

# The Challenge to Evangelical Churchmen.

BY THE REV. J. P. THORNTON-DUESBERY, M.A.

**M**Y first words are naturally those of welcome. I am particularly glad that I can speak them this evening, both in the name of St. Peter's Hall which, though still for a season dispossessed of its inheritance, is specially happy to welcome back a part at least of this Conference on its own Patronal Festival, and also in the name of Wycliffe where, "temporary-acting" though I am, nine-tenths of my working and sleeping hours are now spent. To all the members of the Conference we would express our pleasure at having them again in Oxford, and we hope they will forgive the importunity with which we besought them to bring their own bed-linen, and that they will pardon anything they find lacking in our hospitality; our domestic staff is very willing, but its numbers are very small.

It would be invidious to mention names, but there is one whose presence is, I am sure, a special happiness to the Conference as a whole—the one whom we in Wycliffe still cannot quite cure ourselves of describing as "the Principal," even though it is now six months since he left us for his Island Kingdom of Sodor and Man.

May I also express my own appreciation of the honour done to me in being asked to occupy this Chair? I could wish that you had someone a little older and more experienced, but you must blame the Committee for their choice! It was not mine! I know I can count on the forbearance and co-operation which you always show, and I would ask this particularly if I make mistakes about the names of those who rise to take part in discussion. Many of you are, I regret to say, still strangers to me, but the man who is "set on high among the people" cannot be concealed, and you will remember the old saying, "More people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows!"

The subject set before us is great and urgent. We meet as a little company of Christians confronted by a predominantly pagan nation in an almost entirely pagan world. If our gathering is to be truly successful and victorious, we must go out from it not merely with a greater understanding of the wide range of vital topics which to-morrow's speakers will bring before us, but with a definite committal, personal and corporate, to a course of action in our own lives, in our homes, our parishes, and our communities, which will under God be dynamic and revolutionary enough to change the nation and win Britain back to Jesus Christ. A "challenge" is a call to action in view of an urgent and even desperate situation. We have assembled not merely to hear, but to answer that call.

And we have assembled as "Evangelical Churchmen." "The Challenge to Evangelical Churchmen" is our subject to-night, and I must say a few words about both the adjective and the substantive at this point. All of us, no doubt, have frequently discussed the question what it is that constitutes an Evangelical, and it is hardly

to be expected that the answer can be given in a few words. Yet it is vital that we *should* reach an answer, and that as speedily as may be ; for if we are to answer the call to action corporately as well as personally, we need to come to a common mind. Quite recently, a contemporary of my own recalled to me some words which Bishop Chavasse of Liverpool had said to us as students, not long before his death : " beware of scorn and suspicion, the scorn of the liberal for the conservative, the suspicion with which the conservative views the liberal."

It is unhappily a fact that many who would claim the title of Evangelical (and claim it rightly, as I believe) would yet deny it to others on the ground of a difference with them about the position of the celebrant at the Lord's Supper or the precise formula in which they would define the doctrine of Inspiration. I know I am treading on most delicate ground, and the last thing that I wish to do is to wave red rags or draw red herrings across the trail of our thought and discussion here. Those are the problems which many of us have thrashed out time and again. I scarcely think it would be profitable to renew the process at this Conference, and yet disunity is a fatal obstacle to taking up the challenge of to-day. I shall have more to say at a later stage concerning the moral and spiritual prerequisites for unity. At this point, and without discussion of it, I would suggest that the true differentia of an Evangelical is not the fact that he takes (or does not take) " north side ", nor yet that he holds (or does not hold) a particular theory of the inspiration of " God's Word written ", but rather the peculiar stress which he lays, in all their implications, upon the doctrines of Justification by Faith, of Assurance, and of the Heavenly Session of our Lord. Compared with these, the common causes of " scorn and suspicion " between Evangelicals of various hues are really superficial. It is in the fundamentals of doctrine, not in matters of ceremony, that unity is to be sought ; when that has been attained, more superficial matters have a way of settling themselves.

We are, however, more than Evangelicals ; we are Evangelical Churchmen, heirs, that is, of all the riches of Anglican tradition in faith and order, in work and worship and life, and the new start of Anglican tradition at the Reformation was itself a recovery alike of the Word of God and, as Cranmer pointed out in 1549, of primitive and patristic order too. Recognition of the depth of our roots does not, of course, mean that our problems can be answered by a mere return to the past. No past was ever really quite as golden as the fond eye of recollection is apt to see it ! And in any case the tree needs constant pruning and purging, if it is to put out new branches and continue to bear fruit. But equally it would be mere folly to throw away all the riches handed down to us. " It hath been the wisdom of the Church of England, ever since the first compiling of her Publick Liturgy, to keep the mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and of too much easiness in admitting any variation from it." Those familiar words are true not only of her Liturgy, but of her whole life, at least whenever she is really wise !

The practical consequences of this are very important. On the one hand, Evangelical Churchmen need ever to be forward-looking. They, if any, recognise that the living Spirit of God is not confined to set

channels and conventional moulds. The river of God has a way of bursting its banks, not to spread death and disaster, but to bring life abundant to a thirsty countryside. We shall not, therefore, attempt to say that in the present crisis the Lord *must* work in this way or that; to do this is to make Him inferior to His own Church. Where the Spirit of God is, He builds for Himself not an organisation, but an organism, a body vibrant and pulsating with life. No Church, however orthodox, can be truly the Body of Christ unless this is its daily and hourly experience.

But, on the other hand, recognition of this truth, which is the very breath of life to us, need not and must not turn us into a guerilla force of partisan individualists exercising each his inalienable right (*and* responsibility) of private judgment in the new pursuit of private will o' the wisps. And this needs saying, however deliberately exaggerated that last sentence may be. For here lies the defect of the great Evangelical virtue, the distortion of the glorious truth that every individual in Christ is a king and a priest unto God. It is surely not without significance that the great passages in I Peter (ii. 5-9) and Revelation (i. 6 : v. 10 : xx. 6) are all in the plural not the singular. It is in the company of all the other "saints" that the Christian begins both to realise the length and breadth and depth and height of God's love and to show it forth to the world in the life of the Christian Community. It is for the warmth and affection of Christian family life, in both its narrower literal sense, and in its broader application, that so many wistful souls are longing to-day.

One rightly hesitates to pass any criticism upon the work of churches and parishes in which "the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly ministered" and "the Lord is adding to them day by day those that are being saved." Yet probably most of us can think of splendid centres of vital Christian work, which *could do even more* if they moved out and took their rightful place in the councils of the Church and the life of the nation. It is a narrow razor-edge on which to walk. One recognizes the danger,—the same danger, *mutatis mutandis*, as of those whose contemplation led the returning Jewish exiles into the narrower circles of an exclusive Judaism instead of to the exercise of a world-wide missionary vocation. He would be a bold man who would say that they were wrong. And yet,—the latter end of that path was the rigid Pharisaism of our Lord's day. Eager for the intensive culture of a separatist society, the leaders of the Jewish Church had lost touch with the great needs of broader national life. The disaster (from the Jewish standpoint) of A.D. 70 was the inevitable result.

A ready acceptance of our privileges and responsibilities as Anglican Churchmen will (*granted always the moral and spiritual prerequisites to which I shall presently return*) save us from falling into this mistake. We shall not claim to be a law unto ourselves, however pure and good a law it may appear. Rather, we shall recognize that we are members of a greater whole, members who both draw life and inspiration from its order and tradition, and also, *ipso facto*, are charged with the responsibility of bringing our best and fullest contribution to the common life, so that we not only inherit tradition but pass it on again, better than it was before.

Of the actual situation into which this contribution must be brought, I need say very little. It is well known to us all. To dwell long upon it would be mere defeatism. Our business here is to see and apply the answer. We are concerned with diagnosis only in so far as it is the preliminary to cure. The symptoms and their probable underlying causes have been set out in detail wherever clergy have gathered together for years past. The decay in elementary morals; the growth of dishonesty; the increase of promiscuity; the emptiness of churches; the indifference to the demands of God; all these are only too well-known to us. It would serve no good purpose to go over them once more, merely adding a few facts and statistics to a picture already familiar and complete enough for our purpose here. The challenger's glove is on the ground at our feet. The challenge is not to measure it and to decide whether it is size 8 or 9, but to pick it up and fight.

Of course we know the answer. At any rate, we say we do. A country-wide return to God; national repentance; the renewal of moral and spiritual standards in every branch of professional, industrial and commercial life; the provision of a genuine Christian education for every child in the land;—these and their like are our objectives. They can be attained by the might of the Gospel of God. That must be our faith. No challenge can be met by defeatism. An effective answer to it depends upon a victory-claiming confidence that God can and will change England, if only the limits imposed upon Him by Christian misuse of free-will are removed. That is for us the point of tension and crisis. We can and must begin with the immediate point that, by the grace of God, lies within our power,—ourselves. For we are ourselves the challenge and the problem. The answer which we have to make as Evangelical Churchmen is to *Change, Unite, and Fight*.

Change! Obviously, all sorts of things and people require to be different. There is probably not a parish in England in which the incumbent does not feel, perfectly correctly, that the whole situation would be transformed if only some particular person or persons came into a radiant, transforming experience of Jesus Christ; each of us can call up his own particular picture; a churchwarden, a sidesman, the lady who does the flowers, the sexton, the head teacher, or whoever it may be. They are difficult. They create difficulties. They hinder the whole work and witness of the local church. The only, and the all-sufficient, answer is conversion. But it may be true, it almost certainly is true, that the conversion of that crucial, difficult person who will make all the difference, depends humanly upon nothing but the continual changing and deepening of our own quality of life.

St. Paul really supplied the answer to the challenge of to-day when he wrote the opening words of the 12th Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and set them at the head of the four chapters, (twelve to fifteen) in which he lays down the principles for personal and communal Christian life. "Present your bodies," he says (Aorist Imperative—once for all!) "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God," and then, dropping into the Present Imperative of Continuous Action ". . . go on being transformed by the renewing of your mind." In the last resort, it is on the continuity of our response that the effective answer to the challenge of to-day depends.

Not long ago, if I may be allowed to draw upon a personal experience for illustration, I was attending a Clergy Conference in London. From one angle it was a most disquieting experience, for it revealed how great were the needs, the moral defeats, the self-absorption and the lonely isolation of many of our brethren both in the Church of England and in the Free Church ministries. But from the reverse side, it was an experience to kindle fresh hope and joy, both for what happened at the Conference itself and for the miracles that followed, miracles of saving grace, as the members returned to their various spheres of work. I think particularly of one middle-aged incumbent of a country parish in the neighbourhood of a cathedral city. He told me something of the problems of his life, the estrangement between his wife and himself and the causes of it, which threatened to break his home, and a craving for tobacco which had become an ungovernable impulse in his life. And then we prayed together and asked God to take and control what was outside man's power to handle, and he went back to his parish a changed man. His people have become conscious of a new power in him, a new fellowship with God which he can communicate to them in turn, and his brother-clergy have been turning to him that they through him may find what he has found. Am I wholly wrong in believing that his needs, in one form or another, are the needs of great numbers of our brethren up and down the land? Is not the challenge to us, first and foremost, to be sure that there is no area in our own hearts and lives where Jesus Christ has not been admitted to be victorious Lord and King? The evangelisation of this country, as Saturday's leader in the "*Times*" on the Church Assembly so powerfully reminded us, must be based on nothing but the evangel. And can they proclaim the evangel who have not found it true for every need and problem of their own? If we, by the grace of God, are having the constant daily and hourly experience of victorious living, are there not many among our neighbours who are waiting impotently for the moving of the waters? It is in ourselves and in them that we can first and most effectively begin to answer the challenge of to-day.

Our England has become a pagan country. There are, indeed, many splendid examples of generous heroism and self-sacrifice that do still spring up, partly from the Christian tradition of centuries not yet wholly lost, partly from the fact that man at his very worst has never totally lost all trace of the image of God. But, broadly speaking, our national passion has been setting these many years towards comfort and ease, forgetful of the joy of hard creative activity and considering rather how to be amused. "It takes a passion to cure a passion," and it is upon us that the responsibility of leadership must inevitably fall. Our lay friends, who are truly concerned for the life of the nation, tell us that our vision is too small, our passion too parochial; it is good as far as it goes, but it does not go nearly far enough. We must begin with ourselves; we must go on into the winning of the individuals around us for Christ and the consequent transformation of their lives. That is the beginning of revival. But even revival is not enough. We cannot rest till we have the full flood of a Christian revolution upon us, the rebirth of nations and the world. The challenge is to pass beyond our immediate concerns to the expectancy of a miracle-working God abroad in the world, shaking it and us, breaking us, if

need be, that He may remake us according to His own perfect plan.

That is what change involves,—not a superficial reformation of outward habits and characteristics, but “the renewing of the mind”, a deeply-penetrating inner revolution. And it is when this is happening, when the moral and spiritual prerequisites have in this way been received (and are being maintained by the continuous process of which St. Paul speaks) that the next stage can begin. We have already said that it is of vital importance that Evangelical Churchmen of every hue should unite if they are to bring the full measure of their peculiar contribution to the total life of the Church and to play their part (the outstanding and leading part, as I believe) in the winning back of the nations to Christ, the Christian re-education of the Continent, and the evangelization of the world to which our thoughts will be directed tomorrow. But this essential Unity is the fruit of the earlier process of Change. I cannot personally believe that we shall attain it by seeking it first for itself alone. It is as the passion for the conversion of England takes hold upon us and bears us out to new ventures of evangelism, using, it may be, new methods which are not the artificial result of clever human thinking, but the natural fruit of a new, creative experience, that we shall be prepared for the steps by which Unity will be attained. Some day, somewhere, somehow, we shall, I believe, be led, conservative and liberal alike, to a new synthesis vastly richer and more creative than anything which our present thesis and anti-thesis can envisage. That is so often how God works! There are already signs that He is so working at this very day. The intellectual and ceremonial issues which at present divide Evangelical Churchmen can never be settled so long as the judgment of those who discuss them is swayed, even unconsciously, by personal and partisan considerations; for all of us know well, though we often forget it, how easily the clear stream of the intellect is muddied and darkened by even the smallest failure in the moral and spiritual life. In the last resort, intellectual, as well as spiritual, things can only be spiritually discerned. When men are truly at one with themselves because they are at one with God, they will not be long in becoming at one with their fellows.

This does not, however, mean that either the second or the third stages of the answer which I have suggested need wait for the completion of the first. Obviously if we cannot begin either to Unite or to Fight, until the process of Change has been finished, we shall never begin at all! St. Paul's tenses make it clear enough that the process is never completed in this life. We win towards perfection; we do not attain it. For “perfection is finality, and finality is death.” Unity will be growing all the time, as the Fight goes on, a Fight not against one another not against our fellow-Christians, but the Fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil which is the proper concern of Christians of every sort in every age. Such fighting will be hard and bitter. The fight within ourselves; the readiness to endure misunderstanding and suspicion and persecution,—these sound heroic in the abstract; they are apt to be merely dull and hard and wholly without glamour in actual fact. But they are the stuff of life for the faithful soldiers and servants of Christ. It is to Him that our loyalty and our responsibility are, of course, ever and always due. And as

Evangelical Churchmen we shall show and practice our loyalty to Him by our loyalty to His Church. That will involve the kicks and curses of His Church's open enemies, as well as the still more wounding indifference of its secret foes. It will involve our personal identification with all the failure and sin, both personal and corporate, of our fellow-Christians of every kind. It will involve also the pain of ourselves, both by life and word, keeping the challenge, the call to drastic revolutionary action, constantly before the mind and conscience of the Church. But then God's Word to us through the crisis of to-day is a challenge! It is not a mere invitation to sit at ease beneath the awnings, comfortable spectators of the combat in the arena below. It is a challenge ourselves to get down upon the sand and join the battle, to Change, Unite, and Fight!

## Summary of a Devotional Address.

BY THE REV. PREB. H. W. HINDE, M.A.

I Corinthians ii., 2. "Jesus Christ and Him Crucified."

**T**HE subject which has been chosen for our Conference is "The Challenge of To-day." This evening we have been considering the challenge to Evangelical Churchmen. Tomorrow morning we shall be meeting for the service of the Holy Communion. Why? Firstly, because it is our usual custom to invite our members to meet together at the Lord's Table on the first morning of our Conference. Secondly, it is St. Peter's Day, therefore, fitting for the Conference to mark the day by such an act of worship. But chiefly because what we there thankfully commemorate is fundamental to the consideration of our subject, and indeed to all for which we stand, whether it is

in respect of Social Righteousness,

in respect to Education,

in respect to the world, whether Europe or elsewhere.

Last Thursday was St. John the Baptist's Day. "A man sent from God" (John i. 6) who "came . . . preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke iii. 5). We read, "there went out unto him all . . ." (Mark i. 5), a sort of mass movement, witnessing to a hunger and thirst after God; and to a belief that God "is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Out they went, apparently distance was no obstacle, a great crowd, a multitude, including all sorts and conditions, confessing their sins, and seeking to walk in newness of life, enquiring what they should do to give expression to this new way of life.

But twelve months later—what was its effect? What was its fruit? There were some, of course, who remained, two became Apostles, some later were found at Alexandria (Acts xviii. 24) and at Ephesus (Acts xix., 3), but the vast majority did not continue. Where did this great religious movement break down? The answer is that the preaching of repentance and baptism could not alone satisfy.