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THE CHURCHMAN

August, 1913.

The Month.

**A Problem
for Methodists.** OUR brethren of the Wesleyan Methodist Church are passing through a season of dissension and acute controversy. The point at issue is the suitability or otherwise of the Rev. George Jackson for the post of Theological Tutor at Didsbury College, and the trouble has arisen from certain "higher critical" views to which he has given expression in his recently delivered Fernley Lecture. To take any part in the discussion either as critics or as partisans would be for us an impertinence. The Methodist Church must settle the difficulty for itself, and we can only pray that it may be guided to a wise and sound decision in the matter. The controversy, however, has called forth expressions of opinion not only from the rank and file of Methodism, but from some of its eminent and well-known leaders, and our present reference to the matter is made with the aim of calling attention to some wise words of counsel offered by Professor John Shaw Banks. He is a veteran scholar, whose fame has long extended far beyond the limits of his own communion, and the fact that his own sympathies are probably on the conservative side may give added weight to his attitude of kindly toleration. Churchmen who are faced with similar problems may listen with profit to his words.

**The "Higher
Criticism."** "Most of us," says Dr. Banks, "will agree that within a due limit latitude must be allowed on questions chiefly affecting the letter and form of Scripture, and the due limit can be no other than fidelity to

the essential truths of salvation. . . . Latitude within such a limit is allowed and acted on, tacitly or avowedly, in all other Churches. To advocate any other course is greatly to narrow our outlook and to sacrifice our influence for good among intelligent inquiring youth. . . .

“How unwilling we all are to give up old opinions, even on secondary questions of religion, we all know. There are few, indeed, who have not had to do this. We forget that inquiry is not closed. The trial of spirits is not over. The last word is not spoken, though the last speaker often thinks so. German experts who may be named as occupying this intermediate position are numerous—Kittel, Koenig, Oettli, Orelli, Sellin, Seeberg, Loofs, Haering, Ihmels, Feine, Schlatter. English-speaking scholars of the same class will occur to everyone. These writers are proof-positive of the tendency to rest at or return on questions of Biblical criticism to old positions. Can we not be satisfied with believing that such subjects may be left to the play of free discussion, and that truth will, in the end, assert itself without the exercise of authority?”

Dr. Banks' concluding words deserve to be
 A Plea for
 Toleration. carefully weighed :

“We shall do well silently to accept trials of faith in revelation as in the experience of life. We may prefer sight, but we live by faith. In the last resort, our confidence rests less on intellectual than on experimental certainty. Scripture grips us in the depth of our being as no other literature does. We have verified its truth too often in great moments of our personal life, and especially in the fight against evil, to listen to doubts coming from without.

“With all respect let me submit that in these days, when religion does not always gain a ready hearing, when general intelligence is growing fast, when our chief hope rests on our ability to win youthful eagerness and enthusiasm to our side, that it would be a serious mistake to run the risk of division and strife on questions which, however important, are scarcely

supreme. On such questions I would rather rely on time and truth, and even run some risk on the side of generous, brotherly tolerance. Indiscretion is not a capital crime."

Kneeling at the Epistle. Evangelical Churchmen have now for some time been giving expression to views on the subject of appropriate and suitable ritual. In this connection there is one particular point of detail on which it is well to have clear views and a correspondingly consistent practice. The custom is becoming very common in churches which would hardly be classed as "extreme" of kneeling during the reading of the Epistle in the service of Holy Communion. This is probably due to a general instinct of reverence—a feeling that each part of so sacred a service should be gone through kneeling. It should be borne in mind, however, that this custom of kneeling at the Epistle is not primitive, but is a medieval innovation. Amalarius wrote in the ninth century that while the Lesson or Epistle is being read "we are accustomed to sit *after the manner of the ancients.*" Obviously the sitting position is a natural one for the congregation during the reading of Scripture or the preaching of sermons. But from very ancient times an exception to this general rule was made at the reading of the Gospel in the Office of Holy Communion. In the Gospel the acts or words of our Lord Himself are brought before us, and it was felt that the standing posture was most expressive of reverential hearing.

Reasons Against it. The custom, then, of standing at the Gospel is not only of high antiquity and practically universal usage, but it is specifically enjoined in our own rubric. Now, no claim of this kind can be advanced for kneeling at the reading of the Epistle. It began in the Middle Ages, when the people did not know what was being read until they witnessed the ritual that immediately preceded the Gospel. It continues to this day in the Roman communion under similar conditions. When in our own Church provision was made for

the services in English, there was also a general revival of the ancient and primitive custom of sitting to hear the Epistle read. This continued as the general Anglican practice until the Roman habit of kneeling was introduced in a few churches, and has now obtained a very considerable prevalence. Probably many people do it now, without the least idea that they are conforming to a Roman custom. But it cannot be said that the practice has really any claim on our observance. The practice of sitting at the reading of the Epistle should be maintained not only as being more reasonable in itself, but as being in closer conformity with primitive antiquity as well as with the usage of the Reformed Church of England.

Another
Ritual Point. Another common custom is worthy of consideration, especially as it is more significant, and therefore more important, than the practice of kneeling at the Epistle. It is the custom of bowing to the Holy Table. There are varieties of practice : sometimes it is done once only, as the church is entered ; sometimes it is done on every occasion that the chancel is crossed ; sometimes additional reverences are made before and after the act of reception at Holy Communion ; sometimes the bowing becomes genuflexion or even prostration. The practice is intended to make for reverence, and we do not want for one moment to set ourselves against a practice which in an irreverent age helps us to be reverent. At the same time we are Catholic Churchmen, with a real reverence for that which is primitive, a real desire for purity of doctrine, and a real loyalty to the Church of England as reformed in the sixteenth century. We are also anxious that our ritual observances shall not be doctrinally misleading. What is to be our attitude to this growing practice ? First, we must examine the facts.

Bowing at
the Name of
Jesus. A slightly mistaken, but entirely harmless, exegesis of Philippians ii. 10 brought into existence in quite primitive times the custom of bowing at the Name of Jesus. The custom is a beautiful one, but, like many such

customs, unless care is taken may become slipshod and irreverent. The Canon of 1604 makes the custom a universal one throughout Divine service, ordaining : " When in time of Divine service the Lord Jesus shall be mentioned, due and lowly reverence shall be done by all persons present, as it hath been accustomed." Whether the Canon was intended to cover the singing of hymns, in many of which the frequent repetition of our Lord's Name makes the custom difficult, is open to dispute. But the custom itself is primitive ; and although the authority of the Canon over the laity is not unquestioned, we do well to maintain a custom which enshrines so beautiful an ideal. Let the practice of it be as reverent as the ideal behind it should make it.

This is an entirely different custom, and in our judgment very difficult of defence. It is defended on two grounds : because it is canonical, and because it is a very natural and necessary act of reverence. Let us take the latter ground first. We are told that we bow to the throne in the House of Lords, and that we salute the quarter-deck of a battleship. Precisely so. We do the one because it is the place where our earthly King sits ; we do the other because it is the place from which the supreme authority of the ship is exercised. But the Holy Table of the Lord is not his altar-throne. That is just the point at which we differ from all that doctrine of Holy Communion which culminates in Transubstantiation itself. An act of reverence directed to the Table tends to a materialistic notion of Holy Communion, which draws perilously near to the overthrowing of the nature of the Sacrament. We do not wish to impute motives or to be uncharitable. In many cases those who use the custom do not at all intend it to be directed to the Table. In many cases, however, the method of the act is such as to exclude any other intention. For us it is sufficient at this moment to say that Holy Communion is not a re-enactment of Calvary, but of the scene in the upper room the night before He suffered. It is a feast in which He, as Giver of the feast and Consecrator of the elements,

" Bowing
towards the
Altar."

assures to us by faith and Sacrament the blessings which flow from His death for us. There is no altar, there is no altar-throne, and we can, therefore, make no reverence to it such as men make to the King's throne or the quarter-deck. We could bow in the presence of that upper room, we could bow to the counterpart of it in our own day, but we should want to bow to more besides, to mark our reverence for the places where the other Sacrament of the Gospel is administered and the Word is read and preached. But we cannot bow if by our bowing we are yielding to superstition or fostering a doctrine that is misleading and false.

But it is urged that the practice is binding upon us on the ground of the Canon. The Canon referred to is the Seventh Canon of 1640. It is quite unnecessary to remind our readers that there is all the difference in the world between the Canons of 1604 and those of 1640. The authority of the former upon the laity is, as we have said, questioned, and some of the Canons, at least, have lost their validity owing to disuse and change of habit. But concerning those of 1640, there is no question. They were unauthorized, and are binding upon no one. Even if the Canon with which we are concerned said that we were to bow to the "altar-throne" every time we crossed the chancel, it would have no compelling voice for us. It is almost an insult to our readers to mention so well-known a fact. We have risked the insult because we believe that too many English Churchmen have allowed themselves to imagine that both sets of Canons are of equal authority. But when all this is said, there remains the extraordinary fact that the Canon of 1640 gives no warrant to the modern practice, and on the doctrinal side carefully guards against the view of Holy Communion which the practice of bowing to the altar is sometimes made to support. The words of the Canon are so striking that they claim quotation :

"Whereas the church is the house of God, dedicated to His holy worship, and therefore ought to mind us both of the greatness and goodness of His Divine Majesty; certain it is that the acknowledgment thereof, not only

inwardly in our hearts, but also outwardly with our bodies, must needs be pious in itself, profitable unto us, and edifying unto others. We therefore think it very meet and behoveful, and heartily commend it to all good and well-affected people, members of this Church, that they be ready to tender unto the Lord the said acknowledgment, by doing reverence, both at their coming in and going out of the said churches, chancels or chapels, according to the most ancient custom of the primitive Church in the purest times, and of this Church also for many years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The reviving therefore of this ancient and laudable custom we heartily commend to the serious consideration of all good people, not with any intention to exhibit any religious worship to the Communion Table, the east, or church, or anything therein contained in so doing, or to perform the said gesture in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, upon any opinion of a corporal presence of the body of Jesus Christ on the holy table, or in the mystical elements, but only for the advancement of God's Majesty, and to give Him alone that honour and glory that is due unto Him, and no otherwise; and in the practice or mission of this rite we desire that the rule of charity prescribed by the Apostle may be observed, which is that they which use this rite, despise not them who use it not; and that they who use it not, condemn not those that use it."

This speaks for itself. It is reverence for the house of God which is enjoined—for the house of God as a whole, and not for any particular part of it. The language of the Canon is such that it cannot be quoted, at any rate in full, by the advocates of the "altar-throne" theory. The purpose of the Canon is a good one; we are not quite so sure as to its method. In a day when the Canon is misused, and the mischievous and misleading practice being introduced, we do not feel that it would be wise for Evangelicals to introduce as part of their ritual the harmless practice of making a reverence as they enter and leave the house of God. We do need to do all that we can to cultivate reverence in the house of God and elsewhere. Reverence of posture and ritual does help reverence of heart and mind, but this reverence is not to be won by the introduction of practices which tend to superstition and materialism, neither of which things can ever be really reverent.

Mr. Balfour on the Ideal of Union. Mr. Balfour, in a recent address to the Young Men's Guild of the Church of Scotland, gave some wise counsel, by which Anglicans as well as Presbyterians may well profit. He spoke of the feeling "that there is

so deep a bond of real unity among Christian men and women, uniting even, when they know it not, every member of the universal Church, that more and more every thinking man must feel that he has got to get the very best he can out of the history, and the present organization, and the present work, and the future hopes, of the religious denomination to which he belongs ; but in doing that he must never for one instant forget that that denomination is but one in an even greater whole. . . . What we in our several ways have got to recognize is a firm loyalty, and unswerving loyalty, to the historic Church to which we belong, combined in the fullest measure with the sense that we are all working—all the Churches are, or should be, working—to a common end, and that to waste in conflict forces that ought to be combined against a common enemy is not only folly, but it verges upon wickedness.” No words could more clearly express the ideal of the Evangelical Churchman to combine the most whole-hearted loyalty to his own historic communion with a passionate yearning for the doing away of the barriers which at present separate him from his other brethren in Christ.

