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THE PERSECUTION OF JAMES SHORE

By David Phipps

I don't know much about George Santayana, except that he was a Spanish philosopher. I don't even know whether he was a Christian or not, but he said something very profound: "*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*" As we look at the case of James Shore, there is a warning for us about what happens when private patronage is eroded, and too much power is centralized in the hands of the bishops.

In 1832 the Duke of Somerset, who had extensive property around Totnes, built a chapel there to serve the population in Bridgetown, where he had recently erected a large number of houses. That summer, the Duke took the Bishop of Exeter along to view the chapel, with the intention of having it consecrated. The Bishop was Henry Phillpotts, who considered the promotion of Tractarian ideas and the suppression of Evangelicalism to be his life's work.

The Bishop told the Duke that the chapel could either be a daughter church of Berry Pomeroy, in which parish it lay, in which case the Vicar of Berry Pomeroy would nominate the minister, or the Duke could endow it fully, in which case it could become a separate parish, and he would have the patronage.

It seems that relations were initially friendly between the Duke and the Bishop, but the Duke was advised by his solicitor against committing himself to providing the funds necessary to endow the income of the minister. He therefore asked if he could have the minister licensed to the chapel but simply to pay his stipend, and keep the building as a private chapel. In the cynical words of *The Standard*, twenty years later, "*The duke desired to retain the patronage without contributing to the endowment.*" The Bishop, however, had "*a strong disinclination to a licence of that description.*"

The Duke offered, as a kind of compromise, that the building should be licensed as a private chapel as an experiment, which did not close the door to later endowment, and entered into an arrangement with the Rev. James Shore, Curate of Berry Pomeroy, to do the duty, agreeing to give him a stipend of £200. The Bishop accepted the compromise, but interpreted the Duke's position as a firm commitment eventually to endow the living. This misunderstanding eventually led to a court case, but that is another story.

On this basis, the Bishop licensed the building, and, to quote the Bishop, "*The Rev. J. Edwards, Vicar of Berry Pomeroy, at the request of the Duke of Somerset, nominated the Rev. James Shore, who was licensed accordingly, to perform Divine Service in the new building.*" There cannot have been much wrong with Shore since the testimonial declaring to the Bishop that he be sound in both doctrine and life was signed by both his Vicar and the Archdeacon.

Unfortunately, in 1834, Mr. Edwards died, and was succeeded by the Rev. E. Brown. The Duke had sold the next turn of patronage to Brown's friends in 1821 (a practice which is now illegal!), but what Brown did not know was that since then the Duke had built Bridgetown Chapel in the parish!

In 1843 Mr. Brown swapped his parish with the Rev. W.B. Cosens for one in another diocese. At this point, the Bishop discovered that, due to an oversight on the part of the Diocese, Shore had not been re-nominated as curate of Berry Pomeroy during Brown's incumbency, and thus, according to the Bishop, had been ministering for nine years without a licence. The Bishop's secretary therefore

wrote to Shore to tell him that action would be taken against him unless he was re-nominated.

This whole matter was a shock to Cosens, who claimed that he did not even know that he had responsibility for Bridgetown before he came. When he met the Bishop on 12th August 1843, the matter of the chapel and the curate was discussed. The Bishop later denied, under oath, that he had warned him off Shore, but did admit that he had cautioned him to take great care over the nomination - a nod is as good as a wink – and Cosens promised not to act without the Bishop's approval. The Bishop later claimed that Cosens had said that he had heard that Shore was a "*very troublesome person,*" whereas Cosens wrote in a letter of 6th December, that he had never heard anything of Shore until 16th October, but then wrote that Brown had told him before he came that he would "*find that man, Shore, a thorn in your side, but you can't get rid of him.*"

But it becomes worse than this! Shore tried to find out why he could not be nominated, but no one would tell him. All Cosens would say was that Shore had not had a licence during Brown's incumbency, and that this was evidence, in itself, that he was not a fit and proper person to be his curate for he had flouted the Bishop's authority, but he also launched a smear campaign and wrote a letter to the *Western Times* on 19th October, 1844, in which he referred to Shore and said that

'There is a vice which, however common it may be, still places those who practise it beyond the pale of respectable society; and, by universal consent, deprives them of the claims and privileges of gentlemen.'

Since he refused to be more specific than that, the charge could not be answered, even though the imagination runs riot!

After waiting for a decent interval for Cosens to nominate Shore, the Bishop forbade Shore to officiate any more. That is the Bishop's side of the story. Shore claimed that Cosens had been going round telling people that it was the Bishop who had objected to his nominating Shore, and that he saw no point in his nominating him anyway, because the Bishop would not grant a licence.

Why did this happen? In January, 1844, Cosens wrote to the Duke of Somerset saying that, "*The congregation [of Bridgetown], nearly half of whom were Dissenters from Totnes, were as nearly unchurched, as I could imagine possible.*" On the other side, Shore wrote to the Duke, saying that he was grateful to him for "*not allowing Bridgetown Chapel to be secured for Tractarian worship,*" and said that the congregation had been delivered from "*the Puseyite heresy, which is now so much encouraged in this diocese.*" In other words, even though the term is never used, it is clear that Shore was an Evangelical, and that the Bishop and the Vicar of Berry Pomeroy had entered into a conspiracy to get rid of him. Shore himself later said that he "*had not adopted baptismal regeneration and other dogmas which the Bishop had introduced.*"

Eventually, Shore was pushed to the point where he told the Bishop that if he would not license him to Bridgetown, and since he had a family to support, he might be forced with the greatest reluctance, and much as he was attached to the Church of England, to continue ministering at Bridgetown with the Duke's support, but without the Bishop's licence.

The Chapel closed for six months, but, after receiving a petition from 500 of its members, the Duke took the extreme step of registering the chapel as a dissenting meeting house, and, a week later, Shore wrote to the Bishop to tell him that he intended to stay with his congregation. Upon hearing this, the Bishop took legal action against Shore under Canon 76:

No man being admitted a Deacon or Minister shall from thenceforth voluntarily relinquish the same, nor afterward use himself in the course of his life as a Layman, upon pain of

excommunication.

Shore did everything he could to register himself as a Dissenting Minister, and even wrote to the Bishop's Secretary, asking what more he needed to do in order to secede from the Church of England. The case, however, still dragged through the ecclesiastical courts for years, and went all the way up to the Privy Council. Shore was found guilty of acting as a clergyman of the Church of England without a licence even though he protested that he had left.

During this time Shore went on a speaking tour of the country with the aim of gathering the public support which might keep him out of prison. It is Shore's predicament, and this tour which are generally reckoned to be the origins of the Free Church of England, a body which adheres to Anglican doctrine but rejects Anglican discipline.

This anomaly led to the introduction of a Clergy Relief Bill in Parliament in February 1849, providing legal protection for seceding clergymen, but even so, the Bishop sued Shore for his legal expenses, and Shore, who did not have the means to pay, ended up in Exeter Gaol for ten weeks – ostensibly for failing to pay, but really for preaching the Gospel.

On his release, Shore returned to Bridgetown, where he remained until 1862, after which he moved to Matlock, Derbyshire where he worked with John Smedley at his famous hydro. He then moved up the road to Buxton, where he ran a Hydropathic Hotel and preached as a minister of the Free Church of England. He died in 1874, after falling off a horse in Derbyshire, and had a big funeral in Bridgetown. As for the chapel – it rejoined the Church of England in 1869, the year in which Phillipotts died, and was finally consecrated in 1888.

There is no likelihood nowadays that there could be the tangle which existed in 1840 about the rights of patrons to sell patronage, nor is there any doubt that clergy have a right to leave the Church of England without being pursued through the courts, but the Shore case does warn us of the dangers of giving too much unfettered power to bishops. Without the proper checks and balances, they could in theory, use it to remove clergy who will not tow "the party line." Phillipotts consistently did this to Evangelicals. Is it totally impossible that the same could happen again?

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