

Evangelical Religion and Roman Catholicism.¹

BY THE VERY REV. THE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

AMONG the problems presented by the work in which we are engaged—that of promoting an alliance among Christian men of all denominations—none is at once more important and more perplexing than that of the relations between Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians. There can be no question that the division between those two bodies of Christians lies at the root of some of the greatest political and social, as well as religious, difficulties of to-day, alike at home and abroad, in Ireland, in France, in Italy, and in Germany. In Ireland it has for generations been at the root of our troubles; in France and in Italy the antagonism between Roman Catholicism and the State menaces the very foundations of society, and a remarkable expression of the distress occasioned by this antagonism in Germany has recently been uttered by one of the most eminent scholars and leaders of thought in that country.

On the occasion of the celebration of the Emperor's birthday, on January 27 in this year, Dr. Harnack delivered an address before the University on the subject of "Protestantism and Catholicism in Germany." He began by describing vividly what he calls the chronic condition of weakness which this religious division in Germany entails. "In numerous deep questions of life and of public welfare," he says, "our people are at the very outset divided into two camps, and this division works itself out from the centre into the circumference of our life in the smallest and most everyday affairs. Everywhere we are met by the prejudices of religious divisions; everywhere we are checked by the hedges, or rather the walls, of the religious confessions. This division is felt in every expression of public life; it dictates reserves, hopelessly complicates all relations, and creates numberless obstacles and barriers." In view of

¹ A paper read at the Evangelical Alliance International Conference, July, 1907.

this state of things, he inquires what hope there may be of at least alleviating, if not of overcoming, this division of religious communions, and of Protestants and Roman Catholics working together in the common interests of the nation's internal welfare. He recalls the striking fact that 300 years ago no one would have dreamed of the possibility of Lutheranism and Calvinism being amalgamated. "Yet," he says, "we have now the Evangelical Union, and thousands call themselves Evangelical Christians without any thought of the opposition which once divided Lutherans and Calvinists more bitterly than Lutherans and Catholics." He dismisses, in a spirit of generous religious earnestness, the suggestion that members of the two confessions might work together, and keep their religion in the background as a purely personal matter. The Christian religion, he says, is too deeply rooted in the inner and national life of Germany, and in that country no one can be a mere politician; he will be judged by his significance for our inner life. In Germany, therefore, if the difficulty of division is to be overcome, it can only be, he says, by more light and more air, by the healing influences of knowledge and truth. In what direction can we hope for increasing union under these influences?

Not, he says—in a spirit which is in harmony with our principles in this Alliance—not by aiming at an external unity and disguising differences by compromises. The effect of such efforts to unite two bodies by compromise is, as he says acutely, only to make a third body. What we must look at, he urges, above all, is the cultivation of a deeper Christian spirit in both communions, a more intense concentration of effort and thought on the great spiritual realities of the Christian life, "more inwardness, more genuine Christian feeling and Christian freedom within each Church, 'and all the rest shall be added unto you.'" That is a principle which we recognize in this Alliance, realizing that the best way to promote harmony and alliance between the various Evangelical communions is to realize more earnestly and deeply the common Christian spirit which is the life of our souls.

But still he recognizes that more than this is necessary if there is to be a real working union between Roman Catholics and Protestants. If the two confessions remain divided by antagonistic definitions or principles, the spirit of Christian life and love will not suffice to establish a working unity among them. He inquires, therefore, whether there are any circumstances in the present day which tend to weaken the severity of these divisions, and he thinks he finds it in the development of the scientific study of Church history and dogma. History, he recognizes, has to some extent deepened the sense of division, by taking us back to the deep causes of our divisions in the struggles of the past; but, on the other hand, the spirit of scientific study in both communions has tended to mitigate the opposition. In this connexion he makes some statements respecting recent contributions to Church history in the Roman Catholic communion, which, coming from perhaps the most eminent Church historian of the day, are of extreme interest. A comprehensive "Church History of the First Three Centuries" has lately been published by a French priest, Monsieur Duchesne; and Harnack says of it that, with the exception of some minor points, no Protestant scholar could take any exception to it. On the contrary, he would be glad to have written the work himself. The latest investigation about Savonarola, also by a Roman Catholic priest, could not, he says, exhibit more knowledge of the facts or more impartial judgment. The same, he says, is the case with respect to the religious history of Germany; the unworthy attacks upon Luther by some Roman Catholic writers have been answered by other Roman Catholics; and the number of able Roman Catholic historians is remarkable. There is one point, indeed, in which an approximation between the two is impossible, namely, the Roman Catholic doctrine of the powers of the Church and of the Pope, and this, as we shall have occasion to bear in mind, is a vital point. What Dr. Harnack chiefly urges on this head is that an absolute authority is always obliged to recognize a sort of anonymous authority behind it, and to apply its own authority with reserve.

But he finally goes on to mention certain great points of doctrine in which he thinks this process of approximation is taking effect. The first is the principle of Justification by Faith only, as against that of Justification by Faith and works. On this, as he truly observes, no Evangelical theologian would now deny that that faith only has any worth which manifests itself by love to God and our neighbour. He might have gone further, and have said that no Evangelical theologian ever did deny it. On the other hand, he says that every Roman Catholic theologian would repeat the incessant declaration of his Church, that there can be no merit which is not rooted in the grace of God and in faith. Where, then, he asks, lies the controversy? It is only, he says, that Catholicism admits a certain laxity in practice, and allows forgiveness on imperfect repentance; this in time becomes abused, and then the *furor teutonicus et Christianus* breaks out, and asserts the impossibility of any justification by human merit. Now, it is on this point, I would submit, that Harnack's optimistic pleadings break down. He does not really seem to apprehend what is the practical question at issue in Justification by Faith. What it is practically in opposition to is not justification by merit, but justification by the priest.

The whole strength of the medieval Church rested on the principle, theoretical as well as practical, that no man could be sure of his justification, that no man could claim the full privileges of a Christian, unless he had received absolution from the priest. Wherever the medieval principle was accepted, no man could die in peace without the last sacraments, without the assurance of forgiveness at the priest's hands. The principle of Justification by Faith asserted that no priestly intervention was requisite, that a man might be assured of His forgiveness by God's own promise, that he might put faith in this promise, as declared in the Gospel, and that that faith justified him. I see this grand principle still misrepresented, as though it only meant that a man is justified and his sins forgiven when he believes they are forgiven. The

true statement is that a man's sins are forgiven when he believes God's promise that his sins are forgiven. It is the promise of the Gospel, the promise of Christ in the Gospel to every penitent sinner, which is the cardinal element in the matter. If it were not for the Gospel, there would, indeed, be very little danger of a man's believing that his sins are forgiven. That is one of the hardest things for a man to believe who knows his own heart. But when our Lord Jesus Christ sends him a message that his sins are forgiven if he repents and believes, then it becomes a cardinal point in the Evangelical faith to assure men and women that they may accept that assurance, independently of the sentence of the priest.

Interesting, accordingly, as much of Harnack's discussion is, it illustrates a characteristic weakness in much German theology at the present day ; it fails to appreciate the real depth of the religious and theological problems out of which Protestantism arose, and by which it is, after all, divided by a great and impassable gulf from Roman Catholicism. Men discuss these matters, not only in Germany, but here also, as if Roman Catholicism were simply a set of opinions, and as if the division between Evangelical religion and Roman Catholicism were simply one of divergence in theological views. But the cardinal fact is that Romanism is not simply a set of theological opinions ; it is a great working system, a real spiritual kingdom, which claims a more than royal authority over the souls of men and women, which has an elaborate and well-organized army of ministers, and which claims, by virtue of this supernatural authority, to direct the lives of men and women individually here, and to pronounce on their fate hereafter. It is a vast spiritual monarchy, claiming the supreme government of men's souls. This is its strength. Men and women are weak, and are too ready to place themselves at the disposal of a venerable, ancient, and fearless authority, which claims the capacity and the right to govern them. The consequence is that, when a man becomes a Roman Catholic, he does not merely change his opinions, he changes his master ; or, rather, if he has been a Protestant before, he places himself

for the first time under a human master claiming divine authority over him.

Now I would submit that that is a difference which never can be bridged over. I wish it were simply a question between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Unhappily, it is also a question between true Evangelical religion and the Romanizing tendencies which exist in some Churches which nominally refuse allegiance to Rome. It is the question of the free development of the soul of the Christian under the influence of the Word of God, given in the Scriptures and applied to the heart by a faithful ministry, or the moulding of that soul under the controlling and masterful hand of the priesthood. That is the real difference, and consequently, notwithstanding all the apparent approximation which Dr. Harnack depicts, there remains an immense and impassable gulf between the Evangelical tendency in religion and the Roman tendency.

But the mention of the Word of God leads me to notice one other point in which Dr. Harnack would minimize our differences—that of the relation of Scripture and tradition. He says Protestants recognize that Scripture is dependent on the testimony of tradition, while the Roman Catholics recognize that every tradition must be subject to criticism, and that on the weightiest questions of early Christianity the New Testament is the only trustworthy authority. But that does not alter the vital fact that the Roman Catholic Church recognizes Scripture and Tradition as of equal authority where they can both be appealed to, and thus deprives the Word of God of its supremacy. There is another grave difference on this point, which has become more and more important in relation to the criticism of the day. The Roman Catholic Church, by adopting the Apocrypha as part of the Canon, has placed itself in a position of great embarrassment in relation to the question of inspiration. Their critical writers are obliged to form a theory of inspiration which would include, for instance, the Book of Tobit; and the false decision of the Council of Trent on this point is thus recoiling upon Roman theologians. So, again, Dr. Harnack dismisses

lightly the difference between the Roman Mass and the Evangelical Communion, by such observations as that the idea of sacrifice has been too much thrown into the background in Protestantism. But once more he forgets that the cardinal point in the Roman Mass is that it is a sacrifice offered by the priest, not the commemoration by the whole congregation of a sacrifice once offered by Christ.

On the whole, therefore, we are forced to come to the conclusion that Dr. Harnack has failed to make out that the great differences between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism can be explained away, or so modified as to be no bar to religious co-operation. On the contrary, the antagonism is rendered all the more conspicuous, and the more hopeless, by the fact that these approximations in point of learning can be made without affecting the vital differences. The principles of development and infallibility, which are now at the basis of the Roman system, render its position, as I think Cardinal Manning said, independent of the evidence of history. Monsieur Duchesne has no hesitation in producing a faithful picture of the Early Church, because, when a Protestant appeals to it as the example to be followed, a Roman Catholic is able, and is content, to reply, "*Nous avons changé tout cela.*"

After all, it comes to a question of practical life. Dr. Harnack depicts the situation in a brilliant image. The Roman Catholics, he says, live together in an ancient castle which has been built by the labour of centuries. It is flanked by formidable towers, protected by ditches and walls, and within it are vast halls, mysterious passages, and noble chapels, with safe retreats for penitents. The Protestant Christians live around it in numerous lately built houses, very different in structure, and some of them very imperfect. But around both castle and houses there lies a common garden in clear sunshine, and all day long Roman Catholics and Protestants alike are working in this garden, the garden of their common life and of God's world. It is only by night that they return to their various separate habitations. "Oh for more work in the day,"

he exclaims, "and less in the night!" He thinks all that is needed is that they should think only of the garden and of their work, and forget the edifices which separate them. But he forgets that they work in the garden on different principles; that the Protestants work in full trust in God's light and air, while the Roman Catholics work in reliance on their artificial methods of spiritual culture. The consequence is that the results are very different. The one method of culture produces a spiritual life of fear, and of dependence on human agency; the other produces that manly and womanly dependence on God, and that independence of human authority, which is the glory of the Evangelical faith and of the Protestant nations. Let us, with all charity, but with all earnestness and firmness, resolutely resist the many temptations around us to disregard these deep divisions of principle, and amidst all the minor differences which distinguish the Evangelical Communions, let us hold fast to the great cardinal principles of the Evangelical faith.



Leaders of Religious Thought. IV.—Butler: Evidential Thought.

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF BURNLEY.

THE toleration which marked the attitude of William III. to religion, while for a short space it raised hopes of reuniting the Nonconformists and the Church, offered occasion to freedom of speculation such as had heretofore been unknown. From 1688 to 1750 has been assigned the period of the sway of a rationalizing bent of a kind which to-day seldom gains a voice or an ear.

The deism of the end of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century—belief in a God, coupled with disbelief in providence and revelation (theism, shorn of all sympathetic relation to man)—has long since receded before the dawn of other dim interrogative days. This shifting of the contro-