

A Durham Evangelical Scholar

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THE history of the great movements of thought and piety within the Church of England is best studied in the lives of its leaders. The life of Canon D. Dawson Walker strikingly illustrates much of the strength of the Evangelicalism of his day and also indicates what we should regard after the lapse of years as its limitations. It is just twenty years since Dawson Walker died (January 20th, 1934), an interval sufficient to provide us with a proper perspective in which to view the course of his career and to enable us to evaluate rightly his very real contributions to the Church in the early decades of the century, especially in Durham and the North.

Dawson Walker came of a West Riding family, probably in origin sturdy but not distinguished yeoman-farmers. At some period in the early progress of the Industrial Revolution members of this family were drawn into the vortex of the woollen manufacturing district around Bradford, and by the eighteen-sixties the Walkers were prosperous wool-merchants in Bradford itself. Dawson Walker (Dawson being originally his Christian name and Walker alone his surname) was born in 1868, and was educated at Bradford Grammar School. It was a remarkable community in which he was brought up, with its own distinctive culture and way of life. His family, like many others among the business people of the city, were fervent Wesleyan Methodists, and he himself grew up within the vigorous Christian fellowship of the old Eastbrook Chapel. It was there that he received those fundamental religious convictions which remained with him for the rest of his life. "The Chapel" stood for an outward-moving religion concerned with taking the Gospel to a rapidly increasing city population, many of them untouched by the ministrations of the Church of England. However much he was later drawn to the life of scholarship he never lost his concern and zeal for the commendation of the Gospel to his contemporaries. The Grammar School, an old foundation much reconstituted and reorganized, was already one of the outstanding day schools of the North of England. It was noted for its fine classical tradition, and of the classics Dawson Walker proved himself a gifted scholar. Of other influences in Victorian Bradford two call for special mention, its music, and its library. The first found its centre in St. George's Hall, which was famous for its concerts, both orchestral and choral. The latter was that of the Library and Literary Society (which is still continued in its premises in Darley Street, the principal street of the town). Here was a first-rate subscription library, which served the needs of the reading public before the development of the public and municipal system. It was well stocked with books on serious subjects, especially theology and philosophy, and played a most important part in the cultural life of the community. The Walker family had close connections with it. In 1887 he went to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, with an Open Classical Scholarship. There he was placed in due course

in the First Class in Classical Moderations, and obtained a very good second in Greats.

It was during his time at Oxford that he decided to leave the Methodism of his upbringing and to enter the Church of England. It was a natural enough step to take. The Wesleyan tradition in Methodism had departed least from its Anglican origins, and there was not at that period any marked doctrinal divergence. It began to appear that he was cut out for an academic career, and the Oxford of the last century was almost completely Anglican in habit and system. If he was to play his full part in the academic community his thoughts would naturally turn to the Church of England. Moreover, at this period he began to think of the ordained ministry as his life-work, and he may rightly have decided that he was not cut out for the special labours of a Methodist circuit minister. There was more scope in the Church of England for one of scholarly attainments and disposition. (Even in the Church of England he was never to hold an exclusively pastoral charge.) We need not suppose, however, that the change was merely due to such considerations. He chose the Church of England because he believed it the better way. Yet unlike many who have made a similar change he had no reaction against his former evangelicalism, which he carried over with him into Anglicanism. He remained not only on terms of friendship with many old Methodist associates but retained a warm admiration for some of the teachers of his boyhood. Years after we still find him sending his greetings to anniversary meetings and special gatherings at Eastbrook. There has been more cross-fertilization of the Church of England and Methodism in the North of England than is commonly realized. In the industrial districts e.g. of the West Riding there have not been those same social distinctions which have often divided "Church" from "Chapel" elsewhere. The present problem of reunion is not how to bring together two quite separate communities but how to remove those obstinate difficulties which keep formally apart those who hold much of their treasure in common.

He was ordained in 1892 by the Bishop of Ripon to the curacy of Bradford Parish Church (now Bradford Cathedral). He was appointed at the same time to an assistant mastership at his old school, the Grammar School at Bradford, and so from the first combined his ministerial work with that of a teacher. He did not, however, remain long in Bradford, for in the following year he took an opportunity of coming to Durham, where he was appointed Classical Tutor in the University, thus beginning what was to prove a life-long connection. This tutorship he retained for five years until 1898. At that time perhaps a majority of the students at Durham reading classics were eventually destined for ordination, so that so early in his career he was concerned with the work of training men for the ministry, which was soon seen to be his real vocation in life. Moreover, the meticulous accuracy of knowledge and thought required of those who have to teach the classical languages strengthened the foundations of careful scholarship which was to be manifested in all his later theological studies. In 1898 he was able to change from the classical tutorship to the theological tutorship, and so had the direct opportunity of teaching

in that field where his primary interests lay. In theology he was soon to achieve distinction, for in 1901 he graduated B.D. at Oxford and four years later in 1905 took the D.D. degree.

He was rapidly making a place for himself in the life of the university, and had a very considerable influence among the younger teachers in the Durham of that time. In 1901 he was appointed Censor of St. Cuthbert's Society, many of the members of which were then ordination candidates who were prevented often by a lack of financial means from seeking membership in one of the colleges. To these men he became a trusted friend and counsellor and soon won their unstinted affection and respect. This was made clear when they organized a torchlight procession to welcome him back from Oxford on the occasion of his taking the D.D. degree.

In 1907 he felt it right to resign from the Censorship, for already his attention was being drawn to other work. Contemporary papers show that he was already looked upon as one of the leading men among the younger evangelicals of the day, and already his name was associated closely with those of Guy Warman¹ and Watts Ditchfield,² the three of them being recognized as a trio sharing the same general approach to the theological problems of the period. Dawson Walker was looked upon as the most scholarly of the three, and Watts Ditchfield as distinguished for his practical drive and organizing ability. Guy Warman occupied a middle position. It was therefore inevitable that Dawson Walker should from the first be closely associated with a project now advanced to found an evangelical college for ordinands at Durham. The bulk of the money-raising and organization was undertaken by Watts Ditchfield and Guy Warman, but clearly much depended upon the sane counsel and support of Dawson Walker who was already engaged in teaching work at Durham, knew the local conditions well, and helped to commend the idea within the university. It is interesting now to read some of the speeches and letters in which the cause of the new foundation was urged. The day of the non-graduate ordinand was declared over, or practically so, and therefore evangelicals had to be provided with the means whereby they could furnish themselves with the requisite degrees. The new foundation was brought into being in 1909 as St. John's College, and Dawson Walker became chaplain.

In 1910 he was elected to a professorship which has now disappeared, that of Biblical Exegesis, but continued to act as chaplain of St. John's. On the resignation of the first principal he succeeded him, and was principal of St. John's from 1912 to 1919. They were difficult but formative years. When he became principal the college had not been established long enough to have secure traditions or to have won a firm place in the public estimation. He did much to give the college its character and influence, despite the intervention of the War and the consequent disruption of all academic life. He brought to the college not only the knowledge of a scholar but also his great abilities as a teacher, and established that tradition of careful tuition which succeeding generations on the staff have sought to uphold.

¹ Later Bishop of Manchester.

² Later Bishop of Chelmsford.

Then in the early fifties and at the full height of his powers, in 1919 he gave up the principalship at St. John's in order to accept the Professorship of Divinity in the University, to which was attached a canonry in the Cathedral. He was thus enabled to continue his ministry in Durham, in a new form but still engaged upon the work of theological training and of preparing men for ordination, to which he had given himself, rejecting all prospect of other preferment in the Church. From that time his life might outwardly appear uneventful, for he continued in his professorship until his death in January, 1934. Yet during those fifteen years he quietly and methodically devoted his energies to study and teaching, winning the respect and gratitude of those who had the benefit of his instruction.

The strength of his character lay in the depth and sincerity of his evangelical convictions which in him were united with a careful and accurate scholarship. The evangelical party in the Church of England has often suffered from the charge that its leaders have lacked any wealth of real learning or scholarship, and the implication has been suggested that they have been leaders in the evangelical cause because of their lack of knowledge and appreciation of the deeper levels of philosophical and theological thinking. There is, of course, some ground for these charges in so far as for evangelicalism academic distinction can never be the primary qualification for the ministry or for spiritual leadership. The zeal for souls and the God-given ability to speak to man's need for redemption have always been honoured. Dawson Walker in all his time at Durham gave in his own life and teaching a notable demonstration that these things are not and need never be incompatible. Through years of quiet and steady work he gave to all those who came to study theology at Durham, both those of his own and of other traditions of churchmanship, an example of one who valued alike study and learning on the one hand and on the other the concern of the Church and its ministers for the outward reach of the Gospel.

His published work is not extensive, and is not generally known. He looked upon himself much more as a lecturer and teacher than as an author, and did not follow the too prevalent modern practice of turning lectures into books. What he thought about that can perhaps be judged from some remarks made by him and recorded by Dr. C. E. Whiting (*D.U. Journal*, March 1934). "Dawson Walker was a very pains-taking and conscientious teacher," writes Dr. Whiting, "and a very hard worker, especially in his own particular line, the exegesis of the New Testament. In these days books pour forth from the press, often the hasty and ill-digested results of too hurried research, and the scholar must keep himself in the public eye. Dr. Dawson Walker once said to me: 'You know, I think that we can have too much of that kind of thing. I feel that there is another side of one's work. If I could feel that I had inspired some of my pupils with a real love of learning, I shouldn't care so very much how many books they wrote, but I should feel that I had not lived quite in vain'".

Nevertheless the published work which he left behind is of high quality, and though not extensive is sufficient to indicate his distinctive genius. Apart from articles and pamphlets his first publication was

the volume of essays, *The Gift of Tongues*, issued by Messrs. T. & T. Clark in 1906. This preserves in permanent form the work in virtue of which he had earlier been awarded his D.D. degree. It contains four essays in New Testament scholarship. The first, after which the whole volume is named, is a careful examination of the phenomenon of glossolalia at Pentecost, in which he argues that the disciples probably did have an actual gift of foreign tongues. Possibly this essay is the least likely of all his published writings to commend itself to modern readers. The next two essays are concerned with the criticism of Galatians. In the one he examines the legal terminology of the epistle in the light of Ramsay's theory that the words and phrases and their use reflect distinctively Greek modes of expression and of the contrary theory of Halmel that they indicate the usage of Roman law. The whole is related to the controversy concerning the North and South Galatian theories, and he reaches the negative conclusion that the legal terminology cannot be invoked as evidence for either theory. The title of the other is "St. Paul's Visits to Jerusalem, as Recorded in the Acts and in the Epistle to the Galatians", which sufficiently indicates its scope. It provides a masterly summary of the evidence in this complicated question and an estimate of the various scholarly opinions advanced to that date. The conclusion to which he himself is drawn is that "The first visit of Galatians is to be identified with the first visit of Acts; that Galatians omits any reference to the second visit of Acts; that the second visit of Galatians is to be identified with the third of Acts". The essay can still be read with profit and deserves to be better known. The final essay in the volume is called "The Date of St. Luke and Acts". It is really refreshing at the present time to read an essay on such a subject which is not dominated by the great authority of Streeter, for since the publication of *The Four Gospels* very few have ventured to take an altogether independent line. Dawson Walker's conclusions are quite at variance with modern orthodoxy, but are convincingly supported by argument. He urges dates for Acts and Luke earlier than is now commonly allowed, suggesting that the Gospel of Luke was probably composed during St. Paul's imprisonment at Cæsarea between the years 58 and 60 A.D., and that the Acts of the Apostles was composed by St. Luke at Rome not later than the year 63 A.D. Accordingly he does not hesitate to place the composition of St. Mark's Gospel before 59 A.D.

At this period much of his interest and energy went into the supervision and production of *The Churchman*, of which magazine he was joint-editor with Guy Warman, maintaining a high standard of editorial work and attracting to that periodical many contributions of considerable significance. The partnership in this work between Dawson Walker and Guy Warman was continued right up to 1914, when both resigned together.

During his tenure of the principalship of St. John's he added to his reputation by the series of scholarly articles which he contributed to the newly published *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, edited by Hastings. They were mostly word-studies of expressions found in Acts or Paul, e.g. "Respect of Persons". This work led directly to his best writing, the biblical commentaries which came from his pen

while he was Professor of Divinity. These consist of two volumes, the first containing commentaries on Colossians and Titus, the second commentaries on II Peter, II and III John and Jude. Unfortunately neither volume is dated, but the introduction to Titus in the first refers to P. N. Harrison's *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles*, which was itself published in 1922, and therefore they probably appeared somewhere in the middle 1920s. The commentaries are typical of the author's deep concern both for accurate scholarship and for the clear exposition of the Biblical message. Like many other notable commentaries, e.g. George Adam Smith on Isaiah, they formed part of a series of which most of the other volumes are not now remembered. This particular series was the Devotional Commentary published by the then R.T.S., now the Lutterworth Press. Dawson Walker's aim in these commentaries was to make the epistles which were entrusted to him intelligible to the intelligent reader willing to give thought and care to the understanding of the text but not possessing any knowledge of Greek. In this he succeeds admirably, so that they may be read with profit to-day by layman and scholar alike. Each epistle has its own short introduction, which displays a masterly handling in short compass of the critical questions associated with them. In the body of the commentary he follows the method later made much more familiar to the English public as a result of its use by Archbishop William Temple in his *Readings in St. John's Gospel*. A short paragraph or section of the text is printed, and this is followed by a running exposition and explanation in which words and phrases from the text are picked out in a distinctive type.

His opinions on some of the debatable points of New Testament scholarship touched upon in these commentaries are worth recording. The question of the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles he held to be one of the most intricate and delicate in the whole field of New Testament criticism. He himself argues that the generally admitted Pauline character of certain passages containing personal allusions and injunctions is such as to carry with them the remainder of the Epistles. "The mythical Paulinist," he writes, "who has taken certain Pauline personal fragments, and inserted them into the fabric of ecclesiastical writings, is a very improbable person, the creation of critical brains reduced to rather desperate shifts". Concerning II Peter he describes himself as "one who would gladly welcome a convincing demonstration of the Petrine authorship, but who cannot resist the conclusion that the preponderating weight of evidence is on the other side". He was more inclined to an acceptance of traditional authorship in his commentaries on II and III John, but having presented the arguments on both sides, adds the note, "I am keenly aware of the unsolved problems that still attend the question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel and of the three epistles assigned to St. John. Some regard John "the Elder" as the beloved disciple and as the author of these writings. I feel, however, that there is still so much to be said for the traditional view as to the authorship that I have retained it in the text (of the commentary)". Having discussed whether the Elect Lady to whom II John is addressed is an individual or a Church, he concludes that while it is necessary to maintain an attitude of cautious reserve,

" the balance of probability lies on the side of the view that the Epistle is written to a Church, and this mainly on the ground of its general contents ".

His last publication was the essay which he contributed to the volume *Atonement in History and Life*, under the editorship of Dr. L. W. Grensted in 1929. His subject was " The Pauline View of the Atonement ". In it he attempts a systematic exposition of the passages in the epistles which bear upon this doctrine. It is characteristic of him that here as elsewhere he combines fine scholarship with religious feeling. " It is simply impossible to follow the track of St. Paul's thinking," he writes, " without the clue of a sympathetic insight into his experience ". He is often at his best in paraphrase, e.g. the following based upon II Cor. v. 17. " Christ's love has a constraining power over us ; and it has this power because He died for us—that is, He died a death which was our death, a death which we should have had to die if He had not died. But what He did was no mere work of substitution, to be regarded as having fulfilled its purpose when the death had been died. It had a further object in view—and it was the necessary and inevitable preliminary for the obtaining of that object—that we should be drawn into such an intimate communion of love with Him, our Saviour, that His life should be our life ; that we, inspired and enabled by that divine power which in Him triumphed over sin and death, should share in the same triumph ". It is not inappropriate that his most mature work should be the exposition of that doctrine which has always played a central part in the thinking and living of evangelical Christians.

By many Dawson-Walker will also be remembered as a gifted preacher who exercised his gifts to the full both in the Cathedral at Durham and elsewhere in the diocese. His words were always profound but such that the ordinary man could understand, and he was heard gladly. In part to these gifts he owed the considerable affection in which he was also held in Durham outside the university and colleges. He never lost the fervour associated with his early background. H. Ward wrote in *The Pelican Record* (Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 1934) : " He carried with him into the Cathedral pulpit and elsewhere the Methodist tradition of straightforward and human exhortation and exposition ".

Such was the very great strength of the man both in his teaching and writing and preaching. If there was anything which we would after twenty years have had otherwise it is perhaps to be found in what may seem to us to be an almost too rigid conservatism in some matters ecclesiastical, rooted in a deep-seated fear of anything pertaining to Anglo-catholicism. This is perhaps best illustrated in the attitude which he adopted at the time of the controversy over Prayer Book Revision in 1927 and 1928, during which he wrote a pamphlet outlining his views. He urged that the 1662 service of Holy Communion should be retained unchanged and without the provision of any alternative. Few even among the most convinced evangelicals would now adopt such a policy, for we have seen by experience in South India and elsewhere that the 1662 service could be greatly enriched (e.g. by the addition of an Old Testament lection) without any fundamental change

of doctrine. However, at the time of the controversy Dawson Walker and those who thought like him opposed change because they believed that any alterations would involve concessions to the Anglo-catholic party, and rightly or wrongly they at that time suspected underlying Romanising motives behind the Anglo-catholic policy. One of the gains of the intervening years has been that we have learnt to distinguish a comparatively small Romanising minority within the Anglo-catholic movement, and are learning to co-operate with and indeed to appreciate the very real contributions to be made to the common store by the great majority of moderate men who remain loyal to the essential spirit of Anglicanism.

Let not, however, this apparent rigidity be taken to detract in any way from the vitality of his thought. In conclusion here is a passage taken from his commentaries which shows his real greatness marked alike by alertness of intellect and a zeal for the maintenance and extension of true belief and spiritual life within the Church. Commenting on II John 9-11 (Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God etc.) he writes :

“As we reflect on these words we find ourselves dealing with two complementary truths the precise correlation of which has often been a matter of trouble and conflict in the history of Christian thinking. There is, on the one hand, a sense in which we must go onward ; we must grow, advance, progress. On the other hand we must remain loyal to the ‘teaching of Christ’. Professor George Jackson has put the point well in a recent address. ‘We are,’ he says, “Modernists. . . .” We cannot help ourselves ; if we are to think at all we must think as modern men. Yes, but we are Christians too, and we are Christians first, and there must be no reservations here’. The trouble has been, as he points out later, that we have left it to one section of Christians to ‘advance’ and to another to ‘abide’, and so a perilous and distracting schism has been set up. There has been a tendency to regard the ‘scholars’ as being in one camp and the ‘saints’ in another. This is a disastrous and unnatural division. The late Dr. Denney used to say that the ideal would be reached when our scholars were our evangelists and our evangelists our scholars. This may be a counsel of perfection ; but it should always be before us as an ideal. To quote Dr. Jackson’s words again : ‘At all costs we must make an end for ever of the desolating antagonisms and suspicions of the past. To have the scholar and the evangelist at cross purposes is to sterilize the Church’s best endeavour. Evangelism which is afraid of scholarship has only a maimed Gospel, which will only commend itself to maimed men. Scholarship without an evangel is as futile as the wheeling of swallows round the church steeple’”.
