

The Need for Re-asserting the English Character of the Church of England.

IN the two last chapters of the Book of the Revelation St. John writes of a City which "comes down out of heaven from God." A description at the same time so simple and so august baffles at first the intelligence of the reader. He does not realize the fact that this City is set up on earth, nor the further fact that it has to do with the earth as it is. Yet St. John connects the City in decisive words with human history, both past and present. The names of the tribes of Israel, God's ancient people, are inscribed upon its gates, and the kings of the nations bring their glory into it. To the nations of the world it is a beacon and a guide; they walk in its light. In it the kings of the earth acknowledge an authority higher than their own; they pay it homage; they bring their glory into it.

This is a splendid picture of the work and of the glory of the Universal Church, the Church which has the uncontested right to call herself Catholic. Her Catholicity is marked by a characteristic which had never marked any city which St. John had known. Her gates are open without any thought of shutting. The nations pour into the City without hindrance.

St. John has given us an Ideal of the Catholic Church which is higher than any which is now realized among us. On the other hand, it does stand in harmony with some of the great facts of Christian life to-day. One in particular should be emphasized. The City of God—the Universal Church as St. John saw it—is a mistress which claims the homage of the nations and in turn confers benefits upon them. The nations as nations and their rulers with them have a great part to play in the Kingdom of God.

If we ask, *How are nations to do this*, surely history, and pre-eminently the history of our own country, supplies the answer. Nations serve the Catholic and Universal Church by means of National Churches. These as parts make up the whole, as many regiments make up one army. In a truly National Church we learn the Catholic spirit, and so we are taught to confess with full understanding, *I believe in the Holy Catholic Church.*

The nations and all the gifts that each particular nation can bring are needed for the Universal City of God. But the gifts are not material gifts—not tribute, nor revenues—rather they are moral and spiritual gifts which can only be rendered by Frenchmen as Frenchmen, by Russians as Russians, by Englishmen as Englishmen. National Churches, as far as they are true to their character, gather tribute of these national virtues and national talents, and so pour them into the Treasury of the Universal Church. The fervid and yet logical piety of the Frenchman, the mystic strength of the Russian, the plain, practical religion of the Englishman—these separate gifts are nursed by the Church of each land. Christ is well served in each of these; it is not His pleasure to lose *one*. The great *Fact* of Nationality is to be accepted in the sphere of Religion as well as in other important spheres. God made all nations of one blood, but He made them—nations!

The spiritual capacities of Englishmen are to be drawn out for the service of the Master by the action of a National Church, a true Church of England which consists of Englishmen, understands Englishmen, and appeals to Englishmen. Through such a Church alone can the Universal Church gather the full tribute of our nation for Christ.

The Universal Church then delegates to the Church of England the duty of gathering all that is distinctly English into the service of the King of the Church. How must the English Church perform her task? How must she foster the plain, practical religion which is to be hoped for in our countrymen?

(1) By a great appeal to the understanding and to the affections of our fellow-countrymen. The Church of England must persuade and win Englishmen. To a certain extent it is done. It is needless to point to our Bible and Prayer Book in the Mother Tongue. But perhaps it is not as fully recognized that even before the Reformation many books of devotion were in circulation *in English*. The principle of our Church from long ago has been to sing God's *praises with understanding* and to interpret what is read from the Scriptures.

But it is useless to try to live in the past. Language changes, meanings of words change, modes of thought change. Neither the English Bible nor the English Prayer Book can safely remain word for

word as they were in past generations. It is a principle of our Church to revise, as need arises, not only her translation of the Scriptures, but also the text of her Prayer Book. Many a word in a Collect which was vivid and full of colour in the seventeenth century is *dull* if not *dead* to many of our people to-day. Again certain forms of devotion in the Prayer Book have lost much of their power of appeal, while other forms which are *not* in the Prayer Book have proved their value to meet the religious needs which are felt to-day. The Church of England must do her utmost to teach all Englishmen to pray in words which they understand, and in words which when they are understood are powerful in appeal to those who speak our tongue. Prayer Book Revision is a first need among us in order that simpler souls may not go untaught by the Church how to pray. But in addition to an official revision of the standard text of the Prayer Book some provision must be made for elasticity in the use of the services thus revised. The amount and the kind of change in the jealously-guarded text of the Book which are likely to be generally accepted are not likely in the least to be sufficient and suitable to meet the needs of mission buildings in Lambeth or Bethnal Green, and in some of our neglected rural districts. There is a great opportunity for wise bishops and for wise clergy who will carefully consider the case of many English congregations which would hardly be reckoned Christian when judged by the more careful judgment of the Mission Field. The Act of Uniformity is no boon to them; they need not to be driven, but to be led gently to Prayer Book worship.

(2) And secondly, the Church of England ought to strive to make her appeal to *all* religious Englishmen. Her mission is given her by the Universal Church—or rather by the Lord of the Universal Church. Her duty is to make her appeal as wide as the Gospel of Christ. She must realize that the Church exists for men, and not men for the Church. She must be tolerant—and more than tolerant—towards differences of opinion and of practice among her members. The Church of England belongs to a race which is devoted to Freedom; which has done service to the world in the name of Freedom; which has been knit to the Gospel by the promise of spiritual Freedom. But Freedom presupposes many differences; free minds will not all take the same mould; and English minds by long enjoyment of freedom have learnt to tolerate one another's

differences in secular things. The Church of England must be content to minister to free men ; she must be content to suggest and to teach where others perhaps would command and compel. If the reproach be leveled at her that she becomes all things to all men, well, that reproach was leveled at the greatest of all evangelists (St. Paul).

She must listen in particular to the voice of the free men of Greater Britain. The Church of England is not confined to the English land : indeed, her strength lies largely in the vigorous branches which she has sent forth beyond the seas. The younger English peoples have " ten parts " in the Church. The claim must be allowed, and the needs and views of Dominions and Colonies must be allowed full weight. It is due to them for the rich and varied experience which they have enjoyed, which we cannot claim at home. One very important subject may be mentioned here as an illustration. From Canada and from Australia comes a strong voice in favour of Re-union in Church fellowship among men of the same blood and of the same language. This voice is truly English. It is our national good sense which cries out that no unreal barriers shall be allowed to separate Christian from Christian. In cases in which Re-union is too difficult or at any rate premature, the claim is raised for Co-operation at least between one body and another. The Kikuyu Conference of June, 1913, together with much for which it stood, has receded to the back of our minds owing to the pressure of an almost world-wide war. But *Kikuyu* must not be forgotten. The problems remain and the English love of comprehension and toleration remains. Our Church must justify its English character by returning to the task of removing all that perpetuates avoidable causes of division.

It is, for instance, to be remembered that our Church is committed neither by her history, nor by her ordinal, nor by her formulas to any rigid theory which forbids co-operation with non-Episcopal bodies. Rigidity is not a principle of the English Church, although it is not seldom exemplified in individual English Churchmen. We are not bound, for instance, by any principle to unchurch the Presbyterian kirk whether we meet her in Great Britain or beyond the seas. Nor ought the phrase " Catholic Practice," so easily flung in defiance and so loosely used, keep us from all acts of help and inter-communion. To take one case only which the war

has brought once more to the front with urgency. English generosity, no less than Christian charity, constrains us to lend our sacred buildings, where need exists, to other religious bodies. The fact that the English Church has never lost the ancient custom of consecrating her churches does not run counter to the charitable practice of lending churches from time to time for Presbyterian or Wesleyan worship. We do not depreciate the supreme value of the Book of Common Prayer by providing a temporary roof for those who prefer *extempore* prayer. Such action is not to be ascribed to mere careless good nature. Charity is a principle of Christianity, and *therefore* of the Church of England.

On the other hand, the Church of England must conform to the English love of order. Perhaps she has been fairly successful in answering to this condition in the past. Certainly our public worship has been orderly—even to stateliness. And this quality we certainly ought to strive to the utmost to retain. At times we are tempted to depart from it. We see some of our countrymen attracted to services conducted at white heat, when all orderliness is lost in fervour or apparent fervour. For a time and in certain circles such services have great success. But they can be only exceptional in the general scheme of the worship of the Church. The heart that cries out for the Living God has indeed its moments of almost childlike familiarity, but in the main it feels that worship means falling low on our knees in humility and in awe. Most souls experience the need of guidance and of teaching how to approach the Lord of All; the cry, *Teach us to pray*, rises again and again in the human heart, and the words which our Prayer Book gives us are felt to answer to our need.

But order in the sphere of the Christian life is a still more important matter even than order in worship. The Church of England shows those who look to her how to guide their lives. Baptism first—in infancy—at the earliest possible date, that Christ's claim upon each one of us may be acknowledged as soon as possible. With Baptism goes the appointment of sponsors, of persons who are responsible that the babe who has been baptised into Christ shall learn of Christ. And after Baptism—*Confirmation*. Those who have received Christ's blessing in unconsciousness must receive it again in full consciousness—and at the impressionable time of life—if possible, just when a general sense of responsibility is begin-

ning to grow. The girl who is beginning to help her mother, because she realizes that the mother needs her help, the boy who is beginning to think *either* that he must earn, *or* that he must decide on some occupation which will keep him longer at his books—these are they who should be encouraged and urged to come to Confirmation. And after Confirmation then the steady regular use of the Holy Communion to keep us in mind of our need of help in the spiritual life and to furnish us with that help monthly (it may be) or weekly—the bread which the Lord Jesus still gives us in remembrance of that great day when He gave Himself once for all. And then joined with this supreme blessing the solemn thanksgiving, the *Eucharist*, for this wonderful provision which Christ continually makes for us.

On this orderly scheme of Christian life the Church of England has hitherto insisted and will surely continue to insist. No doubt it has been severely criticized by many Englishmen and even by many of the deeply religious of our countrymen. But here we must face the difficulties of the situation, and decide to the best of our power between the claims of two conflicting principles—Freedom on one side, Order on the other. The State has had to face the same problem, and on the whole has dealt with it successfully. The Church need not despair. The Church must still cling to her scheme of Christian life—Baptism, Catechism, Confirmation, Holy Communion with all her strength. But two precautions must be taken. First, the scheme must be administered in its fulness heartily by men who realize that each ordinance is a strand in a cord of love by which the Master is drawing and holding us to Himself. Here we have not bare forms, not things of the letter, but sacraments, spiritual instruments. Only make clear to Englishmen that your talk of an ordered life within the Church means this and they will cease to be hostile to it. The Church must use her order simply as a spiritual force, and she will have power with our countrymen.

But again. This order is offered ; it is not imposed. Spiritual things cannot be dispensed with the rigidity with which the things of the world are sometimes administered. The Church of England must see with the eye of Christ and accept the fact that some deeply religious men will always, through misunderstanding or through misfortune, stand outside her order. And then there comes upon

the Church the Lord's command *not* to forbid the spiritual work of such men. Least of all can the English Church do it, since she is bound by all her history and by her native soil to the principle of Freedom both in Church and State.

The experience of our State may be used for the guidance of our Church. A National Church must not only teach her own people, but also *learn from them*. Just as the State is not too proud to learn, but moulds and re-makes its institutions from generation to generation as it learns from movements among its own people of the needs and capacities of its own people, so it must be with the Church of England. She has to look not only to the splendid heritage of the past, but also to the needs and opportunities of the present. She lives not for herself, but in order to present to Christ all that is best and most characteristic in the English people. Her ideal should be that of the sympathetic teacher who realizes that his pupils are growing up, and so need room and freedom. And behind all the sympathy and readiness to meet every spiritual aspiration, even, if its appearance be strange, must be the firm conviction that Jesus Christ in His saving and sanctifying power is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

W. EMERY BARNES.

