

The Baptist Quarterly.

Anglo-Catholicism: Its Strength and Weakness.

A Dissenting View.

IT would not be fitting that the article by the Rev. A. G. Peile, M.A., on "Anglo-Catholicism, its Strength and Weakness," published in the last issue of the BAPTIST QUARTERLY, should be allowed to pass without any indication on our side of attention and interest. All our readers will be at one in acknowledgment and warm appreciation of the true catholicity of spirit shown by Mr. Peile, first by consenting to write upon his faith in our journal, and then by discharging his undertaking in a manner at once so frank and courteous. But this very generosity of attitude renders comment difficult. The absence of anything like a controversial tone with regard to Evangelicalism makes it seem unchivalrous to criticise his positions; and the frankness with which he recognises weak points in his own system, if it does not quite disarm criticism, at least lays to rest for the time the critical instinct. We cannot but sincerely desire to meet him with a like courtesy, restraint and frankness. And yet it is difficult to make any sort of rejoinder without being tempted into controversial arguments in favour of one's own position and against that of our charitable friend. I can, however, try to keep his example before my eyes, and to confine myself, as far as possible, to indicating the measure of my agreement with him, and stating positively the points on which I am compelled to differ.

Mr. Peile modestly disclaims any such prominent position among Anglo-Catholics as would give him the right to speak authoritatively as their representative, but he suggests that, as a priest busily engaged in the practical work of an ordinary parish, he may be a better judge of the Anglo-Catholic movement than some arm-chair critics. Let me assure him that no exponent of the movement would appear to us better fitted to give a

representative statement of its real character. I am afraid that the views that I shall state cannot claim to be regarded as equally representative of Baptist opinions in general. They are my own, and probably diverge more or less in details from those held by my brethren. There is, indeed, no body of opinions necessarily held by Baptists in the same sense in which there are positions necessarily occupied by Anglo-Catholics. This will probably appear a grave weakness to Mr. Peile. We, on the contrary, regard it as really an advantage. We have a unity, true and precious, but it is rather inward, of the spirit and central faith, than outward, of the belief and observance. It is the unity that comes of common discipleship to the one Lord, and of souls inspired, nourished, and guided by study of the same Scriptures with the help of the same Holy Spirit of Christ. But this brings me at once to the first point to be considered here :

THE CONCEPTION OF THE CHURCH.

Mr. Peile claims that his movement is the continuation of the Oxford movement, which stood for "the demand that the Church of England was an integral part of the Catholic Church founded on the day of Pentecost." He is careful to explain that he uses the word Catholic in no small sense, but means thereby "the Holy Church throughout all the World," and that he holds its primary business to be that of saving souls. But he believes that "the Divine scheme for the salvation of souls" is the Catholic Church, "with all its historic continuity and sacramental means of grace." The mode and proof of this continuity he sees in the threefold orders of bishops, priests and deacons, administering the same sacraments. He holds that these orders have been in the Church from apostolic times, and that the church thus constituted has persisted down to the present time. Even the Reformation effected no breach in the continuity, but merely modified the historic church in certain points. And he claims that men find this continuity a very impressive spectacle. Other institutions—even nations—wane, or disappear: only the Church abides in strength, and this despite the most deadly persecution. This wonderful life wins to the Church multitudes who crave a secure support in this everchanging world.

We agree with Mr. Peile in insisting on the Church as the divinely instituted agency for the salvation of men, and in claiming our own place in it. And we, too, protest against narrow or illiberal definitions of the term Catholic. Indeed, we are so jealous for its full inclusiveness that we cannot draw the line where he draws it. We cannot consent to identify the Catholic Church with certain external forms of organisation, belief, or worship. We hold that you can have these forms

without a true church, and that you can have a true church without these particular forms. What is essential is the presence of a certain spirit, namely, the spirit of Christ, the evidence of which is love to God expressed in love of the brethren. This spirit is the birthright of the faithful disciple—of him who follows Jesus Christ, and renders to Him the thorough obedience that accompanies utter trust in Him. Those in every place who, having that Spirit, unite together in the service of God and pursuit of the eternal welfare of their fellow men, we deem a true part of the Catholic Church. Compared with the essential spirit, the external forms are secondary. Forms, of course, there must be: they are the body without which the spirit could neither survive nor operate effectively. But we believe them to be human, not divine, and neither fundamental nor unchangeable. Indeed, there may come times in the Church's history when the external forms *must* be changed if the essential spirit is to survive in health and vigour, e.g., when the forms become too narrow for the expanding life of the spirit, or when they even threaten altogether to usurp the place of the spirit. We recognise the possibility that the visible continuity may have to be ruptured in order that the true, i.e., the spiritual continuity, may be preserved. Luther may have to break with the mediaeval church in order that the spirit of Christ may not be stifled in it.

Here I must say what will perhaps seem to Mr. Peile almost unintelligible: the historic continuity which is with him a fundamental requirement, to us is a matter of comparatively small moment. It is enough for us if the presence of the spirit of Christ is continuous, and we rejoice to acknowledge His presence, not exclusively in this church or that, but in Christian men of all the churches—and in some of no recognised church.

But even if we attached more importance to historic continuity than we do, we find it difficult to perceive the alleged continuity in the Catholic Church from apostolic times until now. We cannot admit that in apostolic times there were the three orders of the Catholic Church. We thought, indeed, it was conceded by eminent scholars of the Church of England itself that originally bishop and priest were identical, and that even when subsequently the monarchical bishop emerged, he was simply the pastor of a local Christian community, and comparable much more to the parish priest than to the diocesan bishop of later ages. To this we might add that the continuity of the episcopal orders in later ages has not been always beyond question, and that in this sense it is possible to dispute whether after the Reformation it was 'the same historic church with its sacraments and ministry'; but we will not press this point.

The episcopate, however, if neither divine in origin nor

unimpeachable in continuity, might still be demanded on practical grounds, i.e., if it proved an effective instrument of church government and administration. But neither can we perceive its effectiveness. And in this failure we can find support in certain admissions made by Mr. Peile. He laments that the bishops are not at one in their policy—in the practices that they forbid or allow. I am afraid that the only effectual guarantee of the unity in policy thus desiderated is to be sought in an individual supreme head over the bishops. But let that pass. Mr. Peile wishes that at least each bishop would take counsel with his own clergy—that he would summon his Diocesan Synod and impartially allow the various parties to advocate their own views before him. Why, we wonder, do the bishops not adopt this course? They must have some weighty reason for abstaining. One of the parties to be heard would, of course, be what Mr. Peile calls the “extreme” party. This is one of the weaknesses that he admits in the Anglo-Catholic movement. He recognises “that they are a very real source of danger,” and adds, “Unless they are content with what they can find in the Church of England, I for one devoutly wish they would join the Church of Rome.” But notoriously, they are not content. Notoriously, they practise ceremonies not sanctioned by the Prayer Book, and there are instances in which the admonition of the bishop has been disregarded. If the bishop summons his synod, he must, thereafter, give decisions on the points in dispute, and if the “high” clergy in any considerable numbers should refuse obedience, what would follow? If, in face of the possible consequences, the bishop hesitates to call his synod or take decisive action, his hesitancy is at least intelligible. But whatever be its grounds, admittedly the bishops are not dealing adequately with a serious situation; in other words, the episcopal order is not proving an effective instrument of government and administration. We are told that we must accept episcopacy because without it there can be no security for unity in doctrine and practice in the church. But if episcopacy fails to secure this, why insist that we must accept the episcopal order?

Only while the Church abides in strength is its historic continuity likely to prove impressive. That its survival in the past is an impressive fact we have no wish whatever to deny, though we confess to being a little mystified by Mr. Peile’s assertion that “the Church of Christ has all down the ages met with every kind of persecution that the mind of man could devise to oppose it. Theological, national, civil, legal, and military powers have done their best to kill Christianity.” It has lately been shown by Professor Merrill, and conclusively, as we hold, that the persecutions endured by the early church were consider-

ably less formidable than they have usually been represented by church historians, and it appears to us that since Constantine's adoption of Christianity, the Church has suffered far more from the friendship than the enmity of the world. That theological and other powers have done their best to kill Christianity may be true, but that is not the same thing as persecuting the (Catholic) Church. But discounting some possible exaggeration, we will allow that the continuity of the Church is impressive to some—perhaps to many minds. It is, however, not less true that to many, and perhaps to an increasing number, of minds, this historic continuity is a stumbling-block rather than a recommendation. To such it appears to result in the Church carrying a good deal of useless, if not mischievous, lumber. Mere antiquity does not impress them. They apply the test of efficiency. Do certain beliefs square with the best modern thought? Do certain observances keep pace with the advancing enlightenment of conscience and of the aesthetic sense, and their inevitable reaction on our thought of God? We believe that to-day there is an increasing number of persons who reject the Catholic Church, but are ready to welcome a Christianity disencumbered of outworn features. Mr. Peile appeals to history in support of the use of vestments, and says, "We cling to these historical robes just as a 'Beefeater' at the Tower of London rejoices in his uniform." But is not this a rather unfortunate instance? Whether the Beefeater does rejoice in his uniform I cannot pretend to say. But to us it appears that the Beefeater's costume is a pure anachronism, having no justification in fitness or use, but only in sentiment. And the case of the vestments seems not dissimilar. We think that in so far as they belong to a bygone age, their use to-day tends to convey an air of unreality, and to suggest that antique costumes as such are well-pleasing to God. But we have come in sight of our second point.

THE QUESTION OF CEREMONIAL.

Mr. Peile reckons that a reasonable and decent ceremonial is a source of strength. While a matter of only secondary importance, it proves in practice a help and incentive to worship, and of great teaching power. He does not enlarge on this last particular, but presumably he means that ceremonial teaches by setting forth religious truths under the forms of symbol. The point that he stresses is that ceremonial answers to and satisfies the sense of beauty that is implanted in us all. He holds, however, that it does not merely satisfy our aesthetic instinct, but is appropriate to the worship of the God who is the author not only of man's sense of the beautiful, but also of all the

surrounding world of beauty that calls the sense into activity. Clearly, beauty has a positive value for God, reflects something in His own being, and hence He should be worshipped in the beauty of holiness. Churches should be beautiful and services artistic. Our native instinct for beauty should not remain in isolation from religion, but should be Christianised by being introduced into and harmonised with religion.

With the principle involved in this contention we shall heartily agree. We acknowledge that our worship should be beautiful, as truly beautiful as we can make it. And most of us, at least, would be ready to acknowledge frankly that in this matter we have had much to learn, and perhaps have still not a little to learn, from our Church of England friends. It is now a good while since we began to build churches with more pretension to architectural beauty, and we hope that there is a growing sense among us of the religious value of reverent bearing and order and decency in the outward forms of worship. Where we should differ from Mr. Peile is in our conception of what is demanded by worship of God in the beauty of holiness. We should lay the emphasis on the holiness. We should argue that the concept of beauty, like all others, is relative to the ideals of those who hold it. In this case, our concept of beauty in worship will be relative to our thought of the God to whom the worship is offered. And conversely, our thought of God will be reflected in our worship; and not only so, but it will in the long run be restricted by its forms. This truth may be made clearer by illustration. We all admit that the Christian idea of God is higher than the Jewish, and that the advance in the idea of God involves a corresponding advance in the mode of worship. The Jews clung to external modes of worship which, in effect, made Jerusalem the only place at which the worship could be fully and adequately rendered. But our Lord has taught us that "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. . . . God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth." This was revolutionary teaching; it moved the centre of gravity of worship from the formal to the spiritual, from the external to the internal. It made not adequacy and decorum of outward form, but inward holiness of spirit the vital thing in worship. Hence it surprises us to find Mr. Peile referring to the divine instructions to Moses as to the details of the Tabernacle worship as a direct authority for the artistic ordering of Christian worship. Ought we not to have got beyond Moses? Of course, we cannot dispense with forms without in effect dispensing with united worship altogether. This I have recognised already; and I now add that wherever there are forms, there will be a

danger of formalism. Mr. Peile frankly acknowledges the danger in the case of his own church, and we shall, if we are equally frank, admit that we too are not free from it. We are always tending to slip into ruts, to attach value to forms in themselves, and let them usurp the place of the spirit, so that they cramp or suffocate it instead of giving it play. But we contend that the danger is reduced to a minimum if we keep the forms simple. There is then less temptation to become absorbed in the forms, or attach value to them for their own sakes. And we hold that simplicity does not necessarily involve loss of beauty or fitness to the character of the God of beauty. For the supreme beauty of God is moral and spiritual. He is Truth and Love, and both of these have a grand simplicity. There is profound significance in the proverbial representation of Truth as naked; and Love involves a radical simplification of nature in those of whom it takes possession.

We are shy of anything like elaborate ceremonial because history repeatedly warns us that where it is admitted it inevitably gravitates from the secondary to the primary position. Many at least of those who practise it learn to regard it as not the accident, but the essence of their religion. Mr. Peile's admission on this point has a frankness that does him great honour. He says that the danger is realised just in proportion as the movement becomes fashionable and attracts many adherents. These will often fasten on the ceremonial as the most obvious, and perhaps easy, part of the system, and fail to realise its more arduous obligations. Presumably it is specially such persons who are most open to the further danger signalled by Mr. Peile, of thinking "more of their own special presentation of the truth and of external aids than of the Church Catholic." Against this he strongly protests, and maintains that Anglo-Catholic prayers for the conversion of England are not prayers for such things as the use of vestments, but for the saving of souls. For himself we unreservedly accept this disavowal, and we readily believe that it holds good also for many of his brethren. But we cannot help being aware that there are churches in which prayer is concentrated upon supplication for the wider or universal prevalence of this or that bit of Catholic ceremonial, and we meet with Anglo-Catholics who make these things of the essence of the Christian religion, to the practical exclusion from their charity of those who cannot accept them for themselves. It would seem as though wherever certain external forms are made requisite, or at least invariable, people will be liable to regard them as the fundamental element, if not the whole, of the religion of which they form an integral part. This reflection applies also to our next point, which we may entitle

CHRISTIAN LIFE, INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL.

"The insistence on a disciplined inner life," and the insistence that the Catholic faith shall colour the daily life and contact with our neighbours, are claimed by Mr. Peile as further sources of strength to his movement. Under the former head he insists most truly that we should not be less earnest and methodical in our Christian life than we are in sport or art. As examples of discipline for the inner life he instances fasting before Communion and Confession. In an interesting revelation of his own spiritual history, he tells us that the Holy Communion has become to him a new service altogether since he began to act on a conviction "that so sacred a gift demanded a bodily discipline from very reverence," and that "as one grew in the spiritual realm, I found myself demanding some such spiritual aid" as Confession.

This is another matter in which I think we have a good deal to learn from our Church of England friends. I believe that our private devotion is apt to suffer from a poverty and in particular a narrowness of range which would be largely corrected by following a stricter method. I will say for myself that I believe we often lose heavily through not being trained to the use of the great classics of devotional literature—"the prayers of the saints." Fasting, also, I believe to have a rightful place and wholesome use in the discipline of the Christian life. Here, again, I must give an individual opinion, for many of my Baptist brethren would not, I suspect, agree with me. I would, however, remind them that our Baptist forefathers still had their days of fasting and humiliation, and, as they believed, to their spiritual profit. They continued this practice because they found authority for it in the New Testament. Their Lord had said, "Thou, when thou fastest." In the same context they found, on the other hand, the true value and proper limits of fasting. "Anoint thy head and wash thy face," said the Master, "that thou appear not to men to fast." And the injunction occurs in a passage, the general drift of which is to emphasise sincerity and reality in religion. The outward practice is merely a help to the inward realisation of spiritual experience. Fasting can afford such help; it can assist towards the subduing of the flesh and the giving of the spirit its rightful dominance over the flesh. It is safe and good as long as it is used with a clear recognition that it has no value in itself or in the sight of God, but only as being capable of promoting an inward life which has such value. As soon as fasting begins to assume the aspect of a virtue or an end in itself, it becomes illegitimate and hurtful. Especially is this the case where fasting is insisted on to the

postponement of the weightier matters of the law—justice and the love of God. I have known cases in which, in a small household, an individual's insistence on observance of ecclesiastical fast-days has been the cause of more or less serious inconvenience to other members of the family. And if fasting communion is made a rule, people are apt to regard it as a thing required or commanded by God, and to make it a sort of fetish. I have known a man of very delicate constitution himself insist on practising it, although thereby he endangered his health, and once or twice actually reduced himself to a fainting condition.

As to confession, again, we can allow that it may have its wholesome use. A Christian may occasionally gain great consolation, encouragement, and guidance by revealing his burdened conscience to a friend of riper experience, whether minister or layman, who commands his confidence. But he must be entirely free, both as to his choice of confidant, and the occasions and extent of his confession. Mr. Peile assures us that confession is entirely free in his church. "Any Anglican priest who teaches compulsory confession is disloyal to the Church of England." Undoubtedly that is true. It does not alter the fact that priests not a few urge frequent confession as a duty or ideal for the devout Churchman. And in proportion as it is urged, the impression is likely to be created that God requires it, and that in itself it is a good thing to do. And there is such a thing as coming to regard confession as a set-off to one's sins, so that one thinks more lightly of sinning instead of more seriously.

In general, where certain particular observances are especially inculcated, we think we discern a tendency that the individual should regard these "churchly" duties as tantamount to religion, as coextensive with Christian life, or at least as taking precedence of other obligations, so that there is comparative indifference to other parts of Christian duty. Mr. Peile affirms that "we stress the point that mere reception of the Blessed Sacrament is not enough." At the same time he admits the prevalence of considerable indifference to social obligations, at least in respect of missionary work. To us it appears that there may be a positive relation between the Sacramentarianism and the indifference. When the individual's attention is disproportionately centred upon frequent reception of the Sacrament, with its preliminaries of confession and fasting, is it not probable that he may come to feel that this substantially is religion, and be conscious only of relatively a faint impulse to his social duties instead of realising that religion should be transfusion of the whole life and its activities, social as well as individual, with the love of Christ?

Finally, Mr. Peile insists that the Anglo-Catholics stress

LEARNING.

By holding conferences and selling "well-got-up cheap and popular booklets dealing with the Catholic Faith" (Anglo-Catholic Manuals of Instruction, 3d. each) the movement tries to teach people to think for themselves.

Ungrudgingly I pay my tribute to the scholarship of the English Church. I acknowledge that her scholars do not lose lustre by comparison with those of any other church, and speaking for myself, I avow that in the realm of scholarship I often get more from their books than I can from those of Free Churchmen. But then, the most eminent scholars of the Church of England are not as a rule supporters of the Anglo-Catholic movement.

The popular propaganda of the movement deserves our admiration for its wholehearted zeal and earnestness. Whether it is calculated to achieve the object of getting people to think for themselves is another matter. It seems scarcely possible, within the compass of a threepenny manual, to supply adequate materials, *pro* and *con*, for the formation of an independent judgment upon, say, the origin and nature of the ministry in the primitive church, or indeed to do more than give the Anglo-Catholic conclusions on this and other important and much discussed problems. The position assigned to the priest in Catholicism seems to us to result too often in the layman being kept *in statu pupillari*. We meet Anglo-Catholics who hardly venture to have a mind of their own in religious matters, apart from the sanction of their priest. We think it preferable that the New Testament should be the manual of instruction placed in the people's hands, and that they be urged to read it for themselves, under that guidance of the Holy Spirit of God which we believe is not withheld from those who seek it in humble faith. We are alive to the perplexities which it presents, but we hold that without the discipline of personal grappling with difficulties, no sturdy and independent power of thought can ever be developed.

In conclusion, Mr. Peile has told us—and again we thank him for his frankness—that "I see no chance of our reunion with any who would ask us to deny . . . that since the apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons." Let us, with equal frankness, inform him of our terms of reunion. We are ready to hold Christian fellowship with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in uncorruptness—with all who are loyal disciples of His, seeking to obey His words and His will as they discover them in the writings of the New Testament.

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