

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER.

- SEPT. 6th—15th Sunday after Trinity.
 " 13th—16th Sunday after Trinity. [*Notice of Ember Days: Ember Collects daily this week.*]
 " 16th— }
 " 18th— } EMBER DAYS.
 " 19th— }
 " 20th—17th Sunday after Trinity. [*Notice of St. Matthew.*]
 " 21st—St. Matthew. Ap. Ev. Mar. (*Athanasian Creed.*)
 " 27th—18th Sunday after Trinity. [*Notice of St. Michael and All Angels.*]
 " 29th—St. Michael and All Angels.

DOES A NATIONAL CHURCH CREATE SECTS.

An eminent Baptist preacher has lately given utterance to the sentiment that the destruction of the National Church would speedily result in the union of all Christian denominations in England. He thinks that the Church of England, as at present constituted, is a 'divisive' influence. And it is so, not because it is an Episcopal Church, but because, to use Dr. Clifford's own peculiar phrase, it brings Christianity into association with the State. Coming as this statement does from one of the most earnest and able of Nonconformist ministers, it deserves something more than a mere passing notice. There can be no doubt that Dr. Clifford's conception of the separative influence of the National Church is one that is very common amongst Dissenters. The sincerity of this conception cannot be questioned; and yet, while no one can doubt that thousands of Dissenters so think of the Church, it must be a matter of wonder to any intelligent reader of modern history that they should form so incorrect an opinion in regard to the essential influence of a National Church. It needs but the most elementary acquaintance with the genesis of English dissent to make the acceptance of Dr. Clifford's dictum impossible.

Puritanism is claimed as the very fountain head of Nonconformity; yet Puritanism was never truly anti-national or separatist. The modern divisions of Dissent would have been a horror to the Puritans, and they would have utterly disclaimed all parental responsibility for the numerous separations which have at last become a scandal even in the eyes of the disciples of the 'Dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion.' If it be true that the National Church begot the Puritan, it is not true that the Church has, in any sense, caused those divisions which are the essential element of modern Nonconformity. Was it the National Church that so deeply and, from a Dissenting point of view, so disastrously divided the Independents from the Baptists? Was it the influence of the National Church that set the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians in such fierce antagonism in the seventeenth century? Was the growth of Arianism and the creation of yet another Presbyterian cult the work of the National Church? No. Independents, Baptists, and Presbyterians can-

not father their forms and ecclesiastical division upon the Church of England, nor upon the Puritans, who never forsook that Church nor favoured separatism. Is it due to the 'divisive' influence of the National Church that another separation is in the process of birth amongst the Baptist, and that 'Spurtoonites' will soon be the name of another denomination? and are we put to the credit of Liberationists the fact that the Particular and the General Baptists have, after years of unreasonable separation, come together again? 'The Church of the future,' said Dr. Clifford, 'could not be splintered and divided.' It is very cheering news; but from Dr. Clifford's position it would seem that the most potent power in the way of 'splintering' has been not the National Church but the denominations.

Modern Dissent has seen yet one more large and significant illustration of the divisive force at work amongst English Nonconformity, Methodism is one of the most influential sections of modern Nonconformity. Now, Wesleyanism rose in the National Church, and, so far as its founder proposed, it was never meant to be a separation from the Church. It was, in a secondary sense, the product, not of the National Church, but of a widespread Arianism and indifference in all sections of Christianity. But Methodism is the most 'splintered' of all the sects. What had the National Church to do with Whitefield's separation from Wesley, and the setting up of Calvinistic Methodism? American Episcopal Methodism may have felt most powerfully, and, in some senses, most happily, the influence of the State Church; but the utmost historic ingenuity will fail to find any trace of the 'divisive' influence of the National Church in those great and grave Methodist schisms which are known as the New Connexion, the United Methodist Free Church, the Primitive Methodists, the Bible Christians, the Wesleyan Reform Union, and some smaller divisions which have grown up amongst the followers of John Wesley. It does not fall within the scope of this article to recall or record the story of those separations; but this is true beyond dispute, the National Church has had no more to do with those secessions than the Sultan of Turkey. They have arisen from the cultivation of principles, aims, and notions as foreign to both the idea and existence of a National Church as anything could possibly be. They are a most suggestive illustration of the 'dissidence of Dissent,' and they are utterly and essentially antagonistic to the most elementary conception of nationality in faith and worship.

So far, then, Dr. Clifford's theory of the genesis of the divisions of English Christianity finds no basis in the history of Dissent. Everything points in the other direction. So soon as men separated from the National Church, the disunion of Christianity in England began to proceed at a swifter pace!

The repudiation by the English people of the idea of a National Church would, there can be little doubt, give a new impulse to sectarian separations. Some Dissenters are quite aware of this, but they deplore the prospect. On all hands Nonconformists are crying out for union, and the best men amongst them find it accordingly difficult to justify a tithe of the separations that have taken place. There is not a leading Independent, Baptist, or Methodist who does not regret that some of their separatist sires did not possess their souls in patience and comfort their consciences with a little charity. Had those men been mastered by the idea of a National Church, many a big chapel, and many a small sect would never have come to a troubled birth, and would never have lived on, a burden to those who built them, and a curse to those who evolved them. Dissent is the very paradise of earnest, excited, and sometimes angry men, who resolve the difficulty of one congregation by forming another, and who evade the discipline of one denomination by setting up another. In the less stimulating atmos-

phere of a National Church these 'fits of fervour' have time to cool, and space to consider. Small minorities in the Church think, as a rule, better of their heated resolutions; whereas the very conditions of Dissent favour, much to the sorrow of its most spiritually-minded men, the building of chapels and the starting of 'causes,' for which there is no reason in any man's conscience, and no room in any place. These are 'divisive' forces, ever in active and injurious operation amongst Nonconformists; but they have no relation whatever to the National Church. Within her walls they could scarcely come to their birth, and, if born, would die for want of their needful sustenance.—G. S. R. in *Church Bells*.

NATIONAL IDOLATRY.

By the Right Rev. W. C. Magee, D. D.

"The people gathered themselves unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt we wot not what is become of him."—Exod. xxxii. I.

Jewish history may be called sacred history—more sacred than any other, as it seems to bring us near to God Himself. The sacred history of the Jew has for us the deepest interest if we remember that our history is also sacred, because then the Divine presence, as we trace it in Jewish history, becomes for us at once the pledge and the type of the Divine presence among us now. As truly as God was then ruling the nation of the Jews, so truly is He ruling our nation and all other nations. It is just as it is with the story of miracles. When our Lord turned the water into wine He was but intensifying and abridging, as it were, that natural process by which the streams upon a thousand hills are gathered year after year and converted into blood of the grape. So with respect to Jewish history, we see there, as it were, condensed, intensified, and so made shapey and clearly visible, one of those slow processes of Divine government and judgment which, in other nations, rolled themselves out through the length of centuries.

Now, I would ask you to-day to consider with me one such feature of the dealings between God and man in history as it is given us in the text.

When we turn to the history of the Jews as it is described in this chapter, we find that it is really the history of a most remarkable religious revolution occurring in the nation of the Jews. In the thirty-first chapter you will find that the people are setting about the building of the tabernacle in which they are to worship the one true God, whose prophet they acknowledged Moses to be. In the thirty-third chapter we find them once more acknowledging the authority of God and Moses; but in the thirty-second chapter we find them completely casting off the authority of both. The people impatient at the absence of Moses, gather around Aaron and bid him make gods for them, for as to this Moses, we wist not what has become of him, and Aaron, yielding to their entreaty, makes them a god; and then comes the outbreak of national licentiousness described in the sixth verse: 'And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play' and then comes the national judgment of fratricidal strife and murder. They fell every man by the hand of his brother. National apostasy, national licentiousness, national strife and misery—this is the great drama in three acts that is set before us here.

Now let us trace, for our own guidance, each one of those acts in this finely recorded drama, that we may profit thereby for ourselves.

In the first place, we find here an instance of national corruption and ultimate rejection of