

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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*Satan's Shortest
and
Surest Way to the Heart*

(The Pastor's Letter February 1975)

Dear Friends,

One of the most enjoyable exponents of the writings of John Bunyan is, surely, Alexander Whyte, who occupied one of the Edinburgh pulpits in the second half of the eighteenth century. Whyte's "Bunyan Characters" rate among the classics of pen portraits of the men and women, places and personages of the Pilgrim's Progress and the Holy War. However, one remark from a sermon of Whyte's on the subject of "Eye-gate" – one of the gates in the walls of the City of Mansoul in Bunyan's Holy War – seems to set himself and Mr. Bunyan at loggerheads, and calls on our love for the Bedford Tinker to judge between the two. Mr. Whyte's statement is this: "Now, in the Holy War John Bunyan says a thing about the ear, as distinguished from the eye, and that I cannot subscribe to in my own experience at any rate ... He says that the ear is the shortest and surest road to the heart. I confess I cannot think that to be the actual case. My eye is much nearer my heart than my ear is. My eye much sooner affects, and much more powerfully affects, my heart than my ear ever does." So, says Bunyan, Ear-gate – the things that are heard – is "the shortest and surest road to the heart." No, no, says Alexander Whyte, in this particular judgement Bunyan has missed the mark, it is Eye-gate that is the real and short way to the heart of man.

Now then, who stands right? Mr. Bunyan, or Mr. Whyte? Or is there equal truth in both of their statements? Well, my friends, attractive and all as Alexander Whyte's opinion appears – and true and all as each and every one of us probably realises it to be – we feel that it is the dear old Tinker who emerges victor, and proves, indeed, what has been often said of him – "Prick him anywhere and he bleeds the Bible."

You see we believe that Bunyan went back to that best of all theological colleges before he wrote down his opinion that Ear-gate is the shortest and surest road to the heart. He went back to the garden of Eden, and there he learnt to be a right good sound divine in the doctrines of sin and the human heart and the devil. You remember how the temptation of Eve in the garden finally ended? It was when "the woman saw that the tree was good for food," that she took of the fruit and did eat, and gave it to her husband and he did eat. Well, you say, does that not substantiate Alexander Whyte's case? She *saw*, and she took, and she ate. Eye-gate was opened, and the temptation accomplished. Ah, but, before Eye-gate was ever opened Ear-gate had long-since been breached by the old enemy of our souls. And be sure that when the devil set out to capture and captivate the hearts of our first parents he took the shortest and the surest route for the job. "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And *he said* unto the woman ..." And as the Lord had spoken into Adam's ear with His words of command and prohibition at the first, so the devil chose to speak into the ear of Eve his counter-proposals. So the die was cast: God's Word against the devil's propaganda. And dear Mr. Bunyan is right; and Ear-gate is still to be mightily defended, or mightily assaulted, as the case might be. Defended against the lies of the devil; assaulted by the truths of our everlasting God.

You'll remember how the devil set about that task of leading our first parents into captivity to his evil will? He began with an attack on the integrity of God's Word. "And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said ...?" The thing that ultimately brings down Eve is, undoubtedly, the sin of pride, when she desires to be "as God," as the devil suggests. But, that pride immediately begins to show its head when she countenances the devil's suggestion that God has spoken inadvisedly in prohibiting the taking of the fruit from the tree. He gives her an alternative opinion to the words of the Lord, and sets before her the possibility that she herself is then capable of sitting on judgement on what God has spoken. And this is exactly what she does.

So the devil does yet. Through the same Ear-gate that God sends His saving truth in the preaching of His word to our hearts, the devil sends his legions of lies, and sets in motion that continual struggle for the rule of our hearts and of our minds.

You'll remember, too, how the devil continued with his task? Having prised open Eve's ear just a little, he began to infiltrate more and more – removing a bar here and a bolt there. And first of all, he began to *distort* the words of God a little. "Yea, hath God said that ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Now in fact, God had not said that; at least, he had not said it with that inflection or that emphasis. What God did say is found in the previous chapter, chapter 2 verses 16 and 17; "... of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat," the Lord says, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it ...". Now you see the vast difference there? Our God shows Himself a God of all bounty and grace. Adam has the whole garden spread out before him – he may freely eat of every tree, except one. But, the devil takes up the word of the Lord to Adam, and by emphasising the one prohibition makes God appear to be a God who is out to rob them of their rights. He, in fact, distorts the words of the Lord.

And let us never feel that we are beyond such an attack on our own Ear-gate by the old enemy. Let one striking piece of evidence convince us beyond all possible doubt that the devil delights to distort the clear, clear truths of the scriptures. Where is that piece of evidence found? It is found in the fact that the devil didn't even stop short of trying on a distortion of the truth with Christ Himself! In the wilderness temptation, does he not quote from one of the psalms? But, he only quotes in part and out of context in an effort to get the Lord to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem. So then, once he has well-sown his tares – his distortion – his mock-wheat of the good grain of God's word with Eve, then comes his next step – a flat *denial* of what God has said: "Has God said ye shall die? Ye shall not surely die."

But then my friends, that *distortion* of God's words comes in verse 1; the devils *denial* doesn't occur until verse 4. but, the denial confidently follows the distortion, because already Ear-gate has been breached to the extent that Eve herself has come to distort the words of the Lord. Verse 2, "And the woman said unto the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God hath said ye shall not eat of it, *neither shall ye touch it*, lest you die." Now, when did God say that? Whenever did God say that they were not to "touch" that tree? But, as Satan had begun to erect a distortion of God in Eve's heart, so she had begun to put her own additions to that distortion, making God out to be a God who would rob them of their very breath and existence.

No wonder, then, the devil feels on safe ground to come blazing through Ear-gate within his flat denial of God's word: "Ye shall not surely die." In one fell swoop the devil brushes aside the Holiness, and the Justice, and the Uniqueness of God, and throws to the wall Eve's Ear-gate for the reception of the word and thought that is going to put the capstone on the temptation – "God doth know that on the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods (literally God) knowing good and evil." That was the capstone. That was the straw that broke the camel's back, as we would say. Now Eve is ready – yes, is impelled – to turn, and look, and see, and take, and eat. "To be as God," is the message that has reached her heart and won it fully to the devil's cause. And it has reached her heart post-haste, by the devil's shortest and surest route, via Ear-gate.

Small wonder, my friends, when our Saviour came to stand as Surety and Substitute for His Church, He should come with His "ear opened" only to the will and the commandments of His Father in heaven. "My ear hast thou opened." The Greater David would fulfil all of Jehovah's will, and the devil's attack upon Him with God's Word distorted would find no house-room and would be repulsed. But remember the capstone of the temptation in Eden? It was "to be as God." That's what threw Eve's Ear-gate open that day – "to be as God" – the great desire of the human heart always – to be as God unto ourselves. And so how perfect that Atoning work of Christ for His

people; for He who was "very God of very God" thought it not a thing to be grasped at to be equal with God, says the scriptures, but He made Himself of no reputation became a man, and died obedient to all His Father's words to repair our utter loss. Perfect to Substitute in all His ways! And the first blow of our redemption struck even before He permitted His holy head to be laid in the cradle of Bethlehem's manger. For, in heaven, He who was God by absolute right undertook to become man, for man who illegally desired to be "as God" by the devil's lie.

"Take heed how ye hear." The *Eye*-gate, indeed, is a swift way to the heart; in that, Alexander Whyte judged rightly. But, as far as "the shortest and surest way" is concerned, we feel that the good Dreamer of Bedford had the better schooling. Perhaps, for a moment, the Edinburgh pulpit giant forgot to ask why Mr. John should have said such a thing. If he had, then, I'm sure he would have been conducted back to the fall of the human heart in the first place, and to our first introduction to the devil on the pages of the Bible – And "he *said ...*"

How it becomes us to guard the Word of Truth, knowing that it is this that the devil attacks – and can attack with – when he has suitably moulded it to slip in through an unguarded Ear-gate and lay seige upon our hearts.

Yours Sincerely
W. J. Seaton

William Carey's Text:

"Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited". (Isaiah 54 verses 2 and 3)

Sermon Divisions –

- (1) Expect great things from God.
- (2) Attempt great things for God.

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 68)



This psalm is very suitable to that time when David, having gotten the victory on his enemies round about, assembled all Israel, and carried the ark of God triumphantly out of the house of Obed-Edom into the city of David, as a type of Christ's ascension after the work of redemption in the world.

David Dickson

Verse 1. "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered ..." In some such words Moses spake when the cloud moved onward, and the ark was carried forward. The ark would have been a poor leader if the Lord had not been present with the symbol. Before we move, we should always desire to see the Lord lead the way. The words suppose the Lord passive for awhile, suffering His enemies to rage, but restraining His power. Israel beseeches Him to "Arise", as elsewhere to "Awake", "Gird on his sword", and other similar expressions. We, also may thus importunately cry unto the Lord, that He would be pleased to make bare His arm, and plead His own cause.

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 2. "As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God." The psalmist adds a striking figure to illustrate how easily God can overthrow the machinations of our enemies, comparing them to *smoke which vanishes away when blown upon by the wind* or *wax which melts before the fire*. We consider it utterly incredible that such a formidable array of opposition should be made to disappear in a moment. But the Spirit takes this way, chiding the fearfulness of our carnal minds, and teaching us that there is no strength in our enemies as we supposed. That we only allow the smoke of them to blind our

eyes, and the solid mass of resistance that they present to deceive us into a forgetfulness of the truth, that the mountains themselves flow down at the presence of the Lord.

Calvin

Verse 4. "Sing unto God, sing praises to his name ..." To time and tune, with order and care, celebrate the character and deeds of God, the God of His people. Do it again and again, and let the praise, with resolution of heart, be all directed to Him. Sing not for ostentation, but devotion; not to be heard of men, but of the Lord Himself; sing not to the congregation, but "unto God."

Spurgeon

Verse 6. "God setteth the solitary in families ..." Gospel churches, like families, have a Master over them – Christ the Son and the Firstborn. There are saints of various ages, sizes, and standing – some fathers, some young men, and some children. There are provisions suitable for them all, and stewards to give them their portion of meat in due season, who are the ministers of the Word. And there are laws and rules, by which they are directed and regulated, so that everything is kept in good decorum.

John Gill

Verse 9. "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary."

God's mercy compared to a shower of rain.

- (1) It is direct from heaven.
- (2) It is pure and unmixed.
- (3) No one has monopoly of it.
- (4) There is no substitute for it.
- (5) It is sovereignly dispensed – as to, Time, Place, Manner, and Measure.
- (6) It works efficiently.
- (7) Prayer can plead for it.

There are seasons when these showers fall.

- (1) In the house of God.
- (2) In the means of Grace.
- (3) In prayer.
- (4) In affliction.
- (5) When saints are weary – through working, through sickness, through non-success.
- (6) By the Holy Spirit refreshing the heart.

These showers are meant to confirm God's people.

"Whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance ..."

They are needed now.

"Whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, *when it was weary.*"

Hints to the Village Preacher

Verse 10. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor." While the congregation of Israel dwelt in the wilderness in all its poverty, God rained down His provision in the manna upon them. Likewise, He will not see His spiritual Israel – the Church – in absolute want as she dwells in the wilderness of this world, but give her that portion of "the True Bread" that came down from heaven for her life.

(To be continued)



John Bunyan's New Eyes

By

Alexander Whyte

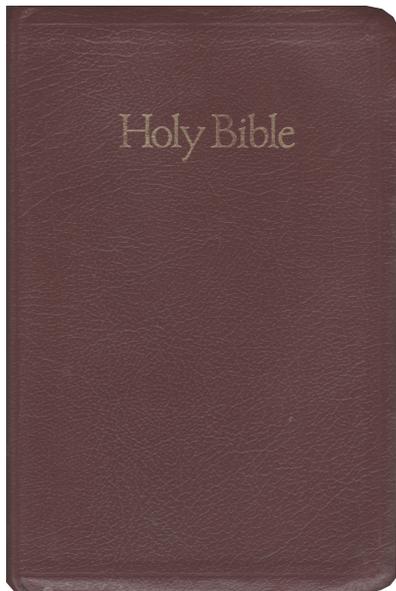
"And, now, I began to look into the Bible with new eyes, and read as I never did before. And especially the Epistles of the Apostle Paul were sweet and pleasant to me. And, indeed, I was then never out of the Bible, either by reading or meditation."

From the beginning to the ending of his *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan describes to us the successive eyes with which he read his Bible from first to last. When Bunyan first began to read his Bible it was with the eyes of a child. As a child he greatly delighted in the enthralling stories of the Bible. The garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, Noah and his ark, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. Then through the native strength and the native originality of his mind (though he never went to the schools of the Fathers or to the early Councils) he began to look into his Bible with the eyes of a student. And then, after that, the eyes of a sinner intent on seeking his own salvation were given of God to Bunyan. And as we go on through his wonderful book we rejoice to trace how the eyes of a true saint are more and more given him of God – the eyes of his understanding being enlightened that he might know the hope of God's calling and the riches of His inheritance in the saints.

After Bunyan had once got his new eyes, this was how he immediately began to read his Bible, and especially his New Testament. "Methought I was as if I had seen Him born; as if I had seen Him grow up; as if I had seen Him walk through this world from His cradle to His cross; to which also when he came, I saw how gently He gave Himself to be hanged and nailed upon it for my sins and wicked doings. Also, as I mused upon this His progress, that scripture dropped upon my spirit – He was ordained for the slaughter." Let us learn to read our New Testaments in that way. For reading in that way is not only a sure evidence to us that we have got new eyes from God, but as we go on to read in that way our eyes will become more and more new every day. Scale after scale will fall from off our eyes till we shall see deeper and deeper into the Word of God every time we open it. This is what has been called reading with "the eye on the object," which is the only true and fruitful way of reading the Bible and everything else. "Especially the Epistles of the Apostle were sweet and pleasant to me," says Bunyan. If Dr. Thomas Goodwin is right when he says that reconciliation is the main argument of the Bible, then that argument comes to its consummation and its crown in Paul's Epistles. That was Paul's own conviction and assurance about his Epistles and about his whole apostleship, for he claims in every

Epistle that to him above all other men had been committed the word of reconciliation. And, if that is so, then Bunyan is entirely right in his immense indebtedness to Paul, and in his immense enjoyment of Paul.

When you sit down at night for a little heart-sweetening reading after another heart-embittering day, to what part of the Bible do you turn your eyes? Luther said that since he was always sinning so he was always reading the Romans and Galatians. Now since you are always sinning, what are you always reading? Well for myself, I often sweeten my heart at the end of the day with this passage out of Paul: "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." Now, if you know any thing in all the world more sweet to the sin-embittered heart than that, I would like you to tell me where I can find it. Many of our new eyes have been fastened, like mine, upon this also: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." And on this: "Who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." and on this: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."



"And, indeed, I was then never out of the Bible," our author goes on. Just so. When once any man has really got his new eyes from God, and once he has fairly gone into his Bible with his new eyes, that man will never again be long out of his Bible. His daily life will not let him be long out of his Bible. And especially his evil heart will not let him be long out of his Bible. His house may be full of books, and not bad books either; but his Bible is the only book of them all that wholly answers to his life around him, and especially to his life within him. "I was then never out of the Bible." Have you ever had a time when your whole life of which you could so speak? Was it when you first

got your new eyes from God? Or was it when some great sin of yours threatened to find you out? Or again, was it in some great shipwreck of desire and hope, when all your other books, on which you had fed your desire and your hope, had suddenly become so much dust and ashes in your mouth? A time of a great bereavement also sends some people back in a hurry to their deserted Bible. Or when they sat solitary, and when no man cared for their soul, then their Bible began to come to its own again in their broken hearts, and then the forsaken soul rose up out of the dust of death, and said: "I will go and will return to my first Husband for then it was better with me than now."

"And now I began to look into the Bible with new eyes, and read as I never did before. And especially the Epistles of the Apostle Paul were sweet and pleasant to me. And indeed, I was then never out of the Bible either by reading or meditation." Delightful! Delightful! ***But what is this?*** For I turn the leaf of my Grace Abounding and I find this: "I am convinced that I am an ignorant sot; and that I lack those blessed gifts that other good people have: the blessed gifts of spiritual knowledge and spiritual understanding. For I am tossed continually between the devil and my own ignorance, and am so perplexed, especially at some times, that I cannot tell what to do." Now, are you not – some of you – secretly glad to hear that? Does that not immensely comfort you? I am sure it does. At any rate, it immensely comforts me. To know that John Bunyan with all his new eyes and with all his rapturous love for Paul's Epistles, yet at some times felt himself to be an sot of a man; and to be tossed about by the devil and by his own ignorance of divine things – does that not comfort you? At any rate, I say, I for one get great comfort and great hope out of all that – as well as out of such corresponding Scriptures as these: "I am dust and ashes," said Abraham; "I am a worm and no man," said one of the psalmists; "I am as a beast before thee," said another psalmist; "I was shapen in iniquity," said the greatest and best of all the psalmists; "I am a man of unclean lips," said the most evangelical of all the prophets; "I abhor myself," said Job; "I am sold under sin," said Paul; "I am an ignorant sot, tossed about by the devil at his will," said Bunyan. And so on – in every sincere and genuine saint of God who

is undergoing a great sanctification for a great service on earth and in heaven.

Dear sin tormented people of God! Do not be too much cast down! You are in good company. You are in the best of company. Angels envy you and your company. They would exchange all their glory for such an experience and for such a prospect as yours. Therefore, comfort your hearts with these words, and with a thousand more words like them that you will find in Paul's so sweet and so pleasant Epistles.

Boys and Girls

Dear Boys and Girls,

Billy and Sam two boys who lived beside the sea. You can imagine that they find all kinds of interesting things to do. One day, as they were playing on the shore, Sam said to Billy, "Let's each build a float out of whatever we can find on the beach." So off they went, back and forward, bringing all sorts of things – tin cans, bits of wood – pieces of oiled rope – all kinds of things you find scattered on beaches. At last they got it all sorted out into two heaps and each set-to and built a raft.

My, how proud they were of those rafts! They got a loan of two long pieces of rope, and tied one on each of the rafts, and began to have great fun floating them on the bobbing waves.

All too soon, it was lunch time, and they had to go home. "We must make our rafts secure," said Billy, "so that we won't lose them." On saying this, he looked around for a safe place to put his raft. He noticed that on some rocks a little distance away there were a few iron hooks embedded on the rocks, just ideal for tying up the rafts. So off he went and clambered over the rocks, hauling his raft with him. At last, he got it well and truly tied up. When he got back to Sam he

noticed that Sam had taken a bit of stick and had pushed it deep into the sand, and tied his raft to it. "Don't be silly, Sam," said Billy, "the tide will come in and take it away." "Well, I'll risk that," said Sam. "I can't be bothered going over those rocks." So, off they went for their lunch.

When they returned, how sad Sam was, for there, floating off in the distance, was his raft. The tide had of course, come in, and the sand was not solid enough to hold the stick in place and so, this was the result. "You should have taken the effort to secure it like mine on a solid foundation," said Billy.

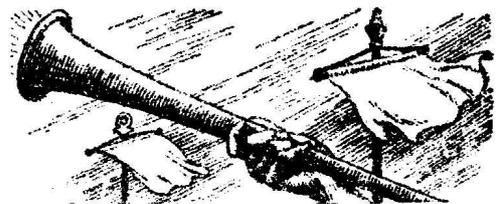
I am sure you would all agree, boys and girls, with Billy. And, you know, there's a similar story in the Bible, at the end of chapter seven of Matthew's gospel. I'll tell you what to do. Read it over and see if you think it's like the story of Billy and Sam. In my next letter I will tell you how I think it's like the story.

Here is a verse from the Bible that will help you to start thinking: - "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1st Corinthians chapter 3 verse 11)

Love,
Mrs Seaton

Doctrinal Preaching - The Need of the Hour -

By J. C. Ryle



The explanation of this boneless, nerveless, jelly-fish condition of soul (that we see today) is not difficult to find. To begin with, the heart of man is naturally in the dark about religion – has no intuitive sense of truth – and really *needs* instruction and illumination. Beside this, the natural heart in most men hates exertion in religion and cordially dislikes patient, painstaking enquiry. Above all, the natural heart generally likes the praise of others, shrinks from collision, and loves to be thought charitable and liberal. The whole result is that a kind of

broad religious "agnosticism" just suits an immense number of people, and specially suits young persons. They are content to shovel aside all disputed points as rubbish, and if you charge them with indecision, they will tell you: "I do not pretend to understand controversy; I decline to examine controverted points. I daresay it is all the same in the long run" Who does not know that such people swarm and abound everywhere?

Now I do beseech all who read this paper to beware of this undecided state of mind in religion. It is a pestilence that walketh in darkness, and a destruction that killeth in noonday. It is a lazy, idle frame of soul which, doubtless, saves men the trouble of thought and investigation, but it is a frame of soul for which there is no warrant in the Bible. For your own soul's sake dare to make up your mind what you believe, and dare to have positive distinct views of truth and error. Never, never be afraid to hold decided doctrinal opinions; and let no fear of man, and no morbid dread of being thought party spirited, narrow, or controversial, make you rest contented with a bloodless, boneless, tasteless, colourless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity.

Mark what I say. If you want to *do good* in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut doctrinal religion. If you believe little, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology; by telling men roundly of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice; by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross, and His precious blood; by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Saviour; by peaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit; by lifting up the brazen serpent; by telling men to look and live – to believe, repent, and be converted.

This – this is the only teaching which for eighteen centuries God has honoured with success, and is honouring at the present day both at home and abroad. Let the clever advocates of a broad and undogmatic theology – the preachers of the Gospel of earnestness, and sincerity and cold morality – let them, I say, show us at this day an English

village or parish, city or town or district which has been evangelized without "dogma" by their principles. They cannot do it, and they never will. Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless thing. It may be beautiful to some minds, but it is childless and barren. There is no getting over facts. The good that is done in the earth may be comparatively small. Evil may abound, and ignorant impatience may murmur and cry out that Christianity has failed. But, depend on it, if you want to "do good" and shake the world, we must fight with the old apostolic weapons, and stick to dogma. No dogma, no fruits! No positive Evangelical doctrine, no evangelization!

Mark once more what I say. The men who have done most for the Church in England, and made the deepest mark on their day and generation, have always been men of most decided and distinct doctrinal views. It is the bold, decided, outspoken man, like Capel Molyneux, or our grand old Protestant champion Hugh McNeile, who makes a deep impression, and set people thinking, and "turns the world upside down. It was "dogma" in the apostolic ages which emptied the heathen temples and shook Greece and Rome. It was "dogma" which awoke Christendom from its slumbers at the time of the Reformation and spoiled the Pope of one third of his subjects. It was "dogma" which over a hundred years ago revived the Church in England in the days of Whitefield, Wesley, Venn, and Romaine, and blew up our dying Christianity into a burning flame ... It is doctrine – doctrine, clear, ringing doctrine – which, like the ram's horns at Jericho, casts down the oppositions of the devil and sin. Let us cling to decided doctrinal views, whatever some may please to say in these times, and we shall do well for ourselves, well for others, well for the Church in England, and well for Christ's cause in the world.