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THE
CHURCHMAN

JULY, 1881.

ART. I.—FIRST PRINCIPLES, OR ESSENTIALS AND
NON-ESSENTIALS.

IN the present state of opinion and parties in the Church of England, it seems a very important thing to distinguish clearly between essentials and non-essentials. There can be no question but that two portentous dangers stare us in the face. One is the insidious and ever-increasing approximation to the teaching of the Church of Rome which is apparent in a large section of the English Church; and the other is the gradual alienation of the more thoughtful portion of the laity from any distinctively Christian belief whatever. We verily believe that neither of these dangers is a mere bugbear, but that each is a very formidable reality. And, what is more, the connection between the two phases of thought is closer than appears at first sight. Not seldom has extreme Romanizing doctrine prepared the way for the excess of free thought, and most assuredly there is no escape from the abyss of unbelief even in the bosom of the Church of Rome itself. Those in authority who are not fully alive to the peril which threatens us from these apparently opposite directions have most assuredly not estimated aright the full gravity of the symptoms attending the present condition of the Church. And there can be no more urgent practical question than the consideration whether anything—and if anything, what—can be done under the circumstances to promote the welfare of the Church. Is greater unity of feeling and action desirable in itself? and, if desirable, can it be brought about? Now it can hardly be denied that the divided condition of the Church of Christ is itself an element of weakness that is only to be deplored. It is certain that in military tactics an enemy ceases to be formidable when indecision and dissension pervade its counsels, and division and

disloyalty hamper its action. A house divided against itself must eventually and inevitably fall, and if there is a common foe the only way successfully to meet him is to present a united front. The common foe that we as Churchmen have to confront is the spirit of unbelief, whether it is manifested in the restless and disintegrating scepticism of the present day, or disguised under the more attractive but not less fatal aspect of semi-Romanism. And in order to make head against this common foe, it is of all things most important that we should present a front as united and compact as possible. It would probably be for the advantage of the Christian cause generally if this union could be extended beyond the limits of our own communion; but that in the present state of religious feeling is a Utopian hope, and it may be questioned after all whether an outward and recognized uniformity is so indispensable an advantage as it may at first sight appear. At least we may well believe, or at all events cherish a hope, that the Christian cause at large is not without some compensating advantages in being maintained as it is from a Wesleyan, a Baptist, or an Independent, as well as from a Church of England standing-ground. But for those who are members of the same national Church, and who hold the common social position which is filled by the national clergy, it can hardly be doubted that it would be for our mutual advantage and welfare if the bonds of union could be drawn tighter around us.

How, then, is any such nearer approach to unity to be brought about? First it would seem to be a matter of considerable importance to understand what is vital and what is not. If we must take up opposite sides in the same camp, only let us see that it is no mere matter of routine or external practice that divides us: if there is a sin not unto death as well as a sin unto death, so most assuredly there is that which is essential as well as that which is non-essential. And it must be a matter of the very last importance not to confound the one with the other. What, then, may we regard, or, rather, what must we acknowledge, as essential? First, for any Church constituted on the lines of the Church of England, it is absolutely indispensable that the Holy Scriptures should be regarded as the sole rule of faith. One cannot but believe that the tone of feeling with regard to the Holy Scriptures is apt occasionally to be pitched somewhat too low among professed members of the English Church. The Bible is not recognized as an available standard; it is too often assumed to be somewhat removed from the ordinary ground of discussion and interest. But is not this in itself a fact fraught with instruction? The Scriptures undeniably occupy the foremost place in all sacred literature. They do so not only because of their intrinsic value, but because of the recognized

authority with which they proclaim their message. This authority relates to matter of the highest import. The Bible confessedly contains the Divine way of salvation. This is its essential topic, inasmuch as the Bible is unique in dealing with it. There are many other matters touched upon in Scripture which are of subordinate interest and importance. No one can for a moment confound the two. We all distinguish between the relative importance of the first chapter of Chronicles and the third chapter of S. John, between the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and the fifth of the Second Epistle to Corinthians. It is not that the first chapter of the Chronicles and the last of the Epistle to the Romans have not an intrinsic importance of their own, but that they must yield in this respect to the others; and the reason is, because these rather treat of vital and essential truths which are of the very kernel of revelation. Now, it is because of the existence of such statements of truth as these that the Bible is a unique book; but being, as it is, a unique book, it follows necessarily that its authority in matters of faith must be acknowledged as supreme. No councils or canons, no decrees of the Church or opinions of doctors, can for a moment compare in importance or authority with the declarations of Holy Writ. It is, and must ever be, regarded as the highest and ultimate referee. It is, however, not a little significant that we find oftentimes more anxiety expressed for compliance with the letter of a rubric or some ecclesiastical order of the day, than for obedience to the letter of Scripture. Because forsooth it is affirmed the cases in question lie outside the declarations of Scripture. But is not this of itself sufficient at once to stamp them as of the nature of non-essentials? How many of the points upon which the Church has from time to time been divided are exactly those upon which Holy Scripture has not, with absolute certainty, pronounced. Take, for example, Episcopacy. It is quite possible, by a system of inferences perfectly legitimate, to arrive at the conclusion that the episcopal form of Church government is the original and apostolic one. But probably all will allow that this conclusion is the result of inferences thus drawn rather than of any one explicit statement of Scripture. Certainly it is hard to understand how so large a body of sincere believers as the Presbyterian community comprises should even exist if it were the indubitable order of Holy Writ that the Church should be governed only by bishops. In like manner with infant baptism. No one can for a moment maintain that the directions of Holy Scripture upon this matter are plain and unmistakable, or that they do not admit of the possibility of a doubt. Here, again, the decision in favour of the custom of baptizing infants is the result rather of an inference than of any definite provision; but if so, is not this a proof that the

question in point cannot be vital, and ought not to be so regarded?

And we might go further. What specific directions are laid down in Scripture for the ordination of the ministers of the Church? Manifestly the directions that are given are of a moral rather than a specific character. Is not this, then, an indication that so far as Scripture is intended to be our rule of conduct, these are not points upon which we are to be too precise and dictatorial? To be sure, it is easy to affirm that Scripture is not thus intended to be our rule of conduct, that it is not a sufficient rule, and that it must be supplemented by the rule of the Church; but then here comes in a radical change of principle. If the Bible is the ultimate rule of faith and practice, there is a hope of union on that basis, because then, however zealous we may be for the prescriptions of the Bible, we shall be equally generous concerning the points it has confessedly left open; but if, in addition to the Bible, we are to admit the co-ordinate or even subordinate authority of the Church, however defined, it is hopeless that the advocates of these too opposite principles can be brought to agree. There is a radical and profound element of discord, and this is to be found in the original estimate of the functions of the Word of God. It may be said, however, that this estimate of Scripture is itself a notion foreign to Scripture, that we have to go to the Church to gain that very estimate of Holy Writ which we forthwith ungraciously magnify to the disparagement of the authority of the Church. But is this so? What more common—in the Old Testament, at all events—than the continual asseveration of the authority upon which the Word is communicated. As far as self-asseveration is concerned, the writings of the prophets and the Old Testament generally do most assuredly claim for themselves the utmost deference. And the way in which the writers of the New Testament express themselves in regard to the Old is equally decided and deferential. Nor is there wanting evidence in the New Testament of a similar claim to the attention of mankind. St. John many times appeals to the consciousness with which he professes to be uttering the truth. And the same may be said of St. Paul likewise. The estimate in which we hold the Scriptures is part of the very completeness with which we accept their message concerning themselves and their subject-matter. It is in no sense the attribute bestowed upon them by the Church. They are not indebted to the Church for their authority, any more than they are indebted to the individual who believes their message. There is much confusion on this point, and in the early "Tracts for the Times" the position was carefully inculcated and maintained that if it had not been for the Church we should have known nothing of Holy Writ, nor

have been able to claim for it that amount of reverence which was demanded and instinctively conceded as right and proper ; and this, of course, with a view to divert in favour of the Church some small portion of that reverence for and dependence upon it which was as yet exclusively shown towards the Bible. But it is certain that no man receives the Bible as the Bible itself claims to be received on the authority of the Church. It is not what the Church says of the Bible, but what the Bible says of itself, and by itself, that is the ground of our acceptance of the Bible. And therefore if a man has a mind to be sceptical with regard to the authority of the Bible, it is in the highest degree improbable that he will be restrained by the verdict of the Church. If he is persuaded that the message of the Bible is unauthorized, it is not likely that he will be won by the authority of the Church to recognize the authority of the Bible.

So important, therefore, is it that we should acknowledge as one of the primary and most essential conditions of unity, the principle of absolute loyalty to Holy Scripture as the supreme and ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice. Here then is an essential which must be duly recognized if we would arrive at anything like unity. The Church has manifestly power of self-organization, administration, and government, but power only within the limits virtually conceded by Scripture. The Bible is the polestar by which the Church must guide herself—the standard by which her own action must be regulated. She has no power to constitute herself a standard or a guide independent of Holy Scripture. This was the principle so triumphantly reasserted and successfully maintained at the Reformation, and there is no hope of any vital union till it is thankfully recognized and loyally returned to. But it will be said that the remarks and conclusions of modern criticism have contributed in no slight degree to render this position no longer tenable. Now, is this so? It is exactly here that we are liable to go astray. What are the conclusions of modern criticism? That the Gospels were written in the second century? No. But even if they were, the epistles of St. Paul are confessedly genuine. And these epistles contain, by implication, every important fact of the Gospels. That the Gospel of St. John was not written by him? No; but even if it was not, the position of St. Paul's great epistles is virtually identical with that of St. John's Gospel. The question therefore really is not whether we believe that St. John wrote his gospel, but whether we believe the gospel that he is supposed to have written; and if we believe that, not on the authority of the Church or of any college of critics, but on the authority with which it works conviction in the believing mind, we shall be little likely to be disturbed by any of the shifting vagaries of

human criticism on this or any kindred point. Once more, is the conclusion of modern criticism, that the chief part of Isaiah, or at all events the latter part, was not written by him? Say not the conclusion of modern criticism, but rather the reiterated assertion of some modern critics. What, then, shall we hold our judgment in suspense till these modern critics have been disproved, or say, rather, till they have proved their point (for it is not less easy to disprove their point than it is for them to prove it), or shall we not rather take even the latest of the Esaian prophecies and ask ourselves by whose authority they were written—whether in Babylon or Jerusalem?—and when we have determined that, then we shall be able to judge how far the conjectures about their composition are of any real importance, and whether the verdict concerning them is not, in fact, a verdict also concerning the power by which, under any supposition, they must have been produced.

Take, for example, such words as these, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." Is this the utterance of the prophet himself, entirely unauthorized; or is it the utterance of God? Is it the utterance of God only because it is the utterance of the better mind of the prophet in accordance with the assumed Divine will; or is there any ground to believe that the authority upon which alone the ambassadors of God can comfort His people is a distinctly Divine authority made known to man by means radically and essentially Divine—whether or not these means included the agency of predictive prophecy or of physical miracle? Now it is this which is the essential question, and not the other, which is subsidiary and subordinate, and it is only throwing dust in people's eyes to represent the main interest of the matter as concentrated in the human authorship of certain chapters of a certain book on the ground of the extreme improbability of predictive prophecy, while the far more important question whether the message contained in them, by whomsoever brought, is virtually human or essentially Divine is studiously and designedly kept in the background. And yet this is the question which we must decide before we can determine our true estimate of Holy Scripture, and whether it is the word of man or actually and in very deed the Word of God, a message from Heaven. Or again, in like manner, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember thy sins." Was this the expression of a mere subjective conception of the prophet, or was it the authorized expression of the Divine will towards his people; and if so, how authorized? Does not any degree of true authorization involve a supernatural communication of the presence of the Divine mind to the mind of the prophet just as contrary to, and beyond the mere operation of, Nature, as the working of

miracles or the utterance of prediction. But is it not exactly *this* upon which we want information? May we, or may we not, trust this assurance of the prophet as a promise from God, the objective fact of the disposition of His mind, and not the mere subjective apprehension and conjecture of the prophet. And will any one venture to say that the absolution pronounced—by a Christian minister, for example—gives us, or is intended to give us, a surer hope of forgiveness than the word of the prophet accepted in all its length, and depth, and breadth, and fulness by the believing heart as the very word of the living God? But if this is the value of this passage of Isaiah, what does it matter, comparatively speaking, who wrote it, or when it was written; or, rather, if it pleased God actually to make known His will in this way to the prophet, was that intrinsically less wonderful than enabling him to look far into the distant future, and depict the return from Babylon, or the sufferings of Christ, or the ingathering of the Gentiles? Depend upon it, the real question is, whether or not we have received the message of the prophet, and whether that message is intrinsically worthy of our acceptance unless we can rest fully and firmly assured that it comes from heaven and not from him, and is a word of God and not of man, though even a prophet or apostle. It is therefore of the very last importance that we should clearly distinguish between the authority of the Bible and the authority of the Church. The one is virtually human, the other is intrinsically Divine; the one is temporary and local, the other is universal and eternal.

But the Church has a tendency continually to contract her limits. She was intended by her Divine Master to be literally Catholic in a sense far other than that in which the much-abused word is commonly employed. She was to be coextensive with the confines of the habitable world, and anything which tends to limit and counteract her charter of expansion must be contrary to the will of her Divine Master. Any barrier which she, by her corporate action, interposes between herself and the souls of men whom she should attract and not repel, is, and must be of necessity, prejudicial to her own interests, as well as derogatory to her Divine calling. And yet who does not see that this has been the action of the Church over and over again in her history. Religious movements, which owe their existence and their vitality to the energy and zeal of individual men, and in the first exercise of their inherent powers are a blessing to mankind in the creation of model societies, rapidly manifest a tendency towards disintegration, and the societies originated by them exhibit the spectacle of division and subdivision, of schism and separation, as though union and communion were not part of the original conception of the

Church. It is clear, therefore, that the innate tendency there is in religious communities to split up and to subdivide arises from a disposition towards narrowness and exclusiveness which is too often associated and identified with sensibility of conscience and high principle. If, however, the charter of the Church is expansiveness and universality, there is surely an element in her very being to which violence is done by the indulgence of this tendency to subdivide. It must be theoretically more essential at times to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, than to yield to the apparent dictates of an over-sensitive conscience on some minor points to which we are tempted by circumstances to give an undue prominence and importance. But in point of fact this tendency of the Church thus to usurp authority over the consciences of men is a mark of unfaithfulness to her true calling as it is of a want of appreciation of her real mission. The Church exists as a witness for Christ and the truth of His Word; to bear the message of salvation unto all people; and to hold forth the Word of life to the whole family of man. The Church mistakes her calling, therefore, when she imposes as conditions of communion any other terms than those which are the conditions of salvation. The Church exists to unite and not to divide; to gather together and not to scatter abroad. But whenever the Church affects to narrow the limits of her communion she virtually excludes men from the pale of salvation instead of winning them to the fold of Christ.

It is important, therefore, that she should rightly apprehend the difference between essentials and non-essentials; and those things must be non-essentials which are only connected in a remote degree with the precepts and teaching of Scripture. How, for instance, can the distinction between infant and adult baptism be of the nature of an essential? How can the present method of "confirming disciples," different as it manifestly is from the ministration of that rite in the Acts of the Apostles, be insisted upon as an essential binding upon all mankind? It is not, indeed, the formularies of the English Church which exalt these or kindred points into conditions of communion. But it may be questioned how far practically they have not more or less of such an effect in manifold cases. And it is certain we shall not approach nearer to an ideal condition of unity until we have learnt to estimate more exactly the distinction between essentials and non-essentials, and to apprehend and hold fast by the breadth and strength, fulness and freedom of first principles. For example, take the question of the surplice and its use in the pulpit or in choirs. Who does not see that it is a matter of absolute and entire indifference in itself, and that the surest way of making it anything else is to insist upon it as a badge of semi-Romanism? Surely there

is a way of rescuing things indifferent from abuse and reproach and of consecrating them to higher ends. And is not to do so to increase our spiritual wealth, which must at all times be better than ministering to intellectual or æsthetic poverty? By parity of reasoning it would be possible even to regard with equanimity a thing in itself far more offensive and to excuse the introduction of the eucharistic vestments were it not that the only possible excuse for introducing them is to inculcate a doctrine which is essentially opposed to the supremacy of first principles. For there is and can be no principle of union between the system which interposes a sacerdotal machinery between Christ and the individual soul, and that which proclaims access to the Saviour through belief of His Word as a moral and regenerative power. Though we must confess that the adoption of the eucharistic vestments and the eastward position would themselves be perfectly innocuous if disassociated from that which alone renders them of value to their advocates—the sacerdotal teaching which they symbolize.

And this brings us to the real point of divergence, in our opinion, between the existing parties in the Church. Nor do I, for one, see any way in which they can effectually be reconciled. The foundation principle, on one side, is the supremacy of Scripture; the foundation principle, on the other, is the agency of the priesthood as the sole administrators of the grace of God. In the one case, the Church is the whole body of believers, bound together by a common faith in a common Lord—a body having many members, discharging various functions; in the other, the Church is an organization through virtue of, and by union with, which alone we can become participators in the grace of God. These representative views may be held with various degrees of tenacity and completeness; but it seems to us that they are essentially opposed to each other. If the absolute supremacy of Scripture is held, it is indeed conceivable that together with it there may be a considerable faith in the power of the Christian Ministry and its sacred Orders; but unquestionably, as all experience proves, the tendency of exalting the priesthood is to lower and to supersede the vital power and supreme authority of the Scriptures; and when this is done the real foundations of the faith are imperceptibly undermined.

Earnestly, then, do we exhort all those who live in Him to lay to heart the ultimate importance of essentials, to accept willingly, and with a generous large-heartedness, any modifications of familiar customs that may commend themselves to large bodies of men, such as musical services, surpliced choirs, greater elaborateness in the details of worship, a more æsthetic

ritual, and the like, if only in conjunction with all these things: there may be an ingenuous loyalty to the life and authority of the written Word—the preaching of the fulness, freeness, and sufficiency of the grace of Christ, and the indispensable-ness of the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit of God. We are one in Christ; but it is only in Christ that we can be one, and Christ is the same living and Divine man that He always was, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—not an idea or a sentiment, or an aggregate of propositions and doctrines; but a living and ruling man, who has the characteristics of a man in being able to exercise and bring to bear upon the heart His personal influence. When Christ is thus apprehended He is sure to be the one thing needful, the pearl of great price, the hidden treasure for which all is gladly given. And when He is thus believed in and accepted, all other matters fall into their legitimate and relative positions. The supremacy of first principles dominates and holds sway, and the indifference of minor points is found to assume naturally its rightful place in the category of the non-essential. But as long as the non-essential is looked at through a microscope and intensely magnified, we cannot be surprised if it is confounded with the one great essential and substituted for it. In that case there is an end to all hope of unity or of reunion, for it is a false centre that is proposed instead of the true one for the unknown and as yet indefinite circle.

STANLEY LEATHES.

ART. II.—THE REVISED NEW TESTAMENT.

SECOND NOTICE.

HAVING turned aside from questions of grammar, in order to present our readers with extracts from the new translation, of which we quoted twenty specimens, giving both the text and the marginal rendering, we revert to the consideration of changes which are the result of a more accurate acquaintance with the grammatical structure of the original. And from the consideration of the Article we naturally turn to that of the Aorist. Whereas the Latin language has no article, and in the Version of 1611, as we have remarked, the presence or the absence of the article is almost wholly disregarded, so again, the Latin language has but one past tense where the Greek has two, and the Revisers of 1611 failed, for the most part, to distinguish between the aorist and the perfect. The Revisers, in fact, were accustomed to write and to speak in Latin, and, as Bishop Lightfoot has