

"The Glad Tidings of Reconciliation."

AT the consecration of bishops the imposition of hands is immediately preceded by a prayer for grace that the newly ordained Bishop may "evermore be ready to spread abroad Thy Gospel, the glad tidings of reconciliation with Thee," and is at once followed by the charge, "Hold up the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring again the outcasts, seek the lost." The ministry of reconciliation and help is rightly regarded by the Bishop of Manchester as "a duty which our Church solemnly imposes on her bishops at their consecration and as taking precedence of all disciplinary authority that is committed to them." He therefore selected these glad tidings as the subject of his charge at the recent visitation of his diocese, which is now published in volume form.¹

A similar emphasis of the duty of declaring to all men this important message is laid upon every priest or presbyter of the Church since, at the moment of his ordination, the Bishop delivered into his hand a Bible, not the paten or chalice according to the pre-Reformation use, bidding him "Take authority to preach the Word of God and to administer the holy sacraments." At all times and by all persons the proclamation of the Glad Tidings is the paramount duty of the ministry in our Church. The reminder of this, always necessary, is particularly opportune at the crisis through which the country is now passing.

The historical and scriptural treatment of the subject was inevitable, and, however great the desire to exclude controversy, contact with the teaching of science, the claims of critics, and the disputes of ecclesiasticism could not be avoided. Certainly the three indisputable facts of the Christian revelation are the unique personality of Christ, the unique power of the Bible, and the unique society of the Church. But interpretations differ. The progress of human thought has brought us to a period when nothing is immune from searching analysis and inquiry: we are still in a transition age, and general agreement has not yet been attained. We need not fear the results; already the gains are great, and clearer light will come as the human Reason, itself the creation of

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God, pursues its quest of Truth under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth.

Concerning the correlation of our knowledge of the world and of God, the Bishop says: " So long as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were treated as textbooks of theology, immune from all possibility of errancy as to facts, it was impossible to effect this correlation. No honest interpretation of the science of the Bible could reconcile it with facts as we know them." If these words are taken to mean that the immediate acceptance as undeniably correct of the first impressions received by the mind in the persusal of the Bible is an attitude which could excite the hostilities of science, no one will be found to raise objection. If they are taken to mean that the Bible must be acknowledged to contain errors in order to avoid an open rupture with science, there is a concession to the adequacy and finality of the present results of discovery, which men of science would be the last to demand. Independent students follow separate lines of investigation. The theologian, with the aid of grammatical, textual, and philological criticism, is unfolding with astonishing consequences the precise meaning and value of the original language of the authors of the inspired volume. The scientist lays bare the secrets of Nature. At each step both alike learn to discard errors which their predecessors had made. When the warfare between Faith and Science waged most fiercely, theories were held with great confidence which during the last half-century have been shown to be not quite so certain. Science attacks its own fortresses. The Newtonian laws of motion have been recently questioned, and the operation of gravitation is found to be more limited than was once supposed. The textbook of Christian theology has endured in its completeness eighteen centuries: the textbooks of science are radically altered in each successive generation. Science and Philosophy are giving to natural phenomena a more spiritual explanation. The two lines of inquiry are converging. The dawn of the day is not beyond hope when with better understanding neither science nor theology will accuse the other of wrong. For the present it is sufficient to know that the Bible was not intended to teach science; nor are its statements made with scientific precision.

The Bishop's references to the " higher criticism " are both tolerant and fearless. " The strange reversion to anti-Christian

thought and morals that affected Germany, and English theology through Germany, has been rebuked on a scale and with a severity for which there is no parallel in human history.” Again, “to be quite plain, the study of comparative religion has somewhat diminished the importance of the conclusions of the Higher Criticism in relation to the priestly code. It is now quite certain that Israel, like other Semitic nations, must have had a law and ritual long before the days of the prophets. We cannot imagine that Israel, alone among nations, many of them its nearest kinsfolk, was without the common heritage of nations—a law of relation between the race and its national God.” The supposition that historically the books of the law followed the prophets who had appealed to an older and purer religion would to some extent strengthen the Bishop’s argument, for then the ceremonial law expressed the increasing requirement of the human conscience for some means of reconciliation with God. But on the other hand, if the historicity of the revelation of the law to Moses is rejected, we miss in its most marked form the Divine recognition that this requirement of conscience is thoroughly sound and true to fact. The methods of criticism must be left to finish their work: they are not to be entirely repudiated; but we cannot re-write the history of the world at the dictation of philological or linguistic ideas which in the nature of things do not lend themselves to rigid demonstration.

Severe, but not undeserved, are the Bishop’s animadversions upon certain tendencies of modern sacerdotalism. “It is to be noted that there is not one Epistle which alludes to our Lord’s commission to remit and retain sins, not one which suggests confession to a priest as the divinely appointed method for dealing with this sin [impurity]. It is impossible to imagine letters written without any such allusion by a considerable proportion of our clergy to-day.” In contrast between certain letters recently written by a chaplain with the forces and St. Paul’s epistles he remarks: “In the chaplain’s letters the name of God occurred but once, not one mention was there of Jesus Christ, not one of the Holy Spirit, nor of the Gospel, nor of grace. But twenty-one times in the seven letters was there mention of the Mass, the Holy Communion, the sacramental system, of which St. Paul, to judge from his letters, is not likely to have made mention even once.”

Entire agreement causes a regret that in two passages the Bishop failed to add those brief but forcible foot-notes which so often justify his position. Of St. John's testimony to the need of a conscious and personal faith in Christ we are told that "all the sacramental teaching which has been read into his writings cannot affect this great fact. He assumes no doubt the existence in the Church of baptism and of Holy Communion—the latter less certainly than the former." A short appended comment on John vi. 37, which had just been quoted, would have disarmed the replies which are sure to be made. "It is vain to search the pages of the New Testament for *ἱερεῖς* as officers of the Church. Church rulers of every variety are found. Although there is mention of baptism, of the Lord's Supper, of re-admission of lapsed penitents, of marriage, of visitation of the sick, of burial of the dead—there is not one mention of any sacrificing priest, or indeed of any priest at all in connexion with these offices." The *ἱερουργούντα* of Romans xv. 16 will be raised in objection: this might have been forestalled by a line or two displaying its metaphorical construction.

Timidity lies at the base of all natural religion. Awe in the presence of unseen beings works to procure favour or to avoid catastrophe. This sense of fear, as man develops his ideas of the invisible world, engenders a conviction of wrong done. Thus elementary notions of sin are formed. In early stages religion is either tribal or national in character, and the widest changes of ceremony or augmentation of ritual do not disparage a feeling of efficacy and validity within the area of adherence. Expositors of the Old Testament too frequently fail to observe that the effect of the Mosaic legislation was to create dissatisfaction with its own authorized sacrifices as insufficient, tempting the majority to incorporate abominable rites from their idolatrous neighbours, and developing in the more faithful minority a trust in God to Himself forgive the sins which no effort of man could cleanse away. The Bishop shows how the evolution of this hope of remission was accompanied by a deepening conviction that the achievement of salvation was only possible by an obedience to the law which experience proved to be unattainable. This seed-thought transferred to New Testament times is fruitful in promoting a better understanding of such incidents as the conversion of St. Paul, the

vacillations of St. Peter, and the endeavour to regulate Church questions by means of a central council in Jerusalem. Patriotism still clung to the law and obedience, when the heart was stirred in the more earnest seekers to an unreserved trust in the finished work of the Son of God, and the glad tidings of reconciliation He had brought to a sinful world. Such an inward struggle would be marked by inconsistency of conduct, until faith had secured its final victory.

In a short chapter of this Charge the religion of the Roman Empire on its better side is displayed as inducing a sense of disorder through neglect of the religious regulations, a desire for some means of purifying the soul in the light of eternal destinies, and the pursuit of philosophic Reason as offering the truest hope of solving the soul's perplexity. The doctrines of Christ awakened much contemptuous hostility, and later kindled the ferocities of actual persecution; but from the first the victory of the Cross might have been predicted, as it alone could satisfy the personal longings which had been aroused. The bitterness of the conflict and the suddenness of its conclusion after the conversion of Constantine have left the stained marks of its impress in the impure teaching and alloyed characters of many Churchmen. But when it pleased God in the fullness of time to send forth His only Son, the world had been largely prepared for a gospel of redemption which placed in the forefront the joyful news of a reconciliation effected between man and God.

The Jews after the close of the Old Testament Canon, particularly during the stirring days of the Maccabees, manifested a zeal for Jehovah [Why does the Bishop at times write *Jehovah* and at others *Jahweh*?] and a tenacious adherence to their national privileges. Wider ideas came through their dispersion, but the only advice they could offer was either "Keep the law" or "Get wisdom"—an impracticable advice which must lead either to Christ or despair. In the narratives of our Lord's infancy both tendencies are clearly discernible. Both Jew and Gentile were prepared for the advent of the Salvator Mundi. The obedience plus wisdom of the one, the reason of the other, are primarily personal. Unlooked for, the personal Saviour came. A personal salvation involves a universal Gospel.

The writings of the New Testament are here subjected to a

cogent analysis in order to ascertain the contribution of each to the message of the Gospel. St. Paul's epistles were not written as theological treatises, but to deal with the pressing problems of the moment. They are on fire with a consuming emotion, and reveal how to their author the Gospel declared a restitution of right relations with God, a reconciliation with Him which removed the barriers that hitherto had separated the families of mankind, a joyful freedom from the tyranny of sin through the most complete subjection to the will of God, a power to save every one that believeth. The Epistle to the Hebrews, with the most cautious and considered illustrations, demonstrates the shadowiness of the Levitical types, the perfection of the Christ, and the finality of His redeeming work to which addition is neither possible nor necessary. The Synoptic gospels are a "preaching of the Cross" combined with such a study of the human personality of our Saviour as proves Him to have been God incarnate. The two books of St. Luke, read together, narrate the passing away of the Temple, with all its splendour, as the centre of worship. St. John tells us of the offering of the true Paschal Lamb for the sins of the whole world, willingly surrendering Himself in the intensity of His love for man. The book of Revelation "echoes with the thunders of that awful war [between God and sin], until sin at last is vanquished, and finally overwhelmed in the lake of fire": its goal is "the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell among them." Passing by the epistles of St. James, St. Peter, and St. Jude, the teaching of the New Testament is summarized as declaring the universality of sin and its association with death, repudiating all human devices for its remedy, emphasizing the sufficiency of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and proclaiming the effective reconciliation thereby of God with man.

This succinct account of the Bishop's doctrine is altogether inadequate, but the principal merit of his own words is the impulse given to a fresh study of Holy Scripture. Here and there he appears to deprecate inquiry into the nature of the Atonement, or the formulation of theories concerning its mode of operation. But this is not his intention. The great cardinal fact of the Atonement is immensely more important than, and takes precedence of, any human explanation. There is danger in exploring "a region where we have neither chart nor compass to guide us." Oxenham,

Campbell, Dale, Cave, Moberly, Bruce, Denney—all contribute to our thought much that is valuable. By all means let such studies be continued : but the cumulative evidence of centuries testifies that where the minister of the Gospel boldly preaches the glad tidings of reconciliation through our Lord Jesus Christ, with full conviction of its truth, it makes its own appeal to the conscience, and leads souls through the writhings of conviction to the despairing cry for mercy and to the peace which passeth understanding.

The commission of the Church being to preach this Gospel to all men, no theories of her ministry and worship can be accepted which are not strictly conformable to the purpose. The rigid views which are tenaciously advocated in some quarters find scanty support in the New Testament. In the absence of positive precept, deductions from historical incident require corroboration. The universal application of local arrangement is not permissible. The Bishop recalls the facts that in the first three or four decades after Pentecost many Churches were founded which are not mentioned in Scripture, that some of these were probably never visited by an Apostle, and that others could have enjoyed no long visitation. Many problems, practical, ethical, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal, had to be grappled with. The appointment of some kind of ministry was essential, but there was no obligation to adopt the same regulations in every place. Local freedom prevailed, but no known Church devised a hierarchy with plenipotentiary powers. The *argumentum e silentio* is frequently precarious, but here it is convincing. A large variety of names was applied to ministers, but none which even hinted at a direct “ apostolical succession.” Partisans who profess to have been shocked by the Kikuyu Conference may be reminded that “ no doubt it is difficult for us to conceive that there ever was a time when all Christian Churches had not their threefold ministry, but that is because we are insufficiently acquainted with the early days of native Churches.” “ The New Testament was not intended to be a manual of Church government.” One step towards unity “ will be the abandonment of the New Testament and sub-apostolic writings as an armoury of texts for the building up of Church government, the frank recognition of the freedom which our Lord left to the Church.”

Was the synod at Jerusalem a pattern to be imitated? Two or three times the Bishop alludes to the fact that St. Paul did not

accept its decisions as binding. It may be added that the Council originated in a time of dissension, was followed by a still more embittered strife, and (though St. Luke mentions prayer in almost every chapter) was not apparently accompanied by any request for Divine guidance. It was the last expiring effort of the central authority in Jerusalem, except for the mistaken policy recommended by James and the elders in Acts xxi. 20 ff. St. Paul was passionately fond of Jerusalem, but his frequent visits to the capital of Judaism were not fraught with spiritual blessing to himself. The Lord stamped no system upon His Church. Such a course would have justified the worldly stratagem of affixing to Christianity the faults of Christians. But the Holy Spirit has ever overruled human agencies and contrivances to the advancement of God's Kingdom.

The accusation will not improbably be preferred against the Bishop that his sacramental teaching is rather negative than constructive. With his mind fixed upon the predominant topic of the gospel of reconciliation, he is here mainly concerned with a disclaimer of all *ex opere operato* notions which militate against the completeness and sufficiency of our Saviour's redeeming work. The sacraments are signs, but He Who knew what was in man could not have riveted "bare signs" upon His Church, for their reception would become mechanical and void of spirituality. Nevertheless, these "efficacious signs" must not be so interpreted as to subvert all that is otherwise taught us of the gospel of reconciliation. They are invaluable, beautiful instruments whereby we receive grace and are sealed with the promise of redemption; but they are neither complementary nor supplementary to that great sacrifice upon the Cross whereby alone we are saved.

Evangelicals have long grieved that "the preaching of the Cross" does not command the same insistence and power amongst us which it possessed in the days of our forefathers. We have rejoiced at the spread of evangelical principles and their grand achievements at home and abroad. We are glad to observe a return to the proclamation of the Atonement wrought on the Cross by numbers of our High Church brethren, and we are truly thankful for the increase of missionary zeal manifested by them. But when we reflect upon the pitiable condition of the crowded masses in our towns and the neglect of Sunday by rich and poor alike, when we consider how a prosperous and pleasure-loving

generation throngs all places of amusement but leaves the churches only partially filled, when the sight and sound of sin abound and the great trinity of evil—lust and gambling and drink—is so very little abated, when we realize the opportunities of evangelization presented by the heathen world and the Church’s puny efforts—so parsimonious in men and money—to seize them, our hearts burn within us and we long for a return of Pentecostal power. We pray that the coming Mission of Repentance and Hope may stir the nation to put away sin and put on the Divine armoury of spiritual life. The Bishop of Manchester reminds us that the great means whereby this spiritual regeneration is to be accomplished lies in publishing far and near the glad tidings of reconciliation through Jesus Christ, and the resolve of many will be strengthened and refreshed to follow more closely the example of the Apostle of the Gentiles and to “know nothing” in their ministry “save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

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