

## The Church of the Future.

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### II.

WHERE, then, shall we look for the Church of the future—the true Catholic Church of Christ—seeing that we cannot find it in obedience to Rome, with all its errors, superstitions, irrationalisms, and dependence on priestcraft, against which intellectual progress and spiritual enlightenment are marching forward to final victory? The Churches of the East have had a deeply troubled career. They were the firstborn of the Gospel. Many of them were personally founded and personally instructed by Apostles themselves. Where are they now? Their lampstand has, in most instances, been removed. Of the Eastern Churches mentioned in the New Testament not one remains to-day as a strong, living force. Internecine disputes and foreign invasions have either greatly crippled or destroyed them utterly. The Church at Jerusalem, the first of all the Churches, founded, if ever Church was founded by St. Peter himself, under the direct and manifest outpouring of the Holy Ghost, has perished as an independent missionary Church. Even the Patriarch of Jerusalem is subordinate to the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Christians in Jerusalem to-day belong to many differing Christian Communions, whose hostility to each other, and violent contention for the holy places, has at times to be subdued and kept under control by Moslem soldiery. It would carry us too far from our present subject to inquire into the strange fact that all the sacred places connected with the life of our Lord and the birth of His kingdom have passed away from Christian rule. Even the exact position of many of them is now indeterminable, and all are subject to Mohammedan sway. It may be that as Jehovah buried the body of Moses so that no man knoweth the place of his sepulchre unto this day, thus preventing Judaism from drifting into the idolatrous worship of dead men's bones at local shrines, so also it may be—who can tell?—

that for a similar reason God has partly hidden, and partly removed from Christian possession, the Holy City and the Holy Land that Christians may learn the stupendous truth, first taught by our Lord to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, that His religion is not a local, but universal, religion ; and that God is Spirit, and they who would Christianly worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. However this may be, the fact is clear that none of the Churches of the East give any promise, from their present position and character, of becoming strong and catholic enough to take the lead in the formation of the Church of the future. Even the Holy Orthodox Eastern Church is too closely bound up with the political fortunes of Russia, besides being unfitted in many other ways, to take cosmopolitan rank among Christian Churches.

The Reformed Churches of Western Europe are far stronger and healthier, more progressive in character, and apparently capable of grander possibilities than the Churches of the East. To them we largely owe much of the recent advance in religious thought, and especially of fresh and truer light upon the nature of the Holy Scriptures and their marvellous revelations of the dignity and destiny of man ; of God's unsearchable love for man, and of man's mysterious privilege of consciously co-operating with God for the redemption and exaltation of the human race. But one part of these Churches is loaded with the dogma of consubstantiation, and the other with that of predestined and helplessly unavoidable spiritual doom. These two tenets, consubstantiation and predestined reprobation, are heavy clogs on the wheels of the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches respectively. They are, we believe, out of harmony with both reason and revelation ; two of the great pillars of the Church of the future.

The non-episcopal Churches of the English-speaking peoples are obviously more Catholic, more rich in spiritual possibilities, than any of the Churches hitherto mentioned. They are more open to the light of reason, more loyal to the Divine simplicity of Scriptural truth. They are hampered with no medieval tradi-

tions. Their Apostolic Creed is practically that of Nicæa. They are not harnessed to the chariots of the schoolmen. For them the Bible is the test of the orthodoxy of the Fathers : the Fathers are not the infallible interpreters of the Bible. Unlike the Church of Rome, they teach nothing contrary to the Scriptures, although, on the other hand, some of their teachings, notably those concerning the Church and the Sacraments, seem to fall short of the fulness of the Scriptural measure. Those of them who maintain Genevan teachings have for the most part brought those teachings to the bar of Scripture, and have stripped them of all the attributes inconsistent with the unfathomable mercy and love of God. In their earlier days these Churches, possibly in reaction from the miserable notions of unity prevalent in the Papal Church, disclosed a dangerous facility for division ; but in later times this tendency has been arrested, and a strong tide is setting in towards unification, as is manifest from the recent action of branches of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. The finger of Pharisaic scorn is sometimes pointed at these Churches. Their passion for liberty is defamed as licence ; and, indeed, there have been epochs in which ecclesiastical tyranny has goaded the extreme wings of Reformed Churches into licence. But none have lamented this licence more deeply, or have sought to repress it more earnestly, than the overwhelming majority of the members of the Reformed Churches themselves. Nor at its worst has the madness of these fanatics exceeded the madness displayed in the ranks of Unreformed Churches. The vilest Anabaptist was never more vile than the vilest Inquisitor.

Then, too, the multitude of divisions among the Reformed Churches is pointed at contemptuously as an evidence of their detachment from the unity of the Church. All divisions among Christians, especially when accompanied by bitterness and faction, are truly a matter for profound, penitential regret. But where is the Church which is free from divisions ? Apostles grieved over the divisions in the Churches founded by themselves. For more than a thousand years the story of the Papal Church has been largely a story of divisions, Popes anathematizing anti-Popes,

Popes cursing cardinals and cardinals Popes, one order of monks plotting against and undermining the authority of another order, the Pontiffs in antagonism with the Jesuits, and the Jesuits struggling with the Pontiffs until they gained the mastery over them. To the historian there is no figment more palpable than the loudly proclaimed unity of the Roman Church. To say nothing of earlier Councils, who that knows anything of the latest Vatican Council, or of the election of Popes in even recent times, can be ignorant of the internal divisions in the Roman Church? And what also of the English Church? There is more real difference and distance, less unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, between members of the English Church Union and members of the Church Association, than between the different branches of either the Methodist or the Presbyterian Communion. The distinction between Roman differences and other differences is not that the former are fewer or less real than the latter, but that they are more carefully hidden out of sight and covered over with a thin veneer of uniformity. All Romanists, indeed, profess allegiance to one single Pontiff. But as all Christian communities confess allegiance to Christ, and as allegiance to Christ is immeasurably more important and more vital than allegiance to the Pope, it follows that the unity among all the differing Churches who confess the Christ is a truer and more living unity than the unity of allegiance to the Pope. In so far as Romanists derive their unity from allegiance to the Pope it is a merely outward ecclesiastical uniformity; in so far as they owe their unity to their life in Christ, and their love of Him, they have their share, but only their share, in that grander unity of the whole Catholic and Apostolic Church which is the true Body of Christ, of which all Christian Communion are equally members.

The Church of the future will not be a mechanically uniform Church. Its lay members will not be as pawns in a game moved at the will of priests. It will be a Church of great diversities of custom, and many varieties of worship; and within the limits of Holy Scripture different ways of setting

forth religious verities. Necessarily this will be so ; because the Church of the future will be both human and divine. On its human side it will give expression to the ever-growing developments of human thought, the ever-changing character of human needs. It will be diverse as the highest aspirations and the deepest wants of mankind. Like the beauty of spring or the richness of harvest its manifold elements will be countless in their diversities ; but one in their origin, and one also in their aim, which is the spiritual nourishment and exaltation of mankind. Because the Church of the future will be both more human and more Godlike than the Church of the past, therefore in its comprehensive and Catholic unity there will be greater mental and spiritual variety. If there were no other evidence of the enormous distance which the Roman Church has travelled from the purity of the primitive evangel, the demand which that Church makes for a cast-iron uniformity of discipline and usage would of itself be evidence enough. Nothing could be less like the pictures of Christian unity portrayed in the New Testament Scriptures than the unity prescribed by the Vatican authorities. Scriptural unity is unity of will, unity of work, unity of love, unity of life : a unity resembling that of the Eternal Father with the Eternal Son, or of the redeeming Bridegroom with His loving, deeply cherished bride. But nothing is more conspicuous in this Divine unity than the absence of mechanical uniformity. Godlike unity is the unity of a tree in which no two leaves are alike ; of a family of which each child has its own personality ; of a body of which every member has a different character and a different office. Roman unity is unity of drill ; Divine unity the unity of love. Drill has its uses, but in excess they tend towards the suppression of personality. Love yields an obedience more resolute, more ardent, more victorious than drill ; and yet at the same time an obedience which foment rather than quenches personal development.

If, then, the Church of the future will be a Church in which diversities of thought and usage will be not less conspicuous

than the unity of love and service, what are some of the hindrances in the path of that Church in the present day? As thought progresses, as mankind grows more and more enlightened, the desire for a uniform Church grows weaker and weaker; and that for a Church with many diversities, yet at unity with itself, stronger and stronger. How then, I ask, can this unity be attained? Owing to the limitation of my available space I leave out of reckoning in this paper the conditions of unity requisite to be fulfilled by the Eastern Churches, the Papal Church, the Reformed Continental Churches, the Old Catholics, and the Roman Modernists, before they can take leading parts in the constitution of the Church of the future. My hope is that one and all of them will in course of time, under the operation of the Holy Ghost, shake off their various hindrances and unite in the formation, not of a merely nominal, but a most real and actual, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. Omitting, then, for the present, these Churches, I proceed to inquire what are the hindrances in the path of those other Churches which possess the most hopeful promise for the making of the Church of the future?

These other Churches I take to be, broadly speaking, the Church of England and the English Nonconformist Churches. These Churches already enjoy an intimate and most essential relationship. They are immeasurably nearer to each other than either to the Church of Rome or the Eastern Churches. In all the fundamentals of the Christian faith—the truths and beliefs necessary to salvation—they are in practical harmony. Their errors are fewer and less vital than those of other Churches. In the Church of England, indeed, during the last sixty years, there has been a partial recrudescence of medieval superstitions and of ecclesiastical efforts to reintroduce medieval customs and disturb the Scriptural proportions of the faith. But these superstitions, based on priestcraft, are foreign to the genius of the Reformed English Church. They cannot be proved by Holy Scripture; they are at war with reason and are against revelation, and are, therefore, not only not of the essence of

Anglican teaching, but in absolute opposition to it. Either by rupture or decay the Church of England is sure in time to get rid of these alien elements; for it is impossible for a Church whose great charter is the Bible to tolerate for ever either teachings or usages of which the contriver is the priest.

On the other hand, the Nonconformist Churches have in recent times discovered a tendency towards undue political bias. All true Christianity should exercise a real influence on politics, but it should be the influence of grand and sacred principles, not of narrow secular partisanship. We want religion everywhere and at all times in our politics; but politics nowhere and never in our religion. The inevitable and dread result of political partisanship in religion is to de-spiritualize it. This result, we are told, is being increasingly felt at present in some Nonconformist Churches; and is bitterly lamented by their best and noblest members. And yet this political partisanship is contrary to the origin and purpose of Nonconformity. In some instances the rise of Nonconformist Churches was due to their anti-Erastianism—their resolve to constitute spiritual communities free from political control. In others the rise was due either to the reverence for liberty of conscience or to a great hunger for a more simple Gospel, a great thirst for a deeper spiritual life. And as I have no doubt that the Church of England will cleanse itself in time from anti-Scriptural customs and teachings, so have I no doubt that the Nonconformist Churches will soon return to their first love, will throw off their political fetters, and become once again splendid heralds of the spiritual truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

When these two great consummations have been reached, when the Church of England is completely de-Romanized, and the Nonconformist Churches are completely respiritualized, what are the hindrances which will still remain in the way of their reunion? The two greatest will be episcopacy and establishment. The former is absolutely essential to the English Church; the latter, however desirable and beneficent for the sake of historical continuity and Christian comprehensiveness,

and national well-being, yet is not of the essence of the life of the English Church. These two great issues will have to be faced, and faced without flinching, before there can be corporate reunion between the Conforming and the Nonconforming Churches. These questions can never be solved by diplomatic fencing, by beating round the bush, by unreal and unsatisfying compromise. They are questions involving great principles on both sides ; and only by the frank recognition, and clear statement of these principles will the final and full solution be reached. Amongst other things Churchmen will have to decide whether or not by episcopacy they mean only and solely monarchical episcopacy, and Nonconformists whether or not by disestablishment they mean the cessation of the national recognition of God in assemblies and ceremonies of State, in the education of children in the public schools, and particularly whether or not they mean to substitute the congregation for the parish as the unit of ministerial responsibilities and the centre of ministerial activities. These questions are preliminaries vital to all considerations of corporate union between the Church of England and the Nonconformist Churches, just as that union is vital to the formation of the grand Catholic Apostolic Church of the future.

Meanwhile and long before these two great questions of episcopacy and establishment can get themselves settled, there are many minor questions which may be usefully debated and brought to a workable solution. The Church of England has many things to learn in richer fulness from Nonconformists : such as the extension of lay government and ministry, more cordial relationships between Church members, spiritual *esprit de corps*, the value of unwritten, even *extempore* prayers, the art of preaching, the realized fellowship of believers, the importance of individual consecration, the unspeakable joy of direct spiritual access to God. On the other hand, there are many things which Nonconformists may learn from the Church of England. The value of the parochial system is beyond all calculation in ministerial work. Again, a lineage of long centuries of historical continuity is not,

we know, essential to a Church's life and vigour, but it has great charm and power over multitudes of thoughtful men. Ceremonials of worship, too, which engage the imagination and appeal to the artistic and æsthetic side of man's psychical constitution are not illegitimate servitors of true religion. Temples and sanctuaries which in their sublime magnificence and reverent splendour suggest something, at least, of the wonder and glory of God are aids to spiritual exaltation, and outward helps to inward awe. It is by no means necessary that our sacred buildings should be bare and beggarly in order to be exempt from superstition. A Book of Common Prayer—common to all classes, and to every clime and quarter of the earth—is a strong and happy instrument for promoting the sense of brotherhood, for procuring a delightful liberty from the bondage of ministerial idiosyncrasies, and for creating a realization of spiritual nearness between those sundered by physical distance. There is also a scope of intellectual and spiritual liberty in the Church of England of which few are aware who are not within her pale. Comprehensiveness is one of her principal and most attractive characteristics. Some Churches exalt authority at the expense of reason ; others glorify reason at the expense of authority ; but I know of no Church which combines the authority of reason with the reasonableness of authority, and both with revelation, in the same degree and with such justice of proportion as the Church of England. Then, too, there is a definiteness about the Sacramental teachings of the English Church which is lacking in some Nonconformist Churches, and which supplies great fulness to her teachings and great richness to her spiritual strength. In these and other directions there are lessons touching both faith and practice, doctrines and ordinances, which Nonconformists would advantageously learn from closer association with the English Church.

It is in this closer association of the Reformed Church of England with the Reformed Nonconformist Churches that I believe the germ of the Church of the future will ultimately be found. The fundamental truths, the essential revelations of

Christianity, must always remain the same—yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Like their Unchangeable Source, they cannot change. But their manifestations are new every morning. Their applications to the needs and ways of men, to the mental, moral, social, and spiritual progress of the race, must be perpetually varying. The modes of worship of the primitive Christian times would be anachronistic now. In medieval times medieval forms of worship, medieval customs and ordinances played their part and did their work. It is difficult to see how the Church of the Middle Ages could more effectively have counteracted the feudal powers of secular lords and overlords than by setting up a feudalistic ecclesiastical constitution of its own. The secular tyrannies of feudalism in those ages could be best overthrown by spiritual forces organized on feudal lines. The cardinal mistake of the Roman Church has been, not that in the feudal age she was feudally organized and feudally strong, but that she has sought to stereotype her feudal institutions and make them permanent for all ages, and has encouraged ignorant superstitions and invented a whole succession of traditions, decretals, and dogmas, to prop up those institutions after their purpose was served and their very existence had grown obsolete. As at present constituted the Church of Rome is generically a Church of the past, and can never be part of the grand Catholic Church of the future until she breaks free from the fetters of her feudalism and renounces the errors and superstitions with which she is now endeavouring to sustain her crumbling walls.

The vice of immobility is a vice common to all Churches in varying degrees. Ecclesiastical institutions are the last and most reluctant of all institutions to adapt themselves to changing circumstances and changing times. And to some extent it is well this should be so. For the surest progress is always made on conservative lines. By preserving and cherishing whatever is good in the past we best secure that the unfolding future shall be better. To tear plants up by the roots is not the way to bring forth to perfection their blossoms and fruits. The new graft on the old stock grows often the most rich in loveliness.

Similarly with institutions. There are times, indeed, in their history when their rottenness is so complete that nothing short of a root-and-branch reformation can save and make them whole ; times when even the brazen serpent, once the symbol and instrument of salvation, must be ground to powder lest it should foment idolatry. But such drastic remedies are needed only in cases of deadly disease. As a rule reform is better than revolution. And what is reform? It is sometimes the introduction of new principles into practice ; but more often it is the enlargement and readaptation of old principles to new requirements. Such reforms are both truly conservative and truly progressive. They contain both the elements of permanence and elasticity. They strengthen what is enduring, shake off what is obsolete, and prepare the way for advancement to higher ends.

Many such reforms will be needed in existing ecclesiastical institutions and ways of formulating Christian thought and belief before the Church of the future can be firmly established as the pillar of truth and the trusted guide for men. Take only two instances out of many. Who, *e.g.*, that takes note of the movements of the human mind, or looks for reunion between Nonconformist Churches and the Church of England, or reflects on the action of the American and the Irish Episcopal Churches, can suppose that the Creed commonly called the Creed of St. Athanasius will be among the *Credenda* of the Church of the future? As a relic of its own age it is an intensely interesting symbol. As a crusading lyric it is incomparable. As an historic survival of a form of passion which holy devotion once assumed it is as precious as the imprecatory psalms. And in the same sense in which Christians to-day can sing the imprecatory psalms they can also recite the Athanasian Creed. But the day is at hand when neither the one nor the other will constitute part of the symbolism and psalmody of the Church of Christ. We can enter into the feelings of the exiled captives who in their utter desolation could exult in the thought of Babylonish little children being taken and dashed in pieces upon the rocks ; but Christ has put an end to all such feelings in His true disciples. We can

enter also into the feelings of those warrior Christians who, trembling for the security of their orthodox Trinitarian faith, and realizing its inestimable preciousness, could raise the battle-cry of an indubitable everlasting torment as the doom of their heretical foes ; but the slow development of Christian love has made these feelings impossible now among those who have learned that the greatest of all Christian virtues is charity. Even among those who cling most strenuously to the Athanasian Creed I doubt if there is now left one, so uninfluenced by the general growth of Christian gentleness, who, if he had the power, would condemn father, sister, child, wife, or mother, to perish everlastingly because of unbelief in any or all of the profoundly metaphysical, and in the case of the vast majority of people utterly unintelligible, propositions of the Athanasian Creed. Yet these good, kindly people, in their ecclesiastical conservatism, find no difficulty in attributing to God, who is Love, feelings and actions which they would deem unworthy in themselves. So strange and strong is the blinding power of ecclesiasticism—a power from which the Church of the future, if it is to exist at all, must shake itself absolutely free.

The second and only other reform for which I have now space to make mention is the Church's attitude towards death. The slowness of the Christian Church in learning even the first rudiments of the Christian religion has been nothing less than marvellous. If one announcement was placarded more prominently on the banner of Christian revelation than another, it was that our blessed Saviour, by His resurrection, has abolished death ; not, indeed, the fact of it, but the curse of it and the entire system of old beliefs concerning it. The old belief was that "as a tree falls so it lies" ; that the dead praise not God ; that there is no remembrance in death nor any giving of thanks in the grave. By three grand strokes Jesus Christ abolished all these old mistakes concerning death. On the Mount of Transfiguration He talked with Moses and Elias about His decease which He should shortly accomplish at Jerusalem. On the Cross He promised to one of His fellow-sufferers that before

sunset they would be in Paradise together. On the third day after His crucifixion He rose again—the same but glorified. By these three strokes the Redeemer rent the veil from death as manifestly as by His death He rent the veil from the hidden Mercy Seat. Yet how slowly, how almost reluctantly, the Christian Church has assimilated this sublime and stupendous truth into her daily consciousness. No doubt the perversion of this grand verity by the Roman system into a mighty engine of priestly control and most lucrative traffic has hindered the Reformed Churches from accepting it in all its strengthening and refreshing power. But the perversion of a truth is no just ground for neglecting it. I sometimes think the Evil One invented purgatory in order to place impediments in the way of man's realization of Christ's conquest of death and of the nearness of the paradisaical to our present life. If this be so, then in more ways than one purgatory has proved one of his most successful inventions for the hindrance of the Gospel of the Resurrection. However this may be, the thankworthy fact remains that science in several of its departments is now coming to the aid of the Gospel and is demonstrating with ever-increasing force the irrationality of supposing that death is the *terminus ad quem* of human life, or that there is neither remembrance, nor further ascent beyond the grave. And this, I think, will be one of the most influential and beneficent convictions of the Church of the future as it was of the Church of Apostolic times.

To sum up. I have endeavoured in this essay to set forth the grounds of my belief that the Church of the future will be a grander and more glorious Church than the world has ever yet beheld—a Church visible on earth in its influence and fruits, and connected by a realization of living communion with the Church invisible; that it will be a Church emancipated from all the manifold fetters of medieval priestcraft, a Church truly Catholic because truly Apostolic, ever developing but never on anti-Scriptural lines; a Church with great diversity of ordinances and methods of worship but always at unity in itself and with its Heavenly Head. The first steps towards this unity will be made,

I believe, by the Church of England and the English Nonconformists, after considerable purgation by both of their outstanding blemishes and defects. By degrees I hope all other Churches will join this great Catholic Union: those whose errors are fewest, first; those that, like the Roman Church, are most in error, last. The process of reunion will probably be hindered rather than hastened by premature attempts at external manifestations such as exchange of pulpits and the like. Meanwhile, in all personal and social relations let Christians of every denomination and of all the Churches cultivate the freest and most friendly intercourse. Let them study their differences and study also their harmonies. Let them cling with a great loyalty to their past history, yet let not their past history be a clog on the wheels of their future development. Above all, let them pray for each other in the Holy Ghost, that He would guide them into all the truth and fill them with most holy love. Then in God's own time will the Church of the future look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and, in its warfare against falsehood and sin, terrible as an army with banners.



## The Problem of Home Reunion.

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IT may be useful to preface this contribution to the above problem—the contribution of one not a member of the chief Christian communion involved—by quoting some sentences from what may be regarded as the primary recent utterance on the subject. In his sermon on “The Vision of Unity,” addressed to the Bishops assembled for the Lambeth Conference of 1908, the Dean of Westminster referred to the preceding Congress as having shown “an unexampled *recognition of the work of the Divine Spirit* in the communions which are separated from us, an unexampled desire *to learn what they have to teach us*, an unexampled readiness to inquire how union