

# THE CHURCHMAN

January—March, 1939.

## NOTES AND COMMENTS.

### “The Churchman.”

ONCE more, as a New Year opens before us, comes an opportunity of thanking our readers for the continued support which they have given to us and for the many messages of appreciation and encouragement which we frequently receive. We look forward with confidence to a continuance of that support and encouragement during the years that are to come, and especially hope that our readers will help to increase the influence of THE CHURCHMAN by making it known among their friends and inducing them to become subscribers. Each section of ecclesiastical and theological opinion has its organ or organs in the Press, and THE CHURCHMAN is the only quarterly magazine which affords an opportunity for the expression and exposition of the principles of Evangelical Churchmen. It, therefore, fills an important and, indeed, a necessary place in current Church literature. The principles of the Reformation and their manifestation in the contemporary life of the Church of England are being challenged and attacked in all directions, and their best defence is to make them known and understood. The Commemorations of 1938 were, at their first inception, intended to give a large place to the Reformation and its great value in the religious and national life of this country. By degrees, however, attention became focussed upon the Bible in our mother-tongue as the noblest achievement of the Reformation, and its greatest legacy to posterity, and the movement itself received only a small share of attention. It was, probably, on the whole, the better course to concentrate upon one thing at a time. But the debt of both Church and Nation to the Reformation is so great and of so enduring a character that this side of the Commemoration must not be allowed to drop out of sight. In the present number of THE CHURCHMAN we give an article by the Rev. P. H. Scott on the influence of the Bible on the Reformation and we hope during this year to give further articles on the movement as a whole, its principles, its chief promoters, and its contribution to the cause of true religion and individual liberty.

### **The International Crisis.**

The beginning of another year always suggests a twofold ground for reflection. We may look forward with hope and resolve afresh to avoid the mistakes which so often have marred our best endeavours in the past ; and we may glance backward to note the many occasions of thanksgiving for the way in which we have been guided in the year that has now gone from us. And one of these occasions for thankfulness is that we have been spared the iniquity and horror of another European war, and that we, in this land, have enjoyed in peace, the season which is given to the thought of glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men. As time passes, the greatness of Mr. Neville Chamberlain's achievement does not grow less. It was not so much that he earnestly desired peace. Others, as *The Times* reminded us recently, had desired it with equal intensity before him. It was more that he showed that peace must be actively worked for if it was to be attained. And the strength of the welcome with which he was received by the people of Germany showed how little the great mass of them desired war and how eagerly they hailed the prospect of averting it. A few years ago Sir Philip Gibbs made a tour of the countries which had been involved in the last war. He avoided official circles and great personages, confining his intercourse to the common people—the middle classes, tradesmen and working folk. Everywhere he found but one sentiment expressed, whether it was in France, in Germany, in Italy or in Eastern Europe, no one desired another war. Mr. Chamberlain's reception at Munich and elsewhere brought this fact into the light of day and showed that so far as the people of Germany are concerned there is no real antagonism to England, in spite of the propaganda of suspicion and distrust to which they have been subjected.

### **Religious and Racial Persecution.**

The evidence of many people who have visited Germany is that outside extreme Nazi circles there is little sympathy with what is being done there against the Jews and against the Confessional Church, but the avenues for freedom of expression are closed, and outsiders know only what is officially stated through the Press and by other means. With every desire to promote friendly relations with Germany, the barbarous treatment of which the Jews have been the unhappy victims, seriously strains the situation. The nature of evil is to destroy itself in the end ; and such treatment will bring a stern retribution to those who are its authors. In the meantime, it is our bounden duty to extend all the sympathy and help we can give to relieve the sufferings of those who have been so grievously afflicted. The most serious aspect of the situation, in which Christians of every country are deeply concerned, is the overthrow by the ruling caste in Germany of the Christian ideal of love for all men and of the equality of all men before God, and the setting up of a racial and paganized form of religion, which recognizes no agency but brute force for the attainment of its

ends. If civilization is to be saved from destruction, it is for the members of all the Christian Churches to find a means of restoring the belief that it is only by spiritual and moral influences that a people or nation can become great in any real sense. It is still true that righteousness exalteth a nation and that sin is a reproach to any people.

### **The Bible Commemoration.**

The year which has just closed has witnessed a serious attempt to bring the Bible to the notice of the people of this country. That so considerable an effort should have been needed is a strange comment on the statement of the historian J. R. Green that in the reign of Elizabeth, England had become a people of one book and that book the Bible. And yet it is very largely true that while much lip service is rendered to the greatness and value of the Bible, it is practically an unknown book to the great majority of English people. All competent observers unite, from many points of view, in deploring this. Not many years ago a Government Department, the Board of Education, issued a lengthy Report on "The teaching of English in England" which contained a section of several pages on the value of the Bible as a medium for familiarizing young people with great English writing. It is true that the Bible has other purposes than this, but it has so much power that it will effect those purposes if it is only really known and read. The Commemoration of 1938 was very successful in concentrating a large amount of general attention upon the Bible, and much literature on the subject was produced, not all of it equally good, but on the whole excellent. But to draw attention to the Bible is only a beginning. If the movement is to have any permanent value, it must be followed up by a further movement with the object of encouraging the clergy to preach more from and about the Bible so that their congregations may desire to read it for themselves. Their curiosity and interest must be aroused before they can be led to do this. Exhortations to read it as a duty or on general grounds will rarely attract or influence people. But if their minister shows that he himself knows his Bible and finds it the most interesting and vital book in the world and will familiarize them with its contents, they will soon seek a closer acquaintance with the treasures it contains.

### **The Neglect of the Bible.**

From whatever cause it arises, we cannot doubt the fact that except in a limited circle the Bible is comparatively little read and consequently little known, even by Christian people. A kind of general acquaintance with the more prominent incidents and teachings of Scripture, most congregations possess, but this knowledge, largely second-hand, has little vital force and produces little effect in their daily life. We have it on the testimony of the late Dr. Peake that "One of the most ominous signs in the life of the churches at the present time is the ignorance of Scripture which meets us on every hand"; and he says further,

“The consequences of this neglect are disastrous. It is unquestionable that neglect of the Bible is coincident with a lowered spiritual vitality. Even those who are members of the Church, and take their profession with some measure of seriousness, are too often tempted to imagine that their spiritual growth will largely take care of itself. At any rate, they are not keen and eager to foster it, hence their Bible reading tends to become perfunctory. Their ‘daily portion,’ if they have one, is something to be got through rather than embraced as a precious opportunity of storing new force and winning new insight.” The consequences of this are not merely those which affect the individuals themselves. “The preacher is largely paralysed when his people have given up the habit of Bible study.” This testimony could be strengthened indefinitely by utterances to the same effect from a multitude of preachers and students of Scripture of all shades of opinion. In recent times there have been many expressions with regard to the need of a revival of religion in this country. The Archbishop of Canterbury’s recall to religion, of two years ago ; the stimulating book of the Rev. W. Thompson Elliott, entitled *Back to God*, and a great cloud of witnesses in the last few years, by speech and pen testify to the need of revival if religion is even to survive the hindrances and antagonisms of modern life. But we have all the means for such revival at our disposal and we cannot reasonably expect that God will work a miracle to make up for our neglect of them. He has spoken to us through His Word and has no other or different message if we put that on one side and fail to read or to use it. It has a vitality and energizing power which will soon make itself felt if it is only given the opportunity. It is for this reason that the clergy will do wisely if in 1939 they follow up the Commemoration of 1938 by devoting a large part of their preaching to this pressingly urgent question. “It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.”