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The Record of the Several Religious Parties Relative to Art.

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THERE are not so many now who reckon the Church of Rome, whatever her other delinquencies, to have been always the trusty and the unique nurse of the fine arts—whether these be viewed as fulfilling their own distinctive, peculiar function, or as serving as a factor auxiliary to Christian knowledge and devotion—though the delusion has been dying an uncommonly hard death. It should be understood that in the pre-Reformation era the Protestant, the primitive Christian, spirit had never been entirely dispossessed. It lingered on in the Church, actuating the minds of craftsmen, if only fitfully ; an undercurrent, a tendency unidentified, a heaven-born impulse towards originality, which could be religious without being ecclesiastical, which asked for no priestly prescribing of the objects and details round which it would entwine its idealizings. Not the Renaissance alone disclosed this underswell, though in that period we witness an intensification and in some ways an exaggeration of it. Ecclesiasticism had not then knitted up its regulations and administrative forces with its later thoroughness. Genius felt no tug of any arbitrarily and precisely measured chain. She could roam through art's lovely demesne without being now and then pulled up sharply at some door marked "Private." The layman was considerably more "free to serve." Men such as Dante and Michaelangelo could never in modern days have so far developed and exercised their powers according to their own bent within the pale of that Church which now claims them for her scions. But eventually the Reformation brought about the inevitable sifting. And Ruskin judges that "Romanism, instead of being a promoter of the arts, has never shown itself capable of a single great conception since the separation of Protestantism from her side."

One department of art there is to which, ere passing from

this point, particular reference may perhaps be made. Rome's advocates in latter years have been claiming the Gothic style of architecture as a creation peculiarly hers. Yet the original Gothic builders were laymen, not clerics, and, indeed, are known to have often left whimsical traces imprinted on their work of their lax veneration for the latter. To the last the ecclesiasticism at the Italian headquarters was chary of encouraging their work. Generally speaking, we do not get Gothic churches south of Milan. The style had fallen into universal disuse a good while previous to the Reformation. The building of Cologne Cathedral, *e.g.*, had been brought to a standstill through this widespread apathy. And, as for the post-Reformation period, to quote Ferguson's standard "History of Architecture," "if the countries which remained Papal did not learn to hate, they at least learned to despise the works of their forefathers; they saw the most beautiful Gothic churches fall to decay" without regret. Nor did the modern revival of the style owe anything to Romanist encouragement. Pugin deplored the dissimilarity of ideal in this respect between his church leaders then in England and the men of old time. Wiseman, and Newman after him, had no appreciation for Gothic. Sir F. Scott, in the dispute over the building of the Foreign Office, could at that date (1860) point out how "in modern times the Ultramontane party have formally protested, by means of their organs in the Press, against the use of Gothic architecture as being heterodox and alien from the practice and customs of Rome."

It is enough, however, for our purpose to demonstrate that Protestantism puts no damper on art. Dr. Hans Rost, a Romanist writer, who has lately published a work on the social condition of German Roman Catholics, after airily declaring that "the Catholic Church has been through the centuries the upbearer of art,' finds himself compelled to admit that in the art domain Protestants exceed, and Romanists fall short of, their due numerical proportion.

It is not being contended that the proficiency of a race or community in art will always be proportionate to its possession

of revealed truth. Naturally it need not be so, inasmuch as art and religion occupy quite distinct planes, though they were ordained by the same Author, and therefore cannot ultimately be discordant. Nor has it been so historically. The Greeks were, and doubtless will prove for all time to have been, the world's paragon artists. But then they never refused or suppressed the Gospel light, for in the good pleasure of God it did not come their way, whilst the same Divine good pleasure ordained that out of the treasury of "general grace" they should be favoured and endowed with this lovely gift. Analogously in the case of the medieval Communion, as Ruskin has said, "so long as, corrupt though it might be, no clear witness had been borne against it, so that it still included in its ranks a vast number of faithful Christians, so long its arts were noble." But since the Reformation Rome has had opportunity to accept, and has rejected, a clearer light.

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The first representatives of the more strict or, if anyone wills, more stringent type of Protestantism, as it emerged at the Reformation, are now receiving more of the credit due to them for the sane and generous attitude which they entertained towards art and the good service they rendered in her cause. Even Calvin is well on the road towards recovery of his repute. "All the arts come from God, and are to be respected as contrivances Divine." The fine arts are "excellent gifts of the Holy Ghost." Art was intended to disclose to man ideals beyond what the corrupted world of reality can offer us. Objection to sculpture based on the Second Commandment was unworthy of refutation. So he thought and wrote, many have come to know. In particular, as it is of the essence of art to suggest or convey an impression of the infinite and boundless, so it is also her principle, Calvin perceived, that every appropriate object in nature and life should be enlisted as a subject for idealization, and that every individual should equally share in the enjoyment of her creations. The Renaissance, it is true, had done something to fulfil these latter conditions. Its

art made a beginning in dealing with home scenes, and in bringing pictures into homes. Art then stepped out genially from her immurement in the sanctuary, but it was only to put on presently the gyves of a "classic expert" exclusiveness in workmanship. Accordingly the privileged task remained for Calvin pre-eminently, both in his own person and through those professional workers who followed him and shared his spirit and tenets, to restore to art her imperatively essential but long-lacking catholicity. Men like Taine and Carrière, though no friends of its theology, both concede the services of Calvinism in the liberation of art then. The plain citizen, the common man, was discovered, and came by his own, when personal "election" had been adopted as a creedal keystone. The "daily round" came to be deemed worthy, as well as capable, of the enhancement of idealization.

Calvin restored to the people the knowledge and use of the Psalter, which during the Middle Ages had lain in Latin dress, incomprehensible to the generality. It was his Genevan metrical Psalter that gave the lead to the Church of England in the metrical hymn direction, according to Hardwick. He memorialized the Geneva City Council to assist in the good work. He summoned Bourgeois to the task of setting the metrical renderings to music; and Bourgeois's tunes, we read in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, "in their original form, are masterpieces which have remained popular on the Continent from the first, and are the best that can be imagined for solemn congregational singing." Yet writers in both the religious and the æsthetic domain, and Evangelicals not least, through prejudice and culpable lack of knowledge, have persistently represented Calvin as insensible to song as well as to art in general.

Then the Dutch school, culminating in Rembrandt, took Painting by the hand and led her outside her previous cribbed and cabined groove. Art at that point, Lord Leighton says, "more and more seized upon every object, not of mere display, but of daily use, the steadfast and prevailing aim being 'that everything which had form and colour and was capable of

adornment should be ennobled by the touch of Art.'" At a later stage, from among the ranks of English Protestantism, there arose the great masters who gave the lead to the world in landscape painting. These were by descent and associations more closely linked with the stricter school than with any other. And the soil had been prepared for them by the poetry of Thomson of the "Seasons," and, earlier still, though in less detail, by the verses of Milton and Marvel—utterances which had awakened appreciation and reverence for the beauty and grandeur of God's ever open and accessible temple of nature. The names of Gainsborough, Constable, Crome, and Cotman will occur to the reader as the foremost among this galaxy of artists. And it is a simple fact that they in their turn inspired the French masters, Millet and his fellows, who founded the renowned "plein air" school of art.

Further, if poetry be the highest form of art, and if art's "shareability" should be on the broadest plane that is consistent with propriety, the Evangelical Revival must not be denied its due meed of credit. It found our secular poets destitute of the lyrical note. "Whatever else the poets of Pope's time could do they could not sing," writes Mr. Beers, the historian of English Romanticism. And it revived that note. That epoch proved to English hymnody what the Augustan was to Latinity.

But the range of their potentialities in the realm of the fine arts has never been fully gauged by the Protestant peoples. Other fields of more pressing importance have commanded an unceasing outflow of their imaginative energies—the engineering, the mechanism, the institutionalism, so multifarious in their nature, which have made the modern world so different from what it was. Nor can the Romanist pretend not to understand this exigency; his own monks have relinquished the old art of manuscript illumination, finding that other concerns have a more urgent claim on their time and skill.

Even the Puritans are receiving a somewhat fairer treatment in the matter of possession of artistic sense and appreciation. The old sweeping assertions are not being made. Theirs was a

lot of stress, little conducive to sedulous cultivation of the lighter charms of life. But the finest music comes forth from the harp-strings when they are straining and taut. Spencer and Marvel, as well as Milton, sang; Coverdale, too, disclosed the rhythmic capacities of prose. The facts concerning Cromwell's services to music have been laid bare, as well as his valuable encouragement of painting (in which he was ably seconded by his chaplain, Stirry, a connoisseur in that branch), and his rescue for the nation of masterpieces which Charles had been inclined to sell. The memoirs also recounting the varied accomplishments of the regicide, Hutchinson, have been read afresh; and it is recalled how Wren trained himself for his craft during that Commonwealth period.

True, they were disposed to exclude the fine arts from the precincts of worship. They dreaded the "handmaid" becoming a Hagar. They dreaded worship-inspired art degenerating into mere art-inspired worship. So had the Moors of Spain, who yet created the Alhambra. The private chapel of Lenthall, Speaker of the Long Parliament, with its carved angels guarding the entrance, aptly typified the Puritan attitude to art. Representative Puritanism carried its hostility no further, as even the Rev. P. Dearmer recognizes, though the inferior spirits did revive the old mistake of preferring world-flight to world-conquest. For unmeasured repression of artistic feeling on the part of responsible religious leaders, we have to hark back to some of the more eminent of the medievalists, aye, to some of the most revered of the Fathers, against whom, somehow, no one ever remembers to take up this reproach.

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What have been the services of Tractarianism to art? It is high time that the question was asked. There is more than a dumb, tame acquiescence on the part of Evangelicals in the idea that the interests of art have been fostered and advanced in a peculiar and decisive degree under Ritualistic auspices. Indeed, Evangelicals themselves are constantly heard stating that the outstanding principle and characteristic of the movement has

been an over-emphasis and a too exuberant cultivation of the æsthetic sense, in connection with the externals of worship. It is taken for granted apparently that the art requisitioned is in its essence genuine and accurate, though to be sure misplaced, or at all events overvalued and obtrusive. And so the impression is formed that, while the system must be decried on doctrinal grounds, on this secondary plane its leading spirits have earned our gratitude and veneration for their trusty, enthusiastic, and almost consecrated zeal in the cause of art, God's next best gift to man. Nay, the simple-minded Evangelical, though consoled with the conviction that he possesses a clearer Gospel light, has been made to feel that there is something relatively gross and course about his mental make-up, that he lacks taste and a refined sensitiveness, as compared with his Ritualistic neighbour, lay or clerical. Is there warranty for any such conclusion?

Take architecture. Tractarianism is imagined to have been the fairy godmother of the Gothic style. Yet (1) it is a fair presumption that that school never cultivated it on its own merits as a form of art, but simply on the score of its having been a medieval feature. It is instructive to recall, if Laud be considered to have had any affinity with them, that old St. Paul's in his day was the finest of English Gothic cathedrals, and yet that apostle of "the beauty of holiness," as he deemed it, collected a huge sum for the rebuilding of this ancient fane, and Inigo Jones was authorized to pull down the old work and to re-erect it in the Grecian style. The Laudian diarist, Evelyn, is also scathing in his scorn of Gothic. (2) Their exertions in this department are now widely recognized to have been one prolonged process of bungling. In the main they have but succeeded in caricaturing and, where restoration was intended, in spoiling the old Gothic. Canon Rawnsley's strictures in the new "Prayer-Book Dictionary" on the pseudo-Anglican connoisseurs of the past sixty years are worth reading. He quotes Mr. Thackeray Turner to the effect that they have "robbed the majority of our ancient churches of their true expression." Gilbert Scott in his day used to wax eloquent on the wholesale

mischief that was being wrought by "neo-medieval architects." "Has not the hand of a false and destructive restoration swept like a plague over the length and breadth of our land?" "Greater havoc has been made among sacred edifices in our own time—boasting as we do of a revived taste for their beauties—than they had experienced from three centuries of contemptuous neglect." Oddly enough, present-day authorities include himself as well among the delinquents (see the "Encyclopædia Britannica" and the Home University Library Manual). And (3) they took little pains to obviate the defects to which the genuine Gothic is liable. It is notorious how acoustic considerations have been overlooked in the modern lavish attempts at the style. The quality of solidity, also, has been unduly sacrificed. Churches (and other buildings) seem as though they were erected for the admiration of the passer-by rather than for the comfort and convenience of the users. Mr. Beresford Pite aptly remarks that whilst the wisdom of serpents has always planned theatres and music-halls in keeping with their primary requirements, under this movement the foolishness of doves has continued to plan churches upon other principles. In a true rendering of art utility would be combined with beauty, as it ever is in the primordial art of nature.

And take music. Sacerdotalism removed organ and choir from their former position in the west gallery in order that the "priest" might have his retinue of quasi-Levites in the aisle and chancel. How has this enhanced Church music in point of art? Let Sir Walter Parratt, the King's Organist, answer. Addressing the Bristol Church Congress, after being introduced by the President as the "Archbishop of Music," he deprecated the almost invariable arrangement of placing the choir in a narrow chancel, from which the sound emerges most imperfectly, in addition to the fact that the congregation, seeing in front a number of people paid more or less to do their work, makes small effort to participate. He declared emphatically in favour of the west end position for the organ, as did a Diocesan Committee under Bishop Gore, at Worcester, some little time

subsequently. Women's voices were silenced in the choirs with the same end in view, and yet who will pretend that vocal music, as an art, was furthered by the exclusion of a factor which is reckoned as indispensable in the oratorio? "The interpretation of vocal music is specially the province of woman," says the music historian Upton; "it is a realm where her sway will always be undisputed." Again, in respect of the wording of devotional compositions, Professor Shuttleworth attests that "Hymns Ancient and Modern" "set the fashion of a type of hymn in which it is impossible for a thoughtful man to join with reality and intelligence"; and Dr. Walker, in his "History of English Church Music," passing under review the music which dominated the period subsequent to 1861, when that collection appeared, characterizes it as redolent of sentimentalism, as revelling in cheap, sugary harmony, as lacking the bracing sternness which lies at the root of the supreme music of the world; and he judges the period to be one on which future historians of our religious music "will look back with the reverse of pride."

Evangelicals may be assured that the Word which God inspired and the artistic talents He bestows will not prove to be habitually divergent. There are other minor departments of art, wherein the above result equally discloses itself. The Grinling Gibbons wood-carving was contemptuously cast out of Winchester College Chapel and other churches while the pseudo-Catholic tide was at full swell. Cardinal Logue lately consecrated an oratory in Co. Louth, which is adorned, as the Romanist papers gleefully told, with some of these discarded treasures. And in the *Nineteenth Century* of June last there was sad but instructive reading as to the extent to which old Church plate has been flung out to make way for new imitations of medieval vessels.

More than once Ruskin insisted that love of newness, novelty, was a prime indication of bad taste. Nor can a party which looked with favour on the Ober-Ammergau Passion Play very cogently claim the palm for delicate sensibility. Neither can

they point to an increased appreciation for good art among the populace, as an outcome of their revival; it is emphatically the other way in the judgment of one of themselves, the art critic, Mrs. Russell Barrington.

A word more. Ritualistic art-fashions have their tides and ebbs, and it is a pitiful and undignified thing that Evangelicalism should seem so prone to get sucked into their backwash. The new "Encyclopædia Britannica" justifiably regrets that the Liverpool committee should have clung to the "played-out bias" for Gothic, and did not take the opportunity to evolve a Protestant type of cathedral, with central area and dome. The Oriental dome, in the view of Tyrwhitt, was matchless as an expression of sublimity and soaring aspiration. Again, in many quarters people now are finding themselves more secure from musical vagaries in the High Church than in the supposed Evangelical congregations. And the sequaciousness may be observed in a variety of the more subsidiary accessories. One of these, by way of exemplification, may be accorded the briefest closing notice—the Continental soutane, commonly called the cassock. Once it might have seemed a veritable bathos so to refer to it; but surely not now, when its absence from the attire of an officiating clergyman is more resented by many "Evangelicals" than the absence of the Atonement message from his sermons. We would simply raise the point whether its adoption is in harmony with true artistic principle. Lord Leighton and other authorities like him have effusively admired the long flowing vesture of classic days, and surely the undocked surplice approaches it more closely than the newer garb. It is a canon of Art that she should suggest the boundless, or at least not obtrude a boundary. Landscapes are never painted as enclosures; a slanting and not an even cut is given to the flower-stalk. Edgings have been discarded in latter-day wall decoration in obedience to the same instinct. It is possible to secure the "neat" at the sacrifice of the artistic.