

primitive ideal of the New Testament and the purest Christian centuries." Again he says, "All through the Nicene troubles, the informal influence of the faithful laity who would not accept Bishops or teachers who represented alien doctrine, was so great a counterpoise to imperial pressure that it is the opinion of well-informed contemporaries that in that great crisis the laity saved the Church."

The present constitution of the National Assembly needs considerable amendment. The laity deserve fuller powers than are accorded to them. There is no reason why measures which relate to worship should emanate only from the House of Bishops, or why amendment of such measures should be denied to the laity. To discuss details would open up some large questions, so I merely urge that Evangelicals should aim at developing the powers of the laity in the government of the Church. We need courage and confidence. The laity have saved the Church before. They may do so again.

Our policy in the National Assembly will be to help, not to hurt ; to impress, to co-operate, to improve, to advance ; where necessary, to repress, to prevent ; to foster the freedom of the Spirit rather than the narrowness of ecclesiasticism ; to emphasize the inner life as well as external order ; to develop spiritual rather than ecclesiastical power ; to make the Church of England the minister rather than the master of the English people. Our power in the Church assemblies does not depend even mainly on the number in which we go there. "Was Canon A. there to-day?" asked a clergyman of his friend in a Church assembly where there was scarcely another Evangelical. "I do not think he was," the reply came, "for there is something about him, that you are always conscious of his presence, even if you do not see him in the room."

II.

BY ALBERT MITCHELL, Member of the National Church Assembly.

THE National Assembly of the Church of England is not created or constituted by Act of Parliament or by any action of the State. The Act of Parliament that we call, for convenience, "The Enabling Act" (although its full title is the "Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act, 1919"), did not create the Assembly, as the heading and preamble to that Act clearly recognize ; nor does the fact that the constitution of the Assembly is included in the schedule to the Act imply that it is given to the Church by the State. "The Enabling Act" recognizes an accomplished fact, and makes provision in respect of the "powers in regard to legislation touching matters concerning the Church of England" which the State recognizes ought to be conferred on the Church Assembly . . . "constituted in the manner set forth" in "addresses presented to His Majesty" by "the Convocations of Canterbury and York."

Who then is the parent of the Church Assembly? There is only one possible reply: "The Representative Church Council"—the purely voluntary body that, since 1904, had been patiently engaged in the work of constitution building, and automatically ceases to exist, as its own child, the Assembly, comes into existence.

It is in the study of history that we find the clue to the understanding of our own times. I am but paraphrasing the famous dictum of a great student. The period of the silencing of Convocations lasted from 1717 to 1852; and, during that period, the political history of England included a complete transference of the balance of power, and great changes in voting and legislative and administrative methods. When, after the lapse of nearly a century and a half, the ancient Church Assemblies of Bishops and Clergy attempted to take up again the thread of workaday existence, they discovered themselves to be anachronisms; and they have ever since been engaged in the pathetic attempt to overtake Time. In 1717, the Houses of Parliament still represented the Laity of the Church, and knew that there was a constitutional kinship between them and the Convocations of the Clergy. In 1852, Parliament had ceased to be even nominally composed of churchmen, and scarcely any one took Convocations seriously. The Church was inarticulate; most people supposed (without thinking) that it was quite right that it should be so, and treated such inarticulateness as one of the fundamental conditions of what it had become the fashion to term "the Establishment." If any one thought otherwise, and sought a remedy, public opinion referred such a dreamer to what is euphemistically termed "Disestablishment," the effect of which, it was indolently assumed, would be miraculously to put the laity into their proper place—the precedent of Ireland, after 1870, being gravely quoted as final and authoritative!

In 1885, under the leadership of Archbishop Benson, a House of Laymen for the Province of Canterbury was brought into being. In 1892, a similar House was constituted at York. In 1902, the Canterbury House suggested a National Council of the whole Church; and this was constituted and convened, in 1904, by the quite simple device of bringing together the four houses of Convocation and the two houses of Laymen into one room for common deliberation—The Representative Church Council. Because this Council, like the Houses of Laymen, had no parliamentary sanction, it was the fashion to belittle it as of no legal authority, and to ignore its work and action. Those who, with a better understanding of the lessons of English history and a clearer vision of the future, struggled to take their part in the making of history, were regarded by most churchmen as faddists and devotees of an interesting hobby. But the Representative Church Council has made good; and the National Assembly, now in course of convention, is the natural and inevitable fruit of the work of the Representative Church Council, and of that work alone. The constitution of the Church Assembly was framed by the Representative Church Council and presented to the Church by the Council. The old

Clerical Convocations have sponsored it, and the King in Parliament has recognized it. It is in being. And, on all sides, people who sleepily and dreamily disregarded all the constructional work, and idly imagined that until "Disestablishment," diversely regarded, came upon them from without, all things would continue as in the great nineteenth century, have awaked with a shock to find that something like a revolution has taken place; and there is not a little danger of heads being turned. That is why we are asked to-day to consider the subject of Evangelicals and the National Church Assembly.

The functions and powers of the Assembly are regulated by clause 14 of the constitution :—

14. *Functions of the Assembly.*—The functions of the Assembly shall be as follows :—

- (1) The Assembly shall be free to discuss any proposal concerning the Church of England and to make provision in respect thereof, and where such provision requires parliamentary sanction the authority of Parliament shall be sought in such manner as may be prescribed by statute :

Provided that any measure touching doctrinal formulæ or the services or ceremonies of the Church of England or the administration of the Sacraments or sacred rites thereof shall be debated and voted upon by each of the three Houses sitting separately, and shall then be either accepted or rejected by the Assembly in the terms in which it is finally proposed by the House of Bishops.

- (2) The Assembly or any of the three Houses thereof may debate and formulate its judgment by resolution upon any matter concerning the Church of England or otherwise of religious or public interest :

Provided that it does not belong to the functions of the Assembly to issue any statement purporting to define the doctrine of the Church of England on any question of theology, and no such statement shall be issued by the Assembly.

May I call attention to the wording "to discuss *any* proposal concerning the Church of England, and to make provision in respect thereof," and again, "may debate and formulate its judgment by resolution upon any matter concerning the Church of England." No terms could be wider. Note, also, the phrase, "Where such provision requires parliamentary sanction." That obviously means that it is contemplated that "provision" may be made which may not require "parliamentary sanction." Some may ask how such provision will be enforced; and I will then reply with a counter question, "How do the Bishops enforce upon the Church numerous provisions that lack parliamentary sanction?" The fact is, whether we like it or dislike it, the powers of the new Assembly will be limited in practice only by the willingness of the episcopate to enforce its decisions. If legal coercion is required, then parliamentary sanction must be sought; but there is a whole world of possibilities in between before that becomes necessary.

So the first thing that we Evangelicals have got to get clear in our heads is this: that those who ignore or despise the Assembly do so at their peril. It will be an ill thing to attempt to flout it. And the next thing we must be quite clear about is that the Assembly

having been constituted, any control henceforth exercised by Parliament will be so exercised on political, constitutional, and national grounds only, and not on religious grounds.

Therefore we must face the fact that henceforth it is in the National Church Assembly that we have to give our witness to the truth, to assert our rightful place and responsibility in church life, and to serve our Master and His Church, according to the privilege and call that God has given to us as Evangelical churchmen. If we fail there, in the purity of our witness, in the faithful consistency of our principles, in the courage of our convictions, and in the effectiveness of our resistance to that which we regard as adverse to God's will and truth, then we have no second line of defence; we cannot look to Parliament to save us from the consequences of our failure.

I do not think it is possible to over-emphasize the importance of this point. We cannot hug to ourselves the idea of an appeal from the Assembly to Parliament. The House of Commons will not intervene to protect us from our own Church Assembly. I would like to say this over and over again till the solemn and far-reaching consequences of any failure in the Assembly are burned into our very souls. Whether from a positive or from a negative standpoint, we must make our stand—our last stand—with all our might and power, *in the Assembly*. *It is the Assembly* that matters henceforth.

Now if it be as I have said, see the great responsibility that is thrown upon us all. No Evangelical clergyman and no Evangelical layman can afford to put the subject aside as of secondary importance. Looked at from that sectional point of view that of necessity suggests itself to our minds, the continued existence of the Evangelical section—or school, if you prefer the term—I do not—in the Church may hang upon the wise, patient and uncompromising vindication of its essential principles in the National Assembly. But looked at from the bigger, broader, deeper point of view, that matters far more to every one of us here, who knoweth if we be not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? May it not well be, in God's Providence, that the way of the desert through which Evangelicals have been called to pass in recent years has been the sifting and discriminating process necessary to fit us for the peculiar witness that God requires us to give in these critical days; and that in the fearless, unshaken re-assertion in the National Assembly of the principles that made the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and also that Evangelical Revival in the eighteenth century to which all that is best in modern Church life can mediately or immediately be traced, Evangelical churchmen may lead the Church of England to be articulate and to rediscover its own soul. Do not think this is rhetoric—I detest rhetoric. I want to be practical.

If this is our duty as Evangelicals, I want to lay down a few theses:—

1. If we are to give a clear witness in the Assembly, we must

go into it as Evangelicals. Principle and straightforward openness before tactics. Tactics rarely agree well with spiritual principles. "Be not . . . ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner," counselled the old apostle to his young deputy. We must accept the reproach of the Gospel if we wish to share its power. If we are ashamed to be known in the Assembly (or the elections to the Assembly) as Evangelicals, we are not likely to *be* evangelical. Do not waste time upon platitudes, about greater unity, seeking opportunities of working with men of other schools, and such like. Those phrases are "common form"; and it is only those who are uneasy about their own strength who resort to them. What the Church and the Assembly will want to know is what is our *distinctive* positive contribution.

2. We must unite on a constructive basis. We must be "in," early, with our policy, and not simply wait to see to what of some one else's proposal we can say *Yes* or *No*! And we must be on our guard against the "divide and conquer" policy which the great adversary of all evangelical truth finds so effective. This involves frank conference among ourselves, and agreed and concerted action of all Evangelicals, under Evangelical leadership, on all points, and not merely on what are unhappily classed as party questions. To take one concrete example: we, as Evangelicals, must be ready with our own positive contribution to the debate on the powers to be conferred on Parochial Church Councils. *Ex uno disce omnes*. Let all Evangelicals stand together, and the relations of Evangelicals with other churchmen will "sort themselves." But if there is division in the Evangelical ranks, the "larger unity" will be illusive and delusive.

3. Then we must see to it that we have no axes of our own to grind among ourselves. One of the greatest hindrances to a constructive Evangelical policy will come from those with pet plans to push, because such people are often tempted to trim their sails to catch a passing breeze from any quarter. Closely connected with this danger is another—over-anxiety as to personal status and reputation. In both these particulars there must be a readiness to subordinate personal aims to the fidelity of the Evangelical witness, which is of much more importance than a transient triumph in some detail.

4. Then we must be prepared for sustained effort. That requires patience, dogged sticking to the post, and self-sacrifice. It is never possible to go into Church work as a pastime; we must pay the price if we are to deserve success. That points, among other things, to securing that representatives to the Assembly will take their work seriously. We must see to it that we do not suffer from the all too common practice of electing a man to the Assembly "because he cannot well be passed over." If our representatives do not *work*, we must call them to account.

5. We must recognize that the strength of Evangelical churchmanship in the Assembly will at first very much depend upon the laity. It will, I fear, be some little time at least before we can

hope for any very great representation in the Clerical Houses. And in any case, the numbers of the House of Laity will always be the greater. Do not let anything operate to drive a wedge between Evangelical clergy and Evangelical laity. Neither can do without the other. Let us hear no more cant about lay apathy, and let us trust and confide in one another. And, in this connexion, let it be remembered that the Assembly is the successor to the Council; and let us take full advantage of the experience of such members of the old Council who may secure re-election to the Assembly. Do not begin all over again.

6. And over all, and before all, and after all, let us take the whole matter of the Assembly—its elections, its meetings, its members, and its measures, before the Throne of the Heavenly Grace. Let it all be in our constant prayers whenever Evangelicals meet together, as in such Conferences as this, and in all details of preparation. I do hope that Evangelical members of the Assembly, as Evangelicals, will meet for prayer before and during every session, as well as before every election. There will be, in all probability, corporate services from which Evangelicals, by the nature of their principles, may possibly find themselves excluded by the ritual adopted—a most cruel wrong. Well, then, let them meet together themselves. It will be quite feasible. But, beyond that, let there be constant prayer about every detail of policy. Let us seek the Holy Spirit's lead in everything, great or small.

III.

BY THE REV. E. W. MOWLL, M.A., Vicar of Christ Church, Southport.

THE machinery of the Church of England needed improvement. On that question there can be no doubt. Some of that improvement is available, and more is possible by the passing into law of the National Assembly Act. On that score we welcome it heartily. The Act has a democratic basis in consonance with the times in which we live. It opens up a new avenue of approach to the laity in matters of Church life and government, which they never possessed before. It compels Churchmen to take a wider view of Church life than that limited by the parochial horizon. It gives the Church a far greater opportunity of making her voice heard and her influence felt than she has ever known heretofore. The very fact that the members of Parochial Church Councils are *elected* gives much enhanced value to resolutions passed by them, whether they deal with Church affairs, civic affairs, or matters touching the country's well-being.

At the same time, let us face the fact that the number of those, who up to the present have signed the Declaration and are on the various Electoral Rolls, is insignificant when compared to the membership of the Anglican Communion. We are told that those who have not signed are not so much indifferent as ignorant. Now