

Preface

I had long admired Adrian Fortescue, dedicating to his memory in 1992 the first, Edinburgh, edition of my *Rome and the Eastern Churches. A Study in Schism* (and the dedication of course remained in the second, San Francisco, edition of 2010). But the idea of writing something about him came to me when reading Janet Martin Soskice's page-turner, *Sisters of Sinai. How Two Lady Adventurers found the Hidden Gospels* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2009). I realised that some of the same elements found in her book were likely to be present in a study of Fortescue.

Firstly, here was someone fascinated by the Christian East and closely acquainted with it through travel. As a commentator on matters Oriental Fortescue combined romantic enthusiasm with political savvy and theological insight, a rather rare but (to me) attractive combination. Secondly, there was a Cambridge connexion — I liked that, as a resident of the city for twenty-five years — for as his diaries show, Fortescue was often in Cambridge, whether to meet dons, shop at Heffer's, or make a sacramental confession. Letchworth Garden City, his home for the larger part of his priestly life, was on the Cambridge to King's Cross railway, and still is, if you catch a stopping train. It is appropriate that perhaps the largest single cache of his letters is preserved in the Cambridge University Library. Thirdly, like Janet Soskice's 'Sisters of Sinai', Fortescue had a passionate concern with Christian antiquity. Listen to what he says — and the undertone of *pietas* in what he says — in so apparently unlikely a source as a Catholic Truth Society pamphlet on vestments. (He is speaking of the old Latin Mass, now celebrated under the somewhat exotic title, the 'Extraordinary Form'.)

If Ambrose or Augustine or Leo came back now they would find hardly a thing in our world intelligible. Our language, dress, manners, even food would be utterly barbarous and strange to them. And then, if they wandered into a Catholic church, there and there alone would they be at home. They would see the sacrifice they offered still shown forth in the same way. They

would recognize the prayers and understand the language that they used. And as they gazed from the barbarous clothes of the congregation to the altar they would see at least one man dressed as they were. They would recognize the *tunica talaris* [the alb] girt, the *lorum* [the stole], the *mappula* [maniple] on his left arm, and I think — I hope — that they would recognize that he wore over all a *planeta* [chasuble], as they had done. So the ghosts of the mighty men who spread the name of Christ throughout the dying Empire would know that, in spite of all changes, their Church still stands, after sixteen long centuries.

That reminds me of a fourth and last reason for wanting to write about Fortescue. Whereas Professor Soskice's 'Lady Adventurers' were Presbyterians, the relicts of Anglican clergymen, and rather enjoyed conversational opportunities to share with the Orthodox indignation at the enormities of Rome, this was a thoroughly Catholic subject, likely to be of use in my own lifetime theological project of accessing and making more available to others the riches of the Catholic tradition. Fortescue's attempts to show people — in both theory and practice — the best of the Church's liturgical patrimony is a good example of that. His love of the Christian East was strong enough for him to consider transferring, as a priest, to the Byzantine Rite (in later parlance, the Byzantine 'ritual church'), but he remained what he called himself: 'The Latin Clerk'.

It was never likely that the drama of Professor Soskice's narrative would be reproduced in my materials. Still, Adrian Fortescue's literary panache might, I thought, make up for the absence of so strong a story-line. I think so still, and he knew a great deal more about Christian history, Liturgy, and the contemporary condition of the Eastern churches than did the 'Sisters of Sinai', as well as surpassing them as a linguist. Syriac, which the ladies (or at any rate one of them) made their *forte*, was among his accomplishments, as bear witness citations — admittedly, these are brief — in that language from the *Chronicle of Edessa* and the *Hymn of the Apostle Judas Thomas* in his teaching notes from St Edmund's College, Ware. It seems to have been rather a Johnny-come-lately among his various tongues: a Notebook preserved in the Westminster Diocesan Archives claims assiduous study of Syriac in the last two years of the First World War, though he must have had an elementary knowledge before that date, for he discusses how best to render Syriac orthography in the preface to his *The Lesser Eastern Churches*, which dates from 1913. More conspicuously, Hebrew and Arabic were constituent elements in the *doctoratus completus* that gave him his sobriquet 'the Doctor' among the Westminster clergy, and he was able to practice a Syrian form of Arabic during his stay in the Middle East in 1906–1907. At that time he was still hopeful he might be considered a candidate for a chair of Oriental Languages at Vienna.

In its zest and many-sidedness, Fortescue's example of a priestly life is inspirational. His life was not without its difficulties: early bereavement, uncongenial postings, self-questioning as a pastoral priest, serious irritation at what he considered the excessive caution of Church authority in its attitude to scholarship, and, signalled poignantly at one point, the breakdown of friendship. And finally there was the cancer that took him to a premature death. But as the king (Fortescue would have considered him, rather, the Elector of Hanover) remarks to the queen in Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III*: no life is without its regrets, and none without its consolations.

For the help received in looking at original documents I am very grateful to Dom Aidan Bellenger, the Abbot of Downside; Father Nicholas Schofield, the Archivist of the Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, together with his assistants Claire Muller and Peter Kent, and to Nicholas Robinson of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, who located for me the Fortescue letters in the manuscripts collection of the Cambridge University Library. Alan Robinson of St Edmund's College, Ware, put into my hands a copy of a privately printed book, *Adrian*, by the late Mgr John R. McCarthy of East Cleveland, Ohio, which assembles a mass of materials — invaluable for Fortescue's family background — in a rather disorganized and altogether non-paginated way. He also allowed me to see, and handle, the wonderful Fortescue vestments and frontals, saved from decomposition at Letchworth by the efforts of Duncan Gallie, also of St Edmund's, Ware. It is excellent to see how well they are now cared for in the place where Fortescue taught seminarians in the last years of his life. Fergal Martin of the Catholic Truth Society kindly arranged for me to look at rare copies of Fortescue pamphlets published by the Society in the early years of the twentieth century, and the staff of the Society's headquarters in Vauxhall — Carlo Boi, Pier Paolo Finaldi, and Eddie O'Brien — went to considerable trouble to help me in my search. And I must thank too, of course, Professor Soskice for the stimulus provided by her delightful book. Finally, the author and publisher are extremely grateful to Josh Tidy, Curator of the First Garden City Museum at Letchworth, for permission to use photographic images made in connexion with the Museum's special exhibition about the life and work of Adrian Fortescue, which was mounted in 2008.

Blackfriars, Cambridge,
Ash Wednesday, 2011.