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*John Berridge: an early evangelical: an examination  
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JOHN BERRIDGE : AN EARLY EVANGELICAL

An examination of his life and works.

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Dissertation submitted for the degree  
of Master of Arts, in March, 1959, by  
The Rev. D.V. Treanor  
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THE REVEREND JOHN BERRIDGE, A.M  
(From an eighteenth century engraving)

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- B. Works                        The Works of the Rev. John Berridge, M.A., Late Fellow of Clare Hall, Vicar of Everton, Bedfordshire, and Chaplain to the Right Honourable the Earl of Buchan. With an enlarged Memoir of his Life: Numerous Letters, Anecdotes, Outlines of Sermons, and Observations on Passages of Scripture and his Original Sion's Songs: by the Rev. Richard Whittingham, Vicar of Potton, Bedfordshire.  
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- Smyth                         Simeon and Church Order : Charles Smyth
- Tyerman's Fletcher            Wesley's Designated Successor: L. Tyerman
- Tyerman's Wesley             Life of the Rev. John Wesley: L. Tyerman
- Tyerman's Whitfield         Life of the Rev. George Whitfield: L. Tyerman



PREFACE

The pulpits of the Tottenham Court Road Chapel and the Tabernacle, near Moorfields, were draped in black. A few days earlier, on January 22nd, 1793, the Reverend John Berridge, A.M., had died at his home in Everton, Bedfordshire. Now his London friends had gathered to pay their last tributes. At the Tabernacle the preacher selected as his text the words which Christ employed as a description of the one who had gone before him calling upon the people to repent and prepare themselves for the advent of the Messiah - "He was a burning and shining light" (Jn.5.35). (1) The choice was indeed apt for he was a godly man, and it has been said that he, and not Wesley, was the true 'apostle of the eastern counties' in the eighteenth century. (2) Certainly, in his own day he was known far and wide; but today far too little is remembered about him - except his peculiarities - and he is often misrepresented (3), and some of the reasons for this are not difficult to find. Berridge wrote relatively little, lived alone and had no contact with his family, belonged to 'a sect everywhere spoken against', and spent the most important years of his life ministering to the needs of simple peasants.

For information about his early years all modern authors have been forced to lean heavily upon the brief memoir compiled by the Rev. Richard Whittingham (his assistant curate for a time) for inclusion in his publication of Berridge's Works.

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1. B. Works, 2nd edit., p.614.                      2. Knox, p.460.  
 3. See, e.g., The English Country Parson, p.121.

This consists of certain facts which Berridge told Whittingham directly, and of others which the latter culled, in the main, from such contemporary periodicals as The Gospel Magazine, The Evangelical Magazine and The Gospel Standard.

Of Berridge it is perfectly true to say that life began at forty, and fortunately very much more is known of the decades which he himself regarded as his most profitable. His letters are revealing and there are many useful references to him in John Wesley's Journal, in the writings of some of the notable early evangelicals, in the "Life" of Lady Huntingdon, and in Tyerman's biographies of Wesley, Whitfield and Fletcher.

It has often been pointed out that Berridge had undeniable faults. It seems worth recalling and emphasising that he also had undeniable virtues.

YEARS OF PREPARATION

On March 1, 1716, Sarah Berridge gave birth to her first son and named the baby John, after his father. The proud parents decided that their child should be given the best possible training to equip him to take over their farm when he was of age, and so as soon as possible they sent him from his home in the village of Kingston in Nottinghamshire to the county town. There John lived with an aunt and developed into a studious, serious-minded boy. It is recorded that one of his young friends urged him to begin reading the Bible, and before long he was not only reading and praying himself, but was also making every effort to gather together his schoolmates in order to instruct them in the Faith. (1) When he was fourteen Berridge left school. His young mind was obsessed with a sense of his own sinfulness; he longed to be born again, but as yet he did not understand how it was possible to receive this blessing.

Now that John and his parents were re-united and the boy had been provided with all the formal education that his wealthy father deemed necessary for a good farmer, the time had come for instruction in the more 'practical' business of agriculture. He was taken to all the local fairs and markets; he rubbed shoulders with men whose whole lives had been spent close to the soil; he listened to their conversation and heard them wrangling together; but it profited him little. He seemed utterly incapable of learning their lore.

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1. Whittingham p.1 : cf. B.Works, p.350.

Little more than a decade earlier Jonathan Edwards, on the other side of the Atlantic, had begun his evangelistic work in precisely the same manner.

The youth with the town education tried, for his parents sake, to understand those things which the average countryman knows almost instinctively, but he failed miserably. His heart was not fully in his new work. He had never abandoned his desire to become something other than a simple son of the soil, and was therefore delighted when he struck up a friendship with the local tailor. This worthy soul was the village scholar and he was always pleased to see John and to encourage him in the pursuit of knowledge, both secular and sacred. The bluff farmer became, in the meanwhile, more and more exasperated with his heir. It was clear that one of the other three sons would have to shoulder the responsibilities of the farm. "John", declared the disappointed man prophetically, "I find you unable to form any practical idea of the price of cattle, and therefore I shall send you to college to be a light to the Gentiles." (1)

So it was that on October 28, 1734, at the age of eighteen, John Berridge entered Clare Hall, Cambridge. He was a year or two older than most freshmen (2), but thanks to some extra tuition and to the fact that he was more ready to apply himself to his work than were the majority of the students this proved no handicap. From the first he was extremely happy with the life at Cambridge and revelled in the opportunities which the university gave him. It is said that throughout the whole of the twenty one years of his residence there he gave not less than fifteen hours a day to study!

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1. Whittingham p.2.
  2. Elliott-Binns, The Early Evangelicals, p.274.

Four years after he entered Clare Hall Berridge took the degree of B.A. and four years later, in 1742, he became a Master of Arts, took Holy Orders and was elected to a Fellowship.

These were the most carefree years of his life. He was now in his element and 'pursued his studies with uncommon avidity, and made such progress in every branch of literature as rendered him in no way inferior to any of his contemporaries' (1) The Classics, mathematics, philosophy, logic, metaphysics and the works of eminent divines; he delved deeply into them all (2), and Henry Venn, who was his friend for half a century, maintained that Berridge 'was as familiar with the learned languages (Latin and Greek) as he was with his mother tongue'. (3) His learning earned its just reward. On at least one occasion he was privileged to be appointed Moderator in the schools (4).

However, it was not his knowledge and ability alone that endeared him to 'ecclesiastics of superior rank' and to men who, like the elder Pitt's nephew, became his intimate friends. Berridge had a great sense of humour and a keen wit and was very fond of regaling his companions with apt quotations from Samuel Butler's Hudibras. Whenever it was known that he was to be present at a dinner the host was assured of a full table, for everyone knew that 'he was a man of rare gifts.' (5)

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1. Whittingham, p.4.  
2. B.Works, p.358.  
3. Whittingham, p.20.

4. Tyerman's Whitfield, Vol. II p.441  
(Letter to Rev. J. Gillies of  
Glasgow, dated March 14th, 1761)  
cf. Brown's Recollections of the  
Conversation Parties of the Rev.  
Charles Simeon, p.200.  
5. Ryle, The Christian Leaders of  
England in the 18th Century, p.220.

He drew others round him as a magnet draws pins, and was soon a very popular character in the university. 'In short', as Canon Charles Smyth says 'he was a Studious, clever, fat and jolly don; the best company in the world.' (1)

Yet all was not well with the good man. He had become so involved with the daily round of reading and with the trivialities of the dinner table that for the greater part of ten years he abandoned his private devotions and drank deeply from the cup of Socinian scepticism (2). At this Ryle was not surprised. 'We must remember', wrote the bishop, 'that he was exposed to extraordinary temptations'. And then he exclaims, rather unkindly, 'how hardly shall resident Fellows of colleges enter the kingdom of God! It was a miracle of grace that he was not cast away for ever, and did not sink beneath the waters, never to rise again.' (3) Noting this comment Smyth observes that in point of fact Berridge was saved because 'he had a particularly acute intelligence of the academic pattern. He perceived that from Socinianism he was insensibly lapsing into mere infidelity: and, being sufficiently impartial in his scepticism to be sceptical of unbelief itself, he fought his way back to orthodoxy and renounced his former errors.' (4)

Now he determined to apply for a curacy and to do some active work among people outside the university. He was offered, and he accepted the curacy of Stapleford a few miles outside Cambridge in 1749, and for the next six years he ministered to the extremely ignorant and dissolute villagers there, while continuing to reside at college.

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1. Smyth, Simeon and Church Order, p.159.
  2. Whittingham, p.5.
  3. Ryle, p.221.
  4. Smyth pp.159, 160.

This may seem to be a very unsatisfactory arrangement, but the practice was a common one at the time and most of the churches within ten miles of Cambridge were served by Fellows of Colleges. (1) Charles Simeon took on the same cure many years later (in 1794) in addition to his other duties because he felt that it was wrong to restrict himself to one pulpit three times a Sunday. (2).

In a long letter to a friend written on July 3, 1758, Berridge speaks of these years at Stapleford and confesses ashamedly that he strove to impress upon his congregation 'the doctrine that everyman will naturally hold whilst he still continues in an unregenerate state, namely, that we are to be justified partly by our faith, and partly by our works.' (3) He performed his duties zealously and prepared his sermons carefully but which ever way he looked he could see no signs which indicated that an impression was being made upon the people. He was forced to admit that 'not one soul was brought to Christ.' It was only years later that he understood why he had failed. People called him a Methodist because he was a little more grave and took a little more pains in his ministry than some other brethren, but the sorry fact was that he was not what he appeared to be. As he wrote, nearly a decade after he had begun his labours at Stapleford, 'in truth I was no Methodist at all, for I had no sort of acquaintance with them, and could not abide their fundamental doctrines of justification by faith...' (4) In common with many men of his day Berridge had subscribed to the Articles of Religion while neither believing fully nor teaching the doctrine which they enshrine. (5)

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1. Ibid, p.155.  
 2. Ibid, p.157.  
 3. B.Works, p.350.

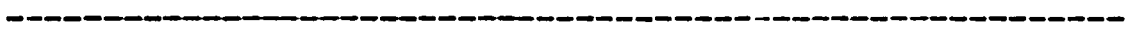
4. Ibid, p.359.  
 5. Ibid. pp.361, 362.

His aim at this time was 'to bring his people to appreciate the excellence of morality and to manifest it in their life, thus leading them to build their hopes of acceptance with God, and of future felicity, in great measure upon their own doings.' (1) But, little by little he began to see that 'knocking off fine caps and bonnets' was entirely ineffectual.

Fortunately failure was just the tonic that he himself required. He was forced to stop and think again about the fundamental truths of the Gospel. But the light did not dawn even then. Though he was living the life which he urged upon the folk of Stapleford neither he nor they seemed to be really satisfied.

He decided that the time had come for a change. He would try again somewhere else. So it was that on July 7, 1755, he was instituted to a college living. Everton, which was to be his home for the rest of his life, lay partly in Bedfordshire and partly in Huntingdonshire, and it was here that the infamous John Tiptoft, known as the 'Butcher of England', had been born and had died. This cruel man had condemned to death more people than he could count... but he had also written some of the first books to be printed in English.

Long before the days of Tiptoft's reign of terror, in the fifteenth century, a splendid little church had been built on the Huntingdonshire side of the border. Within its precincts an elaborate monument to Sir Humphrey Winche, the Stuart judge who sentenced 19 women to death for practicing witchcraft, caught the eye of every visitor.



1. Whittingham, p.7.

But this was a peaceful little place whose inhabitants were untroubled by thoughts of the violent men who had once lived in their village. The squire and his tenants conformed to the undemanding religious customs of their day. There was nothing in anyway remarkable about the cure which Berridge had accepted.

'Ere long however, the name of Everton was upon the lips of people living many miles away, for the new vicar soon shattered the peace of his parishioners and transformed the sleepy little community into a great centre of revival.

THE TURNING POINT

As soon as he had established himself at Everton, Berridge began to preach the same message that he had delivered at Stapleford but to his dismay it had no more effect than before. Earnestly he pondered the position and was forced to conclude that there must be something wrong in his own life. After about a year and a half at Everton, as Christmas 1757 approached, he began praying and re-praying this prayer: "Lord, if I am right, keep me so; if I am not right make me so and lead me to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus." (1) After about ten days, he says, God 'was pleased to return an answer to my prayers, in the following wonderful manner. As I was sitting in my house one morning, and musing upon a text of Scripture, the following words were darted into my mind with wonderful power and seemed indeed like a voice from heaven, viz. "Cease from thine own works." Before I heard these words my mind was in a very unusual calm; but as soon as I heard them, my soul was in a tempest directly, and tears flowed from my eyes like a torrent. The scales fell from my eyes immediately, and I now saw the rock I had been splitting on for near thirty years!" (2)

Hitherto he had believed that 'sanctification was the way to justification' but now he was assured that 'we must first be justified by faith, before we can have any true sanctification by the Spirit.' (3) As he admits,

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1. B.Works, p.350.  
2. Ibid. p.351.

3. Ibid. p.352.

until this time he had despised the doctrine of justification by faith alone, believing it to be not only foolish but positively dangerous. Speaking of his former manner of life and of the content of his earlier preaching he says, 'watching, praying and fasting are necessary duties, but I, like many others, placed some secret reliances on them, thinking they were to do that for me, in part at least, which Christ only could. The truth is, though I saw myself to be a sinner, and a great sinner, yet I did not see myself to be an utterly lost sinner, and therefore I could not come to Jesus Christ alone to save me.'

'In short, to use a homely similitude', he continues, 'I put the justice of God into one scale, and as many good works as I could into the other; and when I found, as I always did, my good works not to be a balance to the divine justice, I then threw in Christ as a makeweight.' (1) Berridge now turned his back upon the past. Henceforth, he resolved, he would only preach 'Jesus Christ and salvation by faith'. At forty one, in the very prime of his life, he was suddenly changed from being a zealous moralist to a hard-hitting, forthright and exceptionally effective exponent of the essential truths of the Gospel.

At once he destroyed all his old sermons and instead of 'lopping off branches' he now laid the axe to the root of the tree. Very plainly he informed his astonished people that they were 'the children of wrath, and under the curse of God, though they knew it not; and that none but Jesus Christ could deliver them from that curse.' (2)

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1. Ibid. pp.354, 355.

2. Ibid. p.355.

Throughout the years at Stapleford and for nearly two years afterwards Berridge wrote out his sermons word for word but now something happened which changed his method of preaching as radically as his conversation had changed the content of his message. He was invited to deliver what Whittingham describes as a 'Club sermon' (1) and, since he had destroyed all his old sermons and had not time to prepare a new one, he was in a quandary as to what he should do. Fortunately, it seemed, there would only be a very small congregation, and so he decided to speak extemporarily. To his horror, when he arrived at the appointed place, he discovered that all the clergy and people of neighbouring parishes had gathered to listen to him. The word had got round that Berridge was a preacher well worth hearing and so a large number of people had assembled from the surrounding districts to judge for themselves. Taking his courage in both hands he rose diffidently to address them and to his amazement he discovered that he had no difficulty in speaking without any notes. Thereafter, he never penned another discourse, except on very special occasions.

The effect of his new sermons was not obvious immediately, and for a few weeks he was doubtful as to whether he had done the right thing. But then one of his parishioners came to ask for his advice, and all his doubts were dispelled. "Well, Sarah", he greeted her. But she replied, "Well, not so well, I fear." "Why, what is the matter?" he asked her. "Why, I don't know what's the matter. These new sermons! I find we are all to be lost now. I can neither, eat, drink, nor sleep.

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I don't know what's to become of me."(1) He began to make enquiries among his flock and discovered that all who had heard him were 'surprised, alarmed and vexed!'(2) He was overjoyed. At last he had found the weapon with which to dislodge them from their apathy. One after another men and women came to him, as had Sarah, 'pricked to the hearts, and crying out with strong and bitter cries, 'What must we do to be saved?'(3) Calmly Berridge met them, reminded them of Christ's promises, and exhorted them to give thanks for their new convictions. It was now eight years since he had devoted himself to the spiritual welfare of simple country folk, and at long last he was experiencing the privilege of seeing "believers added to the Church continually." Nor was there anything nominal about the faith of these new adherents who 'flocked from all parts to hear the glorious sound of the Gospel, some coming six miles, others eight, and others ten, and that constantly'. (4) The whole manner of life of a great many of them was completely transformed.

News came to John Wesley about the revival at Everton through a letter, written by Berridge to a certain Mr. Daw, which was passed on to him on April 29, 1758, by Martin Madan. Berridge said:

'God has been pleased to bless and prosper my labours, in a very extraordinary manner, for these last three months. Since I preached the real Gospel of Christ, seven people in my own parish have now received the Gospel in the appointed way of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Nine or ten from Potton are in a very hopeful way, two at Gamlingay, and two at Eaton. There is now such a storm arising that I know not how it will end, or when.....The tempest is now whistling about my ears, but it does not ruffle or discompose my heart.

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1. Ibid.p.11.  
2. B.Works. p.356.

3. Ibid. p.356.  
4. Ibid. p.357.

Some time ago, I was told by several hands, that twelve Clergymen had combined together, in order to oppose and prosecute me, if they could. My 'Squire ..... stopped me and called me the usual names of Enthusiast &c.&c. Today I hear that the 'Squire has sent for such of his tenants as are disposed to hear the word of God, and has given them warning to leave their farms directly.' (1)

The story was a familiar one to Wesley. Frequently opposition had been offered to his own preaching and it was not very long before the Methodists in Bedford heard of what was afoot in Everton. Accordingly they sent John Walsh, a converted Deist, to give them a first hand report. He was well received by Berridge and saw that the rumours which had reached the ears of the brethren were well founded. After Walsh had returned with his report he was sent on to meet John Wesley himself and to tell him about all that he observed. Once, he told his leader, John Berridge had been ashamed of the word Methodist, but now he was only too ready to be so described. Further, he declared, Berridge had read some of Wesley's works and was very keen to meet him. (2) All this was most encouraging, and Wesley decided that he would journey to Everton as soon as he could conveniently do so.

Before his arrival, however, George Whitfield passed through the little village on his way north, and in a letter written from Newcastle on July 31 of the same year (1758) he declared: 'Mr. Berridge, who was lately awakened at Everton, promises to be a burning and shining light.' (3)

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1. Smyth, pp.163, 164, from Arminian Magazine (1797).
  2. Ibid. p.164, from Arminian Magazine (1780).
  3. Tyerman's Whitfield, Vol. II , p.410.

Whittingham tells us that Berridge's 'acquaintance with Mr. Wesley commenced on June 2, 1758, (not more than six months after the change in his religious sentiments... ) (1) but in point of fact Wesley was in Ireland at that time, and it was not until November 10 that he was able to pay his first visit to Everton. On this occasion he preached twice; at six in the evening, and at 5 a.m. on the following day, before he rode on to the London Foundery. In his Journal, along with certain observations about Berridge's conversion and resultant change in teaching he adds that 'God confirmed His own word exactly as He did at Bristol, in the beginning, by working repentance and faith in his hearers, and with the same violent outward symptoms.' (2)

In passing it may be observed that Bristol was neither the first nor the last place to witness the Methodist paroxysms but it was there, in April 1739, that the 'Shriekings, Roarings, Groanings, <sup>ai</sup>Wallings, Cursings, Blasphemies and Despairings' which so shocked Bishop Lavington first occurred in large numbers.(3)

In every way the years 1758 and 1759 proved to be most important ones in Berridge's life. They marked the turning point in his career. He was converted; he burnt his old sermons; he began to preach the full Gospel; he observed the first positive results of years of hard work; and he stirred up opposition from many influential

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1. Whittingham, p.13.
2. Wesley's Journal, Vol.IV, p.291
3. Knox: Enthusiasm, pp.520, 521.

people, while at the same time making the acquaintance and enlisting the support of Whitfield, John Wesley and other friends of the Countess of Huntingdon. Hereafter he became one of the leading figures in the revival which was steadily sweeping across the country, and like the pioneers of that revival he took the dangerous step of beginning to itinerate.

FIELD PREACHING AND MYSTERIOUS PHENOMENA

In a letter to a friend, written in July, 1758, in which he explained how he had lived in the years before and the weeks after his conversion, Berridge observed:

'In the last century our Clergy have been gradually departing more and more from our doctrines, articles and homilies... and almost all the sermons that have been published in the last century are full of that self-destroying doctrine, that we are justified partly by our own works, and partly by Christ's merits.' (1)

So it seemed. Moreover, wherever he turned he found empty churches (2) and inactive and spiritually inert clergy (3). John Brown, in his 'Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times (1757-1758)' said of the clergy, 'It is grown fashionable among these Gentlemen to despise the Duties of their Parish; to wander about, as the various seasons invite, to every scene of false gaiety; to frequent and shine in all public places, their own Pulpits excepted...' However, he attempted to soften his criticism of them by adding, they 'are neither better nor worse than other men'. In so saying, of course, he damned them utterly. (4)

Perceiving the spiritual malaise of the country the new convert determined to extend his own activities and to become 'a riding pedlar' serving some 'forty shops' in the county, besides his own parish. (5) Without delay he began

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1. B.Works, p.362.
  2. Abbey and Overton, pp.439ff.
  3. Ibid. p.26. cf. B. Williams : The Whig Supremacy, p.85 and C.G. Robertson : England Under the Hanoverians, p.207.
  4. English Historical Documents, Vol.10, edit. D.B. Horn and M. Ransome, pp.366, 367.
  5. B.Works, 2nd Edit, p.355.

itinerating and soon found a useful ally in the Rev. William Hicks, the rector of Wrestlingworth.

Like other neighbouring clergy Hicks had at first opposed Berridge's new message and his resolution to publish it far and wide. On August 1, 1758, however, he became convinced that he had been fighting against the truth. For a few weeks his mind was in a turmoil, but by September 17, he had found peace, had turned his back upon the past, and had begun to preach the true Gospel (1). He put himself at Berridge's disposal and on May 14, 1759, they began to preach in the open air. In a letter, quoted by Whittingham (2), Berridge describes the occasion:

'On Monday se'nnight Mr. Hicks accompanied me to Meldred. On the way we called at a farmhouse. After dinner I went out into the yard, and seeing nearly a hundred and fifty people I called for a table and preached for the first time in the open air. We then went to Meldred where I preached in a field to about four thousand people. In the morning, at five, Mr. Hicks preached in the same field to about one thousand. Here the presence of the Lord was wonderfully among us, and, I trust, beside many that were slightly wounded nearly thirty received heartfelt conviction.'

No doubt Berridge and Hicks were encouraged in taking this step by the example of their newly found friends John Wesley and George Whitfield. As has been said, Wesley paid his first visit to Everton on November 10, 1758, and immediately he saw the 'violent outward symptoms' which convulsed many of Berridge's hearers. On December 18 he returned and again the same strange phenomena were apparent. On the first occasion, he relates in his Journal, he preached at Wrestlingworth on the way to Everton, and at both the evening and morning services in the middle of

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1. Whittingham, p.13.

2. Ibid. p.14.

a woman fainted, and 'dropped down as dead'. Twentyfour hours later, when he had reached his destination the same thing happened to several people. (1) On December 18 the disturbances were even more distressing. Many 'were not able to contain themselves, but cried aloud for mercy.' (2)

On March 1, in the following year, Wesley again called at Everton on his way to Norwich, and on this occasion he was relieved to find that the congregations were far more calm. In a letter to Lady Huntingdon, written at this time, he reports, 'Mr. Berridge seems to be one of the most simple, as well as most sensible, men of all whom it pleased God to employ in reviving primitive Christianity. They come now twelve or fourteen miles to hear him. His word is with power; he speaks as plain and home as John Nelson, but with all the propriety of Mr. Romaine, and the tenderness of Mr. Hervey.' (3)

But the same puzzling phenomena which had been apparent in the work of the early Quakers and late Jansenists, in the revivals at Kingswood, Bristol and Newcastle upon Tyne, and also in the great revivals in America and in Scotland (4) had by no means disappeared at Everton.

On Sunday May 20 the little village was well and truly stirred up. An eye witness later describing the scene to Wesley (5) recorded that while Berridge was preaching at the morning service a great many of the congregation fainted or cried out in alarm. In the afternoon the church was again packed; there were so many people that the vicar 'seemed almost stifled by their very breath.' Incredibly

1. Vol. IV. pp.291, 292.

2. Ibid. p.295.

3. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.1. p.399.

4. Tyerman's Wesley, Vol.II, p.312. 5. Wesley's Journal, Vol.1  
p.318.

enough there were almost three times as many men as there were women present, and no less than thirty of them had left their homes at two in the morning to walk the thirteen miles to Everton.

'The presence of God really filled the place', declared Wesley's informer, 'and while poor sinners fled the presence of death in their souls, what sounds of distress did I hear! The greatest number of them who cried or fell were men; but some women and several children felt the power of the same almighty Spirit and seemed just sinking into hell.' The cries were ghastly, but not all cried. While some fell down in deathly silence, others collapsed 'with extreme noise and violent agitation.' (1)

Standing up on one of the pews in order that he might have a better view of all that was going on around him this witness declared that he himself could not fail to be moved by the spectacle and filled with dread, even as a soldier, who though unwounded himself experiences the shock of seeing his comrades struck down one by one. But he made it clear that all the noise was not sorrowful. Accompanying the anguished cries there were countless shouts of joy (2). After the service the work continued at the vicarage. Here the scene was even more extraordinary and even more impressive. 'The faces of ... all believers present did really shine; and such beauty, such a look of extreme happiness and at the same time of divine love and simplicity did I never see in human faces until now,' (3) he declared.

1. Ibid. p.318.  
2. Ibid. p.319.

3. Ibid. p.320.

On the very next day Berridge addressed 'near ten thousand people ... among whom were many gownsmen from Cambridge.' This time his pulpit was a table set in the middle of Shelford Common, about twenty miles from his own parish. On this occasion 'the audience behaved with great decency.'(1) On the following morning Berridge spoke to another gathering of about one thousand, and then agreed with his faithful assistant Hicks to go into Hertfordshire. They decided to travel together at first, and then to separate in order that they could carry the Gospel to greater numbers. They resolved to preach everywhere and in the future to devote four days each week to itinerating. So it was that they made plans which were to be the guide of all that Berridge strived to do for the next quarter of a century.(2)

Three days after he had stood beside Berridge shivering with cold on Shelford Common Hicks was back in his own parish. Again he was forced to witness extraordinary convulsions seizing many of those to whom he addressed himself. As had been the case on the previous Sunday at Eyerton the violent struggling of those who were convulsed resulted in several pews being broken! (3)

All through this first summer the most incredible scenes attended the preaching of Berridge and Hicks though they did nothing to encourage the outbreaks - except continue to preach. Doctor John Green, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, Master of Corpus and later Bishop of Lincoln, declared that Berridge was extremely disappointed when paroxysms did not occur, and that on

1. Ibid. p.322.
2. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.1, p.368.
3. Ibid. p.321.

one occasion the new vicar of Everton had cried, "Fall! won't you fall! why don't you fall! better fall here, than fall into hell!" but Smyth (1) disbelieves this report. Dr. Green, like so many others in his generation, hated 'enthusiasm' and 'methodistical oratory'. They detested the appeal to the emotions to which the Methodists and early Evangelicals frequently resorted, and they were only too ready to oppose them in every way possible. The second-hand 'evidence' of such a man can hardly be regarded as entirely reliable.

Indeed there is very real evidence on the other side which makes it seem that Berridge (if not Wesley) was extremely worried by the strange phenomena. Certainly he did all he could to prevent the news of what was happening from spreading about the countryside. But, of course, he could not. In a letter to Wesley, written on July 16 (1759), Berridge says, 'I would not have you publish the account of A.T.' (Ann Thorn) 'It might only prejudice people against the Lord's work in this place'.(2) How very true that was. The news did get round; it did cause a great deal of trouble; and even today when nearly everything else may be forgotten about the devoted ministry of the vicar of Everton the events which have been described are carefully recorded in all manner of books about the period. Strangely enough much less is said about the Methodist paroxysms and even when they are mentioned the impression is given, more often than not, that they were on a much smaller scale than those which were witnessed in the early months of the revival at Everton.

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1. op. cit. p.175.

2. Arminian Magazine, 1780, p.613.

Even Monsignor Ronald Knox says that the 'most extraordinary outbreak of these symptoms was produced neither at Bristol nor Newcastle, but in East Anglia', at Everton. (1) However, he destroys his own contention by citing instance after instance from the early years of Wesley's and of Whitfield's itinerant ministry. He gives very full and helpful details and the parallels to the outbreaks at Everton are extremely close.

Furthermore, Knox gathers together evidence which proves conclusively that the mysterious occurrences at Bristol, Newcastle and Everton were not in any way unique. They were not even unique in this period, to say nothing of the times of the early Quakers, Jansenists, Anabaptists and others of whom he writes. Other outbreaks took place in Cornwall (in 1755) at Newcastle ('57), at Cardiff ('58), and at Norwich and Otley, near Leeds ('60). In 1762 Wesley records similar strange phenomena at Bartley in Hertfordshire, at Limerick and at Macclesfield. Amazing sights were witnessed at Grimsby ('64), at Stroud ('65), at Monrath and Enniscorthy, in Ireland ('69), and so on. Right up to 1788 outbreaks of all kinds took place unexpectedly when Wesley was preaching. They died out very quickly at Everton, but it seems that they followed Wesley for the rest of his life. Though sporadic they never ceased. (2)

Great emphasis has been laid upon the doubtful nature of the occurrences at Everton, and the reason is not difficult to find. They are still difficult to understand.

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1. op.cit. p.527.  
2. op.cit. p.527.

Neither Wesley nor Berridge was entirely happy about these phenomena. They were at a loss to know what to make of them, but Wesley observed them calmly (1) and gave it as his considered opinion in November 1759 that:

1. God began by suddenly convincing people of sin; this naturally resulted in outcries and strong convulsions.
2. To encourage the believers, he favoured (sic) several people with divine dreams, trances and visions.
3. In some of these instances, after a time, nature was mixed with grace.
4. Satan likewise mimicked this work of God, in order to discredit the whole work; and yet it is not wise to give up this part of the work, any more than the whole.(2)

Wesley also said that 'those whom it pleases God to employ in this work ought to be quite passive in this respect; they should choose nothing, but leave entirely to Him all the circumstances of His work.' (3)

Many writers agree with Bishop Ryle's conclusion that, 'the whole subject, like demoniacal possession, is a very deep and mysterious one, and there we must be content to leave it.' (4) But Dr. William Sargant believes it is possible to say more than that. In his recent study of the techniques of conversion and brainwashing (5) he argues that it is perfectly possible to show definite scientific reasons, both for the success of Methodist and Evangelical preaching, and for the mysterious effects which it produced in the eighteenth century. He makes a special examination of Wesley's methods and message, and bases the conclusions which he reaches upon evidence drawn from

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1. R.A. Knox, pp.451,452.
2. Ibid. p.535.
3. Tyerman's Wesley, Vol.11, p.333.
4. op.cit. p.229.
5. Battle for the Mind, 1957.

a very wide variety of sources, taken from different eras, from many different parts of the world, and from many different religions and cults.

In his fascinating book Sargant deals with the results obtained by Russian experiments on dogs, and the conclusions of European and American doctors derived from their treatment of soldiers and civilians suffering from shock. He offers also an examination of the methods of Voodoo priests, Holy Rollers, secret police and many others.

The importance of this work for an understanding of the Methodist revival is that it suggests very persuasively that Wesley, Berridge (1) and a host of their peers achieved their undoubted success by making 'a tremendous assault on the emotions' of their hearers, and that the physical disturbances which often followed were the natural result of a temporary upheaval of their minds. (2)

First of all, he points out, these men would create a state of high emotional tension in their potential converts who were, in the main, very simple folk, by convincing them that 'failure to achieve salvation would necessarily condemn them to hellfire for ever after. The immediate acceptance of an escape from such a ghastly fate was then very strongly urged on the ground that anyone who left the meeting unchanged and met with a sudden fatal accident before he accepted this salvation, would pass straight into the fiery furnace. This sense of urgency increased the prevailing anxiety which, as suggestibility increased, could infect the whole group.' (3)

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1. Ibid. p.76.  
2. Ibid. pp.83, 84.

3. Ibid. p.78.

Fear of everlasting hell affected the nervous system of those who listened to the revival preachers and prepared them for the next stage. As Sargant says, 'it is not enough to disrupt previous patterns of behaviour by emotional assaults on the brain; one must also provide an escape from the induced mental stress. Hellfire is presented only as the result of rejecting the offer of eternal salvation... Emotionally disrupted by this threat, and then rescued from everlasting torment by a total change of heart, the convert is now in a state to be helped by dwelling upon the complementary gospel of Love.' (1)

Exactly similar effects can be achieved either by powerful persuasion of this kind or by the use of drugs. As an illustration of the point Sargant quotes part of a report by two colleagues on their treatment of acute war neuroses which has close parallels in many of the reports taken from Wesley's Journal. He writes, Grinker and Spiegel describe the effects of abreaction of war experiences under barbiturate drugs as follows:

'The terror exhibited...is electrifying to watch. The body becomes increasingly tense and rigid; the eyes widen and the pupils dilate, while the skin becomes covered with a fine perspiration. The hands move convulsively...

'Breathing becomes incredibly rapid or shallow. The intensity of the emotion sometimes becomes more than they can bear; and frequently at the height of the reaction, there is a collapse and the patient falls back in the bed and remains quiet for a few minutes...' (2)

Sargant makes it quite clear that it was possible to resist the preaching of men like Berridge, but only by refusing to take it seriously. Emotional involvement

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1. Ibid.p.80.

2. Ibid.p.74.

of any kind was fatal. Interest <sup>or</sup> and hatred, credulity <sup>or</sup> and opposition brought those who adopted these attitudes to precisely the same position. As soon as the emotions were deeply affected, the nervous system was disarranged, and the body convulsed. Hope was offered, the mind reasserted itself, was overjoyed and filled with a sense of peace, and the body returned to its normal functions. Complete apathy was the only sure weapon with which to face the eighteenth century revivalists, and it is this attitude of mind alone, declares Sargant, that can defeat modern attempts at either religious or political indoctrination.

While this thesis is extremely illuminating it fails to account for one important fact. Berridge preached the same message and he used the same methods for more than thirty years. At the beginning the mysterious phenomena were a regular accompaniment to his work, but in a very short time they disappeared, never in his case, to return again. Dr. Sargant unfortunately, does not note this point and nothing he says seems to explain it. As we have seen W.E.H. Lecky was certainly right in maintaining that the 'methodists preached especially to the nerves', but his conclusion is unjust, to say the least. 'A more appalling system of religious terrorism', he wrote, 'one more fitted to unhinge a tottering intellect and to darken and embitter a sensitive nature, has seldom existed.' (1) In putting his judgement in this way he fails - as Sargant does not - to give due weight to the positive good results which were achieved by those men whose methods he deplored.

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1. A History of England in the Eighteenth Century,  
Vol.11, p.582.

In spite of growing opposition the work at Everton continued and the revival spread. In the same letter in which he warned Wesley about the danger of repeating what he had heard about Ann Thorn (Wesley later verified the facts by interviewing the young woman himself) Berridge gave the following account of his progress:

'Mr. Hicks and myself have been preaching in the fields for this month past, and the power of the Lord is wonderfully present with the word...Near twenty towns have received the Gospel in a greater or lesser degree, and we continually receive fresh invitations wherever we go. The word is everywhere like a hammer, breaking the rock in pieces.'

As always, at this time, disturbing scenes accompanied his labours:

'People fall down, cry out most bitterly, and struggle so vehemently, that five or six men can scarce hold them down...'

In this letter Berridge explains that whenever he and Hicks visited a new town or village they were always greeted by scoffing crowds, but after one or two sermons had been preached the atmosphere changed completely. Results were to be seen immediately, and as soon as there were three or four in any village who had been converted Berridge made it his business to persuade them to gather together several evenings a week in order to sing hymns, and, ultimately, to study the Bible and pray together. In consequence of the formation of these little groups of men and women the work of evangelisation went on, and indeed prospered, long after Berridge himself had ridden off. Dr. Laubach's motto, 'Each one, teach one', may not have been coined at this time but it was certainly put into practice.

Even the corporate singing of hymns brought remarkable results, of which Berridge cites the following examples:

'At Orwell, ten people were broken down in one night, only by hearing a few people sing hymns. At Grantchester, a mile from Cambridge, seventeen people were seized with strong convictions last week, only by hearing hymns sung.' (1)

By this time more and more news of the new revival in the Eastern counties had reached the ears of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, and so she despatched two of her chaplains, William Romaine and Martin Madan, to investigate. At first they were very troubled by what they saw but they were well received by Berridge and Hicks and as they went about with them and spoke to some of those who had been convinced by their preaching they decided that all was well. In due course, therefore, they returned to their great patron<sup>ess</sup> with a favourable report. (2)

July 18 was a great day for Berridge, for on that day he returned at last to Stapleford where he had worked for six years without any appreciable success. About fifteen hundred people gathered round him and it seemed that he would fare just as badly as before, for a great number of them were 'laughers and mockers'. But on this occasion they were to hear from him the full Gospel message. Never before had he preached a true Gospel sermon to them, and as the message was different so was the sequel.

'I had just spoke', Berridge said afterwards, 'when I heard a dreadful noise on the far side of the congregation, and turning thither, saw one Thomas Skinner' (the ringleader of the scoffers) 'coming forward, the most horrible human figure I ever saw. His large wig and hair were coal black; his face distorted beyond

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1. Arminian Magazine, 1780, pp.611ff.
  2. Wesley's Journal, Vol IV, p.335.

all description. He roared incessantly, throwing and clapping his hands together with his whole force. Several were terrified and hasted out of his way.'

After praying aloud Skinner suddenly collapsed on the ground and would have been taken for dead had not his face continued to twitch with horrible contortions while the veins of his neck swelled alarmingly. After several hours the poor man's body became normal again and his soul was filled with a feeling of peace. What happened to Skinner so scared his companions that they were silenced, and by the time that Berridge was ready to dismiss the crowds he found that several hundred people, instead of going home as bidden, preferred to stay behind in the hope of speaking to him privately.

On the following morning, Thursday July 19, Berridge preached at Grantchester and 'the Lord was wonderfully present convincing a far greater number now than even last night...' (1)

And so it went on, day after day. Even in his own parish violent outbursts still accompanied and followed his sermons. On July 22 some two hundred persons, most of whom were men, 'cried aloud for mercy; but many more were affected, perhaps as deeply, though in a calmer way.' (2)

It might be assumed even from this very abbreviated account of Berridge's work during the first months after he took to itinerating that he was physically a very strong man. But this was not the case. It is true that he was a tall, well-built figure of a man, with a strong, deep voice (3) but having pored over his books for as much as fifteen hours a day for more than twenty years and having taken very little exercise during those years his stamina was not great. Ryle said,

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1. Ibid. p.340.

2. Ibid. p.342.

3. Whittingham, p.22.

'He seems to have had one of those iron constitutions which nothing but old age can quite break down, (1) but Ryle was wrong. Even as early as July 17, 1759, Berridge told Wesley that he felt so weak that he feared he might have to abandon for ever the field-preaching which he had so recently undertaken.(2) Nevertheless, he was not lacking in determination, and although illness forced him in the years following to curtail his labours, sometimes for very long periods, he never went back on his resolution to carry the Gospel to as many people as possible. Often he would ride one hundred miles in a single week, preaching as many as a dozen sermons. Gradually he lengthened his circuit until he became well known throughout Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Hertfordshire, Essex and Suffolk.(3) In the first year of his work with Hicks an astonishingly large number of men, women and children were converted. Whittingham gives the number as four thousand (4), and even when allowance has been made for exaggeration, it is clear that these two men were indeed instrumental in starting an amazing revival in their part of England.

Fortunately the violent convulsions became more and more rare. Wesley visited Everton again on August 5, 1759, and could not fail to observe that a more peaceful and normal spirit pervaded the place. He returned again on August 28, and yet again on November 24. Berridge had been summoned to preach before the University of Cambridge for four consecutive Sundays in November and Wesley had agreed to look after his congregations at Everton for one week-end. The Lord was still remarkably present, but now no one fell down or was convulsed and no one cried out or lapsed into a trance.(5)

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1. op. cit. p.233.  
2. Journal, Vol.IV, p.337

3. Whittingham, p.28.  
4. Ibid. p.32.  
5. Wesley's Journal, Vol.IV,  
p.360.

Meanwhile the former Fellow of Clare did not receive a very friendly reception at Cambridge. Commenting on Berridge's preaching at St. Mary's Dyer bluntly recorded, in his History of the University and Colleges of Cambridge, that it 'gave great offence to the university.' (1) But then it seems that Dyer was thoroughly prejudiced and had no use for Methodism which he dismissed as being 'a great disturber of the quiet of our university.' (2)

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1. Whittingham, p.59.

2. Ibid. p.59.

NEW ALLIES AND NEW ENEMIES

Writing from Dunstable on March 1, 1760, to Charles Wesley, John Fletcher said, 'The fine weather invites me to execute a design I had half formed of making a forced march to spend next Sunday at Everton, Mr. Berridge's parish.' (1) Lady Huntington had already heard something of Berridge's activities and Fletcher informed Charles Wesley that he intended to add to her information by letting her know what he himself could discover.

As soon as he reached Everton, Fletcher introduced himself to the vicar as 'a new convert who had taken the liberty of waiting on him for the benefit of his instruction and advice.' His accent betrayed the fact that he was a foreigner and Berridge enquired from which country he had come. Learning that his visitor was 'a Swiss from the canton of Berne' he then asked whether he had any news of a fellow-countryman, one John Fletcher. Berridge said that he had heard wonderful reports of this man's talents, learning and ability from Wesley and he was overjoyed when the modest visitor finally admitted who he was. Immediately Fletcher was invited to preach the following day. (2) So it was that the two good men met, and for a time, at least, Berridge gained an important and extremely saintly friend. (3)

1. Tyerman's Fletcher p.51.      2. Ibid. p.51.  
 3. John Wesley wrote, 'I have known many exemplary men, holy in heart and in life, but one equal to him I have not known, one so inwardly and outwardly devoted to God.' (Sermon on the occasion of the Death of Fletcher, 1785) Balleine, p.82 and  
 Robert Southey declared, 'No country or age had ever produced a man of more fervent piety or perfect charity.' (Life of Wesley) Balleine, p.82.

It is probable that Fletcher carried out his intention of communicating to Lady Huntingdon his reflections upon all he had seen and heard at Everton for the Countess hastened to join him there. Accompanying her were Martin Madan and Henry Venn. Not unnaturally, the arrival of all these eminent people caused a great stir in the little village, and during the three days of their visit vast crowds came in from the surrounding countryside. They were not disappointed for no less than nine sermons were preached.

On the morning after their arrival Berridge preached to a huge crowd in a field near the church, at 7 a.m., and at 11 a.m. Hicks read prayers in the church. On this occasion Venn delivered the sermon, taking as his subject the joy that is felt in heaven over one sinner that repents. That afternoon less than one fifth of the enormous crowd could be squeezed into the church, and so Madan addressed them in the open air. On the second morning Fletcher read the prayers and Madan preached again to a packed church. In the afternoon the vicar himself took the prayers and Venn was the preacher. Once more it was impossible to get all the people in, and so after the service, Berridge went out and spoke to the great concourse. By the third day, it is said, the crowds had swelled to ten thousand and Venn and Berridge again spoke. This memorable little mission closed with everyone joining in the singing of Wesley's hymn -

'Arm of the Lord, awake, awake,  
Thine own immortal strength put on...'

Leaving Madan in charge of the parish, the Countess now carried Berridge off to London, 'with a view to his spiritual improvement' ! Thus began a series of annual visits to the capital, usually lasting about three months, during which (except when he had an assistant

curate) Lady Huntingdon supplied a minister to take over his duties at Everton.

On this first occasion the pattern of future visits was laid down. Berridge preached in one or two of the city churches and gave expositions at Lady Huntingdon's each morning and evening. He also lectured occasionally at Lady Hotham's and at Lady Fanny Shirley's homes.(1) Each year, henceforth, he left Everton soon after Christmas and returned in time for Easter. Crowded congregations gathered to hear him at Whitfield's tabernacle and at Tottenham Court Chapel, and Whittingham declares that he 'was abundantly successful in bringing numbers from darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel.' (2)

But while thousands in London and in the villages upon which he called appreciated Berridge's ministrations, a great many influential people opposed him and resented his incursions into their 'private preserves'. As far as he himself was concerned the issue was clear. All over the country souls were perishing because they were not being nourished by the Word, (3) Clergy were failing in their simple duty. What else could he do but ride forth and strive to set things right? In an undated letter to an unnamed clergyman he stated that 'if every parish church were blessed with a Gospel minister, there could be little need of itinerant preaching, but since these ministers are thinly scattered about the country, and neighbouring pulpits are usually locked against them, it behoves them to take advantage of fields or barns to cast abroad the Gospel seed.' (4) Very early on strenuous efforts were made to put a stop

1. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.1.pp.399,400.
2. op. cit. p.41.
3. B.Works. p.394.
4. B.Works, p.476.

to his work. If other men were misguided, at least they wished to be left in peace to carry on in their own (entirely ineffectual) way.

Representations were made by local clergy and landowners first to his college and then to the ecclesiastical authorities and in due course Berridge was summoned before his diocesan and bidden to give some explanation of his unruly conduct. In a letter to the Rev. David Simpson of Macclesfield in Cheshire, written from Everton on August 8, 1775, Berridge describes what took place when he first began to itinerate in these terms:

'A multitude of dangers surrounded me and seemed ready to engulf me. My relations and friends were up in arms; my college was provoked; my bishop incensed; and the Church canons pointed their ghastly mouths at me.

'As you are now doing, so did I, send letters to my friends, begging advice, but receiving unsatisfactory or discouraging answers.

'Then I saw that if I meant to itinerate I must not confer with flesh and blood but cast myself wholly on the Lord...

'At various times, complaints or presentments were carried to my college, to successive archdeacons and bishops...but through the good blessings of my God, I am yet in possession of my senses, my tithes and my liberty... I have suffered from nothing, except from dilapidations and pillory threats, which have proved more frightful than hurtful. '

Berridge told his young friend Simpson that if he was sure he had been called to go out and preach he must 'take a lover's leap, kneck<sup>(sic)</sup> or nothing', and simply commend himself to the keeping of Christ. It was quite useless to turn to other men for advice, for as Berridge knew only too well, 'most preachers love a snug church, and a whole skin; and what they love they will prescribe.' (1)

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1. Ibid. pp.529, 530.

About one year before his death the good old man told another correspondent - a friend of Mr. Sutcliffe of Olney - the full story of his first brush with his Bishop and this story was passed in to the editors of the Evangelical Magazine (1)

'Soon after I began to preach the Gospel of Christ at Everton', he said, 'the church was filled from the villages around us, and the neighbouring clergy felt themselves hurt at their churches being deserted. The squire of my own parish, too, was much offended. He did not like to see so many strangers, and be so incomod. Between them both it was resolved, if possible, to turn me out of my living. For this purpose they complained of me to the bishop of the diocese, that I had preached out of my own parish. I was soon after sent for by the bishop; I did not much like the errand, but I went.

'When I arrived, the bishop accosted me in a very abrupt manner : "Well Berridge, they tell me you go about preaching out of your own parish. Did I institute you to the livings of Abbotsley, or Eaton, or Potton?" "No, my lord," said I, "neither do I claim any of these livings; the clergymen enjoy them undisturbed by me."

"Well, but you go and preach there which you have no right to do?"

"It is true, my lord, I was one day at Eaton, and there a few people assembled together, and I admonished them to repent of their sins, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls; and I remember seeing five or six clergymen that day, my lord, all out of their parishes upon Eaton bowling green."

"Poh!" said his lordship, "I tell you you have no right to preach out of your own parish; and if you do not desist from it, you will very likely be sent to Huntingdon gaol."

Berridge readily admitted that he had no desire to be put in gaol, but if it came to it, he said, even that would be better than living in freedom and losing the ability to follow the dictates of his conscience. Threats having failed the bishop now changed his mode of attack.

"Berridge, you know that I have been your friend, and I wish to be so still. I am continually teased with the complaints of the clergymen around you. Only assure me that you will keep to your own parish; you may do as you please there. I have but little time to live; do not bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

At this point the interview had to be broken off, as two important persons were shown into the room. Berridge was dismissed for the time being and sent off to the local inn with an invitation to come up to the bishop's residence in time for dinner. As soon as he reached his room Berridge immediately fell upon his knees and began to pray. He could not be bullied and browbeaten, but when the elderly Bishop had begun to implore him his resolution had weakened. What answer should he give?

'At dinner,' Berridge relates, 'I was treated with great respect. The two gentlemen also dined with us. I found they had been informed who I was, as they sometimes cast their eyes towards me in some such manner as one would glance at a monster.'

'After dinner, his lordship took me into the garden. "Well Berridge," said he, "have you considered my request?"

"I have, my lord", said I, "and have been upon my knees concerning it."

"Well, and will you promise me, that you preach no more out of your own parish?"

"It would afford me great pleasure," said I, "to comply with your lordship's request, if I could do it with a good conscience. I am satisfied that the Lord has blessed my labours of this kind, and I dare not resist."

"A good conscience!" said his lordship, "do you not know that it is contrary to the Canons of the Church?"

"There is one Canon, my lord," I replied, "which saith, Go preach the Gospel to every creature."

"But why should you wish to interfere with the charge of other men? One man cannot preach the Gospel to all men."

"If they would preach the Gospel themselves," said I, "there would be no need for my preaching it to their people; but as they do not, I cannot desist".'

And that was that. The meeting was concluded and Berridge returned to his home to await whatever developments there might be. At this point his friend Thomas Pitt, the nephew of Lord Chatham, who had been a fellow-commoner at Clare Hall (1) decided to take a hand in the matter.

At first when he had heard of Berridge's conversion and itineracy he had turned against him. However, when he learnt that it was probable that he would lose his living, Pitt relented and determined to help him. As a result, the bishop was approached by a certain nobleman to whom he was indebted for his promotion and was advised to leave Berridge alone. The bishop dare not refuse, and, as Berridge says : 'I continued ever after uninterrupted in my sphere of action.'

When the squire 'waited on the bishop to know the result of the summons, he had the mortification to learn that his purpose was defeated. On his return home, his partisans in the prosecution fled<sup>(sic)</sup> to know what was determined on, saying, "Well, you have got the old Devil out?" He replied, "No; nor do I think the very Devil himself can get him out".'

On another occasion when he was reproved by his Bishop for preaching at all hours of the day, and on every day of the week, Charles Simeon told one of his 'Conversation Parties' Berridge had said, "My Lord, I preach only at two times." "And which are they?" enquired the Bishop. Back came the reply, "In season and out of season, my Lord"(2)

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1. vid. Smyth, footnote p.263.

2. Whittingham, 2nd edit. p.liv : Abner Brown, Conversation Parties, p.200.

On yet another occasion when being taken to task for his itineracy by the Bishop, Berridge is said to have replied that he could see less harm in doing as was his custom "than attending a cock-fight at an ale-house" - a practice which both men knew was common amongst many of his culumniators.(1)

Clearly Berridge had scant respect for Church order or for ecclesiastical authority, but then he saw his duty very plainly and had no intention of being dissuaded by anyone from fulfilling it to the very best of his ability.

Though Simeon refused to be drawn fully into the work of field-preaching himself he admitted in later years that Berridge 'was perhaps right in preaching from place to place as he did...' For 'he lived when few ministers cared about the Gospel and when disorder was most needful. I don't think he would do now as he did then, 'Simeon continued, 'for there are many means of hearing the Gospel, and a much greater spread of it; a much greater call for order, and much less need for disorder.' (2)

Whatever may be said about his methods, as J.H. Overton declared, 'His motives were always good. A more single-minded, devoted man never lived; and the Revival in Bedfordshire and the neighbouring counties was as much due to Berridge, as that in more northern climes was due to Grimshaw.' (3)

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1. Reported in the Funeral sermon preached by the Rev. W. Holland, B.Works, 2nd edit. p.630.
  2. Whittingham, 2nd edit. p.lv : Abner Brown, Conversation Parties, p.200
  3. The Evangelical Revival in the 18th Century, p.64.

WANING PRESTIGE AT CAMBRIDGE

When he was first presented by his college to the living at Everton, Berridge maintained a close link with Cambridge. But the link was subjected to unnatural strains, and within a dozen years it was broken completely. Very early on he incurred the displeasure of his former associates. As has been noticed, when he preached before the University in November, 1759, Dyer declared that his manner was most offensive, and in this opinion he was joined by the Master of Corpus. He 'formed no party... which openly countenanced him in the university.' (1)

The trouble now was that Berridge had only lived a long way from Cambridge, but he had also abandoned all belief in the advantages of secular study. He had broken away from the rationalism which was characteristic of his age and, as soon as he had been converted, he had come to the conclusion that he had wasted all the hours which he had spent with his nose to the grindstone learning 'useless lumber'. (2) How he had worked! But all the while, he now believed, he had been 'departing more and more from the truth as it is in Jesus.' In vain he had hoped to receive 'light and instruction from human wisdom' when it 'could only be had from the Word of God and prayer.' (3)

As Wycliffe, in the fourteenth century, had decided that there was no need for his 'poor preachers' to know any book save the Bible, so Berridge now decided that he

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1. Op. cit. p.123.

2. B.Works, p.468 : cf. p.463.

3. Ibid. pp.358, 359.

had reached the point in his own life when he must devote himself to one Book and leave all others upon his shelves to accumulate dust. It was Wycliffe's view that 'a single unlettered preacher does more, by God's grace, for the profit of the Church than a whole number of classmen', (1) and by 1760 the same conviction had become implanted in Berridge's mind. He would have been happy now to agree with Wycliffe's contention 'that Universities and college degrees were instituted by pagan vanity, and that they serve the devil's purposes quite as much as God's.' (2) Years later (August 16, 1774) his views were unchanged and he told Samuel Wilks never to forget that 'one grain of godly fear is worth more than a hundred thousand heads-full of attic wit, or full of philosophic, theologic, or commercial science.' (3)

In 1760 Dr. John Green addressed a pamphlet to Berridge entitled, 'The Principles and Practices of the Methodists, in some letters to the leaders of that Sect.' Herein the Senior Fellow of Clare was warned against 'contracting one of the most dangerous and deceitful of all religious maladies, the tumour of spiritual pride.' Certainly there was some justification for the warning, if not for the attacks upon Whitfield, Wesley, Hervey, Count Zinzendorf and others which followed. All were guilty, said Green, of stooping to all manner of 'tricks of calumny and misrepresentation' in a vain attempt to 'raise their own reputation' by undermining that of others. But who was really guilty of misrepresentation may be judged from the reply which Wesley made on behalf of all

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1. Quoted from Knox, pp.114,115.    2. Ibid. p.114.  
 3. B.Works, p.397.

those who had been attacked (in Lloyd's Evening Post, November 24, 1760). 'In many ways I wholly agree with him' wrote the humble man, 'but there is a bitterness in him which I should not have expected in a gentleman and a scholar.' (1)

Wesley himself had begun to appreciate just how stubborn a man Berridge was. From Dublin, on April 18, 1760, he had written to him:

(It seems to me that of all the persons I ever knew, save one, you are the hardest to be convinced. I have occasionally spoken to you on many heads; some of a speculative, others of a practical nature; but I do not know that you were ever convinced of one...Does not this imply thinking very highly of yourself?'

Wesley presumed that it was the desire to stand alone and to accept advice from no one which had led Berridge to take the unprecedented step of 'discouraging new converts from reading...anything but the Bible.' This was absolutely ridiculous, argued Wesley, for it followed that 'if they ought to read nothing but the Bible, they ought to hear nothing but the Bible; so away with sermons, whether written or spoken.' (2)

Berridge purposely delayed his answer to this letter, for, as he explained, he did not wish to write down the first (angry) thoughts that crowded into his mind. When he did write, on November 22, 1760, he said:

'I discourage the reading of any books, except the Bible and the Homilies, not because of the jealousy mentioned by you' (Wesley had implied that Berridge was jealous of some of the Methodist pamphleteers) 'but because I find they who read many books usually neglect the Bible...'  
(3) And how true that is.

Obviously this new contempt for the culture of his old

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1. Tyerman's Wesley, Vol II, pp.370,371.
2. Ibid.pp.356, 357.
3. Ibid, p.357.

world did nothing to enhance his reputation with his former colleagues at the university. Henceforth we hear little of contacts with dons, but for a while he was able to maintain his connections with certain students since he made a practice of preaching from time to time at Grantchester, where they could easily come and hear him.

In October, 1764, a young man named Rowland Hill came up to St. John's and his name was passed on to Berridge, by a Mr. Thomas Palmer, as one who was a fearless witness to Christ. On December 18, Berridge therefore wrote to him from Grantchester and invited him to walk over and see him.(1) Hill accepted the invitation and afterwards spent the Christmas recess at Everton.

Sunday by Sunday, in the months that followed, Hill would ride over to Everton, regardless of the weather, and return to college in time for evening chapel. 'Many a mile I have rode', he used to say, 'many a storm have I faced, many a snow have I gone through, to hear good old Mr. Berridge; for I felt his ministry, when in my troubles at Cambridge, a comfort and a blessing to my soul. Dear affectionate old man, I loved him to my heart.' (2)

Hill's sister and elder brother, Richard, definitely approved but warned him that others would not take the same view of his association with Berridge (3), as indeed proved to be the case. His parents and the University authorities were not slow to show their disapproval.(4)

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1. Sidney, p.21 : B.Works, 2nd edit.p.449.

2. Ibid.pp.173,174.

3. Ibid.p.22.

4. Lecky, op.cit., Vol.II, p.614.

Rowland Hill was deeply influenced by Berridge and soon began to visit the sick and prisoners in the gaol. He also began to preach in private houses in Cambridge, to the disgust of many of his fellow undergraduates. He formed a group of friends into a society, not unlike Wesley's Holy Club at Oxford, and the members made a practice of joining him in his rides to Everton.

So it was that through 'Rowley', as he always called him, Berridge was introduced to young men like Thomas Pencycross (who came to see him with 'two pockets full of doubts and scruples relating to the Articles and Liturgy' (1)), Charles de Coetlogon of Pembroke, and David Simpson of St. John's. To these young men and others like them Berridge was a highly respected campaigner, and from him they learnt much that they were enabled to put into practice both at Cambridge and in the years after they had gone down. Unfortunately for some of those who consorted with the vicar of Everton, when they offered themselves for ordination they found that the Bishops were upon their guard. Rowland Hill himself was turned down by no less than six of them before he was finally admitted to the disconate, and he was never ordained priest.

When Hill and his friends left Cambridge, Berridge's influence, which had been declining steadily in the university, ceased for ever. Few products of the Schools would tolerate his irregularity, and he for his part had become completely dissatisfied with them. In a letter to Lady Huntingdon written on June 8, 1771, in which he

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1. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.II, note p.59.

bewails his inability to care for his congregations properly, as he has no assistant curate, Berridge asks her to send Mr. Glascott for six weeks, and says, 'There are several serious students at both universities, but I fear they are very prudent and very doctrinal, and such would not suit me.' (1) In this letter he also announces the arrival of his old friend Venn at Yelling, nine miles from Everton. Though ill-health had driven him to this semi-retirement it was providential that he should have arrived at precisely this moment when Berridge was shedding the mantle of mentor of the 'serious students'. Venn quickly donned it, and as Elliott-Binns points out there were many reasons why he was better fitted to wear it than Berridge. One obvious reason was purely geographical. Yelling was five miles nearer to Cambridge than Everton - 'an important consideration when all travel had to be done on horseback.' But there were other, even more important reasons why Venn 'began to exercise an influence in Cambridge which was of untold good.' Berridge had changed tremendously since he had gone to Everton. The result was that Venn 'was much more suited to such an office than Berridge, with his uncouth ways and avowed contempt for the learning in which he had once delighted.' (2)

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1. B.Works, 2nd edit., p.512.      2. Op. cit. pp.360, 361.

THE HARDSHIPS OF BACHELORDOM

Soon after Berridge accepted the living of Everton he began to think seriously about the possibilities of marriage, but only because it occurred to him that a wife might prove a useful asset to him in his ministry. However much he pondered the matter he could not make up his mind and so he determined to pray about it frequently. Still no guidance came and so he turned to his Bible, resolving that he would accept whatever direction was to be found in the Word of God. In a letter to Lady Huntingdon (March 23, 1770) he explained what happened. Opening the Book at random he said:

'I fixed my eyes immediately upon these words, "When my son was entered into his wedding chamber he fell down and died." (2 Esdras X.1) This frightened me heartily... but Satan... presently suggested a scruple, that the book was apocryphal, and the words not to be heeded.

'Well, after a short pause I fell on my knees again and prayed the Lord not be angry, whilst, like Gideon, I requested a second sign from the canonised Scripture.'

Again he opened the Book, and this time he read:

"Though shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons nor daughters in this place." (Jeremiah XVI.2)

This settled the point for him and never again did he think seriously of changing his condition. To the end of his days he remained a bachelor.(1)

But Berridge, man's man though he was, caused a flutter in the heart of at least one woman. Lady Huntingdon introduced him to the 'beau monde', and as soon as he had begun to preach at Whitfield's Tabernacle he became very

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1. Whittingham, p.81.

well known and drew large congregations. A certain lady - who she was Whittingham does not say - decided that she would be an admirable bride for so fine a preacher and so she drove 'down in her carriage...to Everton, to solicit his hand in marriage.' On arrival, without further ado she announced that 'the Lord had revealed it to her that she was to become his wife.' For a moment Berridge was stunned, but regaining his composure quickly, with his usual wit, he replied, 'Madam, if the Lord has revealed it to you that you are to be my wife, surely he would also have revealed it to me that I was designed to be your husband; but as no such revelation has been made to me, I cannot comply with your wishes.' (1)

The more he thought about marriage the more he felt sure that the guidance which he had received had been for the best. He came to the conclusion that there is 'no trap so mischievous to the field-preacher as wedlock, and it is laid for him at every hedge door.' How other men had suffered! 'Matrimony has quite maimed poor Charles' (Wesley), he declared, 'and might have spoiled John (Wesley) and George (Whitfield), if a wise Master had not graciously sent them a brace of ferrets.'(2) So it was that he made a practice of warning friends like 'honest Glascott' and 'Rowley' against what he picturesquely described as 'Petticoat snares'.(3)

But the lot of an 'awkward old bachelor' (4) is not always an enviable one. Berridge admitted to Lady Huntingdon

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1. Ibid. pp.81,82.

2. B.Works, 2nd edit.,p.508.

3. Ibid. p.508 : cf. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.II, p.49.

4. B.Works, p.390.

that he had been 'grievously tormented with housekeepers'(1), and in other letters he spoke of the troubles he had with his servants, whose health, it seems, was little better than his own.(2)

In spite of this perennial domestic problem, it is clear that by modern standards, the vicar of Everton did not fare too badly when he was at home. On one occasion when he was going up to London, and when Lady Huntingdon therefore sent her first cousin the Hon. Walter Shirley to take charge of his parish, Berridge left him the following illuminating memoranda:

'FAMILY

'Prayers at nine in the morning, and nine in the evening; first reading a chapter, and singing a hymn, the hymns always sung standing. On Saturday evenings, the serious people of the parish come to my house about seven. I first sing a hymn, then expound a chapter, then sing another hymn, then pray, and conclude with singing on my knees, Praise God from whom, etc.

'You must eat what is set before you and be thankful. I get hot victuals but once a week for myself, viz. on Saturday; but because you are an Honourable man, I have ordered two hot joints to be got each week for you, with a pudding each day at noon, some pies and cold ham; so that you will fare bravely; much better than your Master with barley bread and dry fish. There is also ale, port, mountain, and a little madeira to drink: the liquor suits a coronet. Use what I have, just as your own. I make no feasts, but save all I can to give all I can. I have never yet been worth a groat at the year's end, nor desire it.' (3)

In a letter to his friend and benefactor, John Thornton, written when he was much older (Nov.18,1786), Berridge said that he now had 'two roasts a week'. If Thornton would let him know when he was coming, Berridge continued, 'I will give you the same treat I always gave Mr. Whitfield;

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1. Ibid.p.508.  
3. Ibid.p.491.

2. Ibid.pp.389,392,410 etc.

and eighteen-penny barn door fowl.' This he observed 'will neither burst you nor ruin me. Half you shall have at noon with a pudding, and the rest at night.'(1)

It seems tolerably certain that those who called at the vicarage in Everton were not treated to cups of tea! The old incumbent believed in practicing what he preached, and we know that he advised a certain country parson to 'keep a barrèl of ale ... and when a man comes to you with a message, or on other business, give him some refreshment, that his ears may be more open to your religious instructions.'(2)

But the life of an itinerant preacher was attended by few home comforts. No doubt this was one of the reasons why Berridge always had such difficulty in securing curates. When he was over sixty he wrote to Lady Huntingdon (on December 26, 1777) describing his needs and saying:

'I do not want a helper merely to stand in my pulpit, but to ride round my district. And I fear my weekly circuits would not suit a London or Bath divine, nor any tender evangelist that is enthroned with prunello.

'Long rides and miry roads in sharp weather! Cold houses to sit in with very moderate fuel, and three or four children roaring or rocking about you! Coarse food and meagre liquor; lumpy beds to lie on and too short for the feet; stiff blankets, like boards, for covering; and live cattle in plenty to feed upon you.

'Rise at five in the morning and preach at seven; breakfast on tea that smells very sickly; at eight mount a horse, with boots never cleaned, and then ride home, praising God for all his mercies!'

There was only one kind of man that would be prepared to face that day by day, and week after week, and Berridge knew that he was not likely to find him in the universities.

1. Ibid.p.466.

2. Whittingham, p.79.

And so he concluded his letter by telling the Countess that he was prepared to wait until her academy could provide the man he needed.(1)

Eleven years later, when his curate, Richard Whittingham was offered the living of Potton, Berridge wrote to Thornton about a replacement and said, 'I am not very fond of college youths; they are apt to be lofty, and lazy, and delicate', and frequently they 'got into petticoats' before they got into Orders.(2) It was imperative that he should have an assistant whom he could trust completely : he had had some very unfortunate experiences with those who had come to look after Everton when he made his annual visits to London.

On one of these occasions George Dyer (resident minister at Tottenham Chapel and Lecturer of St. George the Martyr, Southwark) served him very badly indeed. When he returned, Berridge told Lady Huntingdon (February 1766), it was to find that his people were 'in a mighty ferment, occasioned by the sounding brass of a Welsh DYER...' 'Tis a pity he should have charge of anything but wasps.' (3)

On another occasion (in 1775) he discovered his congregation 'cast into spiritual lunacy, easily mistaken for spiritual liveliness, and such gospel-junketing introduced, as made Methodism exceedingly palatable to the carnal mind.' This, he told Thornton (April 1775), was the work of 'Mr. Jonathan Coughlan, a Newfoundland divine. Such a light-spirited, vain-glorious, and Canterbury tale's man', he declared, 'never stepped into my pulpit before... a pillory would suit him better than

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1. B. Works, 2nd edit. p.503.      2. Ibid. p.461.  
3. Quoted from Elliott-Binns, p.246.

a pulpit.' (1)

Fortunately, it was not ever thus. Richard Whittingham (who was blessed with a suitable wife) proved a very satisfactory curate (2), and such men as Shirley and Cradock Glascott of Lady Huntingdon's Connexion were also admirable.

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1. B.Works, p.399.

2. B.Works, 2nd edit., p.461.

POWERFUL POPULAR PREACHING.

'Numerous congregations...at all times crowded round him, and hung upon his words with pleasure.' (1) So testified the Rev. W. Holland, preaching at Bartholomew Chapel on February 3, 1793, less than a fortnight after Berridge's death. This seems to have been the simple truth. Literally thousands turned out to hear him as he journeyed from village to village, for he was pre-eminently a preacher, and though he was one 'whose abilities would have appeared to advantage in the most refined auditories, he chose rather to render himself useful to the more inferior ranks of men.' (2)

But then it was not only the simple country folk who delighted to hear him. Writing to the Rev. James Stillingfleet on August 12, 1776, Henry Venn declared that during Berridge's recent visit to London 'he had the largest congregations that were ever known, for a constancy: and greatly was his word owned of the Lord.' (3)

Countrymen and townsmen; both came under his spell. One may well ask, "why?" The answer is very simple. Once he advised Rowland Hill to 'preach nothing down but the devil, and nothing up but Christ' (4) and it is clear that the single-minded Berridge strove to do precisely this himself.

At the time of his conversion he had destroyed all his old sermons and thereafter it became his custom - like many other itinerants - to speak on most occasions without a manuscript, and generally without notes of any kind.

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1. B.Works, 2nd edit., p.631.  
3. Venn, p.233

2. Ibid, p.630.  
4. Sidney, op.cit. p.92.

It is very difficult in consequence to form any true assessment of the quality of his sermons. Fortunately however, Whittingham has preserved one full sermon (the last which he preached at the Tabernacle, eight and a half months before his death) together with the outlines of twenty five others. In addition thirty-six brief notes upon passages of Scripture are extant. Some idea of their brevity is gained when it is appreciated that while the full sermon occupies eighteen pages, the twenty-five outlines take up no more than fifty-eight pages, and the notes, twenty-three.

There is nothing in anyway remarkable about these skeleton sermons and comments. They contain good, straightforward, simple teaching on most of the essential facts of the Gospel. However, the final sermon is extremely revealing.

Here the text is announced, re-stated more than once and analysed word by word in a manner which is rare, if not totally obsolete, today. The style is diffuse; the language and illustrations are Scriptural; rhetorical questions are common; and the appeal is more to the emotions than to the reason. Even when read the sermon is very moving... and Berridge was certainly not a man to read his sermons. Modern revivalist preaching (particularly that of certain Americans) employs the technique which is manifest in this address with the same startling results in those who long for a simple, clear-cut faith.

In neither the outlines, the full sermon, nor the notes is there so much as a single joke and yet it is well known that 'there was a strange vein of quaintness in his mental constitution which seemed to crop <sup>up</sup> ~~out~~ and bubble <sup>out</sup> ~~up~~ on every

occasion... He could not help putting things in a ludicrous way.' (1) This no one would ever suspect from reading the sermons by themselves.

On the contrary, the outlines are very reminiscent of Wesley's forty-four 'standard' sermons, where Biblical quotations are to be found in almost every line. Unlike those sermons, however, Berridge shows a predilection in his own for a few central truths of the Christian Faith. As Ryle says, 'man is always painted in his true colours and put in his right place, and Christ magnified, glorified, and exalted on every page.' (2) C.H. Spurgeon's conclusion was that it was 'no wonder that people thronged him, for his style was so intensely earnest, homely and simple, that every ploughman was glad to hear the Gospel preached in a tongue which he could understand.' (3)

Whittingham records how Berridge once took a visiting preacher to task, saying, 'your sermon was good, but my people cannot understand your language.' The clergyman in question could recall nothing in his sermon which was not simplicity itself, and so he asked Berridge to explain just what was difficult. 'You have endeavoured,' replied Berridge, 'to prove that God is omniscient and omnipotent; but if you had said that God was almighty and knew everything, they would have understood you.' (4)

He understood the ploughboy-mind thoroughly (5) and so it was his laudable aim to be simple and ever more simple.

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1. Ryle, p.236.

2. Ibid, p.237.

3. Eccentric Preacher, p.127.

4. Whittingham, pp.69,70.

5. Balleine, p.99.

Berridge endeavoured, as did Grimshaw, to preach at all times 'in market language'. (1) After he left Cambridge he offered his congregations 'bread, not venison', and when he did give them 'meat' it was 'without sauce'. (2) In a letter to Rowland Hill (September 3, 1773) Berridge advised him not to study to be a fine preacher.

'Jerichos', he said, 'are blown down with ram's horns. Look simply unto Jesus for preaching food, and what is wanted will be given, and what is given blest, whether it be a barley or a wheaten loaf, a crust or a crumb.' (3)

Bishop Ryle lists the major themes which are discernible in the preaching of the early evangelicals, and in doing so makes it quite clear what Berridge meant when he spoke of 'bread not venison'. First, they taught the sufficiency and supremacy of Holy Scripture, which they accepted in the same way as all 'fundamentalists', and arising from this they stressed also the total corruption of human nature.

The cardinal point in most of their sermons was that Christ's death upon the Cross was the only satisfaction for man's sin, and over and over again they expounded the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In addition, they pointed out the universal necessity of conversion and new creation by the Holy Spirit, and emphasised the inseparable connection between true faith and personal holiness. Finally, they never ceased to express their belief in God's hatred of sin, but deep love for all sinners; and they never shrunk from declaring, in the plainest terms, the certainty of God's judgement and of

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1. Ibid. p.68.

2. B.Works, p.491.

3. B.Works, 2nd. edit., p.513.

the wrath to come if men persisted in impenitence and unbelief.(1)

With the exception of many references to the true Christian attitude to suffering, and to real 'spiritual healing' there is little else to be found in any of Berridge's published notes. The doctrines with which he dealt were elementary and his manner of treating them was carefully calculated to meet the needs of the people whom he understood so well.

In a letter, which in his works is undated and is addressed to an unnamed clergyman, Berridge tells us much about his own message and his methods. Smyth has identified the person whom Berridge is addressing for he notes that the letter was published in the September issue of the Arminian Magazine (1794) under the heading 'From the Rev. Mr. Berridge, to the Rev. Mr. Simeon.' (2)

After explaining the need for 'Rural Deans' and 'Rambling Bishops' Berridge goes on to give the following advice on preaching:

'When you open the innumerable corruptions of the hearts of your audience Moses will lend you a knife, which may be often whetted at his grindstone. Lay open the universal sinfulness of nature; the darkness of the mind, the frowardness of the will, the fretfulness of the temper, and the earthliness and sensuality of the affections.

'Speak of the evil of sin in its nature, its rebellion against God as our Sovereign, ingratitude to God as our benefactor and contempt both of his authority and his love. Declare the evil of sin in its effects. Bringing all our sickness, pains, and sorrows, all the evils we feel, and all the evils we fear; all inundations, and fires, and famines, and pestilences; all brawls, and quarrels, and fightings, and wars, with death to close these present, and hell afterwards to receive all that die in sin.

'Lay open the spirituality of the law, and its extent, reaching to every thought word and action, and declaring every transgression, whether by omission or commission, deserving of death.

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1. op. cit. pp.26-28 : cf. B.Works, pp.476 ff. (Advice to preachers)  
 2. Smyth, p.276.

'Declare man's utter helplessness to change his nature, or make his peace. Pardon and holiness must come from the Saviour.

'~~A~~acquaint them with the searching eye of God, watching us continually, spying out every thought, word, and action, noting them down in the Book of his Remembrance; bringing every secret work into judgement, whether it be good or evil.

'When your hearers have been well harrowed, and the clumps begin to fall, (which is seen by their hanging down the head) then bring out your Christ, and bring him out from the heart, thro' the lips, and tasting of his Grace while you publish it. Now lay open the Saviour's Almighty power to soften the heart, and give it true repentance; to bring Pardon to the broken heart, and the Spirit of Prayer to the prayerless heart; Holiness to the filthy heart; and Faith to the unbelieving heart.

'Let them know that all the Treasures of Grace are lodged in Jesus Christ, for the use of poor needy sinners; and he is full of Love as well as Power; that he turns no Beggars away from his Gate, but receives all Comers kindly, - loves to bless them, and bestows all his Blessing Tythe-free; Farmers and Country people chop at that.

'Here you must wave the Gospel Flag, and magnify the Saviour proudly; speak with a full mouth that his Blood can wash away the foulest stains, and his Grace subdue the stoutest corruptions. Exhort the people to seek his Grace directly, constantly and diligently, and acquaint them that all who thus seek, shall find the Salvation of God.

'Never preach in working hours: that would raise a clamour. Where you preach at night, preach also in the morning; be not longer than an hour in the whole service, and conclude before six. Morning preaching will show whether the evening's took effect, by raising them up early to hear.

'Expect plain fare, and plain lodging when you preach, yet perhaps better than your Master had. Suffer no treats to be made for you, but live as your Host usually lives, else he may grow weary of entertaining you. "Go not from house to house," Luke X.7.

'If the clergy rail at you where you go, say not a word, good or bad, Matt. XV.14.

'If you dare be zealous for the Lord of Hosts, expect persecution and threats; but heed them not.

'Bind that word to your heart, Jer.1.19 and XV.20 The Promise is doubled for your encouragement .

'The chief Block in your way will be from prudent Peters who will beg and entreat you to avoid irregularity; Give them the same answer that Christ gave Peter, Matt.XVI.23. They savour not the things of God, hear them not.

'Where you preach at night, go to bed as soon as possible, that the family be not kept up, and that you may rise early.

'When breakfast and morning family prayer are over, go away directly that the house may be at liberty.

'Don't dine where you preach, if you can avoid it: it will save expence, and please the people...!' (1)

In another undated letter, to Cornelius Winter, Berridge explains that it is very necessary that God should try any man whom he calls to minister for him, for he asks:

'How can you tell others what you feel, unless you have felt the same yourself? How can you sympathise with a prisoner, unless your feet have been fast in the stocks? How can you comfort those who have been cast down, unless you have been often at your wits end?

'Expect nothing but conflicts', he warns Winter, 'day after day to humble and prove you, and teach you to speak a word in season to one that is weary.'

'Remember always', he continues, 'it is his (Christ's) work...Undertake nothing without first seeking direction from the Lord... You cannot rely safely on your own judgement...' (2)

In order to get their message over to the people Berridge and some other leaders of the evangelical revival were 'not ashamed to crucify their style, and to sacrifice their reputation for learning.' (3) They were ever ready to use illustrations drawn from nature - as did our Lord - and to make people laugh if it helped to get home to them the point that was being made.

'A vein of innocent humour', Whittingham declared, 'ran through all his private and public discourses. This softened...the austerity of religion and rendered his

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1. B.Works, pp.476 ff.  
3. Ryle, p.25.

2. Ibid. pp.489,490.

company pleasant to people of a less serious habit. But what is very singular, it never overcame his gravity. He would often, by an unexpected sally of humour, throw a whole assembly into a sudden burst of laughter, but would himself keep his countenance.' (1) Simeon blamed Berridge and Rowland Hill for acting as they did (2), but since they were thus enabled to achieve the desired result of bringing many to Jesus Christ they seem to have been entirely justified.

Knox, referring to Wesley, Whitfield and Ingham, the 'hot gossellers' Howell Harris and Cennick, Berridge and many others says that this was an age of 'giants in the preaching world'; (3) and Bishop Ryle even went so far as to say that Berridge and his fellow itinerant clergy had 'revived the style of sermons in which Luther and Latimer used to be so eminently successful.' All of these men appreciated the fact that 'no one can be a good preacher to the people who is not willing to preach in a manner that seems childish and vulgar to some.' (4) Moreover, Berridge knew full well that while 'much reading and thinking may make a popular minister' it is 'secret prayer' that 'makes a powerful preacher.' (5)

Smyth sums up the matter when he says that Berridge's style was 'plain; the points in his arguments boldly underlined; the language simple, colloquial and sometimes jocular, but never trifling.'

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1. Op. cit. p.19.  
 3. Op. cit. p.483.  
 5. B. Works, p.408.

2. Brown, op.cit.: Whittingham, p.55  
 4. Op.cit. p.25 : of. J.Macpherson,  
 'Revival and Revival Work',  
 esp. p. 145.

He stands, Smyth continues, 'within the great tradition of English popular preaching which looks back to Bishop Latimer, and forward to that grand old man of Cornish Methodism, the Rev. Mark Guy Pearse...' (1)

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1. Op. cit. p.182.

RELATIONS WITH GREAT LEADERS AND GROWING  
RESPONSIBILITIES

As soon as he had heard of Berridge's conversion, John Wesley had taken a great interest in him, had visited Everton on several occasions, had preached there, and had even looked after the parish for a week-end while Berridge was away in Cambridge. He had also tried to pass on what he regarded as sound advice, gained in the hard school of practical experience. But Berridge preferred to make up his own mind on all matters, and even as early as the spring of 1760 it became apparent to Wesley that Berridge was a truly stubborn, independent individual 'You stand alone', he complained, 'you care for no man. You need help from no man. It was not so with my brother and me when we were first employed in this great work. We were deeply conscious of our insufficiency; and though (in one sense) we trusted in God alone, yet we sought his help for all his children, and were glad to be taught by any man.' Since they were pioneers they had to learn their own lessons, often by making mistakes, but it was not necessary for Berridge to do the same. 'You tread in a beaten path', he says. 'Others have gone before you.' (1)

In his reply to these criticisms Berridge remained adamant. However, he had intentionally delayed his answer in order that he 'might not write in a spirit unbecoming the Gospel' (2), and he emphasised the fact that it was his sincere desire that they should continue on terms of friendship by inviting Wesley to preach for him as often as he was able to do so.

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1. Tyerman's Wesley, Vol. II, pp.356, 357.
  2. Ibid. p.357.

Wesley accepted the invitation and preached again at Everton on February 4, 1761, and again on January 3 of the following year. But a rift had come between the two of them, and in point of fact Wesley never again came to Berridge's home. In later years Berridge met Wesley in London and again issued his invitation, but it was not accepted, and in a letter written on January 1, 1768, Berridge expressed his regret that they should keep at a distance whilst still continuing to serve the same Master. 'I trust we agree in essentials', continued the good man. 'I am weary of all disputes, and desire to know nothing but Jesus; to love him, trust in him, and serve him...' (1)

By this time, however, it was not just Berridge's independent spirit that caused Wesley to stand aloof from him. Very gradually Berridge's doctrinal position had been changing from Arminianism to a modified Calvinism, and when the doctrinal controversy broke out in earnest two years later Berridge found himself fighting on the opposite side to the Methodists.

During that controversy a poem appeared in The Gospel Magazine entitled, 'The Serpent and the Fox, or an Interview between Old Nick and Old John', over the signature, J.H. Overton states, of 'Old Everton'.(2) After many pages of abusive doggerel, it concluded:

'The Priest with the simpering face  
Shook his hair locks, and paused for a space;  
Then sat down to forge lies with his usual grimace.'

This poem was a direct attack upon John Wesley, and if Overton, - following Southey - is right in thinking that Berridge was its author then it must certainly have played an important part in ending for ever the cordial relations

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1. Tyerman's Wesley, Vol.III, p.2.    2. Op. cit. p.62.

which had once existed between the two men. The periodical, Elliott-Binns (1) points out, had already published a number of similar effusions from Berridge, signed 'Old Everton', but Overton is wrong in saying that this was also signed in this way. The signature under this particular 'work' was 'Auscultator', and while Elliott-Binns is still of the opinion that Berridge was its author Smyth (2) disagrees. Suffice to say that for one reason or another by the early seventies Wesley had broken off all dealings with Berridge.

In the meanwhile, however, Berridge had made himself most useful to George Whitfield, who noted in two different letters (on February 23 and March 14, 1761) that he had been 'preaching like an angel of the churches' and that he had awakened the people 'with great flame'. (3)

It was Lady Huntingdon who first brought Berridge up to London, and during these years his friendship with her also deepened, and through her he was enabled to carry his ministry to those 'brilliant assemblies' which 'met in her drawing-room in Chelsea.' (4)

But she also had good cause to appreciate his stubbornness. Unlike so many of her other proteges Berridge declined to be told by her what he must and must not do. Knox makes this perfectly clear.

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1. Op. cit. pp.280, 281.                      2. Op. cit. p.186.

3. Tyerman's Whitfield, Vol.II, p.441

4. Abbey and Overton, p.347.

'The most illustrious men and women of the day' came to hear Lady Huntingdon's favourite preachers. Overton gives a shorter list than Tyerman (in his life of Whitfield), but even his list is impressive enough. It includes -

The Earl of Chatham, Lord North, the Earl of Sandwich...  
Bubb Doddington, George Selwyn, Charles Townsend, Horace Walpole, Lord Camden, Lord Northington, the Earl of Chesterfield, Viscount Bolingbroke, the Earl of Bath,

(cont. in note p.63)

After speaking of John Wesley, Whitfield, Grimshaw, 'the great Venn' and Conyers, and alluding to all the clergy and lay-preachers who wrote to her in terms of deepest respect, Knox declares that 'in all that galaxy of Evangelist there is only one (apart from Wesley himself) who writes to her with no hint of approaching her on all fours - Berridge of Everton.' (1) But Rowland Hill was another. Both he and Berridge believed in speaking their minds to the Countess, and the letters of the latter to her, especially, abound in reproofs of her dictatorial manner. In 1761 she persuaded him to take charge of the first chapel which she built, at Brighton (or Brighthelmstone as it was then called) for a few weeks. (2) When she tried to secure his services again the next year he flatly refused. On November 16, 1762, Berridge answered her letter and explained why he felt himself unable to accede to her demands, and journey again to the little fishing village that was fast becoming a popular sea-side resort.

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Cont. from note on p.62

Frederick, Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cumberland, John, Lord Hervey, the Duke of Bolton, the Duke of Grafton, Sarah, Duchess of Malborough, the Duchess of Buckingham, and Lady Townshend.

Balleine points out that 'though much of the seed fell in very thorny places, some did bring forth fruit. The most important of her converts was the Earl of Dartmouth, President of the Board of Trade and later Colonial Secretary. He was one of the most enlightened and cultured men of the day... and after his conversion in 1756 he made it his special work to help forward the movement by securing livings for Evangelical clergy: he it was who sent Venn to Huddersfield, Robinson to Leicester, Stillingfleet to Hotham, Powley to Dewsbury, and Newton to Olney.'  
Op. cit. p.57.

1. Op. cit. pp.486-488.

2. Tyerman's Whitfield, Vol.II, p.417.

It was too far to ride, he said, and his heart was 'utterly set against wheel-carriages' since the roads were so appalling. Berridge continued, 'you threaten me Madam, like a Pope, not like a Mother in Israel, when you declare roundly that God will scourge me if I do not come.' She may have issued a 'vatican bull', but he had no intention of paying any heed to it.(1)

Even when his great friend Mrs. Bateman wrote urging him to come to Sussex, in the following year, he again told Lady Huntingdon that he could not manage it.(2) Yet again, on December 26, 1767, he declined her invitation - this time to go to Bath. 'Verily you are a good piper', he wrote, 'but I know not how to dance. I love your scorpion letters dearly though they rake the flesh off my bones.' (3) And so it was. Berridge would not be brow-beaten, but he had as real a regard for Lady Huntingdon as she had for him... and that is saying a good deal. A few weeks before Berridge wrote this letter one of the Countess' converts, David Stewart, had succeeded his father as eleventh Earl of Buchan. The young man wished to appoint suitable chaplains and had therefore turned to her for advice. Without hesitation she had recommended Fletcher, Venn and Berridge.(4) It was not for nothing that Berridge told her on April 26, 1777, that he owed her 'much love, which will ever be paying, I trust, and never paid.' (5)

Some years earlier Lady Huntingdon had founded a theological college in which to train men whom she could be certain would preach the true Gospel. She had told Berridge of her plan and he had taken a great interest in

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1. B.Works, 2nd edit. p.445.                    2. Ibid. p.448.  
 3. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.II,p.19.  
 4. Tyerman's Fletcher, p.123.  
 5. B.Works, 2nd. edit., p.514.

it, but at first was rather critical of the project. In an undated letter to her about the new college, at Trevecca House, Talgarth, South Wales, he said:

'The soil you have chosen is proper. Welsh mountains afford a brisk air for the student; and the rules are excellent, but I doubt the success of the project, and fear it will occasion you more trouble than all your other undertakings besides.'

Already, perhaps, he had realised where the all-too-liberal rules would lead. But for a time his criticism was based on other grounds. He continues:

'Are we commanded to send labourers or to pray the Lord to send them? Will not Jesus choose and teach, and send forth his ministering servants now, as he did the disciples aforetime, and glean them up when and where and how he pleaseth? The world says, "No"; because they are strangers to a divine commission and a divine teaching. And what if these asses blunder about the Master's meaning for a time and mistake it often, as they did formerly? No great harm will ensue, providing they are kept from paper and ink, or from a white wall and charcoal.'

In order to bolster up his argument, as so often in his letters, sermons and hymns, Berridge turns to the Old Testament for support:-

'We read of a school of prophets in Scripture, but we do not read that it was God's appointment. Elijah visited the school which was at Bethel, and seems to have been fond of it; yet the Lord commands him to fetch a successor, not from the school, but as the Romans fetched a dictator, from the plough. Are we fold of a single preaching prophet that was taken out of this school?' (1)

By December 30, 1768, however, he was able to write to Lady Huntingdon:

'I am glad to hear of the plentiful effusion from above on Talgarth. Jesus has now baptised your college, and thereby shown his approbation of the work... Faithful labourers may be expected from thence... I believe the baptism will prove a lasting one.' (2)

1. Ibid. pp.449 ff.

2. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.II, p.94.

Nearly a decade later (April 26, 1777) he freely admitted to the Countess, 'your students are as real dissenting preachers as any in the land, unless a gown and band can make a clergyman. The Bishops look on your students as the worst kind of dissenters and manifest this by refusing that ordination to your preachers which would be readily granted to other teachers among the dissenters.' (1) Though that really didn't worry him unduly he was distressed to contemplate what might happen to the dissenting academy and its students after Selina died. In the same year he enquired, 'What will become of your students at your decease? They are virtual Dissenters now, and will be settled Dissenters then.' The wise old man foresaw the future for the Wesleyans. 'The same will happen to many, perhaps most, of Mr. Wesley's preachers after his death', he continued. 'He rules them like a real Alexander, and is not stepping forth with a flaming torch; but we do not read in history of two Alexanders succeeding each other.' (2)

More and more people were being helped by Berridge's own ministry. Many would leave their homes in the middle of the night to hear him preach at seven in the morning, and they would stay if they could to listen to him again, at 10 a.m. When he was well enough to do so he would preach a third sermon at half-past two, and yet another in the evening. Whittingham says that the congregations that stood patiently in the fields were often well over ten thousand strong (3), and that great numbers of people would come up to him after he had spoken craving further spiritual direction.

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1. Ibid. Vol.II, p.422.

2. Ibid. Vol.II. p.423.

3. Whittingham, p.30.

At first he made a practice of noting down the names and addresses of those who sought his help, but before long his list grew to unmanageable lengths, and he was forced to abandon his attempts to keep track of most of these men and women. (1)

It was clear that the common folk were crying out for help and he was prepared to go to any lengths to meet their needs. He tried to ensure that those who had come from far off should be provided with at least a cold meal, and they found that his field and stable were always available for their horses. (2) But no one man could hope to deal with all the folk who showed their hunger for the Gospel and so Berridge began to sponsor lay evangelists.

For these men, many of whom were extremely poor and had little education, Berridge provided a great deal of practical assistance as well as spiritual inspiration. His own income was meagre, but whatever he had he gave away with the result that he was 'often in the deep' with his 'chin under water.' (3)

He scrimped and saved, gave away money and books and was frequently imposed upon by unscrupulous people who knew he would never turn anyone away. (4) Faced with every incumbent's difficulty of deciding between genuine cases of hardship and the rogues with plausible stories he declared, 'it is better to be imposed upon sometimes, than turn away a real needy person from the door.' (5) But a soft heart and a small income are a poor combination, and in Berridge's letters there is many a passing reference to his debts.

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1. Ibid. pp.31,32.

2. Ibid. p.34.

3. B. Works, p.304.

4. Ibid. p.384.

5. Ibid. p.385.

He soon discovered that 'it is an easy matter to get into debt... but no easy matter to get out.' (1) His trouble was that his benevolence did not end at his own door-step. He had sent out lay preachers and he felt himself morally responsible for their material well-being. He sold his family plate in order to provide clothes and Bibles for them (2) but could never find enough money. So it is, that of ninety letters which have been preserved, in at least one third of them there are references to his financial needs. Over and over again he wrote to John Thornton, the wealthy banker, and others asking for their assistance, and it seems that he was fortunate in having numbers of wonderfully generous Christian friends.

On January 28, 1766, he wrote to Lady Margaret Ingham (Lady Huntingdon's sister-in-law) thanking her for the fifteen pounds which she had sent him by the hand of William Romaine and which he had 'converted into cloth for the use of lay preachers' (3), and in August 1773 he thanked Thornton for the money which he had sent, and also for the 'hundred golden treasuries' (4), half of which had been distributed on the previous Sunday.

1. Ibid. p.389.
2. Whittingham, p.34.
3. B.Works, p.367<sup>s</sup>
4. Balleine points out (p.60) that Thornton published a great many books at his own cost, the best known of which (other than the Bibles and Prayer Books, of course) was his English edition of Bogatzky's 'Golden Treasury'. From this book he removed all passages which seemed to him to verge on Moravianism and substituted short meditations written by himself and his friends.

This work 'rapidly became one of the most popular Evangelical books of devotion.'

In a footnote to the same page Balleine states: 'the copy which he (Thornton) sent to Berridge for correction, with the latter's very characteristic MS. notes and suggestions, is now in the C.M.S. Library.'

Unfortunately it is not.

cont. on p.69

With the thanks however, comes the statement, 'My stock of Bible and Testaments is almost gone, and when it suits I should be glad of a few of the smallest Bibles and Testaments. The labouring poor...may carry these in their pockets, and peruse them at meal times.' (1) The plea was heard and answered immediately. On September 25, he acknowledges another of Thornton's gifts: 'I have receive six dozen of Bibles, as many Testaments, and three hundred and eighty-six Watt's Songs, a most acceptable present for God's children... The sight of your Bibles and Testaments filled my heart with joy. For my hearers are Bible readers, and prefer the Word of God to everything.' (2)

By August 1774 Berridge had received a further 'three hundred and fifty Alleins...two hundred hymn books, and a dozen of Omicron's letters' which he guessed, quite rightly, from their matter and style were the work of John Newton. 'Pithiness and candour', he said, 'will betray the curate of Olney, notwithstanding h<sup>e</sup>is veil of a Greek signature.' (3) Next April the arrival of 'six dozen of Bibles, six dozen of Testaments, one hundred Allein's Alarms and one hundred treasuries,' (4) was the occasion of yet another letter to Thornton, and within three years the same source supplied him with another delivery of 'twelve dozen of small Bibles, nine dozen of small Testaments, and one thousand hymns for children.' (5)

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cont from p.68

The Librarian, after making a very careful and unhurried search, can find no trace of it and suggests that this was one of the many books which were destroyed by enemy action during the 2nd World War.

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| 1. Ibid. p.383. | 2. Ibid. p.387. |
| 3. Ibid. p.395. | 4. Ibid. p.399. |
| 5. Ibid. p.401. |                 |

Along with all these gifts for the newly converted, the ever-generous Thornton also sent a great deal of money - in small sums at regular intervals. While he was sending all these things to Berridge, he was also assisting others like Newton, to whom he allowed a minimum of £200 a year for the sixteen years that he was at Olney. (1) The unending liberality of this wealthy merchant prince and his son made a tremendous difference to the work of Berridge and other evangelicals. Without assistance from the Thorntons the 'tools for the job' would have been far harder - if not impossible - to find.

In paying tribute to Thornton, Venn declared, 'few have ever done more to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and help all that suffer adversity.' The fact that John Thornton was said to be the wealthiest merchant but one in Europe may have accounted for the fact that he was able to spend at least £100,000 on works of charity (2), but it does nothing to minimise his munificence.

However, John Thornton was not Berridge's only benefactor. He told Benjamin Mills (on November 4, 1785), 'I know not what my poor lay-evangelists would do without some assistance received from yourself and your society. They are labouring men, whose paws maintain their jaws, and two of them have seven children, and their wives are kindling every year.' Berridge believed that these men were 'the only free grace preachers in the land', for said he, 'they do preach free grace freely, without money and without price, having nothing for their preaching but a plain dinner and sometimes not even that.' How different from some of the Methodist preachers, amongst whom the evil of 'coaching' was now to be seen. Unlike his lay-evangelists, some of the Methodists were on a different social level from the people to whom they

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1. Abbey and Overton, p.395.      2. Balleine, p.59.

addressed themselves and - because they refused to 'rough it' - the gulf between themselves and their congregations was impassible. (1)

Writing again to Benjamin Mills, in November 1786, Berridge expressed his gratitude for the recent gift which he had converted into cloth for two lay preachers (2), and in other letters the story is the same.

The work was going on so far from Everton now that Berridge could never have enough to give away. Wherever he stopped the night himself it was his habit to leave half-a-crown, and Whittingham declares that during his itineracy this one item alone cost him five hundred pounds. (3)

So much Berridge received on behalf of his lay assistance, and in one of his letters to his great benefactor Thornton (May 3, 1773) he explained where all the money was going :

'My living is £160 a year; £100 of which defrays the expenses of my house-keeping, horse-keeping, servant's wages, my own raiment, and Sunday food and liquor for poor pilgrims who come to church from afar.

I keep no company; pay no visits, but preaching ones; and receive no visits but from travelling Christians, who are welcomed with some hashed meat, unless they chance to come on boiling days, which are twice a week.

'The work of God has extended itself from Everton, by means of field-preaching, into four counties, viz. Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex and Cambridgeshire. Near forty towns have been evangelised, many of which lay at a great distance from each other, and two lay preachers ride from town to town, preaching morning and evening every day. These are yearly allowed twenty-five pounds a piece, to provide themselves with horses and clothes, and defray turnpike expenses.

'There are also six Sunday preachers, who often want support and receive it from me.

'By this means the Gospel is preached without charge to the hearers. No collections are made, which mightily stoppeth the world's clamour.

1. B.Works, p.464.

2. Ibid, p.465.

3. Op.cit. p.34.

'But, Sir, besides these constant outgoings, I have a thousand other occasional demands upon me. The flocks in every place are very poor, and often distressed, on account of their religion. Labouring men have been turned out of their work; and some who are unable to work, through sickness, lameness, or old age, have been deprived of parish collection, or received a very scanty one, because they are Methodists. These you may think will apply to me for relief - true, you reply, but how are you able to relieve them?

'I will tell you, Sir. When I began to preach the Gospel I was possessed of £140 in money, and a paternal inheritance of £24 a year. The money was first expended - then I sold some needless plate and books for £50 - this was also expended - and, lastly, I sold my inheritance, which is not half expended.

'I scatter my mites about, because I am trading for another world. What silver and copper is left behind me, will profit me nothing; but what is given for Christ's sake will find a gracious recompense. The world would call me a fool for this traffic; but they will see and own hereafter, that I carried my goods to the best market.

'The walls of my house are made of plaster, and are very leaky in parts, and I fear the woodwork is decayed; they have wanted repairing for some years, but I could not find a heart to repair them because of the expense..

'It would delight you to see how crowded my cathedrals are, and what abundance of hearers they contain, when the grain is threshed out. I believe more children have been born of God in any one of these despised barns, than in St. Paul's Church or Westminster Abbey...' (1)

Smyth agrees that the directness and simplicity of this statement are extraordinarily moving, but as he points out, 'it does show two obvious and fatal weaknesses in Berridge's evangelistic work. Not only did it fail to create out of itself the discipline and organisation necessary for its consolidation and continuance; it also disparaged and defied the traditional discipline and organisation which the cumulative experience of the past had provided for the maintenance and propagation of the Christian religion in this country.'

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1. Smyth, pp.268, 269 (Quoted from the Congregational Magazine, 1842)

'To this extent,' Smyth continues, 'John Berridge is the spiritual ancestor of those broadminded and self-opinionated persons who, in our generation, have talked wildly about "the unfettered guidance of the Holy Spirit".' (1)

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1. Ibid. p.269.

ECENTRICITIES GALORE

'A Gospel minister, who has a church will have a diocese; and let him, like (Episcopos) and overseer or bishop of that diocese, and like faithful Grimshawe, look well to it.' (sic) (1) So Berridge wrote to Lady Huntingdon on December 26, 1767. Four and a half years earlier 'faithful Grimshawe' had died of an infectious fever contracted from one of his parishioners, and twenty-one years of devoted service at Haworth had been brought to a premature conclusion.

Berridge admired Grimshaw greatly, and it is often pointed out that they were two of a kind. They had much in common, and by no means all of the similarities were superficial. Both were big men; both had received their training at Cambridge, though Grimshaw had left Christ's College four years before Berridge went up to Clare. Both were converted soon after they had given themselves over to full-time parochial work. Both, thereafter, made a calculated attempt to suit their preaching to the rustic tastes of their congregations. Both cared considerably less for ecclesiastical regularity than most of their fellow clergy, were pioneers of revival in their own areas, and itinerated regularly in at least four counties. Both consequently found themselves haled from time to time before their respective Bishops and were opposed by influential land-owners. Moreover, both excited the interest and, in varying degrees, gained the support of John Fletcher, George Whitefield and the Wesleys. (2)

Then again, both raised funds for the opening of

1. Lady Huntingdon, Vol. II, p.20.
2. In point of fact Grimshaw fared better in this respect than Berridge, for it is on record that John Wesley paid no less than fifteen visits to Haworth, Charles four, and Whitefield at least six. Venn and Romaine also occupied his three-decker pulpit occasionally.

chapels - in Berridge's case, at least three (1) - and the erection of barns which could be used as 'threshing floors for Jesus' (2), and while both sponsored lay evangelists Grimshaw even went so far as to become the first Superintendent of the Haworth Circuit and to attend the Methodist Conferences.

But one of the most noticeable things about this pair is that they were both extremely eccentric.

In her life of Charlotte Bronte, Mrs. Gaskell records many interesting facts concerning Grimshaw which she gained from Newton's letters about the life of the extraordinary man (3), and many others have noted down his unusual methods. Faced with exceedingly superstitious people living on top of the desolate moors, this athletic, robust Christian decided that his God-given brawn could be turned to good effect in the service of the Lord. Thus he made it his practice to sally forth from the church (during the very long psalm or hymn prior to the sermon) riding crop in hand, and round up any of his parishioners who were unwise enough to be in the village at the time. Some would run into the 'Black Bull', but the 'mad parson', as he soon became known, would follow them...and woe betide those whom he caught.

On one occasion, it is said, he pretended to be a mischievous boy and teased a blind woman with a stick in order to ascertain whether she had really attained to a Christian command over her temper! On another, he dressed up as a woman and went out onto the moors to take down the names of all who were there instead of at worship. It was not long before the lawless countryfolk were terrified of him and 'he acquired such an ascendancy at Haworth that the village blacksmith positively refused to

1. Smyth, note p.267.
2. Charlotte Bronte, pp.18-21.
3. B.Works, p.407.



He had little use for the niceties and refinements of the society in which he had once mixed, and frequently he displayed a brusqueness which would have been more understandable in one of Grimshaw's Yorkshiremen, or indeed, in that forthright incumbent himself. Neither would tolerate flattery, especially if they thought it was ill-deserved. (1) The Rev. Alexander Coats once began a letter to Berridge in the polite fashion of the day : the answer (April 22, 1761) was typical of the vicar of Everton. 'Should a frog croak out a compliment to a toad?' (2) He believed that 'much writing is pernicious' (3), and that the ideal was to make short comments which 'should contain multum in parvo' (4). When he was forced to take up the pen he did try to come straight to the point and avoid all repetitions, but except in his 'begging letters' he seems to have failed in the praiseworthy aim.

On one occasion a very loquacious young lady visited him and, barely pausing to take breath, proceeded to talk on and on and on. Finally she decided that the time had come to leave and at last Berridge was able to get a word in. 'Madam', he said, 'before you withdraw I have one piece of advice to give you, and that is this, when you go into company again, after you have talked for half an hour without intermission, I recommend it to you to stop a while, and see if any other of the company has anything to say.' (5)

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1. On one occasion Whitefield began his sermon at Haworth 'in his suave, conciliatory way with a few remarks about the privileges' enjoyed by the residents of that village. Springing to his feet, Grimshaw cried out, 'for God's sake do not speak so. I pray you do not flatter them. The greater part of them are going to hell with their eyes open.' Balleine, p.68 (from Newton's letters to H. Forster.III)
  2. B.Works.p.365. cf.p.397
  3. Ibid. p.371.
  4. Ibid. p.376.
  5. Whittingham, pp.70,71.

In a letter to Samuel Wilks (April 11, 1775) he made it perfectly clear what he thought of pointless compliments and of all tittle-tattle : 'I do not love hard words', he wrote, 'yet I am afraid of kind ones : they have procured me many a whipping. Sweet words are to the heart what sweetmeats are to the stomach; unwholesome, producing sickliness.' (1) In the previous year he had advised Newton to 'leave this varnish... to the world who love to guild a base metal and make it look like gold.' (2)

Ten years before his death, and almost as man before he had confessed to Miss Lissey that he regretted all the years he had spent 'learning useless lumber' (3) he appended a post script to his letter to Benjamin Mills, enquiring why the latter had put 'A.M.' on the back of his letter. 'It makes me seem', said Berridge, 'a coxcombe got into my dotage.' (4)

Even his friend Thornton, who once admitted 'your vein of humour and mine seem much alike' (5), had cause, from time to time, to take him to task for his odd speech. In a letter written from Clapham on October 17, 1775, Thornton took exception to the fact that, in the prayer before the sermon at Tottenham Court Chapel, Berridge had asked, 'that God would give us new bread and not stale, but what was baked in the oven on that day' (6) That, Thornton felt, was going altogether too far! Berridge had once told him that he had been 'born with a fool's cap on.' 'Pray, my dear Sir', wrote Thornton, 'is it not high time you pulled it off?' (7)

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1. B. Works, p.397.

3. B. Works, p.468

4. Ibid. p.463.

6. Ibid. p.522.

2. Gadsby, Memoirs of the  
Hymn Writers, p.34.

5. Ibid, 2nd edit. p.522.

7. Ibid. p.523.

But Berridge had to have the last word. In his reply on October 22, he said, 'you know the man; odd things break forth from me as abruptly as croaking from a raven.' In any case, he continued, 'a fool's cap is not put off as readily as a night cap. One cleaves to the head and the other to the heart.' (1)

But Berridge was really no fool at all, and while he was perfectly prepared to sponsor strange lay preachers like 'Johnny Stittle' (2), he would not tolerate men who might injure the people by pervading what he judged to be false doctrines. Whittingham makes it clear that his wit was often employed in discomfiting such folk.

Early in his ministry at Everton, Berridge was visited occasionally by George Bell, a talented lay evangelist. He seemed in every way a most praiseworthy individual, but after a time strange reports reached the good vicar about the things which he had been saying. Without delay he was summoned to give an account of himself (even as Berridge had been summoned to present himself to the Bishop), and as soon as he arrived at the vicarage, Berridge said, 'I have heard that you say you will be carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire.' 'So I shall,' replied Bell, 'Indeed,' continued Berridge, 'then you will be highly honoured. May I request one favour of you? Having always given you a cordial reception when you visited me...I have some small claim upon your kindness.' This Bell admitted readily, and agreed to grant any favour in his power. Little did he realise what was coming! Without so much as a smile Berridge promptly said, 'when you are carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire, I request that you will grant me the honour of being your postilion.' That was too much for poor Bell, and Berridge was rid of the deluded man. (3)

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1. Ibid. p.523.

2. Sidney, p.47.

3. Whittingham, pp.76,77.

Later Bell was to prophecy that the world would end on February 28, 1763 ... and to be lodged in gaol for his pains.(1) In a letter written on September 2, 1763, Berridge reported that "Bell recovers his delusions apace, bidding fair for a greater enthusiast than ever." Sad to relate, it was not to be so. He ended his life as an atheist. (2)

One of Berridge's favourite jokes was at the expense of those who were visiting his home for the first time. Around the walls of his study he had arrayed a number of small prints of 'eminently pious men'. "That", Berridge would say, "is Calvin... and that is Luther; and that," he would continue pointing to the similarly-shaped mirror, "that is the Devil." Guests would step over and peer intently, only to discover too late that they had been 'had.' (3)

Richard Whittingham himself discovered just what the vicar of Everton was like on the very first occasion on which they met. He had gone to be interviewed as a prospective candidate for the post of Berridge's assistant and all had gone well until the young man was about to leave. There was just one thing more that Berridge wished to say. 'If you come to be my curate, you must draw that waistcoat and those stockings up the chimney.' (4) And presumably he did; for he came to Everton and proved himself to be thoroughly satisfactory.

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1. Many folk were terrified, for the earthquakes in London in 1750, and at Lisbon (1755) in which it was estimated that 30,000 lives were lost, were still fresh in their minds. Wesley had helped to keep the catastrophes before the public eye by issuing a collection of 'Hymns occasioned by the earthquake, March 8, 1750'. Though there were about a score of these hymns none of them were of first-rate quality. The second earthquake brought forth another pamphlet and another hymn from Wesley. Henry Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, p.67.
  2. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.I. p.339.
  3. Whittingham, p.80.
  4. Ibid. p.80.

Berridge was not a Puritan, in the true sense of the word, but he had a puritan streak in his character and this is well demonstrated by a letter which he wrote to his old friend John Newton on June 14, 1786.

'My Dear Brother,' he wrote, 'I have received and read your Messiah; and I thank God for the sermons, and for the testimony you have born against Oratorios.

'They seem a growing evil... the fiddling of scripture in a theatre seems to me a profanation of God's word, making it a mere carnal amusement; and the matter is made worse by bringing Oratorios into God's house; they then become a Satanical ordinance...

'The bringing of an Oratorio band, an army of pipers and fiddlers into God's house, appears to me worse profanation than bringing doves into the temple. But the cry is, they were all professors' (ie. Christians); perhaps so, and they are quickly made by a gallery ticket and a hymn book.'

It appears that Sir Richard had written two very long letters urging Rowland and the Trustees of the Surrey Chapel to have an oratorio at each of their anniversaries, and Berridge told Newton that he rather feared that Rowland might be influenced by his brother 'and a large band of fiddle-stick professors.' He was not sorry, therefore, that a stir had been made about the matter. The result, he hoped, would be to nip this dangerous innovation in the bud.

Newton and others had described oratorios as 'inexpedient things'. That also disappointed Berridge. He wanted to go much further. (1)

Bishop Ryle declared that 'of all the Evangelists of the Eighteenth Century this good man was undeniably the most quaint and eccentric' (2), and Knox points out that 'Southey gives him the character of "a buffoon as well as a fanatic" and Newman is frankly shocked by him.' 'How difficult,' comments Knox, 'for marble to appreciate granite!' (3)

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1. B.Works, pp.452, 453.  
3. Op.cit. p.488.

2. Op. cit. p.216.

Berridge was indeed an eccentric fellow, but underneath the odd exterior and behind the ready wit lay a deeply sincere and humble soul. In his quiet moments of self-examination it grieved him to think what an odd character he was, and on one of these occasions (July 3, 1763) he wrote :

'O heart, heart what art thou? A mass of fooleries and absurdities! The vainest, foolishlest, craftiest, wickedest thing in nature. And yet the Lord Jesus asks me for this heart, woes me for it, died to win it.

O wonderful love!, Adorable condescension!  
Take it Lord, and Let it be  
Ever closed to all but Thee.' (1)

Sincerity and fatuousness were well mixed in this strange man, and the combination of the two is illustrated by the lines which he wrote and pasted on the clock in his study :

'Here my Master bids me stand,  
And mark the time with faithful hand;  
What is his will is my delight,  
To tell the hours by day, by night.  
Master, be wise, and learn of me,  
To serve thy God, as I serve thee.' (2)

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1. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.I, p.358. 2. Whittingham, p.68.

## A SHAMEFUL CONTROVERSY

The eighteenth century produced one religious controversy after another, but the only one of real importance in a consideration of the life and works of John Berridge is that which flared up again in consequence of Wesley's publication of 'The Minutes of the Conference of 1770'.

When Whitefield had been in America, Wesley and he had corresponded on the subject of Calvinism and collateral questions. The content of their letters has been summed up wittily in these few sentences :

'Dear George, I have read what you have written on the subject of predestination, and God has taught me to see that you are wrong and I am right. Yours affectionately, J. Wesley.'

And the reply -

'Dear John, I have read what you have written on the subject of predestination, and God has taught me that I am right and you are wrong. Yours affectionately, G. Whitefield.' (1)

When Whitefield returned to England in 1741 the two were temporarily estranged. But they were devout Christians and found it impossible to go on for ever in opposition to each other. They agreed to differ, but 'their followers unfortunately failed to imitate this charity; and one of the most painful episodes in English religious history is the controversy between Calvinist and Arminian amongst the epigoni of their disciples.' (2)

For a few years it seemed that the controversy would be forgotten, but then, in 1755, it was brought before the public gaze by the publication of Hervey's 'Dialogues between Theron and Aspasio'. John Wesley's answer to them

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1. Abbey and Overton, pp.357, 358.

2. Norman Sykes, 'The English Religious Tradition,' p.68.

(in 'Serious Thoughts upon the Perseverance of the Saints' and 'Predestination Considered') and Hervey's reply to these pamphlets re-awakened a temporary interest in the question, but it was not until the year 1771 that the tempest broke out again with full force. By that time George Whitefield had died, and John Wesley had resolved to leave the argument in the hands of his lieutenants.(1)

When Wesley's preachers met in London, in August 1770, they found their leader disturbed by the Antinomianism which, he declared, had spread like wildfire through the Societies. As early as 1744 they had discussed the doctrine of Predestination and had come to the conclusion that they were treading on very dangerous ground by ascribing all good to free grace; by denying all natural free-will and all power in man precedent to grace; and by excluding all merit from man even for what he has or does by the grace of God. Now they felt it was necessary to stress the importance of faithfulness as well as faith, and stated :

'We have received it as a maxim that, "a man is to do nothing in order to justification". Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favour with God should "cease from evil, and learn to do well". And if this is not in order to find favour, what does he do them for?'

The argument was continued thus:

1. Who of us is now accepted of God?

He that now believes in Christ with a loving and obedient heart.

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1. 'Whitefield to the last spoke of Wesley with a touching affection. On one occasion when a censorious Calvinist asked him whether he thought they would see John Wesley in heaven, "I fear not," said the great preacher; "he will be so near the throne, and we shall be at such a distance, that we shall hardly get a sight of him." He remembered him warmly in his will, and it was in obedience to the express wish of Whitefield that Wesley was selected to preach his funeral sermon.'

Lecky, op.cit. Vol.II, p.576.

2. But who among those who never heard of Christ? He that feareth God and worketh righteousness according to the light he has.
3. Is this the same with 'he that is sincere'? Nearly, if not quite.
4. Is not this 'salvation by works'? Not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition.
5. What have we then been disputing about these thirty years? I am afraid, about words.
6. As to merit itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid : we are rewarded 'according to our works', yea 'because of our works'. How does this differ from for the sake of our works. And how differs this from secundum merita operum? As our works deserve. Can you split this hair? I doubt I cannot.
7. The grand objection to one of the preceding propositions is drawn from a matter of fact. God does in fact justify those who, by their own confession, neither feared God nor wrought righteousness. Is this an exception to the general rule?

It is a doubt, God makes any exception at all. But how are we sure that the person in question never did fear God and work righteousness? His own saying so is not proof; for we know how all that are convinced of sin undervalue themselves in every respect.

8. Does not talking of a justified or a sanctified state tend to mislead men, almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? Whereas we are every hour and every moment pleasing or displeasing God, 'according to our works', and our outward behaviour. (1)

Some months later, A.W. Harrison says, Wesley wrote to Fletcher explaining that for many years he had emphasised 'the total fall of man and his utter inability to do any good of himself; the absolute necessity of Grace and the Spirit of God to raise even a good thought

or desire in our heart...the blood and righteousness of Christ being the sole meritorious cause of our salvation...' (1) But all this he wrote too late. Lady Huntingdon had heard about the 'Minutes' and had been horrified by them. She did not appreciate that they were intended to guard against an excess, and so she informed Wesley that until such time as he decided to renounce these doctrines she would be forced to exclude him from all her pulpits.

Wesley quietly rode off to Cornwall... and the grande dame gathered together her clan for the celebration of the anniversary of her college.

On Wednesday, August 23, the 'celebrations' began, and on the following evening Berridge arrived. He took part in the many services which were held and preached twice - on Thursday and on Sunday. The company was a large and distinguished one. William Williams, Peter Williams, Daniel Rowlands and Howell Harris were all present, and so were Venn, Shirley and Fletcher (who was still President of the College). In her own party Lady Huntingdon had brought down Lady Anne Erskine, Miss Orton and Messrs. Ireland and Lloyd, and while these persons and all the other clergy, dissenting ministers, lay preachers and students squeezed onto a great platform, a huge congregation stood in the courtyard and delighted in the sermons, extempore prayers and hymns. (2) Fortified by the good fellowship, the party broke up on Sunday. The members went their several ways... and battle commenced.

Benson was dismissed from his post (he was headmaster of the College) and Fletcher resigned soon afterwards.

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1. The Evangelical Revival and Christian Reunion, pp.82, 83.
2. Lady Huntingdon, Vol II, pp.106-109.

The Calvinists tried to rally their forces for a conference at Bristol, and sooner or later most of the principal leaders of the revival found that they were forced to declare themselves as being for Wesley and Arminianism, or against him and for Calvinism.

'Popery unmasked' (1) was how Selina described the 'Minutes', and little by little pamphlets began to pour forth from both sides. While Sellon (to whom Berridge had sent his love - via Housman, on June 3, 1771), Olivers and Fletcher held the Arminian fort against repeated onslaughts, Shirley, Sir Richard and Rowland Hill, Toplady, Berridge and others rushed up and beat upon the walls in a most shameful manner.

As Smyth says : 'To us the idiom and the presuppositions of the controversy...seem not so much archaic as, rather, almost inconveivably remote.' (2) Furthermore, the spirit in which it was conducted was an exceedingly bad one. As evidence of this fact, Knox points out that Wesley was called 'an old fox tarred and feathered', 'a designing wolf', 'the most perfect and holy and sly that e'er turned a coat, or could pilfer a lie', 'a grey-headed enemy of all righteousness', 'a venal profligate', 'the most rancorous hater of the Gospel system that ever appeared in this land', and much else besides.(3)

It is not entirely surprising that the literature which was produced by this controversy was of an exceptionally poor standard. None of it is read today, but since Berridge failed to abide by the sound advice which he had given to Rowland Hill, it is necessary to consider his contribution to this unhappy affair.

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1. Ibid. Vol.II, p.240.  
3. Op. cit. p.502.

2. Op.cit. p.184.

Soon after the Bristol Conference in 1771 he had written to Hill, saying : 'The late contest at Bristol seems to turn upon this hinge, whether it shall be Pope John or Pope Joan. My dear friend, keep out of all controversy...'(1) If only he had had the wisdom to do just that! Shortly afterwards he entered the lists himself with 'The Christian World Unmasked'

Whittingham explains that for many years after his conversion Berridge held Arminian views (the word is really a misnomer) and it was because of a long period of inactivity occasioned by a nervous fever (in 1768), 'that he was led to embrace the Calvinistic creed, which he had before abhorred.' (2) This illness came at a time when Berridge's labours were meeting with great success, and, being unable to do any work himself, he began to see that no man is indispensable. From this time onwards he had more dealings with Calvinists (so called) but still remained on terms of friendship with many of the Arminians.(3) When the Calvinist Controversy was well under way he decided to try and defend his newly-formed beliefs, and for this reason he penned a lengthy dialogue between an imaginary doctor and grazier. It seems very probable that the views which he expressed so quaintly in 'The Christian World Unmasked: Pray Come and Peep', would have 'gone home' to the same simple folk who appreciated his sermons and hymns...though they proved to be entirely ineffectual in convincing the more sophisticated men for whom he really wrote them.

I will 'Gentle reader,' he begins, 'lend me a chair and I will sit down and talk a while with you... I have no flattering words to give you...I am come to enquire of your health, and would ask a few questions about it.' (4)

He enquires how the grazier, whose home he is visiting, feels; and, having felt his 'spiritual pulse'

1. Sidney, p.430.  
3. Ibid. pp.16,17.

2. Whittingham, p.14.  
4. B.Works, p.187.

tells the man that he is 'sick...of a mortal disease.' (1)  
 The man protests. He is in excellent health. He is sober, honest and charitable. He leads an inoffensive, respectable life and always tries to do good to his fellows. Surely there must be some mistake? There is nothing wrong with him at all! The argument is one which is all-too-familiar to every parish priest, and Berridge replies:

'Whilst you remain a stranger to Christ's inner Kingdom, you are, with all your outward decency, but a painted tomb, full of uncleanness...Your bosom is a cage of unclean birds, and you dearly love their chirping, and feed them with your own hand...If your filthy thoughts were all exposed to the world you would almost die with shame.' (2)

Outward decency is not enough. The heart must be changed. The mind must be completely re-orientated. The man must be born again, must come to love the Bible more than his newspaper (3) and be prepared to talk about the Faith to others, even though he be branded as a 'methodist' for doing so. He must pray and take steps to ammend his life; and this he can never do as long as he relies upon his own will-power. God alone can save any man and give him a new heart and the power to reform, for even if he does try to work for his own salvation he will fail.

'God has proposed no more than two covenants,' he says, 'The first was wholly of works...and the second is wholly of grace...' but, 'men have patched up a third covenant, consisting partly of works, and partly of grace.' (4)

'Works have no share,' he explains, 'in the covenant of grace as a condition of life; they are only the fruit of salvation freely bestowed, and the genuine evidence of a true faith, which works by love.' (5)

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1. Ibid. p.188.  
 3. Ibid. p.195.  
 5. Ibid. p.211.

2. Ibid, p.191.  
 4. Ibid, p.208.

'Sincere obedience' is nonsense, for everyman is left to decide for himself just what it means, and so to do as little towards obeying God's law as satisfies his own conscience.

'I trust you see...' he says, 'that sincere obedience is nothing but a jack-o'lantern, dancing here and there, and everywhere; no man could ever catch him, but thousands have been lost by following him. A cripple might as well rest upon his shadow for support, as your heart depend upon the phantom of sincere obedience....'

'Your mixed covenant, ' he continues, changing the metaphor again, 'is a mere bubble, blown up by the breath of pride. It has neither got a foot in heaven, nor a foot on earth, but is pendulous in the air, and rests upon a castle floating in the clouds, which threatens downfall and ruin every moment.' (1)

Berridge's simple grazier now admits that he must change his ideas. But he does not know what he is to substitute for them. This gives the 'doctor' the opportunity of explaining the Pauline doctrine of the law as a preparation for Christ, and the discussion now turns upon 'faith' and 'believing in Christ'. The grazier protests against making 'a packhorse of my Saviour' (2) and clings to his original notion that there is something which he can do to work out his own salvation. But the 'doctor' sticks to his point. There is nothing whatever that any man can do except concentrate wholly upon Christ, for He alone can make atonement for us.

'Our business is to watch and pray; and it is the Saviour's office to work in us to will and to do. What will and power he gives, we may exercise, and nothing more.' (3)

The argument now turns upon human knowledge, with the cowman suggesting that his learned landlord (who had been up to Cambridge, who spoke French fluently and had a large library) must, of necessity, be further advanced

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1. Ibid, p.213.

2. Ibid, p.234.

3. Ibid, p.236.

in the Christian life than he who has only his Bible from which to learn heavenly wisdom. This, of course, Berridge denies. Even 'the scholar must go empty to Jesus, and see himself a fool in heavenly science.' (1) This point is expounded at great length, and, like all others, is supported by a wealth of Biblical quotations. It elicits a reply which throws an interesting side-light upon the state of many churches in the mid-eighteenth century:

'Indeed Doctor, we have nothing to trouble us in our parish beside family cares and bodily infirmities. The Vicar's chief complaint is about his large family and scanty income...On Sundays we march to church in our best clothes, and are decently seated in pews, which are swept every Christmas. (!)... we keep popping in all prayer time. And during the sermon, which is soon dispatched, some listen, some giggle; and when the weather waxes warm, a few are half awake, and the rest are fast asleep; which proves that they have no burden. This is our parish way of going unto Jesus; and as for yours, Doctor, it seems more suitable for thieves and harlots, than for honest folk.' (2)

At this point Berridge doubles back on his tracks, so to speak, and goes over all the ground which he has covered already, re-emphasising the necessity of 'believing' and the uselessness of 'doing', as a means of salvation. He speaks of the Fall of Adam and of original sin, and of how Jesus has paid the debt and taken 'the law-curse upon himself, to free believers from it.' (3) The man still can not see why everyman should not pay his own debts, and so the argument is re-traced once more. 'Merit is a fuz-ball which sprouteth from a dunghill,' maintains Berridge, and continues :

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1. Ibid, p.239.  
3. Ibid, p.265.

2. Ibid, p.249.

'The popish conclave has acted craftily, and more consistently than protestant divines, by inventing works of supererogation. For though these works are false, absurd and blasphemous, yet being once allowed, they lay a right foundation for human merit. If a man can do more than he is in duty bound to do he may merit by such doing. And nothing now is wanting for the Pope, 'Berridge adds prophetically, 'but a Cyclop's eye of infallibility, which any Vulcan will readily make, to determine what these works of supererogation are, and the Church's coffers are loaded presently by treasure. Simon Stylites, by perching on a pillar for a month, shall purchase pardons for a thousand adulterers and sodomites.' (1)

This is not to say, however, that everyman must not be born again. Every man must accept the redemption that is freely offered to him, must trust in Christ alone for salvation, and must turn his back for ever upon the 'mixed covenant' of faith and works which has been 'discovered lately by some ingenious gentlemen.' (2)

'A pole held to a drowning man, and by which he is driven to land, saveth him, just as faith saves a sinner. In a lax way of speaking we are said to be saved by faith; and so the drowning man might say he was saved by the pole, though in truth he was rescued by the mercy of a neighbour, who thrust a pole towards him and thereby drew him safe to shore.' (3)

Here Berridge expounds the doctrine so ably expressed by Hooker, that 'the believing man is justified, not by the worthiness of his belief, but by the worthiness of Him who is believed.' (4) Then he goes on to assert that while there are no degrees of justification (for the 'man who is truly justified, is justified from all things') nevertheless, 'degrees of glory' will be assigned to each at the last judgement 'according to their various fruitfulness.'

1. Ibid. p.270.  
3. Ibid. p.297.

2. Ibid. p.292.  
4. Eccles. Polity

'Thus a believer's state of happiness is finally determined by his faith. He that believeth shall be saved, but the measure of his happiness in that state depends upon the fruits of faith. Faith alone can save a Christian, but his crown is brighter according as his faith works more abundantly by love.' (1)

The argument becomes more and more tortuous and complicated as text after text is quoted in its support. Consequently it is little wonder that the simple grazier breaks in from time to time to admit that he is utterly baffled. In due course Berridge turns to a question about 'Election' and (from personal experience) he declares :

'A furnace is the proper place to learn this doctrine in, and there I learnt it. Nor men nor books could teach it me; for I would neither hear nor read about it. A long and rancorous war I waged with it, and when my sword was broken and both my arms were maimed, I yet maintained a sturdy fight, and was determined I would never yield; but a furnace quelled me...and as I learnt to loathe myself, I learnt to prize his grace.' (2)

'The grace of God is called free, because it is free for God to give to whom he pleaseth.' (3)

In his determination to make his point Berridge completely overlooks all passages of Scripture in which it is made explicit that God wills all men to be saved, and that Christ came to save all men - a point which so many of his hymns do make clear. In this particular work the whole emphasis is upon the 'fact' that salvation is limited to those for whom God has marked it out from the beginning of time. The good vicar of Everton gets into a hopeless muddle and makes complete nonsense of the doctrine of prevenient grace. And yet he is no thorough-going Calvinist for he passes over the subject of Election as soon as possible.

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1. B.Works, p.300.  
3. Ibid. p.315.

2. Ibid. p.313.

There is a great deal of confused thinking and the result is that the reader is left in doubt as to whether the author really does rule out all human choice, free-will and decision, or whether he does not. In point of fact he tries, very unsatisfactorily, to make a synthesis of the views of the two contending parties, and in consequence he managed to satisfy neither. However, many a wise word is spoken and many an amusing metaphor is produced in the one hundred and fifty pages, and although this is a singularly ill-starred attempt to defend the doctrines of justification by faith alone and of predestination, Berridge's sincerity is obvious.

Unlike so many others who rose up to put the Calvinist point of view, Berridge refrained from attacking his adversaries by name.

On August 18, 1773, he tried to explain his motives for joining in the controversy in a letter to John Thornton. He said, 'In my pamphlet I wrote something against what the world calls sincere obedience, and with a two-fold view; first to expose that insincere obedience which is commonly cloaked under the name of sincere obedience, or doing what we can. Secondly, to show that obedience, where it is sincere, and the fruit of the Spirit, is no ground of merit or cause of justification. And I thought no professor could misunderstand me; but in a letter received from Mr. Fletcher, he writes thus,

"What you have said about sincere obedience, has touched the apple of God's eye, and is the very core of Antinomianism. You have done your best to disparage sincere obedience, and in a pamphlet (ready for the press) I have freely exposed what you have written."

Then he cries out in a declamatory style,

"For God's sake let us only speak against insincere and Pharisaical obedience."

Indeed I thought I had been writing against insincere obedience throughout the pamphlet; and that everyone who has eyes, must see it clearly; but I suppose that Mr. Fletcher's spectacles invert objects, and make people walk with their heads downwards.(1)

In later years (like some of the others) he deeply regretted that he had gone even as far as he had, and even as early as August (31) of this year we find him telling Thornton that though it seemed clear that Fletcher would attack his recent work, 'whatever he may write against my pamphlet, I am determined to make no reply.' (2) He had the greatest possible respect for the vicar of Madeley, and in the same letter he said, 'his heart seemeth very upright, and his labours are abundant.' (3)

Writing to John Newton, three weeks later, he notes that Fletcher has written to him saying that his 'prattle' is the 'core of Antinomianism' and that he intends 'to put my head in a pillory and my nose in the barnacles.' (4)

Four days later (September 25) Berridge sent a third letter to Thornton telling him that he had written to Fletcher and had tried to explain his 'intention in speaking against sincere obedience'. Moreover, he had informed him that he was 'an enemy to controversy' (a little late!) and that if Fletcher persisted in publishing a reply to The Christian World Unmasked he would 'not rise up to fight with him.'

'I further told him' he continued, that 'I was afraid that Mr. Toplady' (in a scurrilous pamphlet entitled 'More Work for Mr. Wesley) 'and himself were setting the christian world on fire, and the carnal world in laughter,

1. Ibid. p.382.  
3. Ibid. p.383.

2. Ibid. p.384.  
4. Ibid. p.386.

and wished they could both depart from controversy. A letter seemed needful yet I wrote to him without any hope of success...' 'Mr. Jones, an expelled Oxonian' (Thomas Jones, one of the seven men sent down because of their Calvinist views) 'has just been with him, and called upon me last Saturday, as he returned to his curacy. Mr. Fletcher showed him what he had written against my pamphlet, which has been revised by Mr. Wesley, and is to be published shortly.' (1)

He despaired of unity in the Church and said that 'until the millenium comes, and perhaps until the resurrection, Judah will be vexing Ephraim, and Ephraim will be envying Judah.' (2)

Strangely enough, while Berridge was pleading for peace from Everton, Richard Hill was doing the same from Hawstone...but it was of little avail. Fletcher had had something to say of Berridge's errors in First Part of his 'Fifth Check', when he had answered Richard Hill's so-called 'Finishing Stroke', but in the next pamphlet, published on March 1, 1774, he went straight for him. This work bore the incredible title -

Logica Genevensis continued. Or a Second Part of the Fifth Check to Antinomianism; containing a defence of 'Jack o'lanthorn' and 'the Paper-kite', ie., Sincere Obedience; - of the 'Cobweb' ie., the Evangelical law of liberty; and of the 'Valiant Sergeant I.F.', ie., The conditionality of Perseverance, attacked by the Rev. John Berridge...

In this reply, Tyerman says, 'there is often plain speaking, but there is no acidity. Berridge is routed, but he is invariably treated as a Christian gentleman' (3); and this is no more than the truth. In the introduction to his pamphlet Fletcher began as he intended to continue :

1. Ibid, p.387.

2. Ibid, p.388.

3. Tyerman's Fletcher, p.397.

'Before I mention Mr. Berridge's mistakes, I must do justice to his person. It is by no means my design to represent him as a divine who either leads a loose life, or intends to hurt the Redeemer's interest. His conduct as a Christian is exemplary; his labours as a minister are great; and I am persuaded that the wrong touches which he gives to the ark of godliness are not only undesigned, but intended to do God service.'

'There are many things commendable in the pious vicar of Everton,' he continued, 'and so much truth in his Christian World Unmasked, that I find it a hardship to expose the unguarded parts of that performance. But the cause of this hardship is the ground of my apology. Mr. Berridge is a good and excellent man; therefore the Antinomian errors which go abroad into the world with his letters of recommendation, speak in his evangelical strain, and are armed with the poignancy of his wit, cannot be too soon pointed out and too carefully guarded against...' (1)

In concluding his reply Fletcher returned to the note with which he had begun. He professed his 'brotherly love and sincere respect for the ingenious and pious author' and declared that 'few, very few of our elders equal him in dev<sup>o</sup>teness to Christ, zeal, diligence and ministerial success.' 'His indefatigable labours in the word and doctrine entitle him to a double share of honour; and I invite all my readers to esteem him highly... entreating them not to undervalue his vital piety on account of his Antinomian opinions.' Fletcher even invited Berridge - his 'much esteemed antagonist' - to preach in his church, and stated that he would be 'edified and overjoyed to hear him enforce there the guarded substance of his book, which not withstanding the vein of solifidianism' (a softer word which Fletcher coined and used frequently in the 'Fifth Check', more or less as a synonym for 'antinomianism') 'contains many great and glorious truths.' (2)

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1. Ibid, p.397.

2. Ibid, pp.298 and 307.

Richard Hill had already extended the olive branch to Fletcher, and now Lady Huntingdon did the same. Early in December 1776 the vicar of Madeley visited young G.J. Gorham at St. Neots...and together they went on to Everton to see Berridge.

The month after John Berridge died, Gorham wrote to Whittingham and described the meeting of the two men.

He says (and many others have followed him in the error) that Fletcher and Berridge had not met for some sixteen years, during which time they had disputed with each other. In point of fact, as we have noticed, they were both present at the Trevecca anniversary immediately prior to the Calvinist flare-up. Nevertheless, they had disagreed, and 'the meeting of these two excellent men was such as could not but bring to mind the Apostolic days...They embraced each other with tears of affection.' Gorham and two other friends who had arrived, left them together for a couple of hours, and when they returned they were delighted to see that 'the spirit with which they met had not evaporated. They were still consulting how they might be most useful to the Church of Christ.' Before they went their several ways all who were present knelt down and Fletcher prayed first, and Berridge followed. Both were warm, affectionate and fervent, and their conduct reminded Gorham 'of the saying of the persecutors of the Primitive Church - "See how these Christians love one another".'

The hatchet was well and truly buried.

THE VENNS AT YELLING

Perhaps of all men Henry Venn was Berridge's greatest friend. For eleven years after serving a four-year curacy at Clapham he was vicar of Huddersfield, but so hard did he work there that at the age of forty-seven he was obliged to accept a benefice where less would be demanded of him. Naturally Berridge was delighted to hear that they were to be neighbours, and on June 10, 1771, he told John Thornton, 'Mr. Venn...is expected this week at Yelling, which is only measured nine miles from Everton.' (1) Within a short time they had begun to exchange pulpits once a month and to see a great deal of each other. But they had both changed considerably. Their doctrinal views, for example, had altered. Thus, writing to James Stillingfleet, on November 22nd, 1771, Venn said; 'Last Wednesday Mr. Berridge was here, and gave us a most excellent sermon. He is a blessed man, a true Calvinist; not hot in doctrine nor wise above what is written, but practical and experimental. Summer differs not more from winter, than this dear man from what he was ten years ago; he is now broken in heart, yet fervent in spirit.' (2)

It was good to have a kindred spirit so close at hand, particularly as it soon became obvious that Venn was able to keep a closer eye on the students of their old university than Berridge had been able to do in recent years. It was not long before the local clergy began to oppose his 'dear brother' Venn, (3) for although he had retired to Yelling he still did far more in his parish and in the district around it that was common in those days. He even preached twice a Sunday, and held

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1. B. Works, p.374.  
3. B. Works, p.378.

2. Venn, p.191.

mid-week meetings in his vicarage (1). Moreover, he spoke, on occasion, in neighbouring parishes, in barns and farm-houses.(2)

On August 10,1774, Berridge wrote to Thornton telling him of his recent work and apologising for not communicating with him in recent months. 'I have been enabled to itinerate thirteen weeks this summer', he says, 'and am now resting my old bones during harvest...In most places I find very large auditories. My cathedral barns are much crowded, and the cathedral yards well sprinkled with hearers...I have been recruiting for Mr. Venn at Godmanchester, a very populous and wicked town near Huntingdon, and met with a patient hearing from a numerous audience. I hope he will also consecrate a few barns, and preach a little in his neighbourhood to fill up the fold at Yelling.' And so he did. Venn did not take very kindly to the idea, at first, but as Berridge explained to Thornton, he had told him that he could hardly stand by and watch 'sinners go flocking to hell' just because he was frightened of 'irregularity'. 'Whilst irregularities in their worst shape traverse the kingdom with impunity,' he argued, 'should not irregularity in its best shape pass without censure? I tell my brother', he continued, 'he need not fear being hanged for sheep stealing, whilst he only whistles the sheep to a better pasture, and meddles neither with the flesh nor the fleece.' (3)

As far as the neighbouring clergy were concerned there was little to choose between Berridge and Venn. One was as bad as the other, or very nearly, Berridge told Thornton that, 'The scoffing world make no other distinction between us, than between Satan and Beelzebub. We have both got tufted horns and cloven feet, only I am thought the more impudent devil of the two.' (4)

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1. Elliott-Binns, p.287.

2. Smyth, p.280.

3. B.Works, p.394.

4. Ibid, pp.394,395.

Berridge may have been given to exaggeration, but he was (as we have noted more than once) also genuinely humble. In the same letter in which he described his work in recent months he commented that he was growing more and more aware of his 'spiritual poverty'. 'I am ashamed', he said, 'of the little that I do for Jesus, and of the poverty of that little.' This was his constant complaint to Venn and to others during these years following on the Calvinist controversy. And yet he was still riding far and wide, still going up to London each year, and still meeting with enormous congregations. Speaking of one such trip to the capital Venn told Stillingfleet (on August 12, 1776) that Berridge had 'had the largest congregations that were ever known, for a constancy: and greatly was his word owned by the Lord.' But he also told Stillingfleet that 'he is often telling me, that he is sick of all he does, and loathes himself for the inexpressible corruption he feels within: yet is his life a pattern to us all...(and) resembles that burning and shining light, who cried out, "I have need to be baptised of Thee".' (1)

'He is as affectionate as a father to my son, and gives him many valuable books', Venn also told Stillingfleet, and this affection is reflected in one of Berridge's own letters (to Thornton : June 12, 1778) in which he says; 'Young Venn is the most promising youth I have seen; great mental abilities close application to study, and much unction from the Holy One.' (2) On October 24 of the same year he added the following postscript to another letter addressed to Thornton :

'I preached at Yelling on Tuesday evening to a large congregation, and left the family in good health. Jacky goes on well... and promises to be a polished shaft in the Lord's quiver.' (3)

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1. Venn, p.233.  
3. Ibid. p.404.

2. B.Works, p.402.

But it was not only Jacky - who had entered Sidney as a scholar in the previous year - who delighted the old man with no family of his own. Three years later (November 24, 1781) he told Thornton :

'I came from Yelling not much improved in health, but greatly delighted with their (the Venn's ) family worship, and with the gracious behaviour of the whole family. Truly it seems a little household of faith.

'Nelly is quick and smart, and appears to advantage in company; but Jenny is the most solid (sic) and has the best abilities. She visits all the sick in the parish, makes up their medicines, delights in the work, and would make a good parson's wife. Her health is indifferent, yet she does not seem to quarrel with the Lord on that account.

'Kitty had a wonderful breathing of the Holy Ghost upon her three or four years ago, which continued for many months. A spirit of prayer was given in rich abundance with divine consolations, and her heart seemed wholly taken up with God. I hope this has left her such a relish for divine things as will never be lost.

'Jacky is the top branch of the tree, highest and humblest. His abilities seem equal to anything he undertakes, and his modesty is pleasing to all that behold him. He has daily hours of retirement for waiting on his God, as have his sisters, father and mother; and he is so recollected in his talk, that I seldom hear him speak a trifling thing. His behaviour in college has turned the hearts of the Master and Fellows entirely to him, who were very averse, and even injurious for a season, on account of his being the son of a Methodist Clergyman. (1) There seems not a doubt but he will be elected a Fellow next Easter...' (2)

But it was not to be. 'Jacky' was not elected (3), and on September 17, 1782, Berridge informed Newton that Venn's son - 'a very gracious youth - is gone to Buckden (4)

1. 'This was the only suggestion there is that John Venn was regarded with contempt by the members of the Senior Common Room, because his father was known as a 'methodist'.' M. Hennell : John Venn and the Clapham Sect. note p.43.
  2. B. Works, pp.414, 415.
  3. Michael Hennell states that John Venn was placed
- cont. on p. 103.

for orders, and prays earnestly for the Lord's unction along with the Bishop's hands on Sunday next.' 'He seems intended for a polished shaft', he added, and 'has been much in the furnace of late, a good school for Christian experience.' (1) In the following year the young man became vicar of Little Dunham (the first to reside in the parish for seventy-five years) (2) and there he remained for the next nine years until he moved to Clapham.

In the meantime, however, Henry Venn had written again to Stillingfleet (1782) speaking of his delight in Berridge's preaching at Yelling. In this letter he observed; 'His voice grows weaker. He is sixty-eight in February - a great age for one who has laboured so much! Dr. Conyers, Mr. Madan, Mr. Newton and myself are all fifty-eight in March.' (3)

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cont. from p.102

Sixth Junior Optime. That is to say, he gained no more than a Third Class Honours degree. As Hennell explains, the method of classing candidates left much to be desired. Before the Moderators left the Senate House it was their custom to issue a provisional list of gradings. In this list Venn had appeared as 'Senior Optime'. However, when the final list was posted he was bitterly disappointed to discover that he had been dropped to the lower grade.

In spite of the poor result the Master of Sidney encouraged him to stay on in the hope of a Fellowship. An unfortunate misunderstanding ended his chances.  
 Op. cit. pp.56-58.

4. The residence of the Bishop of Lincoln.

1. B. Works. p.418.

2. Elliott-Binns, p.270.

3. Berridge was certainly old for the work to which he devoted himself so zealously, but he was two years younger than Venn believed - and Newton, Conyers, Madan and Venn were not the same age !

It was in this year, 1782, (14th June) that a young undergraduate named Charles Simeon had been introduced by John Venn to Berridge. Later, in the autumn, the same young man, having been in orders for only a few months (1), and still not having taken his degree, was appointed to the living of Holy Trinity, Cambridge. With the very best motives he had been very anxious to secure the living, and was fortunate in having a father who had the ear of the Bishop. As Berridge wrote to Newton on September 17, 1782, 'Mr. Simeon... has just made his appearance in the Christian hemisphere, and attracts much notice.' (He might have said, with equal truth, 'much opposition'). 'He preaches at a church in the town, which is crowded like a theatre on the first night of a new play.' (2) Another young ally for the aging itinerant? It seemed so at first, but whatever Henry Venn might do himself he was not going to let young Simeon stray too far from the path of 'regularity' if he could help it. The two of them would ride over and dine at Everton on Tuesdays, and on one occasion, it is recorded, that they took along Fletcher and the Rev. and Mrs. Robinson of Leicester. Berridge was delighted to see them all, and his welcome was all the more warm as he had had close contacts with Robinson before the latter had moved north in 1772. (3)

Venn tucked Simeon very firmly under his wing and it was to Yelling that the new vicar of Holy Trinity would ride, far more often than to Everton. Berridge bears witness to this fact in a letter to Thornton dated July 2, 1785. He says :

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1. 'He was ordained on May 26, 1782, while he was four months under the canonical age.' Hennell, op.cit., note p.55.
  2. B. Works, p.418.
  3. Abner Brown, p.201 (Quoted in Whittingham, 2nd edit. p.lv)

'Yelling church is well attended under Mr. Simeon's afternoon ministry. A brave Christian Sergeant he is, having the true spirit of an Evangelist, but his feet are often put into the stocks by the Archdeacon of Yelling' (Berridge means Venn) 'who is doubtless become a vagabond preacher as well as myself, a right gospel hawker and pedlar, but seems desirous of having the trade for himself. Through mercy he is grown as scandalous as I could wish him, yet he wants to fasten the shackle on Simeon which he has dropped from himself.' (1)

Herein lay one of the important differences between Henry Venn and John Berridge. The latter could not (or would not) see that what had been necessary in their earlier days was now, by the grace of God - and because of their labours - by no means so necessary. Venn, on the other hand, could foresee a greater future and a wider sphere of influence being open to Simeon in the years ahead if he did not scandalise the whole ecclesiastic hierarchy by the gross breaches of Church Order of which he, his old friend and some of their contemporaries had been guilty.

But he could not have it all his own way, As Berridge told Thornton :

'Some little time before Mr. Venn went to London, he preached at Bluntisham.' (for Mr. Coxe Feary), 'a village in the Fens, and finding great power and success, he promised to preach there once a fortnight in some barn on his return.

'In the meantime I desired Simeon to strike whilst the iron was hot, and to visit Bluntisham as well as Yelling. He consented : accordingly, after preaching at Cambridge on a Sunday morning, he preached at Yelling in the afternoon, and at Bluntisham in the evening; and finding a very crowded and attentive audience, he preached early on Monday morning, leaving off before six. This he did for three weeks, and then acquaints his principal with what he had done, expecting a letter of congratulation; but lo ! a funeral answer comes, declaring Mr. Venn is grieved at his conduct, grieved at Mr. Simeon what he himself had done, and intended to do.'

Berridge just could not understand Venn's motives. He urged Thornton to chastise 'the Archdeacon' the next time he saw him, for he felt sure that if he were to continue in this irrational (sic) conduct he would 'spoil a Christian Sergeant.' (1) But, of course, it is now possible to see that while Venn was absolutely right in the advice which he gave to his young friend, and that his actions had far-reaching consequences for the University and indeed for the whole Church of England, Berridge was completely wrong in his assessment of the situation and in his belief in the continuing necessity of itineracy.

A new age had dawned. Young men of Charles Simeon's generation would employ different methods to propagate the Gospel from those used by their fathers...and their influence would spread far beyond the shores of Great Britain.

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1. Ibid. pp.445, 446.

'ZION'S SONGS'

In 1760 Berridge published 'A Collection of Divine Songs' which, in the main, were taken from the Wesley's hymns. For one reason or another, however, after a few years he determined to suppress this volume, and in its place, in 1785, he brought out his 'Zion's Songs'. All these were alleged to be original, and while some were taken from the 1760 work the majority were new. But original or otherwise, in the opinion of Elliott-Binns and other modern writers they are 'sorry effusions'. 'It might have been thought', commented Elliott-Binns, 'that Berridge's classical training, even though he had put it behind him, would have made him conscious of their defects' (1), but apparently it did not. Indeed it is clear that he felt himself well qualified to pass opinions upon the labours of other men, and it is known that he had a good deal to say about a pamphlet which Thornton produced (2). Furthermore, he ventured to give John Newton advice when he was engaged in writing his ecclesiastical history. He was sorry, he said, that Newton felt compelled to undertake this task for he felt it was an extremely unprofitable one. (3) Nevertheless, since he was determined to carry it through, Berridge told him to 'study to be concise'.

When he received a copy of the Olney Hymns (in 1775) he informed Thornton that on the whole he believed it to be the most edifying book yet published; but for all that, the hymns, he declared, 'seem to want a little unction sometimes, and sometimes a little more poetic vein, and I wish there had been more hymns of praise.' (4) Seven years later, writing to Newton, Berridge had a great

1. Op. cit., p.417.  
3. Ibid. pp.370, 371.

2. B.Works, p.376.  
4. Ibid, p.405.

deal more to say about Cowper's hymns. He admitted that he thought him 'the nation's poet-laureat, though not the King's', and that his verses were very much better than those of Whitehead (who had been one of his contemporaries at Cambridge). However, he had many minute criticisms to make and even stated that 'many of the lines are not readable, neither prose nor verse, and break old teeth inhumanly.' His notes about their punctuation are ridiculous. (1)

In 1785 Cowper published more poems, and on this occasion Berridge observed (November 12), 'his poetry though excellent, is not likely for sale. There is too much Gospel for the world, and too little for most believers.'<sup>(2)</sup>

There seems then some justification for Elliott-Binns' conclusion that, 'Berridge had an unbounded confidence in his literary taste.' (3) As he notices, Berridge actually altered some of Charles Wesley's hymns - to the great indignation of his brother. 'How vilely', wrote John, 'he has murdered that hymn! weakening the sense as well as marring the poetry'. (4)

It is possible that it was this outburst that caused Berridge to destroy every copy of the 'Collection of Divine Songs' upon which he could lay his hands. But be that as it may, it is certain that though he was a scholar he was not a good poet, and that even when he did try again he borrowed and adapted the works of others.

Two hymns, at least, - 'Jesus cast a look on me' and 'Since Jesus freely did appear' - he took from Wesley. A third, 'O happy saints who dwell in light' was, according to J. Julian (5) a re-written version of Ralph Erskine's 'Aurora veils (sic) her rosy face'.

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1. Ibid, pp.416, 417.

2. Ibid, p.449.

3. Op. cit. p.417.

4. Tyerman's Wesley, Vol.II, p.357.

5. Dictionary of Hymnology, p.98.

J. Gadsby is even more emphatic than Julian. 'Zion's Songs', he said, 'were not strictly original. Some were made up from Allen and Batty, Cennick, Erskine and others.' (1) Now Allen and the Battys were among the more eminent of Benjamin Ingham's eccentric evangelists; Cennick ended his life as a Moravian, and Erskine had the doubtful distinction of being deposed by the Scottish General Assembly! So Berridge was certainly catholic in his tastes; but then so were all the others whom we have mentioned. Each borrowed quite blatantly whatever suited him and, without so much as a second thought about the morality of his action, adapted the verses to suit his own ends.

Erskine, we know, borrowed freely from Watts, and so did Whitefield, who also dipped into Wesley's hymns and changed their doctrine to suit his own Calvinism. When Martin Madam published his hymn book (Julian says that it was 'the second of importance for the Church of England') in 1760, he, in turn 'went to the collection published by Whitefield in 1753...The alterations made in Whitefield's book suited Madam better than the originals, and he took them without hesitation and without leave.' (2) This was an age of plagiarism on the grand scale.

Augustine's definition of a hymn, which is so often quoted and so widely accepted, is a rather narrow one: 'praise to God with song' (cum cantico). In this strict sense it is impossible to speak of Berridge's 'Hymns', for it is obvious that many of his poems were not written as songs of praise.

Miss Evelyn Underhill has said that, 'it is in hymns above all that we hear the accent of people's worship.'

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1. Memoirs of the Hymn Writers and Compilers - 5th Edit. p.153.
  2. Julian, p.332.

The greatest religious poetry has little chance of acceptance by them... and the worst doggerel achieves a certain homely beauty when it becomes the channel of the love and confidence of simple souls.' (1) In another context, she wrote, 'the Lutheran hymn book is the people's real prayer book' (2), and this statement is equally true of the hymnals of the Methodists and the early evangelicals. It is unnecessary to limit the use of the term 'hymn' to sacred songs.

Writing of eighteenth century characteristics Adam Fox declares, 'prose writers of the period tried very successfully to write much as they spoke, and the hymn writers did the same. In fact they were bound to do so, since they were writing largely for people who read very little besides their hymn books.' (3)

John Berridge had his simple country folk very much in mind when he penned many of Zion's Songs 'during a six month's illness', and they are best understood and appreciated if this fact is accepted. It should also be realised that the hymns (to which there is no index, in the first edition) are probably the fruits of his daily meditations. Such a man had to express himself. He could not be muzzled even when he was unable to preach from pulpit or farm waggon. Unfortunately he made no attempt to arrange the poems in any logical order with the result that their reader never knows what to expect next.

No doubt he hoped that his hymns might serve as helpful aids to the meditations of the faithful; and, surprising as it may seem to-day, his hopes were justified. 'Make the hymn book a private manual of devotion. Do not restrict it to public worship' (4) is H.A.L. Jefferson's

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1. Worship, p.108.

2. Ibid, p.297.

3. English Hymns and Hymn Writers, p.28.

4. Hymns in Christian Worship, p.xii.

sound pastoral advice. Peeress and ploughman alike accepted Zion's Songs in this spirit and were pleased with them, or so we may judge. From the home of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, to the humblest dwellings in at least five counties there were hosts of men and women who admired Berridge and who had found Christ through his labours.

None the less, his biographer, Whittingham, was right enough when he suggested that the hymns might (not please some fastidious readers' (1). On the other hand it must now be pointed out that Elliott-Binns has gone a little too far in maintaining that Berridge had exaggerated ideas of his own abilities or of the literary merit of his verses. In the preface to Zion's Songs the author explains, 'twelve years ago these hymns were composed in a six month's illness and have since laid neglected by me. Often they have been threatened with the fire but have escaped that martyrdom.' No man likes to destroy his own work. Berridge believed that for all their defects the hymns had 'a clear Gospel tone' (2) and so might be of some help to his flock; and, of course, he was one of those men who never doubted for a moment that the world is their parish.

Though Berridge left only one full sermon and a relatively small number of outlines, his message and simple theology is well displayed in these hymns. They were not all produced at one period and therefore it is not surprising that they reflect the changes in his thinking over the years.

The majority of the hymns - even if they really were composed for corporate worship - are, and were, unsuitable for that purpose. However, to the unlearned men and

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1. Op. cit., p.7.

2. B. Works, 2nd edit., p.108.

women who were his principal concern they would have been profitable for instruction and edification in the essentials of the Faith. What Henry Bett said of some of Charles Wesley's hymns is only too true of the majority of Berridge's - they 'are mere versification of Evangelical commonplace.' (1)

By the time when most of Zion's Songs came to be written many of the eighteenth century conventions and restraints in hymn writing had been swept away. Poetry had been 'held in the Arctic grip of the heroic couplet' (2), Dr. J.E. Rattenbury declares, but as he explains, Watts and the Wesleys pioneered exciting new metrical techniques and these speedily transformed hymn composition and singing completely.

Berridge wished to write verses and so he turned first to the old Ballad metre - 'often called the Old Fourteener because of the number of syllables in two lines' - for 'it expresses most easily of all measures the desire of any Englishman who wishes to rhyme.' (3) But he was not satisfied with common metre alone. He soon turned his hand both to short metre, scorned by prosodists who dub it "the Poulterers' Measure", (4) and too long.

To these iambic measures, and the 'Trumpet metre' (four 6s and two 8s) and the 'Old Romance metre' (886 doubled), he added also the trochaic four 7s which Charles Wesley used to great effect in his simplest devotional hymns.

A far more 'solid' metre, the six lines 8, enabled Wesley to write 'some of the noblest hymns in the English language' (5) and in this measure Berridge also tried his skill - though with considerably less success.

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1. Op. cit., p.10.

3. Ibid, p.43.

4. Ibid, p.43.

2. The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns, p.33.

5. Ibid, p.43.

Charles had used it as the principal medium for the expression of his deepest theological reflections. It served John Berridge merely as the means whereby he might 'ring the changes' from time to time.

Four and six line metres (and especially those described) became common in England during this century. After the beginning of the Evangelical revival thousands of hymns were written in these and in other more unusual measures, for at last the would-be hymnologists felt free to experiment. Of the less familiar metres Berridge used two. In one hymn he adopted the traditional German five lines 8 (brought to England by the Moravians, presumably), and an even more unusual three line stanza (5 5 11) he pressed into service for ten of the hymns. In praise of God he writes cheerful, jolly verses of which these are a brief illustration:

'He gave us our birth  
And formed the earth,  
And feedeth us kindly with all it brings forth.  
'He makes the heart warm,  
Defends it from harm,  
And holds up our steps with a fatherly arm.  
'He bids the sun rise  
To gladden our eyes  
And calls up night watches to spangle the skies.  
'His provident eye  
Is watchfully high  
To guide us, and guard us, and bring us supply.'  
(279)

In complete contrast with this measure is the tenth (and last) variation which Berridge employed. He did very little with it, but half a century later it was to be used most happily by Sir Robert Grant in 'O worship the King All glorious above'. This is the four 5s and double 6 5 measure.

Rattenbury makes out a good case when he contends that Charles Wesley had special reasons for using specific

types of metre. He selected his 'vehicle' most carefully in order to create just the right tone to express a certain theme. It is impossible, however, to detect any such care and brilliance in most of Zion's Songs. Berridge had no such sensitivity. It is clear that he wrote a number of hymns in one metre (regardless of their subject) and then, when he tired of it, he changed to another, coming back to the first or going on to a third after a dozen or twenty more had been 'made'.

In one case, at least, it is noticeable that there is a change at precisely the point where Berridge introduces a hymn which he had adapted from Wesley. If we are right in seeing these hymns as the products of his daily meditations this fact of the change in metre suggests that he may have been influenced by his day to day reading, not only of the Bible, but also of other men's poems.

As poetry Berridge's hymns are almost uniformly poor. He only uses the simplest figures of speech (metaphors and similes) and while the hymns are full of the former, the latter, though less frequent, also abound. In the main these are taken either direct from the Bible or from rural life. There are homely touches everywhere.

Nearly all the hymns suffer from poetic conceits and from over-dramatisation, and yet it is clear that their author is not interested in the properties of words or in their grouping. He employs them merely to convey his message with the result that most of his sentences are simply plain expressions arranged in poetic form.

Some of the poems begin in a grand, formal manner, but they are disappointing for they invariably degenerate within the first few stanzas. Again, Berridge has a sickening habit of failing to develop his theme properly.

More often than not he paraphrases his text, and while using different words, says the same thing in each verse and concludes with a prayer in which he summarises his thoughts once more.

But the hymns should be allowed to speak for themselves as far as possible and to show us how Berridge presents the Gospel through them.

In the first stanza of the first hymn he plunges straight into his subject:

'I am defiled throughout by sin,  
And by my very birth unclean.' (1)

Over and over again the reader is reminded of the Fall, of Original Sin, and of his complete inability to close the ever-widening gap between himself and God.

'Should I spend my life in prayers  
Water all my couch with tears  
Turn from every evil past  
Still I am condemned at last.

'Could I run no more in debt  
Old arrears are standing yet,  
Still the law remains in force  
Breathing out its deadly curse.

'In myself I have no hope...' (132)

There is a solution to man's dilemma, but as Berridge had discovered and had afterwards proclaimed, it does not lie along the path of 'works'.

'My self-will, pride and peevishness  
The briars are that would distress  
Myself and friends around;  
And oft I try to root them out,  
And dig and hoe them round about,  
And yet they keep their ground.

(Right weary of the work I am  
For nothing comes of it but shame...' (213)

Salvation is a free gift from God and must be accepted in all humility. The man who has reached the end of his tether and has proved the bankruptcy of human effort

in his own experience will be ready to surrender himself to the Lord and to receive the blessings which He alone can give.

'I come, O Lord, and thirst for Thee,  
Some living water give to me,  
Or I shall faint and die;  
All other means my heart has tried  
All other streams are vain, beside  
What flows from Calvary.' (207)

In his quaint manner Berridge describes those who try to keep a foot in both camps and who are consequently unwilling to give their lives entirely to Christ and to trust in Him alone for salvation :

'To Jesus some will pray,  
Yet not with single eye,  
They squint and peep another way  
Some creature-help to spy.' (39)

Of such people he despairs for he knows that nothing short of complete commitment will be of any avail.

Though the doctrine of 'election' does appear in some of his hymns, Berridge is no more concerned with it than he was in his 'Christian World Unmasked'. In spite of much that has been written about him it is certain that he was not a thorough-going Calvinist. At the very heart of all his own writings and in almost every hymn we see his emphasis upon the fact that universal salvation is a very definite possibility - on the ground of justification by faith, and that alone.

'The sons of earth delight  
To spread their fame abroad  
To glory in their worth and might  
But such are not of God.

'The heavenly word declares,  
And faithful is the word,  
That Israel's seed, the royal heirs,  
Shall glory in the Lord.

'In Jesus they shall trust  
From first to last each one,  
Through Jesus shall be counted just,  
And boast in Him alone.' (61)

The hymns of Charles Wesley and of other Methodists repudiated completely the idea of election and stressed that the love of God is boundless. The same note rings out with the greatest clarity in many of Berridge's hymns. Christ died for all. His grace is freely offered to all. Through Him the door to everlasting life is opened wide.

'Life eternal is bestowed  
Not for thy good service done;  
'Tis a precious gift from God  
Freely granted through His Son.' (133)

The water of life is available for all who will accept it :

'Whoe'er can truly say, I thirst,  
May come and take his fill,  
'Tis free for good, and bad, and worst,  
For whosoever will.

'Come when thou wilt, or soon or late,  
It stands inviting thee;  
And will admit no market-rate,  
It is divinely free.' (94)

However, 'He loves His people, great and small,  
And grasping hard embraceth all,  
Nor with a soul will part...' (230) might be taken.

in a narrow sense, and elsewhere we find the purest Calvinist doctrine :

'So Jesus Christ is blest  
By all His chosen seed...' (45)

The fact is that Berridge is very inconsistent. At one moment he veers towards the Arminians (whom he professed he had left) and away from Calvin; in the next he alters course again. His great desire was to underline the complete inadequacy of all human attempts to work out one's own salvation. Of that much we may be sure. It is probable that he would have had scant respect for the emphasis upon 'personal work' implicit in such a verse as Wesley's :

'A Charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify;  
A never dying soul to save,  
And fit it for the sky.'

His constant theme and prayer is very different:

'A child of God is made  
Not from his parent's blood,  
No worth the father has conveyed  
To make his infant good.

'Nor may the will of man  
Convert a sinful heart,  
Nor sense, nor might, nor reason can  
A spark of help impart.

'Create my heart anew,  
And breathe the life divine,  
And fan it with fresh vigour too,  
Or soon it will decline.' (50)

In one couplet 'Old Everton', as he sometimes called himself, sums up the belief which he rode thousands of miles to proclaim. Paul had maintained that "Christ is all in all." Berridge agreed wholeheartedly :

'All the merit I can claim  
All my hope is in His name.' (125)

It is then, in complete humility that the seeker must approach the throne of grace, for -

'To Jesus none are reconciled  
Till they become a little child.' (26)

'The simple have a childlike soul,  
Go hand in hand to Jesu's school,  
And take the lowest place;  
Their only wish is Christ to know,  
To love Him well, and trust Him too,  
And feed upon His grace.

'They all declare, I nothing am,  
My life is bound up in the Lamb,  
My wit and might are His;  
My worth is all in Jesus found,  
He is my rock, my anchor ground,  
And all my hope of bliss.' (229)

But "faith without works is dead". Berridge does not tolerate what he calls 'vain professors' whose manner of life belies their words. The very 'umble

Uriah Heaps of the world are readily discernable. True humility leads to faith in Christ, and it leads also to direct and natural expression in practical Christian living.

'Assent is earthly weed  
And brings no profit forth;  
But Gospel faith is noble seed,  
And claims a heavenly birth.

'Friend, if thy tree is good,  
And faith lies at its root,  
It gathers life from Jesu's blood,  
And beareth goodly fruit.' (66)

So it is that the Christian becomes a useful member of society for he loves his fellow men. His old, worldly nature is changed. Before conversion,

'If some harm befel my foe,  
How I danced at his woe!  
If he stumbled into sin  
How refreshed my heart had been.

'Had he perished by a fall  
Sure I had not cared at all;  
Had he pined away in want.  
Truly I had been content.' (122)

But the new man in Christ is a new man. No longer does he delight in the difficulties of one neighbour, nor does he envy the good fortune of another. Instead he prays:

'Jesus, let me not repine  
At a better lot than mine.' (130)

Contentment is one of the marks of the true believer:

'This wishing trade I fain would leave,  
And learn with sweet content to live,  
On what the Lord shall send.  
What'er he send, He sends in love,  
And good or bad things blessings prove,  
If blessed by his friend.' (224)

This was certainly a comforting philosophy for one who had to bear so much in his later years, but here as elsewhere Berridge gives the impression that his contentment

is akin to fatalism. Here he leans heavily upon Calvin:

'If sick, or lame, or poor,  
Or by the world abhorred,  
Whatever cross lays at thy door,  
It cometh from the Lord.' (56)

Few, if any, today would go as far as that!

Nevertheless, Berridge is certainly following our Lord's teachings when he points out that hardship often attends the faithful and that there are many sacrifices involved in living the Christian life :

'But he who seeks to live  
A godly life in Christ,  
And unto Christ will give  
The praise from first to last,  
Is surely doomed to worldly shame,  
And born to bear a scoundrel name.' (15)

How well he knew the truth of his own words. As every itinerant preacher discovered sooner or later -

'Faith in the cross brings high disdain,  
And usage course from carnal men.' (15)

Of the Olney Hymns Garrett Horder wrote, 'Their somewhat narrow theology is softened by the reality and tenderness of the religious experience of the authors, of both of whom it may be said, "They learnt in suffering what they taught in song".' (1) 'I must expect a daily cross' (Hymn 95) Berridge declared, and we know that he too wrote from a full heart - and often from a sick bed.

'Should pain o'er my weak flesh prevail,  
And fevers boil within my breast,  
And heart, and strength, and reason fail,  
Be yet my soul on Jesus cast.' (138)

No matter what his subject Berridge always stresses the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ. To the man who trusts in Him there is nothing to fear. Once he said:

'Some fast by Calvin hold,  
And some for Luther fight,  
.....  
Well, though with Calvin I agree,  
Yet Christ is all in all to me.' (8)

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1. Quoted from Jefferson, op.cit., p.96.

As has been said, he had little time for any 'party'. He felt himself called to preach the whole Gospel to all men and was prepared to use any means that would help him to persuade others to 'flee to Christ alone for salvation.' His Calvinism never took him to the extremes of Toplady, but both published some of their hymns in the same journal (of which Toplady was at one time the editor) and Berridge would have welcomed, used and commended 'Rock of Ages', to which there are many parallels in his own works. The fine old words which, unlike Berridge's, have stood the test of time expressed his thoughts and beliefs perfectly :

'Not the labours of my hands  
Can fulfil Thy law's demands,  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears for ever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save and Thou alone.

'Nothing in my hand I bring  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.'

Not surprisingly a large proportion of the hymns have one or other aspect of Christ's redeeming work as their subject. Christ is set forth as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

'I cannot walk without His might;  
I cannot see without His light;  
I can have no access to God  
But through the merit of His blood.' (153)

In expounding Col.1.16 Berridge develops the theme :

'All things in heaven above  
All things on earth below,  
All living things that move,  
All lifeless matter too,  
Created were by Jesus Christ  
And for His glory they subsist.

'In Him we live and move  
 And have our being here,  
 Refreshed by His love  
 And guarded by His care;  
 Through Him behold the Father's face,  
 And taste the precious fruits of grace.' (17)

In a hymn on the equality of the Father and the Son, Berridge again proclaims the Gospel of salvation for all men and introduces a stern warning to those whom he describes as 'Scorners pert and wise'.

'His godhead who denies  
 Or His atoning death,  
 Shall fall himself a sacrifice  
 And feel the Father's wrath.

'All who in Him believe,  
 And seek His offered grace,  
 A joyful pardon shall receive,  
 And see the Father's face.' (64)

Yet again Berridge extends the invitation and the promise of which he never tired :

'Come all ye poor who cannot buy,  
 Yet long for living bread;  
 The Saviour will your wants supply,  
 And make you rich indeed.

'The poor and maimed, blind and lame,  
 May come to Jesu's feast;  
 And all that come will bless His Name,  
 When of His cheer they taste.' (96)

'All that hunger for His bread  
 May, and will be kindly fed.' (119)

In the hymns - if not always elsewhere - Berridge is not guilty of twisting isolated texts of Scripture in order to support strange doctrines of predestination and of limited salvation. He knew, and he did everything in his power to make plain, that in Christ lies the hope of all men who are "poor in spirit". The Lord is,

'Pleased to help them in their need,  
 Pleased, when hungry them to feed,  
 Pleased to hear them tell their case,  
 Pleased to cheer them with His grace.' (119)

Such declarations as these are numerous, and there are a great many hymns portraying Christ as the only Saviour, the only refuge, the rock, the light, the good shepherd, and the judge of all men. His strength is measureless; His love is changeless; His is the voice of peace, and His compassion and mercy are infinite. What then does such a Saviour demand of men? The 'inspiration' for his answer to this question Berridge finds in Is. 55.1, which he paraphrases, 'buy and eat without money'. This hymn is typical of his prosaic vocabulary, rough style and single theme and, quoted in full, it makes clear the reason why Zion's Songs have not found their way into modern hymnals.

'Gold and spices have I none,  
For a present to my King;  
All my livelihood is gone,  
Only rags and wounds I bring.

'But I'll traffic, Lord with Thee,  
For Thy market suits me well;  
All my blessings must be free,  
And I know Thou wilt not sell.

'Yet my Jesus bids me buy,  
Something sure He would receive;  
Well, to please Him I will try,  
And my something I will give.

'Take my burdens for Thy rest,  
Take my death for Thy life given,  
Take my rags for Thy rich vest,  
Take my hell for Thy sweet heaven.

'Now the sale I understand,  
Know what Jesu's market is;  
Much He asketh of my hand,  
All my woe to buy His bliss.' (103)

In his collection of hymns Berridge returns to one point over and over again, and the very simplest shepherd who learnt the words by rote would have grasped that one fact which was of such importance to the author.

Zion's Songs are nearly all little homilies in indifferent (and sometimes, appalling) verse which aim to bludgeon their reader into the paths of righteousness. They speak of the temptations of day to day living, of the fascination and folly of 'idols', of love and honour, of pride and prayer. There is even a hymn which begins by noting recognised facts about the upbringing of children and the training of youth, which then goes on to draw the parallel lessons for the life of one who is a "child of God".

'Much indulgence spoils a child,  
 Makes him masterful and wild,  
 But correction makes him wise,  
 Silencing his froward cries.' (120)

To this hymn the final prayer of another might make a more fitting conclusion than the original lines. It is hard to imagine that -

'Father, sanctify the rod  
 Dip it in the Saviour's blood' can ever have been acceptable to anyone. Better by far is,

'Make me Thy obedient child,  
 Simple, tractable and mild;  
 Acting now a thankful part,  
 Loving Thee with all my heart.' (127)

In these hymns sin - both original and actual - in its many manifestations is described and revealed in all its sordidness, and their author's warnings against the penalties of unrepentant pride are still very moving, though many of them are couched in the imagery normally associated with the Middle Ages.

But there is also a place given to less weighty matters. Such varied topics as mirth, health, weeping, the heart, wishful thinking, the tongue and God and Mammon are dealt with in full hymns. Alongside them interesting sidelights are provided upon the differences in doctrine, rites and ceremonies apparent in the eighteenth century.

Echoing the words of the psalmist Berridge declares,  
 "my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."  
 Others came to Church for different reasons and in a  
 different spirit -

'With solemn weekly state  
 The wordling treads Thy court,  
 Content to see the gate,  
 And such as there resort;  
 But, ah, what is the house to me,  
 Unless the Master I can see.

'While formalists admire  
 The pillars, walls and roof...' (7)

The Church may no longer be fashionable, but it is still  
 plagued by 'formalists' in plenty, and there are still  
 all too many of whom it would be fair to say,

'In Sunday Church, and outward deeds  
 The most of man's religion lays.' (174)

Berridge makes two interesting comments on the  
 sacraments. While weekly worship may have been the norm  
 in his day, attendance at the Holy Communion was obviously  
 less popular and its celebration, in the majority of  
 churches, less frequent:

'A monthly feast we keep  
 Where hungry souls may come;  
 Kind Shepherd gather in more sheep  
 For in Thy fold is room.

'Thy table would provide  
 For many a twenty more;  
 No bread we lack, nor wine beside,  
 Send guests, a precious store.' (334)

Of Holy Baptism we are told,

'Here sprinkling will not do,  
 And there will only please;  
 Some wash the child, and some the man,  
 And some reject the whole as vain.' (8)

When the Calvinist Controversy flared up in earnest in  
 the seventies Berridge had taken a full part in it, but  
 as he grew older so he grew in grace. He learnt charity

and withdrew himself further and further from a narrow sectarianism, apologised for some of his writings and consigned them to the flames. From bitter experience he writes,

'If carnal feuds appear  
Where Gospel truth is taught,  
Sweet love is quickly banished there,  
And Jesus Christ forgot.

'The Gospel suffers harm,  
And infidels blaspheme,  
When fiery disciples lift their arm,  
And raise a party flame.' (57)

'Lord, fix me on Thy side, he prayed,  
A branch in Thy true vine,  
Nor let me straggle wide,  
But round Thee twine and twine;  
And clusters bear of heavenly fruit,  
By sap received from Thy rich root.' (7)

When Whitefield died in 1770 Berridge wrote a long prayer in his memory in which he observed,

'Old sheep are moving off each year  
And few lambs in the fold appear.' He was

worried by the Church's failure to attract into her ministry the right type of men in sufficient numbers - the perennial problem - and he implored God to,

'... thrust out preachers more,  
With voice to raise the dead,  
With feet to run where Thou dost call,  
With faith to fight and conquer all.'

In this same hymn Berridge shows his deep respect for his old comrade, and ends on the right note :

'As one Elijah dies,  
True prophet of the Lord,  
Let some Elisha rise  
To blaze the Gospel-word;  
And fast as sheep to Jesus go,  
May lambs recruit His folds below.' (33)

Few hymns were written either by Berridge or by his contemporaries for the special seasons of the Christian year - even in the Olney Hymns, Christmas is the only

festival which is mentioned - but whereas the Methodists did survey all the major doctrines of the Faith, he made little attempt to do so. Zion's Songs include no more than one hymn on God the Father and four on the Holy Spirit. There are, however, three hymns on the Incarnation and one on the hypostatic union, two on the resurrection, one of the ascension and two for Whitsunday.

In all, six prayers are addressed to the Trinity. The first five are written in six stanzas, each of four lines, two verses being devoted to each of the Persons. In the last of these prayers Berridge uses a different metre, and after a single verse addressed to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively, he adds this conclusion:

'In name and nature linked we know  
The holy, holy, holy Three;  
To each eternal thanks we owe,  
To each eternal honours be;  
And let the earth, with heavenly host,  
Bless Father, Son and Holy Ghost.' (204)

Three other groups of hymns must be mentioned. The first is a collection of meditations on each of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. These, like so many of the other hymns, are didactic, versified expositions ending with a short prayer. On the whole they are slightly more restrained than most of Berridge's poems. But this only serves to make the reader suspicious as to their true origin. As elsewhere, it seems possible here to trace Berridge's debt to Charles Wesley and John Cennick. 'Claim the kingdoms as Thine own' (189) is reminiscent of their famous Advent hymn, 'Lo! He comes with clouds descending', with its penultimate line - 'Claim the Kingdom for Thine own.'

In his 'occasional hymns', besides those already mentioned, John Berridge includes one 'to be sung in a tempest', five rather fatalistic hymns for the sick, two 'on the death of a believer', one 'on the death of a

child', and three more general funeral hymns. There is also a general morning and evening hymn, and a special morning and evening hymn for a domestic servant! The one wedding song, 'Our Jesus freely did appear to grace a marriage feast' Julian (1) claims is adapted from one of Wesley's poems.

Twenty of these occasional hymns were published in the Gospel Magazine between 1775 and 1777 under the signature of 'Old Everton' and they are definitely among the best which he wrote, though many of them cannot be described as hymns in the strict sense of the term. They are homely and comforting little meditations in verse.

The final group of hymns are very short and were designed for use before, at or after the Holy Communion. Some have no more than a single verse, but in spite of that, many of them are more suitable for congregational worship than the majority of Zion's Songs. As their subjects they have remembrance, praise, the prayer of humble access, oblation and invocation, and they include this doxology :

'Holy, Holy, Holy Lord,  
Ever live by us adored;  
Ever should a sinner cry  
Glory be to God most high.' (341)

All but twenty-seven of the three hundred and forty-two hymns in the first edition (the sacramental and those addressed to the Trinity) are headed by a text or texts which they proceed to elaborate. It is interesting to notice that almost exactly half of them are taken from the Old Testament, and that in his choice of these verses Berridge has ranged far and wide over the pages of Holy Scripture, from the third chapter of Genesis to the last of Revelation. Here was a man who

knew his Bible and who showed his particular affection for the Psalms, both in his apt choice of texts from them, and also in his use of their language and thought. Sometimes he is even guilty of descending to the same depths as those plumbed in the worst sub-Christian Psalms, as for example when he writes,

'Awake, O sword, with vengeance wake,  
Against the man, my fellow found;  
Rush on him, make his bowels quake,  
And gash his hands, his feet, and head,  
Then pierce his heart, and strike him dead.' (181)

But then, in fairness to Berridge, it must be admitted that this is probably the crudest and most frightful verse in the whole of his hymn book. He believed that the Psalms were 'intended as a model for hymns', and freely confessed that he 'copied them as nearly' as he could. (1)

In line after line of his hymns - as in John Wesley's sermons - Biblical allusions and phrases abound. In an age of greater education (and of widespread ignorance of the Scriptures) they can only be deemed 'old fashioned'. Berridge drew the texts whose message he sought to expound in the hymns, from every book in the Old and New Testaments save Leviticus, a few of the minor prophets, and three or four of the shortest epistles.

The sixteen stanza 'ode...designed to vindicate the ways of God in making use of the most unlikely means to compass His ends; and chiefly with a view to His sending out unlettered men to preach', provides us with an outstanding example of his use of Biblical allusions. In a single verse there are no less than eight. This is an incredible Scripture mosaic :

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1. B.Works, 2nd edit., p.108.

'The ass's jaw, and tongue,  
 The salt, and snake to heal,  
 The ram's horn sounding long,  
 The pitcher, stick and meal,  
 With one harmonious voice declare,  
 The God of all the earth is near.' (1) (34)

Calvin believed that neither through history, personal experience nor conscience could any man find God. Through the Holy Scriptures alone is it possible to know Him as He is, and then only as read through the light which He supplies. As we have seen, to a great degree Berridge concurred in this view. He had good reason to despair of what he described as 'earthly trash, froth and air' for in all his years at Cambridge he had not come to know God personally until he had abandoned all secular study and concentrated upon the Bible alone.

'Nor on the earth, nor in myself,  
 I find a single meal of good;  
 Then reach my Bible from the shelf  
 For there I find substantial food.' (166)

He was wrong, no doubt, but this was his sincere conviction.

A countryman by birth ministering in the main to countrymen, Berridge turned to nature for many of his metaphors, with the result that an agricultural note rings out clearly in not a few of his hymns. In its way, and seen against its proper background, there is much to be said in favour of such hymns as this one:

'Pinest thou for Jesus bread,  
 And with plenty wouldst be fed?  
 Learn to work with godly skill,  
 And the ground unwearied till.

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1.

The Biblical refs. in the verse quote above:

1. Jud.15.19	2. Num.22.28.	3. 2 Kings 2.21	4. Num.21.8.
5. Jos. 6.5	6. Jud. 7.16.	7. 2 Kings 6.6	8.2 Kings 4.41

'Ground I mean of thine own heart,  
 Churlish sure in ev'ry part,  
 Most unhealthy, barren ground,  
 Such as no where else is found.

'Get it broken up by grace,  
 Else it weareth legal face;  
 Sow it well with Bible-seed,  
 Else it bringeth only weed.

'Dung the ground with many prayers,  
 Mellow it with gracious tears,  
 Drench it too with Jesu's blood,  
 Then the ground is sweet and good.

'Watch the swine, a filthy train,  
 Swinish lusts will eat the grain;  
 Hoe up all the ragged thorn,  
 Worldly cares which choke the corn.

'Muse upon the Gospel-word,  
 Seek direction from the Lord,  
 Trust the Lord to give it thee,  
 And a blessing thou shalt see.

'He will cram the bran with store,  
 Make the winepress tricle (sic) o'er,  
 Bless thee now, and bless thee still,  
 Thou shalt eat, and have thy fill.' (123)

Hymns like this one have no appeal in our age, more is the pity. Berridge's hymns are out-dated in many ways and it is no wonder that they have been abandoned by all compilers of modern hymnals. Where his phraseology is not over-rural it is over-Biblical, and all too often it is desperately crude and harsh. In an era when the masses do not believe that they are 'miserable sinners' it is obvious that Berridge's extravagances would not be tolerated. No one would think of himself as being a 'polluted worm' saved by the merit of the 'purple flood' that springs from 'Christ's carcass' ! Furthermore, the eighteenth century use of the word 'bowels', as a description of God's tenderness, grates upon our ears... as do other words like bosom, crafty, churlish, pert, sluggard and scorpion. Again, while such words as

balsam, blackamoor, cordial (liquid refreshment) and leopards (to say nothing of leeks and garlic) may give a picturesque tone to his writings, they are entirely out of place.

In the hymns there are numerous auto-biographical notes, and despite their obvious failings, it is impossible to read them without sensing their author's deep humility, reverence and utter sincerity.

Julian points out that Zion's Songs were reprinted in 1842 and that several of the hymns 'are in common use, though in an altered form'. The Victorian era has long since passed, and with its passing Berridge's hymns have for ever sunk into complete oblivion. They have faults in plenty, but we may regret that 'the good' has been 'interred with their bones' while the 'evil' alone is noted by the historians.

'The hymn enchants as well as informs'.(1) In Berridge's case it may be said that his hymns inform but no longer do they enchant.

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1. Evelyn Underhill, op.cit., p.104.

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

The whole of John Berridge's extremely active life as an itinerant evangelist was dogged by illness, and all his writings are punctuated by frequent references to it and by reflections upon it. Almost as soon as he had begun to carry the Gospel far outside the confines of his own parish he had reason to fear that he would have to curtail his activities and resign himself to preaching only in his own church. On July 17, 1759, he wrote to Wesley and said, 'I am so weak I must leave off field-preaching' (1), but the good man persevered and his horses were seldom left to grow fat and frisky in his stable.

Many another godly man might have been happy to accept recurrent illness as a sure sign that the Almighty did not intend him to exercise an itinerant ministry - particularly if his fellow clergy and superiors went out of their way to prevent it. He might even have become embittered. But Berridge was convinced that such suffering as he was called upon to endure was 'of the Lord', and that it was sent to him to strengthen his faith and dependence upon Christ. In 1761 the Rev. Alexander Coats wrote to him mentioning a recent mishap. Berridge's reply (on April 22) was typical of so much else that he wrote :

'I dare not say that I am sorry for your fall, nor indeed for any afflictions that God layeth on his children; they are tokens of his fatherly love, and needful physic for us: rather would I pray that while God keepeth you in the furnace, you may be still, and feel your dross and tin purged away. The Lord giveth me a dose of this physic most days; and I am never so

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1. Wesley's Journal, Vol.IV, p.337.

well as when I am taking it, though I frequently make a wry face at it: and if your heart is as my heart it will need many a bitter potion to cleanse and strengthen it.' (1)

Were this an isolated judgement upon the efficacy of suffering in the Christian life it would hardly be noteworthy. But over and over again in the next thirty years Berridge made similar statements. His theological position changed more than once, he matured and modified his opinions about some things and he was often despondent, but never for an instant did he waver in his belief that his life was in the hands of God and that sickness must therefore be sent to him for a purpose. Nor did he contemplate retirement, though he was often forced to take to his bed. Thus he tells Newton, on March 13, 1771, that in the previous November he regained sufficient strength to begin preaching again. He continued, 'and through mercy have continued preaching ever since.' For the last month he had had a cold which had made him wheeze and cough, but although he felt rather 'run down' he had been able to keep going. His comment upon these minor afflictions is in his usual strain :

'O, how needful is the furnace, both to discover our dross, and to purge it away! How little we do know of ourselves, of the pride, sensuality and idolatry of our hearts, till the Lord lays us down on a bed, and searcheth all our inward parts... My heart, I knew was bad enough, but I scarcely thought there was half the baseness in it which I find, and yet I know not half its plague...

'I have no prospect of going abroad at present, for though my flesh has re-visited my bones, my breast and stomach remain weak, and my body tender.' (2)

Summer came, but illness remained. In another letter to Newton on June 10, Berridge explained that he could not write as often as he would like to have

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1. B.Works, p.364.

2. Ibid. pp.369,370.

done because he found that it tired him too much. Nor had the warm weather brought renewed vigour. On the contrary, he was now able to do little more than Sunday duty. He says,

'I can bear very little exercise in walking or riding, and a gentle hurry overturns me, (but)...I can see clearly the utter need I stood in of rods and scorpions, and can thankfully say, it is good for me to have been afflicted.' (1)

In the same letter he tells his friend that he has reason to think ('by a token received') that he will be an invalid for 'two summers more', but he thanks God, in advance, for he knows that the trial will be good for his spiritual wellbeing.

Sure enough, it was almost exactly two years more before he was able to take to his horse again. On August 18, 1773, he told Thornton:

'In May I began to itinerate, after a five year's discontinuance through illness, and kept on, though with much feebleness for two months, when I was seized with a smart attack of my old complaint.' (2)

What this 'old complaint' was he had already explained to the Rev. R. Housman on June 3, 1771, when he had said :

'This time three years, I was seized with a high fever, which laid me up for five months; this was succeeded by a nervous fever, which has hung on me ever since.

'In winter I am somewhat braced, and can make a poor shift to preach on the sabbath, but nothing more. As soon as the hot weather comes in, I am fit for nothing but to sigh and yawn. Last summer I did not preach for four months. I feel myself growing very feeble, and how much longer I shall be able to preach I know not...

'My disorder is nearly the same with Mr. Whitefield's...' (3)

Five days later he asked Lady Huntingdon if she could possibly send Glascott 'for six weeks in the

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1. Ibid. p.373.      2. Ibid. pp.378,379.      3. Ibid, 2nd edit. p.527.

hottest part of the summer' because his 'health and strength' were 'declining apace since the warm weather came in.' (1)

In 1774 (August 10) Berridge told Thornton that he was ashamed of the little he was able to do, (2) and by 1779 (the second edition gives the date as 1775) all the old symptoms had returned. Writing to the Rev. S. Lucas, on October 23, he said :

'I have been much, yet not too much, afflicted with my old disorder for some months, a nervous fever... This fever-friend has kept me this summer twelve weeks at home, and forbid me all literary correspondence.

'As winter comes on, I begin to revive; and when the swallows march off, I begin to march out; as when the swallows return, I am often obliged to keep in...

'I do not love this fever-friend; yet he is certainly the best earthly companion I have.'

As in so many others, Berridge makes a great point in this letter of the necessity of earthly afflictions to keep his heart humble, and he says,

'Though I cannot love a furnace, nor bask in it like a salamander, yet the longer I live, the more I see of its need and its use.' (3)

It was his conviction that suffering was the outcome of personal sin, and innocent as he might seem when compared with many of those to whom he ministered (and indeed with many men in his own calling) he knew himself to be a sinner, and believed that 'every stripe' he received he had procured for himself.(4)

But Berridge was one of those rare people who are fond of minimizing their own achievements. It must be remembered that all the time he was pouring scorn upon himself and stressing his own spiritual unworthiness and ineffectualness he was, in fact, engaged in prodigious

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1. Ibid. p.395.

2. Ibid. 2nd edit., p.512 : cf. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.II,p.51.

3. B.Works, p.407.

4. Ibid, p.379.

works for God which were rivalled by few in his generation and surpassed by fewer still.

In the very letter in which he told Thornton (on August 10, 1774) that he was ashamed of himself and of how little he was able to do, he had also referred - very casually - to thirteen weeks of itineracy during which he had preached to 'very large auditories' in crowded barns and farm yards in many different places.(1) 'The older I grow, the poorer I seem', commented Berridge; and so it should be. But he did not appear in anyway poorer to the crowds who collected to hear him! Journeys to London, however, were becoming increasingly tiring to him, and he told Samuel Wilks on April 11, 1775, that the large congregations exhausted him to such an extent that he found himself forced to sit down quietly after he had addressed any large gathering and summon up his energy before preaching again. (At fifty-nine that was not entirely strange.)

But weakness brought a timely reminder to him of eternity, and he told Wilks - who was also failing, physically - that he should not be sorry if he found his constitution 'breaking up' for even as 'a cottage gives a crack before it falls' so this should be a warning to him of the approach of death and of his need to lean ever more heavily upon Christ.(2)

In the winter of 1780 Henry Venn had gone off to Yorkshire 'hoping to ride off his disorder in the mountains'. Berridge stayed at home and painted a sorry picture of himself to Thornton: 'Old age, with its winter aspect, creeps on me apace. My mind waxes feeble as well as my limbs; my windows grow dark, my memory leaks, and my grinders are few.' Again he said he was

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1. Ibid. pp.394, 395.

2. Ibid. pp.397, 398.

'much ashamed...for loving the Lord so little, and doing so little for his name.' (1) But then, as he had told Mrs. Elizabeth H. earlier in the year, by this time he was having a certain amount of trouble with his legs. He had been very lame and had even taken to sitting on a stool, on some occasions, instead of standing to preach.(2) And his comment? 'The Lord be praised for past sickness, and returning health'! And, be it noted - 'next week I go to preach in a parish church... (at) Ickleford, near Hitchin.' There the vicar, Mr. Peers, had been 'newly enlightened to preach Jesus' and so had turned for support to those whom he knew would give it to him. He had 'driven the 'Squire and his family from the church', and that, said Berridge, is 'a mighty good symptom.' Nevertheless, he told Newton, 'he is a bold man to ask the madman of Everton to dust his cushion.' As Berridge knew only too well, if Peers had 'any reputation still remaining among the neighbouring clerics' it could not possibly survive after he had been to the church.(3)

Two years later (September 17,1782), in another letter to Newton, the 'crazy old vicar' (as he described himself) confessed that he was growing more and more frail. 'I am now sinking into the dregs of life', he said, 'just able to preach once in a week...my outward case, the soul's coffin, is well to look at, only rather too portly, and my health is better than usual in the summer, but my strength is soon exhausted by preaching, and my breast complains long afterwards.' (4) He had asthma now, in addition to his other ailments, and when he wrote to comfort John Thornton upon the death of

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1. Ibid. p.411.  
3. Ibid. p.413.

2. Ibid. p.409.  
4. Ibid. p.418.

his wife in November 1783, he told him that this latest malady, which had racked him during the previous three months, was 'attended with a deep cough and much phlegm' and had kept him from the pulpit for two Sundays. However, continued the triumphant old man, 'through mercy I am now able to preach once a week. My appetite is better and I sleep better...' (1)

He had struggled up to London again in January 1783, but had been forced to forego an engagement at the Tabernacle owing to another bout of fever accompanied by a sore throat. 'Starvation, and a few grains of Jame's (sic) fever powder, through the Lord's blessing are restoring me,' he told Thornton (2). From the Tabernacle he again wrote to his great benefactor on February 20, 1786, describing himself on this occasion as 'an old drone' who belonged to 'the family of Dolittles' (3). But it is clear that he was still very busy and his letters still ring with praise to God whom he blessed for all His continuing mercies. By the autumn of '87 he was becoming deaf (4), yet he still travelled up to London the following January to preach at the Tabernacle. The effort wearied him so much that he longed to be back at Everton (5). Nevertheless he hung on determinedly, still preached, still wrote to his friends, and still took an active interest in all the work with which he had associated himself in the years since his conversion. Furthermore, he clung firmly to his belief that 'sanctified afflictions are a thousand times rather to be chosen than unsanctified prosperity.' Indeed, as he told a friend who was in

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1. Ibid, p.422.

2. Ibid. p.420.

3. Ibid, pp.449,450.

4. Ibid, pp.457, 460, 467.

5. Ibid, p.458.

trouble, they 'are often the effects of God's special love; he sees we want them, and he knows that they will work for our good.' (1)

No matter what happened to him he always managed to see the 'silver lining' and his infectious sense of humour never left him. When, in September 1788, he lost an upper front tooth he was so ashamed of the hissing noise that issued from his mouth that he decided the deficiency must be remedied immediately with wax - and his pride, he said, insisted that it should be white wax. All went well until he was half way through his next sermon... then the pellet dropped out. He had a good laugh at his own expense whenever he thought of the episode. (2)

The following month he told Benjamin Mills, 'Solomon's account of old age suits me well. The windows are dark; the daughters of music are low; the grinders cease...' (3) But in sickness or in health, in youth or old age, praise was continually upon his lips, and he wished for no more than that God would enable him both to know and to do His Will.

'Can, or ought we to repine, if God deals with us as he did with his own well-beloved Son? ...Say then with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him".' (4)

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1. Ibid. p.473.

2. Ibid. 2nd Edit., p.520.

3. Ibid. p.474.

4. Ibid. p.474.

THE LAST YEARS

Year after year Berridge continued to minister to his parishioners, and as he told the Rev. S. Lucas he thought that the method of 'the old puritans' who used to visit 'their flocks by house-row' was an excellent one. 'The visits were short, they talked a little for God, and then concluded with a prayer.' This rule 'prevented tittle-tattle and made visits profitable' (1) and he tried to stick to it himself. However, he was finding the work much harder than in his younger days. In September 1782 he admitted to John Newton that, 'Church work goes on heavily here: many old sheep are called home, and few new lambs drop into the fold. The wealthier sort seem to be growing downward into the earth, and find solid gold a more tempting idol than poetic fame. Sometimes I am ready to be offended at them, but this is stifled by finding more cause to be offended with myself.' (2)

In the same week he told Benjamin Mills that his congregation was 'in a decline' and that it seemed 'consumptive'. This was due, he felt, to his curate who was a mere 'stop-gap', but no assistant. He cannot preach without notes, not read handsomely with notes; so my hearers are dwindling away....' (3) But the situation improved again.

He continued to ride round his circuit, and when he was nearly seventy his letters to John Thornton told, once more, of 'very numerous audiences' both in the surrounding countryside and also at home. 'My church,' he reported, 'is usually very full in the

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1. Ibid, p.404.

2. Ibid. p.419.

3. Quoted from Smyth, p.194.

afternoons, and the people are awake and attentive, but the congregation is almost a new one. Many old sheep are housed in the upper fold; and many, who live at a distance, are dropped into neighbouring meetings, and only pay occasional visits to Everton. 'I shall meet them by and by', he continues, 'and a blessed meeting it will be, when sheep and shepherds will give to Jesus all the glory of it.' (1)

Still he undertook his annual visits to London, but was forced to write in February 1788, 'never am I well.' (2) The end of John Berridge's earthly pilgrimage was in sight, and Henry Venn writing to his son in the same year said, 'he told me he could pray little out of his own mind; but the method he used was to read his Bible, and as he read, to turn the word into prayer for himself.' (3) Later still he was unable to read or hear or do anything, and it moved Venn deeply to see the old man in such a state. 'In this ruin of his earthly tabernacle', however, said Venn, 'it is surprising to see the joy of his countenance.' (4)

Abner Brown put it on record that Simeon had declared that towards the end of his life Berridge became an hypochondriac. Sometimes he believed that he was made of glass; at other times he fancied that he was swelling up to an enormous size. Simeon told this pathetic story of the aged Berridge:

'Once in very cold weather, when he was visiting with another clergyman at a friend's house, he slipped out of the parlour in the evening, and went upstairs to his bedroom to pray, as was his wont.

'After a while the assembled party was alarmed with frightful groans from upstairs, and rushed to Berridge's room whence the groans proceeded.

1. B. Works, p.447.  
3. Venn, p.462.

2. Ibid. p.458.  
4. Ibid. p.501.

'The old man was sitting buttoned up in a greatcoat, evidently not his own, groaning; and when asked what was the matter said, "Matter? Don't you see how I am swelling up? I shall burst into shivers presently".

As soon as it was explained to him what had happened, and he realised that he had donned a coat which was far too small for him, he calmed down and laughed heartily at himself. (1)

On one occasion when he was about to begin his sermon at Tottenham Court he sensed that the congregation was becoming restless. Without looking up he continued to wipe his spectacles carefully and 'with great gravity' said, 'If you can see without spectacles, thank God for it; I thank God I can see with them.'(2)

In 1791 he had to be led into the pulpit. After he had prayed Whittingham says, he began a certain sermon with these words:

'My dear Tabernacle friends,' (the tears were trickling down his cheeks) 'I bless my dear Lord that he has thus brought me on my wearisome pilgrimage through the wilderness, and has permitted his old worn-out servant to see you face in the flesh once more, which, in all probability will be the last time.'

(But it was not. The next year he struggled up to the city again and delivered his last sermon to a London congregation on April 1, 1792) He continued:

'Satan said to me as I was coming, "You old fool, how can you think of preaching to that great people, who have neither strength nor memory left?" I said to him, "Well, Satan, I have got a good Master, that has not forsook me these forty years, and in his strength I'll try"; and blessed be his name, he has thus far helped me; and if you'll pray, I'll try to preach once more in my poor way, and may the Lord make it a blessed opportunity to us all! and I think you'll say Amen to it.'(3)

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1. Quoted Whittingham, 2nd Edit., p.lvi.
  2. Ibid, p.69.
  3. Ibid. p.70.

Years before, when Whittingham had become his curate, he had told the young man to raise his voice, when he preached, 'and frighten the jackdaws out of the steeple; for if you do not cry aloud when you are young' he had said, 'you will not do it when you are old.' (1) He was to prove the point himself. On August 2, 1792, Berridge ashamedly confessed to Mrs. E... (Venn's eldest daughter, Nelly?) 'the last two Sundays I was led to church and into my pulpit; my voice was feeble, but hearable, and Christ was precious.' (2)

Ever since his regrettable entry into the Calvinist controversy in the early seventies Berridge had made it very clear to his acquaintances that he wanted peace and that he was an enemy to all dissension among the brethren. He had tried to patch up his differences with John Wesley, and he had come to terms with his old adversary Fletcher whom he visited at Stoke Newington shortly before that saintly man died. (3) In 1777 (April 26) he had written to Lady Huntingdon declaring that he had no time for 'High Church nor Low Church, nor any Church, but the Church of Christ, which is not built with hands, nor circumscribed within peculiar walls, nor confined to a single denomination.' (4) He was dissatisfied with extremes of all sorts and confided to Whittingham that 'he saw such difficulties attending the systems of Arminianism and Calvinism, as defied the reason of man to solve...' 'Salvation is of God, and Man's destruction is of himself'; that was the maxim to which he resolved to adhere. Disputes upon doctrine he now left to others. When, therefore, 'an eminent minister' paid him a visit and asked whether

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1. Ibid. p.80.

2. B.Works, p.470.

3. Tyerman's Fletcher, p.387. 4. Lady Huntingdon, Vol.II.p.422

he had read certain controversial works relating to the different systems of the Methodists and the Evangelicals he told him, 'I have them on the shelves of my library, where they are very quiet; if I take them down and look into them, they begin to quarrel and disagree' and that he would not have at any price.(1)

When Joseph Hobbs arrived at Everton with the news that the Countess of Huntingdon had died, the old man exclaimed, "Ah! is she dead? Then another pillar is gone to glory. Mr. Whitefield is gone - Mr. Wesley and his brother are gone, and I shall go soon." Hobbs said that he agreed and that although they had some 'little difference of opinion' they would be 'in perfect harmony in heaven'. Berridge smiled, in his own inimitable fashion, and answered, "Ay, Ay, that we shall; for the Lord washed our hearts here, and he will wash our brains there." (2)

On the very morning when he was to have set off on his yearly journey to London (January 12, 1793) he was forced to stay in bed because of another violent attack of asthma. His appetite failed and his health and strength 'rapidly and visibly decreased'. Gorham, who was present, says that although he was very ill he remained cheerful and continued to speak of 'the excellency and preciousness of the Saviour'. (3) He came downstairs on Sunday, January 20, but had great difficulty in getting back to his bedroom in the evening. Soon after he had been put to bed he fell into a coma, and on Tuesday (January 22, the day after Louis XVI was executed) he died peacefully at about 3 p.m. Venn, writing to James Hervey (February 14) said,

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1. Whittingham, p.18.                      2. Ibid. p.79.  
3. Whittingham, p.65 : cf. p.42.

'His departure is to me a loss unspeakable...'

On the Sunday following Berridge's death his old friend Henry was himself ill (1) and therefore unable to preach the funeral oration. Charles Simeon took his place and spoke to the 'immense concourse of people who assembled from all parts of the country to be present' at the funeral. He took as his text the words of the great Apostle Paul - 2 Tim.4.7.8 -

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Few texts could have been more appropriate.

Six clergy carried his coffin to the place where he had directed that he should be buried. A singular man to the last, Berridge had told his friends to lay his earthly remains in that part of the churchyard which had hitherto been reserved for criminals and for those who had committed suicide, and that the epitaph which he had written himself should be carved upon his tomb. In it he tells his own story, in his own way, leaving only the final date to be supplied by his friends.

P.T.O.

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1. Venn, pp.418, 419.

HERE LIE  
THE EARTHLY REMAINS OF

JOHN BERRIDGE

LATE VICAR OF EVERTON  
AND AN ITINERANT SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST  
WHO LOVED HIS MASTER AND HIS WORK  
AND AFTER RUNNING ON HIS ERRANDS MANY YEARS  
WAS CALLED UP TO WAIT ON HIM ABOVE

READER  
ART THOU BORN AGAIN?  
NO SALVATION WITHOUT A NEW BIRTH!

I WAS BORN IN SIN FEBRUARY 1716 \*  
REMAINED IGNORANT OF MY FALLEN STATE TILL 1730  
LIVED PROUDLY ON FAITH AND WORKS FOR SALVATION TILL 1754  
ADMITTED TO EVERTON VICARAGE 1755  
FLED TO JESUS ALONE FOR REFUGE 1756  
FELL ASLEEP IN CHRIST JANUARY 22ND 1793.

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\* Whittingham gives the date as March 1, 1716.

EPILOGUE.

Many slanderous names like 'the Old Devil' were hurled at Berridge by those who disliked him or his methods or his message, or all three. Even today his name is accompanied, only too often, in the brief paragraphs accorded to him by many historians by such unqualified adjectives as 'eccentric' or 'fanatical'. He would not be surprised. Soon after he accepted the living of Everton and began his itinerant work he grew accustomed to expect abuse and calumny from his family, his former colleagues and friends, and he bore proudly the name of 'methodist'. And yet he was not a real 'Methodist'. Those who described him as a 'Calvinist', an 'antinomian' and a 'solifidian', and without doubt he was one of those folk who 'trusted blindly in the light that was in them' (1) - which is how Knox defines that body of men and women who were grouped together loosely under the title of 'Enthusiasts'. In every one of these terms there is a grain of truth, but 'Evangelical' is the word which is most accurate, and which tells us most about him.

Though he disliked all party labels this one certainly fits him perfectly, as the epitaph which he composed for himself shows very clearly. As Overton remarked, it is 'a very characteristic example of the Evangelical way of looking at the religious life. There is no mention of Baptism or Confirmation as marking the actual steps, but all is concentrated upon the consciousness of saving grace and the necessity of being born again.' (2)

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1. Op. cit. p.8.

2. Overton & Relton, op.cit. p.150.

The Evangelicals were very definitely 'in' the Church, but as they showed in their hymns, sermons and other writings they were far more interested in the individual members than in the Body itself. Nevertheless, as Bready has said, their practical influence within the Establishment was altogether disproportionate to their numbers.(1) Bishop Butler and other intellectual giants of this century laboured magnificently for the Church, but it has been argued that, though utterly different, the contribution made by the leading Evangelicals was just as important. Of this much, at least, we may be sure - the work of the great scholars who deplored 'enthusiasts', and of the great 'enthusiasts' who cared little for scholarship, was complementary. While the one group apologised for the Faith to the more learned ranks of society, the other carried the Gospel persuasively to the unlettered masses... and each used to the full the divers talents with which the Almighty had endowed them.

In spite of his early academic leanings and his undoubted ability, Berridge was no theologian. He was a stirring preacher wedded to a single idea, namely, winning men and women for Christ. But he was so obsessed with the salvation of individual souls that he neglected to give adequate teaching about the necessity of being grafted into His Body... and this was one of his greatest weaknesses. Wesley was not so unwise. He appreciated that it was imperative to weld together into 'classes' those whom he and his followers were instrumental in

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1. J.W. Bready, England: Before and After Wesley, p.291.

converting, and at first Berridge had tried to do the same. After the first years, however, nothing more is said of any further attempts, and even though the argument from silence is never a very satisfactory one, it seems probable that Berridge did not pursue Wesley's wise policy.

Then again, it is frequently stated that Berridge's literary contributions are undistinguished and are wholly irrelevant today. But Overton speaks a truer word when he declares that his 'writings are full of humour and good sense and are well worth reading.' (1) It would be extremely difficult to read his letters and Life without being humbled and inspired by his absolute faith, by his attitude to personal suffering, by his life of prayer, by his selflessness and frugality, and by his desire for peace and complete commitment to Christ.

He may not have been in the first rank of eminent men (as judged by the world's standards) but as Ryle declared, he was 'a comet rather than a planet, a man who must be put in a class by himself, a minister who said and did things which no one else could say and do.' (2) It is a great pity that his undoubted failings and eccentricities are far more frequently remembered than his many exemplary qualities.

'In him a friend, through all the country round,  
The poor, the naked, and the hungry found...  
He envied not, he courted no applause:  
His heart was only in His Saviour's cause...  
Many called him Father, while here on earth;  
As instrumental in their second birth...' (3)

1. Op. cit. p.150.

2. Op. cit. p.216.

3. Whittingham, pp.67, 68 (from an elegy written by  
'a person in London' on learning of Berridge's death)

In very many ways John Berridge's latter years are reminiscent of those of the 'Povre Parsoun', of whom Chaucer wrote :

'Riche he was of holy thoght and werk.  
 He was also a lerned man, a clerk,  
 That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;  
 His parisshens devoutly wolde he teche.  
 Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,  
 And in adversitee ful pacient;  
 And swich he was y-preved ofte sythes.  
 Ful looth were him to cursen for his tythes,  
 But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,  
 Un-to his povre parisshens aboute  
 Of his offring, and eek of his substaunce.  
 He coude in litel thing han suffisaunce...

This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,  
 That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.'

It would not be inappropriate to give thanks for this 'Apostolic man's' (1) life and witness, and to pray that we may have grace so to follow his good example, that with him we may be partakers of God's Heavenly Kingdom.

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1. The Rev. Cornelius Winter, quoted in B.Works, p.490.