

CHANGES OF ORTHODOXY IN ENGLAND.

WHAT looks like chance is often an important part of the machinery of evolution. We have a remarkable illustration of this fact in the drift of religious thought, especially in England and in the English Church. When we compare theological with philosophic thought, we are at once struck by the extraordinary difference between them. Philosophy is constantly progressing through the voluntary efforts of its votaries. Every great philosopher, every humble student, sets himself to correct, to develop, to carry further, the thoughts of those who have gone before him. In theology, on the contrary, there is but little voluntary movement, and that little is generally in a backward direction. Among the clergy, as a rule, there is no desire for advance. Retrogression is their ideal. To believe what St. Augustine, or Calvin, or Luther believed, to wear the same clothes and perform the same rites as obtained in the reign of Edward VI., to go back to some by-gone age and stop there—this for hundreds and thousands of clergymen is the *summum bonum*. But just as matter, in spite of its own inertia, is always moving, so there is really a progressive drift in religious thought; although the clergy, with but few exceptions, are doing their best to remain stationary. The drift of thought, chiefly unconscious and involuntary, which is taking place in the Church of England, I purpose now to investigate.

There is not one single doctrine or ceremony in regard to which the clergy are agreed. The views which they hold are divergent oftentimes to the point of contradiction. Some of the clergy, for instance, adopt the expiatory view of the atonement, and believe that Christ's vicarious suffering "satisfied the justice of God," and so saved us from hell. Others look upon this theory as no better than a "doctrine of devils." Some, again, think that the Saviour's connection with the Father was unique not only in degree but in kind, and they speak of his human exist-

ence as the incarnation. Others—one or two—speak of it merely as *the* incarnation, that is, the incarnation *par excellence*; for they hold that all men are incarnations more or less. As to the Trinity, some adopt the formula “three persons in one God” in the vulgar acceptation of those terms—in the sense, namely, of three individual gods in the Godhead. A few interpret “person” according to its original meaning of “character,” and understand by the persons of the Trinity only different manifestations of one indivisible God. In regard to miracles, some acknowledge an indefinite number, including even the theosophical; some, though doubtful of theosophy, believe in the miraculous power of the saints; some restrict themselves to the miracles mentioned in the Bible; some draw the line at the New Testament; some believe only in the miraculous conception and physical resurrection of Christ; while some regard even these stories as after-growths, and are ready to subscribe to the famous dictum of Prof. Jowett, “Men will in time give up miracles as they have already given up witchcraft.” With reference to prayer, some assert that we may ask for health, wealth, fine weather, and all the good things of this life, with a considerable likelihood of getting them, even at the cost of a violation of the laws of nature; others relegate prayer entirely to the spiritual sphere, and maintain that the only gifts we can receive in answer to it are faith, hope, “grace,” and the like; while others tell us that even here the effect is subjective rather than objective—that we are made better, not by any direct action of the Deity, but simply by our own desire for improvement. As to the sacraments, some believe in “baptismal regeneration,” and think that an infant is really “born again” when a few drops of water are sprinkled on it by a priest; while others look upon this dogma as a vain, not to say blasphemous, superstition. And regarding the eucharist, some are transubstantiationists, acknowledging the real physical presence of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine; others, preferring Luther’s idea of consubstantiation, believe that his spiritual presence goes along with the elements; and others adopt the Zwinglian view that the effect of the bread and wine is merely to stimulate the imagination of the communicants. As to future punishment, some declare that a large proportion of the race

are predestined to damnation, and that by no conceivable effort can the reprobate avert their doom; others say that salvation is provided for all men, and that they can be lost only by their own voluntary rejection of it; and others again assure us that there is no such thing as being lost, in the vulgar sense, and that hell is but a name for punishment, the purpose of which is in reality to save us, if not here, at any rate hereafter. As to the Bible, some believe that it was "written by God," and must therefore be infallible throughout; others restrict its infallibility to moral and spiritual subjects; others again state that even in these matters its teaching is often degraded, and that much of what it says about right and wrong and about the nature of the Deity is utterly false and profoundly pernicious. As for the Prayer Book, some profess to accept the thirty-nine articles and all the rest of it; while to others it seems a very unsatisfactory compilation, often flatly contradicting both the Bible and itself. And the ceremonies of the Church of England vary no less than the doctrines. Its ritual ranges from the baldest evangelicalism, where the sole vestments are a surplice and "decent tippet," and where the dreary monotony is relieved only by a choir singing out of tune, to the most advanced Puseyism, where you find chasubles, copes, mitres, acolytes, incense, confession, and everything that has ever received the sanction of Rome. Finally, there is not complete agreement among the clergy even in regard to the value and importance of the Christian religion; for one well-known divine—Canon Taylor—emphatically asserts the superior efficacy, under certain circumstances, of the religion of Mohammed.

Now the priests of the Church of England, holding these different doctrines and practicing these different rituals, are all "successors of the apostles"; at least they have all received episcopal ordination, and they must all, therefore, be in possession of the advantages which such ordination confers. Some of them, no doubt, would be ready to accuse the others of having "fallen from grace"; but, fallen or not, they continue to be members of the Church and to minister as priests at its altars. The efforts which are occasionally made to turn them out are almost always unsuccessful, and at the present moment there is every possible diversity both of opinion and practice among those who are act-

ually holding the priestly office. This may be regarded—no doubt it often is—as an unpleasant fact; but its unpleasantness does not make it any the less real. Whether people like it or not, the fact remains that in the English Church, as at present constituted, the priesthood is open to men altogether irrespective of the doctrines they believe and the ceremonies they practice. Neither doctrines nor ceremonies have anything to do with our church as such. In the language of logicians, they are merely its accidents, not part of its essence.

Prosecutions for heresy, when they fail, as they generally do, and sometimes even when they partially succeed, bring this fact into striking relief—an irony of retribution which must be very galling to the prosecutors. In the judicial decision given in connection with the “Essays and Reviews,”* it was laid down that the books of the Bible may be subjected to the fullest and freest criticism, and that a clergyman is within his rights even if he accuses an inspired author of willful and deliberate dishonesty. We are legally debarred, it is true, from denying the canonicity of any of the Scriptures; but the greatest heretic in the world can never feel tempted in that direction. For to be canonical and to be in the Bible are synonymous expressions. The books of the Bible *are* the books of the Bible, and no sane man would ever dream of saying they are not. What occurred some years ago in Manchester affords a still more remarkable illustration of the fact that theological prosecutions serve only to emphasize our church’s indifference to theology. In that town were two priests, named respectively Green and Knox-Little, who both professed the same “high” creed and both practiced the same elaborate ritual. The former, being the less popular of the two, was less expensive to prosecute; he was therefore selected for that purpose by the Church Association, and was condemned to a term of imprisonment. While he was still in jail, Knox-Little was promoted to a canonry. Here was a *reductio ad absurdum* of the opinion that our church concerns herself with creeds or rituals. It was shown to be the falsest of delusions. For of two men whose creeds and rituals were identical, the one was placed in a cathedral stall and the other found himself in an ecclesiasti-

* See the report of the Williams and Wilson trial.

cal dungeon. The punishments and rewards of the Church of England are administered with sublime disregard for the doctrines and ceremonies of their recipients.

Even in past generations the clergy differed to a very considerable extent from the Prayer Book and from one another, but up to the year 1865 they went on quietly making a subscription which implied that they were all agreed. The declaration contained these words: "I, A. B., declare my unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything prescribed in and by the Book of Common Prayer." We should probably be required to sign the same subscription to-day but for the intervention of the late Dean of Westminster, from whom it received its death blow. I may mention, however, that two ineffectual attempts to relax the subscription had been previously made, the one in 1772 by Archdeacon Blackburn and the other in 1862 by Bishop Stanley, father of the Dean. But in 1862 the late Dean of Westminster addressed a protest to the Bishop of London, and pointed out the extreme absurdity of flying in the face of facts, and the gross immorality of exacting a subscription which could only be a lie. The Dean said that the clergy could not assent to the literal and dogmatic meaning of the six hundred propositions, on the most intricate and complex subjects, which the articles embody; they could not assent to the literal and dogmatic meaning of all the sentences in the liturgy, many of which are poetic and devotional in form, but which must be received, according to a strict subscription, in their most matter-of-fact signification; still less could they assent to both these sets of propositions, emanating from ages unlike each other and each no less unlike our own. And the Dean further showed that, even supposing the clergy could assent to all and everything contained in the Prayer Book, as a matter of fact they did not. The sixth article, for example, to take one of his illustrations, "understands by 'Holy Scriptures' those canonical books of the Old and New Testaments of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church." Taken literally, subscription to those words would exclude from the clerical profession all who receive as Holy Scripture the epistle to the Hebrews, the Apocalypse, the second epistle of St. Peter, the epistles of St. James and St. Jude, and the second

and third epistles of St. John, of whose authority it is well known there was considerable doubt in the early Church. Yet this statement of the article was not only overridden, but even forgotten; and the vast majority of the clergy, in defiance of the article and of their subscription to it, received as Holy Scripture without scruple those books of whose authority there was doubt in the Church for no less than three important centuries. They even attacked as heretical those who adopted the language of the article itself. "So that," concluded the Dean, "if once we press the subscriptions in their rigid and literal sense, it may safely be asserted that there is not one clergyman who can venture to cast a stone at another; they must all go out, from the primates at Lambeth and Bishopsthorpe to the humblest curates of Wales and Westmoreland."

On these grounds, therefore, Stanley prayed the Bishop of London, the rest of the Episcopate, and the legislature in general, to take the whole question of subscription into their serious consideration. In the following year a royal commission was appointed, and the result of their inquiry was the introduction of a bill by Lord Granville, in which the old form of subscription was completely set aside. The new form ran thus: "I, A. B., do solemnly make the following declaration: I assent to the thirty-nine articles of religion and to the Book of Common Prayer. I believe the doctrine of the Church of England, as therein set forth, to be agreeable to the word of God."

The enormous scope of the change may scarcely at first sight be apparent in this clumsy form of words. But it was brought out clearly enough by Mr. Buxton in his speech before the House of Commons. He said:

"It was the express intention of the commissioners to relax the extravagant stringency of the existing tests; in other words, to make it possible for men to minister at the altars of the Church, though they might dissent from some part of her teaching. . . . Instead of declaring his assent to all and everything the Prayer Book contains, a clergyman now only declares his assent to the Prayer Book itself, that is to say, to the book as a whole, and his belief that the doctrine of the Church therein set forth is agreeable to the word of God. He does not declare that the doctrines, in the plural number, or that each and all of these doctrines, are agreeable to the word of God, but only the doctrine. It was expressly

and unanimously agreed by the commission that the word 'doctrine' should be used in the singular number, in order that it might be understood that it is the general teaching of the Church, not every part and parcel of that teaching, to which assent is given."

This act of Parliament* is very seldom mentioned, and I believe that it is very little known. But whether the clergy are aware of it or not, the act has been passed, and the character of our church, as essentially a broad church, has been thereby legally determined.

For let us ask, as all intelligent men and women sooner or later will ask, what is this "general teaching of the Church," this "doctrine in the singular number"? It is, it can only be, Christ. And there is but one all-comprehensive synonym for Christ, namely, righteousness. He "gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Every Christian church properly so called must be concerned exclusively, or at any rate chiefly, with the promotion and development of righteousness. And this fact is admitted in the Prayer Book, though the admission was probably neither seen nor intended by its compilers. According to one of the rubrics preceding the communion service, only "the notorious evil liver" can be kept away from "the table of the Lord." It was perhaps thought that this would be taken in connection with the catechism and the confirmation services; and it may have been assumed that all who had gone through the preliminary training would continue orthodox to the end. But nothing is said to that effect; and therefore, though a man refuses to accept the creed adopted for him by his godfathers and godmothers, though he no longer agrees with the profession of faith which he made at his confirmation, and though he is a very skeptic of skeptics, he must, according to the law of the land, unless he is a notorious evil liver, be received by the priest as a communicant. So that we have, in every celebration of the communion, little as the clergy seem to suspect it, another witness to the fact that our church as such cares nothing for doctrines or ceremonies; that righteousness, or rather the absence of flagrant unrighteousness, constitutes a sufficient title to its membership.

* 28 and 29 Vic., c. 122.

This conception of the Church, though unorthodox, is scriptural. "In every nation he that . . . worketh righteousness is accepted," and is therefore a member of "the general assembly and church of the first-born." And I have shown over and over again * that Christ held the same views as to the nature of religion. In one sense, then, the broadest of broad churchmen may be accused of going backward as far as the rest of his clerical brethren; nay, farther, for they generally find themselves satisfied with the third or fourth century. But just as there are two kinds of skepticism, the one which doubts for the sake of doubt, the other which seeks only "firm ground of assurance," so there are two kinds of retrogression. Some go back that they may ultimately stand still, others that they may find the best path for progress. Nor is it difficult to show that a return to the idea of the paramount importance of righteousness is essential to the development, and even to the existence, of the churches.

No church can permanently survive unless it appeals to the reason, the conscience, the common sense, of mankind; unless it is felt to be in harmony with the organic development of the race. But ecclesiasticism shocks our reason by its silly claim to infallibility and finality; it outrages our conscience by its wicked preference of creed to conduct; it violates our common sense, for its very deities are represented as more or less arbitrary, unreasonable, and bad. Further, ecclesiasticism is quite incapable of development within itself, and it is a hinderance to all development without. The theology inherited from St. Augustine or Calvin cannot grow, except, it may be, by the addition of a few theorems as uninteresting, not to say irritating, as the rest. The ritual which comes to us from Edward VI. cannot be expanded, except perhaps by the addition of a few trimmings to ornaments that are already more than sufficiently gorgeous. And what is worse than its own incapacity for growth, is the obstruction which ecclesiasticism offers to the progress of the world. The organic growth of the race is a conception quite beyond the ecclesiastical range of vision, and indeed quite incompatible with the ecclesiastical system. That system professes to be complete in itself, and disclaims all connection with the other religions and

* See, for example, my "Church and Creed," pp. 80-91.

philosophies of the world. Its crowning glory is to exist in an irrational isolation. Its supreme aim is to bring all human thoughts and endeavors within the narrow limits of its own cut-and-dried theology.

In these days of advancing knowledge and advancing courage, such a system cannot have long to live. The churches at present are in a state of unstable equilibrium, and within a measurable distance of annihilation. Though scarcely any of the clergy can be called thinkers, there are still among them, I admit, many scholars of deservedly high reputation. But in fifty years' time even the scholars will be conspicuous by their absence. In the English universities it is but rarely nowadays that distinguished students go into the Church. Educated men—and I need hardly point out that a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is not in itself education, for he only can be called educated who has some acquaintance with the best thoughts and achievements of the race—educated men who feel that their heads and lives are worth something refuse to fling them into the vortex of ecclesiasticism. And unfortunately ecclesiasticism is generally confounded with the Church. It is not understood that *the* church properly so called is something different, something infinitely superior, to any temporal and local church, such as that of England or that of Rome. It is not understood that the true church is absolutely opposed to ecclesiasticism. Those who take orders in any particular church almost invariably do so with the view of keeping alive its errors, scarcely ever for the purpose of leading it to the truth. And so it comes about that the ranks of the clergy are recruited every year from a lower intellectual class. But if only men can be got to see the essential difference between churches as they are and churches as they should be; if they come to understand that there is no necessary connection between "going into the church" and supporting the corruptions of ecclesiasticism; then the best of our graduates will begin to feel that there is still noble work—the very noblest—to be done "in orders," and clergymen themselves, in the future, will be among the most powerful opponents of ecclesiasticism. At any rate, whether the clergy take part in its destruction or whether it is destroyed in spite of them, it is most assuredly doomed.

The churches of the future will be founded on the idea of righteousness. "Other foundation can no man lay." Any narrower church is unworthy of humanity and of God, and will, in the natural course of events, be swept away. The gods of ecclesiasticism have very often been devils. But the true God is a perfectly good Being, and his church must therefore be co-extensive with the race. In righteousness, and in righteousness alone, we have an idea that will unite all men by a common bond. In righteousness, and in righteousness alone, we have an idea capable of indefinite expansion, of unceasing application to the ever-changing, ever-growing necessities of human life. A church founded on the idea of righteousness is a church which all wise men must approve, which all good men must love, for righteousness is absolutely necessary for the well-being of mankind. A church founded on the idea of righteousness is part of that eternal and universal church which existed long before the Christian era, which will continue to exist when every ecclesiastical institution in Christendom has collapsed. Ecclesiasticism must be destroyed before religion can begin. The churches of men must be revolutionized in order that the church of God may be saved.

And, as I have shown, the revolution which is necessary can be effected more readily in the English Church than in any of the rest. It is, so to speak, revolutionized already by implication. The Church of England, as by law established, is actually standing on the true foundation. If only she will not tear herself away, if her clergy will but recognize where they have drifted in the course of evolution, or rather, let us say, in the providence of God, she will enter on a career of triumphant and never-ending progress. And what is true of my own church is true of all others. When they have been thoroughly purged of ecclesiasticism—but not till then—the churches of the world will become the churches of our Lord and of his Christ.

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THE TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE.

A GREAT prophet of science has arisen, in the person of Professor August Weismann, of Freiburg, who has essayed * to prove that what biologists call an "acquired character" is not hereditary. An acquired character is one that is not congenital, but has arisen, no matter how, since the birth of the organism possessing it. Professor Weismann naturally confines himself chiefly to animals and to modifications that take place in their physical structure, and he maintains that wherever such modifications descend to the offspring of such animals they cannot have been acquired by the animals during their lives, but must have previously existed in a latent state in their reproductive germs, and have been handed down from ancestors more or less remote. Mr. Francis Galton had anticipated Weismann in the expression of similar views, but he made them less absolute, and did not insist upon them with so great emphasis. He applied them, too, chiefly to man, and dealt with mental as well as with physical qualities. With the mental qualities of the human race, we are just now exclusively concerned, and we must leave the biologists to settle the question as regards animals and plants.

Weismann could not, of course, wholly ignore mental qualities, and the following passage from his book will serve to show that he does not exempt them from his law. At the same time, it may be taken as a sample of his reasoning and as a sort of text for what is to follow. He says:

"The children of accomplished pianists do not inherit the art of playing the piano; they have to learn it in the same laborious manner as their parents acquired it; they do not inherit anything except that which their parents also possessed when children, viz., manual dexterity and a good ear. . . . The pianist may by practice develop the muscles of his fingers so as to insure the highest dexterity and power; but such an effort would be entirely transient, for it depends upon a modification of local nutrition

* "Essays upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems." Authorized translation (Oxford, 1889).