

BENEDICTION AND ITS ADVOCATES.

BY W. GUY JOHNSON.

ENGLISH Churchmen may well feel bewildered by the rapidity with which first one and then another of the "newest fashions in religion," to use a phrase of Mr. Gladstone's, are being, may we say, "hustled" into the foreground and then claimed as so inalienable a part of our Catholic heritage that it must not be surrendered even if all the Bishops on the Bench combined to forbid it. The particular novelties for which agitation is being made at the moment are "Exposition" and "Benediction," ceremonies of which scarcely one Churchman in a thousand has ever even heard and at which very few even of those have ever been present.

In "Exposition" the Sacrament, by which is meant in this case the consecrated wafer, is exposed on the altar for veneration by the faithful. In "Benediction" the congregation is "blessed" by the sign of the Cross being made over them with the Sacrament, which is placed for that purpose in a receptacle called a monstrance.

The service of Benediction is very simple. It is described in the *Catholic Encyclopædia* as "ordinarily an afternoon or evening devotion and consists in the singing of certain hymns or canticles before the Blessed Sacrament, which is exposed upon the altar in a monstrance and is surrounded with lights. At the end, the priest, his shoulders enveloped in a humeral veil, takes the monstrance into his hands and with it makes the sign of the Cross (hence the name Benediction) in silence over the kneeling congregation." With regard to the accompaniments of the service the article just quoted says, "the use of incense and wax candles, which even in the poorest churches must not be less than ten in number, the singing of the 'Tantum ergo' with its versicle and prayer, and the blessing given with the Blessed Sacrament are obligatory everywhere."

These constitute the irreducible minimum of the service, which, however, usually has a litany of the Virgin, a litany to the Blessed Sacrament, and other similar elements added as a part of it.

John Henry Newman in one of his books gave a brief description of the service, which we borrow from a recent pamphlet:—

"Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is one of the simplest rites of the Church. The Priests enter and kneel down; one of them unlocks the Taber-

nacle, takes out the Blessed Sacrament, inserts it upright in a Monstrance of precious metal, and places it in a conspicuous place above the altar, in the midst of lights, for all to see. The people then begin to sing; meanwhile the priest twice offers incense to the King of Heaven, before Whom he is kneeling. Then he takes the Monstrance in his hands, and, turning to the people, blesses them with the Most Holy, in the form of a cross, while the bell is sounded by one of the attendants to call attention to the ceremony. It is our Lord's solemn benediction of His people, as when He lifted up His hands over the children, or when He blessed His chosen ones when He ascended up from Mount Olivet. As sons might come before a parent before going to bed at night, so, once or twice a week, the great Catholic family comes before the Eternal Father, after the bustle or the toil of the day, and He smiles upon them and sheds upon them the light of His countenance. It is a full accomplishment of what the Priest invoked upon the Israelites: 'The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord show His face to thee and have mercy on thee; the Lord turn His countenance to thee and give thee peace.' Can there be a more touching rite, even in the judgment of those who do not believe in it?"

We have before us four forms of service for the use of those in the Church of England who observe this rite. The earliest is contained in *Catholic Prayers*, compiled by the late Rev. A. H. Stanton, of St. Alban's, Holborn, of which the fifth edition was published in 1901. Two different forms have more recently been published by the Society of St. Peter and St. Paul, dated 1915 and 1918 respectively. The fourth was published this year by Messrs. Cope & Fenwick. In the case of the three last there is no name given of compiler or editor. From these four, which do not materially differ from one another, we may discover in what this particular service consists when it takes place in an Anglican parish church.

The Rubric at the beginning enjoins "When the Priest opens the Tabernacle and incenses the Blessed Sacrament, the following hymn is sung"—

"O Saving Victim, opening wide
The gate of heaven to man below;
Our foes press on from every side;
Thine aid supply, thy strength bestow.

All praise and thanks to thee ascend,
For evermore blest One in Three;
O grant us life that shall not end
In our true native land with thee. Amen."

After which, we are told, usually follows the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. This is sometimes called the Litany of Loretto, and it is printed in Latin and English in *Catholic Prayers* and in *Emmanuel* (the Service of the SS. Peter and Paul Society). The latter suggests the reason for this in the following prefatory Note:—

" No apology is needed for the Service of Benediction which is printed in Latin and English. Like the stations of the Cross, The Three Hours' Agony, Compline and numerous other services now part of our Church worship, it is frankly borrowed from the prayer books of Catholics of the Latin Rite. We may be grateful to them for it. We have followed them in great matters such as the *filioque* in the Nicene Creed—may we not say too of Church Worship?—What Rome does to-day, Canterbury will do to-morrow."

Space will not admit of transcribing this Litany in full, but the following extracts will indicate its character to readers who may not be acquainted with it :—

" Holy Mary
Pray for us
 Holy Mother of God
Pray for us
 Mother of the Creator
Pray for us
 Virgin most mighty
Pray for us
 Mystic Rose
Pray for us
 Tower of David
Pray for us
 Tower of ivory
Pray for us
 Ark of the Covenant
Pray for us
 Gate of heaven
Pray for us
 Refuge of Sinners
Pray for us
 Help of Christians
Pray for us
 Queen without original sin conceived
Pray for us
 Queen of the most holy Rosary
Pray for us
 Pray for us O Holy Mother of God
 That we may be worthy of the promises of Christ."

In one of the forms of service the following collect concludes this Litany :—

" Grant, we beseech thee, O Lord God, that we thy servants may rejoice in perpetual health of mind and body, and at the glorious intercession of blessed Mary, Ever-Virgin, may be delivered from the sadness here and attain to eternal gladness hereafter. Through Christ our Lord."

The forms vary slightly as to the order of the service, and one of them states that any other litany, or psalm or hymn suitable to the occasion or to the day may be substituted for the foregoing. It would seem, however, that normally it should be used. The Litany of the Blessed Sacrament and the Litany of the Holy Name are

respectively set out in two of these forms. It should be borne in mind that these last two Litanies, if either of them is used, are directly addressed to the Sacrament, which is being exposed before or exhibited to the people.

Then follows the hymn *Tantum Ergo*, the English version being as follows :—

“ Therefore we, before him bending,
 This great Sacrament revere ;
 Types and shadows have their ending,
 For the newer rite is here ;
 Faith our outward sense befriending,
 Makes the inward vision clear.
 Glory let us give, and blessing
 To the Father and the Son,
 Honour, might, and power addressing,
 While eternal ages run ;
 Ever too his love confessing,
 Who, from both, with both is One. Amen.”

After this is prescribed the following :—

V. “ Thou gavest them Bread from heaven (Alleluia).

R. Containing within itself all sweetness (Alleluia).

O God, who in a wonderful Sacrament hast ordained unto us a remembrance of thy Passion ; grant us, we beseech thee, so to honour these holy mysteries of thy Body and Blood, that we may evermore perceive within ourselves the fruits of thy redemption. Who livest and reignest world without end. Amen.”

Then comes the actual ceremony of Benediction, when the Priest makes the sign of the Cross with the wafer, the congregation being instructed to “ bow down in reverent adoration and receive the Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament.”

After this comes “ the Divine Praises,” from which we quote the following :—

“ Blessed be the Name of Jesus.
 Blessed be his Most Sacred Heart.
 Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
 Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most Holy.
 Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.
 Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.
 Blessed be God in his Angels and his Saints.”

The service is concluded by the singing of the following :—

“ Let us adore for ever the Most Holy Sacrament,
 O praise the Lord, all ye heathen, praise him all ye nations ;
 For his merciful kindness is ever more and more towards us, and the truth
 of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise the Lord. Glory be to the
 Father, etc.
 Let us adore for ever the Most Holy Sacrament.”

It must be remembered that the ritual accompaniments to the service include a great number of lighted candles, the use of incense, and the most marked forms of outward adoration—bowings, genuflections, and sometimes prostration before the consecrated wafer.

Such is the service which, in defiance of the authority of the entire episcopate, is being steadily introduced into English Churches. A few years ago nothing was heard of it. We are told that Mr. Lowder and Dr. Littledale both used it, but our informant, the anonymous author of a pamphlet issued by the "Faith Press," gives no authority. He merely says that he is "credibly informed" that they did so. They may have done, but the evidence is insufficient. Only one case was reported to the late Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline, and there is some doubt whether it was in fact technically Benediction. But as with other similar matters, so with this, the opportunity afforded by the preoccupation of people's minds with the war has been seized upon to advance the "Catholic" cause. Comment upon the character of the service is needless. It speaks for itself. Like many other services introduced by the "Catholic" party, it has avowedly been taken bodily from the Roman Church. The late Mr. Stanton, with plaintive alliteration, pleaded in excuse that "there is in our midst such a plethora of protestant piety" (*Catholic Prayers*, Preface to second edition, 1893).

The service has been prohibited by the Bishops as a body, and Dr. Burrows, when Bishop of Truro, deprived one of his clergy, the Vicar of Cury and Gunwalloe, for refusing to yield to his authority in the matter. The Bishop of London has issued a formal prohibition of the service in his diocese, and up to the present seems to be resolute about it. The Bishop of Chelmsford is taking action in the case of the Vicar of Thaxted, who retorts by inviting his people to pray for the Bishop. The Bishop of Bath and Wells has forbidden the Vicar of St. John's, Taunton, to continue the service; but the Vicar's reply is, "Nothing in this church will be given up" (*Church Times*, 2 May, 1919). Their lordships will have the sympathy and support of all loyal Churchmen in these endeavours to suppress so monstrous a misuse and perversion of the Sacrament which our Lord ordained.

There is, of course, a considerable outcry. The Bishops are accused of betraying the faith, persecuting faithful and self-denying

priests, and making sad the hearts of devout and innocent congregations. Of late years on occasions of this kind we have noticed an improvement in the controversial style of the Ritualists ; but the present agitation has produced a revival of the truculent invective which met the first serious episcopal efforts to secure obedience to the law of the Church of England. Two publications issued lately afford examples of this. One is a small book entitled *Benediction and the Bishops*, by the Rev. A. H. Baverstock ; the other an anonymous pamphlet entitled *The Bishop of London and Benediction : A Reply*. Mr. Baverstock, though he writes in a tone of more than papal infallibility, does however observe some moderation in his language ; but the author of the Reply to the Bishop of London, secure in his anonymity, lets himself go without restraint. To him the Bishop's attitude is nothing less than " transparent dishonesty and hypocrisy " (p. 7). We will, however, consider Mr. Baverstock's brochure first.

It is an instructive little volume for the light it throws on the theological position and mental attitude of the writer and those who think with him. The Pope could not write with more assurance of certainty. For example, he tells us (p. 28) that the Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Gore) is " one of the few English Bishops who can claim to be regarded as a theologian." Yet, on the very next page, he says, " we are convinced that Bishop Gore is gravely at fault," and later on (p. 32), " we may surely assume that they (i.e. the great teachers of the Middle Ages) were at least as likely to understand their (i.e. the Fathers') teaching as the Bishop of Oxford." Again (p. 39) reference is made to " the Bishop of Oxford's misleading account of the primitive Eucharist " ; a statement which is more definitely emphasized two pages further on, where we read that " The Bishop of Oxford's account of the early Eucharist is vitally misleading." Accordingly, without any undue display of modesty, he undertakes " to substitute for it a brief but more accurate account." If Bishop Gore, whose theological attainments are admitted, is thus dealt with, we need not feel surprised to find that the Bishop of London, who is described as " a busy and overworked dignitary who is no theologian," receives similar treatment. It is true that he is said to have " won the affection and respect of Catholics " (p. 26), and to have " earned the affection and gratitude of Catholics " ; but his authority is denied, his reasoning is rejected, and it is plainly

asserted that he has been driven "to the uneasy putting forth of prohibitions *unsupported by any strong convictions of his own*" (p. 57). The italics are ours. Again we read, "Were the Bishop of London surrounded by Bishops who would receive with approval, instead of with a stony and hostile silence, his brave words defending access to the Blessed Sacrament, an access which he had for some years endeavoured to check, we believe he would be willing enough to sanction Exposition and Benediction. We are not without hope that he will yet arrive at sanctioning them, when he finds that Catholics will not do without them" (p. 57). Charges of weakness, timidity, insincerity and inconsistency which are here implied, coupled with flat defiance, to say nothing of the anonymous accusation of "transparent dishonesty and hypocrisy," seem a strange way of showing either affection, respect, or gratitude; but these "Catholics" are a strange people.

Mr. Baverstock claims that there is an increasing demand from the laity for this service, though the fact is not very obvious. It did not at Cury, nor does it at Thaxted, attract the laity. At both places the dissenting chapels are well attended and the churches practically empty. But the reason given for the statement is more interesting than the question of its accuracy. Mr. Baverstock tells us that "the war increased the number of churches in which there was Reservation," and "the increase of opportunities of access to the Blessed Sacrament *led inevitably* to the demand for something in the nature of Exposition and Benediction." "The clergy inside the circle knew, what others who objected even to access suspected, that *the demand could not stop there*: that whole congregations would demand some corporate expression of their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament *reserved in their midst*" (12-14). If it is not clear that the congregations make this demand spontaneously, the "Catholic" clergy may be relied upon to educate them up to doing so, and herein is a principal objection to Reservation. It will not, and indeed cannot, stop there. First follows the demand for access and then for Exposition and Benediction, then for processions with the Sacrament in the Church, then for such processions (as at Thaxted) through the streets, and so on. How far we should be led may be seen in Mr. Baverstock's open adhesion to the doctrine of transubstantiation. He says, "We do in fact adopt the doctrine of transubstantiation as held by modern Western (i.e. Roman) eucharistic theology, and

find in it nothing contrariant to a right philosophy, still less to the principle of the Incarnation" (p. 30). He similarly supports communion in one kind, telling us that "the Canon Law of Western Christendom, promulgated in these provinces, never repealed, and therefore still binding, not only requires the Blessed Sacrament to be reserved in every parish church, but requires it to be so reserved under one kind only" (p. 50); and he takes opportunity to twit the Bishop of London with inconsistency in demanding canonical obedience while at the same time he (the Bishop) disobeys in this particular the Canon Law on which he bases his authority to prohibit Benediction. Mr. Baverstock admits that the ceremony is modern even in the Roman Church, that there are no Anglican canons relating to it, and that authority in matters of the kind is vested in the Bishop; but he declines to bow to authority in this instance because the motive which actuates the Bishop is a wrong one, and also because whatever may be the rule in normal conditions, the present conditions are not normal. It is obvious that if every person under authority is at liberty to refuse obedience to a definite command when the reasons for it do not commend themselves to him or when he thinks that the circumstances are not normal, he himself being the sole judge in both cases, there is no security that any one will ever obey anything. Mr. Baverstock tells us again and again that the real issue in the present case is "the honour due to our Lord truly present in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. We hold, as the constant teaching of the Catholic Church, that the Blessed Sacrament is Jesus Christ Himself, and, therefore, to be adored with the supreme homage due to God. This is the truth which Exposition and Benediction express" (p. 21). Again, "The Blessed Sacrament is Jesus, and Jesus is God" (p. 74). And it is, he asserts, because the Bishops do not believe this doctrine that they forbid Benediction. Their prohibition, therefore, is invalid, and consequently he refuses to obey. It would take too long to discuss here the above propositions, or the garbled snippets from patristic sources by which an attempt is made to give them an air of respectable antiquity. We have stated, we hope without unfairness, the position taken by Mr. Baverstock. In a Roman Catholic it is an intelligible position, though not the more credible or reasonable on that account. But it passes the comprehension of an ordinary man how any one can reconcile such a position with the authorized formularies of the

English Church, or even with the teaching, order and discipline of the Roman Catholic Church from which he has borrowed so much.

The anonymous reply to the Bishop of London requires but little notice. The writer is very angry, unless, like Newman's in the *Apologia*, the anger is simulated; and he can do nothing but scold. We have already given one example; here is another: "The Bishop of London requires personal instead of lawful obedience. His requirement is that of the autocrat; he demands loyalty to himself before obedience to Truth, and obedience to his word as though it were the Word of God. The claim to absolute obedience as of Divine right is not deceiving any one in these days of fallen Kaisers, and neither the Bible nor law give help to the supreme egotist, whether he be War Lord or Lord Bishop, when he erects himself into the law and substitutes personal will for law and custom" (p. 7)—and so on for seventeen pages. Yet these are the people who insist on the necessity of episcopal ordination. The whole production suggests a parody after the style of Defoe's *Shortest Way with the Dissenters* or Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society*, where the absurdity of certain opinions is shown by putting them in their most extreme and extravagant form in the mouth of a supposed advocate. It hardly sounds real.

Whether it is real or simulated, a hint as to the reason for all this frenzy is given in an appendix. It is there said: "*We have not a long time in which to get people used to everything Catholic. When legislation comes it will allow nothing but what is in vogue and generally accepted. It is better to fight for the whole thing if you fight at all.*" These people realize that if they can intimidate even some of the Bishops into recognizing such services as Exposition and Benediction in the manner in which the Bishop of London has permitted access to the Reserved Sacrament for purposes of adoration, it may be possible to claim that the revised Prayer Book, should it ever obtain proper authority, cannot be interpreted in a sense contrary to such services. Whether this be so or not, the very grave danger involved in some of the proposals for revision, the permission of Reservation in particular, is becoming more evident the more it is looked into. It is impossible, as Mr. Baverstock rightly says, that it can end there. It will inevitably and inexorably lead to adoration of the Sacrament, and if, as the Bishop of London said when preaching on the subject, the only difference between prayers

said before the Reserved Sacrament and Benediction is that the one is permitted by the Bishop of the Diocese and the other is not, there is clearly no ground of principle upon which the prohibition of the latter by the same prelate can be maintained. In either case, of course, the idolatry is the same.

It is asserted, in most of the pamphlets and letters which have appeared on the subject, that the monstrance is an "Ornament" the use of which is enjoined by the Ornaments Rubric. There is some inconsistency in the great dependence placed on a rubric which prescribes only such Ornaments "as were in this Church of England, by *authority of Parliament*, in the Second Year of the Reign of King Edward the Sixth" on the part of men whose whole aim is to destroy the authority of parliament in matters of religion. They do not, however, produce any "authority of parliament" in that particular year which requires the use of the monstrance. When pressed on the subject of the use of this vessel by the Royal Commission, the Rev. Edward Denny admitted that "The fact that the monstrance was in use in the second year of Edward VI does not carry with it the right to use it, because there is no service in which it was anciently employed represented in the Book of Common Prayer" (q. 18,563). And a much-needed caution was given by the Rev. Edmund G. Wood, in the *Church Times* of August 29 last, as to the ready assumption that because the name monstrance is to be found before the sixteenth century it meant the same thing as the "Ornament" which bears the name now. He writes: "the name was applied to vessels quite other than those now so called and used in the service of Benediction. For instance, reliquaries were so called, and even small lockets to contain a minute relic and hung round the neck," etc.

The case for Benediction breaks down at every point. There is nothing remotely like it in the New Testament. There is no primitive authority for it. It is not even medieval, and there is nothing in the Prayer Book which can by any ingenuity be shown to support it. If the Bishops have not authority to prohibit this service, then they can have no authority to prohibit anything.

W. GUY JOHNSON.

