

THE SEVENTH EARL OF SHAFTESBURY.

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IT is fashionable to-day to refer, rarely with any specific detail, to the great blessings brought to the Church by the Oxford Movement ; but there is a strange absence of any real appreciation, possibly of any adequate knowledge of, and certainly of any such frequent reference to the achievements of the Evangelical Revival, both in Church and State.

We are familiar with the statement that the Evangelicals produced no leaders of any intellectual ability, that they were unpractical visionaries, hide-bound dogmatists and narrow-minded Puritans. It may be true that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called, but history will record that these foolish ones were chosen to confound the mighty and to bring to nought the things that are.

Sir Josiah Stamp, in a Foreword to a life of Shaftesbury,¹ says :

“ Other countries made the transition from the old to the modern conceptions of industrial society by violent stages that necessitated force and bloody revolution, but Wesley and Shaftesbury together so transformed the social and ethical ideas of England as to achieve the same result by evolution of opinion and sympathy.”

A movement which saved England from the horrors of the French Revolution and is perhaps responsible for the fact that the British Empire is one of the few stable monarchies in the world to-day is hardly a movement to be treated with scornful contempt. Evangelicals, when tempted to despair, should remind themselves of their glorious heritage ; and the Church generally must not be allowed to forget the practical and unsurpassed results of the movement.

One who has given many years to exhaustive research in this field says he “ was driven to the conclusion that the Evangelical Movement, started by Wesley in the eighteenth century, rises supremely above any other religious movement affecting the social developments of the English-speaking world.” Indeed he believes “ the influence of this movement, in sowing the seeds of social righteousness and propagating the spirit of reform, stands without a peer in the annals of social emancipation, and that, as yet, it has never been duly recognised by History,” and again—

“ the religious zealots who organised the temperance movement in England, who started the Sunday School and inaugurated the Sunday evening service, who opened Britain’s first free medical dispensary and originated societies for

¹ *Lord Shaftesbury*, by Dr. J. Wesley Bready, to whom I am much indebted for valuable assistance in this article. The Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. R. B. Bennett, has recently confessed that the inspiration for his “ New Deal ” came through the reading of this book.

self-help among the working populace, who humanised both prison system and penal code, who emancipated the slaves and laid the foundations of popular education, who encouraged the growth of middle-class influence and originated the Protestant world-missionary crusade, who taught the labouring world to become vocal and provided many Trade Union leaders—these zealots, surely, were rather active in the affairs of this world for a people obsessed with 'other-worldliness.' "

The accepted adjuncts of the parochial system to-day were established as a direct outcome of the pioneer work of Evangelicals in spite of opposition. Pastoral visitation, the employment of lay workers, open-air meetings, early administrations of Holy Communion, and the missionary enthusiasm of the Church, and much of the Diocesan machinery for assisting poor parishes follows the example of early Evangelical effort. Truly we have a goodly heritage! and through a long list of Evangelical Reformers, from John Wycliffe to John Wesley, and the noble company of the Evangelical Revival, none displays more faithfully the saintly character, spiritual devotion, inflexibility of principle and practical idealism of the movement than the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury.

Anthony Ashley Cooper was born in 1801 into a home in which parental tenderness and love were unknown. His father was harsh and dictatorial and his mother too fond of the pleasures of the aristocratic society in which she moved to give the boy a mother's care and devotion. Perhaps it was to the loveless childhood of this sensitive lad that we owe his deep sympathy and love for his even less fortunate fellows in humbler walks of life. A godly and motherly nurse compensated to some extent for the lack of parental affection, and she early bred in him the seeds which eventually produced such a noble Christian character. Her death, when he was eight years of age, cast a dark shadow over his young life.

At seven years of age he was sent to a school at Chiswick where his misery was complete. Looking back even in old age he said :

" The memory of that place makes me shudder ; it is repulsive to me even now. I think I never saw such a wicked school before or since. The place was bad, wicked, filthy ; and the treatment was starvation and cruelty. Nothing could have surpassed it for filth, bullying, neglect and hard treatment of every sort : nor had it in any respect any one compensating advantage except perhaps it may have given me an early horror of oppression and cruelty."

Even in those early days his love for spiritual things was sufficiently developed to make him the object of savage amusement and persecution by the older boys.

Holidays, however, brought little relief from his unhappiness, for, in spite of his aristocratic home, he tells us that he was " left for days without sufficient food until he was pinched with starvation ; and he can recall many weary nights in winter when he lay awake all through the long hours suffering from cold."

The first real happiness came to him when he went at thirteen to Harrow, where he responded to the kindly influence of the school but gave no evidence of brilliant intellectual ability. Here, however, there occurred an incident, the memory of which was engraved upon his soul and gave the direction to the whole of his life's energies

and aspirations. He witnessed a pauper's funeral, and was stricken with horror as he saw the drunken bearers shouting a ribald song and so intoxicated that they were unable to support the coffin, which fell to earth with a crash in the midst of a struggling group of humanity. There and then he resolved that his life should be spent for the uplifting of the poor and down-trodden.

In 1819 he went to Christ Church, Oxford, where he obtained a First in Classics, and then after a period of continental travel he was elected M.P. for Woodstock in 1826.

Shaftesbury was not cast in the mould that makes men self-assertive. He was indeed conscious of his own supreme weakness, and only an over-mastering sense of devotion to his Lord for the welfare of the masses forced him, against his will, to lead that great campaign against slavery in every form which has made him famous as a Christian philanthropist. In 1827 he wrote in his diary: "Would to Heaven I could quit public life and sink down into an ambition proportionate to my capacity." Later he writes: "Entertained yesterday strong opinion that I ought not to give up public business or rather the endeavour to qualify myself for it. The State may want me, wretched ass that I am."

It was two years before he made his first speech in Parliament, but it was perhaps prophetic that this speech was an appeal on behalf of more humane treatment of lunatics.

In 1830 he married Lady Cowper, of whom he afterwards said: "A wife, as good, as true, and as deeply beloved, as God, in His undeserved mercy, ever gave to man."

In 1851 his father died and he succeeded to the Earldom as Lord Shaftesbury.

The condition of the poor, the homeless, the mentally deficient and of many thousands of workers was appalling. The system under which they laboured can merit no better description than "white slavery." Shaftesbury determined to give his life to the task of letting the oppressed go free, but the great motive power of his labour was a religious one and his spiritual inspiration was to succeed where political theory had failed. Shaftesbury declared himself to be "an Evangelical of the Evangelicals," and it was this plain, vital, practical religion that dominated his life. He believed in salvation by faith but by a faith which showed itself in works. He was deeply spiritually minded and had a solemn sense of stewardship. Proud to be known as a Protestant he was a rigid Sabbatarian and never tired of reminding the workers that this heritage was their great charter of liberty. The Bible he deeply loved and revered and was so well versed in it that his speeches contained countless Scriptural allusions and quotations. He lived in constant expectation of, and supplication for, the Second Coming of Christ. Though a staunch Churchman his hope of salvation rested not upon Sacraments or Sacerdotalism but upon faith in the redeeming Blood of Christ and a renewed heart and life. He loved to visit the poor and never failed to point them to spiritual sources of comfort and help.

The success of his efforts on their behalf was in no small measure due to his intimate knowledge gained by assiduous personal visitation and investigation.

His attitude to the Oxford Movement is summed up by Dr. Wesley Bready as follows :

“ On, with Christ, for the establishment of God’s Kingdom, in righteousness, on earth ; not back with the hierarchy, through a glorified Medievalism, to the Golden Age of the Fathers. He insisted on a forward, not backward look, and although he never minimised the value of creeds, forms, symbols and ceremonies, if vehicles of living truth, he ever emphasised the conviction that the primary purpose of Christian institutions is to lead men into communion with the Divine Power, enabling them ‘ to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with their God.’ ”

The characteristic of Shaftesbury’s amazing reforms is the strong religious motive power which was the mainspring of his action. He demonstrated to his own and every subsequent age that in regard to social reform the empty philosophy and secularism of his day were no match for the dynamic of the Gospel. It was a triumphant vindication of spiritual motives over political theories ; and of religious work among the people he says : “ All hopes are groundless, all legislation weak, all Conservatism nonsense without this alpha and omega of policy.”

Shaftesbury’s visitations of the people had opened his eyes to the unspeakable horror of their slum conditions—“ dens of despair ” he called them, and prayed for another “ vast fire of London ” to sweep them away. He had himself discovered as many as five families living in a single room. In one of the common lodging-houses of those days, 100 people, men, women and children, were crowded into a room 30 ft. × 20 ft., huddled together and sleeping on vermin-ridden straw or rags. A case was reported of thirty-one people sleeping in three beds.

Unfortunately Shaftesbury found himself face to face with a practical problem on his own estate which, when he inherited it from his father, caused him to write :

“ Surely I am the most perplexed of men. I have passed my life in rating others for allowing rotten houses and immoral, unhealthy dwellings ; and now I am come into an estate rife with abominations ! Why, there are things here to make one’s flesh creep ; and I have not a farthing to set them right. I am half-pauperised ; the debts are endless ; no money is payable for a whole year and I am not a young man. Every sixpence I spend is borrowed.”

His honesty and sincerity are manifest in the heroic spirit with which he faced the situation. At great self-sacrifice and expense he set about making his own estate a model community. He erected workmen’s cottages, planted orchards and gardens, built schools, organised clubs, renovated the Parish Church, saw to the early closing of the public-house and appointed a paid Scripture Reader to visit the people in their homes. This was only accomplished by the sale of valuable treasures which his artistic soul dearly loved and could ill afford to lose.

When at last the Lodging House Act was passed in 1851 Dickens,

who was a close friend of Shaftesbury, described it as "the best piece of legislation that ever proceeded from the English Parliament."

Shaftesbury's first great effort in social reform was, as we have seen, directed to the treatment of lunatics. Considerable reforms had already been accomplished, yet a great deal remained to be done. A Commissioners' Report of the time describes a licensed asylum near Gateshead thus :

"Chains attached to the floor in several places and it was the practice to chain patients by the leg upon their first admission, in order, as it was said, to see what they would do ; bedding filthy, cell offensive, also sleeping room ; improved by visitation but still unfit. In one of the cells in the upper court for the women, the dimensions of which were 8 ft. \times 4 ft. and in which there was no table and only two wooden seats fastened to the wall, we found three females confined ; there was no glazing to the windows and the floor was filthy. The two dark cells which adjoin the cell used for a day room are the sleeping places of these three unfortunate beings. It must be added that these two cells, and one other adjoining it, have no window and no place for light or air, except a grate over the door, which opens into a passage."

In 1845 Shaftesbury carried two Bills, one to regulate asylums, and the other to provide better treatment for the inmates.

His second great effort aimed at the improvement of the conditions in factories and mills, and especially in the lot of children. It seems incredible, in a country noted for humanitarian feeling, that such a state of affairs as then existed could be tolerated. The truth is that the public were ignorant of the conditions, and vested interests were powerful. Shaftesbury's revelations shocked the conscience of the Commons, but there was strenuous opposition to the Ten Hours Bill, and it was passed only after a great struggle. Even then its provisions were evaded by a legal quibble, which made it necessary to fight the case all over again.

Shaftesbury's knowledge of the unhappy state of the slaves in factories was due to personal investigation. Men, women and children were broken and maimed and prematurely aged by the crippling conditions of labour. Workhouse orphans between seven and thirteen years of age were supplied as cheap hands for the mills and were worked from thirteen to sixteen hours per day.

A Spanish gentleman visiting England observed the unnatural dexterity of the infant fingers which laboured to accumulate the nation's wealth, but he preferred the stagnation of Spain to the white slavery of England.

The result of these conditions upon men and women was dreadful. Few workers avoided the scrap-heap after forty years of age.

Shaftesbury had resigned his seat shortly before the Ten Hours Bill was passed, but when the news reached him he wrote in his diary :

"Six o'clock—news that the Factory Bill has just passed the third reading. I am humbled that my heart is not bursting with thankfulness to Almighty God, that I can find breath to express my joy. What reward shall we give unto the Lord for all the benefits He hath conferred upon us ? God in His mercy prosper the work and grant that these operatives may receive the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord. Praised be the Lord in Christ Jesus."

Perhaps the most sensational of his exposures was concerned with the frightful conditions of the workers in coal mines, where women and children were employed eighteen hours per day, the children drawing trucks along narrow passages eighteen inches in height, on all fours like animals. Shaftesbury asked for a Royal Commission to enquire into these horrors and this Report was issued in 1842. So shocking and disgusting were the facts revealed that the Home Secretary attempted to suppress the Report, but through a providential mistake it had already come into the hands of Members of Parliament. The boys and girls performed their tasks in sloppy roadways no better than common sewers, where an ordinary-sized dog could not have followed except in a crouching position. Children, sometimes quite naked, were hitched by means of a leathern girdle and a chain between the legs to trucks bearing loads of from one to two and a half hundredweights of coal which they drew through passages, in some cases only eighteen inches high, and not infrequently twelve inches deep in mud and water. A beautiful girl of six was found to be drawing a truck a distance equal to the height of St. Paul's Cathedral, and this journey was made sixteen to twenty times a day with one to one and a half hundredweight of coal. Ill treatment was added to these unhappy circumstances and the children were treated with a brutality which was only equalled by their slavish conditions.

Of the effect of such conditions upon women and the results upon home life and morals it is unnecessary to speak. The publication of the Report caused a wave of popular indignation, but so callous had the employers become that considerable opposition was offered to Shaftesbury's efforts for reform. He introduced, in a speech lasting two hours, a Bill to prevent the employment underground of women, and of boys under the age of thirteen. His diary records :

" Oh that I had the tongue of an angel to express what I ought to feel. God grant that I may never forget it though I cannot record it. On the 7th brought forward my motion. The success has been wonderful, yes, really wonderful. For two hours the House listened so attentively that you might have heard a pin drop, broken only by loud and repeated marks of approbation. As I stood at the table, and just before I opened my mouth, the words of God came forcibly to my mind—' Only be strong and of a good courage.' Praised be His Holy Name, I was as easy from that moment as though I had been sitting in an arm-chair. Many men, I hear, shed tears. Sir G. Grey told William Cowper that he ' would rather have made that speech than any he had ever heard.' Grant, O blessed God, that I may not be exalted above measure but that I may ever creep close to the ground, knowing and joyfully confessing that I am Thy servant, that without Thee I am nothing worth."

His speech closed with an exhortation " to break off our sins by righteousness and our iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." The House as a whole was sympathetic, but there was some opposition and the hope of the opponents of the Bill lay in the House of Lords, where the struggle was to be much more difficult.

It is sad to relate that Shaftesbury received no support from the Bishops. He says :

" Never have I seen such a display of selfishness, frigidity to every human

sentiment, such ready and happy self-delusion. Three Bishops only present—Chichester, Norwich, Gloucester, who came late but intended well. The Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury went away! It is my lot, should I, by God's grace, live so long, to be hereafter among them; but may He avert the day on which my means of utility in public life should be for ever concluded!"

The Bill passed into law on August 10, 1842.

The scope of his efforts in other industrial spheres, though not so spectacular, is none the less valuable and remarkable for the improvement brought to the lot of the workers. In the calico-printing trade, children of eight years of age were working fourteen or sixteen hours a day in temperatures ranging from 80° to 115°. In 1845 his Print Works Bill modified these conditions and prevented the employment of any child under the age of eight. Not a great achievement, but indicative of the need for reform.

To the agricultural workers similar help was given. Gangs of children, from six years old and upward, marched for miles to the seat of their labours to work from early morning till late at night. A girl of six walked eight miles to Peterborough and worked from 8 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., for which she received 4*d.* Shaftesbury's Bill was not passed, but the Government introduced a substitute, which, while it fell short of Shaftesbury's ideal, was at least a move in the right direction. In 1872 he carried a Bill to modify similar abuses in the brickyards.

The story of the "climbing boys" is a familiar one. Tiny children, their bodies soaked in brine and dried before a fire, were forced to climb narrow flues in order to clean the chimneys. If, choked with soot and stupefied by fumes, they hesitated in their task they were hastened by prods with wire upon the bare soles of their feet, or by the lighting of a fire in the grate below. Many children died in the performance of these tasks. Of Shaftesbury's final Bill passed as recently as 1875 it has been said that "had he done nothing else in the course of his long life he would have lived in history by this record alone."

Time does not permit here of any account of his work for the depressed classes in India, of his labours for the suppression of the opium traffic or of his efforts to deal with the evils of the drink traffic.

His work for the education of the poor is a wonderful story in itself. In 1833 he discovered that over 1,000,000 children of school age were receiving no education whatever. Grown men, known only by their nicknames, did not know their own names. In some districts not one boy in ten could read. Shaftesbury realised the serious moral result of this ignorance. His Bill included, of course, religious instruction, and this proved to be a stumbling-block to its progress owing to the opposition of the secularists on the one hand, and to the lamentable division between Church and Dissent on the other.

Meanwhile, an attempt had been made to deal with this problem by the workers of the London City Mission, who opened the first Ragged Schools. Later, a Central Committee was formed with the title of the Ragged School Union, with Lord Shaftesbury as its

President, a position which he occupied for thirty-nine years. Dickens was a great admirer of the Ragged Schools and wrote warmly in their praise. More than 300,000 children were helped by this Union, and its schools provided all the advantage of the craft and recreation clubs of modern times, with the addition of sound Gospel teaching.

An amusing story is told by Shaftesbury which illustrates both the difficulties and the victories accomplished by these schools. One night his friend, Judge Payne, went to visit a newly started school. On arrival he found the lights extinguished and all the windows broken; the headmaster was lying on his back with six boys sitting on him singing "Pop goes the weasel." Commenting on this incident Shaftesbury said: "Depend upon it, the very boys that sang 'Pop goes the weasel' on the prostrate master will be among the best boys and monitors in the school."

Time forbids an exhaustive account of all the spheres in which his influence was paramount. He had an amazing capacity for practical interest in numerous good causes. This sketch, however, would not be complete without reference to his honourable connection with such well-known Evangelical Societies as the C.P.A.S., C.M.S., Bible Society, etc.

I may perhaps be pardoned for referring particularly to his long connection with the C.P.A.S. The Society was formed to bring the Gospel to those multitudes of whom we have been speaking, through the medium of the parochial system by pastoral visitation. Shaftesbury presided over the meeting at which the Society was formed, and for nearly fifty years hardly ever absented himself from the Chair at its Annual Meetings. "I never was called," he said, "by God's mercy to so happy and blessed a work as to labour on behalf of this Society." "His speeches at the Annual Meetings give the religious history of nearly half a century," says his biographer.

They also provide instructive, and sometimes amusing, insight into his evangelical outlook. On one occasion he wrote: "I propose to speak openly at the C.P.A.S. and then retire from the Presidency saying that with such opinions I ought not to occupy a post which ought to be filled by a person in harmony with those he represents." In his speech he dealt with the need of Church reform. On the subject of patronage he recognised that the system was faulty, but he said: "Two changes to which I should strongly object are, firstly that applications to livings should be made a matter of popular election; and secondly—tell it not in Gath!—that they should be given to the Bishops." He said further: "I will not go on preaching any more about ecclesiastical reform because it would be utterly useless, because I know their Lordships the Bishops will *never* begin." Shaftesbury immediately offered his resignation, which, needless to say, was not accepted.

On the subject of Evening Communion he said: "The rectors and vicars of large parishes tell me that for one poor man or woman who has attended Morning Communion fourteen or fifteen have attended Evening Communion."

Shaftesbury possessed a marvellous ability for sympathetic identification with every good cause for the uplift of the people. The name of Wilberforce will always be connected with the liberation of slaves, Elizabeth Fry with the reform of prisons, Raikes with the beginnings of Sunday Schools, but the name of Shaftesbury is closely linked with almost every effort for social reform.

Though always a poor man he never received a penny for all his labours for the benefit of the poor. On one occasion he was chairman of a Commission, six members of which were each receiving £1,600 per annum, yet his work was entirely honorary.

He was a tall, attractive man, a good speaker, having rank, distinction and great abilities which placed within his reach the highest political offices, but his unselfish ambition compelled him to consecrate all his energies upon social reform. He had at first refused the Garter and had declined to accept Cabinet rank, and on his death-bed disapproved the suggestion that he should be buried in Westminster Abbey.

He was a man both loved and hated. Some of his contemporaries called him saint, hypocrite, fanatic, sentimentalist, monomaniac and even madman. In his own circle he was a lonely man, but he earned the love and devotion of millions of poor people in a measure, probably unsurpassed before or since. Four thousand cotton operatives of Lancashire presented his wife with a bust of her husband, and the costers of London subscribed among themselves to present him with a donkey, a symbol of their affection and indebtedness.

A gold watch, bequeathed to him by the faithful servant who had acted the part of mother in his infancy, was one day stolen from his pocket. He advertised his loss, and a sack, containing the watch and the urchin who had stolen it, was deposited on his doorstep by representatives of a settlement of thieves.

On another occasion he was invited by a gang of thieves to visit and confer with them. He read to them from the Scriptures, offered prayer and then gave them a heart-to-heart talk. The result of his visit was an effort which enabled many of them to start a new life in the Colonies, where most of them made good.

The good Earl died in 1885, full of honour but not of riches, and the funeral service was held in Westminster Abbey. Probably never has the Abbey witnessed such scenes. The great ones of the land were there, but more conspicuous were those unaccustomed to such dignified surroundings, who had come to pay their sorrowful tribute to one they had learned to love. Factory workers, costers, chimney-sweeps, women who had once toiled in coal mines, flower girls, labourers, thieves and outcasts all came to honour his memory. Thousands of people thronged the streets and few eyes were dry. Shaftesbury's biographer wrote: "For no other man in England or the world could such an assembly have been drawn together."

A great statesman, Disraeli, said of him: "The name of Lord Shaftesbury will descend to posterity as the one who has, in his

generation, worked more than any other individual to elevate the condition, and to raise the character, of his countrymen."

A great preacher, Spurgeon, said : " A man so firm in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so intensely active in the cause of God and man, I have never known."

The Roman Catholic, Cardinal Manning, wrote : " What a retrospect of work done ! It makes me feel that my life has been wasted."

The historians of the Industrial Revolution, Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, said : " He did more than any single man, or any single Government in English history, to check the raw power of the new industrial system."

I cannot find words more fit to close this brief sketch than those of Dr. Wesley Bready :

" Shaftesbury was a child of the Evangelical Revival. A consuming faith directed his life. He could not trace his ' conversion ' to baptism, confirmation, or any sacramental rite : but he knew he was a re-born man and also he knew that the old housekeeper, of boyhood days, was the priestess who led him to the Light. He had little veneration for sacerdotal assumptions and was a ' layman ' to the core ; yet no nobler prophet of God is included in the Calendar of Saints."

A new edition of Dr. G. Campbell Morgan's challenging little book, *The True Estimate of Life* (Oliphants, 2s. 6d.), comes appropriately at the beginning of Lent. Those who are seriously attempting to examine their lives in the light of the Life of their Master cannot afford to miss it. The author does not mince words or attempt to make excuses for our failings. He shows us, as in a mirror, exactly what we are. His power of presenting spiritual truths in a forceful and vivid way is too well known to need any fresh comment here. The chapters on " The Divine Government of Human Lives " and " Pitching towards Sodom " are of particular value. Though it may seem churlish as well as rash to challenge the conclusions of so famous a commentator as Dr. Morgan, we cannot in one or two instances accept his exegesis. In particular, we are surprised in Chapter Two to find " holiness " explained as spiritual " health." While in Anglo-Saxon " holy " may have this meaning, surely in the Scriptures it signifies rather " aloof " or " morally pure." The word that has the meaning of " health " in the Scriptures is " Salvation." However, this is but a small blemish, and we can cordially recommend this book to our readers for Lenten reading.