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# RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES:

A SERMON PREACHED AT

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GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET,

AND AFTERWARDS READ AS A PAPER BEFORE

THE

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BY THE

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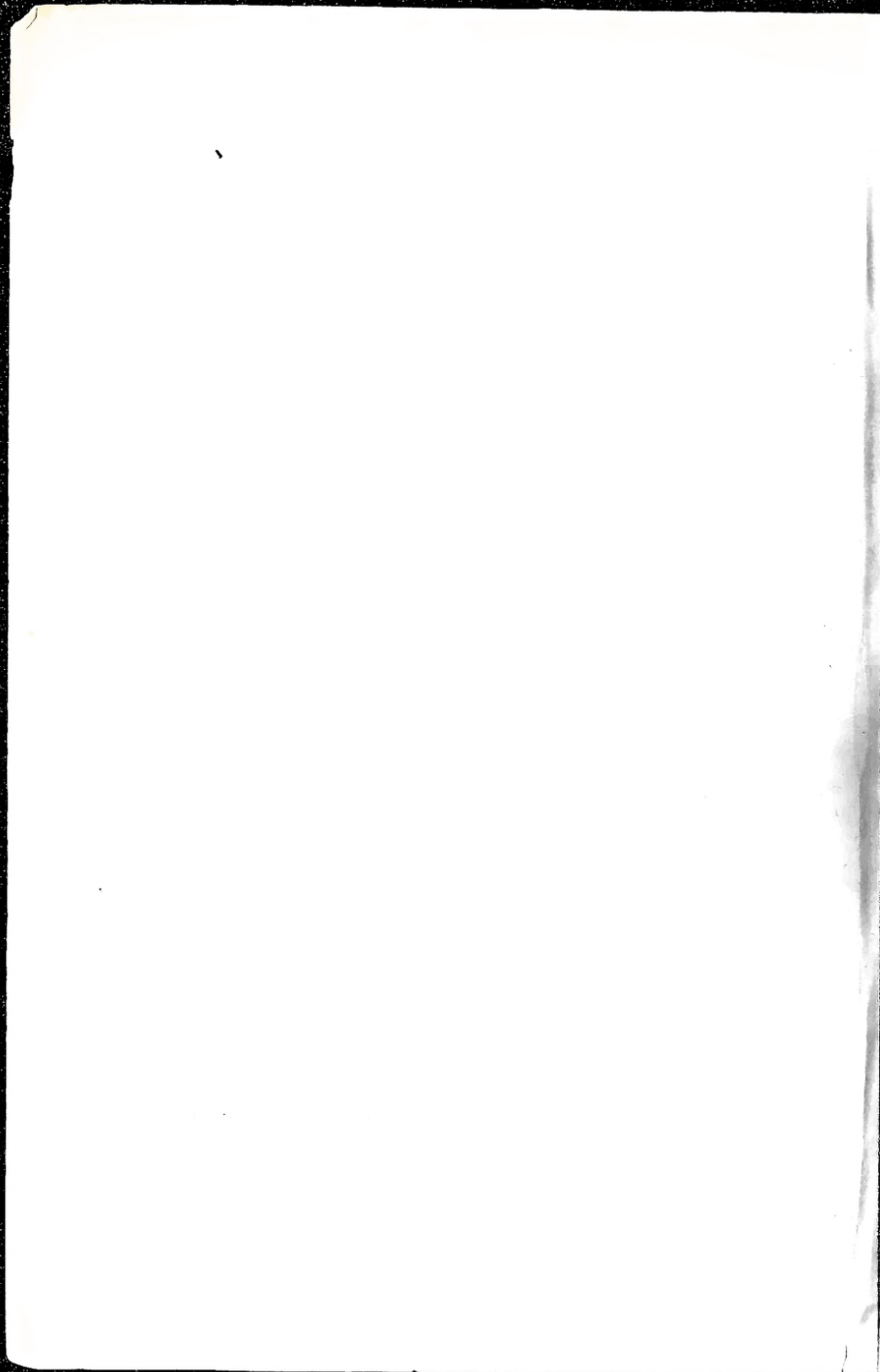
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## RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES.

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ST. LUKE xii. 51.

*“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you nay, but rather division.”*

For those who are disposed to take a sentimental view of religion, it must be infinitely distressing to find that the revelation of Jesus Christ has not proved that complete panacea for all evils social and theological which their own *a priori* principles laid down that it ought to be. Peace on earth was the anticipatory announcement of the Coming Man. *Not* Peace, but a Sword, his own account of his mission, more than borne out by the event. Before he came there was that stagnation which men artificially make and misname Peace. Since that time they have ever been ready to fight and slay one another for their religion. Every new era of Reformation has been a fresh development of odium theologicum, until the old encomium is quite reversed, and people cry out “See how these Christians hate one another;” and on the Augustinian principle, but with a new meaning, the seed of every evolution in Church development has been the blood of martyrs. Every Reformer from

Christ himself to the Wesleys has realised this. The method and measure only of their misery has differed : the principle that inflicted it was identical. The Scribes and Pharisees crucified Christ. The Bishop of Lincoln erases from the tombstone of a dead child the title which courtesy awarded to its Wesleyan father. In proportion to the purity of their faith have men been prone to

Prove their doctrines orthodox  
By apostolic blows and knocks ;

and to

Call fire, and sword, and desolation,  
A godly, thorough Reformation.

Along with general progress, religious stagnation has had the tendency to pass into its violent antithesis, and in both cases, general and special, has humanity been the gainer. Only in proportion as it has caught the contagion has religion in any degree seemed not to deserve the stigma cast upon it by Mr. Buckle of being the static as opposed to the dynamic force in Society.

It may be edifying, and certainly will not be uninteresting to trace in one or two typical cases this condition of human stagnation met by what we are bold to call the genuine revulsion of Christian Faith and Energy, and collaterally to notice some of those Com-

promises by which the ingenuity of man tries to override the great principle "Not Peace but Division"—the *quieta non movere* method which is characteristic of so great a portion of modern orthodoxy.

In the Jewish Synagogue at the date of the Christian era, degenerated though it was held to be from the perfect centralisation of the Temple pure and simple, we have an admirable picture of full-blown Sacerdotalism, which the recent lectures of Dr. Benisch, at St. George's Hall, only amplified in more minute details without questioning the vraisemblance of the New Testament account. The result was, to a great extent, the stagnation we spoke of. True, the Pharisees were disposed to carry things with a high hand; they were the Ritualists of the hour; while Broad Churchmen in the shape of Sadducees spread into the very highest quarters doctrines which seemed to spiritualise away a good deal of the antique Faith and olden discipline. But on the whole the Jewish Church represented to a very satisfactory extent that artificial Peace which the Sacerdotalism of every age creates and pronounces "Very good;" and, in complete opposition to this came the system of Christ. Aiming in the Judæan Ministry at being nothing more than a reformation and expansion of Judaism to meet the growing needs of humanity, it was driven by the fulminations of the Sanhedrim into fierce revolution out among the

Galilæan hills, and finally culminated in the fatal mistake of Calvary.

Here we have the two poles in extreme opposition. On one side the established faith, with its prestige of centuries, its delicate *nuances* of theological opinion just to relieve the monotony of Infallibility—on the other the levelling doctrines of Nazareth branded with the stigma of Golgotha.

Between these two came the accommodations and compromises which some pretend to find even in St. Paul himself—in the anathemas hurled at the Corinthian Church, and at those who questioned his personal apostleship; and which certainly were discernible in the constant efforts of well-meaning heretics to drag the Christian schism back into the respectable position of a Jewish sect.

And so History repeats itself. Sown in the blood of martyrs, established by the policy of Constantine, developed in the east and west by the finesse of Patriarchs and Popes, the Christian Church stood after fifteen centuries curiously in the same position as the Jewish Synagogue had done—and just as that had developed, in a precisely similar period, out of the simple institutions of Sinai. The so-called Catholic Church stood supreme in Western Europe, until Luther, like a second Baptist, sounded his note of defiance “Repent,” “Reform;” and again the reformation was refused, the reformers were persecuted, and, in Eng-

land, like another Galilee, the battle of Faith and Free Thought seemed likely to be fought to the very knife.

When, lo! another compromise. The Anglican Church, under Royal Supremacy, threw herself into the breach. It is no sort of disrespect to speak of her thus as the result of a compromise. The fact stands recorded in the very structure of her formularies and articles, just as the successive changes in the structure of the globe are written in the solemn letters of the igneous and the stratified rocks. A fresh totality was formed by the superposition of the new doctrines on the antique faith. We can concede thus much without joining Mr. Froude to attribute all the cardinal virtues to Henry VIII., as Head of the Church, or wailing with the *Church Times* about "the lamentable schism of the sixteenth century." The Anglican Church first, and the Protestant sects afterwards, were efforts more or less respectable, more or less graceful, more or less successful, to graft the new opinions on the old trunk.

Our position as ministers and members of the Church of England shows that we hold the Anglican Communion to have a logical *locus standi*. What else counteracts the centrifugal force which would otherwise drive us off into the abysses of theological space, until we reached the position of the Dialectical Society itself, and accepted nothing save as the conclusion of a syllogism?

But is not the same apparently inevitable mistake being made over again,—the mistake of High Priest and Sanhedrim as opposed to Christ, of Pope and Cardinal as opposed to the Reformers? Do not the words of the Founder still stand good, “Nay, but rather division:” “Not peace but a sword?” We are always trying to do away with Divisions—to wreathe, prematurely and precociously, the Sword with the Olive Branch.

On one side stereotyped Faith, on the other crude Reason. On both sides Intolerance; on neither Conciliation—is not that a fair statement of what we see around us?

What shall we do then? Try to eliminate either of these opposed elements—the static or the dynamic? As well seek for the Philosopher’s Stone or the Elixir Vitae. As wisely think to ensure peace by suspending either the centripetal or the centrifugal in the balanced forces of the universe. From the collision of these forces results the well-being of humanity, as the symmetry of our planetary orbits.

Shall we, on the contrary, drift into an Epicurean optimism, and say, Whatever *is* is best? The alternative would seem scarcely necessary. It is surely possible to agree to differ. The endeavour to develop Pure Faith is the Idol of the Churchman: to excise Faith the Idol of the Philosopher (if we may borrow a



Baconian term.) The supreme mistake is to carry into science the dogmatisms of theology. The opposite error, though not so fatal, palpably *is* erroneous, to import into theology, which claims to be in some degree a matter of *à priori* revelation, the purely inductive method of science.

Is there no *via media*—no spicy equatorial zone between these poles of Pure Faith and utter Free Thought? That is the problem we set ourselves so wearily to solve in our Churches, Communities, and Parties. The pervading error is that we all claim finality. Each assumes to have ultimated truth: and, worse than all, wants to call down fire from Heaven on those who differ.

Surely here come in the words of the Master, "Ye know not what Spirit ye are of."

Can any Christian read the posthumous work of John Stuart Mill, or the recent utterances of Professor Tyndall at Belfast, and say there is nothing in common between true Theism and self-styled Materialism?

On the other hand will those who make of the works of the Philosophers what they accuse the Christians of making of the Bible—will they deny the existence of a missing link in science—a failure of Philosophy to cover all the knowable? Is it necessary to assume a sort of mental emasculation in every one who accepts anything on trust? Is that not what Lord Lytton

called "the most stubborn of all bigotries—the fanaticism of unbelief?" Such was scarcely the doctrine of him who wrote on the Scientific use of the Imagination thus:—"The clergy of England—at all events the clergy of London—have nerve enough to listen to the strongest views which any one amongst us would care to utter; and they invite, if they do not challenge, men of the most decided opinions to state and stand by those opinions in open court. No theory upsets them. Let the most destructive hypothesis be stated only in the language current among gentlemen, and they look it in the face \* \* \* smiting the theory, if they do not like it, with honest secular strength. In fact *the greatest cowardice of the present day are not to be found among the clergy but within the pale of science itself.*"

The question of questions at the present hour is whether it be not possible to elaborate something like a *Christian Positivism*—the terms are not contradictory—which, accepting the broad basis of the Christian Revelation, and leaving its extent undefined, should range—not below, not above, but co-ordinately therewith the great demonstrations of science; making of the revelations of faith and the facts of science, not two discrepant books, but simply two volumes in the Great Book of Nature—each, in the truest sense, a Revelation, neither of the two (in the words of the

Athanasian Creed) before or after the other, greater or less than the other. Is it chimerical to look for such an issue of our divisions?

Is it not, at all events more hopeful to seek thus to utilise those inevitable divisions than to try to drill men into an artificial and unreal unity either on the side of implicit Faith or licensed Scepticism?

Such utilitarianism is not—need it be said?—the present tendency on either side. On the one hand there stand the Dogma of Infallibility and the Vatican Decrees which no special pleading in the world will ever convince men to be anything like an extension of Magna Charta; on the other there is what has been clearly defined by its promulgator as not the atheistic position which reluctantly doubts the existence of God, but the antitheistic which dogmatically, and in the very spirit of the Vatican Decrees, denies such existence—and still between these poles any number of compromises good, bad, and indifferent, temperate, tropical, and frigid.

It is for some such compromise we plead; and therefore would not indiscriminately condemn all or any, though neither would we lose sight of the fact that they *are* compromises and accommodations. The grand mistake is not the putting the new wine into the old bottles (though that is proverbially a delicate and dangerous experiment), but the insisting that the

wineskins are intact when the wine is palpably spilt before our eyes.

In all things charity: agreement to differ: the simple logical processes of abstraction and generalisation—are not these the methods by which we may get at the essence of the Christian Faith and Morals?

What, on the contrary, do we do? Pass a Bill, nominally to “put down Ritualism,” but which will certainly “put down” defects as well as excess of rubrical orthodoxy, even if the “putting down” anything or anybody were not as much an anachronism in the Reformed Church, as the excommunication of an offender by Paul was alien from the spirit of him who raised the sinful woman from the ground, and bade her go and sin no more when none of her accusers were found capable of casting a stone at her.

The infallibility which we look for in a Vatican Decree, comes incongruously enough from Fulham or Lambeth: and whereas the Catholic only holds infallible the decisions of Pius IX. given *ex cathedra*, we—some of us—are disposed to accept as final all the utterances of our Episcopate—the Fulham Code of Morals—the Canterbury Standard of Faith (each no doubt of the very purest kind),—the diatribes of Dr. Wordsworth against race-horses, Wesleyan Ministers, and Cremation!

The cardinal clerical virtue at the present moment is

holding one's tongue—*Tacere tutum est*—the being content to keep quiet : not to have " views " either in the direction of Dr. Pusey or Bishop Colenso. What a commentary on the elasticity of our Establishment is the simultaneous presence of each of these dignitaries within its comprehensive fold ! Whoever gravitates towards either of those poles is labelled in the Index Expurgatorius of episcopal regards a " dangerous man." But it is too late ; there are others equally high in dignity to those just mentioned, who have set the fashion of speaking out, and the Muscular Christians among our clergy are taking up the old battle cry from Marmion :—

" On, Stanley, on !"

And as with the priests, so with the people. They are beginning to see that the assumption of authority in a body whose very *raison d'être* is the emancipation of its adherents from Jewish and Roman bondage is an incongruity and an anachronism. If they like genuflexions and a full band in church, they feel they have a right to them ; if moral essays and a shortened service, who shall say them nay ? The question of establishment or disestablishment is one more likely to come from without than within ; but already the mysterious words of Mr. Miall, with reference to possibly uncongenial allies of the Liberationist, point towards a very novel reproduction of the junction between the Pharisees and Herodians.

Recognising, then, as we are taught on highest authority to do, the supreme authority of the individual conscience, we may still discern a work for the combined consciences of the many fused into sympathetic union in churches, just as the individual duties and rights of men run up into their social rights and duties as citizens of a State; but we see no reason for churches any more than nations claiming to represent mankind exhaustively; and a judicious balance of power stands far above any supremacy of one faith over another.

Our lots as Englishmen, whether in Church or State, will, we venture to think, well bear comparison with any; but it would be the poorest insularity to deem that we exhaust excellence in either capacity. To assume authority in a system which, whether we like it or not, is the outcome of that schism of the sixteenth century as well as the previous schism of the first, is as incongruous as that aping of national supremacy which too often renders our countrymen ridiculous when they come into contact with other and more cosmopolitan people.

It is thus I feel that without sacrificing one iota of our individual convictions we may still comport ourselves courteously towards those forms of faith or systems of discipline that differ even most widely from our own, whether in the direction of sacerdotalism or scepticism.

The very fact—so travellers tell us—that at the equator the sun is all the year overhead, and that at the poles there is the wearisome monotony of the one long day and dreary night, makes more enjoyable the changes of our temperate climate—the long summer days, the short grey winter evenings, the alternate sunshine and rain—“which things” surely “are an allegory.”

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