

CHURCH AND STATE IN ENGLAND IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND TO- DAY.

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(*Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century.* By the Revd. Norman Sykes. Cambridge University Press. 21s.)

IT is characteristic of the wealth of documentation, which gives special value to Professor Sykes' book, that he has appended to it extracts from the Confirmation returns of three eighteenth-century Dioceses, Exeter, Lincoln and Worcester. These three Dioceses are now four, through the creation of the Diocese of Truro. Lincoln has been shorn of its extraordinary proportions. Worcester has returned to its eighteenth-century dimensions. But the extracts are so arranged that it is easy to compare the Confirmation Statistics of to-day with those of the eighteenth century, in respect of these Dioceses, which have, perhaps, been less affected than any others by the growth of population in industrial areas.

The first difference between the twentieth and eighteenth centuries that arrests us in these statistics is the difference in the number of Confirmation centres. In the eighteenth century we find that in the course of three years Confirmations were held in the County of Devon at 16 centres, in Cornwall at 13, in Lincoln at 15, and in Worcester at 10. Against this we have in the years 1930, 1931 and 1932, spread over three years, Confirmations in the Diocese of Exeter approximately 290, in Truro Diocese 285, in Lincoln 300, and in Worcester 190. We should expect to see a corresponding difference in the number of candidates confirmed. We should expect from the diligent annual Confirmation tours of to-day, and from the multiplication of centres, from the revolution in facilities of travelling, a number of candidates confirmed which would make the eighteenth-century returns look pitifully small. But in fact the eighteenth century, supposed to present Church life at its lowest nadir, the eighteenth century with its supposed spiritual deadness, and abundant abuses and anomalies, has, in these particular returns, the advantage over the twentieth. At the 54 centres in the above-named Dioceses were confirmed about the middle of the eighteenth century 41,696 candidates against 37,560 confirmed at approximately 1,000 centres in three years of the Church of to-day. The chief difference is in the Diocese of Truro. The other three show figures slightly in favour of modern diligence. But in the Truro Diocese the 9,133 candidates of the eighteenth century are represented by 4,051 of the twentieth. Here is an arresting contrast, which may well set us searching the pages of Professor Sykes' book.

The search will not be unrewarded. We shall be confronted

at once with many often forgotten difficulties of Church work in the eighteenth century, and impressed by sheer tenacity of methodical regard for duty as such, duty done without aid of enthusiasm, without conferences, press advertisements, fatherly episcopal supervision, and many other adjuncts which we regard as indispensable. The eighteenth century was innocent of Church Lads' Brigades, Scouts, Rovers, Wolves, Girl Guides, and even Sunday Schools. Yet it turned out, if we may judge by these specimens, more Confirmation candidates than we can muster to-day. We must not be supposed to be passing any reflection upon the modern methods, many of them called into being by necessity of counteraction to a world of appeal to youthful propensities, cinemas, football clubs, cricket clubs and the like, such as our forefathers never knew. We are not suggesting that we can put the clock back, and be content, as they were content, to depend on weekly catechisings in Church. Each age has its own difficulties and must use its own ingenuity to overcome them. But a perusal of Professor Sykes' book vividly suggests reasons why Confirmations were more rare, why they had to be held when countryfolk were most busy in the field, why they were so infrequent. Out of the wealth of illustration drawn from contemporary records we must be content with one or two extracts.

Here is a quotation from a report sent by Bishop Kennett of Peterborough to Archbishop Wake. Kennett, it should be remembered, was so unpopular for his Whig opinions that a portrait of him as "Judas Iscariot" adorned "the painting of the Last Supper" on the "altar-piece" in the Parish Church of Whitechapel.

"I have entered," writes Kennett in 1723, "on my stages of Confirmation, and began at Uppingham in Rutland, within which county they have had no Confirmation these forty years. The numbers as taken by my attendants were 1,700 and odd. I appoint it on Sunday afternoon because the good folk have their best clothes, and horses to spare; otherwise we should have very few upon these dripping days, when they must wait upon their hay and corn. I intend constantly to preach myself in the morning, and to have evening prayer over before 3, and to spend the remainder of the day in that office. I had not done at Uppingham till after ten at night."

Here again is an extract from Bishop Pearce of Bangor's letter to Lord Hardwicke in 1749. After mentioning Visitation and Confirmations at Conway, Ruthin and Dolgelly, he goes on:

"As my horse, who was a native of Merionethshire, had never been used to any but such rough and stony ways, he carried me very safe from one stone to another without once stumbling on the journey. . . . Our road [by Snowdon] lay generally in the valley beneath rocky mountains on each side, a rapid river running at the bottom, by the edge of which we travelled, and the water of which running so violently through numberless large stones fallen from the mountains, occasioned such a noise as made us unable to hear ourselves speak. . . . Our road for several miles was rather a pair of stone stairs than a path; and whenever we might have gone off from this rough pavement, we should have run the hazard of being set foot in a bog. I thought within myself that if Milton's description [in his *Paradise Lost*] of the battle of the angels had been true, it might have seemed as if the rocks and mountains which the one army threw at the heads of the other, had

fallen down upon the earth in this place, and had continued in this fallen situation."

Could the present Bishop of Bangor motoring along the lovely banks of Llan Gwynant have either imagined such difficulties or been inspired by such reflections? A tyre-burst or oil-shortage would be the worst, not only of his own troubles, but of the troubles of the candidates whom he was to confirm.

We have chosen the subject of Confirmations, as being one in respect of which eighteenth-century prelates have been held to be specially liable to reproach, and not altogether undeservedly. There must have been disorderly Confirmations; there were among the candidates those who had been confirmed more than once. Many must have been presented with insufficient preparation. But there is also abundant evidence that the eighteenth-century Bishops were not insensible to these difficulties, and took pains to establish decency, order and reverence. It is curious to read (p. 135) that Confirmations by a rail at a time were among the efforts to improve administration of the rite.

"The clergy and people were struck with the decency as much as with the novelty of the ceremony. The Confirmations were performed in less time and with less trouble, with more silence, with more regularity and order. It commanded attention, it raised devotion, in so much that several Bishops have since adopted the same method."

The sum of the whole matter seems to be this. The Hanoverian Prelates, charged with the unwieldy Dioceses inherited from the Pre-Reformation Church, hampered by the ancient traditional duty of residing in London during the sessions of Parliament, and labouring under the long-continued difficulties of locomotion, did in fact attach more importance to Confirmation than their predecessors, and confirmed probably a far larger proportion of the population than is confirmed by the existing Episcopate. At all events this is the impression left by an attentive perusal of Professor Sykes' most carefully documented History.

We must pass by many most fascinating subjects, such as the Ladder of Preferment, Pluralities, Cathedral dignities, the Subaltern clergy, ornaments of Churches, administration of Sacraments, and in fact leave to the Professor's readers the very enjoyable task of gaining for themselves through his pages an unprecedentedly full acquaintance with the life of our Church in the eighteenth century. We must turn to that which is the core of his book—the Alliance of Church and State in England. Professor Sykes' summary of the controversy associated with the names of Atterbury, Leslie, Gibson, Hoadley, Wake and Warburton seems to us both complete and exact, and a luminous presentation of an obscure and intricate controversy. We start with the surrender of Convocation to Henry VIII, which practically put the Sovereign in the place that had been enjoyed by the Pope, since the Convocations promised that they would

"never from henceforth presume to attempt, allege, claim or put in ure, enact, promulge, or execute any canons, constitutions, ordinances, provincial, or

by whatsoever name they may be called, in Convocation, unless the King's royal assent and licence may to them be had, to make, promulge, and execute the same, and that His Majesty do give His most Royal assent and authority in their behalf."

In spite of Royal professions that things spiritual were to be left to the spirituality, we find both the Prayer Books of Edward VI, the Ordinal, and the Prayer Book of Elizabeth, 1559, enacted without the consent of the Convocations, and in 1559 against their will. But severe as was the blow administered to the Convocations by Henry VIII, a far more fatal retrenchment of their power was made when, in the early years of Charles II, they surrendered their privilege of granting taxes to the Crown on behalf of the Clergy. Up to that time they had it in their power to make bargains, to debate, to present petitions *before* they proceeded to taxation. After the fatal compact of Archbishop Sheldon with Lord Clarendon in 1664 they were only summoned, but not allowed to proceed to any effective business. The shadow of power left to them by Henry VIII subject to the Royal will vanished at the very moment when we should have expected some revival of their ancient rights, vanished for more than two centuries. For those two centuries all ecclesiastical legislation, building of Churches, settling boundaries of Parishes, alterations in the law of marriage and so forth, and even suggestions of Prayer Book Revision passed into the hands of Parliament.

Naturally this loss of power evoked in 1644 a protest, and that protest was louder still when the Nation, acting through Parliament, dispossessed the Stuarts, or to speak more strictly, interrupted the line of hereditary descent, on account of the secession of James II and his heirs to the Church of Rome. Bishop Creighton used to say that nothing brought greater discredit on the clergy of the Church of England than the necessity of abjuring their favourite doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. No doctrine had they preached more assiduously since the Restoration of the monarchy. But in spite of all their preaching they found themselves compelled to admit that the nation had a right and a duty to depose its Sovereign in spite of his being, as they had taught, the Lord's anointed, in spite of his being the Head of the Church. The same Act which transferred the Crown to William and Mary transferred to them—without consulting Convocation—the powers that the Crown exercised over the Church of England. The sermons which the clergy had preached for years about the sin of rebellion against the King became waste paper if they conformed. Rather than suffer this disgrace, some 400 of the clergy went into exile, with their Archbishop and his fellow non-juring Bishops. Those Bishops were deprived of their sees by no other authority than the authority of Parliament. It is a singular irony of fate that to-day the stoutest champions of the Church's right to resist the authority of the State in matters ecclesiastical trace the descent of their orders through Bishops who, from the strict High Church point of view, were schismatics, dispossessing the true successors of the Apostles. Twice over, first at the Reformation, and secondly at the Revolution, has

the strict Apostolical succession been impaired in the Church of England by the rude hands of the civil authority.

Lack of space compels us again to refer our readers to Professor Sykes' book for the story of the controversy naturally awakened by the secession of the Non-jurors. It was no small matter that the seceding leaders, men such as Sancroft and Ken, and several of the clergy who accepted deprivation with them, were men of saintly lives, clergy of whom the Church of England had a right to be proud. Why did not the strong appeal of their personality bring England over to their side? The answer must be that nothing short of dread of restoration of Papal powers in England could have struck the nicely adjusted balance, especially on the death of Queen Anne, between Jacobites and Hanoverians in favour of the Protestant line. The contest was one which penetrated to the very foundations of national life. Though the mighty tomes in which it was conducted are far too voluminous for modern use, yet the abstract of them, brilliantly made in the work which we are reviewing, throbs with living issues for our own times. Professor Sykes gives the palm in the controversy to Bishop Warburton. Warburton, in his *Alliance between Church and State*, comes to the conclusion that it is an alliance between "two sovereign and independent powers, each ordained for its proper function." It follows that the union between them can be produced only by free convention and mutual compact. "In return for its acceptance of the Church into partnership the State requires the surrender of the independence possessed by the spiritual Society in its former condition of absolute sovereignty." But the Church secured from its compact evident advantages; a public endowment for its clergy, the presence of its prelates in the legislative assemblies of the Realm, and the bestowal of coercive power upon ecclesiastical courts, all which privileges must determine with the dissolution of the alliance between the civil and religious societies. Within the framework of this compact Warburton would allow "no independent action on the part of the Church."

It is often insisted that we ought to remember that Warburton's theory belongs to an age in which none but members of the Church of England were admitted to Parliament, and that Warburton made this exclusion of Dissenters a necessary part of his alliance between Church and State. On the other hand Parliament, in spite of the removal of Tests, and of opening its doors to Nonconformists, has left the Church in undisturbed possession of its special privileges. It has even gone further. It has, by the Enabling Act, allowed the Church to institute an Assembly with the extraordinary right of repealing or amending *any* Act of Parliament. It was a necessary corollary of this right that Parliament should retain a *Veto* on all such repeals and amendments, a veto which made no distinction between measures temporal and measures spiritual. Such a distinction must have presented insuperable difficulties. Who is to say, for instance, whether the establishment of a new Bishopric is a temporal measure or a spiritual? Even the public prayers of

the Church, while a purely spiritual measure if none but Churchmen had the right of attending public services, had a temporal aspect and effect when the State secured to the use of the Church the buildings in which those prayers were to be said, and the endowments of the ministry by which the prayers were offered. It is often forgotten that by the Act of Uniformity the State guaranteed to the English citizen a form of worship, which he was entitled to expect as a matter of right, when he attended his Parish Church. The troubles of Prayer Book Revision in the main arose from the departure of individual clergymen from that uniform standard of worship without regard to the authority of either Church or State. The plea put forward for the Revised Book was that it would enable the Bishops to enforce discipline in the Church of England. But this very plea took the measure out of the category of purely spiritual measures. It was not a spiritual but a temporal question whether uniformity of worship on lines enacted in an Act of Parliament was to be abandoned in favour of diversity of worship regulated by the discretion of Bishops. Even the question of Reservation of the consecrated Elements in Churches was not the purely spiritual question that it appeared to be superficially. The existence of the alliance between Church and State of necessity involved the State in approval of the new departure. The State was requested to sanction uses which appeared to a considerable number of citizens to be idolatrous, and offensive to their conceptions of pure worship. The State would have had no concern with the introduction of Reservation in Wesleyan or Baptist Churches. It would neither have sanctioned nor disapproved the practice there. But Reservation could not be introduced into the buildings of the National Church without involving the Nation in *sanction* of the practice. That was the real trouble.

Prayer Book Revision, in fact, brought to light the real implications of the Enabling Act. It had seemed not only harmless, but very desirable, that Churchmen should have the same freedom to manage their own affairs that Nonconformists had. But at once the question arose, "Who were Churchmen?" Electoral Rolls had to be formed on a basis distinguishing Churchmen from Nonconformists, and by that very act excluding Nonconformists from the Church more sharply than they were excluded even by the Test Act in the eighteenth century. By the Test Act Nonconformists were deprived of certain State privileges, but they were not excluded from Church Vestries, or from holding office as Churchwardens, or even from Confirmation or Holy Communion. They were still compelled to pay Church rates, and consequently entitled to sittings in the Parish Church. The Church regarded itself as responsible for all citizens who did not refuse her ministrations, although the State, under Church influences, sorely limited the temporal rights of non-Churchmen. The Enabling Act was the first Statute which closed the doors of the newly formed and Statutory Church Councils against all who were members of some other religious body than the Church, and by that very deed recog-

nised the Church as a religious Corporation of borders more limited than those of citizenship.

As soon as the Electoral Rolls of the Church were fairly constituted, it appeared that out of 24,000,000 citizens above the age of twenty-one, not much more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ millions found their way on to those Rolls. To this $3\frac{1}{2}$ million were reserved the exclusive right of electing the Church Assembly or of being elected to it. To this $3\frac{1}{2}$ million attached all the powers of the Church Assembly and the right, through the Church Assembly, of repealing all Statutes of the Realm, subject to the veto of Parliament. It is true that Parliamentary Committees were formed to protect citizens against injury through measures improperly framed by the Church Assembly. But it was really a drastic revolution which transferred to $3\frac{1}{2}$ millions ecclesiastical rights and powers that in theory, and to some extent in practice, attached to the whole Nation. For it was the Nation that had endorsed the Tudor monarchs in the separation of England from the great Western Communion ruled by the Papacy. It was the Nation, which under the Stuarts both abolished and restored Episcopacy. It was the Nation that rejected the rule of Roman Catholic kings, and refused civil rights to all but members of the Church of England. The Church of England, that in the eighteenth century still enjoyed certain civil rights to the exclusion of all who deliberately separated themselves from itself, in the nineteenth century lost this exclusive status by the act of the Nation which repealed the Test Act without consulting Convocation. But the Church of England in that nineteenth century lost, also by its own act, the adherence of millions, and not a few of these millions through the obstinate and narrow intolerance of the parochial clergy. In the eighteenth century the Church of England was still in fact, as well as in name, the Church to which the vast majority of the Nation adhered. To-day the same Church includes on her Electoral Rolls but a very small minority of the Nation, and still enjoys privileges to which the number of her adherents does not fairly entitle her. It is true that by the alliance of Church and State, the Nation expresses her religious character, and gains the inestimable value of religious sanction for its laws, its institutions, and its standard of morals. But the hold of the Church on the Nation is largely sentimental, and, on numerical grounds, not easily defended. It is difficult to exaggerate the dangers to the alliance of Church and State, if the question of that alliance is brought once more into the political arena.

It is true that the Bishop of Durham has not many followers in his ambition to rescind the union of Church and State. What is more to be feared in practical politics is the disturbance of the balance adjusted in the Enabling Act. Such a disturbance would, for instance, follow from substituting for assent by Parliament to Church Assembly Measures, the expression of dissent from them. "Assent" involves a deliberate Sanction by which the State expresses approval of Church proposals, and becomes an active party in passing them. By "dissent" the Church is put in the category

of corporations over which the State exercises restraint lest they should do mischief, but is in no sense a party to their proceedings. Reducing the part of the State in Church legislation to simple "dissent" would be a further step towards secularising the State and towards sectarianising the Church—and that means in the end the complete separation of Church and State. Both France and the United States are evidence that the one Church which gains by such separation is the Church of Rome.

Though reflections on Professor Sykes' book have led us astray into consideration of modern Church problems, we have not really strayed very far afield. For the substance of Professor Sykes' book is to show that in spite of a very close alliance between Church and State in the eighteenth century, religious life in England was not at so low an ebb as is commonly supposed. Mr. Sykes does not shut his eyes to the serious defects of the Georgian Church. He is far too good a historian to make any concealment of the abuses which marred its usefulness, and have given it a bad name in Church history. He does not "leave out the warts" in painting his portrait. But he also points out the difficulties with which Bishops and clergy had to contend. He reminds us of the noble defence which the Bishops put up against deism, unitarianism, and atheism. He illustrates the genuine piety that was found in both clergy and laity. Though he does not happen to mention the fact, in no century were the works of John Bunyan and Robert Leighton in greater demand. Though it was the age of "Tate and Brady," it was also the age that gave us, "While shepherds watched," "O God, our help in ages past," "Hark the glad sound, the Saviour comes," "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn," "The God of Abraham praise," "Hark, the herald angels sing," "Jesu, Lover of my soul," "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," "Rock of ages, cleft for me," "My God, and is Thy Table spread," and very many, besides, of our greatest hymns, for lack of which we should be spiritually poorer to-day. The century of our Church life which gave us Berkely, Butler, the Wesleys, Whitfield, Newton, Johnson and Cowper is a century of which our Church has no need to be ashamed. Nor would it be easy to find words more appropriate to our Church life to-day than those which Professor Sykes quotes from Burke's speech on the Feathers' Tavern Petition:

"The ground for a legislative alteration of a legal Establishment is this, that you find the inclinations of a majority of the people, concurring with your own sense of the intolerable nature of the abuse, are in favour of a change. . . . If you have no evidence of this nature it ill becomes your gravity . . . to listen to anything that tends to shake one of the capital pillars of the State, and alarm the body of your people upon that ground, in which every hope and fear, every interest, passion, prejudice, everything which can affect the human breast, are all involved together. If you make this a season for religious alteration, depend upon it you will soon find it a season of religious tumult and religious wars."

Nor let it be forgotten that the Church Assembly represents an exceedingly small proportion of the religiously minded Englishmen of to-day.