

From The Church Herald.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH—
OR A POPULAR OBJECTION
ANSWERED.

It is thought by many that the system of the Church is a mere formalism, that we substitute rites and ceremonies for inward grace that we rely upon them, and think, when we have recourse to them, that merely to attend Service, to observe Fast-days and Saint's-days—this, it is supposed, we regard as the sum of religion. Were these our views, it would be almost idle to assail them; for what could be more absurd than such teachings? Errors so transparent, so obvious, could hardly be mistaken for truth.

But these are not our views, nor are they even a tolerable caricature of them, as we shall presently see. It answers a purpose to make such statements. Many take such representations for fact, and are thereby prejudiced, when otherwise they would admit and cling to the beauty, depth, spirituality, and practicalness of Church-teaching and order, were they once suffered to behold the Church as she really is, and more especially, were they to drink from her pure and deep fountains.

Placing then, on the one hand, the sketch of what we believe and do, which has just been given, let us place, on the other, a sketch of what we really hold, that our readers may have the means of viewing both in contrast.

It is our firm belief that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The very essence of this holiness we maintain to be "the mind of Christ formed in us." We regard the formation of the Christ-like mind as a growth, a daily renewal of our sinful nature through the inbibing of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while we ourselves, watchfully, earnestly, strenuously co-operate with them. We believe, moreover, that our out-life must not only correspond to our inward, but so express and embody it, that our lives shall be "fruits of the spirit," manifesting in their course true faith and love towards God and man; or, if we be allowed to vary the illustration, webs woven of words and deeds of which the very substance is holiness. We regard the Christian as but a stranger and pilgrim here, so endeavoring to "pass through things temporal, that he finally lose not the things eternal;" a "casting away the works of darkness, and putting on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life * * that in the last day he may rise to the life immortal; in short, as living to purify himself from sin, and prepare himself for the presence of God, by a holy obedience flowing from divine grace, which works to change, and changes to transform our whole nature. Our prayer is, in the beautiful and solemn words of the Church, words clear and impressive as they are beautiful; "Grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Such is the teaching of our Church, and the sum of it is this:—

First, we must be regenerate, and made children of God through adoption and grace; in other words, we must receive God's Spirit, the reception of which into the soul, as leaven into a mass of meal, we call regeneration. Second, we must be daily renewed, that is, freed from sin, and created anew in Christ, by the daily working of this same spirit in leavening our natures, and subjecting them to its own laws; and Third, our lives must be an embodying of what we are thus inwardly made, that as by the "holy inspiration" of God, we are enabled to "think those things that are good," so by this "merciful guiding we may preform the same."

Is this to substitute rites and ceremonies for inward grace? Is this to rely upon them apart from God's grace, and imagine, when we have recourse to them, that no more is required? Is this to regard Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Fast-days, and Saint's-days, as the whole of religion? What are such assertions but distortions and misrepresentations of what the Church firmly believes and constantly teaches? They may indeed serve a purpose, and prejudice generous and well-meaning minds against the Church but they cannot serve this purpose long. The truth must prevail. It will flash forth in its heavenly brightness and power.

It will make its way into and light up the hearts and intellects of men.

If there be any of our readers who belong not to our own Church, they can now see what we really hold, and how different it is from what we are so often represented as holding. And if they have entertained objections on this ground, their candour and good sense will discover that so far such objections are groundless. The religion of the Church is deeply spiritual, and flows forth from within, as it were molten gold, into the Christian's words and deeds as into moulds.

But is not great stress laid upon Sacraments, on the Sunday service, on the keeping of Fast-days, and Saint's-days, on daily prayer? Doubtless, Sacraments are of Christ's own institution? Has He made any thing without bestowing upon it efficacy? Behold nature in her golden round, and on what has He laid His hand without marking it with His wisdom, and bestowing upon it some gift? Has He not pointed to the water-and-spirit birth? Has He not said, "my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed?"

Divine service has its peculiar blessing. Has not Christ said, "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them?" Are not these the Almighty's words, "In all places where I shall record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee?" Did not the Apostles and their converts assemble daily in the temple? Did not Christ teach "daily in the temple?" Wherein did He neglect the prescribed daily worship of His house? Do not his acts and the acts of His Apostles speak more forcibly than words? They are eloquent voices ever in our ears, and shining examples ever before our eyes. Shall we be wrong if we hear and imitate?

Again. Did not Christ prescribe fasting and prayer? Did he not observe the Feasts and Fasts of the Jewish Church? Are we wrong for having regular stated times of fasting and prayer? and also of solemn joy and thanksgiving for our manifold blessings? Is regularity in our great duties to be set aside? Are we in error while treading in Christ's steps? Do His steps lead to the hollow and formal?

The rites and observances, now mentioned, we justly prize as means of inward holiness, as channels of grace. We do not view them as religion itself. We do not put them in place of inward holiness, of daily renewal, but regard them as we have just remarked, as hallowed means thereto. We have recourse to them in obedience to God, in imitation of Christ; and having recourse to them in faith, in humility, in earnestness of heart, in sorrow for sin, shall we receive no blessing? Will no spiritual, refreshing, healing influence flow through them as channels into our souls? Have God's promises failed? Has He spoken, and yet cannot perform? How can we look upon His Sacraments lightly? What right have we to separate the inward grace from the outward form? Shall we, in our wisdom, endeavour to make the rivers flow, but not in channels? Shall we, to improve man's earthly condition separate the soul from the body, its dwelling place? Shall we preserve the life of the tree by severing it from the wood in which it lives? By God's own hand have the inward and outward been united. Is it ours to wrench them asunder?

Thus, while we value the institutions of God, we do not misplace them. We endeavour to use them as He directs. They but little understand our system, who suppose that we regard the form and not the life, the outward act, and not the inward state of faith and love. Were we to rest in the sacraments as ends, our error would indeed be grievous. Were we to put partaking of them for holiness of heart and life, we would be most culpable? If we imagined that they would act as charms independent of fitness in the receiver, our teaching would be perilous. But though we are often said, after this manner to regard them, yet nothing is farther from our thoughts or more abhorrent to our feelings. We consider Holy Communion, for example, as a means of grace, in order that our lives may be more strict and holy. Holiness of heart and life is the very end to which it looks. If we partake of it unworthily, so far from being benefited, we eat and drink our own condemnation.

So much in illustration of the Church. Let her teaching be viewed, not in caricature, but

just as it stands, simple, beautiful, heart-stirring, deep, and who will not admire, and admiring love, and loving embrace, what so comes home to our better nature, and meets all our spiritual wants?

NIEBUHR.

"A remarkable fact in the experience of Niebuhr, the German infidel historian, is worth a serious consideration. Niebuhr was a prince among historians, and equally so among skeptics. He tried what is called the rational, or doubting system, and had experience of its withering result. Speaking of the education of his son, he says, that he means his boy shall know the old poets, and shall take the gods and heroes for historical beings, but shall be instructed at the same time that the ancients had only an imperfect knowledge of the true God, and that these gods were overthrown when Christ came into the world. 'He shall believe in the letter of the Old and New Testaments, and I shall nurture in him from his infancy a firm faith in all that I have lost, or feel uncertain about.'

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