

Anglican and Eastern Churches

The alliance of Great Britain with Russia in the present war has naturally called renewed attention to the Eastern Church, and especially to that part of it which is so prominent in Russia. But even more, for several years past the question of the relations between the Anglican and the Greek Churches has been a subject of great interest, especially among a certain class of Churchmen. Then, too, the recent visit to Canada of the Archbishop of Baalbek, of the Syrian Church, is another reason for considering this subject. We are usually so taken up with Western Christendom, and the Church of Rome bulks so largely in our eyes, that we often fail to realize the fact, importance and extent of Eastern Christianity. Leaving out the separated communities, the Orthodox Eastern Church consists of the four Eastern Patriarchates, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, together with several independent Churches. In creed and ritual all these Churches are practically identical and their unity is complete, though, of course, owing to differences of history and nationality, there are inevitable distinctions of tone and temper. The Eastern Church claims to represent the undivided Church before the great Schism which separated East and West in the eleventh century, and to preserve unadulterated the doctrines and practices of the Apostolic Age. It accepts the Nicene Creed in its original form, the First Seven General Councils, and Seven Sacraments. Thus it claims to be at once the oldest and the truest Church.

It is unnecessary to enter into the details of the Anglican associations with Eastern Christendom during the last 300 years, but for the past fifty years or more the courtesies between representatives of the two Churches have become increasingly definite. There are two parties in the Eastern Church, just as there are parties with us; one party is friendly to Anglicanism and the other is unfriendly. Some people tend to minimize and others to exaggerate the differences between the two communions. It has been pointed out that while generally our Creed and Church order agree with those of the Eastern Church, the latter lays much greater stress upon tradition and claims to possess the true tradition reaching from the time of the Apostles. It is, of course, well known that our Creed contains the words "and the Son" in connection with the Procession of the Holy Spirit. The Eastern Church urges that these words were inserted unwarrantably in the Creed, and have been accepted in the West mainly through the influence of the Mediæval Church of Rome. There is no doubt that historically the Eastern Church is right, and that the addition was decidedly irregular. But it is quite another question whether the words are heretical, as the Easterns maintain, because the Western Church never claims by the addition to imply the source of the Holy Spirit. So that while, historically, the Eastern Church is right, doctrinally, the Western Church is not wrong. When we turn to Sacraments the Eastern Church is strong in its insistence on Seven, while the English Church says there are only two. Then the Eastern Church teaches a doctrine which is virtually, if not identically, the same as the Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation. This is no question of the use of a word, but of essential identity of doctrine, whether the term is used or not. The Eastern Church claims that the First Seven Councils, and no more, are "General," while the English Church accepts the first Six, though naturally puts the chief emphasis on the first Four. There are also other points

of difference, including the use of Icons, or images, and also the Invocation of Saints.

When the question of reunion is raised the matter is generally regarded as involved not merely in theological questions, such as have been mentioned, but in an entire difference of attitude shown by the two Churches. The whole tendency of the Eastern communion is to regard itself as orthodox, primitive and entirely unchanged since the apostolic times, and on this account it usually demands absolute submission as a necessary condition of reunion. As Dr. Headlam says, in an essay to which we are indebted for particulars, the position of the Eastern Church is: "You must accept us and our Church and look on its teaching as correct." This assumption of the Eastern Church is, we are afraid, an insuperable difficulty in the way of reunion. By saying that the Church has never moved from its Apostolic position and by claiming to be infallible, it necessarily requires unconditional surrender on the part of an individual or a community desiring to unite with it, and until it is ready to approach points of difference in a very different spirit to the present, it is difficult, if not impossible, to see how reunion can be accomplished.

The party in the English Church that seeks reunion with the Eastern Church is the extreme Anglican section, which has been refused reunion by Rome, and its apparent dread of isolation has led it more and more during recent years to approach the Eastern Church, desiring acknowledgment by that Communion as against the claims of Rome. But Evangelicals in our Church have not felt any particular desire for reunion with the Greek Churches because of the essential Protestantism of the Anglican formularies. The supremacy of the Bible as the rule of faith, and its authority over tradition; the doctrine of the two Sacraments; and the Anglican teaching concerning the Holy Communion, constitute points of difference that cannot be overcome except by surrender on one side or the other. Then, too, it is well known that the Eastern Church does not at all like the statements of Article XIX., that the Churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch have erred.

Amid all the politeness, courtesy and real warmth of expression found to-day towards England and the English Church on the part of members of the Eastern communion, certain facts must not be overlooked. The Eastern Church does not, and apparently will not, recognize the validity of our baptism. It does not, and apparently will not, recognize the validity of our Orders. And, as a consequence, it does not, and apparently will not, recognize the validity of our Holy Communion. Bishop Blyth, our Bishop in Jerusalem, endeavoured to obtain this recognition several years ago, but was politely and yet firmly rebuffed by the Patriarch in Jerusalem. Of the same kind is the attitude of Archbishop Platon, who was until quite recently the representative of the Russian Church in the United States. In "The Constructive Quarterly" for September, 1913, the Archbishop wrote an article, entitled "Unity is Possible," but all through there was the assumption that it must be on the basis of submission to his Church, and he did not favour the idea of any concession to Anglicanism. Indeed, he recognizes with frankness that no concession is sought by us, nor is any need of such concession felt, and that all Anglicanism wishes is unconditional acceptance without any reservations. Archbishop Platon goes on to remark, following a Russian Professor, that "the only obstacle in the way is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles." On this the comment is made that

"the obstacle is insurmountable because the Articles deny that Holy Orders are a Sacrament." It is true that the Archbishop quotes the Rev. F. W. Puller to the effect that undue importance is given to the Articles, and that they are not dogmatically binding. But, of course, Mr. Puller only speaks for himself and his friends, and he would find it impossible to prove, either historically or legally, that the Articles "are not dogmatically binding." It is only on Mr. Puller's view that the Archbishop would be willing to acknowledge Anglican Orders. But it is quite clear that he himself favours the idea of some general acceptance of what he calls the "Anglican hierarchy," and then after this acknowledgment, whatever it may involve, "there would be a laying on of hands, after which the validity of Anglican Holy Orders would be beyond doubt." If this were not so serious a matter it would be almost amusing, because the wildest imagination cannot conceive of our Archbishops and Bishops permitting themselves to receive this "laying on of hands" for the purpose of ensuring their "validity."

Altogether, therefore, while we naturally welcome every opportunity of getting to know more of Eastern Christians and of giving them every facility for knowing more of us, any definite basis of recognition seems utterly impracticable. To say nothing of the great barrier of the "Filioque" clause, union with Eastern Orthodoxy would be almost as objectionable from the standpoint of Evangelical Protestantism and the Reformation Settlement as would be union with Roman Catholicism. It would mean a stereotyped form of religion. There is, perhaps, no Church which has been less affected by movements during the centuries, for the Eastern communion has been isolated for long periods from the rest of professing Christianity. There have been no developments and no serious changes, and the result is a fixity which accords ill with a living and progressive Church life. A Bishop of the Eastern Church has recently remarked that the great hindrance to reunion between the Anglican and Eastern communions is the Protestantism of the former, and there is no doubt that he is correct. Reunion could only come about by the denial of our history since the sixteenth century, or else by capitulation on the part of the Eastern Churches. It is bare truth to say that neither of these is possible, or even likely.

THE CLOUDS OF WAR.

When the clouds of war art o'er us,
Duty calls us to the fight,
As our fathers strove before us,
Striving then for freedom's right.
God of battles, bless our armies,
Britain's name and honour save;
Give our leaders strength and wisdom,
Help our forces to be brave!

Brave to face 'mid bullets hailing,
Fiercest fury of the fray;
Brave to bear with hearts unflinching
Burden of the long-fought day.
Suffering bodies, aching spirits,
Wounds Thy hand alone can cure;
Heal and comfort in Thy mercy,
Help our forces to endure!

Lord of hosts a mighty nation
Leans upon Thine arm alone;
Hearken to the supplication
Which we pour before Thy throne.
Hear the prayers of fathers, mothers,
Sobs of wives, the children's cry;
Bless, oh, bless, our bravest, dearest!
Help our forces when they die!