

**THE CONFLICT OF
IDEALS IN THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

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INTRODUCTION

To any one who values and loves the Church of England, both for what it *is* and for the work which it has done and is doing, the present time is not free from anxiety. It is true, indeed, that "there is always a crisis in the Church," and consequently we do well to put a restraining hand on extreme or alarmist statements. None the less "things and actions are what they are and the consequences of them will be what they will be ; why then should we desire to be deceived ?"¹

There is a deep inner life and energy for good in the English Church, but undoubtedly the (almost morbid) restlessness of the age has not left the Church unaffected. It sometimes looks not like a strong rock—firm in a tumultuous sea and supporting a light which shines clear through the darkness over the uneasy waves—but rather

¹ Butler's Works, ed. 1836, ii. 100.

like a ship tearing at her cables and tossing so that the light now glimmers, now disappears among the restless billows. No one can watch current events, or listen to the many voices which are speaking, without feeling that *things march*. We have only to turn to the correspondence columns of the Church newspapers or even the secular press to see that the most fundamental questions are discussed with a freedom and satisfied individual conviction from a hundred points of view, as if nothing had been or could be *settled* either by the Catholic Church or our National part of her. No one can read Episcopal "charges" without noticing how very much the members of the Right Rev. Bench are "all at sea" also.¹ Like the human mind, according to George Eliot, the Church of England appears to be very "hospitable"; and, as one perplexed writer, in a Church newspaper lately, seems to perceive, the

¹ The present writer has listened to one Episcopal "charge" proving, with great learning, the doctrine of "the Real Presence" and "the Eucharistic Sacrifice"; to another denying it wholly and teaching pure Zwinglianism; to a third, teaching "Consubstantiation"; to another repudiating "the Ornaments Rubric," and declaring the rochet and chimere of a Bishop to be a cope, and so on.

only "note" which is evident in the Anglican Church is "comprehensiveness." It certainly *appears* to find a shelter for all opinions—heretical or otherwise. Some of the clergy claim almost unrestrained liberty in teaching almost any opinion. Some of the Bishops discountenance some heresy or some "practice" which they are conscientiously opposed to, while preserving and teaching some equally doubtful "practice" or doctrine towards which they are individually favourable. Others assume a Papal air (which never sits well on an Anglican prelate) and say "it will not be permitted"—and "nobody seems one penny the worse." Convocation is active and even restless within its possibilities, but the hand of the State is heavy upon it, and its possibilities are not abundant. There are schemes for "A National Church Council," to include the "intelligent" and (apparently) infallible laity, the electors to which, it is proposed, need not even be communicants of the Church, which, while ostensibly preserving intact the rights and duties of the Ancient Convocations, will lead them tenderly to a lethal chamber or a *εὐθανασία*, and

which Archbishop Temple described in his frankest manner as "revolution." A Royal Commission inquires about "irregularities" or "disorders," with what object it is, as yet, premature to guess. The continual talking is more strenuous than ever. Ruridecanal chapters, conferences, congresses, meetings of all sorts discuss *everything*, from the being of God to the reason why *men* (it is supposed) do not go to church. Oxford is still full of discussions of abstract questions, which are applied in odd ways—by the ever widening range of its stray disciples—to Church and Religion. Cambridge professors and teachers deliver themselves of manifestoes and memorials not only on Tariff Reform, but on the Athanasian Creed. Even a select number of Deans—forsaking their *raison d'être* of chairmanship in their chapters—become, *qua* Deans, "trained theological experts," and "strengthen the hands" of a certain class of bewildered Bishops in their efforts to suppress a creed which we are all bound "thoroughly to receive and believe." A great battle rages as to whether the rising generation and some which follow are to be brought up in the Christian

Religion, or in some other religious "Undenominationalism" as some prefer, or "Secularism," which carries the day with others.

In spite of all this "activity," there is indeed real, solid religious work being done for God's glory and the souls of men in the Church; but this "activity" is striking and arrests attention. It may mean useful energy, but it may also mean a merely feverish love of movement, or even revolution. It may be a sign of life; it may possibly be the agony before death. What does it mean? Can the Church of England—the great teacher of the Gospel, of the Catholic Faith, in this land—stand the strain? Is the Church of England moving along a line of true development? Or is she being led away from her true course on ways to follow which would destroy her claim to be any part of "the Catholic Church of Christ"?

These are anxious questions, and they are clearly suggested by what is going on. Never before, since the convulsion of the sixteenth century, have "foundations" been so freely meddled with, and, apparently, with such "a light heart." Here we

may quote some wise words: "We cannot remind ourselves too often or too seriously that the questions which are so freely discussed among us now, and are forced upon us all with increasing reach of aim and urgency of argument, are questions of life and death to human hope—not in one particular form or under one set of conditions only, but in any form intelligible to our minds, to any hope that we know of. A time so critical, so stormy in the regions of thought and feeling, and so pregnant with consequences which are scarcely conceivable to us now, is a time to be watchful over both life and intellect, watchful over the way in which we handle the grave matters which we may be called on to handle. . . . It is possible that, as men at all times are apt to do, we may exaggerate the real force and meaning of what interests us and goes on before us; as it is also possible that we may undervalue it. But a man must be indeed engrossed by the present who does not sometimes see in the future possibilities impending over his children which he does not like to think of." ¹

¹ Dean Church, *Human Life and its Conditions*, pp. 70, 71.