

THE PRIESTHOOD AND PRIESTLY SERVICE OF THE CHURCH.

FROM the Head of the Church we turn to the Church herself. The living Lord is now a Priest in heaven. How far is His Church on earth priestly? and, if she is so, what are the functions in which her priestliness is fulfilled? The inquiry must relate in the first instance to the Church as a whole, and not to any particular class within her. Upon the propriety of keeping this in view, it is unnecessary to say more than has been said already.

There can be no hesitation then in asserting that, in the strictest and fullest meaning of the words, the Church of Christ is a sacerdotal or priestly institution. Sacerdotalism, priestliness, is the prime element of her being; and it is so because it is the prime element in the being of her exalted and glorified Head. The general principle from which we must start in all inquiries of this kind is, that whatever function Christ discharges in heaven must also be discharged, according to her capabilities and opportunities, by His Church on earth. This principle is the simple corollary to the fundamental principle of the Church's existence as a spiritual body, that she is the Body of Christ, and that the Body lives in such close communion with the Head, that whatever the latter is or does the former must in measure be or do. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches" (John xv. 5); such is the declaration by her Lord of the Church's privilege and standing among men. "Abide in Me, and I in you" (John xv. 4) is His authoritative command. The true idea of the Church on earth is not that she consists of a vast multitude of men, individually following in the footsteps of their Master, and looking for ever-increasing measures of the Spirit dispensed by Him from heaven. Nor is it even that of a Body starting from earth, and

reaching onwards to a heavenly condition, only perfectly attained when our present mortal pilgrimage is over. It is rather the idea of a Body starting from heaven, and exhibiting the graces and privileges already ideally bestowed upon it in such a manner as may lead the world either to come to the light, or to condemn itself because it loves darkness rather than light, its deeds being evil. The visibility of the Body is one of the essential notes of its existence. The Father of the spirits of all flesh desires to make Himself known for the salvation of the world. Before this can be effectually done, He must, according to the constitution of our nature, be seen in what He is. Therefore, because no man hath seen or can see God at any time, the Only Begotten, which was in the bosom of the Father, hath "declared" Him (John i. 18). This "declaration," however, could be made by Christ Himself to none but the men of His own generation. A record of it might be preserved; books might be written regarding it; a full and detailed description of what Jesus was while upon earth might be given to mankind. But not in books alone could all that is involved in communion with the Father be so presented to the world as to attract it also into that blessed fellowship. The world needed to see what such fellowship implied, how it elevated and consecrated and beautified human life, and, in the only sense in which the word ought to be used, brought "salvation" to man. Hence, accordingly, the words of our Lord Himself, "As Thou didst send Me into the world, even so sent I them into the world"; "And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given unto them; that they may be one even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and lovedst them, even as Thou lovedst Me" (John xvii. 18, 22, 23). Hence, the words of "the disciple whom Jesus loved," "If we walk in

the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). And hence, even more particularly, those words of the same apostle which hardly appear as yet to have received the due consideration of the Church, "As He *is*, even so are we in this world" (1 John iv. 17). Further, it would seem to be a principle involved in the revelation of the New Testament, and confirmed by the analogy of nature, that the Head of the Church acts only through the Body; and that, if the world is to be made partaker of the influences of His Spirit, that Spirit shall be conferred through the instrumentality of men, through the instrumentality of those of whom, it may be said that, when the world receives them, it receives Christ Himself and Him that sent Him (John xiii. 20).

It follows from all this, that whatever Christ is or does in heaven must be represented or done by the Church on earth. No doubt it will be done imperfectly. The Church has not yet realized the ideal perfection which belongs to her. Sin too often prevails where there ought to be no sin; there is disunion where there ought to be unity; there is weakness where there ought to be strength; and, however high their spiritual life, the members of the Church must always be clothed with their body of humiliation, with their body of flesh, until He who is now waited for comes again and fashions it anew, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself (Phil. iii. 20, 21).

Notwithstanding this, the Church's ideal state supplies even now the standard of her duty; it is the manifestation of that state which she is to have ever before her eyes; and to draw nearer and nearer to it is to be her constant effort. From Him in whom her ideal is already actually realized she draws her measure of that state to the extent

to which she is able to receive it. The stream of which she is to drink, and which she is to convey to others, does not show simply the amount of water stored in any small spring opened on the mountain side, but rather the abounding fulness of that great gathering of waters above the firmament, upon which more truly than upon the ocean the words may be written, "dread, fathomless, alone." These waters the Church, with her varied ordinances of grace, is to transmit, as she passes onwards to the future, in ever-increasing volume for the fertilization of widening lands and the refreshment of multiplying peoples. The true conception of the Church, in short, is that she begins in heaven and descends with all her powers to earth: she does not begin on earth and work her way to heaven.

Whatever function then is discharged by Christ in heaven must also be discharged by His Church on earth. Is the glorified Redeemer a Prophet?—the prophetic office must belong to her. It may be in a form distributed through appropriate members; but primarily it belongs to her as a whole, the life of Christ in His prophetic office being first *her* life, and then *her* life pervading and animating any particular persons through whom the functions of the prophetic life are discharged. In like manner, is the glorified Redeemer a King (into the special nature of this kingship we cannot inquire at present)?—the kingly office must also belong to her; and, if it again is to be represented in any particular members rather than in the Body as a whole, her life must penetrate and pervade these members so that they may be kingly. If it be so with Christ's offices as Prophet and King, it cannot be less so with that priestly office which is the culminating part of all His work, the foundation upon which the others rest, and the fountain out of which they flow.

Nothing accordingly can be more distinct than the manner in which this priestly character of the Church is

set before us in Scripture. We have already had occasion to speak of the priestly character of Israel; and we have seen that, if that central aspect of the people of God under the Old Testament dispensation is to be fulfilled under the New Testament, it must, after the analogy of all else, be fulfilled in Christ, and then in His Church. We have referred also to the plain statement of the Apostle Peter on the point. Yet it may be worth while to note the same fact in connexion with that Melchizedek aspect of our Lord's priesthood which especially distinguishes it in heaven. Wherever the priestly character of the Church's Head in heaven is treated of, there the priestly character of His people upon earth appears. Thus in Psalm cx., where the coming Redeemer is saluted as "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," those that stand by Him in the war are described as offering themselves willingly "in the beauties of holiness," or "in holy attire." "The holy garments are priestly garments. They who wear them are priestly warriors in the train of a priestly leader."¹

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, again, the sacred writer has no sooner set forth the glory of the Melchizedek priesthood, and of Jesus as a High Priest after that order, than he makes the practical application: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place in the blood of Jesus, by the way which He dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a great Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water" (chap. x. 19-22). The entering "into the holy place," spoken of in these words, at once suggests the light under which Christians are there thought of, for into it, under the Old Testament economy, priests alone could enter; and this conclusion

¹ Perowne, *in loc.*

is strengthened by the fact, that the two participial sentences, marking out the mode in which we are to draw near, are grounded, the one on the sprinkling of blood which accompanied the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (Exod. xxix. 21); the other on the command that when they entered into the tabernacle of the congregation they should wash with water, that they died not (Exod. xxx. 20). It is as priests then that members of the Christian Church enjoy their privilege of immediate access to the presence of God. Because they have a High Priest over the house of God, they are priests in Him.

The same thing appears once more in the Revelation of St. John. That in the visions of that apostle, Christ exalted in glory is the High Priest of His Church, no one can for a moment doubt. It is the truth embodied in the fundamental vision of the book, that of one "like unto a Son of man" in chap. i. In that vision Jesus may also be a King, but He is certainly first a Priest, in priestly garments worn as these were worn by the priests of Israel when engaged in active work. With equal clearness does St. John teach us in the same book that in the risen and glorified High Priest all His people are also priests. They have been made "to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father" (chap. i. 6); and the white robes which they wear on all occasions throughout the book are robes of priests.

It is unnecessary to enlarge upon this point; for, the Head being a priest, the mystical union between it and the members involves in their case the same idea. Few indeed deny what is here contended for. What is needed is not so much a wider acceptance of the truth, as a deeper and livelier appreciation of its power and consequences. We may start with this as an indisputable fact, that the chief characteristic of the glorified Redeemer being His heavenly

priesthood, a priesthood moulded upon His, and exhibiting it to the world, is the chief characteristic of His Church. What, we have rather to ask, is in this respect the Church's commission in the world? It must correspond to that of the Head.

I. The Church has an offering to present to God. After what has been said of the offering of our Lord, we can have little difficulty in determining what this offering is. We have seen that the offering of our Lord is not a mere memorial of His death, but that it is rather His life, won through that death, in a full, one, everlasting, and never to be repeated sacrifice and offering to the Father. The Church again is in Him, and He is in her; and what therefore she presents is her life in His life, obediently and submissively devoted in perpetual service to the will of His Father and her Father, of His God, and her God. Constrained by the mercies of God, she is to present herself, in body as well as spirit, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is her reasonable or spiritual service (Rom. xii. 1). In the joyful confidence of love she is to draw near continually, with full assurance of faith, into the inmost sanctuary of the Divine presence, and there to obtain fresh quickening for the duties that would otherwise be too difficult for her, and for the temptations that she would be otherwise unable to overcome. The life of the Church, even in this world, ought to be at once a life of consecration and of joy. Thus it was that our Lord spoke of it as the great end of His own consecration, that His Church "might be consecrated in truth" (John xvii. 19); that is, in a manner real, spiritual, everlasting, the counterpart of that in which He is consecrated. And thus it was that He prayed that His people might have His "joy fulfilled in themselves" (John xvii. 13),—His own deep, abiding joy, because He stood in the Father's name; because His work, amidst all its sorrows,

was in them and through them a joyful work; and because He was the constant recipient of the Father's joy. It is because she is priestly that the offering by the Church of herself to God is so unconstrained and free. Why is "the spirit of bondage again unto fear" so common among us, instead of the "spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father"? Why do so many fail to say, "His commandments are not grievous," "His yoke is easy, and His burden is light?" It is because they do not sufficiently recognise the fact that, in their great High Priest sitting on or standing by the throne, they are priests. Did they feel that they were so, they would see that it was the very essence of their position to draw near to God with confidence, and to lay their bodies, souls, and spirits upon His altar, assured that they were an acceptable offering to Him.

So far as we have come no objection will probably be taken to anything that has been said. But a most important point now meets us, on which there may be more difference of opinion. The point seems to have been hardly enough discussed in the Church; and what is to be said ought to be regarded as rather suggesting inquiry, than as indicating positive or dogmatic conclusions.

The principle upon which we have been proceeding, it will be remembered, is, that the offering of the Church on earth is the counterpart of her Lord's offering of Himself in heaven. In this offering, however, our Lord does not simply surrender Himself to God in a life, if we may so speak, of *individual* freedom and joy. He surrenders Himself for others. He does not stand alone; and the question thus forces itself upon us, Is there anything in the offering made on the part of the Church on earth in her priestly functions that corresponds to this?

Let us glance again for a moment at our Lord's heavenly offering, in the light in which we have been led mainly to consider it. In heaven He always presents Himself to the

Father in His perfect, one, and everlasting offering for the redemption of the world. There He also presents in Himself, as an acceptable offering or sacrifice to God, all who in the exercise of appropriating faith are enabled by Divine grace to make themselves one with Him. In other words, our Lord being now in heaven, and being there not less truly human than Divine, carries out in its complete perfection the life of God in human nature; while at the same time, taking His people into union with Himself, He makes those who from the first moment of faith are ideally His to be more and more actually His, so that the Father may behold in them what He beholds in Him. It is impossible however that this should be accomplished by a merely legal act. Christ's people must be offered, and they must freely offer themselves in Him, with a true, personal appropriation on their part of such a sacrifice as He made, of such labours and sufferings as He endured, of such a death as that through which He passed. Now of this sacrifice, of these labours and sufferings, of this death on our Lord's part, the idea of enduring them for others is an essential element; and there must therefore be some sense in which a similar thought has a place assigned to it in our conception of offering on the Church's part. Without this, indeed, offering would fail to accomplish its great end, alike as regards Christians themselves, and as regards the world around them.

It would fail as regards themselves; for suffering on behalf of others, self-sacrifice for the good of others, is essential to that perfecting of the character, to that bringing it into likeness or conformity to the character of Christ, which is "salvation." Did that word mean in itself only the bestowal of pardon and everlasting happiness, or were it possible to think of the bestowal of a completed moral and religious life without disciplinary experience, it might not be so. But "salvation" always implies in Scripture delivering

us from the power of evil, "loosing us from our sins," and a re-creation within us of that Divine image which we had lost. And this again, according to the nature of man, cannot be imparted without our passing experimentally through that process in which we die unto sin and live unto righteousness, in which we die to self and rise into the life of God.

Now the essence of the Divine life is love. "God is love." Love is the fundamental conception of His being. It is that boundless crystal sea which contains within it all existence and which would communicate its own blessedness to every creature. Love moreover cannot be conceived of without the thought of others to share what it has to bestow. We must therefore love others if we are to know what "salvation" means; and, in the growing and perfecting of our love to others, our salvation grows and is perfected. Further, when they to whom our love must flow forth, if we have love at all, are sinful and rebellious against the only true good; when they are ignorant of what their real welfare is; or when, so far as they are dimly conscious of it, they are inclined to resist and to reject it; when they are involved in misery that shocks our sensibilities, grieves our hearts, and threatens to baffle all our efforts for its cure; when their condition, in short, needs rectifying, and when it cannot be rectified without pain, then love must assume the form of self-sacrifice. Without this it may be a genuine pity or an empty sentimentalism, but it is not that powerful, vigorous passion which is "strong as death," and which "many waters cannot quench." To suffer for others is thus not a mere burden laid in an arbitrary way upon the followers of Christ. It is not a mere test of their fidelity to their Lord. Nor is it only a severe probation through which they must pass, that their affections may be weaned from the present and directed to the future. It is not even a mere duty imposed upon us by the remembrance of Him

who gave Himself for us, the just for the unjust. That we shall suffer for others is implied in the very nature of a salvation adapted to man's condition. It is part of the process. It is that experience in which our salvation is wrought out, that in which we are brought nearest to the mind of God and Christ, so that we may say with one who has recently written with great thoughtfulness upon pain and self-sacrifice, "If God would give us the best and greatest gift, that which above all others we might long for and aspire after, even though in despair, it is this that He must give us, the privilege He gave His Son, to be used and sacrificed for the best and greatest end." ¹

"The joy that comes in sorrow's guise,
The sweet pains of self-sacrifice,
I would not have them otherwise."

While suffering for others is thus needed on the part of Christians, in order that they may themselves be perfected, it is not less needed in order that they may exert influence on the world. Men must see suffering endured for them and for their sakes if they are to acknowledge any power on the part of those who profess a desire to do them good. The spectacle of patient Christian suffering under ills directly inflicted by the hand of God may be a precious lesson to persons already, or almost wholly, within the pale of the Christian faith. It may be doubted whether it has much influence on the world. The world does not understand it. It may wonder, perhaps admire. Most probably it will treat the exhibition of such patience as something inexplicable, or as curiously illustrative of the delusions which men practise on themselves. If it is to own a right in the sufferers to speak to it, to warn it of error, or to demand its submission to views and ways different from those it has chosen, it must see more. Sacrifice of ourselves for others,

¹ Hinton, *Mystery of Pain*, p. 17.

bearing for their sakes toil or want or privation, is, according to the laws of human nature, the necessary condition of winning them to our side.

The point now contended for is taught in important passages of Scripture. How otherwise, for example, shall we explain the remarkable scene of the footwashing in John xiii. ? After that scene our Lord said to the disciples, " Know ye what I have done to you ? Ye call Me, Master, and, Lord : and ye say well ; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you " (vers. 12-15). No one who has entered into the spirit of the fourth gospel will for an instant suppose that we are here taught nothing more than a lesson of humility and kindness. What had our Lord done to the disciples whom He is addressing ? He had " bathed " them in His blood. He had taken them up into His own holy and blessed life. They were in Him ; in Him their sins had been covered ; they were united to Him, and in Him to God ; they were " clean." But clean though they were, they could not live in this world without soiling their feet. Sins and shortcomings would mark them every day, not indeed of so serious a character as to destroy their interest in Christ, but enough to show that they stood in need of daily cleansing and of daily renewal of their consecration. In this sphere they were to offer for one another. In suffering and self-sacrifice they were to be victims for one another. The man strong to-day was to take up his weaker brother into his life, and to strengthen him. Weak himself to-morrow, he was to be taken up into the life of the man whom he had strengthened yesterday, and in him to obtain strength ; until all, thus revived and completed in the communication of their brother's strength to make them strong, and of his life to make them live, were to be " clean every whit." This

cleansing then, not the ideal but the experimental cleansing—for Jesus said to them, “Ye are clean” (ver. 10)—was to be reached by offering, by self-sacrifice, by suffering for each other. Then the power of that sympathy and love, which were really Christ’s Divine life flowing through them all, would change each other’s sin into sinlessness, each other’s imperfection into perfection, and each other’s weakness into strength.

To a similar effect is the language of St. Paul in Colossians i. 24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the Church.” It is impossible to accept as satisfactory the explanations usually given of these words, for all of them are marked by the effort to distinguish between the sufferings of Christ and those of His people, whereas the obvious intention of the apostle is, in one way or another, to identify them. St. Paul indeed would never have allowed that the sufferings of Christ lacked anything necessary to the full accomplishing of the purpose they were intended to effect. But that very purpose lay in this,—that, as Christ Himself was perfected through suffering, so the members of His Body might in Him be perfected, and might reach this perfection through suffering for their brethren’s good. To introduce into the words of the apostle a distinction between the sufferings of Christ as *satisfactoriæ* and in that sense *complete*, and as *ædificatoriæ* and in that sense *incomplete* and needing to be supplemented,¹ is to introduce a thought which does not seem to have been in the apostle’s mind, and which is inconsistent with his desire to bring out a *similarity* between Christ’s sufferings and the sufferings of His people. In a certain sense the sufferings of Christ, even when viewed as *satisfactoriæ*, may be spoken of as incomplete without the

¹ Comp. Lightfoot on Col. i. 24.

thought of His people; for when He offered Himself they were *in* Him, and without this His offering would have possessed only that character of a legal work, of a work to be imputed externally to man, which falls short of the teaching of Scripture upon the point. If therefore we would understand the language of the apostle, we must think of it as proceeding from the feeling, that just as Christ suffered for others, so the members of His Body suffer for others. To teach His people thus to suffer, to redeem them from the power of selfishness, and to impart to them the life and joy of love, was the aim of the Redeemer in what He did and suffered on our behalf. So long therefore as there is sin or weakness for which to suffer, sin or weakness which cannot be healed except through the sufferings of those who show that they have the spirit of their Master by trying to heal it, the offering of Christ is not "filled up." Its final result is not attained; nor will it be attained until, there being no more room for suffering on behalf of others, both the Head and the members, penetrated by the same life, shall be presented to the Father in one fulness of joy.

Taking these considerations into account, we seem to be justified in asking whether the Church has not been too chary of allowing the idea of offering for others to be connected with her position and life. It is surely without sufficient cause that she has been afraid of encroaching upon the one sacrifice of Christ, or of attributing to sinful men the possibility of making satisfaction for the sins of others. No one awakened to a sense of sin, and that is the condition of all believers, could for an instant entertain such a thought. So long as the Church feels—what ceasing to feel she ceases to be the Church—that in Christ alone is she accepted and complete, that her life is wholly in His life, and that her work is wholly done in the grace which He supplies, the thought of her making satisfaction

for others must in the nature of the case be entirely put aside. For the same reason, any idea of merit upon her part must be equally foreign to her thoughts. There can be no merit where all that is done by her is not merely at first bestowed upon her from without, but is at each moment maintained in her by influences flowing from the same source. Nay, more; the most powerful argument to expel, rather than foster, a sense of merit on the Church's part is to be found in the considerations now adduced. To produce humility there is certainly force in telling her that, as she suffers in following Christ, she is either undergoing a necessary discipline, or that she is only making a suitable return for the blessings which she has received. Yet there is far more force in reminding her that her sufferings have a deeper root, that they are an integral and indispensable part of her experience of redemption, and that in the very act of recognising that she owes all to Christ she must include her suffering for others as a part of her obligation and her debt.

Before passing on it may be well to add that the view now taken of the Church's priestly offering on earth appears to bring with it most momentous practical consequences. Of one only of these is it possible to speak at present, but it is too important to be omitted.

It will place the Church before the world in the true and proper relation in which she ought to stand to it. At the Pan-Presbyterian Council held in London last July a paper (since published in *THE EXPOSITOR* of the following October)¹ was read which, in spite of the objections made to it at the time, cannot be regarded otherwise than as one of interest and value. Dr. Dods said:

“It cannot, I think, be doubted, that the Church might have given a more distinct idea of Christianity and of what the true Christian is.

¹ Page 297.

It must frequently have been matter of astonishment, and even of something like dismay, to every reader to find how completely even the best educated assailants of Christianity misunderstand what it is. Not only in the lower class of freethinking journals, but in writers of the culture and knowledge of the late Cotter Morison, there is exhibited an almost unaccountable ignorance of the spirit and aims of Christianity. The Christian is represented as an obscurantist, afraid of light, and capable of swallowing the grossest absurdities; as a selfish, small-souled creature, whose object it is to save his own soul, and whose idea of saving his soul is escaping from punishment in a future life.

“For such misrepresentations the Church is responsible, in so far as it has not produced a type of Christianity which would make these conceptions impossible; and in so far as it has allowed faith in Christ to become identified in the popular mind with faith in a number of doctrines regarding Christ, and has thus made faith needlessly difficult, and to many minds repellent and impossible.”¹

The words thus quoted are as unquestionably as they are painfully true. It is not indeed necessary to suppose that the writer undervalues, when they are kept in their proper place, the “doctrines” of which he speaks; nor does he probably fail to see as well as others that the *interpretation* of a revelation given in a person must be doctrinal. The main point of his contention is, that the Church is responsible for having so lived and acted, as to permit the world to suppose that the reception of any tenets, however Divine, constituted Christianity. Such a supposition is of course entirely erroneous, and the Church is bound to correct it. How is she to do so? Not by merely shortening her creeds, or by modifying the relations of her ministers and members to them. That procedure may be on other grounds wise. We have nothing to do with it just now. Enough that it will not correct the fatal misapprehension with which we are dealing. We have had in recent years a good deal of it, both in England and Scotland. Terms of subscription have been shortened; explanations have been added, till the explanation threatens to become as troublesome as the

¹ THE EXPOSITOR for October, 1888, pp. 299, 300.

creed; the idea that creeds are loose where men thought them definite, and that they possess a richly expansive, instead of a narrowly binding nature, has seized with sufficient firmness many a mind. Yet we do not see in the attitude of the Church to the world anything that gives more promise of convincing the world that the Church is Divine, than in days when men held by every iota of a creed as if it were the middle pillar of the house that upheld the house. It was in the midst of these later phenomena on which we have touched that Cotter Morison's book appeared. That book ought not to have been written, and it would not have been written had the Church been true to her commission, or had she presented Christianity to the world as her Lord, if He had been in our days upon the earth, would have presented it. In this last case we should have seen in Him—as things are, we ought to see in her—what is the real “service of man.” Noble words! The very utterance of them, like the utterance of those other words, “the enthusiasm of humanity,” elevates us. May it not be a matter of regret that both expressions should have come, not from the Church, but from those who either scorn her, or have little sympathy with her?

To return to the point before us. What the Church needs is revival in life and spirit, a keener appreciation of the fact that she is divinely called to occupy in the world her Lord's position, to take up there His work of doing good to man. Instead of declaiming against sacerdotalism and priesthood, she ought to see more clearly that her own highest destination is to be sacerdotal, is to be priestly. She has an offering, a sacrifice, to make; and it is the very essence of her condition to make it. That offering, that sacrifice, is herself; a sacrifice for the poor, the ignorant, the wretched, and the criminal, that she may win them into her own life, and in that life present them as an offering to the Father of the spirits of all flesh in the life, the offering,

of her High Priest in heaven. When she does this, she will find that she has attained a greater element of power than she will ever acquire by thanking Heaven that she is not priestly.

We have spent so much time upon this first part of the Church's priesthood, that little space is left for its two other parts. A brief notice of them must suffice.

II. As in her priestly capacity the Church has an offering to make, so also, like her glorified Lord, she is an intercessor with the Father. And what is this intercession? We have already seen that it is not prayer alone, but the diligent performance of every office and every act by which the persons for whom she prays may be built up into the completeness, strength, and beauty of the Divine life in man. She has to form those who are as yet babes in Christ into perfect manhood, to give courage to the faint, to restore the fallen, to speak peace to the sensitive conscience, to lift up to higher notes of praise those who are already singing the Lord's song in a strange land. Of this "intercession," indeed, prayer is undoubtedly one of the most essential parts. Not only the prayers of individuals, but the prayers of the Church as a whole, ought to ascend continually to Him who says, "Put Me in remembrance; let us plead together; set forth thy cause, that thou mayest be justified" (Isa. xliii. 26). The world ought to know that, apart from the struggles in which it is engaged, from the distraction of thought from which it suffers, from the materialising tendencies of life,

"There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime";

and who, within such veils as earth supplies, are sending up their unceasing prayers to Heaven on its behalf. Nor

would this only teach dependence upon others, and the superstitious feeling that without working out our own salvation we may be saved by the pious exertions on our behalf of those who love us. That may be the danger, but there is no good which has not its attendant danger; and surely it is better to think of salvation gained in some way than not to think of it at all. How often have a parent's, or a friend's, or a minister's prayers, accidentally overheard by their object, touched the heart of one wandering in sin, and done far more to reclaim him than words of direct remonstrance or reproof! How often has even the persuasion that Christian friends were praying for us lent us courage and hope in the hour of need! Let the Church "pray without ceasing" for her own members; let her "pray without ceasing" that through her the world may be made in truth the kingdom of God, and she will only be acting a part for which even nature pleads, and which is sanctified by grace. She cannot make a real offering, either of herself or for others, without occupying the position of her heavenly High Priest, and presenting her prayers, the prayers of all saints, as much incense, before the throne of the Majesty on high.

III. In fulfilling her priestly function the Church, like her Lord in heaven, dispenses blessings. The point thus touched on cannot be discussed at present. It would require separate treatment; for it opens up the whole question of the bestowal, not directly, but through the Church, of the Holy Spirit upon men. Yet, without entering upon this wide and in some respects difficult subject, it may surely be said that through the Church there is, according to the teaching of Scripture, the direct impartation of strengthening grace to those who do not close their hearts against it. Benediction, blessing, cannot be a mere form of words. There must be some reality beneath it. Nor can it be only prayer, or why does it not take the form of prayer alone?

When the apostles baptized the early converts to the faith they laid their hands upon them, and the Holy Spirit was given in their act of doing so. In Acts xiii. 3 it would even appear that, when Barnabas and Saul were separated for the particular work for which they are there described as called, the whole Church at Antioch took part in fitting them for the execution of their task. "Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

We cannot suppose that the Church of Christ now has less at her command than she had in the apostolic age, that Divine grace is less at her disposal now than it was then, or that there is anything in the Divine arrangements made for her in her later history by which the efficacy of her early influence is limited and restrained. When, accordingly, we read so often in the Acts of the Apostles of the bestowal of the Spirit as of something distinct from prayer, we are entitled to infer that there is blessing of a similar kind still bestowed through the action of the Church in word and sacrament. Not that the Church is the source of blessing, any more than she is the source of offering. Rather may it be said that, as she carries out and applies the offering wherewith Christ offers Himself to the Father, so she carries out and applies the blessing wherewith He blesses. But that blessing is real. Under all circumstances it comes forth from Him who has in Himself the "fulness" of grace; and, when it is not accepted by the world, it returns to His people for their own increase in holiness and comfort. Pentecostal seasons did not close with the day of Pentecost. He who then came down in tongues of flame is not confined to an upper room in Jerusalem, nor is the fire of His influence less potent at the present day than it was then. It may appear in different forms; but it appeared in different forms even in the apostolic Church. Let it be enough for us to know that, amidst constantly changing circumstances

and conditions of life, the Spirit of God is still given with a power not less intimately adapted to them, and not less capable of producing the same heavenly life in the earthly homes and haunts of men.

Such then is the priesthood of the Church ; and it will be observed that it includes far more important functions than those generally spoken of by writers on the universal Christian priesthood, or the present priesthood of believers. It is not enough to say with Bishop Moberly that the Christian, in the power of his personal priesthood, may cultivate a true and perfect faith ; that he has a right to the Holy Scriptures ; that he has a title to the sacred doctrine of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ; that he may go before God in repentance and confession of sin ; and that he may pray.¹ These privileges belong to man as man, and they fail to express the distinguishing characteristics of the priestly position of the members of the Body of Christ. That position involves far more, for it involves the privilege of constantly drawing near to God in Christ, and in full assurance of faith. It involves an immediate and full participation in the Divine love, so that that love shall flow in rich abundance through all the members of the Body, and shall animate each to the office for which it possesses "natural ability." It involves the right, not merely the power (John i. 12), of each to make first an offering of himself to God, and then of himself for others, so that we may share the mind of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. It involves the privilege of so helping weak Christian brethren as to convey to them the sense of God's pardoning mercy and the assurance of strength that is perfected in weakness. And, finally, it involves the right to confer that Spirit of the Head at once Divine and human which fills and satisfies every want of our nature as the rising tide runs up and fills every ripple of sand upon the beach.

¹ *Administration of the Holy Spirit*, p. 252.

At this moment nothing is more imperatively demanded of the Church than a revival of that idea of her priestliness which flows directly from the fact that she lives in Him who is our High Priest in heaven. The idea has been left too long associated with periods of unscriptural domination on the part of the clergy, and of ignorance and superstition on the part of the laity. In spite of this, it is alike true and fundamental. A clear perception and a bold enunciation of the Church's priestly character lies at the very root of all that is most distinctive, most real, most forcible, and most valuable in her work. The duty of the Church is not to abandon a position to which she has been divinely called, because it has been abused, and may be abused again. It is, rather, so to occupy it that the fears of timorous friends may be dispelled, and the reproaches of opponents silenced. The aim of true priesthood is not wealth or station or power. It is love, work, self-sacrifice! The anointing in Bethany was accepted by the Redeemer as His consecration, not to worldly honours, but to His "burying"; and to such a burying, not to ease and the high places of the earth, is the Church in her turn consecrated. She has not gained much by casting the thought of her priestliness aside. Let her again proclaim it, not so much in word as in deed; and it may be that men will be more ready to listen to her message, and that the house will once more be filled with the odour of the ointment.

W. MILLIGAN.
