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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE CHURCHMAN

June, 1917.

The Month.

A Critical Position. By general consent we have reached a critical phase of the war, and the prayers of God's people will continue to ascend day and night that He may grant us a speedy victory. But it is not of that, especially, that we are thinking just now. We have in our mind rather the extremely critical position in which the nation stands to-day concerning its moral and spiritual welfare. "Are we worthy of them?" asked a well-known clergyman after hearing afresh of the tremendous efforts of the men at the Front and of their willing self-sacrifice, and it certainly seems at times that if an honest answer were to be returned to such an inquiry it would have to be in the negative. The unrest in the Labour world; the widespread refusal to accept anything like equality of sacrifice; the continued growth—in spite of all restrictions—of the love of sensuous pleasures; the alarming neglect of the obligations of religion—manifesting itself in many ways and not least in the indifference to the claims of Sunday; and much else—all tending to show that the nation is not even yet alive to the gravity of the times through which we are passing. And, perhaps, one of the saddest features of all is that side by side with the neglect of true religion there is steadily growing up among us a hankering after that which is false. The revival of Spiritism—upon which Mr. Abbey Tindall contributes an able article elsewhere in our pages—is assuming large proportions, and there are other equally hurtful "isms" which are making their influence felt not only in London but in all parts of the country. It may be said that the readiness with which so many people accept false "religions" is, at least, an evidence of a desire on their part to discover some remedy for, or alleviation of, the anxieties and troubles

which so heavily beset them, and that so far it is a sign of greater seriousness of purpose. We cannot, ourselves, altogether accept that view. That there is a spirit of religious unrest, a desire to find some "unknown God," among many who are touched by the sorrows of the war, we readily admit, but remembering we are a Christian country, and that there are Christian churches and chapels within the reach of all, it is most lamentable that so many should be ready to listen to the voice of the first charlatan who happens to come along. Is there any adequate explanation of it? No doubt that old enemy of mankind, the devil, is putting forth all his powers to capture all who will yield to him, but the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil, and we venture humbly to express the opinion that the reason why there is so little "destruction" of Satan's works at the present day is due to the lukewarmness of those who pledged themselves that they would be the Son of God's faithful soldiers and servants until their lives' end. In other words the Church is failing in its warfare.

**Wanted
a Leader.** When the comparative apathy of the Church in face of the nation's great need is considered, the question sometimes comes almost unbidden to the mind, Has the Church any message at all to offer to the nation? We know, of course, that it has; we know that it is put in trust with the Gospel which is sufficient for every need; we know, too, that it has illimitable reserves of power at its disposal. Why then is the Church so weak? Why is it that the Church has so little religious influence upon the life of the nation? There are many answers to these questions, but the supreme answer, and one that covers all others, is, we believe, that the Church is such a very poor "trustee" of the Gospel—that it does not proclaim it on the housetops and in too many instances has ceased to proclaim it in the churches, and that it does not seek with any degree of real earnestness that endowment of spiritual power which alone can enable it to overcome the powers of evil. The great need of the time is a spiritual leader, some man with a heaven-given message that shall compel attention and stir all hearts. At different stages of the world's history God has raised up such a man, and it may be that He will yet again call out one of His servants to lead His people and to give deliverance to the nation. Such a man has been found for the Government

of the day ; why may we not look for an equally powerful leader in the spiritual sphere ? Is it not permissible to hope and believe that such a leader would be given if the Church were sufficiently earnest in prayer that one might be sent ? Let it not be forgotten that "when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a Deliverer who delivered them" (Judges iii. 9), and when there is the same earnest cry in our own day there will assuredly be the same answer. Meanwhile it is for the Church to see to it that it is at least faithful to its sacred trust and to give itself wholly to the work to which it is called.

It cannot be said that the Church is so comporting Convocation itself in the present crisis as to impress the world that Again. it has a message to mankind. What the secular side of society thinks of the Church has lately been seen in the comments in the daily press on the recent proceedings of the Convocation of Canterbury. It was pointed out that the nation is engaged in the deadliest war in history, and yet this august body, representative of the clergy of the Church of England, devoted much of its time at the recent session to questions connected with Prayer Book Revision, including the restoration of the name of Charles the First to the Calendar. The criticisms of the press were severe, and no wonder, for the fact that such a body could devote its energies to such objects at such a time as this fills one with despair. The Convocation of York wisely suspended its session ; and the Convocation of Canterbury should have done the same if it had no better contribution to make to the solution of the problems of the time. But this is an old subject and we must not pursue it. Yet it is enough to make angels weep when they look down and see how Convocation misuses its great opportunities. Have its members never heard of the injunction about "redeeming the time" ?

The *Official Year-book of the Church of England* Church Statistics. for the year ending Easter, 1916, has been published by the S.P.C.K. (2s. 6d. net), and its various summaries of work and finance are instructive. Moreover, it is the first year-book which covers an entire twelve months of war. This fact should be borne in mind when attempting any comparison of the figures with those of previous years. The voluntary offerings

amounted to £7,060,911. Only eight months of the previous year were war months, but it is very noticeable that the voluntary offerings showed immediate contraction. Thus in the year ending Easter, 1915, there was a reduction of £676,084 as compared with Easter, 1914, and in the following year a further reduction of £470,317. In other words, the diminution for the two years ending Easter, 1916, was £1,146,400, as compared with Easter, 1914. This, though regrettable, is of course perfectly explainable. For one thing, Church building and restoration has practically stopped for the present, and this accounts for some of the falling off in voluntary contributions. But, no doubt, the chief cause is the absence of so many Churchmen with the Army abroad, or away from their parishes at home, on military or other duties arising out of the war; coupled with the heavy demands of the State upon the resources of the taxpayer. Then in regard, also, to the statistics of Church work, it was hardly to be expected that they would show advance having regard to the conditions of the time, with many thousands of men out of the country, and men and women at home almost continuously engaged on war work. Moreover, the number of clergy making returns is slightly fewer than last year, which would have an adverse effect upon the general totals. The figures relate to the year 1915-16 and are as follows:—The Easter Communicants were 2,337,612, compared with 2,359,599 in the preceding year; Sunday schools had on the books 2,388,205, against 2,481,999; and Bible classes had 219,014 males and 280,716 females, compared with 277,102 and 304,336 respectively. Confirmation candidates reached a total of 224,756, compared with 225,575 in 1915. The male candidates in 1916 were 95,440, an increase compared with 1915, when they were 93,772; and the female candidates numbered 129,316, a decrease compared with 1915, when they were 131,803. It is not easy to draw any useful inference from these figures for the reason we have stated. It would seem, however, that the Church is holding its own. But when will the advance be made?

“The *English Church Review* accuses us of “unfairness” because, in a paragraph on “The Rebellious Alternative.” Thousand” (*CHURCHMAN*, p. 195), we said that “if . . . a member of the Church of England desires to have access to the Reserved Sacrament for devotional purposes, he comes at once into

conflict with the Church's rule, and he must either abandon his idea or join the Church of Rome, the only body in all Christendom where such devotions are allowed." We cannot see what there is which is "unfair" in this suggestion. The practice is unlawful in the Church of England, and it does not seem to us to be "unfair," but merely common sense, to suggest that men and women should abide by the laws of the Church to which they belong and that if they cannot do so they should find a spiritual home elsewhere. They may, of course, try to get the law altered, but until it is changed they are bound to obey. But let the *English Church Review* speak for itself—

Is it really accurate to talk in this way of overstepping well-defined bounds, of ceasing to be legitimate, and of coming in conflict with the Church's rule, when writing of a practice on which the Province of Canterbury, not the Church of England, but only a part of it, has come to a decision : a decision which the Bishops of London and Birmingham have refused to share or take any responsibility in ? Would anybody, reading the peremptory alternative, "he must either abandon his idea or join the Church of Rome," imagine that the practice in question was being allowed in the greatest diocese of the Church of England : that of the capital of the whole empire ?

If this dilemma applies to any one it must apply to the Bishop of London more than to any one else. Does anybody seriously wish to make that application ?

We are not in the least disturbed by the challenge presented to us by the case of the Bishop of London. We should be sorry to believe that he himself desires access to the Reserved Sacrament for devotional purposes. His only share in the business is that, with his large-hearted generosity, he is prepared to allow the practice in his diocese. But then there are very few things that the Bishop of London will not allow to a man whom he believes to be in "earnest." We believe him to be wrong : no Church can be successfully worked on the "go-as-you-please" principle.

* * * We are glad of the opportunity of announcing that next month Dr. Griffith Thomas will begin a short series of papers in THE CHURCH-MAN on "The Wondrous Cross."

