





A

PASTORAL LETTER

TO THE

Parishioners of Hursley,

IN THE COUNTY OF SOUTHAMPTON :

OCCASIONED BY

THE PROPOSED SYNODICAL MEETING

IN THE

DIOCESE OF EXETER.

BY

THE REV. JOHN KEBLE,

VICAR OF HURSLEY.

“ I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.”—*Zephaniah*, iii. 17.

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PASTORAL LETTER

TO THE PARISHIONERS OF HURSLEY.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

I make no question but many of you, my friends, neighbours, and children in the Lord, have had your thoughts,—perhaps you have wondered, why such frequent mention has of late been made here of the distress of the Church. Ever since Easter in last year you know that whenever the Litany has been said, and whenever the Holy Communion has been administered, we have been accustomed to ask your prayers in special “for the whole Church of England in her present distress.” And some never having been told, some forgetting, some not rightly understanding, may have wondered what this “present distress” should mean; for outwardly all appears to go on as usual: the clergy go about their work, and receive their portions, in peace, and no one, here at least, interferes with our solemn assemblies. Yet we have gone on using this word “distress,” and signifying also, that it was a kind of distress touching the Bishops and Clergy in particular. We have said, indeed, enough to show that we did not mean outward and temporal distress, but rather such as is inward and spiritual. This we have signified by adding the words, “all who are in trouble and perplexity of mind.” And a good deal was said when we first began this custom to explain what it was that pressed on us. Nevertheless, I have often wished to say something more to you on the matter; but it is a hard and painful matter to speak of, and not in all respects fit for the

House of God, which is the reason why I now write, instead of preaching on it. But now a time is come which almost compels us to speak, for we want your prayers more than ever; and we must tell you why, that you may know what to pray for, and what deep reason there is for your praying with all earnestness.

You may perhaps, many of you, remember, my brethren, how that more than a twelvemonth ago we were in trouble about the doctrine of Holy Baptism; the cause of our trouble being this,—that certain judges appointed by the Government to decide such matters had settled that the Church, in the Prayer-book, does not certainly teach Baptismal Regeneration. So we were left in doubt whether little children regularly baptized were really made members of Christ or no: the clergy need not teach it, and we need not believe it. And those who wanted to be easy in their sins were put into a way of thinking, as if those sins might not, after all, be so very bad, because, although they had been christened, maybe they had not received grace, and then their sins would be, in comparison, excusable, as the sins of the heathen. Surely this was a great trouble, a great advantage gained by the Evil One against us. And what if we were for the present left free to teach, and you to receive, the truth? Ought we not to be troubled to think of the many who are encouraged to teach and receive such evil doctrine? Ought we not to be sorry and ashamed, and afraid for the Church of England, lest she also some time, in spite of her Prayer-book, should give her consent to this heresy, and throw away her faith?

Here, then, is one great and so far continued distress in our holy Church; concerning which, I trust, we do not amiss in inviting you to remember it as often as we say the Litany, and in making our Litanies more frequent than usual, according to the custom of all Churches in times of trouble.

This, I say, was and is one great and continued distress—the encouragement given to the denial of Sacra-

mental Grace. Another is, that in trying such a cause as this, a holy matter regarding Christ's holy doctrine, no legal account is made of the Bishops and Clergy, to whom our Lord said, "He that heareth you, heareth Me," but it is left entirely to men learned in the law of the land. I need not say to you, for it is quite plain of itself, that a man may be very learned in the law of the land, and yet know little or nothing of Christ's and His Church's law in the Bible and Prayer-book. Which of you that is a father, and makes a conscience of managing his children, knowing that he is answerable for them to God Almighty, would not think it very hard, as well as very foolish, if persons were sent round by the Government to force him to manage them in a particular way, care being taken that none of those persons should have children of their own, or be much used to children? I ask again, Would not this be very hard, as well as very foolish? Yet this is not at all worse than appointing lawyers instead of clergymen to settle what shall be taught in the Church. And what is unspeakably worse, think of the profaneness, brethren, think of the sin; to say to the Clergy, "We will not hear you, though you are in the Apostles' place, sent by Christ as He by His Father, but we will only hear those whom the Government for the time has appointed." Surely this, if anything, is saying to Christ, "We will have no king but Cæsar:" surely it is the very gainsaying of Korah, and can only come to the worst of all ends.

This, then, is a second great distress; that by the way in which things are managed all Apostolic authority is denied in the Church, and very unbelievers may settle what we are to believe. Surely it cannot be wrong to pray to be delivered from this, when we say the Litany, or make offerings in Holy Communion.

I will mention a third distress, and a very sad one, which we were made to feel particularly some four years ago, and which these late troubles have brought back strongly to our minds. I do not know that I ever spoke of it in a sermon, but all of you, I think, will perceive at

once, if you will attend, that it is a great distress and wrong. What, then, is it? It is the way in which our Bishops are appointed. The old way of the Church was, that the Communicants should elect the Bishop, care being taken by godly discipline that no notorious sinner should be a communicant. By and by, when the Kings of the earth became Christians, and were willing to do great things for the Gospel, it was judged fair that they, standing in the place of the whole body of Communicants, should nominate the Bishops in their dominions, as our Government does now. But observe: whether it were the body of the Communicants or the Sovereign that named the Bishop, he could not be consecrated to be a Bishop by any one but those who were Bishops before him. Their hands must be laid upon him: hands which the Apostle said were not to be laid suddenly—that is, hastily and at random—on any man: the Bishops, therefore, and especially the Archbishop, were always able to keep out of the holiest office any one whom they judged unworthy. But how is it now in our country? As the law is at present understood and acted on, whomever the Government may name to be a Bishop, though he be the worst of men, a known unbeliever, or any thing too bad to be named, that man the Archbishop must consecrate, or he loses all his goods, and is imprisoned for life. Nobody is allowed to say a word of objection; they will not even allow the matter to be inquired into. On this, I will only just make one remark: that it cannot be wrong to call such a law a great and continued distress in the Church of England, and to pray most earnestly that her Communicants may be restored to some of their ancient freedom in the election of her chief shepherds, and the Bishops no longer forced, as far as law can force them, to consecrate without inquiry, at the mere will of the Government. This *must* be a good prayer, for it is simply praying to be delivered from a great public sin.

Yes, indeed, my brethren, if we believe the truths of the Gospel—if we believe that men have souls, and

if we care for those souls, we cannot but feel these three to be great distresses : first, that persons teaching in our Church should be held free to deny Sacramental Grace ; secondly, that not the successors of the Apostles, but lawyers appointed by the Government, should decide on matters of faith ; thirdly, that the same Government should absolutely appoint whom they please to be a Bishop, without so much as hearing an objection from either clergy or people. What is sinful, what is profane, what is ruinous to souls, if these things be not so ? Well may it be a trouble to us ! well may we cry unto the Lord, as Samuel did for Saul, even all the night, however quiet and undisturbed our own way of life may be ! Samuel was not interfered with in body or estate ; he was free to serve God himself, yet he was sore distressed for Saul ; and we, if we have any Christian love in our hearts, must not we feel distressed for the many, many souls which are the worse for such a state of things, some of them, perhaps, persons in whom we have some special interest ? Oh, indeed, it is a real trouble to think of them ! it is a real relief to pray for them.

Consider only the sort of case which I am going to mention. I must mention it, though I am very unwilling ; it brings so many sad thoughts in many ways. Most of us must be aware that a certain number of persons, seeing and keenly feeling such evils as I have now mentioned, have become impatient—have said to themselves, “ How can this be a part of the true Church which permits such things to be done ? ” (as if a Church could not sin without ceasing to be a Church ;) and so they have put aside all their doubts, and have betaken themselves to the Church of Rome, with all its errors, denying (which is saddest of all) the Grace which had fed them all their lives long unto that day. Some of the most earnest and self-denying have taken this course. Is not this a thought to set us on praying ? How can we pray too much for them, that they may have grace and strength to break their bonds ? How can we pray too earnestly for the souls which they might have helped to save, but which

they are now tempting to unbelief? I hope we have prayed, and do pray heartily, for those who have so sadly and so wrongly left us, as often as we beseech our Lord to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred and are deceived.

And there is another misery yet—another great danger. As the sins, not so much of the Church as of the nation, have caused some to forsake the Church, so their forsaking the Church has brought a great trouble upon many of those who remain. For the Pope, or Bishop of Rome, encouraged, it seems, by the liberties which all sorts of people were taking with this our Church of England, has thought it a good time to send among us a number of new Bishops, on a new plan, and to call upon us English Catholics to submit ourselves to the same. And what has been the consequence? Why, as many of you must know, besides a great deal of confusion in other respects, advantage has been taken of what the Roman Catholics are doing to put down those of our teachers, clergy or other, who most try to be strict and exact according to the rules of the ancient Church. There are always a good many who cannot bear any strict and exact rules; who had rather, if they could, be as the heathen, that they might be less answerable for the worldly lives they lead, and the sinful liberties they take; and these persons, seeing many good men provoked at what the Roman Church is doing, have turned the blame upon certain among ourselves (I mean, upon those who desire most scrupulously to obey our own Church, in looking always towards primitive antiquity), and have told everybody that “it was *their* fault—*they* had been encouraging the Roman errors, and tempting people that way.” And so there has been, and now is, such an outcry, that the earnest persons of whom I speak, whose only desire is to spend and be spent for the Church of England—who would rather die than depart from that Church, and some of whom, to my knowledge, have nearly sacrificed their lives in trying to prevent others from doing so—some of these are even now in danger

of being put to silence, if not of being hindered from communicating in our churches; while those who scorn the Creeds, the Ministry, and the Sacraments, seem for the present to have their own way.

Now, is not *this* too a trouble—another reason for extraordinary prayers, for early Litanies, for frequent Communion? Surely it is so; and it is also a reason (as are all the other distresses which I have mentioned) why we should all try to be more than usually attentive and devout in what may be called our State Prayers. By State Prayers, I mean our prayers for the Queen, the Royal Family, the High Court of Parliament, and the like: as also for the Lords of the Council and all the Nobility, and for the Magistrates and all who are in authority. In these prayers many of us are, I fear, too apt to be negligent, as if they were just matters of course, needing no special lifting up of our hearts; and who can tell how much our negligence may have to do with the present unhappy state of things? Perhaps, if we had all prayed in earnest, He who heareth prayer would either have turned the hearts of such as have power in the State (as of old He caused those who led His people captive to pity them); or He would have given the power into the hands of others who know better the true meaning of “the kingdom of heaven;” or He might have caused their doings to turn out otherwise than they meant: and this the rather, as we have much reason to believe that the laws which have worked so badly were not, in the first place, meant as against the Church; it was not seen what their effect on the Church would be. And even as, for our sins and negligence, laws which were not so intended have proved very hurtful to us, so we may hope, that on our true repentance and prayer, that which is ignorantly done against the Church may be over-ruled for her freedom and improvement. Any how we have great encouragement, and surely we have great need, to pray.

This very day on which I am writing to you, I find in the Second Morning Lesson a portion of

our Lord's history, which, if I mistake not, we may, without presumption, apply to the present condition of the Church among us. There is, first, the evil mind of the Scribes and Pharisees towards our Saviour, and then there is the account how He met it on His part. Their evil mind was this, that "they were filled with madness, and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus." They held their meetings, and took counsel against Him: the world knew nothing of it, but He knew; and what did He do on His part? what measures did He take to baffle their evil designs? Two things He did, both very remarkable, considering who He is—the very Power and Wisdom of the Most High. He is Almighty, yet here behold Him praying,—spending the whole night in prayer to God the Father, as any one of us, His poor creatures, might do in our distress. He is All-wise, the Eternal Wisdom; yet here behold Him choosing certain persons upon earth—frail, weak creatures, sinners like all other—to speak for Him and do His work. Those are His two ways of contending against the malice and evil designs of such as were gathered together against Him.

Now, if it be presumptuous to say what I am going to say, may He mercifully forgive the error, and guard it from harming His people: but I cannot help thinking that there is a sort of resemblance between this passage of our Lord's history and the course of our present distress, as I have now described it. For now, too, a good many of our countrymen are "filled with madness"—I cannot call it less; it is a most violent, inconsiderate prejudice, altogether unreasoning and unreasonable, against those English Churchmen who profess to hold by the ancient Church. People are "filled with madness," and now for many months have been "communing among themselves what they may do" to the believers in sacramental religion. Why, what has made them now so much fiercer than they used to be? Much the same kind of reason as that which made the Pharisees mad against our Lord. He had just been performing a

mighty work—the withered hand had received power at His word: *that* was the provocation. If He had tried the miracle and failed, they would have cared little for it: and little would this generation have cared for the preaching of the true English Church, the true Catholic sacramental religion, if it had seemed to work as little effect as preaching too commonly does. But when the Evil One saw many hearts moved, an untold quantity of good being done, the poor, forsaken corners of crowded towns, such as Plymouth, Leeds, Westminster, cared for and looked after, of course he would put forth all his power, and malice, and craft: false tales must be spread, mobs raised, clergymen forced away from their all in this world, and from their flocks which they love more than all. All this has been going on for some time; and now there are blind rumours of persons being to be hindered from preaching, and the Prayer-book, sooner or later, to be altered;—blind, I say, and uncertain rumours, yet they show which way people’s minds are leaning.

But some of you may say in your hearts, “Why so greatly alarm us? *to us*, surely, the evil is at a distance: nothing is being done *here* as yet: yet for awhile, happily, we may abide unconcerned.” Nay, but is not this too like that evil and selfish spirit which wrought so miserably on Cain, and caused him to say, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” We cannot, we must not, so wrap ourselves up in ourselves; we are members of the same body, we must pray that we may have the same care one of another. Others have felt, and do feel, the evils which I have been mentioning; must we not care for *them*, and pray for them as for ourselves?

And, besides, what wise man would wait till the evil actually comes upon him, and not rather do what he can, be it much or little, as soon as he can? In the place of Scripture to which I have been referring you, nothing was yet done to our Lord. The Pharisees, as yet, were only communing one with another; as for the people, they rather seemed inclined to favour Him: did He then let things take their course? No, He prayed all night;

and so, before all things, let us pray. Pray night and day in His name, for the holy Church Universal, for our Queen, for Bishops and Curates, for those who seek increase of grace, for the weak-hearted, for the desolate and oppressed, for those who have erred and are deceived, and for our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers. At all times, of course, it is good to pray for them ; but this surely is a special time for such prayers.

But our Lord met the blind enmity of the Pharisees with something besides prayer. Having prayed all night in the mountain, "As soon as it was day, He called His disciples, and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named Apostles ;" and with them, going down from the hill, He began, as it seems, to heal and teach more publicly than ever. What can we do at all answering to this? Why, as His nightly prayer shows, how we must pray continually, so these His doings in the daytime show, that we in our day must do what little we can to strengthen the hands of those who are His Apostles among us—that is, the Bishops and Pastors of His flock, in all that they do for the sound faith and godly discipline of the Church. Bishops sound in faith, and lawfully appointed, are His present Apostles. Where such an one is, there, according to a very holy Martyr, is the Catholic Church, and Jesus Christ Himself ; and if you see such an one calling his clergy together, and publicly taking counsel with them, first to affirm the faith and the grace which He has given to His Church, and then to provide for the spiritual sicknesses and infirmities of his flock, I say that this is an image, faint and unworthy of course, yet still a true image, of our Lord coming down on that occasion with His Apostles, to speak to the people in the plain, and heal those that had need of healing. This was His way of meeting the malice of the Pharisees, and the other can be no bad way for His Church to meet the erroneous dislike of this present generation. Especially since we know that such solemn assemblies have always been the way of the Church in time of trouble, so claiming the promise of

our Lord, spoken in the first place to His ordained ministers, "Where two or three of you are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

These solemn assemblies are called Synods, or Councils. A particular Bishop, with his Clergy so assembled, is a Diocesan Synod; an Archbishop, with the Bishops under him, is a Provincial Synod; all the Bishops of the realm are a National Synod; the Bishops of the universal Church are a General Synod; and when the decrees of such a synod have been accepted, as agreeing with holy Scripture, by the churches throughout the world, then it becomes what is termed an Œcumenical or Universal Synod, and must be obeyed as having full claim to the promise of our Lord, "He shall guide you into all truth."

This is the true and ancient constitution of the visible Church of Christ. And whereas a good deal is being said about the claim of those Churchmen who are not Clergy to have a voice in these matters, I must remind you that this was fully provided for of old, by the circumstance that the Bishops were elected by the whole body of the Communicants. They did as truly represent the Church, as the House of Commons represents the State; and besides, in all national and general synods, Christian princes were present in person, or by their commissioners, and had very great influence. Among ourselves, how can it be true to say that the people have no power in church councils, since no provincial council can be holden, or pass canons, without consent of the Crown; and since the Bishops, who form those councils, are absolutely named by the Crown, at the recommendation of the prime minister, who is virtually named himself by the House of Commons, *i.e.* by the people? The irregularity is, that the whole people, and not the Communicants only, are allowed to interfere. It is the same injustice, as if you or I claimed to have a voice in choosing ministers, or making rules, for a congregation of Dissenters.

However, our Bishops, however appointed, are Bishops; there is no doubt of that; and the Priests ordained by them are Priests; and, therefore, the Bishop of any one of our churches, with his Clergy, in solemn assembly, may hope for Christ's special blessing; and if the purpose of such assembly be one in which other churches are alike interested, then the members of other churches ought to help that assembly with their prayers and best wishes, and to speak a good word for it on occasion, if they can do no more. Such an assembly, such a synod, has now been called by the Bishop of the Church of Exeter, to meet on Wednesday in this week. You know that I have asked your prayers especially for it. The main purpose of it is especially to uphold the true doctrine of the Sacraments, which, as I have long since explained to you, is in danger among us. Now, why such assemblies are not held in other dioceses besides Exeter, is a matter not for us but for our rulers to judge of. But where it is done, as now in Exeter, and last year in Scotland and Australasia, surely all good Christians, however far away, do well to accompany it with their hopes and prayers, that all may be ordered for the best.

These, my brethren, are the reasons, why I have so earnestly in church requested your prayers for our brethren in the Church or diocese of Exeter, for the Bishop and Clergy in their Diocesan Synod, and for the Laity or Christian People in their way of receiving the same. For indeed, besides the rule of Christian fellowship, we are greatly concerned in that meeting, every one of us. Because, first and chiefest of all, it will be a great and good thing for us and for our children, to have such a solemn declaration from one which is not the least of the churches of God in this island, that as a church, it cleaves to the true doctrine and faith of the Nicene Creed, concerning Holy Baptism. All parents and teachers especially are concerned in this; for how can they do their proper work with the souls of these little ones, if they do not ground it upon the grace of baptismal regeneration?

And over and above this, if the Church is really under such difficulties as I have now endeavoured to explain to you, and which surely amount to a very great and present distress, it must be good for His ministers, fearing Him, to speak earnestly one to another (as they will after the matter of doctrine is settled) upon the best means of performing their several tasks for the good of souls. Brotherly and Christian counsel will help them in their work, and will be accompanied with better help than their own. No one can tell how much our hands may be thus strengthened, not only against the endeavours of the Roman Church—which now, alas! seems more than ever determined to deal with us as a scornful and unsparing enemy—but also against the yet greater and more pressing danger of proud and lawless unbelief—against him who is the common enemy of all.

Once more, then, I ask your prayers for the Church of Exeter, both during their synod and after it, and for all who are like-minded. Pray for them, brethren, I earnestly beseech you; and may we all be on the watch to help as we may, with a mind (if need be) to suffer also, in the cause of the Church of England in her present distress; and, above all things, may we never damage it by undutiful, scornful, or otherwise unchristian behaviour.

I desire to remain, always, dear Brethren,

Your loving Friend and Servant in Christ,

JOHN KEBLE.

Hursley, June 22, 1851.

A PRAYER

FOR A BLESSING ON ANY CHURCH SYNOD.

(Altered from one in the Works of St. Gregory.)

GOD, Who, by the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, wast pleased to unite the several nations in the confession of one holy faith, keep, we beseech Thee, the clergy and people of this realm, with our Sovereign Lady the Queen, in the unity of the same faith; and grant unto those who shall now meet in solemn assembly, Thy mighty aid to order their counsels according to Thy perfect will: that obeying Thine admonitions, defended by Thee from all evils, and endowed with all good gifts, we, with all Thy whole Church, may serve Thee here in tranquillity and freedom, and hereafter be found meet for a portion in Thine eternal city: Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.



