

THE PROPOSED *COUP D'ÉTAT* IN THE CHURCH.

BY THE REV. ALFRED FAWKES, M.A., Vicar of Ashby St. Ledgers and Honorary Chaplain to the Bishop of Hereford.

I. **O**N Easter Day, in common with other incumbents—some, no doubt, persons of distinction; others as obscure as myself—I received an Encyclical Letter entitled “The Easter Vestries and Self-Government for the Church.” There seemed no obvious connection between the two things; and the Encyclical was not from the Archbishops, or even from the Bishop of the Diocese. It was signed by the Dean of Lincoln, on behalf of the Church Reform League; by Lord Wolmer, on behalf of the Church Self-Government Association; and by Dr. Temple, on behalf of the Life and Liberty Movement. Of the two first of these societies I had never heard. The third has been too well advertised for this to be possible. *Quae regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?* But I confess that Wordsworth’s remark on Peter Bell occurred to me:

“ Full twenty times was Peter feared
For once that Peter was respected.”

“An agitation,” says Bishop Thirlwall, “is not harmless because it is futile and useless”; and “We should be on our guard against the illusions of phrases and names.”¹ Those distinguished men informed me that “it was of the utmost importance that every possible step should be taken to make plain to Parliament the extent of the demand for the Enabling Bill throughout the Church”; they hoped, therefore, “that I would bring the matter before my Easter Vestry; with a Resolution urging that this Bill should be passed through Parliament at the earliest opportunity,” and that I would forward copies of this Resolution to our local M.P., to the Prime Minister, and to Mr. Bonar Law. Sensible as I was of the kindness of Dean Fry and Lord Wolmer and Dr. Temple in interesting themselves in so small a matter as the Easter Vestry of an obscure country parish, I did not see my way to acting upon their suggestion; nor did I trouble either our local M.P., or the Prime Minister, or Mr. Bonar Law with any correspondence on the matter. But, had I done so, as the Easter Vestry consisted of the Parish Clerk and two farmers—my good friends and churchwardens—who had never

¹ *Charges*. Vol. I, 50; Vol. II, 141.

heard of the Enabling Bill, and would have passed unanimously any resolution either for or against it which I had proposed to them, I doubt whether such a resolution would have been very satisfactory evidence of "the extent of the demand for this measure throughout the Church." How many agitations rest on slender foundations! Blow the trumpet in Zion; and if you blow it loud enough, your audience is assured. It is said that some 300 Members of Parliament have been prevailed upon to pledge themselves to the support of the Enabling Bill, and to the general programme of the Life and Liberty Movement. *Nimum ne crede colori*. Is it by the employment of such tactics, and on the strength of such "evidence," that the support of these simple-minded legislators has been secured?

2. It must have occurred to those who followed the proceedings of the Representative Church Council that, outside a very small circle, the proposals passed by that body for effecting what may be described as a *coup d'état* in the Church excited neither interest nor attention. Very few people had, or have, even so much as heard of the Representative Church Council. If you could get the average Englishman to understand what its proposals really are and really mean, he would, I think, turn and rend you. As it is, they would convey no idea to him; he knows nothing of, and cares less for, the whole thing. It is impossible to conceive a less representative body than this so-called Representative Church Council; there could be no greater mistake than to suppose that it has any general public opinion behind it, or that it expresses in any way the lay mind.

"The laymen who as a rule figure in these assemblies," says Dean Stanley, "do not represent the true lay mind of the Church, still less the lay intelligence of the country. They are often excellent men, given to good works. But they are usually the partisans of some special clerical school: they are, in short, clergymen under another form rather than the real laity themselves."¹

3. Not only is the country as a whole ignorant of and indifferent to these proposals: the minority, who are conversant with and interested in the questions involved, are acutely divided: anything less calculated to produce an atmosphere of peace than legislation on the lines contemplated cannot be conceived. The attitude of those who would describe themselves as "Catholics" is, in general, one of reserve. A self-governing Church, they think, might, as things are, restrain the Eucharistic developments to which they attach so much importance—Reservation, the rite of Benediction,

¹ *Essays on Church and State*, p. 350.

etc. ; the so-called " Spikes " are a minority though an active one : it might sanction the ministry of women, and admit Non-Conformists to our pulpits and to communion ; the proposed Parish Councils might prove recalcitrant—there is still a good deal of Protestant and even Puritan feeling in the country—and resent the reconstruction of our accustomed services on " Catholic " lines. While, as the Bishop of Oxford's resignation shows, the " Church Party " is profoundly exercised over the Franchise question, some going so far as to threaten a schism unless the communicant test is imposed. The Evangelicals are not enthusiastic. The Mass Vestments, they think, would be legalized—they certainly would ; mediæval beliefs and practices would be encouraged ; the Prayer Book would be revised in the direction of the First Book of 1549. Indeed, they are by no means sure that the reaction would stop here. If the *Jus Liturgicum* and the *Charisma Veritatis*—i.e. the power to regulate Public Worship and to decide controversies of faith—are attributed to the Bishops—who, as the *Challenge* tells us (November 3, 1916), " are either the organ of the Holy Spirit, or nothing "—one thing is certain : the Reformation Settlement is overthrown. Some Liberal, or Broad, Churchmen seem to believe that a certain magic attaches to a ballot box, and rise to the word Reform, like salmon to a fly. But, though these nibble at the bait, most are frankly hostile. With St. Gregory Nazianzen, they distrust Synods—" I have never yet seen a good end to any," says that Father ; in the recognition of the fundamental unity of Church and State they see the guarantee at once of the religious character of the State and of the reasonableness of religion ; and with regard to Ultramontanism, whether Roman, Anglican, or Puritan—for it can take all three shapes—their sentiments are those of Bishop Thirlwall (Charge, 1869) :

" I entirely dissent from these opinions. I have no sympathy with the motives of those who hold them. I believe that the kind of liberty which they desire would be a grinding tyranny, and the worst calamity that could befall the Church."

4. It is not necessary to recapitulate the proposals of the Representative Church Council. They were reported in *The Times* (February 26, 27, 28, and March 1) ; and the Report of the Archbishops' Committee on Church and State, on which they were based, is published by the S.P.C.K. (2s. 6d.). It is enough to say that the *Enabling Bill* is a scheme for organizing the Church of England as a

self-governing denomination within the State, and for taking away from the State the ecclesiastical responsibility which it has acknowledged since the Reformation. It is, therefore, a measure at once of Disestablishment and of Establishment. It disestablishes one Church—the Church of England as we have hitherto known it ; and it establishes another—a denominational Anglicanism based on the Oxford Movement. In such a religious body Evangelicals of accommodating temperament might enjoy a temporary and insecure toleration.

Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt
Moliri :

but they would eat the bread of affliction, and it would be severely rationed. While the position of Liberals, as the *Church Times* frankly tells them, “ would instantly become precarious ” (December 14, 1917). They would be taken, like the prophets of Baal, to the brook Kishon, under instructions that not one of them should escape. Can we wonder that they look askance at such “ Life ” and refuse such “ Liberty ” as one-sided ? or that, with the Bishop of Hereford, they are of opinion that the proposed Self-Government would “ become a natural and effective instrument for giving authoritative expression to those purely denominational ambitions which it is the salutary function of the State to restrain ” ?

5. The threat of spiritual tyranny is open. It is important, it is most important, to remember this. The Bishop of Oxford's *Memorandum* (Appendix viii. in the Report of the Archbishops' Committee on Church and State. S.P.C.K.) is sufficiently significant. But, in his thoughtful and candid book, *The Testing of Church Principles*,¹ Mr. Oliver Quick excludes all possibility of doubt as to what is contemplated :

“ The Church of England must reform herself as the representative of a whole ideal ; so that a certain position in doctrine corresponds to a certain method of worship, a certain system of government, and even a certain organization in finance. If the views of the different parties *at present* (note the time qualification) comprised within the Church are so divergent as to make impossible a unanimous reform of this type, then the will of the majority must be given some power to make itself effective, and *minorities must suffer more than they have done in the past*. The effect of freedom from State control would undoubtedly be to give the majority of real members of the Church more power than it has at present. It is this undeniable fact which to some minds constitutes the chief argument for the retention of State control, and to others makes the removal of this control the one essential preliminary to reform.”

¹ Murray. 1919. 5s.

The writer admits that there is "*real danger of a schism as the result of self-government.*" He is prepared, however, to risk this danger; and in his argument for the communicant, as opposed to the baptismal franchise, he tells us why:

"If we decide (he says) to include in an equal membership all those who have received Christian baptism, a majority of our nominal members will be composed of those who own no real or effective loyalty to our Church. The main objection to giving our franchise so wide a range is insufficiently understood. If once we recognize the class of people mentioned as members of our body, it will be, to say the least, *very difficult to refuse them the ministrations for which they ask*"—*i.e. marriage; the baptism of their children; and burial.* "On the other hand, to go on performing these ministrations for all comers, as is the general custom at present, would *endanger the whole principle of the reform which we contemplate.*"¹

To unchurch "*vast numbers* of those who at present come to us for marriage, baptism, and burial" is scarcely the way to make England Christian. "What portion have we in David?" *i.e.* what have we to do with a Church which leaves us unmarried, unburied and unbaptized? "To your tents, O Israel!" Such a Church would not remain long either endowed or established: "so Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day." "The tenure of the ancient religious endowments of the nation cannot reasonably or rightly be conceded to a Church which has repudiated the condition of national establishment, and constituted itself as an independent denomination within the State."

6. When a sum works out to an absurd conclusion, we go back to see where the original error came in. In this case, it must be traced to certain assumptions on the part of the Archbishops' Committee of 1916 in which the conclusions which it was desired to draw were already contained. Such was the loosely and inaccurately conceived distinction between "Church" and "State"; such were the notions of "the spiritual independence of the Church"; of its "inherent authority"; of its "fundamental conception as a self-governing society"; of the "powers and functions inherent in the Episcopate," and the like. One is amazed that so palpable a series of fallacies and sophisms should have escaped detection. Nothing, indeed, could be more calculated to shake our faith in lay representation than the facility with which, on so important a body, and in such important subject matter, the lay representatives walked into the trap laid for them. Presumably they thought that the bishops and clergy knew their own business, and that non-experts

¹ Pp. 80, 81, 107.

should follow their lead. If this was so, their moral virtues were so much in excess of their intellectual that both fell into the ditch. We have no use for lay representatives who play the part of the woman of Tekoah in this way. It is neither sense, nor reason, nor common honesty. A man is made a representative to use his own judgment, if he has any, not to be the mouthpiece of an ecclesiastical Joab in the background. "Thy servant Joab, he bade me; and he put all these words into the mouth of thine handmaid. To change the face of the matter hath thy servant Joab done this thing."

7. It was a great saying of Cromwell—"If any whosoever think the interests of Christians and the interests of the nation inconsistent, I wish my soul may never enter into their secret"; the abstract terms "Church" and "State," though their connotation differs, denote one and the same thing. For the same men and women who compose the State compose the Church also; the Church is the community viewed from the standpoint of religion, the State on its religious side. This is the teaching of Hooker: "There is not any man of the Church of England but the same is also a member of the Commonwealth; nor any man a member of the Commonwealth which is not also of the Church of England." The whole chapter (Book viii. ch. I) deserves careful study. The rival conception of the Church as a "Perfect Society," possessed by Divine institution of "the full legislative, administrative, and judicial powers which the effective realization of the authority to bind and loose implies"—the words are those of the Archbishops' Committee—is a figment of Ultramontane canonists. To find the Committee assuming it as self-evident takes one's breath away; the Syllabus of Pius IX asks no more. It is not Catholic; an important school of mediæval theologians, of whom Marsilius of Padua is an example, denied it as strenuously as any modern Protestant. And, theology apart, on the ground of politics—and of ethics, of which politics are part—a Church is an institution on too large a scale for its administration to be safely withdrawn from that of the community. This would be to imperil civil as well as religious liberty; we have a right to appeal for the co-operation of "our partners which are in the other ship"—those whom Stanley happily describes as "Nonconforming members and ministers of the Church of England"—in what is a common interest, and should be a common cause. It is not for Protestants to stand by and see Protestantism weakened;

it is not for Free Churchmen to look on when religious freedom is attacked. For this freedom is the reverse side of civil freedom ; the two are one.

8. It is argued that the situation has changed so greatly since the sixteenth century that Hooker's identification of the nation and its Church has ceased to hold. That the two are no longer co-extensive is true. Perhaps they never were so quite literally ; it is possible that Hooker and the mediæval thinkers whom he followed were describing rather an ideal than a real state of things. But their coincidence, if it is no longer material, may, and should be, moral. When Thiers said in 1870 that the Republic divided Frenchmen less than any other form of government—*c'est ce que nous divise le moins*—he did not mean that all Frenchmen were Republicans—they were not : what he meant was that the general sense of the country acquiesced in the republic, and that it would not have acquiesced in any other *régime*. I would say the same of the Church of England *as we have it*. It divides us less than any other Church ; and this is the justification of its legal position in the country. I should not say it of the denominational Anglicanism by which our Church Reformers propose to replace it. To establish this would be (1) to establish a sect—an obvious injustice to the sects left unestablished : and (2) the sect thus established would be one opposed both to the conscience of the community and to the mind of the age.

9. The strength of the Self-Government Movement is to be found in the fact that it commends itself to, or perhaps in some cases has been forced upon, so many of the permanent Church officials. The Archbishops, and (it is believed) the majority of the bishops, support it ; and, though their influence is, no doubt, a moderating one—the wise ruler guides forces which he cannot suppress—the official mind is opportunist, and follows rather than leads opinion. Now we owe officials, religious and civil, much ; they are indispensable ; they supply a centripetal force to the community without which its more volatile elements would scarcely cohere. But officials are apt to be obsessed by the idea of system ; to desire uniformity in a degree which is unattainable ; and to expect results from organization which it is not in its power to produce. It is for the more detached, the really lay, mind of the Church to correct this angle of vision. The reforms which are to be desired can be brought about without revolution ; the incapacity and unwillingness of

Parliament to deal with ecclesiastical anomalies has been exaggerated out of all relation to the facts. The House of Lords, e.g., lately assented to the Bishop of Norwich's useful Bill for the Union of Benefices (March, 1919); and one may refer in this connection to the Dilapidation Act (1871), the Glebe Lands Act (1888), the Clergy Discipline Act (1892), the Benefices Act, the Incumbents' Resignation Act, etc.; Parliament is ready—and, if more measures of the kind were brought before it, it would be readier—to deal with practical questions on practical lines. What it will not do, and rightly, is to treat with the Bishops on the assumption that the Church is what it is not—i.e. a society independent of the State, and *sui juris*: it will not alienate the patronage or abolish the appellate jurisdiction of the Crown; it will not leave “an insolent and aggressive faction” free to ride roughshod over sane and sober Churchmen, and to remodel the National Church on party lines. That what these people call “the Church” shall be “enabled” to do these things by its so-called “inherent authority” is in effect the claim put forward by the Archbishops' Committee and the Representative Church Council. It is a preposterous, an intolerable, and an impossible claim. The secular Press sees this, though the so-called religious journals characteristically do not. And the weighty words of *The Times* (February 22) should be remembered:

“We are driven to the conviction that Churchmen are in great danger of being committed unawares to a programme which may destroy the Establishment, and restrict liberty within the Church to the narrow limits of a party whose religious and doctrinal outlook most of them reject.”

10. After the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland (1867), the wisest of English bishops, Bishop Thirlwall, warned us that our danger in this matter was not from without, but from within. It is so still. The cry, “Down with it, down with it!” comes from those of our own household: “We believe,” wrote the *Challenge* (April 18), “that immediate voluntary Disestablishment is a necessary corollary to Life and Liberty in the Church of Christ.” The disaster which Disestablishment, voluntary or involuntary, would involve is not (the Bishop reminds us) only or primarily a material one.

“It is not confined to the loss of our temporal position. If this were all, though I should think it an evil not likely to be counterbalanced by any advantage which it is reasonable to expect, still I should not contemplate it with despondency. I should be ready to hope that it might be over-ruled, so

as in the end to work for our good. But I cannot look forward with the same equanimity to the ulterior consequences of the event which present themselves to my mind as inevitable. For it seems to me hardly possible to doubt that the final result would be the disruption of the Church into two or three sects, one of which would, probably, sooner or later, be merged in the Church of Rome. There would be divers Anglican Churches, but no longer a Church of England. Who could pretend to forecast the effects of such a dismemberment on the Colonial Churches, or on our Foreign Missions? It is enough to say that it is the state to which our chief adversary, whom nothing can satisfy but our destruction, most eagerly desires, and is most actively labouring, to see us reduced" (Charge, 1869).

Superstition, and Scepticism—the shadow thrown by Superstition—these are the forces, the sinister forces, which stand to gain by the downfall of what Hooker describes as "the present state of the Church of God established amongst us," and by the defeat of "their careful endeavour which would have upheld the same."

Hoc Ithacus velit, et magno mercentur Atreidæ.

ALFRED FAWKES.

DEAN WACE AND THE ENABLING BILL.

The Dean of Canterbury, speaking in Convocation on a motion in support of the Enabling Bill, said the reason why, after very long thought and consideration, he felt obliged to speak against the proposal was that he felt convinced that, if the proposal was adopted, the Church would be entering upon a false step which must, sooner or later, lead to disestablishment. What was being done by the proposal was narrowing the basis upon which the Church of England now rested. It was certainly a great advantage, in avoiding that difficulty, that the Representative Church Council adopted the Baptismal as against the Confirmation franchise. That, at all events, opened the franchise to every Christian in the country, with one fatal exception, as it seemed to him. It was the Baptismal franchise coupled with a declaration that the person who claimed the vote did not belong to any other religious body in the country. That at once narrowed very seriously the basis upon which the Representative Assembly rested. He thought that he was right in saying that, speaking in round figures, the Nonconformist bodies contained at least half the number of Christians in this country. Taking the whole world, including America and the British Colonies, the number of communicants in the Anglican Church was four millions and the number of communicants in the Nonconformist Churches was twenty-one millions. He thought that that ought, to give a good deal of ground for consideration, and, he would even add, for anxiety. He could not help thinking that the narrowing of the basis to which he had referred amounted to diminishing the claim of the Church of England hereafter to be a National Church. The Dean of Christ Church had said some words upon that subject, but he had missed a point upon which great stress was laid by ancient divines, and that was that the Church of England was called "National" because it had behind it the whole national authority. When the fatal moment was arriving when the Nonconformists were beginning to be permanently divided from the Church of England, Stillingfleet laid particular stress upon the point that the National Church was a National Church which had the whole national authority. The Church, by adopting the present proposals, was moving away entirely from the position which Stillingfleet, one of the greatest names among English divines, the defender of Laud, and others, occupied.