

The Call of the Mission.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD'S SERMON PREACHED AT CHELMSFORD CATHEDRAL AT THE OPENING OF THE NATIONAL MISSION IN HIS DIOCESE.

"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."—ST. MATTHEW xvi. 18.

"He that overcometh and keepeth My *works* unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations."—REVELATION ii. 25.

"This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom He hath sent."—ST. JOHN vi. 29.

IN these texts certain statements are made. The Church of Christ was to be undefeated and the nations were to be conquered. The cause of both was to be Christ. The Church was to be built upon Him, and the one to rule the nation was the one which kept the work of God, which was to believe on Him who was sent. Have these statements become historical facts? Are the nations conquered by the Power? Is the Church undefeated? If not, why not?

We are all thinking to-day of England—of Empire. Is England a nation conquered by the power of the Crucified? In many ways she stands pre-eminent as a Christian nation. Egbert, the first King of all England, was a Christian, and for eleven hundred years men and women have sat on her throne, some noble and some disgracing their profession, yet, without exception, all making their profession of belief in God, and therefore we may say that from the beginning England has been in name a Christian nation. I am no pessimist. It has recently been stated by one held in high estimation by all Churchmen that England is worse than it was one hundred years ago. I confess I cannot subscribe to that statement. Anyone who reads about the state of morals during the Regency, the habit of drinking among all classes, the number and nature of crimes punishable by death, the conditions of labour in coal mine and factory, the treatment of the aged, the sick and insane, will realize to some extent the low average of the public tone or opinion of that period. Contrast all this with that which prevails to-day. Think of the sentiment of the nation to-day, of her real charity and philanthropy as evidenced on every hand. Think of this war, unlike any before. A war not of races but essentially of ideals. A hundred years ago the pressgang had to be used to obtain the comparatively few men required, while to-day five

million of men have come forward voluntarily, not for material gain, not to receive, but to lay down their lives a ransom for the many. Surely the silent leaven of the spirit of the Crucified has been working during the ages, and we can hail Him as the cause of the spirit which is so manifest in our midst.

Therefore I do not approach the National Mission as a pessimist, but as one filled with hope, and yet, as a patriot, as a Christian and as a Churchman, I am compelled to ask : Is the nation really Christian ? Is the Church really fulfilling her Mission in the world to-day ? Alas that a whole-hearted affirmative cannot be given to either question ! No nation can be regarded as Christian with a drink bill of one hundred and sixty millions and an expenditure of some two millions on the evangelization of the world : with a turnover of some fifty millions in the bookmakers' hands : with its reports of the Commission on Venereal Diseases and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children : with the appalling conditions of slumland in all our large cities : with the spirit of materialism still in our midst : with the forgetfulness of God as evidenced by the desecration of His Holy Day. These are facts which must be faced, for they surely weaken the nation in the midst of what the Prime Minister calls " a spiritual war." National power does not depend for its continuance upon conscription, munitions, wealth, as the nations of bygone ages testify, but on soul power. The plays of Shakespeare, from Richard II to Henry V, all tend to show that expediency and policy can never safely replace righteousness. The concluding words in King John come down to us with a meaning which cannot but be felt to-day :

Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them ;
Naught can make us rue
If England to herself be true.

Germany is proving to-day that a race of Samsons and Solomons, strong physically and intellectually, but shorn of their spiritual locks and bereft of their moral sense, cannot dominate the world, and we on our side are realizing that the spiritual munitions of a nation are as essential to her welfare as her high-explosives. Yet are we not in danger of concentrating our thoughts on the victory of our nation, to the exclusion of its regeneration ? Here lies the work of the Church.

But what of the Church? While, as we have seen, the spirit of the Christ, largely through His Church, has affected deeply the nation, yet as the organized Body of Christ she has somehow failed to incorporate the manhood of the nation within her ranks. They are largely outside. But if the Church of England has failed in this respect, so has every form of organized Christianity. In our own country Nonconformity and Romanism have equally failed with Romanism, say in Italy. The first object, therefore, in any Mission of Repentance and of Hope must be to consider the position of the Church herself, and how she can become at once impregnable and the conqueror of nations.

Is she one? Her Lord prayed that His followers might be one even as He and His Father were one. But look at His followers to-day. Where is the unity? On the Continent, the Orthodox and Roman Churches entirely separated from each other, and our own Church from both. In England, look at the position of the followers of Christ in any town or village. Church and Chapel side by side, and yet with a gulf between. The Church of England herself divided into hostile camps; her newspapers, if the man in the street cared to read them, revealing how these Christians do *not* love one another. Again, take the ordinary Parish Church: Apart from ecclesiastical differences, is there real unity? In a country village one of the Pilgrims of Prayer asked an officer of the Church to have a prayer meeting in his house. He consented. She also asked the man living in the next house, an official of the Church, and he likewise consented. She then realized that the two houses were next to each other and that one prayer meeting should suffice for both. But alas! she found that while both were willing to be officials of the Church, both willing to have a prayer meeting in their house, neither was willing to enter the house of the other. So, as we see the numbers gathered at the Table of their Lord, eating of the same Sacred Bread and drinking of the same Sacred Cup, we ask, What of the relationship of these people outside during the week? Do the squire, the labourer, the master, and the man ever permit their relationship together in Christ to influence their relationship in the world of business or of social intercourse? Is the spirit of brotherhood as manifest in the Church as even in the Freemasonry, or even in the trade union? I ask the question, not to extol the latter to the detriment of the former, but to provoke thought. The Holy

Communion was meant to be symbolic of the unity in Christ of all His followers, and the world was to know who the disciples of Christ were by their love to each other. Is this so?

If the Church is to be the teacher of nations on brotherhood she must be their example. If after the war she is to be a power to prevent arising the pre-war class distinctions manifest in our midst, if she is to be the unifier of peoples and the cementing force which is to prevent all future wars and really to bring in an era of peace on earth and goodwill among men, she must herself be united. Here is the opportunity of the Church of England. On the one side she is connected by great historical ties with the great Orthodox and Roman Churches of East and West, ties which cannot be ignored, and ought not to be lightly cast aside. On the other hand she is the Mother, so to speak, of all the Christianity of Nonconformity, the adherents of whom are our fellow-citizens, and are bound to us by the strong ties of kinship and of blood, and it must not be forgotten that in the English-speaking world to-day the number of Nonconformists probably exceeds those of our own Communion. No English Churchman ought to think of re-union with the one side regardless of the other.

How is re-union to be obtained? Let us be clear in this matter. While we long for re-union with a passion which words cannot sufficiently express, it must never be brought about at the expense of the truth in Christ. Far better for the Church, for the world, that the present state of things should continue rather than that we should, as a Church, sell our glorious inheritance of truth for the mess of pottage of re-union on such terms. Again, there is a tendency to think that trifling alterations in our service or ritual will either hasten or retard re-union. Re-union will never be brought about by our putting on or taking off this or that—it will never come as a result of this or that change in our services. The cleavage of the ages has produced a gulf so wide and deep that when the day dawns for re-union I do not think that matters relating to ritual or even to episcopacy will seriously be any hindrance. Re-union when it comes will be the result of a wonderful outpouring of the Holy Ghost shaking the whole house, and binding us together in one accord. Nothing else will ever bring us together. In that day we may all wear vestments or all worship without them; we may have the most elaborate or the plainest of services; but these,

in the Spirit-filled Church, will be relegated to their right position and importance.

One great object of the National Mission is to hasten re-union by bringing down, in answer to our prayer and following upon our repentance, the Holy Spirit in such power that we shall not only be compelled but glad to come together. The more the Holy Spirit fills the Church of England the greater will be her power upon the whole of the Catholic Church, and the greater force will she be towards the spiritualizing of the whole atmosphere of every Christian community. The lower the spirituality of the whole the greater tendency to division and strife, while the higher the spiritual average the greater will be the drawing together and the desire for unity. The Early Church concentrated on essentials, and the accessories received but little attention. Is not that position in danger of being reversed to-day?

It is a question as to whether the organized Church has not become too highly organized and too elaborate a system. The machine itself has become so complicated and the system of theology so subtle and diffuse that the Church in dealing with both finds that both require so much attention that there is little time left to deal with the work that the machine was meant to accomplish. For instance, years ago the services of the Church may have needed brightening, but is there not another danger to-day? Bishop Corfe, of Korea, revered by all of us for his works' sake, said recently that "Music was tending to become a substitute for religion, and not a help." Anyone acquainted with the tendency of modern worship must agree that the warning is not unnecessary. Our services must be more and more congregational, and it must be acknowledged that reverence and dignity do not always go hand in hand with elaboration, but are as frequently found with simplicity.

But the tendency follows upon the ecclesiastical mind, whether of clergy or laity, being out of touch with things human. The clerical mind becomes centred inside his Church and upon the services held within. Looking at the question broadly, I venture to think we have multiplied our services far beyond what is either necessary or helpful. People must be taught that intensity of prayer and praise is more important than the multiplicity of services which are fast becoming the end of the Christian life to very many. The salvation of souls, the winning of the parish for Christ, the

evangelization of the world, are to many mere phrases. The invitation to church, to Holy Communion are seen on every hand, but the object for which Christ died and the Church exists is known and realized by only a select few. The way in which Sunday itself is used testifies to the lack of proportion which exists. How is any ordinary Sunday used by the clergy or the laity of our Church? Let us go back to the life and practice of our Lord and the Apostles. We are thankful to have it on record that *every* Sabbath Day our Lord was found in the synagogue "as His custom was." But He did not spend the *whole* day there. Read the first chapter of St. Mark. After the synagogue He went to the house of Simon and healed his wife's mother, and then were brought to Him all that were diseased and possessed with devils, and all the city was gathered together, and He healed many that were sick, and cast out devils. Read the story of the Acts of the Apostles on the first day of the week, beginning with the great Day of Pentecost, and then, thinking of them and of the life of our Lord, go back to last Sunday and ask what proportion of time was spent on worship and what on "going about doing good." The question has still to be answered, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath Day? Is it lawful to visit from room to room, to stand on the village green or town park and witness for Christ?" Will England ever be won on our present lines? Our Lord has many titles all glorious, but one is scarcely ever attached to Him to-day. He was the "Friend of publicans and sinners." To how many of the clergy of to-day can that title be given? "He is a good preacher." "He is a good organizer." "He is hardworking." But how seldom do we hear of a man *distinctly* known as "the friend of sinners." Our Lord was charged with "eating with them." Are we so charged? How often do we eat at the Table of our Lord, and how often "with sinners"? We are the Body of Christ, but are we certain that in the Body the *heart* of Christ, full of compassion for the multitude, is to be found?

I would not for one moment be misunderstood. No Church, no individual Christian, can afford to forsake the assembling of themselves together. Of course, worship and the Holy Communion must have a prominent place in the Christian life, but not as the end—only as the means to a fuller and deeper realization of a life lived in the world for Christ. The average Churchman's conception of his place and his work for Christ and His Church is far too fre-

quently fixed upon the fabric of his parish church, the services held within it, or the giving of money for the support of both, and he too often does not realize that the Church is to be God's fighting force in the world, and that he at his baptism is pledged to "confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be a faithful soldier, fighting and serving unto his life's end." Spurgeon was once asked by a man for some Church work. "What are you?" "An engine driver." "Is your stoker converted?" "No." "Then *there* is your Church work." Are our people dealt with on these lines? I dread some times the putting of men into office in the Church. At Bethnal Green a man was keen for souls. He visited the public-houses and brought many men to Christ. He became a sidesman, and gradually this all ceased. He thought his Church work was to collect the offertory. How many of our wardens, sidesmen, choirmen, and servers realize their responsibility to witness in the world for Christ, to make disciples? I know the difficulty of revising our methods of worship, of our conception of Church work, but that such revision is necessary and must take place I am convinced if ever the Church is to lay the nation as a trophy at the feet of her Lord. These are some of the questions which the Church must face. At the beginning of the effort of the National Mission I pressed upon clergy and laity alike to pray for the open mind, for willingness to follow wherever the Holy Spirit led, to be willing to abandon old positions, to follow any new light if revealed. All of us, High, Evangelical, Broad, are so tied and bound by our prejudices that we cannot move. We may have life, even as Lazarus, but the grave clothes of the sepulchre of the past impede our movements, and we must be willing to be loosed and live our life.

Thus we have the National Mission of Repentance and of Hope. The message is that of our Lord and of John the Baptist: REPENT. But full emphasis is being laid on the motive, "for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"—so near that it can be brought down—repent as citizens—repent as Churchmen. You are part of the nation and a sharer in its sins; you are a member of the Church and a sharer in its failure. Repent ye, but repent not that you may go free from punishment and enjoy heaven, but repent that you may the better fulfil the will of God in the nation and in the Church. Let your repentance be for the sake of others; your motive that which sent our Lord to the Cross, the good of the world and the salvation of men.

The Church is at such a low level of spiritual life and power that she cannot move the nation to repentance and faith. Here is an effort to raise her on to such a high level of spiritual power that she may rule the nation and bring her to her Lord. We are being told by one whose words are read by millions that this call to repentance is a national insult. We are told that it is to be hoped that no word of this effort may reach the trenches, and we are asked, "Of what have we to repent?" I will give one answer, although many might be given.

We ought to repent because of the shortage of men, and for the reason of that shortage. It is a scandal to the nation and to the Church that we have not more men to support our gallant lads; but what is the reason? The wastage of life during the last ten years, owing to drink, would, if prevented, have yielded us many a battalion. We are told that one hundred thousand infants are annually lost owing to the most horrible diseases of vice. If this had been prevented, ten years' salvage would have sent half a million men to the Front. A recent report of the Government shows that to-day out of six million children of school age one million are either physically or mentally defective. Similar children of ten years ago are now the medically rejected for the Army. These are largely defective owing to preventable causes, such as slumland or the circumstances of their early life. I think it can be proved that owing to drink, vice, and conditions of life, the nation to-night is prevented from putting in the field an army of surprising size, and which would have speedily brought peace. Is there not here a cause for Repentance?

But, again, if our Repentance is real we shall take steps to remove these national evils from our midst, and to reconstruct England on Christian lines. The visit of the Messenger to the parish is not the culmination or climax of the effort. It is only an incident—an important incident—in a large campaign. For months we have been preparing; we have been praying and praying, and now a Messenger is coming with the message that shook the world in the first century—the message of the Christ on the Cross. We are told that our lads at the Front are not taught; but what is it that they are not taught? Is it not the message of the Apostles in the Acts and in the Epistles which has not been delivered? How few of us have determined to know nothing and preach nothing save Jesus, His Incarnation,

“God manifest in the Flesh.” His atoning work, “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” His Resurrection “declared to be the Son of God with power.” And all this to be revealed to us by the power of the Holy Spirit who was Himself to bring to us the assurance of sins forgiven, and adoption into the Kingdom of God. “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby ye cry, Abba, Father.” The preaching of Christ crucified must be the secret and substance, the centre and heart, of all our preaching. This is the message, and men are to be urged to accept it and bind themselves together in His Body—His Church—to carry on His work and win the world for Him. It is the only message for the world, for England and for individuals, and when delivered a new chapter in the history of our Church must be opened—purer, grander, nobler than ever before. She must be strong for her task.

Grave problems lie ahead. When peace comes the problems of labour will not be solved thereby. They will be there, and upon their solution on wise lines will depend largely the future of England. Again, the problem of the Women’s Movement remains unsolved, and the war will make it in many ways a more difficult task than before. The return of the men and their assimilation into the industrial world, the continuation of women workers or their replacement by men, will provoke controversy and divide the nation unless on the troubled waters One stands able to cry Peace, quell the storm, and bring the ship to port. The great issue has to be decided as to how the world, how England, is to be governed. Is she, after crushing Germanic Prussianism, to have the similar spirit of selfishness and grab in her own land, or is the spirit of the Christ, of the Cross, to prevail? That is the issue we are facing in this great effort.

While we appeal to the nation and to the Church as such, we realize that both are what the individuals composing it are. It is no use saying “Except a nation be born again,” unless we say to every man and every woman within it, “Ye must be born again.” Christ, then, whose voice is Christianity, addresses Himself first to the individual conscience; indulges in no dreams of a renovated world without till He has flung His appeal to man within; looks *there* for the creative and vital forces which are to make all things new. So to-day we cry: Repent ye of your own sins, of your own

life, and be a better citizen—a better Churchman—because of your forgiveness of sins, your adoption into the Kingdom of Heaven. Turn to Christ and Him crucified, whereby we alone obtain remission of our sins. I am asking you all here to-day to—

(1) Pray. Pray as you have never done before, pray for yourself, pray *with* your family, with groups of your friends. Read the Bible more day by day. Keep Sunday for increasing your spiritual strength by “feeding on Him in your hearts by faith,” and by going about bringing others to Him.

(2) Be prepared to witness for your Lord to your friends, in your streets, in your business. Why should not all the communicants living in the same street, or working in the same shop, begin to realize that there they represent their Church, and arrange to meet privately and discuss how best they can witness for Christ collectively in their street or business? So far such collective witness is almost unknown. The evangelization of the world must begin by the evangelization of street, social circle, or business house.

(3) Be careful of your life. Israel was defeated by the sin of Achan. The nation and the Church is weakened by individual sin. Remember that the will of God is your sanctification. The doctrine of perfection or holiness of life may have been distorted, but it is true nevertheless. The *character* of the witness determines the force and power of the testimony given.

Christ is sitting over the World—England, Essex. Surely He has a vision of what the world might be were He its King! Of what England might be were He its Ruler! Of what Essex, in little country hamlet and crowded town, might be if He was Lord!

To achieve this the Holy Spirit has come into the world, and come into His Church to fill it with power for its conflict. Are we ready to be used of God? Are we, clergy and laity alike, men full of Holy Ghost? Are we keen and ready for the Mission? I ask you, Will you fail your country in this her hour of trial? Will you fail your Church in the hour of battle? Above all, will you fail your Lord Who died for you, and whose heart bled because it was broken for the sin and for the love of the world. In this solemn hour I ask that, repenting of our sins, we should return unto the Lord and listen to His voice saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” and then humbly conscious of our unworthiness, but filled with His love, say: “Here am I, Lord, send me.”