

THE CHURCHMAN

October, 1937.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

The Bucharest Conference.

NOTWITHSTANDING the approval given by the Houses of Convocation to the Report of the above Conference, there is a strong feeling among many Churchmen that the matter must not be allowed to rest there. Convocation has never counted for very much in the esteem of the Church as a whole or of the country generally. It has usually been a centre of obstinate conservatism and a focus of reactionary influence, and its latest pronouncement is not likely to increase its reputation. We are glad, therefore, that Prebendary Hinde has challenged its decision by calling the attention of a wider audience to the matter. He in concert with a few friends prepared a Declaration which appeared in *The Times* newspaper last August, and of which he has sent us a copy. The following is the full text :—

“ We the undersigned (clerks and laymen of the Church of England), earnestly desiring such unity of the Church on earth as is according to God’s will, affirm our conviction :—

“ That Intercommunion is to be regarded as an important step in the path of unity and not as a goal or crown to be postponed until organic unity has been otherwise achieved.

“ That Intercommunion should be sought first with those of our own blood and language who use and acknowledge the authority of the same Bible and use the same hymns of praise and devotion ; and then with the other Churches of the Reformation with whom our divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries held fellowship ; and ultimately with all who hold the faith of the Triune God and recognize that Christ is Lord of all.

“ That the establishment of such Intercommunion would be a manifestation of the true essential unity that exists between all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth.

“ That such Intercommunion should be governed by the principle already formulated that ‘ Intercommunion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other ; but implies that each believes the other

to hold all the essentials of the Catholic Faith.' (Concordat made in July, 1931, with the Old Catholic Churches of Western and Central Europe.) This principle ought to be applied to those who, holding all these essentials, yet differ from us in the lesser matters of Church order and discipline."

This Declaration was signed by, among others, Sir Thomas Inskip; the Revs. J. M. Hewitt, H. W. Hinde, Canon V. F. Storr, H. McGowan, Canon T. Guy Rogers; Principals C. Sydney Carter, D.D., T. W. Gilbert, D.D., J. P. S. R. Gibson, F. B. Heiser, J. R. S. Taylor, and W. Dodgson Sykes. Further signatures are invited and should be sent to the Rev. Prebendary Hinde, Oak Hill College, Southgate, N.14.

We are glad that the matter has been so promptly taken up and so well dealt with; and we trust that a large number of further signatures will be sent in, for it is a matter the grave significance of which is not, we fear, yet adequately realized. A further step has been taken by those in authority in the direction of departure from the reformed basis on which the Church of England must continue to rest if it is to be the Church of the people of England. There may, and probably will be, further steps in the same direction.

Oxford and Edinburgh.

The two Conferences on Church, Community, State and on Faith and Order which have recently been held at Oxford and Edinburgh respectively, in continuation of that held at Lausanne in 1927, may not have fulfilled all the expectations of some of those who composed them, but they have marked a definite advance in the direction of Christian Unity. Great preparations were made beforehand in order that when the Conferences met, time should not be taken up with preliminaries and explanations and the result seems to have justified the arrangements. It would have been a mistake to expect that the Conferences would produce definite and tangible results which could be tabulated and put on record as something actually accomplished.

An Analogy.

Ecclesiastical, like political difficulties, are not removed by majority resolutions or amiable expressions. The League of Nations has not ended war and few people of reflection and knowledge anticipated that it would do so; but it set up an ideal and pointed men's minds in the right direction and it has ameliorated some of the conditions and consequences of war. It is not a small or unimportant thing that there is a carefully constituted body in which diplomatists and statesmen from many nations can meet and discuss their various aims and at least tone down their animosities by conferring over them and so understanding better each other's grievances. In a similar way such Conferences as those at Lausanne, Stockholm, Oxford and Edinburgh foster the aim of unity and create an atmosphere in which that great Christian ideal may be more nearly realized. It is the great increase

in this atmosphere of mutual understanding and friendly feeling, in place of animosity and embittered controversy, which is the real achievement of these two Conferences. They have not added much to our knowledge of the differences which hinder unity and they have not seriously come to grips with any specific points, unless it was that of Apostolical Succession, and on this a prepared statement had to be omitted from the general Affirmation on Unity because its phraseology was said "to present difficulties."

A Main Hindrance.

This brings us to the heart of the matter and shows how much ground has to be covered before the desired end can be reached. No very clear view as to what is actually meant by Unity seems to have emerged. Is it comprehension in one great organization, or agreement on such fundamental doctrines as are contained in the Apostles' Creed, or a recognition of each other as brethren in Christ, thus keeping "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," or is it to include agreement on secondary matters of Church organization such as the nature and purpose of the Ministry, the Church and the Sacraments? Experience does not encourage the attempt to provide one great organization, and to make episcopacy an essential is to place a principal stumbling block in the path of unity. Those who hold what is called the "Catholic" view, though it has no legitimate claim to that honoured name, maintain a theory of Apostolical succession of so exclusive a character that it practically denies the validity of any ministry except that alleged to have come in unbroken succession from the Apostles through the laying on of Episcopal hands. Any order of ministers not thus derived are said to have no power to administer the Sacraments, their ministry is irregular and can only look to the "uncovenanted mercies" of God, whatever that may mean, for any blessing upon it. There is no support for such a theory in the New Testament, and, so far as the Church of England is concerned, her authorized teaching gives no countenance to it. This it is which more than anything else is the great cause of dis-unity and the evidence of the fact is that the Roman Church, which is the typical example of rigid adhesion to the theory, refused to be represented at the Conference. While this is maintained there can be no possible union. It even prevents the meeting together at the Lord's Table of those who are earnestly endeavouring to promote union. The Bishop of Gloucester, who is an ardent supporter of the necessity, at least on practical grounds, of Episcopacy in a United Church, offered a protest against the view that it necessarily unchurches other ministries. The Conference at Edinburgh owed much to the able, wise and tactful chairmanship of the Archbishop of York whose position, experience and knowledge of all the intricacies of a most difficult business, marked him out as the obvious President of such a gathering. It was, however, a real blunder, to say no more, that the Evangelical representation from the Church of England was so small as to be almost negligible and it is worse that there is not one Evangelical Churchman on the Continuation

Committee. Dr. A. J. Macdonald called the attention of the Conference to the fact and it is possible that something may be done. It is not so difficult to get harmony and unanimity at a Conference, if the members are carefully selected beforehand and all who might oppose, excluded. But people sooner or later are able to estimate the value of such agreement.

The Reformation.

The time for the active steps to commemorate the Reformation for which there has been long and careful preparation is now very near at hand. The occasion is the fourth Centenary of the movement and the particular date selected is neither its commencement nor its conclusion, but the year in which the Bible was, by Royal authority, set up in the parishes of this country for all to read who were able and desired to do so. To make this the centre and focus of the Reformation was a happy and appropriate inspiration, especially as one of the great purposes of the commemoration is to attract people of every class and creed in the country to the Bible and to induce them to discover for themselves afresh the treasures of literary beauty, moral teaching and spiritual help which it contains. It is to the message of redemption and forgiveness therein contained that the Reformation itself was due—that great liberating and uplifting movement which brought the individual man into the very presence of God through Christ without the intervention or intrusion of any earthly mediatorship whether of Church or priest or canonized saint. Subsequent history bears witness to the vast and beneficial changes which were wrought by the spiritual freedom thus realized and made possible. But a mere commemoration of the setting up of the Bible in Churches without any reference to the great truths which, revealed in Scripture and reasserted at the Reformation, worked so amazing a change in the life and character of the English people, would be to leave an incomplete impression of all that took place. A corrupt and cruel tyranny over men's minds and bodies, the grossest superstition in worship and the most flagrant greed and immorality, had steadily grown until they could be endured no longer. These have to be known, before we can estimate aright our debt either to the Reformation or the Reformers. And further, the commemoration should furnish a fresh stimulus for those who value the blessings of the Reformation, to preach its great message of free and full redemption more zealously than ever, and more earnestly endeavour to defend that message from being again corrupted and overlaid.