

**THE CHELTENHAM CONFERENCE.**

*King George's Hall, Y.M.C.A., Tottenham Court Road, W.C.*

WEDNESDAY and THURSDAY, JUNE 5 and 6.

**Chairman's Address.**

By the Rev. H. A. WILSON, M.A., *Rector of Cheltenham.*

FOR the third time I have the great honour of opening the Cheltenham Conference. It is matter for regret that we are unable to meet this year in the charming town, now looking at its best, where our Conference originated. But circumstances were against us. There is, however, little doubt that future sessions will be held at Cheltenham, and that the removal to London is only part of that strange life which we are all living owing to War conditions.

I earnestly hope that the value of our gathering may not suffer from the changed conditions. Here may I venture to make a plea. Many of our members are near their work. To drop in for an hour or so and make a speech and then drop out again, I dare to say is not going to be much use. We are a deliberative assembly and not a debating society. To arrive at any really useful conclusions (which is what we are here for) is not possible if the attendance is fluctuating and irregular. The Report of the Conference and its findings which will be printed on Thursday evening will be based upon the papers and the discussion which will follow each paper, and members who have not been present pretty regularly at the various sessions of the Conference may at the final session not only be useless, owing to their ignorance of what has transpired, but may even be an embarrassment. We are here to formulate some conclusions, I venture to hope some bold and definite conclusions. This will necessitate hard work and regular attendance by the members. I hope the event may prove that our Conference has not suffered greatly through its temporary transference to London.

Cheltenham has won for itself a reputation, and I think we may say a proud one. The Cheltenham Conference has a reputation for fearless and progressive Evangelicalism, and I hope we shall enhance that reputation this year. Of course we lay ourselves open to the charge of being rather dangerous persons. But I believe I speak

for many when I say that to "live dangerously," to dare to take risks, make a strong appeal to us, especially in these days. Certainly people of this temper are needed if the subject with which our Conference was concerned last year, and which will mainly occupy our attention this year, is ever to be brought on to the plane of the practical.

The re-union of Christians is more prominently before the Christian Church than ever before in living memory. Influential bodies are discussing it in the slow and dignified way habitual to such assemblies, more adventurous groups of men in our Church and outside are meeting to discuss points of difference and possibilities of agreement.

Now all this consideration of the subject of reunion gives us grounds for deep gratitude to God. But at the same time there is danger. Reunion is a popular subject now. There is such a thing as "being in the fashion," and these assemblies have need of a body of "hot Gospellers" who will watch and stimulate and goad on the mere thinkers and theorists into definite action. Such people are not usually popular, and laurel wreaths are not likely to come their way, but they are essential to every movement. I believe the Cheltenham Conference is destined to play this part in the forward march to reunion.

To state my meaning baldly, we want to see something done, and we are here to do our best towards the achievement of this object. Three incidents have recently occurred which are of great importance, and bear more or less directly upon the subject we are about to consider. The first of these is the Report of the Joint Committee appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Free Church Council, which is a hopeful document so far as it goes. It was published to be read, and I assume to be commented upon, so I suppose we are quite at liberty to handle it pretty freely. In this matter I speak entirely for myself. For years past we have had from various assemblies statements in varying degrees of definiteness. Usually they are couched in vague phraseology which can be assented to fairly and honestly by men of totally different opinions. The present document is not exactly of this order. Every word in it we welcome, and the tone of the document enhances the value of what it actually says. We note with thankfulness that the expression "Christian Churches" is applied to the non-episcopal communions,

and that it is acknowledged that they have been used by "the Holy Spirit in His work of enlightening the world, converting sinners and perfecting saints." This whole-hearted acknowledgment of the great work of the Free Churches, and the recognition of their status as part of the Spirit-filled Body, which is the only logical deduction from these words, marks a great advance on the petty and unworthy language of the narrow controversialists which freely unchurched all non-episcopalians and talked foolishly of uncovenanted mercies. Let us hope that this great document marks the end of this boastful, and I fear we must add profane, self-satisfaction.

Another most interesting part of the interim report is the admission that our Church, while retaining episcopacy, holds no official theory concerning the episcopate. Of course, every fairly-well informed person knew this. But it is of great value to have it stated by such a body as this, as it may serve to check the zeal of those who endeavoured to manipulate our formularies with a view to proving that our Church stood for opinions on the ministry which have been destroyed by critical and historical enquiry. What it says is quite admirable, but it is defective in what it does not say. There is a studious avoidance of any categorical statement that episcopacy is not essential to the existence of a Church. Knowing as we do the opinions of many of the signatories on this point, I cannot but feel that the great obstacle so far has only been talked round. More and more I feel, and here I venture to speak for the Conference, that we at Cheltenham last year were right in our findings. It will be recalled that then we boldly stated that non-episcopal ministries were ministries of grace equally with our own. This phrase was severely handled by some who accused us of being willing to surrender episcopacy. Nothing was further from our minds. We are fully conscious of the growing feeling of appreciation among the non-episcopal Churches of the value and effectiveness of episcopacy: we are alive to the fact that on the one hand some of their leading men are firmly of opinion that reunion can only be finally accomplished on an episcopal basis, and that on the other hand, probably not a single Free Church leader would ask us to give up our system and accept his as the price of reunion. We, for our part, are as confident as ever that episcopacy has the sanction of the Divine Spirit, is in complete accord with primitive custom, and agreeable to Holy Scripture. So that apart altogether from our personal

attachment to the system, and our confident belief that it is intrinsically the best form of Church Government, these considerations have prevented the idea of sacrificing episcopacy from ever crossing our minds.

But there is the widest difference possible between the contentions that episcopacy is the best system of Church Government, and that episcopacy is the only system. The former expresses the opinion of last year's Cheltenham Conference, the latter we should like to have seen denied by the Archbishops' Committee, and we contend that until it is frankly repudiated, reunion is not yet on the plane of the practical.

For it is as certain as any fact can be that the Free Churches, which cherish now precious traditions, and upon whose ministries the Divine Imprimatur is so evident, will never deny their status. It is possible that they might adopt our system, but only on the basis that the past is recognized and their present ministries acknowledged.

This, I say again, is exactly the Cheltenham position. We acknowledge the non-episcopal Churches as ministries of grace equally with our own; that is to say, so far as their efficacy is concerned. God has stamped upon their services and sacraments the same marks of His approval which we thankfully record He has placed upon ours—no less and no more.

The fundamental point in last year's Conference was this: recognition is the first and essential step. We can perhaps shape an effective policy if we meet as equals; otherwise we see no hope of reunion.

Part of the policy of recognition is the plea for inter-communion and pulpit exchange. These are the inevitable marks of recognition, and if we are courageous and consistent, we are bound to work for them. We do not mean to suggest that we would encourage indiscriminate gadding about. The religious nomad who wanders everywhere and belongs to no Church has approached as nearly as a Christian can to the point of uselessness. But we do press for an official recognition of the status of the baptized members of the Free Churches which would acknowledge their full right to join us at the Lord's Table, both at those times when they have no access to the Holy Communion in their own Churches, and also on some great occasion (as for instance, the declaration of peace) when an united witness to our unity is called for.

The second incident to which I would refer is the publication of the series of Essays on *The Early History of the Church and the Ministry* which the late Professor H. B. Swete edited. This volume is the reply to the destructive criticism to which Apostolical Succession has been subjected by historians and theologians for many years past. A defence was urgently called for, and anxious minds among adherents to Apostolical Succession were full of hope. The book has appeared, and what must be our estimate of it?

It is a great misfortune that the late Professor Gwatkin was not spared to give us his criticism of this book. Some of us were expecting some remarkable discoveries and some new and overwhelming arguments, after the curious letter published in *The Times* recently by Dr. Sanday. Frankly we fail to find them. It is hard to see that the High Anglican theory is made any the stronger by the arguments of the essayists. I must not give way to the temptation to discuss the many interesting points suggested by this volume, but for our purpose it is interesting to note that the Dean of Wells, who deals with that period of history which is decisive so far as this dogma is concerned, maintains the substantial correctness of Bishop Lightfoot's view "that the episcopate was formed not out of the apostolic order by localisation but out of the presbyteral by elevation," and affirms what we could all endorse, viz : that the Christian ministry was the result of a process of evolution. This view is most damaging to any theory of Apostolical Succession. Bishop Gore, who has striven more diligently than most men to recast Apostolical Succession in the light of modern scholarship, has declared that "authority to minister is given in the Church only by devolution from above on the principle of succession to the original apostolic ministry," and that this is "a law of divine authority in the Church, and also an essential principle of the Church's continuous life" (*Orders and Unity*, pp. 183-4). But evolution is the very antithesis of this opinion. Evolution as applied to the ministry means that the Church possessed the power to develop from within itself the ministry which meets its needs. The Reformation principles maintained that the Spirit-filled body could evolve from within itself, owing to the previous involution accomplished at Pentecost, all things needed for its life and mission.

We do not declare that it is impossible for the adherents of Apostolical Succession to adapt the new opinions to some modified

form of their theory. The facts can with some ingenuity be squared with the requirements of Apostolical Succession, provided that that theory is not too precisely stated nor too exacting in its terms. Cinderella's slipper can be squeezed on another foot than that of its rightful owner, but only by cutting off the great toe. And to maintain that episcopacy is the result of evolution is nothing else than the mutilation of "the Catholic theory" to such an extent that it is practically unrecognisable.

The Essay on the Apostolic Succession by Mr. C. H. Turner which follows that by the Dean of Wells is even more doubtful in value to those it is designed to help. As an accomplished scholar he, of course, dismisses the view that Apostolic Succession was approved by the Apostles as a cut and dried theory. But he does not leave things there. He holds that the theory took gradual shape in the minds of great Church leaders owing to the necessity of being able to make an appeal to authority against the Gnostic heretics. But it appears their words are so vague that unless they are read with the assistance of some bias they cannot apparently be used to prove much. For instance, Mr. Turner shows that Clement of Rome was zealous for the principle of succession, but not necessarily episcopal succession; and Ignatius, on the other hand, though clear about Episcopacy is vague on the question of succession. In other words it is necessary to form your conclusions before you read the earliest writers, and your preconceptions will then fit in the gaps in the argument!! But even more disturbing are the further considerations urged by Mr. Turner. Hitherto in order to be assured of sacramental grace, the adherents to "Catholic" theory urged that it was enough to possess an episcopate. But Mr. Turner destroys this view. A Church must not only have an episcopate, but it must be one of the right kind. That is to say an heretical or schismatical episcopate is inadmissible according to fifth-century opinion. The deductions from this are apparent. Heretical and schismatical are terms freely used of us by Rome, and now Rome is furnished with a very strong argument. She can say: apart altogether from the question of the validity of your ministry you are certainly schismatical and heretical, and your episcopate, even assuming you have one, is thereby nullified.

I dwell upon this book because it was expected to advance new arguments and strengthen old ones. I am bound to say that it

leaves our views entirely unaffected, but I doubt if the Catholic party will be able to say so much.

The third incident to which I will refer is one which appears only indirectly to touch upon reunion, but I venture to think that upon examination it will be found quite vital. I mean the recent determination by the Upper House of Canterbury Convocation to sanction the alternative use of a Communion Office based upon a re-arrangement of our prayers.

This surrender by the Bishops, for it is a surrender, may appear at first to be a matter merely of domestic interest.

I do not propose to discuss the theological significance of the new projects. It is of such grave importance apart from its bearing on reunion that we have determined to consider this aspect of the matter at the last session of our Conference. I would at this stage only point out how gravely it will hamper all efforts in the direction of Home Reunion.

The advocates of the new departure will bring back into the Prayer Book a pre-Reformation view of the Holy Communion. Evangelical Churchmen are not the only children of the Reformation in our land. The Free Churchmen are also the offspring of that great movement. Indeed in many cases they left the English Church originally because it was not zealous enough in the work of reform. Now the Bishops are on the one hand warmly inviting the Nonconformists to reunite with us, and at the same time capitulating to that faction in our Church who "repent of the Reformation in dust and ashes." The Bishops are, as it were, fraternising through the window with the Nonconformists, but at the same time shooting another bolt in the front door.

The arguments of the Catholic Party in favour of the restoration of the Canon of the Mass are quite familiar, but their most effective argument, most effective because apparently so innocent, is that this restoration is a return to old custom. But this old custom was one of the principal things which was considered to require reform, and I think that we must be urged to see clearly that a return to pre-Reformation ideas is going to make hopeless all efforts to arrive at a reunion with the Evangelical Free Churches. We are grateful to the Bishops for their consciousness of the need for some rapprochement to Nonconformity and for the great interest which practically all of them are taking in the subject, but we would respectfully point

out that in thus surrendering to the Catholic Party they are taking back with one hand what they offer with the other.

The controversy is simply a clear illustration of the conflict of ideals amongst us. The Catholic Party favour an orientation to Rome, and we Evangelicals to the Free Churches: the Catholic Party have their eyes on the past and we on the future. There is no doubt whatever as to what the final result will be. The progressive and forward-looking men always win. But what about our Church in the immediate present and the near future if the progressive party suffers a temporary reverse? That is the anxious question which agitates our mind.

With these preliminary observations I pass on definitely to open the Conference.

The basis of the various papers is the Lambeth Quadrilateral. This document was drawn up at the Lambeth Conference in 1888 and has since been frequently reaffirmed.



## Holy Scripture as the Final Authority in Faith and Conduct.

By the Rev. J. M. HARDEN, B.D., LL.D.

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### I

“THE Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary to salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.” The Lambeth Conferences of 1888 and 1897 put this as the first of four Articles on the basis of which approach might be, by God’s blessing, made towards Home Reunion. Whether there is any special significance in its position as first is not quite clear. The compilers of the XXXIX Articles put first in Articles I–V what corresponds to the second Article of the Lambeth Quadrilateral. Only in their VIth Article did they first touch on the question of Holy Scripture. The Lambeth order is that of the Helvetic Confession and the Westminster Confession of Faith. As a matter of logic either order will stand. For if, on the one hand, it seems natural that the “ultimate standard” should precede, it is clear, on the other hand, that in a sense the Creeds (or, at any rate, a creed) must come first, at least so far as to assume