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harmony of truth and order a model to other parts of the Church Catholic, or will she be swept away into the lumber-room as an institution that has betrayed its trust and is no longer of any use in the world ?

F. MEYRICK.

ART. II.—THE SUPREME AUTHORITY TO THE
CONSCIENCE, THE STATE, AND THE CHURCH.

LET us begin with the conscience. Is there a supreme authority to which the human conscience owes deference and submission ?

If it be answered that there is such an authority, and that it is the will of God, I do not see how any Christian can refuse concurrence to this statement. But more commonly some other authority is assumed to have a right to dictate to the conscience. The Word of God, in the sense of the volume of Holy Scripture, has been held to be the authority which the human conscience is bound to consult and to obey. A Book, according to this view, has been provided which has the exceptional character of being entirely true and containing no error. This being so, what has the human conscience to do but to study this Book and to follow its dictates ? The Bible, it is contended, is the infallible guide for man's thought and belief and conduct, and therefore it is the ultimate and supreme authority to the conscience. There is another view which values the Bible very highly, but places above it the Church, the keeper of the Bible, with an infallible voice to dictate belief and conduct. Of these two views, the former places the Bible in the highest place, and would allow a subordinate and dependent right of command to the Church ; the latter places the Church in the highest place, but assumes that the Church will reverently interpret and apply the Bible. There is a third view, still more common, which regards the conscience as an authority to itself, and an authority which to the right-minded man is absolutely supreme. But I do not see how those who hold any one of these three views can decline to admit that the will of God is to the human conscience an authority superior to the Bible, the Church, or the conscience itself.

To say, "I must obey my conscience," sounds like a true and lofty morality. But I would urge that all the truth of this confession, and much more, is contained in the saying, "I must obey the will of God." The conscience in one who puts it under the will of God becomes an ear rather than a

voice. And the change of title from a voice to an ear will be found helpful and illuminating. The conscience in us is the ear which hears the voice of God. We assume that we are so made as to be able to hear the voice of Him who makes us. That is the mystery of our spiritual nature. We are so related to our Maker, who is to the Christian the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He can speak to us, and we can hear Him. And it will be admitted that there can be no more ultimate account of duty than that we owe unreserved submission to our Maker and heavenly Father. There can be nothing behind or above the will of our God. When a man says, "I must obey my conscience," what he ought to mean is: "I must obey the will of God, my Maker and heavenly Father. It will be wrong in me if, for whatever reason, under the intimidation of any danger or under the attraction of any inducement, I refuse to obey the will of my God."

I may have a very strong conviction as to what is right in some matter. That conviction has been produced in me by various influences, of which I could give but a very imperfect account. The conviction has for the moment a right to direct my action. But the conviction is not infallible, nor guaranteed against change. A conviction, instead of being strong, may be weak; or there may be uncertainty in the place of settled conviction. To take as a rule, "I must act according to my conviction," may be quite satisfactory to a very self-confident and shut-minded person, but will be to others very unsatisfactory. There are many who will say: "I know and admit that I am bound to do what is right, at any cost; it is clear to me that I ought to be absolutely ruled by the will of God. But I cannot find in myself an oracle that will lay down for me what is right, or declare to me God's will; and I want to know what is right, and what my God, if I could hear Him, is bidding me do."

It is this want that is answered by those who hold that the Bible or the Church is the oracle for the human conscience to consult. But it has been ordained, I believe, by Divine Providence—"by the God of heaven and earth, greatly providing for mankind"—that neither of these authorities should be able to perform the functions of an oracle. If we want to know what is the right opinion on a question of controversy, or what action we should take in respect of a problem of individual duty, we are not likely to obtain a definite answer from either the Bible or the Church. It would not be good for us, as rational and spiritual creatures, as God's children, to have an oracle to decide our doubts for us. But then, how is the poor human conscience situated? If there is no avail-

able oracle to tell us what we are to believe and how we are to act, what means have we of learning what the will of God is ?

That is a question not to be evaded by those who hold that conscience, in the moral sense, is the recognition of the supreme authority of God's will. And the answer they must give is that God reveals His will, in some manner and degree, so that action may be guided by it, to those who desire to know it and to serve it. Life, human life, is the chief instrument of God's education of His human children. The will of the living God, or the living will of God, is working—must it not be?—in all human affairs: those of the individual, those of societies smaller and greater, and those of the human race. And one discernible operation of the living will of our God is to hinder His children from depending on oracles. He has been making it impossible for us to obtain immediate direction from the Bible or the Church. He breaks the false props upon which men would like to lean instead of looking to His living will; He uses manifold means, according to His wisdom, for revealing His will to men and pressing it upon them for guidance.

In the light of this belief existing traditions receive a wonderful consecration. The maxim, "Whatever is right," can hardly have been stated or accepted by anyone as unqualified truth. That a good deal of what is wrong is an assumption on which every human being is always acting. But the principle that we are instructed and guided by the living will of God leads us to hold that whatever is right, except so far as, and until, any part of it is perceived to be wrong. This is a doctrine which goes a long way, but which will commend itself, I believe, to those who test and prove it by pressing it to its consequences. It assumes that all men are under Divine instruction. We are not allowed to limit the communications of the will of God to elect believers in Jesus Christ. To all men everywhere, God, the Saviour of all men, is showing some light, to which those who love light may be loyal. We feel reluctant, I imagine, to admit this when we contemplate a backward heathen race. But there is a better and a worse everywhere, and the better is the will of God revealing itself, and attracting those to whom He gives the grace to be attracted. And the traditions of every race and household—those which have held the receivers of them together, which have been supports of order and right, which have favoured reverence and docility, which have rebuked selfishness and promoted kindness—these are entitled to acceptance, and have authority for all who, in whatever partial blindness, submit themselves to the will and light of God, until clearer light and the pressure of life prove them to

be untenable. We have two great sayings which contain this doctrine; one is that of our Lord: "If any man wills to do the Father's will, he will know whether My teaching is from God or is only from Myself"; the other is St. Paul's: "By manifestation of the truth I commend myself to every conscience of men in the sight of God." Every man, Jew or Gentile, Christian or non-Christian, has in him an ear for truth, an eye for light, a soul that cries "Abba, Father," to the living God; by listening for truth, by looking for light, by moving towards the Father, he will continually be enabled to lay hold on something better than something that is; but until he can do this, he is right in making the best of the traditions that have come down to him.

No theory will save us from practical difficulties of judgment when a question of belief or action presents itself to us. Difficulties, we may reasonably conclude, are exercises by the use of which the Divine Instructor trains us. The conscience is no guide to itself; neither the Bible nor the Church will answer our inquiries as infallible oracles. Our God, in keeping the ultimate authority to Himself as the alone infallible Instructor, pledges Himself not to fail or betray His dependent children. But He has His ways, which are not as our ways. Take such a case as a change of religion. Do we not see one conscientious person rejecting the appeal of a truer and better religion, and another conscientious person going over to a less true and less wholesome religion? Such instances are perplexing, and baffle our judgment. They compel us to admit our incompetency to judge. But there are things which God can see, though they are hidden from us. A man may do courageously what seems to him to be right, but he may not have done all that he might have done to learn what is right. It is also conceivable and possible that one who makes a change which is not in itself for the better may be making one which for him is better. Mistakes have their own instructing value. But no perplexities should have power to destroy our hold of these primary principles—that there is a living will of God for every man, and that this will is to be learnt by self-surrender, teachableness, and experience. The voice of conscience in each man should be, So far as I can ascertain what is right—that is, what is the will of God for me—I ought to do this; and, God helping me, I will do it.

The notion that any man, however religious or illuminated he may be, has in him a secret guide, which dispenses him from obtaining information and exercising his judgment like his fellow-men, and which he must follow wherever it may lead him, is dispelled by the sovereign truth that a conscientious man is one who disinterestedly endeavours to find

out the will of God and to do it. The living will of God is the supreme authority to every conscience of men, and every man has to ascertain what God's will for him is by the help of authorities, by reflection, and by the witness of experience.

Again, is there any authority to which the State owes deference and submission? The same answer must be given as when the conscience was in question. The State owes allegiance to the living will of God, and is bound to be guided in its action by that will.

There are those who hold that the State is one ruler, and that God is another. Those who think thus generally personify the State as Cæsar. Cæsar and God, they assume, have different provinces, and neither should meddle with the other's dominion; the individual man who finds himself to be under both Cæsar and God is bound to keep his relation to the one separate from his relation to the other, and to discharge his obligations to each separately. The members of the Free Churches and the anti-Erastian Anglicans appear to recognise an ultimate sovereign authority in Cæsar or the State over the civil province; but the Roman Catholic holds that the State is subject to the Pope of Rome as representing the Church, the Pope being the Divinely appointed ruler of the world, supreme over all individuals and all societies.

In the old time, when Kings governed as well as reigned, the ruler was believed to be under Divine authority as much as his individual subjects—more so, indeed, on account of his heavy responsibility and the wide-reaching influence of his action. No one doubted that rulers were bound to rule in the fear of God. The duty of subjects towards the ruler was never separated from the ruler's duty to God. The ruler's authority over his subjects might be allowed to be absolute; but, then, God's authority over the ruler was affirmed to be equally absolute, and God held the ruler responsible for governing in accordance with His righteous will. Misfortunes befalling a country were habitually regarded as signs of Divine displeasure, whilst prosperity was welcomed as an assurance of Divine approval.

But all this way of thinking has been altered, it is said, by the progress of democracy and the accompanying progress of freedom of opinion. When the people govern, and the people are not all of one religion, the administrative authority of a State cannot acknowledge any supernatural dominion over it. In this country the King was formerly the actual ruler, and the King was a member of the Church Catholic, and those who served or controlled him were also members of the same Church; and it was a matter of course that the State should acknowledge the authority of our God, the Father of Jesus

Christ, as unreservedly as any subject of the realm. But the ruling power of the State has now passed into the hands of the House of Commons, which is elected by the people at large, and both the people and the representative House include adherents of various creeds.

That difficulties are created by this change, no one would deny; but it is going too far to say that the difficulties prevent the living will of God from being the supreme authority to the State. Due weight should be given to the following considerations :

1. The fundamental principle of the democratic system of government is that the majority should prevail. In the constituencies the majority is represented, and the minority has to go without representation; in Parliament the majority makes laws: the minority may try to prevent their being made, but is overruled. If, therefore, the majority are of one religion, the democratic principle itself authorizes them to profess it and act upon it in the administration of the State. But this principle, that the majority must prevail, is obviously unsatisfactory, and populations only acquiesce in it as a convenient working rule, which, subject to conditions, preserves peace and concord. The great condition to which it is subject is that there shall be reasonable consideration on the part of the majority towards the minority, and that all parties shall keep in view, not only what each prefers, but what is right and fair and for the common advantage. A majority possessed by this spirit of consideration and sense of community will be especially respectful towards the religious opinions of the minority or of minorities, and this feeling will tend to make the majority that is in power unwilling to take religious action which may be gravely displeasing to their fellow-representatives and their fellow-citizens.

2. But, further, for those who are reverent and thoughtful it becomes a growing conviction that, as the Bible teaches, the God of Christians is essentially righteous and gracious, and that His will means active righteousness and grace. Who is there in the House of Commons—who is there in the United Kingdom—who will not bow to the authority of righteousness and grace? There are those amongst us who would dissociate righteousness and grace—or, as they might prefer to name them, justice and humanity—from the very name of God; there are others who would dissociate them from any one formal creed or ritual; but what a wonderful acknowledgment of the supremacy of the will of our God over the State we have in the universal profession of allegiance to justice and humanity, to righteousness and grace! I lay stress on *profession*, because our politics are still too much

the struggles of rival interests, forgetting the supremacy of justice and humanity; and those who care for the will of God have a mighty task before them in labouing that their country, in its State character, shall seek first the kingdom of the heavenly Father and His righteousness.

3. Further, whilst members of the Church of England should hold themselves bound in Christ's name and for Christ's sake to be considerate towards the religious opinions of Nonconformists, of Roman Catholics, of Mussulmans, and other non-Christians, where they have the power to enforce their own preferences, and are justified by Divine Providence in keeping their religious preferences to themselves where they have not the power, they may reasonably regard it as within their right and their duty to profess openly their own faith, and to let it be seen that they hold the Gospel, as they have received it, to be a Divine message to mankind, and the healing and life-giving power to all races of men.

In view of these considerations, it is surely possible to believe and to maintain that the living will of our God, the Father of Jesus Christ, is—for us as for our fathers—the supreme authority to the State.

Is the same will equally the supreme authority to the Church? In speaking of the will of God as a living will, I am assuming that the Maker and Father of men is acting in their affairs, is instructing them and leading them onwards. And I can hardly imagine it being denied that the living will of our God is a real authority to His Church, an authority which subjects to itself every other authority.

Christians belong to the Church universal, and also to their own particular communion. The Church universal is the ideal Body of Christ, which is realizing itself—in a way which we must believe to have its advantages—in the strange variety of divergent and even conflicting Christian societies. Each of these is justified to itself by the desire of those who have founded it or governed it to be as loyal as possible to Christ the Head. The will of God for the Church Catholic must be to bring all these societies into the unity of perfect allegiance to Christ. What God desires for each society, and for the members of it so far as they influence its action, must be that all Christians may study with sincere docility along what lines God is drawing and impelling them into their proper relation to Christ.

We have recognised it as an undeniable truth that every human being should regard with reverence the traditions which he inherits. It has been commanded, with the encouragement of a promise, that children should honour father and mother. This involves for children the respectful

acceptance of the creed and practices of the society in which they have been born. It is with some reluctance that we agree to this conclusion; but we may find it to be, on the whole, a welcome one. No one, it follows, ought to be in a hurry to abandon his religious inheritance; and everyone has reason to see the hand of God and to hear His voice in some aspects and influences of the creed to which he has been born. But when the light of the Gospel comes to one who has been bred in an idolatrous religion, whilst he may thankfully acknowledge that the true God has not been far from him in the past, it may be still more clear to him that God is imperatively calling to him to go forth from the home of his fathers into a better home.

If we can imagine a perfect Christian to descend, unattached, into the world, and to be bidden to choose the communion to which he should attach himself as the most truly Christian of the many Christian communions he would find here, we of the Church of England hope that he would choose our Church. If we were commending it to him, we should have to ask his attention to those features of it which make it a good instrument for expressing and fulfilling the mind of the Saviour who is at the Father's right hand, and which show it to be animated by the one heavenly Spirit. And in doing so, would not our hearts sometimes sink within us?

But we are not unattached. According to what I have contended to be the necessary belief of those who follow the Son of man and His Apostles, we, like all our fellow-men in their respective places, are bound to begin with reverent loyalty to our sacred inheritance, and, except in a few exceptional instances, those who are born in the Church of England find, as they grow up in it, much to honour and value, much that attracts and feeds their best spiritual instincts, much that commends itself to their love of light and progress. If we believe in the will of God as ordering the movements of mankind, we can look with awe and thankfulness upon the history of our Church, going back from the present, century by century, seeing as we go too many evidences of the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, but recognising also that our Church has not been left to itself, but has had a continuous life under heavenly guidance from the first days until now.

In considering the ways of this National Church of ours, we may, if we will, dismiss the will of God, revealing itself in the pressure of history and in new light as the supreme authority to the Church, and fix our minds only upon the tradition of the Church, either of the undivided Church, or

of the Western Church whilst it was still a whole, or upon some speculative theory of what a Christian society should be. We may persuade ourselves that the will of God has for us buried itself in the tradition or the theory. But the living will of our God has never abdicated its sovereignty—not with regard to the Church any more than with regard to the State and the individual soul. If we defer in Church matters to its authority as supreme, the past will become full of importance and interest to us, as we see in it, not a casual sequence of events or the clashing of competitive appetites, but a revelation more or less discernible of the guidance and the purposes of God; and all that we learn from the past will help us to understand and appreciate the present; but we shall look forward to the future also in pious dependence upon the same living will, hoping to be guided and impelled by it, and seeking courage to make any changes by which we may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

J. LL. DAVIES.



ART. III.—A PLEA FOR PRACTICAL PREACHING.

THE relation between doctrine and ethics, religion and morals, or, to speak more definitely, between Christian faith and Christian character—this is a subject never out of place, and which has now a special importance from certain conditions of our time. If I may use the graceful language in which His Majesty's inspectors have been accustomed to note the defects which would bring loss and danger to our schools, it is "a subject which requires attention." That there are reasons for this suggestion in the thought and habit of the day will be more or less acknowledged if the following observations are held to be correct.

On the side of faith, the subjects which have long pre-occupied the mind of the Church do not, in the first place, concern themselves with the individual life. The prevalent discussions inaugurated by the Oxford Movement, bearing on sacraments and ministry and corporate and historic Christianity, have in their effect largely superseded the practical teachings on personal character and conduct. These, again, are placed at a still greater disadvantage in presence of that line of scriptural study which consists in a detailed criticism of the documents, a revaluation of their truth and worth, and a reconstruction of their historic contents. Such religious interests (if they may be so described) have but a remote