

# The condition and prospects of the Anglican communion

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# THE CONDITION AND PROSPECTS OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION.

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It is now two years and more since I expressed my opinion on the condition and prospects of the Anglican Church. There is an American saying: "Never prophecy unless you know." And I must confess that in my last paper I gave utterance to anticipations which have not been realized. The schism between the adherents of the older Tractarianism and those who champion the shape that movement has assumed since the publication of *Lux Mundi* has not, so far, taken place. And the hopes expressed that the Report of the Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline would awaken public opinion to the dangerous extremes to which toleration has extended have not been fulfilled. There are reasons for this. The Parliamentary elections in 1906 displayed such a tremendous "swing of the pendulum" in the direction of Radicalism and Socialism, that the attention of the general public has been altogether diverted from ecclesiastical questions to such important subjects as the preservation of the British Empire, and the probability that what are called "the classes" may at no distant date be altogether submerged by "the masses". While as regards members of our own Church, it is a singular feature of modern life that no movement which is not highly organized, and which is without the support of energetic and popular newspapers and reviews, has the slightest chance of success. The old-fashioned Tractarianism of which Canon Liddon was the last eminent representative, has died out even more rapidly than the old-fashioned High Church Anglican school has done. It must mournfully be confessed that in all departments of thought the cheap

newspaper and the cheap Magazine is master of the situation, and that the movement which possesses neither is doomed to wither for years, it may be for ages, in the cold shades of neglect.

Nevertheless a change has come over the condition of our Church during the last twelvemonth, though it is impossible to say as yet whether it is likely to be permanent. That must depend on whether it can or cannot capture some newspaper or review which happens at once to be cheap, smart, and popular. The cause of this change is undoubtedly the Congress which last year was added to the periodical meeting of the Anglican Episcopate. The free expression of clerical and lay opinion which took place at this Congress has undoubtedly made, at least for the moment, considerable impression in this country. And chiefly in this way. The dominant section of our Church has long been supported by corks and bladders in the shape of repeated assertions of the unvaried success of its policy in gaining the people. But the unpleasantly plainspoken folk who made themselves heard at the Congress pointed out, beyond contradiction, that the Anglican Communion, in spite of these boasted triumphs, has not succeeded in gaining the people, either in the United States, or in Canada, or in Australia, or in South Africa, or elsewhere in the British Colonies, and that it is altogether distanced by Protestantism in the Mission Field. It was hardly possible to maintain the fiction of a triumphant progress all over the world after such an *exposé* as this, especially as it appears to have synchronized pretty exactly with the dominance of a particular party in the counsels of the Church at home. Nor did the circumstances appear to warrant the assumption that Protestantism, at which every half-fledged priest, and even every stripling has long been taught to gird, was quite such a negligible quantity as it has been the custom to represent it. The triumph of what are believed to be Catholic principles at home has been shewn to be not quite so complete as it has been represented. So, for the time at least, a disposition has shewn itself to regard ecclesiastical questions from a broader point of view, and to treat even Protestantism with a little less ostentatious display of contempt than has for years been the fashion. One point of importance is perhaps beginning to emerge from the obscurity to which it has of

late been consigned. It is that everyone is a genuine Catholic who accepts the formularies sanctioned by Œcumenical authority. The Protestant of to-day, on the other hand, in England at least, differs a great deal from the Protestant of fifty years back. It may be hoped that from 1908 onwards "Protestants" may be found less "Protestant", and "Catholics" more "Catholic", at least in the British Empire, than they have been in days past. For some little time "Protestants" among ourselves have learned to attach themselves less rigidly to the doctrinal formularies of the sixteenth century than they used to do, and to claim, moreover, more frequently their heritage as Catholics in the Catholic Church. On the other hand Father Tyrrell has been teaching our Mediævalists to regard the thirteenth century with less certainty as the "rock whence" Catholicism "was hewn", and the hole of the "pit whence" it "was digged". There can be no doubt, too, that the policy of the Roman "Modernist" has materially modified the views of advanced High Churchmen of late. The "Modernists" have done just what the Old Catholics have been blamed for *not* doing, that is, they have remained in the Roman Church while rejecting its current theology. And the influence on advanced High Church thought which they have gained thereby has considerably modified the attitude of the latter towards Rome. This modification, strangely enough, has produced a change of feeling towards Old Catholicism in the same quarter, as the recent foundation of the Society of S<sup>t</sup> Willibrord has proved. I shall not be suspected of condemning the Old Catholics—I do not of course mean for their separation from the Roman Church, for they did not leave it, but were driven out—but for their determination to enjoy the privileges of which the action of Rome had temporarily deprived them. But as the relations between Father Tyrrell and the Old Catholics are not unfriendly, and as the new Society has brought Old Catholics and "advanced" High Churchmen together, the two influences together must necessarily to a considerable extent modify the relations of extreme High Churchmen to Rome. Hitherto our advanced friends have been dependent for their ideas of Rome on the ecclesiastics of that Church with whom they have come in contact in their Continental trips, and whose rose-coloured pictures of their Church have been carefully touched up so as to en-

courage enthusiastic visitors in their sentimental idealism. In communication with Old Catholics and Modernists they will feel themselves on Catholic ground, but they will then be dealing with men who can tell them from long and bitter experience what Rome really is.

Another element of uncertainty in the situation of our Church is the very serious modification of Tractarian opinion to which I have already alluded as having taken place since the publication of *Lux Mundi*. As the neo-Tractarians have the command of the religious Press very largely in their hands, the followers of the older Tractarians have been reduced to an embarrassed and dissatisfied silence, but having no organ of their own which cares openly to maintain the old Tractarian position they are unable to keep the younger clergy in their allegiance to the views of the older Tractarians. What calls itself the "Catholic party" is more zealous for externals than for the defence of Catholic truth as understood by the older Tractarians. So entire has been the abandonment of their position that even the Life of their brilliant leader, Canon Liddon, concludes with an astonishing apology from the pen of the Bishop of Oxford, and the tone of this apology has called forth a spirited protest from Mr George Russell, in a new and shorter Life of the great Canon. Mr Russell thinks that Liddon's attitude to theology needed no apology, and with his protest I desire, as one of his pupils, most emphatically to associate myself. I have long predicted that the neo-Tractarians could hardly remain where *Lux Mundi* left them, and my prophecy has at length been fulfilled. An article in the *Church Quarterly Review*, the organ of the more learned and intellectual Tractarians, appeared in October 1908 which as it appears to me amounts to an entire abandonment of the Old Tractarian position, and an acceptance of the view of the Broad Church party of the day. The acceptance, by what I may call the *Lux Mundi* school, of Wellhausen's conclusions on Old Testament criticism, places that school in opposition to one of the most fundamental principles of the older Tractarians. It is obvious that this change of sentiment left the neo-Tractarians in an unsatisfactory logical position. The abandonment of the Scriptures as the infallible authority on which Catholic principles were based must either sweep away all the dogmatic

barriers on which the Church has hitherto rested, or it leads directly to Rome; there being no living authority which can lay down dogmas for the guidance of Catholic Churchmen on the "Branch theory", inasmuch as the three "branches" into which the Church, on that theory, is divided, are precluded by their divisions from meeting to decide the questions which are thought to be pressing for decision. It is true that, in the earlier stages of the Tractarian movement, the High Church Anglicans who had associated themselves with it were not unfrequently disposed to regard the voice of the Anglican Church, as embodied in her Prayer Book, as the "living voice" required. But though of course the formularies of the Anglican Church are or should be authoritative for her own children, infallibility can hardly be predicated of them when the Anglican Church herself so emphatically disclaims such infallibility. The only course open to Anglicans of the genuine Catholic type is to accept the official decisions of the Catholic Church in the past; to appeal, as the divines of the sixteenth century did, to a truly Œcumenical Council for a decision on the points disputed; and in the meanwhile to agree to differ on them. But whatever view may commend itself to us in these matters, there can be little doubt that the intellectual basis on which the "Catholic party" in our Church believed itself to have reposed is more or less completely withdrawn from it, and though its rank and file may long cling passionately to the scholastic theology, and the ritual which that theology caused to exist in the West from the thirteenth century onward, their position will hence forward be that of men suspended in mid air. The eventual dissolution of that party may therefore be looked for, though not, perhaps, in the near future. What the future lines of cleavage in our Church may be it is altogether impossible to predict at present.

The present position of what is called the Evangelical party is also interesting, and its future development uncertain. The last few years have seen a remarkable modification in its composition and policy. The older Calvinistic or Arminian tendencies appear to have vanished, save among the older members of the party, and the less intelligent of its younger men. Two opposite tendencies display themselves among the more thoughtful members of the party. Some of them seem inclined to follow the neo-Tractarians into the Broad Church camp. The more



orthodox thinkers are steadily approaching the position of the Anglican divines of the post-Reformation period, and are disposed, with the late Lord Salisbury, to pin their faith to "the Prayer Book as it is", not of course in every minute detail, but in all its main principles. One remarkable feature of the situation is that all parties alike seem inclined to regard the non-Episcopal bodies with far more respect than would have been thought possible a few years back. The attitude of English Churchmen, indeed, to the Nonconformist bodies could only be preserved by men who kept their eyes obstinately closed to what has been going on in them of late years—their virtual abandonment of Calvinism, and the cordial recognition by the ablest of them of the nineteen centuries of Catholic Church history as a blessed inheritance for Christian people to-day.

Of the recent proposals to alter the Prayer Book I can only say that the moment is particularly ill chosen for their introduction, and that they are far more likely to aggravate than to assuage our disputes. But there can be no doubt that the Church of England, and for the matter of that, the Nonconformist bodies also, and even the Roman Church itself, display a tendency to remove the ancient landmarks, and to address themselves to the problems of the future in a spirit altogether new. We may at least hope that the narrow-minded tenacity with which one school among us has clung to externals and to an obsolete scholasticism will soon disappear entirely. Some dissatisfaction has occasionally been expressed on our side of the North Sea with the rebukes of this spirit which have appeared in the *Revue internationale de Théologie* from time to time. I have ever thought that those rebukes were deserved, and I rejoice in the hope that a closer intercourse between us and our brethren on the Continent than has existed since 1882 will tend to remove all asperities, and to widen the horizon of both in the future. The only dangerous symptom which displays itself is the impatient and flighty spirit of the hour, which on the one hand is tempted to underrate the wisdom of the past, and on the other to overrate the infallibility of the present by representing the conclusions of the hour as absolutely final and incontrovertible. One who has lived through the greater part of the last century may be pardoned for falling back on his experience of the fact that the pioneers of spiritual progress

in that century, Tennyson, Maurice, Kingsley and others, fought their way though long continued and violent opposition to ultimate success, while their successors of to-day are frequently welcomed *because of*, rather than *in spite of* the novelty of their views. Herein lies our most serious danger. All true progress consists in the building on what is best and truest in the past. To ignore the past is to court disaster and ensure failure. To assume that "we are the men" who have reached the utmost pinnacle of truth is to make sure that "wisdom will die with us". The wise householder "will ever be he who takes care to" bring out of his store things new *and old*."

J. J. LIAS.

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