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THE CHURCHMAN

May, 1919.

THE MONTH.

**Bishop of
Oxford's
Resignation.** THE Bishop of Oxford's resignation will be a heavy loss to the extreme High Church party. His friend, Mr. D. C. Lathbury, writing in the *British Weekly*, raises a point to which no large attention had previously been given :—

Is it wrong for a bishop to resign "in such critical times for the Church"? If the crisis in question were likely to be soon over, it would be the plain duty of a bishop to retain such vantage ground as his position gives him for dealing with it. But Bishop Gore feels sure that the crisis through which the Church of England is now passing will not only continue, but "perhaps become more acute for years to come." In such a situation as this a single bishop who is almost invariably one of a very small minority can be of little service. Both in Convocation and in the Representative Church Council Bishop Gore's speeches are listened to, because he knows his own mind and can express it with remarkable force and clearness. But it is more than doubtful whether, except in the rarest cases, they have any influence on the division. They are far more likely to be dismissed with some of the customary platitudes about the mischief of extremes.

"This," adds Mr. Lathbury, "is the main motive which has determined the Bishop's resignation." The passage we have quoted seems to us to convey a very significant admission. It is nothing less than this, that the Bishop and his friends realize that they are powerless to direct the issue of the crisis through which the Church is passing. They see that their influence is passing away, and that there is reason to believe that real power will ultimately—perhaps soon, perhaps late—be vested in a body which, with the laity largely represented, is not specially impressed by sacerdotal pretensions. We think, however, that Mr. Lathbury does the Bishop of Oxford less than justice when he throws doubt upon his lordship's position in Convocation. We should have said that no one bishop has more dominated the Upper House of the Canterbury Convocation than

Bishop Gore, and the result is seen in the reactionary proposals agreed to by the House in connection with Prayer Book Revision. That he has failed "to have any influence on the division" in the Representative Church Council we readily admit, and we attribute the fact, as we have hinted above, to the presence in the Council of a strong and independent body of lay opinion. What the effect of the Bishop's resignation will be upon the fortunes of the party with which, all his life through, he has been identified, it is not easy to say. It is certain he will not be inactive. He wants leisure for study and for writing—not little books, but something much larger. How will he use the opportunity? Will he seek to bolster up the tottering cause of the Ritualist party? or will he choose rather to give himself to authorship on lines which will enrich the whole Church? It would be altogether wrong to refuse to acknowledge the great service he has rendered by some of his writings to the study of Christology, and it may be hoped that he has it in mind further to explore that most interesting and most profitable field. That would, indeed, enable Churchmen of all schools of thought gladly to join in the Archbishop of Canterbury's prayer "that for many years to come" Bishop Gore's "learning, devotion and personality may be as heretofore at the service of the Church and people of England." But we should view with the deepest regret any attempt on the Bishop's part to resort to propagandist methods in the interests of so-called Anglo-Catholicism. It is hardly to be expected that he will support the cause of the extremer men of that school, for on more than one occasion he has taken a line (e.g. on Reservation) hostile to their position. Moreover, now that he knows, by seventeen years' experience, what are the duties and difficulties of a Diocesan Bishop, he will, we should hope, be specially careful not to do or write or say anything that would embarrass the position of the episcopate. A retired bishop has hardly less responsibility in this respect than those in active service.

A
Contrast. It is not easy to avoid noticing the startling contrast between the reception accorded by the two Archbishops to the Memorial against the proposed changes in the Communion Service, and to that presented by "the Council of the Federation of Catholic Priests" in favour of lowering the age of Confirmation. In the case of the first Memorial the

reception accorded to that deputation was sufficiently described in these Notes last month, and we have no wish further to refer to it. To say the least, it left much to be desired. But in the case of the Memorial from the "Catholic Priests," we are told that the Archbishops "have been so kind as to allow copies to be given through them to the Diocesan Bishops of their respective Provinces." We do not know who is responsible for the use of this phraseology—the Archbishops or the Federation—but, if the fact is correctly stated, we do feel it to be a matter for deep regret that "through them" this Memorial was sent to the Diocesan Bishops. For it not only asked for a lowering of the age of Confirmation so as to take in children of ten or eleven years of age, or even younger, but it actually spoke of the use of confession in such cases as tending to secure adequate moral preparation! We wonder if the Archbishops had read this Memorial before they were "so kind" as to allow copies to be given "through them" to the Bishops? We hesitate to believe it. In any case, however, they have now had the Memorial before them for some weeks, and Churchmen are entitled to know what reply the Archbishops and the Bishops to whom it has been sent have returned to it. There is a grave danger of their silence being misinterpreted. The Memorial seems to us to call for the most serious condemnation, and any hesitation on the part of the episcopate may easily become disastrous.

We do not propose to comment upon the purpose of this Memorial. It will suffice to give a few passages from it and they will carry with them their own condemnation. The Memorial is signed by the Rev. Dr. Darwell Stone (Chairman) and the Rev. F. Underhill (Secretary), and is presented to the Archbishops "on behalf of the Council of the Federation of Catholic Priests—a Society now numbering some 600 priests of the Church of England, and formed for mutual support in the defence and furtherance of Catholic Faith and Order"—who desire to ask their Graces' help "in a matter which is causing serious pastoral difficulties in some dioceses," viz., "the age limits which are fixed in many dioceses, with considerable variations, for candidates for Confirmation." Here are passages from Part I of the Memorial:—

As belief in the sacramental character of Confirmation, and in the reception thereby of those gifts of the Holy Ghost which are essential for the develop-

ment of the Christian life, has increased among us, both priests and people have come increasingly to desire the Confirmation of children at the earliest possible age.

1. We are encouraged in this by remembering that the Church of England has abstained from placing in the rubrics any definite limitation of age. Instead of an age limit, the Church requires only a sufficiency of knowledge, and a realization of responsibility. If a bishop fixes an age limit, he appears to us to go beyond, and to be in danger of contravening, what the rubrics require.

In children there will be great differences of development, due either to natural causes in themselves, or to the circumstances of home influence and education; and girls mature more quickly than boys. But it is our conviction that in a Christian household, or in a Christian school, where faith and religion are taught to the children on a Catholic basis, the requirements of the Prayer Book can be met normally at ten or eleven years of age, and frequently even earlier.

2. We believe that psychologically it is now accepted as true that there is greater receptivity to religious impressions in children up to the age of twelve, as compared with the years immediately following, and that therefore the grace of Confirmation should be imparted before the critical period of twelve years of age.

3. To this consideration we add that derived from practical experience. It is our experience that one reason for the falling away from Communion after Confirmation is that the habit of Communion was not formed in the age of receptivity. A great effort may be made at fourteen, or fifteen, to reach Confirmation, but a reaction immediately follows. The boy or girl is in the midst of a very rapid development of natural powers, and functions, and is in the full current of the world. It is precisely the period at which the formation of a good habit is most difficult; but for which the strength of a formed habit is most needed.

But the Memorial is much more than a plea for
 lowering the age of Confirmation. The following
 passages from Part II of the document convey their
 own sad tale:—

**Confession
 for Children.**

We are not asking for the promiscuous Confirmation of any children. We speak on behalf of those who practise and teach Confession, and who seek thereby to be sure that the grace of God is really received into a loving and clean heart. The graver sins of the flesh begin, often without consciousness of sin, very young. It is in the preparation for Confirmation, and first Confession, that again and again sins of pollution, alone or with others, are for the first time realized as sins. We speak frankly, but we speak for those who have acquired their bitter knowledge by experience in the Confessional, besides that which may be acquired in the conduct of rescue and reformatory work. The roots of these sins, if not killed early, poison life in all its after stages. We implore your Grace to believe that we are not exaggerating. At the same time there is no safeguard of innocence so effective as regular and carefully prepared for Communion.

There will be some who object to the practice of Confession still. We speak of it, because we feel that it removes one objection which might be taken to early Confirmation and Communion. The practice certainly tends to secure adequate moral preparation, and relieves children of a responsibility of

walking alone, for which they are not yet ready, and which it is unnatural to lay upon them.

We do not ask promiscuous Confirmation, without inquiry. The present custom of bishops is to confirm without question all who are presented, if at least they seem to be of the minimum age required in the diocese. This rests no doubt on the fact that it is the responsibility of the parish priest to prepare the candidates, and the bishops trust their priests. We believe this trust to be both reasonable and right, and it would indeed be a great reversal of it for a bishop to refuse merely on account of age a candidate whom the parish priest, on inquiry, certified to be intellectually, morally, and spiritually fit. Yet this has been done.

More interesting than this Memorial will be the answers of the Archbishops—when they are made known.

The discussion which has been proceeding more or less continuously during the last eighteen months concerning the finances of the Church of England culminated at the annual meeting of the Central Board of Finance in a definite proposal by Dr. Headlam that the Prime Minister be asked to appoint a Royal Commission "to inquire into the revenues of the Church of England, and the best use that may be made of them for the religious life of the country." The suggestion found, however, very little support, but in its place the Board adopted a proposal that the Archbishops be approached to form a Committee "to inquire into the revenues of the Church of England and their distribution." What answer, if any, the Archbishops have returned to this suggestion has not yet appeared, and, for ourselves, we should not regret it if the Archbishops refused to comply with the request of the Board. We feel strongly that, if there is to be any inquiry at all, it should be, for obvious reasons, by a Royal Commission and not by an Archbishops' Committee. Whether such an inquiry is called for depends, of course, from what point of view it is regarded. Dr. Headlam's object would seem to be, if we may fall back upon his Lectures rather than his speech before the Board, more extensive than the circumstances seem to justify, and certainly wider than the general body of Church opinion would support. He would like, for example, to obtain funds from the Ecclesiastical Commission for the creation of new bishoprics, of which he thinks that no fewer than twenty are required. But the chief, perhaps the only ground on which such an inquiry is desirable is that it may be ascertained whether it is not possible by some method of pooling and

redistribution to remedy some of the glaring anomalies that now exist in the financial arrangements of the Church of England. It may be hoped, however, that the new Union of Benefices Bill which has passed the House of Lords, and may look, it is believed, for a safe passage through the House of Commons will be the means, when it comes into full operation, of effecting large reforms which will materially relieve the financial situation; and the Commission appointed by the Bishop of London, with Lord Phillimore as Chairman, may be expected to do something, we hope much, to ease the position in London where, by reason of the revenues of the City churches, the anomalies are greater than anywhere else in England. We hope we are not too sanguine, but the fact that steps are being taken in these respects does suggest a doubt whether this is the opportune moment for such an inquiry as has been suggested. It would, of course, take a very long time and might not, in the end, produce commensurate results, and meanwhile the course of reform would necessarily be brought to a standstill. The origin of recent discussions on the finances of the Church, and of such dissatisfaction as exists, may be traced to a lack of adequate knowledge concerning the administration of Church revenues. In a general sense it is known that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have considerable sums of money at their disposal, and that grants are made from time to time for the augmentation of livings and other kindred objects. But essential details have not been grasped, with the result that much misunderstanding has prevailed, and still prevails even on the part of those who, like Dr. Headlam, set themselves up as critics. The small volume published a week or two ago, *The Ecclesiastical Commission: A Sketch of its History and Work*, by Sir Lewis Dibdin, First Church Estates Commissioner, and Mr. Stanford Edwin Downing, Secretary of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. One shilling net), will do much to remove misapprehension and to show the really large amount of assistance the Commission is rendering to underpaid clergy, and in the cause of reform. We cordially recommend it.

It seems to be taken too readily for granted that
 Church and State. the Enabling Bill, which is to give statutory authority to the scheme of self-government lately passed by the Representative Church Council, will be steered through the House

of Commons without much difficulty, and that the measure will become law this year: It may be so; but the friends of the Bill will do well not to be over-sanguine, for it is tolerably clear that at some stage or other the Bill will encounter severe opposition from at least a section of the House. In the old days we should have been inclined to say that such a Bill would have a very poor chance of success, but to-day the political world is in such a condition of topsy-turvydom that it is not easy to predict what will happen. Now that party spirit has been laid by the heels, the House is supposed to be in a conciliatory mood, but even so, there are some members who are not prepared to "shut their eyes and open their mouths, and swallow whatever is sent them." They want to know the why and the wherefore of everything that is submitted to them, and assuredly they will want more information about the practical working of this scheme in its details, than some of its promoters have shown themselves ready to give. Particularly they will want to know how it will affect the present relations of Church and State, and it will not be surprising if they look somewhat askance at the argument which is urged in some quarters that the rights of Parliament will not be affected. It is just possible, too, that some members may urge that the Church of England can have self-government in the same way, and upon the same terms, as it is being "conferred" upon the Church in Wales. If this view were to prevail, what would be the Church's official answer to it? It is believed that some of the hot-heads of the "Life and Liberty" Movement are prepared, if they are driven to it, to accept disestablishment if they cannot get self-government in any other way. But that, we should hope, is not the view of the really responsible authorities of the Church of England. In any case, however, the period during which the Enabling Bill is under discussion in Parliament must be a time of real anxiety for the Church, yet we see very few signs that the possibilities of the position are at all adequately realized.

Quite the most formidable attack on the Enabling Bill which has appeared in the public press comes from the Rev. J. R. Coahu, who, in a long letter to *The Times* raises several points of great importance. These are adversely commented on, but hardly answered by, the Rev. Dr. Temple.

**Attack on the
Bill.**

Mr. Cohu declares that the Representative Church Council is not representative. "None but those whose office compels them to attend such assemblies of clerics and their lay satellites," he says, "can possibly realize their atmosphere or futility, and their proceedings do not in the least appeal to one-tenth of the Churchpeople whom they profess to represent." More than this: he goes on to contend that "there is no blinking the fact that our Church to-day is all but captured by one of its extreme wings," and he points out that "this extreme party all but hold the arena to themselves, are all-powerful in Church councils, and, unrepresentative as they are of the main body of Churchmen, carry all before them at elections and are bound to have a big majority on the so-called Representative Church Council—i.e. its policy and decision will be theirs." There are other important passages in the letter which we must quote more at length:—

Under the new scheme our Anglican comprehensiveness is doomed. At present the coupling of Church and State safeguards one of our greatest assets, the comprehensiveness of our English Church. It takes men of all types to make a nation or a national Church, and differences of religious outlook are largely temperamental. In a national Established Church every member of the nation has a right to the ministrations of the clergy. Inevitably, if the Church is to gather to her bosom a wide variety of thought, she herself must be many-sided. She must have groups of clergy facing truth from these various aspects—High, Broad, Low—yet equally loyal to her leading principles. She must also secure for them a freedom of thought and utterance, and this spiritual independence strengthens both Church and nation alike. Give the Church the "self-government" the new scheme demands, and what then? You place it under the domination of a "predominant partner," the extreme wing forming the majority in the Representative Church Council, and as the memoranda of the Bishop of Oxford (p. 248) and Dr. Frere (p. 277) in the Report itself show, short shrift will be given to those who do not fall into line with the views of this majority: "A dissatisfied member can without difficulty surrender his membership or exchange it for membership of some other body." Obey or go! . . .

It naturally follows that the "spiritual independence" and "self-government" which the scheme is demanding mean "ecclesiastical autonomy," or the power of the majority in the Council to impose their own views on the whole Church and crush or turn out all dissentients. At first glance, self-government of the Church by the Church seems such a natural and right form of procedure, but it all depends on the nature of the "self" which governs, and when, as in this case, "self-government" is but another word for government by an official majority which does not represent more than one-third, at the outside, of the real members of the Church, it is a *reductio ad absurdum*. . . .

These are some of the matters which are weighing heavily upon the minds of many thoughtful Churchmen, and they are almost certain to find their reflection in the discussion in Parliament.