

From Necrology to Eulogy? A Preacher memorializes his Father-in-Law

Clyde Binfield*
University of Sheffield

Whether death is a passage or a terminus, an obituary can be an important accompaniment for the survivors. Victorian funerals were improved by sermons setting the deceased in the eye of eternity. Today's funerals prefer eulogies. The Congregational City Temple's Joseph Parker (1830–1902) was second only to the Baptist Metropolitan Tabernacle's Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92) in popular estimation. Parker's father-in-law, Andrew Common (1815–96), bank manager, chapel deacon and active Liberal, was a type found nationwide. Parker and Common are placed in context, with Parker's commemoration of Common in the Evangelical Magazine as a prime focus for this article, balanced by his earlier extempore graveside appreciation of Common's kinsman Robert Teasdale (1809–83). What might be gleaned about their attitudes to life and death? Were these particular instances representative? Was the piece in the Evangelical Magazine a sermon slipping insensibly into eulogy, the occupational hazard of any preacher at such a moment?

Is death a passage or a terminus? Whatever rites mark a death, an obituary can be an important accompaniment for those who survive. A funeral is the culmination of a life. Victorian funerals were improved by sermons which set the deceased in the eye of eternity. Today's funerals prefer eulogies to sermons; these may recreate a life but keep well away from eternity.¹

The Congregational City Temple's Joseph Parker (1830–1902) was second only to the Baptist Metropolitan Tabernacle's Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92) in popular estimation. Parker's father-in-law, Andrew Common (1815–96), was a Sunderland banker, a Congregational deacon and an active Liberal. His was a

* E-mail: noreenbinfield@gmail.com.

¹ I acknowledge the help during a long gestation of Irene, James and Ruth Common, Barbara Dainton, Geoffrey E. Milburn, Geoffrey F. Nuttall, Patricia J. Storey and E. Tinker (City of Sunderland Community and Cultural Services).

type found nationwide. Parker's commemoration of Common, as published in the *Evangelical Magazine*, is the prime focus for this article.²

What might be gleaned from it about Parker, Common and their attitudes to both life and death? Was this instance, particular to that preacher and his family but shared with the readers of the *Evangelical Magazine*, at all representative? Was it more sermon than eulogy, or was the former slipping insensibly into the latter, the occupational hazard of any preacher at such a moment? Some scene-setting is necessary: who and what were Parker and Common?

THE PREACHER

Joseph Parker was a pulpit phenomenon.³ He was a Congregationalist who in early life had a Methodist phase. Between 1853 and 1901 he held three contrasting Congregational pastorates in equally contrasting parts of England.⁴ Each was locally influential but the third and longest allowed for an influence beyond both national and Nonconformist bounds. This was in the City of London, at a cause dating from the 1640s which in Parker's time moved from Poultry to Holborn Viaduct. There, taking full advantage of the adjacent railway station, Poultry Chapel (which had been advantageously sold to what became the Midland Bank) was rebuilt as the City Temple. Its façade was a display of architectural good manners verging on arrogance, for it suggested the west front, judiciously pared down, of St Paul's Cathedral. Given the City's steadily and irreversibly declining population it was in all respects a bold venture.

Nothing about this passionate Congregationalist fitted a Congregational template. He had not trained for ministry at a

² For Parker and Spurgeon, see R. Tudur Jones, 'Parker, Joseph (1830–1902)' and Rosemary Chadwick, 'Spurgeon, Charles Haddon (1834–1892)', both *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35386>> and <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26187>>, respectively; for Common, see *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 14 February 1896, 4; Joseph Parker, 'Andrew Common, J.P.', *Evangelical Magazine* 3rd series 39 (1897), 17–23, at 17.

³ The following account is largely drawn from Joseph Parker, *A Preacher's Life*, 5th edn (London, 1903); *Congregational Year Book* [hereafter: *CYB*] 1903, 208b–e; Albert Clare, *The City Temple 1640–1940: The Tercentenary Commemoration Volume* (London, 1940), 76–137.

⁴ Banbury (1853–8); Cavendish Chapel, Manchester (1858–69); City Temple, London (1869–1901).

theological college. His pastorates were manifestly successful but his model of Congregational ministry exemplified an autocracy in which the essence of Congregationalism, its church members' and deacons' meetings, was ignored. It is characteristic that when the *Congregational Year Book* began to publish denominational statistics, church by church, the City Temple's were left blank. Was there a fear that they would not bear comparison with those of the Metropolitan Tabernacle?⁵

In fact, Parker was more than a pulpit autocrat. He was twice chairman of the national Congregational Union (only one other man achieved that before 1901) and he had a statesmanlike and accurate grasp of where Congregationalism's future lay. There was, moreover, little doubt as to his evangelical orthodoxy, although, like Spurgeon's, his was a strikingly capacious orthodoxy and in one respect it was a strained orthodoxy: death and immortality. In the words of his admiring friend, W. Robertson Nicoll: 'Death was to him the most formidable of foes ... but much was dark to him on that side. He viewed the life after death for long with hesitations and tremors ... The unknown and untried regions which the spirit enters when it is severed from the flesh daunted him.'⁶ Nicoll also quoted Parker: 'When I come to die do not preach to me, do not exhort me – leave me with myself and with God.'⁷

Parker's publications were prolific without being memorable. His fame as a man of words and the Word depended on his mastery of speech. This is best illustrated by two of his most famous interventions, each delivered in the City Temple, as recalled by Alexander

⁵ In 1893, the Metropolitan Tabernacle seated 4,880, with a further 4,050 in its 19 mission stations and 25 Sunday and Ragged schools. It had 5,179 members, 8,034 scholars and 611 Sunday school teachers: *Baptist Handbook* 1894, 227. In 1898, the first year for which the *CYB* published such statistics, the City Temple seated 3,000; no figures were given for membership but 225 scholars and 25 teachers were listed: *CYB* 1899, 288. In 1901, no figures were given beyond the 3,000 sittings: *ibid.* 1902, 206.

⁶ W. Robertson Nicoll, *Princes of the Church*, 4th edn (London, ?1921), 181–2.

⁷ *Ibid.* 181. Leaving Parker with himself and God is something that historians cannot do. Parker's pivotal, indeed posthumous, influence on Congregationalism informs Alan Argent, *The Transformation of Congregationalism 1900–2000* (Nottingham, 2013), especially 1–9. He figures significantly in D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (London, 1982); James Munson, *The Nonconformists: In Search of a Lost Culture* (London, 1991); M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters, 3: The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford, 2015).

Gammie, journalist and sermon-taster, and J. D. Jones, the next man to be twice chairman of the Congregational Union.

The first was more speech than sermon. The occasion was an evening meeting held during the Congregational May Meetings for 1897. The intention was to celebrate the queen's diamond jubilee by reviewing the 'progress of civil and religious liberty during Her Majesty's reign' in the form of addresses on 'The Relation of the Free Churches to the Hanoverian Dynasty', 'Some Notable Religious Movements of the Reign', 'The Development of the Social Idea in the Reign of Victoria' and 'Pastors and Teachers who represented Congregationalism in the early part of Her Majesty's Reign'.⁸ It was a thoroughly worthy occasion and, given the inescapable sense of time passing, it was more commemoration than celebration. It was, in preview, a national rite of passage as observed by some of the nation's Nonconformists. Parker took full advantage of it.

His was the fourth address, on 'Pastors and Teachers', but he swept his hearers from England in the 1830s and 1840s to present-day Turkey and the failure of the Powers to restrain its sultan, Abdul Hamid. There could be no doubt as to his answer to that failure: "I believe in another King, Our Jesus, whom Paul affirmed to be *alive*." He shot that word *alive* out like a thunderbolt. It left the audience literally stunned and speechless. People scarcely realized that the speech was finished ... Then such a tumult of applause broke out'. It was 'a tremendous passage' in a speech aflame in every sentence 'with the fire of genius'.⁹ It was also a perfect example of oratorical sleight of hand. Parker repeated it two years later.

On 25 April 1899 he preached from Ezra 9.3 (KJV): 'And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.'¹⁰ The occasion for this sermon was the tercentenary of Oliver Cromwell's birth and the text's preceding verse, so applicable to the Stuarts – 'yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass' – allowed for a switch to contemporary princes and rulers. Parker's hearers always expected the unexpected but the effect was startling. He seized on a recent reference to Abdul Hamid as the

⁸ *CYB* 1898, 5–6.

⁹ J. D. Jones, *Three Score Years and Ten* (London, 1940), 67–8.

¹⁰ R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962* (London, 1962), 324.

friend of the emperor of Germany: ‘He may have been the Kaiser’s friend, but in the name of God, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost – speaking of the Sultan not merely as a man, but speaking of him as the Great Assassin – I say, “God damn the Sultan!”’¹¹ The words could not have been simpler or more direct but it was the timing – the pause between ‘God’ and ‘damn’ – which made them electrifying.¹²

There was more. Years later Alexander Gammie of the *Glasgow Citizen* emphasized the appearance (the massive figure, leonine head, shaggy locks, gleaming eyes and sweeping gestures), the voice (its ‘constantly changing inflexion ... at one moment like a roar of thunder and the next soft as a whisper’), the orthodoxy (‘I preach the love of Christ, the power of the Cross, the One Priesthood of the One Priest’) and the discipline (‘Apparently free from rule, it was unconsciously obedient to the great principles of art’),¹³ but it was a quotation in the *Congregational Year Book* obituary which best summed him up, in a sequence of Parker-like paradoxes: ‘so deep and so shallow, so brusque and sarcastic and bitter, so gentle and tender and lovable, so rugged in his independence and self-esteem, so absolute in his dependence on the sympathy and goodwill of those about him, so full of inconsistencies of all sorts’.¹⁴

However outside his pulpit presence, a Congregational minister’s position depended on his credibility. Parker’s was rock solid. He was a Northumbrian stonemason’s son with farming links on his mother’s side. As the minister of increasingly eligible churches, a professional man with a position to enhance, he expressed social mobility at its most admirable. In London he moved from Highbury New Park to Hampstead. His houses were comfortable without ostentation, his household ran to three servants, and he left £27,000.¹⁵ His marriages, both of them happy, confirmed the credibility. His first wife, Ann Nesbit (d. 1863), a Methodist farmer’s daughter, was of a similar age and background to his own. His second wife, Emma Jane

¹¹ Alexander Gammie, *Preachers I have heard* (London, 1945), 40.

¹² So Dr Ernest A. Payne (1902–79), whose father was in the congregation, told the present writer.

¹³ Gammie, *Preachers*, 40–1.

¹⁴ *CYB* 1903, 208e.

¹⁵ According to the 1881 census return, the household at North Holme, Highbury Park, included cook, housemaid and assistant cook: RG11/0255/113/27; Clare, *City Temple*, 128.

Common (1845–99), also came from the north-east but she was fifteen years younger, well connected and financially secure.

That Parker was touchingly aware of his good fortune is illustrated by the reminiscence of a young cousin of Emma Jane's, a medical man who in 1898 called one Saturday evening on the Parkers:

I saw very little of him as he was preparing his Sunday sermons. She was a good-looking woman and he was a plain man, and they went by the name of 'Beauty and the Beast.' Dr. Parker had sufficient humour to accept this, but he complained that whilst he had no objection to being called a beauty he did really object to his wife's being designated a beast!¹⁶

That story, with its engaging flash of egotism, did the rounds. It is with the Beauty that we come to her Beast's father-in-law, Andrew Common.

THE FATHER-IN-LAW

His stock was farming and Scottish, all Commons claiming descent from the Red Comyn,¹⁷ but this Common left the Lowlands and agriculture for England's north-east and banking in York, Darlington and Sunderland, latterly with the Quaker Backhouses. He worked his way from inspecting their branch banks to opening, managing and then rebuilding their Sunderland branch. His success was undoubted. He was a man to be reckoned with.

That was as clear from his appearance, his shock of red hair and beard whitening with age, as from the range of his interests. He was a lifelong Congregationalist, a lay preacher, a deacon for over thirty years and church treasurer for nearly as long at The Grange Congregational Church, Sunderland. He was a political Dissenter, a vocal opponent of church rates which he 'hated with the perfect hatred of a Nonconformist and a lover of religious fair play'.¹⁸ He was an educationalist and it cannot have been wholly coincidental

¹⁶ Charles Herbert Melland, 'Memoirs Part I' (typescript, 1950–1; in possession of the Melland family when I consulted it in 1974), 142–3; for Melland (1872–1953), see *Who Was Who 1951–1960* (London, 1961), 756.

¹⁷ For John Comyn (d. 1306), see Alan Young, 'Comyn, Sir John, lord of Badenoch (d. 1306)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6046>>.

¹⁸ 'Mr. Andrew Common, JP: His Separation from Sunderland. Biographical Sketch', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 8 February 1895, 3.

that his church's new school buildings were widely admired for the way they appropriated and improved on 'the American plan of Sunday-schools'.¹⁹ His secular politics were Liberal. In 1865, he chaired the election committee of John Candlish, the Radical who sat for Sunderland from 1866 to 1874.²⁰ In the 1870s he presided over Sunderland's Liberal Political Union; for rather longer he was a vice-president of one or other of the Liberal organizations which succeeded it; and he was an unfailing presence on Liberal election platforms. It followed that he was a JP and that he was elected to the board of guardians. It also followed that he had married appropriately.

His wife, Ann Kipling, was a Darlington woman, two years her husband's senior. Her family – Kiplings, Teasdales, Middletons and Mellands – were chiefly Methodists, originally Wesleyan but latterly Free Methodist, with a Congregational admixture. In Darlington they were tanners and carpet manufacturers, the sort to serve as guardians or Improvement and Inland Revenue commissioners or to sit on the local board of health. One of them was Darlington's mayor in 1869, two years after his town's incorporation. Their network reached Manchester, where one of them married a future Liberal home secretary and prime minister, H. H. Asquith, although she died the year before he achieved front-bench eminence. In Sunderland the future seemed assured for the next generation of Commons: the banker's iron merchant son, the London solicitor son, the accountant son-in-law and the ship-owning grandson with a war-time knighthood ahead of him.²¹

There was, however, one mortal caveat: health. Andrew Common's health was poor; his wife predeceased him by many years; two sons and a son-in-law died in their thirties; a third son survived into his fifties and then committed suicide. That their world

¹⁹ *CYB* 1882, 408.

²⁰ For Candlish (1816–74), see Michael Stenton, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, 1: 1832–1885* (Hassocks, 1976), 65.

²¹ Ann (Kipling) Common's brother, Edward Kipling (1807–80), was mayor of Darlington in 1869; her great-nephew, Charles Herbert Melland, was the young medical student who called on the Parkers in 1898; his much older half-sister, Helen Melland (1854–91), was H. H. Asquith's first wife; Ann's ship-owning grandson was Sir Lawrence Common (b. 1889), director of the Ship Management Division of the Ministry of War Transport, 1940–6. I have not been able to verify the relationship which the Darlington Kiplings claimed with the Nidderdale Kiplings, also Methodists, of whom Rudyard Kipling was the best-known scion.

was not quite their oyster was evident in Andrew Common's own career.

For all his platform prominence, Andrew Common, quintessential Nonconformist in a strongly Nonconformist town, was a background figure. He was a banker, but as a manager rather than a Backhouse. He never achieved the eminence of the Baptist John Candlish, the Congregational Sir Edward Gourley or the Free Methodist Samuel Storey, each of them a local MP.²² He was a guardian for only one year, he failed to be elected to Sunderland's school board and his Liberal activism was less seamless than it appeared to be. Were Nonconformity's local differences too hot to handle? Was it his ill-health at critical moments? Or were there quirks of character? It is time to turn to his ministerial son-in-law's memorial assessment.

COMMEMORATION

Joseph Parker was closer in age to his father-in-law than to his wife. The two men shared much in outlook and personality. Parker was not a man who found friendship easy and his wife's family, her siblings all much younger than her husband, met that need. This made it the more natural that her father should move in the last year of his life to be with Joseph and Emma Jane; their Tynehome, in Hampstead, was a north-eastern outpost. There he died, on 14 February 1896. Five days later he was buried in Bishopwearmouth Cemetery, following a service in The Grange Church.²³ A year later, in May 1897, Parker's memoir of Common appeared in the *Evangelical Magazine*.²⁴

Its status is unclear. As a memoir it is rounded but relatively brief. Its rhythms are those of the spoken word, crisp, clear and direct. It is not a sermon, for it takes no biblical text. Is it the distillation of what

²² For Sir Edward Temperley Gourley (1828–1902), see *Who Was Who 1897–1916* (London, 1920), 288; for Samuel Storey (1840–1925), see *Who Was Who 1916–1928* (London, 1929), 1004. For their religious context, see Geoffrey E. Milburn, *Religion in Sunderland in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Occasional Paper 3, Department of Geography and History, Sunderland Polytechnic (Sunderland, 1983). I must acknowledge the meticulous help of Patricia J. Storey in navigating Sunderland's political history and in alerting me to the *Sunderland Daily Echo*, of which her forebear was proprietor.

²³ 'Death of Mr. A. Common, J.P.: A Sketch of His Career', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 14 February 1896, 4.

²⁴ Parker, 'Common', 17.

was said (perhaps extempore) at the graveside or (perhaps more likely) at the unveiling of the windows which Emma Jane Parker gave to the City Temple in memory of her parents? Whatever its genesis, it is vintage Parker, turbocharged with passion and affection, as expressive of the speaker as it is of his subject.

Its structure flows naturally. First, the necessary details: birth, death, marriage, children, denomination and political affiliation:

You may know all that, and yet know nothing about the spirit and character of Andrew Common. You may even know that in dignity of carriage, in loveliness of expression, in majestic type of head, he would be noticeable in any assembly of men, and yet you would have no conception of his noble personality. In his very soul Andrew Common was spiritual and heavenly-minded.²⁵

First you must confront what ‘affected the whole life and thought of the man’, his ‘fiery enthusiasm’:

... it extinguished all frivolity, and kept even humour at bay. He made no jokes; he told no stories; he asked no riddles. It was emphatically true ... that he had no ‘small talk’. He did not converse, he lectured; he discussed subjects, he did not gossip about individuals. His very food he ate with the impatience of a man who wanted to get on without hindrance with some higher service. When he visited us, I always gave him the work of carving for the whole company, and even then he was done first, and he would look round for his work, his book, his paper ...²⁶

That is the cue for Common’s next enthusiasm: reading, that essentially solitary passion:

During the closing years of his life he read, so to say, voraciously, ... He was never so little alone as when alone ... If it is possible to be enthusiastic in silence, Mr. Common would be first in that line. I never knew so silent a man. He could read in his papers about shipwrecks, collisions, explosions, earthquakes, and conflagrations, and never ‘let on’ that he knew anything about them. As I have said, he lectured, he did not chatter.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

He was knowledgeable, he knew where he stood, he was vocal on the platform and in the pulpit, and he was ‘popular and efficient’ in both: ‘With what eager rapidity he spoke! How furiously he carried the war into the enemy’s camp! And yet when he preached upon “He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” or “There remaineth a rest for the people of God,” what tenderness!’²⁸ He was, of course a businessman.

Through and through his life, the enthusiasm glowed and quivered, in business, ... in all manner of consecrated service ... he was daily in business, yet daily above it ... He made no bargains; he never underbade a tradesman; he never boasted that he got an article worth thirty pounds for little more than thirty shillings. In such transactions he took no delight.²⁹

By his own account Parker had been close to Common for thirty-five years; he was well placed to judge the integrated Christian citizenship of his friend and father-in-law. He praised his generosity. Here was a man whose ‘mind naturally turned to religion, to politics, to social advancement, to public responsibility, to personal stewardship, and beneficence’, who tithed his income, ‘often, indeed, he gave away a third’, on occasion even a half. ‘I never knew so conscientious and so bountiful a giver.’³⁰ Parker stressed his discretion:

But surely, as a man of business, he would talk about banking, and discounts, and loans, and exchanges, and new enterprises? Never – literally never – on his own motion. If others inquired, he would answer, but never to my knowledge did he introduce the subject or prolong the conversation. He did not reside on the premises; he lived away on the sunny green hills that sloped up to heaven ...³¹

And how conscientiously he shouldered the consequences:

How he was trusted, consulted, waited for! Wherever he went he cleared a space for himself, and walked, as if by right, to the presidency and the casting vote. At one period he did a great deal of book-keeping at home, but it was book-keeping for the church. As the treasurer, he

²⁸ Ibid. 19.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. 20.

weekly opened hundreds of envelopes, and entered the amounts in the church-books ...³²

Parker had a gift for introducing the humdrum and the domestic and investing it with spiritual significance. Such things gave credence to his remembrance and to his picturing of mortality, for Andrew Common was mortal: 'I never knew any man suffer so continuously and so distressingly ... he would say that for five-and-forty years he had never been wholly free from pain'. Yet there is no death-bed scene in Parker's account, no glimpse or gleam of immortality such as a good death might provide. Parker keeps this side of the veil. It had been enough to recapture a vital humanity that surely could not be extinguished. Hence, perhaps, the significance of a swift last word-picture to bring his old friend and father-in-law home, of the sort to which Victorian preachers, fired by memories of Alpine visits, were irresistibly drawn. It conveyed the Christian hope: 'The yellow hair which adorned the head of his youth expressed the hopefulness of his temperament, and the Jungfrau-like snow that transformed it into the lustre of a Silberhorn signified that his hope in God was unsullied by a stain.'³³

POSTSCRIPT – AND ENVOI?

Almost thirteen years earlier, 9 August 1883, Joseph Parker was in Darlington for the funeral of a Common connection, Robert Teasdale. Teasdale, tanner, bank director, guardian, Inland Revenue commissioner, Liberal and Free Methodist, had been a business partner as well as kinsman of Ann Common's brother, Edward Kipling.³⁴ The weather fitted the moment. It was 'rather unpropitious, a cold wind blowing, and threatening clouds hanging overhead during the morning'. There was, nonetheless, an 'exceedingly large' attendance and the procession from Westfield, the Teasdale house, to the West Cemetery was impressive. It was headed by Durham County Constabulary's Darlington Division, followed by 'several magistrates', the trustees of two Free Methodist chapels, the mayor and corporation, the town clerk and the local MP. There were five

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ For Robert Teasdale (1809–83), see Julie Nichol, 'Aspects of Public Health in Darlington' (Undergraduate dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1986), 42.

mourning carriages. Andrew Common was in the second and Joseph Parker was in the fifth, along with three ministers. One was Darlington's Congregational minister, one was the principal of the Free Methodist Theological Institute, and one was Marmaduke Miller, a past minister of Robert Teasdale's Paradise Chapel and long a leading man in Free Methodism.³⁵

Miller conducted the service, and asked Parker to speak. Parker had not expected this. He rose, of course, to the occasion. Only ten days earlier he had been a guest at Westfield. Teasdale, whom he had known for nearly twenty years, had been in good spirits: 'The grip of his hand ... was strong; his voice had no faltering.' Parker began modestly: 'Yet, even here, I am stopped by a wholesome fear, as if our friend were himself present, for I know how critical he was as to every eulogium that is passed upon human life and conduct. Our friend was so honest in this matter'. But modesty was not really Parker's style and he got into his stride: 'Yet, it is the delight of love to exaggerate. Love cannot be content with bare measure; it says it must be good measure, pressed down, heaped up, running over. So would we now speak of our neighbour, and friend, and Christian brother.'³⁶ So Parker spoke of him as 'a business man, a reading man, a Christian evangelist, a teacher who gathered around him many young and devoted disciples who loved to hail him as their guide, philosopher, and friend'. Parker's words were striking and appropriate but hardly unexpected:

The occasion, however, would be lost upon us, would sink into commonplace, if it did not remind every man who is here, the strongest and bravest, that there is but a step between him and death. It is on these occasions that I personally feel the grandeur, the sublimity, the infinite helpfulness of the Divine Word. These are times characterised by a mocking godlessness ... but when we look into the out ground and see the blank pit, and feel the great farewell has been spoken, we do instinctively look about us with a serious and anxious inquiry ...³⁷

³⁵ *Northern Echo*, 10 August 1883, 3. The MP was from a local Quaker dynasty: (Sir) Theodore Fry (1836–1912), MP for Darlington 1880–95. Marmaduke Miller (1827–89), who ministered in Darlington from 1862–6, held positions of national responsibility in Free Methodism from 1858–83.

³⁶ *Northern Echo*, 10 August 1883, 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Did these words lift the veil for Parker and his hearers as together they looked into the out ground and the blank pit?

Parker's friendship with Teasdale began, it would seem, at the time of his marriage to Emma Jane Common. Emma Parker died in January 1899, and her husband was inconsolable. His own health began to fail in the autumn of 1901. He dated this from the time of his autumnal chairman's address to the Congregational Union on 15 October; the place was Manchester's Free Trade Hall, and his theme was 'The United Congregational Church'. His illness, he said, was 'a mystery even to his physicians'. Nonetheless, in March 1902, he became president of the National Free Church Council and by September he was sufficiently recovered to resume preaching 'with unabated power'. On 28 September he preached his last sermon.³⁸ On 28 November, at teatime, he died, cared for by his brother-in-law, Francis Common, the Sunderland iron merchant. Francis was prone to depression and his depression increased after Parker's death. He returned to Sunderland and shot himself on the morning of 10 October 1903.³⁹

What conclusions are to be drawn from this? Parker was *sui generis*. That is not to downplay his role in contemporary Congregationalism or his posthumous influence. He was a Free Churchman of national note and was long remembered as such, but he was not to be pigeon-holed. His re-creation of his friend and father-in-law, so particular to their family, was bound to resonate among those with whom he shared it because it was so characteristic of him. It could not be other than a sermon slipping insensibly into eulogy. Even so, the question with which I began hangs in the air. For the Christian death is a passage; for the historian it is a terminus extended by memory; and for the Christian historian? Here more attention might be paid to that word shot like a thunderbolt to stun that audience gathered so worthily in the City Temple to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee: 'I believe in another King, Our Jesus, whom Paul affirmed to be *alive*.' There was more to that than pulpit pyrotechnics but it was a word for this world and not the next – or was it?

³⁸ Jones, 'Parker, Joseph (1830–1902)'; Nicoll, *Princes*, 170; *CYB* 1902, 9–10.

³⁹ *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 12 October, 6; *ibid.* 13 October 1903, 6. Francis Common (1847–1903) was a trustee and deacon of the Royalty Union Congregational Church, Sunderland, and treasurer of the Parker Memorial Home for Girls, founded in memory of his sister, Emma Jane Parker.