

FRANK EDWARD BRIGHTMAN

1856-1932

AMONG the Oxford theologians of the last thirty years, three figures stand out with special distinctness, those of William Sanday, Cuthbert Hamilton Turner, and Frank Edward Brightman. For quite a generation these three were the men to whom everybody looked as possessing a real mastery in their several departments of research. Of the first two, any one who knew them at all would find it easy to write, so well marked were their personalities, so interesting their intellectual development, their output of work so copious. To write about the third is a harder task. His life was quiet and self-contained, his story uneventful, and his visible achievements were relatively few. These things make it difficult to justify in writing the very high value at which his gifts were assessed by those who knew him well, and to make it even plausible to say that in virtue of the width of his learning and the fineness of his judgement he was at least the equal of any of his companions.

Brightman came up from Bristol Grammar School to University College, Oxford, as a scholar in 1875. As an undergraduate he read widely but without conspicuous success; in Classical Moderations, in *Literae Humaniores* and in Theology he was placed in the second class, but it was perhaps typical of his natural exactitude that he was given a first class in Mathematical Moderations. After taking his degree he went on to prove himself to be of first-rate theological ability by winning the Denyer and Johnson scholarship and the Senior Septuagint Prize, acquiring as he read for the latter a competent knowledge of Hebrew. After preparing for Ordination at Cuddesdon he came back at once to Oxford, and soon found a quiet home where he could give himself entirely to liturgical study. This was afforded by the newly founded Pusey House, where Charles Gore nominated him as one of the first

librarians. A chaplaincy at his own College kept him for a time in touch with its Common Room and with some of its undergraduates; there was a brief interlude during which he served as a curate at St. John the Divine, Kennington, but with this exception he remained at Pusey House, a rather silent and not quite uncritical sharer in its quasi-monastic life, until 1902, when he was elected to a fellowship at Magdalen.

He came very near, indeed, to becoming a member of that Society at an earlier date. He was a candidate for a Prize Fellowship in Theology at Magdalen in 1889. The other possible candidates were C. H. Turner and R. B. Rackham, and it was difficult for the College to decide which should be placed first out of a field so distinguished. After anxious 'exercitations' on the part of the President, Turner was chosen; and it is pleasant to remember how anxious Turner was in later years to press upon his College Brightman's claim to recognition. In 1902 the rightful opportunity came; a Fellowship and Theological Tutorship became vacant, and Brightman moved down to the New Buildings at Magdalen, into a set of rooms looking over the Grove on one side and towards the Cloisters and Tower on the other. Changing his habitation only once, when Turner's rooms on the next staircase were vacated, Brightman stayed on in the same buildings to the day of his death.

There, at any hour of the day or up to almost any hour of the night, his friends could find him, in a setting which always seemed oddly appropriate: there were books everywhere, books and papers heaped high, in apparent confusion, on every table and chair: there was a rich and constantly increasing collection of mechanical toys, there were tins of Navy-cut, detective stories, service books of many Churches—and always that of his own—piles of proofs from the *Journal of Theological Studies* and of volumes awaiting review. In the midst of this chaos of humane letters there was a tiny figure—almost formidably small, one might say, so quiet was its bearing, so impressive the

domed head and its φαλάκρωμα—no one ever remembered a time when Brightman had more than a faint fringe round the base of his skull—with the piercing eyes and the firm, small, expressive lips; a still, small voice would greet the incomer, perhaps with affectionate sarcasm and certainly without surprise; and as soon as a fresh pipe had been filled, it would be uttering the fiery indignation of one who could never accustom himself to the follies of mankind, at the latest liturgical enormities of the episcopate or the vagaries of Cambridge theology.

Brightman was reserved. Among the things which he held in reserve was an intense moral seriousness which could flame out formidably. He could also, when he chose, be inaccessible: yet he enjoyed the happiness of friendship, and was surprisingly at ease with many of the junior members of his College, who discovered a rich store of human interest in his conversation. His occasional journeys to the Near East, and his intimate knowledge of the Eastern Orthodox and their worship, brought him into specially close contact with the Serbians, and during the War he devoted himself especially to the Serbian students in Oxford. His services to these young men brought him recognition from abroad in the shape of the Order of S. Sava. In the War period, he was also in close contact with Belgian scholars, and rendered great service towards the reconstruction of the Library of the University of Louvain, which had given him a Doctorate five years before the War began. In his later years his life in College, apart from his intimacy with a few of its senior members, became rather more secluded: but he was never friendless, and his correspondence and contact with Eastern friends was maintained to the last.

From all Brightman's published work I should single out one small volume as most characteristic of his mind and method—the singularly perfect edition of the *Devotions* of Bishop Andrewes which was published by Methuen in 1903. With Andrewes he was completely at home and in harmony,

in an atmosphere of absorbed devotion, profoundly Catholic and yet essentially English. Andrewes's mind, like his own, was set upon 'the magnalities of religion', saturated with Scripture, enriched by a wide knowledge of liturgies Eastern and Western, and penetrated by the study of early patristic theology. It was for Brightman a congenial task to trace every clause in the *Preces Privatae* to its origin, and every allusion to its source. This he achieved completely; and the Introduction and Notes which he added are also perfect, alike in accurate scholarship and in the light which they throw upon the faith and mind of Andrewes and upon those of the editor who resembled him so closely.

It is to be hoped that work so well done will not be forgotten; yet of course Brightman's wide reputation as a liturgiologist was based chiefly upon the one completed volume of his *Liturgies Eastern and Western*. It was Brightman's purpose simply to re-issue both volumes of Hammond's work (which bore the same title), in an accurate form as regards its text and in such a shape as would exhibit the structure of the great liturgies with the utmost clearness. I was never able to learn whether he cherished any hope of completing this undertaking. To have published the Western liturgies adequately would have been a vast enterprise for any one scholar, so immensely has modern research increased the mass of available material. Brightman certainly collected a large amount of Western liturgical *data*, but I doubt whether he ever felt sanguine of publishing this. Volume I of his work in fact remains without a successor. It presents the greater and lesser Eastern liturgies, arranged with luminous clarity, from the liturgy in the Apostolic Constitutions onwards, those rites which are said in languages other than Greek being translated into English; and there is an Introduction which enables even a non-liturgical student of Church History to orientate himself with ease in what would otherwise be a bewildering series of rites.

To this achievement Brightman added in 1921 an ex-

haustive edition of *The English Rite*, which contains in 230 pages the most minutely accurate account of the English Books of Common Prayer that exists, and proceeds to exhibit in parallel columns the sources of every form printed, and the Prayer Books of 1549, 1552, and 1661. Of this, as of the *Liturgies*, it may be said that for its purpose it is final. In two works of large scale he did completely what needed to be done, and will not need to be done again.

The same thing may be said of his many *opuscula*. He was for many years a co-editor of the *Journal of Theological Studies*. Unlike Turner, who contributed to every volume of the *Journal*, Brightman wrote but rarely. He was a meticulously careful editor, and devoted endless time to the pruning, sifting, and verifying of other men's work—far too much time, and excessive pains, his friends always thought. When he did write, however, he wrote because he felt able to achieve something final; and this is the mark of all his contributions to the *Journal*. I think in particular of articles on the 'Sacramentary of Serapion', and of liturgical notes in vols. x, xxix, and xxxi, each of which is novel and conclusive; also of a brilliant and convincing study of the Quartodeciman problem (vol. xxv) which, to me at least, sets a difficult problem of Church History for ever at rest. The *Dictionary of English Church History* (1912) contains several pieces of his best work in another field, and among them an article on Bishop Edward King which is of singular beauty. One larger *opusculum* should not be forgotten, his long essay on 'Terms of Communion' and the 'Ministration of the Sacraments' in Dr. Swete's volume *Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry*, pp. 313-408. The facts are there, and they are all there, in perfect order and proportion, fully attested by copious and accurate references. I happen to know what reams of letters had to be written before the editor could extract the MS. from a contributor who was many months behind time; but the essay was worth waiting for.

These were, I think, the most notable of Brightman's

printed contributions to learning. Those who knew him best are well aware how much more he might have done, had he been content to concentrate his powers upon his own work. But that was not his way: that was not the man. He knew very many things and many people: and he liked to make free with his learning after his own fashion, spending just as much time as he chose, and as much pains, upon a casual *parergon* as upon the things he was expected by publishers to do. Yet to all who shared his interests the man himself was far more than any visible output of his could have expressed; so long as he was here, there was an inexhaustible fund of erudition, shrewdness, and humour upon which they could always draw, with equal enjoyment of his explosive indignation and of his childlike simplicity. In Oxford, at least, there is no one left who is in the least like that.

Brightman received honour from the East and from Belgium, as I have said. In his own Church, though he became a universal referee upon liturgical questions—I knew a bishop, for instance, the correctness of whose vestments was guaranteed by Brightman's cutting out the patterns himself in brown paper—he was given little outward recognition. He was for thirty years a Prebendary of Lincoln, by Bishop King's appointment, and loved his connexion with a Church which he always held to be the loveliest in England; but the two distinctions which gave him most abiding satisfaction were his Fellowship at Magdalen and the high honour which came to him in 1926, when he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy

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