

# THE CHURCHMAN

February, 1918.

## The Month.

**The Bishopric of Hereford.** THE opposition to the appointment of Dean Henson to the Bishopric of Hereford failed to effect its purpose, and his consecration has been fixed to take place on February 2. It must be admitted, however, that the opposition assumed a grave and formidable character, and at one time it seemed quite uncertain what would be the result. But the calm and judicial letter in which the Archbishop of Canterbury announced his decision to proceed to the consecration did much to remove misunderstanding and allay fears. The various incidents of the controversy are of such great importance that it is necessary, if only for future reference, to put the main lines of the story on record. The chief opposition to the appointment came from the English Church Union, which by advertisements in the papers and in other ways sought to obtain signatures to a Protest against the appointment. The result, however, must have been very disappointing to the E.C.U., for when it was presented to the Dean and Chapter of Hereford it had only 2,300 signatures—an almost insignificant number when we remember the extraordinary efforts made to push it. The Protest, of course, had very little if any effect upon the Dean and Chapter, for when that body met on January 4 to elect the new Bishop, Dr. Henson was duly elected, without an adverse vote. Nineteen members of the Chapter attended, and of these fifteen voted in favour of the Bishop-designate and four abstained. But much heavier fire was then directed against the appointment.

**The Bishop of Oxford's Plea.** Within a few days a letter was published which the Bishop of Oxford had addressed to the Archbishop, the day before the election, begging his Grace to refuse to consecrate Dr. Henson. The Bishop of Oxford disclaimed

that he was taking action because of anything which Dr. Henson had said about the ministry of the Church or any other matter of Church polity or policy :—

I am driven to act as I am doing solely because his expressed beliefs touching the fundamental matters of faith seem to me incompatible with the sincere profession of the Creeds.

In more than one book he has argued that, though a man has been led to believe that our Lord was not born of a virgin mother, he should still be free to exercise his ministry in the Church and to recite the services of the Church in which the miracle is unmistakably and repeatedly affirmed ; and even if he believe that “ no miracles accompanied His entrance into, or presence on, or departure from the world,” he should still hold this “ freedom ” to make public profession to the contrary. But may I think that the Dean is simply pleading for freedom for others ? I am led reluctantly to conclude that I cannot. His treatment of the Virgin Birth seems to me incompatible with personal belief in its occurrence. Again, he expressly repudiates belief in the “ nature-miracles ” recorded in the Gospels as wrought by our Lord. He writes explicitly, “ From the standpoint of historical science they must be held to be incredible.” But the birth of a virgin mother and the bodily resurrection of our Lord—that His body did not “ see corruption ” but was raised again the third day to a new and wonderful life—are similar “ nature-miracles ” ascribed in the Gospels to the same power and Spirit of the Father as the miracles upon nature worked by our Lord during His ministry. I can conceive no rational ground for repudiating the latter as incredible and believing the former. The Dean himself seems incidentally to include both classes of miracles in the same category. He does indeed confidently and constantly affirm the truth of the Resurrection of Christ ; but he seems to me by “ resurrection ” to mean no more than personal survival. He repudiates again and again any insistence upon the “ empty tomb,” and declares it to have no significance. But the empty tomb was an absolutely necessary condition of any such resurrection as the New Testament postulates. If the tomb was not empty, Christ was not, in the New Testament sense, risen again. On the whole I am led irresistibly to the conclusion that, though he nowhere explicitly expresses in so many words his personal disbelief in the physical miracles affirmed in the Creeds, he does in fact regard them as incredible.

The Bishop of Oxford recalled to the Archbishop’s mind the terms of the Declaration recently agreed to by the Bishops of the Southern Province, and then continued :—

As things stand—that is, judging only from his published writings—if Dr. Henson were to take his place among the Bishops, I think three results would follow :

1. It would be impossible to deny that the Bishops—not all of them individually but the Bishops as a body—are prepared to admit to the episcopate, and therefore to the other orders of the ministry, one who does not believe in the miracles of the Creed, supposing he unfeignedly believes (as Dr. Henson does) in the doctrine of the person of Christ. And this, it appears to me, is to abandon the standing ground of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which has insisted on holding together the ideas and the miraculous facts. I do not mean that the action of the Bishops would commit the Church of England. I think the mind of the Church of England would

be opposed to their action. But I think it would commit the Bishops corporately.

2. An atmosphere of suspicion will increasingly attach itself in the mind of the nation to the most solemn public assertions of the clergy, in the matter of religion, just at the time when we are constantly hearing that the awful experiences of the war have forced us back upon realities.

3. An effective (though not, I think, a legitimate) excuse will be afforded to all officers of the Church to treat their solemn declarations on other subjects as "scraps of paper." Any discipline on the basis of official declarations will become more and more difficult; and the authority of the episcopate will be quite undermined.

In order that such disastrous consequences may be avoided I feel myself constrained to entreat your Grace and my brother Bishops, in the event of the Dean of Durham being elected to the see of Hereford by the chapter, to refuse him consecration.

Undoubtedly this letter, coupled with one from Dr. Darwell Stone, who also gave passages from Dr. Henson's writings, made a deep impression upon the public mind, and the uneasiness was increased by what we can only call a most unfortunate letter from Dr. Sanday. The result was that some who had previously upheld the appointment felt bound to withdraw their support. Of these the most conspicuous was the Dean of Canterbury.

Dr. Wace wrote to the *Times* to say that he felt  
 Dean Wace's  
 Position, compelled to join in the protest against the appointment, and in the *Record* of January 17 he thus explained his position:—

A letter from Dr. Sanday appeared in *The Times* on Saturday, January 5, entitled by *The Times* "Modern Belief," respecting the "expression of Fundamental Truths," which he began by saying that "my own general position is so similar to Dr. Henson's that I believe he will accept me as an advocate." He says that our own generation "has to ask itself whether the fundamental truths of Christianity can be stated in terms that are acceptable to the modern mind. Dr. Henson and I agree in thinking that they can," and he proceeds to give examples of such modes of statement. "The Virgin Birth," he says, the "physical resurrection and physical Ascension, are all realistic expressions, adapted to the thought of the time, of ineffable truths which the thought of the time could not express in any other way." The witnesses of the Gospel narratives would, he says, view them in the light of the thought of the Old Testament, while in the present day men view them in the light of scientific thought. If men of our day were describing these momentous events, "we should do our best to tell over again the story of the Gospels; but we should not tell it quite in the same way. . . . The First Gospel and the Third each devote two chapters to the Nativity and Infancy of the Lord. Both stories must be regarded as poetry and not prose." Now if these allegations, which must carry great weight in a person of Dr. Sanday's authority, are not in substantial accord with Dr. Henson's views, it is reasonable to expect that, if only for the sake of his friends, he would repudiate them. But when he failed to do so, it became unavoidable

to conclude that he is not materially out of harmony with them, and that his own statements must be read in the light of them. It must be supposed that it is to statements like this that he refers when he speaks of the narratives of our Lord's birth being "generally assumed by the learned to belong less to history than to poetry." I waited two or three days, after the appearance of this letter from Dr. Sanday, before abandoning the hope that Dr. Henson was not involved in the misbelief attributed to him; but under his continued silence, it seemed to me inevitable to recognize that he had yielded to the "modern" influences to which Dr. Sanday has made so disastrous a surrender.

\* \* \* \* \*

In face of these considerations, is it possible to acquiesce without protest in the admission to an office, in which the holder is solemnly charged to drive away "all erroneous and strange doctrines, contrary to God's Word," of a clergyman, however able, eminent, and personally beloved, who, to say the very least, is prepared to view with indifference or tolerance such errors on one of the most sacred elements in the Christian Faith? I am doubly grieved, considering the happy personal relations I have always enjoyed with Dr. Henson, to come to the conclusion that this is not possible, and that, whatever may be the result of this conflict, I must join in the public protest which is being made.

The Dean of Canterbury carries, so deservedly, such great weight among all classes of Churchmen, and especially among Evangelicals, that his defection was seen to be of very great seriousness to the cause of the Bishop-elect. About the same time some of the Bishops—London, Salisbury and Worcester—caused it to be known that they would take no part in the consecration ceremony. But one Bishop—his lordship of Peterborough—publicly championed the case for consecration.

The Bishop of Peterborough, with the Archbishop's permission, published the letter he had addressed to his Grace on January 14. In this he wrote:—

**A Bishop's  
Championship.** I do not propose to examine in detail the statements in Dr. Henson's writings which have been quoted by the Bishop of Oxford as evidences of heresy, but I would venture to point out that it would seem less than just to base so grave an accusation not so much on the statements themselves as on their implications, implications which must certainly differ according to the point of view from which they are approached. To refuse consecration to a duly elected Bishop in the absence of definite heretical teaching on his part, both *positive* and *proved*, would seem to be hardly in accordance with the genius of the Church of England. I hold no brief for Dr. Henson. I dislike his apparent Erastianism. I object strongly to the almost obstructive conservatism by which, as it seems, he seeks to retard the progress of those reforms in our Church which are so vital and so urgent. I differ *in toto* from what is alleged to be his position in regard to the Virgin Birth of our Lord, and His Resurrection. I believe with the Bishop of Oxford that these transcendent truths would never have become part of the faith of the Church without the physical phenomena by which they were attended. None the less, when I ask myself whether a man whose devotion to our Lord is beyond

question, and whose full faith in the supreme miracle of our Lord's unique personality as God and Man is known to all, but who, in his fearless search for truth, is not in all respects convinced as to some of the physical accompaniments of that faith, is therefore to be excluded from the Episcopate, and therefore incidentally pronounced to be unworthy of his priesthood, I confess that I do not find it easy to answer confidently in the affirmative.

\* \* \* \* \*

No Bishop would dare to face his task unless he believed that the Holy Ghost had called him. At the solemn hour of his consecration the Bishop-elect of Hereford will profess his faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. He will then give a solemn undertaking to banish all false doctrine from his flock. Most of all he will be endued with that Spirit Whom the Lord promised should guide His Church into all truth.

I am content to leave it at that. I am a Modernist, but not in the usual sense of that word. I believe in the present movement of the Holy Ghost in the Church of England. I believe that my Mother Church, which I passionately love, so far from being at the end of her usefulness, is on the threshold of a new potency as His instrument. I believe that one of her glories is the alertness with which, while holding utterly to the faith once delivered, she ever expects new light from Him, even if this should mean at times taking risks and making mistakes. I believe that with faith and patience and forbearance it is in the power of the Church to compel even the present perplexity to minister ultimately to her further effectiveness in the hands of God. With these considerations in view, I humbly submit that the Bishops will do wisely if they proceed with the consecration of Dr. Henson at this time.

The studious moderation of this letter, no less than its fearless courage, appealed to many, and, if the controversy had proceeded, would have proved a very important factor in the discussion. But the day following its appearance, there was published the important communication from the Archbishop which, to most reasonable minds, was the last word on this particular incident, although the discussion on the general question will doubtless continue for a long time to come.

The Bishop-elect had been pressed both privately and in the Press to ease the position of some of his best friends by making reference, in a sermon, or otherwise, to the doctrinal questions involved that it might be seen what his *present* position is, seeing that the allegations of his opponents rested on extracts from books published several years ago. But he was sufficiently ill-advised to turn a deaf ear to all such entreaties. At length, however, letters were exchanged between the Archbishop of Canterbury and himself which cleared up the point most satisfactorily. The Archbishop's letter to Dr. Henson was dated January 16, and was as follows:—

**Dr. Henson's  
Assurance.**

I am receiving communications from many earnest men of different schools who are disquieted by what they have been led to suppose to be your disbelief in the Apostles' Creed, and especially in the clauses relating to Our Lord's birth and resurrection. I reply to them that they are misinformed, and that I am persuaded that when you repeat the words of the Creed you do so *ex animo* and without any desire to change them. I think I understand your reluctance to make at this moment a statement, the motives of which might be misconstrued, and it is only because you would relieve many good people from real distress that I ask you to let me publish this letter with a word of reassurance from yourself.

The Bishop-elect at once recognized the reasonableness of the request coming from such a quarter. \* Replying on January 17, Dr. Henson wrote the Archbishop as follows:—

I do not like to leave any letter of yours unanswered. It is strange that it should be thought by any one to be necessary that I should give such an assurance as you mention, but of course what you say is absolutely true. I am, indeed, astonished that any candid reader of my published books, or any one acquainted with my public ministry of thirty years, could entertain a suggestion so dishonourable to me as a man and as a clergyman.

The reply could easily have been more graciously worded, and the last few lines of his letter shows that Dr. Henson has wholly misunderstood the anxieties of his friends; but when we pass from the manner to the matter of the reply we are thankful for its definiteness, and we feel that the whole Church should be grateful to the Archbishop of Canterbury for having been the means of calling forth so clear an assurance from the Bishop-elect.

With these letters was published the full text of The Primate and Dr. Gore. the reply of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Bishop of Oxford's protest. It is a letter of the very first importance, and will become of great historic value. Especially interesting is the first point by reason of its reference to what might happen in the case of a conflict between the Crown and the Church:—

I have, as you know, always maintained that in the last resort a large measure of responsibility must belong to the ecclesiastical authorities, and especially to the Archbishop of the Province, in regard to the filling of a vacant See by the consecration thereto of a priest duly nominated by the Crown. It is, therefore, appropriate that you should write to me as you have written on a matter about which you feel so strongly. No constitutional rule or usage can force the Archbishop to the solemn act of consecration, if he be prepared, by resignation or otherwise, to abide the consequences of declaring himself in *foro conscientie* unable to proceed. I should be deliberately prepared to take that course if I found myself called upon at any time to consecrate to the Episcopate a man who, in my judgment, is clearly unworthy of that office or false to the Christian faith as taught by the Church of England.

In regard to Henson's case the Primate's review of the circumstances is most able and thorough and puts the difficult points in their right perspective :

During the last few weeks I have read with care most of Dr. Henson's published books, and since receiving your protest I have re-read with close attention all the passages to which your protest refers. Taking them, as in fairness they must be taken, with their full context, I find opinions expressed with which I definitely disagree ; I find in some pages a want of balance and a crudity of abrupt statement which may give satisfaction or even help to certain minds or temperaments, but must inevitably be painful and possibly even dangerous to others ; I find what seem to me to be almost irreconcilable inconsistencies ; I find much that seems to me to need explanation, qualification, or restatement.

But the result of my consideration of the whole matter—and it has not been slight or hurried—is that neither in Dr. Henson's books nor in the careful communications which have taken place between him and myself on the subject have I found anything which, when it is fairly weighed in its true setting, I can regard as inconsistent with the belief which he firmly asserts in the facts and doctrines of the faith as set forth in the Creeds. Some of the collections of isolated extracts from his writings, as sent to me by correspondents, are even more than usually unfair. And, as you say in your letter, " he gives noble expression " to what you have called " the theological ideas of the Creed and the New Testament."

We are familiar with the danger, common in ecclesiastical controversy, that a critic, taking his opponent's premises, may base on them what seems to him to be an obvious conclusion, and then describe, or perhaps denounce, that conclusion as the opinion of the man whom he is criticizing, when, as a matter of fact, whether logically or illogically, the writer commits himself to no such opinion. This danger is very real in the case of a writer so exuberant as Dr. Henson. It is a satisfaction to me to note your explicit statement that the " denial " which you attribute to him is your inference from what he has written, and is not found in the words themselves.

I am bold to say that no fair-minded man can read consecutively a series of Dr. Henson's sermons without feeling that we have in him a brilliant and powerful teacher of the Christian faith, who regards the incarnation of the Son of God as the central fact of human history, who accepts without qualification the Divinity of our Blessed Lord, and who brings these supreme realities to bear with persuasive force upon the daily problems and perplexities of human life. That he has also a singular power of effectively presenting the Gospel message to the hearts of a congregation of quite ordinary and untheological people is a fact of which I have personal knowledge and experiences.

You have legitimately directed attention to a resolution which was adopted *nemine contradicente* by the Bishops of the Province of Canterbury on April 30, 1914, in reply to certain memorials which had been presented to us. I do not find myself in that resolution, interpreted either literally as it stands or in the light of the ample and weighty debate which introduced it, anything which leads me, as one of those who voted for it, to feel that I should be acting inconsistently in proceeding in due course to the consecration of Dr. Henson.

I am acting, in a difficult matter, with a sense of high and sacred responsibility towards God and man after giving weight to the theological, the ecclesiastical, the constitutional, the practical, and the personal issues involved.