

TWOFOLD FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH.

As to the distinguished function, or grand characteristic mission, of a Church of Christ, in the present evil world, it may at once be replied, that it is entirely that of a belligerent or militant power. This, in theory, most people are as ready to admit, as, in practice, they have hitherto been so much habituated to disregard it. The whole world is in a state of rebellion against the most High, Christ hath purchased it at the inestimable price of his own precious blood. It is now, therefore, his inheritance by right of purchase; though not his, as yet, by actual possession. As its Sovereign Proprietor and Lord, He commissioned his believing followers to go forth into every land, and by the sword of the spirit, and his own promised presence and blessing, quell the rebellion, and reduce the rebels to a rightful submission and allegiance to their heavenly King.

At the outset, therefore, in every land, the soldiers of the Cross are thus in the position of an invading enemy. Their dealings are exclusively with rebels or inveterate foes. But, when numbers of these are prostrated, and their territory seized, the invading army must next divide itself into two. One half must go forward, under the great commission, in prosecution of the original enterprise. The other half must remain behind, to bring the subjugated people under the administration of settled government and justice,—to plant institutions for the cultivation of the spirit of loyalty, and the continued maintenance of order and law,—and to furnish the muniments and appliances of aggressive warfare to the advancing army in the field.

This twofold generic function of the Christian Church has been felicitously portrayed by the celebrated historian of the Reformation. "There are," says he, "two movements in the Church: one is effected inwardly, and its object is its preservation; the other is effected outwardly, and the object aimed at is its propagation. There is thus a doctrinal Church and a missionary Church. These two movements ought never to be separated; and when they are disunited, it is because the spirit of man and not the Spirit of God prevails." Mighty definition this of a true scriptural Church! would that it were engraven on the hearts and on the very foreheads of all her members! we may shut our eyes against the light of day; our sloth, our cowardice, and our avarice may lead us to wish that the fact were otherwise. But there the fact stands, and in the blaze of scriptural light,—clear as the meridian sun, and immovable as the everlasting hills. This twofold function of inward preservation and outward propagation, in other words, of internal teaching, discipline, and government, and of external aggressive warfare, with the legions of unreclaimed heathenism, constitutes, by heaven's decree, the distinguished character and attribute of a true Church of Christ. The vigorous, uninterrupted exercise of this twofold function constitutes its peculiar and distinctive mission in the world, under the present dispensation. And the faithful discharge of this glorious mission, its Divine Author and Head has ordained to be the law or condition at once of its being and well-being,—a law or condition as immutable as the foundations of the eternal throne.—*Dr. Duff.*

THE COVENANT.

On the 28th February, 1638, a great crowd filled the Grayfriars Church in Edinburgh, and in the burial-ground, 60,000 Presbyterians had assembled. Henderson, the minister, fervently invoked the Divine blessing on this vast meeting, and the Earl of London stated the motives which had brought them together. Johnstone unrolled the parchment, on which these Scottish charters were inscribed, and read them in a clear, calm voice. When he finished, there was a deep and solemn silence. No explanations were

demanded and given; then, again, all was still as the grave.

But the silence was soon broken. An aged man of noble air was seen advancing; it was the Earl of Sutherland, one of the most considerable of the Scottish barons, whose possessions included all the northern parts of the British Isles. He came forward slowly, and deep emotion was visible in his venerable features. He took up the pen with a trembling hand and signed the document.

A general movement now took place. All the Presbyterians within the church pressed forward to the Covenant and subscribed their names. But this was not enough; a whole nation was waiting, the immense parchment was carried into the church-yard, and spread out on a large tomb-stone, to receive on this expressive table the signature of the church. Scotland had never beheld a day like that. The heads of the people then said, as Joshua once did, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord."—(Josh. xxiv. 15, 16.) They rushed to the tomb which covered the ashes of one of Caledonia's sons, and on which was spread that chart r by which the nation, in signing it, became "witnesses against themselves, that they chose the Lord to serve him." (v. 22.) Some sobbed, some shouted; some, after their names, added "till death," and others opening a vein, wrote their name with their own blood.—There was no confusion, no tumult. After these hours of strong emotion, this immense multitude dispersed quietly, and each one returned to his home in peace.

On the following day, the parchment, to which it became necessary to add several more sheets, was carried to different parts of the town, that the inhabitants of the respective districts might affix their signatures. Crowds accompanied it from place to place, shedding tears and imploring the Divine blessing on these acts. At the same time a remarkable improvement took place in the life and manners of those who signed. With the exception of one instance of trifling importance, no injury was anywhere done either to the prelates or their partizans.

The Covenant then began to make the circuit of Scotland. John Livingston was at Lanark, his father's parish, when it was read and sworn to by the minister, elders, and people. Livingston, yet a young minister, having been called upon to preach in the church of Shotts, in the year 1630, on a Communion day, had passed the whole night, from Sunday to Monday, in prayer. In the morning, standing on a tomb-stone, he preached in the church-yard to a great multitude, on Ezekiel xxxvi. 25, 26, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean."—The pouring out of the Spirit of God was such, that five hundred persons could date their conversion from that day. Soon after, on a similar occasion, a thousand persons were either converted or rather remarkably confirmed; the preceding night having, in like manner, been devoted by the young minister and some pious friends to fervent prayer. The Covenant now arrived at Lanark; and the servant of the Most High again witnessed those powerful emotions which the Spirit of God had formerly excited in the churchyards of Shott and Holywood. Thousands of reformed Christians were standing with their hands uplifted, and tears falling from their eyes, while with one consent they all devoted themselves to the Lord.

Such scenes might be witnessed everywhere. In the Highlands especially, this Evangelical alliance was joyfully welcomed. The king and the prelates, with the view of getting rid of the most pious and steadfast ministers—Bruce, Rutherford, Dickson, and others—had banished them to those wild districts; but by the instructions of these godly ministers, vital Christianity had been widely spread abroad. Rival clans, which had never before met, except in strife, now saluted each

other as brethren, and, after signing the Covenant, departed in charity and peace. The bishops were thunderstruck. "All that we have been doing these thirty years," exclaimed they, "is thrown down in one day!"—*Historical Recollections of Scotland.*

THE PRAYER WAS TOO LONG.

Well, that is a fault. We have no model in the Bible for a long prayer. The longest recorded is that of Solomon, upon the momentous, special occasion of the dedication of the temple.—The deliberate offering of this would scarcely occupy eight minutes. One of the shortest that of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner," may be offered in one breathing; and it was answered. "Lord, save, I perish," and "Lord help me," are patterns of earnest effectual prayer.—Earnestness utters its desires directly, briefly, even abruptly. We are not heard because of "much speaking."

The prayer was too long. It is certainly difficult for us to concentrate our thoughts with the intensity that devotion requires for a long time, or to maintain, without weariness, the proper attitude of prayer. Remembering this, he who leads publicly in prayer, representing not simply his own desires, but those of the congregation, should go no further than he reasonably may hope to carry with him their thoughts and devotions.—All beyond this, if it be sincere, is private prayer, and should be uttered in the closet; if it be not sincere, it is hypocrisy.

The prayer was too long. Perhaps the good brother did not know it. In the self-forgetfulness of devotion, perhaps he took "no note of time." As the prayers of the social meeting are generally too long, he was but extending a bad custom. Now, if you were kindly to mention it to him, not complainingly, but as though you really desired to promote his usefulness and influence, might it not have a good result? Just try it: and if he is a reasonable Christian, he will thank you for it.

The prayer was too long. Perhaps your own heart was not in a proper frame to sympathize with the devotions. You did not pray in private before you came to the public meeting, and consequently you wanted a praying spirit. There was then but little fellowship of spirit between you and the brother who sought to express what ought to be your desires, and if his heart was warm and yours cold, it is no wonder you thought the prayer was too long.

The prayer was too long. Was there any preaching in it? Sometimes brethren aim to instruct the congregation, and substantially turn their prayers into exhortations or statements of doctrine. I think, in all such cases, it would greatly add to the interest and profitableness of the meeting, if a division were made, and the things that differ were separated.

The prayer was too long. Was it formal and heartless? Without unction and earnestness did it seem as though the brother prayed merely because he was called upon, without appearing to have any special errand to the throne of grace? Did he seem to pray merely to fill up the time or to perform his part in the prescribed routine of service? Was it the same old stereotyped prayer which he always offers, as though circumstances never changed, and our wants and supplies were always the same? If it were so, then the prayer was certainly too long, even if it occupied only one moment.

There may not be much poetry, but there is common sense and piety in the following stanza

"Few be our words and short our prayers,
When we together meet;
Short duties keep religion up,
And make devotion sweet."