

"Our Unhappy Divisions."

[This paper is based on an address given by the writer at a conference held in connexion with the National Mission of Repentance and Hope. It was cordially received and backed by several speakers. The address was suggested by a note by the Editor of THE CHURCHMAN in a recent issue: "Our unhappy divisions seem to paralyse all our efforts, yet there does not seem to be the slightest sign of any attempt to bridge the gulf between the Church and Nonconformity."]

THE antipathies and animosities of the various Christian churches and bodies are an undeniable scandal, and do infinite harm to the cause of Christianity, specially perhaps in the mission field. That remarkable, large-hearted, broad-minded man, Donald Hankey (the "Student at Arms"), wrote: "In this, as in other ages, outsiders would be puzzled to recognize the disciples of Christ by the love they bear one another." And again: "In the long run the most disastrous failure of the Church is the failure to love. It is this that does more than anything else to alienate men of good will."

I venture to offer my opinion that the antipathies and animosities arise mainly from an imperfect conception of what the Holy Catholic Church, the Church Universal, "the Holy Church throughout all the world" which acknowledges God in the *Te Deum*, is, and is not. Evidently it cannot be the Roman Church alone, or the Greek Church alone, or the Church of England alone, or the non-Episcopal Churches, whom we call "Nonconformists," alone. The Holy Church Universal is the blessed company of faithful people, in all these Churches, who are seeking God and His Christ, and are striving to serve Him. I believe that the doctrine of our own Church is the purest, and its system of Church government the best, and that there is much that is wrong in the doctrine of the Church of Rome and its system; nevertheless I do not doubt for a moment that in that Church, and in other Christian communities, there is as great a proportion of true servants of God who are accepted by Him, as in our own. It would take pages to give the names of the saintly men who have adorned the Church of Rome, but as prominent ones St. Francis Xavier and Lacordaire, of whom there was recently a memoir in *THE CHURCHMAN*, may be mentioned; and among Nonconformists, Bunyan, the Wesleys and Whitefield, who, with many others, are esteemed to be holy and saintly men by the great body of Christians.

In England we are principally concerned with the Nonconformists. It is to be remembered that in Scotland the very great majority of the people are Presbyterians, whose doctrine varies little from that of some of our Nonconformist bodies; also that it is estimated that among English-speaking Christians the number of non-Episcopalians exceeds that of our own Church.

The Nonconformists have been estranged from us largely by our own fault. We, clergy and laity, have too often treated them with aloofness and cold toleration, and even arrogance and condescension. This must be most galling, and is sufficient to account for the hostility which many of them feel towards us. It is a consequence of this that they are unwilling to give our Church an opportunity of improving our services and discipline, and it is common knowledge that there may be, in consequence, difficulty in passing the Archbishops' scheme for the purpose through Parliament. We have to thank ourselves for much of this.

I would give an instance of what I mean. I recently heard it propounded that we might come to the Sovereign of this kingdom being crowned by the head of the Baptist Church instead of by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and this was considered a joke. (I think I have heard it before.) Some years back there was much discussion, in which Lord Rosebery took a leading

part, as to the advisability of making the House of Lords more representative, and it was suggested that the Nonconformists should be represented, as our Church is by the Bishops, which to my mind would be right. There are many things more improbable than that this should not eventually come to pass, and then it might fall to the head of the Baptist Church to place the Crown on the Sovereign's head. Why should there be anything ludicrous about this? He would no doubt be a holy, devout man, revered by multitudes of our fellow-Christians. The idea that it should be so, seems to come from the supercilious attitude of some Church people, and surely the spirit which suggests it is not the spirit of Christ. Church people should remember the scathing reproof of St. Paul to the Jew despisers at Antioch in Pisidia. If this attitude of arrogance and superciliousness comes from the Church being the State Church, the sooner it ceases to be so the better, for it does infinite harm.

The Times of January 24 published a peace declaration by eminent members of the "Christian Churches" in the United States. Such a joint declaration is not possible in this country even on so great an occasion as the National Mission, owing to the want of harmony and cordiality between the different Churches. Again, in *The Times* of January 27, there is an article headed "The Holy Communion in War Time," in which the following occurs: "There are many ways of celebrating the Holy Communion: serious as such differences may be, on the eve of battle the soldier knows that the Romans, the Anglicans, and the Nonconformists are remembering the same Great Act and are communing, however dimly, with the same Lord; and, after all, to-morrow they may be, all of them, where they will know the truth and pass out of shadows. . . . They have all the same vision. If it were in the power of any Recorder to compare spiritual experience it might be discovered that those who are keeping the solemn Feast according to all customs are nearer together than they think." If this spirit and frame of mind could only be got into our hearts at home, surely the antipathies and animosities would subside. Much the same thought was expressed by Hooker in Queen Elizabeth's days, but it fell on deaf or unwilling ears.

Now I think it is the business of every one of us to do our utmost to bridge the gulf mentioned by the Editor of *THE CHURCHMAN*. I have already said that I believe the doctrine of our own Church to be the purest, and its system of government the best, but we do not claim an exclusive monopoly of truth as the Roman Church unfortunately does. I would not press our doctrine and system on others, but I would hold out to all Christians, Church of Rome, Greek, and Nonconformists, the right hand of fellowship, recognizing that they, with us, are fellow-soldiers in the Church militant, fighting on the side of God and His Christ against sin, and seeking to save that which was lost. In our daily prayers we should remember, first, God's servants the clergy who immediately care for us, and ask His blessing also on the clergy throughout the world, of all Churches and Communion: that He would be their refuge and strength, and that He would give them a right judgment in all things, and they may ever rejoice in His Holy Comfort.

The antagonism between ourselves and the Nonconformists has gone on for generations and will not be allayed in a day. I am thankful that in my lifetime (and I am old), I see great improvement, specially of late years, and more specially since the war. I believe that the war is drawing all Christians together, and I fervently hope that we may come out of it purified as by fire. My plea is that we all, not pressing our individual opinions, should do our utmost to forward the cordial fellowship in Christ of all Christian Churches.

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