

WILLIAM BOYD CARPENTER

(LATE BISHOP OF RIPON).

Rev. H. D. A. MAJOR, B.D.

BY the death of Bishop Boyd Carpenter on October 26, the Church of England has lost one who in the eyes of the nation represented the English episcopate in its most attractive form. The breadth of the Bishop's mind, his wonderful pulpit eloquence, his philanthropic sympathies, his charming manner, his unflinching good sense, his genuine interest in literature and the drama, his disregard of ecclesiastical distinctions, won for him the confidence and admiration of the English laity of all classes and denominations. And yet it would be absurd to affirm that he was admired by all. He was a layman's, rather than a clergyman's Bishop. In certain clerical circles he was criticized on three grounds—viz., that he was not a scholar, or an organizer, or a Churchman. We hold that we shall be doing some service to his memory and to an episcopal type, which we could wish were greatly multiplied, by dealing briefly with these criticisms which are based in some cases on misconceptions, and in other cases on a conflict of ideals.

It is quite true that Bishop Boyd Carpenter was not a scholar in the technical sense of the term. He had not an academic or an archaeological mind nor the training or temperament which would have fitted him for scientific research. He had not that accurate and eminent knowledge of any branch of humane learning (with the possible exception of Dante) which would have entitled him to membership of one of the great European academies. We ought to look for such a standard of scholarship in our Regius Professors and in our Deans, but we can hardly expect it in our modern Bishops. What we may rightly demand of them is an absence of obscurantism, and a respectful, sympathetic and practical interest in all sound learning and genuine research.

Bishop Boyd Carpenter certainly possessed these, but he possessed more. Those who were much in his society realized that if he did not know everything of something, at least he knew something of everything. His knowledge, moreover, did not consist of *dissecta membra*. He was no *spermologos*, a collector of intellectual trifles. His knowledge was systematic. It was duly arranged in a mind in which general principles and laws reigned supreme. It consisted of vast collections of facts chiefly in the form of literary quotations, historical events and personal experiences, so grouped and disposed as to be ready for immediate and effective use in pulpit, on platform or in private conference. His mind was not only orderly but moved rapidly. He had an extraordinary facility for recognizing likenesses where the more ordinary mind does not readily perceive them. It was this gift which, combined with his remarkably retentive memory, gave a brilliancy to his conversation, which always stimulated even when it did not convince. His interest in new truth or new aspects of truth was Athenian rather than Anglican. Physiology, psychology, psychic phenomena, sociology, statistics, educational methods, comparative religion, literary criticism, modern philosophy had all an absorbing interest for him.

For a Bishop he took exceedingly little interest in ecclesiology, liturgiology and dogmatics. The Bishop liked to do his own theological mining, smelting and minting. He found his ore not in theological systems, but in the visions of God vouchsafed to the prophets and poets of humanity, in the Divine ideals which permeated human history, above all in the character and teaching of Jesus Christ, the supreme manifestation of God to man, a manifestation which the Divine in man must instantly recognize when it comes face to face with Him, and to which it must finally conform.

The Bishop's mind was of the poetic, prophetic and artistic type, not of the academic or dogmatic. Yet we ought to add that it was of the scientific type, at least to this extent, that he

loved truth, and recognized with the Scotch poet that:—

"Facts are chieils that winna ding."

When a certain clerical library refused to place Harnack's *History of Dogma* on its shelves, he spoke of it as "drawing down the blinds." But it was the significance of facts and their interpretation, rather than the facts themselves which appealed to him.

The statement that the Bishop was no organizer equally demands examination. He was gifted with great powers of imagination and initiative, but he left it to others to work out his schemes in detail, and to realize them in practice. In some cases like that of the Victoria Clergy Fund, he was well served. But those who object that he was no organizer would do well to remember that the highest function of a Bishop, even in a Yorkshire diocese, if he be of the true apostolic type, is to inspire, not to organize. An English Bishop ought to be a great moral and spiritual leader, voicing the nation's noblest aspirations, and appealing in times of temptation to its better self. Organization ought to be accomplished by his officers, archdeacons, rural deans, representative laymen, etc.

The notion that a Bishop ought to be an organizer is a deleterious one. A Bishop ought no more to be an organizer than a barrister ought to be a solicitor.

One reason why we have the demand for more Bishops to-day, and a growing *percentage* of the episcopate bereft of the power of appealing to the hearts, imaginations and consciences of the nation, is due to Bishops having too often mistaken their episcopal functions. They preside at a vast number of committee meetings; they attend to an enormous business correspondence; they become immersed in all the minutiae and routine of their dioceses. They have less and less time for thought and study, for proper preparation of their sermons and speeches, for enlightened social intercourse with significant laymen. As they pass on through the years of their episcopate, they lose mental, moral and spiritual depth, and breadth, and height. The remarkable thing about Bishop Boyd Carpenter was the way in which he fought this temptation. He showed no marks of degeneracy. His intellectual interests were as keen, his moral force as strong, his spiritual emotion as lofty at seventy-seven as when he was consecrated a Bishop at forty-three, and this was due to the resolute way in which he devoted himself to the great things of his office, and ignored the small ones—and yet he never counted among the small things letters from those in suffering and doubt. Such letters from the humblest, he answered personally and sympathetically; business letters he often handed to others to answer, and he was not always well served. When people talk of Church organization, it should be remembered that organization demands money, and the Bishop who, like Boyd Carpenter, can win the laity to give money generously is of more use than the Church official who can formulate schemes for the best way of spending it. We need to withstand the besetting temptation to multiply the bureaucratic type of Bishop.

The criticism that the Bishop was no Churchman depends for its force upon the critic's conception of the Church. If the Church, as the Prayer Book avers, consists of "all who profess and call themselves Christians," or "the blessed company of all faithful people," then the late Bishop was a great Churchman and a profound lover of the Church. But if the conception of the Church be sectarian; if to be a good Churchman be, as recently defined by a foreign missionary, "to maintain an offensive attitude towards all them that are without," the Bishop was not a good Churchman at all. For the Bishop the Church of Christ was the product of the Spirit of Christ, and he saw that Spirit operating in men

and communities where eyes which were less keen to mark "the Spirit's viewless way," and hearts which were less sympathetic to His motions failed to recognize Him. He concluded his Noble Lectures with these words:—

"Christ taught love and has been ever since love's picture to men; and I feel sure that there will not be a soul to whom the final revelation comes who will not see that in the evolution of our world there has been one law, one life, one love, and that that law, that life, and that love have been the law, the life and the love unfolded to us in Jesus Christ our Lord." (p. 180.)

A Bishop with that conception of Christianity finds his Churchmen inside many Christian denominations, and sometimes outside them all.

To the British public the Bishop was best known as an eloquent preacher. Every good cause sought his advocacy. He was the public orator of English philanthropy for half a century. But he was more than that; he was one of the most persuasive pulpit exponents of religious liberalism. He delivered the Bampton Lectures in Oxford, the Hulsean in Cambridge, the Donellan in Dublin, the Noble in Harvard. These are all non-controversial expositions of modern views in religion.

The Bishop was a most diligent man, and it is impossible here to deal with every side of his manifold activities. He fulfilled the prediction of the Wise Man. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings." The Royal Family are technically parishioners of the Archbishop of Canterbury, but in that case the Bishop of Ripon was the Primate's curate. Three generations of royal personages received his ministrations, and his dying message to his Sovereign, "As I pass I give you my loyal love," expressed his heartfelt attitude towards those, who however exalted, value human love and loyalty at least as much as do their subjects. Some who called the Bishop a courtier hardly realized that he was as much a courtier to the lowly as to the lofty. It was his nature to be courteous, and to win men by love was his office as an ambassador of Christ.

The Bishop was a facile and voluminous writer. It is difficult to decide which of his many volumes have been most widely useful. The four which we would recommend, especially to laymen who desire lucid and interesting expositions of Christianity, breathing a spirit which is modern, optimistic and spiritual, are *An Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures*, *The Witness to the Influence of Christ*, *Some Thoughts on Christian Reunion*, *The Permanent Elements of Religion*.

But it is not as a writer but as a preacher that the Bishop will be longest remembered. Those who knew him personally, however, will forget both the preacher and the writer in the personality of the man. In one of his lectures he cited Marion Crawford's remark that some people have no inside doors to their personality; when once you have crossed the threshold of their acquaintance you know all of them there is to be known. In his case, after you had entered the hall-door, you were admitted to apartment after apartment full of delightful treasures of knowledge, fancy, insight, humour, wisdom, sympathy. And how natural and simple he was. Hierarchical dignity and clerical professionalism were repugnant to him. He told with verve the anecdote of the patient who said, "Now, doctor, don't be professional, but tell me the truth." Professional he never was; that was symbolized by his refusal to wear gaiters. Asceticism and ritualism were equally repugnant to him. They seemed to embody a false conception of the Christian Religion. The service of God he believed to be essentially natural in the higher sense of that term. Human duties were Divine duties. The service of God apart from the service of man seemed to him to involve a radical misconception of the Gospel; hence for an Englishman the service of the Church could not be divorced from service to the nation. This accounted in his case for the absence of all ecclesiasticism and pietism. Those who knew him best may often have forgotten that he was a Bishop, but they could never fail to be conscious that they were in the presence of a personality essentially Christian and essentially human. "Type of the wise who soar, but never roam, True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home."

The Modern Churchman.

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