

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR MARCH.

- MARCH 2nd—Second Sunday in Lent.
 " 9th—Third Sunday in Lent.
 " 16th—Fourth Sunday in Lent.
 " 23rd—Fifth Sunday in Lent. (*Notice of the Annunciation*).
 " 25th—Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
 " 30th—6th Sunday in Lent. (*Notice of Holy Days in this week*).

"FACT VS. OPINION."

Man cannot involve a religion out of his inner consciousness, or formulate it by the standard of his intellectual conceptions. It lies beyond his plane of thought and action. Religion is, as the very name asserts, the return, or bringing back, to God of the children who had strayed away from, or rejected His authority and guardianship. It is the reunion of the earthly with the heavenly, and every impulse, guidance and strength in the bond must come from above, not from below. Man cannot bridge the gulf of separation—the bridge must spring from the other side. It is crossed, and its far distant sides united, only by the Incarnation and Mediatorship of the God Man Christ Jesus. Restoring through His own body and life the paternal relationship of God, and the filial relation of man, He instituted, as only He could, the means by which man can establish his sonship, and the duties through which he can maintain and support and educate its life. To this great end and purpose He established

HIS CHURCH.

It must have the authority of divine institution, or it is worthless. It is not an association simply of Christian believers who think alike, a social club of Christian believers, or a moral and intellectual organization, but a living, organic and spiritual body, of which Christ is the Head, the Lawgiver, Guide and Supporter. Resulting from this, His institutes, commands and precepts are the supreme rule of believing and of living. These may not be set aside by individual whim, caprice or opinion, but only by a divine revelation. Failure in obedience breaks the bond, and makes a forfeiture of

living sonship with Him; man's opinion in the matter cannot change this character. The requisite obedience of His authority applies to all things, great or small, where the authority is manifested, and may not be avoided or neglected, for any cause, without sin. The Church He instituted to teach, guide and instruct in His name, and through it men are to be saved by Him. The initiatory act in which they are admitted to its fold and benefits, is the sacrament of Baptism, through which they, born into the world, are re born (regenerated) into God's spiritual kingdom. So when our Lord said, "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God," He declared a *fact*, and established a *duty*. He meant, too, just what He said; He was not trifling with words, or with human souls. But, a man says, "I do not believe that baptism is essential where it may be had; I fail to see any reasonable connection between a little water, and the spiritual life, or my relations to God." But what does this amount to, or what is it worth? It is his *opinion*, but his opinion does not annul the *fact*, or excuse the *duty*. It cannot, in the reasonable nature of things do so. Christ's command is not subject to change. So of the

HOLY COMMUNION,

which is to keep alive, and nurture, through union with Christ, the spiritual life of the soul regenerated; He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," and "except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you." This was not meant for a select few to observe, but for all that look for salvation in Christ's name. It is a distinct command, and He meant just what He said. But one says, "I fail to see any connection between these simple elements of bread and wine, and the Saviour's body and blood, therefore I do not deem it necessary for me to communicate." Christ does not ask you for your *opinion*, but *requires* of you a *duty*. Disobedience is dangerous, even fatal; and through obedience only will come enlightenment and acceptance. Your opinion is—well, just your

OPINION,

and it does not alter at all the *fact* that the command must be obeyed, under rather penalty of the forfeiture of God's grace and guidance. There is no hope for a man so long as he thinks and acts upon the thought that his individual views or opinions alter the facts or nullify the force of God's law. When one asserts that the earth is not round but flat, it does not change the fact that it is round; nor if he maintains that the simple confession that Jesus is the Saviour of man, is all that is necessary to salvation, does it release him from the obligation that obedience to Christ's commands and precepts must exist and be in force as the evidence and result of that confession. What is essential to every one is the reality of *sonship* in

CHRIST,

which brings every thought and act into subjection to Him; this relation and its duties are strongly and touchingly expressed in the opening of the Epistle for next Sunday, the third in Lent, "Be ye followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and given Himself for us."—*The Church Year*.

DANGERS OF THE CHURCH.

THE DANGER OF PRIVILEGE.

Lent is not a time for prophesying smooth things but right things and true. The rest of the year may suffice for gratulations; at this season we may well look at dangers. The most obvious dangers are those of Laodicea—of prosperity.

The abundant gifts bestowed upon the Church bring with them a perpetual danger.

The Catholic system she inherits is not free from danger. Episcopacy itself may at one and the same time be deprived of just authority and externally magnified into an ornamental prelacy. Sacramental worship has been, and it can again be, perverted to superstition. The nobly edifying order of the Christian Year, with its recurring harmonies and contrasts of fast and festival, may degenerate into ceremonial routine. The noblest forms, with the most faultlessly aesthetic rendering, may be made to foster a spirit of semisensuous self-pleasing rather than the spirit of devotion. The Church's wealth in all these things is a continual danger. It is infinitely easier to be proud or vain of one's advantages than to use them well; and unless the Church lives up to the measure of her privileges, she must fall below it. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required"; and "from him who hath not shall be taken away that which he (only) seemeth to have" since he has not appropriated it.

THE DANGER OF INCREASING NUMBERS.

Of the many dangers which attend increase of numbers we need here mention only one. When the crowds gather, one does not always ask, "Who are they that flock like doves to the windows?" nor does one always pause to think why or to what end they are flocking thither. The world worships success; when the Church succeeds, the world worships her; and then, too often, does the Church turn round and worship the world's idol! It might be well sometimes to consider how far the crowd thronging some great temple resembles the "little flock" of one hundred and twenty souls which, to the world's eye, measured the success of our Saviour's personal ministry. If he should ask His Church now, "Where is the flock that was given thee, that beautiful flock?"—that flock to which He said, "Blessed be ye poor!" the flock which was beautiful to Him because it was poor—what would the answer be? It was the marvel of the Incarnation that "although He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor." It was the noblest evidence of the Messiahship that "the poor had the Gospel preached unto them." It was the triumph of His ministry that "the common people heard Him gladly." The victories of the Apostles were like those of their Master; "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble" were called; but then, as before, the love of Christ constrained the poor common people who had more need of the Gospel than anybody else. When it is not so, when the numbers of the Church are swelled, not by the poor, not by the common people, but by the well-to-do, the wealthy and the worldly, the Church is not only in danger of falling—she has fallen already. And the danger of a deeper fall lies still before her—the danger that she may be proud of a "success" which is spiritual bankruptcy!

THE DANGER OF WEALTH.

The danger of wealth anywhere and everywhere are great and manifold. Not that wealth is evil—God forbid! Wealth is God's good gift, but it is good only when it is used in God's way and for God's good uses in this world. Consecrated wealth is a blessing, and it may become a fountain of innumerable blessings. He to whom God gives wealth is honored with a sacred trust. The deference paid to wealth is not therefore wholly irrational; and to a wealthy Christian there ought to be profound significance in the fact that it was to two rich and righteous men that the care of our Saviour's Crucified Body was committed, and in the new-made tomb of one of them that it was laid.

Wealth is power; it is a power in the Church as well as in the world; but when it has the same power in the Church as in the world, that is to say, the power to buy and