CENTRALIZATION IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

SERMON IN GREAT ST. MARY'S CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE, ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4,

BY THE RIGHT REV. B. POLLOCK, K.C.V.O., D.D.
Lord Bishop of Norwich, Lady Margaret Preacher.

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee."—*Deuteronomy* viii. 2.

WE are here to commemorate good men who have done great things for this University in the true English spirit of generosity, independence and spontaneity. Each in his own generation had his own ideas, and by his liberality dedicated and perpetuated them for the general good. Every gift represents quiet intention, the desire to enrich the future by something gathered from the past. I believe to-day, not only in academic life, where perhaps there are more safeguards than elsewhere, we must be careful not to let go that purposefulness and that thoughtful independence of outlook for which this long list of benefactions stand. We dare not drift; we must deliberately see that the future loses none of the treasures of the past by mere inadvertence, as it heaps up new treasures of its own. Drift, even the most rapid drift, is not progress.

Many of us can look back some years and remember the general cry raised for efficiency in public services and in public service. It was a wise and a noble appeal, and, thank God, it did not fall upon deaf ears. The efficiency of public service to-day is remarkable. We need not go outside the walls of this University and town to admire the number of able men and women who from their over-busy lives give time and attention to the promotion of public welfare in many directions. The same is true all over England. Men and women have at heart the health, the happiness, the education, the uplifting, the improvement of their fellow-countrymen, and though all too frequently they do not name His name which is above every name, they are, in fact, following from afar the example of Him who went about doing good.

The growing means of communication have helped forward such endeavours. Long ago most good work had to be strictly local in its character. This no doubt had advantages of its own. An estate, a parish, a neighbourhood, meant more than they do to-day in the way of mutual confidence and mutual helpfulness; neighbourly ties do not go so well with the crowds and masses which are now congregated together by these very facilities of transport. But it *is* these facilities which have enabled men and women of good heart to get together for such common work as I have in mind. People in one part of the country know what is

being said and thought and written and done in another. They can learn from one another's efforts and warnings and mistakes. Public work is done in a less amateur way. Principles of efficiency are evolved and there is not that loss of time and trouble which arises when every little group is acting as an independent pioneer in an unknown country.

But there are corresponding dangers in this accumulated efficiency. In the first place the sacred personality of the individual who is to be assisted may come to be forgotten, and that is why we welcome heartily every individual offer of humble voluntary devotion which can mitigate this danger. For it *is* a danger that the person may be lost in the case. There is no one afflicted in mind, body or estate who likes to become a case ; every true helper will remember this. Pupils must be grouped in numbers, yet wise teachers remember that each has his or her own personal attitude and a slightly different way of approach to the subject in hand. The very study of psychology, intended though it is to prevent mistakes in such directions, has to be careful not to lose by classification the full grace of sympathy, which in the Bible is called love.

Another danger at hand is that the very extent of such concerted efforts leads to an exaggeration of the importance of the system which has brought them together. Such large enterprises require elaborated machinery for their success, and the machinery must be guided and kept running. But this leads on to an over-valuation of the machinery for its own sake, apart from the purpose for which it was erected. It is first rightly established and then wrongly worshipped. This is I suppose what we mean by the danger of bureaucracy. Methods look as big as their objects. Hence arises the mere official and the professional.

A third danger is that of excessive specialization. There is so much to be done, so much to be learnt about the way of doing it, so many wise views to be weighed, there arise so many new ramifications of the original intention, that the eagerness to render public service and to achieve a general amelioration of the common lot, has more and more to be broken up into fresh and fresh sections, and these new departments of work may get out of touch with one another. The expert in each may come to reign supreme, but in his own little kingdom cut off from others. In the old days to which I referred, though the general knowledge, and that means the general power to help, was much smaller, nevertheless the same people were aware of, and dealt with many objects ; more was concentrated in the same hands, and this strengthened the general position of helpfulness of those who were in a position to help at all. They could interpret one need by another, and often deal with the whole problem rather than with parts. At times it can happen that a worse result comes from a more efficient dealing with the parts, one by one, of a situation, than from a less satisfactory but more comprehensive handling of it as a whole. The danger which waits upon efficiency in this direction is the weakness that comes

from the want of coherence in over-specialized efforts. It is, it would seem, this kind of weakness, a very result, mark you, of departmental efficiency, which in political life more and more subordinates Ministries to one central control. When there were fewer Ministries and Ministers, every Minister had a stronger position ; the growing number of Ministries due to the growth of specialized efficiency has led to each Minister being immersed in his own work, and ceasing to be jointly responsible for the general policy. It is easier also to dominate a large number of small departments than a small number of large departments possessing a strength of their own and leaders of their own, leaders more on a par with the director-in-chief.

The quickness of communications which we have already considered assists in this regard. No one, however important, is out of reach. Everything can immediately be referred to headquarters. But in all life, initiative, independence and the sense of responsibility are not fostered, when the final decision may in any case be removed from the apparent head of any section of administration to the supreme head.

This necessarily tends to a personal centralization of authority of dubious value, which need not arise from any wish for excessive power felt and pushed at the centre, but may come simply as the result of the large breaking up of things into departments, and the lack of spontaneity and freedom in the departments so formed, and from the sheer impossibility that a great and growing number of men should hold independent responsibility.

I seem to see in the Church of England to-day some of the dangers which I have sketched, and, without making any attempt —for it would be artificial and arbitrary—to draw exact parallels, I go on to observe that in the Church, too, we have this danger of over-organization. The desire to make diocesan efforts as efficient as possible, this right desire, has led to the erection of many new dioceses, and diocesan efficiency has no doubt been thereby increased. But diocesan efficiency, if it is not very carefully guarded, may lead on to diocesan officialism. The efficiency may be stronger at the centre than at the circumference. It may come out better in appearance than in reality, if it fails to carry with it the hearts of all the clergy and all the people, some of whom do not respond to official direction. Thus comes unreality.

Some, I know, are fearing the new reliance placed in synods of the clergy for promoting the diocesan spirit, lest these synods should tend to emphasize the general cleavage between the clergy and ordinary churchgoers and church well-wishers, and lest in them the more professionally minded of the clergy should count for more than is their due.

Church organization is essential and admirable if it really quickens the simple parochial efficiency throughout the parishes. But true efficiency must always mean the spread of the gospel into the hearts and the lives of the people. Any system fails if it has not drawn men to God in Christ and brought the love of God in Christ to shine upon them one by one. Efficiency must be tested.

If this danger belongs to the organization of the diocese, it belongs also to the work of the Church Assembly. No one can question that this Assembly has successfully carried through many useful developments and reforms in church life, which could not have been achieved under the old parliamentary rules; though it is only fair to mention in passing that Parliament itself did carry through on the very eve of the establishment of the Church Assembly one most important of recent improvements, namely the Act for the Union of Benefices, which has been only slightly modified by the more recent Measure. The Church Assembly, as to whose permanent position there are misgivings, will fail if it adopts the line of dictating everything from headquarters, without allowing for that variety and independence which we have already characterized as being consonant with the English temper. It would be a disaster if so much was prescribed from headquarters as to weaken the contribution which each diocese, each cathedral, according to its special circumstances and opportunities, ought to make to the whole life of the Church of England.

Side by side with the peril that the Church Assembly may attempt too much, and substitute the uniformity of a system for the vigour of spontaneous life, comes a similar danger of excessive co-ordination of the episcopate. What has happened in political life happens in church life. Small dioceses are not large enough to stand alone. The multiplication of bishops, however useful for the advancement of diocesan organizations, tends to make the whole body of them become not a Brotherhood but a Board. A Brotherhood keeps the brothers near together, and respects their independence—independence under a leader. A Board requires the official direction of a chairman, on whom rests the main responsibility for the level direction of the business as a whole.

It may be right or it may be wrong; but the Church of England ought to recognize the fact that it has been passing more and more under the immediate supervision of Lambeth. Its government has recently been less episcopal and more archiepiscopal. These growing facilities of communication have drawn it that way; in previous centuries it was a far cry from most see cities to London. Administration on the spot was a necessity. That meant independence, and in a good sense self-sufficiency. Now in the church are repeated the ways of public government; where, while formerly the few heads of large departments met on more equal terms, now, as we have seen, the many heads of specialized departments become subordinate to one chief. The war hastened the process. In all directions unity of command was the order of the day. The Navy, the Army, the Nation, the Church had all to be mobilized as one man; there was no room for variety. All must be directed from London. The habit then acquired has not been lost. The erection of the Church Assembly, literally and by example, pressed in the same direction.

Again the very pressure of this newly insistent diocesan work together with the serious inroads made upon a bishop's time by

his constant visits to London in connection with the Church Assembly, result in the fact that only those resident within the London area can also spare time to take much part in parliamentary and public affairs in a general way.

All these things tend to centralization, and to the transference of the larger responsibilities from the bishops who presided over dioceses, various in character, spontaneous in opportunity, yet coherent in one Church, to one paramount centre.

And not least the personal ascendancy, based upon his own ripe experience and power matched with the growing affection and confidence of those who worked with him and under him, the personal ascendancy of the great and honoured chief whom in all the "sadness of farewell" we are soon to lose, has, in recent years, given a predominant position to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

I have thought it might be of interest for one who has been a bishop long enough to see all the other dioceses but two changing their bishops at least once, to call attention to a development that has been going on before his eyes, before and during and since the years of the war. I am not here to advocate any scheme, perhaps not even to call a halt; but rather to ask that whatever is being done should be done deliberately, and not by a feeble policy of silence or drift. The old order changes necessarily, rightly, but prudent men desire to see such changes guided and guarded. The true patriot has no desire to see his country standing still, but wisely advancing towards God and to a greater usefulness in the comity of nations. The same is true of loyal citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And when their eyes are fixed upon the advancement of that kingdom, there will be no wish for envious comparisons between the old and the new, no room for jealousies or rivalries. Those whose lot it is to work now, will as gratefully think of all that they owe to those who went before them, as they will eagerly and gladly think of the richer work to be done by their own successors. Content to sow or reap, pleased as they are called to reap what others have sown, pleased as they are called to sow what others shall reap, they will rejoice in the one great joy with which those who sow and those who reap shall rejoice together, each in his own generation, sowing, reaping, one with all the whole family in thanksgiving to God. A great festival of the Commemoration of Benefactors bids us to look back with gratitude, to look forward with hope, and it sets before us the glory of the continuous work and of the common joy in the service of our one Master, Jesus Christ our Lord.