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THE HISTORY AND TEACHING OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.¹

BY W. GUY JOHNSON.

THE issue of his first Episcopal Charge by a scholar of the weight and distinction of the Bishop of Gloucester, still best known as Dr. Headlam, is an important event at a time like this ; and it becomes yet more important when the Charge is found to consist of a comprehensive review of the history and teaching of the Church of England. The extent of ground covered by this substantial volume makes anything like a complete summary of its contents impossible within the compass of a magazine article. No more will be attempted here than an appreciation of the Charge as a whole and a brief criticism of some of the points which seem to call for special comment.

The scope of the Charge is expressed in the concluding paragraph of the Introduction, where the Bishop writes :

“ I cannot but think that, especially in view of the discussions and hopes of the present time, it will not be inappropriate if I devote my primary visitation Charge, to reviewing the history and purpose of the Church of England, to discussing its doctrine, its worship, its organization, to considering its relation to other religious bodies, and to attempting to outline its mission in the world.”

This is an extensive programme for a single volume of less than three hundred pages. It is, of course, inevitable when so many matters, each of which bristles with the controversies of the moment, are dealt with that the treatment should frequently be dogmatic in form and that statements should be made for which the available space will not allow the evidence on which the author relies to be given. The Bishop, indeed, tells us that this Charge is but the outline of a larger work which he hopes some day to complete. We trust that this hope will be realized, for all that Dr. Headlam writes is marked by solid scholarship, an independent judgment and complete outspokenness. It is possible that closer examination of the evidence may lead him to modify some of the statements he makes here.

¹ *The Church of England*, by the Rt. Rev. Arthur C. Headlam, C.H., D.D., Bishop of Gloucester. London: John Murray. 12s. net.

One of the first impressions which the book will leave on the mind of the reader is the evident and sincere effort which is made to approach the consideration of the various questions to be discussed, with fairness and detachment of mind, and to give the fullest weight to the arguments upon them from whatever quarter they may come. Difficulties are in no case evaded, even if we may think that at times they are not fully met ; and it will be found that in many cases where a questionable admission seems to be made it is deprived of much of its possible mischief by the powerful antiseptic of the Bishop's strong common sense expressed in some qualifying statement.

The Charge comes from a High Churchman, and one who in some respects is more advanced than the High Churchmen of Caroline days, though his attitude towards Nonconformity is more tolerant and reasonable than theirs. He sees clearly the drift of the Anglo-Catholic movement as developed in recent years and speaks strongly enough about it at times ; but he does not seem to realize how completely subversive of the whole basis of the Church of England the movement is. And it is unfortunate that in the introduction he suggests a doubt as to the possibility of ascertaining what the teaching of the Church of England is :

“ A further characteristic of it is that it (the Church of England) is difficult to define or to describe. We know what Calvinism is. We find its tenets admirably put before us in the Institutes of Calvin. We know what Lutheranism is : it represents quite clearly the teaching of Luther. The Church of Rome has systematically defined and regulated its doctrine, its worship and its law ; but what is the teaching of the Church of England ? There is no great theologian to whom we can appeal and say ‘ Here you can find what we teach ’ ” (p. 1).

But, even if there were no great theologian to whom we could appeal, which can only be admitted with qualification, have we not two authoritative documents which sufficiently meet the need—the Prayer Book and the Articles of Religion. Is either of these so obscure as to convey no meaning ? Until the exigencies of the party which sought to reverse the Reformation Settlement, but desired to hide this purpose, compelled a meaning to be read into both which they were never intended to bear and which grammatically and historically they are not capable of bearing, there was no doubt as to the position and teaching of the Church of

England in the minds of the great and distinguished band of her Divines from the Reformation until the middle of the nineteenth century. It is a bad policy to weaken the standards of authority. They may be altered or superseded, just as they superseded earlier standards; but hints of disparagement or suggestions of obscurity furnish excuses for withholding obedience to people who ignore altogether the limits which the Bishop would place upon his own words. And it is here where so many of the Bishops, and other people as well, seem to go astray. They cherish the idea that if permission to disregard authority in certain directions is given it will still be possible to say "Thus far, but no farther." Have we not just seen the Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Pretoria trying to put the brake on, and protesting against Mr. Pinchard's advocacy of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary? Just as the demand for adoration of the Sacrament has been forced on during the last decade, so will the adoration of the Virgin Mary in the next few years, unless we return to history, to common sense and to the standards of the Church of England—Holy Scripture, the Creeds, the Prayer Book and the Articles of Religion.

We find another example of the weakening of the standards of authority in the case of the treatment of the question of the Mass Vestments, or as the Bishop calls them "Eucharistic Vestments." It is admitted (p. 81) that "the actual law depends upon a judgment which has not been overruled, according to which the Eucharistic Vestments are not legal." So far good, but the Bishop goes on to say: "There was strong ground for thinking it was a judgment of policy rather than of law," and adds, "I have read with much care what has been said on this subject, and I cannot feel that there is any real force in the argument which has been used condemning the vestments." The Bishop can hardly have realized how serious an accusation he makes against so eminent and distinguished a body of judges as those who tried the case *Ridsdale v. Clifton*, in suggesting that their judgment was one of policy rather than of law. The original author of the statement, Chief Baron Kelly, was one of the judges, but dissented from the conclusion of the majority, which included the first Lord Selborne and Lord Chancellor Cairns. Annoyed, we may presume, at having been overruled he charged the majority with following policy and not law. For this he had to make a public apology. It was dated

October 25, 1877, and was published in *The Times*, "withdrawing and correcting the statement." Those who have read the chapter on the Ridsdale Judgment in Lord Selborne's *Memorials* will be able to estimate the value of the accusation. As the author withdrew it publicly it ought to have been left to its merited oblivion. The Bishop, however, proceeds to discuss the question of the Vestments, and it must be admitted that he does so in a candid and tolerant spirit. It is evident that he has taken great pains to get at the truth of the matter. Though he does not see the force of the argument against vestments, his own opinion is "quite decidedly in favour of the surplice," "to me the dignified simplicity of the white surplice harmonizes better with the whole character of this service." He goes on, however, to say that "both usages prevail in the Church, both have become legal by prescription." But, surely, it is the province of *the law* to declare what is legal, and the surplice is legal by more than prescription. Space will not admit of a discussion of the Ornaments Rubric, but as the Bishop has been persuaded, or has persuaded himself that the rubric requires the vestments, we may ask if he has really considered the bearing of the historical evidence, much of which he recounts on the matter. In its present form the rubric comes to us from the revisers of 1662. Not one of the Bishops of the time required, and not one of the clergy used the vestments. They had disappeared for 100 years and were never revived until after the rise of the Oxford movement. Moreover, all the Bishops on the bench required in the ministering of the Sacraments the use of a large and comely surplice with sleeves. It is one thing to connive at neglect of the law; it is quite another to issue directions contrary to it. Surely the Bishops who had taken part in drawing up the rubric knew what they meant. The utter disappearance of the vestments and the universal recognition of the surplice are impossible to reconcile with the theory that the rubric was intended to direct the use of the vestments. The conclusion at which the Bishop arrives is startlingly paradoxical: "It seems to me, therefore, that by the law of the State vestments are enjoined; by the law of the Church there is no authority for their use." By the law of the State the Bishop here means the Prayer Book, since that is enjoined by an Act of Parliament. But the Prayer Book, before it reached Parliament, was drawn up by the Church; it comes to us with the authority of Convocation as

well as that of Parliament. Is it conceivable that Convocation should deliberately draft a rubric in contradiction to the Canons, which direct the use of the surplice, send it to Parliament for enactment and then universally violate it? Most people would feel that a theory which does such violence to the facts stands condemned. On this point the Bishop repeats the statement which is often heard, that "The original policy of the Queen (Elizabeth) was in favour of retaining the vestments." For this statement there is no evidence, and what we know of Elizabeth's actions points the other way. Bishop Boyd Carpenter, of Ripon, in his *Popular History of the Church of England* (p. 215), wrote: "It is thought that the queen, who loved pomp and ceremony, hoped that the old vestments would be revived. But this is only a conjecture *and is not borne out by what took place afterwards.*" Elizabeth was fond of pomp and ceremony, and the ordering of the use of the cope in cathedral and collegiate churches on great festivals may have been due to her; but she had a much clearer view of matters concerning doctrine than she is usually credited with, and a desire to retain the Mass Vestments in the services of the Church is quite out of harmony with what we know of her.

On the subject of Confession the Bishop writes much that is of real value. His practical sense and clear theological perception put the matter on its proper footing. He sees what is the mischief of Confession: its tendency to undermine self-reliance and to lead to a dependence upon the direction of a priest. "When once people begin the habit of confession they begin to exaggerate formal ecclesiastical offences, they lose the idea of character and substitute the idea of discipline" (p. 99). But it is unfortunate that he makes an admission which greatly weakens the force of his counsel. He tells us that in the Long Exhortation in the Communion Service, the Church of England "quite clearly recognized the value of confession" (p. 97). But is this so? Let us compare the present Exhortation with the form in which it appeared in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI.

"And if there be any of you, whose conscience is troubled and grieved in any thing, lacking comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned *priest*, taught in the law of God, and *confess* and open his *sin* and grief *secretly*, that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice and comfort, that his conscience

may be relieved, and that of us (as of the ministers of God and of the Church) he may receive comfort and absolution, to the satisfaction of his mind, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness: *requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general confession, not to be offended with them that do use, to their further satisfying, the auricular and secret confession to the priest; nor those also which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to GOD, and the general confession to the church. But in all things to follow and keep the rule of charity, and every man to be satisfied with his own conscience, not judging other men's minds or consciences; where as he hath no warrant of God's word to the same.*"

This was carefully revised three years later, in 1552, and, practically, as so revised it appears in our present Prayer Book. The following is the form as it now stands:

"And because it is requisite, that no man should come to the Holy Communion, but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned minister of God's Word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God's holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

In view of the fact that all the words marked in italics in the earlier form were removed, it is a very strong assumption to regard the present form as having reference to confession. And considering that in both, the resort to a minister is regarded not as the normal but as the exceptional thing, the Bishop's statement, "It is, I think, clear that if any man or woman desires habitually to go to a priest for confession, for absolution and direction, there is nothing contrary to the teaching of the Church of England in that," is scarcely in accordance with the evidence.

It is to be wished, too, that in his references to the Malines controversy the Bishop had dealt rather with the realities of the situation than with its appearances. There is, moreover, here a tone of irritation in his comments strikingly absent from the Charge as a whole. He speaks of the "curious controversy which has arisen as to which religious community has been wicked enough to try and behave in a Christian way for the first time" (p. 158). With most that the Bishop says on the subject there will be general

agreement. But, surely, the point of the objection to the Malines "conversations" was that Rome has made it perfectly clear that the only terms upon which relations can be established are those of complete submission to her claims and full acceptance of her teaching; and this objection derived additional weight from the fact that Lord Halifax was the leader in the matter. Of Lord Halifax's sincerity and devotion to the cause of religion, the Bishop speaks in the highest terms, and deservedly. But it remains true that Lord Halifax is the representative of those who accept with very slight reservations almost the whole system of Roman doctrine, and while he is universally respected, he can hardly be regarded as one who would suitably represent the position of the Church of England.

It is a profound mistake to represent the differences between Rome and the Church of England as merely, or even mainly, a matter of the primacy or supremacy of the Pope. The differences are far deeper and are to be found in that dark region of unscriptural teaching and monstrous superstition from which the papal claims derive their origin. We differ, not in this or that detail, nor in this or that extravagance of expression, but in the whole conception of the nature of the Gospel of Christ. Hooker's words are as true now as when they were written :

"Wherein then do we disagree? We disagree about the nature of the very essence of the medicine whereby Christ cureth our disease; about the manner of applying it; about the number and the power of means, which God requireth in us for the effectual applying thereof to our soul's comfort." (*Works*. Vol II. p. 486.)

These are two ways by which reunion with Rome may be reached: the Church of Rome may reform itself by relinquishing its arrogant claims to supremacy and infallibility, and by renouncing its false doctrines; or the Church of England may abandon all that it secured at the Reformation. There is no other way, and "conversations" which ignore this are futile.

It is obvious that a Charge so comprehensive in its scope must raise questions, at almost every point, upon which opinions will differ, and differ widely. The Bishop has not hesitated to express his own views frankly and forcibly, and for this he deserves our gratitude. His Charge will stimulate thought; it lays down important principles; it offers much valuable guidance, and it should be widely and carefully studied.