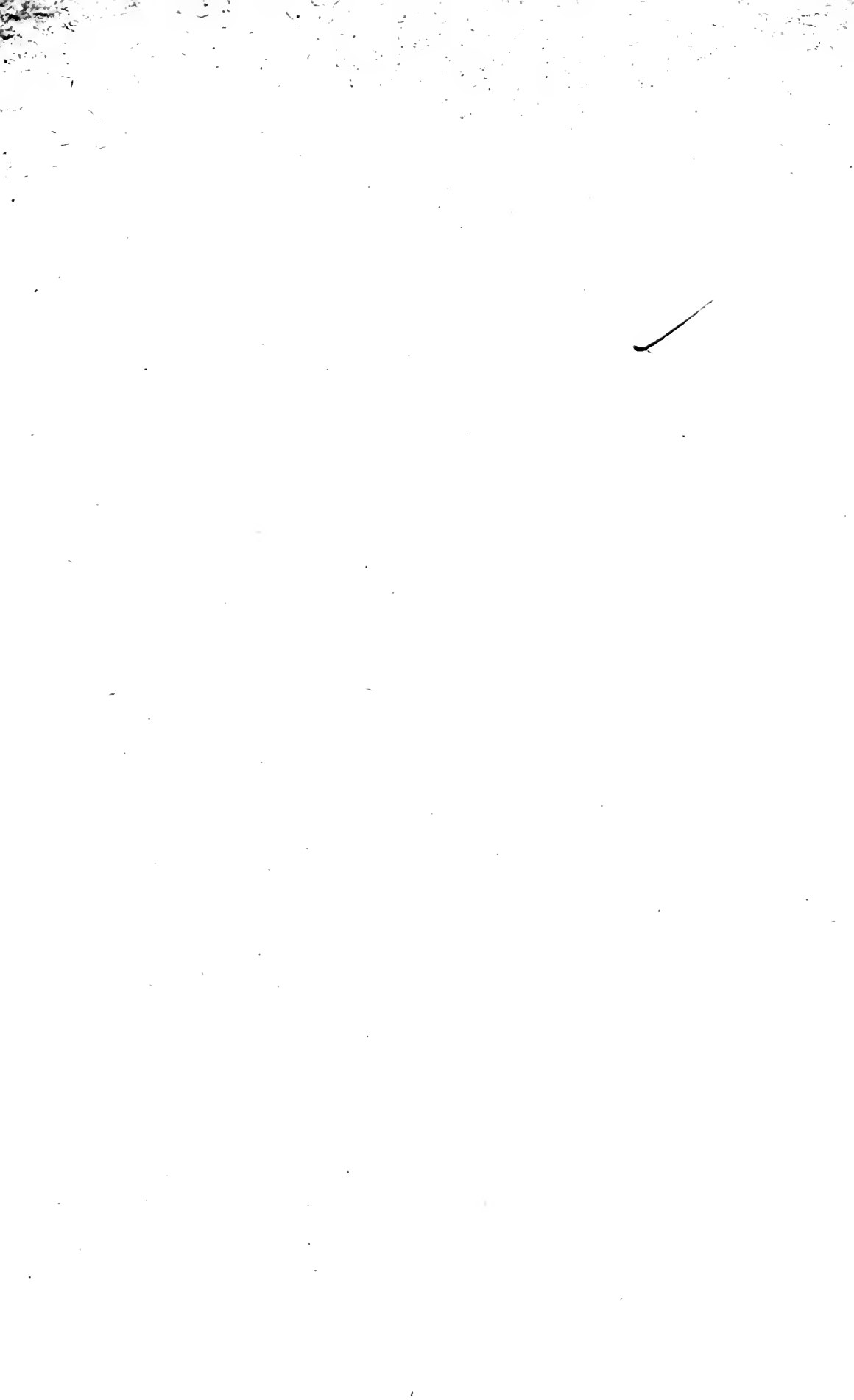
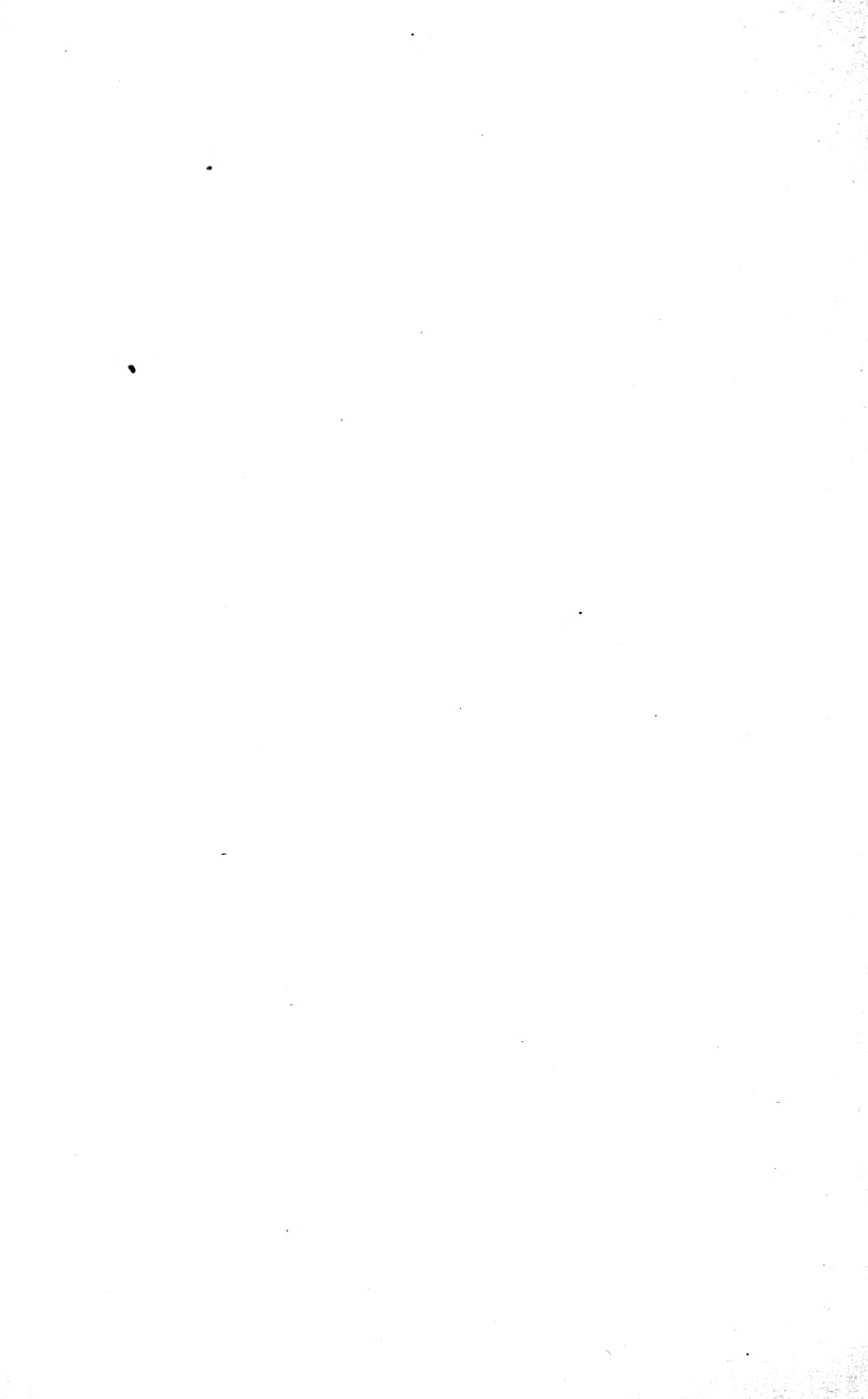


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CLERICAL SUBSCRIPTION
AND
PUBLIC HONOUR

I CORINTHIANS IV. 1-5

*Preached on the Sunday before Christmas, December
20th, 1903, at S. Margaret's, Westminster*

BY

H. HENSLEY HENSON, B.D

CANON OF WESTMINSTER
LATE FELLOW OF ALL SOULS' COLLEGE, OXFORD

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CLERICAL SUBSCRIPTION AND PUBLIC HONOUR

LET A MAN SO ACCOUNT OF US, AS OF MINISTERS OF CHRIST, AND STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD. HERE, MOREOVER, IT IS REQUIRED IN STEWARDS, THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL. BUT WITH ME IT IS A VERY SMALL THING THAT I SHOULD BE JUDGED OF YOU, OR OF MAN'S JUDGMENT: YEA, I JUDGE NOT MINE OWN SELF. FOR I KNOW NOTHING AGAINST MYSELF; YET AM I NOT HEREBY JUSTIFIED: BUT HE THAT JUDGETH ME IS THE LORD. WHEREFORE JUDGE NOTHING BEFORE THE TIME, UNTIL THE LORD COME, WHO WILL BOTH BRING TO LIGHT THE HIDDEN THINGS OF DARKNESS, AND MAKE MANIFEST THE COUNSELS OF THE HEARTS: AND THEN SHALL EACH MAN HAVE HIS PRAISE FROM GOD.—*I Corinthians iv, 1—5.*

THE fourth Sunday in Advent is one of the "Ordination" Sundays, and you will need no further explanation of my choice of subject. This morning I propose to preach to you about the Christian Ministry, a subject at all times of the utmost practical importance, and, at this juncture, of deep and painful interest to every thoughtful and religious member of the National

Church of England. The passage from S. Paul's writings which I have read to you as my text sets forward a view of the Christian Ministry, which is as true to-day in the case of the men who are, as we worship here, kneeling to receive the laying on of hands in Ordination, as in the first age, when the great apostle composed it to describe his own case. In the striking prayer which in the Ordinal immediately precedes the Act of ordaining to the priesthood, this unchangeableness of the Christian Ministry is clearly asserted. After making mention of the "Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Doctors, and Pastors," whom Jesus Christ had "sent abroad into the world" to gather together "a great flock in all the parts of the world, to set forth the eternal praise of God's holy Name," the prayer goes on:—"For these so great benefits of Thy eternal goodness, and for that Thou hast vouchsafed to call these Thy servants here present to the same office and Ministry appointed for the salvation of mankind we render unto Thee most hearty thanks." In early times, under the strain of conflict, and under the influence of notions drawn, not from the Gospel, but from the Roman Law,¹ this

¹ *V.* Principal Lindsay's "The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries." (Hodder and

continuing identity of the Christian Ministry was expressed in the famous dogma of Apostolic Succession, but that dogma is nowise essential to the truth, and must now, in deference to a juster reading of primitive Christian history, and to an honest recognition of the plain teachings of Christian experience, be laid aside. The validity of the Christian Ministry cannot be made to depend upon a specific method of public ordination, whether episcopal, or presbyterian, or any other, but must now, as at the first, depend on the combination of a Divine call of the individual confessed by himself at his own risk, and a formal commission constitutionally conferred by the Christian Society at its own risk. Let no one adventure a separation of these two essentials. They are set in the forefront of our Ordinal. The

Stoughton, 1902.) "Apostolic succession, in the dogmatic sense of that ambiguous term, is the legal fiction required by the legal mind to connect the growing conceptions of the authority of the clergy with the earlier days of Christianity. It served the Christian lawyer in much the same way that another curious legal fiction assisted the pagan civilian. The latter insisted that the government of the Emperors from Augustus to Diocletian was the prolongation of the old republican constitution; the former imagined that the rule of bishops was the prolongation through the generations of the inspired guidance of the original apostles who were the planters of the Church" (p. 279).

first question which the candidate for Deacon's Orders must face, and which carries with it such final importance that it is not repeated in the subsequent ordinations to Priesthood and Episcopate, is this :—"Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God for the promoting of His glory, and the edifying of His people?" To that momentous question the answer is decisive and clear :—"I trust so." It is an immense and solemn declaration, and on the sincerity with which it is made the whole worth of the ministry it claims must depend. May I add that not less solemn is the declaration which he makes, whosoever he be, who tells a Christian Minister, blameless in his life and steadfastly confessing his Vocation of God, that he, in spite of his consciousness of Divine Commission, has no place in the ranks of honourable Christian teachers?

St. Paul's words, then, are before us as an authoritative account of the Christian Ministry as we ourselves know it.

2. But it will fairly be argued that, though this Divine Vocation confessed publicly by the individual is the indispensable basis of the Christian Ministry, yet it is not less the fact that the public exercise of that ministry in any given

church is necessarily hedged round by conditions, imposed by law and enforced by law, and not less by opinion. The Christian Minister must honestly accept the system in which he aspires to take an official position : he must honestly teach, and therefore he must sincerely believe, the Religion of Jesus Christ : he must frankly accept and honourably obey the orders of his lawful superiors. He is “a man under authority.”

These evident conditions of exercising the Christian Ministry are stated in the questions addressed to the Candidates for Ordination, and they are sometimes called the “ORDINATION Vows.” What is the degree of importance and the measure of obligation which these solemn statements possess? Are they to be taken (as Charles I.’s declaration still prefixed to the Articles required with respect to that lengthy and contentious Confession) “in the literal and grammatical sense”? Or may we fairly accept them in a more general way, allowing something for the changes and chances of the many years—more than 240—which have gone by since the last revision of the Ordinal? May we take them with the mental reservation “subject to the altered belief which now obtains among well educated Christians”?

3. Let us take by way of illustration one of

the questions, certainly not the least important. It is brief and unambiguous:—"Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament?" The appointed answer is clear and categorical:—"I DO BELIEVE THEM." It is certain that no ambiguity attached in the minds of the compilers of this question and their contemporaries with respect to the "belief" thus professed. An exact and un-discriminating literalism reigned everywhere supreme. But, as all men know, the situation with respect to the Bible has completely changed, and even the men who are the most strenuous opponents of theological liberty, have to admit the fact. An excellent example of the revolution of ideas which has taken place within the sphere of orthodox opinion may be found in the essay on "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration" contributed by the present BISHOP OF WORCESTER to the volume entitled "Lux Mundi." There¹ we are told that "the Church cannot insist upon the historical character" of the Old Testament narratives; that the historians of Israel enjoyed no immunity from the normal

¹ I quote from the fourth edition. The book has had a very large circulation and is still on sale. We may, therefore, assume that the views therein expressed have not been modified or abandoned by their authors.

defects of primitive writers; that they, like their uninspired contemporaries, “unconsciously idealised” history, and read back into past records a ritual development which was really later, that there is “a considerable idealising element in the Old Testament history”; that the Song of Solomon “is of the nature of a drama,” and the Book of Job “mainly dramatic”; that the earlier narratives of the Pentateuch are “myths or allegorical pictures.” “The present writer” (it is the BISHOP OF WORCESTER, then MR. CHARLES GORE, who speaks), “believing that the modern development of historical criticism is reaching results as sure, where it is fairly used, as scientific inquiry, and feeling therefore that the warning, which the name of GALILEO must ever bring before the memory of churchmen, is not unneeded now, believes also that the Church is in no way restrained from admitting the modifications just hinted at in what has latterly been the current idea of inspiration.” It was not easy to reconcile all this with that “unfeigned belief” in all the Canonical Scriptures which the writer had professed but a few years previously at his Ordination, and it will be within the recollection of many of my hearers that a considerable outburst of orthodox indignation occurred. Many people,

including no less eminent a person than DR. LIDDON, contended that "consistently with public honour" a clergyman could not thus flagrantly depart from the "unambiguous" pledges, on the faith of which he had been ordained.

I was then among those who resisted that orthodox clamour, and maintained that the literal sense of the Ordination formularies could not be fairly pressed, that it was irrational to ignore the advance of knowledge, that, since an alteration of the formularies was practically impossible, it sufficed to make clear to the world the large latitude of interpretation with which they were taken, and then in good faith to take them. I am of the same mind still when another outburst of orthodox indignation is being engineered against a clergyman of the Worcester diocese whose opinions as to one clause of the Apostles' Creed depart from the traditional understanding of that formulary.

(4) Let me say at once that I refer to MR. BEEBY's case with the utmost reluctance. My long acquaintance with BISHOP GORE, and the deep personal regard which I feel for him, make any criticism of his action extremely painful to me, but my own name has been publicly brought into the matter, and there seems no

course open to me except that which I now adopt.

Moreover, the Bishop has deliberately addressed himself to the public opinion of the country. He has publicly stigmatised as dishonourable a clergyman, long beneficed in his diocese, against whom he alleges nothing save that his understanding of a clause in the Apostles' Creed differs from that which has been traditional in the Church. He has coerced that clergyman into a reluctant resignation of his benefice, and has exposed him to the general reprobation of honest men. All this is much more than the oppression of an individual. It constitutes a formal challenge to every English clergyman who claims, in whatever measure, liberty to depart from the letter of the traditional standards of doctrine.

It is not a question of approving MR. BEEBY'S opinions ; he approaches the questions at issue from another standpoint than mine, and sees them in a different perspective ; but when I am asked, as you and I together with all other English Church folk are asked, to hound MR. BEEBY out of the Anglican Ministry because, while honestly accepting the Creed as a whole, he cannot conscientiously affirm the traditional sense of a particular clause in it, I conceive myself honourably bound to say

publicly that in my judgment he is being treated with great unfairness. Ought we to concede the right of any bishop to go behind the deliberate assent and profession of his clergy, and to insist on their accepting specific clauses of the Creed in the specific senses which the Bishop may himself approve? Ought we not to protest against any Bishop constituting himself a censor of books, and prohibiting his clergy from taking part in theological discussion temperately carried on in a learned journal? Must we not resent this new attempt to erect within the English Church some counterpart to the notorious "Index" of the Church of Rome? Even if such conduct be not legally *ultra vires*, must it not be allowed that it is contrary to the best traditions of the Church of England, and in itself unreasonable? Is it not more in harmony with our Anglican traditions to say with DR. SANDAY, whose name has become among us the very synonym of thoughtful orthodoxy, that in this matter of accepting formularies, "the total effect is the important thing"? "Let it suffice (he says) that, by subscribing to the Creed as a whole, the man declares himself heart and soul a Christian." You cannot rightly or reasonably go beyond that when you are dealing with doctrinal state-

ments, which had their origin in far distant age, when men thought under conditions which have long ceased, and had no consciousness of the problems which perplex the understandings and trouble the consciences of modern believers. You cannot go beyond the demand that a man shall declare himself heart and soul a Christian, and, for the rest, be willing to accept the practical system of the Church. In pressing for more than that, in making new tests out of old clauses, you will probably shut out the best and most scrupulously truthful Christians, you will certainly not protect the Church against the unthinking, the ignorant, and the insincere. The Church of England to-day may well adopt the words of one of the most honoured of her older divines, HAMMOND, spoken indeed with respect to that Article of the Apostles' Creed which affirms Christ's descent into hell, but surely not inapplicable to that which affirms His Virgin Birth, that it "may be taken in a latitude, and either not determined to any one interpretation, or resolved to be capable of more ; and so the words be received, the particular sense one way or other will be indifferent to them that sincerely follow that light which is offered to them." You cannot push your inquiries into the hidden

places of a man's deliberate conviction : you may fairly ask of the candidate for Holy Orders the confession of discipleship ; you ought to take securities for his character, for his knowledge, and for his ability ; but if you venture beyond those limits you transform your venerable formulæ into irrational shibboleths and instruments of oppression. The self-respecting minister, obediently fulfilling his ministry as the law provides, may meet your impertinent questionings with the Apostle's profession, " He that judgeth me is the Lord."

(5) The question which the BISHOP OF WORCESTER has so unexpectedly propounded to English Churchmen is one of far-reaching significance. Is the National Church of England in the future, as in the past, to give a place among her accredited teachers to such men as ARNOLD, THIRLWALL, MAURICE, JOWETT, TEMPLE, STANLEY, and FARRAR, or not? All those men were told, often with much vehemence, that " consistently with public honour " they could not retain their official positions. The particular contentions on which they departed from the prevailing opinion were various, but the underlying issue was the same as that which is now before us. MR. BEEBY may or may not be a sound theologian ; his opinions may or may not

ultimately prevail, but in claiming for himself a larger liberty than the mere words of the Creed allow, he stands in the succession of the men whose honoured names I have recounted. In the interest of religious liberty itself we cannot consent to lend ourselves to this resuscitated bigotry, to be parties to the latest attempt to reduce the National Church to a mere soi-disant Anglo-Catholic sect, to acquiesce in an attempt to arrest by the violence of abused authority the movements of Christian thought, and to petrify intelligence by direct appeals to the facile fanaticism of the unthinking and the uninformed. The deeper religious thinkers among us will rather accept BISHOP WESTCOTT'S dictum that "as long as experience is incomplete there can be no finality in the definition of doctrine?" It will be a grave misfortune if the English laity allow the political distractions of the time to fill their minds so completely that they take no heed to what is passing within the Church of England, and, by sheer inadvertence, permit honest men to be oppressed, and the old heritage of Anglican tolerance to be endangered. I have spoken as if the issue mainly concerned the clergy, but though obviously they must be the first to face it, they have not properly any more concern with

it than other Christians. There are not two versions of fundamental Christian truth—a longer one for the clergy, and a shorter one for the laity. As disciples of the One Divine Teacher our obligations in respect of belief are absolutely the same; and every layman who, when he repeats the Creeds, knows that he must do so with some mental reservations, and who also knows that, in spite of these, nay because of them, the Creeds on his lips do utter the highest truth he knows, and to himself and to the rest of men do mean that he is heart and soul a Christian, I say, every layman of whom this is true is “consistently with public honour” required to acquit MR. BEEBY of the injurious imputation made on him by his diocesan.

We are drawing near to the Birthday of Christ, and all things should speak to us of reconciliation and forbearance. It grieves me more than I can say thus to be compelled to call you to the always painful and at this time repulsive subject of Christian conflict. But no choice is left me. The Birth into the World of Him whom we believe to be the Incarnate Truth is profaned if its tender and hallowing associations are made auxiliaries to a policy which, however it may masque itself under

sacred pretences, is essentially the old, old policy of persecution. Let our devotion to the Divine Master, Whom we worship, move us to a more scrupulous justice, a more considerate charity, a more resolute devotion to the freedom which He brought us. Let the Christmas Bells bear to us anew the vocation to larger sympathy and bolder faith ; let them, indeed, for us

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife.
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand ;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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