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CHELTENHAM CONFERENCE PAPERS.

THE CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS.

BY THE REV. CANON H. A. WILSON, M.A., Rector of Cheltenham.

I HAVE the very great honour and pleasure of welcoming you, my brethren, to our Seventh Cheltenham Conference. A considerable proportion of our members consists of those who have been with us on several occasions before, if not at every one of our Conferences.

Those members will be fully acquainted with our methods and ideals, but for the sake of those who have come for the first time, I think it necessary to enlarge upon these points to some extent.

Our object and hope for this Conference is to make it to some extent and increasingly an organ of expression for the general body of Evangelicals in the Church. There are larger gatherings than ours, more impressive in numbers. But these larger gatherings are not vocal in the sense that we seek to be. A supreme need for us to-day is to provide Evangelical Churchmen with an organ through which they can express definite opinions upon current Church questions. The voice crying in the wilderness is unheard in a world of much talk. We seek to unite our voices in such unanimity that we may be heard above the tumult.

It has been a bold experiment, which has received criticism not only from those who are not of our way of thinking. But I think it cannot be disputed that we have won a hearing in many quarters. We have been distinguished for boldness of utterance and courage of conviction, and the attention we have received proves the acknowledgment and the respect always accorded to sincerity of conviction.

Two conditions have always to be observed in attempting to arrive at genuine decisions upon great questions. The body that speaks must be a representative body, and it must be afforded sufficient time to weigh and discuss the subjects under consideration.

We claim only to represent the rank and file of Evangelical and moderate opinion in the Church. Our invitations are issued broadcast. In this way we have secured not a chosen group who will dance to a selected measure, but typical representatives of Evangelical thought from most parts of England.

To give this body ample opportunity for discussion the number must be limited. The force of circumstances partly secures this. The time, the place, the period occupied all combine to reduce numbers. And we are generally left with about fourscore men who are prepared to apply themselves to the task of beating out definite conclusions, and to do this we offer full opportunity for discussion and self-expression to everyone.

I need hardly remind you of the peculiarly grave conditions under which we meet to-day. Never have Evangelical Churchmen had such a wonderful opportunity for influencing the Church and the nation as to-day. We believe that the Gospel committed to us is the one solvent for all the world's troubles and distress ; we believe that the call to Evangelize has come very definitely from God ; we believe that the prestige of the Evangelical School in the Church never stood so high. And yet in this day of tremendous opportunity and desperate need we are found divided.

I desire to speak with the profoundest respect for the opinions of men from whom I differ, but I feel every one of us must feel sadness unutterable at this tragic event. Our whole programme is taken up with these questions, and I am sure it must be the earnest prayer of us all that this Conference may help in no small measure to lead to a healing of this grave wound. But if this is to result, there must be frank, courageous, sympathetic, and charitable discussion of the questions at issue between us.

The title of the first subject for consideration suggests concisely the whole problem—Evangelicalism in the modern world. It reminds us that the present environment of Evangelicalism is somewhat different from what it was in the past. I think we should probably all agree that this is so. There are constant elements, such as human needs and human hopes, and there are elements which have become modified. The human organism with all its hopes, fears, needs, is unchanged, but its world is a very different place. I will not turn aside to note these differences. This will probably be done by one of the most distinguished of our speakers, the Bishop of Bradford. I think at present I may take all this for granted.

Has Evangelicalism the power to live in this world? That is, the supreme question which runs through the whole of our Conference Life has been defined as the capacity of an organism to adapt itself to its environment. An oak tree cannot grow in the tropics, neither can the orange tree bear fruit in northern climes.

Is Evangelicalism an exotic in the modern world? The question cannot be answered by stout protests, but only by honest inquiry, and we must begin by discovering what Evangelicalism essentially is.

I have felt myself increasingly during the past ten or fifteen years that our supreme need is the discovery of our fundamental principles. The simple way to do this is to go back to the past—say the sixteenth or eighteenth centuries—discover what were the great principles of Evangelicals then and impose them on Evangelicals to-day. But the simple way of doing things is nearly always the wrong way, and this short way is on reflection seen to be scientifically unsound and in practice hopelessly confusing. We should have to take into account Wickliffe, the "Evangelical doctor," the reformed Churches of the Continent, the Puritans in our own land, the Evangelicals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the Evangelical Free Churches of to-day. We should find ourselves then faced by contradictions which were irreconcilable and burdened

by views of God and man impossible to accept. There is another method, much more difficult to employ, but one which gives us a value for x . This is to study patiently and carefully all those varying expressions of Evangelicalism and to seek for the spirit which is common to them all.

Despite the danger I am in of anticipating what some will have to say, I venture to try to define this common spirit which I believe to be the permanent element in Evangelicalism. It may be summed up in one word—Redemption.

The supreme purpose of the Incarnation was to redeem man, to save him from sin and from self. This was achieved by the Life and Death of our Lord, who on His Cross made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. By an act of faith the individual soul is opened to the inflow of Divine Grace, which cleanses from sin and reconciles to God. This Grace of God is free and unfettered ; the soul needs no mediation from priest or Church for a contact with God, which is direct and immediate. It is God's Will to save all, but His beneficence is limited by human will. " If any man will he shall know." Evangelicalism proclaims its belief in the constant recurrence of a moral miracle, that any man, however steeped in sin and vice, by a willing act of faith in God can be lifted into a new relationship with God, be conscious of a new power, and give evidence of a new life.

The authority for this belief was found in Holy Scripture, which was ratified in the experience of the believer.

This, I believe, is the heart and core of Evangelicalism. It gathered around it, as has already been noted, in each age certain other views, but these were often only the ephemeral clothing of an eternal truth. The Evangelicals of the sixteenth century never hesitated to discard much that Wickliffe taught, apart from the fact that they differed also among themselves, and the eighteenth-century Evangelicals jettisoned many things which were regarded as vital in the sixteenth century. It is only, therefore, what we should expect that many modern Evangelicals should decline to take on board some of the heavy cargo which their fathers in the eighteenth century deemed necessary. Evangelicalism has always been a bigger thing than the Evangelicals. No generation has been able either to declare it completely or to escape the danger of alloying it with secondary and ephemeral matters. And more than once in history Evangelicals have made the fatal blunder of quarrelling over the secondary matters, with the result that their witness and influence have been fatally impaired.

Is the same tragic mistake to be made now ? Let it be plainly said that absolutely the only thing which can possibly justify a breach among us is the conviction that the subject of dispute is an absolutely vital matter affecting Divine Truth. I cannot but feel that if this were borne in upon us all, and if we could all grasp what are the permanent elements in the Evangelicals' vision of truth, a breach would no longer be possible.

It is a perfectly certain fact that we are not all going to hold

precisely the same views upon inspiration or details of ritual ; it is, I am confident, an equally certain fact that we do all hold the same views on the great question of Redemption. I believe on this point there would be no appreciable difference or variation in the advice given to a sin-stricken soul by every Evangelical clergyman in the land. When we have this great, sacred and precious thing in common, is it not enough to provide a rallying-ground for us all ?

The Evangelicals have been called by God to preach the Evangel—the Evangel stands above and apart from all these other and, perhaps, important matters of inquiry. But I cannot think we are true to our mission if we allow these other things so to occupy our attention that we lose our perspective, and, as a result, fall to blows amongst ourselves. St. Paul could say : “ Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel.” Would that all we Evangelicals could penitently say, “ Christ has sent us not to dispute on secondary doctrines, but to preach the Gospel at home and abroad, in sincerity, in passionate love for Him and the souls in our flocks, and with a full trust in the sincerity of our brethren.”

May God grant us deliverance from this grave peril which threatens us in this day of splendid opportunity ! But deliverance will not come unless we are determined to do our part—*i.e.*, to seek peace and ensue it.

EVANGELICALISM IN THE MODERN WORLD.

BY THE BISHOP OF BRADFORD.

WE ARE living in a new world : and it is not easy to realize it. We forget that in five years we have seen changes greater than those which normally mark the passing of a generation or even of a century. There is a real alteration, and not simply a modification, in the problems and conditions of our individual and social life. Science has made great leaps of advance in mechanics, physics, medicine and biology. The world had been shrinking before the War through the development of quick transport, telegraphy and telephony—but the War itself produced an extraordinary race contact, through the medley of the world's fighting men gathered in many fields of battle. Europeans, Americans, Asiatics, Africans, and dwellers in distant islands, have fought and fraternized, racial and religious barriers have been partly overcome, and at the same time the international outlook has not hindered the growth of nationalism. Rather has the instinct of peoples to assert their own self-consciousness, and the determination of nations, small or great, to work out their own destiny, been quickened. The political and industrial situation to-day had no real parallel before the War. “ Neither the French Revolution nor the Industrial Revolution can give us guidance as to the causes of our present discontents or the remedies likely to prove effectual. Then the struggle was for