

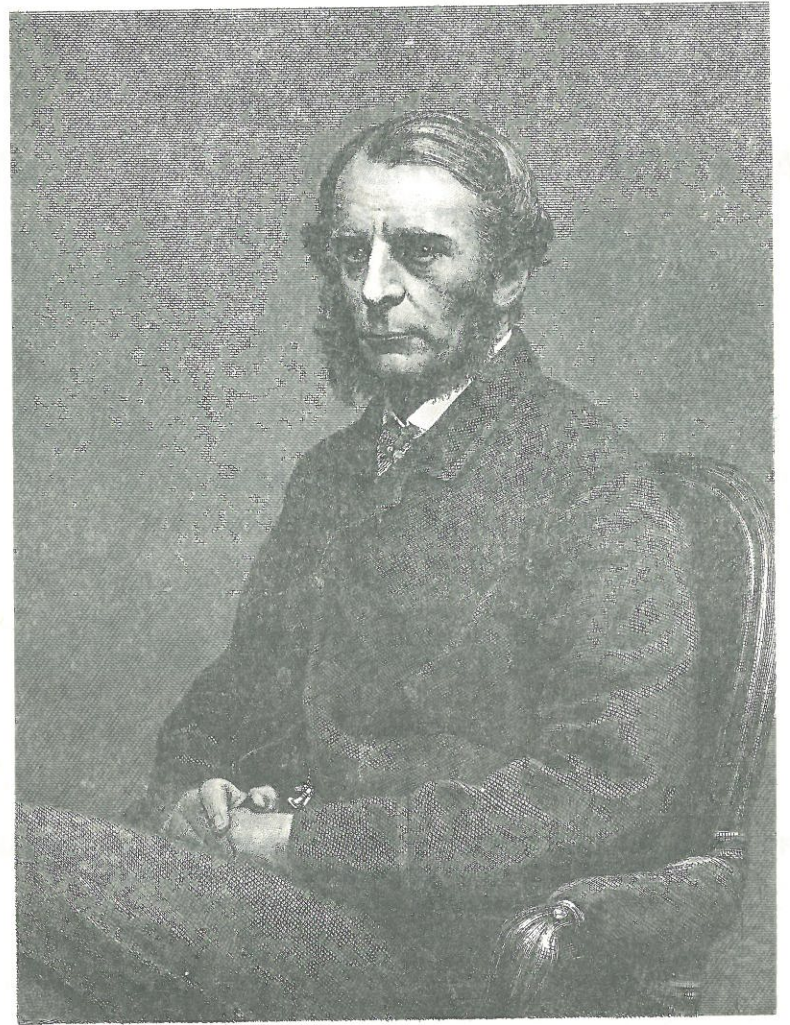
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VICTORIAN PREACHER WITH A
MODERN MESSAGE**

CHARLES H. MULLER
M.A. (Wales), Ph.D. (Lond.), D.Litt. (UOFS)



**INAUGURAL LECTURE DELIVERED ON ACCEPTING THE CHAIR OF
ENGLISH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH
ON FRIDAY, 17TH AUGUST, 1979**



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PIETERSBURG

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Mr Chancellor, members of the Council, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

Charles Kingsley, Professor of Modern History, Rector of Eversley, Chaplain to the Queen, and Canon of Westminster, is remembered today as a writer of old-fashioned novels and children's stories (on the strength of *Westward Ho!* and the *Water-Babies* alone), and as a crusader for Christian Socialism, and perhaps as an exponent of 'muscular Christianity'. Yet he was foremostly a preacher of stirring didactic sermons. Much of what he wrote (which ranges from natural history to sociological tracts in addition to his literary and religious writings) is forgotten today because he wrote (as the *Edinburgh Review*¹ observed in 1877) 'of the present, and for the present'. His writing, meant for immediate effect, was undoubtedly careless. 'As it first flowed from his pen it went before the public, and so remains'.² Fanny Kingsley, in her biography of Kingsley, regarded her husband's rapid creativity a mark of his genius. It is, perhaps, the remote topicality of his writing which makes it less powerful — or less popular — today; but the dramatic 'present' character of Kingsley's style — particularly as exemplified in his sermons — cannot be denied. It is easy to see that his spoken words, as recorded in the sermons, must have had an almost magical, and very dramatic, effect on his congregation, coming, as they do, so directly from the heart rather than from the head.

As a preacher, Kingsley was pre-eminently a teacher — a theological or Christian didactician. Though largely a moral exhorter, he was primarily an expounder of Scripture. He explained at length the present relevance of the Bible, and the present reality of God's providence in the affairs of men. He believed in his divine calling. In July 1848, when he was writing his first novel *Yeast*, he wrote to F.D. Maurice, expressing his belief 'that One is guiding me, and driving me when I will not be guided, who will make me, and has made me, go His way and do His work, by fair means or foul'; he believed that God had made him a 'parish priest', and that, like Jeremiah, he could not ignore the urge to preach, for God had made his Word 'like fire within my bones'.⁴ This was more strictly an urge to *teach*, for Kingsley's special province was his educative work as preacher and writer. Not only are his novels imbued with socio-religious polemics, but the sermons themselves are distinctly didactic, in theme as well as structure. It may be well to consider Kingsley's style as a preacher before looking more closely at his message — as represented by two of his 'contemporary' (non-historical) novels.

Kingsley was a plain and honest speaker, a dashing cavalry leader rather than a subtle strategist. The blunt pugnacity and dramatic instinct we sense in the sermons are a feature of the man himself. It is interesting to note some of the contemporary reports of his manner. Justin McCarthy gives a full account of how he could 'conquer his audience' in spite of his uncouth way of speaking. Though his appeal was largely emotional (not rational), he was

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unquestionably famous for his power and fluency as a preacher. The occasion was a meeting in London when Kingsley addressed a largely 'Cockney audience' on the social suffering of the poor:

Rather tall, very angular, surprisingly awkward, with thin, staggering legs, a hatchet face adorned with scraggy gray whiskers, a faculty for falling into the most ungainly attitudes, and making the most hideous contortions of visage and frame; with a rough provincial accent and an uncouth way of speaking, which would be set down for absurd caricature on the boards of a comic theatre . . . But he has a robust and energetic plain-speaking which soon struck home to the heart of the meeting. He conquered his audience. Those who at first could hardly keep from laughing; those who, not knowing the speaker, wondered whether he was not mad or in liquor; those who heartily disliked his general principles and his public attitude, were alike won over, long before he had finished, by his bluff and blunt earnestness and his transparent sincerity. The subject was one which concerned the social suffering of the poor. Mr Kingsley approached it broadly and boldly, talking with a grand disregard for logic and political economy, sometimes startling the more squeamish of his audience by the Biblical frankness of his descriptions and his language, but, I think, convincing every one that he was sound at heart . . .³

It is easy to see, from this description, that Kingsley would have had a blunt oratorical manner in the pulpit, a dramatic vigour of delivery combined with an earnest sincerity, or honesty which would have gone a long way towards off-setting the impression of fustian. This, as well as his dramatic and didactic manner, is apparent in the remarks of the *Church Quarterly Review* (1877):

What he did was to teach and preach with all the resources of a striking style, with a never-failing fund of illustration, and a profound and contagious earnestness, some few striking truths. These he held and taught with intense and passionate energy . . .⁴

Kingsley was a compelling preacher, patently sincere, given to homely images and down-to-earth advice. It is not surprising that he faced an early objection of being too colloquial in his style — by Dr Sumner, the Bishop of Winchester, when Kingsley went up for his priest's orders. It was this very peculiarity, according to Fanny Kingsley, which 'arrested and attracted his hearers, and helped to fill a very empty church'.⁵ There is, as the *Edinburgh Review* observed in 1877, nothing abstract about his sermons, 'nothing which the clod-crushing mind could not readily lay hold of and understand'.⁶ To some, the *Edinburgh* goes on to observe, his colloquialism 'may seem to verge on profanity', though in fact it was 'strictly the expression of an intensity of religious feeling, which considered no work of God too small to be spoken of, and no work of the devil too homely to be denounced'.⁷ We may ask, was it an intensity of religious feeling, or emotional energy, which sometimes precipitated in a style of tautologous rhetoric? It is surely uncontrolled zeal which resulted in the bombast and rhatos of an emotionally-charged confirmation sermon preached at Eversley in 1847. The sermon MS, hitherto unpublished, and at present in the Parish Collection at the Firestone Library, Princeton University, illustrates Kingsley at his worst, and, paradoxically, at his most powerful.

An impression of power is produced by the impetuous verbal flow, the rough, energetic feeling, the lacerating language which is nevertheless softened by a vein of tenderness — of concern for the young Christians — and the denunciatory statements. But the repetitive rhetoric, the exaggerated sense of threat, and what one might call a declamatory relish, make one ask if Kingsley was not being carried away by a form of emotional intoxication rather than religious fervour. No doubt the young Christians who comprised the congregation were petrified by the almost melodramatic style, their hearts literally 'failing them for fear' as they were made aware of the ominous danger of a ravenous devil — if the obtrusive theatricality of the preacher's manner was not self-defeating, that is, in destroying the illusion of reality. The church at Eversley is itself small, conducive to an intimate bond between preacher and congregation; the overwhelming effect of the sermon, with its rising tide of feeling, and with the rough, even harsh⁸ voice of the speaker, might be imagined:

What is overcoming the wicked one? Overcoming the temptations which he puts into our hearts — To pride — to spite — to foul & filthy desires — that if possible, he may make us like himself — proved selfish — monsters — out of tune with heaven & earth — Thus . . . laughing at all that is honest & pure . . .

And believe me, my friends — he and his evil spirits are not far from any one of us . . . He walks about like a roaring lion whom he may devour.

And believe me too, he fights harder to gain the souls of the young than he does the souls of the old — Because he hates to see things healthy, thriving & growing — therefore he especially hates young people — He hates joy — He longs to make all their merriment low & brutal — He hates tenderness & love — therefore he tries to make them selfish & hard hearted — He hates to see things or men *grow* — therefore he longs to stunt growing peoples' immortal souls — that they may wither away, & bring no good fruits to perfection — He hates to see a flower blossom, or a tree bear fruit — & just so he hates to see your soul bud & blossom, & become beautiful & noble . . . Amen. Above he hates to see anyone useful — therefore he especially tries to get hold of the young, & make them selfish, unprofitable useless to God & man, before they have the chance or the power of doing any good at all — that he may keep them useless — weeds hurtful & poisonous weeds if he can — through their whole lives, to get as much mischief as possible out of them - believe me young people — The great awful devil — The prince of hell hates you — hates you doubly — with such a deep mean bitter spite as only devils can feel — He hates you doubly because you are young — he hates you doubly because you are going to be or have been confirmed.

(*'First Sermon after Confirmation Sunday morning Sept. 26/47 Eversley'*)⁹

By far the greatest number of Kingsley's sermons were never prepared for the press. As Rev. W. Harrison in his preface to the anthology of Kingsley's sermons *All Saints' Day*¹⁰ points out, they were written out very roughly — sometimes at an hour's notice — and were only intended for delivery from the pulpit. The above extract, very slightly edited, was clearly written straight off, as the emotional inspiration took hold of the author — as might be suggested by the constant hammering on the same point. The impulsive haste of composition is borne out by the use of dashes in lieu of

punctuation. As he wrote he barely waited for the ink to dry, which is frequently smudged: where one page lies upon another, the ink has come off on the facing page. The aural impact of his preaching style may be deduced, not only from the speed of composition (which may be assumed to coincide with speed of delivery), but from the colloquialism, for it is particularly in the unedited (unpublished) sermons that one detects the rhythm of natural speech.

Kingsley's strong feeling, masculine language and militant tone are features of his writing which W.R. Greg aptly typified in the following account of his style in 1860:

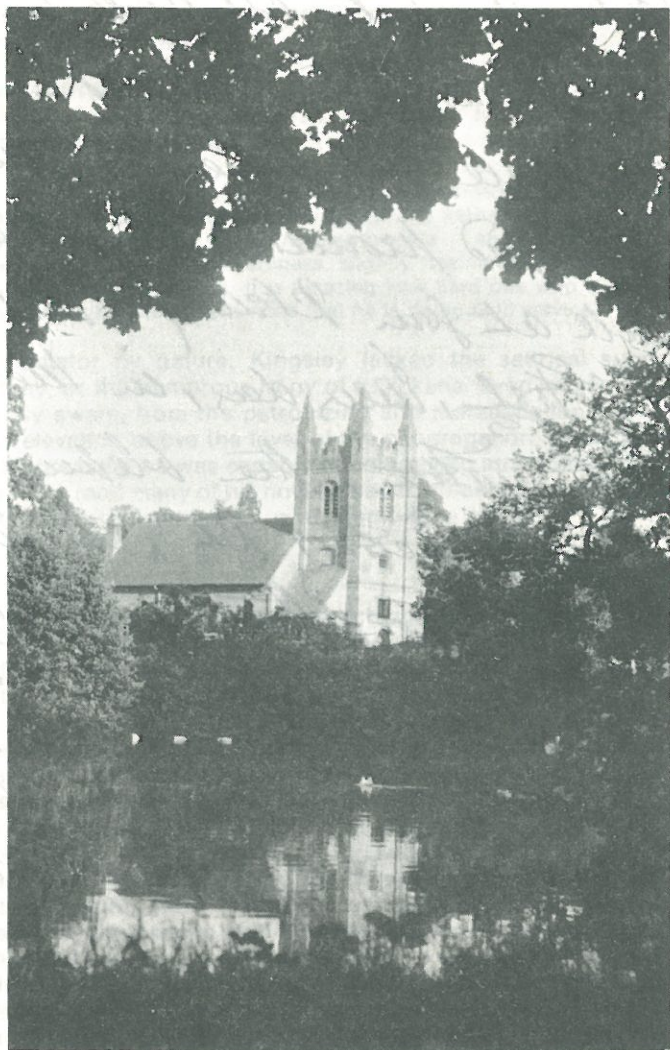
... he reminds us of nothing so much as of a war-horse panting for the battle; his usual style is marvellously like a neigh — a 'ha! ha!' among the trumpets; the dust of the combat is to him the breath of life... and he wields his tomahawk with an unregenerate heartiness, slightly heathenish no doubt, but withal unspeakably refreshing. It is amazing how hard one who is a gladiator by nature strikes when convinced that he is doing God service.¹¹

As a gladiator by nature, Kingsley lacked the satirical subtlety of a Thackeray, or the humorous irony of a Dickens. Even in his novels one is frequently aware, from the patronizing and moralistic tone, of the pulpit with its elevation above the level of the congregation. As a dynamic and dramatic preacher he was capable of compelling attention — but because the sermons (and many of his novels) had the blunt effect of a cudgel, they have not been transmitted to us as memorable prose.

Much of Kingsley's gladiatorial preaching is evident in his novel *Alton Locke* (1850), which is narrated by a young Chartist tailor who becomes a poet of the people. In the person of Locke, Kingsley is protesting against the exploitation of the poor by the aristocracy. While still a young apprentice tailor, Locke is forced into the putrescence of sweatshop life where workmen starve and die of disease. Later an old Scots bookseller, Sandy Mackaye (modelled on Carlyle), encourages him to become a Chartist poet. He tries to promote his literary interests through Cambridge University where he is actually befriended by members of the aristocracy: there is Dean Winnstay, the Dean's daughter Lillian (who is little more than a sawdust doll with whom he falls in love), and Lillian's resolute cousin, Eleanor Staunton, who later becomes a Christian Socialist. Locke is persuaded by the Dean to strip his poetry of its revolutionary content, and it is ironic that he is later imprisoned for his accidental involvement in a Chartist riot. His romantic love for Lillian turns to ashes, for she marries his self-seeking cousin George. While he suffers disillusionment in his own life, Locke also becomes thoroughly disenchanted in what he sees in the orthodox clergy as represented by his hypocritical cousin who chooses the Church as a means of rising into the aristocracy. The social exclusivism of Victorian Christianity is attacked in George's 'orthodox' religion: 'Carry out the Church system', he says, 'that's the thing — all laid down by rule and method'. Rigidity of doctrine, or rigidity of tradition, effectively results in the

Lead you into all truth —
For Christ is at hand — &
If you will but believe, & trust
the blessed promises & believe
for all at your praying, you will
suddenly feel, every day, in your
contemplation, the blessing of
being remembered by the children
of the Kingdom of Heaven
of the Kingdom of Heaven
it is to be done — If you believe
that this is the way to the Kingdom
Experience that this is the way

The last page of a sermon preached at Eversley in 1846 and 1849, entitled 'The Lord is at Hand'. (From the Parish Collection, Princeton University Library.)



Charles Kingsley's church at Eversley.

churches being filled, in Locke's words, with the 'rich and respectable, to the almost entire exclusion of the adult lower classes' (p. 247).¹² Yet, he says, in Judea it was the common people who heard Christ gladly. And so, on personal, political, and spiritual levels, Locke's socialist fervour is dampened if not extinguished. His political involvement is followed by his devastating illness and repentance of Chartism, or political activism. But the novel ends with his spiritual rebirth — his simple acceptance of Christianity before he dies.

With its autobiographical form the novel follows the pattern of a Christian testimony — a life which becomes more desperate and purposeless until, completely broken down, the repentant sinner rejects any further reliance on his own resources and accepts Christ as his sole *raison d'être* and sustaining strength. Locke's name is thematically significant, for his autobiography is a gradual unlocking process: a lock which is finally broken to admit the regenerating power of Christ who said, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you'. This, undoubtedly, is the abiding message of *Alton Locke* — the priority of the Kingdom of God, not Chartism or immediate political ideals. The novel's eponymous apprentice tailor and poet is, in fact, modelled on the working-class poet and radical Chartist, Thomas Cooper, who became converted to Christian orthodoxy, largely through the influence of Kingsley.

In spite of Locke's final conversion, however, one feels that his heated political commentary expresses Kingsley's views. One is aware of the author's gladiatorial sermon-style in Locke's many direct addresses to the reader. In speaking of the oppression of the masses his direct addresses break the illusion of reality and interrupt the narrative flow; on these occasions it is clearly the voice of Kingsley the political sermonizer which breaks through Locke's personality:

Ay, respectable gentlemen and ladies, I will confess all to you — you shall have, if you enjoy it, a fresh opportunity for indulging that supreme pleasure which the press daily affords you of insulting the classes whose powers most of you know as little as you do their sufferings. Yes; the Chartist poet is vain, conceited, ambitious, uneducated, shallow, inexperienced, envious, ferocious, scurrilous, seditious, traitorous. — Is your charitable vocabulary exhausted?

(*Alton Locke*, p. 52)

Here the Chartist poet shows himself to be quite worthy of the scurrilous epithets he anticipates from the aristocratic reader; his tone is insufferably arrogant and it is little wonder that it invoked the wrath of what, elsewhere, he calls the 'venal press' (p. 26). *The Times* took up the challenge, and felt obliged to warn the reader against Locke's 'charge of democracy against aristocracy' — 'Reader, do not believe it! Be more faithful to your brother labourer, and refuse to accept these perverted utterances . . .'¹³ Kingsley's style is undoubtedly overcharged, when his social realism becomes almost contrived through the author's uncontrolled fervour — as happens when he describes the notorious Jacob's Island region in London with its open sewer from which the tenement dwellers drew their drinking water. But his

writing is not, as a recent critic has maintained, always overheated in its excitement — 'intrusive, lascivious, thrilled at its own capacity for shock'.¹⁴ If anything, his graphic verbs suggestive of bestial subsistence, and his double, sometimes triple, adjectives, betray his indignation, or express his Christian involvement in suffering and his desire to stir people up, as he once put it, 'with the tongue of St James':

From the butchers' and greengrocers' shops the gas lights flared and flickered, wild and ghastly, over haggard groups of slip-shod dirty women . . . Blood and sewer-water crawled from under doors and out of spouts, and reeked down the gutters among offal, animal and vegetable, in every stage of putrefaction . . .
(*Alton Locke*, p. 93)

And he goes on to describe the 'narrow, brawling torrents of filth, and poverty, and sin, — the houses with their teeming load of life . . . piled up into the dingy, choking night'; and, in an emotional outburst, he concludes with a tautology of epithets: 'A ghastly, deafening, sickening sight it was' (p. 93). Undoubtedly something of the garish effects of transpontine drama is produced. But Kingsley is merely employing the melodramatic techniques which writers like Dickens and Mrs Gaskell were using for social reform; melodrama is not indulged in for its own sake, but becomes the legitimate outlet for the author's righteous Christian anger.

With its exposure of the sweatshop life of destitute tailors, and its radical vision of social oppression and social realism in vivid scenes of starvation and squalor, *Alton Locke* was considered subversive and reactionary by Victorian critics. Nevertheless, Carlyle welcomed the work as 'a new explosion, or salvo of red-hot shot against the Devil's Dungheap'¹⁵ — words which, in fact, suggest a dynamic political content rather than a message of passive Christianity. And yet Kingsley's central vision was religious, not political like Disraeli's in *Sybil*. Although Kingsley was a self-confessed Chartist,¹⁶ *Alton Locke* is not all fretful tract. It is really a Christian novel, written in the spirit of his sermons which never failed to emphasize, on the one hand, the Gospel message of the Kingdom of God, and, on the other, personal salvation or reform.

Few critics have given the concluding chapters of *Alton Locke* their due importance. With their position at the end of the novel, they drive home the author's chief message, which is that of spiritual democracy; and they are written with the suave rhetoric of an evangelistic preacher, which is frequently the quality of Kingsley's sermons:

. . . the priesthood alone, of all human institutions, testifies of Christ the King of men, the Lord of all things, the inspirer of all discoveries; who reigns, and will reign, till He has put all things under His feet, and the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ.
(*Alton Locke*, p. 425)

These words are spoken by the resolute Eleanor Staunton who, in the words of a recent critic, is 'a kind of Christian Socialist rector in skirts';¹⁷ in the novel she serves as Kingsley's spiritual mouthpiece, and in the passage just quoted preaches on the active role of the Church in bringing about the

Kingdom of God on earth. Notice the similarity of her words (based on Rev. 11:15) to those used by Kingsley in his advent sermon 'The Kingdom of God' (1849):

Yes, I say, Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of health and deliverance for body and soul; and it will conquer, and it will spread, and it will grow, till the nations of the world have become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ. Christ reigns, and Christ will reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet . . .¹⁸

The rhythm, the emotional fervour, and the tone of positive assurance, are exactly the same in both passages. Admittedly Kingsley's vision was a fusion of his political and his religious ideals; but this is because he saw God as actively concerned with, and engaged in the affairs of men — in as much as He became manifest in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ. In *Alton Locke* the author's Chartist ideals, in fact, are subservient to his religious-evangelical purpose, and in this sense his vision is closely Carlylean as defined by Basil Willey: 'democracy', in order to survive, must be born again; it must 'unlearn its economic idolatries, cease to be self-seeking and mechanical, and recapture its soul by returning to its own inmost ideas, which will turn out, on reflection, to be those of Christianity'.¹⁹ Yet for Kingsley liberty, equality and fraternity were not to be found in Carlyle's God, a mere 'formless Infinite', but in the God of the Bible, and specifically in the Gospel of the 'glad tidings of the Kingdom of God', as preached by Christ. Thus in converting Locke from Chartism to Christ, Eleanor Staunton tells him 'to look for a state founded on better things than acts of parliament':

That state, that city, Jesus said, was come — was now within us, had we eyes to see . . . Call it the church, the gospel, civilization, freedom, democracy, what you will — I shall call it by the name by which my Master spoke of it — the kingdom of God.

(*Alton Locke*, p. 407)

Kingsley's social vision, then, is wholly subservient to the hope of a divine kingdom being realized at a future time on earth, yet also in the hearts of those who are at present subject to Christ. In the foremost instance his perspective is a political eschatological one, for he believes in the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy concerning a future millennium, to be realized not so much by means of direct divine intervention as by means of God operating through the agencies of men. History, therefore, is conceived of as a state of forward progress, with democracy (the highest quality of civilization) in a state of being christianized. Eleanor tells Alton Locke: 'If, henceforth, you claim political enfranchisement, claim it not as mere men, who may be villains, savages, animals, slaves of their own prejudices and passions; but as members of Christ, children of God, inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, and therefore bound to realize it on earth' (p. 406).

Thus one's personal response to, and acceptance of Christ, is the beginning of one's involvement in the evolutionary process that will be culminated in the divine kingdom on earth — which was the ideal of the Zealots and the writers of eschatological prophecy. It follows that it is one's personal acceptance of Christ — the Kingdom of God being *within* one —

which is the most important step towards Christ's universal rulership. In this lies the responsibility of the individual, for Kingsley placed great emphasis on one's *fitness* to rule, and on one's worthiness of Christ's Kingdom. The emphasis is not so much on grace as on the acquisition of spiritual muscle:

If we cannot feel bound in honour to live for Christ, to work for Christ, to delight in talking of Christ, thinking of Christ, to glory in doing Christ's commandments to the very smallest point, to feel no sacrifice too great, no trouble too petty, if we can please Christ by it and help forward Christ's kingdom upon earth — if we cannot feel bound in honour to do that for Christ, what honour is there in us?

(Sermon: 'The Love of Christ')²⁰

This is the quality of Christian strength or fitness — dedication and obedience — which Kingsley regarded as the foundation of socialism or, for that matter, of Chartism. In a poster directed at the workmen of England, he emphasized the primary need for personal transformation, or 'fitness': 'You think the Charter will make you free — would to God it would. The Charter is not bad; *if the men who use it are not bad* . . . Workers of England be wise, and then you *must* be free, for you will be *fit* to be free'.²¹

The basis of Kingsley's socialism, and the basis of his Christianity, is rebirth or conversion on a personal level. But, primarily, it is Christian conversion, for as a leader of Christian Socialism Kingsley regarded himself an instrument of the Church. And the unifying symbol of the Christian, Kingsley said in a controversial sermon on equality given at St Johns in London, is the Lord's supper: 'One table, one reverential posture, one bread, one wine, for high and low, for wise and foolish'.²² All become members of the one body of Christ. The sacrament of the bread and wine is the ultimate leveller, and is Kingsley's answer (in *Alton Locke*) to spiritual or social exclusivism. In the final chapter members of the aristocracy and the working class kneel together to partake of the eucharist. It is this Christian perspective which gives the novel its abiding value.

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Charles Kingsley wrote three 'contemporary' Victorian novels. *Alton Locke* (1850) pleaded the case of the working man in the city. *Yeast* (written a year before *Alton Locke* but only published in 1851) attacked the exploitation of the rural working class. Seven years later, in 1857, *Two Years Ago* preached a similar gospel of social (and religious) reform — though this time more clearly on a personal, or individual level.

Reviewers and readers alike found the polemical pill offered by *Two Years Ago* much easier to swallow, if not more palatable, than the original social fermentation of *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*. The author was less critical, and the novel's contemporary Victorian milieu showed signs of considerable social and agrarian progress. In the introductory chapter, two of the minor characters, travelling through the Devonshire countryside, comment on the 'spirit of self-reform' awakened in the hearts of the Devonshire people; their desire for duty has resulted in 'rich and poor meeting together more and more in the faith that God has made them all'. This optimism is clearly an

expression of Kingsley's belief that materialism and secular matters are in the hands of a divine Providence — the belief that all physical, scientific and social evolution is evidence of the gradual realization of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the strong undercurrent of scientific interests in *Two Years Ago* expresses Kingsley's view that man's scientific conquest of Nature — his technological progress — is one phase of the divine Kingdom coming on Earth. All progress — scientific and social — is, for the author, reassuring proof of a wise and meaningful Providence, both in Nature and in the secular affairs of men.

This theological view of material progress is the main burden of Kingsley's sermon, 'The Fount of Science', preached at St Margaret's Church, Westminster, in 1851. The blessings of science and civilization are 'signs that the Lord God was really dwelling' amongst men.²³ Kingsley's scientific mentor is Francis Bacon who stated that 'the pursuit of physical science clearly proceeds from Him, the Author of good, and Father of light'.²⁴ For Kingsley this meant that 'liberty, law, peace, civilization, learning, art, science', were Pentecostal gifts, the fruits of the Spirit, even to the extent that nations that have not accepted the divine Kingship of Christ 'have in exactly that proportion fallen back into barbarism and bloodshed, slavery and misery'.²⁵ This theory of human progress, or philosophy of history, Kingsley called the 'Gospel of the Kingdom of God'. It is difficult to judge whether he would have held to this view had he lived today, when godlessness and technological progress are not necessarily unrelated — though he would certainly have indicated the extent to which certain countries, in rejecting God, have indeed reverted to barbarism and bloodshed, and have re-enslaved the people under the banner of equality and freedom. In his own time his faith was severely tried by the setbacks of history; he was so emotionally involved in the spiritual progress of mankind that, in the year in which *Two Years Ago* was published, news of the Indian mutiny depressed him, even evoking grave doubts about God's existence. Nevertheless, for Kingsley, crises of doubt — and involvement in suffering — were necessary religious experiences in the spiritual development of the Christian. All great thinkers, says Kingsley, 'have this one fact in common — that once in their lives, at least, they have gone into the bottomless pit, and . . . there, out of the darkness, have asked the question of all questions — "Is there a God? . . ." ' (p. 456).²⁶

Behind the apparent posterity with which *Two Years Ago* opens is the dormant nightmare of cholera. But cholera, for Kingsley, did not mean a negation of secular-spiritual progress, as is clear from his three cholera sermons preached at Eversley in 1849. Much of the novel bears out his belief that disease, the result of sin, is nevertheless used to good effect by a just and loving Father.

Neither did the Crimean war dampen Kingsley's religious faith. The war, which might have been the greatest impediment for the belief that an economic and social millennium was in view, created no doubts in Kingsley's mind; he readily assimilated or rationalized it into his optimistic

philosophy of history. In *Two Years Ago*, the war serves a useful purpose, having a regenerative effect on the characters who rely too much on their own strength. Imprisonment in a Russian prison brings about the conversion of Tom Thurnall, the self-reliant, cheerful, devil-may-care hero whose eyes are finally opened to the ways of God in the affairs of men. This, in effect, is the Christian purpose of the book. It presents a theodicy — a justification of God — and is, at the same time, an evangelist's plea that men should submit to Christ.

As with *Alton Locke* and *Yeast*, Kingsley's new novel about contemporary life supplemented his work in the pulpit. While it employs various narrative techniques to dramatize the message of the Broad Church, it does not obey 'the canons of criticism' about which, Kingsley told a correspondent, he knew little and cared little for, since his novel was what he called 'Christian art'.²⁷ For Kingsley, the true artist is dedicated to the plight of humanity. As one of a brotherhood — as a member of Christ's body, or church — he cannot remain objective, nor portray 'common life' with its trivialities of fashion and 'insipid respectability'. Concerned only with 'what this world means, and what God is doing here', he endeavours to show 'how much of the heroic and tragical element, supposed to be dead, buried, and white-washed over, survives in modern society, ready to assert itself for evil and for good the moment a great cause or a great sorrow appears'.²⁸ In *Two Years Ago* the author, the ubiquitous commentator, says that 'the special and proper province of the poet' is to aspire towards the ideal — an ideal which he identifies very closely with the Kingdom of God. For Kingsley the true artist was 'still heroic in God's sight', working 'at the divine drudgery of doing good', descending into 'dens of darkness and sloughs of filth' to rescue the sinful and the fallen (p. 151). For him, true art was committed art. That is why, preoccupied with the heroic and the Christian, he fuses, in the protagonist, two diverse traditions: the conventional melodramatic tradition of the Resourceful Hero (seen at its best in the sensation novels of Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins), and the practical Christianity as conceived by the Broad Church. The marriage is an uneasy one, for the melodramatic hero, accustomed to a life of high adventure, does not normally stoop to such mundane matters as bad drains, sewers, and cholera-infected hovels.

The marriage of the romantic, melodramatic tradition and the Christian tradition makes the novel a hybrid art form. Consequently it runs counter to fictional conventions, and the conventions of the religious novel where the protagonist moves from darkness to enlightenment, from sin to conversion. There is a collision between what the reader is led to expect of a hero and what is offered. Tom, in spite of his heroic stature, has a serious flaw, which is the very strength on which his heroism is based — his self-reliance. In his sermon 'The Fall', Kingsley points out that man's righteousness consists 'in looking up to God, trusting Him utterly, believing that he was to do God's will, and not his own'.²⁹ Yet by nature the Resourceful Hero of Victorian fiction is independent and self-willed, and has the happy power of always

landing on his legs. He is not the product of original sin. From the Christian point of view man's 'fallen nature of itself is inclined to pride, to worldliness', says Kingsley;³⁰ therefore Tom must be convicted of sin, and convinced of his reliance on God.

It is not surprising that Kingsley's unconverted hero is a very paradoxical figure. The villain of the novel, a conceited poet who is driven to suicide through smouldering jealousy, might be said to have a greater need for grace, and to be better material — or a better challenge! — for the power of Providence. (In recent times, one thinks of Graham Greene's sanctified sinners.) The villain Vavasour, however, is excluded from salvation by his own weakness, whereas Tom, with his physical and moral fitness, has good potential for salvation. He is like Tom the waterbaby who, through doing good, is able, eventually, to recognize and find good. Only after the waterbaby has rescued a lobster from a lobster-pot, are his eyes opened to the other waterbabies. Tom Thurnall has the courage to act bravely in order to grow spiritually strong. Similarly, Tom the waterbaby must prove his bravery in his hazardous journey to the Other-end-of-Nowhere before he can become a man and marry Ellie — 'He has won his spurs in the great battle, and become fit to go with you and be a man; because he has done the thing he did not like'.³¹

All this means that the would-be Christian must take the heroic initiative before he can benefit from the initiative that Providence takes to help the sinner. Kingsley says as much in his sermon 'True Abstinence', which is really an exposition on athletic Christianity. We must exercise spiritual training and so 'make ourselves fit to do God's work';³² only when God 'sees you trying to be all this, will [He] help you to be so';³³ only when we 'subjugate the flesh and keep our minds clear and strong enough', will we be able to hear 'the voice of God within our hearts'.³⁴ It is through man's innate strength that Providence is able to guide him. And Tom Thurnall, though reprobate, has such strength. He is a man who 'depended on nothing but himself'. He is really considerably more conceited, or self-inflated, than the eponymous working-class chartist of *Alton Locke*, but the author's tone of general approbation puts the reader off his guard. In his sermons Kingsley could speak more harshly of self-will: 'That root-sin of self-will first brought death and misery among mankind'.³⁵ In spite of the author's general approval of Tom, it is, nevertheless, Tom's self-will which is the cause of his godlessness, or religious apathy. Kingsley goes on, in his sermon 'The Fall', to say that it is 'the sin of self-will . . . which hinders sinners from giving themselves up to God; and that sin must be broken through, or religion is a mockery and a dream'.³⁶ The novel, as a whole, is a dramatization of this statement, for Tom's self-reliance is finally broken — although very casually and fortuitously — in the last chapter. But he does become more susceptible to grace as the novel proceeds. At first he represents the scientific agnosticism of his age: 'All religions were, in his eyes, equally true and equally false. Superior morality was owing principally to the influences of race and climate . . .' (p. 36). Tom, of course, is a determinist, not an environmentalist, and illustrates Kingsley's belief in inward progress:

'But I'll be an anti-firing boat, as you see' said
Tom.
And another, 'The East lies here, my dear; I suppose you
think it the East?'

'But I don't want to go East' said Tom.
'All these state recruits, whether they are going,
you are going wrong; cried they all with one voice. — It
was the only thing that they were agreed about; and pointed
advice to all the kind of two points of the compass.
till the Tom thought all the ships in England had
got together, & fallen fighting.

And then Tom would have been ^{swayed} ^{about} the storm, the
said sea, if the dog had not taken into his lead, that he was
going to pull his master in pieces; & he had been ^{so} sharp
about the gastrocnemius muscles, that he gave them some twirl
& then only to think of at last; & while he was ^{so} busy with his
Calves, Tom & the dog got safely away.

A page from the original manuscript of *The Water-Babies*. (From the Parish
Collection, Princeton University Library.)

Progress is inward, of the soul . . . The self-help and self-determination of the
independent soul — that is the root of progress . . .³⁷

It is, in fact, through the self-help philosophy of the Samuel Smiles variety
that Tom moves towards dependence on God. In this is the implicit
ambivalence of Tom's character — or the spiritual ambivalence of
Kingsley's theology — for while Tom's self-sufficiency is opposed to
dependence on God, his self-help is the cause of his spiritual progress.
Herein lies the unorthodoxy of Kingsley's Christianity, for though Tom is
saved not by works but by grace, it is by virtue of his inborn strength to do
good works that Providence can help him. This is, really, a Christian
paradox. Tom receives help because he is worthy of help. When he exhorts
Frank Headley, the curate, to preach on means to fight the cholera, the
latter tells him that he 'would make a right good Christian' (p. 217). The
author says of Tom: 'If he accepts cheerfully and manfully the things which
he does see, he will be all the more able to enter hereafter into the deeper
mystery of things unseen' (p. 225); and again: 'At least he is a man, and a
brave one; and as the greater contains the less, surely before a man can be a
good man, he must be a brave one first, much more a man at all' (pp. 225-6).
It follows that the cowards, like the villain Vavasour, are lost and without
hope. Providence has no power to save them. Kingsley's message is that
God helps those who help their brothers. This, in fact, is Darwinism —
natural selection or the survival of the fittest — within a Christian context.
The result is divine selection.

In *Two Years Ago* it is primarily through the heroine (a woman) that
Providence works to bring the hero to Christ. For Kingsley, the interaction
of eros and agape (physical and spiritual love) was a perfectly legitimate —
if not necessary — requisite for the divine initiative. Here it should be
mentioned that Kingsley minimized the distinction between the flesh and
spirit, for he was violently opposed to the Manichaeism which condemned
all natural impulses as evil. In his novels, therefore, a young woman is
always the agent of Providence; through her feminine charm rather than
logical persuasion, she helps the protagonist to find the Celestial City.
Divine grace comes to Alton Locke through the resourceful Christian
heroine, Eleanor Staunton; to Lancelot (in *Yeast*) through Argemone; and,
to Tom Thurnall, through the significantly named Grace Harvey. In *Two
Years Ago* Armsworth, the genial banker and friend of Tom, says of women:
'I fancy sometimes that they were all meant to be the mates of angels, and
stooped to men as a *pis aller*; reversing the old story of the sons of heaven
and the daughters of men' (p. 412). That this expresses the author's view
seems evident from his sermon 'Grace', preached at Eversley in 1856, where
he speaks of the Greeks' concept of *Charis*:

they fancied that they [the three graces] were goddesses — spirits of some
kind in the shape of beautiful, and amiable, and innocent maidens, who took
delight in going about the world and making people happy and amiable like
themselves . . .³⁸

The incarnate angel motif is clearly embodied by Grace Harvey whose
rescue of Tom from shipwreck is symbolic of the spiritual role she plays in

helping him to salvation. Throughout the novel it is love — divine and human — which she brings to bear on Tom. Unfortunately the reader's impression of the authenticity of her influence on Tom is offset by the obvious theatricality, or vein of melodrama, which colours her portrayal. She prays for ships at sea 'in her wild way, with half outspoken words', in a prayer that is really a theatrical soliloquy. Her clairvoyancy is dramatized by externalization of detail, with close attention to dumb play or facial expression to assist the reader's visualization of scene; one has an unfortunate awareness of a stage actress:

And she stands looking out over the sea; but she has lost sight of everything, save her own sad imaginations. Her eyes open wider and wider, as if before some unseen horror; the eyebrows contract upwards; the cheeks sharpen; the mouth parts; the lips draw back, showing the white teeth, as if in intensest agony. Thus she stands long, motionless, awe-frozen . . .

(*Two Years Ago*, p. 52)

One is aware of a statuesque pose, unnaturally held. Even when she suffers the humiliation of being suspected by Tom of the theft of his money, the heroine's anguish is conveyed by external details — 'With hot brow and dry eyes she paced her little chamber, sat down on the bed, staring into vacancy, sprang up and paced again . . .' (p. 174). In this respect she is not so different from the melodramatic heroines of Charles Reade. Nevertheless, Kingsley intended her to be a dramatic creation for, psychologically, she is internally melodramatic and changes, or matures, only under Tom's manly, practical influence, inasmuch as *he* changes through her gentle, Christian nature. They both respond to the good in each other. As the author (who was passionately opposed to celibacy in the priesthood) says in his sermon on marital happiness: 'True love is when two people love each other for the goodness which is in them'.³⁹ In so far as they become more like each other, Tom and Grace approach 'the likeness of Christ'. The *Christian Remembrancer* (October 1857) remarked that the discrepancy between the two is too pronounced: 'They are incapable of contact; there is never an instant's life in their intercourse. The one is flesh and blood, the other ghost or wraith'. There is little convincing contact, but this is due to the obtrusive authorial commentary and the reliance on melodramatic techniques. The difference between the two is precisely what the author intended. It permits the interaction, with the ultimate union, of the flesh and spirit.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

One wonders why Kingsley's brand of 'muscular' Christianity should be regarded in our century with so much scorn. Literary critics today tend to adopt an attitude of cynical superiority towards him — because he endowed his heroes with overmuch spiritual and physical muscle, and because (apparently) he could speak naturally and with reverence of the love between man and woman. It is a strange quirk of fate that Kingsley, of all Victorian novelists, should lately have been held up as a figure of fun — in the recent publicity given to some of his private drawings which depict, in very literal terms, the union of the flesh and spirit. (One sketch is that of

Kingsley and his wife Fanny intimately embracing while ascending to heaven; another depicts the embracing couple afloat on a cross.)⁴⁰ There are those who would see the Rector of Eversley as a sort of super sensualist with lurking eroticism below his gospel of divine love. Already in 1948 a critic felt disposed to see 'something most neurotic and nasty' in him.⁴¹ But Kingsley, for whom matter reflected spirit, regarded human love as a 'natural' medium for Providence. To quote Leslie Stephen: 'The love of man for woman, when sanctified by religious feeling, is, according to him, the greatest of all forces that work for individual or social good'.⁴² That view was expressed in 1877. One wonders why Kingsley's philosophy, when taken to its logical conclusion today, should be thought — in this permissive age — to undermine his integrity as a theologian and author. Is his moral vision — his social and spiritual message — any less valuable than that of Dickens, or inferior to that of so great a psychological moralist as George Eliot? He belonged, perhaps, to 'the second order of intellectuals', as Leslie Stephen phrased it. As an artist he was, no doubt, second rate. But this does not, surely, mean that his Christian didactics should be altogether depreciated. His poetics were faulty *because* he believed in the practical manifestation of Providence — divine love and justice — in every life. Hence his 'Christian' art is not objective: the author's presence and views are far too obtrusive, his style too strident. But can we, who belong to an age of atheism, violence and sexual indulgence, devalue his integrity as a man and a Christian?

I would venture to say that what we need, today, is a literature with at least something of the moral and spiritual fibre as that which Kingsley propagated. In an age which seeks universal emancipation and the vindication of human rights, we need a literature that promotes the development of spiritual muscle, and moral resilience, on the individual level. Kingsley's message to us — had he lived today — would be that if we wish to be free, we must be 'fit to be free'. He would no doubt still maintain that it is one's personal acceptance of Christ — the Kingdom of God being *within* one — which is the most important step towards universal justice and freedom. The help and strength of Providence, Kingsley would tell us, will increase in proportion to the extent to which we acquire *individual* responsibility, and to the extent to which each member of society (regardless of class or cultural background) cultivates spiritual and moral resilience, or fitness. Kingsley, at any rate, would certainly have regarded much of today's literature as singularly lacking in moral and spiritual muscle. And, as far as the blatant treatment of human love (or sexuality) in today's literature is concerned, Kingsley would have been appalled — to say the least — at the total desacralization of what he considered a legitimate (or natural) channel of divine Providence.

With these observations, Mr Rector, it gives me great pleasure to confirm my acceptance of the Chair of English.

FOOTNOTES

The footnotes conform to the regulations of the *MLA Style Sheet*.

1. *Edinburgh Review*, CXLV (April, 1877), 446.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Justin McCarthy, 'The Reverend Charles Kingsley', *Galaxy*, XIV (Aug., 1872), 182.
4. 'Charles Kingsley', *Church Quarterly Review*, IV (April, 1877), 232.
5. See *Edinburgh Review*, *ed. cit.*, p. 420.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Justic McCarthy speaks of the 'vigour of speech' and 'rough voice' of Kingsley (*Galaxy*, *ed. cit.*, p. 183); similarly the *Edinburgh* records that, in Westminster Abbey, his 'voice, more especially when raised in the occasional services in the navel, was harsh' (*Edinburgh Review*, *ed. cit.*, p. 443).
9. MS in the Parish Collection in the Firestone Library, Princeton University, N.J.
10. *All Saints' Day and Other Sermons*, ed. W. Harrison (London: Macmillan, 1909), ix.
11. [W.R. Greg], 'Mr Kingsley's Literary Excesses', *The National Review*, X (Jan., 1860), 3. Since Greg was a prominent critic of the Christian Socialists, his account of Kingsley's 'refreshing' style is remarkably generous.
12. Page numbers are those of the 1884 Macmillan edition of *Alton Locke*. (*The Works of Charles Kingsley*, Vol. XXII.)
13. *The Times* (18 Oct., 1850), 3.
14. Jonathan Raban, 'Mr Kingsley and Master Locke', *New Statesman*, LXXXI (7 May, 1971), 643.
15. Quoted by F.E. Kingsley (Kingsley's wife), *Charles Kingsley: his letters and memories of his life* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. 93. (Hereafter cited as *Letters*.)
16. In his Prefatory Memoir to the 1884 Macmillan edition of *Alton Locke*, Thomas Hughes quotes Kingsley as having declared in a public meeting on the People's Charter, 'I am a Church of England parson and a Chartist' (p. xix).
17. Raban, *loc. cit.*
18. *Sermons on National Subjects: The Works of Charles Kingsley* (London: Macmillan, 1880), XXII, 26. (Hereafter cited as *Works*, XXII.)
19. 'Thomas Carlyle', *Nineteenth-Century Studies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), p. 140.
20. *Works*, XXII, 237.
21. Quoted by Una Pope-Hennessy, *Canon Charles Kingsley: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), pp. 76-7.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
23. *Works*, XXII, 108.
24. Quoted by Kingsley: *Works*, XXII, 119.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
26. Page numbers are those of the 1884 Macmillan edition of *Two Years Ago*. (*The Works of Charles Kingsley*, Vol. VIII.)
27. *Letters*, II, 13.
28. Letter to the Macmillans; quoted by Charles Morgan, *The House of Macmillan: 1843-1943* (London: Macmillan, 1944), pp. 47-8.
29. *Works*, XXII, 418.
30. *Village Sermons, and Town and Country Sermons* (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 71. (Hereafter cited as *Works*, XXI.)
31. *The Water-Babies* (Macmillan, 1885), p. 384. (*Works*, IX, 384.)
32. *Works*, XXII, 51.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 421.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Historical Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1893), p. 230.
38. *All Saints' Day and Other Sermons*, *ed. cit.*, p. 182.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
40. The sketches are reproduced in Susan Chitty's recent biography of Kingsley, *The Beast and the Monk* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975).
41. Raymond Mortimer, 'Books in General', *New Statesman and Nation* (25 December, 1948), 572.
42. [Leslie Stephen], 'Hours in a Library', *Cornhill Magazine*, XXXV (1877), 427.

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The following table provides a summary of the research findings. The data is presented in two columns: the left column lists the research questions, and the right column provides the corresponding findings. The findings are organized into three sections: Section A, Section B, and Section C.

Research Question	Findings
Section A: What are the key factors influencing curriculum development in Ontario schools?	Section A: The findings indicate that curriculum development is a complex process influenced by multiple factors, including policy, resources, and teacher beliefs.
Section B: How do teachers perceive their role in curriculum implementation?	Section B: Teachers perceive their role as being primarily focused on delivery and adaptation, with limited involvement in the development process.
Section C: What are the challenges faced by schools in implementing the curriculum?	Section C: The main challenges identified include limited resources, time constraints, and varying levels of teacher buy-in.