

ART. VI.—THE PROTESTANT FAITH.

“ I BELIEVE that I hold the Catholic faith, and that I know what that faith is, whereas I never yet met any human being who could define for me that *monstrosity* ‘the Protestant faith.’” These words were written in the *Times* of June 20 by Prebendary Villiers, who has been a minister for twenty years at St. Paul’s Church in Wilton Place. This official spokesman for the Church of England first of all defines “the Protestant faith” as a “*monstrosity*”; and then, having made a dogmatic utterance, he goes on to say that the subject of his definition is, so far as he knows, undefinable. He says again, in the same dogmatic way, that “the purest form of Protestantism is infidelity,” and yet he has to confess that he himself, with regard to the subject which he defines, is an agnostic; that this subject, in other words, is to him unknown, and is by all men unknowable. Prebendary Villiers might be asked reasonably, if words are supposed to have any meaning, why he presumes to speak at all about a subject of which he professes a complete ignorance; and, still more, why he is so rash as to define the undefinable, or so foolish as to dogmatize about the unknowable. It is quite plain, from Prebendary Villiers’ own confession, that he knows nothing about Protestantism. It follows, as a natural consequence, that he is equally ignorant about true Catholicism, although he asserts so confidently that “I hold the Catholic faith, and I know what that faith is.” I venture to think, on the other hand, that he does not know at all; and I also think it is quite possible to explain to him both that there is a very definite “Protestant faith,” and also what it is.

“The purest form of Protestantism is infidelity,” says Prebendary Villiers. Such epigrams may sound plausible, but they don’t prove anything, except that words are elusive and double-edged. “The first Whig was the devil,” as Doctor Johnson said once; but that phrase did not undo the Revolution of 1688, nor stultify the sound principles which caused it. “The purest form of Protestantism is infidelity,” says Prebendary Villiers. Let us test him by history, and see what value or truth may be contained in his assertion. The *purest* form of most things, especially if they be things of the mind, is usually their original form. What, then, is the original form of Protestantism? In other words, what did the name and the thing signify to those who used it first? This is a matter which can be settled beyond all dispute. Let us therefore examine it, and see whether the term “infidelity” can be accepted as describing the principles and beliefs of the first Protestants. I am quite willing to let the

matter be judged by the test which Prebendary Villiers has himself chosen. Fortunately, his ignorance, though it may deceive the unwary, cannot alter facts, and it has led him into an absurdity from which there is no escape. The word "Protestant" was coined first to defend those principles which were reaffirmed by the reforming minority at the Second Diet of Spire in 1529. These first Protestants drew up the following declaration: "We protest and declare," they said, "herewith openly before God, our only Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Saviour, who searches and knows the heart, who will one day be our Judge, as well as before all men and creatures, that we, for us and for our people, neither consent nor adhere in any manner whatever to the proposed decree in anything that is contrary to God, to His Holy Word, to our right conscience, to the salvation of our souls, and to the last decrees of Spire." This protest of the minority was made on behalf of three things: First, of the existing law; that is, of the principle of toleration which had been established by the former Diet: secondly, it was made on behalf of the rights of conscience; that is, of individual and spiritual freedom: thirdly, the protest was made on behalf of the Word of God, as the highest exponent of His will and the ultimate guide of conscience. The Protestants ended by appealing to "a free and universal assembly of holy Christendom"; that is to say, the Protest of Spire was made on behalf of the sovereign rights and authority of Holy Scripture as the ultimate standard and test of belief. From this protest the first Protestants got their name. They accepted it willingly as the expression of their principles. These principles are the original and "the purest form of Protestantism." According to Prebendary Villiers, this belief in the supreme and final authority of Holy Scripture is "infidelity." "The position of one who simply describes himself as a 'Protestant' is not satisfactory." This really depends upon what we understand by the term "simply."

The Protest of Spire was made, on its positive side, on behalf of Holy Scripture. The protesters went back to the position of the early Christians. They subordinated the Church to Scripture; they reversed the medieval and Papal notion that Scripture must be subordinated to the Church either past or present. In this matter, surely, they agreed with those Councils which Prebendary Villiers accepts as of the highest authority; they also agreed with those authoritative writers whom we call the Fathers. These writers invariably disclaim all individual and personal authority. They send their readers to Scripture as the test of what they say,

and as the final standard of what may be true in their writings. The great Councils took precisely the same attitude. They judged this or that to be true solely because it was to be found in Scripture. There was, of course, in Protestantism, as in all other statements, a negative side as well as a positive. It protested for some things and against others: It protested for the right and sovereign authority of Scripture: it protested against the usurped authority of the Pope, of tradition, of the Fathers, of the Canonists and Schoolmen; in other words, against any and every ecclesiastical authority which could not justify itself by Scripture, which interposed itself unlawfully between Scripture and the individual Christian. This, surely, is the position of the Church of England, to which Prebendary Villiers is supposed to belong. Indeed, he claims for the Church of England, and for himself as a member of it, a certain amount of Protestantism. "I admit," he says, "that the very existence of the Anglican Church, of which I am a member, is a standing *protest* against certain claims of the Church of Rome." To this extent, Prebendary Villiers owns that he is a Protestant. Is he not forced to acknowledge, by his own reckless epigram, either that his Protestantism is imperfect and impure, or that it is, if not infidel, yet on the high road to infidelity? How can he believe that any approach to infidelity can be sound and justifiable as a theological position? How, again, can he say with any confidence, "I believe that I hold the Catholic faith"?

Prebendary Villiers seems really so confused a reasoner and thinker that it is impossible to guess what the term "Catholic faith" may convey to his imagination. As there are many others in these days whose thoughts and utterances are no less turbid, it may be advisable to state what the historical meaning of the term "Catholic faith" is, and to explain what should be meant by those who desire to use the term correctly. As with Protestantism, so with Catholicism, the *purest* form of it is likely to be the original form. The term "Catholic," as officially applied to the Church, is found in the Nicene and in the Apostles' Creeds. We say, "I believe in the holy Catholic Church." "I believe one Catholic and Apostolic Church." We may put aside the literal meaning of the word "Catholic," viz., universal, because that meaning has never been literally applicable to the Christian Church. The Church is not universal in this twentieth century. It is farther and farther from being universal as we go back towards the first. The term "Catholic," therefore, has a technical and theological meaning, to which alone we need confine ourselves. What, then, is the technical meaning of the word "Catholic?" What was understood by those authors

who used it in the second century? What did it convey to the Council which put it into the Nicene Creed? It conveyed, surely, speaking broadly, two things: first, the doctrines and the historical statements which are contained in the Creed, and which were reported to the Council as the belief of the whole Church; and, secondly, that theory or notion of the Church and its government which was held by the makers of the Creed. To force into the words of the Creed meanings which were not held by the makers of the Creed is, necessarily, to profess a different belief from theirs. It is to say one thing, and to mean another. It is a false and an un-historical profession. With regard to certain beliefs, which were not held by the Fathers of Nicæa, but which are held by many so-called modern Catholics who use the Nicene Creed, there will surely be no controversy among the supporters of the CHURCHMAN. The Papal claims, for instance, are held by many who still use or misuse the Creed of Nicæa. They were not held by those who made the Creed. That is clear for many reasons, chiefly because the Papal claims were resisted as an innovation by the successors of those who made the Creed, as they are still by the representatives of those Churches which alone use that Creed in its original and unaltered form. This difference of belief is perceived and approved even by Prebendary Villiers. What he means by the "Catholic faith" is not what a Romanist means by it. So far, indeed, have the Romanists moved from the Creed of Nicæa that they deny Catholicity to all those, including Prebendary Villiers, who do not accept the claims of Rome; that is to say, their test of Catholicity has come to be a set of beliefs which was not held by the makers of the Creed. When, therefore, Prebendary Villiers says so confidently "I know what the Catholic faith is," a very large number of ostensible Catholics will assure him no less positively that he does not. The test of Roman Catholicism is not the Creed of Nicæa, but the Creed of Pius IV., which had to be drawn up to express the official beliefs of Romanists in the sixteenth century. Since then some new beliefs have been added to their list, and new catechisms have had to be written to justify them. Their making of new creeds and catechisms is, at any rate, logical. Whether it be compatible with holding the ancient faith of Christendom is another matter with which we are not concerned at present.

But, over and above those Papal tenets, which Prebendary Villiers protests against, even at the risk of infidelity, there are other beliefs and practices which were clearly not held by the makers of the Nicene Creed. For instance, did the Church and the Fathers of the fourth century believe in Tran-

substantiation? Did they practise Communion in one kind? Did they believe in Seven Sacraments? Did they know anything about Private Confession, enforced by law as a prelude to Communion, and made with a view to Sacerdotal and Sacramental Absolution? Did they hold the modern, or even the medieval, views of Purgatory and of Indulgences, or did they go to the extreme lengths which Mariolatry has acquired since the fourteenth century? Those who know anything of Church history and of Christian literature in the different centuries must, unless they be partisans and special pleaders, own that not one of these things, at any rate in its current form, or even in its medieval form, was held by the makers of the Nicene Creed, or was known to the Church of their time. It follows, in consequence, that those who believe these things must hold very different opinions about the "Catholic Church" and the "Catholic faith" from the notions which were conveyed by those phrases to the makers and the first users of the Creed. Both as to the form, the government, and the attributes of the Church, as well as in respect of its theology, there are differences between the Christians who used that Creed in the beginning, and various Christians who use it now. In what position, we may go on to ask, does Prebendary Villiers stand with regard to these theological differences, and can he be as certain as he imagines when he says he holds the "Catholic faith" and *knows* what that faith is?

The term "Catholic," in the popular use of it, has moved far from its original and historical meaning. It has become a badge of party. It is annexed audaciously by the Romanists, and is denied by them to all who do not accept the narrow, modern, exclusive, and political theories of the Papacy. But the term "Catholic" is also misused too commonly by those who apply it, not so much to the older, simpler, and more Scriptural faith of Christendom, as to the whole range of what we may describe as medieval doctrine; that is, to doctrines which germinated in the early and deplorably ignorant Middle Ages, some of which were accepted and imposed officially at the Fourth Lateran Council, and all of which were developed logically during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and were defined systematically in the sixteenth century at Trent. Now, for a Papist to hold all these doctrines is, as we admit freely, logical, because they all rest upon that Papal authority which alone can vouch for them in the face of Scripture and Church history. What can be said, however, for those who reject the Papal authority, and who yet cling to these doctrines, or to some shadow of them? This is, really, the position of Prebendary Villiers, and of all those who may be described conveniently as neo-

Anglicans. They are, in fact, "new," in so far as they differ, both with regard to Protestantism and Catholicism, from the great High Church divines of the past, and from the formularies of our Church as they were understood by those who made them. Canon Meyrick not long ago compiled a volume entitled "Old Anglicanism and Modern Ritualism," in which he shows by quotations the differences between the great Anglican divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the representative writers and speakers of the neo-Anglican school.

The *Church Quarterly Review* for July tries to deny these differences and to explain them away; but the question cannot be disposed of by a few glib phrases. Both with regard to Protestantism and to Catholicism, the differences between the old and the new Anglicans are not only grave, but they are fundamental and irreconcilable. One position is incompatible with the other. There can be no doubt that the leading Reformers were Protestants, and that they meant the Church of England to be a Protestant Church. The Prayer-Book and the formularies all prove this; but, over and above these unanswerable proofs, some of the Reformers gave their lives, not in protest against the Roman claims, which the Church had officially repudiated, but chiefly in protest against those theories of the Eucharist which were adopted by the Lateran Council and perfected by Trent; that is to say, the English Reformers died in opposing that whole range of doctrine which the neo-Anglicans are most eager to accept and spread, which they also say has always been the doctrine of our Church. But if we proceed farther we shall find that the divines of the seventeenth century were no less firm in their Protestantism and in the Protestant character of our Church than were the Reformers of the sixteenth century. In this matter Laud and Andrewes were as staunch as Ridley and Cranmer. A neo-Anglican, however, Mr. Suckling, the Vicar of St. Alban's, Holborn, is not of their opinion. Instead of glorying in the Protestantism of our Church, he speaks of "the *small-pox* of Protestantism, which has disfigured her outward appearance." The brutality of the phrase can only be excused by ignorance in the speaker. Mr. Suckling's offensive language would not be worth noticing if he stood alone, and spoke only for himself; but he speaks for a large and a hitherto growing section of the clergy.

There are, no doubt, many among the older clergy who, like Prebendary Villiers, would accept the Protestantism of Laud and Andrewes so far as Rome is concerned, although they fail to see that they have moved far, not only from the Reformation, but from the old High Church divines with

respect to Catholicism. The standard of Catholicism for the old Anglicans was the "primitive Church." This is a vague and an elastic phrase. It is easier to say what it does not mean than what it does. At any rate, it does not mean the same thing as the phrase "medieval Church." For neo-Anglicans the medieval Church is the standard of Catholicity. The thirteenth century, as Lord Halifax has said, is their high-water mark of ritual and belief. This is perfectly true; but it is not true that the rituals and beliefs of the thirteenth century were those of the "primitive Church." Those beliefs and practices which are paraded so confidently now as "Catholic" are, for the most part, only medieval; and, in so far as they are medieval, they rest solely upon that Papal authority by which alone theology was decreed and vouched for in those mistaken ages. Those ages were mistaken because neither the Popes of that time nor their theologians were competent to decide theological questions at all. Now it is the height of unreason to accept a theological system, and to reject the sole ecclesiastical authority which can make it valid in the face of Scripture and Church history. Yet this is the position of Prebendary Villiers, of Lord Halifax, of Mr. Suckling, and of all the neo-Anglicans. It was distinctly not the position of our Reformers or of the great High Church divines. They all gloried in their Protestantism, and they all knew, far better than Prebendary Villiers knows, what they meant, and what the makers of the Creed meant, by the terms "Catholic Church" and "Catholic faith."

It is the custom now to gird at our Reformers; but they were far more learned and intelligent than most of their detractors, and their position was assuredly more logical. The aim of the early Tractarians, at any rate of Newman and Froude, was to "un-Protestantize the Church," to "un-Miltonize" English opinion. They have succeeded only too well, and the word "Protestant" has now become a term of derision and reproach. This result has been partly a reaction against the unhistorical views of certain narrow Protestants, and partly an effect of the equally unhistorical theories of their opponents. It was at one time a fashion to worship the sixteenth century blindly and narrowly, as though it were the starting-point of our religion. Of late, and as a protest, certain people have taken to worshipping the thirteenth century instead, which is indeed the starting-point of much spurious "Catholicism." Our own larger and more detailed knowledge of history shows us that we should worship neither. It tells us that a great deal which is now falsely described as "Catholicism" is only medieval in origin. It also tells us that a great deal which was once attributed to

the sixteenth century is really primitive and Scriptural. This knowledge, and the historical spirit, and scientific ways of thinking will, we hope, be the solvent for many differences, and help to reunite Christendom.

After all, Protestantism, properly understood, is the basis of our civil and religious liberty. The Imperial greatness of England came with her Protestantism, and was maintained by it. That greatness will decay and will assuredly depart if her Protestantism be thrown away. By Protestantism we do not mean the tenets of this or that sect; of Lutherans or Calvinists, of Baptists or Wesleyans, of Evangelicals or Congregationalists. We mean something much broader and more essential. We mean that body of religion which is given to us in the New Testament, and also that belief in the Word of God as the highest authority and the final arbiter of faith which was assuredly held by the Fathers and the early Church. By "Catholicism" we do not mean Romanism, or Medievalism, or Lateranism, or anything newer and narrower than the faith and practice of those who made and first used the Nicene Creed. We hold to that relative position, which they also asserted, between the Church and Scripture. If that position be maintained, there is always a corrective for human errors and mistakes, whether they be individual or ecclesiastical. This, surely, was the position and the belief of the Reformed Church of England. Is it not, surely, more "Catholic" as well as more logical than the beliefs and position of the neo-Anglicans?

It may be remarked, finally, that the first Protestants laid down a definite and an affirmative principle, both of thought and action, as well as of Church polity. They did not set up anything new and vague. They went back to the ancient ways, and overturned various medieval barriers which were obstructing them. They took for their motto or device the letters V. D. M. I. Æ., the initials of the words *Verbum Domini Manet In Æternum*: "Thy Word, O Lord, endureth for ever." Upon that Word they took their stand. From that starting-point our own Reformers proceeded to deliver us from many errors, and felt their way back, through Medievalism and spurious "Catholicism" to the faith of the ancient Creeds. This is "the Protestant faith" which Prebendary Villiers calls "*a monstrosity*" and Mr. Suckling a "*small-pox*." This faith in its "purest form," says Prebendary Villiers, is "infidelity." The ignorance to which such opinions are due may well be pitied as well as the absurdity and the peril of the opinions themselves. They are not only ridiculous, but exceedingly irreverent. Moreover, unless the Protestant faith in its "purest form," that is, a loyal and an

intelligent faith in the Word of God, be taken as a foundation and starting-point, it is quite vain to repeat the Nicene Creed or to profess the Catholic faith. Unless a man be a Protestant in this sense, he cannot be a Catholic in the sense of the early Church. If Prebendary Villiers be not a Protestant, he cannot be truly and historically a Catholic. According to his own turbid reasoning, this means that he cannot be a Christian without being an infidel. The "purer" his Protestantism is, the greater his infidelity. The absurdity of this conclusion is all his own, and no one can deliver him from it but himself.

ARTHUR GALTON.



The Month.

THE grand event of the past month has been the Coronation of the King and Queen. It is an event which, in all its circumstances is one of the most memorable which has occurred in the history of England, and it ought to mark a conspicuous turning-point in the life and reign of Edward VII. For him it marks the most signal warning, combined with the most signal mercy, which any Monarch, or even any man, could well have received. Never was a King or Emperor at a moment of more conspicuous glory than was Edward VII. on June 23 last : within forty-eight hours his Coronation was to be celebrated amidst circumstances of greater splendour and honour, alike for himself and for his realm, than any English ruler had ever witnessed. But at that moment his physicians had to tell him that he was stricken with a mortal disease, and that his only hope lay in submitting at once to a most dangerous operation. At once the pomp and splendour which was gathered around him dispersed, and his Queen, his family, and his realm stood in profound anxiety round his bed of sickness. Prayers were offered for him from all peoples and languages and religions in his realm, and he submitted himself in patience, and with a touching consideration for his people, to the will of God. Those prayers were speedily answered in a marvellous convalescence and recovery. His physicians were able to say that his Coronation could be fixed for August 9. Their admirable treatment and foresight were justified by the result ; and on the day fixed the solemn ceremony was performed, and the King with his Consort was consecrated in Westminster Abbey. There could not have been a more striking witness to the truth that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." The King, in a manly and thoughtful address to his people, has solemnly declared that "the prayers of my people for my recovery were heard ; and I now offer up my deepest gratitude to Divine Providence for having preserved my life, and given me strength to fulfil the important duties which devolve upon me as the Sovereign of this great empire." The King has fittingly combined in this simple acknowledgment his sense of gratitude and his