

Forward at Burlington Street: J. Vyrnwy Morgan in Liverpool, 1889-1891.

From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, it is tempting to view the late nineteenth century as a golden age for Christianity in Britain, especially for the Free Churches. The removal of disabilities, in place since the Seventeenth Century meant that the ancient universities were no longer barred against Nonconformists, and the way opened for Christians outside the established churches to play a full (or almost full) part in national and public life.¹ By the 1880s, Nonconformists were increasingly active in politics, the 'Nonconformist Conscience' becoming a force to be reckoned with.² Pulpit giants such as Baptists Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Alexander Maclaren, Congregationalists Joseph Parker, Guinness Rogers, Silvester Horne, and R. F. Horton were national figures. The massive, ornate, chapels which still mark the streetscapes of many British towns and cities date in large part from this period. Their brash self-confidence stands in stark contrast to the plain, often unobtrusive, architecture of the period immediately after the Toleration Act of 1689. Often constructed in the Gothic style, these are 'churches', rather than 'meeting houses', their scale proclaiming the social as well as spiritual aspirations of Nonconformity.³

This was not an age of unmixed blessings, however. The enjoyment of new privileges went hand in hand with more sobering thoughts. There was a growing realisation by all sections of the Christian Church in Britain that a substantial portion of the population was not being reached, especially in the great cities and industrial settlements. Allied to this was a growing feeling that the bulk of this non-churchgoing population was comprised of the poorer classes in the great cities.⁴ The Religious Census of 1851 had already

¹ E. K. H. Jordan, *Free Church Unity* (London, 1956), p.12.

² Dale A. Johnson, *The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1999), pp.5-6; For a contemporary account, see C. Silvester Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (London, 1903), p.426.

³ Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920* (London, 1977), pp.145-8.

⁴ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism: Conscience of a New Nonconformity* (Cardiff, 1999), p.108; Clyde Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, p.27.

demonstrated the existence of ‘an enormous mass who did not, under any religious body, avail themselves of the means of spiritual instruction’.⁵

In part, this was due to the dislocation caused by the growth of industrial towns; men and women moving into crowded industrial districts lost contact with the churches in which they had grown up, and made no new connections in the areas to which they moved. The squalor of these slums and the perceived moral degradation of those who dwelt in such communities brought a response from the established church and nonconformity, in the creation of new mission agencies and the adaptation of older buildings to attract this unreached community, increasingly seen as a local mission field.⁶ At the same time, the influx of poor migrants into the inner city, and the flight of the ‘better sorts’ to the suburbs weakened local Nonconformist churches by depriving them of the element which had previously formed the backbone of their congregations.⁷ Churches in formerly comfortable areas became struggling mission stations in the midst of squalor.⁸ With the publication of *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, a pamphlet drawing attention to the material and spiritual state of London’s poor, published under the auspices of the London Congregational Union, this question of the relation of the churches to the urban poor was brought into sharp relief. The author of this anonymous pamphlet (later revealed as Andrew Mearns, Secretary of the London Congregational Union) accused the churches of having been often content to leave the poor to outside agencies.⁹ One man attracted to inner-city mission work by the *Bitter Cry*, described its effect:

The title itself was a stroke of genius, and the writing was realistic without being sensational. Although the facts were well known to mission workers, they startled the general public and awakened the conscience of the churches.¹⁰

⁵ James G. Miall, *Congregationalism in Yorkshire: A Chapter of Modern Church History* (London, 1968), p.209.

⁶ S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.116-7.

⁷ Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (Hampden, CT, 1974), pp.4-5.

⁸ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, p.203.

⁹ Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (London, 1883, repr. Leicester, 1970), p.55.

¹⁰ Basil Martin, *An Impossible Parson* (London, 1935), p.51.

This awakening was not confined to London; every large city in Britain had its own destitute population, living at close quarters in decaying properties, in which several families sometimes shared a single room ‘often without benefit of legal matrimony’, alien to the churches.¹¹ The towns and cities of the North, although less squalid, being of more recent growth than London, gave voice to the same ‘bitter cry’. In cities such as Leeds, Bradford and Liverpool, housing initially erected to accommodate skilled workers moving out of the town centre rapidly became the homes of manual labourers, as their number increased.¹²

The challenge to the churches implied by *The Bitter Cry* was, it has been argued, one which nonconformist Churches, dependent as they were on the financial support of members, were particularly ill-equipped to meet, even if this was not always obvious:

The Independent Church required intelligence as well as a level of affluence.... City chapels, bereft of a well-loved and long-lived minister, frequently found themselves without congregations (for their hearers were suburbanites who now turned to suburban chapels), with a church inadequately grounded in churchly principles and on both counts without the means of existence. The usual answer was removal to fresh pastures, thus justifying Anglican criticisms that gathered churches could not meet the spiritual demands of those who most needed them.¹³

Charles Silvester Horne, the dynamic minister of Kensington Congregational Church, called for the Congregationalists to inaugurate a similar movement in an address to the international Congregational Council, in July 1890.¹⁴ There, Horne had criticised the stifling ‘respectability’ of many churches, and spoken of the need for ‘the spirit that

¹¹ Kingsley Martin, *Father Figures: A Volume of Autobiography* (London, 1966), p.35.

¹² B. Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity; or, Sketches Historical & Descriptive of the Congregational and Old Presbyterian Churches in the County: The Churches of Southport, Liverpool, and the Isle of Man* (London, 1893), vol. 4, p.163.

¹³ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, pp.202-3.

¹⁴ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, p.201.

recognises that the church exists to save the souls of others'.¹⁵ In contrast to Methodism, however, Congregationalists were not able to order the creation of central missions, but left this to the exertions of local churches and county or city Congregational Unions. The machinery of these unions did not always lend itself to swift action, nor could the income of these efforts be assured. In Yorkshire, almost a decade elapsed between the call for a forward movement and the setting up of an 'Aggressive Committee' to lead a mission in the Middlesbrough area.¹⁶ Wealthier churches could set up missions in deprived areas, or support struggling churches in such areas.¹⁷

While Methodists could establish 'central missions', supported by denominational machinery, and the resolutions of Conference, such a course of action came less readily to Independents, given their tradition of congregational autonomy.¹⁸ Congregational Unions began to play an expanded role, establishing new mission churches and aiding churches no longer able to maintain themselves, giving these bodies greater power in the lives of the churches.¹⁹ This was not only deplored by a number of Congregational ministers, but had an effect on churches forced to rely on such help. For a church which had been founded as a self-supporting spiritual community, or one which had achieved this status through the sacrifices of its members, to appeal for outside assistance was not always easy.

The ministry of John Vyrnwy Morgan (1861-1925) at Burlington Street Congregational Chapel, Liverpool, was only two years in duration, lasting from 1889 to 1891. At the conclusion of his pastorate, however, it was stated that Morgan and his wife had 'done wonders' in a challenging area.²⁰

¹⁵ W. B. Selbie, *The Life of Charles Silvester Horne* (London, 1920), pp.73-4.

¹⁶ Francis Wrigley, *The History of the Yorkshire Congregational Union: A Story of Fifty Years 1873-1923* (London, no date), pp.63-8.

¹⁷ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, p.203; Edward E. Cleal, *The Story of Congregationalism in Surrey* (London, 1908), pp.232-3.

¹⁸ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, pp.108-9.

¹⁹ Leslie Stannard Hunter, *John Hunter, D.D.: A Life* (London, 1922), p.215.

²⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 2 February 1892.

Formerly a middle-class neighbourhood inhabited by tradesmen and builders, containing a significant Welsh population, the character of the Vauxhall district had changed by the late nineteenth Century. Much of the old population had left the city for the suburbs, leaving houses to be subdivided as tenements. The Welsh population moved to Everton and Toxteth, and were replaced by Irish immigrants, already committed to a very different form of Christianity. It has been estimated that by 1883 twelve hundred of the fifteen hundred registered voters in the Vauxhall Ward were Irish.²¹ For the Congregationalists and other Protestant Nonconformists, this meant a contraction in income as well as the size of congregations, as one-time stalwarts migrated to suburbia. Those who remained felt like strangers in their home; public houses proliferated, and more dubious means of passing leisure time still were not unknown.

The chapel at Burlington Street was older than the congregation. Originally constructed in 1829 for the use of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists,²² who possessed a considerable number of adherents in Liverpool, it had been acquired by the Congregationalist Church meeting at Crescent Chapel, Everton, as a mission station in 1859. The Revd James Mahood (1822-1906), a city missionary active in the area since 1851, had been chosen to lead the new work.²³ The mission was constituted as a church of just over sixty members in 1861, Mahood becoming pastor. A diaconate was appointed to support the work, and by 1869 the Lancashire Congregational Union was able to state that ‘the most glowing anticipations cherished as to this interest’ had been fulfilled, the chapel having ceased to require support from the funds of the Lancashire Congregational Union.²⁴ During Mahood’s long pastorate, the debt on the chapel had been completely paid off, a new organ purchased and classrooms for the Sunday Schools erected, the chapel building being completely modernised. Most significantly for the life of the church, it had become completely independent of the mother church at Crescent Chapel by 1881.²⁵

²¹ P. J. Waller, *Democracy & Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1939* (Liverpool, 1981), p.39.

²² D. Ben Rees, *Labour of Love in Liverpool* (Liverpool, 2008), p.10.

²³ Dr. Williams Library, Surman Index of Congregational Ministers, card 430; B. Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity*, vol. 4, p.185; *Liverpool Mercury*, 22 September 1859.

²⁴ Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity*, vol. 4, p.185.

²⁵ *Liverpool Mercury*, 13 October 1881.

James Mahood's ministry at Burlington Street, his only settled pastorate, lasted twenty-nine years. By the year 1887, however, it was clear that, at the age of sixty-five, he was no longer robust enough to carry on the work in Vauxhall, which required the services of a younger man.²⁶ Initially, his decision was communicated privately to the deacons and church meeting, allowing them to search discreetly for a successor, prior to making a public announcement. A number of young men were called on by the church to preach 'with a view' to assuming the pastorate. Among them was a young Welshman, the Revd John Vyrnwy Morgan.

Born at Cwmafan, South Wales in 1865, the son of a tinsmith, John Morgan had trained for the Congregational ministry at Memorial College, Brecon, meeting his wife, Sarah, the daughter of a Baptist minister in the town.²⁷ His first pastorate had been at Llanwddyn, Montgomeryshire, where his duties had included pastoring a mission church for navvies employed in the construction of the dam and waterworks at what became Lake Vyrnwy. Here, he adopted the middle name Vyrnwy, common practice for Welsh ministers of the period. His pastorate at Llanwddyn came to an end with the conclusion of work on the dam in 1889, and the departure of the workmen.²⁸ Morgan had begun to look for a new charge as 1887 drew to a close.

In late December Vyrnwy Morgan preached for the first time at Burlington Street Congregational Church, Liverpool. In a letter to Ebenezer Williams, the Calvinistic Methodist minister at Llanwddyn, he reported that the engagement had gone well '...and from the conversation the Deacons had with me I have every reason to expect a call'.²⁹ The deacons moved more slowly than Morgan expected, however. James Mahood announced his retirement in August.³⁰ But even after Mahood's final service, no 'call' came. Vyrnwy Morgan found himself facing the prospect of ministerial unemployment, although still hoping to hear from the deacons at Burlington Street.³¹ Married with two

²⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, 9 August 1888.

²⁷ *Tenby Observer*, 14 August 1925.

²⁸ *Liverpool Mercury*, 5 April 1889.

²⁹ National Library of Wales, Acrefair Papers 2716: J. Vyrnwy Morgan to E. J. Williams, 2 January 1888.

³⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 9 August 1888.

³¹ NLW Acrefair 2720: J. Vyrnwy Morgan to E. J. Williams, 20 October 1888.

young sons, Parker and Guthrie, Vyrnwy Morgan was forced to rely on the hospitality of his parents and in-laws, both of whom had limited room for a growing young family. The illnesses of the two boys, including chicken-pox, can only have made the situation more difficult.³²

By February 1889, it was clear that Burlington Street remained interested in the young Welsh preacher. Vyrnwy Morgan was asked to preach on two consecutive Sundays; a sign that the church, which had depended on visiting preachers since November 1888, was seriously considering calling him to succeed Mahood.³³ References were forwarded to influential Liverpool Congregationalists,³⁴ and by the time of the church meeting in mid-March, Morgan was able to report that he had 'done well at Burlington Street', and was 'expecting a unanimous call'.³⁵

The expectation was not misplaced, and by early April, Morgan's letters were full of the logistics of moving his furniture from Llanwddyn and Brecon to Liverpool. His servant from Llanwddyn, Mrs. Bellin, was engaged to assist, while Sarah Morgan remained with her father at Brecon. The strain of the months waiting had caught up with the Morgan family, and they were forced to rest before starting their move to Liverpool.³⁶ The Morgan family arrived in Liverpool on 14 April, receiving a cordial welcome from the members and deacons. The picture he painted of the chapel was rosy:

The deacons telling us that the cause was far in advance of what it has been for many years. The chapel will hold 800 people.

We live in a nice place, four minutes' walk from Stanley Park. We pay £26 free of taxes. We are next door to our landlord. Brother in law to Amen Elias the great builder. They are merchants and very kind too.³⁷

³² NLW Acrefair 2721: J. Vyrnwy Morgan to E. J. Williams, 26 December 1888.

³³ NLW Acrefair 2725: J. Vyrnwy Morgan to E. J. Williams, 20 February 1889.

³⁴ NLW Acrefair 1864: George Oliver Jones to E. J. Williams, 25 February 1889.

³⁵ NLW Acrefair 2726: J. Vyrnwy Morgan to E. J. Williams, 18 March 1889.

³⁶ NLW Acrefair 2727: J. Vyrnwy Morgan to E. J. Williams, 3 April 1889.

³⁷ NLW Acrefair 2728: J. Vyrnwy Morgan to E. J. Williams, 15 April 1889.

In spite of the kindness of the people, Morgan was painfully aware that his circumstances were less than ideal:

The only difficulty we feel at present is that we are short of money. The friends here made a little among themselves.

But our expenses on gas fittings, paying for baggage and furniture & have been very great. There are many things we require but cannot have them.

In fact we are absolutely penniless & have nothing to go on with.³⁸

These circumstances must have caused Vyrnwy Morgan to feel sympathy with the population of the Vauxhall district, where the chapel was situated. An area of much social deprivation, it had been described as ‘one of the hardest places for Christian work that can be found’.³⁹ One of the supporters of the cause described the area as ‘a district full of evil’, observing that it had ‘yielded the largest crop of crime of any district in the city, or probably in the county of Lancashire’.⁴⁰ Slums surrounded the chapel, which had been given up by the Calvinistic Methodists in favour of a building in the more salubrious surroundings of Netherfield Road, closer to where the bulk of its congregation had moved.⁴¹

J. Vyrnwy Morgan preached his first sermon as pastor of Burlington Street Congregational Church on 17 April 1889, the recognition services taking place on Sunday 26 May. His brother, David Morgan, then between pastorates, spoke at both services, and John Thomas, veteran minister of Tabernacle Welsh Independent Chapel, chaired the special meetings in connection with Morgan’s settlement, held on 28 May, which was addressed by numerous representatives of Liverpool Congregationalism.⁴² It was an auspicious start to a pastorate in a difficult area of Liverpool, but Morgan had been assured that he would be working on strong foundations laid by his predecessor. He threw himself into the work, continuing Mahood’s work to prevent the proliferation of

³⁸ Ibid. (underlining in original).

³⁹ Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity*, vol. 4, p.185.

⁴⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 15 October 1890.

⁴¹ Rees, *Labour of Love*, p.240.

⁴² *Liverpool Mercury*, 25 May 1889.

public houses in the neighbourhood by organising opposition to the granting of new licences.⁴³ Addressing a social meeting at the church in October 1890, notable Liverpool Congregationalist businessman and public man William Crosfield⁴⁴ had nothing but praise for Morgan's work in the area, and decision to accept the call to Burlington Street:

No one could spend 15 minutes within the district without encountering sights shocking to look upon, and of which he would hesitate to speak. And this was the neighbourhood into which Mr. Morgan had cast his lot and determined to labour. He (Mr. Crosfield) had done nothing to encourage him to come from the bracing atmosphere of the Welsh hills to work in Vauxhall, Liverpool. Mr. Morgan had identified himself with the workmen engaged in the Vyrnwy Valley, whence Liverpool, at no distant date it was said, would receive her water supply. They would remember this service of Mr. Vyrnwy Morgan, and as from the Vyrnwy Valley would flow beautiful fresh water, Mr. Morgan had come amongst them with the most precious of all gifts – the water of life.⁴⁵

It is clear, however, that not all the members of Vyrnwy Morgan's church agreed with these sentiments. The church split, a majority of the membership withdrawing from the congregation.⁴⁶ Led by R. E. Davey, formerly senior deacon at Burlington Street,⁴⁷ the seceders met for worship in Albert Hall, adopting the title Burlington Congregational Mission.⁴⁸

Personal differences played a part, as did changes in the conduct of services. Significantly, the leadership of the split included senior members of the congregation and church leadership. This was not the only occasion on which long-serving church officers attempted to obstruct the actions of a new minister. Some ministers sought to remedy this

⁴³ *Liverpool Mercury*, 16 September 1891.

⁴⁴ P. J. Waller, *Democracy & Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1939* (Liverpool, 1981), p.486.

⁴⁵ *Liverpool Mercury*, 15 October 1890.

⁴⁶ Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity*, vol. 4, p.185.

⁴⁷ *Liverpool Mercury*, 8 November 1888.

⁴⁸ *Liverpool Mercury*, 1 November 1890.

by substituting a church council, subject to annual election.⁴⁹ Vyrnwy Morgan, however, sought to run the church by force of personality, weakening his health.

What is clear is that Morgan, inspired by Mearns' *Bitter Cry*, and the poverty of the district, had determined that Burlington Street chapel's role was to bring both spiritual and material relief to the poor of the Vauxhall district. This meant recasting the work of the church in a way which would reach out to the surrounding district, rather than continuing the previous work of the chapel. Andrew Mearns had recommended that tradition should be cast aside in favour of simple and direct action:

The Gospel of the love of Christ must be presented in its simplest form, and the one aim in everything must be to rescue and not to proselytise. Help will be thankfully welcomed from whatever quarter it may come, and help will be freely given to other workers in the same field, if only by any means some may be saved. It is impossible here, and yet, to give details as to the methods by which it is proposed to pursue; suffice it to say that in each district a Mission Hall will be erected, or some existing building transformed into a Hall having appliances and conveniences requisite for the successful prosecution of the Mission. Services and meetings of all kinds will be arranged...⁵⁰

In the changes which he led at Burlington Street, Vyrnwy Morgan followed this prescription closely, introducing concerts and other amusements during the week. The chapel building was renovated, side galleries, no longer required given the diminished congregation, were removed and the chapel repainted, lending a bright and cheerful aspect to the building. In order to expedite the work of transforming the chapel into a mission hall, the money required for this was borrowed. This was by no means unusual; chapels had long had recourse to banks when it came to funding building work. In instance of chapels in poor districts, however, there was always the danger of debt

⁴⁹ Hunter, *John Hunter*, pp.39-40; T. Rhondda Williams, *How I Found My Faith* (London, 1938), pp.42-3.

⁵⁰ Means, *Bitter Cry*, p.71.

becoming an albatross around the neck of the church, hampering its effectiveness, sometimes to the point where the buildings paid for by such loans were in danger of being lost.⁵¹ Morgan was determined that this should not happen at Burlington Street, leading efforts to pay off the new debt on the building, amounting to £170. The *Liverpool Mercury* reported that £140 had been collected by the time that the renovations were completed in May 1891. Donations were received from the leaders of Liverpool Nonconformity, including the Unitarian William Rathbone, formerly MP for the town.⁵²

The pattern of services changed, too. ‘Stringed instruments’ supplemented the organ, and ‘popular afternoon services’ consisting largely of music, accompanied by a short address, were introduced.⁵³ These informal meetings were patterned after the Pleasant Sunday Afternoons, informal services originated by John Blackham, a midlands draper, c.1875, and by the end of the Nineteenth century felt my many to exemplify ‘...all that was original and fresh in Nonconformity’.⁵⁴ Vyrnwy Morgan’s sermons were described as ‘...marked by originality, breadth, and freshness of thought’, a number being issued as pamphlets by the church.⁵⁵ Among the speakers at the multiplying church functions was Sarah Morgan, who at times acted as unofficial co-pastor with her husband, occasionally delivering the evening sermon, freeing Vyrnwy to speak elsewhere. That she was billed as ‘a Lady Preacher’ indicates that the novelty of this situation was appreciated by the church.⁵⁶

The role played by Sarah Morgan was an unusual one for this period, but it was not wholly unknown. Women had spoken on Congregationalist platforms before, and were just beginning to be accepted as occasional speakers in Congregational pulpits. Ella Sophia Armitage, wife of a Yorkshire Congregational Minister, had first preached in

⁵¹ For example Splott Road Baptist Chapel, Cardiff, was forced to issue an immediate appeal for fifty pounds in July 1902, the pastor observing of the membership: ‘the debt is more than these people can bear, and unless a worthy effort is made to keep them on their feet, I am afraid that the end will be for them to give up in despair and leave the premises in despair’ (Glamorgan Archives: Lord Pontypridd Papers XXV.6: R. Jenkins to Sir Alfred Thomas, 15 July 1902).

⁵² *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 May 1891.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, p.211; McLeod, *Class and Religion*, p.65.

⁵⁵ *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 May 1891.

⁵⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, 25 July 1891.

April 1891,⁵⁷ and by 1898, a correspondent for *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* was able to observe that '[a]mong the Nonconformists... there are many women preachers', listing a Congregationalist sister of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the wife of John Lawson Forster, a London Congregational minister, and Sarah Morgan.⁵⁸ The Morgans did not rest content with efforts to bring the poor into Burlington Street Chapel. Husband and wife took a leading part in the movement to reduce the hours of shop assistants, addressing public meetings of the Shop Assistants Union. Vyrnwy Morgan appealed to the public to refuse to shop after six o'clock four nights of the week, in order to show solidarity with this movement.⁵⁹ The appeal which the young minister made for clothing, in order to allow the poor to attend church, as a number were staying away because they could not attend respectably clad, indicates a further avenue of social service explored by Vyrnwy Morgan.⁶⁰

John Vyrnwy Morgan's efforts were applauded by the *Liverpool Mercury*, which described the changes at Burlington Street in glowing terms. After deploring the way in which Liverpool Congregationalism seemed to be losing touch with the poor one reporter observed:

...at Burlington Street, under the ministry of the Rev. Vyrnwy Morgan, a heroic effort is being made, in the teeth of innumerable difficulties, to remedy this evil. A forward movement has been started, on the same line as that of Mr. Hugh Price Hughes, in London....⁶¹

The Forward Movement of Hugh Price Hughes, a leading Wesleyan minister in London, was the attempt made by that denomination to address the challenge posed by the *Bitter*

⁵⁷ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, p.222.

⁵⁸ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 13 February 1898. It must be noted, however, that all the women preachers in Congregationalism mentioned during this period were married to ministers, and admitted to the pulpit in virtue of this. Indeed, the first woman ordained into the Congregational ministry, Constance Coltman, was ordained to a joint pastorate with her husband (Elaine Kaye, *The History of the King's Weigh House: A Chapter in the History of London* (London, 1968), pp.131-2).

⁵⁹ *The Woman's Penny Paper*, 6, 13 December 1890.

⁶⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 May 1891.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Cry, bringing their home mission work into sharper relief than hitherto. As with Mearns' suggested method of reaching the people, it involved the construction of mission halls in districts perceived as 'spiritually destitute'.⁶² It also required wealthy suburban congregations to lend considerable financial aid to inner-city work, recognising that missions to the poor were unlikely to be self supporting.⁶³

In considering the practicalities of saving the souls of the urban poor, the business of finding funds was of paramount importance. Vyrnwy Morgan's efforts to reorganise the Burlington Street church as a Congregational Mission to the poor did not come cheap, and many of the wealthier members of the church had left. At a point when the income of the church was dropping, its expenditure was rising sharply. In spite of the swift reduction in the debt of the chapel after the rebuilding work of 1891, by December a debt of over a hundred pounds was reported, bazaars being held in an attempt to reduce this to manageable levels.⁶⁴ The only remedy to hand was the writing of religious begging letters. Morgan appealed to richer Congregational churches in Liverpool to give aid to their poorer compatriots.⁶⁵ Samuel Smith, another former Liverpool MP, asked the city's elite to lend their aid to the mission, rather than confining their munificence to their own neighbourhoods.⁶⁶ While the connexional structure of the Methodists allowed the diverting of funds to missions, for an independent Congregational Church, such as Burlington Street, fundraising was proving more problematic, and the need to raise money could only blunt the church's efforts to reach out to the poor. The obvious course of action; becoming a central mission of the Lancashire Congregational Union was ruled out by the fact that the Union did not wish to take it on.

In late September of 1891, it was reported that Vyrnwy Morgan had received a unanimous invitation to assume the pastorate of Hannah Street Congregational Church, in

⁶² W. J. Townsend; H. B. Workman & George Eayrs (eds), *A New History of Methodism* (London, 1910), vol I, pp.460-1; Alan Brooks, *West End Methodism: The Story of Hinde Street* (London, 2010), pp.91-6.

⁶³ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity* (Cardiff, 1999), p.139.

⁶⁴ *Liverpool Mercury*, 3 December 1891.

⁶⁵ *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 May 1891.

⁶⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, 3 December 1891.

the Butetown district of Cardiff.⁶⁷ Like Burlington Street, this was a church built in an area deserted by the commercial elite in favour of the suburbs.⁶⁸ However, the work at Burlington Street was not yet self-supporting, Morgan's vision of the church receiving a substantial endowment from the wealthier churches of Liverpool, allowing it to function as an independent entity having not been realised.

However, Vyrnwy Morgan consented to accept the call from Hannah Street, which he saw as providing the same opportunities as Burlington Street, without the mounting financial difficulties of the latter chapel. On the first of February, 1892, Vyrnwy and Sarah Morgan took their leave of the Burlington Street Congregation. William Crosfield chaired the farewell meeting, at which the Morgans were presented with illuminated addresses of thanks from the congregation, and a gift of money to help with their moving expenses. All the speakers described Vyrnwy Morgan's ministry at Burlington Street as a success, the *Liverpool Mercury* describing the proceedings:

Mr. Morgan has during his comparatively short mission in that district 'done wonders', and it is only to be supposed that on leaving the district to which he has become a *sine qua non* that he should be the recipient of a testimonial.... The Chairman, in opening the proceedings, spoke of the difficulties which the Rev. and Mrs. Morgan had to encounter in taking charge of such a district as that, and how well they had combated the difficulties.⁶⁹

In spite of the confident note sounded at Vyrnwy Morgan's departure from Burlington Street, his ministry left the church considerably weaker than it had been at his arrival. A description of the church in 1893 starkly illustrates the state of the church:

⁶⁷ *Liverpool Mercury*, 28 September 1891.

⁶⁸ John Williamson (ed.), *History of Congregationalism in Cardiff and District* (Cardiff, 1920), pp.47-8.

⁶⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 2 February 1891.

No successor to Mr. Morgan at Burlington Street has been appointed. For the last five years the church has been in receipt of generous assistance from the funds of the County Union.⁷⁰

The church ceased to have an independent existence, instead being run by a city missionary employed by Huyton Congregational Church on a temporary basis.⁷¹ The group which had left the church continued to worship in public halls, presided over by a 'lay pastor', and dependent on visiting preachers.⁷²

Given the praise accorded to Morgan on his departure, it may be asked why Morgan had decided to leave Burlington Street. The strength and appeal of a call to his native Wales cannot be wholly dismissed. However, it is significant that, looking back in 1898, he described only his first ministry, at Llanwddyn, as 'happy'.⁷³ Vyrnwy Morgan's health collapsed shortly after leaving Burlington Street, and he was unable to take charge of Hannah Street.⁷⁴ Like Charles Lemoine, successor to Eustace Conder at East Parade, Leeds, another minister grappling with the problems of an inner city church, Morgan had been 'a restless force',⁷⁵ and spent himself freely, if not always wisely, in prosecuting his designs for his church.

Vyrnwy Morgan's three years at Burlington Street can by no means be characterised as an unqualified success. His plans for the church alienated a number of long-established worshippers and when he left the church was unable to call a successor for lack of funds, quickly losing its independent condition altogether; if the criteria for ministerial success are to be defined as strengthening the financial condition of the church and increasing its membership, then Vyrnwy Morgan's pastorate at Burlington Street was a failure.

⁷⁰ Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity*, vol. 4, p.185.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Liverpool Mercury*, April 21 1894. By 1911, this had been recognised as a Congregational church in its own right ('Liverpool: Churches', *A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 4* (1911), pp. 43-52. URL: [http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=41374&strquery=Burlington Street Congregational Chapel](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=41374&strquery=Burlington+Street+Congregational+Chapel) Date accessed: 09 December 2010).

⁷³ J. Vyrnwy Morgan (ed.), *The Cambro-American Pulpit* (New York, 1898), p.585.

⁷⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 13 February 1892.

⁷⁵ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, p.98.

However, it must be noted that this was not the standard of success which Vyrnwy Morgan set for himself. He led the church in a determined effort to reach out to the wider community around Burlington Street, treating financial and membership concerns as of secondary importance to the work of social and Gospel outreach. The afternoon services and sacred concerts did attract worshippers; however, they were not of the sort likely to put the church on a sound financial footing. Vyrnwy Morgan, with the leaders of Liverpool Congregationalism, recognised this, but beyond appealing for help from more prosperous congregations, and individuals, he could do nothing.

It must also be asked whether any other minister could have solved the problems of Burlington Street. These were by no means unique to the chapel under Vyrnwy Morgan's ministry. Indeed, Andrew Mearns' example of his suggested remedy for the social ills of the Victorian City, the mission hall at Colliers' Rents, Southwark, had been bought by the London Congregational Union, and the mission maintained by Union funds, rather than the membership.⁷⁶ Other chapels in inner-city areas, such as Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel, and Whitefield's Tabernacle, Tottenham Court Road, struggled on for a while longer, before accepting substantial outside help from denominational funds, but by the early years of the Twentieth Century were being run as missions, rather than independent churches, in spite of the commitment of both churches to the ideal of independency. As in the case of Burlington Street, the failure to clear debts incurred in the course of modifying the church buildings was an important motive in applying for help.⁷⁷ Other examples are numerous, indicating that the growth of cities and the pattern of middle-class migration to the suburbs presented a strong challenge to the Congregational principles when it came to maintaining a presence in the inner cities, given its strength among these classes. Some churches, for example Penn Street Congregational Church, Bristol, were able to buck the trend of urban change forcing churches in affected areas to seek outside aid, and remain independent through the influence of outstanding

⁷⁶ Edward E. Cleal, *The Story of Congregationalism in Surrey* (London, 1908), pp.62-3.

⁷⁷ Faith Bowers, *A Bold Experiment: The Story of Bloomsbury Chapel and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church 1848-1999* (London, 1999), pp.229-31; Selbie, *Life of Charles Silvester Horne*, pp.133-4.

personalities.⁷⁸ However, for many small churches, located in slum districts, the choice faced was between aid from denominational bodies, transfer to the suburbs, or extinction.⁷⁹

The fact that the congregation at Burlington Street, which had issued a unanimous call to Vyrnwy Morgan, split during his ministry indicates that the enfeeblement of the Congregational Church at Burlington Street was not wholly due to the changing character of the district. The work of the mission was further weakened by the creation of a second Burlington church, led by senior members of the chapel. This is a reminder that the changing approach to reaching the urban poor did not meet with universal approval, and that changes designed to bring in non-churchgoers could be the means of losing, or at least dividing, an existing congregation.

The changes which Morgan introduced were by no means unique or shocking. In redecorating the chapel and taking down unwanted galleries, he was largely following the advice of Andrew Mearns' *Bitter Cry*,⁸⁰ while the Sunday afternoon services followed the pattern of what would later be known as 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoons', offering light entertainment of a religious character in place of the Public House or Music Hall.⁸¹ This provision of alternative amusements was the other side of the movement to restrict the number of Public Houses in a district, and campaigns for the restriction of working hours; both of which Vyrnwy Morgan took an active part in during his time in Liverpool. Similarly, his attempts to clothe the populace of the district, recognising that there were those who would not attend a church because of their material condition, showed an

⁷⁸ Ignatius Jones, *Bristol Congregationalism: City and Country* (Bristol, 1947), pp.27-8. Founded by followers of George Whitefield in 1839, the majority of the congregation at Penn Street, located in a challenging urban neighbourhood, refused to follow their pastor in a move to the suburbs. The old church continued, through a joint pastorate with another chapel, but was restored to stand-alone strength under the ministry of W. Pedr Williams, from 1885 to 1889.

⁷⁹ Barry M. Doyle, 'Gender, Class and Congregational Culture in Early Twentieth Century Norwich', *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, vol. 5 (1995), p.319. In the case of Norwich, a medium-sized city, the migration of the churches, as distinct from the congregations, to the suburbs did not start until after the Great War. Doyle, however, recognises this as unusual. For an illustration of the opposite tendency, see Ignatius Jones, *Bristol Congregationalism: City and Country* (Bristol, 1947).

⁸⁰ Mearns, *Bitter Cry*, p.71.

⁸¹ Doyle, 'Gender, Class and Congregational Culture', p.325.

awareness that the practical needs of the working classes had to be addressed as well as their moral and spiritual state.

The three year pastorate of John Vyrnwy Morgan at Burlington Street cannot be said to have ended satisfactorily, in that the church was unable to maintain an existence separate from outside aid. However, it must be asked whether a church in a slum district such as Vauxhall, where the majority of the churchgoing population belonged to another communion, possessed an independent future, in the absence of a local church leadership, or an outstanding preacher, able to draw hearers from beyond the limits of the district in which the church was located. Certainly, Vyrnwy Morgan's vision for the church did not see it as standing alone but, after the pattern of *Bitter Cry*, as a mission, drawing its support from well-wishers outside the district, and especially from the richer churches of the denomination. In view of this, and the decision of Vyrnwy Morgan to leave Liverpool after only three years' work, the fact that Burlington Street Chapel reverted to the status of a mission station under the auspices of another chapel, is unsurprising, as well as illustrative of the challenge to Congregational Churches posed by the growing physical separation between rich and poor in the larger cities of Victorian Britain.