

VI.—MR. BICKERSTETH'S "THOUGHTS FOR TO-DAY.
NO. 1."

Evangelical Churchmanship and Evangelical Eclecticism. By the Rev. E. H. BICKERSTETH, M.A., Vicar of Christ Church, Hampstead, and Rural Dean. Sampson Low. 1883.

WHATEVER else may be said about Mr. Bickersteth's pamphlet, just published, this at least will be admitted, among devout and thoughtful Church-folk, on every side: its tone is excellent, while its statements and its suggestions are worthy of most serious consideration. On such a subject no man probably has a better right to speak; and certainly no man could refer to facts and plead in argument with gentler lovingness and zeal.

I. Mr. Bickersteth refers to facts. Is Evangelical Churchmanship changing its front? "If by this," he writes, "it is meant to ask, Are Evangelical Churchmen willing to surrender one foothold of that great platform of Catholic and Protestant truth which we have received from our fathers? I for one am confident that thousands of the clergy of our Church and ten times ten thousands of the laity would answer, God forbid! But if it is meant, Are Evangelical Churchmen in non-essential matters of ritual—ritual which symbolized no false doctrine—willing to use for the furtherance of the Gospel the prevalent aesthetic tastes of the age? Facts answer, Yes."

"Let facts speak," says Mr. Bickersteth; and accordingly he quotes the well-known *Guide to the Churches of London and its Suburbs*, as to the surplice in the pulpit and surpliced choirs. The statistics are striking. The surplice in the pulpit is now used in some 700 churches; and surpliced choirs last year were found in 476 churches out of 907. "Twelve years ago," he proceeds, "according to the same *Guide*, the Holy Communion was administered weekly in 169 out of 651 churches; last year, in 488 out of 907. And during the same period the primitive and apostolic custom of celebrating the Lord's Supper in the evening has advanced from 97 to 285 churches." Again, numbers alone are not to be weighed. "The surplice in the pulpit, surpliced choirs, and weekly Communion are now to be found in a great number of congregations which are shepherded by our most trusted Evangelical leaders, men whose fidelity to Protestant truth is as staunch and undeniable as theirs who still adhere to the black gown, the choir of school-children, and the monthly Communion."

These facts in the churches of London and its environs, says Mr. Bickersteth, "are very significant. Probably the proportions would not widely vary in the provinces;" but "the

verdict in favour of musical services," he rightly remarks, "would be even more pronounced in the northern than in the metropolitan dioceses."

Now, do these facts, while signifying a growth of Church taste, and a desire for "bright and dignified services,"¹ signify in themselves any change of doctrine? The esteemed author says, No. He quotes "the weighty words of the late Archbishop of Canterbury." The Archbishop says:—

It is a mistake, as I believe, to ascribe, directly or indirectly, to the influence of the Oxford movement, the marked change which has, with the general approval of the clergy and laity, taken place during these very years in the arrangements and architecture of our churches, and in the conduct of divine worship. The change is to be observed beyond the limits of the Church of England. It is not less evident amongst the Presbyterians of Scotland; and even the most rigid of English Dissenters have thrown themselves into the æstheticism of the day.

Upon this point, Mr. Bickersteth also quotes an article in the *Record*.² That paper says:—

There is a tendency to oppose every change which comes, or appears to come, from the High Church party. Here we seem to notice a lack of discrimination. We principally refer to matters of detail connected with the fittings and furniture of churches, and the conduct of public worship. Now we have already commented on the large support which the popular taste of the hour has given to the outward development of the [Oxford] movement. Much wisdom has been shown by the leaders in this respect. Not only is it a great assistance to have fashion on your side; but in such matters it is almost hopeless to fight against it. And why should we?

Nevertheless, the policy of concession, in any congregation, may easily be carried too far. Every "innovation" should be tested: and in a day of ceremonialism it is well the testing should be strict. Is the change in accordance with Church rule? Does it directly or by obvious symbolism foster false teaching? Does it tend to support an unevangelical ecclesiasticism?

II. We have passed from statements to suggestions.

Mr. Bickersteth touches upon such subjects as decorations,

¹ "To try to check Ritualism by discouraging a bright and dignified service is the wisdom of a mother, who, to prevent her boy from being a sailor, never lets him go near the sea."—*Bishop of Rochester's Pastoral*, 1878, p. 52.

² We gladly quote Mr. Bickersteth's words, in regard to the improvement in the *Record*, a change which more than once has been noted in *THE CHURCHMAN*:—"Let me add the counsel lately given by the *Record*, a Church paper which has shown such a marvellous growth of vitality and power and breadth of thought during the last two years, and bids fair to become increasingly an organ of light and leading in the anxious days before us."

surpliced choirs, daily services, Holy Days, Retreats or clerical "quiet days," the amount and character of the music which it is wise to introduce into our services. Against a policy of concession where doctrine is concerned, he speaks with firmness. For instance, he says: "If ritual, commended by the fleeting fashion of our times, in anywise whatever symbolizes strange and Romanizing doctrine; if it tends to signify the local presence of our ascended Lord in the sacramental bread and wine; or if it would, in the eyes of the people, transform the ambassador of the everlasting Gospel into a sacrificing priest, we must give place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel may continue amongst us unpolluted, undegraded, unimpaired." Elsewhere, in a similar vein, he speaks strongly of faithfulness. "The great Evangelical principles," he says, "must be held inviolate." Nothing could well be clearer than his sketch of these principles; and his language concerning the tenacity of grasp should satisfy every inquirer that his "change of front" is in no wise doctrinal. Strongly Protestant he is as ever. Nevertheless, as to musical services, Church adornment, etc., he recommends—as is natural in a man of his poetic gifts—that "Evangelical" Churchfolk should "go with the times." Let us gladly, not grudgingly, he says, employ "the cultivated tastes of the present day in the worship and service of our God."

One ingredient in his counsel, we think, is a specially suitable "thought for to-day," and we therefore quote it:—

Surely our wisdom in these days is to take our stand on the impregnable rock of pure Scriptural doctrine, and in any matters of ritual or practice, which do not countenance error, to leave the decision to our brethren, *without holding them more or less Evangelical* because their usage may not in all points coincide with our own. If we suspect or speak hesitatingly of others on account of such external matters, the mischief may be done before we are aware. Suspicion repels. Confidence wins. I fear we have lost many young men, both lay and clerical, and more young women still from our Evangelical ranks, because some of us have set ourselves against certain tastes of the age, although these tastes are free from doctrinal error, instead of using them to the utmost in our Master's service.¹

¹ In his able address at the Islington Meeting, Mr. Goe said:—"I submit these remarks in the interests of Evangelical Churchmanship, which we all desire to see vigorous, united, and growing. In view of the errors and difficulties of the present time, I wish to see its basis as comprehensive as we can make it, consistently with the special functions which God in His providence has assigned to us. Let us strive to attract the undecided by showing them that we can enter into their difficulties, rather than to repel them by an unsympathetic exclusiveness. If we protest against harmless diversities in ceremonial with as much vehemence as we protest against false doctrine, we shall weaken our own cause, drive away many whose sympathies are on the side of Evangelical truth, and incur the merited reproach of being unable to distinguish between things that differ."

Concerning some of Mr. Bickersteth's suggestions, of course, different opinions will be held. The correspondence columns of the *Record* bear witness to this diversity, especially as regards ritual; matters of Church order and discipline stand on a different footing. About the observance of rubrics, in cases where the Bishop has given directions, there can hardly be two opinions among loyal, law-abiding Churchmen. Obedience has happily been, and is, a note of the Evangelical School. Again, when congregations desire their minister to make a change, provided the thing itself be according to the general spirit of the Word of God, and be likely to foster devotion in the temper of the Prayer Book, surely it may be chosen as good. One guiding principle, however, must be borne in mind. In the majority of our rural parishes, circumstances differ widely from those of ordinary town churches. In regard, therefore, to Holy Days, to take one point, the question for an incumbent seems to be, Can a congregation be had? In parishes of which the population is at all considerable, no doubt, whether rural or urban, a service in the evening can hardly fail to be well attended, if only the value of prayerfulness and of common prayer, according to the traditions of the Evangelical School, be duly proclaimed in the pulpit and taught by a diligent pastor. Of the usefulness of "prayer-meetings," in the parish schoolroom, or in some Bible-class room contiguous to the church, or in private houses, we have a very high sense; but all such gatherings, as a rule, we believe, where there is a sound "Church" tone, will increase rather than diminish, week-day attendances in the sanctuary. Of services conducted in a meagre, parsimonious way, Mr. Bickersteth's criticisms are just. "The pure and incorruptible Gospel," he says, "will not sound the less sweetly because the house of God in every part of it, within or without, bears witness to the loving earnest care with which we regard all things connected with His service and worship."²

As to the tendency of Mr. Bickersteth's suggestions, regarded as a whole, and taken together with the corollaries which his pamphlet is sure to bring out, a second edition, no doubt,

¹ Mr. Bickersteth does not ignore the question of *cost*. He says:— "While admitting the urgency of the command, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,' some have been so absorbed with providing for the expenses of an extravagant ritual . . . that their efforts in the missionary cause would make apostles blush."

² In his recent Diocesan Address, we observe, the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol remarks, that "in many of our churches" the "plainest and most obvious requirements" of the Prayer Book are ignored, and "its rules slothfully disregarded." If any of the "churches," to whom his lordship's remarks apply, have *Evangelical* Incumbents, we can only express our great regret that so it should be.

will soon give us an opportunity to express an opinion. Here and there occurs a remark which will probably be perverted. For instance, on page 33¹ our honoured friend says, "the bread and wine we present are not consecrated:" the Prayer Book word, however, is not *present* but *place*. It is important to bear in mind, as we have more than once observed of late, the Rubric says of the alms, "*humbly present and place*," but of the elements, simply "*place*." About the word "*then*" [when there is a Communion the Priest shall then place], compared with the same word in the Baptism Rubric [the font "is then to be filled"], something might be said, with justice, in refusing to make a change; but, for ourselves, we do not forget the Liddell judgment.

Other points in this interesting pamphlet invite attention. But we desire to recommend the "*Thoughts for To-day*," and we hope it will be widely read. The subject is one of immediate importance.

Reviews.

The Official Report of the Church Congress, 1882. Bemrose & Sons.

THE Church Congress at Derby has been admitted on all hands to have been a great success. In many ways, no doubt, it thoroughly deserves this meed of praise. The arrangements gave universal satisfaction; there was not a single breakdown or failure or hitch in the management. From the first the Bishop of the Diocese took the liveliest interest in it, watched over all the work of the committees, and at last presided in such a way as to win golden opinions from all who were present. There was an elevated tone of thought maintained throughout the majority of the meetings. Never, we believe, has the attendance been so well sustained all through the week, and the attention so continuous. The financial results also were satisfactory. Though the price of tickets was lower than on many occasions, and no expense was spared to secure the comfort

¹ Mr. Bickersteth here quotes from the Bishop of London's Primary Charge, 1871. His lordship said:—"May not a clergyman . . . when rebuked for the introduction of some unauthorized ceremony, feel some natural indignation when he observes his neighbour continually violating the Rubric which provides that 'when there is a Communion, the Priest shall *then* (*i.e.* after presenting the Alms, and before saying the prayer for the Church Militant) place upon the Table so much bread and wine as he shall think sufficient'? This Rubric is perfectly plain and undoubtedly binding. If it had at one time fallen into desuetude, its vigour has been revived in a decision of the Final Court of Appeal. It is practically without difficulty under almost any conceivable circumstances. It has about it no taint of superstition."