

Orders and Reunion.

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THE question of Christian Reunion deserves to be a first charge, not only upon the work and prayers of Christian people, but also upon their thoughts and study. That our Lord's intention was for His disciples to be united in one visible fellowship is a truth which we must incessantly bear in mind, and from which all our interest in ecclesiastical matters should derive its inspiration and its ideal. But the besetting danger in this, as in so many other matters connected with religion, is not the lack of earnestness nor the lack of enthusiasm for an ideal, nor even, perhaps, the lack of study, but the lack of scientific study—the lack of a really scientific appreciation of the problem set before us. It is not enough to be keenly interested in such a topic; it is not enough to be ardently zealous for such an ideal; we must also be methodical and scientific students of the situation, of its difficulties and its possibilities. We must face facts and we must study history, if our interest is to be more than mere emotion and sentiment; and the chief defect underlying the modern conduct of denominational controversies is probably to be found in these two directions. It is the rank and file of parties and schools who are usually most talkative, or, at least, most positive; it is also they who study least, and least widely. It is probably useless to require that our minds should not be to some extent clogged with prejudices; but we may at least seek to temper our prejudices by attempting to become acquainted with other points of view besides those to which we have been brought up. And it is certainly not unreasonable to ask that we should be able to shake ourselves, in some measure, free from the tyranny of catch-words—that we should be able to go beneath the catch-words to the realities which they were in the first instance intended to

express. Again, we profess to be willing to look facts in the face ; but we are not disinclined to look at them with the wish to defy them rather than to learn from them. We are ready to think that if the facts will not accommodate themselves to our theories, so much the worse for the facts. We refuse to consider the possibility that our theories may be in need of readjustment in order to meet the circumstances of the case.

I do not propose that we should consent to join in the worship of that latest fetish, "the man in the street," the image which the modern spirit of democracy has set up for our worship. The experience of parish work furnishes considerable opportunity of becoming acquainted with his normal attitude upon the subject of the differences between Christian denominations, and I believe that his view might be succinctly expressed in the words of his stock axiom, "We are all going the same way." He has a feeling of profound indifference for all distinctions of party or sect, except in so far as they give him an excuse for standing aloof from all forms of organized religion. He assumes, without troubling to defend, the right of the individual to form promiscuous associations or to join any existing association in which he finds that which he wants. He has an inveterate disposition for forming or joining private connections, and this is true, not only of those who decline the ministrations of the English Church, but also of many who use them—not only of the man in the street, but also of many a man in the pews. For no small proportion of these the church in which they worship is the church of which they are members ; their outlook is either parochial or congregational ; they treat the English Church as merely the sect which has engaged their favour, or the church which they attend as merely the building and congregation in which they feel themselves most at home. So far as any theory of Churchmanship is concerned, they are as defective as the most ignorant upholder of invertebrate Christianity.

We can scarcely, I think, regard such an outlook as really enlightened or scientific. It has at least two cardinal faults. In the first place, it is merely individualist, whatever be its par-

ticular character, for parochialism and congregationalism are only Individualism writ large. And, in the second place, it is merely pragmatic in its view of truth. It is based upon the notion that there are many kinds or degrees of religious truth, and that each individual may select that kind or degree which suits him, and thus it is as hopelessly unscientific as undenominationalism. The cause of Christianity can never be satisfactorily based upon any theory which possesses these two defects. For the problem which Christianity professes to answer is a cosmic problem, and therefore can only be solved by a cosmic witness of Christendom to the world. Christian individualism may coexist with the edifying of Christian individuals, but it cannot coexist with the edifying of a Christian world. And, in the second place, the idea of Christianity is the idea of a system of revealed truth, progressively apprehended; and this idea is wholly incompatible with the notion that there can be a more and a less of truth for various people respectively, without harm resulting to the general structure of the system. If the line of thought, which forms as it were the main artery of the system, ends, for instance, in the Sacraments, then we can say that virtually it began also in the Sacraments; and to cut it short, before that point is reached, is not only to curtail the line, but to divert its whole direction; not only to mutilate the system, but to enfeeble it right down to the very heart. No difference can appear in conclusions, unless it was already latent in the premises. And a half-truth, unless it is distinctly acknowledged to be only preliminary and propædeutic to a farther advance along the same line, a half-truth acquiesced in as satisfactory and final, is a worse enemy to truth than absolute falsehood. Whatever may be the case with material architecture, at any rate in the architecture of thought, a building cannot have a steeple superimposed as an optional ornament; the steeple must have been in the original design before ever the foundations were laid.

But if we cannot accept the man in the street as the dictator or arbiter of ecclesiastical theories, we are not thereby absolved from attempting to supply his need of a theory. It is of no use

to repeat catch-words to him. Even if we understand them, he does not. His whole habit of thought and speech is alien to them, and he will not accept them on authority from anyone. He asks for realities made real to him, and this need we cannot meet so long as we have not made the realities real to ourselves. We cannot explain our principles until we have grasped them firmly ourselves—until we have ceased to be the slaves of our terminology.

There are many catch-words which are commonly used among controversialists and other people of every shade of ecclesiastical colour, often in irreconcilably different senses. Among such are the words "Catholic," "Real Presence," "Apostolic Succession," and so forth, and the phrase "Valid Orders" is, I cannot help feeling, another instance. Different parties attach totally different significations to the phrase, in accordance with their several theories, and the consequence is that discussion of the idea has largely lost all reality. My wish, in this essay, is to begin with the first principles which must underlie all discussion on the subject. If we can carry back our controversies to the fundamentals, we shall at least see where the divergences begin. At the present time we only know where they end, and, since they end in an utter confusion of issues, a return to the beginning may at least help to clarify the problem.

I will begin, therefore, by laying it down as an axiom that the Christian Church, as an historical society, has the duty of preserving an historical continuity, so far as may be possible, throughout all succession of changing conditions; and that this continuity must be one, not only of spirit, but also of structure. This, and nothing less than this, appears to me to be involved in the whole course of primitive Church history; and the classical expression of the idea is found in St. Paul's doctrine of the one Body and the one Spirit. The two must be taken together. Structural continuity is an element in spiritual continuity. But I would ask careful note to be taken that the term to be used is "continuity," and not "identity." It seems

monstrous to suppose that the Christian Church, alone among all societies in the world, is not to be allowed to alter its forms and reshape its framework in accordance with the demands of the ages. There may be, and there must be, development; and development may mean the evolution of one form out of another. Slavery to primitive ideas, for the sole reason that they are primitive, is mere acquiescence in that tyranny of custom which all history proves to involve stagnation of life. This is the fundamental defect underlying all theories of Church organization and practice which are based upon the desire to copy accurately past types. We find it in that strange doctrine—nowadays so fashionable—that our ideal in matters of ritual and worship should be to reproduce exactly every iota of medieval practice, on pain of being denied the epithet of “Catholic.” We find it in the assumption of the Independents that, because the primitive Christian system was largely congregational, therefore the Congregationalist system is bound on the back of the Christian Church for all time; and that too, apparently, without regard being paid to the fact that every precaution was taken by the primitive Christians to secure harmony between the various congregations in matters of faith and doctrine. We find it equally in the theory of the Presbyterians that, because the Apostolic Churches were in the main governed by presbyters, therefore Presbyterial government is the ideal system for every age.

If such be the true view, then the question simply resolves itself into the choice of the particular epoch to be copied. Do we prefer to copy the medieval, the sub-Apostolic, or the primitive epoch? It is a mere matter of individual preference and private choice; we are to suppress all the teachings of antiquity save those of that period which we favour. Such a view is a treason to the belief in the continuous guidance of God’s Holy Spirit in the Church. We must realize that development is of the essence of God’s way of working, and that development may mean a total alteration of form. The Providence which brought one form into being may equally bring another and different form into being to

replace it. But, while this view is alone in accordance with a whole-hearted belief in the Spirit of God, at the same time we must recognize that antiquity has a claim to our respect, that continuous tradition has a moral authority over us. To break loose wantonly from the continuity of the Christian Society is the sin of schism. If we wish to link ourselves on to the past ages of the Christian Church, we must desire to carry on, through whatever developments and alterations, the fundamental principles of the Church's historical existence—those principles which were the sources of its vitality and the basis of its system from the beginning.

It appears to me that if we study carefully and without prejudice the literature of the New Testament, we find that the principles which are there regarded as vital and fundamental to all true Church life are three in number: firstly, the principle of conduct; secondly, that of truth; thirdly, that of life. This classification, which I venture to suggest, is neither taken at haphazard nor selected for the deliberate purpose of supporting a case. It seems to me to come to light spontaneously, as soon as we begin to notice the epithets which the New Testament applies to the Divine Spirit. We find that Spirit called the Holy Spirit, and connected with the life of righteousness; we find Him called the Spirit of Truth, and connected with the notions of faith, wisdom, understanding, and liberty—though the last connection no doubt refers primarily to the notion of moral and spiritual rather than intellectual freedom;—finally, we find the Spirit called the Spirit of Life, the Spirit of Adoption, and connected with the idea of corporate unity. These three divisions correspond to the triple classification which I have suggested. I think they are also involved in our Lord's definition of Himself as "The Way, the Truth, and the Life"; finally, they are in accord with that threefold division of human activities as moral, intellectual, and spiritual, which seems complete and satisfactory for all practical purposes, however much it may lack of scientific precision of analysis.

If, then, we recognize these as the three fundamental

principles of the Church's vitality, we must proceed to ask how the necessity for preserving them bears upon the question of the mutual relations of divers Christian bodies. And, firstly, as regards the principle of conduct, I do not believe that any clear guidance in the matter can be derived from its consideration. Every Christian system can produce, and has produced, Christian saints. Indeed, if I were to go farther, and to say that some non-Christian systems have produced Christian saints, I should only be repeating in other language what not a few of the earliest Church Fathers have already said. I think it would be possible to argue that different systems produce different types of saintliness. But it would be very difficult to compare one type with another in order to prove the superiority of any one type over the others. The facts on which to base a comparison are too intimate and personal to be called lightly into evidence. But, while the appreciation of this circumstance should serve in a negative manner to give us a needful caution against judging too hastily systems which we do not choose to adopt, at the same time we must maintain, in the face of all implications to the contrary, that Christianity is, and was meant to be, more than a system of morals. The type of mind, of which we see many examples nowadays, which draws a distinction between "the propagation of particular doctrine" and "the preaching of true religious ideals," very much to the disadvantage of the former, is one which has failed in observing at least two-thirds of the true purpose of the Christian revelation. Christianity was meant to provide not only a rule of conduct, but also a system of truth and a theory of life; and it is under these two heads, if anywhere, that we shall be able to find some guidance as to our relations with other Christian denominations.

The Christian attitude towards intellectual matters, as taught in the New Testament, is a compound of two factors—a jealous reverence for the essentials of the Christian revelation, and a deliberate recognition of the liberty of the individual mind. We are bidden to "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints," but we are also bidden to "prove all things." And the

history of Christian controversy revolves round the practical difficulty of adjusting these two duties to one another. The course of Christian history seems to lead to two conclusions : Firstly, that the Church must have a creed. Nobody could have been more careful than the Apostles in insisting that, if a man wished to be a member of the Church, there were some doctrines which he must believe. They sought to convince the man's own judgment ; they did not require or encourage a slavish obedience to doctrines delivered *ex cathedra* ; but, nevertheless, they were quite clear as to the fact that there was such a thing as necessary Church doctrine, and that a man who could not assent to it could not claim a position within the Church. And, secondly, the essential and obligatory doctrines of the Church must be deducible from the New Testament. That is the literature which the Church itself, by the slow working of general opinion, selected as providing the standard and norm of Christian doctrine ; and it is the final court of appeal in all questions with regard to dogma. Anything that could not stand such an appeal could not be imposed as an essential of the Christian faith. It might be a matter of pious opinion or customary practice ; it might have a certain degree of force, according to the unanimity with which it was recommended ; but it could not be laid down as a belief which must be held as a condition of Church membership.

Here, then, we find two maxims to apply to our modern controversies. Our own practice, I am afraid, has often been inferior to our theory. We have not always allowed that liberty in non-essential matters which is one of the two Apostolic elements in the Church's intellectual attitude ; we have sometimes been disposed to stifle or ban free inquiry and study, and we have sometimes inclined to insist on forcing upon everybody opinions and practices which have no, or no certain, Scriptural and Apostolic guarantee. But at least in theory we base our position upon the co-ordination of Scripture and Church tradition. And thus we hold strong ground when we declare that the Roman Church has adulterated the truth by

the disregard of Scripture, and the official discouragement of free inquiry and of the free exercise of the intellect, and that conversely the Nonconformist bodies in general appear studious to disregard the essentials of Apostolic tradition, and to set no limits upon the exercise of private eccentricity in matters of intellectual truth. It surely is not Apostolic, not in accordance with the whole teaching of the New Testament and the spirit of early Christianity, either to force people to believe any new dogma that a majority of the authorities may choose to promulgate, or to allow people, while remaining members of a Christian body, to believe or disbelieve at will, without any necessary regard to the historic creed, in which the essentials of the Christian revelation are summed up.

(To be continued.)



The Time of Communion at Troas.

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IT is an admitted fact that in the earliest times the Holy Communion was administered in the evening, and the service at Troas, which is described in Acts xx. 7-12, might naturally be regarded as a plain enough example of the custom. Opponents of Evening Communion have generally sought for their main arguments in other directions, and into these it is not possible now to enter. But there has been manifested in some quarters a tendency to seek for a different interpretation of the passage just mentioned. Perhaps the force of the evidence which is supplied by Apostolic times in favour of administering the Communion in the evening has been felt to be so overwhelming as to call for some attempt to undermine the strong Scriptural position of those who maintain the practice.

Nothing, of course, can alter the fact that all other indications in Scripture point to the evening hour. What, then, can