

The Church: the Heed of a Fearless Message and a Definite Witness.

THE Church is at the Cross Roads. Values are changing as quickly in the spiritual as in the temporal life; but in an opposite direction. On the one hand human life has become less valuable, on the other we are appalled with the enormous significance of an eternal being. Speaking from a military point of view, it is only numbers that really count; that is to say, that the army that can outstay the other in losses is the one that must win. Speaking from the standpoint of religion, each soul that passes unprepared into eternity is an awful responsibility, and that responsibility is enhanced in proportion as we not only support the war, but encourage men to enter upon the present conflict.

The burden of souls is the load of the Church to-day. Never before has she realized this so intensely—perhaps we should say, never in our day—and the vastness of the frightful carnage has at last opened her eyes to her past neglect. We look back but a short two years, and we see the whole Christian community occupied in age-worn controversies, delighting in widening breaches that should never have been allowed to exist, and striving again and again to call down fire upon those who follow not us, and yet profess to worship the same Lord. The necessities of the hour are changing all this. Roman priest and Salvation Army Captain are succouring the wounded and the dying together. High Anglican and Evangelical Anglican are together working in the Chaplains department and winning souls for Christ—not because of their badge, but because of their individual likeness to their Lord. And we at home are being shamed. We are shamed because we have done so little to prepare our lads for this great ordeal. We have had them in our Day Schools and our Sunday Schools, and they have in so many instances gone out to battle utterly ignorant of the very rudiments of their faith. It is easy to make excuse, but this is not the time for excuse, it is the time for repentance and amendment of purpose.

There are indications that the seed is germinating and that the good fruit will yet be borne. But it will only be through much

tribulation that all that God is teaching us as a Church will be brought to bear upon our parishes and our adherents. The very fact that we acknowledge the necessity for repentance is a great step in advance. We have been content with so little, now our souls are filled with discontent—a divine discontent we hope. We look, not at the handful that we have always been able to reach, but, at the vast multitudes with whom the Church simply does not count. What are we to say of them? How far dare we face the ordeal and give account for the unevangelized of our great city parishes—aye—and of our small country parishes too. Huge crowds of men and women actually use some of our churchyards as pleasure gardens and yet never enter the church. Hurrying multitudes pass the door of God's House; they are longing for peace of soul, and yet they never seek it in our churches. God, as we represent Him, is altogether outside their life.

Thank God these crowds are getting on our conscience. What are we to do for them? How are we to answer the Almighty God when he asks of us, the shepherds, "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?" It is just that question that is continually ringing in our ears, and its iteration is driving us to our knees for guidance. Hence the coming mission which is gradually taking form. Personally I am not yet sure that the prime movers are clear as to their objective, but I am quite certain that the Holy Spirit is working and His purpose will be revealed. It is for us to be ready not only to recognize that purpose, but be willing to lay aside all preconceived ideas and just do His Will. So far as I can understand the present aim of preparation, the great effort is to be concentrated upon the present professing members of our Church. If there is to be an after evangelization there is no definite teaching given as to how it is to be conducted. So the idea lacks completeness and seems to finish in the air. I know it is stated to be because we don't want to chain the future developments and so prevent expansion, or to force it into an expression which no longer appeals. The only danger is a critical one. By aiming at nothing it is just possible that we may hit the mark. The Church's supreme opportunity is at hand, but if it is to be grasped she must be led. The "Wait and see" policy has been proved to be fatal in other regions, and it will not be less fatal if it is adopted by our Church at this crisis.

But there is a certain indication of guidance in what appears to be a wrong direction. There is an inclination to belittle the grand message of the Church, and extol her sacerdotal functions. As a body she has such functions, and it is her duty to discharge them. The witness of the Church to the world is the witness of the "royal priesthood"; but there is ever a danger in the over emphasis of one aspect of a complex organization; and whilst Holy Scripture certainly bids us remember that our character in the world is that of a peculiar people and a separate people, it more often urges the importance of our message. The history of the Church also bears out the importance of this consideration. The times which have been characterized by what I should call intensive culture have not been those that have marked a growth of spirituality of life. The darkest ages of the Mediæval Church were those in which the Roman hierarchy held undisputed sway over the education and the conscience of men. She lived in and for herself, and corruption was eating at her vital organs. Not only is this true of the corrupt mediæval Church, but the Reformation period itself was followed by one of utter stagnation, in which the Church busied herself concerning the mystical and metaphysical developments of her theology. She was self-centred, and because of that the light of her lamp burnt blue and lost its radiance. On the other hand, when she has been keen to extend her boundaries, when she has lifted up her voice with a clear call to redeem the time because the days are evil, her power for her Lord has been greatly increased. Even the Crusades, with all their mistakes, had a refining influence upon the Church, and never has there risen a man of God with a message for his time without the awakening from sluggish, intensive, and selfish life, having had a beneficial effect upon the whole after-life of the Church. To come to our own times only, how many of God's most blessed servants bear witness to the fact that they owe their life in Christ to the preaching of D. L. Moody.

But the best example of the truth that I would enforce is to be found in the foreign missionary work of the Church. A Church that is self-centred is the Church that is losing touch with her Lord. To renew spiritual life within you must insist upon spiritual activity without. National righteousness is not obtained in a corporate conversion, but in an individual cleansing of heart and

conscience. There is a great danger in making the external influence the first objective. A man who is cleansed in heart and soul will, because he must, carry his new conviction into civic, commercial and social life. But the message of the Gospel must touch the heart before it can properly appear in the life. Therefore it appears that the aim of the Church to-day must be fearlessly, constantly, in season, out of season, to preach in all its fullness God's judgment upon sin, His abounding love for the sinner, and the atoning work of the blessed Saviour. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me," is as true now as when it was spoken.

But is the Church fearless in her message? We only have to examine our own practice and the answer will be clear to our conscience. Have we fearlessly denounced sin? It is easy enough to preach about sin in general and then, skipping over the thin ice, pass on to more agreeable subjects. Is not that what we have done? The witness of the Church has not been nearly definite enough about the vices that are rampant in our midst. We all recognize, for instance, the sin of drunkenness and the temptation to sin which the present licensing laws permit. We are constantly deploring the woeful effect of this sin. But the Church as a whole is utterly indifferent to this question which means the moral and spiritual ruin of thousands of those for whom Christ died. Even the King's example did not move Churchmen as a whole to give up their drink for the cause of their country—much less have they been inclined to do it for the cause of Christ. This applies to laymen principally, but our laymen are largely what we clergy make them. If we were in earnest very soon the whole country would take this terrible sin into its cognizance and, at least for the period of the war, expel this, the greatest of all our enemies, from our midst. But we are afraid. Why? Because we are relying upon beer money. We are subsidized—not openly, not in a way that appears even to ourselves—but not less certainly we are far, far too often under the power of money obtained by the sale of drink. That has shut our mouths. We are not fearless in our witness against sin. I could enforce my point by many other instances, but I will take one only. Immorality is eating into our national life. We know it is there. It needs most careful handling, but it is not therefore to be ignored. It is a growing national danger which is made light of in the modern "sex" novel. It is touched with not too light

a touch in the fiction that our sons and daughters read in six days of the week ; but on the seventh it is too delicate a subject to come within the range of our message. You think this is overdrawn ? How many of us in these days when the marriage bond is so lightly esteemed read the whole of the Marriage Service ? I even know of some incumbents who when in the lessons for the day comes a strong passage, for instance, in the Epistle to the Corinthians, omit it, conveniently supposing that the calendar is mistaken. This dereliction of duty is glossed over because in these soft, sin-loving days our ears should not be offended by hearing that sexual lust is sin.

The message of the Church is anything but fearless, and we need to repent. It is our duty to stand for righteousness and to declare the wrath of God upon those who wilfully continue in sin. There surely is our mission of repentance, first to the outsider and then to ourselves, for the message will certainly recoil on to our own heads. Only the message must be heard. The Word of the Lord must be proclaimed. The King in His majesty must be uplifted if ever the Church is to regain her position in the nation.

The Witness of the Church is somewhat different to the message ; it is, so to speak, the silent pressure that the Church puts upon the world by the ordering of her own house. And here indeed we need a definite purpose. The urgency of this question will be revealed as we endeavour to proclaim our message. But the witness can only be true as it is a united one. I will treat of it under three heads : Education, Worship, and Conversion.

I. Education. The appalling fact that the present generation is growing up without a knowledge of God is one of the most awful revelations of the war. The witness of those who are with our armies is unanimous to the distressing lack of knowledge of Christ and His Gospel which our soldiers display. It reflects no credit upon the Church. They have all gone from our parishes, and we are their appointed teachers. We have not taught them. We have far too often contented ourselves with appealing to the emotions and have left the more difficult and monotonous duty of teaching to the Church school teachers or to the too often hostile Council school teacher. I do not decry the many noble men and women who in both these classes are doing their best, and a right good best it is ; but the Church as a whole has been content to let definite dogmatic—strongly dogmatic—teaching drop out of our

course of instruction. This is most specially true of that section of the Church to which we belong. Sankey's hymns—or even "Golden Bells"—fill up time, but neither in day or Sunday school does their often morbid sentimentality excuse the pastor from feeding the lambs of his flock.

But teaching is not only necessary for the children. The adults—our regular Church people—need instruction so that they may know why they are Churchmen and not Methodists. We do not teach them, because far too often we do not know ourselves. Teaching is not feeding upon the husks of our holy religion, it is rooting and grounding our people in "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

2. Worship. The ordering of our worship is in the hands of the clergy. They have practically autocratic power. How do they use it? We will not inquire into the past, but will rather look at the present and the future. Our incomparable Prayer Book has weathered many a storm—in fact it never seems to reach the calm after storm, for fresh tempests arise before the last has subsided. That is true of the present time. Hardly has the struggle for reform of the Prayer Book been relegated into the background for the period of the war than use is made of the present call to National Repentance in order to urge the re-arrangement of the order of the Prayer Book services. The cry "The Lord's Service on the Lord's Day" is mischievously deceptive. It is really the cloak under which the evil practice of non-communicating attendance at the Holy Communion is to be still further encouraged. It means in effect the re-introduction of one of the evils which were expressly exposed in the first Prayer Book of Edward VI and in Article XXV of our present Prayer Book, and also the teaching of the Service Books of the English mediæval Church, as is proved by the Sarum Missal. It is contrary to the whole genius of the Reformation of which our Church is the great living exponent. We must resist this new attack and defeat it as we have others. But mere negation is useless. Let us be positive and add completeness to the phrase and say "It is indeed *the* Lord's Service on the Lord's Day *for the Lord's People.*" Then let us teach with definiteness that is quite unmistakable that the ideal is, not the Holy Communion once a month for the Lord's people, but *at least* once a week, as the Prayer Book evidently enjoins. We must add to that a greater care and

reverence in all the other services of the Church. We must see that our rendering of the service is sympathetic as well as audible ; that our reading of the Holy Scriptures is with holy reverence and true unction. We must show that we value the two Sacraments of our Lord by not hurrying over the sacrament of Holy Baptism. In a word our worship must be true, reverent, and devoutly humble adoration, and we must lead our people to a similar attitude.

3. Conversion. Last but by no means least. What do we mean by it? A new life. A complete change and a turning to God. But if that is our meaning what is our experience? What experience have we of conversion in our congregations? Many of us have ceased to look for them, and so have altogether neglected to provide the machinery. The result is that to us conversion often is merely a phrase. To others of another school of thought it has a definite and an intensely spiritual meaning. We honour them for having recovered the ministry of conversion from the limbo of forgotten spiritual forces. And we may not quarrel with their methods until and unless we set to work to obtain like results by more directly scriptural means. The Confessional is not *per se* wrong ; it is the abuse of it that is wrong. Our Prayer Book urges the man whose heart is torn with the consciousness of sin, which he has not faith enough simply to lay at the foot of the Cross, to confess that sin, to some "learned minister of God's Word." That is the Confessional, though not in its present distorted form. That confession is English, and not to be denied the burdened sinner. It is exceptional for the exception. The wrong is when it is made the rule, and becomes the prop of a weakened conscience. The English character and the Christian character has been built up upon the teaching of the Bible, that there is but one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. We must be definite in our teaching of conversion, in our working for conversion, in our readiness to succour the sinner on his way to the Saviour. We must be equally definite surely in our stand against a system that is subversive of true happy home life, undermines parental authority and connubial confidence, and saps the foundation of all manly Christianity.

We have much to do. The need of repentance was never greater. The way of repentance is through a Mission. As we take up the

cross and preach the cross and live the cross we shall learn how to purify our own lives. Nay, surely not, as we desire to live for Christ, the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth—the truth of our own failure amongst other things—and will lead us from grace to grace; from our present low level to a higher, and show us how through the Cross we shall be privileged to gain the light.

S. A. JOHNSTON.



The Secret of Peace.

PEACE! how the sad heart feels the irony,
 Cruel the language sounds!
 And yet, even in War there may be peace,
 When doubts and questions cease;
 While, as of old, the voice of Jesus sounds:
 "Peace; it is I!"

A beloved face no longer gladdening
 The heart, which for it longs!
 Another, on the land or on the sea,
 In danger it may be!
 Yet "in the night" Christ "giveth to us songs,"
 And FAITH can sing.

So while the desolating conflict moves
 Onward towards its end;
 Bereaved and anxious hearts find peace and rest
 Upon the Saviour's breast:
 Knowing, while severed from the earthly friend,
 God lives and loves!

WILLIAM OLNEY.