

ART. VI.—CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT: A  
FRIENDLY CRITICISM.

ENGLISHMEN have never been accustomed to be much taken with those who come to them with paper constitutions promising much. Paper constitutions have been viewed with deep suspicion, as frequently proving the symptoms and heralds of revolution. And the reason is not far to seek. Compromises, which are often essentially illogical, are the method of history. They are not infrequently the bulwarks of freedom and the safety of the State. They have grown and not been forced. Their very want of logic may be strangely enough the very secret of stability. Growth in societies does not follow the logical line, but the real. It is well for States and Churches to have an ideal, as for individuals, but to force entire conformity prematurely and with too much diligence has been found in practice a fertile source of disaster. Growth is from within; force is from without. For the State or Church to force the best possible may be to imperil the best practicable. As the anonymous writer to Diognetus puts it in the highest matters, so it applies to lower matters. "As a King, sending His Son, He sent a King. He sent Him as God, as to men He sent, as saving He sent, as persuading, not as forcing, for force belongs not to God." It was an ill day when men, with the best intention, began to try to force what they thought the most perfect in its entirety and completeness upon societies not prepared for it. They may or may not have been right in their ideas of perfection, but the extreme straightness of their method is not to be imitated. Laud was a great Christian, but would it be very bold to hold the opinion that Laud, with whose aims one may be in cordial agreement, with a little more moderation in action and a little more practical and far-seeing wisdom, might have saved this country from many an evil from which it suffers to this day? He would have achieved more with less energy. His very success was fatal. So with the Puritans. "The truths assured of ultimate triumph were, so far as political liberty is concerned, rather with Falkland than with the Puritans."<sup>1</sup> Extremes of temperament are not favourable to growth. Does it not seem that, as the pendulum of history swings from the one extreme to the other, the underlying principle is the same? It is the impatience of a gardener who should hack a tree to his liking from without rather than watch and train its growth from within. He might achieve more immediately, but less permanently.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Mixed Essays," Falkland, p. 231.

There are questions which are widely debated with regard to the constitution of the Church of England, which clearly need to be weighed from all points of view. Give more real power in legal status to the layman, and, we are enthusiastically told, all will be well. Our present distress will gradually vanish away. Take away the parson's freehold, and the Church will at last make greater headway. Concentrate to the Bishop, for the sake of getting rid alike of irresponsible self-will and of sleepy parochialism, and the energies of the Church, dissipated by controversy, at length with a unity which centres in obedience and symbol rather than in truth, will revive. These are questions of constitutional government.

It is a problem of true freedom. If we hurry into mistakes, we may plant the seeds of many difficulties, which those who come after us will have to suffer from. It is a question as to how best the freedom and energy of the Church can be fostered, and established, and turned to a blessing to the nation; for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. It is to make the Church the best instrument possible in the hands of the Spirit of the Lord that we seek. How best shall the Church of the twentieth century grow? The aim is not logical completeness, but real advantage.

There are two considerations which strike the thoughtful observer at the outset with regard to these suggestions of Church reform themselves, and the way in which one of them is presented. First and generally, they centre in the position of the presbyter already hard pressed enough, and receiving in the open, sometimes under conditions not very encouraging, the first onset of such division, unbelief, and indifference as there may be. They affect his independence. They threaten his security of tenure. They promise to enlarge indefinitely the sphere of the Bishop's influence over him. Next, with regard to an increased legal status of the layman, perhaps we are led to expect more from it than changes in legal status usually reach to. We some of us know the layman pretty well. We love him, work with him, learn, perhaps, as much from him as from anybody else, and heartily respect him. But we are not quite convinced of his infallibility. It is asserted that the layman's "interest in Church affairs would be deepened, his zeal for righteousness would be kindled afresh, his love for his suffering and destitute neighbours would revive, his sense of membership in a spiritual society would be strengthened, and he would himself be more ready to submit to its laws and discipline"<sup>1</sup>—all this if only he should have an assured legal

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<sup>1</sup> Convocation Report on the "Position of the Laity," p. 54.

position given to him, which he has not now. We are a little inclined to ask whether all this would result always and in every place from whatever change in legal position. The end is too deeply to be wished; but this means to compass it, does it not promise more than it can perform?

It is not without instruction that the ancient Greeks seem to have regarded forms of government with comparative indifference, each being open to its special abuse. We remember that Sir Henry Maine brought down the rhapsodies of democracy from the sky to the earth by calling it only a mode of government, and that the most difficult.

We have some of us seen and read of legally constituted and duly elected parish vestries, which have proved nothing but a scandal in themselves and an obstruction to good works. We remember reading in the life and letters of a broad-minded and democratic clergyman how he spent some of his time in the East end of London in endeavouring to teach even his churchwardens their small importance.

Again, some of us have read of deacons, and have in a little way experienced what they might be like. We do not want deacons in the Church of England. This is a question with which aspect has a good deal to do. As Newman points out, Montaigne and the seamstress saw the world very differently.

Given a party leader, with a strong party behind him, or a man of commanding influence and large success, the legally constituted layman is only anxious to help and to follow. Mr. Spurgeon, we are told, "was supreme in his church, and was never trammelled by boards of deacons, elders, or trustees; his wish was law among them." But to others it has fallen out differently. The interest of "Salem Chapel" by Mrs. Oliphant centres in the impossible position into which a man of ability and sensitive feelings is driven by the organized power of the laymen, who were without sympathy with his higher aims.

Dr. Guthrie's elder was great in *objecting*. The lay temptation is to work a church on purely business principles. "The accepted policy," says one, "of throwing the entire burden of the church on one man's shoulders, of making a church a financial investment, on which the minister is to pay the dividends, is encouraging and intensifying the demand for the talent which fills pews, and making it the unpardonable sin of the minister not to draw. To more than one faithful pastor his church is a cross on which he is crucified, while the people sit down and watch him there."

"One of the admirable sayings of Fred. W. Robertson," says Dr. Carpenter, "has always seemed to me to be his reply to the remonstrance addressed to him by one of his Church-

wardens, as to the displeasing effect of the outspokenness of his preaching upon some of the principal supporters of his church. 'I don't care,' he said—meaning, of course, 'I must preach as my own sense of duty prompts me.' 'You know what "don't care" came to?' said the remonstrator. 'Yes, sir,' replied Robertson, 'it came to Calvary.'<sup>1</sup>

Now, undoubtedly, the presbyter has sacred rights which it is the duty of the Church and the advantage of the nation to preserve. "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock amongst which the Holy Spirit made you Bishops, to shepherd the Church of the Lord which He purchased by His own blood."<sup>2</sup> "Amongst which the Holy Spirit made you Bishops" (*ἐπισκόπους*), says the High Churchman St. Paul to the elders of Ephesus in the first Episcopal Charge. I can scarcely help reading in it the Divine right of the presbyter's episcopacy. Conferred by the laying on of hands with the assent of the Church, there is yet an immediate Divine mission, a sending, an apostolical succession, a heavenly vision, a faithful witness. "Let a man—*i.e.*, a layman—so account of us as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, besides, it is required in the stewards that one be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by man's judgment." The idea is that of service, as under-rowers in the ship of the Church to the Divine steersman; officers for His work; stewards to be faithful, not in the judgment of the layman, but to Him whose goods they dispense. We are bound by such words as these to recognise the sacred Divine right of the faithful presbyter. For Apollos is one of those coming under this category in the context. And this mission the laity neither confer nor take away.<sup>3</sup> The idea of Christ's servant for the good of His Church, which is His body, is one given to us. We dare not impair it. For the power and presence is His.

Again, the New Testament view of the ministry is an apostolic charge to the consummation of the age with Christ's presence; a faithful keeping and witnessing of the faith once delivered to the saints, a deposit committed unto us ministers of Christ. "If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a bondservant of Christ." "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no man despise thee." These words are spoken to a Bishop. But even if we receive

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Carpenter's "Mental Physiology," Preface, p. xl.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xx. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Clement of Rome's letter in behalf of presbyters improperly ejected by the laity.

a theory, for which I find no warrant in Scripture or in the primitive Church, that the presbyter is nothing but the Bishop's representative, the words equally apply to him in this capacity. The language of the first Church, when the voices of the Apostles were still echoing in men's ears, though as far removed as possible from the language of modern priestly domination, yet faithfully reflects the Apostolic idea of Christ's ministry. Clement of Rome impresses the laity with the thought that order is Heaven's first law; that each man has his own rank, and is to be subject to his neighbour, according as he was appointed with Christ's special grace; that Christ and His Apostles both came of the will of God in the appointed order; that Bishops (presbyters) and deacons were appointed unto them that should believe by the Apostles as their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit. Let them subject themselves unto the presbyters. The layman is bound by the layman's ordinances. They are to submit to their leaders and to render the fitting honour to the presbyters who are with them.<sup>1</sup> The perfervid Ignatius, though he allows himself, in expressions which are easily perverted in a sense of autocracy and arrogance, from which he himself is wholly free, speaks the same language. His words are but extreme and unguarded reflections of the words of Christ: "As My Father sent Me, even so send I you." "For when ye are subject to your Bishop," he says; "as to Jesus Christ, ye appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ, who died on our account, that so believing in His death, we might escape death. It is therefore necessary that as ye do, so without your Bishop ye should do nothing. Also be ye subject to the presbytery as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom, if we walk, we shall be found in Him. But the deacons, also being deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, ought in every way to please all, for they are not deacons of meats or drinks, but servants of the Church of God; therefore they must avoid all offences as they would fire. In like manner let all reverence the deacons as a commandment of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> It is true, as has been said, that the expressions of Ignatius are open to the abuses which after set in in the monarchy of Bishops, and the painful assumptions of the clerical order, but in their own context, and in the spirit of Ignatius, they do but reflect the New Testament idea of the ministry of Christ. The ministry is entrusted with the commandments of Christ with which

<sup>1</sup> Clement, "Epistle to the Corinthians," chaps. i., xlii., xli., xl., lvii., and *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Ignatius, "Ad Trallianos," chaps. ii. and iii.

also the laity are "in all things ordered and beautified,"<sup>1</sup> and without the ministry "the Church is no proper Church." It is the mind of Jesus Christ that they witness. Like the Bishop of Philadelphia, they "obtained the ministry belonging to the public good, not of themselves, neither by men, nor after vain opinion, but in the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> It is not the dignity of an order that is in question, but the health of the body as touching unity, and perseverance in the true faith committed to the saints. It is for this that "where the Shepherd is, there as sheep do ye follow."<sup>3</sup> It is to keep the commandments of Jesus Christ that each estate should observe the order of his own office or ministry. "The admirable and striking gentleness of equity" of the Bishop of Philadelphia, "who by his silence is able to do more than others with all their vain talk," consists in this, that "he is in harmony with the commandments<sup>4</sup>—i.e., of Jesus Christ—as a harp with its strings." On the other side, Polycarp is addressed as "the Bishop of the Church of those in Smyrna, but rather as one overlooked (*ἐπισκοπημένω*) by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Polycarp reminds the deacons that "they are deacons of God in Christ, and not of men"; that the laity are to "submit themselves to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ"; that the presbyters should fulfil the charge of loving oversight over all; and all this "that we may turn to the Word committed to us from the beginning."<sup>6</sup> In the early Church leaders, presidents, rulers, governors, were terms common to the presbyters, and to the Bishop set over them.<sup>7</sup> The danger of "lording it over their parishes" which the Primate St. Peter guards against, was not the danger of those times. The danger of the times was separation, disunion, scattering, following false teaching. The Church, instinct and breathing with love, was to be kept in love and truth by the Divine ordinance of its ministry. Clericalism had not set in. The faith was a life too simple and Divine for that to flourish.

Now I am aware that all this will be regarded as a mere truism, a truism that all schemes of Church reform have well in view, and are quite content about. But truisms need to be

<sup>1</sup> Ignatius, "Ad Ephesios," chap. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Ignatius, "Ad Philadelphenos," chap. i.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. ii.

<sup>4</sup> *ἐντολαί*. Cf. teaching them to keep all things whatsoever I commanded (*ἐνετείλαμαι*) you.—Matt. xxviii. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Ignatius, "Ad Polycarpum," chap. i.

<sup>6</sup> Polycarp, "Ad Philippenses," *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Bingham, i., 266.

emphasized, and this one in the present day especially. The general principle that the Christian ministry is a charge not given by men, but to witness the commandments of Jesus Christ and to exercise a stewardship of the mysteries of God, for the health and life of the body of Christ, is a principle which descends into details. The policy and direction of each Church and parish is a matter of details. Unity and co-ordination are of the essence of advance and progress.<sup>1</sup> The individual soldier in Christ's army has his rights and his place of honour. He should be trained to act with independence and true freedom, as the modern soldier is desired to do. But nothing but chaos and dissatisfaction can result if the leader is obliged to bow before every passing phase of opinion; or if the policy and direction of a parish may be altered in an hour by a bare majority. Government is concerned with details. Constitutional government is still government. It is not abdication. It gives *suum cuique*. It tempers and co-ordinates. It gives free-play to each in his own order, in his own office and ministry in the Church of God, that each may serve truly and godly.

Let it not be thought that what has been written has been written in a spirit of hostility to Church reform. But experience teaches that there are dangers which Church reform should have full in view. Human nature likes power, but chafes at rule.

Many years ago Dr. Arnold wrote: "To revive Christ's Church is to restore its disfranchized members, the laity, to the discharge of their proper duties in it, and to a consciousness of their paramount importance. All who value the inestimable blessings of Christ's Church should labour in arousing the Laity to a sense of their great share in them. In particular that discipline, which is one of the greatest of these blessings, never can, and indeed never ought to be, restored till the Church resumes its lawful authority and puts an end to the usurpation of its powers by the Clergy." Arch-deacon Hare, in a note to one of his interesting and important charges, commenting upon this, proceeds: "Most truly does Coleridge lay down that the great pervading error and corruption of the Church of Christ is not so much the usurpation of the Papacy, as that by which the rights and privileges of the Church were narrowed and restricted to the Clergy. This division of the Church has fatally narrowed and crippled the kingdom of Christ. It has led the opposite parties to eye each other with jealousy, to keep watch and

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<sup>1</sup> The writer has for many years had a parochial council, which has exercised its powers pretty freely.

guard against each other, instead of working together as brethren in the same Divine task of love. It has rendered the Laity profane. It has rendered the Clergy secular. It has deadened the corporate life of the Church; inasmuch as the laity being debarred from a share in that life were fain to suppress it, and refused to recognise an authority which they justly felt was founded on usurpation."<sup>1</sup>

We have travelled some distance since these words were written in 1842; it is hoped in many ways in a right direction. Would to God that the laity would take everywhere and always their right position of work, and of influence, and of lawful authority as living members of Christ's body. For them to be influenced, as the Convocation report quoted above on the position of the laity suggests, would indeed be life from the dead. We see, on the one hand, an ever-widening breach between clericalism and the laity; on the other, with much assurance, and assumption of blessing, a growing movement for Church reform. "The errors and defects of old establishments are visible and palpable," writes the layman Burke,<sup>2</sup> "it requires but a word to abolish the vice and the establishment together. No difficulties occur in what has never been tried. At once to preserve and to reform is quite another thing. We see that the parts of the system do not clash. The evils latent in the most promising contrivances are provided for as they arise. One advantage is as little as possible sacrificed to another. We compensate, we reconcile, we balance. We are enabled to unite into a consistent whole the various anomalies and contending principles that are found in the minds and affairs of men. From hence arises, not an excellence in simplicity, but one far superior, an excellence in composition." Wisdom consists in no inconsiderable degree, says Burke, in knowing what amount of evil is to be tolerated. *Il ne faut pas tout corriger.*

The laity have rights and privileges of influence, of co-operation, of initiative, of counsel, of legitimate authority in the body of Christ. This position of the laity has often been lost, and not always by the fault of the clergy.

But they are members in particular. It is no usurpation, but it is the sacred duty of the presbyter to lead, and let it be said without offence, to govern. We want constitutional government—a temperament and composition of many orders. Love, which seeketh not her own, must be the cement of it. It seems the weakness of the Church Reform League that it puts forward no constitutional checks to a possible abuse of

<sup>1</sup> Hare's "Charges," p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> "Reflections," p. 198 (Clarendon Press Edition).



power on the part of the laity ; it does not seem to have them in view. St. Paul prays to be rescued from unreasonable and wicked men in the Church, for all men, he says, have not the faith. It is in the midst of an ignorant and careless laity, who do not or cannot study the commandments of Christ, that unbounded priestly arrogance is found to flourish. But, on the other hand, it is abundantly possible for a well-educated and sensitive presbyter, who has given up his lay independence to serve the Church, anxious to extend his master's kingdom, to find himself in the hollow of the layman's hand, thwarted and cramped and checked in schemes that are admirable, in teaching that is sorely needed.

The present completely anomalous system of patronage sprang up historically, not always from causes that are unworthy. It is better than "the trier's."<sup>1</sup> The parson's freehold ought not indeed to be absolute by any means. It is so too much. But better far endure the evils that spring from it, than destroy the parson's independence and self-respect by making it possible that he should be removed by caprice or uncharitable judgment. The motives that produced its legal recognitions were sound, and abundantly justified by evils which it supplanted. The present system has enabled many an able, humble, and conscientious presbyter to do noble work for God and His people. Where these qualities are not, we shall not succeed in making them by mechanism. It is the prayer of the laity that such humble, able, and conscientious men may be raised up by God to bless our England. There are many disabilities, which might well be removed from the power of the Bishop, but it should be constitutional power, lest it should destroy all individuality and initiative in the presbytery. Where the Bishops lead even now, there are many to follow. There is a select circle to advise. And if the parish presbyter is to have his legally constituted Parish Councils, a representative oligarchy should have no absolute power to check new efforts and prayerfully laid plans for the good of the Church by a bare majority. Their power should be constitutional power. There should be always the possibility of an appeal to the country. It ought to be possible to go from a decision of the parochial council to the general body of the communicants in the parish ; nay, finally, before action, even in very important matters, to the Bishop himself. Rash decisions, not to say heated and partisan, in a small assembly would bear to be discussed more fully, to

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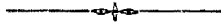
<sup>1</sup> See an interesting account of the intolerable proceedings of "the triers" of men's qualifications for a benefice in the time of the Commonwealth in "Perry's Church History," vol. ii., p. 230.

have time afforded for further thought, to enlist the opinions of other minds, to listen to a Bishop's wisdom in counsel in the last resort.

What has been said about the ignoring of the layman's legitimate influence, of his responsible and honourable estate, of the valuable counsel of the humblest in the Church of England, is only too true. The best results may be anticipated from a due and balanced recognition of every true member in co-operation, counsel, and influence in the body of Christ. But in an ancient historical Church improvements must be slow and tentative to be improvements indeed. Long custom must be broken down by gradual education. If the Bishops would advise to all their presbyters the trial of voluntary Parish Councils with defined powers and constitutional checks, we should be nearer a just legislation.

It is no imagination but a grave certainty that there is a possibility of being hurried into the other extreme. It is absolute from Scripture and the primitive Church, the proper standpoint of a Catholic Churchman, that it is a commandment of Jesus Christ that the presbyter should lead and govern for the everlasting good of the Church, which He purchased with His own blood.

What we want is constitutional government.



#### ART. VII.—ASSYRIOLOGY AND THE EARLY RECORDS OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

THE discovery of ancient monuments in the Nearer East, and the decipherment of the cuneiform writing which most of them bear, proceed apace, and as nearly all these have some reference to Bible lands and illustrate Old Testament history, we cordially welcome the appearance of a volume by one of the most competent experts,<sup>1</sup> giving us a full outline of Assyriological research in its bearings on the narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures.

It would be impossible in a monthly magazine to review *in extenso* a book covering as much ground as this book covers, especially when written by a scholar as thorough and as painstaking as Dr. Pinches; we propose, therefore, in this article to confine ourselves almost exclusively to a discussion of so

<sup>1</sup> "The Old Testament in the Light of the Historical Records and Legends of Assyria and Babylonia," by Theophilus G. Pinches, LL.D., M.R.A.S. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge).