

THE CHURCHMAN

July, 1928.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

The Rejection of the Prayer Book Measure.

AFTER two days' strenuous debate the House of Commons on June 14 rejected the revised Prayer Book Measure by 266 votes to 220, a majority of 46. In December the previous Measure was rejected by 240 to 207, a majority of 33. This second decision has been received with warm approval throughout the country, except in circles of the ecclesiastical character in which episcopal influence prevails. The previous decision was attributed to misunderstandings and misapprehensions as to the character of the proposals on the part of the Commons. There can be no misapprehension on the present occasion as to the significance of the vote. The House of Commons as representing the nation has declared that the tendencies represented by the revision are away from the standards of Church of England teaching and worship maintained since the days of the Reformation, and that the changes proposed in the revised Book are contrary to the spirit of that great movement which definitely placed our Church at the head of the Protestant Churches of the world. There is no doubt that Parliament was also greatly influenced by a belief that the new Prayer Book would not bring peace to the Church, and that it would not prove an effective instrument for the restoration of discipline by the Bishops. This "lapse towards Rome," as it was described by *The Morning Post*, was regarded, in view of the Malines Conversations and other movements of a similar kind, in the light of a stage towards further assimilations to the Church of Rome, with a view on the part of some to ultimate reunion with, or rather submission to, the Papal See.

Truth and Consistency.

When Emerson wrote that "with consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do" and "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," he cannot have meant to imply that greatness of mind and soul is indicated by the alacrity with which "statesmen, philosophers and divines" can change their views. A capacity for performing intellectual somersaults seems rather to indicate a condition of instability that in the majority of people would be indefensible. If anyone were to declare that an object which has undergone no change was black yesterday, and to-day is white, and to-morrow may be grey or green, we naturally question the mental

processes by which these conclusions are reached. A jesting Pilate may not wait for an answer when he asks the question, "What is truth?" but in matters of religion serious people cannot declare that doctrines and practices which have been held for a considerable time to be essential elements of truth can suddenly without any adequate reason or any revolution of thought be treated as errors to be denounced and discarded. Yet something similar to this has occurred in the process of revising our Book of Common Prayer. Teaching and practice which have again and again been pronounced by the Bishops and by the Houses of Convocation as essential to the maintenance of the truth have been flung aside, and those denounced as erroneous have been accepted and adopted.

The Inconsistencies of Bishops.

When a Bishop who, with an unusually well-developed gift for denouncing the weaknesses and failures of any portion of the body politic, has employed his powers with marked effect in exposing the unrepresentative character of the Church Assembly suddenly becomes its champion, and declares that any opposition to its decisions is an insult to the Church and must lead to complete severance between Church and State, we naturally wonder whether sound reasoning or passion joined with prejudice is the cause of the rapid and unexpected change of attitude. When brilliant powers of invective are invoked to discredit opponents as "illiterates," as associated with an "underworld," as representatives of "Corybantic Christianity" and of "unimaginative Fundamentalism," it is obvious that the "sweet reasonableness" of the Father in God has been for a time overlaid by the ardour of the polemical protagonist of a faction.

When another vigorous member of the Episcopate can be one of the strongest advocates of alternative Communion Services to-day, we can only express astonishment when we read his equally vigorous statements of a couple of years ago that "unity could only be attained by the acceptance of one national rite," or his even more forcible declaration: "It is difficult to conceive a more complete failure in statesmanship than the proposal to stereotype the two parties in the Church of England by allowing disunion in exactly the service in which most of all we should be united."

Worship and Experience.

The character of two of the claims which have constantly been made in support of the new elements introduced into the worship and teaching of the Church by the revision of the Prayer Book has frequently been exposed, but the continued reiteration of them requires a constant exposure of their real significance. One is the claim that the Book brings into the Church's worship "movements of thought and spiritual experience which have marked its growth as a living body" and that it makes public worship correspond with the life and experience of the people. There are no doubt portions of the Book which are more in harmony with the needs of Churchpeople than the corresponding parts of the old Book.

There would have been no need for revision if a greater degree of elasticity had not been required. But there are other portions of the new Book which cannot be defended on these grounds. These portions are marked by the spirit of reaction. They are retrogressive. They tend to medievalism. They reject the fundamental principle of the Church of England—the appeal to Holy Scripture. They raise the question of the wisdom of accepting everything that meets the needs of any religious experience, without examining whether that experience is sound and healthy, and whether the means of satisfying it is in harmony with the teaching of Christ. Every error that has crept into the Church has been the outcome of an effort to gratify some similar experience, but the result has frequently been disastrous to the purity of the Christian Faith.

Lessons from the Past.

The history of the Middle Ages amply illustrates the growth of error in the Church. The adoption of apparently innocent and even helpful practices, the assumption of the truth of doubtful propositions, prepared the way for the full-blown system of medievalism. The claims made for the successors of the Apostles led to the enormous increase in the powers of bishops and priests which ultimately reached their fullness in the papal endeavour to control the spiritual and temporal concerns of the world. The primitive conception of the confession of sins as a wholesome discipline developed into the system of the confessional which made the faithful dependent upon the priesthood for their welfare in this world and the next. The distinction between venial and mortal sins gave rise to the belief in purgatory, the sale of indulgences, the offering of propitiatory Masses and all those medieval features of Church life which are opposed to the teaching of Christ. All these could no doubt have been justified by contemporaries on the ground that they found a place for “movements of thought and spiritual experience which marked the growth of the Church as a living body.” Possibly they may have made public worship correspond with the life and experience of the people. But the Reformation showed that the experience was neither sound nor healthy and that the method of satisfying it was contrary to the teaching of Scripture and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The same test must be applied with the same sincerity and earnestness to-day, if the Church is to be saved from similar disastrous developments.

An Imaginary Comprehensiveness.

The other claim constantly advanced for the revised Prayer Book, and more especially for the alternative forms of Communion Service, is that the comprehensiveness of the Church is thereby increased. At first sight this may seem to be so, as a greater variety of worship is permitted, but this is only a superficial view. We have already dealt at some length with this point and we can only now remind our readers that in the Book of Common Prayer there are a number of matters which are left to the individual worshipper

to interpret for himself. He is for example not tied to any one view of the nature and method of the presence of Christ in the Holy Communion. In the new Book the presence is associated definitely with the Elements of bread and wine and the method by which the association is produced is implied. It is hoped in some Church circles that the new Communion Service will in the course of time replace the old one. If this takes place it is obvious that the boasted comprehensiveness will be gone, and the Church's teaching narrowed to one theory of the presence of Christ. This is one example of a number that might be given, but it is sufficient to show that those who are putting forward the plea of increasing the comprehensiveness of the Church are misleading the ignorant and unwary. The inevitable consequences will be the same as past history has shown in the process of the development of erroneous teaching and practice.

Sir W. Joynson-Hicks' New Book.

One of the many points of value in Sir William Joynson-Hicks' *The Prayer Book Crisis*, which is reviewed at length in this number of THE CHURCHMAN, is that it sets out in clear and unmistakable language the true significance of present tendencies in the Church. The style of criticism to which the book has been subjected shows that its statements of fact are incontrovertible. Prejudice and passion may be invoked against them, but these cannot alter the foundation truths of the Reformation. The principles of the Reformation may be described for partisan purposes as out of date, and as the obsolete remnants of remote and forgotten controversies. Such statements can only be regarded as the effort of the weak and partially educated to ignore truths that they find disagreeable when courting popularity among those like minded with themselves. The maintenance of truth is the first duty of Christians. It is a special obligation laid upon Bishops, who at their consecration promise to be ready "with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's Word; and both privately and openly to call upon and encourage others to the same." We have the spectacle in the Church to-day of Bishops maintaining and encouraging teaching and practices which their predecessors of only a few years ago denounced as erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word. Sir William Joynson-Hicks shows in his valuable account of the doctrine of our Church the process of departure from New Testament teaching.

Reunion in Scotland.

Scotland is leading the way to reunion in the homeland. Already the reunion movement has achieved notable results in Canada. The Methodist Churches are rapidly approaching the final stages of reunion in the British Isles. These are gratifying indications of the development of the new spirit in our religious life. The impetus given to the reunion movement by the Great War led many to hope that progress would have been rapid. There was hope at one time

that the Church of England and the Free Churches would come together. The movement towards unity in the mission field, which dates back to Kikuyu, led many to believe that the ground had been cleared for immediate advance. The great need of to-day is a combination of the Christian influences of the world to meet the situation revealed by the World Call. The religious conditions in Asia and Africa point to the urgency of a great united movement on the part of all the churches of the Reformation. The present position is disappointing. The whole movement has received a grievous set-back. The blame for this must be laid upon the section of our Communion which has set up indefensible claims for the ministry based on an obsolete theory of Apostolic Succession. Evangelical leaders have been so fully occupied with other matters, that they have not given the attention which it deserves to this subject of supreme urgency and importance. Events in the mission field will undoubtedly soon compel renewed efforts to secure unity based on the wide grounds of spiritual experience and modern views of Church organization.

The Home Missions Problem.

The Moderator of the Church of Scotland at the closing session of the recent Assembly referred to some aspects of the subject which deserve wide notice and full consideration. He called up a vision of a Scottish National Church which would include in its membership "every branch of the Church of God in the land which had its roots in Scottish soil and its place in Scottish history." The door of the Mother Church, he said, would never be closed against any of her children or neighbours, and they were ready to confer with any who would confer with them. He went on to speak of yet another dream, of "a great British Church whose bounds should be conterminous with the Empire and whose Christian influence should mightily affect the whole world." They should continue to cultivate the larger catholicity in thought and devotion which well became every member of the body of Jesus Christ. This is the spirit which gives hope of a real advance in the near future of a great unity which will impress the non-Christian and semi-Christian world. At the same time he pointed out a danger which faces all sections of the Church in the home mission problem. "It would avail them nothing adding to the Church in heathen lands if they lost as many of their own people at home." It is this fact that emphasizes the need of greatly increased support for the work of such organizations as the Church Pastoral-Aid Society in our own land, and of the Colonial and Continental Church Society among our own people throughout the Empire.

The Future.

While there is much discussion as to the effect of the rejection of the Prayer Book Measure on the future of the Church, there is general agreement that a deep and widespread revival of religious life is one of the greatest needs at the present time. Many of the

matters which are now arousing controversy and dividing Christian people would pass out of sight, if there were a great awakening to the spiritual power of the Gospel, and a return to the simplicity of an intense devotion to the person of Jesus Christ. Evangelical church-people have a special responsibility and an almost unrivalled opportunity of showing the power of their faith and love by a great forward movement for the deepening of spiritual life at home, and for renewed enterprise in the advancement of the Kingdom abroad. The Church must get on with its real work. We look to those in authority to give a strong lead in self-sacrificing efforts.

Editorial Note.

We are able to offer our readers in this number some interesting personal reminiscences of Bishop Chavasse by Canon Ffrench of Clonfert, who was a student at Wycliffe Hall nearly forty years ago. They give an insight into the Bishop's character and methods of work, and reveal something of the secret of his influence. The study of "The Jurisdiction of the Primate in the Middle Ages" by Mr. H. P. Palmer discloses some aspects of Church life in pre-Reformation days which are not, as a rule, brought to light by historians of the period. Dr. Harold Smith in "The Future Revival" briefly analyses the origin and influence of some past revivals in the Church, and offers some important suggestions as to the line of the future revival which may confidently be anticipated. In "Gaul and Spain as Spheres for Work in the Days of Paul," Dr. Montgomery Hitchcock provides one of his useful studies of New Testament times. His extensive acquaintance with classical literature enables him to throw interesting sidelights upon the conditions of life and thought in the period with which he deals. A subject of practical importance to the parochial clergy is dealt with by the Rev. G. P. Bassett Kerry in "The Training of Young Life for the Service of the Church." His experience of work in several parishes of widely varied character gives his suggestions for developing the usefulness of young people for the work of the Church a special value. "John Wycliffe," by John Knipe, is the first part of a fresh study of "The Morning Star of the Reformation." The writer has a special gift for setting out the salient features of great characters of past ages. The Rev. T. C. Hammond is well known as a student of many phases of Roman Catholic doctrine. His recent booklet *Does the Doctrine of Transubstantiation involve a Material Change?* is an important contribution to a discussion in which the Bishop of Gloucester and the Warden of Keble have been involved. The article on Mr. Hammond's essay shows the strength of his contention and the sound knowledge on which it is based. A well-known reviewer contributes an article of lighter character which will appeal to lovers of fiction and especially to those who experience the fascination of the detection of crime provided in detective stories.
