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THE CHURCHMAN

July, 1935.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

Commemoration of the Fourth Centenary of the Reformation.

A GENERAL welcome will be accorded to the proposals that have been put forward for the celebration of the Fourth Centenary of the Reformation in 1938. A National Council to carry through the Commemoration was formed at a representative meeting held in the Central Hall, London, at the end of May. The Bishop of Manchester presided at the meeting and pointed out that it had been decided to centre the Celebration on the setting up of the English Bible in the English Churches, which actually took place in 1538. The Archbishop of Canterbury attended the meeting, and in the course of an address supporting the Celebration said that beyond question the greatest and most valuable legacy of the Reformation was the gift to the English people of the Bible in their native tongue, and that he was glad therefore that it was proposed to concentrate the Commemoration so far as possible upon gratitude for the possession of the English Bible. English life owed an enormous debt to the Bible, and he hoped that they would do what they could to restore the place and value of the Bible in the life of the English people. Dr. Scott Lidgett followed, and showed the place that the English Bible had taken by a natural series of developments in the Church, in the home, and in the schools of our country. He emphasised the far-reaching influence of the Bible on English life and character. The Archdeacon of London, Archdeacon Storr, and Dr. Sidney M. Berry, Secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, also spoke. The National Council contains the names of a large number of representatives of the Reformed Churches, and with such support the Commemoration should be of so widespread and enthusiastic a character as the occasion demands.

The Resolutions.

Several of the speakers were emphatic that the Commemoration was to have nothing of a controversial character. It was to declare the positive elements of the Reformation. These were set out in

the resolutions which were unanimously passed. The first declared the desire "to place on record profound gratitude to Almighty God for the Gospel of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; for the renewal of the witness to that Gospel at the Reformation and for the provision of the Bible in the Mother tongue of the English people; and for all which had been accomplished through the Gospel, not only in this country but in many lands throughout the world, to the Glory of His Name and the coming of His Kingdom." The second resolution, after an expression of approval of the Commemoration in 1938, expressed the desire that it should be an occasion for renewed effort to advance the Kingdom of Christ, and called upon "all the Christian Churches to share in this Commemoration, for the enriching of their spiritual life, the strengthening of their witness to the Gospel, and the increase of their service in the extension of the Kingdom in all the concerns of the modern world." Readers of *THE CHURCHMAN* will, we are sure, give their hearty support to this important movement and will take their part in the preparations which are necessary to make it thoroughly successful.

The Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen.

The subject of the recent Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen was "The Gospel of Christ and Present-Day Evangelism." We are able in this issue of *THE CHURCHMAN* to give several of the chief papers read at the Conference. We regret that we are not able to give the complete series as they were all of special value, but some of the addresses were delivered from notes and the authors have not been able to prepare the whole report for publication. It may be possible in a subsequent issue to supply the omission. From the papers which we print it will be seen that the Conference made a useful contribution to the consideration of the purpose and methods of Evangelism, which is at present practically the chief subject before the Church in this land. The divisions of the subject showed that every important aspect of it was reviewed. The Rev. C. M. Chavasse, Master of St. Peter's Hall, the Chairman of the Conference, gave a general opening, which served as a useful introduction. The Bishop of Worcester emphasised Evangelism as "The Primary Task of the Church." The Rev. F. B. Heiser, Principal of St. Aidan's College, Birkenhead, opened the first special portion—"The Content of the Gospel"—and dealt specially with "Christ as God." The third paper of the same section on "Christ as Lord" was read by Canon A. St. John Thorpe. The closing paper, which was intended to deal with the personal duty of Evangelism, was read by Prebendary H. W. Hinde, Principal of Oak Hill College, on "God and Ourselves." The Conference has given a stimulus to the effort of Evangelism in Evangelical circles, especially in connection with the movement inaugurated by the Church Pastoral-Aid Society.

Oxford Conference Findings.

The following findings were agreed upon at the final session. They are to be taken, as in previous years, as expressing the general sense of the Conference, and not as representing in detail the views of individual members.

1. The Church of Christ exists to witness to and to proclaim the Gospel. While the need of the Gospel, and the inexorable obligation upon the Church and every member thereof to evangelise, is the same in every age and race, there is to-day in our own land a special and persistent call by reason of the fact that millions of our own people have no touch with organised religion. If the Church fails to see the vision and respond to the call, its own existence is in peril; for it cannot live by its worship alone.

2. The Gospel is the free gift of God's grace, the outcome of a downward movement of God—not an upward movement of man; and it is only as the Church humbly receives that gift and unreservedly and uncompromisingly ministers it to the world that it can and will realise the unity for which the Redeemer prayed.

3. The ministry of Evangelisation, while it is first a ministry of reconciliation, necessitates and includes that of teaching, the only basis of which is God's Word written. The widespread ignorance of the Bible and its contents and the lack of respect for its supreme authority in matters of faith and morals is a principal cause of present-day sin and failure.

4. The heart of the Gospel is in the Pauline words: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." The only remedy for the sin and failure of men is in the atoning substitutionary sacrifice upon the Cross of the Eternal Son of God. That sacrifice was the redemptive act of God Himself bearing the sin of the world in Christ. We own Jesus Christ—Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, and Ascended—as God, as Saviour, and therefore as Lord of the whole life.

5. The forgiveness of sins is a miracle of creative power in which God takes the initiative. Salvation is in a personal relationship between God and the individual, through faith, by the work of the Holy Spirit. It demands and creates the responsive consecration to God of ourselves—mind, heart, and will—with a view to the presentation to the world of the work of reconciliation.

6. The Salvation of God, through the power imparted by the gift of the Holy Spirit, includes deliverance from the dominion of sin.

7. The practical outworking of the call to evangelisation must be primarily in the ordinary work of the parish, but it calls for the most careful and prayerful training of the laity as well as the clergy in order to effect the work. In this context the conference welcomes the setting up of the Archbishops' Committee on Evangelistic Work, and the scheme for parochial evangelisation initiated by the Church Pastoral Aid Society in connexion with its centenary in 1936.

8. In the presentation of the message of God there is need for a fresh emphasis on the fact of sin and its exceeding sinfulness. The way of renewal an only be the threefold way of repentance, faith in Christ as God and Saviour, and obedience. There is no other gospel. The authority of the Church must be: "Thus saith the Lord."

The Church Congress.

The announcement that the Church Congress will meet again this year will be welcomed by many. It was feared that the meetings would be discontinued, partly because most of the Bishops were reluctant to add to their work by undertaking the arrangements for the Congress, and partly because some Churchpeople were of opinion that there was no place for the Congress, as there are now so many other conferences, and in their view the Church

Assembly gave sufficient opportunity for the expression of Church views on all important matters. The Church Congress has had for many years a special place in our Church life and has given an opportunity for the consideration of matters for which no other gathering provided an adequate platform. The Bishop of Winchester has welcomed the Congress to his diocese and the meeting at Bournemouth in October ought to be an occasion of special interest. The subject chosen—"Christianity in the Modern State"—is one of supreme importance and interest at the present time. It is also one that presents many difficulties and we admire the courage that has led to its adoption, although it is true that no other could so appropriately have been chosen in view of the condition of affairs in the relations of Church and State, both in our own land and in several of the Continental countries. The arrangements of the syllabus of the Congress and the speakers who have been selected give promise that a searching examination of every aspect of the problems involved will be made. Some clear pronouncements on the whole position will be welcomed by Church-people.

Church and State.

The consideration of the position in our own land will be the primary interest. It is not known if the report of the Commission on Church and State will be issued before the meeting of the Congress, but if it is there will be an opportunity for some wholesome debate on the conclusions of the Commission, whatever they may be, and it is anticipated by many that some changes of a radical character will be suggested which will not be acceptable by those who hold strong views on the value of the State connection. It can never be forgotten that the relationship between Church and State in this country is unique in character and there is no desire on the part of a host of Churchpeople that it should be weakened. There is all the difference in the world between a Christian and a pagan State, and our claim is that ours is a Christian State. In whatever degree it is not Christian, the blame must rest upon the Church either for failure to represent Christianity in its true character and so retain its hold upon the people, or for not rising to the opportunities which it has had of bringing the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven to bear upon every aspect of the life of the people.

The position of Christianity in other lands is also a source of anxious interest at the present time. The persecution of the Christians in Russia and Germany is a painful fact in the life of the twentieth century, which few of us ever anticipated, and the issues of the conflict are of the deepest interest to us all. The Congress will give an opportunity for the expression of some strong opinion on these matters.