

Editorial

THIS month's quatercentenary of the first English Prayer Book rendered practically automatic the choice of theme for the present issue of *The Churchman*. The anniversary which we are now celebrating is a notable one in every way. Second only to the English Bible, the English Prayer Book has been the predominant spiritual influence in the life of both Church and nation for the past four hundred years. The present celebration is, happily, one in which all sections of the Church of England can share, even though one extreme wing is fastening its gaze chiefly on 1549 and the other extreme is looking back with particular longing to 1552. The loyal Church of England man, however, is not concerned primarily with either 1549 or 1552, any more than with 1559 or 1604—or for that matter with 1928—except as interesting landmarks in liturgical history. His interest is supremely centred in the Prayer Book of 1662 as still constituting the only duly authorised liturgy of the Church. And while he is not so foolish as to claim that it is, in every respect, a perfect liturgy, or to deny that a certain amount of revision is overdue, he nevertheless finds in it a medium of worship which is a very embodiment of scriptural and catholic truth and which has triumphantly vindicated itself through nearly three centuries of uninterrupted use.

It is not without significance that a good deal of the criticism of the 1662 rite comes from those who for reasons of their own have apparently abandoned its use—at least so far as the central act of eucharistic worship is concerned—and who have substituted for it a nondescript liturgical concoction known as the English Missal. These are the last people who have any right to criticise the Book of Common Prayer. It is the experience of those who have used the book most faithfully and consistently that whatever be its limitations and imperfections, it is still wonderfully adapted to our modern needs and when intelligently used becomes a vehicle of living worship in the Church. Well may the Archbishop of Canterbury, in writing of the Prayer Book as the enduring expression of Anglican doctrine and worship, remark: "It deserves study; it deserves a hearing—yes, literally, a hearing. For in its faithful use in the congregation it most reveals its excellence". And he adds: "If this commemoration teaches us all again to make full and understanding use of the heritage which we have in the Book of Common Prayer, it will have done a great thing for us".

In the first of the articles which follow the Rev. F. J. Taylor, vicar of Christ Church, Claughton, Birkenhead, deals with the principle of "Common Prayer" as it is exemplified in the Prayer Book services. He shows how in no respect is the genius of Archbishop Cranmer more apparent than in his restoration of the primitive catholic pattern of congregational worship, thereby giving expression to the biblical

doctrine of the priesthood of the whole Church. The next article examines in some detail the Prayer Book of 1549, with reference alike to its character and content. The writer is the Rev. C. W. J. Bowles, Vice-principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge. Evangelicals have not always sufficiently recognised how striking was the liturgical achievement of 1549; but as Mr. Bowles remarks, whatever differences of opinion and practice there may be on points of detail, the Prayer Book of 1549 has left an indelible mark on all subsequent Anglican worship. An article follows on "The Use of the Prayer Book to-day", written by the Rev. D. R. Vicary, who is Chaplain of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. He deals with three principles which emerge from an attempt to interpret the spirit of the Prayer Book and understand its use: the relation of worship to doctrine, the pattern of worship, and the pastoral ministry.

Two subsidiary articles are included, bearing on the general theme of this issue. We are particularly glad to welcome a contribution from a well known Methodist scholar, the Rev. Gordon Rupp, who offers a Free Church appraisal of the Book of Common Prayer. The other article gives an account of the Canadian Revision of the Prayer Book and is written by the Rev. Dr. Ramsay Armitage, Principal of Wycliffe College, Toronto.

Two articles of a more general character, together with the customary book reviews, complete the present issue. As Mr. Taylor has written one of the main articles, his usual quarterly feature entitled "Contemporary Commentary" is omitted. It will be resumed in the next issue, which will have as its theme "Amsterdam 1948".

AN APOLOGY

In the article by the Rev. J. Stafford Wright in our previous issue it was stated that Dr. Graham Howe was an avowed Buddhist. This was our contributor's interpretation of what he had read concerning Dr. Howe's associations with the Buddhist Society in this country. Dr. Howe has since informed us that the statement is quite inaccurate. In offering him our sincere apology we would express our regret for any inconvenience which the statement may have caused him.—*Editor*.