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REUNION :

THROUGH CHARITY AND PENITENCE

A Sermon

*Preached at the Anniversary Festival of the English Church Union
in St. James' Church, Buxton, on August 20th, 1896,*

BY

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REUNION: THROUGH CHARITY AND PENITENCE

“ Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”—1 *Corinthians* i. 10.

[From the Second Lesson at Mattins, Aug. 20th.]

I have been asked to speak to you to-day on the subject of Reunion, and I do so with very special interest when I remember that in only three weeks time from to-day it will be just forty years ago since I was one of the little company that met in the rooms of a clergyman in London to take measures for the formation of the Association for the Promotion of the Union of Christendom.

It is solemnizing to remember how many of that little company have passed away during the nearly past forty years to join the great Reunion of Christendom in the life of the world to come. May they rest in the peace of Christ! Of us who remain the question may very well be asked, Has the experience of the last forty years justified your action in banding together to promote the union of Christendom? What progress has been made towards the accomplishment of your end during this long course of time?

As to outward signs of a visible answer to our prayers and efforts, we cannot say much, but this we may boldly say—that every year that has elapsed since our Association was formed has made it more and more evident that, as far as the good estate of Christ's Church Militant here on earth is concerned, the reunion of Christendom is the one thing to be desired; that the work which the Eternal Son of God came down from heaven to do cannot be accomplished on earth without the reunion of Christendom. The importance of reunion is nothing less than this.

And we may presume to say this, because on this subject we have the mind of Christ revealed to us. And here let me

say that the longer I live the more I become convinced of the supreme importance of looking at the religious problems of the day from a purely Christian point of view, that is, from Christ's own point of view. What was the mind of Prophets and Seers on this or that subject? What was the mind of the Jewish Church? What was the mind of Apostles and Fathers? What was the mind of Councils, of Schoolmen, of Reformers? What is the mind of the Church of England, of the Prayer Book, of the Church of Rome, of the Orthodox Church? All these questions are important, and the answers to them are worthy of reverent consideration, but, after all, the only question of absolutely supreme importance is, What is the mind of Christ? And when we once have a clear answer to this question, nothing else matters.

What, then, is the mind of Christ as to the kind of union that, according to His will, should exist among His disciples? About this, we are left in no manner of doubt.

Hear the Eternal Host offering his Eucharistic Prayer before He consummates the Oblation of Himself: "Holy Father keep through Thine Own Name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are . . . neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us."*

And the Holy Apostle St. Paul, speaking by the Holy Ghost, thus seeks to bring home the Master's will to the hearts of the Corinthian Christians: "I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."†

Here, then, is the union that it is Christ's will should exist among His disciples, expressed by Himself, and expounded by the Holy Ghost, a union as perfect as that which exists between the Divine Persons, resulting in absolute unanimity in mind and action, and tolerant of no divisions. Till this ideal is realized, Christ's disciples are not, in His sight, as He would have them to be. For nearly two thousand years millions have prayed, "Thy Kingdom come," but, till the will of Christ is accomplished in His people, the kingdom of God cannot come on earth, and the prayer which our Lord

* St. John xvii. 11, 20, &c.

† 1 Cor. i. 10.

has taught us to pray cannot receive in fulness the answer which it is destined to receive.

It is not infrequently the case that a story, a fable, or a comparison, which has its humorous side or application, may have also a very grave and serious lesson to enforce. We have all heard the fable of the Fox that lost his Tail. It is full of sarcastic humour. A fox loses his tail in a trap, and, to cover his disgrace, seeks to convince his fellows that, after all, a tail is a clumsy, meaningless appendage, and that one can get on much better without it. There are, alas! those who profess and call themselves Christians who act the part of the fox in the fable with regard to reunion. The divisions of Christendom are an accomplished fact which seems as if it meant to maintain its place in the history of the world to the end. After all, some dare to say, Are these divisions a real evil? Do we not gain much by them? Does not each Church or sect emphasize something valuable that might otherwise be lost or obscured? An unfortunate person who professed to speak as a Minister of Christ in an assembly of Christian people, said that it would take at least three distinct Churches to bring out in fulness all the aspects of Christianity. What is talk of this kind but an attempt to represent, in fair and pleasing colours, a state of things utterly alien from the mind of Christ as expressed in His own words? And what must be the guilt of those who thus seek, from whatever motive, to lead Christians disloyally to approve of that which is in contradiction with the ideal set before them by their Master?

“They have seduced My people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace.”*

“From the prophet even to the priest every one dealeth falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush.”†

Our divisions are indeed an abomination in the sight of the Lord; let us at least have the grace, if we cannot heal them, to blush for them, and not to excuse them.

But some say, No doubt, theoretically, and in the abstract, the divisions of Christendom are as wrong and reprehensible as they can be; but after all they *are* an

* Ezek. xiii. 10.

† Jer. viii. 11.

accomplished fact, and though one may not justify them, is not simply to let them alone the only thing that can usefully be done? You can hardly pretend that reunion comes within the range of "practical politics" (as the phrase goes); why then excite or interest yourself about it?

I would first ask anyone who would put the matter thus, Are you a Christian? Supposing the answer to be, No, I might admit that from a non-Christian point of view it is at best superfluous to treat the question of reunion seriously.

But if the answer be, Yes, I would further ask, Have you faced the fact that as Christians we are called upon (one may almost say, from first to last), to work for the realization of ideals which we cannot, as a matter of fact, hope to see fully accomplished as long as this present state of things lasts?

To begin with, what ideal of perfection does Christ set before us as the standard to which we are to strive to attain? "Be ye perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect."* What? is the very perfection of the great God of heaven, the holy and mighty, set before men born in sin, and wounded by their own iniquities, as the standard to which they should attain? Yes, nothingless. This is the standard proposed to you and me. And we shall attain to it; but hardly while this life lasts. Strive as we may here, the utmost we can hope for is to draw in some slight degree nearer to that to which we are called. But when we have passed through fire and water, and are brought into the wealthy place, when we have stood before the judgment seat of Christ, when the fire has tried our works, and has burned up the wood, hay, and stubble that we have wrought into our life, when we are saved, so as by fire, then as living, regenerate members of the glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, we shall stand before the Father's face, conformed to the image of His Son, perfect as He is perfect. Then, but not till then. And woe be to us if because attainment is delayed, and seems impossible to us *here*, we yield to the temptation to rest satisfied with any standard short of that divinely proposed to us—the perfection of God in heaven.

We have thought of ourselves as individuals, now let us turn our thoughts to the Church at large. What was the

*St. Matt. v. 48.

task given to His Church, to do in His Name, by the Great Head of the Church before His Ascension? "Go, make disciples of all nations." For nearly two thousand years the Church throughout the world had been occupied with this work; and what some tell us with malicious glee, others admit with faint-hearted shame, and that is, that the time when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ seems as far off as ever it was. So it may be; and yet we know the accomplishment of the work is only delayed; the word "It is done" will be spoken at the hour decreed; the Lord will descend from heaven to "claim the kingdoms as His own"; all enemies shall be put under His feet; and He shall reign over redeemed humanity as King of kings, and Lord of lords, for ever and ever. And woe be to those who seek to dishearten the Church, and to make her faint in striving to realize the ideal of a world subdued to Her Master, Christ, because the day of the Lord seems to delay its appearing.

"Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, thus saith the Lord God, I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel, but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision."*

Apply all this to the matter immediately before us, to the duty of striving for the reunion of Christendom. Christ has prayed that His people may be united in a bond of unity absolutely perfect. This is the will of Him Who alone of all that ever wore human nature could dare to look up into the Face of the Great God and Father of all, and say, "Father, I will." Heaven and earth may pass away, but this word cannot pass away. His will must be done. Christ's people must and shall be one, and blessed are they who strive to bring about the accomplishment of their Master's revealed will, blessed are they who despite seeming impossibilities, faint-hearted warnings, cold discouragements, or bitter sneers, work and labour to bring Christ's people all to speak the same thing, that there may be no divisions among them, but that they may be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Blessed are they, for when Christ shall appear to finish His work, and to reign as King of Peace, over the City of Peace, they shall receive the reward

* Ezek. xii. 22, 23.

of peacemakers, they shall see God; and can they ask for more than this?

The ideal set before us is nothing less than that of perfect unity; its realization may seem prolonged, but it will surely come.

That we may be workers together with God in the work of bringing about, in its own appointed time, the perfected union of His people, we must, I need hardly say, first and before all things make this great "heart's desire" of Christ, and of those whose hearts beat in unison with His, the subject of unceasing prayer. As He prayed "that they all may be one," so we too must pray in union with Him. And, indeed, implicitly at least, we do pray thus whenever, as He hath taught us, we say "Thy kingdom come."

But on this duty of praying for union and reunion I do not purpose now to dwell. I wish more especially to speak of something that should be a consequence of our prayers. What, in our intercourse with others, so far as it affects this matter of reunion, should we specially try to promote in order that, so far as our poor influence extends, it may set forward this blessed work of reunion?

I believe that it is possible for each Christian, even for the poorest and meanest, to do *something* to increase the prevalence among us of that which is the only power which can bring about a reunion worth accomplishing, a reunion which will be of value in the eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That power is the power of love, the power of charity.

Of what value would any reunion be that was not accomplished according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ?

But Christ recognises one, and one only power, as the force that, according to His will, is to bind His people to Himself and to each other, and that force is love, that power is charity.

"As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you; continue ye in My love.

"If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love."

"A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

And if we desire a description, given by Divine inspiration,

* St. John xv. 10, 11; xiii. 34, 35.

of what the essential characteristics of this love, this charity, are, we have it in the sublime words of St. Paul.*

“Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.†

Only if charity can go forth conquering and to conquer in the hearts of Christians can any reunion be effected that will be in the eyes of Christ anything but a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.

But we at least *speak* as if we forgot this. We often seem to take it for granted that the reunion of Christendom must be a work, not so much of love, as of diplomacy. We are eager to discuss how boundaries of jurisdiction can be arranged here; how definitions can be accommodated there; how safeguards must be secured in this direction, how freedom must be conceded in that; and all the time the one thing needful is ignored, we forget to ask, Are the hearts of the divided Churches yearning the one for the other? Is the charity of Christ constraining them to long and desire to be of the same mind one towards another?

It is quite possible that a reunion of Christendom might be effected by diplomacy. But what would be the value of it? The history of the Council of Florence and its results may be left to answer that question. Reunion by diplomacy must break down the first time it is really put to the test.

Some, however, are inclined to look on love, on charity, as not sufficient, *in itself*, as a motive power to bring about reunion. No, they think love is all very well, it is a beautiful adornment that should deck the work of reunion, indeed, it is an adornment that cannot be dispensed with, we admit this (they would say), but the actual work of reunion must depend for its vital strength rather on skill in reasoning, and astute statesmanship, than on love; these must supply the *power*, love must come in to give grace and beauty to the work.

Those who talk or think in this way have never yet

* In the original, the word used in 1 Cor. xiii., which is rendered *charity* is the same as that rendered *love* in St. John's Gospel, chapters xiii., &c.

† 1 Cor. xiii. 4, &c.

learned what love is. Why, love is the great ruling power in the universe. The secret force which in reality shapes each individual life among us is the love which draws each one this way or that. And when the Holy Spirit would teach the Apostle to speak of God in His ineffable essence in one word, He inspires him to say—not God is power, God is wisdom, God is majesty, but—God is love. God the Holy, God the mighty, God the immortal, God, is love! And yet some would doubt the immortal power of love! Again, I say, they know not what love is. There was one who knew something of what love is, hear his burning words:

“The noble love of Jesus impels a man to do great things, and stirs him up to be always longing for what is more perfect. . . . Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller nor better in heaven and earth. . . . Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility; for it thinks all things lawful for itself, and all things possible. It is, therefore, able to undertake all things, and it completes many things, and warrants them to take effect.”*

Oh, if God would but call for a new Day of Pentecost, if He would but pour out in its fulness on His Church this gift of mighty, unconquerable love, what would become of the divisions of Christendom? Like as smoke vanisheth, so would love drive them away; like as wax melteth at the fire, so would all middle walls of partition perish at the presence of love.

And if, by the power of love, the multitude of them that believe could be of one heart and of one soul, none would say that aught of the definitions or confessions which he had hitherto possessed was his own (there would be no contentings for my Thirty-nine Articles against your Decrees of Trent), but all would have, in common, one expression of the one faith; then, indeed, with a great power hitherto unknown, would the pastors of the Church bear witness to the heathen world of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace would be on all. Love, and love alone, made things to be thus once before. Love can realise all this again.

“O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that Thou didst in

* Imitation of Christ. Book III., cap. 5.

their days, and in the old time before them. O Lord, arise, help us, and deliver us for Thine honour."

But if we want to intensify our sense of the supreme and all-important part that love must play in the reunion of Christendom, we have but to turn to the history of the disunion of Christendom.

The history of the divisions of Christendom may be all summed up in one short sentence, Love had grown cold.

If we turn to the history of the great schism between East and West, consummated in the tenth century, and never healed since, it can but strike us that if *on either side* there had been more of the constraining charity of Christ, no division would have separated Old from New Rome.

But when we turn to what more immediately concerns ourselves; when we read the history of that terrible period of strife and division which, for want of a better name, we call the time of the Reformation, if we read that history impartially, and try candidly to look at it from all sides, we may well ask, What, in the midst of the confusions of that evil time, became of Christian charity? Where did Love hide herself?

The history of the Reformation brings before us, on all sides of the conflict, men of splendid intellect, of profound learning, of brilliant eloquence, of exalted culture; we see men displaying zeal, courage, self-devotion, skill, to the very highest degree; we hear of scholars and divines speaking with the tongues of men and angels, searching into all mysteries and all knowledge; we read of men full of a faith in the justness of their cause that might remove mountains, gladly giving their bodies to be burned in testimony to what they deemed to be the truth.

Yes, we hear and know of all this, but where is the one conspicuous man, in all the history of the Reformation, who is the exemplar of the meekness and gentleness of Christ? Where is the man, or Church, that stands forth to witness to the fact that the adorable Founder of our holy religion claimed above all things to be recognised as the meek and lowly in heart? Where, at the time of the Reformation, was there a body of religionists, whether in communion with Rome, England, Luther, Calvin, or with any other Church or leader, who seemed to remember that, as Christians, the vocation wherewith we are called obliges us to walk in "lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in

love ; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace " ? *

In truth, at the time of the Reformation there seems to have been a kind of Satanic Pentecost ; the spirit of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness seems to have been poured forth, in a fearful flood of iniquity, over the whole Church.

And can any of the Churches which were divided from each other at that evil time claim to be guiltless in this matter ?

It can hardly be contended that it was the exhibition by the Roman Court and Pontiff of the constraining charity of Christ that provoked, or gave excuse to, those who began the work that ended in destroying the unity of Western Christendom.

And when the work of schism was begun, how was it met ? Did the Supreme Pontiff and the prelates and doctors, who held with him, remember that the Holy Ghost had taught them that " the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves " ? † Did they remember that the typical priest is described as called upon to " have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are in error, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity " ? ‡ Nothing seemed to be further from their minds than all this. Those who opposed themselves, the ignorant, those who erred, were first met with contempt and bitterness, and then were visited with fire and the sword.

Was there ever a greater outrage committed on the Christian religion than when (as was the case in every country in Europe) the image of the Crucified—the image of God dying for men—was uplifted in the public places of cities, to give a ghastly sanction to the burning to death of men, feeble women, aye, and sometimes of those who were little more than children, who had gone astray from the religion of their fathers ? True, their errors were sometimes absurd, sometimes worse ; but where or when, I pray you, did Christ ever commission His Church to burn sinners, even the worst of sinners, for His sake ? Where could the love of Christ have disappeared to, when under the sanction of His religion men were burned to death ? Think what burning to death means.

* Ephes iv. 1, &c.

† 2 Tim. ii. 24, &c.

‡ Heb. v. 2.

Protestants, in their zeal to maintain a feeling of hatred against the Roman Church, have so fatigued our ears with references to the Tortures of the Inquisition and the Fires of Smithfield, that we are inclined to yawn at their mention and to disbelieve in them as facts; but for all that, the bloody persecution with which heresy and schism were met at the Reformation *is a fact*—a terrible fact, which did more than anything else to stereotype the divisions of Christendom. It is neither wise nor true to the truth to ignore or forget this.

If the appearance of dissension and division was met on the Roman side, not with the patient love of Christ, but with fire and sword, what of the other side, or sides? To pass by for the present the conduct of those bodies of men who, on simply Protestant grounds, separated, or were separated, from the Roman Church, what are we to say of the spirit exhibited by our own Church of England when those steps were taken which resulted in our separation from the Holy See? It is well not to forget, however, that whatever else was or has been done, the Church of England has never formally renounced ecclesiastical and spiritual communion with the "Church" of Rome—this by the way, but however this may be, did our Prelates, our Priests, our Princes at the time of the Reformation exhibit the constraining love of Christ in their dealings with men and things? Can it be candidly said that with lowliness and meekness, with forbearance and long suffering, they honestly endeavoured to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

With shame and confusion of face the candid Churchman, who really knows the history of the Anglican Reformation, must acknowledge that the only answer that can truly be given to these questions is an emphatic and unreserved negative.

It may seem to some of us that our Church of England was not as deeply involved as some others in the crime of blood-guiltiness, but even as to this we are not innocent. But even if, in carrying through what they deemed to be plans of reformation, our prelates did not often imbrue their own hands with blood, they at least connived at the spilling of much that was shed by the civil power.

But murder is not the only sin against the charity of Christ. Besides the sword of steel there is the sword of the tongue. And when we come to read the controversial works of the prelates and divines who carried through our Reformation, we find therein committed every conceivable offence against

Christian charity that it is possible to name. And the same characteristics are found in the reports of the disputations of the Reformers with their opponents. Again and again, in reading the controversial works of the Reformers, and the reports of their public and private disputations, one is compelled to pause and ask, Did these men for a moment imagine that such language, that such a way of treating things, could convince one single mind of error, or were they merely trying to irritate and exasperate those whom they were unable to convince? It would have been a sufficiently humiliating fact had the Reformers been only exasperating in controversy; alas! with shame be it spoken, they were sometimes as well both blasphemous and indecent. What was there between such controversialists and the Love of Jesus Christ? And as were their words, so were their deeds.

Is it urged that, in all this, the other side was quite as bad? Possibly it may have been so. But how does this make the Reformers any better?

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter—the work of disunion which was done because men forgot to love, must be undone by love. We who profess an enthusiasm for reunion must be before all things Apostles and Evangelists of the Love of Christ, zealots for charity.

And how are we to fulfil our mission? Well, chiefly by labouring to school thought, word, and pen to exemplify in all that we think, speak, or write about the great Church of Rome, for instance (and, indeed, about all Churches separated from us), those characteristics of charity set before us by the Holy Ghost through the mouth of St. Paul. Thinking for the moment of what is, after all, only one direction in which our aspirations for reunion tend, let us strive to be kind and generous in our judgment of things specially Roman; let us avoid that petty unseemly habit of perpetually using names or terms that imply contempt of what is Roman Catholic; let us shrink from puffing up ourselves as superior to our Roman brethren. When Roman opponents seem to us to be bitter, unjust, discourteous, let us not be easily provoked, nor return railing for railing. To act in this way, to bind thought, tongue, and pen straitly in the bonds of charity, will no doubt make us poor controversialists. But what of that, if thereby we become better Christians?

And here let me give one word of warning. There are those who, by a strange perversion of the spirit of true charity, seem to think (or to act as if they thought) that in

order to heal the wound of division which separates us from Rome (for instance) it is a good thing to create or foster suspicion, discontent, and disputing among ourselves by a contemptuous depreciation of everything Anglican. The unreality and folly of such a course can hardly be exaggerated. Can any reasonable man for one moment imagine that to sow dispeace at home will help towards a good understanding with those abroad? It may be enough here to remember that the same charity which will enable us to see all things Roman in the fairest possible light will enable us to see things Anglican under the same aspect. A supposed charity which does not produce this effect in us is a spurious imitation of the real thing.

We dare not conclude without giving serious consideration to a matter of overwhelming importance. It is an axiom of our holy religion that no sin can be pardoned, that no reparation can be made for sin committed, without repentance.

The Church of Rome and our own Church have both grievously sinned against the charity of Christ. Which Church has repented as openly and clearly as she has sinned? I do not know that either Church has.

The reñion of Christendom waits for the repentance of the Churches. Which Church will lead the way? Which will first set the example of repentance?

The Bishop of Rome, in his character of Supreme Pontiff, has lately put forth officially two documents worthy of our most respectful consideration. In the one he calls on the people of England to return to unity with himself; in the other he authoritatively defines in what, from his point of view, unity must consist. Nothing could be more temperate or pacific than the spirit of these documents; but where in either document does the Pope by a single word express shame and repentance for the wickedness of his predecessors?—wickedness which was, as even Roman Catholics must admit, the great reason why the evil power of schism was able to wreck the unity of Western Christendom. No doubt it is right for the Pope to remind Christians of that which belongs to him (according to his own way of looking at things), as the successor of St. Peter; but ought he to forget that he is also the successor of Alexander VI., to say nothing of others? If from the Apostle he has inherited a legacy of privileges and prerogatives, he has certainly, from the Borgia and those like him, come into an inheritance of guilt which cannot be expiated by being ignored, but which must lie at the door of the Angel of the Church of Rome, except he repent.

But do we see on our own side any greater signs of repentance than can be seen on that of the Church of Rome? I fear not. Something like an acknowledgment of fault on our side we do sometimes come across when prelates and divines, speaking in the name of the Church of England, deal with the causes of Protestant dissent. But *vis-à-vis* with the Church of Rome, the attitude generally taken by us is haughty, defiant, contemptuous, self-justificatory. Little right, indeed, does the history of our Reformation give us to assume any such attitude! The sins of our Church at that period are patent; where is our repentance?

No, on public occasions the tone taken on our behalf by our prelates and others, instead of being penitent, is too generally full of blind self-laudation, of foolish proclamation of our immeasurable superiority to everybody else. Have we totally forgotten the warning, "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips"? *

Not so very long ago one in high ecclesiastical place among us publicly said that the Church of England is the best and purest National Church in the world. The best and purest National Church! There is only One Who is entitled thus to judge the Churches; only He Who tries the reins and the hearts can tell which Church excels another. Let us shrink from foolish boastings such as this, and leave the judgment of the matter to Him to Whom alone it belongs.

Again, one of our own communion has publicly claimed for us that we shall be called "The Church of the Reconciliation." What do these fine words mean? When has the Church of England had the good fortune to play the part of reconciler? And between whom? It is true that an eminent Roman Catholic thought he discerned in our own Church a capability for exercising a reconciling power; but we have done nothing in that way as yet—nor shall we become able to do work of the kind by snatching at laudatory titles, nor without deep repentance for our own share in the wickedness which resulted in the breaking up of the unity of Western Christendom.

When, more than half a century ago, God in His mercy raised up in our Church that band of chosen men who called us back, with trumpet voice, to walk in the old paths, in the good way which was fast becoming forgotten by us, what was

* Prov. xxvii. 2.

the one thing which His Spirit most strongly impressed on their minds, and which they, in turn, most solemnly enforced by word and example on others? Surely the necessity of deep, stern, whole-hearted repentance. Are we not in danger of forgetting the cry of this voice?

Perhaps, on the one hand, the preachers of repentance may have, to some extent, used exaggerated terms in delivering their message; perhaps they may have wished to see signs of humiliation maintained where such signs are not appropriate—for instance, in the services of the sanctuary; perhaps, in these ways, they have weakened the power of their word; perhaps, too, on the other hand, the reaction against merely Puritanical and artificial primness may have led men into excess in the other direction; but, be all this as it may, have we not too great reason to fear that the call to repentance, which the great Head of the Church sent us through those His servants, whom we acknowledge as our fathers in the faith, is losing its power over our minds? Is not Catholic Religion in the Church of England in danger of becoming enervated, ineffectual, unprogressive, through the want of penitential self-restraint in those who profess it?

If we love our Church let us dread for it above all things the incursion of a self-complacent spirit, satisfied with itself, and conscious of no grievous deficiencies. Such a Church is an object of nothing short of loathing to Him in Whose hands are the destinies of all the Churches*; self-satisfaction can be to a Church (or an individual) the prelude only to shame and ruin.

If we would help our Church to escape from this dread fate let us take the prophet Daniel as our example†; it was when he confessed not only his own sins but the sins of his people, the sins of Israel, the Church, and people of God, that the Angel Gabriel was sent to him with the assurance of personal acceptance, and with the prophecy of ultimate restoration for the captive Church. Let us, too, in our prayers and supplications, confess the sins of our Church, the sins of our fathers, the sins of our prelates, our priests, and our princes. "Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers, neither take Thou vengeance of our sins. O Lord, deal not with us after our sins, neither reward us after our iniquities."

And we need not fear, if we thus pray in simplicity and

* Rev. iii. 14, &c.

† Dan. ix. 20, &c.

sincerity, that we shall become hypocrites, confessing other people's sins and forgetting our own. No, the more we realise that the sins of the Church corporate have kept back good things from it, the more, if we be thoughtful and sincere, we shall be brought to face the fact that our own lives are destitute of many a blessing, which might have cheered and strengthened them, but for the sins which have kept back from us God's hand of benediction; that gracious hand which disperses every cloud of blackest sin, when the cry of repentance is heard, confessing the sin, and seeking its forgiveness for the sake of the great Sacrifice of Expiation once offered on the Cross for the sins of the whole world, mortal and venial, public and private, individual and corporate.

It is the great Psalm of Penitence itself that teaches us, in the midst of a very agony of prayer for personal restoration to God's favour after sin, to be mindful of the good estate of the Church, and to invoke His loving kindness on its behalf also:—

Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness.

Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

Be favourable and gracious unto Sion, build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.—*Psalm li. 1, 11, 18.*

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