

THE CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS.

A REMARKABLE SERMON.

WE devote our editorial columns this week to what the London *Guardian* calls "the very remarkable sermon of the Bishop of Sydney, its report of which is as follows. The text is Ezekiel xlvii. 3, 4, 5. We divide the discourse under three captions:

"Of the striking vision of the future Temple, closing the prophecy of Ezekiel, the chapter from which my text is taken is unquestionably the most striking element; most distinctly, amidst much which seems to us strangely literal and even prosaic in its detail, it stamps the whole vision with a clearly symbolic character.

1. "Like the other features of the prophetic description, it seems to have its germ and starting point of literal fact in the stream which, as we know, poured out from beneath the actual Temple down into the deep valley below. But in its entirety it shadows forth a more than earthly reality. The living waters gush out from the feet of the altar of God's atoning covenant, in their inexhaustible fullness; as they flow on they deepen and widen at once; they gather, it would seem, to themselves the time-honoured and sacred waters of the Jordan; and so the combined stream in its calm, majestic power floods the Dead Sea of gloom and accursed desolation, and bears with it healing and fertility, till those waters, once empty and dead, now swarm with glad life, and, where all was smitten with barrenness, now on either side there grows every tree good for food, 'whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit of it fade;' 'it shall bring forth new fruit every month,' and, like the tree of life in the Apocalypse (evidently suggested by this vision of Ezekiel), 'its fruit shall be for meat, and its leaf for the healing of the nations.'

"These things, my brethren—mysterious, perhaps, to the prophet's first hearers—are to us an allegory of which we hold the key—an allegory of that living and life-giving water of the Spirit of which our Lord Himself once spoke in the Temple, on the day when the water from Siloam was solemnly poured out with joy as from the well of salvation. It flows out from the altar of the Cross itself a twofold stream of grace—not water only (if we may apply St. John's words) but water and blood—the blood to atone, the water to cleanse and regenerate. Whether in the individual soul, or in the great Church of Christ it fulfils the whole graciousness of the vision in every point. It spreads alike in width of persuasive influence, and in depth of power; it absorbs into itself all the revelation and the provision of the older covenant, transfiguring them with a new and diviner life; and then, through what also would be a blighted, death-smitten humanity, it diffuses an exuberant life, an undying fruitfulness; till with a purer and brighter stream it waters the restful Paradise of God, and loses itself at last in the crystal sea before the Great White Throne.

2. "The subject, as a whole, is far too large for our grasp to-day. It is, in fact, a parable

of the whole doctrine of the Spirit in the soul and in the Church. I would limit it to the application, which the occasion suggests—in the remembrance, still lingering in our memory, of the solemn inauguration yesterday of the great Lambeth Conference in what was rightly called the cradle of English Christianity—in the thankful realization to-day of what the old society, the handmaid of our Church, has been doing in that propagation of the Gospel in parts now hardly foreign to Englishmen, of which the conference itself is the visible fruit and symbol.

"I take from the text just that one characteristic which marks out as absolutely unique in history the growth of the light and the grace of God, the Gospel of the Church—that, beginning from but a little source, it widens out and deepens at once—at each thousand cubits of advance and spread over the land, becoming ankle-deep, knee-deep, waist-deep, till beyond human depth, it becomes 'water to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.'

"It is not so in artificial works of man. In these width of diffusion brings shallowness, and narrowness is the penalty of depth. But it is so even in nature, in that which has inherent life from the hand of God. The stately tree strikes its root deeper as it spreads its branches wider, and bears more abundant profusion of fruit. To come nearer to the metaphor of the text, the great river springs often from a slender source, and as it widens or deepens continually, till it bears navies on its bosom and loses itself in the fathomless sea. So is it still more with the spiritual work of God, both in its own secret operation, and as wrought out through the hands of men; and it keeps close to the type in this—that it then unites width and depth, because it draws in as it goes the tributary streams of all the forces, and all the wealth—physical, intellectual, social—of humanity, and bears them on by the divine impulse of its appointed course. Let religion be merely formal and artificial—depending on rules, laws, ordinances—and it can never thus grow. Probably it would not spread wide over the world; for it could not adapt itself to all the varieties of place and time, and, while it might flourish vigorously here, would become an exotic there, doomed to short life and decay. But if it did spread it would necessarily become more and more conventional, a thinner and shallower covering of the mere surface of human society, in many points a dead survival of what once had life and meaning. Such things we see, or think we see, in philosophical and religious systems which have passed away. If, thank God, it is not so with Christianity, if as the ages roll on, it spreads more and more widely as the one aggressive religion which bears on it the name Catholic as an inspiration and a prophecy, if at the same time it goes continually by necessity deeper into the great problems of life, deeper into the ultimate principles of the being of man and of the universe, deeper into the depths of human character and society, it is because it is a religion of the spirit—a 'well of water,' as our Lord

Himself promised, inexhaustible in the soul, 'springing up into eternal life.'

"Not always indeed, do these two growths advance in the same proportion. There are some servants of God, whose influence for Him is (so to speak) diffusive, spreading like wild-fire through the great mass of men, appealing to the imagination, emotion, affection, which stir the most rapid and wide-spreading effects. There are others, whose work it is to deepen religious thought, character, spiritual life, perhaps on the few, who will thus influence the many, telling thus more slowly and more calmly, perhaps hardly swaying their full power till they themselves have passed away. And what is thus true of individuals is true of races and ages. It may be that in our own Church life and thought there is need to beware lest in the busy expansion in length and breadth we lose something of the less obvious, the extension in depth and height. But, still, though in different proportions, both always go together in the growth of the kingdom of heaven. Like the eastern tree, as its branches stretch out, they throw off shoots which root themselves afresh in the spiritual soil, and by very extension lay faster and stronger hold of humanity for God. Never, perhaps, was this double growth more needed than in our own age, in which, while civilisation extends itself with marvellous rapidity, and discovery pushes on almost restlessly the bright circle of knowledge, all the questions of life, speculative and practical, are assuming the profoundest forms, and demanding imperiously an ultimate answer."

THE THREE VISIBLE EXPANSIONS OF THE CHURCH.

THE Bishop of Sydney's sermon proceeds thus: "Note, my brethren, the exemplification of this spiritual law in three great visible expansions of the Church of Christ.

"Look, first, at the growth of the early ages of Christianity over the then civilized world of the Roman empire. It spread from its cradle in Judæa over Asiatic, Greek, Roman society so rapidly that in a century its power had been felt in every province of that empire—so rapidly that (as a Christian apologist of the second century boasts) it had soon advanced the banner of the Cross beyond even the eagles of Rome—so rapidly that when three hundred years had passed it had asserted itself victoriously as the religion of the world. Yet all through that swift advance how marvellously had it been deepening continually its hold on the whole fabric of humanity, assimilating now the old religious vitality of the Jewish covenant, now the bright and sweeping philosophy of Greece, now the massive law and order of Rome, and developing the while in thought its own theology, in practical sway its own spiritual organization. The new water of life has widened and deepened at once, as the hand of God measured the first stage of its ordained course through the ages.

"Turn next to the second great expansion