

Some Theological Issues in the Church of South India

BY THE REV. F. J. TAYLOR, M.A.

IT is rapidly becoming a commonplace of theological observation in the contemporary debate that mission and unity are inseparable aspects of the life of the church. The most cursory survey of church history since the end of the eighteenth century emphasizes the missionary outreach of the older churches of western Europe and America, as the most significant fact of the period. This expansion of Christianity in the nineteenth century, so greatly assisted by the cultural and material dominance of the west, has given rise to consequences of profound importance as well for ecclesiastical order as for theology. The distinction between church and mission now stands revealed as false and misleading; the phrase "foreign missions" has disappeared from the vocabulary of educated modern Christians. "It is no accident that the modern movement for Christian reunion is a by-product of the modern missionary movement and that its chief impetus has come from the areas where the church has been formed by missionary expansion outside the frontiers of the old Christendom."¹ Bishop Newbigin points out that in a missionary situation as in South India, the stark contrast between Christ and no-Christ is so vividly present to the Christian consciousness, that the things which divide Christians from one another cannot but be seen in a different perspective.

The de-christianization of Europe which has proceeded apace in the last four or five decades, has thrust this issue before the older churches of the west. Hesitantly, slowly, but with an increasing awareness of the plight of western man—a man by his own confession "without a clue"—they have struggled to become again missionary churches. "When Christians are engaged in the task of missionary obedience, they are in the situation in which the church is truly the church. They are actual participators in Christ's apostolate. They participate in his redeeming love for the world, the love which seeks to draw all men to him . . . in that situation the disunity which is easily taken for granted among churches which are not in a missionary situation becomes literally intolerable. It is felt to contradict the whole nature of the apostolic mission at its heart. It is out of that situation of unbearable self-contradiction that the demand for reunion in the mission field has come."² It is the whole world which is to be summoned into obedience to Christ and the church cannot issue this summons save from the agony of its own struggle to be obedient to its Lord, the head whose body it is to be in the world. That obedience requires, as the biblical testimony to Christ declares unequivocally, the manifestation of a visible, historic unity. "There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism." "That they may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the

¹ *The Household of God*, J. E. L. Newbigin (1953), p. 151.

² Newbigin, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

world may believe that thou hast sent me."¹ Christian faith in the incarnate Lord carries as an inescapable corollary the acceptance of that divine order in which spirit must find expression through bodily forms, that is in visible, physical and historical realities.

A concern for Christian unity as an obligation of the gospel has been for more than a generation quick and urgent in those areas where the church has been most conscious of its missionary calling, as in Nigeria, Iran, China, Japan, Ceylon, North India and South India, as also in such countries as Canada and Australia where vast distances and lack of resources make it impossible for the several denominations to provide the customary ministrations for their members in every place. Schemes of reunion have been canvassed in most of these countries and in some areas partially implemented. In South India, once Christians became convinced that visible unity was the divine will, their discussions were sharpened by the realization that the participating churches looked towards a great act of obedience which should be the end of their talking. For a generation, from the morrow of one world war to the morrow of Indian independence which followed upon the close of another and greater world war, the thinking, the praying and the negotiating were continued. But the moment arrived when it was clear that everything had been said which could justly be said on the subject and the divided churches were faced with the necessity of giving an irrevocable decision—either to lose their separate identities and so to find themselves again in a greater fellowship or to abandon the proposals for union and to cease from all talk about the necessity of unity. By a great act of spiritual daring, undertaken in fear and trembling, the churches committed themselves to one another, and from that decisive act of committal they have found themselves engaged in the arduous task of learning to live together within one household. Nobody pretends that this is an easy thing to achieve, nor is there any desire to deny the inevitable tension and difficulties experienced by the united church, or that mistakes have been made. Nevertheless seven years of this new unity has been a long enough time for certain things to become evident about the meaning and possibilities of unity in Christ. The existence of the church of South India is in itself a fact of immense significance which puts a question mark over against many of the presuppositions of western thinking about unity and against many features of western church life. It is our catholicity and apostolicity which are called in question by its existence, so that South India has inevitably become a battleground of contemporary ecumenical thinking. The issues which arise in any serious inter-confessional consideration of the church and its worship, of the ministry and intercommunion are brought to focus in the debate about the church of South India and its relations with other churches.

I

It may be useful to recall the language used in the original Tranquebar manifesto of May 1919.² The signatories made three im-

¹ Eph. iv. 3, 4; St. John xvii. 20-21.

² The text is printed in *Documents on Christian Unity* (First Series, 1920-24), ed. G. K. A. Bell (1924), pp. 278-281; cf. also *Church of South India, 1900-1947*, B. Sundkler (1954), pp. 101-103.

portant affirmations before proceeding to an outline sketch of the essential lines of an authentic union in Christ. First, they confessed, " we believe that union is the will of God, even as our Lord prayed that we might all be one, that the world might believe. We believe that union is the teaching of scripture. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all ". The discussions about unity in South India from 1919 to 1947 were dominated by the conviction that the will of God for his church in every place was and is that it should manifest a visible and effective unity. No doubt the actualities of history, by the light they cast on the significance of the biblical testimony, helped Christians of different traditions to become aware of this divine imperative to unity. But that is what might be expected since the Christian faith teaches that God meets man in the hard facts of history. The accusation of expediency has frequently been cast in the teeth of the promoters of South Indian unity, though it is an accusation scarcely warranted by the facts. The movement was born of the theological conviction that unity was the will of God and reunion the way by which that will was to be obeyed. The mass of evidence assembled by Professor Sundkler in his book shows how it was only the conviction that Christian obedience required a way to be found to the expression of that unity in India, which sustained the participators in discussion and negotiation through a generation of hard labour and enabled them again and again to surmount apparently impassible barriers to unity.

Secondly, the Tranquebar statement was drafted in a mood of penitence for the illogical and sinful state of affairs in which Christians everywhere found themselves divided one from another. We are called, declared the signatories, " to mourn our past divisions and to turn to our Lord Jesus Christ to seek in him the unity of the body expressed in one visible church . . . we find ourselves rendered weak and relatively impotent by our unhappy divisions, divisions for which we were not responsible and which have been as it were imposed upon us from without ; divisions which we did not create and which we do not desire to perpetuate ". The language bears traces of a pharisaism which was speedily abandoned in the subsequent discussions, but it also breathes a spirit of determination in turning away from the sin of disunity.

It is sometimes forgotten in the glow of satisfaction engendered by the declaration made by the churches at Amsterdam, " we intend to stay together," that the ecumenical movement had its roots in the need to express penitence for disunity. A sense of shame at the scandals of division for which all churches carried a share of the responsibility and from which no Christian generation could excuse itself, compelled as well acknowledgment of guilt, as action intended to testify the reality of penitence. Now that churches have found it easier to come together for certain purposes and to talk with one another in a way that was hardly possible at the beginning of this century, there is grave danger that penitence may decline into little more than a perfunctory admission of the sin of disunity, with the consequence that the impulse

to action will fade away. "Diplomatic declarations on the unity of the church which seem to be not much more than diplomatic tend to be demoralizing in the long run. People ask whether all the talking is perhaps merely a smoke screen behind which the old trenches are being dug deeper still." Penitence unaccompanied by resolute action to turn from the abhorred sin can be a form of spiritual indulgence which is positively harmful. Christians in South India have taken with the utmost seriousness the two convictions which most twentieth century Christians profess to share, that visible unity is the will of God for his church and that disunity is a scandal because it is a sin. They have perceived that repentance must lead to action and that Christians who face one another in a particular local situation must find a way to unity.

Thirdly, the Tranquebar statement was set firmly in the context of the mission of the church to the people of India. The connection between mission and unity which is a leading theme in the contemporary ecumenical debate, was forecast in the language employed by the men of 1919. "We face together the titanic task of the winning of India for Christ—one fifth of the human race. Yet, confronted by such an overwhelming responsibility, we find ourselves rendered weak and relatively impotent by our unhappy divisions." Divided churches in South India have sought to commit themselves to one another in the truth of Christ that they might commit themselves more explicitly to the Christian mission. The comment of a recent writer on the significance of the ecumenical movement might with justice be taken as an adequate summary of the purpose which animated the men of Tranquebar and their successors in South India. "More and more we are taking as our slogan not merely *ut omnes unum sint* but 'that they may be one that the world may believe that thou has sent me'. The recovery of the church is necessarily a recovery of the church's mission in history."¹ This is but to observe that the theological developments of the last decade have gone far to confirm the insight of the group which began its deliberations in India in 1919. Theological conviction, profound penitence and an awareness of the church's calling to mission in unity, these three notes were sounded from the beginning and have been constantly re-echoed in all the stages of the growth towards greater unity in South India.

II

The period during which negotiations, leading to the union of churches in South India were conducted, coincided with a generation of discord, violence and revolution in world affairs. Christian thinking could not remain unaffected by those signs of the disorder of man, so that the same period witnessed a significant theological revival. The optimism of 1919 was replaced by the pessimism of 1947 and many of the theological assumptions of the earlier period have been discarded as naïve by the biblical orthodoxy which is now fashionable. The scheme of union which was outlined in 1919 and received detailed expression in 1929, reflected the prevalent theological ideas of those years. The

¹ Sundkler, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-6.

² *Ecumenism and Catholicity*, William Nicholls (1952), p. 75.

Lambeth Appeal of 1920 with its moving declaration of the "vision which rises before us . . . of a church genuinely catholic, loyal to all truth and gathering into its fellowship all who profess and call themselves Christians, within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order bequeathed as a heritage of the past to the present, shall be possessed in common and made serviceable to the whole body of Christ",¹ was the product of a particular theological emphasis of that period. It played an important part, for a decade or more in the development of ecumenical thinking and relationships especially in English-speaking lands, but an appeal for unity would not now be published in those terms. Ecclesiastical leaders in any period can only work with the dominant theological concepts of the time and the negotiators of 1920 or even 1930 can hardly be blamed for their failure to give expression to the theological insights of 1954. "There is a time-lag between the rapidly developing theology and the more slowly changing ecclesiastical and administrative machinery of the church."²

The Tranquebar statement was drafted by men who had awakened to the fact that the Spirit of God had manifestly blessed and used each of the separated churches, so that their distinctive traditions could not be ignored. Like the Lambeth fathers they were prepared to believe that all the treasures of faith and order should be possessed in common. They desired to express these convictions in unmistakable language—language which has by no means lost its relevance to current issues. "We aim not at compromise for the sake of peace but at comprehension for the sake of truth . . . the terms of union should involve no Christian community in the necessity of disowning its own past and we find it no part of our duty to call in question the validity of each other's orders." Thus the idea of the addition of heritages became from the first the ruling concept. All three elements, congregational, presbyterian and episcopal, which had hitherto existed in separated traditions, were to be included in the church of the future. It is not difficult to dismiss this procedure on the ground that it made for an 'episcopresbygational' blend of doubtful scriptural warrant or catholic ancestry,³ but there was much in the theological writing of the years between the two world wars, to justify the method adopted. The work of Headlam, Streeter and Bartlet as well as that of Gore, Palmer and Turner, provided the material with which the negotiators had to work and afforded the weapons with which the controversialists armed themselves. Discussion and controversy centred on the intricacies of early church history and patristic theology. "The main contestants in this debate were not to be found in the assemblies of South India. They were sitting in their studies in Oxford and in Cheltenham . . . these men decided very deliberately that the real issues lay, not in Bangalore and Trichinopoly, but in Carthage and Antioch."⁴ Bishop Azariah who played so prominent a part in South India regarded Hort's *Christian Ecclesia* and Headlam's *Bampton Lectures* as his authorities. Others took Streeter's *Primitive Church*

¹ G. K. A. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

² Sundkler, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

³ Vide the *Report of the Derby Committee* (1946), p. 13.

⁴ Sundkler, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.

as the principal reference book, while yet others, under the influence of Heim and Barth, rejected the appeal to the fathers and by way of the sixteenth century sought to make holy scripture the sole and sufficient authority.

Theology does not stand still, nor is it likely that many of the questions raised in such a debate can receive a final and definite answer. To wait for such an answer by demanding a "further period of study, of theological thinking and of prayer as a first pre-requisite" because "the ways in which God may eventually guide his church in those matters cannot be foreseen"¹ is a plausible suggestion, but one of doubtful validity. Theology emerges from action which men must take, often in darkness and uncertainty. Action in unprecedented circumstances, can rarely wait upon an agreed or authoritative theological pronouncement. It was not for nothing that Bishop Azariah heavily underlined a sentence in his copy of Headlam's *Christian Unity*. "It is only those who have the courage of leadership who can accomplish anything that is worth accomplishing in the world."² The question now is, not whether the theology of the negotiators of 1919-1947 was seriously defective in certain respects by the standards of 1954 but whether the church of South India is now showing itself sensitive to the insights which the new generation of theologians are sharing with the church, or is content to stand by the theology of the earlier period.

III

The second synod of the church of South India, meeting in 1950 declared: "We are united in one church; our parent churches are divided . . . we can be content with nothing except that they should be united as we are. So long as they remain divided our position must remain anomalous from the point of view of any of the divided churches. But from the point of view of the historic faith of the church we must surely judge that the real anomaly, the real scandal is that the church should be divided."³ The church of England as one of the parent churches named in this paragraph finds itself under the inescapable obligation of making up its mind about the present status and actions of one of its children. Let no one suppose that it can be an easy decision. The child may have shown itself wayward or it may be thought to have contracted a union which merits the enthusiastic assent of the parent. But whichever way the verdict goes, the child remains a child of its parent, though now possessed of an independent and adult status. In 1950 the convocations of Canterbury and York recorded their deep interest and sympathy with the church of South India and expressed the hope and prayer that the day may come when full communion between the two churches becomes possible.⁴ It was also agreed that members of the church of England who visit the territory of the church of South India may accept the hospitality of that church for the receiving of the holy communion or the perform-

¹ L. S. Thornton in the *Report of the Derby Committee*, pp. 45-46.

² Sundkler, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

³ *The Church of South India: Report of the Joint Committees of the Convocations of Canterbury and York* (1950), pp. 37-8.

⁴ *Convocation Report*, p. 25.

ance of priestly functions.¹ The convocations found themselves unable to pronounce upon the status of bishops, presbyters and deacons "consecrated or ordained in the church of South India, at or after the inauguration of that church" and required as a matter of administrative action, that any bishop or presbyter of that church who should be invited to celebrate the holy communion in an Anglican church, should accept the invitation on the understanding that while in England he would only celebrate in churches under the jurisdiction of the bishops of the provinces of Canterbury and York.²

There are therefore two particular problems to which the convocations must address themselves in 1955. The first and most important issue is the theological question of the status of the bishops and presbyters consecrated or ordained at or after the date of union in South India. The second difficulty to be resolved is whether it may be possible to remove the restriction which obliges ministers of the church of South India when in England to celebrate the communion, if at all, only in Anglican churches. It will be convenient to examine some of the difficulties which will confront members of convocation in their endeavour to reach a definite decision on these matters.

The church of South India has from the beginning accepted the historic episcopate as a necessary element in the fullness of the life of the church and there has never been any disposition to recede from this decision. The agreement was written into the constitution and care was taken in September 1947 to see that the newly consecrated bishops were brought into the historic succession. The most careful scrutiny of the ordinal with which the church is provided has made it clear that the church intends to continue the historic ministry in its life. There is general agreement that the form and manner of ordination sufficiently declare this intention. All ordinations subsequent to September 1947 have been episcopal, so that there can be no doubt on the rule of the church.³ What has given rise to apprehension is that the church has stated explicitly in its *Basis of Union*⁴ that the acceptance of episcopacy is not to be taken as committing the united church to the acceptance of "any particular interpretation of episcopacy and no such particular interpretation shall be demanded from any minister or member of the united church". This appears to do no more than to put into words the actual position in which the Anglican finds himself in respect of episcopacy. The official formularies of the church of England together with its unbroken practice do not allow of any doubt about its view of episcopacy as a necessity in the church, but they do not require the loyal Anglican to adhere to any one theory about the origin of episcopacy or the doctrine of succession, nor is he required to believe that a church without episcopacy is necessarily no true part of the church catholic. Liberty of individual interpretation allowed to Anglicans may not reasonably be refused to members of the church of South India when the declared intention of that church is so unambiguous. Nevertheless the phrase "any particular interpretation of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 27.

³ *Constitution II*, 21, vide 1948 *Lambeth Conference Report*, p. 47.

⁴ *Constitution and Basis of Union*, p. 10.

episcopacy" has been urged as a reason for doubting whether the church of South India has a genuine historic episcopate. To accept episcopacy and yet to refuse all meaning to it, is to stultify the initial acceptance of it. Such an argument has a superficial appearance of cogency but it must be disallowed on the ground that the meaning of episcopacy only becomes apparent in its actual exercise and that any premature definition of it would be likely to have injurious effects on its proper exercise and development. The wisdom of the leaders in South India seems to have been confirmed by the evidence of the superior of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist who after a visit wrote in 1953 that "the bishops of C.S.I. really do show what episcopacy is".¹

A more formidable criticism is based upon the fact that the existing ministry of the church of South India is a dual ministry, part episcopal and part non-episcopal, though the church makes no distinction between its ministers and regards them all as members of its one ministry.² Moreover even after the thirty years' period during which it is expected that the ministry will become wholly episcopal, it is apparently contemplated that non-episcopal ministers may come into the church and perform ministerial functions either temporarily or permanently. Such administrative rules, it is alleged, conceal a novel and dangerous doctrine of ministry and treat two different ministries as though they were parallel and equal. The necessity of episcopal ordination appears to be limited by these exceptions and the procedure of the church raises doubts as to whether it is competent to confer holy orders at all. It is difficult to pronounce bishops in such a church to be true, catholic bishops if non-episcopal ministers are regarded as true ministers in every respect. This is a problem which, as Lambeth in 1948 and the convocations in 1950 discovered,³ cannot be resolved in merely logical terms. The church has professed its intention to be episcopal and has taken every possible step to implement that decision. It has also refused to question the ministry of those who were not episcopally ordained prior to 1947, or the status of non-episcopal ministers in other churches. Honesty has compelled the admission that non-episcopal ministries have evidently been used of God and still do show the fruits of the Spirit. No good can come of ignoring these facts. Moreover no reunion is either possible or desirable which requires men to repudiate their own spiritual past. There are precedents in church history and even in Anglican history which suggest that it is possible to contemplate for a considerable period of time, the existence of some ministerial anomalies if the intention of the church is unambiguously expressed and its actions serve this declared intention.⁴

A third difficulty arises from the relations of full communion and

¹ The whole passage is deeply interesting and worth careful study; vide the *News Sheet* of C.S.I. Council No. 13, March, 1954, p. 5.

² *Constitution II*, 13.

³ *Lambeth Conference, 1948 Report*, pp. 47-48; *Convocation (1950) Report*, pp. 12-18.

⁴ Reference may be made to the restoration of episcopacy in Scotland in 1661 and stages in the early history of Anglican missionary work in India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

fellowship which the church of South India possesses and desires to retain with non-episcopal parent churches. This decision is regarded as a basic feature of the union and there is no possibility of reversing it. "It is not conceivable that in any reasonably foreseeable circumstances the church of South India should break off relationships with those parent churches with which it now enjoys unrestricted fellowship."¹ This means that although the church of South India is episcopal, it enjoys and intends to continue the enjoyment of full fellowship with non-episcopal churches. For many Anglicans this fact presents a grave difficulty and suggests that South India, despite its official declarations, is not treating episcopacy with that seriousness which is necessary if it is to be taken as an authentic part of the church catholic. This practice of full intercommunion with non-episcopal churches has never been admitted by the church of England whatever action individual Anglicans have in conscience felt free to take, and it cannot fail to affect judgment upon the catholic status of a church which authorizes it. The sacrament of communion is the sacrament of corporate unity and can only be shared by those between whom such unity exists.

There is nothing to be gained by attempts to minimize this difficulty, for the church of England cannot properly make any agreement with another Christian communion which infringes in any way its own insistence on the necessity of episcopacy. To do that would be an act of disloyalty to its own history and traditions.² However the particular question at issue is whether such disregard of its care for episcopacy would be involved in the establishment of relations of intercommunion with the church of South India, that is with an episcopal church. The church of South India feels able, by reason of its particular history and circumstances, to maintain full fellowship with non-episcopal churches without compromising its own insistence on episcopacy. There is here an apparent want of theological consistency, but it is difficult to see how it can be avoided. Neither truth nor charity will ever allow the great non-episcopal churches to become fully episcopal if that transition involves either the repudiation of their own spiritual past or the rupture of existing relations. If the church of England entered into communion with the church of South India, it would not be committed to agree to intercommunion with the non-episcopal churches, a theological absurdity which is part of the price which disunity exacts. It may be noticed that Anglican history is not without its precedents for this course of action. The Lambeth conference of 1920 adopted certain resolutions designed to secure closer relations with the church of Sweden. These resolutions provided for the admission of communicants of the church of Sweden to Anglican altars and for the participation, as well of Swedish bishops in Anglican consecrations as of Anglican bishops in Swedish consecrations.³ They were based on the conclusions of a commission which had reported in 1911 that the episcopal succession had been preserved in Sweden and that the office

¹ Reply to questions raised by the Derby committee, *Convocation Report*, p. 36.

² *Conditions of Fellowship*, J. P. Hickinbotham (1948), pp. 3-9.

³ G. K. A. Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

of priest was rightly conceived.¹ Yet the church of Sweden maintains intercommunion with non-episcopal churches. It is true that those Lambeth resolutions have not been brought before the convocations, but after 1930 conversations were opened with the churches of Finland, Latvia and Esthonia. The reports of those conversations² contained recommendations similar in substance to the Lambeth resolutions on the church of Sweden. When the reports came before the convocations in 1935 and in 1939, resolutions were adopted which promised a relationship to lead "in due course to complete intercommunion based on a common episcopal ministry". Among other things these resolutions authorized the admission of members of those churches to communion in the church of England and expressed the opinion that if invited to do so, the Archbishop of Canterbury might commission an Anglican bishop to take part in the consecration of bishops for the Latvian, Esthonian or Finnish churches. It was known that these churches, being Lutheran in confession, did not lay the same emphasis on the historic episcopate as an indispensable condition for a valid ministry as the Church of England seems to do,³ and that they intended to maintain fellowship with non-episcopal Lutheran churches. The difficulty which has arisen from the intention of the church of South India to follow this practice does not seem to have found expression in these earlier discussions, nor were the churches of Latvia, Esthonia or Finland required to give any assurances on this point as a condition of intercommunion with the church of England. If in relations with South India the convocations stumble at intercommunion between the church of South India and non-episcopal churches, it will be a reversal of previous Anglican thought and practice. It will also slam the door in the face of any hope of enlargement of the area of fellowship which the church of England now enjoys.

This discussion may be fitly concluded with the reminder that in the words which it addressed to the Faith and Order conference at Lund in 1952, the church of South India, "confesses its own partial and tentative character by acknowledging that the final aim is the union in the universal church of all who acknowledge the name of Christ . . . it confesses itself to be on the road and it makes a claim to be on the right road but it does not pretend to have arrived".⁴ In such circumstances anomalies are bound to occur and possibly to persist for a long time, certainly for so long a time as it takes for the parent churches to come together in unity. The greatest anomaly, it must be repeated, is the organized disunity of Christians besides which most other anomalies pale into insignificance. Moreover the church of South India is living in the eschatological dimension, asking itself what is the will of God for his church and not, what can if necessary be surrendered, or what must be defended at all costs? "The church of South India has the idea of development written into its very constitution,"⁵

¹ *Christian Unity: The Anglican Position*, G. K. A. Bell (1948), pp. 51-52.

² *Documents on Christian Unity: Third Series, 1930-1948*, ed. G. K. A. Bell (1948), pp. 146-158.

³ *Christian Unity*, G. K. A. Bell, p. 51; *Documents (First Series)*, pp. 186-190; *Documents (Third Series)*, pp. 149-150, 152.

⁴ *The Nature of the Church*, ed. R. N. Flew (1952), p. 221.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*

so that it is not only concerned with what the Holy Spirit has willed to do in the past, but also with what he wills to do now and in the future. Already, obedience to the will of God has brought its first fruits into the life of the church, for in the midst of tension "many problems of the conference hall that seemed almost insoluble when we faced each other from outside, with an obligation to defend the separate denominational emphasis, have taken on a very different appearance when we find ourselves handling them as practical issues within the fellowship of one church".¹

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Fragmentary Truths

Some New Books on Modern Movements

BY THE REV. J. STAFFORD WRIGHT, M.A.

FROM early days the Christian Church has had to declare its attitude towards deviationists. St. Paul, St. John, and St. Peter, all speak in the strongest terms of those who held their own erroneous versions of the Christian message. While they were ready to be tolerant over quite a wide area, they believed that there were certain boundaries which could not be crossed without ceasing to be members of the true Church. The problem of heresy and schism continued through the centuries, and the creeds and formularies are very largely to be read in the light of answers to erroneous expressions of the Christian Faith. Gradually it was agreed that this or that was the crystallization of the articles of the Faith, and a fair summary of the Biblical revelation. Those who held different opinions must go on their own way; they were not members of the Church of Jesus Christ. Obviously this principle could be, and was, overdone. Less important things became recognized as *de fide*, and indeed a whole host of unscriptural dogmas were elevated to credal status. Hence our Reformers went back to the Three Creeds as basic. They "ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture" (Article VIII).

The assumption that underlies the New Testament and Christian thought of later ages is that the substance of the Christian Faith has come by revelation from God, and may be found in the pages of the Bible. Deviationists have taken two lines. Some have agreed with the premise, but have argued that orthodox Christians have been mistaken in the propositions that they have derived from the Bible. They may even add a further "inspired" book of their own, by which the Bible is to be interpreted. Others have started with the basis of experience, and have allowed just so much authority to the Bible, or to sections of the Bible, as will illustrate and support their experience.

Examples of these different attitudes will be found in Dr. Horton Davies's book, *Christian Deviations*, where he discusses some of the