The Club Irenicon.

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IT is in accordance, neither with the traditions of English life in the past, nor with the fitness of things in the present, for social intercourse permanently to be affected by the controversies of Church and State. The heat of these may periodically be both wide and strong. But the controversy has scarcely reached the climax of acuteness when the atmosphere gradually gains a normal temperature. The agitation proves to be that of effervescence rather than explosion. The whole episode, with its incidents, issues, and protagonists, is remembered, if at all, without bitterness, and only as an abnormal experience. Nearly four decades have passed since one of the most memorable sessions of the Victorian age showed in the civil and religious province the harmlessness or the innocence of the sequel apt to await legislation, in which alarmists saw the seeds of disaster irretrievable, which, as a matter of history, divided party and even placed Cabinet Ministers at loggerheads with each other. The first of these was the Public Worship Bill, that must inevitably doom the Church to civil war, provoke litigation and reprisals, which, within a few years, would uproot its foundations, and rend its polity asunder. The interchange of spiced repartees in a Disraeli, a Salisbury, a Gladstone, a Harcourt, is on record. The Bill itself is a dead letter.

Equally calamitous in its results was to be Lord Sandon's inquiry into the Endowed Schools Commission, nor in the present century did Tariff Reform, now a phrase, threaten to be a less deadly apple of discord. Whatever the occasion, in spirituals or temporals, of these "blood feuds," nothing worse actually happens than that a few of the least representative and important of the rank and file parade an unsolicited loyalty to their chiefs by a short-lived show of avoiding each other in clubs or drawing-rooms. The individual animosities have died out when, a few

months later, fresh points of political departure have been made, and the rising tide of new social interests has washed away most traces of a strife that is now ancient history.

Even in this present writing, may not something of the same sort be destined to happen as regards the Irish difficulty? When all parties of a dispute are agreed on the necessity of doing something to end it, there is at least a possibility of patience, compromise, and tact, amicably and by some happy turn, if not suddenly, sooner than had ever suggested itself to the most sanguine forecast, solving the insoluble, and so effectually composing an ancient and inveterate strife as to make the next generation wonder, not that a tranquil consummation was at last reached, but that it was delayed so long. Similarly as regards theological and clerical disputations, how many of these might have had for their motto the well-known Virgilian couplet:

> "Hi motus animorum atque hæc certamina tanta
> Pulveris exigui jactu compressa quiescent."[1]

Recall the desperate and, as at the time they seemed, the permanently estranging issues with which the Oxford discussions of the sixties were, as it was thought, charged. *Essays and Reviews* were followed by the Max Müller and Monier Williams competition for the Boden chair of Sanskrit, and by the battle over Jowett's salary as Professor of Greek. How did it all end? The college of Pusey, Christ Church, endowed the professorship held by Jowett. Jowett himself lived to be recognized as a peacemaker between classes and parties; another of the *Septem contra Christum* temple died Archbishop of Canterbury. The heretical volume to which, with Jowett, he contributed, has long since been discovered to have few other faults than an innocent dulness, and an absence of the bold originality marking the literature of the *Lux Mundi* school. On the other hand, the archiepiscopal censor of Ritualism, Tait, left on his deathbed a legacy of peace and toleration to his successor. In 1892 the Privy Council, dealing with the

[1] "Georgics IV.," 86 and 87.

Bishop of Lincoln, practically revised some of its earlier decisions, and since then there has been no fresh Ritual prosecution.

The most active of University clubs, for the most part, concern undergraduates alone, and have therefore had no part in drawing up the irenicon now to be described. But throughout the stormy seasons on the Isis, now glanced at in retrospect, an office as mediatorial as that of the club was performed in common rooms, college chambers, and private houses. Mark Pattison's hospitalities at Lincoln came first. Those at the Master's Lodge, Balliol, brought together Churchmen differing so widely from each other as Dean Stanley, Bishop Thorold, Archdeacon Sinclair, and Archbishop Magee. To these peacemaking reunions must be added the welcome awaiting the very miscellaneous guests from Canon Christopher, the venerable Vicar of St. Aldates, whose services, outside the Evangelical party, to peace and goodwill among all sections of English Christendom were as valuable as they are now forgotten or unknown.

The social fusion promoted by Jowett's dinner-parties or receptions was carried on after his death by one of his best-known pupils, who had become the lay head of another society, George Brodrick, the Warden of Merton, whose interest in Church matters may have been limited, but who shared his old teacher's conviction that ecclesiastical squabbles reacted mischievously on the entire body politic. As Jowett approached middle life, there set in with him a mellowing process with the happiest consequences of representatives of all parties within his sphere of influence. It took him, indeed, ten years to overcome his resentment of disgust at Robert Scott's election in preference to himself for the mastership in 1854, but gradually the irritation was replaced by a resolve to associate his name with the conversion of Balliol into a great centre of English intellectual life, and the nursing mother of useful citizens, a school for statesmen who could compose quarrels between States by diplomacy, or who, in another sphere, could extend and

administer the Empire. At Jowett's table there were brought together H. P. Liddon, J. C. Ryle, Edward Henry Bickersteth, and E. S. Talbot, the first Warden of Keble, a better man than he was whip, and whose imperfect charioteership occasioned one of his friend Liddon's jokes at his expense. A few days before, he had been overtaken by a little accident while driving with one of Ismail Pasha's sons, then a student at Oxford. "Let me drive you home," on leaving Jowett's, he said to Liddon, who at once replied, "Wouldst thou kill me as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday?"

The names associated with the club irenicon of this twentieth century may not have the same distinction as those just mentioned. The pacific process itself is nevertheless equally real, and quite as active. Of that truth the present writer from personal experience can record a welcome illustration in the point-blank refusal of several High Anglican clergymen, possessing both leisure and means, to join, or even silently to sanction, a society designed by its organizers as a counterblast to the National Club in Whitehall Gardens. The suggestion of a High Anglican club could only have come from certain hot-heads among the clerical crusaders against the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, equally inconsiderable as regards authority and numbers. On the other hand, at the local capitals of North and South Britain clergy and laity, wearing very different party labels, are combining to support certain purely social clubs, likely to be of practical convenience when they periodically visit their local capitals on business. If such a scheme is carried out in accordance with the latest ideas on the subject, it will doubtless develop on essentially twentieth-century lines into a mixed resort, where, first it may be as visitors, but afterwards almost certainly as members, the vicarage ladies can rest during the intervals of shopping, of servant-interviewing, or other domestic business; while the head of the household may have occasion to visit the local solicitor or perhaps get a look in at Quarter Sessions; for the club *à la mode*, formerly a place where "wives cease from

troubling and husbands are at rest," has now, entirely or in part, annexed itself to the feminine empire.

This, however, by the way. The real matter for satisfaction here is that even the militant section of the party now in the Anglican ascendant steadily discourages the contemporary club runners innumerable from making enmity to Evangelicals the basis of a fresh feature in club-formation. Coincidently with this, one hears of the National Club's removal from its ancient home in Whitehall Gardens to new quarters. This, it may be pointed out, is by no means either the obsolete or the transformed institution currently described by those who lack alike sympathy with its objects and knowledge of its origin. No club could be more accurately described by its name, none has ever reflected more faithfully the popular feeling which prevailed at its birth, or was so little clerical and even professedly religious in its early and subsequent personnel.

About the middle point of the nineteenth century the whole country was agitated by the ground-swell of the Tractarian movement. J. H. Newman's secession to Rome came in 1843, that of F. W. Faber two years later; others, not less significant, soon followed. Pius IX. and his counsellors were notoriously anticipating such a falling away from national Protestantism as should make England the patrimony of St. Peter, and "the fairest jewel in Our Lady's crown." The years between 1845 and 1850 witnessed the establishment of Cardinal Wiseman at Westminster, the full-blown "Papal Aggression," and the ineffective rejoinder of Lord John Russell's Ecclesiastical Titles Act, 1851, repealed in 1871. A little more than two decades before that abortive legislation George Canning had been worried into the grave by the ill-success of his efforts for Roman Catholic Emancipation. The obstinate refusal of the King had been hardened by the hatred of Canning as a political adventurer by the aristocracy of both political connections. Canning died in 1827, on August 8. In exactly one year and seven months, on March 5, 1829, the Duke's Tory Cabinet had carried Catholic Emancipation through the Commons. The measure quickly

passed through its remaining stages; on April 13 it received the royal assent. The social and political atmosphere was long charged with a dangerous electricity. A Kentish magnate, hitherto known as a sportsman rather than a theologian, the ninth Earl of Winchilsea, had publicly charged the conqueror of Waterloo and his colleagues with a readiness to sacrifice at the shrine of treason and rebellion the Constitution for which our ancestors nobly fought and died.

That was not all. London University, chiefly through Lord Brougham's exertions, had been opened on October 1, 1828. As an antidote to that "secular and godless" bane, the movement for founding King's College, London, was begun almost immediately afterwards by the friends of the Church. Among the promoters of this scheme were both the Duke of Wellington and Lord Winchilsea. The latter of these, however, soon found reasons for regretting and cancelling his connection with the scheme; he denounced it in a letter to the *Standard*, charging the Duke with a determination to break in on the Constitution of 1688, and, under the cloak of professed zeal for the Protestant religion, to carry on his insidious designs for the infringement of our liberties and the introduction of Popery to every department of the State. These were the expressions that caused the hostile meeting on March 21, 1829, between the two noblemen.

The scene of the encounter was Battersea Fields. Lord Hardinge acted as second for the Duke, Lord Falmouth for Lord Winchilsea. The Duke fired first without effect; Winchilsea fired in the air, and, having done so, produced a written apology, regretting the imputation of evil motives to his adversary. The Duke touched his hat, wished everyone good-morning, mounted his horse, and rode away.

Winchilsea's letter had never been taken seriously by the public, and had much amused George IV., who called it "very clever, much the best thing he ever did." Letter-writing was indeed one of Lord Winchilsea's chief hobbies. Some five years after the Wellington episode, he put forth another specimen of his literary skill in a manifesto calling on Englishmen to stand

up for the protection of their religion, from Popery, scepticism, infidelity, and dissent. If this appeal was meant for a blow at its maker's old opponent in Battersea Fields, it signally failed, for among the great features of 1834 were the extraordinary demonstrations of enthusiasm awaiting the Duke of Wellington, not only from all the great Tory families, but from many a neutral spectator, on his installation as Chancellor of Oxford. Almost at the same time Cambridge Town, while not returning the Conservative candidate, Sir Edward Sugden, in the by-election, bade him so regretfully adieu that the Wellingtonians might almost be excused for regarding the Conservative defeat as a moral victory.

As for Lord Winchilsea, he shortly afterwards found tolerably congenial, if comparatively unexciting, employment in vigorous co-operation with the promoters of the National Club. Conspicuous in this number was the eighth Earl of Cavan, who only died in 1887, and whose English country residence, Hill House, near Bridgwater, rented from Mr. R. G. Evered, became, during his occupation, a social centre for the Evangelical party.

Other highly representive members during the same period were, to give them in alphabetical order, the Marquis of Cholmondeley, W. G. Habershon, James Maden Holt, C. N. Newdegate, and the first Lord Tollemache of Helmingham, Suffolk, both veteran champions of Reformation principles. To a somewhat later period, perhaps, belong J. Bateman, of Biddulph Grange, Congleton ; J. C. Colquhoun, sometime member for Newcastle-under-Lyme ; Lord Balfour of Burleigh, Colonel Macdonald, of St. Martin's Abbey, Perth ; Richard Nugent, of Gloucester Terrace, S.W. The group of National Clubmen showed the courage of their convictions in supporting the Conservative *Hour*, that in 1874, and for two or three years afterwards, made itself, under Thomas Hamber's able editorship, the mouthpiece of Conservative Protestantism, and that only failed permanently to establish itself because at that particular time its many excellencies did not include the merit of being wanted.

For the rest, what the club was at its beginning it still remains, and will continue in its new abode. Morning and evening prayers are still held daily ; from three to ten members, and from eight to ten servants, form the average of those present. During the session a weekly prayer-meeting takes place from two to half-past on Mondays.

On the other ecclesiastical side the Higher Anglicanism, forming with its broad Church affinities the creed now mostly in fashion, has long possessed an amount of social organization enabling it to dispense with a special house of call of its own. Its leading spirits are to be found at all the University clubs, but especially at the youngest of the class, the New University Club in St. James's Street, where, at the chief academic anniversaries, whose *venue* is the capital, Bishop Gore's lay and clerical disciples, from curacy, vicarage, or public school, muster not less numerously than those whose immediate business is with the Thames between Putney and Mortlake, or the classical cricket-field in St. John's Wood.

The club irenicon is, however, even more a provincial than a metropolitan growth. Party or personal animosities within the pale of the establishment are the commonplace, above all things, of our pleasure towns—the fashionable marine watering-place or inland spa. Here they are principally fomented at the five o'clock tea-tables or the midday luncheons of the hospitable daughters of the Church, who for the most part not only have each of them their pet places of worship, but back those ministering beneath such sacred roofs against their rivals of other establishments, and expect something in the nature of sport as a return for liberal Easter offerings and perennial entertainments for their priestly favourites, whether at bridge parties or other mild dissipations.

Fortunately, at all these haunts of modish piety there exist clubs which, as finishing schools of social training, perform all the useful functions common to the like resorts in St. James's Street and Pall Mall. The passions excited in the seaside drawing-room are allayed or disciplined at the country club,

which thus increasingly becomes a place where the clerical rivals of a curiously mixed society remove their war-paint, and, meeting each other as English gentlemen engaged in a sacred calling, drop mutual misunderstandings, and generally find that duty and expediency are alike consulted by the conscientious, which in the long run becomes the successful determination to "adorn the Sparta they have obtained."

The club as an institution has suffered in London and, in a less degree, elsewhere from the competition of the new restaurants and hotels. Yet these in their turn have become club parents, and each of them are sub-societies permanently domiciled in a room of their own, assembling at regular intervals for business or pleasure. Some of these companies, indeed most, are purely secular and social. Others have a motive and a character, spiritual or intellectual as well, and are partly composed of members in Holy Orders ; but the whole modern genius of club life, and the best as well as the most characteristic tendencies of the time, are opposed to the invasion of the resorts here dealt with by ecclesiastical differences, and consequently still more to emphasizing, perpetuating, and extending them by giving them a local habitation that should bear their name.

Thus the irenicon which the club propounds or constitutes for the Church, socially and morally resembles that supplied by the platform on which high, low, broad, Anglican, and Nonconformist stand together nominally for the secular interests, but really for all that tends to enlighten or ameliorate the amalgam of denominations, sections, and concerns whose sum constitutes the body politic.