

## CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.

A SERMON.

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\* This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.—Ephesians v. 32.

THE church in union with Christ is a great theme of the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is shown to be chosen, accepted, endowed, and enriched in Christ. It is His living body, holy temple, heavenly Bride; the body of the Lord, the temple in the Lord, the Bride for the Lord.

As this Epistle reaches farther forward than perhaps any other into the counsels of God concerning His redeemed, so also it begins further back, and recalls some of the earliest scenes in human history. It explains the heavenly places which God assigns to the church, by the garden which He planted in Eden, where the first man and woman of our race dwelt in union.

Adam was the son of God and heir of the world. So is Christ, and in a far more exalted degree. It was not good that the man should be alone in his inheritance, and therefore God made "an helpmeet for him" and brought her to the man. So also it has seemed good to the Divine wisdom that Jesus Christ should not be alone, but have a Bride to dwell in His love and share His inheritance.

Now the woman was not only made for the man but also made from him—taken out of his side. "The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept, and He took out one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof, and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man made He a woman, and brought her unto the man." Sign this of the deep sleep of death which fell upon Christ, and of the great spiritual truth that the church derives its very life from the Lord, so that Christians are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. This is in virtue, not of the incarnation, but of the atonement. The former brought Christ into our nature, not us into communion with Him, but from His deep sleep and burial He has derived His bride. As from the riven side of Adam was formed the woman, so from the riven side of Jesus Christ is constituted the church. It is of Him as well as from Him, and, because of its origin, has a profound sympathy with Him and a community of life. In a word, the church is, after an ineffable, spiritual manner, an extract from or product of the last Adam even Christ.

This is true properly of the church complete and corporate. No individual Christian, or party of Christians, can claim to be the body or the Bride of Christ. This honour belongs to the whole assembly of saints. But the doctrine is profitable to believers individually, that they may know their church calling, as involving their having been chosen in Christ, and having received all spiritual life from God in virtue of the wounds and death of Christ. Now they are rooted and built up in Him, strengthened and solaced by Him:—"for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth, even as the Lord the church."

When Adam rose from his deep sleep, God brought to him the woman who should be his helpmate and consort, and the words which ever since have described and consecrated marriage were spoken by the risen man. It was not the union of Adam and Eve, for the

name "Eve" was not given till after the Fall. It was the marriage of Ish and Isha—the man and the woman. So to Christ risen from the sleep of death is brought the living church, and the marriage is "to Him that is risen from the dead." This is the ideal of the church's position now—a position to be manifested and declared with great joy when the church which is now in course of formation, growth, and purification, is completed, and the Bride is shown in her beauty as the Lamb's wife:—"a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish."

"This is a great mystery." The apostle Paul meant by the term "mystery" a great religious truth, long hidden from the minds of men, but at last made known in the Spirit. Thus he spoke of the formation of Jews and Gentiles into one body, the church, as a great mystery; and the humiliation and exaltation of Christ as the mystery of piety in contrast with the mystery of iniquity. In the same sense he describes the union of Christ and the church as a great mystery. The Vulgate has the translation "*Sacramentum hoc magnum est*," and as the word "sacrament" came in course of time to be ascribed to certain religious rites supposed to be the authentic channels of divine grace, it has resulted that this verse is quoted to prove that matrimony is a holy sacrament and one of seven sacraments. This much we must on our part affirm, that the whole passage in which our text lies elevates and ennobles the conception of marriage among Christians. That which may be used to illustrate the holy intimate union of the Redeemer and the redeemed is indeed an august and sacred ordinance of God, but then it is not a sacrament of the church; it is not even confined to Christians but belongs to the human race. The answer to those who on the authority of this passage talk of the sacrament of matrimony is easy. It is the union of Christ and the church, not the union of an ordinary husband and wife that is called "a great mystery." Moreover, the word "mystery" nowhere in Scripture means what ecclesiastics call "a sacrament." Our divines have been wont to allow two sacraments—Baptism and the Lord's Supper—though we should have done much better had we avoided the word sacramental altogether. But those two ordinances which have authority and dignity in the New Testament are nowhere called mysteries. On the other hand, we have the mystery of the church position of the Gentiles—the mystery of the seven stars, and the mystery of the woman in purple and scarlet and the seven-headed ten-horned beast that carried her. If "mystery" is to be translated "sacrament," are these also to be added to the other seven?

But to return to the truth before us. The church mystical or spiritual is the Bride of the Lamb, and of the Lamb as slain and risen from the dead. Alas! it is plain that the things spoken of the marriage as well as of the formation of the church apply properly to the whole of the church, and not a part. Nevertheless the truth and comfort of these things may be known to particular churches and even to individual Christians who know their high calling of God. St. Paul said to a particular church, "I have espoused you as a chaste virgin to Christ," and the same apostle, writing to individual Christians, thus expresses their new relation to Christ:—"My brethren, ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that