

*“THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE.”*

THE present writer has been a reader of the EXPOSITOR for thirty years, and an occasional contributor to its pages for twenty. In the former capacity he trusts it may not be impertinent in him to express the gratitude he feels that religious controversy has been so carefully and tactfully banished from its covers. Possibly some reader glancing at the heading of the present article might fear the introduction of this unhappy feature. It will not be so, although, the pity of it, the moment the word Church or The Church be named, the figure of the spirit of controversy, ugly, ominous, is not very far off, the foe to truth and peace, the ally to passion and prejudice. But if one more tribute may be paid to this periodical it will be that controversy by the nature of the case finds itself shut out. Its one object is the exposition of the Holy Scriptures. Given intelligence, sincerity, and devoutness, given that writers and readers can declare with Huxley, “I hold no opinion which I will not exchange for the Truth,” then controversy has already received its congé. Something still more hopeful remains. Christian people talk about “unhappy divisions,” they make blind and painful efforts after reunion, but reunion remains on the far distant horizon. Bishop Westcott once declared that such reunion need not be a matter of despair if only the teaching of the four Gospels was at once fully known and laid to heart. But there is no need to narrow such teaching to the Evangelic record. Wherever a body of Christian people is found with a passionate and devout love of Holy Scriptures, whenever lives are spent in their study, whenever the linguistic, the critical and historical faculties are dedicated to the service of the Master,—in other words, when sacred study and its fruits are crowned by the work of the

Holy Spirit of God, then in such a body or bodies will be found a harmony half conscious, but ringing true, like the music of the spheres.

Controversy is on occasion a necessary evil. When such a melancholy crisis arises, then the only fit controversialist is the man who hates the controversial spirit. Such a man was our own Richard Hooker. Students of the Fifth Book of the Laws of *Ecclesiastical Polity* will remember how he proposes to deal with the question of the Eucharist, an issue upon which controversy was at least as acute in his day as in the present. He entreats with a pathetic insistence that his readers shall drop all contention as to how Christ may be there present, and to rest in the happiness of grace therein received. “Take,” says he, “that upon which different bodies in the Church are agreed,” ignore the issue on which they differ.

“Let no other cogitation fill the heart of the communicant but this : O my God, Thou art true ; O my soul, thou art happy.” It was a wish right nobly expressed, but, alas, three hundred years are passed and it awaits fulfilment.

Richard Hooker’s language may not unfittingly be applied to the present subject. Let us see then certain great facts about the title “Church” wherein there is a general agreement among all Christian people. There is the Church visible, militant here on earth ; there is the Church invisible, at rest. If the Church visible is, as again will be accepted by Christians, “The blessed company of all faithful people,” it follows that it is universal, and all-embracing. As St. Paul would assure us in and through Him Who is the Head of the Church there is within it no limitation or separation possible of nationality, of caste, of sex.<sup>1</sup>

The primary meaning of the Church according to the New Testament is the great comprehensive company of believers,

<sup>1</sup> Col i. 24.

the Spirit-bearing body,<sup>1</sup> knowing no limit either of time or space, remaining one in one Lord, possessing one Faith, sharing in one sacrament of initiation, or membership, not indeed losing this characteristic and inherent unity because she is seen now and again down the ages to be convulsed with divisions, the schisms which rend her asunder and the heresies which distress her being actual tokens of efforts on the part of the faithful ever being made to preserve and realize her unity.<sup>2</sup>

This great and comprehensive meaning of the term Church primary in the New Testament is one which it is of the first importance to hold in these days. To throw doubt upon the inherent oneness of the Church is to imperil her true headship by Christ. To throw doubt upon her universal character is to go back to the position of those Judaizers whom the great Apostle of the Gentiles so strictly rebuked. It is indeed difficult to realize these august conceptions because the dust of controversies blurs their outlines; but just as political feuds and parties do not crush out our single national life and Spirit, so neither do our unhappy divisions destroy or obliterate these marks of the Church. The grand conception of her oneness and catholicity survives the attempts to divide the former and to limit the latter. According to the New Testament generally, and to Pauline teaching in particular, the first—the inalienable meaning of the Church is that one and universal body wherein believers recognize and find their communion with their Lord its Head.

There is no contradiction to this primary conception in the fact that there are Churches within the one Church.<sup>3</sup> Seven of St. Paul's Epistles are addressed to local Churches, most of which he had himself founded.

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 19.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 17.



wish may have prompted the Apostle to employ the plural number<sup>1</sup> when referring to the Church of a district or country, although the singular is at times explicitly used. It is enough to say that the New Testament adds to the great primary meaning of the Church another meaning, only narrower because it is applied locally, whether to the Churches of a vast area like Asia Minor or Galatia, to the Churches of great cities like Rome and Corinth or to the Church of a little town like Cenchrea. There remains a third application in the New Testament of the term Church which forms the subject of the present inquiry, viz., the Church in the House. Just as the family is the real unit of Society so the Church in the House is the unit of the Church universal. The narrative of the Acts of the Apostles indicates that Christians first met for common worship in a dwelling-house. The choice of such a centre would be, from the nature of the case in the Apostolic age, limited. The house must be of sufficient size to contain a room large enough to accommodate the Christian community. Such a house would be that of Mary, the mother of John Mark; the room large enough to hold a considerable number of worshippers would, in Jerusalem, be the upper room.<sup>2</sup> Mary was probably a woman of substance who devoted such a room for the local Christian ecclesia. The situation is not without modern parallels, when women exhibiting the rare conjunction of social distinction with spiritual instincts open their salons for philanthropic or religious gatherings. What Mary did at Jerusalem was doubtless done by Prisca<sup>3</sup> at Rome and elsewhere; while her name, coming as it does before that of her husband Aquila, at least indicates that she was the leader in this Christian enterprise. But both may be assumed from the narrative of the Acts as

<sup>1</sup> Gal. i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xii. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Acts xviii. 2, 26; Rom. xvi. 3, 5; 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

heads of a business firm to have been able to receive in their house the Christian community. A like religious hospitality must have been extended to Laodicea by the otherwise unknown lady, Nympha.<sup>1</sup>

To such a list of women—good, if not great—may be added that of Apphia,<sup>2</sup> specially described as "the sister," and with less certainty the forbears on the female side of Timothy, Lois and Eunice. The Church in their houses would include their family and dependents, while Christian neighbours would also find there a central point for common worship. One may conclude therefore that in great cities such as Ephesus, or Rome, or Corinth there would be several meeting-houses of the kind, and that the credit of arrangement and organization was largely due to women marked off not only by their goodness but by social status. Nor does it seem true to history to regard the Church in the house as a merely temporary expedient. Consecrated buildings do not appear to have come into existence within the area of the Roman Empire before the third century. Meanwhile for some hundred years at least, owing to suspicion on the part of the imperial authorities breaking out from time to time into actual persecutions, the common worship of Christians was confined to the "Church in the House."

At this point recent archaeological investigations both here and in America offer an interesting contribution to the question. It seems unlikely that the upper room which was a peculiarity of Syrian architecture had any relation to the house out of whose form sprang the outline of the earliest Church building.

Professor Lowrie, of Princetown, N.J.,<sup>3</sup> has demonstrated that the form of the basilica was not derived from the

<sup>1</sup> Col. iv. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Philemon 2. The best attested reading.

<sup>3</sup> In *Christian Art and Architectures*.

school building, still less from heathen temples, but that its general place was determined by the early custom of worship in the private house. The general characteristics of the basilica exhibit "an oblong rectangular ground plan divided longitudinally into aisles by pillars supporting a wooden roof. Sometimes, though not invariably, there would be a transept, and the basilica would terminate eastward by a circular presbytery or sanctuary surmounted by an apse." All these main features, the Professor holds, are derived from the chief ground chamber, or hall of a large Roman house or villa. Again, the transition from the Church of the house to a consecrated building would be all the simpler from the custom, as may be almost certainly concluded, of the gradual reservation of the large room in the former wholly to sacred purposes; just as in many private houses in England there is felt to be a gain in reverence when a room is specially dedicated for family prayers.

Of the nature of the common worship in the Church in the house it is not the purpose of the present writer to speak. It is enough to say that the celebrating of the Lord's Supper at least on the Sunday must have been its most significant feature.<sup>1</sup> Psalmody,<sup>2</sup> Hymnody,<sup>3</sup> the recitation in its simplest form of a Christian creed (for few students deny its presence in germ in the New Testament), lections from the Old Testament, the recitation of Apostolic letters and commissions,<sup>4</sup> collections for the poor,<sup>5</sup> would be the common features of worship. Extempore addresses, and prayers duly regulated by authority<sup>6</sup> would be given and made. A devout simplicity must have characterized the gathering, and such an unity as only can be experienced when all the worshippers are known to one another. As

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 26.      <sup>2</sup> Eph. v. 19.      <sup>3</sup> Cp. Acts xvi. 25; Col. iii. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Col. iv. 16.      <sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 2.      <sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

the little congregation dispersed, often not without fear of insult or attack, it must have experienced more than we can experience in these softer days, the fulfilment of the Lord's promise: “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.”

The “Church in the house” in the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic age has certainly some lessons for the present. Not only in our Colonies, but in many country districts in our own land, there are places where access to Churches is difficult for the very young, the aged, the infirm. There it would often be a worthy Christian enterprise if well-to-do laymen in the exercise of their just privileges, and without encroachment upon ministerial authority, provided and furnished some oratory, and, as far as it might be, conducted its services. By so doing in many places the lamp of the Faith would burn clearly, if not splendidly, where now it is going out.

Lastly we are told, with a melancholy insistence, recalling the famous utterance of Bishop Butler, of the decay of religion and of prevalent indifference to things spiritual. May this not largely be due to the fact that Religion and the Home are to-day so often strangers? The very title “Church in the house” shows that at the beginning of the Christian era the two were regarded as inseparable. As it is now the fires of the domestic altar are rarely kept burning, and the family life receives no consecration. Not until Christians can make Joshua's bold assertion, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord,” can they expect the choicest blessings of home life, or set a serviceable example to the world around.

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OLD TESTAMENT NOTES.

*Revue Biblique*, July, 1905. Van Hoonacker, commenting upon the text of; Jonah ii. 6, suggests for הריים the somewhat novel reading הריים, in which he would recognize the Greek ἄδης; he translates accordingly: "I have descended the precipices of Hades." J. Dissard, in the same number, gives an interesting account of the movements of the tribe 'Amr or Banu 'Aqabah in the last century from the neighbourhood of Mecca to South Palestine, and thence to the occupation of the land of Moab. The vivid description of tribal conflicts and clan jealousies, the motives and plan of migrations, and the characteristics of Bedouin life, present a picture which is not without some value for the Old Testament student. The writer remarks that the Arab nomad is neither a mere highwayman nor is he the simple man adorned with all the virtues with which some writers have depicted him. It is difficult for him to adapt himself to the ideas of other peoples, and almost impossible for him to endure foreign domination. Work is not honourable; and if the district where he settles will not suffice for his needs, he seeks other pasturage, to give battle to the weak or to make alliance with the strong. M. Dissard observes further that in the history of this migration religion or religious acts scarcely find a place; the Bedouin of to-day (as he remarks), like his ancestors of the time of Gideon, have no religion. This interesting record is a useful corrective to the not uncommon view that the idealized pictures which Israelite tradition drew of the patriarchal age are literally true representations of Hebrew nomad life. Cp. the valuable remarks of Robertson Smith, in the *English Historical Review*, 1888, p. 129.

A discussion of the oft-debated phrase "a land flowing

with milk and honey," by Dalman and Bauer in the *Mitteil. und Nachrichten d. deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 1905, pp. 27 sqq., 65 sqq., has produced much interesting information on the fertility of Palestine both in the past and present; and whilst the former scholar approves of the explanation of a native that the words are a comprehensive phrase for the production of "all things that are sweet and tasteful," the latter argues strenuously for a literal interpretation. It is at least certain, Professor Dalman observes, that the phrase could never have been used from the point of view of (Israelite) immigrants from the desert; the usage points to its having been a customary Palestinian saying. Professor Guthe, in the same journal (p. 49 sqq.) has an interesting investigation of the sacrificial-place at Petra; he discovers the table at which the participants ate the sacrificial meal, and notes that the cult at Petra is reminiscent of Canaanite or Israelite high-places rather than of Arabian ritual.

*Zeitschrift f. d. alttest. Wissenschaft*, 1905: I. A. Büchler discusses exhaustively the account of the celebration of the Passover, especially in regard to the burnt-offering, in the days of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Chron. xxx. 15, xxxv. 12, 14-16) in the light of the rival views of the schools of Hillel and Shammai, the evidence of the Book of Jubilees and Old Testament post-exilic references. Büchler's study, with its proof of traces of later redaction, should be a stimulus to deeper criticism of the work of the so-called "Chronicler" in Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, which, as the Levitical genealogies alone show, cannot be from one hand.

Heft II. Hans Schmidt gives an account of past literary-critical work upon the book of Jonah, with particular attention to Böhme's study in that journal (1887). This

is a supplement to his own theory, which he works out with considerable skill : (I.) It is generally admitted that Jonah's prayer (ch. ii.) may be ignored as a later interpolation due to a hand which missed the words which "Jonah prayed" (*v.* 1). (II.) In ch. iii. two proclamations are unnecessary, and the royal command to clothe man and beast in sackcloth ignores the circumstance that the inhabitants had already attired themselves in mourning garb. Hence *vv.* 6-9 (marked by distinctive linguistic peculiarities) are regarded as an addition to emphasize the penitence of Nineveh. (III.) Further, in ch. i. many inconcinnities are to be found : e.g., *v.* 16 (where the men apparently begin to call upon the Lord) compared with *v.* 14 (where they are already God-fearing) ; Schmidt suggests that *v.* 13 seq. is an interpolation. Also, he finds it difficult to understand *v.* 5 seq. ; and asks, why did Jonah lie down to sleep ? The most contradictory explanations have been given. Pointing out the use of different words for "ship" and "storm," he proceeds to argue that traces of a distinct source are to be found in *vv.* 4*a*, 5 (*a* and *c*), 6 . . . 8, 9, 10 (first clause). . . . Since it is unlikely that *v.* 9 can belong to the story of a disobedient prophet, it is conjectured that this source contained an entirely different view, and that the storm was not sent, as the present narrative suggests, on account of Jonah's refusal. It is possible, therefore, in his opinion, that in the original story from which this fragment was derived Jonah was an ordinary sailor, whose prayers to his God were more successful than those of his heathen companions.

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