

Bishop Westcott.

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THERE is an impertinence in any endeavour to estimate the character and work of such a man as Bishop Westcott. Still the attempt must be made, and will be made by many. It is difficult for those who have felt his power and influence with them in almost all their work, to realize that there are others to whom he was not closely known, who need to have set before them what he was, and will long continue to be, to all students of theology, and to a great body of English-speaking Christians.

We may divide those who have been influenced by him into two classes—those who have known him only through his writings, and those who have known the man.

I.

There can be little doubt that his *Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* has been the most widely read of all his works. Its readers have not only learned to understand St. John, but have also felt the personality of the commentator. The affinity between the Johannine type of doctrine and Dr. Westcott's mind is so obvious that it hardly needs notice, but it was this affinity which enabled him to accomplish his work, not only on the Gospel, but also on the Epistles of St. John. One is almost tempted to say that what Augustine did for St. Paul in his generation, Bishop Westcott has done for St. John in ours.

His *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* may be less widely known, but is of no less value. To mention only two points—the sympathy with which he enters into the position of those addressed, and the thoroughness with which he deals with the problem of O.T. quotations in the Epistle, remove a mass of difficulties. It is no disparagement to the different genius of Bishop Lightfoot to say that the theological and philosophical interest of important passages which one finds absolutely unnoticed in his commentaries, always call out from Bishop Westcott some pregnant sentence or at least some enlightening references.

No attempt will be made here to estimate the Bishop's textual labours and their result, as the present object is rather to consider his influence through his writings on the mass of educated Christian people.

Of his lesser works none is more characteristic than *Social Aspects of Christianity*, with its appreciations of the Franciscan Order, and of the Society of Friends—a body, it may be added, which always had a special attraction for the author. They have had no warmer panegyrist. *The Gospel of Life* contrasts with the work last mentioned as belonging to a more abstract region of thought and being nearer in character to the difficult early work, *The Gospel of the Resurrection*. It is perhaps not too much to say that familiarity with Origen, especially with the *De Principiis* and *Contra Celsum*, will be found to help very much to an understanding of both the books named, and indeed to a general understanding of their author's mind. But difficult though it be, *The Gospel of Life* is an apologetic of the truest and best kind. No one who has read it can forget the clearness with which it shows at the outset that the so-called difficulties of Christianity are really the inherent problems of the world in which we find ourselves, and that so far from making the difficulties, it is Christianity which suggests the most enlightening answers to them. Again, the chapter in the same book on the other great religions of the world evinces the sympathy with which he approached them, and shows the character of his ardent zeal for missionary work, and the convictions which underlay it.

It is impossible here to mention and characterize his various shorter works, but this may be said of them all, that they have been found to appeal to men of all shades of opinion, Anglicans and Nonconformists, High Churchmen and Low Churchmen. His influence has been, and will be, a unifying influence. To him the Church was as real and precious a conception as it was to Liddon. The English Church was dear to him, and no man has better understood and expounded its historical position and its special vocation.

But it was dear as the representative for him of the Universal Church, the blessed company of all faithful people, including all that confess the name of Christ under whatever appellation and however divided. It is said that his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* has been left almost, if not quite, ready for publication. If this be so, we may yet learn more fully his thoughts on a question of the highest importance.

II.

It remains to speak of what his influence has been on those who knew him in person as well as through his writings. It is true that his character, bearing, and manner in conversation corresponded with the impression given by his written teaching to an unusual degree. But there were certain features which came out more fully in intercourse and helped to interpret what was read. Humility, seriousness, decision, enthusiasm were the graces which most distinctly struck those who approached him. And to have seen and felt them in personal intercourse enabled one more distinctly to recognize them in his work. As seen in him they tended to impress themselves on those around him. For it must always be remembered that he was never merely an intellectual teacher. The moral element was always present, and every intellectual process had for him a moral side.

Special stress must be laid on *decision* as an element of his character. To represent his mind as vague and indefinite is entirely to misapprehend it. Where he was sure, he was vehemently sure. But in dealing with doctrine he was possessed by a sense of the evils which have come in the past from the 'logical development of accepted statements.' 'The Dogmatist,' he says, 'accepts formulæ as equivalent to complete truths,' and 'draws logical conclusions from imperfect premises.' And he adds, 'We do not look upon the heavenly truths themselves, but on a reflection of them' (*Lessons from Work*, p. 137).

But to return to his personal influence. It will never be known how much of the good work of our day, social, ministerial, and literary, has owed

its beginning to direct impulses from him. But one feature of his service in this way must be noticed. In his last sermon at Cambridge he deplores having lost the help of sympathy, because he had been unwilling to claim sacrifices from others. This may have been so to some extent, but certainly not on the whole. He did claim work, if not sacrifices, very largely, and when the work was done he was chary of praise. It was not by the common cheap method of flattery and personal thanks that he led men on to do what he saw they were capable of. You did your best and had to be content with that.

He was never, even in Cambridge days, a recluse in the sense of being out of touch with modern life, its ways and thoughts. Little as he mixed with it, he seemed thoroughly to understand it, and to see as few others its dangers from confessed or unconscious materialism. An illustration of this may be found in his 'Spiritual Ministry of Art' (*Lessons from Work*, pp. 441-451). The same address illustrates another characteristic—his confident hopefulness about aims which in the ordinary mind only provoke satire. The task of 'bringing back the sense of the beautiful, the sense of the divine, which art develops, to toilers in the field, in the mines, in the workshops,' seems to many a useless attempt. But the fact that he believed it possible will keep the ideal before us. 'The world,' he says, 'is ruled by great ideals; the soul responds to them.' This was why he hated satire and satirical men, because satire is the world's way of taking the life out of ideals.

But perhaps the most marked characteristic of all was extraordinary width of view. There was an amazing power of looking up, but no less of looking round. As one reads his more difficult writings the strain is first to dissolve into fuller expression the brief enigmatic sentences, then to see the logical connexion which links them together, but more than all to share and maintain the wide panoramic view of human life and thought, past and present, which seemed ever to be open around him, telling upon his estimate of every person and action, of every principle and endeavour.