

# The Church Guardian,

A Weekly Newspaper published in the interests of the  
Church of England.

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## LENT.

### V.—REPENTANCE.

FROM the just wrath of God against sin, and from the despair we must naturally feel when contemplating the long roll of our transgressions, how shall we escape? Is there no deliverance from the guilt and the tyranny of sin? "What must I do to be saved?" The Answer of God's Word is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." A simple answer, truly, and yet not simple. The difficulty is to know when we have believed, what constitutes belief. It is very clear that a mere formal assent of the mind to the great Facts of Christ's Life and Death will not be sufficient. Thousands thus believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet have no peace in believing. This passage must be interpreted by others. Let us take one, and interpret by its means, "Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out."

#### I.—WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

1. A man on review of his past life discovers that he has been living in gross sin and negligence. He has practically forgotten God. In one of those ways which a merciful God uses to bring men to a better mind, he has been suddenly brought face to face with his sins. He is smitten to the very ground. He agonizes in an almost overwhelming despair. The remembrance of one fearful sin, or a succession of sins, hangs like a black cloud over the past, and the excuses which served so long to palliate them have disappeared. Utter misery and unhappiness follow. Is that repentance? Nay, Judas felt thus. It was Remorse, not Repentance. And it drove him to suicide.

2. Another finds he has made a mistake. Honesty is, after all, the best policy. Fraud and dishonesty do not thrive. Robbery of the public purse or of widows and orphans does not pay. The world finds out these things, and the respectable world, guilty itself, is very hard on discovered sin. This sinner, then, is angry and vexed at himself for having been so foolish and blind. He suffers a good deal of humiliation, and his exposure causes him severe pain. Is this Repentance? Nay, it is nothing more than disappointment and annoyance at being found out. It was the feeling of Simon Magus; mere vexation at being detected.

3. Upon a third comes some heavy chastisement of God. Not upon others but upon himself. Men can generally bear with fortitude an accumulation of woes, as long as others are the sufferers. But now God touches the sinner himself. A fever deprives him of all strength, or an incurable

disease, involving long and distressing suffering. He feels, too, that his own sin and folly has caused it. God's broken laws have avenged themselves. He thinks of his folly, and bewails his lost pleasures, and regrets his wasted health, and he says "I would go on in reckless wickedness, and now I have lost everything that makes life endurable." Is that Repentance? Nay, that is the sorrow of Esau, who "found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

4. These feelings all have their foundation in self. The object of true repentance is not self but God. There may be sorrow and dissatisfaction with self; but repentance comes from sorrow at having offended God. Sin grieves a just and holy God. No matter whether it is known or not. No matter whether it is punished or not. Many sins the world does not account sins; many sins it never knows. The question is not whether magistrates have cognizance of it, or the law punishes it, or society turns up its eyes and hands in holy horror of it; it is whether the sin has offended against the purity and holiness of God, who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Do I feel that I have sinned against the yearning love of God? Does He who longs for my salvation, who has done all that Omnipotence can do to save me, turn His face from me because He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Does my heart sink within me when I reflect how I have grieved a loving God, sacrificed my Saviour afresh and put Him to an open shame? I see Him dying a shameful death. I am forced to confess, "This is my doing. It was my sins that made this necessary." "O by Thine agony and bloody sweat, by Thy Cross and passion, good Lord, deliver me."

II. This is true repentance. Love is its key-stone, and therefore this repentance projects itself into the future. It will strive to walk and please God. A man may love God and yet be overcome by temptation; but no one can have repentance unless he love God. Peter, in cowardly fear, denied his Lord; but Peter's repentance was easy. He did love his Lord. When he saw what he had done, when he saw the look of love, he wept bitterly, and the intensity of his plea, "Thou knowest that I love Thee," tells what he had suffered.

Here, then, lies the secret. The man of intellect is convinced that certain things are wrong. He hears this and assents to it. He joins in Church services, repeats the heart-breaking strains of the Litany, unites in hymns and psalms of most piteous petition for mercy; yet he feels not a word, he sheds no tear; his pulse throbs with no emotion as he watches the Lord in His Agony, His Cross, His Death. His sins have not humiliated him to the dust. Not in the least; and why? He has no love!

The tradesman knows he should not use false weights or drive hard bargains. He works very hard during Lent—at making money; but he comes to church on Sunday, and with unctuous self-complacency confesses himself a miserable sinner. But does he really mean a word he says? No; he has no love!

The man of the world goes through life enjoying it as much as he can. To him the penitential language of the Church is simply a matter of toleration. He may go to an Ash Wednesday service and condescend to join in the responses and to kindly listen to the plaintive hymn. Sin to him is an evil—in the abstract. But does he realize his share in it? Has he done anything to get rid of it? There his sins are—sins of boyhood, youth-

hood, school life, college life, married life. But he has no grief, no sorrow. He is happy and jovial. He will allow that the poor have vices, but for his own he has no thought. He would not deny the truths of the Gospel, or despise religion. But he thinks that his gentlemanly assent to the statements of the Bible and the Church is sufficient for him. But there is not a shred of Repentance in this. For there is no Love for God. The only love he is capable of is love for self. The heartless woman of fashion, the votary of worldliness, lives and dies in the same cold, stony, well-bred listlessness to divine things, with no higher aspiration than the fit of a dress or the cut of a bonnet; for to feel deeply about religion or to shew an anxiety about the soul would be vulgar. Oh when will dying souls look to the Cross of Christ?

"But how can I love God, when I cannot feel thus?" Ah! kneel in self-abasement before the scene of His Death. WHAT MADE HIM SUFFER so? Love for you! You were one of His lost souls, whom He loved so much that He sacrificed Himself to save you! Go through His agony and mark with streaming eyes each step of that cruel path, each drop that fell from that bloodstained brow, each sigh that lacerated that sacred Heart! YOUR SIN DID IT! Each nail you drove home. Each blood-drop you caused. He looked on you as He hung there slowly giving up His priceless Life, and for your transgressions He was bruised. Do not talk about your sins, or advertize your sorrow. Begin by the sight of His so great love, and then only, by the work of His Spirit following His Word, may you be led to the beginnings of love for Him. Throw yourself at His feet in a passionate cry of penitence, and say as you confess your sins and condemn yourself in His sight, "This I do because I love Thee." I will love Thee O Saviour, Whose love was so great for me.

And then you will have joy. A peace which the world cannot give will come over your soul. You will see the simplicity of Gospel Truth; you will see that there is only the one condition for God's mercy, and you will fulfil it eagerly. To your joy and comfort the burden of the past will roll off; you will be reconciled to God; your sins are gone forever.

"THERE IS JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ANGELS OF GOD OVER ONE SINNER THAT REPENTETH!"

## THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH.

THIS is a subject which, it must be admitted, does not receive the attention that it deserves. Indeed, so neglectful or forgetful have been those whose duty it has been to make Church people and others acquainted with the progress and condition of the Church, that but very few are aware of her altogether remarkable advance within the last twenty or thirty years, both in England and the Colonies, as well as the United States. If we go back as a starting point to the year 1850, and look at what has been accomplished since, the figures will indeed surprise those who have perhaps been led astray by the small results of the work in their own immediate neighbourhood, or who have contrasted what they know of their own Church with the enthusiastic utterances of the religious press and pulpit of other religious bodies respecting their work and progress. It may safely be affirmed that no religious body is making the progress which the Church of England and the bodies in communion with her are showing, both in numbers, influence and Spiritual life at the present time; and that no Christian body can at all ap-