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PRAYER BOOK REVISION.

CHELTENHAM CONFERENCE PAPERS.

THE CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS.

BY THE REV. CANON H. A. WILSON, M.A., R.D., Rector of
Cheltenham.

I HAVE the great honour, my brothers, of welcoming you to the Eighth Cheltenham Conference. It seems as if it was but yesterday that we met together for the First Conference in these rooms. Few of us who gathered on that occasion realized that we were inaugurating a movement which was to become an annual institution. We met first at a critical time, when Kikuyu and all the questions related to that place were burning subjects of controversy. The following year Kikuyu questions and the Archbishops' Report on Church and State were to the fore in our discussions. In 1918 we met in London to comply with Government requirements for the reduction of railway travelling, and for the third time reunion occupied the greater part of our attention as was also the case in 1919. The following year the attention of the Conference was divided between reunion at home and abroad and the Enabling Bill, which soon became law. In 1921 we tried the interesting experiment of inviting Anglo-Catholic and Broad Churchmen to address our Conference with a view to determining what common ground could be discovered between us and them. And last year we endeavoured, by emphasizing the basic truths of Evangelicalism, to heal the wounds in our own party. Looking back on the past, no one can doubt the courage with which we have faced anxious questions, and, I think, few can deny that we have really contributed something of value to a great variety of controversies. This year we are facing a subject which is a matter of most anxious concern—Prayer Book Revision. I have no doubt that we shall express a view worth attention at the close of our discussions.

No gathering is more competent than ours to express the mind of the Evangelical School for, as I would remind you, we are not representative of a mere section of Evangelicals. We have here men who can speak for every shade of Evangelical opinion. And here is the unique value of our Conference. Other gatherings may be larger, may have a more imposing membership, but we alone both welcome all who profess and call themselves Evangelicals, and also debate and publish our conclusions. I want to emphasize this fact this year, because I am sure that the opinions of the rank and file of Evangelical clergy are not only needed in the Prayer Book controversy, but they are also wanted. Our serious and well-weighed opinions will, we may be sure, receive careful attention and full consideration. I will not occupy time by summarizing in any detail how the position stands at the moment. But in brief

it is as follows : there is, first of all, our Book of Common Prayer, then the National Assembly Book (N.A. 84), then the E.C.U. Book, then the "New Prayer Book," and to all this bewildering literature is added the Archbishop of York's suggestion to adopt the Prayer Book of 1549. There is no reason to think that the stream of invention has dried up, and any day we may have another sample Prayer Book put before us. It is really a Gilbertian situation, and despite the stout assurances we hear that all these suggestions are to be welcomed one cannot but feel that they do not add to the dignity of the Church of England. I do not suppose *we* shall decide to draw up a Prayer Book at our Conference, though "you never can tell," for Prayer Book compilation is "in the air," and apparently a large number of people consider themselves quite competent to undertake what has in the past been considered the supreme test of literary skill, careful scholarship, and deep spirituality. We shall probably content ourselves by expressing our opinions and offering suggestions.

It would be most improper for me to attempt to tune the Conference by any opinion of my own, but a few general observations may be offered.

In the first place we shall have to consider the large question of Alternative Prayer Books. I doubt if it is possible to deny that this proposal is anything but a sad confession of failure. It was never contemplated when the original committee was appointed, and it has only emerged as the impossibility of reaching general agreement became more clear. At best it is a sorry expedient, and it is hard to see how it can fail to harden our differences and accentuate party spirit in the Church.

In a speech in the House of Bishops, one who is justly and highly honoured among us made the most able defence of alternatives which could be made. Let me read you his own words :

"I believe that modern life must express itself in divers ways. I want to make a strong point of that. I know it may be said that everybody should pray exactly alike, and everybody should do exactly as everybody else does. That may seem ideal, but I think it is absolutely contrary to the present spirit of the age. We have already (unauthorized it is true) alternative uses. I have to preach, as Your Lordships have, Sunday by Sunday, in different Churches ; and whether it is a so-called advanced or a so-called Evangelical Church, when I get there I never know what is going to happen : prayers are put in of all kinds ; not one of them has been submitted to me as Bishop, but there they are. It is not a new thing, even with our present Prayer Book, which we all love so much, to have the principle admitted of alternative use ; you may do this or that ; it is not a new principle introduced into the Church of England, it is an extension of that principle—a very great extension, but only an extension. . . . In the Reunited Church each individual group would be allowed to retain to a large extent its own mode of worship. If that proposal comes

to fruition, we shall have a great number of alternative uses. The question arises whether, that being so, it is not right now in our own borders to have a greater variety than we have ever known before."

Now this is a strong argument, and undoubtedly it carries us a long way. The Bishop might even have added a reference to the alternative "uses" in pre-Reformation days. No one objects to ordered variety in worship. But the Alternative Prayer Book, when it reaches its final shape, will not simply give us more variety in the conduct of public worship; it will present us with alternative doctrine, and that is surely an absurdity in a Church which claims to have a mind of its own. I am not saying that "N.A. 84" really presents in its Order of Holy Communion a doctrine different from the present Prayer Book. I know some people think it does; personally I do not, at any rate at present. But the whole trend of the controversy now is away from the Holy Communion proposals in "N.A. 84" to something much more mediæval in form. The Archbishop of York, e.g., pointed out, in the debate already referred to, the futility of the "N.A. 84" order of Holy Communion:—

"Turning to the suggestions of the Committee, they are many and admirable; but, without elaborating the point, I think it is obvious that these things have to be said about them—namely, they will certainly not satisfy those who desire no permissive change in the Order of Holy Communion; and they will equally not satisfy those who desire that such a change should be permitted. To put it in a sentence, they will distress those who object to any permissive change, and will not satisfy those who desire it."

I think this is probably true, and as a result the final alternative will be much more mediæval in form, and will certainly vary in doctrine from the Book of Common Prayer. Especially is this likely to be so if it is moulded on the Prayer Book of 1549, for it will be remembered that Bishop Gardiner considered that book agreeable to his view of Transubstantiation, and hence Archbishop Cranmer deliberately altered the form of the Communion service to destroy this argument.

Our Alternative Prayer Books will thus contain alternative doctrines, and if this is so it is not very easy to deny the claim which has been voiced for alternative creeds. The line between matters of doctrine and matters of faith is not so clearly marked as the line between matters of doctrine and forms of worship, and if the line between the latter two may be transgressed, why not the line between the former two?

An argument freely used is that in these days we ought to make experiments. I think there is very much to be said for this. We certainly do want very wide liberty in our services, and undoubtedly recent years have given us a freedom in which we rejoice and which we should not care to surrender. But the experiments made in the Communion service, even in the case of the temperate recommendation in "N.A. 84," are all of them returns to past forms of

worship which our Church discarded at the Reformation. The re-arrangement of the canon, the sanctioning of Reservation, the permissive use of the chasuble, the observance of All Souls' Day, can no more be described as experiments than the arming of our troops with muzzle-loading rifles could be called an experiment.

I confess I am quite deficient in the liturgical sense, therefore my next remark is probably worthless. What is there so irresistibly attractive about the liturgy of the Roman Church? Is it really such a perfect arrangement of prayer that it is impossible to improve upon it? Has the Church of England no individuality of its own? Is it incapable of making a real experiment in the Service of the Holy Communion?

I question very much whether the driving force behind the movement for approximating to the ancient Western liturgy—for it is noticeable that in every point the E.C.U. suggestions choose the Roman way in preference to the Eastern way when the two conflict—is really reverence for the past. It is, we suspect, rather a desire for the re-introduction of the views which the Roman liturgy embodies. Nor will the people who crave to follow the Roman way ever be satisfied with anything short of this. They have received in "N.A. 84" most remarkable concessions—Prayers for the Departed, the observance of All Souls' Day, a re-arrangement of the Communion Office, the authorization of the sacrificial vestments, and Reservation for the sick. All this has been conceded in the hope of achieving unity in the Church.

Now if these serious modifications of our liturgy could produce that result it would be an enormous gain. Think of the Church as it is to-day! It is really not too much to say that one-half is virtually out of communion with the other half. Imagine the situation if we could achieve unity: the blessed cessation of our strife at home and abroad; the spirit of true brotherhood and mutual trust and the end of all suspicion; our Church facing the great opportunities of to-day as one united communion. It is a picture so fascinating that we feel almost anything might be well paid to achieve it. Personally, I do not shrink from saying that if the concessions made in "N.A. 84" would accomplish this, if the needs of the Anglo-Catholics were fully and finally met, however distasteful they may be to us, it would be our bounden duty to strain our convictions to the uttermost, and accept "N.A. 84" *not as an alternative but as the New Book of Common Prayer*, and so achieve at last a real unity in worship. But these are but idle words. We might make the offer, but no one could really hope that that offer would be accepted by the Anglo-Catholic party.

The last point I want to make is to consider what are the guiding principles upon which a right revision should be conducted.

The supreme consideration must be *truth*. It is a sad reflection that the Church of England has ceased to be theological. In the many and lengthy discussions of the subject, the method adopted has been one of haggle and barter. A great many people want this concession; can we allow this, or how much of it can we allow,

without upsetting another large number who don't want this. In secular matters this, no doubt, is a proper way of proceeding. But methods appropriate for arranging say the affairs of Ireland are thoroughly wrong in dealing with religious matters. Is this demand right? Is it based upon a true view of God and the redemption wrought by Christ Jesus? These are the questions a Church should ask in arranging its worship, and the answers given should be taken as settling the matter finally. Indeed, it may be added that surely it is quite hopeless to expect a real solution which God can bless except this method be adopted.

At any rate, we in Cheltenham are not likely to overlook the second necessity in revision. It must be carried out in the light of the reunion of Christendom. I will not weary you by attempting to deal with this question at length. I will only make two remarks:

(1) N.A. 84 is not likely to advance reunion with the non-Episcopal Churches. Not one of the five great concessions to which I have referred make the least appeal to them, and indeed they are probably all repugnant to them. These Churches are in the main definitely Protestant, although there are here and there to be seen a few abnormal persons of other ways of thinking.

(2) As I have remarked, the Anglo-Catholic desires have no larger purpose than approximating to Rome. Their suggested liturgy is deliberately Roman: the Reservation of the Sacrament for adoration is purely Roman and contrary to the practice of the Eastern Church. To accept their suggestion means the preference of Rome to the East, and the end of all hopes of home reunion.

My last word must be the expression of the earnest hope that by our united efforts we may achieve what is the most difficult task which has ever fallen to the lot of our Conference; to say something really helpful in this anxious and difficult hour, when our Church is definitely at the cross-roads, and to utter a prayer that the Holy Spirit of God will teach us in our deliberations what we ought to say.

ALTERNATIVE USES AND HOME REUNION.

BY THE REV. J. J. R. ARMITAGE, Public Preacher,
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OUR subject is divided into two main parts: Home Reunion and Alternative Uses, with sub-divisions: (A) Home—Reunion—I. With whom? II. With whom not practicable? III. Fundamental differences between Rome and England IV. Historical importance of these differences; (B) I. Alternative Uses: no valid objection. II. Nature of suggested alternative use. III. Would suggested alternative use be acceptable to Free Churches? IV. Would suggested alternative use satisfy Anglo-Catholics? V. What of the future?