

THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—CONVOCATIONS, SYNODS, AND DIOCESAN
CONFERENCES.

ALTHOUGH the Diocesan Conference occupies the last place in the title, as being the Consultative Assembly which has been latest called into existence, it is the one which must first engage our attention as that which elicits most popular interest, and which promises the most practical results. The age has for ever passed away in which the laity of the Church of England would patiently endure, that important questions touching their own temporal and spiritual interests should be decided in purely clerical gatherings, in which they themselves had no place, and in whose election they themselves had no part. How the remedy was to be applied and where to be found have been for some years past the most weighty of ecclesiastical problems which pressed for solution.

On the one hand, our Church laymen, as a body, heartily applauded the fairness of the appeal made by the late Archdeacon Sinclair, when, in 1852, addressing the clergy of the Archdeaconry of Middlesex, he said, "There is scarcely one of us who, could he take the place of a layman, would not feel misgivings rise within him when he found a purely clerical body called together to determine the doctrine he was to believe, the discipline he was to undergo, and the mode in which he was to worship God."¹ With equal depth of feeling they refused any such compromise as that which might be deduced from certain mediæval precedents, which would allow them at stated times to enter the Synod for the purpose of making complaints, but which would give them no true position in the formation of its decisions.

¹ "Collected charges of Archdeacon Sinclair," p. 212.

Happily for their interests other precedents survived. It was remembered that in the councils of Constance and Basle the spiritual rights of the laity were asserted and recovered, though but for a little while. It was not forgotten that in the debates of the latter council the speeches in favour of the long-suspended rights of the laity are its most precious monuments, and that in the treatise of Andreas, Bishop of Megara, which chronicles its doings, the arguments are ably sustained, which prove that as the Creed defines the Church to be "the Communion of Saints," the right of all Catholics, lay as well as cleric, to take part in a general council which represents the whole Church, *verè, vel interpretativè aut representativè* is involved—and that on the ground of the universal brotherhood of Christians, and the equal transfusion of the Holy Spirit through their earliest assemblies, the equality of the votes of the laity in Synod with those of the clergy may be maintained.¹

On the other hand, the lay members of our Church may well have thought that he had need to be a bold man who would seek to engraft a lay element on the old stock of our conciliar assemblies, whether convocational or diocesan. It must surely be with the fear of canonical wrath that some among them at the present time seek to promote a compromise on the lines of having a body of laymen associated with the convocations of the clergy as lay assessors. It is a question to be gravely considered whether such propositions do not render their exponents liable to the penalties which Canons 139, 140, 141 denounce against those who deprave our sacred synods, and affirm that they are not the true Church of England by representation! Let all such be hereby duly warned, for, if their language can constructively be interpreted to cover such depravation, they may be excommunicated, and not restored until they repent and revoke their wicked error! Apart, however, from all questions of terror, it is an opinion entertained by many of the laity, that the Archbishops and Bishops should have the power of calling into Provincial and Diocesan deliberative assembly their respective clergy where, in such questions as affect the clergy alone, the Bishops could ascertain their wishes and also make known their own views, provided that in no case decisions be arrived at affecting the body of the Church at large.

It has been amid such conflicting opinions and sentiments that a new kind of diocesan assembly has sprung into existence, which the Bishop of Bangor claims that his diocese in modern times has had the honour of inaugurating; and it is the distinction of this conference that whilst newer than mediævalism it is also older, inasmuch as its lines are based on those of the

¹ Vide "Historical Introduction to Sinclair's Charges," by Canon Jenkins, p. 44.

earliest Church assemblies. This new council, known as the Diocesan Conference, has been thus defined, "It consists of elected representatives of the clergy and elected representatives of the lay churchmen of the diocese with some ex-officio members of both orders; and meets annually under the presidency of the Bishop, to deliberate on such matters as, with his sanction, are laid before it."¹

The definition speaks of elected representatives, but the character of the representation varies greatly. In the diocese of Bangor where the clergy only number about 200, every one holding the Bishop's licence is summoned, whilst the laity are elected by a system of universal suffrage of all those in full communion in the Church of England—parishes under 1000 being entitled to one lay representative—over that number an additional representative for each additional 1000, but in no case to exceed six, and by this arrangement the lay members a little out-number the clergy. In the diocese of Chester the principle prevailed for some years of electing a third of the clergy and a third of the lay members by their respective orders, of the several ruri-decanal chapters and conferences. A change was introduced however in 1874, and has since prevailed, whereby, without any distinction between clergy and laity, all the members of the ruri-decanal chapters and conferences have the right to attend the central Diocesan Conference. The attendance has not, it may be observed, been greatly increased by this change of arrangement, but the sense of perfect fairness and of mutual confidence which everywhere exists in reference to its proceedings has been regarded as a sufficient justification of the change. In the Diocese of Norwich, where a Diocesan Conference was attempted some years ago on the collective principle of including all the clergy, the churchwardens and the lay representatives, the gathering was found to be too unwieldy to be worked, and latterly, when the conference has been revived, it has been on the elective principle.

The definition further makes no reference to anything beyond "deliberation." It may be well to add that in the Diocese of Chester, after a self-denying ordinance of seven years, whereby the proceedings were limited to bare discussion, a change was resolved upon whereby the results of such discussions are embodied in resolutions, upon which a vote is taken. By this change the tone of mutual forbearance and mutual respect has in no way been lowered, and the moral weight attached to the discussion on such a question as that of "Sunday Closing" is very greatly increased when, as in the Diocesan Conference at Chester, in October last, an amendment in favour of such entire

¹ *Church Quarterly Review*, Oct., 1879, p. 169.

Sunday Closing is proposed and all but unanimously carried. The Diocese of Chester does not stand alone in following up its deliberations by the practical test of the vote.

Where an experiment was so new and purely tentative as that of the first Diocesan Conference, it could not be otherwise than that experience must test and correct many of the original features. After an existence of seven years the Diocese of Chester framed for itself a working constitution based on information procured from twelve other Dioceses in which Conferences were held. The resolutions which follow are its code, and will be studied with profit by those who wish to know more of the internal organisation of a successful Diocesan Conference :—

1. That the Diocesan Conference meet annually at Chester, under the presidency of the Bishop, and that the time of meeting be determined, with the approval of the Bishop, from year to year, by a committee of management.

2. That all the beneficed and licensed clergy, and all the lay-members of the rural-decanal Conferences be members of the Diocesan Conference—and that a number of laymen not exceeding 24 be nominated by the committee of management and approved by the Bishop, such laymen to be communicants.

3. That the arrangements of the Conference be entrusted to the committee of management appointed year by year, consisting of the Dean, Chancellor, Archdeacons, one clergyman, and one layman, elected from each rural-deanery.

4. That the subjects for discussion be decided by the committee of management, subject to the approval of the Bishop. Subjects may be suggested either by deaneries or by individual members of the Rural-decanal or Diocesan Conferences. Notices of motion are to be sent to the secretary of committee at least 30 days before the meeting of Conference. The business proposed to be transacted at any meeting of the Conference is to be stated in a list of agenda, which shall be issued at least 20 days before such meeting, and no business except such as is of a merely routine character shall be transacted, and no discussion be permitted thereon, unless the same shall be duly notified in the list of agenda, or shall arise in the form of an amendment strictly relevant to a motion so notified and sanctioned by the Bishop. Any special business, the introduction of which shall receive the consent of the meeting, may, with the consent of the Bishop, be brought before the Conference if time permits. Provided always that nothing herein contained shall be taken to prohibit the Bishop himself from making, *proprio motu*, and at any time, any statement or motion, although no previous notice shall have been given thereof.

5. That the conduct of the business of the Conference and the selection of the speakers be vested in the chairman; that voting be by show of hands; and where not less than ten may claim it by orders; in which case tellers shall be appointed and the motion shall not be deemed to be carried unless approved by a majority of each order.

6. That one open session be held at each Conference if the com-

mittee of management so advise, and that special notice of motions to be brought forward at such session be sent to the secretary of committee 30 days before the meeting of the Conference, and be approved by the committee.

7. That it shall be competent to the Conference to appoint committees to consider and report upon any subject of special interest and importance.

8. That the treasurer shall receive 3s. from each church or congregation sending representatives to the Conference, and that such payment be a condition of being so represented.

Against Diocesan Conferences the objections have been frequently urged that they are shunned by the laity, and that they begin, continue, and end in desultory talk. Neither of these charges I proceed to show can be substantiated. The accusation that such Conferences are the creation of the sacerdotal party, undertaken to promote a government of priests, will not bear a moment's investigation, and is at once contradicted by those who remember the circumstances which called them forth, and the character of their constitution.

(a.) The accusation that *the laity have never really been consulted, and that they have never taken any interest in the movement*, can be best refuted by an appeal to facts. Turning to the Diocese of Chester first, we find that its Conference in 1871, when elected, consisted of a total of 465—viz., 258 lay and 207 clerical members. The actual attendance on the first day of that Conference comprised 209 out of the 258 laymen, and 154 out of the 207 clerics. On the second day the numbers were 177 of the 258 laymen, and 151 of the 207 clerics. In the year 1875, when the Conference was thrown open to all members of the ruri-decanal chapters and conferences, and the clergy were thus reinforced by the addition of all licensed curates, the attendance on the first day still showed 180 laymen to 257 clergymen. Turning to the Diocese of Carlisle, we find similar results. "After ten years' trial," says the Bishop, "I see no reason to believe that the interest in our annual Conference diminishes, or that there is any doubt as to its utility. I find that in the present year the numbers attending were 60 clergy and 55 laity. In the previous year the lay element slightly predominated, and the same in the year before. Upon the whole the equilibrium is fairly maintained between the clerical and the lay sides of the house." The Ripon Diocese has been one of the last to adopt the Diocesan Conference, but the feature which seems mainly to have impressed itself upon the minds of impartial onlookers during the Conference which was held in

¹ "A Pastoral Letter by Harvey Goodwin, Lord Bishop of Carlisle," p. 4, Christmas, 1879.

Leeds in October last, and whose proceedings were reported in full by the local papers, was the great attendance and keen interest of the laity. "Such a gathering of laymen of mark and of position in the area embraced by the Diocese could not (says the editor of the *Leeds Intelligencer* in a leading article) have been drawn together by any other cause than that of the Church, in whose welfare they feel an interest, apart from and above any political associations. To talk of the Church of England as the decrepit creature of the State in the face of a gathering so earnest, so truly representative, and combining such a variety of opinions, firmly held and freely recognised, is the very infatuation of self-deception."¹ The Conference called last into existence is that of the Isle of Man, so recently as January of the present year. The excellent Bishop, Dr. Rowley Hill, thus explains the circumstances under which it was originated:—

Experience has taught us, in the great religious movement of the present day, that there never can be any healthy development of Church life without the hearty co-operation of the clergy and laity. The wise counsel, the help, the experience, the sympathy of our religious laymen are now considered essential to the proper working of the system. It is the realization of this principle which has led to the institution of Diocesan Conferences. For many a long day the whole work of the Church was thrown upon the clergy. We have seen the error of our ways. We feel the importance of acting cordially together. The clergy seek the counsel, they ask for the opinion, they look for the help of the religious laity. They shrink from occupying an isolated position. Hence our Diocesan Conferences.²

If our readers will bear in mind such facts as these we have adduced, and which might be easily multiplied, they may ask with astonishment what justification there can be for such statements and counsels as those recently given in one of our religious papers, when, throwing ridicule and discredit on the attempt to organise a Diocesan Conference in London, it remarks: "In this way we get the materials of our Conference, over which the Bishop will preside in person, and which we doubt not will as obsequiously represent the episcopal views as did the Papal Counsels—*alias* the image of the Beast—the predominant theology of the Vatican. As for the laymen who are not 'churchy,' they, if wise in their generation, will have nothing to do with all this complicated machinery for the promotion of priestcraft. Only let them steadfastly refuse to countenance these gatherings, and they will soon collapse; for in reality they do not possess an atom of authority or a particle of stability. They are but the scaffolding without which sacerdotalism cannot

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, October 20, 1879.

² *London Guardian*, January 28, 1880.

rear its habitation, and they will fall into desuetude the moment the hateful building is complete." It may be hoped that no Evangelical Churchman will rashly accept statements so utterly baseless and so entirely mischievous. It may be confidently claimed that the movement has done more than all other movements combined to make the laity a living and directing force in the government of the Church, and to roll away the reproach brought against it by the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, when some years ago, at a Church Congress, amid sympathetic plaudits, he affirmed, "I look with dissatisfaction upon the imperfect share which is assigned to the laity in the administration of matters of common concern in the Church. The readiest means of preventing collisions between the two powers is to provide for such a representation of the lay members of the Church as may enable the whole Church body to act harmoniously together in effecting improvements in discipline and in the mode of the Church's action—for in order to accomplish her task she must make a far greater call than at present upon that great but imperfectly developed element of her strength, the Christian laity."¹

(b.) The objection that *Diocesan Conferences begin, continue, and end in talk*, can also be refuted by the very simplest statement of facts. If such a charge were literally true, it would not therefore follow that good had not been accomplished. Discussion contributes its share towards forming and moulding that public opinion which in our own day exercises so great an influence on legislation. Canon Ryle, in his little pamphlet on "Our Diocesan Conference,"² enumerates a list of thirty-five subjects on which he thinks there is a great deal to be said and a great deal to be learned, and concerning which he would be exceedingly glad to know what his clerical and lay brethren in Norfolk and Suffolk are thinking and doing. He admits, with his masculine common sense, that during a ministry of thirty-seven years he must have made some foolish experiments and had some humbling failures from want of knowledge of the right way to go to work. In such a Conference only those would command attention who were seen to know what they were talking about. In addition to the information elicited by discussion, he argues that much would be gained by the occasional appointment of small committees, who would undertake between the annual meetings to investigate special subjects, to collect and arrange information, and present the result of their inquiries in short reports, which, printed and circulated among the members, would be productive of good, as the experience of certain dioceses has already proved. Those

¹ "Bath Church Congress Official Report," p. 172, 173.

² "Our Diocesan Conference," 1879, p. 10.

who are persistently incredulous as to the practical character of Conferences might profitably be put on such a course of reading as would be involved in the study of the fifteen annual reports of the Ely Diocesan Conference!

As, however, no proof seems so valid as one that can be measured by the pounds, shillings, and pence standard, I may state that taking the Diocese of Chester as an instance of others, such practical tests can be successfully applied. One of the first fruits of the Chester Diocesan Conference was the formation of a fund for the augmentation of poor benefices. That fund has already received from the diocese a sum of 57,884*l.*, which amount has been doubled by grants from Queen Anne's Bounty and from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The work still progresses, and how urgently it was required, and how much has been accomplished will be seen when it is announced that there still remain in that diocese 107 benefices under 200*l.* a year. Again, as a direct result of the Diocesan Conference discussions, an association has been established entitled the Chester Diocesan Finance Association, which receives funds for the four so-called Diocesan Institutions. It is entirely due to this organisation that, notwithstanding the long spell of commercial depression, the funds devoted to the furtherance of Church Building, the maintenance of Training Colleges and Diocesan School Inspectors, the provision for Clergy Widows and Orphans, and the sustentation of Schools for the Children of the Clergy, manifest a steady increase producing during the past year an income of nearly 10,000*l.* This committee in closing their Report feel warranted in saying, "With the return of better times we may anticipate a large development of liberality and zeal not only sufficient to place our Institutions on a more satisfactory basis than in times past, but ample enough to meet any fresh want arising from the growth of population or the increasing action of the Church." The Chester Association is the first of the kind in the kingdom, but other dioceses are quickly following its example. How quickly and successfully a Diocesan Conference may contribute to mould public opinion, a most cheering instance has recently proved. After an interesting discussion in the Chester Conference on Sunday Closing, an amendment, as already stated, was all but unanimously carried in favour of entire closing of the public-houses on the Lord's Day. Three months later, a Parliamentary election is held in Liverpool, and for the first time, in the largest constituency ever polled, numbering over 60,000 voters, the two candidates went to the poll pledged for entire Sunday closing. A few days later, and on Monday, February 1st, the Town Council of the same place, by a majority of 29 votes to 1, decide that a petition in the name of the municipal council shall be forwarded

to the Houses of Parliament in favour of entire Sunday closing. When it is remembered that such conferences now exist in all but four of our English dioceses, and that such are the fruits they can be made to yield, no language can adequately convey the strength of the writer's conviction as to the immense importance of Evangelical Churchmen loyally supporting and intelligently working these institutions which have so rapidly taken root in the soil of our English Church.

If, however, additional evidence be required to strengthen faith in the utility of the Diocesan Conference, it may be well to look outside our own land, and to remember how in the American Church, for wellnigh a century, the convention has been the very foundation on which our sister Church has rested all her organisation—or rather the very root from which her branching system has grown. On the creation of a new diocese a Diocesan Council of clergy and laymen is fully formed, even before the appointment of a Bishop. Besides the annual Diocesan Convention, there is the General Convention every third year, which if the parishes be reckoned as the articulation, and the Diocesan Convention as the larger limbs, may be accounted to hold the place of the backbone in the American system of ecclesiastical framework. How marvellously this system has adapted itself to the growth of the great Republic has been told by the present Dean of Chester. He was privileged to be present at the General Convention, held at Baltimore in 1871, and whereas the last General Convention held at Baltimore in 1808, was attended only by two bishops, there met in 1871 fifty Bishops, together with theoretically 400, but practically 300, lay and clerical delegates elected four and four from each corresponding diocese. The same differences prevail in the sister Church as among ourselves; but the excellent spirit of moderation which was diffused throughout the assembly the Dean ascribes to the presence of the laymen, who with equal knowledge and experience spoke in the Convention on equal terms with the clergy.¹

Again, it would be well to study the constitution of our own colonial churches. The Diocesan Conference has had no more distinguished, no more hearty exponent, than the late Bishop of Melbourne, Dr. Perry, now Canon of Llandaff. A glowing testimony to the success of the experiment wrought out by Bishop Perry has been given by Sir W. Stawell, Chief Justice of Victoria:—

We met together in Conference under legislative enactment. The representatives elected were members of the Church of England and communicants; clergy and laity met together, and were presided over by the Bishop. They voted by orders, they passed their own enact-

¹ "Leeds Church Congress Official Report," p. 277.

ments, they framed their own resolutions, and the result has been that in a country in which there were only two clergymen, there are now about 170 incumbents, with churches fully in proportion to the number of clergymen. The most conservative persons in that assembly are the laity. Generally speaking, those who wish to support the power of the Bishop are the laity; those who think the Prayer-book, as it is constituted, cannot be improved upon, are the laity; and those who desire to cling to the old Church, without any alteration whatever, are the laity.

Again, it would be well to study the history of our sister Irish Church since her disestablishment. The fragments have been rendered compact and seaworthy, which otherwise as wreck had been strewed on every shore. To the General Convention, consisting of the Archbishop and Bishops, together with representative clergy and laymen, under God this success is due. On this point our readers may be referred to an interesting article by Archdeacon Whately, in *THE CHURCHMAN* of November last. The opinion set forth in that article, that the laity as a body are more Protestant in doctrine, more practical in business, and capable of stronger attachments by having responsibility imposed upon them, is one which will command general assent, and it is his belief that since the introduction of the laity into the Irish Convention, Plymouth Brethrenism has decreased, whilst in the power expeditiously to put down practices which savour of Romanism, and in the appointment of a committee for the distribution of patronage, the Irish Church has largely gained.

The system which works so well in the American Church—in the Colonial Churches, in the Irish Church, and which has been found so efficacious in the Established Church of Scotland, as well as in the dioceses of our own Church wherever it has been fairly tried, is no longer an experiment. No party in the Church has the credit of its inception, and no Bishop, whatever his school of thought, who has held his Diocesan Conference would be willing to be without one. If the present Bishop of Winchester and the present Dean of Lichfield be classed as High Churchmen they may be claimed as enthusiasts in favour of the Conference. The former has said:—

A diocesan synod was the very embodiment of episcopal autocracy. . . . For these reasons I prefer Conferences of the character of this assembly—Conferences of free thinkers, of free speakers, and of free voters. The clergy require the assistance of the laity; and if the laity are asked to give their work, the clergy must expect that they will desire to give their opinions as well, for it cannot be expected that they will act merely as the followers or bond-slaves of the clergy. Many of the laity, too, are as zealous for the faith as any clergyman

¹ " Bath Church Congress Official Report," p. 278.

can be; so that probably the best form of a council now is one which consists of Bishop, clergy, and laity.

The opinion of the Dean will be found on page 158 of THE CHURCHMAN.

The Bishop of Ripon and the Dean of Carlisle will be ranked as evangelical churchmen. Both of them have looked with some suspicion on the diocesan movement, but though among the latest adherents none, as it will be seen, can be more ardent in their support of the Diocesan Conference. The Bishop of Ripon, at his recent Conference in October last, having explained the reluctance with which he was prevailed upon to move by the pressure exerted upon him by the body of the Church itself, gave in his hearty adhesion to the principle as one which must henceforward be recognised as an indispensable condition of healthy Church life, and then added, "the experience of two years has swept to the winds any lingering doubts that might have existed in my own mind." With the opinion expressed by the venerable Dean of Carlisle at the last Conference in that city, I will bring this article to a close:—

This Conference is just the thing we want—that is, a fair representation of clergy and laity in the council of the Church. Bishops are not the Church, the clergy are not the Church, the laity are not the Church; but the Bishops, priests, and deacons acting in wise accordance with the people, constitute the Church of England. The times in which we live are just adapted for such a Church, and we ought to be thankful if to this ancient structure and machinery, many parts of which have become rusty and useless, we can apply new springs of power and wisdom, which may make it a grand source of reformation, if it be needed, to the Church of England.¹

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ART. II.—CHAUCER AND WYCLIFFE.

1. H. SIMON, of Schmalkalden. *Chaucer a Wycliffite*. Chaucer Society's Essays, Pt. III.
2. REINHOLD PAULI. *Bilder aus Alt-England*. Gotha. 2^{te} Aufl. 1876.
3. G. V. LECHLER. *Johann von Wiclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*. Leipzig. 1873.

RELIGIOUS reformations have invariably been preceded and attended by times of intellectual excitement and activity, prolific in men who, by voice or pen, have loudly inveighed

¹ *The Guardian*, Oct. 8, 1879.