

THE ENGLISH REFORMATION.

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"The Reformation of Luther and Calvin was an Ecclesiastical Revolution. Its result was a *schism* which separated the Lutherans and Calvinists from the doctrine, discipline, and ministry of the *visible* Church of Christ, and thereby *deprived them of valid Orders*, and of those Sacraments of the Church which depend on valid Orders. The Reformation in England was an ECCLESIASTICAL RESTORATION. Its result was a pruning of religious novelties, and a return to *primitive* and *Catholic* doctrine. It was (in its general lines) an orderly and somewhat tedious movement, which began in 1531, and did not find a final settlement till 1662." [Wirgman's Eng. Ref. and Bk. of Com. Pr.]

For a long time previous to the second quarter of the present century, the continuity of the Church of England was not strongly asserted even by those from whom it might have been expected. It was held, no doubt, as a sort of esoteric doctrine; but writers were apt to commence a "History of the Church of England," with the Reformation period. They spoke of it as having been "founded," and the Prayer-Book as having been "composed," at that time. From this point of view, the Reformers of the sixteenth century being looked upon as the founders of the Church, their personal character, theories and intentions, came to be matters of primary importance. Such considerations would afford tests by which to judge and interpret the doctrine, discipline and worship of the organization which begins to emerge in settled shape in Elizabeth's time.

Even among those who were led to see that the character of the Anglican Church must be defended, not simply as an institution which had been fashioned by the Reformers after primitive and Scriptural models, but as *the Primitive Church, itself, planted on English soil and reaching back in unbroken sequence to the earliest times*, the same feeling remained that everything depends upon the views and intentions of the Reformers,—that name being also too narrowly restricted to the leaders of the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI.

There are many who can testify that this view of things forces the conscientious student to a very "uneasy enquiry" indeed. If he supposes that he must pin his faith to the teachings of Cranmer, Ridley, and others of that period, in regard to the sacred ministry, or the Sacraments, he is soon lost in a veritable maze. To maintain a quasi-catholic position, he finds himself tempted to put upon history a strained interpretation and to claim for individuals a position which can hardly be supported in the face of the plainest facts. Many writers, even of the High Church school, have endeavored to maintain this position with such consistency as they could. But it demands too much from the intelligent student of the present day who has at his fingers' ends, information which was not accessible to the most learned men even a generation ago.

At the opposite extreme are those who, while apparently determined to defend the Catholic continuity of the Anglican Church, are yet of opinion that the Reformation went much too far, that "it was hateful as a whole—a great evil and misfortune out of which, by the special mercy of God, some incidental good has been attained." This class of persons, too, seem hardly able to consider Church principles apart from individual men, and are as extravagant in attacking and condemning the men of the early Reformation era, as those already described have often been in laudation and eulogy.

The whole question must be placed upon

broader and firmer ground, if we wish to abide by the facts of history, and at the same time vindicate the Catholic character of the Church of England. The following, then, is our fundamental proposition: The character of a religious body is to be ascertained, not through the study of the views of *individuals*, or of their endeavors to affect the organization to which they belong, but it is to be gathered, first, from its own constitution and its authoritative documents and declarations; and, second, from its fruits where its system is submitted to in good faith, and allowed to work without counteracting influences.

In the study of the English Reformation, therefore, it is, first of all, necessary to settle what are the fundamental notes or marks of the Catholic Church, in constitution, government, faith and worship. Next, we have to ascertain whether the Church of England preserved these marks, through all the agitations which shook her fabric to and fro, in the stormy period of Henry, Edward and Mary. If, as she emerges in something like settled form at the accession of Elizabeth, the marks of Catholic identity and continuity are found stamped upon her still, then the argument is complete.

Is it not true that this method has the advantage of delivering us from bondage to the views of individual reformers? And if the study of their writings should show that any single error was common to them all, such a discovery would not shake our position so long as it could not be shown that they had embedded that error in the formulas and authoritative documents of the Church. And to put the most extreme case, which the present writer would be far from admitting, "even if we should find that the intention of those who at any moment had the direction of affairs, was to *destroy* utterly the ancient fabric of the Church in England, and erect a new institution upon its ruins, their intention would be nothing to us. The one question for us is: "Did they or did they not succeed?"

Such is the outline of a method of defending the catholicity of the Anglican Church against the attacks of Roman controversialists, and of vindicating its character as contrasted with the bodies to which continental Protestantism gave rise. "We are thus emancipated from all narrowness of spirit in considering the character and motives of individual reformers." We shall certainly desire to vindicate them from unjust assault, and take what pride we may in all high endeavor and all honest devotion to principle, which we discover in them; but we shall accept with unshaken equanimity whatever unquestionable testimony reveals of the life and aims of any amongst them, even though it may give us in some cases a far different impression from that which we would fain have retained of those who became leading agents in one of the greatest movements the world has ever seen.

But further than all this, the question arises: Was the English Reformation justified by the state of things out of which it arose? It is hard to imagine any one who has made a careful and unprejudiced study of that period and the two preceding centuries, who has noted the growing conviction amongst the most upright men, from pope and cardinal to the "poor parson of a town," that reform was imperative, that the abuses of the age were fast getting beyond all endurance; and who has seen this conviction take form in council after council with too little definite result; and, finally penetrating the masses of Christendom, give itself voice in threatening murmurs and wild uprisings, the mutterings of a coming storm—such an one, after all condemning the English Reformation as unnecessary and unjustifiable.

It is the Reformation which has delivered the English race from the appalling dilemma which at this moment confronts France. "Practically she has to choose between Atheism and the Syllabus. If she chooses the latter

she has to accept not only God, but Papal infallibility; not only Christ but Mariolatry and the Immaculate Conception; not only the Bible but the legends of the saints; not only the priest and the sister of charity, but the scapulary, and the consecrated medal, the wonder-working image, Lourdes and La Salette." (Eng. Ch. Quart. Oct. 1883)

Furthermore, the philosophical reader of history cannot but see in the course of events and the trend of the human intellect at that period, that a new age was dawning, and that if the Church was to maintain her hold upon the minds of men, some great re-adjustment was needful. We cannot suppose that the reformers saw this, but to some extent they certainly felt it, and at any rate, through the providence of God, such a re-adjustment was effected in the Church of England. The result is seen in this single fact if no other, that in England religion has maintained its hold in the vast majority of cases, upon the flower of the nation, the great body of intellectual men. And this is the case no where else in the Catholic world.

And lastly, there are many indications which the earnest soul can hardly miss, that the divine purpose in the Reformation has not yet been completely wrought out; that this Church has yet a great mission in the religious world, to be unfolded before her, if she continues to go forward bravely in the path of duty, adhering steadfastly to her catholic character while at the same time continuing to prize those special advantages, which she has gained through the Reformation, of adaptation to the conditions of the modern world and fitness to deal with modern thought. It might seem to be her destiny to be the rallying point of hope, a harbor of refuge.—*Living Church*.

THE Bishop of Salisbury, speaking of the Home Reunion movement, urges on his clergy the importance of making themselves fully acquainted with the history and principles of Dissent. At the same time, Dr. Wordsworth takes care to say, "We cannot consistently" (we quote the abstract given in the *Guardian*) "join in public worship with Dissenters, or help to build Nonconformist chapels, without implicitly declaring that our own Church is defective, and that her organization needs supplementing from outside." As our contemporary goes on to observe, "The distinction between recognizing the individual merits of many Dissenters, and condoning the act of schism which their corporate existence implies, is one which many Churchmen seem not to have grasped." His Lordship also touches on the place of the laity in the Synods of Disestablished Churches. While he would give them a share in deciding questions of doctrine and Church government, he is strongly of opinion that all proposed changes in Church formularies should emanate from the House of Bishops, and from that only. He is in favour of constituting the Lambeth Conference the final legislative assembly of the Anglican Communion.—*Irish Eccles. Gazette*

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