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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE CHURCHMAN

February, 1916.

The Month.

The Old
Evangel.

It is not surprising that the Bishop of Chelmsford's paper, read at the Islington Clerical Meeting, has excited deep and widespread interest, not only among Evangelicals, but also among those as far removed from the Islington platform as Mr. Athelstan Riley. It said much that has long wanted saying, and it said it well and to good purpose. Yet it was a simple paper; the secret of its power was that it dealt with a real live question which vitally affects every ordained minister of the Church. Its main purpose may be set out in a word or two: it was an indictment of the Evangelical party, that its members are failing to preach the Gospel; and it was a plea that they should return to the proclamation of the old message, the old Evangel, as the only message with power in it to save men's souls. And, after all, the salvation of souls is the chief end of the ministry. We have given the paper the premier place among the articles in this issue because we are profoundly convinced of the importance of the Bishop's message. We have pleaded again and again in the CHURCHMAN for the more definite preaching of the Gospel, but we hardly expected so soon to find the plea so forcibly expounded at the Islington Clerical Meeting, by so powerful a prelate as the Bishop of Chelmsford. We commend the paper to the most earnest attention of all our clerical readers, and laymen will profit by it hardly less. But the real appeal, of course, is to the clergy, that they may realize the grave respon-

sibility resting upon them to know "nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him Crucified." This it was which in the old Apostolic days brought men in penitence and faith to the Lord Jesus Christ; this it is which to-day will change men's hearts. The old Evangel, ever new! It is the theme which, above all else, is worthy of the Christian minister's best efforts; it is the one theme men and women delight to hear; it is the one message for which they are hungering and thirsting to-day.

It is of the utmost significance that the *Guardian* of January 13 devoted its leader to the subject of the Bishop of Chelmsford's paper, and it is not a little remarkable that it endorsed its allegations and supported its conclusions. Entitling its article "The Preacher and the Crisis," it said:

The Preacher
and the Crisis.

"His (the Bishop's) appeal for the preaching of the 'old Evangel' was primarily addressed to Evangelicals, but it is impossible not to feel that it comes home to the whole Church, especially at this period of crisis. For the matter of that, indeed, the Church is always faced by a crisis. It passes through times, like the present, of especial poignancy when, however plain its duty, the best and simplest means of performing it is not always obvious, when it treads the path with doubt and diffidence and looks wistfully for a glimmer of light ahead in the darkness. The gravity of the crisis of the moment is plainly realized by the Bishop, and the thanks of Churchmen are due to him for going straight for those fundamentals which, simply because they lie at the root of everything, are peculiarly liable to be lost sight of. If insistence upon the momentousness of the Church's Sacramental system has been the especial 'note' of Tractarian teaching, stress upon the value of the spontaneous spoken word, upon those exhortations to virtue of life with which our Lord led up to the institution of the Church's ordinances, has been the distinguishing characteristic of Evangelical theology. Happily we have of late years made very considerable approach to the blending of these two complementary ideals. They are not mutually exclusive; the blend is essential to the adequate presentation of the whole body of Christ's teaching.

"Sermons directly intended and calculated to save souls are, the Bishop of Chelmsford thinks, 'nowadays looked down upon.' That is a hard saying, and we would fain believe it to be exaggerated. But can we honestly declare that it is conspicuously removed from the facts? Is that the type of sermon which congregations have learned to expect, or which preachers have grown accustomed to preach? Unquestionably we need greater simplicity in the pulpit, and there is nothing so simple as the Gospel. It may be, and is, hard to live, and it is not always easy to preach; yet it is the only thing that matters. But the responsibility for failure to preach it does not rest

clusively with the individual preacher. It must be shared with the hearers who do not demand it, and in an especial degree with the Church, which does not insist upon it from its ministers.

“The old Evangelical Gospel, as it came from the lips of those who laid especial stress upon ‘conversion’ as it was understood in those days, was often hard and narrow; but it achieved great results. It was the Gospel which made Wesley so great a power, which breathed life into the dry bones of the religion of his time. Now that we have to so great an extent got rid of the hardness and narrowness, now that we have learned a wider outlook and have infused a more intense charity and tenderness into the message, its results ought to be more vivifying and more compelling than we have any reason to believe them actually to be.

“The Church, indeed, has long laid far too little stress upon the power of exhortation. Churchgoers look for novelty of treatment, are eager for eloquence, avid of fresh ideas. But there are no fresh ideas in religion. The Gospel is immutable. Its inner meaning may be revealed and illuminated by a penetrating mind, but in essence it remains the same, and that is the first thing which the preacher of salvation has to recognize. Yet within this essential limit there is scope for a multitude of gifts—gifts of intellect, of devotion, of personal holiness, of burning zeal. And it is because these things have been to so great an extent obscured, or even forgotten, that we believe that a most useful purpose will be served by the Bishop of Chelmsford’s outspoken address. If it is, in the first instance, a challenge to the new Evangelicalism, it is, at the same time, a warning to the whole Church to beware lest it lose sight of its primary, its most solemn, and its most pressing duty—the leading of men and women into the path of salvation, not for themselves alone, but, by their example, for those whom they encounter in their passage through the world.”

We have quoted at some length from the *Guardian* article, as we regard it as a most refreshing sign of the times that a newspaper with such traditions should lend its powerful support to a plan for a return to Gospel preaching. There are, indeed, other signs equally welcome (*e.g.*, the Rev. Walter J. Carey’s article in the *Church Times*) as indicating that all sections of the Church are coming to realize that men and women, burdened with cares and sins, are seeking not systems or “isms,” but the living Christ. The Church has failed—miserably failed—to preach Christ, and as a consequence it has lost its power to influence men and women spiritually, and it has become divided against itself. Let the Church recover its primary message and fulfil its primary duty, and the face of England will soon become changed. Moreover, we have a profound conviction that that is

the surest way to the healing of divisions and the promotion of spiritual unity.

The fact that the Government have voluntarily decided to exempt clergy and ministers of religion generally from the operation of the Compulsion Bill ought to set at rest once and for all the questions which have been raised concerning the enlistment of the younger clergy in the armed forces of the Crown. We have never had the least sympathy with the demand that clergy should become combatants ; the idea is absolutely repellent to us, as we believe it must be to all who have a due appreciation of the sacredness of the office to which a clergyman is ordained. It was launched originally by men who by no stretch of imagination can be called friends of the Church, and the less thoughtful of the working classes took it up and, with strange ignorance of the real character of the clergy, attributed the holding aloof to cowardice. It was conveniently forgotten, among other things, that the clergy were practically forbidden by the Bishops to enlist, and that, whatever their own views may have been, their first duty, as Lord Derby admitted, was to obey their ecclesiastical superiors. But after all that was, perhaps, a side issue ; the main contention was challenged even by some who ought to have known better. It was urged indeed by some clergymen—above military age, be it noted, themselves—that if it were right for a Christian man to fight it could not be wrong for a clergyman to join the King's forces, and they disputed that there was anything in the Ordination Service that constituted a bar. But they lost sight of the truth that it is fact of Ordination which is the real deterrent. Without entering into the question of the gifts and graces bestowed at Ordination, it must be admitted that an ordained man is set apart for a particular work. The lay Christian can follow one occupation to-day and another to-morrow, and no one can say him nay. Not so the clergyman. He cannot lawfully engage in business ; he cannot enter Parliament ; his life is consecrated to the ministry. How,

**Exemption of
the Clergy.**

then, can he possibly lay aside this work, which is pre-eminently one of saving men's souls, to engage in warfare, which admittedly involves destroying men's lives? The argument is so clear, that it is strange it should ever have been questioned. Christian people, therefore, ought to be profoundly thankful to the Government for adopting a course which is wise in itself, and is in agreement with the traditions of Christendom.

**War Work
for Clergy.**

There is much work for clergy to do for the nation, within their own proper sphere, without their intruding into the fighting line. The Bishop of London, whose sympathy with all lawful aspirations of younger men is well known, has made an effective answer to a deputation which wanted the rule against enlistment relaxed. He pointed out that Army Chaplains are sharing to the full the dangers and risks of the soldiers, and so also are the stretcher-bearers. Two Chaplains were killed in the last battle, and one clerical stretcher-bearer. He promised any curates anxious to serve as Chaplains, that if he considered them suitable, and if on inquiry he found that they could be spared from their parishes, he would endeavour to get them posts as Chaplains, or failing that, always assuming that their departure would not undermine the spiritual work in their parish, and so weaken the nation as well as the Church, he would gladly give leave for them to act as stretcher-bearers. As to the reorganization of the work of the Diocese, he said that already he had asked the Chaplain-General to use the organization of the rural deaneries to ensure that all hospitals in the rural deanery, whether private hospital for officers or Red Cross hospitals or military hospitals, were properly cared for from a spiritual point of view. The Rural Dean had in two deaneries to his knowledge been able to use the clergy from all parishes to help in what is looked upon as the common work of the whole deanery; and as the war goes on such co-operation and re-organization of the work of the diocese will be more and more extended. But he added—and this was the main point of his letter—that when all was done the fact would remain that

the great majority of the clergy will be needed to keep the heart of the Empire true to God at home :

“ We have four millions of people in the diocese, and we must not so act and speak as to lead people to suppose that we have discarded ‘ spiritual ’ weapons and regard physical force as alone effective. If the priests of the Church were to give this impression, it would either shock the consciences or lower the ideals of the laity. As I said at St. Martin’s-in-the-Fields, I want every mourner visited, every recruit commended to the care of the Chaplain of the regiment to which he is posted, touch kept with all women left behind, and help given them to invest their separation allowances in some permanent benefit for their homes and children, or in the War Loan. More than this, we are starting this New Year a chain of unbroken intercession in the diocese throughout the year, and are about to prepare the Church to undertake a National Mission to the whole nation. I think that we shall find the already diminishing number of priests in the diocese no longer reinforced by the large Ordinations of recent years, none too many for so mighty a task, and that in the light of the great spiritual issues involved we may ‘ shorten the days ’ more effectively by renewed fervour and earnestness in the work of our parishes than by any other course which we can adopt.”

The Bishop of London is to be thanked for such a plain, straightforward and convincing answer.

What the Bishop of Oxford describes, with **“ A Remarkable Experiment.”** apparent sympathy, as “ a remarkable experiment ” has lately been tried during a Mission among troops at Fenny Stratford. The Vicar, the Rev. J. H. Firminger, and the Missioner, the Rev. Paul Bull, were anxious that the men should have more opportunities of attending Holy Communion, and as the men were specially liable to calls for Sunday work, it was decided to make the Parade Service a Communion Service, and this was done. The clergy concerned have sent a report of the experiment to the Bishop, who commends it to the consideration of other clergy. There are one or two points about the report which interest us. The first is as to the authority for making the change. The clergy claim that it is within their right. “ It was not necessary,” they write, “ to consult the military authorities, as they are only concerned in arranging the hour and length of the service. The nature of the service lies in the discretion of the Chaplain or officiating

clergyman, and he alone is responsible." We are not sufficiently well acquainted with the King's Regulations to say whether or not this view is correct. It strikes us as a point of such great importance that it ought to be referred to the Chaplain-General, for if the contention can be sustained, it opens the door to irregularities rather more widely than we like to think. Another point in the report is in reference to the "five-minutes' sermon." The men were thus instructed :

"1. We are going to show forth our Lord's Death before the Father, and then those who are properly prepared may come up to receive His Life in Holy Communion.

"2. We plead this Holy Sacrifice for the living and departed, so remember your comrades who will not come home.

"3. You have a special right to be present, for as Christ died for you so you have offered to die for others.

"4. When we show forth the holy Body broken, pray for the wounded and the maimed.

"When we show forth the holy Blood outpoured, pray for those who have laid down their lives for their country.

"5. Remember that the Saints and angels and the faithful departed all take part in this service.

"6. Only those who have been confirmed may come up to receive Holy Communion; those who wish to be confirmed are to give in their names to their Chaplain. During times of war soldiers are allowed to receive Holy Communion even though they have already taken food."

Upon this we need only remark that exact theologians will find many things within these few sentences to which to take exception. One other point remains for notice: "Forty-five out of three hundred received Holy Communion, and on the following Sundays eighteen and twenty-three." The men "left the Church without waiting for the ablutions, as the service had taken the allotted time." We should be sorry to seem to disparage any effort which proved to be spiritually helpful to the men, but we cannot think that the substitution for the usual Parade Service of a service of Holy Communion when the great majority of the congregation do not communicate is an "experiment" which, in the long run, will tend to edification. The clergy conclude their report by saying that "in this camp now lads who are going forth to face sufferings and death can always have free access to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament."