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## Abstract

### Peculiar Ground

#### The Theology of Isaac Watts

by R. W. Wilkinson

The thesis is designed to demonstrate what was distinctive about Isaac Watts. It begins with a brief account of his life and background. There is no attempt at comprehensive coverage but rather a discussion of significant detail. Then follows a survey of Watts' work - first his poetry, then his prose.

Watts' writings on the Atonement are critically analysed, followed by his views on election and predestination. The purpose here is to demonstrate that Watts had a profound commitment to traditional theology, in particular to the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. However, he displays a thoroughly humane and reasonable attitude to the difficulties posed by this doctrine, and by the doctrine of predestination. Watts could fairly be described as a follower of Baxter whom he much admired. His salient characteristics were common sense and devotion to Scripture.

Against this background Watts' writings on the Trinity are considered. Here his pursuit of reason and his desire to help others and to reconcile conflicting opinions led him into much more stormy waters. His mature conviction was that God had covenanted with the pre-existent human soul of Christ in order to redeem the world. This mildly heretical doctrine, derived from Origen, served to deflect Watts from out and out Socinianism and Arianism, both of which creeds held a dangerous attraction for him. The possibility is explored that at the end of his life Watts had written tracts which were definitely Unitarian - and which were subsequently destroyed. This would account for the self-torturing anguish of the Solemn Address, Watts' desperate cry to God for help and guidance.

Lastly, the 'peculiar' gifts of Isaac Watts are stressed, so that the success of his religious verse can be evaluated. The qualities which he displayed in all his writings combined to produce his 'System of Praise', his enduring legacy to the Christian church. His heresy has been forgotten. But Watts' heresy helps us to understand his hymns, and his hymns help us to understand his heresy.

Peculiar Ground

The Theology of Isaac Watts

by R. W. Wilkinson

\* \* \*

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Master of Literature to the University of Durham.

Department of Theology

1981



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22 MAY 1984

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Declaration

So far as I know, none of the material contained in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in the University of Durham or in any other university.

My thesis is not based on joint research, but is entirely my own independent work.

*R. W. Wilkinson*

..  
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R. W. Wilkinson

April 1981.



Statement of Copyright

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## Preface

By and large biographers and critics of Isaac Watts fall into two groups: those who write from the head or from the heart. In the former group are literary critics who see Watts as an interesting but minor figure on the eighteenth century stage. In the latter are the committed hagiographers.

In this work I hope to throw some new light on Isaac Watts, by writing from both points of view. Not that I wish to oversimplify the problem by suggesting that all other writers are wholly in one camp or the other. Some of Watts' admirers are at the same time penetrating critics, while literary historians are often emotionally moved by Watts' poetry.

What I do suggest is that the hagiographers are reluctant to explore the question of Watts' heresy, and that uncommitted critics miss Watts' stature as a hymnographer. Take for example A. P. Davis, Watts' most recent biographer:

My ultimate purpose has been to present Watts as a typical and significant eighteenth century minor transitional figure whose works transmitted to that century the evangelical tendencies inherent in seventeenth century Puritanism.

Watts was certainly significant. But I do not believe that he was typical; he was far too original and individualistic. And one can only call him a minor figure if one ignores his achievements in the development of the English hymn - an achievement which the judicious and dispassionate Davis underestimates.

My belief is that Watts' peculiar genius can only be correctly assessed if his religious poetry receives its true desserts - and if his theological odyssey is followed to its probable conclusion.

Watts' personal commitment is best appreciated by studying his writings on the Atonement, his rational common sense by reading his views on election. Orthodox, sensible, charitable, humane - yet he had an intellectual wanderlust which took him, as he himself confessed, to the tents of Socinus. And it almost drove him mad.

The same gifts which enabled Watts to write 'When I survey' produced the 'Solemn Address', his desperate and bewildered appeal to God for guidance. My purpose is to explain how such differing works came from the same pen. If Watts emerges as a sad and self-pitying neurotic, nevertheless he is more real and more interesting than his biographers suggest.

Preface (continued)

I am glad here to express some debts of gratitude.

It has been a privilege to be an external student of the University of Durham. I am grateful to Professor Kingsley Barratt and to Mr. Gerald Bonner who initially encouraged me. Dr. Sheridan Gilley has proved a most inspiring and helpful tutor.

The Rev. John Henderson of Scarborough gave me an introduction to Dr. Geoffrey F. Nuttall who has generously offered me his time, both in conversation and correspondence.

I have benefited from the courtesy and efficiency of the staffs of the University Library, Durham, of Dr. Williams' Library in London and of the British Museum. The Registrars of the Universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen have kindly answered my questions about Watts' doctorates.

The Governors of Scarborough College have helped me with the costs of my studies. Mrs. Susan Pearson has typed my thesis with cheerful and prompt efficiency. And, last but not least, I must thank my wife and family for their forbearance while I have been with Dr. Watts.

Scarborough  
April 1981.

R.W.W.



## Chapter 1

### Historical Background

#### Brief Life

For three reasons my treatment of Watts' life will be brief indeed. First, my concern is primarily with his thought. Secondly, others have dealt with his life competently. Thirdly, nothing very much ever happened to Watts. One can say of Watts what Bernard Williams said of G. E. Moore: 'not a promising subject for a biography. He hardly did anything except think.' (1)

Nevertheless there are important details in Watts' long life (1674-1748) which illuminate and explain his thought. He was a strange mixture. In part a child of his time, he was also a survival from seventeenth century puritanism - and very much a revolutionary who blazed all sorts of trails for others. His background accounts for much of this mixture - though by no means all.

Watts' childhood and early manhood explain the marked cheerfulness of his religious verse. Traditionally he was suckled outside Southampton jail where his father was imprisoned as a dissenter during the persecution of Charles II's reign. His emotional hero-worship of William III was understandable against the persecution of dissenters under Charles II and James II. He became the pastor at Mark Lane on the day that King William's death

ushered in the reign of Queen Anne, the dreaded reactionary. And yet all turned out for the best. The principles of William the Deliverer triumphed, the enemies of truth received their deserts. 'Why was Jacob's name changed to Israel?' Daniel Burgess asked Watts - and was answered, 'Because the Almighty did not wish his people to be known as Jacobites'.

As a dissenter Watts was excluded from Oxford and Cambridge, thus encountering prejudice if not persecution. But he benefited educationally, in that the dissenting academies were rightly famed for their lively, progressive intellectual tone. Thomas Rowe's Academy was distinguished by its notable products - Samuel Say, John Neal, Archbishop Hort, Lord Barrington and Isaac Watts himself. De Sola Pinto (2) writes of Watts' poem Free Philosophy: 'These lines seem to me to express the ideal relationship between a tutor and a pupil of genius'. In view of later developments, Watts' Letter to Pocyon, 1696, is of interest and significance: 'When I have given my thoughts a loose, and let them rove without confinement, sometimes I seem to have carried reason even to the camp of Socinus, but then St. John gives my soul a twitch, and St. Paul bears me back again (if I mistake not his meaning) almost to the tents of John Calvin'. He was encouraged to think for himself.

This sturdy, Protestant background explains much of Watts' independence of thought. We read in Thomas

Gibbons' Memoirs that 'The hymns which were sung at the dissenting meeting at Southampton were so little to the gust of Mr. Watts that he could not forbear complaining of them to his father ...' When his father caustically told him to do better, Watts took him at his word. Sir Edward King advised Watts 'Young man, I hear that you make verses - let me advise you never to do it, but when you cannot help it'. Watts was not discouraged. In a letter to Benjamin Colman at the end of his life, he wrote: 'I ever own myself a protestant, and claim a right to think freely and judge for myself'.

Set against this bracing, somewhat deprived background occurred the long-lasting good fortune of the Abney family's patronage. Gordon Rupp (3) describes the unenviable lot of the eighteenth century domestic chaplain - 'not quite a servant, not quite a gentleman', when he discusses Watts' position in the Abney household. But despite Defoe's (4) reference to Sir Tom's 'diminutive figure of a chaplain', Watts was not in fact Abney's chaplain. He was a guest - even if he stayed with his hosts thirty-six years! There is a charming anecdote of Toplady's (5) about Lady Huntingdon's visit to Watts at Stoke Newington. 'Madam, your Ladyship is come to see me on a very remarkable day' ....Watts went on to explain, 'This very day, thirty years ago I came hither, to the house of my good friend Sir Thomas Abney, intending to spend but one single week under this friendly roof: and I have extended my visit to the

length of exactly thirty years'. Whereupon Lady Abney broke in: 'Sir, what you term a long thirty years visit, I consider as the shortest visit my family ever received'.

It is this comfortable security - for Watts was given a home where he was loved, appreciated, admired, cosseted - which explains his inactivity. A. P. Davis (6) claims that Watts was 'not a part of the polite world of his day'. Perhaps not. But he was certainly part of a highly respectable and affluent world. In theory he was pastor at Mark Lane. In practice he seems to have put in an appearance when he felt like it. As early as 1703 an assistant pastor, Reverend Samuel Price, had to be appointed. It is wholly typical of Watts that in the one great crisis when he might have been expected to have intervened decisively - the Salters Hall debate - he was missing.

Watts' correspondence gives an attractive picture of his relationship with the congregations at Mark Lane and in Bury Street. In a letter dated 4th November 1713, he writes:

I rejoice to hear of your union, your love, your attendance on the worship of the Church. This has been a great comfort to my thoughts in the time of my affliction and absence. Yet I am in pain for your edification because you have none among you to administer the special and (healing?) ordinances...

He charmingly apologises for not writing to everyone:

...But I feared to indulge myself the pleasure either of visiting or writing to one or two of my friends under mournful providences, finding myself entirely unable to pay the same respect to all and thereby have given an appearance of partiality and tempted your censure.

In another letter (6th August 1715) Watts offers his latest literary products as compensation for his absence:

As I lately made yourselves a small present of a Treatise of Prayer, so I now desire your acceptance of a few Divine Songs for your young children, for whom they were written. Every person that hath children under fifteen years of age and capable of reading a verse will receive of my Brother Price a book for each. And may God even your God cause your families to flourish in grace and build the Church in the next generation.

References in the same letter to 'the continued kindness of this Good Family of Sir Thomas Abney under my great weakness' make one suspect that Watts gave in too easily. But his congregation was clearly in his thoughts. (7)

Watts never went anywhere outside London except to Bath and Tonbridge Wells - for his health. Did he ever visit his friend, admirer and protégé, Philip Doddridge in Northampton? I know of no evidence that he did - still less that he put in an appearance at Edinburgh and Aberdeen to collect his Hon. D.D.'s. Certainly the Registrars of both Universities have no record of Watts' presence in person.

I suggest that this gracious background explains the unruffled complacency of much of Watts' writing, and also its length. Davis (8) says that he 'liked the smell of printer's ink' and quotes John Wesley's view that Watts' Treaties on The Passions could easily be reduced from 177 pages to 24. No doubt Watts had

plenty of time in which to be verbose. Possibly his comfortable remoteness from the real world explains his hostility to Wesley's and Whitefield's evangelical methods. 'Are you sure that the impression is divine?' he asked Whitefield. And he rebuked Doddridge for associating publicly with Whitefield. Member of the fashionable world or not, he fully shared polite society's dread of enthusiasm. In his pleasant little nook it was easy to do so.

Not that Watts was without contacts with the outside world; but they were on his terms. He was an indefatigable correspondent, especially with such friends as Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Colman and Cotton Mather, all living in the American colonies, and with the Germans, Gotthilf August Francke and Johann Jacob Rambach. He was also glad to receive visitors. It was the done thing to call on 'dear Dr. Watts' (9). Wesley's Journal, 4th October 1738, reads thus: '1.30 at Dr. Watts. Conversed. 2.30 walked, singing conversed'. Gordon Rupp (10) comments, 'there is the picture of them walking under the trees, two plain, trim little men, singing to one another their own and other people's hymns'. Charles Wesley, the other great giant of eighteenth century hymn writing, was there as well - quite an occasion!

When we consider the background to Watts' writings, his health is of interest. Possibly because the other five of his Six Makers of English Religion

all suffered real hardship (11), Rupp places considerable stress on Watts' physical sufferings. He quotes with effect the delightful poem to 'My watch' in which the poet wishes that he could drive the mighty wheels of heaven to whirl away 'these cloudy wintry suns, these tedious moons, these midnights'. Undoubtedly Watts suffered ill-health which, again, might explain the sheer volume of his writings and perhaps their occasional emotional intensity. Yet the impression remains that he was a hypochondriac - hence perhaps his nick-name 'Old Mother Watts'. When he preached at Bury Street, Watts 'being for several years so much disposed with nervous disorders, desired the hymn to be sung rather before he went into the pulpit, only because his head was unable to bear the sound'. (12) Like many creaking gates, he lived to a great age. But one should perhaps take Watts seriously when he claims to have written feelingly about the grave, having looked over the edge so often himself. (13)

Similarly, his own small stature may well have affected his writing. 'What, is that the great Dr. Watts?' a bystander is supposed to have asked. And, so goes the story, Watts, having overheard the question, quoted his own verse:

Were I so tall to reach the pole,  
Or grasp the ocean with a span,  
I must be measured by my soul -  
The mind's the standard of the man.

In Reliquiae Juvenales, Watts attacked the notion that size matters. 'Ridiculous thought and wild imagination!

as though the size and colour of the brute were the proper measure to judge of the man'. Elizabeth Singer is supposed to have rejected Watts as a suitor because he was so plain. The notion that Watts transferred his passionate emotions to religion is by no means absurd when one reads the quite extraordinary adaptations of the Song of Solomon by which the poet himself was embarrassed in later life. It is a shame that Miss Singer turned him down. The charming correspondence between Philip and Mercy Doddridge which Dr. Geoffrey F. Nuttall has published in his Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge DD suggests how much Watts lost by never getting married. A wife and children might perhaps have encouraged Watts to take himself less seriously.

Here is Watts' letter to Doddridge of 17th January 1743/4: 'I have not these twelve months past been able to attend upon any place of worship. My employment has been, when I was able, to set the footman who stayed at home with me, to read your writings ... but in reading them I found, upon enquiry, there were many words which he did not understand'. Or again, dated 10th April 1744: 'My diarrhoea continues still though not violent ... I have, as I may say, kept my chamber above fifteen months. Some of our servants do not understand your writings when they are read in the parlour'. Contrast these humourless little essays in self-pity with Doddridge's



delightful letter to his wife on the problem of buying presents for their daughters: 'They are too big for toys and I am not so far skilled in cloaths as to know what they want or how they are to be bought'. Or take Mercy's letter on the same subject - presents: 'I would beg you to doe me the favour to buy me a speling book I am sure you see I abundantly need it.' (14)

Perhaps because he was lacking in 'presence' Watts shunned polite society:

The noisy world complains of me  
That I should shun their sight and flee  
Visits and crowds and company.

One of the most theologically important clashes in Watts' life was with Thomas Bradbury. Of course the issues which divided the two men were profound. Nevertheless, it is also probably that Bradbury and Watts were mutually antipathetic - Watts shy and unsociable, 'Bold Bradbury' noisy and earthy, repairing after church to a local tavern and singing 'The Roast Beef of Old England'.

Watts was really in his element corresponding with Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London. The two tolerant old whigs complimented each other on their publications - Gibson's 'Pastoral Letter to the People of his diocese', Watts' 'Redeemer and Sanctifier' which Gibson criticised Watts for publishing anonymously. (15) The two men agreed on Whitefield's enormities, Watts telling the Bishop that Whitefield's criticism of the clergy of the Church of England was

so general that it was impossible 'to know certainly whether it was true or not, and therefore these censures were by no means justifiable'. This ironic situation was in fact wholly appropriate, a great gulf separating the establishment dissenter from the Anglican rebel.

And yet Watts was the successor of Isaac Chauncey, the one congregationalist who had dared petition the House of Lords against his ejection in 1660. (16) And if he showed little sign of being influenced by Chauncey's high calvinism, Watts always boasted of his debt to Richard Baxter. He once said that he would have preferred to have written Call to the Unconverted than Paradise Lost. In many ways Watts deserved to be called Baxterian - even when the label was not kindly meant. (17) We shall note his debt to Baxter intellectually and theologically. He was a true follower of Baxter in his tolerance and impatience with the dogmatism of others. (18)

The impression which emerges from an investigation of Isaac Watts' life and personal background is of an essentially ordinary, second-rate little man (19) - likeable, urbane and really quite influential, but at the same time self-regarding and overrated. However two vital characteristics redeem Watts and make him both remarkable and interesting. First, he was a true religious poet. Secondly, Watts

had an unusually honest and flexible mind. ' I freely answer - I wish some things were corrected', he wrote with characteristic wrongheadedness about his hymns, the products of his poetic genius. His willingness to think again and to admit that he - and other people - had been wrong, made untold difficulties for himself and for all who try to understand him.

### Intellectual Climate

Facile generalisations about 'the age of reason', 'the enlightenment' and 'the eclipse of tradition and authority' are dangerous. (20) Nevertheless, there were definite features which can be pinpointed about the intellectual world in which Watts lived. Indeed, he did his best to remove what he thought were blemishes from the landscape as he saw it - in clear outline, he believed.

Though some have followed the principle 'the more absurd the doctrine, the greater merit in belief', Christians have always reasoned. What was new about the century 1650-1750 was the removal of repressive censorship and the public example of bold thought given by the leaders of intellectual society. Of course there had always been heresy, or at least heterodoxy. But such historians as Christopher Hill have surely been right to stress the remarkable liberalising effect of the Great Rebellion, the public trial and execution of God's anointed, the dramatic if

temporary eclipse of the governing class. 'Never again' (21) may well have been the slogan of that same governing class when back in the saddle. But in fact the world had been turned upside down and could never be the same. Censorship ebbed and flowed. So did the theological deviations of Newton, Locke, Shaftesbury - and scores of lesser imitators and followers. Carl L. Becker's observation , (22) 'What we have to realise is that in these years God was on trial', is indeed true; it is also true that tradition and authority, if not eclipsed and while not necessarily opposed by reason, were also on trial, subjected to rigorous scrutiny. Not much was sacred.

One possible reaction was undoubtedly to belittle revealed religion and to abandon traditional Christian dogma. 'Wise men are all of one faith' Shaftesbury explained to a lady friend. 'And what might that faith be?' 'Madam, wise men never say'. Shaftesbury postulated a Deity, 'the best-natured Being in the world'. Halifax argued for a religion that was 'a cheerful thing, so far from being always at cuffs with good humour'. The dogmatists had had their chance, and a fine mess Laud and Charles I, Peters and Owen had made of things. There was a strong case for Charles II's lack of interest in theology and his conviction that God did not mind him enjoying himself.

Deism owed much to the discrediting of dogma. It was also the product of faith in reason, faith in natural religion. 'What distinguished the deist was not an interest in natural religion but the belief that natural religion alone was sufficient without the need for any Christian revelation'. (23) At their best, Deists were in Paul Hazard's phrase 'rationalists with a nostalgia for religion'. Noble Australian savages, sage Chinese, admirable Indians seemed to have escaped the curse of Adam - or was it the curse of Calvin? The Paris faculty of Theology drew the inescapable conclusion: 'on peut donc se sauver par les forces de la nature et la foi en Jesus Christ Mediateur n'est nullement necessaire'. (24) One takes the point that deists have had a bad press from confessional historians. What is surely unanswerable is that theological links between Deism and the undermining of orthodox Christian theology by Arians and Socinians (25) are close - and this accounts for the paranoic hatred of Deism by emotionally conservative contemporaries, such as Isaac Watts.

Even if the reasonableness of Christianity was indeed the 'solitary thesis' of English Theology for nearly a century, the positive contribution of the Enlightenment is undeniable. However naive Watts' conviction that reason must bolster up Christianity, a great deal of highly unpleasant naivety still had to be eradicated. In William III's reign, a prosecution

Secondly, one has to admire the intellectual qualities of Watts' contemporaries, especially the unorthodox. J. H. Colligan (29) movingly defends his Arian heroes for their devotion to intellectual integrity. Eighteenth century Arianism was not 'a quarrel over a diphthong', but a real attempt to think honestly and achieve a truly rational interpretation of scripture. This fearless pursuit of truth is one of Watts' most attractive characteristics, even it served only to convince him of his own ignorance, as he modestly put it. Coleridge was to write: 'He who begins by loving Christianity better than truth will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than all Christianity and end in loving himself better than all'. Just so. Men like William Whiston and Samuel Clarke did indeed love truth more than Christianity. Clarke enjoyed proving that those who adhered to the Athanasian Creed were in fact Sabellian, (30) to be answered by the formidable Dr. Waterland who proved Clarke illogical in arguing subordination from scripture. Waterland may have been right: both thought hard.

However a price had to be paid for theological liberalism - namely, the impoverishment and general watering-down of the gospel. Waterland wrote concerning the dissenter James Foster: (31) 'He gives up the doctrine of the Trinity, and of course betrays the doctrine of satisfaction and whatever depends upon it'. The belief that 'Christianity is a resumé of the

knowledge of God already attained by reason' (32) certainly needed tempering by such old-fashioned, reactionary views of Thomas Bradbury - the doctrines of the Gospel are 'unaccountable', the words of Scripture are 'absurdities to the reason of man', Christ's atonement 'destroys every natural idea we have of divine justice'. Incidentally, what a fine example the last observation is of that intellectual liveliness to which I refer above - even if on the conservative side.

Nevertheless, it should not be argued that the Enlightenment and revival religion were necessarily opposed. Zinzendorf's favourite reading after the Bible was Bayle's Dictionnaire Historique et Critique. (33) There was a lively, international network for disseminating the latest theological ideas, based on Scotland (e.g. a German translation of Watts' Death and Heaven). Watts and Doddridge, exponents of Baxter's 'Middle Way' theology, tolerant, rational, charitable, bequeathed this approach to the Wesleys. Eighteenth century rational Christianity at its best 'produced a distinctively attractive devotionalism in which faith and reason, revelation and natural religion, head and heart, sense and sensibility, were held in balance, according to the classical conceptions of order, proportion and harmony'. (34) The logical counter-part of this intellectual enlightenment in the best sense of the word was there too: genuine

philanthropy - Wilberforce was a true son of the Christian enlightenment - missionary enterprise and evangelism, fruitful co-operation between the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom.

Obviously, generalisation can go too far in the presentation of such edifying pictures. Norman Sykes has provided wholesome correction to the view that the eighteenth century was an age of religious torpor - no doubt as deceptive an oversimplification as the contrast between faith and enlightenment. But as late as 1800 there were only six communicants at St. Pauls on Easter Day. John Wesley's Journal depicts widespread lethargy, ignorance and overt hostility to the Christian faith. And Isaac Watts' preaching and correspondence tell the same tale. As for tolerance and charity, as ever there was no shortage of downright bigotry. The local vicar tried to close Philip Doddridge's Academy - and used to refer to 'the Duke of Brunswick, commonly called George II !'

Against this generalised background we must set two extreme positions which Watts encountered. Both were found among the ranks of nonconformists in particular: the Socinians on the one hand and the Hyper-Calvinists on the other.

There was good reason for dissenters adopting extremist positions, rather than Anglicans. Far less was at stake for a dissenting minister who deviated from orthodoxy. Anglicans could lose their



professorial chairs, their livings, their hopes of preferment. Indeed, to attack heresy real or imagined was a sure road to high office (35), whereas 'heretics' like Clarke and Whiston were definitely handicapped. Gibson, Bishop of London, effectively knifed Clarke by praising him as a man - 'but he is not a Christian'. It was safe to preach down-the-line orthodoxy, like Waterland, and reasonably safe to take traditional doctrines to extreme lengths like such Anglican evangelicals as Grimshaw, Vicar of Haworth (36). In general, however, Anglicans cheerfully relegated to the background whatever was paradoxical and remote from ordinary ways of thinking, having no relish for speculative doctrines such as the Trinity or mystical ideas like salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Horror of antinomianism, combined with Cartesian stress on man, his ability to justify himself and please God through his own initiative, led to the rise of moralism. Genuine theological truths were debased, debate was suppressed, Dr. Tickletext preached safe platitudes. Why should the established church worry if religion was ridiculed? (37)

Dissenters were made of sterner stuff. Coleridge was to write that 'Socinianism is as inevitable a deduction from Taylor's scheme as Deism and Atheism are from Socinianism.' (38) Jeremy Taylor was an Anglican; the non-conformists were to prove the first part at least of Coleridge's theory correct. No dissenter rides

in his coach for three generations, went the adage. In particular presbyterians who did remain faithful to the principles of dissent - that is to say, refused to conform for social and economic gain - were drawn irresistibly towards Socinianism, or to give it its late eighteenth century form, Unitarianism. (39) The great name is of course Priestley. There were others, however - Lardner, Lindsey, Belsham. Watts and his contemporaries were anxious about the challenge of Socinianism, intellectually so appealing and so successful. There were very close and logical links between liberal protestantism - the stress on Christ's example on the cross, for instance - and out and out unitarianism.

The rise of moralism, the threat of Deism, the challenge of Unitarianism explain only too natural a development, the growth of the opposite extreme, Hyper-Calvinism. (40) Peter Toon points out that the original theology of John Calvin was balanced and that his followers were responsible for unbalancing Calvin's ideas through excessive, Aristotelian precision. (41) High Calvinism battled with the moderate Calvinism of Baxter and Daniel Williams during Watts' youth. It is of interest that the particular champion of High Calvinism was Isaac Chauncy, Watts' predecessor at Mark Lane. Chauncy (42) taught that Christ was the surety for the elect and that the Resurrection was proof that God discharged Christ and, because he was the surety, the elect as well from the guilt of sin. He accused

Williams of socinianism on the atonement and of preaching salvation by works. Baxter had taught that God had changed his law so that man could be saved. Chauncy, far more rigid, believed in a God who was equally rigid and who could not change his law. Hyper-Calvinism went still further. Hussey and Brine preached irresistible grace, supra-lapsarianism (the decree of election preceded the decree that man was to be created and permitted to fall), the doctrine that Christ's pardon and salvation were to be preached, but not offered, as only the elect could respond. Justification by faith was merely the persuasion that one is already justified. Missionary activity was of course futile. When W. Carey suggested a Baptist missionary society, J. C. Ryland interrupted him: 'Sit down, young man; when God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine'.

When confronted with this perversion of the Christian gospel, one is tempted to agree with Toon's remark that the Hyper-Calvinists were after all men of little education. Yet Toon is also right to point out that there is a kind of logic in Hyper-Calvinism - as a lunatic product of the age of reason.

Such extremism was unacceptable to the middle-way Calvinists (if they were Calvinists) of Richard Baxter's tradition. Robert Trail remarked (43) in 1692 that 'such men that are for middle ways in points of doctrine have a greater kindness for that extreme they go half-way to, than for that they go half-way from'. On the other hand it is feasible to adopt a genuine half-way

house position and this is what Watts and Doddridge tried very hard to do. Perhaps it would be more true to paraphrase Trail to the effect that middle way men are believed to have a greater kindness for that extreme they go half-way to by those whom they have left behind! To us, however, Doddridge writes sensibly and attractively:

That such a being, who is said not to tempt anyone and even swears that he desires not the death of a sinner, should irresistibly determine millions to the commission of every sinful action of their lives ... that hereby he may promote the happiness of others, who are or shall be irresistibly determined to virtue in like manner, is of all incredible things to me the most incredible. (44)

(This is of course not a full statement of Doddridge's position).

I end this survey of Watts' intellectual world with the trite but perhaps necessary reminder that he did live two and a half centuries ago - and that the world has changed. For instance the same Doddridge whose modern-sounding, liberal sentiments on freewill I have just quoted wrote this in a letter to Watts:

It is the unanimous judgement of this church that the frequent acts of bankruptsy which have happened in dissenting congregations as well as elsewhere, have brought so great a dishonour on religion ... that we are obliged in duty to enter our public protest and caution on this head. And we do hearby declare that if any person in stated communion with us shall become a Bankrupt or as it is commonly expressed fail in the world, he must expect to be cut off from our body...'

How Weber and Tawney would applaud! (45) 'And God was with Joseph and he was a lucky fellow'. Or again, we are shocked by Watts' outrageous sentiments on education, his belief that the working classes were not to be

allowed to rise above their station. And then we discover that on education, as in so many things, Watts was progressive and indeed revolutionary. Mandeville attacked Watts' views arguing that it was dangerous to allow work-people to read at all. Fletcher and Mellon had advocated that labourers should be reduced to slavery - for their own good. (46) It was after all the age of enlightenment!

## Chapter 2

### A Bibliographical Survey of Watts' Writings

According to De Quincey it is legitimate to distinguish between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. Isaac Watts' prose comes into the former category, his verse into the latter. By this I do not mean that Watts' prose is tedious, his verse exciting. For he wrote some very bad verse and at times his prose is magnificent! What I do mean is that Watts' verse lives and still has power over men's minds. His prose is well-informed, indeed erudite, but it is dead. Not that we can ignore Watts' prose. While his verse was composed when Watts was still a young man, he went on writing prose until his death. Much of his thought has to be quarried from his prose, even if his verse has been more influential. Both repay study.

#### Watts' verse

Isaac Watts is supposed to have displayed his poetic gifts at the age of seven when he submitted the following lines to his mother for a prize:

I wrote not for a farthing, but to try  
How I your farthing writers can outvie.

The child is father to the man: Watts was always to have faith in his own talents. Also mildly significant is this childish acrostic, showing evidence of Watts' Calvinist upbringing:

I am a vile polluted lump of earth,  
 So I've continued ever since my birth,  
 Although Jehovah grace does daily give me,  
 As sure this monster Satan will deceive me,  
 Come therefore, Lord, from Satan's claws relieve me.  
 Wash me in thy blood, O Christ,  
 And grace divine impart,  
 Then search and try the corners of my heart,  
 That I in all things may be fit to do  
 Service to thee, and sing thy praises too.

Watts published five collections of verse:

Horae Lyricae (1705), Hymns and Spiritual Songs (1707),  
The Psalms of David Imitated (1718), Divine Songs for  
 Children (1720) and Reliquiae Juveniles (1734). In  
 addition he attached hymns to the ends of his sermons  
 and various verse compositions have survived which were  
 published posthumously under the title Remnants of Time.  
 The dates of publication have of course only limited  
 relevance to the date of composition. As one would  
 expect, Reliquiae Juveniles is a hotch-potch of early  
 work. Watts had been composing hymns for well over a  
 decade when he gathered them together in Hymns and  
 Spiritual Songs, 'Behold the glories of the Lamb' having  
 been written in 1694 in response to his father's  
 challenge. Likewise, The Psalms of David Imitated was  
 the fruit of Watts' genius, refined and perfected over  
 the years.

Watts prefaced his collections of verse with  
 introductory essays and he frequently inserted glosses  
 in prose, explaining and developing his ideas. It is  
 obviously sensible to take these comments with Watts'  
 verse writing.

Horae Lyricae is a collection of poems, some religious, others secular. There are included translations from the classics, funeral odes, odes to nature and the day of judgement. Reliquiae Juveniles - which also contains essays in prose - is subtitled Miscellaneous Thoughts on Natural, Moral and Divine Subjects.

Watts' preface to Horae Lyricae is a highly significant declaration of intent. He deplores that modern poets have stopped writing religious verse and 'that the devil has all the best tunes'. Watts' aim is to 'diffuse virtue and allure souls to God'. There is a marked echo here of Luther's ambitions as a Christian poet.

On the other hand Horae Lyricae is hard poetry, typical of much seventeenth century devotional verse. Watts explicitly says that he is writing for refined, sophisticated readers. By contrast, he was to introduce his hymns, designed for congregational use, as follows: 'The metaphors are generally sunk to the level of vulgar capacities'. As he explained to others who would follow:

Smooth be your style and plain and natural,  
To strike the sons of Wapping or Whitehall.

Nevertheless Horae Lyricae marks the transition from seventeenth century devotional lyrics to hymns as we know them.

The influence of metaphysical poetry is striking. Take for example:



On the thin air, without a prop,  
     Hang fruitful showers around:  
 At thy command they sink and drop  
     Their fatness on the ground.

Or take the Watch poem from Reliquiae Juveniles:

My watch, the solitary kind companion of my  
     imprisonment,  
 My faithful watch, and with a short repeated sound  
 Beats like the pulse of time and numbers off my woes  
     a long succession, while the finger  
 Slow, moving, points out the slow moving minutes,  
 The slower hands the hours. O thou dear engine,  
 Thou little brass accountant of my life      etc.

Or again:

Our eyes the radiant saint pursue  
 Through liquid telescopes of tears.

Although Watts was deliberately to simplify and 'sink'  
 his style when he turned his hand to congregational  
 hymn-writing, he never entirely shook off this quasi-  
 metaphysical quaintness:

We are a garden walled around,  
 Chosen and made peculiar ground,  
 A little spot enclosed by grace  
 Out of the world's wide wilderness.

Watts enjoyed himself translating Horace, like so  
 many eighteenth-century poets. It was the age of  
 imitation - and it could be argued that Watts' subsequent  
 adaptations of the Psalms can be compared, say, to Pope's  
 and Johnson's free verse imitations of Juvenal and  
 Horace. His translation of Casimir's 'Dacian Battle' is  
 particularly successful.

In Horae Lyricae and Reliquiae Juveniles there is  
 impressive variety of technique and style. Watts gave

full vent to what he himself called 'his adventurous muse'. In particular in the funeral odes and in his 'Divine Love' poems, one feels that he is experimenting, learning and perfecting his art. The climax was to be achieved, perhaps, in the Song of Solomon hymns.

Watts' Hymns and Spiritual Songs made his name. Contemporaries soon recognised that this work marked a revolution in worship. I shall deal in detail in due course with the thought to be found in these hymns and with the reactions which they provoked. Suffice now briefly to outline the scope of Watts' Hymns.

The first two books are free compositions, but inspired by scripture, the third and last, also Bible-based, is devoted to the Communion Service. Here we definitely have hymns, not metrical psalms. However influential scripture may have been in Watts' mind, the words are his own. An excellent example is of course 'When I survey', which clearly echoes Galatians VI 14 but is highly individual.

The metres are far less enterprising than in Horae Lyricae, for obvious reasons. These are hymns, to be sung in church and the music was simply not available for obscure metres. Charles Wesley never accepted this restriction, but defied musicians to produce the necessary tunes in the most extraordinary and taxing metres. Here, as so often, Wesley reaped where Watts had sown.

The themes are predictable - God's love and forgiveness, his power, his comforts available to dying

Christians. The theology is for the most part down-  
the line Calvinist:

Who shall the Lord's Elect condemn? (1)  
'Tis God that justifies their souls.  
And Mercy like a Mighty stream  
Oer all their sins divinely rolls.  
Who shall adjudge the Saints to Hell?  
'Tis Christ that suffer'd in their stead,  
And the Salvation to fulfill  
Behold him rising from the Dead.

Perhaps inevitably the standard varies, though it  
is easy for the modern reader to be put off by Watts'  
dated rhymes (pronunciation changes) and, above all,  
dated ideas:

Then rise and to your realms convey  
The glorious tidings of the day;  
Great William shall rejoice to know  
That George the Second reigns below.

One could quote many verses along these lines. One  
could also quote illustrations of just how bad a poet  
Watts could be - and I shall examine some examples  
when we review others' assessments of Isaac Watts.  
He could indeed sink!

I offer these verses as fairly typical of the  
Hymns:

The Song of Simeon or Death made desirable

Jesus, the vision of thy face (2)  
Hath overpowering charms,  
Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace  
If Christ be in my arms.

Then while ye hear my heart-strings break,  
How sweet my minutes roll!  
A mortal paleness on my cheek,  
And glory in my soul.

Note the emotionalism of 'Christ in my arms' and the  
preoccupation with death.

Emotionalism leads me to the Song of Solomon poems. Whether these could ever be sung, I doubt. They are certainly unusual, very much a young man's kind of verse and, not surprisingly, regretted by Isaac Watts in his later years. While there are features in the Song of Solomon which Watts refrains from using - he averts his gaze from 'we have a little sister, but she has no breasts' etc. - he writes genuinely erotic verse, faithfully reflecting the genuinely erotic text on which his verse is based.

Watts' idea is of course to bring out the love of the Christian for Christ - and vice versa. Here are some of the more successful verses:

Often I seek my Lord by night, (3)  
 Jesus, my love, my soul's delight;  
 With warm desire and restless thought  
 I seek him oft, but find him not.

He gives me there his bleeding heart,  
 Pierc'd for my sake with deadly smart;  
 I give my soul to him, and there  
 Our loves their mutual tokens share.

I charge you all, ye earthly toys,  
 Approach not to disturb my joys;  
 Nor sin nor hell come near my heart,  
 Nor cause my Saviour to depart.

The wondering world desires to know  
 Why I should love my Jesus so:  
 'What are his charms' say they 'above  
 The objects of a mortal love?'

Compassions in his heart are found,  
 Hard by the signals of his wound;  
 His sacred side no more shall bear  
 The cruel scourge, the piercing spear.

Watts' consistent idea is to 'Christianise' the Song of Solomon, not merely by bringing out the theoretical love affair between God and the soul, but by superimposing

the gospel of redemption through the Cross. He was to develop this approach to the Old Testament in his adaptations of the Psalms. Again, one is reminded of the metaphysical poet's love affair with Christ, by such 'hymns' as this - written by Watts at his most romantic:

His charm shall make my numbers flow,  
 And hold the falling floods;  
 While silence sits on every bough,  
 And bends the listening woods.  
 I'll carve our passion on the bark;  
 And every wounded tree  
 Shall drop and bear some mystic mark  
 That Jesus died for me.  
 The swains shall wonder when they read,  
 Inscribed on all the grove,  
 That Heaven itself came down and bled  
 To win a mortal's love.

The Communion hymns, which form Book Three of Hymns and Spiritual Songs, stress the connection between the Lord's Supper and the Atonement. ('When I survey' is one of these hymns).

For us his Flesh with Nails was torn,  
 He bore the Scourge, he felt the Thorn.  
 For us his vital Blood was spilt  
 To buy the pardon of our Guilt.

Jesus, thy Feast we celebrate,  
 We show thy Death, we sing thy Name,  
 Till thou return, and we shall eat  
 The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Or again:

For Food he gives his Flesh  
 He bids us drink his Blood;  
 Amazing Favour, matchless Grace  
 Of our descending God.

We are but several Parts  
 Of the same broken Bread;  
 One Body hath its several Limbs,  
 But Jesus is the Head.

Or again:

How rich are thy Provisions, Lord,  
 Thy Table furnish'd from above,  
 The Fruits of life oer-spread the Board,  
 The Cup oer-flows with heavenly love.

There is much fine, sensitive writing here, of a theologically orthodox nature. Watts concludes Book Three with some doxologies which he introduces as follows:

I cannot persuade myself to put a full period to these Divine Hymns till I have addressed a special song of glory to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Though the Latin name of it, Gloria Patri, be retained in our nation from the Roman Church, and though there be some excesses of superstitious honour paid to the words of it, which may have wrought some unhappy prejudices in weaker Christians; yet I believe it still to be one of the noblest parts of Christian worship. The subject of it is the doctrine of the Trinity, which is that peculiar glory of the divine nature that our Lord Jesus Christ has so clearly revealed unto man, and is so necessary to true Christianity.

In view of Watts' later alleged deviations from Athanasian orthodoxy, these are ironic - and possibly significant - words. The doxologies themselves are entirely orthodox:

Glory to God the Trinity  
 Whose Name has Mysteries unknown;  
 In Essence One, in Persons Three;  
 A social Nature, yet alone.

Give to the Father Praise,  
 Give Glory to the Son,  
 And to the Spirit of his Grace,  
 Be equal Honour done.

The Psalms of David Imitated begins with a splendid preface, one of the most effective, incisive pieces of prose writing Watts ever produced. I shall discuss the thought behind this preface when I come to evaluate Watts' theological ideas. Suffice now to say that Watts cheerfully claims to be a better Christian than David - or, at any rate, better informed. This justifies him in drastically altering the Psalms, not merely translating them into English verse. Watts' case is that, as the Psalms stand, they are hopelessly dated and unsuitable. He writes with real wit about the problems faced by the long-suffering Christian worshipper:

When we are just entering into an evangelical frame by some of the glories of the Gospel presented in the brightest figures of Judaism, yet the very next line perhaps which the Clerk parcels out to us, hath something in it so extremely Jewish and cloudy that darkens our sight of God our Saviour; thus by keeping too close to David in the House of God, the veil of Moses is thrown over our Hearts'.

Watts warms to his theme:

Have you not felt a new joy spring within you, when you could speak your own desires and hopes in the language of the holy psalmist? But then on a sudden the clerk has proposed the next line to your lips, with dark sayings and prophecies, with burnt-offerings or hyssop, with new moons and trumpets and timbrels in it, with confessions of sins which you never committed, with complaints of sorrows which you never felt; cursing such enemies as you never had, giving thanks for victories which you never obtained.

Watts draws the necessary conclusions:

When the psalmist describes religion by the fear of God, I have often joined faith and love to it. When he speaks of the pardon of sin through the mercies of God, I have added the blood or merits of a Saviour: where he talks of sacrificing goats or bullocks, I rather choose to mention the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God. Why must I join with David in his legal or prophetic language to curse my enemies, when my Saviour has taught me to love and bless them?'

Watts deals with two criticisms in advance. First, is he being disrespectful to David?

Others maintain that a strict and scrupulous confinement to the sense of the original, is necessary to do justice to the royal author. But in my judgement the royal author is most honoured when he is made most intelligible.

Secondly, Watts anticipates the criticism that God's Word must be handled reverently. He argues that while we read anything else but God's word at our peril, we can sing our own words to God. In the preface to Hymns and Spiritual Songs Watts had written, 'Songs are generally expressions of our own experience, or of his glories ... we breathe out our souls towards him'. So now he has no inhibitions in turning David upside down. How many sing 'Jesus shall reign where'ere the sun', remembering or realising that it is a paraphrase of Psalm 72?

Watts subsequently revised his hymns - when he could get his hands on them. (4) He alternated between humility and self-praise. In the Preface to Reliquiae Juveniles he wrote: 'I make no pretence to the name of a poet, or a polite writer, in an age wherein so many superior souls shine in their works through this nation'. Of course, all of us, Watts included, can disagree about the definition of 'poet' and 'polite writer'. He



probably did not regard his hymns as poetry - and subsequent commentators have agreed. (5) On the other hand he wrote about his own hymns and metrical psalms - 'If an author's own opinion may be taken, he esteems it the greatest work that ever he has published or ever hopes to do, for the use of the churches'.

Watts did not attempt a version of every psalm, as he regarded some of them as quite hopeless. He was for instance caustic on the irrelevance of Psalm 150 ('the greatest part of this psalm suits not my chief design'). Other psalms he edited ruthlessly. For example, the title to Psalm 75 is revealing - 'Power and Government from God alone. Applied to the Glorious Revolution by King William or the happy ascension of King George to the Throne'. Verse 2 reads:

Britain was doomed to be a slave  
Her frame dissolv'd, her fears were great;  
Where God a new supporter gave  
To bear the pillars of the state.

Or again, David might well have been surprised by Verse 6 of Psalm 47:

The British islands are the Lord's,  
There Abraham's God is known,  
While powers and princes, shields and swords,  
Submit before his throne.

But of course the most important adaptation is 'making David speak like a Christian'. Take Psalm 35, (entitled 'Love to Enemies; or the Love of Christ to Sinners typified in David'):

Behold the love, the generous love  
 That holy David shows;  
 Hark how his sounding bowels move  
 To his afflicted foes!

They groan'd; and curs'd him on their bed,  
 Yet still he pleads and mourns;  
 And double blessings on his head  
 The Righteous God returns.

O glorious type of heavenly grace!  
 Thus Christ the Lord appears;  
 While sinners curse, the Saviour prays,  
 And pities them with tears.

He the true David, Israel's king,  
 Blest and belov'd of God,  
 To save us rebels, dead in sin,  
 Paid his own dearest blood.

One could quote many examples. Here is Psalm 40,  
 preceded by explanatory comment. 'If David had written  
 this Psalm in the days of the gospel, surely he would  
 have given a much more express and particular account  
 of the sacrifice of Christ. I have done no more  
 therefore in this paraphrase, than what I am persuaded  
 the psalmist himself would have done in the time of  
 christianity':

Thus saith the Lord, 'Your work is vain,  
 Give your burnt offerings o'er,  
 In dying goats and bullocks slain  
 My soul delights no more.

Thus said the Saviour, 'Lo, I'm here  
 My God to do thy will;  
 Whate're thy sacred books declare,  
 Thy servant shall fulfil.

And see, the bless'd Redeemer comes,  
 The eternal son appears.  
 And at th'appointed time assumes  
 The body God prepares.

No blood of beasts on altars shed  
 Could wash the conscience clean;  
 But the rich sacrifice he paid  
 Atones for all our sin.

There is an interesting example of Watts' ideas of social justice in his paraphrase of Psalm 49 - 'Why doth the man of riches grow?'

Why doth he treat the poor with scorn,  
 Made of the self-same clay,  
 And boast as though his flesh was born  
 Of better dust than they?

This ties in with his sermons on the same topic.

It remains to be said that the hymns which Watts published at the ends of his sermons were for the most part rather ordinary. Occasionally they rise to his highest standards. These lines are typical:

Immortal honour to the Son,  
 Who makes thy anger cease;  
 Our lives he ransom'd with his own,  
 And dy'd, to buy our peace.

Nothing very special? Watts' achievement, from a purely technical point of view, can be assessed by comparing his verse with his metrical predecessors: see for instance **Stem**hold and Hopkins' psalm 90 -

The lasting of a thousand years  
 What is it in thy sight,  
 As yesterday it doth appear  
 Or as a watch by night.

Or again, compare the Scottish version of Psalm 20:

In chariots some put confidence,  
 Some horses trust upon;  
 But we remember will the name  
 Of our Lord God alone.

With Isaac Watts':

Some trust in horses train'd for war,  
 And some of chariots make their boasts;  
 Our surest expectations are  
 From Thee, the Lord of heavenly hosts.

I shall discuss Watts' thoughts prevalent in his verse at a later stage. I temporarily leave the hymns and metrical psalms with the observation that Watts often falls from grace or - more to the point - writes in a dated, quaint style which makes it difficult to use many of his hymns today. If one selects verses or even lines, however, one appreciates what a gift he had. For instance:

Jesus the God was born to die.

God is a name my soul adores  
The Almighty Three, the eternal One.

The Word comes down to me  
From dread Eternity,  
Ascends in prayer to Thee  
Through my infirmity.

And with the flow, upward, below  
Our freighted galleons go;  
Mine with a load of woe,  
Thine with love's argosy.

And can this mighty King of Glory  
Condescend?  
And will he write his name  
'My Father and my Friend'?  
I love his name, I love his word,  
Join all my powers  
And praise the Lord.

I conclude my survey of Watts' verse with a glance at his Divine Songs for Children. Watts was a revolutionary here also. He rejected the prevalent belief that it was necessary to frighten children into religion - as John Wesley believed, for example. Watts believed that Christianity should be made attractive to children, interesting, entertaining:

e.g.           The sorrows of the mind  
                  Be banish'd from the Place;  
                  Religion never was design'd  
                  To make our Pleasures less.

At least, so the authorities claim. However, there is some stern, conservating<sup>ve</sup> theology for the children in Watts' verse:

There's not a sin that we commit,  
Nor wicked word we say,  
But in thy dreadful book 'tis writ,  
Against the judgement day.

There is a dreadful Hell  
And everlasting pains:  
There sinners must with devils dwell  
In darkness, fire and chains.

Against this picture of doom and devils for sinners is salvation through Christ's death:

Remember all the dying pains  
That my Redeemer felt,  
And let his blood wash out my stains,  
And answer for my guilt.

In the middle of this formidable theology is a good deal of improving advice on the question of behaviour. Until quite recently children were subjected to Watts' rebukes if they quarrelled:

Let dogs delight to bark and bite  
For God hath made them so ...  
But children, you should never let  
Such angry passions rise;  
Your little hands were never made  
To tear each other's eyes. (6)

Or compare Watts' diatribes against sloth -

'Tis the voice of the sluggard ...

or

How doth the little busy bee ...

Divine Songs is the shortest of Watts' collections

of verse - 28 songs, four rhymed commandments, a Hosanna in three metres, a Gloria, seven moral songs and the Cradle Hymn:

Hush! my dear, lie still and slumber;  
       Holy angels guard thy bed!  
 Heav'nly blessings without number  
       Gently falling on thy head.

### Watts' Prose

There are six large volumes of Isaac Watts' prose - with some relatively short intervals of verse - in the Barfield edition. One can only express amused scepticism when Watts introduces his various effusions with the assurance that he had not meant to publish! Or it was only due to the encouragement of kind friends that he had resurrected some sermons from a drawer in his desk.

Although Isaac Watts had a lively, receptive mind with regard to secular ideas and very broad interests, fundamentally he was a man of God. Thus his works on education, philosophy and political thought tend to be almost as theological as his writings overtly devoted to theology. However, one can distinguish between his essentially theological writing and his ideas on other themes.

I will deal first with Watts' ideas on education, then with his philosophical essays - which tend to be attacks on Deism, his <sup>^</sup>bête noir - next with his thoughts on Christian worship and finally with his theology as such, culminating in the Trinitarian controversy.

I should add that getting hold of Watts' works presents no difficulties so far as his magna opera are concerned. (7) There have been various editions, of which Barfield's, preceded by a biographical essay by the Rev. George Burder ('Memoirs'), is perfectly satisfactory. However, there is a certain amount of Wattiana in libraries, private collections and in other published works. He was an assiduous letter-writer. He wrote introductions and recommendations for other men's works. No doubt there is still much to unearth and what has been discovered is not always easily available. In addition there are two volumes of posthumous works of doubtful authority. It is probable that although some of the poems are definitely by Isaac Watts' father, the majority of the sermons and letters are by Watts - and as he did not consider them worthy of publication, they did not emerge during his life-time.

(a) Education

We have already noted Watts' liberalism with regard to suitable reading matter for the young. His Divine Songs for Children have only quite recently gone out of popular circulation. However, the educational scene in 1728, when Watts wrote his essay on Charity Schools, was very strange by our standards. As intelligent an authority as Daniel Waterland advocated the following technique in religious education: 'Let them be informed how dreadful his vengeance is towards

those that offend him: How he drowned a whole World at once for sinning against him etc.'

Watts' views on Charity Schools (8) were enlightened by the standards of his day. His attitude to children and to the poor was humane. He maintained that the poor should be taught to read and write - and to cope with simple mathematics. They would then be more useful to their employers and by reading the Bible would be able to resist popish superstition and Jacobite propaganda. Children of the poor should combine manual labour with their 3Rs, in order to learn industrious habits. Watts pleaded for the rights of servants to correspond with their relations. But he is disappointing on the subject of intelligent children of the poor, agreeing with Gibson, Bishop of London:

This wise and sagacious prelate saw sufficient reason for these cautions. He found that there were too many of these schools of ancient if not of later foundations, wherein children are taught Latin, Greek, Mathematics and any parts of learning which are by no means necessary for the poorer sort of mankind; and therefore he gives prudent advice against it.

Watts, however, continues:

And yet after all, I cannot but beg leave to put in one word of apology for here and there a lad of a bright genius.

What does the 'word of apology' amount to? Not, we may be sure, to be promoted to a school where in the company of upper class children he might be more taxed intellectually, but merely that he should not be



removed from his school just because he had covered the ground quickly.

Watts had interesting views on the desirability of dissenters' children attending Anglican charity schools:

I answer that it is readily granted that the religion itself, in substance of it, is the same which is professed and practised by both parties. God forbid that I should suppose that a good education of youth in the established church should prevent their usefulness here on earth, or their arrival in heaven. I hope and believe, there are thousands of holy souls in the Church of England which are beloved of God, and shall be for ever happy in his presence ...

But in some Anglican schools, children are taught to hate dissenters and, still worse, to become traitors, so that they:

Would be also in great danger of learning to hate the present government under his most excellent majesty King George and to rail at the establishment in the Protestant succession, which is the glory of Great Britain, the defence of the reformed religion and the securest guard of the liberties of Europe.

This extract gives the true flavour of Isaac Watts' prose style, of his strengths and weaknesses and of his prejudices. In his Discourse on the Education of Children and Youth (1725) Watts advocated the education of girls, entertaining pass-times such as improving card-games (sic!), a system of rewards rather than punishments. But he returns to his theme that the poor should not waste their time with Latin and French, but should be prepared for hard manual drudgery.

Watts produced various aids to worship and Christian growth for children. The most famous was

his Catechism (1730). This was naturally in the traditional question and answer form:

Question: Can you of yourself love and serve God and Christ?

Answer: No, I cannot do it of myself, but God will help me by his own spirit, if I ask him for it.

His Catechism begins with a highly significant

Dedication:

I am well aware that both my younger catechisms (which appeared in 1728) will be thought defective in that I have not therein warned children more particularly of some sins of which they are in continual danger. But I was much afraid to make these early forms of instruction too burdensome and tedious ...

One is impressed by Watts' realism. He goes on:

Now though I am firmly convinced that there are great and glorious mysteries in our religion which could never have been known until they were revealed, and some of them do now far outpass our full comprehension, such as the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, his satisfaction for our sins and the operations of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men, yet in the main I am assured that religion is a very intelligible thing; and as it is the most reasonable thing in the world, I am persuaded it ought to be let both into the memories and hearts of children in a reasonable way, that is by their understanding.

This passage tells us much about Watts' approach not only to education but to Christianity.

Watts gave helpful advice in his Guide to Prayer (1716) and also in his Prayers for Children (1725), which was largely a question and answer version of the earlier work. He is very much the dissenter in his criticism of the established church's formalised

system of prayer. On the other hand he is well aware of the ludicrous nature of much extempore prayer - or at least of the danger that this should be so. And, interestingly, years before he would be deploring Wesley's and Whitefield's antics in his correspondence (e.g. with Bishop Gibson (9) and with Doddridge), he is concerned about enthusiasm manifesting itself in the spontaneous prayers of dissenting ministers: a dread thought!

Watts wrote a number of text-books, designed to ease the task of acquiring education. The Art of Reading and Writing English (1721) was developed from his experience of teaching the Abney children. Logic: or the Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry after Truth was more ambitious and was deservedly popular (1724). (10) His Philosophical Essays and Brief Scheme of Ontology (11) (1732) speak for themselves: Watts was gifted at presenting complex ideas in simplified form. His Improvement of the Mind is a student's guide to study. His good sense shows through from this extract:

For the most part people are born to their opinions, and never question the truth of what their family or their country or their party profess. As Mr. Locke says, he that considers and enquires into the reason of things is counted a foe to orthodoxy. And thus men, lazy and idle as they are, inherit local truths. (12)

A Short View of the Whole Scripture History (1732) is, as could be guessed, a summary of the Bible for children. Questions Proper for Students in Divinity (1740)

is a dialogue between the individual and his conscience, useful for would-be ministers.

To sum up, there is nothing here that is very startling. Watts was a man of good sense and goodwill. His writings were to be a force for progress and sense in English education for the century after his death, though hardly revolutionary.

(b) Philosophical Essays

No-one claims that Isaac Watts was an original philosopher. In fact his educational works merge into his philosophical essays, in which he popularised the thoughts of others. Similarly his philosophical work merges into his theological.

The Essay on Civil Power (1739) combines theology and political thought. In this work, Watts explores the question, painfully relevant for dissenters, of the conflict between state and individual with regard to worship. Should there be a state church? His conclusion is that the state has no right whatever to impose any form of worship on individuals - or to outlaw any form of worship, unless the external and internal security of the state is endangered. Predictably, Rome does not pass Watts' test here and he is against the state protecting Roman Catholics and against Roman Catholics being employed in a position of trust. He adds a significant footnote:

Let it be observed here, that this scheme does not allow any prince or state to persecute the papists in the least degree on the account of their worshipping images, or making a piece of bread their God ...

Again, predictable, prejudiced knockabout stuff. (13)

Watts has a striking conclusion to his discussion of the issue of whether a christian magistrate can suppress pagan religion because it is false, whereas the pagan magistrate has no right to suppress Christianity, because it is true:

Everyone who sets up for a persecutor, will pretend he is orthodox, and has the right on his side; and there is no common supreme court of judicature that can decide this matter, till the Supreme Judge of all appears in the last great day ... it follows evidently that each profession must allow liberty and toleration to the other, where the welfare of the state is secure, and brought into no danger by the practices of the inferior party.

Watts' Caveat against Infidelity written in 1722 and published in 1729, was a somewhat tendentious attack on Deism. Any reasonable man must be a Christian; only the perverse failed to recognise the Truth. He added as clear proof the superior morality of Christians - another highly suspect argument.

In the Strength and Weakness of Human Reason (1731), Watts argued for the necessity of revelation to supplement reason. This essay took the form of a debate between Logisto (a young gentleman who admires reason), Pithander (the local rector, representing orthodox Christianity - a broadminded touch, this!) and Sophron, the referee. This is the Rev. Mr. Pithander's assessment of Sophron:

A pretty fair reasoner; were it not for one thing, I should like him very well for a moderator ... but he indulges such a latitude of thought on some subjects that I expect he will too easily allow reason to be a sufficient guide to lead heathen to heaven; for he not only speaks favourably of the

presbyterians, but I myself once heard him say, that he believes even the papists and the quakers may have some good things among them and some good men too.

I suspect that Watts' sympathies were partly with Sophron.

In Self-love and Virtue Reconciled only by Religion

Watts defended Christianity from the charge that it was primarily concerned with rewards and punishments. This was certainly among the more damaging of Deist arguments. He had after all written the lines:

'Worthy the lamb that died', they cry  
     To be exalted thus.  
 'Worthy the lamb', our lips reply,  
     'For he was slain for us'.

Watts invoked God's will as the final arbiter and thus effectively ran away from the challenge.

He blamed atheism for the alleged increase in suicides in eighteenth century Britain. The Unlawfulness of Self-Murder (1726) is not a particularly attractive work. Nor is Watts' logic apparent when he quotes Plato's, Cicero's and Pythagoras' condemnation of suicide and then defends Cato, Brutus and Otho (a very odd choice) as people who justifiably took their own lives as ancient times were so different from modern. For these heroes of old had other motives compared with 'the mean and ridiculous motives which are the occasions of self-murder in our weekly news-papers'. He is critical of Sampson ('it must be confessed there was a mixture of his own sinful revenge in his heart').

Watts launches out next into a tirade against prevalent practices which were tantamount to self-murder,

such as duelling. If you refuse a challenge:

Perhaps you imagine you must part with the character of a gentleman; but fear it not. As long as the laws are on our side, the heraldry is all safe. And if it were otherwise, let us remember we are christians. If there happens a competition between these two pretensions, let us drop the gentleman and keep the christian; for he is a person of the best quality.

We can perhaps admire Watts for his abhorrence of children drinking - 'little young wretches are taught the use of drams in the most early parts of life, and begin to destroy themselves betimes'. He condemns those who work themselves to death - all terribly obvious, though worthy. Perhaps, however, one can detect a saving sense of humour (or was it completely unconscious?) when he passes on to prize-fighting. After comparing the practice to gladiatorial contests in ancient Rome, he continues, 'I do not suppose indeed that this sort of combatants will ever come within the reach of conviction by anything that I can write'. No doubt!

The Doctrine of the Passions Explained and Improved (1729) was an attempt by Watts to find a middle way between the extremes of apathy and enthusiasm.

'The passions were made to be the servants of reason, to be governed by judgement and to be influenced by truth'. Watts appeals to the prophets and apostles and stresses his admiration for St. Augustine and Sir Isaac Newton (an odd pair!). He first prays for the right kind of religious ardour:

Grant, O Lord, that I may never lose the pleasure of religion, by suffering my affections to grow cold and languid. Quicken this lifeless spirit of mine by daily influences from above; shine upon my soul, O Sun of Righteousness; awaken my drowsy powers to active piety and zeal, and let all my passions conspire with my reasoning faculties to promote the interests of religion in my own heart and life, and to diffuse the savour of godliness all around me.

However, the impression is irresistible that Watts was far more concerned about the dangers of going to the opposite extreme. It was possible to be so moved by God's love so as to forget one's judgement:

Here the passion of love and esteem for the divine goodness acts in an irregular manner, for it takes off the eyes of the soul from his awful holiness and his strict justice, and the unknown evil that is in sin. It prevents the mind from giving due attention to God's express word .....

Or again, it was only too easy to be possessed by unhealthy fear, to forget that Christ came to save the chief of sinners (I Timothy I. 15). In other words it was important not to lose one's sense of proportion and to be bowled over by emotion - say, in a sermon.

Watts gets in some hearty cracks at the church of Rome, despite a somewhat grudging curtsy to tolerance:

God forbid that I should so condemn all that are educated in that church, as though there was no sincere devotion among them, though the church itself is abominably corrupt.

But the reader is invited to survey Romish idolaters and enthusiasts 'With what furious and burning barbarity do popish persecutors express their zeal for religion ...' 'I wish such persecution and bigotry, enthusiasm and idolatry, were never found among any other sects of christians'. Watts goes on to defend



decent Christian emotion, provided that it is not contrary to reason.

Next those who fail to defend themselves against the earthier passions are rebuked. Watts does not name Bradbury, but I feel sure that readers would think of him:

Oh how shameful a sight it is, and what a reproach to the profession of the gospel, to see a Christian just come from Church and holy ordinances, where his devout affections have been raised, and immediately to find him breaking out into vain, earthly merriment and carried away with idle and sensual discourse.

A. P. Davis (14) calls this essay 'a typical Neo-classical compromise'. Perhaps this is fair. Indeed Watts here tries to have it both ways. His own approach to religion was quite definitely emotional - and I am not alluding purely to the poetry. Watts' attitude in particular to the Atonement was deeply committed - in heart as well as head. And I know of nothing more emotional than the Solemn Address. On the other hand enthusiasm he could not abide - hence his ambiguous relationship with Whitefield and the Wesleys.

(c) Christian Worship

Isaac Watts cared deeply about the worship of God. And he cared deeply that God should be worshipped properly by dissenters. These two concerns prompted An Humble Attempt towards the Revival of Practical Religion among Christians (1731).

Watts had much forthright advice for his preachers:

Judge wisely on what to leave out as well as what to speak. Let not your chief desire be to work up a sheet, or to hold out an hour, but to save a soul.

He contrasts two imaginary preachers - Polyramus and Fluvio. Polyramus subdivides his sermon into:

eithteenthly or seven and twentiethly, and when I sit under his preaching I fancy myself brought into the valley of Ezekiel's vision: it was full of bones and behold they were very many ... and lo, they were very dry.

Fluvio by contrast:

Glides over the ear like a rivulet of oil over polished marble, the attention is engaged in a gentle pleasure ... but the hearer can give an enquiring friend scarcely any account of what it was that pleased him.

This is all very sound, though whether it led to preaching that could move a congregation à la Whitefield, one doubts. 'For God's sake, Sir, go on! go on!' the congregation in Great St. Mary's Church, Cambridge, had shouted to the seventeenth century preacher, Laurence Chaderton, after a two hour sermon. Watts' own sermons and the advice which he offered to others were less ambitious, though consistently serious. He was appalled by the possibility that Jews, Anglicans and Papists put up a better showing than dissenters.

(15) What shall I say for our own excuse if I should find some papists exceeding us in their love to God, in their devotion to Christ and in their benevolence to men? I believe indeed, their number is but small; but methinks it is a shame and reproach to us under our superior advantages if there should be found any of that corrupt and superstitious church practising the Christian religion, in the substantial duties of it, better than we.

Watts back up his arguments by quoting with approval Thomas a Kempis and 'that excellent man the Archbishop of Cambrai'.

Watts continued to grapple with the problems of improving Christian worship in The Holiness of Times, Places and People (1738). His attitude was, as ever, thoroughly reasonable, though to our way of thinking excessively text-based. 'Did Noah keep the Sabbath in the Ark?' (16) was for Watts an important question, the answer to which had direct relevance to his own times. However, Watts could bring to bear caustic commonsense, as for example to the argument that the Lord's Supper should be administered in the evening because that was when the Last Supper occurred. John baptised 'with a hairy garment upon him and a leathen girdle, but it is not necessary that the minister should wear such vestments of hair or leather'.

The holiness of places of worship received a similar, no-nonsense treatment. Such had been the Jews' belief and practice in Old Testament times. But the New Covenant abolished the Old. Stephen told the Jews (Acts VII, 49) (17) that the holiness of their temples was ended. Baptism and the Lord's Supper did not require particular locations. 'Mortal men can never put holiness in ground or buildings where God has not put it'. Watts predictably lambasts the church of Rome's 'fooleries and ridiculous rites' and continues: 'I am well persuaded our wiser brethren

of the Church of England do not, indeed cannot believe them (places) to be of any value or importance in order to make the worship more acceptable to God'. Watts points out that the Church of England allows churches to be used for elections and council meetings and to be 'appointed to teach little children their ABC' .....

How few wise men are there, amongst all our brethren in the national church that would now-a-days approve of the ridiculous ceremonies, rites and gestures whereby Archbishop Laud, heretofore, consecrated Creed-church, near Aldgate, in London, and several others?

A foot-note rams home Watts' prejudices:

It is no wonder that the church of Rome should pretend to make common things and places holy, by the consecration of their bishops, when every priest among them, assumes a power to turn a bit of senseless paste into the holy body and blood of our Blessed Saviour.

So when Watts turns to the problem of Christian unity, we shall expect him to show more tolerance for Canterbury than Rome. Actually the Rational Foundation of a Christian Church (1747) is one of Watts' more attractive works. He does his best to emphasise the common ground between protestant denominations and to minimise doctrinal differences. He advocates at least occasional communion between protestants who differ in important points of doctrine or in:

External forms of worship or discipline which yet are not utterly inconsistent with each other; but if fixed and united in one single community, they might probably occasion frequent disturbances; such are the moderate episcopalians and baptists, lutherans and calvinists etc....

Now if these three sorts are admitted occasionally to communicate in the special ordinances of Christ, this seems to me sufficient to answer the canons of the apostle, where we are bid 'to receive such as Christ has received, and that without doubtful disputations (Romans XV, 7, 8 and XIV. 1)'. (18)

Watts continues:

As for all other protestants, whose differences are of less moment, notwithstanding they may be various, and almost infinite, yet if they are of a peaceful spirit and give evidence of hearty and sincere piety, I think they may join, where they have opportunity, as complete and constant members of the same Church, and worship the same God together, through the same Lord Jesus Christ, by the same Spirit, and fulfil all duties of Christian fellowship to his glory, and their mutual edification.

On the other hand when Watts deals with the question, 'whether all sorts of protestants may join together as members of the same church', he answers:

1. It is impossible, and they cannot.
2. It is unlawful, and they ought not.
3. (19) If it were both possible and lawful, yet it is highly inexpedient, and therefore it should not be done.

His approach, on the face of it far from oecumenical, is in fact perfectly sensible. Watts maintains that where views differ radically on such matters as episcopal ordination, worshippers cannot with a clear conscience participate in an invalid rite. Again, where there are fundamental differences in practice - e.g. standing or sitting or kneeling for communion, or praying extempore or by set formulae - common worship would lead to chaos and bitterness. Watts pleads, however, for mutual charity even if shared worship is

not to be -

Let them not therefore censure or judge one another, but so far as true piety appears, let them account each other good Christians. (20)

Nor will Watts allow that devotion to Scripture is an adequate basis for protestant unity. For he appreciates that widely differing interpretations may be placed on scripture. He lists the various heresies which can be derived from scripture - anthropomorphites, allegorists, arians, sabellians, socinians, enthusiasts, pelgians, arminians, antinomians, strict calvinists. He concludes:

Note, I have not mentioned the papists, because they allow not the Bible to be a perfect rule, but build part of their religion on human traditions, and the pretended infallible authority of their church ... But so many of all these sects of Christians that I have mentioned, as are found in our day, do all take the Bible for their perfect rule of faith and practice, and each of them will subscribe the whole Bible, at least their own translation of it. (21)

A particularly modern touch, this. Watts suggests that a socinian would translate John I, 'In the beginning was reason, and reason was with God, and reason was God'. He then mentions as a special case, comparable to a socinian - this is suggestive - the athanasian:

Suppose an athanasian refuses the English translation of Rev. III. 14, where Christ is called the beginning of the creation of God, and says ~~apx~~ ought to be translated 'the head of God's creation', lest Christ be represented as a creature, and he will put this text into his confession of faith ... (22)

Much of the early part of the work consists of discussion of the light reason and revelation throw on 'social religion'. How should Christians organise their society? Watts even acknowledges the wisdom of Rome in

demanding a two-thirds majority for crucial decisions. (23)  
 He has much to say of sound sense about the obligations of membership of covenants, of the best ways in which faith should be professed.

Just as the hymns are very much the product of youth, so the Rational Foundation is an old man's composition - sane, balanced, but somewhat platitudinous. However Watts writes from long experience and his views are of interest for the light thrown on the eighteenth century nonconformist scene.

(d) Theology

I have perhaps laboured the point too much that for Isaac Watts everything was Theology. Nonetheless for the purpose of clarity, I have reserved for special treatment Watts' work which to my mind is specifically theological. In particular, while his views outlined above are often striking and interesting without being especially controversial, we now definitely enter the realm of controversy.

Not that Watts' sermons were particularly controversial. They can be found in Volume 1 of the Barfield edition where they do in fact comprise the whole volume: if we include the Evangelical Discourses. There are in addition the Funeral Discourses in Volume 2.

We find ourselves listening to a sound and lucid conservative theologian. In sermon 2, for instance, Watts has this to say:

As high and glorious as my expectations are, they are built on a due apprehension of the justice of God, as well as his goodness; for in this way of salvation, offended justice is satisfied to the full, and mercy can exert itself in full glory, without the least dishonour or reflection on the strict righteousness of God. God is just in the justification of a sinner this way.

It had been said before! Watts every now and again makes a trenchant point. In sermon 7, he stresses the creditable fact that the rich man who came to Jesus was young. In addition he was courteous, humble - and asked the right question. Watts then suggests an interesting distinction between Jesus the man and the eternal God:

Jesus the Man looked upon this pretty youth that was well-born, sober and virtuous, and he loved him; but the eternal God, could pass by so desirable a person, whom the man Jesus could not look upon without pity and love.

Riches not surprisingly present Watts with problems. In sermon 4 he suggests that we should aim at the happy mean between self-indulgence and superstitious mortifying of the flesh: 'Let not any man imagine that I am here teaching the Romish penances and monkish severities.' On the other hand in sermon 8 he lambasts the well-bred and complacent:

Shall the rugged and clownish part of mankind press forward into that kingdom which ye despise?... Believe me, sirs, it is not an easy thing to be saved. Laziness and mere enquiries will not secure your souls from perdition.

This sermon was delivered at Tonbridge Wells. When Watts attacked the rich, he was doubtless correct in adding:



While I address myself to this assembly,  
I am well assured I speak to many persons  
of this character.

Watts could be emotional. He points out the need for the angel to minister to Christ in Gethsemane when he experienced the curse of the broken law, forsaken by God the Father (Sermon 35):

Surely such sorrows and such terrors  
demonstrate the work of propitiation and  
the dreadful labour of reconciling an  
offended God and sinful man.

Sermon 36 has a moving climax:

O happy day and happy hour indeed that shall  
finish the long absence of my beloved, and  
place me within sight of my adored Jesus!  
When shall I see that lovely, that illustrious  
friend, who laid down his own life to rescue  
mine, his own valuable life to ransom a worm,  
a rebel that deserved to die?

These extracts are, I hope, a fair cross-section of Watts' sermons and discourses. He is always worth listening to, even when he covers familiar ground. For example, he argues that the Resurrection proved that full atonement had been achieved on the Cross, which guarantees the power of Christ to sanctify and save. Watts deals with the claim that the Resurrection was only witnessed by Christ's followers. Not so, retorts Watts. Paul was his enemy! He was furthermore a man of passionate integrity, an intelligent, highly educated Pharisee, unlikely to tell lies.

The Funeral Discourses in Volume 2 of the collected works show Watts grappling with the Last Enemy. Death, he says, is like a serpent with drawn teeth. By his death, resurrection and ascension, Christ has removed

the curse of death, turning it into a blessing. The grave has been sanctified because Our Lord lay there. Death is for Christians just an opportunity to sleep; Watts points out that the ancient Christian word for a grave-yard was *κοιμητήριον*, the sleeping-place. However, Watts sees the grave as only a half-way stage. In his funeral discourse for Lady Hartopp, (Volume 2, page 10) he writes:

It is certain that she cannot enjoy that perfection of humble society with Christ in his glorified human nature, nor with fellow-saints while she is deprived of one part of herself, her body lying silent and moveless in the prison of the grave. And yet she waits for the more complete satisfaction of all her hopes when death her last enemy shall be destroyed and her body redeemed from the dust, together with the bodies of all the saints.

But Watts always stresses that those who die in Christ are present with him. And they enjoy the company of the spirits of 'just men made perfect - Robert Boyle, John Ray, Dr. Henry Moore, John Howe, Dr. Goodwin, Dr. Owen, Archbishop Ussher, Dr. Burnet, Archbishop Tillotson, Eusebius, Richard Baxter' - a catholic and rather odd selection. (24)

It was Baxter who had argued that 'there was nothing more indecent than to be a dead preacher, speaking to a dead people the living truth of the living God'. As one wades through Watts' sermons, one sometimes wonders how they went down. For example, the discourse Humility represented in the character of St. Paul is wholly admirable in its

sentiments, but terribly repetitive and verbose:

Let the fond child cry and roar because his play-thing is broken, let the fool storm or grow sullen because his will is thwarted; let the dog bark and the ox bellow when the brutal cholera is aroused within them; but remember thou art a man, a reasonable creature, a christian.

And so on - though I like Watts' motto:

They are so topful of self that they spill it on all the company.

He deals with the poor as well as the rich so far as the dangers of pride go:

I suspect there are more quarrels and contentions among the poorest and meanest of the people, than among the rich and high-born ... the polite education of the great teaches them to imitate humility and good humour, and by this means a quarrel is prevented; whereas the poor, who have been unbred and untaught, betray their pride often, and often rush into clamorous contentions.

Well ...! (25)

Watts always did his best, by the lights of the time, to comprehend within a rough definition of the church, all reasonable Christians. This was the theme of one of his earliest published prose works, the Essay against Uncharitableness (1707). But Watts was not prepared to gloss over fundamental issues - as he saw them - especially with regard to the atonement. In 1745 he published Orthodoxy and Charity United. 'Bottoming on fundamentals' (Baxter's phrase) was all very well. But there was a danger that everyone would simply choose his own version:

Synodias reads the Bible with a presbyterian glass, and Fratrio with a congregational optic. They can find nothing there but their own opinions. (26)

Watts attacks:

Some persons in the last and present age, I chiefly intend the socinian writers and those nominal christians, who are leaning towards deism.

Such nominal christians advocate the worship of God and love of neighbour as sufficient. Because we imitate our Lord Jesus Christ:

Then our sins shall be forgiven us by the mere mercy of God, through the supplication and intercession of so good a man as Jesus Christ, and we shall be accepted to eternal life ... and this without any dependence on the death of Christ, as a proper atonement or satisfaction for sin, or any regard to him as a true and real sacrifice. And as for the spirit of God and his almighty operation on the souls of men, to enlighten and sanctify them ... this is almost banished out of their gospel. (27)

Watts quotes the usual texts in favour of substitutionary atonement - and asks why there are so many references in the Bible if the Socinian scheme is correct (i.e. that Christ 'was a mere man: they deny his satisfaction for sin'). He discusses the Socinian claim that substitution was immoral. His answer is perhaps not entirely convincing: Scripture stresses Christ's sinless sacrifice - and who are we to argue with God's word? Watts adds:

The man Christ Jesus, who had a natural will which was distinct from the supreme will of the godhead, gave up himself to these sufferings and consented to it fully.

The atonement is also the central topic of  
The Redeemer and Sanctifier (1737): (28)

By the words atonement or propitiation I mean therefore some toilsome or painful thing to be done or suffered, or both, by Jesus Christ the Son of God, in the room and stead of sinful men, as a penance or punishment on account of their sins; and this by the wise and righteous appointment of God the universal Governor shall excuse the penitent offender from the punishment that was due and obtain his pardon because it shall give a recompense to the authority of the divine lawgiver for the affront which was put upon him by the sins of men, and shall make some reparation of honour to His holy law which was broken.

Again Watts attacks the views of those who could not accept New Testament preaching ('Did Plato preach "Socrates poisoned"?:')

By atonement for sin ... I do not mean any such thing as shall in a proper and literal sense appease the wrath of God, the offended Governor ... and incline his heart to mercy which was before determined on vengeance.

Watts accepts that such a doctrine would be inconsistent with the New Testament where God is represented as rich in mercy. (29) He points out that precisely because God pities sinful creatures, who had broken his law and deserved to die:

God himself provided and sent his own son to become a sacrifice and atonement and a ransom for them; he appointed him to be a surety for us, the just for the unjust, and to suffer death in the room and stead of sinners.

Watts, in other words, based his stand on Scripture, refusing to modify what he took to be the biblical gospel to accommodate progressive thinkers in the Age of Reason!

On the other hand, Watts was far more open to reason on the vexed issue of man's freedom, God's election. In the Ruin and Recovery of Mankind (1740), he could not accept the teaching of the High Calvinists. He realised that there was danger in forgetting that all men are sinners; even saints cannot live a whole day 'without breaking the perfect law of their Maker, in thought, word or deed'.

If all sense of our native sin and wretchedness be banished from among men, the rising ages may be tempted to neglect the only sovereign remedy of the grace of Christ, the second Adam, upon a mistaken presumption, that our natures have received no infection from the first.

However, he saw the strong logical case for some form of justification by works: (30)

There will be some reward for those that have sincerely repented of their sins ... and have endeavoured to honour Him and to serve their fellow creatures from a right principle of love to God and their love to man.

Watts points out how reasonable it is that:

Repenting sinners and men who practice virtue and piety shall be made partakers of this mercy and this salvation.

The case for double predestination is fairly put. (31) Watts points out that the majority of mankind are in fact offered the chance of availing themselves of God's mercy - and refuse:

Now when the great and blessed God had provided a means of recovery sufficient for all these sinners, and yet foresaw them disinclined to accept of it, would it be unjust in him to resolve that some should certainly be recovered by it?

Might he not ... form a decree that all these vicious and wretched creatures should not be utterly miserable? But that he would take certain and effectual care to save some of them from this madness and misery? ... Would not such a conduct be a manifestation of great grace and favour in God to men, even though he did not extend this favour to all the race of mankind?

But Watts cannot believe that God would deny anyone the chance of salvation:

His choosing other persons who were fellow sinners, to make them certain partakers of his grace, is no hinderance to those who were not chosen, from accepting the same. It is my opinion that there is such a thing as a general sufficiency of pardon, grace and happiness, provided for all mankind by Jesus Christ: And it is left to their own natural powers, under common helps, to accept or refuse it ... How can God, or Christ, be sincere in sending their ministers with this commission, to offer this grace to all men, if they know that God has never provided such grace or salvation for any but the elect, no, not so much as conditionally? (32)

Watts has an interesting footnote about 'those who profess to be the strictest calvinists; (33) not that they really do come nearest to Calvin's sentiments and language; for Calvin himself has frequently intimated, in his Comments on Scripture, that Christ did in some sense die for all men'. Watts is a long way from High Calvinism, still further from Hyper-Calvinism, both movements having indeed moved a long way from Calvin's original teaching; Watts was quite right. (34) He was far more in Richard Baxter's tradition, as he himself boasted. Watts, as ever, tried to reconcile contrasting views, grappling with - or even bottoming on! - paradox.

He follows up Ruin and Recovery with three supplementary essays, the second A Plain Explication of the Doctrine of Imputed Sin and Imputed Righteousness.

(35) Watts accepts the doctrine of imputed sin (our sins imputed to Christ) and righteousness (imputed to us by Christ), though with caution. He points out that there is no scriptural authority for the use of the actual term, imputation, though such a doctrine is implicit in scripture, provided it is not applied too literally. Here again, as in his essay Freedom of Will in God and in Creatures (1732) Watts' good sense revolts against the suggestion that men are automata. God has complete freedom of choice in his dealings with mankind, who is also free to accept God's grace:

Thus the virtuous and pious actions of man are praise-worthy and rewardable, and approve themselves to their own consciences as well as to God, the righteous governor and judge.

And so to the Trinity! This subject was to cause Watts endless mental torture, and to get him into trouble with his contemporaries. He meant well. In the Preface to his first Trinitarian work, The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, (1722) Watts naively expressed his excessively optimistic aims - to help all Christian believers by purging the doctrine of its scholastic non-scriptural elements. It was all to be so easy! He claims:

As the result of my search, I must say that I am a steadfast and sincere believer of the godhead of Christ still. (36)

Some might argue that 'still' was significant.



Watts begins his argument by stressing that one cannot be a Christian without believing in a doctrine of the Trinity. And this doctrine must be simple and scriptural:

It is certain, indeed, and must be confessed that this Sacred Doctrine of the Trinity has some great and unsearchable difficulties which attend the full explication of it, such as the wisest men in all ages have found too hard and too high for their comprehension; and yet it is as certain that so much of this doctrine as is necessary to salvation, is plainly revealed in Scripture, and easy to be understood; that the unlearned and persons of the meanest capacity, may attain the knowledge of it ... It shall be my business, therefore, to lead the unlearned Christian, by soft and easy steps, into this mystery.

Watts then puts forward twenty-two propositions which he proceeds to develop and explain. (37)

Most of these propositions are self-evident and unexceptionable. For instance, Proposition VII:

The peculiar and distinguishing characters of godhead are those names, titles, attributes, works, and worship which God has assumed to himself in his word, exclusive of any other being; and has either asserted them expressly to belong only to himself, or left it sufficiently evident in his word that they belong to him alone.

Proposition VIII:

Yet these very names, titles, attributes, works and worship which are peculiar to God, and incommunicable to another, are ascribed to three, by God himself, in his word; which three are distinguished by the names of Father, Son and Spirit.

Proposition XI:

Since there is, and can be, but one true God, these three, who have such a communion in godhead, may properly be called the one God, or, the only true God.

Proposition XIII:

Therefore it has been the custom of the christian church, in almost all ages, to use the word person, in order to describe these three distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit, and to call them three distinct persons.

Proposition XIV:

Though the sacred Three are evidently and plainly discovered in scripture to be one and the same God, and three distinct personal agents or persons, yet the Scripture hath not in plain and evident language explained, and precisely determined the particular way and manner, 'how these three persons are one God' or 'how this one godhead is in three persons'.

Proposition XV:

Thence I infer, that it can never be necessary to salvation to know the precise way and manner, how one godhead subsists in these three personal agents, or 'how these three persons are one God'.

Proposition XVII:

And wheresoever we meet with any thing in Scripture that is incommunicably divine, ascribed to either of these three persons, we may venture to take it in the plain and obvious sense of the words, since we believe the true and eternal godhead to belong to them all.

Proposition XVIII:

Where any thing inferior to the dignity of godhead is really and properly attributed in Scripture to the person of the Son or the Holy Spirit, it may be easily imputed to some inferior nature united to the godhead in that person, or to some inferior character or office sustained by that person.

Proposition XXI:

In so doing (i.e. by paying divine honours to the Trinity) we shall effectively secure our own salvation: For the Scripture has made our salvation to depend on those offices which these divine persons sustain, and the honours due to them according to these offices, rather than upon any deep philosophical notions of their essence and personalities, any nice and exact acquaintance with their mysterious union and distinction.

This last proposition is perhaps rather more debatable. Nor would anyone necessarily accept the final Proposition (XXII):

The man, therefore, who professes each of the sacred Three to have sufficient divine power and capacity to sustain the characters, and fulfil the offices attributed to them in Scripture, and pays due honour to them according to those offices, may justly be owned by me, and received as a christian brother, though we may differ much in our notions and opinions about the explication of the blessed Trinity, or though we may both be ignorant or doubtful of the true way of explaining it.

Watts then proceeds to discuss and develop each of the twenty-two propositions. Under Proposition 8, he deals with the theory that 'a sort of lower adoration, a subordinate sort of divine worship' should be paid to Christ. He finds any such worship to be unscriptural: (38)

It is plain that the arian and socinian doctrines, which deny our Lord Jesus Christ to be the true and eternal God, cannot be supported in opposition to such obvious evidences of Scripture ...

Watts argues that to pay subordinate honour to Son and Spirit suggests separate gods - i.e. polytheism. Nor

can he accept that worshippers (and martyrs) who have lived and died in the Trinitarian faith would have received God's comfort and support (he calls this 'a moral argument' (39)).

On the question of inferior attributes, (Proposition 18) Watts is perhaps more controversial. He details the human weaknesses of Christ (sent by God, born of a virgin, 'he knew not the day of judgement', subject to hunger, thirst, weariness, grief, etc.).

Then:

Now if we can give ourselves leave to suppose that the human soul of our Lord Jesus Christ had a being, and was personally united to the divine nature, long before his body was born of the virgin, even from the very foundation of the world, and that this was the Angel who conversed with Abraham, Moses, Joshua, etc., then we may most easily account for these expressions in Scripture, which signify something inferior to Godhead before his incarnation; (40) and we may attribute them to the human soul of Christ; which, though infinitely inferior to God, yet doubtless is a spirit of a very excellent and noble nature, as being formed on purpose to be united to God, and never existed but in a personal union with God.

Watts argues that there is nothing in Scripture to contradict such a belief. He adds a significant footnote: (41)

I do not mention this pre-existence of the human soul of Christ as a point of faith, which I firmly believe, but merely as a matter of opinion, not to be rashly rejected, and well worth our farther inquiry; for I have not met with any thing yet published against it, that is sufficient to forbid the proposal of it here; and perhaps I shall say much more for it if I should live to publish some short dissertations that I have written relating to the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Son and the Spirit are compared to a king's ambassador and resident, physically subordinate and yet representing the king's mind and soul. (42) Watts admits that such a simile might over-simplify the problem. But such an approach ties in with his advice to his readers ('especially those of younger years'), given in the Conclusion:

Since a particular knowledge of the modus or manner, how three persons are one God, is not clearly revealed in Scripture, and therefore not necessary to salvation, 'Be not too fond of any learned explications of this sacred mystery'. (43)

The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity was attacked by both orthodox and unorthodox. Martin Tomkins, who had lost his post as minister for his Arian/Socinian notions, published A Sober Appeal to a Turk or an Indian, Concerning the Plain Sense of Scripture, relating to the Trinity. Being an answer to Mr. I. Watts's late Book. This work was partly the cause of Watts' next utterances on the Trinity, Dissertations relating to The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, though he had made clear in the footnote quoted above that he was going to publish anyway.

The first part of the Dissertations, published in 1724, consisted of three essays. In the Preface (44) Watts thanked the anonymous author (i.e. Tomkins) of the Sober Appeal for his courtesy, though he accused him of misrepresenting his arguments. 'I confess, when I wrote that little book, I had no purpose of engaging

myself in controversy. My intention was only to exhibit the plain naked doctrine of the Trinity'. Is Watts being disingenuous here? Possibly not. He was in fact a poor controversialist, not so much because of his ill-health - about which he complains bitterly in this Preface - but because he was too ready to see his opponents' view point, too hesitant in expressing his own ... 'Some will make it a matter of offence and scandal, that "I do not write with that full assurance of every thing as others would do in the like case".' Watts explains that his own opinions are constantly changing, though 'I think that I am established afresh in the belief of the deity of Christ and the blessed Spirit'. Again, he meets the criticism that 'I treat the adversaries of the divinity of Christ with too much gentleness' by arguing that Christ's example should lead us to charity, that wisdom is peaceable and not tempestuous.

Watts' charity to the unorthodox was in evidence in the first essay, The Arian Invited to the Orthodox Faith. He defines 'orthodox' as 'that explication of the Trinity which supposes the divine nature to be but one numerical or individual essence or being; and that this essence is the same in the Father, the Word and the Spirit'. He does his best to coax his Arian reader into accepting a reasonably orthodox view of Christ. His argument is that 'these names, titles and prerogatives, ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ, in

several places of scripture, ... would naturally lead the unlearned and common Christian into a belief that they are the very same characters whereby the great and blessed God has distinguished himself'. How can these divine attributes of Christ be reconciled with the unity of God? Watts pleads for the divine and human nature of Christ. He continues: 'May there not be such a close and intimate union or oneness between God and a creature, as that the actions and characters of either of them may be attributed to the whole compound being?'

(45) Arians such as Dr. Clarke accept 'a peculiar, strict and perfect union and communion between the Father and the Son' ... 'Where is the inconvenience or difficulty of allowing this to be called a personal union, whereby what is proper to God may be attributed to Christ and what is proper to either part of the compound person may be applied to the whole?'

Having nudged the Arian this way, Watts introduces his own hobby-horse, the pre-existence of Christ's human soul:

The human soul of Christ being thus anciently united to the divine nature did, about seventeen hundred years ago, assume 'a body that was prepared for it by the Father, through the peculiar operation of the Holy Spirit'. Upon this account sometimes Christ, or the Son of God, is said to 'come in the flesh', at other times God himself is represented as 'manifest in the flesh'; some expressions referring chiefly to the godhead, others to god-man, or the soul of Christ in ancient union with his divine nature.

Watts developed these ideas in his second essay, God and Man United in the Person of Christ. He was especially concerned with the question, what do we mean by person in this context? It is evident, Watts maintains, that Christ was a proper person; it is also evident that he is God. We can only defend these two notions by supposing 'two distinct natures, of God and of man, united to make up one complex or compound principle of action and passion, that is to make up one person'. Watts argues for 'a peculiar union between the human and divine natures in Christ, as sufficiently qualifies him for all the honours and of offices of his mediation'. (46)

Watts was to return to the problem in the second batch of essays, which he published in 1725, on the subject of the Trinity:

I confess, I am not aware of any text, where any term that expressly signifies person is applied to the Holy Spirit, or to the divine nature of Christ, considered apart from the man Jesus; yet since the sacred Three have such sort of distinct actions and characters attributed to them in Scripture, as we usually ascribe to three distinct intelligent agents, we make no scruple to call them all persons, and think there is sufficient foundation for it in Scripture.

Yet let it be noted, that though the word person may be fitly used, and applied to the doctrine of the Trinity, we are not to imagine that it should be always taken here exactly in the same sense, and include precisely the same ideas, as when we call three men, or three angels, three distinct persons. (47)

This is precisely Watts' problem. He is unwilling to use the word person with regard to the divine



attributes of Christ. If Christ the man is being discussed, fine! But:

If the divine Word, ...be not sufficiently distinct from the Father to be called a person, yet surely it may be allowed that the man Christ Jesus is a proper person, and his union to the divine Word does not abate or destroy his personality. The whole complex being, or God-man, may have a sufficient claim to personality, and all the personal pronouns, I, thou, and he, are properly applied to him.

But he also claims that the word person can only be applied to Christ as God figuratively and analogically. (48)

Still less is Watts happy about the application of 'person' to the Holy Spirit. In fact he advocates tentatively the substitution of 'powers' to describe the Word and the Holy Spirit, though he very sensibly draws back from the confusion of Christian people if such a substitution were made. In the essay Of the Holy Spirit (second group of four dissertations) Watts reiterates his conviction that the Spirit is a person in the figurative sense only, though Scripture clearly teaches that he has true godhead and is a person distinct from the Father and the Son. The dangers of the term 'person' are summed up by Watts when he defends his figurative sense argument:

This seems to be much more eligible than that we should explain his personality in a strict literal sense, for this would lead us into one of these two dangers, viz. either to make three distinct consciousnesses, or intelligent minds, in the one true and eternal God, or to sink the character of the Holy Spirit into a creature, that we might save the proper personality. (49)

In Watts' third essay, The Worship of Christ, as Mediator, founded on his Godhead, he will not allow the possibility of Christian worship of an inferior being - a very protestant doctrine, as Watts points out. He makes much of John X.30 - 'I and my Father are one' - which words 'represent him to be the same God as the Father, or to be God by virtue of some personal oneness with the godhead of the Father'. (50) The argument here is that if Jesus had allowed himself to be worshipped in a subordinate sense, he would have been creating in himself a separate god. Watts quotes 'the learned Dr. Waterland' who had written, 'The worship of the same one God, exclusive of all others, is for ever made unchangeable by this text' (from Deuteronomy). The first commandment must not be repealed. Watts accuses the socinians of reintroducing 'creature worship' which the Judo-Christian religion had sought to abolish. While expressing caution on the danger of worshipping Jesus the man, Watts argues that this obligation is specifically stated in Scripture, because Jesus had succeeded in mediating between man and God ('Worthy is the Lamb ...' 'No man cometh to the Father but by me'). Watts quotes texts from John's first Letter (1 John I, 1, 2, 3) to back up his claim that Christ as Logos is to be worshipped as God.

But then what does our theological hero do but back-track and argue that subordinate worship is desirable, to Christ as mediator? He admits that he

has changed his former views:

I confess, that in my Book of the Trinity, I have followed some great writers, and allowed no different sorts or degrees of religious worship mentioned in Scripture, nor any scriptural difference between supreme and subordinate religious worship. In so sublime and so difficult a subject we are too ready to follow the phrases and language of great writers without a due examination: I beg leave to correct these expressions, and to explain myself according to the distinction which I have now proposed. I know of no subordinate worship in Scripture with regard to the foundation of it, or that which renders the object capable of religious worship; this is the sense in which I meant all worship is supreme, that is, it admits no person to be the object of it who is not God; but there may be mediate or subordinate forms of worship paid to him that is true God, when in union with an inferior nature he condescends to take upon him the form or character of a Mediator. (51)

When Jesus is the vehicle by which we come to God, he is subordinate, in other words. Watts quotes 'At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow' as a text illustrating subordinate or mediate worship. (52)

Watts concludes his essay by appealing for belief in the duty to worship God alone and 'that the man Jesus, as personally united to the godhead, is exalted to some kind of partnership in this honour'. He also very wisely appeals for caution until we shall see the Redeemer face to face, and discover all. (53)

In his Preface to the second group of essays, Watts defends his achievements, willingly admitting that he has changed his mind on important issues. And why not? Watts claims that his principles are to consult Scripture, think for himself and listen to his

critics. Inevitably, because he is human, ('Only God is unchangeable') he turns out to be wrong and, being honest, he admits it. It is impossible not to admire Watts' integrity - and his formidable knowledge and industry which are both prominent in his essay, The Sentiments of the Ancient Jews and Primitive Christians Concerning the 'Logos', or Word, Compared with Scripture. After reviewing the theories of Old Testament prophets and Christian Fathers, to say nothing of latter-day authorities such as Baxter and Whiston, Watts reverts to his pet-theory that Jesus' human soul had its origins 'as the first-born of every creature'. (54) He develops this idea from the theory which others had advanced (according to Watts, 'generally agreed') that Christ 'before his incarnation, was the angel of the Lord - the God who fed Jacob and the angel who redeemed him. He was the man who wrestled with Jacob, and God, the Lord of hosts, whose name and memorial is Jehovah'. (55)

Watts concluded these essays with Of the Distinction of Persons in the Divine Nature, in which he proposed an analogy between God and a human soul. Just as a soul has a knowing power (the mind) and an active power (the will) so God has two distinct powers, the Word and the Spirit. In other words, Watts is still working away at the dangers of the concept 'persons' when Christ and the Holy Spirit are considered. We recall his preference for 'powers' instead of 'persons'.

The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity and the seven essays or dissertations which emerged between 1722 and 1725 were tentative enquiries, rather than dogmatic statements. Watts was thinking aloud, so to speak. Near the end of his life, in 1746, he published two further works - Useful and Important Questions concerning Jesus the Son of God Freely Proposed and The Glory of Christ as God-Man. These final attempts are not really any more dogmatic; the author is the same honest, puzzled seeker after truth. Furthermore they had been in draft for many years, Watts having delivered 'a trailer' about the Glory of Christ as God-Man in his dissertations of 1725. Nonetheless, in all probability these two works represent Watts' mature views on the Trinity.

In the preface to Useful and Important Questions Watts attests his concurrence with the Athanasian Creed, quoting 'We believe and confess the Lord Jesus Christ ... God of the same substance with the Father ... Equal to the Father, as touching his godhead, and yet inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood'. He then discusses the meaning of the term 'Son of God'. Watts maintains that Christ's own words did not amount to a claim to be Son of God, implying equality with God - 'the belief of Christ to be the Son of God, in some more eminent sense than all the ancient prophets and kings were, that is, to be the glorious Messiah, is all that Christ directly and plainly designed in calling himself the Son of God'. (56) After all,

Watts observes, the very word 'son' implies dependence - and therefore to base Christ's divinity on the title 'Son of God' is intellectually dangerous:

Now if by this exposition of the name Son of God I remove any of the great impediments out of the way of the arians or socinians, from believing the true deity of Christ, then I shall account myself to have done service and honour to that glorious article of our faith. (57)

Watts goes on to argue that only gradually, after the Resurrection, did Christians accept Christ as divine, 'in whom dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily' (Col. II. 9).

Watts now reaches the essence of his case, the pre-existence of Christ's human soul. He quotes a sermon by the seventeenth century puritan John Flavel where God's love in sending his Son to save us and Christ's love in agreeing to obey his Father and be born on earth are movingly described. How could such a covenant be agreed, asks Watts, if Christ's soul had not pre-existed before the Incarnation? (58)

And this blessed soul of Christ, united to godhead, is a proper subject to enter into these articles, to accept of the terms of this covenant of redemption, to consent to part with the bosom of the Father, etc. (59)

This great love led to the incarnation, the union of God and man, whereby Jesus was the express image of God's glory.

The Glory of Christ as God-Man opens with Watts, in the Preface, stressing once again his conviction that 'Our blessed Saviour is often represented in

Scripture as a complex person, wherein God and man are united, so as to make up one complex agent ...' Once again, too, he appeals for open-minded charity, stressing that just because his ideas may seem new, they are not necessarily wrong.

The work consists of three discourses. In the first, Watts exhaustively traces the Old-Testament appearances of Christ, for example talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (this was not God the Father). Watts states right away that his argument entirely destroys socinianism. He maintains that Christ's Old Testament appearances were in the form of an angel, just as his New Testament manifestation was in the form of a man.

In the second discourse, the Extensive Powers of Christ Glorified, Watts stresses the biblical evidence for the power and honour of Jesus, after returning to the Father. Jesus is now at the right hand of God, the Judge, Alpha and Omega. How can it come about that a human soul should be invested with such honour? Because of course the human soul of Christ was united with the divine nature. Though his powers were limited in the days of his humiliation on earth, it is otherwise now that Christ is in his glorified state. (60)

So we come to the last discourse - The Glory of Christ as God-Man Displayed by Tracing out the Early Existence of his Human Nature as the First-born of God, or as the First of all Creatures, Before the Formation of this World.

Watts traverses much familiar ground. He places additional emphasis, however, on the notion that such incidents as God wrestling with Jacob or sitting with Abraham under a tree are much more intelligible if we suppose that this was in fact Christ's human soul. (61) Or take the text, Philippians 11. 5. where Paul speaks of Christ being in the form of God, before emptying himself. This surely suggests an existence before Christ came to earth? Or again:

Consider further, it seems to be that same nature emptied itself which was afterwards filled with glory as a recompense: And it is the same nature that is said to humble itself which was afterwards highly exalted by God: Now this was not the divine nature of Christ, but the human: Therefore it must be the human nature of Christ that emptied itself in this text; because it appears very incongruous for the apostle to say, that the divine nature emptied and abased itself, and that the human nature was exalted as a recompense of this abasement. (62)

Watts concludes by admitting that his doctrine is not 'necessary to make a man a Christian', although it deals with many problems and, in the author's opinion, 'casts a beauty upon the whole Christian faith'. (63) Watts backs up his own opinion by claiming that various reputable divines have agreed with him on the pre-existence of Christ's human soul - Dr. Henry More, Dr. Edward Fowler, Mr. Robert Fleming, Mr. Joseph Hussey, Dr. Francis Gastrell, Dr. Knight, Dr. Thomas Bennet, Dr. Thomas Burnet and various anonymous authors - to say nothing of Origen.

There remains A Faithful Enquiry which according to George Burder was initially published without the author's permission and which adds nothing to Watts' Trinitarian



views. Of great significance, however, is The Author's Solemn Address which was published posthumously and had been placed in front of A Faithful Enquiry. This touching, indeed harrowing document, shows just how unsatisfied Watts remained about the truth concerning the Trinity. I shall refer to The Author's Solemn Address in detail later and it will be found complete as an appendix to this work.

I hope that I have given a fair picture of Watts' literary achievements. Although verbose, he is never to be taken for granted. There is a charming anecdote which illustrates Isaac Watts' lively approach to life. An artist was painting a picture of a lake for Sir Thomas Abney. He left his painting for a few moments - perhaps for his tea-break. When he returned, he was astonished to find that a swan had miraculously appeared on the canvas. Sir Thomas' tame theologian had walked by and could not resist the temptation to improve the picture. He was always willing to chance his arm, even when it would have been wiser to have left well alone. He was also a wit.

I have heard it hinted that the name of Christ has been banished out of polite sermons, because it is a monosyllable of so many consonants, and of so harsh a sound.

One can surely be forgiven for regretting that Watts did not give free rein to his wit and sense of fun more often.

### Chapter 3

#### Some Assessments of Watts' Work

##### (a) Watts' Verse

It is difficult to avoid the distinction between Isaac Watts' poetic and prose works when one approaches the question of how his works have been assessed. So far as I know, virtually no-one has questioned the theology in his hymns and other poems. When the unitarians invited him to disown his own doxologies, he agreed that he would gladly have them expressed otherwise. And J. Austin Baker, The Foolishness of God, considers the last verse of When I survey the Wondrous Cross 'moral blackmail'. (1) These comments apart, the poetry poses the question of aesthetic judgement, or such issues as Watts' place in the development of English literature. Apparently the hymns are theologically sound - unlike Watts' prose.

I shall come back to this question in the next chapters. Now, however, I must briefly mention the assessments of Watts' hymns, made by various commentators. I may say that I would never accept a hard and fast division between aesthetic and theological judgement. I have views on both aspects of the question, what makes a great hymn? The skill of the poet as a technician is married to his sensibility and insight as a theologian.

Nor should one miss so obvious a point as the role of a good tune in popularising a hymn. A. P. Davis is absolutely right to stress this aspect of Watts' popularity, (2) though I am surprised that he should mention the Old 100th ('Before Jehovah's Awful Throne), St. Anne's ('Oh God, our help'), Beulah ('There is a land of pure delight') but not Rockingham ('When I survey the Wondrous Cross').

Watts' hymns undoubtedly made a great stir with contemporaries. They were such a striking improvement on previous attempts at religious verse. Even Dr. Johnson, in his rather patronising and grudging way, wrote of Watts' religious verse, 'It is sufficient for Watts to have done better than others what no man has done well'. Johnson certainly included Isaac Watts in his anthology of poets. John Wesley had enormous admiration for Watts' verse and he died with Watts' hymn on his lips - 'I'll praise my Maker while I've breath'.

Subsequent views of Watts' verse have been reflected in the numbers in popular hymn-books. Perhaps inevitably, as his verse becomes more and more quaint and dated, the number has fallen off, though you never know where Watts' hymns will turn up.

As a poet Watts has had distinguished admirers apart from Johnson - Cowper, Southey, A. E. Houseman. As a hymnographer, his significance has always been appreciated. Although the novelty of his hymns and his revolutionary approach to the psalms offended

conservative contemporaries such as Bradbury, Watts' hymns were a success from the start. (3) Davies believes that congregationalists were saved from Arianism by the strongly traditional hymns of Isaac Watts. R. W. Dale judges that Watts' 'theological peculiarities ... have been forgotten in the immense and enduring services that he has rendered to English-speaking evangelical churches in all parts of the world'. Harry Escott sees Watts as the man who enabled congregations to sing hymns - hymns having become a social necessity, not only to enable congregations to praise God, but also for doctrinal edification. Watts' hymns were grateful songs of deliverance from persecution, according to Escott - 'the new song of the redeemed community'. (4)

Bernard Lord Manning compared Watts and Charles Wesley in his Hymns of Wesley and Watts. He suggests that Watts saw the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection, against a cosmic background: he surveys the whole of creation as opposed to Charles Wesley who could never leave Calvary. Manning makes the obvious but important point that Wesley came after Watts and owed him so much. Wesley, Manning believes, was the greater artist - 'He flies more surely, he crashes far less often'. Watts had the greater mind, the wider outlook, the daring originality which Wesley lacked, in his theological blinkers. (5)

Watts' poetry for children has been generously praised. Escott credits him with writing for children,

not about children. V. De Sola Pinto believes that the Cradle Song was Watts' masterpiece:

In an age of sophistication and stilted speech and thought, in the midst of a highly artificial civilisation Watts has rediscovered things that English poets had forgotten for a long time, the magic of innocence and tenderness, the beauty of small and humble things, the divine quality of childhood. (6)

Pinto also admires Watts' general approach to poetry, his willingness to give his 'adventurous muse' her opportunity. Watts is to be remembered 'as a poet who kept alive the spirit of freedom and adventure in imaginative literature at a time when it was nearly stifled'. Pinto sees the importance of Watts' aim that poetry was to be all 'meridian light and meridian fervour'. He is illogical, however, in rejecting Watts' hymns as poetry - 'A hymn, if it is poetry, is, as it were, poetry by accident. Its main object is not to give aesthetic pleasure but to provide edification'. Personally, I see no reason why a hymn should be any more or less poetical than, say, love poems. Pinto is perhaps nearer the mark when he sees Watts as a link between seventeenth century puritanism and the Romantics.

Hoyles (7) argues that Watts occupied the watershed between the late Metaphysical poets and the early pre-romantics. This is ground which Addison is widely credited with holding, but Hoyles points out that contemporaries read Watts as much as Addison. Isaac Watts is for Hoyles too a link figure between the aristocratic, intellectualistic world of the Renaissance and the modern

world of emotionalist democracy, between seventeenth century pietism and the sentimentalism of the eighteenth century and nineteenth century. Hoyles sees Watts as an ingrained compromiser, like Addison a populariser. His particular contribution was utilitarian - to make poetry widely useful by sinking it. His hymns were designed for all Christians. He was averse to making 'anything in religion heavy or tiresome' - or contentious.

Hoyles still sees Metaphysical influence, rightly pointing out that Watts' verse often sounds more like Crawshaw than Wesley. But Watts proceeded to purge his hymns of metaphysical influences, with unfortunate results, according to Hoyles. His poetry became impoverished due to this deliberate pursuit of simplicity - or bathos. Of course Watts had a point. In the Preface to his Psalms he wrote:

In some of the more elevated psalms I have given a little indulgence to my genius; and if it should appear that I have aimed at the sublime, yet I have generally kept within the reach of an unlearned reader. I never thought the art of sublime writing consisted in flying out of sight.

Watts was so scared of seeming to 'fondle Christ' that he revised his religious verse, toning down metaphysical touches: 'To the dear crimson of thy veins' becomes 'To the dear fountain of thy blood', 'And taste the sweetness of those lips' becomes 'And hear the language of those lips'. Suspect verses were omitted or recommended for omission. 'His dying crimson' was demoted to the optional category as early as 1709

(written in 1707) - and demoted by Watts. Some would argue that it was the finest four lines he wrote!

Watts, of course, has been parodied and belittled. For instance:

The dogs and the birds and the little busy bee -  
O! It's all sing-song in the Watts countree.

Lewis Carroll enjoyed himself at the expense of Divine Songs for Children in Alice in Wonderland and Evelyn Waugh mocked 'O God our help' in Decline and Fall. (8) But while extravagant praise can be overdone (it is a matter of opinion whether one agrees with Matthew Arnold that 'When I survey' is the greatest hymn in the English language) no-one is going to dispute Watts' place as a hymnographer. R. Tudor Jones puts it well:

Watts amply fulfilled his programme. When all has been said about his turgidity, grotesqueness and lapses of taste and when the parodists have had their fill of demonstrating their facility on his verses, he remains one of the greatest of English hymn writers ... The magnificent self-centredness of Methodist hymnody had not yet displaced the classical objectivity of Puritan theology. In consequence Watts looks outwards rather than inwards. And yet his greatest hymns pulsate with an emotion which is prophetic of the emphasis on feeling and personal experience which was such a close link between Methodist hymnody and the Romantic movement in literature ... As preacher, logician, educationalist and apologist this frail man of little more than five feet made a valuable contribution to the life of the churches. But his lasting gift to the Church of Christ is his hymnody. (9)

In his book A Gathered Church Donald Davie gives us a perceptive and generous assessment of Isaac Watts. In general he gives Watts and Doddridge credit for toning down the Calvinist doctrinal system which they rightly

appreciated was 'offensive to sensibility'. In particular Davie admires Watts' verse, both for its bold experimentalism ('a shocking example of Protestant individualism') and for its restraint. He believes that 'O God our help' is classical, in that detail is subordinated to the whole, and aesthetically Calvinist in its simplicity, sobriety and measure. He sees Watts as the tribal poet, the true successor of David, the tribe being Protestant dissent ('We are a garden'). Davie points out that 'Watts Entire', that is to say his collected hymns and psalms, was more read, sold and known than any other eighteenth century work, including Johnson's Dictionary, Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver's Travels.

Davie argues that eighteenth century orthodox dissent has been harshly treated by historians, as opposed to unitarians such as Priestley and Faraday whose political radicalism has procured them a favourable press. He attacks Stephens for his unfairness to Watts - 'In his doctrinal writings there are signs of the diffuse sentimentalism which not infrequently accompanies a feeble constitution ... Unlike most of his contemporaries, he addresses the heart, rather than the intellect'. On the contrary, Davie claims, it was the sentimental enthusiasts Whitefield and, later, C. H. Spurgeon who abandoned orthodox doctrines with regard to the Atonement and the sacraments. It was they who were responsible for the mindless Philistinism of Dissent in contrast to Watts who



was a deeply cultured European, translating the Polish Jesuit, Matthew Casimire Sarbiewski ('the Christian Horace'). Davie praises Watts for his 'artistic kenosis': 'Watts had to lay his poetic glories aside, and dress the profound message of the gospel in homespun verse and the language of the people'.

(b) Watts' Prose

To the best of my knowledge no-one has made claims for Watts' prose comparable to those discussed above with regard to his verse. No admirer has praised his prose style - though it is not bad. No one claims that he was a link-figure or even that his contribution to theological development was significant in the history of the Christian church. The only critical comment that has been passed on Watts' prose is that he was unorthodox - to a greater or less extent. And it is chiefly to this question that I shall confine myself in my review of assessments of Watts' prose.

Watts' contemporaries were clearly unhappy about the various Trinitarian essays. His own friends were sad and embarrassed that such a widely loved and respected figure - the noted author of popular hymns, the fashionable London preacher, honoured with doctorates by two universities - should be suspected of arian or socinian heresies. Colman wrote from America, 'My dear Watts has looked so long at the sun as to weaken his sight'.

Cotton Mather was equally shocked by Watts' charity towards Arians (cf The Arian Invited to the Orthodox Faith), writing to Thomas Prince about Watts:

I take him to be a very disqualified person for the managing of the vast subject he has undertaken ... He is not only too shallow for it; but also led away with a spurious and criminal charity (sic!) for those abominable idolaters, the Arians ... Could his predecessor (Chauncy) once again take his pen into his hand, he would charge him with nothing less than grievous heresies. (10)

And perhaps most wounding of all those who criticised Watts to his face was Thomas Bradbury, his erstwhile friend:

It is a pity, after you have been more than thirty years a teacher of others, you are yet to learn the first principles of the oracles of God ... Was Dr. Owen's church to be taught another Jesus, that the Son and the Holy Spirit are only two powers in the divine nature?

There was heated controversy immediately after Watts' death as to how far along the road to socinianism he had travelled. Watts' published works were allegedly to have been supplemented by works which were destroyed by his orthodox friends. It was widely accepted that Watts had been senile for prolonged periods - and this accounted for his deviations, though whether he deviated from orthodoxy or socinianism in his dotage depended on one's point of view!

Theophilus Lindsey maintained that Watts was definitely unitarian in his last years and that his hymns contained many sentiments 'from which his judgement revolted in maturer years, and which he would gladly have altered, if he had been permitted by the proprietors of

the copyright, who knew their own interest too well to admit the proposed improvements'. Nathaniel Lardner claimed that 'Dr. Watts' last thoughts were completely unitarian' ... 'But his papers fell into good hands (meaning Mr. Neal's) and they did not think them fit for publication'. The Rev. S. Merivale of Exeter asked Lardner if Watts ever gave up his belief in the pre-existence of Christ's human soul. Lardner replied:

I question whether you have anywhere in print Dr. Watts' last thoughts upon the Trinity. They were known to very few. My nephew Neal, an understanding gentleman, was intimate with Dr. Watts and often with the family where he lived. Sometimes in an evening when they were alone, he would talk to his friends in the family of his new thoughts about the person of Christ and of their great importance and that, if he should be able to recommend them to the world, it would be the most considerable thing that ever he performed ... My nephew being executor had the papers, and showed me some of them ... (11)

Contemporaries were certainly aware of the rumours alleging Watts' unitarian tendencies. Witness the anecdote about a unitarian woman telling Dr. Johnson that 'although he (Watts) had defended the Trinitarian doctrine in his works (sic), he opened his eyes at his death. "Did he, Madam?" Johnson is said to have replied, "Then the first thing he saw was the devil".'

Toplady has this to say: (12)

Gladly would I throw, if possible, an everlasting veil over this valuable person's occasional deviations from the simplicity of the gospel, relative to the personality and divinity of the Son and Spirit of God. But justice compels me to acknowledge that he did not always preserve an uniform consistency with himself, nor with the scriptures of truth, so far as concerns that grand and fundamental article of the

Christian faith. The inconclusiveness (to call it by the tenderest name we can) of his too wanton tamperings with the doctrine of the Trinity, has been largely and irrefragably demonstrated by more hands than one... Notwithstanding this declension, I am happy in believing that the grace and faithfulness of the Holy Ghost did not permit our author to die under the delusions of so horrible and pernicious an heresy.

Controversy raged for the rest of the eighteenth century. The Rev. S. Palmer, in his Character of Dr. Watts (1785) produced a sensible summary: (13)

Dr. Watts was willing to receive light from every quarter and ready to embrace whatever upon free enquiry appeared to be the truth, however contrary to his former sentiments. ...Accordingly it is well known that he did in various particulars differ in judgement from those on the one hand who have claimed the character of orthodox, as well as from those on the other who have complimented themselves with the title of Rational. He thought for himself and called no man master on earth.

Palmer did not think that Watts was Arian 'though it must be owned that his manner of conceiving and explaining some things relating to the Trinitarian doctrine was different from that of the generality of those who were called orthodox'. With regard to the Glory of Christ as God-Man Palmer argued:

From these it is abundantly evident that he had not given into the Arian or Socinian hypothesis, for he expresses himself strongly against both, and maintains positions inconsistent with either. But it must at the same time be allowed that he evidently appears to have deviated from the most commonly received opinions, concerning the Son and Spirit of God, though he maintained the true Divinity of both.

The Rev. George Burder wrote the Preface or 'Memoirs' to the Barfield edition of 1810. He did not mince his words in his review of Watts' works. 'We now come to the Doctor's more obnoxious publications on the Trinitarian controversy'. Burder gives Watts full marks for his ambition to reconcile contending parties. But he then demolishes his theology. 'He first avows his strong attachment to the indwelling scheme which, it seems, ascribes the Godhead of Jesus to his union with the Divine nature, and not to his being a distinct person in that nature, as the Trinitarians generally speak'. Burder asks, how could Jesus be the second Adam, if Watts' scheme is correct? If there was no personal distinction between the Persons, was the Father himself incarnate, subject to sufferings and death? Burder especially attacks Useful and Important Questions concerning Jesus the Son of God, where Watts claims that 'Son of God' does not relate to deity but to Jesus' mediatorial character and miraculous conception. Very true, comments Burder, but there is much more in the Bible than that - compare John V. 18 and Hebrews VII. 8. Finally Burder is most unsympathetic to Watts' Solemn Address, criticising him for trying to live too much by sight as opposed to faith, delving too deep and presuming on his own fitness to have too much revealed to him. (14)

It is of course ironic that such a slashing indictment should appear as part of an edition of Watts'

works. As a matter of fact, during the course of the nineteenth century, Watts' alleged heresies tended to be forgotten and neither Milner nor Hood are as hard on Watts as Burder. Remnants of Time were read by the youthful J. H. Newman in 1816 - there being no suggestion that as an author Watts was unsafe, though this was not of course one of the Trinitarian works. (15)

J. Hay Colligan (The Arian Movement in England) has an exceptionally interesting passage on Watts' theology. 'The most important name among the liberal school of theologians in the eighteenth century, was that of Isaac Watts D.D.' (1674-1748) - with all respect to Watts, a somewhat flattering judgement. Colligan accepts that Watts' last two pamphlets (presumably Useful and Important Questions and the Glory of Christ) represent his final views, and rejects Lardner's contention that anything of significance was suppressed. Colligan continues:

Watts is of opinion that 'the Sacred Three' are all represented in several places, as having true and proper deity, yet on account of the contention which the word 'person' has raised in the Churches he argues against the use of it. The foundation truth as he conceives it is, that if the Son of God and the Holy Spirit have true Godhead, as well as the Father, then since there is but one true eternal God, it follows that one and the same true Godhead which is in the Father is the very Godhead that belongs to the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Colligan then proceeds to analyse Watts' theories with regard to the 'assumption' of Christ's human soul by God. Christ became the archetype for the whole of

humanity, his perfections being scattered in the rest of creation.

Upon this theory Watts had therefore to give the archetype a real existence before the origin of the world, and he does so by conceiving Christ as a glorious creature who was 'assumed' by God as an organ prior to the world, and through it (sic) all things were created. This glorious soul is the mirror and image of God, taking up into itself as much of the divine as any created being could grasp. In Mary, this soul 'assumed' in addition, human flesh.

Colligan's concern is of course with deviation from strictly orthodox theology, and for this reason pays Watts the compliment of detailed description. I am not convinced, however, that this description is entirely accurate. Still less do I find Colligan's overall assessment of Watts' theology unquestionable:

The Christology of Watts was neither unique nor original, although he gave it more lustre than any who previously adopted it. He impressed this view upon English religious thought, and it became the orthodox one (can this be true?), (16) although not agreeing with the orthodox creeds. It was probably first advocated by Hugo de St. Victor, and found many adherents in England from the close of the seventeenth century until the middle of the eighteenth century.

Colligan quotes virtually no references to support his description of Watts' theology and his assessment seems in places illogical.

Twentieth century writers have tended to make passing reference to Watts' 'theological peculiarities' without attaching much importance to them. T. Wright puts the matter well. 'I have grieved with others that

in his declining years he should have wasted so much time in trying to prove the unprovable, to explain the inexplicable, to accommodate the unaccommodatable'. (17)

In the 1921-22 edition of the Dictionary of National Biography, H.L.B. (Henry Leigh Bennett) - who states wrongly that Watts was present at the Salters Hall debate - writes:

His theory was that the human soul of Christ had been created anterior to the creation of the world and united to the divine principle in the Godhead known as the Sophia or Logos (only a short step from Arianism and with some affinity to Sabellianism) and that the personality of the Holy Ghost was figurative rather than proper or literal.

H.L.B., however, concentrates on Watts' achievements as a hymnographer.

Stromberg has little to say about Watts' deviations from orthodoxy - 'Watts wrote book after book about the Trinity until he had only "learnt more of my own ignorance".' Manning and Rupp, who admittedly are primarily concerned with Watts' hymns, say nothing at all. A. P. Davis, who has written the most satisfactory biography of Watts, sensibly concludes:

Was Watts really a Unitarian? The answer is now largely a matter of definition, but of this we may feel certain: Watts never considered himself one. The question is now seldom raised, for we are far more concerned with Watts' general religious influence than with his particular sectarian bias. His writings on the question of the Trinity interest us primarily as the efforts of a candid and pious soul honestly but hesitantly groping for the truth. (18)

The most recent biographer is David Fountain. His approach resembles the nineteenth century hagiographers,





and on Watts' deviations he writes with sorrow rather than anger:

It is held by some that Watts' views on the Trinity underwent a change as a result of the debate on the subject that took place when certain West Country Presbyterian ministers were accused of Unitarianism. He tried to work out a scheme that would accommodate the rival parties, but in so doing became suspect of heresy himself. He tried to explain the unfathomable and made remarks that Bradbury and others used to imply ideas and views that he never held. At this time Watts had written his hymns, and his speculations had not entered them. He would have done well to have kept strictly to the attitude so well-expressed in his hymn on the Trinity:-

Almighty God to Thee  
Be endless honours done;  
The undivided Three  
And the mysterious One.  
Where reason fails with all her powers  
There faith prevails and love adores. (19)

Given Watts' unconventional views on the Trinity, it is perhaps ironic that the label attached by all his assessors to the rest of his theology is 'moderate calvinist'. Stromberg calls Ruin and Recovery of Mankind 'a study in hesitant Calvinism'. (20) Davis says:

Watts was a Calvinist, and the doctrines of that faith permeate his poetry. But at least he was not one of the more rigid Calvinists. As we have seen, he explained away predestination ... in him Calvinism has softened into incipient sentimentalism. (21)

Others have stressed Watts' debt to Baxter. Henri Cregoire, bishop of Blois, wrote in 1829: 'Baxter became the head of a party which had adherents in the majority of the parties in England. Such were the celebrated Watts and Doddridge'. (22) According to Peter Toon,

Many Presbyterians and Independent ministers who had been influenced by the appeal of the 'Middle-Way' Calvinism of Saumur and of Richard Baxter adopted a moderated Calvinism. This proved popular with those who were of a conservative frame of mind but who sought to keep in touch with the philosophical developments of their age. Edmund Calamy (1671-1732), Daniel Williams (1643?-1716), Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) are examples of men who held this theology. (23)

Watts willingly stressed his debt to Baxter.

Whether he would have gone so far as Baxter on predestination ~~is an~~ interesting point. Could he have written - 'That such a being, who is said not to tempt anyone and even swears that he desires not the death of a sinner etc.' (24), as his protege Doddridge was to write? Watts certainly could not be described as Arminian. He could never have written the following lines:

O let Thy love my heart constrain,  
 Thy love for every sinner free,  
 That every fallen soul of man  
 May taste the grace that found out me;  
 That all mankind with me may prove  
 Thy sovereign everlasting love. (25)

Watts could well have written:

O happy day that fixed my choice  
 On Thee my Saviour and my God

which Toon surprisingly quotes as an example of Doddridge's liberalism. (26) But the day did the fixing!

### Conclusion

Has Isaac Watts had a fair press? On the whole, yes. Some commentators have had obvious axes to grind,

a few have written out of malice. But by and large Watts' achievements have been recognised, his heretical notions dealt with charitably. The doubt still remains, just how heretical was he? More work remains to be done before this issue is settled. Nor do I think that Watts' thought on the atonement and on election has been correctly evaluated.

For the time being let Dr. Johnson have the last word:

Whatever he took in hand was, by his incessant solicitude for souls, converted to theology. As piety predominated in his mind, it is diffused over his works: under his direction it may be truly said, philosophy is subservient to evangelical instruction; it is difficult to read a page without learning, or, at least, wishing to be better. The attention is caught by indirect instruction; and he that sat down only to reason, is on a sudden compelled to pray.

A bit fulsome, perhaps; but Johnson's respect for Watts is impressive and significant.

## Chapter 4

### The Atonement

#### I

(1) To this dear Surety's hand  
 Will I commit my cause;  
 He answers and fulfils  
 His Father's broken laws:  
     Behold my soul  
     ~~At freedom set!~~  
     My surety paid  
     The dreadful debt.

Jesus my great High Priest  
 Offer'd his blood and dy'd;  
 My guilty conscience seeks  
 No sacrifice beside:  
     His powerful blood  
     Did once atone;  
     And now it pleads  
     Before the throne.

My Advocate appears  
 For my defence on high,  
 The Father bows his ear,  
 And lays his thunder by:  
     Not all that hell  
     Or sin can say  
     Shall turn his heart,  
     His love away.

Isaac Watts wrote at great length about the Atonement, and with great consistency. His approach is completely orthodox and bible-based. He discusses alternative interpretations, presenting his opponents' views with apparent justice and makes several trenchant observations. He also puts forward views which are of some significance when we remember that he was accused of heresy with regard to other matters.

For it goes without saying that the Atonement is central to Christianity - a favourite argument of Watts'. And the connection between the Atonement and the nature of Christ's Godhead is emphasised by Watts on several occasions, especially when he attacks Socinian - or what he thinks are Socinian - views.

Watts sums up his thinking on the Atonement at the beginning of his essay, A View of the Manifold Salvation of Jesus Christ, Represented in order to Reconcile Christians of Different Sentiments. (2)

Mankind by nature lies under the ruins of the fall, both as guilty and as sinful. We are guilty in our persons, and exposed to the divine anger, as well as sinful in our natures, and ever ready to break his holy law. Whoever therefore becomes our complete Saviour must relieve us under both these distresses.

As we are guilty in the sight of God, we are condemned in the court of his law and justice, we are liable to bear the punishment due to our sins, and we have lost all pretence of right to the favour of God and eternal life. Now our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who has undertaken the work of our salvation, is an all-sufficient Saviour in every respect; by his obedience, death and intercession, he relieves us from the guilt of sin, and so delivers us from all obligations to the punishments of hell: He reconciles us to God, and gives us a right to life and salvation in the heavenly world.

As we are sinful creatures we are ever ready to offend God afresh, and are utterly unfit for his heavenly presence: And Christ saves us in this respect, by changing our vicious nature and temper, sanctifying us by his Grace or Holy Spirit, so that we may be prepared for the enjoyment of God in heavenly places.

In these two things the substance of our salvation chiefly consists: and since these divine affairs could not be so well understood by us, according to those sublime ideas by which God the Father and his Son transact them in their eternal counsels and their subsequent

dispensations, therefore God has been pleased to reveal them to us under such ideas or representations, and in such forms of language, as are borrowed from our common affairs in human life: And that not only by one figure or emblem, but by many representations, that we might have them on all sides, and have a fuller knowledge of them, so far as is sufficient for our present state, or necessary to our salvation.

Watts then proceeds to discuss the various roles of Christ as the Christian's saviour. For example, he compares the New Testament's picture of Christ as Mediator (St. Paul beseeches the Corinthians to be reconciled) with Job's desire for a daysman (the A.V. word for an umpire or reconciler). The high-priestly nature of Christ's office is stressed - 'he offered a sacrifice acceptable to God upon earth, even a sacrifice of atonement, or propitiation by his own blood, and he ascended to heaven to present it there before the throne of God'. Indeed Christ himself was also 'the very sacrifice of propitiation or atonement ... he offered himself up to God for us as a sacrifice'. As Advocate Jesus 'pleads against the charges which the law of God, or which Satan, our adversary, may bring against us; not by pretending that we are not guilty, but by pleading the atonement made by his blood for our sins, by pleading our pardon in the court of heaven, and by pleading his own righteousness, as the foundation of our hope'. As our surety, Christ 'has undertaken to answer the demands of the law of God for us who had broken it, to pay a compensation for our violation of the law, and to make peace betwixt God and us'. He is also our representative, the second Adam - 'in his obedience, in his death, and in his appearance for us in heaven, he is our common head ...'

Above all, Christ is our Redeemer.

It is generally represented, both in the scripture and by our divines, as one who redeems both by power and by price. Now the redemption of us by his powerful grace out of the slavery of Satan, and our own lusts and our rescue from the temptations of this world, belong rather to the other part of this salvation, wherein his sanctifying influences are necessary and requisite; but when Christ is considered as a Redeemer by price, he frees us by the price of his own blood as a ransom, chiefly from the hands of the vindictive justice of God (sic), and from the bonds of the guilt of sin and condemnation, whereby we are held as breakers of the law of God. Yet our redemption from the slavery of sin and Satan may be also attributed to the blood of Christ which purchased sanctifying grace for us . . .

Like 'lawful', 'vindictive' has no doubt changed its meaning since the eighteenth century. Yet here we have an uncompromising statement of substitutionary atonement, which would only be acceptable nowadays to fairly conservative evangelicals. Actually Watts does not use the word 'substitute', though he does speak of Christ's sufferings 'in the room and stead of sinful men'. But his argument is clear enough.

This extract, which I have just quoted, gives a true sense of Watts' style - somewhat verbose and repetitive. His published writings on the Atonement go over the same ground several times. (4) In Redeemer and Sanctifier one of his fictional characters says with modest humour:

I must now entreat your excuse for dwelling upon these representations of things too long, and perhaps for rehearsing them too often: But I am sensible of the great importance of the contest that is between us. I am content to be called 'a repeater', if I may be so happy as to hit the soul of the man who hears or reads this in a right vein, and convey the doctrine of the propitiation of Christ for sin with some light and force to the mind by all this variety of expression, and this repetition of ideas.

No doubt this is a fair summary of Watts' own approach to the Atonement. He took his ministry of reconciliation very seriously.

## II

The Redeemer and the Sanctifier is Watts' most deliberate and methodical discussion of the Atonement. It is literally a discussion, a conversation piece between fictional characters - Paulinus and Ferventio of the orthodox party, Cavenor who has been influenced by a certain Agrippa's progressive opinions and Charistes, 'a hearty christian, and a person of known moderation in religious disputes'.

In the preface Watts explains his reasons for putting pen to paper, and for adopting such a dramatic approach. (5)

The author of those papers has often been grieved to see such a new sort of christianity published and propagated in the world, as leaves out the propitiatory sacrifice of our blessed Saviour and the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit, which in his esteem are two of the chief glories of the gospel ... He leaves it to more learned writers to manage this controversy in a way of strict and regular dispute. He hath chosen this manner of publishing his sentiments, with some hope that they may be better accepted by those who stand in most need of them, and particularly by the polite readers of the age, who seek something to entertain, as well as to instruct and profit. If there are any sudden starts of thought found here out of place, any abrupt sentences or paragraphs without that logical method or exact connection, which would be expected in a set discourse; let it be remembered that this book is but a sort of conversation-piece among a few private friends, who pretend not to theological accuracies.



In actual fact Watts' attempts to popularise his theme by playing to the gallery - or, as he would doubtless have put it, 'sinking' the argument - do not amount to much. His dramatis personae are men of straw, the character drawing being crude and unconvincing. The contest ends in a predictable victory for truth. (6) Here Cavenor seemed to stand musing in a sort of astonished silence, and at last with tears in his eyes broke out into a passionate address to heaven.

Forgive me, O my God, that ever I consented to forsake those holy doctrines which I was taught in my younger years. Blessed Jesus, forgive me that ever I should be so easily led astray from thy word, and part with the blessings of thy atoning sacrifice, and thy sanctifying Spirit. I lie at thy foot a humble penitent, and willing convert to thy divine truths, which these my dear friends have been sent this day by providence to set before me in so powerful and convincing a light: And may I never dare to make the least departure from them again, though under the strongest temptations, but live and die under their blessed influence.

Most edifying!

However, Watts' socratic dialogue does enable him to put the 'progressive' version of atonement at some length and, it must be said, in reasonably convincing form. These are the views of an absent, fashionable theologian named Agrippa (whom did Watts have in mind? Samuel Clarke?). Watts calls these views 'the religion of nature'. Paulinus claims that (7) -

The special and important doctrines of this religion (christianity), such as the sacrifice of Christ as a proper atonement for sin, and our sanctification by the Holy Spirit, which are taught so frequently and so expressly in the New Testament, carry something in them so disgusting, not only to the relish of our

modern infidels in general, but also to the prejudices of some who profess christianity, that they would fain evade these truths, and quit themselves of them by such a construction as really destroys them.

Paulinus then reads a paper written by Agrippa, which can be summarised as follows. The gentiles' knowledge of God was buried beneath superstition and vice, nor were the Jews much better, relying on mere ceremonies, God therefore sent Jesus Christ to restore the religion of nature, the knowledge of the one true God and true piety without superstition. Men were to be assured of their pardon if they repented of their sins, though there would be judgement after death. Unfortunately men were so corrupt that their reaction to Jesus' teaching was to kill him. 'This death of Christ on the Cross was a noble testimony which he gave as a martyr to the doctrines which he preached'. Christ's Jewish background explains biblical references to 'redemption by his blood' and 'making atonement for sin'. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are to remind us that 'Jesus Christ the Reformer of the world (!)' died in vindication of this doctrine of pardon of sin upon repentance. (8)

Agrippa's paper ends thus:

Now if any man has any other creed made up of notions and mysteries which goes beyond all this, I affirm that he draws more out of his Bible than God ever put into it; and though I will never be angry with him for believing more than I, yet I cannot but laugh at him for a strong believer: I dare pronounce boldly he is not just of my religion, nor can I be of his; and if he thinks me but almost a Christian, I think him gone as much beyond christianity.

This is not too tendentious by any means. Of course Watts never really does justice to the case against substitutionary atonement - namely that love is subordinated to law. (9) However, he does show himself aware of the dangerously unattractive and misleading notion of appeasing God's wrath. Paulinus says: (10)

By atonement for sin I do not mean any such thing as shall in a proper and literal sense appease the wrath of God, the offended Governor, which is supposed to be kindled against his sinful creatures, and shall incline his heart to mercy, which was before determined upon vengeance; ~~for though this~~ doctrine may be so represented sometimes after the manner of man, yet this is an idea or supposition in many respects inconsistent with the attributes and actions of the blessed God, and with the doctrine of the New Testament. In that book God represents himself as rich in mercy, and for this reason he pitied sinful creatures, who had broken his law and had deserved to die, before he had received any atonement; and therefore God himself provided and sent his own Son to become a sacrifice of atonement, and a ransom for them; he appointed him to be a surety for us, the just for the unjust, and to suffer death in the room and stead of sinners.

It is God's law that has to be satisfied. Watts stresses this:

Now by these appointed sufferings of the Son of God, in the room and stead of sinful men, there is an honourable amends made to the Governor of the World for the violation of his law, and glorious way made for the exercise of mercy in the pardon of the sinner; and that without any imputation or reflection upon the holiness of God's nature or conduct, or any suspicion of the justice of his government, as if he would connive at sin; since he discovers and declares that in his passing by all the sins of his people in former ages, and in pardoning and justifying sinners now who believe in Christ, he will manifest his justice or righteousness by requiring such a sacrifice ~~whereby~~ sin shall be punished, though the sinner be spared.

The next words are significant: 'This is the plain meaning of the apostle' - and he quotes Romans III. 24-26. Watts bases his defence of substitutionary atonement on scripture. Indeed he points out that Agrippa's party is illogical in that they pride themselves on adherence to the Bible. 'Are not these the gentlemen who are continually giving us caution to keep close to scripture, to use the words and expressions of scripture in all matters of revelation, to speak of the doctrines of the gospel as Christ and his apostles speak?' Watts naturally gives full play to such texts as the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, Romans III, 24-26, 1 Peter II, 23, 2 Corinthians VI, 21, Hebrews IX. 13, 14 - and from the Gospels, John I. 29, Matthew XX. 28, Mark X.45. He pours scorn on the argument that these texts should be understood metaphorically. Given the importance of such doctrines and the dangers of misunderstanding, is it conceivable that Christ, the apostles and prophets should avoid plain speaking? 'Can it be supposed that (God's) missionaries the apostles should never make a clearer explication of them after these events were fulfilled, and tell us that they meant very little more than the religion of nature'. (11)

Watts puts into Paulinus' mouth some caustic comments on the notion that Christ's death was but a martyrdom for truth. (12)

Was not Socrates accused for speaking against the idols of Athens, and the public religion, as Jesus was for reproving the corrupt manners of the Jews? Was he not condemned by wicked men, and put to death by prison on this account, as Christ was by the Cross ... Do not the deists cry him up as a martyr for the 'unity of the true God', and the 'rule of

virtue', as our modern christians make Christ a mere martyr for his doctrine of reformation? ... But does Socrates himself or any of his disciples ever talk in such a manner about his death and the cup of poison, as Christ and his apostles do about the crucifixion of the blessed Jesus? ... Did Plato ever teach his pupils that 'they must be saved by the death of Socrates?' ... Can we persuade ourselves that when 'St. Paul determined to know nothing else among the Corinthians in comparison of Christ and him crucified', that he meant merely the martyrdom of Christ to attest the truths of natural religion, of which he was the restorer?

Watts effectively develops the argument that the cross is much more than this. He firmly believes in the objective theory of the Atonement - that is to say, that a mighty work of Salvation was achieved at Calvary to which the darkness and the rent veil bore witness. He stresses the consistency with which Christ's death is seen as a sacrifice by New Testament writers. In particular he stresses the significance of the Lamb as one of the names by which Jesus was called - 'Behold, the Lamb of God etc.' For Watts, Jesus really did take away his sins. The language of sacrifice was understood clearly by the ancient Jews, the gentile Roman world and the early Christians.

(13) Now if primitive writers inform us this was the common sense in which the first christians understood the speeches of Christ and his apostles, why should we not imagine that they took them in the right sense? Why should the church be supposed to wait so many hundred years for the true meaning of the christian doctrine till the days of Socinus? Why was it left to wander so long in such strange superstition and mysterious darkness, as the doctrine of 'atonement for sin by the death of Christ', if these speeches meant nothing else but natural religion, or the confirmation of it by the martyrdom of a prophet? In

doctrines and expositions of lesser moment I easily suppose many of the fathers may greatly mistake, but methinks in doctrines of such vast importance, Christ would not suffer all his early churches to be mistaken.

This is forceful, indeed somewhat tendentious argument. Watts is less than fair to the view that Christ's death can be understood subjectively, its importance lying in the effect on the individual's heart and mind. Certainly, this view of the Cross can lead to its debasement so that it virtually becomes just another martyrdom. Ironically however Watts wrote one of the most succinct and moving summaries of the subjective impact of the Atonement in his hymn, 'When I survey the wondrous Cross'. Only at the end of The Redeemer and the Sanctifier do we catch echoes of the great hymn - and even here Watts stresses that it is above all the sacrifice of Christ, not just his death, which moves us.

(14) Neither miracles, nor bullocks, nor lambs, no wonders wrought, nor bleeding beasts sacrificed, could ever express such amazing pity and love as the Son of God expressed by dying as our surety, agonizing in the midst of torments which you should have suffered, and expiring in your stead. Would not this excite and kindle your love to a dying Saviour in a much superior degree to all the representations and pretences of Agrippa's creed; And would you not think all your zeal and your future diligence in obedience infinitely his due, who had done and suffered so much for you? These thoughts were doubtless warm and powerful in the heart of the blessed apostle, when he is crucified and grows dead to every thing by the cross of Christ, when he lives only to the service of Christ, who loved me, saith he, and gave himself for me.

Watts makes his hero, Paulinus, hammer away at the absent Agrippa (surely if he had had any sense of drama,

Watts would at least have arranged for the chief heretic actually to be there, to take his beating!). (15)

I would yet further ask Agrippa why St. Paul should frequently represent the gospel as a great mystery, a deep and sacred thing which the world knew not, nor could know till it was revealed? ... Is there any such hidden mystery in the doctrines which the light of nature teaches? ... But that the Son of God ... should actually die in the room and stead of guilty men as a sacrifice of atonement, that he should reconcile them to God by his death, that he should rise again, and reign in heaven to complete this salvation, and that sinful men must obtain pardon from sin and eternal life, by the sufferings and death of the Son of God as a sacrifice in their stead, and by faith in his blood; this is such a doctrine unknown to the world, such a divine mystery as deserves all these expressions of wisdom and honour which the apostle applies to it. Though the heathens as well as the Jews might easily understand this doctrine when it was preached unto them, according to the notion of expiation by sacrifices, which was familiar to them, yet it was originally a mystery which they could not have known without express revelation, and they were averse to receive it when it was revealed.

Why was the cross 'foolishness to the Greeks and to the Jews a stumbling-block' if it was merely the glorious martyrdom of natural religion? Why did St. Paul require courage to preach the cross, bearing reproach and shame? Paulinus continues:

This is that which some of the philosophers of Greece would deride and call foolishness, viz, for one person to hope for pardon of sin and eternal life by the sufferings and death of another; and this is the doctrine of which St. Paul is not ashamed, but makes it the matter of his sermons and his glory.

Only substitutionary atonement does justice to Christ's priesthood, Watts argues. (16)

The scripture ascribes this atonement of Christ to the office of his priesthood, to his blood, and his death as a sacrifice, whereas these mistaken interpreters ascribe his taking away sin, either to his doctrine as a prophet ... or in this present sense to his royal power of forgiveness as a king, without ever considering that the beasts which were made atoning sacrifices afford us no shadow of Christ's taking away sin by his prophetic or his kingly office, but only by his priesthood or sacrifice: Nor is there any other way, besides that which I have maintained, to make the scriptures of truth abide in any happy harmony, or the type and substance to agree.

Watts stresses the logical connection between baptism and the Lord's Supper on the one hand and atonement by the cross on the other. 'Does not baptism design to exhibit the purification of our souls from sin, and the change of our tempers to holiness by the Spirit of God?' Christ himself tells us that the communion service is:

The representation of his own body which was broken for us by wounds upon the Cross, and his own blood which was shed there for the remission of sins; Matthew XXVI. 28. under the two plain emblems of bread and wine? But are not these sacred representations of such important truths explained away by a forced construction of the words? Can such strong expressions of a dying Redeemer receive due honour by a confinement of them to a mere memorial of a dying martyr to confirm his doctrine, or by sinking them to a mere figurative manifestation of what sin deserved, without any proper expiation of it?

Watts makes considerable play from the close connection between atonement through Christ's death and the sanctification of our natures by the Holy Spirit. (17)

Which two great doctrines are eminently and peculiarly some of the prime subjects and glories of the gospel, and are equally left out of Agrippa's creed ... Is this all the



meaning of the apostle Paul when he says, The Love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; Romans V.5.? ... Saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Titus iii. 5? And does St. Peter mean no more than extraordinary gifts, when he says, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience; 1 Peter i. 2.? Are all the comforts of this spirit in the New Testament spent and exhausted, so that none of them remains for Christians in our day? And is the same gospel now become a spiritless gospel to men, without a divine converter, or a divine comforter?

Paulinus concludes his defence with some slashing cracks at the 'naturalists', pointing out that the classical theory of the atonement is explicitly stated over and over again by New Testament writers - or so he says. (18)

I am so overpowered with evidence concerning the true and plain meaning of the language of scripture, that I am ready to wonder how it is possible for any man of reason in the sincere exercise of it, to read the New Testament, and not see there these great articles of the atonement for our sins by the blood of Christ, and the sanctification of our hearts by the Holy Spirit ... I would therefore entreat Agrippa and his friends to consider once again, whether they may not be mistaken in their strange interpretations of the word of God. I would entreat them once again to read the gospels and epistles with a honest heart and without prejudice or bias from their former opinions.

### III

At this stage in the proceedings the intrepid Cavenor intervenes. Watts informs us that he was shaken by Paulinus' argument, (19) 'struck with a sensible surprize

to find the whole current of scripture run so contrary to the opinions he had lately embraced'. Cavenor 'could not at once freely and utterly renounce his errors, yet he was a little afraid to persist in them'. Granted, he suggests, that Agrippa's views may be mistaken; surely they are an innocent mistake?

Are there not many mistakes, said he, concerning some truths of the christian religion, and concerning the sense of many texts in the New Testament, which are very pardonable things? And what greater mischief is there in denying the proper ~~atonement of Christ, than in many other~~ mistaken opinions which Paulinus himself would grant might be received and embraced very innocently, and without danger to our christianity?

Paulinus is presumably so shattered by the preposterous nature of this question that speech is beyond him. However, his ally Ferventio really jumps down Cavenor's throat. (20)

What mischief is there in these opinions?

There is a long and dreadful train of mighty mischiefs in them, there is a great appearance of infidelity, and a large step toward it: There is a bold affront offered to Scripture in some of its plainest revelations, and denial of the blessed gospel in some of its chief glories: There is unspeakable injury done to the honour of God, both in his justice and his grace, there is a sinking of the dignity of the Son of God, as a dying Mediator, into a mere prophet and witness; and there is a dreadful risk and hazard to the souls of men, by encouraging them to venture into the presence of God without a sacrifice. This is not a little dispute about the logical relations of the atonement of Christ to our pardon; nor whether the sufferings and death of Christ as a propitiation for sin must be properly imputed to us, or whether we must rely upon their merit merely as the price of a salvation purchased for us: This is not

a strife about words, nor a lesser controversy whether faith is an instrument to receive this atonement, or a condition of the fruits of it bestowed upon us: No, the contest here is, whether our Lord Jesus Christ made any atonement for sin at all or no, by all his sufferings? And whether his death laid any such sort of foundation for our hope of pardon? We may bear with a hundred errors and mistakes in the lesser things of christianity, the doubtful disputables in opinion and practice, as the apostle calls them; Romans XIV. 1-6 ... but I hope the doctrine of the proper atonement of Christ for sin shall never be numbered among the doubtful disputables.

Ferventio credits the Jews with a more edifying faith than Agrippa's - which (21) 'sinks the gospel of Christ almost down to the level of heathen philosophy.'

In the two last centuries, when the doctrine of Socinus prevailed in some parts of Europe, who denied the satisfaction of Christ for sin, our fathers were wont to charge it with a reduction of christianity to a sort of mahumetism; for the Turks confess Christ to be a great prophet ... How much more does the Scripture teach of the way to obtain salvation than the Alcoran does, if the doctrine of the proper sacrifice of Christ be set aside, with all the blessed truths and duties which are derived from it? The socinian error, says Doctor Arrowsmith in his Tactica Sacra, is more properly called a subtle mahumetism, and it opens its mouth as a whirlpool of irreligion.

Even the Papists, 'who have corrupted christianity beyond all that ever went before them', never renounced the atonement. But Agrippa and his party in this respect are worse than the papists themselves, for they renounce and cancel the merit of the death of Christ, and exclude it from making any atonement at all for the sins of men. Now comes Ferventio's climactic point. Even Dr. Clarke, 'though he hath publicly departed from the common faith in his book written on the Doctrine of the Trinity' has

not abandoned the satisfaction and atonement of Christ.

Next, Ferventio proceeds to establish the central importance of the atonement. It is not too much to say that our own salvation is imperilled if we abandon apostolic preaching. Such a course -

Tempts us to turn the brightest discoveries, and the peculiar glories of it (the atonement) into mere lessons of morality. When we explain away one of the most evident and substantial doctrines of it at this rate, it gives us a sort of effrontery and ungodly courage to oppose the most express truths which are written in scripture, if we can possibly construe and translate them into another sense. It introduces a sort of profane hardiness into the conscience, and emboldens us to renounce the most evident lessons of St. Peter, Paul, and John, and deny the truth of them even to the very teeth of the sacred writers.

Ferventio quotes with approval Hebrews X. 26. 27 (22) -

If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary.

Doctor John Evans and 'the late venerable and learned Doctor Whitby' are mobilised to support Ferventio: to insist on the paramount importance of the atonement is not to be intolerant or uncharitable, where scriptural truth is so very plain. 'He that believes not shall be damned': Mark XVI. 16.

Confronted with this battering, not surprisingly 'Cavenor sat silent: But it was easy to see by the changes of his contenance, and the passions of his face, that he was not unmoved'. (23) However, Cavenor is made of stern stuff. He is still not convinced. And Watts

makes him ask some pertinent questions. Is it not sufficient for salvation to accept Jesus Christ as Son of God and Saviour of the world? Cannot scripture be less dogmatically interpreted? When precisely did belief in substitutionary atonement become necessary for salvation? Will not God pity men who have never been taught this precise doctrine? Why not the possibility of a genuinely good man mistakenly believing that the language of sacrifice in the Bible is 'figurative and emblematical'? Will God only bestow his Spirit on the strictly orthodox?

Ferventio tartly remarks that there is all the difference in the world between ignorance of a doctrine and wilfully rejecting it. Having made this point, he hands his case over to Charistes who accepts the role of umpire, with some reluctance 'in such an awful and difficult debate'.

In his summing up, Charistes - predictably - finds for the orthodox party. He agrees with Ferventio 'that our charity must not be boundless: It must have its proper limits according to scripture'. Yet he faults Ferventio for expressing himself 'with a little too much severity and too little charity'.

Here follows a quaint touch. Paulinus confesses to similar lack of charity, but (24) 'I have two sons here in London, in the midst of these errors and dangerous opinions. The young fellows do not want a natural genius, and I thank God, they have something of a serious turn towards religion too; but they love to keep polite

company, and if Agrippa's creed grow much in fashion, I fear they will be tainted with it ...' Hence Paulinus' severity. It is pleasant to think of the little Doctor lining up with Juvenal, Johnson and the author of Revelations in attacking Babylon the Great!

Charistes returns to his summary. The orthodox theory of the atonement is clearly essential to scriptural revelation. Without blood there can be no remission of sins. Just as a strict Jew must believe in the rites introduced by Moses, so a Christian may not reject Christ's sacrifice and he imperils his soul if he does. At the best, anyone who rejects the atonement is 'almost a Christian'. (25)

I desire it may be observed here, that several things which I have asserted concerning the propitiation of the blood of Christ might be also applied to the sanctifying operations of the Holy Ghost, but perhaps not in the same degree; for though I believe these operations to be an essential part of Christianity, yet they may not be quite so powerfully pronounced in scripture, or not so largely argued, or not so frequently repeated as the atonement of Christ is, and therefore, perhaps, the necessity of acknowledging that doctrine may not be quite so great.

Charistes concludes with the reflection, (26) -

Dreadful hazard of missing God, if we renounce the way, when it is so plainly shewn us, and refuse this divine Conductor who offers his assistance!

As for good men who are ignorant,

If the belief of his atonement be necessary to their salvation, God will find ways to illuminate the mind and convince the conscience, and will rather send an angel or an apostle to them, as he did to Cornelius, than that any sincere penitent should fall under a condemning sentence.

Which begs the question!

Charistes is then asked to comment on the impact of the atonement on men's lives. He has no hesitation in denying the moral content of Agrippa's creed, while by contrast the atonement causes in the believer a hatred of sin, 'grand and sublime ideas both of the justice and of the mercy of God', greater love of our fellow men (I John III. 16. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren) and a happy self-confidence based on God's love and forgiveness.

Cavenor's capitulation has already been described. Charistes adds a significant postscript on the importance of not condemning ministers of suspect orthodoxy but blameless life - (27) 'Truly, Sir, I have learned to attend with reverence and profit upon the labours of ministers who have had very different sentiments upon many points in christianity' - though he would not actually recommend the ordination of ministers who rejected the atonement and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. 'I would not pronounce a curse upon them, but I would pray for them with sincere and hearty addresses to the mercy seat'.

'These pious wishes of Charistes were pronounced with such an air of devotion and goodness that all the gentlemen present added their hearty amen to them ... Here the conversation ended, and the company broke up with mutual civilities'. So ends this example of wishful thinking; how Isaac Watts must have wished that Bradbury would only behave like a civilised eighteenth century gentleman!

IV

The Redeemer and the Sanctifier is the longest, most methodical and most impressive of Isaac Watts' works on the Atonement. It is also the product of his mature years, having been published in 1737. Watts wrote various other works which dealt explicitly or implicitly with atonement. They do not add much to The Redeemer and the Sanctifier, but here and there forceful and interesting arguments are put forward.

I have already quoted from A View of the Manifold Salvation of Jesus Christ, Represented in order to Reconcile Christians of Different Sentiments, one of a group of essays collectively entitled Orthodoxy and Charity United, published in 1745 but, according to Watts, written between twenty and thirty years previous to that date. In this work the question is faced,

How can the atonement for sin, by the death of Christ be so considerable a part of the gospel, when Christ himself, the great prophet of his church spoke so seldom and so very little of it, during the whole course of his ministry? Surely one would think so important a part of the christian doctrine should not have been neglected by Christ himself. (28)

Watts answers that Christ does in fact explicitly teach the significance of his own death - for instance Matthew XX. 28, The son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for many and Matthew XXVI. 28, the Last Supper. If such texts are



indeed few, Watts counters:

This doctrine of atonement for sin by his death, as a sacrifice, and the acceptance of it with God the Father, could not be so well preached in public, before those very facts were fulfilled, upon which this doctrine is founded.

Christ only gave his disciples specific instruction about the Atonement after his death and resurrection.

If such arguments seem rather forced, Watts deserves credit for facing another very real objection to substitutionary atonement - (29)

That it does not agree to the moral perfections of God to punish sin in a surety, nor does it become the great God, who is a being of infinite wisdom and goodness and equity, to appoint such a way of salvation for men as would necessitate an innocent creature to be exposed to so many sharp sufferings as Christ underwent, while the guilty sinner suffers nothing of all these terrors, but is delivered from the severest of them by the death of Christ.

Watts replies, it may be thought rather tendentiously, that a doctrine which is expounded over and over again in scripture, simply cannot be immoral!

Can it be ever thought, that the eternal mind did not know what was decent for a just and wise God to do, better than we can conceive or suggest?

Watts goes on to stress that Christ gave himself up deliberately and willingly and that God exalted him after his self-sacrifice to even greater glory. He argues that the alleged immorality of substitution is countered specifically by New Testament writers - e.g. II Corinthians V. 21, God has made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,

or at least the apparent immorality is squarely faced and indeed emphasised, e.g. I Peter II, 21, 22, Christ suffered for us, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree.

Watts attacks his opponents for their cavalier attitude to scripture, pointing out how appropriate this is. (30)

Nor is it at all strange, that those who borrow from the socinian writers may raise such objections against the atonement or satisfaction of Christ for sin: since Socinus himself, saith: 'should there be found some places of scripture, where it should be expressly written, that God was made man, or did assume human flesh; they should not presently be taken according as the words sound, since that is altogether repugnant to the divine Majesty'. So Socinus in his Disputations of Jesus Christ, And again: 'If not once only, but often it should be written in the sacred scriptures, that Christ made satisfaction to God for sins: I would not therefore believe, that the matter is so as you imagine?' So Socinus on the Satisfaction. And again: 'Any, even the greatest force is to be used with words, rather than take them in the obvious sense'. So his Second Epistle to Balcerimicius.

In his essay (31) The Mistaken Ways of Coming to God without Christ Watts lambasts the complacency of humanists believing in the natural goodness of man - 'the way of supposed innocency'. He deplores the loose sentimentality of people (32) -

When a man dies, even though he were a drunkard or a man of irreligion, 'Alas, for him! poor man! he has been honest and just; his soul is at rest, he never did any body an injury but himself'.

Watts' advice to such ignorant people is predictable:

Dare not therefore, O sinners, dare not continue one day longer in this practice: Renounce and abandon your false and foolish hopes: Walk no longer in this vain, this dangerous, this supposed way of innocency, for it will never bring you to God and his favour.

Nor will Watts allow Christians the consolation that God is merciful (33) -

He will not damn us; his goodness will not bear to see us eternally miserable, and therefore though we do indulge a little sin here, we shall not perish for ever.

Watts condemns such presumptuous indifference to God's proffered salvation through Christ's death. Despite God's mercy, the very angels were condemned, so what hope is there for us men? Still less, is salvation to be achieved through good works. Needless to say, Rome comes in for a sound thrashing here. But in truth all Christians are at risk if they believe such arguments.

But alas! what can a little charity to the poor do toward the reconciliation of a God to an offending creature. Is there any force in this reasoning, because I do a kindness for a fellow-worm, therefore my Maker must love me, and forgive me all affronts against him?

The answer is, of course, that men must note John XIV. 6 - No man cometh unto the Father but by me. Watts eloquently explains the beatitude, Blessed are the poor in spirit (Matthew V.3) as referring to the necessity of spiritual humility. (34) In a footnote he points out that the natural tendency of men to propitiate their gods is healthy and proof of the impression 'of the God of nature on the mind of man'. God has sent his

Mediator whom we must accept with humble gratitude.

This is that great act of Christian faith, trust, hope or dependance, which we are so often called to perform in the New Testament ... upon which our salvation is so much represented to depend.

There are three especially powerful sermons (35) (Numbers 34, 35 and 36) on the Atonement in which man's sin is emphasised so that Watts can bring home to the listener the high price which had to be paid. (II Peter II. 4, Angels that sinned, he spared them not). The majesty of God's law is stressed by the atonement paid by God's son, who suffered the full torments of alienation from God. Hence the agony in the garden and the necessity of an angel to minister to Jesus, hence the dereliction experienced when his Father forsook him (the curse of the broken law), hence Jesus' quick death. 'Surely such sorrows and such terrors demonstrate the work of propitiation and the dreadful labour of reconciling an offended God and sinful man'. This was no mere socinian martyrdom. Watts enlarges upon the dangers of rejecting Christ's atonement and the folly of Romish good works from which we have been saved 'by the arm of God, and by the two best of Kings, William our deliverer and George our defender'.

In sermon 36 Watts exhorts his hearers to be meticulous in their attendance of the Lord's Supper,

Where Christ crucified is set forth before us in the memorials of his propitiation ... shall I dare to say, it is enough for me to read it (i.e. propitiation) in the Bible, and to hear it in the ministry of the word, and to meditate on it in private, when my Lord has

given me an express command to receive it also in those emblems and sensible figures of bread and wine, and has sanctified them for this very purpose? Is this a kind return to him that died for me?

This sermon has a touching climax:

O happy day, and happy hour indeed, that shall finish the long absence of my beloved, and place me within sight of my adored Jesus! When shall I see that lovely, that illustrious friend, who laid down his own life to rescue mine, his own valuable life to ransom a worm, a rebel that deserved to die?

Watts' theology of the Atonement is, of course, to be found in his hymns which effectively complement his prose works. 'When I survey the Wondrous Cross' comes, in fact, from the communion hymns which form the third section of Hymns and Spiritual Songs. As one would expect from the author of the sermons quoted above, the link between the Cross and the Lord's Supper is frequently stressed. The following hymn is highly reminiscent of Watts' prose:

(36) Nature with open volume stands  
To spread her Maker's praise abroad;  
And every labour of his hands  
Shows something worthy of a God.

But in the grace that rescu'd man  
His brightest form of glory shines;  
Here on the cross 'tis fairest drawn  
In precious blood and crimson lines.

Here his whole name appears complete;  
Nor wit can guess, nor reason prove  
Which of the letters best is writ,  
The power, the wisdom or the love.

O the sweet wonders of that cross  
Where God the Saviour lov'd and dy'd!  
Her noblest life my spirit draws  
From his dear wounds and bleeding side.

The reference to worms in the following verses strikes a highly Calvinist note. I know of no hymn of Charles Wesley which mentions worms!

(37)           We sing the amazing deeds  
                  That grace divine performs;  
Th' eternal God comes down and bleeds  
                  To nourish dying worms.

                  This soul-reviving wine,  
                  Dear Saviour, tis thy blood;  
We thank that sacred flesh of thine  
                  For this immortal food.

                  The banquet that we eat  
                  Is made of heavenly things,  
Earth-hath no dainties half so sweet  
                  As our Redeemer brings.

One of Watts' best passion hymns comes from part two of Hymns and Spiritual Songs and was not designed for the Lord's Supper. It is headed: Godly Sorrow arising from the Sufferings of Christ.

(38)           Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,  
                  And did my Sovereign die?  
Would he devote that sacred head  
                  For such a worm as I?

Thy body slain, sweet Jesus, thine  
                  And bath'd in its own blood,  
While all expos'd to wrath divine  
                  The glorious sufferer stood.

Was it for crimes that I had done  
                  He groan'd upon the tree?  
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!  
                  And love beyond degree!

Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
                  And shut his glories in.  
When God the mighty Maker dy'd  
                  For man the creature's sin.

Thus might I hide my blushing face  
                  While his dear cross appears,  
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness  
                  And melt my eyes in tears.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay  
                  The debt of love I owe;  
Here, Lord, I give myself away,  
                  'Tis all that I can do.

The parallels to 'when I survey' in this hymn are striking. It is interesting to analyse the superiority of the more famous hymn, to find out why one hymn is great, the other merely very good. Or is this merely a matter of taste? One could point to the inelegance of the first line - 'Alas and did ...' or the bad grammar of 'for such a worm as I'. Perhaps the chief merit of 'When I survey' is that Watts sticks to one idea - the subjective impact of the Cross - whereas in this other hymn-subjective and objective are combined.

Watts refers to the Resurrection infrequently. Here, lastly, is a poem from Horae Lyricae in which Easter is celebrated as well as Good Friday.

He dies! the heav'nly Lover dies!  
The tidings strike a doleful sound  
On my poor heart-strings. Deep he lies  
In the cold caverns of the ground.

Come, saints, and drop a tear or two,  
On the dear bosom of your God,  
He shed a thousand drops for you,  
A thousand drops of richer blood.

Here's love and grief beyond degree,  
The Lord of glory dies for men!  
But lo! what sudden joys I see!  
Jesus the dead revives again.

The rising God forsakes the tomb,  
Up to his Father's court he flies  
Cherubic legions guard him home,  
And shout him welcome to the skies.

Break off your tears, ye saints, and tell  
How high our great Deliverer reigns  
Sing how he spoil'd the hosts of hell,  
And led the monster death in chains.

Say 'Live for ever, wondrous King!  
Born to redeem, and strong to save!'  
Then ask the monster, 'Where's his sting?  
And where's thy victory, boasting grave?'

The quaintness of the first verse prompted Martin Madan to rewrite it as follows:

(39) He dies! The Friend of Sinners dies!  
 Lo! Salem's daughters weep around!  
 A solemn darkness veils the skies,  
 A sudden trembling shakes the ground.

This is perhaps more singable as a hymn. But in Watts' original version the title is adhered to more faithfully - Christ dying, rising and reigning. The actual event of the crucifixion is subordinated to the Resurrection whereas Madan's version stresses the drama of Good Friday.

V  
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At the end of Chapter 3 it was claimed that Watts' thought on the Atonement has not been correctly evaluated. In fact none of his biographers attach any significance to it whatsoever. It seems to me, however, that it is of considerable interest and importance in the context of Watts' own spiritual and intellectual Odyssey - apart from its solid merits.

Not that I am qualified to judge Watts' theology. (40) Apart from making the obvious point that his adherence to scripture would nowadays seem naive and ill-informed (for example he quotes Mark XVI. 16 without showing any awareness that the text is certainly suspect), I merely note Watts' consistency and forcefulness in argument. He misses few tricks though I am surprised that he never uses Acts VIII, 26-40 ('Understandest thou what thou readest?' etc.).



It is worth noting Watts' emotionalism. (41) In Remnants of Time Employed he has this to say about the Atonement:

Never was there any hour since the creation of all things, nor ever will be till the last conflagration, wherein the holy God so remarkably displayed his justice and his grace, as that hour that saw our Lord Jesus Christ hanging upon the Cross, forsaken of his Father and expiring. What a dreadful glory was given to vindictive justice when the great and terrible God made the soul of his own son a painful sacrifice for sin! What an amazing instance of grace, that he should redeem such worthless sinners as we are from the vengeance by exposing his beloved Son to it! When I view the severity or the compassion of that hour, my thoughts are lost in astonishment: it is not for me, it is not for Paul or Apollos, it is not for the tongue of men or angels to say which was greatest, the compassion or the severity. Humble adoration becomes us best, and a thankful acceptance of the pardon that was purchased at so dear a rate.

Watts goes on to discuss the implications for the individual Christian, rejecting good works and Romish purgatory.

But whatsoever sorrows the dying Christian sustains in the wise administrations of Providence, it is by no means to make compensation to God for sin; the atoning work of Christ is complete still, and the sanctifying work of the spirit perfect as soon as the soul is dismissed from earth; therefore it has an entrance into full blessedness, such as becomes a God infinite in mercy to bestow on a penitent sinner, presented before the throne in the name and righteousness of his own Son. We are complete in him; Col. 11. 10. By him made perfectly acceptable to God at our death, we are filled with all grace and introduced into complete glory.

One could quote many comparable instances to prove the personal debt of gratitude which Watts feels for his

redemption. It is hard to imagine the emotional cost for Watts of the doubts which he subsequently expressed about the nature of Christ, his redeemer. And one can understand how grieved he must have been by the charges of heresy. Set against the background of Watts' writings on the Atonement, his anguish in the Solemn Address is all the more touching.

Watts' horror of heresy is striking. Not only are his own views strictly orthodox on the subject of man's salvation, but he is desperately anxious to save others. For him Socinian heresies are particularly deplorable - and again, how it must have hurt Watts to be so labelled himself! In the Preface to Orthodoxy and Charity United (42) he is under no doubt about his own orthodoxy.

Almost every one of these essays was written above twenty years ago, and some of them more than thirty. The author finds reason to offer his sincere acknowledgements and thanks to Almighty God, who has preserved him, even to this day, in the same sentiments and principles of christian faith and love, amidst the numerous follies and errors of the times.

'That's your opinion!' some of Watts' unkinders critics may well have muttered as they read those words. For Orthodoxy and Charity United was published in 1745, by which time the author's views on the Trinity had become notorious.

In the context of the Trinitarian controversy, it is most significant that in The Redeemer and the Sanctifier, published in 1737, Watts stresses that Jesus was Son of God and that the value of the Atonement is dependent on the nature of the Redeemer:

Might I be permitted (Paulinus is speaking) to proceed in this sort of interrogative manner, I would enquire of Agrippa and his companions, whether a much meaner person than they themselves believe Jesus Christ to be, might not have been sufficient to be sent from God as a prophet, to restore natural religion, and teach the world all the doctrines which Christ taught them? I suppose they believe him, according to scripture, to be the only-begotten Son of God, who lay in the bosom of the Father before the foundation of the world, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, by whom and for whom all things were created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, who is Lord of angels, and to whom all the principalities and powers of the upper world are made subject, and are but his-ministering spirits. Now was it worthwhile for so illustrious a being, who is so near to godhead even in their sense (sic) to be sent down on this earth to spend a life in labour and sorrows, to be scourged and buffeted, and nailed to a cross, and expire there in the midst of shame and agonies, if his chief business had been to restore natural religion as a great Prophet or Teacher, and to die in the confirmation of it? Might not Isaiah or Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets have been raised to life for such a purpose as this, rather than the only Son of God sent down to die so cruel a death?

Again, Watts stresses the uniqueness of Christ's personality when he points out the inadequacy of ancient Jewish sacrifices for sin - Hebrews X.4. It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should really take away sin:

Though these types were not much understood by the Jews of old, yet they were to be accomplished and fulfilled by the bloody sacrifice of the Son of God, or his offering up his own life in the room of sinners. (43)

On the other hand, Watts' own charity and good will towards men of other persuasions frequently breaks through. (44) He refers to Dr. Samuel Clarke as 'so great a writer'. There is an intriguing reference by Ferventio to :

A valuable treatise on Jesus the Mediator, by a nameless author, who has critically and learnedly established this doctrine against the modern disbelievers of it, and has shown much of the wisdom of God in this appointment, and of what importance it is to us to believe. I confess, saith Ferventio, the author is suspected not to be very orthodox in some other important points ...

In his Essay Against Uncharitableness Watts pleads for exchange of views:

But let you and I, my friend, who delight in charity, let us converse a little with authors that differ from our present opinions, and we shall see their sentiments dressed up so plausibly, and set in so fair a light, that might easily persuade men of sincere consciences to embrace them; and this will prevent us from censorious thoughts concerning our candid adversaries, and their disciples. There is scarce anything that enlarges the mind more, and more disengages it from narrow and selfish principles, than a free converse with the virtuous and ingenious of all parties.

Watts then tells an anecdote about two neighbours:

In an unsociable town who were always quarrelling about the private meeting and the parish church: Both places of worship in that town were well supplied with preachers of good sense and serious religion: But each of them was the subject of unmerciful reproach between these two neighbours ... At last Pacifico their common friend persuaded them to hear each others minister, and accompanied them both one day to their different assemblies; and they were both surprised to hear the gospel preached with a due degree of decency and fervour, both at meeting and at church.

As a result they ended the best of friends, respecting each other's views.

The true reason why we kindle our anger against our christian brethren that are not entirely of our party is, because we not only have the vanity to fancy ourselves always in the right, and them in the wrong; but we judge their consciences and their sincerity too, that they did not come honestly and fairly by their principles, while we never consider how we ourselves came by our own. (45)

The Cross recurs in this discussion - for instance when Watts deplores the generation of heat through disagreements on inessentials - but he will not accept the Atonement as a thing indifferent. Or again, he quotes Christ's death in the context of perverse parody and exaggeration of an opponent's view-point.

Evangelillo believes that Christ Jesus has completely answered the demands of the law in order to our justification, and that in the room and stead of all believers. Nomineus hears this doctrine, and thus begins his chain of severe and false deductions; then, saith he, the law has no power to demand obedience of us; then we are not to be charged with sin, though we break the law hourly and profanely; then we may contemn all the commands, sport with the threatenings, and defy God the law-giver and the avenger. He proceeds then to pronounce Evangelillo a wicked antinomian. Evangelillo on the other hand ... hears Nomineus, preaching up repentance and sincere obedience, as the conditions of our justification and acceptance with God to eternal life; He smites his breast with his hand and cries, Surely this man knows no use of Christ in our religion, he makes void his righteousness and his death, he is a mere legalist, a papist, a rank socinian ...

A rank socinian! How Watts hated that particular heresy! The over-riding impressions derived from reading Watts on the Atonement are of a passionately orthodox and emotional believer in substitutionary redemption, combined with a most attractive tolerance and good humour. He certainly believed that at Calvary a great work was wrought not only in man, but for man - to paraphrase Newman. (46) He would have agreed with Chevasse with regard to objective and subjective atonement - 'the truth seems to consist in grateful acceptance of the Gospel proclaimed by both'. (47)

Where did Watts find inspiration for his views on the Atonement? 'From the Bible!' he would no doubt have answered. But he goes further than this:

For my part, I am fully persuaded, that the books, which have been written in vindication (confutation) of the atonement of Christ in the last two centuries, carry such abundant force and evidence in them, that they can never be answered. Let Agrippa try to refute some of the chief discourses which have been published in former years by protestant divines on this subject: Let him destroy all the arguments used by Dr. Owen, Dr. Bates and Dr. Edwards in their writings on this theme, and in confutation of the socian tenets: Let him give an effectual answer to the first part of Truman's Great Propitiation, to Bishop Stillingfleet, or Archbishop Tillotson's writings on the sacrifice of Christ ... (48)

One could well imagine that Watts would heartily approve of such orthodox works as John Owen's massive Death of Deaths.

Another of Watts' sources was John Mason's Select Remains. The 1742 edition of this delightful work carries a recommendation by Rev. I. Watts, D.D.: (49)

By spending one Minute in reading these sentences now and then, serious Persons may find sufficient matter to furnish them with frequent pious Meditations in every Circumstance of the Christian life; and they be as happily useful in the Retirements of the Closet.

Here are some of Mason's sentences:

Go to Golgotha and see what Sin did there.

Christ did not die for sin, that we might live to sin.

Christ died that our sins might die, and our Souls live.

If Sin were better known, Christ would be better thought of.

He that thinks he hath no need of Christ  
hath too high thoughts of himself; he that  
thinks Christ cannot help him hath too low  
thoughts of Christ.

And, lastly, a remark of Mason's which has no apparent  
application to Isaac Watts' thought on the Atonement but  
which points us forward to the Trinity:

All saints have had their doubtings.

## Chapter 5

### Degeneracy and Election

#### I

'A study in hesitant Calvinism'. Thus R. N. Stromberg about Watts' Ruin and Recovery of Mankind. A. P. Davies tells us that Watts explained away predestination and preached sentimentalism. I believe that both these judgements are unfair. There is nothing hesitant about Watts' views on election, nothing sentimental either.

In his writings on the Atonement, which we have already reviewed in the last Chapter, Isaac Watts inevitably touches on the problems of election and free choice. For example in his Essay, A Plain and Easy Account of a Sinner's Coming to God by Jesus Christ, or of Saving Faith in Christ Jesus, (1) Watts stresses man's original freedom:

Innocent man in the day of his creation had a liberty of drawing near to God his Maker, and of delightful converse with him in a more immediate manner.

Then came the fall - and of course the need for a Mediator.

Now in order to explain what it is for sinners to come to God the Father by Jesus Christ, let us consider that all saving approaches of the creature unto God, depend on God's approaches to the creature: He first draws us by his grace, and then we follow ... If our souls are set a moving towards him, it is because his heart, his pity and his love moved first towards us. In the reconciliation of God and his sinful creatures, there must be a mutual approach, and a mutual nearness; but it must be



remembered, that the sinner's coming near to God is but an echo or answer to the merciful voice of God coming near to him.

This, it might be thought, amounts to a decisive rejection of free will. Watts preached the same message in verse:

Glory to God the Father's name, (2)  
                   Who from our sinful race,  
 Chose out his favourites to proclaim  
                   The honours of his grace.

Nothing he ever wrote did Watts intend to detract from the majesty of God. God could select whom he willed for everlasting bliss or damnation. Nor was Watts inclined to ignore the scriptural evidence for predestination.

But even in his writings on the Atonement - where Watts was more concerned with the issue, how men were saved, rather than with the question which men were saved - he showed awareness of the complexity of the problem, of the paradox that God selects, yet man is free.

Though God beheld mankind in these deplorable and helpless circumstances, yet he was pleased, out of his free grace, to decree and determine, that they should not all perish. He resolved to bring some off at least, out of their state of distance from him, and to restore them to his favour and image, to holiness and happiness. Whether this gracious will and design of God, be so clearly and sufficiently discovered, to the light of nature, in his providential goodness to all the world, I will not now debate: But it is sufficiently discovered in the gospel, or the book of grace.

The stress in the argument is on man's initiative in recognising his own depravity and approaching God in humility and in faith in the efficacy of Christ's death.

The implication is clear - that man is free to respond or not to respond to God's initiative, to 'his providential goodness to all the world'. Watts explicitly tackles this paradox - between election and freedom in his Ruin and Recovery of Mankind, of which the revised edition was published in 1740. This work contains endless repetition and tedious, tendentious insults to the intelligence. It also shows Isaac Watts at his most incisive and effective. If one can make allowances for much dated naivety, one can, I think, be impressed by the author's insight into the real meaning of Christianity, by his massive good sense and reasonableness. As has been suggested above, there is nothing hesitant here and indeed one can think of no work in which Watts displays overall a surer touch.

## II

In his Preface (3) Watts boasts that he has followed Scripture and reason:

If it should be found, that in my sentiments on this subject I have followed no human scheme, no established system, no hypothesis of any contending party, let it be known that my studies have been more engaged in meditation, than in reading controversies; reason and the Bible were the only springs whence I derived my sentiments, and the only tests by which I tried them, and not the authority of any great name, or any sect or party among men. Therefore if any reader is determined already to believe nothing but

what is perfectly conformable to some favourite system, or the opinions of the party which he has chosen for his test of truth and error, I shall not court his favour, nor be greatly moved by his censure.

So much for the view that Watts was a Calvinist - assuming of course that one takes him at his own valuation.

Rather disarmingly Watts then takes a swing at 'the learned Dr. Whitby's scheme'. However, it seems charitable to accept his concluding readiness:

To see a safer and more consistent scheme on these subjects proposed to the world, which may rectify all the errors of this book with convincing evidence, and scatter our darkness like a rising sun ... Man must yet grapple with difficulties in this dusky twilight: But God, in his time, will irradiate the earth more plentifully with his light and truth. Hasten, O Lord, the happy day! Amen.

Watts was not a conceited man and always noted constructive criticism.

The work proper begins with a long, indeed to our way of thinking, inordinately long description of man's degeneracy. One takes the point that a christian must be convinced of his own need and moral inadequacy before committing himself to faith in Christ's cross. One accepts, too, the complacency of the Augustan age, though whether it was any worse than our own, or any other age, is open to doubt. Humanists there have always been implicitly or explicitly rejecting the doctrine of original sin. But Watts really spreads himself at vast length. St. Paul said it all much more concisely - and therefore more effectively, - at the beginning of Romans. Still:

This scriptural doctrine of original sin has engaged my pen, because, in my opinion, it has a most extensive and powerful influence on several parts of practical godliness.

Watts begins by proving that man is by no means 'such a creature as he came out of the hand of God'. On the contrary, he is 'depraved and ruined by some universal degeneracy of his nature'. The earth, with its storms, earthquakes and floods, is clearly fit only for fallen men. (4)

Do not these seem to be evident tokens of the actual displeasure of a God against the inhabitants of this globe? ... If a man were not a fallen, sinful creature, fit for punishment, would there have been so many tribes of the serpent and viper kind, armed with the deadly venom to bite and kill man? ... What are the immense flights of locusts which darken the sky, and lay the fields desolate? ... What are the innumerable hosts of caterpillars, which in a night or two turn a garden into a desert, but so many messengers of the anger of God, against a sinful race of beings that dwell upon this earth? And since we are neither able to resist nor subdue their power, nor avoid their plunder, we may certainly infer that we are not such favourites of heaven as God at first had made us, while we are exposed to the endless attacks, insults, and triumphs of such little despicable insects and yet deadly and destructive enemies.

No insecticides in those days!

But perhaps man is indeed innocent, but in a state of probation? No, Watts replies.

The state of probation for innocent creatures would not have included death in it, a violent and bloody, or a lingering and painful death, such as flows from some of these plagues and mischiefs upon the earth. (5)

Nor will Watts allow that God made a new covenant with Noah, giving him dominion over the beasts. In his innocent state, 'no man would have been poisoned or torn by serpents or lions, as now'. The pain caused to women

by childbirth is further evidence of 'a curse from an offended God'. 'Daily observation and experience prove that the blessing of propagation, repeated to Noah, Genesis IX. 6, did not take away that curse'.

Watts then describes the general hardships which mankind has to undergo - further proof of his fallen state and of God's displeasure.

Even in Great Britain, in a land of freedom and plenty, a climate temperate and fruitful, a country which abounds with corn and fruits, and is stored with beasts, and fowl, and fish, in rich variety for food, what a hard shift do ten thousand families make, to keep out famine, and support life! ... How is the rational nature of man almost lost between their slavery, their brutality, and their incessant toils and hardships! They are treated like bruits by their lords, and they live like dogs and asses among labours and wants, hunger and weariness, blows and burthens without end. Did God appoint this for innocents?

Watts might perhaps have drawn other conclusions from this sad state of affairs; he was obviously no leveller. But, to be fair, it should be remembered that over a century later Mrs. Alexander was to write:

The rich man in his castle,  
 The poor man at his gate,  
 God made them, high or lowly,  
 And order'd their estate. (6)

So far as the general wickedness of men is concerned, Watts now delivers himself of an impassioned indictment. (7)

Would the blessed God make a world of intelligent creatures so ignorant and thoughtless of himself, and so insolent and rebellious against him, as man now is? Can we think of that gross and stupid ignorance of the true God which reigns through vast tracts of land in Asia, Africa, and America,

and the thick darkness, as well as toil and slavery which buries all the heathen countries? ... Can we survey the bold and desperate impiety and profaneness, the swearing and cursing, and wild blasphemy that is practised and pronounced daily and nightly, among vast multitudes in those countries which know and profess the true God ... and yet imagine that those wretches love their Maker, that they wear his image, and are conformable to his will, as his original creature must and ought to be?

Nor are man kind only negligent of their duty to God, but they seem to have abandoned their duties to their fellow-creatures also. Can we think of the perpetual practices of fraud and villainy in the commerce of mankind, the innumerable instances of oppression and cruelty, which run through the world; the pride and humour of the great ... etc. If we take a survey of the impure scenes of lust and intemperance and drunken madness which defy the day-light, and pollute the darkness; if we think of the monstrous barbarities that are continually committed by men in the christian inquisitions of Spain, Portugal and Italy (a predictable touch, this), and among all the brutal and wicked tribes of heathenism, the African savages, and the American cannibals, who kill and roast their fellow-creatures, and eat up men as they eat bread; can we still imagine that mankind is a race of beings, who abide in their own native and original state, such as they came from the hands of their Maker?

Could it not be argued that only a minority are quite so shamelessly vile? Watts considers this question, but emphatically answers that the majority are very wicked indeed - and he quotes Virgil, Ovid, Manilius and Juvenal in support of this jaundiced view of the human race. (8) And he quotes St. Paul as an example of an exceptionally virtuous man who, by his own admission, is a sinner. 'There is none righteous, no, not one'. Men are hopelessly tainted and corrupted.

Or could it be sheer coincidence that all men are sinners, and nothing to do with Adam's sin?

There is indeed a bare possibility of this event: but the improbability that every creature should fall into sin, is in the proportion of a million to one. And I prove it thus.

Here follows an example of Watts at his silliest:

If a million of creatures were made but in an equal probability to stand or fall; and if all the numbers from one to one million inclusively were set in a rank, it is plain that it is a million to one that just any single proposed and determined number of all the multitude should fall by sin: Now the total sum is one of these numbers, that is, the last of them, and consequently, in this way of calculation, it is a million to one against the supposition, that the whole number of men should fall. - And yet further, if they were all made in a far greater probability of standing than falling, which the justice and goodness of God seem to require, then it is much more than a million to one, that all should sin against their Creator without exception ...

And so on! One is battered into submission and can only agree with Watts: Q.E.D.!

(9) A much more real question is faced when Watts discusses the connection between original sin and God's love and mercy. Will God require more of us than we are clearly capable of doing? Will he not forgive, this being his metier? Watts' answer is not entirely convincing. In effect he says that God's nature is not the point. What is in fact the salient truth is man's depravity. Having established this, we can then discuss what God can do about it.

This gets Watts back on to the degeneracy theme. In a purple passage (10) he proves God's displeasure with man's sin by analysing death, pain, war earthquakes and so on. He has already played this card. Now he

plays it again - and again and again.

It would add much to the heap of human misery, if we should consider the cutting sorrows which arise from the daily loss of our dearest comforts. What groans and heart-aches and wailings of the living surround the pillows of dying friends and dearer children? What symptoms of piercing and painful distress attend their remains when they are conveyed to the grave? And by such losses all the comforts of future life become disrelishing, and every new scene of sorrow is imbittered with double gall.

There are pages of this, including a section devoted to the sufferings of children - very significant:

'before they can be said to perform rational actions, or to commit actual sins, they are subject to a thousand miseries', which Watts proceeds to describe in loving detail. He is like a humourless Juvenal.

Do we not shudder with a sort of sympathy and compassion, when we read of children falling into the fire, and lying there in helpless screams till their limbs are burned off, or their lives expire in the flames?

Clear proof this of the human race's degeneracy.

Needless to say, when Watts eventually reaches the question of human sin as opposed to human suffering, he writes with great gusto and venom.

Let us consider what poor, low sorry pleasures the bulk of mankind are in pursuit of, to relieve them under this train of wretchedness.

Children's 'little toys and fooleries', the exhibitionism of the rich ('My coat is gayer than yours, and I have more shining things round about me than you have'), cards, dice, gluttony, drunkenness ('They drink and swill, till they have lost their reason'), 'gadding abroad, and mixing with trifling and impertinent company', railing at neighbours - the list of man's sins seems endless.



If I were to add one more proof of the general ruin and degenerate state of human nature, I would observe how we are all posting to death and the grave ... and yet how exceeding few are there amongst mankind, who are solicitous about this great and awful futurity. (11)

Watts concludes: (12)

Methinks, when I take my justest survey of this lower world, with all the inhabitants of it, I can look upon it no otherwise than as a huge and magnificent structure in ruins, and turned into a prison and a lazar-house, or hospital, wherein lie millions of criminals and rebels against their Creator, under condemnation to misery and death ... What an unreasonable thing it is to deny this doctrine of the universal depravity and corruption of mankind ... Is it not almost like winking against the light, since the premises are so strong and glaring, and the inference so powerfully demands our assent?

Why indeed could anyone doubt original sin after such a battering? The answer must be the problems which the doctrine causes, when we consider 'how came this general degeneracy, vice and misery, to overspread mankind in all nations and in all ages?' It is to this problem that Isaac Watts now turns.

### III

'To find a complete and satisfactory answer to this inquiry, is not a very easy thing'. (13) Watts first of all tries to solve the problem by using his reason, as opposed to consulting Scripture.

This general degeneracy of mankind, so far as I can judge, can come upon them but by one of these three ways: either, 1, That the souls

of all men existed in a former state, and sinned against their Maker there, and are sent to dwell in bodies in this world, attended with such unhappy circumstances of sin and misery, either as a natural consequent of, or as a punishment for their former sins in some other world. (14) Or, 2, That one original parent of them all, sinned against his Maker, and sustained the miseries consequent upon it, in his own person first, and when he became a father he spread a sinful and miserable nature through all his vice and offspring by mere propagation. Or, 3, Some original person stood before God, as a common federal head and representative of mankind, upon condition of bringing happiness or misery on all the race, according as he behaved well or ill; and through his disobedience, sin and misery came upon all whose head he was, or whom he represented. If the first two will not solve the difficulty, we shall be constrained to take in the last.

Watts rejects the first two possibilities. He demonstrates the patent injustice of men being punished in this life for sins they committed in a former existence -

For we know nothing of any such former state, or former offences; we have not the least idea or remembrance of it. Now personal guilt cannot be properly punished by the all-knowing and just God, where the sinner has no consciousness nor remembrance of the crime.

Nor can he accept that our moral depravity is inherited, physically, so to speak. He finds it hard to account by this theory for the painful birth, agony and premature death of children, who 'while incapable of proper virtue or vice, merit such pains and agonies of themselves as they often suffer'. Nor does such a theory square with the notion of a kind and just God.

It is hard to suppose, that the creating power and decree of God, or his law of nature for propagation, should place mankind in such a

situation as to render them unavoidably sinful and miserable in a degree, before they have any personal sin or guilt to deserve it, unless you suppose them to be some way interested or involved in something of guilt, or sin, which was derived from a common head, surety, or representative, who might be appointed by some wise and righteous constitution to act for them.

This is the solution which Watts favours and which he now develops. Yet with the characteristic honesty and objectivity which made him such an indifferent controversialist, he at once has this to say: (15)

~~I must confess, I am not fond of such a scheme,~~ or hypothesis, of deriving some sort of guilt from a surety or representative, though I know it has been embraced by a considerable party of christians, ancient and modern. No, I would gladly renounce it, because of some great difficulties attending it, if I could find any other way to relieve the much greater difficulties and harder imputations upon the conduct of divine providence, which will attend this enquiry, if we follow any other track of sentiments.

He is still troubled by the problem of children's suffering. And yet facts are facts. Watts concludes by quoting scripture (Romans V. 12, By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned), before proceeding to a detailed discussion,

How could a holy, wise and a righteous God, who is also a being of infinite goodness, establish such a constitution, that all mankind should derive their being from such a natural parent and legal representative, whereby such universal sinfulness and misery should, in the event, be spread through all human nature in all following ages?

It's a good question.

Watts attempts to answer it, with, it must be admitted, varying degrees of success.

He effectively demonstrates that there was nothing unkind or unjust in God creating man (16)

An intelligent and holy creature, but capable of mistake and sin ... What if man was formed with intellectual powers inferior to those of an angel; let him remember that even an angel is capable of mistake and sin also.

Nor can man complain because his soul is united to a body of animal nature. The soul should be perfectly capable of rising above carnal appetite. (17) Nor is the ability to propagate a handicap, in that man has all the joys of family life as a result. Watts quotes Milton:

Relations dear, and all the charities  
of father, son, and brother.

There is no injustice in man's possession of freedom of choice, which makes him in God's image. God's law was placed before man:

If thou obeyest not thy God in the duty which  
reason requires, thou shalt surely lose thy  
present privileges, and life itself.

Watts supposes that there was a covenant made between God and innocent man, and a promise given of eternal happiness.

And how kind of God to entrust the human race's future welfare to Adam who was our father: For all the kind endearing thoughts that arise from the relation of a father, must add abundant weight to the obligations and the sollicitudes which lay upon him to continue in his state of innocence and obedience. If he had merely been appointed to be the representative of millions who were no way akin to him, it must have lain with much concern upon the heart of a good and innocent man, as the first man was, to oblige him to watchfulness in his duty; but when every one of these millions is his own offspring, the obligation is enhanced by all the tenderness of a father, and all the sollicitude that an innocent and

benevolent father must be supposed to have for the welfare of those who should spring from him.

Such artificial reasoning continues for several paragraphs until Watts faces the question which one expects him to face (with increasing impatience, it must be admitted): what went wrong?

Adam committed one sin, namely, disobedience. Watts demonstrates how this one sin ruined everything. Adam sacrificed his own basic holiness. Guilt replaced love of God.

By indulgence of some sinful appetite of passion, contrary to the dictates of reason and judgement, he weakened his reasoning powers, and gave such a loose to passion and sense after this victory, that it more easily prevailed over him in all following instances, as is common in his posterity even to this day: Reason, opposed and beclouded by strong passions, loses its clearness of judgement.

And so on.

But why should mankind for the rest of history suffer for Adam's moral fecklessness? One assumes that this is the problem that troubles Watts and makes him a reluctant champion of federal original sin - as we have noted above.

Then sinful and miserable man, going on to propagate his kind, according to the law of creation, in his own image, and according to the constitution and covenant between God and man, produced all his race in the same degenerate, sinful and miserable state, and circumstances, whereinto he had plunged himself.

Watts argues that such a theory is perfectly consonant with verifiable fact. (18) Look at the way that gout, scurvy, stone, king's evil, frenzy, madness 'run in the blood', and taint whole families.

How frequently do the diseases of an infamous name, derived from the lewdness of predecessors, make the lives of their offspring short and miserable. And how many instances are there of a great part of a household that from one generation to another die of the small-pox, or a consumption of the lungs, in their youth or in the midst of their days.

Proud, passionate, false, lewd or sottish inclinations are transmitted from parents to children. Whole households of drunkards, adulterers, cheats or thieves prove the wholly credible nature of inherited original sin.

Maybe. But is this just? Can one go on believing in a kind and loving God, or as Watts puts it,

Has it not an appearance of injustice in the creator and governor of the world, to make so many millions suffer for the sin of one?

Watts' answers vary in their effectiveness. He argues that eternal and universal happiness might just as easily have been passed down to us by Adam if only he had behaved himself. That he chose disobedience was no fault of Almighty God. No doubt God would have been delighted if his problem had been how to reward varying manifestations of human excellence. We would all have been translated, like Enoch, 'after some appointed time of obedience here on earth'.

If this seems unimpressive, there now follows an argument which is quite the feeblest Watts produced. (19) 'An insult to the intelligence' may seem a harsh judgement, so I give the passage in full.

Let it be considered also, that this is a common thing among men, for one person to be a natural representative, and, as it were, to become a trustee or a surety for his posterity thereby; by which means they enjoy or sustain the honours or the dishonours, the riches or the poverty, which the merit or crime of their forefather hath procured. If a subject receive from his prince the honour of nobility, and be made an earl, upon account of his merit, together with the royal endowment of a large estate to support the honour; this estate, and this honour will descent together to the latest posterity, and the eldest male of his family, in all ages, is an earl, and enjoys the estate which is annexed to the title. But, on the other hand, if a nobleman rebel against his king, and is attainted of high treason, or proved guilty and condemned, he loses his estate and his honour together; he loses the favour of his prince at court, and that nobility which is the image of his prince; and together with him all his posterity are cut off from their pretensions to the honour and the estate: Nor is this ever counted unrighteous dealing among the governors of the world; when then should it be imputed as unrighteous to the great God, who is the supreme Governor of all worlds?

Watts quotes as additional parallels the delegated powers of an M.P. to speak for his constituents, or the rights of a plenipotentiary from the republics of Holland or Venice to negotiate on behalf of the whole community, even with regard to war and peace.

The parallels, however, are not close - or helpful. Unless Watts argued - which he does not - that a nobleman's very nature was enhanced, and his heirs' as well, just as a traitor's heirs were degraded morally, which is absurd, there is no light to be thrown here on man's degeneracy. Furthermore, as Watts himself appreciates, there is little justice in men suffering from Adam's fall when we have never agreed to abide by

such a representative's decisions and achievements.

Watts is unconvincing when he argues:

Though all mankind were not actually present, to consent that their father should be their representative, yet the appointment is so just and so equitable in the Governor of the world, and also there is so much goodness in it, considering that they were to have enjoyed immortality and happiness if he had kept his innocence, that none of the race of Adam could reasonably have refused this proposal.

When reduced to such arguments, Watts causes us no surprise when he goes on to claim that God is incapable of injustice anyway, so of course our degeneracy, inherited from Adam our federal head, must be deserved!

Watts, one feels, is on safer ground when he turns to the Scriptural proof of his scheme. (20)

Though God hath not thought fit to reveal to us at large in his word, all these particular transactions between himself and the first man whom he created, yet there might be all this, and more, revealed to the first man; and it might be set before him in full light, to secure his obedience and deter him from sinning ... But if we collect together all this is revealed concerning this subject, we shall find that the word of God leads us into many of the same solutions of these difficulties which our reasoning powers have proposed.

Genesis is quoted at length. The creation myth and the Fall are accepted as historical truth, recounted by Moses. The only gloss which Watts feels inclined to add is typical: (21)

Here it may be noted, that it is very probable, though Adam and Eve had no garments in their state of innocency, yet they were not entirely naked, but were covered with a bright shining light, or glory, as a token of their own innocence, and the divine favour and presence;



such glory as angels sometimes appear in, and such as Christ wore on the holy mount ... But God may be justly supposed to take away his clothing of glory from them, upon their sin, as a token of his withdrawing his favour and presence: For without this supposition how could they be said to be more naked after their sin than they were before? And how could our first parents be painfully sensible of any nakedness, if they had not lost something which clothed them?

How indeed! It is with some relief that one eventually reaches Watts' discussion of the federal issue. (22) Job ('What is man, that he should be clean ...?'), David ('Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me'), Moses ('Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart of man was only evil continually') are mobilised predictably. So also is St. Paul, whose constant theme of a connection between sin and death is, of course, very helpful to Watts' argument.

As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men; for that all have sinned.

Watts proves that Paul included children in this general condemnation, in that they too are subject to death - which

Is not only a natural, but a penal evil, and comes upon infants considered as accounted guilty and condemned, not for their own sins, for they had none, but for the sin of Adam their legal head, or representative and surety, according to this constitution, or law, or covenant.

Naturally Watts makes great use of Romans V and I Corinthians XV, to prove:

That Adam conveyed sin and death to his posterity, not merely as the natural spring or parent of their race by propagation, but as a federal head and representative of all his offspring, and involved them in his own guilt, or liableness to misery and death by his own act of disobedience. Take it thus: As Adam and Christ are here represented by the apostle as the two springs of sin and righteousness, of death and life to mankind, which is agreed by all in their expositions of the last half of Romans V and I Corinthians XV so the one is represented as a type and figure of the other ... As one was the spring of life, so the other was the spring of death, to all their particular seed or offspring.

Watts now introduces a pertinent objection.

Some persons have supposed, that it confuses and perplexes our ideas, to treat of mankind thus as one collective body, or to suppose that the race of man have ruined themselves in Adam their head; whereas, they say, the Scripture often tells us, that God will judge every man personally and particularly according to his own works. I answer. It takes away all this supposed confusion and makes our ideas very distinct and plain, if we consider that in the general sentence of ruin and condemnation for the first sin of Adam, mankind may be reckoned as one collective body ... Whereas, in the last judgement, every one will be personally judged, and acquitted, or condemned, according to their personal behaviour.

Watts develops this argument at some length. He rejects salvation by good works, though he accepts damnation by bad works. He is too sensible to deny that some men are far superior in a moral sense to others. Nor does he reject the value of penitence. (23)

And though, I think, it can never be proved by the light of nature, that an offended God will certainly forgive the sins of the best of men, so as to demand no punishment of them in the other world ... yet it may be certainly concluded that, from the equity and holiness of God, the punishment of the wicked and profligate among mankind, shall be vastly greater than the punishment of those who had much more virtue, and better sentiments and practices of piety.

This, of course, brings us to the Atonement -

The methods God has taken to honour his law and vindicate his authority by the sufferings of his Son Jesus Christ, which are revealed to us in the gospel.

But who shall benefit from this Atonement?

At some length, the uncharitable might argue, to the point of tedium, Isaac Watts has proved in Ruin and Recovery the degeneracy of man as a result of humanity's federal head falling from grace. He does not dwell here on God's measures to redeem mankind, in other words, the precise way in which Christ's sacrifice on the cross was efficacious. He does, however, proceed to a discussion of the vexed questions, who is saved, who is condemned, how much freedom have we to influence our ultimate fate?

#### IV

Like the sound Calvinist that he was supposed to be, Isaac Watts stands four square in defence of Election.

Reason also will give us this further information, that if God has provided any way or method of recovery for sinful and miserable man to his image and to his favour, he has taken effectual care that some part of mankind shall be certainly recovered and saved by it ... It is probable therefore that the grace or goodness of God, in conjunction with his wisdom, would or did fix upon some persons among degenerate mankind, to whom he resolved this way of salvation which he has provided should be effectual ... Nor is there just reason for any criminals to complain against the goodness of God, for effectually leading some of their fellows into a certain and secure method of salvation since they sustain no injury thereby. Why should their 'eye be evil', because God is good?

But Watts is concerned about the rest of mankind. While keen to show that the unredeemed have no reason to complain, he throws out interesting hints that their position is not necessarily hopeless.

They are continued under many mercies, and the common operations of reason and conscience, with various degrees of advantage for virtue and piety, with hopeful encouragements to excite them to repent of sin and return to God, and very probable hopes of acceptance, if they sincerely repent of past sins, and practise the duties of love which they owe to God and man, and betake themselves to the free mercy of God, so-far-as it is revealed, and so far-as-reason-and conscience can guide, and enable them in this imperfect state. And can our reason say, that the great God is bound to go further than this toward the recovery of sinful man?

All this, by the light of reason. Watts will go much further, when he resorts to Scripture. 'Very probable hopes of acceptance': that is the key phrase.

Scripture, in Watts' hands, is a most effective source of polemical argument. He now reinforces his case that men are deservedly condemned not only to physical but to spiritual death, due to their sins. He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death (I John III. 14). Those who are dead in trespasses and sins are children of wrath (Ephesians II. 1-3). With regard to the second death (Revelation XXI. 8). Watts concludes:

So that the gospel or covenant of grace has provided hope and salvation by Jesus, the Mediator, for all that would accept of it, whether under the patriarchal, jewish, or christian dispensation; so those who continue impenitent, and will not return to God according to this new covenant, are exposed to double punishment under the government of the Mediator; and he will raise them from the

dead to receive the reward of their obstinacy and impenitence, their violation of the law of God, and their neglect of all the means and hopes of grace.

Stern stuff! But note again the stress on personal, free response.

Watts now recapitulates the classical theory of the Atonement, (24) which as he himself remarks, he has described at length in Of Jesus the Mediator and The Redeemer and Sanctifier. He adds the observations that the law of innocence, or law of works, as delivered by God to Adam, is by no means cancelled by the Atonement, any more than original sin, 'as though Adam had not sinned; for this is contrary to the witness of our senses, and the observation of our minds, every day of our lives'.

There follows a passage of great importance.

Nor did this grace of God provide an absolute, certain, and effectual salvation for all mankind from the penalties and effects of the broken law of innocence, for it is evident enough that all men will not be saved. But lest this method of grace should be utterly ineffectual to all men, the blessed God, who saw the universal degeneracy and corrupt principles of mankind, would not leave it to such an uncertainty, whether any men should be finally saved or no ... Therefore he resolved a number should effectually accept of it.

Watts quotes Scripture extensively to support the salvation of the elect, pointing out that the effects of original sin still apply, but that the elect should eventually be restored to the favour and image of God again, that their bodies should be raised again on the last day etc.

What follows must be quoted in full. (25)

Since the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was so very glorious a person in his own nature, one who was with God, and was God, one who had all the fullness of the god-head dwelling in him bodily, there was such an abounding merit in his perfect obedience to the law of God for four-and-thirty years together, his voluntary submission to so many sorrows and sufferings in his life, and afterwards his enduring death itself, which was the express penalty threatened for sin: I say, there was such a superabundant value and merit in these undertakings, arising from the dignity of his person and character, that these labours, and these sufferings, did not only procure absolute and certain salvation for the elect, according to the will and the appointment of the Father, but they may justly be called sufficient in their own nature, to have obtained actual salvation for all mankind.

And though God did not think fit to appoint all mankind to be certainly and effectually saved thereby, yet this redundancy of the merit of Christ, this overflowing influence of his great undertaking, his obedience, and his death, might be actually appointed and accepted by God the Father to obtain the following benefits for men; and as far as common benefits reach, Christ may be said 'to die for all'; or to 'taste death for every man', in the language of Scripture; II Corinthians V, 14, 15, Hebrews II, 9.

It is due 'to the exuberant merits of Christ' that this earth is still inhabitable, that Adam and Eve lived for hundreds of years after their first sin and that the world is such a lovely place. Then follows an especially typical Watts argument:

Yet, methinks, every thing round about us seems to speak, that God has not utterly and absolutely abandoned all mankind to certain and necessary guilt and misery, besides the few whom he has chosen and secured to be certain subjects of his Son's kingdom: Every divine monument and instance of bounty and blessing round about us, seems to teach us that God is upon terms of grace and reconciliation with all the rebel race of his creature, man.

It is owing to the same grace and purchase of Christ that ever this promise should be again repeated to Abraham ... for in him all the nations of the earth are blessed; Genesis XXII. 18.

That all mankind have had a gospel revealed to them, or a covenant of grace proposed to their acceptance at first, in and by Adam their father, and conveyed by way of tradition to his posterity; surely this must be acknowledged to proceed from the generous undertaking of Christ.

Could all these blessings be really bestowed upon sinful men by the faithful and merciful God, if the original, the eternal, and only design of them were merely to render them so much the more heinously criminal, and the more extremely miserable, without any possibility of hope or recovery ever included in these blessings, or intimated by them?

This leads Watts to a business-like discussion:

How far has the glorious undertaking of our Lord Jesus Christ provided any hope of salvation for those who were not eternally chosen, and given into the hands of Christ, to be redeemed and saved?

His conclusion is very definitely:

That there is such a thing as a general sufficiency of pardon, grace, and happiness, provided for all mankind by Jesus Christ: And it is left to their own natural powers, under common helps, to accept or refuse it.

This conditional salvation, as Watts calls it, can be defended on a number of counts. First, (26)

It is very hard to vindicate the sincerity of the blessed God, or his Son, in their universal offers of grace and salvation to men, and their sending ministers with such messages and invitations to accept of mercy, if there be not such a conditional pardon and salvation provided for them.

Secondly, what is the point of exhorting all men to repent, if there is no hope of salvation for all? Thirdly,

It is equally difficult to vindicate the equity of God ... in condemning unbelievers, and punishing them eternally, for not accepting the offers of pardon, if there was not so much as a conditional pardon provided for them.

After all, Christ's particular censure was reserved for those cities which had heard the gospel and rejected it - a decisive indication that mankind in general had a real opportunity of repenting and being saved. Or does God playfully sport with men whom he has already condemned? This is, of course, unthinkable.

Watts concludes:

It seems evident to me from several texts of the word of God, that Christ did not die with an equal design for all men; but that there is a special number whom the Father chose and gave to the Son, whose salvation is absolutely secured by the death, and intercession of Christ; John XVII, 6, 9, 10. But why should this hinder our interpretation of some texts in a more general and catholic sense, where the love of God and Christ to mankind, are expressed in more universal phrases and terms? Why should we affect to limit that grace which is expressed in an unlimited form of speech? Why may we not suppose conditional pardon and conditional salvation ... to be the purchase of the death of Christ, since the death of so glorious a person has such an exuberant value in it, and such all-sufficient merit?

As ever, Watts' purpose is to minimise disagreements between Christians and bring about reconciliation.

Nor indeed can I conceive why the remonstrant should be uneasy to have pardon and salvation absolutely provided for the elect, since all the rest of mankind, especially such as hear the gospel, have the same conditional salvation which they contend for, sincerely proposed to their acceptance; nor can I see any reason, why the strictest calvinist should be angry, that the all-sufficient merit of Christ should overflow so far in its influence, so as to provide conditional salvation for all mankind, since the elect of God have that certain and



absolute salvation which they contend for, secured to them by the same merit; and especially since that great and admirable reformer, John Calvin, whose name they effect to wear, and to whose authority they pay so great a regard, has so plainly declared in his writings, that there is a sense in which Christ died for the sins of the whole world; and he sometimes goes so far as to call this the redemption of all.

There now follows a most interesting section in which Watts quotes from Calvin's Comments on Scripture which were 'the labours of his riper years and maturer judgement', (27) whereas 'some of the most rigid and narrow limitations of grace to men are found chiefly in his Institutions, which were written in his youth'.

Matthew, XXVI. 28. This is my blood of the New Testament, which was shed for many for the remission of sins. 'Submultorum nomine non partem mundi tantum designat, sed totum humanum genus'. Under the name of many, he signifies not a part of the world only, but all mankind ..... I John II. 2. He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world. 'Hic movetur quaestio, quomodo mundi totius peccata expientur - aliqui dixerunt - Sufficientur pro toto mundo passum esse Christum, sed pro electis tantum efficacitur. Vulgo haec solutio in scholis obtenuit; Ego quanquam verum esse illud dictum fateor, nego tamen praesenti loco quadrare'. Here a question is raised, How can the sins of the whole world be expiated? Some have said Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world, but effectually for the elect alone. This is the common solution of the schools: and though I confess this is a truth, yet I do not think it agrees to this place.

Watts quotes several such extracts and concludes:

Thus it appears that Calvin himself thought that Christ and his salvation are offered to all, and that in some sense he died for all.

Watts then deals with the problem of God's fore-knowledge. (28)

Can his offers of grace be sincere to persons whom he foresees will certainly reject it? What are these offers, but delusions of their hope, and appointed aggravations to increase their guilt; since God certainly knows these offers of grace will be abused only to sinful purposes?

Yes, God can and does offer his grace, Watts replies, to men since he consistently treats them as free agents. Foreknowledge on the part of God is, in fact, irrelevant to the issue of conditional salvation.

Lastly, an old, recurring difficulty is tackled.

Can the different opinions of Christians, concerning the operations of divine grace on the souls of men, be reconciled?

Watts delivers himself of a cri de coeur: (29)

It is a pity the professed disciples and followers of the religion of Christ should have been divided into so many different opinions, and thereby give occasion to distinguish them by so many different names, which are chiefly derived either from their several tenets, or some practice of their forefathers, or from some signal writers who espoused, defended, or propagated those different sentiments. I could wish with all my soul that they were all of one opinion, and all confined only to the single name of Christians, which were given them first at Antioch, to distinguish them from heathens, Jews, and infidels of every kind ...

What a hope! Similarly Watts was being over-optimistic in expecting the scheme which he now develops - based on the arguments which have been described here - to find acceptance among warring Christian parties. He humorously remarks that he has perfected the scheme at least to his own satisfaction!

Watts concludes (30) by stressing the moral effect on the soul of the doctrines of original sin, imputed sin

and universal degeneracy. 'We shall learn to lie humbly before a God of majesty and holiness', depending wholly on redemption wrought by Jesus Christ. If we believe:

That multitudes of souls shall certainly obtain this salvation, this is a matter of thankfulness and hope, since all mankind lay in one common ruin.

And if we take with us also this comprehensive and compassionate doctrine of the sincere and extensive offers of mercy to every sinner ... we shall acquire a more large, more generous and diffusive benevolence to all our fellow-creatures of the race of Adam: We shall give a large foundation for hope to every guilty creature among mankind, assuring them that the great God hath debarred none from his mercy but those who debar themselves by impenitence and unbelief; we shall vindicate the goodness and justice of God in his dispensations towards men, and leave the final condemnation of wilful impenitents and of all the wicked of the earth, entirely upon their own heads.

We shall see things hereafter in a divine light, where all difficulties and darkness shall vanish for ever.

V  
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As in his writings on the Atonement, Isaac Watts displays very definite - and indeed, very attractive - qualities when he tackles the issues of degeneracy and election. The clarity of his mind and his sheer good sense; his awareness of the Christian's helplessness before God's law and his need for Christ's offer of redemption; his gratitude for deliverance and his tolerant goodwill towards all men - these characteristics are

certainly combined with intellectual naivety, a text-chopping adherence to the minutiae of scripture and a regrettable prolixity. But Watts commands respect for his thoroughness!

Whether he is hesitant and sentimental is largely a matter of opinion. But it is at least arguable that any apparent hesitancy is due to Watts' own genuine humility, awareness that these are stormy issues which he is tackling and a truly open mind, humbly seeking after the best solution. As for sentimentality - with all allowance made for the technical meaning of the word in an eighteenth century context (31) - there is a strong case for praising Watts for his robust and courageous adherence to doctrines which he recognises are scriptural and must not therefore be discarded. He is far from sentimental in his honest acceptance of biblical teaching which may initially seem unpalatable.

There is less concern with the heretical teaching of the loathed Socinians in Ruin and Recovery. If Watts is gunning at anybody it is the ultra-Calvinists who, to his way of thinking, make God out to be grossly unchristian! But there is the same basic orthodoxy, the same anxiety to operate within the traditional Christian creeds, the same reverence for scripture. Again, the point must be stressed that here we have an essentially cautious, conservative divine, though certainly prepared to think for himself, with all the protestant's readiness to overturn tradition if reason and the Bible demand it.

But Watts is no Whiston or Clarke, at least if we consider his views on election and Atonement.

One final point. It might seem to the modern reader that Watts is excessively concerned with sin, degeneracy, God's wrath, damnation and so forth - and that here he is indeed a typical, traditional Calvinist. (32) Certainly there is nothing hesitant or sentimental in his conviction that the stern teaching in the New Testament about judgement after death must be taken very seriously. Indeed, modern liberals who water down traditional teaching here have been accused of sentimentalism, not the conservatives such as Watts. (33)

All that can be said is that Watts was brought up in a strongly biblical tradition, that his conviction that he was a veritable worm (a significant and favourite word, especially in his hymns) was deeply ingrained and that his gratitude for redemption was all the more heart-felt. Watts' belief that hell does exist and that sinners, especially wilful sinners, will go there, colours all his writing on the Atonement and on election and reprobation. Because hell is so awful, a good God cannot be believed not to give all men a fair chance of avoiding hell. This is the truly Christian, common sense, biblical argument which prevents Watts from accepting ultra-Calvinist rigidity. The unelected are not hopelessly damned.

But there will be judgement and there will be punishment. This comes over well in The Day of Judgement, that 'hell-fire sermon in plunging Sapphics' (Donald Davie). (34)

When the fierce north wind with his airy forces (35)  
 Rears up the Baltic to a foaming fury;  
 And the red lightening, with a storm of hail comes  
 Rushing amain down.

How the poor sailors stand amaz'd and tremble!  
 While the hoarse thunder, like a bloody trumpet,  
 Roars a loud onset to the gaping waters  
 Quick to devour them.

Such shall the noise be, and the wild disorder,  
 (If things eternal may be like these earthly)  
 Such the dire terror when the great Archangel  
 Shakes the creation;

Tears the strong pillars of the vault of heaven,  
 Breaks up old marble, the repose of princes;  
 See the graves open, and the bones arising,  
 Flames all around 'em!

Hark the shrill outcries of the guilty wretches!  
 Lively bright horror, and amazing anguish,  
 Stare through their eyelids, while the living worm lies  
 Gnawing within them.

Thoughts like old vultures, pray upon their heart-strings,  
 And the smart twinges, when the eye beholds the  
 Lofty Judge frowning, and a flood of vengeance  
 Rolling afore him.

Hopeless immortals! how they scream and shiver  
 While devils push them to the pit wide yawning  
 Hideous and gloomy, to receive them headlong  
 Down to the centre.

Stop here, my fancy: (All away, ye horrid  
 Doleful ideas), come, arise to Jesus,  
 How he sits God-like! And the saints around him,  
 Thron'd yet adoring!

Oh may I sit there, when he comes triumphant,  
 Dooming the nations! Then ascend to glory,  
 While our hosannas all along the passage  
 Shout the Redeemer.

## Chapter 6

### The Trinity

What will it avail thee to argue profoundly of the Trinity, if thou be void of humility and are therefore displeasing to the Trinity?

- Thomas a Kempis (1)

Seek for it (the doctrine of the Trinity) chiefly in the word of God. Read the word with holy reverence and humility of soul ... read with an abasing sense of your own weakness and darkness of mind.

- Isaac Watts (2)

### I

Watts' original motives for writing about the Trinity were a mixture of intellectual curiosity, a desire to help others who were similarly perplexed, the ambition to heal Christianity's divisions and to combat heresy. What stands out a mile is that the last thing he initially intended was to give comfort to Arians or Socinians or to be accused of heresy himself. He certainly had no wish to be mischievous or provocative.

That Watts did indeed mean well is evident in the Preface to his Christian Doctrine of the Trinity:

I then considered how useful it might be to private Christians to have the plain naked doctrine of Scripture concerning the Trinity fairly drawn out, and set before their eyes, with all its divine vouchers ... I imagined also, that it would be an acceptable service to the church of Christ, if this sublime and important doctrine were brought down to a

practical use ... which is of far greater moment to our piety and salvation than any nice adjustment of all the mysterious circumstances that relate to this article in the theory of it. I knew of no treatise on this subject written in this manner, and therefore I attempted it. (3)

This passage gives a fair impression of Watts' naivety - and also, one has to admit, his vanity. Protestant freedom of thought was all very well, but if he had had more of the humility which Thomas a Kempis believed was so necessary, Watts would perhaps have saved himself anguish and embarrassment.

Not that he was unaware of the dangers of pride, to which he accuses the Socinians of succumbing:

There is, I confess, a certain pride in the mind of man, that is ready to resist divine truth, if it does not lie level to our understanding. It was this criminal pride, that has tempted some of the Socinian writers to say, that if the divinity and satisfaction of Christ were never so plainly expressed in Scripture, yet they would not assent to them in the literal sense, because they could not understand them. Therefore they are wont to twist and turn the plain expressions of Scripture by the arts of criticism and metaphor, to signify something else. (4)

Watts himself, however, was in his own eyes uniquely qualified to present Christianity in an acceptable way to Arians and Socinians. The former in particular he believed he could reconcile - hence the title of one of his dissertations, 'The Arian invited to the Orthodox Faith'.

Again, there is a touch of arrogance in Watts' belief that the Christian faith had become encumbered



with unnecessary complications which he would now remove. Watts asks his readers 'of every kind, whether arian or athanasian ... whether it be not possible that such a sublime and mysterious doctrine as the deity of Christ may be true, when some of the more indefensible appendages of it are lopped off'. (5) And he concludes his epistle to the Arians by asking 'his zealous friends' not to be too hard on him:

I intreat them to consider the design of this ~~discourse which is not to explain this~~ article (i.e. the Trinity) at large, but merely to lead an arian, by soft and easy steps, into a belief of the divinity of Christ: And therefore it was necessary that I should not break in upon his understanding all at once, and attempt to assault and batter down all his old sentiments. (6)

Watts modestly compares himself with Christ who 'bore with the prejudices of his own disciples for a season' and, in a footnote, with 'that great defender of the divinity of Christ, Dr. Waterland' who commended the fathers 'for adapting their style sometimes to pagans'. (7)

Credit must, however, be given to Isaac Watts for the conscientious seriousness which he brings to bear on the topic of the Trinity. As he writes in the Preface to his second batch of Dissertations:

It is not a matter of light or trivial concern to write upon the sacred article of the Trinity. Many of the glories of our holy religion are derived from it. The various and particular modes of explaining it can by no means be esteemed of equal importance with the doctrine itself: For men of wisdom, and learning, and exemplary piety, have fallen into different sentiments in this attempt: And there will always be room for further enquiry, while we abide in this feeble and imperfect state ...

And as we are encouraged by Scripture to seek a further acquaintance with the mysteries of the gospel, so we are sometimes constrained to it by the importunate objections of our opponents. (8)

He appreciates that the doctrine of the Trinity originated in the necessity of defeating heretical and pagan doctrinal onslaughts.

The primitive Christians found perpetual objections against the doctrines of their faith raised by the heathen writers; this constrained them to enter into a deeper enquiry; and the violent opposition that was made to these doctrines by the patrons of several errors in the first and following ages, set the Christians in every age at work to draw out the matters of their belief into various human forms ... And particularly in the present controversy, when the opposers in all ages have endeavoured to represent the doctrine of the Trinity as utterly inconsistent both with reason and scripture, the believers of this doctrine have found it proper to search out some way and manner in which it is possible this doctrine may be conceived without such inconsistency. (9)

Perhaps Watts might have credited the Athanasians with a similar desire to defend the Trinity from heresy - and the Schoolmen whom he is so fond of attacking. (10)

Fundamentally, however, his aims were admirable - the clarifying of difficult Christian doctrine. Watts was well aware of the magnitude of his task.

I know it is a very difficult and hazardous undertaking, for a man to attempt to give a rational account of these mysterious parts of our religion, though he endeavour humbly to follow the tract of Scripture light; and there is much danger in it upon this account, as well as others, viz. That what scheme of explication soever he follows, there are some hard names, of modern or ancient error, which lie ready to be discharged upon him. If he explain the Trinity according to the ancient athanasians, with Bishop Pearson, Bishop Bull, and Mr. Howe,

he is censured perhaps as a downright tritheist. If he follow the scholastic scheme, which has been professed by most of the reformed churches ... he incurs the charge of sabellianism. If he dare propose the doctrine of the pre-existent soul of Christ, and follow Bishop Fowler, Mr. Fleming and others, he is accused to favouring the arian and nestorian errors, even though all this time he strongly maintains the proper deity of Christ, and a sufficient personality of the sacred Three to support their distinct characters and offices. (11)

These dangers did not deter Isaac Watts, for he felt sure that his views were so reasonable that no-one would quarrel with him.

## II

Watts believed that he could present the Christian faith - especially with regard to the divinity of Christ - in such a way that Arians would accept it. His motive however, especially in adopting the theory of the pre-existent soul of Christ, was by no means solely to 'invite the Arian to the Christian faith'. Watts himself was deeply worried about various aspects of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and he was anxious to resolve his own doubts and perplexities.

What in particular troubled him?

Over and over again, Watts returns to what he calls 'the complex person of Christ, both God and man'. If Christ receives worship as God, does not this involve the worship of a man as well? And if the answer is, 'when godhead assumes a creature into so near a union as to

make one person with itself, the religious honour may be paid to the whole person', Watts then begins to worry about the state of affairs before Christ became a man, by being born of a virgin.

Watts stresses the inferiority of the man Jesus.

There are many things inferior to the dignity of godhead, which are evidently attributed to the Son in Scripture; such as these, that he was made of a woman, Galatians IV. 4; that he was in the form of a servant, Philip II. 7; that he increased in wisdom and stature, Luke II. 52; that he 'knew not the day of judgement', Mark XIII. 32; that he was hungry, and thirsty, and asleep, that he wept, that he groaned, that he was forsaken of his Father, that his soul was exceeding sorrowful, that he was crucified and died, that he rose again, and ascended into heaven. (12)

Watts accounts for these facts 'by the union of the godhead to the inferior nature of man, in the person of Jesus Christ'.

But he pursues the problem further.

Now there are some things that seem inferior to the dignity of godhead which are attributed to the Son, even before his coming in the flesh, and being born of a virgin; as, that 'God the Father sent his Son into the world', which seems to imply his being before. That he 'came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him'; John VI. 38, 39. Galatians IV. 4, That he left the 'glory which he had with the Father before the beginning of the world'; John XVII. 5, That God the Father 'prepared a body for him'; Hebrews X. 5, The Son came and assumed that body 'to do the will of God on earth'.

Of course Watts' solution to the problem was his favourite doctrine - that Christ's human soul had been adopted by God and united with Christ's divine essence, before the creation of the world. However, he was prepared to consider the alternative theory that, before

the Incarnation, Christ was inferior due to his role as a mediator.

But if we dare not venture our thoughts so far out of the common track, as to suppose that the human soul of Christ had any being before he took flesh, then we suppose that he existed only in his divine nature before his incarnation; and then these inferior expressions of being 'God's messenger or angel', of having 'a body prepared for him by the Father', of 'being sent', of 'coming to do the will of his Father', and of 'not doing his own will' etc. must be attributed to his character and office as Mediator, which carries something inferior in it, and which he assumed even from the beginning of the world: So that the Son, who had all power and sovereignty as God, must be said, under the character of a mediator, to be the messenger, the servant of God the Father, and be sent by him to do his will. (13)

When, therefore, Watts notes that the New Testament is full of 'characters' (characteristics) which seem to be too great for any mere creature (e.g. the Father showeth the Son all things that himself doeth) and also 'characters, that seem much inferior to the dignity of godhead', he offers us the alternative explanations of the pre-existent human soul of Christ or, on the other hand, Christ the Mediator - in which role 'he is supposed to waive this sovereignty'.

However, Watts became progressively more dissatisfied with the idea that Christ's inferior nature before his birth could be ascribed to his role as mediator. In his latest writings, the essays which form The Glory of Christ as God-man displayed, he finally rejects this theory - or rather maintains that it is only part of the truth. Certainly Christ was - and is - the mediator between God and man. But in order to fulfil the role of mediator, he

must have had inferior characteristics - and these before he assumed a human body. He therefore must have had a pre-existent human soul.

If we consider the covenant of grace as it has been proposed to men in all ages since the fall, the existence of Christ as God-man appears requisite also to constitute him a proper Mediator. It does not seem to be so agreeable a supposition to make this covenant for the salvation of men from the vengeance of God to run on for the space of four thousand years together, that is from the creation and fall of man to the incarnation of Christ, without any proper or suitable mediator or undertaker on the part of man. This covenant of the gospel, or of God in Christ, includes in the very nature and theory of it two real distinct parties, God and man; so that the title of mediator seems to be required that man should be represented by the mediator as well as God, and that the complete person of the mediator should have some affinity to both parties ... Observe also that this one Mediator is particularly called the man Christ Jesus, I Timothy II. 5, that the human nature may appear to be signally concerned in the mediation: And for the same reason, the book of life is said to belong to the Lamb, which name is applied to the human nature of Christ ... (14)

And, of course, the point which Watts repeatedly stresses is that the Covenant between God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ for the redemption of mankind 'is represented in Scripture as being made and agreed upon from or before, the foundation of the world'. Watts continues:

Is it not then most proper that both real parties should be actually present, and that this should not be transacted merely within the divine essence by such sort of distinct personalities as have no distinct mind and will? The essence of God is generally agreed by our protestant divines to be the same single numerical essence in all three personalities, and therefore it can be but one conscious mind or spirit. Now can one single understanding and will make such a covenant as Scripture represents? (15)

Watts' writings on the Trinity are on the whole consistent and coherent to the point of tedious repetition. However, he himself claims to have changed his opinions since writing his first attempt to solve the mystery of the Trinity (The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity). He was worried by criticisms levelled at this first essay by the anonymous author of A Sober Appeal to a Turk or an Indian (in fact the Rev. Martin Tomkins). In particular Watts was now convinced that the complex nature of Christ's personality demanded different degrees of worship.

All the expressions of Scripture which represent our 'coming to the Father by Jesus Christ, or praying to the Father in his name, or giving thanks to God in the name of Jesus Christ, and offering the sacrifice of praise by him, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ'; This language seems to signify mediate and subordinate worship, that is, religious honour paid to Jesus Christ as Mediator, in order to make us and our services acceptable to God the Father. And when the man Christ Jesus is said to be exalted, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, it seems to imply this mediate or subordinate worship, that is, as to the special purpose and design of it, though at the same time this very man Christ Jesus is united to the divine nature, and by that means rendered capable of being worshipped as part of the complex person God-man. (16)

Watts is well aware that he is skating on thin ice. He was only too ready to admit his ambition of coaxing Arians back into the fold by going out to meet them. However he was careful to stress that he had no intention of 'sinking Christ'. He defended his doctrine of the pre-existent soul of Christ by asking:

Is not this a more natural, more easy, and more scriptural method of accounting for the attribution of divine names and properties to our Lord Jesus Christ, than for us to take the peculiar and distinguishing names, titles, characters, and properties of godhead, which are applied to Christ, and sink them to a diminutive and inferior sense, and thus apply them to the man Christ Jesus? Is it not more rational and more scriptural to suppose the man Christ, by his union to God, capable of these names and characters in their sublime and exalted sense, than to run counter to so many places of Scripture, which at least seem to appropriate these names and characters to God. (17)

Watts' motives throughout are to preserve Christ's divine status, to avoid the tritheism of which he accuses Arians and Socinians and to choose his words carefully with regard to Christ's 'person'.

This leads us to Watts' problems with regard to the Holy Spirit. He is in fact far less concerned with the Holy Spirit and concludes without much self-torturing debate:

Upon the whole, I conclude, that since the Scripture represents him under the characters of true godhead, and under the character of a person distinct from the Father and the Son, since also it is exceeding hard to reconcile strict and proper deity with three strict and proper personalities in the godhead itself, in a fair consistence with reason and Scripture, it seems to me most agreeable to the word of God, that we should explain the personality of the Spirit in a figurative sense, that we may better maintain his proper eternal deity, and his unity with the Father. (18)

So far as I know, Watts consistently maintains the necessity of worshipping the Spirit as God.

Now if the Son and the Holy Ghost were inferior to the Father, and not the same God, the joining them with the Father ... would seem to have a very broad appearance of idolatry. (19)

He movingly records his gratitude to the Spirit 'who



enlightens, who comforts, who regenerates and sanctifies men, who bestows on the saints so many gifts and graces ...'

In the British Museum there is a copy of John Owen's Of Temptation.\* (20) On the fly-leaf is written:

N.B. This Book was the property of the late great Dr. Isaac Watts - the observations and Notes in the Margin are in his hand-writing.

Various passages are underlined or quaintly stressed by the drawing of a hand in the margin:



One such passage appears on page 156:

He is called the Holy Spirit of Promise; not only because he is promised by Christ, but also, because he effectually makes Good the promise.

Watts had no difficulty in recognising the Holy Spirit as God's power in action, not to be thought of as a person in the same way that Christ the man obviously had been a person.

Although Watts wrote at length in his earlier works on the Trinity, in truth even in those essays his chief preoccupation was with the complex personality of Jesus Christ. The titles of his last works - Useful and Important Questions Concerning Jesus the Son of God and The Glory of Christ as God-man make the same point. Watts' gospel, to a great extent, was the pre-existence of Christ's human soul.

\* Oxford 1658.

### III

Now if we can give ourselves leave to suppose, that the human soul of our Lord Jesus Christ had a being, and was personally united to the divine nature, long before his body was born of the virgin, even from the very foundation of the world, and that this was the Angel who conversed with Abraham, Moses, Joshua etc. then we may most easily account for these expressions of Scripture, which signify something inferior to godhead before his incarnation; and we may attribute them to the human soul of Christ; which, though infinitely inferior to God, yet doubtless is a spirit of a very excellent and noble nature, as being formed on purpose to be united to God, and never existed but in a personal union with God. (21)

Thus Isaac Watts in The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity.

He mentioned this doctrine in all his Trinitarian works, developing argument upon argument to justify it.

Basically Watts believed that Christ as God could not have performed the functions that he was required to perform before the Incarnation, if he had possessed divine status only. Above all Watts applied this argument to Christ's role as redeemer.

(22) It is granted that the generality of our christian writers believe, that it was only the divine nature or godhead of Christ had an existence before he was conceived by the Virgin Mary, and became incarnate; yet whensoever they would represent the exceeding great love of the Father in sending his Son into our world, that he might suffer and die for us, and when they would describe the transcendent love of Christ, in his coming into our world, and his submitting to death for our sakes, they usually represent it in such language as can never agree to his divine nature in any propriety of speech, but only to the pre-existent human soul of Christ, with its descent into flesh and blood, and the sufferings of this human soul for us ...

And this love is exceedingly enhanced, while we consider, that this human soul of Christ was personally united to this divine nature; so that hereby God himself is joined to flesh and blood; God becomes manifest in the flesh, I Timothy III. 16.

Watts then goes on to argue that if Christ is supposed to have existed only in his divine nature before the Incarnation, so many biblical notions lose their impact. God the Father could never dismiss his Son's divine nature from his bosom.

Godhead must have eternal and complete beatitude, joy, and glory, and can never be dispossessed of it ... And as it is plain that the divine nature of Christ could not be separated from the bosom of his Father, when he came into this world and took flesh upon him, so neither could the human nature leave this bosom of the Father, if it had no prior existence, and was never there.

But now if we conceive the soul of Christ in its pre-existent state, as the first-born of every creature, the darling of the soul of God, who, as it were, lay in the bosom of the Father, to come forth from the Father and come into this world, John XVI. 28; to part with the joys and glories it was possessed of there before the foundation of the world, John XVII. 5; to dwell in a feeble mansion of flesh and blood, pain and sorrow, to be cramped and confined in human limbs, and to sustain the pangs and punishment of a cursed death on the cross, for the sake of rebellious creatures; this is amazing love indeed; this has a surprising and sensible reality in it, and should awaken all the powers of our souls, to admire and adore both God the Father for sending his Son Jesus Christ, and Christ himself for consenting to such an abasement. (23)

Watts felt himself free to emphasise the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ's human soul because he consistently stressed the merit of Christ the man, in his

life on earth. He argues that we are mistaken if we invariably refer 'sublime and glorious attributions' to his divine nature - 'not considering that we may perhaps by this means swallow up and bury some of the most illustrious excellences and honours of the man Christ Jesus, nor suffer his human nature to receive that due share of glory and dignity to which the Father has advanced it'. (24) Watts readily agrees that such arguments must be backed by Scripture. Indeed, he goes on to claim that God's word has not been properly followed.

Let us do so much justice to our blessed Saviour, as to read the distinct honours of both his natures in those very places of Scripture where he has written them, that so we may pay him the full glory due to his sacred and complex person as God-man. (25)

Willing as he is to distinguish so emphatically Christ's two natures in his life on earth as God-man, Watts finds it so much easier to make a similar distinction with regard to Christ's pre-incarnational state.

He has, of course, very fixed views about that state which colour his thinking - notably that the covenant between the Father and the Son was made 'from or before the foundation of the world'. Watts argues that:

The essence of God is generally agreed to be the same single numerical essence in all three personalities, and therefore it can be but one conscious mind or spirit. Now can one single understanding and will make such a covenant as Scripture represents? (26)

Watts continues:

I grant, the divine nature, which is in Christ from eternity, contrived and agreed all the parts of this covenant. But does it not add a lustre and glory, and more conspicuous equity, to this covenant, to suppose the man Christ Jesus, who is most properly the Mediator, according to I Timothy II. 5 to be also present before the world was made, to be chosen and appointed as the Redeemer or Reconciler of mankind, to be then ordained the head of his future people, to receive promises, grace and blessings, in their name, and to accept the solemn and weighty trust from the hand of his Father, that is, to take care of millions of souls?

It was this covenant which was to lead to the salvation of men's souls in due time. Therefore Christ had been a Saviour from the beginning of the world.

Those who apply all these things merely to the divine nature of Christ ... yet they suppose the human nature of Christ to be included in it, in the view of God the Father, by way of prolepsis, or anticipation.

It makes more sense, however, so Watts argues, if Christ's human nature was actually and literally involved and consented to a covenant which after all was to lead to the suffering of that same human nature.

So Watts concludes:

Thus it appears, if we consider this covenant as made between God the Father and his Son, and as it has usually been called the covenant of redemption, it seems to require the pre-existence of the soul of Christ. Or if we consider the covenant of grace as it has been proposed to all men in all ages since the fall, the existence of Christ as God-man appears requisite also to constitute him a proper Mediator. It does not seem to be so agreeable a supposition to make this covenant for the salvation of men from the vengeance of God to run on for the space of four thousand years together, that is from the creation and fall of man to the incarnation of Christ, without any proper or suitable mediator or undertaker on the part

of man. This covenant of the gospel, or of God in Christ, includes in the very nature and theory of it two real, distinct parties, God and man; so that the title of mediator seems to require that man should be represented by the mediator as well as God. (27)

This is the essence of Watts' case. He backs up his argument by suggesting that Christ's human soul can be seen at work at various stages and levels before the Incarnation. I have mentioned in Chapter 2 Watts' notion that Christ can be seen in action before the Incarnation as the angel who wrestled with Jacob.

Now since the Scripture has revealed to us a superior and inferior nature in Christ, to sustain the divine and creatural characters attributed to him, why may we not suppose the primitive fathers, under the influence of these scriptural representations, might be led to attribute both divine and creatural characters to Christ, the Logos, the Son of God, in his pre-existent state, though they do not evidently keep up the just and distinct ideas of two beings, united in one complex person. (28)

Watts enjoys himself pointing out the illogical defects in Athanasian thinking:

Some of the athanasians suppose there may be some 'real and natural subordination of an eternal Son to an eternal Father, though the divine nature be equal to both of them' and that is, by supposing the Father only to be self-existent and independent, and by referring the Son's existence, and his godhead and power to the Father, as the spring and fountain of it, from which it is derived by way of natural and necessary emanation; and they think that this will account for all those inferior sort of expressions which are used concerning the derivation of the Logos from God the Father, and the Father being greater than the Son, etc. (29)

And Watts' comment:

Yet after all the mollifying constructions of interpreters, I think still the difficulties can scarce be solved upon that hypothesis without allowing too many catachreses, and too hard figures of speech, by speaking of God like a creature, and of a creature like God. These lay a foundation for very obscure and perplexed ideas, and thereby introduce perpetual contests between learned men, concerning the sense of the fathers. (30)

Of course Watts' solution is predictable. The Logos is a complex subject, consisting both of 'something in the godhead analogous to a power or virtue, to be infinite, uncreated, co-essential, and co-eternal with God the Father, as being of his very essence, and in this sense true God' - and Christ's human soul:

May we not suppose also, that in some unknown moment of the divine eternity, God, by his Sovereign will and power, produced a glorious spirit in an immediate manner, and in a very near likeness to himself, and called him his Son, his only begotten Son? Would not this be a proper subject for all the inferior attributions? ... And might not this be the human soul of our blessed Saviour? Supposing further this angelic spirit to be assumed into a personal union with the divine logos, from the first moment of his existence, might he not be called the Son of God also, upon this account? May it not be said, that true godhead is communicated to the Son of God in this manner, and that by the free will of the Father? 'For it pleased the Father that the fulness of the godhead should dwell in him', Colossians I. 19. (31)

Watts' conclusion:

Thus Scripture and reason seem to agree to inform us, that as man, with his distinct properties of reason and vegetation, is composed of a body and spirit; so they lead us to suppose, that the pre-existent nature of Christ, which is called the logos, is composed, or constituted of God and a creature, or an inferior spirit, personally inhabited by the divine word, to which the distinct properties of God and a creature may be attributed. (32)

IV

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Isaac Watts felt very strongly indeed that the pre-existence of Christ's human soul was a theory which solved problems as opposed to creating them, and strengthened rather than weakened the Christian gospel.

This doctrine casts a surprising light upon many dark passages in the word of God; it does very naturally and easily explain and reconcile several difficult places, both of the Old and New Testament, which are very hard to be accounted for any other way. (33)

Watts goes on to instance such phrases as 'the image of the invisible God' -

This cannot refer merely to his divine nature, for that is as invisible in the Son as it is in the Father; therefore it seems to refer to his pre-existent soul in union with his godhead, who is the brightest, the fairest, and most glorious image of God; and so he appears to the world of angels in heaven and by his frequently assuming a visible shape heretofore, became the image of the invisible God to men, and dwelt here for a season on earth.

Or again, the phrase 'first-born of every creature', Watts claims, has caused untold difficulties - yet has vivid meaning,

Because God was pleased to ordain that the divine nature should be united to this glorious being, the human soul of Christ, now appearing in a body. (34)

The terms 'Son', 'only begotten Son' for Watts imply derivation and dependency -

Perhaps the sonship of Christ ... may be better explained by attributing it to his human soul existing by some peculiar and immediate manner of creation, formation, or derivation from the Father, before other creatures were formed.



Watts continues:

Now this matter being set in a fair and full light, and established by just arguments from Scripture, would take off the force of many arian pretences against the Trinity, viz. such pretences as arise from the supposed derivation of one person from another in pure godhead, and a supposed eternal act of generation producing a co-essential son; which things are not plainly expressed in any part of the Bible, and which are acknowledged on all sides to be great and incomprehensible difficulties. (35)

Watts works his way through the whole of Hebrews chapter one showing how such-expressions as 'being made so much better than the angels' make more sense given the pre-existence of Christ's human soul - 'a creature, which has the nearest likeness to its creator', 'the image of the invisible God' etc. He then continues:

Since the design of the second chapter to the Hebrews is, to prove the incarnation of Christ, and his taking upon him a human body, I might here ask, whether the design of the first chapter may not be to represent our blessed Lord in his pre-existent state, both divine and human, that is, to set forth the glory of this human spirit both in its own excellencies and in its original union with the divine nature. (36)

Watts defends his theory by pointing out that references to Christ before his incarnation make more sense if he had a pre-existent human soul. He quotes I Corinthians X. 9, Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them (the Israelites) tempted him, and were destroyed. II Timothy I. 9, Grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. Christ had been the King of Israel - hence St. John's expression, 'He came unto his own ...' 'Let us dwell a little longer on this sacred subject, the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ'.

Watts dwells on it interminably, stressing the pre-existent Christ's role as King, as God's counsellor, as God's colleague in creation.

Yet there may be some properties and condecencies in it, that when this first-created spirit or soul of Christ was framed, and united to the divine nature, he should not be a mere idle or inactive spectator of the first works of God. (37)

As a climax we are brought back to the Atonement. Watts believes that his pet theory makes the love of God and of his Son all the more moving.

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This doctrine greatly magnifies the self-denial and the condescending love of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his state of humiliation and death; it casts a thousand rays of glory upon all the scenes of his humble estate; it makes his subjection and obedience to the will of the Father appear much more illustrious, and his charity and compassion to perishing mankind stand in a very surprising light. (38)

Why? There follows a highly emotional, purple passage where the human soul of Christ's progress, from heaven to Calvary, is described.

See the ancient and original king of Israel, who had made David and Solomon, and all their race, his deputies for many generations; see him crowned with thorns instead of glory; see him scourged, buffeted, nailed to the cursed tree between two thieves ... Think of that ancient darling of heaven, now made the sport of the Jewish rabble ...

And so on, and so on.

Collect all these strange and astonishing ideas together, survey them in one view, and say, how divinely glorious was the love of God in parting with such a Son from his bosom! How amazing was the condescension and self-denial of this glorious Saviour in giving himself for us!

'All very fine', we may well say. 'But all this rhetoric is surely applicable to orthodox Christian tradition anyway?' 'Yes, but how much more relevant, if we accept Christ's pre-existent human soul!' Watts would reply.

When we conceive of this pre-existent soul of Christ, this glorious, this holy and happy spirit, with pleasure consenting to his Father's proposal of this most surprising abasement and bloody agonies, it gives us an example of such profound humility, such absolute obedience to God his Father, and such unspeakable love to sinful men, as far surpasses the greatest instances that he ever gave, or ever was capable of giving, while he was here upon earth, if we suppose, according to the common opinion, that he was merely born and trained up for this service, without his own previous consent ... Many of these things, by the help of tropes and figures, may be said concerning the deity of Christ, or God manifest in the flesh; but if we leave out the figure of communication of properties, and speak in such plain and natural terms as Scripture seems to use generally on this occasion, it signifies only 'God's will that the man Christ should suffer these sorrows and that the man Jesus passively consented to suffer them when it was revealed to him that he was born and made for this purpose.' But the divine nature itself could really suffer nothing of all this; the utmost condescension of the godhead was, that it stood related to the man who endured these sufferings: And infinite condescension it was indeed, for God manifest in the flesh to be thus dishonoured and unglorified. But the godhead itself is impassible still, and cannot really suffer pain or loss; nor underdo proper sensible humiliation, shame, or sorrow.

Whereas by aggrandizing the human nature of Christ, by this doctrine of his pre-existent state, we see that very same glorious being itself who suffered all this, actually leaving the bosom or beatifying presence of the Father, really divesting himself of his primeval glories and joys in the literal sense, and without a figure, and freely devoting his very self to all these calamitous circumstances. (39)

Watts is very keen to claim that his ideas, far from being Arian or Socinian, help to defend Christianity from those doctrines. He claims that 'vulgar explication of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ' allows no real self-emptying, no literal and proper abasement and suffering of the Son of God, 'but only a relative abasement by being united to the man who did suffer'. Watts quotes Tomkins' Sober Appeal to a Turk or an Indian to this effect. Orthodox doctrine supposes only -

A relative humiliation, a relative or nominal suffering of the Son of God by his uniting himself to a man, while he himself really suffered nothing, underwent no diminution, but was all the while possessed of the highest glory, and of the same unchangeable blessedness.

Watts counters this Arian argument:

Whereas this doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul of Christ sets the whole scheme of the self-denial and sufferings of Christ, in as glorious and advantageous a light as their doctrine can pretend to do; and yet at the same time secures the divinity of Christ, together with all the honours of its condescending grace, by supposing this pre-existent soul always personally united to his divine nature. Thus all this sort of pretences for the support of the arian error is destroyed at once, by admitting this doctrine. (40)

Furthermore, Watts points out, we do not, if we hold this doctrine, have to risk Arian and Socinian ridicule by arguing that the mere godhead of Christ wrestled with Jacob, ate and drank with Abraham, talked with Joshua and held a plumb-line in his hand while he stood upon the wall in the view of Amos.

Watts then, rather pathetically, pleads that his doctrine is utterly harmless.

Some of the most zealous and learned defenders of the sacred Trinity have acknowledged to me, that they could see no danger of heresy in it, nor any injury to sacred truth, though they themselves had not seen this doctrine yet in a convincing light. And as there is no article of the christian faith that is endangered by it, so neither does it alter any of the particular schemes of doctrine which divines of various parties have espoused.

In other words, the pre-existence of Christ's human soul is quite irrelevant to major theological issues! Watts even admits that it is irrelevant to the Trinity.

Nor does it in the least interfere with any particular schemes, which men have invented to solve the difficulties of the blessed doctrine of the Trinity ... This sentiment of the pre-existent soul of Christ has a friendly aspect upon any scheme that maintains the godhead of the sacred Three; and may be easily assumed and ingrafted into any one of them: But the socinian and arian errors are inconsistent with it, as I have explained it. (41)

A further claim Watts put forward was that he avoided Sabellianism by his arguments.

If the divine nature, or true God, be but one single conscious mind or spirit, and this spirit be united to human nature, or the man Jesus, then does not God the Father seem to be incarnate? Is there not too great an approach made to that doctrine which was called the heresy of the Sabellians, or the Patripassians, viz. that God the Father took flesh, suffered, died, and rose again, and ascended to heaven? To this I answer: If the sonship of Christ be not referred to his divine nature, or to its personal union with the godhead, or to his office as Messiah, then the name of Father will not import any internal real distinction in the divine nature or essence. (42)

- especially, Watts maintains, if the human soul of Christ

is 'anciently united to the divine nature, assuming a body that was prepared for it by the Father, through the peculiar operation of the Holy Spirit'.

Watts is equally anxious to avoid the charge of Nestorianism, so far as his teaching on Christ's 'complex personality' was concerned.

Nor can I see any thing so terrible or heretical in it, if we should suppose the human nature of Christ, to be in some sense two distinct persons, as God and man, being each of them a single intelligent agent. I confess, the frightful sound of Nestorianism may reasonably forbid a man to indulge this language, because it will not be counted orthodox: But I know of no manner of injury done to the Scripture, to the sacred truths of the gospel, nor to the common schemes of explaining the Trinity, by such an allowance as this is ... the Scripture sometimes seems to speak of Christ, as a distinct person in one of his natures, and as abstracted from the other, though it be not really separated. (43)

'Nothing so terrible or heretical in it'.

Superficially this might seem a fair summary of the whole of Watts' notions with regard to the Trinity.

Unfortunately he wrote at such length and with such persistence that his enemies could not but take notice.

His ideas were sufficiently odd for him to be suspected of heresy, or at least quasi-heretical ideas.

Inevitably Watts was upset by this criticism. Take for example his indignant reply to a hostile letter from Thomas Bradbury:

As for my thoughts and expressions, concerning the person of our blessed Saviour, and the doctrine of his deity, I can only tell you again, that all my labour and care has been engaged to support that doctrine, in such manner as might most effectually refute both the objections and the calumnies of those who oppose it. Your reflections on such a profession, of my seeking for divine guidance, with

the story of Socinus, carries in it an unbecoming air, to say no worse; and your further turns of wit on my prayers for you, shall receive no answer from me but silence. (44)

Even sadder is that, in the long run, Watts himself did not derive peace of mind from his enterprising schemes. I shall discuss the Solemn Address shortly. Suffice now to say that it is the work of a deeply distressed man. Not only did Watts' special pleadings for the pre-existent soul of Christ fail to impress and convince contemporaries. They did not even finally satisfy their author.

V

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Where did Watts get his Trinitarian theories from? He himself gives us the answer. He appears to have been well read not only in Scripture, but in the Fathers and in, at any rate, protestant seventeenth and eighteenth century theology. He knew Origen, quoting him to back up his view that Christ had true godhead and unity with the Father:

Let him that dares say, there was a time when the Son was not, consider that he also says there was a time when wisdom was not, and when light was not. (45)

Above all, he marshalls Origen in the defence of the pre-existent soul of Christ:

Origen seems to be a believer of the pre-existent soul of Christ, when he says, 'Perhaps the soul of the Son in its perfection was in God and his fulness, and coming out thence when he was sent by the Father, took a body of Mary'; and again, upon these words of John the Baptist, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me; John I. 30. He says thus, that it is spoken of Christ, 'that we may learn that the man (or manhood) also of the Son of God, mixed with his divinity, had a prior subsistence to his birth of the virgin'. Origen also seems to allow this human soul to be the first created; for speaking of the formation of wisdom before the world, he says, 'God created Ἐμφύχον σοφίαν, an animated wisdom, or wisdom with a soul'. (46)

Watts quotes Justin Martyr and Theophilus.

'The Logos, or eternal Word, which was always in the heart of God, was afterwards produced, generated, and became a son' (Theophilus) ...

If Justin Martyr, who in the judgement of the learned speaks the sense of the other ante-nicene fathers, asserts the logos 'always to have co-existed with the Father, and that he was then begotten, when God by him created the world', this may be exactly explained in the same manner as Theophilus: And all the rest of the fathers; before and after the council of Nice, who speak of the Logos existing eternally with God, before he was generated and became a son, may be interpreted in the same manner. When they speak of the generation of the Son, by the will and power of God the Father: when they assert the Father to be the cause, fountain, spring of his existence, and of all his powers; when they call him conditio; a creature, and 'the first-born work of the Spirit', etc. Here is an angelic logos, or human soul, a proper subject for these ascriptions. (47)

Philo is another ancient author whom Watts frequently quotes.

May we not suppose also that, in some unknown moment of the divine eternity, God, by his sovereign will and power, produced a glorious spirit in an immediate manner, and in a very near likeness to himself, and called him his Son, his only begotten Son? Would not this be a proper subject for all the inferior attributions? Might not this be that Logos of Philo, and the other ancient Jews, who was



called the 'first-born of God', the 'eldest archangel', the 'man after God's own image' etc? And might not this be the human soul of our blessed Saviour? (48)

And again:

In some parts of his works, Philo describes the Logos as a particular divine power, which he also calls σοφία or wisdom, as Solomon does in the eighth of Proverbs, and he attributes to this wisdom, or word, an existence before any creature, the contrivance of the creation of the world and all things in it, with other divine and incommunicable ascriptions ... in other places, Philo makes the Logos, or Word, to signify that glorious archangel which the ancient Jews supposed to be the supreme of creatures, formed before all the angels and all the other parts of creation, 'in whom was the name of God', who was sent to conduct Moses and the Jews into Canaan. This glorious spirit Philo calls 'the most honourable Logos, the archangel, prince of the angels and stars, high-priest in this temple of God, the world, who stands in the limits between the creature and the Creator, the eldest, the first-begotten of the sons of God, who under God governs the world, and who doth humbly mediate for us mortals with him that is immortal'. (49)

Watts claims that Philo sometimes uses logos to mean God himself. More often, however, logos for Philo means a glorious angel. (50)

Watts claims the support of protestant divines for his Trinitarian ideas. 'The great Calvin, one of the chief glories of the Reformation' is quoted as an authority on the use of the word person to describe the Son and the Spirit. According to Watts, Calvin does call them persons, but also 'the wisdom and power of God the Father' - nor will he quarrel with anyone who will not admit the word, 'person'. (51)

Watts' greatest ally is Dr. Thomas Goodwin.

'The learned and pious Dr. Thomas Goodwin, that deep and happy inquirer into the sense of Scripture, gives numerous instances wherein the divine nature of Christ must be supposed by way of prolepsis to be united to many of the expressions of Scripture concerning Christ'. Watts quotes Goodwin's interpretation of Hebrews I which accords very conveniently with his own. 'These attributions cannot belong to the pure simple divine nature of Christ', Watts claims Goodwin to have said. Watts continues:

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There is very little difference between my opinion, and the sentiments of that great man, in the exposition of all these scriptures, except only that he attributes to the human nature of Christ before its existence, and considered only in its designed and future union with the divine nature, those same scriptural properties, characters, and transactions, which I would rather ascribe to the human soul of Christ, supposing it actually existent, and considered always in a present, real and personal union with his divine nature. Now, as he supposes those texts must necessarily be explained concerning Christ as God-man, so I suppose a literal interpretation of Scripture is to be preferred before a figurative and proleptical sense ... (52)

Watts thinks that Goodwin makes difficulties for himself - 'there is no need to bring in such a figure as prolepsis, or the anticipation of things future, since the real and actual existence of the soul of Christ before the creation makes all this language of Scripture just and plain in the literal sense'. Watts concludes that Goodwin, 'a learned, a laborious, and a successful inquirer into all those Scriptures that treat of our Lord Jesus Christ' would probably have come round to his way of thinking:

And what that pious and ingenious author declares upon this subject almost persuades me to believe that had he lived in our day, he would have been a hearty defender of the doctrine which I propose. (53)

Watts adds an appendix to the Glory of Christ as God-man displayed - an abridgement of Goodwin's Discourse On the Glories and Royalties that belong to Jesus Christ considered as God-man. He explains why,

Having found occasion ... to cite some passages out of this learned and pious writer, who soars far higher than I dare to do, in describing the glories due to the human nature of Christ Jesus, I thought it might be very entertaining to many of my readers, as well as serviceable to the doctrine here proposed, to draw out an abridgement of that discourse ... Hereby the pious reader will easily perceive, that the manner in which I have expounded many Scriptures, is nobly patronised and supported by this great author, whose name and memory are honoured among evangelical writers. (54)

Of course one cannot be absolutely certain to what extent Watts manipulates the authors he quotes; he does not always give page references. However, where he does quote Goodwin verbatim, one can quite see why he approves of him. Take, for instance, Goodwin's gloss on John XVII. 5, Glorify me now with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

It is not the glory of the second person simply or alone considered, for this was not a thing to be prayed for, it is naturally and essentially his due; and he had it as much now at the time when he prayed, as he had from everlasting: The word, Now glorify me, necessarily implies a suspension of a glory due before; and it argues a glory to be given in time; for both which reasons it concerns the human nature, not the divine. The subject of the glory prayed for, is the man; Austin was convinced of this, though he was engaged against the arians as much as any in his time. It is the man, or rather the person of God-man in union together, is the subject prayed for: It is the petition of the person who had been humbled, who had glorified God on earth, and had finished his work and waited for this glory until

now, and it is a glory suspended until this work was done ... This will never be unriddled so fairly any other way, as by predestination, that is the glory he was ordained to, as God-man; for he had before the world was, the title of God-man elect, although not of God-man united to, or made flesh. (55)

Watts uses this and similar pronouncements to justify his claim that 'I have not ventured upon such expositions of the Bible, nor such exalted sentiments and language concerning Christ's human nature, without an honourable precedent. If I am mistaken, yet I may reasonably hope that while I have erred and wandered under such a leader, and in such good company, the censure will be light and gentle ...' (56)

Another name for Watts to conjure with was Dr. John Owen. He quotes Owen on Hebrews:

'It is not the direct and immediate design of the apostle in this place to treat absolutely of either nature of Christ, either divine or human, but only of his person: And though some things here expressed belong to his divine nature, some to his human; yet none of them are spoken as such, but are all considered as belonging to his person'.

Watts comments:

So I have those two excellent writers, Dr. Goodwin and Dr. Owen, concurring with me in this sentiment, that it is not the prime design of this first chapter to the Hebrews to prove the deity of Christ, but the glory of his person considered as God-man: And in this view several expressions of the apostle are most appositely adapted to represent the glory of the human soul of Christ in its pre-existent state, and in its union to the divine nature. (57)

Watts also quotes with approval Mr. John Flavel's remarks about Christ's pre-incarnate state.

'Christ was not then abased to the condition of a creature, but it was an inconceivable abasement to the absolute independent being to come under the

law; yea, not only under the obedience, but also under the malediction and curse of the law ... He was never pinched with poverty and wants while he continued in that bosom, as he was afterwards ... the Lord embraced him from eternity, but never wounded him till he stood in our place and room.'

Watts draws the inference that these expressions, describing God's love and Christ's answering love, all make much more sense and have greater impact 'if we suppose that the human soul of our Lord Jesus Christ had a pre-existent state of joy and glory in the bosom of the Father through all former ages of the world'. (58)

As for Anglican divines, Watts was naturally delighted by Bishop Edward Fowler of Gloucester who had cited an ancient Jewish authority:

'After God had created the world, he put his hand upon the throne of his glory, and brought out the soul of the Messiah, with all his attendants, and said to him, Wilt thou head and redeem my sons after six thousand years? He answered, I am willing so to do. Again therefore God said unto him, And art thou willing to suffer chastisements for the purging away their iniquities? And the soul of the Messiah answered, I will suffer them, and that with all my heart'. (59)

'The learned Dr. Knight' is another welcome Anglican ally who:

'Supposes this birth of divine wisdom is her coming forth into a human figure and subsistence, or her entrance into the substance of the first-created nature, that is, the human soul of Christ, at the moment of its creation. By this means the Word, as man, became the head of mankind, who were to be made by him after his image and likeness; and as the first-begotten, he had the right of primogeniture or government over the rest'. (60)

Watts frequently quotes phrases from 'the learned Dr. Waterland', though he never actually claims that

Waterland agreed with his Trinitarian theories. Similarly Watts had vast admiration for Richard Baxter whom he quotes admiringly, without suggesting that he accepted Christ's pre-existent human soul. On the other hand Dr. Samuel Clarke, 'the great modern refiner of the Arian scheme', is quoted with caution and is usually shown to be in disagreement with Watts. There is the occasional disapproving reference to Whiston. Locke is admired for his philosophical ideas, but is not quoted on the subject of the Trinity. If Watts read Toland, he conceals the fact and, so far as I have been able to discover, makes no reference to him. Least of all does Watts make any reference to Hugo of St. Victor. (61)

It is difficult to understand J. H. Colligan's claim that Watts' theories were based on Hugo's teaching.

My impression is that Watts had really got the bit between his teeth so far as the pre-existent soul of Christ was concerned. He quoted anyone who seemed to agree with him, without being able to find allies from the main streams of Christian theology. (62)

## VI

'I question whether you have anywhere in print Dr. Watts' last thoughts upon what we call the Trinity'. Thus Dr. Nathaniel Lardner to another Unitarian minister, the Rev. Samuel Merivale, in a letter dated March 8th, 1766.

Lardner has a point. It is indeed possible that Isaac Watts' papers were 'edited' by his friends, after his death - especially Philip Doddridge and David Jennings. It is to this possibility that we now turn.

In another letter to Merivale, dated June 24th, 1766, Lardner wrote:

Dr. Watts' last thoughts were completely Unitarian. What became of the papers I do not know - Whether they were destroyed, or whether they may be in the hands of his brother Enoch in Southampton, or his descendants.

Lardner went on to tell how 'my nephew Neal', who was a friend of Watts and of the Abney family, claimed to have heard Watts regretting his early views on the Trinity and proposing to publish completely Unitarian sentiments. Writing on January 18th, 1768, Lardner was more explicit still. He claimed that for several years before his death Watts was a Unitarian, 'but his papers fell into good hands, and they did not think them fit for publication. I also saw some of them'. (63)

The Unitarian case was strongly stressed in Thomas Belsham's Memoirs of the Late Theophilus Lindsey (1812). Belsham recapitulated Lardner's case and scored some telling points against Watts' orthodoxy by quoting from the Solemn Address - to which we shall turn shortly.

Were important papers written by Isaac Watts destroyed? There is no conclusive evidence either way. It is perhaps significant that Lardner does not quote from the writings which he allegedly saw - or even give the gist of their arguments apart from making the predictable point that they

were Unitarian in their conclusions. On the other hand, Watts' orthodox admirers might well have protected their hero's reputation by destroying work which was to his discredit. It is perhaps significant that, according to Belsham, Doddridge had to struggle hard to get Watts' other orthodox friends to agree to the Solemn Address being published. But Doddridge, though orthodox himself, was 'a lover of truth and a friend to enquiry'.

However, there is little hint of such difficulties in the surviving correspondence between Neal, Jennings and Doddridge promising lists of Watts' manuscripts. Later in the year, Neal was quite prepared to offer Doddridge and Jennings a fee for editing Watts' manuscripts. Perhaps one could put a sinister interpretation on a letter from Neal to Doddridge (15th March 1749) in which he tells Doddridge that Jennings and Price have declined to write a biography of Watts and hope that he (Doddridge) will accept. Neal promised to 'make no difficulty of taking such liberties as may seem ... necessary' over Watts' manuscripts. And lastly, Neal wrote in April 1750 that he was uneasy at 'interposing between yourself and Dr. Jennings, in relation to Dr. Watts' MSS' but he hoped to prevent a misunderstanding. 'As it is generally known you have within the last two or three years increased your acquaintance with some of the most eminent members of the establishment, let not your worst enemy have a pretence for saying that you are paying court to them'. This could all be something or nothing. (64)



In 1813 Samuel Palmer countered the publications of Lardner and Belsham with a trenchant, polemical pamphlet, Dr. Watts No Socinian. Palmer asked why Watts had published orthodox works if Lardner was correct in his claim that Watts was 'an Unitarian in the latter part of his life, for several years before his death'. Lardner had claimed that Watts 'was very desirous to promote that opinion (i.e. unitarianism)'. 'Then why didn't he?' Palmer wanted to know. On his own admission Lardner had not seen all Watts' papers. As for his claim that Watts was senile in his last years, Lardner was clearly contradicted by Mrs. Abney, Joseph Parker, Dr. Gibbons and Dr. Stennett, all of whom were frequently in Watts' company.

Palmer then takes some of Watts' most extreme published writings, proving that the author might possibly be faulted as a Sabellian, but certainly not as a Unitarian. 'Had Dr. Watts given up his belief in the personal union of Jesus Christ with the Deity, so as at last to consider him as being merely one of the human race, who had no more claim to Divinity than Moses, or any of the prophets or apostles?' Answer, clearly No. Had Watts surrendered his belief in the Atonement? No. Even Belsham, Palmer points out, admitted that Watts 'would to the latest day of his life have started from the imputation (of Unitarianism) with horror'. He chose as his epitaph for his tomb: 'In Uno Jesu Omnia'. (65)

Some of Palmer's arguments are less convincing. Thus he points to the fact that the unquestionably orthodox David Jennings preached Watts' funeral sermon - which he would have refused to do if he had known that Watts was Unitarian. And, Palmer assures us, Jennings knew Watts very well indeed. But, as we now know, Jennings refused to write Watts' biography. Again, Palmer makes great play out of the dates of Watts' last works on the Trinity - 1746. Useful and Important Questions and The Glory of Christ are hardly Unitarian. Would Watts have produced these works if he had made up his mind in the opposite direction? Probably not, we can answer - but both works were in fact written twenty years before the publication date and then tidied up by the author in 1746. Could these works have been dust in the eyes of the orthodox establishment? Palmer dismisses Neal's story that Watts used to talk in an alarmingly radical way about 'his new thoughts concerning the person of Christ'. This was Watts' Hobby-Horse, says Palmer. (66) It was indeed! Palmer continues:

It must however be added, that Mr. Neal might infer from what he heard the Doctor so often speak against the popular doctrine of three real, distinct persons in the Godhead, that he was in this particular point a Unitarian ... though I cannot believe that Mr. Neal could suppose him to be so in any other.

Palmer ends charmingly:

Indeed, if the principle be admitted of determining men's sentiments, and fixing on them names, by inferences drawn from a part of their creed, you may denominate a man almost anything you please, according to the prejudice you entertain against him or in his favour.

Palmer then quotes the case of the old Calvinist Minister who used to say 'I am a Unitarian' - and, says Palmer, 'So he was! And so am I!' (67)

If some of Palmer's arguments border on the tendentious, so do the Unitarian polemicists who tried to claim Watts as one of their own. Watts' Solemn Address was published in 1816 with a very loaded Appendix:

'The following extracts from the published writings of Dr. Watts will be found to harmonise with the 'Solemn Address'. In fact, they do nothing of the kind - or rather, they do not support the view that Watts was Unitarian. For example,

It is evident that the word Son of God is applied to angels (Job I. 6) and therefore there is no necessity that it should signify one of the same nature in any sense when applied to Christ. (68)

This is a fine example of how to give a misleading impression by lifting a quotation from its context. For the last thing Watts is trying to do here (the quotation comes from Useful and Important Questions) is to question Christ's divinity. He is merely trying to prove that 'Son of God' sometimes refers to Christ in his human capacity or nature. Or again,

Upon some special occasions they worshipped him ... perhaps a bowing of the knee or falling on the face at his feet. (69)

The suggestion here is that Watts is questioning the practice of worshipping Christ as God. In fact he is doing nothing of the kind. He is showing how the disciples only gradually came to recognise Jesus' divinity. One more example must suffice:

Jesus Christ, neither in this place (John XVII, 21) nor in any other, doth ever ascribe his divine works to any other divine power of his own ... any Godhead different from that of the Father. (70)

But Watts' purpose here is not to deny Christ's divinity but to emphasise it - 'because the very godhead of the Father dwells personally in the man Jesus'.

The Unitarians are on firmer ground when they point to contemporaries' doubts about Watts' orthodoxy. The ubiquitous Lardner is again the letter-writer - to the Rev. John Wiche of Maidstone. (71)

That great and excellent man Dr. Isaac Watts who never was an Arian, was in the latter part of his life an Unitarian, and would gladly have promoted that doctrine if able. Somewhat of this, I suppose, appeared in public, in so much that at his interment, an ignorant preacher who stood near the grave was heard to say, And pity his works were not buried with him.

Due to his intellectual honesty, Watts could sometimes be his own worst enemy - and a gift to those whose views he detested. The Christian Register of Boston contained this extract in its number of January 29th, 1825:

We have, however, in our hands, by the kindness of a friend, an original and unpublished document, which must convince any candid mind that Dr. Watts, if not a decided Unitarian, had at least himself such doubts and such a readiness to defend those who doubted as would subject anyone at the present day to the imputation of downright heresy and Unitarianism.

This damning document turns out to be a letter from the Rev. Thomas Prince, Minister of the Old South Church, Boston, in which Prince quotes Watts' letter to him:

You say 'you cannot yet assent to this position, that the denial of the divinity of Christ is as culpable of God the Father; for it is not the

equality of the objects can make the crime equal, unless there be also an equal revelation of them, and an equal case to come at the knowledge of them. Guilt arises chiefly from the proportion of light. God the Father is known in a hundred instances by nature and scripture which say nothing of the Godhead of the Son'.

If Watts really wrote this, the prose is untypically clumsy. But the sentiments are just the kind of pedantic, over-scrupulous logic of which he was capable - and which could be so damaging. Given his reputation and fame in the Protestant world, everything he wrote was a hostage to fortune.

Take Watts' highly unwise - though again typically honest - admissions to contemporaries who quizzed him about the theology of his hymns:

I freely answer, I wish some things were altered. But the question with me is this: as I wrote them in sincerity at that time, is it not more for the edification of Christ and the glory of God to let them stand, than to ruin the usefulness of the whole book, by correcting them now, and perhaps bring further and false suspicions on my present opinions?

Another example:

Mr. Crove remarked to the Doctor, that several of the Hymns laid the stress of our own redemption on the compassion of Christ rather than the love of God, and expressed his wish that he would alter them in this respect, and make them more conformable to the Scripture doctrine. The Doctor replied, that he should be glad to do it, but it was out of his power, for he had parted with the copy, and the bookseller would not suffer any such alteration.

All credit to the bookseller, we might retort. And full marks to Watts for his intellectual integrity. But such a vulnerable and damaging humility made it only too easy for unscrupulous people to spread rumours about suppressed manuscripts.

There are two other pieces of evidence to be considered.

We have already noted in a previous Chapter that Watts' hymns were, without exception, orthodox. In his posthumous works there are a few hymns which were not incorporated in the main collections. They include one of his best known - 'Come let us join our cheerful songs'. (72) There is also a Chorus, no date given, (73) which may well be a product of Watts' last years:

Glory to God the King,  
Who dwells in royal state;  
Who for thy pleasure everything  
Didst by thy word create.

Glory to God the Son,  
The Lamb that once was slain;  
Worthy of honour and renown,  
Worthy to live and reign.

To God the spirit of power  
An equal glory be:  
Let all in Heaven and earth adore  
This co-eternal Three.

Whether this is late or not, it is typical of Watts' hymn-writing. This hymn compares interestingly with another hymn in the posthumous works which is dated. It is headed: Written in the Seventy-First Year of his Age. (74)

When I can call the blessed Jesus mine,  
By strong embraces of a faith divine,  
My soul's transported to a strange degree  
And nothing can my joyful thoughts remove,  
From the dear object of my sov'reign love;  
My inward pow'rs dissolve in sacred extasy.

He the fixt centre of my soul's delight,  
On whom I feast by day, and rest by night;  
In him alone are all my wants supply'd;  
While I can clasp him thus within my arms,  
In vain the world, with her deceitful charms,  
Shall offer from his love to draw my heart aside.

To make atonement with his precious blood,  
 He gave himself a sacrifice to God;  
     And now as intercessor in thy stead,  
 Appears for thee before his Father's face,  
 To sue for pardon and supply of grace,  
     Where all his suff'rings for thy mis'ries plead.

Now let all three be added into one,  
 What hath been, is, or further shall be done,  
     In the transaction of the Saviour's love.  
 A matchless work it will appear to be,  
 In union of the eternal Three,  
     Accomplished here below, but first contrived above.

T'was wisdom's self that did project the scheme,  
 How God's own Son should criminals redeem,  
     That justice should appear in mercy drest.  
 Here stop, my soul, and join the heav'nly choir,  
 And when thy feeble strains can reach no higher,  
     In humble silence meditate the rest.

Juvenal unkindly remarked that Cicero should have stuck to verse; Cicero's poetry was so terrible that it would have provoked nobody and he would never have been murdered by Anthony's thugs. (75) Having read these two delightful poems by Isaac Watts, one is tempted to say that he too should have stuck to verse. Apart from their literary quality, their serenity and theological orthodoxy are striking. Perhaps the line, 'Accomplished here below, but first contrived above', is reminiscent of Christ's pre-existent soul - but not necessarily. The first two verses take us back to Watts' early poetry, especially the Song of Solomon love poems, while verse three illustrates his involvement in the Atonement - the consistent thread of his whole life's work. 'In humble silence meditate the rest': what splendid advice and if only he had followed it!

To say the least, this remarkable poem marches strangely with Watts' late prose works, and even more strangely with Unitarian allegations. Still more

fascinating and significant is our second piece of evidence in prose this time, the Author's Solemn Address. Actually, there is nothing wrong with this from a stylistic point of view: nothing turgid or long-winded here. But it is the sentiment expressed that matters; there can be fewer more harrowing and pathetic (in the literal sense) essays in the history of literature. (76) It is a veritable cri de coeur.

The full title is significant: The Author's Solemn Address to the Great and Ever-blessed God on a Review of what he had written in the Trinitarian Controversy.

Watts beseeches God to guide him, he remonstrates with God for not making clear the truth about the Trinity, he chides God because of the contradictions in God's self-revelation:

Hast thou not ascribed divine names, and titles, and characters to thy Son and thy Holy Spirit in thy word, as well as assumed them to thyself? And hast thou not appointed to them such glorious offices as cannot be executed without something of divinity or true godhead in them? And yet, art not thou, and thou alone, the true God? How shall a poor weak creature be able to adjust and reconcile these clashing ideas, and to understand this mystery? Or must I believe and act blindfold, without understanding?

Watts stresses the supremacy of the Father, the fact that Jesus is 'God manifest in the flesh' and that the Spirit 'hath almighty power and influence to do all thy will'.

But I acknowledge my darkness still. I want to have this wonderful doctrine of the all-sufficiency of thy Son and thy Spirit, for these divine works, made a little plainer. May not thy humble creature be permitted to know what share they can have in thy deity? Is it a vain



and sinful curiosity to desire to have this article set in such a light, as may not diminish the eternal glory of the unity of the true God, nor of the supremacy of Thee, the Father of all?

Watts pursues his 'sad complaint'. (77)

Hadst thou informed me, gracious Father, in any place of thy word, that this divine doctrine is not to be understood by men, and yet they were required to believe it, I would have subdued all my curiosity to faith ... But I cannot find that thou hast anywhere forbid me to understand it, or to make these enquiries ... Surely I ought to know the God whom I worship, whether he be one pure and simple being, or whether thou art a threefold deity, consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Watts points out that the way of holiness is supposed to be a plain and easy path. When then should 'this strange and perplexing notion of three real persons going to make up one true God', be so necessary and important? However, God has not entirely abandoned the author who has struggled so hard to find the truth:

Great God, who seest all things, thou hast beheld what busy temptations have been often fluttering about my heart, to call it off from these laborious and difficult enquiries, and to give up thy word and thy gospel as an unintelligible book, and betake myself to the light of nature and reason: But thou has been pleased by thy divine power to scatter these temptations, and fix my heart and my hope again upon that Saviour and that eternal life, which thou hast revealed in thy word, and proposed therein, to our knowledge and our acceptance. Blessed be the name of my God, thou has not suffered me to abandon the gospel of his Son Jesus!

Watts then calls God to witness that his aim has always been to honour God's supreme majesty and the 'grandeurs and honours of thy Son Jesus, my dear Mediator'. And so the conclusion:

Help me, heavenly Father, for I am quite tired and weary of these human explainings, so various and uncertain. When wilt thou explain it to me thyself, O my God, by the secret and certain dictates of thy Spirit, according to thy word? I entreat, O most merciful Father, that thou wilt not suffer the remnant of my short life to be wasted in such endless wanderings, in quest of thee and thy Son Jesus, as a great part of my last days have been ...

Presumably such orthodox critics as Dr. Burder rebuke Isaac Watts for having doubts at all. Many of us, however, would agree with John Mason's aphorism, which would certainly have been familiar to Watts, 'All saints have had their doubtings'. It could be argued that the Solemn Address is a prolonged, self-pitying bleat. If one has followed Watts on his tortuous journey, on the other hand, one cannot but feel very sorry for him.

What is interesting and significant is that in this revealing, desperately honest confession, there is no reference to Christ's pre-existent human soul. And the whole, moving supplication is couched in an orthodox, Trinitarian mould. Not only has Watts retained his loyalty to Almighty God, but also to Jesus the Son, the Redeemer and to the Holy Spirit.

And yet this is not a happy man's testimony. There is little serenity, no peace of mind. This is what is so damaging to Watts' reputation. Orthodox critics have felt that Watts should have known better! The Unitarian tales of strange, suppressed works take on a certain plausibility when one reads of Watts' gratitude for not being allowed to abandon the gospel. What were the temptations from which

he had been protected? One feels that the man who could write the Solemn Address was so confused, so wretched, (so guilty?) that he could have written anything.

## VII

Well, not quite anything! Here are two reactions to the Trinity of which Isaac Watts was surely incapable. Mother Maria has written: 'I don't speculate on the Trinity. I want some surprises when I die'. And a very different writer has this to say:

Gentle critic! when thou has weighed all this, and considered within thyself how much of thy own knowledge, discourse, and conversation has been pestered and disordered, at one time or the other, by this, and this only: what a pudder and racket in Councils about **δοξία** and **επίδοξια**; and in the Schools of the learned about power and about spirit; - about essences, and about quintessences; - about substances, and about space; - what confusion in greater Theatres from words of little meaning, and as indeterminate a sense! when thou considerest this, thou wilt not wonder at my Uncle Toby's perplexities. (78)

Watts lacked Mother Maria's saving common sense and his contemporary, the Vicar of Coxwold's saving flippancy. As we noted in Chapter 1, Watts took life very seriously - and, indeed, he debates very serious topics. There was unfortunately no-one who could advise him when to draw back, when to let it alone.

He continued to be tortured by the contradiction - or paradox - that God is one and Jesus is God. Watts could

never get the balance right - at any rate to his own satisfaction. Take his letter to Dr. Benjamin Coleman of Boston:

I am glad my book of Useful Questions came safe to hand. I think I have said everything concerning the Son of God which Scripture says; but I could not go so far as to say with some of our orthodox divines that the Son is equal with the Father. Our Lord himself expressly says, 'My Father is greater than I'. Scripture is express in determining that Jesus Christ, at least his human soul, is the first creation of God.

Watts really was his own worst enemy, and it is no wonder that he was attacked by the orthodox. It was all very well for him to write in the Improvement of the Mind:

If it be a question of FACT, your examination is partial when you only enquire what one man or a few say, and avoid the testimony of others - when you content yourself with mere loose and general talk about it, and never enter into particulars; or when there are many who deny the fact, and you never concern yourself about their reason for denying it, but resolve to believe only those who affirm it.

The trouble was that the FACTS were, to say the least, unfortunate. While never, so far as I can see, actually advocating Unitarianism, Watts pursued with over-scrupulous obstinacy the authority of scripture, coupled with his own reason. He could not see that reason could not take him all the way to total clarity. Of course he was right to ask God for an authoritative lead. There must be authority:

In all the great religious traditions faith is response, gift before it is demand, and to say with Jeremiah or Jesus that it has to be found in the heart is not to say that it comes from the heart or that I must make my own religion.

Unless the religious response corresponds in some way to 'how things are', it is difficult to see on what basis one can know whether it is as Freud thought 'the future of an illusion', whether our cheques will be found to be cashed or dud. (79)

Watts' mistake was to demand too much, to want to know how too many things are. The tragedy is that after all his 'pudder and racket' he achieved nothing but self-torture. (80)

Was this self-torture - so evident in the Solemn Address - partly the result of guilt, of the awareness that he had strayed from the straight and narrow faith of orthodoxy? 'Sometimes I seem to have carried reason with me even to the camp of Socinus ...' The young man was father to the old. Is it not abundantly clear that Watts was attracted to the 'camp of Socinus' - and of Arius too, for that matter? Because he believed that the Godhead was one in essence, he abolishes the distinction between the persons of the Trinity. To explain the personality of the Spirit in a figurative sense - as Watts does - is a way of emptying the godhead of the Trinity. Again, Watts' use of such phrases as the 'first-created spirit' has Arian overtones, just as his identification of the Philonic **Λόγος** with the human soul of Christ must amount to a dangerous degree of subordinationism. Though Watts uses Philo's arguments against Arianism, it is interesting to remember that Philo's work was one of Arius' sources of inspiration.

Does not Watts use the pre-existent soul of Christ argument as a means of stopping short of the heretical doctrines for which he felt such a fatal attraction? By

stressing the dual nature of Christ before the incarnation, he was at least able to avoid identifying Christ's human soul - or the Philonic *Lógos* - with the Christian *Lógos* of St. John's Prologue.

Or was he? We are brought back irresistibly to the Solemn Address and to the possibility that Watts had indeed written works which went all the way to Socinus and Arius. We know that Watts was driven to a nervous breakdown in his last years - so that on one occasion he could hardly recognise Philip Doddridge. Thomas Gibbons claims that the inconsiderate behaviour of Watts' nephew caused the Doctor this distress - though he does not specify precisely what this behaviour was. The Solemn Address suggests a neurotic, deranged mind. It is, to say the least, possible that this unhappy state was caused by deeper troubles than the unkindness of a relative.

A. P. Davis cannot understand why A Faithful Enquiry - the work to which the Solemn Address was a preface - was immediately suppressed by Watts' friends:

All that it said concerning the Son of God and the Holy Spirit had either appeared already in the 1725 Trinity essays or was to appear at greater length in the two 1746 treatises. Why burn this tract and preserve the others in which the same material was presented in greater detail? (81)

But surely there is no mystery if we remember that the Solemn Address had by no means appeared already. As the editor of the 1802 edition of A Faithful Enquiry wrote:

The Doctor printed off only fifty copies of this work, and showed them to some friends, who all persuaded him that it would ruin his character in his old age, for publishing such dotages.

Exactly! However slow Watts' subsequent admirers have been to recognise how damaging the Solemn Address is, his contemporaries were only too well aware of its implications. Is this the confession of Isaac Watts D.D., heretic?

I have already pointed out the highly significant omission in the Solemn Address of any reference whatsoever to the pre-existent human soul of Christ. It is very odd that Watts, at this supreme crisis of his life, makes no mention of his hobby-horse. Are we perhaps to assume that at last he recognised how dangerous his enquiries had been? If his hobby-horse was indeed supposed to save him from going all the way to Arianism and Socinianism, had it failed him? Perhaps he had spoken - or written - things which really did amount to heresy and which were indeed subsequently suppressed. Now he recoiled in guilty horror from what he had written - whether it was the mildly heretical stuff which we have analysed here or whether it was out-and-out Unitarianism, as Lardner claimed. But, Watts not only suffered from a troubled conscience. His intellect too was troubled. It is not hard to see why. We have noted both how emotional Isaac Watts was and how orthodox his beliefs with regard to the Atonement. Far from offering that 'love so amazing, so divine' his life, his soul, his all, he now found it hard to believe in 'the death of Christ my God'. Watts was almost out of his mind. His was indeed a troubled spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

## Chapter 7

### The Qualities of Watts as a Hymn-writer (1)

#### I

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We take hymns for granted. It is therefore hard for us to appreciate how revolutionary Watts' hymns - and still more his poetic version of the Psalms - seemed to his contemporaries. Bradbury, it will be recalled, slated Watts' devotional verse just as much as his unorthodox views on the Trinity.

Isaac Watts has been called 'The Father of English Hymnody'. Certainly if anyone deserves this not particularly meaningful title, it is Watts. However, his claims must not be exaggerated. Five minutes' examination of any standard collection of hymns reveals the work of many authors earlier than Watts. Bunyan, Baxter, Milton, Crossman, Ken, Tate and Brady, Herbert are all well represented. It is not even true that Watts pioneered the Christian version of the Psalms, Phineas Fletcher having led the way. And of course there had been several metrical translations.

Watts, however, broke new ground in the scale and in the deliberate ambition of his achievement. F. J. Gillman correctly analyses the contemporary need 'for a new type of congregational song, witnessing to and expressive of, Christian experience and voicing the feelings of men and women in the presence of God as revealed to them in Jesus Christ'. (2) Watts recognised this need and resolutely and methodically set out to meet it.



And he was successful. To quote Gillman again:

If Watts was not the first to set the form of the congregational hymn, he definitely established it as the normal medium of public praise. He was the first effectively to initiate a new type of worship song in the English tongue, with Christ as its central theme, and in so doing he placed our modern hymnody on right and firm foundations. (3)

This is well put. Watts' poetic predecessors had written religious verse, suitable for private devotion. If such poetry proved acceptable in public worship (e.g. Baxter's 'Ye holy angels bright'), this was an unlooked for bonus. Watts, on the other hand, deliberately set out to revolutionise God's public praise. He believed that his work would prove sufficient, both in quantity and quality. Events proved him right.

For Bradbury and other hostile critics could not undermine the popularity of the 'System of Praise'. The contrast with the fate of Watts' other most 'peculiar' works is very instructive. The essays on the Trinity are dead and buried. They brought the author little profit or credit. His opponents successfully undermined the credibility of Watts as a theologian even with himself! Yet his prestige as a hymnographer soared.

Why? The reason is not far to seek. Watts' success as a writer of hymns was a triumph for true quality. One of the protestant churches' unsung heroes is Isaac's brother, Enoch, who encouraged the young poet to publish his hymns, appealing both to his idealism and to his vanity:

I am very confident whoever has the happiness of reading your hymns (unless he be either sot or atheist), will have a very favourable opinion of their author ... (4)

Enoch was absolutely right, even if he disarmingly points

out how abysmal was the standard of other competitors in the field! He dismisses Sternhold and Hopkins' reign (John Hoyles happily refers to their 'sclerotic grip' (5)) and indeed all other writers of hymns including Bunyan who 'made much more ravishing music with his hammer and brass kettle'. Enoch Watts' letter to his brother was both generous and perceptive in his assessment of Isaac's work.

Much the most effective and memorable of Watts' Trinitarian writings is the Solemn Address - a confession of failure and defeat. Watts' hymns, on the other hand, are triumphantly self-confident. 'Unless he be either sot or atheist ...' This is perhaps a little unkind to those who do not admire Watts' hymns; after all, it is a matter of opinion. But Watts had good reason for his self-confidence.

## II

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The most obvious of Watts' 'peculiar' qualities is his poetic genius, his feeling for words, his eye for a fine phrase. Inevitably this is a matter of taste. But surely one can safely say that at his best Watts was indeed a poet:

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood  
Stand dress'd in living green ... (6)

His dying crimson like a robe  
Spreads oer his body on the tree ... (7)

Swift as an eagle cuts the air  
We'll mount aloft to thy abode, (8)

Actually Watts took trouble to restrain what he called his 'adventurous muse' (9) when he composed his 'System of

Praise'. In order to appreciate the full stature of Watts as a poet, one has to read Horae Lyricae. Although the theme is almost always religious, Watts was certainly more adventurous in these earlier poems which were written for private enjoyment rather than for public worship. His choice of metres for his hymns was severely restrained, either long, short or common metres - unlike Charles Wesley's. But in Horae Lyricae there is much variety. Take for example Self-Consecration: (10)

It grieves me, Lord, it grieves me sore,  
     That I have lived to thee no more,  
         And wasted half my days:  
     My inward pow'rs shall burn and flame  
     With zeal and passion for thy name,  
 I would not speak, but for my God, nor move,  
     but to his praise.

We have already quoted The Day of Judgement (11) - a remarkable experiment in the Sapphic metre. Equally striking is the Dacian Battle (12) written in blank verse:

The bold Borussian smoking from afar  
 Moves like a tempest in a dusky cloud,  
 And imitates the artillery of heaven,  
 The lightening and the roar. Amazing scene!

Watts had a felicitous gift for producing fine first lines:

God is a name my soul adores.  
 How bright those glorious spirits shine!  
 Join all the glorious names ...

Indeed his very first hymn begins impressively -

Behold the glories of the Lamb.

Horae Lyricae contains some interesting anticipations of the erotic Song of Solomon hymns. What a love poet he might have been!

Come let me love: Or is thy mind (13)  
 Harden'd to stone, or froze to ice?  
 I see the blessed Fair One bend  
 And stoop t'embrace me from the skies!

Of course, Watts makes clear that this is a theological love poem:

Infinite grace! Almighty charms!  
 Stand in amaze, ye whirling skies,  
 Jesus the God, with-naked arms,  
 Hangs on a cross of love, and dies.

Did every pity stoop so low,  
 Dress'd in divinity and blood?  
 Was ever rebel courted so  
 In groans of an expiring God?

Sure I must love; or are my ears  
 Still deaf, nor will my passions move?  
 Then let me melt this heart to tears;  
 This heart shall yield to death or love.

The anticipation of 'When I survey' will be noted here, though the highest quality is perhaps not maintained throughout this poem. Nevertheless what a gift Watts had! In his early childhood he was heard to giggle during family prayers when he saw a mouse run up the bell-rope - but he was laughing not at the mouse but at the verse which instantly occurred to him:

There was a mouse for want of stairs  
 Ran up a rope to say his prayers.

He retained this aptitude, this delightful facility for making verse, into middle age, so that his poetry is permeated with 'meridian light and meridian fervour'. (14)

It is perhaps true that Watts' best hymns are the best

known - though such a magnificent work as 'Join all the glorious names' or, for that matter, 'We are a garden walled around', are not well known at all. Such masterpieces, one would think, would be admired, or at least respected, even by atheists, to say nothing of sots - pace Enoch Watts! But one is always coming across first-rate poetry in Watts' work - and there is a prophetic and 'peculiar' note as well sometimes:

My God, I love and I adore:  
 But souls that love would know thee more.  
 Wilt thou for ever hide, and stand  
 Behind the labours of thy hand? (15)

### III

The second quality which Watts displays in all his hymns is this: he really had something to say. We have noted his deep commitment to the Atonement and his clearly reasoned views on election and pre-destination. Without being a profound theological thinker, Watts, at any rate in his early years, was devoted to the truths of the Christian faith. Bernard Manning has stressed Watts' insight into the cosmic significance of the Cross and the Resurrection. The greatness of God, displayed in creation, is combined with the greatness of men's debt to God for redemption.

Brought up to grasp these Christian dogmas, Watts was a very serious man. At times, he almost parodies himself, as in his apologetic note to the poems in Horae Lyricae 'dedicated to Divine Love' which he published in later editions.

Different ages have their different airs and fashions of writing. It was much more the fashion of the age, when these poems were written, to treat of divine subjects in the style of Solomon's Song than it is at this day, which will afford some apology for the writer in his younger years. (16)

Even as a young man, however, Watts was only interested in Christianity; his was a one-track mind, despite his apparent width of interests. He was as far removed as possible from the cynics attacked by Bishop Butler:

It is comē, I know nōt hōw, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it, as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world. (17)

In his poetic days Watts thumps out the salient claims of the Christian faith with magnificent, cheerful self-confidence.

Jesus shall reign wherere the Sun  
Doth his successive journeys run. (18)

Wide as the world is thy command  
Vast as eternity thy love.  
Firm as a rock thy truth must stand  
When rolling years shall cease to move.

Watts' hymns have a massive simplicity. He is too competent a technician to risk incorporating too much. 'Praise to the Redeemer', 'God's awful power and goodness', 'Our sin the cause of Christ's death', 'The Christian Warfare' - and so on. The titles of Watts' hymns indicate his down-to-earth approach, while his christianised Psalms retain the merits of the originals plus orthodox Christian

doctrine. Some of Watts' arguments and beliefs may strike us as quaint, old-fashioned or over-simplified. But there is nothing sentimental or vapid here.

Twentieth century hymnology was to become dechristianised. (19) One thinks of the sloppy, insipid sentimentality of 'Morning has broken'. No such criticism could possibly be levelled against Watts. Bradbury was to get a cheap laugh with his crack, 'We will have none of Watts' w'hims'. But in all fairness Watts wrote 'mere christianity' -- hymns not whims. That is why they have always been so popular and so effective.

#### IV

Show me the man that dares and sings  
Great David's verse to British strings:  
Sublime attempt! But bold and vain  
As building Babel's tower again. (20)

Highly inappropriately, Isaac Watts wrote these lines! He certainly did not act upon them. Perhaps the greatest reason for the success of Watts' system of praise was his courageous radicalism. We have noted how revolutionary his achievement was. In his youth he brought to bear a young man's freshness and vision on an age-old problem. Watts' writings on the Trinity illustrate his willingness to think for himself, to ignore 'custom, the tyranness of fools'. Bradbury was right to bracket Watts' off-beat Trinitarian views and his iconoclastic approach to Christian worship. A clean slate was needed; half measures would not do.

Horae Lyricae, Hymns and Spiritual Songs and the Psalms of David Imitated are all introduced by Prefaces - pungent, amusing, provocative prose: Watts at his very best! In these Prefaces he explains what he is trying to do and what methods he proposes to follow.

The first fallacy which he nails is that poetry and Christianity are antithetical. On the contrary. Just because the Devil has indeed spoken in verse, this is no reason why God's praises should not be rhymed:

This profanation and debasement of so divine an art, has tempted some weaker Christians to imagine that poetry and vice are naturally a-kin; or, at least, that verse is fit only to recommend trifles, and entertain our looser hours, but it is too light and trivial a method to treat any thing that is serious and sacred. (21)

In the Preface to Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Watts deplores the disgracefully low standards of song which is supposed to express God's praise:

Many ministers, and many private Christians, have long groaned under this inconvenience, and have wished rather than attempted, a reformation: At their importunate and repeated requests, I have for some years past devoted many hours of leisure to this service. (22)

And so Watts explains how he has succeeded in his task. He defends himself against the charge of abandoning Scripture. He has the greatest admiration for David. But the New Testament is superior to the Old.

Watts anticipates his most defiant and shocking innovation in the Preface to his Hymns:

After this manner should I rejoice to see a good part of the book of Psalms fitted for the use of our churches, and David converted into a Christian: But because I cannot persuade others to attempt this glorious work, I have suffered myself to be persuaded to begin it ... (23)



'David converted into a Christian!' In the Preface to the Psalms of David Imitated Watts has no doubts about the inadequacy of his predecessors. Even Dr. Patrick is faulted for his slavish adherence to the Jewish original. Is Watts guilty of disrespect to Scripture, and especially to the royal author? 'But in my judgement the royal author is most honoured when he is made most intelligible'.

Moses, Deborah, and the princes of Israel; David, Asaph, and Habakkuk, and all the saints under the Jewish state, sung their own joys and victories, their own hopes and fears, and deliverances, as I hinted before; and why must we, under the gospel, sing nothing else but the joys, hopes and fears of Asaph and David? Why must christians be forbid all other melody, but what arises from the victories and deliverances of the Jews? David would have thought it very hard to have been confined to the words of Moses ... (24)

So why should not the psalms be brought up to date, the wonders of the Christian revelation be incorporated, ideas that are irrelevant or anti-christian omitted? Watts sums up his philosophy, 'In all places I have kept my grand design in view; and that is, to teach my author to speak like a christian'.

The result is the modern hymn. How many present day worshippers realise that 'Jesus shall reign' is a paraphrase of Psalm 72? Or even that 'O God our help' (or rather, as Watts wrote originally, 'Our God, our help') is Psalm 90? Or compare 'Sweet is the work of God, my King' - based on the ninety-second psalm.

The Hymns and Spiritual Songs created less stir, because it was less obviously an assault on God's Word. Watts was careful, whenever possible, to indicate scriptural inspiration. 'When I survey' is introduced with the heading,

'Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ, Galatians IV, 14'. 'Join all the glorious names' is headed 'The offices of Christ from several scriptures', and 'Awake, our souls, away our fears' is headed 'The Christian Race, Isaiah XI, 28-31'. And, of course, the splendid Song of Solomon love hymns are self-evidently bible-based.

Yet the Adventurous Muse was assuredly at work. Again and again, one is impressed by Watts' cleverness. The questing brain—which eventually came to grief over the Trinity through over-cleverness was here perfectly employed:

Shall we go on to sin  
Because thy grace abounds,  
Or crucify the Lord again,  
And open all his wounds?

Forbid it, mighty God,  
Nor let it e're be said  
That we whose sins are crucified  
Should raise them from the dead.

We will be slaves no more,  
Since Christ has made us free,  
Has nail'd our tyrants to his cross,  
And bought our liberty. (25)

Of course Watts falls from grace. Many of his hymns are ordinary, banal doggerel. Sometimes he tumbles dreadfully. But overall one is impressed by his self-confidence, his enterprise and his sure touch.

And one is impressed by Watts' professionalism - in the best sense of the word. Enoch Powell argues that a

professional poet writes verse from cradle to grave, while the amateur only responds to his own mood, however changeable. (26) But Watts the poet died thirty years before Watts the theologian. And the reason was sheer professionalism - or better, perhaps, sheer utilitarianism.

Modern critics of Isaac Watts emphasise that he knew what he was doing. He deliberately 'laid his glories by', achieving what Harry Escott calls 'artistic kenosis'. In the Preface to his Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Watts wrote:

The metaphors are generally sunk to the level of vulgar capacities. I have aimed at ease of numbers, and smoothness of sound, and endeavoured to make the sense plain and obvious. If the verse appears so gentle and flowing as to incur the censure of feebleness, I can honestly affirm that sometimes it cost me labour to make it so. (27)

And as we have seen in the Improvement of the Mind, Watts summed up his whole philosophy of composition:

Smooth be your style, and plain and natural,  
To strike the sons of Wapping or Whitehall.  
While others think this easy to attain,  
Let them but try, and with their utmost pain  
They'll sweat and strive to imitate in vain.

Donald Davie credits Watts with the achievement of real classical self-restraint - and by 'classical' he means the subordination of detail to the whole. (28) He calls Watts the true tribal poet of protestant dissent. Watts' achievement was indeed 'to sink every line to the level of a whole congregation, and yet to keep it above contempt'. He was a popular writer in the very best sense of the word, for his hymns have always had a wide appeal despite the absence of sentimentality and sensationalism. John Hoyles aptly calls Watts 'a great vulgariser' and compares him with Wordsworth.

Again, Watts' professionalism is seen at its best in this sensitivity to his audience's receptiveness. Perhaps the best example to quote is the Divine Hymns for Children, which were quite exceptionally well planned for young minds, by the admittedly low standards of the day. Watts' interest in the reactions of children - and his wit - is well illustrated by the Preface to the Assembly's Shorter Catechism:

Some persons may think I have explained too many words, and those which were well enough known, such as chief end in the first question, and the like: But I have been informed of one child who was asked, what the chief end of man was, and he answered, His head; another being asked the same question, answered, Death; neither of them taking in the true idea or meaning of the words ... (29)

Watts concerned himself with such bread and butter matters because he was determined to be useful. Hoyles believes 'that Watts' utilitarianism constitutes an important contribution to the modern consciousness'. (30) He links seventeenth century puritanism with nineteenth century utilitarianism, by quoting Watts' educational and philosophical works. But Watts was even more concerned to be useful to his fellow Christians by helping them in their worship and belief.

'Useful and important questions ...' - a highly significant title! Watts was touchingly anxious to be useful to the Church by removing doubts and obscurities and by uniting potential Christians: 'An Arian invited to the orthodox faith', and so forth. Similarly Watts wrote his 'System of Praise' to be useful. This is why he ceased to write verse almost completely after the publication of the

Psalms of David Imitated in 1719. The job was done. He could justifiably boast the Latin title 'vates' which Horace claimed when expressing 'useful' patriotic propaganda. (31)

Watts concludes his Preface to the Psalms of David Imitated:

It was not my design to exalt myself to the rank and glory of poets; but I was ambitious to be a servant to the churches, and a helper to the joy of the meanest christian. Though there are many gone before me, who have taught the Hebrew psalmist to speak English; yet I think I may assume this pleasure of being the first who hath brought down the royal author into the common affairs of the Christian life, and led the psalmist of Israel into the Church of Christ, without anything of a Jew about him ... (32)

It is interesting to compare Watts' Prefaces with John Wesley's Preface to the Methodist Hymn Book, which he edited:

As but a small part of these hymns is of my own composing, I do not think it inconsistent with modesty to declare, that I am persuaded no such Hymn Book as this has yet been published in the English language. In what other publication of this kind have you so distinct and full account of scriptural Christianity ...? (33)

Wesley has been blamed for complacency - if not to say vanity. The same charges could perhaps be levelled against Watts. However, both authors take a justifiable pride in their work, a knowledgeable craftsman's conviction that the job had been well done. 'For the use of the churches'. Both men wanted to be useful and realised that in their Master's service only the best would suffice.

## V

Watts' hymns are less sung nowadays than they used to be. The Anglican Hymn-Book, first published in 1965, contains 29, but Ancient & Modern Revised has only 17 hymns by Isaac Watts, Songs of Praise 14, Hymns for Church and School 11 and the English Hymnal 10. This is inevitable. Watts sound increasingly dated. His use of such words as bowels and worms strikes us as quaint and sometimes-- absolutely disastrous. (34)

'O God our help' and 'When I survey' will surely be sung as long as English-speaking Christianity survives. (35) But Watts' influence is not to be measured by the survival of his own work. By establishing the respectability of hymns as a regular and valuable feature of Christian worship, he opened the door for others. Charles Wesley and Philip Doddridge were among the earliest and most distinguished of his imitators. Thousands followed.

Much ink has been wasted on the futile question, who was the greater writer of hymns, Watts or Wesley? The sensible approach is to be grateful for both. The important point, however, is that Watts came first. Naturally the younger man benefited from his guide's mistakes. Wesley was able to be more adventurous in his use of metre and vocabulary. Watts could never have written:

Our God united to a span  
Incomprehensibly made man.

Wesley explicitly and implicitly acknowledged his debt to Watts. His brother, John, quoted Watts on his death-bed.

Isaac Watts, therefore, deserves to be remembered as a pioneer, as well as a religious poet of genius in his own right. It has been the contention of this thesis that Watts' approach to hymn-writing can only be understood against the background of his theological inheritance and development. His intellectual qualities were great: curiosity, cleverness, the refusal to be bound by tradition and precedent. Leslie Stephen complains that Watts 'addressed the heart rather than the intellect'. He was indeed an emotional writer. But he always appealed to his reader's commonsense and reason - and above all, he used his own not inconsiderable intellect.

An excellent example of this rational approach is Watts' paraphrase of Psalm 137. Not surprisingly he omits this beautiful but supremely unchristian psalm, ('Blessed be he that taketh thy children and dasheth their heads against a stone') from the Psalms of David Imitated. Instead he relegates it to Miscellaneous Thoughts - where he makes the following amusing and perceptive comments: (36)

Had Horace or Pinder written this Ode (i.e. Psalm), it would have been the endless admiration of the critic, and the perpetual labour of rival translators: But it is found in the scriptures, and that gives a sort of disgust to an age which verges too much toward infidelity ... This particular psalm could not well be converted into christianity, and therefore it appears here in its jewish form.

Not surprisingly the resulting poem is by no means Watts' best. The horrible climax reads:

As thou hast spared nor sex nor age,  
Deaf to our infants' dying groans,  
May some blessed hands, inspir'd with rage,  
Dash thy young babes, and tinge the stones.

But my point is that Watts' introductory remarks indicate his good sense and his self-confidence. Even today Christians who hold to the inerrancy of scripture try to explain away this psalm. (37) But - writing in 1719 - Watts will have none of it.

Isaac Watts brought to bear wonderful gifts: emotional appreciation of God's love expressed at Calvary, a sturdy independence of mind leading to a determination to follow reason wherever it led him, a commendable ambition to be useful. The results were his 'System of Praise' - and his other theological writings culminating in his Trinitarian adventures. His work is superficially contrasting - the hymns orthodox, clear, concise, popular, deservedly winning him admiration and devotion, the prose works confused, long-winded, little read and doing his reputation nothing but harm. However, the one cannot be divorced from the other; the 'Sweet Singer of Zion' became the neurotic heretic.



## Conclusion

### The Peculiar Doctor Watts

'The Peculiar Covenant of Sinai'. 'Peculiar honours'. 'Peculiar ground'. Watts liked the word 'peculiar' - used of course in the old-fashioned sense to mean 'specifically belonging to or appertaining to' rather than in the modern sense of 'strange or odd'. The theme of this work has been that Watts himself was indeed 'peculiar'. How did these 'peculiar' qualities and characteristics combine to make him what he was and give him both his peculiar greatness and his peculiar futility?

'No man is an island'. This is of course true of a man's intellectual and cultural development. Watts' methods, his sources, his whole approach to religious truth were in many ways typical of his times. S. L. Greenslade has shown how the English Reformers resorted to the Fathers of the Church - 'building a stronghold from which Hooker and others could defend the Church of England when the battle shifted to another front against the biblicist Puritans of the next generations'. (1) Watts was certainly a child of those biblicist Puritans. Yet his respect for the Fathers and for antiquity in general is perhaps inherited from a wider, more tolerant ancestry. Watts' claim to be an 'honorary Anglican' has already been noted. Similarly his admiration for Newton, Locke, Descartes shows him to be a product of the age of

reason.

Watts combined traditional, indeed old-fashioned orthodox ideas about atonement and redemption - which he held with exceptional emotional intensity - with a singularly lively intellectual approach. 'I ever own myself a protestant and claim a right to think freely and judge for myself'. We have shown how Watts' free thinking may well have led him right into the tents of Socinus - and out again, perhaps. His readiness to judge for himself enabled him to influence profoundly the development and quality of Christian worship. The result was the hymnographical revolution! In the last chapter we demonstrated how fruitfully Watts' self-confidence, Christian commitment and great poetic gifts combined with a down-to-earth practical desire to be useful.

But one has to take the whole man - and his works! It was precisely the same qualities which drove him to the Solemn Address. Having 'solved' Christian worship, he stopped writing hymns and addressed himself to the problem of the Trinity. He was confident that he could 'solve' that as well. There might be a little captious opposition, as there had been to the 'System of Praise'. But the majority of Christians would be grateful to the little Doctor for clearing away the theological debris with which the Trinity had been cluttered during seventeen hundred years of the Church's history.

'Cometh the hour, cometh the man'. Watts was just the right man to revolutionise Christian worship. But he was the wrong man to re-write the Athanasian Creed! A study

of both Watts' hymns and of his theological writings enables one to see how he came to write his masterpieces in verse. They were the natural products of that devout, sensitive and enquiring mind. But, in a way, he had to write Useful and Important Questions and the Glory of Christ as God-man displayed as well. He could not stop trying to be useful and it was just his tragedy that the utilitarian endeavours of his latter years were so unsuccessful and unappreciated - and, indeed, futile.

The picture of Watts the man which has emerged from this enquiry is rather different from that of the hagiographics. His later years in particular were far from happy. Having put the Christian world eternally in his debt, he now tortured himself with questions which he could not finally answer to his own satisfaction, let alone to anyone else's. Sick in body and mind, he lingered on to no useful purpose, deriving little pleasure or satisfaction from life. It is a sad story; he lived too long. (2)

This is not the place - still less is the present writer the man - for a critical assessment of Unitarianism. What cannot be doubted, however, is the anguish with which Watts must have impugned the deity of Christ. As we have seen, he himself labours the point that to question Christ's divinity impoverishes the Atonement. We have noted the depths of Watts' devotion to Christ in the Song of Solomon poems. He really did believe that 'love so amazing' demanded life, soul, all. And now here he was

denying that Christ was his God - or coming dangerously near to it. No wonder that the author of the Solemn Address was an unhappy man.

In his last days Watts was 'a poor sinner, waiting God's leave to die'. According to Gibbons, Watts recalled the words of an aged minister who used to say that the most learned and knowing Christians have only the same promises of the gospel as the common and unlearned; 'And so', said he, 'I find it. They are the plain promises of the-gospel which are my support, and I bless God they are plain promises, which I do not require much labour or pains to understand them; for I can do nothing now but look into my Bible for some promise to support me, and live upon that'.

This edifying picture comes from the pen of one of Isaac Watts' orthodox admirers. One would like to think that the man who has brought strength and comfort to millions derived at least some support from his own writings as well as from the Bible. Even if, unlike John Wesley, he did not remember these matchless lines while he lay dying, he had at least written them!

I'll praise my Maker while I've breath  
 And when my voice is lost in death,  
 Praise shall employ my nobler powers,  
 My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
 While life and thought and being last,  
     Or immortality endures.

Appendix 1

The Author's Solemn Address to the Great and Ever-blessed God on a review of what he had written in the Trinitarian Controversy, prefixed by him to some pieces on that subject, which it was not judged necessary to publish.

Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet I may talk with thee concerning thy judgments. Permit me, O my God and Father, to plead with thee concerning the revelations of thy nature and thy grace, which are made in thy gospel: And let me do it with all that humble reverence, and that holy awe of thy majesty, which becomes a creature in the presence of his God.

Hast thou not, O Lord God Almighty, hast thou not transacted thy divine and important affairs among men by thy Son Jesus Christ, and by thy Holy Spirit? and hast thou not ordained that men should transact their highest and most momentous concerns with thee, by thy Son and by thy Spirit? Hast thou not, by the mouth of thy Son Jesus, required all that profess his religion to be washed with water in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost? Is it not my duty then, to enquire, who or what are these sacred names, and what they signify? Must I not know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ thy Son, whom thou hast sent, that I may fulfil all my respective duties towards thyself and thy Son, in hope of eternal life? Hath not thy Son himself appealed to thee in his last prayer, that eternal life depends upon this knowledge? And since thou hast made so much use of thy Holy Spirit in our religion, must I not have some knowledge of this thy Spirit also, that I may pay thee all these honours thou requirest from this divine revelation?

Hast thou not ascribed divine names, and titles, and characters to thy Son and thy Holy Spirit in thy word, as well as assumed them to thyself? And hast thou not appointed to them such glorious offices as cannot be executed without something of divinity or true godhead in them? And yet art not thou, and thou alone, the true God? How shall a poor weak creature be able to adjust and reconcile these clashing ideas, and to understand this mystery? Or must I believe and act blindfold, without understanding?

Holy Father, thou knowest how firmly I believe, with all my soul, whatsoever thou hast plainly written and revealed in thy word. I believe thee to be the only true God, the supreme of beings, self-sufficient for thine own existence, and for all thy infinite affairs and transactions among creatures. I believe thy Son Jesus Christ to be all-sufficient for the glorious work of

Appendix 1 (continued)

mediation between God and man, to which thou hast appointed him. I believe he is a man, in whom dwells all the fulness of the godhead bodily. I believe he is one with God; he is God manifested in the flesh; and that the Man Jesus is so closely and inseparably united with the true and eternal Godhead, as to become one person, even as the human soul and body make one man. I believe that this illustrious person is hereby possessed of divine dignity, sufficient to make full atonement for the sins of men by his sufferings and death, even though sin be accounted an infinite evil; and that he hath all-sufficient power to raise himself from the dead, to ascend to heaven, and fulfil the blessed works for which thou hast exalted him, and to govern and judge the world in thine appointed time.

I believe also thy blessed Spirit hath almighty power and influence to do all thy will, to instruct men effectually in divine truths, to change the hearts of fallen mankind from sin to holiness, to carry on thy work of illumination, sanctification, and consolation on the souls of all thy children, and to bring them safe to the heavenly world. I yield myself up joyfully and thankfully to this method of thy salvation, as it is revealed in thy gospel. But I acknowledge my darkness still. I want to have this wonderful doctrine of the all-sufficiency of thy Son and thy Spirit, for these divine works, made a little plainer. May not thy humble creature be permitted to know what share they can have in thy deity? Is it a vain and sinful curiosity to desire to have this article set in such a light, as may not diminish the eternal glory of the unity of the true God, nor of the supremacy of Thee the Father of all.

Hadst thou informed me, gracious Father, in any place of thy word, that this divine doctrine is not to be understood by men, and yet they were required to believe it, I would have subdued all my curiosity to faith, and submitted my wandering and doubtful imaginations, as far as it was possible, to the holy and wise determinations of thy word. But I cannot find thou hast any where forbid me to understand it, or to make these enquiries. My conscience is the best natural light thou has put within me, and since thou hast given me the scriptures, my own conscience bids me search the scriptures, to find out truth and eternal life. It bids me try all things, and hold fast that which is good. And thy own word, by the same expressions, encourages this holy practice. I have, therefore, been long searching into this divine doctrine, that I may pay thee due honour with understanding. Surely I ought to know the God whom I worship, whether he be one pure and simple being, or whether thou art a threefold deity, consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Appendix 1 (continued)

Dear and blessed God, hadst thou been pleased, in any one plain scripture, to have informed me which of the different opinions about the holy Trinity, among the contending parties of christians, had been true, thou knowest with how much zeal, satisfaction, and joy, my unbiassed heart would have opened itself to receive and embrace the divine discovery. Hadst thou told me plainly, in any single text, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are three real distinct persons in thy divine nature, I had never suffered myself to be bewildered in so many doubts, nor embarrassed with so many strong fears of assenting to the mere inventions of men, instead of divine doctrine; but I should have humbly and immediately accepted thy words, so far as it was possible for me to understand them as the only rule of my faith? Or, hadst thou been pleased so to express and include this proposition in the several scattered parts of thy book, from whence my reason and conscience might with ease find out, and with certainty infer this doctrine, I should have joyfully employed all my reasoning powers, with their utmost skill and activity, to have found out this inference, and ingrafted it into my soul.

Thou hast taught me, holy Father, by thy prophets, that the way of holiness in the times of the gospel, or under the kingdom of the Messiah, shall be a high-way, a plain and easy path; so that the wayfaring man, or the stranger, though a fool, shall not err therein. And thou hast called the poor and the ignorant, the mean and foolish things of this world, to the knowledge of thyself and thy Son, and taught them to receive and partake of the salvation which thou hast provided. But how can such weak creatures ever take in so strange, so difficult, and so abstruse a doctrine as this; in the explication and defence whereof multitudes of men, even men of learning and piety, have lost themselves in infinite subtleties of dispute, and endless mazes of darkness? And can this strange and perplexing notion of three real persons going to make up one true God, be so necessary and so important a part of that christian doctrine, which, in the Old Testament and the New, is represented as so plain and so easy, even to the meanest understandings?

O thou Searcher of hearts who knowest all things, I appeal to thee concerning the sincerity of my enquiries into these discoveries of thy word. Thou knowest me, thou hast seen me, and hast tried my heart towards thee: If there be any lurking hypocrisy in my heart, any secret bias towards any thing but truth, uncover it, O Father of lights, and banish it from my soul for ever. If thine eye discovers the least spark of criminal prejudice in any corner of my soul, extinguish it utterly, that I may not be led astray from the truth, in matters of such importance, by the least glance of error or mistake.

Appendix 1 (continued)

Thou art witness, O my God, with what diligence, with what constancy and care, I have read and searched thy holy word, how early and late, by night and by day, I have been making these enquiries. How fervently have I been seeking thee on my bended knees, and directing my humble addresses to thee, to enlighten my darkness, and to show me the meaning of thy word, that I may learn what I must believe, and what I must practise with regard to this doctrine, in order to please thee, and obtain eternal life!

Great God, who seest all things, thou hast beheld what busy temptations have been often fluttering about my heart, to call it off from these laborious and difficult enquiries, and to give up thy word and thy gospel as an unintelligible book, and betake myself to the light of nature and reason: But thou has been pleased by thy divine power to scatter these temptations, and fix my heart and my hope again upon that Saviour and that eternal life, which thou has revealed in thy word, and proposed therein, to our knowledge and our acceptance. Blessed be the name of my God, that has not suffered me to abandon the gospel of his Son Jesus! And blessed be that Holy Spirit that has kept me attentive to the truth delivered in thy gospel, and inclined me to wait longer in my search of these divine truths under the hope of thy gracious illumination.

I humbly call thee to witness, O my God, what a holy jealousy I ever wear about my heart, lest I should do the slightest dishonour to thy supreme Majesty, in any of my enquiries or determinations. Thou seest what a religious fear, and what a tender sollicitude I maintain on my soul, lest I should think or speak any thing to diminish the grandeurs and honours of thy Son Jesus, my dear Mediator, to whom I owe my everlasting hopes. Thou knowest how much afraid I am of speaking one word, which may be construed into a neglect of thy blessed Spirit, from whom I hope I am daily receiving happy influences of light and strength. Guard all the motions of my mind, O almighty God, against every thing that borders upon these dangers. Forbid my thoughts to indulge, and forbid my pen to write one word, that should sink those grand ideas which belong to thyself, or thy Son, or thy Holy Spirit. Forbid it, O my God, that ever I should be so unhappy as to unglorify my Father, my Saviour, or my Sanctifier, in any of my sentiments or expressions concerning them.

Blessed and faithful God, hast thou not promised that the meek thou wilt guide in judgment, the meek thou wilt teach thy way? Hast thou not told us by Isaiah thy prophet, that thou wilt bring the blind by a way which they knew not, and wilt lead them in paths which they have not known? Hast thou not informed us by thy prophet Hosea,



Appendix 1 (continued)

that if we follow on to know the Lord, then we shall know him? Hath not thy Son, our Saviour, assured us, that our heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them who ask him? And is he not appointed to guide us into all truth? Have I not sought the gracious guidance of thy good Spirit continually? Am I not truly sensible of my own darkness and weakness, my dangerous prejudices on every side, and my utter insufficiency for my own conduct? Wilt thou leave such a poor creature bewildered among a thousand perplexities, which are raised by the various opinions and contrivances of men to explain thy divine truth.

Help me, heavenly Father, for I am quite tired and weary of these human explainings, so various and uncertain. ~~When wilt thou explain it to me thyself,~~ O my God, by the secret and certain dictates of thy Spirit, according to the intimations of thy word? Nor let any pride of reason, nor any affectation of novelty, nor any criminal bias whatsoever, turn my heart aside from hearkening to these divine dictates of thy word and thy Spirit. Suffer not any of my native corruptions, nor the vanity of my imagination, to cast a mist over my eyes, while I am searching after the knowledge of thy mind and will, for my eternal salvation.

I entreat, O most merciful Father, that thou wilt not suffer the remnant of my short life to be wasted in such endless wanderings, in quest of thee and thy Son Jesus, as a great part of my past days have been; but let my sincere endeavours to know thee, in all the ways whereby thou hast discovered thyself in thy word, be crowned with such success, that my soul being established in every needful truth by thy Holy Spirit, I may spend my remaining life according to the rules of thy gospel, and may with all the holy and happy creation ascribe glory and honour, wisdom and power to thee, who sittest upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.

Appendix 2A Summary of Watts' Works

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Barfield Volume</u>
<u>Verse</u>		
Horae Lyricae	1705	4
Hymns and Spiritual Songs	1707	4
Psalms of David Imitated	1718	4
Divine Songs for Children	1720	4
Reliquiae Juveniles	1734	4
Remnants of Time	1753	4
<u>Prose</u>		
Essay towards the Encouragement of Charity Schools	1728	2
Discourse on the Education of Children and Youth	1725	5
Catechism	1728	2
Guide to Prayer	1716	3
Prayers for Children	1725	3
Art of Reading and Writing English	1721	4
Logic	1724	5
Philosophical Essays	1732	5
Brief Scheme of Ontology	1732	5
Improvement of the Mind	1741	5
Short View of Whole Scripture History	1732	3
Questions Proper for Students in Divinity	1740	3
Essay on Civil Power	1739	5
Caveat against Infidelity	1722	4
Strength and Weakness of Human Reason	1731	2
Self-love and Virtue Reconciled	1739	3
The Unlawfulness of Self-Murder	1726	2
Doctrine of the Passions	1729	2
Humble Attempt towards the Revival of Practical Religion	1731	3
Holiness of Times, Places and People	1738	2
Rational Foundation of a Christian Church	1747	5
Sermons	Various Dates	1
Humility represented in the Character of St. Paul	1737	2
Essay against Uncharitableness	1707	3
Orthodoxy and Charity United	1745	3
Redeemer and Sanctifier	1737	3

Appendix 2 (continued)

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Barfield</u> <u>Volume</u>
<u>Prose</u> (continued)		
Ruin and Recovery of Mankind	1740	6
A Plain Explication of Imputed Sin	1740	6
Freedom of Will in God and Creatures	1732	6
The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity	1722	6
Seven Dissertations	1722-5	6
Useful and Important Questions	1746	6
<u>The Glory of Christ as God-Man</u>	1746	6
A Faithful Enquiry	1745?	British Museum
Solemn Address	1745?	4

To the Church of Christ meeting in ~~Burgh~~  
 of which the Holy Spirit has made me a member  
 Dearly Beloved in our Lord,

Grace, mercy and peace be multiply'd to  
 you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.  
 It has been a very sore aggravation of my long sor-  
 rows, that I have not been able to encourage your  
 Christian visits, to converse with you singly, to re-  
 ceive your consolations and relate my own sorrows,  
 nor have I been capable to express my constant concern  
 for your welfare by writing to you together as  
 a Church which I often designed. But you are in  
 my heart more than ever. While God chastises my  
 former want of zeal by silencing me for a season,  
 I bow to his wisdom and holiness, and am learning  
 obedience by the things that I suffer, and many  
 lessons of righteousness and grace which I hope  
 hereafter to publish amongst you. As I have  
 been long pleading with him for pardon of my negli-  
 gence, so I ask you also to forgive. Long af-  
 flictions are soul-searching providences; and dis-  
 cover the secrets of the heart and omissions of  
 duty that were unobserved in a day of peace.  
 May the blessed Spirit reveal to each of us why

he

he continues to contend with us!

I cannot reckon up all my obligations to you for your kind supports of me under my tedious and expensive Sickness, and for your continued & instant prayers for my recovery, which gave me the first ground of hope that I should be restored, which hope and expectation still remain with me and (I think) are supported by the word and spirit of God. It seems at present to be more needful for you that I abide in the flesh, and I trust I shall yet abide for your furtherance & Joy of Faith, that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Christ Jesus for me by my coming to you again. And while I am confined as the Prisoner of God, I request the continuance of your supplications for patience and Sanctification as well as health.

Phil. 24.21

I rejoice also to hear of your union, your Love, Your attendance on the worship of the Lord. This has been a great comfort to my thoughts in the time of my affliction and absence. Yet I am in pain for your Edification because you have none among you to administer the special and leading ordinances: And since 'tis your earnest desire

desire to know my opinion in that affair that lies before you, I have at several seasons been enabled to write it under these heads. (viz)

1. That there were in the primitive Church, several preaching Elders, ~~for~~, Bishops or overseers.
2. That where their gifts were different, some were called Pastors, or Elders for Exhortation, to feed the flock, to exhort the Saints: others were called Teachers, or Elders for Doctrine to instruct their hearers in the principles of Christianity, chiefly the younger Christians, and to bring in new converts.
3. The Scripture makes ~~not~~ difference, nor Subordination of power betwixt them in the Church, but seems to give all Elders an Equality of power.
4. The Scripture does not determine when or how often one or other should preach or administer holy ordinances, and yet 'tis necessary there should be some rule to decide it lest Ambition or Controversies should arise among the Elders in this matter.
5. Therefore I believe the Church (to which the Light of nature and Scripture has given all power in things indifferent that are necessary to be determined) has power to appoint the time, season and

and places of their Ministrations.

6. 'Tis for the certain advantage of a Church to have more Elders than one in it, that may more frequently visit the Churches, more fully take care of them, and regularly administer all holy ordinances if one or other be sick or absent, may also better keep the Church together and encourage young Converts to Joyn themselves to it.

7. That 'tis for the advantage of a Church to have such an Eldor chosen whose gifts have been tryd and approved in the Church, and been owned and blessed of God for the good of Souls; Such a one may most ~~profitably~~ <sup>liberally</sup> serve or profit;

1. 'Tis <sup>Now with regard to our Church in Wiltshire</sup> my opinion that whether I live or dye if such an Eldor be chosen by the universal desire or voice of the Church, it will be much for their Spirituall advantage in all profolity.

2. Whether I live or dye, If another Eldor be chosen with the desire of a few persons and the opposition of a few and the bare cold consent of the Major part, It will not be for the advantage of the Church, And I am sure my worthy Brother Mr Samuel Price on whom your thoughts are set does too tender a sense of your spiritual Interest,

and

Notes on Chapter 1

1. Observer, 28th October, 1979. Bernard Williams' Review of G. E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles by Paul Levy.
2. V. De Sola Pinto: Isaac Watts and the Adventurous Muse, Essays and Studies, XX (1934).
3. E. G. Rupp: Six Makers of English Religion (London 1957). The founder of the Abney family fortune was Sir Thomas (1640-1722). Born at Willersley, he was in origin a Derbyshire man, but was described in his marriage licence as, 'Of All Hallows in the Wall, London, citizen and fishmonger'. He was knighted by William III, and was of course a dissenter. His second wife, Mary, daughter of John Gunston, bought him the manor of Stoke Newington and, as a summer retreat, Theobalds in Hertfordshire. Theobalds had witnessed very different occupants to the clean-living Abney family. In 1606 Salisbury entertained James I and his bibulous brother-in-law Christian IV of Denmark there; the ensuing entertainment, or rather orgy, was immortalised by Harrington.
4. D. Defoe: Short Way with Dissenters. See A. P. Davis Isaac Watts (London 1948) page 33 for discussion of the identity of the diminutive chaplain. He may not have been Watts, though most commentators seem to think so.
5. Works of Augustus Toplady: 2nd edition (London 1794) Volume IV, page 117.
6. Davis: page 225.
7. All the letters quoted for this paragraph are in manuscript at Dr. Williams' Library. See the photocopy in Appendix 3. Dr. Nuttall commented to me: 'Not the handwriting of a sick man!'
8. Davis: page 221.
9. I am grateful to Dr. Geoffrey F. Nuttall for telling me this charming detail of eighteenth century life.
10. Rupp: page 109.
11. The others are Tyndale, Cranmer, Foxe, Milton and Bunyan.
12. Quoted by Davies: Worship and Theology in England, (London 1928).



Notes on Chapter 1

13. Watts to Bradbury, 1725: 'My weaknesses of nature are so many, and perpetually recurring, that I am often called to look into the other world, and would not dare to write anything that might derogate from the divine ideas which scripture ascribes to God my Saviour and my Sanctifier'. Bradbury had accused Watts of preaching Socinian views to the evident disgust of Sir John Hartopp.
14. Nuttall: Letters 945, 963, 1647 and 513.
15. See Norman Sykes: Edmund Gibson, (Oxford 1926).
16. See R. Tudor Jones: Congregationalism in England, (London 1962), page 47.
17. Hugh Farmer to Doddridge (1737): 'Mr. Coward begins to think Dr. Watts Baxterian and is almost come to an open rupture with you'.
18. The only people Watts could not stand were Deists and Roman Catholics.
19. Lest it be thought that I overstress Watts' lack of inches, it should be recalled that not so long ago Robert Blake had been turned down for a fellowship at Merton because he was not tall enough (M. Ashley, Cromwell's Generals, page 116, London 1954).

And it is only recently that fictional heroes have been unimpressive in appearance. John le Carre's Smiley is 'small, podgy and at best middle-aged, by appearance one of London's meek who do not inherit the earth. His legs were short, his gait anything but agile' (Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy, London 1975, page 21). Contrast Homer's Thersites whom the audience is meant to find ridiculous (Iliad II, lines 211-277): 'This was the ugliest man who came beneath Ilion. He was bandy-legged and went lame of one foot, with shoulders stooped and drawn together over his chest, and above this his skull went up to a point with the wool grown sparsely upon it'. Compare Jane Austen's Sir Walter Elliot who was appalled by Admiral Baldwin's appearance (in Persuasion).

20. S. Gilley: Christianity and Enlightenment, page 1. History of European Ideas, Vol. 2 (1981) pp 103-121.
21. Compare the damage done to the exclusionist cause, 1679-1681, by the slogan '41 is come again'.
22. Quoted by R. N. Stromberg: Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth Century England, (Oxford 1954).

Notes on Chapter 1

23. Stromberg: page 55.
24. Quoted by Basil Willey: Eighteenth Century Background (London 1940).
25. Gilley: 'Semi-Deists', page 4.
26. Gilbert Burnet: History of My Own Time, Volume 1, pages 175-176.
27. I am indebted to G. R. Cragg: Puritanism to the Age of Reason, (Cambridge 1950), for this paragraph.
28. My original phrase was that the possession of 'charity is a matter of biological chemistry' which I was persuaded to change. No doubt the advice given to me was excellent. I am amused, however, by Watts' remarks in his Essay against Uncharitableness (Volume 3, page 679). 'An uncharitable humour springs generally from some of these following causes:  
1. From a malicious constitution of nature, an acrimonious or a choleric temper of blood. There are some animal engines of human flesh, that have their juices all soured in their very formation ...'
29. J. H. Colligan: The Arian Movement in England, (London 1911).
30. cf. J. P. Ferguson: Dr. Samuel Clarke, (London 1960), for Clarke's liveliness, and R. Holtby's Waterland, (Carlisle 1966), for counter-arguments.
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31. Holtby: page 49.
32. Mark Pattinson: Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, page 326.
33. I am indebted to W. R. Ward's The Relations of Enlightenment and Religious Revival in Central Europe and in the English Speaking World. Derek Baxter (Ed) Reform and Reformation, England and the Continent. c 1380-1750, Oxford, 1980.
34. Gilley: page 5.
35. See John Redwood: Reason, Ridicule and Religion, (London 1970).
36. When Whitefield introduced his sermon with some polite, 'visiting preacher' platitudes about the worthy members of the Haworth congregation, he was interrupted by the Vicar: 'For God's sake, don't flatter them, Sir. They are all going to hell with their eyes open!'

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37. I owe much to Davies: Worship and Theology (already cited), and to C. F. Allison: Rise of Moralism (London 1966) for the material in this paragraph.
38. Quoted by Allison: page 13.
39. Of course the problem of definition applies here and I am aware that I am over-simplifying. See E. M. Wilbur, History of Unitarianism (Cambridge, Mass. 1952).
40. Peter Toon: Hyper-Calvinism (London 1967). The term itself was coined in the nineteenth century.
41. Toon: page 12. Many have wrongly read back the views of his followers into Calvin's own theology, e.g. A. P. Davis, Isaac Watts, page 163, refers to predestination as 'the most important doctrine of Calvinism'. Important to whom? Certainly not to Calvin.
42. Toon: page 53 onwards.
43. Toon: page 66.
44. Nuttall: Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge, page 4.
45. To be fair to Doddridge, he could preach the social gospel in a very modern, enlightened way. This is a point made by Eric Routley (Hymns and Human Life, London 1952 page 90). Routley points out the significance of:
- He comes, the broken heart to bind,  
The bleeding soul to care,  
And with the treasures of his grace  
To enrich the humble poor.
- We regard 'Hark the glad sound' as an Advent hymn. Doddridge simply entitled it 'Christ's Message'.
46. Davis: pages 94-95.

Notes on Chapter 2

1. Book 1, Number 14. Watts' verse is in Volume IV of his Works.
2. Book 1, Number 19.
3. Song of Solomon hymns are Book 1, 71 onwards.
4. Watts sold the copyright for Hymns and Spiritual Songs for £12. This compares badly with the £16 Milton received for Paradise Lost.
5. De Sola Pinto: Isaac Watts and the Adventurous Muse. A. P. Davis: Isaac Watts, pages 159-160.
6. My grandmother used to quote this at me.
7. See separate Summary.
8. An Essay towards the Encouragement of Charity Schools (1728).
9. Watts applauded Gibson's 'Pastoral Letter to the People of his diocese by way of caution against Lukewarmness on the one hand and Enthusiasm on the other'. Watts wished that Whitefield 'had not risen above any pretence to the ordinary influences unless he could have given some better evidences of it'.
10. I give the following extract as an illustration of Watts' work - very reasonable, verbose - and obvious. 'If we have occasion to judge concerning matters done in past ages, or in distant-countries, and where we ourselves cannot be present, the powers of sense and reason, for the most part, are not sufficient to inform us, and we must therefore have recourse to the testimony of others; and this is either divine or human'.
11. Again, an extract: 'When substances are called finite or infinite, it is chiefly in respect of their quantity, or in respect of their powers. All substances are in this sense finite or infinite; But as there are some qualities or modes of being which are called infinite or finite, so there are some to which neither finite nor infinite can properly agree: We speak of knowledge, goodness, patience, length, breadth, etc. as finite or infinite: But there is no such thing as a finite or infinite blue, red or green: no finite or infinite likeness between two drops of rain: There is no finite or infinite truth in a proposition, nor finite or infinite crookedness in a stick ...'

Notes on Chapter 2

12. Watts' values are also apparent from the first page, when he writes 'that all persons are under some obligation to improve their own understanding ... Even the lower orders of men have particular callings in life, wherein they ought to acquire a just degree of skill, and this is not to be done well without thinking and reasoning about them ... Besides, every son and daughter of Adam has a most important concern in the affairs of a life to come, and therefore it is a matter of the highest moment for everyone to understand, to judge, and to reason right about the things of religion. It is in vain for any to say, we have no leisure or time for it'.
  
13. Again, typically Watts bolsters his arguments with appeals to Scripture - Romans XIII, 1-7 (of course), Matthew XX, 22, 21, John XVI, 24, Colossians III, 17, Jonah III, 5-10, where the King of Nineveh, though a heathen, was led by the light of nature and reason to announce a day of humiliation. On the other hand Watts found it against nature and reason for James II to expect his subjects to join in prayer against the Prince of Orange or to thank God for 'the birth of the spurious Prince of Wales'!
  
14. Davis: Isaac Watts, page 142.
  
15. Works, Volume 3, pages 49-50.
  
16. Works Volume 2, page 506.
  
17. Works Volume 2, page 542.
  
18. Works Volume 5, pages 769-770.
  
19. Works Volume 5, page 761.
  
20. Works Volume 5, page 763.
  
21. Works Volume 5, pages 751-752.
  
22. Works Volume 5, page 748.
  
23. Works Volume 5, page 719.
  
24. Milner Isaac Watts (London 1834) quotes Watts' moving address to himself: 'Why, O my fearful soul, should thou be afraid of dying? Why shouldst thou be frightened at the dark shadows of the grave, when thou art weary with the toils and crosses of the day? Hast thou not often desired the shadow of the evening and longed for the bed of natural sleep, where thy

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fatigues and sorrows may be forgotten for a season? And is not the grave itself a sweet sleeping-place for saints, wherein they lie down and forget their distresses, and feel none of the miseries of human life, and especially since it is softened and sanctified by the Son of God lying down there? Why shouldst thou be afraid to lay thy head in the dust? It is but entering into God's hiding-place, into his chamber of rest and repose'.

Compare Graham Greene, Brighton Rock (Penguin) page 36. 'Flowers, Ida thought scornfully, that wasn't life. Life was sunlight on brass bed-posts, ruby port, the leap of the heart when the outsider you have backed passes the post and the colours go bobbing up. Life was poor Fred's mouth pressed down on hers in the taxi, vibrating with the engine along the parade. What was the sense of dying if it made you babble of flowers'. Greene and Watts faced the same problem!

25. According to Watts' admirers he was a popular and effective preacher. cf David Jennings (Works Volume page IX). 'It is no wonder that a Man thus richly furnished with Gifts and Graces, was an admired preacher. Though his stature was low, and his bodily presence was weak yet his preaching was weighty and powerful. There was a certain Dignity and Spirit in his very aspect, when he appeared in the Pulpit, that it commanded Attention and Awe; and when he spoke such strains of truly Christian eloquence flowed from his Lips, and these so apparently animated with zeal for God, and the most tender concern for your souls, and their everlasting Salvation; as one would think, could not be easily slighted or resisted'. According to Gibbons, Watts always commanded 'respectable and serious authority', 'ease and beauty in his language'. The church was always crowded when Watts preached. He had a particularly effective trick of pausing for several seconds after making an important point so that its solemnity could be truly appreciated.

Watts' approach to class and wealth was, perhaps understandably, inconsistent. One could not see him addressing the mighty as the Rev. Mr. Dering wrote in his 'godly and comfortable' letter to Lord Abergavenny: 'Though I know that Our Saviour Christ hath given us a straight charge not to cast precious

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stones before swine, nor to give that which is holy to dogs; yet I see so many examples of His unspeakable mercies that I know not any swine so wallowing in the mire, nor any dog so returning to his vomit, of whom I have not some hope that he may be a pure and clean creature in Israel. This maketh me bold with a good conscience to write unto Your Honour' - quoted by Collinson, Elizabethan Puritan Movement.

26. Works, Volume III, page 681.
27. Works, Volume III, page 548 onwards.
28. Works, Volume III, page 750 onwards.
29. See G. W. H. Lampe The Atonement in Soundings page 175 onwards for a modern liberal attack on substitution, similar to Watts' opponents!
30. Volume VI, pages 130-131.
31. Volume VI, pages 133-134.
32. Volume VI, page 148.
33. Volume VI, page 152.
34. See Toon, Hyper-Calvinism.
35. Volume VI, page 215 onwards.
36. Volume VI, page 283.
37. Volume VI, pages 288-290.
38. Volume VI, pages 307-310.
39. Volume VI, page 322.
40. Watts refers here to the fact that Jesus was sent by his Father, that God the Father 'prepared a body for him'. Volume VI, page 337.
41. Volume VI, page 337.
42. Volume VI, pages 339 and 353.
43. Volume VI, page 359.
44. Volume VI, pages 363-368.
45. Volume VI, page 372.

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46. Volume VI, page 386.
47. Volume VI, pages 491-492.
48. Volume VI, page 496.
49. Volume VI, page 489.
50. Volume VI, page 393.
51. Volume VI, page 409.
52. It is interesting that John Hicks Myth of God Incarnate uses this text to undermine Jesus' Godhead. The Greek, incidentally, ( *ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι* ) supports Watts and Hicks.
53. Volume VI, page 414.
54. Volume VI, page 463.
55. Volume VI, page 458.
56. Volume VI, page 543.
57. Volume VI, page 544.
58. By 'soul', Watts clearly means a reasoning personality.
59. Volume VI, page 568.
60. Volume VI, page 667.
61. Volume VI, page 680.
62. Volume VI, page 684.
63. Volume VI, page 726.



Notes on Chapter 3

1. J. Austin Baker: The Foolishness of God (Penguin 1972), page 334. 'Words such as these mean a great deal to a great many people, the present writer included. But they do still miss the point. It is not just God's extreme sacrifice which faces me with the challenge to give my life, my whole being; it is love itself. God's cross can do no more than blackmail me, unless I have made my prior, free decision for sacrificial love'.
2. Davis: page 206.
3. Compare the conservatives in the West Country who liken Cranmer's Prayer Book to a 'Christmas game'.
4. Harry Escott: Isaac Watts: Hymnographer.
5. Manning continues, 'Watts sees the Cross as Milton had seen it, planted on a globe hung in space, surrounded by the vast distances of the Universe. He sees the drama in Palestine prepared before the beginning of time and still decisive when time has ceased to be. There is a sense of the spaciousness of nature, of the vastness of time, of the dreadfulness of eternity'.
6. De Sola Pinto: Isaac Watts and the Adventurous Muse (Essays and Studies XX 1934) pages 105-107.
7. Hoyles: The Waning of the Renaissance, devotes a section to Watts.
8. Evelyn Waugh: Decline and Fall (Penguin) pages 183-184.
9. R. Tudor-Jones: Congregationalism in England, page 129 and 140.
10. Quoted by Davis: Isaac Watts, pages 113-114.
11. Thomas Belsham: Memoirs of the late Theophilus Lindsey, pages 216-221. On the other hand Dr. Gibbons wrote: 'How it came to pass, I know not, but that it has so happened is certain, that reports have been raised, propagated and currently believed, concerning the Doctor, that he has imagined such things concerning himself, as would prove; if they were true, that he sometimes lost possession of himself, or suffered a momentary eclipse of his intellectual faculties. But I take upon me, and feel myself happy to aver, that these reports were utterly and absolutely false and groundless ...' T. Gibbons, Memoirs of the Rev. Isaac Watts DD.

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12. A. Toplady: Works Volume 14 pages 121-132, 'Outlines of the Life of Dr. Watts'.
13. S. Palmer: Character of Dr. Watts (London 1785), pages 227-231.
14. Works Volume 1, XLI onwards.
15. Thanks to Dr. S. Gilley for this detail. Remnants of Time is a collection of Watts' early writings, all strictly orthodox.
16. Colligan: pages 83-86. The question in brackets is mine. Come to think of it, how could Watts' views become orthodox if they did not agree with the orthodox creeds?
17. T. Wright: Life of Isaac Watts, page XI.
18. Davis: page 126.
19. David Fountain: Isaac Watts Remembered, page 79.
20. Stromberg: page 116.
21. Davis: page 163.
22. H. Gregoire: Histoire des Sectes Religieuses, page 53.
23. Peter Toon: Hyper-Calvinism, page 40.
24. See page 13.
25. The author is of course Charles Wesley. See Methodist Hymn Book 173 - 'Would Jesus have the sinner die?'
26. Toon: page 41.

Notes on Chapter 4

1. Hymns and Spiritual Songs Book 1, Hymn 150, Volume 4, page 295.
2. Volume 3, page 665.
3. Volume 3, pages 666-671.
4. Volume 3, page 767.
5. Volume 3, page 741.
6. Volume 3, page 798.
7. Volume 3, page 742.
8. Volume 3, page 743.
9. See Soundings op. cit. page 180.
10. Volume 3, pages 751-752.
11. Volume 3, page 750.
12. Volume 3, page 759.
13. Volume 3, page 759.
14. Volume 3, page 795.
15. Volume 3, page 760.
16. Volume 3, page 766.
17. Volume 3, page 767.
18. Volume 3, page 772.
19. Volume 3, page 773.
20. Volume 3, page 773.
21. Volume 3, pages 774-775.
22. Volume 3, page 783.
23. Volume 3, page 784.
24. Volume 3, pages 788-789.
25. Volume 3, page 792.
26. Volume 3, page 793.
27. Volume 3, page 799.

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28. Volume 3, page 591.
29. Volume 3, page 591.
30. Volume 3, pages 592-593.
31. Volume 3, page 644.
32. Volume 3, page 647.
33. Volume 3, page 649.
34. Volume 3, page 658.
35. Volume 1, page 377 onwards.
36. Hymns Book 3, Number 10, Works Volume 4, page 350.
37. Hymns Book 3, Number 17, Works Volume 4, page 352.

Charles Wesley wrote the lines:

This body then shall rest in hope  
 This body which the worms destroy;  
 For thou shalt surely raise me up  
 To glorious life and endless joy.

Of course when I claim that, unlike Watts, Wesley does not mention worms in his hymns, I mean that he does not liken sinners to worms. So far as I know, he just calls us sinners!

38. Hymns Book 2, Number 9, Works Volume 4, page 299.
39. Methodist Hymn Book 195.
40. I hope I have succeeded in not revealing my own views on the Atonement.
41. Volume 4, page 636.
42. Volume 3, page 577.
43. Volume 3, page 765.
44. Volume 3, page 775.
45. Volume 3, page 683.
46. From 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height'.
47. C. M. Chevasse: The Meaning of the Cross, (London 1958) page 10.

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48. Volume 3, page 746. Watts also frequently mentions with approval Dr. Whitby's commentaries.
49. Select Remains of the Rev. John Mason MA.  
Recommended by Rev. I. Watts D.D., London MDCCXLII.  
There is a copy in the Library of the British Museum.

Notes on Chapter 5

1. Works Volume 3, page 636.
2. Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Volume 3, Number 26.
3. Volume 6, pages 50-51.
4. Volume 6, page 62.
5. Volume 6, pages 66-67.
6. Hymns Ancient and Modern (unrevised), Number 573.
7. Volume 6, page 69.
8. Volume 6, page 73.
9. Volume 6, page 76.
10. Volume 6, page 77.
11. Volume 6, page 87.
12. Volume 6, page 89.
13. Volume 6, page 90.
14. Volume 6, page 91.
15. Volume 6, page 94.
16. Volume 6, page 95.
17. Volume 6, pages 96-99.
18. Volume 6, pages 102-103.
19. Volume 6, pages 105-106.
20. Volume 6, page 114.
21. Volume 6, page 118.
22. Volume 6, pages 121-123.
23. Volume 6, pages 130-134.
24. Volume 6, pages 140-143.
25. Volume 6, pages 145-148.
26. Volume 6, page 152.
27. Volume 6, page 154.

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28. Volume 6, page 160.
29. Volume 6, page 163. (note)
30. Volume 6, pages 183-185.
31. e.g. L. Sterne: 'A Sentimental Journey'.
32. Of course the question, was Watts a Calvinist, is an essentially arid one. What's in a name? He obviously revered and respected John Calvin and his works. But he was certainly not an extreme Calvinist. Watts moved away from Calvinism during his life and in his mature years could definitely be termed Baxterian.
33. 'It is time, too, to stop the mouth of the blasphemer who calls it "sentimentality" to reject the idea of a God of retribution'. G. W. H. Lampe on The Atonement in Soundings op. cit. page 189.
34. Donald Davie: A Gathered Church (London 1978), page 42.
35. Works Volume 4, page 441, Horae Lyricae.

Notes on Chapter 6

1. Imitation of Christ, l. 1. 3.
2. Christian Doctrine of the Trinity. Works Volume 6, page 358.
3. Volume 6, page 284.
4. Volume 6, page 333.
5. Volume 6, page 368.
6. Volume 6, page 378.
7. Volume 6, pages 378-379.
8. Volume 6, page 417.
9. Volume 6, page 513.
10. See Charles Gore: Reconstruction of Belief (London 1926), pages 527-531.
11. Volume 6, page 418.
12. Volume 6, page 336.
13. Volume 6, page 337.
14. Volume 6, page 692.
15. Volume 6, page 691.
16. Volume 6, pages 409-410.
17. Volume 6, pages 372-373.
18. Volume 6, page 489.
19. Volume 6, page 313.
20. Of Temptation: John Owen, D.D., (Oxford 1658).
21. Volume 6, page 337.
22. Volume 6, page 562.
23. Volume 6, page 564.
24. Volume 6, page 645.
25. Volume 6, page 646.
26. Volume 6, page 691.



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- 27. Volume 6, page 692.
- 28. Volume 6, page 458.
- 29. Volume 6, page 455.
- 30. Volume 6, page 456.
- 31. Volume 6, page 456.
- 32. Volume 6, page 457.
- 33. Volume 6, page 696.
- 34. Volume 6, page 697.
- 35. Volume 6, page 698.
- 36. Volume 6, page 699.
- 37. Volume 6, page 708.
- 38. Volume 6, page 712.
- 39. Volume 6, pages 713-714.
- 40. Volume 6, page 714.
- 41. Volume 6, pages 715-716.
- 42. Volume 6, page 376.
- 43. Volume 6, page 385.
- 44. From Dr. Watts to Mr. T. Bradbury, 24th January, 1725-1726. Posthumous Works Volume II, page 177.
- 45. Volume 6, page 448.
- 46. Volume 6, pages 725-726.
- 47. Volume 6, pages 458-459.
- 48. Volume 6, page 456.
- 49. Volume 6, page 694.
- 50. Volume 6, page 435.
- 51. Volume 6, page 500.
- 52. Volume 6, page 444.
- 53. Volume 6, page 697.

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54. Volume 6, page 729.
55. Volume 6, page 733.
56. Volume 6, page 738.
57. Volume 6, page 700.
58. Volume 6, pages 562-563.
59. Volume 6, page 724 note.
60. Volume 6, page 701.
61. J. H. Colligan: The Arian Movement, page 86.
62. Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) was certainly very influential among seventeenth century puritans, while John Flavel (1630-1690) was still widely read in the eighteenth century. Neither were men of unimpeachable orthodoxy, comparable to, say, John Owen.
63. Dr. Lardner's letters are to be found in Belsham's Memoirs of the Late Theophilus Lindsey (London 1812).
64. The letters to Doddridge are Numbers 1437, 1447, 1549, 1589 and 1600 in Nuttall's Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge, already cited.
65. Samuel Palmer: Dr. Watts No Socinian (London 1813). Dr. Williams' Library has just-acquired a copy of this pamphlet. Pages 13-19.
66. Palmer: page 25.
67. Palmer: pages 44-45.
68. Volume 6, page 533.
69. Volume 6, page 552.
70. Volume 6, page 574.
71. Dated 22nd November 1764, Hoxton Square in London.
72. Posthumous Works, Volume 1, page 6.
73. Posthumous Works, Volume 1, page 83.
74. Posthumous Works, Volume 1, page 55.
75. Juvenal: Satires, Book X, Lines 118-126.

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76. The Solemn Address is to be found in Works Volume 4, page 670. It is also to be found in full as an Appendix to this thesis.
77. The phrase is Baxter's - 'Then I shall end my sad complaints, And weary, sinful days', from his hymn, 'Lord, it belongs not to my care'.
78. Tristram Shandy Volume 1, pages 91-92, by Laurence Sterne (London 1741).
79. John Robinson's review of Taking Leave of God by Don Cupitt, Times Literary Supplement, 5th December 1980.
80. And others could exploit his admissions. Take this example: 'There is nothing spoken of Christ in Scripture but what is perfectly consistent with his being inferior to, and distinct from Him who is the Only True God; Whereas on the other hand we have shown that he expressly disclaims, in his whole Person, that which must belong to Him who is the Supreme God; and acknowledges that the Father is greater than he'. Now Watts did not write this. It comes from A Sober Appeal to a Turk or Indian by the Rev. Martin Tomkins (page 147). The point is that Watts read Tomkins' work, was deeply disturbed by it - and could almost have written this extract!
81. Davis: Isaac Watts, page 117.

Notes on Chapter 7

1. This is in part a theological matter and therefore within my terms of reference.
2. F. J. Gillman: The Evolution of the English Hymn, (London 1927) page 201.
3. Gillman: page 211.
4. Thomas Milner: Isaac Watts, (London 1834), pages 176-179.
5. John Hoyles: The Waning of the Renaissance, (The Hague 1971) page 240.
6. 'There is a land of pure delight' - Volume 4, page 316.
7. 'When I survey the wondrous cross' - Volume 4, page 349.
8. 'Awake, our souls! away, our fears' - Volume 4, page 267.
9. Volume IV, page 470. This poem is of interest as it is the only occasion that I can find when Watts shows awareness of the musical world:
 

Nor Rapin gives her rules to fly, nor Purcell  
notes to sing.

He never mentions J. S. Bach or G. F. Handel who were both almost his exact contemporaries. This is particularly surprising when one remembers Watts' sympathy for German culture and his many links with Germany.
10. Volume IV, page 425.
11. Volume IV, page 441.
12. Volume IV, pages 475-476.
13. Desiring to Love Christ, Volume IV, page 450.
14. Preface to Horae Lyricae, Volume IV, page 414.
15. Miscellaneous Thoughts, Volume IV, page 510.
16. Volume IV, page 449.
17. From the Advertisement to The Analogy of Religion by Joseph Butler, May 1736. Works Volume 1, edited by W. E. Gladstone, (Oxford 1896) pages 1-2.

Notes on Chapter 7

18. Psalm 72 Second Part, Volume IV, page 179, and Psalm 100, pages 199-200.
19. Perhaps the root set in earlier than the twentieth century. William Temple was to say of F. W. Faber's 'Hark, hark my soul' that it was 'a minor but quite indisputable part of the problem of evil'.
20. Miscellaneous Thoughts, Volume IV, page 513.
21. Preface to Horae Lyricae, Volume IV, page 408.
22. Volume IV, page 254.
23. Volume IV, page 255.
24. Volume IV, page 116.
25. Volume IV, page 283.
26. On 'Parkinson', BBC Television, 20th December, 1980.
27. Volume IV, page 255.
28. Donald Davie: A Gathered Church, (London 1978), pages 24-25.
29. Volume 3, page 249.
30. Hoyles: op. cit. page 179.
31. cf. G. Williams: The Nature of Roman Poetry (Oxford 1978). The opposite of vates is persona - i.e. when the poet writes from a private, individualistic viewpoint. Watts claims the title 'vates' in the Preface to Horae Lyricae, Volume IV, page 417.
32. Volume IV, page 123.
33. Preface to A Collection of Hymns for use of the People called Methodists.
34. Volume 4, page 157, Psalm 41:
 

Blest is the man whose bowels move  
And melt with pity to the poor.
35. One never knows when Watts will turn up. The present author was able to guess that Watts was the writer of 'Join all the glorious names' which appeared unattributed on a leaflet for a special service in Christ Church, Oxford, a few months ago. Not that inspired guess-work was required. Only Watts could

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have produced such phrases as 'His powerful blood'  
and:

'I shall be safe  
For Christ displays  
Superior power,  
And guardian grace'.

36. Volume IV, page 534.

37. cf. J. L. Packer: God has Spoken, (London 1963).

Notes on Conclusion

1. S. L. Greenslade: The English Reformers and the Fathers of the Church (Oxford 1960), page 9.
2. I do not think that I have exaggerated the unhappiness of Watts' later life. cf. A. P. Davis: Isaac Watts, page 64:

The last years of Watts' life were plagued by continual illness accompanied with increasing weakness, by worry over the subject of the Trinity, and by two family disturbances ...

The same picture is given in the correspondence of Philip Doddridge.

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