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THE CHURCHMAN

April, 1915.

The Month.

ARE we satisfied with the moral and spiritual condition of the country at the present time? Soon after the war broke out a deep spirit of earnestness and inquiry, admittedly, came over the people. Almost every parochial clergyman one met had the same tale to tell. He was convinced that the war was doing much good; his church had never been so full; many were attending services who were rarely seen in church before; and the congregations were more attentive, more solemnized, than they had ever been. This was a great movement. Has it been maintained? We fear not. People have grown accustomed to the war, and are sinking back into their old ways. That, at least, is the opinion we hear from many who are in a position to know; and if it is true, it represents a very serious state of things. We have had nearly eight months of the stern discipline of war; bereavement has entered into many homes, and sorrow and suffering into many more, and yet the nation is not sufficiently sobered in its outlook. We all know that the influence of chastisement must have one of two results: it either softens or it hardens those upon whom it is laid. It ought thankfully to be noted that in not a few cases men and women, by and through the circumstances of the time, have been drawn nearer to God, and their spiritual vision has become clearer than it has ever been. This is particularly the case with soldiers who in many cases have responded gladly and gratefully to the appeals made to them

by army chaplains, whose splendid work among the men at home has hardly been sufficiently realized, and by other Christian workers. It may be said, we believe, without any exaggeration, that during their months of training hundreds and thousands of men who have since gone or will soon be going to face death in the trenches have given their hearts to God. But, alike among civilians and soldiers, the numbers who have thus made the great decision are woefully few compared with the vast masses who remain careless and indifferent, if not hostile, to the claims of religion. The general tone of the nation has deteriorated; it is not now spiritually inclined; it is essentially secular and worldly. Evidence of this may be discerned in a hundred different ways by those who will be careful not to be misled by surface appearances, but will be ready to go deeper. Even the tone of the Press is different. In many cases it is proud, boastful, and arrogant, when the times call for something very different. Whose is the blame? It cannot be apportioned with any accuracy, but we feel bound to add that the Church has not done all that it might do for the moral and spiritual uplift of the people. It has been a day of splendid opportunity, but only the few have taken advantage of it. The times of acute testing for the nation and for individuals is yet to come. Are we prepared, are we preparing, for them? Oh, that some Spirit-filled leader might arise, who would call the nation to humiliation, penitence, and prayer!

In thus expressing our sentiments we are not in the least perturbed by the risk of being included among those whom Mr. Ernest Barker in *The Times* of March 18 dubbed "New Puritans." We read his letter with interest—for it was exceedingly clever—but with real regret. The general line of his argument may be judged by the following extracts from his letter :

"There is no tragedy more tragic than war. There has been no war more terrible than this war. Unless we mix some laughter we shall crack.

If we falsify Nature's wise economy, and rack ourselves to the pitch of tragic intensity, we are undone. Let us not, like the Puritans of old, close theatres, or suppress race meetings, or even shut down alehouses overmuch. It will but lead to swift reaction. The Puritans were tragically earnest in the ten years before 1660. There were cakes and ale in abundance after 1660, and ginger was hot in the mouth."

"I have never been to a race meeting in all my life. I have been to the theatre on an average once a year. I cannot conceive myself going to either nowadays. But I can very well conceive better men than I am going to the play—and even to the picture theatre. I am even glad to see them going. After all, I feel something of the old world survives the Deluge. Men still go about the old streets in the old way."

"I love to think of Sir Thomas More dying with a jest. I long to think that my country, of which I was never more proud than I am now, can be as gaily gallant in great things as it can be mournfully serious in little things. I would have us meet the unseen with a cheer, and even with a smile, provided that no man is offended thereby."

The writer's views may well be quoted as an illustration of the gay and worldly spirit against which we feel bound to protest. Not that we would plead for severe austerity, nor would we lessen the amount of good, healthy laughter, but we urge that men and women should be led to face the serious facts of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. We believe that this war is God's call to the nation to forsake its sins and to turn to Him, and no minister of His should be changed from his purpose of pressing that call home upon the hearts and lives of the people by any fear of reproach. The faithful servant of God may be, and often is, called a "Kill-joy," whereas the message he has to deliver brings to heart and life, wherever it is received, the greatest joy of all—the joy of the Lord.

The consideration of the moral condition of the
National
Regeneration. nation has led to many proposals for amendment.

Sir Edward Clarke's appeal to the clergy to promise on Easter Day that they would abstain from all intoxicating drinks as beverages until after the war was well directed, but it has received scant support. Although we are certain that the man—be he cleric or layman—who entered upon such a course of self-denial would exercise considerable influence upon his

fellows, and especially upon those who most need the strength of example to help and encourage them, we feel that at the best it can only be described as a half-measure towards meeting a very real need. The Bishop of Worcester's letter, though not very happily conceived in its answer to Sir Edward Clarke, showed that something deeper is needed. "Would," he wrote, "that the National Church, which from its position has a particular right to speak (and I say this without the least disparagement of other bodies), would soon lead us by some comprehensive movement of recall to see that it behoves a great Empire to fit itself for carrying out the purposes of God, and that if it will not so fit itself, the reason for its power is gone. When such a course of national regeneration is put plainly before us, there will be no hesitation among the clergy of all sorts to pledge themselves to something more splendid than any promise directed against a single vice." We are thankful to the Bishop of Worcester for expressing the need so clearly, but it is permissible to ask whether he has pressed the same point upon his brethren of the episcopate. The Bishops are the natural leaders of the National Church, and they ought to make a move in the direction indicated. They have not done so, and it has been a great disappointment to many that as a body they have shown themselves so deficient in leadership in a truly spiritual campaign. The position is still in their hands, and we trust that the Bishop of Worcester may stir them to take some joint action in calling upon the Church at large to make a determined effort to bring about that national regeneration which is so much needed.

It will be extremely interesting to see whether

The Call for
a Truce. the Convocations of Canterbury and York pay heed to the very strong feeling, which is growing and deepening in intensity, that in connection with the question of Prayer-Book Revision a truce should be observed until after the war. These great assemblies of Churchmen meet again this month, and, as at present arranged, the discussion on the

Revision proposals is to be continued. We much hope that wiser and better counsels will prevail, for it is most undesirable that internecine strife should continue within the Church, when on general questions the voice of controversy is hushed. If anyone supposes that the passing of Convocation's Revision scheme will bring any measure of peace, he is labouring under a grave delusion. Not peace but a sword will be given to the Church if Convocation proceeds; and the influence upon the non-religious world, seeing Church-people fighting among themselves at the moment when thousands of our brave fellows at the front are laying down their lives for their country, will be simply disastrous. There is no necessity to go over once again the main ground of the Revision dispute, but those who desire to see a simple and adequate exposition of the Evangelical position should procure a copy of a penny pamphlet issued by the National Church League, entitled "Revision and the Rome-ward Drift." The following passage from the author's conclusion is sufficiently expressive :

"As Churchmen we desire to stand in the old paths. We wish to be by the side of the saints of the Primitive Church and to meet with our Lord as His disciples met with Him in the Upper Room. We know no sacrifice for sins other than the One Offering on the Cross which can never be repeated. We know no Presence of Christ localized in the Elements—we find Him in our hearts when we communicate in faith. We are Christians, members of the Church of Christ which has no sacerdotal ministry, and we look to the one great Priest—our High Priest—to present us faultless before the Throne of God. We must fight against any alteration of the doctrine of our Prayer-Book. We cannot be parties to any betrayal of the solemn trust given into our keeping. . . . Regretfully many of us have been forced to oppose all Revision at this time because we can only have any Revision by the sacrifice of principles which have been entrusted to us by our fathers. We can only surrender these principles at the cost of loyalty to the highest truth. We dare not accept what is alien to our Book of Common Prayer and the teaching of Holy Scripture."

The grave nature of the issues at stake may readily be judged from the above quotation, and the more they are considered the more clear does it become that it would be monstrous to force upon the Church a quarrel of this magnitude at a time when the nation is at war.

Churchmen have every reason to be satisfied with the action of the Government over the Welsh Church Act. The delay in dealing with the Postponement Bill is, perhaps, unfortunate, but if in the meantime the Government are able to secure the concurrence of the Welsh Members, it may prove a blessing in disguise. At this critical time in our national history we cannot afford to keep alive any matter of domestic controversy. National unity is the one overwhelmingly important consideration at the present time, and it may well be hoped that under Mr. Asquith's kindly guidance the Welsh Members may be led to see the thorough reasonableness of the Government proposal. Rightly to understand the new Bill it is necessary to remember that there are two dates provided in the Welsh Church Act. There is "the date of the passing of the Act," and there is "the date of Disestablishment." Broadly speaking, the policy of the Act is that the date of passing is, as it were, a kind of warning, preparatory date, and the date of Disestablishment is the date on which the Act comes into full operation. Under the Act that date is the close of the war, and unless that were modified Welsh Churchmen would be compelled, even now, while the war is on, to make their preparations for the new order of things. The Church, for instance, as Lord Robert Cecil reminded the House of Commons, must set up new laws and new courts, and that can only be done by bringing into existence the legislative body provided in the Act. The Church has also to consider whether it will accept commutation or not, and the representative body to consider that must therefore also be brought into existence before the date of Disestablishment. Churchmen, again, have to make preparation for the cessation of their endowments on the date of Disestablishment. A very large sum will have to be collected. Leading Churchmen took the very best legal opinion they could get, and they were advised that if they were to be safe under the Act they were bound to take these steps before the date of Disestablishment. The Duke of Devonshire introduced a Bill to put the Welsh

Six Months'
Grace.

Church Act on a level, in point of time, with the Irish Home Rule Act, but the Government, recognizing the unfairness placed upon the Church, hit upon a compromise. Their new Bill postpones the date of Disestablishment until six months after the termination of the war—thus giving the Church six months' grace in which to make the necessary preparations—and the Opposition on their side have undertaken not to bring forward in Parliament any proposal for the amendment or repeal of the main Act until after the new date of Disestablishment. This is a reasonable bargain, and we hope to see it carried into effect. We still hope, however, that at the proper time a determined effort will be made to repeal the Act.

There was an interesting if somewhat incon-

The Date of
Easter,

clusive discussion at the Victoria Institute on
March 15 on "The Determination of Easter Day."

The opening paper, read by Dr. A. M. W. Downing, F.R.S., furnished a detailed and elaborate review of the astronomical and other questions concerned. He showed that our Lord's Resurrection took place on the Sunday after the Passover, and the Passover was held on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year. The first month of the Jewish year was regulated by the spring equinox—that is to say, it depended upon the progress of the natural solar or tropical year—and the Jewish months were natural months depending upon the actual observation of the new moon. But the week, the natural month, and the natural year, are three measures of time, mutually incommensurable. It follows, therefore, that if the attempt is made to keep Easter on the first day of the month, and near the full of the moon in the spring time of the year, the date chosen cannot strictly fulfil all the three conditions at once. Easter therefore fluctuates through a considerable period of time—actually five weeks. The problem, Dr. Downing explained, has been further complicated by the difference between the Julian and the Gregorian calendars. The Julian calendar, which is followed in the eastern countries of Europe,

assumes that the year is exactly $365\frac{1}{4}$ days in length, while the Gregorian, followed by the western countries, makes the length of the year nearly eleven minutes short of this, and the difference between the two calendars now amounts to thirteen days. This year, and next, it happens by a most unusual coincidence that Russia and Great Britain keep Easter on the same day, but that day in 1915 will be called April 4 in Great Britain, but March 22 in Russia. We imagine, however, that if any change is ever made in the direction of a fixed Easter, it will be governed, not by astronomical, but by practical considerations; and, indeed, there is much to be said from this point of view in favour of fixity. Dr. Downing practically admitted as much, but in summing up he showed the immense difficulties in the way thus:

“The lengthy explanations given in this paper may reasonably be held to be a strong argument in favour of a fixed Easter—a subject that has been again brought to our notice during recent years. And really there is a good deal to be said in favour of the practical convenience of the proposal, quite independently of the complications involved in the determination of the fourteenth day of a certain artificial moon. Without having the least sympathy with the changes in the week and in the month that have been proposed, we may heartily agree that Easter Day should be a Sunday in a fixed week. But it would be undoubtedly a breaking away from the system that has been handed down to us from the early days of the Christian Church, and the prejudices of those who look with dislike on all such changes would have to be overcome. Practical unanimity between Christians of all denominations, and of all nations and languages, would be very desirable, and very difficult to secure. But any independent action that would tend to our insular isolation in such a matter would be deplorable. It is stated that the late Pope (Pius X.) was prepared to give his favourable consideration to the project. The authorities of the Orthodox Church do not appear to have expressed their views on the matter. But if the proposal ever comes within the range of practical politics, it may be urged, from the astronomical point of view, that, as there is evidence that the original Good Friday fell either on April 3 (A.D. 33) or on April 7 (A.D. 30), the change to be effected should insure that Good Friday should be the first Friday in April. Easter Day would then be either the first or second Sunday in April. But alas! ‘the time is out of joint.’ All such proposals must now, it is to be feared, be relegated to the Greek Kalends.”

We are not quite so hopeless. The reform is one that commands a large measure of support, and we should like to see it discussed more from the practical than the academic point given.