

CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN

THE NECESSITY OF LAW BEING SUPREME
OVER INDIVIDUAL TASTES AND
INTERESTS.

IT is one of the happiest features in the life of all British countries that those to whom is committed the administration of the Law are, as a rule, highly conscientious in their observance not merely of the Statute Law they have to deal with, but severely careful to set a high example by regarding also the laws and customs which govern those societies and institutions of which they are members.

A breach of law imposed by a private society, if it ever does occur, is universally most justly condemned if the rebel is in any way officially connected with the administration of the public laws. The necessity of law being supreme over private opinions and tastes is so imperative for the general welfare, that all sane minds instinctively condemn the member of any duly organised society, having commendable objects, who sets the rules of such society at naught in order to gain his personal ends, or to make trouble out of a spirit of partisan wilfulness.

The Church of England has done more service to humanity within reach of her influence than any other institution by breeding respect for law and order.

Now the Church of England has laws relating to her internal discipline. These are not all the wisest possible, just as many of those on the Statute book are foolish, but as no sensible citizen breaks a law to show his opinion of its folly, or because of its antagonism to his private opinions, so no sensible Churchman breaks the laws of the Church when they happen to run counter to his personal feelings or interfere with his personal schemes. Least of all do those Churchmen who have been set on high as examples of a law abiding life, as executors of the law of the State on offenders against those laws, ever scandalise the Church, their official position, and themselves as citizens by taking an ostentatious attitude of defiance to the laws of the Church. Honor forbids. Take an illustration.

A highly distinguished Chief Justice some time ago, who is a pronounced member of a certain School of thought, openly rebuked a whole congregation and a number of clergy of his own party, when they proposed to set the law and order of the Church at defiance. This illustrious Judge, one of the brightest ornaments of the Canadian Bench, even censured the use of the party name in association with the work of the Church wherein he worships.

That certain personal tastes of any person, cleric or lay, should not be catered for in an ecclesiastical arrangement, is indeed a very insignificant thing indeed, compared to his obligation to show reverence and obedience for the law governing such an arrangement.

See what principle is involved, and to what consequences it would lead were others to follow the law breaker's example! Suppose a few persons in the Church object to

the recognition of the Bishop as a ruling officer, because they are Presbyterians in principle, but worship in one of our Churches. Because of their Presbyterian opinions they resolve to exclude their Diocesan from all such control of the Church they attend, as the law provides he must exercise.

Or suppose, what happened in the Presbyterian body in England in the last century, that the congregations of the Church of England began to demand clergy who taught Unitarian doctrine or some other form of heresy, and the Bishop refused to appoint clergy so false to their vows, what should we expect from a Judge who belonged to such a congregation? Would he not be expected by the whole public, even by those whose opinions were sought to be taught in the Church, to stand firmly in defence of that law of the Church which declared the Bishop's rights and duty in appointing clergy? If, however, he led on those who treated the law of the Church with contempt, would not the whole community outside the law breakers demand, "How is it that thou who are set to administer the Law of the State, thyself consorts with and encourages those who defy the law of thy own Church?"

The Archbishop of Canterbury recently said, "Party was a loud spirit fixing attention on itself, and there were many in England to-day to whom party was more than their Church. Want of knowledge produced that want of respect for law which made the wisest men look with dismay on the probable effect of their example on other questions."

In these days when doubtless there is a movement which inspires some unwise enthusiasts to break the laws of the Church in the matter of ceremonial, he is estopped from protesting against such irregularity, who himself, in another direction, is equally guilty of a non-observance of the Church's law. Is it not notorious that the non-obedience of one party in the Church has led to the disobedience of an opposite party?

Coleridge in one of his brilliant essays shows how the teachings of Rousseau in regard to the freedom of individuals to set any general law at naught, which is to them distasteful, led on to "military despotism and the Satanic government of horror under the Jacobins, and of terror under the Corsicans." Rousseau's problem was, "to find a form of society according to which each one uniting with the whole shall yet obey himself and remain as free as before." Does not that maxim of anarchy strictly state the aim of those who, while united to the Church, yet desire to be free to disregard the law of the Church? Is that Apostolic, is it even common sense? We submit this to wise men, to honorable men, that the outbreak here and there of individualism, either in men or in particular congregations, which is really based upon Rousseau's principle, is a direct violation of the Apostle's command to be "subject to the powers that be," and an open attack upon the constitution of the Church of England.

"In that barbarous tumult of inimical interests which the present state of society exhibits, religion appears to offer the only means

universally efficient by which the classes most tempted to disorder can be made to learn their duties and urged to practice them." But what if those who are religious teachers or should be religious exemplars, set an example of law defiance? If the lights in the Church, the light of Obedience, the light of Duty, the light of Self-repression for the general interest,—lights of divinest lustre, be dark, how can the Church shine illumination upon society?

If Churchmen shape their conduct by the teachings of the pagan Rousseau, and the French revolutionists, as those do who set up their personal wills against the regular order, and constituted authorities of the Church, the Church will become a pandemonium of rebels, and our Zion, that has been a sanctuary of peace and safety, will be a hissing and a reproach,—no longer a home but a bear garden.

France sought refuge from the anarchy of those who in the name of Liberty committed those innumerable and hideous crimes to which Madame Roland so pathetically alluded to on her scaffold.

Churchmen are sick and wearied by the strife of partisans who disturb dioceses and congregations, ever and anon, by cries of the very same class as those which gave a false glamour to the work and words of Tom Paine, Robespierre, Rousseau, and others of that hellish crew who yelled for liberty while exercising the terrors of the sternest despotism. Our people will, however, not turn to Congregationalism, which is being pushed into such prominence, for relief, that would be going from the frying pan into the fire. If ever a secession took place there would be not a few who would seek rest where Newman went to escape from the troubles of the English Church. The cry "enfranchise the laity," the demand for the rights of the laity is inspired very much by the same restless spirit of dislike to orderly government which called forth "The rights of man." A demand that the duties of the laity shall be discharged does not catch the popular ear so readily!

The attempt to override the law of the Church in favor of some particular congregation, as appears to be the object of some agitators at present, is not calculated to enlarge the freedom of Churchmen, it will only provoke a reaction, and excite such strife as must lead to division, and to secessions towards dissent and Romanism.

A SLIGHT TO CANADIAN
CHURCHMEN.

THE members of the Conference on Reunion, who met in Toronto some time ago, refused to make their meetings public. They have had a report printed, and yet still decline to let the public know what the Conference did.

But while we Churchmen in Canada are kept in ignorance as to the proceedings of the Conference, an exceedingly lengthy report of its sayings and doings has been sent from inside the closed doors of the Conference to an English newspaper!