

Dominion Churchman.

THURSDAY, MAY 25, 1876.

WHITSUNTIDE.

The fourth of June will be Whitsunday. We introduce the subject this week because of its great importance; and also because, from the moment of the Ascension, the whole attention of the Disciples was turned to the "promise of the Father"—*The gift of the Holy Ghost.*

From the earliest ages of Christianity, the festival of Whitsunday has always been held to be one of the chief celebrations of the Church. Nor have her children usually been backward in their commemoration of that great gift—the gift of the Divine Spirit to the Church—which the day brings before us.

We are not, however, without considerable danger that this gift of boundless value may be regarded with less attention than it ought; and the tendencies of the present age are of such a nature, and of so powerful an influence, that great watchfulness on the part of the Church is imperatively demanded, lest the work and agency of the Divine Spirit, on the Church collectively, and on the individual Christian, should come to be too little regarded. For the gift of the Spirit is made to the Church in her corporate capacity as well as to each of her members separately. And this is a truth which many who might otherwise be supposed to be earnest minded Christians, appear even anxious to forget. In the first and purest ages of the Church, and when her triumphs over the world and sin were the most remarkable, it was in the assemblies of the Church, it was when they met together in the breaking of bread and with prayers, that the Divine Spirit was most eminently vouchsafed. That primitive upper room, whose walls could testify to the devotion, the united accord, and the daily assemblies of the disciples, was the first to be filled with the tokens of the Holy Ghost, as it was poured forth from the Throne of Heaven, whither the Redeemer had just ascended. And we have no right to look for that celestial effusion except according to the primitive model. We may have made grand discoveries, and advanced to a far larger control over the forces of nature than was known a few hundred years ago, we may have learned to boast of the independence of human nature, and of every man's right to be a law unto himself; but no change can ever take place in the kind of means whereby the graces and virtues of the Divine Spirit can be attained, until Messiah shall come in His glory and establish His reign on earth according to the purposes of His will.

We have referred to the tendencies of the age, as calling for the watchfulness of the Church in guarding a cultivation of the influences of the Holy Spirit. For

the tendency of the age is essentially a materialistic one; and to prove this, it is not necessary to refer to the aims of the distinguished naturalists who have so successfully pursued one or other chosen path of physical science; and whose minds have become so thoroughly engaged in their own particular branch, that they are almost totally oblivious of every thing else above and around them. For, as is remarked by one of the most eloquent men now living: "The world of matter, with all its vastness, with all its undeniable mystery, with all its attractiveness and resource, presses around the human soul, around each human soul as never before; and it makes the realization of an immaterial world, at least for large classes among us, increasingly difficult." All that which enhances and sets forth the outward, visible, material side of human life has made within the last few years a progress altogether unprecedented in the history of the world. The sources of capital have been reached in a manner, with a rapidity, and to an extent never before known; and we are masters of the world of sense and motion, in a meaning that no former age could have imagined. We have assumed a new relation towards space and duration, can hold communication with the nearest and the most distant parts of the globe in almost the same instant of time; so that, in a sense, the world of matter is invested with sources of wonder which our ancestors regarded as closely connected with the world of spirit. So much indeed is this the case that the tendency of the age, refusing the former worship paid to the supernatural, actually finds itself ready to pay a secret homage almost Divine, to the newest discoveries in materialistic science. The material universe has consequently almost shut out of sight the spiritual, in the immense place it occupies in the thoughts and imaginations of the present generation.

Nor do the life, the kindlings, and exuberance of the intellect bring the soul up to the true sphere of the highest life of man. The spiritual gifts of the day of Pentecost infinitely surpassed the highest powers of the most expanded intellect, more than does the richest and best endowed mental inheritance excel the unconscious and inanimate world. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, and they were all with one accord in one place, the blessed gift was made to the Church, which brings the Christian into the closest communion with the most glorious and ever blessed Godhead, assimilating him to the Divine image, and preparing him for an eternal residence with pure spirits above. The gift comprehends every grace and virtue to which man can attain, and every spiritual faculty he can ever exercise. The gift belongs to the Church as imparted to her by her Divine Head, and is claimed by none but those within her fold. It is essential to

the existence of the Christian life, and no growth and maturity can ever be achieved without its constant presence. It is the substitute for the presence of the Lord, who went to the realms above, in order that He might send down from thence the richest influences of His love.

In the Apostolic age, the array of the endowments of the spirit were of the most varied and magnificent character. These endowments rendered the external ministry of the Church more attractive to the mass of mankind than these later ages have been familiarized with. What a number of rites must have connected themselves with the gifts of miracles and of healing, the gifts of tongues and of the interpretation of tongues! Whether these rites were pre-arranged, or whether they were extemporized for each particular occasion, would make no difference in the amount, the number or the show of the display made at the time. The exercise of the endowments themselves must have been most remarkable and attractive, and must have presented features of Christian worship, of overwhelming impressiveness, such as in these days of indifference, and of disregard for the real character of the early Church, we can form no conception. These splendid endowments have long ago been withdrawn from our midst; and so little have we been accustomed to appreciate their value, that it has come to be almost an article of our creed that they were of an extraordinary character, and only intended for that which is generally called the apostolic age. We are not aware that any reason has been assigned for this opinion beyond the fact of the withdrawal of the endowments; but we rather incline to think that the reason of that withdrawal is to be found in the church's unfaithfulness. So that when the Church shall return to her pristine purity and vigor, she may reasonably expect from her heavenly Comforter, those external testimonies of the presence and sanction of the Divine Spirit which graced and ennobled the worship of the Primitive Church.

The Lessons, Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels, appointed for the day, contain a vast fund of instruction bearing upon the descent of the Holy Ghost, and His offices in the Church. The whole week was formerly used as a festival, but as in later times the succeeding Sunday was chosen as one of the days for the ordination of Priests and Deacons, the usual Ember fasts came to be observed. The Church has provided us with a Homily on the subject of Whitsuntide, in which she shows how every good and perfect gift, whether of nature, Providence or grace, all come to us through the agency of the Holy Spirit, without whom no good thought can enter the mind of man, or good deed be done by him; no right knowledge can be attained without His influence, or good intention be formed in the soul.