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W. Wilberforce

SESSION.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

The Oratory of S. Margaret's, East Grinstead,

NOVEMBER 18, 1859.

BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN MASON NEALE, D.D.,

Founder and first Chaplain of S. Margaret's.

“Ye who are fighting the battle for England's Church and her glory,
Whenso that battle seems going against us, remember the legend.
Time there will be, there *will* be, though we never shall see it in this world,
When by the hands of the men that come after us God shall upraise her;
She whom we fight for now be no more despised and rejected,
But an eternal praise, and a joy of all generations!”

The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

FOURTH EDITION.

LONDON :

JOSEPH MASTERS, ALDERSGATE STREET,

AND NEW BOND STREET.

1868.

INTRODUCTION.

THE following Sermon was preached about eight years ago, to the Sisters of S. Margaret's, East Grinstead, on the occasion of one of their number (a Probationer) having joined the Roman Church. It will appear in a volume of Sermons already in type, and which will soon be published: but it has been thought that if put forth immediately it may reassure some who feel perplexed and troubled at the present crisis, containing as it does the sentiments, deliberately formed in the course of many years' careful study, of one whose opinions should carry great weight, especially with those who may be doubtful as to their future course. It may be well to state that though written several years since, those who knew the writer most intimately can assert with confidence that his opinions never changed on this subject. One, who conversed with him a very short time before his decease, can vouch without hesitation, that as he never wavered in his allegiance to the English Church, so to the very last where his fondest love had been fixed, there it abided steadfast.

J. H.

EAST BARKWITH RECTORY,

First Sunday in Lent, 1868.

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A SERMON.

"But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus, the king of Persia, hath commanded us. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose."—Ezra iv. 3—5.

It would be unnatural, my Sisters, were I not to speak on the sad subject which has taken up so much of our thoughts this last week. Far, far rather would I be dwelling on the things which are nearest to our hopes, and dearest to our hearts;—but it must not always be so. If God has been pleased to allow this affliction to happen to us, I am not to pass it by as if I were resolutely determined to think nothing about it.

God forbid that I should say anything unkind of the poor Sister who has left us. To her own Master she stands or falls. I should not be speaking the truth if I did not say that she has been tempted into a great sin: but He will make all the allowances in His mercy that His justice does not forbid:—and do not let me even in thought presume to limit His loving-kindness.

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But why is it a great sin? That is what I mean to speak about now. Satan, who has attacked you in so many ways,—who has led one of you away by the love of the world, one by the love of her own self-will, and so on—has now caused another to leave us by transforming himself into an angel of light. Thus far, I take comfort: that the very set—so to speak—he has made against you, shows that he fears lest you should be made the means of destroying his works.

Now, I take for granted, in the present case, that our Church is allowed to be a true Church, our Sacraments valid Sacraments, our Priests real Priests. Almost all who have left us,—just as our late Sister,—have allowed this. If any one denies it, then, of course, the whole field of argument alters. But (thank God!) the proof is so absolutely certain that the fact is hardly ever now disputed—is never disputed except with the very ignorant, to whom anything may be told without the fear of discovery. Yet, after all, the internal evidence is, to those who have it, more convincing than any external argument. You know, dear Sisters, (what she, poor thing, owned) that our dear LORD has so spoken to you in and by His Sacraments as to tell you that He is there of a certainty. Of this matter, then, I say nothing; only do not imagine that I forget it, but believe that I take it for granted.

Well, then: the shortcomings of our own English Church being set before us on the one side, and on the other, the greatness and beauty of Rome being stated, as they so well know how to state it, and made so enchanting and captivating; why, even if they spoke the truth, would it still be a sin to join them?

Dear Sisters, for this reason; in this place, in this

nation, in this Church, GOD has placed you, with work to do for Him ; a particular work ; His choosing, and not yours. And woe be to him who says : “ I wish to work for GOD ; but in another place, and in another way ! ” I do not, of course, mean to say that one who has left us, has, simply because he has joined the Roman Church, put himself out of the pale of salvation. But I do say this : that the refusal to do his appointed work here, and doing a fancy duty there, must *imperial* salvation. “ Where is the work I gave you to do ? ” — Will it be any answer to that, to say : — “ Here is the work I have done, which I thought was better and prettier ? ”

This would be true, let the circumstances be what they may. But see what they are. It has pleased GOD to place us in that nation which is the most powerful among the nations of the earth ; which, and especially by its colonies among heathen lands, will have a greater influence over the religion of unborn millions and millions of souls than any other. Twenty-five years ago, it pleased the HOLY GHOST to pour forth His grace on this Church in a way, the like to which since the day of Pentecost has not been seen. You are not old enough to know this, as I know it ; but the older you are the more you know of it : “ It is the LORD’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. ” Well : it was not to be supposed that Satan would permit this glorious revival to go unopposed. You know the hatred, the bitterness, the fierce attacks, he has stirred up against Catholic progress in the English Church ; and yet you know how steadily, point by point, we have conquered : how we have been the stronger for defeat, how we have spread after loss. How Baptismal Regeneration, Prayers for

the Dead, the doctrine of Absolution, to a great extent the true faith in the Blessed Eucharist, have been poſts, as it were, won already : how at the preſent moment for that Bleſſed Sacrament we are ſtill contending, how other Sacramental Truths are coming back with it, ſuch as the doctrine of Evangelical counſels, the merit of Virginity ; you know that never from the beginning have churches been ſo built as in this England of ours within twenty years. There is, at the preſent moment, in England, a battle on the largeſt ſcale between God and Satan, that, ſince the Reformation, has ever been fought. In this battle He has given us a place. He has given you the power of coming to His help in a way in which few women can come ; not by doing anything unwomanly, but by your very poſition as Brides of CHRIST, by the prevalent merit of Chaſtity, by lives devoted to the Bridegroom of the Virgins. At the ſame time He has beſtowed on you, what He has not on all, every privilege that the Church can give you. And oh ! how wickedly ungrateful to ſay—“ I will have nothing to do with this ſtruggle ! I will go into a quiet life. I will rid myſelf of all this oppoſition, ſtop my ears to all this outcry. I will join thoſe who are ſheltered, and be ſheltered with them.”

Yes : it is moſt grievous to ſee how thoſe who have left us have, almoſt without an exception, funk into pure idleneſs. Hardworking prieſts, who, while with us were inſtant in ſeaſon, out of ſeaſon : who laboured up to, and beyond, their power, are tempted, fall :—and then ? And then—they lead lives of more than worldly eaſe, they give themſelves up to novels, to cigars, to wine parties : to a morning of lounging on the ſofa, to an evening at the opera. Does “ by their

fruits ye shall know them," mean anything or mean nothing? Why, even at the convent where I was on Monday, you were ridiculed for your austerity: and that by those on whose breast hung the silver scourge of S. Francis! No: go for ease, if you will: luxury, if you will: comfort, if you will: but the hard battle, the weary self-denial is, thank God, and is acknowledged by our opponents to be, with us: "And if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."

We may be sure of this: if England ever becomes a Catholic country, it will be by the Church of England, not by that of Rome. They, you know, notwithstanding the cry raised about our secessions, are many thousands weaker than they were twenty years ago. They also know this, and allow it; but we hardly think enough about it. Now, if the good leaven in the Church of England were swept out,—if it were attached to Rome, or were altogether to fail,—what then? Why, the Roman Church would itself be banished from England, as it virtually has been before. We bear the brunt. We are the breakwater. And were that removed, the ocean of Protestantism would in a very few years overwhelm all their establishments; banish them as in the time of William III.; and because we had fallen, they would fall too. Most mad is their endeavour to injure us: we cannot perish without drawing them after us.

Now there is a curious parallel in Apostolic times with these controversies. You know that there were two Churches in Judæa and Syria; one of the circumcision, one of the uncircumcision. What did the circumcision say? The violent, like the violent ultramontanes now, "You must join us, or you cannot be

saved." The more moderate,—“How much better that you should come over to us! why not? We have more means of grace; you would gain so much.” And what did the Apostolic council decide? You know. What did S. Paul say? “Let every man abide in the state wherein he is called.” That was the great law then; and has been from that time to this. And yet even more strongly, “If ye be circumcised, CHRIST shall profit you nothing.” No matter for arguments of safety, of desirableness, of the secure way, of the greater grace,—“If ye be circumcised, CHRIST shall profit you nothing.”

I said just now, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” You know how in almost every case the excessive yearning after Profelytes has led to fearful falsehood. You know that this is no exception. And can GOD’s blessing be on a lie? Can He stand in need of man’s sin to carry out His own purposes? Are we not rather reminded of our dear LORD’s condemnation of those who compassed sea and land to make one profelyte.

One thing more on this part of our subject. We, you know, descend directly from the old Church of England. We are the spiritual children of S. Osmund, S. Thomas of Canterbury, S. Richard of Chichester, S. Felix of Suffolk. A very few generations, and I can trace my orders to our great martyr of Canterbury. The Roman Church in England has its orders from Spain. You may not know that, at the accession of Elizabeth, the Bishops who would not conform ordained no successors. The Roman Catholics in England for five years attended our churches, and received our Sacraments. Then,—not till then—Pius V. excommunicated and deposed the queen; but not for sixty years

had the Romanists any Bishop. About 1620 one Dr. Bishop, calling himself Bishop of Chalcedon, was sent over: he had been consecrated in Spain: and from him modern Romanists derive their orders. Then: either that Church of Saints has come to an end, or it exists in us.

What I have hitherto said, rests on the supposition that all the Romanists tell us of the glory of Rome, and our own poverty, is true. Now I go much further: and I say that the joining Rome involves straining our consciences to believe doctrines which we do not believe,—know to be false,—and in knowing to be false, agree not only with the Primitive, but with the Mediæval Church.

Now, you know, dearest Sisters, I am not given to shut my eyes with respect to what we must all feel to be the shortcomings of the English Church. I think you know that, had I chosen to defend and flatter and support everything in it, to use what I know of ecclesiastical history for the purpose of proving its present perfection, there are few dignities in it to which I might not have aspired. As I did not, you also know what I am: though, by God's great goodness, a thousandfold happier with your love and with your regard, than I could have been in any dignity. I only refer to this to remind you that my eyes are not blinded.

What then do I see? On the one hand the English Church teaching three or four doctrines less clearly and plainly than I could wish—dimly, if you will, and indistinctly—but teaching them still: on the other, Rome teaching three or four doctrines which Bernard, which Thomas Aquinas, which Rupert, which Bonaventura called blasphemous, and forcing them on us.

Had I no other duty to stay where I am, am I not therefore safer? Verily yes.

Listen to me, my Sisters. For four years now past I have taught you weekly, sometimes almost daily, from mediæval writers; what they said to their Sisters, I, without alteration, say to you. When I say without alteration, I mean without doctrinal alteration. There, I call GOD to witness, neither by way of addition or subtraction, do I remember, in those five hundred sermons I have preached to you, to have made a single change. Well; then we hold now what they held, exactly and literally.

Now mark me: a Roman Priest could not do so. His sermons, if he did, would be at least branded as without unction, probably termed heretical, because he would not speak of S. Mary as the channel of all grace. The Sisters of this day are not taught what Bernard taught—are taught what Bernard protested against. You know how he wrote against what he calls the blasphemy of the Immaculate Conception. And not only that: that dear Litany which he wrote, and which we say daily,—how is it characterized by modern Romanists? A criticism the other day termed it *profane*, as applying to our LORD the title, “Star of the Sea,” which, they say, ought to be confined to S. Mary! What would he, what would those mediæval Convents of his, have said to such a doctrine?

So again: within the last three hundred years, they have equally altered the doctrine of Prayers for the dead. Why, till far down the history of the Church, did Roman Catholics pray for them, as the East does still! And how? Why, thus:

“And at Thy spiritual and holy altar, O LORD, grant

rest, good memory, and felicity to all the souls, bodies and spirits of our fathers, brethren and sisters, corporal or spiritual, who have departed in whatever regions, cities, or states; or have been suffocated in the sea or in rivers, or have died in travel, and of whom there is no memory in the Churches constituted on earth. Thou, O LORD, give them good memory, who have departed to Thee in the orthodox faith, together with those whose names are written in the book of life. And to all of them, who having run the race of this life, have appeared perfect and illustrious before Thee, and having been set free from the ocean of sins, have reached Thee, our fathers and brethren according to the flesh and the spirit,—give rest, O LORD, in that spiritual and mighty bosom. Give them the spirit of joy in the habitations of light and gladness, in the tabernacles of shade and rest, in the treasures of happiness, whence every sorrow is far banished, and the souls of the pious wait without labour for the first fruits of life; and the spirits of the righteous in like manner, are waiting for the fulfilment of the promised reward: in that region, where the labourers and the weary look towards Paradise, and they that are invited to the wedding long for the celestial Bridegroom: where they that are called to that feast wait till they go up thither, and ardently desire to receive that new state of glory: where sorrows are banished and where joys are found; for love only has appeared not entangled in the passions of sin of all who have been arrayed with the human body, namely, Thine Only-Begotten SON, JESUS CHRIST, our LORD, through Whom also we hope to obtain mercy for ourselves and for them.”

And how does the Roman Church—or rather how

does the clique which she allows to monopolize all her missionary energy in England,—speak of them now?

“In pains beyond all earthly pains,
Favourites of Jesus, there they lie:
Letting the fire wash out their stains,
And worshipping God’s purity.

“O Mary, let thy Son no more
His longing spouses thus expect;
His soldiers to their Chief restore,
And to the SPIRIT His Elect!”

And this is what we must believe now, if we are to have any part or lot with Rome! This, instead of “Blessed are the dead which die in the LORD;” this, instead of the lovely and sweet expressions of many an Eastern and Western Liturgy that Rome has now abolished.

Then, how miserable to be deprived for ever of the Chalice of which He said, “Drink ye all of it!” You know, my Sisters, how I grieve from my very soul that His greatest gift has been so little esteemed, so much dishonoured among us; you know that I would sacrifice anything, lay down anything to see, what I hope some day will be,—the Eucharistic teaching of our Church—I will not say, more true—but more distinct, or rather, more true, because more distinct. But, were I in the Roman Communion, what agony it would be to see the Chalice so abused! to know what that dear LORD shed out of His most Precious Side that I might drink it; that He said, “Drink ye all of it;”—that He still says, “Come, drink of My Wine that I have mingled;”—and to have the Church interpose, and say, “No: I forbid it.” You may not know the story of the Bishop of Exeter, Ralph de Queval, in the thirteenth century,

when the corruption was first authoritatively taught in England, who said, "Whatever be the consequence of my disobedience, I never will so incestuously maim the Sacrament." And, during his life-time, he never did. In fact, it seems difficult to imagine, what yet is true, that many Churches in England were not for above a hundred and fifty years deprived of the Chalice. For those who have been born where the Roman Church is their mother, to bow to this in obedience to GOD's Will must be, one should say, the hardest of hard things. But to fly against GOD's Will as our late Sister did, for the purpose of *not* receiving the LORD's Blood—Ah me! I know no words of sorrow deep enough to mourn for such conduct! And we ought to remember too, the great Eastern Church, with its seventy millions of Christians, never ceases to protest against the maimed Sacrament and the corrupted Sacrifice!

Another thing: I want you all to feel this: that within the last thirty or forty years the Roman attitude to S. Mary has become more than startling—really awful. You can see by what those blessed Saints who loved and adored her most deeply, such as S. Bernard and S. Bonaventura, have left on record,—how they would have shrunk with horror at the modern language of Rome: such, I mean, as that some things are impossible to the SON, nothing to the MOTHER: if we must choose an Advocate with the FATHER, rather the MOTHER than the SON: that Rebecca prevailed when Isaac failed, and so now—and the like.

O dear Sisters! were it possible that grief could enter into those habitations, what must that most glorious, because most humble One feel when she is made to eclipse Him Whom she so dearly, dearly loves; when, as in

the latest phase of devotion, He is made our Intercessor with her, instead of her being our suppliant with Him. And consider this :—those saintly painters who drew the Mother of God as we so love to behold her, decked in such celestial purity, arrayed with such perfect love,—they believed and spoke of her as we do ; such as Giotto or Memling or Fra Angelico. Later, as the false devotion crept on and on, how was she designed by the great painters of Europe ? How ? from licentious, wicked women : frequently from the mistresses of the painter :—and this the pattern and crown of all purity, —the Virgin Mother of God !

One other thing more. You hear people now speaking of wishing to lean on an infallible guide, and finding it in Rome. Few people know how late a thing that claim is. It is not a hundred years old. I believe the first time the Pope, by himself, ever claimed to be infallible, was in his proceedings in reference to Napoleon after the First French Revolution. In making converts before that time, none ever dreamt of such an argument. Many and many a Pope has fairly disclaimed it ; and has said, “Without the East, not even can the Western Church profess infallibility ; a divided Church has lost that grace.” There is a very curious and wise and loving letter of S. Bernard to one of his pupils, Pope Eugene III., showing that the Western Church taken altogether may err ; much more the Bishop of Rome. And yet never was infallibility stretched so far as when the present Pope, out of his own head, made necessary to salvation a belief in the Immaculate Conception of S. Mary, which till 1200, every Saint had rejected. It is truly pitiable to see the ignorance which looks to the Papal see for infallibility ; but what are we to say of

those who offer this as an argument, knowing that Rome, up to the nineteenth century, did not believe it herself! and which every page of Ecclesiastical History over and over again refutes.

Now, I have done :—I would only remind you *what* I have said. That, supposing the Roman Church to be holier, more glorious, more happy than the English : here, and not there is our lot : here is the work we have to do, and for doing or not doing which we shall be saved or lost. But that it is not so : whatever our shortcomings, (and they are many,) they are corrigible, and they are omissions : the Roman are incorrigible, because of her sad claim to infallibility, and they are commissions. We, by God's grace acting in and by us, may amend, as we have already amended marvellously :—as the dry bones have almost miraculously begun to live. But Rome!—every error is engraved more deeply in each successive year ; that, most, the worship of S. Mary. God of His infinite mercy stop the plague-spot ! For, if not,—if it goes on for another quarter of a century as it has for the last, surely that awful voice, “Come ye out of her,” will be heard. It was held by some, just before the Reformation, that S. Mary had been *assumed* into the Trinity, so as to make it a Quaternity. Were that to be promulgated officially, as the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception has been, then would it not be the duty of each one, as he valued his soul, to leave her ? God forbid this ! but remember, it is only what many of the greatest Roman Saints have believed, that as Peter fell grievously and rose again, so the Church of Peter will for a while deny the LORD, and be brought back again in His love, purified and faithful ;—and then the end shall be ! S. Bernard held this ;—and Rupert,

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