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## MEMORIES OF CANON CHRISTOPHER.

BY THE REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

(*Concluded from THE CHURCHMAN of November, p. 628.*)

[It may perhaps be permitted me to say that as Canon Christopher wrote to me many of his memories, the material now presented is usually very largely and sometimes identically in his language.—W. H. G. T.]

### CONCLUDING CHAPTER.

IN 1886, the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Mackarness, appointed Mr. Christopher an Honorary Canon of Christ Church, mainly as a testimony to his indefatigable advocacy of Missions. Coming, as it did, only eight years after a controversy with the Bishop in connexion with extreme teaching at Cuddesdon College, it was as much a credit to the Bishop's large-heartedness as it was a proof of Mr. Christopher's earnest and faithful work. He received the appointment with characteristic humility, telling one of his parishioners that it would make no difference to his views and Churchmanship. But the honour was none the less welcome to him, as it also was to his friends, who rejoiced that the Bishop should recognize so fearless a champion of Evangelicalism in this way.

### CHRISTIAN UNITY.

A subject very near the heart of Canon Christopher was the oneness of God's people, and it was this that led, very largely, to his enthusiastic advocacy of the Bible Society as in some respects the best instrument of unity by bringing together Christians of various Churches round the Word of God. There was scarcely a speech or prayer for the Bible Society in which he did not refer to this, and in later years he was particularly thankful for the advocacy of the Society by prominent High Church Bishops like the late Bishop of St. Albans (Dr. Jacob), Bishop King, of Madagascar, Bishop Mitchinson and others.

### GRANDPONT CHURCH AND SCHOOLS.

Canon Christopher naturally thought that with St. Aldate's Church restored and enlarged, new schools built and a new Rectory provided, no more building would be needed in his time, but the growth of the suburb of Grandpont during his long tenure of office

forced upon him the absolute necessity of providing proper spiritual and educational accommodation for the people who were settling there. The proposal for a new church took shape in 1889 and Brasenose College generously granted a freehold site. The Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Stubbs), Dean Liddell, of Christ Church, and Archdeacon Palmer all bore testimony to the need of the new and rapidly growing district, and in 1890 Canon Christopher undertook the responsibility of signing the contract for a building which eventually cost almost £8,000. The result was a church holding 600 people, well finished and furnished, and if people thought too much money had been expended, the Canon would say he desired members of the University and others to know that Evangelicalism did not mean bareness or cheapness or slovenliness, but that everything should be as reasonably good as possible.

The need also of a new school at Grandpont soon became apparent, and again Brasenose College gave the site. In due course a fine set of buildings was erected at a cost of over £3,000, about which the Diocesan Inspector said that "the parishioners are to be congratulated on having secured such excellent school premises." Thus, St. Matthew's Church and Schools fittingly crowned the labours in actual building during Canon Christopher's long years of service in Oxford.

#### HELPING STUDENTS.

One of the ways in which Canon Christopher determined to help forward the cause of Christ and His Gospel in Oxford was by obtaining help for men who might, and probably would, otherwise be prevented from obtaining their degrees. It is, of course, impossible to give details of this quiet but important work, but, by means of personal letters to friends and appeals in *The Times* and elsewhere, he was enabled to render assistance to many a worthy but needy man.

#### THE REFORMATION.

That Canon Christopher believed heart and soul in the Reformation we have already had abundant proof, and he was enthusiastic in support of its principles. He frequently quoted some words of the well-known and eloquent Canon Henry Melvill, of St. Paul's, which come from a sermon preached on the Tercentenary of the printing of Coverdale's English Bible in 1843. The text was

Romans xii. 18, "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." <sup>1</sup>

Bishop Ryle, of Liverpool, and Canon Christopher were in frequent correspondence, and among many communications from the Bishop the Canon was specially interested in some notes made in regard to the Reformation. The question was raised as to the chief points which needed defence, and the Bishop's opinion was that the following constituted the most important positions in connexion with what he called "The Battle of the Reformation": (a) The Supremacy of Scripture, (b) the Finished Work of Christ, (c) the Intercession of Christ, (d) the Work of the Holy Spirit.

One of the efforts into which Canon Christopher put a great deal of power was the attempt to defeat the proposal to erect a statue to Cardinal Newman in Broad Street, Oxford. It was felt that to place such a memorial so near the spot where the Martyrs were burnt would be an insult to their memory. The opposition was headed by Dr. Ince, Regius Professor of Divinity, who in a letter to *The Times* protested against the suggestion. Correspondence ensued in the Oxford Press, and a large and enthusiastic meeting of protest was held in the Town Hall. In all this work, Canon Christopher, aided by the late Commander Williams, then the representative of the Protestant Reformation Society in Oxford, was most energetic. The effort was crowned with success and the statue was instead put in Birmingham, where Newman had lived and worked for many years as a Roman Catholic, and therefore a place more appropriate to one whose whole attitude had been a denial of the truths associated with the Reformation.

In Canon Christopher's later years he was glad to be associated with an old schoolfellow, Mr. J. C. Sharpe, of Gosling's Bank, whom he had not met since boyhood days, but with whom he was in frequent correspondence. Mr. Sharpe was, all his days, an old-fashioned High Churchman, but a strong Protestant and sad at

<sup>1</sup> Sermon 4 (Rivingtons), vol. ii. p. 128:—

"Make peace, if you will, with Popery; receive it into your senate; shrine it in your Churches; plant it in your hearts. But be ye certain, as certain as that there is a heaven above you, and a God over you, that the Popery thus honoured and embraced is the very Popery that was loathed and degraded by the holiest of your fathers: the very Popery—the same in haughtiness, the same in intolerance—which lorded it over kings, assumed the prerogatives of Deity, crushed human liberty, and slew the saints of God."

heart at the encouragement of Ritualism in our Church. He compiled two volumes entitled *Anglo-Catholic Principles Vindicated*, containing a most valuable catena of testimonies from High Churchmen to the essential Protestant character of the Anglican Church. Mr. Sharpe also compiled a booklet which he issued in conjunction with Canon Christopher entitled *Quousque*,<sup>1</sup> containing some very striking testimonies at once to the essential Protestantism and to the true Catholicism of the English Church. Canon Christopher was always delighted when he could elicit the sympathy of those whom he described as old-fashioned High Churchmen in support of the Protestantism of the Church of England. Thus, he received, and was permitted to publish, this letter from Professor Odling, of Oxford, and it appeared in the *Record* in 1902. :—

DEAR CANON CHRISTOPHER,—

You have been good enough to send me from time to time several recent numbers of the *Record*, for which please accept my thanks. I have been much interested in the Laudian Controversy, but even Laud himself would scarcely have attempted what is nowadays commonly taught and practised among us.

Though I do not ticket myself as a member of the Evangelical party, I sympathize warmly with the position it now occupies as the sole champion of the Church of the Reformation and its sole defence against rampant sacerdotalism.

Believe me,  
Yours very truly,  
WM. ODLING.

#### THE MISSIONARY BREAKFAST.

One of the outstanding features, indeed a unique feature, of Oxford life was Canon Christopher's missionary breakfast. Originally begun in a very small and quiet way with a few undergraduates brought together to hear some missionary like Moffat, it grew year by year until it became one of the largest of gatherings in Oxford, and was attended by over 400 (in 1912 by 600) senior and junior members of the University, together with representative citizens. After it had been in existence for several years the expense of it was undertaken by a friend of the Canon's. For a long time the name of the donor was kept secret, though always remembered in prayer at the gathering, but towards the end of the Canon's life

<sup>1</sup> A new edition of this remarkable work has been published with a Preface by the Dean of Canterbury, and may be obtained at the Church Book Room. Price 2s. net.

it became known that the giver was the Dowager Lady Buxton, who lived to reach her ninety-eighth year and passed away in 1911. In January, 1877, she was visiting her daughter, Mrs. Pelham, whose husband was then Camden Professor of Ancient History in Oxford, and afterwards became President of Trinity College. Lady Buxton called on Mr. Christopher and, before leaving him, gave him a ten-pound note to be used as he thought best. He thereupon obtained some other gifts, and this enabled him to invite some 200 men to breakfast to hear the address of a missionary. Lady Buxton thereupon paid the whole cost of the breakfasts arranged year by year since then. It was a remarkable sight to see first the Clarendon Hotel large room, and, in later years, the Oxford Town Hall, filled with "all sorts and conditions of men" from the University and city, and all shades of ecclesiastical thought, from St. Barnabas' Church to Mansfield College. Canon Christopher generally managed to obtain some of the leading missionary advocates as speakers, from year to year, while the chair was often taken by leading men in the University. Among the speakers have been the late Archbishop of York (Dr. Thomson), Bishops Paget and Gore, together with Bishops Ridley, Ingham, Tucker, and many other missionaries. One of the most striking addresses ever delivered was by the late G. L. Pilkington of Uganda. His simple and artless narrative of spiritual need and spiritual revival among the missionaries in Uganda, as told to the "grave and reverend seniors" of Oxford, was something to be remembered for life.

#### TESTIMONY OF HIGH CHURCHMEN.

Canon Christopher was always glad when he could either associate with those who are often spoken of as old-fashioned High Churchmen, or else obtain their testimony to the essential Protestantism of the English Church. He frequently referred to Bishop Christopher Wordsworth's pamphlet, *Union with Rome; Is not the Church of Rome the Babylon of the Book of Revelation?* and he rejoiced in this as coming from so definite a High Churchman.

But notwithstanding what he had seen of the S.P.G. in India and the influence of Henry Venn's example, Canon Christopher was unable to take part in later developments of the Society, which he considered went beyond the proper limits of High Churchmanship. In 1904 he was invited to join the Festival Committee

of the Oxford Diocese, the Bishop (Dr. Paget) and others urging it upon him as the one who "had done more in the past than any other man in Oxford to bring together those interested in Mission work." It was felt that any such Festival without him would be almost unthinkable. But he could not be prevailed upon to join, notwithstanding several urgent letters from representatives of the S.P.G.

#### BIBLE SOCIETY.

For over thirty years the Canon had been Honorary Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Oxford, and in 1898 he received a letter from the Earl of Harrowby inviting him to become a Vice-President of the Society. The letter naturally gave him immense pleasure.

Nothing could have been more fitting than this acknowledgment of the Canon's indefatigable and prolonged service for one of his beloved two societies. It might almost be said that if his heart could be seen, the letters C.M.S. and B.S. would surely be found imprinted on it.

#### CIRCULATION OF LITERATURE.

Canon Christopher wrote very little himself, but he made up for this by his full, hearty, and frequent recommendations of the works of others. One of his greatest favourites was *Christ our Example*, by Caroline Fry; and the story of how he came to recommend this book is worth telling. He was requested to open, at a Conference, a discussion of the question whether our Lord's example is brought forward in a sufficiently systematic manner by ministers of the Gospel. When preparing his paper he asked three friends, Dr. Miller, then Vicar of Birmingham, the Rev. C. J. Goodhart and the Rev. S. R. Capel, then Rector of Wareham, which they considered to be the best book on the Example of Christ. Each one of the three, without knowing that the other two had been consulted, named Caroline Fry's book. Mr. Christopher mentioned this fact at the Conference, and a clergyman said that when he was an undergraduate at Oxford, thirty years before, he had fallen under the influence of mistaken teachers, but the reading of *Christ our Example* was used of God to deliver him from the erroneous views he had adopted. Owing very largely to Canon Christopher's recommendations the book obtained an increased circulation, until

at length the eighth edition became exhausted and a ninth was published at a very cheap rate, Mr. Christopher himself taking the risk of publication. From that time forward there were few occasions on which he did not either recommend the book or give it away. He felt that the special merit of this book over several works on the same subject was that it was written with a clear understanding of the Gospel of Divine Grace, without believing which no one would ever be able to follow the example of our Lord.

Another favourite book was *God's Way of Peace*, by Horatius Bonar, of which Mr. Christopher must have circulated thousands. He was fond of advising readers to commence with chapter iii. "God's Character our Resting Place." Many were the incidents he was able to tell in connexion with this book, which he was led to read as far back as 1862 by the opinion of Canon Garratt that "it was the best uninspired book for the anxious ever written." He thought that if that clergyman, whom he so highly valued, held this opinion the book must, in any case, be worth reading.

A sequel to *God's Way of Peace* was *God's Way of Holiness*, which Canon Christopher was instrumental in persuading Dr. Bonar to write. Walking through Holyrood Palace together, Mr. Christopher urged him to add two or three chapters on holiness to *God's Way of Peace* to make it more complete as a gift. Bonar replied, "No, I prefer to keep the unity of the subject." "Then," rejoined Christopher, "you must write another book on holiness." "Well," said Bonar, "what shall the title be?" Mr. Christopher thought for a minute and then replied, "God's Way of Holiness," and he gave Bonar no rest until the sequel was actually written.

It would be impossible to mention all the books so often and so warmly recommended by the Canon, but it became one of the most characteristic features of every speech he made and almost every letter he wrote to the papers. Undergraduates who came to his study went away loaded with books and pamphlets. Sometimes he would lend larger books, and among them were those invaluable works: Dean Goode's *Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*; Litton's *The Church of Christ*; Mozley's *Review of the Baptismal Controversy*, and Blakeney's *The Book of Common Prayer in its History and Interpretation*.

As for tracts and booklets, he gave them away by the thousand; indeed, he was one of the greatest "Tractarians." On one occasion

he was in a train from Oxford to London which started about eleven o'clock in the morning, when he dropped asleep for a moment and woke up with a start. The rest of the people in the full compartment smiled. "Ah!" said the Canon, "I wonder how many of you were up this morning at 4.30" (he was then well over eighty), and before they were aware of it, his hand had dived into his capacious pockets and brought out tracts which he handed round. They could not possibly refuse them under these circumstances. Once when walking from Menai Bridge to Beaumaris, he was giving away tracts to people he met. A young woman to whom he offered a tract said, "I have met you before, sir, I believe." "Where?" he asked. "In a railway carriage near Perth. You gave me a tract then." He had been invited to take part in the Annual Conference at Perth by the late Colonel Macdonald Macdonald. When he first visited me in London he asked the proper cab fare from Paddington to our house, and then gave the cabman something extra, together with a tract, "for," he said, "you cannot possibly give a tract if you only pay the exact fare." On this and similar visits we would go to the door to greet him, but we always had to wait while he gave the cabman the fare, the tip and the tract. He would accompany his gifts with the earnest recommendation to read the tract, saying, "It has done me good and it will do you good also." This, spoken in a loud voice (due to his deafness), could be heard all around as well as by the cabman, whose face clearly showed no little embarrassment. But our beloved friend did not notice, perhaps did not think of this; enough for him to be about his Master's business.

#### GOLDEN WEDDING.

One of the red-letter days of Canon Christopher's time in Oxford was the celebration of his Golden Wedding. The original announcement read as follows:

#### GOLDEN WEDDING.

Christopher and Christopher. On the 15th of June, 1844, at the Parish Church, Chiswick, Middlesex, by the Rev. Edmund Harden, M.A., Alfred Millard William Christopher, M.A., Principal of the Martinière, Calcutta, to Maria Frances, eldest surviving daughter of the late Thomas Christopher.

When it became known that June 15 would see the 50th Anniversary of the union between Canon and Mrs. Christopher, it was

at once felt that an event so auspicious could not be allowed to pass by without proper recognition. The notable day passed off most successfully. Greetings came from all parts and suitable services were held in both Churches. In the evening the Rectory Room was packed with an enthusiastic audience presided over by Dr. Ince, Regius Professor of Divinity, who made a most felicitous speech. Referring to the illustration afforded by the Canon and Mrs. Christopher as to the question, "Is Marriage a Failure?" he went on to refer, amidst much laughter, to the powers Canon Christopher possessed as a collector of money. Among other speakers were Professor Montague Burrows, the Rev. W. B. Duggan, the High Church Vicar of St. Paul's, and Professor Legge.

#### MRS. CHRISTOPHER.

On January 10, 1903, after a married life of nearly 58½ years, Mrs. Christopher fell asleep, to the irreparable loss of her devoted husband, whose life and work in Oxford owed so much to her quiet, gentle, unremitting care. Very many Oxford men have borne their testimony to her influence, and what Canon Christopher himself thought no pen can tell. She was almost always in his thoughts with thanksgiving to God for her and what she had been to him.

#### RESIGNATION.

Towards the close of 1904 Canon Christopher felt the time had come to resign his position as Rector of St. Aldate's after forty-five years of service. He had been seriously considering it in private for several months, but now he notified the Bishop and Patrons of the living of his desire and intention to resign in the spring of 1905. The news was received with deepest regret, though not without surprise, because, in his 85th year, it was impossible for him to continue the active work which had characterized his long tenure of office. The Bishop of Oxford's letter was as beautifully characteristic of the writer as it was of the receiver:—

CUDDESDON,  
OXFORD,  
*November 11, 1904.*

MY DEAR CANON CHRISTOPHER,—

I am sorry with all my heart for the true regret and distress with which, I well know, the thought of your resignation will come to those for whom

and with whom you have laboured during the forty-five years. And I can deeply enter into the sorrow and pain with which you must feel the severance of ties which the long and manifold experience of your ministry at St. Aldate's must have made manifold and strong.

But you have indeed a right to desire and to seek rest, if it please God. I cannot demur to your resignation : and I trust that the time of rest may be gladdened by the blessing which has gladdened the years of work.

Believe me, dear Canon Christopher,

Yours very sincerely,

F. OXON.

With his resignation an epoch closed and St. Aldate's could never be the same again to many who associated it solely with the honoured and beloved Rector of forty-six years.

#### CLOSING YEARS.

The resignation of St. Aldate's did not mean cessation of work, even though Canon Christopher was in his eighty-fifth year. While it brought relief from parochial responsibility, it set him free for other things, and notwithstanding a natural waning of his physical powers, this venerable servant of God was intellectually as keen as ever, as his correspondence and actions show. He retired to a house at 4 Norham Road, and was under the loving care of his second granddaughter, Miss Edith Christopher (daughter of Mr. Henry Christopher, the Canon's elder son), whose devotion to her grandfather was as constant as it was wise. Later on, as his health failed, a nurse was engaged from the Acland Home, who proved of the greatest assistance to Miss Christopher, as the good Canon did not always realize the limitations of age. A nurse armed with medical orders (those of his able doctor, Mr. H. P. Symonds) could assert an authority not always possible to relatives. Thus the closing years of his life were surrounded by all possible consideration, care and comfort, and he was enabled to carry out many of the purposes nearest his heart.

In particular he set himself to get help from friends for the circulation of books which he thought worthy of attention. There were several of these which he first read and then recommended by voice and pen. The most important of them was Dr. Orr's *The Problem of the Old Testament*, and he obtained quite a large sum for the circulation of this book, which he sent to very many in the University.

Although for several years before he died he was unable to attend

the Annual Missionary Breakfast, yet one of the things which he did almost to the last was to send out the invitations, and, as far as possible, to make the necessary arrangements for it. The subject has been already dealt with in general, but instances connected with one of the last in his life are of special interest. The giver of the Breakfast for many years, the Dowager Lady Buxton, died, as we have seen, on August 18, 1911, in her ninety-eighth year.

In March, 1912, just a year before he died, he wrote to another daughter of Lady Buxton, Mrs. Pelham, wife of the then President of Trinity College, acknowledging the cheque in payment of the cost of the Breakfast, and closing with these words:—

“ Surely it is all of God from the beginning to the end that the last Breakfast should have no less than 600 men as guests ; that the Vice-Chancellor of the University should be the Chairman ; and that the High Church Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Gore) should say, when expressing to Bishop Tucker most cordially the thanks of the whole company for his address, that, so far as he knew, there was not in their modern history anything as thrilling as the history of the Church in Uganda. Surely, dear Mrs. Pelham, among the many things for which your beloved mother will throughout eternity praise ‘ the God of all grace ’ will be the Annual C.M.S. Breakfast during forty years in Oxford.”

During later years the continuation of this Breakfast was much on Canon Christopher's mind, and he was naturally desirous that it should remain in association with his beloved C.M.S. Indeed, he contemplated taking steps to ensure this, but nothing was actually done. After his death in 1913, the Breakfast was held in 1914 under the direction of the Rev. H. G. Grey, Principal of Wycliffe Hall, and although the circumstances connected with the war have prevented its being held since, it is much to be hoped that the Breakfast may be recommenced now that Oxford has once more resumed its normal life and work. Hitherto, it has been called the C.M. (Church Missionary) Breakfast, but it might well be given another “ C.M.” also, and be called the Christopher Memorial Breakfast, for nothing could more worthily commemorate the missionary zeal of the Canon and his intense love for all efforts connected with world-wide evangelization.

With his characteristic energy, he determined to have a Sunday afternoon meeting for undergraduates at his house. Some of us were afraid that at his age, nearly ninety, it would prove too much for his strength. But nothing could prevent his holding the meet-

ing, and he thought we were really (although kindly) plotting to stop him from doing this. He met all suggestions about age and weakness by saying that the fear of a weak heart had been urged upon him sixty years before, but that he had never felt the slightest approach of the kind. And although not many undergraduates came, those who did attend were helped by the dear old saint's beautiful life and testimony, as letters now in my possession clearly show.

On August 20, 1910, he celebrated his ninetieth birthday, but was confined to his house. His mind was as clear as ever. Congratulations were showered upon him from all quarters, and the dear old man was much gratified at the interest shown in this memorable event. Special mention must be made of the address sent by his old parishioners of St. Aldate's, to which the Canon replied in a firm and bold hand in a truly characteristic utterance.

The death of the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Paget, naturally elicited Canon Christopher's deepest sympathy, and a letter written on August 3, 1911, just before his ninety-first birthday, will show what he felt :—

MY DEAR ARCHDEACON,—

I heard this morning with sincere regret of the death of the Bishop of Oxford, and feel very deep sympathy with his Lordship's family in their great afflicting bereavement.

If I live until next Sunday fortnight, the 20th of the month, I shall on that day be ninety-one years of age, and therefore am one of the oldest clergymen of this Diocese.

I am under a doctor and a hospital nurse, and have not been off my own premises for more than a year. As my heart is weak I am not allowed to go up any of the stairs in my own small house.

I need hardly say that under these circumstances I shall not be able to testify my respect and regard for my late Bishop by attending his funeral. All I can do is to express through you, as the chief representative of the parochial Clergy of the Diocese, my grief at the death of an ever kind and considerate Bishop, and my heartfelt sympathy with his mourning family in their most painful bereavement.

Believe me,

Dear Archdeacon,

Always sincerely yours,

ALFRED M. W. CHRISTOPHER.

It is worth while calling special attention to the fact that in 1911, when he was nearly ninety-one, the old Cambridge man found great delight in re-reading *Paley's Evidences*, which he had been compelled to take in his examination at Cambridge in 1840.

Between the years 1903-1911 he read the entire volume through four times. The circumstances of the last of these are noteworthy enough to find a place here. He said that sometimes before 5 a.m. he would pull aside the window curtains and then sleep would be very unlikely. Usually he began with the reading of the 51st and 103rd Psalms, but he wondered what he had better read after his Bible. He felt a great interest in history, but, to use his own words, he was just "on the wing" for eternity and however innocent, useful and interesting history might be he did not choose a book of history to read before rising. The result was that he thought of *Paley's Evidences* and gave his attention to it, with as much interest and keenness as though he had never read the book before. His letter to me, dated May 11, 1911, extends to no less than seven sheets of notepaper filled mainly with extracts from Paley which the Canon thought particularly valuable and timely. This will show something of the remarkable alertness of mind and his grasp of the fundamental realities of the Christian faith.

But the end was gradually drawing near. In February, 1912, he could say in a letter to me that he was able to work on as if mind and body were quite well, and that when in bed he had not the slightest pain. He added that he felt a little pain if he walked ten times around his garden, seventy yards each round. But in March, 1912, he had a fall which affected him to some extent and led to his remaining in bed. On reaching England from Canada in the spring of 1912 for the first time since leaving in 1910, I took the earliest opportunity of going to see my beloved old Rector, and I was, of course, struck by the change in him. And yet his intellectual vigour was truly wonderful as he discussed books and topics of theological and ecclesiastical interest, including a point in my own book on the Epistle to the Romans which he considered incorrect. When I bade him good-bye on my return to Canada in September, 1912, I felt it was impossible for us to meet again. At the beginning of March, 1913, he contracted a cold and this developed into an illness which brought on the end. He fell asleep on Monday, March 10, about a month after his Annual C.M.S. Breakfast, in the ninety-second year of his age.

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS.