

GEORGE TYRRELL



George Tyrrell (Jesuits) and passed his novitiate at Manresa and other houses of the order, becoming teacher of philosophy at Stonyhurst.

He had a keen sympathy with the difficulties experienced by the ordinary lay mind in trying to reconcile the conservative element in Catholicism with the principle of development and growth, and in *The Faith of Millions*, *Hard Sayings*, and *Nova et Vetera*, he attempted to clear them away. His writings have been described as "apologetic in intention, meditative in method and mystical in substance," and Tyrrell himself certainly combined in a wonderful way the judicial and the enthusiastic types of character.

Besides the influence of Newman, the friendship and work of Robert Dolling made a great impression on him, and as he admitted, saved him from being contented with a merely academic and ecclesiastical type of religion. Tyrrell privately circulated among his friends writings in which he drew a clear line of distinction between religion as a way of life and theology as the incomplete interpretation of that life. One of these, the *Letter to a Professor of Anthropology*, was translated without his knowledge into Italian, and extracts from it were published in the *Corriere della Sera* of Milan in January 1906.

For at least eight years before this he had been more or less in conflict with the authorities of his order, through his sympathy with "modernist" views, but the publication of this letter (afterwards issued by Tyrrell as *A Much Abused Letter*) brought about his expulsion from the order in February 1906.

"The conflict," he wrote, "such as it is, is one of opinion and tendencies, not of persons; it is the result of mental and moral necessities created by the antitheses with which the Church is wrestling in this period of transition."

Tyrrell found no bishop to give him an ecclesiastical status and a *celebret* (authorization given to a priest by a bishop to celebrate the sacraments), and he never regained these privileges. In July 1907 the Holy Office (the Pope) published its decree condemning certain modernist propositions, and in September the pope issued his encyclical *Pascendi Gregis*. Tyrrell's criticism of this document appeared in *The Times* on the 30th of September and the 1st of October, and led to his virtual excommunication from the Church.

In the few years that remained to him he gave himself with patience and dignity to the work of his life. He had already published *Lex Orandi*, insisting that the true interpretation of the creed is determined by its prayer value, and in 1906 he wrote *Lex Credendi*. This was followed by *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, in which he developed his favorite view of revelation as experience; *Mediaevalism*, a vigorous apologia in reply to a Lenten pastoral of Cardinal Mercier, archbishop of Malines, who had attacked him as the chief exponent of Modernism; and *Christianity at the Cross Roads*, which emphasizes the distinction between his own position and that of the Liberal Protestants, and is of special interest for its treatment of the eschatological problems of the Gospels.

On the 6th of July 1909 he was suddenly taken ill, on the 10th he received conditional absolution from a priest of the diocese of Southwark, and on the 12th extreme unction from the prior of Storrington. His intimate friend, the Abbe Bremond, gave him the last absolution and remained with him until his death on the 15th of July 1909. Such appear to be the facts, but Tyrrell's relations with Rome were such that a good deal of mystery was made as to whether he really received the last rites of his Church in any authorized manner. About his own saintly and sympathetic character, and his essential religiousness, there was no doubt.