

ART. VII.—THE CHURCH AND THE NATION.¹

EVERY age has its problems, moral and spiritual. Our age comes behind no other in this respect. Our needs and necessities are many and great. It is true we are now happily at peace with the world, in so far as our armies are no longer engaged in active war. But beneath the placid countenance of the goddess Peace there often slumber deep plans and lurk dangerous designs. When that goddess begins to reflect, the world may prepare itself for storms. For Peace has her periods of stress and strain no less than War. Revolutions and reformatations that have carried before them ancient kingdoms and States, and customs yet more ancient, have suddenly come upon the world, as a thief in the night. In the silence of ages their forces were being stealthily marshalled, and in the twilight, ere men were well awake, they were already upon them, overwhelming with their tidal waves the people who rejoiced in the fancied security of peace. Religious crusades and crusades against religion, the building of empires and the wrecking of dynasties, the tightening grasp of feudal systems and the rising of the masses in revolt—these things have ever been the result of some movement unnoticed or not regarded, that at first appeared above the horizon of life like a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but which always seemed to roll onwards, checked here and there for a time by the barriers of existing institutions, and diverted into other channels, until, as a wave, it surged aloft and swept over the doomed place with a force that nought mortal could withstand.

Upon the verge of some such change we may be standing, for aught we know. There are ominous signs at home and abroad. England must be affected more or less by the expulsion of the religious Orders from France, by the growth of socialism and agnosticism in her own heart, by the gigantic combinations that have been formed in America with a view to monopolize the trade and marine of the Western world, by the tremendous progress that Germany has made in the science and art of war. On the threshold of a new reign, with a popular and peace-loving monarch at our head, we may well pause in our onward voyage to take the bearings and the soundings of our course.

What we need most of all, as a nation, is character. Character is the only security of happiness and endurance. The great alone remains; the grand passeth away. Character was the one thing that could have saved ancient Rome in her terrible warfare with the ever-advancing Teuton. But

¹ 1 John iii. 7.

character she had not. Riches, slaves, powerful armies and navies, pomp and parade she had, such as perhaps no other empire ever had. But her grandeur was foiled by her luxury and her state undermined by her sins. She perished because she was not good. It is questionable, however, if she was any worse than we are as a nation. She had her "gilded youth"; so have we. Dining has become more than an art; it is a "rage" that tends to develop rich young men into sybarites and epicures, with all the vices, but without the elegance of Petronius Arbiter. The whole catalogue of impurity has been exhausted by modern society. London, our proud Metropolis, is indeed the centre of the world's commerce, but it is also the receptacle of the dregs of the world. We are indeed, in some respects, better off than our neighbours, thanks to the fact that a great middle class, distinguished for strong common-sense and manliness, is still the backbone of the nation, and that a press, high-minded and impartial, still controls the public opinion of the empire. But we are, when all is told, considerably lacking in character. Would God Britannia only sought to hold aloft before her children's eyes the life of the White Christ! With that ideal in her heart, with that life in her breast, England would not only be great; she would be more; she would be good with the goodness that endures through all the changes of time.

Heroics are not to our taste, jeremiads are ever unwelcome. We love not to contemplate the possibility of disaster, but we desire to prevent such a possibility. Others may rejoice over these signs of decay, but it is the duty of the Church to speak plainly to the nation of that power which alone can renew her youth and make her strong and lusty as an eagle. But here, again, we have struck upon a rock. The Church is ill-fitted to cope with such a formidable situation. Out of gear and out of hand, she is drifting into cross-currents, and is unable to bring her passengers into the haven where they fain would be. "Physician, heal thyself," is the taunt hurled by a waiting, if not incredulous, world at the Church, the garment of which has been rent, and the arm of which has been broken by our unhappy divisions. "To all those Churches that quarrel in the Name of Christ," a well-known authoress dedicates her book. If any article of the Creed is repeated with a wistful pathetic yearning, it is surely that "We believe in one Catholic Apostolic Church." For the necessity of unity of some kind, spiritual if not formal, is absolutely imperative at this crisis in our history. Instead of being dismayed by the colossal nature of the task before us, we should be rather stirred up with a sense of duty—ay, with the indomitable spirit of faith—and then, like the British nation

in the dark days of 1900, though shattered and scattered, we shall gather our forces together for a final and victorious effort.

Division is the cause of much of our weakness. If all the time and labour that Christians of different denominations and Churchmen of different parties have spent in counter-acting and hindering each other's influence had been spent in raising the moral tone of home-life, and bringing the truth of God to the heathen, the history of the Church had been very different. If all the bitter feelings aroused in this internecine struggle had been compressed into one strong, overwhelming passion of hatred for all that is evil and impure, dishonest and ungodly, the world would be a different one. The Moslems may well despise us because there are some sixty different sects of Christianity in Calcutta. And the Chinese may well be astonished to have forty different versions of Protestant Christianity laid before them by as many missionaries. But for the existence of such numbers of sects the Church has her measure of responsibility. Persecution and pride, bigotry and narrowness, want of interest, lack of love, have fomented, and will foment, seditions among the people of God. What about reunion then? Is it but a topic of conversation, or a dream that will never be realized? We trust it is more. But shall we have it unconditionally? Not, surely, at the risk of things essential, the things that are apostolic and spiritual, the things that belong to the Church as founded by Christ. To this point all those who have strayed away must at some time come back. But the Church that loves is the Church that lasts. We need more love for those who dissent from Church methods and government. This is one of the things we lack. Sincerity is another need of our Church. Our people do not observe the plainest principles of our religion. The Christian laws of marriage and Sunday are openly broken. And surely a man owes it to his Church to adhere to her rules on these subjects, especially when those rules have the support of the national common-sense, as well as the sanction of religion. But this is not all. Worse remains to be said. The lives of many Christians are so much at variance with their profession that abroad they are the great argument against Christianity, and at home the great hindrance to its cause. We are accused of pride, superstition, and idolatry. There is too much of self and too little of God in our lives—and this is pride. The antidote of pride is knowledge. "Pride puffeth up, but knowledge edifieth." And this knowledge means the understanding of the relations of things, and how to keep things in their right places. It implies the knowledge of God, which involves the knowledge of one's self and of one's true position and real significance in

the order of creation. In the fierce light of that knowledge we shall humbly and reverently play our part on the great stage of human life. We shall not wound our fellow-Christians by cold contempt, studied indifference, or careless neglect. We shall think less of self and more of God.

There is a strong tendency abroad to follow the fashions and the forms of religion rather than to assimilate the principles and cultivate the spirit thereof. Idolatry, or the cult that is satisfied with the husks of religion, superstition, or the deification of things unreal, untrue, and uncanny, are twin sisters, unholy seducers of men; for servile terror ever leads to the consecration of frauds. The voice of the beloved Apostle warns us against idols of every kind—things that come between us and God, things that men worship as gods—position and power, wealth and dignity, the prizes and pomps of this world, which are but vanity. To this indictment our country and our Church must alike plead guilty. And to check the further encroachments of error and godlessness we must invoke the true spirit of religion.

Free from the domestic unrest and political troubles of other nations, enjoying the most liberal government in the world, emancipated from the oppressive yoke of foreign superstition and ultramontane sway, the British Church might well turn herself from the trifling and hair-splitting questions that absorb her mind and contract her vision, and address herself to her great mission—the purification of a nation's life and the consecration of an empire's energies. The Ornaments Rubric, ancient uses, Catholic customs, are all very useful and right in their proper place; but there are weightier matters of the Gospel—love and mercy, the saving of human souls and the sanctification of their activities. "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." The voices of Roman Catholics warn us of our peril. St. George Mivart says: "It seems that before long there will be hardly any superstitions of which Romans are becoming ashamed that Anglicans will not be eager to adopt." And Mr. Robert Bagot testifies that the greatest misfortune England would suffer would be to become a Roman Catholic nation. And Mr. McCarthy shows what a nation has become when that religion is the only thing that prospers in the land.

Now the cardinal points of Christ's religion are three: *Pro Christo, in Christo, and ad Christum.* These are the principles that govern not merely the life of the National Church, but also the lives of individual Christians. *Pro Christo*—freed by Christ and fed by Christ, we work for Christ. Christian liberty prepares for service, fuller, larger,

more devoted, more blessed. Here there is no scope for casuistry or ostentation. The essentials are not covered; but "the light" shines and "the salt" preserves. *In Christo*—working for Christ, we shall be in Christ, united in Him, living in Him; in Him beloved, in Him redeemed; having in Him our grand hope, our great ideal, the only fountain-head of union and reform, of knowledge and character. *Ad Christum*—working for Christ and living in Christ, we shall grow after His likeness—the likeness of the perfect man—and we shall have in Him the realization of our ideals, the consummation of our hopes, and the crowning goal of the journey of our life. Living in the light and acting in the spirit of these three immortal principles—working for Christ, existing in Christ, and advancing to Christ—we shall be better Churchmen because truer Christians, and we shall not love our Church less, but Christ more.

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ART. VIII.—THE MONTH.

THE long controversy of the Education Bill was closed in Parliament just a week before Christmas Day, and it only remains to hope that, in spite of threats from the extreme parties on both sides, the general good sense of the country will secure its being brought into operation in a peaceable and practical spirit. The debate in the House of Lords will always be memorable for what we fear must prove the last public words of the venerable Archbishop of Canterbury. As these lines are being written he lies at Lambeth in a condition of extreme weakness, from which it is too much to hope that he can really recover. It is a striking and touching fact that his last words should have been a weighty contribution to the discussion of a subject to which he has devoted so large a portion of his life, and to which, perhaps, especially in his work on Royal Commissions, he has rendered more services than any man of his generation. It is a matter of great regret that his strength should have failed him before the opportunity arose of applying his unique abilities, experience, and authority to the settlement of the most important measure on education ever passed by Parliament; but his message to the Church and the country was none the less of a singularly impressive character. As became the head of the English Church, he did justice to the generous exertions and self-denying sacrifices which the clergy have made in the discharge of their duty to the