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"CHURCH PROSPECTS."

MR. LLEWELYN DAVIES, writing in the January *Contemporary* on this subject, refers thus to that stumbling block—the Athanasian Creed.

"When a Rubrics Bill is before either House of Parliament there is nothing to prevent the moving of an amendment to omit this Rubric, and to remove the Athanasian Creed from its present place in the Prayer-Book to the neighbourhood of the Articles."

We confess ourselves unable to see how such a move would clear the ground cumbered by this objectionable "confession of faith," the result, as all the world knows, or should know, of a theological quarrel between Bishop Alexander, of Alexandria, and a Presbyterian named Arius. It may not be amiss to refresh a little the memory regarding this famous (or infamous) creed; the feud between these two learned men waxed fast and furious as to whether "the Son is totally and essentially distinct from the Father, the first and noblest of those created Beings formed out of nothing, or whether he is, and was originally, of the same essence as the Father, viz., God himself in another form."

To settle this unseemly dispute (during which the Bishop excommunicates the Presbyterian,) the Emperor Constantine, in 325, assembled the famous Council of the then entire Christian Church (at Bythynia.)

This Council continued in force for two months, exchanging blows as well as words in the warmth of argument. The Council finally decided, as was perhaps to be expected, in favour of the Bishop, and condemned Arius the Presbyterian to exile, compelling his adherents to subscribe to that confession now called the Nicene Creed.

So far we see there is no appearance of Athanasius in the matter, who at this time was Archdeacon of Alexandria, and, as secretary to the Nicene Council, drew up the formularies of that creed. He supported his Bishop's view, and

it was out of compliment to him for his strenuous opposition to Arius and his extreme advocacy of the Nicene Creed that the *later* one bore his name.

Athanasius succeeded Bishop Alexander, and so impulsive was the zeal of this good saint, that in the cause of the Nicene Creed we hear of his flogging Bishops, burning sacred books, breaking the jewelled chalice, overthrowing Communion tables, nay, that he razed to the ground (for the glory of God) the churches of his contumacious fellow-workers.

Doubt, however, exists as to the origin of this Athanasian Creed, which is said to have been composed by a drunken monk of the middle ages, who was surely sober enough to see the monstrous absurdity of the rival claims of "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost."

The proposition of Mr. Davies, firstly, to remove this creed from its present place in the Rubric to the region of the Articles (of which it already forms a part); and, secondly, that the laity should resolve, with the Archbishops, to strike it, "not out of the Prayer-Book, but out of the mouths of ordinary men and women, of the poor and of children," strikes us as nothing less than a cowardly form of compromise, showing to the full the entire rottenness of a system redolent of pitfalls and snares for honest men.

Mr. Davies, as a minister of the Church of England, *has* signed the Thirty-nine Articles, *has* sworn his entire belief "that this Athanasian Creed, with the others, is to be thoroughly believed and received as truth, which truth can be proved from Holy Scripture." Nevertheless, he speaks of himself "as one of those clergy in whose churches this creed is not used;" so, while swearing to its truth, provable from Holy Scripture, he refuses to read it to his congregation, acknowledging the while that the Rubric directing its use is unambiguous, that is, obligatory. But surely the Articles, barring as they do the threshold of the church, are equally obligatory, and, before dealing with the Rubric question, Parliament had better take in hand the more serious matter, and erase from the law of the land the statute of 1562, a statute enforcing subscription in the name of God and for his service, to beliefs in a series of enigmatical propositions, containing absurdities, contradic-

tions, and irrational conclusions, summed up in the confession of faith, that forbids us to say, "There be three Gods or three Lords; compels us by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be God or Lord, yet declares that, if we confound the Persons, or divide the substance, the flames of an eternal Hell shall be our portion."

Mr. Davies evidently feels that he and his brother clergy are in a dilemma; they must either offend their congregations or forego the use of this enlightened Christian dogma. "To abstain from a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance" is certainly to his credit as a rational, sensible creature, though by so doing he breaks his ordination vows—nor, until removed from the Rubric, could the refusal to read this creed legally better the condition of himself or of those clergy who follow his example.

A learned inquirer as to the dogma of the Deity of Christ, says, "The Sun itself is not more visible in the bright blue sky of a summer's day than is the fact evidenced by the religious history of the past 2,000 years, that the dogma of the Deity of Christ is the product of the speculations of ancient heathen philosophy carried to insane lengths; and is not as our clergy represent it to be, and as the English people are taught to regard it, a "special revelation from God."

Between this Scylla and Charybdis, this God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, what wonder if our barques theological founder with all their freight dogmatic; what wonder that not only human beliefs but human intellects stagger blindly, and suffer shipwreck; what wonder if noble minds "all o'er wrought" turn in disgust and weariness from the contemplation of the *impossible*, and seek within the source of those diviner impulses, that stir the soul to love, pity, justice, and mercy.

Until the scales fall from eyes that should see clear; until, casting aside all fear in their search for truth, the leaders and teachers of the people dare sift to its foundation, this institution of 2,000 years, this Church, with its army of apostles, martyrs, hierarchs, and alas! humbugs, and prove its origin to have been a myth; prove that the teacher on whose traditional saying, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I found my Church, against which the gates

of Hell shall not prevail," had no divine authority for saying it; prove that the Church is equally ignorant of the nature of its Christ as of the God in whose service it claims to exist, then, and then only, may we consider ourselves in any way superior to the grand old heathen "whose sublime speculations concerning the Great Unknown we have corrupted and dwarfed into a Church dogma, and hardened into a frozen mass of stupidity and blasphemy, embedded in such creeds as the Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostolic."

While reading articles like this on "Church Prospects," from such men as Mr. Davies, seeing how persistently they ignore truths, they must know, though may be dimly, we have scant hope that the scales will fall in our generation; less faith that the men who openly advise that "the Athanasian Creed shall not be struck out from the Articles, but prohibited to ordinary men, women, the poor, and children," can ever be the pioneers out of the dark, tangled wood of ignorance, superstition and pagan barbarisms, pioneers to the presence of unsullied truth, to that world of unfettered thought, where no shams, no compromise, no worldly-expediency motives, shall hide the face of knowledge, or bar to the soul her search for, "that power, in darkness whom we guess," that being we call God as he really is.