

REUNION FROM TWO ASPECTS.

BY THE REV. H. A. WILSON, M.A., Rector and Rural Dean of
Cheltenham.

SIMULTANEOUSLY there have come to hand two books on the subject of Reunion: Canon Ollard's *Reunion*¹ and a volume of essays by Churchmen and Free Churchmen, entitled *Towards Reunion*.² They present a most interesting contrast in almost every respect. The former looks back, the latter looks forward: Canon Ollard yearns hopelessly, the essayists are buoyant in expectation: Canon Ollard can only propound a "wait and see" policy, but *Towards Reunion* has a definite programme outlined. Such are a few of the points of contrast.

A good deal of attention has already been given in *The Record* to the essays referred to, but it is impossible to exaggerate their importance. I am not now attempting a review of a book which is of the highest importance, but simply trying to express some of the thoughts which it awakens, thoughts which are thrown up on the background of Canon Ollard's four lectures. But a few comments on this High Anglican contribution to the Reunion problem must first be indulged in for the sake of clarity. It is not quite fair to take popular lectures too seriously, because there are certain limitations imposed upon the lecturer. He must be brief, he must compress his matter, he must try to be definite and lucid. But when all allowances are made it is hard to be patient with this lecturer. Questions upon which authorities are greatly divided are dismissed in a dogmatic sentence or two, and when for party reasons a certain conclusion is desirable all contrary evidence is ignored and an *ipse dixit* is called in to settle the matter. For instance, to quote Jeremy Collier's absurd remark about the Synod of Dort as conclusive against the authority of the English delegates there, is as futile as the adoption of Heylin's attempt to wriggle out of the difficulty of the 1610 consecration of the Scottish bishops. Canon Ollard makes no reference to Bishop Andrewes' (who was one of

¹ *Reunion*. By the Rev. Canon S. L. Ollard. London: Robert Scott, 3s. 6d. net.

² *Towards Reunion*: Being Contributions to Mutual Understanding by Church of England and Free Church Writers. London: Macmillan & Co., 7s. 6d. net.

the consecrating bishops) attitude, but boldly says that the Presbyterian ministers were consecrated bishops *per saltum*, whereas there is practically no doubt whatever that the reason they were not first ordained priests was that their Presbyterian ordination was officially recognized. Nor again is there any evidence that the persecuting legislation of the Restoration was the work of the State and not of the Church. Every Churchman would like to think this was so, but no serious historian would maintain such a theory. Archbishop Sheldon admitted that he was out to eject all Nonconformist divines from the Church, and had he known that even the few who actually conformed would have done so, he declared he would have made the terms harder still. The sermons and pamphlets published at the time show that the bigoted Archbishop had a wide following among the clergy. It is sadly true that the legislation of those dark days was inspired by the Church.

It would be an easy task to add to these illustrations of partisan garbling of history, but that is not the matter we have in hand. The lectures are on the subject of Reunion, and so deep and urgent is this matter that every Christian should welcome any honest attempt to help the ideal to become the real. But unhappily Canon Ollard has no help to give. Rome is hopeless, and the East is nearly as bad. The foreign Reformed Churches make but a slight appeal. The only path which is really open runs towards the English-speaking Free Churches, and this path the High Anglican will not take. He is obsessed with an exploded view of the ministry and hampered by mediæval theories of the sacraments, and this impedimenta renders him helpless and unable to make any contribution whatever to a subject which is increasingly engrossing the attention of Churchpeople.

One of the most depressing aspects of the Reunion movement is the inability of High Anglicans to make any practical contribution to the problem as it affects our English religious life. For instance, of what value is the following suggestion: "We shall do our share best by being true to the English Church, loyal to its positive principles." The writers in the volume of essays would repudiate hotly any charge of disloyalty to the English Church, and rightly so. But "loyalty," as Canon Ollard seems to use the term, appears to mean a jealous and unyielding maintenance not only of "the Prayer Book standard," but of the Tractarian exegesis

of that standard. But even this is less helpful advice than it appears to be. High Anglican writers are repeatedly urging us to think out our principles, to understand clearly what the "Ecclesia Anglicana" really stands for. So that to maintain a standard which we have not yet discovered is not exactly helpful in what is nothing less than a religious crisis.

Now the essayists, on the other hand, have already thought out their principles: they know where they are; their minds are clear and fluid, and in consequence they have a message. They believe that the Holy Spirit of God is the urgent cause of the movement towards Home Reunion. The matter is not with them a question of tactics or ecclesiastical politics—God Himself is in the thing. These convictions are shared by multitudes, and many of us would go so far as to say that the Church of England is on its trial, and if this "day of the Lord" is missed it may never return and our candle may be put out.

It is because of these firm feelings that we view with dismayed alarm the procrastinating tactics of the Upper House of Convocation and the negative and ferocious *non possumus* of the Lower House. It seems as if Bishops count for little to-day. They appear to have lost all power for initiative and leadership. Because the Lower House, by obstructionist tactics, rejected a somewhat lukewarm report in favour of co-operation with Free Churchmen, the Upper House suspended their consideration of the subject. Bolshevik generals are in the habit of "leading" their armies by following on well behind. There is much to commend in this policy. If the troops are successful, the general hurries to the front and claims the success as his own; if they fail, he has secured a good start on the way home. But England wants real leaders in every sphere to-day, and the policy of waiting to see how the cat will jump is simply worse than useless.

In practice this episcopal inactivity and anxious looking for something to turn up will result in simply damming up the stream, which is already dangerously high. The dam is near bursting point, and what then? Some of us who have worked and prayed for Reunion when the subject was not popular, and we were simply voices crying in the wilderness, are genuinely alarmed at the possibilities. We want Reunion by constitutional methods and not by "direct action." Courageous direction by our leaders is the supreme need

of to-day, and all we can find is caution carried to the point of timidity, and an exasperating procrastination which irritates almost beyond endurance.

The writers in the volume of essays referred to would probably be all correctly classified as Evangelicals, and the book is arresting as a witness to the fact that Evangelicals have at last found a positive policy. No longer are they in the intolerable and undignified position of trying to hold back a refractory horse. They have seen a vision of an England reunited in faith and worship: it is a vision which inspires the soul and creates the daring spirit. And it is the daring spirit which alone is in harmony with the trend of thought to-day. Caution is not popular, and those who would lead in the England that now is must be willing to "live dangerously." The old fearful timidity which has destroyed the hope of Evangelicals to be leaders in the Church is dying rapidly and will soon be buried deep.

But Evangelicals are not alone in their Reunion programme. The successors of the Moderate Churchmen or the Latitude men of the seventeenth century are the Broad Churchmen of our own time. And these, like their predecessors, have taken some very decided steps in seeking to bring about Reunion with Free Churchmen. Perhaps one of the most significant acts was the passing of a resolution unanimously in favour, of pulpit exchange at the annual meeting of the Churchmen's Union on the eve of the meeting of Convocation last month.

Alas, there remain outside the High Anglicans! They have nothing positive to say: they have only threats to utter. If the forward policy is sanctioned, those threats may materialize; but in any case if, as is firmly believed by Evangelicals, God has given the vision and God bids them go forward, it is not for them to hold back. The Finger of God points straight ahead and the consequences of their obedience may well be left to Him.

H. A. WILSON.

