

# The English church and her relations to Rome

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# THE ENGLISH CHURCH

## AND HER RELATIONS TO ROME.

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The Ultramontanes throughout Europe have been assiduously spreading the report that the Anglican Church is being steadily Romanized, and that her submission to the Roman See is only a question of time. As our great national poet has said, "the wish was father, Harry, to that thought". Ultramontanes have been striving and praying for centuries for the conversion of England. I do not blame them for this. On the contrary, it is their duty to do so. But their prayer, I think, is most likely to be answered by their own conversion to opinions more truly Catholic than those they at present hold. Still, it is not unnatural that they should interpret the remarkable changes which have been passing over the whole religious attitude of our country in a sense altogether favorable to their wishes and efforts. May it be permitted to one who for the last forty-five years has been by no means an uninterested spectator of Church matters in England, to give his reasons for believing that the Ultramontanes are the victims of an absolute delusion in supposing that the return of England to the Roman fold is in any way imminent, or even probable in the end?

That English religious thought and feeling has undergone an extraordinary revolution during the last half century is a fact which admits of no question. This revolution is due to that "Tractarian" movement of which several notices have lately appeared in the columns of this review, and which was carried

on under the influence both of Newman, who seceded to Rome, and of Pusey, Keble, Isaac Williams, Sir W. Palmer, H. J. Rose, W. H. Mill, and other profound and learned Divines, who remained behind. When they undertook their common action, sixty-two years back, the condition of the English Church, though outwardly imposing, was nevertheless, to those who looked beneath the surface, not a little alarming. In fact, the English Church in 1833 was in a very similar condition to that of the Church of Rome at the present day, and needed a similar awakening, though in precisely the opposite direction. The High Church party, the representative of the old Anglican divines, had for the most part crystallized into inactivity and Erastianism. By far the greater part of the energy of the Church was monopolized by the Evangelical party, whose theology was essentially Protestant. Thus the Catholic traditions of our Church were in danger of extinction. The Evangelical party was violently opposed to Rome. The Pope was to them the "Man of Sin;" the Church of Rome, the mystic Babylon of the Apocalypse, the harlot clothed in scarlet who corrupted the Kings of the earth. The polemic against Rome had coloured even the High Church theology, so that it was more intent upon bearing witness against Rome than on preserving intact the stream of Catholic tradition in our midst. The endeavour to revive Catholic traditions in England was received favourably as long as it confined itself to a protest against the excesses of the Protestant party. But when it further proposed to rectify the traditional attitude of the High Church party towards Rome it evoked the fiercest hostility, even from some who had, up to that time, been its warmest supporters. Newman, impulsive and sensitive, disheartened at the defection of friends and the open opposition of the Bishops, placed himself in a current of thought and influence which swept him into the bosom of the Roman Church. Pusey, supported by Keble alone, persisted in his determination to preach a wider Catholicity than had become traditional in the Church of England since the Reformation, and to this course he adhered in spite of the protests of a good many of the warmest supporters of the "Tracts for the Times".

His labours have had a most profound effect on the whole mind of the Church of England. One by one the upholders of the old-fashioned High Church theology have died out, and

their place has been filled by men who look, not to the traditions of the Anglican Church alone, but to those of the Catholic Church at large, for information and guidance.<sup>1)</sup> Such an attitude has its advantages, but it has also its inconveniences. The successors to Pusey and Keble in the leadership of the High Church party have scarcely a tithe of their learning, their intellectual power, nor their theological instinct. The consequence has been that the Ritualistic party, which is the present inheritor of the traditions of the Tractarian school, has imbibed the spirit of Western mediævalism. Even Pusey and Keble both publicly and privately lamented the extent to which this tendency was carried among their followers, though they never formally condemned it. The Cambridge school of theology, to which reference has already been made, concerns itself more with scholastic research than with ecclesiastical or dogmatic questions. The consequence is that there is a large and increasing number of men who, dissatisfied alike with the theology of the Ritualist, Evangelical, and Latitudinarian schools, yet intensely Catholic in tone and sympathy, is looking about for “new bottles” into which to cast the “new wine” of their convictions<sup>2)</sup>. They approximate, perhaps, most nearly to the old-fashioned High Churchmen. But the old High Church school, with its somewhat Chauvinistic laudation of the Articles and formularies of our Church, is a little out of fashion with

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<sup>1)</sup> The difference of tone between the Liberal Catholic of to-day, and the High Anglican of thirty years ago, will be best perceived by comparing the works of Bishops Lightfoot and Westcott with those of Bishops Wordsworth and Harold Browne. All are equally attached to the Catholic Faith as handed down in the Creeds, and in the dogmatic decrees of the first four Œcumenical councils. But a wide divergence will be seen in the way in which theological questions are handled by the earlier and by the later school of thought. Bishops Wordsworth and Harold Browne conceive themselves bound to do battle for the whole Anglican position as it is, whether ecclesiastical or dogmatic. To them every sentence of the Thirty-Nine Articles, every detail in the Prayer Book, must be maintained at all hazards and the ecclesiastical position of our Church defended by a vigorous polemic against Rome and Geneva. In the works of the late Bishop of Durham and his successor a far different tone is found. As profoundly attached to the Catholic faith as the Bishops of the older school, their interest in questions purely ecclesiastical or in the maintenance of the practical infallibility of the Anglican Church is comparatively languid, while polemic, either against Rome or Geneva, is conspicuously absent from their pages. Their attitude is that of a large number of the more learned and thoughtful clergy of the Church of England.

<sup>2)</sup> Matt. IX. 14—17.

our younger men. They recognize the fact that those Articles and formularies, though they did good service in the sixteenth century, are too narrow and one sided to represent Christian theology in all its aspects. But many are in great doubt what to substitute for them, or whether anything whatever should take their place. The "Evangelical" party is in a similar state of transition. Some of its members are considerably leavened by Tractarian theology, and all are more or less affected by the definite rejection of Calvinistic doctrines which is becoming very pronounced on all sides at the present time. Thus while the attachment of English Churchmen to the doctrines formulated in the Creed of Christendom is as strong as ever it was, the form which their attachment to those doctrines will ultimately assume is at the present moment extremely doubtful. New dangers, new difficulties, new lines of cleavage, are confronting us, with which the old party organizations are insufficient to deal. New combinations of religious parties are imminent. We are waiting for a leader, or leaders, who shall indicate to us the path in which the religious life of England is hereafter to tread. One thing only may be regarded as certain: that path, for the vast majority of English clergy, will not be the path that leads to Rome.

And if the conditions of religious thought among the clergy have undergone, and are still undergoing, so vast a change, there has been an equally vast revolution of thought among the laity. For three hundred years, to the apprehension of the average English layman, the smoke of the fires of Smithfield had not yet cleared away. To him the Roman Church was still the cruel persecuting Church which his fathers hated, and against whose disciples they fought. Roman theology was a mass of hideous, revolting, stupid corruptions, the Roman clergy claimed to subjugate the souls of men, and polluted those of women through the abominations of the Confessional. To hint that Romanism was on the increase among us was to rouse the whole nation. Forty years ago, the barest rumour that "Popish practices" had been introduced into our parish Churches, even though it were a matter so simple as a surpliced choir or the chanting of the Psalms, was sufficient to raise a riot. All this is now entirely changed. The English layman has become tolerant to a fault. Reared as he has been

during fifty years of the most incessant and violent controversy on first principles of belief, he is usually a little puzzled as to what he ought to believe. But at least he believes in *work*. Wherever he sees a clergy active, earnest, devoted, he regards them with respect, even if he cannot understand all their utterances. As he sees the Roman clergy in England answering to this description, and as all the less favourable aspects of Roman doctrine and practice are carefully concealed from his view, he is disposed to be ashamed of the violent language in regard to them which he was accustomed to hear in his youth, and is quite ready to give them a fair hearing, and not unfrequently a considerable measure of support.

Thus the whole mind of England, clerical and lay, is far more favourably inclined toward Rome than it was half a century ago. Our language in regard to Rome is for the most part inspired by a straining after impartiality which very frequently does great injustice to ourselves and our whole history since the breach with the Papacy. Yet nevertheless it would be the greatest possible mistake to imagine that anything like the submission of a large body of English Churchmen to the Roman obedience is probable or even conceivable. No doubt, the recoil from Protestant bigotry, and the assertion of our rights as members of the Catholic family, has resulted in the revival among us of many doctrines and practices countenanced by the Fathers or the mediæval divines, but which the Anglican Church had long tacitly abandoned or definitely rejected. But side by side with this movement in a Patristic and mediæval direction there has always been present with us—even among the staunchest High Churchmen—a love of freedom which every man who joins the Church of Rome is required promptly to abjure. It is not a paradox to assert that the Catholic Reform which has taken place so markedly among us has *been carried out on Protestant principles*. That is to say, it has been carried out independently of, and very often in defiance of authority. The Bishops have all along been suspicious of, if not hostile, to the revival of Catholic theology, as well as to the revival of Catholic or mediæval ceremonial. Thus the so-called “Catholic party” in our Church have ingrained in them a spirit of sturdy independence, and they will not brook anything in the shape of slavish submission to any ecclesiastical superior. This will

explain, what is undeniably the fact, that among the most advanced High Churchmen of to-day are to be found some of the most uncompromising opponents of the Roman See. For corporate reunion they are most anxious; in fact it is their continual prayer. But corporate reunion with Rome as she is—with Rome until she sees her way to abate her pretensions to supremacy and infallibility—is to them an utter impossibility. Sanguine and earnest noblemen, such as Lords Nelson and Halifax, and the Duke of Newcastle, may indulge the dream of reconciliation. But it is because they are laymen, and are moreover insufficiently acquainted with the practical working of the Roman system. The speech of Lord Halifax at Bristol in favour of union with Rome drew forth strong and indignant protests from many members of the Union before which it was delivered—a society called “the English Church Union”, which consists of the most advanced members of the High Church party. There may be, possibly there will be, from time to time, some individual secessions to Rome. Such seceders will be found chiefly among weak-minded and ignorant clergymen and among inexperienced laymen who have been encouraged in an illogical and unreasonable dissatisfaction with the practical abuses still to be found among us—abuses which cannot be escaped in any Church as long as men remain what they are. They will consist almost exclusively of the wealthier classes. For Rome “compasses sea and land to make” a rich “proselyte”, and the Jesuits use all their arts to entrap such men when it is rumoured that their attachment to the Church of England is wavering. But it is the most absolute chimera to suppose that men trained in the habits of freedom enjoyed by Englishmen will ever submit themselves *en masse* to the humiliating yoke which the Church of Rome seeks to impose.

As little is it to be imagined, in spite of Ultramontane boasts, that Romanism is making great, or even any progress amongst us. True, the number of priests, monasteries and nunneries has of late very greatly increased in England. But this increase synchronizes with the expulsion of ecclesiastics and convents from other lands. True, the Roman Catholic services, when they are accompanied by beautiful music and imposing ceremonial, are largely attended by English people.

But so is a scenic display at a theatre. True, the Roman "Ransomers" as they are called, are always in evidence, to break up a meeting where Roman abuses are openly referred to, or the continuity of the Church of England before and after the Reformation asserted. But this is the energy, not of hope, but of desperation. The organs of the Church of Rome among us admit the "leakage" which is taking place among them, and their complaint is supported by facts. Forty years ago, the number of marriages celebrated at Roman Catholic Chapels among us shewed a sudden rise. For many years they remained stationary. In the last decade they once more began to decline. And they form a pretty accurate test of the number of the real adherents of Rome in these islands. The *Tablet* of three or four years since, again, had a correspondence which extended over nearly six months, carefully studied by the writer of these lines, on the best mode of putting an end to the losses which the writers admitted the Roman Church in England to be sustaining. In vain do the pupils of the Jesuits enroll themselves unsuspected among the writers and editors of the secular press, and endeavour to doctor the intelligence sent forth to the British public in the interests of Rome. Many of them are swept into the current of indifference, and some cease their membership in the Roman Church. In vain are the "Ransomers" urged to interrupt and break up Protestant meetings. Their very organizers complain that the "Ransomers" rank and file is inclined to shew a disinclination for the task. And this though they are perpetually reinforced by recruits from that turbulent nationality which exists among us as a continual and conspicuous object-lesson of the capacity of Rome for forming a creditable national character. Mixed marriages, which are frequently, to the writer's knowledge, a source of loss to Rome among us, must, it is confessed, be tolerated, until Rome is strong enough to forbid them. The children of the poorer and middle classes belonging to the Roman Communion are often compelled to go where they cannot obtain the ministrations of their own priests. Curiosity at first, and afterwards the attractions of the simple, yet dignified services of the Anglican Church, attract them, and they ultimately conform to the Church of the country. It may be safely affirmed that very often the



impossibility of giving "a reason for the hope that is in them", the inherent weakness of a faith resting simply on authority, the incompatibility of the Roman system with either Scripture, christian antiquity, reason or common-sense, the influence upon them of daily contact with purer and higher forms of religion, tend to draw away thoughtful minds from the Church of Rome. It is only the higher classes which Rome's emissaries are able to enmesh in those webs which Roman ecclesiastics know so well how to weave around those whom it is necessary at any cost to keep within the Roman pale. It must be remembered, too, that it is a question among Romanists themselves whether the admitted advance towards Rome in the Anglican communion does or does not tend to further the Roman designs. It is the belief of a good many of them—a belief in which the writer of these lines fully coincides, that it does *not* tend in a Roman direction—that by giving minds of a certain class the privileges in the Anglican communion which at one time they were compelled to seek in the Church of Rome, it is acting very prejudicially to the Roman cause among the English-speaking races.

That the number of Roman Catholics in England and Scotland has increased considerably, there is no doubt. But it is forgotten, that this is due to a very large extent to Irish immigration. Against it must be put the fact that whereas the Roman Catholic Vicars Apostolic, in a letter issued by them in the year 1810 claimed for the members of their Church that they were a *fourth* part of the population of these islands, they are now shown by statistics to be no more than a *seventh*. If this be indeed a sign of the progress which in a few short years is to end in the reconciliation of England with the Holy See, the friends of Ultramontaniam are welcome to boast of it as much as they please.

But an amiable and respected English nobleman has been to Rome. He has interviewed the Pope, and has urged with deep earnestness the desire of a great many Englishmen for Corporate Reunion. Lord Halifax is quite right. There *is* such a desire. It is shared to the full by the writer of these lines. But Lord Halifax is no theologian. Nor is he a politician. He does not seem to be even a keen observer of men and things. He knows nothing of the actual working of the

Roman Church, of the gradual yet steady growth of superstition within her pale, of the deteriorating effect of the various *cults* which find a congenial soil within her. He has no dread of the spirit of clericalism which brings her into antagonism with nearly every civilized government in the world. He sees only the majestic framework of an organization once powerful for good, and even now not without much to excite genuine admiration on the part of those who are most opposed to the principles which inspire it. Even the theological differences between us and Rome are far more serious than they appear in the eyes of an enthusiastic and minimizing layman. Dr Pusey once published an Eirenicon. But so plain were his statements about the need for a reconstruction of Roman theology before there could be reunion between England and Rome, that his once bosom friend Newman complained of his message of peace as having been discharged "as if from a catapult". And the reply of Rome to that Eirenicon was—the Vatican Council!

All men capable of seeing more than one side of a question have been convinced ever since that disastrous step *of* and *for* the Papacy, that resistance to unjust and unlawful claims is the only answer that rational Catholics can make to the Vatican decrees. *England will never submit to Rome.* The only possible ground on which union can take place is the abandonment by Rome of her claim to enforce the decrees of local Councils upon Œcumenical Christendom. Therefore the only wise course on the part of non-Roman Christendom is the most stubborn resistance to an usurped authority; the closest possible alliance on the part of all who hold the Catholic Faith and reject the Roman claims—in fact who reject the Roman claims *because* they hold the Catholic Faith. Mutual conference, on the lines of the recent Old Catholic Congresses; mutual discussion, for which the *Revue Internationale* affords a suitable channel; friendly intercourse, in the spirit of the recent visits of the Anglican Bishop of Gibraltar to Eastern Patriarchs and Bishops; the recent interchange of courtesies between Russian and Anglican ecclesiastics at Rome;—these should be our answer to the Pope's letter to the English people. We must tell him that reunion with Rome is absolutely impossible until Rome's *non possumus* is abandoned. This is the

language of Archbishop Laud in the seventeenth century: "Till Rome be other than she is", said he, he could not be reconciled to her. It is the language of Archbishop Benson at the latter end of the nineteenth. "Union with Rome," he has lately declared, "is absolutely visionary and impossible, so long as Rome retains her distinctive and erroneous doctrines and advances her present unprimitive and unscriptural claims." If we speak of the increased and still increasing authority wielded by the occupant of the See of Canterbury we shall doubtless only raise a smile on the part of enthusiastic Vaticanists. But it is a fact nevertheless, and a fact with which the Pope will find himself obliged to reckon. It is impossible for the most bigoted Romanist any longer to deny that the Anglican Church is daily gaining in importance and influence throughout the world. And the longer the Pope blinds his eyes to this fact, the more complete the surrender he will one day be compelled to make. In truth that surrender has already begun. The Pope has addressed a letter to the English people. And for the first time for three centuries and a half, the tone of menace, if we do not say insult, with which it has been customary to speak of us has been exchanged for one of studied courtesy and even kindness. The Pope has condescended to mention the christian virtues so eminently displayed by a land which is nevertheless, in his opinion, severed entirely from the Church of Christ. To those who look on the matter from any point of view not exclusively Roman, the unquestioned presence of those Christian virtues among us is as unquestionable a proof that we are *not* "aliens" from the Christian "commonwealth". Be this as it may, the Pope has addressed us in terms of Christian sympathy, and the tone of his letter demands sincere acknowledgement at our hands. To be sure, the conclusion of the letter is singularly *maladroit* for such astute diplomatists as are usually to be found at the Vatican. If there be any two points, beside the doctrine of Papal infallibility, to which the average Englishman is wont to be most stubbornly opposed, it is the practice of Indulgences, and the practice of Mariolatry. The most skilful manufacturers of perverts are accustomed to put these practices as far as possible out of sight when they are enticing persons in this country to join the Roman communion. And

among English Roman Catholics in general such practices are allowed to fall very much into the back-ground. But the Pope himself has now taken care that there shall be no mistake about them. And for some time to come—in fact till the Pope's letter is forgotten—it will be impossible to represent the prevalence of such practices as a "Protestant exaggeration". But however this may be, there can be no doubt that all true Christians must congratulate themselves on so marked a change in the spirit which reigns at the Vatican. For the manifestation of a similar spirit one must go back some fourteen centuries. The greater part of the letter gives expression to sentiments with which all Christendom is in the fullest accord. We all pray, in private and in public, and many pray most fervently, that it may please God to restore among us "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".<sup>1)</sup> We may not think that the Roman Church has done much in this direction in the past; we may think her action in the present not the best calculated to bring it about; our ideas may in the future differ as to the terms of union, but few earnest Christians will now be found who do not desire even an external unity as sincerely as the Pope himself.

This change of attitude on the part of the Pope on which we have remarked is however more significant, and more enthusiastically to be welcomed than many of us have as yet perceived. There are many signs abroad that the democratic spirit is even beginning to invade the Church of Rome. The revolt of native-born American members of her communion against foreign dictation is one of them. The coquetting with Socialism in some European nations is another. A still more marked instance of change of tone is the complete withdrawal of the *Syllabus* which caused so much stir some twenty-five years ago. This is an indication that Infallibility has been obliged to reconsider its position in relation to modern science and research. We do not complain of this. On the contrary, we hail it with the liveliest satisfaction. When the strings of the Roman Church are no longer pulled by a knot of wire-pullers at head-quarters; when she ceases to impose conditions on the exercise of human reason;

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<sup>1)</sup> Eph. IV, 3.

when the voice of the great body of her clergy and laity, instead of that of a few astute intriguers, is permitted to guide her counsels; then she will cease to be the Rome against which we protest. Meanwhile, we do not fail to detect in the Pope's recent letter to the English people a most conspicuous sign—perhaps the most conspicuous sign that has yet appeared—of the influence of modern thought upon Papal action. No more complete recantation than that letter of the spirit which has reigned at Rome for more than half a score of centuries can possibly be imagined. The invectives, the denunciations, the interdicts, the excommunications of the past are replaced by a document which is full of the “milk of human kindness”; of which loving persuasion and a candid appreciation of the merits of opponents are the leading characteristics. After such a surrender on the part of the Vatican what else may we not expect hereafter in that direction? The arrogant assumptions, the anathemas of the Vatican Council have been followed within a quarter of a century by what may not unfairly be described as an imploring appeal to the English people to return to the Papal fold. We may therefore “thank God and take courage”. Rome is already “other than she was”. We may hope—and there is good reason for hoping—that the time is not far distant when she will abate her claims, and submit the decrees of her local councils to the judgment of universal Christendom. And then “whosoever will be saved” will be thankful to know that he need not defer to the sentence of an usurped authority, but that all he is bound to do is to “hold the Catholic Faith” as defined by the general voice of the Universal Church.

ANGLICANUS.

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