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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION



IT may be desirable at the outset to offer some reasons for devoting a series of Dale lectures to the teaching of Frederick Denison Maurice. Dr Mackennal, in his book *The Evolution of Congregationalism*, published in 1901, suggested that 'the time has not yet come to estimate the effect of Maurice on the religious and social thinking of the century'. He added, 'I often suspect that when it can be appraised, it will be seen that his abiding influence has been, not on English Churchmen but on English Congregationalists'.<sup>1</sup>

If confirmation and illustration of the truth of Dr Mackennal's judgment be needed, it may be found in the fine appreciation of the influence of Maurice which Dr F. J. Powicke contributed to the *Congregational Quarterly* in April 1930. His interest was first aroused by hearing John Hunter preach in the Old Meeting House (the Baxter Church) at Kidderminster. The teachings of Maurice were mediated to Congregationalists by John Hunter and J. Baldwin Brown and many lesser lights. Dr Powicke became an ardent Mauricean while a student at Spring Hill. 'When I left Spring Hill, in the summer of 1877, Maurice meant far more to me than Simon [the Principal] and this relation was never quite reversed, though the latter's merits as a great teacher . . . gave him an unique place in my affectionate reverence. I may be

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 206.

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wrong, but I incline to think that a majority of our younger ministers in 1877 bore the Mauriceian stamp.' This might suffice to show that an estimate of Maurice should be of interest to Congregationalists, but since Dr Mackennal wrote, we have had several appreciations of Maurice and it might fairly be argued that any further estimate is superfluous.<sup>1</sup> Since 1901, we have had C. F. G. Masterman's sketch of his life and position as a leader of the Church. King's College, London, has made the *amende honorable* for depriving Maurice of his chair in 1853, by establishing a lectureship in his memory. Two series of these lectures have been published, one by Dr Scott Lidgett and the other by Dr Claude Jenkins, the first estimating Maurice's contribution to the Victorian transformation of theology, while the second appraised him not only as theologian but as educator and social reformer. Dr Raven has given us a sympathetic study of Maurice in his account of the Christian Socialist movement in this country. Still more recently an American scholar, Mr C. R. Sanders, in his book *Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement*, devotes the last third of the work to a full and judicious survey of the leading principles of Maurice, whom he regards as the main channel through which the influence of Coleridge was brought to bear on theology and philosophy in England. Where so much has been written already, further discussion may seem to be a work of supererogation. Yet perhaps something remains to be said. Mr Sanders prefaces his account of Maurice with the assertion that 'his figure seems to have lost some of its luster and strength in our day', and if this is the case, it may need more than one essay in appreciation to restore to his figure

<sup>1</sup> For a survey of recent studies of Maurice's teaching, see A. R. Vidler, *The Orb and the Cross*, p. 85.

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the lustre and strength that clearly belong to it. I may note that if Maurice escaped debunking at the hands of Lytton Strachey in *Eminent Victorians*, he also missed inclusion among the portraits of *Great Victorians*, which the Massinghams edited, though it is true that his name is in the list of candidates whose claims were considered. Even now he is probably not estimated at his true worth, and he deserves a higher place in the ranks of the Victorians than he has yet received.

I shall be studying his life and thought in relation to the religious and social movements of his time, and I shall try to estimate afresh his significance for his own age. But my chief reason for choosing my present theme is not that there is still room for a further considered estimate of the influence of Maurice on the religious and social thinking of the nineteenth century. My justification must be found in my conviction that his legacy has not yet been fully appropriated and that his principles are peculiarly relevant to our own age. He was, I think, in advance of his time. His name is often associated with the Broad Church, and Mr Sanders who follows this tradition could appeal for support to the authority of Dr Fairbairn, who, in *Christ in Modern Theology*, associated Maurice with Thomas Arnold and Dean Stanley as leaders of the Broad Church school. Maurice had much in common with Arnold and Stanley, and enjoyed a close friendship with the latter. Yet, as Dr Scott Lidgett observes, he does not belong to any one school of thought. The impossibility of classifying Maurice may be due to his distinctive individuality. J. B. Mozley, who found him antipathetic and irritating, once wrote, 'As for F. Maurice, it is really no use to take him in hand. He is Mr F. Maurice, an individual, and that is all.' Dr Fairbairn suggested that

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Maurice lived in a world of philosophical ideas, peculiarly his own. 'The theology of Maurice had its basis in philosophy and he read Scripture and history and institutions in the light of illuminating philosophical ideas.'<sup>1</sup> Certainly his approach was his own, and the special characteristics of his mind rendered his teaching unacceptable and indeed unintelligible to many of his contemporaries. But the real reason why we cannot classify Maurice is not so much the strength of his individuality, as the genuineness of his catholicity. It may be possible to-day to appreciate Maurice as never before. At a time when the Churches are drawing and being drawn closer to one another, we may well find illumination in his understanding of the nature of the Catholic Church. At a time when planning, national and international, is alike a fashion and a necessity, we may well return to the founder of Christian Socialism to learn the art of co-operation. At a time of renewed concern for Christian education, we may well examine afresh the principles and methods of one of the finest educators of the nineteenth century.

Mr Sanders offers three reasons for what he regards as a decline of interest in Maurice, and an examination of these reasons may introduce a closer study of his character and outlook. Mr Sanders says, 'That this figure seems to have lost some of its luster and strength in our day may be due partly to the changes in systems of values and modes of thinking which have taken place between his day and ours, partly to the vigorous exercise of mind that is required to understand and digest his thought, and partly to a method of self-effacement which he habitually employed in all that he said or did.' With regard to the first

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reason, I am inclined to think that Maurice was more at variance with the systems of values and modes of thinking that prevailed in his own day than he is with those that prevail in ours. Many of the changes which have taken place between his day and ours favour a fuller appreciation of his position. The form in which he presented his teaching may be more distasteful to us than to his contemporaries. No man was more prodigal than he in publishing sermons, and the Victorians seem to have read sermons with an avidity which is sadly lacking in their degenerate posterity. Both the demand for and the supply of printed sermons have fallen off since the Victorians passed from the stage. Volume after volume of Maurice's works consists of sermons, and for that reason alone they often remain unread. But the content, if we digested it, would be found again and again to chime in with and anticipate many of our systems of values and modes of thinking.

The necessity of a vigorous exercise of mind to understand and digest his thought remains unaltered. Many of his contemporaries who were quite capable of such exercise of mind declined to make the effort. They formed the impression that Maurice was confused, inconclusive and ineffectual. We may recall Matthew Arnold's saying that Maurice was constantly beating the bush with great fervour without ever starting the hare. When his *Theological Essays* appeared in 1853, they made an unfavourable impression on James Martineau at first reading. He wrote to R. H. Hutton, 'I am reading Maurice's "Theological Essays" and find them notwithstanding a good deal of interest in parts, on the whole shadowy and unimpressive. I hardly think a man has any business to write till he has brought his thoughts into distincter shapes

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and better defined relations than I find in Maurice. He seems to me to have a mere presentiment of thinking, a tentative process in that direction that never fairly succeeds in getting home. But I have thus far read only some half-dozen of the essays.' J. B. Mozley, in writing to R. W. Church, was even more slashing in his criticism: 'I do not envy you your task of reviewing Maurice's *Theological Essays* in the *Guardian*. . . . It is a pity to see a man losing himself and becoming a ruin from a radical mistake of thinking himself a philosopher. Some of the cut-up reviews did much good in this way. They put down a man at the outset. But Maurice has been petted and told he is a philosopher till he naturally thinks he is one. And he has not a clear idea in his head. It is a reputation that the instant it is touched must go like a card-house.' This adverse verdict might be due to the fact that Maurice had suffered what the late Viscount Halifax regarded as the greatest possible misfortune that could happen to any man. He had been educated at Cambridge. Though he subsequently had the good fortune to become an undergraduate at Oxford and take his degree there, Oxford could not efface the formative influence of the sister university. His was still a Cambridge mind. Church, who had a great admiration for Maurice, felt that he was never at home in Oxford. In writing to Acton, Church says, 'He [Maurice] always seemed to me to lose his temper when talking of Oxford and the Oxford men.' So Mozley's critical attitude and rather contemptuous judgment are readily intelligible. But this cannot be the whole truth of the matter. Though Maurice exerted a great influence in Cambridge, perhaps a deeper influence before he became Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy than during the brief years of his Professorship, yet

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typical Cambridge men reacted to his teaching very much in the same way as Martineau and J. B. Mozley. As representatives of the Cambridge mind, few men can compare with Henry Sidgwick and Leslie Stephen. Sidgwick felt that Maurice was an adept in looking difficulties boldly in the face and passing on. He gives this entertaining picture of Maurice's method: 'In Maurice's hands you feel like a horse being led up to a five-barred gate, which is your theological problem. How will you get over it? Maurice shows you the gate, dilates upon its bars, its height, its insuperability, strokes your nose a little more, and all of a sudden you find yourself looking at the gate from the other side. You know that you have not got over it legitimately, but how you find yourself on the other side you do not know.'

Leslie Stephen was as severe as J. B. Mozley. In 1874 he wrote an article on Maurice's Theology for the *Fortnightly*, of which John Morley was then editor. In a private letter he says, 'I am writing on Maurice for Morley. Of all the muddleheaded intricate futile persons I ever studied, he was about the most utterly bewildering. But I hope to explain his vagaries tolerably.' His more considered judgment may be found at the close of his article on Maurice in the *Dictionary of National Biography*—the article which Raven thinks Stephen should never have written. There, with some insight, he attributes the muddleheadedness which he detects in Maurice to 'his catholic interest in all religious beliefs . . . and his excessive intellectual ingenuity in reconciling apparent contradictions. The effort to avoid a harsh dogmatic outline gives an indistinctness to his style if not to his thought and explains why some people held him, as he says himself, to be a muddy mystic.'

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J. S. Mill, who had a very high opinion of Maurice's intellectual gifts—he reckoned him decidedly superior to Coleridge in merely intellectual power, apart from poetic genius—always thought that there was more intellectual power wasted in Maurice than in any other of his contemporaries. All these verdicts point to real weaknesses in Maurice as writer and thinker, but they underline the necessity of a vigorous exercise of mind if we are to do justice to his thought. If Maurice had really been a futile, muddleheaded person without a clear idea in his head, he could never have exerted the influence on Hort which we know he did. If Maurice had done nothing more than help to form the mind of Hort, he would be entitled to our respect as a thinker and teacher.

An early judgment of R. W. Church is also illuminating. 'There is something in Maurice and his master Coleridge, which awakens thought in me more than any other writings almost: with all their imputed mysticism they seem to me to say plain things as often as most people.'<sup>1</sup> Even more striking are Martineau's second thoughts. After alluding to the religious realism which was the distinction of the genius of Coleridge and which developed itself in the school of F. D. Maurice, he says of the latter, 'for consistency and completeness of thought and precision in the use of language it would be difficult to find his superior among living theologians'. Martineau made the effort to understand Maurice and found the effort to be worth while. In the light of his tribute we may discern the inadequacy and impatience of the estimates of J. B. Mozley and Leslie Stephen. We may also suspect that we shall not appreciate Maurice ourselves without being willing to make a strenuous exercise of the mind.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, p. 17.

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That in his own life-time and since, Maurice was and has been depreciated because of the demands he makes for mental effort is no doubt true. How far the lustre and strength of his figure have been dimmed by his method of self-effacement is more difficult to say. That he was almost morbidly self-depreciatory is true enough. He could not have been and he was not unaware of his real powers, and he was most anxious that they should not be overrated either by himself or by others. He was eager to acknowledge his debts, spiritual and intellectual. He believed he was entrusted with a message which he was unworthy to deliver, with a truth he was unworthy to declare. Like John the Baptist, if he had been asked whether he was a prophet he would have replied, No, a voice. He felt on occasion that particular messages were given to him. He wrote to his mother in 1837, 'I sometimes do find that words are put into my mouth which I hardly knew the meaning of before, and which seem to be spoken through me for the sake of those to whom God would do good. And though it humbles me to perceive how little I have to do with what I have thought and said and even that I have done what in me lay to cross the intention of God, yet it rejoices me to have this new proof of His graciousness and goodwill.'<sup>1</sup> His expressions of self-distrust and even self-condemnation were so frequent as to awaken in some minds the suspicion of insincerity. But the true nature of his self-distrust has been rightly interpreted by R. H. Hutton. It sprang from his reverence for Christ and from the tenderness of his moral sympathies. As R. H. Hutton says, 'the more Maurice believed in Christ, the less he confounded himself with the object of his belief and the more pathetic was his

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distrust of his own power to see aright or to say aright what he saw'.<sup>1</sup> And to quote Hutton again, 'the tenderness of his moral sympathies gave him a double ground for self-reproach and self-abasement. He thought himself guilty of the guilt into the depths of which he had pierced, and he thought himself equally guilty of not having entered into its pangs more generously and with more healing power.'<sup>2</sup> Another aspect of Maurice's self-effacement, or rather of his never completely successful struggle to efface himself, is brought out in a discerning observation of Dr Dale. In the days of his retirement, Dr Dale wrote to a friend:

I am reading Maurice's life again. . . . He seems to have had more than a suspicion that the discomfort with which he received the affection and honour of his friends lay very near the root of all false relations to God. He did not quite learn the secret, but he nearly learnt it. What he wanted was to be conscious that he *deserved* all the love and trust that came to him. I am more and more clear about this, that we must be content to know that the best things come to us from man and God without our deserving them. We are under grace, not under law. Nor until we have beaten down our pride and self-assertion so as to be able to take everything from earth and heaven just as a child takes everything without raising the question, Do I deserve this or that? or rather with the habitual conviction that we deserve nothing and are content that it should be so, do we get into right relations with our Father in heaven or with the brothers and sisters about us. . . . The craving to *deserve* can never be satisfied: we have rather to try to be grateful for what we do not deserve.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Guides of English Thought in Matters of Faith*, p. 318.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>3</sup> Dale, *Life*, p. 541. This passage from Dr Dale's life is worth recalling for its own sake. Even if Maurice was more successful than Dale supposed, how hard it is for the best of men to surrender the thought of making them-