SOME CAUSES OF THE REFORMATION.

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FUNDAMENTALLY the duty of a historian, certainly one who occupies a Chair, is to attempt to see things steadily and see them whole, and not merely to see one side or one aspect of those things. There are, it seems to me, two fundamental qualifications for the study of history to any profit at all. The first is sympathy, and the second imagination. I do not, of course, use the word "imagination" in the sense of imagining things which never existed, I mean rather the faculty of realizing the things unseen, of seeing what is below the superficial occurrence of events. Sympathy we need, not on one side of a question, but in the sense in which we can put ourselves in the place of either of the combatants. Unless we can feel something of what they both felt, and not merely of what one of them felt, we can never realize what happened, nor why it happened, nor how it happened. If we are to understand things we have to cultivate sympathy, not merely with one party or one cause, but also with the opponents of that party or that cause. The student of history has to get this sympathetic and imaginative understanding of the events that took place.

All that I can do in this lecture is to put before you certain aspects of the Reformation as they appear to me, and leave you to make what use you can of what I have to say. I do not propose to invite you to attend to any detailed exposition of any particular part of the Reformation. If you wish to study any particular aspect of it you have had provided for you by Professor Alison Phillips [1] a bibliography which, I think, will satisfy the most expansive appetites for detailed information, and I do not propose to give you a list of the facts or details about any part of Reformation history. It is one of the defects of our education in history at the present time that the discovery of facts has been going on at such a rate—owing largely to the assistance of the Master of the Rolls—that the assimilation of those facts has not kept pace. In the physical realm, for example, a man's health does not depend upon the amount he eats, but upon the amount he digests. If the student of history tries to take in more facts than he can assimilate it is not good for his historical education. What I wish to bring out is not so much facts, whether old or new, as the meaning of facts. I want, broadly speaking, to indicate the place of the Reformation in certain general lines of development, evolution, or progress, or whatever you may like to call it.

An eminent dignitary of the Church [2] denies, with some emphasis,

[1] The Churchman, October, 1925.
[2] Dean Inge in his Romanes lecture on *The Idea of Progress.*

that there ever has been or can be any progress in human affairs. That, in a sense, is true, or, if I may put it in another way, there are certain spheres of activity of the human mind in which progress hardly seems to apply. I do not suppose any of us would be so bold as to say that, so far as the highest ideals in religion or literature or art are concerned, there has been very much progress during the last two thousand years. If people mean that there has been evolution or progress in these highest spheres I think it is a disputable proposition. But it does not follow that there has been no progress at all. These terms that seem so simple are pitfalls to the understanding. I believe there has been a very great deal of progress, even though I eliminate progress in the very highest intellects and minds. This progress, I think, has two main aspects. First, more or less ordinary men, as time goes on, realize more fully what was meant by these greatest teachers of the past. It is not that the doctrine or the teaching has altered, but that we see more in it; as time goes on there comes about a fuller realization of what was really meant by the things then said. At any rate I believe myself that we can see no limit to the increasing realization of the truth in that sense. Truth has not changed, but we change, and I hope and believe that we change in a sense for the better, that we see more truth than before.

Again, the number of people who become capable of seeing more and more of the truth is increasing. We must not limit our attention to one particular point. We cannot fairly compare the select few of brilliant Athens with the general mass of modern democracy. In the general mass I think we see evidence of progress. In the last war, for instance, I do not know that there was any single courageous act which stood out more markedly than similar acts in the wars of the last two thousand years; but whereas courage had formerly been the characteristic of the few it became in the last war the common characteristic of the mass. As Mr. Chesterton says, 'Looking for a hero, you can point to nothing but a mob.' I think there has been a similar increase in the number of people capable of appreciating more and more literary and artistic and religious truth. One classical author said that the human race lives in the few. The great mass of men are born and live and die, leaving no memory behind them, and as far as people can judge, no effect follows from what they do. It has been only in the few that the human race has really lived and made progress. But those few have increased, and I believe they steadily go on increasing.

It is, of course, a point we always have to bear in mind, whether we are talking about the Reformation or any other great event or revolution in history, that while we say that it was brought about by the nation or by the people we should be careful to define what we mean by the nation or the people. How large a proportion of the English people, for instance, were really vitally interested in or understood the issues at stake at the Reformation? However optimistic our view of that period, it would be a tiny fraction

of the nation. How many people really understood the issues of the Civil War of the seventeenth century? One per cent, five per cent, ten per cent, how many? It is a sound criticism of a great deal of historical writing that we do use terms implying big forces without explaining what we mean. Even in modern times the first French Revolution, I believe, was essentially a *bourgeois* Revolution. Its leaders were not of what we call the working-class. You have people like Robespierre, a middle-class lawyer, Danton, another lawyer, and Marat, a highly respectable physician and honorary graduate of the university of Aberdeen, a man who made considerable contributions to medical science. As to the American Revolution, a very competent and learned American historian has shown that even in that most democratic of political agencies, the Boston Town Meeting, which threw the tea into Boston Harbour, only about four per cent of the adult population of Boston at that time were represented. What do we mean by the nation, by the people? Is it really true that at any time before the twentieth century—even if it is true now—the majority of the people really thought, took an interest in, or really knew much of the questions propounded for their decision?

I am quite convinced of this, that one of the general important aspects of the Reformation to which I wish to call your attention is that it was caused by, and resulted in, a very considerable increase in the number of people who were interested in various things, particularly, of course, in religion, but also in politics and in social questions. As I once put it,[1] the period of the Reformation—including other aspects of it than the religious—is the period of the advent of the middle class. It is the period of the entrance of the middle class into active participation in ecclesiastical matters, in political matters, and in other matters as well. You may call it intrusion, if you like; if you dislike the effects and manifestations of it, you probably will! But at any rate it is the intervention of people in matters in which they had not previously intervened to any considerable extent. If we examine that we shall find that it determines many of the episodes and important consequences of the Reformation. It might be said, perhaps, by a rather unfriendly critic that Protestantism is essentially a *bourgeois* religion. If you examine the history of the sixteenth century you certainly find that the people who were most zealous and interested in the adoption and development of Protestantism were members of the middle class. Take, for instance, France—take the Huguenots. Almost the entire force of the Huguenots in France lay in the towns. The peasants were hostile for one reason or another. Or again, take the Lutheran movement in Germany. The strength of it lay in the cities, not in the country, nor in the highest social ranks or spheres. Wherever you go you find that it is the middle class who are the most zealous for the cause of the Reformation.

We have to remember one thing in connection with all this,

[1] *Factors in Modern History*, 1907, pp. 26–51.

that the middle class, while much wider than the class that had been interested in these things before, was still a narrow class compared with the whole nation; and from that point of view Protestantism in the sixteenth century stood upon a somewhat narrow, and therefore a somewhat unstable foundation, with, consequently, an unstable equilibrium. That is one of the things which helps us to understand the rapidity of the changes, particularly in England, though in other countries too, during the sixteenth century. The cause of the Reformation advanced rapidly at one time, and then there came a setback, and then it advanced again, and so on. I think that is because the foundation of political and other power rested upon a somewhat narrow basis, and it was comparatively easy to overturn things. At any rate, I have no faith in the theory sometimes put forward that all these changes were merely due to the strength of will of a single man. Whatever your form of government, however autocratic a ruler may be, he can never achieve anything except with the help and co-operation of forces, interests, and so forth, existing independently of his will. So I have no belief in that somewhat superficial explanation of historical events, even in the sixteenth century under the Tudor despotism. These changes are not to be ascribed merely to the individual will of the monarch for the time being.

I propose to deal with some illustrations of this intrusion of the middle class into certain spheres of activity. First of all we take perhaps the most important from our point of view—the Church. What was the Church? What did the *Ecclesia* mean to the people in the middle ages and at the beginning of the sixteenth century? That question, I find, to students at the beginning is always made difficult by the change in our terminology. In our historic studies we have no constants. Words to-day mean something different from what they meant in the sixteenth century or in the middle ages. We have to learn a fresh terminology for every different period with which we are dealing. So this question of the Church is complicated by the fact that to-day we talk about a Churchman more or less indifferently as to whether he is in holy orders or is a layman. We are quite sure that some laymen are good Churchmen, perhaps sometimes better Churchmen than some Bishops! But in the Church of the middle ages no layman could be a Churchman. In a description of Henry VII, Bacon says, that "his countenance was reverend, and a little like a Churchman." The writer was not contrasting the countenances of Churchmen with the countenances of Nonconformists, he was contrasting the countenance which a man in holy orders was supposed to have as against the ordinary frivolous countenance of the secular-minded person outside. Therefore the *Ecclesia* consists exclusively of ecclesiastics. No layman could be a Churchman. No layman had any part in the election to ecclesiastical assemblies. No layman had any vote in the determination of ecclesiastical questions.

It has been contended that that sharp distinction between Churchman and layman in the middle ages has been exaggerated.

That was the view of the late Dr. Figgis, a learned and admirable writer on these questions, though, no doubt, a number of us would not agree with what he said. He contended that in the middle ages there was one body with two sets of officers, ecclesiastical and lay, and that the Crown represented the one set and the hierarchy the other. There is something in that view, but Dr. Figgis did not point out that while the secular officers associated the general body more and more with them in the exercise of their functions—in Parliament and so on—the ecclesiastical officers shut themselves up more and more, and insisted on the exclusion of the rank and file. That is one of the reasons for the Reformation. When the conflict came the Crown and Parliament were on one side and the Church on the other. The ecclesiastical officers found themselves in a comparatively weak position. While the laity had no voice in the election of clergy, clergy as well as laity were represented by bishops and abbots in Parliament. Parliament, therefore, although very imperfectly representative from our modern point of view, was vastly more representative than the ecclesiastical authority.

There was, of course a much older conception of the Church than this which separated so decisively and unfortunately the ecclesiastic from the layman. The older conception was very different, and the older conception did exist throughout the middle ages. There is no period through the middle ages in which you cannot find that some one puts forward a wider and more liberal view of the Church as the whole body of the faithful. You find that Marsiglio of Padua, in the fourteenth century, was so impressed by this conception of the whole body of people constituting the Church that he held that all jurisdiction and all authority was derived from the people, both secular jurisdiction and ecclesiastical jurisdiction as well. But that was not the view usually adopted even in the later middle ages. Of course, what he said coincided very well with what many of the Reformers wanted to do. We find Thomas Cromwell subsidizing a printer in order to get printed a translation of Marsiglio of Padua in English in 1534. One of the conflicts of the Reformation is over that question; what is the conception of the Church? Is it something which practically precludes the laity from determination of ecclesiastical questions, or does the Church include the whole of the faithful?

My own view of what was happening towards the close of the middle ages is this, that the narrow view was getting ever narrower, whereas the other view was beginning to make more progress. You all remember the story of how Luther in his early years saw a picture over an altar in which a ship represented the Church, and the rest of the world was in liquidation, so to speak. No one except an ecclesiastic was in the ship, no one except a layman was in the water! Ecclesiastics were, it is true, throwing a stray rope out here and there, but the general conception that the Church was a ship in which there were only ecclesiastics underlay a good deal of what happened at that time. There was a feeling that

this whole conception that had come to be held must be altered and reformed. That was one of the fundamental points in the conflict.

This intrusion of the laity, or this advent of the middle classes, was, of course, possible owing to the fact that the Church—the ecclesiastics—no longer possessed the monopoly of education and intelligence which they had practically possessed in earlier times. Here I should like to make a still more general remark. I very much demur to the use of words like "usurpation," even with regard to the Papacy. No doubt the privileges of the mediæval Church were abused, but they were a natural development. The Papacy itself was a natural development. The whole hierarchy of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and courts was a natural response to needs that were real. I do not myself believe that any human institution has developed, struck root, or lasted for any considerable time unless it has been to some extent and in some sort a response to needs that were real. We can easily imagine those needs. We can easily see how, the greater the need the greater the response. Take the worst epoch in English history —the anarchy of Stephen's reign, when brute force decided everything. What an appeal must have been made by any kind of jurisdiction or authority which did hold up some kind of peaceful settlement and determination of questions. Then, of course, it was owing to the anarchy of Stephen's reign that you got such a tremendous development of ecclesiastical claims and privileges. Thomas à Becket's too exalted ideas of his position were due to the anarchy of Stephen's reign. Anarchy made people more willing to accept if not to welcome the claims of Thomas à Becket.

Institutions, I say, are always rooted in a response to needs that are real. Therefore, in a sense, the very extensive privileges of the Church in the middle ages had a natural and legitimate foundation. Churchmen did practically monopolize the intelligence and the education of that time, and it was natural that the Churchman, being able to read and write with skill when the ordinary layman could not, should take a large and determining part even in the political and secular affairs of that time.

But at the close of the middle ages intelligence and education and religious feeling were ceasing to be so much the monopoly of the expert—the specialist Churchman—as had been the case. There are endless illustrations of that. One knows, for instance, how the intelligence which found expression in the monastic chronicles and other writings withers up in the latter part of the fourteenth century and still more in the fifteenth century, and, on the other hand, we find purely secular chronicles beginning to develop, in a childish and elementary way at first, and becoming more extended in their outlook until they blossomed out into the national chronicles of Stow and Holinshed in the sixteenth century. Take the development of schools. By the fourteenth century even villeins were sending their children to school. There was a spirit moving among these people. They wanted their children

to be educated. The humblest class of layman began to want some sort of education, and expressed that need in the last century or so of the middle ages.

That leads us, of course, to this point, that what is commonly called the Renascence in the latter part of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is very different from the earlier revival of learning. Mrs. J. R. Green writes about the Renascence of the reign of Henry II. But that had been a revival of ecclesiastical learning confined almost exclusively to ecclesiastical circles. In the fifteenth century there was no revival of ecclesiastical learning but there was a new birth or demand for education and learning among the laity. The Renascence fundamentally is a response to that demand for education, for culture on the part of the *nouveau riche*. There had been a great development of capital and capitalism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It sometimes produced depressing results for the time being. One of the general tragedies of the late war was that it effected the transference of so much wealth from the pockets of the intelligent to the pockets of the unintelligent. But the unintelligent become intelligent in time. Their descendants become intelligent. And it was the descendants of these early capitalists, of these people who had developed commercial enterprise and so on, that wanted the new learning which was provided for them by the Renascence of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Take the use of the English language itself. You are familiar with that phenomenon in the translation of the Scriptures, but that was not the earliest development of the use of English. We have the Act of 1367, that English should be used in the law courts, though the lawyers disobeyed it for a long time. Still, there was a tremendous development of the use of English in the latter part of the fourteenth and in the fifteenth century. The translation of the Scriptures by Wycliffe and so on is part of the general movement. It is part of this increasing demand by people for the use of a language that was understanded by them. Then, of course, you get a perfectly natural conflict. We do not always do sufficient justice to those obscurantist people who resisted the translation of Scriptures into the vernacular. They wanted the Scriptures to remain in a common tongue. After all, Latin was the common tongue of all the ecclesiastics, and so long as the Church was regarded as only the ecclesiastics, it was natural that they should think that the one language was the best guarantee of orthodoxy and uniformity. We are prone to lay stress on the common English language on both sides of the Atlantic. Perhaps we lay too much stress on it, because understanding what the other fellow says does not always promote good feeling! Still, we can understand how that early resistance was partly due to a fear lest diversity of tongues should lead to diversity of doctrine. With the authoritative books kept in exactly the same language there was less danger of diversity of opinion and heterodoxy in religion. The fact that those translations were made into languages or vernaculars

that were becoming national, links up the movement with the development of nationality.

First of all, let us look at some illustrations of this intrusion of the middle classes into religious affairs. Fundamentally in the middle ages religious service was something done for you by the expert. You might participate in the effects of that service, but you only assisted by being present while it was performed for you. And connected with it was this idea that service was public worship. That is one of the features of the middle ages—the service was public. There was very little but public worship. So long as people could not read or write, and could only grasp a little of what was said, how could they themselves develop religious thoughts and expression? It is quite natural that while the vast bulk of the population had not the faintest idea how to read or write, worship should be public, official, and formal, and not private or family. One of the significant developments to which attention has not been adequately directed is the quite spontaneous development of family worship and private worship before the Reformation, in the latter part of the fifteenth century or perhaps earlier in that century. That is one of the elements of the Reformation, the desire for self-expression, for self-determination, the growth of discontent with having all these things done for you, and not being able to do very much of it yourself. Hence, of course, the familiar features and developments of the Reformation, the conversion of the Mass into the Communion Service, from something that was done *for* people by the expert into something which the people had to do for themselves. Hence the Book of Common Prayer. Hence the congregational singing of Psalms in place of the sacerdotal solo. Hence almost all the familiar features of the Reformation movement in England. They are all an expression of this increasing desire of an increasing number of people actively to participate in religious services which previously had been performed for them by the expert. That idea of the expert doing things for them was ceasing to be satisfactory. Just as in modern times we see the increasing self-determination, the increasing demand of an increasing number of people to have a voice in their own affairs, so we see it in the Reformation movement.

Now I come to the other aspect of the subject—the growth of a deeper and more spiritual meaning among this increasing body of participants. Again I am not going to suggest that anybody saw deeper spiritual meaning than St. Francis of Assisi or Thomas à Kempis. The point is that whereas these people had been but a few individuals, now, in the sixteenth century, you have an increasing number of people who saw spiritual truth in what they read or were taught.

That leads me to say something about the materialism of the middle ages. What we generally understand by the middle ages is a period of romanticism—anything but materialism. I do not mean materialism quite in its ordinary sense at the present time. What I mean is a more comprehensive kind of materialism—that

materialism which makes it so difficult for the natural man to grasp a spiritual or even a moral or intellectual truth, except by means of a concrete material symbol. It is a very familiar difficulty to all those who have anything to do with education from the elementary schools up to the universities and even beyond—the difficulty people have, unless they are very highly educated, in grasping anything abstract except by concrete symbol. Let me tell you a true story, which may shock you at first. A father of a little girl of four was trying to teach her some elementary notions of God. "Is God here?" she asked (that was in the Isle of Wight). "Yes." "Is He at Portsmouth?" "Yes." Then came, "Isn't He fat?" When some of us are talking in eloquent language about abstract ideas to our students it would be good for us to ask ourselves how those ideas appear and reproduce themselves in their minds. That is one of the things which makes me doubt a little bit about the demand for illustration in schools—even the cinema. They are all right in their way so long as you remember that you cannot make visible to the eye the really vital things. You can portray the King, but not the monarchy. You can show the Houses of Parliament, but you cannot photograph the constitution. You may have a beautiful illustration of Westminster Abbey, but you cannot reproduce the Church upon the screen. The vital and fundamental things have always been and will always be invisible to the material eye. Yet we have this difficulty, that the natural man cannot grasp these invisible things without some material symbol to suggest them. Hence we get some of the familiar controversies at the time of the Reformation. We know the value of the Union Jack. It is an emblem of a great idea, it is necessary to have that symbol. When a Government changes office seals of office are exchanged. So the old Romans who, when they wanted to convey an estate, could not do so without actually taking a clod of the earth and handing it over in court from one person to the other. You cannot get married now without a ring. If you appoint a commissionaire to keep order in restaurants not very orderly, you must have not merely a big man but a man in uniform. Authority depends upon its symbols, and even a judge owes something to his wig.

We most of us remember village grocers' almanacs, coloured and showing the king, but always in a crown. People would not recognize him without it. William the Conquerer at Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide wore his crown in different parts of his realm to show his people they really had a King. The material symbol was the essential thing. We know it now in political controversies. When Mr. Joseph Chamberlain started the campaign for tariff reform we know that the really effective way to argue was to produce the big and the little loaf. It was no good talking about principles. If you are to be really effective in popular argument you have to get your concrete material symbols, or at least your figures of speech.

We thus see the importance of images in the controversy.

Bishop Stephen Gardiner, one of the most honest and best opponents of the Reformation, used a reasonable argument against abolishing images. " You want to abolish images and get the people to read the documents themselves," he said in effect, " but images are the only documents people can read." So we find also in religious controversies an enormous importance attached to vestments. We hope that the vestments were the outward sign of an inward grace, but the popular controversy seems to be all about the external, not about the fundamental. And the underlying reason, again, was that the mass of the people, even of comparatively educated people, could only grasp the abstract thing in and through the outward symbol of it. An elaborate ritual, a gorgeous ritual will always be popular. Necessarily it will appeal to a large number of people who will not be able to get any religious conception apart from the visible symbol. Unless the thing is visible to the physical eye they cannot grasp it. So with the most important controversy. No Presence was " Real " unless it was corporeal. The same with the term " religion " itself. There was once an eminent archivist, nearly a century ago, who came across a charter of King John to a certain Baron *condere noram religionem*, and thought that it referred to a new religion. He thought it threw new light on King John, that it revealed him as a Modernist ! He was mistaken by the use of the word " religio " in that connection ; it meant not religion, but a religious house. It had to do with mortmain. Even " religio " was something concrete, something you could see with the visible eye. The alteration of " religion " in Henry VIII's reign was the dissolution of the monasteries. In Elizabeth's reign Religion (with a capital R) always means Calvinism. Gradually religion comes to be more abstract, more general, in a sense more spiritual. You get an expansion of meaning, and an increased power of perception.

That was very greatly needed. It only comes about, and it can only come about with increasing education, with a growing intellectual and spiritual life on the part of the people. In the time of the religious orders of the Benedictines or the Dominicans, at any rate in the earliest periods of their existence, there was something intense and all-absorbing in their " religio." It came to be less intense as the thing came to be generalized, and that is one of the great troubles in connection with all history, not merely religious, but political as well. The more you extend, the more you dilute. The larger a party becomes, the more diluted it grows. The Labour Party with increasing size becomes diluted. The Conservative Party is very big indeed, and it is diluted. The more people you take in the more you dilute your faith. Was not that the trouble even with early Christianity ? The earliest Christianity was very intense indeed. As it grew it became a little more diluted, and most of the medieval abuses in the Church grew from that compromise which men almost made inevitable when they were trying to bring people in and were smoothing the path for them. The Jesuit Missions in the East

in the seventeenth century were very successful because they diluted Christianity; but at length there came a papal protest; they were told they must stop the dilution, and the Missions failed.

Well, we have this expansion, this intrusion of the middle class into the religious sphere, taking a more and more active part in religious affairs. The religious public, I believe, increased rapidly during that period, but the religion got diluted, diluted particularly by commercialism. I remember a phrase in a sixteenth-century pamphlet—a dialogue between a merchant and a lawyer. The lawyer refers to laying up treasure in heaven, to which the merchant replies, "A good jest indeed, I lay it up in my chest." Religion was diluted also by patriotism. I have often wondered what Sir Francis Drake's religion would have been if by any chance Spain had become a Protestant country. Old Thomas Fuller, a sound historian, had a good phrase—"sea divinity." It was something by which Sir Francis Drake and Hawkins managed to combine piracy and the slave trade with a firm belief in the Protestant religion. Owing to expansion you have dilution. A Spanish ambassador makes this complaint at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign: "Here in England religion has become simply a matter of politics." The dilution was inevitable. Although in politics I consider myself somewhat advanced, I have no doubt that every extension of the franchise, with the possible exception of that in 1832, meant a diminution in the intelligence of the average voter. That does not mean that an extension of the franchise is a bad thing, because the voters who come in get more intelligent in time. So I still think we gained by the Reformation. We brought people in, or they thrust their own way in, and this meant dilution for the time, but in the long run it was a good thing. If religion became simply a matter of politics, there is something to be said for the ideal of making politics a matter of conscience and religion. If the priest was being reduced to a citizen, there was at least an effort to make the citizen religious; and if there was a movement to secularize the Church there was also an attempt to sanctify the State.

The first of a series of lectures under the auspices of the Reformation Study Brotherhood, given at the Dean Wace House on Monday, October 19th, 1925, with the Right Hon. Sir W. Joynson-Hicks, Bart., M.P., in the Chair.

[Professor Pollard's second lecture on the Reign of Henry VIII will appear in a subsequent number of THE CHURCHMAN. Ed.]