

AN OXFORD CENTENARY

It is not easy to judge the real significance of contemporary events. For one thing they are too near at hand for us to see them in their true proportion and setting. Besides, there are often in connection with their origin and setting so many obscure conflicting elements which come to light only in after-years that, in ignorance of these, we have not before us all the relevant facts that we should have to form a true judgment of what is taking place about us in our own time. Still further, when things work themselves out into their appropriate results we are in a better position to assess their real value and character than it is possible for us to occupy until their mature fruits appear. At the interval, however, of a century, when two or three generations have passed and the private documents of a bygone age may safely be allowed to see the light, we have a fair chance to adjust the balance in our judgment of events. It is possible then to see on a wider field the outcome of a movement in the sequence of subsequent historical events, at the same time as we take into account in our estimate of it not only what was matter of everyday knowledge to its contemporaries but the private information that the lapse of years has permitted to become public property. When a full century has run its course, one of the notable measures of time furnishes a standard of reckoning which appeals to the imagination; and it is fitted to call forth little wonder that the centenary of any great event or movement should recall to men's minds the things that took place a hundred years before. And when we take note of a centenary we show that we pay some heed to the flight of time and to the course of history.

I

The Church of England received its present National recognition and establishment after the restoration of Charles II in 1660. The Royal Supremacy in all causes, sacred and civil, which held such a prominent place in the Reformation it experienced in the sixteenth century, was as fully acknowledged and exercised, subject to Parliamentary control, at the epoch of its confirmation and establishment in Restoration days as it was in

the days of the Tudors. The supremacy that in the Middle Ages was acknowledged as belonging to the Papacy was transferred to the Sovereign and the King was recognised as the supreme Governor of the Church. When the Puritan ministry was ousted from its place in 1662, the restored Episcopacy took no exception to the action of the State, which now meant not only the Crown but also the two Houses of Parliament. So long as the civil authority took the side of the Episcopate, it found in the bench of Bishops its obsequious tools and in particular the High Churchmen of the seventeenth century were the most strenuous upholders of the *jus divinum* of the Crown. They stood indeed for a double *jus divinum*, that of the Diocesan Episcopacy and that of the reigning king. The Caroline divines were very frankly Erastian; and any opposition on the part of their faction to the exercise of the royal prerogative in the business of the Church showed itself only when steps were taken to extend toleration to the Dissenters. This opposition became vocal, in post-Revolution days, when the attempt was made to make such alteration of the Anglican settlement as would make it possible for these Dissenters to return to the unity of the National Church. The tradition of the School of Laud was of a very definite character in their opposition to everything that seemed to savour of Puritanism; and if they had their way Protestant Dissenters would have had short shrift given to them. Happily they did not have everything their own way.

The failure of the policy of the Jacobites meant that militant Anglicanism had fallen from its high estate. Yet Oxford long remained a hot-bed of sentiment which was by no means well-disposed to thorough-going Protestantism, and its influence told on the Clergy of half of England. In many country rectories and vicarages the leading positions taken up in doctrine by the school that was dominant in the days of the last of the Stuarts continued to be maintained. The extreme claims made on behalf of the figment of the historic Episcopate were stoutly defended. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration was held in a very positive form, though in these respects the High Church Clergy were outdone by their brethren the Nonjurors. Along with this attitude towards Orders and Baptism, the Arminianism which in the seventeenth century became the characteristic note of the narrow Anglican school in its revulsion from Reformed

orthodoxy continued to be its accepted teaching. In this last respect, however, the High Churchman did not differ much from the Low Churchman of the Latitudinarian school. Apart from the orthodox Reformed wing of the reviving Evangelical Party the prevalence of this lax relation to the Thirty-nine Articles indicated the almost universal doctrinal tendency of the Church of England a century ago. The matter of the honest and cordial acceptance of the teaching of the English Reformers, as that was set forth in the Articles of Religion, was destined to come to the front before many years elapsed. Things came to a head when the *Tracts for the Times* reached their last number in 1841.

What brought this about? In the last of the Tracts Newman made a bold bid to make it possible so to juggle with conscience as to allow men who accepted the full tale of Roman doctrines to subscribe to the Articles of the Church of England which were drawn up expressly as the manifesto of the Protestantism of the English Reformation. This Tract was solemnly condemned by the University authorities of Oxford. The old-fashioned Heads of the Oxford Colleges may have stretched the Articles, or their consciences, to permit of their own subscription to them. But the ground taken up by Newman was in flagrant opposition to the undeniable, Protestant, purpose that the Articles of Religion were meant to serve. In those days every undergraduate had to avow his assent to these Articles. So an assault on them, such as was made in Tract XC, sought to frustrate the very function that subscription was meant to fulfil. It was thus in the interests of College and University discipline that such a disingenuous and tortuous method of evading the end of subscription should be unequivocally condemned. It would have been well to have enquired further into the matter of honest acceptance of the professed symbol of the Church's faith. But what called forth these Tracts?

II

It is just over a hundred years since the Act that secured Parliamentary reform changed the whole complexion of our National, political life. The epoch was one of reform which almost threatened to be revolution. The party of movement were not at one on all the questions that interested the public mind. Some of them went further than others in their schemes

to deal with Church questions. There were many serious apprehensions as to where the movement might end. The Roman Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 had already loosed Parliament from its old Protestant moorings and the Government of the day took steps to rectify what it looked upon as abuses in the Irish State Church. Its hierarchy was interfered with; it lost two of its Archbishoprics and so many of its Bishoprics. The Liberalism that thus ventured to meddle with one branch of the united Church of England and Ireland might conceivably meddle with the other also, and many of its leading exponents were known to entertain views that were regarded as Liberalism in Theology. It was little wonder, then, that the High Church Clergy who were notoriously out of sympathy with the whole Liberal movement should take fright. Oxford was their headquarters and natural rallying centre.

In 1833 John Keble preached his Assize sermon at Oxford on National Apostasy and sounded the alarm of war. Representatives of the High Churchmen of Oxford and their fellows of Cambridge conferred together at Hadleigh in the rectory of Hugh J. Rose, who was regarded as the leading High Churchman of the Cambridge school. These "conspirators", as they came to be called, took joint counsel. The critical state of things called for concerted action and they were resolved to fight for the interests of the Church as they understood them. The most active spirit in the movement that then originated was not present at the Hadleigh Conference, but he lost little time in beginning the issue of the *Tracts for the Times* that called upon the Clergy of the Church of England to assert themselves and to magnify the Apostolic authority that belonged to their office in virtue of their Ordination by Bishops who were in the Apostolic Succession. The Tracts poured out of the press rapidly and the youthful leaders of the movement did all that lay within the compass of their zeal to circulate those Tracts and to stir up the lethargic minds of the country Clergy, to rally them by the cry that had so often rallied them before. The Church was said to be in danger, and her sons must quit them like men in the defence of their venerable mother.

The earlier Tracts were brief and pointed and inflammatory; the chief writer was John Henry Newman; and no man of his generation wielded a more facile or persuasive or trenchant pen than he. He was one of the master sophists of his century and

he was a sophist who believed in his own sophistry. The weapons that he wielded were sharp, so sharp as to cut the fingers of the operator himself. This they did because he was an implicit believer in himself. In his youth he had been under Evangelical influences. But if one is to judge of his grasp of the Faith that he once professed to hold from the travesty of Calvinism that he gives in the history of his religious opinions, he was by no means well grounded in his knowledge of the Faith of Evangelicals. The influence of Thomas Scott which told so far upon him had certainly not reached the point of casting his thought into the mould of that master to whom he said in later years that he almost owed his soul. At Oxford he shed one by one the opinions and the prejudices that he brought with him there from his early environment ; and step by step he moved onward along the Romeward path until he put the logical copestone on the strenuous work of those years during which he was the leading champion of an Anglicanism which became higher and higher as the years passed. Before the Oxford Movement began, he had invoked the leading of a " Kindly Light " that leads " o'er moor and fen ". Such a Light is a will o' the wisp ; and the heedless traveller that accepts its guidance may easily find himself embogged in the morasses over which it flickers and sheds its uncertain beams. It is the tragedy of Newman's career that he followed the gleam of such a Light. It led him by devious paths away from the simplicity that is in Christ ; away from the teaching of the Apostles, and away from the Faith that he was pledged to maintain, until it brought him into subjection to that spurious Apostolicity to the service of which he devoted his great gifts when, as a self-blinded Samson, he made sport for the Philistines.

III

The system that Newman had espoused at the outset of his militancy is in all essential features the system of the medieval Scholastic Theology which received its formal embodiment in the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. It is the elaboration of the tendency which substitutes the corporate visible Church as an institute of salvation for Christ the Saviour, or rather that makes the Visible Church as real and as necessary a mediator of salvation as our Lord Himself. If the concision of the Apostolic age made of the nation of Israel a second mediator

between God and the world at large, the Apostle whose special commission destined him for the evangelization of the Gentile world could speak of the teachers of this tendency as bad workmen or botchers who had never mastered their lesson. Against them he gave warning. Yet the leaven of this concision spread in after-days among the early Christian Churches. And it gave such a place to the Church in its visible and corporate character as to say in effect what the Jewish concision had said before. The language of the concision was, "Christ is the Saviour of Israel, and to get the good of Him, you, Gentiles, must become members of the commonwealth of Israel; you must become incorporated in the unity of the holy people whose Messiah Christ is. So you must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, that you may profit by Christ." Thus membership of the nation of Israel was made the first requisite for the salvation of the Gentile world. Israel were to absorb the Gentiles, and as the result of this process of absorption the world was to share in Israel's salvation and in Israel's glory. The working of this leading principle is to be seen in the adoption of the war cry, "*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*" The Church as an accessible organisation was interposed between the sinner and the Saviour; and it was only when he became a member of the Church that one could derive saving good from the Gospel. All this went to exalt the Church and give it the primary place; and the Church thus exalted came to be identified with its rulers. It was in them that its visibility found the organs of its concrete expression.

This exaltation of the Church to the primary place carried with it the exaltation of the priesthood. For side by side with the movement to give to the Church the place that belongs to the Church's Head there was at work the tendency, on a false and superficial analogy, to identify the presbyter of the Christian Synagogue with the sacrificing priest of the Levitical order. A sacrificing priest, when room was found for him, must have a sacrifice to offer. This sacrifice must surpass those offered under the Law just as the economy of the Gospel has put that of the Law into eclipse. The gifts of the Christian congregation came to be spoken of as their offering of thanksgiving and as such it was a sacrifice of praise. The bread and the wine that were employed as the elements in the Lord's Supper were taken from this "sacrifice" of the people, and by degree it came about

that these elements in the hands of the consecrated priest were looked upon as transmuted by his trans-substantiating word and were held to have become the very substance of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The former substances of bread and wine had vanished and new substances had taken their place. Thus on ten thousand altars on earth the one sacrifice once for all offered on Calvary was held to be repeated from day to day; and the fully developed Sacramental system not only took root, but threw over the Church the shadow of its widespread branches. It is still the system that prevails in the unreformed Churches. It makes the Sacraments to be self-operative significant services which secure to the worshipper in virtue of their regular administration the grace of which they speak. Thus, unless he interpose an obstacle, the Sacrament of the believer's nutriment becomes *ipso facto* his nutriment itself because he has partaken of it. And in like manner the Sacrament of the new birth is looked upon as being itself the instrument of that supernatural change of which it is the Sacrament. This caricature of Apostolic teaching was and is the rival of the Apostolic Gospel.

As the tendency represented by Laud and his School made headway in the Anglican communion in the seventeenth century, the leading features of Tridentine Theology came to be the outstanding characteristics of developed High Church teaching. This tendency, as we have hinted, was at work in particular among the Nonjurors. It was the divinity of the Nonjuring extremists and of such a man as Alexander Knox that was the type of doctrine for which the Oxford Tracts stood. It was a break-away from the teaching of the Reformation as that was embodied in the Thirty-nine Articles. It was in particular a revolt from the Evangelical Faith in the two capital Articles of the Justification of a Sinner and the Nature of the Church. From the days of Bull on the one side and Burnet on the other, the leading Churchmen of the Anglican Church set aside the teaching of the Reformers in regard to Justification. In this respect the Low Churchmen were about as far away from the teaching of the Articles and the Homilies as were the High Churchmen themselves. This made it difficult for either of them to appeal to those official statements of the Faith of their Church as a Reformed Church when the new Oxford School of Tractarians became professedly Tridentine in their teaching on

this subject. Perhaps the most successful critique of the new Oxford divinity in this department came from the pen of C. P. MacIlvaine, Bishop of Ohio, in the United States of America. He held the Reformed Faith on this cardinal topic and wrote with all the accuracy that one would expect from the disciple of Archibald Alexander who had been drilled in his early Princeton days in the study of Francis Turretine and had cordially accepted the full teaching of the Articles of his Church in regard to the Evangelical verities.

IV

The Evangelical doctrine of the Church regulates the doctrine of the Sacraments. The revival of the priestly pretensions of the Laudian School meant that the Church is to be recognised only in its official representatives, and that for the regularity and even the validity of a ministry the Apostolic Succession through the historic Episcopate is necessary. The Evangelical view of the Church recognises the ministry as existing and functioning for the sake of the Church. It is Christ's gift to it. On the other hand the hard and fast Hierarchical doctrine looks on the Church, if not as existing for, at least as existing in and through the ministry. It is at this point that in the most salient respect the contendings of the Reformed Church of Scotland for freedom from Erastian interference and the endeavours of a party in such an Establishment as that of the Church of England to secure for the official Church freedom from the control of the Crown and the Civil Magistrate, as embodied in Parliament, differ from one another. In the Church of Scotland as Reformed, the Eldership, both teaching and ruling, were the choice of the people and their representatives. In the English Establishment, until the recently instituted Church Assembly made some change, unless Parliament had a say in controlling the official Church the people who were the true constituents of the Church had no voice at all. The whole genius of the Scottish Reformation breathed the atmosphere of freedom for the Christian Church from the control of any authority other than the Word of her Head and Lord. The Anglican Church had, on the other hand, from the sixteenth century onwards accepted the full Royal Supremacy that was claimed by the Tudors and the Stuarts. It had been, also, a consenting party to the extrusion from the ranks of its Ministry

of the Puritan Confessors of 1662. During the upheaval of militant High Churchism which followed the Sacheverell Trial and which was strongly Jacobite in sentiment, the Convocation of the Church of England tried to assert itself and made as near an approach as it dared to throwing off the yoke of the Civil power. The policy that the aggressive High Churchmen then pursued was met on the part of the State by the suspension of Convocation itself, and this suspension lasted for about a century and a half. In the course of the Oxford agitation in view of the situation with which the Church was confronted, there rose up a spirit of renewed resistance to the Civil supremacy. And this resistance has continued down to our own days in one shape or another on the part of the more outspoken section of the High Churchmen. The consistency of their action with their acceptance of the Articles and of the privileges that they derive from the State in virtue of this acceptance it is for themselves to explain and to defend.

Those who disapprove of such an acknowledgment of the Royal Supremacy as the Church of England has all along accepted and made, may welcome the manifestation of a disposition to assert the fundamental liberties of a Christian Church, while they cannot sympathize with the shifty policy that accepts of State privilege while it rebels against the carrying out of the terms of the legislation which gives the Anglican communion its privileged status. Even should they succeed in securing a more effective method of exercising ecclesiastical freedom than is afforded by the Church Assembly, the prelatial character of the Church's government leaves the Bishops as so many lords over God's heritage. With this prelatial constitution which is itself an infringement on the Apostolic freedom of a Christian Church, the most ardent lovers of Spiritual Independence, as that is understood in the terms of the Reformed doctrine of the Church, can extend only a modified sympathy to the aspirations of present-day High Churchmen when they seek to break in on that uniformity of worship which the law of the land prescribes. To impose and enforce this uniformity, the ancestral representatives of these same High Churchmen did not shrink, after the Restoration, from breaking up the unity of the Reformed Church of England, and when they had done so they accused the ousted Non-Conformists of schism. When the endeavour of the present-day leaders of the Church is to obtain the recognition of

a type of service, and in particular a type of Communion Service, which will legalise, as the Bishop of London told his fellow-Ritualists, all that they had been fighting for during forty years, the direction that these aspirations take shows what such leaders would do if the way were fully open. Emphatically as we do not believe in Erastian lordship over the Church in any shape or form, we must bear in mind that when there is a Concordat between Church and State the latter does not overstep the bounds of its own province in approving or disapproving the kind of teaching or worship over which it throws the shield of its protection and to which it gives the smile of its favour. If the Nation establishes a Church, it surely is entitled to be satisfied as to the faith and worship of the Church on which it thus sets the seal of its approval. And Parliament is the great Council of the Nation. On the other side, those who have come to their present position of authority by their professed acceptance of the Concordat are called upon by the facts of the situation to honour the pledge of their own subscription; and they show something else and something less than good faith when they endeavour to get behind the terms of the pact to which they are themselves parties.

V

As the series of *Tracts for the Times* advanced, the shorter and more pithy Tracts of its earlier issues gave place to occasional treatises some of which were long and heavy. As they appeared in steady succession, the thoroughly un-Evangelical character of their teaching became more and more fully apparent. The best known and most influential contributors were Pusey and Keble and Newman. They showed a great capacity for assimilating the most obvious puerilities of patristic tradition. The whole tendency of their work, as indeed it was its aim, was to undo the work of the Reformation. They made it plain enough that they had a rooted aversion to the Reformers and to all their works. Yet in regard to Holy Writ, whatever inclination they had to agree with Rome in adding to the Rule of Faith and to the Canon of the Old Testament, they accepted the authority of the New Testament Scriptures as the authentic voice of the Apostles and of the Old Testament as given through Moses and the Prophets by divine inspiration. In this sense they refused to play fast and loose with the Word of God, and so

far they were in the line of the Historical witness of universal Christendom.

The time had not come yet when an alliance could be made by the upholders of the Apostolic Succession with a Rationalistic Unbelief which sets at nought the authority of Holy Writ. Though Newman made his way to Rome and, in his new environment, incurred the suspicion of being one of the abettors of the Movement that came to be known and condemned as Modernism, yet Keble and Pusey remained to the end the defenders of Orthodoxy in regard to the inspiration of Holy Scripture. Pusey's leading disciple, who in due time was his biographer, Henry Parry Liddon, continued also to maintain with vigour and decision the Christian Faith as to Scripture against all the assaults of Radical Unbelief. Indeed, it was a heartbreak to Liddon to find that the younger men whom he had trained and in whom he trusted were breaking away from the faith that he had done so much to defend and to commend. Charles Gore, whom he had regarded as the rising leader of his school, was the Head of Pusey House, and yet he edited *Lux Mundi* which was the manifesto of the new mongrel tendency which weds the highest of Sacramentarian doctrine and of exclusive prelatial claims with the fashionable Unbelief which calls itself Modern Thought. This hybrid system seems now to be the one most widely accepted among the representatives of that exclusive Anglicanism which unchurches Protestant Christendom and undermines the whole work of the Reformers. So the Oxford Movement, in its more recent development, has turned away from the Faith of its first promoters and has taken up ground such as was held by the Modernists in the Church of Rome who, about a quarter of a century ago, were condemned by Pius X.

Thus we are face to face with a piquant situation. The older type of Tractarianism tended only too easily to cross the Rubicon and come under the Roman obedience. Now that Rome has spoken in the official condemnation of the teaching of Loisy and Tyrrell those who have imbibed the teachings and spirit of Modernism are shut out from making their way to Canossa. For they have come to terms with that Liberalism in Theology which, as it is now banned by Rome, was anathema to the early Tractarians. For of all things it was their pet aversion. In this connection it may be said at once that the Oxford Movement has been a tragic failure. It set out to essay the task of

exorcising Liberalism, and now its leaders are led in triumph to grace the victory of a Radicalism of Unbelief which leaves the old Liberalism of a century ago far behind. There might well be a grin on the face of the tiger with which such High Churchism has come to terms.

VI

The militant exclusive Anglicanism that erupted as a volcano at Oxford a hundred years ago should not, however, be looked upon as the sole representative of High Anglican teaching. It was the most aggressive, as it was the most explosive, wing of the High Church Party. It secured most of the publicity. It knew how to make use of the limelight. Yet there was another wing of the Party which was less militant or blatant, more cautious and conservative, less ritualistic and more disposed to continue the old fight of the Church of England with the Papacy. Such men as the Wordsworths, Burgon, Goulburn and their fellows belonged to this wing. Perhaps they represented a tendency of the English mind to associate the Church to which they were devoted with the interests of a political party. For it is long since the followers of the aggressive faction, such as Gladstone on a great scale and G. W. E. Russell, for example, on a more modest scale, have shown themselves to be Free-lances in politics. Thus they have come to terms with a type of political thought which is at the antipodes to what found favour with the first leaders of the Movement. In this respect, also, the Movement has failed, and the Liberalism which it detested has triumphed.

VII

Yet, in spite of its failures, the Oxford Movement has profoundly influenced the Church life of the peoples that speak the English tongue. This it has done in different ways. For one thing, it has helped to break down the hearty aversion that was once the characteristic of the Englishman's outlook on the Papacy and all that it stood for. Again, it has given a vogue in wide circles of the community to a kind of medievalism of thought which is rather a slush of sentiment than real conviction but which has brought with it its own prejudices. Yet again, it has revolutionised the worship of half of England. And as it set a fashion in regard to Architecture and Art and Music and

the idea of Corporate Unity, it is telling powerfully on the life of the non-Established Churches of the country, not to mention the Churches in Scotland and overseas. One need say nothing of the zeal that it has called into activity. For any religious system which is heartily espoused calls forth the zeal of its adherents and partisans. The zeal, however, to which Oxford Anglicanism has given rise has often shown itself in asceticism and community life in austerities and macerations, in fastings, and in midnight vigils, so that the monastic ideal has got a new lease of life in Britain. And the end is not yet.

VIII

From the outset the Tractarian School found a favourite target in the old Puritanism whose ideal was an Apostolicity of doctrine and worship and life which would bring the Church and the individual Christian to the footstool of the Apostles to learn from their word. This Puritanism would lay on their shoulders the exclusive yoke of the Church's One Head. It gave Christ His own place in His Priestly activity, in His one and final sacrifice and in His prevailing intercession. It gave Him His own place in His Prophetic authority as He set His seal to the Old Testament and through His Apostles gave the New. It gave Him the glory of His Kingship as it regarded Him as the Church's One Head even as He is the believer's One Redeemer and Lord. It did not sunder His Kingly authority from His authoritative Word. For it did not look upon Him as an absentee Sovereign, whose Will was to be learned only from the lips of His servants on the spot. It regarded Him as a King still present by His Word and Spirit. It looked upon His Word as the Statute-Book of His Kingdom and from its pages it held that His subjects, great and small alike, may learn His Will. And His Will obviously is that, as the Apostles used great plainness of speech, the rank and file of the subjects of His Realm are meant to engage in a service which is not only thorough and devoted and loyal but is also intelligent and free. Such Apostolicity as this is the truest Apostolicity. It is the Catholicity that is Catholicity indeed. And, however paradoxical it may sound for us to make the claim, it is a well grounded one when we make it, that the Puritan ideal is the most catholic of all. It is the Catholicity that is content to abide in the simplicity that is in Christ. Those who boast of their Catholicism while they set aside this claim are like the bad

workmen against whom the Apostle gave warning. They were bad and poor workmen, for they were making a mess of things. And so far as the leaven of the concision is at work, such is the case. The position of our Reformed Church lays us open to attack from the side of Rome. And the attack is ever with us. But we have no more reason to fear that attack now than our fathers had in their days. It lays us also open to attack on the part of the Radicalism that has capitulated to Unbelief and that is so active and menacing in these days of ours. But those Holy Writings in which our Lord through His Apostles has made known His Will for our salvation still shine to opened and anointed eyes with the radiance of their own self-evidencing light. The sheep of the Good Shepherd still hear and can tell His voice; and as they discern His glory in the light of His witnessing Word they acclaim Him as King. "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ: Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father."

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