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# THE CHURCHMAN

December, 1919.

## THE MONTH.

**The Enabling Bill.** QUITE the most important speech in the Second Reading debate in the House of Commons on the

Enabling Bill was that made by Sir William Joynson-Hicks who, alone of all the speakers, seemed to get to the heart of the question. We all know by this time the leading points in the case for the Bill, and we know also that its friends urge as one of their strongest appeals in its support that it has received the assent of all parties in the Church. Mr. Bonar Law himself said in the House that he hesitated as to giving time for the discussion of the Bill until he had assured himself that the Church as a whole desired the change. "He satisfied himself that they did—all sections." While not in the least desiring to controvert that statement, it is yet permissible to say that it needs to be explained and qualified. If the vote given at the special session of the Representative Church Council is to be taken as expressing the mind of the Church, then undoubtedly all sections have accepted the measure, for the scheme was carried with only one dissentient; but the claim to unanimity needs to be qualified to this extent, that whilst there are large numbers in all sections of the Church, who welcome a measure which it is believed will enable the Church to do its work more efficiently, there are also large numbers in all sections who view the proposed changes, whether they be merely administrative or deeply fundamental, with no small measure of anxiety. Whether they are right, or whether the out-and-out supporters of the Bill are right, remains to be seen: it is impossible to say until the new system gets to work. The time for further discussion seems to have passed, for if the figures stand for anything it seems practically certain that the Bill will be passed into law this session. The majority for the Second Reading was enormous: in a House of

320, only 16 voted against the Bill. Whether the majority would have been quite so large if the House had had before it the Bill as originally drafted we take leave to doubt. It came down from the House of Lords where it had been severely criticised and amended, and it was the Bill, so amended, that the House of Commons all but unanimously accepted. The measure has been referred to a Committee—incidentally we regret that it is not to be considered in Committee of the whole House—and some further amendments will doubtless be introduced. But we do not anticipate that any vital changes will be made, and it is probable that ultimately the Bill will be passed very much in its present form. But that some further amendments and safeguards are needed we have no doubt.

The position was admirably defined by Sir W. Joynson Hicks' View. Joynson-Hicks, who stated quite frankly that very few Bills had given him more anxiety, and that his vote for the Bill would be recorded with grave misgivings. He admitted that he had been greatly impressed by the Bishop of Chelmsford's letter in the *Times* of that morning supporting the Bill, and we imagine that the strong backing the measure has received from Dr. Watts-Ditchfield, who is President of the Church of England Self-Government Association, did much to convince other Members of Parliament both of the need for and the practical character of the Bill. But it is only right that certain contingencies should be fairly faced, and Sir W. Joynson-Hicks indicated a few possible dangers ahead. These were connected with such questions as Prayer-Book Revision, the Act of Uniformity, Disestablishment, the appointment of Bishops and the Final Court of Appeal.

Speaking on behalf of a very large number of Evangelical Protestant Churchmen, he said that they were not prepared to have great alterations made in the Book of Common Prayer. Under the Bill not only external questions could be dealt with, but subsection 6 of Clause 3 was as wide as the hemisphere. It stated :—"A measure passed in accordance with this Act may relate to any matter concerning the Church of England." Even the Act of Uniformity might be repealed, and the doctrines of the Church put in the melting pot. He hoped his hon. friends opposite would consent in Committee to amendments to deal with mundane affairs only, and to prevent the Bill from dealing with such other matters as he had outlined. He held that there could be no national Church without establishment, and he feared that the Bill must inevitably lead to the disestablishment of the Church. It would make the Church a sectional body. To-day, as Evangelical Churchmen, they gloried in the fact that Wesleyans and other Nonconformists could attend

their own Church in the morning and might attend the Church of England in the evening, that they might be married in the Anglican Church and be buried under the rites of that Church. That was the very essence of a national Church. The Cheltenham Evangelical Conference had passed three resolutions. If the provisions of these were embodied in the Bill he should feel much greater confidence. First, the appointment by the Crown to the Archbishopric and other ecclesiastical positions. He was proud to say that, with a Nonconformist Radical Prime Minister, the Church of England had never had a better succession of Bishops than those which had been appointed during the last two years. If the Church Council were to appoint the Bishops there would be anger and wrangling, wire-pulling, and log-rolling. The second resolution was that the Constitution of the final Court of Appeal in ecclesiastical causes should not be touched under the provisions of the Bill, and, thirdly, that baptismal franchise for the electorate should be maintained. He wanted to see the Church widened, not narrowed. He believed that there rested upon the Church an enormous responsibility for the future years; let them do nothing that would interfere with her spiritual power and force.

Undoubtedly this weighty and important speech reflects what is in the minds of a large number of Evangelical and Protestant churchpeople. They have no desire to be obstructive: they long to see the Church become a greater force in our national life, and so far as this Bill will conduce to that end they wish it well; but they know from a long experience that it is necessary to take every possible precaution to safeguard the constitutional position of the Church of England in its Reformed and Protestant character, and they are justified, therefore, in their desire that the limitations of the present measure should be clearly defined.

**The Church Assembly.** It may be doubted whether, among the ordinary rank and file of Church-going congregations, there are many who have any adequate idea of how near we are to the setting up of a National Church Assembly. It has been widely assumed, even by those who take a deep interest in the question, that if the Enabling Bill does not pass the whole scheme agreed upon by the Representative Church Council falls to the ground. But this is not so. The position is put with admirable clearness by the Archbishop of York in his *Diocesan Gazette* of November 15, and we quote his words:—

The Enabling Bill does not create the Assembly; it only asks Parliament to confer certain powers upon it of initiating legislation in matters which require Parliamentary sanction. It is for the Church itself to decide what it desires its representative Assembly to be. It is for Parliament to decide whether it is willing to confer certain powers upon this Assembly. The Enabling Bill therefore presupposes the existence of the Assembly; and if, as we hope, it becomes law it would be inoperative unless and until

the Assembly is constituted. Put shortly, the Assembly does not depend upon the Enabling Bill, but the Enabling Bill depends upon the Assembly. That is why it is so important that as soon as possible the Assembly should come into being. But if unfortunately the Enabling Bill should not become law, the Assembly must still be formed. Although in that event it would be without the measure of statutory authority and the statutory powers which we wish it to have, it would still be the representative Body of the Church with functions of the greatest importance in the Church's corporate life.

The importance of the Archbishop's statement will not be overlooked: it shows how important it is that every preparation should be made without the least delay for seeing that the elections result in the return of loyal and faithful members of the Church. Much will depend upon the effectiveness of our organization, and the wise advice of an experienced correspondent of the *Record* should be acted upon at once. "There can be," he said, "only one opinion as to the duty of Evangelical Churchmen to prepare themselves for the grave position that is gradually shaping itself; and I fear that most of our friends are waiting for a lead. May I urge all of the Evangelical clergy and laity to put themselves into touch with the National Church League on this point, lest by inaction or delayed action they seriously prejudice the good cause?" The offices of the National Church League are at 6, Grosvenor Mansions, 82, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W.1, and the Secretary, we doubt not, will be glad to render any assistance within the power of the League to clergy and others who may be desirous of knowing how best to act in the present circumstances.

We are exceedingly glad to find that a strong protest has been made against the postponement of the decision in regard to the Interchange of Pulpits until the Lambeth Conference has reported upon the general question of the relation of the Church to Nonconformity. Unfortunately the protest has not been successful, but it was good that it should be made, and this, too, by a Bishop of the independence of the Bishop of Norwich. Nor did he stand alone. In the letter he addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury he said he wrote also on behalf of the Bishops of Durham, St. Albans, Manchester, Carlisle, Ripon, Sodor and Man, Bristol, Hereford and Worcester. The purpose of the letter was to let the Archbishop know that they have been not a little distressed by the correspondence between the Archbishop and the Bishop of Gloucester.