

THE CHURCHMAN

July—September, 1938.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

The Reformation and the English Bible.

THE celebration of the Fourth Centenary of the Reformation and of the order in council for the setting up of a Bible in English in every parish in the land has been very successful in attracting public attention to the great influence the English Bible has had on our national life. There can be little doubt that the more solid and reliable elements in the English character may be traced to the fact that since the Reformation, until quite recent years the Bible has been the one book which was almost universally known and revered in Great Britain and a large part of Ireland. The English Bible has had due meed of recognition from all quarters, so far as its incomparable literary value is concerned. Government Reports, Educational authorities, the newspaper Press, literary men and persons of eminence in every walk of life have testified to its value and charm as literature, and to the impoverishment which declining familiarity with its contents inflicts upon our speech and writing. But its chief value is in its effect on the religious life of those who study its precepts and seek to obey them. A vigorous, growing and influential Christian life, it is hardly too much to say, can only be developed by a knowledge of and reverence for the Scriptures. To recall this truth has been the object of these celebrations ; but they will only attain their object fully by a widely spread revival of the habit of Bible reading. The practice will well repay those who adopt it.

Lawful Authority.

The Report of the Archbishop's Church and State Committee which in prospect aroused many needless apprehensions and on publication disappointed most of them, has received fresh attention through the adoption by Canterbury Convocation of the cumbrous and unconstitutional "Interim Proposal" which it contained. Whether by design or accident, the effect of the Proposal, if adopted, would be to confer on the Bishops a quasi-legal power to vary the requirements of the Book of Common Prayer without having first to obtain the sanction

of Parliament. The Royal Commission of 1904-6 pointed out that the Acts of Uniformity bind Bishops as well as other clergymen, and consequently they have no rights inherent in their office in virtue of which they can change what has been constitutionally enacted by process of law. The fact, however, that the declaration of assent made by every clergyman prior to ordination or to institution contains the words, "and I will use the form in the said book prescribed, and none other, except so far as shall be ordered by lawful authority," has raised the question in some minds as to what is the "lawful authority" referred to. The answer would seem to be "the authority of law"—the same process of law which prescribed the use of the said book and none other. What the law has enacted the law only can vary. The Interim Proposal is, however, that the two Convocations should, with the approval of the Church Assembly, adopt a Synodical Declaration to the effect that the Bishop of the Diocese shall, subject to certain conditions, which are set out in full, be deemed to be the "lawful authority" to which obedience is pledged. The objections to such a course are fairly obvious, and have been forcibly stated by the Bishop of Norwich, but one of the chief is that the procedure proposed runs counter to that of the Enabling Act which was passed by Parliament at the request of the Church less than twenty years ago. The Convocations have, in spite of this, approved the Proposal, though it is very doubtful if it will find much favour outside certain clerical circles. The moral authority and influence of Convocation has never stood very high and is not likely to be enhanced by this action following so soon upon its approval of the Report of the Conference at Bucarest. A body which can profess to equate the doctrinal system of the Orthodox Eastern Church with the plain declarations of the 39 Articles has little claim to respect either for impartiality or soundness of judgment.

The Doctrinal Report.

As our April number was taken up with the papers read at the Oxford Conference, we were compelled to leave over any mention of the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Doctrine. The object of the Commission is expressed in the terms of reference which were :

"To consider the nature and grounds of Christian doctrine with a view to demonstrating the extent of existing agreement within the Church of England and with a view to investigating how far it is possible to remove or diminish existing differences."

The Report is an interesting document and will take its place among similar productions as a record of the views of those who took part in its production. We hope to deal fully with the subject in a later issue.