THE CHURCHMAN

February, 1911.

The Month.

Islington.

THE Islington Meeting of 1911 was larger than any of its predecessors in point of numbers; it was a real witness to the vigorous life of the Evangelical school of thought; it was a gathering of which any Church might be proud, marked by enthusiasm and earnestness of a high order. The subjects had been selected with courage and with real appreciation of the difficulties of to-day. They were subjects concerning which absolute agreement in detail could neither be expected nor desired. Real unity will only be secured if liberty of thought be granted in matters non-essential. We hope and believe that this is being more and more fully realized by the Evangelical school of to-day. Only as it is realized shall be given the strength that unity imparts.

The Opening Speech.

In his opening speech—and it was a speech of real statesmanship—the Vicar of Islington postulated caution as well as courage in the investigation of Scripture. He emphasized the fact that he who is false to fact cannot be loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. He welcomed reverent and honest criticism; he acknowledged that modern criticism had done much for vital religion in our midst; at the same time he uttered a most useful warning against the acceptance of theories of scholars who later on may easily be found to have gone too fast and too far. We gladly associate ourselves

with his words. We have nothing to fear from honest criticism. We welcome—nay, we insist that we must have—freedom of thought, so long as real loyalty to Article VI. be conserved. It would be an ill day for Evangelical Churchmanship if, ostrich-like, we refused to discuss or consider the questions that are perpetually arising concerning the history and origin of Scripture. It is good that the Chairman of the Islington Meeting should welcome to its programme the discussion of critical questions, and that he himself should in his opening words dare to speak words of real loyalty to Scripture and of unflinching courage in face of the perplexing difficulties of to-day.

The Old Testament.

The first two papers at the Conference were devoted to matters of Old Testament and New Testament Criticism. It is unnecessary for us to give a detailed account of their contents, as a verbatim reprint is issued by the *Record*. That on Old Testament Criticism, by Mr. Pilter, aimed at showing that "the 'Higher Criticism' of the Old Testament is unsound in reason and untrue in fact." On this understanding he claimed that "the attitude of the Evangelical Churchman is reassured." We must remind him that an increasing number of Evangelical Churchmen find their faith established and reinvigorated by the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament, and that to the Evangelical who adopts the critical point of view on the Old Testament Scriptures "it remains" (to use Mr. Pilter's own words) "true—faithfully and eternally true—that 'all Scripture was given by inspiration of God,' and that it 'came not in old time by the will of man; but men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.'"

The New Testament.

Professor Knowling is an ever-welcome visitor to Islington. He dealt with recent phases of New Testament Criticism in the method we have learned to expect from him—a method marked by exhaustive research and felicitous eloquence. Perhaps the most striking points in

a paper that was charged with interest from start to finish were his allusions to the bearing on New Testament Criticism of the present-day study of comparative religion, with especial reference to Buddhism and Mithraism. He uttered wise and timely criticisms on the present tendency to emphasize exclusively the eschatological element in our Lord's teaching, and the practical exclusion of all others. We are especially grateful, too, for his *caveat* "against the present and somewhat fashionable method of isolating one or more of the Gospels, and dealing with it as if it was the sole reliable authority for our Lord's life."

The Ordinal.

The Dean of Canterbury dealt with the difficult problem of the question in the service for the Ordination of Deacons: "Dost thou unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?" He emphatically and cogently deprecated any change. He found ground for doing so in Mr. Pilter's and Dr. Knowling's papers. At a time when we are faced with an increasingly aggressive attack at the hands of rationalistic criticism, it is of prime importance that no change be made which is calculated either to alter our final standard of belief and practice or to depreciate the standard that we possess. But there is another side to the question. What does "unfeignedly believe" mean? Does it mean adhesion to the old theory of verbal inspiration, and the closing of the door to all criticism, however reverent and honest? The question is difficult to answer. The phrase is ambiguous, and we have no business to ask candidates for Holy Orders ambiguous questions. Without, therefore, committing ourselves to the particular change that is now proposed, we do feel that there must be some method by which the ambiguity of the present question can be removed, by which the position of Holy Scripture may be safeguarded, and by which the sober and devout critic may not be made to feel that his only pathway to ordination lies through the doubtful interpretation of a particular question in the Ordination Service.

Communion and Co-operation.

The question of Communion and Co-operation with Protestant Churches was discussed by Canon Hay Aitken. His information about the possibility of reunion with the Protestant Church of Sweden was most interesting, and his clear recognition of the difficulties that at present seem to hinder our closer co-operation with the Nonconformist Churches of our own country was timely and necessary. But the presence of difficulty is no matter for despair; it is only an incentive to more earnest prayer and more strenuous effort for the realization of our Lord's ideal of unity. The paper of Archdeacon Sinclair on our relation to non-Protestant Churches was packed with historical matter presented in most illuminating and attractive form. It will be well worth keeping as a storehouse of fact for purposes of reference.

Divorce.

One of the best of the day's papers was that by the Rev. J. E. Watts-Ditchfield, who recently gave valuable evidence before the Royal Commission on Divorce. Mr. Watts-Ditchfield spoke with no uncertain sound, but he refused to base his contentions upon a depreciation of the authority and independence of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We have had occasion in these columns to point out the danger of this depreciation, and we are glad that Mr. Watts-Ditchfield so clearly recognized it. As to divorce itself, it was refreshing to hear the Vicar of an East End parish, a true friend of the poor, one who really knows them, repudiating in the name of the poor any desire for either new grounds or new facilities for divorce. It was good to hear him say, with the evident approval of the huge meeting, that the Church can have nothing to do with the marriage of divorced persons (with the possible exception of the innocent person), for whatever cause divorced. We entirely agree; the Evangelical school stands for purity of national life, of home life, as well as of Church life, and any degradation of Holy Matrimony would be a step backward, tending to do irretrievable harm to spiritual religion.

Reunion.

We took occasion last month to declare, in some detail, our position on Prayer-Book Revision in general, and on the question of the Eucharistic Vestments in particular. This month we propose to say a word on the subject of Reunion. It is a topic which we shall strive to keep continually before the attention of our readers, not only on grounds of personal interest in the matter, but as fulfilling a most urgent and sacred obligation. The time has gone by for contented acquiescence in the present state of things. A divided Christendom is a contradiction in terms. The success of missionary work hampered by our "unhappy divisions" is some index of the result that *might* be achieved if a united Christendom were to approach the task of evangelizing the world. We have had sound advice as to procedure. We must not minimize our differences; we must try to understand them. To understand them we must discuss them, in a spirit of Christian brotherhood, with those from whom we differ. Only so can we ever hope to resolve the difficulties in a satisfactory way. The subject of Reunion, then, is not one to be dropped or lightly laid aside. It must have our unremitting attention and our constant prayers.

The Subject under Discussion.

It may be that many of the difficulties involved in our points of difference ought not to exist at all. But they do exist, and our wisest course at present is to realize how vital they are. We have recently come across a most interesting presentment of this, and we commend to our readers a careful study of it. Dr. Palmer, the Bishop of Bombay, has recently issued, under the title "Reunion in Western India," a series of papers and articles, partly by himself, partly by others. It is really a *symposium* on the subject of Reunion, for the Bishop has included not only the expression of his own view, but Free Church criticism of a most candid kind upon the view, reserving, quite properly, the last word for himself. There is also a narrative of the Jubbulpore Conference—an attempt to federate Christian bodies on an undenominationalist

basis—followed by the comments both of Dr. Palmer and of the C.M.S. Western India Conference. Following on this there is an account of the American Marathi Mission, showing very clearly the perils of Congregationalism. Finally, there is an Epilogue by the Bishop. This most fascinating description of discussion actually at work can be obtained in England from Messrs. Blackwell, Broad Street, Oxford.

The Bishop's Position.

The discussion is opened by a paper read by Dr. Palmer at a Missionary Conference. The key-note of this paper is that disunion is wholly to be regretted—is, in fact, to be lamented as a sin. He quotes the sad remark that it is only foreign missionaries who keep Indian Christians from unity. He goes on to emphasize the ideal of unity: "The Church must be one, not by the loss of any vital and vitalizing peculiarity of any of the now separate bodies of Christians, but by its preservation, its development, its availability for the whole body." Again, he says: "A part of my ideal for the Church that is to be is the federal unity of groups of Christians having a relative independence, and each charged with the function of bearing witness to exemplifying and developing some vital truth." Then follows a discussion of the ministry, in the course of which Dr. Palmer says: "On the historical side, the monarchical episcopacy seems to me to have been evolved out of a committee government of Presbyter-Bishops; and I do not think we can say that the Apostles either did or did not suggest or establish this evolution." The address, which is throughout exceedingly valuable, concludes with the earnest wish that the discussion may be entered on by all in a spirit of real humility.

Free Church Criticism.

Some comments follow from the pen of the Rev. F. E. Corley, Editor of the *Madras Christian College Magazine*. These represent a point of view differing widely from that of the Bishop. Disunion is not viewed with dismay and remorse, but with approbation. Dr.

Palmer's whole position on the subject of ministerial succession, as well as his view on the relation of a prophetic ministry to a ministry of ordered succession, is frankly repudiated. His argument, it is maintained, if logically carried out, can only lead to the Papacy. "In his anxiety," says the writer, "to forestall the plea for the Papacy, Dr. Palmer falls back on true Christian principles; but they are the principles which govern the life of the Free Churches in England, whose valid ministry Dr. Palmer has yet to admit." The Bishop's view is charged with betraying an inadequate conception of the possibilities of the Church, and the school of thought which he represents "concedes an undue preponderance to the external in estimating the unity and continuity of the Church, and is too little alive to the significance of the unity of the faith." The debate, as the Bishop in his comments shows, brings out the fact that "between crude Congregationalism and crude Catholicism no reunion is possible." Each has much to learn before there is any chance of coming together.

An Undenominational Suggestion.

We have no space to indicate in detail the interesting programme of the Jubbulpore Conference. It represents an attempt on the part of seven Christian bodies, ranging from the Presbyterians to the Friends, to enter into a federal alliance for Christian work, on the basis of "belief in God through Jesus Christ," and the recognition of "the validity of each other's ordinances, ministry, membership, and discipline, without thereby committing themselves to the approval of particular methods or practices." There are other points, too, but these are the main principles of the federation. This, in effect, means to meet on a basis of undenominationalism. Dr. Palmer's comments on this attempt are trenchant and suggestive. The C.M.S. Western India Conference of October, 1909, virtually takes its stand with the Bishop. It expresses the "warmest sympathy with the general aim and desire with which the Conference at Jubbulpore was held," but "feels that a union which is only effected by dis-

regarding differences for the sake of apparent unity cannot lead to a strong and vigorous presentation to the world of 'the faith as it is in Jesus.'"

The Bishop's Appeal.

Dr. Palmer in his Epilogue makes an earnest appeal to scholars in the homeland—both to historians and to philosophic theologians—to reinvestigate the great questions which lie at the root of these discussions from the very beginnings. "Reunion," he declares, "will probably come from the Mission-field." But missionaries are too busy and too far from books to conduct the necessary researches. The Church at home must take an active part and do its share. "The real gulf," he says, "across which it is difficult to build a bridge of reunion is that which seems fixed between the theory of ministry as validated by Congregational delegation and as validated by Apostolical Succession. . . . We ask the historian what it was that the Church all along, or at different periods, thought to validate orders. We must also call in the philosophic theologian, and ask him whether these conceptions of the validity of orders are reasonable and consonant with Scripture and with the spirit of Christianity." A plea such as this cannot be disregarded. It is laid on all who have the scholarship, leisure, and ability to do their part in attempting to solve this great and complicated problem, with the prayer that God may use their efforts in the restoring of the unity of the Body of Christ.

A New Feature.

Not infrequently it happens that an article in our pages raises questions of considerable importance. Occasionally it would be an advantage if another side of a question could be put. We propose, therefore, to follow the example of our contemporary, the *Hibbert Journal*, and to set aside a page or two each month in which we invite our readers to express their opinions. Of course, we must reserve to ourselves the right to reject or to print, and we must ask that communications shall be as short as possible.