

CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS.

The following paper was read before the Dublin Clerical Society by the Rev. Canon Neligan, D. D.

With the conviction that we live under the laws of a just, loving, and allwise God, that "all things work together for good for those who love Him," and that as He reigns in heaven and earth, He "will make even the wrath of man to praise Him," we cannot allow any idea of failure in His purpose to paralyse our energies. Pessimism is antagonistic to a belief in any God, and is one of the most disintegrating and destructive ideas that can dominate an individual or a community. The Church of Christ—"the House of God, the pillar and ground of the truth"—must fulfill the purpose of her existence and adapt her functions to the circumstances of the age and sphere in which she is placed. Her assurance of a deathless lease will be in proportion to her consciousness of responsibility; and her remedial and restorative power will be effective so far only as she balances and harmonises the salvation of the individual with the development of the entire Christian organization or "Church."

In Church life and work the love of self must be equalized with the love of our neighbours, for though each human link may be complete in itself, it can be useful so far only as it is helpful to the nature and numbers of the other links attached to it. Isolation, as a law of existence, is an absurdity, and the limiting of Christ-force and life to the individual's religious safety is but the baptism of heathen self-concentration and gratification into the Church of Him who says that "love to one another" is the test and credential of His disciples.

Many of us know that human thought and action too often swing like the pendulum. In our early days "individual salvation" was pressed upon our responsive natures as the Alpha and Omega of Christianity; it was the grand goal of man's life on earth and in heaven. This, however, was but a reaction from the great mistake of former teaching, when "Churchianity" was considered as synonymous with Christianity, and the "good Churchman" was reputed to be the "good Christian." To-day there is a new adjustment of spiritual, moral, and ecclesiastical organization, and the happiest results will be secured by those who study most intelligently and patiently the mind and will of God, and who, permeated and invigorated by the life and love of His eternal Son, consecrate all their Divine-human life-force to that altruism taught and exemplified by the God-man who said "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;" and "ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." In seeking to adapt our Churchism and Christianity to the environment of the present age, the old principles about Revealed Truth must be accepted as stereotyped and *unalterable*. Truth cannot be created by man: we may discover it, like jewels; but it must be believed in as *eternal*. The adaptation of Truth, and the opinion and language in which it is clothed and presented to man, ought to vary in proportion to the mental and moral receptivity of the disciple. Our Master adopted various plans of teaching, so must we; therefore uniformity, universal and perpetual, whether of the Anglican, Greek, or Roman type, is a dream, and the sooner the Church of Christ substitutes for it "Unity in Him" as the pivot of Christianity, and assents to that variety which is both essential to, and evidential of, healthy life-force, the sooner will the Catholic Church "worthily magnify His Holy Name."

The literary facilities of our age—"knowledge running to and fro"—by means of a cheap press, cheap instruction in primary schools, cheap illustrations, and above all, never-ending "object lessons" in the lives and habits of all the classes of the social world, have quickened the intelligence and perceptive faculties of the

hitherto obtuse classes. The result has been the strong accentuation of unpleasant contrasts: rankling feelings of envious anger and a dangerous rumbling, such as may precede a terrible social upheaving.

If a wedge be wrongly inserted in the social body, so that the cleavage will be lateral instead of vertical and upraising, the mischief accruing may be irreparable. Now the Church of Christ in her morally antiseptic and illuminating functions, must try to hinder the miseries consequent on such a mistake. Her primary function may be and is individualistic, but not with the idea of finality, for individual salvation is but a *means* to an *end*. She must develop her work first into that of co-operation and then that of social grouping. She is not to teach the individual that his own welfare is to be the end of his life-quest and ambition, and that having drawn a draft on eternity, he can spend his life-powers on self-ease. Such teaching leads surely to the hateful censoriousness of a mere critical and detective religionism, and to the false, illogical, and unnatural conclusion, that our to-days can be divorced from our yesterdays, and that our characters in eternity will not be "water-marked" by our conduct in time.

Another thought seems to urge too many Churchmen into a questionable attitude relative to the world, *i. e.*, the attempt to make the Church nearly, if not altogether, synonymous with *civilization*. Now the life of the Church of Christ is *not* the result of mere human evolution, but of a *superhuman force and law* originated by God Himself, and grafted into the olive tree of the human race. In all our estimation of the forces at work on earth, the awful factor of the disease of sin must be reckoned with. Evolution and moral development may be dreamt of for a race or species unaffected with this virus, but when conscience collides with passion, and will is found to be in a state of paralysis, civilization as a human evolution is but a sorry burlesque of intellectual and moral harmony. The history of the most civilized nations of the past illustrates the inferiority of civilization as a potential and continuous factor in the uplifting of the human race. The United States, the North-West and South of America, and South Africa, attest by the discovery of pre-historic and historic remains of cities, to former but vanished civilizations. Ancient and interesting are the evidences of the Inca's civilization in Peru and the Aztecs in Mexico; grandly suggestive in that of Greece and Rome; but all fade into insignificance with that of Egypt, whose pyramids represent a civilization even recent when compared with that of previous centuries. Yet where are now the magnificent symbols of kingly and priestly intelligence and power? Where the exquisitely adorned and gracefully proportioned temples? Where the literature? Where the evidences of governing power? Does it not look as if in national civilization, as well as in the life of the individual, there is ever coincident with the birth, the germ of the death? In every nation the "Ichabod" of decay seems to have been inscribed on its pillars in its highest prosperity. No nation has yet succeeded in blending the incongruous elements of "the clay and iron" of Daniel's vision into a permanent whole. If then this principle—the inherent element of decay so visible in civilization—can be deduced from the facts of history, does it seem probable that we shall succeed in inducing men to believe the exact opposite, namely, on the one hand, that the civilization of the nineteenth partakes of more noble and permanent elements than that of bygone centuries; or on the other hand, that by dovetailing the civilization of the world and that of the Church, the lines of difference will fade away, and that on these lines "the kingdoms of this world" will become the kingdom of God and of His Christ? The answer is obvious, for, apart from all the lessons of past history, the teaching of our Master is opposed to it—for He says we are to be "in the world" but not "of the world," that "he who is a friend of the world is an enemy of God;" and St. Paul says he was

"crucified unto the world and the world unto him."

With such teaching as this before us, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that there must be a terribly preponderating materialism in millions of men, who know not God, and are therefore anti-Christian, but yet civilized, respectable, educated, and self-directing. These men are not in the "Church" of Christ, though they may fall in with many of her services, and they are not to be considered for a moment as real Christ-born men.

Again, we are not to mistake "National Churchism" for real and true Christianity. Nations, and the Churches of those nations, have risen and fallen as we have seen; but as the element of continuance is promised only to the "Church of Christ," the "nationality" of any Church, though desirable, must be considered as accidental and not essential. Our own Church of Ireland is an example of this distinction. She was never so spiritual and forceful as now, when the State has pillaged and disowned her; although is has formerly used her so ostentatiously as a political engine, that the majority of Ireland's sons have identified her with English politics, and have declined to be baptised at her founts. Nor is the Church, as established by Christ, to ally herself through her clergy or any part of her ecclesiastical organisation with any one particular form of government, monarchical or republican, or with any particular political party, so long as the *de facto* government rules rightly for the welfare of all. A usurped authority, or an authority acting wrongly, ought not of course to be sanctioned by either clergy or laity. But we have our Lord teaching obedience to the *de facto* government of His day, even though it was that of imperial Rome, which afterwards delivered Him to be crucified. He, as became a good and loyal subject, declined to be a judge in matters of property, and even arranged that both He and His disciples should pay their taxes. Further, He never opened directly a prison door or set a prisoner free. The Apostles always inculcated the same principle.

On reflecting over the teaching of Christ and His Apostles, I have decided that a clergyman should not use his clerical office for any political purpose or party, though in his capacity as a citizen he ought always to exercise his privileges of voting. It is further objectionable for the Church to interfere with the civil power in the execution of its own system and laws, or at any time to grasp at secular government for Church purposes and ends. The "law officer" has his own work to do as "a Minister," to punish "the evil doer and reward those who do well." In this position he is one of God's subsidiary agents, and ought to be recognized as such by every Christian man. But he can only take cognizance of facts as related to transgression of the existing law. He cannot intrude or teach in the domain of Christ, for all the laws of civil government can merely secure a minimum of morality. Civil law begins with "this do," then warns "you had better," and last insists, with threat of punishment, "you must" or "you shan't." Whereas the Christ principle is—(1) "you ought," (2) "you can," (3) "you will," because, in His aim to conform us to His own likeness, and thereby secure in our lives a maximum and not a mere minimum of morality, He "writes His laws in our minds and in our hearts," and works by His Spirit in us "to will and to do all things through Him who strengthens us." A state or a nation having necessarily "tares and wheat" in it, cannot impart strength for morality, but the Church supplements the deficiency of the State, and, by appealing to other and higher motives, and conveying as God's medium, requisite help and strength, secures regenerated life and sanctification in her members.

The world's morality, having no fixed basis of origin and no standard of permanent utility, must vary according to the world's expediency. Its movements of morality can only be horizontal on the plane of the earth's surface and for the mere convenience of some present phase of public opinion as expressed in some laws and customs,