

# THE VICTORIAN EVANGELICAL SHAFTESBURY: A SON OF THE CLAPHAM SECT OR A BROTHER OF THE RECORDITES?

*David Furse-Roberts*

*The public life of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury began as the largely postmillennial Clapham Sect drew to a close, and continued on through the rise of a trenchantly Protestant premillennial generation of evangelicals, whose views were promoted through The Record newspaper. This article explores the continuities, priorities and personal influences through Shaftesbury's life.*

Describing himself as an 'Evangelical of the Evangelicals' in the twilight of his life, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–1885) maintained a steadfast loyalty to the religious tradition of Anglican Evangelicalism throughout his long public career.<sup>1</sup> Born into an aristocratic lineage hitherto associated with a formalistic and spiritually lukewarm breed of Anglicanism, the Seventh Earl would emerge as an unlikely standard-bearer of this doctrinally orthodox and spiritually vibrant evangelical strain of Anglicanism in the Victorian age.<sup>2</sup> Whether it was in his patronage of the British and Foreign Bible Society, his parliamentary crusade against High Anglican ritual, or in his designated role as Lord Palmerston's appointer of Church bishops, the Earl never ceased to advance and defend the interests of this religious tradition in the political and ecclesiastical spheres of Victorian life. With his life spanning multiple generations, Shaftesbury witnessed the transformation of English Evangelicalism from the rationalist, measured and postmillennial variety of the Clapham Sect generation to the more strident and premillennial version of the Recordites.<sup>3</sup> This therefore begged the question as to which strand of Evangelicalism Shaftesbury best represented, at least in his public life.

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1884, Shaftesbury told his biographer, Edwin Hodder, that 'I am an Evangelical of the Evangelicals. I have worked with them constantly, and I am satisfied that most of the great philanthropic movements of the century have sprung from them. I stand fast by the teachings of the party, but I am not, and never have been, a leader of that party.' Edwin Hodder, ed., *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury KG*, Vol III (London: Cassell, 1886; repr., Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Best, *A Biography of A.A. Cooper: 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1964), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785–1865* (Oxford, New York: OUP, 2001), p. 10. 'Recordite' was a term popularly assigned to the succeeding generation of Victorian Evangelicals who identified with the *Record* Newspaper and its promulgation of a militant and premillennial form of Evangelicalism.

While the Earl evidently resembled the Anglican evangelical spirit of his own Victorian day, best exemplified by the *Record* newspaper and its sympathisers, it is also true he was the legatee of an earlier form of this religious tradition popularised by the London-based ‘Clapham Sect’ of the 1790s–1830s. This paper will seek to illuminate how the evangelical Shaftesbury imbibed the ethos and guiding principles of the Clapham Sect, whilst at the same time, attuning his Evangelicalism to the temperament and emphases of his Recordite contemporaries.

Before discussing Shaftesbury’s identification with the distinct ‘Clapham Sect’ and ‘Recordite’ schools of Anglican Evangelicalism identified by Boyd Hilton and Donald Lewis, it is instructive to briefly delineate their common theology as well as their obvious differences.<sup>4</sup> The Anglican evangelical expression of Protestantism took root with a religious revival bursting forth on the English scene from the 1730s through the dynamic preaching activity of the Wesley Brothers and Whitfield.<sup>5</sup> Like its Puritan antecedent of the seventeenth century, Anglican Evangelicalism represented an energetic, popular revival of orthodox Protestant Christianity which sought to vigorously reassert the core doctrines of the sixteenth century Reformation which lay at the heart of authentic Christianity. In common with the Evangelicalism of both the Clapham and Recordite generation, Shaftesbury’s own faith embodied many of these doctrinal fundamentals:

He [Shaftesbury] believed in the doctrine of the total depravity of the human heart by nature; in the necessity of a ‘new birth’ through the ‘revelation to each individual soul, by the agency of the Holy Spirit and the Word, of the great saving truths of the Gospel of the grace of God, by which the understanding is spiritually enlightened and the character transformed.’ He believed in the Christian life as a humble, ‘continuous trust in the Atoning Blood,’ a simple faith in Scripture, a constant prayerfulness, and a recognition of the Hand of God in all the events of life.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, the Earl and his fellow Evangelicals regarded the primacy of Scripture and its application as the principal doctrine distinguishing their breed of Anglicanism from either Catholic or liberal forms, each of which were seen as compromising the supreme authority of Scripture. Hence this evangelical disposition helped account for the antipathy of Shaftesbury and his Victorian generation of Recordites towards Roman Catholicism

<sup>4</sup> In *The Age of Atonement*, Hilton actually uses the terms ‘moderate’ and ‘extreme’ to denote the Claphamite and Recordite factions of Evangelicalism respectively.

<sup>5</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, III: p. 4.

and Anglican Ritualism on the one hand, with their excessive emphasis on adhering to the received precepts of church tradition; and rationalism on the other hand, which contended that Scripture needed to be interpreted in light of human reason and contemporary scientific developments.

Whilst sharing a common theological thread, thereby ensuring a recognisable degree of continuity in doctrine and practice between the two generations of English Evangelicalism, cracks began to surface in the Anglican evangelical landscape. From about the 1820s and 1830s, a new evangelical generation succeeded that of Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect. Whilst retaining many of the same core beliefs and approaches of the Clapham generation, these new Evangelicals were decidedly more militant and spirited in temperament exhibiting an emotional and enthusiastic embrace of the faith in contrast to the somewhat tempered and rationalist approach of their Clapham forebears.<sup>7</sup> In emphasis and strategy, they differed from the Claphamites in that they were frequently on the *defensive* as well as being on the *affirmative*; accordingly they channelled greater energy into countering forces perceived as inimical to Evangelicalism such as Tractarianism, Roman Catholicism and rationalism. Commonly dubbed the ‘Recordites,’ these Evangelicals promulgated their views through the fiercely evangelical *Record* newspaper founded in 1828.<sup>8</sup> The rise of this new generation of Anglican Evangelicals was buoyed by a combination of economic anxieties, Catholic Emancipation, constitutional crises, cholera and other ‘signs of the times’ that were widely interpreted as divine interventions.<sup>9</sup> Owing to anxieties about such ferment, the premillennial doctrine of an imminent Second Coming preceding the thousand year reign of Christ on earth broadly appealed to these Evangelicals. This contrasted with the postmillennial eschatology of their predecessors.

## The Pivotal Significance of the Clapham Sect

The Clapham Sect of the 1790s–1830s, however, represented the first reservoir of evangelical Anglicanism from which Shaftesbury imbibed his religiosity. Although the Earl was not known to have had any formal ties with the Sect, he identified with its ethos of public-spirited Christianity. With the evangelical movement having gained traction amongst the professional classes of the established church, various evangelical professionals in the 1790s had gravitated towards each other to form a fraternity inspired to breathe forth the spirit of ‘vital religion’ into English

---

<sup>7</sup> Donald M. Lewis, *Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828–1860* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Josef L. Altholz, ‘Alexander Haldane, The Record, and Religious Journalism,’ *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring, 1987): p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, pp. 11–12.

public life.<sup>10</sup> Later dubbed the ‘Clapham Sect,’ this network of friends, together with their families, revolved around its unofficial figurehead of William Wilberforce and was based primarily in the London suburb of Clapham. As well as Wilberforce, leading figures of the Clapham Sect included fellow MP and abolitionist, Thomas Buxton (1786–1845); the educationalist, philanthropist and writer, Hannah More (1745–1833); the chairman of the East India Company, Charles Grant (1746–1823); the poet and philosopher, Thomas Gisborne (1758–1846) and the editor of the *Christian Observer*, Zachary Macaulay (1768–1838).

This coterie of well-heeled and well-educated, public-spirited Anglican Evangelicals were united by shared moral and spiritual values, by Christian mission and by social activism.<sup>11</sup> According to Tomkins, the Clapham Evangelicals saw their Society’s endeavours as an exciting campaign for a godlier ruling-class who would lead the nation back to God. This vision foreshadowed the role that Victorian public figures, such Shaftesbury, would come to play in exerting evangelical influence from high places. In the spirit of Clapham, the Earl believed that a godly foundation for civil government was vital to the spiritual and moral wellbeing of the nation.

There is no hope of democratic government—none, for until the administration of this country can be founded on truth, religion, the welfare of man and the honour of God (and this both actually and ostensibly) there will be no return to an ancient dignity and happiness—for to think even of such principles is to look for the Garden of Eden...<sup>12</sup>

Thus together with the evangelisation of the common people at the grassroots, the Christianisation of government was central to Shaftesbury and the Clapham Sect’s mission strategy of forging a more Christian England. In their respective capacities as legislators, both Shaftesbury and Wilberforce felt equipped to execute this mission from ‘above’ as reform agents within the nucleus of government.

The activist Evangelicalism kindled by the Claphamites and much of their co-religionist contemporaries did not altogether fade with a succeeding generation of Victorian Evangelicals carrying on the torch of social reform. Well educated and by no means anti-intellectual himself, Shaftesbury nonetheless typified an Evangelicalism that was eminently practical and committed to effectuating palpable moral and material

<sup>10</sup> David Spring, ‘The Clapham Sect: Some Social and Political Aspects,’ *Victorian Studies*, 5:1 (1961: Sept): pp. 35–36.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect: How Wilberforce’s Circle Transformed Britain* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Shaftesbury, ‘Diary Entry,’ 1834–35, p. 85 [Vol II of the original Shaftesbury Diary Collection, Broadland Archives SHA/PD/1]

improvements to the temporal world. Addressing an assembly of young men, Shaftesbury exhorted them to exercise a ‘practical Christianity.’

Christianity is not a state of opinion and speculation. Christianity is essentially practical, and I will maintain this, that practical Christianity is the greatest curer of corrupt speculative Christianity. No man, depend upon it, can persist from the beginning of his life to the end...unless he is drawing from the fountain of our Lord Himself. Therefore, I say to you, again and again, let your Christianity be practical.<sup>13</sup>

Rather than preaching of perfection in the life to come, Shaftesbury saw it as his mission to actively ameliorate much of the poverty and suffering afflicting humanity in the realm of the ‘here and now.’ As Shaftesbury reflected in his memoirs, the notion of providing his fellow human beings simply with spiritual food for their souls without also the physical food for their bodies would be unpalatable. Just as Evangelicalism was adapted by the Claphamites to address the social needs of their day, the practice of this religious tradition by Shaftesbury and a number of his fellow Victorian Evangelicals was aimed towards ameliorating much of the hardship and poverty plaguing British life in the wake of the Industrial Revolution.

The ‘voluntary society’ pioneered by Clapham was a mechanism subsequently adopted by Lord Shaftesbury and his generation of Victorian Evangelicals with alacrity to the extent that they became a defining feature of Victorian Evangelicalism. From the Ragged School Unions and the Church Pastoral Aid Society to the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the voluntary society, together with the institutional church, represented the visible organs of evangelical religion in the Victorian age. Thus in applying traditional evangelical orthodoxy to new strategies, methods and machinery such as the voluntary association, the Evangelicalism of the Clapham Sect represented a vital bridge between the evangelical revival of the 1730s and 1740s and Victorian Evangelicalism. This was of course fundamental to understanding how evangelical belief and practice permeated aristocratic life in Victorian England, a class largely untouched hitherto by the winds of the Wesley-Whitfield revival.

It was not simply the mission strategy and mechanisms of the Clapham Sect which were continued by Shaftesbury and likeminded Victorian Evangelicals but also its ideals and causes. Upon comparing the achievements of the Clapham Sect to the work of Shaftesbury, a continuous thread of evangelical concerns and campaigns running from the former to the latter can be discerned. Shaftesbury’s desire to Christianise British imperialism in India was a concern first entertained by Clapham’s Charles

<sup>13</sup> Shaftesbury, ‘Address to Assembly of Young Men’ (1841) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, I: p. 327.

Grant as early as 1793.<sup>14</sup> The efforts of Claphamites, such as Hannah and Patty More, to establish schooling for the poor in 1789 were continued by Shaftesbury through his involvement in the Ragged School Union.<sup>15</sup> From 1837, the Seventh Earl assumed a lead role within the Church Missionary Society (CMS) just as Wilberforce, Grant and Thornton of the Clapham Sect had done so in the preceding generation.<sup>16</sup> Likewise Charles Simeon's pioneering work with the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews (LSPCJ) was continued in earnest by Shaftesbury, as were the activities of the British and Foreign Bible Society founded with the assistance of Clapham leaders. Even with the antislavery crusade, Shaftesbury brought much of the same abolitionist zeal to the plight of 'climbing boys' and other forms of domestic child-labour that Wilberforce and Buxton had successfully mobilised against indentured servitude in Africa and the Americas.<sup>17</sup> Thus it is apparent that the Clapham Sect represented a seedbed of evangelical social and political causes which Shaftesbury and his generation of co-religionists would cultivate through the ensuing Victorian age. Even through the decades succeeding the demise of the fraternity in the 1830s, the form and thrust of Shaftesbury's Evangelicalism would continue to exhibit the hallmarks of the original Claphamites.

### **Bridging the Generational Divide of English Evangelicalism: Edward Bickersteth and Premillennialism**

Proceeding to the generation sandwiched between the Clapham Sect and Shaftesbury himself, Edward Bickersteth (1786–1850) represented a bridge between the older Clapham-style of Evangelicalism and the new Evangelicalism of the Recordites. As such, Bickersteth personified an interesting amalgam of traits and tendencies of both the old and the new. Like the Claphamites of the preceding generation, the Anglican clergyman became a leader in garnering nationwide, grass-roots support for the multitude of religious societies mushrooming in Britain during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> He continued the pioneering work of the Clapham-aligned Charles Simeon in the CMS, eventually

<sup>14</sup> Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect*, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect*, pp. 75–77.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Turnbull, *Shaftesbury: The Great Reformer* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010), p. 57. Shaftesbury accepted an invitation to serve as Vice-President of the CMS from 1837, an office he held until his death 1885.

<sup>17</sup> Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, III: pp. 82–85.

<sup>18</sup> W.J. Clyde Ervine, 'Bickersteth, Edward,' in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (ed. Donald M. Lewis; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 92.

becoming principal of its missionary training college.<sup>19</sup> Prior to his conversion to premillennialism in the early 1830s, Bickersteth was also a postmillennialist. Indeed it was his conscious assent to Adventism in 1833 which marked a critical turning-point in his Evangelicalism. Bickersteth's shift in eschatology oriented his faith towards a more combative stance reflecting that of the Recordites as he joined the Victorian evangelical crusade against the triumvirate of 'Romanism, ritualism and rationalism.' Notwithstanding the Recordite disposition of his Evangelicalism, particularly in eschatology and temperament, the clergyman never lost touch with all of his Clapham roots, especially in his enduring zeal for Christian mission and evangelism amongst the Jews.

Not since the tender nurture he received from the Evangelical Maria Millis, as a young boy, did Shaftesbury receive so much spiritual mentoring as from Bickersteth.<sup>20</sup> Preserved records of correspondence between the two men suggested the existence of a warm and close rapport between the elder clergyman and the rising statesman. Essentially, this personal friendship acted as a conduit through which the influence of Recordite Evangelicalism on Bickersteth would then be transmitted to Shaftesbury. Upon reading through the various journal entries and correspondence penned by Bickersteth, it is apparent where much of the inspiration lay behind the public postures Shaftesbury adopted on a range of issues including the honouring of the Sabbath, support for Christian mission, concern for the poor, an antipathy towards both Tractarianism and Roman Catholicism, and the embrace of a 'denominationally inclusive' evangelicalism seeking to build bridges with fellow evangelicals outside the established church.<sup>21</sup>

Accordingly, Shaftesbury's premillennial eschatology, together with his closely related concern for the conversion of Jews to Christianity, was heavily indebted to the outlook of his spiritual mentor. Bickersteth himself came to embrace premillennialism in the early 1830s believing that its view of prophecy best accorded with the scriptures.<sup>22</sup> In short, the doctrine of premillennialism affirmed that the second coming of Christ would *precede* the Millennium (that is, the one thousand year reign of Christ on earth).<sup>23</sup> Premillennialism gained currency in English evangelicalism broadly with the terror of the French Revolution helping

<sup>19</sup> Ervine, 'Bickersteth, Edward,' p. 92.

<sup>20</sup> Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, I: p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Bickersteth, 'Journal Entry' (24 January 1846) in *Memoir of the Rev. Edward Bickersteth*, Vol: II (ed. Thomas R. Birks; London: Harper Bros, 1851; repr., Memphis: General Books LLC, 2009), p. 171. In his efforts to foster pan-evangelical unity, Bickersteth was responsible for helping to found the Evangelical Alliance in 1846.

<sup>22</sup> Birks, *The Memoir of the Rev Edward Bickersteth*, II: p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Birks, *The Memoir of the Rev Edward Bickersteth*, II: p. 25.

to fan prophetic speculation about the 'end times.'<sup>24</sup> Owing to anxieties about such ferment, the premillennial doctrine of an imminent Second Coming appealed to such evangelicals who increasingly interpreted day-to-day political events in prophetic Biblical terms. This outlook contrasted with the more postmillennial eschatology of their Clapham predecessors who maintained that the second coming of Christ would *succeed* a fixed interval of a thousand years. On eschatological matters, Bickersteth represented a critical departure from the postmillennial outlook of the older Claphamite Evangelicalism by embracing the newer, emerging Adventism of the Recordite Evangelicals.

Drawing from the ideas of Bickersteth, Shaftesbury typified this Adventist spirit with his frequent and earnest petitions for the return of Christ.

There is very little seeming, and no real, hope for mankind but in the Second Advent...when there shall be 'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and goodwill towards men,' even so come, Lord Jesus!<sup>25</sup>

Although Shaftesbury, by his life and example, stressed the imperative of doing everything possible to better the human condition in the present world, he expressed the premillennial conviction that it was only in the second coming of Christ that the ultimate hopes of humanity would be realised. By adopting Bickersteth's premillennialism as his own, Shaftesbury configured his Evangelicalism into a more Recordite mould. Like that of his mentor, the tenor of his Evangelicalism became increasing militant and uncompromising. While a young Shaftesbury had joined forces with the Claphamites to support Catholic Emancipation in 1829,<sup>26</sup> the Earl's subsequent denunciations of Popery both inside and outside the parliament echoed the strident Protestantism of the Record. His deep-seated suspicion and antipathy towards scientific rationalism and higher biblical criticism also reflected Recordite attitudes.<sup>27</sup>

Typically axiomatic to a premillennial outlook was a concerted drive to bring the original inhabitants of Israel, the Jews, to a saving faith in

<sup>24</sup> Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (New York: CUP, 2010), p. 37

<sup>25</sup> Shaftesbury, 'Diary Entry' (25 December 1842) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, I: pp. 441-442.

<sup>26</sup> Shaftesbury, 'Diary Entry' (5 February 1829) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, I: pp. 109-110. Although Shaftesbury warned that Catholic Emancipation was a measure 'pregnant with danger,' he rejoiced in what he saw as its 'high expediency.'

<sup>27</sup> Shaftesbury, 'Diary Entry' (29 August 1863) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, III: p. 18. In so far as it sought to 'govern the destinies of the human race,' Shaftesbury denounced modern science for putting itself 'on a par, at least, with God.'

the gospel. The priority of mission amongst the Jews, however, was never an exclusively premillennial project with postmillennial Evangelicals, such as Simeon, responsible for pioneering evangelistic outreach to the Jewish people.<sup>28</sup> Thus given that outreach to the Jews was one of those evangelical objectives which transcended the generational divide between Claphamites and Recordites, it was a mission embraced with equal fervour by the transitional figures of Bickersteth and Shaftesbury. Like premillennialism, this resurgent interest in the Jews and Judaism had been integral to the response of Evangelicals to the political turmoil of the French Revolution. Accordingly, prophetic commentators insisted that the Jews were ‘God’s timepiece’—the key to understanding the prophetic speculations.<sup>29</sup> Even after the French Revolution had abated, evangelical momentum for the Jewish cause remained strong with British Evangelicals in the early nineteenth century, feeling with special power the injunction that the Christian gospel should be preached (in the words of Paul in Romans 1:16 KJV), ‘to the Jew first.’<sup>30</sup> Such momentum could be attributed to three factors; first, the influence and notable impact of German-speaking Pietism in the English speaking evangelical world at the turn of the nineteenth century; second, the attitude of the older generation of English evangelical leadership to the LSPCJ and to the issues of Jewish conversion and restoration; and third, the initiative and involvement of converted Jews whose leadership was crucial to the conversionist cause and to evangelical perceptions of the Jews as a group with a national, Hebrew identity.<sup>31</sup>

The prominence the Scriptures gave to the salvation of the Jews, according to Bickersteth, was inescapable. In practical efforts to support the mission to the Jews, Bickersteth immersed himself in the work of the LSPCJ and, together with Lord Shaftesbury, would enthusiastically support the establishment of a Protestant bishopric in Jerusalem. Conceding that he arrived somewhat later as a convert to the Jewish cause, Bickersteth reflected:

Engaged for many years in the work of promoting missions to the Gentiles, my mind was but little directed toward the Jews; but having since been enabled to give more consideration to the Divine testimony concerning them, I have increasingly seen how plainly, in these momentous times, our God requires His people to care for Israel, and how great is the blessedness of helping forward their salvation.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, pp. 60–61.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Bickersteth, ‘Anniversary Sermon to the London Jews’ Society’ (1834) in Birks, *The Memoir of the Rev Edward Bickersteth*, II: p. 33.

By championing Christian mission to the Jews, Bickersteth could be true to both his Clapham Sect origins and his newfound Recordite sympathies. The cause, after all, was as much that of Simeon as it was of the *Record*.

As England entered the Victorian age, the mantle of lead evangelical advocate for the Jews passed from Bickersteth to Shaftesbury. Typifying the aspirations of various British evangelical and premillennial groups to reunite the Jewish people with their ancient soil, Shaftesbury expressed his heartfelt desire to provide a homeland for the Jews in personal reflections and parliamentary speeches.<sup>33</sup> Penning an article for the *Quarterly Review* in 1838, Shaftesbury enthused about the progress made towards realising this vision:

a more important undertaking has already been begun by the zeal and piety of those who entertain an interest for the Jewish nation. They have designed the establishment of a church at Jerusalem, if possible on Mount Zion itself, where the order of our service and the prayers of our Liturgy shall daily be set before the faithful in the Hebrew language<sup>34</sup>

In addition to his work with the LSPCJ, Shaftesbury's abiding devotion to the Jewish cause was evident in his approach to British Foreign policy, particularly with respect to Near-Eastern affairs. According to Adler, it was these intense religious feelings that motivated the Earl in 1838 to urge Palmerston to appoint a British Vice-Consul for Jerusalem and to extend the consulate's protection to the Jews of Palestine.<sup>35</sup>

### Shaftesbury and Victorian Evangelicalism: Premillennialism, Alexander Haldane and the Record

Having converted to Anglican premillennialism primarily through his elder friend Bickersteth, the Earl's newer evangelical sensibilities would only be reinforced through a subsequent friendship with the premillennial Recordite, Alexander Haldane. Under his influence, Shaftesbury came to personify many of the characteristic traits stemming from premillennial thinking. Embracing the Adventist missionary hope of bringing the gospel to the entire world in anticipation of the Second Advent, Shaftesbury wrote:

I see it, surely I see it; the Gospel will be offered where, in truth, it has never yet been fairly offered, in China and Japan; it will then have been

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Adler, *Restoring the Jews to their Homeland: Nineteen Centuries in the Quest for Zion* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc, 1997), p. 141.

<sup>34</sup> Shaftesbury, 'The State and Prospects of the Jews,' *The Quarterly Review*, Vol. 63, No. 125 (1839): p. 186.

<sup>35</sup> Adler, *Restoring the Jews to their Homeland*, p. 140.

‘preached for a witness to all nations,’ and then will ‘the end come!’  
Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.<sup>36</sup>

As with his zeal for mission, Shaftesbury’s social and political activism was arguably galvanised by Anglican Adventism in the 1840s. Relying upon the premillennial publisher Robert B. Seeley for advice and deferring to his older friend, Bickersteth, who in turn was influenced by the premillennial author Charlotte Elizabeth (Tonna), Shaftesbury’s acceptance of Christ’s return before the Millennium gave an added layer of spiritual urgency to his support for social reforms such as the Ten Hours Bill.<sup>37</sup> The Earl and his fellow premillennialists had interpreted industrial unrest in the early 1840s as signs of God’s displeasure at the neglect of the industrial masses with the Chartist riots erupting in August 1842.<sup>38</sup>

The Earl’s premillennialism and evangelical reorientation had stemmed primarily from his mentor Bickersteth, however, it was the ensuing temperament and outlook of his Evangelicalism which owed much to his developing friendship with Alexander Haldane (1800–1882), the Scottish Presbyterian proprietor and unofficial editor of the influential *Record* Newspaper.<sup>39</sup> Combative in temperament, robustly Calvinist, conservative in political disposition, prophetic, premillennial, anti-rationalist, anti-Catholic and uncompromisingly Protestant, the Presbyterian Haldane came to typify the emergent generation of Anglican Evangelicals in the pre and early Victorian age.<sup>40</sup> Despite retaining his formal Presbyterian identity, his *Record* publication would become the mouthpiece of the new Anglican Evangelicals, just as the *Christian Observer* represented the organ of the old Clapham-generation of Anglican Evangelicals.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the *Record*’s aggressive tone and militant Protestantism contrasted with the *Observer*’s somewhat more moderate and conciliatory tenor. Attuned to the dominant concerns expressed by Shaftesbury and other Evangelicals of the Victorian Age, the *Record* campaigned vocally against Roman Catholicism, Tractarianism and Rationalism whilst stoutly defending Biblical orthodoxy, championing Protestant morality and promoting pan-

<sup>36</sup> Shaftesbury, ‘Diary Entry’ (3 September 1852) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, II: p. 440.

<sup>37</sup> Ella Dzelzainis, ‘Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, Premillenarianism, and the formation of Gender Ideology in the Ten Hours Campaign,’ *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2003): p. 183.

<sup>38</sup> Shaftesbury, ‘Diary Entry’ (18 August 1842) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, I: p. 434.

<sup>39</sup> Anne H. Corsbie, *A Biographical Sketch of Alexander Haldane* (London: Spottiswoode & Co, 1882), p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Ian S. Rennie, ‘Haldane, Alexander,’ in *Blackwell Evangelical Dictionary of Biography*, p. 500.

<sup>41</sup> Lewis, *Lighten Their Darkness*, p. 17.

evangelical unity between Anglicans and Non-conformists.<sup>42</sup> In its ability to amplify the sentiments of Victorian Evangelicals, the *Record* became synonymous with this religious movement, where 'for many people, Evangelicalism meant the *Record*.'<sup>43</sup>

Initially cool towards the *Record* for what he saw as its abrasive and graceless tone, Shaftesbury came to appreciate this bold new mouthpiece of Evangelicalism as a kindred spirit in his own crusade for Protestant truth.<sup>44</sup> Shaftesbury's warming to the newspaper had no doubt been attributable to the premillennialist and defensive temperament of Evangelicalism he had imbibed from Bickersteth. Although Haldane initially had little interest in the humanitarian legislation of Shaftesbury, their shared opposition to Tractarianism in the 1850s brought the two men closer together as strong friends and co-religionists.<sup>45</sup> After the death of Shaftesbury's beloved mentor, Bickersteth, Haldane took his place as his principal 'counsellor and friend.'<sup>46</sup> The two stalwarts of Victorian Evangelicalism collaborated together in the campaign against rationalism and the *Record* proprietor became a useful 'sounding board' for the Earl after he was given responsibility for appointing bishops under the premiership of Lord Palmerston. With Haldane's death in 1882 marking the end of a thirty-five year friendship, Shaftesbury paid tribute to his spiritual soul-mate:

He [Haldane] believed intensely in the Lord Jesus, His power, His office, His work. He intensely loved Him, and ever talked with a holy relish and a full desire for the Second Advent. A long life, one less of personal activity than of religious intellectualism, was devoted to the advancement of Christ's Kingdom and to the temporal and eternal welfare of the human race. His sole hope was in the all-atoning blood of our blessed Saviour; any approach to a doctrine of works was his abhorrence...<sup>47</sup>

In an age where he saw Victorian society increasingly turning away from the 'old paths' of Evangelicalism with the advance of naturalistic science and reason, together with the ascendancy of Higher Biblical Criticism in ecclesiastical ranks, it was Haldane's steadfast and unabashed evangelical Protestantism that Shaftesbury found most appealing.

---

<sup>42</sup> Altholz, 'Alexander Haldane, The Record, and Religious Journalism,' pp. 23–31.

<sup>43</sup> Altholz, 'Alexander Haldane, The Record, and Religious Journalism,' p. 26.

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey B.A.M. Finlayson, *The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury 1801–1885* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), pp. 102–5, 160–1.

<sup>45</sup> Ian S. Rennie, 'Haldane, Alexander,' p. 500.

<sup>46</sup> Altholz, 'Alexander Haldane, The Record, and Religious Journalism,' p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> Shaftesbury, 'Diary Entry' (20 July 1882) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, III: pp. 449–450.

In the continued evolution of Shaftesbury's Evangelicalism, the significance of this close, enduring friendship spanning over half of the Victorian era should not be underestimated. While Haldane simply reinforced attitudes which Shaftesbury had long held and could hardly be said to have revolutionised his religious outlook, he nonetheless helped to shift the Earl's Evangelicalism towards a more strident, uncompromising and combative disposition.<sup>48</sup> This typified the shift in emphasis of British Evangelicalism at large during the Victorian era. Although it had always been a religious movement of a conservative cast, particularly on doctrinal matters concerning the Bible, its *principal* focus had shifted from affirming the need for spiritual and moral reform in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to defending traditional doctrines and paradigms in the Victorian period. In addition to reflecting the influence of premillennial eschatology, this reorientation was a reaction to the ascendancy of competing movements perceived as inimical to evangelical Protestantism. Thus it was Shaftesbury's ongoing crusades against Romanism, ritualism and rationalism, in concert with Haldane's *Record*, which would come to define the strongly conservative essence of his personal faith and that of Victorian Evangelicalism at large during the 1850s and 1860s.

## Conclusion

By the time Shaftesbury entered late middle-age in the 1860s, it was apparent that the flavour of his Evangelicalism palpably reflected that of the Recordite generation. Scathing of Higher Biblical criticism,<sup>49</sup> sceptical of the promises rendered by scientific opinion<sup>50</sup> and fiercely loyal to the Authorised Version of the Bible,<sup>51</sup> Shaftesbury stood for an Evangelicalism which was resolutely orthodox in its adherence to the scriptures, unaccommodating of theological modernism and impenitently opposed to Catholic influence both inside and outside the established church. Beneath this steely Recordite exterior, however, the living core of Shaftesbury's

<sup>48</sup> Finlayson, *The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, p. 320.

<sup>49</sup> Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, III: p. 163. Of Bishop Colenso's book on the Pentateuch, Shaftesbury was quoted by Hodder as describing this work of Higher Biblical Criticism as a 'puerile and ignorant attack on the sacred and unassailable Word of God.'

<sup>50</sup> Shaftesbury, 'Diary Entry' (25 August 1868) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, III: p. 18. Appraising the merits of Victorian scientific explanations for humanity's origin and purpose, Shaftesbury questioned 'how shall we be better, wiser, happier?'

<sup>51</sup> Shaftesbury, 'Correspondence with Professor Selwyn' (1870) in Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl*, III: p. 260. Decrying the revision of the Bible, Shaftesbury praised the Authorised Version as 'that precious, inestimable and holy gift to England.'

Evangelicalism essentially resembled that of the Clapham generation. The causes of Christian mission, education and philanthropy which had animated the Clapham Sect from the 1790s remained with Shaftesbury right up to his death in 1885.<sup>52</sup> The frequent visits to Ragged Schools and the chairing of mission societies continued to dominate the elder Shaftesbury's evangelical witness as much as his parliamentary campaigns against Roman Catholicism and Tractarianism. Given the capacity for Shaftesbury's Evangelicalism to simultaneously accommodate both Clapham and Recordite traits, it is critical not to view these two schools as mutually exclusive. As Ralph Brown argued, there were overriding similarities between the two schools despite their differences; a moderate Calvinist theology, an abiding loyalty to the established church, a devotion to Christian mission and a commitment to social reform were just some of the enduring commonalities.<sup>53</sup> Notwithstanding, Hilton's discernment of a theological and ideological divide between the two generations was indeed useful in illustrating just how Anglican Evangelicalism, and its practitioners such as Shaftesbury, could adjust their core doctrines to the tumultuous economic and social vicissitudes of the nineteenth century.

DAVID FURSE-ROBERTS is a PhD candidate in History at the University of New South Wales (Sydney, Australia) and is completing his doctorate on Lord Shaftesbury and the character of Victorian Evangelicalism.

---

<sup>52</sup> John W. Kirton, *True Nobility; or the Golden Deeds of an Earnest Life. A Record of the Career and Labours of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, A Priceless Example for Youth* (London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1886). Attending the Funeral of Shaftesbury in Westminster Abbey on October 8, 1885, were deputations from the Ragged School Union, the Costermongers' Mission, the London City Mission, as well as numerous other societies and missions with which he had a lifelong involvement.

<sup>53</sup> Ralph Brown, 'Evangelical Social Thought,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (January 2009): pp. 127, 131. Brown suggested that owing to their moderate premillennialism, the Recordites in fact had more in common with the earlier Claphamite generation than with contemporaneous Evangelicals who held to the extreme premillennialism of Edward Irving and the 'Albury circle.'