

## The Spirit of Archbishop Leighton.

**I**N a lecture delivered at Edinburgh a few years ago, Mr. Balfour pleaded with his fellow-countrymen not willingly to let the spirit and the works of Archbishop Leighton die. The exhortation might well be extended to all Christian people at this time of stress and warfare. For it may reasonably be hoped that one outcome of the present struggle will be the drawing together, in bonds of closer friendship and communion, of members of the various bodies and denominations into which Christ's Holy Catholic Church is unfortunately divided here on earth. And if that happy result is to be attained, it can only be by a wider diffusion of that beautiful spirit of wise toleration and of Christian charity which earned for Archbishop Leighton the honourable and gracious title of "the saint of all the churches."

The story of Robert Leighton's life may be briefly recalled. He was born, probably in London, in 1611, but of his early years little is recorded. Bishop Burnet, however, tells us that he was "accounted a saint from his youth up." Having taken his degree with distinction at the University of Edinburgh, he spent the next ten years of his life with relations in France, where he came in contact with the Jansenists, whose mystical piety strongly attracted him. He learned, we are told, "to love them in Christian charity for the goodness they possessed, and thought less regarding the differences that separated them."

Returning home in 1641, he received Presbyterian orders, and was appointed to the charge of Newbottle, a parish near Edinburgh, where he remained eleven years. At Newbottle he wrote his Commentary on the Epistle of St. Peter, concerning which Coleridge said: "Surely if ever work not in the sacred Canon might suggest a belief of inspiration, of something more than human, this it is." He confined himself almost entirely to the concerns of his parish, and but seldom attended the Presbyterian Synods. On one occasion, however, when he happened to be present, he was publicly rebuked for not "preaching up the times." "Who," he asked, "does preach up the times?" It was answered that all the brethren did it. "Then," said Leighton, "if all of you preach up the times, you may surely allow one poor brother to preach up Christ Jesus and eternity."

In 1653 Leighton resigned his charge of Newbottle, owing, it is said, to the extreme weakness of his voice, when he accepted the Principalship of the University of Edinburgh, a post for which he was eminently qualified. He was a "master," says Burnet, "both of Greek and Hebrew, and he had the greatest command of the purest Latin that ever I knew in any man." This position he held for ten years, and was "a great blessing in it; for he talked so to all the youth of any capacity or distinction that it had a great effect on many of them." The breadth of his teaching may be inferred from the fact that he recommended "Thomas à Kempis" to the students, saying "it was one of the best books that ever was writt next to Inspired Writers." This action of his, we learn, gave much offence to many persons at Edinburgh.

Soon after the Restoration, Charles II having resolved to re-establish episcopacy in Scotland, it became necessary to find men suitable for the position, and Leighton was at length prevailed to accept the See of Dunblane.

It was a strange and painful position in which the new Bishop found himself. He had consented to accept the office with the sole object of conciliating the differences between the Presbyterians and Episcopalians, and of bringing the two parties together. He found himself associated with men of whose policy he profoundly disapproved, and whose actions he condemned. Often must he have echoed the Psalmist's words, "Woe is me that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar. I labour for peace, but when I speak unto them thereof they make them ready to battle." More than once, owing to the violence of the Episcopalians, he threatened to resign his bishopric. Having at length obtained from Charles II some measure of toleration, he set to work upon his scheme of comprehension, known as the "Accommodation," by which he hoped to conciliate the Presbyterians. With the purpose of furthering this movement, he accepted in 1671 the Archbishopric of Glasgow, and for some years he used every endeavour to promote peace. But it was all to no purpose. He was suspected alike by both parties. The Archbishop was in despair. "My sole object," he said, "has been to promote peace, and to advance the interests of true religion." And so, in the language of Bishop Burnet, "having gained no ground on the Presbyterians, and being suspected and hated by

the Episcopal party," this great and holy man at length resigned his Archbishopric, and retired from the noise and turmoil of the world to his sister's house at Horsted Keynes, in Sussex, where he spent in prayer and meditation, and in ministering to the wants of the poor people of the parish, the remaining ten years of his life.

A circumstance in connexion with his death is worth relating. He used often to say that, if he were to choose a place to die in, it should be an inn. It looked, he said, "like a pilgrim going home"—sometimes he used to sign himself "your weary fellow Pilgrim"—"to whom this world was all as an inn, and was tired of the noise and confusion of it." Strange to say, this singular wish was gratified, for going up to London on an errand of charity, he contracted a pleurisy, from which he sank rapidly, and breathed his last in the Bell Inn, Warwick Lane.

Thus this eminent servant of Christ passed away from the perturbations of the world to where beyond these voices there is peace. Throughout the whole course of Scottish history there are few figures which appear so calm and gracious as that of Robert Leighton. In an age of bitter controversy and of ecclesiastical persecution, "he emerges as a unique personality in Scottish history, winsome, attractive, and strangely beautiful in an age which was not ready to receive him." His soul was like a star and dwelt apart. He lived constantly as in the presence of God, and the weariness of life often lay heavily upon him. "To be content to stay always in this world," he said, "is above the obedience of angels." He would compare the close of life to a traveller pulling off his miry boots; and whenever, his nephew states, his temper rose to an unusual pitch of vivacity, it was when some illness attacked him—when "from the shaking of the prison doors he was led to hope that some of those brisk blasts would blow them open, and give him the release he coveted."

During the stormy period of his episcopate, when all his efforts in the cause of peace were doomed to disappointment, his favourite haunt was an avenue of trees along the banks of the Allan, still known as the "Bishop's Walk," up and down which he would pace for hours in profound meditation.

And with this detachment from the world, there was associated in the mind of Robert Leighton a wide conception of the essentials of true religion. He recognized the limits of human knowledge,

and refused to confound the essentials of Christianity with questions of ritual and organization. He did not encourage the desire to "soar into the secrets of the Deity on the waxen wings of the understanding," or to speculate on matters concerning which Scripture is silent. To his nephew, who complained that there was a certain text in the Bible which he could not understand, his answer was: "And many more that I cannot." Being once interrogated about the saints reigning with Christ, he tried to elude the question by replying: "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." Such curiosity, he thought, might be well answered in the words of the angel to Manoah, "Why asketh thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" "Enough," he said, "is discovered to satisfy us that righteousness and judgment are within, although round about His throne are clouds and darkness."

Anything in the nature of religious persecution was abhorrent to Robert Leighton. His sister once asked him, at the request of a friend, what he thought was the mark of the Beast, adding, "I told the inquirer that you would certainly answer you could not tell." "Truly you said well," replied the Archbishop, "but, if I might fancy what it were, it would be something with a pair of horns that pusheth his neighbour, as hath been so much seen and practised in Church and State." He also passed a severe sentence on those persons "who, in their zeal for making proselytes, fetched ladders from hell to scale heaven." "I would prefer," he had been heard to say, "an erroneous honest man before the most orthodox knave in the world; and I would rather convince a man that he has a soul to save, and induce him to live up to that belief, than bring him over to my opinion in whatsoever else beside." Being told of a person who had changed his persuasion, all he said was: "Is he more meek, more dead to the world? If so, he has made a happy change."

His French Bible, marked in numerous places, and filled with extracts from the Fathers in his own handwriting, is carefully preserved as a sacred relic in the library at Dunblane. For the Psalter he had a special affection, and spoke of it as "a bundle of myrrh that ought to lie day and night in the bosom." Scarce a line in that Psalter, his nephew tells us, that hath passed without the stroke of his pencil. He much loved the Lord's Prayer, and would sometimes say, "Oh, the spirit of this prayer would make rare Chris-

tians." And in those who exhibited that spirit Leighton recognized a fellow-disciple, whether he was a Presbyterian or Episcopalian, a Catholic or a Protestant.

Leighton's views on Church government were of a wide order. "The mode of Church government," he would say, "is immaterial; but peace and concord, kindness and goodwill, are indispensable." It is well to understand clearly his position, for he has been blamed for accepting the episcopal office, which, it will be remembered, Richard Baxter refused, and for submitting to re-ordination before he was publicly consecrated in Westminster Abbey to the bishopric of Dunblane. Fortunately, we have from the pen of Bishop Burnet, his most intimate friend, the clearest statement as to Leighton's opinion on re-ordination and episcopacy. "He did not think orders given without bishops were null and void. He thought the forms of government were not settled by such positive laws as were unalterable, but only by apostolical practices, which, as he thought, authorized episcopacy as the best form; yet he did not think it necessary to the being of a Church. But he thought that every Church might make such rules of ordination as they pleased, and that they might re-ordain all that came to them from any other Church, and that the re-ordaining a priest ordained in another Church imported no more but that they received him into orders according to their rules, and did not infer the annulling the orders he had formerly received." With regard to his opinion of episcopacy that it is not of the *esse*, but only of the *bene esse* of the Church, his view of course is shared, not only by the judicious Hooker, but by many of the ablest divines, both ancient and modern, of the English Church.

This brief consideration of the life and teaching of Archbishop Leighton will not, we trust, be found inappropriate at the present time. The spirit of this "Saint of all the Churches" is surely one which should animate the hearts of Christian people in these days of upheaval and distress. In the searching light of European conflict the old lines of ecclesiastical demarcation seem to be fading away. The point of importance is no longer whether a man be a Catholic or a Protestant, a Churchman or a Nonconformist; but whether he be a good man or a bad man, whether he walks in the light or in the darkness, whether he has fellowship with Christ or with Belial. And if a man be a good man; if the Ten Command-

ments and the Lord's Prayer, and the Eight Beatitudes, be written on his countenance ; if the parables of the Prodigal Son and of the Good Samaritan constitute the faith and practice of his religion ; if he loves Christ, and follows Christ, and tries to do the things that Christ says, then, with Archbishop Leighton, we shall not be too curious to discover whether he worships God in a Gothic cathedral or a wayside Bethel : we shall take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus.

JOHN VAUGHAN.

