

Evangelicals and the Royal Commission.

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THE Report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline has already achieved success. It has been anxiously awaited, and is now everywhere discussed. It is too early to predict its ultimate fate. It is conceivable that, like the Report of the Ecclesiastical Courts Commission in 1883, it may be first discussed and then quietly shelved. But we see no reason to anticipate this. Churchmen to-day are everywhere alive to the gravity of the situation. "A house divided against itself cannot but fall," and unless the National Church pulls itself together under the stimulus of a Report that represents, on the one hand, a vast amount of research, legal and historical, and, on the other, the unanimous judgment of a Royal Commission, the outlook is gloomy in the extreme. This unanimity is all the more remarkable in view of the composite nature of the Commission, which included men of widely differing views in matters ecclesiastical and political, and it affords reasonable ground for hope that the best men on both sides of the Church will find in it some solid basis of common action.

We welcome the Report not less on other grounds. In terse, nervous English, which cannot be misunderstood, it deals with a variety of questions where official language has too often served to disguise thought. Every matter within the proper purview of the Commission is here set forth in masterly fashion, the facts are admirably marshalled, and the recommendations are cogently stated. The result to Evangelical Churchmen is, from one point of view at least, eminently satisfactory. They have been told again and again by those in authority that the most flagrant illegalities ("defiant lawlessness," to use the Commissioners own words) were matched by their own omissions, and that as between the two parties there was really nothing to choose. All such dialectic is here swept away. Things that differ are distinguished with the utmost clearness,

and for the first time a great gulf is fixed between "breaches non-significant of doctrine" and "breaches significant of doctrine." "The distinction which is constituted by the significance of some illegal practices and the non-significance of others is a real distinction to which great regard should be had." For this we are profoundly thankful. That some of the proposals of the Commission give reasonable ground for anxiety there is no question, but for its authoritative discrimination between non-significant practices and eleven practices that are "clearly inconsistent with and subversive of the teaching of the Church of England, as declared by the Articles and set forth by the Prayer-Book, and which should be promptly made to cease," we are grateful.

It is with the former class of breaches that we are for the moment concerned. The Report divides them into three classes :

"1. Practices adopted on the ground of convenience. Amongst them may be mentioned the omission of the two longer exhortations in the Communion Service. The publication of notices during Divine service other than those prescribed by the King or the Ordinary. The saying of the words of administration at the Holy Communion to a row of communicants instead of to each individual. The saying of the first part only of the words of administration to each communicant. The performance of special services containing prayers not taken from the Prayer-Book, and including special collects, Epistles, and Gospels — *e.g.*, services for harvest festivals, missionary gatherings, and dedication festivals. The making of a collection during Morning or Evening Prayer.

"2. Practices which have resulted from negligence or inadvertence—*e.g.*, the omission of daily service as a practice, and not only when the curate is from home, or 'otherwise reasonably hindered,' and the omission of service on Ascension Day or holy days.

"3. Practices that have become common—*e.g.*, the omission in whole or part of the ante-Communion Service. One case

was reported in which it was totally omitted at the celebration of the Holy Communion, and in the case of Evening Communion its total omission is common in many dioceses. In other cases certain portions—*e.g.*, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Prayer for the King—were omitted, nor could it be maintained that the omission was invariably due to the desire to shorten the service."

There is only one item in the whole list of twenty-one non-significant breaches that we should have expected to find in the other and more serious schedule—we mean "the saying of the first part only of the words of administration to each communicant." When we recall the fact that this use is culled from the first Prayer-Book of Edward VI., and that it is found in one well-known ritualistic manual, we confess to some surprise that the Commissioners have dealt so gently with it. But, taking the list in its entirety, it is obvious that by far the larger number of these "breaches" is due neither to carelessness nor to a deficient respect for the Church's rule. Probably there is no single parish clergyman in the land who is not technically guilty under one or other head of the indictment. Most of them are inevitable, and must be treated as such. "We do not think," say the Commissioners, "that in many cases there is a deliberate intention to disregard what the Prayer-Book requires. But the aggregate effect of a number of omissions goes far beyond the significance which any one of them separately would have. In parishes—and not a few such may still be found—where there is no daily service, no proper observance of holy days, no notice of Ember days, no public catechizing on Sundays, and perhaps no service even on Ascension Day, it cannot be denied that the standard of worship and of religious observance set before the parishioners differs widely from that which the Prayer-Book enjoins." This is well put, and will command general assent. *De minimis non curat lex*, but the aggregate of many small omissions may be serious enough, and the Bishops can rely upon the support of Evangelical Churchmen generally when they exercise pressure

in such cases. They are highly discreditable, not confined to any one school of thought, and it is satisfactory to note that "carelessness in these matters is steadily decreasing." We trust it will soon be non-existent.

As a matter of fact there are but two of these infringements of the letter of the rubric which are ever made the gravamen of a charge against the Evangelical side of the Church: we mean the question of daily service and "the saying of the words of administration at Holy Communion to a row of communicants instead of to each individual." We may take it as practically certain that, were the Ordinary to give explicit direction upon either of these matters, he would be obeyed; the Evangelical clergy are bound in all things lawful to set an example of submission to lawful authority. If the Report should become an effective instrument, the Bishops themselves will be compelled to relinquish their present liberty in the matter of the "veto" and of the *jus liturgicum*, which between them threaten to restore the ancient uses, and to reduce the Church to her condition under the Heptarchy! But an indiscriminating "levelling up" in the two points we have selected would for more than one reason be extremely ill-advised. "Elasticity" is the keynote of the Commissioners' Report: "The law of public worship in the Church of England is too narrow for the religious life of the present generation"; and the Bishops' insistence on a wooden uniformity of practice in matters which are admittedly non-significant would be a violation of its spirit through an adherence to its letter. When the Commissioners recommend the substitution of a carefully-defined elasticity for one fixed standard of rites and ceremonies, it is noteworthy that they have in view "breaches with significance"; and it is, at least, not unreasonable to plead for like "sweet reasonableness" in matters that, taken alone, have no "significance" at all.

The following table, in Chapter IV. of the Report, gives the exact available figures as to daily service. They are sufficiently complete for our purpose, and are important :

Dioceses.	Number of Churches.	No Daily Service.	No Service on Ascension Day.	No Service on Holy Days.
Bangor	146	123	1	81
Bath and Wells	495	294	2	185
Bristol	175	113	1	63
Canterbury	430	277	2	159
Carlisle	293	241	14	190
Chester	273	160	4	109
Chichester	381	234	0	119
Durham	247	128	4	91
Ely	559	348	4	210
Exeter	506	324	5	207
Gloucester	320	211	1	131
Hereford	363	289	4	221
Lichfield	466	271	4	173
Lincoln	568	338	3	228
Liverpool	208	143	1	87
Llandaff	254	175	0	130
London	622	232	1	114
Manchester	543	383	13	268
Newcastle	173	103	0	75
Norwich	*	*	15	*
Oxford	636	397	6	240
Peterborough	581	366	1	236
Ripon	358	246	6	166
Rochester (before formation of Southwark)	348	161	1	78
St. Albans	625	405	4	228
St. Asaph	208	166	2	114
St. David's	400	356	8	289
Salisbury	—	—	1	—
Sodor and Man	—	—	2	—
Southwell	481	325	4	227
Truro	—	—	2	—
Wakefield	170	90	3	52
Winchester	567	347	1	156
Worcester (before formation of Birmingham)	497	320	7	200
York	636	375	4	242

* The Norwich figures are promised in an Appendix.

It has been often said that it is no small testimony to the general rectitude of Evangelical Churchmen that the *tu quoque* of opponents finds its heaviest charge in the neglect of a daily service. Well, here are some 12,000 churches, in 8,000 of which there is no such service. One of two things follows:

Either the Evangelicals are a very much larger body than they are usually represented—two-thirds, in fact, of the whole Church in this country—or the omission of daily service can no longer be charged upon them as a neglect peculiarly their own. On which of these “horns” will our critics care to sit? Is it not obvious at a glance that this “breach” is common everywhere, and that the daily service, rather than its omission, is the real exception?

We have no wish to feel pleased at these figures; on the contrary, we think that the ideal of a congregation gathered twice daily in its own church to hear the Word of God and pray is one that many a parish priest might well aim at. “God standeth in the congregation of God” is a solemn word. But when we are told that it is the positive duty of every curate, without exception, to have daily service in his church, then we protest in the name of that common-sense which, after all, must still guide devotion. Will anyone venture to maintain that two-thirds of the whole clergy are lacking either in devotion or in common-sense? Yet that is the indictment if a daily service is the criterion. Is it not more reasonable, more consistent with facts, to remember that the twentieth century is not the sixteenth, that the bulk of the town clergy are thoroughly overworked, and that the addition of two services a day would in many cases spell collapse? Two services, we say, for the rubric cannot be satisfied by either Mattins or Evensong alone. We are quite certain that if the clergy had reason to believe that such services would really assist them in their parishes, and would take the place of some of the “meetings” which multiply from year to year, they would gladly and thankfully make the exchange. It is easier to spend two half-hours in the quiet of the sanctuary reading the services for the day than to visit in the slums; and if the curate by tolling the bell could get the people to come together, that “by daily hearing of Holy Scripture read in Church they might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of His true religion” (Concerning the Service of the Church),

which of them would not thankfully do it as the most important part of his work? It is notorious that the daily service in the vast majority of cases utterly fails of its purpose as here set forth. In a day when few could read, and fewer still had Bibles, it was right that the Church should everywhere make provision for public worship day by day, but clearly she nowhere contemplates a service apart from the congregation; yet that is the actual state of things in hundreds of churches where the rubric is obeyed, and that although only one in every three offers the privilege to the people. The matter is one where local and congregational circumstances must be taken into account, and the responsibility of decision must be left to the parish clergy; and that is all we ask for.

As to the saying of the words of administration to more than one communicant at a time, the same plea must be urged: the matter must be left to the reason and conscience of the curate of the parish. Where celebrations are frequent and communicants few, there can be no difficulty in saying the words (and all of them) to each. But where, as in many Evangelical Churches, there is an average attendance of 100 to 150 at the midday or evening Communion, convenience alone might dictate the shorter method. In one church well known to the writer, to insist upon the repetition to each would practically shut out a number of Sunday-school teachers from the midday Communion. Nor should the physical and spiritual needs of the clergy be forgotten. The strain of repeating the same words perhaps 200 times is considerable; it tends to destroy their prayerful and devotional use, and makes a real burden of what should be a time of deepest joy and privilege. It is almost impossible to avoid a mechanical and monotonous repetition, and the sacred words are often gabbled until they are robbed of every shade of meaning to the hearer.

But we are anxious not to rest the shortened use solely upon convenience. It is dear to many of us because it most resembles the method of our Lord Himself in instituting the Sacrament. Our Saviour's words of institution set forth a double aspect of

the Sacrament, its personal and its corporate character. To eat, to drink, are essentially individual acts; no one can perform them on our behalf: they are personal, appropriative, throughout. That is one great aspect of the Supper. But then this is carefully balanced by the other. *Λάβετε, φάγετε* imply a united social and composite action, and this is emphasized by the plural pronoun in the words that follow: "This is My body which is given for *you*," etc. This is that feature of "a communion" [*i.e.*, a joint participation] "of the body of Christ" on which St. Paul insists. Dear as our own familiar form is, with its words of personal appropriation, "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for *thee*," we venture to think that it loses something of the significance that He Himself put into the words when He first gave them to His Church and bade them "Do this"—*i.e.*, perform the actions and say the words that they had just seen and heard.

We would close this paper with a note of thankfulness to God for the Report taken as a whole, and with the prayer that it may tend to the restoration of the proper discipline of the Church. The National Church has a position unequalled by any other Church in the world; she has been, we firmly believe, a great blessing to the nation, in spite of manifold failure and shortcoming, and if this Report is loyally received and acted upon, she has yet before her a glorious future.



Organs and Choirs.

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IN a paper contributed to this Magazine some years ago, the writer endeavoured to point out how, according to his judgment, the competing claims of congregation and choir may be reconciled. He urged that a frank recognition of the existence of the other's claims should be accorded by each; that