

Correspondence.

FOR THE CHURCH TIMES.

LIBERALITY OF THE CHURCH.

It is, oftentimes, painful to discover the ignorance and liberal feeling which exist in the minds of many persons towards our beloved Church. They think of her as intolerant, and they will speak of her Ministers and the members of her Communion, as exclusive and uncharitable. To Churchmen they attribute the selfish opinion of thinking that there is no other church; and so other body of christians besides themselves, and hence, they conclude that we expect to meet none hereafter in the kingdom of God above, but those of our own denomination. Should there be one such narrow minded Churchman in our body, his views and his opinions are not to be taken as the religious standard of the Church. By such an uncharitable opinion he clearly manifests his ignorance of the sentiments and teaching of his Prayer Book, and evidences that he has neither read nor heard aright those noble and heavenly strains, which are offered up by the whole body of the Church throughout the world every Lord's day. Those, too, who take the opinion of such members of the Church, will necessarily do us a very great injustice; and except they examine for themselves the truths contained in our public standard, they will continue to have their minds filled with prejudice, and never come to a right knowledge of the truth.

According to the sentiments and doctrines contained in the Prayer Book, I maintain that neither the Ministers nor the Members of the Church can justly entertain the narrow views and exclusive doctrines attributed to them. Our Church is liberal and charitable towards those who differ from her. She takes a comprehensive view of Christ's "household the Church", and embraces all mankind in her supplications at the throne of Grace. She looks not only to the spiritual welfare of her own members, but offers up her solemn petitions for that of others also. She considers all true Christians as drinking into one spirit, and enjoying that "Communion of Saints" which in the end will prove that there is but one "Lord and one God, and Father of us all"; and which will assemble us into one fold, under "one shepherd."

To correct the wrong opinion of those who think uncharitable, I will place before them some of the sentiments contained in the daily services of the Church. They are not passages from the holy scriptures, which abound in the Prayer Book, but they are words and sentiments uttered by the Church herself. Such extracts since they agree with the tenor of God's word, must convince all who will read them that are the views of the Church, and what were the opinions of her chief members who compiled the Book of Common Prayer.

That beautiful and scriptural piece of composition Te Deum Laudamus, introduced into the worship of the Sanctuary as early as the fifth century, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is acknowledged, and the same work and offices of the Triune God are proclaimed. There the Church teaches her members to look upon others as the followers of Christ, and all who are in him as his true disciples. She there declares "When He hath overcome the sharpness of death opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." In words the Church excludes none who are born upon earth; she considers all such as christians, and as having a right to the benefits of Christ's death; and says also in the same place to the Lord Jesus in words, "Help thy servants whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood."

In the Litany the most charitable feeling is displayed, and the very spirit of her great spiritual head extended for every one in whatever state or condition may be placed. She thus beseeches God to keep the Magistrates; to bless and keep the people; to comfort the weak hearted; to succour all that are in danger, necessity or tribulation; God is besought in behalf of "all that travel by water; for all sick persons, for young children, prisoners and captives, and for all that are oppressed." When such unbounded libel and good will are expressed, it is difficult to suppose how the charge of bigotry or uncharitableness is laid at our door; and more especially so, when in our very Litany we are taught to pray God to keep us from "all uncharitableness." The best perhaps for such accusations is prescribed in the Litany, "forgive our enemies, persecutors."

The passages already quoted from the Prayer Book may be called the religious sentiments of the Church. They exhibit the aspirations of her heavenly mind for the welfare both temporal and spiritual of the whole half of our people, or our sect, or our nation; but go up to the throne of Grace for blessings upon all persons without distinction of name or creed. They embrace all the people of God, and are uttered in behalf of "all men". This proves that the Church, as well as her divine Head, will have all men to be saved; and that she entertains the same mind which was in Christ her Lord, that the "true worshippers are they who worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

If we examine the doctrines contained in the daily prayers of our Divine Service, we shall see the same charitable and heavenly sentiments displayed. This shows the unity of thought, and the harmony of the doctrines that run through the Prayer Book. It nowhere contradicts itself; but expressions used in one part will frequently explain the meaning of the same words contained in another part. By comparing the religious sentiments contained in the Lauds and Anticles, with the doctrines embodied in the prayers, we shall discover that they perfectly coincide. In the prayer for "All conditions of Men" we are taught to "pray for the good estate of the Catholic Church." By the Christ throughout the world. This Catholic Church must embrace christians of various opinions and of various creeds. It must necessarily include all true believers, whatever be their sectarian names or their mode of worship. That this is the idea to be gathered from the expression, we infer from the unlimited and liberal assertions contained in another part of this prayer, which is that "all who profess and call themselves christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace and in righteousness of life."

In the collect for 5th Sunday after Epiphany, supplication is made that God's "Church and household" may be "kept in his true religion": and that "they who do lean only upon the hope of his heavenly grace may evermore be defended." Those who "lean only upon the hope of His heavenly grace" are not surely confined to one body of christians, and only found in one Church? The secret ones of the Lord are scattered throughout the world, and can be known only to him who seeth the heart. The collect for 3d Sunday after Easter, which is supposed with many others to have been composed by St. Ambrose, contains this sentiment: "Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession." The same charitable doctrine is expressed likewise in the collect for 18th Sunday after Trinity: "Lord, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil."

If at any time the Church would show herself charitable, and manifest a good will towards all, it would certainly be when she gathers her children around the table of their common Lord. And we rejoice to find that in the prayer for the "whole state of Christ's Church, Militant on earth," this liberal feeling towards all others is exhibited, the contrast being rendered all the greater by the exception made in favour of those participants give thy heavenly grace, and especially to this congregation here present." Let us turn to her more mournful and pathetic office for the burial of the dead, and we shall still find the same charitable doctrines carried by her into the world unseen. In one of the prayers there used we beseech God to grant "that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss both in body and soul in thy eternal and everlasting glory."

Such are the religious and liberal sentiments entertained by our Church; and which she endeavours to instil into the minds of all her children. From the way in which she expresses herself in the words of her truly scriptural prayers, it is plain that she confesses that Christ the Lord has other sheep which are not of this fold. She certainly recognizes other believers as being the disciples of the Lord Jesus, and plainly confesses that "whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish."

But while she is thus liberal and charitable towards all, and prays for their spiritual well being, her members cannot but feel that they have good reasons for preferring to receive the rites and ordinances of religion at the hands of her duly appointed ministers. As Churchmen we would certainly choose as preferable to all others our mode of public worship; our manner of

administering the holy Sacraments; and our ordination to the ministry. And until a more scriptural way can be pointed out let every member of the Church hold fast the form of sound words contained in the Prayer Book; while at the same time they imbibe the spirit of Charity it entertains; and exercise that charity freely towards all others who differ from them. November, 1853.

FOR THE CHURCH TIMES.

"Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together." AMONG the many discouragements against which a Minister has to contend in the performance of his duties, none perhaps is greater than to see his people neglect his ministrations. So long as they continue to do this there is very little hope of doing them much good. They remove themselves from one of those essential means of grace committed to the servant of Christ, by which he is to win souls to God. They exclude themselves from the word preached, whereby they may be made wise unto salvation; and they almost effectually deprive themselves, by their negligence, of one of the best means of obtaining the precious gift of faith. By the indulgence of such negligence in their more public duties, we may conclude, without much fear of judging severely, that their private and family duties are neglected also. If the former were conscientiously discharged, the latter we might feel assured, would not be wholly omitted. The true worship and service of God may be compared to a chain complete in every link; and so closely united and dependent upon each other, that neglect of one known duty is as the breaking of a link, and then the whole chain becomes useless. To offend in one point makes the sinner wholly guilty in the sight of God. And likewise to neglect one important duty renders a man wholly culpable, and is a certain indication that he is equally indifferent in other religious duties. For persons to neglect the assembling of themselves together to hear the word of God, is then the sure way to render the mind obtuse to the effects of private admonitions; such conduct places them beyond the influence of a necessary means of grace, and by so doing they resist the strivings of the Holy Spirit, they refuse to meet God in one of those ways by which he promises to bless them! And they so deaden the religious susceptibilities of the soul, that all the exhortations of the man of God become useless. With sorrow of heart, and with deep concern for their deathless souls, he sees those for whom his bowels of mercies are enlarged, hopelessly sinking into the grave of the impenitent and unbelieving. Their miserable end is indeed a source of unfeigned grief to his mind. He hoped, under God, to have plucked them as brands from the burning; his desire was to win them to Christ; and his fondly cherished expectation was to have them, at the last great day as the seals of his ministry, so that he might present them to God as the spiritual children whom He gave him. But instead of this anticipated happiness, he will be raised up as a condemning witness against them, to see them standing on the left hand of their Judge, and driven away for ever from his presence into outer darkness.

The following striking incident may prove a salutary warning to those who neglect the sanctuary of God, and the preaching of his word. It must convince them that God knows all their ways and their thoughts towards Him. It also proves with what displeasure He must look upon their negligence. It shows clearly that He approves and sanctions the efforts used by his faithful ministers, and that their very exhortations and warnings will one day take hold of the sinner; and that God will cause him to realize the full force of those godly exhortations, which he too often neglects and despises.

The pious Fletcher once mildly and affectionately expostulated with one of his congregation who always refused to hear him preach; and who would not even enter the Church. Failing to make any impression on the man, he left him with those solemn words, 'I am clear of your blood! henceforth it is on your own head; you will not come to Church on your legs; prepare to come upon your neighbours' shoulders.' This interview took place in the Church-yard after the burial of a corpse was over, which the young man had attended. From that time his health failed, and he rapidly wasted away. Mr. Fletcher visited him in his sickness. At the end of three months he was brought to the Church on his neighbours' shoulders, and buried on the spot on which he stood while listening to the expostulations of the man of God. The narrative says, Mr. Fletcher expressed a wish rather than a hope, that God may have made him a subject of saving grace in his last moments.

Manchester, November, 1853.