

## EDWARD CAIRD

1835-1908

WITH the death of Edward Caird there passed away the last, or almost the last (for Dr. Hutchinson Stirling survived him), of the pioneer generation who opened the road for English philosophy to continuity with that of the great masters, both in the modern and in the ancient world. The English mind, indeed, from Locke to Herbert Spencer, had never failed to exercise its influence far beyond these islands; but a time had come when it was feeding on itself, and needed for its reinvigoration to study in a wider school.

Edward Caird was born at Greenock in 1835. Among his brothers was John Caird, who became Principal of Glasgow University, and, sharing in the main his brother Edward's views, exercised conjointly with him an immense influence on the religious life and thought of Scotland.

Edward Caird was educated at the Greenock Grammar School and at the University of Glasgow; whence he passed to Balliol College, Oxford, forming one of the Scottish contingent to whom Balliol owes so much of her character and her distinction. He was elected to a Fellowship at Merton, and after a short time of residence was called (in 1866) to the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, which he held till in 1893 he returned to Balliol as its Head. He retained this position for about fourteen years, though latterly with failing health, but resigned more than a year before his death, which took place on the 1st of November, 1908.

He received the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws from St. Andrews and from Glasgow, that of Doctor of Civil Law from Oxford, and that of Doctor of Letters from Cambridge and from the University of Wales. He was one of the Original Fellows of the British Academy, and a corresponding member of the French Academy.

Some idea of what Caird was to the University in which he was a Professor, and through the University to the Church and people of Scotland, may be gathered from the following note, furnished by an intimate friend of Caird's (the Rev. John Wellwood), a distinguished student under him:

"Apart from his philosophical reputation, or in spite of its decay, the memory of Edward Caird will survive, like that of Dugald Stewart

and Sir William Hamilton, in the tradition of his influence as a teacher of students. There will cling to it also a savour almost of saintliness, for the Christian ideal, which he held to be at one with the deepest truth of philosophy, was fulfilled in his character and actions. Simplicity and tenderness were united in him with great strength of purpose, and his days were passed in the company of the highest minds of all ages, the interpretation of some being his work, as communion with others was his recreation. If he read Kant in the morning, he had his page of Wordsworth or of Dante in the afternoon.

"As a teacher in Glasgow, having under him at least two hundred students, Edward Caird was in his true vocation. He never ceased to congratulate himself on the privilege of being 'brought into contact with many of the ablest young men in the country at a time when their minds were opening to the great interests of literature and science and life'. (Speech on presentation of portrait to Glasgow University, 1887.) His course of lectures embraced the development of thought from the first to the last word of Greek philosophy, through the Middle Ages, and so onward—never a link forgotten—to Descartes, Locke, Hume, and, if time permitted, as far as to the borders of Hegel. As he paced the rostrum, unfolding the ideas of some master, he would challenge, by a look or a smile, this man and that, as if they were bound to be amazed, perplexed, or enchanted. He assumed that his students were eager, like himself, to know the truth, and made them partners with him in the search—in accordance with Goethe's maxim—'If you would raise men to a higher level, treat them as if they had already attained it.' And at moments there seemed to run through the whole class the spirit of good resolution. 'If fortune,' Caird said at the presentation of his portrait to the University, 'if fortune had given me the power of choosing my place and work in life, I do not think I should have chosen any other than that which has fallen to me.' Once in conversation he declared, with his charming smile, that he would not be happy in heaven unless he had students to teach. His thoughts were never far from the concrete human struggle, and his joy in teaching was partly due to the spectacle of 'new reinforcements continually coming to the army of those who are fighting for light against darkness'. 'We,' he said, 'the teachers of a University, of all men in the world, should be the last to despair of human progress.' (Speech referred to above.) He gave up his career as a teacher with a heavy heart. On his appointment to the Mastership of Balliol he confessed (letter to Mr. Wellwood)—'It is a hard thing in many

ways to leave Glasgow, and I may say that nothing would have made me do it, except what has happened—a unanimous call to the College of Jowett and Green.’

“No philosopher in recent times has left behind him so large a school of disciples as Edward Caird. His pupils, all heirs of his thought, are to be found in Chairs of Philosophy in the United States, in the British Colonies, and in most of the new colleges of England and Wales. He has his part also in the reformation of theological belief. In 1866, when he took up his work in Glasgow, the people were still, in large measure, dominated by the ultra-Calvinism that had set in after the Disruption. But the awakening had begun. Macleod, Tulloch, and, above all, John Caird, had, each in his own way, declared war against the traditional creed. If Edward Caird did anything for this movement, it was not by design. He kept to his own sphere, that of contemplation; and he was a great teacher of philosophy just because he left his students to arrive where they pleased—content if he could make them see the organic process of thought in history, and instil into them ‘the holy spirit of education’. For him, as for Hegel, Christianity was a revelation of reason. He delighted to show its kinship with Greek Philosophy, and he would smile as he threw a flash of light into the depths of modern Idealism by quoting a text from the New Testament. There were, to be sure, some students, and among them not a few of his ablest, who rejected his doctrines; but many so well learned to think as he taught them that, for the rest of their lives, they could think in no other way. Hundreds of these men passed into the Christian ministry, and it is through them that the influence of Edward Caird has told upon the Churches. They do not recognize the principle of authority. They regard systematic theology as no true science, and put in its place the philosophy of religion. But if their preaching is marked by the absence of dogma, it is no less free from the negations of a shallow enlightenment. Nor is it merely ethical, for every true disciple of Edward Caird affirms the essential ideas of the Christian religion.

“Such is the peculiar part of this famous teacher in the great change that has taken place (not without many struggles and some martyrdom) in theological opinion north of the Tweed—a change inadequately confessed by the Churches in declaratory Acts and the relaxation of Formulas.”

In becoming Master of Balliol, though confronted with a type of work in many respects new to him, Caird did not, of course, abandon the function of teaching which lay so near his heart. His

lectures at Oxford were largely attended, and not by undergraduates only. It is said by those best qualified to judge that his coming put new life into the philosophical teaching in the University. He acted as examiner in the Final School of *Literae Humaniores*, and he took occasion to re-study the treatises of Plato and Aristotle, which are the principal text-books for that school, with results in his published work which we shall see to have been of the highest value. Both the college and the University had profound reason to congratulate themselves on his appointment. Balliol has had at once the wisdom and good fortune to secure in her successive heads men of rare capacity for the post, yet so different from one another that comparison brings no criticism with it.

But this laborious and distinguished professional life of over forty years was only one side of Caird's activity. Punctuating it at almost regular intervals there came a succession of philosophical treatises which by themselves, nay, any one of which by itself, would have sufficed to found a philosopher's reputation.

When Green's method—his way of analysing Hume or Mill or Spencer, instead of propounding a positive doctrine—was criticized in Caird's presence, he observed, with the mingled dignity and gentleness which sat so attractively upon him—"Well, you see, all that was what we had laid upon us to deal with in those days." And so among the writings of each we find just a single work, if we disregard minor though highly pregnant utterances, of which the bulk does not consist in the critical interpretation of other thinkers; an interpretation directed to show that there is a centre of unity to which the mind must come back out of all differences, however varied and alien in appearance. And on the other hand we find in them throughout a peculiar lofty preoccupation or sense of spiritual duty; the mind's eye always fixed upon the system and main outlines of the world, the argument always seeming to reiterate the same fundamental reasonings, which border upon the philosophy of religion. In the writings of thinkers belonging to even a slightly younger generation, writings actually in some cases of the same date with theirs, we cease, on the whole, though not in every instance, to feel this special note of a religious bent and preoccupation. It seems to have become recognized that the pioneers had done their work; that the spell of insularity, of a narrow modernism, had been broken once for all; that the unity of the philosophical spirit in all its phases had been re-established; and that the field was open henceforward for free and various investigation. A comparison of philosophical interest and creativeness throughout the English-speaking world

to-day, with what they were in the same area when Caird and Green began to teach between 1860 and 1870, gives some measure of the intellectual revolution in the early stages of which these men bore a conspicuous part.

This sense of an exalted quest, and this continuous labour and struggle to apprehend things from the centre, was the life and spirit of Caird's philosophical productiveness. In the first instance it took form in the enormous labour of the two great works upon Kant, published in 1878 and 1889 respectively. This Herculean task, we may suppose, was the first duty that he held to be laid upon him by the philosophical conditions of his day. To display, in the very argument of the great metaphysician, who was supposed to have cut the world in two with a hatchet, an almost involuntary but continuous and inevitable "regression" towards objective organic unity, was an enterprise that could not be declined if free expansion was to become possible for modern philosophy. This great achievement placed Caird at once in the first rank of Kantian interpreters. The perseverance, ingenuity, and learning, which he united with an iron grasp of the thread of his argument, made it a work the results of which may enter into unexpected combinations, but which shed a clearness on its whole subject-matter that can hardly cease to be of value. And it was apparently decisive for Caird's own mode of thought. Thenceforward he always couched his main argument in the terms of the Kantian Ideas of Reason, and in his interpretative criticism of other writers perpetually recurred to the proof of their interconnexion; of the unity of the self and the world in the concrete being of God. As the first of the works on Kant closes with the anticipation of the metaphysical result of the second—the establishment of Kant's advance towards an Idealism other than subjectivism—so the second, in its treatment of the Ideas of Reason, gives the framework on which his third principal Treatise was constructed. This was the "Evolution of Religion" (Gifford Lectures at St. Andrews, published 1893). The plan of it had indeed been briefly sketched on one page of a series of articles on the social philosophy of Auguste Comte (1885), which reproduced on a small scale in the case of the French thinker's "Subjective Synthesis", the critical treatment which Caird was then in course of applying to Kant.

The "Evolution of Religion" is the one treatise in which Caird dealt rather with the world at first hand than with the history of Philosophy. It is framed on the scaffolding of the three Ideas of Reason; tracing men's sense of a superior being through three principal phases, determined respectively by the ideas of the object

or world of things, of the subject, or conscious mind, and of the unity which includes them both and is a presupposition of each. The book is probably the best general treatment of religious philosophy in the English language.

And this work again, in its relation to the succeeding one, brings before us the persevering continuity with which the author pursued his lofty quest. For on a page or two of this book is sketched in outline the general view of Theology in Greek Philosophy, destined ten years later to take shape in that elaborate study of Greek Metaphysic which was the end and climax of Caird's literary production, with the title "The Evolution of Theology in Greek Philosophy" (the Gifford Lectures delivered at Glasgow, published 1903). This crowning effort to treat thoroughly, from the standpoint of the metaphysic of religion, and not of mere antiquarian learning, the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, was very probably stimulated by Caird's return to Oxford in 1893 and the need of adapting his teaching to the Oxford curriculum. In any case it was a remarkable achievement for a man then over sixty-five to carry through the story of Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus and St. Augustine; considering that this was accomplished with a thoroughness and mastery of detail, a soundness of judgement, and a lucidity of exposition, which make it the best complete textbook on the subject in English or perhaps in any language. In particular, the account of Plato's Forms constitutes a striking advance on the views generally accepted, and gives a quite masterly survey of this exceedingly difficult subject.

When Caird's whole activity is reviewed, it may fairly be said that there is no philosopher of the first rank, ancient or modern, whose ideas he has not subjected to the peculiar analysis involved in his unwearied struggle towards the centre and his war against abstractions. In Hegel, on whom he wrote (1883) the best textbook that could be written in the space, he found the nearest approach which any philosopher had made to the conception which he sought of a fully correlated concrete whole. But it is characteristic of him that not even Hegel furnished what he held to be the highest expression of a unity in which evil and negation are absorbed and overcome. For this he looked rather to the founder of the Christian religion.

So, too, the highest point which Plato touched in his reasonings on immortality seemed to him to be where he came nearest to the language of the New Testament, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." "And perhaps," he added, "this is

the one argument for immortality to which much weight can be attached."

Two minor utterances, in which his philosophical position is seen at its simplest and best, must not be passed over. One is a paper in the *Journal of Theological Studies* on Anselm's argument for the being of God. After a criticism and re-interpretation of the "Ontological Argument", he continues: "I may perhaps be asked whether this is Hegelianism. I would be inclined to answer that to say so would be to give Hegel, or any man, too much credit. It is rather the outcome of the whole idealistic movement of thought, and if it is to be attached to any name at all more than another, it would be to that of Plato." It is an enormous advance, due to the efforts of many students and scholars in the time of which we are speaking, but certainly not least to Caird and Green, that Plato and Aristotle have regained their appropriate place as living forces in the movement of philosophy.

His tendency was rather away from than towards subjectivism, and it is noteworthy that in his last public utterance, the paper on "Idealism and the Theory of Knowledge", delivered before the British Academy on May 14, 1903, he is anxious to point out how the name Idealism is likely to mislead, and to disclaim for the doctrine which he held any antagonism "to the strongest assertion of the reality of the distinction of matter and mind".

Some thirty years ago, when Lewis Nettleship heard some one lamenting the anti-idealistic reaction in Germany, he exclaimed: "What does it matter? Just think what they have gone through." A nation could not lose, he implied, what an arduous philosophical discipline had taught it. A reaction would only be a development. A similar remark could not have been made about the English-speaking world at that time; but it might be made with some truth to-day, and if this is so, it is in a large measure due to Caird, to his unwearied industry, his high loyalty to truth, and his gift of luminous exposition.

Personally he seemed almost a perfect character. Younger men have the most grateful recollection of his readiness to help and to approve, to impart the encouragement which comes from the commendation of a master. His extreme width of sympathy and his gentleness and modesty in personal intercourse might have suggested that he would be wanting in fire and strength and definiteness. But the fact was far otherwise, and the story is at least true to character which ascribes to an Oxford resident, after a public

discussion in which Caird had taken part, the observation, "I saw then that the man could *fight*."

His views were positive, and he held them strongly. He believed in University education and degrees for women. He believed in University education for wage-earners, and gave his moral support to Ruskin College. He lectured on Socialism to an audience, largely Socialist, in the East End of London, and carried his hearers with him, not all in opinion, but all in spirit and sympathy. Social duty to him was an essential expression of the philosophic life.

His career was not prematurely cut short like that of some of the most gifted among recent Oxford thinkers. He served through the long day to its end, which is perhaps the severer test; and he stood it nobly.

BERNARD BOSANQUET.