reminiscences, p. 29.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 61.
3. F. Trestrail: Reminiscences of College Life in Bristol, p. 57.

The Use and Abuse of Tobacco, hoping it would convince Hall of the sin of smoking. Hall read it and returned it to Gregory, saying "Thank you, sir, for Adam Clarke's pamphlet. I can't refute his arguments, and I can't give up smoking."[1]

Ever since his Aberdeen days Robert Hall loved argument and debate. Here at Cambridge, under the stimulus of Mackintosh and Parr, he was again the centre of many arguments. It often led him into trouble, for his old demon of sarcasm would sometimes break out in the heat of debate and wound a friendship. On one occasion Andrew Fuller, the Baptist minister at Kettering, began to support the doctrine of total depravity. Hall immediately took up the challenge and all went well until he sarcastically remarked that he thought Fuller's doctrine a libel on human nature. The argument then became rather heated and eventually, with ruffled feelings, it was broken off. J. W. Morris, Hall's biographer, recalled that Fuller, as he left the room, complained that Hall "gave no quarter" and "instantly anticipated all he had to say".[2] Fortunately, they soon calmed down and their friendship continued as closely as ever;[3] but every argument did not end so happily. Hall found it difficult in debate

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 61.
2. Morris's Recollections, pp. 154-155.
3. Hall referred to Fuller's bushy eyebrows as "Fuller's Peace Establishment": see Baptist Magazine, May 1838, p. 200.

to suffer fools gladly and, as a result, sometimes lost his temper with the opposition. He always recovered quickly, but with a sense of burning shame at his lack of self-control. There was one occasion when he suddenly broke off an argument and went out, muttering "Lamb of God! Lamb of God! Calm my perturbed spirit!"[1]

Despite these lapses, Hall liked a battle of wits and enjoyed crossing swords with his friends on controversial topics. One of his habits was to throw out some outrageous cricitism of a book or of a personality in the hope that someone would argue with him. Casual listeners were often deceived by this, and, without realizing Hall's true object, would grasp each remark and take it to be his seriously considered opinion. He often had difficulty later in explaining away some of these rash remarks. Even his friends sometimes found it difficult to tell whether he was arguing for the sake of arguing or for a truth which he genuinely believed.

Yet they delighted in hearing him talk, and often a group of friends would meet on an evening and invite Hall to join them. His witty remarks and brilliant conversation were always a success, and he enjoyed the rôle of entertainer; but when the party was over and he was on his way home his conscience would smite him for having failed to speak of

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 36.

spiritual things. To his friend Gregory he would sadly remark "Ah, sir! I have again contributed to the loss of an evening, as to everything truly valuable: go home with me, that we may spend at least one hour in a manner which becomes us."[1]

This dualism in Hall's character is discernible again and again. On the one hand, he obviously enjoyed the applause of hearers and the reputation he was gaining amongst his friends. People expected him to carry on a learned and witty conversation and he would not disappoint them. But every now and then the sharp realization of his duties as a minister of the Gospel would stab him into humble repentance. At his death a well-known journal of the day declared that, like Johnson, Hall "has something of the same proneness to erect himself before men and prostrate himself before God, a mixture of pride and humility, of domination and self-abasement".[2] This is too harsh a contrast but it faces a real factor in Hall's character. While at Cambridge, if it had not been for the memory of his father's example and for the depth of his own faith, he might well have become pompous and proud. But time and time again, when the applause of the crowds became too pleasant and the flattery of friends too convincing,

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 72.
2. Quarterly Review, October 1832, Vol. 48, p. 131.

Hall would be reminded of his saintly father and of his own unworthiness in the sight of God. It was this sense of humility before God which brought him the love of his congregation and the honour of his friends.

IV. SCHOLAR

Although Hall did his duty as pastor of his church in visiting his people and sharing their joys and troubles, he did not forget the cultivation of his own mind and soul. From his earliest years he had a keen thirst for knowledge, and in the middle years of his Cambridge pastorate he began to study more intensely than ever before.

By 1795, when John Greene first met him, Hall was settling down to regular study, and he spent the major part of the day at his books. Greene visited him about once a fortnight in the evenings, when "after an hour's conversation on general subjects, on the books I had read, and the sermons I had heard, he reached down a favourite author and read aloud a few of the finest passages".[1]

He also studied with Olinthus Gregory. Hall had first met Gregory in January, 1797, at a discussion group among the young intellectuals of the church. (This seems to have been on the lines of the "Hall and Mackintosh" club of his Aberdeen days.) Hall was at once attracted to the young mathematician and they frequently dined together. Later, Hall suggested that they should read together in the mornings, and they continued to do this three or four times a week for several years.[2]

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 10.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 38.

The local literary clubs and societies did not receive much support from Hall. He occasionally addressed the Royston Book Club and was a member of the Cambridge Book Club, but, generally, he preferred his own circle of friends - as he wrote in 1798 to Henry Crabb Robinson, "It is in a very limited circle I move".[1]

His attitude is also seen in a letter he wrote to his brother-in-law, Isaac James, on 29th September, 1794. He describes his first meeting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, then a student at Jesus College. "I breakfasted with him a few mornings since at a friend's. He is a very ingenious young man, but intoxicated with a political and philosophical enthusiasm, a sophic, a republican and leveller. Much as I admire his abilities, I cannot say I feel disposed to cultivate his intimacy."[2]

The outstanding characteristic of Hall's studies seems to have been their variety. He loved devotional classics like Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Holy Dying and Baxter's Saint's Rest; but he was also familiar with Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations and Bacon's Essays. Concerning Lord Bacon he remarked to John Greene "There is scarcely a week in which

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1. Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson, ed. T. Sadler (1872), Vol. I, p. 21 and p. 28.
2. The Hall Family, p. 60. Hall and Coleridge met later in the company of Joseph Cottle, the Bristol bookseller, who described the ensuing discussion as a "collision between equal minds" which "elicited light and heat". J. Cottle: Early Recollections (1837), Vol. I, p. 183.

I do not want to consult or refer to him".[1]

In these middle years at Cambridge Hall determined to "re-arrange the whole furniture of his mind".[2] He devoted six hours a day to study, and this was later extended to eight or nine hours. For three hours a day he made a study of the Latin and Greek poets, orators, historians and philosophers. By January, 1801, he could write on the last page of his copy of Homer: "N.B. I finished the critical perusal of Homer for the second time."[3] Plato seems to have been his favourite among the philosophers and he deplored the neglect into which Plato's writings had then fallen.

He also read widely in the early Christian Fathers and delved into the Reformation theologians and the works of the Puritans. He kept up-to-date in philosophy and theology, and was acquainted with the writings of Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Greene tells that from among the current journals he preferred the Spectator, and improved his grasp of French by reading, in the original, the sermons of Masillon, Bourdelieu and Bossuet.[4]

Not content with this, he began to study mathematics with Olinthus Gregory in order to understand the thought of Sir Isaac Newton. He advanced in the subject so rapidly that

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 11.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 43.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 41 (note). See also the article by F. A. Cox in North British Review, Nov. 1845, p. 70.
4. Ibid, p. 15 and p. 10.

Dr. Hutton, a mathematician from Woolwich, said to Gregory, "What an extraordinary man that friend of yours is! Why, he was born to be a mathematician. If you could persuade him to give himself up to the sciences, as Priestley did, he would teach us all something".[1]

On top of all this, thanks to tuition from a University tutor (Mr. Lyons), he mastered Hebrew sufficiently to read fluently from the Hebrew Scriptures. For the rest of his life his practice was to read the Bible in the original tongues and, in time, he became more familiar with the Greek and Hebrew texts than with the Authorised Version.[2]

This great weight of learning becomes all the more impressive when one remembers that it was acquired amid bouts of severe suffering. Gregory on his morning visits was often aware of this. "On entering his room to commence our reading," he wrote, "I could at once tell whether or not his night had been refreshing; for, if it had, I found him at the table, the books to be studied ready, and a vacant chair set for me. If his night had been restless, and the pain still continued, I found him lying on the sofa, or, more frequently, upon three chairs, on which he could obtain an easier position. . . . Sometimes, when he was suffering more than usual, he

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 47 (note)
2. Ibid, p. 44. See also Greene's Reminiscences, p. 119.

proposed a walk in the fields, where, with the appropriate book as our companion, we could pursue the subject."[1]

One of Hall's failings, which his study did not improve, was his absent-mindedness. He was often found taking the wrong hat or coat after a visit, and missed many an appointment by mistaking the day or the hour. Gregory tells of occasions when on journeys he promised to post letters for his friends, but on his return the letters would be discovered in his coat pocket or in his baggage.[2] These and similar instances of forgetfulness occurred daily. On several occasions he became so absorbed in his books that he forgot the Thursday night meetings in the church, where he usually gave a short Bible reading. The deacons had to send John Greene to fetch the forgetful pastor, who, when reminded of his engagement, would look up in surprise and say, "Oh no, it is impossible, sir, it cannot be Thursday". As the meeting-house was only five minutes' walk from his rooms he usually managed to save the situation by getting to the meeting in time for his Bible reading.[3]

Robert Hall is not usually remembered as a scholar, largely because he wrote so little, but there is no doubt that much of his facility of speech and his fame as an orator

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 46.
2. Ibid, p. 36.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 21.

was due to the background of hard study which marked his Cambridge days. It was from a mind well stocked with history, science, philosophy and theology, and much more besides, that his powers as a preacher developed.

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V. HALL'S THEOLOGY (1791-1806)

The Cambridge congregation prided themselves on their liberal outlook, and welcomed Hall as one who would carry on their tradition. But although he found this a welcome change after the narrowness of the Baptists at Bristol, Hall felt that some members of the Cambridge church were inclined to go too far towards unorthodoxy. "I could wish their sentiments were more orthodox," he wrote to his friend, Isaiah Birt, "though the far greater part of them are sufficiently so."[1] One of the members said afterwards that Hall, in the first years of his ministry at Cambridge, had "sufficient orthodoxy to pass muster with the pious members and not too much to be refused by the speculative part of the congregation".[2]

Unfortunately, the records for a study of his theological outlook during this period are very limited. Only seven publications came from his pen during the fifteen years of his pastorate, and none of these can be classed as a theological work.[3] In addition, on leaving Cambridge in 1806 he destroyed the major evidence for a study of his theology - his sermon notes.[4] Nevertheless, from the evidence of private letters, his few published works and the notes preserved by friends, it is possible to ascertain the main lines of his thought.

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1. Works V, p. 408.
2. Greene's Reminiscences, pp. 3-4.
3. They consisted of 2 Political Pamphlets, 4 Sermons and 1 Book Review.
4. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), preface p. viii.

Fundamentally, Hall's theology is still the same as it was at Bristol. He still sought a middle way between calvinism and arminianism, and his doubts about original sin and predestination remained. When a friend asked him whether he was an arminian or a calvinist Hall replied, "Neither, sir; but I believe I recede farther from Arminianism than from Calvinism".[1] He generally avoided controversy on this subject on the grounds that as both systems produced fine Christian men the debate must be regarded more "as metaphysical than religious".[2]

There were, however, two points at which Hall's theology was modified during his Cambridge ministry.

First, he abandoned his unorthodox theories concerning materialism. These were shattered by the death of his father in 1791. It was easy enough to argue in theory, as Hall did, that the soul dies with the body and that man is unconscious until the resurrection, but when the tragedy of the death of a loved one came home to him personally, he found that his materialism brought him no comfort. He, therefore, re-examined his theories and afterwards confessed that he buried his materialism "in his father's grave".[3]

The second modification of Hall's theology involved his views on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. During the early

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 51.
2. Ibid, p. 51.
3. Ibid, p. 30.

years of his Cambridge pastorate he continued to hold the view that the Holy Spirit was an "influence" or "divine energy" rather than the third person of the Trinity, and ten years passed before he publicly expressed his acceptance of the orthodox Trinitarian teaching.[1] This change to orthodoxy appears to have gradually developed and cannot be accounted for by any single factor. Hall himself used to say that in private prayer when he was most overwhelmed by the sense of God "he always felt himself inclined to adopt a Trinitarian doxology".[2] At any rate, by 1800 he had no hesitation in preaching of the Holy Spirit as a person[3], and his teaching on the doctrine of the Spirit was acknowledged to be thoroughly orthodox.[4]

As at Bristol, Hall continued to express his admiration for Dr. Joseph Priestley, and such were the glowing terms with which he commended him that the socinians at Cambridge took it for granted that Hall was veering in their direction. They were soon disillusioned. On one occasion after hearing him praise Dr. Priestley, a socinian tapped Hall on the shoulder and said, "Ah, sir, we shall have you amongst us soon, I see." But Hall replied, "Me amongst you, sir! Me amongst you! Why, if that were ever the case, I should

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 52.
2. Ibid, p. 52.
3. cf. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), pp. 33 and 49. Sermons preached on 19th December, 1801, and 26th December, 1801.
4. Gregory's Memoir, p. 52.

deserve to be tied to the tail of the great red dragon, and whipped round the nethermost regions to all eternity."[1] The fact was that Hall admired Priestley, not for his socinian theology, but for his personal character and zealous defence of liberty. As early as 1791, Joseph Kinghorn, who had spent a few days with Hall at Cambridge, wrote, "I am happy to say he (Hall) makes a firm stand against Socinianism; he considers it contrary to Scripture, and that its general tendency is opposed to the growth of religion and real piety".[2]

Although Hall differed from many of his Baptist friends in such controversial questions as those concerning original sin and predestination, his theological standpoint was definitely evangelical. At the very beginning of his ministry at Cambridge he wrote to an old college friend, "I intend very soon to preach a sermon professedly on the divinity of Jesus Christ. This and the atonement, I am more and more convinced, lie at the foundation of the true system of vital religion; nor will sinners ever be converted to God by a ministry that excludes them."[3] Hall's evangelical convictions are also seen in a letter he wrote in 1799. In the spring of that year he had been struck down with a severe attack of fever, which, at one stage, threatened his life.

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 35.
2. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich, p. 194.
3. Works V, pp. 408-9.

During his convalescence he wrote, "My mind was supported merely by a faith in Christ crucified. I would not for the world have parted with that text 'the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin'. I never before saw such a beauty and a grandeur in the way of salvation by the death of Christ as on that occasion (his illness). I am fully persuaded the evangelical doctrines alone are able to support the mind in the near views of death and judgment."[1]

Another proof of his evangelical convictions is to be found in his sermon The Sentiments Proper to the Present Crisis, where Hall deplored the way in which "the doctrines of the fall and of redemption" were being neglected. These doctrines, he insisted, are "the two grand points on which the Christian dispensation hinges", and are the truths which, throughout the ages, have "inspired the devotion of the church and the rapture of the redeemed."[2]

Holding views like these, it is not surprising that Hall was friendly with men like Charles Simeon, William Wilberforce and Beilby Porteus. These men were leaders of the Evangelical party of the Church of England and, although they differed from Hall on various points of doctrine and church order, they were one with him in their basic conviction that the crucified

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1. Works V, p. 418.
2. Works I, p. 158.

Saviour was the only answer to the sin of man. As Vernon Storr points out in his detailed study of the thought of this period, the two fundamental beliefs of the Evangelicals were "the depravity of human nature and the redeeming work of Christ".[1] In this respect Hall was a true Evangelical. Yet, as he later testified,[2] the proclamation of this gospel was not the most prominent feature of his ministry at Cambridge. From the sermons and writings that have been preserved it is evident that Hall's main concern at Cambridge was the defence of the gospel against what he considered to be two dangerous errors.

The first error against which he preached was one within the Christian Church. He felt that many Christians were paying too much attention to points of doctrine and not enough to practical Christian living. Hall was weary of the endless doctrinal controversies which had raged in his own denomination. He deplored the zeal of those who were for ever "settling ceremonies" and "defending subtleties" while "the lovely fruits of peace and charity perished under the storms of controversy".[3] Again and again he pointed out that it is not sufficient merely to hold a correct theology or to talk of faith. "The profession of the Gospel of Christ," he says,

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1. Vernon F. Storr: The Development of English Theology in the 19th Century (1800-1860), p. 67.
2. Works V, p. 483.
3. Works I, p. 14.

"must be a practical one; there must be something calculated to recommend it, so that others may embrace it. . . . Holiness is so much the spirit of Christianity that we do not possess any part of it but as we act with uprightness and integrity."[1] In another sermon he said, "In business, or the common transactions of life, that Christian is essentially defective who has not a regard for the character of justice, truth and integrity".[2] For Hall, faith on no account must be divorced from works. If a man profess faith in Christ, then his life must prove it. It was with this conviction that Evangelicals like Wilberforce so ardently supported philanthropic enterprises.

The quality of life Hall advocated as Christian was strongly puritan in many of its aspects. In her book Before Victoria Muriel Jaegar writes that in the fifty years between 1787 and 1837 the roots of "the sombre conventions of the Victorian age" are to be found. She finds these roots in the morality advocated by Wilberforce and the Evangelicals, and says that they "went to surprising lengths" in reversing the natural sentiments in the interests of religion. "Seriousness," she argues, was considered the authentic Christian attitude. "Serious" people always had an eye on their eternal interests, they spoke much of "triumphant"

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1. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 26.
2. Ibid, p. 117.

death-beds, and were opposed to every form of frivolity and lightheartedness.[1] These characteristics are much in evidence in Hall's writings.

His interest in death and the life to come is seen particularly in his letters. His condolences with one of his friends on the death of her sister almost approaches congratulation. "What a glorious display of the power of Christianity! What a triumphant departure! O, that I may die the death of Mrs. Parsons, and that my last end may be like hers! . . . Immortality dawned on her enraptured mind even before it quitted its earthly abode; and her pure and elevated soul made an easy transit to the society of the blessed."[2]

Hall is also "serious" in his opposition to frivolity. In one of his sermons he says that the Christian stands "opposed to a fantastic, to a light and frothy manner of behaviour, to foolish talking, jesting and buffoonery, to the character of a scoffer, and to the character of a sarcastic wit. Indeed, it is impossible that wit, or the faculty of making people laugh, should be suitable to the dignity of a Christian, 'an heir of eternal life'. It is impossible that this faculty can associate itself with a grave, a serious and a manly deportment, which is perfectly inconsistent with trifling and jesting. Nothing can produce this propriety of

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1. M. Jaegar: Before Victoria (1956), p. 41 ff. and p. IX.
2. Works V, p. 414.

character so much as the serious consideration of the design of human life, the dignity of the Christian calling, and the great end of our being. Mirth, though useful at times to the animal spirits, yet, if it be made the business of life, will produce spiritual insensibility, and it may be said that 'we are dead while we live'."[1] Hall's natural gaiety and his gift of witty repartee made it difficult for him to practise what he preached, and after an enjoyable evening with his friends he would reproach himself for his lack of "seriousness".[2]

Strict Sabbath observance was another demand of the Evangelicals, and here again Hall is at one with them. Not even the prospect of the invasion of England by Napoleon caused him to yield on this point. In his sermon on The Sentiments Proper to the Present Crisis he strongly objected to military training on Sundays which the government had ordered as part of the nation's defence. "When we consider how important an institution the Christian Sabbath is," said Hall, "how essential to the maintenance of public worship, which is itself essential to religion, and what a barrier it opposes to the impiety and immorality of the age, is it not to be lamented that it should ever have been, in the smallest degree, infringed by legislative authority?"[3] In another

1. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 112.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 72.
3. Works I, pp. 174/5.

sermon, following the execution of two forgers in Cambridge, Hall warns the congregation that the criminals "began their wicked course by breaking the Sabbath, and by neglecting the worship of God on His holy day".[1]

The second error Hall attacked, and the one he considered of the greatest danger to the nation, was that of atheism. It was his belief that the moral laxity of the age was due primarily to the influence of atheistic doctrines from the Continent. He saw the spread of atheism as a major threat to the Christian Church in England. It was to defend religion against this growing atheism that he preached his sermon on Modern Infidelity. In this sermon he described at length the decline of moral standards in an atheistic society and showed that morality without religion degenerates into expediency and inevitably undermines the moral foundations of society.[2] This theme is repeated in the sermon on The Sentiments Proper to the Present Crisis, where he declared that if the "dethronement" of religion "is suffered to continue", it will "ere long shake the foundation of states and endanger the existence of the civilized world".[3] Hall's defence of religion won him the plaudits of all the Evangelicals in Cambridge and they were glad to count Hall as their ally.

1. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 178.
2. Works I, p. 13 ff.
3. Works I, pp. 168-9.

In summing up Hall's thought at Cambridge, it is clear that he stands alongside Evangelicals like Wilberforce, Charles Simeon and Beilby Porteus, believing with them that the primary activity of Christians should be "the proclamation of the Word of the Lord in a sinful world, a continual challenge to unrighteousness in the Name of a holy God, and the studied application of faith to works".[1]

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1. M.A.C. Warren: What is Evangelical? (1946), p. 20.

VI. PREACHER

Hall's preaching ministry was concerned with the main church at Cambridge and with the surrounding villages. He wrote to his friend, Thomas Langdon, on 29th April, 1797, "I regularly preach in some village every Sabbath night, unless I am prevented by illness. The growing number and serious attention of the audience on these occasions is very encouraging, though I can say little at present of any decisive good having been done."[1]

Apart from this village preaching, he conducted two services every Sunday, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. At the morning service Hall generally expounded some passage of Scripture, and John Greene records that at Cambridge, Hall preached through the Gospel and Epistles of John, the two Epistles of Peter, the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of Jesus. He was once asked why he did not expound Romans, and answered "I do not understand it, sir. The apostle Peter says there are many things hard to be understood; I shall reserve the exposition of that epistle for the last work in my life."[2]

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1. Brief Memoir of Thomas Langdon, by his daughter (1837), p. 145.
2. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 17.

There are few records of Hall's expository preaching because he destroyed all his sermon notes; but John Greene, who was a member of the church for twenty-five years, kept shorthand notes of many of the sermons. He published most of these notes in 1843 in a volume entitled A Practical Exposition of the Epistle to the Philippians in twelve discourses delivered at Cambridge in the years 1801 and 1802.[1] Greene filled out the notes as best he could and admits, in the preface, that it was very difficult to take notes of Hall's preaching. It seems that Hall spoke very rapidly and, in addition, the "electrifying effect" of his closing appeals made accurate note-taking almost an impossibility. Hall himself said "No-one, sir, can take down my sermons correctly".[2] Nevertheless, Greene's notes supply sufficient evidence to indicate the general pattern of Hall's expository preaching. It appears that he usually based his exposition on from six to twelve verses of scripture. He began with a few general remarks on the selected passage as a whole and then commented on each verse in turn, explaining the meaning and applying it to his hearers. Throughout the twelve discourses on Philippians Hall keeps strictly to his text. There is little

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1. The only copy of this volume I have been able to discover is in New College Library, Edinburgh. The copy in the British Museum Library was destroyed by enemy action during the second World War.
2. Exposition of Philippians (preface), p. viii.

"spiritualizing" or artificial exegesis. He honestly seeks the meaning of the text in its setting and applies it to his own generation. Clarity is one of his characteristics. You may disagree with his exegesis, but you are never in doubt about his meaning. Although there are not many illustrations, he holds the attention by brief references to such topics as the pagan mystery cults,[1] the olympic games,[2] and the sacrificial customs of the temple at Jerusalem.[3] His comments, apart from their devotional merit, cover a wide field of doctrine and practice, and include such questions as the function of bishops in the early church,[4] the importance of Christian unity,[5] the place of women in Christian service,[6] and the problem of pain and suffering.[7]

This straightforward Biblical preaching proved the best antidote to the doubts which Robinson had left in the minds of many church members. The senior deacon, Mr. Hollick, used to say that "had it not been for Mr. Hall he would have become a socinian".[8] This expository preaching on Sunday mornings built up the congregation in the faith and the attendances gradually increased.

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1. Exposition of Philippians, Discourse XII, p. 123.
2. Ibid, VIII, p. 83.
3. Ibid, VI, p. 56.
4. Ibid, I, p. 3.
5. Ibid, I, p. 5.
6. Ibid, X, p. 100.
7. Ibid, VI, p. 62.
8. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 5.

The afternoon services were even more popular.[1] Hall generally preached from a single text. There was usually nothing sensational in his texts or his treatment of them, but occasionally he would take advantage of a national event or a local incident to bring out his message. His most famous "topical" sermon centred on a trial in Cambridge following the arrest of two men on a charge of forgery.[2] It appears they went into a draper's shop and tried to pass on a forged £5 note. The shopkeeper was suspicious and sent off an employee to check the note at the Bank. Realizing what was happening, one of the men snatched back the note and, to destroy the evidence, swallowed it. His quick thinking did not save him or his accomplice. They were arrested and were later executed. Hall visited the men in prison and, after their execution, preached a sermon based on the incident. His text was certainly appropriate. It was from Job 20, 12-16: "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue . . . yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him. He hath swallowed down riches and he shall vomit them up again . . ."[3]

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1. Most of the churches in Cambridge held services in the morning and afternoon rather than in the morning and evening. Charles Simeon after much opposition eventually managed in 1790 to have an evening service (6 p.m.) at the Trinity Church; but Hall continued in the afternoon, and in the evenings preached in the villages. See Carus: Memoirs of Charles Simeon, p. 85.
2. Notes of this sermon are given in Exposition of Philippians, p. 166.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, pp. 31/2.

Hall's manner of preaching at Cambridge has been described by Gregory and Greene, two of his frequent hearers. They both say that he began his sermons with hesitation, in a low and feeble voice, coughing frequently and giving the impression of being a nervous and indifferent preacher. But as he warmed to his subject the hesitancy disappeared, his voice grew in colour and power, and his words flowed on with such grace and passion that his audience were soon listening intently to every word.[1] Crowds flocked to hear him. Some regularly travelled sixteen miles to be present at the afternoon Services, and London visitors to Cambridge made a point of attending a Service. The University was also well represented. Often College tutors would join with the undergraduates in the crowds which thronged the Baptist church. At some Services over fifty members of the University were present in the congregation;[2] and when it is remembered that the total number of students in the Colleges was less than one hundred and fifty during most of Hall's ministry[3] it is not surprising

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 53.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 97. See also Gregory's Memoir, p. 66.
3. Historical Register of the University of Cambridge, ed. J. R. Tanner (1917), p. 990. The number of students was as follows:-

1791 .. 180	1797 .. 180
1792 .. 205	1798 .. 129
1793 .. 180	1799 .. 126
1794 .. 151	1800 .. 129
1795 .. 149	1801 .. 177
1796 .. 148	

that complaints were made by members of the Established Church. A meeting of the heads of the Colleges was held to discuss this student exodus every Sunday afternoon; but Dr. Mansel, the Master of Trinity - the largest College - strongly objected to any ban being made on the students' attendance. "He admired and revered Mr. Hall," he said, and "could not be a party in such a measure." To complete the discomfiture of the opposition he frankly declared, "If he was not the Master of Trinity, he should certainly often attend himself." This speech carried the day and the students continued to attend the Baptist church.[1]

The Cambridge students of this period were exceptionally wild and undisciplined. They were, in fact, a public nuisance. During Robert Robinson's ministry a letter had to be sent to the authorities, indignantly complaining of the "interruptions from the undergraduates" and of the fact that "every agreeable female in the society is exposed to the same insults as a bawdy-house; no pew privileged from bold intrusion; no family, however considerable, in fortune or credit, from insolent affronts." Matters reached such a pitch that an American visitor declared that not even among the "naked

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 67.

Indians" had he witnessed "such heathenish impiety during Divine Service".[1]

The situation was not much better in 1810 when Isaac Milner, the vice-chancellor, referred in a speech to "breaking of lamps and windows, shouting and roaring, blowing of horns, galloping up and down the streets on horseback or in carriages, fighting and mobbing in the town and neighbouring villages . . . resisting the lawful authorities and often putting the peaceful inhabitants of the town in great alarm".[2]

It was not only dissenters who were disturbed. Charles Simeon of Trinity Church exposed student behaviour in these words, "We have seen persons coming into this place in a state of intoxication; we have seen them walking about the aisles, notwithstanding there are persons appointed to show them seats; . . . we have seen them insulting modest persons, both in and before Divine Service; in short, the devotions of the congregation have been disturbed by almost every species of ill-conduct." As a result of this, Simeon took strong measures against the students. He "appointed persons to stand with wands in all the aisles" to keep the unruly undergraduates in check.[3]

Sometimes there were over fifty of such students in Hall's

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1. G. W. Hughes: With Freedom Fired (1955), p. 21.
2. D. A. Winstanley: Unreformed Cambridge (1935), p. 214.
3. W. Carus: Memoir of Charles Simeon (1847), pp. 89-90.

afternoon congregations. It says much for his preaching that there is no record of any student disturbances during his ministry at Cambridge.

The old meeting-house, seating six hundred, became too small for the crowds, and it was decided to enlarge the building so that it could accommodate about eight hundred persons. The whole of the expense involved - one thousand pounds - was immediately subscribed by a few wealthy members of the congregation, and during the alterations, which took three months to complete, the Independent meeting-house was placed at Hall's disposal.[1] The enlarged building was opened in 1801, but even this was not large enough to accommodate the crowds who came to hear him.[2]

Hall's eloquence was so gripping at this period of his career that he held his congregation spellbound. An almost breathless silence prevailed in the meeting-house. Every eye was fixed upon the preacher and, as he proclaimed his message, people would gradually lean forward in their seats and slowly rise to their feet, entranced by the preacher. By the close of the sermon, according to the report of Olinthus Gregory, "a considerable portion of the congregation" would be standing, with "every eye directed to the preacher".[3] Hall himself

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 37.
2. N. Bosworth: Discourse on the decease of Robert Hall (1831), p. 22.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 55.

seemed to receive fresh inspiration by the response of the crowd and would rise to still greater flights of oratory. When, at last, he closed the sermon - often abruptly - the congregation slowly and reluctantly resumed their seats as if coming back from another world. "Scenes like this," said Gregory, "I have witnessed repeatedly" so that after "an interval of more than thirty years they present themselves to my mind with a more vivid influence than many of the transactions of the last month."[1] Another frequent hearer at Cambridge, Newton Bosworth, said in a sermon, "Well do I remember, and I trust I never shall forget, the sublime and holy impression which many of these discourses made upon me when I heard them delivered".[2] Dr. Parr spoke of it as "hallowed eloquence",[3] and even one of Hall's opponents admitted that his was "the sublimest eloquence by which false doctrine was ever commended to human consciences".[4]

It is difficult to discover the secret of Hall's preaching. He did not write out his sermons in full, except in a few cases, and when he eventually went to Leicester he destroyed all his notes. The only evidence available is found in notes by John Greene appended to his Reminiscences and to his Exposition of Philippians; but even from these it

1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 56.
2. N. Bosworth: Discourse on the Death of Robert Hall, p. 38.
3. The Hall Family, p. 87.
4. The Baptist Encyclopoedia (ed. Cathcart), article on Hall.

is difficult to account for the extraordinary response which Hall's preaching aroused in his hearers. The fact is that even the greatest of preachers can appear ordinary in print. Divorce the words from the personality of the preacher and the atmosphere of expectant worship, and set them down in cold print, and invariably the spell is broken. It is significant that when Gregory assesses Hall's preaching at this period he refers constantly to intangible qualities like his "earnestness and sincerity" and "the eloquence of his most speaking countenance and penetrating eye".[1]

Newton Bosworth also commented on Hall's piercing eye: "Whether beaming with benignity, or lighted up with intelligence, or blazing with intense and hallowed feeling, that eye indicated sentiments and emotions which words were not made to express."[2] Another of his hearers, Thomas Swan, said that Hall's eyes seemed "illuminated with the fire of genius",[3] while F. A. Cox simply says "He was always in earnest . . . deeply in earnest."[4]

The pulpit presence and personality of Hall was certainly a major factor in his preaching success, but it was allied to technical brilliance as an orator. His pronunciation, for

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 55.
2. N. Bosworth: op.cit. p. 32.
3. T. Swan: Sermon on the Death of Robert Hall. p. 5.
4. F. A. Cox: Posthumous Testimony, p. 39.

example, was "distinct and clear".[1] He had an easy flow of speech, which made it a pleasure to listen to him. "The sentences were finished with such exquisite care," said Bosworth, "that he appeared to have selected not merely the most appropriate, but the only words which served his purpose, and yet delivered with such freedom and ease that they seemed the first which came into his mind."[2]

Although he began with hesitation, there was always something "from the beginning which promised that he would soon break away and expand and kindle with his theme"[3] and he had the gift of clarity so that even the most ignorant of his congregation, as Newton Bosworth said, "were scarcely behind their more intelligent brethren in their love and admiration of the preacher".[4]

This combination of technical brilliance, absolute sincerity and those indefinable personal qualities which form the genius of a great orator, made Robert Hall, by the middle of his Cambridge pastorate, one of the most effective preachers in the country. He accepted many invitations to preach in other towns, so that within a few years his influence extended far beyond his own town and denomination.

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1. T. Swan: op.cit. p. 21.
2. N. Bosworth: op.cit. p. 31.
3. W. R. Nicoll: The Preaching of Hall and Foster (1899), p. 6.
4. N. Bosworth: Discourse on the Decease of Robert Hall, p. 33.

On New Year's Day, 1795, he was at Royston preaching at the funeral of an old friend, the Rev. Habakkuk Crabb, the pastor of a paedo-baptist church there.[1] In June of the same year he preached at a meeting of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association at Kettering. Hall excelled himself on this occasion. Samuel Pearce, who was present, wrote home to his wife, "Mr. Hall preached last evening from I Peter 1, 8. A most evangelical and experimental season! I was charmed and warmed."[2] Another of his hearers, James Hinton, told how "Hall preached with amazing applause".[3]

Next year on 18th May, 1796, Hall preached at the opening of the George Street Chapel, Hull, where his co-preachers were his friends, Joseph Kinghorn and Thomas Langdon.[4] Later he preached in Bedford at the invitation of the Bedford Union of Churches,[5] and then went south to London to preach for Abraham Booth at the Prescott Street Baptist Church.[6] The founding of the Baptist Missionary Society brought Hall's immediate support, and he often preached on its behalf. On 16th October, 1798, for example, he preached for the Society at Kettering. William Ward, who was then preparing to join

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1. Works IV, p. 268 ff. The sermon is printed in full.
2. Fuller: Memoirs of Samuel Pearce (1816), p. 70.
3. M. H. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich, p. 252.
4. Ibid, pp. 261-262.
5. Memoir of Thomas Langdon, by his daughter, p. 145. See also Brown and Prothero: History of the Bedfordshire Union of Baptist and Congregational Churches (1946), p. 84 ff.
6. The Hall Family, p. 62.

William Carey in Bengal, India, heard Hall preach on this occasion and wrote, "I could not help thinking if I were in heaven I should like to sit on some green and flowery mount to hear him preach. I had no idea of the possibility of receiving greater pleasure." (On reading this opinion David Kinghorn, the father of Hall's friend, Joseph Kinghorn, remarked, "I cannot help thinking that Mr. Ward has either low thoughts of the happiness of heaven, or else he has exaggerated in his expressions".[1])

Another of Hall's visits was to Clipstone, where, in a letter to John Ryland, he noted that "fifty young people who have been very profligate have been for some time brought under deep religious concern, and meet very frequently for prayer".[2]

In 1804 he visited Rochdale in connection with the founding of a new Baptist Academy - later to become Rawdon Baptist College, Leeds. On this visit Hall's sermon was described as "one of the best and greatest, full of evangelical doctrine and one of the most powerful inducements to every good work".[3] Thomas Langdon of Leeds called it "the most astonishing sermon"[4] and John Fawcett, a Baptist leader in Yorkshire, wrote that Hall's sermon "was every way worthy of himself".[5] As subscriptions were promised amounting to £160

1. M. H. Wilkin: op.cit. pp. 299-300.
2. Ibid, p. 300.
3. The Baptists of Yorkshire (1912), p. 280.
4. M. H. Wilkin: op.cit. p. 306.
5. Ibid, p. 302.

per year, as well as a capital sum of £1,200, it seems that his sermon touched both the hearts of his hearers and their pockets. He was asked to print it for general circulation, but replied, "I have no intention of printing it. I am very certain its merit is much over-rated."[1]

In addition to the places already mentioned, there are records of Hall having preached at Plymouth, London, Norwich, Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester and Bristol. Hero-worshippers were many - one critic preferred to call them "fawning parasites"[2] - but Hall never let success go to his head. Although the crowds flocked to hear him and his popularity was growing, he never entirely forgot that he stood in the presence of Another. Newton Bosworth, in a sermon after Hall's death, puts Hall's attitude in a nutshell when he makes this brief comment. "He obviously spoke from the heart and as in the presence of God."[3] This was perhaps Hall's greatest asset as a preacher in those halcyon days at Cambridge.

Unfortunately, at this period of his career he only consented to publish three sermons. They considerably enhanced his reputation and are worthy of closer study because, although they were all preached on national occasions and are not typical of his everyday Biblical preaching, they demonstrate

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1. Memoir of Thomas Langdon, by his daughter, p. 46.
2. G. Gilfillan: Galleries of Literary Portraits (1856), Vol. II, p. 242.
3. N. Bosworth: Discourse on the decease of Robert Hall (1831), p. 34.

Hall's appeal as a popular orator.

The first of the three arose in this way. In October, 1799, Hall visited Bristol. It appeared to be just another of his regular visits but it proved to be of importance, for it was here that he first preached what was to become one of his most famous sermons. He repeated it at Cambridge the following month, where it created so much interest that he was asked to publish it. Olinthus Gregory undertook to see it through the press; but Hall, who had preached the sermon from brief notes, took some weeks to complete his manuscript. Severe pains in the back constantly interrupted the work so that Gregory would receive eight pages one day, then a few days later four more pages, and so on. Hall wrote part of the sermon lying on the floor to ease the pain. Eventually, after seven weeks of intermittent labour, the completed sermon was in the hands of the printer. It was published in January, 1800, under the title: Modern Infidelity Considered with Respect to its Influence on Society.[1] This was Hall's first major publication since the Apology for the Freedom of the Press in 1793.

Almost immediately it appeared the Cambridge Intelligencer printed a series of anonymous letters attacking Hall and his sermon. The editor, Benjamin Flower (1755-1829), also entered

1. Works I, p. 1 ff. See note prefixed to the sermon by Gregory.

the lists against Hall. Flower had been a member of Robinson's congregation and had eventually become a socinian. He left the church not long after Hall became minister. Flower published his accusations in a pamphlet[1], but Hall refused to reply to these attacks. His friends, however, rallied to his support. Sir James Mackintosh, for example, in a scathing reply published in the British Critic declared Flower to be a "miserable scribbler" who had "foully slandered" the finest preacher among the dissenters.[2]

Even Flower's effort to denounce Hall faded into insignificance compared with the sixty-page pamphlet written by another dissenter, Anthony Robinson, who undertook "an examination" of the sermon on Modern Infidelity, in which he defended atheism and bitterly attacked Hall.[3] These critics had little popular support and, compared with the astonishing success of Hall's sermon, their influence was negligible.

Edition after edition of Hall's sermon was called for and many well-known personalities joined in congratulating him. Dr. Mansel, the Master of Trinity and vice-chancellor of the University, seeing Hall in the street, crossed over and, shaking him by the hand, said, "Mr. Hall, I thank you most

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1. The proceedings of the House of Lords on the case of Benjamin Flower with prefatory remarks and animadversions on the writings of the Rev. Robert Hall (1800), p. 49 and p. 51.
2. British Critic, August 1800. See also Baptist Magazine, May 1832, p. 177, and Gregory's Memoir, p. 128.
3. Anthony Robinson: An examination of a sermon preached at Cambridge by Robert Hall, M.A. (1800). See also Baptist Annual Register, Vol. I, p. 471, and Morris's Recollections

sincerely for your masterly sermon; it does you honour, sir!"[1] Among others who joined in the praise were Dr. Porteus, the Bishop of London, and Sir James Mackintosh, who quoted it in his lectures at Lincoln's Inn and praised it in the Monthly Review (February, 1800). It was also warmly received by leading politicians like Henry Brougham, William Pitt and Lord Hardwicke, and copies were sent to Charles Fox and the Earl of Rosslyn, who was then Lord Chancellor.[2] Dr. Parr in the notes to his "Spital sermon" joins in the praise[3], and even the Quarterly Review, which was so severe on the Apology, declared that Hall's sermon on Modern Infidelity was a wonderful composition.[4] The Edinburgh Review, which dismissed Carey and his missionary band as a "nest of consecrated cobblers"[5], allotted a special article to a review of Hall's sermon.[6] Besides the many English editions, there was an American edition which was being sold in Boston by 1801[7], and a French edition published in Paris in 1836 under the title L'Incredulité Moderne.[8] The sermon so added to Hall's reputation that, at Cambridge, he found it difficult to take a quiet walk without

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 24. Cf. Gregory's Memoir, pp. 67-69.
2. Gregory's Memoir, pp. 65-6. Paxton Hood: Robert Hall, p. 121. C. Badham: Selections from Robert Hall, p. XVII. British Critic, March 1800, p. 80.
3. Gregory's Memoir (Appendix), p. 130.
4. Quarterly Review, October 1832, Vol. 48, p. 120.
5. Edinburgh Review, April 1808.
6. Ibid, December 1826, Vol. 45, p. 147.
7. Catalogue of the Library of Congress (1943), Vol. 62.
8. Catalogue Général des Livres imprimes de la Bibliothèque Nationale.

the students staring at him and saying to each other, "That is Hall who preaches at the meeting in St. Andrew's Street".[1]

Hall himself was greatly surprised at the success of the sermon,[2] and modern readers would join in the surprise for, although it has an impressiveness of its own, its massive phrases and rolling sentences make it hard reading for a generation brought up on newspaper headlines and advertising slogans. The great value of the sermon lies in two facts.

First, it expressed the mood of the nation. The widespread support for the French Revolution had long since faded. Disillusioned by the barbarities of the Terror and by the conquering march of Napoleon, many began to question their initial enthusiasm. Some, like Hall, who had hailed the Revolution as a triumph of justice over oppression, now found their hopes dashed to the ground. What had gone wrong? Why had the Revolution, with all its promise, become a reign of terror? Hall's eloquent answer in this sermon was that the Revolution had been permeated with atheism. To accept an atheistic view of life seemed to him the inevitable step to a life without standards of truth and morality, and, in France, this process had been plainly visible. There, morality had been thrown overboard in the interests of power and conquest. The horrors

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 39.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 164.

which accompanied the Revolution must, therefore, be traced back to Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot and Rousseau, who prepared the minds of the people with their sceptical philosophies. To Hall, therefore, "the reign of atheism was avowedly and expressly the reign of terror",[1] and he pleads with his hearers: "Settle it, therefore, in your minds, as a maxim never to be effaced or forgotten, that atheism is an inhuman, bloody, ferocious system, equally hostile to every useful restraint and to every virtuous affection; that, leaving nothing above us to excite awe, nor around us to awaken tenderness, it wages war with heaven and with earth; its first object is to dethrone God, its next to destroy man."[2] Hall then gives an eloquent warning about the spread of atheism among the masses now forming the new towns of industrial Britain. "At such a season as this," he says, "it becomes an urgent duty on parents, guardians and tutors to watch, not only over the morals, but the principles of those committed to their care."[3] But Hall is not pessimistic. Despite the "efforts of infidels to diffuse the principles of infidelity among the common people",[4] he sees signs of a new spiritual advance in the churches centring on the missionary movement. "The stream of divine knowledge, unobserved, is

1. Works I, p. 47.
2. Works I, p. 48.
3. Works I, p. 75.
4. Ibid, I, p. 63.

flowing in new channels," he asserts, "winding its course amid humble valleys, refreshing thirsty deserts and enriching with far other and higher blessings than those of commerce the most distant climes and nations."[1] His sermon concluded with the solemn affirmation of the sovereignty of God and of God's ultimate triumph over the impiety of man. Hall's sermon expressed what many in England were feeling, and it justly won the warmest approval.[2]

A second fact of importance must be noted. The sermon, with its impeccable style and language, came from one of the despised dissenters. At this time men of culture were still apt to dismiss dissenters as ignorant and uncouth, and, unfortunately, their criticism was often justified. Lord Grenville is a typical example of this cultured class. When asked to read Hall's sermon, he "seemed sceptical", said Sir James Mackintosh, "about anything good coming from the pastor of a Baptist congregation".[3] But Hall in this and later sermons was able, as W. Robertson Nicoll said a century later, to overcome "the aversion of men of taste to evangelical religion"[4]; and this fact is echoed in the Free Church historian's statement that "through him the Baptist churches gained an elevation in the eyes of their countrymen which they had not before enjoyed.

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1. Works I, p. 76.
2. North British Review No. VII, November 1845, p. 58. Article on Hall by F. A. Cox.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 65.
4. W. Robertson Nicoll: The Preaching of Hall and Foster, p. 9.

It was impossible to sneer at a sect with which such a man had deliberately chosen to identify himself."[1]

This sermon on Modern Infidelity, and the two others following it, were all delivered on national occasions and were inevitably linked with the momentous events of the Napoleonic wars. Their popularity was widespread. They were preached with dignity and power, and in each of them Hall stands out as a man who had his finger on the pulse of the nation and who could express its feelings to perfection. This was the chief reason for their astonishing success.

The second of Hall's three published sermons owed its immediate origin to the founding, early in 1801, of a Benevolent Society in Cambridge. This had the double object of relieving the poor by gifts of money and of seeking their "moral and religious improvement". It was an example of inter-church co-operation and was open to "any person of whatever denomination, age or sex"[2]. Hall at once gave the Society his support and undertook to preach the annual sermon on its behalf. The day appointed - Tuesday, 1st June, 1802, was celebrated throughout the country as a thanksgiving for

1. Skeats and Miall: History of the Free Churches in England, p. 436.
2. Works I, p. 122 and p. 111 (note). The annual sermon for the Fund was preached alternately in a Dissenting Chapel and in an Established Church. See Victoria County History of Cambridge, Vol. II, p. 194.

the Treaty of Amiens, which had given the nation a much needed respite in the war with Napoleon. From 1793 the French had marched to victory after victory. The British and Austrian armies had been driven out of the Low Countries. Holland, Italy and the Rhineland had been over-run by the French. Austria, beaten to her knees, crept out of the war, leaving England alone against France. By 1797 England was faced with defeat; but the navy, under energetic commanders like Jervis and Nelson, defeated the French fleet in a number of skirmishes and, at the Battle of the Nile, achieved such a resounding victory that Napoleon had to scuttle out of Egypt. The war dragged on to stalemate. On land, no-one could make any headway against Napoleon. At sea, Nelson reigned supreme. The two victorious enemies recognized their respective limits in the Treaty of Amiens. In England the peace was welcomed with joy and great relief, and Hall caught the spirit of the times in a sermon entitled Reflections on War[1] which he preached for the Benevolent Society.

To a people tired of war he reminds them that war is "the most awful scourge that Providence employs for the chastisement of man" and recalls its horror in grim detail. One critic said the sermon was "beautiful but faint, written in water when he should have dipped his pencil in blood"[2], but

1. Works I, p. 85 ff.
2. G. Gilfillan: Galleries of Literary Portraits (1856), Vol. II, p. 250.

this hardly does justice to Hall's words.

He depicts streets "filled with slaughter and blood" and tells of battlefields where "thousands are left without assistance and without pity, with their wounds exposed to the piercing air, while the blood, freezing as it flows, binds them to the earth amidst the trampling of horses and the insults of an enraged foe". For page after page Hall builds up, in this vein, a picture of the evil consequences of war. Then, almost with relief, he turns to the blessings of peace; but, lest his hearers should attach too much importance to the Treaty of Amiens, which Hall rightly sensed to be a temporary truce, he sounds a warning note.

"Whether the foundations of lasting tranquillity are laid," he says, "or a respite offered to the nations of the earth, in the present auspicious event, is a question, the discussion of which would only damp the satisfaction of the day"; and adds, "the present condition of Europe" is not such as "affords to any party room for high exultation".

Nevertheless, whatever the ultimate issue of Amiens, Hall recognizes that the peace which it brought was a great blessing. He rejoices in the reduction of the price of bread and hopes that "the circumstances of the poor and the labouring classes will be much improved". He is glad that England has not been so mad as "to wade through the horrors of a revolution to make way for a military despot", and urges that "our only

security against similar calamities" is a steady adherence to religion.

In closing, he invites his hearers to thank "that gracious Providence" which has brought the war to an end, and after describing the objects of the Cambridge Benevolent Society suggests that as an expression of gratitude a contribution to the Society would be most fitting.

It is not known by how much the Society benefited by Hall's eloquence, but the sermon was everywhere hailed with delight. It is a clear example of Hall's genius for saying the right thing at the right time and in the right way, and was justly applauded.

Hall's uneasiness concerning the duration of the peace was fully warranted, for the peace, which had been greeted with such relief, proved to be only a hollow truce. Napoleon interpreted the Treaty to mean the retirement of England behind the sea-curtain of the Channel while he remained free to annex every state in Europe to which he had a mind. England dare not allow him this freedom, and so in May, 1803, she declared war. Napoleon had not expected England to take the initiative and for a moment was caught off balance, but soon prepared his vengeance. He set in motion a great shipbuilding drive. Every French seaport and inland river town was mobilized for building vessels to carry an army to England. Dutch, Spanish and Swiss troops were ordered to join the

French in an attack across the Channel.

In the middle of July it became known in England that Bonaparte had inspected troops and barges at Boulogne. By the autumn, accounts of preparation, brought by American and other neutral travellers, grew hourly. A quarter of a million men, it was said, were to sail in five divisions - three against England and the other two against Scotland and Ireland; the landing was to be followed by a general massacre.[1]

In the face of this challenge it became accounted righteousness to appeal to every feeling of hatred, scorn and insular pride that could mobilize the people for battle. Pamphlets and handbills poured from the presses. Church doors and village trees were placarded with bloodcurdling posters describing the consequences of invasion. The underwriters of Lloyds opened a Patriotic Fund. The government issued Regulations for the Preservation of Good Order to be Adopted in Case of Actual Invasion, and arrangements were made for the safety of the Royal Family. Volunteers were called for and over 300,000 came forward in a few days. Throughout the summer and autumn men drilled in town square and village green as though their lives depended on it. The citizens of

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1. These details are largely taken from Chapter III of Arthur Bryant's Years of Victory (1944).

Bristol panted in battle formation up the slopes of Leigh Down, while merchants and barristers, students and craftsmen rose early to put in two or three hours of drill. The crisis was considered so serious that a day of prayer and fasting was appointed on 19th October, 1803. Robert Hall was on a visit to Bristol at the time, exchanging pulpits with the minister of the Bridge Street Church (Rev. Samuel Lowell)[1]. It was here that he preached the third of his famous national sermons. This one was called The Sentiments Proper to the Present Crisis.[2] One writer called it "the best of a long catalogue of discourses on the subject"[3], and even Pitt approved of it.[4] (This means a great deal when it is remembered that in his younger days Hall had denounced Pitt as "a veteran in frauds . . . falsifying every promise, and violating every political engagement".[5])

In his sermon Hall calls the nation to repentance for its sins - one of which he believes to be the holding of military exercises on Sundays. He complains: "Our places of worship have been thinned by the absence of those who have been employed in military evolutions, and of a still greater number of gazers,

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 168.
2. Works I, p. 135 ff.
3. Gilfillan: Galleries of Literary Portraits, II, p. 250.
4. Gregory's Memoir, p. 69.
5. Advertisement to 3rd edition An Apology for the Freedom of the Press: Works III, p. 65.

whom such spectacles attract".[1]

He joins the popular enthusiasm for denouncing Napoleon by describing him as "a man bred in the school of ferocity amidst the din of arms and the tumult of camps; his element war and confusion; who has changed his religion with his uniform, and has not spared the assassination of his own troops".

In measured tones Hall rallied the country on the verge of invasion. "We are awaiting with anxiety," he said, "but without dismay the discharge of that mighty tempest which hangs upon the skirts of the horizon, and to which the eyes of Europe and of the world are turned in silent and awful expectation. . . . Though he (Napoleon) has carried the flame of war throughout Europe . . . he has yet to contend on a soil filled with the monuments of freedom, enriched with the blood of its defenders; with a people who, animated by one soul and inflamed with zeal for their laws . . . are armed in defence of all that is dear." He urged his countrymen, "It is for you to decide whether this freedom shall yet survive, or be covered with a funeral pall and wrapt in eternal gloom". Then, turning to a company of Volunteers in the congregation, he declared: "Go then, ye defenders of your country, accompanied

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1. Works I, p. 175.

with every auspicious omen; advance with alacrity into the field, where God Himself musters the hosts to war. Religion is too much interested in your success not to lend you her aid. She will shed over this enterprise her selectest influence. While you are engaged on the field many will repair to the closet, many to the sanctuary, the faithful of every name will employ that prayer which has power with God, the feeble hands which are unequal to any other weapon will grasp the sword of the Spirit; and from myriads of humble, contrite hearts the voice of intercession, supplication and weeping will mingle in its ascent to heaven with the shouts of battle and the shock of arms."[1]

This sermon with its patriotic fervour added much to Hall's growing national reputation. Like his previous sermons, it caught the temper of the nation and expressed eloquently the feelings of the moment. The situation lent itself to Hall's powers of oratory and to a very different generation faced with a similar threat in 1940 the closing pages still read well, although the style of oratory has changed so much.

Yet this popular sermon[2] was the prelude to the darkest hours of Hall's life.

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1. Works I, p. 135 ff.
2. Only Hall's old opponent, Benjamin Flower, seems to have disapproved of it. See the preface by Flower to Divine Judgments by Robert Aspland (1804), p. V.

VII. TRAGEDY

Hall's friends had been noticing symptoms of trouble for some time. Early in 1799 he was struck down by a fever, which nearly cost him his life and left him considerably weakened.[1] Then, not long after this, his friends began to notice that his usual cheerfulness was being replaced by fits of acute depression. He would become absorbed with morbid feelings about his own state before God and his own circumstances in Cambridge; and what really worried them was that these periods of depression were gradually increasing in frequency and duration. He began to take an unreasonable dislike to the Cambridge countryside. "'Tis a dismally flat country, sir . . ." he said to Olinthus Gregory. "It must be the very focus of suicides."[2] These sentiments were uttered so often and with such seriousness that his friends feared he would leave Cambridge. John Greene noticed the same thing. Hall used to say to him, "It is a remarkable fact that there are more suicides committed in Cambridgeshire than in any other county in the kingdom." Later he complained "Sir, you cannot conceive how it lowered my spirits when I first came into the county at Royston. The whole aspect was

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 52.
2. Ibid, p. 42.

so cheerless, so flat and monotonous, I thought I could never live in it."[1] This aversion to the Cambridge countryside never left Hall completely. On his last visit to the town in the closing years of his life he still commented on the "insipid sameness of scenery all round" and on the fact that "there is not a tree for a man to hang himself upon when he is weary of the barrenness of the place". When it was pointed out that there were a few trees, Hall replied "Yes, sir, I recollect. Willows, I believe, sir. Nature hanging out signals of distress, sir!"[2]

Writing had never been easy for Hall because of the nagging pain in his back, but now his aversion to writing went beyond the bounds of reason. Many appeals were made to him to publish his sermons, but apart from the three "national" sermons he stubbornly refused to commit his work to writing. Such was his mood at times that he contemplated resigning from the Christian ministry altogether.[3]

In an effort to rid himself of this haunting depression, Hall confined himself more and more to his rooms and seldom went out except to meetings. "I have no pleasure in walking out," he told John Greene, and confessed that he was now reading "from 5 o'clock in the morning until seven or eight

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 38.
2. S. A. Swaine: Faithful Men (1884), p. 111.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 157.

at night".[1] Why did he work at such a pressure? The answer is partly that it took his mind off the hated countryside and partly a desire to redeem time. He wrote of his feelings to his friend, James Phillips, on 26th May, 1801. "How ardently," he writes, "do I long to do something which shall convince the world I have not lived in vain! My wishes in this respect will, it is to be feared, never be fulfilled. Tranquillity is not my lot . . . I am now perfectly devoured with an impatience to redeem time, and to be of some lasting benefit to the world, at least to the church."[2] With this burning desire he worked himself into a worse state than before, studying ten and eleven hours daily.

His room overlooked a graveyard, and it was observed that he began to take an unhealthy interest in the supernatural. He once went out with a friend at midnight to see a ghost which had been reported in the neighbourhood. It turned out to be a student prank. On another occasion he pointed to the graveyard and said very seriously to Greene, "I have actually seen stones rising from these graves in rapid succession, and beat against the church tower".[3]

All of these symptoms of mental stress, it must be remembered, were paralleled.by severe physical pains in the back,

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 41.
2. Works V, p. 424.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, pp. 39-40.

which interrupted his sleep and sapped his strength.

In an effort to help him out of his depression, J. W. Morris, who was then editing some sermons by the French preacher, Saurin, suggested that Hall should translate Saurin's Dissertations, but all his persuasion proved futile.[1] In a letter dated 5th March, 1803, Hall told Morris, "My intention is to leave Cambridge . . . the face of the country is so extremely flat and disgusting and habitually to make an uncomfortable impression on my spirits. I am not unaware that a tendency to occasional depression is wrought pretty strongly into my constitution, not a little increased by certain events in early youth, to which it is unnecessary to allude."[2] There is some disagreement as to whether the "events in early youth" refer to his shattered love affair at Bristol or to his mother's tragic years at Arnesby. The latter seems the more likely. At any rate, his friends realized that unless something was done quickly they would lose Hall from Cambridge. On the advice of Dr. Kerr of Northampton they, therefore, obtained a house for him at Shelford (five miles from the town), where he would have fresh air and quietness[3]; and as he was proud of his equestrian prowess[4] his friends hoped the many opportunities for riding that Shelford offered would accelerate

1. Morris's Recollections, p. 157.
2. Ibid, p. 166 ff.
3. Ibid, p. 168.
4. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 43.

his recovery. All went well for some months, but in the summer of 1804 his depression returned and this time it appeared so serious that a doctor was called in. This was Dr. F. Thackaray, and he diagnosed a serious mental disturbance. For some weeks Hall was very ill and complained of severe pains in his head.[1] At times his mind gave way completely and his speech became incoherent.

Newton Bosworth visited him regularly and John Greene also went to see him. "He was in bed, being very ill," writes Greene, "I heard but could not see him. He was engaged in one continual stream of incoherent talk. I wept to hear him."[2] In December Hall was placed under the care of Dr. Thomas Arnold of Leicester, who kept a private asylum at his house in Bond Street, where, in addition to having wealthy patients under his care, he had begun to take a small number of poor patients free of charge.[3] The Cambridge congregation prayed earnestly for Hall and weekly bulletins on his progress were sent by Rev. J. Mitchell, an Independent minister in Leicester, and were read out at the close of the morning Services. Friends paid all his medical expenses and, to show their concern for his welfare, provided a fund of two thousand guineas - enough to provide him with an annuity of £100 a year

1. Morris's Recollections, pp. 175-6.
2. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 45.
3. A. Temple Patterson: Radical Leicester (1954), pp. 7/8. See also Leicester Journal - 13th March 1789, 17th May 1791.

for life - and a further sum was invested on his behalf in government securities.[1]

He gradually recovered, and on 19th February, 1805, was allowed to leave hospital. A deputation from Cambridge welcomed him, but he was far from well and stayed on at Leicester for a few days with one of his sisters. He wrote to William Hollick, the senior deacon at Cambridge, on the 26th February, "my spirits are rather low; but my mind is composed, and in some measure resigned to the leading and conduct of Divine Providence . . . If God enables me to do some little good . . . it will be enough, and infinitely more than I deserve; for I have been, in the most emphatic sense of the word, 'an unprofitable servant'."[2] He stayed with his brother at Arnesby for a few days, where John Greene went to visit him. Greene was much disturbed at Hall's appearance. "He looked pale and emaciated," he wrote. "His eye had lost its brilliancy, his spirits were broken by severity and harshness."[3]

On 16th March Hall returned to Cambridge in company with Thomas Toller, the Clipstone minister, who preached for him on his first Sunday at home. His friends noticed his weak condition and a number of scars on his head. These were the

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 74. William Wilberforce was one who subscribed generously to the fund: see The Correspondence of William Wilberforce (ed. R. I. and S. Wilberforce), Vol. I, p. 348.
2. Works V, p. 435.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 46.

result of his treatment at Leicester. The treatment of mental disease at this period was the subject of a growing debate. In 1788 it had become known that George III was suffering from recurring fits of insanity. He was placed under the supervision of Dr. Francis Willis, who made no secret of his methods. Willis believed that the first step in the cure of insanity was for the doctor to acquire ascendancy over the mind of the patient - if necessary, by intimidatory means. The king was, therefore, separated immediately from his wife and family, and kept in constant fear of the strait jacket. It was reported that he was beaten and starved, and the history of the king's illness showed, as Dr. Kathleen Jones observes, "that the most exalted station did not wholly exempt the sufferer from this stupid and inhuman usage".[1]

In March, 1789, the king recovered and there was a Service of thanksgiving in St. Paul's Cathedral. Unfortunately, his recovery appeared to vindicate the methods of Dr. Willis, so that when the king became ill again in 1801, despite strong opposition he was once more subjected to such desperate measures as the strait jacket and cauterizing irons.

Dr. Arnold, Hall's doctor in Leicester, was one of those who sided with the king's physician and employed the same

1. K. Jones: Lunacy, Law and Conscience 1744-1845 - The Social History of the Care of the Insane (1955), p. 42 ff.

methods in his asylum. Hall obviously suffered from the full brunt of his treatment and on his recovery described his experiences to John Greene.

"Sir, they took away my watch and confined me in a place which overlooked the ward in which were a number of pauper lunatics, practising all manner of ludicrous antics. Sir, this sight was enough to make me ten times worse; they were as mad as March hares. I was at times quite insensible. I don't believe Dr. Arnold was aware how I was treated by a lazy keeper. Do you know, sir, to save himself a little time and trouble (being winter) the fellow came at 5 o'clock and fastened me down upon my bed, where I could not stir either hand or foot till about eight o'clock the next morning. During this time I had many lucid intervals; he had no business to leave me, sir, so long, but it was to enable him to go away sooner. You cannot conceive the horror of my situation. . . . Now, sir, I hope if ever I am taken ill again you will use all your influence to prevent my being sent there a second time. It is a very mistaken notion that severity is requisite. Mild treatment, with proper restraint and kindness, is all that is necessary in such cases."[1]

For a week Hall stayed with his senior deacon, William Hollick, and then moved out to Fowlmire[2], nine miles

1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 48.
2. This is the modern spelling. In Hall's day the name was written Foulmire or Fulmire.

from Cambridge, where his friends had provided him with a comfortable home. For a time all went well. He wrote an article for the Eclectic Review[1] and preached as well as ever, and in a spirit of great humility. Hearers noted that his sermons were perhaps more evangelical in tone, and his manner was, if anything, more serious than before. A helpful letter came from Sir James Mackintosh (now the Recorder of Bombay) and friends began to congratulate him on his complete recovery. But their congratulations were too premature. His apparent health was but the calm before the storm. Within a few months there were distressing signs of mental weakness. He forgot the Sunday Services, made no preparation for preaching and was sometimes found wandering in the streets. Then, one Sunday in November - about a year after his first attack - he did not turn up to the morning Service. In the afternoon he arrived ten minutes late, and John Greene, who was in the congregation, knew "by the wildness of his appearance" that something was seriously wrong. Hall gave out the hymn, read the Scriptures and prayed quite normally. Then after the second hymn he began his sermon.

All went well until about half-way through, when he began to speak quite incoherently. The church was crowded with students and friends. The congregation did not know what to do.

1. This was a Review of Foster's Essays. See Works IV, p. 3 ff.

The deacons were in a quandary, wondering whether to go up to the pulpit and lead him to the vestry, or whether to leave him alone. After a few moments, however, Hall stopped, put his hand to his head, and said, "My friends, I beg pardon, my head is very bad this afternoon". He then went on normally to the end of the sermon.

After the Benediction he went to the vestry and the crowds dispersed, but the church members waited behind in anxious suspense. The Communion Table was laid as usual and Hall solemnly conducted the Service. At the end, just as the people were leaving to go, he called out wildly, "Stop, my friends, I have something very important to communicate to you. I have to inform you that the Millenium is come; that period which we have been waiting for, hoping for and praying for so long, is come. Let us kneel down and bless God that we have lived to see this day." He then offered a wild prayer. He was, at this time, being looked after by a member of the church, Mr. T. Nutter, and when he was taken home to the house it was plain that something seriously was wrong. He paced about his bedroom for a time, then on a sudden impulse took £70 from his bureau, ran to the stable, saddled his horse and galloped off across the fields to the Inn at Royston. Friends gave chase, but he insisted on going on. He rode, in fact, to within twelve miles of London, where he

was taken back to Fowlmire.[1] It was plain he needed immediate attention and on 26th November, 1805, he was once more placed in the hands of the doctor.[2] His brother came to visit him, but Hall, not fully realizing what he was doing, refused to see him. Meanwhile, his friends arranged for him to be sent to Fishponds, near Bristol, where Dr. Cox agreed to care for him. Here he was given more sensible treatment and gradually recovered. His only complaint was that his pipe had been taken from him. Dr. Cox, however, sensing that the pipe helped to calm his nerves, returned it to him within a few days. Hall was urged to leave Cambridge and live elsewhere in a countryside more congenial to him. A year's complete rest was also prescribed, and it was hinted that marriage would be another valuable step towards a complete recovery.

It is difficult to account for the surprising number of well-known literary figures of this era who, like Hall, were subject to mental disorders. Dr. Kathleen Jones, in her study of the problem, includes William Cowper, Robert Burns, Oliver Goldsmith and William Blake in a lengthy list, and remarks that the "high incidence of insanity among men of letters during this period is a phenomenon which seems incapable of adequate explanation"[3]. In any explanation the

1. These details are taken from Greene's Reminiscences, p. 56 ff.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 180.
3. K. Jones: Lunacy, Law and Conscience 1744-1845, p. 46.

religious element must have a place. Certainly in the case of Cowper and Robert Hall, among others, religious doubts and questionings were a contributory factor in their afflictions. Sir James Mackintosh, who had studied the subject while a medical student at Edinburgh prior to his legal career, certainly thought so. He wrote to Hall, "all your unhappiness has arisen from your love and pursuit of excellence. Disappointed in the pursuit of union with real or supposed excellence of a limited sort, you sought refuge in the contemplation of the Supreme Excellence. But by the conflict of both, your mind was torn to pieces."[1]

Hall gradually improved and was able to write. "It is with the sincerest gratitude I would acknowledge the goodness of God in restoring me. I am, as far as I can judge, as remote from anything wild and irregular in the state of my mind as I ever was in my life."[2] But just as his convalescence was being completed sad news reached him. His brother, whom he had refused to see at the beginning of his illness, had died very suddenly. "Since I have been here," he wrote to his friend, James Phillips, "another stroke has befallen me, under which my heart is bleeding. This is the death of my dear and only brother, two years older than myself,

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1. Life of Sir James Mackintosh, Vol. I, p. 369. The original of this letter is in the museum of Carey Cottage, Harvey Lane, Leicester.
2. Works V, p. 440.

who died about ten days since, without a moment's warning. He was reaching something from the chimney-piece, and instantly dropped down and expired. . . . I feel poignant regret at not having treated him with more tenderness."[1]

The news of Hall's recovery brought a measure of relief to his admirers, for they feared the worse. John Foster, the essayist, when he heard about Hall's second attack, wrote "Every recollection of this gives me a feeling of gloomy regret. We had hoped that the calamity might never have returned; but now, if he should recover, the threatening omens always hang over him. It is a most mysterious dispensation that so strong and sublime a spirit should be thus humiliated."[2]

The faithful Cambridge congregation were willing to risk another breakdown if only Hall would continue as their pastor. But, wisely, he heeded the doctor's advice and sent in his resignation to the church. Thus, on 4th March, 1806, Robert Hall ended his second pastorate after fifteen years of service to the Cambridge church. In a letter to them he thanked the people for their kindness and generosity during his ministry, and urged them to choose a minister "whose heart is truly devoted to God and who is determined, like the great apostle, 'to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him

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1. Works V, p. 442.
2. Life and Correspondence of John Foster (1846), ed. by J. E. Ryland, Vol. I, p. 277.

crucified".[1]

Hall himself stepped out into the unknown future, broken in health and humbled in spirit.

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1. Works V, p. 444. See the church Minute Book for 4th March, 1806.

PART IV

LEICESTER 1807-1826

I. INTERLUDE

The dark days which Hall had experienced in 1804-1805 made a profound impression upon him. Sometimes he hinted in conversations with his friends that he had been caught up, like Paul, to the third heaven, where he had heard unspeakable words. He said to John Greene after his first breakdown, "My mind was so excited and my imagination so lively and active, that more ideas passed through my mind during those seven weeks than in any seven years of my life. Whatever I had obtained from reading or reflection was present to me: I had all my ideas at my fingers' ends and could bring them to bear upon any subject."[1] But if his first breakdown from one point of view was a heavenly revelation, his second was an affliction which nearly broke him utterly. He felt that this second illness had been sent to humble him and preserve him from the dangers of pride and popularity. That God had spared him at all seemed a miracle and, on his recovery, the dominant note in his letters and conversation is not what great visions he had experienced but what gratitude he owed to God for a further opportunity of service. "Pray for me, my dear friend," he wrote to James Phillips, "that I may retain an indelible sense of the mercies received, and that the inconceivable

1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 50.

afflictions I have undergone may 'work for me the peaceable fruits of righteousness'."[1]

To John Fawcett, one of the Baptist leaders in Yorkshire, he wrote: "I have undergone the severest afflictions that ever befell me. The Lord has shown me terrible things in righteousness. It has graciously pleased Him, however, to restore my captivity, and to recover me to the perfect exercise of my reason. Assist me, my dear Sir, to magnify the Name of the Lord. May a sense of the goodness of God be indelibly imprinted on my mind. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within bless His holy Name. I am a monument of astonishing mercy. May the goodness of God lead me to repentance and stimulate me to obedience."[2]

This consciousness of the unspeakable mercy of God towards him was the matrix in which the rest of Hall's life developed. He had always been a humble man, but now the sense of his unworthiness in the sight of God became almost an obsession. J. W. Morris wrote: "After his mental relapse he became so abased in his own eyes, so prostrate and self-annihilated, that he scarcely presumed to hope for permanent acceptance or

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1. Quoted in Gregory's Memoir, p. 79. A letter in similar vein was sent to Mr. Fysh in London. The MSS letter dated 25th February, 1805, is in Bristol Baptist College Library.
2. MSS letter dated 11th April, 1805, in the Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford. Quoted by Wheeler Robinson: Life and Faith of the Baptists (1946), p. 68.

success in any quarter."[1] This, at times, became most frustrating to his friends. Hall refused, for example, to see any good in anything he ever did, even when all his friends combined to persuade him otherwise. He refused to consider that his writing could be of lasting value. In one of his letters he confesses, "I find strange and seemingly insurmountable obstacles arising in part from a certain fastidiousness of taste, which renders me dissatisfied, and even disgusted, with all my performances."[2]

A sad example of this occurred about two years after his recovery. In India the missionaries Carey, Marshman and Ward were hard at work on the translation of the scriptures into the native languages. In the course of their work they were often glad of advice from friends at home on some difficult points of interpretation and translation. Dr. Marshman, for example, wrote to Andrew Fuller and John Ryland, asking their help in some of his translation difficulties. They decided to approach Hall with the double object of enlisting the help of his scholarship and of aiding his convalescence by giving him some positive work to do. Hall accepted the task and soon became so engrossed in the search for the exact meaning of the New Testament text that he carried on his researches

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 201.
2. Works V, p. 470.

for two years, intending to publish some of his conclusions in a hundred-page booklet.

Just as he was completing his work some volumes came into his hands which fascinated him. They were the four volumes of Dr. James Macknight's The Apostolical Epistles. They were the result of thirty years of toil by the Scottish scholar and were first published in 1795. As Hall read them he realized that they embodied many of his own ideas. Macknight's work was based on four principles[1] with which Hall was in wholehearted agreement. These principles were as follows:-

(1) As far as possible any translation of the New Testament must be based on the original Greek texts.

(2) In any translation the order of the Greek words in the original must be carefully considered.

(3) When translating the New Testament Greek, the Hebraic background of the New Testament writers must be taken into account.

(4) No phrase must be translated in isolation but must be considered in the light of its total context.

As Hall read on he discovered that most of his translations and comments had been anticipated by Macknight. Thereupon he immediately destroyed his own manuscript.[2] His

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1. James Macknight: The Apostolical Epistles (1835), p.11. (One volume edition)

2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 81 (note).

friends were appalled when they heard what he had done. What drove him to do such a thing? Part of the reason for the destruction of his manuscript was no doubt the frustrating knowledge that his work had been forestalled by another man, but there was a deeper reason. As he read the weighty tomes comprising Macknight's researches, he felt how unworthy were his own poor efforts. He decided they were not worth keeping and the only proper thing to do was to destroy them completely. In this mood he destroyed also the notes of his Cambridge sermons. His friends were gravely disturbed at his attitude and felt that his humility was going beyond reasonable bounds, but Hall's convictions were quite definite on this matter. When asked to publish a sermon he wrote, "The truth is I am tormented with the desire of writing better than I can: and, as this is an obstacle not easily overcome, I am afraid it will never be in my power to write much".[1] This was his general attitude in the years following his mental relapses of 1804 and 1805.

After leaving Dr. Cox's hospital at Fishponds, Bristol, Hall rested for a few months, staying with his sister at Leicester, and on the Sundays worshipping in the Harvey Lane Baptist Church. Then he moved on to other relatives at

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1. Works V, p. 471.

Arnesby. Here he walked the old familiar paths and let memories of childhood flood his mind. The sight of the old church and manse brought back again the poignant recollection of his father, and the villagers often saw him kneeling at his father's grave in earnest prayer.[1] He avoided all preaching engagements, and in the quietness of the countryside slowly recovered in body and in mind.

Early in 1807 he moved out to Enderby, a village about five miles from Leicester, where he lodged in a house owned by an aged relative. He set apart days for prayer and fasting, took quiet walks in the neighbourhood, and was often seen in the woods praying aloud. Sometimes a passer-by would hurry past unnoticed. There was no dissenting church in Enderby village so he attended the nearby parish church, where he stood among the labourers in the place reserved for the poor of the parish. The local vicar, realizing that Hall was a visitor of distinction, immediately arranged for him to be given a pew; but the dreary services bored Hall so much that he stopped attending. He used to say that "if he had not been a dissenter before he should be one now, and should continue a dissenter to all eternity".[2]

During this quiet stay at Enderby two events happened which made a vital difference to his future. The first was

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 81.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 195.

his marriage.

He had often been advised to marry, but his unfortunate love affair at Bristol had left a sore wound and he remained a bachelor. His friends, however, were convinced that marriage would greatly benefit him, and they engineered many an introduction in the hope that Hall would find a wife. He took it all in good part, and had to use all his powers of wit and satire to demolish many of the rumours that quickly developed around him. On one occasion a friend asked "Is it true, Mr. Hall, that you are to marry Miss . . .?" (naming a well-known spinster). "I would as soon marry Beelzebub's eldest daughter," replied Hall, "and go home and live with the old folks!"[1] His friends were almost despairing of him when, to their amazement, he announced his engagement. The surprise this created was only surpassed when it became known whom he intended to marry. His unusual romance began one day in the summer of 1807. Hall was taking the week-end services for Thomas Edmonds, the Clipstone minister, and in the house where he was staying he met the girl who was to become his wife. It seems that one of the servant girls particularly attracted his attention. He had never spoken to her directly, nor did he even know her name, but her appearance and character so pleased him that on a later visit he

1. G. Gilfillan: Galleries of Literary Portraits (1856), II, p. 249.

went down to the kitchen where she was working and quietly asked her to be his wife.[1]

The story of his proposal has been told by a number of Hall's biographers, probably with a measure of romantic exaggeration. George Gilfillan, for example, in his Galleries of Literary Portraits, tells of Hall "going down to the kitchen of a brother minister, where his inamorata lived in the shape of a most respectable and pious domestic. He lights the inseparable pipe. His question: 'Betty, do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?' Her answer: 'I hope so, Sir, I do', and his succeeding and conclusive query 'Betty, do you love me?'"[2]

Whatever the actual words may have been, the main facts are clear enough. Hall, when forty-three years of age, became engaged to a totally uneducated servant girl. His friends were horrified, but Hall told one of them, "I do not want a wife to read Greek, sir, I can read Greek myself".[3] The girl, Eliza Smith, stayed for a few months with Mr. and Mrs. Edmonds at Clipstone and then for six months with friends of the Hall family at Kettering, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Timms.[4]

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 213 ff. gives most details concerning the marriage, but Olinthus Gregory considered that Morris was inaccurate in some of his details. See Gregory's Memoir (1866 ed.), p. 100 (note).
2. G. Gilfillan: Galleries of Literary Portraits, II, p. 250.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 216.
4. Joseph Timms was one of the deacons of the Kettering Baptist Church. He was the only layman present at the inaugural meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society in the parlour of Widow Wallis's house, Kettering, in 1792.

Mrs. Timms immediately took Eliza under her wing and helped her a great deal. The marriage took place on 25th March, 1808, in the Kettering Baptist Church. The bridegroom caused some anxious moments by arriving very late, but all went well and on the way home to Leicester Hall declared it was the happiest day in his life.[1] A few months later he wrote to Dr. Ryland and appended this note:- "P.S. In gratitude to God and to my dear companion, I must add that marriage has added (a little to my cares) much to my comfort, and that I am indulged with one of the best of wives."[2]

He spoke of his wife as "a perfect Martha", and when friends were coming to dine with them Hall used to say "At such times she is as much engaged as Napoleon would be in the arrangement of his army previous to fighting a mighty battle!"[3]

Hall's choice of a wife was one of the best things he ever did, for she proved to be a charming and gracious personality and their marriage was blissfully happy. A frequent visitor to the home wrote many years later: "Of Mrs. Hall it is impossible to speak too highly. Those who were only acquainted with her slightly, as well as those who knew her intimately, equally felt the attraction of her person and manner. She must have been very beautiful when young, and

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 220.
2. Works V, p. 456.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 221.

possessed in a remarkable degree that air of refinement which is found among those who have been accustomed to highly intelligent and cultivated society. Mr. Hall invariably paid her the greatest deference and relied on the soundness of her judgment."[1]

The second major event of his residence at Enderby was his call to the pastorate of the Harvey Lane Baptist Church, Leicester. About a year after his illness he had begun to do a little preaching. At first it was merely a case of conducting family worship in the house where he was staying, but he later was invited to preach at the village of Narborough. The congregation were delighted with the visiting preacher and soon other invitations began to come in from the villages. Gradually, his engagements multiplied until on most Sundays he was preaching in some church in and around Leicester. On 2nd January, 1807, he wrote "I preach most Sabbaths, though at no one place statedly, and have found considerable pleasure in my work. I have little or no plan for the future, but endeavour to abandon myself entirely to the divine direction."[2]

As soon as the news spread that Hall was preaching again there was much debate as to his future. The Clipstone church invited him to preach on a number of occasions, and when a

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1. F. Trestrail: Reminiscences of College Life in Bristol, p. 149.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 194.

vacancy arose he secretly hoped they would invite him to become their minister.[1] But the deacons at Clipstone did not believe that he would accept, so they did not ask him. But the congregation at Harvey Lane were not so reticent. They unanimously invited him to become their pastor. This was the first positive invitation Hall had received since his breakdown and, moved by their kindness, he promised an early reply.

In the meantime, the church at Arnesby resolved to invite Hall to follow in his father's footsteps as their minister. This invitation was a tempting one, for he knew the people well and would be continuing a great tradition; but, despite these advantages, it was the call of the Harvey Lane church to which he was most attracted. The church was in a poor state and was generally dismissed as an unattractive prospect, but Hall's excessive humility saw these defects to be positive advantages. He felt that he only deserved the most humble position and became convinced that God's will for him lay in going to Leicester. He, therefore, accepted the call to Harvey Lane and commenced his ministry on 7th October, 1807. Neither Hall nor the church realized that their partnership was to last almost twenty years and was to bring both church and minister into the front rank of English nonconformity.

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 199.

II. HARVEY LANE

When Hall came to Harvey Lane Baptist Church, Leicester, he was not the first of the family to be its minister. His uncle, Christopher Hall, had been the minister there as far back as 1760.[1] But the church was a struggling cause with a small membership. It first became well known in the Baptist denomination through its association with the missionary pioneer, William Carey, who was the minister from 1789 until 1793.

At the commencement of his ministry Carey found division and a spirit of quarrelsomeness and, as one of his biographers says, "he passed through a time of great difficulty until he had reconstituted the church and set it again on a sure foundation".[2] Carey was an excellent pastor and soon the building had to be enlarged to house the growing congregation. At the cost of £98 a gallery was built, but the congregation was so poor that it took five years to pay off the debt.[3] By 1793 the call of missionary work in India had become too insistent for Carey's peace of mind, and he resigned from the pastorate.

The loss of Carey brought the congregation together in

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1. T. Lomas: Memoir of R. Harris (1855) which gives a summary of the early history of Harvey Lane. See also Morris's Hall of Arnesby (1828), p. 21.
2. A. Dakin: William Carey (1942), p. 20.
3. G. Smith: The Life of William Carey (Everyman edition), p. 42.

prayerful enthusiasm and the church continued to thrive. In a letter to Carey in 1794 Samuel Pearce, the minister of Cannon Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, reported that he had baptized twelve in the Harvey Lane church and that one of his members, Benjamin Cave, was taking over the pastorate.[1] Two years later Pearce again visited Leicester and told Carey of an overcrowded congregation and of a large collection for the Missionary Society "given with the heart". He goes on to say "Thus the seed you sowed springs up to the glory of God".[2]

But as the years slipped by the Harvey Lane congregation gradually declined. Fourteen years later, when Robert Hall became pastor, the church was half empty and the membership reduced to seventy-six.[3] Some of Hall's friends were disappointed when they heard he had accepted the call to Harvey Lane. John Foster, the essayist, for example, wrote that Hall "is likely to remain at Leicester, a very dull place, by no means adapted to such a man, who ought to be in some one of the three or four principal towns in England".[4] But Hall found the congregation "a simple-hearted, affectionate, praying people".[5] It is true they were not well-educated, nor were they rich. Hall told John Greene, "My congregation, sir, is

1. S. Pearce Carey: Samuel Pearce (3rd edition), p. 150.
2. Ibid, p. 179.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 81.
4. J. E. Ryland: Life and Correspondence of John Foster (1846), Vol. I, p. 372.
5. Works V, p. 456.

composed principally of plain people who are engaged in manufactories, and who have not enjoyed the advantages of education."[1] The "manufactories" to which Hall referred were those of the framework-knitting trade in which most of the population of Leicester were employed. Wages were low and poverty was widespread, yet Hall told John Ryland that he found greater pleasure preaching to these working-class people than "to the more refined audience at Cambridge". He went on to say, "We have had, through great mercy, some small addition, and hope for more; our meetings in general, our prayer meetings in particular, are well attended."[2]

Such a comment merely illustrates Hall's exaggerated humility. In actual fact, he made a remarkable beginning to his ministry. Within eighteen months the church was so crowded that the building had to be enlarged to double its size, and the church which in Carey's day took five years to collect £98 now subscribed nearly £700 in a year. Such was Hall's rapidly growing popularity that many leading citizens of Leicester, from other denominations for the most part, contributed to the Baptist building fund.[3] The new alterations were completed in 1809 and brought the seating capacity up to eight hundred. Within a short time even this larger building was crowded with eager listeners.

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 124.
2. Works V, p. 456.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 227.

III. SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE

Underneath this brilliant opening period at Leicester Hall was fighting a desperate personal battle. Only his closest friends were aware of it, for he was adept at hiding his feelings in public. From a purely physical point of view he was suffering increasingly from pains in his back. "It is seldom, for weeks," he wrote to J. W. Morris, "that I can sit up an hour together. My pain is nearly incessant and often very severe."[1] He consulted a well-known doctor at Northampton, Dr. Kerr, who advised him to take opium or laudanum to relieve the pain. Hall accepted his advice, and whenever the pain became intense he took the drugs. It brought him some relief and he continued the habit until the end of his life.

But no medicine could cure the desperate mental battle he was fighting with doubt and depression. In July, 1808, he told Morris that his mind was "filled with awful and disquieting apprehensions respecting a hereafter".[2] A few months later, on 28th December, he wrote to John Ryland, "My mind and body are both much out of order; awful doubt and darkness hanging on the former, and much affliction and pain in the latter: let me, dear brother, entreat an interest in

1. Morris's Recollections, p. 225.
2. Ibid, p. 225.

your prayers."[1] In April, 1809, he wrote, "I labour much under darkness and despondency respecting my religious prospects."[2] This despondency seems to have stemmed from the calvinistic background of his early life. Could he be sure of his salvation? This was the crucial question which tormented him. Outwardly, he appeared the popular preacher, but only a few guessed at his agony of soul.

On one occasion he was on his way home from a ministers' meeting at Clipstone. It was such a dark and stormy winter's day that he called at the Inn by Sibbertoft village, which was owned by a fine Christian known as Master York. As Hall warmed himself at the fire, the genial innkeeper suggested that before he went on his way he might preach to the villagers. Hall agreed and at once Master York, with the help of his wife and son, roused the villagers and invited them to hear the well-known preacher. Many years later, the old man told the story to Frederick Trestrail (then secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society), who was visiting him at the Inn. "Why, Mr. Trestrail," he said, "the whole village was astir in no time. You could see the lanterns everywhere. This room was soon filled; and then we had to borrow chairs and forms, for the big 'un was filled, too; and so Mr. Hall stood in the doorway and preached to us, and didn't he go on grand! It would have done your heart good to have been there and heard

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1. Works V, p. 456.
2. Ibid, p. 458.

him." The innkeeper summed up the evening by saying "My poor little public that night was turned into the house of God and the gate of heaven".

But when the crowds had dispersed Hall was strangely silent. He sighed a few times, and the puzzled innkeeper asked "Anything the matter, Mr. Hall?" "Yes, Master York," said Hall, "very much. I am in great doubts as to my state. I sometimes fear I have never been converted and it distresses me exceedingly."[1]

Hall's battle with doubt reached a climax on 2nd May, 1809. It was his forty-fifth birthday and in the evening he sat down and painfully penned what he called An Act of Solemn Dedication of Myself to God.[2] In it he poured out his soul to God and committed his life afresh to the service of Christ.

"Oh, Lord," he wrote, "Thou that searchest the heart and triest the reins of the children of men, be Thou the witness of what I am now about, in the strength of Thy grace, to attempt: that grace I humbly and earnestly implore, to give validity and effect to that act of solemn engagement of myself to Thy service, on which I am about to enter . . .

"O Lord, I esteem it a wonderful mercy that I have not long since been cut off in the midst of my sins, and been sent to hell before I had an opportunity or a heart to repent.

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1. Trestrail's Reminiscences, pp. 145-6.
2. Gregory's Memoir, pp. 79-80.

Being assured from the Word of God of Thy gracious and merciful nature, and of Thy willingness to pardon and accept penitent believing sinners on the ground of the blood and righteousness of Thine own adorable Son . . . I do most humbly prostrate myself at the footstool of His Cross . . . I disclaim all right to myself from henceforth, to my soul, my body, my time, my health, my reputation, my talents, or anything that belongs to me. I confess myself to be the property of the glorious Redeemer . . .

"I do most cheerfully and cordially receive Him in all His offices, as my Priest, my Prophet and my King. I dedicate myself to Him, to serve, love and trust in Him as my life and my salvation to my life's end.

"I renounce the Devil and all his works, the flesh and the world, with heartfelt regret that I should have been enslaved by them so long. I do solemnly and deliberately take Thee to be my full and satisfying good, and eternal portion, in and through Thine adorable Son the Redeemer, and by the assistance of the blessed Spirit of all grace, the third person in the triune God . . . praying that the Holy Spirit may deign to take perpetual possession of my heart, and fix His abode there . . .

"I call Thee to witness, O God! the truth and reality of this surrender of all I have, and all I am, to Thee; and, conscious of the unspeakable deceitfulness of my heart, I

humbly and earnestly implore the influence of Thy Spirit to enable me to stand steadfast in this covenant, as well as an interest in the blood of Thy Son, that I may be forgiven in those instances (alas! that such an idea should be possible) in which I may, in any degree, swerve from it.

"Done this 2nd day of May, 1809, seven o'clock in the evening, Leicester. Robert Hall."

This act of dedication seemed to take a great load off Hall's mind; he became more settled in his work, less open to moods of depression and much happier in his ministry. There are echoes of his personal crisis in his correspondence at this time.

He wrote, for example, a circular letter for the Northamptonshire Association of Particular Baptist Churches entitled On the work of the Holy Spirit.[1] In this letter, when Hall warns against "a disposition to despondency and distrust", and tells how in the midst of prayer it is possible that "hope may languish", he is clearly relating the experience of his own heart. But when he goes on to speak of the help of the Spirit, the tone of his remarks make it clear that he himself is experiencing the truth of which he writes. The darkness of doubt has now passed and the help of the Spirit is a reality.

Hall's spiritual crisis of May, 1809, is also evident in

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1. Works I, p. 433 ff. Many editions of this letter were published, e.g. in 1813, 1822 and 1827. It was also published by the Religious Tract Society for general distribution.

two letters which he wrote to a friend who, like himself, was passing through a period of doubt and perplexity. In the first letter, dated 20th April, 1809, Hall writes, "You may depend upon no-one seeing the letter but myself; and I wish it were in my power to say anything that might be of use. Of this I have very little hope; for the adage might, in too great a degree, be applied to me - 'Physician, heal thyself'; as I labour much under darkness and despondency respecting my religious prospects, through the prevalence of indwelling corruptions. What then, my dear sir, can I say to you or to any other?"[1] How different is the tone of the next letter, dated 17th July, 1809. Hall can now write from the viewpoint of one who has crossed the Rubicon. "Be assured," he writes, "I sympathize with you in your spiritual trials, having had a large share of them myself." He goes on to suggest "serious, punctual, undeviating attention to private prayer, and reading of the Scriptures", and asks "Would it not be advisable for you to give yourself up publicly to the Lord?"[2] This more assured letter is a reflection of Hall's new temper. He is no longer filled with despair but has found peace. In later life he dated his conversion not from his childhood days at Arnesby, nor from his ministry at Cambridge, but from this period of recovery after his mental breakdown.[3] He seemed

1. Works V, p. 458.
2. Ibid, p. 460.
3. Gregory's Memoir, pp. 78-9.

now to take a new lease of life and his most fruitful years followed his act of self-dedication. This can be seen from the wide range of activities which now claimed his attention.

During his earlier ministry, Hall had been interested in parliamentary and penal reform, in the Bible Society, anti-slavery movement and Missionary Society, as well as in a variety of other causes; but, owing to his poor health and eventually to his mental breakdown, his activities had been greatly restricted. But now, at Leicester, he turned with fresh vigour to these and other causes and made an important contribution to their success. In order to understand the importance and extent of Hall's contribution it is necessary to consider his work in detail.

IV. EDUCATION

During the 18th Century Baptists had been slow to realize the value of education, but a new spirit came with the dawn of the 19th Century. Education, thanks largely to the evangelical revival, became regarded as a Christian duty, calling for the support of every Christian. New colleges for the training of ministers were founded; societies to advance education were established; and Sunday Schools sprang up in many towns and villages. Robert Hall was heart and soul behind this movement.

(1) Education for the Ministry

The Quarterly Review, after surveying Hall's career, wrote "Hall is for a well-educated ministry".[1] It was necessary to say this because there had been much prejudice against ministerial training in the days when hyper-calvinism gripped the Baptists; but in 1811 Hall, perhaps too optimistically, was able to write "There was a time, we are aware, when doubts were entertained, in some serious minds, of the eligibility of training young men for the ministry by a preparatory course of study. These scruples, we believe, have long since subsided . . . Learning is no longer dreaded as the enemy of piety; nor is it supposed that the orthodoxy of a public

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1. Quarterly Review, October 1832, Vol. 48, p. 124.

teacher of religion derives any security from his professed ignorance on every other subject."[1]

Hall was intimately concerned with three of the Baptist colleges in England, two of which were founded during his lifetime. He himself had been a student, and later a tutor, at the Bristol Baptist College, but long after leaving Bristol Hall had its interests at heart. He became a life member of the Bristol Education Society in 1814,[2] and, as the minister of Broadmead Baptist Church from 1826-1831, he was closely associated with its work.

His interest in the second of the Baptist Colleges has already been noted.[3] He was one of the original members of the Northern Education Society which sponsored the Horton Academy (now Rawdon Baptist College, Leeds), and he preached at the inaugural meeting in Rochdale in 1804.[4] His sermon drew forth the financial and prayerful support of many hearers and was a great encouragement to the new project. Later, he pressed the claims of Joseph Kinghorn, the Baptist minister at Norwich, as a likely president for the new college, and made such an "impression on all present" that Kinghorn was approached by the committee; but he preferred to stay at Norwich and refused the invitation.[5] Eventually William Stead-
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1. Works I, p. 225.
2. See Annual Report of Bristol Baptist College, 1830, p. 26.
3. See page [illegible] 151
4. M. H. Wilkin: Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich, p. 302.
5. Ibid, p. 302: See also J. O. Barrett: A Short History of Rawdon College (1954), p. 5.

became president. He, like Kinghorn, had been in Hall's classes when he was a tutor at Bristol.

A few years later the Baptist Magazine reported the foundation of another Baptist college - the Baptist Academical Institution at Stepney[1] (later to become Regent's Park College, London, and now Oxford). This arose in response to the growing need for a Baptist college in the London area. Hall drew up a prospectus which for twenty years was attached to the College reports[2], and, besides being issued as a separate pamphlet, it was printed in full in the Baptist Magazine for August, 1810. The prospectus gave a short account of the motives and aims of the College founders. In it Hall stated his conviction that to win the educated classes of the community for Christ and His church requires all the resources of learning a minister can acquire; but he is careful to point out that all learning must be co-ordinated with a personal experience of the Christian gospel. "An unconverted ministry", he writes, "we look upon as the greatest calamity that can befall a church"; but given this personal experience he urges the importance of "sanctified learning" and "the propriety of enlisting literature in the service of religion".

It is difficult to assess the influence of Hall's support

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1. Baptist Magazine - May 1810, p. 318: July 1810, p. 405.
2. Baptist College, Stepney: Reports 1812-1837 (in Regent's Park College Library, Oxford).

of the Stepney Academy, but if financial results are any guide Hall played his part well; for more than £4,000 was donated in response to the appeal for funds and a further £200 a year was promised in subscriptions.[1]

The following year (1811) Hall returned and gave an address at the annual meeting of the Academy in the Prescott Street Church, London, entitled The Discouragements and Supports of the Christian Minister.[2] The address was published and, in a short preface, Hall again commends the college to the Christian public. The college report for June, 1814, makes special mention of a donation of books by the "Rev. Mr. Hall of Leicester" and in such ways he continued to show his interest.

Hall's support of the colleges never wavered, and his name must go down as an eloquent and enlightened supporter of a well-trained ministry.

(2) Popular Education

As early as 1786 Hall's name was associated with the demand for popular education. In a letter to the Western Association of Particular Baptist Churches, signed by Caleb Evans and Robert Hall, the Broadmead Baptist Church reported that they had established a school "for the education

1. G. P. Gould: The Baptist College at Regent's Park (a centenary record, 1910), p. 41.
2. Works I, p. 219 ff. It was originally preached in 1810 at the ordination of James Robertson of Stretton. See also Baptist Magazine, May 1811, p. 219.

and clothing of fifty poor children and united with other congregations here in another school for the education and clothing of one hundred poor children and cannot help expressing a wish that similar plans might be adopted throughout all our churches".[1]

At Cambridge in 1793 Hall was lamenting the ignorance of the lower classes and complaining that "the people are perishing for lack of knowledge".[2] In 1810 he wrote, "These are not the times in which it is safe for a nation to repose on the lap of ignorance".[3] Ten years later he still was speaking against "the evils of popular ignorance".[4]

There were three main motives underlying Hall's zeal for the education of the masses. The first arose out of his experience among the poor of his congregations, particularly in industrial Leicester. "I am persuaded," he wrote, "that the extreme profligacy, improvidence and misery which are so prevalent among the labouring classes in many countries are chiefly to be ascribed to their want of education." Teach a poor man to read, was Hall's view, and you will preserve him from many of the evils of the public-house; teach the working classes to think for themselves and "you have put them in possession of the principle of all legitimate prosperity".[5]

1. Documents Book at Broadmead Baptist Church, folio 83.
2. Works III, p. 169.
3. Works I, p. 218.
4. Works VI, p. 257.
5. Works I, p. 201.

There was also a political motive behind Hall's zeal for education. He realized that if the growing demand for a more representative government was granted, its success would largely depend on an informed and responsible electorate. "Nothing in reality renders legitimate governments so insecure," he said, "as extreme ignorance in the people".[1] On another occasion he stated, "By educating the poor, we should make them better subjects; more obedient to the laws: and increase the welfare of society at large".[2]

Yet humanitarian and political motives were not the most important as far as Hall was concerned. His primary motive in advocating education stemmed from the Christian faith. He considered it a Christian duty to further the cause of education. "If we survey the genius of Christianity," he wrote, "we shall find . . . it was ushered into the world with the injunction 'go and teach all nations'."[3] Hall interpreted this command widely. All learning, he believed, must be harnessed for the service of God. As a lad of 17 he had urged this view on his fellow-students at Bristol[4], and in his later ministry he often referred to the millennial future in which every branch of knowledge would be consecrated to "the service of the Most High".[5]

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1. Works I, p. 203.
2. Baptist Magazine, September 1815, p. 363.
3. Works I, p. 205.
4. The Hall Family, p. 117.
5. Works I, p. 206.

In his demand for education Hall considered Biblical knowledge to be pre-eminent. Other branches of knowledge were no doubt of importance, but they must be seen in the context of faith. It was for this reason that he urged the study of the Bible. No matter how much other knowledge may be amassed," we insist, he said, "on the absolute necessity of an acquaintance with the Word of God".[1] Because the Sunday School movement stressed this, Hall gave it his whole-hearted support.

Despite opposition this movement had gathered such momentum that by the turn of the century the Sunday School Society could report that 1,086 schools were affiliated to it, with 69,000 children on the rolls.[2] Unfortunately, some high-churchmen like Bishop Horsley strongly objected to dissenting Sunday Schools, and even accused them of being the tool of Revolutionists and Jacobins.[3] Hall was at Cambridge when this accusation was made and he began to prepare a defence of the Sunday Schools, but only a fragment of his proposed publication remains. It makes plain, however, his conviction that the nation dare not "submit to have the business of education exclusively in the hands of one set of men".[4]

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1. Works I, p. 215.
2. C. Northcott: For Britain's Children (1953), p. 24.
3. Works III, p. 328 (note).
4. Works III, p. 338: see also Works V, pp. 421-2 and 426-7.

At Leicester the Harvey Lane Sunday School had been formed in November, 1803, and within six months had seventy children on the roll, but, by the time Hall began his ministry in the church, it had greatly declined. Hall reorganized it and occasionally preached a special sermon on its behalf.[1] His most famous was entitled The Advantages of Knowledge to the Lower Classes. It was published in 1810. In it he pleads the cause of education and commends in particular a knowledge of the Bible. He says to the Sunday School teachers, "Be not satisfied with making them (the children) read a lesson, or repeat a prayer . . . Lead them to the footstool of the Saviour; teach them to rely, as guilty creatures, on His merits alone, and to commit their eternal interests into His hands. Let the salvation of these children be the object, to which every word of your instructions, every exertion of your authority, is directed."[2]

These early Sunday Schools included reading and writing among the subjects taught, but considerable argument developed as to the propriety of this practice. Hall was asked for his opinion and replied in a letter entitled "The inexpediency of teaching to write in Sunday Schools". It was published in the Christian Guardian for August, 1816.[3] Hall argues that a

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1. History of the Leicestershire Association (1865), p. 17.
2. Works I, p. 216.
3. See Miscellaneous Pieces (1830), p. 164.

true observance of the Lord's Day implies "an exemption from every employment not strictly religious, works of the last necessity and mercy excepted". The teaching of writing not being strictly "a religious employment" ought, therefore, to be excluded from Sunday Schools. (To get over this difficulty, the children at Harvey Lane were taught writing on a week-night.) Hall's second argument is that the primary object of Sunday Schools is Biblical instruction. They were not meant to be "schools of general instruction" and, therefore, any subject - such as writing - which detracted from this object must be dropped from the curriculum.

Hall's arguments expressed a growing tendency among nonconformists and churchmen alike. Sunday Schools throughout the country were gradually restricting their studies to the Bible. One cause of this was the development of other forms of elementary education. Day schools were being established by such institutions as the British and Foreign Schools Society, which was founded in 1814 from the Lancasterian Society which Joseph Lancaster had started in 1808. The society was supported by public subscriptions and at its schools reading, writing and arithmetic were taught, as well as Biblical knowledge.[1] On several occasions Hall addressed large crowds on its behalf. In 1815, for example, he gave "an acute and witty

1. P. Gregg: A social and economic History of Britain (1760-1950), p. 229 ff.

speech" in Bristol, which was fully reported in the Baptist Magazine for September of the same year.[1] A few years later he preached a sermon for the Society at Bristol, notes of which are published in his collected Works.[2] In 1824 he mentioned, in another sermon, his gladness at the "multitudes of sabbath and national schools".[3] In these ways Hall showed himself to be awake to the growing importance of education, and gave the Baptists valuable leadership at a time when the education of the poor was still a debated issue.

The breadth of his vision is also seen in other ways. Such was his interest in the formation of a University at London that William Wilberforce wrote to him about it,[4] and he also publicly expressed his approval of the medical lectures being given in Leicester Infirmary. Although some disapproved of this method of instruction, Hall declared that the lectures "furnish the most important branch of medical instruction, and are adapted to benefit generations yet unborn".[5]

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1. Baptist Magazine, September 1815, pp. 361-3. See also Ryland: Life and Correspondence of John Foster, Vol. I, p. 449.
2. Works VI, p. 247 ff.
3. Works VI, p. 337.
4. The Hall Family, p. 89.
5. Works IV, pp. 502-3.

V. TRADE UNIONS

Until the middle of the 19th Century Leicester had only one large-scale industry, the manufacture of hosiery. Throughout the greater part of the 18th Century this trade had grown steadily in the three counties of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire. The industry became capitalised and large wholesale houses came into being; but it remained essentially on the domestic or "putting out" basis until after 1850, since, for technical reasons, it proved difficult to apply power to the stocking-frame.[1] The trade involved the major part of the population of Leicester and gave work to a variety of people as framework-knitters, woolcombers, dyers, framesmiths, combmakers, winders, sizers, seamers, spinners, bobbiners, needlemakers and so forth.[2]

The most flourishing period for the hosiery workers came in the years 1800-1810 when there was a boom in the trade, largely as a result of war conditions. But the high wages attracted a host of ex-agricultural labourers into the trade so that the labour market became glutted; changes of fashion reduced the demand for certain types of goods; and in 1812 the war with America closed a market on which the Midland hosiers greatly relied. Bad harvests, war taxation and

1. F. A. Wells: History of the Midland Hosiery Trade (1935), pp. 141-152.
2. A.T. Paterson: Radical Leicester (1954), p. 42.

consequent high prices aggravated the situation still further until wages were desperately low and economic distress widespread.

The reaction of the Nottingham and Derbyshire stockingers and lace-hands took the form of the first Luddite riots of 1811-13. The authorities, with memories of the French Revolution still before them, determined to stamp out the movement. Troops were sent into the district to prevent trouble - one of the soldiers was John Mack[1], whom Hall arranged to buy out of the army - but in Leicester itself, apart from a threatening letter or two, there were no riots.

In 1812 in an effort to seek better wages the workers formed a union, covering the three counties of Nottingham, Leicester and Derby, under the leadership of Gravener Henson, a Nottingham bobbin-net maker. The main difficulty was to organize the union in such a way as to evade the Combination Laws of 1799-1800. This was done by organizing a union which, for the sake of legality, was disguised as a friendly society, and strike pay was issued under the guise of charitable relief. The system succeeded for about eighteen months, but the employers forced the issue and after a long struggle the union's funds were exhausted and the men had to give in.[2]

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1. See Trestrail's Reminiscences, p. 66 ff. Such was Mack's preaching ability that Hall arranged for his demobilisation from the army that he might study at Bristol for the Baptist ministry.
2. A. T. Paterson: Radical Leicester, pp. 61-2.

For a year or two conditions remained static, but in 1816 the post-war slump struck central and southern Leicestershire. Wages fell 30 or 40 per cent. in the years 1816-17 and many of the workers were reduced to starvation level. As the minister of a city church Hall was greatly perturbed at the condition of the unemployed, and made it his business to help his poorer members. It was said that "he thought it wrong to have more than two coats when so many persons around him were clothed in rags", and he fasted in order that he might give more to the needy.[1] In a sermon he declared "Peace, instead of being the nurse of industry and the harbinger of plenty, . . . has brought poverty, discontent and distress in her train".[2]

Such was the poverty that some Luddites attacked a lace factory at Loughborough on the night of 29th June, 1816. James Towle, the leader of the gang responsible for the outrage, was arrested and executed. Six months later the rest of the gang were rounded up and six of them were sentenced to death at the Leicester Assizes in April, 1817.[3] They were all young men between 18 and 30 years of age. Hall deeply sympathized with them. He knew the desperate economic distress which had driven them to act and deplored the eagerness

1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 87 (note).
2. Works I, p. 365.
3. A. Paterson: Radical Leicester, p. 114.

of the Special Commissioner to have them executed. In private he expressed his disapproval of the harshness of the existing penal code and, obtaining permission from the authorities, he went every day to the prison - even between services on Sunday - and talked and prayed with the unhappy men.[1] A scaffold was set up on the outskirts of the town and on the day of the execution a crowd (estimated at 10,000 people) assembled to watch the sentence carried out. The doomed men went to their deaths singing a hymn, while sympathizers in the crowd joined in.[2]

But hanging the Luddites was no cure for the industrial depression which hung over Leicester. The men sent a petition to Parliament, and a Parliamentary committee of enquiry was formed as a result; but the committee's recommendations were turned down by the House of Lords on a majority of two. The news was received in Leicester with gloomy disappointment; the bells of St. Mary's rang a mourning peal and the bitterness of the workers simmered to boiling point.[3] Wages were now averaging 6-7s. a week for a working day of 15 or 16 hours, and many were unemployed. It seemed that the only move left was for some form of united action against the employers, but the Combination Laws still barred this way of revolt.

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 335.
2. Leicester Journal - 4th, 11th, 18th April, 1817.
3. Leicester Journal - 25th June, 1819. Leicester Chronicle - 26th June, 1819.

There were many in Hall's congregation at Harvey Lane involved in this critical position. He wrote later that many of the workers in despair "quitted their homes and sought a precarious and scanty relief by dragging through the county loaded waggons and carts, like beasts of burden".[1] Hall determined to do something about this situation. Under his guidance an experiment was made in the evasion of the Combination Laws. The basic idea had already been tried in Henson's three counties union of 1813-14, i.e. the disguise of a fighting union as a friendly society, and the issue of strike pay as charitable relief. On this basis there came into being "The Framework-Knitters' Friendly and Relief Society of the Town and County of Leicester". The articles of the society, after being approved as legal by Thomas Denman, a well-known barrister who often worshipped at Harvey Lane, were published in the Leicester Journal on 3rd September, 1819.[2]

The funds of the society were to come from two main sources. First of all, from the workers themselves. Full members were to subscribe 6d. a week when at work and were entitled to 8s. a week relief, while women and youths under 14 paid 3d. a week and received 4s. a week relief. With so many unemployed it became clear that further income would be necessary, and it was agreed to appeal to the public for funds to

1. Reply to the Christian Guardian, p. 19, published in Miscellaneous Pieces (1830).
2. See A. Paterson: Radical Leicester, p. 126.

augment the men's contributions. Hall, therefore, wrote An Appeal to the Public on the subject of the Framework-Knitters' Fund, which he published anonymously. The author's reason for suppressing his name is simply, he wrote, that "while it might possibly create prejudice in some quarters, he is not aware that it would bestow additional weight in any".[1]

Hall addresses his remarks primarily to the educated and moneyed classes of the community and brings into play all the arts of persuasion at his command. He appeals to self-interest by showing that improved conditions among the Framework-knitters will benefit, not only the workers, but every section of the community. He uses the fear of Luddism to suggest that a contented working class is the finest insurance against such outrages. "Alleviate their distress," he writes, "convince them at least of your solicitude to do it, and you extirpate the seeds of disaffection far more effectively than by all the arts of intimidation." He pleads for help on humanitarian grounds, and reminds his readers of the good old days when "the village poured forth its cheerful population to assist in preparing the tedded grass and reap the golden harvest; content resided in its valleys, joy echoed from its hills; the distresses of poverty were almost unknown . . . But what a contrast is now presented," Hall

1. Works III, p. 233. See also T. Lomas: Memoir of A. Harris (1855), p. 119 ff.

continues, "in the languid and emaciated forms and dejected looks of our industrious mechanics, who with difficulty drag their trembling limbs over scenes where their fathers gazed with rapture."[1]

The results of Hall's appeal were quickly in evidence. His friend, John Deacon, minister of the Friar Lane General Baptist Church, Leicester, preached to a large congregation in favour of the fund;[2] wealthy landowners like the Duke of Rutland and the Earl of Stamford sent donations, the Members of Parliament for the county and borough added their support, and the city corporation voted several contributions.[3] Thanks to this support, the Framework-knitters' Society established itself and forced the employers to increase wages by about 4s. a week. The reaction of the hosiers was not long in coming. They brought a charge of breaking the Combination Laws against William Jackson and other officials of the Society, but sympathetic magistrates quashed the charge on technical grounds. Then there began an effort to provoke a struggle that would exhaust the stockingers' funds and break the union. By November, 1820, when the union had been in existence about a year, the trustees reported that over £6,000 had been distributed in relief, of which £4,400 had been

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1. Works III, p. 251.
2. J. W. Smith: History of the General Baptist Church, Friar Lane, Leicester (1896), p. 57.
3. Paterson op.cit. p. 130. Leicester Journal - 15th December, 1820. Leicester Chronicle - 8th April, 1820.

contributed by the members themselves.

The winter of 1820-21 proved the severest test. Trade was poor and more than 2,000 men unemployed out of a total membership of 8,000. In a letter to John Greene, Hall comments on the distress. "Our town and neighbourhood is a scene of misery on account of the severe depression of our local manufacture. Such is the mass of hopeless misery everywhere presenting itself to view that it is next to impossible for a mind of any sensibility to be cheerful. Surely never was a country, which has not experienced some public convulsion, so completely ruined as ours."[1]

In the face of this misery Hall personally consulted many of the leading hosiers to see what could be done.[2] A huge sum had become necessary to meet the unemployment benefits, and subscriptions of working members were doubled and allowances were reduced. Even so, £6,000 had to be paid away in the first four months of 1821 and the society was only saved by a loan of £1,500 without security or interest made by well-wishers. Hall did what he could. In January, 1821, he preached a sermon on behalf of the unemployed, based on the text "Blessed is he that considereth the poor". After speaking of the evils of poverty he goes on to say,

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 88.
2. Works III, p. 269: See also Memoir of R. Harris by T. Lomas (1855), pp. 71, 127 and 136. R. Harris, one of the leading hosiers, and later M.P. for Leicester, was a friend of Hall's and a member at Harvey Lane since 1800.

"Sometimes the vicissitudes of trade will throw them (the poor) out of work . . . This is very much the case in this town, and I am sorry to say in most towns. Here is a case for your benevolence. They are not sturdy beggars, but worthy objects of your compassion."[1] On 11th March he preached another sermon on behalf of the Framework-knitters' Society and again stressed the Christian's duty to help the distressed.[2]

Unfortunately, at this juncture William Cobbett took upon himself to lecture the stocking-weavers in his Weekly Register. The chief target of Cobbett's choleric attack was Hall's anonymous pamphlet; but it was obvious that Cobbett had not examined the local situation. He used the stocking-weavers as an excuse to urge his pet theories that the root of all the industrial evil was the weight of debt and taxation pressing upon the nation. He warns the stockingers that their efforts are bound to fail and urges them in the meantime to fall back on the parish relief which is their right.[3]

Hall felt it his duty to reply to this attack and he published another anonymous pamphlet, A Reply to the Principal Objections Advanced by Cobbett and Others against the Framework-Knitters' Friendly Relief Society.[4] He answers all

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1. MSS notes of sermons by Hall during the years 1821-23, p. 24 (in Angus Library, Regent's Park College).
2. Ibid, p. 141 ff.
3. Weekly Register - 14th April, 1821, included in Pamphlets III, Leicester Public Library.
4. Works III, p. 255 ff.

of Cobbett's objections and once again explains the aims and objects of the Society. He writes also of the support the Society had already received, and says "The public have, in my humble opinion, displayed both humanity and wisdom in lending their aid to a plan which has already effected much good, and promises in its fuller development to accomplish much more." As for Cobbett himself, Hall makes no bones of his contempt and, perhaps for the first time since his Cambridge days, lets himself go in a scathing condemnation of a political opponent.

"He (Cobbett) is a popular declaimer, not a philosopher; a firebrand, not a luminary. He emits fire and smoke in abundance, like a volcano, but the whole effect is to desolate, not to enlighten. His principal artifice consists in the exhibition of a few specious and bold generalities, which he illustrates and confirms by a few prominent facts, culled for his purpose, without the slightest attempt at that patient induction and enquiry, which alone leads to solid and useful results. Shrewd, intemperate, presumptuous, careless of the truth of his representations, and indifferent to their consequences, . . . he is well qualified, it must be confessed, . . . to scatter delusion, to excite insurrection."[1]

The pity was that, for all the care and logic of his

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1. Works III, p. 288.

reply, Hall's pamphlet had not a tithe of the circulation of Cobbett's Weekly Register. Yet this did not prevent the Society from prospering. Thanks to the emergency loan, the worst period of the struggle was victoriously passed and the Society reached such a stable position that the loan was repaid in the autumn of 1822. Nevertheless, the relative good fortune of the stockingers during 1821-23 bore within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The well-to-do sympathizers, now that the men's objects seemed to be achieved, ceased their voluntary contributions to the funds. The men themselves, in most shortsighted fashion, began to think it unnecessary to pay an appreciable part of their wages in weekly subscriptions when times were good. The number of paying members steadily declined until only 560 remained.[1] By 1824 the Framework-Knitters' Society had completely broken down. Immediately some employers began to reduce wages and the struggle for wages began again. But this time, thanks to the experience already gained, the men were ready and at once formed a fresh union. By March, 1824, 1,412 members had enrolled.[2] Hall took no part in these negotiations. He had played his part and by his efforts confirms the statement of

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1. Leicester Journal - 18th November, 1825, and 21st May, 1830.
2. Paterson, op.cit., p. 135.

E. A. Payne that "It was the distinction of Dissent that in the early years of the Industrial Revolution it gave to the new working class practical sympathy and support as well as the spiritual consolations of the Gospel".[1]

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1. E. A. Payne: The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England, p. 99.

VI. PENAL REFORM

Throughout the 18th Century Parliament had added statute after statute to the penal code, enlarging the long list of offences punishable by death; finally, they numbered two hundred.[1] Not only were horse- and sheep-stealing capital crimes but also stealing in a shop to the value of five shillings, and stealing anything from the person were it only a handkerchief. The severity of the law was thrown into sharp relief by the legal chaos which surrounded it. Juries often refused to convict for minor offences that would lead to the scaffold. Moreover, it was easy for a criminal, with the help of a clever lawyer, to escape on purely technical grounds from the meshes of an antiquated procedure. Out of six thieves brought to trial, five might, in one way or another, be acquitted, while the unlucky one was hanged. In a trial at Cambridge in April, 1802, two men were hanged for passing forged notes, but the forger himself was acquitted.[2] This illogical and severe code became the subject of a growing criticism during the lifetime of Robert Hall.

Jeremy Bentham brought to light the useless and complicated absurdities of the law; Sir Samuel Romilly and

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1. G. M. Trevelyan: English Social History (1946), p. 348.
2. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 166 (note).

Sir James Mackintosh in Parliament pressed for reforms; John Howard worked unceasingly to expose the scandalous state of the prisons; but the fear of revolution and the complacency of the sheltered classes proved, for many years, an insurmountable obstacle.[1] In 1810 a Bill was brought before Parliament for exempting petty larceny from the death penalty, but it was rejected by the House of Lords. Other measures met with a similar fate and it was not until the substitution of Sir Robert Peel for Lord Sidmouth at the Home Office in 1822 that reform became possible. Peel put into legislative effect the principles of the crusade carried on for years past by Bentham, Romilly, Mackintosh and Howard, and abolished the death penalty for a hundred different crimes. This was the real beginning of a continuous movement for reform, and it is to Hall's credit that he was with the movement from the first.

He applauded the work of John Howard and visited his home at Cardington.[2] Jeremy Bentham was one of his favourite writers and he spoke enthusiastically of his teaching. When Bentham's work on Jurisprudence was published he sent a copy of it to Hall as a mark of his esteem.[3] As for Sir James Mackintosh, Hall's long friendship with him was further strengthened by their common devotion to the cause of penal

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1. A. Bryant: The Age of Elegance (1950), pp. 381-2.
2. Works IV, p. 17 (note). See also Grinfield: Sermon Notes, p. 226, and Baptist Magazine, June 1818, p. 209.
3. J. P. Mursell: R. Hall, his genius and writings (1854), pp. 25-26; see also Gregory's Memoir, p. 99.

reform.[1]

Hall's advocacy of reform was not based on hearsay evidence. He knew of the severity of the law from personal knowledge. In November, 1785, while a tutor at Bristol, five women and two men were publicly flogged in the city, and the next year after the Spring Assizes there were nineteen executions at least, in and around Bristol.[2] Later, when Hall was at Cambridge, two men were sentenced to death for forgery. He visited them in prison and preached a sermon after their execution on The Misery Inseparably Attendant upon a Vicious and Criminal Course of Conduct.[3] After the arrest of the six Luddites in Leicester in 1817 Hall attended the trial and regularly visited the prison when they awaited execution.[4] It was from this personal experience that he was able to speak out against the evils of the criminal code and mould public opinion in favour of reform. He expressed his views in writing, preaching and personal conversation.

In 1793, for example, Hall wrote that "the laws, in their present state, are so piled into volumes, encumbered with precedents and perplexed with intricacies, that they are often rather a snare than a guide".[5] In the Eclectic Review for January, 1809, he declared, "the multiplicity of capital

1. Works VI, p. 256.
2. J. Latimer: Annals of Bristol in the 18th Century (1893), pp. 465 and 469.
3. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 165 ff.
4. T. Lomas: Memoir of A. Harris (1855), p. 75. See also Morris's Recollections, pp. 334-5.
5. Works III, p. 168.

punishments we shall always consider as a reproach to the English nation; . . . While nothing can exceed the trial by jury . . . we are compelled to look upon the criminal code with very different emotions, and earnestly to wish it were carefully revised, and made more humane, simple and precise."[1] In 1817 when he heard the sentence of death passed on six Luddites, Hall deplored the severity of the sentence and, as J. W. Morris records, "in private conversation he dwelt with much feeling on the unjust severity of the criminal code in general, on the necessity of an effectual revision . . . and the glaring inexpediency of entrusting to the discretion of a judge the power of life and death".[2] Hall's advanced views on penal reform were also made clear in a sermon entitled The Signs of the Times preached at Bristol in 1820. After approving of the efforts being made for reform of the law he says, "We hope the time is not distant when, in conformity with the Divine Standard, the crime of murder shall be regarded as the only proper subject of capital punishment".[3] There were still two hundred offences punishable by death when Hall said this, but he held to his opinion to the end of his life and supported every effort for its attainment.

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1. Works IV, p. 42.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 334.
3. Works VI, p. 256.

VII. THE REFORM MOVEMENT AND ROMAN CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION

Robert Hall, like most dissenters, was a keen advocate of the reform of parliament, and his opinions on this subject remained unchanged throughout his life. As a young man in his twenties at Cambridge he had taken an active part in the reform movement and had written in its favour.[1] But the march of reform had been abruptly halted by the national emergency resulting from Napoleon's advance to power, and political changes were postponed for nearly thirty years. It was only towards the close of the war that reform again became a live issue.

At Leicester, during Hall's ministry, this renascence of reform can be clearly seen. By the close of 1810 a growing interest in reform enabled the Leicester Chronicle to be re-started. Its first editor was John Ryley, a member of Hall's congregation at Harvey Lane, and a man of means and culture who had removed from Cambridge so that he might continue to enjoy Hall's ministry. For many years he was prominent in the political and philanthropic activities of the town.[2]

Following the establishment of the Chronicle, the reformers then organized a society called 'The Friends of Peace,

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1. See page 93 ff.
2. Paterson: Radical Leicester, p. 100. See also C. J. Billson Leicester Memoirs (1924), p. 88; Leicester Journal 4th December, 1812; 14th May, 1813; 21st May, 1813. MSS notes of Hall's Sermons by John Ryley are in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, and in Bristol Baptist College Library.

Reform and Religious Liberty'. Hall appears to have been a member of this society, signing their petitions and attending their meetings.[1] But, on the whole, he preferred to remain aloof from the hurly-burly of politics and speech-making. This had been his settled conviction for many years. At Cambridge in 1795 he had written "For myself, all who have ever heard me are witnesses that I never introduced a political topic into the pulpit on any occasion",[2] and at Leicester he could have said the same thing. His conviction was that "the Christian ministry is in danger of losing something of its energy and sanctity by embarking on the stormy element of political debate".[3] For this reason he was reluctant to participate in the violent party controversies which disrupted Leicester society. But every now and then some particular situation would arise which overwhelmed Hall's political reticence and forced him to speak his mind.

Early in 1810, for example, a determined effort was made to restrict the activities of itinerant evangelists who went from village to village preaching and distributing tracts and testaments. Most of them were not licenced under the Toleration Act and it was this technical breach of the Act which gave Lord Sidmouth the excuse to introduce a Bill before

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1. Leicester Journal - 30th April, 14th May, 21st May, 1813.
2. Miscellaneous Pieces (1830), p. 148.
3. Advertisement to 1821 edition of Hall's Apology, p. ii.

Parliament seeking to forbid unlicenced village preaching.[1] The dissenters rose as one man in opposition to the Bill. For his part Hall wrote one section of a pamphlet defending the evangelical theology of the village preachers[2], and then undertook to write a Defence of Village Preaching[3]. While he was engaged in this work petitions began to pour into Parliament against Sidmouth's Bill - the Baptist Magazine reported that six hundred petitions were presented in forty-eight hours[4] - and such was the opposition that the Bill was utterly rejected. Realizing that his Defence would no longer be needed, Hall scrapped it and only fragments remain. But they are enough to show that his zeal for freedom of religion was as strong as ever.

Another opportunity for expressing his political views arose in 1821. Rumours were then being circulated claiming that Hall's aloofness from Leicester politics was due to the fact that he had changed his opinions and no longer wished to be associated with the reform movement. In answer to this criticism some of Hall's friends, anxious to defend him, circulated a pirated edition of his Apology for the Freedom of the Press, which he had written nearly thirty years previously. When news of this reached Hall he determined to put a stop to

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1. Ivimey IV, p. 107 ff. Baptist Magazine - July, 1810, p. 406; August, 1810, p. 444.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 253 ff.
3. Works III, p. 327 ff. See note by Gregory.
4. Baptist Magazine - July, 1811, p. 301. See also June, 1811, p. 260.

the rumours and controversy by officially re-issuing his Apology with a note concerning his present convictions.

"It has been insinuated," he wrote, "that my political principles have undergone a revolution and that I have renounced the opinions which it was the object of this pamphlet to establish. I must beg leave, however, to assert that . . . the effect of increasing years has been to augment, if possible, my attachment to the principles of civil and religious liberty, and to the cause of reform as inseparably combined with their preservation."[1]

When Hall's decision to re-publish his Apology became known, friends suggested that he ought to omit his criticisms of Bishop Horsley and William Pitt. Hall agreed that some of his criticisms of Horsley were "not quite consistent with the spirit of Christianity, or with the reverence due to departed genius"[2], and consented to omit some sarcastic passages - but his criticisms of Pitt were another matter. Hall could never forgive Pitt for his sudden change of policy with regard to reform. In 1785, to the delight of dissenters like Hall, Pitt had introduced a Bill for parliamentary reform, but suddenly he withdrew it, turned his back on reform and never again encouraged the movement.[3] This reversal of

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1. Advertisement to 1821 edition of the Apology, pp. i and ii.
2. Ibid, p. iv. See also Morris's Recollections, p. 124.
3. G. M. Trevelyan: History of England, p. 558.

policy made Pitt appear, in Hall's eyes, to be an unprincipled politician whose aim was not the good of the country but the advance of his party. The years of war and the industrial distress that followed Pitt's leadership seemed to confirm Hall's opinions, and for this reason he refused to alter his former criticisms and, indeed, confirmed them by saying that "the policy, foreign and domestic, of that celebrated statesman, has inflicted a more incurable wound on the constitution and entailed more permanent and irreparable calamities on the nation than that of any other minister in the annals of British history".[1]

The re-issued Apology found a ready sale in Leicester, where the nonconformists were beginning their final campaign for civil and religious equality. But the opposition did not capitulate without a struggle, and in January, 1822, a bitter attack on Hall appeared in a high church periodical called the Christian Guardian.[2] The article was re-printed in the Leicester Journal, which, although professing independence of party, was, in fact, robustly Tory.

The review was largely a criticism of Hall's political opinions - he is dismissed as a radical reformer, a revolutionist and a republican, but the argument is well spiced with

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1. Advertisement to 1821 edition of the Apology, p. iv.
2. The article is re-printed in Miscellaneous Pieces (1830), p. 337 ff.

sarcasms concerning his praise of Price and Priestley and with sneers at the idea of a minister of the Gospel dabbling in politics.

Hall, roused to wrath by this attack, replied to it in a letter published in the Leicester Journal on 5th February, 1822.[1] Point by point he exposes the prejudices of his opponent. He denies the charge of being a revolutionist or republican, but is prepared to accept the title of "radical reformer". "A radical reformer," Hall writes, "is one that goes to the root of the evil, that purposes not merely to palliate but to extirpate it; and what is that reform worth that purposes less? He that labours under an inveterate malady wishes for a radical cure . . . If, by styling me a radical reformer he intends to impute revolutionary views, I say it is a calumny and a falsehood; and I challenge him to produce a single sentence from my publications which sustains such a charge or which convicts me of hostility to the existing order of things, as consisting of King, Lords and Commons." Hall touches the heart of the matter in one sentence when he goes on to say, "the plain state of the case is, not that the writer is offended at my meddling with politics, but that I have meddled on the wrong side".

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1. See Works III, p. 183 ff., where the article is re-printed.

The debate as far as Hall was concerned ended with his letter, but there were other letters published in the Leicester Journal defending and attacking him. A radical paper called The Black Dwarf published his letter under the heading "A vindication of Radical Reform by the Rev. Robert Hall", but the fact that the editor was later gaoled for sedition did not help Hall's case.[1]

Hall left Leicester before the reforms he cherished were passed, but his influence was carried on by men like John Ryley and Albert Cockshaw, who, as members of the Harvey Lane Church, rallied round Hall's successor, J. P. Mursell, and, as the "shock troops of local Radicalism", carried the day for reform.[2]

There was one aspect of the reform movement in Leicester which Hall viewed with uneasiness. This was its association with the agitation for Roman Catholic Emancipation. Hall feared the advance of the Roman Catholic Church. In a review he wrote, "Innumerable symptoms appear of a prevailing disposition to contemplate the doctrines of popery with less disgust and to welcome their progress with less alarm than has ever been known since the reformation". He attributes this to the reform movement "which seems to have had the effect of identifying the cause of popery with that of

1. Correspondence between the Rev. Robert Hall, his friends and the writer of the Review (pamphlet in Leicester Public Library).
2. Paterson: Radical Leicester, p. 231.

protestant dissenters".[1] Hall protests against this and warns his readers "Popery still is what it always was - a detestable system of impiety, cruelty and imposture, fabricated by the father of lies".[2] In a speech to the Leicester Bible Society he describes the Roman Catholic Church as this "gigantic dominion" founded on "a perverted interpretation of the Scriptures"[3]; and in a sermon spoke of its "gross idolatry, cruel edicts and tyrannical claims".[4]

Despite these strong views, Hall did not question the sincerity of individual Roman Catholics. He felt that they "were in many respects better than their system, but there was no guarantee that their successors would be men of like character and moderation"[5]. He was prepared to admit that salvation was possible in the Roman Catholic Church and said "We venture a charitable opinion of many who have been entangled in the errors of the papacy. We presume to hope that the merciful God will distinguish between the impious inventor of a system and those who, without imbibing its spirit, have in different degrees been duped by its sophistry."[6]

The reason for Hall's opposition to Roman Catholicism is given in an uncompleted pamphlet found at his death. Following the opening of a Catholic chapel in Leicester, Hall had

1. Works IV, p. 228.
2. Works IV, pp. 231/2.
3. Works IV, p. 393.
4. Works V, p. 371.
5. Trestrail's Reminiscences, p. 99.
6. Works IV, p. 469.

preached two anti-Catholic sermons, "which were heard" says J. W. Morris, "with great satisfaction by a crowded auditory, including several of the resident clergy".[1] From these addresses he planned to publish a full-scale attack on the Roman Catholic system, and had begun the task when ill-health intervened. Yet the fragment which remains is sufficient to show his line of argument.[2]

Hall attacks "the supposed infallibility of the church" which he believes is "the corner-stone of the whole system of popery", and from which derives the intolerance of the Church of Rome. It is this intolerance which particularly angers Hall. "It would give us unfeigned pleasure," he writes, "to find that the Catholics have, in good earnest, renounced the intolerant principles of their predecessors; but when we look around for some proof of this we see nothing that is satisfactory. In the midst of much courtesy, much urbanity and address, we meet with nothing that partakes of the nature of solid concession; no steps retraced, no errors revoked, no protest opposed to the persecuting maxims of former times. Whatever breathes an air of liberality issues from the unofficial communications of private individuals. We anxiously wish for some important concessions at the

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 414.
2. Works IV, p. 241 ff.

fountain-head, some exposition of the Catholic faith from the supreme pontiff, or his accredited agents, calculated to satisfy us that intolerance is at last expunged from the papal creed. We wish, but we wish in vain. On the contrary, we perceive, in the restoration of the Jesuits - in the total suppression (as far as his (the Pope's) influence extends) of Bible societies - in his opposition to the toleration established in Belgium - in the exclusion of the Protestant religion from Spain and Portugal, at the very moment they are indebted for their existence to the arms of Protestants - decisive evidence of a determination to maintain the ancient system with inflexible vigour."[1]

It was from such considerations as these that Hall concluded that Romanism was more than a religion - it was a vast politico-religious system, which, given sufficient power, would become an instrument of intolerance and oppression. He, therefore, refused to support Roman Catholic Emancipation until he was assured that the Roman Catholic Church would renounce intolerance and allow freedom of religion.[2]

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1. Works IV, p. 250.
2. In his book The Politics of English Dissent R. G. Cowherd suggests that Hall taught the Dissenters "to defend the Catholic claims". This is a misunderstanding of Hall's position. (p. 33)

VIII. THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT

It was in 1562 that Sir John Hawkins began the slave trade between Africa and the West Indies, selling 300 slaves at £20 a head; and from this unhappy beginning the trade swelled to such proportions that by 1838 it was estimated that there were 800,000 negro slaves in the West Indies.[1]

The trade at first aroused little opposition in England and it was not until 1761, when the Quakers made their protest, that an anti-slavery movement developed.[2] This was taken up by Granville Sharp and the "Clapham Sect", who formed a committee in 1787 to seek the abolition of the slave trade. The "Clapham Sect" were Evangelicals of the Church of England but they were ready to co-operate with Christians from other denominations.[3] The movement, which Hall heartily supported, was in two phases. The first was for the abolition of the slave trade.

This trade had one of its main centres at Bristol, and Hall, in his first pastorate there, immediately joined in the movement for abolition. He helped to form an anti-slavery committee and wrote several pamphlets under the signature of "Britannicus" on the "injustice and inhumanity" of the trade.[4] In a letter to his father dated 10th February, 1788, he told

1. H. Townsend: The Claims of the Free Churches, pp. 293/4.
2. G. M. Trevelyan: History of England, p. 599.
3. See article on "The Baptists and the Anti-Slavery Cause" in The Freeman - 5th October, 1894, p. 638. cf. Ivimey IV, p. 63.
4. Gregory's Memoir, p. 23. None of these pamphlets seem to have survived

of a petition being signed and sent up to Parliament, but admitted "much opposition is made by the merchants and their dependants".[1] When he reached Cambridge he continued the struggle, and on many occasions strongly condemned the trade. In 1802, for example, he spoke of it as "this inhuman traffic"[2], and declared in another sermon that "its enormity no words can express".[3] He described how "multitudes of unhappy beings" are carried away captives "from their homes and native country, loaded with chains into slavery"[4]. Unfortunately, the tragedy of his mental breakdown clouded the day in 1807 when the slave trade was abolished, but on his recovery and settlement at Leicester he took an active part in the second phase of the attack, which developed in 1823 against the institution of slavery itself.

In Leicester the movement was led by Thomas Babington, and on 17th December, 1823, an Anti-Slavery Society was formed under his chairmanship. It had widespread support from the churches. H. D. Erskine, the vicar of St. Martin's, and G. B. Mitchell of St. Mary's were the chief Anglican representatives; Robert Hall represented the Baptists; Charles Berry the Unitarians; and laymen included John Coltman, a well-known hosier, John Ellis, a Quaker landowner, and

1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 23.
2. Greene: Exposition of Philippians, p. 159.
3. Works I, p. 177.
4. Greene: op.cit. p. 159.

William Heyrick, the Town Clerk.[1]

In order to commend the society to the public Hall was commissioned to write a pamphlet for circulation in Leicester, and it was published in 1824 under the title An Address on the State of Slavery in the West India Islands.[2] The Baptist Magazine, in a review, declared it was an "elegant and energetic address", distinguished by "manly dignity and evangelical fervour".[3]

Hall's conviction was that slavery is evil both in principle and in practice; in principle because it treats men and women made in the image of God as though they were beasts of burden; in practice because it was associated with cruelty, injustice and oppression. "Slavery", he writes, "is most iniquitous in its origin, most mischievous in its effects, and diametrically opposed to the genius of Christianity and of the British Constitution". In an appeal for support of the Society he says, "We cannot sit year after year silent spectators of the most enormous oppression exercised within the limits of the British dominion without partaking of its guilt. We cannot remain silent and inactive, without forgetting who we are, and what we have done; that we are the country which, after a tedious struggle with a host of

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1. Works III, p. 301 ff.
2. Works III, p. 305 ff. cf. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 185.
3. Baptist Magazine - March, 1824, p. 124.

prejudices arrayed in support of oppulent oppression, have overthrown the slave trade, torn it up by the roots and branded in the eyes of all nations the sale of human flesh as the most atrocious of social crimes."

The pamphlet was re-printed in a local paper - the Sunday Times - 28th March, 1824, and had a wide circulation in and around Leicester. It drew forth an attempt to defend slavery by James Barstow, who published A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Hall of Leicester in Answer to his Attack on the West Indian Proprietors, but this pamphlet gave no answer to Hall's main argument and appears to have had a very small circulation.[1]

Apart from writing and speaking against slavery and attending the meetings of the Anti-Slavery society, Hall was also well acquainted with the leader of the abolitionists, William Wilberforce. They exchanged letters[2] and several times Wilberforce expressed his admiration for the Baptist preacher[3]. On one occasion at Bristol he was seen coming out of Broadmead Baptist Church arm in arm with Hall[4], and various anecdotes were circulated about their friendship[5].

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1. A copy of this pamphlet is in the British Museum Library.
2. The Hall Family, p. 89.
3. Private Papers of Wm. Wilberforce, ed. A. M. Wilberforce (1897), pp. 231/2.
4. The Hall Family, p. 90.
5. See E. Paxton Hood: Robert Hall, p. 165.

IX. THE BIBLE SOCIETY

The authority of the Bible was, for Robert Hall, the foundation on which his preaching was built. In his sermons he often spoke of his veneration for the Bible and urged his congregations to read it for themselves. In a sermon delivered at Cambridge in 1802 he said, "Did you ever hear of any one person, who was in the practice of diligently reading the Scriptures, that ever went off into infidelity? A firm adherence to Christianity is founded, as an inevitable result, on the careful examination of the sacred Scriptures".[1]

A few years later at Leicester Hall issued to his congregation a pamphlet giving daily Bible Readings, throughout the year. In a short preface he wrote, "This small collection of passages for the ensuing year is offered to the candid attention of a particular Christian society . . . If the members of the church, for whose use it is especially intended, will take the trouble to turn to their Bibles and meditate on the passage referred to for each day, it is surely no presumption to hope that they will be sensible of the benefit derived from it, in the cultivation of devotional feeling and the increase of fraternal affection".[2] There is some doubt whether Hall compiled the references himself or whether he

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1. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 57.
2. Miscellaneous Pieces (1830), p. 321.

adopted some existing collection for the use of his church[1]; but there is no doubt he regarded the regular reading of the Bible as indispensable to spiritual growth. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that he was strongly in favour of the British and Foreign Bible Society. He had been well acquainted with the Society from its formation in 1804, and two of his friends, John Owen and Joseph Hughes, had played an outstanding part in its early activities. At the beginning of 1810 there was talk of forming an auxiliary Society at Leicester, but it was only when Hall and Thomas Robinson (1749-1813), the vicar of St. Mary's, joined forces in its support that anything positive was achieved.[2] Hall had become friendly with Robinson and, despite their differences in tradition, they co-operated heartily. Hall drew up an introductory address which was circulated in Leicester, announcing the formation of the Society, and in it he set out the case for the Bible Society. The need for Bibles in the expanding mission field is his main argument, but he also points out "the incalculable benefits" which follow the study of the Bible, and sees in the Bible Society "a rallying point for the piety of the age".[3]

The inaugural meeting was held in the Guildhall, Leicester,

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1. Miscellaneous Pieces (1830), p. 321. See also Morris's Recollections, p. 427.
2. E. T. Vaughan: Life of Robinson (1816), p. 244.
3. Works IV, p. 363 ff.

on 19th February, 1810, in the presence of the Mayor and other distinguished guests. Robinson and Hall - Anglican and Baptist - linked arms as they neared the Guildhall. "On such an occasion, sir," Hall remarked, "this is the way that things ought to be". "Yes, my brother," answered Robinson, "and this is the way that things shall be". Their friendly entrance was loudly applauded by the audience and augured well for the success of the Society.[1]

Robinson gave the main address at the meeting and took an active part in the first and second anniversaries.[2] Hall joined him at these meetings and was the primary speaker at the second anniversary on 13th April, 1812.[3] Hall described Robinson as the "father" of the society, but Robinson's biographer considered that Hall himself had "an equal claim to be hailed by this title".[4] Unfortunately, Robinson's health declined and in March, 1813, he collapsed and died. A few weeks later, at the annual meeting of the Bible Society, Hall spoke of his friend's fine character and noble service to the community, and, remembering many pleasant conversations, described Robinson as a "cheerful, engaging companion".[5] Although Robinson was popular, Hall's brilliance had attracted

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 238.
2. Leicester Journal - 12th April, 1811.
3. The speeches given at this meeting were published as a separate pamphlet, a copy of which is in Leicester Public Library.
4. E. T. Vaughan: Life of Robinson (1816), p. 245 (note).
5. Works IV, p. 284 ff.

many Anglicans to the Baptist chapel - Olinthus Gregory puts the number at more than a hundred, many of them were baptized by Hall.[1] One day Robinson remarked "I cannot think how it is, brother Hall, that so many of my sheep have wandered into your fold". "Oh, sir," came the answer, "they wanted washing, to be sure, that is all."[2]

After the second anniversary meeting Hall wrote to a friend, James Phillips of Clapham, "Yesterday we had our second jubilee anniversary of the Bible Society in Leicestershire - a happy, harmonious meeting, with one little exception; on the church side several clergymen spoke, but no dissenter."[3] The next year (1813) he again attended the annual meeting and reported to Newton Bosworth, a member of the Cambridge Baptist Church, that "it was more numerously attended than ever, and delightful to see clergymen and dissenting ministers sit in the same seat, and ardently engaged in promoting the same object, with perfect unanimity."[4] In March, 1815, at the fifth anniversary Hall addressed "an overflowing congregation, which was with difficulty prevented from loudly uttering its applause".[5] More than two years later, in July, 1817, he took the opportunity in his speech at the Bible Society of criticizing the Roman Catholic Church and, in particular, the

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 82. Morris's Recollections, p. 239.
2. Morris's Recollections, pp. 239-240.
3. Works V, p. 480.
4. Works V, p. 483.
5. Morris's Recollections, p. 297.

Pope, who had issued "A Bull against Bible Societies", in which priests had been instructed to "abolish this pestilence (the Bible Society) as far as possible".[1] Hall remarked, in the course of his address, that "the roar of his bull (if I may be allowed to pun on so serious a subject) is but the instinctive cry of a beast which feels itself goaded to madness by the operations of the Bible Society".[2] He ended his speech in these words:-

"Let us endeavour to give as wide an extension as possible to the waters of life. Let them flow freely, in opposition to the narrow and mischievous policy which would confine them in artificial pools and reservoirs, where they become stagnant and putrid. Let us join our prayers with our efforts, that the Word of God may have 'free course and be glorified', whatever opposing force it may sweep away in its progress; and should his holiness the Pope, while he is buffeting with the waves, and attempting to arrest the current, be thrown down, and his triple crown totter and tumble from his head, instead of feeling the smallest concern let us rejoice and exult in the sure presage it will afford of the speedy arrival of that long-looked-for moment when, at the decree of the Eternal, at the oath of the Archangel, Babylon the great

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1. Baptist Magazine - May, 1817, p. 192. The text of the 'Bull' is printed in this issue.
2. Works IV, p. 394.

shall sink like lead in the mighty waters".[1]

Apart from his speeches at the Bible Society meetings, Hall frequently referred to its work in the course of his sermons[2] and continued till the end of his life to give it his support.

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1. Works IV, p. 398.
2. See Works VI, p. 337 and p. 260.

X. THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

The modern missionary movement marks one of the notable developments of the 19th Century. Robert Hall was intimately connected with the Baptist Missionary Society, whose origin can be traced to a small group of fourteen men who met in Kettering in October, 1792. Hall was not present on that occasion - he was at Cambridge at the time, but his heart was with the work from the beginning.[1] An early historian of the Society has written of his "never-failing interest in its affairs"[2], and this is amply borne out by all the available evidence.

He was personally acquainted with the leaders of the Baptist Missionary Society and, of the fourteen who took part in the original meeting, at least seven of them are frequently mentioned in Hall's correspondence, and he shared with them in the Society's work. These were William Carey, Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, John Sutcliff, Samuel Pearce, Joseph Timms and Thomas Blundell; but it is probable he had met the others in his home contacts with Arnesby.

Apart from his varied contacts with the pioneers of the Society, Hall made a considerable contribution to the missionary cause, in which his preaching, writing and personal influence played a notable part.

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1. In the first issue of Periodical Accounts, p. 48, there is noted a donation for the Society sent by the Cambridge Church as early as 1793.
2. F. A. Cox: History of the B.M.S. (1842), Vol. I, p. 432.

(1) Missionary Preaching

It was at Cambridge that Hall began the practice of preaching annual missionary sermons. This does not mean he restricted his missionary zeal to one day in the year. On the contrary, he made frequent references to the missionary cause in the course of his ordinary ministry. At the close of his sermon on Modern Infidelity, for example, he is plainly thinking of the work of William Carey and his colleagues when he declares that "the stream of divine knowledge, unobserved, is flowing in new channels, . . . enriching with far other and higher blessings than those of commerce the most distant climes and nations."[1] In another sermon, in 1802, Hall speaks of the day when the Church of God will be extended to all the nations and, again thinking of the missionary cause, says "We have seen some beginnings of this glorious day".[2]

Unfortunately, Hall's poor health restricted his preaching and his mental breakdowns of 1804 and 1805 halted all his efforts. It was not until 1807 when he started afresh at Leicester that the Baptist Mission began once more to benefit from his labours. He revived his practice of preaching an annual missionary sermon and, when health allowed, preached for the Society at other towns. In this connection he visited

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1. Works I, p. 76.
2. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 162; See also Works III, p. 334.

Nottingham in the years 1807, 1810, 1811, 1812, 1816, 1819 and 1825, and he also preached for the Mission at London, Cambridge, Bristol, Hull, Sheffield, St. Ives, Leeds, Newcastle (Staffs.), Oxford, Bedford, Swansea, Birmingham, Watford, Northampton, Kettering, and many other smaller towns.[1]

He was pressed to visit Scotland on the Mission's behalf but ill-health tried him so severely that he had to reply to Dr. Ryland, "With respect to Scotland, I must absolutely decline it. I have been already five weeks absent from my pulpit, on account of illness; and it would be extremely injurious to my congregation to incur so long an additional absence. In truth, I am little fitted for distant excursions on account of my liability to be attacked with such violent pain, which renders me a burden to myself and to all about me."[2]

But Hall visited Wales in July, 1815. J. W. Morris relates that "upwards of fifty ministers, from all parts of the principality, assembled at Swansea, where the public Services lasted two days and Mr. Hall preached on both evenings to a crowded and enraptured audience".[3]

Despite the well-attended meetings Hall was disappointed

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1. Details taken from the early volumes of Periodical Accounts and Missionary Herald.
2. Works V, pp. 505/6. The initial request came from Christopher Anderson of Edinburgh. See Life and Letters of Christopher Anderson (1854), p. 219.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 303: Baptist Magazine - December, 1815, p. 522.

with the missionary giving of the Welsh people. He told his friend, J. W. Morris, that the Welsh are "more distinguished for hospitality than for their liberal donations".[1] He found a different situation at Leeds in 1819 and wrote to another friend, Thomas Langdon, "Leeds surpasses every place in liberality to the Mission as well as in personal kindness." The collection on that occasion amounted to £67 17s.[2]

One of Hall's greatest missionary sermons was entitled The success of Missions depends upon the Agency of the Spirit.[3] He preached this at the annual meeting of the Society at Cambridge in 1819. The Missionary Herald, the journal of the Baptist Missionary Society, reporting the meetings, said:

"Mr. Robert Hall preached a most impressive discourse from Isaiah 32, v. 13-14, in which he dwelt with much emphasis upon the absolute necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit to render missionary exertions effectual . . . Mr. Hall has been very earnestly solicited by the Society to publish his sermon; and we cannot but hope that he will feel it a duty to comply with the request."[4]

But despite all the appeals Hall remained adamant. His sermon, he felt, was over-rated, and he refused to publish it.

The next year in November, 1820, Hall was one of the

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 304.
2. Memoir of Thomas Langdon by his daughter, p. 142.
3. Works VI, p. 215 ff. (Notes of the sermon preserved by W. B. Gurney and S. Hillyard).
4. Missionary Herald - November, 1819: Baptist Magazine - November, 1819, p. 493.

speakers at the annual meeting of the Bristol and Bath Missionary Auxiliary Society. The Missionary Herald reported that "the Rev. Robert Hall again advocated the cause of the Society by delivering a most impressive sermon from Isaiah 53, v. 6."[1] His co-preacher at the meetings was the fiery Welsh orator, Christmas Evans, and it was probably on this occasion that they argued about the merits of the Welsh language. Evans, with national pride, expatiated on the impressiveness of his mother tongue and wound up by saying that he wished Dr. John Gill's works had been written in Welsh. "I wish they had, sir," replied Hall, "I wish they had with all my heart, for then I should never have read them. They are a continent of mud, sir."[2]

In May, 1821, Hall was the preacher at the inauguration of the Bedford Missionary Auxiliary Society. Here he preached "an excellent discourse . . . from John 1, vv. 35-36."[3] The following year he returned for the Society's anniversary and rejoiced to see its success.

In another missionary sermon he stressed the fact that Christians ought to give as much to the missionary movement as they did to their own churches at home. "It is become as much the duty of every Christian to assist foreign missions," Hall said, "as to assist the Christian ministry at home."[4]

1. Missionary Herald - February, 1821; Baptist Magazine - February, 1821, p. 81.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 125.
3. Missionary Herald - May, 1821, p. 221; Baptist Magazine - March, 1821, p. 128.
4. Works VI, p. 338.

This alone shows the place that missionary work held in Hall's thinking. For him the Christian church was commissioned to take the Gospel into all the world and, therefore, it was the Christian's duty to support missionary work as much as the work at home. Believing this with all his heart, Hall pleaded with his hearers to give liberally to the Society. He concluded one sermon in these words:

"Contribute, brethren, to the support and extension of this sacred enterprise, and you will convert uncertain riches into the means of bestowing the true riches - of diffusing the unsearchable riches of Christ; your contributions will become, in the hand of God, Bibles, instructions, prayers, sermons; the messengers of saving mercy to many immortal souls."[1]

Unfortunately, except for the notes taken by interested hearers and later published in his collected Works, none of Hall's missionary sermons were published, but the titles of the sermons give a fair indication of their contents: The Success of Missions depends upon the Agency of the Spirit; The Enlargement of Christian Benevolence; The Evils of Idolatry and the Means of its Abolition.

It is difficult to assess the influence of a preacher,

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1. Works VI, p. 414.

but by every outward sign Hall stands above his colleagues as a missionary orator. Wherever he was expected to preach crowds were assured, and he was eagerly sought after for missionary rallies. He pleaded the cause of missions so effectively that year after year, despite recurring ill-health, he sent large offerings for the funds of the Society. When he preached at Bristol, for example, in 1820, the missionary contribution was increased by about £100 on the previous year's total;[1] and when the tragic fire at Serampore roused the sympathy of the country one of the largest single collections was made by Hall at Leicester when £211 8s. 6d. was donated to repair the fire losses.[2] Hall did not travel around the country as much as Andrew Fuller, the secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, but his record for consistent service to the missionary cause, during his Leicester ministry, is very impressive, as the following details show. The figures are taken from the published lists of "Subscriptions, Collections and Donations" appended to Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Missionary Society.

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1. Missionary Herald - February, 1821, p. 82.
2. Periodical Accounts xxiv, Vol. IV, p. 525.

Collections made by Rev. Robert Hall of Leicester on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society (1807-1825)

Year	Place	Amount £ s. d.
1807	Leicester	32.19. 6
	Nottingham	53. 4. 3
	Narborough	11. 6. 0
	Sheepshead	5.16. 4
1809	Leicester	50. 3. 6
	Blaby	3. 0. 0
1810	Leicester	43.17. 0
	Nottingham	46.17. 6
1811	Leicester	48. 1. 0
	Nottingham	50. 4. 3
	Miles Lane	106.18. 8
1812	Leicester	50.12. 0
	Harborough	11.11. 0
	Nottingham	45. 8. 0
	Special collection for fire loss	211. 8. 6
1813	Leicester	37.17. 0
1814	Leicester	44. 3. 6
	Sheepshead	19.10. 0
1815	Leicester	49. 0. 6
1816	Leicester	70. 9. 5
	Nottingham	55. 7. 6
1817	Hull: Bethel Chapel	11.14. 0
	Cottingham	12.13. 0
	Fish Street	28.14. 3
	George Street	18.15. 2
	Hope Street	8.16. 6
	Leicester	44. 4. 2
	Sheffield	24.11. 6
1818	Leicester	45. 2. 6
1819	Leicester	52.17. 8
	Hull: Bethel	14.16. 6
	Cottingham	10. 1. 8
	Fish Street	20. 9. 0
	George Street	20.16. 6
	Leeds	62.17. 0
	Nottingham	55. 8.11
	Newark, Collingham and Scarborough	100.18. 9
	Burlington	10. 0. 0

Collections (Continued)

Year	Place	Amount £ s. d.
1820	Leicester	73.13. 6
	Sheepshead	7.16. 6
	Newcastle (Staffs.)	37. 0. 0
1821	Bedford	42. 7. 0
	Clipston	30.10. 8
	Birmingham	54.15.10¾
1822	Watford	21. 6. 0
	Leicester	53. 1. 3
	Clipston	27. 4. 6
1823	Ridgmont	24. 6. 4
	Northampton	42. 0. 0
	Leeds	85. 6. 9
	Birmingham	74.17.11½
	Sheffield	21.12. 6
	Personal subscription re debt	10. 0. 0
	Salendine Nook	33.10. 0
1824	Leicester	51.17. 0
	Lutterworth (Independent Church)	4. 0. 0
	Birmingham	67.13. 2
	Leeds	73. 8. 6
	Mr. Hamilton's Chapel	12.16. 4
1825	Leicester	57.12. 0
	Nottingham	66. 0. 0
	Netherton	9.16. 1
	Sheffield	35. 0. 0
	Clipston	40. 0. 0
	Kettering	44. 3. 3

These figures show that Hall sent to the funds of the Baptist Missionary Society, during his Leicester pastorate alone, a sum of at least £2,692 7s. 8¼d. - made up of collections taken at meetings at Leicester and other towns.

But apart from the financial success of his missionary preaching, Hall also had a share in encouraging new candidates for the mission field. William Ward and John Chamberlain,

among the earlier missionaries, both acknowledged their debt to Hall's preaching[1]; and when in December, 1813, John Rowe was leaving Bristol to open new work in Jamaica, Hall was one of the preachers at his valedictory Service in Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol.[2]

At Leicester Hall helped at least three young men who had volunteered for missionary service. These were William Gamby, William Yates and Eustace Carey.

William Gamby, an apprentice at Leicester, regularly attended the services at Harvey Lane and was baptized by Hall in October, 1810. He volunteered for the mission field and, in October, 1811, Hall recommended him to the Baptist Missionary Society. He was placed under the supervision of John Sutcliff, the Baptist minister at Olney, for preliminary training, but, unfortunately, he became seriously ill just as he was completing his course and died at the age of twenty-three.[3]

William Yates, another member at the Harvey Lane Baptist Church, was a shoe-maker whom Hall advised to enter Bristol Baptist College for training. He did so, and a year or two later Hall was able to tell the lad's father: "I have great news to tell you, sir; your son, sir, will be a great scholar

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1. W. Yates: Memoir of John Chamberlain, p. 43.
   M. H. Wilkin: Kinghorn of Norwich, p. 299.
2. Periodical Accounts, xxvi, Vol. V, p. 290. Baptist Magazine - January, 1814, p. 42.
3. Baptist Magazine - May, 1814, p. 200 ff. See also Periodical Accounts, xxii, Vol. IV, p. 291.

and a good preacher; and he is a holy young man."[1] Yates's early promise was amply fulfilled and on 31st August, 1814, he was set apart for work in Bengal, India. Hall and two other Baptist leaders - John Sutcliffe and John Ryland - shared the Service at the Harvey lane Church, where it was reported that "the prayer offered by Mr. Hall was one of sublime simplicity and solemn fervour".[2]

The third of Hall's missionary protegés was Eustace Carey, the nephew of William Carey. Hall took a keen interest in this talented young man, and on many occasions opened his home and pulpit to him. Young Carey was delighted at these opportunities of visiting the Baptist preacher and timed his visits to "about three in the afternoon when Mr. Hall took his early cup of tea". Their discussions lasted as long as there was water available for tea, "but the kettle," said Carey, "when this was exhausted . . . I was inwardly vexed and disappointed".[3] Hall urged Eustace Carey to remain in the home ministry instead of going overseas on the grounds that the Carey family were already well represented in India and that his preaching talent would be better used in England. But the younger man had made up his mind and not even Hall could change it. On 19th January, 1814, Hall journeyed with

1. S. A. Swaine: Faithful Men, p. 246.
2. J. Hoby: Memoir of William Yates, p. 53. See also pp. 41 and 33.
3. Memoir of Eustace Carey by his wife (1857), p. 109.

him to Northampton, where the valedictory services were to be held.[1] Hall's address that day drew this comment from the Baptist Magazine:

"Mr. Robert Hall addressed an exhortation to him (Eustace Carey) on the nature and importance of his undertaking, with the encouragements held out to him in the Word of God. . . . It is hoped that the address of Mr. Hall will appear in print, as it was particularly requested both by Mr. Carey and the ministers who were present, and Mr. H. expressed his willingness to comply."[2]

Hall kept his promise and in due course the address was published. He reminds young Carey of the qualifications necessary for a good missionary - a true call, a complete self-surrender, a strong faith, a loving spirit, a thorough knowledge of Christian doctrine, a blameless character - and leavens the whole address with such practical advice as to avoid giving "the smallest ground of umbrage and distrust to the constituted authorities", and to be guided "by Dr. Carey . . . whose wisdom and experience, to say nothing of his relationship to you, entitle him to reverential attention."[3]

A few weeks later Eustace Carey sailed for India.[4]

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1. J. T. Godfrey and J. Ward: History of Friar Lane Church, Nottingham (1903), p. 184. See also Morris's Recollections, p. 282.
2. Baptist Magazine - March, 1814, p. 125.
3. Works I, p. 277 ff.
4. Periodical Accounts xxvi, Vol. V, p. 294.

(2) Missionary Writing

Hall not only preached for the missionary cause but when an opportunity arose he used his pen effectively on its behalf. When the Edinburgh Review published an article decrying the missionary enterprise, Andrew Fuller asked Hall to write a reply. He at once consented to do so and, when F. A. Cox (the Baptist minister at Hackney, London) visited him at Enderby he had completed twelve pages of manuscript which, said Cox, were hardly equalled for "pungency of satire, power of argument and beauty of composition";[1] but the severe pain in his back prevented Hall from completing the work and it was never published. But another opportunity for writing came in 1813 in connection with the renewal of the East India Company's charter.

The East India Company had been founded in Elizabeth's reign and, thanks to shrewd trading and eventually to the victory of Clive at Plassey, it laid the foundations of British rule in India. Pitt's India Act of 1784 restricted to some extent the Company's influence, but it still retained extensive powers.[2] By its charter, for example, no-one could land in the territory administered by the Company without a special licence. This had important repercussions for the new

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1. F. A. Cox: History of the B.M.S., Vol. I, p. 164 (note). See also an article on Hall by Cox in the North British Review, VII - November, 1845.
2. G. M. Trevelyan: History of England, p. 594 ff.

missionary movement, because the Company refused to grant licences to missionaries. This meant that it was only by taking advantage of Danish and American shipping that Carey and his colleagues could reach India at all; and even when they landed they were forced to take refuge under the Danish flag at Serampore. This tension between an increasingly hostile East India Company and the growing number of missionaries continued for many years.[1]

William Carey, in close touch with the situation from the start, repeatedly wrote hometo Andrew Fuller, the secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, urging him to press for a revision of the East India Company's charter which was due for renewal in 1813.[2] Christians of all denominations united in an appeal for a clause legalising missionary work to be inserted in the charter. Early in 1812 William Wilberforce, a member of the Established Church, wrote to a friend, "It will be necessary to call into action the whole force of the religious world" and with enthusiasm he canvassed his friends and organized a meeting in London with the Archbishop of Canterbury in the chair.[3] Andrew Fuller, the Baptist leader, travelled the country urging support for the revised Charter and, early in 1813, visited London to interview

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1. cf. Periodical Accounts xvii, Vol. III, p. 374.
2. G. Smith: Life of William Carey, p. 252.
3. A. Coupland: Wilberforce (1945), p. 318.

influential leaders.[1] In Scotland the Presbyterian, Thomas Chalmers, joined in the agitation and preached in support of missions.[2]

Robert Hall's health prevented him from travelling extensively, but towards the end of 1812 he wrote a pamphlet entitled "An Address to the Public on an Important Subject connected with the Renewal of the Charter of the East India Company."[3] It was widely circulated and copies were sent to members of the Royal Family, members of Parliament and to directors of the East India Company.[4]

Hall answers the arguments of the opposition and then goes on to show the positive advantages of missionary work that would accrue not only to India but to Britain. He pours scorn on those who, professing to be Christian, deny the opportunity for missionary work. "Here are a people, indignant posterity will exclaim, who profess subjection to the Saviour of the world, and hold in their hands the oracles which foretell the universal extension of His dominion, who yet make it a crime to breathe His name in pagan lands." For Hall, the revision of the charter is a question of principle. If we admit the principle of liberty, he argues, this

1. F. A. Cox: History of the B.M.S., Vol. I, p. 256.
2. W. Hanna: A Selection from the correspondence of Thomas Chalmers (1853), p. 248.
3. Works III, p. 205 ff.
4. Morris's Recollections, p. 273.

means not only liberty to hold certain views but also liberty to share these views with others. To resist this privilege is an encroachment on the freedom of man. This, for Hall, settled the matter.

In this pamphlet Hall presents also an enlightened view of Britain's responsibilities as an imperial power. "The possession of sovereignty over extensive kingdoms," he writes, "is a sacred trust, for which nations are not less responsible than individuals. . . . Every individual of the immense population subject to our sway has claim on our justice and benevolence, which we cannot with impunity neglect: the wants and sufferings of every individual utter a voice which goes to the heart of humanity." By such sentiments as these Hall shows himself to be at one with the humanitarianism so clearly shown in Wilberforce[1] and Carey[2]; and like them his inspiration is drawn from Christ and not Rousseau. For all three the notion of the British Government fulfilling a trust for the welfare of the Indian peoples seemed farcical if it did nothing whatever to raise them from ignorance and idolatry. Hall agrees "that to consult the welfare of the subject is the first duty of the sovereign," but for him "the Christian religion is the greatest blessing we have received, the most

1. A. Coupland: Wilberforce (1945), p. 316.
2. A. Dakin: William Carey (1942), p. 24.

precious boon we can bestow."

In July, 1813, Hall attended the Baptist Missionary Society's meetings in London in connection with the charter agitation, and added his voice to his writing by preaching what the Baptist Magazine called "an excellent and appropriate sermon".[1]

As a result of this widespread agitation over a thousand petitions were sent up to Parliament from every part of the country[2], and during the charter debate in the House of Commons Wilberforce spoke the mind of Fuller and of Hall when he said, "Let no man think that the petitions which have loaded our table have been produced by a burst of momentary enthusiasm. While the sun and moon continue to shine in the firmament, so long will this object be pursued with unabated ardour until the great work be accomplished."[3]

In 1813 the revised charter was passed by a decisive majority, and the door for missionary work was opened.

(3) Committee Member

Although his health restricted his activities, it is clear that Hall played an important part in the committee work of the Baptist Missionary Society. He took an active part in the

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1. Baptist Magazine - July, 1813, p. 303.
2. M. H. Wilkin: Kinghorn of Norwich (1855), p. 350.
3. G. Smith: Life of Wm. Carey, p. 255.

meetings at Northampton in October, 1815, at Birmingham in 1816[1], and at Cambridge in 1819[2]. He was on the general committee until his death, and also served until 1822 on the central or executive committee. This committee functioned harmoniously under the guidance of Andrew Fuller, but when he died in 1815 there was a disagreement concerning his successor. Fuller, before his death, had urged that Christopher Anderson of Edinburgh should be appointed as his assistant and eventual successor[3]; and at Northampton in October, 1815, when the appointment of a successor to Fuller was being discussed many felt that Fuller's recommendation ought to be upheld. But Hall rose and opposed the appointment of Anderson, not "from any personal disrespect to the gentleman named but because he preferred a person of age and experience" (Anderson was 33 at the time).[4] Hall then moved "that our esteemed brother, Dr. Ryland (then aged 62), be requested to undertake the office of secretary for the year ensuing". Hall's prestige and eloquence swayed the meeting, and Ryland was elected.[5]

After the death of Fuller the committee was increased in size and many new men came into prominence. Hall continued to serve, but his appearances at committee meetings were more

1. Periodical Accounts xxx, Vol. VI, p. 79; xxix, Vol. V, p. 681.
2. Missionary Herald, November 1819, p. 495.
3. Life and letters of Christopher Anderson (1854), pp. 200, 207, 234.
4. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 182.
5. Periodical Accounts xxix, Vol. V, p. 681.

and more restricted by his poor health. Unfortunately, an acrimonious debate arose between the Home Committee and the Serampore missionaries, Carey, Marshman and Ward. With the passing of Fuller, Sutcliff and, later, Dr. Ryland, Hall was one of the few left on the Home Committee who had been associated with the Society from the beginning, and the whole controversy was distasteful to him. To understand the controversy, it must be remembered that Carey, Marshman and Ward had been sent out to India on the understanding that they were to become independent of the support of the Society as soon as possible.[1] To support themselves and their many activities Carey accepted the post as professor of Indian languages at the College in Calcutta for officials of the East India Company; Marshman and his wife kept a boarding school for European children; Ward made the Mission printing press a profitable concern. The new committee at home, who were pressed for funds for an expanding work, felt that the Society, under whose auspices Carey was working, ought to have some say in the control of the Serampore funds and property; but the missionaries were adamant that they should have exclusive control over their own earnings.

As Hall studied the reports on the matter he came to the conclusion that the committee were right in principle, and so

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1. Periodical Accounts xxxiii, Vol. VI, p. 340.

he gave it his support; but because of his regard for Carey and his friends he kept clear of the controversy as far as possible. The misunderstandings involved in the situation eventually forced Marshman to travel to England in 1826. He visited Hall and they discussed the situation in India with cordiality and affection.[1] But Marshman's journey proved fruitless, and in 1827 the Society and the Serampore Brethren (as they came to be called) agreed to part. It is not clear what followed, but John Foster alleged[2] that after Marshman's visit exaggerated reports were made to Hall concerning the lavish standard of living at Serampore and the immense profits the Brethren were supposed to be accumulating. When Hall heard that the Serampore Brethren were asking for one-sixth of the Society's income to be made over for their use, he at once sent up a strongly-worded protest to the committee in London.

In this letter, dated 12th March, 1827,[3] Hall admits that "it may be very proper, under certain circumstances, for us to aid the brethren at Serampore by occasional donations requested by the state of our funds and the attention necessary to other objects", but he strongly opposes the idea of an annual grant being made. Hall goes so far as to accuse Dr. Marshman of

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1. J. C. Marshman: Carey, Marshman and Ward (1864), p. 285.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 198 ff. Perhaps the reports were from Eustace Carey, of whom it was said 'his animosity towards Dr. Marshman was implacable'. See Carey, Marshman and Ward, p. 282.
3. Works IV, p. 415.

using the celebrity of the Brethren at Serampore to blackmail the committee into granting their request. "What security have we," Hall wrote, "against future requisitions, if we yield to the present? What reason to suppose our ready compliance in this instance will not encourage him (Marshman) to embrace an early opportunity of making further demands?"

A short time after this Hall appears to have come to a more balanced view of the controversy, and in a sermon on The Contention of Paul and Barnabas he said:

"When, therefore, we see good men taking different ways to the same great end, as we see in the case of our missions, what do we see but a repetition of the case before us? They may separately pursue their differing measures; but all are actuated by the same principles, all are embarked on the same cause . . . Let me not, however, be mistaken as encouraging separations. We are by no means to lend ourselves to a spirit of division and schism, than which nothing can be more opposed to the unity desired and taught by Christ; but if we cannot agree, let us separate in love, as the different members of the one body."[1]

But, despite these sentiments, the schism continued to be permeated with misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Hall, like many others, deplored the whole thing, but found himself

1. T. Grinfield: Sermon Notes, pp. 418-9.

dragged into the net. The tragedy was all the more poignant in that he was forced eventually to oppose those whom he had admired and supported for thirty-five years. The controversy dragged on, and it was not until 1837 that a re-union was made, but Hall did not live to see it.

Hall held strong views in connection with the raising of money for the Baptist Missionary Society. At this period the expanding work of the Mission was making heavy demands on the home supporters and, in an endeavour to meet the need, auxiliary societies were formed in the provinces to organize public support. At the meetings of the auxiliaries it became customary to invite large numbers of ministers to take part in the public meetings, and Hall, as the leading Baptist preacher, was continually being asked to take part. He heartily disliked this method of raising money. He felt that "noisy appeals to the public"[1] were unworthy of the Mission. "The Baptist Society," he wrote, "has prospered abundantly, with the blessing of God, . . . the unobtrusive modesty of its operations has been one of its strongest recommendations. . . . I am much grieved that it is about to relinquish that praise, and to vie with others in the noise and ostentation of its proceedings."[2]

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1. Works V, p. 504.
2. Ibid, p. 503.

Another of his objections was concerned with the expenses of the auxiliary society meetings. "The expense of collecting ministers from remote places," he wrote, "is not small; and, supposing their expenses to be borne out of the public fund (and the situation of few allows them to travel at their own expense), it will, I fear, more than counterbalance the pecuniary advantages resulting from the efforts at publicity."[1] In another letter he wrote, "As to collecting a great number of ministers together for the purpose of making a collection, nothing, in my opinion, can be more injudicious. Besides, why should more assemble than are wanted? And what a waste of money attendant on the travelling of so many from distant parts!"[2]

In his own travels on behalf of the Mission Hall was careful to keep expenses as low as possible. He told John Greene "I invariably endeavour to travel on such occasions, sir, outside of the coach; and when, from indisposition, I am compelled to have a post-chaise, I pay the extra expense out of my own pocket".[3] So strongly was Hall opposed to the idea of making public appeals for the Mission that when John Ryland invited him to preach at the inauguration of the Bristol and Bath Auxiliary Society he replied, "Were I to consult

1. Works V, p. 503.
2. Works V, pp. 513-4.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 197.

my inclinations, an excursion, in the pleasant month of July, to Bristol and to Wales, would be highly gratifying; but, from the considerations I have suggested, I must beg leave absolutely to decline your kind invitation. I do exceedingly deprecate the precedent about to be set at Bristol."[1]

Hall's convictions seem to have been taken seriously, because, although the committee did not agree with his views, they were at great pains to meet his objections. The report of the meetings of the Bristol and Bath Auxiliary Society in November, 1819, carefully explained that the results of the meetings "prove the great efficiency of local exertions in augmenting the funds of the Society," and went on to say, "While we trust that our Missionary transactions at home, as well as abroad, will ever be characterized by that spiritual modesty which ought to distinguish the followers of Him Who was meek and lowly in heart, we are persuaded that great advantage would arise in many instances if the claims of the Society were fairly stated to the Christian public".[2]

In another report on a meeting of the Exeter Auxiliary the organizer of the meeting (Rev. Samuel Kilpin) adds this note: "With a view to remove the difficulties that some of our friends may feel on account of the supposed expense of these meetings, allow me to add that the ministers and other

1. Works V, p. 504.
2. Missionary Herald - January, 1820, pp. 1-2. See also August, 1820, p. 57.

friends, thirty-eight in number, dined at my house, and from Tuesday evening to Thursday evening seventy-two persons dined, drank tea or supped there, and the whole expense did not amount to three guineas and a half".[1]

It is clear from their statements that Hall's protest was not in vain in that it drew attention to the dangers of elaborate public gatherings. His own views were that the local church ought to be the main source of missionary support, rather than an imposing auxiliary. "The best Auxiliary societies, in my humble opinion," he wrote, "that can be devised are already prepared to our hands in regular, organized churches, and in the certainty of meeting some hundreds of professing Christians every Sabbath day."[2] Hall felt that if the local ministers did their job properly the interest in missions would be maintained, the prayer meetings would be "doubly interesting", and all the necessary funds raised by Baptists themselves.[3] In a letter to John Ryland, Hall sums up his views on the matter. "There is one simple and effective mode, in my opinion, of promoting the mission, which has never yet been tried on any extensive scale; namely, an annual collection in every Baptist congregation which is attached to

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1. Missionary Herald - November, 1821, p. 82.
2. Works V, p. 504.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 196.

its interests. If such a measure were resolved in your association it would soon spread to others and would shortly become a standing practice in all our congregations; and that number is such that, with the sums which would incidentally fall in from other quarters, the pecuniary resources of the society would be as great as we ought to aspire to."[1] Hall's fears for the Auxiliary Societies faded when he saw the effective work they were doing, and he gave them his assistance on many occasions. Yet organization, by itself, Hall realized was not sufficient. "If we can once draw down the Spirit of God on our churches," he said, "the rich will contribute their property; the pious will contribute their prayers, . . . and the leisurely will give up their time."[2]

With the increasing size of the Mission other problems arose. It was decided to centralize the Mission headquarters, but Hall felt this was a mistake. His experience of the early days with Fuller and Sutcliff influenced him greatly - these were the days when there was a friendly intimacy pervading the Society, when the workers all knew each other personally and had personal knowledge of the missionaries overseas. But with the enlarged committee and expanding work the personal touch was disappearing and Hall lamented the loss. He,

1. Works V, p. 513.
2. Works VI, p. 239.

therefore, advocated that, for the growing Society, the work should be organized on an association rather than on a national basis. Hall envisaged local churches banding together to send out and support missionaries known to them from their own district. In this way, Hall believed, a more intimate link would be created, prayer would become more personal, and support would become more enthusiastic.[1] For him, it was vital to maintain a personal link between the home supporters and missionaries overseas, and any form of organization which submerged this personal factor must be avoided at all costs.

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 196. See also Periodical Accounts xxviii, Vol. V, p. 526, where Hall's views seem to have prevailed.

XI. CHURCH UNITY and the COMMUNION CONTROVERSY

Robert Hall again and again declared himself to be a convinced Baptist and dissenter. He upheld the traditional Baptist principles. He was a baptized believer himself and had declared that the doctrine of believers' baptism had his "unqualified approbation".[1] He accepted the church as the "gathered community" of believing people, and wrote that, in his view, the local church ought to be "a voluntary society, invested with a right to choose its own officers and acknowledging no head but Jesus Christ".[2] Its ministers, he felt, were "brethren whose emoluments should be confined to the voluntary contributions of the people".[3] The authority of the Bible was the background to all his sermons, and he spoke of it as "the great and only standard of Christian faith and practice".[4] Freedom of religion, as has already been noted,[5] was the theme of some of his best known publications and of many of his sermons. In all these ways Hall carried on the Baptist tradition, and was proud to belong to that denomination.

He was also a dissenter. In answer to an enquirer who suspected that he was veering towards the Establishment, Hall

1. Works II, p. 16.
2. Works III, p. 150: Grinfield's Notes, p. 419.
3. Grinfield's Notes, p. 419.
4. Works VI, p. 260.
5. See page 93 ff.

answered "I am a steady and conscientious adherent to the principles of Dissent".[1] He opposed the Establishment on three main grounds.

First, he objected to it on principle. He expressed his views in a conversation with John Greene. "Jesus Christ," he told his friend, "is the sole lawgiver in His church. He said 'My kingdom is not of this world'. It was to be distinct and separate; whoever then attempts to connect his Kingdom or Church with the State or with the honours, the dignities and the emoluments of this world, whatever may be the pretence, makes it a worldly sanctuary and disobeys the will of the lawgiver."[2] For Hall the idea of an Established Church was inconsistent with the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of Christ, and he declared it would "not be able to endure the increased light and glory of the millennial age".[3]

The second objection Hall had to the Establishment was his conviction, which he felt to be amply evidenced in history, that an Established Church and religious liberty were incompatible. "The boasted alliance between Church and State", he wrote in 1791, "seems to have been little more than a compact between the priest and the magistrate, to betray the liberties of mankind both civil and religious".[4] He deplored "the

1. Trestrail's Reminiscences, p. 45.
2. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 189.
3. T. Swan: Sermon on Death of Hall, p. 27.
4. Works III, p. 24.

jealous policy of the establishment"[1] which closed the universities to dissenters, and he denounced such leading figures as Bishop Horsley and Charles Simeon when he felt they were infringing the rights of dissenters. Later, in a reply to a High Church publication, he referred to "the overweaning pride, ceremonial hypocrisy and priestly insolence" of some defenders of the Establishment.[2]

His third objection largely concerned episcopacy. In a letter written in 1818[3] he says: "In regard to episcopacy, it appears to me entirely a human, though certainly a very early, invention. It was unknown, I believe, in the apostolical times; with the exception, probably of the latter part of John's time. But, as it was practised in the second and third centuries, I should have no conscientious objection to it. As it subsists at present among us, I am sorry to say I can scarcely conceive a greater abuse. It subverts equally the rights of pastors and of people, and is nothing less than one of the worst relics of the papal hierarchy. Were everything else what it ought to be in the established church, prelacy, as it now subsists, would make me a decided dissenter." Hall also disliked the forms and ceremonies of the Established Church as well as its insistence on creeds and confessions.

1. Works III, p. 23.
2. Works IV, p. 58.
3. Gregory's Memoir, pp. 92/3.

"A long course of experience," he wrote, "has clearly demonstrated the inefficacy of creeds and confessions to perpetuate religious belief. . . . Public creeds and confessions have occasioned more controversies than they have composed."[1]

The picture we now have of Hall is of a man convinced of the Baptist emphasis, ardently a dissenter, and sometimes harshly critical of the Established Church. But this is not the complete picture. Hall was no bigoted Baptist. On the contrary, he was ever ready to give credit where credit was due. He wrote that among the Anglican clergy "as splendid examples of virtue and talents might be produced as any which the annals of human nature can afford".[2] He spoke approvingly of the "venerable founders of the Established Church of England"[3], and in a sermon declared: "In justice to the established clergy of the realm, I cannot but remark the great advance in piety and diligence which they had exhibited during the last half-century, . . . far be it from any of their dissenting brethren to regard their success with any other than a godly jealousy, a holy emulation."[4] To some of his narrower Baptist friends Hall sounded dangerously liberal when he said "We, as dissenters, for the most part use and prefer free prayer. But God forbid we should ever imagine this the only

1. Works IV, pp. 62/3.
2. Works III, p. 148.
3. Works V, p. 248.
4. Works VI, pp. 258/9.

mode of prayer which is acceptable to God".[1] He went further in a speech to the Bible Society when he expressed his admiration for the prayer book. "Though a protestant dissenter," he said, "I am by no means insensible to its merits. I believe that the evangelical purity of its sentiments, the chastised fervour of its devotion, and the majestic simplicity of its language have combined to place it in the very first rank of uninspired compositions."[2]

It is this charitable spirit towards other denominations which makes Hall stand out from the shallower minds of his age. His convictions were as definite as the most ardent Baptist's, but he always had an eye for the best in other traditions. Yet, as he looked at the religious life of England, Hall realized that the divisions and controversies which were then raging seriously limited the Christian message. Again and again he comments on this.

In February, 1802, he said to his Cambridge congregation, "There has been, my Brethren, unhappily, in all sects and parties of Christians a disposition to strife and envy; to quarrel and even to anathematize one another; to confine and arrogate to themselves the title of the 'true church'; as if the church of Christ could be limited to any one assembly.

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1. Works V, p. 258.
2. Works IV, p. 372.

I had almost rather reject Christianity itself than thus narrow the limits of the great Creator within such artificial and bigoted distinctions."[1]

A few years later he wrote, "What can be more repugnant to the beautiful idea which our Saviour gives us of his church, as one fold under one Shepherd, than the present aspect of Christendom, split into separate and hostile communions, frowning defiance on each other?"[2]

In another work he described the churches "regarding each other with the jealousies of rival empires, each aiming to raise itself on the ruins of all others, making extravagant boasts of superior purity, generally in exact proportion to their departures from it, and scarcely deigning to acknowledge the possibility of obtaining salvation out of their pale". This, Hall felt, was the "odious and disgusting spectacle which modern Christianity presents". He confesses his belief that "nothing more abhorrent from the principles and maxims of the sacred oracles can be conceived than the idea of a plurality of true churches. . . . This schism in the members of his mystical body is by far the greatest calamity which has befallen the Christian interest. . . . We have been so long familiarized to it as to be scarcely sensible of its enormity." . . . It is "probably the principal obstruction

1. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 138.
2. Works I, p. 224. See also Works VI, p. 147.

to that ample diffusion of the Spirit which is essential to the renovation of the world."[1]

This theme repeatedly thrusts itself into Hall's preaching and writing. He felt strongly the tragedy of a divided church. He longed for "that bright aera, when the names of sect or party shall no more be heard but all shall form 'one fold under one shepherd'."[2]

But just because he was a convinced Baptist, Hall was confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, he held to his Baptist principles and was quite unshakeable in his conviction that they were taught in the New Testament; on the other hand, he believed that the divisions of the Christian Church not only handicapped its witness but were a sin against the unity of the Body of Christ. Yet, as Hall himself admitted, "It is easier . . . to deplore the malady than to prescribe the cure".[3] What was to be done? Hall's answer came from his personal experience.

Ever since his student days at Aberdeen he had enjoyed fellowship with those of other denominations. He had shared the friendship of Anglicans like Bishop Porteus and Thomas Robinson; of Presbyterians like Thomas Chalmers and Sir James Mackintosh; of Independents like Habakkuk Crabb and James Robertson;

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1. Works II, pp. 9-10.
2. Works VI, p. 340.
3. Works II, p. 10.

and of Methodists like Theophilus Lessay and Jacob Stanley. With all of these men Hall had differences of opinion, but this did not make Christian fellowship impossible between them. On the contrary, despite their differences they discovered a bond of faith in Christ and a common desire to do His will. It was from this experience that he was able to say, "There is sufficient, my Brethren, in Christianity to form a union with all its professors. Sufficient grounds in which they are agreed to make them all of 'one mind'."[1] Not that Hall wanted a spurious unity which involved the sacrifice of truth, but he believed that a measure of unity already existed and ought to be cherished and clarified. As the Bible Society and kindred organizations shared, it was possible for Christians of different views to work together for the glory of God. "Are we at liberty, or are we not," he challenged his fellow-Baptists, "to walk with our Christian brethren as far as we are agreed, or must we renounce their fellowship on account of error allowed not to be fundamental?"[2] In a similar vein he wrote, "Instead of maintaining the barrier which separates us from each other and employing ourselves in fortifying the frontiers of hostile communities, we should be anxiously devising the means of narrowing the grounds of

1. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 100.
2. Works II, p. 12.

dispute by drawing the attention of all parties to those fundamental and catholic principles in which all concur".[1]

What practical steps towards unity could be achieved in the face of existing divisions? Hall worked for unity in three main ways.

I. In his preaching he repeatedly spoke of the importance of charity and co-operation between Christians.

"Real religion, my Brethren, is one thing," he said at Cambridge, "an attachment to forms and ceremonies another. We may be very zealous for one particular creed, opinion, sect or denomination, and with the credit and conceit of our own wisdom yet be very defective in Christian spirit; this temper leads to malignity of feeling. There may be sufficient in such religion for us to hate one another, but not enough to cause us to love each other. . . . Let us exercise the greatest candour and charity towards those who differ from us."[2]

At a Missionary Society meeting in 1819 Hall said, "Let us guard against that vicious rivalry . . . which shall lead us to look coolly on the most splendid acts of missionary labour, unless they emanate from ourselves, or bring honour to our party".[3] A few years later at another missionary meeting he stated: "The only kind of proselytes we desire to make are

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1. Works IV, p. 73.
2. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene), p. 74. See also p. 137.
3. Works VI, p. 237. See also Works I, p. 6; V, pp. 352/3; V, p. 317.

proselytes to God and Jesus Christ! In the promotion of such a cause we are ready to forget our own denomination and to co-operate with every other."[1]

Perhaps the best exposition of this theme of cordiality and unity was in a sermon entitled Is Christ Divided? preached at Leicester on 21st February, 1821.[2] "All real Christians," said Hall, "are members of that one body of which He (Christ) is the head. . . . Division has its origin in sin; union in grace. The first beginner of division among men was Satan, but the great design of Jesus Christ's coming was to restore union, to restore reconciliation, first between man and God and then between man and man. . . . It is to be lamented that the gracious designs of Jesus Christ in gathering together all His followers have been so ineffectual. We hope the time will come, and we hope the symptoms of it are now appearing, when party name shall no more be known, when the name of 'Christian', that excellent name, shall swallow up every other. . . . Let us earnestly pray that that blessed time may arrive when all these opinions which have divided Christians will all disappear. Never will Christianity thrive as it is intended to do till it is said, as it was of the ancient Christians, 'Behold, how they love one another'."

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1. Works VI, p. 413.

2. MSS notes of Sermons by Hall (taken down by John Ryley) in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

II. Hall not only preached about the importance of harmony and co-operation between Christians, he, himself, actually supported many united efforts to advance the cause of Christ.

In the Bible Society, for example, he found "a rallying point for the piety of the age. . . . A centre of union and co-operation in the advancement of a common cause".[1] He encouraged local church unions which were being formed to evangelize the villages and outlying districts of England. In this connection he preached at the inauguration of the Herts. Union of Churches in April, 1810, and also at the Bedford Union in 1816. Concerning the latter, he wrote to his friend, Thomas Langdon of Leeds, "I was much delighted a few weeks since by my attendance at the Bedford Union, of which you have undoubtedly heard. It appears to me an admirable institution. I wish it were initiated in every part of the kingdom. It would delight a heart like yours to behold Dissenters, and Methodists and Church people, and Moravians, blending together their affections, forgetting their differences and uniting their endeavours to promote the great and common cause of Christianity."[2]

Hall also served such united movements as the London

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1. Works IV, p. 365.
2. Memoir of Thomas Langdon by his daughter, p. 145.

Missionary Society, the British and Foreign School Society, the Anti-Slavery Society, the Cambridge Benevolent Society, the Framework-Knitters' Society[1], the Committee for the Relief of Distress in Germany[2], as well as similar good causes.

Hall's co-operation with other churches was freely noted by his contemporaries. Newton Bosworth, a member of the Cambridge Baptist Church, spoke of "the cordiality of his (Hall's) intercourse with good men of all denominations", and "the sincere and sacred pleasure with which he received accounts of the progress of the Gospel from all quarters without distinction".[3] Dr. William Sprague[4], writing in the New York Observer in 1828, said of Hall:-

"He sympathizes with the clergy of the Establishment in all their sorrows . . . At the same time he cheers every Dissenter that he meets with and bids him God-speed. He preaches at the ordination of the Independents, and protects by his arm all that unprotected multitude, both from diocesan jealousies and from political power. By every party he is equally esteemed . . . It is no praise and no paradox to say of Mr. Hall that he is the greatest Bishop in England. His diocese is limited only by Christendom . . . Hall was raised

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1. See Works VI, p. 311, and pages 213 ff. of this Thesis.
2. Baptist Magazine - March, 1814, p. 253.
3. N. Bosworth: Sermon on the Death of Hall, p. 46.
4. Dr. Sprague is described as "one of the most widely known American clergymen of his day". He visited England in 1828 and his reports were published in the New York Observer from 17th May to 14th October, 1828, under the title "Letters from Europe". See Dictionary of American Biography (1935) Vol. XVII, p. 476.

up for a special purpose . . . no less than to make of one hue all the party-coloured garment of the Christian world; and, under God, he has already done much of this work . . . When the history of religion shall make a record of their achievements, it shall be told of this man that he had the powers of an exorcist; that he was indeed a hero of one of the most noted revolutions in time."[1]

Similar comments came at Hall's death from many sections of the Church and bear testimony to his persistent efforts to promote better understanding between the churches. It comes, therefore, as a surprise to find that Hall appears to have had very little to do with the launching of the Baptist Union in 1813. In that year an effort was made to encourage a greater degree of union within the Baptist denomination. The instigator of this effort was Joseph Ivimey (1773-1834), a Baptist minister from London, who published an article in the Baptist Magazine entitled: "Union Essential to Prosperity".[2] Largely as a result of Ivimey's work, at the annual meetings of the Baptist Missionary Society in June, 1812, a plan was approved by sixty Baptist ministers for "a more general union"[3]. Robert Hall was absent from this meeting. He was at Leicester, slowly recovering after weeks of intense suffering[4]; but he accepted

1. Quoted in Morris's Recollections, pp. 375/6.
2. Baptist Magazine - June, 1811, p. 234.
3. Ivimey: History of the English Baptists IV, p. 123 ff.
4. Works V, pp. 476/7.

an invitation to preach at the meetings the following year. This he did, and his sermon was described by the Baptist Magazine as "excellent and appropriate".[1] The next day - 24th June, 1813, "The General Union of Baptist Ministers and Churches" was founded.[2] The "General Union" did not prosper. It had "no practical aim, no permanent officers, no inspiring leader"[3], and, by 1830, Ivimey admitted that "the good design" of the Union was never realized.[4] There are no records of Hall having taken an active part in the affairs of the Union, but this was probably due, not to any disapproval of the idea, but to his poor health, which made his regular attendance at meetings well-nigh impossible.

III. The third means Hall used for promoting the cause of unity was his advocacy of "open" or "free" communion. Hall believed that the unity of the Christian Church ought to be shown above all at the Lord's Table. But at once he was faced with the question of "closed" or "strict" communion. In most Baptist churches of the time only those baptized by immersion as believers were welcomed at the Communion Service. Paedo-baptists were, as a rule, refused admission. Hall felt this state of affairs to be contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and

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1. Baptist Magazine - July, 1813, p. 303.
2. Ivimey, op.cit. p. 380 ff.
3. Whitley: A History of the British Baptists, p. 205.
4. Ivimey: op.cit. p. 382.

to the unity of the Church. The Church, he believed, was one body, and however much individual believers might differ in points of doctrine, they ought not to be divided at this most central point of worship and faith. Being convinced of this, Hall decided it was his Christian duty to press for open communion. In the 17th Century John Bunyan and William Kiffin had taken opposing sides over this question, and in the 18th Century Robert Robinson and Abraham Booth continued the debate[1]. Now it was Hall's turn. For a number of years he had supported open communion in conversations with his friends, but it was not until the autumn of 1815 that he publicly expressed his views on the subject. His defence of open communion was entitled: Terms of Communion with a Particular View to the case of the Baptists and Paedo-baptists. Hall's prestige at once assured its sale. The first edition was quickly sold out and many other editions followed, both in England and America.[2]

The work itself is divided into two sections. In the first he shows the weakness of the case for closed communion by carefully examining the arguments put forward by Abraham Booth, whose book, An Apology for the Baptists, was an elaborate defence of closed communion[3]. In the second section Hall turns

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1. See E. A. Payne: The Fellowship of Believers, p. 64.
2. A copy of the first American edition (1816) is in the British Museum Library.
3. Abraham Booth (1734-1806), pastor of the Prescott Street Baptist Church, London, for over thirty years. He was a calvinist and published, besides his Apology for Baptists, several books of sermons. See A. C. Underwood: A History of English Baptists, p. 179 ff.

to the positive arguments in favour of open communion. Underlying his lengthy argument, a number of broad principles can be discerned.

The first concerns the terms or conditions of salvation. Baptism, Hall insists, is not essential to salvation. Faith in Christ alone makes a man a Christian and, therefore, paedo-baptists must be reckoned to be genuine members of the Church of Christ. If this is so, then it cannot be right to refuse from the Lord's Table those whom He has received. Hall sums up this argument by saying "No church has a right to establish terms of communion which are not terms of salvation".[1]

His second main argument is based on the principle of love. The Scripture teaches, he says, that the bond which unites those who believe in Christ is love. If paedo-baptists are granted to be members of the family of Christ, then it must surely be a sin against love to exclude them from the family table. Even if it is argued that for truth's sake they ought to be excluded, Hall shows that in the New Testament disputes between equally sincere Christians were solved by love and mutual toleration, and he quotes Paul's injunction that Christians ought to receive those who are "weak in faith" and to bear their infirmities.[2] To follow the Scriptures, therefore,

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1. Works II, p. 167.
2. See Romans 14, 1-5: 15, 1, 6, 7.

paedo-baptists ought to be received at the Lord's Table in love and charity.

Another of Hall's arguments concerns the power of truth. He is convinced that the Baptists are right in their doctrine of baptism. "From a full conviction," he writes, "that our views as a denomination correspond with the dictates of scripture, it is impossible for me to entertain a doubt of their ultimate prevalence."[1] Truth must ultimately prevail, therefore, Hall believes, Baptists need not fear that by encouraging open communion they will cause the true doctrine of baptism to be lost. On the contrary, truth flourishes best in that atmosphere of Christian love and fellowship which is characteristic of the Lord's Supper. Instead of being engulfed, the doctrine of believers' baptism will, in fact, be extended by open communion.

The publication of Terms of Communion at once roused the public interest. Many people were anxious to know what Hall had to say on this controversial subject, and it quickly became known that he had come down on the side of Bunyan and Robinson. Controversy was soon raging. An anonymous pamphlet appeared in November, 1815, entitled A Plea for Primitive Communion, occasioned by the Rev. Robert Hall's recent publication entitled

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1. Works II, p. 89 ff.

"Terms of Communion".[1] The author was chiefly concerned to prove that Christian baptism was instituted prior to the Lord's Supper. Hall had already dealt with this subject but felt it needed further treatment, and, therefore, wrote another pamphlet entitled The Essential Difference betwixt Christian Baptism and the Baptism of John[2]. In it he elaborated his previous arguments and clears away the misrepresentations of his anonymous opponent. But the main attack on Hall was yet to come. Joseph Kinghorn, the Baptist minister at Norwich, for years had been thinking about the question, and eventually decided that closed communion was the Scriptural teaching[3]. When Hall's work appeared Kinghorn set about writing a reply. William Button (for many years minister of Dean Street Baptist Church, London), after staying with Hall for a few days, said to Kinghorn, "I told him (Hall) that he must expect an attack from Norwich. He was pleased to say that he could not be replied to by a more respectable man than Mr. Kinghorn; what he would write would be worth reading. He further added that he should pay the utmost attention to it, and if Mr. Kinghorn did not overpower him with argument, he should certainly give him an answer."[4]

Kinghorn finished his reply early in 1816 and it was published under the title Baptism, a Term of Communion at the

1. See Baptist Magazine - November, 1815, p. 476.
2. Works II, p. 179 ff.
3. M. H. Wilkins: Kinghorn of Norwich, pp. 165, 194, 225.
4. Ibid, p. 356.

Lord's Supper. He began with some remarks about his opponent. "Everyone who is acquainted with Mr. Hall will readily bow to him with great deference. I have for many years known him and acknowledge myself under great obligation to him. His works praise him in the gate, his pre-eminent talents are confessed, his praise is in all the churches; still, it must not be forgotten that the splendour of genius has often adorned mistaken opinions and that the influence of abilities may promote error."[1] Kinghorn then goes on to examine the minutest points of Hall's argument and to put forward his own views of the subject. He claimed that all Christendom agreed in admitting only baptized people to Communion and that, as all Baptists agreed to recognize only believers' baptism, therefore only Baptists could commune at Baptist churches.

Hall at once began to write a reply and some months later he wrote to his friend, Thomas Langdon of Leeds, "I am far advanced in my answer to Mr. Kinghorn, and expect it will be in the press in a very few weeks".[2] But the months went by and Hall's answer did not appear. He later ascribed the delay to "a strong disinclination to controversy, the want of a habit of composition, repeated attacks of illness at one period, and various avocations and engagements at another".[3]

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1. Baptism, a term of Communion (1816), 2nd edition, p. 2.
2. Works V, p. 512.
3. Works II, p. 237.

His reply at last appeared early in 1818. It was entitled A Reply to the Rev. Joseph Kinghorn, being a Further Vindication of the Practice of Free Communion. Hall examined the arguments of Kinghorn and scornfully rejected them. He felt that a distinction must be drawn between those who blatently refuse believers' baptism and those who, like the paedobaptists, accept the principle of baptism but have a mistaken conception of it. It is justifiable for the former to be excluded from the Lord's Table but Christian love and toleration demands that the latter ought to be welcomed as sincere though mistaken brethren.

Some of Hall's scornful comments irritated Kinghorn. In a letter to a friend he wrote, "The way in which Mr. Hall gets over what I said concerning baptism being a mode of making a scriptural profession is by downright violence"[1]. Even Olinthus Gregory thought Hall had "suffered himself to indulge in terms of sarcasm, if not of contempt, that add nothing to his argument, and had been better spared"[2].

In 1820 Kinghorn wrote his reply A Defence of "Baptism, a Term of Communion" in answer to the Rev. Robert Hall's reply. By this time the controversy was degenerating into a series of debating points, and Hall had no desire to continue it further.

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1. M. H. Wilkins: Kinghorn of Norwich, p. 406. (Letter from Joseph Kinghorn to Mr. Jarrow, 20th April, 1818).
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 91.

He had spoken his mind. He had done what he could. As far as he was concerned the debate was over, and he wrote later "It is by no means my intention to renew it"[1].

Other Baptist writers, however, continued to take sides. R. A. Cox, Joseph Ivimey, William Newman, Christmas Evans and a number of others published pamphlets on the subject[2], but Hall maintained a steady silence. Then in October, 1826, eleven years after the opening of the controversy, another pamphlet came from his pen, which re-opened the debate. In the preface of the work Hall tells why he is writing. "After having discussed so largely in some former publications the question of strict communion . . . it was not my intention to trouble the public with the subject any further, not having the least ambition for the last word in controversy. But it has been suggested to me that it would not be difficult to condense the substance of the argument within smaller compass, so as to render it accessible to such as have neither the leisure nor the inclination to peruse a large performance." Thus Hall issued A Short Statement of the Reasons for Christian Inopposition to Party Communion[3].

The next year Kinghorn published a reply with the lengthy title Arguments against the practice of Mixed Communion, and in

1. Works II, p. 247.
2. See Baptist Magazine - September, 1827, pp. 415-23: New Baptist Miscellany, Vol. I, p. 303, August, 1827.
3. Works III, p. 407 ff.

support of communion on the plan of the Apostolic Church, with preliminary observations on Rev. R. Hall's "Reason for Christian inbpposition to Party Communion".

This was definitely the last word in the controversy as far as either Kinghorn or Hall was concerned. Later history shows that victory largely rested with Hall. By 1833 a preacher in Kinghorn's own church was referring to "a very general tendency towards mixed communion" among the younger ministers, and, after a court case, the Norwich church eventually accepted open communion[1]. At Leeds, Blenheim Baptist Church was founded on an open communion basis after a dispute at the South Parade Church[2]. At Leicester, Harvey Lane Baptist Church agreed to open communion the year after Hall left. Hall was delighted at the news and cheerfully congratulated his successor, J. P. Mursell, saying "You must be a wonderful man, Mr. Mursell, you've done in a month what I couldn't do in eighteen years!"[3]

But controversy never quite ceased, and even in 1951 it was still the case that a few Baptist churches upheld the practice of closed communion. Nevertheless, it is significant that in an official Baptist statement on the Lord's Supper (published in 1951) the open-communion position is strongly

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1. Whitley: A History of the British Baptists, p. 307.
2. R. Gawler: History of Blenheim Baptist Church, Leeds (1848-1948), pp. 12/13.
3. A. Mursell: James Phillippo Mursell, his life and work (1886), p. 33.

maintained and the arguments used are substantially the same as those used by Hall more than a century earlier[1].

1. The Lord's Supper - a Baptist Statement (1951), p. 30 ff.

XII. IN THE PULPIT (1809-1826)

While it is important to remember Hall's wider ministry (as has been detailed in the previous sections), it must not be forgotten that behind all these activities lay the regular work of the ministry at Harvey Lane. Hall took his responsibilities to the church very seriously, and his duty as a pastor always had the first claim on his services.

His preaching was, of course, the outstanding feature of his ministry, and large crowds continued to flock to the Harvey Lane chapel. Twice the building had to be enlarged. In 1809 it was extended to seat eight hundred people. Eight years later another alteration brought the seating capacity up to one thousand, and it was still crowded. The congregations were largely composed of working-class people employed in the hosiery trade, but people from all classes could be seen on most Sundays. So great did Hall's reputation become that people came from London especially to hear him. They travelled by stage-coach on Saturday and returned on Sunday evening or Monday morning.[1] Distinguished visitors made a point of going to the Baptist chapel at Harvey Lane (a building described as having "almost a quaker plainness" outside, while within it was "unadorned and certainly not with the most comfortable

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1. T. Fielding Johnson: Glimpses of Ancient Leicester (1891), p. 276.

accommodation for ease-loving people"[1]). Among the visitors were Henry Brougham (later Lord Brougham), who used to relate that he "never willingly missed the opportunity" of hearing Robert Hall[2]; and Thomas Chalmers, the Scottish preacher, who wrote of his delight at hearing Hall preach[3]. One visitor wrote to a friend, "I thank you for sending me thirty miles on foot out of my way to hear him"[4]. Many barristers, when the Assizes were at Leicester, joined the crowds at the Baptist chapel. Among them were Robert Lush, later Lord Justice of the Court of Appeal, and John Mellor, later the Mayor of Leicester, both of whom expressed their admiration for Hall.[5]

Often there were overseas visitors present. Of these Americans predominated, drawn by the writings of Hall, which were being published in America. One of these visitors was Dr. Mason (a Presbyterian leader from New York and founder of the College which later became Union Theological Seminary), who went out of his way to visit Leicester and talk with Hall.[6] Another admirer was a French Protestant clergyman, who was so thrilled with Hall's preaching that, in a letter to France, he

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1. Speech by J. T. Brown in The Jubilee celebrations of Belvoir St. Chapel, p. 13.
2. A. Mursell: Memories of My Life (1913), p. 3. Thomas Carlyle also heard Hall preach. See D. A. Wilson: Carlyle till Marriage, p. 343.
3. W. Hanna: Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers, Vol. I, p. 422.
4. Morris's Recollections, p. 385.
5. Modern Memorials (Leicester 1875), p. 28. See also Greene's Reminiscences, p. 110.
6. Morris's Recollections, pp. 312-3; Dictionary of American Biography (1933), Vol. XII, pp. 368-9.

he wrote that Hall's sermon "was so great, so good, so eloquent, so simple, so pious, in a word, so complete a piece of pulpit oratory, that I cannot tell you anything about it except that it has made an indelible impression on my mind. I thought when I came out that I never could preach again."[1]

Several people settled in Leicester just to enjoy Hall's ministry. John Ryley transferred from Cambridge for this reason.[2] Then there was Thomas Wheeler, who heard Hall preach at Dunstable and was so impressed that next morning he gave his master notice to leave, saying he must sit under such a ministry. He followed Hall to Leicester, told him what he had done and asked for help in finding a situation there. Hall is reported to have drawn himself up to his full height and to have said "I never was so complimented in my life, sir. I will go with you at once, sir, and see if I can find you a situation" - which he did. Wheeler eventually became a deacon at Harvey Lane.[3]

The popularity of Hall's sermons in America is seen from a report of the American Board of Missions for the year 1819, which describes a school for "the education of destitute heathen youth of different nations". Here orations were delivered "in the Cherokee, Choctaw, Otahaitean, Owhyhee and

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 85 (note).
2. See page 229 of this Thesis.
3. Wheeler Robinson: Life and Faith of the Baptists, p. 111.

Chinese languages; besides extracts in English from the noblest parts of Hall's (of Leicester) and Dwight's sermons".[1]

Hall's reputation as a preacher made him the focus of attention for all those who wanted an outstanding preacher for anniversaries, ordinations and the like. Invitations came from all over the country. Joseph Gutteridge, a leading Baptist layman in London, tried hard to get Hall to preach a series of sermons in London in the spring of 1812. He suggested that for six weeks Hall should stay in London, preaching on one evening in the week and on Sundays at some important churches. Hall felt it his duty to go, the Leicester congregation gave him their "cheerful consent", and all seemed set for an important and influential work. Then ill-health intervened and the London project had to be abandoned[2]. But when health allowed Hall gladly helped other churches. He preached at the opening of many new churches and chapels. Among them were Cosely in Staffordshire[3]; Zion Jubilee Memorial Chapel, Bradford[4]; Cold Arbour Lane, Camberwell[5]; Sparrow Hill Chapel, Loughborough[6]; Dover Street Chapel, Leicester[7]; and the Baptist chapel at Oadby in Leicestershire[8].

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1. Missionary Herald - April, 1819, p. 32.
2. Works V, pp. 472-8.
3. Baptist Magazine - September, 1814, p. 393.
4. Ibid - September, 1824, p. 399. See also The Baptists of Yorkshire (1912), p. 123.
5. The Pulpit - 14th July, 1825 (No. 117).
6. Baptist Magazine - June, 1816, p. 264; November, 1817, p. 439.
7. D. Ashby: Friar Lane, the Story of 300 years, p. 53.
8. A Brief History of the Baptist Churches in the Leicestershire

The reports of these occasions uniformly tell of large crowds and liberal collections. At Camberwell, for instance, the correspondent of The Pulpit described the scene in these terms:-

"The extreme anxiety to hear this justly celebrated preacher occasioned the new chapel to be filled to overflowing with people at a very early hour. Very few persons were able to sit except by turns; and those who succeeded so far as to get inside the doors were so jammed in as to be deprived, in a great measure, of the use of their arms. This, added to the very low tone of voice in which Mr. Hall delivered a great part of his discourse, must be our apology for not furnishing a more extended report of a sermon full of sound and luminous reasoning, delivered for the most part in a language of peculiar eloquence."[1]

Hall also preached at many ordination services. In 1810 he preached at the ordination of William Cuttriss at Arnesby[2]; in 1811 he gave "a very solemn charge" at the ordination of E. Hall at Rugby[3]. He preached in the same year at Sutton-in-the-Elms, when E. Burdett was ordained[4]. Later he preached at the ordinations of Benjamin Evans of Blaby[5], and of W. Goodrich at Ravensthorpe. Concerning the latter, the

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1. The Pulpit - 14th July, 1825 (No. 117), p. 437.
2. W. Bassett: History of Arnesby Baptist Church (1856), p. 65.
3. Baptist Magazine - November, 1811, p. 480.
4. Ibid - November, 1811, p. 481.
5. Ibid - March, 1813, p. 131.

Baptist Magazine reported that it was "a time long to be remembered by many"[1]. Then there was the ordination of his nephew, John Keen Hall, at Kettering[2], of James Robertson at Stretton in Warwickshire[3], and of John Mack at Clipstone in 1815[4].

Funerals in Hall's day were usually associated with lengthy sermons and elaborate services, and as a leading preacher he was constantly in demand. There are many records of his funeral sermons. He preached at the funerals of his own members like William Gamby[5] and Mrs. Carryer[6]; and at the funerals of close friends like Andrew Fuller[7], John Ryland[8], Joseph Freeston[9], Thomas Toller[10] and John Deacon[11]. These funeral services attracted great crowds of people. At the funeral of his friend, Joseph Freeston, for instance, Hall wrote that "a prodigious concourse of people attended"[12]. A report of another funeral, of a member of the Friar Lane General Baptist Church, Leicester, gives a good description of the crowds -

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1. Baptist Magazine - September, 1819, p. 396. Goodrich was a member of Hall's church at Harvey Lane.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 304.
3. Works I, p. 223 ff.
4. Baptist Magazine - May, 1815, p. 219. The Story of John Mack's life is given in Morris's Recollections, p. 269 ff.
5. Ibid - May, 1814, pp. 201-2.
6. Ibid - June, 1815, p. 248.
7. Morris's Recollections, p. 298.
8. Ibid, p. 440.
9. Ibid, p. 405.
10. Ibid, p. 411.
11. Smith: History of Friar Lane General Baptist Church, p. 57.
12. Morris's Recollections, p. 406.

"The Rev. Robert Hall at the particular solicitation of the whole family preached a funeral sermon on the Lord's Day of 8th November (1818) from 'To die is gain'. The interest excited at this time was beyond all former example in this town, in reference to any private character, in the memory of the oldest person living. Almost an hour before the commencement of worship the Meeting-House was nearly filled; and such was the pressure of people of all denominations to gain admittance that it created the most serious alarm. Above two thousand persons were crowded within the walls, the seats being generally filled double, and every spot of room was completely occupied. Some hundreds waited about the doors; and the street to a considerable extent was blocked up. More than a thousand people, it is believed, could not gain admittance even in the chapel yard, and, of course, were obliged to retire without hearing a word of the sermon, which was peculiarly expressive and pathetic, and admirably adapted to the character of the deceased and the state of the audience."[1]

Hall published two funeral sermons when he was at Leicester; one was on the death of Dr. Ryland and the other on the death of the Princess Charlotte. This latter, in particular, had a widespread appeal. Princess Charlotte was

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1. General Baptist Repository - December, 1818. See Smith: History of Friar Lane Baptist Church, pp. 53/4.

the only child of George IV and heir to the throne of England. She was very popular and on her marriage in 1816 there was national rejoicing. Then tragedy intervened. In November, 1817, she died in childbirth. The effect of this on the nation was remarkable. People in the streets burst into tears on hearing the news. The shops were closed in silent testimony to the nation's grief. On the day of the funeral the magistrates of Glasgow and many other towns resolved that all the churches should have appropriate services. Magazines reporting the death of the Princess were edged with black. Lord Brougham wrote that it was difficult for persons not living at the time to believe how universal and genuine was the national grief.[1] Apart from the many thousands of sermons that were preached, it was reported that at least 112 sermons were published.[2] They had such titles as The British Empire in Tears; The March of Death; The Sun of Britain set at Noon. Hall's sermon was published under the title A Sermon Occasioned by the Lamented Death of her late Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales.[3] It was one of three that he preached on this occasion and is a good example of his oratory. His aim, he said, was to turn the national mourning into "channels of piety", and he did it, as the following extract shows, by

1. See A. Bryant: The Age of Elegance (1950), p. 389 (note).
2. Baptist Magazine - May, 1818, p. 186.
3. Works I, p. 319 ff.

leading his hearers on from the tragedy of the occasion to the Gospel of Christ -

"The nation has certainly not been wanting in the proper expression of its poignant regret at the sudden removal of this most lamented Princess. . . . Sorrow is painted on every countenance, the pursuits of business and pleasure have been suspended, and the kingdom is covered with the signals of distress. But what, my brethren, if it be lawful to indulge in such a thought, what would be the funeral obsequies of a lost soul? Where shall we find the tears fit to be wept at such a spectacle? Or, could we realize the calamity in all its extent, what tokens of commiseration and concern would be deemed equal to the occasion? Would it suffice for the sun to veil his light and the moon her brightness; to cover the ocean with mourning, and the heavens with sackcloth? Or, were the whole fabric of Nature to become animated and vocal, would it be possible for her to utter a groan too deep, or a cry too piercing, to express the magnitude and extent of such a catastrophe?"

This sermon was hailed as "the ideal of funeral sermons".[1] Another reviewer wrote that "the author of this sermon deserves to be classed" with the greatest of English orators.[2] Yet

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1. G. Gilfillan: Galleries of Literary Portraits II, p. 249.
2. Baptist Magazine - March, 1818, p. 111.

another declared that Hall "put in the form of language what a generation felt".[1] The Prince Regent approved of it[2], and it was claimed that the sermon "by universal acknowledgment bore the palm above all the numerous valuable sermons that were then published".[3] The first editions were rapidly sold out, and Hall, surprised at its success, doubted whether his bookseller was wise in publishing several more editions. "I am afraid he will overdo it," Hall wrote to a friend. "If you are of that opinion, do stop him."[4] But the bookseller knew the market and eventually sixteen editions were sold. (The popularity of Hall's sermon can be gauged by the fact that by 1826 only fifteen editions of William Wilberforce's great book A Practical View (1797) had been issued.[5])

There were two main characteristics of Hall's preaching at Leicester. The first was its variety. Although he was minister there for more than eighteen years his hearers remarked on the fresh way he expounded familiar themes like the Lord's Supper, the Unity of the Church, Regeneration, and Prayer. Some of his sermons had formidable titles like God's Eternity Considered in Reference to the Suspension of His Promised Purposes, and Parallel Between the War against the Canaanitish Nations and that of Believers with their Spiritual Enemies;

1. W. Landels: Baptist Worthies (1883), p. 212.
2. The Hall Family, p. 94.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 88.
4. Works V, p. 517.
5. M. Jaeger: Before Victoria (1956), p. 40.

but for the most part he preached from individual texts, expounding them with careful reasoning and flowing oratory. During the week he gave regular Bible readings, and at one period lectured on "Socinianism". This was in reply to twelve "Challenge Lectures" given in 1823 by Charles Berry of the Great Meeting (the centre of socinianism in the town). Hall's reply consisted of twelve lectures given in Harvey Lane chapel, opposing the socinian arguments.[1] Crowds thronged to hear him and he was urged to publish the lectures. He refused, on the grounds that he had said nothing new and that there were already books which contained the substance of his argument.[2] Wide as their theological differences were, Charles Berry and Robert Hall remained good friends, and when Hall's statue was unveiled in Leicester in 1871 Charles Berry, then an old man of eighty-eight, paid a fine tribute to his former opponent.[3]

A second feature of Hall's preaching at Leicester was its increasing evangelical emphasis. This was largely due to his experiences in the period 1804-1809, when his mental breakdowns and subsequent doubts and depression had severely tested his faith; but it emerged stronger than before. This was

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1. MSS notes of these lectures by John Ryley are in Bristol Baptist College Library; see also Works V, p. 14 ff.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 94. Morris's Recollections, p. 332.
3. Memoir of Charles Berry (1783-1877), p. 1 (author unknown).

reflected in his preaching. In a letter to his friend, Newton Bosworth of Cambridge, he said, "When I recollect the course of my ministry at Cambridge I feel continual matter of condemnation. 'Do you preach better now, then?' you will perhaps say. In one respect I do not preach half so well. I do not bestow near so much attention on my composition, but I trust I do insist on more interesting and evangelical topics. A greater savour of Jesus Christ does, I trust, breathe through my ministry, in which it was formerly greatly deficient."[1]

The effect of his preaching continued to be remarkable. When, for example, he was preaching at Cambridge, during a summer excursion there, he drew his sermon to close by uttering a short ejaculatory prayer. At once the whole congregation rose from their seats. Hall was taken by surprise for a moment, and then continued his sermon for about twenty minutes "in such a strain of magnificent and overwhelming eloquence" that the congregation remained standing to the end.[2] On a visit to Bristol he preached on the text "Dead in trespasses and sins". The moment he delivered the last sentence, such was the tension in the church that Dr. Ryland hurried to the pulpit and, with tears in his eyes, called out vehemently "Let all that are alive in Jerusalem pray for the dead that

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1. Works V, p. 483.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 56 (note).

they may live!"[1] Scenes of this nature appear to have been frequent, but it must be said to Hall's credit that he never became proud, despite all the praise that came to him. His attitude is reflected in the answer he gave a friend who had been praising him for a sermon he had preached. "Yes, sir, yes," said Hall, "the Lord was with me on that day."[2]

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 56 (note); see also Morris's Recollections, p. 249.
2. North British Review VII - November, 1845, p. 64.

XIII. IN THE STUDY

In order to sustain his preaching ministry Hall, throughout his Leicester pastorate, continued to be a diligent reader. Regularly he studied the works of Plato, Homer, Aristotle and Cicero. F. A. Cox, the Baptist minister at Hackney, reported that he examined Hall's copy of Plato "which everywhere bore the marks of a studious perusal, by frequent observations in the margin. The Iliad and Odyssey were repeatedly and diligently examined."[1] He also read many of the puritan writings. He was particularly fond of the works of John Howe and Richard Baxter, but thought Owen "intolerably heavy and prolix".[2] The works of Jonathan Edwards still gave him "undiminished pleasure"[3], as did Chillingworth's Religion of the Protestants.[4] He read the Bible daily in the original languages and studied some French commentaries on the works of Jeremy Bentham.[5] Evidence of Hall's wide reading is seen in his Terms of Communion, where he quotes from many of the early Fathers such as Chrysostom, Eusebius, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Cyprian, Augustine, Austin and Irenaeus. In addition to this, just before he left Leicester (i.e. when he was about sixty years of

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1. North British Review - November, 1845, p. 70.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 120.
3. Ibid, p. 99.
4. Hall's copy of Chillingworth is in the Bristol Baptist College Library.
5. Gregory's Memoir, p. 99.

age) he began the study of Italian. A comment in the Edinburgh Review about Dante caught his attention and, as he said to a friend, "I always like to judge for myself and so I have been studying Italian. I have caught the idiom and am reading Dante with great relish."[1]

In 1817 Aberdeen University conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. The records of the University for 4th September, 1817, state:

"The Faculty, taking into account his acknowledged merits, both as an eloquent preacher and as an excellent writer on theological subjects, and having likewise ascertained by undoubted evidence, particularly that of Dr. Olinthus Gregory, at present in this city, the amiable private character of the said gentleman, unanimously resolve . . . to confer on him the degree of D.D."[2]

Hall was not the least impressed with the honour. He had decided objections to using the title and wrote to a friend that he believed such an honour encouraged vanity, was "abhorrent from the simplicity of the Gospel", and was "bestowed with such a total want of discrimination" that it could never "add an atom to the reputation of any man who deserved it".[3]

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1. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 91; see also Edinburgh Review July, 1833, p. 427 (note).
2. Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis, ed. P. J. Anderson (1898), Vol. II, p. 90.
3. MSS letter to Dr. Newman in Bristol Baptist College Library, dated March, 1818.

His fame attracted many visitors to his Leicester home. He was always delighted to see old friends, but often strangers, on the slightest pretext, came to see him. They generally interrupted his study and bored him exceedingly. For many years he treated these callers with courtesy, but as he grew older he found their interruptions increasingly irksome. "The greatest annoyance of my life," he wrote, "has arisen from not being able to command my time, particularly in the morning; . . . the afternoon and evening I have always been willing to abandon to the use of others; but to have no time to call my own - to be liable to have the most precious hours of reading and meditation snatched from me - is an evil, to one of my temperament almost insupportable."[1] In 1817 he removed to a house just outside the town to be free from interruptions, but visitors continued to call. Latterly, he was sometimes irritable and rude. One morning, for example, he was engaged in private prayer in his study. The door was locked as a sign that he did not wish to be interrupted but one of the servants, ignoring the locked door, began to knock with growing urgency. Hall got up and angrily opened the door. His anger was increased when he discovered that a messenger had come with a greeting from his friend, James Phillips of Clapham, who was passing through the town. It was not an urgent matter and

1. Works V, p. 550. cf. Gregory's Memoir, p. 83 (note): Morris's Recollections, pp. 343-4.

Hall sharply sent the messenger on her way. His irritation soon passed and, regretting his rudeness, he wrote a letter to James Phillips, confessing "my conduct was not such as ought to have been shown to anyone; much less to a domestic of yours. . . . I was visibly pettish and chagrined". He went on to explain. "Sometimes the incessant interruptions I meet with, by people calling from a distance, is such, especially in summer, as to leave no time at all, sometimes not half-an-hour a day, that I can call my own. This operating upon a mind fond of retirement to an excess sometimes almost drives me to distraction."[1]

Despite the annoyance of frequent interruptions, Hall thoroughly enjoyed the company of friends, and his sparkling conversation became famous. The subjects for talk ranged widely over politics, law, architecture, philosophy, theology and a host of other topics.[2] George Gilfillan, a well-known critic of the day, wrote that "ministers from all quarters called to see the lion of Leicester and tried to tempt him to roar with such questions as 'whether do you think, Mr. Hall, Cicero or Demosthenes the greatest orator? Was Burke the author of Junius? Whether is Bentham or Wilberforce the leading spirit of the age?' . . . Many of his visitors, too, were really distinguished men and were sure when they

1. Works V, p. 507.
2. Gregory's Memoir, p. 117 ff.

returned home to circulate his repartees and spread abroad his fame."[1]

Many stories were circulated about Hall's gift of sarcastic repartee. One Sunday he had some fellow-ministers laughing heartily over a story he had told: but one of the company, remaining aloof from the merriment, remarked "I am surprised, Mr. Hall, you should indulge in such levity, after the very impressive discourse you have given us this morning." "Oh, sir," Hall replied, "both of us talk nonsense occasionally, the only difference between us is that you talk yours in the pulpit."[2] On another occasion, at the close of a service a very pompous preacher asked Hall's opinion of the sermon. "There was one very fine passage, sir," said Hall. "I rejoice to hear you say so," replied the preacher, eagerly. "Pray, sir, what was it?" "Why, sir," answered Hall, "it was the passage from the pulpit to the vestry."[3]

From these illustrations it is obvious that Hall's wit could at times pierce to the quick, and some people thought he was too free with his sarcasms.[4] While this appears to be a fair judgment, many friends pointed out that Hall's "withering sarcasm" - as J. P. Mursell called it[5] - was only aimed at

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1. G. Gilfillan: Galleries of Literary Portraits (1856), Vol. II, p. 253.
2. J. P. Mursell: Robert Hall, his genius and writings (1854), p. 31. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 194.
3. S. A. Swaine: Faithful Men, p. 113. For another good example see Gregory's Memoir, p. 50.
4. Newton Bosworth: Sermon on the death of Hall, p. 42. J. Hughes: Sermon on the death of Hall, p. 37.
5. J. P. Mursell: Inaugural address at the unveiling of the Statue of Robert Hall (1865), p. 6.

pompous and conceited people, and the overwhelming impression he gave in private was not sarcasm but cheerful wit and robust humour. Newton Bosworth said "he had a strong sense of the humorous"[1]; J. P. Mursell spoke of his "scintillations of wit"[2]; F. A. Cox wrote of his "innocent merriment and jocularity"[3], and it is as a humorist rather than as a satirist that his friends remembered him.

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1. Newton Bosworth: Sermon on the Death of Hall, p. 42.
2. J. P. Mursell: Sermon on the Death of Hall, p. 35.
3. North British Review - November, 1845, p. 65.

XIV. IN THE HOME

Hall's marriage in 1808 made a great difference to his domestic life. After his marriage, as Gregory pointed out, "his domestic comfort at once contributed to a more uniform flow of spirits than he had for some time experienced, and greatly to the regularity of his habits".[1]

His children were all born at Leicester. He had three daughters and two sons. Eliza, the eldest, was born in 1809; Jane, the second daughter, was born in 1810, and his first son, Robert, in 1813, but after nine months the child became suddenly ill and died. This was a great blow to Hall. He sat by the coffin of the child for hours on end, and friends found him almost inconsolable. Then suddenly he shook himself free of gloom and stated his determination to preach as usual on the Sunday. The Christian, he felt, ought to show an example of faith; so, laying aside all mourning, he went into the pulpit and preached on the certainty of the blessedness of children who die in infancy. His conviction was that if you could not speak of infants being "saved" in the fullest sense, there was no doubt that they were "safe". Many of the congregation that Sunday testified to the benefit they received from the sermon.[2]

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 82.
2. Morris's Recollections, p. 290 ff.

Not long after the death of Robert, another son was born. He also was named Robert. Mrs. Hall was dangerously ill at his birth, and it was an anxious time for the family[1], but she recovered, and four years later, in 1818, gave birth to a third daughter, Mary. The family seemed to have been very happy, but as the children grew Hall became concerned about their spiritual state. In 1816 he wrote to Dr. Ryland: "I already begin to feel the spiritual interests of my dear children a frequent source of painful solicitude. Let me beg an interest in your prayers for their conversion."[2]

The family had its adventures. One winter's night burglars broke into the house and stole some valuables from a room on the ground floor. Fearing their return, Hall armed himself with pistols and, hearing a noise during the night, fired from his bedroom window, and later searched the premises, but no-one was to be seen. For several nights he watched for the intruders, but without result.[3] On another occasion he heard someone moving very quietly in the house at a very late hour. Hall was a tall, well-built man, and, springing out of bed, he grappled with the intruder and dragged him to the ground, pleading for mercy. He turned out to be a friend of one of the servants who, staying long after hours, was trying to

1. Works V, p. 487.
2. Works V, p. 506.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 345.

slip away without being heard.[1] Hall's great fear of burglars probably derived from his experience as a lad at Arnesby, when a neighbour was nearly murdered by a thief.[2]

His life at Leicester was, unfortunately, marred by the continued agony of pains in his back. He could not sleep properly at night and he often got relief by lying on the floor or on three chairs. He once said that for more than twenty years he never knew the pleasure of a complete night's rest.[3] John Greene saw him writing a letter while lying full length of the floor - it was the most comfortable position for him.[4] The cause of this pain, which troubled him from childhood, was renal calculus, i.e. stones in the kidney. This disease produces a continuous dull ache in the back, which at intervals merges into bouts of agonizing pain. A series of letters which he wrote in 1812 describes the severity of his agony.

29th February, 1812. "My old complaint has grown upon me so much of late that it is with great difficulty I can go on with my stated work. I have been for some time under the necessity of taking fifty, and sometimes a hundred, drops of laudanum every night, in order to procure any rest. The pain has been both violent and very nearly constant."[5]

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1. Morris's Recollections, pp. 345-6.
2. See page 20 of this Thesis.
3. Gregory's Memoir, p. 103 (note).
4. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 138.
5. Works V, p. 475.

29th March, 1812. "I am ready to suspect that the complaint under which I have so long laboured is intended to 'weaken my strength by the way' and, at no great distance, to bring me to 'the house appointed for all living'. The pain is almost incessant and often so violent as to put my patience to its utmost exercise."[1]

16th April, 1812. "I have little doubt, unless my malady takes a favourable turn, it will, ere it be long, reduce me to the dust. . . . I presume the Lord sees I require more hammering and hewing than almost any other stone that was ever selected for his spiritual building, and that is the secret reason of his dealings with me."[2]

Hall recovered from this attack but there were many other similar bouts. In 1816, for example, he had to stop preaching for a month. Special prayer was made for him and anxious enquirers called at his home. Looking back on the experience, he wrote of having "met with awful momentos of my latter end".[3] There was no known cure for his kidney complaint and relief was only obtainable through drugs.[4] Hall took laudanum and opium, but only at times of acute pain; yet his addiction to these drugs was such that in the closing years of his life he could

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1. Works V, p. 477.
2. Works V, p. 479.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 305 ff. Works V, p. 510.
4. Renal Calculus is still recognized as one of the most painful of all afflictions, but it can now be cured by operation.

take, without any serious effects, a dose which would be lethal for ordinary people.[1] Laudanum and opium are drugs which produce a state of depression, dreaminess and lack of concentration, and when this is taken into account, together with the recurring bouts of agony, Hall's achievements at Leicester are all the more remarkable.

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1. Gregory's Memoir, p. 109.

XV. IN THE HARVEY LANE CHURCH

Hall was very happy with the church at Harvey Lane. Despite his growing prestige and fame he never appears to have taken advantage of his position, and humility and tolerance marked all his relationships with the church.

Anxious to improve the spiritual tone of the congregation, he suggested in 1814 that a quarterly day of prayer and fasting be arranged in the church. This was approved, and the practice continued for several years. The day commenced at 9 o'clock in the morning, and included sessions of prayer conducted by the minister and elders. These prayer sessions were interspersed with discussions on personal spiritual experience. J. W. Morris, Hall's biographer, wrote that "these were seasons of great refreshment to the worthy pastor, who found in them an opportunity of ascertaining the state of his flock, the tone of religious feeling which prevailed among them, and of seeing the fruit of his own labour".[1] In addition to these quarterly fast days, there was a prayer meeting every Sunday evening, which Hall regularly attended.[2]

As far as his pastoral work was concerned, Hall regularly visited his congregation and made a special point of calling on

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 426. cf. Gregory's Memoir, p. 93.
2. Ibid, p. 432.

the poorer members.[1] J. P. Mursell (Hall's successor at Harvey Lane) recalled a visit to one old member. They chatted amicably for a few minutes and, seeing that she was busy, Mursell prepared to leave, saying, "We'll have a word of prayer at a more convenient season"; but he never forgot the reply he received, "Mr. Hall, he used to come and see me, and he never went away without a word of prayer. He'd sit upon a lump of coal and smoke his pipe and then kneel down and pray against the wash-tub as if it had been an altar."[2]

Hall's tolerance endeared him to many of his people. At baptismal services, although declaring his conviction that believers' baptism was the scriptural ordinance, he never paraded his views "with an air of triumph", but always in a spirit of tolerance.[3] This spirit is also seen in his willingness, in addition to the ordinary Communion Services, to conduct a regular Communion Service for the paedo-baptists who attended at Harvey Lane. Then, at the prayer meetings, one old gentleman used to pray at length for the minister, often rebuking him for imagined heresy and imploring God's mercy upon him. Hall took it in good humour and sometimes said "Amen" to the petitions that were made.[4] He also had difficulty with the old precentor at Harvey Lane, who had a coarse voice and

1. Morris's Recollections, p. 421.
2. A. Mursell: J. P. Mursell, his life and work (1886), p. 76.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 423.
4. Morris's Recollections, pp. 432-3.

irritating manner - so much so that many of the members were anxious to get rid of him, but Hall had not the heart to dismiss the old man who had served the church faithfully for many years. When the precentor heard that Hall had intervened on his behalf he was naturally delighted, and on the following Sunday opened the service by announcing a hymn by Isaac Watts, the first verse of which he read out with great enthusiasm:-

"Now shall my head be lifted high
Above my foes around,
And songs of joy and victory
Within Thy temple sound."

This greatly appealed to Hall's sense of humour and he used to say that the effect of these words on the church was indescribable.[1]

In the matter of church discipline Hall's tolerance is also noticeable. He believed in the necessity for discipline,[2] but while the neighbouring Friar Lane General Baptist Church was excommunicating members for trivial offences like attending the races or the theatre[3] Hall was persuading the Harvey Lane church to be more lenient in its judgments. Apart from serious moral lapses, it was only after a year's absence from Communion that a person was struck off the roll at Harvey Lane.[4] There are few records of such disciplinary measures being necessary, but on the one occasion of which we have details it so split the church that it led to Hall's resignation.

1. Morris's Recollections, p. 341. cf. Greene's Reminiscences, p. 92.
2. T. Grinfield: Sermon Notes, p. 425. Works II, p. 124.
3. J. W. Smith: History of Friar Lane General Baptist Church (1896), p. 55.
4. Morris's Recollections, p. 430.

XVI. LEAVING LEICESTER

In 1824 a clear case of dishonesty had been proved against one of the church members and, after much debate, it was decided to expel him from the church. Hall gravely announced the church's decision from the pulpit. The friends of the guilty member felt that Hall had been too severe, and by announcing the matter from the pulpit had given it unnecessary publicity. Anonymous letters were sent to him and garbled statements were made to the local press; but Hall felt that enough had already been said and refused to reply to his critics. Lack of detailed information makes it difficult to decide the rights and wrongs of the case, but there was so much argument and division in the church that Hall began to wonder if the time had come for him to leave Leicester.[1] In this frame of mind he went to Bristol in 1825 to preach at the funeral of John Ryland[2], and in the course of conversation with his Bristol friends he mentioned the uneasy situation at Leicester. They at once thought it a good opportunity to sound him about succeeding Dr. Ryland at Broadmead Baptist Church, and later sent him a formal invitation.[3] When Hall received this he did not know what to decide and replied asking for time to consider the matter; but, fearing he would refuse, a deputation

1. Morris's Recollections, pp. 438-440.
2. For details of this funeral see Broadmead Document Book, folio 138.
3. Broadmead Records III, p. 159.

came from Bristol to press home their invitation.[1]

Meanwhile, the Harvey Lane deacons summoned a church meeting and, in August, 1825, they assured Hall of their united support and entreated him not to leave. A similar assurance came from the paedo-baptists with whom Hall had shared communion; and then a group of friends, including a number of the leading citizens of Leicester, offered to build a new church of an interdenominational nature if Hall would consent to stay in the town as its minister.[2] Such was the pressure of appeals from Leicester for him to stay that Hall found it impossible to reach a decision. In October he wrote again to Broadmead Baptist Church, asking for more time to consider their invitation. He talked with his friends about it. He wrote down all the points in favour of Bristol and then all the points in favour of Leicester, but the two sides about balanced and he was no nearer a decision.[3] For months he vacillated and then, in December, made up his mind. A few days before Christmas he wrote to Broadmead, "After long and mature deliberation and earnest prayer I write these lines to inform you that I accept the invitation you have been pleased to give me to the pastoral office." He went on to stipulate that he would only come for one year, after which he would decide whether to continue or

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1. Morris's Recollections, p. 442.
2. Ibid, p. 444.
3. Greene's Reminiscences, pp. 143-145.

not.[1] At the same time, he wrote to his brother-in-law, Isaac James, "I feel, my dear brother, an awful sense of the importance of the step I have taken, and of the weighty responsibility with which it is fraught. When I consider the eminent character of that man of God whom I am to succeed, no words can express the sense of deficiency I feel. . . . My greatest consolation springs from my consciousness that as I did not seek the situation so in all the preliminary steps I have most earnestly implored the Divine direction."[2]

The news of Hall's decision soon became known in Leicester and for several days he was besieged by callers imploring him not to leave; but his decision was definite and he intended it to be final.[3] In anticipation of leaving he arranged to sell some of his furniture and possessions, and an auction was held at his home in Prebend Place on the London Road. (Included in the catalogue were the following items:- "Rich china and glass, Carey's map of the world, very handsome refracting 28" telescope complete, brewing vessels".[4])

His last Sunday was 26th March, 1826 - a day on which he had previously agreed to preach for the Baptist Missionary Society[5]. The church was crowded and the morning congregation

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1. Works V, p. 553.
2. T. Grinfield: Sermon Notes, p. 483.
3. Morris's Recollections, p. 447.
4. Leicester Journal - 17th March and 24th March, 1826.
5. Leicester Journal - 24th March and 7th April, 1826.

included "several persons of rank and title, and some sportsmen belonging to the chase". At the close of the Service five persons were baptized. In the afternoon Hall gave an address on behalf of the Missionary Society and then welcomed into membership those who had been baptized in the morning. A Communion Service followed, at which Hall prayed most earnestly for the church, but by the close of his prayer neither he nor the congregation could restrain their emotion and with eyes filled with tears he sat down. However, with the help of Eustace Carey he managed to complete the Service, and, amid a tearful congregation, made his farewells.[1]

The following Tuesday, 28th March, he received a letter signed by twenty-five ministers from the district, of various denominations, who thanked him for his kindness and courtesy and expressed their appreciation of the work he had done at Leicester. The next day he left for Bristol. He had ministered at Harvey Lane for eighteen-and-a-half years, and at the age of nearly sixty-two was setting out on a new task in the same church where he had begun his ministry forty-two years earlier.

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1. Reports of the Services are given in Morris's Recollections, pp. 447-9. and Gregory's Memoir, pp. 95-6.

PART V.

BRISTOL 1826 - 1831.

I. RETURN to BROADMEAD.

Broadmead Baptist Church, when Hall came to it, in 1826, was well-hidden from the public gaze. It lay between Broadmead and the Haymarket, and access to it was along narrow passages from the main streets. But it was well-known in Bristol and had, for long, been the centre of nonconformity in the city. Inside the church a visitor would have noticed "the venerable aspect of the place, with its four massive columns supporting the roof, the simplicity of its arrangements, the air of respectability pervading the congregation and their quiet, devout demeanour."[1]

Compared with Harvey Lane, Hall found the congregation to be wealthier and better educated. Among the members were R.B. Sherring, a prosperous business man: James Livett, a lawyer: J.M. Chandler, a doctor: William Anderson, a tutor at Bristol Baptist College, and many other professional men. In a letter written a few months after his settlement at Bristol, Hall said, "I certainly find the society of this place more intelligent and more polished, and in this respect superior to Leicester. Not that they have more native talent, perhaps on the whole less, but a far greater proportion of them are in easy circumstances, and therefore have more leisure for reading and conversation."[2]

At first, Hall stayed with his brother-in-law, Isaac James, in Deighton Street, but within a few weeks moved to his own house in Ashley Place about a mile from the church.[3] Hall's fame

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1. Trestrail's Reminiscences p.152.
2. Morris Recollections p. 459
3. Greene's Reminiscences p.160.

preceded him and the services at Broadmead were always crowded. He wrote in a letter, "The congregation is quite as numerous as I wish. We are well attended in the morning and in the evening, very full, so that seats are placed in the aisles."[1]

There was one aspect of Bristol life which gave Hall much pleasure. This was his contacts with the students of the Baptist College. Every Sunday, whenever possible, they attended the services at Broadmead and were given good seats in the church. Some members felt that too much attention was paid to the students, but, overhearing a remark of this kind, Hall at once turned to the speaker and said, "I am surprised at such a remark from you, Sir, ... Under God, the students are the hope of the denomination. If I have any influence, Sir, they shall have the best seats in the place; and when there, Sir, I would cover them over with cloth of gold."[2] He made a point of welcoming new students and would invite them to his home for supper on Sunday evenings where he encouraged the freest talk. On one occasion, William Anderson, a tutor at the College, became rather officious at one of these supper parties and Hall bluntly told him, "We will drop the tutor here, Sir, if you please."[3] One of the students, describing these evenings, said "The conversation was full of life and spirit, touching on a vast variety of topics, but scarcely ever falling into lengthened argument or discussion, - Wit and humour, facts and

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1. Morris Recollections p.459
2. Trestrail's Reminiscences p.50
3. IBID p.51

anecdotes, repartee and joke - sometimes producing peals of laughter, at other times moving to tears - were wonderfully mingled together ..... We sometimes speak of 'red letter days'; these were certainly red-letter nights!"[1]

Another contact Hall had with the students was at the Tuesday evening "conference". This was a weekly meeting held in the Broadmead Church Vestry at which the students took it in turns to preach a sermon. A box was placed at the door into which anyone could drop a note of a text of Scripture. At the end of each "conference", the box was brought to Hall who selected a subject for the following week. The attendances at these meetings averaged two hundred and included many of the prominent Broadmead members. Hall used to sit at a table alongside Thomas Crisp, the president of the Baptist College, and two of the deacons of the Church. It was a trying ordeal for the students, but Hall, no doubt remembering his own failure as a student, was most sympathetic. He would listen carefully to the sermons and then, while sitting in his chair leaning on top of his staff, would tactfully add his comments.[2] Among the students who enjoyed Hall's friendship at this time were John Leechman who became a missionary in India; J.E. Giles, later a nonconformist leader in Leeds; J.P. Mursell who succeeded Hall at Harvey Lane, Leicester, Francis Clowes who was to become an editor of The Freeman; Frederick Trestrail, secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society from 1849 to 1870; and Benjamin Davies

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1. IBID p. 77

2. Trestrails Reminiscences p. 42: cf Gregory's Memoir p.102.

who became principal of Stepney Academy (later to become Regents' Park College, Oxford).[1]

Besides this work among the students, Hall continued to support all the causes which had interested him so much at Leicester. His interest in education was strengthened by his close association with Bristol Baptist College, and he collaborated with John Foster, the essayist and fellow Baptist minister, in advocating an annual collection in every Baptist church for the work of the Colleges.[2] His enthusiasm for penal reform continued unabated and at a service in Broadmead Baptist Church, he spoke so strongly against the death penalty for forgery that large numbers crowded into the vestry to sign a petition.[3] Reform of Parliament still had his support but he avoided the noisy reform meetings which were then disrupting Bristol society. "Our city," he wrote in a letter, "is much agitated by political discussion and the strife of parties. A meeting was lately held of the friends of reform, to petition on its behalf; but it was stormy and tempestuous.....Such, of late, has been the general character of public meetings at Bristol. For my part, I never attend them."[4] Nevertheless while shunning such meetings, Hall expressed his continued agreement with reform by signing petitions in its favour.[5] He continued also to speak against slavery and urged his Broadmead congregation to work for its abolition.[6]

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1. Swaine: Faithful Men p. 311 ff.
2. MSS. Letter dated 3 Feb. 1829 in Bristol Baptist College Library.
3. Trestrail's Reminiscences p. 88.
4. WORKS V p.566-7
5. Morris: Recollections p. 417
6. Baptist Magazine July 1830 p.294/5. Trestrails' Reminiscences p. 85 ff.: Private Papers of Wm. Wilberforce (1897) p.231-2

The Bible Society was another cause which still held his interest and occasionally he preached for the local auxiliary.[1] As for the poor, Hall's interest in them seemed to grow with the years. In his sermons he advocated abetter standard of living for the working-classes[2] and such was his concern for them that he regularly invited the poorer members of the church to his home for dinner.

On one occasion his guests were Mrs. Thomas, the church caretaker, and "Blind Jones"[3], one of the church workers amongst the poor, together with their friends. Blind Jones later told Frederick Trestrail about it. "Why you see, Mr. Trestrail, we went up early, but of course did not go to the front door. So after we had been some time in the kitchen, I heard Mr. Hall asking whether we were come. Finding we had, he came down, and taking us by the hand, he said, 'Mr. Jones, this is quite wrong. You should have come to the front door, Sir. You are to dine with us Sir. You and your friends are our guests. Pray walk up Mr. Jones.' and we did!"[4]

In his own home Hall was very happy. When he came to Bristol his eldest daughter Eliza was seventeen years old, Jane was sixteen and Robert was just a lad of twelve. The youngest child, Mary was only eight and was an invalid nearly all her life. It is not clear what her affliction was, but she had a talent for music and often entertained guests by singing Scots songs to them.[5] The daily life of the home has been given in detail by Gregory in his Memoir, but one thing is obvious, Hall's devotional life was now of more and more

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1. The Hall Family p.92.
2. WORKS VI p.454
3. A portrait of Blind Jones can still be seen in the vestry of Broadmead Baptist Church.
4. Trestrail's Reminiscences p.142-3.
5. For details of the family see Trestrail's Reminiscences p.147, and The Hall Family p.103.

importance to him. Daily prayer and Bible reading were never omitted and sometimes a whole day would be put aside for prayer and fasting. Mrs. Hall admitted to a friend that her husband's "devotional habits were extraordinary" and told how a servant had once come into her room "almost breathless and greatly excited". On enquiring the reason, the girl replied, "Oh Ma'am, I never heard such a man as my master. I have just passed the study door and heard him pray. Oh Ma'am, I can never forget it."[1]

As each birthday came round, Hall re-dedicated himself to God. On May 2nd 1828, for example, he wrote "This day I commence my 64th year. What reason have I to look with shame and humiliation on so long a tract of years spent to so little purpose. Alas! I am ashamed of my barrenness and unprofitableness. Assist me, O Lord, by Thy grace, that I may spend the short residue of my days in a more entire devotion to Thy service. It is my purpose in the strength of divine grace, to take a more minute inspection into the state of my heart, and the tenour of my actions, and to make such observations and memorandums as circumstances may suggest. But, to thee, O Lord, do I look for all spiritual strength, to keep Thy way, and do Thy will".[2]

Hall's work at Bristol was, however, increasingly restricted by declining health. Almost as soon as he reached the town his

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1. Robert Hall as a man of prayer: Anonymous Tract published by the Baptist Tract Repository. (A copy is in Bristol Baptist College Library)

2. Gregory's Memoir p.104. Hall appears to have made a slight error in the calculation of his age. He was actually commencing his 65th year.

health took a turn for the worse and ominous signs of heart failure appeared. Severe pains in his chest cramped his breathing. His eyesight deteriorated, and, for reading, he had to use spectacles. He could not walk without taking frequent rests and when he came down from the pulpit after preaching he often had to lie down and rest![1] Sometimes he had to have a carriage to take him to church[2] and visiting his congregation became difficult. This difficulty was partly overcome by encouraging the members to gather at one house so that he could meet them the more easily. On most evenings therefore, a carriage would take Hall to the house of one of the members where he would stay from 6 o'clock until 10 o'clock talking together over cups of tea with groups of his friends.[3]

II PREACHING

Hall's reputation as a preacher had become so assured by the close of his Leicester pastorate, that at Bristol he always had great crowds flocking to hear him. A year after his settlement he wrote to John Greene, "Our congregations continue very good, rather increasing than otherwise."[4] Two years later he was able to say "I continue to be very happy with my people, from whom I daily receive every demonstration of affection and respect. Our attendance is as good as I could wish....."[5] Before he had been settled

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1. Morris' Recollections p.459 and p.473.
2. An account for the cost of carriage is preserved in the Broadmead Documents Book, folio 138.
3. Gregory's memoir p.102: Morris Recollections p.460.
4. Greene's Reminiscences p.185.
5. Gregory's Memoir p.97.

three years he had baptized about a hundred people from many grades of society. One of the baptismal services included a lad of thirteen, an old woman of seventy-five, a wealthy lady, a domestic servant, a convert from socinianism and another from atheism.[1] His preaching was noted by John Foster, the essayist, who frequently mentioned Hall's ministry in letters. In 1826 he referred to "the admirable sermons of Mr. Hall which I have heard each Sunday evening." In 1827 he wrote "Hall is still, in our sort of circle, the great primary object to talk of and to hear talk, whether in his public or private positions." Two years later, Foster wrote that Hall "must have a most important effect on the rising race of educated and enquiring persons."[2]

His sermons still seemed to have an astonishing effect. At one service in Broadmead in September 1829 the gas lighting began to fade early in the service until the church was almost completely dark, but Hall continued preaching. His subject was "Points of agreement in the state of the rich and poor." He described the inequalities of the rich and poor in this life and then went on to show that in the presence of death and divine judgement they were on common ground. His oratory was rising in power and brilliance and in the semi-darkness it was all the more impressive. He eventually reached a climax and called out vehemently, "They shall meet together in death and judgement". At that moment the lighting was suddenly increased and the church was flooded with light. "Had

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1. Morris Recollections p.478
2. The Life and Correspondence of John Foster (ed. Ryland) Vol.II p.107.

the affair been previously arranged", wrote Trestrail, "it could not have been more artistic or better timed." Hall seemed to emerge from the darkness with his face glowing. He was startled for a moment, then repeated with great earnestness "Yes, my brethren, they will meet together in death and judgement." Many of the congregation, moved with emotion, stood up gazing in awe at the preacher. Trestrail wrote afterwards, "I had the privelege of hearing other sermons of singular eloquence and power ..... but none have left an impression so indelible and so deep."[1]

Another extraordinary sermon was based on the text, "Beloved, now we are the sons of God." A visiting clergyman said he had never heard anything like it and that he could hardly tell whether he was in the body or out of it. Some persons, it was said, were taken ill by the emotional impact of the service. A doctor claimed that he did not recover until 3 o'clock on the monday afternoon. Greene declared, "I did not recover from the effects before Wednesday". When Hall heard about the effect of this sermon, he was most surprised. "I was not aware of anything remarkable in it," he said. "I should have thought you very candid, Sir, if you had told me that it was an inferior sermon."[2]

Distinguished visitors continued to come and hear him. Among them were Dr. Thomas Chalmers,[3] Dr. Sprague of New York,[4] Henry

1. Trestrail's Reminiscences p.158: WORKS VI p.446 ff
2. Greene's Reminiscences p.200-202
3. Trestrail's Reminiscences p.139.
4. Gregory's Memoir p.135 (note).

Brougham,[1] Sir James Mackintosh,[1] Sydney Smith (editor of the Edinburgh Review),[2] William Wilberforce,[3] and Daniel Wilson (later Bishop of Calcutta.[4]). One visitor noticed at a service "an Irish Bishop, A Dean, and thirteen clergymen".[5]

When health would allow, Hall responded to invitations to preach in other places. For example, he was the chief speaker at the opening of the English Baptist Church at Newport in June 1829,[6] and in 1830, at the ordination of Henry Frend at Bridgewater.[7] He helped the church at York Street, Bath,[8] and preached at many of the local churches in and around Bristol.[9] He ventured further afield in June 1827 when he preached in London for the Baptist Missionary Society. It was reported that the Great Queen Street Chapel, Lincoln's Inn, "was beseiged at a very early hour, and ultimately it was crowded to excess".[10] Two days later he preached at Mare Street Chapel, Hackney, on behalf of Bristol Baptist College. Among those present were "the right honourable the Lord Mayor, Mr. Brougham, Dr. Birkbeck, Dr. Gregory, Counsellor Gurney etc."[11] In the evening he preached at

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1. J.F. Nichols and J. Taylor: Bristol, past and present (1881) p.292.
2. Trestrail's Reminiscences p.56: cf. Bristol Journal 10th Feb.1828.
3. Private Papers of Wm. Wilberforce ed. A.M. Wilberforce (1897) p.231/2.
4. The Hall Family p.90.
5. J. Cottle. Early Recollections Vol. I p.104 (note).
6. Baptist Magazine Oct. 1829 p.436.
7. IBID (Supplement) 1830 p.575.
8. P. Cater: Sermon on death of Hall p.1.
9. T. Grinfield Sermon Notes p.474 ff.
10. The Pulpit June 28th 1827.
11. IBID. June 30th 1827 p.348.

Camberwell where there were some riotous scenes among the crowds who gathered. A magazine correspondent explained that Hall's visit "had been announced from many pulpits and made very public by numerous advertisements. The public curiosity was excited and christians of different denominations crowded to the place. But, lo and behold! great oaken posts were driven into the ground, stout rails were put up, and four police officers were stationed at the doors, who had strict orders not to allow any to pass who had not tickets. As these same tickets were issued, not for the accomodation of Mr. Steames' regular hearers and members, but for the accomodation of strangers, the consequence was that the chapel was crowded before the front doors were opened, and then a large crowd consisting of many hundreds, females and others, were told in mockery that they could not enter. Hundreds were of course disappointed..... we hope never to witness so disgraceful a scene at any place of religious worship".[1]

Three months later Hall visited Leicester and had long conversations with J.P. Mursell who had just been inducted to the work at Harvey Lane.[2] He then went on to Cambridge where crowds thronged the church in St. Andrew's Street to hear him. People travelled from London and so great were the crowds that the windows were opened so that those unable to get inside the church could hear something of the service. He preached also at Royston and Melbourne. Lord Dacre a well-known land-owner of the county, was so impressed with Hall's preaching that he invited Hall to visit him.[3] On the last Sunday

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1. The Pulpit June 30 1827 p.348

2. Morris: Recollections p. 473: Gregory's Memoir p. 98.

3. Morris: Recollections p. 462.

evening of this visit to Cambridge the church was so crammed with people that props were placed under the gallery as a precaution against accident. Every seat was taken and people stood in the aisles, shoulder to shoulder until there was hardly a space left. Hundreds could not get in and crowded round the windows. Hall, after having great difficulty in reaching the pulpit, preached on the text "Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners" (I Cor. 15[33]). On the way home after the service he told John Greene that he had never witnessed such a scene before. "On reaching the pulpit, it was almost terrific. I could not see the bodies of the people, they appeared all heads, Sir - a mass of inextinguishable heads: and all eyes were fixed upon me Sir."[1]

Hall had very definite views concerning the preachers' task. He particularly disliked the constant use of "pious phrases" which characterised much of the preaching of the day; and all his life he protested against the use of a technical vocabulary of religion which the mass of ordinary people could not understand. In 1805, he wrote, "The superabundance of phrases appropriated by pious authors to the subject of religion, ... has not only the effect of disgusting persons of taste, but of obscuring religion itself."[2] He wrote vehemently against a religious phraseology which is "regarded with a mystic awe, insomuch that if a writer expressed the very same ideas in different phrases, he would be condemned as aheretic. To quit the

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1. Greene's Reminiscences p. 178: cf. Morris' Recollections p.461.

2. WORKS IV p.26.

magical circle of words, in which many christians suffer themselves to be confined, excites as great a clamour as the boldest innovation in sentiment ..... In defiance of the dictates of candour and good sense, these phrases have been obstinately retained, and have usually been the refuge of ignorance, the apple of discord, and the watchwords of religious hostility."[1] In 1815 he urged his nephew J.K. Hall, to "avoid all canting and hypocrytical terms and phrases".[2] Four years later he was still complaining that "the slightest deviation from the consecrated diction comes to be viewed with suspicion and alarm."[3]

Hall's own preaching - or so his admirers claimed - followed the advice he gave to others. His sermons were marked, wrote John Foster, the essayist,[4] by "the utmost plainness both of thought and language"; Joseph Hughes, one of the founders of the British and Foreign Bible Society, declared, "He was not in the habit of quoting the Scriptures so often as preachers in general do. But he quoted them well, proceeding on the basis of studied selection;"[5] and Newton Bosworth a close friend of Hall's, said "Notwithstanding the frequent magnificence of his style, there was so much simplicity united with it, that the poorest and most unlettered of his hearers were able to profit by his discourses."[6]

It is difficult to understand these comments about Hall's "simplicity" and "plainness" for his sermons are cast in the grandiloquent mould common to the oratory of the day. His vocabulary, for

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1. WORKS IV p.26.
2. WORKS IV p.490.
3. WORKS IV p.445.
4. Gregory's Memoir p.150 (appendix)
5. J. Hughes: Sermon on the death of Robert Hall p.33.
6. N. Bosworth: Sermon on the death of Robert Hall p.33.

example, can hardly be termed "simple". He sometimes uses unusual words like encomium, tergiversation, piacular, logomachies, and sublunary, and he also has a fondness for polysyllabic words of latin origin. The following paragraph (from his sermon on Modern Infidelity) illustrates this point and is typical of his style. (The frequency of words of more than two syllables is accentuated by underlining).

"The advocates of infidelity invert this eternal orderof nature. Instead of inculcating the private affections, as a discipline by which the mind is prepared for those of a more public nature, they set them in direct opposition to each other, they propose to build general benevolence on the destruction of individual tenderness, and to make us love the whole species more by loving every particular part of it less. In pursuit of this chimerical project, gratitude, humility, conjugal, parental, and filial affection, together with every other social disposition, are reprobated - virtue is limited to a passionate attachment to the general good. Is it not natural to ask, when all the tenderness of life is extinguished, and all the bands of society are untwisted, from whence this ardent affection for the general good is to spring?"[1]

The structure of Hall's sentences is also far from simple. By using many subordinate clauses he often builds up lengthy, complicated sentences which demand careful attention on the part of the reader. The following sentence (from his sermon on The Sentiments Proper to the Present Crisis) is typical of his involved style and many similar examples could be quoted.

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1. WORKS I p.54.

"It remains with you then to decide whether that freedom, at whose voice the Kingdoms of Europe awoke from the sleep of ages, to run a career of virtuous emulation in every thing great and good; the freedom which dispelled the mists of superstition, and invited the nations to behold their God; whose magic touch kindled the rays of genius, the enthusiasm of poetry, and the flame of eloquence; the freedom which poured into our lap opulence and arts, and embellished life with innumerable institutions and improvements, till it became a theatre of wonders; it is for you to decide whether this freedom shall yet survive, or be covered with a funeral pall, and wrapt in eternal gloom."[1]

If Hall's vocabulary is so extensive and his style so involved what did his admirers mean when they spoke of his "simplicity" and "plainness"? The answer seems to lie in the clarity of Hall's reasoning. His sermons follow a clear-cut pattern of thought and his most abstract topics are expounded in a clear and logical way. This is noticeable in his sermon on a difficult topic like "The Spirituality of the Divine Nature."[2] One of his friends said, "What was complex and confused to others, was simple and clear to him, what seemed cloudy and mysterious, was transparent and plain; he would seize on occult and obsolete truth and bring them forth to the eye of day."[3]

Hall's facility for clear and accurate exposition has been noted by many critics. John Scott, editor of the London Magazine, praised Hall's ability to "make truth visible."[4] More than a century later

1. WORKS I. p.190
2. WORKS VI p.1 ff.
3. J.P. Mursell: Sermon on the death of Robert Hall p.23.
4. London Magazine no. XIV Feb. 1821.

Dr. Arthur Dakin, in an article on "Baptist Preaching" declared that Hall's reasoning is "clear and accurate."[1] It appears therefore that when Hall's admirers spoke of the "simplicity" and "plainness" of his sermons, they referred to his clarity of thought rather than to his simplicity of language.

A practice which Hall disliked was the preaching of "hell-fire" sermons. He believed in judgement to come and often preached about it but he objected strongly to the "hard and unfeeling manner of denouncing the threatenings of the word of God."[2] which characterised so much of the preaching of the day. "When you must denounce the wrath of God," he told his friend Eustace Carey, "great mildness and affection are requisite to prevent such representations from exciting disgust."[3] He had little patience with thoughtless preaching about the wrath of God and the agonies of hell. Such a manner of preaching sermons, he declared, "is not only barbarous and inhuman, but calculated, by inspiring disgust, to rob them of all their efficacy."[4] Hall insisted that the proclamation of the wrath of God must always be overshadowed by the gospel of the grace of God. This is amply illustrated in his own sermons. In 1827, for example, he brought a sermon to a close with these words:-

"I cannot close without reminding every person present of the awful consequences of remaining under the law. Recollect, wherever you are, that if you are not vital believers in Christ, if you know

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1. See article by Dakin in the Annual Report (1932). Bristol and District Baptist Association p.9.
2. WORKS I p.242.
3. WORKS I. p.291.
4. WORKS I. p.243.

not what it is to have trusted your souls in his hands, and to be justified by faith in his blood, you are under the law. Rejoice not as others rejoice, you have nothing to do with joy; it would be madness in you to taste of joy till this grand impediment to your happiness is removed. If you are under the curse of God, what have you to do with joy? The joy of a maniac dancing in his chains, the joy of a criminal on his way to execution, is reasonable in comparison with the joy of a man who says, 'Soul take thine ease,' whilst the wrath of God hangs over him, and he knows not how soon it may fall.

Let us, then, all flee to the Saviour; let us, without delay, lay hold of the great atonement; thus shall we 'be justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.' Christ is ready to receive us; Christ says to everyone, 'come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I willgive you rest.' Oh, 'seek ye, then, the Lord while he may be found, call upon Him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon'."[1]

Hall's power as a preacher is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that "he had no oratorical action..... scarcely any kind of motion except an occasional lift or wave of the right hand..... and in his most impassioned moments an alternate retreat or advance in the pulpit by a short step."[2] His voice had never been strong

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1. WORKS VI p.444 ff.

2. North British Review November 1845 Article by F.A. Cox about Robert Hall.

but it was weaker than ever during these closing Bristol years and it was said also that his oratory was less imaginative and impressive than in his early years.[1] This may well have been true, but it is plain, in those Bristol years, that it exercised its old resistless charm. It was the closing appeals at the end of his sermons that especially gripped his hearers and many recounted how they had been stirred to the depths by his eloquence. Some idea of the power of these appeals can be seen from the notes which were taken down by various hearers. In July 1828, for example, he concluded a sermon in these words.

"Do you believe these things? Let none persist any longer in the neglect of the salvation offered! Save yourselves from a rebellious generation. Come out and be separate from a world that lieth in wickedness, that is devoted to destruction, and you shall be made the sons and daughters of the most High! The Lord Jesus Christ invites you to come to Him for life. The Heavenly Father waits for your return. He will welcome you home. He will rejoice over you with singing. He will kill the fatted calf and say 'This my son was dead and is alive, was lost and is found'"[2]

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1. Gregory's Memoir (appendix) p.145.

2. T. Grinfield Sermon Notes p.311-2.

III. HALL'S THEOLOGY (1807-1831)

The most fruitful period of Hall's life (as already noted[1]) was undoubtedly that which followed his removal to Leicester in 1807 and there are far more records available for a study of his theological standpoint during his later ministries than in his earlier. Yet when these records are examined one discovers that only 35 brief publications came from his pen during the twenty-four years of his Leicester and Bristol pastorates.[2] When this is compared with the massive volumes comprising the writings of the puritan divines, or the theological works of Andrew Fuller or the thousands of sermons published by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous victorian preacher, the material available for a study of Hall's thought is seen to be very meagre.

These 35 publications consist of:

6 Book Reviews.

9 Short Articles comprising prefaces and memoirs.

5 sermons

4 Addresses given at such meetings as that of the Bible Society.

4 pamphlets concerning the communion controversy

5 political pamphlets (e.g. the Appeal on behalf of the Framework-knitters).

2 circular letters of a devotional nature for the Northamptonshire Association of Particular Baptist Churches.

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1. See page 202 of this Thesis

2. For a complete chronological list of the works by Hall published during his lifetime, see the Baptist Magazine June 1832 p. 234.

With the exception of his writings on the communion controversy, it is noticeable that Hall published no theological treatises or detailed examination of christian doctrine. In this he is typical of the Evangelicals of the day of whom it has been said, "They were not theologians; they were religious reformers..... Their passion was for saving souls and for large schemes of religious and philanthropic enterprise. Doctrine was utilised for this end.... Their writings were in the main homiletical. They produced no great theological work."[1]

But although Hallproduced no great theological work, this does not mean he was not deeply concerned with theological issues. On the contrary, from the letters he wrote and the numerous sermon notes which friends preserved, it is plain that Hall preached regularly on the chief doctrines of the christian faith; but most of the notes which have come down to us give little more than the outline of his thought and the material available is too meagre to give a complete and systematic account of his beliefs. Yet the main characteristics of his thought are clearly discernible.

It has already been seen from the survey of his theological views at Bristol and Cambridge that Hall cannot be classed with the strict calvinists of his denomination, and during his Leicester pastorate and in the closing years of his life at Bristol his theology, in general, remained unchanged. Not even the spiritual crisis of 1809, which was so important to his personal life, appears to have affected his views to any large extent, and although his preaching after this date became more evangelical in tone, this is a change of emphasis rather than of doctrine.

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1. Vernon F. Storr: The development of English Theology in the 19th

Among his fellow-Baptists, Hall's theological views are of importance in two respects. First, he stands out as a moderating influence on the stricter forms of calvinism common to his denomination, and secondly, he advocated views on the doctrine of the ministry and sacraments which were not generally accepted by the Particular Baptists.

I. HALL and CALVINISM.

Hall believed that too many Baptists had allowed themselves to become fettered by the calvinist system and in opposition to this he urged the claims of tolerance and freedom. "We must learn", he wrote, "to quit a subtle and disputatious theology, for a religion of love..... reserving to ourselves the utmost freedom of thought, in the interpretation of the sacred oracles".[1] Yet, despite his rejection of some of the more extreme doctrines, Hall remained at heart a calvinist.

It has been said that there were four great themes in the theology of John Calvin:- the authority of the Bible, the sovereignty of God, the depravity of man and the mediatorial office and work of Jesus Christ.[2] These themes frequently recur in Hall's preaching and writing, and the trend of his thought can be seen by examining his treatment of these important doctrines in the light of Calvin's teaching and of the calvinism predominant among the Particular Baptists during Hall's lifetime.

A. The Authority of the Bible.

Hall believed that only through the Bible can God be truly known.

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1. WORKS II p.470.
2. A.J. Barnard. The Fraternal no. 75 Jan. 1950 p.14.

He admits that the Bible is only "an external record"[1] but declares that it ultimately comes from God. He has spoken, and, inspired by Him, men have committed His word to writing. Hall insists that "in the Bible alone, we learn the real character of the Supreme Being, his holiness, justice, mercy and truth."[2] To Hall, the Bible is the place where God reveals Himself to His people. Mere speculation about God is therefore fruitless if it involves by-passing the Scriptures which "inform us on a multitude of subjects which elude the researches of finite reason."[3] John Foster, the essayist, criticized Hall for his "disinclination to adventure into the twilight of speculation,"[4] but he had misunderstood his friend. Hall's suspicion of speculation is the natural consequence of his belief that the Scriptures alone provide "the standard to which we must all appeal."[5] Again and again he exhorts his congregations to beware of trespassing beyond the bounds of Scripture and stresses the fact that the Bible is "the only standard of truth, and the only infallible directory in practice."[6]

In this, Hall follows Calvin who insisted that the Bible as a whole is both infallible and authoritative.[7] Calvin himself wrote,

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1. WORKS V. p.132.
2. WORKS I. p.208.
3. WORKS I. p.321.
4. Gregory's Memoir (appendix) p. 170.
5. WORKS IV. p.400.
6. WORKS IV. p.371.
7. A. Dakin Calvinism p.189.

in words which are echoed by Hall,[1] that the Bible is "such a depository of doctrine as would secure the truth from perishing from neglect, vanishing amid error, or being corrupted by the presumptuous audacity of men."[2] The general drift of Calvin's teaching concerning the Scriptures is, as Dr. A. Dakin points out, "in the direction of verbal infallibility"[3] and his followers among the Particular Baptists appear to have gone to this extreme. Thus, writing of Andrew Fuller, Dr. A.H. Kirkby says, "There is every reason for believing that Fuller regarded the Bible not only as the infallible authority but as a book totally and verbally inspired."[4]

It would however give a false impression to say that Hall (or for that matter, Calvin[5]) held this extreme theory. Hall, for example, is not averse to discussing points of textual criticism. In the introductory paragraph of a sermon on Isaiah 53:8 ("For the transgression of my people was he stricken") Hall comments, "There is reason to believe that the original text, has in this instance, undergone some alteration, and that it anciently stood thus, he was smitten unto death. It was thus written by Origen.....It is thus rendered by the Septuagint in our present copies."[6] On another occasion Hall told his nephew. "Adhere to the dictates of the holy Scripture. I mean not, by this, that you should confine yourself to the words, but to the sentiments."[7] Earlier, in a review, he had written, "We do not,

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1. WORKS I p.211: IV p.169: IV p.368.
2. Calvin's Institutes I vi 3.
3. A Dakin Calvinism p.190.
4. A.H. Kirkby The Theology of Andrew Fuller and its relation to Calvinism p.127.
5. See A. Dakin: Calvinism p.189.
6. WORKS I. p.488.
7. WORKS IV p.478

indeed, contend, that in the choice of every particular word or phrase he (Paul) was immediately inspired."[1] These references are enough to show that Hall was not bound to an arid literalism in his interpretation of the Bible.

Alongside the idea of the authority of the Bible, Hall, like Calvin, places the doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Hall speaks of "the necessity of the agency of the Spirit, to render the knowledge (of the Bible) practical and experimental"[2] and declares, "The internal illumination of the Spirit is merely intended to qualify the mind for distinctly perceiving, and cordially embracing those objects, and no other, which are exhibited in the written word."[3] This theme is repeated in other sermons[4] and the references show that Hall follows Calvin's teaching closely.[5]

A further point of importance is that Hall grasped the conception of the Bible as a progressive revelation. This is a point which Calvin never reached. Referring to Calvin's view of Scripture, Dr. A. Dakin says, "There is in his theory no true historic sense and no allowance for any human element."[6] Hall has a much more enlightened view. In a sermon on Spiritual Leprosy, he makes his view clear:-

"The people of Israel, at the time they came out of the land of Egypt, having been long surrounded by idolatry, and in a state of depression and slavery, were a people, we have the utmost reason to

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1. WORKS IV p.28.
2. WORKS I. p.215.
3. WORKS I. p.256-7.
4. See WORKS I p.451: V p.132: Grinfield's Notes pp.59 and 217.
5. See Calvin's Institutes III ii 33-35: I vii 5.
6. A. Dakin: Calvinism p.193.

believe, of very gross conceptions, deeply sunk in carnality and ignorance; a nation peculiarly disqualified to receive any lasting impression from didactic discourses, or from any sublime system of instruction. Their minds were in an infantine state; and divine wisdom was imparted to them, - not in that form which was best in itself, but in that in which they were best able to bear it."[1]

This view of a progressive revelation is again seen in a sermon entitled, On Taking the Name of God in Vain. At the beginning of this sermon, Hall divides the Old Testament laws into three categories:- ceremonial, judicial, and moral, and then goes on to say, "The two former sorts of laws are not obligatory upon christians; nor did they, while they were in force, oblige any besides the people to which they were originally addressed. They have waxed old, decayed and passed away. But this third sort are still in force and will remain the unalterable standard of right and wrong, and the rule throughout all periods of time. The Ten Commandments, or the 'Ten Words,' as the expression is in the original, ... belong to this class."[2]

Hall did not think of this progressive revelation in terms of a development from false to true ideas of God. He believed that the Jewish nation had been taught slowly, but, from the beginning, what was taught was true, however elementary, but it was adapted to the stage of experience reached when it was given. The subsequent revelation amplified and fulfilled the earlier but did not contradict it. This view of a progressive revelation appears to have been first expounded in England in 1806 but it was by no means universally

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1. WORKS V p.168-9.

2. WORKS V p.328.

accepted[1] and Hall's approval of it shows a readiness to accept new ideas which was not very common in calvinist circles.

It has also been said of Calvin that many of his quotations from the Old Testament appear "simply irrelevant to the matter in hand."[2] Hall is seldom guilty of this mistake. He is careful, whenever possible, to give the historical context of any Old Testament text from which he preaches and he seldom quotes indiscriminately, merely to bolster up an argument. It was his habit, also, to use the Old Testament analogously, in order to illustrate christian truth. In one sermon, for instance, he uses the levitical laws concerning leprosy, as an illustration of the defilement of sin,[3] and, in another sermon he contrasts the struggles of the Israelites against the Canaanites with the difficulties of believers against "their spiritual enemies."[4] It was this method of using Scripture which appealed so much to William Wilberforce. He heard Hall preach at Cambridge and noted in his diary that the preacher excelled "in experimental applications of Scripture, often with immense effect."[5]

To sum up, Hall's attitude to Scripture is basically the same as that of Calvin but his attitude to the Old Testament in particular shows that he held a much more enlightened view than many of his contemporaries.

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1. Vernon F. Storr: The development of English Theology in the19th Century: see chapter X on "the rise of biblical criticism in England."
2. A. Dakin Calvinism p. 193.
3. WORKS V p.167 ff.
4. WORKS V p.196 ff.
5. R.I. and S. Wilberforce The Life of William Wilberforce III p.186.

B. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

It has repeatedly been claimed that the sovereignty of God was the fundamental conception of Calvin's theology. W.P. Patterson calls it "the ruling conception of calvinism".[1] J.S. Whale in his book The Protestant Tradition says, "Calvinistic theology is informed throughout with an adoring sense of the transcendence, the sole and absolute causality of God, before whose infinite majesty, incomprehensible essence, boundless power and eternal duration, man is utterly insignificant, save to illustrate the operation of God's grace in redemption."[2] This stress on the sovereignty of God is found also in Hall's sermons.

He believed that the universe, and the world of men in particular, is subject to divine government, and that God carries out the purposes He has formed and prevents any hostile forces from frustrating His plans." "The history of the church and the world" says Hall, "is the history of Providence."[3] Hall sees God as the Lord of history and the evils which overtake the nations as, "the just judgements of the Almighty."[4] He declares that "the finger of God"[5] is discernible to the eye of faith in the events of world history and writes that "the Great Supreme is accustomed to execute his plans and purposes through the intervention of second causes; so that we are apt to forget that hand through which all are produced, and on which all are suspended."[6] In a sermon on The Inscrutability of God's Ways.

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1. W.P. Patterson: The Rule of Faith (1932) p.302.
2. J.S. Whale The Protestant Tradition p.136.
3. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene) p.155.
4. WORKS I.p.156.
5. WORKS III p.59
6. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene) p.149.

Hall says that the rule and dominion of God over His creatures is "the most important doctrine of religion; a doctrine which is the foundation of all serious piety."[1] This theme is often repeated in Hall's sermons and in this respect he is typically calvinistic.

But Calvin did not simply state a general doctrine of divine causality, he went on to work out the doctrine in detail until it reached what J.S. Whale described as "its notorious and appalling climax, the divine decrees, or the doctrine of double predestination."[2] It was around this doctrine that controversy had raged among the Baptists throughout the 18th and into the 19th centuries. During Hall's ministry at Leicester, the extreme calvinist view was upheld by such men as William Gadsby and John Warburton who denounced free will "upholding in its stead, sovereign grace."[3] Against this extreme view, Andrew Fuller and his followers insisted on both election and human responsibility. "That there is a consistency" wrote Fuller, "between the divine decrees and the free agency of men, I believe; but whether I can account for it is another thing. Whether it can be accounted for at all, so as to enable us clearly to comprehend it, I cannot tell. Be that as it may, it does not distress me; I believe in both, because both appear to me be plainly revealed."[4]

Where does Hall stand in this controversy? As at Bristol and Cambridge, so now in his later years, he accepted the calvinistic

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1. WORKS VI p.142.
2. J.S. Whale. The Protestant Tradition p.140.
3. A.C. Underwood: A History of the English Baptists p.185 ff.
4. Fuller's WORKS p.229.

doctrine in its positive aspects. In one of his sermons he says, "That a certain number of the human race are ordained to eternal life may be inferred from many passages of scripture; but, if any person infers from these general premises that he is of that number, he advances a proposition without the slightest colour of evidence."[1] But Hall believed that the whole question of election and predestination had been magnified by controversy out of all proportion to its importance. In a letter to his friend, James Phillips, he explained his point of view:-

"As the doctrine of election..... occupies but a small part of the New Testament revelation, it should not, in my opinion, be made a prominent point in the christian ministry. It is well to reserve it for the contemplation of christians, as a matter of humiliation and of awful joy; but in addressing an audience on the general topic of religion, it is best perhaps to speak in a more general strain. The gospel affords ample encouragement to all: its generous spirit and large invitations should not be cramped and fettered by the scrupulosity of system."[2]

Hall's general tendency to treat the whole controversy as a minor matter, is reflected also in his preface to Help to Zion's Travellers:-

"If there be any impression, in the following treatise, which implies that the questions at issue betwixt the calvinists and arminians are of the nature of fundamentals (of which, however, I am not aware) I beg leave, as far as they are concerned, to express my explicit dissent; being fully satisfied that upon either system the foundations of human hope remain unshaken, and that there is nothing,

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1. WORKS IV p.455.

2. WORKS V p.454.

in the contrariety of views entertained on these subjects, which ought to obstruct the most cordial affection and harmony among christians."[1]

In accordance with this view, Hall seldom refers to the doctrine of election in his sermons. One of his friends, John Foster, wrote that Hall "rarely made any express reference" to the doctrine of election, and Foster goes on to say that if it had not been for Hall's talents and popularity as a preacher the "rigidly Calvinistic hearers" would have been much more critical of his views.[2] On one occasion an important member of Hall's congregation took him to task for not preaching more frequently on the subject of predestination and Hall's sarcastic reply has often been quoted, "Sir, I perceive that nature predestined you to be an ass, and what is more, I see that you are determined to make your calling and election sure."[3]

To sum up, Hall accepted with Calvin the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and the positive aspects of the doctrine of election but he considered the latter had been given a far greater place in preaching than the New Testament warranted. His attitude reflects a growing movement among the Particular Baptists to free themselves from the shackles of a rigid calvinism. Hall's views were by no means popular with the strict calvinists who preferred the old ways, but, as A.C. Underwood says, "More and more Particular Baptist ministers, under the influence of the spirit of the time and of the work of their

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1. WORKS IV p.424
2. Gregory's Memoir (appendix) p.166.
3. Quoted by A.C. Underwood: A History of the English Baptists p.170.

Missionary Society, lost their interest in the Calvinistic scheme of doctrine."[1] Hall appears as one of the leaders of this movement and later history shows that he was leading the Particular Baptists in the right direction.

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1. A.C. Underwood: A History of the English Baptists p.202.

C. THE DEPRAVITY of MAN.

Calvin describes man's state before God in the strongest terms. Man is utterly incapable of good, he is a rebel against God, he has a "hereditary corruption and depravity." As a fallen creature and a sinner man merits nothing but damnation.[1]

In Hall's sermons this theme of the depravity of man is reiterated and his descriptions of man's fallen estate are typically calvinistic. For Hall, man is the creation of God, made in His image, and is endowed, in distinction from the animal creation with intelligence, freedom and immortality; but these gifts do not belong inherently to man, they are the gifts of God. "For whatever inherent good we possess", Hall says, "we are indebted to divine grace."[2] He speaks of man's freedom which "the divine Being has given us"[3] and stresses that "men are the creatures of God originally and essentially, and continually accountable to Him."[4]

But man is a fallen creature, He has "swerved from God, and lost his true centre."[5] He has shown contempt for the infinite majesty of God.[6] He has totally alienated himself from the life of God.[7] His nature as a creature of God is now seriously impaired. He has a "moral incapacity to do what is pleasing to God";[8] the image of

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1. Calvin's Institutes II i, 8.
2. WORKS V. p.289.
3. Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene) p.150.
4. WORKS III p.386-7.
5. WORKS V p.263.
6. WORKS V p.336.
7. WORKS V. p.126.
8. WORKS IV p.97.

God is now "mutilated and defaced";[1] he is prejudiced against the gospel: his understanding is darkened; his conscience is seared.[2] Hall speaks of the "indolent depravity of the human heart"[3] and of the "inherent corruption of human nature."[4] Yet he recognized that in fallen human nature there are traces of grandeur even in its ruins."[5] Even fallen man, Hall argues, is distinguished from the animal creation by rationality and freedom,[6] and to despise even these distorted remnants of the image of God is to show "a profane disregard of that God who made man in His own image."[7] Nevertheless man stands under the righteous judgement of God; the wrath of God hangs over him; he sits "in the darkness and in the shadow of death"; he is enslaved by Satan; he cannot save himself, and apart from the grace of God he is utterly without hope.[8] This is the basis on which Hall built his preaching. "We addressour invitations," he told his friend, James Robertson, "to minds fatally indisposed, alienated from the life of God, with little sense of the value of his favour and no delight in his converse."[9]

There are three points in Hall's teaching about the depravity of man which ought to be noted.

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1. WORKS I. p.162.
2. WORKS V. p.104.
3. WORKS IV p.479.
4. WORKS IV. p.130.
5. Grinfield's Notes p. 126.
6. WORKS VI p.179: Exposition of Philippians (ed. Greene) p.150.
7. Grinfield's Notes p. 388.
8. Notes of a sermon by Hall in The Pulpit No.117.
9. WORKS I. p.237.

1. In his early years at Bristol and Cambridge, Hall rejected the idea of the imputation of Adam's sin to posterity.[1] This appears to have remained his view to the end of his life. He was prepared to admit that the human race, as a result of the fall of Adam, had inherited a bias towards sin, but he always insisted that a man is not judged for Adam's sin. "Our faults are our own" he wrote, "they originate entirely in ourselves; to us belong all their demerit and their shame: while for whatever inherent good we may possess, we are indebted to divine grace."[2]

2. L.E. Elliott-Binns has criticized the Evangelicals for making sinful man and not the God of all grace the foundation of their theology.[3] But Hall cannot be accused of this. Although he held an essentially calvinistic viewof the depravity of man, he did not stress this in his preaching as much as most of the calvinists of his day. John Foster, in a criticism of Hall's preaching alleged that there was "hardly a due proportion" of his sermons given to this doctrine,[4] and when Hall's sermons are compared with those of other Baptist preachers of his time, it is noticeable that in a large proportion of Hall's sermons the depravity of man is not mentioned. Again and again, particularly in his later ministry, Hall refers to the gracious purpose of God in redemption and in a variety of ways emphasises that "it is the triumph and pre-eminence of grace that

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1. See page 72 of this Thesis.

2. WORKS V. p.289.

3. L.E. Elliott-Binns The Early Evangelicals (1953) p. 387.

4. Gregory's Memoir (appendix) p.166.

forms the distinguishing character of the christian system."[1] That the God of infinite majesty and holiness is the God of all grace - this is for Hall the supreme revelation, and in his sermons this is the theme upon which he frequently preached.

3. A third point of interest is that Hall gives a much higher place to human reason than Calvin does. For Calvin, every part of human nature suffered at the fall and both reason and will are corrupted.[2] Man still has reason to distinguish him from the brute beasts, and in the manual and liberal arts this is clearly displayed, but "to the great truths, what God is in Himself, and what He is in relation to us, human reason makes not the least approach."[3]

Hall does not go as far as this. He admits reason is corrupted by the fall and that the Biblical revelation is necessary to bring men to a saving knowledge of God, but Hall thinks of reason not as contrary to revelation but as preparing the way for it.[4] He believed that the existence of God could be proved by reason and he frequently refers to the traditional proofs.[5] In this respect Hall disagreed with calvinists like Andrew Fuller who had little regard for the value of such proofs. Fuller contended that the man who questioned the existence of God "is not so much to be reasoned with as to be reproved. His error belongs rather to the heart than to the understanding."[6] Hall could not agree with this view. He believed, as

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1. WORKS V. p.296.
2. Calvin's Institutes II ii 12.
3. IBID II ii 18.
4. WORKS IV p. 409.
5. See Works I 17: VI 7: V 1 ff.
6. Fuller's Works p. 744.

he said in a sermon at Leicester in 1814, that "man is endowed with reason and understanding, enabling him to perceive the proofs of the being of God, and to entertain just, though inadequate, conceptions of the principal attributes of his nature."[1]

In his preaching, Hall, therefore addressed men as rational beings, and, in the words of John Foster,[2] he appealed to "their coolest reason" believing that men must be able to apprehend the great truths of the gospel "unless they will practically renounce" the gift of reason.

Here again, it is noticeable that Hall, while holding, in the main, a calvinistic view of the depravity of man, is not prepared to go to extremes and presented a more moderate view than was common among his fellow Baptists.

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1. WORKS V. 92-3.
2. Gregory's Memoir (appendix) p.167.

IV. The MEDIATORIAL OFFICE and WORK of CHRIST.

The significance of the incarnation for John Calvin is that God became man to bridge the gap between the Creator and the creature; and in Calvin's writings he expounds at length the truth that Jesus Christ is the Mediator both of revelation and of redemption.[1] In this respect Hall is typically calvinistic.

(A) THE PERSON of CHRIST.

Referring to Christ as the Mediator of revelation, Hall speaks of God revealing Himself in such a way that man is not blended by His incomprehensible brightness.[2] Such is the grace of God that He accomodates Himself to our weakness. He takes upon Himself a lowly form - "the veil of His flesh" as Hall calls it[3] - so that He can speak at man's level of understanding. "Duty", says Hall, "requires to be shaded and softened, by putting on the veil of our nature, before it can be suited to our feeble perception."[4] Thus God in Christ graciously unveils Himself to man by veiling Himself in flesh. This is entirely in line with Calvin's thought and Hall's very wording can be paralleled in Calvin's writing. For example, Hall's description of Christ as hidden under "the veil of His flesh", is also used by Calvin.[5]

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1. See Calvin's Institutes II xii.
2. WORKS VI p.67.
3. Grinfield's Notes p.242.
4. WORKS VI p.307: See also New Baptist Miscellany July 1827 p.270.
5. T.H.L. Parker: Portrait of Calvin (1954) p.59.

But Christ is also the Mediator of redemption, and this is Hall's main theme. He speaks of Christ as "The stupendous link which unites God and man."[1] As true God, Christ steps into this world to deal with man's guilt and sin; but as true man, Christ assumes our nature and becomes "of one flesh and of one spirit with us."[2] How are we to understand the nature of the God-man? Ultimately it is a mystery, which, says Hall, "must necessarily confound the reason, and shock the prejudices, of a mind which will admit nothing that it cannot perfectly reduce to the principles of philosophy."[3]

Hall's teaching about the person of Christ is clearly seen in a sermon he gave at Leicester in June, 1813. It was entitled, Christ's Pre-existence, Condescension, and Exaltation,[4] and was an attack on the socinian view that Christ was a mere man who, as a reward for his perfect obedience, was raised to heaven and constituted God's viceroy over the whole universe. Hall affirms, against the socinians, that Christ was the pre-existent Son of God who voluntarily laid aside His original dignity and took upon Himself the form of a servant.[5] When Hall speaks of Christ laying aside

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1. WORKS I. p.510.
2. WORKS I. p.499.
3. WORKS IV. p.23-4.
4. WORKS VI p.95 ff.
5. WORKS VI. p.110.

"His original dignity", he does not mean, as some modern kenotic theories imply,[1] that Christ denuded Himself of all the properties of Godhead and exchanged His Divine consciousness for one that was human or Divine-human. Rather, for Hall, the pre-existent Son takes human nature into personal union with Himself in such a way that, as Calvin states, "the Divinity was so conjoined with the humanity that the entire properties of each nature remain entire, and yet the two natures constitute one Christ."[2]

H.R. Mackintosh in his book, The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, traces the christology of the reformers back to the "formulas of Chalcedon."[3] Hall also follows in this tradition and has little to add to the doctrine as it is found in Calvin.

(b) The Work of Christ.

For Hall the great work of Christ is the redemption of man and he sees this work beginning at the moment of Christ's birth at Bethlehem. "We are justified", he says, "in considering all the humiliation He endured, during His abode on earth, as forming a part of his merit, and, consequently, of the price of our redemption."[4] This suffering and humiliation became more intense as the cross drew near. But the suffering was not accidental. It was God's redemptive purpose in action. By His obedience even to death, Christ became a sacrifice for the sin of the world. Man's sin against God is trans-

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1. See H.R. Mackintosh: The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ (1951) p.266.
2. Calvin: Institutes II XIV. 1.
3. H.R. Mackintosh: op.cit. p.242.
4. WORKS V. p.381.

ferred to Christ Who makes atonement for us by a perfect sacrifice and a "spotless obedience".[1] Hall sees Christ "standing in the stead of sinners, representing their persons, and being exposed to the penalties of a broken law."[2] (This reference to Christ "standing in the stead" of sinners is expounded at length in a sermon Hall preached at Luton in 1822 entitled On the Substitution of the Innocent for the Guilty.)[3]

But Hall's gospel does not end at the cross. The resurrection vindicates the work of Christ as Mediator, and Christ is seen as the Conqueror of sin and death. The resurrection is the sign of His victory. It not only vindicates the sacrifice of Christ but asserts, His "everlasting victory over the last enemy."[4]

The crowning moment of redemption is, for Hall, the ascension of Christ to the right hand of God. Here is the real beginning of the reign of Christ Who enters into His Kingdom as "Judge and Lord of all."[5] He ever intercedes for us and dispenses "pardon, peace, and eternal life to all that humbly seek His aid."[6] Hall sees the ascended Christ, "still using every means to gather His elect from the four quarters of the world,"[7] and, says Hall, we can look forward to the day when

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1. WORKS V. p.241.
2. WORKS VI . p.424.
3. WORKS I. 482 ff.
4. WORKS V. p.384.
5. Grinfield's Notes p. 404.
6. WORKS V. p. 516: Letter to William Hollick.
7. The Pulpit No. 222. Report of a sermon by Hall.

"the great Redeemer will again appear upon the earth as the Judge and Ruler of it."[1]

There are three points of importance to be noted here.

1. Hall's exposition of the doctrine of the work of Christ follows that of Calvin very closely. This can be seen in the following table where some parallel passages are set out showing the great similarity between Calvin's thought and Hall's.

CALVIN.	HALL.
"The merit of Christ depends entirely on the grace of God (which provides this mode of salvation for us)"	"The whole system of the gospel is, emphatically the Gospel of the grace of God"
/Institutes II xvii, 1/	/Works V p.295/
Christ "was appointed both Prophet, King, and Priest."	Jesus Christ "my Priest, my prophet and my King".
/Institutes II, xv, 1/	/Gregory's Memoir p. 80/
"From the moment when He assumed the form of a servant, He began, in order to redeem us, to pay the price of deliverance."	"We are justified in considering all the humiliation he endured, during his abode on earth, as forming a part of his merit, and consequently, of the price of our redemption."
/Institutes II xvi 5/	(WORKS V p.381).

1. WORKS I. p.424.

CALVIN (cont.)

"This is the wondrous exchange made by His boundless goodness. Having become with us the Son of Man, He has made us with Himself sons of God. By His own descent to earth, He has prepared our ascent to heaven."

(Institutes IV xvii 2)

"Our acquittal is in this - that the guilt which made us liable to punishment was transferred to the head of the Son of God. We must especially remember this substitution."

(Institute II xvi. 5)

Christ endured the cross "in order that the whole curse, which, on account of our iniquities awaited us....." ..... should be "transferred to Him."

(Institutes II xvi. 6)

HALL (cont.)

"What an exchange was that which He made! He left a world of Glory for one of meanness, a world of bliss for one of misery, a world of purity for one of crime."

(Grinfield's Notes p.52/3)

"The character in which He appeared was that of substitute."

(WORKS VI p.427)

For "deliverance from the curse, ---- we are indebted entirely to the mediation of a blessed Redeemer."

(WORKS VI p.430)

CALVIN (cont.)

Christ died "That we might not be all our lifetime, subject to bondage, having our consciences oppressed with the fear of death."

(Institutes II vii, 15)

"The first step in obedience was His voluntary subjection; for the sacrifice would have been unavailing to justification if not offered spontaneously."

(Institutes II, xvi, 5)

HALL (cont.)

Christ "has delivered His people from the bondage of this fear of death."

(Grinfield's Notes p, 241)

"Such was his infinite love, that he came voluntarily..... and in his hour of suffering, nothing is plainer than that he gave himself up to it voluntarily."

(WORKS I. p.496)

The similarity between Hall's thought and Calvin's (as illustrated above) suggests that Hall was well acquainted with the writings of John Calvin. But Hall never quotes directly from Calvin and never specifically states that he had read Calvin's works. Nevertheless, the evidence of Hall's wide reading makes it more than probable that he had studied Calvin's writings; but even if he had not, his

familiarity with Calvin's thought can be accounted for by the widespread currency of calvinistic ideas among the Particular Baptists![1]

2. There are two main ideas underlying Hall's preaching about the atonement. The one (deriving from St. Anselm) represents the crucified Saviour as offering satisfaction to the injured majesty of God: the other (deriving from the reformers), represents Christ as vicariously bearing the penalty of sin. In general, Hall stresses the penal rather than the satisfaction theory of the atonement, but both are found in his preaching.[2]

But Hall is so concerned to emphasise the death of Christ and His atoning work that he says little of the new life and power given by the risen Christ. The note of assurance and joy, which is so characteristic of the new Testament is missing in many of Hall's sermons. Probably because of his own bitter experience of suffering, Hall's tendency is to describe the christian life as a grim struggle through the wilderness of the world to the heavenly Canaan. The following quotation is typical of Hall's attitude. It is taken from a sermon preached in 1815.

"We must, my brethren, hold out unto the end. We must touch the goal, or we run in vain;; one last effort must be made in this journey, or we shall never reach the Canaan that lieth beyond the waters of the grave."[3]

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1. This has been closely examined by A.H. Kirkby: The Theology of Andrew Fuller and its Relation to Calvinism.

2. See WORKS I p. 493 ff. WORKS V p.240 ff.

3. WORKS VI p.170.

This emphasis on the christian life as a struggle against doubt and difficulty is again seen in a sermon preached in 1828.

"Those who never knew a doubt as to the end of their course, are far from being in a safe state for eternity. It is not so with christians. With such, it is an anxious enquiry, 'Am I in the way to God? What law am I serving? What proof do I possess that I belong to those whom Scripture distinguishes as righteous?'..... When they have been led astray by an occasion of sin, it is not without much sorrow and searching of heart that they return to their former way, and it is often long before they regain a calm and settled state. Men that live at large know nothing of all this, but pious men have done much business in these deep waters; and thus they are saved with fear and doubt."[1]

A study of Hall's sermons confirms the opinion of W. Robertson Nicoll (for many years editor of the British Weekly) who wrote, "It is not enough that a preacher should aim at the conversion of his hearers and then give them ethical teaching. Between these two there is a great region of revealed truth concerning the mystery of holiness. Neither Hall nor Foster, so far as I can find out, ever taught in its fulness the final truth of the soul's union with Christ and its bearing alike on sanctification and justification."[2]

3. A third point of importance is the relationship of Hall's teaching on the work of Christ to the divisions within the Baptist denomination. The Baptists (as already noted)[3] were divided into two

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1. Grinfield's Notes p. 308.

2. W. Robertson Nicoll: The Preaching of Hall and Foster p.15-16.

3. See page 69 of this Thesis.

main groups:- the Particular Baptists and the General Baptists. They were divided primarily over the doctrine of the work of Christ. The former held that Christ died only for the elect: the latter held that He died for all men.

During Hall's lifetime a theological evolution began among the Particular Baptists. Largely through the influence of Andrew Fuller, the Particular Baptists broke with hyper-calvinism and, while retaining their belief that Christ died only for the elect, they now began to preach the gospel to all men. But during the early years of the 19th century, it became increasingly clear, as A.C. Underwood says, "that Fullerism could only be a half-way house in the advance of the Particular Baptists from the prison-house of hyper-calvinism and that the logical corollary of the offer of the Gospel to all men was a universal Atonement."[1]

It was at this point that Hall gave a lead to the Particular Baptists. He expressed his views very clearly in a conversation with a friend. When asked about the efficacy of the death of Christ, Hall answered, "On that point, I entertain no doubt whatever. I believe firmly in 'general redemption'. I often preach it, and I consider the fact that 'Christ died for all men' as the only basis that can support the universal offer of the gospel."[2]

Dr. Whitley in his History of the British Baptists admits that Hall accepted the doctrine of general redemption but suggests that,

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1. A.C. Underwood: A History of the English Baptists p. 202.

2. Gregory's Memoir (appendix) p.118. See also WORKS IV. p.458.

for Hall, it was largely a matter of theory, and that, in practice, he had no dealings with the General Baptists.[1] This is certainly inaccurate. Hall was very friendly with the General Baptists in Leicester. He sometimes preached in the Friar Lane General Baptist Church and was very friendly with its minister, John Deacon; and when the neighbouring church was being rebuilt, Hall was glad to arrange that the General Baptists should have the use of the Harvey Lane Chapel.[2]

Hall's advocacy of general redemption and his friendship with the General Baptists was an important step in the direction of a union between the two Baptist groups. But it wastoo big a step for the majority of the Particular Baptists. They were slow to follow Hall's lead and union was not finally achieved until sixty years after his death.[3]

Conclusion.

The evidence given in this section has shown that Hall's theological standpoint, at Leicester, and in his concluding ministry at Bristol, was basically calvinistic. But he refused to be bound by the more extreme doctrines, and, at a number of points, showed a liberal attitude which was not typical of his contemporaries among the Particular Baptists.

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1. W.T. Whitley: A History of British Baptists (1932) p. 309.
2. D. Ashby: FRIAR Lane, The Story of Three Hundred Years (1951) pp. 49: 47: 53:
3. A.C. Underwood: op. cit. p.216.

II HALL'S TEACHING concerning the MINISTRY and SACRAMENTS.

A. The MINISTRY.

Hall's views on the ministry are seen in the protests he made against some ordination customs that were frequent in the Baptist churches of his day. A candidate for the ministry, among the Baptists, was generally "set apart" by the church of which he was a member and in which he had been brought up. Later, a church in some other place would call him to the pastoral office. Ordination took place (sometimes a few months after his pastoral work had begun) at a solemn service attended by the pastors of nearby churches. If the pastor removed to another church, and was by that church called to become its pastor, he was re-ordained.[1]

In Hall's own case, as a lad of sixteen, he was "sent out into the ministry" by his home church at Arnesby.[2] There are no records of any ordination at Bristol where he went as assistant to Caleb Evans, but, at Cambridge, the question of his ordination was raised by the church. The minutes of the Cambridge Baptist Church state:-

"At a meeting of the Church by appointment immediately after the morning worship, It was debated whether any neighbouring ministers shou'd be invited to recognize the ordination of Mr. Hall to the pastoral office of this church; And Mr. Hall having from the chair put the question, whether any such invitation shou'd be given, no

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1. E.A. Payne The Fellowship of Believers p. 40 ff.

2. Morris Recollections p.45.

individual member voted for it Whereupon it was considered as Unanimously determined that no invitation upon this ceremony shou'd take place ------ the Church considering their ordination as complete."[1]

From this background Hall's views concerning ordination emerged. He consistently opposed the custom of large numbers of neighbouring ministers sharing in ordination services. Referring to the New Testament practice, Hall wrote "Nothing can be more distinct from this, than the manner in which these things are at present conducted."[2] In another letter he wrote, "Though the calling in a stranger on such occasions may attract a greater audience, it is, in my humble opinion, at the expense of more important objects".[3] He repeated this view when he wrote, "Ordination services as they are now conducted, I consider of more show than use,"[4] and in another letter said, "I have serious apprehensions that the ostentatious spirit which is fast pervading all denominations of Christians, in the present times, in the concerns of religion, will draw down the frown of the Great Head of the Church."[5]

Hall refused to believe that ordination conferred special authority or grace. "It is Christ who appoints them (ministers) to their office," he said in a sermon, "from him, as the sole Head of the Church, they derive their commissions."[6] In his Address to the Rev. Eustace

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1. Minutes of St. Andrews St. Church Cambridge, Aug. 17, 1791.
2. Morris Recollections p. 243.
3. WORKS V p. 557.
4. Morris Recollections p. 243.
5. WORKS V. p. 503.
6. WORKS V. p. 388.

Carey, Hall stated that it was "the omnicient Searcher of hearts" Who "separates a christian minister from his brethren, and assigns him a distinct work."[1] Because of this, Hall could not see "how he could impart any portion of authority to another, or concede a right which existed independently of his sanction."[2]

But he also admitted that the inward call of Christ to the individual ought to be recognized or ratified in some way by the local church, and, as J.W. Morris records, he "deemed the call of the people amply sufficient, without any other recognition."[3] In a letter Hall says, "It has long been my opinion, that they (ordinations) are best conducted by the presbytery or elders of the immediate vicinity of the party; and that, to step beyond that circle, is to sacrifice or impair the chief benefit of that practice, which is the putting a wholesome check on the abuse of the popular suffrage, by making it impossible for a minister to establish himself at the head of a congregation, without the approbation and sanction of the circle of pastors with whom he is to act. It is an affair in which the church are chiefly or solely concerned."[4]

Hall nevertheless was prepared to allow that one or two ministers should be present to give a word of exhortation and advice; their presence, he believed, was an expression of brotherly love not a mark of authority. "The presence of one or two ministers, along with the

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1. WORKS I. p.278.
2. Morris Recollections p. 208.
3. IBID p. 205.
4. WORKS V. p.557.

church", he wrote, "accompanied with prayer and laying on of hands, and a few serious exhortations would be a genuine, scriptural ordination."[1] Hall practised what he preached. At ordinations he confined himself to giving an address of encouragement and advice - as can be seen in his addresses at the ordinations of Eustace Carey and John Keen Hall - and he "left the official parts of the service to other hands."[2]

The evidence suggests that in Hall's view the ministry is to be defined primarily in terms of the local community and not in terms of a central authority or of an ideal whole. This view was not accepted by many of the Particular Baptists who, as E.A. Payne has shown, held "a wider conception of the ministry."[3]

B. The SACRAMENTS

The word "sacrament" was seldom used by the Particular Baptists of Hall's day, as it appeared to conflict with their views on the Lord's supper as a memorial rite. They replaced "sacrament" by the term "ordinance."[4] Thus, A.H. Kirkby, writing of Andrew Fuller, says "The word 'sacrament' is never used by Fuller. He speaks of the 'ordinances'. We find the word in his Confession and in many of his works."[5] Robert Hall, however, does not follow this practice. He

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1. Morris Recollections p. 243.
2. IBID p. 208.
3. E.A. Payne The Fellowship of Believers p. 45. But it should be noted that a modern expression of Hall's view is given by A. Dakin The Baptist View of the Church and Ministry (1944) ch. XII.
4. E.A. Payne: The Fellowship of Believers. p. 63.
5. A.H. Kirkby: The Theology of Andrew Fuller and its relation to Calvinism p. 212.

uses the terms "sacrament" and "ordinance" interchangeably. For example, in his work On Terms of Communion, the word "sacrament" is found 16 times and "ordinance" is found 20 times. This freedom, with which Hall uses the word "sacrament", is a reflection of his views on the Lord's supper.

Hall's teaching about the sacraments was determined by the Scriptures. "Since we have witnessed the dreadful consequences of following human authority, in the corruptions of the Church of Rome," he says, "we ought to allow nothing that is not taught by Divine Revelation."[1] Following this principle Hall observes that baptism and the Lord's supper are commanded by Christ for the enrichment of His church. They are "the consecrated channels in which his spiritual mercies flow;"[2] but they are a means of grace only to those who receive them in faith. For Hall, this is fundamental to an appreciation of the sacraments.

1. BAPTISM.

Although Hall frequently preached on the subject of baptism none of his baptismal sermons appear to have been preserved and only scraps of evidence are available for a study of his views on this subject.

It is clear however that he strongly disapproved of infant baptism. In a letter to an enquirer he wrote, "I have not the slightest doubt that infant sprinkling is a mere human invention, and a nullity!"[3] and later declared that believers' baptism had his "unqualified

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1. Grinfield's Notes p. 364-5.

2. WORKS I. p.462.

3. Baptist Magazine Sept. 1831 p. 360.

approbation."[1] Baptism, Hall believed, is a solemn act of obedience to Christ.[2] It is the outward sign of repentance and faith and is "the answer of a good conscience towards God."[3] He acknowledges that in the New Testament it is usually associated with the gift of the Spirit[4] but rejects any idea of baptismal regeneration.[5] As to the mode of baptism, Hall is sure that immersion is the New Testament practice and feels that the Baptists are right in retaining it.[6] But there is no evidence that he changed his opinion (which he held at Bristol during his first pastorate) that the mode of baptism is subordinate to the principle that it should be administered to believers only.[7]

2. The Lord's Supper.

Among the Baptists there had been two main streams of thought concerning the Lord's supper. The one deriving from the Swiss theologian, Zwingle, the other from the Frenchman, Calvin. Among the Particular Baptists during Hall's lifetime, the so-called "zwinglian" view was predominant.[8] In this view, the Lord's Supper

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1. WORKS II p.16.
2. Grinfield Notes p. 363.
3. WORKS II. p.199.
4. WORKS II. p.30.
5. WORKS II. p. 144.
6. WORKS II. p. 334.
7. See page 77 of this thesis.
8. E.A. Payne: The Fellowship of Believers p. 64 ff.

was considered to be primarily a commemorationor memorial of the death of Christ and a means of uniting a congregation of believers in a common attestation of loyalty to their risen Lord. For example, John Sutcliff, one of the leaders of the Particular Baptists, declared that the Lord's supper "is a standing memorial of Christ. When you see the table spread and are about to partake of the bread and wine, think you hear Christ saying, 'Remember me'."[1]

Hall acknowledges that the Lord's supper is "appointed to be a memorial of the greatest instance of love that was ever exhibited, as well as the principal pledge of christian fraternity,"[2] but says that to "consider the Lord's supper, however, as a mere commemoration ..... is to entertain a very inadequate view of it."[3]

In his controversy with Joseph Kinghorn Hall's view is clearly stated. He describes the Lord's supper as "a feast upon a sacrifice, in which we are actual partakers by faith of the body and blood of the Redeemer offered upon the cross"[4] and in similar language speaks of it as "a federal rite in which, in token of our reconciliation with God, we eat and drink in his presence; it is a feast upon a sacrifice, by which we became partakers at the altar, that less really, though in a manner more elevated and spiritual, than those who under the ancient economy presented their offerings at the temple. In this ordinance, the cup is a spiritual participation of the blood,

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1. quoted by E.A. Payne: op. cit. p. 66.
2. WORKS II. p.14.
3. WORKS II p.63.
4. WORKS II. p.87.

the bread of the body, of the crucified Saviour."[1]

This sacramental language is often repeated by Hall. For example in a sermon at Leicester, he stated that the Lord's supper "presents to our faith His flesh which is meat indeed and His blood which is drink indeed. When we take that bread into our hands we in reality receive that body and that blood which was shed for the remission of sins."[2] Taken by itself, this almost suggests a doctrine of transubstantiation but Hall utterly rejects this. "There is no charm in the Lord's supper which has a tendency, in itself, to purge away sin,"[3] he said in a sermon, and makes his position still clearer by saying, "Some with the greatest folly thought that He (Christ) was present in the sacramental bread. This was in the strongest sense of the term Christ's being divided. When Jesus ascended, He entirely ascended. The heavens received Him and must receive Him till the consummation of all things. Hence it is impossible that He can be bodily present at any assembly of His people on any occasion whatever."[4] Nevertheless Hall believed that by the Holy Spirit, Christ was present with His worshipping people, and those who came in repentance and faith could enjoy "spiritual participation of the body and blood of Christ."[5]

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1. WORKS II. p.64.
2. MSS. notes of Sermons by Hall (taken down by John Ryley) p.72 (Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford).
3. IBID p. 73 (See also WORKS IV p.396.)
4. IBID p. 112.
5. WORKS II p.13.

To sum up, Hall's interpretation of the Lord's supper, in general, echoes that of Calvin.[1] He advocated among the Particular Baptists of his day the "calvinistic" as against the "zwinglian" interpretation of the Lord's supper,[2] repudiating the idea that the celebration of the Lord's supper is a memorial rite only and insisting that, at the Lord's table, by faith, the believer and his Lord are united.

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1. See Calvin's Institutes IV. xvii, 1-10.
2. cf. E.A. Payne The Fellowship of Believers p. 67.

IV. THE CLOSING YEARS.

Hall's health was the dominating factor in his closing years at Bristol. He still preached regularly and seldom missed a service, but his reserves of strength were rapidly being exhausted. The pain in his back continued; yet he seldom complained. One evening at supper Frederick Trestrail (then a student at the Bristol Baptist College) commented on how well he looked. "Indeed Sir!" answered Hall, "then appearances are very deceptive. I have been in agony all day; I have suffered a martyrdom and have taken opium enough to kill twenty men."[1]

In letters to friends, he occasionally mentioned his sufferings. For example, he told Ebenezer Foster of Cambridge, "Some small abatement of the violence and frequency of my old complaint has, I think, of late, been experienced: but it is very inconsiderable; and the last night it prevented me getting a wink of sleep until after seven o'clock this morning."[2] One Sunday he came down from the pulpit at the end of the service in extreme pain and for an hour lay groaning on the floor of the vestry. "I think my work is nearly done," he told the anxious deacons, "the sooner I am taken the better." He recovered sufficiently to preach at the evening service but one of his hearers wrote that he preached as "a dying man to dying men."[3]

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1. Trestrail's Reminiscences p.59/60.

2. WORKS V p.563.

3. Grinfield's Notes p. 312.

Yet this continual suffering in the back was not the worst of his affliction. For years he had endured this pain but had still been able to carry out his duties. Now however, he was also the victim of heart trouble which made his breathing difficult and walking almost impossible. He was heard to say that he could more easily "suffer seven years unabated continuance of the pain in his back, acute as it was, than one half hour of the conflict within his chest."[1] At his best he could not walk more than a quarter of a mile without stopping to rest. One evening, on the way to Broadmead, he could not complete the journey and struggled to a friend's house where he had to remain for some time, the meeting abandoned.[2] By 1828, he was forced to hire a carriage every Sunday to take him to church, but the Broadmead congregation gladly paid the account.[3]

He consulted a leading London doctor[4] but little could be done for him, and by the summer of 1830, his health had deteriorated so much that he was told to stop all church work and take a long holiday. On this advice he went to Coleford in the forest of Dean with an old friend, Isaiah Birt, who was also in poor health. The two friends were constantly in each other's company and when Birt was struggling in the grip of asthma Hall watched by his bedside till he recovered.[5]

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1. Chandler: Authentic account of the last illness & death of R. Hall p.13.

2. Greene's Reminiscences p. 171.

3. Broadmead Documents Book, folio 138.

4. Gregory's Memoir p.105.

5. Baptist Magazine Feb. 1838 p.56 (memoir of Isaiah Birt).

The rest brought an immediate improvement in Hall's health and after staying at Cheltenham for a few days he returned to Bristol to continue his ministry.[1] But the improvement was shortlived. Further heart attacks in January 1831 weakened him greatly and he sensed that death was near. His sermons were particularly solemn and he often alluded to death and the hereafter. In one sermon on January 16th he expressed his own faith by saying, "Some are alarmed at the thought of death; they say; How shall I meet the agonies of dissolution? But when you are called to die, you will, if among God's children, receive dying consolation. Be satisfied if you have the strength to live to God, and God will support you when you come to die."[2]

In the next week or two Hall visibly declined. To his embarrassment he found he could not pronounce certain words properly and had difficulty in speaking. Then, on February 9th, 1831, he attended what was to be his last meeting in Broadmead Baptist Church. It was a church business meeting. He seemed quite at ease and next morning went to his study as usual. An hour or two later he collapsed and had to be helped into bed. Doctors were called at once and eventually three of them were in constant attendance. They advised various treatments - blood was taken from his arm, drugs were given, his limbs were bathed in hot water - but there was little improvement in his condition. For ten days he lay in great agony but friends were

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1. Gregory's Memoir p. 105.

2. IBID p. 108.

impressed by his faith. "What are my sufferings compared to the sufferings of Christ?" he told one friend. To another he remarked "Oh my dear Sir, I have suffered intense agony but I have received unspeakable mercies." Another reported hearing Hall repeat nearly the whole of the hymn, "Come Thou fount of every blessing."

As news of his illness spread, anxious enquiries were made for him and special prayer meetings were held at Broadmead; but the end came on Monday, February 21st, 1831, and Hall after suffering yet another heart attack, died aged sixty-six.[1]

His body lay at his home in Ashley Place until the funeral, and at the request of Mrs. Hall, students from the Baptist College kept vigil at the house. The funeral was held in bitter weather on March 2nd. Six ministers bore the coffin to Broadmead Baptist Church and they were followed by a long procession which included Hall's doctors, the officiating ministers, the deacons of the Church, the students of the College and over three hundred friends, walking four abreast. Many shops along the route were closed and "the windows, the roofs of houses and the streets through which the procession passed were thronged with spectators."[2]

Reaching Broadmead, where the galleries were hung with black cloth,[3] the coffin was placed in front of the pulpit, and the funeral service began. T.S. Crisp, the president of the Bristol Baptist College, gave the address in which he spoke of Hall's outstanding services to Broadmead and to the whole christian church.[4] The body

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1. A detailed account of Hall's last illness is given in Chandler's Authentic Account: see also Morris Recollections. p.509.
2. Bristol Journal March 5th 1831: See also Trestrail's Reminiscences p. 181: Morris Recollections. p.532
3. The cost ofthe funeral was £102:15:6: See Broadmead Documents Book (folio 151-3)
4. Address by T.S. Crisp appended to J. Hughes: Sermon on the death

was then interred in a vault behind Broadmead but a few years later it was removed to Arnos Vale cemetary in Bristol.[1]

Tributes were paid to Hall from many sections of the christian public. Among those who expressed their admiration were the Bishop of Litchfield, the Bishop of Calcutta; the Bishop of Peterborough; Sir James Mackintosh; Lord Bexley; Lord Henley; Henry Brougham; Justice Mellor; Justice Lush and many others.[2] Dr. Thomas Chalmers, the Scottish Presbyterian leader, personally called on Mrs. Hall and wrote to J.E. Ryland, "I received your melancholy intimation of Mr. Hall's death with the greatest emotion and consider it as a severe blow to the Church Universal - as an event to be deplored not by his own flesh and family alone, but by all the friends of our common christianity."[3]

The local press carried articles concerning Hall's work and obituary notices appeared in many magazines. The Evangelical Magazine published a lengthy "Poem on the Death of Robert Hall"[4] and memorial sermons were preached in churches at Leicester, Bristol, Bath, Manchester, London and Birmingham. Eight of these sermons were afterwards published.[5]

The common theme of all these tributes was the all round brilliance of Hall's talents as a preacher, writer and conversationalist, together with his humble and devotional spirit. The only

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1. Trestrail's Reminiscences p. 181. cf. Morris Recollections p.532.
2. Gregory's Memoir p. viii: The Hall Family p.90-94: Modern Memorials (1875) p.27ff.
3. Selections from the Correspondence of Thomas Chalmers (1853) ed. W. Hanna p.321.
4. Evangelical Magazine April 1831 p.144.
5. See Reviews of these sermons in Baptist Magazine May 1831 p.192.

criticisms that were consistently made against him concerned his occasional outbursts of sarcastic, and sometimes rash, denunciation of those whose views he disliked; and the paucity of his published works. Apart from this, the acknowledgement of his greatness and genius was unanimous.

Hall had never been particularly concerned about finance and, fearing that his family were not provided for, friends contributed about £1300 as a gift to Mrs. Hall, which, together with the £4,000 received from the sale of the copyright of his WORKS, provided her with a comfortable income.[1]

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1. The Hall Family p.100: cf. Evangelical Magazine April 1831.

V The INFLUENCE of Robert HALL

At first sight, the influence of Robert Hall seems surprisingly small. His name means little to the overwhelming majority in the modern world and although he had many of the gifts that go to make outstanding leadership - a strong personality, a commanding presence, brilliant oratory and a wide knowledge of men and affairs - the fact remains that no influential society bears his name, no famous institution acknowledges him as its creator and no renowned revival stems from his ministry. The explanation of this apparent failure in popular leadership is largely to be found in his constant ill-health which greatly restricted his activities (especially his writing) and in his mental breakdowns of 1804-5 which left him with such a crippling sense of his own inadequacy, that, apart from preaching, he was seldom persuaded to take a prominent part in any society or organization. Nevertheless it is clear that even within his own denomination, his influence has been greatly underestimated.

As a Baptist preacher, his influence was unique among his contemporaries. The major part of his ministry was spent at Leicester, a strategic centre in the midlands, just when the working classes, disillusioned by the conservatism of the Established Church, were looking to the nonconformists. For over eighteen years, he was the leader of the nonconformists in the town[1] and attracted great crowds to the church most of whom were from the working classes. They came not only because of Hall's brilliant preaching but also because they

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1. His only rival for this claim was Charles Berry, the unitarian pastor of the Great Meeting.

could not forget his work for the Framework-Knitters' Society and his sympathy with the poor and unemployed.

Yet he exerted a still more important influence on the educated and cultured classes. The evangelical Revival had made its conquests mainly among the poorer classes and, to the average well-to-do Englishman, this new conception of religion which Wesley and Whitfield preached, so revolutionary in its simplicity, so demanding on a man's whole manner of life, seemed not merely inconvenient but dangerous. Most of them viewed nonconformity with distaste, if not alarm; but Hall did much to overcome this prejudice. At no time did he court the favour of the upper classes but his scholarship, dignity and oratory attracted many who would otherwise never have entered a Baptist meeting-house. As T.S. Crisp put it - Hall drew "a class of hearers whom none beside himself could attract ..... among this class not only have men of genius and learning been both delighted and edified, but infidels and scoffers have been awed."[1] In his preaching and writing, Hall made contact with a class largely indifferent to the christian gospel because he knew how to write and speak the English of cultivated men. Among his congregations were members of the aristocracy, politicians, university professors, government officials, and leading citizens of the towns in which he preached. Well known figures of the day like Samuel Parr, Thomas Carlyle, Sir

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1. Address by T.S. Crisp at Hall's funeral. Appended to J. Hughes: Sermon on the Death of Hall p. 60.

James Mackintosh, Dugald Stewart, William Pitt, Sydney Smith, Henry Crabb Robinson, Thomas Chalmers, William Wilberforce and Lord Brougham spoke of him among their friends and discussed his writings.[1] The widespread interest which Hall aroused among the upper classes can be seen from the list of subscribers to a volume of notes of Hall's sermons published in 1843 by Thomas Grinfield. Among the names on the list are:- Sir Charles Elton, Lady Isabella King, Viscount Lorton, Prof. Samuel Lee of Cambridge, Dr. Robert Candlish of Edinburgh, Henry Law (Archdeacon of Bath and Wells), and many others. Forty years after his death, J.P. Mursell declared that, in his judgement, Hall had been sent "to take away the reproach of Nonconformity."[2] He certainly did much to take away the reproach of the Baptists, for, as a Free Church historian has written "It was impossible to sneer at a sect with which such a man had deliberately chosen to identify himself."[3]

Hall's influence as a preacher continued long after his death through the publication of his sermons. The first complete edition of his published works was the American edition of October 1830 (in two volumes), in the preface of which the editor referred to "the numerous admirers of Mr. Hall" in America.[4] Six months later, Olinthus Gregory, issued the first of the six volumes of Hall's collected WORKS which included, besides his published works, various

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1. See the various Memoirs etc. of these men and the quotations already given in this thesis.
2. J.P. Mursell: Address at the Unveiling of the Statue of Robert Hall (1871) A copy of this is in Leicester Public Library (Leicester Collection).
3. Skeats and Miall: History of the Free Churches (1891) p.436.
4. A copy of this American edition is in Leicester Public Library (Leicester Collection). See also Baptist Quarterly Oct. 1956 where Thomas Jefferson is quoted as a student of Hall's writings.

sermon notes, letters and other similar documents. More than twelve editions of these WORKS appeared during the next thirty-five years, together with several sermons which were published as tracts - one of them being translated into French in 1836. That Hall's works were widely read is confirmed by the numerous quotations which appeared in books, magazines and tracts during the fifty years following his death. For example the Edinburgh Review in 1835 quoted Hall's opinion of Bentham;[1] thirty years later George Gilfillan quoted at length from Hall in his Galleries of Literary Portraits, while C.H. Spurgeon, probably the greatest preacher of the Victorian era, frequently quoted from Hall[2] and declared that the Baptists "stand second to none in the ministry with Robert Hall."[3]

Nevertheless the influence of Hall's preaching faded with the years and today his works lie unread on library shelves. The reasons for this are not hard to discover. Great preaching loses much of its power when confined within the limits of the printed page. Divorced from the personality of the preacher and the atmosphere of expectant worship a sermon loses much of its impact. This is so with the sermons of Robert Hall. The generation who had heard him preach quickly bought up his works to relive their experience of his preaching; but the next generation, eager to confirm the opinions of their fathers, could not recapture to the same extent the magic of

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1. Edinburgh Review July 1835 Vol.61 p.373 (note)
2. C.H. Spurgeon: The Treasury of David. III p.192: IV p.201: VI p.39
3. Autobiography of C.H. Spurgeon (1897) III p.7.

his words. Gradually sales of his Works diminished and fifty years after his death no more editions were published. It must also be remembered that the style of preaching changed with the years. Hall's eloquence, as Wheeler Robinson wrote, "is stately and dignified, the vocabulary copious and well-chosen, the intellectual mastery of the subjects treated very marked," but the style is that of a byegone day. It is too measured and elaborate for modern taste and to read Hall's sermons is to be made conscious of the changing fashions of preaching.[1]

Hall's reputation as an orator had one serious defect. It tended to overshadow the other contributions he made to the life of his denomination and to the country as a whole. For example, his strong advocacy of freedom, in the years 1790-1793, when the rights of the individual were being harshly suppressed, stands out as an important contribution to the development of civil and religious liberty in England; and the re-issue of his Apology in 1821 played aprominent part in launching the final nonconformist campaign for civil and religious equality.

Hall must also be credited with being a pioneer in the development of education, penal reform, trade unionism and parliamentary reform. His influence in these matters is plainly seen at Leicester where by his writingsand preaching he gathered round him a group of men of the calibre of John Ryley and Albert Cockshaw who shared his ideas and who made the Harvey Lane Baptist Church into one of the chief centres of local radicalism.[2] Hall did not enter into Leicester politics nearly

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1. H. Wheeler Robinson The life and faith of the Baptists (1946) p.65.

2. A.T. Patterson: Radical Leicester (1954) p.231.

as frequently or as vigorously as his successor at Harvey Lane, J.P. Mursell, but he laid the foundations on which Mursell built and Mursell never tired of declaring his indebtedness to him.

Mursell was one of a group of students at Bristol Baptist College who were greatly influenced by Hall during his closing pastorate at Broadmead. Another was J.E. Giles who as the pastor of South Parade Baptist Church, Leeds, (1836-45) became prominent for his interest in the working classes and in socialism. That he was indebted to Hall is plain from the funeral sermon which he preached on Hall's death and from the public lectures on Socialism which he gave in Leeds in 1838 when he freely quoted from Hall. Among many other students who came under Hall's spell was Frederick Trestrail, later secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, whose Reminiscences pay generous tribute to Hall's influence.

Hall's influence also permeated the Baptist denomination through the enlightened views which by his eloquence and example, he commended to the denomination. When overseas missions were still a novelty, he summoned the support of his fellow Baptists and urged on them the importance of the work; and then as the Baptist Missionary Society became established, he freely gave of his eloquence to extend the work. He standsout as one of the most successful missionary advocates that the Baptists ever had. There is no doubt also that he carried with him many of his fellow-Baptists when he gave his support to the Ante-Slavery cause and to the Bible Society; while his stress on the necessity for a well-trained ministry brought many Baptists to a fresh awareness of the importance of the theological colleges.

But Hall's views were sometimes too advanced for his contemporaries they failed to follow his lead. He believed, for example, that, to meet the challenge of the rising industrial age, Baptists must simplify their essential message and widen their appeal. He felt that too many churches were being fettered by the restrictions of an outmoded and complicated theology. "We must learn", he wrote, "to quit a subtle and disputatious theology, for a religion of love ..... Reserving to ourselves the utmost freedom of thought, in the interpretation of the sacred oracles, and pushing our enquiries, as far as our opportunities admit, into every department of revealed truth, we shall not dream of obtruding precarious conclusions on others, as articles of faith; but shall receive with open arms all who appear to 'love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity'."[1] As the communion controversy showed, Hall's attitude was considered too liberal by most of his contemporaries and it was only very gradually during the next generation that his views gained widespread support.

Similarly in his stress on church unity, Hall was far ahead of his age. One of the dominant themes of his ministry was the sin of a divided church. He viewed with concern the growth of sects and the tensions between the denominations both at home and abroad, and he did all he could to foster a spirit of unity and co-operation. Yet Hall's appeal for unity seems to have been largely ignored by his contemporaries many of whom were very suspicious of his friendship with the Established Church and of his tolerance of other denominations.

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1. WORKS II. p.470.

There seems little doubt that Hall would have felt at home in the modern ecumenical movement.

Yet perhaps the greatest influence Robert Hall has had on succeeding generations has not been through his preaching or his writing, but through the example which he left of undaunted courage and resolute character in the face of continual suffering. Lord Lytton focussed attention on this aspect of Hall's life, in his novel The Caxtons (1849). One of the characters in the novel is an old soldier who, after reading the story of Hall's life, says, "What I have seen in this book is courage. Here is a poor creature rolling on the carpet with agony; from childhood to death tortured by a mysterious incurable malady - a malady that is described as 'an internal apparatus of torture'..... Robert Hall reads me a lesson - me, an old soldier who thought myself above taking lessons - in courage at least."[1] This is the background which must not be forgotten in any estimate of Hall's career. The wonder is, not that he did not accomplish more, but that he accomplished so much.

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1. The Caxtons: part IX chapter VI.

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