

THE CHURCH WHICH IS OUR MOTHER.

("Hibernicus," in Bellast Witness.)

The title has been suggested by a Whit-Sunday Reminution Sermon, preached by the Rev. Alexander Whyte, D.D., of Edinburgh, and published in The British Weekly. In this sermon the following paragraph occurs:—

"The first step to a real union of Christendom will be taken when we come to admit and to realize that the Greek Church was the original Mother of us all; that the Latin Church was her first child; and that through both those Churches, we ourselves have our religious existence; through them we have the universal foundations of our Creeds and Confessions and Catechisms; our public worship also; our Christian character and our Christian civilization; and everything indeed that is essential to our salvation," &c., &c.

We need hardly be surprised at anything in these days, but I am sure that many of the readers of that paper on seeing statements like these coming from such a quarter must have been tempted to exclaim, Where are we and what are we coming to? What claim the Greek Church has to be recognized as "The Original Mother of us all," I am utterly at a loss to know.

The Greek Church may be said to have originated as a separate organization in the reign of Constantine the Great, when in the year 330 A.D. he removed the seat of government from Rome to Constantinople. The Christian Church, in spite of the terrible and constantly-increasing controversies over almost every doctrine and shade of doctrine of the faith, was still outwardly one. Its government and administration were largely under the direction of the three great Patriarchates of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria. It is true that Rome, with a keen eye to future supremacy did not relish the title, which put her upon a level with other centres of religious life. The conversion of Constantine to Christianity and the removal of the seat of Government to Constantinople rapidly secured to the Church there a considerable pre-eminence, and it with Jerusalem were raised to the dignity of patriarchal sees.

The principal event of that epoch was the meeting of the first General Council at Nicea, in Asia Minor, in 325 A.D. It was not a voluntary assembly of bishops to draw up a summary of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. It was necessitated by the rise and spread of the Arian heresy. The Council was summoned by the Emperor, and was attended by 318 bishops. It is a melancholy proof of the spiritual decadence which had then early set in that at this Council the Arians and the Eusebian Moderates were in a majority and it was only through the eloquence of Athanasius, a native of Alexandria, and the influence of the Emperor that Orthodoxy prevailed, and the condemnation of the Arian heresy was secured. Within ten years the judgment was reversed. Arius was restored to favor, and Athanasius was banished. The subsequent history of this champion of Orthodoxy fully justified the sneer of Gibbon that as regards the leaders of the Church, "The will of the Sovereign was the rule of their obsequious faith." The fate of the great Bishop depended upon whether the Sovereign was Orthodox, or Arian, or Pagan. Five times did he suffer banishment and was as often restored, and twenty out of the forty-seven years of Episcopacy were spent in exile. After a chequered experience of strife and turbulence, during which the Emperors more and more asserted their supremacy, the Greek Church gradually sank into a state of torpor and continued in that condition until it was finally crushed on the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 A.D.

As regards the moral condition of the Church at the beginning of the fourth century, here is the verdict of Mr. Lecky in his "History of European Morals":—"In the first two centuries of the Christian

Church the moral elevation was extremely high. In the century before Constantine, a marked depression was already manifest. The two centuries after Constantine are uniformly represented by the Fathers as a period of general and scandalous vice."

This is the Church which, according to Dr. Whyte, is our spiritual Mother!

As regards doctrine, the Greek Church accepts as its rule of faith not only the Holy Scriptures, but tradition as embodied in the decisions of the first seven Ecumenical Councils. It recognizes seven sacraments. It believes in penance, a sort of purgatory, and prayers for the dead. As regards the Lord's Supper, it believes in the Real Presence, Transubstantiation, and the propitiatory sacrifice. If for images it has substituted the holy icons, it pays the same homage to the one that the Church of Rome does to the other.

Apart from the Church in Greece and a diaspora scattered throughout the world, the Greek Church has but one child, the Russian Church. Russia was won over to the Greek faith in 988 A.D., when a sister of the Emperor Basil married Prince Vladimir. For 900 years the Greek Church has had that country and its people in the hollow of its hand, unchallenged and unopposed. As to its right to be regarded in any sense as a Mother to any country or any people, let the moral, social, and spiritual condition of that unhappy country at this moment testify.

In no real sense can it be claimed for the Greek Church that it is the Mother of the Church of Rome. The removal of the Imperial throne from Rome to Constantinople opened the door for the Bishop of Rome to assert himself, which he forthwith began to do with all the vigor of unrestrained priestly ambition. Assuming the mantle of emperor and priest within fifty years, he began to put forth those claims to universal supremacy which have since been reverberating throughout the world, but of which the world seems to be at last getting very weary. These claims soon led to the great separation between the East and the West, in regard to which no sign of reconciliation is apparent.

I was under the impression that, after all the horrors and cruelties and abominations of the Dark Ages it was by returning to the New Testament, to the life and teachings of our Lord, and to the Apostolic Church which He founded, our Reformation fathers entered upon a new religious existence, secured a safe and secure foundation for our Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms, for our public worship, our Christian character, and our Christian civilization, and everything, indeed, that is essential to our salvation.

We are surprised at Dr. Whyte. He seems to have come powerfully under the spell of Professor Cooper. We would strongly advise him to extricate himself as soon as possible. No good can come out of the like of this.

We Christians have a spiritual Mother. It is The Church; that Church to which our Lord referred when, stretching out His hands towards His disciples, He said, "Behold, My Mother" (Matt. xii. 49); to which the Apostle Paul referred when he said, "The Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our Mother" (Galatians iv. 26 R.V.). It is the Church of the New Testament, that Holy Catholic or universal Church, which is the Bride of Christ, the whole company of the Redeemed in Heaven and on earth. It deserves, as the earthly representative of the Great Father, all the love and veneration due to a Mother. With it, and with it alone, is the future of the world. "Plead with your Mother, plead!" is an appeal to believers just as appropriate today as it was on the day it was uttered well-nigh three thousand years ago, if the Divine ideals for humanity are to be ever realized.

The straight and narrow way is always an up-grade.

PROTESTANTISM IN FRANCE.

What of Protestantism in Decatholized France? This interesting question is treated by a French correspondent of the New York Times, in a recent letter, in terms following:

Since Pius X. has formally and categorically declined to accept the Public Worship Associations in France or to allow the Church there to be temporarily organized in accordance with the Disestablishment act, it may be interesting to inquire into the situation of French Protestants, who represent one-sixtieth of the religious population of the country. This small minority, powerful and influential, is pledged to a maintenance of democratic institutions, but it represents a religious influence which is almost nil.

Some of the most prominent men today in France are Protestants. For example, Ferdinand Buisson, Felix Faure, and Gabriel Monod—and curious it is that those men were once Ministers in the Protestant Church of France, who have now been driven out because of their supposed heresy. Just as the contest is waged between the Clerical or Curatorial Catholics and the Liberal Catholics of the church of Rome, so in the Protestant Church of France one party clings to orthodoxy and the theology, while the other preaches Protestantism in its widest application.

Prior to the Disestablishment act any sect which numbered 100,000 adherents was entitled to a grant from the French Government. Thus in 1915 Roman Catholic worship received 40,381,993 francs and Protestant worship 1,531,500 francs. Now the Protestant Church, like the Roman Catholic Church, having no further claim on the State, must find its own resources. The more conservative Protestantism includes some of the most respectable and wealthy elements of French society. They will undoubtedly help the orthodox Protestants. But it is feared by the newer and more independent workers of the Church that for this very reason the old-fashioned and coldly formal section will obtain the upper hand by reason of the financial necessities of the hour.

The theological Faculty of Paris, which forms part of the Sorbonne and has hitherto been supported by a State grant, is noted for the width of its teaching. The young men who leave its walls for ministry in the Protestant churches of France preach what one might call the new gospel of humanity as opposed to dogmatism. Here, then, is the difficulty of the situation: The Paris school, in order to continue, must make appeal to the wealth of the congregations; it must establish some sort of endowment. Exactly the people who can help are the most conservative, having little sympathy with the modern trend of thought. They have established in the south, a college where the stricter theology is taught, but, as it has been laughingly put by a Liberal Protestant: "Books have wings; they have flown to this hiding place of orthodoxy, and as a consequence have disturbed the religious conceptions of the professors."

Still, the Orthodox and Liberal Churches express great hope and confidence. People having to pay for their religion will take greater interest in it than before. "I do not say that France will become Catholic," observed one minister whose reputation as a preacher is world wide, "but I do say that we shall see a remarkable renaissance in the Catholic as in the Protestant Churches. I have myself noticed a great movement going on for the last five and twenty years. It will increase and accentuate. Many of the priests rebel against celibacy, and against the worship of saints, such as St. Antoine of Padua. Such men will now form independent churches, evangelical in tone, though preserving the Catholic ritual. Believe me, we are on the eve of a great religious movement in France."