

LAY HELP.

THE question of lay help has been discussed for some years past with an earnestness and thoroughness which gave promise of practical results far nobler than have been realized. Those discussions have done the Church a service of great moment in awakening a wider interest in her work among the laity. The specific form of lay help which is usually indicated in that phrase has been much less brought out than was hoped to be secured. But the laity are now fully informed of their duties, their responsibilities, their privileges, and their powers. Where there is apathy it is no longer the apathy of ignorance. Where there is zeal it needs no longer be the mere restless zeal of laymen who fret under any form of discipline, but where it is an intelligent, a truly spiritually inspired zeal, it is directed towards the discharge of such work as the necessary discipline of the Church alone directs and empowers a layman to perform, under conditions most conclusive to the welfare of the Church. The old fashioned idea, old we may say, only relatively, for it is quite new, that the Church has only work for the clergy, that the laity are without a sphere of labor, is no longer held by any churchmen. Laymen may, as so many do, live as though they had no knowledge of their being an integral part of the Church, having equally with the clergy, certain duties to discharge. They may live a life of indifference to and gross neglect of laymen's responsibilities, but question such drones as to their idea of who constitute the Church, or tell them that they, as laymen, have no duties in the Church, and they would reply with indignation, that they as laymen are just as certainly a part of the Church as the clergy. It is well that this conviction as to the lay sphere and position exists; it is a keen reproach to the bulk of those by whom it is held. It is indeed a scandal of inconsistency and a shameful spectacle of neglect of duty to see our laity entertaining such strong and intelligent views as to the layman's standing in the Church, while they practically in their lives ignore all the responsibilities which they theoretically recognized. The change of feeling in this matter may be judged by the contrast in all our Church publications since the Oxford movement awakened churchmen to their membership in the Divine Body. A most able series of "Essays on the Church's needs," published in 1859, is before us, written from the Evangelical standpoint, and there is not one word in the book as to the need of lay help! Seeing how complete has been the revolution in lay ideas during this generation, the question arises: "Why with opinion so decided and so sound, is practice so dead and so partial?"

There is we fear apathy elsewhere than among the laity as to the power of lay help. In condemning irregular, erratic, unchurchly, so-called mission work, are we wholly blameless? We know that some natures ever will exist in the Church, as they do in the world, which have a strong analogy to the wild ass of the plains, that will not bear bit, or bridle, or

any sign of restraint. But, happily, these are merely morbid phenomena; no laws will guide or control such erratic persons, and we must not make laws in harsh restraint of the loyal, which the disloyal alone need and alone will repudiate. We need, then, some organized system of the lay sphere, some well-ordered, easy rules of work; some method of helping them by instruction, by sympathy, by the mutual aid of other laymen; some mode of inviting laymen to enter upon duties they recognize as duties, and some wise plans for utilizing the varied talents which laymen are willing to consecrate to the Church.

THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE.

A SENTENCE in the lecture of Provost Body, touching the identity of the evidence for the teaching of the Church as to Episcopacy and for the Canon of Scripture, was misreported in a local paper. It was hardly possible to have avoided such an error, as the attempt was made to condense into a dozen lines, the matter of an argument which took over 8000 words to express. Without making any attempt to verify what to an experienced writer would have been known to be manifestly not an accurate report, an attack was made on this statement as though it had been authentic, and remarks were based upon a report which on the face of it it was impossible to be correct. Dr. Hodgins, with commendable manliness, wrote to the paper which made this Quixotic attack on language never used, but his letter was refused insertion. We refer to this in order to show our friends precisely the manner in which those reports get afloat that are so injurious to the Church, and the spirit animating those who keep up party divisions. It is a very grave offence against peace, and charity, and decency, to attack any man for language he never used, especially when, as in this case, the assailant had the very best possible evidence for knowing that such words were never used. Apart from this we much regret that a churchman should utterly repudiate two fundamental truths of Church history. 1st. That the Church is the historic authority for the Scriptures. 2nd. That the Church to-day is historically the same Church, visible and Divine, which settled the Canon of Scripture. We give an excellent letter of Lord Nelson's on this subject:

"What are facts? (1.) The Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament each existed before the inspired Books which compose the Canon were given; and as the Canon was in both cases of gradual growth, the Jewish and Christian Churches had to receive the separate books from time to time as the undoubted Word of God, and to gather them into the Canon. (2.) Holy Scripture was in no single portion addressed directly to the world at large, but invariably to those in Covenant with God and members of His Church."

"Now these facts in no way derogate from the importance of Holy Scripture; but they show that the Church must ever be the keeper and interpreter of Holy Writ."

"It was once a common error among Protestant Nonconformists to set the Holy Scriptures in opposition to the Church as a visible organization, since the publication of Mr. Martin's valuable little book (on the origin and history of the New Testament) which is generally accepted by Nonconformists, this error can hardly be maintained."

Mr. Martin, who is a Baptist, writes:—

"For years the churches were left without any writings at all, that they might bear witness to all ages that the Church of Christ is not founded upon a book; and that the Gospel of Christ—or, rather, the Christ of the Gospel—is infinitely superior to the written record in which the truth has been handed down. At length, however, as the voices of the Apostles died away, and the utterances of living teachers became more and more discordant, the written words of the dead increased in worth, and were eagerly sought and carefully preserved. They have served the part of living witnesses that the Gospel which has come down to us is not a mere mythical perversion of facts and truths, or cunningly devised fables; but the same Gospel which Christ revealed, which the Apostles proclaimed and for which many an early martyr laid down his life."

So also Dr. Dollinger writes:—

"For the first quarter of a century from our Lord's Ascension the Church existed without any written documents. They lived on the recollections of Christ, the spoken words of His Apostles and disciples, and the Jewish Scriptures and tradition. In the bosom of the Church, as an expression and embodiment of the Spirit which ruled, and the tradition laid up within it, the New Testament was written in the course of fifty years. By the light of the Spirit filling the Church and guiding her from generation to generation, both the people and pastor read and understood and explained these writings."

This concurrent testimony from the Baptist and the Catholic is remarkable, and clearly shows that there can be no real antagonism between tradition rightly used and the Holy Scriptures, which were founded and collected on the traditions of the Early Church.

The witness of the Church for the first 1500 years must not be carelessly cast aside. For, though special phases of the truth may be revealed by the Holy Spirit to faithful hearts with far greater emphasis from time to time, we may be sure they could never militate against previously revealed truth; and must not be confounded with the discoveries of one-text men, who know nothing of the originals, and may never have attempted to compare Scripture with Scripture in their eagerness to magnify some particular phase of the truth, which will ever be received with greater or less favour according to the differently constituted minds of men.

As the Church undoubtedly existed before the Holy Scriptures, and as, according to Christ's promise, the Holy Ghost dwells and will ever dwell within the Church, there must of necessity be some outward Body to receive