

## James Cooper

1846-1922.

THE early part of last year completed the century since Dr James Cooper was born in the city of Elgin, "the city of my heart"; when this year's course is over another quarter of a century will be gone since his earthly life ended, in Elgin again, on S. John's Day, 27th December, 1922. These anniversaries call for commemoration, in the pages of the *Annual*, of the half-century of his ministry in the Church of Scotland.

James Cooper was a man of many accomplishments, with interests in many fields, both within what is generally regarded as the province of the Christian ministry and beyond it. "He knew more than most people about so many things," says Dr H. J. Wotherspoon in the excellent biography<sup>(1)</sup> of which he was author; so that anything like a comprehensive account of his ministry would require many pages. Yet his life was one of rare unity, of continuity in purpose, of gradual realisation of aspirations cherished even in early days of youth. It may be possible, therefore, to trace, within the limitations of this article, the main lines of his work in the Church.

When those who knew Dr Cooper talk together of him the remark is sure to be made, "He was unique." This impression was partly due to the fact that his outlook was derived from a tradition other than that in which most of his contemporaries were bred. There were Jacobite strains in his ancestry, other connections which made him very tenderly disposed to the Scottish Episcopal Church; and his career marked the entry, or re-entry, into wider church life of the old churchly predilections of the North East ("Aberdeen," he would say, "was always a high-church city"), and especially of the position of the famous "Aberdeen Doctors." To their views on Worship and Order he would appeal; Bishop Patrick Forbes and Professor John Forbes stood high in his allegiance. Dr Cooper must in himself have been distinctive anywhere; but his course was marked out by the traditions that he followed.

<sup>(1)</sup> *James Cooper: A Memoir*, by H. J. Wotherspoon.

A sense of vocation to the Holy Ministry seems to have been his from very early days, and while he was yet a student in Divinity three aspirations were already formed: "to realise the ideal of ministry, and to recall to the Church that ideal, which seemed to him to have faded"<sup>(1)</sup>; to "aim at reviving the spirit of worship"<sup>(2)</sup>; and to labour for what he says he had learned at first in Elgin, "that entrancing vision whose fulfilment He has promised, One Flock, One Shepherd."<sup>(3)</sup>

These were original aims to occur to a young man not yet embarked on his course. Thoughtful and eager youths do, indeed, frame bright pictures of what they will strive after. The more remarkable fact is that this young man kept his vision unfading, and even succeeded in translating it into fact. Much more than most people he "wrought Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought."

After his appointment as Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Glasgow brought him into wider and more frequent contact with affairs and personalities in the Church, it may have taken some time for his contemporaries, accustomed to the robuster tone prevailing in the councils of our Israel, to realise that one whose whole bearing was so urbane and gracious was also in the highest degree determined and tenacious. Dr Cooper was a man of dedicated purpose, and quite amazingly beyond discouragement or the acceptance of defeat.

Settled convictions and consistent purpose did not, however, lead to rigidity in action. On the contrary they co-existed with great flexibility and even adventurousness in method. Dr Cooper was, in fact, a pioneer in quite a number of activities. He was the first of our ministers to observe Holy Week, the first to form a Guild for Women, the first to conduct a Retreat, very early in the field with a Mission Week, and his ardent interest in Industrial Schools shows him forward in recognising the social responsibilities of the Church. He was keenly sensitive to the occurrence of opportunities, and mourned if they passed away unimproved through silence or inaction. It is not surprising that so original a mind should have attracted attention beyond the borders of his own land, and that he should have been the first non-Anglican to receive the Doctorate of Divinity of the University of Oxford.<sup>(4)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> *Memoir*, p. 57.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>(3)</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>(4)</sup> The list of Dr Cooper's Honorary Degrees comprised D.D. (Aberdeen and Oxford); Hon. Litt.D. (Dublin); D.C.L. (Durham); LL.D. (Glasgow).

### IDEALS OF MINISTRY.

Of Dr Cooper's consistent aims the first, the full work of the Ministry, was pursued in the East Church of S. Nicholas, Aberdeen, whither he went in 1881. For creative impulse his seventeen years' ministry there finds its only parallel in the contemporaneous ministry of Dr John Macleod of Govan.

It was characteristic that the first act of his ministry, done actually between the week-day of Induction and the following Sunday, when he was "introduced," was to revive the old "weekly exercise" customary on Thursdays since the Reformation, but discontinued a few years before 1881. It was characteristic of his abhorrence of allowing good customs to lapse, and struck the keynote of a ministry in which opportunities for worship and knowledge of the Scriptures were multiplied, and devotional habits carefully provided for, particularly by the *Manuals* that were printed for young communicants.

Prominent in Dr Cooper's methods was the promotion of associations for work and fellowship. He followed the bent of his disposition in this; and may be thought to have been a leader in a way of working now customary everywhere in the Church. "The Guild of S. Margaret of Scotland" may be taken as an instance, the first Guild of Women in our Church. Its full and careful organisation included Rules, and a Manual containing a Daily Lectionary, Offices for Meetings and for the Christian Festivals, and Family Prayers for a Week—a simple and sufficient Order which was always used in Dr Cooper's own household. Besides the constant expansion and oversight of organisation he was the unremitting Pastor of a great and ever-growing congregation, and diligent in public responsibility, thus ever seeking to live out his ideal of the Ministry.

### THE REVIVAL OF WORSHIP.

Revival of the spirit of worship has been mentioned as the second of the aims of Dr Cooper's life. It was, in fact, a life-long absorption. In the Autobiography<sup>(1)</sup> begun in his late-won leisure—and only begun—he wrote of very early impressions: Elgin Cathedral was reared "for the glory of God, and for the amplification and more honourable and reverent fulfilment of His appointed worship; and the strongest admonition that its ruins

(1) Printed as Chapter 2 of the *Memoir*.

read to me to-day is my consciousness of how miserably our Reformed Church has failed in regard to worship, which, after all, is what our Saviour tells us that God desires of us: *The Father seeketh such to worship Him*. Whatever else may be the duty of a Scottish Minister, he must aim at reviving the spirit of worship; this also, I may say without boasting, I have laboured through my whole ministry to do.”<sup>(1)</sup>.

In his Address, as Moderator, to the General Assembly of 1917, after recalling how his predecessor of 1862, Dr Bisset of Bourtrie, had “approved of innovations and recommended more” because the baldness of our services then was sending devout people to the Episcopal Church, Dr Cooper declared: “I venture to repeat the sentiment for a higher reason—the greater glory of Almighty God; that we may make our worship more worthy of His Divine Majesty, and more expressive of those devout and tender feelings which as Christians we learn from the Son of Man, through Whom we are enabled and emboldened to present it.”<sup>(2)</sup>.

The accessories of worship, well arranged churches, beautiful ritual, seemly and expressive ceremonial were all precious to Dr Cooper. He published a pamphlet on the “Care and Furnishing of Churches,” which has been serviceable to ministers. “When a church is rightly arranged,” he wrote after a visit to one so cared for, “the whole service takes its proper place, and its meaning is made apparent to all. Men feel that they have come to worship God and hear His message.”<sup>(3)</sup>

Dr Cooper became a member of the *Church Service Society* in 1873, while in his first charge, S. Stephen’s, Broughty Ferry. In 1880 he was appointed to the Editorial Committee, of which he was made Convener in 1915. When he joined the Editorial Committee it was preparing a new edition, the fifth, of *Euchologion*; and it may be significant that in this the Nicene Creed was substituted for the Apostles’ in the service of Holy Communion. With the composition of the Society’s special services Dr Cooper had much to do. For the Society he produced an edition of the *Scottish Liturgy of 1637*—“Laud’s Prayer Book”—which is accepted as the definitive work on that subject.

Perhaps Dr Cooper’s work in this Society and his influence on the Church told especially in two directions. Commenting upon an occurrence in another department

<sup>(1)</sup> *Memoir*, p. 19.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Our Sacred Heritage*, p. 28.

<sup>(3)</sup> *Memoir*, p. 144.

of church affairs he wrote : " so here again we have a new gain in the way of elasticity." Unthinking stiffness always distressed him, because of the monotony it engendered, and the opportunities it lost. In the time when he began his ministry there prevailed no variety in Divine Service. The only special services were those on Fast Days, and these varied, as those who can remember them will agree, in no special particular from that of a Sunday forenoon. Dr Cooper set himself to break new ground, to get rid of this stiffness. He desired many more occasions of service, the anniversaries of the Christian Year, and emergent occurrences of national or local importance, in which it was always his wish that the Church should take its due share.

He was very strongly impressed with the necessity of making special services appropriate to their occasions. With what singular happiness he discharged the office of preaching at these times may be learned from a Memorial Volume published in 1924, with the title of *Kindness to the Dead*, which contains sermons delivered at Brechin, Dunfermline, Yarrow and elsewhere. If Dr Cooper had to do with them, the services, too, were fitted, with equal sensitiveness, to the time, place and interest. The secret of his success in these, where he was surely without rival, and in all his liturgical production, was his vivid, far-reaching and sympathetic imagination. He used to deplore the lack of imagination too often plainly evident in the ordering of worship. It seemed to him that more imaginative approach to the duties of the Sanctuary would go far to dispel monotony, and, its effect, lack of appeal. He valued ceremonial very much for this, that its movement and colour stimulated the worshipper's imagination.

Dr Cooper was dismissed in some judgments as a " medievalist." He had strong sympathy with the wealth of devotion amassed in medieval times, and he had a gift, exceedingly rare, for translating and adapting their prayers.<sup>(1)</sup> But the chief of his desires was for the restoration of the *primitive* custom of frequent celebration of the Eucharist. The view of Calvin, among the Reformers, that " each week at least the Table of the Lord ought to be spread for the company of Christians " had his whole-hearted assent. In his Address to the General Assembly of 1917 he did not conceal his opinion. " One of my

(1) See especially his felicitous rendering of Bishop de Bernham's Office for the Consecration of a Church : Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society Transactions, 1896.

distinguished predecessors (Professor William Milligan) said to me on his death-bed: 'The Reform in the Church of Scotland which we need above all others is the revival of the weekly Eucharist.' What is there to hinder us? No law of our Church forbids it. There is Scripture for it . . . One would think sometimes that we were ordained not to give our fellow-servants *their meat in due season*, but to withhold it from them.<sup>(1)</sup>"

Yet, on the same occasion, there was cautionary counsel against rash or ignorant innovations. "We must remember that our Church is not new. We must be careful not to dislodge in ignorance old customs that are more truly Catholic than those we seek to introduce. We must avoid innovations that will hardly go with our sober usages. Still less dare we venture to bring in practices that are unknown to the *Churches of God*."<sup>(2)</sup>

Nor could it be said that Dr Cooper's own manner or ways in conducting service bore a new-fangled air. On the contrary, phrases and formulas were often pleasantly old-fashioned, reminiscent of the generations past. Like Dr Story, he felt faithfully and tenderly towards things "beloved for the fathers' sakes."

In the reading of Holy Scripture in Divine Service Dr Cooper took delight, and caused it to those who heard. As he performed the duty it truly became "part of the publick worship of God, wherein we acknowledge our dependence upon God, and our subjection to him, and one mean sanctified by him for the edifying of his people."<sup>(3)</sup> He was not afraid of long passages, especially if historical; and he thought that ample space for reading in church was the more necessary now that private reading cannot be presumed. He had a gift for this employment; his confidence in what he read his intense reverence, his power of sympathy with character and situation, produced a naturally dramatic, although always restrained, presentation of Scripture narrative or teaching.

Closely allied with worship was the interest in Ecclesiology. He was the founder, and the life of the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society, whose influence, along with that of its younger sisters in Glasgow and Edinburgh, may be said to have wrought a revolution in the designing and arrangement of churches. Dr Cooper was learned in architecture, and loved beauty there as everywhere. But

<sup>(1)</sup> *Our Sacred Heritage*, p. 28.      <sup>(2)</sup> *Ibid* p. 27.

<sup>(3)</sup> *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*.

whatever affinities he showed to the taste of the eighteenth century, he had no share of its affection for "ruins." He protested that ancient churches must never "be treated simply as ancient monuments with no sort of regard to their religious uses."<sup>(1)</sup> He had lasting pleasure in the share he had taken in procuring the restoration of the precious old Norman Church of Birnie, when it was threatened with destruction. And a darling project of his later years was to see Iona's conventual buildings re-edified, so as to be the focus of a supply of ministers for the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and Islands, and for renewing the missionary zeal and glory of S. Columba and the Celtic Church.

### CHURCH ORDER.

The "entrancing vision of One Flock, One Shepherd," which dawned early on Dr Cooper's youth, commanded his devotion throughout all his life. He was, in consequence, unwearied and undaunted in advocacy of ecclesiastical reunion, both nationally and internationally. The Dublin degree of Hon. Litt.D. was conferred on him with the testimony that both by his writings and by his life he had promoted peace with all, and that no one more earnestly prayed that our Lord's words, *That they all may be one*, may soon be realised.

On this subject, as on others, he had his own standpoint. He gave consistent support to the movement, carried to attainment in 1929, for the obliteration of Presbyterian division in Scotland; and it is certain that his adhesion availed to disperse or assuage in some quarters hesitations that arose as the movement pursued its course. But he looked further. "Nothing," he said as early as 1886, "which looked ultimately for less than the complete and corporate reunion in truth and peace of the whole body of Christ's Visible Church ought to approve itself to any Christian."<sup>(2)</sup> The possibilities of closer relations between the Church of England and the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland offered themselves for a beginning in this direction, possibilities which he believed capable of being converted into reality without unfaithfulness to the principles of either side.

Within the bounds of Scotland he never lost an opportunity of urging approach to the native Episcopal Church. "A merely Presbyterian Church would not unite the Scottish people." Neither would it include all the parts of the

<sup>(1)</sup> *Memoir*, p. 267.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Memoir*, p. 146.

Reformed Church of Scotland. Those who adhered to Episcopacy at the Revolution Settlement did not separate themselves from the Church of Scotland; they were driven out, and largely for political reasons which had lost all force long ago. Few things were nearer Dr Cooper's heart than the longing to see that division healed.

It was not from any uncertainty about a Presbyterian Ministry that his views arose. Historical enquiry satisfied him entirely on the validity of Presbyterian Orders, and that the Presbyterate was the complete ministry of apostolic ordinance. As to questions between the Presbyterian and Episcopal systems he adhered to Dr Sprott's often quoted dictum that what is involved is, in a right judgment, no more than diversity in "the marshalling of Presbyters." There was, in Dr Cooper's view, no necessary incompatibility between the systems. He would point out that, while the Episcopate of 1610 subsisted, the Courts of the Church remained in operation; and that even in the unhappy years after 1660 they were not, with one exception, interrupted. His matured opinion was that Bishops would assist, not injure, our system. "Such an Episcopate as I desiderate would be, in my opinion, not the prejudice, but the crown and completion of our system, adding among other things both dignity and power to her Courts, giving what we so sorely need, a continuous executive, supplying a more elastic system of ministration to the people."<sup>(1)</sup>

He could not, of course, but recognise also, as every one must recognise, that without coming to terms with Episcopacy there is no hope of restoring the visible unity on earth of the Church of God. The vision of that restoration Dr Cooper never lost; upon it were set his unconquerable hope and faith in the will of the Lord.

For those who remember Dr Cooper no article, even such as this is intended to be, can be sufficient by telling merely of what he did and said. Let it close, therefore, with words from a tribute to his memory recorded by another Society, one to which he gave much of his time and devotion—*The Scottish Church Society.*<sup>(2)</sup>

"Wheresoever Dr Cooper went, there appeared to move along with him an atmosphere of serious piety, of goodness, of sociability, of friendliness, of intimacy. A disposition, happy and debonair, pervaded his expansive hospitality. His conversation was always delightful, and possessed

<sup>(1)</sup> *Memoir*, p. 29 (from the "Autobiography").

<sup>(2)</sup> *Kindness to the Dead*, Preface.



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qualities and flavours entirely its own. The embodiment of kindness and generosity towards all, he took exceptional pleasure in the company of younger men . . . He could not but have been that which he undoubtedly was, a man greatly beloved . . . His departure has bequeathed to us . . . unfading in the memory of our hearts, a portrait of himself, a treasured portrait worthy to take its place side by side with those of the great Divines and Doctors whom he venerated, who also have been, each one in his day and generation, a peculiar ornament of the Scottish Church."

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