

Correspondence.

BISHOP GORE'S OPEN LETTER.

To the Editor of the CHURCHMAN.

SIR,—You have kindly sent me an article by Dr. Griffith Thomas on my recent *Open Letter*. I think that at several points Dr. Griffith Thomas has not represented me fairly. But on only one point do I wish to comment. He says of me (p. 491): "Indeed, even subsequently, when he was Bishop of Birmingham, he frankly admitted that the Virgin Birth could not be regarded as part of the faith." This statement is quite untrue. I published, when I was Bishop of Birmingham, a book called "The New Theology and the Old Religion," in which I maintain exactly the same position about the Virgin Birth of our Lord as I am now maintaining. I have, moreover, all through my life maintained it, so that the implication of Dr. Thomas's "even" is quite without justification. His misrepresentation of me seems to me to be quite groundless. Please insert this contradiction in your next number, and let me trouble you to send me a copy.

Yours faithfully,
C. OXON.

[We sent a proof of the Bishop of Oxford's letter to Dr. Griffith Thomas, who asks us to print the following reply :]

To the Editor of the CHURCHMAN.

SIR,—I hope I may say that it was altogether remote from my mind to represent the Bishop of Oxford unfairly. The questions at issue between him and Evangelical Churchmen are far too serious for anything but the most thorough effort to understand them, and if he will be good enough to give me particulars of the points in which he considers I have not done his position justice I will do my best to explain my words, and if I have misrepresented anything I will of course apologize.

With regard to the one point on which he comments, saying that my "statement is quite untrue," and that my "misrepresentation" of him seems to be "quite groundless," my position is as follows.

I intended my words to be a brief summary of the following remarks, which appeared in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* for May 29:

"It would be unfair to Dr. Sanday to write as if he were the only great theologian in England who had changed his mind. The Bishop of Oxford has frequently changed his own, and while Dr. Sanday writes with so many qualifications and reservations that one can hardly feel surprised when his point of view is altered, the Bishop writes with a dogmatic incisiveness which scarcely prepares his readers for the possibility of any alteration at all. It is just twelve years since the Bishop lectured in Birmingham on the Historical Trustworthiness of the Gospels. In the course of his lecture the Bishop observed: 'The evidence of our Lord's birth of a Virgin was no part of the original Apostolic testimony, and still to-day this question is not a ground on which belief is asked.'

"Nor can Dr. Sanday's views on inspiration or divorce be considered one whit more destructive than those of the Bishop as far as the traditional testimony of the Church with regard to the books of the New Testament is concerned."

If, as I assume, the words in the above quotation marks were used by the Bishop, I submit that my summary was not an unfair or untrue interpretation of his position. But to make quite sure I will see that in the reprint of my article in pamphlet form the Bishop's exact words are recorded.

That I am not alone in this interpretation of Bishop Gore's view may be seen by the statements of correspondents in the *Guardian* and the *Yorkshire Observer* to the effect that after all Dr. Sanday and the Bishop of Oxford are in agreement on the subject of the Virgin Birth. The correspondents quote the words referred to above, and say that they were part of the Bishop's fourth lecture on "The Historical Trustworthiness of the Gospels," delivered in St. Philip's Church, Birmingham, on December 10, 1902. Further, that the lecture was reported in

the Birmingham *Daily Post* for December 11, 1902, and that "the reporter's notes were corrected in Bishop Gore's own handwriting."

I wonder whether it is possible that this is another instance of the Bishop thinking that he has been misunderstood, while in reality he may have overlooked some of his own statements. In May last Dr. Gore wrote to the *Guardian* and the *Church Times*, complaining that Professor Gwatkin had misunderstood, and therefore misstated, some of his words. This is his letter :

"Professor Gwatkin has published an open letter in reply to an open letter of mine. On p. 3 he uses these words :

" ' I was a hearer of the remarkable Cambridge sermon in which you taught us that "the Church of England would be all the stronger if it cut off on all sides the disloyal elements—High, Broad, Low—not those you or I may think disloyal, but those which avow themselves disloyal." I quote from memory ; but your words were too impressive to leave much room for mistake.'

"I presume that the Professor refers to a sermon of mine which was printed at the time exactly as it was spoken, and republished in a book called 'Orders and Unity' under the title 'The Peril of Drifting.' The sermon was preached before the University at Cambridge on May 2, 1909. It contains no words in the least resembling those which the Professor quotes as mine.

"I think that the words as quoted by him are somewhat offensive to various schools of thought in the Church, and it seems to me that he ought not to have professed to quote words of mine from memory without seeking to ascertain whether, in fact, I had used any words of the kind."

Professor Gwatkin replied the next week as follows :

"The Bishop of Oxford tells me that he had 'entirely forgotten' his University Sermon of February 16, 1896. I give his words *in extenso* from the *Guardian* :

" ' The time is surely come when excrescences, weakening to the life of the whole body, need to be pared off by the exercise of a moderate and impartial discipline. . . . We should not lose much, for the loss would be our gain, if we were to let drop off what declares itself—I

emphasize the words "declares itself"—as essentially indifferent or disloyal to fundamental dogmas, the dogmas of the Creeds, or what is altogether without the sense of corporate loyalty, and speaks in defiance of the Sacramental language of the Prayer-Book, or what, in a return to medieval doctrine, practically and effectively repudiates the appeal to Scripture. The Church of England would still be wide and comprehensive. But it would secure an intelligible unity at a comparatively small loss.'

"And here is my recollection of them :

"The Church of England would be all the stronger if it cut off on all sides the disloyal elements—High, Broad, Low—not those you or I may think disloyal, but those which avow themselves disloyal.'

"Everyone who quotes is bound at least to render faithfully the speaker's meaning ; but one who gives fair notice that he quotes from memory—after eighteen years—is not bound to do more than this. And this I have done. My wording is more coloured than I knew by our conversation on our return home—for he was then my guest—but the meaning is identical. If my words contain anything 'offensive to various schools of thought,' I am afraid the offence is already in the sermon."

Once again let me say that my desire in this controversy is, first of all, to make quite sure of the Bishop's position, and then to show that it is vitally and fundamentally opposed to that of Evangelical Churchmen. Dr. Gore has, as it were, thrown down the gauntlet, and his words seem to call for the closest and most thorough attention on the part of Evangelicals in order that the essential differences may be seen and the actual position of affairs in our Church fully realized.

Yours faithfully,

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS.

July 7.

