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1919.

THE 605TH ORDINARY MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3RD, 1919,
AT 4.30 P.M.

PROFESSOR H. LANGHORNE ORCHARD, M.A., B.Sc.,
IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed.

Mr. A. W. OKE (in the absence of the Hon. Secretary, Mr. Sewell, on account of illness) announced the election of two Associates, Miss A. C. Knox and Mrs. Harry Barker.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BISHOP BUTLER. By the Rev.
HERBERT J. R. MARSTON, M.A., Rector of Lydford-on-
Fosse, Somerset, and sometime Fellow of the University
of Durham.

ENGLISH life during the first thirty years of the eighteenth century was in its moral and intellectual aspects dreary and sterile in the extreme. Faith had dwindled ; Morality was low ; Zeal was no more, except for a few fanaticisms in politics and churchmanship.

The nation, weary of strife, glad of security under a firm and tolerant government, addressed itself to the task of becoming opulent and comfortable. The Church, administered by a bench of bishops most of whom were mere placemen tinctured with the irreligion of the Whigs, and some of whom were frankly heterodox, dozed dully among the ruins of her creed and the neglect of her people, heedless of the past and of the responsibilities of the future.

Throughout this period the influence of Sir Robert Walpole was dominant in our public life. By the unscrupulous use of corruption he abolished Parliamentary opposition, and almost abolished Parliament itself. Profane and jovial in private life, and without any sense of political virtue, he nevertheless guided the destinies of the country with extraordinary skill and success ;

and at length relinquished power in 1745, leaving a tranquil and contented people to regret his reign and to reap the fruits of his long dissemination of the doctrines of political depravity.

In literature the influences of Swift and Pope were paramount, and in philosophy the doctrines of the Deists held the field. Happily the universal torpor which spread over the English mind was the torpor of a long winter, and not the chill of death. Brighter days were in store. Forces of renewal were latent. The surface of society was encrusted with the evil influences, but beneath were secretly at work those powers which at last, bursting through the superincumbent mass, once more clothed the life of England with the flowers and fruits of purity, enthusiasm, and sincere religion.

It is not the part of this paper to inquire in any length into the causes of this state of affairs. Yet a few suggestions are not out of place.

One cause was undoubtedly the reaction against the repulsive austerities of Puritanism. The Puritans, after rendering great services to the liberties and the religion of England, had pushed their less important and useful tenets to a violent and ludicrous extreme. *Hudibras* exhibits a caricature of these extravagances, but it lets us see how the austerity and insincerity of many Puritan professors impressed a man who, to great acuteness of observation and penetration of analysis, added qualities of a less reputable order.

For a time, and only for a time, the nation forgot what it owed to the virtue, consistency, and magnanimity of men like Hampden and Baxter, and remembered only the old and grotesque eccentricities of Fifth Monarchy zealots.

Behind this influence lay one more subtle and profoundly mischievous. The Jesuits, who had for more than a century striven to extinguish the Reformation by every instrument at their command, had at last succeeded to such an extent that they had produced throughout Europe a general distrust of the very principles of Christianity and morals. They had identified Christianity with a blind adherence to the dogmas of the Papacy, and had reduced morals to a compliance with a system in which all that was wanted was a consent to be guided by a Jesuit Confessor, who would sanction anything that his penitent asked on the easiest terms. Such a creed and such ethics were inevitably adapted to foster loose conduct and low faith.

To these influences must be added that of the rising spirit of liberty in thought and action, which, though certain in the long run to promote a healthy expansion of the human mind, did at first tend to weaken the hold of men upon doctrines and practices which were generally recommended on the score of antiquity and authority. It was into this England that Butler was born in the year 1692.

Butler was born at Wantage. His parents were of Nonconformist connexions and his first religious impressions were derived from Nonconformists. In course of time he revised his opinions, and having studied at Oxford, took Orders in the Established Church. His writings on philosophy and divinity attracted wide attention, and at last brought him under the notice and favour of Queen Caroline, a lady much addicted to speculation on such subjects.

Partly by her influence, and still more by the weight and power of his own publications, he was raised by steps of preferment till he became Bishop of Bristol, and later was translated to the Palatine See of Durham, where after a short tenure he died in the year 1752.

As an administrator of a diocese Butler was conscientious, diligent, and earnest, although his activities were slow and few, when compared with the miscellaneous and endless work of a modern Bishop. His most notable contribution to the life of the English Church was his celebrated primary charge to the Clergy of Durham, delivered in the year 1751. He took for the topic of that charge the decay of religion in England, and treated it with all his customary seriousness, power, and equity. The Bishop surveys the religious situation of the country and depicts it in gloomy colours. He acknowledges the spread of infidelity, and the prevalence of practical irreligion in all classes. Among other remedies for the evil he strongly recommends the care of the fabrics, greater attention to the externals of worship, more devout and frequent services, and constant instruction of the people in Christian truth.

Under the shelter of his great name some persons have sought to put these things as the primary or even the sole cure for spiritual decay. It may be acknowledged that the Bishop does not make enough of the inward and spiritual forces on which Christianity really depends in the last resort. But to say that Butler was a formalist, or to claim his high authority for making externals the chief matters in religion, is equally absurd and

unjust. He needed certainly the supplement of Methodism, but he must be regarded as the preparer for Wesley, and not as his rival or his adversary.

Perhaps the most important service rendered by Butler to the cause of Christian truth was that which he rendered by the qualities of his heart and mind. These qualities were displayed in his books without ostentation, and were at once felt by a large circle of readers which has only increased with the lapse of time.

I shall consider presently whether his conclusions will stand the test of modern knowledge, and whether his arguments are valid in our day as they were believed to be in his own. But the quality of his mind is a permanent possession—many who do not appreciate his reasonings are affected by his spirit and his temper.

Let me select three of these qualities for special admiration. I take first his openness of mind. Butler was incapable of being one-sided in his thinking. Circumspection was his delight: it was a necessity of his mental being.

He must needs look a subject all round and see it whole. He was, as people say, made that way. Neither the largeness nor the complexity of a subject could daunt him in exploring it. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth was his maxim, and until he had reached his limit he would not pause or prejudge the matter, and when he had got to the end, so far as he could, he laid down his convictions fearlessly and defended them with vigour and decision.

But this quality of his mind was the product of another, namely, his religious veneration for truth. To see things as they really are, and to impart that knowledge to others, was with him a part of a sacred obligation incumbent on all men and most of all on a Christian minister, charged with the propagation of the Divine Message. And these two qualities composed a third in his mind, which has sometimes been called timidity and sometimes caution, but which I prefer to style sobriety. This inclined him to the method of reasoning which he has made famous—that from analogy.

That method finds support for one thing in another, and is grounded on the common experience of men; and in that experience Butler, a sober and reverent intellect, felt intuitively a generous trust.

We must neither look in Butler for the beauty and eloquence

of Plato, nor for the admirable clearness of J. S. Mill. Yet in philosophical inquiry I believe that Butler exhibited the true temper of the philosopher, shunning both the French rage for lucidity and the German rage for the obscure.

Butler does not try to make a matter clearer than its proper nature admits of its becoming, nor does he care for the elegance of diction in which to clothe what he has to say. Some of his sentences are uncouth; others are difficult to understand. But he tries always to state the case as it really is, and nothing more nor less can pass the severity of his judgment. There are passages of real power in his writings, borne along by an inward inspiration. But he keeps his hand stedfastly on the helm, lest the vessel should ever deviate from the course of verity and rectitude.

This intellectual temper, of which Butler is a grand example, may be called the characteristically English temper. We discern it also in Bacon, Newton, Locke, Darwin, Kelvin. It is accompanied sometimes by a speculative audacity; sometimes by gifts of style; sometimes by remarkable faculty for luminous exposition. But in itself it remains distinct from all these, and its constituents are circumspection, loyalty, and sobriety. We may wish that the great Bishop had had more command of language; that he had allowed some place to poetry, imagination, and ardent emotion; that his fires had sometimes been allowed to burn fiercely, instead of smouldering with regulated and equal heat.

Had these things been in him his books would have been more easily read and more widely read; but they would not have been read with more profit. The absence of these qualities leaves us open all the more to the uninterrupted play of the spirit of the man. We are impressed as we follow his teaching with the same reverence for truth, the same resolve to explore the whole matter, the same patience in suspending judgment till all available evidence has been obtained, and finally, we reach the same strong degree of certitude without which Butler seldom, if ever, left off his investigations.

Butler's philosophy is inseparably connected with three great doctrines. The doctrine of analogy, the doctrine of probability, and the doctrine of human nature.

The *Analogy* is a work of great difficulty, and was said by the younger Pitt to raise more doubts than it solves. In order to estimate it fairly we must take care to see the point of view from

which Butler was writing. He had in view the Deists. This body of thinkers postulated a living God and the immortality of the soul, but they denied the special tenets of Christianity, and the claim that the Bible was a revelation from God. Indeed, they denied that any revelation at all was possible. They rested their specific negations on the alleged difficulties that followed if we allow that Christianity is a revelation. To that contention Butler replied in effect, that the difficulties arising from the belief that Christianity is a revelation supported by miracles, are no greater than the difficulties arising from pain, misery, and the like, if we believe in the moral government of the world by God. The Deists believed in God, despite pain and misery in the world; they ought therefore not to decline to believe in Christianity because of the alleged difficulties caused by miracles.

This celebrated work has exercised an immense influence on many minds. I have heard that it was the book which longest detained the elder Mill from his final rupture with Christian faith. It may, therefore, not improbably have had some indirect effects in bringing the younger Mill to embrace that faith from which for so long a period of his life he was unhappily estranged. It was a favourite book with Mr. Gladstone—a fact of singular interest and significance to the admirers of that extraordinary and versatile statesman. It has passed through many editions, and is still on the list of theological books for most Bishops' ordination reading, and has a place in the philosophical syllabus of the Universities.

I have heard persons declare that Butler is out of date, by which they appear to mean that his argument in the *Analogy* is out of date; for his treatise on human nature can never be out of date till human nature itself is out of date. The objection deserves refutation, not so much on account of its intrinsic force, as for the credit of so eminent a thinker as Bishop Butler.

Those who profess this objection appear to argue thus. Butler's *Analogy* is directed against Deism; Deism does not exist now, therefore Butler's *Analogy* is out of date.

This objection, as I conceive, rests on two fallacies. The first is this, that Deism is dead. I doubt the truth of that proposition. Deism in the exact form in which it existed in Butler's day may have ceased to exist, and its death was probably due in no small degree to the severe damage which it sustained at the hands of its great antagonist. But Deism in forms but

slightly different from its eighteenth-century type is not dead, and never can die until either Christianity ceases to challenge attention, or until all men embrace the claims of Christianity. There will thus always be a place for Butler's great work on the analogy of religion, because difficulties such as he there treats will always recur.

It is further alleged by these critics, that Butler's arguments are of no force against atheism, or against agnosticism, and that atheism and agnosticism are at present the forms of unbelief that hold the field. But even here, something has to be said on the other side.

In the first place I can well believe that an open unbeliever in all religion might be impressed in reading the *Analogy* with the grave and sincere temper of mind which that book breathes, and might feel compelled to acknowledge that such qualities, combined with so much intellectual strength and grasp, constitute a solid argument at least for caution in rejecting the claims of Christianity so admirably defended.

In the second place, to discredit Butler because he does not confute the atheist or the agnostic, is just as foolish and inconclusive as it would be to complain that vaccination does not cure the whooping cough; or to refuse to take quinine for a fever because it does not mend a dislocated limb. Every weapon in the armoury of faith has its value, and none can say how soon or how often each may be required, and the masters of the armour-maker's art, whose gifts have enriched the offensive and defensive resources of the Church, are to be had in everlasting and grateful remembrance.

Butler's doctrine of probability has not found favour with devout and ardent Christians. It has had in their ears a sound of coolness and calculation, which is chilling to the fervour of their faith. I can appreciate the sentiment, but I am sure that it is founded on a misapprehension. It is true that Butler, like most people, even the best of his day, shrank from enthusiasm, and that while he agreed fully with St. Paul in proving all things, he did not quite so fully follow him in the injunction not to quench the Spirit.

Still the probability which Butler relied on in religious argument was a sound element in Christian apologetics. By it he meant that interior confidence which is created by the observation of the steady recurrence of phenomena. This confidence may not amount to that certainty which is produced by formal

demonstration ; nevertheless, it is a real thing, and a thing of real value. It exists everywhere, and is perceptible by all. In moral matters when demonstration is not attainable, this probability becomes an important aid to faith.

The doctrines of Butler about human nature are more interesting to our generation than any other portion of his philosophy. The reason for this is twofold. Psychology has assumed among us an importance far greater than it enjoyed a century and a half ago. The complexion of modern thought is before all things humanitarian, and for both these reasons we take a special and lively concern in all that pertains to the inward frame of man. If Butler's treatment of human nature, compared with that of a writer like Professor William James, seems to us cold and aloof, the impression is true in appearance only. The subject is the same in each case, the interest is identical. The great Bishop is indeed out for a somewhat different issue from that which engages the American Professor. Butler designed to show that the very nature of man, that from which he cannot escape, that by which he is what he is, places him under an obligation to follow virtue. So far, he treats the matter ethically rather than psychologically. Yet, if his argument is correct, and if his premises are sound, he is in no way at issue with those who study man for his own sake without ulterior aim.

In certain respects Butler is pre-eminent in this subject. No philosopher has shown more conclusively what the inward frame of man really is ; no one has shown more conclusively that man carries within himself the mark of a moral and a responsible being ; no one has more conclusively shown the prophetic office of Conscience ; no one has indicated more cogently that the intimations of immortality are latent in us all.

From the point of view of the Victoria Institute this quality of Butler's teaching about human nature is of supreme value. We assemble in this hall under a pledge to show, so far as we may, that Christianity is in accord with all forms and conditions of truth. Here is a teacher who asserts that by the very structure and state of our inward frame we are adapted to virtue and to religion. This is an argument that none can evade, that all may understand by listening to the voice within themselves that nothing can silence.

Man, says Bishop Butler, is a law to himself. Even though

he knows nothing about history or science ; even though he has never heard of a revelation from God ; even if he does not know whether there is a God to be revealed ; still he is a law to himself ; a law which puts him under obligation to act in a way that is good for himself and for society at large.

Whatever may be thought of the enduring value of Butler's doctrines about analogy and probability, all serious persons must feel the cogency of his doctrine about human nature. To deny that doctrine is to lapse into internal anarchy, the parent of all other anarchies. To adhere to that doctrine is to secure to life personal and social the most enduring stability. In this view Butler is a teacher of perpetual importance.

I have thus passed in review some of the features of the intellect, teaching, and influence of Bishop Butler. Imperfect and cursory as that review has been, it may have sufficed to stimulate curiosity in some, to refresh the memory of others, and to impress all with a sense of the real greatness and excellence of the man.

It remains that I should estimate his relation to that great movement in religion which is known as the Evangelical Revival. I do so because that revival took its rise during the episcopate of Butler, and because it was directed, though by very different instrumentalities, towards the same ends which Butler had in view throughout his life. I have often thought that a comparison between the genius and work of Bishop Butler and the genius and work of John Wesley would furnish a most striking and suggestive lesson in Church history, and such a comparison I venture now, very briefly, to indicate. A friend on whose judgment and accuracy I can completely rely has told me that somewhere in Wesley's Journal there is a note of an interview between the great Methodist and the great Analogist, and that John Wesley was not favourably impressed by the Bishop's attitude towards Methodism and its distinctive tenets. I have not been able to verify the quotation, and I can therefore only mention the fact under reserve.

We can readily understand how two men so different in temperament, in situation and in work, might find it difficult to appreciate one another, especially in a brief and perhaps accidental meeting. Yet no thoughtful Christian can doubt that the two men were, in fact, deeply united, however divided by accidents of time. It is certain that Butler's reasoning would never have aroused the nation from the torpor of those dismal years.

It is certain that something more than argument was required to stem the tide of irreligion that had submerged all classes. It is probable that Wesley brought to bear on England forces of which Butler had but a distant and timorous perception. It is possible that in some points the great Bishop's views of Christianity were defective, and that the great Preacher's views on those points were gloriously complete. But the work that Butler accomplished was a needful work, and without it Wesley and his fellows might have effected much less than they did. Butler endeavoured to show that Christianity is inherently reasonable and authoritative.

Wesley, convinced of these verities, preached Christianity to multitudes whose minds and consciences owned the appeal, and thereby verified the reasonings of the philosopher. Butler repaired the breaches in the walls of the fortress from which issued confident and secure the champions of the Gospel, which infidels had vainly thought was no more to be feared, and was incapable of defending itself or of assailing its enemies.

Thus the two men were fellow-soldiers of Jesus Christ. They occupied different places in the campaign and contributed different elements to the fight, but they shared the stress of one and the same battle, and will wear immortal laurels in the grand review.

Our contemporary Evangelicals would be none the worse for a stiff course of the *Analogy* and of the sermons on human nature. There they would find some truths stated which they are prone to forget, and some points of view commended which would adjust and correct some parts of their thinking or lack of thought.

The great philosophical Bishop could impart to many a tincture of his immense and grave respect for truth, and his sane and large perception of things as they really are, and none of us would be the worse for a good deal of that temper; least of all our most zealous Evangelists.

The combination of reverence with enthusiasm, of zeal with knowledge, rare as it is, is not impossible, and a coalition between Joseph Butler and John Wesley is a coalition devoutly to be prayed for. It is surely a gift that may be bestowed by Him who is at once "The Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning."

DISCUSSION.

Rev. MARTIN ANSTEY, B.D., M.A., said: Our thanks are due to the lecturer for his most interesting and lucid exposition of the philosophy of Butler. What Butler meant by his *Doctrine of Probability* or by his maxim "probability is the guide of Life" was that every moral act and every religious decision was something that called for the exercise of the moral judgment, the reason, the conscience of the individual, the right or the wrong of which could not be settled by an appeal to any quasi-infallible Jesuitical authority. His *Doctrine of Analogy* was directed against the arguments of the Deists, who rejected Revealed Religion but believed in God, duty and immortality, or what they called Natural Religion. Butler's argument is really a *tu quoque*, in which he showed that whatever could be said against the God of the Bible, could also be said against the God of Nature, e.g., If the God of the Bible was responsible for the destruction of thousands of people, the earthquake at Lisbon showed that the God of Nature was in like manner equally responsible for the destruction of many thousands of the inhabitants of that city. The argument does not solve the problem of the origin of evil, but it shuts the mouth of the deistic opponent of revealed religion by showing that his system is open to exactly the same objection as that which he brought against the teaching of the Biblical revelation. Butler's doctrine of *Human Nature* was directed against those who maintained the right of men to indulge their lower appetites as being as much a part of their nature as their conscience. Butler denies this and maintains that the various parts of man's nature are not related to each other as co-ordinate parts of equal validity, but that the selfish appetites, and the self-regarding prudential motives of self love, are, by the very constitution of human nature, subordinated to his reason and his conscience in an ordered scale of worth or value, so that when a conflict arises between appetite and reason, it is contrary to the principle and constitution of human nature that appetite should prevail, and only truly *natural* that reason and conscience should rule, their authority over the lower instincts being as much a part of their nature as the fact of their existence. If conscience exists at all, it exists with the right to rule over every

other part of human nature, and this authority, validity, or right to rule, is inherent in it, and is a part of human nature itself. One of the characters in Mr. Benson's *Dodo* is made to exclaim "I am as I am made and I did not make myself," a claim which acquits man of the guilt of indulging the appetites of his sensual nature and makes God responsible for all the evil which the human heart contains. We have here an illustration of the perennial validity and present-day application of Butler's philosophy.

Mr. W. HOSTE asked, with reference to the phrase "rage for lucidity," ascribed in the lecturer's admirable paper to French writers, whether there is really any opposition between "lucidity" and the "openness," "love of truth," etc., of Dr. Butler. Anyone who had lived in France would know the phrase, "Tout ce que n'est pas clair, n'est pas français." Would not Dr. Butler have gained in places by a little more "lucidity"? It had been said of Renan that he put more stress on "le bien dire" than on "le vrai dire." Mr. H. suggested "a rage for brilliancy" might be said to characterize French writers. The transparent lucidity of Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales* made their study a pleasure, where that of the *Analogy* might remain a duty.

Lt.-Col. ALVES said: I can fully sympathize with the last speaker [Mr. Hoste] in having tried to read works on deep subjects, whose authors would seem to have taken the greatest pains to make themselves unintelligible. This may have been their misfortune, and not their fault, as it is not always given to one mind both to originate an idea, and also to put it forward clearly and simply.

I am informed that in France there is a recognized profession, that of "*vulgarisateur* (popularizer)," whose business it is to make simple that which in its original form is abstruse; and I think that such an office is much needed in England.

I have heard the obscurity of the style of Bishop Westcott contrasted with the clearness of that of Bishop Lightfoot.

Comparing Bishop Butler with John Wesley, the latter produced evidence of the power of the Gospel, showing that Christianity was Christ, and Christ Christianity. Most of us can understand evidence; but I have found that, even amongst Protestants, the great majority are very poor reasoners, and poor also in following a logical argument; and evidence is what the world needs.

The majority of Christian writers do not seem to have grasped the fact that the Epistle to the Romans was not written to bring sinners to Christ, but to give saints a true understanding of their position. So, except in regard to the period of time in which they lived, Butler might be said to supplement Wesley, and not *vice versa*.

Mr. THEODORE ROBERTS expressed his disappointment that the lecturer had found the seventeenth century the least interesting from a Christian standpoint. He, on the contrary, considered the century that produced Bunyan and Howe, also Pascal, and witnessed the attempt of the Puritans to set up the Kingdom of God by force on earth, to be most interesting. He regarded conscience as that which God had implanted in man as the result of the Fall, and that while man was bound to follow his conscience, that conscience needed to be instructed. God addresses Himself to man's conscience rather than to his intellect, and in this way man was able to attain certainty with regard to divine things.

Our Lord's miracles were to be regarded at the present time as adjuncts to, rather than proofs of, the Christian revelation. They appeared as the necessary consequence of Who He was, as He could not but use His power to relieve suffering humanity.

Professor H. LANGHORNE ORCHARD (in the Chair) was in accord with the author of this important and most interesting Paper as to Bishop Butler's assured position among philosophical defenders of the Truth, and as to the permanent value of his work—permanent as Human Nature.

Butler's early life being passed amidst Nonconformist surroundings was probably advantageous to his writings. McCosh has pointed out that thought-objects are like many-sided figures, whereof we men see some sides, some men more than others, angels see more than men, whilst all the sides of the polygon are visible to God only. Butler, regarding Christian Truth from the two standpoints, first of Nonconformity, then of the Established Church, would thus obtain a broader and wider view.

Three great qualities—openness, sobriety, reverence for truth—are noted in his mind, to which a common-sense logic may be added as a fourth. The first and second of these have origin from the

third, the essential equipment of a true investigator and in harmony with a temper of mind "eminently English."

To anyone here who, having begun reading his works, has abandoned the attempt, my counsel is—Gird up your loins and resolutely begin again, remembering always that his arguments in "Analogy" are especially addressed not to Atheists but to Deists generally, and particularly to such persons "as can judge without thinking, and such as can censure without judging;" to those who do not pretend that Christianity is proved false, but say the evidence is unsatisfactory and surrounded with many difficulties. To these objections he replies that in matters of our everyday common world life we continually act upon evidence no stronger, being guided by Probability; and that the difficulties connected with the Christian religion are of the same kind as those found in Natural religion, so that a man sane enough to believe in the God of nature must, if logically consistent, believe in the God of The Bible—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This reasoning receives reinforcement from the testimony of Conscience, concerning which he tells us: "You cannot form a notion of this faculty, conscience, without taking in judgment, direction, superintendency. This is a constituent part of the idea, that is, of the faculty itself; and to preside and to govern, from the very economy and constitution of man, belongs to it. Had it strength as it has right, had it power as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world." (Sermon ii, on "Human Nature.") In this manner Butler may be said to have prepared the way intellectually for the preaching of the Gospel of Salvation proclaimed by John Wesley.