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THE
CHURCHMAN

JANUARY, 1896.

ART. I.—HOME REUNION.¹

ONE of the most marked features of the revival of true religion in this century, seen under distinct and apparently opposing schools of thought, is a desire for unity. The prayer of Jesus has seemed to fall afresh on the hearts of true Christians, and they have longed, and are longing, for a deeper oneness. "The Church of Christ," says Hooker in his "Ecclesiastical Polity" (vol. iii., p. 1), "which we properly term mystical, can be but one—a body mystical because the mystery of their conjunction is removed altogether from sense." The unity of spirit, the unity of faith, the unity of life, is hidden and invisible. Our "life is hid with Christ in God." It is true that there is no real living, lasting union among men except on the basis of a common life in Christ; but Christ prayed for a unity which might be visible and manifest, "that the world may know that Thou has sent Me." The late Professor Milligan, a Presbyterian of great learning and influence—and I quote him because he was a Presbyterian—writes: "The slightest glance at the New Testament is sufficient to show that in founding what He called the 'kingdom of God' or 'the kingdom of heaven' in the world our Lord contemplated more than dealing with men as individuals: He aimed at constituting a community, a Church. . . . If, therefore, it be the duty of the Church to represent our Lord among men . . . she must not only be one, but visibly one in some distinct and appreciable sense—in such a sense that men shall not need to be told of it, but shall themselves see and acknowledge that her unity is real." The primitive Church was one Catholic and Apostolic Church; one by the initiation of

¹ A paper read at the Wakefield Diocesan Conference, October 16, 1895.
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baptism, "baptized into one body"; one by the bonds of Holy Communion, "we, being many, are one bread"; one by obedience to Apostolic rule, "they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship."

A certain bishop advised his son to hold strong opinions, but never to give reasons for them, for "reasons could never be above dispute and criticism." If I do not give reasons for every statement in this paper, it is not because of the fear of criticism, but because of the shortness of time. I never quite realized till now how difficult a thing it is to get a gallon of liquid into a wineglass. Precious as are my moments, I must make one prefatory statement. I would warn myself and you against one danger—and the greater our yearning for unity, the greater the peril—viz., the concession of truths which are not ours to concede. Home Reunion can only be built up on the basis of the great Christian maxim, "In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas." Among the necessary things for Reunion are the primitive doctrine and the Apostolic constitution of the Church. The temple of corporate reunion can only be built upon the rock of primitive truth. It is my firm conviction that an indefiniteness of teaching which gives colour to the impression that a fixed or settled belief is unimportant, so far from helping Reunion, is a grave hindrance to its accomplishment. The minimizing of religious differences often means the depreciation of religious truths.

I know that to most people the thought of the reunion of the Church of England with Dissenters seems chimerical. The question before us is not what is likely, but what is right. As I think of the political history of the various members of the present Government, I realize that there is an underlying truth in the paradox, that "there is nothing so sure as the impossible." Who of the last century would have dreamed that in Scotland to-day any descendants of the Covenanters would ever bear to entertain the idea of anything like a union with the descendants of a persecuting prelacy? What are we Churchmen going to do in this matter? Our liturgy breathes the spirit of unity. I cannot forget that it was neither Cartwright nor Baxter, but Hooker, who pleaded for freedom of thought and worship, and that it was not Owen, but Bishop Jeremy Taylor, who asked for "liberty of prophesying."

I will briefly refer to the chief difficulty which lies in the way of Reunion, and then state what I believe to be three clear duties which we must undertake if we desire to see its accomplishment. The chief difficulty, I need not say, is the question of the validity of non-episcopal orders. It is not necessary to discuss the question for a very practical reason. The authoritative recognition of such orders would break up

the Church at home and in the colonies and in the mission-field into fragments. Such a remedy as regards Reunion would be far worse than the disease. What are we to do? Spread information. Appeal continually to Apostolic history and to the constitution of the early Church. We have gained one great step. The late Home Secretary, during the debate in the House of Commons on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill, said: "I hold very strongly that it is a historical fallacy to represent the Church of England as ever having been a mere offshoot and dependency of the Church of Rome. . . . I am quite prepared to admit . . . that there has been amidst all these changes and developments a substantial identity and continuity of existence in our National Church from earliest history down to the present time." Admit the continuity of the Church, and the way is prepared by constant appeal to its early history for the acceptance of its Apostolic constitution. In saying this, I would remind you of Hooker's dictum, that episcopacy is necessary to the *bene esse*, but not to the *esse*, to the perfection, but not to the existence, of a Church.

I must at once speak of what I consider to be *three* clear duties which lie before us:

(1) Members of the Church of England ought candidly and openly to confess her shortcomings in the past. The Church of England has very largely created Dissent in this country. Many of its phases "were little else than an eager pursuit after some truth which the Church had ceased to recognise in her practice, and which could not be lost without injury." Habits have become crystallized, views have been stereotyped, and separation is hereditary. At a certain period of my boyhood I thought that soap and water were invented for the sole purpose of blowing bubbles. I was taught that they were to be used for more practical purposes. Churchmen sometimes blow bubbles instead of washing their hands and faces. Time prevents my speaking of the rise of Congregationalism. The historical environments are too manifold and intricate. I ask, Would the Society of Friends ever have existed if that saintly and ardent soul, George Fox, had found in the Church of the seventeenth century the recognition in preaching and practice of that fundamental truth, "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Author and Giver of life"? Think of Wesleyanism and its origin. If the Church of England had recognised the desire of John Wesley, she would have had a great religious order within the Church—an order which she needs to-day—instead of a great denomination outside. Worldliness had so obscured her vision that she could not see the work of the Spirit in her midst. Think of men and women, for the most part of the poor, with love for perishing souls, visiting the

sick and dying, and with untutored lips speaking of One who came "to seek and to save that which was lost," and this after a long day of toil, whilst the clergy pocketed the parish endowments and neglected their work. The "oxen ploughed and the asses were feeding beside them." The shepherds ate of the fat and clothed themselves with the wool, but they did not feed the flock. Was it strange that the sheep should wander, when the fold was unguarded and the pasture bare? Let us frankly acknowledge the influence of the Wesleyan movement on the religious life of this land. I thoroughly agree with the Dean of Rochester when he said, speaking on behalf of Home Reunion: "Of this I am quite sure, that while all denunciations, all demands of allegiance, all satire, however caustic, all mere controversial arguments, will repel rather than attract that spirit of humility which recognises a wrong and seeks to repair it, will evoke the sympathy for which it prays and works."

(2) We must prepare the way for Reunion by adopting the methods of the Nonconformists if they prove adapted to reach souls which the Church has not yet influenced. We cannot change our doctrines, but we can be more comprehensive in our methods. What the Church of England needs is a spirit of conservative flexibility, "which, while zealously guarding every essential, enables her to reach out in this direction and in that as necessity may require." The clergy ought to be more ready to acknowledge the royal priesthood of godly laity. We have got rid of *prince-bishops*; we want to get rid of *parochial autocrats*. If some souls, for example, find extempore prayer to be a means of grace, shall I forbid them to meet for the purpose? Shall my methods be so stereotyped and unelastic that I shall drive my warmhearted, very likely ignorant, parishioners to sing in the streets, "We are frozen out," to be relieved by some new sect whose door is wide open, and whose fire is warm? Many parsons are like mulberry-trees. A mulberry-tree never puts out its leaves until all chance of frost is over. On the other hand, it is true that in almost every large centre of population there is some erratic brother who tries the most sensational methods to reach his people. These men remind me of that aggravating creature the corncrake, the chief end of whose existence seems to me to be to prevent the more orthodox and respectable birds in the immediate locality from falling asleep.

A holy order is not incompatible with a healthy freedom. Churchmen are sometimes too frigid and punctilious, prejudiced against all change, living paradigms of what always has been, and stubborn barriers against all that might be. The Archbishop of York, in his sermon at the Cardiff Church

Congress, said the Church "must make provision for the spiritual needs of all her children; if not, they may be driven to seek their satisfaction elsewhere. She must study the expression of those needs as she sees them in the modes of worship, and in the habits of thought of those who are separated from us. She must learn to satisfy all those needs if she is to draw the wanderers home." The primitive Church was the Church of the democracy. How can I put my thoughts in a few broken sentences? As I look back upon the past history of the Church of England, I see that she has been weakest when she has been an exclusive caste, and realized least the exclusiveness of a higher spiritual life wherever found. The Church of England is rising, and will rise, to a more primitive catholicity when she more reflects in her organization the spirit of that grandest of all sentences in the *Te Deum*, "Thou hast opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." I believe that one of the barriers to Reunion will be removed when Nonconformists see that the Church of England desires to utilize every Christian force, to provide scope for the exercise of every Christian energy.

(3) I have well-nigh finished. If time allowed, I should have pleaded for Reunion on the ground of economy of effort and effectiveness of united labour. The *Times*, in a leading article on the Archbishop of Canterbury's Pastoral, said: "Is it quite impossible that persons may agree to differ, and may yet be so far united as to live peaceably and lovingly, and to work together for objects which they have in common? It is not all that the Archbishop is anxious to see, but it would be at least a step gained, and would make a visible union in discipline and doctrine and recognised Church membership less impracticable than it appears just now." This is true. Let us be careful to avoid every uncharitable word. Let us not forget that many within the Church are but nominally its members; many beyond it are in the enjoyment of its real graces. Let us at all times recognise the fruits of spiritual life in our Nonconformist neighbours. God has manifestly blessed their work. Let us know the Nonconformists socially as friends—religious friends—not primarily with a design to their conversion to our views, but because they are brethren in Christ. When speaking of this mode of action, Canon Gore writes: "Let us have fellowship; this will dissipate prejudice, and lead, we trust, in company with other efforts, to a large development and reunion in the one Church on the basis, not of our Anglicanism simply, but of the institutions, the creed, and the worship that are really Catholic, the inalienable heritage of the children of men." Patience must have her perfect work. We of this generation are not likely

to see corporate reunion. Like David, we are collecting materials for the erection of the temple which we are not allowed to build; the stains of warfare—of warfare often necessary and legitimate, sometimes illegitimate—are upon us. Our successors may or may not see its completion; but one thing is certain: God will bless every effort in the direction of Christian unity and love; and as certain also is the fact that we are preparing the way for David's Son. He will put the top stone to the temple of corporate reunion when He enters upon His reign of eternal and universal peace.

In conclusion, "charity begins at home." The one obstacle, I always find, in the discussion of reunion with Nonconformists themselves is the divisions within the Church. I cannot stay for a moment to show that from one point of view these very divisions are an argument in favour of reunion, that the comprehensiveness of the Church of England is her strength. This is true, and yet our divisions are a stumbling-block to those outside her pale. How can we desire Home Reunion and not strive for "reunion at home"—my home an Evangelical, your home a High Churchman? Not the home of those who teach Roman doctrine as distinct from Apostolic and primitive truth. We are brethren; we dwell under the same roof-tree, the home of our fathers. Let us each be unflinchingly true to our convictions, but let us beware of our prejudices. It was a saying of Charles Kingsley that "no man is so right that his adversary is altogether wrong." Let us be true to party, but let us pray to be delivered from party spirit. Shall the uniting principle become of less moment than the forces that rend asunder? I am going to put the matter strongly, but I speak from the observation of years when I say that party spirit is like the action of *foreign Governments with reference to tobacco. They always make the most revenue out of the worst quality.* Let us leave this conference "pledged by silent vow to 'walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us,' drawing ever nearer and nearer to Him, and so, like the radii of the circle as they approach the centre, nearer also to one another, clinging, each of us, to his own experience and conviction of the truth as God may have revealed it to him, but rejoicing also to love and honour every man, who, though separated from us by differences of opinion as wide as the poles asunder, holds fast with us Christ the Head, and already one with Him invisibly, by the nerve of a living faith, hopes hereafter to be one with Him visibly in eternal, manifested union."

J. W. BARDSLEY.