

Reunion and the Norwich Church Congress

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REUNION

AND THE

NORWICH CHURCH CONGRESS.

I write this article to give my impressions of the influence likely to be exerted on the reunion cause by the recent Congress at Norwich. First and foremost, I must mention among the incidents favourable to reunion the presence of Bishop Herzog among us, and the manner in which his paper was received. Swiss Old Catholics have already been informed, in the columns of the *Katholik*, of the difficulties under which the Bishop laboured, in speaking with a foreign accent, in a building the acoustic properties of which may not unreasonably be described as detestable, during a heavy shower of rain which kept up an incessant patter upon the glass roof, and to an audience, some of whom needed to be protected against the inclemency of the weather *within* as well as without, by umbrellas! But notwithstanding these inconveniences, some of the Bishop's best points were immediately taken up, and warmly applauded.

On his paper it does not become me to make any comment. I will only say that it is reproduced *in extenso* in our most influential Church newspaper, the *Guardian*, and that its learning and close reasoning will be better appreciated after private perusal, than they could possibly be while it was being read, under the circumstances already described, before an assembly the vast majority among whom were not theologians. But we who are striving for the reunion of Christendom may be permitted to thank the Bishop for coming once more among

us. A variety of circumstances which it is needless to particularize have led to a general impression among us that Old Catholicism is a decaying, if not a dying cause. The presence of Bishop Herzog on the platform of a Church Congress in this country will not only serve to dispel such illusions, but to explain why they *are* illusions. Old Catholicism cannot die, so long as she possesses men of ability, learning, and character such as the Bishop of the Christian Catholic Church of Switzerland, to maintain, against mediæval and modern additions to the faith, the Vincentian principle that whatever is put forth as necessary to be received and believed by Christian men must have been taught *ubique, semper et ab omnibus*.

I need say nothing on the particular meeting at which Bishop Herzog spoke, beyond the fact that his paper need not fear comparison with those of the eminent scholars and thinkers by whom he was preceded and followed. The papers of Canon Jessopp, the Bishop of Peterborough, Professor Gwatkin and the Bishop of Salisbury were each and all admirable of their kind, and deserve, and will no doubt receive attention on the Continent when the report of the Congress is issued. The Bishop of Peterborough's paper, though not superior in learning or ability to the rest, was received with applause quite unprecedented at a Church Congress on account of its marvellous suitability to the audience to which it was addressed. Its remarkable clearness of statement, its avoidance of fatiguing details, its easy grasp of principles, its power of epigram, and its dexterous use of humour, will cause it to be long remembered by those who heard it. Meanwhile, at St. Andrew's Hall, the "Hindrances to reunion", which formed the subject of the meeting, were being vividly illustrated by the diversity of opinion there displayed. In the morning the discussion chiefly turned on Home Reunion. With these domestic matters I will not trouble your readers. After this discussion had terminated, Canon Meyrick, so well known on the Continent for his interest in Old Catholicism, read a paper on Reunion with the Eastern Church. He appeared to think that the prayers to the Virgin, used in the Eastern Liturgies, and the acceptance by the Eastern Church of the decrees of the Second Council of Nicæa on the reverence paid to sacred icons, were the only serious hindrances to reunion between ourselves and the East, but that

these appeared to him, so far as he could see, to constitute insuperable obstacles to a full understanding between us, so long as they remained parts of the doctrine and ritual of the Eastern Church. At the subsequent afternoon meeting Mr W. J. Birbeck, a young layman who has studied the question very deeply, appeared to be of opinion that the latter difficulty might be surmounted. But he said nothing about the former. There can be no doubt, however, that in view of the rooted objection on the part of the vast majority of Englishmen to anything in the shape of prayers to a human being, however worthy of our reverence, this practice will constitute a very formidable barrier to corporate reunion between ourselves and the East. Then came the question of reunion with Rome. The paper of the Suffragan Bishop of Birmingham was a temperate and moderate one; the only objection to it which suggests itself is that it made no mention of the practical abuses connected with Mariolatry, indulgences and the Masses for the Dead. After this poured forth a stream of controversy, invective, ridicule, combined with the smart interchange of personalities, from the Romanizing and anti-Romanizing parties among us. In a heated atmosphere such as this, there was no hope for reason, no place for moderation. Lord Halifax, in an animated speech, ignored all the grave doctrinal, moral and practical issues that separate us from Rome, and will continue to do so until Rome entirely abandons, or at the least greatly modifies, the position she has so long taken up. The Dean of Norwich charged Lord Halifax with insubordination to his "spiritual pastors and masters"¹⁾ in visiting the Pope without having first conferred with his own diocesan and the two Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and then fell back on the well known topics of Protestant declamation on which so much violent language has been used in England for centuries.

Then Mr Lacey made a capital hit at the Dean, as the champion of the Protestant party, by saying that now for the first time he had been made to understand what "sacerdotalism" meant. Then Canon Garratt told the meeting that Rome was the Beast, the Babylon of the Apocalypse, the Man of Sin, and so on, amid the angry exclamations of the Romanizers.

¹⁾ The words of our Anglican Church Catechism.

Then the Romanizers began to mention the points on which our formularies might be reconciled with those of Rome, amid the equally angry shouts of their antagonists. The Romanizing party, however, entirely forgets that on many of the points on which they think reconciliation possible, the Catholic Church has never pronounced, that not only the Protestant party within our pale, but those of broader and more liberal views, would resist most resolutely all attempts to narrow the liberty of thought we now enjoy, and that this last class of thinkers, though practically unrepresented in the Church Press, are in high esteem among the laity, and in the country at large, so much so as to be able altogether to frustrate any attempts at reunion on the part of those who desire accommodation with Rome. Moreover it must be borne in mind, even those who, for want of a better term, I have called Romanizers do not desire reconciliation with Rome as she is, but with Rome as they hope to persuade her to become. They may rely upon it that the task of persuasion which lies before them is an extremely formidable one, and that the last thing which the Vatican would be likely to welcome very warmly would be the accession of a body of men so utterly unpractised in the implicit obedience which Rome requires, as the great bulk of the so-called "Ritualistic" party among us must be admitted to be. From all which we may infer that reunion between England and Rome, though much talked about, is by no means near at hand.

When we turn from what Lord Beaconsfield once called "the hare-brained chatter of irresponsible frivolity" to the responsible utterances of the prelates of the English Church, we shall find that they are very decidedly of this opinion. What the Archbishop of Canterbury thinks on the matter, your readers know already. Some weighty utterances to the same effect fell from the lips of the Archbishop of York in his opening sermon at the Congress. He says: "The Cardinal [Vaughan] is certainly right as to any prospect of reunion on the condition which he names. He may rest assured that neither the Church nor the people of England will ever submit themselves to an ecclesiastical despotism against which for centuries they protested, and which they finally abjured. The claim of Papal supremacy has been investigated by us again and again during the past three hundred years, and as often deliberately rejected. We

do not reject it merely as an interference with our spiritual liberty. We firmly believe it to be contrary to the Mind and Will of Christ." The Bishop of Durham, the founder, with Bishop Lightfoot, of that school of rational investigation which has its home at Cambridge, speaks out no less distinctly. In a letter to the *Times*, written to correct the report of his address to his Diocesan Conference, he says, "an outward reunion of the English Church with the Roman Church as it is now would, as far as I can judge, postpone indefinitely the reunion of Christendom". And even the Bishop of Lincoln, the prelate most dear of all among us to the "Ritualistic" mind, is no less explicit. "Their reply" he says, to the present Roman claims "must be the same as was made by the great German theologian and historian in 1871 to the Archbishop of Munich." What that reply was, he proceeds to state. It is well known to your readers. But I give it once more in the English shape in which it is found in the Bishop's address to his Conference. "This doctrine, as a Christian, as a theologian, as a historian, as a citizen, I cannot accept. I cannot accept it as a Christian, because it is incompatible with the spirit of the Gospel. I cannot accept it as a theologian, because the whole genuine tradition of the Church stands irrevocably opposed to it."

Those who are anxious that the Church of England should or should not capitulate to Rome may lay their anxieties aside. The utterances I have quoted above indicate the irrevocable attitude of the Church of England. She will neither submit to Roman claims nor Roman definitions of the faith. There is a party among us, neither numerous nor well informed, which has a sentimental and unhealthy hankering after immediate reunion with Rome. But even that party has no idea of submission. It simply hopes, by the use of respectful language, to bring Rome over to its own religious stand-point—the stand-point, not of master-minds which have well considered the questions at issue, but of men of kind hearts and moderate information who have never thought it out in all its bearings. We may safely leave them to themselves. They may produce an effect they have not expected by their negotiations with Rome. They may cause Roman theologians to do what they have never yet done, study the position and principles of the Anglican Church. And so by degrees may the foundations of

that system be sapped, which owes its origin, not to the Will of Jesus Christ, and the teaching of His Apostles, but to the forgeries and frauds of ages of ignorance and superstition. It is to be hoped that a renewal of friendly relations almost broken off since 1881, may be the result of Bishop Herzog's most welcome visit. No efforts should be spared on either side to bring about this result. The moral influence which the hearty support of the English Church will bring to the aid of our Old Catholic brethren is not to be despised; while we very urgently need their aid to enable us to conquer our insularity. Each may learn a great deal from the other. And a cordial union between us will do more than anything else to bring those who think separation from Rome to be the first step backward to chaos, to a different mind.

A MEMBER OF CONGRESS.
