

FROM WEEK TO WEEK

"Spectator's" Discussion of Topics of Interest to Churchmen

A LETTER, beautiful in thought and expression, has been sent forth to the world and particularly to those interested in Christian reunion, by Bishop Brent, president of the first conference on Faith and Order recently held in Geneva, Switzerland. It is the portrayal of a vision rather than the summary of the acts of an assembly. It probably, in this form, more faithfully conveys to us the spirit of the conference than any attempt to epitomize in concrete report what was said, and what was done. It is the invisible spirit of the men of learning, devotion and purpose, assembled from many nations, nurtured in various spiritual atmospheres, yet united in one common fellowship of faith in Christ the Son of God, that counted above all else. There was a frank, free confession of faith as it affects the souls of men under divergent climes and racial instincts, and national influences. There the matter was apparently left to fructify into a harmony and wholeness that no one present could divine how or whence it should come. "Faith first and then Order. The inner principle of life, the ideal, and then the mode of propagating by organic self-government of what is within." The whole scheme of Faith and Order, as set forth by the American Church ten years ago, seemed to many of us about as wild and hopeless an undertaking as could well be devised by man. Since then, however, so many apparently impossible things have happened that the word "impossible" has almost grown obsolete. At all events, the first world conference has assembled and conferred. Before it disbanded, its constituent members, on the festival of the Transfiguration, assembled in the Russian Orthodox Church in Geneva, the city of John Calvin, to worship together for the first, and for most of them, the last time. The Archbishop of Salonica preached to a congregation of Anglicans, Baptists, Old Catholics, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Quakers and many others. "We came away," says the Bishop, "with pain benit and grapes in our hands and sweetness in our souls, under the spell of the mystic East." The vision of a Church universal is still a vision, but a step has been taken to give it form, and who can say how soon we may be rejoicing in its rebirth?

The pronouncement of the Bishops at Lambeth on Christian reunion bring up many questions within our own Church that must be attended to before we can enter with consistent effectiveness on the larger issue. For example, there are scattered here and there through this country an excess of Anglican churches. In some communities there are two church fabrics with all the appurtenances thereto, where one would suffice. The division means not only weakened congregational effort and enthusiasm, an excessive concentration on the requirements of individual existence and a narrowed outlook upon the wholeness and oneness of the Church, but it lowers the prestige of the Church in that particular community. The power of one really successful Church, influenced by the psychology of the multitude, subject and amenable to more daring leadership, is a far greater asset to the locality and the Church at large than two congregations anxiously expending their thought on the possession of the necessities of life. The carrying of the

Church to the doors of the people has been overdone and ought to be rectified. Again, how does the Lambeth pronouncement bear on the existence of two Anglican theological colleges in the same diocese, or two colleges in different dioceses where one can serve all the requirements of the Church? Let us not spend all our time looking to the ends of the earth for the application of the Lambeth principles. We must set our own house in order first, and then shall we have power and the right to confer with others. Legal minds may confront us with the terms of trusts and bequests, as an insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of these things, but if we really are of one mind on the matter, parliament and legislatures can take care of the legal aspects of the problem. The point is, if we give assent to the Lambeth finding, the logic of the occasion and the hope of the Bishops explicitly expressed is that we should begin within our own household.

"Spectator" cannot agree with those who attach special importance to the pronouncement of the Lambeth Conference on the duty of the Church in reference to the League of Nations. Neither does he believe that the public generally so regards it. Even if the position taken be that of wisdom and justice, it will be extremely difficult to convince our people that either prelates or priests are the most reliable guides in international politics. It would be interesting to know how many of the Bishops have actually studied and analysed the Covenant from end to end as it stands, and found that it conforms to Christian principles throughout. We venture to think that very few of the clergy have done so and therefore are only competent to give second-hand opinions thereon. Let us assume, however, that the document is all that can be desired. What of its administration? If the dominant partners in that agreement begin to administer the League to suit their own purposes, rather than the unselfish welfare of all, is the Anglican Church throughout the world still to call all men to its support? How is the Church to decide when the document and its administration are divergent in spirit and in fact? Suppose America declines to enter, and France withdraws, and Italy is indifferent, must the Anglican Church keep on expending its energy in advocating its claims upon the world? We would then be placed in the position, not of a Catholic Church, but of a British institution. It is one thing for individual members of the Church to express their approval or disapproval, but it is an entirely different matter for the Church in its organic capacity to commit itself body and soul to a League which to-day is and to-morrow may be cast into the oven. The great trouble is that in officially espousing the cause of the League of Nations the Church is placing herself in the hands of statesmen and diplomats of varied races and nationalities, and who can say where we may be landed? Should the League develop unsatisfactorily, it will be ten years before the Church can restate her position with the same impressiveness as that which issued from the library of Lambeth. "Spectator" humbly submits these considerations to the attention of the Canadian House of Bishops about to meet in Winnipeg.

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