

Archbishop Laud

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ARCHBISHOP LAUD.

It has often happened that those who have borne a prominent part in controversy, winning the exaggerated applause of their supporters, and incurring the no less exaggerated condemnation of their opponents, have quickly obtained juster treatment at the hands of posterity. After no long interval the heat of the strife, in which they were engaged has cooled down; and when the problem with which they grappled has either lost its interest or received its final answer, men have become free to judge impartially of their aims, their conduct and their character. For others has been reserved a different fate. The issues, with which they were concerned, remain even now in dispute. Party-spirit still runs high, and men range themselves on one side or the other. Partiality and prejudice still render difficult of attainment any just appreciation of the chief actors on the scene. In this latter class is to be reckoned William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1633—1645. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say, that round his name the strife of tongues has continued with little or no intermission throughout the two-and-a-half centuries that have elapsed since his death on the scaffold. His share in making the history of a most critical period is too large ever to be overlooked or lightly regarded, however contradictory may be the judgments passed upon him. To one party the champion of principles which command the highest reverence and devotion, to others he seems the leading exponent of a misguided and mischievous policy. In either view he is emphatically a representative figure; he marks an epoch, and that epoch one of the most important in English ecclesiastical history. Within the narrow limits of an article it will not be possible to attempt more than to indicate the chief points of his doctrinal position and the main lines of his policy; but even such a rough sketch

may give occasion to consider how it came about that a man of his peculiar temperament, hampered with marked limitations, of a mind receptive rather than original, should have exerted so profound an influence in moulding the character of the English Church. That it was so, is indisputable. The impress which he left behind him has proved deep and lasting; and, as men of all parties will agree, the whole aspect of English Church life would be different to what it is at the end of the nineteenth century, had it not been for the work of Laud in the seventeenth.

William Laud was born in the year 1573. His father, a merchant of considerable means, was both willing and able to provide his son with an excellent education. The boy made good use of his opportunities. He became scholar and afterwards fellow of S. John's College, an institution recently founded at Oxford. Here it was that he became imbued with those principles, to which he was destined in after life to give effect throughout the length and breadth of England. His tutor Dr. John Buckeridge, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, has the credit of teaching the young student to derive his theology not from the Institutes of Calvin, then unhappily the popular text book of theology in the University of Oxford, but from the earlier and more trustworthy sources of the Christian Fathers. It is recorded that the Bishop who ordained him "found his study raised above the systems and opinions of the age upon the noble foundations of the Fathers, Councils and ecclesiastical historians, and presaged that if he lived he would be an instrument of restoring the Church from the narrow and private principles of modern times." Thus it appears that Laud was a ready pupil, and indeed he pressed home his conclusions with greater force and a more rigorous logic than his teacher. Moreover a rapid succession of preferments gave him a wider field of activity than the narrow confines of an University town. But before proceeding to relate his rise to power and his initiation of measures by which he sought to impress his convictions upon his fellow-countrymen, it will be well to insert a short account of those fundamental principles upon which the fabric of his theological system was built up, and which were the determining factors of his public policy. At the same time a glance at the condition of religious life in

England may serve partly to explain that which will at first sight give occasion for surprise. For indeed the rapid and favourable progress made at the outset by the Laudian movement is no less remarkable than was its disastrous overthrow a few years later in the crisis of the Great Rebellion.

The theology of Laud must be taken as a genuine contribution to the English Reformation, however widely it may differ from the theology generally current in England during the latter half of the sixteenth century. That the English Reformation was a continuous process lasting over a period of more than a century is a fact of history. To ignore this truth is to introduce confusion and misunderstanding into the record of English religious development. So admirable is the statement of the general characteristics of this protracted English Reformation given by the late Dean Church, that I cannot refrain from quoting a passage of some length.

“It cannot be sufficiently remembered that in James I’s time and in Charles II’s time in 1662 the Reformation was still going on as truly as it was in the days of Edward VI and Elizabeth. The English Reformation was, theologically speaking, one of the most adventurous and audacious—bravely audacious—of enterprises. Its object was to revolutionise the practical system of the English Church without breaking with history and the past: to give the Crown and the State vast and new powers of correction and control without trenching on the inherited prerogatives of the Spirituality; and to do this without the advantage of a clear, solid, well tested, consistent theory or else, as in Luther’s case, of a strong exaggerated cry and watchword The Roman theory of the Church and of Church reform, as pursued at Trent, was compact and complete; the Calvinist theory of Church reform and Church reconstruction was equally logical and complete; in each case all was linked together, consistent, impregnable, till you came to the final question of the authority on which all rested, and till you came to square the theory with certain and important facts Of the English Reformation the public and avowed purpose—I do not say that of all its promoters—but its public purpose was, taking the actual historical Church of Augustine and Ethelbert, of Becket and Wolsey, of Warham and Pole, the existing historical representative and descendant of that super-

natural Society which is traceable through all the ages to Apostolic days, to assert its rights, to release it from usurpation, to purge away the evils which this usurpation had created and fostered; and accepting the Bible as the Primitive Church had accepted it and trying to test everything by Scripture and history, to meet the immediate necessities of a crisis which called not only for abolition, but for reconstruction and remplacement.”¹⁾

Such was the complex problem partly political, partly theological, upon which the Church of England was engaged, while Laud was preparing himself by close and diligent study and by participation in University affairs for the life's work before him. What was the value of his contribution to its solution, when he had stepped forward from among the unknown to take his place in the rank of the leaders? His career as Archbishop may reveal what ill success in the sphere of politics attended his effort to determine the relation of the Church to the power of the State. It is a pleasanter task to observe what great service he rendered to the Church by his outspoken assertion of the old truths of Catholic theology. Not indeed that he was the first of the younger generation of Reformers to sound this note. He was following the example of Hooker and of Andrewes; but various causes contributed to make his protest more effectual than that of his two predecessors. They had appealed to the studious and the devout. Laud so spoke and acted as to be heard by the nation at large. During the earlier portion of Elizabeth's reign the tide had been setting strongly in favour of Calvinism. Averse as the Queen undoubtedly was to these foreign innovations, and ready as she might be to interfere in matters ecclesiastical, she was nevertheless unable to offer an effectual resistance to the force of circumstances. Political exigencies drove her into alliance with the foreign Reformation; and the natural result of the intercourse thus established and fostered was to encourage in England the growth of Calvinistic principles and practices. But no sooner had England been delivered by the defeat of the Spanish Armada from the fear of foreign aggression, than it became increasingly evident to men, whose

¹⁾ Church, Pascal and other Sermons, p. 65 f.

minds were free from prejudice, that there was a wide divergence of principle between the Genevan system and the spirit of the English Reformation, as expressed in the Book of Common Prayer. To this sense of divergence Laud gave expression. In their anxiety to make common cause with the Reformers of the Continent, leaders of the English Church in the previous generation had been content to maintain no more than the expediency of Episcopacy. The attitude adopted by Laud and his school was very different. To them—and they were not afraid to give public utterance to their convictions—Episcopacy exists *jure divino*; apart from this divinely appointed order there can be no true Church. To make this assertion was no doubt to give cause of offence to the reformed Churches of the Continent, but the time had passed, when the maintenance of friendly relations with those Churches was considered essential for purposes of national defence.

To the Laudian school the Zwinglian depreciation of the Sacraments was altogether abhorrent. One of Laud's earliest theological treatises was devoted to a defence of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. On the subject of the Sacrament of the Altar let his words speak for themselves.

“And for the Church of England nothing is more plain than that it believes and teaches the true and real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.”¹⁾ He quotes with approval Bp. Ridley's Statement. “Both you and I agree herein: That in the Sacrament is the very true and natural Body and Blood of Christ, even that which was born of the Virgin Mary, which ascended into heaven, which sitteth on the right hand of God the Father, and which shall come from thence to judge the quick and the dead; only we differ *in modo* ‘in the way and manner of being’: we confess all one thing to be in the Sacrament and dissent in the manner of being there.”²⁾

Of the Eucharistic Sacrifice he speaks in the following terms. “As Christ offered up Himself once for all, a full and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sin of the whole world, so did he institute and command a memory of this sacrifice in a sacrament, even till His coming again. For at and in the Eucharist we

¹⁾ Laud's Works. II. 328. Oxford 1849.

²⁾ Ibid. II. 330.

offer up to God three sacrifices. One by the priest only; that is the commemorative sacrifice of Christ's death, represented in bread broken and wine poured out. Another by the priest and the people jointly and that is, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all the benefits and graces we receive by the precious death of Christ. The third by every particular man for himself only, and that is, the sacrifice of every man's body and soul." ¹⁾

The above passages are taken from Laud's "Controversy with Fisher", the most important of his writings. It is the record of a disputation carried on between him and John Percy, a Jesuit, commonly known by the name of Fisher in presence of James I in 1622. Owing to the pressure of other business the book was not published till many years later. It was reissued several times in the course of the seventeenth century, and in fact won general recognition as a worthy and valuable presentation of the case for the English Church. The circumstances, to which it owed its origin, determined that the case should be put as against Rome rather than Geneva; but its author explains the intermediate position of the English Church, and is conscious of the resultant advantages and disadvantages. "She (i. e. the English Church) professes the ancient Catholic faith, and yet the Romanist condemns her of novelty in her doctrine; she practices Church government as it hath been in use in all ages and all places where the Church of Christ hath taken any rooting, both in and ever since the Apostles' times, and yet the Separatist condemns her for Antichristianism in her discipline. The plain truth is she is between these two factions as between two millstones." ²⁾

His opposition to Rome, no less than his opposition to Geneva, was grounded on an appeal to Christian Antiquity. The evidence of S. S. Cyprian, Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria and Rufinus is brought forward and discussed with reference to the Roman claim to infallibility. While rejecting this claim absolutely, he recognises infallibility in essentials as an attribute of the Catholic Church. "That the whole Church cannot err in doctrines absolutely fundamental and necessary to all men's

¹⁾ Works II, 339.

²⁾ Works II. XIII.

salvation seems to me to be clear by the promise of Christ, 'that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'" ¹⁾

But he protests against the arrogant identification of Roman with Catholic. "The Roman Church and the Church of England are but two distinct members of that Catholic Church, which is spread over the face of the earth." ²⁾

After referring to the "*Filioque*" Controversy he makes an appeal in favour of tolerance, remarkable when we remember how ready all parties of that age were to anathematise one another.

"You may make them (i. e. the Greeks) no Church, as Bellarmine doth, and so deny them salvation which cannot be had out of the true Church: but I for my part dare not so do It ought to be no easy thing to condemn a man of heresy in foundation of faith; much less a Church; least of all so ample and large a Church as the Greek, especially so as to make them no Church. Heaven gates were not so easily shut against multitudes when S. Peter wore the keys at his own girdle." ³⁾

Most interesting it is to observe the function which he assigns to human reason in matters of faith: for here also he holds a position midway between the extreme camps, neither exalting the individual reason into an infallible guide on its own merits, nor degrading it into a mere machine for making deductions from principles supplied by authority. In his view reason works together with tradition and the illumination of the Spirit in order to establish man's initial belief in the fact of divine revelation. This line he takes in answer to a question concerning his grounds for believing in the Inspiration of Scripture.

"The credit of Scripture to be divine resolves finally into that faith which we have touching God Himself, and in the same order. For as that, so this, hath three main grounds, to which all other are reducible. The first is, the tradition of the Church, and this leads us to a reverent persuasion of it. The second is, the light of Nature; and this shows us how

¹⁾ Works II, 156.

²⁾ Works II, 346.

³⁾ Works II, 29.

necessary such a revealed learning is, and that no other way it can be had. Nay more that all proofs brought against any point of faith, neither are nor can be demonstrations but soluble arguments. The third is, the light of the Text itself, in conversing wherewith we meet with the Spirit of God, inwardly inclining our hearts, and sealing the full assurance of the sufficiency of all three unto us.”¹⁾

Of the relation of Scripture to tradition he says. “If the Scripture be the foundation to which we are to go for witness, if there be doubt about the faith and in which we are to find the thing that is to be believed as necessary in the faith, we never did nor never will refute any tradition that is universal and apostolic for the better exposition of the Scripture; nor any definition of the Church, in which she goes to the Scripture for what she teaches, and thrusts nothing as fundamental in the faith upon the world, but what the Scripture fundamentally makes *materiam credendorum*, ‘the substance of that which is to be believed’, whether immediately and expressly in words, or more remotely, where a full and clear deduction draws it out.”²⁾

Leaving now our survey of Laud’s theological views we return to the events of his life. In 1616 he became Dean of Gloucester; four years later he was consecrated Bishop of S. David’s; thence he moved by successive translations to the see of Bath and Wells, to London, and finally to Canterbury in 1633. But side by side with his public advancement there runs the course of an inner career, the progress of which must be noted. Year by year he was gaining an ever increasing amount of influence in matters both political and ecclesiastical, an influence none the less powerful because it was more or less behind the scenes. Shortly after the accession of James I to the throne of England he had been appointed one of the Royal chaplains. Some years later we find him in a position close to the King’s person accompanying him on a journey into Scotland. So far he had secured the King’s favour, but the connection which perhaps contributed still more to his influence was his friendship with the favourite of the Court — the Duke of

¹⁾ Works II. 130.

²⁾ Works II. 62.

Buckingham. Strange as it may seem, when we recollect how Buckingham figured as the gayest of the Court gallants, a frivolous and irresponsible politician, a spoilt child of fortune absorbed in trivialities and amusements, this friendship had a religious origin. Laud was Buckingham's confessor. In his Diary there stands this entry. "June 9. Being Whitsunday, my Lord Marquis of Buckingham was pleased to enter upon a near respect to me. The particulars are not for paper. June 15. I became C. (= Confessor) to my Lord of Buckingham. And, June 16, being Trinity Sunday he received the Sacrament." ¹⁾ Many cheap sneers have been directed against Laud on this count. It is easy to suggest that yielding to the dictates of ambition he abused his priestly powers in order to curry favour with a powerful penitent. But that such a representation of the relation between the two is a cruel slander, the language of the Diary affords conclusive proof. Words meant only for his own eyes reveal the warm feeling in his heart towards his friend. Indeed Buckingham with all his faults was not devoid of striking and attractive qualities. High-spirited, generous, incapable of dissimulation he might well inspire an affection, which even his notorious short comings and falls could not altogether undermine. Laud did for him what he could: endeavoured to arouse his better self, visited him in sickness, remembered him in his prayers, mourned his unhappy end.

Of a very different character was another of Laud's Court friends, Wentworth, Lord Strafford. If it is hard to account for Laud's friendship with Buckingham by reason of their immense dissimilarity in all points, there is no such difficulty here. Laud and Strafford thought alike on many matters. Their convictions as to the needs of Church and State were nearly identical. Both had the same vigorous strenuous temper, impatient of opposition, chafed by delay. Much of the correspondence that passed between them has been preserved. It bears the marks of a close intimacy; it is full of the sense of relief felt by men of great natural reserve in unbosoming themselves to some one chosen confidant.

Laud threw himself with all his characteristic energy into

¹⁾ Works III. 139.

the turmoil of political life. Judged from the standpoint of modern times he has been sharply criticised for unwarrantable interference on a scene ill befitting his character as an ecclesiastic. The answer to such criticism lies in a truer appreciation of the age as one of transition. Mediæval ideas though lapsing rapidly retained some remnant of vigour. It was not so long since it had seemed a matter of course that the conduct of the most important affairs of State should be entrusted to ecclesiastics of high rank. To Laud there was nothing unsuitable in such an arrangement, nor did he hesitate to seek political power that he might use it in the service of the Church. Remembering the great work that had been done by the Mediæval Church, he dreamed of a reformed English Church, adorned with the same dignity, endowed with no less strength, fulfilling equally large functions. It was a dream which the hard realities of his own experience proved to be illusory. The age of the statesman-ecclesiastic was past and gone. The rising power of the House of Commons, destined to become supreme in England, would have none of this combination. Laud himself is the last of the race. Unfavourable critics have represented him as the champion of absolute monarchy in its extremest form, superior to all law, reponsible to no authority. It was inevitable that he should range himself on the side of the Crown in the great political conflict. But he was too much of a philosopher to deny the supremacy of law over all individual rulers, and he checked the fervour of those, who in his opinion went too far in their assertion of the royal prerogative. At his trial he declared "I have since I came into place made stay of divers books purposely written to maintain an absolute power in the kingdom, and have not suffered them to be printed".¹⁾ At the same time he held that the monarchy provided a firmer basis of government than the will of a popular assembly, and he was ready to strain the powers of the Crown in order to carry through what he considered essential reforms.

Such as we have seen were his ideals theological, historical, political, inspired with which he entered upon his career as Archbishop. A man of sixty years of age he had none of the

¹⁾ W. Laud, by W. H. Hatton, p. 127.

buoyant confidence of youth: there is even a note of despondency about the language in which he refers to his elevation: but he was not the man to allow any feelings of depression to be a drag on his public action. It was a direct result of his past influence at Court that many of the English sees were already filled by men of a like way of thinking with himself. So far he could reckon on the stalwart support of his suffragans, but the difficulties of the task before him might have daunted any heart. His however did not quail: he set resolutely to work forthwith. In essence he was a doctrinal reformer, and certainly the English Church needed reform on this side. It was permeated to an alarming extent with Calvinism. From his earliest days at Oxford he had protested against these doctrines: Now he would shape his protest into something more potent than theological dissertations. Rules and regulations sanctioned by legal penalties would penetrate where arguments could make no entrance. External ceremonial was the ground on which he determined to meet his opponents; for he was too wise to underestimate the influence of external modes of worship upon religious belief whether for good or ill. Even the simple minimum of ritual required by the Book of Common Prayer had been largely dropped. It was necessary to take measures to ensure such plain acts of reverence as kneeling at the Holy Communion. It was ordered that the Altars which in many cases had been moved into the middle of the church out of deference to Puritan prejudices should be restored to the east end and protected by a railing. It is not difficult to recognize in such a measure an effort on Laud's part to restore the Eucharist to its proper position in the scheme of the Church's worship. Punishment quick and sharp overtook the disobedient.

But the penalties of the law as administered by Laud reached others besides recalcitrant clergy. The laity were made to feel the weight of Church discipline. The Court of High Commission, that ill-omened ecclesiastical novelty of Tudor invention, was largely employed in dealing with cases of moral delinquency. Whatever may be said against it, it deserves at least credit for impartiality. Where it punished the poor and the insignificant, it did not spare the rich and the great. A lady of rank, the sister in law of the late Duke of

Buckingham was condemned by this court to do public penance for adultery. It may readily be guessed how great was the consequent unpopularity incurred by Laud, who was held by the popular judgment to be personally responsible for every sentence and punishment in spite of the fact that when he differed from the other judges, it was usually in favour of leniency. He however cared nothing for unpopularity, but pressed steadily on, regardless perhaps scarcely conscious of the enmity which he aroused. The result was inevitable. Ill-will hardened into positive hatred, and when the Long Parliament met in 1640, the Commons were resolved that Laud should fall. The Diary thus records the opening of this last stage of his life. "Dec. 18th". I was accused by the House of Commons for high treason.... I went to evening prayer in my chapel. The Psalms of the day (XCIII, XCIV) and chap. 50 of Esai, gave me great comfort.... As I went to my barge hundreds of my poor neighbours stood there and prayed for my safety, and return to my house. For which I bless God and them."¹⁾ After a tedious imprisonment of nearly three years, during which he learnt from time to time of the successive overthrow of all his hopes and plans, he was brought to trial. The result was from the first a foregone conclusion. His enemies now completely in the ascendant never intended that his life should be spared. By every shift, which malignity could suggest, they endeavoured to fasten upon him the guilt of treason. Yet so strong was his defence, that malignity itself was baffled. No tribunal deciding according to law could possibly find the prisoner guilty. It was therefore determined to adopt an easier method, which could dispense with the inconvenient trammels of justice. A bill of attainder was introduced into the House of Commons and rapidly passed. After some delay it received the assent of the remnant of the House of Lords; and Laud, declared a traitor by Act of Parliament, was condemned to suffer the extreme penalty. He met his death with the simple courage of a true hearted Christian Man. To the crowd assembled round the scaffold he preached his last sermon, and so kneeling down and commending his soul to God passed to his rest.

¹⁾ Works III. 239.

Of those who saw Laud die scarcely one perhaps but must have thought that the cause identified with his name was irretrievably lost. Was not the Church in whose service he had laboured so long and so strenuously rejected and proscribed, the Calvinism which he had endeavoured to suppress riotously triumphant? Yet very few years had passed away before it became evident to the world that Laud had not lived and died in vain. With the restoration of the monarchy, the English Church, reissuing from obscurity, returned to her own. It was a return of which the recovery of legal privileges and material endowments formed only the outward expression. There was an inner side to it. She assumed again her true place in the hearts and affections of the English people. Moreover she came in the form and fashion which Laud and his school had given her. His methods indeed had been faulty, and so long as they were in operation men took note only of the vexations and annoyances to which they were thereby exposed. Irritated beyond measure they were content to see Laud and his system given over to the fury of his enemies. But when these methods had been relinquished, when the great political struggle was over, and when the misleading confusion of politics with religion began to pass away, men's eyes were opened to the high and noble elements in Laud's conception of the Church. By this conception the history of the English Church has ever since been largely shaped. The secession of the Non-jurors and the influence of the Whig party combined for a period to throw it into the back ground. But the Oxford movement of the last half century has been essentially a reassertion of Laudian principles. The interest shown in the recent commemoration of the 250th anniversary of his death is sufficient to prove how strong an influence his name still exerts. Yet this influence was gained by one strikingly deficient in some of those gifts which command admiration. True, he possessed in high measure many sterling qualities, an inflexible will, entire sincerity of purpose, absence of affectation, an absolute incapacity for compromise, where any sacrifice of principle was involved. He was a munificent and discriminating patron of letters. There was in him a deep and genuine piety, though so concealed beneath a veil of constitutional reserve that it might almost have escaped notice, had it not been for the revelations

of the Diary. Yet he was so unfortunate in his bearing towards others as to make many enemies where he made one friend. Harsh-voiced, rough-mannered, quick-tempered he would often give offence where he least intended it, and was unconscious rather than wilfully neglectful of the susceptibilities of those with whom he came in contact. In him there was little or none of that gift of prescience, which enables the statesman to forecast the course of events and bring his schemes to a successful issue. But he had that which in the ecclesiastical ruler is of more importance than the most dexterous statecraft, an unwavering grasp on those unchanging principles, which have made the Church of Christ the one permanent institution among the shifting forms of governments and polities.

G. C. JOYCE.
