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C. J. BLOMFIELD, BISHOP OF LONDON, 1828-1856

ANDREW TATHAM

Although it was not until 1846 that the Theological Department of King's College was established, the governance of the College and the hierarchy of the Church of England were closely intertwined from the first. Not only were there three Archbishops and seven Bishops at the famous meeting in the Freemason's Hall on 21st June, 1828, and not only did both the Provisional Committee and the Council include several eminent clergymen in addition to the Primate, but both the first and third Principals had to resign that office on being appointed Bishops. It was indeed, only four years after his appointment as Principal that the Rev John Lonsdale was appointed to Lichfield, and received the thanks of the Council for his period of service, conveyed to him by the Bishop of London, Charles James Blomfield.¹ Perhaps appropriately therefore, when the latter resigned his see in 1856, and therefore his *ex officio* membership of the College Council, it was the Bishop of Lichfield who was asked to compose a minute

“expressive of the deep feelings of the Council in being deprived of Bishop Blomfield's very valuable advice and superintendence.”²

The minute (see Appendix 1), mentioned the Bishop's

“constant presence (so far as the other claims upon his time would allow) at their meetings.”³

This was no idle remark. In the 25 years between the first meeting of the Council and the 13th October, 1854, which was the last occasion on which the Bishop attended a meeting, the Council held some 329 meetings, and Blomfield was present at 185 of these, almost always as Chairman. Even when unavoidably absent, his hand was firmly at the helm, and he was always the Council's intermediary with the Archbishop, with the Government, and the officers of State. Thus, for example, in February 1842, Council agreed that the Right Reverend the Chairman be requested to make application to the Lord's Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury to allow any vacant rooms in the East Wing of Somerset House to be rented by the College for the residence of students.⁴ Over the next 145 years, it may be noted, similar requests from the College have been made to the Lords Commissioners and their successors on a number of occasions.

All this activity on behalf of the College would have been unremarkable had not Blomfield been equally active in many other committees, enquiries, and commissions, both in the House of Lords and as diocesan. Many of these concerns beyond the College had their echoes in the developments within the walls, and all overlapped to such an extent that they will have to be considered thematically rather than chronologically.

The National Society had been founded in 1811 to provide education to the children of the working classes. Blomfield was much involved in its work, and in the place of the Church in education. Indeed, he saw the

foundation of King's College, at least in part, as an extension of the Church's work in education to the higher ranks of society. Concern with education became more acute as population growth rapidly outstripped provision. In 1838, Blomfield discovered that in Bethnal Green only one child in 20 attended school, and that the situation was not much better elsewhere in the Diocese.⁵ In the following year, he founded the Diocesan Board of Education, but while he realised that the Church alone would not be able to solve the problem (the solution was governmental involvement, starting in 1867 with the Forster Act), he was concerned that religious principles – by which Blomfield meant the religious principles of the “Church by law established” – be involved in all education. It was this concern which had led to the founding of King's College, a fact to which Blomfield referred in his opening sermon.

“Every system of education which does not embrace instruction in the doctrines and duties of our holy religion is defective in that which alone can impart to human knowledge the principle of salubrity and life.”⁶

It was this concern too, which, shared by the Council, led to the scheme of “schools in union”. Under this scheme, started in 1833, schools which adopted the Council's regulations concerning organisation and curriculum were accepted into union and were permitted to advertise this fact.⁷ The scheme progressed slowly, and by 1847 there were only 15 schools in union,⁸ perhaps because a prize of £1 per annum per school, and the use of the phrase “in Union with King's College” were insufficient incentives given the stringency of the Council's regulations.

Other educational initiatives of the College met with much greater success. It is certain that the opening of the Theological Department in 1846 can be counted as one of these. Blomfield had been an advocate of improving the quality of training given to ordinands from his time in Chester, and was a strong supporter of the College's plan. Until 1832, only those possessing a university, that is an Oxford or Cambridge, degree had been eligible for the ministry. In that year, however, Bishop Van Mildert obtained the consent of all the other Bishops save two that degrees from his newly-founded university at Durham would be acceptable.⁹ Bishop Blomfield used a similar approach to promote the acceptance of the Associateship of King's College. In February 1846 he reported that all but four of the English and Welsh Bishops had agreed to accept King's men for ordination.¹⁰ Later, agreement was forthcoming from two of the four, leaving only Bangor and Ely out on a limb. Those undertaking the course at King's were trained, from the first,

“not only by a complete course of theological study, but by the exercise of some of the practical branches of those duties.”¹¹

Some eight years later, Blomfield was able to express his conviction that

“the clergy have been the chief instruments in bettering the condition of the poor in this country . . .”¹²

More than any other man it was Blomfield who had created a clergy which was capable of bettering the condition of the poor. This was not only by his insistence on personal interviews, rather than leaving such matters to a chaplain – unlike a Bishop of Salisbury, John Douglas, whose chaplain had been known to interview a candidate while shaving¹³ – but also of his belief in the nature and role of a clergyman, which was considerably more exalted than that held by many contemporaries”.¹⁴ It was indeed in defence of these ideals as well as of his ideals of the nature and role of the Church, that Blomfield entered the arena of church reform so soon after his translation to London.

Blomfield played a significant part in transferring the near complete opposition of the bench of Bishops to the Reform Bill of 1831 into their acquiescence to its successor of the following year. Once this had been enacted, the pressure for the reform of the Church which had already, in 1831, resulted in widespread riots and the burning of the Episcopal Palace in Bristol, grew still greater. There was no doubt in Blomfield’s mind that reform was essential. From his own experience he knew both the lure and the toll that pluralism exacted. He had been a non-resident clergyman himself, and he knew that in the urban parts of his diocese (which included the present dioceses of London, St Alban’s and Chelmsford) the lack of clergy was serious; four parishes, to give one instance, had a combined population of 166,000,¹⁵ while even the tiny city centre parish of St Clement Danes with a population of 16,000 had no resident rector for 30 years.¹⁶

Blomfield’s reaction to this crisis, for indeed it was an extremely critical moment for the Church of England, was typical. His foresight placed him well ahead of his brother Bishops, but he was able to persuade them of the necessity of a parliamentary Commission, and of one, moreover, on which the Church was represented. In 1832, Lord Grey appointed a Commission of Inquiry, of which Blomfield was a member, to survey the variation in Ecclesiastical incomes throughout the country. Although the Commission did not deter those who sought to reform the Church, it did provide its successor Commissions with a considerable amount of statistical information. Thus when Lord Melbourne set up a second Commission in 1834, it was able to proceed rapidly, meeting almost daily through 1835 and 1836. Blomfield was the driving force, to the extent that Archbishop Harcourt reported

“till the Bishop of London comes, we nib our pens and talk about the weather.”¹⁷

The work of the Commission was enacted by the Established Church Act (1836), the Pluralities Act (1838), and the Dean and Chapter Act (1840). The effect of these three Acts, which, *inter alia*, established an Ecclesiastical Commission responsible for administering church money and property, reduced the number of benefices that one man could hold to two, and paved the way for a reduction in the number of non-residentiary canonries, is widely known and need not be detailed here.¹⁸ Contemporary opinion varied between those who believed that in permitting Parliamentary intervention, Blomfield had surrendered the independence of the Church, and those who held that the

measures did not go nearly far enough. There was, however, general agreement that had nothing been done, the Church, and arguably the Crown, would have been destroyed.

The improvement of the quality of the clergy, and the administrative reform of the Church were, for Blomfield, only part of the answer. The lack of churches and the consequent large sizes of parishes had also to be tackled, and in 1836 he established the Metropolitan Churches Fund. During the remainder of his Episcopate, the fund provided 17 new churches in the metropolis, while seven more were built by private individuals (including one by Blomfield himself).¹⁹

Although there were five overseas Bishoprics in 1828 (Nova Scotia, Quebec, Calcutta, Jamaica and Barbados), the newly enthroned Bishop of London was, in effect, Bishop of the Empire. In this responsibility, his approach was comparable to that he took in the Diocese. The work of the Church could only go forward if there were more workers. During his Episcopate, 28 new sees were created (see Appendix 2), while in 1841 he founded the Colonial Bishoprics Fund.²⁰ In this development, as in others, the College was able to play a significant part. In 1842, for example, H. Binney was awarded the AKC, and after taking holy orders, he was consecrated fourth Bishop of Nova Scotia in 1851.²¹ Even before this date, however, the interest of the Council had been drawn to the Church overseas by a bequest from General Worsley,

“the proceeds of which are to be applied to the education at the College of one or more missionaries to the British possessions in the East.”²²

The first Worsley scholar was elected in 1835, and thereafter a succession of young men, benefitting from the Worsley scholarship, were prepared for the Church’s service in India and beyond.

The Bishop of London was not only interested in men’s souls. In his view, spiritual welfare was an essential pre-requisite for health and social welfare.

“Take away their endowments from the clergy and, he said, ‘You will shut up, in many a village and hamlet of our land not only the parsonage, but the school, and the dispensary; the local centre and shrine of knowledge, and charity, and sympathy, and order.’”²³

In medical science, as in education, and in the training of men for the priesthood, King’s was able to make an outstanding contribution, both in its staff, and in their teaching. As Blomfield himself wrote in his reply to Bishop Lonsdale’s minute,

“It is universally acknowledged that a very great benefit has been conferred upon the Medical Profession, and upon the Country at large, by the Medical School of King’s College; in which regard is paid, not only to the professional instruction of the Student, but to his religious principles and moral habits.”²⁴

While, as will be noted below, the Theological Department was born into a time of great controversy among churchmen, the medical department came into being at a time of great expansion in the understanding of medicine and of the medical profession. The very great benefit was none the less real for being timely. The rapid growth of urban centres brought to 19th century Britain many of the problems now associated with cities in the Third World. Overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and disease were rife. The existing systems of providing community work for the unemployed had collapsed in many areas.

In the larger villages, the clergy had taken the lead in providing allotments for the poor, thus enabling them at least to feed themselves. Blomfield himself established allotments at Ealing in 1832.²⁴ The Bishop realised, however, that such schemes could only provide a partial answer, and were in any case impractical in London and the other cities. He was appointed as Chairman of the Poor Law Commission of 1832-4, and supported Chadwick's report and the subsequent legislation, although he later reacted against

"the administration of that law once Chadwick's influence had been eliminated".²⁶

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, there were recurrent outbreaks of cholera in London. The link with foul water was established in 1854 by Dr John Snow, after a pioneering use of cartography to demonstrate that the use of a particular water pump near Golden Square resulted in 500 fatal attacks in 10 days.²⁷ However, even before this it was widely understood that sanitation must be improved, and that medical treatment was more widely required. The establishment, not only of a medical school, but also, in 1839, of a hospital attached to that school in one of the more densely populated parts of London, was a major contribution to the health of the metropolis. Not that it was easily achieved. The Council minutes are full of "memorials" from the Medical Professors, and of minutes to be copied and sent to the Medical Professors. Many had that familiar cause – finance; on 4th May 1835, for example, Dr D'Oyley wrote to the Medical Professors on behalf of the Council in the following terms:

"they (the Professors) shall have full power to regulate the expenses of the medical school in any manner that they please; but that if in any year ending October 1st the special expences of the school shall exceed the income derived from it a proportionate deduction shall be made from the sums payable to each Professor so as to prevent any loss accruing to the College from carrying on the medical schools."²⁸

Eight days later, it was reported at the Council meeting that

"The Medical Professors cheerfully accede to the regulation".²⁹

The cheerful accession of the Medical Professors contrasts with the controversies that dogged much of Blomfield's episcopate, especially in theological matters. Of these the deepest was undoubtedly the struggle between the Tractarians and the Evangelicals. Blomfield

knew that

"both parties were capable of devoted and excellent work, if they could only lay aside their sterile controversies".³⁰

His hope was not to be realised. Indeed his very attempts to find a middle way were thwarted by the extremism of both parties.

The split in the Church, which, it might be argued, is still not healed, was certainly greatly inflamed by the passions aroused in the Hampden and Gorham cases of 1846-7 and 1847-8, and by the "Papal Interference" of 1848-9. The Bishop of London was concerned in each case with the authority of the Church, and it was this concern which led to his active support for the move towards the restoration of Convocation. His dissenting judgement in the Gorham case was that

"the point at issue was a question of Church doctrine, and any alteration in that doctrine can only be done by the Church itself, duly represented in Convocation."³¹

It was over a doctrine of the Church and over the question of authority that the case of F. D. Maurice finally erupted. The effect of the case on the College has been chronicled by Hearnshaw,³² and Huelin.³³ Despite the subsequent tendency to rehabilitate Maurice, Hearnshaw's verdict that

"In the unhappy and disastrous Maurice controversy both sides were right; that is to say, both sides were wrong."³⁴

still has a considerable validity. Blomfield was certainly no stranger to controversy as this paper has suggested. It is also true that throughout his career, Blomfield does seem to have found it more difficult to deal with people than with organisations. However, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, while Blomfield could have taken no other course of action in 1853, had he been as fit then as in his hey-day the situation would not have developed into the major confrontation between Jelf and Maurice that caused the Council so much anxiety.

Almost exactly a year later, Blomfield attended the Council meeting which proved to be his last. Despite his failing health, he continued to serve the College that was in so many ways his creation. In July 1855, for example, his support was called on over a proposal to institute the degrees of Doctor, Bachelor and Licentiate of Divinity.³⁵ Blomfield died before the issue was ultimately settled, unsuccessfully for the College, and 47 years were to pass before London undergraduates could obtain a degree in Divinity.

As mentioned at the start of this paper, Blomfield resigned his see, by special Act of Parliament, in 1856, and his ex-officio membership of the College Council came to an end. At the Annual Court of April 1857, he was elected back on to the Council, but he was unable to attend any meetings, and he died on 5th August, aged 71.

This paper has only been able to scratch the surface of the contribution made by Blomfield to King's College; a much fuller study is needed to do justice to the man of whom Hearnshaw wrote:

“not only was he one of the most influential and devoted founders of King’s College, . . . but he remained for the first quarter century of its existence its most faithful friend, the most eminent member of its Council, and one of the main controllers of its policy”.³⁶

Indeed it may well be said that just as it has been indicated that the Church Commissioners, the Welfare State, the Anglican Communion, and the General Synod all owe something to his energy and foresight, so King’s College very largely owes its existence to Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London.

Appendix 1

Copy of minute drawn up by the Bishop of Lichfield.³⁷

The Council desire to express the very deep feeling of regret with which they regard the termination of their official connection with their late Chairman.

But they desire at the same time to record their unfeigned thankfulness for the invaluable services which, during a period of 28 years Bishop Blomfield has been enabled to render to the College; for the lively interest which he has taken in all the proceedings of the Council; for his constant presence (so far as the other claims upon his time would allow) at their meetings; for the kindness, and the wisdom, with which he has guided their deliberations.

Their affectionate sympathy will be with him in his retirement; and they pray God to bless it with comfort and peace.

Appendix 2

Bishoprics founded during Blomfield’s Episcopate.

1835 – Madras; 1836 – Australia (Sydney); 1837 – Bombay; 1839 – Newfoundland; 1839 – Toronto; 1841 – Jerusalem; 1841 – New Zealand (Auckland); 1842 – Antigua; 1842 – Gibraltar; 1842 – Guiana; 1842 – Tasmania; 1845 – Colombo; 1845 – Fredericton; 1847 – Adelaide; 1847 – Cape Town; 1847 – Melbourne; 1847 – Newcastle; 1849 – Rupertsland; 1849 – Victoria, Hong Kong; 1850 – Montreal; 1852 – Sierra Leone; 1853 – Grahamstown; 1853 – Natal; 1854 – Mauritius; 1855 – Labuan and Sarawak; 1856 – Christchurch; 1856 – Nelson; 1856 – Perth.

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