

The true character of the Anglican Communion

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THE TRUE CHARACTER OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION.

It would seem that there are a number of persons abroad who entertain the idea that the Anglican Church is not, strictly speaking, a Church at all, but a mere *congeries* of heterogeneous atoms, only held together by the fact of establishment by the State. It might be sufficient, in reply, to point to the fact that the Anglican Church is to be found, not only in England and Wales, but in Ireland, in Scotland, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the other Colonies and dependencies of the British Empire, and also in the United States of America, and that in none of these countries, except the first, is it in any sense established by the State. If the theory of our Church to which I have referred were correct, the Church of England ought by this time to be the only survivor of these communities, or at least all her daughter Churches ought to be in the throes of dissolution. The truth is that this idea of our Church is the result of misrepresentations assiduously circulated by our Roman antagonists. The absurd caricature which they have been diligent in spreading abroad was accepted by Dr von Döllinger in his early days, before he had learned to contemplate the Christian commonwealth outside the Church of Rome with his own eyes. But he retracted all his unjust accusations when he became better acquainted with us, and publicly described our Church as one of the great bulwarks of the faith of Christ.

It would, however, be an advantage to the cause of Christian unity were I to enter a little into detail, and endeavour to depict our actual condition to those who are but little acquainted with us. I shall not pretend to represent that condition as perfect. If there be one fault which cannot be laid to our charge, that fault is Chauvinism. I can well remember the time when it was otherwise—when the members of the Church of England were accustomed to regard their Church as the normal Church, all divergencies from which were to be considered as defects. At the present moment a strong reaction has carried us a great deal too far in the opposite direction. We are now too keenly sensitive of our faults, and too nervously anxious to confess them; too forgetful of the marvellous extent to which God has blessed us in the past and is blessing us in the present, of the extraordinary manner in which the Church of a once insignificant island has now spread to the remotest corner of the earth. I might remark, in passing, that this very expansion of the English Church is itself a sufficient refutation of the accusation against us. But however this may be, the Reformation was certainly to us the inauguration of a continuous effort after reform as well as development, and English Churchmen will never be satisfied until, by a complete return to the purest principles of primitive antiquity, in practice as well as in theory, we can fit ourselves to deal in the true Christian spirit with the varied and restless activities of the age in which we live.

To understand our present position, it will be necessary to go back to the period of the Reformation. By a series of statutes which constituted the most wide and far-reaching reform ever known in our country, the Parliament of 1529—1536 effected a most startling change in the relations of Church and State. The Church, in this country, not merely in her spiritual, but even in her legal capacity, had been subject to a foreign potentate. His representatives claimed the power to make laws for themselves, and on one occasion deliberately called on the King and Parliament to alter the laws of England into conformity with those of this foreign potentate, wherever the rules of the two might happen to clash. But the Parliament of 1529 took the contrary course. It declared the Royal power to be the only source of coercive jurisdiction in this country,

and the Sovereign for the time being the sole ultimate court of appeal in all questions of law, ecclesiastical or secular. Yet for many centuries afterwards spiritual causes were heard and decided by spiritual persons, just as secular causes were decided, not by the Sovereign in person, but by judges learned in the law. In fact the Bishop of Oxford, an expert in Constitutional law, has declared that it was never the intention of Henry VIII to undertake the decision of purely theological questions. The Ecclesiastical Courts had managed to usurp a considerable number of functions which properly belonged to the civil power, and these, and these only, the Bishop contends, it was Henry's determination to resume. After the Revolution of 1688, however, there was a marked change for the worse. The relations of Church and State became strained. And as the appointment of the Bishops lay in the hands of the Crown, while the inferior clergy as a rule were inclined to sympathize with the banished dynasty of the Stuarts, there resulted a series of unseemly conflicts between the Bishops and clergy in their Houses of Convocation. Ultimately, in 1717, George I suppressed the meetings of Convocation altogether, and the Church, thus deprived of her representative assemblies, and delivered into the hands of a corrupt and venal Episcopate ¹⁾, sank into a lethargic condition, from which she was only awakened by the Tractarian movement of 1833.

One of the most immediate consequences of that movement was to promote intense dissatisfaction with the suppression of our corporate Church life. That dissatisfaction was principally displayed in two directions, with the suppression of Convocation, and with the way in which the State had usurped the right to decide controversies in the Church. The former question was settled in a very short space of time. In 1851, after a sharp but brief struggle, the Convocations of Canterbury and York began once more to meet, and have continued their deliberations undisturbed down to the present time. The other question, however, has proved an extremely perplexing one, and it still continues to disquiet us. Up to 1833 the old Court of Delegates, being persons appointed by the Crown, was accustomed to

¹⁾ Of course there were exceptions, as for instance the pious and learned Bishop Joseph Butler. The period of corrupt and venal prelates ceased with the Premiership of Pitt in 1784.

decide such ecclesiastical controversies as were referred to it. But in that year a change occurred. It was a curious illustration of the confusion into which things had fallen, that the Judge of the Court of Arches, the representative of the Archbishop in causes ecclesiastical, was also the Judge of the Admiralty Court. In his former capacity his services were little needed, for ecclesiastical suits were few and far between. In the other capacity his principal duty was to decide questions of collision at sea. In the year above-mentioned it was decided that Appeals from the Arches Court should henceforth be carried to the Judicial Committee of Privy Council, a body consisting of lay judges, but with the power to summon not more than three Episcopal Assessors on any question purely theological. So little attention was paid at that period to questions concerning the Ecclesiastical Courts that the change attracted no attention whatever. There had actually been only three cases of appeal to the Court of Delegates from the time of Henry VIII to that of its abolition, and of these two had been withdrawn before the sentence of the Court had been pronounced. Unhappily the time chosen for the abolition of the Court of Delegates, and the substitution for it of a purely secular Court, coincided almost exactly with a period of revived ecclesiastical activity which brought violent religious controversies in its train. The ancient conflict between the secular and ecclesiastical jurisdiction recommenced. The feelings aroused were very bitter. Statesmen and lawyers, accustomed to the period when ecclesiastical authority was content to slumber, were violently indignant to see it again asserting itself. The Bishops and clergy who maintained the spiritual character of the Church were accused of being imitators of Hildebrand and Innocent III. And the Nonconformists, who had been complacently representing the Church as a hotbed of Erastianism, were not a little displeased to see her reasserting a claim to possess a spiritual existence which they had been accustomed to regard as a monopoly of their own. The incident which precipitated a conflict which must sooner or later have occurred was as follows.

In the year 1849 a clergyman named Gorham was refused institution by the Bishop of Exeter to a living in that diocese, on the ground that he held heretical views on the subject of Baptism. The case was carried into the Arches Court, and the

Judge, Sir Herbert Jenner Fust, decided that Mr Gorham's views *were* heretical, and that the Bishop had rightly refused him institution. Mr Gorham appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and that tribunal decided that, while it did not profess to lay down what was the true doctrine in regard to the Sacrament of Baptism, the views of Mr Gorham must be pronounced to be within the limits of toleration which had always been allowed in the Church of England. It is needless to enter minutely into the controversy which followed. It was almost the death-blow of our Church. Already reeling under the shock of the secession of Newman and his followers in 1845, our communion had to suffer yet more severe losses in 1850. Archdeacon, afterwards Cardinal Manning headed a new set of secessions. These took place among men who had stood firm to our cause in 1845. They were not, like Ward and his associates, drawn to Rome by sympathy, but were in many cases driven into her pale by sheer despair of the position of the Church of England. That our Church has not only survived such a shock, but has grown and prospered since its occurrence more than ever she had done during the previous twelve centuries, would once more be proof to any impartial observer that she can hardly be the "fortuitous concourse of atoms" which some of her enemies have pronounced her to be. The real truth, it is now sufficiently clear, was not perceived by the seceders. They were far too ready to "despair of the republic". They had altogether miscalculated the reserve of spiritual strength possessed by the Church from which they were cowardly enough to desert at the first shock of battle. It was not likely that the fetters forged for the Church by Henry the Eighth in his conflict with the Papacy would break in pieces in a moment. Nor had the Church or the Nation as yet clearly realized the consequences of the fact that the admission in 1829 of Roman Catholics and Dissenters into Parliament had changed that body from an assembly of Church of England laymen into a purely civil assembly. Many Englishmen have not even yet grasped the full significance of that constitutional change. And therefore the conflict between civil and ecclesiastical authority aroused by the Gorham case was absolutely certain to be of long duration.

In fact, the struggle, thus inaugurated, has continued ever since, and is not yet at an end. The jealousy with which Whig statesmen (then in power) had regarded the Church ever since 1688, the hostility of the lawyers and of a good many educated laymen to clerical domination, the fear entertained by many earnest-minded men of an undue narrowing of the limits of toleration existing in our Church, the dread of the Romeward tendencies of the Tractarian movement, caused the decisions of the Privy Council during a long course of years, to be almost uniformly hostile to the party which advocated the autonomy of the Church. Between 1860 and 1864 a fierce controversy raged concerning *Essays and Reviews*, a volume in which decidedly liberal opinions were expressed concerning the interpretation of Scripture. Again the Tractarian party were the prosecutors, and again, in February 1864, the Judicial Committee refused to narrow the liberties of English clergymen. After this came the celebrated Colenso case, in which a Bishop, in South Africa, condemned and deprived by his own Metropolitan, in full Synod¹⁾, for depraving the Old Testament and for heretical views on the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, appealed, though not the Bishop of an Established Church, for protection to the Judicial Committee of Privy Council in England, and that Court, on March 20th 1865, enigmatically pronounced the decision of the Synod of South Africa to have no legal force. The controversy between Catholics and Erastians continued to rage in South Africa throughout the whole life time of Bishop Colenso. It still continues to smoulder, though the Erastians cannot obtain consecration for any Bishop nominated by them, and though Bishop Macrorie, the Bishop sent out by the authorities of the Church to confront Colenso, resigned his see in order to promote a peaceful settlement of the dispute. Persons familiar with Church History will recognize here, though with certain points of difference, a curious nineteenth century version of the Meletian schism at Antioch. Meanwhile the Judicial Committee had taken quite an opposite line on another set of questions submitted to it. The Evangelical, or Protestant party, exasperated at what it considered to be the progressive assimilation of our ritual to that of Rome, inaugurated a series of

¹⁾ This condemnation was pronounced on December 16th 1863.

prosecutions of clergy for "Ritualistic practices". These suits were uniformly, and not always fairly, decided against the "Ritualists". They resolved to resist the decisions of the secular Court, and several clergymen were imprisoned for contumacy. The results were hardly in conformity with the expectations of the promoters of so fatuous a policy. From the moment when these clergy were imprisoned for conscience' sake, public sympathy, which had before been against them, veered round in their favour, and the effects of this change in public opinion are still felt. The English public, never much inclined to the consideration of abstract questions of theology, recognized the fact, that these clergy were earnest, sincere, and hard-working, and appeals to English sympathy with the oppressed, whether suffering rightfully or wrongfully, have seldom been made in vain. The "Ritualistic" clergy became popular, not because the English people have a leaning towards Rome, but because they were supposed to have been harshly treated, and up to the present moment they have kept the advantage they have gained.

There has thus grown up, among all parties of English Churchmen, a feeling unfavourable towards bringing theological questions before judicial tribunals, and a preference for deciding them by argument and inquiry. The Ritualists themselves, though thoroughly dissatisfied with our present tribunals, are averse to any solution of the difficulty which has as yet been proposed. They are fully aware that they cannot trust the Bishops to decide uniformly in favour of their party, and they fear the appointment of any tribunal which might deprive them of the liberty, not to say licence, they at present enjoy. It must be confessed that this licence is considerable, and in many ways extremely inconvenient. It was supposed that the reference to the Archbishop of Canterbury of the questions involved in the recent prosecution of the Bishop of Lincoln for excesses in Ritual would have brought about a fair and equitable solution of our difficulties. But this hope has been disappointed. We are still, it must be acknowledged, in the position so vividly described in the Book of Judges, when "there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes". The authority of the State has been successfully defied, but up to the present time the authority of the Church has not taken

definite shape. We are at the present moment practically without any ecclesiastical tribunal whatsoever. But if I may express my own opinion, albeit that opinion may be thought a little optimistic, I believe in the ultimate victory of truth and common-sense. We have the Bible, and the truly Catholic formularies of our own Church to appeal to, as well as the conscience of Christian men. That Court of Appeal, I am convinced, will ultimately be found a sufficient one. And therefore I entertain the hope that our present extravagancies, the reaction from a period of slovenliness, both in theology and ritual, which was almost beyond belief, and the result, moreover, of the abeyance into which ecclesiastical authority, for a time at least, has fallen, will ultimately disappear, and that our people will ultimately settle down to their work in a spirit of truth and soberness.

At the same time it would be an entire mistake to suppose that the toleration even of our judicial tribunals has been, or is unlimited, or invariably extended in one direction only—that of Protestantism and unbelief. Two clergymen, the Rev. Dunbar Heath and the Rev. Charles Voysey, have been condemned, even by the Judicial Committee of Privy Council, for contradicting the fundamental articles of the Christian faith.¹⁾ On the other hand, in 1872, the Judicial Committee refused to condemn the Rev. W. J. E. Bennet for holding extreme High Church views on the Presence in the Eucharist. But there was no disposition to shield men who denied the Divinity, the miraculous Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ. Had not all parties eventually become averse to judicial prosecutions, there can be no doubt that other clergy whose utterances have been as open to objection as those of Mr Heath and Mr Voysey, would have been similarly condemned. The recent article of the Rev. H. R. Haweis in the *Contemporary Review*, for instance, asserting the possibility of a “post-natal” Incarnation of the Divine Word, is strongly disapproved by men of the most liberal views. In the same way the assertion by Archdeacon Wilson, at the Rhyl Congress, that there was a good deal of legendary matter in the four Gospels, was promptly rebuked on the spot by so pro-

¹⁾ Mr Voysey was condemned in 1871 for denying the miraculous Incarnation of our Lord, and for extravagance of language in regard to other doctrines of the Faith. Mr Heath's case was very similar.

nounced a Liberal as Professor Sanday, and the Archdeacon, now in the care of an important parish, has probably found that the expression of such opinions is not of much assistance to him in his pastoral work. At all events, he has not of late repeated those assertions, but has come forward of late as a decided champion of Christian and Church of England education.

The real fact is that so far from our Church being a rope of sand, her clergy are firmly attached to the Nicene formula, the only living utterance, as we believe, of the Undivided and Universal Church. The Evangelical, or Protestant party accept its verities as unreservedly as those who claim the title of Catholic. And if the Protestant school among us be supposed to have fallen into errors, it should be remembered that those errors have never been formally condemned by the Catholic Church, and they are but the natural reaction from the errors of mediaeval scholasticism in the West. The vast majority, both of the clergy and of the laity of the Anglican Church are profoundly attached to her formularies, which, as may be seen, are primitive and Catholic. If undue liberty of action is allowed to individuals, it is because it is strongly felt that the old weapons of excommunication and persecution are not in accordance with the Mind of Christ, but that our true weapons against error are patience, persuasion and free discussion. ¹⁾

Moreover, the numbers and influence of those who are not faithful to the principles of their Church are very much exaggerated by some. The number of clergy who hold extreme rationalistic opinions scarcely amounts to a score. Those who lean towards Rome, partly in consequence of sentimental yearnings after reunion, and partly because the revival of Catholic life and ritual among us naturally took at first a Western direction, are more numerous. But as has already been pointed out in the pages of this Review, the Romanizing party among us has no thought of unconditional submission to Rome, but is buoyed up by hopes that Rome will be induced to make concessions. As your readers know well, it is not the custom of Rome to

¹⁾ Since these words were written, the *Guardian* (Jan. 22th 1896) has expressed a similar opinion on this point: "Both the Church and the people of England may appear at times almost cynically patient under anomalies; but, consciously or unconsciously, that patience is an appeal to something higher than the logic that condemns it."

make concessions. As those hopes die out, the eyes of those who at present are Romanizers will slowly but surely turn toward the Old Catholics and toward the East. The revival of the defunct Eastern Church Association makes it clear that many English Catholics are looking in the latter direction now. The recent Charge of the Bishop of Gibraltar displays that prelate, once so averse to any practical measures of sympathy with foreign Churches, as inspired at the present moment with a strong hope of ultimate reunion with the East. As to the utterances of individual and irresponsible clergymen in favour of submission to Rome as she is, the abeyance into which our ecclesiastical tribunals have fallen allows such utterances to take place among us, but they have no real significance whatever. They generally end in the secession to Rome of those who make them. But they go over entirely unaccompanied. It is years, in fact, since we lost any clergyman of any consequence to Rome, though a good many ecclesiastics of some note have left Rome of late for us and the Unitarians. Those who leave us are generally men of little knowledge and less judgement, and unless they happen to possess money, they usually are found of as little profit to the communion they have joined as to that which they have left. Sometimes, as in a recent instance, they come back to us after a short interval, when they have convinced themselves that their journey to Rome in search of a perfect Church has been in vain. Of course our lack of ecclesiastical discipline is an evil—an evil which is a sore trial to many at home, and a grievous source of misconception abroad—but it is at least a question whether a perfect system of ecclesiastical discipline, administered by imperfect mortals, is not an evil far more serious still. At least the condition of our communion is not found incompatible with an extraordinary amount of expansion, and with a large increase of moral ascendancy in our own country and in Christendom generally. And if growth, moral and material, is an evidence of Christian life in a community, the members of the Anglican Church need not be afraid to await with confidence the ultimate verdict of the Christian world.

ANGLICANUS.
