

Presbyterianism in England.*

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"Two features, he would notice, in the half-century of reconstruction. The first was, that their revival was due mainly to the immigrant Presbyterians of Scotland and of Ulster. In respect of their membership, of their ministry, most of all of their zealous, generous, and devoted eldership, they owed their present position to those who had brought with them from other parts of the United Kingdom the principles and traditions of a non-English Presbyterianism. The other feature was that, in spite of this, their policy had during the last half-century been an English policy. They would readily understand what difficulties must arise when it was attempted to adjust a Church, formed so largely out of alien elements, to English conditions. Yet this had been the wise and far-sighted policy impressed on the resuscitated Church by its founders, and on the whole pursued by it all along.

"In pursuit of this policy it had abstained, though sometimes amid misconception, from interference with purely Scottish and ecclesiastical questions. It had desired to combine into one all Presbyterians dwelling on English soil, and to cultivate the friendliest ties with those of Wales. It had simplified the form of its working creed, in order to facilitate its acceptance by office-bearers of English training. It had encouraged a style of worship which brought it into closer harmony with English usages. In the spirit of the same policy, it had just decided to place its Theological College at the seat of one of the ancient Universities, that it might be more in touch with English scholarship and life. But the question forced itself upon them, and deserved an answer on such an occasion: Was it worth while thus to labor at the rebuilding from its very foundations of the demolished fabric of English Presbyterianism? Overshadowed as they were by the vast national Church, and by the great bodies which preserved the vital forces of English dissent, why could they not fall into line with one or other of these powerful Communions which shared between them the religious life of the country? Were they justified in keeping a Presbyterian banner flying over the remnants of a beaten host? In reply, he asked himself: Could he go back to the bosom of the ancient and venerable Church of England, which all Christians admired for its divines and for its saints, the Church from which his ecclesiastical ancestors were driven by the Act of Uniformity two hundred and fifty years ago? He supposed none of them now believed in the divine and exclusive claim of Presbyterian polity; suppose they sunk that old debate of *Presbyter versus Bishop*, and, since they could not get in the national Communion the more democratic and better fashion of managing Church affairs, suppose they accepted, *faute de mieux*, the ancient order of Prelates? But what, he asked, of the unreformed rubrics beneath which Sacerdotalism found shelter? What of the decisions of the Privy Council which gave a legal foothold to Sacramentalism? What of the tolerated cult of the "Blessed Virgin Mary," of the reintroduced Mass, of the Confessional, of Apostolically descended authority of Priests, of the unchurching of other Communions, of all the Catholic teaching of the fifth century to which a powerful and perhaps a dominant section of the Anglican Church adheres? To go back to-day in face of all that, and be merged in a dumb and helpless Low Churchism, which clings as for life to State connection,

and for sake of that dares no sacrifice to roll off the incubus of Anglo-Catholicism? Impossible. It was too heavy a price to pay. And for what? For an Erastian rule in Christ's House, for the control of Queen in Council, for the *conge d'elire* in the choice of Christ's ministers, for a Convocation in which the free voice of Christ's people had no effective place. He said it was impossible. If by some miracle they were to be put back to-night into the Church of England as it was, to-morrow they would be compelled to leave her, as their fathers did. What then of the great Wesleyan body, to which in some points they bore pretty close analogy? They had still a Calvinistic Creed; but suppose they agreed, for sake of union, to leave that old feud over Divine grace and man's free will an open question, how should they be able to surrender their popular system, whereby the rights of individuals and of the people were safe-guarded, for a bureaucratic administration which had only of late began to admit in guarded form that representation of the people which had been the ancestral birthright of every Presbyterian? There remained the Congregationalists. Moments had occurred in the past, and might occur again, when it seemed a possible thing that the differences between an advisory Union of Congregations and a Presbyterian Synod could be bridged over. But till that came, he rather thought their Congregational brethren themselves would bid them hold their own ground. To desert that inherited position in order to become just 300 more isolated congregations in England would be to gain nothing tangible; it might be to lose a good deal. As they were, they gave at least an object lesson in the ways of a wide spread system of Church administration, which had proved itself strong and efficient in those days and in other lands; some features of which, at all events, he thought there were many of their brethren who missed and some who coveted. The valuable cohesion and mutual support which their system afforded were not to be lightly thrown away just when others were feeling the need of them."

Exploded a Hundred Times.

More than twenty centuries ago (B.C. 168), Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, slaughtered the Jews by tens of thousands, and destroyed and burned their sacred books. Sixteen centuries ago (A.D. 303), Diocletian, the Roman emperor, issued his decree to tear down the churches, and burn up the Scriptures. And through all these ages men have been fighting the Bible. Kings, princes, emperors, potentates ecclesiastics, and infidels, all have been fighting this book. Men have been banished for reading it, burned for translating, tortured for believing it, imprisoned for obeying it, it has been assailed, ridiculed, and exploded a hundred times from the days of Celsus and Porphyry down to the present hour. The men that have assailed it are dead, but the Book still lives. The governments which tried to crush it have perished, but the book still endures. And after passing through the ordeal of the ages we have a hundred times as many copies of this book as of any other book that was ever written; it is printed in every language for which the founder has ever cast a type; it is read in between three and four hundred different tongues; and is studied to-day more widely than ever before. And the nations that have this book and love this book and teach this book, are to-day the most intelligent, prosperous, progressive, and influential nations on earth. Outside the light of this book is poverty, ignorance, superstition, darkness, and degradation. There is not a scientific book under heaven worth reading, but was written under the blazing light of the Bible; and infidelity itself, when it seeks for leaders and orators, has to take them, not from heathenish realms or infidel homes, but from the families of ministers and from classes in Sunday-schools,

Portion of an Address delivered in London, and now revised by the speaker