

Bishop Gore's "Orders and Unity."¹

I.

BY THE REV. CANON H. HENSLEY HENSON, D.D.

BISHOP GORE is, perhaps, the most influential, and in some ways the most attractive, clergyman in the English Church. His influence is conglomerate of many elements, and reflects both a rarely winning character and a strangely various activity. He is interesting to many and widely different sections of the public. His writings—devotional, theological, polemical, political—are numerous, and all, though never of the first rank, are far above the average level. His genuine love of the poor and his strong and increasing sympathy with Socialistic politics have endeared him to multitudes to whom Bishops are not naturally attractive, and brought him into alliance with the Nonconformists, who are content to ignore his sacerdotalism in consideration of his politics. His sacerdotalism in turn makes him the fighting chief of the neo-Tractarians. His zeal for reform, radical and unflinching where sacerdotal principles are untouched, commends him to many who have no love for sacerdotal principles; while at the same time his undeviating loyalty to the last gains him admiration and support from those to whom reform is distasteful. "Lux Mundi" seemed to indicate a zeal for critical liberty; the "Bampton Lectures" demonstrated a passion for orthodoxy; "The Church and the Ministry" gave assurance of unflinching sacerdotalism; the popular expositions of the New Testament disclosed no mean powers of spiritual teaching; the numerous papers and speeches on "Church Reform" revealed a keen perception of practical abuses; "Spiritual Efficiency" presented to view a vigorous autocrat such as the multitude loves, who knows what he wants and means to get it; his evidence before the Royal Commission exhibited for the first time Ritualism and the Episcopate in frankly avowed alliance; his speeches in the House of Lords

¹ "Orders and Unity," by Charles Gore, D.D., Bishop of Birmingham. John Murray, 1909. Price 3s. 6d. net.

have earned for him the gratitude of the extremer sections of the Liberal party ; and his ready acceptance of secular schools and Disestablishment make him a valuable ally of politicians, who have little enough regard for his motives or objects. Thus, he is interesting to many people on many grounds, and has gathered to himself, beyond any of his contemporaries, the hopes and loyalties of many ardent spirits.

For obvious reasons, then, effective criticism of Bishop Gore is extraordinarily difficult. Since so many and commonly conflicting interests meet in him, he is never really held to any one. The Liberal elements are permitted to neutralize the obscurantist, and it is hardly possible to get a clear issue with him. The political Radicalism counteracts in the public mind the ecclesiastical narrowness ; the Socialistic sympathies discount the obscurantist teachings ; the practical reforms make all but incredible the sacerdotalist principles ; the devotional fervour excuses the ritualistic externalism. Of all the individuals now on the stage of public life, Charles Gore is surely the most attractive and the least intelligible, the least reserved and the most enigmatic.

It may go without saying that his latest book has considerable merits. The reader catches the passionate earnestness of the writer, and is carried along by his intense conviction. All that can be done to commend an argument by skilful arrangement, a vigorous though sometimes slipshod style, and illustrations and parallels which, if often misleading, are not rarely felicitous, has been done ; the author's dialectic skill, considerable knowledge, and rare gift of persuasiveness, have all been drawn upon to the full. Yet this book will not add to Bishop Gore's reputation, and, unless we are greatly mistaken, will disappoint many of his friends, for its considerable merits are outweighed by still more considerable faults, and while the merits are most conspicuous in the form and arrangement of the argument, the faults affect the argument itself.

The author is often deceived by his own parallels, and often falls into the fallacy, which might perhaps be called the besetting

sin of copious writers, of shifting the meaning of his words in the course of his argument. Overstatement is frequent, and too often he is the victim of some favourite word or simile. His use of the word "principle" is a good example. His mind is more affluent than profound, more vehement than powerful, and his conclusions have a more apparent relation to his known wishes than to his ostensible premises. He builds too much and too boldly on single points; is far too confident in his assumptions; obscures his real meaning by parade of concession, and takes back in an inconspicuous clause what he has said in a pretentious paragraph. His convictions carry on a running fight with his sympathies, and his concluding chapter seems to belie the more generous language of its predecessors. Illegitimate assumptions and *obiter dicta* which challenge contradiction are scattered freely over his pages, and there are instances of quotation which are in effect, though of course not in conscious purpose, misleading. It would require a long and detailed review, framed on the older polemical model, with large quotations of the controverted argument followed by the criticism, in order to illustrate all these points. Here they can but be mentioned for the student's guidance.

It is not necessary to dwell on Bishop Gore's theory of the ministry, for it has been before the public in fuller form for some years, and he does not pretend to add anything or make any alteration. We may content ourselves with noting the parade of anti-sacerdotal language with which the sacerdotal theory is introduced and partially disguised. The priesthood of the Christian as such is clearly asserted, but the proper inference from the fact is avoided by some verbal juggling with the words "representative" and "corporate." In one place it is plainly stated that the Christian minister is a priest in the old Jewish sense—viz., as the Divinely appointed officer of a priestly community, which apart from him cannot exercise its priestly functions—and that identification really underlies the whole discussion. It is always to be remembered that historically this has been the most potent influence under which

sacerdotalism has prevailed in the Church. It is, indeed, admitted (p. 164) that the notion of a Judaic priesthood in the Christian Church lends itself to easy perversion, and has, in fact, been seriously perverted; but the notion itself is explicitly affirmed, and confused with the quite different conception of the Twenty-sixth Article, which affirms the equitable and necessary doctrine that "the unworthiness of the minister hinders not the effect of Sacraments." This doctrine, of course, has no proper connection with the theory that Orders are indelible, and no apparent relation with what the author calls the "staggering problem" of physical generation. The whole passage (pp. 159-171) is a striking example of confused reasoning and false logic. The fact is that the Bishop is fatally handicapped by his presuppositions. He claims, and doubtless sincerely, to have thought out afresh the whole subject of the ministry, but what he has really done is to attempt a fresh and more plausible statement of the traditional patristic doctrine. "I have done my best to state the ideas of the succession and the ministry with moderation. Certainly for many centuries of the Church Catholic the ideas were held with moderation; the conception of the Christian priest or pastor was neither unspiritual nor autocratic" (p. 167). It would be interesting to know at what point in the history the Bishop would part company with the "Church Catholic," and, indeed, it would be difficult to find a point at which the sacerdotalism of Cyprian, Chrysostom, and Gregory was really left behind by the materializing thought of medieval Christendom.

The most interesting, and from every point of view the most important, part of the book is the final chapter, on "The Present Situation." With dangerous preciseness of statement and an almost reckless dogmatism of tone, the Bishop sums up his argument, and presses its practical requirements. These may be gathered into the single duty of exalting "the Divine authority of the Episcopate," and resisting firmly any weakening of the traditional attitude of exclusiveness towards the non-Episcopal Churches. Incidentally the Reformation is described,

condemned, and repudiated. "Undoubtedly there lay at the root of the whole Reformation movement the denial of the principle of the succession, which we have seen reason to believe to be of Divine authority" (p. 176). The notion cherished by some Presbyterian theologians that the Apostolic succession could be transmitted through presbyters is shortly and sharply disallowed :

"These Scottish divines appeal to Catholic principles and Church law, and on Catholic principles and Church law they have, it must be emphatically said, no case at all. The sixteenth-century presbyters who took part in ordaining the reformed pastors, to do them justice, do not seem to have claimed to do so because they were priests under the old succession; but if they had done so, they would have been claiming a power which, according to the undisputed mind of the Church, they had never received" (p. 183). "I believe that in repudiating this principle the Reformed Churches were—with whatever excuse—repudiating a law of Divine authority in the Church, and also an essential principle of the Church's continuous life" (p. 184).

The Bishop is persuaded that a process of disillusionment, which may quickly pass into repentance, is observable in the Protestant Churches. Experience is teaching them "that there was something fundamentally wrong about the Reformation movement," and we are left in no doubt that the "something wrong" was the abandonment of the Episcopal ministry. "Evangelical divines, historians, and men of letters, are looking back wistfully to the days of the Catholic fellowship, and are asking whether Protestantism was not a passing phase" (p. 187). The Bishop can see no good in "Protestantism"; he carries to its discredit the whole dislocation of social relationship which marks the modern epoch :

"Where Protestantism is the prevailing influence, people pass from one Church to another, as they are attracted by this preacher or that, this service or that, without any constraining sense of obligation to one body. What sense of fellowship in the one family of Jesus Christ binds our artisans to our employers to-day in England or in America? What sense of Catholic fellowship in the worship of fellow-Christians abroad possesses the minds of Englishmen as they collect themselves in a foreign hotel for the English service? What prevailing force in international politics has the name of Christendom to-day? The religious imagination of the world, at its best and deepest moments, is now again haunted by the vision of the ancient unity, by the sense that Christ meant to gather men of all nations and classes

into one family. And as they look back at the period of the Reformation, the old enthusiasm is gone, and they ask whether, after all, when they thought they were destroying the temple of Baal, the Reformers were not really pulling down the walls, however much defaced, of the house of the Lord" (pp. 189, 190).

Biblical criticism, we are assured, has destroyed the very basis of "the old Protestant orthodoxy," for

"You cannot reasonably isolate the New Testament from the Creed or the Episcopal successions, and assert the authority of the one while you repudiate that of the others; or, in particular, assert the authority of the first the while you repudiate that of the third" (p. 192). "It will become increasingly evident that, in attempting to set up the isolated Bible as the infallible standard of religion, Protestantism was attempting the impossible, and violating a fundamental law of the Christian religion which holds Bible and Creed and Episcopate indissolubly together" (p. 194).

This is perilous teaching, and accords ill with the position of an English Bishop. Its fallaciousness is not hard to detect, for it ignores the spiritual principles of the Reformation movement in order to fasten attention on an incidental exaggeration; and it assumes that the witness of experience is exhausted when the mischiefs of sectarianism are disclosed. Inevitably, as we read language which seems like a categorical contradiction of authoritative Anglican teaching, we ask what the author's views of the Church of England must be? The Bishop does not leave us in doubt. He has returned to the insularity of the Tractarians without the vehement anti-Romanism which at first marked them. To him it is "increasingly evident that the Roman Communion is a great and wonderful part of the Christian Church, with a wonderful power of recovery and expansion, and, in moral and administrative matters, a wonderful power of self-reform" (p. 195). While Protestantism has been falling, Romanism has been rising in his esteem. The Anglican Church is the happy mean, and by a singular and almost miraculous providence has "preserved the whole of the ancient Catholic structure, both Creed and Bible, Sacraments and order, beyond the reach of legitimate objection," and with this conservatism has coupled "a repudiation of the supreme authority of the Pope and a whole-hearted acceptance of the principle of the doctrinal

supremacy of Scripture" (p. 199). Of course, the Church of England is sharply distinguished from "the great rebellion against the hierarchy" which created the Protestant Churches. If only it would "recall its unhappy surrender to the State of the necessary functions of spiritual government," it would soon demonstrate its superiority. So we are led to four "elements of this work of internal recovery." We must become severely denominational, narrowly dogmatic, self-governing, and more patient of variety. Thus we shall satisfy the world's need of "a liberal Catholicism." Meanwhile we shall attend the Roman churches abroad, and limit our connection with the Anglican churches to the indispensable duty of "making our communions." "At home we shall make the most of our opportunities of co-operation with Nonconformists for *social and philanthropic objects*," and even go so far as to "join with our fellow-Christians in prayer, wherever we can *on really neutral ground*"; but on no account must we give the least countenance to the cardinal heresy of the age, undenominationalism (pp. 200-208).

The Bishop of Birmingham has a notion of the Church of England which neither its history, nor its constitution, nor its formularies, will authenticate. In his evidence before the Ritual Commission, his lordship offered an interesting sidelight on his mental attitude. "I was what people call a ritualist from the time I was a boy," he said. In this volume he discloses a view of the National Church as ritualists conceive of it, not as it has been, or is, or possibly can be, if in any sense it is to remain what for nearly four centuries it has been—the spiritual organ of a Protestant people.

II.

BY THE REV. CANON HAY AITKEN, M.A.

Amidst the thronging occupations of his strenuous and useful life, the Bishop of Birmingham has managed to find time to write yet another book upon a subject which he has already treated pretty fully, and which seems to exercise a