

## FRANCIS AUGUSTUS BEVAN : A TRIBUTE AND AN IMPRESSION.

BY THE REV. HERBERT MARSTON, M.A., Rector of  
Lydford-on-Fosse, Somerset.

THE passing from our midst of so notable a figure as Mr. Bevan, is for Evangelical Churchmen an event of the first significance. We mourn with reason, and we look back with just pride and satisfaction. I need therefore offer no apologies for attempting to portray so characteristic and honoured a personality, nor need I waste time in any further preface. THE CHURCHMAN seems a conspicuously appropriate vehicle for such a contribution to the literature of the Evangelical body in the Church.

Francis Augustus Bevan was born in London in the year 1840. His father was the famous banker whose genius for finance not only built up the edifice of an immense private and business fortune, but was also recognized by Government, which from time to time sought his counsel in financial questions. Quaker blood was in the veins of Francis; and that tincture may have imparted to him a certain equable temper which we knew so well. He was first schooled at Trent Cottage, under Mr. Tabor, before that celebrated teacher went to Cheam. From Tabor he passed to Harrow, then under the rule of Dr. Vaughan, the favourite school of Evangelical magnates. From Harrow, after two years of foreign travel, he went into the Bank in Lombard Street, which supplied to him the knowledge of men and movements, which others derive from books and colleges. The fact is noteworthy; for a certain practicality and a certain limitation of outlook are inevitable in one so early yoked to the car of commerce. He was diligent in his calling. The great commercial virtues were conspicuous in him. He was regular, punctual, sound in judgment, conciliatory, prudent, and kind in his dealing with men.

Accessible to all, princely and cheerful in his munificence, conscientious and discreet in the distribution of his alms, and void of any tinge of ostentation, he has added another name to the long roll of English philanthropists, all of whom are an honour to our

species, and most of whom have been nursed in the principles of Evangelical religion.

But amid the close and constant obligation of his daily life, Mr. Bevan found leisure for a considerable degree of mental and social culture. He loved cricket. He was a keen musician. He read novels, and travelled. As a boy he had been a good singer; and all his life he attended classical concerts with delight. He visited Switzerland frequently; and in early manhood travelled in Palestine. At the age of 68 he went to India and must have there seen many things to confirm his faith in Christian missions, and to kindle his zeal for the Empire, and some things also to fill so good and just a heart with misgiving and distress.

His predominant bent was towards politics. His family believe that he would have made a mark in the House of Commons. Those who have heard Mr. Bevan speak in public will remember his easy and luminous utterance, and will concur in the belief of his family. It is certain that his wide acquaintance with finance, and with the City of London, and his equally wide acquaintance with the religious needs of his country, would have qualified him to speak, and vote, with more than usual influence. His father, however, dissuaded Mr. Bevan from offering himself as a candidate for Parliament on grounds of health; and thus his undivided energies and powers were given to the cause of Christianity and philanthropy. None the less he was always acutely interested in political questions, and kept up personal connexions with a good many people notable in the world of politics. For many years he frequently attended debates, and listened, as many of us have done, to that strange medley of wisdom and special-pleading, out of which at length emerges as by a gracious fortuity, the Law of the greatest people in the world.

If now, before passing to an examination of the work of Mr. Bevan, we collect the features that have thus been separately delineated, we frame the portrait of an Englishman of singular excellence and charm. High-minded, humble, generous, devout, simple in his tastes, happy in his home, loved by his family, rich in friends, managing a great financial house with consummate tact and patience, disposing of an ample fortune with gracious yet discerning liberality, moderate in all things, and while free himself from the meaner anxieties that afflict half the world, prompt to appreciate, and to relieve those anxieties in others—Mr. Bevan has bequeathed to

us an example that all can admire, and that most can imitate in its largest aspects.

When at the age of 21, Francis Augustus Bevan became a partner in Barclay's Bank, the dominant religious force in the Church of England was still Evangelical. It is true that for near a generation the Tractarian reaction had infected the Church, but the secession of Newman in 1847 had given a shock to that movement; and the growing aberrations of the Ritualist section had alienated much of the public confidence which the first Tractarians had slowly acquired. The Evangelicals were in power. Along with power they had got place and patronage. Resting on the fame of their great predecessors, they became content with the present, and negligent of the future. They suffered the fate of all who thus act. They were overtaken sleeping. Another took their crown. Nevertheless though displaced they were not lost. They forfeited much, but they retained more. Though they have never recovered the position which once they held, they may yet recover it; and in a wiser and more wakeful spirit, may yet lead the English people to better things than even their fathers knew.

That the sceptre did not wholly pass from us was in a measure due to the labours of such men as Mr. Bevan. It is true that he could not impart to the Evangelical school what it most required, a zest of scholarship, a modern outlook, and a clear policy. But he maintained its funds, he supported its parishes and its societies, he adorned its principles, and he recommended its zeal for souls. He was treasurer to a large number of institutions. For years he occupied fortnightly the chair at the committee meetings of the London City Mission. He worked hard at the Church Patronage Trust, especially in conjunction with the sagacious Dr. Barlow, late Dean of Peterborough. He served on a good many other Trusts as well. I remember very clearly my interview with the Trustees of Belgrave Chapel, when they honoured me with invitation to succeed Marcus Rainsford in that chapel. Of the Trustees Mr. Bevan was one. He was present at that interview. I recall now the quiet and musical tones of his voice; the quickness of his questions; and the bright and genial words of his advice when he said, "You had better consult Mrs. Marston before giving us your final answer; a wise man always consults his wife."

There was perhaps about Mr. Bevan's churchmanship a certain

dimness of outline. He was one of a generation which sought to solve the sad problem of a divided Christianity by the method of denominational courtesies. That method has long ago ceased to exist. We want a method more defined and more efficient. That view coloured inevitably his patronage. Though always just and conscientious, yet his proclivity was towards a type of clergyman whose Churchmanship was also somewhat indistinct. The effect of this policy in patronage was not at first apparent. Nor did it much signify. But as time went on, the result appeared in more directions than one. A large number of Evangelical benefices were filled by men who had, in fact, no liking for Church questions, and little understanding of them. The consequence was that these men, taken as representatives of Evangelical doctrine, created an impression that the Evangelicals were only an accident in the Established Church. The men themselves accepted this valuation, sometimes with alacrity, and sometimes with unconcern. Thus the leadership of Church opinion passed from their hands. They were left in devout and honoured isolation. New and active minds turned to other counsellors for light and leading. If this account of some Evangelical patronage be correct, I cannot review it with complacency. I have ventured on this survey as a cautionary suggestion, for in some quarters the tendency is with us still.

No sketch of Mr. Bevan would be complete which omitted his profound personal religion. Here was the deep, pure fountain of his beautiful and life-long beneficence. His early impressions of religion were derived from home. His father and his mother, and his step-mother, were all devoted and exemplary Christians. Their piety was strict. As he grew in years he expanded in his views. He tempered the conservative tendency, native to great capitalists, by the liberal influences of the Gospel; and though never conspicuous in controversy, he adhered faithfully to the doctrines of the Reformation. The Bible was his daily study. The Sunday was religiously and devoutly observed. Family prayer was never omitted. He used regularly to expound a portion of Scripture to his household. His extempore prayers were beautiful. Immediate and habitual communion with God, the felt indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a personal dependence on the merits and the grace of Christ, were the secret talisman of his public and personal life. He walked by faith. He walked with God.

These qualities are primary and indispensable. The Evangelicals may have many faults, but they have amid them all deserved unspeakably well of the spiritual republic, because they have sustained at its very heart an imperishable witness to the reality and supremacy of personal religion. To this high praise Francis Augustus Bevan enjoys an ample claim. If he was not greater than the great men of his generation, he shone with the light of lights, and conferred on his contemporaries in a long life the blessing of a lofty Christian example.

Evangelicals, if they understand themselves and their principles, still await their best. The future is for them. They are called to yet higher things. The Church is looking for an Evangelicalism alert and tender, conscientious about truth, humanely sensitive to all great needs, free from rancour and stagnation. To that high level we are on the way; and among the noble guides who have pointed out the road, one and not the least conspicuous is Francis Augustus Bevan.

H. J. R. MARSTON.

