

CONFERENCE AT CARDIFF

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If 'reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man' (Francis Bacon) then the members of the Society who were at Cardiff, so full and exact, are now ready for anything. Cardiff gave us a mobile Doctors' Commons to which all brought their ignorance and their knowledge, and in disciplined togetherness learnt of one another that which makes ready each to serve the people of God the better.

Bags were seized by a willing brace of archidiaconal hands – true deacon service as the heated traveller received a cheerful welcome from the Ven. Hughie Jones and the Ven. David Scott – and the young ladies of Aberdare College took over from the ancient portress and led one to one's room. The highest judicial authority present pronounced the ablutions contumacious, but there was no Review sought of the unanimous Award in the Dining Hall. Many enjoyed the call to the Bar, too, if service was slower than capacity. The pristine stone of Cardiff shone white still upon the brightly sober multitude who strolled her ample boulevards, with sudden greens and herbage burgeoning if not yet crowned, on the Saturday afternoon walk or Sunday's Church parade, to hear a special preacher in Canon J. H. L. Rowlands, Warden of St. Michael's College, Landaff. The Incumbent, the Revd. M. R. Ellis, had kindly invited the Bishop of Colchester, one of the General Committee, to Celebrate. Walking, old friends delighted to relax with one another, and high authority gave his Opinion that television was not missed, as Shakespeare says, by those who 'have no more profit of their shining nights than those that walk and wot not that they are'. New friendships' opening gambits finding thoughtfully-provided labels sometimes discarded amidst the alien crowd made diligent enquiry of identity. Lawyers determined that the purple ones were bishops, easy until confounded by our President's traditional modesty, and tended to address every other cleric as "archdeacon" until better and more Christian information supervened; clergy, assisted by no such peculiarities of attire in out-of-court lawyers, were tempted to try a rule of thumb which opined that the ones one could not interrupt must be the judges – until more immediate experience shewed that they too were used to deference to others, since some were married, and all polite.

Because the E.L.S. is a polite as well as a learned Society, the formal sessions were conducted in a spirit of seriously open enquiry. Prejudice was banished. The Truth who sets us free ruled. On the Friday, after a Dinner graced by the Bishop of Llandaff, the Rt. Revd. R. T. Davies, the truly brave comprising the Working Party on Marriage Discipline submitted their circulated written Report and Recommendations to searching scrutiny and, it must be said, some rough handling. A leading lay mind writes that the Report 'was useful if it has shewn once and for all that time should not be wasted on any further attempt to revive 'Option G' and episcopal discretion as a basis for decisions'. Nothing dismayed, the W.P. in the persons of the Revd. John Rees and the Revd. David Sherwood, held seizin and would continue their deliberations under the Chairmanship of the Ven. Alan Clarkson, unavoidably absent, as they steered between the Scylla of the Indissolubilists and the Charybdis of maelstrom Options. Conference gave them a good whirl.

Saturday morning continued after Mattins, Communion and that other Rite which although we were in Wales was clearly full English Breakfast with the vexed question of Authority. The Rt. Revd. Eric Kemp, Lord Bishop of Chichester and our President, began by saying he had not accepted the authority of the title printed for him to speak on and was dealing with Authority in his own way, while the Rt. Revd. Hugh Montefiore jibbed at being introduced as the late Bishop of Birmingham. . . . A fascinating hour revealed some tensions between those who saw Authority as like God, everywhere in general and nowhere in particular, and those who saw its locus either in the Supreme Governor or in those who while not born to the purple might well have had it thrust upon them. The session was a wonderful illustration of the unique style of the Church of England, Presidential restraint partnered by retired animation: questioned by one of the Birmingham Members, Hugh Montefiore was clearly warming to his brief as he remembered 'old times'. Perhaps the widely-misunderstood Oath of Canonical Obedience is a fit subject for a Working Party on Authority; one wonders what a new Archbishop of Canterbury will make of the difference between the Oath a Bishop takes in respect of his Metropolitan and that a Clergyman takes in respect of his Diocesan?

Sir John Owen, Dean of the Arches, presided over a full bench when before lunch the Conference noted with delight the inauguration and some detail of the Cardiff LL.M. in Canon Law, already heavily subscribed, and listened with crescent laughter to Chancellor Sheila Cameron and Chancellor Leo Price, whose Tweedledum and Tweedledee act would have calmed the most flapping monstrous crow. The law is in hands not only just but judicious, and tempered with the mercy of humour, not to say well-versed.

The Editorial Committee and the Working Parties met after afternoon tea and the reviving effect of the sunny afternoon stroll or siesta; after Evensong in the Library the reverend and the learned changed into more peacock hues if they were the fairer sex or Hughie Jones and otherwise into an agreeably sober black with an occasional cummerbund splash or bright tie, never a James Bond white tuxedo amongst us, and settled after a fine Dinner of Duck à l'Orange to hear our courtly Chairman, His Honour Judge Edwards, Q.C., propose the health of The Guests. Miss Joan Buckingham, J.P., B.A., Warden of Aberdare Hall, replied *con brio*, although there might have been even more brio if she had not been conned into speaking where the final word was with that artist of the artists, the Ven. Hughie Jones, Vice-Chairman of the Society, who was responding to the Toast to the Society nobly proposed by Sir Aubrey F. Trotman-Dickenson, M.A., Ph.D., D.Sc., Principal of Cardiff College in the University of Wales. Indeed, a portrait of a Welsh dragon, female of the species more deadly than the male, looked down upon us as we heard 'Sir' Hughie's youthful feats of valour in courting his beloved in another age of the world, *sub specie aeternitatis*, beneath that same awesome gaze when to a foolhardy 'boo' had come the minute-to-ten response, 'Boo indeed.' The maiden he had married had not only the last laugh then but had clearly been laughing ever since; and all for whom the pressures of the basilica had been softly subdued by the comeuppance of the basilisk retired to bar and bed, or went out to look at the venerable blood on the lintel, well-content that the (k)night was still with us though the dragons were dead.

The Smiths (The Revd. M. G. Smith and Dr. P. M. Smith) of the Working Party on Visitations had laboured long at the anvil and a first-class

presentation enlivened Sunday morning. If one blinked one missed the spectre of the perhaps accidentally-revived archidiaconal criminal jurisdiction and I came to the conclusion that the main principle behind the work of those who had drafted the new Code of Canons had been to keep everything that sounded grand and meaningful from the old Code of 1603 without much enquiry as to actuality . . . some of the Visitation Jurisdiction was pretty comatose (not a reference to the morning-after-the-night-before or after-breakfast) in that no Metropolitan Visitation had taken place since the Seventeenth Century and other aspects of the Visitation were not apt to the present Century. Nevertheless, a common-sense approach had permeated the Working Party's deliberations and they did not call for sweeping legal changes. P.C.C.s, as we all know 'not visitable', were clearly informally involved to an increasing extent, as were Lay Chairmen of Deanery Synods. One was left with the doubt as to whether all this up-graded Churchwardens, as some maintained, or down-graded them, as the present writer thinks. The printed version has an impressive learned apparatus; there is a misprint on p.9 where surely 'Diocesan Synod' should read 'Deanery Synod'? Bishops seemed to be daunted by their Visitation duties/opportunities, but a fair number felt that to Visit every five years might be a desirable goal. Even Homer nods.

Mr. Average End-user found the weekend a true (B.C.P.) *comfort*. The Society is much indebted to its Executive, to our visitors and guests, to Dr. Norman Doe & Mr. Tom Watkin of the Cardiff Law Faculty, to Miss Buckingham and all at Aberdare Hall.