

The churches of the United States are the churches of the British Isles, modified by recent immigration from the European continent. Each race has, as a rule, adhered to the form of religion it held in Europe; and where denominations comparatively small in England have, like the Methodists and Baptists, swelled to vast proportions here, it is because the social conditions under which they throve in England were here reproduced on a far larger scale. In other words, the causes which have given their relative importance and their local distribution to American denominations have been racial and social rather than ecclesiastical. No new religious forces have sprung up on American soil to give a new turn to her religious history. The breaking up of large denominations into smaller religious bodies seems to be due, partly to immigration, which has introduced slightly diverse elements, partly to the tendency to relax the old dogmatic stringency, a tendency which has been found to operate as a fissile force.

It need hardly be said that there exist no such social distinctions between different denominations as those of England. No clergyman, no layman, either looks down upon or looks up to any other clergyman or layman in respect of his worshipping God in another way. The Roman Catholic church of course stands aloof from the Protestant Christians, whom she considers schismatic; and although what is popularly called the doctrine of apostolic succession is less generally deemed vital by Protestant Episcopalians in America than it has come to be by them of late years in England, the clergy of that church seldom admit to their pulpits pastors of other churches, though they sometimes appear in the pulpits of those churches. Such exchanges of pulpit are common among Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and other orthodox Protestant bodies. In many parts of the North and West the Protestant Episcopal church has long been slightly more fashionable than its sister churches; and people who have no particular "religious preferences," but wish to stand well socially, will sometimes add themselves to it.¹ In the South, however, Presbyterianism

¹ The proposal which has been more than once made in the annual convention of the Protestant Episcopal church, that it should call itself "The National Church of America," has been always rejected by the good sense of the majority, who perceive that an assumption of this kind would provoke much displeasure from other bodies of Christians.

(and in some places Methodism) is equally well regarded from a worldly point of view; while everywhere the strength of Methodists and Baptists and Roman Catholics resides in the masses of the people.¹

Of late years proposals for union between some of the leading Protestant churches, and especially between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists and Lutherans, have been freely canvassed. They witness to a growing good feeling among the clergy, and growing indifference to minor points of doctrine and church government. The vested interests of the existing clergy create some difficulties serious in small towns and country districts; but it seems possible that before many years more than one such union will be carried through.

The social standing of the clergy of each church corresponds pretty closely to the character of the church itself — that is to say, the pastors of the Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Episcopalian, and Unitarian bodies come generally from a higher social stratum than those of other more numerous denominations. The former are almost universally graduates of some university or college, have there mixed with other young men belonging to the better families of the place where they reside, and have obtained that university stamp which is much prized in America. As in Great Britain, comparatively few are the sons of the wealthy; and few come from the working classes. The position of a minister of the Gospel always carries with it some dignity — that is to say, it gives a man a certain advantage in the society, whatever it may be, to which he naturally belongs in respect of his family connections, his means, and his education. In the great cities the leading ministers of the chief denominations, including the Roman Catholic and Protestant Episcopal bishops, whether they be eminent as preachers or as active philanthropists, or in respect of their learning, are among the first citizens, and exercise an influence often wider and more powerful than that of any layman. Possibly no man in the United States, since President Lincoln, has been so warmly admired and so widely mourned as the late Dr. Phillips Brooks. In cities of the second order, the clergymen

¹ The Methodists and Baptists are said to make more use of social means in the work of evangelizing the masses, and to adapt themselves more perfectly to democratic ideas than do the other Protestant bodies.

of these denominations, supposing them (as is usually the case) to be men of good breeding and personally acceptable, move in the best society of the place. Similarly in country places the pastor is better educated and more enlightened than the average members of his flock, and becomes a leader in works of beneficence. The level of education and learning is rising among the clergy with the steady improvement of the universities. This advance is perhaps most marked among those denominations which, like the Methodists and Baptists, have heretofore lagged behind, because their adherents were mostly among the poor. So far as I could learn, the incomes of the clergy are also increasing. The highest are those received by the Presbyterian and Congregationalist pastors in the great cities, which run from \$8000 up to \$15,000, and by the Protestant Episcopal bishops (\$3300 up to \$12,500). Roman Catholic bishops, being celibate and with poorer flocks, have from \$3000 to \$5000; Methodist bishops usually \$5000, with travelling expenses. In the wealthier denominations there are many city ministers whose incomes exceed \$3000, while in small towns and rural districts few fall below \$1000; in the less wealthy \$1500 for a city and \$700 for a rural charge may be a fair average as regards the North and West. The average salary of a Roman Catholic priest is given at \$800.¹ To the sums regularly paid must be added in many cases a residence, and in nearly all various gifts and fees which the minister receives.

These figures, which, however, must be a little reduced for the Southern States, compare favourably with the incomes received by the clergy in England or Scotland, and are of course much above the salaries paid to priests in France or to Protestant pastors in Germany. Reckoning in the clergy of all denominations in Great Britain and in the United States, I think that, so far as it is possible to strike an average, both the pecuniary and the social position of the American clergy must be pronounced slightly better.

Although the influence of the clergy is still great it has

¹ Most of these figures are drawn from an interesting article in the *Forum* for August, 1894, by Mr. H. K. Carroll, acting superintendent of the census. See also an article by the same judicious authority in the *Forum* for June, 1892. Some instructive remarks on the relation of the universities to the clergy may be found in an article by Mr. F. G. Peabody in the same magazine for September, 1894.

changed its nature, yielding to the universal current which makes for equality. At the beginning of the century the New England ministers enjoyed a local authority not unlike that of the bishops in Western Europe in the sixth century or of the Presbyterian ministers of Scotland in the seventeenth. They were, especially in country places, the leaders as well as instructors of their congregations, and were a power in politics scarcely less than in spiritual affairs.¹ That order of things has quite passed away. His profession and his education still secure respect for a clergyman,² but he must not now interfere in politics; he must not speak on any secular subject *ex cathedra*; his influence, whatever it may be, is no longer official but can only be that of a citizen distinguished by his talents or character, whose office gives him no greater advantage than that of an eminence where shining gifts may be more widely visible. Now and then this rule of abstention from politics is broken through. Mr. Henry Ward Beecher took the field as a Mugwump in the presidential campaign of 1884, and was deemed the more courageous in doing so because the congregation of Plymouth Church were mostly "straight out" Republicans. The Roman Catholic bishops are sometimes accused of lending secret aid to the political party which will procure subventions for their schools and charities, and do no doubt, as indeed their doctrines require, press warmly the claims of denominational education. But otherwise they also abstain from politics. Such action as is constantly taken in England by ministers of the Established Church on the one side of politics, by Nonconformist ministers on the other, would in America excite disapproval. It is only on platforms or in conventions where some moral cause is to be advocated, such as Abolitionism was thirty

¹ In some States clergymen are still declared ineligible, by the constitution, as members of a State legislature. They do not seem to have in the early days sat in these bodies; and they very rarely sit in Congress, but one finds them in conventions. Some of the best speeches in the Massachusetts Convention of 1788 which ratified the Federal Constitution were made by ministers. In New England, they were all or nearly all advocates of the Constitution, and passed into the Federalist party.

² The clergy are the objects of a good deal of favour in various small ways; for instance, they often receive free passes on railroads, and the Inter-State Commerce Act of 1887, while forbidding the system of granting free passes, which had been much abused, specially exempted clergymen from the prohibition. Their children are usually educated at lower fees, or even gratis, in colleges, and storekeepers often allow them a discount.

years ago or temperance is now, that clergymen can with impunity appear.

Considering that the absence of State interference in matters of religion is one of the most striking differences between all the European countries on the one hand and the United States on the other, the European reader may naturally expect some further remarks on the practical results of this divergence. "There are," he will say, "two evil consequences with which the European defenders of established churches seek to terrify us when disestablishment and disendowment are mentioned, one that the authority and influence of religion will wane if State recognition is withdrawn, the other that the incomes of the clergy and their social status will sink, that they will in fact become plebeians, and that the centres of light which now exist in every country parish will be extinguished. There are also two benefits which the advocates of the 'Free Church in a Free State' promise us, one that social jealousies and bitternesses between different sects will melt away, and the other that the church will herself become more spiritual in her temper and ideas, more earnest in her proper work of moral reform and the nurture of the soul. What has American experience to say on these four points?"

These are questions so pertinent to a right conception of the ecclesiastical side of American life that I cannot decline the duty of trying to answer them, though reluctant to tread on ground to which European conflicts give a controversial character.

I. To estimate the influence and authority of religion is not easy. Suppose, however, that we take either the habit of attending church or the sale of religious books as evidences of its influence among the multitude: suppose that as regards the more cultivated classes we look at the amount of respect paid to Christian precepts and ministers, the interest taken in theological questions, the connection of philanthropic reforms with religion. Adding these various data together, we may get some sort of notion of the influence of religion on the American people as a whole.

Purposing to touch on these points in the chapter next following, I will here only say by way of anticipation that in all these respects the influence of Christianity seems to be, if we

look not merely to the numbers but also to the intelligence of the persons influenced, greater and more widespread in the United States than in any part of western Continental Europe, and I think greater than in England. In France, Italy, Spain, and the Catholic parts of Germany, as well as in German Austria, the authority of religion over the masses is of course great. Its influence on the best educated classes — one must include all parts of society in order to form a fair judgment — is apparently smaller in France and Italy than in Great Britain, and I think distinctly smaller than in the United States. The country which most resembles America in this respect is Scotland, where the mass of the people enjoy large rights in the management of their church affairs, and where the interest of all classes has, ever since the Reformation, tended to run in ecclesiastical channels. So far from suffering from the want of State support, religion seems in the United States to stand all the firmer because, standing alone, she is seen to stand by her own strength. No political party, no class in the community, has any hostility either to Christianity or to any particular Christian body. The churches are as thoroughly popular, in the best sense of the word, as any of the other institutions of the country.

II. The social and economic position of the clergy in the United States is above that of the priesthood, taken as a whole, in Roman Catholic countries, and of all denominations, Anglican and Nonconformist, in England. No American pastors enjoy such revenues as the prelates of England and Hungary; but the average income attached to the pastoral office is in America larger. The peculiar conditions of England, where one church looks down socially on the others, make a comparison in other respects difficult. The education of the American ministers, their manners, their capacity for spreading light among the people, seem superior to those of the seminarist priesthood of France and Italy (who are of course far more of a distinct caste) and equal to those of the Protestant pastors of Germany and Scotland.

III. Social jealousies connected with religion scarcely exist in America, and one notes a kindlier feeling between all denominations, Roman Catholics included, a greater readiness to work together for common charitable aims, than between

Catholics and Protestants in France or Germany, or between Anglicans and Nonconformists in England. There is a rivalry between the leading denominations to extend their bounds, to erect and fill new churches, to raise great sums for church purposes. But it is a friendly rivalry, which does not provoke bad blood, because the State stands neutral, and all churches have a free field. There is much less mutual exclusiveness than in any other country, except perhaps Scotland. An instance may be found in the habit of exchanging pulpits, another in the comparative frequency with which persons pass from one denomination to another, if a particular clergyman attracts them, or if they settle in a place distant from a church of their own body. One often finds members of the same family belonging to different denominations. Some of the leading bodies, and especially the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, between whose doctrines there exists practically no difference, have been wont, especially in the West, to co-operate for the sake of efficiency and economy in agreeing not to plant two rival churches in a place where one will suffice, but to arrange that one denomination shall set up its church, and the other advise its adherents to join and support that church.

IV. To give an opinion on the three foregoing questions is incomparably easier than to say whether and how much Christianity has gained in spiritual purity and dignity by her severance from the secular power.

There is a spiritual gain in that diminution of envy, malice, and uncharitableness between the clergy of various sects which has resulted from their being all on the same legal level; and the absence both of these faults and of the habit of bringing ecclesiastical questions into secular politics, gives the enemy less occasion to blaspheme than he is apt to have in Europe. Church assemblies — synods, conferences, and conventions — seem on the whole to be conducted with better temper and more good sense than these bodies have shown in the Old World, from the Council of Ephesus down to and in our own day. But in America as elsewhere some young men enter the clerical profession from temporal motives; some laymen join a church to improve their social or even their business position; some country pastors look out for city cures, and justify their leaving

a poorer flock for a richer by talking of a wider sphere of usefulness. The desire to push the progress of the particular church or of the denomination often mingles with the desire to preach the gospel more widely; and the gospel is sometimes preached, if not with "respect of persons" yet with less faithful insistence on unpalatable truths than the moral health of the community requires.

So far as I could ascertain, the dependence of the minister for his support on his congregation does not lower him in their eyes, nor make him more apt to flatter the leading members than he is in established churches. If he is personally dignified and unselfish, his independence will be in no danger. But whether the voluntary system, which no doubt makes men more liberal in giving for the support of religious ordinances among themselves and of missions elsewhere, tends to quicken spiritual life, and to keep the church pure and undefiled, free from the corrupting influences of the world, is another matter, on which a stranger may well hesitate to speak. Those Americans whose opinion I have inquired are unanimous in holding that in this respect also the fruits of freedom have been good.