

The trouble in the Church of England

Autor(en): **Farquhar, J.T.F.**

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THE TROUBLE IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

To give a comprehensive account of the present state of affairs in the English Church is a task that few men could attempt with any prospect of success, and it is a very much more modest endeavour that I have set before me just now. Namely to present a few general reflections from the point of view of one who, though not a member of that national Church, yet finds ecclesiastical shelter close enough to take a lively interest therein. *Quum proximus ardet.*

The “present state of affairs” I call it, for it is not agreed even whether or no it ought to be called a crisis. And certainly when we look at the sane and dignified conduct and utterances of the responsible leaders as well of the State as of the Church herself and remember the eminently practical genius of the English people, which on more than one occasion has served them better than a striving after logical conclusions by the aid of imperfect knowledge and opportunity would have done, we may without precisely approving of everything the said leaders have done or taught, feel some confidence that the Church will suffer no deadly wound.

In any community indeed which is happy enough and strong enough to walk by the rule of freedom, unless mechanical routine be the ideal and lethargy the condition, ill-regulated and ill-informed minds will betray themselves, many through the mere unconscious craving to make themselves peculiar and notorious. Always then under normal conditions the imposing pretensions of Rome and her offer of a machine-aided, if not machine-made, salvation that seems so definite and so speedily to be won, will find disciples and produce other visible effects in the English Church. Similarly the ultra-Protestants, who have never, any more than their neighbours, been famous for

tolerance or for commonsense, are always ready to be up and doing, and those especially who have repudiated the communion of the Church love to pose as guardians of the purity of her doctrine. In Parliament for example, who so forward in this matter as Samuel Smith, and he I fancy would glory in the name of Dissenter?

Thus there is always at hand the material for a small conflagration, the Roman spark and the ultra-Protestant tow, and many are content to look no further than this, and not only to be confident that there will be no violent catastrophe, but even to adopt the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury in a more absolute sense than he probably meant them. He said that we have before us “a fire of straw that will soon burn itself out”.

But for myself I feel that this complacent view is hardly to be justified, for the present troubles are not due solely to the inevitable force of circumstances, but partly also to defects within the Church herself, so that it is not even to be wished that the disturbance should pass away and leave things as it found them. Still less that it should pass away and leave, as is possible, fresh error not only tolerated but triumphant and itself intolerant in our midst.

The existing defects of which I speak are not of course so serious as to make one tremble for the very existence of the Church, or even to forbid a marvellous strength and vitality never perhaps surpassed any where, but still they are able to throw grave hindrance in the way of the full fruition of her true capacities, and in particular full of evil in such conditions as obtain at present, and indeed certain to be the more injurious in proportion as the Church is more alive.

As a living body, visible and energetic in its own organs, the English Church has in many respects ceased to be; in particular there are no proper courts¹⁾ for trying cases of dis-

¹⁾ It is to be remembered that though Sir Arthur Charles the present Judge of Final Appeals in causes ecclesiastical has accepted ecclesiastical authority from the Archbishops, his predecessor in the Province of Canterbury, Lord Penzance, always refused to do so riding roughshod over both English tradition and Christian conscience, and this he was enabled to do by a recent Act of Parliament that still stands as law.

cipline and order among the clergy, and the direct interference of mere parliamentary authority is a disastrous scandal.

Of course the State has a certain legitimate concern with all the doings of an *Established* Church, and could not contract itself, even if it wished, out of the power of saying at any time that it disapproved of the Church's proceedings, and thought it fit to break the connection between them, leaving questions of property to be decided on principles of equity. But that Church courts should be dead and that every or any detail of internal Church life should be subject to direct secular decision and control is a very different and a very dangerous thing. And when further there is a shouting from the housetops that the State has a jurisdiction in such matters, not acquired and indirect, but essential and immediate, so that its decisions even those involving doctrine are ipso facto valid in the Church, it is not be wondered at that many men, in fear lest the very nature and purpose of the Church should be destroyed, and the creed revised by Parliament after every general election, are driven into the opposite extreme, and in an illogical fervour identify undesirable practices with the cause of ecclesiastical freedom, and even come to sympathise with the practices themselves. Let the recent enormous increase in the membership of the English Church Union bear witness to this.

It is to be remarked that the present evil is not the work of the Reformation; so far from it that there are those, who declare that they would be well content could the state of things then established be again restored. The supremacy of the Crown over the Church, they say, was indeed recognised but only in such a way that the proper corporate freedom was preserved for the latter. The Church and the State were sister spheres each ruled by appropriate courts which, possessing an essential character of their own independent of the Crown, were safeguards of all necessary liberty. In course of time however the ecclesiastical courts decayed and died, so that first the King and then the Parliament, which gradually absorbed the prerogatives of the Crown, came to enjoy a de facto but usurped authority, over the Church. A bad enough state of things at any time, but now intolerable when Parliament does not even profess to be an assembly of Churchmen — nay, not even of Christians.

Whether a serious study of the matter would fully bear out this favourable picture of the Reformation settlement, I cannot myself say. The then prevailing notion that Church and State were necessarily commensurate in membership, and the fact that the King was serving himself heir to the usurped authority of the Pope do not suggest that an ideal arrangement would be effected, but Lord Halifax, for example, the President of the E. C. U., who would not be likely to err in yielding any important ecclesiastical prerogative, has declared that a return to the Reformation arrangement would satisfy him.

Meanwhile to meet the present distress the two Archbishop have proposed to form themselves into a court, submission to which must of course be voluntary; and if any mere *modus vivendi* will accomplish peace this will do it and deserves to do it as a germ of even better things, but it is to be feared that ignorance, and factiousness, and even veiled hostility to the Church will defeat the good intention. Ere N° 26 of this Review be published, it is probable that the Archbishops will have given more than one judgment.

Be the ideal remedy, or the actual alleviation to be looked for, what it may, we have before us closely connected with the present troubles a serious defect in the Church, the cure of which would be cheaply purchased at a great price.

Again it is hard to resist the conclusion that there is more of a Romeward tendency than can be due merely to a reaction from the almost superstitious no-popery of preceding generations, full weight even being allowed for the sympathy with the Romanisers due to the personal merit of many of them and to their connection with the cause of ecclesiastical freedom. Naturally these men themselves will contend that the true Catholic standpoint lies considerably to the Romeward side of that taken up by the English Church, and that therefore a movement towards Rome is not necessarily in any danger of ever reaching Rome, and has no necessary connection with Roman doctrine at all, and that I believe this to be a true account of certain changes is implied by my very use of the term *ultra-Protestant*; but as to many of the more important changes I cannot but judge otherwise.

However leaving in this matter each to decide for himself, let us by some definite particulars establish the fact that there

has been in recent years a most distinct movement at least *towards* Rome.

Take the Eucharistic doctrine of the Tractarians. Whether they found it in Germany, or in the ancient Fathers, or evolved it for themselves might be disputed, but not that it is a novelty in the English Church ¹).

And it is equally clear that it is very much nearer to the Roman doctrine than any previously professed. Indeed it is not uncommon to hear those who hold it declare that they have no quarrel with Transsubstantiation on grounds other than those of metaphysics, and that granted its assumptions on this head, the doctrine follows of necessity. As to the prevalence of the Tractarian doctrine it is not possible to speak definitely, but I myself believe that it is only a minority of the clergy who would care to say outright that they did not receive it.

Or take habitual private confession; this also is an approach towards Rome, it is practically a new thing in the Reformed Church of England, and has been steadily gaining ground since the Tractarian movement. To what extent it has spread, with what urgency it is pressed upon the faithful cannot be accurately known; there is small appearance of its having made much way among the intelligent laity, but it is not long since I myself heard an English Presbyter in an address to a company of fellow clergy most of whom were more or less strangers to him, take for granted that they like him encouraged the practice. Certainly I was startled as well as dismayed at his assumption, but it is he, not I, who is the more likely to know how matters stand.

Or again there is the changing attitude with regard to holy days. Of old it was by a somewhat illogical appeal to the 4th commandment and with regard to Sunday only, that men contradicted the vital principle so strongly urged by St. Paul, that

¹) Those who require a proof of this statement may refer to the files of the *Scottish Guardian* for the Autumn of 1894, and they will find it in an exhaustive examination of the Anglican Divines appearing over the name of "Sacrae Theologiae Doctor". A correspondence ensued and the Tractarian champion took the same view as to the novelty, expressing himself thus "I do not think that the Eucharistic teaching of the Tractarians was *absolutely* without Anglican precedent. Surely however patent facts forbid us to doubt that they initiated an entirely new departure as far as our general teaching on the Eucharist is concerned".

with regard to such matters as the observance of days the individual conscience was essentially free from external rule; now there are many who come very near to teaching outright that all the Church's seasons are, not opportunities which she provides and recommends, but duties of absolute obligation on every faithful soul. Judaism of course will always be with us, but it is instructive to note its changing form.

Or finally when we look at all the Societies which have lately sprung up in the Church with more or less open and deliberate Romanist leanings, with the accompanying hostility to the Old Catholic movement on the Continent, when we look at all the novel and even absurd ceremonies by which in fact public opinion has been stirred so much, we cannot surely deny that the present Romeward movement gives cause for serious thought. Even if we could believe that it was due only to an inevitable swing of the pendulum from an opposite extreme, and that the energising force was no more than a much needed awakening to many half forgotten aspects of Catholic truth it would still be our duty to fight against extravagances and extremes; how much more then when we believe that there are other serious and permanent causes at work.

Of such we have touched upon the prostration of the Church under the heel of the State; let us close our reflections, by glancing at another lying more immediately still at the root of the agitation.

In the English Communion Service there lies a permanent suggestion to travel Romeward, a suggestion necessarily inoperative and even unperceived in a lethargic and ultra-Protestant age, but certain to make itself heard when as now the Holy Sacrament is returning to its own place as the central act of worship, and a reaction is abroad against the horror of the very name of Rome.

In the English service there is no Blessing or Thanksgiving for the Incarnation of our Lord; that is, it is not explicitly the Eucharist at all; there is nothing to correspond to the Passover blessings pronounced by our Lord, and surely looked at by the command "do this".

There is no Memorial or Oblation expressed. There is no Invocation to ask God in all spiritual fulness to ratify and fructify our earthly service. Or if there be traces of these things

they are no more than traces, and the evident intention of the whole service is one thing and one thing only, namely Communion; its main action consists in consecrating the elements by a formula, one may almost say a bare formula, and consuming them.

It is inevitable that a certain incompleteness, a certain want of spiritual life and point should be felt in such a liturgy as this. And what more natural for an undiscerning mind than to seek a remedy by attributing to the consecrating formula an efficacy the same as, or analogous to, that which is attributed to the same formula in the Roman mass by the Roman Church? What more natural than to turn to Roman books and without discerning the evil from the good to receive with avidity all there that promises to vivify and enrich the English service, which in no way opposes a contradiction and in itself is so bare and unsuggestive of more spiritual fulness.

That the Liturgy might be amended is not indeed to be looked for, but it is greatly to be wished.

J. T. F. FARQUHAR.
