

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER.

- SEPT. 1st—11th Sunday after Trinity.
 " 8th—12th Sunday after Trinity.
 " 15th—13th Sunday after Trinity. (*Notice of Ember Days and of St. Matthew*).
 " 18th }
 " 20th } EMBER DAYS,
 " 21st }
 " 21st—ST. MATTHEW. A. Ev. and Mar (*Athanasian Creed*).
 " 22nd—14th Sunday after Trinity. (*Notice of St. Michael and All Angels*).
 " 29th—17th Sunday after Trinity, *St. Michael and All Angels*.

A PLEA FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY.

That sectarianism is an evil both in theory and in practice may be indicated by several weighty considerations. Some reasons may indeed be advanced in favor of retaining our divisions, but they cannot claim in their behalf the text of either the four Gospels or the Epistles. The notion that insists upon the existence of a large number of rival, if not hostile, sects hardly squares with the ideal of the Church which the Lord set forth. He has personally given no warrant for such a Christendom as we now look upon. In fact He planned exactly the opposite. He would have His disciples remarkable above all others for the love that discerns the brotherhood of man no less clearly than it perceives God's fatherhood, and which is kind and generous, large hearted and broad-minded. He speaks of His Church—not of the state of things which we behold to-day. He established a society of a spiritual character and for serving spiritual purposes; but it was a palpable, visible society with officers and members, doctrines, sacraments, institutions. He Himself enunciated the evident principle—"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." Nor can we believe that He could have been guilty of the unwisdom of ordering that His people should, for His sake, be sundered into independent ecclesiastical bodies, and that these should be regarded as more spiritual in influence and more useful in operation than one united body. The solemn petitions which Christ uttered shortly before the

crucifixion—and which have been styled His sacrificial prayer—prove what was His mind respecting schism, if words are allowed to have meaning—"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one as We are * * * * * Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou has sent Me." The Son of God founded only one Society that should preach the Gospel to the nations. It is a serious statement to make—but I fear it is true—that sectarianism is contrary to what we know of Christ's will, and if this is true, surely it is time we recognized the wrong, and began to consider the remedies.

With equal clearness do we learn that our divisions are against apostolic teaching. It is safe to assume that the Apostles infallibly understood the Master's wishes concerning the Church's oneness, and their writings show how loyally they stood by His ideal, and that too in the face of many temptations to do the contrary. We recall the familiar reproof which St. Paul administered to the Corinthians:—"For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men? For while one saith I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" (I Cor. 3; 3, 4) There are numerous other texts quite as fierce in their denunciation of this evil, and which would scarcely be thought to be within the bounds of charity if they were used now as one's own words. The first preachers of Christianity warned against the sectary and all who would not be followers of the Apostles and their traditions. In those days sects were not regarded as innocent, or even as neutral, by the inspired rulers of the Gospel Society, who emphasized the Church as Christ's body, proclaimed its rightful oneness, and banished schism as a wrong; and we should admire the record of the earliest believers concerning whom it has been beautifully written that "they continued stedfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2; 41.)

Sectarianism is also against practical wisdom. The existence of sects actually hinders the progress of the Gospel. It is an evil example before the keen sense of this world. Non-Christians score a strong point against us when they urge that we are thus contradicting our own magnificent code of charity, which we throw to the winds by declaring our inability to live together peaceably in the same ecclesiastical household.

Sectism is a bewildering confusion to many who are dazed and hopelessly discouraged by the Babel of denominational sounds, and who know not whither to find refuge for the grace and consolation of religion.

Our divisions are the chief stumbling block that impedes the progress of Christian missions. The heathen who adhere to their venerable and undivided religious systems laugh us to scorn. The argument that we might better retire from the field in order to come to an agreement among ourselves is logic not easy to be answered satisfactorily.

The present state of things involves an enormous waste of men and money. We are like soldiery scattered into many independent bands, while the common foe is solidly massed for the fray. A disorganized army is at the mercy of a small though well disciplined band. A universal maxim is—"In union there is strength," and it holds infallibly true in regard to Christian endeavors. As our organizations now are, they fritter away an untold amount of strength that might tell mightily if Christians were to present a united front against the evil

forces. The smaller towns throughout the country not only on the frontier, but also in the regions nearer home—are a monument to the folly of our divisions. In such places the rule is to have several, perhaps half a dozen, struggling congregations, each bearing a different title, while one would suffice and, if it were well equipped as it then could be, would do the work better than that work is done now. Such a splitting up of force is in the face of business sagacity and common-sense poor policy.

Rivalry of an inferior order is inspired by sectarianism. The evil fosters an unwholesome pride which, though quite natural under the circumstances is scarcely praiseworthy. The various bodies are tempted to spend something of their thought and efforts in overcoming the ambitious designs of one another. The envy and jealousies engendered are inevitable. Besides, we should not be insensible to the humiliation of confessing that the love of God and of souls is in itself not sufficient to move God's people to do the gigantic task of bringing the world to Christ.

Not the least of the charges that rise up in condemnation of the colossal evil of sectarianism is its tendency to corrupt the motives of Christian energy. The salvation of souls is the purpose which it is the Church's business to promote; but instead of clinging to this as the one and only mission of Christianity, our ideal degenerates into mere enthusiasm for the sect to which we happen to be attached. In this respect there is probably little difference among the various societies. Amid present conditions the first care of the Christian worker is more than likely to be for the extension of his denomination rather than for the glory of God. Lofty purposes are not wholly lost sight of, but they are overshadowed by the "denominationalism," which, as it is usually cherished, is not many removes from rank worldliness. Our divisions are positively hurtful from every point of view.

If ever the operation of sectism could be a success, we have a reasonable right to look for its most glorious fruits in this land of ours. Here it has been faithfully tried for a full century; it has had free scope without let or hindrance; it has been popular with the masses; it has flourished amid conditions than which none could be more favorable. What is the result? Although our population began originally under good auspices, starting from noble races of Puritans, Romanists, and Churchmen, our religious progress, after a hundred years of unrestricted sectarianism, has not been wholly gratifying. Very much has been done that will make a splendid record in the book of history, and yet if we were to write up a balance sheet, the balance, we fear, would be found on the wrong side. In matters of temporal progress, we have excelled all the nations, but it is no lack of devoted patriotism to declare that the present moral and spiritual status of the American people is not assuring. Alas, it is no morbid pessimism that is filled with dismay when it discovers the actual facts that stare us all in the face. There are thousands among us to-day who are not identified with any denomination; other thousands who rarely if ever attend divine service; tens of thousands who are not sufficiently interested in religious topics even to become infidels. Discerning minds warn us that irreligion is on the increase in this fair land. In no other country in all the world, with the possible exception of France, does such a small ratio of the population find its way to the Christian assemblies on Sunday morning; in none other do the demons of intemperance and impurity make such sad havoc of bodies and souls; in none other is the sanctity of the family so poorly protected by the laws of marriage and divorce; in no other country would Mormonism have been permitted to exist unmolested for many years in all its polygamous horrors. Our inordinate greed, our passion for pleasure,