

## F. C. CONYBEARE

1856-1924

### I

FREDERICK CORNWALLIS CONYBEARE was born on 14th September, 1856. He was the third son of John Charles Conybeare, barrister, of Coulsdon, Surrey, and afterwards of Tonbridge, Kent. The Conybeare family, which traced its descent back to John Conybeare, a Devonshire humanist of some eminence in the reign of Elizabeth, had produced a number of notable men, most of whom were clerics. Among these were John Conybeare, Rector of Exeter College, Oxford, in 1730, Dean of Christ Church in 1733, Bishop of Bristol in 1750, who wrote a *Defence of Revealed Religion* in answer to Tindal's *Christianity as old as the Creation*; John Josias, a grandson of the Bishop, Prebendary of York and Bampton Lecturer in 1824, who was also Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford (1808-12) and subsequently of Poetry (1812-21); William Daniel, another grandson, eminent as a geologist in the early days of that science, who became Dean of Llandaff in 1844; also, William John, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, a son of the Dean, who in collaboration with Dean Howson produced a well-known edition of the Pauline Epistles (1851). It seems not improbable that F. C. Conybeare derived his interest in theology from his clerical ancestors, though in him it took a different direction.

He went to school at Tonbridge in 1868. Among his contemporaries there were his elder brother, Augustus, subsequently member for Camborne, and his cousin, Lord Olivier; also, his lifelong friend, Dr. G. C. Moore-Smith.<sup>1</sup> As a boy he already displayed the characteristics which became so strongly marked in later life. He delighted in controversy, and in the Debating Society championed extreme opinions. He was interested in New Testament criticism, and on one occasion in class shocked the Head Master, Dr. Welldon, by speaking of the 'Fourth Gospel'. He was rebuked by Dr. Welldon, who said, 'No Fourth Gospel here, my lad! St. John's Gospel, if you please.'

<sup>1</sup> Details of Conybeare's school-life have been furnished by Dr. Moore-Smith and Lord Olivier.

He was also much interested in Natural Science, and is said to have experimented on the spontaneous generation of life in bottles containing boiled hay. He was not remarkable as a composer in Greek or Latin, but won the prize for English Verse on three occasions. It may be noticed that his father, who was a Cambridge man, won the Chancellor's medal for English Verse in 1840 and 1841. In his last year he played Rugby football for the school. Lord Olivier says of him: 'He played Forward. He had a large round head with a thick crop of rather long hair on it. During the game this large hard head used to get into the condition of a swilling-mop, and one could always recognize its wetness and hardness in a scrimmage. He worked vigorously with it like a knob on the end of a sturdy club, securely padded.'

He gained a scholarship at University College, Oxford, and entered into residence in January 1876. He was placed in the First Class both in Moderations (1877) and Literae Humaniores (1879), and in 1880 was elected to a Fellowship at his own College. While reading for his Final school, he became widely known in the University as an ardent student of philosophy. He was a disciple of T. H. Green, and it is recorded of him that he incited other enthusiasts to meet together and compare their lecture-notes, so as to obtain a correct text of their master's words. He was also much influenced by the Logic of Lotze. He was much looked up to by members of his own College, though they felt that his conversation was rather beyond them, especially when he talked about philosophy. Not a few pupils of Green at that time found it difficult to communicate to others the depths of their thought. To the uninitiated it seemed as if philosophy came to those rare souls who were worthy to receive it by some personal and mystical experience, and not by ordinary methods of cognition. He also took great interest in politics, and was a prominent member of an inter-collegiate Debating Society, in which, as elsewhere, he aired unconventional views. A friend says of his conversation at this time: 'He was often cantankerous in discussion and very persistent in returning to his point, but there was never any loss of temper, and he had a considerable sense of humour and a real geniality and playfulness which preserved him from annoying his contemporaries, either in intention or effect.' On one occasion during a political election he was found haranguing and vituperating an angry mob from the windows of his lodgings, not without danger both to his windows and to himself. He entered fully into the social side of undergraduate life, was most hospitable, and is described as having been 'intelligently convivial'.

When elected Fellow, he was made Praelector in Philosophy. This was an annual office which was regularly renewed. For one year he also acted as Praelector in Ancient History. In 1883 he married Mary Emily Max-Müller, the eldest daughter of the famous Professor, who died after three years of married life. It was characteristic of Conybeare that when Henry George, the American apostle of land-nationalization, came to Oxford to lecture, as the guest of Max-Müller, he heckled the visitor severely, to the embarrassment of his father-in-law. It was always impossible to muzzle him. Thus in a great debate in Convocation upon the subject of vivisection he was one of those who brought the speech of the Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Mackarness) to an end by persistent interruptions. As a College Tutor he was stimulating and efficient, as was shown by the success of his pupils, but the task of preparing undergraduates for examinations was not really congenial to him. He was a born researcher and wished to do original work; also, he had considerable private means and was free to follow his bent. Accordingly, in December 1887, he resigned his Fellowship at University College.

He had already begun to study Armenian on the advice of Professor Margoliouth, who suggested to him that Armenian translations of classical authors would form a fertile field for research. In 1888 he married his second wife, Jane MacDowell, of Belfast, by whom he was accompanied in all his travels. In that year he made his first journey to the East. He went first to Cairo, and from there to Jerusalem, where he worked in the library of the Armenian monastery; then he proceeded to Armenia, where in the library at Etchmiadzin he made discoveries which turned his interests from classical to theological texts. From Etchmiadzin he went on to Kars, thence to Georgia, Tiflis, St. Petersburg, and Stockholm. In the winter of 1889-90 he visited India and Burma; in that of 1891-2 he went to Armenia again, going by way of Baku and returning through Constantinople. The only recreation which he would own to was travelling, and before long he had an additional reason for travel in the state of his wife's health, who received medical orders to winter abroad. From this time onward he always went out of England for the winter months, generally to the south of France, or to Italy. He also visited the Balearic Islands and Corsica. He became a familiar figure in the chief European libraries, especially in the Vatican, where he catalogued the Armenian manuscripts. Much of his time, however, was spent in places where there were no books of reference, and he was dependent upon the few books which he brought about with him. His industry never flagged under the most adverse circumstances: it may be said

that he was never idle. If he had nothing else to work on, he would study his Russian dictionary in his bedroom. He was always collecting material which he worked up subsequently.

The summer months were spent in Oxford. During them he worked at high pressure: he wrote very easily and poured out books and monographs. An incident which occurred in 1898 illustrates not only his impulsiveness and generous sympathy but also his journalistic gifts. When in Paris on his way back to England he heard from a very well-informed friend the inner facts about the Dreyfus case, and instantly resolved to do his best to influence public opinion in this country. He collected information with immense rapidity, and on his return began to write. His book, which was completed in a few weeks, made a great sensation not only in England, but also in France. Mr. Nevinson, in a recently published volume of *Reminiscences*, says of it: 'So far as I know the Oxford scholar, F. C. Conybeare, was the only one among us who made his way step by step through the haunted labyrinth of the Dreyfus case and guided others to the centre.'

He was a striking and very popular figure in Oxford. This was due not only to his vivacity and personal charm, but also to many admirable qualities. He was essentially friendly in disposition, always ready to welcome a stranger and invite him to his house. Although he sometimes used fierce language about politicians, in private life he was the most amiable of men. He was no respecter of persons, but treated all men alike, and seemed especially drawn to any one who was unfortunate or in distress of any kind. His charities were great, but this was a subject to which he never alluded. He was also extremely hospitable and loved to gather his friends round him, not now and then at elaborate entertainments, but frequently at small and informal parties. On such occasions he was the life of the gathering: in fact, no one could be dull in his presence. He talked easily, generally about literature or theology, sometimes about his travels and various experiences. On Sunday afternoons his house was a centre for callers, to which not only residents but also foreign visitors made their way.

The war came as a great shock to Conybeare and affected not only his health and spirits, but also his judgement. Thus in August 1914 he firmly believed in the legend that Russian troops had passed through England, and for a long time refused to be convinced that the story was false. Subsequently, he formed the opinion that the outbreak of the war was largely due to British diplomacy, and in particular to the action of Lord Grey. If he had kept this opinion to himself no harm would have been done, but unfortunately he committed a most

imprudent and ill-judged act. He wrote a very indiscreet letter to Kuno Meyer, formerly Professor in Liverpool and then in New York, in which he used violent language about Lord Grey and Mr. Asquith. In former days Kuno Meyer had been a frequent visitor at his house and was regarded by him as a familiar friend. The letter, therefore, was essentially private. After it had been posted, it struck him that he had been imprudent and he cabled to Meyer asking him not to publish it. His request was disregarded by his correspondent, who sent it to the press. The result was that Conybeare was denounced as a pro-German and a violent press-campaign was started against him. Also, what was to him of greater moment, a number of friends were estranged from him. No one, of course, could defend what he had done, but those who knew him best felt that he could not be judged quite in the same way as other men.

This unhappy event shook Conybeare's health and he was never the same man again. Oxford became distasteful to him and he resumed his travels. He spent part of 1915 and 1916 in Spain and France, and the following winter in the South of Ireland. In 1917 he sold his Oxford house. The winter of 1918 was passed at Ventnor. In 1919 he went for the first time to the United States, where he had been invited to deliver the Lowell Lectures at Harvard. On his return from America he went to the South of France for the winter. In 1921 he took a house at Folkestone. In January 1922 he made a voyage round South America, in the course of which he stayed for a month at Rio. He then went again to the United States, where he spent three months. He had for some time been in failing health and suffered from blood-pressure. On the last occasion that he came to Oxford he seemed to have lost his brightness and alertness, and it was obvious that he was seriously ill. He was, however, planning a voyage round Africa in 1924, when he died, after a seizure, at Folkestone, on January 9.

Among the numerous tributes to his memory which appeared after his death, one is especially interesting since it comes from a learned Roman Catholic, the Rev. C. C. Martindale, S.J. Writing from Campion Hall, Oxford, he said in a letter sent to the *Oxford Magazine*:

'SIR,—May I venture to add a tribute, not too belated, I hope, to the memory of the late Mr. F. C. Conybeare from a quarter from which I know he would be glad to have it offered. He began to be a not infrequent visitor here in, I think, 1916 or so, and since then his visits have not ceased. After the death of Father C. D. Plater, late Master of the Hall, he wrote: "His presence

besets me, for he was one besides whom I felt an instinctive desire to kneel, to be able to share in his acts of repentance, awe, and admiration. . . . In this iron age he helped me to guard against a callous or a cynical view of things." He said much more that seemed to me to do honour not only to his friend, but to himself, although he was far from suspecting that. In Oxford, he wrote to me not long ago, he felt "a ghost among ghosts", but also that he "conversed mainly with Homer, Plato, and Paul", and by the help of these he found his way into the realm of realities and ceased to have to listen only to the "much mediocre music" which was all that this life had any more to offer him.'

This touching letter reveals a side of Conybeare which was only shown to a few intimate friends.

ALBERT C. CLARK.

## II

Dr. Conybeare was best known to the world of letters as a master of the ancient Armenian language and literature. In that domain of knowledge he occupied easily the foremost place among living scholars. His services were consequently in demand by the great libraries of the world, for the cataloguing of collections of Armenian manuscripts, as in the case of the British Museum, the Bodleian, and, in part, of the Vatican. It would convey, however, a false and limited view of his position as a scholar to stress unduly his interest in, and knowledge of, one great, if little-explored, language of the East. He was at home in other Eastern languages, as well as in all the great languages and literatures of the West, both past and present. To take a single instance of his range and versatility, he mastered and made incursions into the Georgian language and literature, using the Russian language as a base for operations. In the latter, indeed, he became so expert as to succeed in writing a monograph on the Dissenters from the Russian Church, a theme quite unexplored in the West, which he developed with his customary thoroughness and insight.

His knowledge was enriched and reinforced by his love of travel, which often led him into places where rare manuscripts were lying, waiting for the recognition of the scholar, and to make their finder crowned. A visit to the Armenian convent at Etchmiadzin resulted,

*inter alia*, in the discovery of the authorship of the last twelve verses of the Gospel of Mark; a matter of no slight dispute in the history of criticism. The convent of St. Lazzaro, at Venice, was another of his happy hunting-grounds where he could find early translations of Plato and of Aristotle and use them for the criticism of the great masters of Greek philosophy.

It would be difficult to say whether the scholarly world was more indebted to Dr. Conybeare for his criticism of existing literature or for the additions which he actually made thereto by his own personal researches. His knowledge of Greek philosophy was invaluable, for instance, when he turned from the much-read and often-annotated Plato and his company, and undertook to vindicate the genuineness of a certain work of Philo Judaeus relating to the existence of semi-monastic communities in Lower Egypt, known by the name of *Therapeutae*. It had almost become an axiom that German criticism had withdrawn the mark of authorship from this work, and had covered it instead with an offensive pseudo. Dr. Conybeare, who certainly had no preliminary prejudice for or against a Philonian authorship of the treatise *De vita contemplativa*, prepared himself for his final judgements by three successive readings of the whole of the voluminous works of the Alexandrian sage. When necessary, he could out-German the Germans in microscopic analysis; though he was never one that lost the scholar in the pedant.

In the publication of lost, or of unedited tracts, he was assiduous and felicitous. He was the first to draw attention to the importance, for the textual criticism of the New Testament, of the commentary of Ephrem the Syrian upon the Acts of the Apostles. Of this he first detected fragments in Armenian, and promptly gave the results of his find to another scholar. Then when Professor Lake began what is likely to be a monumental edition of the *Acts of the Apostles*, Dr. Conybeare searched the libraries of the East and West until he found the complete Armenian text of the commentary and communicated the results to his friend. The quest was really something like divination. It was, as he himself says, a surmise which was justified by discovery. He had been trying to find the reason for the concurrence of Chrysostom and Ephrem Syrus in peculiar 'Bezan' readings in the Acts. Then in reading Dashean's catalogue of the library of the Armenian convent at Vienna, he found a manuscript which contained a citation from Ephrem on the Acts with which he was familiar. A copy of the manuscript was procured, and it turned out to be the lost commentary on the Acts of which he was in search. The long study of fragments extant in Greek and Armenian had led to

the discovery of the lost original, and again he gifted the results to his friend.

He edited for the Clarendon Press a couple of lost *Dialogues*, between Christian and Jew, of the first Christian period, and thereby helped to fill—for there is still one notable dialogue missing—the lacunae in the anti-judaic section of the patristic literature.

When he turned his attention to the hagiology of the Christian Church, he produced a whole volume of unedited tracts, the pearl of which was the lost *Apology of Apollonius* before the Roman Senate in the year A. D. 185, the recovery of which in an Armenian text was followed soon after by the discovery of a copy in the original Greek, by a German scholar. In one sense Apollonius was not a new discovery, for the Mechitarist fathers had printed it in Armenian as far back as 1874. Nearly twenty years, however, were to elapse before any one, either in England or Germany, realized that an important document of the second century had been recovered; and Dr. Conybeare himself appears to have minimized his discovery by printing it in translation in a religious paper (see the *Guardian* for 21st June, 1893). It was reprinted, however, in his volume entitled *Monuments of Early Christianity*, and the Greek text was edited by the Bollandist Fathers. Dr. Conybeare's habit, indeed, was to underestimate the value of his own work and the importance of his discoveries.

He was interested, also, in following the by-paths of primitive or of medieval heresiology, such as the Paulicians in the East or the Cathars in the West. Of the former he detected and published the unique document which goes under the title of *The Key of Truth*. The importance of the work thus rescued from the Eastern debris will be recognized by all heresiologists; for the Armenian Paulicians are now extinct, and those who were transported to Philippopolis or other parts of Bulgaria by the Byzantine emperors have long since attached themselves to the Roman Church, and any literature that they brought from their homeland has disappeared or been destroyed. The one volume that remains of Eastern Paulician literature bears the editorial name of Dr. Conybeare. He found it in the library of the Holy Synod at Moscow; but in his characteristic way he kept it by him and only took it up again, years after, to oblige another scholar who was working at the history of the Manichees, and had supposed, incorrectly, that the Paulicians belonged to that brood. So we owe his most important work to the spur of another's labour and the appeal of friendship.

When he engaged in controversial writing, it was with the ease and



confidence of an expert, who had no desire for any victory other than that of truth. He entered, for instance, upon the controversy over the historicity of the Christian documents with one of the most formidable debaters of the day; and, without suspecting it, he added a notable volume to the Christian Evidences. The result was the more valuable and noteworthy as both antagonists were members of the same Rationalist Association. He was always on the verge of new worlds himself, and could detect valuable authors in print, where they often lay unrecognized or wrongly ascribed, or in manuscripts where even practised eyes had failed to find them. His studies made a deep impression in his own university, where his work on the *Categories of Aristotle* as preserved in the Armenian was the first book printed with Armenian type at the Clarendon Press. He was one of the most weighty contributors to the series of *Anecdota Oxoniensia* from the same famous printing-house. To the *Text and Translation Society* he contributed many important unpublished documents. Of his more popular translations from ancient literature, the best known are his rendering of the Armenian version of the *Story of Ahikar*, for which he collaborated with Mrs. Lewis and Rendel Harris, and his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, as told by Philostratus, which is contained in two volumes of the Loeb Library.

The complete list of his published works, including articles in learned magazines, is a long one, yet it is not a true index to the volume of his labours. Much of Dr. Conybeare's work was done in collaboration with other scholars; still more of it took the form of anonymous assistance, which he was wont to furnish liberally to all who asked for it, especially in the region of Biblical and Patristic Criticism and of Liturgiology, where he was perfectly at home. Sometimes his name appears in a partnership, more often his hand can be seen in the amplification and correction of the work of his friends.

When he diverged from the paths of scholarship to politics, either domestic or international, he showed the same easy mastery of the subject as when handling a new patristic discovery. His ardent sense of justice, reinforced by his intimate acquaintance with French and Italian politics, made him the British champion of Dreyfus, whose case he treated with extraordinary clarity. In philosophy he was as much at home as in philology, and if he pleased in and explored early translations of Plato and Philo, he was also modernist enough to translate Lotze, and to follow with interest every turn in the sinuosities of present-day thought. His translation of Lotze's *Philosophy of Religion* had a pathetic interest attached to it. His first

wife was at work upon it in the year before their marriage in 1883, and had subsequently spent time on it, but it was unfinished when she died in 1886. The completed work is therefore both a posthumous and a memorial volume, the former in so far as it incorporated her own philosophical studies, the latter as the tribute of his own personal devotion. He was a member of the British Academy from its inception, and at all times a worthy representative of the sodality,

J. RENDEL HARRIS.