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of all the books of the New Testament, and devotionally it is the most peaceful. At no point is the fatal divorce between criticism and devotion easier to make and at no point has it such an obvious and specious appeal. Yet this divorce reduced Evangelical Anglican scholarship to stagnation for over a generation, and the results in a devotional sugary pietism replacing the true salty tang of the Gospel are plain for all to see. Either we must worship the Lord our God with our whole being, intellect, emotion and will, or we cannot for long worship Him at all. Let us, then, despite all difficulties, tackle the Fourth Gospel. Temple's *Readings* will start us off, and Hoskyn's great commentary will urge us on, and E. F. Scott's pioneering venture, *The Fourth Gospel*, will be perhaps best of all, but it is strong meat and not everyone will be able to digest it. Perhaps before long C. H. Dodd will have written the commentary we are still waiting for on St. John, and if T. W. Manson would complete his studies so as to include all the contents of the first three Gospels, then indeed there would be time to give thanks for that splendid and fascinating rediscovery of the faith and life and worship of the Early Church, which we owe to contemporary biblical and liturgical scholarship.

"These are great days, great in opportunity, great in opposition, glorious in triumph," Bishop Linton wrote home from Persia about 1930. His words may be echoed as we survey the Bible and realise how wonderfully we are being led to a rediscovery of the Gospel as adequate to our needs of to-day as it ever was to the needs of the first century Christians. But there is no short cut. It is no good trying to speak with authority unless you know the authorities. But there is all the difference in the world between speaking from authorities (even biblical ones) and speaking with authority. It is not merely good advice that the world needs, but Good News: and it must be spoken with authority, not merely from authorities. "We through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." We might have it. Have we got it? And can we pass it on?

## THE STUDY OF CHURCH HISTORY

BY J. P. HICKINBOTHAM, M.A.

GIBBON in the *Decline and Fall* distinguishes between the theologian who "may indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from heaven arrayed in her native purity" and the historian whose "more melancholy duty" it is to describe "the inevitable mixture of error and corruption which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings."<sup>1</sup> Bishop Lightfoot, on the other hand, affirms that "History is an excellent cordial for the drooping courage."<sup>2</sup> The difference of verdict is, perhaps due to differing degrees of spiritual insight. Church history is the story of how the Gospel of Redemption has in fact been applied to the world of men and women. Because they are men and

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Sykes, *The Study of Ecclesiastical History*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Smyth, *The Genius of the Church of England*, p. 23.

women needing redemption, the story is often one of failure, frustration and rebellion against the grace of God. But because "where sin did abound there did grace abound more exceedingly" the story is often one of success, of progress, of heroic struggle and victory wrested from defeat; and on balance it is a story of the onward march of a victorious purpose of love.

If Church history is to be read with interest and profit it must be read with some such understanding of its meaning; with a longing to discover in the apparently haphazard events the underlying providence of God worked out in His People the Church. Therefore we must start by getting the right approach. Read a couple of small pamphlets, William Temple's *Christianity as an Interpretation of History* and Charles Smyth's essay in *The Genius of The Church of England*, and your appetite will be whetted by such admirable cocktails. Church history will be discovered to be a fascinating spiritual quest, not a text-book of ecclesiastical politics. Go on from this to some of the more adventurous interpretations of history in the light of the Gospel; to Wand's little book *The Spirit of Church History*, for example, to Charles Williams' *Descent of the Dove*, and to Latourette's massive survey *The Expansion of Christianity*—though you will be wise if you tackle his little book *The Unquenchable Light* first; it lays bare the theme of his big work without the mass of detailed evidence by which it is substantiated. You may not agree with all the interpretations of writers like these; but they are at least gallant attempts to get down to the true meaning of the history with which they deal; and so they are on the right path and will stimulate one's own thought and imagination. History is the meaning of events, not mere events.

That is not to say that the events are unimportant. The meaning is to be discovered through the facts and must do full justice to them. A book which ignores or distorts the balance of the facts may be excellent reading, but it is fiction not history. So the next step is to master the facts, and once one's appetite has been whetted one is ready for some solid grind. It is important from the start to see Church history as a whole; as a continuous unfolding of God's ways with men and the patient working out of His purpose. Therefore try some of the complete surveys which give a bird's-eye view. Text books like C. P. S. Clarke's *Short History of the Christian Church* or Wand and Deansley's three short volumes on the Early, Medieval, and Modern Church are not to be despised. Nor are continuous histories of the English Church, such as Patterson's one volume *The Church of England*, or Dr. E. W. Watson's little sketch with the same title published in the Home University series, or the much more detailed series of volumes edited by Hunt and Stephens. Such books are hard work, and they may justly be criticised as giving only the bare bones and concerning themselves disproportionately with ecclesiastical politics and controversies; but without a real grip on the external facts it is impossible to discover the deeper truths about them or to recover the atmosphere and daily life of the Church in any age of the past. They may be supplemented by more general sketches such as E. A. Payne's *Free Church Tradition* and A. T. P. Williams' *The Anglican Tradition in the Life of England*. Of course, such books

themselves presuppose a background knowledge of general history, and the would-be student of Church history who lacks such a background will achieve little unless he makes good this deficiency. Such fine historical writings as H. A. L. Fisher's *History of Europe* or G. M. Trevelyan's one-volume *History of England* and the companion volume to it, *English Social History*, are an excellent introduction to Church history. We cannot understand the activity of God in the world unless we know something about the world in which He has been acting.

By now the student should have had his interest kindled and should have got through the grind of acquiring a general knowledge of Church history as a whole against the background of secular history. Now he is in a position to follow up his own special interests, to delve deeply into a period or a subject that attracts him, and so to develop his own thought and his own insights. Here every man must follow his own bent, and it is fairly safe to say that he will derive the most profit—and if he goes far enough he will be the most use to others—if he concentrates on the areas which naturally interest him most, though he will lose his sense of proportion and become a bad specialist on his own period unless he keeps it steadily in its context and keeps up a fair amount of reading on Church history as a whole.

The first thing to do in studying a particular period is to read the standard works on it. Professor Norman Sykes in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge, *The Study of Ecclesiastical History*, gives a salutary warning against premature research. If the primitive Church is your subject you cannot do without Gwatkin's *History of the Early Church* as an introduction; you will go on to expand your knowledge with the fascinating three volumes of the Abbé Duchesne, and you will not shirk the more up-to-date and detailed, though less graciously written, *History* by Dr. B. J. Kidd. Likewise if English Church history is your aim, you cannot neglect the relevant works on the period under study: Dr. William Bright's old-fashioned but still excellent *Chapters in Early English Church History*, for example, for the early period, or Z. N. Brooke's *English Church and the Papacy* for the early medieval period, or Coulton's *Five Centuries of Religion* and Raynard Smith's *Pre-Reformation England* (an interesting contrast) for the later Middle Ages, or Dr. Norman Sykes' *Church and State in the 18th Century* and Dr. Elliott Binns' *Religion in the Victorian Era* and S. C. Carpenter's *English Church and People in the Nineteenth Century*, for the later times. Likewise if the Reformation is your special interest J. P. Whitney's judicious and compressed one-volume *History of the Reformation*, T. M. Lindsay's fascinating and enthusiastic two volumes with the same title, Constant's *The Reformation in England*, and anything on the subject by such writers as A. F. Pollard and Sir Maurice Powick are indispensable. For both the medieval and Reformation periods the Cambridge Medieval History and the Cambridge Modern History are a veritable mine of information. For the missionary movement and the still recent history of the younger Churches, such books as Dr. Wilson Cash's *The Missionary Church* and Canon Macleod Campbell's *Christian History in the Making* are excellent introductions.

It is important to get a grip of the period of interest by reading the big standard books. But it is equally important not to stop on them too long or too exclusively. There is the danger of becoming weary with too much solid meat; there is the danger of becoming absorbed in the broad sweep and in the story of institutions and external ecclesiastical events and so of forgetting that the real Church history is the story of God's dealings with individuals and of the daily Christian life of ordinary men and women. So get on to books which bring out the personal side as vividly as possible. A book like J. H. R. Moorman's *English Church Life in the Thirteenth Century* which recounts no events but gives a sort of composite photograph of the Church in its different aspects in a single epoch brings to life the character and ethos of Christianity in the Middle Ages far more vividly than any chronological history—though it can only be profitably read with some chronological sketch previously implanted in the reader's mind.

Biography is perhaps the best of all ways of reading Church history. Books like A. J. Macdonald's *Lanfranc*, Lord Eustace Percy's *John Knox*, Allison Peers' works on the medieval mystics, John Buchan's *Life of Cromwell*, Reginald Coupland's *Wilberforce*, Constance Padwick's *Temple Gairdner of Cairo*, Davidson's life of Archbishop Tait and Bell's life of Davidson, to mention a few completely at random: these are books which light up not only an individual but the age in which he lived. Above all they show how God works on persons through persons, and the Christian interpretation of history must in the last resort be always personal. A somewhat similar and equally valuable and fascinating study is to read what one can of the writings of the great men of the past. The Histories of Eusebius and of Bede may not be exact for the periods they cover, but they re-create the atmosphere and thought of their authors and the age in which they were written. St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, Wesley's *Journal*, Newman's *Apologia*, to take a few once again completely at random, in diverse ways reveal not only the heart of the writer but the mood of an age or of a leading school of thought within an age. Collections of documents like Bettenson's *Documents of the Christian Church* in the World's Classics series will also do much to light up and illustrate a book of general Church history.

Once started, we would like to go on writing about this fascinating subject, with its various by-paths and special interests; but perhaps enough has been said to convince the reader that here is a whole field of study in which, if he will undertake some preliminary hard work, there are endless pleasant pastures which he may explore at will, and find therein not only recreation for the mind but food and inspiration for the spirit. "Church History," writes Canon Charles Smyth, "is neither primarily political nor primarily narrative. It is primarily prophetic, revealing and interpreting the ways of God to Christ's Church and to man's soul."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.