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CONSTITUTIONAL EPISCOPACY.

BY THE VEN. W. L. PAIGE COX, Archdeacon of Chester.

We are indebted to "The Record" for this summary of the paper on Constitutional Episcopacy read by Archdeacon Paige Cox to the Cheltenham Conference. The full text of the paper will, we believe, appear at a later date in one of the monthly Reviews.

IT is stated in the Ordinal—towards the end of the Prayer Book—that "from the Apostles' time there have been these orders of Ministers in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests and Deacons." Our three-fold ministry is in succession to the three-fold ministry of which we read in the New Testament. Apostolic Succession, rightly understood, implies this three-fold inheritance from the Apostles' time, and not merely a continuity of bishops with the Apostles. But the bishops do in some sense correspond to the apostles of the New Testament. It will be admitted that, however the episcopate came into being, the holders of the office did succeed in due course to some of the functions of the Apostolate. They had not the same spiritual authority in having been directly appointed by Christ Himself, and they were not spiritually endowed to the same degree—no one would put the most Christlike of the bishops on the same plane as a St. Peter, a St. John, or a St. Paul; moreover, the bishops from the first were local officials, which the Apostles were not. But we do find the bishops from the early days exercising the same function as the Apostles in leading the Church, in ordaining deacons and presbyters, and in laying on of hands in other Church ordinances. If we liken the bishops to the Apostles in respect of their exercise of such functions, we may not, if we are loyal to New Testament principles and precedent, assign to them an authority which the Apostles themselves did not claim. The Apostolic rule of the Church was essentially constitutional, as we should now put it. The evidence of the New Testament on this point is as clear as it is arresting. When a new Apostle had to be chosen in the place of the traitor, Judas, it was to the general body of "the three hundred and twenty brethren" that the rest of the Apostles appealed to make the appointment, under Divine guidance. So, when the need had become apparent of a special order of ministers to look after the distribution of alms, the initiative came from the Apostles; but they requested the brethren to choose the men of the new order, though it was they who laid hands upon them. In no matter of importance were the Apostles minded to act irresponsibly, nor were they allowed to act irresponsibly. When St. Peter admitted Gentiles into the Church his action was challenged by the general body of Christians in Jerusalem, and the Apostle admitted their right to challenge it (Acts xi. 1, 2). When an important question of discipline arose at Corinth the matter was dealt with by the whole Church, though under St. Paul's direction. At

the council held at Jerusalem, as described in Acts xv., the Apostles and elders deliberated over the business, St. Peter and St. James exercising a leading influence, and the decision was announced in the name of "the Apostles and the elders with the whole Church." It is not a little remarkable, in view of later developments, that in the narrative leading up to the holding of this council, when the arrival of St. Paul and St. Barnabas at Jerusalem is mentioned, we are told that "they were received of the Church and the Apostles and elders"—not the Apostles, elders and brethren.

In the course of the centuries there have been, in various ways and from various causes, striking and prolonged deviations from these precedents in regard to the balance of authority in the Christian Church. We are concerned here and now with recent occurrences in the Church of England. When the National Assembly of the Church of England was constituted the New Testament precedents were obviously kept in view. The Assembly was to consist of three Houses, of bishops, clergy and laity, with co-ordinate powers. The Assembly was to be "free to discuss any proposal concerning the Church of England and to make provision thereof, and where such provision required Parliamentary sanction the authority of Parliament was to be sought in such manner as should be prescribed by statute"; "provided that any measure touching doctrinal formula 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."

It might have been thought that the establishment of the Church Assembly would have placed the authority of the Episcopate on a constitutional basis. But in practice things have not so turned out, particularly in reference to the Prayer Book.

It was said by Archbishop Davidson in commending the Deposited Book to the House of Lords, "The Book is not the Book of the bishops: it is the Book of the Church, drawn up by laity and clergy, and finally approved, amended, and put into its ultimate shape, with such additions and omissions as were thought desirable, by the bishops. But the Book is substantially a Book with which the bishops have no more to do than the clergy and laity in the Assembly." It is just those "additions and omissions" referred to by the Archbishop which have made the difference, and have turned the Deposited Book in its latest form into the Book of the majority of the bishops, and not of the whole Assembly. When the Book was finally considered by the House of Clergy before it was submitted to the bishops they passed a resolution respectfully requesting the bishops to consider the question of revising the form of Invocation in the new Prayer of Consecration. The majority of the bishops, however, did not see their way to comply with this request. We have lately been told by Dr. Vernon Bartlet that the alternative canon "would add an insuperable hindrance to reunion

for evangelical nonconformists." The majority of the bishops are responsible for this.

The bishops naturally lay stress on the assent of the Church Assembly to their final proposals. It was a much less marked assent at the second time of asking than at the first, barely more than half the members of the Assembly voting on the side of the bishops. But how was this assent gained as far as it was given? It has been avowed by not a few since that they voted as they did from a desire to support the bishops and not from personal conviction. The assent on the part of the laity as well as the clergy was very far from being unfettered. It was given under tremendous pressure of archiepiscopal and episcopal entreaty. The assent to the Deposited Book given at the Diocesan Conferences has been still more markedly a constrained assent.

Since the second rejection of the Deposited Book by Parliament the archbishops and the majority of the bishops have tested the opinion of the clergy and laity as to the policy of making a guarded use of the rejected Book, even of the controverted portion of it on account of which it was rejected. That move on the part of the bishops has proved a disastrous mistake. It has provoked opposition and censure from many who had previously supported them, and has unquestionably weakened the moral prestige of the bishops throughout the country.

The majority of the bishops are beginning to see that their recent line of action is "inconsistent with the constitutional relations of Church and State in England," and so we are having in some quarters threats of an agitation for disestablishment, and in other quarters foreshadowings of a movement to deprive Parliament of its power of rejecting such Measures as the Prayer Book Measure. Attention is meanwhile being directed to the Established Church of Scotland, the ordinary decisions of whose General Assembly do not require the sanction of Parliament. The plea apparently is that, in this respect, the Church of England, as an established Church, should be placed on the same relative footing as the Church of Scotland. The general character, history and circumstances of the two Churches are so dissimilar that a parallel cannot be drawn between them as regards their relations with the State. The laity of the Established Church of Scotland have what is practically a predominant influence in their Church through the place they occupy in its councils and through their election of their ministers, so that they are well able to look after their own interests in all matters pertaining to doctrine and worship. In contrast with this it is being more and more noticed that even in the House of Laity in the Church Assembly the laity have not full and direct representation. Sir Lewis Dibdin, who deferred to the bishops when they put forward the Deposited Book, but has dissented strongly from their subsequent policy in reference to Parliament, has said, "That we in the Church Assembly represent the laity as a whole is simply not a fact." Reviewing the actual condition of things in the Church Assembly it is perfectly true to say that Parliament is more fully

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and exactly representative of the rank and file of Churchpeople than is the House of Laity.

As things are at present, disestablishment would mean the removal of the one effective check on the autocratic action of the bishops. But for that check, it would be possible for a passing majority of bishops to change the Church's doctrine and ritual at will. The danger in that direction would be all the greater owing to the drift of late towards the increase of the power of the bishops in the administration of patronage. Concurrently with all this it has been significant of late that a good many bishops have taken to wearing ornate official clothing and jewellery—copes and mitres and pectoral crosses. It is averred, no doubt, that these gorgeous adornments worn nowadays by some of the bishops are symbols of their spiritual powers and functions in various particulars. Yes, but is not that really an indictment of the new fashion? Does it not tend to assert a difference in spiritual endowment and capability between the bishop and the rest of the clergy as well as the mass of the laity? It is assumed, for instance, by some of our bishops that they have the power—an undefined and indeed incomprehensible power—to "bless" places and things, something which goes beyond the accustomed dedication, with thanksgiving, of material gifts to be used in the worship of God. We read of no such power in the New Testament.

There never was a time in the history of the Church when it was less justifiable and less advisable to exalt the episcopate unduly and for the bishops to assume powers which under proper regulation pertain to the whole body.

It goes without saying that from the point of view of reunion with our Nonconformist brethren, the policy of episcopal encroachment on lawful prerogative is fatal. On all hands the more thoughtful and learned of Nonconformists are becoming ready to admit that episcopacy is the only possible form of Government for a reunited Church. It has the precedent of the centuries behind it and it makes for unity and good order. But it is only a constitutional episcopacy that they will accept. The bishops of the Anglican Communion assembled at the Lambeth Conference of 1920 clearly saw this, and in the "Appeal to all Christian People," which they issued then, they made it manifest that in proposing reunion on episcopal lines it was nothing but constitutional episcopacy that they had in mind. Their words are these, and it is on the note thus struck that I would close.

"We do not call in question for a moment the spiritual reality of the ministries of those communions which do not possess the episcopate. On the contrary we thankfully acknowledge that these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace. But we submit that considerations alike of history and of present experience justify the claim which we make on behalf of the episcopate. Moreover, we would urge that it is now, and will be in the future, the best instrument for maintaining the unity and continuity of the Church. But we

greatly desire that the office of a bishop should be everywhere exercised in a representative and constitutional manner. Nay, more, we eagerly look forward to the day when through its acceptance in a united Church we may all share in that grace which is pledged to the members of the whole body in the apostolic right of the laying on of hands, and in the joy and fellowship of a Eucharist in which as one Family we may together, without any doubtfulness of mind, offer to the one Lord our worship and service."

Mr. Douglas Edwardes describes his book, *The Shining Mystery of Jesus* (Longman, Green & Co., 6s. net), as "a frank appeal to the Gospels, and in no sense whatever a substitute for them. It is written in the confidence that the truth which is there so vividly presented will attest itself afresh to straightforward inquirers, more or less adrift, like all of us, upon this strange sea of human life on which we are *volens volens* embarked." The Bishop of Manchester in his Introduction emphasizes this special feature of the volume. It is "admirably planned to bring its readers back from the superficial 'humanitarian' accounts of our Lord to the stupendous fact to which the evidence, scientifically considered, really points. . . . He helps us to look with the eyes and hear with the ears of the first disciples. . . ." The author claims that "the Gospels authenticate themselves," and he shows by an examination of the personality of Christ as shown in them that nothing less than the old faith of the Church will satisfy, and that at the heart of the Christian Gospel "stands the Cross of Jesus Christ." This is one of the books which meet the modern need of showing the true value of Christian doctrine, without using the technical language of theology which repels the ordinary thinker without ecclesiastical leanings.

The Religious Tract Society are the publishers of a series of addresses for boys and girls by the Rev. W. J. Henderson, LL.D., entitled *The Pattern Boyhood* (2s. net). Among the subjects are Giant Slaying, Friendship, Self-Reliance, Service. They are short treatments of great themes clearly and effectively expressed.

The R.T.S. also publishes *Gathered Grain*, a book for the Women's Meeting, by Edna V. Rowlingson, B.A., 2s. 6d. net. The author's aim is "to provide hints and suggestions of workable value to those who labour in that fruitful field—The Women's Meeting." Those who are responsible for such meetings will find in these chapters ample material for lessons suitable for helping the members to a better understanding of life's privileges and duties. The wealth of illustration adds to the effectiveness of the instruction.