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SOME ASPECTS OF THE REFORMATION.

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THE revision of the Prayer Book has produced much discussion on the Protestant Reformation, but it has been a discussion largely confined to the questions of how far the English Reformers intended to make alterations in doctrine and ritual and how far those intentions were actually made effective in the Elizabethan Settlement. Some contend that the English Reformers intended to make changes but were so clumsy that they failed to express what they meant ; others that the Reformers never intended changes but unhappily blundered into making them. There is also a school which appears to think that there was nothing to reform but that reasons largely political and purely local brought about regrettable but unimportant alterations which have long since ceased to have any significance.

I do not, however, propose to plunge into the troubled waters of theology and will content myself by saying that the Church in England prior to the Reformation was an integral part of the Church of Rome and identical with all other parts of it not only in organization but in doctrine and ritual, and that contemporaries considered that the Elizabethan Settlement made changes of a radical nature. In 1570, after that Settlement was completed, the Pope excommunicated Queen Elizabeth, deposed her and released her subjects from their allegiance—he at any rate knew what had happened.

On what was the general intention of the Reformation Bishop Burnet summed it up about 100 years later in his dedication of his *History of the Reformation*, when he said, "The design of the Reformation was to restore Christianity to what it was at first and to purge it of those corruptions with which it was over-run in the later and darker ages."

Loose statements are sometimes made which suggest that the Reformation in England was the act of an arbitrary monarch, though no one has had the temerity to suggest this about Scotland. This theory attributes the Reformation solely to the refusal of the Pope to annul Henry VIII's marriage with Catherine of Aragon—a matter which could have been easily arranged if it had not been that Catherine's brother was the Emperor. It is perfectly true that this refusal was the cause of Henry VIII repudiating the Papal supremacy and proclaiming himself Head of the English Church, but he did not understand himself by this action to be changing either his own religion, or that of his subjects. There was a constant struggle with the Pope all through the Middle Ages, and Henry VIII was by no means the first English King to repudiate his supremacy in ecclesiastical matters. There is even an Act of Parliament of Edward III in which the King is described as Supreme Ordinary, and there are at least three other Acts of

Parliament before the reign of Henry VIII to the same general effect. Henry VIII considered himself as merely doing what his predecessors had done when they were strong enough.

Henry VIII did, however, further the Reformation by letting loose a great flood of Protestant feeling, and he did this most of all by sanctioning the introduction into England of the English Bible and furthering the use of it.

The Reformation was neither the act of an arbitrary monarch nor a merely local event peculiar to England. It was part of a great movement of thought which spread all over Europe.

The recovery of the literature of the Classical period, and in particular of Greek thought, created the "New Learning," or "Renaissance." The New Learning was the parent of the Protestant Reformation, and together they transformed the Middle Ages into the modern world.

The idea that the age so transformed was a golden age is fashionable but quite fallacious. Looking backwards, the Middle Ages lie between modern times and the centuries of barbarism which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire of the West. Between the Norman Conquest and the accession of Henry VII there were eighteen Kings of England. Several of them were either deposed or murdered or both. In practically every reign there were armed insurrections, often headed by one or more of the reigning monarch's sons, and there were prolonged periods of civil war. War or a sort of war with Scotland and in or with France was practically continuous, and if by any chance there was no fighting in Ireland, there was pretty sure to be trouble on the Welsh Border. Society was organized on the basis of fighting being not an abnormal, but a normal, condition, and if there was no public war, powerful land-owners would ride about with small armies, oppress each other's tenants and attack each other's castles. Castles did not exist solely for protection against foreign enemies; in 1218 Richard de Umfraville was afraid that a castle being built at Nafferton threatened Prudhoe Castle, and he was influential enough to obtain a writ from Henry III ordering the Nafferton fortifications to be pulled down.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that the civilization of the Middle Ages was of a comparatively low type. An illustration of this is the state of the means of communication, which is at any rate some index of material civilization. The Roman Empire had a magnificent system of roads, with relays of post horses, and it was possible to travel at the rate of 100 miles a day. In the Middle Ages, the art of road-making had been lost, and what roads there were, beyond mere tracks, were the remains of those left by the Romans. Wheeled vehicles were few, and road traffic was on foot or horseback, or in litters.

Sanitation as we know it did not exist—in the towns the streets were full of garbage—taking the wall meant taking care not to be knee-deep in filth in the gutter. As a result disease was rife, and in the towns in moderately healthy times when there were no epidemics, the death rate is believed to have been as high as 50 per thousand

per annum as against 12.4 for the whole of England and Wales in 1924 and 16.8 for the county borough having the highest death rate. Plagues producing great mortality were frequent; the Black Death in 1349 was only one of many, though the worst, as can be readily believed, since it swept off a third of the whole population of England.

Partly owing to the uncleanly habits of the people, skin diseases were prevalent. Leprosy itself was common. The number of deformed people was large—this was due to bad and insufficient food and the absence of medical and surgical attention. Though hospitals were numerous, they were not hospitals for the cure of disease so much as refuges for the aged and infirm. Medical and surgical science was in a primitive stage and doctors were a subject of popular ridicule.

In the Middle Ages mutilation was a common punishment for crime; its mildest form was the loss of an ear, but the felon might be deprived of a limb or his eyes. Imprisonment was worse: prisoners were not fed except by their friends or the charity of strangers. A person who could not pay the gaoler suffered severely. Most prisons and many castles had an underground dungeon. (Fourteenth-century humour called the underground prison in the King's Bench "Paradise.") Some of these places were merely dark narrow pits having their sole opening at the top, and through this the prisoners were lowered or dropped, with a risk of broken bones. For capital crimes, there was burning and disembowelling as well as hanging.

The *peine forte et dure* to compel accused persons to plead was not easily distinguishable from torture, though torture as a means of extracting evidence never became part of the ordinary machinery of English law. Edward II, however, urged by Pope Clement V, admitted Papal inquisitors into England and the use by them of torture. On the Continent, where they had been corrupted by the persecutions of heretics, torture was common enough.

Unauthorized and unofficial torture for the purpose of extracting money was not unknown in England, and there are many recorded instances of it. Justice could be and was corrupted. Salzman quotes among other cases that of Wilkin of Gloseburn in the reign of Henry III. Wilkin accused Gilbert Wood of killing his son, thereupon Gilbert resorted to bribery and took steps to have Wilkin arrested on a charge of theft and thrown into York Gaol. The gaoler bound Wilkin naked to a post and kept him without food till he paid 40s. to be released. Justice, particularly for the poor man, was dangerous to seek and difficult to obtain in the golden age.

The great achievement of the Middle Ages was its Ecclesiastical Architecture. It is common to assume that the profusion of ecclesiastical buildings necessarily indicated lofty religious motives and high moral standards. It is, however, unsound to deduce that motives which may be reasonably assumed to-day necessarily prevailed then. The anarchy and cruelty of the time of Stephen was such that men said that Christ and his Saints slept, but it was in this reign that a hundred new foundations of monasteries were made.

Mr. G. M. Trevelyan, in his recently published *History of England*, has the following interesting passage:—"Those who caused and exploited the anarchy were foremost in making liberal grants to the Cistercian monks, who first came over from France at this period. We need not suppose that religious motives of a very high order were always at work, any more than that they were always absent. A Baron, whose imagination was perturbed by some rude fresco in the church of a long-clawed devil flying off with an armoured knight, would reflect that a grant to a monastery was an excellent way of forestalling any such unpleasant consequences that might follow from his own habits of torturing peasants and depopulating villages."

Until the revival of learning began to take effect in the later Middle Ages, the number of those who could read and write was comparatively few outside the ranks of the clergy. It is not without significance that the word "clerk" originally meant a cleric.

It will be useful, therefore, to see what was the state of education among the clergy, in the age of faith. All through the Middle Ages there were complaints of their ignorance. Salzman gives some illustrations of this in his *English Life in Middle Ages*. In 1222, at a visitation of seventeen parishes in Berkshire it was found that five of the clergy could not construe the Mass; in other words, they did not understand the words of the Church Service any more than their congregations did. When Louis de Beaumont was made Bishop of Durham in 1316 he did not understand any Latin, and had to be carefully coached for some days in the consecration service. At the service itself when he came to the word "metropolitan" he could not pronounce it, and after a good deal of gasping exclaimed in French, "Let that be taken as read." Bishop Hooper's visitation in 1552 is said to have shown "scores of clergy who could not tell who was the author of the Lord's Prayer or where it was to be found."

Celibacy being considered the holiest of states, marriage and family life held a lower status than they now do. St. Bonaventura affirmed that married people would have no aureolas in heaven. The rule of celibacy among the clergy was frequent in its breach and did not produce high standards of morality. Luther says, "We see also how the priesthood is fallen and how many a poor priest is encumbered with a woman and children and no one does anything to help him though he might very well be helped." The last Archbishop of St. Andrews before the Reformation was, of course, pledged to celibacy, but he lived openly with Lady Stair and had six children.

The monastic system had been a necessity of a rude age. When violence was rampant, the regard (largely superstitious) paid to the monks enabled them to live a life of meditation and to keep alive, to some extent at any rate, the pursuit of learning. The history of monasticism, however, is a history of constant failure to maintain an ideal. One attempt after another was made to restore the asceticism and rules of discipline which were their central idea, but they were never successful for more than a generation, probably because the ideal contemplated, or at any rate the way in which it

was attempted to be carried out, was false to human nature. When, therefore, the Middle Ages were coming to a close, ideas were turned to suppressing monasteries rather than reforming them, and this was not peculiar to England; there had been a partial disendowment of monasteries in Spain as early as 1494, when part of the over-swollen funds of the monasteries were restored to the parishes to which they originally belonged or diverted to the use of hospitals. When Henry VIII suppressed the monasteries in England, he was not attempting to carry out a change of religion but was trying to effect what was felt to be necessary throughout Europe. The monastic system came to an end as a universal system because it had outlived its usefulness.

The age which the New Learning and the Reformation swept away was an age of crude and materialistic conceptions. The veneration of relics was part of the Church's financial system. A thirteenth-century example of this is given in Coulton's *Five Centuries of Religion*. The monks at Heisterbach built a new church; being a new foundation, it had no relics; this was financially unsound, but the difficulty was overcome by a monk having a vision in which he saw a casket containing relics belonging to a chapel at Godesburg floating in the air on its way to Heisterbach. The casket duly arrived with the relics belonging to some one else.

Most relics were bogus, and there was an immense duplication. Canterbury had a complete set of the bones of St. Dunstan, and so had the monks of Glastonbury. The deliberate deceptions on the one hand and the credulity on the other with regard to relics had indirectly a detrimental influence on morals, as they promoted that "indifference to truth which was one of the characteristics of the Medieval Church."

Medieval theologians seriously discussed whether volcanic eruptions were not due to the overcrowding of Hell by the damned, and a medieval text-book asks the question, "Why is the sun so red in the evening?" and gives the answer, "Because he looketh upon Hell and reflecteth the flames thereof."

The system of Indulgences¹ shows the Medieval Church at its worst, and the revolt against the system marked the formal beginning of the Reformation. In the ancient Church, members who had been excluded for serious sins could be re-admitted (1) by making public confession and expressing contrition or real sorrow, followed by (2) the making satisfaction for the sins committed by the performance of some action prescribed on the particular occasion; this might be fasting or the freeing of slaves. After the satisfaction had been performed, came the re-admission into membership.

In its final form the system consisted of, first, private confession to a priest accompanied by "attrition"; at first contrition or sincere penitence had been required, but later "attrition," or the condition of being rather sorry, was considered sufficient. After this came absolution by the priest, not after but before the satisfaction; abso-

¹ For a full account of this subject see Dr. Lindsay's chapter on Luther in the *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II, pp. 123-129.

lution removed the guilt and with the guilt the eternal punishment due. This did not end the matter, otherwise the sinner would escape all punishment, including the pains of purgatory, and to avoid these it was still necessary to make satisfaction by performing penance. The priest prescribed the penance, but the torturing doubt was left of whether the priest might not have made a mistake in calculating the temporal satisfaction or penance exactly equivalent to the purgatorial punishment entailed by the sin. The penance might not be sufficient and there might be some purgatorial punishment left over. Here came the importance of Indulgences. The medieval theory was that the good deeds of all the members of the Church were the common property of all, and that there was a common store house in which superfluous merits had accumulated and had been placed in charge of the Pope to be dispensed by him to the faithful. If the sinner obtained an Indulgence then he was safe from the purgatorial penalties for the sins he had committed. Indulgences could be procured on the terms of fighting in the armies of the Pope, visiting certain churches or altars, making pilgrimages to Rome and visiting certain altars there. Then, if it was impossible on account of health to make the pilgrimage, it became sufficient to pay some one else to do it. Finally it came down to a plain money tariff, with the sale of pardons for sins on a regular scale. "The Lord," remarked an official at the Court of Innocent VIII, "does not will the death of a sinner: He wills that he shall live and shall pay." Though in theory, the Indulgence only relieved from purgatorial penalties, they used language which made intelligent people, including Dante, think that they removed the guilt of sin. When in 1513 Leo X proclaimed Indulgences for the building of St. Peter's, Tetzl and his fellows may possibly (as has been recently alleged) have preached the necessity of repentance, but the effect on the mind of the average man was that he was buying a ticket which both freed him from purgatory and remitted his sins.

The great difference between the Middle Ages and modern times does not lie solely in material civilization or even in moral or intellectual standards: there was also a difference of attitude. The Middle Ages looked upon the organization of Society as being static. Society did, of course, change, but there was no conscious idea of progress. For instance, there was very little direct legislation and a great part of what there was was looked upon as merely restating what was already the law. When Englishmen in the early part of the Middle Ages complained of bad government, they did not ask for new laws; what they asked for was that the laws of Edward the Confessor should be restored. They probably did not know what the laws of that "holy but imbecile monarch" were, and if the laws had been restored, they would have been unsuitable, but in their view no new machine was needed: the old machine, which in their belief had existed unchanged from time immemorial, was all right if it was only worked properly.

This attitude of mind was not confined to laws and customs but extended into other spheres. Speculation was almost entirely

confined to theology, and even where it was not, the Church was the authority, and speculation must only take place within the limits which the Church laid down.

The chief feature in the revival of learning was the recovery of the Greek literature. This received a great impetus from the fall of Constantinople, which had the effect of introducing into Europe Greek manuscripts in large numbers and an influx of people who understood the literature and could teach the language.

The effect of the revival of learning was that the Greek philosophers became known again in Western Europe. Aristotle had only been known in fragments in imperfect Latin translation, and Plato not at all. Scholars discovered that the current ideas and methods of thought were not the only possible ideas and methods. The habit of free private inquiry spread, to the inevitable detriment of the belief in a fixed and stationary society whose knowledge and modes of thought were controlled by the authority of the Church. Then the discovery of printing enabled both the classical literature and the new ideas to be disseminated and to reach large numbers of people.

The discovery of the new world, in 1492, was also very disturbing. In the words of Mr. R. H. Murray in *Political Consequences of the Reformation*, "the moment that men completely realized there was another continent where the eagle of the Holy Roman Empire had never flown, the whole structure of medievalism was undermined."

The period was one of intellectual ferment, and the way having been paved by the revival of classical learning, attention was turned towards the Bible and the Early Fathers. Erasmus published a Greek edition of the New Testament in 1516, and it was found that the Vulgate which had the authority of the Church was full of errors.

In England there were still in existence written copies of Wycliffe's English Bible which had been translated from the Vulgate about 1380. Tyndal's English Bible was printed and published in 1525, and other English translations followed. Between 1530 and 1546 there were fifty-two editions of the Lutheran Bible and 98 reprints issued from Wittenberg. Between 1566 and 1644 there were at least 140 editions of the Geneva translation of the Bible. Europe was flooded with copies of the Bible in the vernacular.

This further shook the authority of the Church, as the reader of the New Testament could not find in it any precedents for the worship of the Virgin Mary or the saints, for celibacy of the clergy, for the use of Indulgences or for the veneration of relics. The Papacy was corrupt, the Church was full of abuses, attempts at reformation from within had failed, partly because they affected the Church's financial system. Wycliffe had been before his time, but in the sixteenth century intellectual freedom had become the dominant note, and the time was ripe for revolutionary change.

Luther, in 1520, formulated the standpoint of the reformers in three great treatises: *The Address to the Nobility, On Christian Liberty* and *On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church*. These

were partly an attack on specific abuses and partly the framing of a new theological basis.

I only wish to draw attention to two points—one is the doctrine of Justification by Faith. Whether all the implications of the doctrine can be supported, I am not competent to judge, but the idea that the response of the inward mind to the Divine promise is the true criterion, appealed to the men of that time as being on a higher plane than the system of Indulgences, which made a priest the judge of the remission of sins and allowed the Pope to fix the money payment which would absolve from Divine punishment. Luther did not hold that works were of no account, but that a good man would produce good works.

The other point is the doctrine of the priesthood of all faithful Christians, which Luther supports from the New Testament and the writings of the Fathers. Luther deduces from this doctrine the right of the laity to communion in both kinds, and that Orders are not a sacrament but a matter of Church organization. In this way he put the laity on an equality with the clergy with a corresponding increase in the sense of individual responsibility. It has been said that henceforth "the religious were no longer men and women in a monastery, and life and religion were now fundamentally one." On its other side this implied the right of private judgment, upon which are based the modern ideas of religious, intellectual and political liberty.

Calvin, on these questions, followed in the same line: he held that the laity and pastors are equal among themselves. He also said, "Christ is the only Head of the Church, and no constraint can be exercised over the conscience which Christ has made free."

What the authority of the Church meant may be gauged by the fact that Tyndal, the translator of the Bible into English, was executed for heresy. Copernicus, who revolutionized ideas on astronomy by putting forward the theory of Pythagoras that the earth moved round the sun, was accused of heresy on that account. Galileo, who elaborated and proved Copernican theories, spent twenty-seven years in prison for heresy. Reuchlin, the first of the great Hebrew scholars, was condemned for heresy on account of his translations from the Hebrew, though the sentence aroused such a storm of ridicule that it was reversed.

In the Massacre of St. Bartholomew alone, ten thousand perished; on receipt of the news in Rome, the Pope had the city illuminated, attended a solemn service of thanksgiving with thirty-three cardinals, and struck a medal to commemorate the massacre.

The first index of prohibited books included all (about forty) of the existing translations of the Bible into the vernacular.

Practically all scientific discoveries which have been made since the close of the Classical period have been made or rediscovered since the revival of learning and the commencement of the Reformation.

As regards literature there is very little in English from before the Reformation of which we can both understand the language and appreciate the ideas.

About 1492—the date of the discovery of America—is generally considered the end of the Middle Ages, but the acceptance of the New Learning and the Reformation did not take place in a day or in any one year; they cover a long period. Some of the ideas and practices of the Middle Ages were fighting for existence and in process of disappearing long before that date; others did not disappear for many generations after. The age of faith was, however, an age not only of low material civilization, but of ignorance, cruelty and gross superstition, and whatever may have been the highest teaching of the Church, the system, as it worked, produced religious ideas of a mechanical and materialistic type. Historically the Middle Ages are the end of the Dark Ages, while the Renaissance and the Reformation belong to the modern world.

NOTE—The principal authorities of which use has been made are:—

Luther's Primary Works, translation by Wace & Buchheim.
Political Consequences of the Reformation, R. H. Murray.
Five Centuries of Religion, G. C. Coulton.
Cambridge Modern History (Vol. II, "Reformation").
History of English Law, Pollock & Maitland.
English Life in the Middle Ages, L. F. Salzman.
History of European Literature, Hallam.
England in the Age of Wycliffe, G. H. Trevelyan.
Anglicanism, Carnegie.



The Swarthmore Lecture was established in 1907 as "an annual lecture on some subject relating to the message and work of the Society of Friends." The lecturer for 1926 was Mr. A. Neave Brayshaw, who took as his subject "The Things that are before us." It is an interesting examination of the principles of the Society of Friends and their application to the changing conditions of the life of to-day. The lecturer is a candid critic and does not hesitate to indicate any weakness, but he is convinced that the spirit and fellowship of his Society have still much to do for the world. He speaks of one chief change during the past century—the members mixing with the world undistinguished by dress and speech. "Nothing is now closed to us on the ground that we are Friends; middle-aged men and women are enjoying recreations, for indulgence in which their grandparents would have been disowned, our lives have been enriched by the literary and æsthetic life in which we share. We can look back on two generations of freedom, and estimate gain and loss." The old problem of self-expression and self-denial faces the members, and they must realize the fundamental truth—no cross, no crown. A body of Christians which has done so much in the past will not be found wanting to meet the opportunities of changing conditions as they arise.