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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Scholar Priest in the Church of England in the Nineteenth Century

David Jasper[1]

Email: davidjasper124@gmail.com

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Abstract

The Oxford Movement in the 1830s prompted some formidable theological scholarship which profoundly affected the lives and personalities of many Oxford-educated Church of England clergymen, not a few of whom combined deeply scholarly lives with successful parish ministries. This essay examines the lives of two such men, Canon T.F. Simmons, a parish priest in Yorkshire for some thirty years, and Bishop Mandell Creighton, much of whose scholarly writing was produced in a remote Northumberland parish before his return to Cambridge and London. By the end of the century such learned clergymen were becoming a rarity in the Church of England.

Keywords: Mandell Creighton, Oxford University, Oxford Movement, parish, T.F. Simmons, theological colleges

At the beginning of Book II of Anthony Trollope's novel *Barchester Towers* (1857) the reader is formally introduced to the Revd Francis Arabin, 'fellow of Lazarus, late professor of poetry at Oxford, and present vicar of St. Ewold, in the diocese of Barchester'. Arabin's academic career is described in some detail. He is a product of Winchester and enters Balliol College, Oxford as a commoner where 'he utterly eschewed the society of fast men'. A religious young man, he follows the Tractarian cause, sitting at the feet of the great Newman, though his assiduous devotion to the Church prevents him from gaining a first class degree. Denied as a result by Balliol, young Arabin is taken up by the fictional Lazarus College as a 'young champion of the church militant', becoming a college fellow, a clergyman and professor of poetry.[2] After a lesson in parochial humility from 'the poor curate of a small Cornish parish', Arabin returns to Lazarus College where 'he took delight in elections, served on committees, opposed tooth and nail all project of university reform' – and no doubt fulfilled his duties as a fellow, though Trollope tells us little more of

[1]David Jasper is Emeritus Professor at the University of Glasgow, Scotland.

[2]John Keble was elected professor of poetry at Oxford in 1831 and was also a country parson. Unlike Arabin, however, Keble achieved a double first in Latin and Mathematics.

his scholarly preoccupations.[3] From his parish of St Ewold, Arabin is eventually elevated to the deanery in Barchester, having acquired a wife – and even more happily a wealthy one – in the process. Arabin is not the only cleric with pretensions to Oxford learning to be found in the fiction of Trollope. In *Dr. Wortle's School* (1881), the Revd Jeffrey Wortle, DD had been a fellow of Exeter College, Oxford before election to an assistant-mastership at Eton, from whence in the village of Bowick he combined the role of parish priest with that of the proprietor and headmaster of a school that taught Latin and Greek to the sons of the nobility, despite his somewhat Low Church bishop who rather disapproves of this combination of school and parish.[4]

Trollope's portraits of Oxford clergymen are revealing, but as a novelist he had his own agenda, and neither Arabin nor Wortle, though good and serious Oxford men, precisely reflect the considerable and serious scholarly achievements of a large number of mid-nineteenth century Anglican clergy, many of them content to remain parish priests and combine pastoral ministry, often pursued with great devotion, with serious attention to learning. It will be the contention of this essay that such English clergy, many of them first- or second-generation Tractarians, flourished in the middle years of the nineteenth century, but by the end of the century they had begun to disappear with, among other things as we shall see, the rising professionalism of the secular academic community in universities and the growth of Anglican theological colleges. James Kirby, in his book *Historians of the Church of England*, has well demonstrated the aspiration of the nineteenth-century Church of England to be a 'learned church' in which pastoral ministry and serious scholarship were seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive, and thus, he writes:

> [t]his idea of the Church of England as a learned church provides us with an alternative conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between religion and knowledge in the nineteenth century.[5]

There is some evidence that by the beginning of the new century the scholar parish priest was becoming a figure from the past, and perhaps even the same might be said of the learned episcopate. There will always, of course, be honourable exceptions to the rule, but nevertheless, by 1899, Percy Dearmer begins his widely read *Parson's Handbook* in an uncompromising spirit.

> The object of this Handbook is to help, in however humble a way, towards remedying the lamentable confusion, lawlessness, and vulgarity which are conspicuous in the Church at this time.
>
> 1. The confusion is due to the want of liturgical knowledge among the clergy, and of consistent example among those in authority.[6]

[3]Quotations are from the Penguin Random House edition of *Barchester Towers* (2012), II, ch. 1, pp. 197-210.

[4]Anthony Trollope, *Dr. Wortle's School* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1973 [1881]), pp. 3-4.

[5]James Kirby, *Historians and the Church of England: Religion and Historical Scholarship, 1870–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 2.

[6]Percy Dearmer, *The Parson's Handbook* (new edn; London: Grant Richards, 1903), p. 1.

Dearmer goes on to accuse the clergy, and perhaps the bishops, of laziness in following the rubrics of the Prayer Book and in their duty of catechising. The implication is that this represents a sad decline from the parish clergy of earlier days in the nineteenth century, and it is to two of these men (they were, of course, all men), their background and education, to which we now turn our attention.

But before reviewing the changes taking place in the education provided by the ancient universities in England (Durham – founded in 1832 – and London – founded in 1836 – were slightly too late on the scene to be significant in this story), it is worth distinguishing between Oxford and Cambridge and why it was the former that was particularly important here. If Oxford gave birth to the great Movement in the Church of England that bears its name, with its subsequent generations of Tractarians and 'Anglo-Catholic' priests, Cambridge was better known as a stronghold of the Evangelicals, led in a ministry of over fifty years in that university by the great Charles Simeon (1759–1836). The brightest period of the Evangelicals was in the very early years of the nineteenth century and by the late 1820s they were feeling the passing of leaders like Simeon and William Wilberforce (1759–1833), one of the leaders of the Clapham Sect whose energies were largely political and social rather than scholarly. In addition, Evangelicals deliberately eschewed intellectual pursuits in their religion. In the words of Elisabeth Jay:

> The clarity and brevity of Evangelical theology had been a strength in reaching the hearts and consciences of well-educated and ignorant alike. These 'few, simple truths' proved less stimulating for those brought up within, rather than converted to, Evangelicalism. Clarity could easily deteriorate into dreary thinness.[7]

True, this rather simplified image of Cambridge as the Evangelical stronghold omits the considerable and far-reaching achievements of the Cambridge ecclesiologists, and in particular J.M. Neale (1818–86) and Benjamin Webb (1819–85) and their founding of the Cambridge Camden Society (later known as the Ecclesiological Society) in 1839. But still it was really in the University of Oxford that the key events for the future religious and intellectual life of the Church of England in the nineteenth century were taking place.

Long before John Keble's Assize Sermon of 14 July 1833, the roots of the Oxford Movement may be traced, at least to a degree, in a series of private lectures given in 1823 by the Oxford regius professor of divinity, Charles Lloyd (1784–1829), later to become bishop of Oxford, on Christian doctrine and the origins and history of the Book of Common Prayer. These lectures, after Lloyd's death, were to become the foundations of William Palmer's *Origines Liturgicae* (1832), Palmer being once described by John Henry Newman as 'the only really learned man among us'.[8] Among those who heard these lectures were Newman, Pusey, Hurrell Froude,

[7]Elisabeth Jay (ed.), *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 6.

[8]William Palmer (1803–85) was a Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford. Of Irish birth, he was a protégé of John Jebb, bishop of Limerick (1775–1833).

Isaac Wilberforce and Isaac Williams. Frederick Oakeley described Lloyd as a person of independent thought,

> considerably in advance of the high churchmen of his time, who had in his youth many opportunities of intercourse with emigrant French clergy, to whom he was indebted, as he told us, for truer views of the Catholic religion than were generally current in this country.[9]

The reason for beginning at this point in Oxford is in order to suggest a rather different portrait of the ancient universities in the nineteenth century than the standard one provided by Owen Chadwick in *The Victorian Church.*[10] Chadwick takes up a well-established tradition that portrays the ancient universities languishing in intellectual lethargy in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1964, V.H.H. Green wrote that at this time, 'there were the good tutors, the genuine scholars and the diligent pastors, but [Oxford] was equally the victim of intellectual and spiritual torpor'.[11] At least until the parliamentary Acts of 1854 and 1856 opened up lower degrees to members of any religion or none with, at least in theory, scholarships and fellowships attainable only by competition, Chadwick suggests that 'the old university gave a liberal education to the upper and upper-middle classes, among them the future clergy of the Church of England'.[12] More changes were to come later in the century. The Universities Tests Act of 1871, under Gladstone's guidance, opened all degrees and offices at Oxford, Cambridge and Durham to men of any religion and none. But of the early and unreformed nineteenth century at Oxford and Cambridge, however, Chadwick wrote in an earlier book, *Westcott and the University* (1963):

> Though the university cannot help begetting a few professors, its true function is the nurturing of citizens, of gentlemen, of Christians. By its mathematical discipline it trains them in logic, by its physics it opens to them the order and beauty of creation, by its studies in ancient history and literature it brings them into converse with minds of philosophic power and literary imagination, by its religious teaching and pastoral care it fosters the virtue without which no state can stand.[13]

This somewhat louche description, however, does not entirely bear close scrutiny of the intellectual state of Oxford. Let us return for a moment to Lloyd's lectures of 1823.

In them Lloyd set out to show that the sources of the Book of Common Prayer were both primitive and medieval and he commended to his listeners a study of the

[9]Frederick Oakeley, *Historical Sketches of the Tractarian Movement* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1865), p. 13.

[10]Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (2nd edn; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972), Part II, pp. 439-62.

[11]V.H.H. Green, *Religion at Oxford and Cambridge: A History c.1160–c.1960* (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 255.

[12]Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part II, p. 439.

[13]Owen Chadwick, *Westcott and the University* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 3.

medieval Breviary and Missal. His lectures stood in a tradition of Anglican studies of the Prayer Book looking back to antiquarian scholars like Hamon L'Estrange (1605–60), Anthony Sparrow (1612–85) and in the eighteenth century, Charles Wheatly (1686–1742) and his celebrated book *A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer* (1710 and frequently reprinted well into the nineteenth century). But there was also something different here and that difference lay in Lloyd's undoubted scholarship. In 1825, Lloyd himself edited two great works of the English Reformation, *The Bishops' Book* and *The King's Book*[14] while more broadly 'Oxford became the source of a flood of liturgical reprints'.[15] The considerable scholarship involved should not be underestimated. Edward Burton (1794–1836), who succeeded Lloyd as regius professor of divinity at Oxford edited three of the Henrician primers. Edward Cardwell (1787–1861), Camden professor of ancient history at Oxford, edited a number of scholarly documents of the Church, including proceedings of the Convocations and others related to the history of Prayer Book revision. He also edited an edition of the Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552 with a substantial critical preface. *The Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology* provided a history of Anglican theology related to the Caroline Divines. In short, Oxford University was producing and publishing an extraordinary scholarly record of Anglican theology.

Thus when the *Tracts for the Times* began to appear in 1833 the ground was well prepared. Their primary purpose was to establish the catholic and apostolic nature of the Church of England, and they begin with Newman's brief call 'ad Clerum' in a reminder to all clergy of their 'ministerial commission' and above to the bishops as 'successors of the apostles'.[16] Short and anonymously printed in their inception the *Tracts* gradually became longer and more scholarly as they proceeded, calling for the separation of the Church, its theology, liturgy and apostolic credentials, from parliamentary control and interference. In *Tracts 38* and *41* Newman expounded the principle of the Via Media, denying the 'Popish' tendencies of his vigorous defence of the Book of Common Prayer and appealing to the authority of the Anglican Caroline divines of the seventeenth century. The doctrinal substance of the *Tracts,* focusing on the Prayer Book and the sacraments, is to be found in the last thirty or so,[17] beginning in *Tracts 67, 68, 69 and 76* with Pusey's substantial *Scriptural Views of Holy Baptism*. It was Pusey also, in *Tract 81,* entitled *Catena Patrum No. IV. Testimony of the Writers in the later English Church to the doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice,* who vigorously defended the doctrine of the Real Presence and the eucharistic sacrifice, claiming the authority of the Caroline divines

[14]*The Bishops' Book* (1537) was compiled by 46 Anglican divines led by Thomas Cranmer, and set out to expound the creed, sacraments, decalogue, the Lord's Prayer and the Ave, addressing also questions regarding the relationship of the English Church to Rome. *The King's Book* (1543) was entitled 'Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for Any Christian Man'. Among other things it taught abstention from the doctrine of purgatory and prayers for the dead.

[15]G.J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy* (2nd edn; London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 148.

[16]*Tract 1*, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford.* I. *1833–4* (new edn; London: J.G. & F. Rivington, 1838).

[17]The *Tracts* remained anonymous though their individual authors were no real secret. The names of the authors of all the *Tracts* can be found in an Appendix to Henry Parry Liddon's *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, Vol. III (4 vols., 1893–97).

and the 1662 Prayer Book over against that of the Book of 1552. Pusey calls upon the work of no less than 65 Anglican divines of the seventeenth century down to the current Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter (1778–1869).

Even as they were published some of the *Tracts* were controversial and provoked vigorous debate in the Church. Isaac Williams' *Tract 80, On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge* (concluded in *Tract 87*), cost him the Oxford professorship of poetry in succession to Keble, more from a refusal to address the details of the argument on the part of those who wilfully refused to understand or give proper attention to Williams' carefully articulated principles, a notable exception to this laziness being the learned and cantankerous bishop of St David's, Connop Thirlwall (1797–1875).[18] Williams was careful to assert that the *disciplina arcani* was not a system but a principle, indeed a moral principle rooted in the moral law and Natural Religion. He, like Keble, drew deeply on Aristotle's *Ethics* as well as the Christian Platonists, extending his discussion to a study of the Scripture, and his argument is an excellent example of the close connection in the writings of the Tractarians between careful learning, manner of life and the exercise of Christian ministry. (Williams was a conscientious parish priest and for a while Keble's curate.) Williams' other great contribution was *Tract 86, Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book and in the Changes Which it has Undergone*. A robust examination of the Prayer Book, then under attack by revisionists who were not always liturgically well equipped for the task, Williams' work sets out to show how recent liturgical scholarship showed the declension of the Church from 'earlier and better' times. He looks back to some of the lost riches of the medieval Church as at the true root of Anglican liturgy and which the Prayer Book abbreviated.

> We cannot look into the Breviaries and Missals without observing their high tone in distinction from our own. To advert to particulars, we have the ancient kyrie eleison but not the hallelujahs … The hosannas at the end of the Trisagion, the Gloria Deo at the Gospel (except as observed by traditionary use) are omitted. Add to this we are even to this day without canonical hymns, notwithstanding all attempts to obtain them … From the Prayer for the Church Militant we have excluded the more solemn commendation to God and prayer for the dead … and in the Prayer of Oblation, the beautiful mention of angelic ministries, as bearing our supplications into the presence of the Divine Majesty, is lost.[19]

The *Tract* was much admired by Pusey in particular. But the whole Tractarian enterprise came to a clattering end with the appearance, on 27 February 1841 of *Tract 90, Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty Nine Articles*. Like all the

[18]Among other scholarly works, Thirlwall translated writings of Schleiermacher and Tieck, and joined with Julius Charles Hare (1795–1855), Archdeacon of Lewes, in translating Niebuhr's *History of Rome*. His principal achievement in scholarship is a vast (8 volumes) *History of Greece* (1835–47). Despite these scholarly labours, and before his consecration as bishop, Thirlwall was a devoted parish priest at Kirby Underdale in Yorkshire from 1834 to 1840.

[19]Isaac Williams, *Tract 86,* http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract86.html (accessed 13 December 2022).

Tracts it was published anonymously but there was little doubt of its author – John Henry Newman. In an article published in January 1840 Newman had made his position and purpose quite clear.

> Anglicanism claimed to hold, that the Church of England was nothing else than a continuation in this country ... of that one Church of which in old times Athanasius and Augustine were members. But, if so, the doctrine must be the same; the doctrine of the Old Church must live and speak in Anglican formularies, in the 39 Articles. Did it? Yes it did ... it did in substance, in a true sense. Man had done his worst to disfigure, to mutilate, the old Catholic Truth; but there it was, in spite of them, in the Articles still. It was there, – but this must be shown. *It was a matter of life and death to us to show it.*[20]

The furore that erupted after the publication of *Tract 90* is well documented and it is not my purpose to rehearse it yet again. Rather I wish to draw attention to Newman's words here quoted, for they breathe a spirit that at least two generations of Anglican clergy who read the *Tracts for the Times* closely, most of them parish priests and most, though not all, trained at Oxford, imbibed and took to heart. They fervently believed that the Church of England was catholic and apostolic, in continuity with the pre-Reformation English Church and in continuity with the Church of the apostles, Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo. Their task was to study and preserve its doctrine in history and liturgy, not merely as an academic exercise but as a matter of life and death for their calling and the Church which they served. Much of the rest of this paper will focus upon the work of two Victorian clergymen – one almost entirely forgotten, the other still well known as a bishop and historian. Both were educated at Oxford and both, for many years, were priests in remote country parishes in the north-east of England where they produced distinguished works of scholarship while living the lives of devoted parish clergy amongst largely poorly educated parishioners. They were Canon Thomas Frederick Simmons (1815–84) and Bishop Mandell Creighton (1843–1901).

Of the life of Canon Simmons we know very little. Like Creighton, he studied at Merton College, Oxford, but never completed his degree there. But Simmons later returned to Worcester College, Oxford graduating with a BA in 1848 (MA, 1859). Almost all of his ministry was spent in the village of South Dalton in the East Riding of Yorkshire, a few miles north of Beverley. There, under the generous patronage of Lord Hotham he built a magnificent new church, designed in the English Gothic style by John Loughborough Pearson, and continued to serve his parish faithfully until his death in 1884. Although Simmons became a prebendary of York Minster in 1869 and gained a wide reputation as a liturgical scholar, it seems that he neither sought nor was offered preferment in the Church.

Simmons was, indeed, a remarkable liturgist, mixing with the best scholarly minds of his day, participating in the reform of the Prayer Book through the debates

[20]J.H. Newman, quoted in Ian Kerr, *John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 216-17 (emphasis added).

of the Northern Convocation,[21] and above all publishing, in 1879 and with the Early English Text Society (EETS), a remarkable edition of a late medieval text (though in verse it can hardly be called a poem) that he entitled *The Lay Folks' Mass Book*. This was, essentially, a guide in Middle English for the layperson attending the Latin Mass. It remains in print with the EETS today, almost 150 years later.

But it is to Simmons' remarkable student notebooks from his days at Worcester College that we shall give our closest attention. Fortunately a number of them are preserved amongst his papers in York Minster Library. They reveal an astonishingly assiduous student, clearly known to Keble, whose signature appears in one of the notebooks, and a man whose habits of diligent study acquired at Oxford continued for the rest of his life. Clearly, from the start, Simmons' primary interest was in the medieval liturgy of the English Church, though it is also clear that he read the *Tracts for the Times* and throughout his life kept abreast of contemporary theology. Although he describes himself as 'a clergyman of the reformed Church' as well as renouncing the 'errors, corruptions and superstitions, as well as the Papal Tyranny, which once here prevailed',[22] nevertheless he did subscribe to the belief in the continuity of the catholic and apostolic English Church since the earliest times and through the Middle Ages. His reading is wide and ecumenical. For example, we find him reading Newman's *Grammar of Assent* (1870) and participating with considerable authority on Tractarian debates regarding the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist.

Among the notebooks is Simmons' heavily annotated Book of Common Prayer,[23] his notes beginning in his Oxford student days. The text of the Order of Holy Communion is given particularly painstaking attention. Simmons begins with a lengthy comparison with the medieval Uses of Sarum (Salisbury) and Ebor (York), and he refers repeatedly to the magisterial work of William Maskell in his book *The Ancient Liturgy of the Church of England* (1844), a work in which Simmons first encountered the *Lay Folks' Mass Book*.[24] Among the annotations are lengthy notes on Bishop Andrewes and other Caroline divines, Bucer, Knox and Ridley, and extensive references to Pusey's *Tract 81* on the doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice. Nor are the early Church Fathers neglected, for his student notes include a lengthy dissertation on St John Chrysostom. There are also references to the great French Benedictine tradition of liturgical scholarship, to be found above all in the work of Edmond Martène (1654–1739), from whom Simmons was to derive much of his interest in the liturgy of Rouen as he worked on the *Lay Folks' Mass Book*.

[21]R.C.D. Jasper wrote of Simmons' contribution to the debates of the York Convocation: 'It [Convocation] possessed a most learned liturgical scholar in Canon T.F. Simmons of York, and his influence was much more penetrating in the smaller Northern body than would have been in that of Canterbury.' *Prayer Book Revision in England, 1800–1900* (London: SPCK, 1954), p. 125.

[22]T.F. Simmons, *The Lay Folks' Mass Book* (EETS; London: N. Trübner & Co., 19769), p. xiv. Simmons draws upon the form of words used each day at the opening of sessions of the York Convocation.

[23]York Minster Library, MS ADD 373.

[24]This was in what he was later to call the 'B' manuscript, found by Maskell in the British Museum. Maskell was another profoundly learned Anglican priest who became a Roman Catholic after the Gorham Judgment of 1850.

Another fascinating document in the York Minster collection is Simmons' copy of a small text entitled *The Ordinary of the Mass including the Proper Mass of the Blessed Trinity* published by the Catholic Book Society in 1852,[25] a mere four years after Simmons' graduation from Worcester. In particular here we see Simmons developing a sense of the difference between the worship of the late medieval English Church and the later Church of England of the Book of Common Prayer, a change from a liturgy that was not only in Latin but also largely said by the priest silently to a text book service in which the people follow the publicly spoken English words of the priest. It is a difference in the nature of public worship only more recently seriously studied in our own day by scholars such as John Harper and Nicholas Orme.[26]

Yet if the academic world today has been quick to dismiss the scholarship of clergymen like Simmons, then we might pause to reflect not only that such clergymen possessed neither the time nor the resources offered by the modern university but that much of what they were studying was untrodden ground. They were indeed pioneers in their fields of study. As a scholar of late medieval liturgy and worship, as a philologist, and as an editor of medieval manuscripts, Simmons was very largely having to make it up as he went along – and in the context of working in a busy country parish. The miracle is that he got so much right, not least through a lifetime of dedicated study that was undertaken not to further an academic career, but to enrich the life of the Church and its worship. The distinction in aspiration is an important one. Simmons was a learned man because his vocation as a priest required it of him. Apart from the notebooks to which I have made reference, and his modest published works, Simmons left only one other substantial record of his life, all in his bold and decisive handwriting. It lies in the volumes of minutes of church and vestry meetings in the united benefice of Dalton Holme, now kept in the East Riding Archives Office in Beverley. They speak to us of his active support of many charitable foundations in Hull, his building of almshouses for the elderly next to his church, his development of worship in St Mary's, the church which he built, and above all his faithful care, year in year out for some three decades, for this people.

But now let us turn to our second example. Rather a different portrait emerges from the life of Mandell Creighton – though perhaps it is not so different in the end. Creighton was of the next generation to Simmons, though also an Oxford man. Like Simmons in his first time at the university, Creighton held a postmastership at Merton College. Unlike Simmons, however, Creighton remained as a fellow of his college for seven years, establishing his reputation as a modern historian, then a new field of study. Both men, however, were profoundly influenced by the principles of the Oxford Movement. Creighton attended worship daily in his college chapel and had an active interest in Anglican liturgy. Simmons and Creighton shared a passion for the Middle Ages that also distinctly reflected their roots in nineteenth-century romanticism: Creighton professed a taste for the works of

[25]York Minster Library, MS ADD 375.

[26]See Sally Harper, P.S. Barnwell and Magnus Williamson (eds.), *Late Medieval Liturgies Enacted* (London: Routledge, 2016); Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

Tennyson, Morris, Rossetti and Ruskin.[27] At the same time there were differences, for by Creighton's time the Oxford syllabus was changing. Law and modern history were now part of the undergraduate degree and he was reading such contemporary historians as E.A. Freeman (1823–92) and William Stubbs (1825–1901).[28] Yet although when Creighton began to teach as a college fellow the study of modern history was in its infancy and regarded as rather newfangled, yet his world was still essentially that of 'old' Oxford. In Creighton's *Life and Letters*, written by his wife, Louise Hume Creighton, it is described in this way:

> The Oxford of 1867, when Creighton first became Fellow and Tutor, was in many ways different from the Oxford of 1900. The days of married Fellows had not begun; and the advantages of Oxford as a residential place had not been discovered.[29]

In short, though change was in the wind, Oxford in the 1860s was still essentially the Oxford that Simmons had known some 20 years before. When Creighton resigned his fellowship in 1874 (the college had changed its statutes to allow married fellows by this time, though not without considerable opposition), he took the distant college living of Embleton in Northumberland, a village even more remote than Simmons' South Dalton. Despite the fact that he remained there for only 10 years, Creighton's parochial ministry in many ways mirrors that of Canon Simmons. Although he was an assiduous parish priest he still regarded his parish as an opportunity for scholarly work and 'concentration of intellectual energy on one subject'.[30] And the academic life fed directly into the parochial ministry. If the Church today seems to regard parish ministry and scholarly pursuits as very largely mutually exclusive, the same could not be said of men like Creighton and Simmons – and many others in their time.

Creighton's biography suggests an interest in local dialect, a concern for the liturgy of his parish church, and close attention to catechism and the education of his parishioners and their children. But above all, he was writing, seriously, and the result was no mean achievement. For from Embleton the first two volumes of Creighton's great *History of the Papacy* (1882) were produced and published, together with occasional papers, mostly on the Italian Renaissance that were later published in *Historical Essays and Reviews* (1902). Then in 1884 Creighton was called from his parish to be first Dixie professor of ecclesiastical history in Cambridge, an interesting shift by modern standards, moving to become bishop

[27]See Kirby, *Historians and the Church of England*, p. 30.

[28]Freeman was appointed regius professor of modern history at Oxford in 1884. Among his works are *Thoughts on the Study of History with Reference to the Proposed Changes in the Public Examination* (2nd edn; Oxford, 1849). His predecessor in this chair was William Stubbs. The pre-eminent modern historian of his day, Stubbs is best remembered for his *Constitutional History of England* (Oxford, 1873–78). But in addition to his academic eminence Stubbs was for 16 years the rector of Navestock (1850–66), and later bishop of Chester and finally of Oxford.

[29]L.H. Creighton, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton* (new edn; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906), I, p. 44.

[30]Quoted in C.M.D. Crowder, 'Mandell Creighton', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* online edition, 2004.

of Peterborough in 1891, and in 1897, bishop of London. It has to be said that he achieved far less scholarly work during his episcopate, admitting in 1896 that he was unable to fulfil his obligation to contribute to the *Cambridge Modern History* because church business in his diocese left him no time for it. As a bishop, he was – in that sadly oft-repeated phrase – 'too busy' to do something that his ordination required of him. As they headed towards the end of the nineteenth century the world of Simmons and Creighton as devout and scholarly clerics was drawing to a close. Admitting his inability to write for the *Cambridge Modern History*, a weary Bishop Creighton wrote to Lord Acton:

> Alas, life closes round me in ways which I do not wish, and I doubt if I shall have time to read or write again ... Your prospectus is admirable and the book would be of enormous value. I hope that you intend to write much of it yourself. I wish I had a chance of a visit to Cambridge, but you will conceive that I am very busy at present ...[31]

In the ancient universities the world was changing after the Universities Tests Act of 1871, though the loosening of religious ties brought benefits of more than one kind. Keble College at Oxford (1870) and Selwyn College at Cambridge (1882) were founded on essentially conservative principles to preserve Christian – and Anglican – education in an increasingly secular environment. But, perhaps inevitably, the academic world, not least through the influence of German universities, was becoming increasingly professionalized and the days of scholarly clerics like Simmons and Creighton, working in their parishes, were largely over. Simmons did not live long enough to see the end of his world, but Creighton was painfully aware of it coming. Yet theirs was not the rose-tinted parish life as once described by A. Tindal Hart in his book *The Country Priest in English History* (1959) and its chapter entitled 'Scholar and Man of Culture':

> The quiet, leisure, and beauty provided by the country rectory have frequently borne fruit in producing the poet, the scholar, and the man of letters; but they have also helped to secure for the countryside itself tiny oases of rich culture and courtly manners, whose influence has slowly but surely permeated the rural parishes.[32]

That dilettante image has persisted and clouded the reality of Simmons, Creighton and their like, perhaps bringing one modern medieval scholar to dismiss Simmons' work as mere 'fey antiquarianism'. That is neither just nor true. As we have seen, the Tractarian Oxford that produced Simmons and Creighton in the middle years of the nineteenth century was not, perhaps, a modern university, but it was for many a place of formidable learning, but a learning that was to a large extent dedicated to the Church and its history in a manner, and with an ecclesiological vision, that is easy to criticize but hard finally to utterly dismiss.

[31]Creighton, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, II, p. 204.
[32]A. Tindal Hart, *The Country Priest in English History* (London: Phoenix House, 1959), p. 72.

Just as the beginning of the *Tracts* is a call by Newman for the ordained clergy to realize afresh the nature of their vocation as priests, so the Oxford Movement was instrumental, simultaneously, in producing through the university scholar-priests in the manner of Simmons and Creighton, with an emphasis on the pastoral work of the priest in his parish, inspired by the example of John Keble in his three decades as vicar of the Hampshire village of Hursley and indeed Newman himself in St Mary's, Oxford. Yet this very emphasis led, within the Movement itself, to a growing sense of the need for more 'professional' training for such ministry.[33] Even as they were sustaining scholarship, the professionalizing of the clergyman's role began to detach such work from the ever busier parish setting. The middle years of the nineteenth century saw a considerable growth in diocesan activity with the founding of boards of education, missionary associations and so on. Improved and far quicker travel by railway brought clergy closer together – and resulted in busier lives.[34] Even Creighton in his remote Northumbrian parish was aware of this as the main line connecting London with Edinburgh ran through his parish boundaries. Clergy were gradually becoming 'too busy' for serious attention to their studies, something which Percy Dearmer picks up all too quickly in *The Parson's Handbook*.

In Oxford, it was largely Tractarian influence that promoted the establishment of theological colleges to supplement the education provided by the university.[35] But what began as an addition to the university tended to replace it. It was partly because the new colleges, at least at first, were often centred on cathedrals rather than universities – though later colleges did appear in Oxford, Cambridge and Durham. But the first Tractarian college to be founded was at Chichester (1839), followed by Wells (1840). Cuddesdon – set a safe five miles away from the flesh pots of Oxford and close to the protection of the bishop's residence – opened in 1854, but it was not until the 1870s and later that colleges began to appear in Oxford and Cambridge themselves. By then, in some ways, the damage was done. The college at Chichester modelled itself on an Oxford college in requirements, academic dress code, daily attendance at the cathedral, and curriculum. Students were taught Greek, Latin and Hebrew, and read through an Anglican diet of Hooker, Butler and William Palmer. The college almost closed in 1845 but it struggled on – at one point there was only one student in residence – until it began to prosper in the last years of the century.

By then things were changing in the theological colleges, though some ordinands continued to be 'trained' by individuals like Bishop J.B. Lightfoot (1828–89) at Durham and C.J. Vaughan (1816–97) as Dean of Llandaff. The comments of a much later Principal of Chichester Theological College, and later Bishop of Ripon, John R.H. Moorman are significant. Education was now being called 'training', and

[33]See, further, George Herring, *The Oxford Movement in Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 58-59.

[34]See Anthony Russell, *The Clerical Profession* (London: SPCK, 1980), p. 44.

[35]There was also a sense that university life could be a tempting snare for the young prospective priest. W.E. Heygate's novel *Godfrey Davenant at College* (1849) was written to warn of the snares and temptations awaiting the innocent young man at university. In 1859, a theological college designed by William Butterfield, the builder of Keble College, was established on the isle of Cumbrae, off the Ayreshire coast in Scotland. A mile of sea separated the young ordinands from the dangerous allurements of Glasgow.

higher standards were in devotional and pastoral spheres, with no mention of the intellectual or academic.

> As a result of the more careful training of men for ordination, whether in the colleges or under the inspiration of such men as Vaughan and Lightfoot, young men went to their parishes far better prepared and with much higher standards, both devotional and practical, of the life and work of a priest.[36]

Perhaps this was so, and no doubt much good was done, but something also was lost – and we reflect again upon the opening words of Dearmer's *Parson's Handbook* of 1899 and their lament upon the 'confusion, lawlessness and vulgarity' within the Church of England, its clergy and bishops both wanting in the necessary theological and liturgical 'knowledge'. It is true that both of our examples of the Victorian scholar-priest in this essay were men of ample means and lived under generous patronage, whether it be from Lord Hotham or Merton College. Nevertheless, it is perhaps worth noting that amongst the early subscribers to the Early English Text Society in 1868, alongside Canon Simmons, there were no less than 66 Church of England clergy, the vast majority of them being parish priests. The EETS was a scholarly venture, part of its purpose being to provide accurate material for the *New* (later *Oxford*) *English Dictionary*. Among these clergy subscribers are to be found Francis Proctor (1812–1905), vicar for Witton, Norfolk for almost 60 years from 1847 until his death. Proctor's *History of the Book of Common Prayer, with a Rationale of its Offices* (1855) was revised by W.H. Frere in 1901, and remains a valuable tool in the study of the Book of Common Prayer. J.C. Atkinson (1814–1900) studied at St John's College, Cambridge, was ordained in 1841, and became vicar of Danby near Yarm in North Yorkshire in 1847. He remained there until his death, an incumbency of 53 years. During that time he did far more than minister to the people of his parish. He became an acclaimed expert in the study of dialect. He edited for the Surtees Society two volumes of *Cartularium Abbathiae de Whiteby* (1879). He published widely acclaimed books on natural history. Like Simmons he was made a prebendary of York Minster in 1891. In the words of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* writing of Atkinson, 'scholarly activity was an integral part of his Christian ministry'. Joseph Bosworth (1787–1876) was for 12 years vicar of Little Horwood, Buckinghamshire and later Rawlinson professor of Anglo-Saxon, Oxford. While a parish priest he published *Elements of Anglo-Saxon Grammar* (1823), and later was the compiler of the first major dictionary of Anglo-Saxon. Apart from such parochial clergymen the membership of the EETS included Archbishop Richard C. Trench (a leading figure in the promotion of the OED and the study of language), Bishop Connop Thirlwall, and William Stubbs, clergyman and distinguished constitutional historian.

With the turn of the century the world of the truly learned Church found in its parochial ministry, was, however, largely vanishing. Church life was becoming busier with committees and the demands of increasing diocesan structures. And the university world was also changing, becoming 'professionalized' in a manner that was to look back with a degree of mild contempt for men like Thomas

[36]J.R.H. Moorman, *A History of the Church of England* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1953), p. 375.

Frederick Simmons, whom one modern medieval scholar, as we have seen, has dismissed for his 'fey antiquarianism'. It is indeed an unjust remark. And furthermore, something in Simmons' own field of medieval liturgical study was lost when it became the field of a slick, disciplined and trained – and undoubtedly able – body of professional medieval scholars, very few of whom are clergy and few of whom have a proper sense of how liturgy 'works'. Simmons of course, was not a professional scholar. But he was certainly a man who for years conducted public worship and celebrated the sacraments in his parish church. He knew very well how liturgy 'works' at first hand and had an organic sympathy with the pre-Reformation texts that he worked upon. He was also a man who devoted his considerable learning to the service of his Church and his vision for it – both nationally and in his parish of Dalton Holme.

Of course, there are many deeply learned Anglican clerics in the twentieth century and beyond. Bishop Frere (1863–1938), who drew much upon Simmons' work, was a formidably learned liturgical scholar – but much of his life was spent as a monk at Mirfield, before he became bishop of Truro. As the century wore on it becomes more and more difficult to find the truly learned and scholarly parish priest, though a few yet remain. Yet Archbishop William Temple (1881–1944) spent a mere three years as a parish priest in the First World War. After him there were further distinguished bishops of towering intellect, among them Robert Mortimer, Michael Ramsey and today Rowan Williams, but all were also university professors and professional academics in their time. The first- and second-generation Tractarian clergy in the nineteenth century – many of them, it is true, people of substance and even affluence – nevertheless were a body of ordained men who often were content to serve as pastors in their parishes, sometimes for many decades, sustaining the idea of the Church of England as a learned Church and as learning something to be pursued in the service of the Church. It is an ideal and a vision that perhaps we have now almost lost – and more is the pity.

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