

ART. V.—PRACTICAL ECHOES FROM THE BRIGHTON CHURCH CONGRESS.

I.

IN the present article I propose to pass in review the late Church Congress at Brighton, not so much in regard to its own outward circumstances, its readers and speakers, its papers and speeches, as for the purpose of seeing what lessons can be gathered from it in a business point of view for the guidance of future executive committees. This is by no means such a work of supererogation as might be fancied. Considering that there have been forty-one Church Congresses, it might be supposed that a vast amount of experience had been accumulated, and that committees had now little else to do than act upon precedents already many times debated and accepted. Such, however, is by no means the case; for, strange as it may seem, it is only within the last three or four years that any attempt has been made to lay by in store memoranda and printed forms useful for future guidance. The Brighton Committee had a vast number of petty details to settle for themselves at a great cost of time and trouble.

Having acted as one of the honorary secretaries of the Brighton Congress, I took very copious notes on a great variety of practical points, and these notes will be the foundation of this article. My programme may be otherwise defined thus: Existing Methods of Organizing a Congress; Criticism on those Methods; Reforms already suggested; Reforms which I should like to suggest; Miscellaneous *Notanda*—*i.e.*, things noted at Brighton for the guidance of future committees and officers.

Whoever may take the initiative in laying plans for a Church Congress to be held in a given diocese, it is evident that the Bishop of that diocese must be, so far as the public eye is concerned, the leading spirit at the start, and most Bishops will wish, and very properly so, to take the lead in all the arrangements from start to finish, however often they may find it convenient to delegate particular matters of detail to committees or sub-committees. As the success of a Congress, by all appearances, will more than ever in the future depend on the sympathies and active support of the laity being enlisted, it is desirable that the first public meeting to take action shall be convened on the widest possible basis. I believe that, as a matter of fact, the Diocesan Conference of the diocese is generally considered to be the best *fons et origo*, and so it is in one sense; but as these Conferences, as at present constituted, have, to put it mildly, rather a hole-

and-corner origin, it is desirable that the first public preliminary meeting should be thrown open as widely as possible to the whole diocese, and that Churchmen really interested in Church work (clergy and laity alike) should be invited and welcomed, quite irrespective of whether they are members of the Diocesan Conference or are specially in touch with existing diocesan machinery or not. There are many earnest laymen and many beneficed clergy and curates whose advice and assistance will often be well worth having, though they are outside all existing central organizations in the diocese.

At the first public meeting (to be held, say, in January) probably resolutions will be proposed approving of the idea of having the Congress in the diocese and appointing a General Committee, and enrolling at once names for the Guarantee Fund. The first meeting will not get much beyond this stage, but that will be a very sufficient day's work. One or two points may here be noted. As regards the choice of the Congress town, it should be the largest in the diocese. However natural and proper it might seem to be to choose the cathedral city, it will very often happen that that place is not the largest centre of population nor one offering the requisite accommodation either of assembly-rooms or of facilities for hospitality. On some few occasions in the past the difficulty of finding ready to hand a sufficient assembly-room has been met by the erection of a temporary hall, but resort to this expedient is much to be deprecated on a variety of grounds. To mention but two: The erection of a temporary building is a great waste of money, and except at a very lavish outlay no temporary structure is ever likely to be rainproof or airtight, or to have any proper acoustic properties. Congress-goers who went to Folkestone in 1892 will readily recall unpleasant recollections of these points. It is satisfactory to note that to an ever-increasing extent the large towns of England are becoming provided with spacious and well-equipped municipal buildings, which generally offer all that is wanted in the way of a good principal assembly-room, with convenient accessory rooms, either under the same roof or not far off, which furnish the requisite accommodation for sectional meetings, reception-rooms, business offices, and so on.

The questions which are connected with the Guarantee Fund are generally so very local that not much can be said here on the subject. Archdeacon Emery, the permanent pivot¹ of all Church Congresses, lays it down that a Guarantee Fund should always be created even in cases where there is

¹ This is a much more expressive name for the Venerable and venerated Archdeacon of Ely than the term usually applied to him of "Permanent Secretary."

little probability, or, as at Brighton, no probability at all, that any recourse to it is likely to be necessary. This may be taken to be sound advice. It is comforting to the Executive Committee at all stages of their career to be kept free of anxiety as to money matters, as, also, free of the temptation to do things "on the cheap." As we shall see later on, the average ticket-holder is a very *exigeant* person, and more than most people expects something for nothing. By way of fixing ideas, I may say that it is desirable that the Guarantee Fund should in most cases not fall much below £4,000.

The preliminary public meeting having nominated a General Committee, and having dispersed, let us now proceed to consider what the General Committee will do at its first meeting—say, early in February. The quotation from Cowper applied to the Brighton General Committee, of "doing nothing with a deal of skill," was generally admitted, even by those who most resented the quotation, to be a plain and wholesome truth. However, let me here take a more optimistic view of things, and say that at its first meeting the General Committee, besides helping cheerfully to inflate the Guarantee Fund, will also proceed to delegate a variety of business matters with a view to them being eventually carried out by several subordinate committees. There will first of all have to be an Executive Committee which will henceforward be the governing body of the whole undertaking (the General Committee fading away into empty space). Affiliated to and subordinate to the Executive Committee, there will be (1) the Subjects Committee, (2) the Finance Committee, and (3) the Hospitality and Reception Committee. I mention these names rather in the order in which they should start and finish their work than in the order of their relative inherent importance, because it is evident that the number and variety of the subjects finally to be taken up, and the extent and liberality of the reception arrangements, must be governed in no small degree by the funds which the Finance Committee can command. For example, it is clear that holders of tickets will expect more, and get more, when they go to the Diocese of Manchester than they would if they were invited to a Congress in the Diocese of Truro.

The Subjects Committee is usually formed in a special manner. Starting with a body of perhaps two dozen representative men chosen from the diocese, there are afterwards added or co-opted perhaps another two dozen chosen promiscuously from all England, men of commanding experience based on familiarity with previous Congresses, or leaders of thought of commanding influence. It goes without saying that the Subjects Committee should be as representative as

possible of the various parties in the Church, no one party being awarded a monopoly. There was in the case of the Brighton Subjects Committee a much more fair division of the seats than at many previous Congresses, where, by judicious wire-pulling, the extreme High Church party obtained a larger numerical influence than their strength in the nation entitled them to.

When once the Subjects Committee has been constituted it should lose no time in getting to work, because although the interval between February and October may sound a long and amply sufficient one for the task of choosing subjects and speakers, yet it will be found in practice that such is not the case, and that even when July has arrived there are still a great many gaps to be filled up. Members of the Subjects Committee will go to their first meeting armed with a portentous number of suggestions—good, bad, or indifferent—emanating either from their own brains or from those of their friends. They will all assemble in good spirits, and with a large-hearted determination to be pleasant to one another. This will be due to the fact that all are provided with fad subjects, as to which they will wish to propitiate their fellow-members. Each should be called upon in turn to read out his suggestions. No comments should be invited by the chairman or allowed until every suggestion has been leisurely read over once. The suggestions should then be handed in in writing, and the chairman should propound them one by one, and invite comments. It will be easy to see quickly whether a suggestion in its present, or possibly in some modified, form is likely to be provisionally accepted, or is scouted at once. In the latter case it will be immediately crossed off the list; in the former case it will be provisionally reserved for future reconsideration.

The chances are that the suggestions thus tentatively proposed will be from fifty to a hundred in number, and very likely a sitting of two hours will not suffice to dispose of them, and an adjournment will be necessary. It will, however, be very desirable to try and get the first crude batch of suggestions filtered through at one and the same meeting, because members and officials will be able to take a better general grasp of the situation at one sitting than by having to survey it piecemeal. Assuming that the chairman has now got on his notes a fairly considerable and sufficient mass of manuscript raw material, there should be an adjournment, say, for a fortnight, during which he and the principal secretary should put their heads together and in some way classify the subjects, and have the titles put in print for further consideration at the next meeting of the Subjects Committee.

At the second meeting the Committee will be in a much better position to consider what subjects they will have or will not have, and also to take note of what subjects have been overlooked and what subjects had better be struck out because stale or inappropriate or unattractive. Another session of two full hours or more will be needed for this, and the Committee will adjourn, giving instructions to the secretary to reprint the list of subjects in a revised and rearranged form. It is probable that not even will a third meeting suffice to settle in general outline the list of selected subjects. However, as soon as it is settled the list must be reprinted on large sheets of paper with ample space for marginal notes, and sent to each member of the Committee with a request that he will return it to the secretary by a specified and early date, accompanied by notes in the margins of the names of speakers suggested for such of the subjects as the member writing feels warranted in naming.

When these sheets thus annotated have come back to the secretary, it will be his duty to tabulate the results as fully and carefully as possible. He will reprint the titles of the subjects and annex to them the names suggested for speakers, without, however, stating who are the suggesters, though if the same speaker is suggested several times over a note of the number of times should be added, because it is, in its way, a slight index to the popularity of a speaker and of his qualifications for the subject with which his name is linked. When all these particulars have been duly digested, they should be put in type and a copy sent to every member of the Subjects Committee, which should be convened forthwith to consider them. The meeting to consider names will have before it a task far more difficult and delicate than any dealt with at the previous meetings, and for obvious reasons. Some of these will be very personal—*e.g.*, a competent man for a subject may be a heavy and dull speaker whose voice will fail to fill a large assembly-room; another good man may be under an engagement to spend October in America; a third may have recently lost his wife or be unapproachable through some other domestic cause; a fourth may be voted to have been already asked more than a sufficient number of times to appear on Congress platforms; a fifth may be a public man, Bishop, or Member of Parliament, whose time is so much taken up that there is no certainty of his coming to the Congress even if he accepts an invitation. This is not an imaginary statement of difficulties likely to confront a Subjects Committee, but an actual record of actual difficulties which at one stage or another did confront the Subjects Committee of the Brighton Congress. Then another class of difficulty is connected with "Schools of Thought."

Where the subject which is selected is one involving party questions, every endeavour should be made to balance the speakers representing different sections so that there may be a fair representation both in numbers, personal weight, and social standing of the different sections; and also that clergy should alternate with laity in something like equal numbers. This last-named point is often one of greater difficulty than some of the former ones, because the number of laymen accustomed to, and willing to, discuss Church questions on public platforms is much smaller than one could wish or than is good for the Church. Another incidental difficulty is that which often naturally arises from men being unwilling or unable for good and sufficient reasons to pledge themselves as early as the spring of the year to do particular things at a particular place so far forwards as October. Yet the Subjects Committee cannot stand still in making their arrangements or keep many places open in their list of speakers.

Thus far we have been dealing with the circumstances of speakers of the male sex, but there is no reason whatever why, if competent lady speakers can be had for certain subjects, a sprinkling of such should not be enlisted. Though ladies of sufficient strength of voice and of qualified training to obtain the ear of a large audience are not very numerous, yet they do exist, and when they can be had they are often well worth having. I have heard several such at different Church Congresses. One especially, the daughter of a once highly-distinguished Judge, comes to my mind as amongst the most powerful and eloquent expositors of a complicated semi-legal subject that I ever had the good fortune to listen to.

I will not expatiate further on the duties of the Subjects Committee beyond saying that by the end of April they ought to be ready to hold their final meeting and make a fairly complete report to their superiors, the Executive Committee, as to what they have succeeded in doing. Though the work of the Subjects Committee, so far as the committee in its corporate capacity is concerned, may be considered as coming to an end by about Easter or a little later, yet there will be work to be done on the programme of subjects and speakers quite up to the eleventh hour in September; but it must be accomplished by other men, fewer in number, or even at the last by one man of responsibility. It is surprising how promises to read or to speak keep on breaking down all through the summer months, however final may seem to be the settlement of everything, and these emergency gaps can only be conveniently disposed of by the programme as a whole being confided for its finishing touches to one or two men empowered to draw, in their discretion, on a list of emergency

speakers held in reserve for the purpose. Those who are made responsible for finishing off the list of speakers may not unlikely be compelled, at the last moment, to re-open the list of subjects because speakers for one or more subjects, or subdivisions of a subject, may totally fail. To meet such a case some subjects, generally, of course, of minor importance, will probably have been kept in reserve in case they are wanted.

I proceed now to deal with the Finance Committee, which will also take in hand the general framework of the Congress arrangements, carving out work to be done at a later stage by the Reception and Hospitality Committee, and perhaps, also, by some sub-committees appointed for some special work of detail likely to be best managed by only four or five men. The first duty of the Finance Committee will be to act upon instructions which it has received from the Executive Committee in regard to various matters connected with the administrative business of the Congress. This will include the appointment of officers, whether honorary or paid; the arrangements with the railway companies as to the charges and availability of railway tickets; the office arrangements for the sale of tickets, whether in the Congress town or in London or otherwise; the publication of the Official Guide, the collection of advertisements for the same, and the advertising of the Congress generally; and other matters of a like character. All these things ought to be well sketched out in outline by the beginning of June. We will now consider some of these points, so far, at least, as regards the preliminary stages.

As regards the appointment of officers, there must be a principal and paid Secretary, several Honorary Secretaries, and a Treasurer. The paid Secretary should be a clear-headed cleric of thorough good business capacity, and well known by name and personally to the diocese at large. For the services of such a man, who is thoroughly qualified for the work, £100 is none too much, seeing that he will be obliged to give a large portion of his time to Congress work, beginning in January and not ending till November, or even later. If he is a beneficed parson he will have to pay constant visits to the Congress town, and be there, indeed, two or three times a week from June onwards, and almost or quite daily from September till the Congress is over. This means that he must neglect his parish and spend a certain portion of his £100 in paying for ministerial assistance. With regard to the Honorary Secretaries, their number must bear some proportion to the number of the meetings. At some Congresses there have been eight or ten in addition to the paid Secretary. At Brighton there were only six, but that number was not

nearly sufficient : there should have been at least eight or ten. These gentlemen have eventually to act as what in the Civil Service would be called "heads of departments" ; and, moreover, as two of them are seated at the side of the presiding chairman at every meeting of the Congress, unless there are sufficient number to form a rota the pressure on the time of too small a number of secretaries is rather severe, and gives them little chance either of a reasonable rotation of duty or of getting off to attend some of the meetings in which they may be specially interested. There ought always to be some off duty whilst others are on duty.

It is a convenient arrangement to start with, say, four or six secretaries, and when the date of the Congress draws near—to within say, three months—then to make up the final number, whatever may have been fixed upon, for it sometimes happens, after the first appointments are made, that one or two efficient men are found willing to work, and if they are men of experience, their assistance should be secured ; but when all the secretaries are appointed at once, five or six months before the Congress, it may be difficult to arrange this. But the choice of these extra men should not be too long delayed, or else it may be difficult for them to pick up the thread of, and get into touch with, the work of their colleagues appointed earlier.

It is a very convenient plan for the Secretaries and Treasurer and President of the Congress, or the general chairman of all committees (where such a chairman is appointed), to be formed into an Executive Officers' Committee—a sort of Cabinet Council—gathering up to a focus all the work and all responsibilities of all the larger bodies.

This committee may meet at short notice (sometimes even at one another's houses) to dispose of pressing matters of business which require prompt attention without the formality of convening committees of numerous members. The Treasurer should be a partner in the local bank who is interested in Church work, for it may be necessary in the early part of the summer to draw upon the Treasurer before the Congress earns any money by the sale of tickets.

As regards railway arrangements, these need not be alluded to in any great detail here. It may be remarked, however, that English railway companies have banded themselves together to be less liberal to Congress travellers than they used to be, now charging a fare and a quarter for return tickets which they used to issue at a single fare. They also enforce a very absurd condition which is provocative of much misunderstanding and inconvenience to travellers. A Congress ticket-holder living or staying, say, twelve or fifteen miles from the

Congress town, and taking a Congress return ticket, say, on the Tuesday to the town, will naturally use the return half to take him back again into the country in the evening. Doing this he will exhaust his privilege of taking a return ticket at the cheap fare, and day by day afterwards will be compelled to take a local return ticket at the full local fare. What the railway authorities expect and intend is that the return half of the first ticket issued, say, on the Tuesday morning should be kept in reserve to take the visitor back on his last outward journey, say, on the Friday night, and if he wants to visit the Congress during the intervening days he should do so by taking a return ticket to go home with on the Tuesday night (in the case supposed), using the second half of this second ticket to take him back to the town on the Wednesday morning, taking a new return ticket to be similarly used on the Wednesday evening, and to be used upon the Thursday morning, linking together, in fact, an evening with a morning journey instead of a morning with an evening journey, as common-sense would naturally suggest. The commercial "dodge" involved in this ridiculous arrangement is obvious enough, and that it is calculated to mislead the public most inconveniently is also obvious. However, there it is, and it is only by adhering to this requirement that visitors can obtain daily return tickets at the Congress cheap prices. These are granted on the outward journey at the stations in the Congress towns on the exhibition of the member's Congress ticket, which is treated as a substitute for the original railway voucher sent out when the Congress tickets are first issued, but which vouchers are exhausted by being used once on the first journey to the Congress town.

As regards the Official Guide, it is important to make this book really what it professes to be, a goal which has rarely been attained in previous Congress years. The editor should assume that he is catering for juveniles who have only the most elementary knowledge of how to find out the trains which will convey them from different parts of England to the Congress town. Too much pains cannot possibly be taken to provide a clear and intelligible service of time-tables from the principal towns within one hundred and fifty miles of the Congress town. Having arrived there the visitor should be assisted in getting cheaply and quickly to his lodging by cabs, omnibuses and trams. Local time-tables of and the fares of these conveyances should be given in some detail, and in the most explicit form possible. A good plan of the Congress town is indispensable. None of those now in the market come near Bartholomew's for accuracy and excellence of artistic execution. The wants of cyclists should also be

consulted, and this should be done by supplying prepared copies of Bartholomew's reduced Ordnance Maps on the scale of four miles to the inch, and taking in a radius of thirty or forty miles from the Congress town. No map-making firm comes up to Bartholomew of Edinburgh, and though the map of Sussex and plan of Brighton which he supplied were very costly (£44), they helped very much towards the popularity of the book, and a very large number of copies were bought by the outside public for the sake of the maps. The Official Guide should supply an outline of the local history of the Congress town, its churches and public buildings, with a selection of illustrations. It will, of course, include the programme of the meetings and names of the speakers. Its usefulness in regard to these latter will be much increased by a few biographical details concerning these, modelled on the lines of the particulars of the clergy given in *Crockford*. The hymns should be printed in good large type, for it should be remembered that they often have to be sung in rooms which, or the remote corners of which, are often very imperfectly lighted, both by day and by night. It would be a useful innovation to give the music of the hymns in short score. A feature of the Guide-book, important in one sense, was very imperfectly and unsatisfactorily handled in the Brighton book—I refer to the advertisements. These are, or should be, an important source of revenue, and ought to go a long way towards defraying the cost of the Guide.

In the preparation of the Official Guide, it is very desirable for an editor who wishes to secure as much peace of mind as he can for himself to place the responsibility of local facts being accurately stated on local people officially concerned with them. For instance, all information which it is desired to give with respect to municipal matters and legal cab-fares, etc., should be sought directly from the officials of the municipality, and not from local guide-books and directories, which are often out of date and inaccurate. Information as to churches should be obtained directly from the clergy of those churches, and they should be invited to supply in their own language such items of information as they desire to have inserted in the Official Guide. If this is not done, the editor will be open to charges of favouritism, or ignorance, or what-not, for which, in reality, there might be no true foundation. So, also, as regards railway time-tables: all information should be sought at first-hand from the General Managers of the companies, and not be borrowed from *Bradshaw*, local *A.B.C.*'s, or local newspapers.

It is usual to print the names of all the vice-presidents and members of the different committees. These last-named, of

course, it would be useful to have, but where a "general committee" comprises a large body of men already possessed of a corporate existence, such as the Standing Committee of the Diocesan Conference, or all the members of particular local Church Societies, it is a waste of money and of space to reprint long strings of names which it is of no use to have, and which nobody cares to read. Similarly, the names of the subscribers to the Guarantee Fund are always printed in the Congress Annual Report, and therefore it is quite unnecessary to print them also in the Official Guide. The fundamental idea of a guide-book should be the provision of information of direct use to strangers, and whatever is not of such use should be very sparingly inserted there.

The details of the services of the Congress churches, of course, must be printed on slips distributed in the churches, but it greatly adds to the usefulness of the Official Guide that they should also be inserted in it. It may often happen that these details are not, or cannot be, settled until a few days before the Congress, and it might be a cause of delay to the Official Guide to wait for them. However, this difficulty can be got over as regards a large portion of the Guide by arranging that these services shall be printed on a separate sheet, perhaps even by a different printer, who should supply copies to the binder of the Guide. This will deprive the printer of the Guide of the chance of making excuses that he was late because somebody else was late.

The question of advertisements in the Guide needs no further detailed mention here, it being a matter on which the Finance Committee must seek and obtain expert professional help, but the advertising of the Congress itself is a matter on which a good deal could be said. It is quite an open question whether the large sum spent in advertising the Brighton Congress (£160) was not to the extent, say, of one-half wasted—that is to say, whether with more time for consideration the aforesaid sum would not have secured a vastly greater publicity for the Congress if it had been better distributed in time and place, and in the dimensions of the advertisements inserted in the newspapers. The subject is one which naturally cannot be well gone into in detail in a magazine article, and I will content myself by saying that the true principle of advertising an event that is going to happen is by the reiteration and wide scattering of a large number of small announcements, rather than by the publication of small numbers of large advertisements going into details most of which are self-evident and known to every reader of the advertisement before he begins to read.

The fullest attention should be paid to the requirements of

the press. Journalists often expect more than they get; on the other hand, they too often do not get anything like such facilities as they are reasonably entitled to, and without which they cannot do their work properly, or be put in a good temper, and this last point is one of very real practical importance if the Congress and its arrangements are to be properly set forth for the guidance of the public. The provision of a special writing-room for them, separate and distinct from every room frequented by the public, is of prime importance. There is one matter connected with the press which requires to be handled very carefully: an undue number of men, and especially women, constantly turn up saying that they represent this, that, or the other journal, and claim special tickets and facilities. The claims of many of these people must be weighed with some severity, and communications on press subjects should be made (especially in the first instance) only by the secretaries to the responsible chiefs of the newspapers which it is desired to get in touch with. If every application made professedly from newspapers were listened to, the committee would very soon have the press representatives run up to one or two hundred, many of which would certainly be bogus claimants. Of course, the daily papers in London and the great provincial towns require a larger number than the local papers, and some of the dailies may fairly ask for, and expect, as many as six tickets, but I rather want to give a caution against the ambitious demands of the amateur-professional journalists.

We had frequent applications from press men for copies of papers read, but we had made no provision for such copies to be put into circulation amongst the press, stating in all cases that that was a private matter between the authors and the journalists themselves. There is no doubt that the want of such provision was an inconvenience to the reporters and a loss of publicity to the authors, which they would have been glad should not have taken place. It was pressed upon our attention that a year or two previously, when a very large Congress had come to Brighton, there was a special department created in the secretary's office which collected the manuscripts from the authors and saw to their being set in type by the official printers, and copies put into circulation from the secretary's office directly. I was told by some of the press people who had profited by the arrangement that it worked exceedingly well, and they wished it had been adopted for the Church Congress. Having looked at the matter in all its bearings, I am disposed to recommend it for general adoption.

G. F. CHAMBERS.