

THE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM OF THE CHURCH.¹

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THE Report of the Fourth of the Archbishops' Committees will be read with a good deal of disappointment. The Committee were asked to deal with two questions :—

1. What matters in the existing administrative machinery of the Church, including patronage and endowments, seem to hinder the spiritual work of the Church.

2. How can the reform or the removal of such hindrances be most effectively promoted.

The form of these two questions at once suggests that there is a general measure of agreement that Church Reform is needed and that some steps in this direction must be taken. The administrative machinery of the Church is out-of-date. The spiritual work of the Church is hindered. Measures of reform must be taken as part of the general work of reconstruction in which the Church, along with every other institution among us, must engage. That is assumed to begin with. The Committee were not asked to examine the grounds of that assumption. They were bidden, rightly or wrongly, to accept it as their starting-point.

Accordingly the sphere of their inquiry was to that extent narrowed. Very few people will seriously quarrel with that assumption. The Church has without doubt been slow to adapt its organization to new conditions. Reform has always been timid and hesitating. Yet at the same time to start with this initial assumption is to begin with a bias towards change and is likely to raise expectations from administrative reform which in the end may not be realized.

¹ In continuation of the series of articles dealing with the Reports of the Archbishops' Committees of Inquiry we print this month's a review of that (the fourth) on "The Administrative Reform of the Church." The Report is published by the S.P.C.K. (6d. net). The Committee consisted of the following : Bishop of Southwell (Chairman), Mr. Ralph Banks, K.C., Bishop of Birmingham, Dean of Carlisle, Lord Hugh Cecil, M.P., Mrs. Creighton, Mr. Douglas Eyre, Mr. P. Lyttelton Gill, Mr. H. Hodge, Dean of Lincoln, Dean of Manchester (Bishop Welldon), Rev. C. H. S. Matthews, Mr. E. Newton, Sir Charles Nicholson, M.P., Mr. W. Peel, Rev. Tissington Tatlow, Rev. W. Temple, Rev. H. S. Woolcombe.

Only in one of their opening paragraphs do the Committee touch upon the general question. They "believe that the spiritual efficiency of the Church is in many ways greatly hampered by anomalies in the existing administrative system," but they go on to admit that "no rectification or adjustment of machinery can of itself make the Church that spiritual power in the nation which we desire to see it become." "Where His Spirit is there is life and power; where His Spirit is absent there can only be impotence and death." This is well said; but it must not be forgotten that even the most defective machinery cannot altogether defeat the power and influence of the Spirit. Where the Spirit is, His influence will be felt in spite of the most glaring anomalies of the administrative system. It is the very glory of God's working that it can triumph over whatever obstacles may be put in the way by human frailty and blindness. His strength is made perfect in our weakness, and it may be that the Church is hampered in its work to-day more because it has lost the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit than because of any faults in its own organization. That of course does not mean that we should not do our best to discover and remedy these defects. It is merely a caution which ought never to be omitted.

The five Committees were appointed as a result of the National Mission. So far they seem to be almost the only result of that well-meant but mis-timed effort. In the opinion of the present writer, the Church ought never to have been called to such a task in the midst of war. No one can say that the National Mission failed, because no one can say with confidence what the National Mission aimed at. But if we can recall the exhortations which were delivered during the planning and carrying out of the mission, we can be fairly certain that it aimed at something more than the appointment of five Committees of investigation and that if the outcome had been more clearly foreseen, possibly the same result might have been reached by a less circuitous route. The Committees were appointed to deal with facts which the experience gained in the National Mission had brought to light. Yet it is surely true that the facts with which the different Committees were called to deal, were patent to almost every one before the National Mission was ever thought of. If the National Mission revealed those facts for the first time, it was only to those who

had been either culpably or deliberately blind. That is certainly true of the questions dealt with in the Report of the Fourth Committee, whatever may be the case with the other Committees. Church Reform has been a living issue for years. There is not a single question raised in this Report which had not been fully discussed before the war and there is not a single remedy suggested that had not been previously suggested and urged. There is a difference of atmosphere, that is all, and that difference may not be wholly and altogether to the good. In the years before the war the Church Reformer spoke to deaf ears; now he speaks to those who are ready to welcome almost any change, so long as it is change. The one attitude may well be just as dangerous to true progress as the other. To accept drastic changes in a hurry or in a panic, is only less mischievous than to refuse to move at all.

Still, when all this has been said, the Committee had a great opportunity before them. They might have been expected to survey the whole field with an open mind, to start afresh without depending too much on the work of others and to draw up a large and comprehensive scheme of reform based on some broad principle or policy which would combine and correlate the different parts into a consistent whole. They would have begun by inquiring what kind of a Church would be best fitted to grapple with the spiritual tasks of the present and the immediate future, and then would have considered what steps should be taken to make this ideal actual. That would have been a task well worthy of their labours, and had they even attempted it, they would have laid the Church under a deep obligation to them. But they have not attempted it. They have approached the subject piecemeal rather than as a whole. They have attacked different anomalies, one by one, providing some kind of a remedy for each, and then have thrown the whole together, without apparently taking time to consider what the ultimate result of a number of different changes would be or how they would react on one another or on the whole life of the Church. The result is a patchwork—rather than a consistent and thought-out scheme. The cumulative effect of a multitude of separate and distinct changes will be more a matter of chance than of purpose and design.

Nor is that all or even the worst. The Committee do not seem to have given independent thought to any single problem that

they have discussed. Not one of their proposals bears the marks of originality. They have simply taken over and adopted as their own almost every suggestion that had been put forward by different bodies of Church Reformers in the past. "Alas! Master, for it was borrowed" might truly be said of almost every suggestion which they make. With such tools they would rebuild the new habitations, having found that the place in which they dwelt was too straight for them. It should not be difficult to foretell whether the axe will sink or swim.

Thus instead of entering upon the difficult task of examining into the relation of Church and State, they practically borrow right off the proposals of the Archbishop's Committee with some further suggestions, also borrowed, from the Life and Liberty movement. Two sentences are apparently enough to devote to what really lies at the very root of the whole matter. "We desire to give a general support to the Report on the relations of Church and State with regard to the formation and function of parochial Church Councils" (p. 11). "We close our report with the recommendation to which we give all possible emphasis, that the Church should at the earliest possible moment recover freedom of legislation through its own deliberative assemblies" (p. 22).

They borrow the suggestion so often made by the Church Reform League that the parson's freehold should be abolished and that institution to a benefice should be for a term of years. They borrow the suggestion that the law is disregarded because "many of the clergy do not recognize the authority of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council which is at present the supreme tribunal in such cases," and foresee a revision in the system of "ecclesiastical judicature"—significantly adding, "but the chief difficulties of the present situation would be removed if the Church recovered its freedom of legislation." In other words, this means that instead of the Judicial Committee we should soon have a purely ecclesiastical tribunal set up by the legislative action of the Church. Instead of entering upon a discussion of the extremely thorny subject of Patronage, they borrow the suggestion of Diocesan Boards of Patronage and would confer new rights upon the Bishops to refuse institution and a certain right of veto on the parishioners. There is nothing new in such suggestions. They have often been made before and they are little more than ingenious attempts to

evade the real difficulty. With regard to the appointment of Bishops, they yield without a murmur to a recent agitation and adopt the expedient of an Advisory Council to assist the Prime Minister, which has been advocated by the Bishop of Oxford and the Church Reform League. Every little group of Church Reformers is to have its own pet reform adopted and its own demand satisfied. This is borrowing right and left, and the different elements are thrown together and presented to us as a serious scheme of Church Reform.

All that the Committee have done with those borrowed materials is to arrange them under separate headings: parochial, capitular and Diocesan, with sub-divisions under each relating to appointment, tenure and vacation of office. This no doubt is useful and convenient for purposes of discussion and reference, but it was work which might just as well have been carried out by an intelligent clerk with a file of the *Church Times* and the *Challenge* and is hardly worthy of the labours of so distinguished a Committee.

There are, however, some general principles which do seem to underlie most of the changes advocated by the Committee. They would result in a great increase of episcopal authority. Dioceses would be subdivided and Bishops would be invested with powers both in regard to institution and discipline far in excess of those which they now possess. It may well be doubted whether even in the case of Bishops appointed under the present system the granting of such additional powers would be for the benefit of the Church. But the new method of appointment must in time tell upon the character of the episcopate itself. At present Bishops are often men of outstanding ability and independence of character. The Prime Minister is practically unfettered in his choice and need look to nothing else than the personal fitness of the nominee. The suggested Advisory Council, if it becomes effective, can only act in one way. It will bring the pressure of current Church opinion to bear on the choice and will tend more and more to favour the promotion of men who have not made themselves unpopular with any large section of the Church. The absence of any decided views, caution and moderation will be the surest recommendations for the episcopate. This will tend more and more to produce a conventional uniformity just where the highest qualities of courage and independence are most supremely desirable. The increased

powers of patronage and discipline which will be placed in these timid hands will react quickly on the whole life of the Church. Variety, individuality, even a certain measure of eccentricity, give life and colour to a large institution like the Church of England. The proposals now set forward seem deliberately calculated to produce a dull conventionality.

This apparent distrust of liberty seems to run through the whole of the proposals of the Committee. It is even more clearly marked in the case of those concerning patronage and the tenure of parochial cures. The Committee admit that the "parson's freehold" is one of the "oldest of English institutions and recognize the advantages secured by it in the way of freedom from arbitrary action by the Bishop or agitation of the parishioners. But we hold that the advantage is purchased at too high a price." Yet the parson's freehold does far more than protect an incumbent from the arbitrary action of the Bishop and the agitation of his parishioners. It gives him that security of tenure which is the condition of his moral and intellectual freedom. It has produced a type of character among the English clergy which in itself is a very precious thing. The price paid may at times be high, but the boon is priceless.

Now suppose you substitute for the parson's freehold the ten years' tenure of a benefice, along with the institution of Diocesan Boards of Patronage and the right of the Bishop to refuse institution to any one whom he may consider unsuitable to the parish, the whole character of the parochial clergy will gradually be changed. The parochial clergy have in the past been drawn to a large extent from a section of the community with clearly marked characteristics and traditions of its own. They have received at public school and University the customary education of an English gentleman. The type produced is one that is on the whole very jealous of its own independence, rather suspicious of external discipline. It is supremely capable of accepting responsibility and it reveals its best qualities when it can develop without much interference. The peculiar position of the parochial incumbent, with his security of tenure, his well-established position and his definite responsibilities is calculated to develop that type of character to its fullest extent. A long tradition has been established and handed down. This type admits of great variety of expression and

on the whole it has reached a high standard of efficiency. But it has—from one point of view—certain drawbacks. It resents interference and dictation, it cannot be drilled into uniformity nor will it become readily subservient to authority. From the point of view of one school of Church Reformer, these are the things which make him say that freedom can be purchased at too dear a price. He is out to destroy this type and whether they mean it or not, the proposals of the Committee are all calculated to achieve that end. Men of the character and traditions who have found a congenial sphere of labour within the ministry of the English Church, will not tolerate the new conditions which it is sought to impose. Gradually the ranks of the ministry will be filled by a different type, which is even now making its appearance and receives a degree of episcopal favour and encouragement which often seems out of proportion to its intrinsic merits.

Let me try to sketch the career of this new type of clergyman who will step into the place of the old. When the class which has hitherto supplied the majority of the clergy ceases to do so, we shall have to look elsewhere for candidates for holy orders. No doubt there is an abundant supply ready to our hand. Our new candidate will be drawn from those who in ordinary circumstances would not go to the University. He will first be selected and approved by a Diocesan Committee or Council. He will then be wholly or partly assisted in his education by Diocesan or Central Funds. From the very first he will be dependent and his whole career will turn upon his success in pleasing those who have selected him. Should he show signs of undue independence during his University career—too marked a tendency to think and act for himself—he will be gently reminded that he is a Diocesan candidate and that he is expected to move on certain lines. After his ordination, during the ten or fifteen years when he is a curate, his chance of ever attaining an independent sphere of work will depend upon a Diocesan Board of Patronage. The Board will look out for safe men. A man who has shown any marked individuality or has taken an unpopular line, will generally be passed over. Accordingly during his unbeneficed years, the new minister will avoid all exaggeration or extreme and walk warily in the well-trodden paths. Then his turn will come and the Diocesan Board of Patronage will select this mild and exemplary individual for the charge

of a parish. But he is not yet to be trusted with too much freedom. He will only be instituted for ten years and at the end of that time, unless he has retained the confidence of Bishop and Board, he may find that he is removed. The spectre of such a fate will act during those ten years as an effectual check on any tendencies of originality in thought or action, which may not have been crushed out by the training he has already received. Finally, those who are most successful in adapting themselves to these strange conditions—the safest of the safe—may eventually attract the notice of the Advisory Committee elected by the Church Council and be recommended to the Prime Minister for one of the higher offices in the Church—possibly for the Episcopate itself.

Does any one imagine that the Church will be stronger, morally, spiritually or intellectually or will have a greater influence on the life of the nation through such a ministry as this? The discipline of the Jesuits is calculated to crush out the independence of the individual will and make a man the obedient instrument of a great machine. The policy of our Church Reformers by gentler but even surer methods would produce in time a similar result. Compare this programme with the free atmosphere of the New Testament and the initiative shown by apostles and it will appear to be almost a burlesque of Christianity.

The general bias of the Committee against allowing too much freedom to the clergy may be illustrated in another way. They do make one concession to the principle which they appear to distrust. "Being aware of the advantage of Crown patronage in relation of the appointment of Canons, in the interest of the comprehensiveness of the Church of England, we are of opinion that this should be better distributed as between the various Cathedrals." The concession appears somewhat reluctant, but it is on that account all the more significant. Residentiary Canonries are to be left as a last shelter and resting-place for clerical independence. Having done their best to bring about uniformity everywhere else, the comprehensiveness of the Church is to be saved by reserving a few positions for men who are excluded from every other position of influence in the Church. Crown Patronage will be allowed to remain in order to provide for a small section of the clergy who cannot be fitted into the conventional moulds, and thus an appearance of comprehensiveness will be retained when the reality has been destroyed.

Such a suggestion shows only too clearly the motives which have influenced the minds of the majority of the Committee. They are really abandoning the best traditions of the Church. They would, if they could, alter its whole character. The comprehensiveness of the Church of England has been its most outstanding feature. This which has been the expression of its inner soul, is now to be left in a mere backwater. What we have been accustomed to find more or less throughout the length and breadth of the land, must now be looked for only in a Cathedral close.

This present article must now be drawn to a close. It is only fair to say that the most searching criticism of the proposals of the Committee come from one of their own members. Every one should read the masterly memorandum of the Dean of Carlisle containing his reasons for dissenting from many of the principal recommendations. If there had been one or two more men like Dr. Rashdall on the Committee the Report would have been of a very different character.

There are two general remarks which may be made in conclusion. True reform will always aim at preserving the spirit and genius of an old institution while altering and adapting its outward form. The Committee have not kept this sufficiently in view. The old spirit could hardly live under the conditions which would be created. Continuity of life may be preserved amid outward change where care is taken to keep alive the inner spirit, but continuity is broken when we destroy what has been the vital force behind the old forms. The Committee's proposals would give us a new Church without vital connexion with the past.

Lastly, what strikes one most forcibly on reading this report, as it does in the case of many other schemes that have been put forward, is the conviction that Church Reform cannot be safely left in the hands of ecclesiastics—whether clerical or lay. It must be the work of the nation speaking through some organ in which the real voice of the laity will find expression. The vital flaw in all ecclesiastical schemes is that they aim at creating a Church which will be easy to manage. They are framed in the interests of the ecclesiastical statesman. We want a scheme based on larger considerations than that—one that will meet the religious need of the nation. One practical way—and only one—has been suggested, that of a Royal Commission. The suggestion was first made by the Bishop

of Hereford. It has received the powerful adhesion of Dr. A. C. Headlam. Surely the next step that should be taken by all who desire reform but distrust our ecclesiastical reformers, should be to press for the appointment of a strong Royal Commission which would explore the whole range of the subject with sympathy and breadth of vision. Then it would be seen whether such a body of men could not produce a scheme of Reform more acceptable to the great mass of the laity and more in accordance with the true interests of the Church.

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THE EMPTY TOMB.

"In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ we have the triumphant vindication of God as Master in His own world. His power and love will have the last word in the universe that He has made. With such a confidence we may not only face the dark enigma of sin and suffering and death, but be bold to live by that same law which Christ made the rule of His own life, and bade us do the same by taking up our cross and following Him. He has shown us that faith is better than sight, dying for the truth better than living for the false, right mightier than force, love stronger than death. Loyalty to right and truth shall triumph when all time-serving and compromise with evil shall have had their day. Here and now the good is often worsted. Vice often wears a crown, while virtue is an outcast. 'But moral principles prevail beyond the tomb, and in the world on the yonder side of the grave they are recognized as supreme.'

"It is for us to win back, first to ourselves and then to the age in which we live, this joyful certainty that springs from the empty tomb. The things for which the Crucified one stood were not 'only the dream of a Peasant, whose cross stands in the deep darkness in a dark world': they are the very truth of man, of the world, and of God. No longer need we say our Alleluia weeping, but may rather strike up our Te Deum to Him who by overcoming the sharpness of death has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers and 'filled all the world with joyful music.'"—CANON DE CANDOLE in *Christian Assurance*.

