

The Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.

BY THE REV. F. W. DILLISTONE, D.D.

"IT is probable," says a writer in a recent issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*, "that all books about national character should be written by foreigners. A man, or a nation, cannot truly appreciate his own character any more than he can correctly hear his own voice." Such a pronouncement encourages me to make a few general remarks about the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. by way of introduction to this special number of *The Churchman*, though I am deeply aware that my *spatial* experience extends little beyond the confines of New England and my *temporal* experience extends to only a little over one year. Those who still regard Boston as The Hub of the universe might not consider the first limitation a serious disqualification for the passing of judgments, but nothing can make up for the limitation of time except perhaps the spirit of interest and inquiry. I have certainly tried during the past year to learn something of the character and problems of the Episcopal Church in America and offer the following reflections, therefore, to English readers who are interested to know more about this particular section of the Anglican Communion.

I

The first and perhaps the most obvious difference between the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. is that whereas the former occupies a place comparable to that of the monarchy or of Parliament in the life of the country, the latter is decidedly a minority group even amongst the professing Christians of the U.S.A. It is true that it seems to exert an influence out of all proportion to its size, but outside the great cities and the larger towns of the eastern seaboard its membership includes only a very small proportion of the population. Now the tendency of minority-groups is to emphasize strongly the points of difference between themselves and their neighbours. There must be some very good reason why they wish to maintain a separate existence if a different pattern of living is gaining general acceptance. So it comes about that the Episcopal Church, whose institutional pattern is in many respects different from that of the general culture of the nation, tends to concentrate its attention upon those differences with the aim, conscious or unconscious, of justifying its own *raison d'être*.

A newcomer soon becomes aware, for example, of the stress that is laid upon the ordered worship of the Prayer Book. Nothing comparable exists in any of the other Christian communions, for whereas the more "Catholic" bodies have their liturgical forms but do not encourage lay participation through the use of a given text,

the Protestant bodies may work out particular forms for particular services but have not yet adopted any regular system of public worship such as the Prayer Book provides. Thus the Episcopal Church is in a very real way the Church of the Prayer Book. The ordinary Church member who may be unaware of theological differences, readily understands the difference which a particular technique of worship involves. Members of other denominations often become uneasy at a certain stage in their church life because of the apparent formlessness of their worship-services, and this leads in many cases to their seeking admission into the membership of the Church where ordered Prayer Book worship is to be found. Further, scholars of the Episcopal Church find in the history and principles of the Liturgy a specially congenial subject for their research. The late Dean Ladd of the Berkeley Divinity School, the present Dean of Washington Cathedral, Dr. J. W. Suter, and Professor Massey Shepherd of the Episcopal Theological School have all made distinctive contributions to this particular branch of scholarship.

There are, of course, dangers in this intensive devotion to the Prayer Book. It can lead to an attitude in which the Prayer Book is regarded as virtually on the same level as the Bible in matters of faith and conduct. It can exalt worship above witness, the Liturgy above the Gospel in the life of the Church. It can encourage what I might call the "decoration" of the Prayer Book Services: if they are highly valued it becomes natural to embellish them with ceremonial and ornamental additions which then come to be regarded as essential parts of the cultus. It can bring about a lack of adaptability which lessens the Church's appeal to those who have not been trained in regular forms of worship. All these dangers may, I think, be seen in the life of the Episcopal Church. Yet the fact remains that so long as the Episcopal Church can maintain a real open-mindedness and flexibility in relation to the Prayer Book, its emphasis upon worship regulated by a book of common order is likely to prove one of its most valuable contributions to the future religious life of America.

A second distinctive mark is to be found in the stress upon an ordered ministry, and especially upon episcopacy. As far as possible, episcopacy has been modified so as to conform to the ideals which have moulded American political institutions. Bishops are elected in much the same way that political officials are elected: they act in close conjunction with their clergy and their Diocesan Synods: their number is large in proportion to the other orders. Yet there is a strong sense in the Church of the value of episcopacy. Some, as in the Church of England, would maintain this on the grounds of historical tradition and administrative efficiency; others would find its importance rather in the realm of liturgical functions and sacramental continuity. I believe it is true to say that the Episcopal Church is very much alive to the debate which in England is centring around the nature of the Apostolic Ministry, and just because this is one of the main points of difference from the other Protestant Churches there is a real danger that episcopacy will come to be magnified out of all proportion to its importance.

In this series of articles I have included one by a Presbyterian, Paul

Lehmann, a profound thinker who has many friends within the Episcopal Church and whose sympathies lead him to appreciate much within its institutional life. But as his article shows, he is genuinely concerned about the importance which is being attached to episcopacy, and his words deserve to be carefully considered, especially by Evangelicals within the Church of England. There is, I am convinced, a growing appreciation amongst other denominations of the value of some kind of episcopal order; there is little or no indication of a growing willingness to adopt it if it is bound up with a particular hierarchical and sacramental philosophy.

II

A second noticeable difference between the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in America may be seen in the different alignment of parties and schools of thought. Particularly is this so in the department of Home and Foreign Missions. There is nothing in the Episcopal Church corresponding to the Societies such as C.M.S., S.P.G., C.P.A.S., unless it be the existence, within the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church, of the various religious communities such as the Cowley Fathers and the Order of the Holy Cross. Whether this complete centralisation of the missionary work of the Church is a strength or a weakness is not for me to say. But it does mean that Evangelicals have no such obvious rallying-ground as is provided by the Societies in England. There are the Evangelical and the Anglo-Catholic Seminaries: there are the more Evangelical and the more Anglo-Catholic Dioceses (the particular character of a Diocese in this respect tends to be more marked than in England): but generally speaking there is much less sectionalism and fewer extremes than are to be found in the Church of England.

In matters of ritual, extremes are less marked. Evangelical churches, for instance, do not hesitate to use furnishings and ceremonial which in England would be characteristic of a "moderate" church. The more Anglo-Catholic churches use vestments (though these do not seem to be a matter of controversy) and the more Anglo-Catholic bishops wear cope and mitre. But ritual differences do not constitute a burning issue. In matters of Biblical interpretation, again, extremes are less marked. In the Presbyterian Church the Liberal-Conservative opposition is still serious, but this does not seem to be the case amongst the Episcopalians. The need for sound Biblical scholarship is recognized, though at the present time there does appear to be a growing desire for a firmly based Biblical theology. Perhaps the most vigorous theological thinking to-day within the Episcopal Church is to be found amongst some of its younger scholars who have done post-graduate work at Union Theological Seminary and have there come under the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. Under their leadership one may perhaps hope for the development of a "Neo-Anglican" theology which will re-interpret the characteristic insights of traditional Anglicanism within the new scientific and cultural situation in which we are living to-day. The publication in England of Charles D. Kean's *The Meaning of Existence*

has made available one example of the thinking of the group of which I have spoken.

If the line between Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics is not sharply drawn in the realms of ritual or of Biblical scholarship, is there any issue on which a deep cleavage is to be seen? There is, I think, just one. It is the issue of Reunion with the other Protestant Churches and particularly (because concrete proposals had actually been formulated) with the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. This is a matter on which feelings run high. At the last General Convention this was the crux of debate. Since then opposite sides have been taken on the merits of the South India Scheme, and Dr. Louis Haselmayer's book on "Lambeth and Unity" has stirred up controversy afresh. The Episcopal Evangelical Fellowship has worked hard to promote the desire for Reunion: on the other side *The Living Church* (a weekly paper which is attractively produced and which may be regarded as the *vis-à-vis* of *The Church Times*) has been strongly critical of movements which seem to envisage anything in the nature of a Pan-Protestantism. It has yet to be seen what influence the recent Lambeth and Amsterdam Conferences will have on the mind of the Church in regard to these questions of Reunion.

III

With these preliminary remarks I turn my readers over to American voices from Alexandria, Princeton, Wellesley and Cambridge. Dr. Alexander Zabriskie has for many years been associated with the Virginia Theological Seminary and has won the affection and esteem of a circle of friends which extends far beyond his own Church. He has many links with England and a deep understanding of the history of Evangelicalism in the Anglican Communion. In his office as Dean of the Seminary his life is very full but he has recently edited and partly written a fine biography of the late Bishop Brent. Readers of *The Churchman* will be grateful for his article on the important subject of Theological Education.

Dr. Paul Lehmann, about whose article I have already spoken, had a brilliant academic record and then taught for a period at Wellesley College. More recently he was appointed to the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary where he is Associate Professor of Applied Christianity.

The third article is by an Englishman now domiciled in the United States. Charles W. F. Smith spent his early years in the Isle of Wight but came to America and received his training for the ministry at the Virginia Seminary. For a number of years he was a Canon of Washington Cathedral, giving assistance at the College of Preachers. Since 1945 he has been Rector of the important parish of St. Andrew's, Wellesley, and during this year has published a scholarly study of the Parables entitled *The Jesus of the Parables*. He and Dr. Zabriskie both contributed to the symposium *Anglican Evangelicalism* published in 1943.

The final article is a penetrating study of a problem which is causing growing concern to many Protestants in the United States at the present time. Dr. William J. Wolf did his graduate work at Union

Theological Seminary where he made a special study of Kierkegaard. He is now on the Faculty of the Episcopal Theological School where he is Assistant Professor in the Department of Theology and Philosophy of Religion.

I have the impression that one of the results of the Lambeth Conference has been to make English Churchmen much more aware of the importance of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., and my hope is that this issue of *The Churchman*, in the editing of which it has been my privilege to collaborate, will provide useful information and at the same time will help to promote mutual understanding and good will amongst those who in both countries are seeking to bear witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Parish Church and the Cathedral

BY CANON CHARLES W. F. SMITH, B.D.

THE past summer has afforded through the Lambeth Conference an opportunity for the churches of the Anglican Communion to know each other and their bishops. One wonders, however, whether the clergy and laity who saw and heard them were able to form any impression of the ordinary Church life in America.

An Englishwoman who was coming to marry a parishioner here wrote to ask if there were an "English Church" in one of the cities in which she might be married—on the analogy of the churches each Church maintains in Europe. Other "war brides" on arrival have had to have it explained to them that the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. is the American equivalent of the Church of England. The new arrival attending services here feels at home, though conscious of some unease and frustration because of slight differences accentuated by many similarities. The type of building, the robes of the ministers, the Book of Common Prayer and the order of service are all familiar. A mixed choir is often at first disconcerting, and the gradually observed verbal differences at points in the service, even in the Lord's Prayer. But on the whole the life of the parish and its Sunday worship is recognizably the same.

Wherein, then, lies the very real difference and the American character of this Church? They lie beneath the surface in its constitution and social habits and in its position in the community. The Church is free and must take its chances with the rest, and the great bulk of its membership comes from those who choose it and are attracted to it. The Church is not established and must therefore win its way on its own inherent virtues. I should estimate that fully half of my own thousand communicants have come into the Episcopal