

Article reprinted from *Cross+Way* Issue Spring 1992 No. 44 (C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

DEAN WACE AND THE HOUSE

By Arthur Pollard

Why does Church Society call its headquarters 'Dean Wace House'? Who was Dean Wace? I write this on the exact anniversary of his death on 9th January 1924. He was Dean of Canterbury, successor in that office to F. W. Farrar, the author of the boy's novel, *Eric, or Little by Little*, and himself succeeded by George Bell, later Bishop of Chichester, and foremost in establishing relations with the German Churches.

EDUCATION

Henry Wace was born on 10th December 1836 in Islington, his father being curate of St. Sepulchre's, Holborn. As a consequence of the latter's ill-health the family soon removed to Wadhurst (Sussex), where Henry received his early education from his father before going to Marlborough in 1848 and thence to Rugby. He next proceeded to King's College, London, where he was taught and deeply influenced by Charles Hole, a learned and devout Evangelical, later Dean of Rochester. In 1856, he moved to Brasenose College, Oxford, graduating in 1860.

EARLY MINISTRY

A year later he was ordained to the curacy of St. Luke's, Berwick Street, a daughter church of St. James, Piccadilly, where in 1863 he became curate in what was then a staunch Evangelical church in the centre of London. He moved in 1870 to the lectureship of Grosvenor Chapel; in 1872 he became Chaplain and in 1880 preacher to Lincoln's Inn. During these years Wace was a frequent leader writer for *The Times*, an association which began with his letter protesting against the treatment of Bishop Colenso by the Church authorities, even though he himself disliked Colenso's liberal views.

ACADEMIC RECOGNITION

From the mid-1870's Wace's stature as a scholar came more and more to be recognized. In 1875 he was appointed Professor of Ecclesiastical History at his old college, King's London and eight years later he became Principal. He also delivered in his old university, Oxford, first the Boyle lectures in 1874 and 1875 (published as *Christianity and Morality, or the Correspondence of the Gospel with the Moral nature of Man*, 1876 and five more editions before 1881), and then the Bampton lectures in 1879 (published as *The Foundations of Faith*, 1880). He also published several collections of sermons and with Sir William Smith edited the immense *Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines during the first eight centuries*. (4 vols., 1877- 87). His later work included the Warburton Lectures on *Prophecy, Jewish and Christian* (1911) and sermons from his last years at Canterbury, *The Story of the Passion* (1922) and *The Story of the Resurrection* (1923).

DEAN OF CANTERBURY

In 1896, Wace accepted the valuable living of St. Michael, Cornhill, which he resigned on becoming Dean of Canterbury at the age of 66 in 1902, a much belated preferment. He had been active and continued active in several spheres. He spoke and wrote on general topical issues; he had

engaged in controversy with Thomas Huxley on *Christianity and Agnosticism* (1889); he was prominent in the improvement of King's College Hospital. In more specifically Church affairs, he was chairman of the Round Table Conferences on Holy Communion and its expression in ritual (proposed indeed by the extreme Anglo-Catholic, Lord Halifax) in 1900 and of its successor on Confession and Absolution a year later. He was chairman also of the Clergy Mutual Insurance Society, of St. John's Hall, Highbury (precursor of what is now St. John's College, Nottingham) and of the National Church League for the first nineteen years after its foundation.

That last is where he comes into our focus, for it was one of the two predecessor bodies of our own Church Society. In addition Wace was sometime editor of our own *Churchman*; and not surprisingly among his many publications is his *Principles of the Reformation* (1910). His last years were as active as any before and they were also the era of Prayer Book Revision. Within weeks of his death he contributed an article on this topic to the *Church Quarterly Review*, a piece characterized by reasoned resistance to the proposed innovations. Wace had no time for the neo-mediaevalism of the Anglo-Catholics, nor for the unbiblical modernism of the theological liberals.

Wace's Biblicism and Protestantism increased with the years. As the Evangelical constituency became more and more infected by liberalism, coming to its crisis with the schism in C.M.S. and the formation of B.C.M.S. in 1922, Wace spoke boldly for the traditional inerrancy of Scripture in history as well as in doctrine, allowing for only minor inaccuracies. As a scholar he scorned the fancifulness of some so-called Higher Criticism, believing as David Bebbington has so excellently put it, that the 'remedy for erroneous criticism was better criticism.' (*Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 1989, p.190).

CAMPAIGNING FOR MODERATION

Wace was early in foreseeing that the trend of Anglo-Catholic innovation would lead to demands for changes in the Prayer Book. His tactic of opposition was exactly right, not least in that it sought to secure the support of moderates throughout the whole of the Church of England. He appealed to the practice of the first six centuries, having already published fourteen volumes of selections from the Nicene and post-Nicene fathers. On that basis he claimed that the eastward position and the use of incense at Holy Communion should be banned. He obtained 4,000 signatures in a petition to that effect in 1905. Wace did not live to see the rejection of the Revised Prayer Book (what he would have thought of the *A.S.B.* I shudder to think!), but he would have rejoiced in the part his friend, Sir William Joynson-Hicks (Home Secretary in 1928; later 1st Lord Brentford), played in the House of Commons debate which saw its overthrow.

DEAN WACE HOUSE - HIS MEMORIAL

But I have still not answered – Why Dean Wace House? In tribute to him and under the leadership of Joynson-Hicks the National Church League set up a fund to commemorate Wace's work. Its proceeds went to the acquisition of Dean Wace House in Wine Office Court, off Fleet Street; and in accordance with the terms of the original trust the Church Society must retain that name on its property. We do so fitly and in continued humble gratitude for the witness of a giant in former days.

Arthur Pollard (at time of publication) was a lay member of General Synod and a member of the Council of Church Society. He was also President of the Protestant Reformation Society.