

Lambeth and Mürren.

TWO important conferences were held last August. The earlier corresponds to our Baptist World Alliance, in so far that it was of members in one communion from all over the world; but it is narrower in that it consists entirely of bishops; laymen and women not being members. When however 307 men from every part of the English-speaking world, besides Japan, China and parts of Africa, come together, their deliberations deserve respectful attention, even by those of another fellowship. The later conference was smaller in numbers, there being only fifty-four, with nine substitutes, and thirteen young people specially invited, chiefly to learn, and to prepare themselves for future gatherings. But this Continuation Committee of the Lausanne Conference on Faith and Order was far more world-wide, and represented all the chief fellowships of Christendom, except the Roman communion. It seems that some note is due of the proceedings of each of these gatherings.

I.

First, as to the Lambeth Conference of bishops in communion with the Church of England. An Encyclical letter has been issued, with seventy-five resolutions adopted by the whole conference; appended to these are interesting reports from six committees, which carry the weight of those committees only. We have no space to dwell at length on these valuable papers, nor would it be seemly to go into details on what are sometimes quite domestic affairs. Yet there are a few points that merit attention.

A report on the Christian Doctrine of God deserves close study, and pastors may well find rich suggestion for their public teaching. For instance, we do not recollect any previous exposition about the Old Testament which clearly states "that Christ gave His perfect revelation, not indeed by destroying, but by fulfilling *and in so far superseding*, all past teachings about God." There is warning also against two tendencies in worship; attention to the human Christ obscuring His relation to the Father, especially in many popular hymns; limitation of the presence of Christ to the Eucharist, or even to the consecrated elements: the former overlooks the coming of the Spirit, the latter neglects the participation of the Spirit-filled society.

A report on the Unity of the Church recognises "that

during the period of division each of the bodies thus separated has under the guidance of the Holy Spirit developed spiritual resources and enjoyed spiritual treasures which must be conserved in the re-united Church, for they are the gift of Christ given to each in its own measure." It is a matter of regret that no general resolution of the whole Conference makes any allusion to this statement; nor are we satisfied with the oral explanation that Resolutions dealt with practical issues rather than with theoretical statements.

The Baptist Union officially replied to official overtures, that it requested attention to the basis of church-membership, and the place of faith: it further asked that the method of federation be explored. Neither question has been touched.

The same report declines to consider "any scheme of federation, involving interchangeability of ministers, while differences on points of order that we think essential still remain." And it proceeds to explain what is thought essential, defining the Historic Episcopate. We have long desired to see some definition, and it is now made clear. "As an institution it was, and is, characterised by succession in two forms: the succession in office and the succession of consecration. And it had generally recognised functions: the general superintendence of the Church and more especially of the Clergy; the maintenance of unity in the one Eucharist; the ordination of men to the ministry; the safeguarding of the faith; and the administration of the discipline of the Church." Such a definition enables us to see clearly the terms on which the Church of England will unite with others. We observe valuable elements here. We, too, value succession in office, dislike long intervals between pastorates, disapprove of churches which habitually have no pastor at all—"Gower Street Memorial" almost prides itself that it has never had any pastor since 1843! We, too, value the recognition of a new minister by those who are trusted ministers of Christ; but we do not stipulate for their recognition as absolutely necessary. We do believe that a pastor has the general superintendence of his church; that he is the centre at the Lord's Supper, the visible token of unity; that it is his appropriate business to guard the faith and to administer discipline. In all these respects what the Anglicans say of their bishops we echo of our pastors, who match the original bishops. But we cannot see apostolic precedent for general superintendence of the clergy; the Presbyterians manage that admirably without bishops, and we hold that the whole congregation, its membership of men and women alike, has a voice in this matter. Nor do we agree that the ordination of men to the ministry is limited to an order of bishops, nor even to an order of pastors.

We may illustrate our position in this matter of ordination, which to the Anglicans appears so extremely important. We have churches with a continuous history of three hundred years, as at Lincoln and Tiverton; and doubtless if they took more pride in their record, they could post in their porches a list of their pastors. Suppose one of these churches calls to its pastorate a man fresh from college. It desires to mark his entrance on his life-work, publicly to recognise that he has been called of God to the ministry, to instal him as pastor of this particular part of the Church Universal. It holds that the promise, often quoted in relation to worship, was originally made exactly for purposes of discipline and administration, namely, that where two or three are met in Christ's name, He is in the midst. That local historical church considers itself competent, under such Headship, to ordain. It may well fortify itself, and call others to rejoice with it; but they come as sympathisers and spectators. The church appoints its own spokesman and leader; he may be the treasurer of the church who has guided it wisely during the interregnum; he may be the venerable pastor of a neighbouring church, loved for his wisdom and piety, though he be a grocer on weekdays; he may be an ex-president of the Union, accustomed to preside over the meetings of all the General Superintendents of the country. But whomsoever the church chooses, member, or minister, or layman, that man acts as commissioned by that church, and on its behalf. The precise ritual employed is immaterial to us; there will probably be something symbolic as well as something spoken; the spokesman may extend to the new minister the right hand of fellowship on behalf of the church, he may invite him to sign in a Pastor's Bible, he may in the name of the church and its Head place hands on the minister's head, he may instal him in the chief seat, ask him to dispense the Lord's Supper—we are indifferent to form, provided only everything be done decently and in order, that the church simply recognise the call from the divine Head, ratify it by acknowledging him as its own pastor. A wider recognition may come from a county Association, from a national Union; it may be convenient to have representatives officially present from these organisations; but to quote the Anglican catchwords, these extras are of the *bene esse*, not the *esse*.

Contrast with our conceptions the extremely careful statement made by the Anglican bishops to the Orthodox bishops when exploring one another's views:—"In the Anglican Communion, Ordination is not merely the appointment of a man into a particular post, but in Ordination a special *charisma* is given to the person Ordained, proper to the Order, and the nature of the

special gift is indicated in the words of Ordination, and in this sense Ordination is a *mysterion* or sacrament." This view is from a different plane. The corporate union of ourselves with the Church of England seems impossible, though Federation may come about.

In another report, there is a regretful statement that the supply of men seeking ordination is steadily diminishing. At the outbreak of war there were over 20,000 clergymen at work in England, to-day only 15,070. Last year 505 died or resigned, 439 were ordained. The reasons are discussed, such as a low ideal of the ministry, intellectual misgivings, finance; but the fact is unmistakable, with its crippling of work at home and abroad. It is some compensation that Anglicans in their time of trial are drawing on classes who for many centuries have not found their way into the Anglican ministry.

Two sentences in a report on Youth and its Vocation is peculiarly interesting to Baptists, and we wish that bishops and others would follow up the implications:—"We find a number of young people placing themselves at a most impressionable age in the hands of their parish priest for a long period of definite and consecutive Church teaching, generally in classes, but with constant opportunities for personal interviews and guidance. It is impossible to exaggerate the value of such systematic preparation when it is made clear that the renewal of Baptismal vows means a deliberate offering of the young life to the service of Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—in other words, a real, though not necessarily sensational, 'Conversion'." These words enable us to see how, despite the inherited handicap of infant-baptism, with no succession from the apostles, yet the bishops have a firm hold on the necessity for a personal choice, to be publicly expressed, and noted by the Church. That their ceremony is Confirmation rather than the apostolic Baptism, is a small thing in comparison with the inward identity.

II.

Mürren was considerably influenced by the fact that several Anglican bishops were there, brimful of their recent proceedings; also several dignitaries of the Orthodox Churches. These have been so long isolated that it is a joy to find them seriously considering mutual recognition of others. It may well prove that within the next few years, many Episcopal Churches will be on interchangeable terms; Anglicans, Greeks, Russians, Old Catholics, Swedes, Moravians. Yet we are constantly surprised at the discrepancy between the historic continuity and the numerical importance. A few years ago we pointed out how

few people are under the care of the ancient Patriarchs; recent political changes have left to His All-Holiness and Beatitude the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, with his brethren at Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople, about 130,000 followers only. If the "Bridge Church," as the Anglican communion often is styled, succeeds in mooring one end of its pontoons to this historic bank, it surely connects with a very trifling island. And so far, the other end of the bridge is adrift. Nor is any serious attempt being made at any connection.

The Lambeth Report had nothing to say about union with the Free Churches: Mürren offered an opportunity. Most unhappily there had been an under-estimate of time, and a wise plan has had to be postponed for a year. It had been seen at Maloja last year that the obvious differences between the churches were but the superficial results of underlying thought; and that certain great doctrines needed to be re-examined. A Theological Committee was set up, under the guidance of Dr. Headlam. He chose for its first duty the study of the doctrine of Grace, and commissioned sixteen divines to prepare memoranda on various aspects. Even with such division between a Scot, a Bulgarian, two Oxonians, a Norseman, two New Yorkers, two Swiss, two Germans, a Russian, a Greek, an American Methodist, an English Congregationalist, and a Frenchman, yet it was impossible in the time to discuss and present a report. Hence the Continuation Committee had a menu from which the chief dish had dropped out. The richness of the feast in preparation may be judged from the fact that its ingredients are in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin and Greek. It will be next August before this important volume can go to press, and before the Continuation Committee can sit at Cambridge to consider the practical bearings of this re-valuation of the doctrine of Grace.

Unexpected support was given to the Baptist reply to the Lausanne overtures. We had said that into a unitary church, governed by bishops, we were not prepared to consider entering, but that we would explore the possibilities of Federation. This was echoed in a weighty speech by Adolf Deissmann, who emphasised that the valuable peculiarities of every communion must be preserved; and also by Dr. Luke Wiseman, while Dr. Parkes Cadman voiced the feelings of Congregationalists. Apparently the next session should concentrate on this, as a really practical step. Hitherto the term "Federation" has been used vaguely, and we think it deserves careful definition.

Of minor matters; sympathy was expressed with the suffering Christians in Russia; reports were given as to conferences in Atlantic City between Episcopalians (both

Methodist and Protestant) and Presbyterians; as to the United Church of Canada; as to the proposed South Indian Church. The appearance of the younger generation was amply justified in a speech on their behalf by a Chinaman; he pleaded for more thought on fundamental questions before hastily varnishing over the surface, for actual facts to be fully weighed and not only past history, for organisation to be related to life, for "faith" to be regarded as dynamic and not merely static, and for a greater readiness of all the churches to make sacrifices.

It was with joy he was listened to, since he was the only man not of white descent. Neither Lambeth nor Mürren abounded in Asiatics, Africans, South-sea islanders, and South Americans. There was some happiness in knowing that while we were talking—and perhaps even thinking—a Canadian President and a British Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance were visiting their brethren in Rumania, Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Germany, the Baltic states and Scandinavia. Some church-fellowship there is already.

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THE LINCOLNSHIRE CONFERENCE of the New Connection kept a minute-book from 1791 to 1803, from which Mr. Hooper furnished us some extracts in 1924. The book has many items of interest, showing how Peterborough was rescued and set on its feet. It shows that soon after Abraham Booth of Sutton-in-Ashfield quitted the General Baptists for the Particular, Charles Briggs of the same town reversed the operation, and settled first at Gosberton, then at Southboro or Laighboro, then at Gosberton again. It shows that Anderson was minister at Gosberton 1799-1802. It shows T. Fant minister at Coningsby 1792, Upwell 1795, Wisbech 1796-1801. And it shows Richard Wright as minister at Wisbech 1798 and 1799, alongside Fant and alongside Samuel Wright at Peterborough. These forgotten facts suggest a good deal as to the fluctuation of opinion then in that district. Once again, the book shows John Deacon of Leicester in 1793 receiving threatening letters owing to political troubles, and his house being set on fire; with one result that internal dissension arose in his church.