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THE CHURCHMAN

July, 1936.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

The Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen.

IN accordance with our practice for the past few years, we give in this issue of *THE CHURCHMAN* the greater number of the papers which were read at the recent Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen. The subject for consideration was the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the relations between Church and State. The papers furnish a valuable introduction to a question which is likely to provoke discussion and controversy for some time to come. There were not many points of importance which were not raised either in the papers or in the discussion upon them which followed. The Rev. C. M. Chavasse, M.C., Master of St. Peter's Hall, introduced the subject in an outspoken address from the chair. The Rev. D. E. W. Harrison, Vice-Principal of Wycliffe Hall, dealt with "Church and State in Scripture." The Rev. V. J. K. Brook, Chaplain of All Souls, Oxford, briefly summarised, from the point of view of the main subject, the History of the National Church, and the Bishop of Norwich emphasised its value. The paper of the Rev. T. W. Gilbert, D.D., Principal of St. John's Hall, Highbury, was on "The Life and Government of the National Church." The Report itself with its recommendations and accompanying volume of evidence was discussed by the Ven. Archdeacon Storr, a member of the Commission on Church and State, and by Mr. Albert Mitchell. The Conference was concluded by a paper from the Rev. T. G. Mohan, Assistant Secretary of the Church Pastoral Aid Society, on "The Church and the People." It was altogether a very satisfactory and satisfying programme for a Conference lasting only two days. One result of the deliberations was to give an urgent call to all Churchmen to study thoroughly not only the Report, but the supplementary volume containing the evidence upon which it is, or is presumed to be, based.

The Findings of the Conference.

The following Findings were agreed upon at the final session of the Conference. They are to be taken, as in previous years, as

expressing the general sense of the Conference, and not as representing in detail the views of individual members.

1. The Conference greatly regrets the re-opening of controversy within the Church by the publication of the Report. It deprecates the dissipation of the energies of members of our English Church on controversies that must necessarily be barren at a time when the more urgent questions of Evangelisation and Intercommunion and ultimate Home Reunion (with which this Conference has always been closely associated) call for unprejudiced consideration.

2. The Conference, while regretting the one-sided character of the Commission, pays grateful tribute to the desire of the Commission to be fair.

3. The Conference is hampered in its consideration by the indefinite way in which such expressions as "The Church" and "Spiritual" are used in the Report.

4. The Conference is of opinion that it is impossible for Evangelicals to compromise on a fundamental principle of the English Reformation, namely, the restoration of the Sacrament for a Sacrifice and of open Communion for the Mass. The Conference is convinced that, at the present time, it would be impossible, at a Round Table Conference, to secure agreement on such questions as permissible deviations from the Order of Holy Communion and Reservation, and implores the Archbishops not to revive controversy by calling such a Conference.

5. The Conference declares again its belief that the Order of Holy Communion contained in the Book of Common Prayer is agreeable to the Word of God; and it holds that the existing Prayer of Consecration is the most scriptural that has yet been evolved in the Christian Church.

6. The Conference denies that there is anything in the existing relations between Church and State that prevents the Church of England from doing the work which is, at present, being left undone.

7. It is an obligation of a National Church to co-operate with the State in matters concerning the character, conduct and welfare of its people.

8. The relations between Church and State in England are not matters of purely local concern, but have an influence upon Christian communities throughout the world.

9. The Conference emphasises afresh the need for definite and systematic education, more particularly of the younger members of the Church, in matters of doctrine and worship, and more intensive pastoral evangelisation.

10. The Conference cannot close its Findings without recording its conviction that everything will be fruitless, unless in the Power of the Crucified, Risen and Ascended Christ we seek to bring each individual to a personal relationship with God through Him.

The Proposed Round Table Conference.

There was a good deal said in the discussion with regard to the proposal for a Round Table Conference and the propriety of Evangelicals taking part in it. It was pointed out that a Conference to consider the question of Reservation as a whole and whether or no it can or should be permitted ought of course to contain Evangelicals in order that their views on what the Commission describes as a "vital" matter, should be represented and adequately expressed. But a Conference where it is taken for granted that Reservation ought to be and must be conceded, and where the only purpose for which it is called is to devise means whereby this may be practically effected, is one in which Evangelical churchmen would be wholly out of place. Indeed, it is inconceivable that they would so far stultify themselves as to attend. There

is, moreover, another aspect of the matter which Mr. Albert Mitchell and others emphasised very strongly. Assuming that the proposed Conference is unfettered in its reference and that Evangelicals have a place upon it, they must be thoroughly representative of Evangelical opinion. It will not be sufficient for the Archbishops or others to nominate persons known to them who may be more or less amenable to the pressure of a majority or of official opinion. In numbers they should be proportionate to the size of the proposed Conference and they should be so nominated or appointed as to give the assurance that they are really representative. We are, however, of the opinion expressed by the Rev. C. M. Chavasse and other speakers that the present time is most inopportune for the calling of such a Conference. We are told that the Report of the Doctrinal Commission may be expected before very long and that Report will probably raise the whole matter afresh and from many different points of view. Why then should we now stir up what must be a controversy of the most acute character only to have it revived in two or three years' time. As Sir Thomas Inskip has so frequently reminded us, there is nothing in the relations between Church and State which hinders any clergyman—or layman, for that matter—from carrying on their spiritual work of Evangelisation and instruction. It is not existing conditions, but the restless and continual raising of controversial issues that hinders it.

The Commission One-sided.

The Report of the Commission raises so many questions that it would take a much longer time than was afforded by a Conference lasting only two days, to deal with them all. It was, however, possible to bring out some of its leading features and to emphasise them, and of these the outstanding fact of the partisan character of the Commission was fully noted. The protest of the Bishop of Norwich was more than once referred to. This was made in characteristically courteous and moderate language by the Bishop at the conclusion of his oral examination by the Commission, and is printed as an appendix to the Volume of Evidence. We give the following quotation :

This particular Commission was specially and directly constituted because of the fact that the House of Commons objected to the Measure which would have made the use of the new Prayer Book legal. This consideration prevents this particular Commission from being such a Commission as might have been constituted at any time whatever in recent years. The occasion, the time and the manner of its erection attach it directly to the fact that the House of Commons, acting strictly in accordance with the terms of what is called the Enabling Act, refused to authorise the new Prayer Book. It does not take many words to express my view, but I wish to state emphatically that it appears fair to consider that the direct connection existing between this Commission and the rejection of the new Prayer Book made it very desirable that in the personnel of the Commission one or two persons known to have been against the new Prayer Book should have been included, just as at least four persons who actually voted in favour of it have been included.

It is essential, therefore, to keep constantly before our minds the fact that no one who opposed the new Prayer Book was allowed a place on the Commission. The Report, as a consequence, can have no claim to impartiality ; and it manifestly proceeds on the assumption that the House of Commons while possessing an indisputable legal right, to reject the new Prayer Book, ought, morally, to have passed it. Another assumption underlying the whole Report is that the large majority vote of the Church Assembly in favour of the new Prayer Book represented the wishes of the English Church as a whole. The Commissioners might well have reflected on a statement contained in the Bishop of Chichester's most valuable and instructive *Life* of Archbishop Davidson on this very point. The Archbishop wrote :

I have found it very difficult to know what, speaking generally, ought to be my own line in regard to proposals for changing the Communion Office. On the one hand my own instinct would have been for leaving that Office alone and adhering to what has satisfied English people for more than three centuries. And I am certain that such is the view of the overwhelming majority of English Churchmen throughout the country. (Vol. II, pp. 1331-2.)

This witness is true, and in face of it any claim that the vote of the Assembly truly represented the mind of the Church was rightly dismissed by the Conference.

Vital Matters.

A point in the Report to which Prebendary Hinde called attention is the admission on page 57 that there is disagreement within the Church on certain "vital matters" and that among these two are prominent, namely, the use and limits of Reservation and permissible deviations from the order of Holy Communion. It is important to note this admission, for the two matters specified are those which provoked the greatest part of the opposition to the revised Prayer Book ; and the advocates of that Book constantly asserted that it contained no change of doctrine. But such matters are only "vital" when some change of the kind is understood to be involved in their adoption.

As a matter of fact, the assertion that the adoption of the new Prayer Book implied no doctrinal change was too specious to deceive anyone who had given any serious attention to the matter ; and it now appears to be frankly abandoned. There is an oblique reference to the proposed Round Table Conference on the same page of the Report, to which attention was called at Oxford, which, taken in conjunction with some words of the Archbishop of York when introducing the Report to the Church Assembly, should be carefully noted. Elsewhere it is implied that substantial agreement must be reached before the proposals of the Commission can go forward and that minorities must not be overridden in the process of bringing them about. But here it is only said, "We recognise that these proposals cannot be carried out until a new and deter-

mined *effort* has been made to secure agreement between men and women of different schools of thought within the Church of England on those matters, in particular, which were mainly responsible for the rejection of the Prayer Book Measures of 1927 and 1928." An *effort* to secure agreement is not the same thing as agreement; and the Archbishop of York's statement in the Church Assembly that no body of Church opinion "that *calls itself considerable*" would be allowed to stand in the way of effecting the changes which it was desired to push through had a distinctly ominous sound and ought not to be forgotten.

Church Courts and the Law.

The question of the reform of ecclesiastical courts was incidentally referred to by Mr. Albert Mitchell, who has more than once pointed out that what is needed is to modernise procedure, as has been done to a great extent in matters of civil jurisdiction, and to concentrate upon securing a strong court of first instance. The cumbrous and costly medieval procedure is a great hindrance to the working of Church Courts, and a really competent Court of first instance would render Appeals less likely to occur or to succeed, so that the question of the appellate tribunal would become of relatively small importance. The Archbishop of York in the Church Assembly expressed the view that the reform of the Courts would not be of much use until there was a *new law* as well as a new instrument for its interpretation. Here is a clear indication of what is in the minds of some, at least, of those who are behind this cry for altering the relations between Church and State. It is not the authority or character of the Courts which has been the real grievance but the law which they have to administer, and if the existing law is opposed to the restoration of the Mass, the Confessional and the adoration of the Virgin Mary, then the law must be altered! A cognate question is raised by the unhappy proposal in the Report that the Canon Law should be revised and brought up to date and that "an authoritative commission should be set up to accomplish what has been long overdue." Canon Law has very little interest for the vast majority of churchmen, its study having been as a rule confined to a few individuals of antiquarian tastes who have been singularly unsuccessful in arousing the least enthusiasm for it outside their own circle. Canon Law does not now bind the laity and it would be a task of considerable difficulty to enforce it upon the clergy. It does not seem a hopeful adventure to seek to revive a system of Canon Law which in the sixteenth century was formally declared by the Convocations, the Parliament and the King to be "much prejudicial to the King's prerogative royal, repugnant to the laws and statutes of the realm, and overmuch onerous to the King's Highness and his subjects."¹

¹ 25 Henry VIII, c. 19.

The Conference at Bucarest.

In June of last year a Delegation appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury as representative of the Church of England took part in a Conference at Bucarest lasting for a week with a Commission representing the Roumanian Church, and a Report upon the results arrived at has just been issued. We cannot do more than refer to it now, for the Report was not received until this issue of *THE CHURCHMAN* was going to press; we hope to deal fully with the matter later. In the meantime we are bound to express the strongest dissent from the statements upon which, as we understand the Report, agreement has been reached. In the case of the Orthodox Church and the agreement with regard to inter-communion, there was a clause to the effect that neither side expressed any opinion with regard to the doctrinal teaching of the other. The Church of England was thus explicitly absolved from sharing or approving the special dogmas of the Orthodox Church. In the case before us, the Anglican Delegation began by informing the Roumanian leaders that the Thirty-nine Articles are a document secondary to the Prayer Book, by which they must be interpreted, an incorrect and misleading statement which appears, if words have any meaning, intended to disparage the Thirty-nine Articles. It should, we think, be obvious that a formal and official statement of doctrine to which every minister of the Church of England has to declare his adhesion is the standard by which the devotional expressions of the Prayer Book should be interpreted. The converse position would seem to deserve the Euclidean censure "which is absurd." From this unhopeful beginning the Anglican Delegation appears to have "accepted" a series of doctrinal statements from the Roumanian leaders on such subjects as the Eucharist, Scripture and Tradition, Justification and the Ministry, which plainly contradict the statements of the Thirty-nine Articles and the general spirit of the Prayer Book. There are movements for reform and enlightenment in many of the Churches of the East which might be fostered and encouraged by some rapprochement between them and the Church of England; but this will not be effected by an abandonment of the doctrinal principles on which the English Church is founded and which are the ground of her hold on the English people.

In Memoriam.

It is with much regret that we record the death of Mr. G. C. Parkhurst Baxter, Deputy Secretary of the National Church League. Mr. Baxter took an active part in the business of the acquisition of *THE CHURCHMAN* by the League and had at all times the keenest interest in its welfare. For several years he has acted as sub-editor, and his capacity, courtesy and energy were recognised and appreciated by all who came into contact with him. An extended notice of his work appeared in the *Church Gazette* for June last.