

Religion in England after the Reformation.

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From the clear, distinct, and definite ideas attached to the authoritative decisions of the Catholic Church, and which ever held her in a real and practical unity both of faith and discipline throughout the land, and joined her in communion with all the orthodox and united Churches in the world, we must now vain be content with "the ambiguous formularies," as they call them, of the wretched system which has been substituted in its stead. They themselves tell us of the "perplexing embarrassment" so prevalent amongst them on doctrinal points; we hear of nothing but "perplexity of controversy;" of "conflicting opinions;" of articles which, as to any intelligible meaning, are still in a state of transition, and, after a discussion of three hundred years, as likely to find any fixed interpretation as if they had never been discussed at all; the Church not knowing how even "strictly to determine the number of the sacraments,"—those "justifying rites, or instruments of communicating the atonement;"—and of a new "understanding of the Church and her system, in a way different from one of late popularity." The doctrines of eternal truth are still fashioned according to "the necessities of the times;" the whole Church is divided within itself into high and low,—at one time imbued with a spirit of Erastianism, at another with Calvinism; while a *via media* is recommended by some as a cure for all her evils,—for "doctrines popularly misunderstood," for "internal disunion paralyzing her efforts and wasting her energies." They tell us of her "maimed condition;" of her "want of holiness sufficient to mark her out visibly as a true living branch of the holy Church;" of her possessing perhaps "the rudiments of everything, but *nothing* developed, so that it should at once be 'manifest' to all, 'that God is in her of a truth;" of " manifold divisions amongst themselves; contending upon points which they, on one side at least, state to be fundamental," "bandying about the name of heresy,"—and "casting out the names of brethren as evil;" of "the impossibility of understanding each other, or making themselves understood;" of a state "more like the confusion of Babel," than that "city which is at unity in itself," and "in which it was promised that there should be one speech and one language;" of "the laity having thus far no living guide, 'the lips of the priest' not 'teaching knowledge' for them—for persons whom they alike respect, teach them differently, and one of the two great classes of teachers tells them often that the other is in fatal error;" of "our poor frail nature (being) fretted often, instead of being humbled by what is so unseemly," so "that persons have difficulty in recognizing a Church so disturbed, as the representative of her who is 'the pillar and the ground of truth;" of her "not possessing the note of holiness, so as at once, and without all doubt, to allay people's misgivings about her apostolic character;" of "one party in the Church stigmatizing the other, as 'the

troublers of Israel;" of "the censures or admonitions of their bishops tending rather to unsettle persons in their Church than to convince and correct;" of "antagonist principles" at work in the same body, and yet schism considered as no sin—dissension as no evil token. We hear the working of one party declared by the other to be "tending to re-establish error rather than truth,"—her ministers to be "the instruments of Satan to hinder the true principles of the Gospel," "on the very verge of an apostasy from Christ," and "as teaching another Gospel," and consequently "that they ought to leave the Church," in which they were so teaching; "that nothing but evil came from them,"—"defacing the brightest glory of the Church, by forgetting the continued presence of her Lord," and fit only to be "singled out from the rest of our Lord's flock, as diseased and tainted sheep, who must be kept separate from the rest, lest they be corrupted." They tell us that their "intestine divisions (are) such that they disagree among themselves as to what the doctrines of the Church are, even as to the very sacrament whereby persons are made members of it;" of "their miserable disunion, and want of discipline;" of "their present confusion and disagreement as to the first principles of their Church, and their practical contradictions or neglect of them;" so that for the present at least "she can be no spectacle of a Church 'holding the faith in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace,' and that unity and peace seem to be the last characteristics which belong to her;" that the real teaching of the Church is not to be discerned amidst the multitude of opinions and teachings of her ministers, so that those who constitute the "mighty movement now swelling month by month, day by day, within the Church, have received a sectarian name, in itself a blot upon the Church," while they whose office it is to guide that movement into its legitimate channel, and to witness the doctrines of the Church, have allowed the leaders and abettors of that movement "to be entitled 'heretics,' for vindicating an article of the creed, and left it undetermined whether (these) or they who opposed that teaching, spake the mind of the Church," while "the chaos of conflicting opinions rolled onward" unarrested. "What wonder," exclaims the original leader of the movement, and we exclaim with him, "if some are faint-hearted whether our Lord be in the vessel which is not only so tempest-tost, but whose very shipmen and pilots are so disunited, how or whether to guide her, 'neither sun nor stars appearing.'" And all this is but a consequence of the change.*

Let us now hear him who at first stood second on the list, but from being second is now first, having passed the original leader of the movement, as being perchance better qualified for the task, and having lately presented a splendid proof

* See the charges of the bishops of Durham, Chester, Gloucester, Winchester, Cantua, and of the archbishop of Dublin, as quoted and commented on in the Rev. Dr. Pusey's letter to the archbishop of Canterbury.

of his ingenuousness and sincerity; speaking, in his introduction to the famous Tract, No. 80, of the actual condition of the Church of England, after a chequered existence of three hundred years, but at a period when, if ever, should have been walking in the ways of peace and light, in the full enjoyment of all the blessings of this peaceful and enlightened age: and yet what are his views? "It is a very serious truth," says he, "that persons and bodies, who put themselves into a disadvantageous state, cannot at their pleasure extricate themselves from it. They are unworthy of it; they are in prison, and Christ is the keeper. There is but one way towards a real reformation,—a return to Him in heart and spirit, *whose sacred truth they have betrayed*; . . . our Church's strength would be irresistible, humanly speaking, *were it but at unity with itself*: If it remains divided, part against part, we shall see the energy which was meant to subdue the world preying upon itself, according to our Saviour's express assurance, that such a house 'cannot stand.' . . . Till we are stirred up to this religious course, let the Church sit still; let her children be content to be in bondage; let us work in chains; let us submit to our imperfections as a punishment; let us go on teaching through the medium of *indeterminate statements and inconsistent precedents*, and principles but partially developed.* We are not better than our fathers; let us not faint under that *body of death* which they bore about in patience; nor shrink from the penalty of sins which they inherited from the age before them." Another, and a very reverential personage, & a very eminent partizan of this movement, has favored us with the following commentary upon these observations, and which tend still more to develop the real and radically inefficient character of the established Church—of a Church without law or grace. "Is Mr. Newman," says Mr. Ward, "*so cautious and guarded in his statements as all admit him to be*, is he to be supposed to use words of such unprecedented strength as those, *without meaning and at random*? Or, is it conceivable that he could use them, if he thought our articles fair and adequate exponents of Catholic truth? How could he speak and think as he does of the English reformation, if he supposed that the formulary then *originated*, was even as naturally susceptible of Catholic as of Protestant interpretation? No! he would acknowledge, and apprehend, that as it has been expressed, while it is *patent* of a Catholic, it is *ambitious* of a Protestant sense; that, while it was never intended to *exclude Catholics*, it was written by, and in the spirit of Protestants; that in consequence of it the English Church *seems* at least to give an uncertain sound; that she fails in one of her very principal duties, that of witnessing plainly and directly to Catholic truth; that she *seems* to include whom she ought to repel, to teach what she is bound to anathematize; and that

* Or, as it was expressed in the first edition, "with the stammering lips of ambiguous formularies."

it is difficult to estimate the amount of responsibility she year by year incurs, on account of those (claiming, as many of them do, our warm love for a zeal and earnest piety worthy of a purer faith) who remain buried in the darkness of Protestant error, because she fails in her duty of holding clearly forth to them the light of Gospel truth.†

Was such language ever used? was it possible it ever *could* be used towards the ancient Church of these realms? But to that which has supplanted it, it applies with all the force of indisputable truth. Such, then, are her gains by the change! and such is the condition of the Anglican Church, as painted by those of her children who know her best, but which it is yet the boast and pride of most modern Englishmen to uphold as a model of perfection, and to glory in having substituted for the superstitions—as they in their frenzy and delusion call them—of the olden time.

The great unruly torrent of the sixteenth century, which in a day uprooted the united labors of many ages, was indeed a second deluge, not for the sudden destruction of one generation alone, but sweeping away the souls of men as quickly as they succeeded each other, for a period of time which still endures, and the termination of which, even after three hundred years of expiation, is known only to Him who afflicts us for the sins of our fathers and our own, until we confess our iniquities, and the iniquities of our ancestors, whereby they have transgressed against him." (See Levit. xxvi.) And thus are we still visited with "the day of revenge;" and "who shall accuse thee, O Lord, if the nations perish which thou hast made?" "for thou shalt be justified in thy words, and shalt overcome when thou art judged."

Another consequence of the change, and a very important one too, has been, that it has disconnected its followers from all the saints and sages of venerable antiquity, and thrown us upon a dreary waste, in which the eye is refreshed neither by flower nor by fruit. It has cut them off from all affinity and relationship with any one saint in the calendar, whether native or foreign; from "spirits without a home and without a name" on earth, but who have inherited "an everlasting name" in the imperishable home of the blessed, for whom altars have been erected in every department of Christendom, and whose memories are enshrined in the hearts of all true believers. And what an unenviable position to be in! unable to claim any share in the glory of these illustrious saints—with as wide a gulph between them as between Lazarus and Dives—compelled to acknowledge the value of, but without any partnership in the property, unworthy and unwilling to worship in the same temples in which they proffered their holy orisons, and in which they sacrificed the adorable mysteries, (unless perchance desecrated by the overthrow of both shrine and altar)—they are condemned to stand aloof in id-

† "A few words more in support of No. 80."