19TH MAY DUNSTAN [909-88]

Dunstan, as the story goes,

Once caught the Devil by his nose,

With red-hot tongs, which made him roar,

That he was heard three miles or more!

Dunstan is the Patron Saint of Silversmiths, Armourers and Gunsmiths and there are many folk tales about his miracles and bargains with the Devil: his name comes up in Chaucer’s Friar’s tale.

Dying in 988, and canonised in 1029, he was England’s most popular saint until overshadowed by Thomas a Becket, although a predecessor to Thomas as Archbishop, Dunstan survived the wrath of a king to die in his bed.

He was born near Glastonbury around 909, ten years after the death of King Alfred; the son of a noble related to the royal family by marriage. At that time Glastonbury was a centre of pilgrimage, popularly associated with Christian settlement in England, and the abbey was a famous centre of learning with a large library containing classical as well as religious texts. Dunstan was educated there before joining his uncle, Aldhelm, who comes up next week.

Dunstan insisted that a monastic calling was not for him until a serious skin disease in his 30’s caused him to change his mind; so, after taking orders, he built himself a tiny cell against the walls of Glastonbury Abbey and took up a life of manual labour and devotion, soon discovering a talent for metalwork, making church bells and vessels. He was also a singer and is occasionally portrayed playing the harp. One of his poems is in the British Library.

Alfred the Great [who comes up on October 26th] had achieved much in reviving the once famous spirit of learning in his kingdom: Dunstan’s royal connections and being nephew to Archbishop Aldhelm would have probably brought him to prominence regardless of his reputation for holiness, but that reputation was established by the time the new King Edmund created him Abbot of Glastonbury in 943. He and Edmund were close, and the king allocated him the resources to rebuild the monastery and improve standards along the lines that Benedict of Amiane had initiated in the rest of Western Europe. Dunstan revived monastic life at Malmesbury, Bath, Muchelney, Westminster and Athelney, which had been in decline since its foundation by Alfred.

Kathleen Jones points out that whereas there were religious foundations for women before Dunstan’s time at Wilton, Shaftesbury and Winchester, it is he who can be credited with the restoration of men’s monastic houses in England.

It is entirely understandable that a talented and well-born figure such as Dunstan should capture the public’s imagination but there were two other important saints in the revival of English monastic life that tend to be rather unjustly overlooked: St Aethelwold [905-84] and Oswald [d992] who was of Danish descent. They in turn were backed up by Archbishop Oda [in office 942-58] who retained his connections with the illustrious foundation at St Benoit de Fleury, where he had resided and sent his nephew Oswald for a while. When, in 955, Dunstan was dismissed as the young King Eadwig’s Chief Minister he spent time as a guest refugee at the famous monastery at Ghent and learned more about the Benedictine life in other houses; so that the reforming impulse came from some way further north than Cluny, and it has even been suggested by other Benedictines that the English reforms were unorthodox!

Aethelwold, however, who had served alongside Dunstan at Glastonbury, restored the House at Abingdon, and becoming Bishop of Winchester in 963 he had the monks in charge of the communities of the Old and New minsters forcefully ejected with similar peremptory expulsions elsewhere. He then began restoring church property in the fens and East Anglia that had been laid waste by Viking raids a century previously: At Peterborough sheep were found grazing on the foundations, and there, as well as at Ely and Thorny the lands had been misappropriated. Aethelwold re-founded all three and ensured their endowments. He was strict, and not likely to have been popular in his lifetime, but he is celebrated nowadays for his Customary for the reformed monastic life, the ‘Regularis Concordia’ and for the wonderful ‘Benedictional as St Aethelwold’ that Geoffrey Hindley describes as the acknowledged masterpiece of the Winchester school of illumination.

The Great House at Ramsey was founded by Oswald, which had been a dependency of the See of Worcester, where he was bishop. Here, with a good deal of assistance from Fleury, he set up another important teaching centre.

As already hinted, Dunstan had been appointed adviser to King Eadred, Edmund’s successor, but in 955, having reproached the new 16-year-old King Eadwig for immorality and rowdy behaviour at his coronation feast, he was exiled, but was called back when the northern king, Edgar realising his talents, quickly made him Bishop of Worcester, where his shrine can still be seen in the Cathedral. At the death of [uncle] Aldhelm, he was created Archbishop of Canterbury in 960, where, from this time, the work of administration rather diverted his energies from monastic reform.

Dunstan did much to devise the coronation service for King Edgar altering the ceremony emphasising the bond between church and monarch, making it a sacred act emulating the consecration of priests, and he might have remained one of those pious and respectable saints who earn canonisation almost like a civil servant getting his ‘K’ after distinguished service, but his evident popularity among ordinary folk after his death places him in another dimension altogether.

The church’s rather ‘worthy’ prayers for his day carry important aspirations for the present, so here they are:

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PRAYER

O God of truth and beauty, who richly endowed your Bishop Dunstan with skill in music and the working of metals; and with gifts of administration and reforming zeal: teach us, we pray, to see in you the source of all our gifts and talents, and move us to offer them for the adornment of worship and the advancement of true religion; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Almighty God, who raised up Dunstan to be a true shepherd of the flock, a restorer of monastic life and a faithful counsellor to those in authority: give to all pastors the same gifts of your Holy Spirit, that they may be true servants of Christ and all his people; through Jesus Christ our Lord … … …

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20th of MAY ALCUIN OF YORK [735-804]

Alcuin’s undoubted fame rests principally on his work with and for others, as a teacher and compiler of knowledge, and reformer of the church; described once as Charlemagne’s Minister of Education.

Emperor Charlemagne; Charles the Great, King of the Franks; a warrior and military strategist who expanded his empire to take in most of modern France and Germany, with some of Northern Italy and Spain, consciously modelled his rule on that of ancient Roman emperors, building his HQ at Aachen in Roman style, often looting ancient ruins for materials.

Unlike many conquerors who boasted cultural attainments to glorify their rule, Charlemagne seems to have cherished a real desire to learn, and to gather, preserve and disseminate the very best in learning in both political and church life throughout his lands. Alcuin compared Charles as Plato’s ‘Philosopher King’ which he certainly was not, but his enthusiasm for personal improvement is attested by his frequent attendance at the school itself, together with his own and other noble children. This is important, because in the brutal and anarchic world of the 8th century nobody was going to get far in learning and scholarship without the protection of a supportive and stable ruler to back it up.

Alcuin was born around 735 near York, where he was educated at the famous cathedral school that had grown up there after the Vikings had done their worst in the Northumbrian monasteries. By age 10 he had learned the Psalms and was well into Vergil and became a star pupil. In the 760’s he took up a teaching post at the school, and with his own fame beginning to spread, he was sent to Rome on the business of the school, and to the Frankish court in 778-9 networking with court scholars, although it was not until 781 when returning from Rome on another errand he met Charlemagne at Parma, and corresponded with him thereafter until 785 when he was persuaded to lead up the palace school at Aachen, which the king was in process of building, together with a library, a religious centre a fortified community centre and his own palace.

Alcuin never became a monk neither did he rise above deacon’s orders, neither is he celebrated as an original philosopher or theologian or saint, but his gifts and achievements lie elsewhere. He was a poet, and his verse history of York is considered the first Latin historical epic of the middle ages, and he revised the lectionary; compiled a sacramentary, and in retirement at the close of his life in Tours he was entrusted with revising and updating Gerome’s Latin Bible which had become corrupted with endless scribal errors and unsystematic punctuation.

Richard Hoppin’s very authoritative survey of mediaeval music stresses the importance of Charlemagne as having taken a starring role in the reform of ‘Gregorian’ chant, and a former pupil recalled Alcuin teaching the boys the Roman Rite, on which he insisted; and he evidently had enough understanding of singers to instruct them not to be loud, nor to show off their technique by over-elaborate ornamentation of the line.

Alcuin’s principal field of expertise was Latin grammar: he taught rhetoric, and wrote a manual of it for the guidance of rulers, trusting that to speak well would engender clear thinking and consequently wise diplomacy and just decisions. . Though not a theologian, Alcuin was familiar with the Latin church fathers, and, besides further spreading the works of Bede, he wrote various Bible commentaries.

At a practical level he would collect manuscripts from all over Europe; compare whichever copies he had and have a clean one made up with the best of everything from each one, distributing them throughout Charles’s lands. In addition to this he designed a font known still as Carolingian Miniscule that copyists and readers found easier to work with than anything previously in use, and formatted books in a tidy and user-friendly way that early printers were happy to follow.

Alcuin never lost touch with his English heritage of which he was always very proud: having moved to Aachen in 785, the following year saw him back in England for church councils in Northumbria and Mercia, and between 791-3 he was back once more.

Besides his gifts as teacher, writer and administrator, Alcuin was very much more than a courtier, although he had been familiar with courtly manners from childhood, having come from a noble family and inheriting an estate of his own. He was on close and usually informal terms with the king, and saw himself as a soldier in Christ’s battle line, but he enjoyed enough influence with Charles to be able to dissuade him from his determination to subdue the heathen to the ‘sweet and mild yoke of Christ,’ if necessary by force: Charles decreed that any conquered Saxon failing to keep Lent properly should be put to death, as should anyone who reverted to paganism. Besides advocating a little less stick and rather more carrot, Alcuin suggested that a tithe Charles had imposed on all agricultural products and other goods among his conquered peoples intended to enrich the church would be likely to foment rebellions and lose converts.

On the other hand, he deplored fornication, adultery and even incest among nuns; drunkenness among monks; he inveighs against greed robbery and judicial violence; and against luxurious dress and the fashion for pagan hairstyle and beard trims. Some clerics were so unprincipled as to hunt mammals with dogs; ‘let not your companions gallop halloing after foxes,’ frivolous Novices at Jarrow were digging out fox’s earths and going hare-coursing rather than worshipping Christ. In the refectories social precedence ruled O K!

He was horrified when King Aerwulf put aside his wife and lived openly with his concubine, as an affront to God, whilst Charlemagne himself had dumped his own wife in favour of six of them, without a word of rebuke from Alcuin, who understood the boundaries of friendship with powerful rulers rather better than the Baptist had.

Despite these occasional strictures in the interests of church order, Alcuin was clearly a very attractive personality who made and retained friends, enjoyed word games at court, and devised an entire almanac of nicknames for his friends and colleagues: Charles himself was ‘King David,’ warrior and poet; his daughter Protrude was ‘Columba’, the dove, and he called himself ‘Albinus,’ after a 2nd-century Greek scholar who had summarised Plato. He wrote more than 300 letters which show him as a human being and a good and generous friend.

Another consequence of Alcuin’s achievements was to greatly increase the English presence in the German lands because many scholars from England followed him to Aachen and took up other important religious and administrative appointments. Charles showered the Abbey at Fulda that Boniface had set up with countless endowments, and Alcuin opened a shrine near present-day Boulogne to St Judoc, which became a pilgrim site and place of meeting between Anglo-Saxons and Franks. Alcuin was a relative of St Willibrord, the evangelist of Frisia, of whom he wrote two biographies, by means of scholarship and missionary foot soldiers the input of English Christianity was strengthened.

Towards the end of his life Alcuin seems to have become the victim of jealousy among some colleagues, and although he writes that he did not come to Francia for gold, but to strengthen the Catholic Church, he was awarded the revenues of three monasteries, at Auxerre, Maestricht and Troie, and passed the last 8 years of his life in the richly endowed monastery of St Martin in Tours, and, after all, he had taken no vows of poverty, and put his wealth to good use.

Alcuin remains a footnote in the history of western civilisation, whereas his royal patron is far better known, but within 60 years of Charlemagne’s death in 814 his empire and political achievements had been shattered, but those that he encouraged and supported through Alcuin and many other scholars from all over Europe brought together a corpus of culture and learning that has lasted one way and another into modern times. If, as he states, his object was to strengthen the Catholic church, he succeeded.

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21st of MAY HELENA

HELENA was the mother of CONSTANTINE the GREAT, the Roman emperor who first published an edict of toleration for Christians, and later inaugurated it as the established faith throughout his territory.

There is so much uncertainty about her early life that we can only hazard a guess that she was born in Greece; married, and subsequently was divorced by Constantius, once he became emperor, and lived in obscurity until Constantine brought her back into public life on becoming emperor himself.

Helena converted to Christianity when Constantine legalised it, and it is recounted that following a dream, she undertook extensive tours of the holy places in Palestine, Syria and Egypt at a very advanced age. Having taken the best advice she could in order to discover the spot on which Jesus was crucified, she is said to have found the three crosses on which he and the two ‘thieves’ suffered.

In order to ascertain which of these three was the ‘true cross,’ a local bishop had a dying woman touch all three, and when she revived at being presented with the third, the miracle was duly taken to have resolved the problem.

Helena reported back to her son, the emperor, whose orders precipitated the building of several churches on these various holy spots.

Helena died at a great age in 333 and is venerated as ‘Protector of the Holy Places.’

If you go to Wikipedia you can catch up with more of the legends around Helena and the ‘true cross.’

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24th of MAY JOHN WESLEY [1703-91]

CHARLES WESLEY [1701-88]

E P Thomson, himself the son of a Methodist minister and author of ‘The Making of the English working class,’ deplored the direction Methodism took under the Wesley brothers’ successor Jabez Bunting but affirmed: ‘Wesley at least had been a great-hearted warhorse; he had never spared himself; he was an enthusiast who had stood up at the market-cross to be pelted;’ and there was, indeed, something of St Paul in the way John Wesley travelled around the whole of what was then the British Isles preaching an estimated 40.000 times in all.

There are digests of John Wesley’s journal which are really worth reading not only to gain an insight into his own spiritual ups and downs, which were considerable, but for the light it shines on the social life of its day, and for its occasional undoubted entertainment value.

The journal was evidently intended for publication so that important areas of his emotional life do not feature, which is regrettable, since the myth that we cannot be faithful Christians without appearing unfailingly cheerful is a dangerous one that is still around in some quarters. Wesley seems to have had immense reserves of faith, compassion, courage and energy which nobody need doubt, but to imagine him as a grim, emotionless Protestant automaton not only does him a great injustice but helps nobody who may be in process of dealing with grief or anxiety if they load themselves with an additional burden of ‘Christian’ guilt and shame.

John Wesley was born in 1703 into an intensely religious family setting. Both his grandfather and father were clergy and suffered from the upheavals in church life, Samuel senior having been driven from his living in 1662, and John’s father, having married, discovered his wife Susannah to have been a Jacobite so that they separated for a year and were not reconciled until after the death of William IV. Susannah had 19 children, of whom 13 did not survive. John was the fifteenth, and Charles was younger by 4 years.

Susannah was a puritan, and by any standards a strict and rather brutal parent who frequently administered floggings and enjoined her children to ‘cry softly;’ shades of Monica and Augustine! A far more loving and nurturing relationship is evident between John and his father, whose counsel he sought occasionally, and Samuel affirmed: ‘Whatever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln’ when the college bestowed that honour on his son. In the letter dated 1732 that precedes the journal John writes of how he sought his father’s advice about his plans for ministry while still at Oxford:

‘But that we might not depend wholly on our own judgements I wrote an account to my father of our whole design with all begging that he, who had lived 70 years in the world and seen as much of it as most private men have ever done, would advise as whether we had yet gone too far and whether we should now stand still or go forward.’

Both John and Charles attended Charterhouse School and went on to Oxford. We can take it that the Wesley brothers faith and work ethic were deeply ingrained, and that determined self-control was ’de rigueur,’ but the poet Robert Southey, one of Wesley’s earliest biographers, attests to his spontaneous love and affection for children: Charles’ daughter, aware of her uncle’s stern and stoical reputation, sought to put things right:

‘It behoves a relative to render this justice to his private virtues, and attest that no human being was more alive to all the tender charities of domestic life than John Wesley. His indifference to calumny and inflexible perseverance in what he believed his duty have been the cause of this idea …. He always showed peculiar sympathy to young persons in love.’

In August 1748, amid his demanding itinerary John encountered a widow, Grace Murray, who nursed him through an illness, and would have proved the ideal wife for him on all fronts, and having travelled together twice for extended periods, they planned to get married, Grace became enmeshed with John Bennet, another minister in the Lancashire circuit, who had also been in love with her and whom she married partly due to the encouragement of John’s brother Charles, who was worried that her low birth might alienate their ministers! In a letter to Charles written directly after Grace’s marriage to Bennet John expresses his anguish with characteristic self-restraint: [Leeds; Oct 7th 1749]

‘… My dear brother:

Since I was 6 years old I never met with such a severe trial as some days past …we were soon after torn asunder by a whirlwind: in a few months the storm was over. I then used more precaution before, and fondly told myself that the day of evil would return no more; but it, too, soon returned! The waves rose again since I came out of London: I fasted and prayed and strove all I could but the sons of Zerouia were too hard for me: the whole world fought against me but above all my old familiar friend. Then was the word fulfilled: “Son of man behold; I take from thee the desire of thine eyes at a stroke, yet shalt thou not lament, neither shall thy tears run down”

The fatal irrevocable stroke was struck on Tuesday last. Yesterday I saw my friend that was and him to whom she is sacrificed: I believe you never saw such a scene, but why should a living man complain - a man for the punishment of his sins? I am yours affectionately …’…

John’s subsequent marriage to a rich London merchant’s widow was disastrous, but he could still rationalise that had his wife been more companionable he might have slackened off from work occasionally to please her! It was said that had his wife been so, John Wesley would have made the most affectionate and tender husband.

So much for the man and his character.

At some point in his formation Wesley met a ‘very holy man’ who pressed the question that has become a cliché in some church circles: ‘Do you really know the Lord?’ and left him with the thought that: ’the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.’ Some of his other influences came from Jeremy Taylor, William Law and ‘The Imitation of Christ.’

It was at Oxford When Charles arrived that he formed the ‘Holy Club’ which John joined, together with several others. They earned the soubriquet of ‘Methodists’ because of their unusually disciplined way of working separately and together at prayer and study: they would go their separate ways for periods during the day, then meet up and share their experiences. At Oxford ‘club’ members began speaking at the prison and visiting several poor families with the bishop’s blessing. Both brothers were ordained in the C of E during the 1730’s.

Having preached with evident success in a number of parish churches and been told often curtly that he would not be welcomed back, the brothers decided to travel to America to preach to the Indians, and, together with the new Governor Ogleton, they embarked in 1735. The crossing in those days took weeks, and club members took it upon themselves to preach to their fellow passengers with varying degrees of success. Wesley encountered some German Moravians whose characters and piety impressed him very deeply. Their reception in America on this occasion was hostile to the extent that a local magistrate tried to arrest John, but the brothers escaped and returned to England.

Having attended the Moravians’ meetings in London for some time, In 1738 John describes an overwhelming conversion of heart which affected him strongly:

‘In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone, for salvation. That assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

‘I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there, what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, ‘this cannot be faith; for where is the joy? Then was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the captain of our salvation; but as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, and sometimes withdraws them. according to the counsels of his own will.’

The journal relates one adventure after another in which John travels, almost invariably on horseback, often having to change mounts, from one part of the country to another, preaching to thousands at a time, and evincing tears, fits, and emotional reactions that often alarmed both civil and church authorities, to the extent that he was accused of rabble-rousing. Their reaction rather mirrored that of the Jewish and Roman rulers to Jesus and his disciples; in both cases an uncaring and oppressive governing class feared that an outsider was subverting their hold on power.

Wesley had no such intentions; neither did he cherish any ambition for power. It is true that he gained power over many thousands of people which he viewed as a trust, and the vast majority of those he cared most to convert were from the lower echelons of society for whom neither the church’s parish system nor the magistracy exercised the least concern.

Augustine Birrell, writing in an old digest of the Journal remarks that Wesley’s occasional rough treatment by mobs was nothing compared to that shown to prospective parliamentary candidates on whichever side, because most people respected Wesley’s motives and character; and Wesley well understood that when things got rough it was often because the crowd were being stirred up by those very people who accused him of rabble-rousing.

Methodists were by no means the first evangelists to understand that for charismatic preaching to have effect for more than a couple of hours, there had to be back-up so that those with serious intentions to follow Christ would have the essential benefit of on-going counsel and support from leaders able and qualified to guide them in their formation, so that John would set up ‘societies’ where possible and would stay in touch and revisit them when he could.

The challenge of how to set up and run groups providing a safe environment in which people can share their experience or difficulties honestly and without feeling judged or belittled by stronger personalities is still very much a work in progress, even with training courses and manuals in group theory and practice. Wesley seems to have set up a model in which each member could speak in order, including the group facilitator, to share as honestly as possible [or practicable] aspects of their Christian formation.

But … ‘the church is Corinth [!]’ and just as we read that every intractable problem or situation devolved ultimately onto Paul, Wesley made himself available as best he could, to speak with leaders and individuals between 10 a m and 2 p m during his visits anywhere, in addition to preaching, and kept a watching brief on ‘disorderly walkers’ or ‘contentious trouble-makers;’

Those of us who have had anything to do with Alpha training will understand the limitations attendant in a system where promising new recruits are placed in positions of leadership well before they can reasonably be expected to be ready; even if searching questioners and flat disagreement need to be discouraged in the interests of the ‘greatest good for the greatest number,’ the model has been shown to produce astonishing results.

In such an environment, however, what the pilgrim is bound to experience is something more akin to what we know as cognitive behavioural therapy than 1-2-1 counselling or spiritual guidance: the goal seems to be that people conform to ‘rules’ and that their inability or failure to do so is often seen as a nuisance or even as a cause of offence by the group leader.

Another aspect of this Pauline spirit is the changes of direction John was forced to undergo, as a High-Church Anglican compelled as he was to train up lay people and hand them responsibility to maintain spiritual and emotional well-being of the ‘classes’ and ‘societies’ he set up. Eventually – most difficult of all – Wesley, who insisted he remained an Anglican until his death, found it necessary to ordain new priests in the absence of episcopal oversight.

It is a cliché that Wesley never intended Methodism to become a denomination, the more so, perhaps, because there were other revivalist clergy working contentedly within the Anglican fold. But the sheer growth in its numbers and spread; the contempt and abuse Methodism received from the establishment, not to mention the splintering of this ‘church within a church’ made it inevitable; but at an enormous cost to Wesley himself. It was Charles who had set his heart on Methodism remaining within the Anglican fold, so that when he died in 1788 he was spared from witnessing the separation, which finally occurred in 1791 just a matter of months after the death of John.

It is written of John: ‘Himself a delightful companion, Wesley disliked having anyone about who was in a bad humour, and if he did find himself in such company he did his utmost to sooth ruffled tempers ... Wherever Wesley went he diffused a portion of his own felicity: easy and affable in his demeanour, he accommodated himself to every sort of company, and showed how happily the most finished courtesy may be blended with the most perfect piety.’

He exerted himself to maintain unity and when separating from the Moravians in 1745 and even when the followers of George Whitefield seceded and formed their own Calvinist branch of Methodism, the painful partings took place with mutual charity and respect.

Reading his journal what stands out is that whatever the poverty and wretchedness of the thousands of people he encountered John Wesley remained very much of his class: he was always careful of his appearance and it is clear from his attitudes that he took his superior social standing for granted even though his family background had been an austere one. His compassion was boundless; through his disciples and followers, the sick were visited regularly and poverty alleviated according to resources available in any community.

As with many movements for spiritual renewal, music played its part, and even today people with a Methodist upbringing never forget the joy of singing.

It is important not to minimise the work of John’s brother Charles, who carried out his own missionary journeys from time to time, but functioned principally as John’s lieutenant, although their relationship must sometimes have been strained. He is the writer of thousands of hymns, which, however, tend to run along broadly similar lines, and which brother John used to ‘correct’ occasionally when he discerned poor teaching or duff theology in them. It is not Charles’s fault that many of his lyrics have been set to some very indifferent music; or that many of the most powerful tunes in the Methodist tradition proved too robust for the Victorians.

The Wesley brothers would have dragged the Church of England into a consciousness of social concern if they could have, but as it was most of the impetus for social and political reform was driven, in the first half of the following century, principally by churchmen of an Evangelical background. Other than this, we can thank Methodism for a fine tradition of honest Bible study and commentary, and for its deployment of lay people in many aspects of their work, including preaching.

Efforts are occasionally made to bring Anglicans and Methodists back together, but it seems that among a minority on each side old wounds still fester, although we have far more in common than anything that separates us, and the optimists among us are sure that it will happen in God’s good time.