

#### d. Protestantism and Roman Catholicism

"Cunninghame Graham's favourite toast", said Mr Thomas Kerr to me in the City Chambers, Glasgow, "was to 'Anti-Puritanism'. Puritanism, Nonconformity, Calvinism - these words were loaded with connotations of disgust and detestation for him. Like magnets, they gathered to themselves, in his hands, suggestions of intolerance and dogmatism, of the drabness of life, of individualised self-seeking disguised under high-sounding pretensions.

In Scotland he found a faith which was often dour and bitter, devoid of grace in relationships and architecture, made inflexible and intolerant by divisions. This he called Calvinism. In Britain he distinguished a distrust of colour, vitality and natural gaiety such as was native to the Latin life. This he called Puritanism. In politics and economics he found an attitude to society which permitted businessmen to adhere to excellent moral principles and still push their own advantage ruthlessly, who salved social consciences with slumming and purity campaigns. This, to him, was Nonconformity.

Calvinism he calls "a simple, bloody creed"<sup>1</sup>. He is surprised to find Luther so hated in Spain: the hatred should belong by rights to "the inhuman and treacherous Calvin". He points to "Servetus, who first he calumniated, then entrapped, and lastly murdered in cold blood"<sup>2</sup>. The "horror of the Geneva discipline" he asserts, equals that of the Inquisition - indeed, goes beyond it, since "no single item of your private life was free from its impertinence"<sup>3</sup>. Calvin and Torquemada are lumped together as persecutors of "savage and narrow malignity"<sup>4</sup>. Knox is an accomplice: "...the tyranny of Geneva under the inquisitors Calvin and Knox"<sup>5</sup>, he calls it. Although in certain speeches he describes Knox as standing for religious freedom and educational advancement<sup>6</sup>, Knox usually exemplifies intolerance and narrowness of outlook for him<sup>7</sup>. In "The Ipane" he writes:

"I saw the yew trees under which John Knox is said to have preached and dealt with heresy and superstition, like the man he was, driving out all that kindly Paganism which is mingled with the Catholic faith, and planting in its stead the stern, hard, hyper-Caledonian faith which bows the knee before its God in a temple like a barn, and looks upon the miserable East End of Glasgow as a thing ordained by God"<sup>8</sup>.

Cromwell and Sunday represent Puritanism to him. A comment on an article of Sidney Webb's in "The People's Press" of July 5<sup>th</sup> 1890 sufficiently expresses his viewpoint. Cromwell made England respected and respectable - more's the pity. He gave us Jamaica and the British Sunday, Day of Horrors, Feast of Gloom. He cut down our maypoles, reft away our love-locks, clothed us in funereal black.

<sup>1</sup> Preface to "Orvieto Dust", by Wilfranc Hubbard.

<sup>2</sup> "A Vanished Arcadia", p. 192: similarly in "Doughty Deeds", p.129, footnote.

<sup>3</sup> "Doughty Deeds", p.130.

<sup>4</sup> "A Vanished Arcadia", p.3.

<sup>5</sup> "Notes on the District of Menteith", p.26.

<sup>6</sup> Speeches inserted in Scrap-Books.

<sup>7</sup> Preface to "John Lavery and his Work" by Walter Shaw-Sparrow; and "Thirteen Stories", p.9.

<sup>8</sup> p.184. One remembers a comment by Bishop Leslie Newbiggin on Roman Catholicism in South India, which he saw as so compromised with Hinduism that people did not know which was which.

The Nonconformist conscience, which was insensitive to the need for a structural change in society, was subjected often enough to a blistering attack by him. In the article quoted above, he warns against any alliance with ".....these smug chapel-goers, till-filchers (from the poor). ....". The hard-headed Christian businessman epitomises to him double-dealing in religion. One such he describes as "....kindly, of course, in everything but trade, which is a thing apart and sacred, semi-divine, sent straight from God<sup>1</sup>". He really cuts loose on the subject in another book:

"To each man after his demerits; to some day-books, ledgers, cash-boxes, and the entire armour of the Christian businessman. .... Let them put it on, taking in their hand the sword of covetousness, having on their arms the shield of counterfeit, the helmet of double-dealing upon their heads, till they are equipped fully at all points to encounter man's worst enemy, his fellow man. Let them go forth, prevail, destroy, deceive, opening up markets, broadening their balances and their phylacteries; let them at last succeed and build their stucco palaces in Park Lane. ...."<sup>2</sup>.

The protest of the poor at the "double-think" of the Christian sitting at ease in Zion and extending his security at the expense of others, may be indicated by a working-man's ungrammatical, ill-spelt letter to the Press, (kept in a Scrap-Book):

"We are tould to Be content in the station in Life in which the Lord as places us. But I say the Lord never Did place us there so we have no Right to Be content. ....".

A Report from Cornwall, in one "People's Press", lays responsibility for such continuing dichotomy between faith and works at the feet of numerous Nonconformist lay preachers who, in the name of religion, urged quiet and contentment on their exploited mates, pointing to the golden city as compensation<sup>3</sup>.

A contrast of portraits comparing type with type sums up his verdict:

"An Eastern scoundrel's face is finer far than a Nonconformist Cabinet minister displays, all spoiled with lines, with puckers round the mouth, a face in which you see all the natural passion stultified, and greed and piety - the two most potent factors in his life - writ large and manifest"<sup>4</sup>.

When Cuninghame Graham is dealing with contemporary matters, he offers valid criticism. His reaction against the Sabbatarianism of his day appears to be based on the belief that this was no Christian way of holding festival<sup>5</sup>. His detestation of the Nonconformist came of knowing personally a class of professing Christians, who had become experts at "double-think", cheating people on week-days, and attempting to cheat God on Sundays<sup>6</sup>. All this is fair enough as accusation. Remembering that Tories and land-owners were more likely to be Anglicans by profession, we can understand his concentration on Nonconformists, who represented booming business and commercial interests. But when he makes historical judgements, especially regarding Calvinism, he is simply ill informed. A great though understandable contrast is offered between his

<sup>1</sup> "The Ipane", p.164.

<sup>2</sup> "Success", pp. 187 and 188.

<sup>3</sup> "The People's Press", September 27<sup>th</sup> 1890.

<sup>4</sup> "Mogreb-el-Aeksa", p.116.

<sup>5</sup> He says so at the opening of Buchlyvie Public Hall Sale at its Jubilee in 1934.

<sup>6</sup> Article "Happy Christmas" in "The People's Press", January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1891.

treatment of Reformers and Conquistadors. He does not have the interest in the former period which the latter held for him. He is content to make the word "Calvinist" an emotional, damnatory word; he filled the word "Conquistador" with nuances of sympathy and admiration which historical investigation and understanding supplied. His feeling for the underdog and especially the underdog of another race makes his prejudice characteristic: a battle had to be fought in his own land for a re-evaluation of the maligned soldiers of the Spanish Conquest; what represented Calvinism in his day was only too entrenched and sure of itself for anything but attack to be apposite. Calvinism, Puritanism, Nonconformity are words of revolt against "the myriad meannesses that dwarf mankind"<sup>1</sup>.

There were features of Roman Catholicism which appealed to him: its kindly adaptation to paganism, as he viewed it<sup>2</sup>; its breadth of culture and contact<sup>3</sup>; its mysteriousness, by reason of the unknown tongue and mystic rites which it employed<sup>4</sup>. He showed that capacity for getting under the very skin of attitudes to life which he personally could not share, when he says of Rev. Arthur Bannerman, Anglican priest turned Roman Catholic: "All the romance and mysticism of the sole enduring Christian sect amazed and strengthened him, entering into the spirit and making him feel part and parcel of something stable, so pitched, inside and out, with such authority, that against its strength all the assaults of reason were foredoomed to fail"<sup>5</sup>.

His own reason (and what one can employ but reason if one is not vouchsafed faith?) spoke loudly against this authority. In his first book, "Notes on the District of Menteith", he ridicules the practice of giving papal dispensations. Robert II received papal dispensations for both his marriages (the second of which took place when the first wife was still alive); if the Pope is infallible, somewhere he must have chosen not to exercise his infallibility, he suggests<sup>6</sup>! Of the claims of William, seventh Earl of Menteith, he writes:

"It may be that his blood was redder than the King's, but even if it was, another papal dispensation would doubtless have reinstated matters (and molecules) in their proper position"<sup>7</sup>.

Speaking of a Roman Catholic, he writes of "the prison in which his spirit was confined"<sup>8</sup>. Of a Roman Catholic town, he says: "Once a stronghold of clericalism, the city.... is slowly getting free from the bonds of bigotry"<sup>9</sup>. The loathing with which some might regard the sight of a peasant kissing the brazen toe of the statue of St Peter, he merely recorded with a shrug. The act forms "the backbone of the church which Peter founded, not on philosophy, but on blind faith"<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> "A Hatchment", pp. 70 and 79.

<sup>2</sup> "A Hatchment", pp. 70 and 79.

<sup>3</sup> "Father Archangel of Scotland", p.69. The whole sketch of a Scottish College in Spain is illuminating.

<sup>4</sup> "What, after all" he says, "is better for the soul than prayer to an unseen God in an uncomprehended tongue": "Redeemed", p.164.

<sup>5</sup> "Success", p.121.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p.27.

<sup>7</sup> *op. cit.*, p.33.

<sup>8</sup> "Charity", p.49.

<sup>9</sup> "Cartagena and the Banks of the Sinu", p.133.

<sup>10</sup> "A Hatchment", p.78.

Mr Thomas Kerr remembered him at the time of the execution of Francisco Ferrer<sup>1</sup> the educationalist, stamping the country and denouncing everywhere the Roman Catholic Church in Spain - for all his defence of it at other times against attacks which he thought ill-informed and factional.

He gives voice to one regret about Roman Catholicism, concerning one great lost opportunity of taking a stand for justice:

"The Roman tragedy of 1848 with the people almost drawn into the European maelstrom of revolutionary thought, is interesting and all true Catholics should deplore the chance, once lost and not to be regained, of the Church universal, with the Pope the shepherd of the poor"<sup>2</sup>.

Cunninghame Graham was married to a Roman Catholic. The lands in which he felt most at home - Spain and South America - were Roman Catholic lands. He observed what he saw shrewdly and sympathetically. He defended what he thought was misunderstood or falsely derogated. He made his own criticisms. But it does not appear from his writings that he ever gave full study and attention to this or any other faith, or felt called upon to do so.

<sup>1</sup> He of the system of "Scientific and Rationalistic Education".

<sup>2</sup> Preface to "Revolutionary Types", by I.A. Taylor.