

Ecclesiastical.

CONVOCATION

THE Bishop of London rose to present the report of a second committee, appointed to consider whether the great increase and present condition of the population does not make some, and if so what, adaptations of the Church's rules needful to meet their spiritual necessities. That report was as follows:

"The committee appointed by the Convocation of the province of Canterbury to consider and report whether the great increase and present condition of the population do not make some, and if so what, adaptations of the Church's rules needful to enable her to meet their spiritual necessities," report—That they have held frequent meetings for the consideration of the subject referred to them, and that they have agreed upon the following conclusions:—

"That some modifications of the Church's rules is needful to enable her adequately to minister to the spiritual necessities of the people of this land; and that these modifications may most properly be considered with reference—

"1. To her services, and

"2. To the ministerial agency which she now employs.

"As to the first of these, we think it of the utmost importance, in the present state of the Church, that the services, as now ordered in the Book of Common Prayer, should be preserved entire and unaltered, but we are of opinion that the length of the morning service on Sundays and holidays, especially when the Communion is administered to a large body of communicants, renders it desirable to allow of its being divided into different services, and used at various hours. We therefore think it would be expedient that, at the request of the incumbent, or, in his absence, of the licensed curate of any parish or district, the Bishop of the diocese should be empowered to authorize, so long as he shall deem fit, a division of the present morning service; so that either the order for the administration of the Holy Communion, or the order for daily morning prayer, may be used as a separate service; provided that the whole morning service, including the Litany when appointed to be read, be used either in one or two services in the course of the morning; a sermon being preached at either or both services.

"As to the order for evening prayer on Sunday, we see no need of suggesting any alteration, except when it is used in the same church both on the afternoon and evening of the same day. In that case, we think it would be expedient, 1st, that a new table of proper lessons should be authorized, which might be substituted in the evening prayer for those already read in the afternoon or evening service; or, 2ndly, that at the discretion of the parish priest, with the consent of the bishop, a substitution should be allowed, either in the afternoon or evening, of one of the occasional services hereafter mentioned, provided that the order for evening prayer be always used either in the afternoon or evening.

"We would suggest that in the present state of our population, the Church would be better able to minister to their wants if some well considered relaxations of the absolute strictness of her services, as prescribed by the Act of Uniformity, were admitted by authority; and we would enumerate the following as some which might be usefully adopted:—

"First, we would suggest that a shorter order for daily prayer might be compiled from the Book of Common Prayer, with a prescribed lesson or lessons of Holy Scripture, which might be used instead of the present order for daily morning and evening prayer, on other days than Sundays and holidays, in parishes where the incumbent shall have satisfied the bishop of the diocese that it might be advantageously adopted.

"Secondly, We would suggest that various occasional services might be formed from the Book of Common Prayer, for use in the Church with the permission of the bishop, on week days, and in addition to the prescribed services on Sundays.

"We would specify the following as examples of such services:—

"1. The Litany, with a scripture lesson, psalmody, holy baptism, churching of women, sermon, or catechizing, or with any of them.

"II. A short selection of collects, with the Lord's Prayer and psalmody, to precede or follow a sermon or catechizing.

"III. A service, with sermon or lecture, preparatory to the administration of the Holy Communion.

"IV. A thanksgiving service, containing the Venite, Te Deum, psalmody, collects, the Lord's Prayer,

or, a scripture lesson, and the General Thanksgiving, with or without a sermon.

"V. Services for the deprecation or removal of God's judgments: one formed of collects, the Lord's Prayer, penitential psalm, and a scripture lesson; another, consisting of the Litany, with penitential psalm, and a scripture lesson; either of such services with or without a sermon.

"VI. A service for imploring the blessing of God on Church missions; with or without a sermon.

"VII. A service for children.

"Further, we think it would be expedient that the Bishop should be empowered to authorize the use of the order for the administration of the Holy Communion as a separate service, on any day of the week; and that he should be authorized to allow, on special occasions, the substitution of other chapters of the Old and New Testament respectively, for the first and second lessons appointed for the day. For one special occasion, viz., Ash-Wednesday, we would recommend the appointment of proper lessons. Besides the adoption of these occasional services, framed from the Book of Common Prayer, we think it desirable that a collection of psalms and hymns, to be used in churches, should be put forth by authority.

"Further, we think it desirable that a form should be authorized for admitting converts from the Church of Rome, and such others as shall renounce their errors, and for restoring such as have relapsed; and we are of opinion that the form prepared by the Upper House of Convocation in 1714 would, with a few alterations, be proper for this purpose.

"Our attention has been invited to certain portions of our existing services, and to certain orders in our canons, which are thought to interfere with that enlarged action of the Church, the means of promoting which we were appointed to consider.

"As to the first of these, the only one on which we would now remark respects the third exhortation, following the prayer for the Church Militant, in the order of the administration of the Holy Communion.—Concerning this exhortation it was suggested to us that, being read, as it now is, after the withdrawal of all save those who have resolved at that time to communicate, and who must be supposed to have already examined themselves, and after such examination to be now drawing near to eat of that bread and drink of that cup, the strong expressions it contains as to the danger of an unworthy receiving are unreasonable, and are found in practice to disturb the minds of some of those who remain to communicate. These objections would, in our judgment, be in a great degree removed, if this address were read, as the exhortations which precede it are ordered to be read, at the conclusion of the sermon, to the whole congregation, rather than after the prayer for the Church Militant. Having regard to the place of this exhortation, after the two which immediately precede it, and which are distinctly ordered to be read at the close of the sermon, and to its tenor as applicable to the whole congregation, consisting of those who have, or have not, yet resolved to remain and communicate, rather than to those who have already begun to take part in the communion office, there does not appear to be so distinct a settlement of the place in the service at which this exhortation must be read, as to prove that it may not be read immediately after the sermon, and before, instead of after, the prayer for the Church Militant, when the Holy Communion is administered.

"An order in the canons bearing on our services, which was brought under our notice as containing rules which tend to cramp the Church's expansive power, by interposing hindrances to the more general use of her offices, was the prohibition, contained in the 29th Canon, of parents standing as sponsors for their own children. As to this, whilst we thankfully recognize the great benefits which arise from engaging other fit persons, where they may be had, to undertake the charitable office of sponsors, we are of opinion that the main reasons which appear to us to have induced the Church of England to prohibit parents acting as sponsors for their own children no longer exist; and having regard to the difficulty now often found, especially by the poor, in obtaining fit sponsors for their children, we think that a relaxation of this prohibition is desirable.

"As to the second head of our inquiry—namely, whether any, and if so, what modification of the Church's present agency is needful to enable her more perfectly to discharge her spiritual functions—we would express our opinion,

"I. That some additional agency is necessary to enable the Church, especially in large and populous parishes, to fulfil her Lord's command to preach the gospel to every creature.

"II. That some of the present needs of the Church, might be supplied by more general and systematic co-operation of the laity in works of Christian charity; in visiting and instructing the sick, poor, and ignorant; in exhorting the careless; in teaching children and adults in schools; in collecting funds for the extension of the Church at home and abroad; and in all other labours of Christian love which can, consistently with the rules of the Church, be performed by laymen; that such works must be undertaken and conducted under the superintendence of the parochial clergy, and should bear in marked features the character of being lay assistance rendered to the ministers of Christ in their proper work, and should be conducted with the especial aim of bringing souls under the direct action of that ministry.

"III. That, besides this more general and systematic agency of the laity of the Church, as parochial district visitors, and the like, some extension of the ministry is greatly needed amongst us.

"We are of opinion that this need might in some measure be supplied, if the bishops should be willing, in such cases as to them might seem meet, to admit to the order of deacons literate persons, and those who had not attained the same proficiency in the classical languages as is now required in candidates for the office of a deacon.

"Provided that, in all such special cases, the bishop be satisfied as to the moral character and religious life of the candidates; as to the soundness of their doctrine; their knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and of the articles and offices of the Church; and their possessing a peculiar gift for imparting religious instruction. Provided further, that all persons who have been admitted deacons upon these terms shall be strictly confined to the discharge of the duties of the diaconate as defined in the ordinal of the English Church; shall be incapable of filling a sole cure; and shall not be admissible to the office of priest until they shall have served five years at least in the lower office, and have made themselves acquainted with the branches of learning now usually required of candidates for the priesthood; and that these conditions be stated in their letters of deacon's orders.

"Further, we are of opinion that various means might be adopted to render more effectual the exercise of the Church's missionary office towards our home population.

"It is deeply to be deplored that there are at present large numbers of the poorer population, especially in our great towns, who are habitually absent from the public worship of God, and live with little or no sense of true religion; and new and increased efforts are urgently required to give them a saving knowledge of the Gospel, and shelter them within the fold of the Church. For this work there is need of men specially fitted for and devoted to direct missionary operations at home. We would therefore suggest the placing in the midst of such a population clergymen who might, with a view to economy, Christian fellowship, and united prayers and action, live together, minister in one central church, and, with due regard to ecclesiastical rule and authority, might labour around it in preaching, exhorting, visiting the sick and poor in their own houses, and superintending schools. We think it would be desirable that men possessed of needful gifts for this work should be especially encouraged to undertake it for a time, and be recognized as having a special claim for preferment out of public patronage in less laborious spheres, after a term of service.

"Further, we think that good would result if those who were gained by these means as converts were associated together in closer religious fellowship and action than has been common amongst us. Such converts, we believe, would thus be themselves built up in the true faith, would become an attraction and shelter to others, and would, under God's blessing, spread around them in their homes, and amongst their companions, a saving knowledge of Christ and of his Gospel.

"We believe, further, that the due action of the Church's missionary office amongst the home population would be promoted, if a body of clergy were organized for the special work of preaching and exhorting, under the bishop's sanction, throughout his diocese. Such clergy might most properly be connected with the cathedral church, and might be licensed by the bishop for temporary service in parishes where their presence was desired by the parochial clergy.—We believe that such an institution would be of great service in parishes of unmanageable size, in them