



BISHOP GORE



FOREWORD

BY PROFESSOR KIRSOPP LAKE

No one who believes that the Christian churches have in the past been the moral leaders of western civilization can fail to be interested in the presentation of some of the English religious leaders by "A Gentleman with a Duster" especially if, like myself, he have some passing acquaintance with most of them. Nor can any neglect to regard seriously his warning that the Church is failing as a moral leader.

What is the reason for that failure? It cannot, I think, be found in lack of earnestness; for today all the guides of the churches in England are serious, upright men, who would gladly lead if they could. Nor is it because they are voices uttering strange announcements in the wilderness; if they have a fault it is rather that they have so little to announce. The defect which is disclosed by the pictures given by "A Gentleman with a Duster" is primarily intellectual, and I propose to devote to its explanation the introduction which the publisher has asked me to write for the American edition of *Painted Windows*.

From the third century to the eighteenth the Christian Church presented views of life and theories of the origin, weakness, and possible redemption of human nature, which were both self consistent and rational. It offered men an infallible guide of life, to be found in the Church, the Bible, and the Christ. Different branches of the Christian church emphasised one or the other, but the three formed in themselves an indivisible trinity. Nor did the laity doubt that this presentation was correct. The clergy were the professional and expert exponents of an infallible revelation which they had studied deeply and knew better than other men, and on which they spoke with the authority of experience. It was firmly believed that to follow their teaching would lead to future salvation; for the centre of gravity in life for seriously minded men was the hope of attaining everlasting salvation in the world to come.

The situation today is changed in two directions. The Church, the Bible, and even the Teaching of Jesus are no longer regarded as infallible. History first abundantly proved that the voice of the

Church was not inerrant; then science discredited the biblical account of man's origin and development; and finally the "kenotic" theory of Bishop Gore showed that what were considered the *ipsisima verba* of the Lord himself could no longer be regarded as infallible. The *coup de grâce* to the belief that Jesus must be followed literally was administered by official sermons during the war. This does not mean that men and women within or without the Church do not admire and venerate the teaching of Jesus and regard him as the best teacher whom they know. But they are not willing to accept *all* his teaching; they have been forced to admit that it is sometimes lawful to resist evil by force; they doubt whether he is to appear as the Judge of the living and the dead; they accept much of his teaching and try to follow it because they believe that it is true, but they do not believe that it is true because it is his teaching. It is therefore impossible today for educated men, even among those who most sincerely adopt it, to settle a moral argument by an appeal to the teaching of Jesus. The tragedy is that there are probably as many today outside the Church who endeavour to follow Jesus, but do not call him Lord, as there are within the church who reverse this attitude. For good or for evil (and I think it is for evil), the Church, especially the Church of England, seems to have decided that to say "Lord, Lord" is the pass-word to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Equally important with this great change in thought, which has abandoned the infallible trinity of Church, Bible, and Jesus, is the fact that the best of our generation have shifted the centre of endeavour from the future salvation of the individual to the present reformation of this world for the benefit of coming humanity. The best men of our time are troubling very little about the salvation of their own souls; not because they are indifferent or unbelieving, but because they believe that if our lives are continued after death it will be a natural and not a supernatural phenomenon, of which no details can be known. They have relegated the whole apparatus of Heaven and Hell to the limbo of forgotten mythologies. The continuance of life to which they look forward is progressive and educational, not fixed or punitive. Moreover, most of them would say, with complete reverence, that the work which is set before them by the Purpose of Life, as they understand it, is to make a better world, materially, morally, and intellectually, as an inheritance for children

who are yet unborn. They are not much disturbed if they are told that they are not Christians, for they are supremely indifferent to names.

Nevertheless their presence in the world today is the concrete problem to be faced by Liberal Churchmen. To consistent Catholics such as Father Knox it is not, I suppose, a problem at all. He would say that such men deserve every adjective of approbation in the dictionary; but they are not Christian. If Christianity means a fixed set of opinions, "a faith once delivered to the saints," Father Knox is right; such men are not Christians, but, if so, the fact that they are not is the death warrant of the Church, for they represent progress to a higher type than that of the Christianity of the past.

But the liberal Christian does not accept the view that the Church ought to exist for the preservation of traditional opinions. In his heart he feels that such men would have been accepted by Jesus as his disciples, and therefore he believes that the Church can and ought to be reformed so as to make room for them. For this Reformation he has no fixed and rigid programme, but there are three things which he thinks the Church must provide.

The first necessity is the right understanding of life. It cannot be given by any theory of the universe which, like the biblical one, is in glaring contradiction to the facts of modern science [1]. Nor is it conceivable that belief can be fixed so as to be unalterable. Intellectual correctness is relative, and Truth cannot be petrified into Creeds, but lives by discussion, criticism, correction, and growth.

[1] Mr. Bryan is right in maintaining that evolution and the whole scientific concept of life is unbiblical, though wrong in thinking that that settles the question.

The second necessity is the purification of the human spirit. Generation after generation of Christians on their way through the world have endeavoured to follow the moral teaching of the Church, but the friction and pressure of life always bring with them many impurities, the swell of passion, the blindness of temper, and the thrust of desire, which a mere appeal to reason cannot remedy because it condemns but does not remove the evil. In the future as in the past, the Church must find means to satisfy men's need and desire for purification.

The third is closely allied to the second. It is "the helping hand of grace." No organized religion is complete or satisfactory which does not understand that when weak and erring human beings call from the depths, the helping hand of grace is stretched out from the unknown. The origin and nature of grace is a metaphysical and theological problem; its existence is a fact of experience. And that same experience shows that though grace may work apart from institutions it does in fact normally work through them.

These are the three things which the Liberal wishes to keep in the Church. He knows that to do this the traditional forms of church life require great changes, but he wishes to preserve the institutional life of the Church as a valuable inheritance. To him it is clear that Christians who in one generation invented the theology, the sacraments, the thoughts, practices, and ordinances of the past, have the right in another generation to change these. The continuity of the Church is in membership, not in documents.

But the Liberals fall into two groups. There is the left wing which expresses itself with clearness and decision, which is not afraid of recognizing that the Church in the past has often been wrong and has affirmed as fact what is really fiction. Those who belong to it are sometimes driven out by official pressure, and more often are compelled to yield to the practical necessities of ecclesiastical life, but their influence is greater than their numbers. The danger which would face the Church if they were allowed to have more prominence, is that their plainness of speech would lead to disruption. The danger is a real one, and the leaders of churches do right to fear it.

Over against this is the right wing of Liberals. There is probably little difference in the matter of private opinion between them and the left wing, but they are more concerned with safeguarding the unity of the Church. They endeavour to do this by using the old phraseology with a new meaning, so that, for instance, members of this party feel justified in stating that they accept the creed, though they do not believe in it in the sense which was originally intended. This is technically called "reinterpreting," and by a sufficient amount of "reinterpreting" all the articles of the creed (or indeed anything else) can be given whatever meaning is desired. The

statement that God created the heavens and the earth becomes in this way an affirmation of evolution; the Virgin Birth affirms the reality of Christ's human nature; and the Resurrection of the Flesh affirms the Immortality of the Soul. Performed with skill, this dialectical legerdemain is very soothing to a not unduly intelligent congregation and prevents any breach in the apparent continuity of the Church's belief. It also prevents any undue acrimoniousness of theological debate, for debate is difficult if words may be interpreted to mean the opposite of their historical significance. The danger is that the rising generation will refuse to accept this method, and that it will lead to deep and irretrievable intellectual confusion. This is what Father Knox clearly saw to be the intellectual sin of the "Foundationers."

Nevertheless, when all is said it is easy to criticize but difficult to advise. As "A Gentleman with a Duster" has seen, the desire of the church leaders whose portraits he paints is to preserve the Church through a period of transition. I doubt the wisdom of their policy, though I recognize the difficulty of their task and appreciate their motives.

I doubt the wisdom of the policy because I think that though it may satisfy the older members of the Church and so preserve continuity with the past, it is doing so at the expense of the younger generation and sacrificing continuity with the future. It may conciliate those who have power to make trouble in the present; but it is only the young who are now silently abandoning the Church, that have the power to give life in the future. It is always safer to agree with the old, but it is infinitely more important to convince the young; and the reason for the failure which troubles "A Gentleman with a Duster" is that ecclesiastical life in England is failing to convince the young. Is it better here?

CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.,
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INTRODUCTION TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

Some of the men whose personalities I attempt to analyse in this volume are known to American students of theology: almost all of them, I think, represent schools of thought in which America is as greatly interested as the people of Europe.

Therefore I may presume to hope that this present volume will find in the United States as many readers as *The Mirrors of Downing Street* and *The Glass of Fashion*.

But, in truth, I hope for much more than this.

Perhaps I may be allowed to say that I think America can make a contribution to the matter discussed in these pages which will out-rival in its eventual effect on the destinies of the human race the contribution she has already made to world politics by the inspiration of the Washington Conference.

For the American brings to the study of religion not only a somewhat fresher mind than the European, but a temperamental earnestness about serious things which is the world's best hope of creative action. Moreover there is something Greek about the American. He is always young, as Greece was young in the time of Themistocles and Æschylus. He is conscious of "exhilaration in the air, a sense of walking in new paths, of dawning hopes and untried possibilities, a confidence that all things can be won if only we try hard enough." With him it is never the exhaustion of noon or the pathetic beauty of twilight: always it is the dawn, and every dawn a Renaissance.

Since this, in my reading, is the very spirit of the teaching of Jesus, I feel that it must be in the destiny of America more quickly than any other nation to recognise the features of Christ in those movements of the present day which definitely make for the higher life of the human race. I mean the movements of science, psychology, philosophy, and the politics of idealism.

If I expect anywhere on the face of the globe a response to my suggestion that a new definition of the word "Faith" is a clue to the secret of Jesus, it is in America. If I hope for recognition of my theo-

ry that Christ should be sought in the living world and not in the documents of tradition, it is also to America that I look for this hope to be realised. The work of William James, Morton Prince, and Kirsopp Lake encourages me in this conviction; but most of all I am encouraged by that youthful spirit of the American nation which looks backward as seldom as possible, forward with exhilaration and confidence, that manful spirit of hope and longing which is ever in earnest about serious things.

Here, then, is a book which goes to America with all the highest hopes of its author—a book which attempts to throw off all those long and hopeless controversies of theology concerning the Person of Christ which have ever distracted and sometimes devastated Europe, to throw off all that, and to show that the good news of Jesus was the revelation of a strange and mighty power which only now the world is beginning to use.

INTRODUCTION

By means of a study in religious personality, I seek in these pages to discover a reason for the present rather ignoble situation of the Church in the affections of men.

My purpose is to examine the mind of modern Christianity, the only religion of the world with which the world can never be done, because it has the lasting quality of growth, and to see whether in the condition of that mind one cannot light upon a cause for the confessed failure of the Church to impress humanity with what its documents call the Will of God—a failure the more perplexing because of the wonderful devotion, sincerity, and almost boundless activity of the modern Church.

As a clue to the object of this quest, I would ask the reader to bear in mind that the present disordered state of the world is by no means a consequence of the late War.

The state of the world is one of confusion, but that confusion is immemorial. Man has for ever been wrestling with an anarchy which has for ever defeated him. The history of the human race is the diary of a Bear Garden. Man, so potent against the mightiest and most august forces of nature, has never been able to subdue those trivial and unworthy forces within his own breast—envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness—which make for world anarchy. He has never been able to love God because he has never been able to love his neighbour. It is in the foremost nations of the world, not in the most backward, in the most Christian nations, not the most pagan, that we find unintelligent conditions of industrialism which lead to social disorder, and a vulgar disposition to self-assertion which makes for war. History and Homicide, it has been said, are indistinguishable terms. "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."

This striking impotence of the human race to arrive at anything in the nature of a coherent world-order, this bewildering incapacity of individual man to live in love and charity with his neighbour, justifies the presumption that divine help, if ever given, that an Incarnation of the Divine Will, if ever vouchsafed, must surely have had for

its chief mercy the teaching of a science of life—a way of existence which would bring the feet of unhappy man out of chaos, and finally make it possible for the human race to live intelligently, and so, beautifully.

Now if this indeed were the purpose of the Incarnation, we may be pardoned for thinking that the Church, which has been the cause of so much tyranny and bloodshed in the past, and which even now so willingly lends itself to bitter animosities and warlike controversies, has missed the whole secret of its first and greatest dogma [2].

[2] I asked a certain Dean the other day whether the old controversy between High Church and Low Church still obtained in his diocese. "Oh, dear, no!" he replied; "High and Low are now united to fight Modernists."

Therefore in studying the modern mind of Christianity, persuaded that its mission is to teach mankind a lesson of quite sublime importance, we may possibly arrive in our conclusion at a unifying principle which will at least help the Church to turn its moral earnestness, its manifold self-sacrifice, and its great but conflicting energies, in this one direction which is its own supremest end, namely, the interpretation of human life in terms of spiritual reality.

To those who distrust reason and hold fast rather fearfully to the moorings of tradition, I would venture to say, first, that perilous times are most perilous to error, and, secondly, in the words of Dr. Kirsopp Lake, "After all, Faith is not belief in spite of evidence, but life in scorn of consequence—a courageous trust in the great purpose of all things and pressing forward to finish the work which is in sight, whatever the price may be."

"The distinction between right and wrong disappears when conscience dies, and that between fact and fiction when reason is neglected. The one is the danger which besets clever politicians, the other the nemesis which waits on popular preachers."
— Kirsopp Lake.

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