

THE CHURCHMAN

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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

The February Session of the Church Assembly.

THE two principal subjects before the Church Assembly in February were Church Patronage and Clergy Pensions. The Clergy Pension scheme was adopted in spite of considerable opposition on the part of some of the clergy. The chief objections to the scheme are that only one out of every three of those who pay contributions will obtain any benefits owing to the age of retirement being fixed at seventy, that no provision is made in the scheme for widows and orphans, and that there will be no return of the premiums paid in case of death before the pension begins. We are able to give our readers in this number a full explanation of the Measure by Canon Davies, C.B.E., a member of the Committee which devoted considerable time to the drawing up of the scheme. Discussion of details is still actively going on, and it is possible that there may be some modifications when the Measure comes up for final settlement at the July Session. We sympathise with the difficulty expressed by some of the clergy, who say that they have already made their domestic budgets and pledged their incomes to the fullest extent. They have no margin for an additional tax, especially in view of the proposed charge for dilapidations, and the probable reduction of the tithe rate. A hope has been widely expressed that the Parochial Church Councils will see their way to relieve the clergy of some of these fresh burdens.

Church Patronage.

The discussion on Church Patronage arose out of the Second Report of the Committee appointed to deal with the subject. The

Committee gave some interesting figures regarding the distribution of patronage. There are about 13,775 livings in England. Of the 6,775 in official patronage, 900 rest with the Crown and its Ministers, 3,000 with the Archbishops and Bishops, 760 with Cathedral Chapters, 1,265 with the Incumbents of Mother Parishes, 850 are in University and College Patronage, and the remaining 7,000 are in Private Patronage including Patronage Trusts. The Committee did not make any suggestion of a fundamental change in the whole system. Their first aim was to secure the rights of parishioners. They regarded the demand of the laity to have a voice in the selection of their incumbent as a reasonable one, that ought to be satisfied. This in their opinion could best be done by an enlargement of the powers of the bishop, rather than by entrusting new powers to some other authority. Their second chief proposal was that a Diocesan Board of Patronage should be set up in each diocese, to consist of the Bishop, Archdeacon, Rural Dean, two beneficed clergymen, and four laymen elected by the Diocesan Conference. To these bodies various classes of livings should be transferred. They thought that the patronage of the bishops should be strengthened. One radical proposal to this end was that the principal incumbencies in the larger towns should be in their hands, so that they could more efficiently deal with the spiritual needs of their dioceses.

Episcopal Patronage.

This proposal and a similar one to reduce the patronage of incumbents of mother churches to seven, have been strenuously opposed by the Vicar of Halifax who is the patron of twenty-five livings in and around that town. The Nonconformists of the district have also issued a manifesto protesting against the proposal, as detrimental to local interests. They made the significant declaration that they regarded the work of the Nonconformist Churches as supplementary to the work of the Church of England.

Very strong opposition will also be offered by some of the important Evangelical Trusts. In a number of the larger towns throughout the country the patronage of the most important parishes is in their hands, for example—Bath, Plymouth, Cheltenham, Bradford, Hull, Beverley, Birmingham and Sheffield, and in each of these cases there would be no guarantee of the maintenance of the present teaching or ritual. Many believe that the patronage of the bishops

is already sufficiently large. It has been pointed out that they are already overworked, yet this proposal is to add to their responsibilities in one of the most difficult and delicate matters that can fall to the duty of any man or body of men. The Church at present seems bent on centralization, while every other organization in the country is recognizing the wisdom of decentralizing as much as possible.

Trust Patronage.

The Committee said that Trust Patronage caused them "exceptional difficulty," but they appeared to make some of the difficulty for themselves. Why, for instance, should such trusts "tend to accentuate partisanship"? Why is it a disadvantage to "stereotype particular views in particular parishes"? Is not the great demand at present for the maintenance of continuity in parishes, especially in those where illegal practices have been introduced? The Committee thought that "consideration for the wishes of the parishioners" was excluded under the Trust System. It is considered as much by Trustees as by any other class of patrons. This is really the weakest part of the Committee's Report, and it gives an impression that the members were actuated more by prevailing prejudices than by calm reason. The craze for centralization has made Trusts unpopular with the official Diocesan section. We are not surprised that Sir Thomas Inskip entered a protest against the Committee's view. He could not assent to the extension of episcopal patronage, for "evangelical clergy of perfect loyalty and integrity as well as ability are in many cases practically excluded from enjoying episcopal patronage." He expresses his belief that trust patronage has not "prevented in any way 'healthy development of thought,' and, on the whole, the continuity afforded by the exercise of trust patronage is very much welcomed by parishioners." This is a sufficient answer to the suggestion that Trustees are not free to appoint fit and proper persons.

The Powers of the Diocesan Patronage Boards.

When the Report was under discussion in the Church Assembly the Archbishop of York moved that two representatives of a vacant parish should be placed on the Diocesan Board of Patronage for the purpose of considering any nomination of a clerk to fill the

vacancy which the patron may make to the Bishop. After a discursive debate the proposal was carried. It was thought that this would give the laity a more effective voice in the choice of their incumbent, than if their interests were left altogether in the hands of the Bishop. The Archbishop also proposed that the name of the clergyman nominated to a parish by a patron shall be submitted to the Board of Patronage, and if the Board consider him "not fitted for the adequate discharge of the duties of the particular benefice" he shall not be presented. An appeal may be made to the Archbishop. If this is incorporated in the proposed measure it will be a serious limitation of the present powers of patrons, and may be strenuously resented. It was pointed out that it went a long way towards the abolition of patronage as it now existed in the Church. We have heard the question raised as to how the Prime Minister or the Lord Chancellor would act if their nominees or those of the Crown were rejected by the Board. Serious difficulties might arise in such a case. The desire for centralization is leading to some strange proposals, and will no doubt before long lead to some impossible situations not at present realized.

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Letter to the House of Clergy.

When the House of Clergy met to resume its consideration of the Revised Prayer-Book (Permissive Use) Measure, an important letter was read from the Archbishop of Canterbury. He regarded the position in the matter of rubrical reform as somewhat anxious, and went on to answer the criticism made by "inadequately informed people" on the ground of the dilatoriness of the procedure. He desired that delays should be reduced to a minimum, but efficiency was not to be sacrificed. He hoped the Bishops would have the necessary material placed before them before the close of the present year. The most significant portion of the letter was in the following paragraphs :

"There has, I think, been a certain tendency in our Assemblies, clerical and lay, to adopt during the last two years a notion that we have to construct an almost new Order of Common Prayer, and not merely to amend what is amiss or doubtful or obscure in the heritage we possess. Like other old men, I personally lean to the conservative side in matters liturgical, but I shall, of course, take the utmost care that what comes before the House of Bishops, if I am

still presiding over it, shall be considered with perfectly open mind.”

If the Archbishop's view of the extent of the revision had been borne in mind in recent years we should have been saved the drastic and revolutionary proposals which aim at turning our Prayer Book, and especially our Communion Service, into a Manual of Doctrine subversive of the teaching of our Church.

Saints' Days in the Calendar.

The House showed no disposition to alter the character of the changes which it is adopting. They tended as in the previous sessions to assimilate our teaching and ritual to those of the Church of Rome. When the Calendar came under review, it was proposed that a Commission should be appointed to make historical investigations concerning “the beatification and canonization of Saints.” As the Archdeacon of Macclesfield pointed out, these are distinctly Roman terms. It is well known that the Church of Rome has a prolonged system of investigation, and a well-defined process by which the honour of beatification is conferred upon some past worthy of that Church. This is followed by a similar process of inquiry before the higher honour of canonization is conferred. Fortunately the House of Clergy responded to the appeal to avoid terms so likely to be misunderstood, and finally agreed that the Archbishops should be requested to appoint a Commission to inquire as to the claims of each name proposed for addition to the Calendar. A further resolution made a distinction between names for which some liturgical observance should be provided, and the saints and worthies, and especially local saints for whose commemoration some provision might be made in cases, for example, where churches are dedicated to them. When the Calendar is finally arranged we hope the mistake will be avoided of introducing merely pre-Reformation names and ignoring great leaders of our Church such as Cranmer, and the others who were suggested by the House of Laity.

Corpus Christi.

One of the most retrograde decisions of the House was the adoption of the Thursday after Trinity Sunday as a day for the Commemoration of the Holy Sacrament. This is the date of the Corpus Christi Festival of the Church of Rome. No more striking example could be given of the Anglo-Catholic determination to fall

into line with that Church. No one could seriously regard the statement of Dr. Darwell Stone in making the proposal that the history of the festival did not justify the opinion that the observance was associated with one particular view of the Eucharist. The facts are that in 1215 the doctrine of transubstantiation was proclaimed at the Fourth Lateran Council. In 1230 Juliana, a nun of Liège, had a vision in which she saw a gap in the orb of the moon. By a special revelation she learnt that the gap signified a serious lack in the Church—the absence of a festival for the adoration of the Body of Christ in the Host. In 1264 Pope Urban IV sanctioned the feast. “The institution was,” says Dean Hook, “the natural result of the acceptance of the doctrine of transubstantiation.” It is impossible to dissociate the two. If the doctrine had not been accepted it is improbable that there would ever have been the Festival. By this decision the House of Clergy has gone far to associate our Church with the errors of Rome. When taken in conjunction with other decisions with similar tendencies, it can no longer be maintained that the Revision is producing no changes in the doctrine of our Church. The House of Bishops have a grave responsibility in this matter, and if they accept the proposal the consequences will be serious.

The Assumption of the Virgin, and All Souls' Day.

An attempt was made to introduce the distinctly Romish Festival of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 15, but fortunately it was defeated by the large majority of 107 to 47. Again Dr. Darwell Stone was the mover of the resolution, and again the method of procedure was to avoid the distinctive Roman title and to call it “the Commemoration of the Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” This proposal is most convincing evidence of the extent to which some of the Anglo-Catholic party desire to go in the Romeward direction.

Yet another instance of this was the adoption of the Roman festival of All Souls' Day. Its history is intimately associated with the Roman doctrine of Purgatory. The festival was instituted to pray for the release from torment of the souls there. When the doctrine was rejected at the Reformation the observance of the Day ceased with it. Canon H. A. Wilson described it as “an unscriptural doctrine and a horrible lie against the love of God. To observe

All Souls' Day almost amounted to a pronouncement as to the state of the departed." He also pointed out the result of these various changes. He said that already one half of the Church of England was completely out of communion with the other half, and that these were wedges driven in, dividing one section of the Church from the other more and more.

It is obvious as a result of these resolutions that some serious events are before our Church. The fateful decision must be made as to whether the Church of England is to be ranged with the Church of Rome or to retain its true place in the ranks of the Reformed Churches.

The Final Decision of the Bishops.

What will be the ultimate issue of the Revision? That is a question which many are asking. It is, of course, impossible to give any definite answer, and it may be foolish to attempt to do so. There are, however, several possibilities which it may be worth while to state briefly. The final form of the Revision rests with the Bishops, and there are several courses which they may adopt. They may accept the whole body of changes made by the House of Clergy, and these may receive the approval of the Conventions and the Church Assembly. If this should happen the whole subject will be debated in the House of Commons, and painful as it may be to Churchmen of all schools, Parliament will be asked to give its decision. The consequences may be a demand for disestablishment and this may ultimately lead to the disruption of the Church. As the Bishops will have these possibilities in their minds, they may determine that this course is at all costs to be avoided. They may endeavour to prepare some new form for the Communion Service, so as to avoid the necessity of the alternative Canons. In this case the Anglo-Catholics may not be satisfied with the proposed form, and may be strong enough to secure the rejection of the whole Revision scheme. This, in the view of many, would not be at all an unsatisfactory result.

A Probable Compromise.

There is, however, another course which may commend itself to the Bishops. It is known that some of their number are very strongly of opinion that every endeavour should be made to avoid the adoption of two or even more forms of the Prayer of Consecration, and desire that a Commission should be appointed to draw

up a form which will be generally acceptable. In order to allow of this being done, the Bishops may decide to exclude the Communion Service from the Revision, and to go on with those portions of the Prayer Book upon which there is a large measure of agreement. This compromise is more likely to give general satisfaction than any other policy that can be suggested. On very different grounds Churchmen widely separated in their views would be prepared to support the proposal, and it would at any rate put off for a time the consideration of the one question on which it seems impossible to attain unanimity.

Elections to the House of Laity.

The election of the new House of Laity will be held during the next two months. Some of the most important decisions in regard to the Revision of the Prayer Book will be made by the new House, it is therefore necessary that the laity of the Church should take care that the members shall represent their views. It has been generally felt that the House during the past five years has not represented the opinions of the great majority of Churchpeople. The members were elected more or less at haphazard. It was the first election, and the procedure was not well understood. The laity have now an opportunity of more careful selection of their representatives. The method of election is still not altogether satisfactory, as the voting rests with the members of the various Diocesan Conferences, and these have already been chosen. Yet with the exercise of care much can be done to secure the choice of those who will be faithful to the teaching of our Church, and will see that our Prayer Book is not mutilated. The views of candidates should be carefully ascertained, and no one should be elected who is not prepared to defend our Communion Service from the introduction of those features which are designed to assimilate it to the Roman Mass. It should be possible in every diocese to make out a list of suitable men and women whose loyalty to the teaching of the Church is assured, and to vote for them and for them only. Organized efforts are being made to secure the election of members who will favour the Romeward trend, and loyal Churchpeople must be prepared to defend the Church from the attacks that are being so vigorously made upon the purity of its teaching and the simplicity and dignity of its services.