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## Possibilities and Impossibilities of Comprehension.

By T. H. S. ESCOTT, Esq.

COLERIDGE'S "BIOGRAPHIA EPISTOLARIS." Edited by A. Turnbull. *Bell and Sons*. 1911.

MODERN ANGLICAN THEOLOGY. By the Rev. J. H. Rigg. *Alexander Heylin*, 28, Paternoster Row.

FREMANTLE'S NATIONAL CHRISTIANITY. *Harper Brothers*.

LIFE OF DEAN STANLEY. By R. E. Prothero. *Nelson and Sons*.

OPTIMISTS and pessimists alike would often profit by a minuter acquaintance with the historical aspect of the public questions that respectively raise their brightest hopes or their darkest fears. On King George's Coronation day, June 22, 1911, the Bishop of Hereford pleased many, scandalized some, and pained others, by inviting the representative Dissenters of his diocese to join Anglicans at the Communion Table in his cathedral. Even among those who approved the motive of the action as well as recognized its broadly Christian purpose, doubts were expressed whether opinion within and without the national Church had ripened sufficiently for such a step. In itself, of course, the obliteration of all sectarian differences on the part of loyal adherents to a common evangelical faith was much to be desired. Further, the holders of this view agreed that the day might come, might even be nearer than definite signs warranted prediction, when the only means of effectual resistance to the encroachments of Rome on the one hand, and the inroads of popular infidelity on the other, would be for all English Protestants, church and chapel indifferently, to stand together against the same foe. Such was the deliberate—indeed, the dying—conviction of that most sagacious and far-seeing, as well as enlightened, widely sympathetic, but consistently devoted son of the Church he ruled, James Fraser, Bishop of Manchester, who in 1885 died, amid the sorrow not less of Dissenters than of Churchmen. Fraser, of course, abstained from any forecast of the time or the circumstances which might necessitate or promote such a reunion. Still, it was with him not merely a pious opinion, but

a practical conviction that, at some point in the unforeseen future, evangelical Christendom's various sections, if they were not to be crushed out by the pressure of Rome, must devise some *modus vivendi* among themselves, and present a compact front to an ecclesiastical system that had never despaired of winning back the British Isles to the patrimony of St. Peter, or ceased to find and fee possible betrayers of the Reformation citadel among its professedly sworn custodians.

A Fellow of J. H. Newman's College at Oxford, Bishop Fraser did but desire the adoption of a policy that, some two centuries earlier, had commended itself to distinguished men trained at the Universities of Cambridge or Aberdeen. Locke and Chillingworth, the spiritual and philosophical champions of the Church and State principles, whose triumph the 1688 revolution was to involve, had both foreseen the possible necessity, in a coming age, of an alliance like that so often thought of by Fraser, though, beyond encouraging a tendency towards the goal, he may have done nothing. In this, the nineteenth-century occupant of the Manchester See showed himself genealogically descended from the prelate of the Orange and Hanoverian era who, whatever else he might have regarded with indifference, had beyond doubt Church comprehension deeply at heart. Gilbert Burnet's appointment, under William and Mary in 1689, to the Salisbury mitre was a throwing down of the gauntlet to the exclusive High Church faction that had enjoyed ascendancy with the Stuarts. Rightly enough, and with perfectly natural resentment, it was interpreted by the Tory high-fliers as an earnest of the conciliatory methods which Dissenters might look for in the new reign. The essential features brought out by Macaulay in his portrait of Burnet may not lack the colouring of truth in their essential details. The sketch itself, however, was introduced for literary effect, rather than with any serious historical purpose. The great Whig stylist wished to relieve his page with a vivid and amusing illustration first; secondly, by delineating Burnet, a typical and enthusiastic Whig Churchman,

in an aspect, not perhaps unfair, but at least droll, he showed that, if elsewhere hard on the Tories, he was not blind to the foibles of the leaders on the other side. The result is, not a genuine personal likeness, but a masterly and good-tempered caricature. As Burnet's selection for Salisbury formed the earliest exercise of high ecclesiastical patronage by the new dynasty, so this Bishop subsequently became the first pioneer of the Church policy favoured in the Victorian age by James Fraser, and in the present reign likely to receive a welcome from at least one spiritual peer in addition to Bishop Percival. Burnet, indeed, resembled most of his contemporaries on the Bench in being not only a political Churchman, but a keen political partisan, carrying his party passions so far as to accept the absurd fable of the Pretender's supposititious birth. On the other hand, he showed conscientious loyalty to his spiritual office in remonstrating with the second Charles on his profligate courses, at the risk of his own preferment ; while his sincere piety effected the most conspicuous of seventeenth-century conversions, that which won the witty Rochester to the faith of the Cross.

Burnet's true and undefiled religion owed much to the teaching of an exemplary Presbyterian mother ; with her he had passed most of his youth in the Low Countries and in Switzerland. The Evangelical associations of those countries had taught him not to mistake the accidents of spiritual devotion for its essentials. Always tenacious of the cardinal points in Anglican theology and worship, he at the same time recognized the triviality of the differences between the various uses of Anglican and nonconforming Protestantism. Unity among all Christians, not being Arminians or Papists, became the object of his life ; to secure it he would have surrendered the mark of the Cross at baptism, the surplice, and chanted prayers. As regards the Thirty-Nine Articles, while stopping a good deal short of the point in relation to them reached by the most modish among the Anglican priesthood of our time, he would have acquiesced in the modification of the letter of subscription. Incidentally we may point out that it is these Articles which

suggest the chief contrast between Church reunion, as understood in Burnet's day and ours. To-day the substance of those declarations would be readily accepted by most sects of Protestant nonconformity. It is demurred to only by the representatives of advanced Anglicanism, on the ground of their being merely articles of religion and not of faith. The only reunion meant by up-to-date employers of the term is not, as in the first half of the last century, with the Greek Church, but with Rome. The fact of Burnet's reunion being with Dissenters did not make him indifferent to the sufferings of the sacramental non-jurors, thrown loose upon the world at the 1688 revolution. Some of the non-jurors' friends, if not of the non-jurors themselves, Burnet trusted might come within his own comprehensive scheme. A temper like his, sanguine as well as sagacious, found some ground for such a hope in the readiness with which, during a period of fifteen years, the national Church had first (1645-47) become Presbyterian, and then at the Restoration of 1660 had reverted to Anglo-Catholic doctrine and worship. The time, therefore, being one of such ecclesiastical plasticity, what need prevent the establishment of Burnet's own day from amalgamating the discipline of Laud and the teaching of Knox? The Presbyterian experiment had not been popular. Upon its final failure, and the consequent outburst of Anglo-Catholic exultation, there supervened a feeling that Presbyterianism and Episcopalianism might learn a good deal from each other, and coexist quite comfortably. By 1654 the religious feuds and scandals of the realm had reached such a height as to convince Oliver Cromwell that he must proceed on another tack for the tranquil reorganization of the national faith; he allowed the Presbyterian formularies to remain in force, but the State religion became that of the Independents. These changes, then fresh in the public mind, as well as the proved possibility of various Protestant sects contriving to hold their own simultaneously justified, as Burnet thought, his policy of so far extending the Anglican pale as to include not only Presbyterians, but all Dissenters, not being declared enemies to the Church, and in any degree disposed to become her members. During most

of these negotiations, Bishop Burnet himself was constantly communicating with the Dutch and Swiss non-episcopal churches.

These were not the only signs of the times that may well have strengthened Burnet and his friends in a belief that their scheme was politically feasible as well as eminently Christian. Some among the best brains of the day, clerical and secular, were on their side. The Cambridge Platonists generally, and among them in a special degree Thomas Burnet, no relative of Gilbert Burnet, worked with pen and tongue in the same direction as the Salisbury prelate. Inside the establishment the movement found able and earnest supporters. Patrick's original orders had been received from a presbytery; Stillingfleet stuck to his Bedfordshire living of Sutton through the whole term of Independent ascendancy under Cromwell (1657-60). Thus, in the seventeenth century, religious comprehension was the child of Church unsettlement, more widely spread and organic than has since been experienced. The conditions under which the idea of ecclesiastical coalition grew up made it impossible to predict the form of faith that might be foisted on the country a few years hence, or even to define from what party or sect the established faith of the moment took its dominant colour or creed. Church recreation, therefore, rather than comprehension, formed the real task that Bishop Burnet took in hand. After the final overthrow of the Royalist hopes at Naseby, what is understood to-day, and was understood then, as the national Church, ceased to exist. Its religion did not die out of the land; its services and its ministers were too deeply rooted in the popular affection for that. But even the best traditions of its faith had grown dim and inactive at the Restoration in 1660. The piety and learning of seventeenth-century divines, High Church or Evangelical, had done little to prepare the way for Burnet's well-meant endeavour; this, as has been already said, was less to amend and enlarge an existing institution than out of the most discordant and incongruous elements to create a new structure.

Such a combination of circumstances has never repeated itself since. Only at one point of the nineteenth century could there have been traced the faintest analogy to the situation that

confronted Burnet. That was when, as a counter-move to the Anglican Romanizers, William Palmer of Magdalen devoted himself to promoting union between the Greek and English Communion at the cost of what proved an unfruitful mission to Moscow. Nevertheless, as was said earlier in the course of the present remarks, at intervals since Burnet's day there have reappeared Church reformers of his temper who, if they have been able actually to do little, have said and written much in favour of reviving his experiment. How to make the State once more so nearly co-extensive with the Church that the two should be almost convertible terms, was a problem which habitually engaged certain early nineteenth-century intellects who, by turns the admiration and perplexity of their own age, have stamped the subsequent course of national thought and letters with their own character.

Among these, the first, in order of time as of far-reaching and subtle influence, S. T. Coleridge, born in 1772, received the usual education of an English clergyman's son. A philosopher before he had been put into jackets, even in the nursery, he associated himself with no particular vagaries till after he had been bought out of the dragoon regiment in which he had enlisted as a trooper. He then returned to and completed his Cambridge studies. Without having subjected himself to the form of taking a degree, he made his first appearance as an intellectual and religious leader in a Unitarian chapel, 1796. The foundations of his poetic fame had been laid by his "Ancient Mariner" before his first visit to Germany in 1799. But he had to make his mark as a journalist on the *Morning Post* long before becoming, in his later years, the philosophic and intellectual oracle of his age. Mr. Turnbull's two interesting volumes of Coleridge's "Biographia Epistolaris," just published, illustrate with fresh personal details his fidelity to those views of Church comprehension originally recorded in "Table Talk." About this he showed himself at least as eager and liberal as Bishop Burnet, if a good deal less definite and practical. Dying in 1834, Coleridge did not live long enough to witness Christian Bunsen's mission to London on behalf of the Anglo-Prussian

bishopric of Jerusalem, an idea that owed not a little to Coleridge's influence. Before, however, he passed away, Coleridge had the satisfaction of seeing himself acclaimed a chief founder of the theological school in which the two Hares came first, Maurice and Kingsley came afterwards. The idea was not more doctrinal reform than the framing of an ecclesiastical polity that should give a place to every individual conscientiously struggling towards a worthy life. Thus there would be brought into mutual harmony all varieties of faith which had proved instrumental in moving any to choose the higher and the better part. Instead of Thirty-Nine Articles, Coleridge had formulated five; their effect was, after due examination, to admit Quakers, as well, indeed, as practically all Dissenters except Unitarians and all such as denied the efficacy of the sacrifice on the Cross. About Romanists he says nothing, not from any want of charity towards them, but from a modest desire to avoid placing himself in competition with the Pope. Apart from his dalliance with an ideally constructed latitudinarianism, Coleridge was ultra-High Anglican, ever leaning more and more towards Rome. The utmost he can say for the Communion of his birth and the nurture of his youth is that the Reformation, whose child the establishment became, was a necessary evil. It errs, however, he thought, grievously in fixing far too modern a date for the appearance in the Apostolic Church of the heresies or superstitions to-day falsely considered to vitiate its authority. Protestants, he allows, may have the historical arguments on their side, but they are sadly to blame for their indifference to the older and better Roman saints, especially Theresa. As it was, in the Church outlined but not instituted by him, he would have given Lancelot Andrewes and Jeremy Taylor a place only a little, if at all, below the Bible. With respect to one personal detail, he is far more uncompromisingly Protestant than the least pro-Papal of the Oxford Anglicans who wrote and thought before High Churchmanship had associated itself with ritualism. He not only defends Luther for burning Servetus, but refutes, with only less of circumstantiality and power than was done by Archdeacon Hare, the charges of carnality and



antinomianism brought against him. Indeed, Augustus William Hare excepted, Coleridge seems the one nineteenth-century champion of Church comprehension who treated even with justice the man that, to quote Disraeli's spirited description, "showed how well he recognized the spirit of his age when he nailed his theses against Indulgences on the doors of a Thuringian church."<sup>1</sup> Thomas Arnold shared in the ecclesiastical liberalism of S. T. Coleridge, and admired his genius, but thought, as a spiritual and political reformer, he would have gained much from the steady influence of a regular profession. The Rugby headmaster also had his own notions of national Church re-organization; though they widely differed from the Coleridgian ideal. The sacramental and superstitious overgrowths of Gospel religion, due to a designing priesthood, were to disappear. There was to be no other test for membership than the acceptance of those truths on which all Christians were agreed; while every congregation was to have the form of worship it preferred. That last provision would have involved the substitution of a disintegrating congregationalism for the cementing principles of a compact and cohesive religious system. It was therefore of the essence of the Rugby project to purchase reunion at the price of Anglican unity.

In other parts of Arnold's native county were the parsonages, Eversley and Hursley, of two men, both in their different ways Church reformers, but wide as the poles asunder on all points connected with comprehension. Keble wrote his "Christian Year" for the purpose of permeating all classes with the Church of England sentiment in its most attractive form; might not he thus win back to its communion the hearts and minds of some who had unnaturally deserted their spiritual mother? Carlyle's teaching had made Kingsley mutiny against the Gradgrind varieties of modern liberalism. He rejected the economical precept making it a duty to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest. Not so much Amyas Leigh in "Westward Ho!" or even the old Scotch Chartist in "Alton Locke," Sandy Mackaye, as the Christian Socialist of a later day bent on making the national

<sup>1</sup> Rectorial Address at Glasgow University, 1873.

Church an agency for private and public righteousness and equity, for social virtue of all kinds was his ideal. In the theological and sectarian chaos of the seventeenth century, Burnet could have alleged good reasons for maturing a detailed and practical plan, almost as soon as he had thought out the idea of Church comprehension. Such, however, are the circumstances of the present time, that any premature talk about or advertised preparations for the project would indefinitely delay, and most likely altogether destroy, the possibility of anything in that direction ever being done. The reception recently given to the proposed inter-denominational exchange of pulpits is not the only experience emphasizing the conviction that, in this matter, *festina lente* indicates the only safe and wise policy. Recall what happened at Westminster during the last century's second half. In 1864 Archbishop Tait set apart St. Andrew's day for missionary intercession. Himself pre-eminently a peace-maker among the sects, rather than a controversialist, Dean Stanley hoped the time had come for opening an interdenominational era of mutual charity, good-will, and even co-operation. R. W. Dale of Birmingham, for learning, ability, and pulpit power, would then have been given, not less by Anglicans than Nonconformists, a foremost place among the preachers and teachers of his time. Stanley had already gone through some friction with his Chapter about appointing select preachers. His suggested invitation to Dale to the Abbey pulpit at the mission services received only the coldest approval from dissenters, additionally embroiled him with his Westminster colleagues, as well as brought upon him the silent wrath of Convocation; and a real chance of Anglican interest in religious comprehension showing itself was missed. No further instances of amicable overture on the part of the Church towards Christians outside her pale attracted any great degree of notice till the invitation, issued last summer, by the prelate who, appropriately enough, had been headmaster of Arthur Stanley's old school, the Rugby that Thomas Arnold created. Since then "exchange of pulpits" is a theme about which, to the gratification of many and the dismay of some, a good deal has been said and written.

Historical experience, however, makes it as clear as anything in the world can be, that the process of comprehending in a single formula the tenets of innumerable communions can only be promoted by agencies whose complexity, as well as slowness in operation, may remind one of the centuries-long struggles, upheavals and reconstructions, that have been needed to produce the political dispensation under which we live. Exchange of pulpits, for instance, has been called the thin end of the wedge. The reception given some time since to this proposal convinced everyone that, to press it now, or within measurable distance in the future, can only be hopelessly to widen the gulf already separating, not only Churchmen and dissenters, but the various parties within the Church itself.

As regards the relationship between Anglicans and Nonconformists, it may or may not be a token for good that the average High Church or even ritualistic vicar habitually shows himself far more tolerant and amiably disposed to the dissenting Evangelicals than to the establishment Evangelicals of his parish. He cultivates the Presbyterian pastors of any local repute as pointedly as was done by Burnet himself, cordially welcoming their appearance by his side on social platforms, occasionally, too, inviting the company of any Congregationalist minister who happens to be in fashion. Such courtesies cost little but may do much. The associations of missionary or hospital meeting in the town hall are far more likely to promote real comprehension than any ostentatious surrender of doctrines or ceremonies such as we have seen Burnet, Church comprehension's historical pioneer, was ready to make. There are other, perhaps even stronger, reasons for thinking that whatever is to be done must follow on the Church of England's unadvertized initiative. Her own little domestic differences do not prevent her from being on better terms with the various Free Church managers at this moment than has often, perhaps ever, been the case before. Never was she attracting more strangers or shedding fewer friends. Within comparatively recent memory, the popular and universally respected Octavius Winslow, Baptist minister of Grosvenor Chapel, Bath, exchanged

that position for the pastorate of a well-known Brighton place of worship, which subsequently passed to the Countess of Huntingdon's Connection, under Mr. J. B. Figgis. Here he repeated his earlier successes in the Somerset capital. Before his death Winslow had received Anglican orders, bringing with him to his Church of England charge many of his old flock. During Octavius Winslow's Evangelical progresses to and from Bath, Brighton, and elsewhere, Thomas Carlyle, if not in his writings, yet in the oracular talks with his disciples, had declared the Church of England to be, in his own words, "the best thing of its sort so far known." Carlyle, whatever his later beliefs or disbeliefs, never outgrew the Scotch Calvinistic training of his boyhood. This compliment of his to Anglicanism may be explained by S. T. Coleridge's observation in 1830: "I never felt distinctly the heavenly superiority of the English Liturgy till I had attended some kirks in the country parts of Scotland." Fitzjames Stephen, therefore, spoke in the spirit both of Coleridge and Carlyle when he described the Church of England prayer-book as unique in the avoidance of formalism on the one hand, and emotion on the other. Forty years ago, during the ascendancy of Disraelian jingoism, the clever writers and keen thinkers, tinged with Positivist doctrines, made a point of exalting, now Mohammedanism, and now Popery, to the Anglican faith's disparagement. To-day, little or nothing in this strain is heard. In 1894 G. J. Romanes found a Christian ending for a course of aggressive agnosticism. At this present moment it is significant that Mr. Frederic Harrison, first made famous by the bitter attack on the Church of England in his "Westminster Review" article on "Essays and Reviews," pointedly abstains from any criticisms or innuendoes unfavourable to the Established Church and its ministers throughout his "Autobiographic Memoirs," while his lament over the sliding away from all religion of the present age might fairly be interpreted as an undesigned warning for all those whom it concerns not lightly to neglect that which Matthew Arnold never denied the Church to be—an organization for promoting national and individual righteousness.