

Religion and the Future:

A RETROSPECT AND A FORECAST.

II.

THE Nature and Constitution of the Christian Church has been disputed for centuries amongst controversial theologians; but one fact at least is generally admitted, though not by any means acted upon to the extent that is necessary if the Church is to fulfil her destiny;—and that is the Church as a Society does not consist only of the Clergy, but of the Laity as well. That fact must cease to be a latent opinion and must become a dominating principle. The Laity of the Future must not be half in and half out of the Church. If they are members of the Church then they must share her humiliations as well as her triumphs. They must not march with the crowd, and then as soon as the Church comes under fire hang back and commence to criticize. We seem almost constitutionally incapable of grasping the nature of New Testament Churchmanship. Look, for example, at St. Paul's strictures in 1 Corinthians v. St. Paul commands no half measures there against any layman who by his sins endangers the prestige of the Christian Society. It may be objected that in actual practice any such conception of corporate discipline would inevitably tend towards hypocrisy. It may do so in some cases, but no more than the position of a magistrate who condemns his fellows tends to hypocrisy in the character of its occupant. It is a risk that must be run. We must at all costs preserve the dignity and responsibility of Christian Fellowship. We have lost the ideal for a variety of reasons, but there is no reason why we should not strive to recover it. We do not want a revival of Excommunication which can be so easily abused, but we do want a better appreciation on the part of the Laity of their responsibilities for maintaining the Christian standard of conduct in business and public affairs. That is the only way in which we can ever change some of the unprincipled methods of modern business.

We must now turn to discover the elements of hope in the present situation. And we will consider first the problem of the attitude of modern Scientists touched upon earlier in this paper. And here

we meet with distinctly hopeful signs. For the old idea that Science had destroyed by its discoveries the possibility of revelation has been entirely abandoned. Religion and Science move in different spheres. It is not the object of Religion to teach Science any more than it is the object of Science to teach Religion. Science deals with the phenomena provided by nature, religion with the realities of spiritual experience. The supposed conflict has arisen because men did not clearly see the difference of aims and methods between the two. A certain amount of friction will probably always be inevitable between them if only because to some extent their "spheres of influence" overlap. Another fruitful source of confusion has been the misunderstanding of the nature of Scientific conclusions. For most of the supposed conclusions of Science are really only theories of which no proof by demonstration can be offered. Take for example the electrical theory of matter. It may be true that "matter" is made up of molecules which are composed of atoms which in turn consist of electrons, but even so we are to understand "that this electrical theory of matter," according to Professor Arthur Thomson, "is far beyond verification, that it makes big assumptions, and that it leaves many difficulties."¹ Its value lies in its being a working hypothesis. But such an hypothesis does not mean that Science is encroaching any more than before upon the domain of Religion. Science has vastly illuminated our ideas of matter, but she has carefully refrained from saying anything as to the cause of the original electrons. Such discoveries enlarge our knowledge, but they cannot shake our faith. And even for a moment supposing that Scientists did succeed in producing life from matter, "the right conclusion would not be that life is less wonderful, but that matter is more wonderful than we supposed." And as Professor Gwatkin proceeds to point out the mystery of life is still unsolved, and the only gain would be that we should "cease to speak of matter as inert."² Again we may take Evolution as representing one of the most popular ideas of our time. What is the real truth as to the conclusions of modern Scientists? Here again we fail to find that dogmatic assertion as to the origin of life which much popular opinion would lead us to expect. We find an almost surprising amount of reticence and caution: "In regard to

¹ *Introduction to Science*, p. 136.

² *The Knowledge of God*. Gifford Lectures, vol. 1. p. 18.

a problem like the origin of life the only scientific position is one of agnosticism."¹ And in referring to Evolution it must always be remembered that what the word implies is not a theory of the origin of life, but an explanation of the method by which all life operates. "Evolution," writes Professor Gwatkin, "only denotes a method of action and tells us nothing of the power that acts, except that it acts in this way and not in that."² So then we fail to find that scientific disproof of Religion which is popularly supposed to have occurred. Instead we find a far more cautious spirit prevailing amongst Scientists, which is a hopeful sign for the future and may go far to help in the reconciliation of the thinking public with the forms of organized religion.

We turn now to another problem which at first does not appear to bear very directly upon our subject, the Problem of Education. But as the "child is father to the man," so the degree in which the child is genuinely touched by religion in its earliest years largely determines whether he will cling to the Church in the more difficult years that follow. Now here again happily we meet with hopeful signs. We have appeared to awake at last to the seriousness of the position into which we have been steadily drifting. For there was a serious danger that while we were becoming as a people thoroughly democratic, we were failing to provide that standard of true education which alone can fit men for the exercise of the privilege of the Vote. But that has not been our only fault. We have possessed a wrong because a purely utilitarian³ idea of Education. We have thought too much about technical results and too little about the development of character. In the spirit of reaction against the crude conception of Education as consisting only of the three "Rs" we have gone to the opposite extreme of trying to inculcate into restless and immature beings a range of subjects more fit for the Academy than the School. And yet what is the general result of our Educational system? A love of books, of study, of reading? Not at all, rather a fierce hatred of them all. We possess as Lord Macaulay told the Government of India in a Minute which Sir George Otto Trevelyan has well described as "long enough for an article in a quarterly review, and as businesslike as a Report of a Royal Com-

¹ Thomson, p. 140.

² p. 54, vol. 1.

³ Using that word not in the philosophic sense but in the lower sense of that which aims only at immediate usefulness in practical affairs.

mission," a literature "more valuable than that of classical antiquity."¹ And yet how many in proportion even of the sons of the "leisured" class, learn to read, still less to love this priceless heritage of our race? The neglect of the reading of English classical literature has been one of the blots upon our educational system, and as yet there seems to be no very clear determination that this reproach shall be removed. Though novels of a sensational kind are widely read and a certain amount of biographical literature, especially if it be of the nature of "revelations," greedily devoured, yet there does not seem to have been much improvement since Ruskin wrote that fierce paragraph where he says: "It is simply and sternly impossible for the English public, at this moment, to understand any thoughtful writing,—so incapable of thought has it become in its insanity of avarice."² Stern words those and not likely to be popular in these days, but they go to the root of the problem. For the note of avarice is still prevalent in the popular idea that our education for the future must be predominantly scientific, and for what purpose? Simply to enable us to adequately cope with any nation that is rash enough to try to share with England the economic spoils of victory! But we hope and believe that better counsels will prevail, especially with regard to that aspect of the educational problem with which we are more immediately concerned.

The religious side of the problem of education in England has long presented the unhappy spectacle of the followers of Jesus Christ unable to agree as to what the little children of our land should be taught about Jesus of Nazareth. The fear of dogma and a suspicion of the privileged ecclesiastical position of the Church of England, have hitherto combined to prevent the co-operation of the Nonconformists in any considerable scheme of religious education, thus preventing the rising generation—the Democracy of to-morrow—from receiving those religious impressions and Christian principles of life which are so essential for the development of character. But surely in the light of the revelations of this war as to the inevitable tendencies of secular education they can no longer tolerate a system which deprives men of the truest source of guidance. Unhappy country shall we be if we cannot find opportunity to teach that

¹ *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (Silver Library ed.), p. 291.

² *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 62. Some of Ruskin's works might well be included in the curriculum of the higher classes in schools.

Word which should be always "the ground of every argument and the test of every action." Undenominationalism has failed because "simple Bible teaching" can mean almost anything or nothing. It is not sufficient to fill a child's mind merely with the bare "facts" of the life of Christ unless those "facts" are presented in a fashion and with a faith which by the method of its sympathetic presentation wins the admiration and stirs the soul of the child itself. In this connexion Professor J. J. Findlay, in his work on *The School*, makes a useful suggestion. After asserting that "what most men desire is not less religion, but more," he goes on to say that "I would rather urge in place of right of entry, the parent should demand a right of substitution. For the proper venue for religious instruction is not the public . . . but the church building, the house of God itself," and he then maintains that the clergyman himself is the fittest teacher and "not the public school teacher who . . . finds his allegiance divided between Church and State." And since they are now sent to "swimming baths and playfields"¹ such an arrangement ought not to be difficult to initiate and carry out. At all events we cannot any longer tolerate as a nominally Christian people a condition of affairs which reduces the instruction in the most important of all subjects to a contemptible minimum.

And here then in these and other indications of a better appreciation of the urgent necessity that the rising generation shall be men of faith as well as men of knowledge, we see one of the possibilities by means of which the men and women of the future will be more in harmony with the Church and more disposed to recognize in religion a necessary constituent of life.

We must now turn to consider the urgent and important problem of the future relation of the Church to the problem of the "condition of England." Again there are not wanting signs that the consciences of Churchmen are at last being stirred to realize that the Church cannot any longer remain indifferent to a state of affairs which cannot possibly be considered as Christian. On every hand we are realizing that comfort and healthy conditions of life ought not to be the privileges of the few, but the legitimate possession of

¹ *The School*, pp. 110, 112. Space will not permit of a discussion of Sunday Schools. As a whole they do not appear to be overwhelmingly successful in keeping their scholars faithful to the Church in after life. The Church Lads' Brigade and similar organizations appear far more successful in this direction and might be vastly extended.

the many. If Christ hallowed all human life that is innocent then the proper "extension of the Incarnation" is to see that the conditions of existence are such that all life may be fashioned after the great pattern of the Gospel. And so long as the Church never forgets that the salvation of men is her first concern, she must strive her utmost to elevate the oppressed by providing those conditions of life which can help though they cannot achieve the ultimate redemption of men. We are all influenced by our surroundings, and it is unfair to expect of those whose life is perpetually confined within a base and depressing environment to become a very virtuous or even industrious people. Yet we need to be on our guard against ascribing to environment a potentiality for righteousness which it certainly does not possess. "We must beware at any cost of that cheap fatalism, which issues in the false doctrine of the predestination of man by matter, and of election unto salvation by a mysterious environment."¹ But such considerations, important though they may be, must not allow us ever to become apathetic in this noblest of all secular causes. The Social problem is with us and we as members of Christ's Church must always remember the example of Christ Himself. "When we look out on the world and on history we are continually confronted by the urgent question whether the purpose of human life and the aim of human effort is to be the exaltation, the advantage, the progress of a few, or whether Christian and honourable men must set before themselves the good, the progress and advantage of all."² For a Christian there can surely be only one reply to that challenge; for Jesus Christ Himself never limited even His ministrations of the body to the few. "He fed the multitudes," not merely the Disciples and Apostles. And one of the criterions of faith is to be the measure of our consideration for the hungry, the naked and the forsaken. To achieve this may sometimes involve a participation in politics distasteful to some devout Churchmen. But in a State where so much depends upon combination for the attainment of common ends and where the ballot box has such an enormous power in determining the actions of politicians the course is inevitable. And in this connexion it is

¹ Ernest Barker: *Political Thought in England from Spencer to to-day*, p. 147.

² Dr. A. J. Carlyle: *The Influence of Christianity upon Social and Political Ideas*, pp. 124, 125.

above all things imperative that the high standard expected of a Christian should never be lowered or surrendered in the performance of any political action. The Church has not always set the world the highest example in this respect.¹

But after all what we chiefly want is to recover the Social Ideal of the Early Church. "The Gospel was a social power from the very first; for the power which claimed the whole man had to cleanse all the relations of life."² St. Paul, the greatest of all bishops, if such we may regard him, was a worker as well as an Apostle. He it was who stoutly declared that if a man would not work neither should he eat.³ Nearly all the Apostles were workers and artisans. And there can be no doubt about the inherent dignity of manual labour to a Christian when our Lord could labour in a carpenter's shop and St. Paul maintain himself with the work of his hands. Yet in recent years we have failed somehow to co-ordinate the fervour of faith with the industry of the world. The man who is working all day in the heat and confusion of a great factory will easily believe that the Church has no message for him if he never hears that work well done is genuine worship and one of the elementary principles of Christian life. Doubtless in some cases the force of this appeal is negatived by the artificial restrictions of output for political or trade unions reasons. But it nevertheless remains true. And is it not a blot upon our democracy that this easy compliance with any standard of work but the very highest which Ruskin deplored as the "special characteristic of modern work," should be actually systematized in some cases by the workers themselves? "Let us have done with this kind of work at once."⁴ Herein perhaps lies the secret of the Church's success in this great problem—if only she will proclaim a Gospel of Work for all classes as part of religion itself, giving it that dignity and worth which belongs to all human effort faithfully performed. The signs of the time are full of hope in this as in the other problems that we have discussed. Our leaders seem alive to the urgency of these problems, as the Report of the Archbishop's Committee on Church and State⁵

¹ See Dr. Forrest: *The Authority of Christ*, p. 235 and note. The whole chapter is useful in this connexion.

² Prof. H. M. Gwatkin: *Early Church History to A.D. 313*, p. 226, vol. ii.

³ Thess. iii, 10., cf. 1 Tim. v. 8. ⁴ *Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

⁵ Space forbids a reference to the question of self-government for the Church, but it is obvious that it must come, and the sooner the better.

and the National Mission Committees recently appointed clearly show.

We have now very briefly passed in review the various phases of religious life before the war ; we have noted the revolutionary effect of the war upon the social and religious life of the nation, and we have endeavoured very briefly to see in three great departments of thought and action what elements of hope exist for the Church. We have seen how before the war the Church seemed too afraid to launch out into the deep of the great and pressing problems of the hour, and appeared far too content to expend her surplus time and energy in disputes over the details of domestic affairs. Then came the call of the war which revealed unsuspected possibilities in human nature, possibilities which were supposed to have been eradicated long ago by the enervations of an effete civilization. This upheaval was accompanied by an insistent call for a Faith for the firing line, and suddenly we became aware that our Faith had lost that note of triumphant and victorious certainty which steels the heart against adversity, and which was certainly the predominant element of that fervent Christianity which overcame the Roman Empire. We had wrongly neglected the preaching of the Cross and almost unconsciously substituted tentative efforts to express the " teaching office of the Church," with the result that men had almost forgotten that Christianity is pre-eminently a religion of decision for time and eternity. Consequently we heard little about Assurance but much about Progress. We had edifying moral essays, but kept well clear of moral certainties.¹ So that it is not surprising that our age had become what Mr. Burroughs rightly terms " typically Laodicean—blending just a little of the warmth of the supernatural with the cold water of those material calculations which really determined all its actions." * We find ourselves therefore faced with a gigantic task, which is nothing less than the Christianizing of the social life of England by the action within the State of a consecrated Individualism. And to accomplish this the religious forces of England must be prepared to unite. If we allow our differences and jealousies to hinder so essential a condition of victory, we shall

¹ These are of necessity sweeping assertions, but they allow of many exceptions. Dr. Forsyth is even more emphatic in his *Justification of God*, quoted above.

* *The Fight for the Future*, p. 82.

be traitors to our cause. The dangers of secularization are great ; our country stands at the parting of the ways. To every Christian there comes the call, now more insistent than ever, to make the Christian ideal of life a practical force in everyday affairs. But in modern days the individual can achieve but little by himself. He must unite with others if his cause is to succeed. And why should the greatest of all causes suffer from the lack of such an obvious source of strength ? But while we emphasize the need for resolute corporate action, it must never be forgotten that after all it is the individual that counts and that the Church, humanly speaking, depends for her success in her welfare with the world upon the keenness and faithfulness of every member. If all Churchmen were filled with an almost fierce determination that the Christian law of life should become the law of England what a force for good the Church would become. Is this an ideal too remote from the world of prosaic facts to be even contemplated ? Surely not ! With God all things are possible. " Be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world." " This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our Faith." So said Master and disciple, and it is only faith in a living Lord which can give us the necessary power which will enable us to go forth into the future and by our earnestness, perseverance and " sweet reasonableness " commend to the toiling millions of industrial England the Eternal Gospel of the Son of God.

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