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The Corporate Unity of the Church.

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A SERMON,

Preached before the Synod of the Diocese of Ontario,

ON TUESDAY, NOV. 29TH, 1881,

— AT ITS —

NINETEENTH SESSION

BY

GEORGE J. LOW,

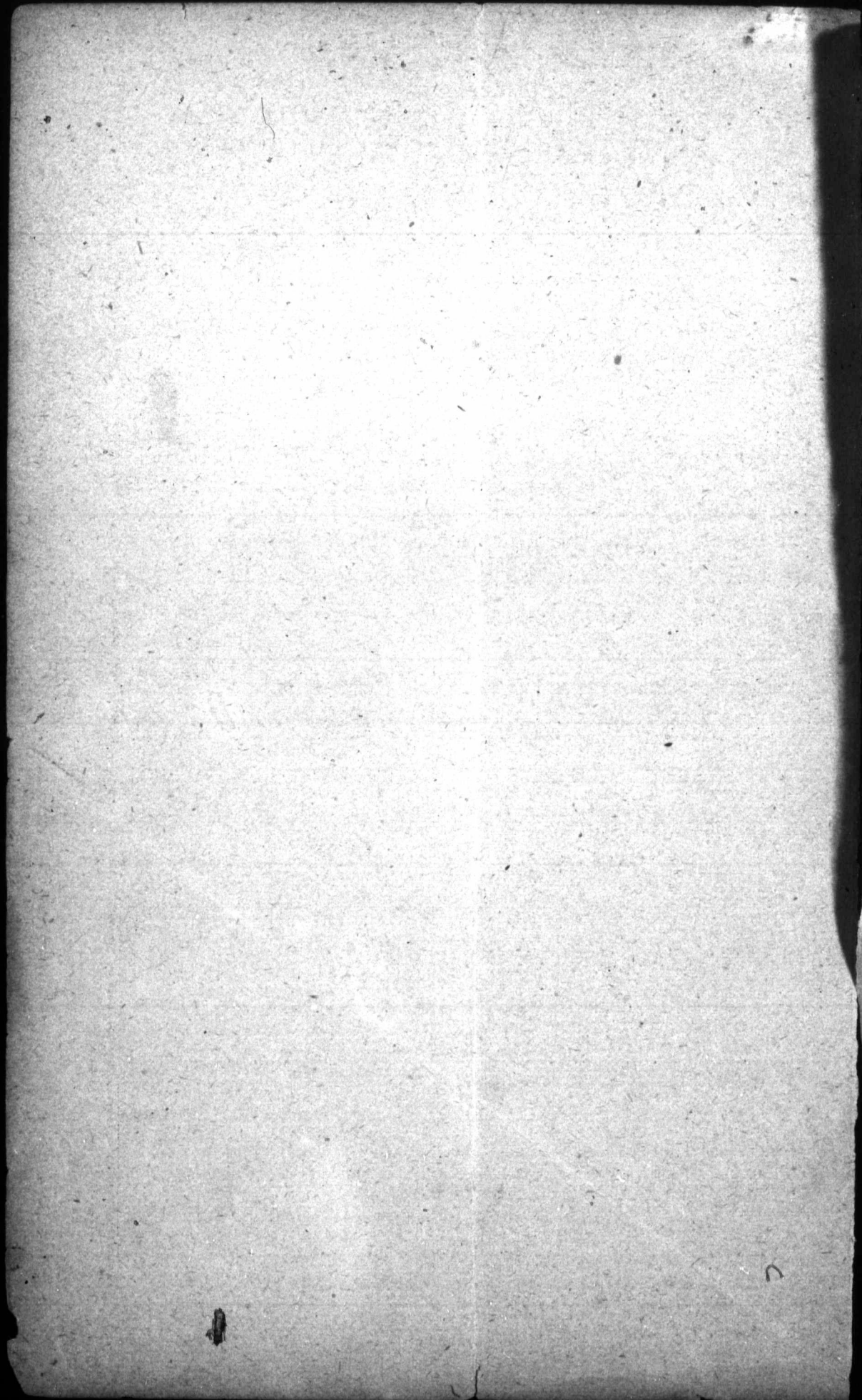
*Rector of Carleton Place, Ont.*

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OTTAWA:

J. DURIE & SON, SPARKS STREET,

1881.



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*with the author's compl<sup>ts</sup>*

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*for sale by Dawson Bros. Mont.*

TO  
THE LORD BISHOP,  
THE VERY REVEREND JAMES LYSTER, LL.D., DEAN,  
THE ARCHDEACONS  
AND  
THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF ONTARIO,  
WHOSE KIND ENCOMIUMS  
AND  
GENEROUS ASSISTANCE PROMPTED  
ITS PUBLICATION,  
THIS SERMON  
IS RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.



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I CORINTHIANS XII. 12.

“The Body is one, and hath many members.”

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**W**E are gathered together in this city, brethren, to take counsel as a Church with regard to its temporal interests; and to legislate upon all those matters which the Constitution of the Church at large, and the Enactments of the Provincial Synod leave free for us to arrange as we think best for the Diocese. It is meet and right that, before doing so, we should seek in prayer, as we have done, the guidance and blessing of God; and that we should celebrate, as we hope to do to-morrow morning, the highest act of Christian Worship in those “Holy Mysteries.” And now let us pause awhile in this House of God, and reflect upon the object that we have at heart;—the welfare of our Church and her extension;—so to set her before the Christian World, that her position and her principles, if not adopted, may be at least respected, and “known and read of all men.”

And what—let us ask—is her position? What great principle do we, as distinct from all other religionists, enunciate? What is the reason of our existence as a separate Communion? We find ourselves one of a number of distinct Christian bodies; each of these bodies has some leading idea, which it considers its special function to proclaim and enforce. Have we any such? To use a popular and expressive term, every denomination has its “platform:”—what is ours?

With many of these denominations, the very name tells its own story, and announces the particular feature of its doctrine or discipline which is deemed paramount. Not so with us: our name tells nothing. In a communication to one of the daily papers,

some time since, we were stigmatized as "a nameless Church;" and indeed the imputation is not altogether groundless. There is no name which we in this country can adopt that is quite satisfactory. Of course, such terms as "Episcopal" or "Episcopalian" we reject. We see no warrant in Scripture for Christians banding themselves into Societies each distinguished by some peculiarity. Still less could we call ourselves after the name of any one man, however great or holy. There remains, then, the term which we most affect;—The Church of England, or The Anglican Church. Yet this name, though endeared to us by a thousand holy and loving associations, is not entirely satisfactory; and that for this simple reason:—that this is *Canada* and not *England*. And though we fully understand its import and its limitations, yet we must admit that the name may mislead; when used in Canada it may lead some to think that our Church is intended only for Englishmen. Still we cling to the name: 1st, because we are the children of the Mother Church of England, and are at one with her in the "doctrine and the fellowship, and in the Breaking of Bread, and in the prayers;" 2ndly, because we see in Holy Scripture that particular Churches were always designated by locality, and never by peculiarities of doctrine or organism; and 3rdly, because, in view of the foregoing facts, and of present circumstances, no other name remains to us. For—while we look forward to the time when men will be able to speak, in accordance with Scriptural phraseology, of The Church of Canada, or The Church of Ontario, or, if you will, The Church of Kingston,—still, in the present disorganized state of Christianity here, the assumption of such title by any would be arrogant and unwarranted.

But though our name may not indicate our distinctive principles, surely we have such: for if we have not, we have no right, in this country, to exist as a separate Body. If it is *merely senti-*

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mentalism that makes us cohere, the sooner we dissolve the better ; for on such a basis our Church will never take root and grow in this country, and will not deserve to do so. In this practical and progressive age mere sentiment is of little worth. Such phrases as, "The Church of Our Fathers," and "The Good Old Church," have little meaning and less charm for Young Canada.

Nor is it, surely, for such trifling points as—"The Expediency and Lawfulness of a Liturgy"—"The Antiquity and Respectability of Episcopacy"—"The Reasonableness and Utility of Forms and Ceremonies"—and the like, that we still isolate ourselves. These are but minor details ; and, moreover, on these points, the battle, so to speak, has been fought and won. Episcopacy is no longer the fearful thing it once was in the eyes of our Protestant brethren. What with Methodist Episcopal, and Reformed Episcopal, the term is no longer a distinguishing badge of ourselves. The value of Precomposed Forms, in some cases and under certain restrictions, is now admitted by almost all ; while, on the other hand, the value of *extempore* prayer, in some cases and under certain restrictions, is now conceded by all amongst ourselves, and notably the Ritualists. And as to the advantage of Ceremonies and Ritual Observances, why the whole land teems with concessions to this principle. Every Gothic Church with its tower or steeple—every bunch of flowers or other special decoration—every Cross (and they can now be seen on the gables of Churches and over the graves of the dead of almost all denominations)—every coloured Window—every Organ—every Christmas or Easter Card—every official dress of the minister, whether black or white—is an acknowledgement of the rectitude of our position, viz. that Ritual (*i. e.* the outward expression of our religious feelings) is lawful and proper. The question is no longer of Ritual in the abstract, but of the degree and kind of Ritual ; while on these points the Lutherans and Irvingites far exceed ourselves.

In order thoroughly to understand what is our position we must go back to our mother Church. And *there*,—in England—her very name is suggestive. “THE Church of England.” By that name she declares that there is—at least *de jure* if not *de facto*—only one Church in any one locality, however, large or small the locality contemplated. *The Church of England*—the Church of any one Diocese in England—the Church of any one Parish in any Diocese. “The Body is one.” And by this it is not meant that the Church must needs be connected with the State. State recognition and State aid are mere accidents. The Church of Rome was just as much the Church of Rome under the heathen monster Nero, when S. Paul wrote her his epistle, as she is now under Pope Leo XIII. And so the Church of England was the Church of England—under John, or Mary, or Elizabeth or Cromwell.

But if her name indicates that there is only one Church in any one locality, her formularies go still further, and declare that there is only one “Holy Church throughout all the World.” “The Body is one”; one Corporation. Not an “invisible” entity. She does not “spiritualize” away the words of the Apostle which so frequently recur, by resolving them into metaphors, and by saying he is speaking of some invisible, imperceptible, indefinable Ideality. The Corporate Unity of the Church—the outward visible Church—“that the world may believe”—is one of her foundation stones. It would be tedious to cite all the instances in proof; let one suffice. In the VIth Article she leaves it to “The Church” to define Holy Scripture, and accepts the decision of “The Church,” as to what books are Canonical and what ones of secondary importance.

The Church of England constantly upholds this great vital truth; The Corporate Unity of the Catholic Church. “The Body is one.” I call it a vital truth, for such it is. It is a truth which S. Paul in all his Epistles, and especially in those to the Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians, and our Blessed Lord in

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His Parables, have rendered most prominent. It is a truth which is vital, not only because Scriptural, but because it gives a different hue and tone to the whole of Christian Doctrine from that of ordinary Protestantism. Let me explain.

There are two divergent lines of Christian thought, which we call the Puritan and the Catholic. The extreme Puritan Idea may be thus stated. From all Eternity God designed that some souls from this world should obtain Everlasting Life. But, forasmuch as by His own judgment all, without exception, were doomed to Eternal Death, God devised a "scheme," whereby He might keep His word and yet save some. For this purpose the Son of God was made Man, that He might become a "substitute" for these Elect. That God the Father accepted the sufferings of the Son in lieu of the penalty incurred by those whom He chose to save. That those whom He so elected unite themselves into Associations for mutual edification, called Churches. But that each elect soul is individually and directly operated upon by God, whether in such Associations or not.

The Catholic line of thought runs thus. That the whole world is guilty before God. That God so loved the world that He sent His Son. That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. That Christ came into the world, not only to save certain souls, but to save MAN, body and soul. That that salvation is not only from the wrath to come, but from present Sin and Misery. That it is not only the Salvation of here-and-there one by God's arbitrary will ; but that that Salvation is extended to all who will to receive it. That for this purpose the Incarnation took place. That the work of Christ and the Presence of Christ, are needed on earth, not only for the few years he was in the flesh, but for all time ; and are therefore accorded. That "the Church is His Body"—the extension of His Incarnation. That the effects of the Incarnation apply, not only to the soul, but to *the*

*whole man*, body and soul. That God ordinarily works in Grace as He works in Nature—by means and by regular laws. That, as in Nature the effects which we see, though brought about by what we call natural causes, are just as much God's work, as was the Stilling of the Storm on the Lake of Galilee or the Turning of the Water into Wine,—so now in Grace, the effects which we see of the Culture and Civilization, the Amelioration of Society, the Moral Force and Atmosphere of a Christian community, are just as much the work of Christ as the Conversion of Saul of Tarsus. That in order to bring about the Regeneration—or if you will, the “Development” into a higher state—of mankind, God works by System, and has established His Church with its Ministry and Sacraments. That this Church is ONE, however wide its extent or numerous its ramifications, and has existed as a Divine Corporation since the Day of Pentecost, and will last till time shall be no more. So God has provided for the Salvation of Man by the instrumentality of his fellow-man. So all Christians are priests unto God. So, analogously, His Church is a “Sacerdotal” Church.

Hence the leading feature of the Puritan line of thought is Individualism : of the Catholic, Corporate Action. The watchwords of Puritanism are “The Right of Private Judgment”—“Christ came to save our souls”—“Religion is an affair of the soul alone”—“We want no human intervention between the soul and its Maker.” The watchwords of the Catholic are : “We are members one of another”—“The Body is one”—“Christ came to save the world”—“Our spirits, souls, and bodies are redeemed”—“We are all priests unto God in varying degrees”—“There should be no schism in the Body.”

Of course each line of thought has its own basis of truth, and each may be exaggerated to an unhealthy extent. Our insistence upon the Corporate Unity of the Church may, possibly, cause us

to lose sight of our individual responsibility, and of personal holiness. But the greatest danger I am sure, at this present time at any rate, comes from our insistence upon our individual responsibility and our personal rights, to the ignoring of the great truth—a truth of Nature and of Science as well as of Grace—that “we are members one of another.”

The danger lies mainly here, because, in all the modern attacks upon the Christian Religion—the Higher Criticism, Agnosticism, Materialism, Positivism, &c.—you will observe, if you study them, that it is not the Catholic position which is undermined so much as the Puritan. Let us briefly notice them.

1. “The Higher or Historical Criticism.”—Suppose all the theories of those who adopt this term should turn out true. Suppose it were incontrovertibly settled that the Books of the Bible had been tampered with—that two or more hands are discernible in the Pentateuch, in Isaiah, Jeremiah and so forth. Such a revelation may indeed scare the Puritan, whose whole system is built on the Postulate that The Bible and the Bible alone, just as it stands, is the infallible Word of God, and is the only guide to Truth—that Almighty God at some unknown period of time presented the world with a book, and told men to frame their several religions out of it. But it does not in the least affect the Catholic position, which is that The Great Historical Church of God existed in its corporate integrity before the Holy Scriptures were written at all, and that those Scriptures are her documents. Supposing all that Professor Robertson Smith, of Glasgow, has written were demonstrated beyond all question (and that is supposing a great deal,) I do not see that one word of our VIth Article would need to be changed.

2. Then again take Materialism. The force of its attack upon Christianity lies in the scientific law of the Interdependence and Correlation of Matter and Force, of Body and Mind ;—that it is

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impossible to conceive of Mind as existing apart from Matter, or of an Intellect without an Organism. Now all that Physiology has discovered and verified is quite compatible with the Catholic Faith, though it may upset the Puritan theory. In reading Mr. Fred. Harrison's Essay on the Soul and the Future Life, which I suppose may be considered the most brilliant exposition of Materialist views, I made in fancy this rejoinder to him. "Your facts, my good sir,—I do not say your fanciful deductions, but your facts—do not disturb the Catholic, however much they may harass the Platonist or the Puritan. The Catholic Church declares in her Athanasian Creed ; 'As the reasonable soul and flesh is *one man*.'<sup>1</sup> And so her system of Sacramental and Ritual Worship deals not exclusively with the soul as detached from the body, but—true to Nature and true to Science—contemplates the 'one man' in all his complexity of soul and body, of mind and matter. Nay more ; she regards the great Future Life, not as of a disembodied Intellect, but as of an Organism. Her Creed says not 'I believe in the Immortality of the Soul,' but 'I believe in the Resurrection of the Dead.'"

3. And now let us take Positivism. The disciples of the Comtean or Positive Philosophy, who seem to be increasing in numbers, having demolished, to their own satisfaction, the Christian Religion, have set themselves, with laudable zeal, to give us in its place, as the *summum bonum*, something better, because more positive, and more ennobling—so they say. The men of that school reject Christianity because of its "selfishness";—they look with scorn upon the ordinary view of Heaven as one of eternal indolence and selfish enjoyment, as "gross," and what not. They recoil from the individualism of the Christian wholly absorbed—as they put it—in "saving his own soul;" and announce, as a grand discovery of their own, the doctrine of Corporate Humanity. Mr. Herbert Spencer and other exponents of Sociology teach (and

very truly) that the individual is what he is, not entirely owing to forces from within, but equally, if not mainly indeed, to forces from without :—that to understand the individual we must study, not only his “organism,” but his “environments”; that the Parents, the Family, the Education, the Associates, the Neighbourhood, nay the Air he breathes, are all important Factors in the Constitution of the Man himself : that the Scientific Law of the Conservation of Energy applies to Mental and Moral Force as much as to Physical :—and that in consequence the elevation and perfecting of Corporate Humanity is the highest and holiest aim to which we can aspire.

Now, there is truth in all this : but is that truth a new discovery ? Is it a truth which has been ignored by the Church ? That it has been lost sight of by Puritanism we may admit. Ultra-protestants have laid such stress on the salvation of the individual soul as to lose all sight of what *we* understand by the “Church Idea.” With them the Visible Church simply means, a Voluntary Association, for purposes of Mutual Improvement, of those who have already been made Sons of God, in some fortuitous and sporadic way, by God’s direct and arbitrary action on the individual soul. Hence, such Protestant cries as “Religion is an affair of the soul alone”—“We want no priestly intervention between the soul and its Maker”—“The Church cannot save us,” and such like, all indicate their entire abnegation of the “Sociological” aspect of Christianity. But He who “knew what was in Man” made all provision for man’s need in this respect. He considered, not only the “organism”, but the “environments”; and constituted His Church, with its Ministry and its Sacraments of Initiation and Participation—its whole organism in fact—(which Church, like the leaven hid in meal, is to work “until the whole is leavened,”) for the very purpose of bringing about that Perfection of Corporate Humanity which is the boasted aim of the Positivists.

In the First Sermon of that remarkably Rationalistic volume, "Scotch Sermons," it is striking to note how the Preacher, Dr. Caird, seems to have grasped for the first time the truth of Corporate Humanity. He had evidently read the works of Herbert Spencer and other Sociologists : he seized their leading idea and endeavoured to Christianize it ; but alas ! it was a lame and inefficient process. That Corporate Humanity from a Christian standpoint was a novel idea to Dr. Caird is not to be wondered at, considering his Puritan "environments." Let us hope that further investigation will bring him into the light of Catholic Truth. For in fact all that is true or beautiful or animating in the Doctrines of Sociology and of the Positivists is epitomized in those wonderful words of the Apostle ; "As the Body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one Body being many *are* one Body ; so also is CHRIST." And the glorious Idea of the Perfection of Corporate Humanity is fully recognized by everyone who says with understanding "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."

So we see the Catholic Christian does not blink at the light of Science, and is undismayed by the speculations of Anti-Christian Philosophers. All that has been proved true beyond question, though it may disturb the Puritan or Platonic view of Christianity, will only strengthen the position of the One Body of Christ. And the realization by all Christians of the Corporate Unity of the Church will be the bulwark against the shocks of the Infidel (whatever guise, Agnostic or Positive, he may assume) in the present ; just as it was the bulwark against the onslaughts of the Unbeliever and Barbarian in the Past.

The Rev. Dr. Grant, Principal of Queen's College, in a masterly essay read before the Evangelical Alliance which met in Montreal, in 1874, while speaking of the inroads of the Goths and Vandals and subsequently of the Saracens, remarked : "The Sacerdotal

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Church, with its outward unity . . . *saved Christianity.*" This witness is true. The Sacerdotal Church, in the days of Political and Social dismemberment, *saved Christianity*: and by God's grace, in these days which are even now upon us of Ecclesiastical and Doctrinal dismemberment, the Sacerdotal Church will save it again.

But if this were all,—if our "platform" were simply this one great Truth,—there is no need of our separate existence. The Roman Catholic Church upholds this doctrine as firmly as ourselves, and exhibits it in a far grander way than we can do. But it is *not* all.

We have already said that each line of thought, the Catholic and the Puritan, has its basis of Truth, and each is in danger of error through exaggeration. Unfortunately, the western portion of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, as again Dr. Grant has so graphically described, did push its Corporate Unity to such an extent as to destroy that rightful liberty of the various local branches which had been enjoyed in the earliest and purest ages of the Church. The spirit of Centralization at last culminated in a one-man power, an absolute autocracy. To protest against this latter development—to assert and to maintain the rights anciently belonging to every "particular or national church," without in the least derogating from the Corporate Unity of the Church Universal—such was the position taken by the Church of England at the Reformation. While admitting the Divine Origin and Continuity of the Church she did not deem her infallible. Errors, and useless or even pernicious doctrines and practices, may creep into the Catholic Church, just as errors and interpolations have crept into the copies of the Scriptures. The Church in her corporate capacity may reform herself either nationally or universally, just as she may make a Revised Version of the Scriptures. But men can no more make a new Church than they can compose

a new Bible. Acting on this principle the Church of England protested against certain claims of the Bishop of Rome, as being *ultra vires*; and, like a true Protestant,—entering her protest against what she deemed the unconstitutional action of the majority—*appealed to a higher tribunal*; and that tribunal was a General Council. And her appeal to that General Council, and her profession to abide by its decisions, provided it be a *bonâ fide* General Council, still holds good. In the meantime she accepts the decrees of all those Councils which were *bonâ fide* Œcumenical or Catholic. And so she retains Episcopacy, and the Divine Liturgy, and the Seasons of the Christian Year and other Forms and Observances, not simply because they are allowable or convenient, or in good taste, but because they are Catholic. But she also retains the right to adapt that Liturgy and those Forms to “countries, times and men’s manners” (Art. XXXIV.) a right which the various local branches of the Primitive Church always possessed. She does not in her formularies assert—in language which I am sure all Christians would now be ashamed to use—The Pope is Anti-Christ: She simply with calm dignity declares “The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of *England*.” (Art. XXXVII.)

And now I think we arrive at the special and peculiar principle of the Anglican Church:—the ground which she takes and which we conceive to be unique, at least in Western Christendom; and it may be stated thus:—

The Corporate Unity of the Church of Christ is perfectly compatible with a certain limited independence of Her Local Branches.

“The Body is one, and hath many members,” Each member, notwithstanding its incorporation in the Body, possesses to a certain limited extent, an individuality of its own.

And this principle—though, as we see, peculiar to ourselves in Ecclesiastical matters—is it so hard to understand or to reconcile

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with facts? Is it not precisely the principle upon which all great associations of men for various purposes are constructed? Take the numerous secret and benevolent societies of the present day. We find there is the Grand Lodge of the whole society—then the National or Provincial Grand Lodges—each with a certain amount of independence—then the County or District Lodges, and so on. Again in the Political world; do not we Canadians feel that in the whole Dominion, “the body is one,” and yet it hath “many members” in the several Provinces? Nay, we may go further and see in the whole British Empire this principle of Unity combined with Liberty strikingly exemplified. And so of that other great Anglo-Saxon Empire,—our kith and kin across the border,—the United States. Does not every citizen of that great Republic feel that, notwithstanding the rights of individual States, still he is a member of the “one Body”? Now this is our contention in the religious world. We assert (to use Political and Social phraseology) that the Holy Catholic Church has but one “Constitution” indeed; but that each local division thereof has the right to frame its own “By-laws.”

And in all this we do not wish to be understood as desiring to force the whole Catholic Church into the pattern of the British Constitution. Rather I believe that our Political Institutions have been, unwittingly, yet none the less surely, based upon the principles of the Early Church.

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Such then, brethren, we conceive to be our peculiar and distinguishing feature: such is the great principle which it is the mission of the Anglican Church to maintain and exhibit. “The Law of Liberty”: Law, as regards principles; liberty, as to details. Law for the “one Body,” consistently with a constitutional liberty for its “many members.”

And let us be imbued with this Idea—let us preserve this object

and aim—in all our Synodical action. A grand opportunity is afforded to us in Canada of exemplifying this “Law of Liberty.” We have our intimate connection with the Mother Church ; we have our Provincial and our Diocesan Synods. Let our own Diocese be a microcosm, a happy illustration of the truth, that “the Body is one and hath many members.” Let the world see that that wonderful comprehensiveness, which some think our reproach—calling us the Church of Compromise—is our boast and pride. Let not the High Churchman say to the Low Churchman, “I have no need of thee,” nor again the Evangelicals to the Ritualists, “We have no need of you.”

And again as to order and discipline. Let us remember that, while the many members of the One Body have not all the same office, yet all—from the highest Prelate to the infant just baptized—*are* members, and as such have their “office” and their individual rights. Let the rights of all classes—Bishop, Clergy, Laity,—be jealously guarded by themselves, and ungrudgingly accorded by the rest. And herein, brethren, we cannot do better than follow the model of the British Constitution, for, as said before, I believe that Constitution itself to be providentially modelled on the plan of the Primitive Church. As in the State the King holds his office for life, so in the Church does the Bishop. And as it is a maxim of the State that “the King can do no wrong,” because he acts within constitutional bounds, so, I ween, our Legislation should tend to this result, that we can say “The Bishop, like the King, can do no wrong.” We do not want, and I speak for my brethren of the Clergy, a Priest-ridden Church :—we do not want, and I am sure the Episcopate does not want, a Bishop-ridden Church ; and we do not want, I know the brethren do not want, a Laity-ridden Church. No : we all desire that the Apostolate, the Presbytery, the Diaconate, the Laity should be (to use the beautiful metaphor of S. Ignatius) like strings fitted to a harp, to perform together one Divine and perfect harmony.

To attain this end Charity is needed : that "forbearing one another in love," that scrupulous regard for others' feelings, and others' rights, which will certainly be engendered in us in proportion as we realize that "we are One Body in Christ, and every one members, one of another." So shall we receive from God the guidance and the blessing that we ask : so will the Synod be providing, in its own special department, "for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ : till we all come into the Unity of the Faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the Perfect Man,—unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST."