

# The Church Guardian

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## SPECIAL NOTICE.

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## CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER.

SEPT. 6th—14th Sunday after Trinity.

" 13th—15th Sunday after Trinity.

[NOTICE OF EMBER DAYS.]

" 16th—Ember Day.

" 18th—Ember Day.

" 19th—Ember Day.

" 20th—16th Sunday after Trinity.

" 21st—St. Matthew, Ap. E.M.

" 27th—17th Sunday after Trinity.

" 29th—St. Michael and All Angels.

## "AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY."

There is much virtue in a good phrase, such as that which heads this article. It attracts attention, and yet lulls suspicion. It is so easily intelligible that all can comprehend it, and it seems so undeniably appropriate that but few think of calling it in question. "Great is the might of words; words may make this way or that way," so says Homer, as Englished by Mr. Matthew Arnold, and certainly the phrase, "Aggressive Christianity," is a splendid instance of this power of words. "General" Booth has used it with effect. Others are taking up the cry, and trying to conjure with it on their own account, and there can be no doubt that it will be some time yet before its energy is finally expended. It may possibly, before then, make "that way," as well as "this way," and, like the charm used by the sons of Seava, being on some who may employ it shame and nudity.

What, then, is aggressive Christianity as distinguished from Christianity of any other type? Churchmen have been taught to believe that all Christianity in this world is aggressive, that every Christian is a soldier, sworn in under the captaincy of Christ, and pledged to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil. A Christian who does not fight against these foes is a disloyal Christian; a Christianity, therefore, which is not aggressive, can be but the pseudo-Christianity of renegades and traitors. No doubt there are a multitude of Christians who prove lamentably ineffective combatants, but the existence of incapable or faithless soldiers cannot annihilate the essential characteristic of an army, and the Church on earth is a Church militant, even though her members are inert and sluggish. By all means let us keep the thought before us that Christianity is an aggressive religion; but, why speak

of aggressive Christianity, when the term Christianity implies aggression?

So far as one can see, the term as used is fallacious. By aggressive Christianity is not meant any particular kind of Christianity, but Christianity adopting such methods as approve themselves to those who appropriate the title. It is assumed that the form which aggression should take is as simple as the meaning of the word, and that the Christianity which takes this form is alone worthy to be called aggressive. But this is not true by any means. An army is as much acting on the aggressive when advancing by slow and devious marches as when concentrated before a fortress, with its leading columns engaged in the assault. Eager spirits often enough chafe at delay and pant for action; but, whatever may be their private opinions, they keep their ranks and obey orders. Were they to desert and band themselves together, in the hope of proving more aggressive than their fellows, they would simply imperil the chance of victory and outlaw themselves as mutineers. And yet is not this very much what some of our aggressive Christians are doing?

The Church has been slowly marching on through some seventeen or eighteen centuries, whilst the world is not yet conquered, and the final victory seems as far off as ever. "What terrible sluggishness! What intolerable delay!" So exclaim the new advocates of a guerilla warfare. "Let us show the main body of the army what success may be achieved by independent energy." Yes, and brilliant results are sometimes obtained. We would not wish for one moment to undervalue them; but brilliancy is not necessarily allied with permanence, and when such results are achieved through want of discipline, no soldier can award than enthusiastic praise. "*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre*!" We sympathise heartily with the feeling which animates the volunteer enthusiasts; at the same time, we refuse to credit them with a monopoly of loyalty and devotion. We think that more lasting good might have resulted had they restrained their enthusiasm within the limits of Church order.

And after all—for this lies at the root of the whole question—what reason have we to suppose that Christ, the Head of the Christian Church, intended His army to make quicker progress than it has done? No doubt the advance seems slow, judged by the standard of man's brief lifetime, but, judged by the standard of God's eternal purpose, who knows whether it is slow or fast? "Tarry thou the Lord's leisure" is surely sound advice for any man; we cannot quicken the hour-hand of eternity by pushing on the minute-hand of time.

Christianity is not, then, least aggressive when it gains few converts and seems almost at a stand-still; its soldiers may be all the time advancing slowly, without needless noise or tumult, acquiring positions whence, when the hour is ripe, their Captain may summons the world to a surrender.

Certainly Christ's own teaching and example seems most to favor this orderly aggression. If He Himself did not strive nor cry, neither was His voice heard in the streets, we ought

surely to have very plain directions before accepting methods not sanctioned by His practice. Who have done most good in the past, the aggressive Christians who have followed in Christ's footsteps, and fought for Him with silent self-suppression, or the aggressive Christians who have preferred the "puff and push method" eulogized by some persons at the present day? Why, the "puff and push" people have to re-write the New Testament to make it even seem to colour their proceedings. A new edition of the Acts of the Apostles, published by the Salvation Army in the *Little Soldier*, shows us what the history should have been if the principle it is supposed to illustrate were true. In this work, the apostles are all generals and majors, and they hold hallelujah-meetings and the like; but, so long as the old Book holds its ground, we may be excused for refusing to replace it by a travesty.

To us the conclusion of the whole matter seems to be this: Christianity is aggressive both by profession and by practice; but "Aggressive Christianity," so-called, has far less value than is by some attributed to it. What we want most now-a-days is individual self-suppression and reverence for authority. The commander-in-chief knows best how to place and when to move his forces. Let each soldier throw all his energy into doing the work manifestly allotted to him. Let him not endeavor, without regard to discipline, to conquer the world by any *coup-de-main*; let him look rather to eventual success through the united action of the Church in its integrity working along such well-considered lines as her leaders feel assured have the sanction of their Master.

## LAY READERS.

A subscriber writes enquiring whether "a Lay Reader is allowed to, or can he if he wishes, write his own sermon, as long as it is according to the forms of the Church of England." We unhesitatingly answer, as a general rule, no; such a practice being in our opinion contrary to the usages and practice of the Church, as well as to the true intent and meaning of the 23rd Article of Religion and to the 49th Canon of 1603. We fear, however, that the practice is one only too common, and that sometimes episcopal countenance is lent to the assumption, under the excuse that the sermon shall be submitted for inspection. We entertain very strong opinions as to the unwisdom of this course; as a rule, we believe it to be injurious to the lay reader, whether he be a student in a Theological College aiming at the ministry, or one fulfilling the ordinary duties of life with no such intention; and we have no doubt of its being injurious to the Church. We have heard of young men, scarcely in their teens, students, used under the plea of necessity as lay readers, teaching the crudest sort of theology, and most dogmatically asserting that which those "old in the priesthood" would hesitate to touch upon. The practice leads to conceit and bumptiousness—qualities far too common amongst our young men—and is destructive of that humility which should be characteristic of one whose aim is the diaconate or priesthood. And there is no need for the innovation. Excellent sermons suitable