

# William George Ward and the catholic revival

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## WILLIAM GEORGE WARD AND THE CATHOLIC REVIVAL.\*)

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W. G. Ward, the second part of whose life is told by his son in this book—a sequel to his earlier volume “W. G. Ward and the Oxford Movement”—was a very clever man, morally fearless, and, in spite of what he sometimes said of himself, very fond of controversy. He was brought up on mathematics, and studied philosophy all his life, and was therefore apt to use his great reasoning powers rather too absolutely: he examined things too generally in the “dry light” of logic. He was thoroughly sincere and kind-hearted, and there was a comic side to his character which certainly helps to make his life good reading. Three notable points in his genius seem to stand out: (1) his aptness for this “dry” or pure reasoning; (2)—which grows out of (1)—his love of simplifying every question he treated; (3) his admiration for the plain and practical life. These three points remembered help us to understand his course in the Oxford Movement. He came up to Oxford in 1830, and so fell in with that great reaction, which had been prophesied of some time before, and was then taking place against the onesided teaching of the English Church for some time past. One or two great doctrines, especially the Atonement, had been made much of by great men with great and good effect, but other doctrines, and these also cardinal ones, had been allowed to drop into the background, especially the doctrines of the Holy Catholic Church and of the Communion of Saints. The Prayer Book with its Creeds and services still witnessed to these; so did the lives and work of such men as Keble, who were themselves, as their fathers had been before them, just the kind of Churchmen which the Oxford teachers wished to

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\*) By *Wilfrid Ward*, Author of “W. G. Ward and the Oxford Movement”. (Macmillan 1893.)

make of all Englishmen. These men of the type of Keble are important figures in the history of the times, for they are one of the really great arguments for the unbroken Catholicity of the English Church, and it is noteworthy that they for the most part never became mistrustful of their Church, while Newman and others who did,—saintly and heroic men as most of them were—had started differently and worked their way to Rome not from, but through the English Church.

Ward was one of this latter class. He was at first rather a broad Churchman [tended to become “Arnoldian”, as he said himself]; was then drawn to Newman, and soon threw himself with his accustomed vigour into the movement which Newman led: then outstripped his master, and started a new line for himself, never however losing his devotion to Newman, or believing himself to be going away from his principles and teaching. First he simplified the question. History he professed to know nothing about, so he left alone all the painful research into historical parallels, precedents, and developments, which most of his party made so much of. He was content to trust those who understood these matters, and accept what they told him as premisses, where needed, for his logic. But what he laid stress on himself was the question, “which church shows clear signs of true life to-day; which gives the proper help towards the Catholic life to men of all sorts and conditions, rich, poor, saints, clever and plain men?” In his book “The Ideal of a Christian Church” [which was afterwards condemned at Oxford] he discusses this question, and finds that the Roman gives this help and the English Church does not. He does not mean simply that Rome does this in practice and England does not; but that the principles and genius of the Roman Church, if rightly and fully used, do this or tend to do this, while the principles and genius of the English Church, if rightly and fully used, tend in another direction. He agreed with Newman (in his later teaching) that the formularies of the English Church allow an English Churchman to hold all the real Roman doctrine, but his stubborn logic made him speak more plainly than Newman; he said the Prayer Book for the most part clearly points that way, and the Articles allow it, if taken in a “non-natural” sense, which was pushing Tract XC to a bold, and, as most thought, an offensive extreme. His logic then led him

farther. He held that since a united Western Church was the one greatest good to be desired, it followed that the duty of the English Church was to conform itself more and more to the ways of Rome, and the glorious event which he looked forward to was England "humbly suing at the feet of Rome", and being restored to full Communion with her. Meanwhile the duty of an English Churchman was to remain where he was, and work with all his might to this end. This turned out to be logic of too pure a kind to be put into practice. Rather to the surprise of his party, Ward married in 1845, and not long afterwards Mrs. Ward, who was writing out one of her husband's articles for him, suddenly gave it up, said she could bear it no longer, and would be received into the Roman Church. They were both received in September, 1845.

Here we reach Mr. Wilfrid Ward's new volume, in which he tells the story of his father's life in the Roman Church. It would take too long to follow the story all through, to show the early difficulties about money and the almost miraculous way in which the worst crisis was got through; the later duties of Mr. Ward as a country squire, sadly ignorant of country lore; the devotion to the opera which made one whole side of this curious theologian's mind; his renewed and delightful intercourse with Old Anglican friends; and indeed all the laughter of this Herculean life. The three works which stand out in it, however, were (1) lecturing at S<sup>t</sup> Edmund's College; (2) support of the "New Ultramontaniam"; (3) writing and discussion on behalf of Theism.

In all these three lines we see Ward's characteristic tendencies at work; his love of uncompromising logic; his determination to simplify all issues; his admiration for the plain, practical life.

I. It was this last no doubt which made him so zealous in his lecturing. It was not without opposition that he a layman and a new convert was allowed to lecture men who were training for the priesthood. But it was allowed, and with the grandest results. Ward himself considered this the happiest part of his life. His lectures seem to have been wonderful, and to have stirred up new life at S<sup>t</sup> Edmund's, and from thence in the Roman priesthood throughout England. His whole heart was in the work. He revered his pupils. They were to him

“persons who have had the heart to correspond with that high and noble vocation with which God has favoured you, and who are looking forward to a career from which I should shrink in craven fear and ignominious despondency”. “There is no one object which I have kept from first to last so constantly in my mind”, he wrote, “as the ascetical application of theological truth”. His mind was stored with knowledge, the outcome of wide reading through the whole range of Scholastic theology. His peculiar simplifying powers made it all plain to understand for his hearers. His fearless logic carried the dry doctrine on to all its issues in the manifold duties and trials of the life of men. His admiration for the practical life made him look up to his pupils, and only wish for himself to serve them humbly, while in them it stirred up an enthusiasm, which must have had in its outcome a good deal to do with the Catholic Revival in the outer world.

II. In a masterly chapter Mr. Wilfrid Ward shows how Ultramontanism, both in France and in Germany started as “a reaction against the Revolution and its parents, the philosophies of Rousseau and Voltaire”. In France the movement in its course took more or less of a political colour; in Germany it took rather a critical and intellectual direction. But in both countries “the return to Christian tradition; the sense that the unbroken continuity of the Catholic Church represents that tradition” was “the initial spring”. It was in fact the applying of ancient and proved principles to new needs and problems: it was the vindication of the Church as a living power. Then in both countries a split took place, and the old Ultramontane movement became the parent of two new and opposite parties, one that of Liberal Catholicism, the other a more uncompromising and extravagant set of Ultramontanes. Ward was attracted by the simplicity of the Ultramontane principle. It cleared the ground between the opposing armies of faith and unbelief, and the definition of the Infallibility of the Pope [which as far as he was concerned ended the controversy] gave him just that clear logical basis for doctrine which he had been so shocked not to find in the Anglican Church. Newman and Dupanloup were troubled at the difficulties which the details of the question suggested, but the great peculiarity of Ward’s mind was that he never was troubled about details. So long as he found a principle which

he believed to make for Catholic life that satisfied him and seemed to him the thing to fight for. Ultramontanism was such a principle to him, though it must be noted that his Ultramontanism was rather the older Ultramontanism of de Maistre and de Bonald than that of Veillot and Gaume. It was to Ward, what de Maistre and de Bonald had hoped it might be, a renewal of the life of the Church, a pure and natural growth by which the Church's true powers were brought into touch with modern needs, and its spirit again might inspire the uncertain life of men.

III. This same idea of going back to the old methods, but using their spirit rather than their form, appears again in Ward's work on behalf of Theism. As in his lectures at S<sup>t</sup> Edmund's so in his polemic against Mill's philosophy, he aimed at following S<sup>t</sup> Thomas Aquinas and the Schoolmen. "A great movement had set in for the revival of the philosophy of the mediæval schools", but most of the "Neo-Scholastics" were simply adopting "bodily the old formulæ of the mediæval systems, with little regard to their connection with the thought of the present hour" and "Mr. Ward preferred to treat contemporary philosophy, as S<sup>t</sup> Thomas himself had treated it six hundred years earlier". To put it briefly S<sup>t</sup> Thomas had freed himself from long standing prejudices, had dealt closely and candidly with non-Christian thinkers, and tried to show how the Aristotelian philosophy which was in vogue among them could be reconciled with Christianity. So Ward met closely and candidly such men as his own much revered friend J. S. Mill, showed himself a master in their own philosophy, but saw that "S<sup>t</sup> Thomas was best imitated, not by a useless *résumé* of arguments against a system of Pantheism which had ceased to exist, but by dealing in S<sup>t</sup> Thomas' spirit with the errors which had taken its place".

This work was carried out in two ways; (1) by writings which began with direct controversy with Mill, and were afterwards continued in several articles written after Mill's death; (2) by helping to form and support the Metaphysical Society, in which the most distinguished thinkers of all schools—Huxley, Tennyson, Manning, Sidgwick, Martineau were among the members—met together from time to time, read papers, and joined in discussions. It is likely that the aim of this Society was reached to a great extent. Nobody converted any one else

to his own views, but the members came to understand each other's points of view better, and through them ideas were spread abroad, and the supposed opposition (to take a notable instance) between science and faith has been put in the truer light.

It was in this philosophical work that Ward's logical powers showed themselves in their truest and best form. His wonderful power of simplifying questions was used with the happiest effects, and it appears quite clearly here, as it did not always in the Ultramontane controversy, that this power is quite different from a habit of shirking inconvenient points. Some of the most striking passages in Ward's writings are those in which he first states his adversary's case so fully and fairly that it seems almost unanswerable, and then brings forward his own arguments. And nothing impresses us more with the wonderful power of the man than the freshness and vigour and depth of understanding with which he shapes anew and gives real force to arguments, such as, crudely put, might have seemed already worn out. Still this simplifying of the question was his avowed method. In opposing for instance the doctrine of Hume which Mill had developed "that all our knowledge is derived from sensitive experience", he held that Whewell and others had introduced confusion into the controversy, and that "nothing but constant concentration on a few critical points was required to show that the root doctrines of the Experience School could not stand philosophically". He "pressed home a few questions in answering which there was no other alternative than the unqualified negative or affirmative. *He banished the concrete in which all is complex and all truth qualified.*"

This indeed was everywhere Ward's favourite course. He banished the concrete. He is not at ease where men confess that all is complex and all truth qualified. Herein is his great strength and his share of weakness. His mind was a wonderful one. What he is reported to have once said in jest "I have the intellect of an archangel, and the habits of an eating, walking and sleeping rhinoceros", was an image of the truth. He must have seen in Ultramontanism all the difficulties that ordinary men can see, but somehow he could see beyond them all, and found—not simply peace, which people sometimes half scornfully allow may be found there—but life in the Roman Church. No doubt his strength lay not only in his intellect, but in his

scorn for intellect. The plain, practical life was what he thought really worthy of admiration and of attention. Romanism, Anglicanism, or whatever the system might be, was to him of avail, and proved its truth, only so far as it fostered and improved this plain practical life, whether in the saint or in lesser men. "True guidance in return for loving obedience" was his motto even at Oxford. The only duty he held worthy of the name was to change the habits of the rhinoceros, and to learn more and more in the course of "the conquered years" to lead the Catholic life. As we put this book down the last and abiding impression that is left on the mind is reverence for the quiet inner life of hard work and disciplined habits of devotion; the noble humility half veiled by the jesting words in which it was now and again expressed, the simple governing faith which underlies all the keen zest for life and its pleasures and contests. Ward was one of those rare men who have made religion the supreme matter, and yet have remained in the best sense their own natural selves. Romanism certainly was to him what he believed it is to the world, the creed which fits the proper life of men in their own time and place, needing no forced explanations and compromises, neither asking nor allowing any shadow of false service.

And the moral of the whole seems to be this. A Catholic Revival is really taking place in the world. Catholic ideas are spreading widely and sinking deeply into the hearts of men. Anglicans, Romanists, Scientists, Agnostics, are understanding one another more than they used. In some ways in which they thought they were hopelessly opposed to one another, they are finding there is some amount of common ground; and yet to-day reverence for the truth and nothing but the truth is deeper than it ever has been before. A change is taking place, and it is towards a united Christendom: but it is proceeding naturally; not as this man or that marks out its course in his fancy or on paper, but slowly and secretly as the changes take place in a living and growing body. The hopelessness which is not uncommon now, both as to unity among Christians, and as to the endurance of Christianity itself, seems to rise a good deal out of the idea that this nineteenth century is a unique period in which knowledge has made such strides as to be really a new thing. Perhaps Ward's work to-day, just like S<sup>t</sup> Thomas



Aquinas' long ago, may tend to show that this is not so: certain ancient principles, traditions, commands, which we may venture to call Catholic, have wisdom in them which reaches even to our knowledge and will reach beyond it. Perhaps Mr. Ward would have rebuked this vague use of the word "Catholic", but we seem to find some sympathy with it in his life. We notice that in this book he says little about that union of England and Rome which was once the one thing always in his thoughts; but he uses to the full the comfortable doctrine of "invincible ignorance", and meets all men generously even while he denounces their errors. Did he feel that this union he once strove for, might after all have turned out to be an artificial thing? that what is really needed is the sowing of the seeds of unity in the world of men, which will one day spring up and bear better fruit than we can prophesy of now? "A certain hankering after premature logical completeness", he wrote a year before his death, "...I quite recognise as prominent among my intellectual faults." In the same spirit his neighbour Tennyson looked at other questions of these days,—“the feud of rich and poor” for instance. Perhaps, even if never admitted, this was one of the bonds of union between these two widely different minds, which nevertheless came so close together. If it be so, certainly Ward, [“most generous of Ultramontanes . . . most loyal in the following of 'Thy Lord'”, as Tennyson wrote of him], by his plain, yet all but saintly life sowed some of these seeds, and in his deeds there is the grand and simple spirit of that prayer in the Roman Canon of the Mass, “ne respicias peccata mea, sed fidem Ecclesiæ Tuæ eamque secundum voluntatem Tuam pacificare et coadunare digneris.”

A. NAIRNE.

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