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## MEMORIES OF CANON CHRISTOPHER.

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

(Continued from *THE CHURCHMAN of August, p. 426.*)

[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.]

### VI. OXFORD: EARLY YEARS. 1859–1871.

THE question may be asked how it was that Canon Christopher, a Cambridge man, became rector of a church in Oxford. Dr. Jeune, the Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, afterwards, for a short time, Bishop of Peterborough, was one day reading at the rooms of the Union Society. De Quetteville, the only Fellow of Pembroke who would have cared to be called a member of the Evangelical body, was also there, and Dr. Jeune said to him, "You should get your Evangelical friends to buy 'St. Old's' (St. Aldate's). I think the College would sell the advowson, because we need money to pay off our debts for the new buildings of Pembroke." He added that it would be a useful thing for the Evangelicals to purchase the advowson and appoint a clergyman as rector who could both take care of the parish and also seek the good of undergraduates. De Quetteville at once wrote to some friends, and it was not long before the money was gathered and the sale of the advowson duly effected. Two days afterwards Bishop Samuel Wilberforce heard a rumour of this, and he at once rode in to Oxford and offered Dr. Jeune £200 more. But it was too late; the transaction had been completed.

It was no fault of the Rev. Edward Auriol, of St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street, London, and Mr. Hathaway, who represented those who had bought the advowson, that a Cambridge man was appointed rector. They were Oxford men who loved their University, and would never have so much as thought of a Cambridge man for the living if the Oxford men to whom they had offered it had not refused it. One of these, Charles Edward Oakley, a Pembroke College man, a brilliant First Class-man, and a favourite of Dr. Jeune, kept Auriol and Hathaway waiting two months before he decided to refuse the offer. Meanwhile, precious time was passing away, and the living would soon lapse into the hands of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce (without the additional £200) in consequence of the refusal of Oxford men to accept it. Just then a Pembroke

M.A. happened to attend a missionary meeting at Shanklin when Mr. Christopher spoke, and he wrote to Auriol and Hathaway recommending that the living of St. Aldate's should be offered to him. Hathaway had heard him address a C.M.S. meeting, and Mr. Christopher had seen Edward Auriol habitually several times a week at the old C.M.S. house, but neither Auriol nor Hathaway had ever thought for a moment of offering St. Aldate's to any but an Oxford man. But as soon as the suggestion of the Pembroke M.A. reached them, they both wrote by the same post and urged Mr. Christopher to accept the living. He himself had no intention of leaving the C.M.S. work for which he felt his personal experience of missions in India gave him special qualification, but he went down to see the church and the parish. It was not an encouraging experience. He was there on the occasion of the monthly communion, and there were only a dozen communicants, including the wife of the curate-in-charge. In the church itself there were just seven pews, with a total of thirty-five free seats for a very poor parish. He put the decision in the hands of Mr. Henry Venn, the Honorary Secretary of the C.M.S., who said, "I think it is your duty to go to Oxford." The result was his acceptance, followed by his institution on August 27, 1859. But with characteristic caution and humility, he told Mr. Hathaway that if he found they had made a mistake to say so at once, and he would resign as soon as a suitable man could be found. "For," said he, "I am sure the Committee of the C.M.S. will take me back as an Association Secretary." And so began an incumbency which lasted forty-six years and made the Cambridge man a veritable part of Oxford.

Mr. Christopher never felt surprised that the two Oxford men refused the living. They were evidently checked by the forbidding state of affairs: an old church with high pews, and only seven of them free, and the seats facing north, south, east and west, with the pulpit in the middle of the South side; a miserable school; a poor parish of 1,200 people, and nothing else. But to Mr. Christopher, difficulties, if in the line of the will of God, were, to use the boy's definition, "things to be got over," and very soon he exemplified the truth of certain words of John Elliot the missionary, which he was never tired of quoting, "Prayer and pains through faith in Jesus Christ will accomplish all that it is God's will for us to do."

The schools were totally insufficient, though they were only

twenty years old. The boys had flagstones for their feet, and the "walls" of the infant school were only lath and plaster. Boys threw stones at the building, and the fragile "walls" were full of holes, by which the wind and the rain came in. It was Mr. Christopher's duty to erect better schools, but it was most difficult to get a site, for that part of the parish which is situated in the old city of Oxford was merely a street with courts on each side. He promptly purchased for £640 eight cottages, put up for sale by auction, which adjoined the old school-yard, and but for this he might never have been able to build good schools in the midst of the people for want of a site. And it must be added, as he himself often said, that he could not have bought the cottages if he had not had at command his small Indian savings. Already he was showing that indomitable spirit which always carried him over great obstacles.

Another piece of work for the parish may here be recorded. During the first twelve years, his old tutor, Mr. Goodhart, was asked every year to give an address to undergraduates on a Saturday night, and to preach two sermons in St. Aldate's on the following day. The only room in the old rectory in which undergraduates could be gathered was a small one, and the ceiling was so low that it was possible for any one standing to touch it with the hand, and when full of undergraduates the supply of fresh air became decidedly limited. On one occasion when Mr. Goodhart was there, the room was crowded, and the landing-place on the staircase outside the room was also filled. After the meeting Mr. Christopher pointed out to Mr. Goodhart how much a large room was needed for a larger number of undergraduates than the small room would accommodate, and also for use for parochial meetings and other religious objects. On Mr. Goodhart admitting the great need, Mr. Christopher said, "I want you to give me this large room." "I wish," replied Mr. Goodhart, "I could afford to do so." Mr. Christopher added that this was a small matter, and that as he did not wish to go begging all over the country for the cost of the room, he suggested that if Mr. Goodhart would write about it to six friends whose names Mr. Christopher would give, they would provide the entire cost. Mr. Goodhart willingly undertook to do this, and the six friends supplied the whole of the £640 needed, so that the room was quickly built in the old rectory garden. It is hardly possible to exaggerate its usefulness, not only for

parochial gatherings, but for the annual meetings of many Evangelical Societies which have been held in it. Mr. Christopher delighted to recall some of the meetings in that room. He would refer to his curates holding Evangelistic meetings and Bible Classes, and would also tell how almost every Sunday night in term time the Bishop of Liverpool (Dr. Chavasse) and the Bishop of Manchester (Dr. Knox) attended as undergraduates. Two brothers, both of them First Class-men in the History School, one of whom was for years Chairman of the London School Board, and the other became Bishop of Carlisle, used to be there, and also the first Bishop of Japan (A. W. Poole), who was Mr. Christopher's curate for a time. Then, too, Dr. Hodges, afterwards Bishop of Travancore and Cochin, Bishop Ingham, formerly of Sierra Leone, Bishop Evington of Japan, and many other well-known men were in the habit of attending that Saturday evening meeting.

It was soon evident that the restoration of the parish church must be undertaken, and as the result of Mr. Christopher's indefatigable exertions, the church was restored, re-roofed, re-seated and also greatly enlarged by the addition of nearly three hundred free sittings. It was re-opened on April 23, 1863.

Among well-known men who bore testimony to Mr. Christopher's energy were Canon Hugh M'Neile, afterwards Dean of Ripon, Canon Stowell, Canon Miller, afterwards of Greenwich, and Canon James Bardsley. But perhaps in some way the most striking evidence of Mr. Christopher's work was seen by a paper drawn up by a few friends, which received the signatures of over eighty junior members of the University. These men spoke in warmest terms of his work among undergraduates. It is interesting to note in the list of names several who have since become known and honoured in Church and State, including the late Bishop Bardsley, Professor Boyd Dawkins, Principal Sir Oswald J. Reichel, Professor Monro, Canon Hay Aitken, and the late Rev. A. L. Mayhew.

It is impossible to give a detailed record of Mr. Christopher's ministry in Oxford. It must suffice to call attention to some of its most outstanding features, and to some of the leading men with whom he was associated. He soon made St. Aldate's a centre of spiritual light and life, and invited leading Evangelicals to preach and speak. At that time Evangelical Churches in Oxford were few, the only assured one being St. Peter le Bailey, then in charge of the Rev. Henry (afterwards Canon) Linton.

The old rectory was very small and dilapidated, and the nearest house Mr. Christopher could obtain was in North Oxford, a mile from the parish. Mr. Christopher placed a Scripture-reader, Mr. Pledge, in the rectory and, of course, went into the parish daily. Not long after he began work in Oxford, a bad attack of sleeplessness came on, and the medical men he consulted were not able to cure him. He used to recall one thing of interest which happened when the trouble was at its worst. Six or seven undergraduates, who had come up to Oxford from Christian homes and were themselves men of prayer, had their faith seriously shaken through reading books of philosophy for the final Classical School. In their distress they formed themselves into a little society called "Lovers of Truth," and met every week with the object of considering the best answers they could find to their difficulties. They always began their meetings with prayer, for they did not and could not give up hope in God. They sought for deliverance from their doubts, and God fully answered their prayers, for those of them whom Mr. Christopher knew were among the best men he met in his first months at Oxford. One of them obtained a First Class in the Final Classical School, and was accepted by the Committee of the C.M.S. But some clergyman with whom he stayed wrote to Mr. Venn and described him as a member of a secret society called "Seekers of Truth," which was, of course, a mistake, for their name was "Lovers of Truth." Mr. Venn naturally wrote to Mr. Christopher and said that a missionary was a man who had not only sought, but found the Truth, and, therefore, went to tell the heathen of it. It was clear that Mr. Venn was in doubt whether this First Class-man was sufficiently established in the faith to be a missionary. Mr. Christopher felt sure there had been a misunderstanding, and although at that time he was very unwell through continued sleeplessness, and was ordered not to do anything, he went to the man's lodgings, asked him a number of questions, wrote down his replies, and sent them to Mr. Venn. That letter removed all hesitation about the fitness of the accepted missionary, who, if his name were given, would be recognized as for many years one of the most learned and useful C.M.S. missionaries.

The phrase "Job's comforters" has become proverbial, and Mr. Christopher soon had an experience of this kind. A brother clergyman, who knew that the rector of an Oxford church had

been for many years in an asylum, and fearing the worst results of Mr. Christopher's insomnia, suggested that perhaps he ought to resign the living, whilst he could legally do this. With characteristic conscientiousness and promptitude he at once went up to London to consult Mr. Hathaway as to his duty. That shrewd man smiled at the idea, and encouraged him to trust God for deliverance, and through this wise counsel Mr. Christopher remained at St. Aldate's.

But something had to be done for the sleeplessness, and medical advice urged a sea voyage. The result was a trip by a vessel which went to Gibraltar, Malta, Syria, Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria, and back to Liverpool. Sleep did not come between Liverpool and Gibraltar for five days and nights, but there was a gradual recovery, and before arriving at Constantinople, Mr. Christopher had begun to visit the sailors in the fore-castle, using his opportunities, as he invariably did so well, by telling them of instances of conversions, and by reading the Bible and praying with them. When he was at Constantinople, the Ambassador's chaplain, Mr. Gribble, asked him to preach on Good Friday in the Ambassador's Chapel.

It was soon necessary to find a curate for St. Aldate's parish, and Mr. Christopher remembered that Mrs. Symons, the wife of the Warden of Wadham, had said that if Mr. Moody, the late Rector of St. Clement's, had lived, he would have had an undergraduate of Worcester College, T. A. Nash, as his curate. Mr. Christopher at once called on Nash, and it was settled that he should be ordained in Advent, 1860. He always counted it one of the great blessings of his life that Nash was for seven years and a half his curate. In those days clerical abstainers were not so numerous as in these, but Nash became a total abstainer, and naturally found his temperance work greatly promoted his parochial activities. After those years of useful service the Bishop of Norwich (Dr. Pelham) appointed him Vicar of St. Paul's, Heigham, Norwich, and subsequently Rector of Lowestoft; while later on the Bishop made him an honorary Canon of Norwich Cathedral. Some years afterwards, his health having broken down, he accepted from the late Lord Forester the rectory of Little Wenlock, Shropshire, which he held until his death.

When John Henry Newman's *Apologia* came out, Mr. Christopher observed in it that in the early part of his life at Oxford Newman used to go over to Aston Sandford to hear Thomas Scott preach,

chiefly because of the high morality in his sermons. And so, with his usual enterprise, Mr. Christopher thought the time was a particularly favourable one to bring before undergraduates *The Force of Truth*, Thomas Scott's remarkable narrative of the way in which God brought him to the knowledge of the Gospel and to a life of untold usefulness. He wrote to the Committee of the Religious Tract Society, who publish the work, saying that seventy-five undergraduates had accepted an invitation to come to his house to hear Canon Carus, and asking them to give a hundred and fifty copies of Scott's *Force of Truth* that he might give two copies to each undergraduate, one for himself and one for a friend. His thought never went beyond the distribution of these copies, but as a result of his letter three thousand three hundred and fifty copies were sent by the Society, one to every undergraduate in Oxford and Cambridge. This is how it was done. Mr. Christopher had the current Oxford Calendar carefully corrected up to date, and his old Calcutta pupil, Steel, by that time a Fellow of Caius College, had the Cambridge Calendar prepared in the same way. Then the Religious Tract Society distributed all the books by post.

A sequel to this effort may be mentioned here. In 1872 Mr. Christopher was addressing a meeting of young men at Montreal, and was urging them to use every opportunity open to them for Christ and His Gospel, however small it might seem to them to be, not only because it is a great duty to do little duties, but also because the doing of the little duty may, in God's Providence, lead on to some greater and more useful effort of which they had not thought. He gave as an illustration the distribution of the one hundred and fifty copies of Scott's *Force of Truth* having led on to the distribution of three thousand three hundred and fifty copies to all the undergraduates at that time at Oxford and Cambridge. A clergyman in the meeting came on to the platform and said: "I was an undergraduate at Oriel College when that distribution was made. I read Scott's book with great profit to myself, and I have lent it to my friends, who have received profit from it. I lend it one after another to parishioners, and it is doing duty at this time in a house in my parish ten miles from Montreal."

To Mr. Christopher no narratives were more interesting than those which illustrated the grace of God towards individuals. He loved to mention some of those which became known to him in the

course of his work in Oxford. Here is one, a great favourite. During the twenty-eight years which followed the day on which John Charles Ryle, the veteran Bishop of Liverpool, took his B.A. degree, he never set his foot in Oxford. He had not taken the trouble to proceed to his M.A. degree. Mr. Christopher invited him to come and preach in St. Aldate's and to stay at his house. His host never forgot the story of his conversion to God and other things which were told at that time. Mr. Ryle (as he then was) had been a prominent member of the Oxford undergraduate world, and was Treasurer of the University Cricket Club, Treasurer of the Christ Church Cricket Club, and a member of the University "Eleven." A hard reader, he gained a Craven Scholarship, and was in the first class of the Final Classical School. Shortly before taking his B.A. degree he became more thoughtful on the most important of all subjects than he had been during the greater portion of his undergraduate course. One Sunday evening he went into some parish church in Oxford, when a clergyman, whose name is unknown, read prayers with great impressiveness. He did not preach, but read the second chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians as the second lesson in the evening service, in a very impressive and certainly a very unusual way. At the eighth verse, he made a slight pause between each clause, as if to let each truth read sink into the minds of the hearers. "By grace are ye saved—through faith—and that not of yourselves—it is the gift of God." The verse read in this manner showed that undergraduate the Gospel, and it is not too much to say that all the sermons, the addresses, the unique tracts, the *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, and all the other works written and published by J. C. Ryle in his long and honoured career as a country clergyman, an honorary Canon and a Bishop, were the fruit of God's work of grace in the heart of the undergraduate wrought by means of that never-forgotten verse.

There is no doubt that Bishop Ryle's remarkably forcible, clear, short-sentence, home-thrust style of English writing had much to do with his reputation and with the usefulness of his tracts. He told Mr. Christopher how it was that he had been led to adopt this style. When he was first ordained to a curacy in Hampshire, he made the eloquent Canon Melvill, of St. Paul's, his model as a preacher. Mr. Christopher remembered hearing some of Canon Melvill's sermons in St. Mary's, Cambridge. The large deep

galleries at that time around three sides of the church were filled with undergraduates when Melvill was announced to preach. The attention was so fixed that no one stirred during his long eloquent periods. When he paused to wipe his forehead, it was a relief to every one to move, and the result was a very audible sound. No style more opposite to that so well known as Bishop Ryle's can be conceived. Moreover, Mr. Ryle told Mr. Christopher that he had preserved these sermons in the style of Melvill written in a very neat, small hand. Well might Mr. Christopher subsequently add: "What will those say to this reference to a 'neat, small hand,' who have had the privilege of receiving letters from Bishop Ryle?" It is commonly reported that only one compositor was able to read Ryle's writing. As he found that the farm-labourers did not understand his polished, well-written sermons, some change was imperative, and Mr. Christopher remembered distinctly the expression he used: "I crucified my style for the sake of the villagers in Hampshire." In regard to the Bishop's style, the late Dr. Hawtrey, when Provost of Eton, is said to have remarked: "None but an Eton boy could write that English," but in reality it was not his Eton training, but a strong sense of duty, which led him to make the change. In speaking of Bishop Ryle, mention may be made of what Mr. Christopher heard from the late Canon James Bardsley, Rector of St. Ann's, Manchester. It is well known that Bishop Ryle's father was a banker at Macclesfield, and a branch of his bank in Manchester was, without his knowledge, imprudently managed and had to be closed. This failure pulled down the parent bank at Macclesfield, and Mr. Ryle, sen., at once sold off his houses and other personal property to pay his debts so far as he could, but there were not a few small depositors who were not paid. Mr. Bardsley told Mr. Christopher that for many years J. C. Ryle wore shabby coats in order that, by using the utmost economy, he might pay off some of the small depositors at his father's bank, and until this work was done, he devoted the profits of his tracts to the same object. Mr. Christopher also ascertained from Bishop Ryle himself that these statements were true, and he used to say in his own characteristic way, "When Bishop Ryle and I have both fallen asleep, some of the self-denying good works of a great preacher of 'Justification by Faith without the works of the Law' will become known, for which some of the opponents

of the great truth of Justification by Faith declared in the Eleventh Article of our Church do not perhaps give him credit now." Mr. Ryle told Mr. Christopher that his father always looked forward to his standing as a candidate for Parliament for one of the divisions of Cheshire, and for this reason sent him to Eton and Christ Church. But when the news of his father's failure reached him, he exclaimed : " Now I shall go into the Church." Thus, as Mr. Christopher was fond of remarking, in the providence of God all the good of Bishop Ryle's ministry was brought out of the calamity of his father's failure, caused by the mistake of a subordinate.

An event which occurred during this period may find a place here. A young Oxford clergyman, the Rev. C. H. Waller, was ordained as curate to Mr. Pennefather, of St. Jude's, Mildmay Park, where he met the lady who was afterwards his wife. Mrs. Waller was asked to go to India to manage a school for Eurasians, and was told that work could be found for her husband in the same place, if she went out married. Mr. Waller wrote to ask Mr. Christopher to recommend him for his share of the work. Mr. Christopher's reply was that he was " not going to set a razor to cut a hedge stake," having heard of something that would just suit Mr. Waller, namely, the position of tutor at St. John's Hall, under Dr. Boulton. The College had then only been in existence one year, and after Dr. Boulton had managed it alone for that time, he wrote to ask Mr. Christopher to recommend him a tutor. As Dr. Boulton's letter and Mr. Waller's reached Mr. Christopher about the same time, Dr. Boulton was told that God had offered Mr. Waller to him, and that he would refuse him at his peril! Mr. Waller had said so little for himself that Dr. Boulton was actually on the point of rejecting him. And yet he did faithful service for many years, first as Tutor and then as Principal in succession to Dr. Boulton.

In 1869 Mr. Christopher read a paper at the Southport Clerical Meeting, on " How may the Clergy Further the Supply of Suitable Candidates for the Ministry ? " and in it he quoted a letter, which, because of its permanent value, deserves insertion here. Although no names were mentioned, there is no doubt that the writer was the Rev. Henry Moule, of Fordington, father of the late Bishop of Durham.

“ I never feel more deeply the sovereign grace of God than when I look on my sons in the ministry. All that I can say respecting the instrumentality which God in the exercise of His Grace, has been pleased to employ, is that firstly—their parents, on the birth of each of their sons, solemnly devoted them to God, entreating Him to make that child His own, to make him an instrument in promoting His glory, if it should so please Him, as a minister of the Word ; and still more as a missionary to the heathen. Secondly,—they have now for nearly forty years joined a small body of Christian parents in the introduction of such petitions into the family prayers, on Saturday evening ; and these prayers have been answered in other of these families besides our own. Thirdly,—their mother has thought it only consistent with such prayers to give herself thoroughly to the moral or rather spiritual instruction of the children from the first dawn of intellect, and to endeavour to train their mental powers also ; making every kind of instruction as agreeable to them as she could, leading them also to useful recreations and never discouraging cheerful and healthy play. Fourthly,—their parents have never left them to the care of servants. On this point they have been so particular that partly for its sake, and partly also for the sake of the souls under the father’s care, they have not for twenty-five years left home together, and have never left their children at home without one or other of them. Fifthly,—they resolved from the first to give them the best education they could, and to do this at home ; endeavouring to make the salvation of their souls the supreme object. All this has called for much self-denial of a certain kind, and for more separation, not only from the world, but from relations and Christian friends, than would be supposed ; but this has been blessed of God and amply repaid. Imperfectly as I have done it myself, I would say that if the clergy would further the bringing forward of fit men for the ministry they must give themselves far more than is commonly done to prayer in the spirit of our Liturgy ; they must live more to God, delighting in Him and in His service ; they must separate their families from worldly pleasures and from such reading as does not tend to strengthen, elevate and improve the mind. Lastly,—I believe that if the Clergy would exert the influence they ought to exert for good, they must prepare themselves to cease very much from Public Schools, and be for their families, and very much for their parishioners, more complete instructors.”

Among the many notable men whom Mr. Christopher met in Oxford was the great missionary, Dr. Moffatt, and he gathered a breakfast party of undergraduates at the Clarendon Hotel to hear an address from him. This missionary of the London Missionary Society was not only noble by grace in character and in his life’s work in South Africa, but he was also noble in aspect. Mr. Christopher described him as one of God’s own nobility, a Non-conformist ornament of the one Church of Christ, “ the blessed company of all faithful people.” The undergraduates were delighted with him, for they quickly value a real soldier of Christ, to whatever regiment of the army of the King of kings he may belong.

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS.

*(To be continued.)*