

goes on to use the following significant language:—

They cut at the root of what the Church has always believed about the Incarnation and Atonement and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mr. Thompson, like many another, both in ancient and modern times, thinks he can improve on the Church's interpretation of the Gospel, and present it in a form more suitable to the needs of his own age. As an honest man, he is quite entitled to say so if he wishes. But he is not, in our judgment, entitled to promulgate the teaching of this book under the ægis of the Church of England. We have no desire to make a martyr of him. The day is long gone by for such methods of persuasion. Nor do we think that the questions he proposes can be determined by the mere authority and tradition of the Church. They must be considered candidly and frankly in the light of history. But this is the point. The existence of the Church depends, in the opinion of the overwhelming majority of her members—a majority which includes some who are not less qualified to speak with the authority of learning than Mr. Thompson—upon the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Atoning Death of Christ, regarded as objective historical facts which have proved of incalculable religious efficacy. She cannot, without stultifying herself, recognize the teaching of one who declares that the efficacy of redemption is enhanced by his belief that the Saviour lived and died in the ordinary human way, neither Virgin-born nor miraculous in His Resurrection. And to use the opportunities which are offered for public teaching in the Church of England for the purpose of repudiating the Church's Creeds is, to say the least, indefensible.

The profound importance of these words warrants our quoting them in full, and we have no hesitation in endorsing them as absolutely true. Neither Mr. Thompson nor anyone else is entitled to promulgate such teaching "under the ægis of the Church of England." If he is an honest and sincere man he will surely take the earliest opportunity of leaving a Church which still believes that Jesus Christ lived an unique life from the beginning to the end; that He was "conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," and "the third day rose again from the dead."

### The Danger of Ridicule

One of our most helpful present-day preachers, the Rev. G. H. Morrison, has given expression to a suggestive thought in the following words:—

A sneer is the apology for argument made by a man who does not understand. And that is why, though you find Christ Jesus angry, you never find Him ridiculing anybody, for every secret of every human heart was perfectly understood by the Redeemer.

This carries with it a very important hint for all Christian workers, especially those who have to deal with controversial subjects. We must never, under any circumstances, sneer at or ridicule our opponent's position. When the Protestant ridicules the Roman Catholic, when the Evangelical ridicules the Ritualist, when the believer ridicules the sceptic, the malign influence will soon be evident in recoiling upon the speaker's own life, to say nothing of the fact that his opponent will thereby be confirmed in his own position. A man's views, however wrong, are generally held with sincerity and conviction, and the arguments of thought, reason, and love are the only proper weapons for any Christian to use. He who uses ridicule in connection with Christianity shows that he has yet to learn the very first lesson of effective, Christ-like service.

## WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE CHURCH?

A Question for 1913

In our retrospect last week we tried to look at the Church of to-day in the light of the primitive Community as it existed soon after the Day of Pentecost, and we were impressed with the inward reality and outward prosperity of that earliest community of Christians. We must now enquire as to the secret of this as we face the New Year, and seek to conform our present Church life to the primitive pattern. How was it that the Church of the first days, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, possessed such genuineness of life and experienced such fullness of blessing? The explanation is found in the simple fact that their life was right with God. The inward and the outward are affected by the upward, for only as we are true to God can we be right with ourselves and with one another. In every true Christian life, individual or corporate, "the length, and the breadth, and the height of it are equal." How, then, came this spirituality of upward attitude towards God? Their life was a life lived in prayer. We notice how, when the Apostles Peter and John were let go, "they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them" (Acts iv. 23); and when these tidings came, the Church at once "lifted up their voice to God with one accord." They turned their difficulties into united prayer, and sought God's grace and guidance for future needs. Not only was their prayer united, it was unselfish. They did not ask for preservation and protection from persecution, but for boldness to speak and for power to work wonders in the Name of Jesus (ch. iv. 29, 30); and the answer soon came, for with undaunted courage "they spake the word of God with boldness." Not only was their power united, unselfish, and undaunted, it was also Scriptural. They knew their Bible, and in their prayer they quoted it, resting upon God's Word and pleading His promises as they waited upon Him for the power. We cannot be surprised, in the face of such prayer as this, united, unselfish, undaunted, and Scriptural, that the Church was inwardly real and outwardly prosperous. Their life was a life lived in the Holy Spirit. In answer to their prayer they were all filled with the Holy Ghost (ver. 31). Pentecost was repeated for them in view of their special need. Peter himself had had the same fullness of the Holy Ghost when he witnessed before the Council (ch. iv. 8), for this gift of the risen Christ was the special mark of the primitive Church. It was in the power of the Holy Ghost that the Church lived and moved and had its being. Thus we find this primitive Church life characterized by Reality, Prosperity, and Spirituality, the last being the explanation of the other two.

What has all this to do with us to-day? Just this: that in proportion as our Church life reproduces these elements, the cause of the Gospel will be powerful and triumphant; and in proportion as these elements are absent will the cause of Christ be weak, and even defeated. Each congregation must at all costs reproduce this primitive Church life. Unity, liberality, testimony, and power through prayer and the Holy Spirit, must characterize our congregational life. It is not too much to say that everything connected with evangelization depends upon the spiritual condition of the Church. As water never rises above its level, so the blessing in the world will be in exact proportion to the spiritual life of the Church. Given this unity and liberality, there would never be any question of missionary deficits and work hindered at home and abroad. As it has been lately said, the real trouble is not with the "non-Church-

going," but with the "non-going Church." A writer, commenting on this passage, says:—

"What is now wanted is a Mission to the Church. It would be well for you if you would be good enough to let the masses alone for a little while. . . . The great soul I cry for is a man who will preach to the preachers, who will convert the pulpit, and will set fire to the Church, and bring back our conscious need of the Holy Ghost. . . . We keep up churches, institutions, organizations, machineries, after we have lost the Spirit. Is there anything more ghastly to the religious eye and the spiritual imagination than a Church out of which God has gone?"

What, then, is to be our attitude and determination as we face the duties of pastoral and parochial life during the coming year? Surely that we will determine to make more than ever of the great realities suggested by this story of the primitive Church. We may be perfectly certain that only as we have this unity and unselfishness, in answer to prayer and the gift of the Spirit, will there be a testimony to the living Christ, and great grace upon all the people of God. Let each one of us search his own heart, and cry to God that there may be no hindrance in any individual life, that in every Church, and congregation, and parish, the love of God may flow in us and through us, making us channels of blessing to the whole world.

We must make more of prayer, individual and corporate; prayer must, indeed, be the vital breath of every Christian and every Church. Only as prayer is prominent can there be power and blessing. We must make more of Scripture. As the primitive Church came into existence by the spoken Word of God, as they proclaimed the Word of God, as they pleaded the Word of God in their prayers, so must the written Word of God be prominent in all our Church life, studied, believed, lived, practised. The Word of God must be everything to the believer. We must make more of the Resurrection. We are united to a living Christ; we rejoice in the Christ who died, but we rejoice still more that He is alive, and that death has no more dominion over Him. It is not a dead Christ to whom we pray; it is not merely a crucified Christ whom we worship. We preach Him who was crucified, who now lives at God's right hand for evermore. And in the power of this living Christ, received through faith, rejoiced in and manifested, we shall find the secret of perpetual and permanent victory. And we must make more of the Holy Spirit. It is His province to glorify Christ and to reveal Him to every soul and every Church. When the Holy Spirit is honoured in our individual life and our Church life, when He is the supreme Ruler of everything, then come light, liberty, joy and blessing. And so by reproducing these elements of primitive Church life in the Church life of to-day we shall do that which must necessarily bring about that revival for which we are all praying and longing. We remember the word of the Psalmist, that when the brethren dwelt in unity the Lord commanded His blessing; and when the multitude to-day of those that believe are of one heart and of one soul, and when in unselfish consecration they are ready to place everything at God's disposal, power will descend, enabling us to witness to the living Christ, great grace will be upon us all, souls will be saved, the Kingdom of our God extended, the coming of the Lord hastened. Then will the words about the Church be fulfilled, for she will be seen to be "Clear as the sun, fair as the moon, terrible as an army with banners."

It is only fools who make a mock of sin. The sensitive, the highly strung, the easily tempted, the men of good intentions, weak will, and strong passions—they know its agony, its thralldom, its reality.—Basil Wilberforce.

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