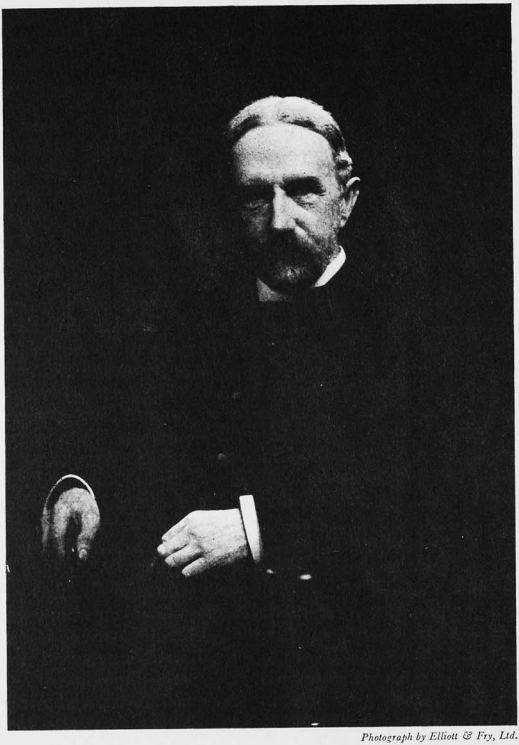
PLATE XXXVI



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JAMES FRANKLIN BETHUNE-BAKER, 1927

JAMES FRANKLIN BETHUNE-BAKER

1861–1951

JAMES FRANKLIN BETHUNE-BAKER was born on 23 August 1861, in Birmingham, the son of Alfred Baker, a surgeon. From King Edward's School, Birmingham, he entered Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he matriculated in 1881 as a classical Scholar. He graduated in 1884, being placed in the First Class of the Classical Tripos that year, and of the Theological Tripos in 1886. He left Cambridge for a short time to return to his old school as an assistant master. In 1888 he was ordained to the title of St. George's, Edgbaston, and in 1891 was elected to a Fellowship at Pembroke College, and appointed at the same time to the Deanship: this office he resigned in 1906, but retained his Fellowship, remaining in Cambridge for the rest of his life. In 1888 he had been awarded the Burney Prize for an essay on *The Influence of Christianity on War*. He gained also the George Williams and Norrisian Prizes. He proceeded to the degree of Bachelor of Divinity in 1901, and that of Doctor of Divinity in 1912. In 1891 he married Edith Jordan of Birmingham, who died in 1949. Their only child, Arthur, died as a schoolboy at Marlborough.

In 1911 he succeeded Dr. Inge as Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity, and in 1924 was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. He resigned from the Professorship in 1935, and died in Cambridge on 13 January 1951.

He was theological lecturer at Pembroke from his return to college until he became Lady Margaret's Professor. Most of those studying Theology in the college were Ordination candidates who had been brought up in strictly orthodox and generally 'low' Church traditions. Though in no sense a 'high' Churchman, his attitude towards Biblical criticism, then a burning question in Cambridge, much disturbed many of his contemporaries. He was rarely willing to 'temper the wind to the shorn lamb', and as a result of complaints by some undergraduates and their parents, he was not reappointed to the Deanship in 1906. He felt this deeply: and, except on one occasion (a memorial service to Canon A. J. Mason, a former Master), never preached in Chapel again. From that time he increasingly withdrew himself from college life: he gave up his rooms: and after his election to the Professorship he was rarely

seen in college except in Chapel and at college meetings, both of which he attended regularly, his critical faculties being expressed without reserve in both places. One Dean at any rate remembers with gratitude (though gratitude was not particularly felt at the time) the frequent question in the vestry after service, 'My dear A, what exactly did you *mean* when you said so-and-so?' In college meetings all his colleagues, including the Master, were amused, or exasperated, according to their being the objects of criticism or merely lookers-on. His influence, however, in the University, and more particularly in the Faculty of Divinity, greatly increased during these latter years, and as Professor he was probably the most influential member of the Faculty.

His work in college was, to the loss of everyone concerned, limited and hampered by his highly developed, some would say over-developed, power of criticism. His immediate reaction to every question was critical: he would at once see every objection to a suggestion, though on rare occasions he might finally admit that on the whole the advantages might outweigh the (to him) very obvious disadvantages. He cared little for what people thought about him and this frequently meant that he ignored the proper feelings of others. As Dean, for instance, he was responsible for enforcing the rule of compulsory attendance at Chapel. To Bethune-Baker, whether he agreed with it or not, a rule was a rule to be obeyed and no personal considerations mattered: and his disciplinary relations with undergraduates were made the more difficult by an incisive and sarcastic manner. Those who knew him were aware that this manner was not really expressive of his inner feelings, and at times he showed himself quite surprised when some caustic remark was taken seriously. This weakness or limitation applied also to his work as a teacher. Had he been able to express himself more sympathetically, his influence on his pupils would have been far wider, to their great profit. As it was, only those who were patient and forbearing enough to put up with ruthless criticism were able to appreciate the value of his instructions. His intense hatred and impatience of shallow and muddled thinking, and of anything that was in the slightest way specious or pretentious, made it all the more unfortunate that the number able to benefit by his help was not greater. It seemed that he rarely, if ever, realized that few were daring enough, or indeed qualified, to oppose him. He took great delight in an argument, and that delight was fully shared by the listeners, waiting for some rapier-

like thrust that nearly always vanquished the opponent. Yet, beneath this exterior, he was warm and generous, anxious and ready to help: and those who penetrated so far conceived a great affection for him. They learnt that beneath his critical and incisive manner lay an honesty of purpose and a passionate desire for truth, and when intimacy and confidence were established, his influence was positive and illuminating.

He and Mrs. Bethune-Baker were generous and charming hosts in their Cambridge home, and a visit to their cottage in North Wales was not lightly forgotten, and a second invitation eagerly accepted.

He came from a family with liberal traditions: and both he and Mrs. Bethune-Baker identified themselves with advanced liberal, or perhaps more accurately radical, opinions, not only in theology, but also in politics. It may be doubted, however, whether he was really at home with the Labour party, certainly not in the later days. Mrs. Bethune-Baker was one of the first women to be appointed a Justice of the Peace in Cambridge: and he fully shared her opinions on the place that women should take in society.

This radical attitude of mind was fully expressed in his theological work, and through the whole of his life he was a protagonist of what later came to be called 'Modernism'. He had been much influenced as a young man by the teaching of F. J. A. Hort. Like Alexander Nairne, he used to say that Hort was the greatest of the Cambridge Triumvirate: and Hort's keen insight into the problems that were besetting theology in the later years of the nineteenth century—an insight shared by only a few of his contemporaries—obviously directed much of his reading and thought. Though no mean Biblical scholar, his interest lay, to begin with, in the study of Christian doctrine, and in the early years of this century he became a recognized authority on the subject, both in this country and in Europe and America.

Bethune-Baker's first doctrinal work, his *Meaning of Homoousios*, published in the Cambridge series *Texts and Studies*, appeared in 1901, ten years after his election to Fellowship and commencement of college lecturing. In this book he reveals himself as one who made appreciative use of the work of his predecessors in the history of Christian doctrine, particularly Dorner and von Harnack, but looked to make all conclusions his own by first-hand study of the patristic texts. A surprising and piquant conclusion as to the sense in which the term

homoousios had finally triumphed was commended to the world by three such names as Zahn, Harnack, and Loofs. The pencil-work in Bethune-Baker's copy of Zahn's *Marcellus von Ancyra* indicates that he read without prejudice, giving all his care to mastering what the writer would say. But this was only preliminary to a testing of the conclusions so gathered, which ended in his severing himself from the conclusion that it was really the meaning of *homoiousios* that triumphed, in favour of the more conservative opinion.

It was the labour of close study followed by slow consideration that ensured the success of his *Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*, which appeared first in September 1903, and went into seven subsequent editions, of which the last is dated 1949: these editions are in fact reprints with small additions: the work, as it came out in 1903, never called for any rehandling. The first volume of the Abbé Tixéront's *Histoire des dogmes dans l'antiquité chrétienne* came out in December 1904. The introduction closed with reference to 'la judicieuse *Introduction* de M. Bethune-Baker'. No single adjective could have come nearer the mark than that *judicieuse*; for Bethune-Baker's work on the early Christian writers was discerning (which is, no doubt, the current sense of *judicieux*), but also judicial (which accords with its older sense). Perhaps part of the secret is that he was little tempted to subjectivity in treating of early Christian doctrine. In old age, when his humanistic interests were very much developed, he would express wonder at the enthusiasms of a younger scholar for patristic thought. There is perhaps something to be learned to the same effect from his comment (*J.T.S.* vi. 624) on Tixéront's first volume: 'It seems to me to be the method of Patristics rather than of history of doctrines.' Here speaks that intellectual detachment whereby the living personalities from whose hearts as well as heads there issued those forms of expression which can be built together to form a 'history of doctrines', can be abstracted without difficulty. Nevertheless, Bethune-Baker was quite right in claiming an advantage for his own method, for it succeeded in describing the broad patterns of doctrinal thought in early Christianity with a sureness and clarity in which he has had no rival.

In 1903 he began his long editorship of the *Journal of Theological Studies*. In this capacity, in 1907, he hailed the work of Loofs in producing an edition of the remains of Nestorius under the title *Nestoriana*. Bethune-Baker had already become interested in this direction as a result of the Archbishop of Canterbury's

Mission to the Assyrian Christians. A copy of the so-called *Bazaar of Heraclides* had been brought to England by Father Jenks as long previously as 1899. Bethune-Baker now obtained the use of this, and the anonymous help of a Syriac scholar, for a drastic revision of the traditional estimate of Nestorius as a theologian. If he was not, in general, tempted to become a protagonist for this or that early Christian writer, there is a pleasant animation about his *Nestorius and his Teaching*, 1908. Roman Catholic writers have felt able, indeed, to treat this work as a piece of advocacy. But it is a valuable and scholarly work, and probably has had more effect than its critics gave it credit for in modifying the old polemical estimate of Nestorius. This episode in Bethune-Baker's literary history was less academic than the others, and was not without its satisfactions: though he was probably as embarrassed as he was delighted when the aunt of the Assyrian Patriarch ran up to him in the middle of a large Cambridge garden party, exclaiming, 'It is the defender of our dear Nestorius?'

It is surprising, in retrospect, to recognize that all Bethune-Baker's original and constructive writing on the history of Christian doctrine was done before he reached the Lady Margaret's chair. After he became professor, his interests were absorbed in the work of education. Teaching, shaping the policy of the Divinity Faculty, maintaining the standards of its examining, and keeping the *Journal of Theological Studies* to its high service in the cause of theological scholarship in the English-speaking world: each of these received its outlay of time and thought. So, worthy standards of study among theological students, rather than the further promotion of the particular study in which he had proved himself so much a master, became his preoccupation. No one who was his companion on the Faculty Board will underestimate his influence upon the work of Theology in Cambridge. It was an astringent influence, but not discouraging to those who sought for learning.

As guardian of the studies of candidates for Christian ministry, he saw it as his inescapable responsibility to stop them passing through Cambridge with comfortable ecclesiastical assumptions uninvestigated. Whether they were Fundamentalists or Anglo-Catholics did not matter. He was convinced that, cost what it might, men of religion must face the facts that are not easily reconciled with their accepted system of belief. He therefore established a course of 'Lectures introductory to the modern study of Theology', which it would not be wholly a parody to

describe as an Introduction to all the skeletons in the theological cupboard. Every lecture began by his reciting the Collect for Whitsunday, in testimony to that service to truth to which every student of theology is bound. To many who attended, these lectures came as a cold douche: the more hardy struggled vigorously to find the firm basis of their faith: some of the shallower undoubtedly succumbed.

Bethune-Baker enjoyed the company of young men and women, and was keenly alive to ideas around him. An instance is the generous interest he took in an informal Cambridge society, known as 'The D Society', which he founded in 1922 at the suggestion of undergraduates who were attending his lectures. Over this Society he presided week by week in term time until his retirement, entertaining its members in his room at the Divinity School. It consisted mainly of undergraduates and younger graduates, though some of his senior colleagues in the Divinity Faculty were also regular attendants. Some theological doctrine or religious idea was chosen for discussion during each term. The method was informal, though books were studied and papers read. In this sympathetic atmosphere Bethune-Baker was at his best, and his wisdom and stimulus unfailing. To such young dons as placed themselves within his influence he was paternal in so delicate and honouring a way as to capture their whole-hearted affection.

When he was made a Fellow of the British Academy, he spoke first of it as an award to the Cambridge Faculty. Perhaps it was, in part, a recognition of his work for the Faculty: for, without question, he had given the best he had to give, albeit distinctly in his own way, to the service of the University as a place of 'Religion, education, learning and research'.

If Bethune-Baker will be remembered principally as an historian of Christian Doctrine, it will be seen from what has been said that his theological interests lay not less in contemporary questions than in the history of the past: and outside Cambridge and the Faculty of Divinity he was an influential figure in the 'Modernist' movement in the Church of England. His interest here was not primarily in philosophy, but in the bearing of modern discovery, historical and scientific, upon Christian Doctrine. He was radical in his assertion of the need for criticism and reinterpretation of the traditional formulations of doctrine, while deeply convinced of the fundamental truths which had found expression in them. But, though radical in his own opinions, he stood consistently for the comprehensiveness of

the Church of England, and in controversy criticized his opponents less for opinions he could not share than for attempts to restrict the liberty of clergymen to use the Creeds according to the 'religious construction' of their clauses, though they could not affirm them, clause by clause, in their literal meaning. In his own thought he turned increasingly to the idea of evolution, in its sense of 'epigenetic' process, as providing the conception through which the fundamental idea of Incarnation could find a new and extended interpretation.

Of his controversial writings, examples are his open letter to the Bishop of Oxford (Charles Gore) entitled *The Miracle of Christianity* (1914), and the pamphlet *Unity and Truth in the Church of England* (1934), both called forth by particular circumstances. His own positive teaching is best seen in *The Faith of the Apostles' Creed: an essay in adjustment of Belief and Faith* (1918), and in the papers and addresses collected in *The Way of Modernism* (1927).

For some years before her death, Mrs. Bethune-Baker suffered from a painful illness, and she was gently cared for and nursed by her husband: he survived her for about eighteen months. In spite of increasing deafness, he took part in college meetings almost up to the end. He died in Cambridge some seven months before his ninetieth birthday.

EDWARD ELY

I am grateful to the Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge (Dr. W. Telfer), and Canon J. S. Boys Smith, Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, for help and advice. E. E.

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