

THE CHURCHMAN

May, 1916.

The Month.

It is distinctly unfortunate that Nonconformity is not coming into the National Mission. That, at least, we take to be the meaning of the correspondence which has passed between Free Church leaders and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The letter from these Nonconformists was very kindly worded; they assured Churchmen of their cordial sympathy and goodwill, and expressed the hope that the movement may be eminently successful. Since the correspondence the Executive of the Free Church Council have passed a resolution reiterating the expression of fellowship, and counselling their own members to abstain from undertaking any special meetings or effort which might divert attention from the National Mission. But beyond this they do not go. Their sympathy is sincere, but it is sympathy from afar, while what is needed is co-operation within. What is the meaning of it all? No one supposes that Nonconformists are less anxious than Churchmen for the moral and spiritual regeneration of England, and when the idea of a National Mission was first mooted it was certainly understood that "other religious communions" would "make arrangements in their own way for an independent effort of a similar character." It may be that a more distinct and definite interpretation was placed on the words we have quoted than they can legitimately bear, but they were widely held to mean that in connexion with the National Mission, but on their own independent lines, other religious bodies would make their own appeal to the Nation. Apparently nothing of the sort is now contemplated, and the Church alone is to undertake the great work. Who is responsible? The Nonconformist leaders?

Undoubtedly they must bear their share of the blame. But are the leaders of the Church altogether free? We cannot say, because we do not know, but there are rumours going round that Nonconformists would gladly have joined in the effort if they had been officially approached, but the Church made no sign, and, therefore, they had to content themselves with offering the Church an assurance of their goodwill and their prayers. The whole business is much to be regretted from every point of view.

For what is the purpose of the Mission? As far
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Mission? as we understand, it is to be a Mission of Witness
 for God and Righteousness. It is a Mission of Repentance and Hope, calling the nation to forsake its sins and to turn back to God Who is our one Hope. These are not exclusively Church aims, or Denominational aims. The message of the Mission is essentially a Christian message; its witness is essentially a Christian witness; its message and its witness belong to the whole Christian body. Why then should the Mission be left to one section of Christians only? If the object of the Mission were to draw people into the Church, then of course it would be right that it should be a Church Mission. But this is not the main purpose. Its primary object is to bring the nation to God, and such a task belongs to all sections of the Christian Church. They would not all perform it on the same lines; the witness each would bear would carry with it its own distinctive characteristic, but it would have the same end in view—that of the regeneration of the nation, the building up of a new England, an England which has forsaken its sins and turned in repentance and hope to the God of our Fathers. If the Church and other religious communions would unite in this one great purpose the witness would be immeasurably stronger than it can possibly be if the work is left to the Church alone. We talk of Christian unity and profess to have aspirations after closer fellowship, and yet we cannot unite in a purely evangelistic effort. The failure is too lamentable for words. What would the world, the ungodly world which we are seeking to influence, say about it if they knew all the facts? Let it not be thought we are blaming the Church only; Nonconformists must accept their share of the responsibility as well. What did it matter whether or not they were approached? Could not they have

come forward with an intimation of their readiness to join in the effort on their own lines? We cannot believe that such overtures would have been rejected. And if they had been, there was nothing to prevent the Free Churches from acting independently. This "day of God" is theirs, as well as ours; and if they refuse to use it for God theirs is the responsibility and the reproach.

Meanwhile we are sincerely glad that, although
 The "National Mission." it is to be mainly a Church effort, the authorities have resisted all attempts to induce them to change its title. It was planned as a "National Mission," and a National Mission it is to be. We hardly know whether to smile or frown at a body of clergy which with portentous solemnity passes a resolution emphatically protesting against the use of the title National Mission and urging its complete and immediate withdrawal. Has a Ruridecanal Chapter nothing better to do, at a time of national emergency as well as spiritual opportunity, such as this, than to find fault with those who are at least recognizing the nation's spiritual needs and are endeavouring to meet them? Happily other Ruridecanal Chapters are reading the signs of the times differently, and their members are seeking to prepare themselves—the hardest task of all—for the great effort to which they are called. In connexion with the question of title we may call attention to a very able pamphlet by the Master of Selwyn, the Rev. J. O. F. Murray, entitled *The Mission in its National Aspect*. It is one of the six "National Mission Papers" just issued by the S.P.C.K. "The National Mission," he says, "is a call to us as a Nation by the National Church to know the time of our visitation," and he goes on to show wherein it differs from a Parochial Mission:—

In a Parochial Mission the immediate aim is to bring back individual souls to their allegiance to God, and to build them up in His faith and fear. Incidentally, a successful Mission should draw the faithful closer to one another and leave the parish more conscious of its organic unity in the sight of God, and more efficient in its corporate witness to Him. But the main objective throughout is the individual.

In our National Mission, on the other hand, the main objective is the nation as a whole. The appeal to individuals is throughout subordinate and conditioned at every point by reference to that end.

The goal which it sets before us is nothing less than the regeneration of England. England means more to each one of us than it did before the war began. We are more conscious than we were how far England, as she is, falls short of the ideal England for which our bravest are shedding their

blood like water. We are filled with longing to hasten the coming of the new England which shall be less unworthy of the sacrifices made on her behalf. So we appeal to all Englishmen to make a united effort for the uplift of our country. We believe that God Himself is drawing nearer to us as a nation through the war, and that, if the heart of the nation can hear and respond to His call, His Kingdom will come in England with a reality and power hitherto undreamt of. The Mission is, therefore, from one point of view, simply a "Mission of Witness" to this converting and inspiring fact.

From this point of view it is difficult to see what other name could be chosen which would more adequately express the purpose of the effort than that of "The National Mission of Repentance and Hope."

It is generally conceded that one of the essentials
to the full effectiveness of the National Mission is
that the Church should be at unity within itself.

*The Plea
for Unity.*

We fear that in its widest aspect that is a counsel of perfection, but beyond all doubt there ought to be a truce—a truce of God as it is called—in regard to all controversial questions before and during the Mission. What will happen afterwards depends very largely upon the use that is made of the Mission itself, and we must be content to wait, although our own belief and hope are that the Church will be so revived and renewed spiritually that many of the things which now divide and embitter will then wear a very different aspect. But let that pass. For the moment we are content to utter a plea for a larger manifestation of Christian unity that the due preparation for the Mission and the work of the Mission itself be not hindered. Let us for the moment try to forget the things which divide, in order that we may concentrate upon the things on which we are agreed. This could well be done by both sides without either party surrendering a point of importance. As an illustration we may mention what happened at a Ruridecanal Conference a week or two ago. There were two selected speakers—one a clergyman of the most "advanced" views, and the other a layman who is closely identified with the work of a leading Protestant organization. Yet there was hardly a word in the address of either to which the other could not have assented. Let it not be supposed that the addresses were weak, or inconclusive; on the contrary they were strong and definite; but for the time the speakers sank their differences, and each offered what he had to contribute to the general cause. Cannot we have more of this

kind of co-operation? It will help the Mission immeasurably, and it will prove a blessing to the Church now and for long after the immediate effort which gave rise to it has passed away.

The Principal Service. But to return to the question of the truce. If it is to be effectual it must be binding on both sides and loyally observed by both sides. It is for this reason that we deprecate the attempts which are being made to secure a discussion of the proposal to make the celebration of the Lord's Supper the principal service of the Lord's Day. It is quite useless to suppose—as has been suggested—that it can be discussed calmly and temperately as an abstract proposition. It is impossible for it to be so considered. It is bound up with questions of such acute controversy—of which that of attendance apart from reception is only one—that it would be lamentable to raise it at this time, when it is of the first importance that the Church should not only cultivate the spirit of unity, but should also present a united front to the world. Yet it is being raised with some persistence by those who favour the proposal. The attempt was even made to introduce the Holy Communion as the Parade Service instead of that ordered by the King's Regulations. We do not intend to discuss the proposal now, although there is much that we should like to say about it. All we ask for is that those who are anxious for the change should hold their hands till after the war, when it may be discussed with greater freedom than is possible now. To force it forward at this stage would make the observance of a truce impossible, would provoke strong controversy and would endanger the usefulness of the National Mission. On every ground, therefore, we ask that the matter may be deferred. And not on this question only, but on all other matters of controversy, whether of ritual or doctrinal significance, we trust the truce of God may faithfully be observed. The Church has other business on hand, and we trust that when the Convocations assemble for their May session, the debates will leave us in no doubt that the leaders of the Church are anxious to get forward with the things that really matter, and to leave on one side everything else till a more convenient season. We venture to adapt the words of *The Times*. It is constantly insisting that the House of Commons should devote solely and strenuously every possible opportunity to the business of winning the war.

"Nothing else matters," it wrote the other day. In like manner the Church will be well advised to devote itself solely and strenuously to the business of seeking to win England for Christ. Until it has done that "nothing else matters."

A Stationary
Church.

The statistics which are published annually in that most useful of all handbooks for a Churchman, *The Official Year-Book of the Church of England*, always afford an interesting and a profitable study; and those which appear in this year's issue are no exception to the rule. The fact that both in regard to voluntary offerings and Church work the statistics show a decline gives rise to serious reflections. Attempts are made to explain—and even to explain away—the decrease on various grounds—war claims and war conditions being most frequently urged. It has also been contended that the difficulty of comparison is enhanced by the fact that the governing date, Easter of 1915, was so unusually early that the "year" consisted of only 50 weeks instead of 52. These considerations are weighty and should be allowed for, but, making every allowance for these things, we find it difficult to resist the conclusion that the Church is not advancing. If it is not going back it is stationary. We are multiplying buildings, we are increasing the machinery, but—are we winning the people? That is the most serious problem and it cannot be ignored by a living Church. The principal figures are these: Voluntary contributions amounted to £7,531,228—a decrease of £676,084 upon the previous year. The communicants at Easter were 2,359,599, or 85,515 fewer than in the previous year. Confirmees numbered 221,572, whereas in 1914 they were 241,820. The number of infants baptized for the year was 570,262, whereas in the previous year they numbered 590,138. The number of baptisms of those of riper years has also fallen behind, the number for 1914-15 being 14,782, against 16,278 in the previous year. The Sunday School statistics continue to show a steady decline. The number on the books has decreased year by year from 2,561,520 in 1911-12 to 2,481,999 in 1914-15. Similarly there has been a steady decrease in the numbers of males and females alike attending Bible classes, the figures being in 1914-15 277,102 males and 304,336 females, whereas three years ago they were 341,716 and 330,973 respectively. This is the situation the Church has to face.