

THE STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH.

A Sermon preached in Westminster Abbey, on the Festival of St. Simon and St. Jude, at the consecration of Dr. John Wordsworth as Lord Bishop of Sarum.

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"Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion."
—Isaiah iii. 1.

This is the Divine answer to the cry of the martyr Church, as she calleth upon God out of the deep of sorrow and anxiety, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old." The Lord needs no awakening. He that keepeth Israel slumbers not, nor sleeps. It is thou, O Church of the living God, thou who canst have righteousness and strength in Him; it is thou that needest the awakening, that thou mayest know thyself to be strong in the Lord, and mayest be clad with the garments of holiness and beauty!

Still, dear brethren, as in the time long past, the voice of God arouses those who are His—that Church which is His body, and which He purchased with His own blood—that Church for which He gave Himself, that He might "cleans it by the washing of water with the word," and might make its members, both sacramentally and spiritually, His own. The Lord's voice cried unto His Church, "Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon." The dust is for the world, not for thee: "Shake thyself from the dust." There is no throne for the world, only final abasement; but for thee, King's daughter as thou art, there is a glorious high throne; "Arise and sit down, O Jerusalem."

And yet, be it far from us to become like "the men settled upon their lees." In rest we shall be saved, but we must first return to our Saviour. "In quietness and in confidence shall be our strength;" only we must be thoroughly awake to our danger, thoroughly conscious of our sin, thoroughly zealous for our work. It is absolutely necessary for the Church, and for us who belong to her, to be on the watch tower, waiting for the reply of the watchman, whatever it may be.

We do not know for certain that it is the Holy Ghost Who is witnessing in every city and village that bonds and afflictions abide the English Church. It may be so; but it is difficult to believe that the jubilee of our great and glorious Queen will be celebrated with a confiscation infinitely worse than that perpetrated by Henry VIII. We can hardly bring ourselves to think that this nineteenth century, of all others—the century of wealth and luxury—the century which, in England at least, shines forth with liberty and light and love—should close with the robbery of the poor man's Church, of the clergyman's diminishing tithe, of the self-sacrificing Saviour's due. It is well-nigh incredible that the free-will offerings of many generations—"down to the last sovereign" brought by the self-denial of the poor—should be taken away, or even supposed liable to be taken away, from the treasury of God, for the sake of the relief of the ratepayers, and on the plea of an ideal equality, never to be realized here, while actual brotherhood is shared by all who abide in "the household of faith," and by all who return to it. These things may seem to us impossible, but they form part of the threatening language which disturbs the Church. For the members of the Church know that they are also citizens, and they dread the downfall of a country which forsakes God. They dread the terrible utterance which is said to have been heard in the courts of apostate Zion, "Let us depart hence." They know that to rob God and call it liberty

is to shake the foundation both of religion and of property, and their British and Christian instincts alike revolt from this. At present they belong to Christ, both as citizens and as Churchmen. The Church is His, and so is the State, for He has given the Church to it. What will the country be, apart from the recognition of Christ crucified? How will the Church have failed, if her ministrations are no longer allowed to reach over the whole country, jurisdiction being given by the civil power, not by the spiritual? If our kings are no longer to be the nursing fathers of the Church, nor our queens her nursing mothers, where will be the security of the crown, the "all England" character of the clergy, the guarantee for the doctrine and discipline of the Christ, as this Church and Realm hath received the same? And so it is for both that our prayer must go up, for both that our hearts must be grave. Here, in this holy and right royal place—so eloquent of Kings and of their King—so full of memorials of England's great ones, so venerable with the dust of the sleeping saints—this Abbey where our Queen was crowned, and our Bishops are consecrated—we may well take up (there is a fitness in it to-day) the word of our poet-philosopher:—

Hail to the State of England! And conjoin
With this a salutation as devout
Made to the spiritual Fabric of her Church;
Founded in truth; by blood of Martyrdom
Cemented; by the hands of Wisdom reared
In beauty of holiness, with ordered pomp,
Decent and unreprieved. The voice that greets
The majesty of both, shall pray for both;
That, mutually protected and sustained,
They may endure long as the sea surrounds
This favored land, or sunshine warms her soil.

But, whatever be the issue, we cannot forecast it. The past yields us no experience of the worst. The dismal silencing of the bells has not been known since the Interdict of 1208. The aspect of the present shifts from week to week. The future, though it is so close, is hidden from us. We cannot tell what is in store for the Church—deep poverty, or greater privileges than ever, in the confidence of the people—joyful sorrow, or more serious responsibility.

But of this we should be well assured—that the future welfare, the lasting freedom, of this old land depend upon the attitude of the Church, not upon her fortune or misfortune, or, as we should say, upon her prosperity or adversity, but upon her attitude and her work; in other words, upon the way in which the Church responds to the bidding of the Almighty, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion."

May one, least worthy to be heard, venture on a word of boldness concerning those who are over us in the Lord, and to the brother priest who joins their company this day?

It is in such crises as this that we look to our Fathers in God to lead us on, to be awake and strong in Christ. They represent us. The Church is summed up in them.

We cannot read the words of our Ascended Lord to the angels of the seven Churches—as opened out to us by one whom all of us, probably, recall in this minster and this service—without observing how remarkably the Bishop of each Church is identified with, rebuked, or commended as responsible for, the Church over which he presides. And so when the evangelical prophet calls, not only to the Zion of his day, but also across the ages, to these last times, to the Church which rests upon our Lord, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength," the charge applies to the chief pastor as well as to his diocese, to every Bishop of ours, and to us whom they rule in the Church. In the "good work" to which these are called we magnify their office, remembering that their service is very great for us, very perilous for themselves. In their hearts the solemn voice is sounding, as

if it were addressed only to them, "Put on thy strength."

Let not the Bishop fear, least, on the one hand, he should be taking too much upon him, by being in this sense the *persona ecclesiae*; for God has made him so; it is his office; he bears the Church upon his heart; his work is all for her Lord and Head; there is not a rule of hers which is not his; nor a son or daughter of hers but is represented by him on the cathedral throne, and before the holy altar, and in the secret chamber of lonely intercession.

Nor let him, on the other hand, think for a moment that he is unsupported, or really alone, in upholding the banner of the Cross. He, of all men, he, a governor of Judah, can surely say, when he is trying to be strong and true himself, "The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of Hosts their God." (Zech. xii. 5). What a wonderful stay it is, for instance, to the Bishop of this great city, to hear that every Sunday there are in London not less than 40,000 communicants gathered round the Table of their Lord, as the very heart of the faithful Church, the precious, beloved nucleus of "the beautiful flock" which is coming in for the Good Shepherd's appearing! What a motive to hopefulness for you, my brother, is given by the many voices from the four hundred parishes yonder, asking in the Holy Eucharist a blessing upon him who is sent to them in the name of the Lord!

What is thy strength—the strength with which thou must be clothed and filled, that others all around thee may be strengthened also?

1. First and foremost, unity is strength. Take as a striking illustration of this the manner in which the attack upon our position appears to be recoiling before the solid front of the Christian host, called into action along the whole line by the rallying call of our Primate and his brethren. What might we not do, what could we not bear, if we who hold the Head were really of one heart and one soul, because of our fellow-membership in Him? It was for this He prayed on the very eve of His passion; so it is by this that He is honoured, now that He reigns in Heaven and earth. This is the very idea of His Church—this one chief object of His baptism—this the abiding effect of His communion—this the end of His Spirit's dwelling with us, to make us all a holy temple, acceptable unto God. And for this also, by continuous succession, there kneels and works one Bishop in each diocese, as a visible centre of unity, and an evident means for its attainment. He it is who is to make men feel the force of the Church through all its members working together. Set as he is for the defence of the Gospel, he is to show this as "the one religion," to uphold the truth of God against the falsehoods of the world—like the great Roman, "bearing the shield, if others draw the sword"—and to preach the mystery of the Holy Trinity, as the Divine call to our oneness in the Lord, that so this mystical and practical oneness may be a proof to the world that God has sent His Son (St. John xvii. 20-22.)

2. And then, with a view to this unity, there must be consultation. The very being and composition of the Church—"many members in one Body"—suggest this. This, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, yes, and for the obtaining of that guidance, was, from primitive times, an acknowledged duty in the Way—an habitual channel of light and blessing. From that earliest council, in which the Apostles and elders came together to consider vital questions—the principle, and the excellence of it, have been acknowledged. And this generation of ours has witnessed a remarkable return, in some sort, to the Apostolic practice; though there has been a tendency, owing to the very useful conferences of clergy and laity, to forget that the grace of holy orders requires a synod of the clergy as a safeguard for the laity in matters of faith and doctrine. Where could the Bishop