

of strength will be feeble. When the union with Christ is rejoiced in as our highest good, and everything sacrificed for the sake of maintaining it, the power will work: "His strength will be made perfect in our weakness." Our one care must therefore be to abide in Christ as our strength. Our one duty is to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Let our faith cultivate large and clear apprehensions of the exceeding greatness of God's power in them that believe, *even that power of the risen and exalted Christ by which He triumphed over every enemy* (Eph. i. 19-21). Let our faith consent to God's wonderful and most blessed arrangement; nothing but feebleness in us as our own, all the power in Christ, and yet within our reach as surely as if it were in us. Let our faith daily go out of self and its life into the life of Christ, placing our whole being at His disposal for Him to work in us. Let our faith, above all, continually rejoice in the assurance that He will in very deed, with His almighty power, perfect His work in us. As we thus abide in Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of His power, will work mightily in us, and we too shall sing: "JEHOVAH is my strength and song: IN JEHOVAH I have righteousness and strength." "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me."

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Lecture delivered by the Rev. Principal Sheraton, D.D., at the opening of Wycliffe College, Michaelmas Term, 1884.

The origin and history of Wycliffe College bring it into very close relationship to you all. Like many other good things it was the free spontaneous outcome of the strong convictions of the evangelical members of our church, the fruit of their prayers and sacrifices. And I am convinced that the real prosperity and usefulness of this institution depend very largely upon the continuance of that relationship in which it originated; in the practical heart-felt interest, which both individually and collectively you take in the College, its aims and teachings, its methods and results. Therefore you ought to come as much as possible into contact with it, and know for yourselves its workings and teachings. And it is for this reason that I am glad that you so cordially respond to the invitation to be present at gatherings such as this, at the beginning and again at the closing of our academic year, upon which occasions, I think, there should be set before you not only reports of the work done, but also some discussion and exposition of what is taught within these walls, and especially the great fundamental principles which ought to mould, and I trust do mould, both the instructions here given and the convictions of those who go forth from our midst into the actual work of the Ministry.

Among these principles

THE TRUE IDEA OF THE CHURCH

of Christ takes a prominent position. Not only is this a crucial question which, perhaps more readily than any other, furnishes a test of theological teaching, whether it be evangelical or sacerdotal; but it is also a very practical subject having a direct and important bearing upon questions which occupy the public mind.

It is, I said, a crucial question. It underlies the various theological differences of the day. It marks off clearly and decisively from each other the two great positive schools of thought which contend for the mastery—the evangelical and sacerdotal. For we may set aside the school of negations and denials. There is no subject as to which more errors and misunderstandings prevail; and no matter in regard to which vagueness and uncertainty work greater harm. As the learned Reformer Bishop Jewell said:—"There never was anything yet so absurd or so wicked, but it might seem easy to be covered and defended by the name of the church." "The adversaries of the truth," said Bishop Hooper, "defend many a false error under the name of Holy Church." "Beware," he cries, "beware of deceit, when thou hearest the name of the church. The verity is then assaulted. They call the church of the devil the holy church many times." Nor are these impassioned warnings less needful in our own day. Every perversion from the simplicity of the gospel, every relapse into sacerdotal error or into the sophistries of Pymouthism, begins with a false conception of the nature of the Church of Christ.

What, then, is the Church of Christ, the one, holy, Catholic

CHURCH OF THE ANCIENT CREEDS?

The surest as well as the simplest method in answering these enquiries is to go at once to the genesis of the Church as related in the Records of the Kingdom. Here, as throughout the whole history and doctrine of Redemption, Christ is Alpha and Omega. He Himself thus describes the mission on which He came and the purpose that animated Him:—"I am come, that ye might have life." "The gift of God is eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Hence, it follows, as St. John tells us, he that hath the Son of God hath life, but he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." To the same effect St. Paul declares:—"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His"; but "as many as are led by the spirit of God they are the sons of God." We are further told that the means by which men are made partakers of this life is faith:—"He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life." Those who are thus united to Christ have, as Canon Westcott says, "their real life solely in their connection with Christ." So Christ Himself declared,—"Because I live, ye shall live also." And St. Paul reiterates the great truth from his own experience.—"I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." So the study of the N. T. throughout shows us that Christ's object was to raise men out of the death and deadness of sin and selfishness, and to make them alive to God, alive to righteousness, alive to all that is good and true and noble.

And Christ's method was in accord with His purpose. He did not begin from without, but from within. He did not proceed to found an earthly kingdom, as the Jews fondly expected, and as more than once they sought to compel Him. He did not even come as a law-giver like Moses, enacting statutes and canons. The contrast is expressly drawn between them:—"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." He likened His kingdom to leaven, which working from within outwards, gradually transforms the mass. So Christ works from within by the expulsive and expansive power of a new heart, new affections, the love of God shed abroad within and gradually possessing the whole sphere of human activities; by the impartation of a divine life, which puts forth energies and powers and organs through which it reveals its effects and proves its existence. Christ did not change His method when He returned to the Father. Its characteristics are even more manifest in the mission of the Comforter. He is poured out upon all the disciples, not the apostles only, at Pentecost. The results are seen at once in the quickening of spiritual affections and moral qualities; in the love, self-sacrifice and Christ-like character of the Christian brotherhood, in the courage and zeal, in the knowledge and wisdom, in the victories over sin and the growth of righteousness, in the triumph of truth over superstition, idolatry and impurity.

Again, if we examine the inspired descriptions of the Church of Christ, especially that marvellously

BEAUTIFUL PORTRAIT

which is sketched in all its ideal completeness in the Epistle to the Ephesians, we find every trait, every characteristic, every quality named, internal and spiritual. The whole ground of its existence is Christ, every thing depends on its relation to Him. "Where He is, there is the Church," as one of the Fathers stated. Its members are expressly called believers, those who hate sin and love Christ, who are redeemed by His blood and led by His spirit. It is the body of which Christ is the head. "From Him," again to quote Canon Westcott, "flows that energy by which every member is enabled to discharge its functions effectually and in due proportion to the marvellous working of the whole; from Him that power of love by which the several parts are fitted and knit together; from Him that vital force by which the multiform body increaseth with the increase of God."

THE CHURCH IS GOD'S BUILDING,

and it is built on Christ alone. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus." Observe—the foundation is Christ Himself, not merely the doctrine about Christ, but Christ, His Person and Work, Himself in all the fulness of His nature, in all the plenitude of His grace. Upon this foundation are built the living stones. Each one comes to Him personally, individually, by the faith of his heart. It is by means of this coming that each becomes united to Christ, becomes a partaker of His life, and thus a member of His body, the Church. As Bishop McIlvaine plainly puts it:—"The soul's coming to Christ is his life; his drawing life from Christ

is his union unto Him; and in that very union unto Christ is contained and involved his being built up in His true Church." As an old divine of the 17th century says: "This union to Christ maketh the Church to be the Church, and by it the members thereof, whether they be in heaven or in earth, are distinguished from all other companies whatsoever." It is thus the act of faith that puts us in possession of Christ, that unites us to Him. As Hooker says, "That which linketh Christ to us is His mere mercy and love towards us. That which tieth us to Him is our faith in the promised salvation revealed in His word of truth." Thus, he tells us, it is that "faith is the ground and glory of all the welfare of this building."

From the whole teaching and scope of the New Testament, it is evident that the essential nature of the Church consists in that which is spiritual, and that wherever there is a believer in Christ, by whatever name he is called, or with whatever ecclesiastical organization he is connected, there is a member of the one Holy Catholic Church, which is the Body of Christ. Any visible society, therefore, which claims to be exclusively the Church, advances pretensions which are contrary to Scripture and to truth; and any doctrine of the nature of the Church which excludes from its fellowship any genuine follower of Christ, or which makes mere external qualities essential to the being of the Church, is to be regarded as violating the first principles of Christianity.

I might quote, in confirmation of this position, innumerable

TESTIMONIES FROM OUR REFORMERS

and great divines. Thus Bishop Ridley declared:—"That church which is Christ's Body and of which Christ is the Head, standeth only of living stones and true Christians, not only outwardly in name and title, but inwardly in heart and in truth." Hooker, in his "Ecclesiastical Polity," says, "That Church which is Christ's mystical body consisteth of none but only true Israelites, true sons of Abraham, true servants and saints of God." Bishop Coverdale says:—"The Holy Catholic Church is nothing else but the company of saints. To this Church pertains all they that since the beginning of the world have been saved, and that shall be saved unto the end thereof." Bishop Jeremy Taylor in his "Dissuasive from Popery" says: "They who are indeed holy and obedient to Christ's laws of faith and manners, these are truly and perfectly the Church in the eyes and heart of God. For the Church of God is the body of Christ. But the mere profession of Christianity makes no man a member of Christ—nothing but a new creature, nothing but a faith working by love and keeping the commandments of God." Jackson, in his treatise on the Church, maintains that "a man may be a true and visible member of the Holy Catholic Church, and yet be no actual member of any visible Church." "Many there be or may be in most ages which are no members of the visible Church, and yet better members of the true Church than the members of the Church visible for the present are." Archbishop Usher defines the Catholic Church to be:—"That whole universal company of the elect, that ever were, are, or shall be, gathered together in one body, knit together in one faith, under one head, Jesus Christ." To these statements correspond the definitions given in our formularies, plainer and more Scriptural than which we could not have:—"The mystical body of Christ, which is the blessed company of all faithful people."—*Communion Service*. "The true Church is an universal congregation or fellowship of God's faithful and elect people, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the head corner stone."—*Homily for Whitsunday*.

THE CHURCH, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE.

I must now pass to the second stage in this enquiry. We have seen that the Church of Christ is a divine institution, and that its essential being and character lie in what is spiritual and internal, not in what is merely outward and visible. But the Church has visibility as well as invisibility, and it is not only allowable but necessary to distinguish clearly between the two. As Hooker states:—"For lack of diligent observing the difference first between the Church of God mystical and visible—then between the visible sound and the visible corrupted—the oversights are neither few nor light that have been committed." They are distinguished in the Creeds and Articles. "A visible Church" implies an invisible as its correlative. The invisible, not the visible, is the object of faith. They are distinguished in the Scriptures. The invisible is one; the visible many, as we read of the Churches of Asia, Galatia, and Macedonia. The invisible is indefectible. It can never cease nor perish. "The

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