

## Church Autonomy in Australia

In the Guardian of May 11th. there appeared an article entitled "A vigorous Defence", on the subject of Church Autonomy in Australia. The author was described as "intimately acquainted with the history and present position of the Church in Australia".

If so, it is at least extraordinary that in laying so much emphasis on the action of the General Synod in 1921 he has omitted ~~the~~ <sup>two</sup> most significant features of the proceedings that bear on the "autonomy" question.

First he has neglected to say that those proceedings came to a sudden stop after the passing of the motion on the second reading of the proposed Determination. If General Synod was so remarkably representative of Church opinion in Australia, and if it was so strongly in favour of that Determination, why did it drop the thing like a hot potato, and fail to pass it?

Secondly, he has neglected to state that, in the place of the dropped Determination, General Synod passed a resolution referring the whole question to the various diocesan synods throughout Australia. The resolution is too long to quote in full but its object was declared thus: - "to ascertain the mind of the Church in their Dioceses with regard to the whole matters contained in them [i.e. the documents enumerated previously, viz: - the draft Determination, the Report and the Resolution] and the methods of dealing with them." Thus the whole question alleged to have been decided by General Synod was reopened, & left thus opened to the Dioceses. Hence when General Synod meets again, the proceedings will have to begin de novo.

To sum up, General Synod in '921 apparently came to a certain decision on the "autonomy" question and then promptly revoked it. That is the practical outcome of its proceedings, and these



facts can be verified from the official record of the Synod, ~~with~~ a copy of which lies before me as I write. Why did your well informed author of "A vigorous Defense" ignore them?

As to the alleged demand for autonomy it is interesting to note that the diocese of Sydney, including one fifth of the clergy and more than one fifth of the ~~Church~~ membership of the Church in Australia has ~~turned~~ decided against severing the "legal nexus". The diocese of Tasmania has done likewise, and the committee appointed by the Melbourne Synod has just reported against any alteration in the present relation between the Church in <sup>Australia</sup> ~~England~~ and the Church in England. But mirabile dictu, the Brisbane Diocesan Synod, in the very centre of the "nexus" agitation, on June 7th. defeated the motion to "break off the nexus" by 131 votes to 88. The voting was: For the motion: Bishops 1, Clerical representatives 52, Lay representatives 25; Against the motion, Bishops 0, Clerical representatives 40, Lay representatives 91.

As to the "initiative" in Prayerbook revision the Church in Australia is no better & no worse off than the "Free Churches" are in England with respect to ~~their~~ the trust deeds of their property. <sup>whatever</sup> changes may be made in the prayerbook in Australia, recourse must be had to the State legislatures to safeguard the property of the Church. But the "initiative" in making changes would always lie with the Church in Australia. It is putting the cart before the horse to seek power to authorise changes without indicating what alterations are to be made. The "legal nexus" is supported by the laity generally, and by a large proportion of the clergy in Australia, because it guarantees ~~the~~ a definite standard of doctrine & worship. Those who wish to break the "legal nexus"



persistently decline to state what alterations they <sup>have</sup> ~~would~~ like to effect in their mind. On the other hand those who have opposed the "autonomy" agitation have indicated the alterations kind of revision and other reforms they are prepared to carry out. The new Canadian Prayer Book embodies most of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> changes that would prove acceptable. Why don't the "autonomists" tell us what they want?

As to the "overwhelming predominance" of Sydney in General Synod the following figures may prove interesting. In the General Synod of 1921 the diocese of Sydney sent 18 representatives out of the 191 named in the official list. The revised scheme of representation gives Sydney 24 representatives out of a total of 172. Yet the diocese of Sydney contains one fifth of the clergy and more than <sup>one</sup> fifth of the lay membership of the Church in Australia. On a proportional basis Sydney would have 74 out of a total of 366 representatives. These figures are quoted from official records and tell their own tale.

One point more. At present the vast bulk of Australian sentiment is strongly against any kind of action or propaganda that points towards any <sup>further</sup> ~~kind of~~ separation from the mother country. The tendency is all the other way - to strengthen the bonds of union. At present the Church in Australia enjoys, actually, fuller autonomy than is exercised by the Commonwealth itself, for it is free from any direct control from the mother land, whereas the Commonwealth is still subject to the veto, though rarely exercised, of the home government in political affairs. The facts I ~~have~~ <sup>have</sup> already given show that the great majority of <sup>the</sup> Australian laity do not display any keen desire to sever any of the ~~old~~ <sup>the</sup> links that ~~are~~ still hold between the Church in Australia and the Church in England. The tendency rather is to preserve rather than to destroy the close relationship between mother & daughter.