

Some Religious Drifts in England.

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It is generally thought in England, I believe, that the Established Church is steadily losing ground. It is not the church of all the people, as every one knows, nor is it, probably, the church of a majority; but it has the advantage of position and power, and might be expected to hold its own. Its strength with the people, however, is said to be less than it used to be, its ministry is not increasing in power and its general grasp on the actual life of the nation appears to be slowly relaxing.

Naturally, this change does not go on without resistance. The church grasps at power, and labors to keep it. Two classes of efforts to strengthen it have lately been apparent. Practical and spiritual work has been done with immense zeal and energy, especially in the great cities. Under the lead of such men as the Bishop of London zeal and organization have been combined, churchly activities have been increased, general humanitarian work has been greatly enlarged and the sincerest faith and love have gone forth to bless the people. The leaders in this movement are not Evangelicals of the old school, but High Churchmen. Some are ritualists of high grade, and others not so far advanced are High Churchmen still. It would not be right to say that the movement is a churchly one alone, intended to produce ecclesiastical results, for that is not the case. It represents much truly Christian fervor. We who are not churchly in our ways have henceforth to think of Anglican High Churchmanship not merely as an ecclesiastical but as a religious force.

External strengthening of the church has also been sought. By recent occurrences the alliance of church with state has been rendered more intimate. There were proceedings of great importance in connection with the consecration of Canon Gore as bishop of Worcester. Objections were made to the appointment, and the question of the terms upon which episcopal appointments could legally be made was for the first time fully adjudicated in the highest court. The result was that the rights of the state were powerfully confirmed. Interference with the operations of church and state in their official unity was practically forbidden, and thus the bonds of the establishment were strengthened. There is no doubt that the establishment stands firmer in consequence, so far as a legal decision can make it so. It is true that the victory lies with the state rather than with the church, and the church appears more clearly than ever as subordinate to the state; but the union of the two has undoubtedly been rendered stronger.

At the same time a powerful effort has been made by the church to strengthen its grasp on popular education. The famous Education Bill, over which England has been so profoundly excited, represents the desire and purpose of the Established Church to extend its power. By means of it, if it is finally enacted, far greater power will be placed in the hands of the church. Educational work of the lower grade throughout the country will be more controlled than now by ecclesiastical authorities, and it will be more difficult than ever for persons outside the establishment to become teachers. The cost of church schools will be charged to taxation, and the public will be required to pay for the support of schools over which it can exercise no control. No attempt is made to conceal the fact that this is a grasp for power.

But with church and state bound closely together, and with education still more firmly in the churches hands, surely, it may be said, disestablishment is less conceivable than before, and the church is newly fastened in a position from which it cannot be removed. But in this there is no spiritual strengthening, no accession of inward power, no suggestion of increase in religious vitality. In some quarters, as I have said, the church of England is exhibiting great spiritual vitality and doing most vigorous religious work; but the present invoking of external help and reinforcing of artificial supports is not a part of any forward movement. It looks rather toward the further secularization of the Anglican ideals, already secular enough, and toward reliance upon government more than upon spiritual power. Such a movement is extremely ill chosen if the church really desires a strengthening of its position. It has aroused an intensity and bitterness of opposition from which great results may come. The church appears as an eager claimant for power, to be obtained through political means. But political strength is not real strength to a Christian body, and in no form is force a substitute for spiritual energy as a means of attraction. The antagonisms that fall to the lot of an Established Church will be immensely increased by the recent actions, and the church will find its grasp on the national life to have been weakened by them.

How far are the other Christian bodies in England, the Free churches as they love to call themselves, are really growing in power, I do not feel myself qualified to judge. They work under great difficulties, and deserve great credit for their fidelity. But one thing is certain; they are rapidly drawing together in the bonds of a common sympathy and interest. The Free church element is becoming unified. If the Established Church had desired to bring this to pass, it could have devised no better means than the Education Bill. By this proposal of hostile legislation the

Free churches are simply forced into a closer unity. The pressure of the establishment has always had the effect to keep the various denominations in more intimate fellowship than has prevailed among them in America, and now this union is made closer and stronger yet by what is regarded as an insult upon the common liberties. There exists a strong federation of the Free churches, extending throughout the country, which watches the interests of all the bodies that compose it, and seizes all occasions for helping the common cause.

I was present at an interesting occasion in a village near Cambridge where three congregations, of three denominations, were uniting to erect a mission hall for the use of a small detached community two miles away from them. The foundation stone was to be laid, and five hundred people from the farms and villages around gathered to see it done. The president of the local branch of the Free church federation, himself a Quaker, was there, and a distinguished woman, of still another denomination, was brought out to lay the stone. The three pastors conducted the service together, and in a great outdoor meeting at twilight, addressed by friends and strangers, the five hundred rural folk rejoiced in the forward movement and the unity of faith and purpose that made it possible. This occasion was a type of a large and hopeful movement. The denominations are not merging into one another, so far as I could judge, but they are becoming one in spirit and aim, and are working together with increasing energy and fervor for the cause that is common to them all.

I am sorry that the Church of England is weakening itself on the one hand, as I think it is, where it strengthens itself by noble work on the other. Anglicanism did not attract me, so far as I saw it, but as a friend of all that is good I can only wish it to be spiritually powerful, and so I am sorry to think of the church as secularizing itself and as standing against reasonable claims of the people. I was glad to find in the Free churches, as I looked in upon them many signs of spiritual vigor. They have their limitations, which are only too visible, and one could wish many things otherwise, but in various Free Church assemblies I felt the warmth of genuine religion, and bore testimony from the heart that spiritual power was there. England has to deal with the same materialistic drift as America, and there is need that all Christian agencies at their best should stand in fellowship to carry forward the work of the spirit of Christ.—The Congregationalist.

Faith For Others.

Not unfrequently the members of a church have been charged with the entire fault for the want of success of an evangelistic effort, and have been told that if they would only believe it there would be a revival and the unconverted would be saved.

It is certainly very desirable that Christians should always have a vital earnestness in the conversion of those about them; that they should be fervent in prayer and earnest in effort for the salvation of others. But there is an evident fallacy in holding that the only prerequisite to a revival and to the conversion of men and women is belief on the part of Christians. If this were the case a few Christians, by the exercise of a large amount of confidence, could bring about a revival at any time. Probably there are those who would claim that this is true; but that belief does not appear to be sustained by the facts. We recall instances in which a number of very sincere and devoted Christians have confidently believed that the church and community were on the eve of a revival, but they have been disappointed. Every pastor can remember cases in which members of his church have prayed and labored for the conversion of friends, and have believed that they would be converted, but so far as seen they have not been.

Shall we say then that prayer is a failure and faith is a delusion? By no means. The essential fallacy at the root of the statements that confidence, and enough of it, is sufficient to bring about the conversion of others is a misunderstanding of the nature of faith. To those who make these statements faith is simply this confident belief that certain things very much desired will come to pass. This idea finds some support in the English translations of the Bible where the word "belief" is used as covering the whole meaning of the Greek word "pistis" elsewhere translated faith. Faith is not confidence that everything is to come about exactly as we desire or even as we have prayed, but humble and filial reliance on God, which enables us, having presented our requests, to leave the granting or withholding to his infinite wisdom. It is a child-like trust that prefers the will of God above its own wishes.

It is easy to see that the other idea of faith goes far to justify the accusation that Christianity takes the government of the universe out of the hands of God and puts it upon the prayers of his people. If it is really true that confidence only is necessary to secure the answer to prayer, where is the limit? If the conversion of one person can be secured simply by believing that he will be converted, why not a hundred, or a thousand, or a million, or the whole human race? We can conceive of no more dangerous provocative to infidelity than this mistaken idea of faith. If one prayer is not answered exactly the way it is expected to be answered, the whole foundation of that sort of faith is

destroyed. It sets aside the will of God and the freedom of man, and makes its own confident assurance the ruling power in the world.

But true faith is never confident of anything except the wisdom and goodness of God. It says with Jesus in that supreme hour in the garden, "Not my will, but thine be done." It joyfully accepts the denial of its own wishes in the confident assurance that the will of the Lord is better. Through tears of disappointment and sorrow it lifts a trustful face to the loving Heavenly Father who makes all things work together for good to them that love God."

It is well to pray for our friends, and to labor for their conversion; and oftentimes we shall have the privilege of leading them to Jesus. But we cannot secure their conversion by adopting a belief that they will be converted. The paralytic was no doubt willing to be converted. Some of our friends may resist every influence we can bring to bear on them, and even the persuasions of the Holy Spirit. After we have done all we can we are obliged to leave them in the hands of the Lord. Many Christians have been made very unhappy by their sincere though mistaken belief that their lack of faith was responsible for the failure of their friends to give themselves to Christ. This responsibility in every case rests alone on the person themselves. Our duty is to do all we can for them, but their salvation is a matter of their own decision.

Perhaps the clearest and most apprehensive Scripture statement of the conditions of answer to prayer is found in John 15:7, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." Here are the conditions of successful prayer. If we are in Christ so that His will is our will, and if His words are in us, so that we will ask nothing contrary to his truth our faith for our friends will be rewarded by their conversion.—Watchman.

A Beloved Name.

BY REV. THERON BROWN.

There may be times and situations in which a man whose life and testimony are a daily rebuke and must incur dislike, and even animosity. But one who can be truly praised "for the enemies he has made" is an exceptional case. Good people sometimes offend so needlessly, and fail so utterly in wisdom and tact, that they seem to invite the hostility of sinners as an indispensible Christian cross. None of the texts written in the Gospel of Love for the church in the days of persecution authorize any such general criterion of virtue.

Sixteen years ago, a young minister was called to one of the churches of suburban Boston and began his pastoral labors. In a flock that had been too long without a shepherd, he found many different wants to satisfy, and many untrained spirits among the youth of his congregation and the social and charitable auxiliaries of his church work. The great city with its iniquities, was at his door. Calm in the peace of God, he faced his task. "Beginning at Jerusalem," in his Master's own way, he organized his band of helpers, young and old, charmed every unruly member into order and efficiency, and became the head and heart of a host united and ready for consecrated endeavor. With his whole soul awake to the suffering and the wrong in his neighborhood, he pitied the sorrow and antagonized the sin. But he comforted the one and rebuked the other with the same kindness. The guilty learned to trust him while they feared him. He would let no man call him enemy,—and there was the hiding of his power. Men in evil business to whom he said, smiling, "I love you, but I do not love what you are doing," found it hard to go on gathering the wage of unrighteousness within the sight of his eyes. Against his gentle firmness and transparent truth there was no weapon. Few could withstand a pleader who (as it was said of him) "carried the commandment to 'love one another,' in his very face."

Last May, in the height of his usefulness, this servant of God suddenly sickened and not long after died. But by his gracious loving kindness he had captivated the whole community that knew him, and he had leavened it with his life. At his thronged funeral there were no distinctions of rank or sect or condition. A Jew among the mourning multitude was asked, by one who did not recognize him, if he belonged to the dead pastor's church. "No, and yes," he answered; "he made the public his parish and that includes me."

When, several months afterwards, a new schoolhouse was ready to be "dedicated" in the neighborhood, a spontaneous vote of the people—mechanics, tradesmen, saloon-keepers, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—named it with the lamented pastor's name,—the name of the man who won souls by wise and sweet address, without stooping in the least to compromise with wrong.

It was a fit and loving thought of the church to which this good man gave his best years that the ten thousand dollars to be raised and set apart as sacred capital to carry on the district missionary work which he began should also be memorial.

Most of us desire popularity. And what a means of usefulness it is when fairly earned! Many a minister has anxiously studied to know how he can reach the masses and gather them in. Clap-trap devices catch public at-