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

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## ART. VIII.—THE MONTH.

THE appointment of the Royal Commission on the disorders in the Church was announced by Mr. Balfour on the 20th of last month, and the announcement was followed by a debate, at the instance of Mr. Austin Taylor, which threw considerable light on the scope and limitations of the Commission. It is satisfactory to everyone that the chairman is Sir Michael Hicks-Beach. His independent character and position and his experience as a statesman afford a welcome guarantee that the proceedings of the Commission will be wisely and firmly guided. The selection of the other members of the Commission has also, on the whole, given satisfaction. It was essential that the Archbishop of Canterbury should be a member, and that the episcopate should be represented by a member of the Bench who, without being of extreme views, will be able to represent with sympathy the action of his colleagues. The law is adequately represented by Sir Francis Jeune, Sir Edward Clarke, and Sir Lewis Dibdin. General lay opinion will be fairly expressed by the Marquis of Northampton, Sir John Kennaway, Mr. J. G. Talbot, Sir Samuel Hoare, Professor Prothero, and Mr. Harwood; and the two chief sections of opinion among the ordinary clergy have able spokesmen in Dr. Gibson, the Vicar of Leeds, and Mr. Drury, the Principal of Ridley Hall. The complaint which was urged in the debate by one or two Liverpool members that what they called "the Church Protestant party" was not adequately represented was amusingly disposed of by Mr. Balfour's condolence with Sir John Kennaway and Mr. Drury in having their Protestant character thus traduced; and as the Commission will to a large extent have to act in a judicial capacity, it seems clearly advantageous that the more extreme partisans, on whichever side, should be excluded from it. On the whole, what may be expected from such a Commission is the judgment of sensible and practical men on the facts and questions brought before them, and such a judgment is what is chiefly needed for the guidance alike of the public and of the Government.

There is in some respects much more reason for criticising the terms of the reference to the Commission. It is to inquire "into the alleged prevalence of breaches or neglect of the law relating to the conduct of Divine Service in the Church of England, and to the ornaments and fittings of churches, and to consider the existing powers and procedure applicable to such irregularities, and to make such recommendations as may be deemed requisite for dealing with the aforesaid

matters." Mr. Austin Taylor expressed an apprehension which is not altogether unreasonable that the inquiries of the Commission will thus be limited to exterior observances in public worship, and that they will not be able to give adequate consideration to the doctrines and principles which lie behind the alleged breaches of the law. It will probably, for instance, be impracticable for the Commission to consider one of the gravest of all recent innovations in the practice of many of the clergy—the growing insistence upon the obligation of private confession. No doubt, however, this is the most difficult of all subjects from a legal and overt point of view, and can only be dealt with satisfactorily by the Bishops themselves. One apprehension, however, which was naturally expressed was removed by an explanation from Mr. Balfour. It was asked whether the practice of Children's Eucharists, "at which special books—not the Book of Common Prayer—were used," could be brought before the Commission; and Mr. Balfour interposed with the remark, "Oh yes; that is the intention." On this the member who was speaking observed that "if so, much of his objection to the phraseology of the reference was removed." If, in fact, the inquiry of the Commission is to extend, not merely to the conduct of the regular Services in Church, but to the various novel services, such as Masses for the Dead, Celebrations of the Festival of Corpus Christi, and Children's Eucharists, and if the Manuals connected with such services can be considered in illustration of their meaning, a considerable range of the most objectionable and characteristic innovations will be brought under review.

One objection which was put forward in the debate, though naturally felt at first sight, was adequately answered by Mr. Balfour, even if on grounds somewhat too wide. The Commission will obviously be unable to consider irregularities of doctrine, although, as Mr. Balfour admitted on a previous occasion, these are the real root of any prevalent disorders. "What my honourable friend," said Mr. Balfour, "is anxious for is to get at what are truly called Romanizing doctrines not connected with the Church services. I sympathize with him," said the Prime Minister; "but can anybody frame a resolution of that kind without dealing with doctrines as a whole, and do you seriously suggest that there is to be an examination into the errors of doctrine of which any clergyman may have been guilty, or thought to be guilty, in the course of his ministrations? I am not sure how the Protestants would come out of it." There is, unhappily, too much force in that suggestion. To inquire into Romanizing errors of doctrine without at the same time inquiring into

Rationalistic errors would be a very one-sided proceeding, and it is only necessary to look into current magazines to see how grave such an inquiry would become. In the *Contemporary Review* for April, Canon Hensley Henson, discussing "The Future of the Bible," says (p. 567) "that no doubt there is much less in the more recent literature [that is, the New Testament] which offends the reason, and hardly anything which hurts the conscience; but whether much or little, it will have to go the way of the Old Testament prodigies." And in the current number of the *Hibbert Journal* the same confident divine protests (p. 485) against "the position of those rigid theologians who would insist upon an acceptance of such a doctrinal definition as that contained in the fourth Anglican Article: 'Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.'" When a Canon of Westminster thus openly repudiates the "belief in all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament," which every clergyman professes at his ordination, and in so many words rejects the Article he has subscribed on so momentous a subject as Christ's resurrection, it is obvious that to refer errors of doctrine to a Royal Commission would open "flood-gates of controversy," as Mr. Balfour expressed it. At the same time, it is difficult to follow Mr. Balfour in his sweeping denunciations of prosecutions for heresy. Any church must become demoralized, and fail in the very conditions of its existence, if doctrines which it expressly prescribes can be denied by any of its ministers without forfeiting their position; and a prosecution may be the only way of insisting on this forfeit. We rejoice to see that the Bishop of London, in his Diocesan Conference, plainly declared that a denial of the Virgin Birth of our Lord was inconsistent with the Catholic faith and with the obligations of Holy Orders. Some very grave action will have to be taken before long if benefited clergymen, of whatever school, combine openly to deny plain Articles of the Creed and of our formularies. But the subject would clearly have been beyond the scope of any Commission. If not all that could have been wished, the return of the Commission to the reference entrusted to it will afford a very valuable basis for future action to all who are concerned with the present position of the Church of England.

