

THE CHURCHMAN

November, 1917.

The Month.

The] THE Conference of Evangelical Churchmen at Chel-
Cheltenham tenham in September, to which we referred last month.
"Findings." agreed upon the following "Findings." It was,
however, expressly stated that they are to be taken as expressing
the general sense of the Conference, and not as completely stating
in detail the views of individual members:—

That all proposals for closer union with Nonconformists should premise
that they are members of the Church of Christ equally with ourselves, and
such proposals should not aim at absorption but at combined action.

That those ministers of the orthodox Nonconformist churches who have
been called and ordained by duly constituted authority within those churches
exercise ministries which are undoubtedly ministries of grace equally with
our own.

That no proposals for reunion which would involve the re-ordination of
ministers would be welcome or practicable.

That the Sacraments are rightly and duly administered by such brethren.

That duly admitted members of those churches should not be repelled
from the Lord's Table in the Church of England merely on account of such
membership.

That the action of those clergy is to be supported who have accepted
invitations to preach in Nonconformist places of worship or have united with
Nonconformist ministers in evangelistic and devotional efforts on common
ground.

That legal barriers which prevent the parochial clergy from inviting
recognised ministers of Nonconformist churches to preach in parish churches
should be removed.

That the goal to be aimed at is some form of federation rather than
anything like organic reunion.

The Conference noted with thankfulness the steps towards mutual
recognition and united action which have taken place in the Mission
field, notably in East Africa, Western China, and Chota Nagpore.

The Conference also considered the Report of the Archbishops' Committee
on Church and State, to which it cordially gave general though discriminat-
ing support. On this subject its findings were as follows:—

That the franchise as proposed is too narrow, and that, since the Church
is national, all adult baptised persons who declare themselves members of
the Church of England should be admitted to the electorate.

That the power of originating discussion or legislation on all subjects should be extended to each of the three Houses of the proposed Church Council, and not restricted, as to certain subjects, to the House of Bishops only.

That the "powers and functions inherent in the episcopate" should be clearly defined before any action is taken with regard to them.

The Conference strongly deprecated any decisive action on the scheme as long as so large a proportion of the laymen of the Church are engaged in the war.

If it is not impertinent we venture to congratulate the Conference upon its courage. It never occurred to us that it would be possible for so large and eminently representative an assembly of Evangelical Churchmen, whose aggressive individualism so often prevents them from agreeing to any definite lines of policy on matters of real importance, would be able to come to conclusions of such a far-reaching character. The first nine "Findings," relating to the Reunion question, mark a distinct advance and should pave the way, not only for a better understanding but also for a closer fellowship among Evangelical Churchmen and Protestant Nonconformists.

Of course these "Findings" have not been allowed to pass unchallenged. The genial banter of the *Church Times* was only to be expected, but it is regrettable that they should be attacked from the Evangelical side. No doubt the phraseology of some of the paragraphs is open to criticism, but when we pierce beneath the mere words and get to the spirit which animates the "Findings" we find nothing to criticise, but much to thank God for. For what, in plain English, do the "Findings" amount to? They decline to un-church Nonconformists; they recognise the Nonconformist ministries; they declare against the necessity of re-ordination; they refuse to repel Nonconformists as such from the Lord's Table; they support clergy who preach in Nonconformist pulpits; they plead for the removal of legal barriers which prevent a return visit; and they affirm that some form of federation should be aimed at. In a sentence, it may be said that these "Findings" go clean contrary to the attitude assumed by the Anglo-Catholic party towards the Free Churches. The lines of division between the Evangelical and the High Churchman could hardly be more sharply defined; and we believe that the general adoption of the broad, generous and sympathetic spirit which prevailed at Cheltenham would be calculated to have most beneficent

results. But is there any possibility of their general adoption? The Anglo-Catholic party will fight against them to the end, but that any Evangelicals, even though they be "strong Churchmen," should find it in their heart to resist a generous recognition of these principles is strange indeed. But it was ever so. We feel confident, however, that the lead of Cheltenham will be widely followed, and the "Findings" should strengthen the hands of all men of goodwill who are seeking to find a way by which the "unhappy divisions" of Christian people may be healed. They will have, also, a still wider application. The "Kikuyu problems" and all that these stand for will most certainly come up for consideration at the next Lambeth Conference, and it is of importance that the Bishops, and not least those who represent the Church overseas, should know that there is a large and influential section in the Church of England who will hail with the greatest satisfaction anything they can do to bring about a closer and more definitely Christian relationship between the Church and Nonconformity. The approach of the Lambeth Conference makes it all the more important that every effort should be made to secure the largest possible backing for the Cheltenham "Findings."

"Whole-Hearted Support." The Cheltenham Conference also gave itself to the consideration of the Church and State Report. It had the advantage of hearing from Dr. Dawson Walker a most admirable paper which gave an illuminating exposition of the whole question raised by the Report—by far and away the best of anything that has been written on the subject. He declared himself on the side of the Report, and we venture to quote the following convincing passages from his paper:—

I suggest to you that our attitude should be one of discriminating but whole-hearted support.

We cannot acquiesce in things as they are. I think we have outgrown the framework which has supported and protected so long the growth of English Christendom. It seems more likely now to hinder than to help. The new wine of twentieth-century Christian service needs the new wine skins of more elastic texture. This consideration—as it appears to me—must prevail, on the whole, over the attractive, but, to my mind, unattainable ideals of our Erastian friends.

I think good reason can be shown why we should support the Committee's proposals.

We are—at least I hope we are—the heirs of the Reformation traditions. If so, we ought to have no nervous fears of change as such. To fear that truth will die through change is lack of faith in the power of truth. Truth

only lives when it grows ; it lives on adventure and discovery. The Church must be a seeker as well as a preserver. Provided always that we pray for the guidance of God's Spirit promised to those who humbly seek it, we may well give scope for the spirit of adventure, of discovery, of search for better ways than those hallowed by long-established custom. It has often seemed to me, in reading the Reformation period, what wanton and wilful destroyers the Reformers must have seemed to the more cautious and conservative of their Christian contemporaries. But we are thankful now for their work. We see that they were really moving on, they were adapting their Christianity to the living needs of their age, and we must beware lest, in venerating the letter of what they have taught us, we be untrue to the spirit of their teaching.

Again, I think we may support the proposals, in spite of the defects which, from the point of view of logical consistency, may be discovered in them. There is force, for instance, in the objection that they are illogical, that under them the Church is no more free than it was before ; that Parliament, with its Ecclesiastical Committee and its forty days' opportunity for considering Bills, has the fullest powers of ultimate control.

" At present," it has been urged, " in theory at all events, Parliament is the nation acting as adviser of the Crown, the Monarch being a spiritual personage. But the scheme proposed first ascertains the will of the Church as an independent spiritual corporation, and then submits that will to the approval of a non-spiritual corporation. It substitutes a definitely Erastian form of government for one which is not, at all events in theory, Erastian."

In answer to that, and in support of the Committee, it must be remembered that we are a practical rather than a theoretical people ; a main consideration with us is, not whether a thing is logical, but whether it will work. It is a truism to say that the settlement in which the English Reformation came to rest, with its large retention of older form along with change of doctrine, was an illogical thing, compared with the sharper cleavages of the Continental Reformation. But it suited our national temperament, and it worked. Let us try with honest and friendly spirit how far the reforms suggested by the Committee will work.

So, too, with regard to my friends whose main aim is to secure for the laity their rightful position of authoritative control, it may be pointed out that the Committee's proposals involve a substantial advance. It may be that further changes which some would wish to see—involving the relations of the laity to patronage and the parson's freehold—do not find a place in the Report. But if the laity use to the full the powers proposed in the Report, it seems to me they will be in a strong position to deal effectively with these problems. Much, in fact all, will depend on the use they make of the added freedom bestowed.

For these reasons, I think we ought to support the proposals heartily in face of such criticism as I have indicated.

We have read these brave words with intense satisfaction. They represent what should be the true attitude of Evangelical Churchmen towards this great scheme of reform, and we regret more than we can say that some among the leaders of the party are so fixing upon the points in the Report they do not approve as to leave it at least open to doubt whether they are in favour of the general principles of the scheme.