

The City whose Builder and Maker is God.

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THE times in which we live seem to breed discontent. Perhaps that is not to be wondered at, for there are many manifest abuses. At any rate discontent breeds apace, and finds many mouths to give it clamorous utterance. I am not a politician, and need not speak of political discontent. But the same spirit which voices its discomfort and unrest with deep groanings or shrill clamour at evils in the State seeks an outlet in matters ecclesiastical by criticism of the Church. For the Church too has fallen on evil days. Critics are as numerous as the stars in heaven, and about as illuminating. The Church, they think, is a dreadful failure. She has not done something which she ought to have done. She has not prevented or stopped the war. Or she has not obtained the loyal adherence of the trades unions. Or she fails to win the patronage of the intellectual, or of those shallow souls who preen themselves as advanced, and up to date. Or she cannot obtain a hearing in the press, as do movements which live by advertisement, such as football leagues, or cinema films.

The public press, whether the Church Papers or the secular press, in so far as it condescends to admit anything of a religious character, is full of wailings and lamentation over the defects of the Church.

Of course every critic has his own remedy to propose, his own nostrum or panacea to recommend.

Some pin their faith to reform of abuses in the Church. Certainly there is plenty of scope for it. But I must confess that I have little hope that reformed institutions, however model, would attract to Christianity people whose souls are untouched by the Church's message of redemption now whilst she is full of abuses. It is the heavenly message, not the earthly channel, that is of ultimate importance. 'If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe though one rose from the dead.'

Others believe that it is the duty of the Church to place social reform in the forefront of her teaching and activity.

No doubt they are right, if so be that they mean

that the Church should urge the necessity of social reform as issuing out of her faith that Christ laid down His life for us, and that we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Others are more drastic. 'In order to triumph,' says a recent writer, 'Christianity has to arrive at a synthesis between the truth of modernity, and the essential truth of Christianity.' It is really very clever of the writer to have discovered this. He means, I suppose, by 'the essential truth of modernity' all that the shrewdest intellects of the day believe to be true up to date. When I read words like these I find myself asking where the Lord Jesus Christ comes in. What is He doing? Will He be in at this synthesis of modernity and Christianity? And what is this triumph which the writer is expecting?

There are others who seem to think that if the Church could be once more assimilated in doctrine and practice to the Church of the Middle Ages all would be well, forgetting that the state of society in the Middle Ages, so far from being well, was very ill, and that the Church was then as full of corruption as a sieve is full of holes.

And others wail about the failure of the Church to attract the so-called best intellects of the age. I do not stay to consider the truth of this description, or the accuracy of moral and intellectual judgment which prompts it. But I ask myself whether it is really advisable to value Christianity as represented by the Church by the number of its adherents or the profundity of their knowledge. My mind goes wandering back to the New Testament, and I remember one who said, 'Behold your calling, brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.' And I ask myself whether something called Christianity would necessarily be true because all the best intellects of this or any other age agreed to call it so, or whether it would be anything like the Christianity which is Jesus Christ, crucified for sin, risen again, dwelling in the hearts of His disciples, drawing them into His eternal kingdom. I must confess that I doubt it. On the score of numbers and intellect some perversion of Christianity would in most ages have held the field.

Christianity is writ plain in the Scriptures, and in the Creed, and in the experience of the Christian disciple. It is not waiting to be discovered and proclaimed by the best intellects of this or any other age.

Of course this discontent with the Church needs explanation. If it is not justified it springs from a misunderstanding of the Church's mission. Consider for a few moments the relation of the Church to the nation which we love, and to the larger world of which we are citizens.

Side by side in human life is going on the growth and development of two great societies of human beings.

One is the earthly society of men and women born into this world. Men love to dwell on the progress and development of this society. They trace with pride its growth from the primitive savage tribe down to the great empires of modern civilization. And possessed by the thought and hope that it is destined to advance to yet unknown splendours, they dream visions of a future human society and brotherhood of man in which present evils shall be done away. To how many such dreamers has the whole basis of their hopes seemed to crumble away, and its fabric seemed to totter, as illusion after illusion has been swept away by this war, and mankind in Europe has seemed to plunge once more into a state of barbarism.

What are we to say about it all? Have the hopes of social reformers been annihilated? Far from it! European society shall arise once more, based, as we pray, upon principles of love and brotherhood more firmly than before. God grant that we of the Christian Church may give ourselves to forward that social reconstruction. It is our shame that we have not hitherto done more to make real among men that principle, 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' upon which alone any lasting society can be founded.

But, after all, is the establishment of a right relation between man and man, and the building up of a future society here upon earth, the first object of the Christian Church, and its final hope? I think not. For imagine this object to have been attained, and this hope realized. Suppose that society has come to such perfection as is conceivable in a physical universe, that men live in peace and plenty, love and happiness, that poverty and crime have been abolished, and a true brotherhood

of man has been set up. To whom will this kingdom of all the virtues and of the senses belong? To the men of the future only? What then of the saints of the past? What of ourselves? What of our dead in Christ? Shall they have laboured for, but never share in, the kingdom? God forbid!

Moreover, those men of the future upon whom that happy day shall dawn, will they be immortal and undying? No. Then that can be a very imperfect kingdom into which souls shall enter by birth, and from which they shall be thrust by death after the short span of their allotted years. Men will once more say, 'We are strangers and pilgrims with God in this life, and there is none abiding,' a saying which Christianity has taken from the mouths of Christians by the simple process of declaring it to be no more true, 'we are no longer strangers and pilgrims, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.'

The question is this. Is there to be a condition of perfection here upon earth? If so, happy shall they be who inherit it, if but for the transient space of their earthly life. But will the souls of the many myriads who laboured to bring it about inherit it. Clearly not. What then of them? Is Christianity right or wrong when it assures them that they shall inherit a heavenly kingdom, and be members of a heavenly society, and enter a city whose builder is God? If wrong, then let us admit that Christianity has awakened in men unreal hopes, and has deluded them with false promises. If right, then the hope of this eternal society cannot but be for every Christian soul of primary importance, in comparison with which that vision of an earthly kingdom is an unsubstantial dream.

Richly coloured as is this vision, some of us can find little warrant for it whether in the teaching of scripture, or in the warnings of history, or in the conclusions of science, or in the dictates of common sense. They who so dream seem to base their hopes upon a very limited number of data. They confine their observation mainly to European society. But beyond the borders of Europe there are awaking from the sleep of centuries the great Empires of the East. These are receiving Western science and knowledge. What if, remaining heathen, they move like an avalanche upon the West. They might blot out our puny civilization, as great empires have before now been swept

away. I doubt if there are any real grounds for believing, though perhaps many for praying, that the future of the world, so far as we can see, will be one of world-wide brotherhood and peace, rather than one of wars and rumours of wars, with of course intervals of peace for this or that part of the world as in time past. 'Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars,' said the Son of God, 'be ye not troubled.'

But side by side with the building up of a better society here upon earth there is going on another building process, that of the Society of the Redeemed of God, His Church, of which the Church upon earth is an infinitesimal portion. Now here is an object of hope, far wider, far more profoundly final, than any future earthly society can be. Hope which does not go beyond the setting up of a future society here upon earth can be a hope only for future generations of souls, and for individual souls only for some seventy transient years. Hope for the building up of God's society of the redeemed comprises in its scope the men and women of all time, and hopes for each one of them for ever and ever. 'They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.'

What the future of this world will be, God only

knows, and it lies in His hand. My main hope, I frankly confess it, looks not to the earthly society of the future, but to the heavenly society of the redeemed. There are they whom I love best. There is Jesus Christ, Saviour and King. There are all they who have looked for, and loved Him. There are, or will shortly be, those whom I love in Christ. There will be gathered through years to come the souls of saints and heroes yet unborn. Beyond the passing generations of men here on earth our eyes are fixed on the city whose builder and maker is God. Its citizens are the souls of all time. God is its architect, Christ its king. It is the object of our desire.

We know not when, we know not where,
We know not what that world will be ;
But this we know, it will be fair
To see.

With heart athirst, and thirsty face,
We know and know not what shall be :
Christ Jesus bring us of His grace
To see.

Christ Jesus bring us of His grace,
Above all prayers our hope can pray,
One day to see Him face to face,
One day.¹

¹ Verses, by Christina Rossetti.

Contributions and Comments.

Matthew xviii. 19, 20.

IN the R.V., as in the A.V., the last clause of the twentieth verse is rendered, 'where two or three are gathered together *in* my name, there am I in the midst of them.' So also other recent translations. But there is no warrant for here rendering *eis* as equivalent to *ἐν*, with which, indeed, it is here expressly contrasted. Worshippers gather *to* a place; but, wheresoever it be, Christ is already *in* that place. *Εἰς τὸ ὄνομα* is never used in the N.T. equivalent to *ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι*. It is used to designate the objective of *faith* by St. Jn., 1¹² 2²⁸ 3¹⁸, 1 Jn 5¹⁸; of *love*, He 6¹⁰; of *baptism*, Mt 28¹⁹, Ac 8¹⁶ 19⁵, 1 Co 1^{13.15}; of *regard*, Mt 10⁴⁰⁻⁴²; and here of *desire*. These are all the instances of its use in the N.T. Rightly, Stier (*Words of the Lord Jesus*, English trans. ii. p. 428), '*Συνηγμένοι*

εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα signifies something more than, and different from, *ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου*, because it closely belongs to *συνηγμένοι*.' Similarly Olshausen, 'The *εἰς* here is not to be confounded with *ἐν*. In the formula *εἰς ὄνομα*, the name is as it were the point of union.' So Meyer (*in loco*), 'The higher, spiritual object of the meeting together of the two or three lies not in *συνηγμένοι*, which expresses nothing more than the simple fact of being met, but in *εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα*, which indicates that the name of Jesus Christ (*i.e.* the confession of, the honouring of it, etc.) is that which in the *συνηγμένον εἶναι* is contemplated as its specific motive.' What has led to the rendering of *εἰς* here as equivalent to *ἐν* seems to be that these verses are regarded as still speaking of the discipline of the *ἐκκλησία*; but surely *πάλιν λέγω* (v.¹⁹) marks the introduction of a new subject of teaching (as, *e.g.*, in chs. 5 and 13).