

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE WILL.

How, then, is the will to be emancipated and strengthened? I am not now speaking of prudential rules and humble efforts, indispensable though these are. I am not just yet referring to sacramental means of grace, but of ultimate Divine principles. And I answer that the strengthening of the will comes (1) from the sympathy of Christ; (2) from the power of the indwelling Spirit.

(1.) The strengthening of our will comes from the sympathy of Christ.

In this we have a law of our human nature perfected. When our will needs an accession of strength, we find such accession by bringing it to a higher will. And the higher and purer that other will may be, with the stronger grasp will it lay hold upon our sinking resolutions. Some of us have fallen. We feel, as the intolerable shame flames in our face when we are alone, that we must tell it to some one or die. To whom, in such a case, would he go? To a man of the world, with the exquisite polish of her finished scorn? No; but to the holiest and most Christ-like spirit you could find, instinctively sure that the sympathy will be in proportion to the purity, and that the measure of purity will be the measure of capacity to help us. In the case of men like these (I will mention Pusey and Arnold) our will is ennobled by their nobility, purified by their purity, strengthened by their strength.

In this way the weakness of our will finds its support in the sympathy of Christ. The meaning of our prayer to Him is—"Thou upon whose perfect will the approach of temptation could no more leave a blot than the shadow of a cloud can leave a stain upon the snow, help me by Thy sympathy, which is boundless just because Thy purity is boundless. Thou Who art mighty to save, take this weak will of mine. Lift it up, and make it strong with the enfolding of Thine everlasting strength. Set me upon the Rock which is higher than I. I may tremble upon the Rock; the Rock will never tremble under me."

(2.) The strengthening of our will further comes from the inward gift of the Spirit, that great gift of the new covenant. "I will put My law in their minds, and write it in their hearts."

In those whose will Christ emancipates, there is a supernatural power, conforming the man to the law, not dispensing him from it. To use the fine comparison of a great old Cambridge Platonist, it is as if we suppose an instrument, where there is no longer an outward hand drawing forth melodious sounds from the strings, but the soul of music incorporates itself with the instrument, and lives along the chords.

Such, then, are the ultimate principles to which the Gospel points us for the strengthening of the enfeebled will—the sympathy of Christ, and the power of the indwelling Spirit.

(3.) And now we are led to see from all this the fitness and reasonableness of the view entertained by the Church of the reality of grace in sacraments and ordinances.

Not many days since an earnestly written tract was placed in my hands. It dwelt upon the weakness of the will, upon the feebleness of all resolutions, and especially of young resolutions. And it enlarged with impassioned energy upon the folly, indeed the wickedness, both of the Baptismal vows and of the Confirmation question and answer. Yes! foolish and wicked perhaps, if Baptism and Confirmation are but signs and forms. But if to the laying on even of sinful hands like these be annexed a gift of the Spirit; if each young soldier of Christ goes forth to the battle confirmed, not by

his own resolution, not by himself, but by the Holy Ghost acting through His ordinance—not foolish, not sinful, but wise and holy.

And so still more with Holy Communion. It is a sacrament—i.e., not only a picture of grace, but a channel of grace. It not only signifies grace, but conveys and confers it. In this we have a simple truth which it is necessary to enforce now, not only for those who reduce the sacrament to a mere outward sign, but for others also. There are those possibly for whom the Holy Communion has more of the beauty of a divine poem, of the mystery of an august commemorative sacrifice (I deny neither the one or the other); more of the romance of religion than of the reality of grace; more of the self-will that asks for a rapture than of the conscious weakness that seeks for a help. Again, the case of the agnostic communicant has lately been pleaded by one of the most delicate and enchanting hands that ever held the pen of English romance. The thoughtful and imaginative agnostic, it is urged, may be in complete inward sympathy with the great sacramental principle by which all nature is pervaded. The perception of "sunshine on the grass" is but the fleeting perception of a momentary phenomenon. But the sunshine and the grass of memory converts the sunshine and the grass before us into a tenderer and lovelier thing; and thus becomes a very sacrament, the "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." And therefore this principle, underlying all life, is concentrated in the bread and wine upon the altar; the ceremonial before which ages have bowed; the right which the agnostic, born of Christian parents, has received with smiles and tears, with the loved and lost. What matter if the dogma has been dissolved by the solvents of death—if his faith have faded away in the fierce sunlight of reason? What matter if the fact which is behind the ceremonial be baseless legend; if He Who is the Life of the sacrament—who, as Christians believe, ever offers in truth behind the veil that which the Church offers in sign and symbol here below—be really existent or not? The rapt elevation is almost the same in one case as the other; the recollections as pathetically tender; the consequent purification and profit very much the same. Indeed, this conception of the sacrament pervades the writer's noble and lofty romance. What manner of recollections does Inglesant bear about of that memorable communion with Nicholas Ferrar at Little Gidding? The sense of rapture; of a figure, divine and gracious, upon the pane; of bowed forms; of the misty autumn sunlight and sweeping autumn wind; and of one fair face. Surely it is the same view of prayer which makes another celebrated writer say in representing one habitually fraudulent who kept up still the habit of devotion, that "it is a mistake to suppose that prayer is always candid, or goes to the root of action." The prayer and the sacrament which are not based upon reality will become unreal too. They will bring with them infinite possibilities of profanity and superstition. Unless Christ lives, they cannot live. Unless Christ helps, they cannot help. But when we believe that He helps, the distinction between the two is this—in the prayer, I put my hand in Christ's; in the Sacrament, Christ puts His hand in mine.

Let us, then, turn to the sympathy of Christ, and pray for the indwelling of His Spirit, that our wills may be strengthened and our resolutions braced. Let us seek the grace which is given in the holy sacrament.—The Lord Bishop of Derry.

When you renew your subscription, try to send at least one new name. Two dollars will pay your subscription for a year, and send the paper one year to a new subscriber.

A CONFIDENTIAL LETTER.

One of the Rectors in the Diocese of Chicago, sent the following letter to each one of the confirmed members of his parish just before Lent of last year, and we think it well worthy of publication.

"I am deeply anxious that this season of Lent and especially the mission services of Friday evenings, shall be of value to the confirmed members of our Church. As one of that number, will you kindly receive this as a personal letter from your Pastor, reading it thoughtfully? You will readily admit that I can have no other end in view than your own good.

"It is my purpose to hold a service which will aim to be a REUNION of all the confirmed members of St. — Church, on the evening of Good Friday, April 23. It will be an occasion of welcome to those who shall have been confirmed at the visit of our Bishop shortly before; a devotional preparation for the Holy Communion of Easter Day, and I hope, also, a means of the Church, whether now actual communicants or not. I send you this kindly admonition thus early in Lent that you may have this service and the Easter Communion in view—especially those of you who are painfully conscious that a work must be done in your hearts and a reformation effected in your lives before you are worthy to come before your God at His Altar. That is what Lent is for.

Many of you who will receive this are not only confirmed members of Christ's Church, but faithful communicants. I know that I shall see you at the altar-rail on every first Sunday in the month unless unavoidably kept away. Among your number are not a few who delight to come to the quiet and helpful early Communion of the Advent and Lenten seasons. You are the life of our parish, the strength of your Pastor in weary hours of discouragement, his ready and cheerful helpers in every good work. May this Lenten season be to all such a joy and a blessing.

"Others to whom this will come know that they have been remiss and neglectful. They are occasional communicants. You are present once, twice, perhaps half a dozen times in the whole year. Some of you I know to be actually hindered by cause beyond your control. Most of you are not thus hindered—though I am afraid you try to persuade yourselves that you are. You give this reason and that, when I speak to you of your often absence from our services; but you know in the depths of your soul, and I know, that most of these reasons are really a sham! You know in the depths of your heart that if you were in downright earnest, if you longed to go, you would find a way! You know that you do find a way when business or pleasure calls. Deal honestly with yourselves. Tell your excuses to God on your knees in prayer, and see your conscience tells you in return that they are valid—such as God will accept! Lent is the time for self-examination. Make it real. Find out the naked truth about yourself. I will tell you what I think you will find—religious indifference. Well what will you do to overcome it? This Lenten season will tell you. Its spirit, duties, frequent week-day services, are all meant to help you 'awake out of sleep.' Will you heed its call—or will you sleep on?

"And now we have another class in this parish—so large that I assure you, brethren, as before God it makes my heart shudder when I read over their names on the parish register. Who are they? The confirmed who are not communicants. With some of you, it is years since you approached your Lord's table. It is so long since you stood in God's presence and took the solemn vows of confirmation that the event is almost forgotten. Do you think that