



THE MIND OF CHRIST THE PERFECTION AND
BOND OF THE CHURCH.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT ST. PETER'S CHURCH, BRIGHTON,

BEFORE THE RIGHT REVEREND

PHILIP NICHOLAS

LORD BISHOP OF CHICHESTER,

AT A MEETING OF THE DIOCESE,

December 9, 1841,

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ARCHDEACON OF CHICHESTER.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD

PHILIP NICHOLAS

LORD BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

AND TO THE CLERGY AND LAITY OF THE DIOCESE

THIS SERMON

WITH AN EARNEST DESIRE AND PRAYER

THAT THE PRECIOUS OINTMENT OF HOLINESS AND UNITY

FROM OUR GREAT AND ONLY HIGH PRIEST

MAY EVER DESCEND UPON US

IS INSCRIBED BY THEIR FAITHFUL SERVANT

H. E. M.

A SERMON.

Philippians, ii. 5. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

ST. PAUL here sets before the church in Philippi the self-abasement of the Son of God. He bids them, that had been born again through the incarnation of Christ, to follow in His steps. "Be ye minded even as Christ Jesus." The Apostle then dwells on the mystery of His unutterable humiliation, who, being in the form of God, and co-equal with God unclothed Himself of His eternal glory, and took upon Him the weeds of our fallen manhood, and became a servant, being made in the likeness of man. And, even in this humiliation, He yet further abased Himself, and, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death. He, that was impassible as God, was made flesh, that He might suffer as a man. He would even take another nature, that He might bring Himself down within the reach of sorrows, which were as far from His eternal Godhead as the

sins for which He died. And even lower still—in the body of His humiliation He chose to die a death beyond all others in shame and agony, even the death of the Cross.

In this unutterable self-abasement, and in this transcendent self-oblation, St. Paul teaches us to see the divine ideas of all earthly forms of lowliness, and self-denial. Whatsoever there is of pure humility and painful self-devotion upon earth is the reflection and the impress of these heavenly realities which were in Christ Jesus. The humiliation of the Son of God taken in its moral, not its mysterious aspect, that is, not on the side by which it manifests itself in the world unseen as a mastery over sin and death, but on the side which is turned on this visible world,—is a type and a law of life given to the church of God. The mind of Christ dwelling in the faithful, is the perfection of the Saints and the bond of unity to His mystical body. The humiliation of the Great Head of the Church, now exalted to the glory of His kingdom, is the pattern in heavenly places of the new creation of God. The mind of Christ then is the life of that great mystery of truth and grace, which was revealed, and shed abroad for the perfection of the faithful. They are the true brethren of the Firstborn, who have received upon their spiritual being the stamp of his humiliation. Every true servant of God from the beginning has borne these two great tokens of his lineage, lowliness and self-devotion :

and men are Saints in the measure in which they partake of this unearthly character. If we look down the line of those who by sanctity of life, have visibly handed on in the world the mystery of Christ's humiliation, we shall find each one bearing, in these particular features, the likeness of Him who was alone above the world. Whatsoever mankind had before known of its own perfection, whether by the yearnings of a purer wisdom, or by the gradual revelations of God, this they had never reached, that the perfection of man is in the abasement of self, in being the last, the lowest, and the least ; in yielding up his own, in suffering for others, in choosing sorrow for his portion. It was a standard and a kind of perfection beyond the thoughts of man. And as before, the world could not reach this mystery, so, afterwards, it could not understand its depth. It was before a secret, it was afterwards a miracle.

Again as the mind of Christ impressed upon his own is the perfection of each several faithful man, so it is the bond of Christ's mystical body, which is the Church. Throughout the whole history of the church, we find the likeness of Christians to their Lord, to be the living basis of Catholic unity. One common type of moral and spiritual being held them all in one common fellowship. They were likeminded one with another, because all were like their Lord. In all ages, in all lands, in all languages, and in all diversities of outward state, in

the churches of Asia, and Africa, in the East and in the West, there was one common type of spiritual perfection impressed on all. And that particular character is exactly such as extinguishes the germs of strife. Lowliness and selfdenial, humility and sacrifice of self, are the natural opposites and correctives of the tempers, out of which spring rivalry and contention. The mind of Christ absolutely subdues the rebellion of the individual will. And, as all national diversities were lost in the one Catholic Church, so were all oppositions of personal character merged in the one pattern of life. They were either blended, or destroyed. How different soever men were before their conversion, by the traditions of nation and home, by cast of mind, or habits of life, as Justin and Ambrose, Vincentius and Augustin, soldiers, statesmen, pleaders, rhetoricians, philosophers, all were assimilated by one dominant spiritual energy, likening them to one universal type. They were transfigured into a form above themselves, and put off the partial and narrow individuality of their former character, as a part of that death from which they were redeemed. They each received in full the outline of that mind, which is one in all, and in which all are one.

1. Now upon what has been said—I would observe first, that so long as the mind of Christ prevailed [over the diversities of individual will and character, the church was united. The close-knit and tenacious unity of early times, while the supremacy

of this spiritual idea was strong, is proof enough. Naturally did they liken it to the seamless coat, which the very heathen forbore to rend. In those days the fact of separation was proof enough that the man was not under the dominion of the mind of Christ. "They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us : but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." 1 John ii. 19.

But it was not only by freedom from internal divisions, that the ascendancy of this governing energy was exhibited, but also in the speedy and thorough healing of schisms which had actually begun, as for instance in the variance which for a time sundered the Churches of Rome and Asia, and again of Rome and Africa. There was within the visible unity of the church an invisible unity of will, springing from participation in the mind of Christ, which knit all members of the church in one as by the pervading unity of one common life. It was as it were the consciousness of the church, one and indivisible. In its moral probation it was tried oftentimes, sometimes it was at the point of being overcome. Individual characters gained a local and temporary ascendancy and usurped upon the sway of this divine power. The individual antagonists met and struggled for a while, and the schismatical tempers of man's original will strove for division and the mastery—but after awhile

the presiding type reasserted its supremacy and reduced all discordant forces into harmony, by reducing all to its own control. This I say may be taken generally as the key of the unity of the church in the earlier ages of its probation. The first impression of His divine character was still vividly retained. The original power of the great mystery of His humiliation still governed, and subdued the will of men. Though sins and errors gathered and wound their way into the church, drawing after them a trail of pride and lust, and the restless cravings of selfwill, and the alienations of jealous and bitter hearts, nevertheless by the space of six hundred years, the great Catholic body in the East and West was still united. And no other account can be given of the unearthly sight, the visible miracle of countless human wills held in a balance and all their natural repulsions composed into one indissoluble force but this—that the visible church was an outward sign of the invisible dominion of the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

2. And now, if this be so, I could observe further that the divisions of the church are a certain sign that the antagonist powers of the individual will have prevailed against the mind that was in Christ. Not in isolated characters, indeed, for the Saints of Christendom scattered through the firmament, shine even in the darkest ages of the church with a resplendent brightness. But from the day when Christendom was severed in twain, it was declared

that the supremacy of that divine character had passed away. It retained its dominion only in part: throughout the body of the Church the passions and powers of individual minds prevailed. Such is the history of the division of the East and West, and of the Western church against itself—such also is the true cause of the inward divisions wherewith the church in this land is, for our sins, afflicted. From this source in all Christendom arise the manifold streams of schism, each cutting for itself a deeper channel of separation: particular traditions of isolated churches and of individual teachers, false schemes of doctrine thrown out by individual minds, heresies with the names of men upon them, schisms for a vestment, or a ritual order, false notions of the Christian character, and of its perfect idea, lower types of sanctity, and a lower tone of devotion even within the body of the church: caprice, affectation, love of deviating from common rules, the singularity of prejudiced or fanciful or self-contemplative minds; in a word the dominion of the subjective character of men over their views of the objective truth and a mind of Christ. If this should be thought a strange and bold opinion, let it be remembered that as, from the beginning, even in its purest days the church was as the mingled field, and as the net wherein was every kind both good and bad, so was it foretold that in the latter times a falling away should come. “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” St. Matt.

xxii. 12. "There shall arise false Christs and false Prophets and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." St. Matt. xxii. 24. "When the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth." St. Luke xviii. 8. And "now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter time some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron." 2 Tim. iv. 1. 2. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good. Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness" (else would they not be of the visible church) "but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4. What do we learn from all these passages of holy writ, but that there should be a declension from the mind of Christ, and that there should grow up and overpower the first supremacy of that divine example, the selfish and heady tempers of man's original heart? what but that the miracle of unity should fall back again into its earthly elements, and the visible church, though the true church still, yet linger on in the world shorn of its transient glory even as its Great Head in the days of his flesh

passed again from the brightness of the transfiguration, to be once more despised, and rejected of men.

3. It follows then most plainly from all that I have said that if sanctity and unity are ever to be restored to the church on earth it must be by restoring the mind which was in Christ Jesus to its ascendancy over the manifold and conflicting forms of individual will ; or in other words, forasmuch as all broad and extended movements to this end must be begun and guided by those to whom the Head of the Church has entrusted the government of His visible kingdom, I will say that this restoration must be wrought out by our submitting, each one of us, our own will to be conformed to that heavenly type. It is neither meet nor right for us, at least now, to dwell on any points either in the external order, or in the administration of the Church, which we may believe to be wanting, or mutilated, or paralysed, so as to become obstructions to a higher theory and a more devoted practice of holy living. Of this at a fit time much may be said, but we are now concerned with what is personal and particular. And as I have no intention to touch on these general points in the system of the Church, so neither shall I presume to use any general exhortations to greater holiness of life. My aim is of a more direct and definite sort. My intention is to note one or two particular excesses of the individual character prevalent in these times of the church, which, as they are most antagonist to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, so they must needs

be absolutely and first of all subjugated to His example.

And first I will take as an instance a spurious individuality of character, which consists not in the boldly pronounced features of an energetic life, but only in an unconscious, or if conscious, in a blameable inconformity to any external rule.

Let me not be thought to commend a weak and characterless devotion, which is made up of feelings and contemplation, and ends in repressed energies, and an enfeebled will. The most masculine and dominant characters the world has ever seen, were those whose manhood was developed and carried up to the highest pitch under the supreme rule of the mind of Christ, which governed and unfolded their whole being. In this common bond they all were one, but in that which belonged to each, as a several creature of God wonderfully and fearfully made according to the mysterious variety of His manifold wisdom, they had each a character as broad and incommunicably distinct as Peter, John and Paul. The very cause of their true individuality was their subjection to one external type. And the consequence of the false individuality of these latter days is the confusion, and obliteration of definite and intelligible character. It is in going about to erect a standard of individuality in themselves that men are baffled and brought to nothing. We see every where diversity without characteristic difference. If any man want a proof of this let him

read the lineage of Christ's servants in earlier days, and see how each stands out with an individuality, as definite and perfect as the stars of heaven. Let him look at the magnitude of their works, at the still unfulfilled outlines of their almost prophetic aims, which men of these days admire without imitating, and under the shadow of which they shelter their own littleness. And if he ask the cause of this moral dwarfishness, in one word it is this: we do not begin by subjecting ourselves to a rule out of ourselves as the first condition of all true energy. We do not govern our life by a habitual gaze on a pattern above and out of ourselves. But with much knowledge of truth, much devotional feeling, many high aspirations, and a full purpose of aiming at the loftiest mark, we unconsciously interpose the haze of our own inward habit between the mind that was in Christ Jesus and our own. Everything out of ourselves is tinged, and re-shaped by the atmosphere of a spurious individuality. So that men, who believe all truth to be a definite revelation of God, external to the reason of man, habitually pursue the images of their own minds: men, who believe the Catholic Church to be an organic, uniform, and living body, ordained of God to shelter and guide his servants, end in forming each man his own scheme of ecclesiastical order, and in filling it up with the details of his own inconsistent and irregular practice: men who are thoroughly persuaded that they ought to imitate the mind that was in Christ, and verily and

indeed believe that they are conforming themselves to His example do habitually follow the dictates, and bias of their individual will, and draw such portions of His example, as they chiefly sympathize in under the supreme rule of their own mind. It is not that they are unlike Him altogether, but it is a subordinate, and not the dominant feature of their character. And what they thus draw to themselves is by a counter-assimilation lowered and debased. From all this what else should follow but diversities and oppositions in opinion, and practice, in will and temper? And as the system of each man is moulded upon himself, how should he fail to be over-fond and tenacious of what is so peculiarly his own, and therefore, if not contentious for its maintenance, at least willing to acquiesce in the forfeiture of unity which follows upon the multiplication of so many isolated and incompatible movements within the precinct of the Church. There is much vanity in all this. They had rather forfeit unity than forego their own opinions. After all what is the hidden cause of this spurious individuality, but self-will, and self-love; and the worst of all idolatries, self-worship, or in a word the direct antagonist of the lowliness of Christ—self-exaltation.

And from this master fault arises another peculiarity in the prevalent character of these days, I mean a littleness which runs through our aims, and works in God's service. It must be so, for the individual mind draws all things into its own cramped

and shallow measure. We no longer embrace Christendom in our aims. Self, or our own narrow section is the ultimate reach of most men's schemes. They are marked too by an impatience of temper. We cannot endure to toil for posterity,—to begin works which we cannot live to finish. We must see it all out in our day—and therefore our plans are little, and our labours transitory. Here and there indeed, God be praised, there are great and noble works of Faith; great when measured against the power of this or that individual man, but small when measured against the greatness of the Stewardship entrusted to this branch of His church. Our greatest works are not as of old the works of one, or of a few devoted men, who denied themselves above measure and consecrated their whole being to fulfil some one vast design: but a confused result, wrought out by a combination of multitudes so great, that hardly any one is conscious of self-sacrifice. Our missions, our efforts to gather again into the unity of the church our brethren of the separation; or to rear God's altar in the howling waste of our spiritual wilderness, or to multiply pastors and teachers for our own flocks, are works wrought by a huge accumulation of petty acts. They belong to no one, they consecrate the memory of no one, they draw no circle of light around the name of any, who, in the story of the church, shall hereafter stand out in the greatness and the glory of those that have stamped the outline

of their life upon some enduring work of love. And as our greater and more public works are so wrought as to demand little or no self-denial of each several agent, so are the private schemes which grow up in the individual mind dwarfed and stunted under the chilling shadow of these greater systems. They give the key-note to our private life : and hence come the strangely narrow schemes of benevolence we daily see even in good men, and the narrower ways of effecting them : hence comes the timid shrinking from aims of a bolder and broader cast, for the self-indulgent mind has a shrewd sensitiveness, amounting almost to an instinct, by which it detects the approach of difficulty and self-denial as the inevitable condition of success:—and hence the half-hearted and irresolute step of those that have put their hand upon the plough, and the quickness of eye with which men seize on the loophole to escape from undertakings greater than themselves, and for a last token of littleness, the visible unconsciousness that, by their shrinking retreat from some severer design, they are self-proclaimed as unworthy of a high and stirring enterprize. And yet such men are often amiable and in the main of a religious cast : sometimes they have gone far onward in a life of personal religion. But for anything higher, or broader or more energetic, or more foresighted than their own daily schemes they have no sympathy nor soul. Nay they mar greater works than they have hearts to imagine, and like a lurking

weakness bring on unexpected failures in the moment we are taxed for a greater effort. They insure failure by deserving it, and they deserve it by foreboding it. The world was never converted, the Church was never restored by such softhearted Christians. They live and die, and have done nothing.

Now what is the root of this evil but a self-sparing temper, the direct antagonist of the self-denial of the Son of God? Brethren, we are poor and laggard followers of Him, whom neither humiliation, nor scorn, nor toil, nor weariness, nor want, nor contradiction, nor ingratitude, nor false witness, nor agony, nor the cross could turn aside, or slacken from the work of love for which He offered Himself to God. Surely we are fallen upon a subtle and deceitful age. The oppressive tradition of a feeble and earthlier character, the conventional laws of self-indulgence, the subdued unemphatic tenor of our daily life, the mutual dispensations which men interchange—each man with his fellow—that none should do more for God than all needs must; these and unnumbered more are the seductions, by which men are beguiled away from the sharper side of Christ's example. A self-sparing age can have little fellowship with the Man of Sorrows: surely it must be an offence to Him who so keenly rebuked the foremost Apostle, when he dared to say, "Master spare thyself:" it must be a stumbling block to our own souls.

It is to these two prominent faults in the modern character of the Church, that we may trace the forfeiture of almost all that we have lost of unity, and sanctity: for what is the source of all strife but self-exaltation; and what the withering blight of all holier aspirations but self-sparing? Mask it as we may, the sin of the later church is not the worship of idols, but worse than all, two-fold more refined and inveterate, the worship of self. And here must we begin the correction, and the discipline. We must each one submit self in all its excesses and flatteries and refinements to a pattern and a power out of ourselves. By no other discipline can we grow towards perfection, by no other bond can we become united. Even though we were united by a miracle, we should quickly start asunder again by the repulsion of self. We should need a second miracle to perpetuate our unity.

This great law of our regenerate life is brought to bear upon us with a peculiar urgency to day. We are here gathered as a Diocesan Church, under our visible spiritual head, supreme under our unseen Lord; a type of Him from whom all perfection and unity descend upon the earth. We are here gathered as a Church, both Pastors and flock, to bear our part in working together with Him who for our sakes was made flesh and suffered. We are bidden by our spiritual Ruler, to share in restoring and perfecting of the church, committed to his charge. In some way we may each one partake in

this hallowed and hallowing work : but in no way without denying ourselves. As to the particular acts by which we may bear our part in this manifold undertaking, I shall now and here say nothing ; save this only : let your first contribution to this work, be a will subjugated to the mind of Christ. Your offerings to day will indeed be consecrated to the work which brings us together ; but I am not set here to ask you for money. Base and low indeed are such thoughts of doing God service. We shall never make again the heavenly tokens of oneness and holiness to shine forth in the Church, by lists of subscriptions, and schemes of raising money. Woe unto us if we are so sunk in earthy and little thoughts. It must be wrought by personal sanctity in self-denial ; by abasement before God ; by penitence ; by a devout spirit ; by lowliness before our fellows ; by meekness, by gentleness of heart ; by yielding up our inferior opinions and choices ; by searing out of our minds the susceptibility of personal offence ; by forbearance to the weakness, and waywardness, and faults of others ; and by a calm inflexibility in doing and suffering whatsoever may lie between us and our fixed aim in God's service. All other things needful will follow in our train : they will wait on us unbidden. If we have them not of our own, they shall be rather given us by the ministry of Angels than that the work of God should fail.

And moreover, Brethren, we have, for the first

time, this day a most unwonted blessing. For the first time is the Church in this Diocese bid openly to witness to its own unity, in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. In that blessed mystery is visibly set before our eyes the self-abasement of the Son of God, His holy Incarnation, His unutterable Passion, His one atoning Sacrifice. Pray of Him so to unite us to His glorified manhood that He may dwell in us, subduing evermore the restless and unruly powers of our will, and changing us into the likeness of Himself. The trial of these latter days is coming in full upon us. We are already caught and borne along in the great movements which are eddying to and fro in the earth. Day by day are we falling under the dominion of one or other of the great spiritual antagonists which are ever developing into a bolder shape; and shall divide the earth at the last. On the one side ruling in the world is the sovereignty of man's fallen will: on the other hallowing the Church is the gentle sway of the mind that was in Christ Jesus. There is no halting between these two great spiritual powers: with one or with the other we must choose our part. All things seem gathering together for some mysterious changes in the Church of God; for what we know not: whether as yet the powers of evil are making ready to go up from the breadth of the earth to compass the camp of the Saints we know nothing. But this we may read in the words of the Seer, that the remnant of the Church on which the ends of the world shall come will be a

narrow remnant, but it shall be united. It may be we shall soon be sifted, but the sifting which shall thin our fellowship, shall bring back our unity. Of things that shall be hereafter we speak blindly. God alone knoweth. One thing is sure, they that bear His seal upon them shall be saved through all ; for the bond of living unity which binds the visible body to its unseen Head no power of hell shall break—the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

THE END. .

