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## THE CHURCHMANSHIP OF THE HOMILIES.

BY THE REV. GEORGE MARTIN, M.A., Vicar of St. John's,  
Kilburn.

IT may be questioned if the vast majority of the laity have ever read the Homilies. It would hardly be rash, perhaps, to go further, and suggest that even the great body of the clergy are more or less unacquainted with them. There is little, if any, excuse for leaving them in such a state of neglect.

In the following pages an attempt is made to sketch their history, to show their authority, to indicate their character and teaching, and, finally, to ascertain what is the type of churchmanship which they represent, and to which some kind of conformity is due.

The First Book of Homilies was published in 1547, which was the year of Edward VI's accession. It was issued by royal authority, through the influence of Cranmer, who was the author of several of the Homilies in it. But in spite of the fact that Convocation gave no sanction for its publication, it really owed its origin to the resolve which was made by that body, in the year 1542, "to make certain homilies for stay of such errors as were then by ignorant preachers sparkled among the people."

These Homilies ceased to be used on the accession of Queen Mary, but were again put forth by the authority of Queen Elizabeth in the year 1559. There were twelve Homilies in this Book.

A Second Book of Homilies was drawn up by Convocation in 1562-3 and was published in 1563. This volume received the Queen's ratification, and consisted of twenty Homilies. An additional one was provided by authority of Convocation in 1571—"Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion." This was the work of Archbishop Parker.

The authority of both Books of Homilies can hardly be regarded as open to serious dispute. It rests upon the terms of Article XXXV, which is one of the Thirty-Nine Articles reviewed and ratified by Convocation in 1571. Its language is clear and explicit—"The second Book of Homilies, the several titles whereof we have joined under this Article, doth contain a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times, as doth the former Book of Homilies, which were set forth in the time of Edward the Sixth; and therefore we judge them to be read in Churches by the Ministers, diligently and distinctly, that they may be understood by the people."

Then follow the names of the twenty-one Homilies which comprise the Second Book. Jewel was the author of eight of them, and others were written by Grindal, Pilkington, and Parker.

The evidence of Article XXXV as to the authority of the

Homilies is sufficiently convincing, but it may be supplemented by two further references. One is to be found in the latter half of Article XI, which runs thus: "Wherefore that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification." The fact that there is no Homily in either Book which bears this title makes no real difficulty in identifying the reference. It appears obvious that the Third Homily of the First Book is the one which the Article has in view, and that its somewhat lengthy title is modified, and given in this shorter form which expresses the substance of its teaching. The full title of the Homily, which was written by Cranmer, is: "A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind, by only Christ our Saviour, from Sin and Death everlasting."

Further evidence bearing on the authority of the Homilies is afforded by the Canons of 1604. It is enjoined by the words of Canon 80 that: "If any parishes be yet unfurnished of the Bible of the largest volume, or of the Books of Homilies allowed by authority, the said churchwardens shall within convenient time provide the same at the like charge of the parish."

The degree to which the Homilies require our assent will depend on the meaning which we give to the words of Article XXXV, which asserts that they "contain a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times." Whilst no one would contend that this demands an unqualified acceptance of everything contained in the Homilies, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that we are not at liberty to disregard the general trend of their teaching. They bear witness to the mind of those who framed the Articles, and they set forth a general standard of doctrine and practice to which all members of our Church were expected to conform.

Inasmuch as the Homilies are said to contain "godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times," it may be helpful to a clear understanding of them, if we enquire what light they throw on these times by their contents.

The Eleventh Homily (Book I) deplores the immorality of the age in these terms: "This vice (adultery) is grown into such a height that in a manner among many it is counted no sin at all, but rather a pastime, a dalliance, and but a touch of youth: not rebuked, but winked at; not punished, but laughed at."

The Third Homily of Book II ("An Homily for Repairing and Keeping Clean, and Comely Adorning of Churches") condemns the practice of allowing churches to become dilapidated: "It is a sin and shame to see so many churches so ruinous, and so foully decayed almost in every corner. If a man's private house wherein he dwelleth be decayed, he will never cease till it be restored again. Yea, if his barn, where he keepeth his corn, be out of reparations, what diligence useth he to make it in perfect state again! If his stable for his horse, yea, the sty for his swine, be not able to hold out water and wind, how careful is he to do cost thereon! And shall we be so mindful of our common base houses, deputed to so vile employment, and be forgetful toward that house of God, wherein

be intreated the words of our eternal salvation, wherein be ministered the sacraments and mysteries of our redemption? The fountain of our regeneration is there presented unto us, the partaking of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ is there offered unto us: and shall we not esteem the place where so heavenly things are handled? Wherefore, if ye have any reverence to the service of God, if ye have any common honesty, if ye have any conscience in keeping of necessary and godly ordinances, keep your churches in good repair; whereby ye shall not only please God, and deserve his manifold blessings, but also deserve the good report of all godly people."

Evils [of a different kind are rebuked in "An Exhortation," attached to the Seventeenth Homily of Book II ("An Homily for the days of Rogation Week"). It shows that the Church was alive to the social wrongs of the time. The rebuke which it administers is stern and uncompromising: "O consider therefore the ire of God against gleaners, gatherers, and incroachers upon other men's lands and possessions! It is lamentable to see in some places, how greedy men use to plough and grate upon their neighbour's land that lieth next them; how covetous men nowadays plough up so nigh the common balks and walks, and which good men beforetime made the greater and broader, partly for the commodious walk of his neighbour, partly for the better shack in harvest-time, to the more comfort of his poor neighbour's cattle. It is a shame to behold the insatiableness of some covetous persons in their doings; that, where their ancestors left of their land a broad and sufficient bier-balk, to carry the corpse to the Christian sepulture, now men pinch at such bier-balks, which by long use and custom ought to be inviolably kept for that purpose; and how they either quite ear them up, and turn the dead body to be borne farther about in the high streets; or alas, if they leave any such meer, it is too strait for two to walk on.

"These strange encroachments, good neighbours, should be looked upon. These should be considered in these days of our perambulations; and afterwards the parties admonished, and charitably reformed, who be the doers of such private gaining, to the slander of the township, and the hindrance of the poor. Your highways should be considered in your walks, to understand where to bestow your days' works, according to the good statutes provided for the same. It is a good deed of mercy, to amend the dangerous and noisome ways, whereby thy poor neighbour, sitting on his silly weak beast, foundereth not in the deep thereof, and so the market the worse served, for discouraging of poor victuallers to resort thither for the same cause. If now therefore ye will have your prayers heard before Almighty God, for the increase of your corn and cattle, and for the defence thereof from unseasonable mists and blasts, from hail and other such tempests, love equity and righteousness, ensue mercy and charity, which God most requireth at our hands."

The reference to "perambulations" finds a fitting place in this

“Exhortation,” which was composed for these occasions at Rogationtide. The practice still survives in many of our old parishes at the same season to-day, and is popularly known as “Beating the Bounds.”

The Twenty-first Homily of Book II (“An Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion”) shows the unsettled state which prevailed in “these times.” In Part IV we read: “Let no good and discreet subjects therefore follow the flag or banner displayed to rebellion, and borne by rebels, though it have the image of the plough painted therein, with *God speed the plough* written under it in great letters, knowing that none hinder the plough more than rebels, who will neither go to plough themselves, nor suffer those that would go unto it. And though some rebels bear the picture of the five wounds painted, against those who put their only hope of salvation in the wounds of Christ, not those wounds which are painted in a clout by some lewd painter, but in those wounds which Christ himself bare in his precious body: though they, knowing little what the cross of Christ meaneth, which neither carver nor painter can make, do bear the image of the cross painted in a rag, against those that have the cross of Christ painted in their hearts; yea, though they paint withal in their flags, *Hoc signo vinces*, ‘By this sign thou shalt get the victory,’ by a most fond imitation of the posy of Constantinus Magnus, that noble Christian emperor and great conqueror of God’s enemies, a most unmeet ensign for rebels, the enemies of God, their prince, and country, or what other banner soever they shall bear; yet let no good and godly subject, upon any hope of victory or good success, follow such standard-bearers of rebellion.”

It may be convenient now to classify the “godly and wholesome doctrine” of the Homilies under distinctive heads. There will be little need for note or comment. The Homilies may well be left to tell their own story.

#### THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

“Let every man, woman, and child, therefore, with all their heart thirst and desire God’s Holy Scriptures, love them, embrace them, have their delight and pleasure in hearing and reading them, so as at length we may be transformed and changed into them. For the Holy Scriptures are God’s treasure-house, wherein are found all things needful for us to see, to hear, to learn, to believe, necessary for the attaining of eternal life.” Homily X, Book II.

“For all are commanded to read or hear, to search and study the Holy Scriptures, and are promised understanding to be given them from God, if they do so.” Homily XXI, Book II.

#### THE CHURCH.

“Thus ye have heard, good people, first that Christian subjects are bound even in conscience to obey princes’ laws, which are not repugnant to the laws of God. Ye have also heard that Christ’s church is not so bound to observe any order, law, or decree made

by man, to prescribe a form in religion, but that the church hath full power and authority from God to change and alter the same, when need shall require; which hath been showed you by the example of our Saviour Christ, by the practice of the apostles, and of the fathers since that time." Homily IV, Book II.

"The true church is an universal congregation or fellowship of God's faithful and elect people, *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head cornerstone.* And hath already three marks or notes, whereby it is known: pure and sound doctrine, the sacraments ministered according to Christ's holy institution, and the right use of ecclesiastical discipline. This description of the church is agreeable both to the Scriptures of God, and also to the doctrine of the ancient fathers, so that none may justify their fault therewith." Homily XVI, Book II.

"It is not then the duty and part of any Christian, under the pretence of the Holy Ghost, to bring in his own dreams and fancies into the church: but he must diligently provide that his doctrine and decrees be agreeable to Christ's Holy Testament: otherwise, in making the Holy Ghost the author thereof, he doth blaspheme and belie the Holy Ghost, to his own condemnation." Ibid.

#### THE SACRAMENTS.

"Now with like, or rather more brevity, you shall hear how many sacraments there be, that were instituted by our Saviour Christ, and are to be continued, and received of every Christian in due time and order, and for such purpose as our Saviour Christ willed them to be received.

"And as for the number of them, if they should be considered according to the exact signification of a sacrament, namely, for the visible signs expressly commanded in the New Testament, whereunto is annexed the promise of free forgiveness of our sin, and of our holiness and joining in Christ, there be but two; namely, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord." Homily IX, Book II.

"But in a general acception, the name of a sacrament may be attributed to anything, whereby an holy thing is signified." Ibid.

"And therefore St. Augustine, weighing the true signification and sweet meaning of the word, writing to Januarius, and also in the third book 'Of Christian Doctrine,' affirmeth that the sacraments of the Christians, as they are most excellent in signification, so are they most few in number; and in both places maketh mention expressly of two, the sacrament of baptism and the Supper of the Lord. And although there are retained by the order of the Church of England, besides these two, certain other rites and ceremonies about the institution of ministers in the churches, matrimony, confirmation of children, by examining them of their knowledge in the articles of the faith, and joining thereto the prayers of the church for them, and likewise for the visitation of the sick; yet no man ought to take these for sacraments, in such signification and meaning as the sacrament of baptism and the

Lord's Supper are : but either for godly states of life, necessary in Christ's church, and therefore worthy to be set forth by public action and solemnity, by the ministry of the Church, or else judged to be such ordinances as may make for the instruction, comfort, and edification of Christ's Church." Ibid.

#### THE MASS.

" For, as that worthy man St. Ambrose saith, ' He is unworthy of the Lord, that otherwise doth celebrate that mystery than it was delivered by him. Neither can he be devout, that otherwise doth presume than it was given by the author.' We must then take heed, lest, of the memory, it be made a sacrifice ; lest, of a communion, it be made a private eating ; lest, of two parts, we have but one ; lest, applying it for the dead, we lose the fruit that be alive." Homily XV, Book II.

" Let us therefore so travail to understand the Lord's Supper, that we be no cause of the decay of God's worship, of no idolatry, of no dumb massing, of no hate and malice ; so may we the bolder have access thither to our comfort." Ibid.

" Now it followeth to have with this knowledge a sure and constant faith, not only that the death of Christ is available for the redemption of all the world, for the remission of sins, and reconciliation with God the Father ; but also that he hath made upon his cross a full and sufficient sacrifice for thee, a perfect cleansing of thy sins, so that thou acknowledgest no other Saviour, Redeemer, Mediator, Advocate, Intercessor, but Christ only ; and that thou mayest say with the apostle, that he *loved thee, and gave himself for thee*. For this is to stick fast to Christ's promise made in his institution, to make Christ thine own, and to apply his merits unto thyself. Herein thou needest no other man's help, no other sacrifice or oblation, no sacrificing priest, no mass, no means established by man's invention." Ibid.

#### AURICULAR CONFESSION.

" It is most evident and plain, that this auricular confession hath not the warrant of God's word, else it had not been lawful for Nectarius, Bishop of Constantinople, upon a just occasion to have put it down. For when anything ordained of God is by the lewdness of man abused, the abuse ought to be taken away, and the thing itself suffered to remain. Moreover, these are St. Augustine's words : ' What have I to do with men, that they should hear my confession, as though they were able to heal my diseases ? A curious sort of men to know another man's life, and slothful to correct and amend their own. Why do they seek to hear of me what I am, which will not hear of thee what they are ? And how can they tell, when they hear of me of myself, whether I tell the truth or not ; sith that no mortal man knoweth what is in man, but the spirit of man which is in him ? ' Augustine would not have written thus if auricular confession had been used in his time. Being therefore not led with the conscience thereof, let us with fear

and trembling, and with a contrite heart, use that kind of confession that God doth command in his word; and then doubtless, as *he is faithful and righteous, he will forgive us our sins, and make us clean from all wickedness.*" Homily XIX, Book II ("Of Repentance").

## PENANCE.

"And according to this example of our Saviour Christ in the primitive church, which was most holy and godly, and in which due discipline with severity was used against the wicked, open offenders were not suffered once to enter into the house of the Lord, nor admitted to common prayer, and the use of the holy sacraments, with other true Christians, until they had done open penance before the whole church." Homily I, Book II.

## PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD.

"Now to entreat of that question, whether we ought to pray for them that are departed out of this world, or no. Wherein, if we will cleave only unto the Word of God, then must we needs grant that we have no commandment so to do." Homily VII, Book II.

"Let us therefore not dream either of purgatory, or of prayers for the souls of them that be dead; but let us earnestly and diligently pray for them which are expressly commanded in Holy Scripture." Ibid.

## INVOCATION OF ANGELS AND SAINTS.

"We must call neither upon angel, nor yet upon saint, but only and solely upon God." Homily VII, Book II.

"As for the saints, they have so little knowledge of the secrets of the heart, that many of the ancient fathers greatly doubt whether they know anything at all, that is commonly done on earth. And albeit some think they do, yet St. Augustine, a doctor of great authority, and also antiquity, hath this opinion of them: that they know no more what we do on earth, than we know what they do in heaven. For proof whereof, he allegeth the word of Isaiah the prophet, where it is said, *Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel knoweth us not.* His mind therefore is this, not that we should put any religion in worshipping of them, or praying unto them; but that we should honour them by following their virtuous and godly life. For as he witnesseth in another place, 'The martyrs and holy men in times past were wont after their death to be remembered and named of the priest at divine service; but never to be invoked or called upon.' But why so? 'Because the priest (saith he) is God's priest, and not theirs: whereby he is bound to call upon God, and not upon them.'" Ibid.

## Vows.

"But to pass over the innumerable superstitiousness, that hath been in strange apparel, in silence, in dormitory, in cloister, in chapter, in choice of meats and drinks, and in such like things, let us consider what enormities and abuses have been in the three principal

points, which they called the three essentials, or three chief foundations of religion, that is to say, obedience, chastity, and wilful poverty." Homily V, Book I.

#### THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

"First you must have an assured faith in God, and give yourselves wholly unto him, love him in prosperity and adversity, and dread to offend him evermore. Then for his sake love all men, friends and foes, because they be his creation and image, and redeemed by Christ, as ye are." Homily V, Book I.

"Think thou hearest him now crying in an intolerable agony to his Father, and saying, '*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*' Couldst thou behold this woeful sight, or hear this mournful voice, without tears, considering that he suffered all this, not for any desert of his own, but only for the grievousness of thy sins? O that mankind should put the everlasting Son of God to such pains! O that we should be the occasion of his death, and the only cause of his condemnation! May we not justly cry, Woe worth the time that ever we sinned? O my brethren, let this image of Christ crucified be always printed in our hearts; let it stir us up to the hatred of sin, and provoke our minds to the earnest love of Almighty God." Homily XIII, Book II.

#### THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

It needs but a slight acquaintance with the Homilies to see the value they attach to the observance of the Christian Year.

Christmas Day has a special Homily assigned to it. It is the Twelfth in number in Book II. The next in order—Homily XIII—is a call to the due observance of Good Friday. Then comes the Homily for Easter Day, on the Lord's Resurrection. It opens with a declaration of the importance of this article of our faith, which is "the ground and foundation of our whole religion," and "the very lock and key of all our Christian religion and faith."

Homily XVII of Book II is appointed for "the Days of Rogation Week." No provision, however, is made for Ascension Day, in spite of the fact that the First Book closes with a note in which a Homily on this and other subjects is promised. The first part of the note runs thus: "Hereafter shall follow sermons of Fasting, Prayer, Alms-deeds, of the Nativity, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Saviour Christ." But although this intention was not fully carried out, the Homilies *do* contain very clear references to the Lord's Ascension. They are found in the one on the Lord's Resurrection, which doubtless was regarded as carrying with it the belief in the Ascension. We read as follows: "*He was conversant with his disciples by the space of forty days continually together, to the intent he would in his person, being now glorified, teach and instruct them, which should be the teachers of others, fully and in most absolute and perfect wise, the truth of this most Christian article*" (the Resurrection), "which is the ground and foundation of our whole religion, before he would ascend up to his

Father into the heavens, there to receive the glory of his most triumphant conquest and victory." Homily XIV, Book II. In the same Homily we read again: "If it were not true that Christ is risen again, then were it neither true that he is ascended up to heaven."

A Homily is provided for Whitsunday with the title: "An Homily concerning the coming down of the Holy Ghost, and the manifold gifts of the Same." Homily XVI, Book II. The second part of it is strongly controversial and challenges the pretensions of the Church of Rome to be the oracle of the Holy Ghost.

There is no special provision in the shape of a Homily for Trinity Sunday. But no one who reads the Homilies will think that they fail in any way to give honour to this subject. They abound in references to all Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity and to their work for man in the Church and in the world.

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In the foregoing pages the Churchmanship of the Homilies has been shown under eleven separate heads. Their teaching on these subjects is clear and needs little additional commentary.

The Homilies reject the Mass. They reject Auricular Confession. Under this head their teaching is strikingly similar to that of the familiar exhortation in the Communion Service. In Homily XIX, Book II, we read as follows: "I do not say, but that, if any do find themselves troubled in conscience, they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man, and show the trouble and doubt of their conscience to them, that they may receive at their hand the comfortable salve of God's Word."

The Homilies also reject Prayers for the Dead and the Invocation of Angels and Saints. In the matter of vows, they have not much to say, but they expose and condemn the hollowness of the profession of obedience, chastity, and wilful poverty, which was such a common feature of their time. The Homilies have a place for Penance, but they know nothing of any Sacrament of Penance. Their view accords with the statement in the opening words of the Commination Service. They are careful to emphasize the spiritual side of it, and with a view to pressing this, they say: "This was commonly the penance that Christ enjoined sinners: *Go thy way, and sin no more.*"

There is little need to say much on the remaining five points with which the Homilies deal so fully. The authority of Scripture has a foremost place in them, and is given the position assigned to it by Article VI. That is the supreme court of appeal.

The Church holds a place of high honour in the Homilies, and due respect is paid to the "judgment of the old learned and godly doctors of the church," and to "the primitive church, which was most holy and godly." They declare, in words already quoted, and which closely resemble those of Article XIX on the same subject, that the Church has "three notes or marks, whereby it is known: pure and sound doctrine, the sacraments ministered

according to Christ's holy institution, and the right use of ecclesiastical discipline."

In the case of the sacraments there is general agreement with Article XXV: "And as for the number of them, if they should be considered according to the exact signification of a sacrament, namely, for the visible signs expressly commanded in the New Testament, whereunto is annexed the promise of free forgiveness of our sin, and of our holiness and joining in Christ, there be but two; namely, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord." Again, we read: "But in a general acception, the name of a sacrament may be attributed to anything, whereby an holy thing is signified."

As regards the spiritual life, no one can read the Homilies and fail to realize that Christianity is not only a creed but a life, and that the source of that life is the indwelling power of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. "Apply yourselves, good friends, to live in Christ, that Christ may still live in you."

Our review closes with the Christian Year. The Homilies illustrate its use and value. By means of it they show the creed of the Church in its true proportion and perspective.

We may sum up the Churchmanship of the Homilies in a few closing words. It is not a dead but a living thing. It links us to the noble heritage of the past. It witnesses to the faith "once delivered unto the saints." It is sober, devout and spiritual. It is broad and liberal in its outlook. Its boundaries have the authority of antiquity behind them. It is Scriptural and Primitive, Apostolic and Catholic.

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Messrs. H. R. Allenson, Ltd., have published *Stories of Grit*, by Archer Wallace (2s. 6d. net). They are "Thrilling Tales of Boys Who Made Good." They are well told, and we need only mention the names of some of the heroes to indicate the inspiring lessons which they teach: George Matheson, Josiah Wedgwood, Henry Jones, Gipsy Smith, and Henry Fawcett.

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*Winning from Scratch*, by the Rev. J. Cocker (H. R. Allenson, Ltd., 3s. 6d. net), is a series of Story Talks as a companion volume to the author's *The Date Boy of Baghdad*. It contains thirty-three of these talks, and they are just the style of bright, entertaining narratives to interest and instruct boys.

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*City Churches and Their Memories*, by G. B. Besant (Messrs. Selwyn & Blount, Ltd., 2s. 6d.), is a racy account of the ecclesiastical edifices in the City of London, some of which have been the subject of much recent discussion. The author is full of information and has no hesitation in expressing frank opinions on men and matters. The clergy and the sermons receive some caustic treatment, but that we are all liable to make mistakes is shown by the text of Mr. Besant's book in the last paragraph of p. 71.