

NOTES ON RELIGION IN EUROPE

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In answer to the request of the editors of this magazine I am to write of my impressions of the state of religion in Europe—such impressions as may have been received during a brief visit of the past summer. My remarks will necessarily be of a desultory nature.

One cannot visit England without being impressed with the religious character of the people. In many, perhaps in all, of the countries of the continent there are as many visible evidences of religion in magnificent cathedrals and churches, in the multitude of persons, male and female, dressed in ecclesiastical costume to be seen on the streets, in the number of imposing rites and ceremonies, and in the frequency of religious festivals, but with all this, it is obvious even to the casual observer that the people on the continent are not as deeply pious as the dwellers in Britain. In London even the churches are filled with devout and reverent worshippers, and religion is treated with profound respect by all classes of the population. There is no city in the world where there is as much practical Christianity to be found as in the great English metropolis.

There is, however, not a little unrest in the religious atmosphere in England. The question of Disestablishment is being more seriously agitated than at any period in recent times. The disturbances connected with popular education, the rise of Liberal sentiment, the horde of representatives of the Labor party which have made their way to Parliament, and the rapid increase of Nonconformists are operating to shake the foundations of the Establishment, and there are not a few conservative thinkers who confidently predict its overthrow in the near future. Another party revolution similar to that of the last general elections will probably precipitate a crisis. The line of cleavage now between the ritualists and the evangelicals in the Church of England is clearly defined, and it is believed by many that when

disestablishment comes, it will bring an entire separation between the parties, the evangelicals becoming more decidedly Protestant and the ritualists going over bodily to Roman Catholicism.

Christian Science is attracting attention in England, and the great dailies are devoting much space to the discussion of it. Its advocates claim that it is rapidly gaining in numbers and popularity. That may be true, but we know that in this country it does not fail to "come with observation," and there is a bare possibility that it is the noise and not the numbers which is attracting attention. The opposers of this fancy faith regard it as another infectious importation from America, the mother of many other religious monstrosities, and pray that its course may be speedily run.

The religious situation in France may be regarded as chaotic. Disestablishment has already come and its advent was characterized by many sensational incidents. These are too well known to bear repetition. The air is now clearing and quiet is returning, but much bitterness of heart remains. I had a pleasant conversation with the Rev. Charles Merle d'Aubigne, one of the leaders of Protestantism in France, and he threw not a little light upon the situation. The Catholic Church has for years been identified with a political party, and Disestablishment was a question of party politics rather than religion. The impression that the government, under the leadership of Clemenceau, was fighting the Church or religion, as such, is a mistaken one. The government in the disestablishment of the Church was carrying out the principles of the liberal party. The Catholic Church was the chief sufferer, but no branch of the Church escaped. It is unfortunate that the Catholics are unwilling to submit to the action of the government, since by resistance they will eventually lose a large amount of property, and it is not clear that any advantage will be gained either to the Catholic Church or to the cause of religion by the attitude which they have assumed. The Protestant Churches have also lost a large amount of revenue which annually came to them from the government, but they are sustaining their loss with equanimity, and, without complaint, are endeavoring to adjust themselves to the new situation in the conviction that the cause of evangelical truth will not suffer.

It seems to me that the Sabbath is better observed now in Paris than it was several years ago. There is almost an entire cessation of ordinary traffic, the streets are comparatively quiet, and large numbers of people attend the Church services. Altogether the outlook for a purer gospel and a higher state of religious life in France is encouraging. From the Protestant point of view the recent disturbances promise good results. In their relation to the government all branches of the Church occupy the same plane, and all henceforward must depend upon voluntary contributions for support. As we have learned long ago in this country, this is far the better method, and will prove a benefit rather than a hindrance to the cause of true religion.

English and Scotch churches are to be found in most of the prominent cities of Continental Europe, and opportunity is thus afforded to English and American travellers to attend upon divine service conducted in their own language. On Sunday I uniformly sought out an English or a Scotch church, but regret to say that I rarely found the service edifying and helpful. There was a lifelessness and formality about most of them that was depressing to me, and sometimes I heard a theological fledgling dispensing 'advanced views' to the innocent worshippers and that was not only depressing, but also appalling. It is little less than a calamity to be at infinite pains to search out a Church for English-speaking people in a great foreign city, and then to have to listen to a man in the pulpit who says twice as much that is disturbing to one's faith as he does of that which is strengthening to it, and this on one occasion, at least, was my experience.

The cathedral services are in a way impressive. The great arched building, the deep-toned organ, the trained choir, the long-robed priests, the lighted candles, the burning incense and the multitude of worshippers—these all have a subduing effect upon the mind. It is of little consequence whether the language of the service be intelligible or not. For the most part, at any rate, it can not be understood. But for the man who seeks instruction or a message of comfort or spiritual uplift, it is vain to attend upon the exercises of worship in a Catholic cathedral. It is a little better in the cathedrals of Protestant England and

Germany, but all cathedrals are poorly adapted for the intelligent worship of God, for which, it may be supposed, they were originally designed.