

THE CHURCHMAN

January, 1916.

The Month.

1915—1916.

DARK and sad the year is ending,
And the feathery flakes descending
Shroud with white the corpse-like earth below ;
From the tower the knell is pealing,
And the shadow blue is stealing
O'er the graves all wrapt in silent snow.

Wait awhile—the skies shall lighten,
And the warmer suns shall brighten,
O'er green woods and tuneful meadow-lands ;
Wait awhile—the dead long hidden,
By the voice of Jesus bidden,
Shall come forth and sing, and clasp our hands.

A. E. MOULE.

The Outlook. What has the New Year in store for us as individuals, as a nation, as a Church? The question may be asked concerning things material and things spiritual. Materially—the reference is wholly to the prosecution of the Great War—the outlook is most hopeful. We have no sympathy with the pessimists and the croakers. Difficulty, suffering, loss of life, there will be, but the sacrifice will not be in vain ; it is a necessary element in the working out of the emancipation

of the world from the thralldom of German oppression and German tyranny. Of the final victory of the cause for which so many thousands of our bravest and our best have laid down their lives we have never had the remotest doubt; and the reason for our confidence is that we believe in God. Whether that decisive victory will be achieved in 1916, 1917, or 1918, no one can say; but by God's help it will come, and the spiritual temper of the nation will be no small factor in bringing it about. It was, indeed, more in relation to the spiritual than the material conflict that we asked our question. Is the spiritual outlook hopeful? Again, we are optimistic rather than pessimistic; because we believe that we are on the eve of revival, even if the first streams of the light of the dawn are not already visible. The night is passing. After nearly eighteen months of war there is coming to be, we hope, a more general recognition of the supreme claims of God, certainly on the part of individual Christians and the Church generally; and we believe that, in the nation at large, there is a feeling—weak it may be, yet of growing strength—that all is not right with us, and that there must be amendment of life. The connection between the spiritual life of the people at home and the success of our armies at the Front is more intimate than we are wont to imagine. The Bishop of Chelmsford, speaking recently of the power of prayer, remarked that it had been stated that there had been blundering at the Dardanelles, and some blamed our politicians whilst others blamed our generals for it. "He believed himself that if, when the war broke out, the Church of Christ in this country had gone on its knees, we should have been through the Dardanelles. But they had not prayed as they ought. They said they believed in prayer—but did they? Their lads were dying by thousands in this ghastly war, but yet the Church had not given itself to prayer." There is reason to hope and to believe that this apathy in regard to prayer is gradually passing away. Certainly the great prayer effort which marks the opening of the New Year is fraught with immense possibilities of blessing.

The careful arrangements made for the right observance of the Day of Prayer on the first Sunday in the New Year are of good augury. On the last occasion there was insufficient preparation, and the day passed, in too many instances, without sufficient realization of its importance and significance. The Church has learnt by experience. We are not to be rushed into observance of the Day of Prayer as though it were merely just one more special service with claims upon the attention of the faithful; it will be approached carefully, solemnly, and with due preparation, ever keeping in mind the greatness of the opportunity and the prevailing power of believing prayer. The two preceding days—December 31 and January 1—are set apart, the first as a "Day of Penitence and Self-Denial," and the second as a "Day of Preparation." In this connection some very solemn and moving words have been addressed to clergy and laity by the Archbishops and Bishops; and if in the parishes of the country a like spirit has been manifested, it can hardly be questioned but that a deep impression will be made. In any case, it is believed that a good beginning will be made; but, let it be remembered, it is only a beginning. If the country is to be saved, as we believe it will be, by the prayers of God's people, it is not one Day of Prayer only that will be required, but continuous intercession carried on, not on formal conventional or perfunctory lines, but in that same spirit of penitence, self-denial, and preparedness, which is to mark the appointed Day.

One of the most hopeful signs of this great movement assuredly is that there seems to be a general agreement that if it is to yield the most fruitful results the clergy must themselves be "prepared." There is no more important fact to realize than this: that clergy, ministers, and teachers generally cannot lead their people to a higher spiritual place than they have themselves attained. It is a solemnizing and humbling thought, but it is abundantly borne out by the facts of Christian experience. If

The Day of
Prayer.

Preparation of
the Clergy.

the pastor is to uplift the people spiritually he will only be able to do so according to the measure of his own spiritual attainments. If he be a man of low ideals, of small faith, of worldly ideas, and with little of true penitence in his own life, his shortcomings will hinder his work among his own people. If, on the other hand, he is constantly pressing towards the mark of his high calling in Christ Jesus; if he is a man of strong faith and earnest prayer; if he realize that he is not of the world even as his Master was not of the world; if in his own life confession and repentance find their rightful and appointed place, then he is able to rebuke and exhort his people, and by his ministry, in the power of the Holy Ghost, he will turn many to righteousness. The gravest responsibility, therefore, rests upon the clergy, and they need to be sustained by the truest sympathy and prayers of all faithful people. The Archbishops and Bishops severally have laid great stress upon the importance of the spiritual life of the clergy, and we feel confident that their efforts will meet with full response. We venture to quote in this connection the following impressive words by the Bishop of Manchester :

“The first steps must be taken by the clergy. We must disabuse our minds of all false issues. We have the strongest conviction that the war was forced upon us, but for all that we are not statesmen or historians called to decide who is responsible for the war. We are God’s messengers, ambassadors, prophets. ‘The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?’ It is for us to hear the voice of God and to speak the word which God puts into our mouths. . . . But if it is our part to pray, to comfort mourners, to minister to the wounded, to preach repentance, to prepare and make ready the way for a new England, are we yet organized on a war footing? Eighteen months of war will soon be over. Have those months found us awake to the opportunity, buying it up, fighting the powers of evil as men fight on the battle-field? It is so easy to reduce the call of the war to the saying of a few prayers, holding of a few special services and other routine functions: so difficult to convict ourselves of slackness, unreality, formality, deadness of heart, and lukewarmness in the service of God. These sins which are brought home to us in the solemn hours of a quiet day or retreat, the voice of God speaking to us through the horrors of this war should have brought home to us with as much vividness as if we had been lying in the trenches, or moving about amid the wounded and dying on the battle-field. Life would have been seen to be earnest there.

But it ought to have been no less earnest here. The Lord God hath spoken, but have we prophesied? or have we failed to prophesy, because we failed to hear? We have a month in which we may be preparing ourselves for the days of solemn prayer. If we do not repent, we shall not move others to repentance. 'What we have seen and heard, that declare we unto you.' A clergy moved to deep repentance will not fail to reach the hearts of the nation."

The Call to
the Nation.

The right observance of the Day of Prayer should prove a strong and useful preparation for the Call to the Nation which is to be made later in the form of a National Mission. The mere suggestion of such an undertaking must stir the hearts of everyone anxious for the conversion of the nation, and we trust that it may be carried through with conspicuous success. At first sight the practical difficulties in the way may seem almost insuperable, but we have faith to believe that they will largely disappear when once the Church as a body determines to become a great evangelizing force. It will be an immense assistance if the whole body of the clergy are so helped in their spiritual life that they can themselves become Missioners, not necessarily in their own parishes—although we think that that is the ideal plan—but in some other district to which they may be assigned. At present no plan seems to be decided upon, but the Committee which is sitting ought soon to be able to take the Church into confidence and let us know what they propose. The need for such a Mission is almost everywhere admitted, but the fact that it is necessary is surely evidence that in the past the Church has failed adequately to discharge its work. If the Church had bought up its opportunities; if it had constantly and consistently preached Christ as the One Eternal Saviour; if it had laid aside its haggling and disputings and given itself more whole-heartedly to the work of saving souls, should we have now to lament the prevalence of indifference to the things of God, and of open and defiant lawlessness and sin, which loom so painfully large over our national life? We think not. The Church needs revival and renewal alike in its own spiritual life and in its capacity as an evangelizing agency.

Dean Vaughan's
"Family
Prayers." * In the aspiration after higher things, attention has once more recurred to the importance of Family Prayer—a practice which at one time was the rule in Christian households, but now, alas! has sadly fallen into disuse. Can it be revived? We are certain it can, and already many heads of families are resolving to set up the family altar in their midst. One of the difficulties in the way has been the want of a suitable liturgy, and with the object of meeting that need Mr. Elliot Stock, in response to a widely expressed wish, has reprinted the very admirable volume of "Family Prayers" written by the late Dean Vaughan,¹ which is generally recognized by those who are acquainted with such books to be quite the most useful, sustaining, and strengthening volume of its kind. In writing his volume, the late Dean set before his mind a very high ideal. In his Preface he wrote :

"Such a work should be neither dogmatical, nor didactic, nor hortatory; neither diffuse, nor involved, nor abrupt; neither affectedly archaic, nor vulgarly modern; neither a compendium of systematic theology, nor a cento of phrases from the Bible, nor an imitation of Collects or Litanies from the Prayer-Book. It should be ample enough to prevent a wearisome frequency in the recurrence of each particular prayer, yet not so large as to forbid familiarity with its contents on the part of those who use it in their worship. It should be spiritual, yet sober, in its tone; not checking the breathings of the deepest and most experienced piety, yet involving no hypocrisy in its utterance by a more level and average Christianity. It should be general, yet real, in its language; expressing the soul's wants, not in their morbid or fanciful eccentricities, but in their daily and regular recurrences. It should be sound, yet catholic, in its doctrine; repelling no Christian by its exclusiveness, but seeking rather to promote that truest, that highest, that deepest unity—a unity not of form or formula, but of personal trust and spiritual devotion—which is more and more the aspiration of our age, and in which alone the divided and dispersed flock of Christ can ever on earth be regathered into one."

The quiet and beautiful spirit of this passage is reflected in the book itself; and the Prayers will be found to express in simple moving language the deepest longings of the human soul. We commend this volume to our readers; they will find it very precious.

¹ "Family Prayers," by J. C. Vaughan, D.D. London: Elliot Stock. Price 2s. 6d. net.