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The Opportunity of the Anglican Communion.

By A MISSIONARY BISHOP.

IT is impossible to believe that our Lord is the One "Who openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth," and fail to connect Him and His eternal purposes with all that is happening around us at this time. No moment of equal significance, no combination of circumstances so striking, has taken place since the dawn of the Christian era. At that time there were three coincidental facts that were all necessary to each other: "The *Messenger* of the Covenant" standing upon ground (Palestine) that was the meeting-place of East and West—ground uplifted *morally* by Divine Revelation above anything then known in the world; *the roads* along which the message was to go made ready and held by the greatest world-power that had yet been seen (Rome); and *the language* (Greek) in which that message was to come down the centuries at its best, and made ready to hand. Such a moment, but of an even more remarkable character, is on us now. Let us only consider the influences and opportunities that radiate from our own land. They are absolutely unprecedented. And the most remarkable discoveries are those which have to do with travel, correspondence, telegraphy, and all that simplifies movement and co-operation. The sensation of surprise is almost gone. The world is much interested in these discoveries, and knows how to use them for its own pleasure and convenience. The man who believes in his God sees in them the hand of Him Who is the sole Disposer of opportunity. It is the day of God's power—may His "people be willing"!

The horizon is alive with new movements and combinations in lands where but a few decades back there was the stillness of death.

The African continent is no longer a *terra incognita*. Our spheres of influence are everywhere, our roads are penetrating her on every side. The tribes are awake and determined to fall

into line with the march of progress. The unchanging East (and Far East) is no longer unchanging. It is awake, never to go to sleep again. And all that the reviving national consciousness that is coming to Japan, China, and India means to the rest of the world no man can forecast. Meanwhile our Empire is becoming consolidated. A spirit of unity and fellow-citizenship is taking hold of every part. And the influence of this cradle of the race was never greater than at this moment.

To the Church of Philadelphia of old, which had exercised its little strength, its loyalty to the Word and to the Name, for the glory of her Lord, there was given a promise of further opportunity as a reward: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." There is no more exhilarating prospect than this—that no labour is really lost, that no attainments in character, no efforts of self-sacrifice or self-denial, are thrown away. "He that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

Some degree of obedience and loyalty, some readiness to equip ourselves for a world-task, has been rewarded a hundred-fold with world-opportunity. Britain was a very small and uncomfortable Britain, and her world-policy was a very poor thing, when William Wilberforce, on March 25, 1807, wrote these words in his diary: "The King has given his assent to-day to the abolition of the slave trade. God will now bless England. The first authentic news of the defeat of the French has come to-day."

Certainly there are three great dates—1807, when we abolished the slave trade; 1834, when we abolished slavery in our dominions; 1864, when the United States of America did the same—that have more to say to the expansion and influence and opportunities of the English-speaking peoples than any other single thing. And it must never be forgotten that these moral movements were the direct outcome of the same spiritual awaking that created Methodism, and sent missions oversea to the Colonies and beyond. It is, therefore, no fanciful suggestion

that the open doors are in God's gracious providence not merely coincidental, but connected with revived obedience to His own revealed purposes and will.

The Church has no right to be dismayed if the conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil wax hotter. She is a militant Church, endowed with the Holy Ghost for that very thing. Of these, and of the different forms that unbelief takes from time to time, this article takes no account. Our anxieties arise rather from storms that the Church herself has to some extent raised, controversies within herself that she does not seem to know how to resolve. The storms come from the direction of an organized and powerful Nonconformity; the controversies come from the successors of the Oxford Movement. With both we have to deal.

Let us not be unfair to Nonconformity. The pendulum at the time of the Reformation was bound to swing to the other extreme. Many of those men who were most profoundly awakened to the power of Christ's Gospel at that time were naturally the most resentful against a Church system that had so far departed from that Gospel. Little wonder that form and ceremony were discounted in their eyes, and that many thought they saw in harmless usages the reimposition of a bondage which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear. It is impossible to read the dreary controversies of those times and fail to see that impossible terms of communion are largely responsible for the Nonconformity that asserted itself so strongly in the Stuart period. It is enough to make angels weep to read of King Charles's methods with Scotland, and when to intolerance are added the disabilities under which Nonconformity suffered till within the last century, there is nearly enough to explain its attitude to-day. In all fairness, of course, it must be asserted, on the other side, that Nonconformity knew how to use the same weapons during its brief period of power under the Commonwealth. But the situation did not improve as time went on. The Church herself has strengthened the ranks of Nonconformity by failing to recognize the workings of God's

Holy Spirit in the Methodist movement of the eighteenth century. And to-day we are face to face with a Nonconformity that is not only far-extending, but also is organized in an unprecedented way. Now, it would be a mistake to regard this condition of things as necessarily hostile to the Church of England. There are many evidences to the contrary. There are parts of England to-day where people (illogically enough, no doubt) attend their chapel in the morning and their parish church in the evening. Many spiritually-minded Nonconformists regard the Church of England as a valuable barrier against Rome, and they would not like to see that barrier removed. But there are two things against which Nonconformists protest. The majority of them consider that we have no longer any right to call ourselves a National Church, when so large a part of the nation belongs to their ranks; and all of them object to being unchurched by the sacerdotal theory that has latterly obtained so great an ascendancy in the clerical circles of our Church.

About this latter movement a very few words must be written. Experience has abundantly proved that hard words do no good and controversy engenders bitterness. It is abundantly evident now that two different views of the Reformation settlement obtain, and the two are not reconcilable with each other. To those who feel that it must be "repented of in tears and ashes" we may have to say: "Let there be no strife between us: if thou wilt go to the right hand, then I will go to the left." It is most sad if it should come to this, and these words are written (from a somewhat different point of view to the one usually taken) in the hope of persuading as many as possible *not* to take the line that Lot took of old!

There remains one other word to be added, and that word must be an appeal to the whole Church. It is high time we clearly faced this issue—viz., that we have only to leave things alone, and the natural and logical evolution will be first disestablishment and then disruption. And it will be recorded on the page of history that just at the moment when unequalled

opportunities lay before and around the Church of England and the nation of England we fell out by the way, to the grievous loss both of the nation and the world! It will be disastrous if it should come to this, and these words are written and the appeal which follows is framed in the hope of awakening some to the great danger we are in by these "unhappy divisions."

At the recent Church Congress at Great Yarmouth the President startled us all somewhat by his bold facing of the Disestablishment question. And many felt that the Bishop of Norwich was feeling the pulse of the times.

It does not require much foresight to gather that circumstances are bringing the two extremes into political co-operation with a view to disestablishing the Church of England. From entirely different points of view, and for absolutely different reasons, the Nonconformists and the Sacerdotalists are likely to combine with this end in view.

The Archbishops and Bishops, of whom it is impossible to write with anything but respect and sympathy, must be tempted to pray with Hezekiah of old that this may not come in their day. But is this right? Not long ago a clergyman in the heart of the South of London, with a flock of thousands of people, said: "The more I think of it, the more I hope it will come in my day. I do think it would be a great privilege to help to deal with it." That was a brave remark. But is it or is it not wise?

Sometimes we hear plain truths from oversea. Here is the view of an eminent and well-known American Churchman:

"It is easy to see how things are shaping in England. No census is needed to show that Nonconformity is a great power. Why do not your leading men face the situation in a statesmanlike manner? Why do they not approach the other side, and admit that no longer can the great bulk of the English people be claimed as members of the Church of England; plainly say that they are well aware of the feeling with which the Establishment is regarded by many Nonconformists, and plead, in the name of all that is most sacred, that this question be not allowed to degenerate into a merely political one? Let them, in short, ask what terms would be granted. I believe that such an attitude on the part of the authorities of the Church of England would go to the very hearts of the best men in the ranks of Nonconformity, and you would get all that you could fairly expect to have, and possibly more."

It is unfair to expect the Bishops to take up this challenge. It is, of course, impossible for the clergy or laity to do it alone and apart. But the Church could do it. There is, however, a grim spectre that hovers here whenever this question is raised. That spectre is disruption, and many would be tempted in these days, when Parliament is so heterogeneous in belief, to accept the American friend's candid advice, if they could be sure that the old Church would hold together after the fetters, as some would call them, of the Establishment were removed. For, great as may be the loss in many ways to the State to have no longer a spiritual expression, the Church of England might become, in a far truer way, the Church of the English people, if only she were more free to manage her own affairs. But as things are, without at the very least a big secession, this is not likely to come to pass. But is it impossible to persuade Lord Halifax and those who, in such an extraordinary way, seem so meekly to accept his lead to consider whether, perhaps, after all, God may not be in that history that we have in these two articles been endeavouring to review? Will they really maintain that they have discovered practices and dresses (disused for at least three centuries) which are so absolutely essential to the Church's life and efficiency as to justify a breach between brethren, rather than that they should fail to revive their use? Will they who make so much of the duty of aiming at the reunion of Christendom actually create a schism in their own body by insisting on impossible terms of Communion? Will they not also reconsider their theories of Catholicity? Is not an utterly unscriptural view of what is Catholic in faith and practice at the bottom of much that they say and do? The Bishop of Birmingham has been recently saying that the Church owed it largely to those who were in the ranks commonly called Evangelical that she was beginning to see her Catholic duty more plainly in regard to the evangelization of the world. Here is indeed a gleam of light! Is it possible that this old Catholic movement that is now enthusing so many—the whole Gospel for the whole world—may be a door of hope to peace and fellowship in the Church?

Already we see, and see with rejoicing, that among the highest Churchmen we find the most satisfactory attitude towards the Sacred Scriptures. The *Church Times* correspondent, moreover, after attending the gatherings of the Students' Volunteer Missionary Movement in Liverpool in January last, not only reported largely upon it, but stated that such spiritual power was manifest in those gatherings, and in the words of many non-Church folk there, that it might become necessary to reconsider their attitude towards such bodies. Here again is a gleam of light! And the encouraging way in which our Church, even though cut away from much that is so dear to leaders of this Ritual movement, is nevertheless setting about her duty, not only in the uttermost part of the earth, but also among the masses of our own land, and the revived spiritual power that is attending her ministries, may well give pause to those who would run us into such grave dangers for quite insufficient reasons. It will be an awful sin if we "fall out by the way," and the sin will be at the door, not of the Evangelical, nor of the old-fashioned High Churchman, but of the Ritualist. There is room for the three well-known types—and all are beginning to understand one another far better than a few years ago—but there is not room for those that say that the Reformation must be repented of in tears and ashes. This wing must be converted to the Catholic faith, or it must be dropped off. And the sooner a well-formed public opinion makes this perfectly plain, the sooner shall we be united for the great national and world problems that we crave to be set more free to deal with.

Our second appeal is to the Nonconformist—not to those who still regard the Church of England as the best bulwark in the land against the Roman system, but to those who imagine that a millennium for all the Free Churches will come when the ancient Church of this land is removed from her present privileges in connexion with the State, and the money of past benefactors has been given to some social movements. Here again there is a gleam of light—we refer to the recent creed that orthodox Nonconformity has been putting forth. They

have done well. They will do better not to interfere, for the present at any rate, with the Church that has older creeds still—that unified the nation, that has formed our public opinion through many centuries, that reformed itself and so worked a deliverance for Nonconformity, and whose Prayer Book receives the flattery of pretty general use and imitation.

There will be those who will say, "But what, after all, is the Anglican Communion?" Quite so. It is not very much. It might have been a much bigger thing had our propaganda been more wise, and our overflow been under better guidance and control. Impossible terms of communion have created abroad also a great deal of what in England would be called Nonconformity. Presbyterians and Methodists and other bodies oversea far outnumber the members of the Anglican Churches, and when it is remembered how much of our liturgy they use, and even sometimes our dress, it is high time to consider how far a careful moderation and restraint in ritual would bring them into line. Bishop Westcott used to say that he thought the problem of home reunion would be solved first at the extremities. The Lord hasten it in His time! It must not be forgotten that six-sevenths of the work of Missions to the Heathen is done by Bodies other than the Church of England and those Churches in communion with her. And, once more, there are others who will say, "What a poor Christendom this is, after all, from which to attempt to exercise influence over the non-Christian world! Have not the Christian Churches failed all along the line?" Yes, there have been terrible shortcomings and grievous failure. But that is no reason for despair. Point, if you will, to the cold twilight that has settled down upon places in the Near East that once were aglow with Christian light and life. Point also to the Continent of Europe, where apostasy and rationalism seem to thrive most in the oldest cradles of Church life. These facts cannot, alas! be gainsaid. But so far from these being arguments for losing faith and courage, they take us back to the plain forewords of the Lord Himself. We see more clearly than ever before that He has foreshadowed all

these conditions! "These things I have told you, that when the time shall come ye may remember that I told you of them."

Let anyone read over the Lord's plain words, and those of His Apostles, as to the developments that would supervene in the days when the Faith should have become historic, and have clothed itself with forms and ceremonies, and he will be bound to admit that here are evidences of miracle of mind to an extraordinary degree. He will see that the Lord indicated that there would be a twofold evolution—one by way of deterioration on the part of those who would hold the form, apart from the power, of godliness, and the other by way of amelioration on the part of those who should yield to His Spirit. Thus the Kingdom should come, "not with outward show," but surely come.

Is not this exactly what we see about us now? Have we not abundant evidence that, where the word of the Lord has free course and is glorified, His Kingdom does increasingly come, and an atmosphere is created that blesses those who breathe it?

It is surely of the utmost importance that we thus ascertain the facts, that we face the worst, and work for the best. There must be no waiting for a reunited Christendom or a converted world. In these very circumstances that the Lord foresaw, it is our duty to be His witnesses, and He has promised that such loyal witness will ensure to us the supply of His Spirit. And it must be enough for us to know that we are working on the lines that will surely lead up to "the Consummation of the age" when He whom we have tried to serve, under many infirmities, will come to lead us on to something far better than the Anglican Communion.

