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EVANGELICALISM
IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
c.1790–c.1900

Edited by
MARK SMITH and STEPHEN TAYLOR

Church of England Record Society

Volume 12

EVANGELICALISM IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND *c.*1790–*c.*1890

A MISCELLANY

Between the end of the eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth evangelicalism came to exercise a profound influence over British religious and social life – an influence unmatched by even the Oxford movement. The four texts published here provide different perspectives on the relationship between evangelicalism and the Church during that time, illustrating the diversity of the tradition. Hannah More's correspondence during the Blagdon controversy illuminates the struggles of evangelicals at the end of the eighteenth century, as she attempted to establish schools for poor children. The charges of Bishops Ryder and Ryle in 1816 and 1881 respectively reveal the views of evangelicals who, at either end of the nineteenth century, had a forum for expressing their views from the pinnacle of the church establishment. The major text, the undergraduate diary of Francis Chavasse (1865–8), also written by a future bishop, provides a fascinating insight into the mind of a young evangelical at Oxford, struggling with his conscience and his calling. Each text is presented with an introduction and notes.

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Mark Smith and Stephen Taylor

THE BOYDELL PRESS

CHURCH OF ENGLAND RECORD SOCIETY

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For
JOHN WALSH

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Preface

In 1999 the Church of England Record Society published its first miscellany volume under the title *From Cranmer to Davidson*. The appearance of that volume reflected a decision by the Society's Council that the time was appropriate to provide a forum for the publication of shorter documents which could not form volumes by themselves. In putting it together a deliberate decision was made to include material from the reformation to the twentieth century, illuminating aspects of the Church's history across the full chronological range of the Society's remit. In the Preface to that volume I made it clear that the Society was committed to publishing further miscellany volumes, but I also stated that these need not necessarily take the form of *From Cranmer to Davidson*. The present volume is the Society's first 'themed' miscellany volume, focusing on a particular period or issue in the history of the Church. I am particularly glad that it has been possible to put together a volume on evangelicalism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as it enables us to give some coverage to a period – the nineteenth century – and a theme – evangelicalism, which hitherto have not received the attention that they merit in the Society's publications. If this volume suggests to any of its readers ideas for further miscellany volumes, the general editor will be very pleased to discuss them.

Over the years I have often found editing to be one of the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of academic life. This volume has been no exception. I am particularly grateful to Mark Smith – the original idea for this volume was his and it has been an enormous pleasure to co-operate with him in putting the volume together. John Walsh, without doubt the most influential historian of eighteenth-century evangelicalism over the last fifty years, was as generous as ever with advice when the project was at the planning stage and has remained supportive throughout. Mark and I have also enjoyed working with an excellent group of contributors, all of whom produced texts which were models of both scholarship and professionalism. They met often tight deadlines without complaint, have been unfailingly helpful in answering queries and kindly generated indexes to their contributions. I am once more grateful to Meg Davies for relieving me of the burden of copy editing the text. Mark Smith wishes to record his thanks to the earl of Harrowby for permission to reproduce material from the Harrowby papers at Sandon Hall and to the British Academy for making a research award which facilitated the completion of the project.

Stephen Taylor
September 2004

Introduction

The evangelical tradition has been, and in the twenty-first century continues to be, one of the most vital expressions of christianity within the Church of England. Since its rise in the eighteenth century, modern evangelical anglicanism has provoked opposition and support, applause and exasperation in almost equal measure. It has exercised a strong appeal for clerics and laypeople, men and women, adults and children. Its adherents have exhibited a wide diversity of methodologies, theologies and spiritualities. They have often disagreed fiercely among themselves while sharing sufficient in common to enable them to recognize each other as belonging within the evangelical fold. Although the Church of England has provided a home for evangelical christianity, the movement has also overflowed the boundaries of the Church. The relationship between the two has, therefore, been marked by a remarkable degree of complexity. Some late Hanoverian high churchmen, for example, opposed evangelical initiatives because they might provide a means for dissenters to subvert the establishment. Conversely, others supported them because they might provide a way for dissenters to rejoin the Church. On the other side of the fence some evangelical anglicans may have continued in the Church pragmatically because they thought it would provide the widest scope for the ministry to which they had been called – it was simply the best boat from which to fish. Others certainly supported the Church conscientiously as the primary means providentially ordained by God for the conversion and pastoral care of the English people. They supported it too because they felt it to be their natural home. Evangelicals were, after all, the heirs of its reformers and theologians, of Cranmer and Hooker. Their doctrines were its doctrines – to be read in its articles and homilies. Indeed for some, evangelicals were *the* true anglicans, exhibiting the Church's expression of the faith in its purest form. No short collection of documents can hope to do justice to a tradition of such size and diversity. Neither can it claim to be representative. What is offered here is instead a sample illustrative of some aspects of that diversity. It covers a period of almost a century from 1799 to 1881 and comprises four different kinds of texts written by rather different kinds of evangelical.

The first of these texts is a collection of manuscript correspondence relating to the 'Blagdon controversy' of 1799–1801. The controversy arose from the attempts of a leading evangelical lay woman, Hannah More, to establish, in the classic mode of later Hanoverian philanthropy, schools for the poor children of her neighbourhood in the Mendips. The correspondence illustrates the depth of suspicion that such lay evangelical initiatives could arouse, especially in a period still haunted by the threat of European revolution. It also shows the tensions that could arise as a result of the close connection between evangelical members of the establishment and nonconformist evangelicals – in this case both the recently separated methodists and the independent William Jay. However, the text is also

illustrative of the firmness with which evangelicals of the school of More and Wilberforce remained attached to the Church of England and their capacity to generate support from ostensibly unlikely quarters. In this case the most prominent of these unlikely supporters was the high church bishop of Lincoln, George Pretyman Tomline, author of the *Refutation of calvinism*.

The second document is a single printed text: the primary visitation charge of Henry Ryder as bishop of Gloucester. Its most obvious significance is its status as the first formal episcopal statement by a modern exponent of the evangelical tradition. It illustrates some of the continuities in both interest and theology between the evangelical and high church schools of the later Hanoverian period – even in areas of controversy. It also reveals some striking differences. These are most apparent in the tone of the charge which took the form of a pastoral exhortation rather than that of the theological disquisition or business statement which was characteristic of most other contemporary charges. Ryder's charge is also illustrative of some of the tensions intrinsic to evangelical episcopacy in the early nineteenth century. Ryder was a man clearly identified with a controverted perspective within the Church and possibly regarded with suspicion on his entry into the diocese. In this context, he sought to deal with ecclesiastical controversy in an even-handed 'diocesan' manner while continuing firmly to maintain his own position on the issues in question.

The third and longest text in the collection is a previously unpublished manuscript: the diary of Francis Chavasse for the years 1865–8. This, in contrast to the *Charge*, is quintessentially a personal and private rather than a public document. It is significant as a record of the early spiritual development of one of the most prominent evangelical leaders of the later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Church of England – Chavasse founded Wycliffe Hall in 1877 and became bishop of Liverpool in 1900. It is also significant for the insight it provides into the spiritual world of a particular kind of evangelical in the mid-nineteenth century – thus complementing the existing historiographical interest in tractarian-inspired high-church spirituality. The diary depicts, albeit with a particular undergraduate intensity, the earnest desire for an ever closer walk with God which characterised much of evangelical anglicanism. It shows, especially via Chavasse's practice of the disciplines of self-examination, a concern for the development of holiness conceived as a personal struggle with sin. This struggle was to be undertaken with the help of the grace of God mediated through faith in the atoning work of Christ, the sacraments of the Church and the practice of appropriate spiritual disciplines. Such a perspective places Chavasse in a long-standing anglican evangelical tradition with links both to puritan spirituality and the holy living traditions of eighteenth-century high churchmanship. It contrasts, however, with the growing contemporary evangelical enthusiasm for the possibility that holiness, like justification, might be received by faith, a view popularized by the influential

Mildmay conferences and Keswick conventions. The diary also displays the tensions inherent in the pursuit of holiness amidst the pleasures and temptations of the world and the delicacy of the judgments with which a tender conscience might be faced in the social circumstances of middle-class and undergraduate life. Finally, and perhaps most vividly, the diary portrays the intimate connexion for evangelicals like Chavasse between the development of an interior spirituality and the activism that continued to be characteristic of mid nineteenth-century evangelicalism.

The final document is a text by perhaps the most prominent anglican evangelical of the later nineteenth century – the first bishop of Liverpool, J. C. Ryle. *First words*, Ryle's address to the first Liverpool diocesan conference of 1881, in contrast to the More correspondence and to Ryder's charge, illustrates the increased security of the evangelical position within the Church of England by this time. However, the statement also dates from a period when anglo-catholic and broad church influence was growing within the Church and evangelicalism may have been felt to have passed its peak. It also concerned an issue – diocesan conferences – that had earlier proved controversial in evangelical circles. As a consequence, *First words* shares with the first two documents in the collection a sense of the tensions intrinsic to the relationship between evangelicals, no matter how firmly they adhered to the establishment principle, and the established Church. Like Ryder, John Ryle, in making a statement to his diocese, was concerned that his tone should be diocesan rather than partisan while at the same time choosing to articulate key evangelical priorities in evangelism. Perhaps most significant in this edition of Ryle's address, however, is its recognition of the potential for flexibility and pragmatism in a late nineteenth-century anglican evangelicalism which has acquired an unenviable reputation for rigidity and oppositionalism.

Individually, each of the documents in this collection provides a starting point for an exploration of a particular facet of the evangelical tradition within the Church of England. Taken together, they illustrate changes in the movement itself and in its relationship with the Church. They are also suggestive of the richness of the material that awaits future students of evangelical anglicanism.

1

**HANNAH MORE AND THE
BLAGDON CONTROVERSY
1799–1802**

Edited by
Anne Stott

Introduction

The so-called Blagdon controversy was a pre-emptive strike by some high churchmen against the growing evangelical movement, represented by the writer and philanthropist Hannah More (1745–1833) and her friends in the Clapham sect.¹ For this reason it is a significant moment in the history of the late Georgian Church of England.

In October 1789, partly at the instigation of William Wilberforce, Hannah More and her sister Martha (Patty) (1750–1819) founded a Sunday school at Cheddar near her home at Wrington in Somerset. Other Sunday schools, adult schools and women's friendly societies soon followed.² Sunday schools were a newly fashionable form of philanthropy for both anglicans and dissenters. The inter-denominational Sunday School Society had been set up in 1785, and by 1789 41,000 pupils were attending its schools. Women were prominent in the venture from the start, and Sarah Trimmer's school in Brentford received the accolade of a visit from Queen Charlotte. In spite of this royal support, Sunday schools were controversial institutions. Critics believed that, by teaching reading, they gave the poor ideas above their station and unfitted them for their lowly occupations. However, their defenders, who included Hannah More's friend, Beilby Porteus, bishop of London (1731–1809), argued that the schools would produce a generation instructed in both the christian religion and the necessity of political obedience,³ and until the loyalist panic of the late 1790s, his arguments were steadily gaining ground.

In sounding out a local parish about the possibility of setting up a school, More had first to find a suitable building. As will be shown, where the local farmers were hostile, this could cause her great difficulty. The school in Cheddar, housed in an unused ox-house, which she rented for six and a half guineas a year, was typical of the type of accommodation provided in the early days. The curriculum was worked out by trial and error. The More sisters taught selected passages from the Bible and the Prayer Book, and also used books provided by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. In addition they wrote their own *Questions and answers for the Mendip and Sunday schools*, which were more explicitly evangelical than the official anglican catechism. The children started school at about the age of 6 (the sisters had to resist pressure from hard-pressed

¹ See Anne Stott, 'Hannah More and the Blagdon Controversy, 1799–1802', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, LI (2000), 319–46; *idem*, *Hannah More. The first Victorian* (Oxford, 2003), ch. 11.

² See Stott, *Hannah More*, ch. 5 and *passim*.

³ Beilby Porteus, *A letter to the clergy of the diocese of Chester concerning Sunday schools* (London, 1786).

mothers who wanted to offload their younger children) and most of them left for domestic service aged 12. Some teenage boys and girls went on to attend evening classes and the more promising could become under-teachers and then masters and mistresses. Although More was eager to allay conservative anxieties by stressing that she taught no writing at her schools, future teachers were almost certainly taught this skill.⁴ The schools were funded by donations, most notably from the wealthy individuals such as the Clapham evangelical, Henry Thornton (1760–1815), the Kentish heiress Elizabeth Bouverie (c. 1726–98), and from Wilberforce himself, who regularly sent £50 per annum. Following Elizabeth Bouverie's death in 1798, Wilberforce and Thornton clubbed together to buy the sisters a chaise; previously, they travelled the tortuous roads on horseback.

The progress of the schools depended to a very great extent on the quality of the teachers. Hannah More spent the spring of every year with friends in the London area, and in the winter her frail health and the state of the roads kept her in Bath. This made it all the more important to hire the right teachers. When she appointed her first mistress for the Cheddar school in the autumn of 1789 she took Wilberforce's advice that she should send for 'a comet', someone in the mould of John Wesley, risky methodist 'enthusiasm' being preferable to the safety of cold formalism. This was controversial advice and would become even more so during the late 1790s when methodism became a separate denomination and the conservative reaction spearheaded by John Gifford's ultra-loyalist *Anti-Jacobin review and magazine* forced evangelical anglicans like More and Wilberforce on to the defensive. In practice Hannah More found it difficult to distance herself from methodism, and years later, More's friend, the Bath dissenting minister William Jay (1766–1853), remembered her saying, 'I find none [but Methodists] seem to do my poor children good beside.'⁵ Her 'methodist' teachers included Sarah Baber at Cheddar, Henry Harvard at Wedmore, and Henry Young at Nailsea. Before she began to teach at Cheddar, Mrs Baber had been involved in a controversial exorcism in Bristol carried out by a group of anglican clergymen with methodist sympathies; Harvard was alleged (perhaps wrongly) to have called the bishops 'Dumb Dogs' and to have distributed methodist literature; Young, a proud quarrelsome character, was in constant dispute with the powerful farmers of his mining parish. At a time when methodism, sometimes in its most radical form, was spreading rapidly in the Mendips, and when the boundaries between methodism and evangelical anglicanism were still blurred, More increasingly ran the risk of being tainted by association with religious (and even political) radicalism.

⁴ Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 168.

⁵ Quoted in *Autobiography and reminiscences of the Rev. William Jay*, ed. G. Redford and J. Angell James (London, 1855), p. 337 n. 338.

Clerical support was always vital to the success of the schools. From the start, More voiced stinging private criticisms of many of the local clergy – the absentee John Rawbone of Cheddar, the old and incapable Henry Penny of Shipham, the eccentric Thomas Gould of Axbridge, the scandalous William Eyre of Wedmore. Using her contacts with the cathedral and chapter of Wells she secured the appointment of the evangelicals John Boak and Thomas Drewitt as successive curates of Cheddar and of James Jones as rector of Shipham. She also secured the temporary use of pulpits for visiting evangelical clergy such as John Venn (1758–1813) and John Newton (1725–1807). By the mid 1790s she had become one of the most influential lay people in the Mendips – a fact that was noted with outrage by local high churchmen such as Archdeacon Charles Daubeny (1745–1827), acutely alive to the perceived dangers of evangelical infiltration.

Anxiety about Hannah More – suspicions about the nature of her churchmanship, and fears that as a mere laywoman she was taking too much on herself – surfaced in 1799 following the publication of her most successful conduct book, *Strictures on the modern system of female education*. In September of that year, Daubeny published *A letter to Mrs Hannah More*, in which he took her to task for her description of christian duties as ‘the natural and necessary’ productions of the ‘living root’ of christian faith.⁶ The September to November issues of the *Anti-Jacobin* followed this up with a review of Daubeny’s *Letter*, in which the Anglo-American loyalist the Revd Jonathan Boucher (1738–1804), who had been carefully primed by Daubeny, accused her outright of ‘calvinism in disguise’.⁷ More’s friends rushed to defend her and in doing so they opened up a theological battle that exposed the developing fault lines between the evangelical anglicans of the Clapham sect on the one hand and the type of high-church opinion represented by Daubeny and Boucher on the other.

Whatever the growing misgivings about More’s activities and her theology, anecdotal evidence suggested that her schools were extremely effective in calming disorderly parishes and in increasing church attendance. It was because of her high reputation that, in the summer of 1795, the curate and churchwardens of Blagdon had begged her to open what would be her eighth school in their impoverished and violent parish. After some hesitation she accepted the request, and appointed as teacher the Nailsea master, Henry Young, in spite of the fact that he was an avowed ‘disciple of John Wesley’. As his quarrel with the farmers showed no sign

⁶ C. Daubeny, *A letter to Mrs Hannah More on some part of her late publication entitled ‘Strictures on female education’* (Bath and London, 1799).

⁷ *The Anti-Jacobin review and magazine*, IV (Sept.–Nov. 1799), p. 255; the reference here is to the master copy of the first six volumes of the *Anti-Jacobin* (P. P. 3596 in the British Library catalogue), which has the names of the contributors inked in. For an overview of this controversy see Stott, *Hannah More*, pp. 228–9.

of dying down, it must have seemed a good move to remove him and allow him to exert his undoubted gifts in a new missionary field. At first, the curate Thomas Bere (d. 1814) was enthusiastic about Young, but in early 1799 his wife wrote to Hannah More complaining of his unofficial evening meetings, which were conducted on lines closely resembling the class meetings of the methodists: this at a time when methodism, in its most radical form, was spreading rapidly throughout the Mendips. Hannah More did not deny Mrs Bere's accusations, and moved to suppress her master's 'excesses'. However, the curate's hostility, if anything, increased, and he continued to undermine Young's work in the parish. In the summer and autumn of 1800, he collected a series of affidavits against Young, and on 12 November he convened a meeting of fellow clergy and magistrates at the George inn at Blagdon. As a result of their deliberations, Young was forced to resign his post and the Sunday school was closed four days later.

However, this was not the end of the matter. Early in 1801, Hannah More's friends (almost certainly with her covert encouragement) began spreading rumours that Bere was theologically unorthodox, and on 17 January he was ordered by his rector, Dr George Crossman (1754–1803), to resign his living. The school re-opened, but Bere refused to step down, much to the embarrassment of his rector, as well as the octogenarian bishop of Bath and Wells, Dr Charles Moss (1711–1802) and his son, also Dr Charles Moss (1763–1811), the diocesan chancellor. After months of mounting acrimony, the ecclesiastical authorities were the first to blink. Bere was reinstated in August, and the school was closed for a second time.

The curate had not been idle during the summer of 1801; between April and September he published three pamphlets, giving his side of the story and abusing Hannah More in increasingly lurid terms.⁸ Two local landowners, the Revd Sir Abraham Elton (1755–1842) and Thomas Sedgwick Whalley (1746–1828), went into print to defend her, but Bere's case was vehemently taken up in the *Anti-Jacobin*.⁹ More was also attacked in further pamphlets, some of them extremely scurrilous,¹⁰ and defended in others.¹¹ The controversy had become a battle for the soul of the Church of England, with neither side willing to take prisoners.

Although the Blagdon school was never re-opened, Hannah More saw off her enemies, and remaining schools continued to flourish. Her national reputation and

⁸ *The controversy between Mrs Hannah More and the curate of Blagdon* (London, 1801); *An appeal to the public on the controversy between Hannah More, the curate of Blagdon, and the Rev. Sir A. Elton* (Bath, 1801); *An address to Mrs Hannah More on the conclusion of the Blagdon controversy* (Bath and London, 1801).

⁹ For the *Anti-Jacobin* attacks on More, see especially vols. IX (1801) and XI (1802).

¹⁰ [William Shaw], *The life of Hannah More with a critical review of her writings, by the Rev. Sir Archibald MacSarcasm, Bart* (London, 1802); Edward Spencer, *Truths respecting Mrs Hannah More's meeting-houses and the conduct of her followers* (Bath, 1802).

¹¹ See, for example, [Thomas Drewitt] *The force of contrast...* (Bath and London, 1801).

her skilful networking of potentially sympathetic bishops gained her valuable allies at her moment of greatest need. Her supporters included the high-church *British critic*, the majority of Mendip clergy, and her new diocesan, Richard Beadon (1737–1824). However, the controversy was a salutary experience, and in future she was to distance herself from the methodists, and be more cautious in the way she expressed her evangelical sympathies.

The controversy sheds much light on the nature of evangelical/high-church relations at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the French revolution and the subsequent revolutionary and Napoleonic wars inspired apocalyptic anxieties in otherwise balanced individuals. It demonstrates deep fractures within the common protestant identity that, according to Linda Colley, was fundamental to the creation of ‘Britishness’. It also shows that J. C. D. Clark’s picture of an undivided anglican political and theological hegemony needs considerable nuancing.¹² Hannah More survived her bruising experience because she had influential high-church allies, and because in the first decade of the nineteenth century there was no united ‘orthodox’ party ready to mount a coherent attack on evangelical entryism. But her enemies proved extremely vocal, and their accusation that she and her fellow evangelicals were potential schismatics – forming a church within a church – was extremely damaging. Tensions were to resurface with the foundation of the Bible Society in 1804, a development that deeply alarmed many (though not all) high churchmen. Evangelical willingness to work with dissenters showed that their ecclesiology differed very radically from that of high churchmen such as Daubeny. The sacraments and the doctrine of the apostolic succession mattered far less to them than the experience of conversion – an experience that united evangelicals and dissenters and set them apart from those who stressed the supreme importance of the ordained ministry and the visible church.

It has recently been suggested that Hannah More had no fundamental theological differences with high churchmen, that she was always an anglican first and an evangelical second.¹³ However, this is not borne out by her correspondence during the Blagdon controversy, where again and again she showed her hostility to what she regarded as the ‘bigoted’ end of the high-church spectrum. The same sentiments cropped up in the many letters she later wrote about the debates on the Bible Society.¹⁴ The inescapable conclusion is that though Hannah More had close

¹² Linda Colley, *Britons. Forging the nation* (New Haven, 1992); J. C. D. Clark, *English society, 1688–1832. Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime* (Cambridge, 1985).

¹³ *Selected writings of Hannah More*, ed. Robert Hole (London, 1996), pp. xxii–xxiv.

¹⁴ For More’s acerbic views on the high-church opponents of the Bible Society, see Anne Stott, ‘Hannah More. Evangelicalism, cultural reformation and loyalism’, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1998, pp. 42–6.

friendships with eirenical high churchmen such as Alexander Knox (1757–1831) and Thomas Burgess (1756–1837), she remained firmly evangelical, and often preferred dissenters to her fellow anglicans. It is surely significant, for example, that in her will she left £100 to the baptist missionaries at Serampore and nothing at all to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

More's extensive correspondence is found in a variety of repositories. Most of her letters relating to the Blagdon controversy, written between 1795 and 1802, are found in the William Wilberforce papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. This correspondence is especially revealing, as, knowing she was guaranteed confidentiality and a sympathetic ear, she spoke her mind extremely freely; it is for this reason that her Blagdon correspondence with him is here printed in full for the first time. This correspondence is interspersed with letters, also found in the Wilberforce papers at Duke University, to two other close friends, Henry Thornton and his wife, Marianne. Two revealing letters from Thomas Bere are also included: one from the Duke manuscripts, showing his initial support for the school (something he later played down), and another, in the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California at Los Angeles, which demonstrates his unseemly eagerness to secure Henry Young's dismissal. Two other previously unpublished letters shed further light on the controversy. A letter to Henry Thornton, from the Thornton papers at Cambridge University Library, shows how her problems in setting up a school at Wedmore were to feed into the later Blagdon controversy. Another, to George Pretyman-Tomline, bishop of Lincoln, found in the Stanhope papers, Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, shows her successful attempt to secure the support of this influential high churchman at a time when her loyalty to the Church of England was being called into question. However, an extract from an earlier letter to Wilberforce, printed in an Appendix, reveals her private mistrust of a man she believed to be fundamentally hostile to evangelicalism.¹⁵

More's letters – lengthy, repetitive, sometimes paranoid, often self-deceiving – reveal her growing animosity to Bere, her distrust of the local clerical hierarchy, and her sufferings, physical and mental, under a campaign of increasingly vicious abuse. They tell one side of the story. Bere's pamphlets and the *Anti-Jacobin review and magazine* tell the other.

¹⁵ This correspondence can be supplemented by reading a printed collection of letters from More to her friend and champion, the Somerset landowner, Thomas Sedgwick Whalley, who wrote one of the more effective pamphlets in her defence. *Journals and correspondence of Thomas Sedgwick Whalley*, ed. Revd. Hill Wickham (2 vols., London, 1863), II, 144–227.

Editorial note

Spelling and punctuation have been slightly modernized. Except where otherwise stated, all the letters printed below are to be found among the letters from Hannah More to William Wilberforce located in the William Wilberforce Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Hannah More and the Blagdon controversy 1799–1802

1. THE FOUNDING OF THE BLAGDON SCHOOL

Hannah More set up the Blagdon school at a time when the parish was in turmoil and the local *élites* felt powerless to control the situation. The school was successful from the start, and initially Bere was an enthusiastic supporter.

Hannah More to William Wilberforce, Cowslip Green,¹⁶ 27 August 1795

Most of this letter deals with other concerns, but an extract is included here as it contains the first reference to the Blagdon school.

We are invited to a new and very laborious undertaking – the field is intensive and the object important – but my mind is in suspense – Henry¹⁷ stimulates me and says we *must* engage in it – but my health is bad, my time and Patty's does not more than suffice to our present schemes, and our expences are already very heavy – I cannot doubt but God will furnish means for the last article as he has already done, nor ought I to doubt that he will give me as much strength as is necessary for these additional exertions, nor do I wish much to spare myself, I hope. Yet I have so far lost ground this summer as never to have lost my cough, and [I have] difficulty of breathing even in the hot weather for more than a day or two, so that I have some sinful fears of not being able to work long, counteracted, I trust, by a desire to work more earnestly and vigorously...

More to Wilberforce, 14 October 1795

An extract from this letter gives a vivid account of the opening of the Blagdon school.

... This hot weather makes me suffer terribly, yet I have now and then a good day. And on Sunday [I] was enabled to open the new School. It was an affecting sight. Several of the grown-up youths had been tried at the last assizes; 3 were the children of a person lately condemned to be hanged;¹⁸ – many thieves! all ignorant, profane, and vicious beyond belief! Of this Banditti we have enlisted 170. And when the Clergyman [Thomas Bere], a hard man, who is also the magistrate, saw

¹⁶ More's cottage, near Wrington, Somerset, from 1786 to 1801.

¹⁷ The Clapham evangelical, Henry Thornton (1760–1815). Wilberforce, his second cousin, was at this time sharing his house at Battersea Rise.

¹⁸ The records do not reveal that anyone from Blagdon was hanged in 1795 or 1796.

these Creatures kneeling round us, whom he had seldom seen but to *commit* or to punish in some way, he burst into tears. I can do them little good I fear, but the grace of God may. Your friend Henry [Thornton] thought we ought to try...

[The next two paragraphs deal with the unpopularity of the local member of parliament, Lord Sheffield, and the failure of the Quiberon expedition.]

Have you never found your mind when it has been weak, now and then touched and raised by some trifling circumstance? So I felt on Sunday. The principal people from many Parishes came to the opening of this scheme for the instruction of this place, which is considered as a sort of Botany Bay. Some musical Gentlemen, drawn from a distance by curiosity (just as I was coming out of Church with my ragged regiment, much depressed to think how little good I could do them) quite unexpectedly struck up that beautiful and animating anthem 'Inasmuch as you do it to one of the least of these you have done it unto me'. It was well performed and had a striking effect.

More to Wilberforce, Bath, 25 January [1796]

In a letter dealing with her poor health and local politics, More gave Wilberforce an optimistic account of the progress of the Blagdon school.

... I ought thankfully to remark that our Schools and other Institutions are prosperous in a very high degree. At no period has there been such an appearance of good being done.¹⁹ My addition of a new Parish where we have already near 200 must oblige me to accept your offered assistance.²⁰ Indeed I fear I have increased my expenses beyond the bounds of prudence – but 'the time is short' – I at least shall not have long to work, and I ought not to distrust Providence. A number of Farmers and their Wives as blind and ignorant as Africans come in secret for Instruction at this new School and receive it with alacrity. By what poor Fools does God work! it only humbles me the more, by showing the power is entirely his. Don't send more than £50. I wish to spare you all I can...

Thomas Bere to More, Blagdon House, 3 December 1796

As More was later to regret that she had no early letters from Bere to produce in her defence, this glowing (if eccentric) commendation of the school must have been lost. The most likely explanation is that she sent it to Wilberforce, that it lay buried for months (even years) under a pile of papers in his somewhat chaotic house, and was only recovered when it was no longer needed.

¹⁹ The 'other Institutions' were adult evening classes and women's benefit clubs.

²⁰ In a previous letter More had stated that she needed £70 per annum. Duke, *More to Wilberforce* [December 1795].

In the hurry and unpleasant feeling of our taking leave we forgot the Good Bishop's books; we are very ardent to know as much of him as possible and therefore send our servant for them: I love a book, and will take care *those* shall sustain no injury.²¹ *Alexander Stevens* (the unhappy person who two years since was tried for a murder) is now a pupil of Mr Young's. This is proof positive of the effects of your labors. Mrs Bere is just returned from Mr Young's readings where were about 60 auditors (farmers and labourers and women). He with great propriety expatiated on the 13th Chapter to the Romans and thence drew sound inferences of subjection to the higher Powers applying them to the present times.²² What do you think now of this clever and useful man? I dare say he has done more essential good by informing and therefore quieting his people than their Squireships and Worships will effect in the whole progress of this turbulent business. I hold myself obliged to him for this very seasonable and valuable assistance. We ambled home very friskily, my wife on the light fantastic toe, her husband pacing with the caution and gravity of a huge Don, but the man has good spirits enough, only he has very feeling feet. Adieu, God bless you all and bestow on you health and happiness.

2. THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLES

Bere soon changed his mind about Henry Young. In the summer of 1798, Hannah and Patty More founded a new school at Wedmore, in the face of much opposition. Hannah More's letter to Henry Thornton shows how fears of 'methodism' were beginning to undermine her work. In this and the two subsequent letters, she accuses Bere of hostility to her schools and of heresy.

More to Henry Thornton, Cowslip Green, 12 September [1798]²³

*The first part of this vivid and revealing letter deals with the winding up of the Cheap Repository Tracts.*²⁴ *The Bath printer of the tracts was Samuel Hazard. More was persuaded, against her better judgment, to employ his nephew, Henry Harvard, as teacher at her new school at Wedmore, in spite of his known methodism.*²⁵

²¹ Possibly a reference to the works of Bishop Porteus.

²² 'Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.' This was the classic text of anglican political theology and was much quoted during the political debates of the 1790s.

²³ Cambridge University Library, Thornton MS, Add. 7674/1/E/1.

²⁴ For the Cheap Repository Tracts, see G. H. Spinney, 'Cheap Repository Tracts: Hazard and Marshall edition', *The Library*, 4th ser., XX (1939), 295–340; Stott, *Hannah More*, chs. 8–10.

²⁵ For Harvard's methodism, see Stott, *Hannah More*, pp. 213–14.

I own I do not feel disposed to make Hazard any compensation for what I know has been a gainful business to him. He thinks there is a deal of money and he may get a share. I will give you an instance of his covetousness. He has just recommended to me his nephew as master of my new school at Wedmore with a high character. This man has been in trade and failed for want of capital. As usual I found I must pay his debts before I could get him, but he and his wife seemed such superior people I thought it right to put up with this business. It was 30 or £40 – I proposed to Hazard to advance £15 only, which he was to be repaid but he refused to so near a relation, and has thrown the debt on my hands. I must pay £25 or lose the man. To keep at this expense I assure you I refused to have any medical assistance after my accident,²⁶ for being so far from Bristol I knew it would cost me a great deal.

This subject of money leads me to say (which I did not intend) that I believe I must desire you not to give away the interest of Mrs Bouverie's money any more but to let me have it; do not however tell her this just now.²⁷ I am now engaged in such very large expenses that humanly speaking I do not very well see how I shall get through it, and my faith, which is not over strong, is kept pretty much on the stretch. Assessed taxes and some other things have reduced my sisters' income £150 a year and they spend all before; as I shall feel it right to help towards this deficiency, I shall not be able to make that new addition towards the schools which I had hoped. I will not however distrust that Providence which has so unexpectedly carried me on hitherto, and I hope to use these little difficulties and uncertainties as an exercise of my trust in him. You will think so when I tell you that in spite of the continued opposition at Wedmore, we are building a house there. P[atty] says she thinks we tire you with our stories. I will however tell you one, which I think will be much to Mrs Clarke's taste.²⁸ After going on Sunday to Wedmore (30 miles there and back) on the wettest day I was ever out in, we found our poor 300 Children assembled in the half finished room without a floor, a door or a window. We taught them with great peace and content, not one of the Farmers considering to come nigh us or offering the least accommodation though the rain was so violent (but I borrowed a Cottage). At length the reason came out. The children had been trying to sing for the first time one of Watts's hymns. This brought a farmer who said now he was sure we were *Methodys*; on being asked

²⁶ In August 1798 More, who was at the time crippled with a headache, fell down and lay unconscious on the floor until her sisters found her. For a while they believed her to be dying. Wilberforce papers, Duke University: More to Wilberforce, 15 Aug. [1798].

²⁷ The evangelical philanthropist Elizabeth Bouverie of Teston, Kent, was a substantial contributor to the Mendip schools. She was more sick than More seems to have realized, and she died at the end of September 1798.

²⁸ Wilberforce's sister, Sarah Clarke (later Stephen) (1758–1832), was noted for her eccentric sense of humour.

what gave the parish such a terror of Methodists, this was his answer. ‘Some years ago a *Methody* preacher came and preached in our orchard under my mother’s best apple tree; immediately after, the leaves withered and the tree died; we saw at once this was a *judgment*, and called a vestry to see what could be done to save our orchards. We there agreed that we should not have an apple left in the parish if we suffered a *Methody* to stay. So we ordered all the people to get all the stones and rotten eggs they could muster and beat the whole crew out of the Parish; they did so and have not lost an apple since.’ I have told it verbatim – This is the enlightened nineteenth century!²⁹

But we have difficulties of a far more serious nature than this, which I would not trouble you with an account of, but that perhaps you may be able to suggest some useful hints to us. In two or three of our most established parishes where most good seems to be doing, there is risen a most violent opposition against us or rather against religion. They let P[atty] and I [*sic*] go on quietly while there was no serious Clergyman³⁰ in the Country,³¹ but 2 or 3 of our young Oxford men having been down in the summer and preached about at our Clubs &c has excited an animosity that is dreadful. One of the worldly clergy has declared he will give himself the trouble to set up an evening Lecture at the Church as the only means he can devise to destroy our evening Reading. I should rejoice at this did I not know what stuff he will preach. If he does, however, I shall endeavour to make our people go, but as many of them seem really serious, I fear they will not. Our other great trial is at Blagdon where the Clergyman (the magistrate you saw here once) is such a hypocrite that he affected to shed tears when I was ill and said in a canting tone ‘what would become of the Country’ yet is doing all he can to knock up the school thro’ a genuine hatred of Xtianity and a personal hatred of one of the serious young Ministers who has awakened a dying woman and several others.³² This Blagdon Parson has been reading Socinian books and now boldly preaches against the Trinity, St Paul etc and tells the people that they need pay no attention to any part of Scripture but the Sermon on the Mount. He has so disturbed the faith of the whole parish nearly that they are afraid to attend the School where they say other doctrines are taught and if the Parson is in the right the ladies must be in the wrong. I am extremely distressed what to do having no Bishop nor Rector who cares for any of these things...

²⁹ In spite of this comment, internal evidence shows conclusively that the letter was written in 1798. In September 1798 Thornton wrote what was clearly a reply. The letter sympathizes with More’s troubles at Wedmore and refers to news of Bonaparte’s capture of Cairo and Rosetta. C.U.L., Thornton MS, Add. 7674/1/N, fos. 85–6.

³⁰ Claphamite code for evangelical.

³¹ In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ‘country’ could also mean ‘county’.

³² Either James Vaughan or Thomas Fry, two young clergymen who had helped More set up the Wedmore school.

More to Wilberforce, Cowslip Green, 11 September 1799

More's letter begins with further details of what she calls 'the Wedmore Prosecution', as the farmers tried to shut down the school.³³ She proceeds to attack Bere for unorthodoxy and to warn Wilberforce about what she sees as the malevolent intentions of the Anti-Jacobin review and magazine.

... But the mischief lies deeper than with these vulgar Farmers. A Clergyman in my own neighbourhood where we have a flourishing School, and where you were last year [Blagdon] always a hypocritical man, has turned Socinian, and is now enraged at the doctrines *we* teach; and is doing under hand all possible injury to us and our schemes. This cause, too has a cause – And this man's malice is inflamed by the Antijacobin Magazine, which is spreading more mischief over the land than almost any other book, because it is doing it under the mask of Loyalty. It is representing all serious men as hostile to Government, and our enemies here whisper that we are abetted by you, and such as you, to hurt the Establishment.³⁴ This is only an episode for I must talk to you more at large and see if no means can be employed to stop this spreading poison. I hear the author is one Williams, who, having been refused some favour by the Bishop of London, exercises his malignity towards him in common with those whom he calls Methodists...

[The rest of the letter deals with the Wedmore school.]

More to Wilberforce [May 1800]

I am truly sorry you did *not* read the papers you sent me, as they all related to the transaction with Mr Bere.³⁵ He is gone to London ever since I came home³⁶ either to publish a book against us or to institute a process of law or both. He has raised a fine flame in the Country. Some of his own poor told me the stream of abuse and

³³ See Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 214. A tactfully censored version of this letter is printed in W. Roberts, *Memoirs of the life and correspondence of Mrs Hannah More* (4 vols., London, 1834), III, 101–4.

³⁴ This letter coincides with the Rev. Jonathan Boucher's review of More's *Strictures on the modern system of female education* in the September 1799 edition of the *Anti-Jacobin*. In his review, Boucher accused More of 'Calvinism in disguise', and his accusations echoed word for word a letter critical of More from the high-church clergyman, Charles Daubeney. See Stott, *Hannah More*, pp. 228–31.

³⁵ On 5 April 1800 Bere wrote to More describing Henry Young as 'a turbulent, troublesome person', and adding that 'if this man continues here in his present character, I must infer ... that it is avowedly with intent to render my ministration in the church as little effectual as possible, and I shall be driven to seek my remedy, where and how I can.' On 11 April he wrote to his rector, Dr George Crossman, claiming that 'under the sanction of the establishment, the man [Young] has assumed and openly uses most of all the privileges of a Licensed Conventicle'. Bere, *Controversy*, pp. 17–18, 20–1.

³⁶ Earlier in May, More had been staying with her friend, Sir Charles Middleton, at Teston, Kent.

personal invective against us and the School for some months would disgrace a common alehouse, and that they dreaded the return of Sunday. After having said in one of his Sermons that our principles gave reason to suspect we might be connected with the Attack on the King's life, he then ordered one of his people to stand at the Church Door and read the newspaper account of Hadfield's attack to the people, as they went out, by way I suppose of following up the impression.³⁷ I have had a very civil letter from Dr Moss, enclosing one to him from Bere's Rector, highly complimentary to me but which shows he is not aware how bad a man his Curate is. I have written by Dr Moss's desire, a long and plain statement of the whole business to the Rector offering to lay down the school if *he* and the *Bishop* desire it, but refusing to give up the master a victim to Bere's revenge. The whole story of the Affidavit is dropped, they have parted from the Servant, he was *so silly and so great a liar*; yet they will receive its oath.³⁸

Luckily for us Bere has preached openly his disbelief in the Trinity several times. I have not plainly told his Rector this, but I have plainly told him that Mr Bere's dislike is not to the Schoolmaster but the Cause, and that our orthodoxy is our crime. Sir Abraham Elton³⁹ I believe will take it up with a high hand – Bere's having refused his mediation has hurt himself a good deal.⁴⁰

3. THE FIRST CLOSURE OF THE SCHOOL

The following letters deal with the events leading up to and following the meeting at the George inn at Blagdon on 12 November 1800, which condemned Young for methodism and led to the closing of the school. Hannah and Patty More's letters seem to show that some of the local élites were less concerned with Young than with the way the More sisters were conducting the school.

³⁷ On 15 May 1800 James Hadfield (c. 1772–1841) had fired a pistol into the Royal Box at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. For an account of the incident see the *Gentleman's magazine*, LXX (1800), 478–80.

³⁸ This seems to be a reference to the first of the Blagdon affidavits. This was from Bere's servant, Silas Derrick, who on 4 April 1800 deposed that on 29 March Young had said to him, 'I would not advise you to go to service at Mr Bere's at all; and if you do go, I would not advise you to stay there long – *For there is no knowing what they might put into your mind, to make you sign away to [your] house and orchard.*' Bere, *Controversy*, pp. 15–16.

³⁹ Abraham Elton (1755–1842), 5th baronet, clergyman and magistrate, head of a distinguished family of Bristol merchants, and owner of Clevedon Court in Somerset.

⁴⁰ On 9 April, More, who was about to leave for Teston, suggested Sir Abraham Elton as a mediator. On 8 May, Bere turned down this offer. *Controversy*, pp. 20–1, 24–5.

More to Wilberforce, 2 September 1800

After telling Wilberforce that the great evangelical preacher Thomas Scott has sent her £50 for the schools, More proceeds to inform him of the growing Blagdon crisis.

The Storm of opposition which has beaten so heavily upon us the whole Summer is about to sink us: at least the Blagdon Bark will be soon engulfed. The list of follies and crimes transmitted by the Curate and believed by the Rector will oblige me to give up the School. The stale charge of Methodism I should have borne I hope with more temper than our friend Lord Kenyon,⁴¹ but *blasphemy* and *sedition* are charges one is not so accustomed to repel. It is said that the Rector has let his Tithes to Bere which being an illegal transaction, he cannot easily part with him.⁴² So instead of coming up, as Dr Moss desired, as examining things on the spot, where false allegations could have been refuted, he sent for Bere down to him: where as Lord North once said, ‘all the reciprocity being on one side, we are tried, found guilty and condemned’. We have no chance with people who make nothing of oaths, but on the slightest subjects swear through thick and thin.

You mistake in thinking we intended to resist the law by refusing to pay the fine. That fine, it was concurred, could only be levied on unlicensed Methodist meeting houses. Now ours, being a new case, the Church Congregation assembled under the sanction of the Minister, and by his express Consent which it was, it was thought for the sake of examples, as it was a new thing, it should be tried on new ground. If you think, however, that it is more right to pay the fine than to go to prison, I readily will do it. But at present the menaces of the law seem to give way to a private blackening of reputation. – I hope I do not murmur – It is enough for the servant to be as his Master,⁴³ but the being obliged to *defend* ourselves (which is contrary to my avowed firm principle) not only in the neighbourhood but in voluminous correspondence was so trying to me that I believe I should have sunk under it had not Sir Abraham Elton seeing my spirits and health failing taken it in a good measure out of my hands. He has entered into it on the grounds of public justice; it being his avowed principle to resist all oppression and intolerance in his own district as Magistrate. It is a trying duty for a nervous man in bad health to bring on himself the abuse of two Clergymen both Magistrates also, but a redresser of wrongs is the character he has maintained since he set down here; and the matter in debate is that he will protect against false charges an honest, laborious pious man, the Schoolmaster, who has done no evil and much good.

⁴¹ Lloyd Kenyon, first Baron Kenyon (1732–1802), master of the rolls.

⁴² *The Anti-Jacobin*, IX (1801), 288 n. reported that Crossman had granted Bere his lease of tithes for ten years from Lady Day 1798.

⁴³ Matthew x. 25.

Bere pretended at first he would be satisfied with this victim but now we are afraid tis not the Man but the cause. You need not fear that Sir A. is a raw rash man, he is one deeply versed in the obliquities and wickedness of the human heart, and an excellent Lawyer, civil and Ecclesiastical We wait for the answer to a letter to know when we are to abandon the instruction of 400 poor Creatures who did not know when we began, who made them, and who are now well versed in the Scriptures. It is the will of God and I labour much after a submissive Spirit.

P[atty] and I are poorly in health, broken up with the weather; I have a slight fever, restless nights and a cough. We are both drinking asses' milk to try to patch up for a little further service if it shall please God. My flesh and heart fail about this *new* place, as it is so distant and winter comes on 'but get thee behind me Satan'⁴⁴ is the language I try to use to the suggestions of an indolent body and a feeble faith. As to the resources for supporting it, I hope not to draw you or Mr Thornton into any fresh expense. I wrote to beg of Mr Hoare⁴⁵ who has kindly promised me £30 per annum which with my own savings will I trust suffice for the short time I shall probably be able to attend to it.

[The next paragraph deals with the death of More's friend, the bluestocking, Elizabeth Montagu.]

It makes me almost sick to tell you that the Blagdon Inquisition have driven our poor Schoolmaster to take an oath that he is not a Calvinist! 'Murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers'⁴⁶ are good people compared with those whom they accuse of Calvinism. This is a nickname. They do not at all know what it means. The poor man being a disciple of John Wesley's could do it with a safe conscience but distinguished those points in which he was and was not. I wish I could have your advice but I must be contented at this distance with your prayers.⁴⁷

More to Wilberforce, Cowslip Green, 29 September 1800

... It is all over with us at Blagdon. I have struggled hard to keep my footing, and would have borne any obloquy on my character while the least chance of doing good remained. But when I consider the dreadful perjuries which my perseverance is every day exciting I can no longer answer it to my conscience to persevere. Among Bere's affidavits which are 'as plenty as Blackberries'⁴⁸ one is taken by a Lunatic, whom, as such, I have helped to maintain. People start up out of ditches,

⁴⁴ Luke iv. 8. The 'new place' was Chew Magna, where the More sisters were considering founding a school.

⁴⁵ Henry Hoare (1750–1832), banker and subscriber to evangelical causes.

⁴⁶ I Timothy i. 9.

⁴⁷ Wilberforce and his family were then on holiday at Bognor.

⁴⁸ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*, Act ii, Sc. 4.

or from under hedges, to listen to the talk of our poor pious labourers as they are at work, and then go and make oath and (which it seems is unexampled) Mr Bere (having doubtless set them to listen) receives Depositions in his own cause! I really did not take the pains to read them through it was such wretched stuff. Some I think go to prove that Young is a Calvinist; several that he was heard to pray extempore in *private*; no-one accuses him of the heavy sin of having done it on the public nights. Another is that he told a dying woman he thought ‘she *might* go to heaven though he did not think she had faith enough’. Though I am ashamed to write such stuff, our Bishop, or rather Dr Moss as Chancellor has thought proper on such testimony to order me to dismiss the master.⁴⁹ That cheap religion which consists in crying *The Church is in danger* has completely won him over. Bere though notorious as a liar and a preacher of heretical doctrines is credited, while my reputation is treated with as much contempt as if I were Hardy or Thelwall;⁵⁰ and indeed *their* political doctrines changed to my own. Mr Whalley has done himself great honour by writing a strong and very spirited state of the case to the Bishop, expressing his strong conviction of the moral benefit to the County from all my Schools; his firm belief in the integrity of the Blagdon Master and describing at large his having witnessed together with Dr MacLaine,⁵¹ Mrs Henry and many other equally respectable testimonies the conduct of the School for a whole Sunday and the practical and useful work of instruction, with the regularity and good order of the Parish. Now as my friend W is not *particularly religious*, I own I did think *his* testimony would have been of use. But no – he was very coolly received. *The man had prayed extempore, he must be a Calvinist. The Church was in danger.*

My dear friend! I have prayed and struggled earnestly not to be quite subdued in my *mind* – but I cannot commend my *nerves*, and tho I do pretty well in the bustle of the day, yet I get such disturbed and agitated nights that I cou’d not speak for my lasting if the thing were to go on much longer. This is such a specimen of the State of religion that *I* too really think the Church *is* in danger, though in another and far more awful sense.

Sir A. Elton is devoted to our cause, and only wants Bere’s recovery from a fit of the Gout (as he would take no advantage of him) to re-examine these *oath-takers*; he is still sanguine that good will come out of all this evil. A volume of letters have been written. Happily for me he will not allow me [to] write any, it

⁴⁹ This is confirmed by Thomas Bere’s letter of 3 November. For More’s defiance of this order, see the letter dated 28 October 1800.

⁵⁰ The radicals Thomas Hardy (1752–1832) and John Thelwall (1764–1834) had been acquitted of treason in October–November 1794.

⁵¹ Dr Archibald Maclean (1722–1804); presbyterian divine; translator (1765) of Mosheim’s *Ecclesiastical history*; settled in Bath, 1796.

affects me so much. ‘How shall I give you up, O Ephraim’?⁵² is my frequent exclamation as I walk in my Garden and look at the Steeple and the village of Blagdon. I know if I had a lively faith I should rejoice that I was thought worthy to suffer in the cause of Christ, but I mourn for our Jerusalem – I mourn to see that nothing is thought a crime but what *they* are pleased to call enthusiasm. I heartily wish I were a greater Enthusiast in their sense of the word.

What you suggest in your very kind and feeling letter about my taking out a license is impracticable on every ground. In the first place there would be a duplicity in it which on reflection you would disapprove for how could I acknowledge myself a Dissenter? I who am firmly attached to a Church which is behaving so ill and who abhor the doctrines of which I am suspected?

Mr Hart the Clergyman of Nailsea where Young was my Schoolmaster three years has sent a most handsome testimony to Young’s moral and religious character, his firm attachment to the Church and his freedom from the doctrines and practices of which he is accused – his letter Sir A. has sent to the Bishop.

I hope you are still enjoying peace and quiet and the company of our friends at the sea; be so good as to show or to send this letter to Mr Thornton.⁵³

More to Wilberforce c. 28 October 1800

I truly rejoice in the good accounts of Mrs W[ilberforce].⁵⁴ I deferred writing as I expected to have gone to Wedmore yesterday, and as that is a land of *great Farmers*, to have picked up better intelligence respecting *grain* than I could get at home;⁵⁵ but deluges of rain and indisposition obliged me to change Wedmore for Blagdon. Our business gets more complicated and puzzling. We have at length obtained from Dr Moss thirteen affidavits *extorted* no doubt by Bere and taken by himself in his own cause, from the lowest and most disreputable people in his Parish to blacken Young the master. Yet *such* affidavits, *such* trash, so absurd on the very face of them you never saw. How a man of Moss’s sense and knowledge of the world can lend himself to such a business is inconceivable – but he has been *appealed* to! and the high Church spirit *must* protect its own. The affidavits go to prove that they heard Young say he was a Calvinist. That a Carpenter from another place passing through Blagdon called at Young’s, and that this Carpenter is *reported* to be a Methodist. – That Young was heard *once* and two of his scholars to pray extempore – that when the minister was reading the Exhortation to the Sacrament at Church Young’s wife elbowed one of her Scholars and lifted

⁵² Hosea xi. 8.

⁵³ The Wilberforces were on holiday with the Thorntons at Bognor.

⁵⁴ Barbara Wilberforce had been taken seriously ill at Bognor, an event that naturally diverted Wilberforces’s attention from Hannah More’s Blagdon troubles.

⁵⁵ A reference to the bad harvests and food shortages of 1800.

up her eyes!!! – So far the Oaths – the private information which we cannot fully get at, goes to prove deeper crimes I fancy, Young's and even my disaffection to Church and State, Psalm singing and various other misdemeanours. When Moss (who is Chancellor of the Diocese) was first appealed to by the Rector, who will go through thick and thin to save his Curate, to whom he has let the Tythe, Moss wrote to me that he thought, as there were so many charges against the Schoolmaster, I ought to dismiss him. As I believe hardly any of the charges, and all to be greatly aggravated, I felt that on my firmness in supporting this innocent Master depended the existence of all my Schools. Sir A. Elton wrote therefore to Moss that I received his decree with becoming submission but tho I obeyed *in iure* I should disobey *in modo*, for that, as I was persuaded Bere meant it as an attack on all my Schools and that the Masters by my yielding would always be liable to the untruths of every opponent, I was resolved that, the School and the Master shou'd stand or fall together. Bere in the mean time gave out that the Chancellor had ordered the dismissal of Young and gave three triumphant dinners in one week in consequence. At one of these the Clergyman of my own Parish⁵⁶ and Mr Addington assisted!!⁵⁷ Sir A[braham Elton] now sent to Bere a handsome letter desiring him 'to produce his Deponents and Sir A. himself would attend with *Young* that the accused might have the benefit allowed to the meanest Englishman of being confronted with his accusers'. This Bere positively refused, saying the business was already settled by the Bishop and his son. This produced a large correspondence between Sir A. and Moss in which the latter said that he only gave me his opinion as a *private Man* and that it was not an *official decree*. On the strength of this I venture to go on a little longer being determined to die hard, and struggle to the last in such a cause: though I can hardly tell you what this determination of duty has cost me. Sir A. has *re-demanded* of Bere to bring forward his people, to this he can get no answer; and a violent fit of the gout in which he now lays delayed Sir Abraham's 3rd letter. A letter from Moss today however does express his astonishment at Bere's refusal, but he spoils this concession again by hinting that if the cause should finally be brought before him in the Ecclesiastical Court this *confronting* may be dispensed with. Sir A. who abhors all intolerance and of course all Ecclesiastical Courts is telling him that the law of the land is paramount, and that this oppressed Schoolmaster shall have justice. Moss's eyes are a little opened by a very strong letter from Mr Hart, Minister of Nailsea where Young taught my school 3 years representing him as a *rational* pious man utterly exempt from any fanatical or seditious propensities, and that he brought numbers to Church and Sacrament on whom *his* public

⁵⁶ The Rev. William Leeves (1756–1828), rector of Wrington from 1799.

⁵⁷ Hiley Addington (1759–1818), local landowner and brother of the future prime minister, Henry Addington (1757–1844).

ministry produced no effect. Sir A. Elton conducts this trying business with great energy and zeal but with equal wisdom and moderation. He has (though a sickly man) rode 60 miles a week ever since June, and in all that heat, to console and direct me; and in more than four months has never once missed being here on a Monday morn to meet our Infirmities. His is a trying duty. Moss is his friend, but he is sacrificing this friendship to the Cause of Justice and Religion. I wish I had kept some of those flattering letters Bere used to write about the School.⁵⁸ I had a letter from Col. Scott inviting himself and two other Gentlemen to come down from Bath on Sunday morn, and go to the Schools fancying they had nothing to do but to walk about this Parish, and then return back. I was obliged to write and explain the mistakes, telling him the distance, our engagements &c and inviting them all *next* Sunday to Cheddar & to come over Saturday night in order to be ready to start.⁵⁹ I hope they will not be gone; but *their* plan was impracticable.

A full reading and School at Blagdon last night; all peace and quiet for the oppressor was confined to his bed. What a pity to break up such a scheme but it *must* come to that. I strive not to be impatient under the indignity of being suspected to connive at least at Sedition and fanaticism; and that Bere is listened to; a man whom his best friends allow to swear, lie, and drink; a known friend to heresy and a suspected Jacobin. On that work we split – it is to varnish over these cracks in his character that he lays these very charges on us. May these trials be sanctified to us, and may I submit cheerfully to any event; indeed, knowing the cause to be prejudiced it requires no spirit of divination to foretell the catastrophe... Patty's journal of our persecutions consists of several little volumes and is so interspersed with other thoughts & that she dares not let it go out of her hands – She will at more leisure copy some extracts for you.⁶⁰

Thomas Bere to G. P. Seymour, Blagdon House, 3 November 1800⁶¹

It is with extreme reluctance that I am constrained under the imperious purpose of a very unpleasant controversy to solicit your kind attention to the following particulars, as it implicates everything estimable in my principle and practice.

You may have heard that Mrs More's Teacher at Blagdon so conducted himself as to have made it my Duty as Curate of that Parish to inform her of his

⁵⁸ But see above for Bere's letter of December 1796.

⁵⁹ Hannah More's strenuous Sunday schedules involved calling at the schools at Shipham, Cheddar and Axbridge one week, and Nailsea, Yatton and Blagdon the other.

⁶⁰ This was subsequently edited by Arthur Roberts and published as *Mendip annals: or a narrative of the charitable labours of Hannah and Martha More in the Mendips* (London, 1859). The book contains many robust comments on the shortcomings of the local clergy.

⁶¹ The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, U.C.L.A., More, Hannah More 1745–1833. Papers, 1777–1829.

extravagant irregularities. Instead of attending my complaint, this Lady wrote (without my knowledge) to the Chancellor and Dr Crossman apparently with intention to Strangle the investigation, by destroying in the minds of those Gentlemen whatever respect they might have entertained for my moral or clerical character. This ultimately brought the matter to issue before our venerable Diocesan & his most highly respected son. The result was that on the evidence before them they adjudged my complaint well founded, & the latter immediately wrote to Mrs More acquainting her 'that her Teacher was unworthy of his station: and in his opinion ought to be removed from his situation'. Dr Crossman & all who knew it (the party only excepted) deemed this perfectly conclusive. Nevertheless the Teacher is yet continued at Blagdon & the Party now impeach the Chancellor's Decision & except to the Credibility & competency of the evidence upon which he determined the Cause. I am therefore permitted in defence of the Chancellor's impartiality to swear the witnesses to their several depositions in the presence of the most respectable Gentlemen of the neighbourhood. The day fixed for this purpose is Wednesday the 12 inst at 11 o'clock, the place Blagdon. Permit me therefore Dear Sir most earnestly to entreat the honor of your presence to meet the Gentlemen that will attend upon this occasion to hear the witnesses as sworn & by so doing to suppress if possible the indecent Clamor raised against the Chancellor's judgment...

PS I hope to have the pleasure of your company to dinner – the business, I apprehend, will not require one hour's attention.

Martha (Patty) More to William Wilberforce, Cowslip Green, 14 November 1800

Following the fateful meeting at the George inn on 12 November, Hannah More became too ill to write, and it was left to Patty to communicate the bad news to friends. This letter highlights the More sisters' vulnerability. As women, unable to be clergy or magistrates, they could not be present at proceedings where their conduct was being questioned and the fate of their school decided. It was left to Sir Abraham Elton to mount their defence.

I scribbled a few incoherent lines in the midst of much bustle and hurry last night to acquaint Mrs H[enry] Thornton⁶² of our complete defeat at Blagdon; but if you will permit me, I shall be more circumstantial tonight. Sir A. Elton had defied Bere to confront his accusers, to this he gave a false colouring; & summoned together the malignants of the Country, both the Laity & Clergy, that he knew were hostile to us & our schemes, & also the worldly & indifferent ones, that seemed

⁶² Marianne Thornton, née Sykes (1765–1815).