The Canons—An Interim Statement

By The Rev. D. F. Horsefield

THE Editor has laid on me two assignments, which I propose to interpret quite strictly: one, to "expound your view that the time for shelving the Canons is past"; the other, to "discuss the next steps following the recent Convocation". Neither of these is easy: the one might land me in controversy with fellow-Evangelicals (which I abhor), the other can do no more than express an opinion *ad hoc*, which may have to be modified in the light of events. I can but put down such reflections and conclusions as seem to me to accord with facts and conditions.

Why not "drop the Canons"? Only those of us who are members of Convocation or of the House of Laity can fully appreciate the frustrations, the apparent waste of time, the diversion of energy from other channels, involved in the long and tedious business of revision: but others can see, with us, the dangers of legalism and the risk of dividing the Church in critical and challenging times. And I, for one, have wished often enough that my conscience would allow me to get out of the whole thing and advise the Convocations to do the same.

But conscience is a stubborn thing; and its promptings are perhaps more easily felt than persuasively argued. I can only set down some of the reasons that appear to me (however unwelcome it may be to my instincts) to be conclusive in favour of proceeding with Stage 1 of the Revision, and embarking on Stage 2.

In the first place, it is possible to adduce advantages as well as drawbacks in the process. Certain it is that the events of the past few years have compelled Evangelicals to re-examine, re-state and re-emphasize their doctrine of the Church and the grounds of their faith. Equally certainly there has been an immense growth of Evangelical influence in the government of the Church. Not only are "the others" prepared to listen to us with a respect and a sympathy that, in my memory, have been hitherto accorded only to individual leaders of Evangelical thought; but our advice is sought, our judgments respected and our standpoint comprehended to a higher degree, I think, than for many years past. This is great gain: gain not so much from a "party" point of view as from that of the whole Church, whose doctrine is, to say the least, sadly defective if it does not include the special insights of an outspoken Evangelicalism.

Further (and this is important) in our present negotiations with Churches so well disciplined as the Methodist and Presbyterian bodies it is surely important that some curb should be put on our own indiscipline; and, in a similar sort of connection, would it not give an immense impetus to the Roman propaganda if that body were able to say that after ten years of discussion the Church of England in the end has to give up any attempt to regulate itself?

I could add other gains, and other losses; and I do not know which, in the aggregate, might prove the more weighty: but I must go on to say that I do not base on this footing my conviction that we ought to

press on with the task of Revision. To me it is a question not of expediency but of principle: and I am bound to ask myself the questions, "Ought, or ought not, the Church of England to have a Code of Canons?" and if the answer is in the affirmative, "Is the Code of 1603-4 adequate or not?" My conscientious conviction is that we need a Code of Canons, and that the existing one is inadequate; and I am therefore compelled to take my part in producing another. Others, I know, have reached the opposite conclusion: let us not try to argue, nor to controvert; if we think differently, let us at least think charitably. But it is surely clear that those of us whose consciences impel us to go on with the thankless task for the sake of the future need most desperately the prayers of all Evangelicals, whether they agree with us or not; we need wisdom, courage, tact, charity, and many other graces.

I would add one further word: even if I could have felt that a revised Code ought not to be produced, I should still be bound to hold that—in the words of the Editor—"the time for shelving the Canons is past". It was open to anybody to oppose the setting up of the Commission in 1939, to make representations about its composition, to formulate a policy during its deliberations, and at once to raise a *caveat* on the publication of the Report in 1947. We took none of these steps; a campaign now against the whole procedure could easily give the impression—even if without justification—that we are concerned to stop the process of Revision less because we object to it in itself than for fear that it may go against us. I think Evangelicals must say openly and officially, either (a) We want the existing Code to be retained unrevised, or (b) We want the existing Code to be abolished and no other substituted, or (c) We want a new or revised Code. I see no further alternative to these three propositions; but the last of the three—which defines my own position—must bear a rider safeguarding the Protestantism of the Church. I cannot allow myself to approve that rider in the dogmatic form "provided that . . . and not otherwise", because in the event of the proviso being unrealized, we should be thrown back on one of the other alternatives: and while I am anxious to avoid argument, and merely to "state a case", I am bound to ask those who in any circumstances would advocate (a) or (b) to study the existing code and to decide whether they really want all the safeguards contained therein to be withdrawn, or all the regulations to remain in being.

For myself, I am driven to say not merely, "We don't object to a revision on certain conditions," which is at best unconstructive; but "We want a revision"; and having committed ourselves so far, then to add, "and we are determined to play an effective part, as Evangelical Churchmen, in that revising process". Herein lies the objection to a proposal, which otherwise has a good deal to commend it, that all matters of controversy should for the present be postponed: I am not at all sure that we should be right to try to saddle those who come after us with a responsibility—difficult and unwelcome as it is—that the passage of time has thrust on this present generation.

So I came to Part 2 of my assignment. I am restricted to some

2,000 words, and have already exhausted more than one-half of that ration, so I must be as concise as possible in what follows.

In certain respects—though I think not the vital ones—we have missed the first bus ; it is for us to make sure that we catch the second. In other words, had Evangelicals taken during the past fifty or sixty years the fuller share in Church government that they are taking today, things would have been different. We start with a handicap : but we acknowledge, gratefully and genuinely, the determination of the authorities to see that nevertheless our point of view is fully considered, in spite of an occasional (and quite unsuccessful) effort on the part of a few of the laity to hustle Evangelicals out of the way. " We won't be druv."

What, then, are " the next steps " ?—to quote again from my instructions. Let me list them as I see them, both those already taken and those which we envisage. I must make it clear that what follows refers mainly to the Convocation of Canterbury ; at the time of writing I have not received the York Journal of Convocation, which is the sole source of reliable information. I have, however, reason to believe that the Convocations are keeping pretty well in step.

(*a*) We are embarking on Stage 2 : the appropriate resolution in each case being " That the Canon in this form be approved for the first time and be referred to the House of Laity for comment ". Proposed amendments are submitted through the Steering Committee, which (of course) has no power to reject them, but can co-ordinate (with the consent of the movers) amendments that seem to cover much the same ground. Evangelical proctors have developed, with the active help and encouragement of the authorities, a technique whereby some of us table amendments which others sponsor in the Steering Committee, in the hope—frequently fulfilled—that this body will support them officially in debate. By this process we have secured certain desirable alterations, e.g. :

Canon 15 : " It is lawful for the Convocations to approve Holy Days to be observed provincially " : this has become " which may be observed ", making such observance optional instead of mandatory.

Canon 18. " Showing due reverence at the Name of Jesus " becomes " Giving due reverence to the Name of the Lord Jesus " ; so that such reverence need not be expressed by outward gesture.

Canon 20. The whole reference to the " vicarious worship " offered by the minister has been deleted.

As for Canon 5, " . . . grounded in the Holy Scriptures and in the teaching of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church agreeable to the said Scriptures ". This becomes " such teachings . . . as are agreeable ". I am aware that there is still uneasiness among us about the word " grounded ", even with this modification : and if I allowed myself the luxury of argument, I should propound certain considerations which seem to me to indicate that in this form the Canon truly represents the standpoint of Evangelical Churchmen as against either the heresies of (e.g.) Jehovah's Witnesses or the divergences of some of the Nonconformist bodies, whether Roman or (like ourselves) Protestant. But I am confining myself to statement, and eschewing

argument ; and can therefore only say that on this Canon Evangelicals will probably still have to agree to differ.

(*b*) Canon 17 of Vestments. We have lost the first round, which was a proposal to delete the whole Canon. This was an attractive way out, although I wondered, even while supporting it, whether we were thereby trying to dodge the issue. A further proposal is before us, which would retain the clause about not sanctioning any strange doctrine, while omitting all reference to specific vesture of any kind. It is quite certain that vestments have, in fact, doctrinal significance in the eyes of many of us : it is equally clear that that significance is (in our Church) historical and not intrinsic. The suggestion has been made that now is the opportunity to unwrite that page of history ; this may appear unsatisfactory, but we have not so far succeeded in propounding a feasible alternative. Practical advice on this point will be welcomed ; and in the meantime much prayer is needed.

(*c*) To be quite personal : my own general policy is to delete from the Draft Canons anything that is already covered by Rubric. This seems to me to be a sound and logical principle : I invoked it in speaking against Canon 17, and shall do so again in Canon 24 about the admission of unconfirmed persons to Holy Communion. There are (as I believe) copious and convincing arguments which I hope to adduce against this clause in any case, but it is, in general, wise to have a broad principle as a background to specific argument.

(*d*) As to Canons which have not yet been debated on Stage 2, 69A (on assent to future Canons) is logically unassailable, if not essential ; but is offensive to our instincts, and ought at least to be amended and softened.

In Canon 26, the specific mention of wafer bread, and the insistence on fermented wine, seem to me to constitute a gratuitous challenge: the Canon would serve its purpose equally well without these.

Certain later Canons, defining the position of the laity in Church government, do not lay down anything fresh, as has been hinted in some quarters, but merely quote from the existing Constitutions of Convocation and of the Church Assembly respectively. The Commission on Synodical Government is, of course, considering the whole position ; and judgment must be suspended until that Commission has reported.

(*e*) Finally, what steps can be taken by Evangelicals as a whole ? First, careful study, accurate information without unwarranted deductions, checking of facts. Second, prayer based on knowledge so acquired ; fervent, constant, believing ; particularly during the actual Session of Convocation. Twice lately in time of crisis, special prayer has thus been called for ; in the wonderful debate on the Church of South India, and recently at the beginning of Stage 2 of the Canons : and each time the whole Convocation was aware of a special Presence of the Holy Spirit directing and controlling thoughts, words, and atmosphere. Third, frequent discussion in Diocesan Fellowships and Unions. And fourth, Resolutions sent to your Proctors : not protesting but demanding ; only asking for deletion after fully considering, and stating, the consequences of the desired alteration, whether it

be entire omission, or substitution of something different. I cannot stress too heavily the importance of this final sentence ; on its implementation depends very largely the influence of Evangelicals as a constructive force in the Church in these days of rapid change and of great opportunity.

Christians of the Confederacy

By The Rev. M. W. Dewar, M.A.

FEW events in recent history have been more subject to generalization and romanticism than the American Civil War, which ending ninety-six years ago still leaves three surviving combatants. British readers, who had been brought up for generations on Harriet Beecher Stowe, twenty years ago found themselves turned emotionally in the opposite direction by *Gone with the Wind*. The bulk of the British public, particularly of what used to be called the " lower " and " middle " classes, remains unrepentantly addicted towards " Uncle Tommery ". A section of the more romantically-minded, given to lost causes, have swelled the ranks of that British minority which supported the Confederacy in the 'sixties.

But with the approach of the centenary of this war of secession, and with a greater need than ever of Anglo-American understanding, the issue between North and South needs to be re-thought out by Christian people. Though the issues were political, they were also ideological. To a certain degree they were not untinged with religion. It is easy to dismiss the conflict as one between benevolent abolitionists and brutal slave-holders, earnest crusaders and reactionary patriarchs, with the figure of Abraham Lincoln dwarfing his contemporaries as a symbol of Triumphant Christianity. But the differences between the Blue and the Grey cannot be written off as a design in snow and ink. Each side had its shadings. Like an over-simplification of history or ethics this traditional picture of " 1861 and all that " contains a number of dangerous half truths.

Slavery was involved, but it was not a war for or against the South's " peculiar institution ". Lincoln was concerned mainly to preserve the American Union of States, and Lee had freed all his slaves. There were Christian men of high ideals on each side. President Lincoln, hailed as " Father Abraham " and " the Great Messiah " by abolitionists and negroes, was something of a deist. The Confederacy numbered active Church members among its leaders. The North did not lack preachers like Henry Ward Beecher, and poets like Longfellow and Whittier. But the practical Lincoln had little sympathy with the fanaticism of John Brown, and realized that his " body lying mouldering in the grave " was sowing the dragon's teeth of war no less than the slavery which they both detested. He half jestingly referred to Mrs. Stowe as " the little woman who started this war " ; and despite the idealism of Julia Ward Howe's " Battle Hymn of the Republic " the Northern armies were as much impressed by her " fiery gospel writ in shining bars of steel " (i.e.,