

A Spiritual Church the Hope of the Nation.

WHEN you speak of anything being the hope of the nation, you mean that at present the condition of the nation is in some respect bad, but that given a certain factor there is hope of its regeneration in the future. You do not mean that it is all bad, nor do you mean that this factor will do all the regenerating, but that granting some bad elements, and given one good factor, hope emerges for the national life. And this is precisely the case. The nation is not all bad ; it would be ludicrous to assert this in face of its history for the past two years, but from one point of view it was not only bad before the war, but it shows few signs of being better since. That point of view is the nation as a Christian nation, and as *the* Christian nation of the world. Here we want more than patriotism, more than universal willingness to "do our bit," more than enforced restriction in drink and bridge-playing and horse-racing. We need more even than a righteous cause to fight for, or even what Mr. Asquith called a spiritual war, by which he meant a moral one, one in which the moral issues were the real ones. As a Christian nation we need personal and collective recognition of God as revealed in Christ. I for one as yet fail to see signs of our exhibiting this. And if it be true that before the war we were, as a nation, worldly, and Sabbath-breaking and pleasure-loving (which it will be hard to deny), if in addition the overwhelming solemnity of two years' warfare has only "scotched" but not killed all these, then surely we need to consider what is the hope of the future if God is to bless us at all.

The hope of the future of the nation is not so much in the nation as in the Church. In all ages the Church has been the strategic factor, has been constituted as conscience-keeper of the nation, and we who belong to the Established Church have officially laid upon us a supreme duty in this respect. Have we been doing it as we ought? The National Mission is the answer, frankly but humbly given by the Church herself. We have not. We have, thank God, done much ; we have done as much as any other body, but we have not done enough, and the Mission has said this to the Church. Clergy, communicants and churchgoers, it has called us to penitence that will rid us of the failings of the past ; then to hope that like an anchor of the soul will fix our faith, motives, and ideals beyond the

veil with God in Christ. It is then my profound conviction that (as said above) the regeneration of the nation lies in a regenerated Church.

I do not expect the war itself to produce a regenerated nation, at least not as we use the word. Beware of those who speak of the war having already regenerated France, of France having "found her soul" through this conflict. I think that she has indeed found that a soul is necessary which she officially denied before, but to find her soul in that sense and to be regenerated is not the same thing. The prodigal son might be said to have found his soul when he "came to himself" and saw how barren his life had been. He was not regenerated until he not only came to himself, but "came to his father." When France, aye, and England, have come to their Heavenly Father (through His Son Jesus Christ), I will believe that the nation is regenerated, but not before. It is the Church, however, which obviously must bring that about; she must be the given factor which will bring hope. And can she? Yes, she can; she can do this as no other agency can, if she but recover her original character as the spiritual factor in the national life. So it is a spiritual Church that is the hope of the nation, and our duty is to ask what constitutes a spiritual Church.

It goes without saying that a spiritual Church is a Church filled with the Spirit of God, but we need to get closer to it than that.

First of all, a spiritual Church will be *definite but not necessarily dogmatic*. Perhaps our weakness in modern times is that we see all round every subject to such an extent that we cannot arrive at a definite conclusion on any of them. That is true in secular and in sacred things, in High Church and in Low Church phases of thinking. But here is the difference: Some sections of Church life, in attempting to meet this undoubted evil, have become more and more dogmatic in teaching certain doctrines, their prophets borrow their thunder from an ecclesiastical Olympus, their parish priests fulminate their orders to their people with the authoritative urgency of a pope. And, be it well noted, some people love to have it so. It is the strangest of paradoxes, that an age that likes *audire alteram partem*, likes to look all round a subject, at the same time likes (in religious matters at least) to have a strong, even dogmatic lead. It may be that in these matters people feel unable to deal with the subject, and so, feeling that they are important, they like to have their thinking done for them. Now that is a strategic advantage

which must not be left to any one party. We must utilize it as well as others. Why should a spiritual Church not be a definite one? The Holy Spirit is definite enough; He leads into all truth. Surely then it is high time that Evangelicalism became much more constructive and instructive, much more positive and Churchmanlike. Not merely dogmatic, not merely protesting, not merely criticizing, not merely destructive. No; but solid, sound, and sane in the definite teaching of Church principles. More than that in the definite attitude as to Church problems. Just at the moment we should have a most definite lead as to the position which the Holy Communion is to hold in the worship of the future. And no mere negative attitude, if you please. To refuse the Holy Communion as the central service merely because certain people desire to make it so, is no sound policy for a spiritual Church. That is merely balancing partisanship by partisanship. A spiritual Church will ask, "What saith the Spirit?" and, basing its teaching on the New Testament, will decide its policy as to this fact, quite irrespective of any alleged unworthy motives that may animate others. It is quite unnecessary to win a party battle; the one thing needful is to get a definite line, and stick to it.

Again it is in the nature of things that a spiritual Church will be *powerful but not necessarily popular*. This is so both in regard to those within the Church and to those without. As regards those within, the trouble has been that, sad to relate, we have been neither powerful nor popular. We may as well face it, that Evangelical Churchmanship has not been the factor it ought to have been in the councils of the Church as a whole. Some say it is because we have no definite message, as above noted; that in simultaneous missions, for instance, the Evangelical missionaries are all exhortation and no instruction, or as a layman put it, "all fizz and no lemonade." Well, as one myself, I can scarcely be expected to agree with this, but there is no denying that there is something in the charge. Power cannot come along that line in a Mission or anywhere else. And in the counsels of the Church power is equally unlikely to follow such policy. Yet Evangelical Churchmanship should have more influence than any, for we believe it is the hereditary successor of the Church of all the ages. That is, Evangelical *Churchmanship*, mark you. I do not mean the type of Evangelicalism that imagines that all Church teaching is Romanism, and all soundness is bound up with a

semi-detached nonconformity. No, no, not that ; but Evangelical Churchmanship that is true to the Prayer Book, that keeps to the whole Prayer Book, including Saints' days and (if reasonable) daily service, and by this very loyalty is able to criticize and counteract those who are disloyal in that they add what is not there at all. And the matter applies to our relation to the world outside as well. The weakness of our position as a Church (every section is involved) is this : That in a worldly, material, pleasure-loving age, we have been too worldly, too material, and too pleasure-loving ourselves. You cannot counteract like with like, you cannot counteract a worldly nation with a worldly Church. If the age has been growing (until the war arrested it temporarily) worldly and material, we should have been growing unworldly and spiritual. Our only hope of being a power in the country rests on that, our unlikeness to the tendencies of the day. But that will not mean popularity ; it will mean power, but it can scarcely mean popularity in the ordinary acceptation of the word. It was even so with the Master. His teaching was not popular with the authorities, even the religious authorities. It was popular with the sad and sorrowing, no doubt ; love must always be so with such, but even with the masses it was not so. The longer Christ's ministry went on, the stronger His teaching grew ; and the stronger His teaching grew, the more the hostility of the masses was aroused. Calvary was but the climax of an inevitable alienation of mentality between divine and human thought. And the servant is not above his Lord. The Gospel as Christ gave it to us (and we have no other given us as yet) can never in the nature of things be actually popular. It must get in touch with the populace, it must be preached in a way that is winning and attractive ; but in the last analysis of things it can never be popular, because it cuts at the roots of human pride, it proclaims the fact of sin and failure in a way that man would rather forget. To the sin-laden, to the conscience-stricken, it will of course come as the veritable balm in Gilead, but that is one of the factors against us that so few are sin-laden, so few conscience-stricken. Therefore to the majority the Gospel must come not as good tidings to the meek or as comfort to the saddened heart, but as a challenge and an ultimatum : a challenge to give up sin straight away, and an ultimatum to choose, choose to-day, *instantly*, whom they will serve. " Ye cannot serve God and mammon " will never be really popular,

but power can come in no other way. Here, however, a *caveat* must be entered to this effect, that there is no merit in bluntness for its own sake; there are some people who gauge their truthfulness by their candour, their whole-heartedness by the amount of opposition they stir up. Such people are not wicked, of course; oh, no, they are merely confusing consecration with eccentricity. They are like those people who "make a wilderness and call it peace"; these make a nuisance of themselves and call it service. A spiritual Church will certainly consist of people who are sane, people who remember that while it is one thing to be what the world calls a fool, and that for Christ's sake, it is quite another thing to be a real fool, and that for the sake of folly.

Again, a spiritual Church will mean a Church that is *sound but not necessarily stagnant*. Mental soundness has too often been made synonymous with stagnation; truth too often confused with mere traditionalism. Now whatever it may be, it is not that in either case. There is no danger of Evangelicalism desiring to restore what is technically called Tradition, that is, giving it an equal place with Scripture. Not at all, the danger is rather in connexion with Scripture itself. Here it may be that (in some circles) there is a tendency to hold views as true that are merely traditional, and to refuse even to face what modern thought has to say thereon. Let me say at once that I am personally most conservative in my views, but then I am a general practitioner not a specialist, and I find that conservative views (that are true, of course) work best with the average soul. But that is not exactly the point. We are talking of the progress of modern thought, and its relation to the armoury of our warfare; the munition work, not so much the fight in the trenches. And we have to ask what is our attitude towards all this. It must be sound (or the shells won't fire at all), it must not be stagnant (or the right kind of shells will not be available). Stripping this, however, of metaphor, which is always dangerous, we come to the point, what is the attitude of a spiritual Church towards higher criticism as we find it to-day, and as it will be to-morrow. In that word "morrow" lies the hope. It is my profound conviction that criticism will not be to-morrow what it was yesterday or the day before. I believe the war has radically altered both the alleged utility of it and the imaginary authority of those who promulgated it. As to utility, the trenches have hit that hard; it can never be

asserted again (outside at least the walls of a University lecture room, and it will be objected to there) that higher critical views are necessary or even helpful to life in its most urgent stages. As to the authority of those promulgating it, remember it came largely (though not exclusively) from German professors, and I imagine that even the most advanced University don in England would be chary either of teaching or believing modern estimates of truth as made in Germany. But let us beware of going to the other extreme. Truth was true even if it came from Germany, and to imagine that all their theories were false, would be to out-Herod Herod, it would land us back in the days of Galileo, and on the wrong side of the table. No, truth is many sided, and it is absurd to say that our grandfathers saw the whole of it. The whole of it is there, in the Bible right enough, but God's plan seems to be that each age should elucidate its quota of it, and the coming age cannot omit its share in the task. What I hope and pray for is this, that not only a regenerated England but also a regenerated Germany will devote itself to interpreting eternal verities in the light of modern discoveries, not with a view to altering the verity but with a view to elucidating the many further facets of its truth not hitherto discovered by man. But a spiritual Church alone can do that adequately; I refuse point blank to allow any one not in sympathy with Christianity to decide the truth of it. He cannot do it. You might as well ask a "conscientious objector" to write up the battle of Verdun or the Kaiser to state accurately what chances Great Britain has of winning the war!

Again a spiritual Church will mean one that is *sensitive but not necessarily sensational*. Sensationalism is indeed foreign to the instincts of our Church, but in an emergency born of the war, and articulated in the National Mission, any sort of method might be tried to bring back the nation to God. It needs it, but I fondly hope that scare head-lines and American pulpit methods will be avoided. Yet we need "sensation," but, as Ruskin says, "sensation of the right sort." Sensation is really perception by the senses of what is going on around. In other words, sensitiveness to environment, that sensitiveness with human needs that will prevent the Church from either not seeing the poor traveller on the road to Jericho, or if she see him, passing by on the other side. It may as well be made clear straight away that any religious body that fails in the future to "see life steadily and see it whole" is doomed in the eyes of men,

and possibly in the eyes of God as well. The war has given a new view to the sweep of life, spiritual, social and material, and woe betide the Church that tries to stereotype its activity, to divide life once again into the watertight compartments in which it too often stagnated before. Yet we must be careful even here, we must beware of those who want to sweep away all distinction (as they say) between the sacred and the secular. Not so fast, please, there is an inherent distinction, though not necessarily in the ways we have made it. Secular means that which pertains to this *seculum*, that is "age or generation"; sacred that which is *sacer*, i.e. consecrated to divinity, in our case consecrated to the Eternal God. Obviously, therefore, a distinction must be maintained, but in addition we must note that between the two, between the secular and the sacred, there is the spiritual, that is the working of those particular factors that can use the present age with a view to the eternal ages. So we must be sensitive to present needs if only for the sake of the eternal possibilities. This in several directions.

(a) *Sensitive to the traits of individualism.* Here is where too many have failed. With the best intentions in the world, they have treated men and women as they would treat so many head of cattle, same brand, same pasture, and same end. But man refuses to be so treated; he says that God, if there be a God, made him an individuality, that Nature (if there is no God) evolved him as the resultant of a hundred forces that combined in the making of his personality. Either way it is impossible to treat all alike. Same Gospel of course, same need really at heart, same salvation by the same Lord, but, allowing all that, still a thousand different ways of approaching, of winning, of developing and utilizing all who are to be won. Perhaps we have all forgotten this too largely.

(b) *Sensitive to social problems.* Ah, here is a delicate but urgent point which a spiritual Church cannot overlook. No one appreciates more than I do the danger of merely social and still more of socialistic tendencies in the Church's life. Our message is spiritual, and addressed primarily to the spirit of a man. But God gave him also a mind and a body, and the Gospel cannot save the whole man unless it saves all that God gave him to start with. But the difficulties are immense. I have watched clergy who felt the need of applying the Gospel to the social needs of the age, go down by steady declension in their life and power. On the other hand I have seen

men who said they "worked on spiritual lines" live ten and fifteen years completely out of touch with the main streams of life around them. It was no answer on the one hand to say that even if he had declined in spiritual power he was getting into touch with men. What use is that if he has lost the power that will bring them into touch with God? That is little better than to be a relieving officer, and the official will do that more efficiently himself. On the other hand it is no answer to say: "I have kept my spirituality, and have ministered to a spiritually select few," if he has failed to make the influence of that spirituality tell on humanity around. Thus you see it is a delicate problem in itself, but it is one that we must face if we are to be any real power in the national life.

(c) *Sensitive to world-wide plans.* The day is gone when a Bishop can say, "My dear sir, if God wants to save the world, He can do without you." He can, but He won't, as most of us have learned by now. Much, however, remains to be done, and a spiritual Church in a Christian nation means also in our case a Christian nation in a Christian Empire. And we have not even begun as a nation to consider the needs of the Empire from a spiritual point of view. We shall need a clerical Mr. Hughes to come from Australia and visualize the whole problem. And even then a vision will be needed of the world beyond. "Come over and help us" will need to come home to every member of the Church before the claims of the world at large can even be partially met. But all that may come, the war has caused us to "think in continents," while even to speak of five millions a day must enlarge one's mind. Surely we can hope and pray that some at least of this enlarged vision may be consecrated after the war to the enlargement of the Kingdom of Heaven.

To sum it all up then. A spiritual Church will be one that is definite in conviction, powerful in influence, sound in faith, sensitive in spirit. Therefore she will be the hope of the nation, because her *definiteness* will call the nation back to God, and then build up its character. Her powerful *influence* will educate the nation and mould it in the right direction. Her *soundness* will steady the nation, and counteract all the error and superstition always too prevalent. Finally her *sensitiveness* will feel the pulse of need in the nation and apply the remedy, and will surely continue to do so until not merely this nation but all nations are brought back to the feet of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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