

1910.

BY THE VERY REV. THE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

WE enter upon the New Year in circumstances of the gravest anxiety. It is not merely that the first two or three weeks will practically decide the result of a General Election, as they did in 1906, but that the issues at stake in that election are of the most vital consequence both to our Church and to our country. It is difficult, indeed, to name any period in our history since the days of the Commonwealth when questions of such import to our national and religious life were at stake. It is the combination of the two issues which carries our thoughts back to that momentous epoch. Now, as then, Church and State are alike menaced by changes which are nothing less than revolutionary. With the purely political issues we are not directly concerned in these pages; and it may be sufficient to observe that, if the present claim of the Liberal party for the supersession of the veto of the House of Lords had been in force in 1893, Home Rule would then have been established in Ireland. As Mr. Redmond has plainly told his supporters, the House of Lords, with its present powers, is the one efficient obstacle to Home Rule. That measure, with its disastrous consequences to the Protestant minority, has now been formally revived by Mr. Asquith as a part of the Liberal programme, and we cannot afford to dispense with a single barrier which may protect us from it.

But with this single reference to the momentous political issues which will be in a large measure determined during the next month, we pass to the great religious issues which more immediately concern us, and these would seem to be far graver than is generally appreciated. Perhaps one of the worst signs is that the world in general does not seem to realize that the religious problems of the day are really determining our political problems. This is, for instance, the case in Ireland. The ultimate source of our difficulties in that country is that the

Roman Catholic Church is an organized force, which marshals the mass of the population in permanent hostility to the ideals of English government ; and the question of Home Rule is a question whether the English and Protestant ideals of the North of Ireland shall be overridden by the "Irish ideas" which have been fostered by the Roman Church. But if we look abroad, we shall see on a broad scale the religious conflict which is agitating modern society. Similar movements of thought prevail over the whole European world, but are from time to time more clearly exhibited in one country than in another. The most portentous exhibition of the religious conflict of the moment is exhibited in France. In that country a Government is in power which ostentatiously proclaims the overthrow of all supernatural sanctions. One of the Ministers, M. Viviani, boasted that the lights in the heavens had been extinguished, and that men would no longer be distracted by such will-o'-the-wisps from the scientific realities of earth. His speech was, by order of the Chamber of Deputies, placarded throughout France ; and the worst sign of all is that no sense of horror seems to have been roused in the public mind in any country by this great blasphemy. The crucifixes which hallowed and awed every court of justice in France have been removed, and Christian faith is now a mere private opinion, which is not allowed to control the principles of French public life. There is a similar state of things in Italy ; and in Spain, though the Church is still officially supreme, the most anarchical and anti-Christian opinions are widely spread among the people, as was shown in the recent outbreak at Barcelona. There can be no reasonable question that this disastrous revolt against religion in the great Latin countries is due to the perversion of the Christian religion by the Roman Church. Wherever Romanism is held in check—as in Germany—by a strong Protestant influence, and a form of religion is thus maintained which is compatible with reason and conscience, there is, at all events, no such general revolt against Christian faith. But where Christianity is almost wholly represented by Romanism, with

its excessive superstitions and its demoralizing sacerdotalism, it is inevitable that the reason and conscience of thoughtful men should sooner or later revolt against it. Over a large part of Europe public life and national government are thus divorced from Christian, and even from all religious, influences. The inevitable result is a disastrous overthrow of every principle of authority, alike in national government and in the whole moral sphere. "There is no power," and no authority, "but of God"; and, consequently, where God is not recognized, there is no basis but that of force for any human authority. Sooner or later such a state of opinion must lead to anarchy, which, in turn, can only issue in the establishment of a military despotism.

But there is lamentable evidence that, in a less conscious and logical form, the same non-religious view of life has been growing rapidly of late in this country. The widespread neglect of the duty of public worship, and the disregard for the observance of Sunday, are alone sufficiently alarming symptoms. Men and women would not neglect the worship of God if they seriously recognized their allegiance to Him as the "King of kings and Lord of lords"; and they would not turn Sunday into a day of mere secular amusement if they had any sense of the privilege of spiritual communion with Him through prayer and meditation. The result is seen in the purely secular and partisan considerations which prevail in the discussion of all great public questions. Nothing, for instance, has been more lamentable than the disregard in the education controversy of the broad religious consequences which are at issue. If the importance of a true faith in God and Christ to the welfare of the nation had been the main consideration, the chief question in Parliament and the country would have been how children could be best brought up in that faith. But, instead of that, the question has always been how one form of religious teaching could be prevented from maintaining a predominance over others; and provided the quarrels arising out of this question could be appeased, the influence of any settlement on the religious life of the nation has been, for the most part, a secondary

consideration. But, to the mind of a true Christian, the supreme necessity for national welfare is that every child should be brought up in the fear and love of God in Christ, and that this influence should be supreme over all others in his education.

A similar disregard of the main religious interests of the country is apparent in those movements for Disestablishment which become daily more menacing. In the attacks which are made, for instance, on the Church in Wales, what sign is there that a consideration for the maintenance of the Christian faith and of a true Christian life among the people is supreme? To take only the question of Disendowment, can any reasonable man say that the funds which are now available for the maintenance of an effective Christian ministry in Wales are too large for the purpose? Is it not notorious that, especially in the great centres of population, they are far less than is needed, and that distressing appeals are made year by year, and not by the Church of England only, for voluntary additions to them? How, then, if the welfare of religion were really the first consideration, could it possibly be proposed to divert any part of these funds to secular objects? If a statesman really sat down to consider how the glory of God and the faith of Christ could best be promoted among our people, is it conceivable that he would begin by saying that the funds upon which the ministry of God's Word is supported should be reduced? It is very conceivable that he might propose that their application should be modified, and that they should be in some way redistributed with a view to their more effective employment. He might fairly contemplate some modification of existing establishments; but he would not consider simply how the jealousy of one denomination of Christians towards another could be most conveniently appeased, even at the sacrifice of necessary resources of religious influence. In a word, in none of these public problems do we see any other than secular considerations prevalent in the minds of politicians.

If we inquire what is the reason of this lamentable decay

of the religious spirit in the country, we fear we must attribute it in some measure to similar influences to those which in a more flagrant degree have been operative abroad. The Ritualistic movement has no doubt stimulated a certain type of religiousness, but it has not tended to strengthen the hold of the Christian faith among the stronger minds among us. The vehemence with which external matters of ceremonial have been pressed has obscured the weightier matters of faith, and with the inevitable opposition it has provoked on the other side it has led to the subordination in the public mind of the supreme interests of spiritual religion to those of ecclesiastical parties. The prominence given to some sacerdotal practices, and to superstitious views of the Sacraments, have alienated some of the sturdiest members of the English Church. Notwithstanding the example of some great preachers, particularly in London, the average character of preaching has greatly deteriorated, and Churchmen and Churchwomen are in a grievous degree deprived of that "food of God's Word," in which they seek the primary source of their spiritual life.

It is to be feared that not only this failure in Scriptural preaching, but the decay of religious authority of which we have spoken, is in great measure due to the manner in which the practical authority of the Bible has been undermined by the extreme critical teaching which has been prevalent in the two leading Universities. Men in general will never regard as inspired and authoritative a book of which large parts are declared to be "unhistorical" or, in plain words, untrue. Vital parts of the Old Testament are thus disparaged in the eyes of candidates for Holy Orders and of the public in general; and a Professor at the Universities even allows himself to speak of St. Luke having "allowed his own strong social sympathies to tinge his reports of Christ's language." When such suggestions are tolerated, the conception of inspiration is gone, in any sense which would enable us to submit our minds and hearts unreservedly to the authority of Scripture, even of the Gospels. As a further effect, the general authority of the great teachers

of former ages of the Church is destroyed; for, as I think Bishop Stubbs observed, the present treatment of the Old Testament would involve our repudiating the whole course of Scriptural teaching by the ancient Fathers. In our belief, more injury to the Christian faith has been done in this way by the reckless surrender of our Professors to German theories, and by the countenance shown to them in the school of the writers of "Lux Mundi," than by most of the other influences that can be named. It is now proposed by the Committee of the Lower House of Canterbury Convocation to eliminate from the Service for the Ordination of Deacons the question whether they unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament—a proposal which would have shocked every English Churchman from the days of the Reformers to those of Dr. Pusey.

To what does all this point but to the conviction that what we need above all things to hope and pray for in the coming year is such a revival by the Spirit of God of a living faith in Him, by means of a reassertion of the truth of His Holy Word, as will inspire our people in general with a renewed apprehension of the supreme importance of national allegiance to Him, and of national devotion to His service. No minor or secondary reforms will suffice to stay the irreligious infection which is spreading among our people. The Prayer-Book, for instance, no doubt needs, in some respects, a conservative revision in order to adapt it to the altered circumstances of our day. But no mere tinkering with the services, no mere compromises with Romanizing or rationalizing demands, will avail to restore the Prayer-Book and the Bible to the place and occupied in the life of former generations of Englishmen. The Prayer-Book as it stands has been sufficient, and is still sufficient, to sustain the deepest spiritual life in our people; and had better remain as it is, rather than that renewed up embittered strife should be threatened in every parish in the country by such alterations as the legal allowance of the Valuations, or by the proposal of the Bishop of Birmingham as

Lord Halifax for the permissive use of the first Communion Office of Edward VI. What is needed is a steady, though patient and considerate, enforcement of the obligation of obedience to the declared law on disputed points, and a concentration of the energy of clergy of all schools on the revival and deepening of faith in the great realities of the Christian Creed and in Holy Scripture. In political action Christian men ought resolutely to oppose policies and parties which would be injurious to the maintenance of a national religion among us, and which would reduce to a secondary place in our public life the obligations and influences of our faith. We may be quite sure that no social reforms will conduce to the permanent welfare of the poorer classes or of any classes unless faith in God and in Christ is maintained and deepened in the hearts of our people. As Lord Hugh Cecil said well the other day, all such social legislation is, at the best, mere machinery. That upon which the results depend is the spirit which animates those who employ the machinery and those on whom it operates; and if we would save our country from the anarchy and misery which menaces any Godless society, the time has come for subordinating all political and ecclesiastical quarrels to the one supreme necessity of reviving the old God-fearing and Christ-trusting religion which has been the foundation of the best English character and life.



Jesus or Christ? ¹

BY THE REV. CANON H. HENSLEY HENSON, D.D.

“**J**ESUS or Christ?” This strange and disconcerting question is often forced on our notice at the present time, and it has a certain importance as summing up shortly a tendency of religious thought and indicating the nature of a

¹ Sermon (on Heb. xiii. 8) preached in Westminster Abbey, November 21, 1909.