

Editorial

IN October, 1958 George Bell passed to his rest. He was seventy-five years of age, and from 1929 till the year before his death, he had been Bishop of Chichester. The twentieth century has seen all too few outstanding and memorable bishops, and among those who are likely to be represented when the history books come to be written, George Bell must be a strong contender. His chief claim to fame in the eyes of the public was his fearless and unceasing championing of the cause of those oppressed in Nazi Germany; lesser claims might be found in his preparatory work in paving the way for the World Council of Churches, and his honest toil as a godly and much loved diocesan. Bell's biography was to have been written by Dr. Norman Sykes, a biographer who would in large measure have shared Bell's own outlook. Sykes had in fact made a start on the project before his premature death, after which the enterprise was entrusted to Dr. R. C. D. Jasper, who had earlier written a large biography of Bishop Headlam, Bell's contemporary.*

George Bell was the son of a very ordinary vicarage, and after an education at Westminster and Oxford he served a curacy in Leeds and then returned to Oxford as a don. Happy though he was back in Oxford, he was soon summoned to Lambeth as one of Archbishop Davidson's chaplains, and there he made his debut among the ecclesiastically great. Bell became a disciple of Davidson, and learned the ways of the ecclesiastical establishment, drafting documents, becoming an intermediary between the Archbishop and a host of callers, and contributing on its literary side to the First World War National Mission. On the death of Dean Wace, Bell was offered the deanery of Canterbury. He accepted and had to face the usual problems (even in those days) of the vast sums required for Cathedral upkeep. His few years at Canterbury were probably the most carefree of his church life, and allowed him to develop his ideas for a cathedral as a centre of the arts, especially drama. He was responsible for commissioning T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and before long he had initiated other musical, literary and dramatic ventures.

Those who knew him realised Bell was a talented man, and it was no surprise to them when he was offered the see of Chichester in 1929, where he was to remain (rather more of a surprise to those same people) almost the whole of his days. One of Bell's lasting contributions was in the ecumenical field. He had been assistant secretary to the 1920 Lambeth Conference, and he was active for several years after the great Lambeth Appeal as secretary of a joint-Free Church committee. Unfortunately Jasper is somewhat unperceptive on Bell's ecumenical contribution. We are never given any clear picture of what Bell stood for ecumenically, though he always seemed to be on the side of the ecumenical angels. Jasper tells us he allayed the fears about CSI of the Tractarian West Indies bishops at Lambeth 1930, but

* **GEORGE BELL BISHOP OF CHICHESTER** by R. C. D. Jasper, OUP, 401 pp., 70s. This book is in fact entirely Dr. Jasper's work, since as he explains he felt obliged to start again and not continue where Sykes left off.

he provides few details on this important issue. In fact Jasper's picture of Bell is one vast catalogue of committees and visits with impressions of various personalities but very little evaluation of the theological issues involved, which are after all the crucial things. In such a lengthy biography, this is a bad omission.

Another of Bell's lasting contributions was his championing of the cause of the Confessing Church in Germany, and indeed all who suffered at the hands of the Nazi regime. In this former he found himself partly at loggerheads with Headlam. Jasper never states Headlam's case at all fully, referring somewhat irritatingly to his own biography of Headlam in a note on page 219. Headlam was chairman of the Church of England's Council on Foreign Relations, a post that had originally been ear-marked for Bell himself. Headlam felt the whole ecclesiastical problem in Germany had been greatly exaggerated. The Confessing Church was behaving unwisely and had been unnecessarily provocative while most German pastors were getting on with their pastoral work unmolested. Dr. A. J. Macdonald had been sent to Germany and confirmed Headlam's impression. But Bell was unimpressed and continued to attack Headlam's line in debate. He believed he must stress the seriousness of the situation and keep the whole issue before the British public. Accordingly he corresponded diligently and regularly with Church leaders in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, paid trips to see Nazi leaders like Hess, met with Ribbentrop the German ambassador in London, wrote letters to *The Times*, and chaired and steered endless delicate negotiations through committees. His energy was prodigious, and his sense of vocation on this issue passionate. He feared that the growing Nazi pressure on churchmen was clamping down on their freedom. Whether Bell achieved very much in the international field is doubtful; the issues were too big for him and his fellow churchmen, and he was often more visionary than realistic, as Archbishop Lang reminded him on several occasions. Bell believed he had a duty to keep the issue before the public, and in this he persisted, encouraged by some German friends like Bonhoeffer and Niemoller, despite pleas from other English friends that he was in fact harming the very cause he sought to serve.

One of the most impressive aspects of Bell's character was his unflagging selfless and sacrificial service of the German refugees, especially the refugee pastors who had been forced to flee Hitler. He found them jobs, did endless trivial but important services for them, visited them when they were interned, and risked unpopularity by defending them (and he believed many other anti-Nazi Germans still in Germany) when the British Government was attacking all Germans indiscriminately. Bell assailed the Government for failing to distinguish between Germans and Nazi National Socialism. For the most part his pleas fell on deaf ears, and they irritated Churchill. When Bell devised a scheme to help starving European refugees, even his Christian friend Lord Selborne turned it down as impossible. Bell saw himself as a man with a mission, but he hardly made allowance for what was possible in a modern all out war against an unscrupulous enemy. Later Bell criticised the Government for its bombing policy, but again without effect. He was not at his best, and not very persuasive, with

Governments and politicians, many of whom found him and his manner trying. But Bell shone as a pastor in his care for suffering individuals, and in his thoughtfulness in such details as ensuring that Mrs. Niemoller always had a newsletter each month a day or two before she visited her imprisoned husband.

Church and State was a field in which Bell was greatly interested, but whether his contribution here was valuable is questionable. Again Jasper fails to make the issues stand out, but rather catalogues all the conferences. Bell was a disciple both of Davidson and of classical Anglicanism in viewing a bishop as a national figure. This concern, coupled with the enormous emotional reaction to the double Parliamentary defeat of the 1928 Prayer Book, and the struggle of the Confessing Church brought the matter very much before Bell. If he had clear theological principles on this subject, Jasper does not succeed in drawing them out. It seems he just accepted the emotional reaction, and voiced his concern for the church's freedom without thinking through the deeper issues involved. If that is right, it is characteristic of a certain Davidsonian pragmatism, but it is strangely ironical for a man who spent so much of his time exhorting the State. Bell regretted that the 1936 Church and State report was not implemented, and felt Lang was too hesitant on it. But the 1946 report was markedly different. Perhaps Lang was right after all, and Bell was, on this subject, rather too much a child of his time.

In his diocese Bell had difficulties with the question of lawful authority, especially with the extremers Anglo-Catholics. He shared the current post-1928 liturgical double-think common to the then episcopate, and though he made several attempts to solve the question of what was liturgically lawful, his plans were criticised at times by almost all he consulted—Oliver Quick, Professor Ratcliff, and his own Chancellor. He never solved the problem, and the underlying theological tensions remained (centring round issues like reservation).

What sort of man emerges from Jasper's life of Bell? Perhaps I should say at once that I never knew Bell, though I have talked to quite a few who knew him well and questioned them about details in this book. Not knowing Bell has disadvantages in checking facts, but advantages in enabling one to assess the book more objectively without falling into the sort of hagiography from which Iremonger's *Temple* suffers so dreadfully. Jasper avoids that pitfall, but it must be admitted that on the whole his biography fails. It is flat and donnish, recounting far too many rounds of committees, letters and meetings. Bell does not stand out as a living person. We are given no theological evaluation of Bell and what he stood for, and only scattered comments on him as a writer (including a very feeble assessment of his large biography of Davidson, where Bell's hero-worship of Davidson is very revealing). The extensive documentation is welcome after the modern fashion for potted biographies (of little use to anyone?), but it is a pity Dr. Jasper has not made better use of his space. To me Jasper's Bell stood out mainly as a champion of persecuted Germans and an ecclesiastical bureaucrat. Behind these two main impressions one can detect the hard-working diocesan pastor. Was it really Bell's outspokenness that cost him an Archbishoprick, as some have thought?

Jasper thinks not, believing that Bell had character defects which would have made him ill equipped for the job. He is probably right. Bell was not diplomatic; he was not a very good judge (relations with the quixotic N. P. Williams reveal this) of character and men, though he had moments of insight as in his reflections on Lambeth 1948. 'Too many subjects of importance in the time . . . very few weighty bishops: and it was noted that English bishops failed to give leadership. Too little of supernatural or spiritual or (if preferred) too little of theological approach anywhere' (p. 384).

THE NATURE OF EPISCOPACY

If Jasper's biography of Bell is disappointing, Bell himself raises some interesting questions as to the nature of the episcopal office in England. It has become commonplace for Anglicans to talk of pastoral bishops these days. That is a splendid ideal, but what does it mean in practice? In non-Christian countries it is relatively easy, for bishops are not public figures to the same extent, nor are they part of the legislature. If a bishop is to be a pastor, ought he to be these other things, a figure of state, a member of the House of Lords, a social figure in the diocese? Was Bell wrong to devote so much time to national issues and even overseas problems? Should he have remained in his diocese, vast enough to occupy any man pastorally full time without any interruptions? Bell spent much time in administration, diocesan administration, Church House administration, and Lambeth administration; is that pastoral? The standard answer today is that administration is pastoral. Perhaps, but is there a certain unwillingness to let the chairmanship of key committees pass to others, and was the experienced diocesan, now retired, who told me he reckoned his greatest achievement to have been to have started his episcopate as chairman of all the diocesan committees and end up chairman of none, wrong? Did he really desert all his pastoral work?

Our purpose here is simply to raise the questions, and to suggest that whatever the situation in the younger churches, some of the stock answers about Anglican episcopacy in England just will not do. It is urgent that the problem of episcopacy be properly thought out, since not for the first time the Church of England seems about to propose that synodical schemes and schemes for dividing up dioceses which will in effect settle the issues by a side wind. Regrettably this is becoming an Anglican way of doing things, but it is far from satisfactory. The Missionary and Ecumenical Council has produced last June a very useful little fourpenny pamphlet entitled *The Nature and the Function of the Episcopate* (reference CA Misc. 14) which helps point up the questions to be answered. One only hopes they will in fact be answered before they are determined by the side winds.

BACK COPIES OF THE CHURCHMAN

Some readers may have unwanted back copies of early numbers of *The Churchman*, and others may be like us in search of some to fill gaps. If any reader has unwanted copies of the following (bound or unbound), October 1894 to December 1908, and March 1956, perhaps he would

let us know. We are anxious to complete our file sets and should be willing to pay the reader concerned. Meanwhile our publishers would like readers to know that they still have a few copies left of numbers Vol 77 No. 3 and 4, Vol. 78 No. 1, 2, 3 and 4, Vol. 79, No. 1, 2, 3, 4 Vol. 80 No. 1 and 3, Vol. 81 No. 1, 2, 3, 4. if any reader wants to complete his set of recent numbers. The copies cost 4s. each, post free. We also have a set of four bound volumes of the *Expository Times* for 1927-1931 (volumes 39-42 inclusive), which we could exchange or sell to complete someone else's set.

The fourth article in this number represents a survey of recent liturgical publications. This particular article sets the scene, and we hope to follow it by others as space allows and liturgical publications demand. It is our intention to publish from time to time surveys of books and articles in particular fields likely to be of interest to *Churchman* readers. The surveys will be non-technical but written by those with specialist knowledge. In our view such surveys are of considerable value since few in these days can keep up with the flood of publications, but lest any reader who is more interested in articles than recent literature should take fright, we can assure him that we shall not publish more than one or two surveys in any one year.

G.E.D.