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THE CHURCHMAN

October, 1918.

The Month.

**Facing the
Winter.** WITH the coming of October, the holiday season may be said to be at an end, and we are all preparing to face the winter which, by common consent, threatens to be one of no ordinary difficulty. It is not, however, of the material side of the problem we are thinking so much as of the spiritual side, and of the way parish work will be carried on. Usually by this time clergy have their programmes all carefully mapped out for the ensuing six months, and everything arranged down to the last button. But in only a very few cases has such a thing been possible this year, for the hindrances are many. With parish halls commandeered; with assistant clergy, and not a few incumbents, gone as Chaplains to the Forces; with lay workers gone—the men to the Army and the women to munition factories or to the land or to some other department of National Service, those who remain at home find it difficult to “carry on,” and we imagine the obstacles will increase as the weeks go by. Yet there never was a time when energetic work in the parishes was more needed than at the present time. Hearts made sad by bereavement long for consolation, and in no way can this be more effectually supplied than by the faithful visitation of the parish clergyman, who brings with him the comforting influences of true religion; young people require more, rather than less, attention, discipline and instruction; parishioners who, in the past, have found help and inspiration in one or other of the many social and religious meetings which rightly have a place in the organisation of every well-worked parish, need as never before the stimulating influence of fellowship and brotherhood; and those attending our services look forward with greater intensity than ever to the uplifting power of bright and hearty services and spiritually-minded sermons. But how can these things be under present conditions? It is impossible to offer any

detailed suggestions as the circumstances of different parishes vary so greatly, but as a general principle it may safely be said that clergy who find themselves handicapped by depleted staffs will do well to concentrate attention upon things that really matter. Especially is it important that services and sermons should be kept up to a high level, so that those who attend public worship shall be really helped and edified. The place occupied by the sermon was never more important than it is to-day. Men and women come to Church hungering and thirsting after that which will minister to their souls' deepest interests, and they are grievously disappointed if they look up and are not fed. They feel their need of the Gospel ; they desire instruction in the Christian faith ; they are asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. Clergy who recognise this characteristic of the times will find no higher scope for their energies than seeking humbly, sincerely and determinedly to satisfy these needs. The preacher who resolutely purposes that he will make a special effort during the next six months to interpret the mind and heart of God to his people will have no cause for regret if some other branches of his work suffer. But need these other branches be altogether abandoned ? Some curtailment there must be, but with careful organisation the more important of them may be kept going. It would be a sorry business if the effective witness of the Church were not maintained towards both those who already value its ministrations, and those who have yet to be won for Christ and His Church.

In one of those Saturday articles in *The Times* which so many have come to look for eagerly every week, the "Correspondent" dealt recently with the question of Reading the Lessons, and offered, as usual, some shrewd observations and not a little wise counsel. Although it is not easy to assent to all his propositions, his plea for clear and intelligent reading of the Lessons will be readily approved by congregations. "Too often," the writer says, "the Word of God is made of non-effect by careless, indistinct, or perfunctory reading of the Lessons in church. Whoever undertakes this important ministry, whether priest or layman, must train himself so to read the Bible that its message may be readily understood, and thus minister grace to those who hear." It is good to find in *The Times* the Bible spoken

of as "the Word of God" and the reading of the Lessons referred to as an "important ministry." Not always is its importance realised, yet there are chapters—such for instance as that magnificent eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans—which, when read with sympathy and with the note of personal experience, are as impressive and as powerful as any sermon. Do clergy or lay-readers sufficiently realise their responsibility in this respect? Do they appreciate how keenly congregations are vexed and disappointed when the Lessons are carelessly or ineffectively read? To be able publicly to read the Word of God so that its message appeals to the heart is, no doubt, a gift which not every one possesses, but with care, and by prayer, the capacity for good reading of the Scriptures can be acquired. The ordinary rules of elocution are not always applicable. The Bible is a book by itself; it cannot be read publicly in the same way, for example, as one would recite a play of Shakespeare's or a chapter by Dickens. Who cannot recall the reading of Lessons which has been absolutely spoilt by the reader indulging in tricks of elocution under the altogether mistaken notion that they enhance the effect of the reading? The more clearly and the more simply the Lessons are read the better. But it is, of course, of the essence of good reading of the Lessons that the reader understands what he is reading, that he believes it to be the Word of God, and that he has within him that which responds to it as a matter of personal experience.

"Life and Liberty" The "Life and Liberty" Movement is taking hold of the imagination of many Churchmen of all schools of thought, but in spite of meetings, conventions and conferences there still seems to be in some quarters some uncertainty, first as to what the movement really means and second, whether the programme, as far as it is understood, is really practical politics. In what way it differs from the Church Reform League or the Church Self-Government Association is not readily apparent. The Archbishop of York has been appealed to by some clergy to say what he thinks of the movement, and his reply is marked by that vagueness so characteristic of the bishops when they wish to avoid giving a definite opinion. He certainly says he is "in full sympathy with its main purpose and desire," but for the rest he indulges in a number of well-meaning platitudes.

It would be wrong, however, to blame the Archbishop for his caution. There are some grave questions upon which it is desirable to know the mind of the leaders of the movement before it is right or wise to pronounce definitely upon it. What, for instance, is their real attitude towards disestablishment? What, again, is their attitude towards "the Romeward drift" within the Church of England?

The new Report of the National Church League has just been issued, and with it is sent out the following important letter from the President, the Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Clarke, K.C. :—

I take the opportunity of the issue of the Annual Report to members of the National Church League to call your attention to the gravely important character of the task which lies immediately before us, and to ask for all the help which you can give towards accomplishing it. The crisis with which our Church is now faced is not less serious than that through which the nation had been passing during four years of war. An active and aggressive faction is making every effort to dominate the Church and to impose upon it ideals alien to its whole character. Should they succeed every trace of the Reformation will ultimately be obliterated. By a policy of resistance to all law, ecclesiastical or civil, they have reduced the episcopate to a condition of impotence, until, in the vain hope of securing peace by compromise, the Bishops in Convocation are now taking steps which will concede in principle practically all that is demanded.

The preoccupation of the people of the country with matters concerning the war, and the absence of so large a proportion of the members of our congregations, have been skilfully used to press forward this Romish propaganda until it now demands the most prompt and energetic action if it is to be successfully resisted.

The Annual Report and the papers enclosed with it indicate something of what the League has done, and is doing. Its most important work is that of education—the exposition and defence of the principles of the Reformation, so that the nature of the assaults upon them may be understood. And next to this comes organisation—the bringing together for common action Churchmen who, while desirous of all necessary reforms in the methods and machinery of the Church, are determined to resist all efforts to undermine and Romanise Church doctrine.

The war has rendered it very difficult to maintain our work, especially during the last two years, and we are faced with a large deficit at a time when the cost of the means by which it is carried on has more than doubled. At least £2,000 will be needed to clear our accounts and to provide for the work immediately before us, and I confidently appeal to every member of the League for contributions towards this.

We are certain that so weighty and impressive an appeal will meet with a gracious response. The address of the National Church League is 6 Grosvenor Mansions, 82 Victoria Street, S.W.1.