

## The Position of the Evangelical in the Church of England.<sup>1</sup>

(Concluded from p. 776.)

WHAT was the effect of all this teaching at the University of Oxford? The answer to this question is seen in the expulsion of six students from St. Edmund Hall for talking of "regeneration, inspiration, and drawing nigh to God." These were the charges actually made by the then Vice-Principal in 1768. Magdalen also sent a man down "for having been tainted with Methodistical principles," while the proctors used to visit St. Mary Magdalene's, which was then the only Evangelical church in Oxford, to prevent undergraduates from attending service there.

Cambridge was equally antagonistic to Evangelicals, but the turn came when Isaac Milner, the Senior Wrangler, was elected President of Queens' College. He was a keen Evangelical, and his influence made Queens' a training-ground for future Evangelical clergy. The man who did most to propagate Evangelical doctrines at Cambridge, however, was Charles Simeon. He had been a typical sporting undergraduate, who rarely gave a thought to serious things, and kept his chapels under compulsion. However, he came at last to grasp the meaning of Christ's atoning death, and he henceforth determined to win undergraduates for Christ by helping them to realize the awful consequences of sin, and the need for a heart repentance, trusting in the Great Perfect Sacrifice for sins once offered for all. His incumbency of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, was wonderful for the way in which he attracted crowds of undergraduates, who listened with rapt attention to a man who taught them with all the earnestness of conviction. This church to the present day has remained a stronghold of Evangelicalism, and is responsible to a large degree for the keenness and earnestness of Cambridge Evangelicals. The very fact that 114 men in the year 1912 gave up a month of their Long Vacation to children's missions at the seaside is evidence of this. Oxford only sent fourteen.

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the Oxford University Evangelical Church Society.

Before we note the main teaching of the revival, and compare it with that taught by Evangelicals to-day, let us see what Evangelicalism has done for the good of the country, both in social reform and spiritual enlightenment.

To begin with, it was owing to the efforts of Evangelicals, and Evangelicals alone, that the gross abuse of slave-trading was done away with in 1807.<sup>1</sup> This is admitted by all parties. Attention was next paid to serfdom at home. It was not till 1833, however, that anything was seriously attempted, but it was due to the determined action of Lord Shaftesbury, then Lord Ashley, that the atrocities of child labour were done away with.

Lord Shaftesbury called himself "an Evangelical of the Evangelicals," and boasted that most of the great philanthropic movements of the nineteenth century sprang from them. The Factory Acts of Lord Shaftesbury are too well known to need describing here. It is through the efforts of men of Evangelical faith, both Churchmen and Nonconformists, that such excellent institutions as Dr. Barnardo's Homes, the Waifs and Strays Society, and General Booth's shelters for the poor, exist. The Church of England Sunday-school Institute owes its origin to the keenness of Evangelical clergy in training the children. As early as 1780, Robert Raikes opened a Sunday-school, and John Wesley reports in his journal that wherever he went he found these schools springing up. Many pamphlets were written against these schools, which were as unpopular with the orthodox clergy of the time as was congregational hymn-singing. In 1799 the Church Missionary Society was founded, whose income at the present day far exceeds that of any other missionary society. It would be superfluous here to mention in any detail the splendid work of this magnificent society. High Churchmen freely admit that the Evangelical party are very keen on missionary work—and what better commendation can we have than that? The South American Missionary Society and the maintenance of the Colonial and Continental Church Society

<sup>1</sup> It seems strange to us that Newton should have thought it quite compatible with his Christianity to continue in slave-trading after his conversion. The abolition of this traffic marks a progress in civilization as well as in Revelation.

are due to Evangelicals also. Neither is work at home neglected, as the income of the Church Pastoral Aid Society (1836) for supplying grants to poor parishes shows. Indeed, all Christian work for the betterment of mankind, both body and soul, is well supported by Evangelicals. This applies also to interdenominational societies, such as the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., of which High Churchmen rather fight shy.

What, then, are the leading doctrines which inspired the old Evangelicals, and inspire those at the present day, to do such splendid work ?

The answer is a plain one. The old Evangelicals simply *revived* the teaching of the Church of England as set forth in her Prayer-Book and Articles at the Reformation. It was not a new movement, but a revival of old teaching. The Reformation itself was not the founding of a new Church, but the *re-formation* of the historic Church, which had got so polluted with unscriptural doctrines and practices during the Middle Ages. It is the re-introducing of these practices of the Middle Ages into the Church of England by the Tractarian Movement within our Church that Evangelicals fight against. The doctrines upon which all who were connected with the Evangelical Revival insisted were—

(1) "The total depravity of human nature. They held that the Image of God in the soul of man was not only *defaced* but *effaced*<sup>1</sup> by the Fall; that, in the language of the Ninth Article of our Church, 'man is very far gone from original righteousness.'"

Whatever our views may be as to the account of the fall of man in Genesis—*i.e.*, whether we take it allegorically or literally—we must all admit that every man born into this world has a *bias* to sin.

(2) When men had been shown their utter depravity and inability to help themselves, the great doctrine of the Atonement was clearly preached to them. This was the main theme of the Evangelical preachers, and is or ought to be among Evangelicals at the present day. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross, not only

<sup>1</sup> See Canon Overton, "The Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century," p. 187. Modern Evangelicals would take exception to this word "efface," and maintain that it is contrary to our Ninth Article and Scripture.

on behalf of, but instead of, sinful man was the great doctrine which was preached with such vehemence by the Revivalists. (3) On account of this, therefore, they emphasized conversion, the need of *real* repentance, of a new life filled with the Spirit from on high. (4) Therefore, also, they gloried in the joy of present forgiveness, the assurance of complete acceptance by God. This was the heart of their message. Of course, they believed very strongly in the full inspiration of the Bible.

Let us now consider the main tenets of the Evangelical party at the present day as contrasted with those held by other parties in the Church.

At the commencement one point is important to bear in mind. The leaders of the Evangelical Revival were forced into the position of a party in the Church of England by the rise of the Oxford Movement. Before that they were purely revivalists of the Reformation doctrines, and of the religious life which had almost decayed in the land. They stood for all that was good and sound in religion, and appealed to the Bible, Prayer-Book, and Articles, for proof of their teaching. Since 1833, the date of Mr. Keble's great assize sermon at St. Mary's, Oxford, which is generally taken as the birthday of the Oxford Movement, Evangelicals have had to resist a party within the Church who desire to go *behind* the Reformation, and so be disloyal to the spirit of our Prayer-Book and Articles. Mediæval doctrines and practices are being introduced into our Church which are thoroughly inconsistent with loyal membership of the Church of England.

First, then, Evangelicals abide by our Sixth Article, which declares that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an Article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." The Bible, therefore, is our final and ultimate authority on all questions of faith and life. While admitting that authority can be claimed by the Church to expound the Bible, yet, "We do not appeal from the Bible to the Church, or the Conscience, or the Reason, but from all these to the Bible."<sup>1</sup> The gist of High

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Denton Thompson, "Central Churchmanship," p. 19

Church teaching is that it is sufficient to hear the Church expound the Bible, for private reading of God's word is not much encouraged. This is seen plainly by contrast in the number of Evangelical unions for daily reading of the Bible, whereas I doubt if there is one controlled by High Churchmen.

This leads to the second point. High Churchmen lay all their stress on the Sacraments as performed by clergy in the Apostolical Succession as the only means of real grace. Evangelicals affirm that they can approach the Saviour direct without any mediating priest in private and corporate prayer. They believe most strongly in the Real Presence of Christ at the Holy Communion, but in the spiritual life of the faithful recipient and not in the bread and wine. They assert that the minister or priest is simply acting as their representative, and that he sets the elements apart for sacred use; and on account of this act they are consecrated. Any idea of the priest performing a miracle by bringing about a change of the Bread and Wine on the Table is abhorred by all Evangelicals as not only disloyal to the teaching of the Church of England, but as being gross materialism, which has done so much harm to real religion in the past. If this is the case, we ask, Where does faith come in? "We are justified by faith, and not by works," is another fundamental doctrine of Evangelicalism. This is applied by Evangelicals to the Sacrament of Baptism. The infant does not receive the Holy Spirit *ex opere operato* at baptism, but only potentially through the faith of the parents and godparents, who see to it that, when he comes of himself to realize his responsibility, he shall offer himself for the confirmation of his faith. It seems strangely inconsistent that High Churchmen admit the validity of lay baptism, while in the other Sacrament ordained by Christ they insist on the sole right of those episcopally ordained for administering the same. They deny that Nonconformists can receive any grace from their celebrations of the Holy Communion, thereby making the non-essential the essential. We maintain that it is faith that brings a man into real communion with God, without which the Sacraments are useless. Man must do his part; then God will do His, but only then.

The main teaching of Evangelicals, as we have seen before, is

the full efficacy of Christ's death on the cross for the sins of mankind. If Evangelicals do not make this their main theme, resulting from their own personal experience of the same, then they are only Evangelicals in name and not in fact. This is the heart of Christianity and the Gospel; hence the name Evangelical as one who lays emphasis on the Evangel. "A religion of ritual or a religion of external authority may conceal its weakness for long. So long as its forms are observed or its external obligations are satisfied, failure can be hidden. But, in Evangelicalism, forms, all things external, count for little. If the Spirit of Life be absent, its absence cannot be concealed."<sup>1</sup> "Among the types of Christianity, none when dead are so obviously dead as Evangelicalism. It presents the very heart of Christianity. When the heart dies, death is unmistakably present! Have we, as Evangelicals, had a deep experience of what Christ's death means to us? Are we all deadly in earnest to save our fellow-men from the power of sin by pointing them to Christ, and Him crucified? Are we as keen on prayer, both corporate and private, as High Churchmen are on attending their Eucharists? If we are not, then why do we bemoan depleted ranks in our party? It is not the doctrines that are at fault, but the men. Many men call themselves Evangelicals from no other reason than that they dislike the ceremonial and doctrines of the Roman Catholics and Ritualists. Consequently the party contains many who, not having made the great Evangelical doctrines their own by personal convictions, hardly know what they believe in a positive sense.

The Oxford Movement has certainly done much good to religion in England as well as harm. Evangelicals are now beginning to see that a beautiful church, good singing, and a certain amount of ritual for sake of decency and order, are not inconsistent with the true worship of God. "We must see to it," says Bishop Denton Thompson, a leading Evangelical, "that, as far as lies in our power, the people worship in the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty."<sup>2</sup>

Evangelicals have, it must be confessed, been rather behind the

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Gillie, "Evangelicalism," p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> "Central Churchmanship," p. 83.

times in their indifference to the growing æsthetic sense of the nation. We want to make our churches as beautiful as possible, and every action of the clergy, choir, and church officers, should "bear witness to the realized presence of God."

Again, however, we must realize that Evangelicalism is first and foremost a religion of the spirit, and that no amount of ritual will help us to win souls for Christ unless the parson is a deeply spiritual man.

We noticed before that catechizing of children in the Faith was one of the methods of the old Evangelicals. The party at the present day seem almost to have given up catechizing in church for teaching in the Sunday-schools. This is a great pity, and a source of incalculable weakness to them. High Churchmen set us a splendid example in the painstaking way in which they catechize the children in church, and so lay the foundation for more solid teaching later on in Church doctrine. Children trained in Evangelical Sunday-schools are palpably ignorant as to the why and the wherefore of their beliefs. The Roman Catholic Church very wisely specializes on the children, knowing full well the importance of this work. We must be definite in our teaching, and know why we hold certain truths. Evangelicals at the present day are not nearly so distinct, bold, and uncompromising, as were their forefathers. In the words of the late Bishop Ryle, "They are too ready to fence, and guard, and qualify all their teaching, as if Christ's Gospel was a little baby, and could not be trusted to walk alone."<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, Evangelical preaching has lost much of the old fervour, directness, and simplicity, which characterized the eighteenth century. What is the reason of all this? Perhaps it is because of the absence of persecution, or a desire to be charitable or liberal, and keep in with everybody. Yes, it *may* be any or all of these, but the chief thing that we want is a *spiritual revival among Evangelical clergy*. The people must be able to see by the lives of their pastors that they are indeed men of God, full of the Holy Spirit, and consequently of power. Definiteness

<sup>1</sup> "Christian Leaders," p. 430 (popular edition).

in teaching is then bound to come. A keen desire to raise the poor to better wages and better conditions will also follow. We have seen this as a result of the enthusiasm of the early nineteenth century, but Evangelicals at the present time do not give the support they should to such institutions as the Christian Social Union.

Let me close with the words of a devout High Churchman, Lord Hugh Cecil, who says : " The glory of the Evangelicals lies in their vivid sense of the reality of the relation between man and God, in their strong faith in the Divine mercy, in their passionate devotion to the person of our Lord, in the abundant love of others they display—in short, in the vital character of their Christianity. A good Evangelical deserves the sincere reverence of Christian people. He ranks high among the saints."<sup>1</sup> Would that we might live up to such a reputation ! Another Evangelical revival is sorely needed, beginning with Evangelicals. We need more men filled with the Holy Ghost; then Evangelicalism will again have the enormous power over the people which it certainly had in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Let us not be ashamed to be enthusiastic for so grand a cause. We have seen that it was in Oxford that the great revival of spiritual religion had its origin. Why should not Oxford see the birth of another such revival ? The answer lies with ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> " Church Principles," Lord Hugh Cecil, quoted in " Central Churchmanship," p. 93.

