

The Relations of Liberal and Evangelical Churchmanship.¹

BY THE VERY REV. THE DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S.

I SPEAK as one who wishes to see the Church of England representative of the Christianity of England. We owe our privileged position as the Established Church of the country to the national, comprehensive character which it was hoped, at the time of the Reformation Settlement, that we should always maintain. But more than this, our peculiar position in Christendom as a Church which claims to be Catholic and yet English can only be justified if we do actually represent English Christianity. If there is to continue to be a Church of England, established or disestablished, it must be the Church of the English people.

Well, what is the state of things now? A hundred years ago, as is proved by statistics, the Nonconformists were a very feeble folk, numerically insignificant, and socially and intellectually even more so. There has been an enormous growth of Dissent at the expense of the Church, not during the eighteenth century, upon which modern Churchmen are fond of pointing the finger of scorn as a period of lethargy and deadness in the Church, but during the "revivals" which have attracted so much attention during the nineteenth century. The defection of the Wesleyan Methodists, which a little patience and statesmanship might have averted, has not only depleted the ranks of the Church, but has to all appearance upset finally the balance of parties by withdrawing from the Church the majority of the Protestant element, so that the Church is now far more Catholic and less Protestant than the nation.

The growth of Nonconformity at our expense has now been

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checked for a time, not so much, I fear, because we are gaining as because political interests have been allowed to preponderate so much over religious in the Nonconformist bodies that disgust has at length been aroused, and many persons who take religion seriously are leaving them. But it is necessary to insist (since the contrary is so often asserted) that the last seventy years of Church life have been for the Church a period of decline. We are relatively far weaker, and our rivals far stronger, than when Queen Victoria ascended the throne and the Oxford Movement began.

And what is the state of things within the Church? The phenomenon that first meets our eyes is the apparently secure predominance of Anglo-Catholicism, and the relative weakness of both the Liberal and Evangelical parties. The victorious party has certainly passed through strange vicissitudes, and appears to be still in the course of rapid evolution. The Oxford Movement began as a rally of the Church against an attempt, headed more by rationalists than by political radicals, to attack her as an obsolete and useless institution. We owe a great debt to the Oxford Movement for repelling that assault. But Tractarianism (as I know, for I was brought up in a Tractarian home) was then closely connected with old High Church Toryism and even Jacobitism. It was learned, antiquarian, intensely haughty towards Dissent and Dissenters, quite indifferent to ritualism, and as hidebound in its theological conservatism as the old evangelicals themselves. The differences are great indeed between this school and the younger generation of Anglo-Catholics to-day — ritualistic and socialistic — willing within certain well-defined limits to accept the results of scholarship and science, and inspired by a free and lawless energy which is at least a sign of vigour and self-confidence. Those who are least in sympathy with the aims and methods of the party must at any rate admit that but for it the Church of England would cut a very poor figure in the nation at the present time. The influence and popularity of the other two parties are, in many parts of England, at a very low ebb.

There are some who predict that this ascendancy of the Anglo-Catholic party will grow until almost all traces of the Reformation are obliterated, except that no allegiance will be acknowledged to the Bishop of Rome, unless he offers honourable terms. The remnants of the Evangelicals will then, it is supposed, be merged in the Wesleyans, while the Liberals will take refuge with the Congregationalists, Unitarians, or with the Quakers, now becoming a highly intellectual sect.

I am far from sharing this view. I believe that the Anglo-Catholic movement has now about reached its height, and that it must soon begin to break up owing to certain internal contradictions which the enthusiasm of its adherents has hitherto masked or ignored. I say this in no spirit of hostility to a movement which all Churchmen must regard with admiration, even if that sentiment is tempered by misgiving. But I want to view the prospects for the future dispassionately; and this is how things appear to me.

Anglo-Catholicism has its theoretical basis in a definition of Catholicity which is absolutely peculiar to itself. All other Catholics couple with belief in Apostolical succession—the mechanical devolution of privilege—a doctrine of intention, which absolutely invalidates our Orders and our Sacraments. Our claims to be “Catholics” (using the word not as equivalent to “members of Christ’s holy Catholic Church,” which the Bidding Prayer defines as “the whole congregation of Christian people dispersed throughout the world,” but as the antithesis of “Protestants”) are, to put it brutally, denied by all other Catholics, by all Protestants, and by all who are neither Catholics nor Protestants. Now, it is easy for Protestants to be “in the right with two or three,” but not for Catholics arguing about Catholicity. The repudiation of authority by those who rest their faith on authority is suicidal. It is difficult to believe that the agonizing doubt about the validity of our claim to be Catholics, which has already driven hundreds over to Rome, will not in the future press still more hardly when the Church of England is shorn of her prestige and endowments, and is

outwardly reduced to the position of one among many sects. Already, if we take the whole English-speaking world, the Episcopalians are in a very humiliating minority. An American Episcopalian, even if a High Churchman, does not dare to "unchurch" his Presbyterian or Methodist neighbours—the thing is too absurd. And yet, if these bodies are Churches like his own, what becomes of his definition of Catholicity?

There is another fact which militates against the Anglo-Catholic theory in its present form. In each generation the divergence between the avowed principles of every denomination and the real opinions held by its members necessarily increases. At the time of the Reformation a man was a Catholic or a Protestant because he was naturally attracted by Catholicism or Protestantism. He chose his party, or Church, or sect because he agreed with it *ex animo*. But now, when conversions are few, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a man remains in the denomination in which he was born and bred. Religious opinions, however, are not inherited. Consequently, in every large religious body we find people who ought to be Catholics and who ought to be Protestants; we find High, Low, and Broad Churchmen everywhere. A man is no more a real Catholic because his family have brought him up as an Episcopalian than a duckling which has been hatched by a hen is a chicken. Conversely, there are men with Catholic sympathies among the Presbyterians. The late Dr. Marshall Lang is an example. There are limits beyond which it is impossible to believe in the validity of external classifications. When the labels become obviously grotesque, one ceases to trust them. There is no longer any *raison d'être* for most of our schisms, or rather, the real lines of cleavage run across and across all the denominational partitions. This is so obvious that people cannot shut their eyes to it much longer. And the most important thing of all—the fruit of the Spirit—is quite clearly interdenominational. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Samaritan — in modern language, neither Churchman nor Dissenter—if we judge the tree by its fruits.

If I am right in thinking that the party at present dominant must soon find itself in some perplexity in consequence of the manifest breakdown of its fundamental hypothesis, it is most important that the Evangelicals and Liberals should prepare to step into the breach, to take their proper share once more in the defence of the citadel, and claim their due place in the counsels of the Church. It is useless to pretend that they have this position at present; it is the Catholic party which is bearing the brunt of the battle, and which directs the tactics of the campaign. What is the cause of the comparative weakness and failure of these two parties?

Let me deal first with my own friends the Liberals. The Liberal Churchman at his best is a devout Christian of a mystical turn, whose moral and spiritual convictions are so strong that he cannot see the use of the ramshackle scaffolding and clumsy buttresses which most people have to erect round their faith. At his worst, he is a cultivated gentleman who happens to have taken up the history and philosophy of religion as a hobby, or a clergyman who has mistaken his vocation. In either case, if he is a controversialist against traditionalism, he takes the historical part of religion as if it were a mere narrative of events, and discusses coolly whether those events took place or not. The simple, orthodox Churchman, who does not in the least understand the grounds of his own belief, is generally eager to meet the Liberal on his own ground, and brings down the ark of God into the camp, where it is invariably captured by the Philistines.

Now, if there is one truth which the philosophy of the last twenty years may claim to have established, it is that every fact which is more than a mere phenomenon becomes false when you tear it out of its context. A fact is an idea—a thought of God—which works itself out in time. Its reality, its truth, is the meaning and purpose which become apparent when it has done its work. There may be mere phenomena which are complete in themselves. If so, they are negligible quantities—they are over and done with, and it does not matter to us whether they

ever happened or not. Such a phenomenon would be the transit of a comet across the sky, the course of which is carrying it for ever away from the earth's orbit. But a religious *fact* is a chapter in religious history ; its meaning and reality are bound up with the meaning and reality of the religion. Its whole context is *religious*, and if we take it out of the religious sphere, and investigate it as a mere occurrence in history, we are ripping it out of its context, and the thing which we have in our hands for dissection is not the religious fact which we want to investigate. The dogmas of the Church's Creeds (to come to close grips with the burning question) are not believed in by Christians as brute facts, but as something rather different. This is a matter which touches Conservative and Liberal alike, and it is a most difficult and delicate problem ; but let me ask you to put what I have just said to a personal test. Suppose that you were offered a ride on H. G. Wells's "Time-Machine," would you at once go and prove by ocular demonstration the two dogmas which are now so much controverted? Would you go to Bethlehem and witness the accouchement of the Virgin Mary, and satisfy yourselves that her physical condition was not that of other married women? Then, would you go to Joseph's garden very early in the morning, and watch the angels rolling away the heavy stone, helping the risen Lord out of His grave-clothes, folding up the grave-clothes and laying them in a corner, handing Him the new clothes which they had brought with them (for we cannot suppose that He appeared to Mary Magdalene without them), and then watch Him issuing from the vault? Having seen all this, would you say, "Thank God, my faith is now established on an absolutely sure basis : Christ was certainly God?" Or would you feel that somehow those precious doctrines had lost some of their value for you by being reduced to *banal* brute fact? If you will face this question fairly, I think it will take you to the heart of the problem about miracles, though not, alas! to the solution of it. Both sides are wrong in the controversy. Mr. Thompson is wrong if he plucks out of the Christian scheme a doctrine which

is part of the texture of it; his orthodox judges are wrong in insisting, on pain of excommunication, that these two dogmas are phenomena just like other phenomena. And, lastly, the Modernists are wrong in saying that though the historical Jesus was the son of Joseph, and though His body rotted in the ditch into which it was probably thrown, yet still the contrary assertions are true for faith, so that we may recite the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds with enthusiasm.

That is the open sore, the unsolved, and as yet insoluble, problem, which at present reduces Liberal Christianity to a perplexed and troubled silence. I have no answer to give. All I have to say is that this problem of the relation of faith to fact—this apparently necessary existence of a symbolic or sacramental element in belief, mediating somehow between the world of science and the world of faith, is far too complex to be solved by purely critical methods. The old expedient of simply cutting out all the supernatural part, and dressing up Christ in modern clothes as the pattern of all the civic virtues, will not serve. It is absurd to talk (as some who should know better have lately done) of the failure of Liberal Christianity. Liberal theology has done a great work—work of great permanent value—but it has not solved the central problem of religion.

Now for the Evangelicals. I have already said that this party has been the chief sufferer by the defection of the Wesleyans, who ought to be in the Church, the backbone of Evangelical Churchmanship. In a recent number of the *Modern Churchman* (an excellent little Quarterly which I commend to your support) an Evangelical clergyman complains of the patronizing tone which, he says, Liberals take in speaking of Evangelicals. I should be sorry to think that I had ever fallen into this fault; I have the highest respect for Evangelicalism; but surely the party must feel that it has fallen on rather evil days, and especially that it somehow fails to attract any large number of intelligent young men. Again and again at Oxford and Cambridge, the sons of Evangelical clergymen

are captured by the other side, and become aggressive Ritualists. And when a Prime Minister is reminded that it is high time for an Evangelical to be made a Bishop, he says "Very true; but where are your promotable Evangelicals?" Therefore it is not impertinent to inquire into the causes why a party with such noble traditions now seems to count for so little in the life of the Church.

To the outsider who, though in thorough sympathy with what (as he believes) Evangelical Churchmanship stands for, has not been brought up in those traditions, there seem to be two causes of weakness: (1) the adherence to verbal inspiration, or at any rate to a theory of inspiration which is incompatible with the results and methods of critical scholarship, even where those results seem assured; (2) the use of a peculiar phraseology which is simply unintelligible except to those who have been educated in the Evangelical tradition. These two legacies from the past seem to put the Evangelical at a disadvantage in dealing both with the educated portion of the younger generation and with the masses who have no religious traditions at all. The younger generation simply won't swallow Jonah, with or without his whale, and when they hear sermons about resting on the finished work of the Saviour, and being washed in the blood of the Lamb, they recognize the note of personal conviction, and wish to understand what the preacher means, but the words convey little or no meaning to them.

Well, I want to suggest that these two depressed and unsuccessful parties, the Liberals and Evangelicals, may profitably consider whether they have not certain things to learn from each other, and whether they may not gain new strength by falling back on their own first principles, in which they have much in common.

That they have much in common *negatively* goes without saying. The Liberals and Evangelicals both believe that what is called sacerdotalism is as near to being purely false as any theory held by good and intelligent men can be. That God should have delegated His Divine prerogative of forgiveness to

fallible human beings, that He should have placed His gifts of grace on a tariff, that He should have sanctioned privileged monopolies, to be exercised by certain persons and institutions—all this is to us incredible, for the simple reason that we cannot believe in a God who would be morally inferior to ourselves. We could not worship such a Being if we believed in Him, and we see no reason whatever to believe that such a Being exists.

But I should be very sorry to suggest that the principal bond between Liberals and Evangelicals is constituted by their common antipathy to certain other views. It seems to me that they have a much closer bond of sympathy, in that both, when they understand themselves, are based on trust in *personal experience*, and on the conviction that the essentials of religion are *moral and spiritual*, not political (in a wide sense), nor æsthetic. By trust in personal experience, I mean the conviction that what is variously called the God-consciousness, the inner light, the mystical sense, or (may we not say in one word) private *prayer*, is the foundation of religious faith. This is what the Evangelical means when he speaks of immediate access to God; this is what the Liberal means when he says that in the study of religious psychology we find the best apologetics for religious belief, and in religious experience its best proof. I think the time has come when we may relegate into the background vexed questions about inspiration—important and interesting as they are—and concentrate our attention on the growth and increase of the spiritual life, and the causes of its decay. The study of human character is the most fascinating of all studies. It is now by degrees being brought under scientific treatment. Books on religious psychology are pouring from the press—perhaps more in America than in England. Take such books as James's "Varieties of Religious Experience"; Stanley Hall's "Adolescence"; and the whole literature of mysticism, so rich in revelations of the human heart. Cannot those of us who are engaged in parochial work combine in a most interesting and useful way theoretical knowledge and practical experience of human character? May not we hope

that if we are properly equipped with such knowledge, and inspired with the sympathy and keenness of true physicians of the soul, we may induce large numbers of our people to come to us as consulting physicians, instead of resorting to the confessional, with its element of what seems to us unwarrantable assumption? I am sure that we shall remain at a disadvantage until we can get people to open their griefs to us as to experts in soul-healing.

Of course, the scientific study of human character, the interaction of mind and body, the special problems of childhood, youth, maturity and senescence, the influence of heredity and environment—all such topics, closely connected as they are with pastoral work, are not always conducted in a religious spirit, or with religious presuppositions. But for us they would be based on our fundamental belief that man was made for God, and that his true happiness and perfection consist in the attainment of an independent spiritual life. All leads up to that—the new birth into a higher, self-contained life, in contact with the realities of which the contents of the world are but shadows. I feel sure that the cause of all the unrest and evil passions which threaten to break up our civilization is that the vast majority of our population have lost all sense of the eternal background before which the things of time come and change and pass. We shall do no good by accepting their view of life and showing sympathy with their materialistic ideas. We must lift them up to the Christian point of view by showing them that *we* ourselves can live and breathe and work in that spiritual atmosphere which to them is so unreal. It is for us to hold fast to the moral and spiritual truth of Christianity, and to present that as our message. We shall find texts enough in St. Paul and St. John, and illustrations enough in that “Bible of the race” which is being compiled century by century in the writings of saints, prophets, poets, and philosophers. In that pure air, party differences simply cease to exist—Catholic, Protestant, and Liberal are one man in Christ Jesus.

What is wanted in our generation, I am convinced, is to go

back to spiritual religion in its simplest and purest form, and work outwards from that. It is not a forward movement that we want, but an inward movement. It is an age for laying good foundations, on which some master-builder of the future may build something worthy to be the temple of God. The old parties can get no further without much reconstruction. We can see how and why they fail. We don't want any more "revivals." We have had enough attempts to galvanize the dead past into life. By far the greater part of the history of the Church—that part, too, which will reveal the meaning and determine the character of the whole organic life of the Church—is in the unknown future, which our efforts may help to shape. We (I mean the Liberals and Evangelicals) do not wish to be fettered by old traditions. We had rather be ancestors ourselves, as Napoleon said. It is in the future, and the far future, that we look for the realization of our hopes for the Church and the world. God is in no hurry, having all future time to work in. Moral and spiritual purposes develop themselves far more slowly than secular and political ones. If we are on the right lines, we need not be troubled at being apparently in a back-water just now. Only if our enemies are rude enough to suggest that the Evangelical party is depressed by its want of education, and the Liberal party by its want of piety, let us lay these criticisms to heart, and try to make them even more unjust than they are. I believe that we shall soon see brighter times, especially for the Evangelical party. For the younger men are full of zeal, and many of them see clearly on what lines "the new Evangelicalism" must work.

