

By-and-by the storm passed over, and the sky cleared, and Cyprian returned to his flock. The first question that arose was as to the treatment of those who had lapsed or fallen away. A small party demanded that they should at once be re-admitted to the communion of the Church, and that no kind of punishment should be inflicted upon them.

Now we must bear in mind that in the early Church a discipline was upheld and administered which would seem strange to us in this nineteenth century. A Christian known to have been guilty of a great sin was 'put to open penance' by the Church. He had publicly to show signs of genuine repentance before he could be received back into the company of the Faithful. It would seem that a confession in the face of the whole congregation was sometimes made by the guilty party, and then for a season he was permitted only to enter the church door, without participation in the highest acts of devotion. This discipline, as we might suppose, had a most wholesome effect. It kept the standard of Christian living high. It inspired men with a deep sense of the guilt of sin. It caused them to value Christian privileges. It made the Christian calling a great reality. And it must be remembered that the Church still regards discipline as necessary to holiness, and teaches us to say each Ash Wednesday that its restoration is 'much to be wished.'

It is quite apparent that the discipline of the Church of Carthage was in danger of being trampled on. And this S. Cyprian perceived. Those who had suffered began to claim a right to answer for those who had fallen. The merits of the one case were to make up for the faults of the other. Martyr tickets were distributed, exempting the lapsed from punishment. It was indeed a system of indulgences not unlike those of the infamous Tetzel in the days of Luther. This gross corruption Cyprian sternly and unflinchingly opposed. He would recognise no such testimonials. A man must repent of his own sins, and not until he had done so, could he be admitted to the communion of the Church. He would not be hard upon the weaker brethren. He would exercise a

boundless Christian charity, and readily receive those whose repentance was proved to be sincere.

This was reasonable enough, but it offended the opposing party. They formed a schism, altered their attitude, and condemned the action of Cyprian in re-admitting the lapsed; and, professing a zeal for the greater purity of the Church, they placed a man named Novatian over them as Bishop. They became known as Novatianists, and for three hundred years divided and weakened the African Church; after which they died out.

Alas! it would have been well had they been the first and last schismatics—well for the spread of Gospel truth, and well for the peace of the Christian Church. We pray in the Litany to be delivered from heresy and schism. The two are distinct. A heretic is one who separates himself from the faith of the Catholic Church to follow some doctrine of his own. A schismatic is one who rebels against her order and government, to set up some new form for himself. Both weaken Christian effort, because they divide it; and both set aside the dying wish of the Lord 'that they may be one.'

Heresy showed itself early in the Christian Church. S. Paul mentions Alexander, Hymenæus, and Philetus, as having erred concerning the faith. And Simon of Samaria caused serious trouble to S. Peter. S. John, in writing to the seven Churches of the Revelation, speaks of the Nicolaitanes as already a formidable body; and the great gnostic heresy had arisen before his death.

Yet out of evil God brings good. S. Paul does not hesitate to say, 'There must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest.' When heresies are rife, the faith is defined, and creeds are framed, and the truth is vindicated. And have they not been the means at times of preserving some aspect of truth which the Church had well-nigh forgotten? The Gnosticism of the early days was a grafting of Christianity upon heathen philosophy. Was God in this way preserving all that was good in heathenism that it might be brought out and perfected in Christianity?