

that if, in any daughters of the Reformation whatever, the fundamental features of that movement, as an attempt to reaffirm and realize the principles of equality and freedom in Christ's kingdom have worked themselves out fully both in their strength and their weakness, in success or in failure it has been within the (so-called) "Reformed" or Calvinistic group, organized freely on the self governing lines of a Presbyterian polity. We are entitled, therefore, to measure our past and to forecast our future by the light of our King's ideal. The ideas which the Sovereign Head of the Kingdom has indicated for us must be regulative in any honest endeavour to reform His Church or spiritual society among men. Suppose we carry back with us the ideas we have gathered from this text. Suppose we apply them to test the issues of our Reformation as they lie before our eyes to-day. Shall we find reason to be ashamed of what our fathers did? Shall we have cause to be satisfied with what they did? I think neither the one nor the other. We have no cause to be ashamed on the one hand, but to take thankful note of the soundness of the principle of individualism on which the new Churches of the Reformation took their stand, and of those inherent rights of man to transact alone and for himself with God his Father, his Teacher and his Judge, in the defence of which our fathers toiled and bled. Neither on the other hand is there room to rest content with what they have done. For if, on the one side on the negative side (that is, of revolt against the false unity of an authoritative society—our fathers fruitfully applied the teaching of our Lord, on the other side the position side of true unity based on fraternal sympathy and service—it is possible that His teaching may still await a more complete development. Ought not a wise and sympathetic review of what God privileged our fathers to attain in past days, to suggest what fresh duties are emerging for their sons in these new times which are now upon us?

As to the former point.—Think first how thoroughly in the spirit of our Lord's own protest Rabbism was the Reformer's protest against Catholicism.

They set out with the rejection of the Church's authority in doctrine. Against the fathers, councils and doctors, for whom it was claimed that they sat in the seat of Christ, with power infallibly to interpret or develop His teaching, the Protestants claimed the right of private judgment. They rested it on these two related truths, first, of the outward authority of God speaking in Holy Scripture, and second, of the inward illumination and witness of the Spirit, enabling each faithful enquirer to know the truth which saves. Not even yet has our theology attained to a complete harmony of these two as the adequate ground for our certainty in the knowledge of revealed truth. For down to this day these related factors have found in succession a one-sided development. All the same is it true that on their combination reposes ultimately the famous claim of Protestants to the private interpretation of the Word of God. But what else is this claim save a republication of our Lord's own words. "Be not ye called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and all ye are brethren?"

The same holds good of the other principle of the Reformation—the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Was it not a vindication of a sinner's immediate access to the Father's grace? Not through penance or sacraments, or priestly absolution, as intermediate channels of grace, does God's forgiving favour filter down (they said), into the souls of His earthly children, as though betwixt us and the face of our Father in heaven there came some spiritual "papa" or "Father in God," with whom we have first to deal. No, but each man's solemn privilege is to deal directly with the Father of spirits, to draw near alone through personal penitence and truth into the Father's presence, to be accepted and absolved solely through the mediation of the Eternal Son, and hold his place and wear his rights in the spiritual family of God, as no other man's debtor, but every other man's equal—a son by the grace of God alone. What is this but to echo Christ's words. "Call no man your father on the earth, for One is your Father, which is in heaven?" The moment you perceive that Christ has opened a spiritual path for each of us to come alone with Himself for our sole ground of acceptance to the one Father of us all, that moment the Church ceases to be the authoritative dispenser of

grace, or its ministry a sacerdotal hierarchy, that moment the Church is a brotherhood, and its ministers the servants of their brethren for Jesus sake.

Once more the Reformers protested against earthly authority on any question of conscience. In private, no spiritual "director" in the confessional. In public, no binding or absolving "bulls" from Rome, in the Church, no canons determining points of casuistry, in the State, no supremacy of pontiff or king over the action of Christ's people in things sacred. In each Christian breast, there, a conscience free from human lords in order that it may receive its orders from Christ alone, and obey them in its allegiance to the King of kings. For it is essential to remember how Christian liberty of conscience is the clear opposite to arbitrary self-will or the license of individual preference. It means a conscience that is free from man just because it is bound by God. Having found in Jesus Christ a regulative Head and Guide to duty who is authoritative and supreme, each member in Christ's mystic body must hold himself in readiness to follow the Master's will, all counter authorities on earth notwithstanding. What else do these words mean. "Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even the Christ?"

Fathers and brethren, do I need in a council like this to tell what services to civilization and to religion were rendered by the revindication of these Christian principles of individual freedom? It is here we require to recount the splendid daring of our fathers? How they clave with passionate hearts to these great rights of spiritual manhood! How for this sacred cause they left the bones of heroes on a hundred battlefields, and the ashes of martyrs beside a thousand stakes! Have we to be reminded that these "faithful contendings" of the Reformed Churches for an "open Bible," a free Gospel and the rights of conscience, laid the foundations of modern inquiries in science and modern liberties in State. Or that the most progressive portions of the world, both in Europe and America, have entered upon a heritage that was won by their sufferings! We are the children of our fathers, let us stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made us free.

But, may I venture, in conclusion, to indicate by a word or two what remains to be done before the full ideal of Jesus kingdom can be realized?

At the outset I remarked what a bold step Jesus took when, discarding as a bond of cohesion the principle of human authority in religion, He proposed to construct a spiritual community upon principles of individual self determination. If the step was a wise one, as well as bold, then this ground conception must be one which contains constructive as well as destructive forces in its bosom. It must combine His people as well as liberate them. If it begins by setting men apart, each in the secret cell of his own soul alone with God, it must end by binding them all with tender and sacred bonds into a new brotherhood.

Now, what was witnessed at the Reformation, and since, is chiefly the negative or destructive side of Christ's teaching. What we have yet to see carried on into action will be its positive and constructive side.

It was originally in the interests of Church unity that the (so-called, "catholic" system organized itself. But the unity was of that obsolete sort which is, indeed, the only one the principle of a central human authority can generate, a unity, that is to say, enforced, mechanical and external in the letter and not in the spirit. The first effect of the revolt in the sixteenth century was, of course, to explode this apparent unity in the Catholic Church of the West, which, after all, was only superficial uniformity. By giving play for the first time during a thousand years to the forces of individualism, it first rent Protestant from Catholic Christendom, and then in its after issues tore Protestantism into shreds. It did so most where its action was most complete—in the Reformed, not Lutheran Churches, in the Presbyterian, not Anglican, branch of the reformed communion. We ourselves, in the multitude of little Churches which we represent to-day (divided, for the most part, by petty differences, and, in some cases, by no difference at all save the accidents of history), are a visible witness to the disrupting, the pulverizing effects of the assertion in Christendom of individual convictions.

Let it be confessed in candour that this assertion (like every human movement of recoil or revolt) has been pushed among us to an extreme, that diversi-

ties of opinion have been made too much of as a ground of separation, that the tendency to split in order to vindicate one's liberty to witness to one's private view of truth has led to a needless and enfeebling disintegration, that the result has been loss of fraternal sympathy and loss of mutual help through the isolation even alienation of brethren, through the friction even rivalry of denominations.

Let all this be conceded. What then? Is there not another side to the teaching of our Lord respecting His kingdom which deserves to be better learnt? We have negatived, vigorously enough, that false union which is reached through the subordination of many brethren to one, are we never to attain a true union through the mutual service and self-denial of all? We have stoutly refused to bind Christ's people in a "catholic" society on the model of an autocratic imperialism, is there to be no adequate exhibition of the other idea—that of a spiritual family, differing in outward feature, yet one in life and character? Perhaps we have given heed enough to our Lord when He bade us own neither doctor, nor father, nor master on the earth. When shall we lend as willing ears to Him when He speaks to us as "brethren," saying. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, and whoever shall humble himself shall be exalted."

It may be that in the wide sweep of Christ's guidance of His Church through long millenniums, separations among brethren had come as an inevitable stage on the road to this deeper and more vital reunion. Probably the shattering of that false conception of Christian fellowship could be followed by a regathering on better lines only after an interval of exaggerated individualism and self assertion. I venture to ask my fathers and brethren if the hour for drawing closer together again has not struck? Is it not time for the forces of disruption to have spent themselves? May not a new conception of Catholic unity be now set up in the room of the old? Are not many hearts drawn to pray for, and many faces set to seek, a visible oneness among Christians that shall rest on something deeper than ecclesiastical reconstruction? In truth, is not this very alliance one evidence amongst many of a turn in the tide? Of one thing we may be sure. the basis for any wide or enduring unity in the family of God must be quite different from that on which catholicity has been sought for in the past. For it must reckon with those rights of the individual, which, once lifted into their place, can never be surrendered more. What, then, is the problem before the great Church of the future if not this—to be true to liberty, yet true to fraternity with the same breath? To gain co operative unity without subordinating legitimate rights, and breathe the Spirit of one Father's love throughout a vast sympathetic brotherhood of the free and equal sons of God? To be as comprehensive as it ought to be, not a mere rally of Presbyterians only, such a reunion of the future will have to realize a deeper agreement in tone and in aim amid frankly acknowledged divergencies of all sorts, both in creed and ritual, both in methods and in polity. God's people will probably have to satisfy themselves hereafter with an organic or vital co-operation of many members for the common ends of the spiritual body of Christ, and either abandon or relegate to an indefinite future that administrative oneness, on a large scale, for which so many fervent wishes have been breathed in vain. Even so the problem is too difficult for our present means to solve it. Yet it must be solved if the Christ's ideal is to be reached. And it may be, for the equality of Christian brethren is not independence of one another, like the false *egalite* of Socialism. Rather it means the strictest dependence of each upon the well-being and the services of all the rest. Therefore, it wraps within it a formative principle which will yet (one thinks) prove strong enough to work some sort of outward as well as inward unity through love, and the self sacrifice and self subordination which love inspires. When each man is severally taught of the Spirit, and the Father's love has filled each heart, and the will of Christ is the rule of all, then will no brother seek to lord it over the belief, the worship, or the obedience of another; but every man shall serve the brotherhood in voluntary self-surrender, that the Lord alone may be exalted in that day. Then shall the Universal Church be one, in the only sense in which Christ would have it so—as a united brotherhood in love of the equal and the free.