

You Shall Be My Witnesses

The Transatlantic History of the Prophetic Witness Movement

by Paul Wilkinson

“The chief fault of Christians today is that they do not make enough of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a good deal of preaching, alas! which is not the preaching of Christ, and there is a good deal of preaching of Christ which is good and true as far as it goes, but it does not go quite far enough, for it leaves out the good news of His coming again. It is good and right to preach Christ incarnate, Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ ascended, but if we would be true to the Scripture we must add one more note – Christ returning, Christ coming again. That is the testimony which God, we believe, has raised us up, all unworthy as we are, to make to this generation.”ⁱ

These words were spoken by the Anglican minister, Francis Scott Webster, on December 13th, 1917. The occasion was a crowded public meeting at the Queen’s Hall in London, which had been organised by one of the foremost Evangelical leaders of the day, Frederick Brotherton Meyer (1847-1929). Just four days prior to this historic meeting, British General Edmund Allenby liberated Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks during the Jewish feast of Chanukah. This momentous event “awoke in the hearts of many students of prophecy a new hope of the Lord’s near return.”ⁱⁱ

One prophecy student among the crowd of 3,000 who attended Queen’s Hall that day was a 16-year old boy by the name of Frederick Tatford (1901-1986). In his recollection of the meeting, Tatford, who was to become a prolific writer on biblical prophecy, described how “the atmosphere was electric and one felt almost as though the Lord might come that very night.”ⁱⁱⁱ The man who presided over the opening session was Anglican minister Hanmer Webb-Peploe, who began his opening address with these words:

“It is indeed a matter of rejoicing to realise that so many as are now gathered here before God are interested in the special subject now to

be considered and to think with holy hope and expectation that the Lord Jesus Christ may soon be among us, taking to Himself His bride to be for ever with Him.”^{iv}

The Queen’s Hall meeting in London effectively launched a new movement which was to shine God’s prophetic light into a nation darkened by war, *and* into a Church which had, to a large extent, lost sight of its “blessed hope”. Initially named the Advent Testimony Movement, it continues today as Prophetic Witness Movement International, and with the exception of one or two Bible institutes here in the United States, it is, to my knowledge, the oldest surviving ‘pre-trib’ organisation in the world. This paper will consider how the Movement came into being, by devoting particular attention to men and women on both sides of the Atlantic whose lives and ministries were knit together in the purposes of God. This is the story of some of God’s true prophetic witnesses, who faithfully sounded the midnight cry to a slumbering Church whilst proclaiming the Good News to a dying world.

The Prophecy Investigation Society

During the summer of 1917, two Baptist ministers, J.S. Harrison and Alfred Bird, contacted F.B. Meyer in London. With the First World War still raging in Europe, Harrison and Bird encouraged Meyer to bring an urgent wake-up call to the Church. Meyer responded by contacting Alfred Burton (Brethren) and Earl Langston (Anglican), chairman and secretary of the Prophecy Investigation Society.

The Prophecy Investigation Society (P.I.S.) was founded on May 24th, 1842, when Henry Montagu Villiers, later Bishop of Durham, convened a conference at St. George’s Anglican Church in Bloomsbury, London. His inspiration had been the Albury Park and Powerscourt Conferences of the 1820s and 1830s, which had brought together a number of Britain’s leading Evangelicals to study biblical prophecy. Many who had attended the Albury Conferences helped to establish this new Society, which, as Villiers outlined in his opening address in 1842, was to be dedicated to investigating “the certainty, nature, and scriptural prominence of the Second Advent”.^v Many leading prophecy scholars of the nineteenth century joined the P.I.S., including Edward Bickersteth, Alexander McCaul, Hugh McNeile, Henry

Grattan Guinness, E.W. Bullinger, David Baron, Walter Scott, J.C. Ryle, Sir Robert Anderson, Ada Ruth Habershon, and the much loved American pastor from North Carolina, Amzi Clarence Dixon, of whom more will be said later.

From the minutes of the Committee meetings it is clear that the Prophecy Investigation Society was predominantly historicist in its eschatology, at least until the latter part of the nineteenth century when futurism was given greater representation. A meeting of the P.I.S. in April 1897 was opened by Revd Marmaduke Washington, who gave a paper entitled, ‘The Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ – Are there *Two Distinct Phases* in His Second Advent?’ Six months later the meeting was opened by Sir Robert Anderson (1841-1918), former Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police who had led the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard during the infamous ‘Jack the Ripper’ case. Anderson had also been a close friend of John Nelson Darby, the founding father of Plymouth Brethrenism, and had preached with Darby in Ireland. Many dispensationalists have been indebted to Anderson’s writings, which include his classic work on Daniel’s seventy weeks, entitled *The Coming Prince* (1881).

Sir Robert Anderson was greatly respected in the United States and received numerous invitations to speak. He counted amongst his friends men like Cyrus Scofield, Amzi Dixon, Charles Alexander, and James M. Gray, all of whom enjoyed hospitality in his English home. When the Prophecy Investigation Society asked him to write a manual on Daniel’s seventy weeks, Anderson produced what would be his final treatise, entitled, *Unfulfilled Prophecy and ‘The Hope of the Church’* (1917). In his conclusion he wrote:

“If even a very few Christians in every place would begin to ‘speak often one to another’ about the Coming of the Lord, they would soon come together to pray for His Return ... and to pray the prayer which He Himself has given us, ‘Even so come, Lord Jesus.’”^{vi}

Sir Robert Anderson became an important ambassador for the Advent Testimony Movement, before his home-call in 1918.

Breakfast at Meyer’s

Back to the late summer of 1917, when F.B. Meyer contacted Alfred Burton and Earl Langston about the need for a new campaign in Britain to herald Christ's return.^{vii} Following their discussions, Meyer hosted a prayer breakfast in London on October 15th, to which he invited a small group of ministers. He asked these men to consider "whether, in view of the momentous happenings in Europe, it might not be desirable to awaken the church to consider the synchronising of those events with the predicted signs of the Lord's Second Advent." A pre-written statement was presented to the group as a basis for discussion. As Meyer later recalled,

"The unanimous sentiment was that the hour was ripe for the issuing of a call to the church ... The proposed statement of the outstanding facts on which all students of prophecy agreed was adopted."^{viii}

A second breakfast was arranged and the statement, later known as the 'Advent Testimony Manifesto,' was finalised. Events now began to take a dramatic turn. On October 31st, 1917, British and ANZAC forces under the command of General Allenby captured Beersheba from the Ottoman Turks; their sights were now set on Jerusalem. On November 2nd, in a letter written by British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild of the Zionist Federation, David Lloyd George's government formally approved "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (the Balfour Declaration). It seemed to F.B. Meyer and his colleagues that the Lord Himself was giving a clear signal for them to move forward in His sovereign purposes. The Advent Testimony Manifesto was finally released to the press on November 8th. Headlined 'The Significance of the Hour,' its seven points read as follows:

1. "That the present Crisis points towards the close of the Times of the Gentiles.
2. That the Revelation of our Lord may be expected at any moment when He will be manifested as evidently as to His disciples on the evening of His resurrection.
3. That the completed Church will be translated to be 'for ever with the Lord.'

4. That Israel will be restored to its own land in unbelief, and be afterwards converted by the Appearance of Christ on its behalf.
5. That all human schemes of reconstruction must be subsidiary to the Second Coming of the Lord, because all nations will then be subject to His rule.
6. That, under the reign of Christ, there will be a further great effusion of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh.
7. That the truths embodied in this statement are of the utmost practical value in determining Christian character and action with reference to the pressing problems of the hour.”^{ix}

Of the ten signatories to the Manifesto, several were already household names, not only in Britain but also here in the United States:

Dr. F.B. Meyer	Baptist	
Rev. Alfred Bird	Baptist	
Rev. J.S. Harrison	Baptist	
Dr. A.C. Dixon	Baptist	(member of the P.I.S.)
Pastor W. Fuller-Gooch	Independent	(member of the P.I.S.)
Dr. J. Stuart Holden	Anglican	(member of the P.I.S.)
Preb. H. Webb-Peploe	Anglican	(member of the P.I.S.)
Preb. F.S. Webster	Anglican	(member of the P.I.S.)
Dr. Dinsdale T. Young	Methodist	
Dr. G. Campbell-Morgan	Congregationalist	

F.B. Meyer later highlighted some of the implications of the Manifesto:

“The pressing duty of the church is to exercise her witnessing function. She is to bear witness to these and similar truths as they are contained in Scripture ... It is certain that such witness-bearing will incur dislike and opposition. It has always been so. Witnesses are often martyrs. But their lives, characters and words are seed-germs, which carry life, as the sea-birds carry to the coral isles the germs of vegetation.”^x

Interest was soon ignited not only in Britain, but also across Europe, America, Africa, India, and Australasia. With the world still reeling from its

first global conflict, “a torch had been lifted high to illumine the dark hours of the war and to cast its beams into the despondent hearts of God’s people.”^{xi} The Committee of the Prophecy Investigation Society unanimously endorsed the Manifesto, and after hearing Meyer address them in person, resolved to assist him in organising “a great public meeting in Queen’s Hall on the Lord’s Coming”.^{xii} The princely sum of £158 (\$263 at the time of writing) was guaranteed in order to secure the venue.

Queen’s Hall, London

All who attended the Queen’s Hall meeting on December 13th, 1917, were still coming to terms with the dramatic news of Allenby’s liberation of Jerusalem, just four days earlier. The atmosphere, as Tatford described it, was “electric”. The following extracts are taken from some of the eleven addresses which were given that day:

“Signs we discern; signs we appreciate in their solemn importance; signs we would study in the light of the Divine Word. But we are not looking for signs. We are looking for Christ.”^{xiii}

(William Fuller Gooch, 1843-1929)

“From the hour of ascension until now it has been true that He might have come at any moment. I am quite sure that I speak what is in the hearts of all God’s waiting children when I say that we should rejoice indeed if by His coming He ended the very testimony we are bearing to Him today.”^{xiv}

(George Campbell Morgan, 1863-1945)

“Ah! How beautiful we should be if our faces were ever turned towards the light; how we should witness for our Master if the reflection of the Morning Star could be seen in our eyes!”^{xv}

(Alfred Taylor Schofield, 1846-1929)

Another speaker on the platform that day was the Anglican vicar, John Stuart Holden (1874-1934). Holden was “a perennial favourite”^{xvi} not only in Britain, but also across North America, where he befriended many leading dispensationalists. In April 1912 he was due to speak at a Christian Conservation Congress at Carnegie Hall, New York. However, on April 9th,

just a day before his voyage from Southampton, his wife fell ill and he cancelled the trip. The ship he was due to set sail on was the *R.M.S. Titanic*. On April 20th, the *New York Times* reported that Holden had “narrowly escaped”^{xvii} disaster. Holden returned his unused ticket, but kept the envelope and had it mounted. In thanksgiving to God, he inscribed on the frame the words: “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction (Psa. 103:4).” It is the only surviving document of its type, and is today held at the Maritime Museum in Liverpool. I obtained this facsimile just a few months ago from a seller here in the United States:

F.B. Meyer – ‘Evangelical Comet’

Following the Queen's Hall meeting in 1917, "interest [in the Lord's return] spread like a prairie fire"^{xviii} across Britain, and soon monthly meetings were being held in London. The Advent Testimony Movement, soon to be renamed the Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement, was launched. The first Council comprised the ten signatories to the Manifesto, plus several additional members of the Prophecy Investigation Society. Seeking to harness the mounting interest, the Council established what they called The

Fellowship of the Blessed Hope, which drew into the fold lay people and clergymen who committed themselves to prayer, witness, and the distribution of literature. The name was later changed to the rather less inspiring Advent Testimony Prayer Union. In June 1919 a monthly magazine was launched, edited by F.B. Meyer, called *The Advent Preparation Prayer Union Bulletin*. Thankfully it was later renamed the *Advent Witness*, and continues today as *Prophetic Witness* (Dr. Thomas Ice has an article in next month's edition.)

The first person to be appointed president of this new Movement was F.B. Meyer. Biographer Ian Randall suggests that with the exception of John Clifford, "Meyer was probably the most celebrated Baptist minister of the early twentieth century."^{xix} Born in London and of German descent (his great-grandfather was a close friend of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach), Meyer was a much loved minister, a tireless champion for the poor and

needy, a formidable crusader against immorality, and a zealous supporter of foreign missions. Meyer's national *and* international reputation can be attributed, in part, to his book sales. A popular writer of biblical biographies and devotional commentaries, five million copies of his books were sold during his lifetime. Meyer is perhaps best known for his holiness teaching, which was a dominant theme at the annual Keswick Convention in the Lake District of England; he was one of Keswick's "oldest and most trusted speakers".^{xx} He also preached at the Llandrindod Wells Convention in mid-Wales in 1903/1904 immediately before the great Welsh Revival. Meyer spoke about the Revival to a large crowd in Los Angeles in 1905.

F.B. Meyer served as president of the Free Church Council (1904), president of the World's Sunday School Association (1907), and president of the Baptist Union (1907). One British newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, described him as "The Archbishop of the Free Churches,"^{xxi} and another, the *British Weekly*, hailed him as "The evangelical comet of our age"^{xxii} on account of his many trips overseas. One country which he visited many times and grew increasingly fond of was the United States.

In 1899, the *New York Observer* described Meyer as a preacher of "international fame" whose services "are constantly sought by churches over the wide and increasing empire of Christendom".^{xxiii} The *New York Times* frequently covered his visits to America. According to biographer William Fullerton, who knew him well, Meyer "had so many crossings of the Atlantic that he lost count of them," so much so that at one meeting he was introduced as "Dr. Meyer, the ubiquitous."^{xxiv} The story of F.B. Meyer's transatlantic connection with dispensationalist leaders in the United States begins in the historic English city of York.

The Little Vestry

On May 1st, 1872, Meyer began his first pastorate at Priory Street Baptist Church in the heart of the city. A year later he was the first minister to welcome D.L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey to Britain. Meyer opened his church to them for the next five weeks, effectively launching their first great mission to Britain which would last for three years, result in thousands of souls being saved, and propel the two American evangelists onto the world stage.

During those early weeks in York, the two young ministers – Moody (36) and Meyer (26) – prayed together in the Priory Street church. As Meyer later recalled,

“What an inspiration when this great and noble soul first broke into my life! ... The little vestry there – how vividly I remember it – was the scene of our long and earnest prayers as we knelt around the leather-covered table in the middle of the room ... and I remember that Mr. Moody, at the great Free Trade Hall, Manchester, referred to that little room as the fountain from which the river of blessing for the whole country had sprung.”^{xxv}

During the course of my research I discovered that I myself had been in that “little vestry” nearly twenty years ago. In February, 1990, I was born again on the campus of York University, and a few months later baptised by an Anglican minister ... at Priory Street Baptist Church. Here are a couple of photographs of a rather nervous Paul Wilkinson giving testimony and being baptised next to the pulpit where D.L. Moody and F.B. Meyer preached from:

I am
told
that

American tourists still visit the Baptist church in York, just to see the table where Moody and Meyer knelt together in prayer. As Fullerton writes,

“That was the beginning of a life-long devotion between the two men. Moody never forgot that Meyer was the first minister heartily to welcome him to England, and Meyer never forgot that he learnt from Moody the art of winning men and women for Christ.”

As Fullerton continued,

“In visiting the [Moody] Bible Institute in Chicago two years ago [1927], I at once noticed that in the office, there were but two large photographs on the wall – D.L. Moody and F.B. Meyer”.^{xxvi}

Moody was greatly inspired by Meyer's teaching on holiness and the consecrated life. He was an enthusiastic promoter of his books and was keen for him speak at his Northfield General Conference for Christian Workers, which officially began in 1880. Meyer spoke at 'the Northfield Convention' for the first time in 1891, and was a regular speaker thereafter. In 1894, he received from Moody the following invitation:

“Cable me that you will give Northfield the month of August and I will work night and day to get ministers there for all the month, and if you could lay out a course and let me advertise it we will give you ministers from all over the land ... This country is ready for your teaching as never before, and you can touch every part of it if you will come.”^{xxvii}

Three years later, in February 1897, Moody arranged a series of ten meetings at Carnegie Hall in New York. He cabled his son: “I want you to fill it for Meyer.”^{xxviii} On February 11th, the *New York Times* reported that “clergy and religious workers were present in such large numbers as to leave standing room only.”^{xxix} On February 16th, Moody wrote Meyer the following letter:

“My Dear Meyer,

My dear Brother, let me tell you how glad I am that you came to this country. I find it is much easier to preach in Boston and New York than it was last month. The ministers have got a great blessing ... I trust the Good Lord will take you safely back to your own land, and soon bring you back to this country. It will never be known in time what amount of good you have done in fourteen days you have been with us, and hundreds of thousands will follow you across the deep with their prayer. I hope you will let me know the first day you can be with us again, and stay as long as you can and help us in this great country, for our need is great.

Your true friend,
D.L. Moody.”

Meyer himself described that fortnight in America as “certainly the most wonderful time of my life”. During his visit he also spoke at Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston, where the meeting was “crowded to

suffocation”.^{xxx} For twenty-five years the Clarendon Street church had been pastored by Adoniram Judson Gordon (1836-1895), one of the foremost leaders of the Bible and Prophecy Conference Movement and the man who inspired D.L. Moody to embrace dispensationalism. Gordon had also been a close friend of F.B. Meyer, who wrote the introduction to his classic work, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (1894). Meyer in turn described Gordon as his “beloved friend,”^{xxxxi} and as “one of the most child-like and massive men”^{xxxii} that he had ever known. He was, of course, referring to Gordon’s stature *in Christ!*

Such was his growing reputation in the United States that in 1898 Meyer was invited to Washington to open the Senate in prayer; he also spoke at length to President William McKinley, who made a lasting impression on him.^{xxxiii} On May 28th, 1911, the *New York Times* reported that Meyer was in America again, this time to present President William Taft with “an address prepared by the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, congratulating the President on his proposal for the general treaty of arbitration between the United States and Great Britain.”^{xxxiv} One of Meyer’s closest friends, G. Campbell Morgan, also enjoyed the company of some of America’s presidents.

Known as “the Prince of Expositors,”^{xxxv} Morgan was well known in the States, crossing the Atlantic fifty-four times to minister in churches and Bible institutes across the country. In December 1902, he and his wife Nancy were presented to President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House, where they were given “a most gracious interview, and received the President’s signed photograph as a souvenir of the visit.”^{xxxvi} Years later Morgan received a letter, dated February 16th, 1914, from President Woodrow Wilson, in which the President expressed his deep regret that illness had prevented him not only from hearing Morgan speak in Washington, but also from having a meal with him at the White House. The President sent Morgan “the most cordial greetings and the most sincere expressions of interest of the deepest sort in the great work you are doing”.^{xxxvii} He would later hear Morgan speak in person during subsequent visits he made to the capital.

The opportunities which the Lord opened up for F.B. Meyer, G. Campbell Morgan, and others who went on to pioneer with them the Advent Testimony

Movement, can be explained, in large measure, by the close fellowship they enjoyed with some of American's leading churchmen ... and with one man in particular: D.L. Moody.

The Man who Moved the World

“Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all; gone out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal ... I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1855. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever.”^{xxxviii}

Few men have been used as mightily by God to win souls to Christ than Dwight Lyman Moody. Cyrus Scofield, who knew him well, paid him the following tribute: “in this humble servant of Jesus, the Spirit had the using of one of the great natural preachers of all time.”^{xxxix} G. Campbell Morgan, whom Moody described as “the most remarkable man I have ever had at Northfield,” said of Moody: “I more than revered him: I loved him.”^{xl}

Moody's long-standing association with Britain began in 1867, when he crossed the Atlantic for the first time to listen to some of the great Evangelical leaders of the day – men like Lord Shaftesbury, Charles Spurgeon, and George Müller. In a letter to his brother Samuel, however, it is clear that Moody's first impressions of ‘Old England’ were less than favourable:

“I was seasick most of the way. I do not expect to visit this country again. One trip across the water is enough for me. I do not like the old country as well as our own. I cannot tell you how glad I am I was born and brought up in America. I shall be glad when I get back. I am not sorry I came for I very much value the information I am gaining here. But it is a horrible place to live in.”^{xli}

Thankfully for Britain, and the thousands who came to know Christ through Moody and Sankey, his first *dreary* impressions did not last. Writing to an English friend later that year, he said:

“God is working in our land and we are praying for you, that England and America may be blessed together ... I cannot tell you how very much I enjoyed my trip in your dear land. My mind is often wandering off over the Atlantic to your home and my heart goes out to my dear Saviour in gratitude and love for ever permitting me to visit Old England, and there become acquainted with so many whom I expect to meet in the better country”.^{xlii}

D.L. Moody was greatly influenced by the Plymouth Brethren, especially the writings of John Nelson Darby and Charles Henry Mackintosh. Moody’s son William later recalled how his father would invite to the family home any member of the Brethren who was visiting Chicago, eager “to learn from him any new truth or exposition.”^{xliii} One member of the Brethren who greatly impacted Moody in a *different* way was the ‘Boy Preacher’ from Manchester, England – ‘Harry’ (Henry) Moorhouse. The two met for the first time in 1867.

Moody had been ministering out of town when 17-year old ‘Harry’ first spoke in his church. Upon his return, Moody’s wife Emma informed him that the young man had preached “a little differently” to him, because, she said, “he tells the worst sinners that God loves them”. “Then he is wrong,” replied Moody, but his resistance was soon broken when he heard the young man preach from John 3:16. As Moody recalled,

“I had never heard anything quite like it ... He preached the most extraordinary sermon from that verse ... I never knew up to that time that God loved us so much. This heart of mine began to thaw out; I could not keep back the tears. It was like news from a far country; I just drank it in ... I used to preach that God was behind the sinner with a double-edged sword ready to hew him down. I have got done with that. I preach now that God is behind him with love, and he [the sinner] is running away from the God of love.”^{xliv}

The rest, as they say, is wonderful history. ‘Harry’ Moorhouse, who went to be with the Lord at the age of 40, became known as “the man who moved the man who moved the world”.^{xlv}

In 1899, Dwight L. Moody received his own home-call, at the age of 62. When Moody’s son, William, compiled a biography of his life, only two tributes from the many hundreds he received were included. The two chosen were from “close associates of later years who were peculiarly near”^{xlvi} to his father – F.B. Meyer and G. Campbell Morgan. In 1900, William Moody asked Meyer and Morgan to continue his father’s work at Northfield,^{xlvii} which they did for a number of years.

An American in London

The only American signatory to the Advent Testimony Manifesto of 1917 was Amzi Clarence Dixon (1854-1925), the indefatigable pastor, expositor, evangelist and missionary from near Shelby in North Carolina. Dixon’s belief in the pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church, combined with his “unquenchable desire for the salvation of souls,”^{xlviii} made him a powerful witness for the Lord on both sides of the Atlantic.

Dixon travelled to Britain for the first time in 1889 to attend the World’s Sunday School Convention in London. In 1905 he was back again, this time sharing the platform with F.B. Meyer at the Baptist World Congress. During his stay in London, Dixon dined with Sir Robert Anderson, ministered at the late Charles Spurgeon’s Metropolitan Tabernacle, and preached for G. Campbell Morgan at Westminster Chapel. Shortly after, he took up the pastorate at Moody’s Church in Chicago (1906-1911), before pastoring the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London for the next eight years (1911-1919). Two events which occurred during his time in the English capital are worthy of note, not because of any *direct* bearing they had on the Advent Testimony Movement, but as a reminder of what it means to be a true, prophetic witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. “The Jew in Palestine!”

One Sunday afternoon a bomb exploded in the gallery of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. It had been planted by a member of the suffragette movement,

which campaigned for equal voting rights for women. A charred note read: “Put your religion into practice, and see that women obtain their freedom.”^{xlx} The British arm of the suffragette movement was led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel. Nicknamed ‘the Queen of the Mob,’ Christabel Pankhurst (1880-1958) was imprisoned several times for her militancy, and for a time fled the country. At the end of the First World War, however, she picked up a book on prophecy by F.B. Meyer in a second-hand bookshop,¹ and later testified that having previously lived in “an atmosphere of illusion,”^{li} she was now awakened to the reality of Christ’s return and her own need of the Saviour. She later wrote:

“Those days of the suffrage campaign were the days of political childhood – now is the time to put away childish things, to abandon the childish, nay, foolish dream of a human-made Utopia, and in its stead hold fast, rejoicing, to the certainty that the Lord cometh.”^{lii}

In 1921, Christabel Pankhurst left England and settled in the Canadian province of British Columbia, where she came to faith in Christ and entered into fellowship with the Plymouth Brethren. A year later she embarked on the first of several speaking tours of the United States and Canada, which were a huge success. After hearing reports, F.B. Meyer invited Pankhurst back to Britain to speak on behalf of the Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement, which she did in 1926. Accompanied by leading figures within the Movement, she spoke to packed audiences about her disillusionment with politics and her devotion to Christ, and many souls were saved.^{liii} In her first book, *‘The Lord Cometh’: The World Crisis Explained* (1923), Pankhurst declared that the signs of the times were “witnessing irresistibly to the truth that He is coming, and coming soon.”^{liiv} In her next book, *Pressing Problems of the Closing Age* (1924), she wrote:

“The Jew in Palestine! It is the most joyful thing that has happened since the resurrection and ascension of the Lord, because it is the decisive sign of His return.”^{liv}

Christabel Pankhurst spoke on behalf of the Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement for a number of years. In 1936 she was made a Dame of the British Empire, before moving to Los Angeles, where she “fell asleep” in Christ in 1958.

2. “Three Themes of a Hero”

The second event which occurred during A.C. Dixon’s pastorate in London is connected to the Day of Prayer he hosted at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on February 29th, 1912. One of the men he invited to the meeting was a Baptist pastor from Glasgow, Scotland, by the name of John Harper.

Harper had recently spent three months ministering at the Moody Church in Chicago, during which time the church had experienced “one of the most wonderful revivals in its history”.^{lvi} He had not been back in Britain long, however, when he was asked to return and continue his ministry. Harper quickly made arrangements for himself and his six-year old daughter, Nana, to travel back to America on board the *Lusitania*, but decided to delay their departure for one week, so that they could sail on a new ship which was about to make its maiden voyage. This was the same maiden voyage – that of the *Titanic* – which John Stuart Holden ‘missed’ in order to look after his sick wife.

The *Titanic* struck an iceberg at 11:40pm on April 14th, 1912. As the call was issued for passengers to vacate their cabins, Harper wrapped his daughter in a blanket, told her that she would see him again one day, and passed her to one of the crewmen. After watching her safely board one of the lifeboats, he removed his life-jacket and gave it to one of the other passengers. One survivor distinctly remembered hearing him shout, “Women, children and *the unsaved* into the lifeboats!” Harper then ran along the decks pleading with people to turn to Christ, and with the ship sinking, he called upon the *Titanic’s* orchestra to play, ‘Nearer, my God, to Thee’. Gathering people around him on deck, he then knelt down, and “with holy joy in his face” raised his arms in prayer. As the ship began to lurch, he jumped into the icy waters and swam frantically to all he could reach, beseeching them to turn to the Lord Jesus and be saved. Finally, as hypothermia set in, John Harper sank beneath the waters and passed into the Lord’s presence; he was 39.

Four years later, a young Scotsman by the name of Aguilla Webb stood up in a meeting in Hamilton, Canada, and gave the following testimony:

“I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought Mr. John Harper of Glasgow, also on a piece of wreck, near me. ‘Man,’ he said, ‘are you saved?’ ‘No,’ I said. ‘I am not.’ He replied, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’ The waves bore him away; but, strange to say brought him back a little later, and he said, ‘Are you saved now?’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘I cannot honestly say that I am.’ He said again, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,’ and shortly after he went down; and there, alone in the night, and with two miles of water under me, I believed. I am John Harper’s last convert.”^{lvii}

In a tribute to Harper, which was published in 1912 under the heading, ‘The Three Themes of a Hero,’ William Andrew of Glasgow noted that the three themes of John Harper’s preaching had been “the Cross of Christ, God’s marvellous grace to man, and the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”^{lviii}

The Certainty of Christ’s Return

Although Amzi Dixon was unable to attend the historic Queen’s Hall meeting on December 13th, 1917, he wrote a letter to F.B. Meyer which was read out that day. In his letter, he outlined twelve “certainties” relating to the Second Coming, the final three of which read as follows:

10. “*It is certain* ... that we ought to be expecting His return for His people at any moment.
11. *It is certain* that this ‘Blessed Hope’ of the Lord’s return for us at any moment makes us, not mystical dreamers, but faithful servants ...
12. *It is certain* that the hope of Christ’s return constrains us to purity of life ... even as He is pure.”

Dixon signed off his letter “In the joyful hope that the Lord may return for us at any moment”.^{lix}

The man who had touched many lives on both sides of the Atlantic received his home-call in Baltimore on June 14th, 1925. At his funeral, W.L. Pettingill read the following words from Dixon’s book, *The Bright Side of Death*, which was published the same year that the *Titanic* went down:

“There is only one thing better than dying, and that is to be alive when the Lord of Life shall come in glory. I do not desire death, and try to shun it, for I want to do all the good I can, and remain, if possible, till the day of His glorious appearing. But if death does come, I shall welcome it as a vanquished enemy”^{lx}.

Conclusion

On November 2nd, 1926, at a meeting of the Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement at the Queen’s Hall in London, Alfred Henry Burton highlighted the obligation which rested upon all who heralded Christ’s return:

“These gatherings will fail if they do not result in the salvation of those who are lost. But we thank God we have seen it in other places where this witness has been given; we have seen worldly people finding salvation in Christ, and thus becoming members of that church which will be caught up in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.”^{lxi}

In 1929, Alfred Burton succeeded F.B. Meyer as president of the Movement. Though little has been written about Burton, one striking piece of information came to light during my research for this year’s conference. Last year I concluded my paper on John Nelson Darby and Christian Zionism by reading from accounts of Darby’s final days in April 1882. I have since discovered that the author of one of those accounts, previously known only by his initials, A.H.B.,^{lxii} was Alfred Henry Burton, one of Darby’s closest friends. It strikes me as being extremely significant that as Darby passed into the presence of the Lord, he was holding Burton’s hand.^{lxiii} It was as if Darby’s lifelong work in recovering and popularising the doctrine of the pre-tribulation Rapture had been passed on, like a torch, to men like Burton who were called by God to champion the same truth, and to herald the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The story of Elijah and Elisha came to mind (2 Kgs. 2:11-15).

Today the Movement, which Alfred Burton so faithfully served for many years, continues to herald Christ’s any-moment return. Known today as Prophetic Witness Movement International (PWMI), I am privileged to serve

on the present Council; Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost and Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum are honorary vice-presidents.

In his address before the historic Queen's Hall meeting in London in December, 1917, Francis Scott Webster introduced a song to those who had gathered that day to hear about the Lord's return, a song which, he hoped, would make as much of an impression on them as it had made on him:

“There is an old hymn I used to sing when a boy – I loved it because it had such a rollicking tune – but I never realised until perhaps twenty or thirty years ago – and I was not a boy then – what it really meant. It is full of the Advent Hope, and when you get a grip of it, or when it gets a grip of you, it will put backbone and hope and gladness into you. This is the chorus:–

‘Hold the fort, for I am coming!’
Jesus signals still.
Wave the answer back to heaven,
‘By Thy grace we will.’

Let men say what they like about the Bible. Let men doubt it if they please, and scoff at us who believe it for being fanatics. Christ said He is coming again, and we will hold the fort till He comes. Nothing helps us more to be true and steadfast than the glad expectation of our Lord's return in this generation.^{”lxiv}

At this point I would like to close my paper, as I did last year, by introducing a new song, which all of us at Hazel Grove Full Gospel Church in Stockport, England, pray “will put hope and gladness into you.” It is again written by our pastor, Andrew Robinson, and is our Christmas gift to you all.

Can You See?

Can you see the star shining bright?

**Over Bethlehem on this night.
See the shepherds watching their sheep,
In the fields where they lie asleep.**

*For unto us, a Child is born,
Unto us, a Son is given.*

**See a mother watching her Babe;
Wrapped in cloths, in a manger laid.
This shall be for you a sign.
Messiah of the royal line.**

*For unto us, a Child is born,
Unto us, a Son is given.*

*Suddenly an angel appeared
And glory shone around.
“Do not fear! Good tidings I bring,
For you and all mankind.”*

**Choirs of angels fill the sky,
Singing praise to God on high!
For today in David’s town,
A Saviour born to wear God’s crown.**

*For unto us, a Child is born,
Unto us, a Son is given.
The Prince of Peace, Emmanuel
Counsellor, so Wonderful!*

**Can you see a Cross on a hill?
The sky grows dark, and all is still.
See a mother watching her Babe,
Wrapped in cloths and laid in a grave.**

*For unto us, a Child is born,
Unto us, a Son is given.
The Prince of Peace, Emmanuel
Counsellor, so Wonderful!*

*Suddenly an angel appeared
And glory shone around.
“Do not fear! The Lord is not here,
He’s risen from the dead!”*

**Hallelujah! Praises ring!
Glory to the risen King!
Born to die and then to reign!
Jesus Christ will come again!**

*For unto us, a Child is born,
Unto us, a Son is given.*

**Hallelujah! Praises ring
Glory to the risen King!
Born to die and then to reign!
Jesus Christ will come again!**

*For unto us, a Child is born,
Unto us, a Son is given.
The Prince of Peace, Emmanuel
Counsellor, so Wonderful!*

**Can you see a Cross on a hill?
Can you see a Cross on a hill?
Can you see a Cross on a hill?**

*Words & music © 2008 Andrew D. Robinson; Musical Arrangement:
Graham Moir*

Copies of the CD and musical score are available free of charge from Hazel Grove Full Gospel Church,
68 London Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport, Cheshire, SK7 4AF (UK). Charity No. 1051785.

Email: grainforthe famine@hotmail.co.uk.

Endnotes

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- ^{xi} Tatford, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 27.
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- ^{xiv} 'Address by Rev. G. Campbell Morgan,' in *Advent Testimony Addresses*, p. 48.
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- ^{xxvi} Fullerton, *No Ordinary Man*, pp. 31-32.
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