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A WORD ABOUT SACRAMENTS.

THERE is now, as there has always been, a tendency in some quarters to exaggerate, and in others to undervalue the Sacraments of the Gospel. Some would give them an influence almost magical in its nature, and make them operate like a charm, regardless of the disposition of the recipient, whilst others deny their efficacy as a means of grace, and would reduce the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to a bare commemorative rite of the death of Christ. The former idea is not held by any outside of the Roman obedience, but unfortunately many in their revolt from this doctrine of the Eucharist have swung to the opposite extreme, and have adopted views that are neither Scriptural nor historical.

The danger of over-valuing Sacraments is not one of which, in these days, there appears much risk. Superstition is not a characteristic of our times, and a lack of reverence is much more prevalent than an excess of it. This is evidenced in the small proportion of every congregation who "draw near with faith" when bidden to the Holy Table, in the neglect of the initiatory Sacrament of Baptism, and in the large number of children who are allowed to grow up outside of the Christian Covenant without being admitted in the way appointed by the Master into the fellowship of Christ's religion.

This disposition to make Sacraments of little value, and positively in some cases to speak of them as unnecessary and superfluous, is painful, as showing how prejudice can warp the judgment and blind us as to the plain teaching of Holy Scripture. There are some now of whom Bishop Ridley, the staunchest of our English Reformers, said, even in his day, "In all ages the devil hath stirred up some light heads to estimate Sacraments but lightly, as to be simply bare signs." There has lately been a manifestation of this spirit by some even in our own branch of the Church, and for those who value these appointments of Christ a name designed to cast an unjust reflection on them has been invented, and is coming into use. To such we now sometimes hear applied the name of "Sacramentarian," which, in its current and popular use, is intended to denote one who uses and believes in Sacraments. It is curious to notice how words are perverted and twisted from

their historical signification into something very different from their real meaning. It will surprise some who use this word to know that the real meaning of the word "Sacramentarian" is not one who believes in Sacraments, but rather the reverse. It was a term applied by Roman Catholics to those who denied the doctrine of the Real Presence as held by that Church, and was applied by them to Protestants and others who differed from them on that doctrine.

When any truth or principle becomes unpopular it has been ever the plan to fix on those who uphold it some nick-name indicative of its character, and calculated to make people regard it with dread or aversion. Thus it may be that some may think it a dreadful thing to be or to be called a "Sacramentarian"; but if by this is meant one who obeys Christ's precepts in this regard, and is loyal to the teaching of the Church that Sacraments are "generally necessary to salvation," then so far from being a reproach, it is a name to be gloried in, to be borne with pride rather than with shame.

Names thus given often stick, but in the triumph of the principles they were intended to stigmatize they become illustrious, and are preferred to any other designation, as showing the obstacles that have been overcome, and that we glory in what was once falsely supposed to be our shame. We have a remarkable instance of this in the name we ourselves bear, and by which, above all others, we love to be called. It is the name of Christian. The early Christians were known as "the disciples" or "brethren"—the name of Christian was first given them in derision—"the disciples" were first called Christians in Antioch; but now no name so glorious, and under this title is ranged all that is best in art, in science, in literature, and in civilization.

People often ask "Can I not be saved without Sacraments?" We would reply with another question, "What do the Bible and the Church teach?" "The law and the testimony, if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us." The Bible does teach the necessity of Sacraments, and does couple salvation with their faithful use and reception. God forbid that we should attempt to limit His mercy and grace, or take upon us to decide so awful a question as to who shall or shall not be saved. All we can do is to faithfully interpret His revealed will as it is revealed to us in Holy Scripture. But we do protest against that spirit that is exacting as to God's part, and very remiss as to ours; which represents God as holding out mercies which we can take at any time on our own terms and conditions. Salvation is always conditionally offered, and we must fulfil its terms if we would enjoy its blessings. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth," but only to those "who keep His covenant and His testimonies to do them."

It is a miserable spirit which is always attempting to reduce the terms of salvation to a *minimum*, which is seeking to get much and to give little, to get *salvation* even, and yet in acknowledgment and return to grudgingly do the Will of God. There is but little religion when a commercial spirit enters into it, and we seek to get the best of a bargain, and calculate how little we can give God in return for all that He has done and we hope He will do for us. Let a man realize that salvation is not simply security as to the future, but Christ-likeness to be obtained here as far as

possible, and that now he can grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; and then he will not argue as to how he can be saved without Sacraments or the other means of grace; but he will joyfully avail himself of all that can deepen Christ's image in his heart and life, will seek communion with His Lord by faith, and will know by a blessed experience that thereby we are made "one with Christ and Christ with us," for "the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ; the bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ. For we being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread."

We can conceive that a man who had never seen nor read a Bible, but who had heard but one verse of it, viz., that in which it says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," and had believed and acted on that gracious message, would be saved; but would that fact prove that we could dispense with a Bible, and that God was foolish to give us a Book when a verse would have sufficed? Certainly not; then it is equally absurd to seek to disparage God's own appointments, His own way of promoting our salvation, the Sacraments of the Gospel, because He vouchsafes to receive those whose opportunities have been less, and to whom He has not given such glorious privileges as He has bestowed upon us.

The attempt to tone down the truths of the Gospel, and to make a vague faith and lax practice the rule of Christians, can only end in weakening the Christian character, and in destroying that Divine Institution which has existed for 1800 years, to the promotion of good morals, the salvation of souls, and the glory of God. In the words, not as some might suppose of a High Church Episcopalian, but of Professor Milligan, the ex-Moderator of the Established Church of Scotland: "The history of religious thought, both in past times and in our own day, seems to teach no lesson more distinctly than this, that when we break loose from the idea of one Church, of the one Body of Christ, we are upon an inclined plane, down which we gradually but surely slip, till we come to the thought of the Church as a mere congeries of benevolent societies, of theology as a human philosophy, of the Christian congregation as a company of hearers in a modern lecture room, and the Sacraments as merely commemorative rites. It need be no matter of surprise that in such circumstances we lose our power."

A "PIOUS" CHURCH.

We do not wish to contribute a new name to ecclesiastical nomenclature, but we are anxious to see the old party names erased from our minds, and to see every shade of Church work henceforth known as active and pious. Enemies of the Church are criticising the inconsistent lives of its members. They point the finger of scorn to our inconsistency and say, "Your Church must give us more than that."

We must not expect too much. Christ's Church is for all. The net takes in fishes of all kinds. The wheat and the chaff grow together till the harvest. But we press upon Church members the necessity of shewing forth God's praise not only with their lips but in *their lives*. One earnest,