

AN OXFORD MAN'S VIEWS.

The Position of Dissenters in England.

N. Y. Catholic Review.

The recent death of Dr. Spurgeon, the most eminent of the Dissenting preachers of this country, suggests the inquiry: What is the present force of English Dissent, as compared with what it was fifty years ago? Now it is not too much to say that, fifty years ago, a Dissenter was disesteemed, if not despised. A good story is told of Dr. Johnson— which, however, must be accepted as a mere jest—in regard to his estimate of a Dissenter, and of the popular estimate in his time. He was seen one day to throw a weed over his garden wall, as though heedless of such impoliteness to a neighbor, and a friend remarked to him that it was hardly in good taste. "Oh," said the Doctor, pointing his finger over the garden wall, "he is only a Dissenter," and so the jest was suffered to pardon the rudeness. But at a very much later period, say, forty years ago, Dissenters were looked down upon as inferior animals. They were assumed to be uneducated, fanatical, of low breeding; or, at the best, to be pious Puritans or sentimentalists. But, curiously enough, from the first beginning of the Oxford Movement, Dissenters have steadily risen in importance. They are now on a par, in the ordinary social apprehension, with English Churchmen and also with Catholics. No one is ever snubbed for being a Dissenter. In a drawing room, on a public platform, in the House of Commons, the Dissenter takes rank with anybody else. His religion is not questioned, it is ignored. And just as, socially, he now holds his own in peace, so, religiously, is he respected, or let alone.

How has this come about? It may be asked. The answer, if a little deep, is, I think, intelligible. I will try to frame it in such a way as to make it plain, speaking only from my own personal observation. I can go back something more than half a century in my recollection of the changes in religious thought. When I was at school, the idea of religion, in what might be called its social aspect, might be described, perhaps, as Evangelical Toryism. "Church and State" was the popular toast after a good dinner—Church meaning the dry routine of the Church of England, and State meaning independence of the Pope. Socially, the Anglican clergy ranked high from their education, and the Dissenting clergy ranked low from the (supposed) want of it; while, religiously, the Anglican formularies were assumed to be pure orthodoxy, and Dissenting services to be outbursts of ignorant Puritanism. Then came the Oxford Movement, when the nation was suddenly called upon to confess in becoming sackcloth and ashes, that it had been living in informal heresy for three centuries. Catholic doctrines were not only smuggled into Protestant Churches, but Catholic practices, Catholic sacraments were housed there. And immediately this happened, one half the nation said to the other half: "You may be Romanizing, if you like, but we intend to stick to our old Protestantism; and we will give the right hand of fellowship to Dissenters, who, at least, are honest in their resistance to Popery." So the "left wing" of Anglicanism became friendly with Dissent, while the "right wing" stood aloof from such debasement, and declared that it was Catholic, "Anglo-Catholic."

Now, mark the next stage in the developments. The High Church party proceeded onward and onward, till it reached the ultimate of openly practiced Ritualism; setting up a pseudo Catholic Church within a Protestant Church, as an avowed censure upon three centuries of Reformationism. The joke was too good to be passed over by the Dissenters, who addressed the New Catholics after this fashion: "You say that you are the Primitive Catholic Church, and that you have only gone back to a thousand years before Luther. You ignore all the reformers, with Queen Elizabeth, and also the whole of the last three centuries of English Protestantism; and leaping over the mighty chasm of fifteen centuries, you assure us that you are the resuscitated Early Church. Well, in this case you have to confess that, for the last three centuries, your Church has been no Church at all. It has blasphemed doctrines which you now affirm to be primitive; omitted sacraments which you now declare to be essential; and practised a ritual which you now say is anti-Catholic, and so you have to confess yourselves the offspring of apostates, who have disgraced this country, and your Catholic religion, for three centuries. A word more, and we will leave you to your conscience. You have demonstrated, by your utter failure to be truly Catholic—substituting self-will for obedience, your self-pleasing for submission to authority—that you are a sham, not the real Catholic Church; indeed, you have brought Church authority into contempt, by centering it in your individual caprice. You are not 'The Church,' but a sect, just like we are; and dissenters from your own communion, from your own ancestry; your new Ritualism being as much a matter of self-creation as is our Independentism, Quakerism, or Baptistism."

Half the nation has seen the logic of this reasoning, and has said to dissenters, "You are justified." Yet one more reason must be given for that great change which has come over the position of Dissenters. Parallel with Ritualism has been the growth of Infidelity, and Ritualism has been incompetent to cope with it.

Armed only with fictitious pretension to authority, Ritualism cannot teach like the Catholic Church; while unhappily the Broad Church party within the Establishment had been widening its boundaries from year to year. Now the Broad Church party sits lightly to dogmatic truth, and above all the divinity of our Blessed Lord; while Dissenters, to their great praise be it said, are earnest professors of belief in the Divine Saviour. Here again Dissenters have proved their value. There is not one in a thousand who is not ready to insist publicly on the Divinity of the Incarnate Son of God; so that all sound, Low Churchmen respect them for their faith, while sceptics and freethinkers are attracted by it. Hence Dissenters have taken the place of Broad Churchmen, as a Christianizing influence in England, while they have gained in the estimation of most English men by their honest consistency in their Protestantism.

One word more: How do Dissenters now act towards Catholics? The answer is agreeable for both sides. Dissenters now know something of the Catholic religion; and they compare it with what they call the Sham Popery. They know too that the Divinity of our Blessed Lord is the Foundation of the whole Catholic faith; and for this reason they have assurance of the reality of that faith from which their remoteness separated. They knew Cardinal Manning, they knew Cardinal Newman, as they now know the life, the daily course, of a thousand priests. Hence their prejudice has been brought down to a minimum. Just as they turn away from the Ritualists, and with still more repugnance from the Broad Churchmen, so do they naturally turn towards Catholics, who respect them for affirming Christ's Divinity. It may seem perhaps an extreme hope, and yet for my part I believe that an approximation towards the Church is more to be looked for among Dissenters than among Anglicans. Dissenters have never been persecuted by the State Church; nor have they a tendency to hold fast to false doctrines, when once they have apprehended the true. I have many friends among Dissenters; and I must say that, for that true liberality which hates to misapprehend another's faith, they are conspicuous among all shades of English Protestants.

Faithfully yours, B. A. OXON. London, Feb. 4.

The Latest Religious Hallucination.

The older we grow the more the necessity for an indisputable authority, like that of the Pope, in Scriptural and doctrinal matters, is forced upon us. Scarcely a week passes over our heads without some strange manifestation of the evil of private judgment which Protestantism brought into the world being brought to our attention. Today it may be Joe Smith and his Mormon revelation, to-morrow it may be Schweinfest of Rockford, Ill., in the character of a new Christ, and the day after it may be a Lieutenant Totten, of New Haven, with his Adventist calculations and absurdities; but every time and in every form it is indicative of the woefulness of man when left to himself. The strangest thing about these aberrations is that no matter how absurd they may be, the fundamental principle of Protestantism is so vitiated and disintegrating that every one of them readily finds followers, who all seem thoroughly honest in their professions. The latest and most absurd of these hallucinations, which in reality has as much foundation for its existence as any of the other thousand and one sects who differ in everything except in their innate hostility to the Catholic Church, is styled "The Disciples of the Flying Roll." This queer upshot is reported as making many converts in Michigan and Indiana and to be gathering the faithful to Detroit as "the City of Deliverance." The Bible of the so-called new and later house of Israel is "The Flying Roll," by an Englishman, James J. Jezreel, who claims to be a prophet, with apparently a single message, a warning of vague impending doom to all who do not join the "Flying Roll," and are not found within the City of Deliverance on the day of the fulfilling of the Scriptures. The local leader calls himself Michael X-Over-Mills, whatever may be the meaning of that singular appellation, and this is his "inspired" proclamation to the faithful in Richmond, Ind.: "Dear ones, one and all, I send my love to ye. I have proved the Flying Roll to be true, and that I am the first one of the 144,000. I am Michael, the Prince, that was to rise up for the people of God to deliver Israel. If you will search your Bible and Roll you will know, without a doubt, that I am he, only a clearer body for Christ to blow throughout." The missionaries of the Flying Roll wear their hair long, and their beards fall over their breasts in patriarchal fashion. In Richmond alone there are about one hundred converts, and many of them have already departed for the sacred city of Detroit.—N. Y. Freeman's Journal.

Rev. Wm. Hollnsted.

Pastor of the Presbyterian church of Sparta, N. J., voluntarily writes strongly in favor of Hood's Sarsaparilla. He says: "Nothing I know of will cleanse the blood, stimulate the liver or clean the stomach like this remedy. I know of scores and scores who have been helped or cured by it."

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THE MALICE AND HEINOUSNESS OF SCANDAL.

London Universe, February 12.

At the Church of St. John, Glasgow, on Sunday, the preacher being the Rev. Father M. Fuller, the subject of the rev. gentleman's discourse, "The Heinousness of the Sin of Scandal and Scandal Giving," was founded on the parable of the seed and the cockle. It was clear, he said, that the cockle mentioned was scandal and scandal givers, who would hereafter be cast, if they did not repent, into eternal fire. Scandal was so great and grievous a sin that human words failed to describe the full effect of its awful malice against God. "Woe to the world because of its scandals, but it must needs be put before them that morning a few considerations bearing directly upon this heinous crime. What, then, was scandal? In its original meaning the word signified a stumbling-block—something that was thrown in a person's way and impeded his progress. It was any act that misled a person and caused him to commit sin. Hence scandal could arise in two ways—by word or by act. The rev. preacher proceeded to enumerate examples under either head. To give reins to impure language was scandal by word; to pay or entice another to commit sin—to omit hearing Mass on Sunday, to get drunk—in a word, to sin by or with others was scandal by act. There were other kinds of scandal—direct, for instance, when the scandal-giver intended another to sin; indirect where indifference to the result existed; and diabolical where he intended the spiritual destruction of another by means of the sin. Scandal was a sin against both God and man. It deprived God of souls which He had reared up as His children, for whom He descended to earth, suffered and died. It deprived the Holy Ghost of souls which He sanctified, fitted up, and furnished as His abode. Again, it was a monstrous sin against man.

IT UTTERLY DESTROYED THE BEAUTY OF THE HOME GOD HAD BUILT, the immortal soul, which it killed. Hence the scandal-giver was a murderer, and as murderers in this life were objects of the utmost horror, and suffered the extremest punishment the law could inflict, so would the spiritual murderer, whose crime was far greater, be eternally damned in the next life if he died unrepentant and unrepentant to God. "Fear not him that kills the body and soul." The motive of the assassin in killing his neighbor was not always utterly bad, but the spiritual assassin's motive was mean, low, and utterly contemptible and reprehensible, so mean and low that he blushed to the roots of his hair in even mentioning it under the seal of confession to the ministers of Christ. With cruel malice he consigned the soul of his hapless victim to the depths of hell, where they could imagine with what vehemence it would cry to God for vengeance on its murderer. And perhaps the scandal-monger had been instrumental in damning thousands of souls. "Woe to the world because of scandals," says our Lord. And again, "If any one scandalize one of these My little ones, it were better for him that a mill-stone were fastened round his neck and that he were cast into the sea." Such were the words of Him who died for the salvation of scandal-givers. And it was important for them to remember that it was a sin to take as well as to give scandal.

THEY SHOULD LOOK UPON THE SCANDAL-GIVER AS THEIR GREATEST ENEMY and avoid him. For he was the enemy of Jesus Christ, being in league with the devil in the diabolical work of dragging down souls to hell and of propagating sin. "If thy right eye scandalize thee pluck it out." It is better having only one eye to enter into the kingdom of heaven than having two eyes to be cast into exterior darkness." To repair that sin let them with true, heartfelt tears kneel before the altar of God and promise to avoid it for the future. Let them by word and deed show good example, and as in the past they had been the ministers of the devil, let them now become zealous servants of God. Let them lead innocent lives which would never sully the lives of their neighbors, and pray earnestly that the eyes of any scandal-givers amongst them might be opened to the evil they were perpetrating.

Gentleness With Children.

Be ever gentle with the children God has given you; watch over them constantly; reprove them earnestly, but not in anger. In the forcible language of Scripture, "Be not bitter against them." "Yes, they are good boys," I once heard a kind father say; "I talk to them very much but I do not like to beat my children—the world will beat them." It was a beautiful thought, though not elegantly expressed. Yes there is not one child in the circle round the table, healthy and happy as they look now, on whose head, long enough spared, the storm will not beat. Adversity may wither them, sickness may fade, a cold world may frown on them; but amidst all, let memory carry them back to a home where the law of kindness reigned, where the mother's reproving eye was moistened with a tear, and the father frowned "more in sorrow than in anger."

Dr. E. T. Miller, of Cross Plains, Wis., has expressed the opinion that, for obstinate cases of syphilis and scrofula, Ayer's Sarsaparilla is unquestionably the most effective remedy known to pharmacy. Wonderful cures have resulted from its use.

Words of Praise for a Good Man.

Sidney V. Lowell, an old resident of Brooklyn, writing to the Eagle gives the following interesting account of the late Bishop Loughlin. "I first became acquainted with the Bishop about 1863, when, though but a stripling, I was engaged in the corporation counsel's office and the Bishop made occasional calls on business with one of the official staff, a hard-fisted old main-top captain, retired from the sea though still of it, and who was and is (for he is still with us) one of the characters of Brooklyn. He used to wear a flaming red vest, bought in some foreign land. On entering the office one day with the now lamented Grenville T. Jenks the red garment caught the latter's eye, when he flung his portly form against the door and cried to me: 'Let us sacrifice the flamingo!'"

"I became well acquainted with the Bishop in these early days. I scanned him keenly, for he was an interesting study to my young eyes. To me a Bishop stood for a figure conscious of his importance and keenly alive to the dignity of his office, something like that of the Protestant Bishops Cox, Quintard and Littlejohn. Could this unassuming, retiring, modest man, plainly if not humbly clad, this gentle Irishman, be indeed the Bishop of Long Island?"

"I found that he kept close watch of the doings of all his subordinate clergy, that he had the presence to choose as his Vicar-General the most talented Irishman that ever set foot in his diocese, the now lamented Vicar-General Keegan, a most rare soul, an ideal of wisdom, wit, bon-homme and religion. Nothing so fit into my mind the superior qualities of the Bishop as candid recognition of the great qualities of his lieutenant."

"When I assumed the private practice of the law I was favored, as most young lawyers of my position are, with more or less cases to hear and decide as a referee. One of the first of these actions was one to which the Bishop was a party. I was obliged to decide against him, and feared that it might cause some abatement in his friendship. It did not in the least, however. The Bishop took no appeal from my decision, though he may have reserved certain spiritual terrors for the contumacious subject—a layman."

"While receiving and disbursing vast sums he was proud of the humility which would make but the smallest expense for his personal wants. In fact, he surprised, shocked and touched me all at once by showing to me one day his nether garments, far gone in antiquity and only held together by a substantial patch."

"The Bishop was one of the most tolerant of souls as regards the religion of others. He knew that I was a Protestant, and of course, and that I was a firm adherent of one of the most rationalist sects, yet his smile was as bright to me and the merry twinkling of his dark brown eye had as fine a humor, I believe for me as for any of his own flock. Meeting him just as I was about going away on my summer vacation one day on Montague street, I stopped him, said I was going to leave the city for the summer and asked his blessing, which he gave me with simple dignity as we stood there for the moment only and immediately passed on."

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