

THE REFORMATION AND REUNION.

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I HAVE been asked to speak on the Reformation in its bearing upon the present-day problems of Reunion and Intercommunion.

Intense life and union were characteristic of early Christianity ; but this living union gradually stiffened into mechanical union. Disunion came with the Reformation ; and even those who are most convinced of the necessity of that revolution in the sixteenth century, and who would insist that there may be far worse evils than disunion, are yet agreed that disunion in itself is an evil. How, then, can the experience of these four centuries help us to reunite without abandoning, on either side, those principles which made union real in the Early Church, or those other principles which made men willing, in the sixteenth century, to shed their blood in a quarrel which has divided Europe into two opposite religious camps ?

To begin with, let us recognize that this contrast between union and disunion has in it a good deal of epigrammatic exaggeration. Neither was the consent of early Christians so complete, nor is modern dissent so absolute, as is sometimes assumed. Some points which common opinion would perhaps single out as especially characteristic of modern nonconformity are not only primitive but even medieval ; nay, more, are characteristic of the strictest Roman orthodoxy at the present moment ; for instance, the reprobation of dancing and of the theatre. However, even when all this has been counted, the Reformation breach was enormous, and the recognition of that breach is our necessary starting-point.

How, first, can we sum up the essence of the Reformation ? In two words : *Private Judgment*. Some historians have taken great pains to show that Luther had no idea of Wyclif's pet doctrine of Dominion, nor Wyclif any idea of Luther's pet doctrine of Grace ; nor could any two of the great early reformers agree upon certain points of supreme importance. All this is perfectly true, but it is irrelevant. Upon one essential point all Reformers agreed in theory if not in practice ; implicitly if not explicitly : they agreed upon the soul's direct responsibility to God and, by implication, the subordinate importance of all human mediators. The orthodox Roman Catholic admits private judgment once, and once only. To the outsider he says : " Question your conscience honestly before God ; probe to the very bottom ; discover there that ours is the One Infallible Church ; thenceforward Private Judgment ceases ; it is no longer a question of what you think or believe, but of what the Church tells you to think and believe." The Reformer, on the other hand, may often, in practice, have been

as intolerant as if he had been infallible. In theory, even, he may have supported doctrines hardly reconcilable, in strict logic, with the claim for Private Judgment. But these anomalies in theory and in practice tend more and more to cancel each other out; meanwhile the root doctrine of the Reformation was, and still remains, the doctrine of Private Judgment. Nor has that doctrine produced the hopeless anarchy which was often predicted. It is true, we wash a good deal of dirty linen in public. It is not counted for righteousness among us Protestants that all should say the same thing in the face of outsiders, while we speak more freely in the closet. Many wonderful and horrible things may be committed among us, but not that particular iniquity which Jeremiah rebuked, of organized unanimity in falsehood as a foundation for priestly rule. We err rather in the opposite direction, and that is the past error which we implicitly confess by the mere fact that all Protestant parties are now so deeply concerned for reunion. Yet the error is not so great as to force upon us impatience, with that risk of still greater errors which impatience involves. Church Reunion would be an enormous gain, as Disarmament would be an enormous gain among nations, but in both cases we need to assure ourselves by careful examination that we are quietly possessing ourselves of the substance, not grasping hastily at a delusive shadow.

Our Reunion of the future must be based, essentially, on that Union of the remotest Christian past. Yet, in some senses, we shall never fully understand that Union, however hard we strive to recapture it. Always, in history, when men thought they were returning to the past, they were also creating a future that had never yet been. With this necessary reminder, however, I take it we are unanimous in an attempt to reunite on the basis of earliest Christian agreement. Can we define that agreement more exactly than by saying that it rested upon a sense of the uniqueness of Christ's person, the uniqueness of His message, and therefore His unique demands upon our obedience? Can we precise much farther than this—I would even ask, can we precise at all farther than this—without falling into divergences which it would need another Nicene Council to deal with? At Nicæa, as Professor Gwatkin showed very plainly, the great majority of the bishops deplored all too exact definition on a subject which had been so long open among Christians; and it was Nicæa which provoked the greatest of all pre-Reformation revolts. To speak quite freely—as you will doubtless wish me to speak—I cannot see how we can recapture pre-Nicæan unity so long as we insist upon more than Nicæan precision of statement upon many metaphysical problems.

Some years ago, I met for the first time one of the most original theologians of our generation, Father Neville Figgis. It was at dinner; and I asked as we lit our cigarettes: "Is it fair to ask you a 'shop' question?" He replied rather wearily (for he had had a long day in the University Library): "Yes." I continued

then: "You always tell us we must listen to the voice of the Teaching Church; but where are we to hear that voice? Does it mean, after all, more than this, that tradition is a very important thing, that we must pay very serious attention to it, and not depart from it on any point unless we are prepared to give very definite reasons for that departure?" He replied rather wearily again: "Perhaps it doesn't come to more than that." And our host, a distinguished theological professor, summed it up: "Yes; how are we to define the Church so as not to exclude the Quakers?" That, I think, admirably states our problem of this afternoon from one very important point of view. No Christian reunion can be complete which does not include the Quakers; from which again it follows that we must not insist upon more than the minimum of agreement—the uniqueness of Christ, of his message, and of our obedience.

It is a common habit to sneer at undenominational religion; and too often, in individual cases, the sneer is more or less justified. Yet it is not often sufficiently recognized that one of those men whom we count among the most definite champions of one denomination, and the noblest martyrs for that religious denomination, did also look forward, ideally, to undenominationalism. Sir Thomas More represents the Utopians as having come more nearly to the solution of the religious difficulty than any nation of his own day. In *Utopia*, he writes, "all the kinds and fashions of [religion], though they be sundry and manifold, agree together in the honour of the divine nature, as going divers ways to one end; therefore nothing is seen nor heard in their churches, but that [which] seemeth to agree indifferently with them all. If there be a distinct kind of sacrifice peculiar to any several sect, that they execute at home in their own houses. The common sacrifices be so ordered, that they be no derogation nor prejudice to any of the private sacrifices and religions. Therefore no image of any god is seen in the church, to the intent it may be free for every man to conceive God by their religion after what likeness and similitude they will."

How can we explain, then, that the man who wrote those words was ready, later on, to go to the scaffold in defence of Papal Supremacy, with its strict ideal of religious exclusiveness? It is not enough to answer that *Utopia* is the work of an irresponsible young man, flinging paradoxes about for his own and for the public amusement. There is a method in all the madness of *Utopia*; and these words represent, if not the conviction, at least the hope, that the world might some day trend in this direction, as in the direction of Plato's communism. Nor, again, can we entirely explain the contrast between this earlier and this later Sir Thomas More by his opportunism as expressed in those final words of the whole book: "So must I needs confess and grant that many things be in the Utopian weal public, which in our cities I may rather wish for, than hope after." We must recognize as the real cause, the root cause, the fact that More, in spite of all his natural

freedom of thought, was strictly fettered when the crisis came for translating thought into action. He was inextricably involved in perhaps the strictest system that is recorded in all world-history. It needed the Reformation to break those bonds; and, now that the world has tested the fruits of the Reformation for 400 years—now that some, at least, of the Reformers' contentions are practically admitted even by the Roman Church, no complete reunion is possible until that Church has abandoned her most exclusive medieval claims. It is possible that, without giving way, she may gain in numbers; she may conceivably swallow up so many among the present outsiders as to become incomparably more numerous and powerful than all other Christian denominations put together. That, I think, will be the result, and will justly be the result, if we non-Romanists all assert our private judgment as uncompromisingly as Rome asserts her institutionalism. But, in that case, the minority, though dwindling in numbers, will grow in intensity of opposition and in real importance. For, as education grows, it will be increasingly possible for a minority of students (it is only a minority, after all, who can find time for these things) to realize that the Reformation, which was a many-sided movement, was on one side a revolt of scholarship against conservative ignorance. Gwatkin has put that very well in his comment on Henry VIII's appeal to the Universities of Europe on the Divorce question. Eight of the greatest Universities in Europe declared for Henry's divorce; and, do what we will to discount their verdict by suggestions of undue influence and of bribery, we cannot believe all these men to have been so venal that the appeal to their learning must be rejected as a mere farce.

For, long before this, learning had begun to sap the papal position very seriously. Marsilius of Padua, two whole centuries before this Divorce question, had shown extraordinary command of facts, and extraordinary penetration, in his analysis of the steps by which the Papacy had arrived at its world-power. If More, or even Fisher, had studied Marsilius in his youth, and had heard the book discussed by people who were free to speak their mind, it is difficult to believe that either of them would have felt it his duty to die for Papal Supremacy; the Forged Decretals, again, which even Marsilius had been compelled to accept as genuine, were finally exposed by at least two scholars at the end of the fifteenth century. The Reformation fixed and sealed these and similar historical discoveries; and it is impossible to imagine that the clock will ever go back again here. There can never be Reunion except on a foundation of free and sane scholarship. By this I do not mean that the intellectualists are to be in command; on the contrary, even in other departments of human activity, character counts for more than intellect in the long run, and more especially so in religion. But religion cannot make intellect into a definite enemy, or try to build without it; a Reunion entirely void of learning could never be true and solid. We must build upon the Early Church, or rather upon the foundation stone of

that Church, Jesus Christ. But we must not be afraid of hard work in getting down to that foundation. No true and abiding Church will ever give us ninepence for fourpence; one of the strongest points in the strongest modern apologist for the Roman Church (Anatole von Hügel) is his insistence on that word *cost*; our creed must cost us something. No soul, therefore, and no society of souls can come into the great Reunion of the future (if such Reunion is ever to take a bodily form) unless this soul or this society is willing to clear away all encumbrances, down to the actual foundation—down to the real Christ, the real Early Church. Here again, then, may we not find one Reformation principle which, by this time, has plainly come to stay? The Romanist says: "I have no need to explore; I know I am on the bed-rock already; if I doubt this for one moment, from that moment I have ceased (if only for a time) to be an orthodox Catholic." The individual Reformers themselves may sometimes have been as dogmatic as this, though I do not think it has ever been proved against any of our great men. But the Reformation, as a movement, made it impossible for such dogmatisms to survive in the mass, even if they survived in the individual. The Reformation took its stand on the Bible, the most difficult book in the world to interpret with unanimity in all its details. At the same time, the Reformers swept away, if only temporarily, the idea of one recognized authority which should secure uniformity by imposing its own interpretation of the Bible upon the multitude. That was a deed which could never be entirely recalled. Short of continuing to accept the Pope as universal arbiter, the question of authority was now in the melting-pot; even those who hated the idea of individual interpretation could no more agree as to where they should find the interpreting authority, than the individual interpreters could agree about the meaning of the sacred text. That is the strength of Romanism; its consistency, or at least its outward show of consistency, though it were only consistency in error. That, again, must always be the weakness of anti-Romanism, that by its very essence it proclaims inconsistency, that it cannot profess as yet to be actually consistent, but only to be struggling towards consistency. To be sure, here is a disadvantage which St. Paul, for his part, is content to shoulder very frankly (Phil. iii. 12): "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." If, therefore, von Hügel asks us what is the cost at which we are trying to buy the pearl of price, I should say, at the cost of perpetual vigilance, lest we think we stand where in fact we are on the point of falling. Vigilance not necessarily unquiet; for, if we are true to that Pauline word, we realize that we are not only striving ourselves to apprehend but, in that very act, we are ourselves being apprehended of Christ Jesus. But vigilance perpetual, and therefore, if not exactly restless, yet not exactly restful: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Some men

feel that this is a hard saying ; at that price, they will walk no more with us ; and there, again, is part of the cost at which Protestantism buys such religion as it can attain to.

But, short of accepting Reunion at Rome's own price ; short of agreeing with Newman's answer to those who sought some modification of the terms—"Beggars," he said, "cannot be choosers"—short of that, seek we must, and try to get down to the very foundations of Jesus and the Church.

What, then, do we find ? The disciples of John Baptist came to him with a question, simplest and most momentous of all that can be imagined : "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another ?" Did our Lord answer them as He should have done if He wished to give authority to the strict idea of a Teaching Church ? Did He not simply throw them upon their own Private Judgment, though a single word *Yēs*, from Him, would have settled their doubts at once ? Did He not thus clearly imply that Christianity is not so much to impose things upon us as to elicit things from us ; that, in religion even more than in other kinds of education, Ruskin's words are true ; you educate a man less by teaching him things which he did not know, than by making him that which he was not.

Pass on a few centuries, and look at that controversy in the Early Church about heretical baptism. St. Cyprian, and many conspicuous bishops of his time, were firmly convinced that heretical baptism was null ; a person thus baptized had not even crossed the threshold of the Kingdom of Heaven ; dying thus, he could scarcely fail to be damned. The Pope disagreed with them, but they repudiated the Pope's verdict with contempt.

Only 150 years later was the question decided, not by the solemn pronouncement of any recognized supreme authority, but by the arguments of a local bishop, St. Augustine of Hippo, who fixed public opinion by much the same means as those by which Darwin convinced the world of the mutability of species ; that is, by appeals to reason and common sense. Yet, for five generations before this general consensus, Christendom had been fluctuating in utter doubt upon one of the most important questions which it is possible to conceive ; moreover, one of the simplest questions and least metaphysical, an issue which the merest child can understand. Is this historical fact reconcilable with any theory of an absolute certainty imposed from above by a teaching authority universally recognized by the faithful, and drawing its doctrines, on every important point, in a direct unpolluted channel from God's own word once spoken to the Apostles, with the Holy Spirit to guide unerringly whensoever advance and expansion became necessary ?

Still more important, perhaps, when we seek to get down to the bare rock for our foundation of future unity, is the story of the Bible. Very few students, even among professed medievalists, seem to realize how Bibliolatry, like many other things which we label now under the general heading of Puritanism, was a creation not of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but of the Middle

Ages. Medieval writers who allow exceptions to the verbal inspiration of the Bible are highly exceptional. St. Thomas Aquinas may be taken here, as in most cases, as typical of the classical medieval conclusions. He insists that the Bible is infallible even in its smallest historical statements. He supplies a concrete illustration: if any man should deny that Samuel was son of Elkanah, that man would contradict the Holy Ghost, and be in heresy. William of Oakham, who was in many ways so independent, and who certainly was not sorry to find excuses for differing from Aquinas, is if possible even more emphatic; he returns frequently to the subject and gives many concrete examples: it is heresy to deny that Solomon was the son of Bathsheba, because this fact is explicitly stated in St. Matthew's genealogy. Here, then, was a collection of books absolutely unique in their inerrancy, divided by an impassable gulf from all other books. Yet for fifteen centuries there was no authoritative decision as to fourteen of these books; were they on the inerrant side of the gulf or not? And, when a decision was finally risked by the party which represented roughly one half of Christendom, that decision flatly contradicted the views of the large majority of the past Fathers of the Church. Does not Church history teach us, as plainly as the Gospels, "The kingdom of God is within you"?

We must not for one moment suggest that no able and honest person, in the face of these and similar historical facts, can believe in the strict theory of an infallible teaching authority in the Church, or can honestly find that infallible authority in the Pope. Such a suggestion would conflict with patent facts around us. But we may say, perhaps, that such a reconciliation of the Ultramontane claims with historical fact is so difficult as to make it incredible that all scholars, or even an overwhelming majority of scholars, will ever support those claims. And so long as any considerable proportion of those who devote themselves to this subject feel bound to reject the Ultramontane claims, those claims will continue to present an insuperable bar to Reunion. If it is incredible that Romanists should ever treat on equal terms with non-Romanists, and that Rome should ever be content with asserting herself to be *prima inter pares*, then Reunion is incredible. Indeed, I have lately heard a learned and candid Romanist declare publicly that he sees, humanly speaking, no prospect of Reunion.

Yet is there not one way, far less likely to occur to an orthodox Ultramontane (and, as things stand at present, there is no orthodoxy in Romanism without Ultramontanism), but easier for us Protestants to contemplate? It will be a long way, yet is it not a possible path? When Newman went over to Rome, Pusey reeled at first under the shock; but then reflection seemed to show him the smiling face behind this frowning Providence.¹ He wrote to Newman himself: "Your case is that of a peculiar providence. I suppose that God has taken you from us for some special office which he reserves for you." And again, in a letter to a friend

¹ H. Brémond, *L'Inquiétude religieuse* (Perrin, 1901), pp. 87-9.

which was published in the papers : " That such a man as this, thus shaped in our Church and accustomed to find in that Church the presence of the Holy Spirit, should pass over to Rome, is perhaps the greatest event which has happened since the separation [of the two Churches]. If anything can open Romanist eyes to what good there is among us, or can soften the prejudices which we nurse against them, it will certainly be the presence among them of such a man, child of our Church, grown up within her and risen to so high a position among us." There, says Abbé Brémond, Pusey showed his invincible optimism. Well, there is something after all in invincible optimism ; and one of the worst of practical mistakes—perhaps even of spiritual mistakes—is to shake one's head beforehand at the suggestion of happy possibilities.

The problem of our Reunion on the other side, with the other Protestant Churches, seems far more simple. When we are asked : " How will you include the Quaker," may we not answer, " Woe is me if I include not the Quaker," the person about whom Bishop Gore has noted that, while each of us thinks his own Church the best, a general referendum of all Churches would probably put the Quaker next highest in general respect. What is there in a Quaker Meeting to shock the sincere religion of the most convinced sacerdotalist ? And, on the other side, one of the most distinguished of modern Quakers, the author of *John Inglesant*, argued publicly that no Quaker need be repelled by anything in the Anglican Communion service. Who will dare to affirm that Christ is on the side of those who would say, " Master, we found one kneeling by our side at thine own Breaking of Bread, and we forbade him, because he followeth not after us " ? Take the question of Transubstantiation, that which would generally be specified as the deepest line of cleavage. We ourselves kneel, in foreign churches, side by side with men who make Transubstantiation a cardinal point of their faith ; men whose spiritual forefathers consigned to hell all disbelievers in Transubstantiation ; men who themselves, if they allow us a chance of heaven, can only do so by explaining away some of the most solemn official utterances in their Church. Are we harmed by kneeling with them, or they by our presence among them ? If any orthodox Romanist says to himself, " My neighbour here in church is conforming with us in most details, in order not to shock us, but there are other details whereby I recognize him as one of the thousand Protestants who visit our churches in the tourist season, and therefore my devotion is hindered by his presence," would not that man write himself down as one of little faith, rather fearing to be infected himself with heresy than hoping to kindle the heretic with something of his own religion ?

And, in a less degree, must we not plead similarly with the extreme Anglo-Catholic ? When these men say : " It is all very well, but you ask us, as preliminaries to peace, to begin by giving up some among the most essential points of our creed," may we not answer, " Has any man the right, before God, to build exclusive-

ness into his creed as one of its corner-stones? Has any man the right to say, 'If you remove exclusiveness, my whole religion will fall?' Not long ago, the watchword for unity within our own Church was *Trust the Bishops!* To get true Reunion we must go a long way deeper than that; we must say hourly to ourselves, *Trust God, who willeth that all men should be saved.*

THE LURE OF SIMPLICITY. By the Rev. Prebendary A. W. Gough. *Eveleigh Nash & Grayson.* 3s. 6d. net.

Prebendary Gough is known as a strong and vigorous advocate of any cause which he takes up. In the present book he treats with his usual vigour and courage some of the movements of a reactionary character which he regards as fatal to the future life of this country. The common cause which he finds in them all is a desire for simplicity, but he distinguishes between the false and the true simplification. Socialism is an attempted simplification, but it is at once the most untrue and the most influential that has ever been propagated "for increasing the miseries of mankind." In the Christian Socialist Movement he finds again an untrue effort at simplicity. In some of the missionary movements of to-day he sees a mistaken simplicity and in Mr. Bernard Shaw he finds an outstanding example of misguided enthusiasm. Prebendary Gough has no hesitation in expressing views which run counter to much current popular sentiment, and it is well, as a corrective of excess, to have a statement so clear and forcible of views, such as he presents.

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