

CHURCH SELF-GOVERNMENT IN ACTION.

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IT is common nowadays to clamour for the self-government of the Church as the panacea for all the ills, real and supposed, from which the Church is suffering. Many Evangelical Churchmen have been carried off their feet by this wave of popular sentiment. Evangelicals are a minority of the Church of England as a whole ; but they claim, and surely with justice, that the teaching they represent is essential to the well-being of the Church. It may therefore be not untimely to submit a few facts as to some effects of Church self-government as seen in action. In the great over-sea dominions the Church is unestablished or has been disestablished, and it is self-governing. We have therefore in the Colonial Church an object lesson ready to hand.

A favourite point of attack on the present constitution of the Church is the method of appointing Bishops. In regularly constituted colonial dioceses the bishop is elected by the diocesan synod of clergy and lay delegates, except where the number of self-supporting parishes within the dioceses falls below a number decided upon by the General Synod. In the latter case the selection is made by the house of bishops of the province or of the whole colony.¹

A generation or so ago, colonial diocesan synods often deputed some of their number or authorized some trusted persons in England to select an English clergyman as bishop whenever a vacancy occurred. This practice has not yet entirely died out, but is more and more rarely resorted to, and will probably cease before long. It has given to the Colonial Church a number of distinguished men ; but with the growth of national consciousness, the implied superiority of English to local clergy is increasingly resented, with the resulting tendency to look for the new bishops within the borders of the colony itself. One disadvantage under which the imported bishop suffered was that by coming into a radically new type of life in middle age he often found difficulty in acclimatizing himself

¹ Missionary bishops in Crown Colonies or outside the Empire are usually appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury from lists supplied by the Society or Societies concerned. Bishops of the Indian Establishment are appointed by the State.

to the new conditions, either in his person, his modes of thought, or his methods of administration. Unfortunately the tendency now goes too far in the other direction. Too often the diocese narrows its choice within its own borders. Alas! in some dioceses, the office of bishop seems to be looked upon as a prize which ought not to be let slip out of the hands of those who have it to bestow. Hence either the "old-timer" or some man of popular gifts or one possessed of good private means or able to pull most wires, has the best chance of election. These influences operate even where the clergy entitled to vote in the synod are few and the number of self-supporting parishes is only a little above the qualifying minimum. The likelihood that a real leader of the Church will be found amongst them is correspondingly remote. As a fact, some very weak and few strong bishops have been appointed under this system.

Nor is this all. The vices of popular election and political intrigue are only too frequently manifest. A few illustrations may be given. In a certain diocese two names emerged from the crowd of promiscuous nominations after the first ballots. One was a strong man, an undoubted leader, so much so that the clergy of the opposite party feared him. Ballots were frequent, wire-pulling and lobbying went on vigorously. At last both sides became convinced that they were too nearly equal to command the requisite majority, and so they compromised on a man of inferior parts who happened to be generally unobjectionable. In another case the lobbying for the bishopric was so flagrant and so prolonged that many of the laity left the synod; and a disappointed candidate exhibited his chagrin by means of a letter in the Church papers. Can any "scandal" of an appointment under our English system compare with such as these?

I am reluctantly driven to the opinion that under the system of popular election, there is no great likelihood that the best men and the strongest leaders will be chosen. Certainly the able man attached to unpopular causes or unpossessed of popular gifts would have no chance. It would be easy to name many men raised to the English episcopate under our much-abused system in the face of popular clamour or astonishment, of whom the Church has afterwards been proud. Such men would never become bishops by popular election.

Furthermore, the tendency of popular election is to reduce the number of Evangelical bishops. Evangelical clergy are often in the minority in a colonial diocese, and still oftener are unorganized or not alert. The result has been to substitute High Churchmen for Evangelicals in diocese after diocese. In the whole of Australia there are now not more than five Evangelical bishops, in New Zealand perhaps only one, in South Africa not even one. In how many English dioceses should we have Evangelical bishops if the choice were made by diocesan synods ?

The importance of this change lies in the all-powerful influence exerted by the bishop. Sooner or later, the diocese takes its colour from the bishop. The protection of the Evangelical party within the Church has been its trustee patronage, devised originally by the far-seeing Charles Simeon, together with such openings as are afforded by private, collegiate and occasional Crown patronage. Under the self-government of the Church all such modes of patronage are swept away. Appointments to livings in the over-sea dominions are vested either in the people or in the bishop, or in both jointly. In practice this usually means that the bishop finds the incumbent, for even when they have a voice in the matter the parishioners have seldom wide enough knowledge of clergy to enable them to make an independent choice. Thus the bishop gradually fills the diocese with men of his own colour, and others rarely have any chance. In one High Church diocese in Canada a single parish consisting of sturdy Evangelicals insisted on having a man of their own way of thinking, but the exception was so marked as to prove the rule. The result is the extinction of Evangelical Churchmanship over wide areas. In the whole of South Africa no Evangelical has the slightest chance of preferment except in the three churches of Capetown, which still stand outside the Church of South Africa, and in one church in Kimberley. Whole dioceses in Canada and Australia are similarly closed to Evangelicals ; and the same would be true of English dioceses under a similar system.

On another point, although it does not specially affect Evangelicals, English clergy ought to realize a result of Church self-government which nearly touches them. Disendowment would inevitably follow ecclesiastical independence, whether the promoters of these schemes intend it or not. Disendowment means placing the power of the purse in the hands of the laity, which again means

that the clergy may be starved out if they fail to please their congregations. The "parson's freehold" has many disadvantages, but at any rate under it the clergyman has an independent position which enables him to take an unpopular line when conscience or duty require it. I could name a Continental chaplaincy controlled by its lay congregation in a manner similar to that of a colonial parish, where the incumbent dared not speak against certain glaring abuses which prevailed amongst his people; or knew that if he did it was at the peril of his stipend. "No, I am not the Independent minister," old Mr. Lepine of Abingdon used to say, "I am the minister of the Independent congregation."

It will have been gathered that in my opinion Evangelicals at least have nothing to gain and much to lose by the proposed schemes. They may well pause and consider whether it would not be better to bear the ills they have—most of which could be remedied by reform in detail—than fly to others that they know not of.

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CHRIST AS KING.

"THE mark of what a Kingdom is, is to be seen in the King. Christ now reigns as God and man on the throne of the Father. On earth there is no embodiment or external manifestation of the Kingdom; its power is seen in the lives of those in whom it rules. It is only in the Church, the members of Christ, that the united Body can be seen and known. Christ lives and dwells and rules in their hearts. Our Lord Himself taught how close the relationship would be. "In that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." Next to the faith of His oneness with God, and His omnipotent power, would be the knowledge that they lived in Him and He in them. This must be our first lesson if we are to follow in the steps of the disciples and to share their blessing, that we must know that Christ actually as King, dwells and rules in our hearts. We must know that we live in Him, and in His power are able to accomplish all that He would have us do. Our whole life is to be devoted to our King and the service of His Kingdom. This blessed relationship to Christ will mean above all a daily fellowship with Him in prayer. The prayer life is to be a continuous and unbroken exercise. It is thus that His people can rejoice in their King, and in Him can be more than conquerors."—ANDREW MURRAY.