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THE
RITUAL CRISIS IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

At the request of the Editor, I have undertaken to give the readers of the *Revue internationale de Théologie* some idea of the serious crisis through which the Church of England is at present passing. On former occasions when I have come forward, partly as a historian and partly as a critic of the policy of our Church during the last twenty years, I have been careful to remind my readers that I spoke for myself alone, and that the majority of my brethren would take a different view of the situation. On the present occasion I stand in a somewhat different position. The people of England, with the single exception of the clergy of England's Church, are tolerably well aware that for some years past the minds of the clergy have been moving in one direction, while those of the vast mass of the laity have been moving in another. I may claim, in what I say in this paper, to express the mind if not of the clergy, at least of a large majority of the people of this country.

The Ritual Commission, of whose Report and its probable consequences I have undertaken to speak, has received little attention from the English secular press. The last election with its—to all who did not look beneath the surface—astounding swing of the pendulum, has brought about a crisis in things secular even more serious than that which exists in matters ecclesiastical. Our newspapers have been too much occupied by the political aspect of affairs to have been able to space much thought to our ecclesiastical disputes. I must therefore take it for granted that my readers will have very little idea what the Ritual Commission is, and what it has been asked to do. They will, however, have at least some idea that the

Tractarian movement, in its later stages, has developed into a movement to express in the ritual of the Church of England the doctrines, and often a good deal more than the doctrines, which the Tractarian party came into existence to emphasize, and that the objection entertained by that party to the supremacy of the State over the Church which was established in this country at the Reformation, has introduced in many quarters an element of bitter antagonism to the tribunals to which the settlement of ecclesiastical questions has been entrusted. This jealousy, on the part of a good many Churchmen, of the secular courts has brought about, for many years, an organized resistance to their decisions, and the impunity which, for various causes, has been enjoyed by the clergy who have taken part in that resistance, has produced a condition of anarchy almost unprecedented in the Church of any other age or place. To many lay folk the position has become intolerable. And at last, in consequence of loud and long continued complaints, the Government has agreed to issue a Commission to inquire into the existing disorders, and if possible, to suggest a remedy.

The investigations into which the Commission entered disclosed an amount of anarchy which few people had suspected. As every parish priest has practically been "a law unto himself" for the last forty years, the modes of conducting Divine Service have become almost as numerous as the clergy. And as organizations of a Romeward tendency, sometimes out-Romanizing Rome, have been long in existence, and exercising a mischievous activity, the services in some of the Churches have been carried to such an extent in a Romeward direction as would offend even sensible members of the Church of Rome herself. And had there been time to go more fully into the question, the disloyalty to the laws of the Anglican Church, as embodied in her formularies, would have been found even more widely extended than appears in the Report.

The composition of the Commission was scrupulously fair to all parties. It was presided over by Lord St Aldwyn, a statesman of ability, experience, and high reputation. A number of Bishops, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, were appointed on it, and in the selection of Bishops the High Church party was well represented. The Evangelical party was represented by divines of repute, and the Broad Church party chiefly

by well known ecclesiastical and civil lawyers, whose legal experience was able to elicit a good many confessions from partisans which they were extremely unwilling to make, confessions which have thrown considerable light on points on which the energy and persistence of those partisans had enabled them to cast considerable dust into the eyes of the public. Some of the "Ritualist" leaders, who for years have been kept prominently before the public eye as experts, in consequence of their untiring, and in some cases, I must permit myself to say, unscrupulous advocacy of their opinions, found themselves in a very painful position in the hands of the Chairman, of lawyers so thoroughly acquainted with their subject as Sir L. T. Dibdin, or so thoroughly accustomed to elicit facts from an unwilling witness as Sir Edward Clarke, and of some of the divines not belonging to their school who formed part of the Commission. The wrigglings and evasions of these partisans, the shifts to which they were driven, and their obstinate determination to stick to their views through thick and thin although their futility had been exposed, have caused considerable amusement to the general public, and some little apprehension and shame among the more reasonable of their followers. Even the most respectable and candid members of this school were forced to admit that the judgements of the Courts they had so long resisted were more in accordance with facts than they had themselves supposed, and they could make no reply to the complaint of their examiners that their conscientious opposition to the decisions of the Courts was based on something very nearly approaching to a quibble. The great mass of the clergy are so dominated by the Church papers, which are for the most part conducted in accordance with the modified Tractarianism of the present day, that it may be some time before the facts which have just been mentioned percolate to the clerical mind at large. But an impression has unquestionably been made, and it has been publicly stated that a schism is probable between the old-fashioned disciples of the Tractarian leaders Pusey, Keble, and Liddon, and the more ardent supporters of advanced ritual at the present day. For myself, I am inclined to look upon this rumour as at least premature. The future will depend on the line taken by the laity at this crisis. The opposition to Ritual consists af a variety of elements.

There is the lay element pure and simple, which in general is patient and tolerant, and somewhat mystified, but is on the whole unfavourable to the innovators. There is the legal element, which as a rule seeks to subject the clergy to the dominion of the civil power. There is the extreme Protestant element, which has almost a fanatical hatred of all ceremonial, and of every thing which, in its eyes, seems to be token the most distant tendency towards Rome. There are the Evangelical, and the Broad Church parties among the clergy. And there are the moderates, whose minds are divided between a hostility to extreme ritual on the one hand, and a distaste for State supremacy on the other. If the more violent elements of this composite party gain the upperhand, the more moderate men will be scared into the Ritualistic camp. The danger of disruption in the Church is therefore imminent unless a statesmanlike capacity for composing differences is displayed, and unless the desire for victory over an opposing faction is subordinated to the true interests of the Church.

The Report of the Commission unquestionably displays this last tendency. It endeavours to mediate between the contending factions, and whether its proposals for the future are ultimately accepted or not, its earnest desire to do justice to all parties will be contested by none but heated partisans. Its cross-examination of the champions on each side was searching and even severe. It brought out the weak points of both sides with merciless impartiality. But for the fact that, in the multitude of newspapers and periodicals which circulate to-day, people very seldom acquaint themselves with any side of controverted questions but their own, the evidence before the Commission would doubtless do much to put an end to our disputes. And even as it is, the perusal of that evidence will have weight with fair-minded persons on both sides. The Report blames the Bishops for insufficient acquaintance with their dioceses, and does not shrink from expressing occasional amazement at their habit of ignoring, or their mode of treating, the disorders which have now, beyond all question, been proved to exist. It lays bare the absolute anarchy which prevails in the Church, investigates its causes, and indicates possible results. Some of the disorders on the "Protestant" side, which are put forward with vehemence by the "Catholic"

party in defence of their own disobedience, are shewn not to be intentional offences, but to have been inherited from a former age which paid little attention to order or propriety in the public services of the Church. The Evangelical party as a whole are anxious for conformity to the directions of the Prayer Book. The disorders on the "Catholic" side—I apologize for falling in with the party nicknames of the hour, but it is on grounds of convenience alone that I do so—are divided into "significant" and "non-significant" breaches of the law. And the fact is admitted that the difficulty in interpreting the famous "Ornaments" Rubric is responsible for a good deal of the disorder which exists, while, as I have already pointed out, the conflicts between the partisans of the civil and of what is sometimes rather incorrectly termed the "spiritual" jurisdiction —though there is very often but little which is truly spiritual about it—have aggravated the danger and difficulty of the situation tenfold. The Commissioners report that the "significant" breaches of the law, i. e., the breaches of the law which directly symbolize doctrines which the Church of England has specifically rejected, ought at once to cease. The "non-significant" breaches of the law are divided into two parts, those which are inherited from an age of carelessness and indifference in the matter of Church order, and those which betray a sympathy with Roman practices. Among the latter are the *Lavabo*, or public washing of his hands by the officiating priest; the repetition of the "Last Gospel"; the introduction into the Communion Service of the *Agnus Dei* and the *Benedictus qui venit;* the "Blessing of Palms" on Palm Sunday; and the use of the Office of *Tenebræ* on Maunday Thursday. It is obvious that such practices, in themselves, are perfectly harmless. But their re-introduction into our services must be confessed by all reasonable persons to be extremely injudicious, when it is considered, (1) that these ceremonies are introduced from the service books of a foreign Church, the domination of which was flung off more than three and a half centuries ago; (2) that a very considerable portion of the population of this country is very strongly opposed to the restoration of such domination among us; and (3) that the blessings secured to the country and the privileges enjoyed by the Church in consequence of her establishment by law will unquestionably be lost should

the Church pursue any policy which is unpopular with English people at large.

With regard to the use of the Eucharistic vestments, and other disputed rubrics, the Commission advocates a revision of the rubrics. It is on this point that the most serious difficulties are likely to arise. The revision of the rubrics, it is clearly seen, will involve a victory of one side over the other. And consequently we are informed in the public press that the Bishop of London, as a representative of the "Catholic", and the Bishop of Manchester, as a representative of the "Protestant" party—I once more apologize for the use of these names, as calculated to produce a mistaken idea of the actual questions at stake—have declared against a revision. Each party, in fact, is afraid of the triumph of the other. And undoubtedly great difficulties lie in the way of such revision. For first of all, if the "Catholic" party claim that the Ornament's Rubric, as it stands, makes decidedly for their view, the "Protestant" party point to the unbroken custom of at least three centuries, and to the Canons of 1604, as justifying their contention. They further plead that as the Vestments are declared to be lawful "by authority of Parliament", the rubric must be interpreted according to the principles of the civil, not of the ecclesiastical, law; that the Act of Uniformity of Queen Elisabeth reserves to the sovereign the right, at his pleasure, to "take further order"; that such "further order" was undoubtedly taken; and that whatever may have been the case with the "Advertisements" of Queen Elizabeth, the Canons of 1604, enacted by James I with the express consent of the Convocation of Canterbury, and the implied consent of the Convocation of York—i. e. with the consent of the representatives of the "spiritualty" —formally alolished the use of the Eucharistic Vestments in the Church of England. The further difficulties in the way of revision are serious enough. Lord Halifax, as the leader of a formidable section of the "Catholic" party, demands the use of the Eucharistic Vestments as symbolizing a view of the "Presence" in the Eucharist which differs little from Transubstantiation. Then, again, various authorities on ritual maintain that the "Ornaments Rubric" covers the use of a considerable number of pre-Reformation ceremonies. The "Ornaments Rubric", as it stands, only sanctions the use of the chasuble

and alb by the celebrant, and of the tunicle by his assistants. But as expounded by the above-mentioned writers on ritual, it involves, not only the exact dress of the clergy before the Reformation, but the use of incense and other ceremonies which have long since disappeared altogether from our services. A further objection to revision is, that if alternative forms of service be sanctioned, the result will be that divergences will become stereotyped which, when the present unhealthy party atmosphere has been dissipated, might be hoped to disappear of themselves. And lastly, there is the very important question. At whose instance are these alternative forms of service to be introduced? The difficulties of the present situation are largely due to the fact that almost all the changes in the accustomed ritual have been brought about by the sole authority of the parish priest—a state of things which, it may fairly be said, is absolutely unique in Christendom. Is it conceivable that this unusual state of things, which vests important decisions on difficult subjects in the hands of a man who at present is by no means competent to deal with them—a vast number of our parish priests are in fact singularly incompetent to deal with them—and who, on grounds which I cannot now stop to explain, is likely to be still less qualified to deal with them in future—will be permitted to exist in the English Church throughout all time?

It will be seen from what has been said, that by what has been permitted to happen during the last twenty-five or thirty years the Church of England has been involved in a considerable *imbroglio*, and that it will require an immense amount of tact, skill, and statesmanlike sagacity to extricate her from it. All this is due to the incurable English habit of putting off dealing with questions till they are well-nigh desperate—a habit however which, I may remark parenthetically, is after all as satisfactory as the tendency of some other nationalities to undertake the settlement of questions before they are ripe. The question is complicated by the amazing attitude taken up by Lord Halifax and the English Church Union, of which he is President. In his evidence before the Commission Lord Halifax denied that the English Church possessed any power of self-government on questions of "Catholic" ritual. The Episcopate of the whole Catholic Church, he informed his

astonished hearers, had the sole right to legislate for the Church of England on such points. He further told us that he could neither advise submission to the present English ecclesiastical Courts, nor suggest any others to which submission might fairly be asked. That is to say, the English Church can make no alteration in her ritual nor even settle disputed points of ritual until the Pope, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Metropolitan of St Petersburg, with the Bishops under their jurisdiction, have been duly consulted. It is not a time for rash or impulsive action. But neither Church nor nation is likely to act precipitately. If "letters of business" are issued by the Crown to the Archbishop of Canterbury, all proposals will have to be considered by the Bishops and clergy in the Convocations of Canterbury and York, as well as by their attendant Houses of Laymen. Thence they will be remitted to the conferences of the various dioceses for consideration and criticism, lay and clerical. And then the proposed alterations must be submitted to Parliament for ratification. This process will be found too slow, no doubt, for impatient Reformers. But it has at least this recommendation, that the steps thus taken are not likely to be hastily retraced. In our difficulties we may not unnaturally bespeak the sympathy and prayers of our Continental brethren, that we may be able to remove the Ritual question, which has so long disturbed and divided us, out of our path, and that our Church may be able to attend to her own proper business, of bringing the minds of Englishmen into obedience to the law of Christ.

J. J. Lias.