

[Cheltenham Conference Paper.]

FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCHES:

(a) PROBLEMS OF THE HOME CHURCH.

III.

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THE writing of a short paper on a large subject is a task for a genius, and as I am not one of the Immortals, I have found it a very difficult matter. Shakespeare may be right when he asserts that "brevity is the soul of wit," it certainly is a sore travail to the writer of a short paper. Perhaps the promoters of this Conference, by adopting the plan of ten-minute papers, have unwittingly revealed their conviction that the time for speech is drawing to a close and the hour for action is at hand. I shall not protest if it be so, for after long but not lost years of waiting (the Lambeth Quadrilateral was promulgated in 1888), after protracted but profitable discussion, after minute and necessary examination of the points on which we agree and those on which we differ, after spasmodic attempts at interchange of pulpits and other friendly and united activities, we have now reached the most delicate and difficult stage in the movement towards reunion. The processes I have alluded to, have compelled all those interested in reunion to state their positions clearly. All have expressed their yearning for a closer unity, and that alone is surely a great gain.

One had hoped that the experiences of the Great War, when the force of grim circumstances brought the Churches into close touch in the administration of the Faith, would have given an irresistible impetus towards reunion. I am inclined to think that the movement in that direction since the war has been decidedly disappointing. I do not wish to undervalue the great gain that has arisen from a vastly wider and more intimate knowledge of each other's methods of operation in dispensing the saving efficacy and ministrations of religion. The result of such co-operation has been a greater feeling of respect for each other, and for each other's ways, a respect which may have been wanting in its sympathetic fullness prior to the war. We have looked each other in the face and discovered that we are brethren in the Lord, aiming at the same end, and agreeing in all the main points of our faith. We have thus learned to respect each other and each other's ways and been drawn nearer together. Yes, we have learned to respect and to reverence one another in the Lord.

Now the first point which strikes one is this, that such being the case we have reached the psychological moment of approach to each other, and all history and experience teaches that such a moment is fraught with momentous possibilities for weal or woe, in the cause we have at heart. With this view agree the latest

utterances of Dr. Scott Lidgett in the *Contemporary Review* for May. "It is safe to say, that the relations between the Anglican Church and Evangelical Nonconformity cannot remain as they stand at present. If British Christianity with its conservatism, caution, and acquiescence in anomalies were prepared to tolerate the existing state of things for another generation, it is pretty certain that powerful forces operating elsewhere would compel us to face the issue in the near future." Dean Welldon, in the *Nineteenth Century* for May, urges the same view for other reasons: "The decadence of the Christian Faith as a commanding influence upon the national life has for some time been a cause of serious anxiety among patriotic citizens. In old days men might or might not act upon the law of Christ in their daily life; but they accepted it in theory. To-day there are an increasing number of men who do not accept it. Even before the war, the signs of revolt against the accredited standard of life in Christian countries was only too evident. The war has revealed in the full light of day the spirit which has long been working all over Europe. . . . The problem of Christian reunion was never so urgent or so vital as it is to-day, because Europe stands confronted by a system which would, in its final issue, be the negation of all Christian faith and the destruction of Christian life."

Now both of these are problems confronting us, and neither of them can be shelved by those anxious to see the cause of Christ progressing in our land. The increasing indifference to religious observances is one of the most serious facts we have to face, and any tendency or influence, however slight, which makes in that direction is palpably perilous.

The man-in-the-street regards our differences with good-natured contempt, because he fails to see efficient reasons for them, and thinks that we are weak-minded to quarrel about such trifles. He thinks that he can safely wait before making up his mind until we have agreed as to the best form of expressing our creed. This may seem a slight matter, but I fear that it accounts for some, probably many, being outside our places of worship. In my own deanery we are on very friendly terms with our Nonconformist brethren and act with them. I as Rural Dean and Vicar am asked to the institution or to the departure of their ministers, and frequently to their anniversary services. I believe that this outward friendliness is doing good to the cause of Christ in our neighbourhood.

I know that some feel that such may tend to confuse the minds of people as to the real differences between us, but I am inclined to think that the good far exceeds the ill in such co-operation.

I have been surprised at the way in which, to my mind, the Holy Spirit has been ignored in this movement. I hope that I may be mistaken, but there seems to me so little reference to the Holy Spirit in the literature on the subject, or at all events in that portion known to me. It has been well said that "It is in the presence of the Holy Ghost that we find the true union of the Church. There are diversities of operation, and must always be such, but diversity of operation does not destroy, or in any degree impair, the unity of

the Spirit." There is one Spirit, and in the unity of that one Spirit we alone shall find the true unity and the true bond of the Churches. We are aiming at something deeper and more radical than uniformity; we are seeking union, and nothing less. That union can alone come through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit of our God. This is the one point I would press upon the Conference, that only in the unity of the Holy Spirit shall we, or can we, reach the desired end at which we are aiming, and I hope that this definite note may be sounded forth. Prayer and faith are necessary as never before. Let us pledge ourselves to a daily calling upon that Holy Spirit to bring about in His own way that which He has put into our hearts to seek after and desire.

Let me again quote the words of Dr. Scott Lidgett: "This widespread movement toward reunion springs from a far deeper source than sense of practical utility, and is being fashioned by quite other instruments than the skill of constitution-makers or the learning of ecclesiastical historians, important as these are in their place. It is born of the sense that Christianity consists above all in a divinely-implanted life, which is found to exist in equal measure throughout all the Christian communions. It matures into a deliberate purpose in the growing recognition that this divinely-imparted life is social and catholic in its character; that the Church is the divine and indispensable expression and instrument of its catholicity, and that therefore there is a hopeless contradiction between the full recognition of the Christian life and the maintenance of separate Christian communions in isolation from or even antagonistic to one another. This contradiction hinders the perfect development of Christian life and the complete realization of Christian truth, mars the ideal of the Christian Church, weakens its ministry to spiritual life, and damages its witness to the Kingdom of God throughout the range of Christian life."

Yes, the present state of affairs hinders the full manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and throughout the whole Christian community.

Let us remember Christ's own words: "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and lovedst them, even as Thou lovedst Me" (St. John xvii. 22, 23).

I cannot do better than close my short paper with another quotation from Dr. Scott Lidgett: "Grave responsibility rests upon the whole body of Anglican Bishops for taking such preliminary and practical steps as may give fresh inspiration and impetus to the movement towards reunion. Upon their decisions will depend whether the saner forces making for this great goal shall be strengthened and directed or whether the movement shall be thrown into confusion by decisions that will bring despair to the practical statesmen of all denominations. No greater occasion for the display of vision, wisdom, and courage on the part of the Episcopate has arisen for generations. The Lambeth decisions will either

give hope of the prevalence of catholicity, in its truest and largest sense, or will intensify the sectarian spirit within the Anglican Church, and therefore, by inevitable reaction, throughout Evangelical Nonconformity."

These are weighty and wise words of warning and ought to bring all those who desire and long for reunion, for the sake of their Master and His cause, to their knees, in continuous prayer that His Holy Spirit may grant at this time vision, faith and courage to go forward to mend the torn but seamless robe of Christ.

We are living in perilous times for the Church, the nation, and the world; we are constantly faced with moral and social questions of far-reaching importance. Our Empire was saved in the Great War by our unity. As a parish priest in a large South London parish, daily facing these problems, I long for such a unity of the whole of the Christian forces of this land, as (for the Churches) to be able to speak with one voice, one heart, one sentiment, upon the great moral and social questions of the day. Such united speech, such united action, would command recognition and respect and go far to create an enlightened public opinion. Our unity would be our strength. May we who pray for, wish for, this unity simply, solely and only for the extension of Christ's Kingdom, and God's glory, be granted to see the fruition of our desire.

"Gather us in,
 Thou Love that fillest all!
 Gather our rival faiths within Thy fold!
 Rend each man's temple veil, and bid it fall,
 That we may know that Thou hast been of old;
 Gather us in!

"Gather us in!
 We worship only Thee;
 In varied names we stretch a common hand;
 In divers forms a common soul we see;
 In many ships we seek one Spirit Land;
 Gather us in!"

THE POSITION IN INDIA.

"The movement towards unity in England is of the few, and not of the many. However deep and sincere are the aspirations of its leaders, they are so far in front of the mass of Church-goers and Chapel-goers, that the movement still produces on many minds an impression of artificiality. It is consequently opposed, and opposed by methods and arguments which in their turn have an air of unreality. It will be a great mistake if those in India whose spiritual pabulum consists of the English Church newspapers reproduce the arguments which they find in them in the different circumstances of India. For the movement towards unity here is a popular movement, not a movement of leaders. It concerns not the adjustment of Christian forces, but the birth-throes of the Church of India."—THE BISHOP OF BOMBAY in his *Diocesan Magazine*.