

Variétés

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VARIÉTÉS.

Clerical Education in England.

In the October (1899) number of the *Revue internationale de Théologie* some questions were asked on the manner in which the English clergy were trained for the duties of their office. As one whose memory goes back a long way, and as one also who has had considerable experience in training men for Holy Orders, and in examining candidates who presented themselves for Ordination, I may be able to impart some information on the point. What I have to say about it will probably not command universal assent in England. I do not present it—though much is so presented to the public in this self-confident age—as the final and incontrovertible results of criticism, but simply as the conclusions I have myself drawn after some years of observation, from the facts which have come before me. Others, I hope, will correct them from their experience.

One point, however, meets us on the threshold of the inquiry. It must be clearly understood that the English clergy since the Reformation are not, and never have been, seminary-men. They are not taken at an early age, immured in an institution, segregated from external influences, and accustomed, nay, indeed compelled, to form ideal pictures of their life and work which they afterwards find to conflict very painfully with the reality. The technical and official training of the English clergy has always been, and still is, very defective. But the main aim of our system has always been knowledge of mankind. For this reason the English clergyman has ever been brought up as other men are brought up. In the olden days he used to go to a public school and to an University, and if, after having received the same education as his fellows, he chose to devote himself to the clerical profession, he received little or no special training; He attended the lectures of Uni-

versity Professors which sometimes were useful to him, but were more often purely academic, passed an examination which was by no means difficult, and at once entered on the duties of his office. The consequence was that the average English clergyman had about him very little of the priest, very little indeed of the theologian, and a great deal of the honest and upright English gentleman.

The Tractarian movement of 1833, which developed in an essentially doctrinal and ecclesiastical direction, brought different ideals in its train. It called attention to the deficiencies of special knowledge in the clergy, and the result was the establishment, at each University, of an examination in the elements of theological knowledge which, at first optional, was ultimately imposed by all the Bishops on their candidates for Holy Orders. I cannot, at this distance of time, remember what the subjects of the examination were, nor have I any *data* at hand wherewith to afresh my memory. But I know that it was not a very exacting examination, and that the qualification of the men who failed to pass it must have been low indeed. But the Tractarian movement produced other results. It placed the clerical life, in regard to its aspirations and duties, upon an altogether different plane than that on which it stood before, and it also produced a cry from the country at large for a large increase in the numbers of the clergy. This increase the Universities were unable to supply, and it became necessary to seek men from among the ranks of those who had not received an University training. It soon was found that these men were as a rule not equal to their task, and one or two Theological colleges were established to give them the special instruction of which they stood in need. There was simultaneously an outcry that the theological training at the Universities was defective, and so graduates of the University were themselves encouraged to spend some time within the walls of a Theological College, to obtain the special instruction which they lacked. I myself was induced, in 1858, to spend a short time within the walls of Cuddesdon Theological College, which had then recently been founded by the great Bishop Wilberforce, and which, at the moment, enjoyed the inestimable advantage of the presence and influence of Henry Parry Liddon, who afterwards developed into a theologian of a high order,

and became, perhaps, the greatest preacher the Church of England ever had. I am bound to say that, short as the time was which I spent at Cuddesdon, it gave me a definitive conception of the aims and duties and aspirations of the parish priest which I should have lacked had I not been there. On the other hand, I am not sure whether, for reasons upon which I shall enter below, it was not well for me that I stayed there no longer.

The throwing open of the older Universities to Nonconformists, which took place about the middle of the present century, gave a renewed impulse to the creation of Theological Colleges. Though various University Theological examinations came into existence, they were of necessity "unsectarian". I have myself assisted in examining, and in passing through such examinations, men who were not members of the Church of England. The intending clergy of that Church, it is therefore clear, must find it necessary to obtain elsewhere the special information they require of her doctrines and general system. Thus Theological Colleges grew and multiplied. It became the ambition of every Bishop to have a Theological College more or less closely attached to his Cathedral. Similar Colleges were established at both the ancient Universities, some in connection with particular religious parties within the pale of the Church of England, some independent of any such connection. An organization has lately been established which promotes a careful special examination for the candidates for Holy Orders, and arranges for systematic conference between the Examiners, the Examining Chaplains, and the heads of the Theological College. Thus, it will be seen, a regular system now exists for the special training of the clergy of the Church of England.

It must not, however, be assumed that all is as well as it looks. In the first place, the Bishops do not *require*, they only *recommend*, that their candidates shall present themselves for this examination. Next, it may be questioned whether the examination itself be a sufficient test of the fitness of the candidate for the duties of the clerical office, or whether, on the contrary, it be not too strictly academic in its character. It is obvious that the standard by which the world in general is accustomed to test the efficiency of a clergyman is by no means always exactly the same as that by which the University examiner is apt to test the qualifications of the candidate for an University

degree. Nor does the average clergyman need to be a trained theologian. His duty is to teach, and to apply to the life, the first principles of the Christian faith. It appears to me, I confess, that this has not always been sufficiently kept in view by those who have conducted the various examinations for Holy Orders, and that, therefore, men enter the sacred office much worse qualified for the duties of the office than those who examine them, and who decide on the subjects of the examination, suppose. As to the heads of the Theological Colleges, they find, as all other teachers find during the prevalence of the present craze for examinations, that their pupils do not seek to learn what will best fit them for their future career, but only that which will "pay" best in the examination which lies immediately before them.

Another difficulty is the extent to which athletic sports are carried at our Universities and public schools. They doubtless tend to foster manliness, and our country has discovered the advantage of this in the extraordinary number of men who have volunteered for the front in the present war. But the worship of athletics certainly tends to divert the mind from study and to diminish the amount of time given to it; and I should think it is a very long time since the upper classes in this country were as a body so imperfectly educated as they are at present. This lack of general knowledge and culture has a prejudicial effect on the education of the clergy, and causes them to be ignorant of a great deal with which it is highly important for them to be acquainted.

Lastly, the very advance in the ideal of the clerical life has had to be paid for at rather a high price. It has produced too great a gulf between the clergyman and the layman. They have ceased to understand one another as they used to do. At some of the Theological Colleges at present it is thought well to accentuate the difference, and though it is perfectly impossible to convert the English undergraduate into a seminarist, still, the ideal placed before him corresponds too closely, very often, with that inculcated on the seminarist, and the man who has not had the advantage of an University training responds more readily to teaching of this kind than the University man does. Unfortunately a variety of causes tend to diminish the supply of clergy from the leisured and cultured classes, and this still further tends to strengthen the seminarist

spirit. Moreover, with some few notable exceptions, the funds at the disposal of the Bishops do not enable them to secure men of the highest calibre to preside over the theological training of the candidates in their dioceses, and therefore there is a considerable tendency in them towards the adoption of one-sided and defective views of truth. The "crisis" in our Church, of which so much has been heard of late, is largely caused, in my own opinion, by the prevalence of one particular type of religious teaching among the Theological Colleges, and that not of the manliest and most enlightened kind. I am glad to find that in this opinion I have the concurrence of a scholar of European reputation, Dr Rashdall, of Oxford.

But these inconveniences are of a purely temporary and accidental character, and will disappear with the causes which have brought them about. Our Church has steadily set herself to improve the education of her clergy, and she will certainly, in the end, attain the object she has had in view. The very "crisis" through which she is passing must tend to bring the minds of clergy and laity into closer accord, to temper the zeal of the former for a one-sided ecclesiastical tradition, and to increase the respect of the latter for genuine ecclesiastical discipline. "The hearts of the fathers", it may be hoped, will be "turned to their children", and those of "the children to their fathers". With a better understanding between the clergy and the laity, and a readjustment of the relations between Church and State in harmony with the recent changes in our political system, a new and healthier condition of things will grow up. The clergy will be better able to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials, between traditions which are really catholic, and those which only represent a temporary phase of Church life. The interpretation of Scripture will be rescued from the domination of party, and will be harmonized with the truths which the Book of Nature, also the Word of God, has at last disclosed. And the gulf between the clergy and the laity, which has so long been widening, will then be bridged over. The enemies of the English Church are always predicting her dissolution. Cardinal Vaughan has once more declared that she cannot last long. His "wish is father to that thought". As a matter of fact, if she rises to the level of her opportunities she is on the eve of a wider expansion and a richer usefulness than has ever before fallen to her lot.

J. J. LIAS.