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ISLINGTON AND THE APPEAL TO HISTORY.

BY THE VEN. A. R. BUCKLAND, Archdeacon of Norfolk.

WITH some of us first memories of the Islington Clerical Meeting carry us back to a small gathering, mainly of older men, collected in a stuffy, not over-clean room down a by-street near the Parish Church. Our earliest memories of the Chairman are of Daniel Wilson the Second, shrouded in a heavy overcoat, brooding over the assembly in what, to some of us younger men, seemed a stern and almost discouraging fashion. Probably our judgment was at fault. But memories of those Meetings must often with many have thrown into happy and reassuring contrast the gatherings of later days. With no one of them could the contrast have seemed greater than with the Meeting of this present year. For in a spirit of confidence, void of boasting or of bitterness, it looked back upon the past hundred years and claimed their witness as sure ground of hope. The survey was worth making, and if here that survey is in some parts extended, it is only in order to draw out more fully the claim of Evangelical Churchmanship to have rendered high service to the nation as well as the Church at a most critical period in the history of both.

The survey made this year had a domestic as well as an external value. It had a domestic value, a lesson for all allied in organization or sympathy with the Evangelical school. For there have been times and quarters in which men of Evangelical convictions have very inadequately presented their own case. They have spoken and written in terms which have led the careless to suppose that the one claim of the Evangelical School to a place, and a place of honour, within the Church of England lay in its steadfast adherence to a certain theological position, to principles of belief and practice settled at the Reformation, and to a whole-hearted repudiation of the claims of Rome. No doubt this theological position stands in the forefront of Evangelical claims. By it the Evangelical school is marked off sharply from at least one other school within the Church. But the defence of this position is not a claim which stands by itself. On the contrary, it gains its force from the fact that it has always been allied with an eager, passionate concern for the souls of men; with well-ordered zeal for the extension far and near of Christ's Kingdom; with a just concern for the well-being and progress of our own Church. All of this is very plainly witnessed to in the sermon and in the addresses of this year's Meeting; and their emphasis on the general as well as the particular claims of the Evangelical School will weigh with many who may have been touched by the popular disposition to make less of theological distinctions and more of the witness borne by life and work.

Again, it has been too much the habit of some Low Churchmen to regard their party as one which has always been an obscure,

despised and isolated body of men. It looks as though they had all but forgotten the men and women of parts and learning,[1] of position and of social influence identified with the earlier history of the Evangelical Revival. They can hardly have remembered that there was a time when observers might have been forgiven for thinking that the Evangelicals would dominate the Church. They may have forgotten the later prospect that, when Newman went over to Rome, the Evangelicals would carry the whole country with them; when, as Mr. Benn reminds us,[2] "they counted a fair number of intellectual and scholarly writers among their number, such as Sir James Stephen, Isaac Taylor, Henry Rogers and Robert Alfred Vaughan. Contributions from these began to appear in the *Edinburgh*, formerly notorious for its veiled scepticism; at their head stood the most philanthropic statesman of the age, Lord Ashley; and the most resplendent literary genius of the new generation, John Ruskin, had been nursed on their tenets." They must have overlooked that interesting phase in the life of the Church when the choice of Bishops was supposed to reflect the wishes of Lord Shaftesbury. They may never have noted the bitter complaints, heard, for example, in the seventies and eighties of the last century, that there were dioceses in which no High Churchmen need look for advancement. The causes of this misapprehension are not obscure. For many years there were foolish prelates who harried clergy known or assumed to be "Methodist." Their follies are remembered, whilst the policy of others who sympathized with the Revival is forgotten. Moreover, the teaching and life of Evangelicals rebuked in plain terms the materialism and levity of much in the world around them. It was easy to hit back; to jeer at the strain of Puritanism that marked their conduct, and to mock at the language—something, perhaps, of a pose in the case of many who used it—which employed familiar words in new and surprising senses. But all this did not of necessity mean that the Evangelicals were either few, feeble or without honour.

Once more, as years went on, the defenders of the School sometimes talked as though, apart from the theological position, it was the foreign missionary enterprise which gave the party its chief claim to attention. It is needless here to dwell on the value of that enterprise. No one familiar with the history and inner working of modern missions can fail to see that it has been of value beyond the ranks of its own supporters; that it has served as a stimulus to other organizations beyond the limits of our own Church. But, whilst keeping this in mind, we should be unjust to our own past if we did not remember the zeal and organizing ability thrown into work at home, work social as well as spiritual, work which will ever associate the history of the Evangelical School with public philanthropy not less than personal piety.

[1] For a list of men of high academic distinction closely identified with the Evangelical Revival see a useful little work recently issued, *Evangelical By-Paths*, by Alfred Leedes Hunt (Thynne & Jarvis, Ltd.), pp. 19, 20.

[2] *English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, ii. 17.

But the survey made at Islington this year had also an external value. There is a large body of religious feeling in England which does not ally itself with any school of thought. It includes men of distinction and of high office in the Church. It includes laymen of intelligence and character in every walk of life. And beyond these there lies a still larger body of persons holding no definite religious belief and yet with no definite hostility to belief. Now the long-continued allegations or suggestions of extreme Anglicans have created in many minds curiously perverted views both of Church and of national history. In one quarter you may find a vague impression that the revival of religious life amongst us began with the Oxford Movement; in another that zeal for the Kingdom of God, zeal for the Church, and zeal in good works have always been and still are more conspicuous amongst High Churchmen than Low Churchmen; in a third, that extreme Anglicans are the only progressive party, and that the Evangelical position is solely one of protest and resistance. Of course one need not dwell on the fact that such misapprehensions find no countenance in the works of sober and responsible historians, whatever their school of thought. By them the solid worth of Evangelical life and effort, whether in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, is never denied nor minimized. But their works hardly reach the public amongst which these misconceptions have been so diligently propagated. The Islington papers may encourage a wider diffusion of the facts, and so lead to a more just apprehension of what the Evangelical School has done for the nation as well as the Church.

They may be helpful also in another way. Principal Tulloch once wrote that "the Evangelical School, with all its merits, had conceived Christianity rather as something superadded to the highest life of humanity than as the proper development of that life. . . . Philosophy, literature, art and science were conceived apart from religion." [1] Without accepting the terms in which Professor Tulloch states his view, we can still see the defect at which he aimed his shaft. There long seemed to lurk amongst Evangelicals a tendency to aloofness from intellectual pursuits, a vague apprehension that there was something "carnal" about them, a dread lest, if indulged in, they should come between the man and God. Ability, unless it would conform absolutely in thought, and perhaps even in diction, was suspect. Incompetence was at least competent to hint a doubt whether this man or that was "sound." As a result of this the School has no doubt failed to bring into intimate relations with its own organizations and work many men of capacity, who in all essentials of creed and conduct were entirely at one with it. The platform of the Islington Clerical Meeting has, upon occasion, been so enlarged as to ensure their participation; but in the main they had not, until quite recent times, found encouragement to join forces with the main body. This year's meeting had characteristics which suggest a growing tendency to comprehension without sacrifice of old and cherished convictions.

[1] Quoted by Overton, *Anglican Revival*, p. 216.

Upon one more point the sermon and papers should help to correct misrepresentations. It has been very freely stated that between the High Churchman and the Low Churchman there has always existed a fundamental distinction, in that High Churchmen were collectivists and Low Churchmen individualists ; that the one School stood for the truth that God purchased to Himself a Universal Church by the precious blood of His dear Son, whilst the other lived absorbed in the task of seeking the individual soul's salvation. It would be easy to quote statements made in one direction or the other which would lend colour to this assumption. Nor will it be denied that in some quarters there has been much talk about "Mother Church" in terms which repelled rather than attracted. But is it anywhere written in the history of the Evangelical School that they forgot or were indifferent to the existence of Christ's Church as a whole ? Would not their policy in many details point to a wider conception of that Church than has been prevalent amongst some of their critics ? And, if it be concern for their own Church's welfare that is required, are not the very faults imputed to them a proof of most zealous concern for its purity and progress ? Let us by all means admit a stress upon the value of the individual soul ; but that by no means implies disloyalty to any view of Christ's Church sanctioned by Holy Scripture, or by the formularies of the Church itself. Assuredly no candid reader of the Islington sermon and papers will find therein support for the old assumption. High regard for the truth of the Church Universal and for our own Church within it is there, but no hint or suggestion of such gross and unworthy individualism as would leave the true believer lonely, isolated, without relation to or tie with others in Christ.

One more point is suggested by the papers. Popular views of Church history often fail to mark the relation of movements to each other. Thus by some the Evangelical Revival will be thought of as though it stood an isolated and entirely independent fact in history. By others the Oxford Movement will be looked at in just the same way. But neither the one nor the other can be separated from things that went before it or things that came after. The Evangelical Revival followed a period in which brilliant and lasting work had been done by English theologians in the field of Christian apologetics. They had put to flight the armies of the adversary. But their triumph could not take the form of a popular victory. They wrote for reading and thoughtful men ; they did not touch the general public. The unlearned masses knew nothing of them, though they may have gathered some few anti-Christian watchwords from the popular works of lesser men. Then came the Revival. Here was appeal not to the mind but the heart. Here was approach not to the leisured or the learned or the speculative alone, but a voice bidding all men repent. The Revival put into active work the truths re-established and vindicated anew by the learned. By the grace of God it extended and made effective what otherwise had reached only the few. In like manner there is a visible link between the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford

Movement. It is seen not only in the fact that the truths taught by the one were held first by some of those who led the other; it is seen also in the influence of Evangelical effort on the minds of High Churchmen, who also desired new life in the Church and nation; it may, perhaps, be found in the just antagonism of the early Tractarians to any form of rationalism and to their growing apprehension of the dangers threatened by reason to faith. That these apprehensions extended even to published views of Pusey himself is often overlooked.[1]

It may, then, be felt that the Meeting of 1927 has pointed the way to a wider realization of what the Evangelical Revival and Evangelical Churchmanship have done for the nation and for the Church. If that be so, more weight may justly be given to their influence during the Georgian period, to the effect which the teaching and practice of the early Evangelicals must have had during the stormy period of the French Revolution, and all through the long, dark years of our protracted struggle with France. It is admitted that the rise and growth of the Evangelical Movement gave new life to the Church, increased its efficiency and extended its influence. As Mr. Lecky has said, "The Evangelicals gradually changed the whole spirit of the English Church. They infused into it a new fire and passion of devotion, raised the standard of clerical duty, and completely altered the whole tone and tendency of the preaching of its ministers."[2] Is it to be supposed that all this went on without influence upon the general life of the nation; that it was no more than an ecclesiastical movement which left the world around it untouched and untroubled? On the contrary, is it not a fact that, long before the Islington Meeting came into existence, the Evangelicals—and notably those in open allegiance with the Church—had done much to create a higher moral tone in all classes; had at least in some measure shamed profligacy in life and coarseness in literature; had aroused a new sympathy with the poor, the ignorant, the afflicted; had remembered the sorrowful sighing of the captive; had indeed given an impulse towards works of practical philanthropy, which, coming as they did in an age of brutality and self-pleasing, amaze us by their courage? Bishop Butler who, in 1751, deplored the "general decay of religion in the nation," thought that the influence of the Christian faith was "wearing out of the minds of men." That it did not "wear out," that, on the contrary, the religious life of the nation had by 1827 become more real, more zealous, more fruitful, must surely be traceable in no small degree to the work of the Evangelical Churchmen.

But whilst the origin of the Islington Clerical Meeting does not mark the beginning of Evangelical power or usefulness, it does focus attention on the opening of a period in which again the school of thought or party was to render essential service to the nation and the Church. Candid historians agree that the earlier

[1] Liddon, *Life of Pusey*, I. viii, *passim*; xi. p. 254.
[2] *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, III. Chap. viii, pp. 134, 135. And *cf.* VII, Chap. xxi, p. 353.

years of George the Fourth's reign found the Church in a far stronger position as to work and influence than it had held in the preceding century. But, despite this, it is also certain that those years found the Church, in regard to her association with the State, in a position of far greater peril. It was, no doubt, a peril that threatened not the Church only, but also the Throne and the Constitution. It may very well be that the rising tide of animosity against the Church found its chief impulse not in any peculiar or restricted enmity against religion in general or a Church in particular, but in the wide-spread ferment manifest in the political and social life of the time. The very horrors of the French Revolution may have checked the tendency to revolutionary thought in Great Britain, but they had not made revolutionary thought powerless amongst us. The financial stress which followed the crowning mercy of Waterloo and the establishment of peace brought with it difficulties closely corresponding with those through which we have passed since the year 1918. Agriculture suffered heavily. Farmers, who had sucked no small advantage out of the country's necessities in time of war, found themselves confronted by ruin. Between January 1819 and July 1822 the price of wheat fell from 74*s*. to 43*s*. a quarter, and beef from 4*s*. 6*d*. to 2*s*. 5*d*. a stone. The fall, which brought relief to the wage-earner, spelled ruin to the farmer and heavy loss to the landlord. In 1833 a Parliamentary Committee had evidence that the landlords had lost £9,000,000 by reduction of rents, and that in parts of Kent and Sussex no tenant farmer was solvent. In the towns unemployment was rife. The close of the war had not brought the desired demand for the products of our factories, for impoverished peoples had neither the cash nor the credit with which to buy them. In the winter of 1825–26 a commercial crisis—in which Bank failures were counted by the hundreds, —intensified the hardships of the time. Poverty—hard, grinding, cruel poverty, unrelieved by the merciful if costly provisions of later days—cried out for relief. Men in their misery drank in readily enough the promise of a new earth to be won by drastic reform of Church and State. To those who know how, even in our own days, the minds of simple folk will accept promises the most fantastic, if made with sufficient verbosity and ardour upon the village-green or in the local tap-room, it will be no surprise to find that, years later than 1827, the passage of the first Reform Bill was accepted as surety for the most sweeping changes in social life. Lord Malmesbury has told us that when that Bill was before Parliament, in 1831, "Servants left their places, feeling sure that somehow they need never serve again. Marriages were put off until the great redemption of the poor was effected."[1]

Is it too much to believe that at such a time the sobering and restraining influence of a body of Evangelical Churchpeople, masters as well as men, must have been of high advantage to the State? It may have been that in them alone was there found any firm faith in the Church's future. In quarters strangely contrasted the outlook

[1] *Memoirs of an Ex-Minister*, i, 38.

was deemed hopeless. T. Mozley believed that "the Church of England was folding its robe to die with what dignity it could." Joseph Hume assured the House of Commons that the Church was "a body condemned by the country" whose "charter was on the eve of being cancelled by the authority that gave it." Lord Grey, coming into office, warned the Bishops that they must "set their house in order." *The Times*, in October, 1831, exasperated by episcopal opposition towards the Reform Bill, plaintively asked "what business" the Bishops had "in Parliament at all," advising them to restrict their superintendence to "the souls of the faithful, and let them begin with their own." Within the Church, Connop Thirlwall wrote of it as "powerless for any good, and at the utmost only able to preserve itself from ruin." Outside the Church, Thomas Binney, an honoured light of Nonconformity, gave it as his "serious religious conviction that the Established Church is a great national evil; that it is an obstacle to the progress of truth and godliness in the land." These melancholy forebodings found encouragement in disturbing manifestations of popular feeling. The Archbishop of Canterbury, during the ferment of early reform movements, was insulted in his own cathedral city. The life of the Bishop of Lichfield was threatened. The palace of the Bishop of Bristol was fired by a mob. Truly there was need of such restraining influence as Evangelicals within the Church could provide.

If it be asked why they did not do more, an answer may be found in the general condition of the Church at that time. There was no lack of abuses that might be employed to inflame the popular mind. The large revenues of most of the prelates and the state in which they lived invited the resentment of a distressed proletariat. Durham, when reform of the Church itself drew near, had a yearly income of £19,480; Canterbury of £18,090; London of £13,890. At that time these were enormous revenues. Moreover, the Bishops were amongst the worst of pluralists, usually holding a good deal of well-chosen preferment in addition to their sees. Majendie, Bishop of Bangor, who died in 1830, held eleven benefices. Great Henry of Exeter (no friend, by the way, to reform) sought, on going to his Bishopric, to retain the Rectory of Stanhope and his stall at Durham, each worth about £5,000 a year. It is little wonder that some prelates left great wealth to their progeny, who, if in holy orders, had usually received other manifest tokens of their approval. Nor was a touching solicitude for the advancement of clerical sons-in-law altogether unknown. Unhappily, it could not be said that it was the financial side of episcopacy that alone invited criticism. Whilst some prelates—of whom Stanley, on going to Norwich, was a good example—worked with wisdom, energy and resolution, others grossly neglected their duty and rarely stayed in their dioceses. Bagot, the predecessor of Wilberforce at Oxford, ordained men whom he met for the first time at the service. When Wilberforce went to the diocese an innkeeper sought compensation because candidates for holy orders no longer attended a ball he had been accustomed to give at the Ember seasons. Some Bishops

held only one Confirmation in the year, and pronounced the words with the imposition of hands once for the whole company of candidates. Possibly by way of compensation the wife of one prelate gave a dance for the newly confirmed. Of the general condition of the clergy at this time it is needless to write in detail. Amongst others, R. W. Church [1] has depicted with candour the position amongst the beneficed clergy, not sparing the faults of "its worst members." With the times when the Islington meeting took its rise the social status of the clergy had improved, and there were not wanting holy and humble men of heart, outside as well as within the Evangelical School, whose patient toil and honoured lives shamed the worldliness and slackness of many neighbours. But here, too, there were scandals that supplied the Church's opponents with an inexhaustible store of ammunition. Non-residence, the inevitable outcome of extended pluralism, was rampant. A Return to the House of Lords in 1807 had shown that of the 11,164 parishes in England and Wales only 4,412 had resident clergy. When Stanley went to Norwich in 1837 there were 500 beneficed clergy in his diocese who did not live in their parishes, and nearly 500 churches in which only one service was provided on Sunday. The contrast in the value of benefices was far greater than it is to-day. In 1832 there were 4,361 livings worth less than £150 a year. London, Lancashire and Yorkshire held parishes with populations of 20,000 or more, the incomes of which were about £150. By way of contrast there were rural parishes of small populations with £3,000, £4,000, and even £7,000 a year. In the face of these anomalies some Bishops sat unmoved. Others did not. Blomfield, who went to London in 1828, later on contrasted the spiritual destitution of Bethnal Green with the position of St. Paul's, then almost valueless to the diocese or the Church, with its "Dean and three Residentiaries with incomes amounting in the aggregate to between £10,000 and £12,000 a year," and, in addition, "twenty-nine clergymen whose offices were all but sinecures" sharing between them an income nearing £12,000 a year.

Another scandal, which by deference to the sacred rights of property has survived in a truncated form to this day, flaunted itself unrestrained and unrebuked. Advowsons were advertised and disposed of at public auction with eloquent allusion to their amenities and none to spiritual responsibility. As late as 1877 it was computed that of the 7,000 saleable livings, 2,000 were in the market. The proportion was doubtless greater in 1827; the prices perhaps lower. In the 'seventies £16,000 was asked for a Yorkshire advowson; £11,000 for one in Lancashire; and £9,300 for (save as to income) an unattractive living in the Fens. But with the birth of the reform movement a further difficulty came into prominence. Nonconformity, vexed by religious disabilities now happily removed, found in the making of church rates a popular ground of hostility to the Church. Resistance took the form of organized refusal to pay. Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds

[1] *The Oxford Movement*, p. 10.

and Rochdale were the scenes of vigorous campaigns. But it is significant that although the first Church Rates Abolition Bill was introduced into the Commons in 1834, Mr. Gladstone's final measure did not pass until 1868.

In the face of conditions such as these—and it would be easy to enlarge the catalogue of the Church's ailments and sorrows—most observers will marvel at its escape from the threatened chastisement of disestablishment and disendowment. We may, in simple faith, set down our conviction that the Church came through these perils because God had work for her to do which needed whatever strength might be drawn from union with the State and from the use of great possessions. But we are bound to seek for the human agencies employed to secure this end. Is it unreasonable to suppose that the new period of deeper personal conviction, of greater parochial activity, of fresh zeal for the extension of Christ's kingdom abroad, of righteous endeavour to grapple with outstanding evils at home, laid some restraint upon clamour for the Church's downfall? Is it idle to suppose that, had there been no Evangelical Revival, no "Methodists" inside as well as outside the Church, no such men as John Venn and Daniel Wilson in parochial life, the verdict of the country might have gone against her? Is it conceivable that the heavy and complicated task of Church Reform could, in the then temper of the people at large, have been carried through if there had been no forces within the Church which compelled respect and invited confidence in a purged and reorganized Establishment? It is unnecessary to assume—it would be false to history as well as charity to assume—that all the righteousness and all the zeal lay within one party in the Church. There had been a Clapton sect as well as a Clapham sect. If on the one side there were men like Henry Thornton, on the other there were men like the father of E. B. Pusey. If there were dignitaries who took a line against "Methodism" in the Church, there were others who gave it countenance. Admittedly there were, as Reform demands grew most insistent, quiet, steady-going, truly earnest High Churchmen of the old School. But their lives and their labours rarely touched the public imagination and never created any enthusiasm for the cause they upheld. On the other hand, the impression left by the history of the period justifies belief that the Evangelicals, whatever their defects, had widely and definitely influenced the public mind. That surely must have been the influence which was used to the advantage of the Church and the preservation of its status when the storm rose high against it.

But whilst so much may fairly be inferred from history, the position has not everywhere been understood. In some quarters a vague impression seems to have prevailed and may still prevail that the salvation of the Church at this crisis was due to the Oxford Movement. It seems to be forgotten that the origin of the Movement can hardly be placed earlier than the point fixed by Newman—the delivery of Keble's assize sermon in July, 1833. But it created no great interest until the appearance of the Tract on

Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge, and no general hostility until the publication of Tract 90 in 1841. So far as any widespread influence on the public mind is concerned, the Movement had no existence for some years after the storm against the Church reached its height. Its most powerful agents in its early days were Newman's sermons at St. Mary's, without which, as Church held,[1] "the movement might never have gone on, certainly would never have been what it was." But whilst Newman—still retaining much of his original Evangelical zeal—was profoundly influencing a group of able and devout men at Oxford, it will hardly be pretended that he was changing the current of thought amongst the general public and influencing the man in the street. Most of his followers were young, and some of the hardest workers for the Movement in later years were still in their childhood. When Daniel Wilson went to Islington in 1826, Newman himself was only twenty-five; Pusey, at twenty-six, had gone to Germany for theological study; Richard Hurrell Froude, just becoming Fellow of Exeter, was twenty-three; Hugh James Rose was thirty-one; and Isaac Williams twenty-four. R. W. Church was a boy of eleven; Charles Marriott was sixteen; Manning, the future Cardinal, was eighteen; G. A. Denison was twenty-one and at Christ Church; W. F. Hook was a young Lecturer at Birmingham.[2] Moreover, no one could allege that the Movement, for long after its birth, enlisted public interest on the Church's side. On the contrary it suggested new lines of assault, and mightily encouraged the adversary. Those of us whose memories go back to the 'sixties of the last century can remember that even then the existence of "Puseyism" in the Church was a favourite weapon in the hands of her critics, and deemed a very present help in the task of winning her downfall. If that were so in the 'sixties, how can it have been a means of gently disposing to better ways an excited popular mind in the days when its pretensions were novel, or in the years when one man of prominence after another followed his convictions to their legitimate end and went over to Rome? But just as in some quarters devices and devotions of the Middle Ages are referred to "primitive" usage or teaching, so the later prosperity and influence of Anglo-Catholicism is ante-dated to the years when the Oxford Movement was struggling for bare existence.

Here, then, we may leave the retrospect suggested by the sermon and papers of the Islington Meetings. It may, perhaps, lend some further support to the plea of Bishop Chavasse that men who are tempted to lose heart may discover "a great cordial to low spirits" in "Church history during the last hundred or hundred and fifty years." Assuredly it will confirm the Bishop's claim that "an overruling hand has guided us through every tempest; has given us light in darkness, and brought good out of evil." Wherefore the wise will, with him, "thank God and take courage."

[1] *The Oxford Movement*, p. 129.

[2] Bishop Charles Wordsworth held that the Movement "was from the first too much in the hands of young men." *Annals of My Early Life*, p. 342.