

Young Cooper



IN MEMORIAM

The Times, 28th December 1922

Professor Cooper was born at Spynie, Elgin, in 1845, and educated at Elgin, in 1846, and educated at Elgin Academy and at Aberdeen University. He was a scholar whose distinguished services to his subject were recognised by honorary degrees from the Universities of Aberdeen, Durham, and Dublin. His published works include some important contributions to the *Dictionary of National Biography* and editions of the Seventeenth century religious classic, Scougal's *Life of God in the Soul of Man* and of the Prayer-book of 1637, which brought about the Bishops' wars. He was appointed Croall Lecturer for 1917, and took as his subject 'The Doctrine of the Trinity.' For many years one of the outstanding figures in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, he became its Moderator in 1917. He never tried to form a party, but he was an originator and a leader of a movement which influenced men of many different schools of thought.

Professor Cooper, in conjunction with Dr John Macleod, of Govan, Dr Lee, Dr Sprott, of North Berwick, and others, did for the Church of Scotland what the Oxford Movement did for the Church of England in introducing a greater regard for the dignity and the solemnity both of Church buildings and of Church services. He founded, in 1886, the Ecclesiological Society, which, in its thirty years of work, had a great influence on educated archaeological opinion in Scotland, and he was one of the foremost clergymen of the Church of Scotland in the punctilious observance of the seasons of the Christian year, and in the promotion of daily services and the more frequent celebration of Holy Communion. As minister of one of the city parishes in Aberdeen from 1881 to 1898, he had to face a considerable amount of opposition, which the strength and the attraction of his

personality enabled him to survive without abandoning the stand he had taken. He did not convert the whole Church of Scotland to his views, or, indeed, any considerable part of it; but he vindicated the right of those who held them to a place within the Church; and the importance of his share in moulding religious opinion would be gladly admitted by many who were not definitely in sympathy with his views.

A man of broad and genial humanity, and greatly beloved, Dr Cooper owed much to his mother - a Scots lady of the olden time, witty, acute, steeped in tradition. Much in him was also traceable to the home and haunts of his early youth in Morayshire, and to the Catholic tradition of the Aberdonian north, to which Presbyterianism was largely exotic. In what Professor WP Paterson has called *Scoto-Catholicism*, Dr Cooper throughout his life really represented that Northern tradition, rather than that of the Southern and Western 'High Presbyterianism,' which Sprott or Leishman stood for, or the John Macleod of Govan influence or type, or that which traces rather to the primitive, and to 'those mad High Churchmen, the Apostles,' spoken of by Law. At the same time, he was always a convinced Presbyterian in the strict sense of the term - regarding the presbyterate as the essential and fundamental order, and sufficient for validity.

PASSION FOR CHURCH UNITY.

Dr Cooper had many friends in the Anglican Church: but its borders did not set the limits to his friendliness. He was as eager and active in approaches of amity to other communions, and was in very real contact with, say, the United Free Church, especially in such fields of interest as that of ecclesiological research. His passion for Church unity was on a basis of catholic completeness; it was simple and sincere, and his advocacy of unity on such a foundation was alike unwearying and consistent. He favoured inclusion rather than absorption - the combination of the Episcopal system with the Presbyterian in such fashion as that the essential elements in each should be preserved. He put a high valuation on the power of friendliness,

and acted on that faith, making friends for himself and bringing people into friendship with each other right and left, in one direction as much as in another. One could not have found anyone less sectarian or less bitter; he believed all things and hoped all things, with a charity to which but few ecclesiastics attain. He cared much more for unity in the faith than for unity in association; it was disloyalty to the faith that he could not abide.

Of this attitude Dr Cooper gave unmistakable pledge in his relation to the committee for the Reunion of the Scottish Churches, which owed much more to his influence with the small but convinced High Church party than is generally realized. The readiness with which the schemes of the committee were generally accepted by that vigilant group of "die-hards" was in great part due to his acquiescence - an acquiescence which was regarded as a guarantee of the orthodoxy of these schemes, and their consistency with the catholic system and with the proper status of the Church.-It will be by his work for the wider and catholic unity that Dr Cooper will longest be remembered. Local coalescence of Presbyterians had, in his view, but a secondary relation to Christian reunion, just as the fusion of the German States into one Empire in 1871 had no necessary relation to the securing of general European peace. There are, indeed, unions which are only steps towards conflict - as the German union proved to be. Dr Cooper took the high and sacred ground of promoting reconciliation - not in mere pursuit of an 'undivided Presbyterianism,' but in the name of Him, whose Body, the Church, was broken by the sectarian strifes of men. Therefore, he will be remembered when others are forgotten.

In 1912 Dr Cooper married Margaret, daughter of George Williamson, of Shempston, and she survives him.

* * * * *

THE FUNERAL

The various tributes to Dr Cooper gathered in the seventh volume of the Transactions of The Scottish Ecclesiological Society are grouped under the heading 'A Man Greatly Beloved.' In addition to reports of Memorial services (especially those held at St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, Glasgow Cathedral, and the East Church of St Nicholas, Aberdeen), there is a report of the Funeral Service.

In accordance with the arrangements drawn up by himself shortly before his death, the body of the Revd James Cooper, DD, Emeritus Professor of Ecclesiastical History in Glasgow University, was on Saturday laid to rest in the family burying-ground in the little parish churchyard at Urquhart, about six miles east of Elgin. Rain fell in torrents during the funeral proceedings, but the inclemency of the weather did not prevent large crowds gathering along the route through the streets of Elgin. Earlier in the day the body had been removed from Dr Cooper's residence, Braemoriston, to St Columba's Parish Church, Elgin, where a short funeral service was conducted. The coffin, which was in purple and silver mounted, and bore a large solid silver cross, was placed in front of the altar and draped with a purple pall lined with crimson and gold, and displaying the gold cross of St Andrew. There was a large congregation, which included Lord Provost Forsyth, the Magistrates and Town Council of Elgin, representatives of other public bodies, and the members of Elgin Presbytery and ministers of other denominations.

The service was conducted by the Revd JMM Madil, Elgin; the Revd John Mair, Spynie; and the Revd JM Kirkpatrick, St Bride's Church, Glasgow. The coffin was borne from the church and placed in a motor hearse along with a wealth of wreaths, under which it was almost completely hidden.

At the graveside, owing to the heavy rain, the service was brief, and was conducted by the Revd JM Kirkpatrick, a life-long friend of Dr Cooper.

The general company of mourners included representative churchmen from all over Scotland, and professors and lecturers from all the Scottish universities.