THE PRESENT STATE OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND

No more striking instance of the vital difference existing between the Roman and the Anglican Church can be deduced, than by a perusal of the letter of Father H. I. Beale in the Times of the 24th August, and of Viscount Halifax's addresses of 1901 and 1902, as President of the English Church Union. In the former, the writer concludes with the sentence: "I declare once for all, that I am a loyal Catholic, and that, as such, and as a Catholic priest holding to the centre of unity, I hope never again to swerve for one moment from the obedience and affection which I owe to my true Mother." In the latter, Lord Halifax asks: "What have the Acts of Uniformity to do with us now? By what is the authority of the Episcopate to insist upon this or to forbid that, limited or controlled? The Union have, on two recent occasions, declared emphatically their convictions as to the right of the Church in relation to the civil power, and their belief as to the adoration due to our Lord in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. From those declarations we have not, nor shall we swerve one inch."

The one breathes the very essence of humility—the other borders on the realms of arrogance and disobedience. True it is, that the one emanates from a Roman Catholic priest, while the other is the utterings of an Anglican layman, but that layman is said to represent the opinions of hundreds of Anglican priests in conjunction with many of the laity.

Would that some "happy mean" might be found, between the
inflexible iron rule of the one church and the too elastic licence allowed in the other. That such licence does exist can hardly be denied. The charges of the Bishops; the complaints of the laity; the petitions of the several Protestant Associations; the success of the Church Reform and the Ladies’ League, each and every demonstrate the dissatisfaction of the laity, and the need of a more perfect organisation in the Reformed Church of England. But unsatisfactory though this state of affairs may be, it is infinitely preferable to the blind unreasoning obedience demanded by the Church of Rome, which, according to the late Dr. Mivart, covers a seething discontent. The wide differences which seem to separate the Evangelical from the Ritualist—the Churchman with strong Protestant tendencies, from the worshipper coquetting with the tinselled ritual and gorgeous millinery of Rome—are but the outcome of that movement, which purified the Anglican Church from error and relieved her from the domination of a priesthood and the rule of a foreign potentate.

It enabled her to enter upon a path of religious liberty. It has advanced the country in civilisation, improved her morals, and has eventually conducted to place her in the present proud position she now holds—as "an empire o’er which the sun never sets."

But the very conception and birth of the Reformation in giving to the Church of England religious liberty, whereby her ministers and laity were enabled to ventilate their religious opinions without fear of anathema or persecution, has unfortunately also allowed that liberty in too many instances to degenerate into licence. Lightfoot declares that to the Protestant, "Liberty is one of his church’s great watchwords, and yet liberty unrestrained by law and love is not liberty, but licence. True liberty is the liberty of the individual restrained by the law of Catholic Unity. Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

The Roman Catholics have apparently allowed the pendulum to oscillate to the other extreme and have sacrificed liberty for unity and autocracy.

By the statutes of Supremacy and Uniformity passed in the first year of the reign of Elizabeth, all jurisdiction of Ecclesiastical Rulers except under the authority of the Crown was abrogated, and all changes of rites or discipline were prohibited, unless by the
sanction and approbation of Parliament. This naturally has tended to place the Church in a subordinate position to the representatives of the rulers of the people, who do not, as they formally did, belong entirely to the Church, but are comprised of all classes and denominations and of all schools of thought.

Besides the enmity of the Papacy, Elizabeth had also to contend with another religious party—inimical to that of Rome no doubt, but nearly as virulent and determined—a party composed of those Reformers who, while fleeing from persecution, had resided in Switzerland, there imbibed the system of Zwingli and Calvin, and on their return had been joined by many of the same opinion. Her position therefore forced her to steer "in medias vias" and to resort to a series of compromises, the effects of which are felt in the Church to the present day.

In the reign of Edward VI. a commission had been appointed to draw up a code of ecclesiastical laws. The old canons from their papal origin and character had become obnoxious, but without them there was no guide wherewith to rule the Church.

This commission completed its labours, but their recommendations were never sanctioned by Parliament, with the unfortunate result (as Hallam remarks) that even in that period, a disorderly state of the Church arose, partly from the want of any fixed rules, partly from the negligence of the bishops. This "unfortunate" position has become more accentuated by the lapse of centuries and by the revival which of late years has been displayed in the Church. The seeds germinating in the sixteenth have borne fruits in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

But the design of the Reformers must also be taken into consideration. As Erskine writes: "It was their desire to restore the primitive church, rather than to settle controversies already arising among Protestants, and to avoid the extreme tenets of Rome on the one side and of Geneva on the other."

The following Declarations emphasise the separation between the two extremes of the Anglican Church. Both parties consist of many thousands of both sexes, who are conscientious and according to their several convictions believe themselves to be members of the Church of England. And yet that Church must be formed on a very wide basis of toleration, which can embrace the two within
PRESENT STATE OF THE CHURCH

her fold, and yet possess a formula and articles so to be obeyed in spirit and in truth.

The English Church Union in their Manifesto of 21st June 1900, declared:

"DECLARATION"

"We, the members of the English Church Union, holding fast to the faith and teaching of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church—that in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Bread and Wine, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, become (1) in and by consecration, according to our Lord's Institution, verily and indeed (2) the Body and Blood of Christ, and that Christ our Lord, present in the same Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar under the form (3) of Bread and Wine, is to be worshipped and adored (4) desire, in view of present circumstances, to reaffirm in accordance with the teaching of the Church, our belief in this verity of the Christian Faith, and to declare that we shall abide by all such teaching and practice as follow from this doctrine of the whole Catholic Church of Christ."

And appended at foot of this published declaration there is a catena of witnesses in favour of the test words, to which the above reference numbers were attached.

On the same date the Council of the Church Association adopted and published the following resolution:

RESOLVED, "that the Declaration put forth by the English Church Union in The Church Union Gazette for June 1900, is based on ignorance or wilful disregard of the fact that 'idolatry' consists in the worship of the true God 'under the form' of any of His creatures.

"The Council of the Church Association desire now to renew in presence of this mischievous falsehood their own Declaration of 1867, repudiating the following dogmas:

"That the Body and Blood of Christ are objectively present, under the outward visible part or sign, or form of bread and wine.

"That the wicked receive the Body of Christ in the use of the Lord's Supper, albeit they do not receive it to salvation.

"That, 'Christ Himself, really and truly, but spiritually and
ineffably, present in the Sacrament, is therein to be adored’ (that is, under the form of bread and wine)."

But they feel bound to add also that the vouchers ‘published by the English Church Union at foot of their Declaration are absolutely fraudulent and misleading. The ungarbled passages from which they have been extracted (and twisted away from the sense of the writers) will be suitably dealt with hereafter.’

The Times, in commenting upon the Declaration of the English Church Union, remarks (23rd June): ‘If any doubts remained as to the militant, not to say lawless attitude, or the Romanising tendencies of the English Church Union, they must have been dispelled by the report of its proceedings which we published yesterday.’

Neither time nor space allows of an attempt to weigh the evidence bearing on this momentous question, and the declarations are merely cited as an example of the present state of the Anglican Church, in which toleration has merged into lawlessness—obedience to the Church into outright rebellion. Both of these contending parties cannot be right, and yet no authoritative steps have been taken to adjudicate between them.

It is, however, often easier to diagnose an evil than to suggest a remedy, and the archbishops and bishops have no easy task before them. They deserve the greatest sympathy from all right-minded Churchmen. As a body they reflect credit on the Church of which they are expected to be the pillars. But it is greatly to be feared that the calm, serene atmosphere of the episcopal bench has not been conducive to that clearness of vision which the gravity of the crisis demands.

It is obvious, also, that the present state of affairs cannot last for ever. Some great disaster may overtake the Church, unless practical efforts are made to meet the growing evils of disorganisation and anarchy. It needed the complete breakdown of all commissariat arrangements in the Crimean War, to awaken the authorities to the reality of the disorganisation in that department. It needed disaster after disaster in South Africa to press home the necessity for stringent reforms in our army. It will be well for the Church if she does not learn in the bitter school
of experience the overwhelming necessity for facing the difficulties now pressing on her. A wholly centralised system has been proved by experience to be subject to many disadvantages. Decentralisation is necessary for effective and speedy working, and to prevent an unbearable pressure upon the central authorities. Units must learn to stand by themselves, and to be responsible for their individual tasks. But complete decentralisation is as great an evil as complete centralisation, if there be no connecting bond and no superior authority as a last court of appeal.

In the Church at the present moment we have complete decentralisation, but in its worst form. Every clergyman is really a law to himself, and except in extreme cases very little authority can be brought to bear upon him. In fact, authority is at a discount, while disobedience is rampant. In the diocese of Winchester the moral influence of a highly respected and broad-minded bishop may perform the function of a definitely recognised authority, and consequently there are no complaints of any excessive ritual in any of the parishes in that see.

In an instructive work entitled "Ritualism in Town and Country," published under the auspices of Lady Wimborne, no complaint is made against "Winchester." But the long list of lawlessness displayed in other dioceses and collated in the above book, should give food for reflection to every one interested in the preservation of the Church of England in its integrity.

The Ladies' League is not a body likely to allow extreme ritualism to escape their notice, and as not a single instance of excess is quoted in this diocese, I assume it to be the only one in which ritual is kept within bounds.

Laws and ordinances, Prayer Book and Articles, episcopal authority, rules of all kinds, in many instances have been disregarded. Each individual is self-sufficing, and for practical purposes completely independent. The soil was prepared beforehand, but the crop of difficulties is due to the instrumentality of the Ritualistic Movement, which exalts the status of the "priest" to the detriment of his congregation.

It is the outcome of a movement which at first assisted to arouse the Church from her lethargy, and in its inception was a benefit, but which has overstepped the bounds of moderation.
and has now in too many instances degenerated into lawlessness. The archbishops endeavour to oppose its onward torrent, but their commands, almost entreaties, have scarcely prevailed. The bishops meet in conclave and produce little but barren resolutions. Convocation itself is half-hearted, and its time is generally occupied with discussions on less important subjects. Even if they could be induced to pass practical resolutions, they remain only resolutions. They have to be incorporated into an Act of Parliament before they are binding upon the clergy.

Until some method short of Disestablishment has been discovered, which will render efficacious the counsels and recommendations of the prelates, the Church will remain as it now is—suffering from anarchy and disobedience. It is suggested that this evil can only be counteracted by making the power of the bishop a reality, and co-ordinating all of them under the authoritative presidency of the archbishops.

Steps in the direction of reform are rendered peculiarly arduous, in face of the fact that there is no real unity of opinion in the Church itself. The modern Ritualist and the old-fashioned Evangelical belong in theory to the same Anglican communion, but in reality they have little in common. It is right that the Church should be comprehensive, and the Reformers framed the articles with that intention. But now the somewhat liberal margins are crossed and broken through in every direction. The river of the Church of England, instead of flowing on in a broad and stately stream, has overflowed its banks, and threatens to overwhelm the ancient landmarks in its course. Until some measure of unanimity has been restored, it is useless to expect success in an attempt at reformation. Are there difficulties in the Prayer Book? Who at this time would dare to meddle with the most insignificant rubric? Is it proposed to increase the authority of the episcopate? The bishops themselves are at variance on many important points. Are efforts made to put an end to the abject poverty of the clergy? The Church is incapable of acting as a united body even for this widely common purpose. Here the clergy have to learn to act together, for in no other profession is it so enormously difficult to secure this necessary co-operation.

A want of authority in the episcopal bench and a lack of
loyalty and obedience manifested by a portion of the clergy, have conducted to this chaos. If the highest officers can employ nothing but moral suasion, what is to be expected of the subordinate officials? From the bishop descend two main lines of hierarchy, which are sometimes joined at certain points, but are more often wholly separate. On the one side stand the governing bodies of the diocese; on the other the cathedral body with its dean and canons. Theoretically the archdeacon is the bishop's right-hand man, but practically his authority is (except in some rare instances) a completely negligible quantity. The burden of all things, great or small, of any connection with the diocese falls upon the bishop, who often staggers under the mass of detail with which he has to contend. In many cases most of these details could well be dealt with by the archdeacon. But with a beggarly income of £200 a year the archdeacon is in most cases unable to give up his living and entirely devote himself to his archidiaconal duties. Consequently the major portion of his best energies are absorbed in his parish, and his acquaintance with his archidiaconal province is confined to his annual charge. An archdeacon should know individually every clergyman, and be acquainted with the condition of every parish under his care. In this work he would have as valuable subordinates the rural deans, who are now little more than a name. If these officers were really enabled to do their work, the bishop would be relieved of overwhelming labours, and would conduct the administration of the diocese with greater freedom, and consequently greater ability. With the bishop, archdeacon, and rural dean acting together in a co-ordinated subordination of power, each one helping the other, and giving their best energies to official supervision, the question of multiplying the episcopate would largely disappear.

Drastic reformers have gone so far as to propose, that each bishop's diocese should be made as nearly as possible conterminous with the county. It is urged that many advantages would accrue by this innovation. There is said to be a certain esprit de corps existing in each county which would cause the bishop to be regarded as its spiritual officer, in like manner as the Lord-Lieutenant is held to be the principal official in temporal concerns. Clerical and lay organisations would be effectually joined together, and the whole would
form a compact and organised unity very different from existing conditions. But such a proposition can hardly be considered within the range of practical politics.

The question of the status of the cathedral clergy is a matter affecting the present condition of the Church. It is right and proper that certain posts should be reserved for men of thought and learning, and the absence of such posts is complained of as one of the disadvantages with which the Irish Church has to contend. To this it may be objected, firstly, that in many cases the incomes to be derived even from deaneries and canonsries are hardly sufficient to support the incumbents; and secondly, that men of thought and learning are not so very numerous, even in these highly respected bodies. Why should not members of the cathedral body have entrusted to them the control of education in the diocese? In this respect there is already considerable activity, and in process of time complete organisation might be expected. The cathedral church might become the active centre of the diocese.

The individual parish offers another difficulty. In some its organisation is perfect, and if these could be taken as samples representing the whole, there would be nothing about which to complain. But unfortunately they do not offer a fair criterion. The parish is a self-sufficing unity, with the connecting bonds weak or non-existent. The rector or vicar is practically irremovable except for gross moral crimes. The expense incurred in attempting to enforce obedience in matters of doctrine and ritual is so great, it is rarely attempted, and here the parishioners are at the mercy of the rector. This question is complicated by two other questions—the question of Lay Representation, and the question of Lay Patronage. With the Ritualistic movement in full course, it is impossible for the unfortunate parishioners to guard against a complete revolution in religious teaching. There is no reason why an extreme Ritualist of the narrowest type should not succeed a broad-minded parson, or a succession of such men. The result is confusion. The former church workers one after the other resign. The church is gradually emptied. The Bishop can do or will do nothing. The rector is irremovable. The parishioner has no redress. Such cases are not mere figments of the imagination, but are daily happening around us. "They have one beneficial result.
They bring home to people in an unmistakable manner the unsatisfactory condition of the Church. It is not a question between a popular and an unpopular sect. It would be impossible to secure a succession of men personally popular with every parishioner. It is a question between two wholly different systems, both of which are embraced in the Church's all too comprehensive fold. When there should be harmony, we find broad lines of divergence continuing on to widely separate routes—one leading to Rome, the other to dissent. Latterly there has been a tendency to enlarge the power of the parishioners by legislation, but much remains to be done before the laity become seized of their just rights.

A cry has been raised against the existence of Lay Patronage. Many Churchmen desire its total abolition. But it extends far back into history, and could hardly be eradicated without a wrenching of vested rights, and the introduction of changes tending to make the remedy worse than the disease. Nevertheless, the bishop's power of objecting to an appointment is too limited, and the system as it stands, tends to weaken Church organisation, and deprives the parishioners of the protection they are entitled to expect.

With all its drawbacks, however, Patronage has worked fairly well, considering the real dangers to which it is exposed. It enables a diversity of patrons to appoint incumbents holding a diversity of opinions, and consequently the Church is not saddled with a dull uniformity. It gives an opportunity for ventilating all kinds of thought, from the Evangelical to the Ritualistic, which is an advantage; provided the two extremes are kept within proper bounds. The experience derived from private presentation warrants the assumption, that patrons have generally been desirous of doing their duty and of providing suitably for the spiritual needs of those whom Providence has made dependent on their choice for religious help and instruction. They can only nominate from a limited number of men, who must have been examined and ordained by an Anglican bishop, and therefore, prima facie, they are justified in assuming that their nominees come fitted for the position to which they may be appointed.

In further considering the present state of the Church, one most important item forces itself to the front. It is a crying evil, increasing in its intensity year by year, withering up the
energies of the parson—carrying dull corroding care into many a clerical home, clouding his life with anxiety, and thereby depreciating his power for sharing the cares and for interesting himself in the welfare of his flock. We refer to the "poverty of the clergy." Even now it becomes necessary, in the face of Non-conformist contention, to reiterate the well-known history of the origin of tithes—facts well known to every educated Churchman, but persistently cavilled at and denied by her political opponents. Originally in days long past and gone, when landowners built a church, they provided for the stipend of the incumbent, by setting aside a tenth of certain of the produce of the lands as an endowment. This they had a perfect right to do. As time rolled on, and the original patrons died, they left the tithe as a charge upon their lands. Heirs were compelled to carry out the behests of their ancestors, and for centuries this legal encumbrance has existed. Lands were conveyed and sold subject to the charge. The purchaser did not suffer, for he paid a proportionately less sum for his purchase. The tithe was collected in kind and not in money, and the old tithe-barns, seen in the country, are monuments of the time when the parson was accustomed to take the tenth sheaf of corn, or the tenth sack of potatoes, &c., from the fields. This custom has been commuted for an annual payment subject to periodical assessments.

The advent of "Free Trade" combined with other causes, has depreciated the value of the crops to such an extent that the parson's stipend, when derived from this source, has decreased by 30 to 40 per cent. Those who are the unfortunate possessors of small incomes can well appreciate what this means, and the dire distress it entails. Luxury and an expensive mode of living are daily increasing, and yet we find educated gentlemen, with their families, compelled to subsist on a wretched pittance which hardly suffices to keep body and soul together. This state of affairs constitutes a reproach to Churchmen. The columns of the daily press teem with complaints of the poverty of the clergy, and they themselves do not appear able to grapple with the evil or to suggest a remedy. The composition of letters to the newspapers, unless followed up by united action, "avalleth them little." Is there sufficient unity in the Church for a successful solution of the
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matter? Is it hopeless to look to the laity? Have the words, "The labourer is worthy of his hire," been entirely forgotten?

One bright spot shines out in strong relief amidst the gloom of this poverty, for by it untold benefit has accrued to the Mother Church. At the present time to enter Holy Orders is to take up a life of poverty and toil. In the old days, when it meant a good living and comparative ease, the motives actuating young aspirants might have been open to question. But now, the knowledge of what is before them must deter all who have not their hearts in the work, and while reducing the quantity, may proportionately improve the quality of the clergy.

In looking for means to palliate, if not entirely to remedy, the parson's straitened income, there are two institutions from whence aid might be expected,—the Ecclesiastical Commission and the Queen Victoria Fund. With regard to the former, there seems to be an impression that business capacity is hardly a constant quantity in its councils. Examples are quoted of property sold, to be again resold by the purchaser for three or four times the amount originally given. Still, the Commission should form a nucleus from which the scope of its work might be enlarged, so as to take over all assets and to pay the stipends of the clergy out of a general fund.

The Queen Victoria Clergy Fund also controls a large income. But it gives its money in doles, and makes no attempt to permanently endow poor living; consequently the recipient of the dole is never certain at the end of one year as to the amount of his income for the next. Hitherto the parson has suffered in silence, but now the question is forcing itself to the front, and the laity cannot plead ignorance of clerical want. If they could only follow the example of the Nonconformist and Roman Catholic laity, much clerical suffering would be ameliorated, and the "parson's dole" increased. There is a reason given for this want of generosity on the part of Churchmen. It is said that the fear of Ritualism prevents subscriptions to the various funds from becoming as large as they otherwise might be.

The whole monetary state of the Church is fraught with anxiety. The aged clergyman has no assured pension for his declining years. He may have done his best for his parish, and
kept it well organised, but gradually it ceases to be worked effectively, for old age has weakened his energy. The controlling hand lacks force—and yet the incumbent can hardly ever retire with any hope of an assured income, sufficient to keep him from abject poverty. Unless this question be really faced, the supply of candidates for Orders will still further decrease. We have had practical examples of this shrinking in late years. No one can do good work on starvation wages.

The system of remunerating surveyors of dilapidations offers a premium for perpetuating a system, by which the clergy, already impoverished to a lamentable extreme, are further mulcted.

As time has rolled on, the administrative requirements of the Church have changed. Her doctrine is and should be unchangeable. Licence and laxity have crept in with the late great revival. It needs the strong guiding hands of the hierarchy to weld it again into a harmonious whole. It has survived the turmoil, the struggles, the apathy of over three centuries; it still contains in its bosom amongst the bishops, in the clergy, and in thousands of the laity, men who are staunch honest and true to the great principles of the Reformation, and to the Church into whose pale they were baptized.

Cardinal Manning well portrayed the position of the Church when he stated: "It is not more certain that the Reformation was a gracious and searching work wrought by the purifying hand of God, &c. . . . Perhaps in no country can be found so remarkable an exhibition of the remedial power of the Reformation and the vehement tide of these latter days. We have the two extremes—that the Anglican Church stands immovably rooted in the soil of England is, under God, because she was brought back to Apostolic truth; that she has lost some portions of her administrative system is because she has shared the strife and the mutilation which all churches have endured. But no church in the last three hundred years has borne what she has met and overcome. She has been slain by the secular arm nerved and guided by foreign enmity, crushed by a lawless rebellion, &c. &c. All foreign churches, shielded as they have been from the storms which have broken on their despised sister in England, &c. &c., have declined and wasted. But she still flourishes in strength." In his letter to a
lady, May 1850, he writes: "For 300 years the grace of sanctity and penitence has visibly dwelt and wrought in the Church of England; the most saintly and penitent have lived and died in it. I must believe that the spiritual discernment of Andrews, Leighton, Ker, and Wilson are purer than mine."—Purcell's "Life of Manning," vol. i. pp. 207 to 473.

Cardinal Manning's words may be prophetic: "No church has borne what she has done in the last three hundred years and has overcome!" Another crisis may be approaching. Again she may be apparently crushed by lawless rebellion. But although those Churchmen mentioned by the Cardinal have passed away, their places are filled with others, and many more, as good and as true—men striving to do their duty, and by God's help in the fulness of time, they or their successors will be found ready, able and willing to pilot the Church through all her troubles into the haven of comparative unity, rest, and peace.

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