

I WILL GO TO THE ALTAR OF GOD.

In the night-time I groaned on my bed,
I felt, O my Father, Thy rod;
I felt Thy beauty and truth;
In the morning I rose and said,
"I will go to the altar of God—
To God, Who rejoiceth my youth."

I arose, and knelt under the sign
Of Him Who the wine-press had trod,
Where it shone like a ruby sooth;
And my soul drank the holocaust wine,
As I knelt at the altar of God—
"O God, Who rejoiceth my youth."

Despair not, O sorrowing friend!
Down, down on the stone or the sod;
To our Father, all mercy and truth,
Cry aloud, "I repent! I amend!
I will go to the altar of God—
To God, Who rejoiceth my youth."

T. D. MCGEE.

IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS.

THE CHURCH AND MODERN CONDITIONS.

Ritualism, Methodism and Salvationism.
Discussed—The Upper, Middle
and Lower Classes.

That I am about to discuss a somewhat burning question I am perfectly well aware; also that there may be something invidious—or apparently so—in the fact that a convert should undertake to offer suggestions to those whose happiness it has been to be Catholic all their lives. I can only say that the experience of my life as a Protestant may, perhaps, be of some use to me in the present case; possibly, also to those to whom this article may prove to be of interest. Further, though I may not hope to convince those who think differently on this subject, I trust that what I may write will present matters in a somewhat clearer light, or at least in a new one, and so make the discussion to that extent, more direct, and the final conclusion by so much the more easily reached.

What then do we understand by "modern conditions?" They may be defined as religious, social, political and scientific. To those better able to deal with them, I am well content to leave the three last; I wish to draw particular attention—chiefly from my own experience—to modern religious conditions, and to the relation in which the church stands in regard to them. It is concerning these conditions and these relations that I am anxious, with all diffidence, to offer some suggestions, to be taken for what they are worth. I may, and probably shall, expose myself to a charge of "Liberalism"; I can only shelter myself behind the many great names against whom the same reproach—if reproach it really be—has been so often brought.

It is necessary, at the outset, to define clearly the terms employed—"modern religious conditions." It is easy enough to form a general idea concerning them; but a more exact conception is required for our present purpose. Therefore, of the many and various phases of the religious conditions of the present time, I wish to select the three that are most marked and prominent—Ritualism, Methodism and Salvationism. The first appeals chiefly to what are known as the "upper classes"; the second, under various names and forms, to the "middle classes"; the third to the "lower orders"; the dwellers in the slums. These distinctions refer, principally, to England; but are true of all countries with an English-speaking Protestant population; they are, more or less, general; but, for our present purpose, they are sufficiently exact.

With Ritualism we are all, Catholics and converts, tolerably familiar. It is, at the present time, the "active principle" of Anglicanism; it has leavened the church of England with a new and vigorous "ecclesiasticism." Though chiefly appealing to the educated upper classes, it has met with a large measure of success among the very poor in the large cities, especially in London. It is, of all forms of Protestantism, the most formidable and dangerous opponent of the True Church, since it satisfies, for many men and women, that craving for dogmatic, authoritative teaching, and for gorgeous ritual, which it is the mission of the Catholic Church, and of her alone, to satisfy perfectly, fully, and by right divine. It is the method used for the advancement of the "church"—as they understand it—by men keenly alive to the requirements of modern religious conditions. It is a method which has

beyond any possibility of question, met with a large measure of success, against unbelief, indifference, "Protestantism"—in the cruder sense,—victories which it well deserves; but also—unfortunately—against the Catholic Church herself, however reluctant we may be to admit it.

Wherein does this "method" of Ritualism consist? First, and primarily, in most intense, most earnest, most unwavering, self-denying zeal; in unquestioning conviction. Such zeal, and such conviction, exemplified by corresponding actions, must ensure success, no matter how sorely misapplied, how grievously misdirected. Therefore, only by the zeal and earnestness which now, and at all times, have been the glory of the clergy and laity of the Catholic Church, can the zeal and earnestness of the Ritualist be counteracted and outweighed. But even as the Ritualist, with a wise spirit of adaptability—"Liberalism," if we choose to call it so—studies to take advantage of every method, ancient, modern,—if only good, that he "may by all means save some"—as he conceives salvation—so must, if I may be allowed to say so—the clergy and laity of the Catholic Church, adapt themselves, as far as possible, to modern conditions. Possession of the true faith for ourselves is not enough; the Ritualist is, above all, close,—a missionary to his fellow churchmen, to "Dissenters," even to "Romanists"; the possession of "Catholic truth"—as he knows it—impels him to make it known to his friends and neighbors. That is to say, that he acts up to his firm belief in his saving necessity of "Catholic doctrine and practice." No matter how hopeless the task may seem, no matter how bitter the opposition, even to deprivation and imprisonment, the Ritualist never shrinks from his labor of preaching to others "Catholic truth." Is there not, in all this, a lesson which might be studied, possibly followed, by those who know the truth? Not a mimed, imperfect, partial truth, but truth itself?

What are the special methods employed by the Ritualist in this mission, not to the heathen, but to his "fellow Christians" of all denominations, a mission carried on "opportune impertune," among those who are willing to receive him, and among those who oppose him strenuously? A mission which exposes him to suspicion, to obliquity, to petty persecution, to physical violence, but which he pursues, year in and year out with a zeal and an earnest devotion which bring him very near to the Master whom he serves to the best of his ability to the utmost of the light that is given him. He realizes fully the vital importance of his mission, weighs accurately the difficulties that it entails; is eager to adopt the best methods in order to further its advancement. With such a mission, such motives, and such willingness to employ the most suitable means possible, what are the methods which he deliberately chooses, in preference to all others?

Clear, definite, dogmatic, authoritative teaching; a sacramental system, penance, the authority of "the Church." All this in an age, and in a country which is absolutely hostile to "sacerdotalism," to "extremes" of any kind. All this, in a communion which, like the people to whose spiritual wants it ministers, discourages "extreme teaching," and approves, before all things, of "safe moderation." More than this; he typifies his teaching with a corresponding ritual, in spite of episcopal opposition, of imprisonment, of persecution. He not only believes himself to a "priest"; proclaims himself a "priest" in spite all hostility, a "Catholic priest" in a Protestant country, his preaching, and by his vestments. A "Catholic priest" in a "Catholic Church" standing as a true and faultless "middle point" between "Dissent" and "Rome."

Nor is he content with teaching and ritual inside the church,—the communion and the building. He carries both, his "Catholic truth" and his ritual, in solemn procession through the streets and lanes of city and country. "John Bull" hates "Popery" but he loves a "show"; the one repels, the other attracts him; he listens to the preaching for the sake of watching the procession. Through the slums of the "East End" of London, with banners, crosses, choristers, incense, the ritualist marches, undaunted by jeers, by stones, by mob-violence. "They have their reward." The average Briton respects any man who has the courage of his opinions, however "unfashionable" they may be, to-day,—with

rare exceptions—any religious procession, Catholic or Protestant, can pass unmolested, through any English city, under due regulations. His the Ritualist who has led the way, will the Catholic be slow to follow?

Is it necessary to define more clearly the methods by which all this has been accomplished? What means have enabled the Ritualists to overcome the "respectable" moderation of a state Church, to make converts from the various "schools" of Protestantism, to change popular opposition to ritual, "sacerdotalism," and processions into popular toleration, if not approval? Catholic doctrines, Catholic ritual, Catholic processions; zeal and earnestness worthy of a true priesthood and the cause of truth itself; willingness to adapt himself and his methods to the various requirements of modern religious conditions. If Protestant heretics have accomplished so much by means of methods stolen from the Catholic Church, who shall say what might be accomplished by Catholics, using the methods that belong to them?

How do the "Methodists"—to use a generic name—reach the "middle classes," highly respectable, intensely bigoted, narrow, and suspicious of all "clerical" influence? Again, by a willingness to adapt their methods to the requirements of the conditions; by earnest zeal, by perseverance under difficulty, by close, personal intercourse,—social as well as religious—between ministers and people. More than this: a Methodist minister or layman, will stand at a street-corner, with true and noble moral courage, with intense, burning conviction, with heroic self-forgetfulness, and preach to a chance audience, in spite of indifference, of opposition, of physical violence. A "Methodist" minister will go and live for years in a village or district, where before there had been but a handful of his sect, or even none at all; and by patient, unremitting labor, in poverty and social inferiority, in almost hopeless conditions, will build up a "church," or rather "chapel." Who first taught him his system of "classes" which are "guilds" and "sodalities" under another name? Who first set him the example of zeal, earnestness, and courage; who first preached in city, streets and country lanes? Who first went out into villages to build up congregations out of apparently hopeless materials? Was it not the preaching Friar, the Jesuit, the Passionist? Are not all these methods originally Catholic? If a Methodist can use them with success, among toil-worn villagers, money-coining shopkeepers, among slum-dwellers,—who shall measure their success when employed by those by whom they were first devised?

The "Salvation Army" which appeals, chiefly, to the very lowest, and least religious of the "masses" in large cities, is, as has been proved by those competent to decide, a close and deliberate imitation of the methods of the Preaching Orders of the Middle Ages. That the "Army," with its autocratic, personal head, its organized methods, its zealous, earnest, obedient workers has met with a large measure of success, cannot be denied. It is the latest, and most modern of all modern methods of dealing with modern religious conditions. It has fulfilled

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filled, and is fulfilling, the task for which it was skilfully designed; it has reached, as no other Protestant instrumentality could reach, the very lowest of the population, the "white heathens" of "Darkest England."

It is modern, and yet as old as the early Middle Ages, intensely Protestant, yet carefully modelled on Catholic examples; that is to say, the "Salvation Army" are doing to-day, for Protestantism, by Catholic methods, what the Preaching Orders, who devised those methods, did for the Church, and are still doing, especially in foreign missions. But, if among the heathen in our midst, the "Salvation Army" can accomplish so great a work, who can venture to set limits to the success of those to whom those methods are due, when employed in the same work, and among the same people? It is not,—so it seems to me,—necessary to say very much as to the relation in which the Church stands as regards those modern conditions of the religious life of men and women, and as regards the Protestant methods of dealing with those conditions. God forbid that I should even to seem to say anything that might be understood as criticizing the methods of the Catholic Church with reference to these matters. Moreover, I am not sufficiently familiar with them by experience to make me to say anything, even were I inclined to do so.

But of Protestant methods, Ritualistic, Methodist, Salvationist, I may fairly claim something, seeing that most of my life has been passed among them. I know that the methods they employ are—each in its own way—Catholic, that this very fact ensures to them a measure of success, against unbelief, and against the Catholic Church, which unbelievers and "conservative Catholics" find it difficult to realize, even if they are not unwilling to admit.

That is to say, that by Catholic doctrines and Catholic ritual the Ritualists have kept and are keeping thousands of souls,—to whom such doctrines and such ritual are a spiritual necessity,—from entering the Catholic Church. By Catholic processions, used for the advancement of heresy, they have familiarized Protestants with the beauty of Catholic customs; have drawn, and are drawing thousands into the fold of their false "Catholicism." If they have met with success what shall hinder the success of Catholics when using the methods that are theirs of right, and theirs only?

So with the methods employed by Salvationists and by Methodists. The Methodist in England draws away from nominal communion with the State Church, the wavering and the indifferent, the same Methodist in Catholic Canada, draws away from nominal communion with the True Church, the disobedient, the careless and the lax Catholics. The methods they employ are Catholic, misdirected and misapplied; is there any reason why those to whom those methods owe their origin, their adaptability, their real perfection should not direct and apply them to the good of the Church? Is our zeal less than that of the Methodists?

The "Salvationists" are the Franciscans and Dominicans of modern Protestant religious conditions. Their success is chiefly due to causes similar to those which ensured it to those Preaching Orders whose methods they imitate so closely; zeal, organization, obedience, utter disregard of the opinions of "respectable moderation," a determination to do all, and bear all, for the sake of Him whom they serve. If Ritualist, Methodist, Salvationist can do so much, shall not the Church whose methods they have stolen do infinitely more with her own methods?

FRANCIS W. GREY.

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