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THE FREE CHURCHES AND LAMBETH.

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MY presence here is itself a symbol of the happier relations that have been established by the Lambeth overture to all Christian churches. I am to speak of the attitude of the Free Churches, but it is a spontaneous action on your part to invite me ; I have no authority. I am not delegated to the service, and anything I say, while it may represent the attitude of many Nonconformists, is to be received merely as my personal opinion. All I have to say may fitly be grouped around three words—Retrospect, Circumspect, and Prospect. And I myself must be circumspect all the time.

I. RETROSPECT.

The "Appeal to all Christian People," issued by the Bishops in August, 1920, went straight to our hearts. Like them, "we acknowledge all who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and have been baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity, as sharing with us membership of the Universal Church of Christ which is His Body." Most of us would go even beyond that and acknowledge believers who, for some sufficient reason, have not been baptized with water, as also belonging to the Universal Church.

We also join the Bishops when they affirm that "God wills fellowship," and that such fellowship shall embrace all "who profess and call themselves Christians," "within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common and made serviceable to the whole body of Christ."

And, further, that "the spiritual leadership of the Catholic Church in days to come, for which the world is patiently waiting, depends upon the readiness with which each group is prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of a common fellowship, a common ministry, and a common service to the world." And we all stand ready "to make the effort to meet the demands of a new age with a new outlook."

We are also prepared to endorse the statement that the causes of division "lie deep in the past, and are by no means simple or wholly blameworthy." We would, indeed, go further and say that on our part they were often not only not blameworthy, but were absolutely praiseworthy: yet in spite of that we are prepared to express penitence so far as our spirit has been alien to the mind of God. Indeed, when the then Archbishop of York visited the Baptist Union and expressed penitence on his side, in reply I was bold to declare that we were not to be outdone, and publicly expressed penitence for anything in our witness that had been, or is, unworthy of the Holy Gospel we profess. And I do so, unofficially, again.

Officially, on September 28, 1920, the Free Churches acknowledged the overture of the Bishops, reciprocated the brotherly and eirenical spirit which characterized it, and "eagerly welcomed everything in the proposals which would further religious intercourse among the Churches."

On May 22, 1921, a reasoned reply was given again "expressing our desire for fellowship," and we must add that we desire, with sincere longing, as the supreme expression of Christian fellowship, the meeting together in the Holy Communion of that Table, which, we must ever remind ourselves, does not belong to any of our Churches, but is His, where He alone presides and to which He alone invites.

The answer emphasized that the essentials of the Church are in the Gospel, not in organization. "The former is that by which the Church is: the latter is something which the Church *has*, and, of course, the more perfectly she has it the better."

At its annual assembly in September, 1921, the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, at the suggestion of the Bishops, appointed some representatives to confer with the two Archbishops and with other members of the Church of England whom they may appoint. In May, 1922, the report of that Conference was presented, and in September, 1922, the answer of the Federal Council was given, and certain questions were asked which necessitated further negotiation.

In July, 1923, a joint conference was held, and the Church of England representatives presented a memorandum in which it was admitted that Free Church ministries are real ministries of Christ's Word and Sacraments in the Universal Church, but that no one could be authorized to exercise his ministry in the Church of England who had not been episcopally ordained.

The Federal Council of the Free Churches on September 18, 1923, regretted that the recognition of Free Church ministries was not followed by any appropriate action, that the plan the memorandum proposed for full ministry in the Anglican Church is precisely that plan which would be followed, and which is followed, in the case of persons possessing no kind of ministry, namely, episcopal ordination.

The Joint Conference on July 11, 1924, issued a further memorandum on the subject of a Constitutional Episcopate: and on September 16, 1924, the Federal Council suggested that it was not in the interests of the unity movement that the conferences should be indefinitely prolonged: adding the remark that the discussions will always lack something of reality when unaccompanied by acts of more definite unity in Christian worship.

On June 19, 1925, both sides expressed the hope that if the Conferences were suspended they should not be regarded as concluded: and there the matter rests. Whether they will ever be resumed depends almost entirely on the overture that may be made from the Anglican side.

It should be remembered that the decisions of the Federal Council of Free Churches must be passed back to the various churches it

represents. Each denomination is called upon to make its own rejoinder. It may suffice to instance the reply given by the Assembly of the Baptist Union on May 4, 1926. After acknowledgment of the courtesy and lofty purpose of the Lambeth Appeal, the reply sets out the faith of the Baptist Church, and then comes a significant paragraph.

"In general, the place given to Sacraments by the Lambeth Appeal would, it appears, exclude from the Universal Church of our Lord bodies of devoted Christians with whom we enjoy fellowship, and to this exclusion we cannot consent."

And in conclusion it asserts: "It will be gathered from this reply that union of such a kind as the Bishops have contemplated is not possible for us. We would say this not only with the frankness which we believe is the highest courtesy among Christian brethren, but with the assurance of our regret that the way in which they would have us go with them is not open."

But another more hopeful paragraph is added. "We believe that the time has come when the Churches of Christ should unite their forces to meet the need of the world. We therefore are prepared to join the Church of England in exploring the possibility of a federation of equal and autonomous Churches in which the several parts of the Church of Christ would co-operate in bringing before men the will and claims of our Lord."

That ends the Retrospect so far as it is possible for us to-day.

II. CIRCUMSPECT.

Three years have passed, but events have moved, and in the words of Lord Grey, it is necessary for us not only to have opinions, but to have all along "the mind of the event."

Our Retrospect ended with some suggestion of a federation of the Churches, but in the last meeting of the Committee of Faith and Order at Geneva one delegate expressed himself as delighted that the word federation was not so much as mentioned. Well, let us see how far the idea of Union has progressed since the Lambeth proposals were made.

In Canada a great movement has brought Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists together, but a considerable number of Presbyterians still hold aloof, and the title chosen by the bodies uniting—"The United Church of Canada"—has given some umbrage to the Anglican Churches in Canada, who think that the title "The Church of Canada," united or otherwise, should have been reserved for them, just as in Ireland, on disestablishment, the Episcopalians adopted the title "The Church of Ireland," ignoring the fact that they were outnumbered by the Presbyterians.

In Scotland a great plan of Union between the Church of Scotland, which of course is Presbyterian, and the United Free Church of Scotland will probably be consummated next month. But here again there will be a dissentient minority, who will stand out because of their objection to any form of State control. Their spokesman says: "We refuse to partake in a favoured position which is not

shared by all Churches alike." "We cannot," they say, "we cannot regard the glossing over of incompatible contradictories as the way in which to build or unite character. It is not good grafting. It is a futile thing to bind Churches together with only a twist of thread or a dash of mortar. That can do nothing but tend to diminish hope of a living and a fruitful stem."

In Great Britain the union of all the Methodist Churches is in sight, and it seems likely to be complete. All Christian people will rejoice when these Societies, which had a common origin, merge their forces in one great witness for Christ, and will congratulate those responsible, in its various divisions, for their patience and unwavering purpose to accomplish their aim.

In England there have been some suggestions of Union between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, but no official action on either side. Suggestions, too, have been made for Union between Baptists and Congregationalists, again with no official sanction, and with much less probability of action.

It is, perhaps, on the Mission field that the problem of Unity is likely, if ever, to be solved. The South India United Church will lead the way: all ministries being accepted as valid at the moment, and future ministers to be Episcopally ordained. It will be an interesting experiment, though North India is scarcely likely to be so complaisant, and the Anglo-Catholic party in the Church of England profess to be outraged by the thought that even for an interim period, a non-episcopal minister can be recognized to the priestly office. The *Church Times* goes so far as to say that it means "that there is no essential difference between the episcopally ordained priest and the commissioned minister." In this Free Churchmen will agree. An interesting situation will also arise when the South Indian Church finds itself in communion with the Episcopal Church in England and with the Non-Episcopal Churches in America.

In China there is also a United Church in embryo, though at the moment it seems to be more concerned with organization and property than with spiritual essentials. But it is not improbable that light on the intricate problem will come to us from the Far East.

III. PROSPECT.

What, then, of the future? It cannot be overlooked that the recent discussion and decision as to the Prayer Book has vitally altered the position as compared with that of 1920, and rendered it much more difficult. Free Churchmen took their part in the proposals for change, as they felt it to be a matter of national as well as of ecclesiastical importance, and their attitude to Union has distinctly hardened since the Sacerdotal aim within the Church of England has become so evident and pronounced.

It may, I hope, be said without even the appearance of rudeness, in a Conference of this nature, or indeed anywhere else, that the Free Churches are not prepared to recognize what most of them regard as the figment of Apostolic Succession. As far as Scripture is con-

cerned, Dean Alford appears to be quite justified in saying that the 33rd verse of the last chapter of Luke's Gospel makes an end of it. The two from Emmaus found in Jerusalem the eleven gathered together "and them that were with them," and it was to all of these that the Commission, and the Spirit to fulfil it, were given. These were not, therefore, exclusive Apostolic gifts, and even if they had been, it is impossible to trace an unbroken chain of succession. Most Free Churchmen do not believe that the Apostles had any successors, nor do they believe that either Nature or Grace is a closed order. We stand for the Freedom of God in both realms: He is not confined within what our observation has learnt of the Laws of Nature, nor within any Sacerdotal realm of Grace. The Free Churches insist that God is free: they believe, of course, that He is the author of order and not of confusion, but the ministries by which He works are the outcome of the living present and not of the dead past.

The question is vital when it affects the effective ministry of the Church and excludes those who are presumed not to be in the succession.

I may here interject that Karl Barth, who has "captured the attention of the Churches of Europe, both in the Protestant and, to an important degree, in the Catholic areas," as his translator assures us, says, in speaking of the Churches, that the people are "often put off, to be sure: for the time being: even when they do not find what they are seeking, they are touched, delighted and gratified by the forms of their worship." "Catholicism, for instance, illustrates on a grand scale how, if need be, people can be put off, lulled to sleep, and made to forget their real want of being entertained in a manner both felicitous, and, for the time being, final. But let us not deceive ourselves: *we* are not Catholic nor are our congregations. With us, in spite of all appearances of retrogression, the situation has advanced to a point where the dispensing of even the best chosen narcotics can only partly, or only for a little time, succeed."

When we are asked to accept the Historic Episcopate as a condition precedent to Union we want to know exactly what it means. We have been told that in the United Church there must be an Episcopal element, and to this we make no objection. In some of our Churches already we have Superintendents of districts, but an adverb was deliberately inserted in the Lambeth discussions that "similarly" there must be the presbyteral and congregational elements. *Similarly*. One element is not to override either of the others. It must be possible to say that in a United Church there shall be the Presbyteral and Congregational elements "similarly" to the Episcopal. That is a point the Bishops, when they meet next year, will have to settle, if any further advance is to be made. It is decisive.

It is necessary also to remember three other things. First, that Free Churches cannot unite with a Church that continues to be a State Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury said quite reasonably

that, considering "the immense changes that have passed over both the life of the nation and of the Church, the relations of Church and State which reflected the conditions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries cannot remain unchanged." It must also be borne in mind that the methods of Scotland are not an example for England, where the factors are much more varied.

Then it cannot be expected that the Free Churches of this country can join a Church which desires to hold itself open to join the Churches of the East, if that means that the Free Churches must renounce their fellowship with the thirty-three millions of non-Episcopal Free Churchmen in America, and millions more in other parts of the world.

And though no question of principle can be settled by an appeal to numbers, it should be remembered that there are less than two millions of Protestant Episcopalians in America. So there can be no question of the less absorbing the greater. And on this side of the Atlantic the matter cannot be determined for England alone. The United Church of Scotland will also have to be considered.

While on the question of numbers it is worthy of notice as an indication of vitality that while, during the century ending 1925, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Protestants generally have each increased less than 200 per cent., much less, the Baptists have increased 2,216 per cent. This statement has recently been published and vouched for by a recognized statistician, Dr. E. P. Allredge, of Nashville, Tennessee, who gives the actual figures. It almost looks as if the trend is not towards Episcopacy.

Lord Selborne, as lately as March 29, gives in *The Times* some extracts from a manifesto published by seven candidates for election as Proctors to Convocation, in which occurs this sentence: "Just as the British Empire is in a real sense a preliminary sketch of the future federation of the world, a veritable League of Nations in miniature, so we believe the Anglican Communion may yet demonstrate the possibility of a wider reunion of Christendom." On which it may be remarked that perhaps the League of Nations itself may demonstrate the sort of Union that may be thinkable, and possible, and workable.

For after all that is the real test of Union. Can we work together? It is of no use to say that we can unite in social and public efforts—that is possible even with infidels. As religious and Christian bodies we must be able to unite, if at all, in religious and Christian exercises. If not in these we had better frankly confess that we exist apart. It may quite plainly be said that the Free Churches would rather be opposed than tolerated. For co-operation or for controversy we must meet on equal terms, and quite gladly we recognize that this is the temper that is manifested in many quarters.

Well, then, let us begin. If we wait till every possible question is answered we will wait until some uprising of the people will give a practical settlement, which may possibly be the casting of all of us aside. For there are questions before us for which there is no answer.

Job could not be satisfied with the answers any of his friends gave to his question, but when he saw the Lord he was satisfied, not that even then he gained the answer to his question—a higher grace was given to him—he lost the question.

When, after the Civil War in America, where the North had been opposed to the South, was over, the Episcopal Churches met in common session, a proposal was made that before advancing any further, the questions that had separated them should be discussed and settled. But a wise old delegate proposed as an amendment that these questions should be postponed until they had considered the work and witness of the Church. To this the whole Assembly assented: they went on with their proper business, and the discussion of the differences between North and South still stands adjourned. If the questions were now raised the present generation would not even know what they were talking about.

So, with thankful acknowledgment of your courtesy and your patience, my last word is—"Let us begin."

AUTHORITY IN CHURCH AND STATE. By Philip S. Belasco. *George Allen & Unwin, 1928. (Pp. 326.) 12s. 6d.*

The foreword which Dr. Gooch supplies to this book is in itself a judicious review of the main doctrines which Dr. Belasco puts forward. The author deals with the problem of Authority in Church and State from the Quaker point of view. He is more concerned with the relation of the individual to society than with the various ecclesiastical conceptions of Authority. He considers the individual conscience as supreme, and any form of social coercion as immoral. The first part of the book gives an excellent account of the political ideas of the Quakers of the seventeenth century. Then follows a valuable survey of the working of authority in Church and State, particularly during that century. This leads the author to an able defence of William Penn, a statesman who has not yet received his due from the historians. Penn's support of the Catholic James II is shown to be a logical issue of his professed principles. Dr. Belasco ends with the significant conclusion: "The Church, if it lives, has silently admitted no rights outside the minds of men: when it has power and authority it has followed the laws of their existence. The Church, as well as the State, therefore, finds strength and not weakness in the personal interests or creative ideas of her members: they are acquisitions necessary for the life of both." There is a good index to the book, and the many references in the footnotes bear witness to the author's wide reading. In a book of general excellence, occasional lapses of style may be pardoned.

G. H. W.