The Evangelical Revival: The Triumphant Phase (1790–1830)

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Jane Austen did not like Cousin Cooper. She found him pompous, self-satisfied and canting. He was preferred to the living of Hamstall Ridware in Staffordshire in 1799, about which move the caustic authoress informed her sister Cassandra:

> We collect from his letters that he means to reside there, in which he shows his wisdom. Staffordshire is a good way off; so we shall see nothing more of them.[1] (January, 1799)

In fact he was assiduous in inviting the Austens to Staffordshire and he prevailed on Jane in 1806. The acquaintance did not improve with proximity; and ten years later Jane was writing that Cooper's sermons were 'fuller of Regeneration and Conversion than ever—with the addition of his zeal in the cause of the Bible Society'[2] (Letter to Cassandra Austen, 8 September 1816). In the intervening decade she had said plainly in 1809:

'I do not like the Evangelicals', but yet in 1814 she confessed: 'I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals'. That double negative betrays her discomfort, and it may also go some way towards explaining *Mansfield Park*, the novel she was writing at the time and which is so markedly different in being less vivacious and more serious than her earlier novels. She did not say, as scholars have claimed from a misreading of one of her letters, that it is about ordination, but it is explicitly moral and even moralizing in its preference for the straight-laced but retiring Fanny Price against the lax but attractive Mary Crawford. This latter young lady is damned for her worldliness, her horror that Edmund Bertram is intending ordination and her easy acceptance of her brother's elopement with Maria Bertram (Mrs. Rushworth). The novel also deals with the inappropriateness of private theatricals, or at least, of performing *Lovers' Vows* at the cost of great domestic upheaval in the absence of the *paterfamilias* Sir Thomas Bertram. But, and I note this for later reference, it does not condemn dancing. I quote Jane Austen at such length to show how a serious and sensitive person was affected by an awareness of Evangelicalism—disturbed, annoyed by some of its adherents, but aware of its qualities and possibly influenced by them.

The publication of *Mansfield Park* falls roughly in the middle of the period I have chosen to deal with, centred as it is around the careers of the two most prominent Evangelicals of the time, the clergyman Charles Simeon and the layman William Wilberforce. Both were of an age, born within weeks of each other in 1759: Simeon on 24 September and Wilberforce exactly a month earlier on 24 August. They each became active in their complementary and overlapping spheres in the latter half of the 1780s and attained increasing eminence and influence as the years went by until the one as the liberator of the slaves died in 1833 and the other, the 'Old Apostle' as he came to be known, in 1836. Between them they had changed the face of England. At most a mere five hundred clergy Evangelicals in 1800 was reckoned, largely through Simeon's work in Cambridge, to have increased at least threefold (if the number of the Church Missionary Society's clerical subscribers form any guide) by 1823, and by 1853 to six thousand five hundred; whilst the change in English morals and manners originating with Wilberforce's idea of the Royal Proclamation against Vice was such that that old left-over from the Regency, Lord Melbourne, gloomily observed to the young Victoria on her accession in 1837: 'Nobody is gay now; they are so religious.' That was one view of things.

Not long after and from a different perspective there was another to remind us that around the accession of Victoria something else had happened. Evangelicalism itself was changing, so that Sir James Stephen, Wilberforce's nephew (all the Evangelicals were inter-related), could look back to the preceding generation and lament in 1845:

> Oh, where are the people who are at once truly religious and really cultivated in heart and understanding—the people with whom we could associate as our fathers used to associate with one another. No Clapham Sect nowadays![3]

So in the period between the conversions and the deaths of Simeon and Wilberforce I place the years in which the fruits of the Evangelical Revival were at their most bountiful and 1815 as about the time of the finest vintage. Writing in that year the man who was destined to become the first Evangelical Archbishop of Canterbury, John Bird Sumner (and incidentally a cousin of Wilberforce), declared:

> We acknowledge, with lively gratitude, that religion has a much stronger hold in the affections of the English nation now than it could be said to possess before the disputes which originated in the active soil of Wesley and Whitefield. Their enthusiastic pretensions applied a stimulus to men's minds, and their mixture of truth with error exerted a general inquiry, which broke the calm and interrupted the dangerous repose.[4]

What then did Simeon and Wilberforce do to achieve such a change? For

Simeon we must ask in what was the exact nature of his faith and how did he convey it to others and so widely? One of his most famous sermons (first preached before the University in 1811) is entitled 'Evangelical Religion Described' and its text is 'I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified'. Copies of it were circulated to every one of his parishioners at Holy Trinity, Cambridge, after his death. In the Cross Simeon found the means of our reconciliation with God and therefore the ground of our hope and the motive to our obedience. He founded his preaching on the love of God as revealed at Calvary in meeting the need of sinful man. At a time when controversy raged, Simeon, whilst willing to be denominated 'a moderate Calvinist', felt that 'Calvinism and Arminianism are equally true, if rightly applied, and equally false, if pressed to extremes'.[5] He felt that as 'human systems' both were limited and that one should always test the exact local sense of Scripture—'I entreat you, brethren, never to wrest the Word of God.'[6] On another contemporary controversy, baptismal regeneration, he distinguished between regeneration as a new state (or states) and conversion as a new nature, but he did value baptism as conveying membership of the church, and, more particularly, of the Church of England. Hugh Evan Hopkins has aptly described Simeon as 'the complete Anglican'.[7] He was, to use his own phrase, 'convinced of her excellency and sufficiency'[8] and therefore he would take no official cognisance of Dissenters, nor would he yield one inch to the relief of Roman Catholics disabilities—'To endanger the Protestant ascendancy and stability is a sacrifice I am not prepared to make.'[9] More positively, he loved the Prayer Book and it is not surprising to find that he preached a series of sermons on 'The Excellency of the Liturgy'.

Nor then can it be surprising that we find in such a man so passionate for the Gospel and for his Church a zealous concern that others should know and enjoy both. The young man who became vicar of Holy Trinity, Cambridge in 1783 was to spend the rest of his life, over fifty years, in that same ministry. Like other Evangelicals he met opposition, with pews, and sometimes even the church, locked against worshippers. He had to meet taunts and worse from jeering students for a decade; he had to bear an afternoon lecturer whose views by no means coincided with his own. But nothing distracted him, and over the years his heart was rejoiced by those who came to mock and stayed to pray. Simeon sought to develop the faithful by weeknight instruction and to extend his pastoral effectiveness by means of 'visiting' teams. But if he had succeeded merely in his own parish, he would have been no more remarkable than many others. In fact, he used his parochial experience in helping generations of Cambridge students who went out as parochial clergy. His Friday-night 'Conversation-Parties' which began in 1813 became, in Hopkins' phrase, a 'one-man Brains Trust',[10] whilst his sermon classes made him, in some words of Charles Smyth:

> the first man in the history of the English pulpit since the Middle Ages to appreciate that it is perfectly possible to teach men how to preach, and to discover how to do so.[11]

He taught his pupils not only doctrine, that is, what to say, but also composition and delivery. As one reads his sermons, one is struck by their lucidity and order. At the same time, though he spoke with fervour, he was always concerned to avoid excessive emotion, or 'enthusiasm' as the eighteenth century called it. He sought to convince, not to carry away. But however good may have been the theory, he needed the students to receive it and spheres of work for them to go to afterwards. In the first regard he was much helped by the munificence of private individuals, as well as his own generosity. Both he and Wilberforce, for example, contributed to the costs of Patrick Brontë's education at St. John's. Beyond this Simeon was helped by the liberality of various clerical societies, most notably that of Elland in Yorkshire. When it came to finding livings for protegés, things were not so easy, especially in the face of the suspicion and antagonism that Evangelicals encountered in many places. Simeon was not daunted. He noted John Thornton's innovation in purchasing advowsons and placing Gospel men in his livings. Simeon developed the idea at immense cost to himself and with immense help from others so that at his death he had over twenty livings in his trust, many of them strategic purchases in either fashionable areas such as Bath and Cheltenham or in fast-developing centres such as Bradford and Derby.

But Simeon's vision stretched beyond England, and his most famous protegés, men like Henry Martyn and Thomas Thomason, went out as missionaries. They went to India, as did David Brown and others, officially as chaplains to the East India Company, whose directors now included some of the Clapham Sect personnel. Besides this, however, Simeon was prominent in the founding of the Church Missionary Society in 1799, whilst later he played a part in the work of the Bible Society and latterly became deeply involved in that of the Jew Society, acting as a kind of 'one-man general staff, preaching for the Society, recruiting workers, spreading propaganda, collecting funds, advising on strategy. 'This great interest', Evan Hopkins has said, 'was the nearest that Simeon ever came to losing his balance'.[12] But he did not lose it and his influence spread throughout his lifetime and after it. In Charles Smyth's words, he 'more than any other inspired and promoted the evangelical revival in the second and third generations of its course.'[13]

In politics Simeon was a Tory, as also, but with varying commitment, was Wilberforce. Simeon, however, though serious, was not actively concerned with specific issues. Like many Evangelicals, he was interested more in the eternal than the temporal, in man's destiny rather than in his condition. Nowhere is there any indication of his views of Wilberforce's lifetime commitment, the abolition of the Slave Trade and then of slavery

itself. We need, however, to remember that this was but one half of Wilberforce's work. As he put it in his diary on 28 October, 1787, 'God Almighty has set before me two great objects; the suppression of the Slave Trade and the reformation of manners'. Earlier in that same year Wilberforce, the twenty-seven year old Member of Parliament for Yorkshire, had driven his plan with the mighty to secure the Royal Proclamation 'to discountenance and punish all manner of vice, profaneness and immorality, in all persons of whatsoever degree or quality within our realm'. The King prohibited his loving subjects from playing dice, cards, or any other game whatsoever on the Lord's Day, whether in private or public, and all those administering justice were to be

> very vigilant and strict in the discovery and the effectual prosecution of all persons who shall be guilty of excessive drinking, blasphemy, profane swearing and cursing, lewdness, profanation of the Lord's Day, or other dissolute immoral or disorderly practices.

They were required to suppress all public gaming, disorderly houses, unlicensed places of entertainment and 'all loose and licentious prints, books and publications'—a comprehensive programme of moral reform by means of legislative compulsion.

Wilberforce did not stop at that. The intention had to be supplied with the means to enforce it. So he set up the Society to Effect the Enforcement of His Majesty's Proclamation against Vice and Immorality (1788), shortly (and shorter) to became the Proclamation Society and later, in a varied guise, the Society for the Suppression of Vice (1802), unfortunately abbreviated to the Vice Society. This latter set out its objects as the suppression of Sabbath-breaking, blasphemous and licentious publications (including toys and snuff-boxes) and private theatricals, fairs, brothels, dram-shops, gaming houses and fortune tellers. As evidence was required, and the Society both refused to employ immoral persons and to allow the practice of deceit, they had problems in dealing with brothels and the like.[14] Alongside the repressive, however, Wilberforce characteristically acted in a positive direction; in 1796 he was instrumental in founding the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor (inevitably the Bettering Society). It was the precursor of many more, the 'Ten Thousand Compassions' as they have been called.

The intensity of Wilberforce's concern with moral reform was only one manifestation of the intensity of his own Christianity. His diaries between 1794 and 1800 show how much he kept watch on his own life, every page headed with a list of faults to which he felt himself especially prone. Thus:

> instability, wandering in prayer, Christianity forgetting, Holy Spirit forgetting, regulation of company and conversation, friends' spiritual good, truth erring, humility, self-denial *etc.*[15]

He was thus applying to his own life what he set out in his book, first planned in 1789 and published in 1796, *A Practical System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this country contrasted with Real Christianity*. Five hundred copies were printed, but these were sold out within a few days. Within six months the book went through five editions and sold seven thousand five hundred copies; and within thirty years it had reached fifteen English and twenty-five American editions and had been translated into all the major European languages. It sustained a contrast between nominal Christians and real ones. It was not enough, Wilberforce insisted, to profess Christianity, to attend church and to lead a decent life. This type of merely nominal Christian concentrated on the temporal, whereas the real Christian focused on the eternal. Wilberforce is critical of merely 'moral virtues', insisting that all human endowments, all our abilities, substance, time and influence be regarded 'not for [our] own gratification but as so many instruments to be consecrated to the honour and employed in the service of God. This must be the master principle to which all others must be subordinate'.[16] He found the differences between real and nominal Christians most particularly marked in their attitude to the Sabbath, and he also launched a violent attack on the theatre. He looked for a Christian Utopia; and until its achievement he asked 'the rich to behave with magnanimity and the poor with gratitude'.[17] He claimed that Christianity

> renders the inequalities of the social scale less galling to the lower orders, whom also he instructs in their turn to be diligent, humble, patient; . . . that if their superiors enjoy more abundant comforts, they are also exposed to many temptations from which the inferior classes are happily exempted; that, having food and raiment they should be therewith content . . . and finally, that all human distinctions will soon be done away, and the true followers of Christ will all, as children of the same Father, be alike admitted to the possession of the same heavenly inheritance.[18]

This, said Wilberforce, was the 'basis of all politics'. It was, of course, a doctrine of political stasis.

It meant, however, that within a strong framework of social control there was an overwhelming obligation on the legislator to secure as much improvement as possible. Thus, besides the anti-slavery movement, the members of the Clapham Sect, or 'the Saints' as they were also called, were foremost in introducing factory legislation; in ending the employment of young boys as chimney-sweeps' apprentices; in denouncing the barbarous criminal code of the day, in seeking better prison conditions; and in attacking cruelty to animals. Their tireless philanthropic activity was focused most fully on a variety of worthy causes, 'the ten thousand compassions' I have mentioned. Wilberforce gave a quarter of his income and Henry Thornton a third of his wealth to charitable causes.

Writing just after the end of our period, Sir James Stephen reflected that

'Ours is the age of societies'[19] a claim borne out by the pages of lists of such bodies in Ford K. Brown's *Father of the Victorians*. I must quote him at some length to illustrate the variety which at times encompasses the unlikely and, even, one might have thought the probably unnecessary. This is only part of his long catalogue:

> There were societies for the deaf and dumb, for the insane, for the blind, for the ruptured, for the scrofulous, for the club-footed, for the penitent syphilitic and for the impenitent syphilitic; for legitimate children and illegitimate children, for chimney sweepers' apprentices and against Tom Paine and Shelley; in aid of juvenile prostitutes and against juvenile mendicants; for distressed respectable widows, for poor pious clergymen in the country, for poor females in the maritime districts, for distressed foreigners, for small debtors, for prisoners, for female émigrées, for the deserving poor, for respectable married women and disreputable unmarried women, for sick people in hospitals and sick people out of hospitals, and for simple ordinary sick strangers.
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> There were societies for gentlewomen of good family, for penitent females, juvenile penitent females, and poor, deserted, friendless females; for orphan females and widowed females and young females the settlements of whose parents could not be found, and for infirm, and faithful, and respectable, and destitute, and forlorn, and degraded females. There were societies of friends of children, of labouring men, of animals, of aliens, of females, of aged pilgrims, of the poor, of the Hebrew Nation, of sick men, of orphan boys to be sent to sea, of peace; there were societies for the Irish Roman Catholics, young men in London, governesses, teachers and female servants; for the gypsies, for the Africans, for seamen and clergymen and the destitute and deserving relatives of seamen and clergymen; for Irish charity schools, for the West Indian Negroes, for sick travellers, for sick children, for the North American Indians; for the London Irish and the London Scottish, for the Jews, for fishermen, for ministers' daughters, for the Moravians, for the Continent, for the Irish poor and the Irish Sunday Schools and the Irish female peasantry and the Irish clergy; for the poor of Australia and the poor of Newfoundland and for poor destitute boys, for infant poor, for poor friendless deserted girls and for aborigines; there were societies against fire, and opium, and alcohol, and intemperance, and tobacco, and Sabbath-breaking, and accident, and shipwreck, and suspension of animation.
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> There were societies to improve, to enforce, to reform, to benefit, to prevent, to relieve, to educate, to reclaim, to encourage, to propagate, to maintain, to promote, to provide for, to support, to effect, to better, to instruct, to protect, to supersede, to employ, to civilize, to visit, to preserve, to convert, to mitigate, to abolish, to investigate, to publish, to aid, to extinguish. Above all there were societies to suppress.[20]

But whatever our possible criticisms, all this was because the Evangelicals recognized the primacy of duty under God. They believed in the gospel of work and the use of divinely given talents. From their activity is derived

the British tradition of private benevolence and the stewardship of money. From it also comes the philosophy of the Welfare State.

These are essentially the characteristics of middle-class morality, as Ian Bradley has pointed out.[21] To them he adds two others. The first is the sanctity of home and family. Personal devotion was reinforced by family devotion, and not least daily prayers, embracing the whole of the domestic staff. This was one side of the coin. Its obverse demonstrates the other characteristics of Bradley's view of middle-class morality—the sinfulness of enjoyment in what he calls the 'oppressive' side of Victorian childhood

> the rigid observance of the Sabbath, the denial of pleasures and the equation of enjoyment with sin, the stress on conformity and obedience to authority and the overwhelming preoccupations with death and hell.[22]

But he goes on to say that out of that came more than 'a lingering sense of guilt and fear' and, quoting one who had experienced an Evangelical upbringing, G.W.E. Russell, he refers to

> an abiding sense of religious responsibility, a self-sacrificing energy in works of mercy, an evangelistic zeal, an aloofness from the world, and a level of saintliness in daily life, such as I do not expect again to see realized on earth.[23]

The quotation from Ford K. Brown ended with the sentences 'Above all there were societies to suppress', and as we recall the Regency years at the zenith of the times I am considering, we may well feel that there was much that needed suppression. In his study of the period from 1780 to 1850 Harold Perkins considered the English at its beginning 'to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world'.[24] I have mentioned cruel sports but there was also widespread drunkenness and immorality, reaching to the highest in the land. Indeed, it is a notable irony that, allegedly, for himself marrying a young lady considered unsuitable for his young nobleman pupil, one of the first Evangelicals to become a bishop *sc.*, C.R. Sumner, received preferment from George IV through the pleadings of Lady Conyngham, the young nobleman's mother, who happened also to be the King's mistress. Let it, however, be said in Sumner's favour that he managed to persuade even George IV to introduce family prayers into the Royal Household.

Amongst the adjectives which Perkins uses to describe the English by 1850 are 'inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded'. This was the result of sustained campaigning against such social abuses as drink, gambling, immorality and pornography. Evangelicals secured the restriction of public-house opening hours (and the Vice Society persuaded employers to stop paying wages at public houses), but they were not total abstainers. Wilberforce liked his port and many others drank wine, whilst Evangelical brewing families included the Buxtons, Hanburys and the Guinnesses.

They were severe on gambling, and when the slave trade was abolished and Wilberforce asked 'What next?', Henry Thornton replied 'The Lottery, I think'. It was—in 1826. Even stronger still was the assault on immorality and pornography. I have already referred to some of the activities of the Vice Society. It brought six hundred and seventy offenders before the Courts in the first year of its existence, and some of the later achievements included the apprehension of a gang of Italian hawkers selling obscene prints in girls' boarding schools, of all places!

In nothing, however, were the Evangelicals more vehement than in their sabbatarianism. As early as 1791 Hannah More, following up the Royal Proclamation, was rigorous against Sabbath-breaking in her *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great.* The Society Promoting the Observance of the Sabbath was established in 1809 and, at the end of the period, The Lord's Day Observance Society, in 1831. An Act of 1780 had outlawed trading, professional entertainment and sport on Sundays, and in 1833 a bid was made to ban all work, trade, public transport, meetings and games. The attempt failed, but in one way and another enough was done to create the sense of gloom about the English Sunday which Dickens expressed so powerfully in *Little Dorrit.*[25]

There was another group of activities which many Evangelicals frowned upon, namely, the theatre, dancing and card-playing. A discussion in the Eclectic Society on 17 March 1800 produced a variety of condemnations of the theatre—the 'Devil's Kingdom' (John Venn); 'Frequenting plays affords a proof of the depravity of human nature beyond most other things' (Henry Foster); and, curiously, 'A Sermon is the essence of dullness after a play; this shows the evils of the play-house' (Josiah Pratt) and even poor Hannah More's 'sacred dramas have done injury. They have associated the idea of innocence with the drama'.[26]

Cards and dancing were not so totally objectionable, though nearly so. Wilberforce, dining at the Duke of Gloucester's, 'felt awkward about cards, but . . . did not make a point of conscience of not playing',[27] whilst Simeon would not make a fourth at whist, but would play piquet with 'an aged parent or a sick and languid relative'.[28] At best, said *The Christian Guardian*, you shut yourself out from 'continual waiting on the Lord'.[29] This same periodical condemned dancing likewise as a means of wasting time, but went further to argue that

> it provided opportunities for familiarities, was no improver of the mind, needlessly endangered health and limbs, put the body in immodest positions and was a favourite amusement of the world.[30]

By contrast, Wilberforce did not oppose private dances (and we are back to Fanny Price and *Mansfield Park*) and there is the beautiful story told by Marianne Thornton of how as a little girl she observed that Aunt Robert took part in the dancing and concluded that if Aunt Robert danced, dancing could not possibly be sinful! The problem both about these pastimes

and about Sunday Observance was neatly expressed by Basil Woodd at a meeting of the Eclectic Society on 10 April 1798 when he said: 'I wish to have a line pointed out whereby we may steer clear on the one hand of Judaising and on the other of too much licence'.[31] It was Judaising, appearing righteous overmuch, which lessened the appeal of Evangelical Christianity for many in the nineteenth century.

We have to remember that both the public and private philanthropy and the private devotions of Evangelicals were rooted in church membership and public worship. Resident clergy, diligent in their work, introducing regular communion, evening worship and weeknight classes and prayer meetings, set a new pattern of activity for church members and reinforced all this with the evangelism of district visiting. Large parishes were divided up and new churches built, usually by private benevolence but also in certain areas of the country supported by government grant. The two Sumner brothers, Charles at Winchester and John at Chester, were notably active among the bishops in advancing this church extension. It needs to be stressed that the work was done by regular services conducted by regular clergy, often spending their whole professional lives in a single parish. It was by this, and not by the stimulation of periodic revivalism, that under God the Evangelical impact was so strong. Moreover, it was in the Church of England rather than in any of the sects that this effort was concentrated. In part, this derived from its position as the Established Church of the realm; in part also from its strategic advantages in having its places of worship more numerous than those of others (though here one must qualify the situation in the new industrial areas); but in part, also, because its Evangelicals were all so supremely Anglican Evangelicals. I have already referred to Simeon as 'the complete Anglican'. John Venn made a similar claim for himself, saying that 'the Church of England in her liturgy, articles and homilies, speaks more in unison with the Scriptures than any systematic writers I know'.[32] In the latter years of the period that I am considering, the question of Catholic Emancipation arose, and it was in 1827 that the Protestant Reformation Society was founded. I have already referred to Simeon's views on the subject. The 'systematisers' to whom Venn refers were the fervent Calvinists and Arminians, between whom large sections of the Evangelicals had been split for many years. On the one hand were those like Thomas Scott, the biblical commentator, or William Carus Wilson, who was pilloried by Charlotte Brontë, whose Calvinism was total; on the other, were those like Wilberforce, Simeon and Venn who wished to play down the differences. In general, these latter with others such as Legh Richmond, Thomas Robinson of Leicester and Thomas Gisborne would have been content with the label 'modified Calvinism'.[33]

I have quoted Simeon once on this subject. Let me do so again. He is writing to the young Carus Wilson who had been refused orders by Bishop Law of Chester because of his Calvinism. Simeon says: 'You well know

that though strongly Calvinistic in some respects I am as strongly Arminian in others.'[34] My own impression is that, though this difference of view interested and distinguished some of the more intellectually enquiring people of the nineteenth century, it probably mattered little to the ordinary congregation. Anti-Calvinism, however, produced one outlet in universalism. God did not merely elect some; His love encompassed the salvation of all. On this, as usual, Simeon was sound. He treasures the universalist texts that Christ died for all and that the message must be conveyed to all, but he distinguished between universal redemption and universal salvation.[35] Likewise with another aspect of the aspiration after perfection, the phenomenon of millennarianism, which established a strong hold in the 1820s and found its most fervent exponent in the Church of England in William Marsh of Birmingham, 'Millennial Marsh', as he came to be called. The premillennialists preached Christ's imminent return to reign on earth for a thousand years, and especially in the 1820s with the apparent decline of the Ottoman Empire Marsh foresaw this return within a matter of years. More soberly, Simeon preferred his own advent hope to look for Christ at the very end of human history, but more sensibly still, he thought it more important to preach 'not Jesus Christ and him reigning on earth, but Jesus Christ and him crucified'.[36] Simeon always wanted balance. This again, with those whose emphasis was solifidian as well as with those who oppositely tended to the Pelagian heresy, he argued: 'A man is justified by faith, because by it he is made righteous, and he is justified by works, because by them he is proved righteous'.[37] That combination led him to remark with a certain wry amusement that 'the very persons who are complained of for the licentious tendency of their principles, should at the same time be universally condemned for the over-righteous sanctity of their lives.'[38] But if much of what I have been referring to in the last two paragraphs was a matter of abstruse doctrine, two other issues were central to Evangelical faith. These were the authority of Scripture and the experience of conversion. Our Evangelicals were not aware of the contemporary German scholastic speculation. For them the Bible was wholly inspired, though not necessarily literally so. Thus Richard Cecil thought it dangerous to consider 'all Scripture as equally inspired'. Henry Martyn said, 'The sense from God but the expression from the different writers of it', and John Davies, that 'the ideas and not the words are inspired'.[39] For Simeon there was

> plenary inspiration, to reveal those things which man could not know, or which the writer did not know: [and] supervising inspiration, to watch over the things which the writer did know, and to prevent him from going wrong[40].

Every Christian needed the Bible; every man needed the Bible to become a Christian. No wonder the Evangelicals were foremost in the activities of the Bible Society.

The second fundamental then was to become a Christian, to undergo the experience of conversion. This is often regarded as a traumatic experience, and so it is. It is also commonly regarded as a matter of public and particular confession, a once-for-all event. My own impression is that this is a view deriving more from the record of Dissenting evangelicalism than from that of the Church of England. Anglicans are wary of what the eighteenth century called 'enthusiasm'. Nevertheless, Anglican Evangelicals did (and do) believe in the new birth, a complete change of nature. We know of Simeon's own agonies of spirit as at Easter 1779 he recognized his obligation and lamented his unfitness to partake of Holy Communion and of the way by which in his solitude the Holy Spirit led him to find Christ as his saviour. He has himself expressed the difference of before and after:

> Conversion is contrary to the course of nature and only brought about by God's almighty power . . . Before conversion (a man's) heart and mind and soul flow rapidly downwards, away from his creator, by its natural tendency towards destruction. After conversion all its tendencies are changed, and it flows upwards from destruction, back again towards its creator. Is this due to human agency? All the inhabitants of the globe could not do it. It is done by an invisible power, by a way of which we know nothing but its name and its effects.[41]

What then is the sum of the whole matter? Individually, the lives of thousands were changed; corporately, the life of England was changed. I have quoted from Perkin his words: 'polite, orderly, tender-minded', but he also said 'inhibited' and he concluded with what I did not quote, 'prudish and hypocritical'. These latter characteristics were the effect of the success of Evangelical *mores*; many felt that they had to assume a virtue even if they had it not. No-one can blame the Evangelicals for that; but they have also been seen as 'busybodying' and interfering; as making life gloomy by their attempt to impose a form of compulsory godliness (and they might indeed have done well to recognize that, though you can compel obedience from others, you cannot create goodness in them thereby); they have been seen as being censorious and self-righteous and as being exclusive and uncultured. On the other hand, they can be admired for regarding life so seriously, as constantly within the eternal dimension. Theirs was a life of total commitment, of intensity of action, of constantly being 'useful'. Theirs was a life of tremendous joy and wonderful certainty in the promises of God. It was not their fault that by the end of the nineteenth century the importance of being earnest had become merely the ironic title of a flippant comedy of manners.

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NOTES

1 *Letters of Jane Austen*, January, 1799.
2 Letter to Cassandra Austen, 8 September, 1816.
3 *Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir James Stephen*, 1906, p. 87.
4 Quoted by G.W.E. Russell, *A Short History of the Evangelical Movement*, 1915, pp. 56–7.
5 Letter to W. Carus-Wilson, 11 October, 1815, quoted by W. Carus, *Charles Simeon*, 1847, pp. 418–9.
6 Sermon 2316, 'The True Means of Perseverance'.
7 *Charles Simeon of Cambridge*, 1977, p. 181.
8 A. Brown, *Conversation Parties of Charles Simeon*, p. 108, quoted by Pollard and Hennell, *Charles Simeon*, 1959, p. 163.
9 Quoted by Hopkins, p. 196.
10 *Op. cit.*, p. 89.
11 *The Art of Preaching*, 1940, p. 175.
12 Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
13 *Simeon and Church Order*, 1940, p. 18.
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30 March 1817, p. 88, quoted by Brown *supra*.
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37 Sermon 2365, quoted by Pollard and Hennell, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
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