

APPROACHES TO ROME BY CONFERENCES.

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A STORY is told of a well-meaning clergyman of a past generation that, animated by the same desire of reuniting the Church of England with the Church of Rome which has lately found expression in the Malines Conference, he went to Rome and obtained an audience of the then Pope, Pius IX. The Pope, it is said, took him for a lunatic; but this is by the way. When he came home he used to describe his interview: "I said to him, 'Holy Father,' I said, 'if you on your side will give up certain doctrines, we on our side will give up certain doctrines.'" Here, however, Bishop Phillpotts, of Exeter, who was present, interrupted him. "I suppose, Dr. Townsend," he said, "that by *we* you meant Mrs. Townsend and yourself?" Is not the moral this:—Do not reckon without your host? "No pledge from Catholics is of any value to which Rome is not a party,"¹ Cardinal Newman reminds us. How much misunderstanding would be avoided were this borne in mind! Dr. Townsend did well in going to Rome rather than to Malines. Where he did less well was in identifying the Church of England with Mrs. Townsend and himself.

2. The distinguished men who have lately discussed Reunion at Malines had no authority to speak for their respective Churches. We may be sure that they claimed none. Only the Pope can speak for the Church of Rome. Only the English people can speak for the Church of England. The Vatican denies that it had any official cognizance of their proceedings. No one who had any acquaintance with Roman procedure could for a moment have supposed that it had. For (1) had it desired to enter into negotiations with the Church of England, it would not have chosen Belgians or Frenchmen, however distinguished, as its representatives; nor would it have acted without the co-operation of the Anglo-Irish Catholic body; (2) it would not have allowed the discussion to take place anywhere but in Rome; (3) and most important of all—dogma lies, as such, outside the field of negotiation. In the case of Père Hyacinthe, Leo XIII was ready (1896) to regulate his marriage by affiliating him to one of the Uniate rites in which the marriage of the clergy is recognized. But a condition of his rehabilitation was his acceptance of and submission to the Vatican definition of Papal infallibility; and it was on this point that the negotiations broke down. We must conclude, then, that the hopes built by enthusiasts on the Malines Conference were without foundation. The discussions, whatever the intention of those who took part in them, were personal and private. It is obvious that the Belgian Primate was free to invite his friends to his house; that his friends,

¹ Letter to the Duke of Norfolk.

whoever they were, were free to accept his invitation, and to discuss any subject or subjects they pleased. We may leave it at this. If the official position of those concerned gave rise to a suspicion that more was intended, the explanations which have been made should be sufficient, under the circumstances, to relieve the anxiety which has been felt in certain quarters. And if the incident, as a whole, leads us in England to regard the proposed scheme of Prayer Book Revision more carefully than we have hitherto regarded it, good will have been done.

3. So much for this side of the question. For another, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" is at once sense and Scripture. And I shall not apologize for again quoting Newman, whose knowledge of both Churches gives weight to his words.

"See what would be required to bring it (the Church of England) into a condition capable of union with the Catholic Church! There have ever been three great parties in it. The rod of Aaron, so to call it, must swallow up the serpents of the magicians. It is a miracle indeed if the 'Catholic' clergy in the Establishment manage to swallow up the Evangelical and the Liberal. But how much more difficult an idea it is to contemplate that they should absorb the whole laity of their communion, of whom but a fraction is with them! Nor do I see how it is possible to forget that the Established Church is the Church of England; that Dissenters are, both in their own estimation, and in that of its own members, in some sort a portion of it; and that even were its whole *propter* laity Catholic in opinion, the whole population of England, of which Dissenters are nearly half, would, as represented in Parliament, claim it as their own. And when it came to the point, they would have fact and power on their side."¹

4. The temper of controversy is an odious one. Those are the best Christians who live on what the Churches of Christ hold in common rather than on their differences. Here may we not say, with the poet, *πλέον ἡμῖν παντός*—the half is more than the whole? We do not find that the spiritual life of the best Roman Catholics centres in the Papacy; or that of the best Churchmen on the necessity of having Bishops; or that of the best Presbyterians on the necessity of not having Bishops; the soul does not rest on these things. But unity of spirit among Christians is one thing; unity of standards and organization among Churches is another. The reason why the latter is out of the question between Rome and England is (1) the irreconcilable contradiction between their standards; and (2) the radical incompatibility of outlook, character, and temperament from which these contradictions spring.

"Those rites and those doctrines which have made most noise in the Romanist controversy are those which are least of the essence of Romanism. The Virgin and the Saints, Reliques, Images, Purgatory, and Masses—these by-words

¹ *Life and Letters of Cardinal Newman*, II, 116, 117, by W. Ward.

with the ignorant and the unthinking are powerless decorations or natural development. The one essential principle of the Catholic system is the control of the individual conscience by an authority, or law, placed without it, and exercised over it by men claiming to speak in the name of Heaven."¹

This is what old-fashioned people called Popery; because it vests this authority in the Pope. Its results are written large in history. What may be called the common-sense argument against this perversion of religion—the argument found in the Homilies and in Jewel's Apology—is out of fashion; it was defective, often deplorable, in form. But it was sound in substance. The thing was, and is so; and "things are what they are." The Papal Church and the Reformed Churches look different ways. This is not to say that they have no common religious ground. They have much. But they have also differences so fundamental that corporate or organic union between them is inconceivable. Were this not so, history would have to be rewritten; and the Churches in question would be other than they are.

5. "Words are the counters of wise men, but the money of fools," says Hobbes.² They are certainly the money of the religious world of to-day. Reunion, Revision, Catholic, Constructive—what folly is too great to make its way under cover of these question-begging terms? At the very sound of them the herd of Gadara—which is numerous and increasing—rushes headlong down the steep into the sea. In what sense can we speak of "Union" with a Church which claims to be the One Divinely-appointed Teacher of Mankind? "I beseech you by the bowels of Christ to think it possible that you may be mistaken," said Cromwell of the Covenanters before Dunbar. They would not, the Church of Rome cannot, think this possible. In the latter case, with perfect consistency. For a Divine Teacher union can only mean one thing—the acceptance of his teaching. Such a teacher does not refute, or discuss, or reason—he condemns. It is said of a would-be convert that, startled by some statement advanced by Cardinal Manning, he ventured on a question. But the authority of the Cardinal checked the presumption of the proselyte. "Nay," he said: "If you wish to argue, I have done." There is infallibility! "I am not arguing with you; I am telling you." Do not blame it! Blame those who are credulous enough to accept it at its surface value. How can it speak in any other way?

6. To those outside it, the Roman Catholic Church is a *terra incognita*. Those who have from circumstances, a certain knowledge and experience of it find this startlingly brought home to them by the sayings and doings of not a few highly-placed Anglican dignitaries. If one may use an Irishism, they never open their mouth on the subject, without putting their foot in it. While, as for our Anglo-Catholic friends, no amount of Rejected Addresses

¹ Essays. Mark Pattison, II, 255.

² Leviathan, ch. iv.

seems to convince them that their overtures to the Papal Church are unwelcome and will be useless :

“ Such proposals, sure enough,
Will meet a merited rebuff.”

This, I think, is what the Jesuit Father Woodlock meant when he said at Oxford that Rome was better understood by English Modernists than by Anglo-Catholics.¹ We have a certain intellectual respect for an avowed opponent which it is difficult to extend to a mere apologist, who approximates, and deprecates, and trims. It is, I believe, Mr. Chesterton who says humorously, that now-a-days people do not apologize for being Roman Catholics, but for not being so. I am afraid that some of us do.

7. I confess to a profound distrust of the “ Round Table ” principle in religion. Nothing but talk comes of it. Platitude is heaped upon platitude till the question at issue is buried under a mass of verbiage. Here the discussion is obviously at cross-purposes. Either the Pope is the Vicar of Christ—in which case we ought to obey him ; or he is not, in which case we should protest against his usurped dominion. Either the elements in the Lord’s Supper are changed by consecration into the Body and Blood of Christ—in which case they are to be worshipped ; or “ the real presence of Christ’s most blessed body and blood is not to be sought for in the sacrament,” but, as Hooker teaches,² “ in the worthy receiver of the sacrament ”—in which case “ the sacramental Bread and Wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored.” What the Anglo-Catholic’s conception of dogma is, it is difficult to say ; “ every one of you hath a doctrine.” But, for Rome, dogma is a fixed quantity, guaranteed by an infallible authority, which can be taken or left, but not made matter for negotiation. Its treatment by a Round Table Conference is unthinkable.

“ There can be no question,” says Cardinal Bourne in his Lenten Pastoral, “ of a compromise built up on the acceptance, or rejection, or mere toleration of a certain number of religious opinions. We believe that to the Church which finds the centre of authority in the See of Rome, both in its episcopal hierarchy as a whole, and in its visible head, the successor of St. Peter personally, there has been granted the gift of infallibility. This is the fundamental doctrine of the Church ; and all discussions are useless and waste of time until this doctrine is accepted. The difference between the point of view of those who accept the Supreme Authority of the Holy See and the outlook of those who reject it is fundamental. The latter have apparently lost all perception of the Catholic idea of faith.”

Let our Anglo-Catholics weigh these words. The Anglo-Catholic Congress is as much, or as little, Catholic as the Cheltenham Conference : and Bishop Gore as the Bishop of Durham or Bishop Knox. And, unless the Church of England is prepared to accept

¹ *Modern Churchmen*, February, 1924.

² *E.P. V.* 67.

the dogma of Papal Infallibility, the Malines Conversations "are useless and waste of time." The claim to infallibility is, indeed, a shirt of Nessus to the Church which advances it. But it sets this Church above—or below reasoning. This is an attraction to those to whom certainty means more than truth. But it makes discussion impossible. The sword of Brennus decides the scale. The ill-advised and undignified controversy as to Anglican Orders, closed by the Bull of Leo XIII, *Apostolicæ Curæ* (1896), should have shown the futility of these *conciliabula* between enthusiastic English Mediævalists and courteous Continental divines. It is not a foreign—i.e., a non-Italian Cardinal, however eminent, but Rome, that has the say in these matters—and at Rome things are not done in this way.

8. It should be noticed that the English delegates at Malines do not represent the Church, still less the people, of England, they are taken from a section of Churchmen, mostly clergymen, who, though influential in ecclesiastical circles, are out of touch with the English Church and nation as a whole. In 1894 Archbishop Benson, writing to a leader of this party, emphasized its non-representative character.

His correspondent was then, as he still is, engaged in somewhat one-sided negotiations with Rome: the *Church Times* tells us that the initiative in the matter of the Malines Conversations was taken by Lord Halifax and the Abbé Portal.¹ The Archbishop doubted both their propriety and their promoter's qualifications for conducting them.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you have lived for years so exclusively with one set of thinkers, and entered so entirely into the usages of one class of Churches, that you have not before you the state of religious feeling and activity in England with the completeness with which anyone attempting to adjust the relation between Churches ought to have the phenomena of his own side before him."²

The reminder is no less needed now than then. We do not all attend Anglo-Catholic congresses; the English Church is not the same thing as the English Church Union; and not all its members take either their religion or their theology from the *Church Times*.

9. It has been urged that the resolutions of the late Lambeth Conference pledged those who signed them to act, should occasion offer, on the lines which led to such discussions as those which have lately taken place. Not all the signatories are of this opinion, or believe that in subscribing them they gave a blank cheque to persons unnamed to translate rhetoric into action. While those who see the Papal Church at close quarters make no secret of their distrust of these compromising and uninvited overtures. The disuse of the official designation of our Church, "The United Church of England and Ireland," is to be regretted. We have much to learn from the Church of Ireland: when in particular the Irish

¹ March 28. ² Letter to Lord Halifax, *Life of Archbishop Benson*, p. 511.

bishops speak of Romanism they speak of what they know. Hence a clearer and more vigorous note than that to which we in England are accustomed. May I close this paper by quoting the recent Message of the Irish Primate, the Archbishop of Armagh, to the Irish Church?

"A few days ago we were surprised—perhaps, I may say, startled—to hear that conversations had been going on for some time between influential members of the Church of England and a high authority of the Church of Rome, Cardinal Mercier, whose noble conduct during the war attracted our admiration; and, further, that these conversations had assumed a quasi-official character, through the cognizance of the highest dignitary of the Church of England on the one hand, and a corresponding cognizance on the part of the Vatican.

"These facts have given a new orientation to the whole movement towards reunion, and we are bound to reconsider our position: we are bound to ask the question, What sort of Christian Church do we desire to see emerging from the reuniting of the forces of Christendom, if such a reunion should come about? The question is of vital importance, though it has been but little considered by those who have been working towards unity. My own conviction is that, if reunion led to the creating or restoring of a universal hierarchal system dominating human life in all its parts and dictating doctrine and practice with professedly infallible authority, it would be the greatest disaster which could possibly befall mankind. For true advance, whether in all branches of knowledge or in social reconstruction, nothing is so important as liberty of research, of criticism, and of opinion.

"It may be said that it is unthinkable that the world, having won its freedom in these matters, should ever go back to the bondage from which it escaped. That may be true. But what, in this case, could be more fatal for the Church than that it should identify its aims with a system which the world has once for all rejected? To-day we have too much lost sight of the fact that the Reformation was not only a revolution in religion, but the setting free of the mind of man; the Renaissance which preceded failed to effect a real liberation until the Reformation broke the fetters of the human soul.

"I conclude, therefore, that the only kind of reunion we should desire is that which, while holding fast the Christianity of Christ as given in the Gospels, secures ample liberty, not only for every individual, but for every type of organized Christian life which has proved really effective in bringing the influence of Christ to bear on men. It is not desirable that any one Church should absorb the rest. The world would be very much the poorer if that happened. I conclude, therefore, that these overtures, or conversations, or whatever they were, are not likely, as things stand, to help us towards the only reunion we should desire."