

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

To Rome and Back.

BY THE REV. A. W. HUTTON, M.A.,
Rector of Bow Church, Cheapside.

I. ATTRACTION TO ROME.

EVERYONE knows that, during the last century, while the life of Evangelical Protestantism in this country went on very much as usual, devoting itself to missionary effort and to other good works, preaching the Gospel and visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, there were in movement two great theological waves, the one the wave of Liberalism, which may better, perhaps, be described as anti-theological, and the other the Catholicizing wave, which is more especially my subject now. Neither of these waves was confined to our own Church or race; and it may be interesting to note how the two waves crossed each other in the middle of the nineteenth century. Both the incidents that I am about to mention occurred in the month of October, in the year 1845. This was just three years before I was born, and I mention the fact because it explains how that, when at school I became keenly interested in questions of theology and religion, I found myself in the midst of this storm, and both the waves affected me profoundly. Ernest Renan and J. H. Newman shall be my illustrations. Sixty-four years ago (that is to say on October 6, 1845), a young man, clad in priestly dress and evidently anxious to avoid observation, might have been seen descending the steps from the famous seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris, and then entering a private clerical hotel in the opposite corner of the square, whence later he emerged in lay attire, the flowing soutane and the tricorne hat having been laid aside for ever, since the theological ideas that are associated with such a costume had already deserted the mind, if not the heart, of that shy and nervous student. He was not a priest: he was only in minor orders. But from his childhood he had

lived in an ecclesiastical atmosphere ; his first and last teachers had been priests ; for ten or twelve years he had continually aspired towards a like position with theirs ; his studies had been directed solely towards that end, and, by his diligence and the brilliance of his genius, he had progressed in those studies, not only beyond his fellow-students, but beyond the professors themselves. Coming from the old-world province of Brittany, its quaint and often instructive local legends had been dear to him from childhood ; but now, just as he was reaching the goal towards which his mother's prayers and hopes as well as his own inclinations had directed him, he found himself pulled up sharp by that noble instinct so fittingly expressed by Shakespeare, "To thine own self be true." Not that he was perturbed by objections to Catholicism widely felt in our own day. Against its political and moral régime it had not occurred to him that there was anything to object. Its ritual observances did not offend him. Its claim to work miracles did not offend him ; for at that date he had not studied natural science, and had no conception of the ordinary uniformity of natural law. It was his familiarity with the Hebrew and Greek original documents of the Bible (so far as we can be said to have access to the original documents) that convinced him that it would be impossible for him to teach that an infallible Church was the true interpreter of the infallible Word of God. The verbal inspiration of the Bible is, of course, a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, and this he had become convinced that he could not accept. And so regretfully, but confident that he was right, he left those scenes in which he had so long found himself truly at home. His secession was at the time only known to a small circle of friends, but it was none the less profoundly significant of the wave of Liberalism that was then gathering strength ; and, though M. Renan is not now regarded as one of the best of critics, still his light touch was at least as effective in his own country as were the heavier guns of the German critics in theirs ; and in France practically the whole edifice of religion needs now to be rebuilt on surer foundations.

Three days later, at Littlemore, just outside Oxford, was witnessed a very different scene, though one not less noteworthy in its way. This second scene illustrates with astonishing force the attraction to Rome which was so keenly felt thirty to seventy years ago, and is still felt, in a wider circle, though of later years its power seems to be less intense. In this second scene the leading part is played by the eldest son of a London banker, now forty-four years of age. His early training had been Protestant and Evangelical, but yet, with some perversity, the boy had read Tom Paine, Voltaire, and Hume's "Essay on Miracles," at an age when other boys would have cared more for cricket and football. Now he had been for over fifteen years the most distinguished clergyman and the most persuasive preacher in Oxford. He was the acknowledged leader of a great movement, which, at first unconsciously, and later consciously, looked to Rome as its goal. And now, in the austere little chapel of the semi-monastic buildings, to which Newman and his friends had retired as to a refuge during their period of transition, there is seated a half-educated Italian monk, Father Dominic, Passionist, and before him kneels the former Vicar of St. Mary's, the brilliant Fellow of Oriel, craving for admission into the holy Roman Church, and hearing with joy and gratitude the words of absolution pronounced by the uncouth foreigner. It was a strange scene, and its influence is still felt at this day in the Church of England, though it is less felt now than formerly. I myself came under the influence of it, twenty years later, when Newman published his "Apologia," which I read with feverish interest when a boy at school. Two years later (in 1867) I went to Oxford, and, by means of introductions that were given me, was associated at once with the High Church leaders—Pusey, Bright, and Liddon. Nine years later I was received by Newman into the Roman Church; I lived under the same roof with him for more than seven years; and when I came out from the Oratory and from the Roman Church in 1883, I came out, I must confess, more as Renan came out than as our Reformers came out in the sixteenth century; and

then, for about fifteen years, I belonged to no organized Church at all. But I was not out of God's sight ; and, about 1898, I slowly saw my way to resumé clerical work in the Church of England. All this I state in outline, by way of explaining myself. Now I must deal more particularly with what (so far as I can judge) is the attractive power which leads others, as more than thirty-three years ago it led me, to Rome.

This power is, I think, less concerned with the externals of public worship than most people imagine. No doubt ceremonial has something to do with it. Mankind, all the world over, and in all ages, takes pleasure in an ordered ritual and in æsthetic surroundings. The worship of the Hebrews (at any rate during the last 500 years before Christ) seems to have been on a magnificent scale, and I may note in passing that one of the earliest converts to Rome, the Rev. Richard Waldo Sibthorp (whom I knew in the later years of his life), justified his secession on the ground that only Rome preserved the tradition of a splendid ceremonial, such as God Himself is (in the Old Testament) said to have taught, even in minute detail, to the Hebrews, during their wanderings in the desert. If God is unchanged, then the kind of worship that He authorized and delighted in when Moses led the people He must still delight in now, and it is a part of the duty of the Church to authorize and arrange for such worship. Mr. Sibthorp was, however, never a very ardent Roman Catholic. He had been a much-loved, popular Evangelical clergyman at Ryde, and in the main he was an Evangelical even in his Roman days. For some years he returned to the Church of England, and officiated in the chapel of St. Anne's Bede Houses, which he had built at Lincoln. Later he reverted to the Roman Church, and became a Canon of St. Barnabas Cathedral, Nottingham. There a solemn requiem was celebrated at his death ; but at the close of the service his body was removed to Lincoln, and was buried in the cemetery there with the service of the Church of England. This was in accordance with his own directions.

But to return to the main subject, Puritanism has only been

an incident in the history of Christianity. The Apostolic Church was simple enough in its observances, certainly ; but by the year 500, ceremonies, many of them pagan in origin, were adopted by the Christian Church, and have prevailed in it for 1,500 years ; only in Northern Europe, and that only for less than 400 years, has a bareness of ritual observance been the rule. So that most men have inherited a taste for ceremonial from Catholic and pagan ancestors, and this counts for something as one of Rome's attractions. But, so far as my experience goes, I should say it is not the ritual itself, but the fact of the ritual being duly authorized that is attractive. In the worship of the Roman Catholic Church every action of everyone who takes part in it is duly prescribed, and so a grand ceremony can be performed with ease, and even seems natural—very different this from the amateurish rites in which High Churchmen often take part. But this orderliness in ceremonial is little more than illustrative of the orderliness in Church government, which is, of course, the great strength and the great attraction of Roman Catholicism. The simplicity and the completeness of the organization counts for a great deal—the laymen subject to their priests ; the priests to their Bishops ; and the Bishops to the Pope. This subordination, accepted and acted upon as if it were not open to question, means strength and (generally speaking) permanence. It is on the Pope that all depends, and, though it may sound strange to some, it is largely from the Bible that men are brought to the Pope—from the Bible, I mean, when read with certain prepossessions. I well remember how, in the five or six years preceding 1876, certain texts from the Bible were constantly in my mind, as finding their proper illustration only in Rome. There are many that inculcate unity : “ One fold, one Shepherd,” and so forth. And there are times when the texts about St. Peter seem to have a marvellous force on the Roman side. When I was at school, in 1865, one of the masters insisted that the doctrine of the Real Presence was taught by Christ, in the sixth chapter of St. John, for (as he said) that is the interpreta-

tion that has been given to His words by the Church, and He must have foreseen this interpretation, so that He either meant it to be given, or He meant to deceive, the latter alternative being, of course, unthinkable. Well, a little later I applied the same method to the words addressed to St. Peter: "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church." They have, almost from the first, been interpreted as authorizing the Primacy of St. Peter, and so of the Popes, who claimed to be his successors. This must have been foreseen by Christ—even the modern dome of St. Peter's, with these words emblazoned round it, must have been foreseen by Him—so that, unless we take the impossible alternative of an intention to deceive, we must confess that Christ meant to teach the Primacy of the Pope.

I am not now stopping to consider what is the reply to this dilemma. I do not, of course, admit it as an argument now, but I refer to it as an illustration of the attractive power that Rome seems to possess in the settlement of controversies, as by Divine right. And, beyond all question, it is the fear of religious Liberalism that sends men over to Rome, in order to escape from the dangers to which that form of freedom seems to them to expose religion. Even the "sacrifice of the intellect," which Roman Catholicism demands, insisting on a man, by an act of the will, setting aside his doubts, and even what seems to him pretty clear evidence to the contrary, and making an act of complete submission to the teaching of the Roman Church—even this may seem to a man, in times of difficulty or of enthusiasm, to be warranted by such texts in the Bible as—"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," it being assumed, of course, that only through the Church do we know what the obedience is that Christ demands of us. Such were some of the thoughts that passed through my mind, and I have in manuscript many pages, written in the years 1875 and 1876, just before and after my being received into the Roman Church, and from these I will quote a few sentences, and then leave the consideration of the other side of

the question until later. After mentioning various clergymen whom I consulted (but not to any purpose), I continued as follows: "I felt at this time that the controversy about Rome was a fundamental one. If it was merely a question of raising difficulties, as several of my friends had done, it would not be hard, from science, history, and philosophy, to raise a host of difficulties against the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the fact of a revelation, and so forth; and these difficulties would be very hard to meet, if I were seeking to convince a man prejudiced against these truths. It seemed to me at this time that, given the Apostle's Creed, the Creed of Pope Pius followed. I was not attracted by the practical system of Rome, nor by her ceremonial, for which my experience of ritualism had inspired me with a certain dislike. But what I felt was that religious truth, if discoverable at all, must be one and invariable, everywhere, always, and for all, though not excluding deductive development; and to secure this I felt that any other theory than that of Rome was hopeless. I was also convinced that, given historical tradition, and the Bible as part of it, no living and working system answered to it more accurately than that of Rome; though perhaps a more ideal system might be set down on paper. And then, assuming the Divine authority of the Bible, what was the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies as to the future Church? What was the true interpretation of a hundred passages in the Gospels and Epistles, if Rome's was not the right one? The Papacy must somehow be accounted for. Could I be sure that it was only a parasitic growth of human engrafting on the Church? Was there not really more Scriptural traditional testimony to its being, in its origin, a Divine institution than there was for episcopacy? And what more was there to be said if that were so?

"And then, what a high ideal of life did Catholicism assert, and, on the whole, assert successfully. Whereas, when I looked round on the Anglican communion, what signs of a Divine authority could it show? It had been my good fortune to have been associated with some of the best of its Bishops and clergy.

Both the Bishops I had served under were very good men, and High Churchmen, but how dependent they were on the State! how sensitive of public opinion was even Dr. Wordsworth, who had the reputation of being the most courageous of all! At Oxford I had known all the pillars of the High Church party, and I could not but admit and admire their great natural gifts and their undoubted goodness. But they also had each of them 'views,' and these views were continually in a state of transition. Latterly, as a country clergyman, I had been thrown among men of the most divergent opinions, and of very varying abilities. . . . There were a few ritualistic clergy within reach, but, of all my brethren, they seemed the least worthy of admiration. They were narrow-minded and crotchety, unpractical, and unattractive. . . . I was not, indeed, without a certain admiration for the country clergyman of the old school such as my father had been, to whose benefice I had succeeded. It was true that his teaching made little or no permanent impression on his parishioners, who, if religious, were pretty sure to be Wesleyans. The good that he did he did chiefly by the example of his life, his refinement, his charity in word and deed, by his transparent honesty and simplicity. But he was gone, and could not now be recalled, while the younger generation of the clergy imitated him only in his geniality."

Here I must conclude my quotation, and leave for a second paper a consideration of the other side of the picture, Of course I can see now that my feet went astray, when, as an Oxford undergraduate, I adopted the High Church position, partly, I think, from mere perversity, but partly, also, on account of the good fellowship of the High Churchmen with whom I was brought into contact. But I might have known, and I think I really must have known, that the position was itself a false one, historically untenable; while it led straight to Rome, as a mere matter of logic and consistency. That point I now had reached, and, on the whole, it satisfied me for the time. But my "conversion," if such it can be called, was

really more an experiment than a conviction. It was impossible for me to cease criticizing, even after I had gone inside. But

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform,”

and, looking back on it all now, after an interval of over thirty years, I feel sure that though “perverse and foolish oft I strayed, still in love He sought me,” as, indeed, He continues to search for each one of us.

(To be continued.)



Some Chapters in the History of the Early English Church.

BY THE REV. ALFRED PLUMMER, D.D.

I.—THE SOURCES; HISTORIANS.

THE very earliest date at which we can place the birth of the English Church is the landing of Augustine, A.D. 597. There had, of course, been Christians in Britain long before that, but they were not English Christians. When the Gospel was preached first in these islands we do not know, but Bishops went from Britain to the Council of Arles in 314, and to the Council of Rimini in 359. These Bishops, however, were not English, but British; not Teutons, but Kelts. The Teutonic English had not yet reached these shores. The ancestors of English Churchmen were at that time heathen tribes on the Continent. When they did come and settle in Britain, the British Christians made no attempt to convert them, and the heathen invaders almost destroyed Christianity in the eastern half of the island. Bede tells us that down to his own day (673-735) British Christians still treated English Christians as pagans, so strong was the race-hatred towards them.

We omit all mention of the writers from whom we derive information respecting the history of Christianity in the British