

Church Consecration.

(See frontispiece.)

There are different ceremonies attached to a church itself or edifice, in which the children of the faith gather around the tabernacle or earthly dwelling-place of their God and Saviour. There is first the laying of the corner stone, or first great stone on which the building is to rest, and then the blessing or dedication of the church after the material work is completed. Finally comes the consecration ceremony when the church is given up to God forever. Consecration can only be had when all the debt is paid on the church.

We can get some idea of the character of such an event by a comparison. As the young religious who at first is received with simple ceremony and after a while is allowed to put on the holy habit, is still free to return to the world, so the church simply blessed and allowed for divine use may, if desirable, be given up and cease any longer to be a place of sacrifice and worship.

But, again, as the religious when once vowed to God or solemnly consecrated to His holy service, irrevocably and forever, is no longer free to change, so too the church that is consecrated is given irrevocably to God — and come what may, the sacred edifice is His and His alone; and should fire or other elements destroy it, or the ravages of time cause it to crumble to dust, the ground on which the church stood would still be sacred, and around the hallowed space where the altar stood would be erected an iron rail, and in the centre of the enclosure would be raised a huge cross telling the story of the past glory.

The presence of our Lord makes any church a holy place, but this holiness, we may say, may be limited to the tabernacle and the sanctuary or immediate surroundings. But when a church is consecrated, that holiness pervades even to its outer walls. Every stone is blessed because it is a part of the one great whole