

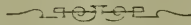




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Christ Church, Albany Street,

ST. PANCRAS.



SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

DEDICATION FESTIVAL

JULY 13th, 1879,

BY THE

REV. H. W. BURROWS, B.D.,

Prebendary of St. Paul's, and Vicar of Edmonton.



LONDON :

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1879.

CHRIST CHURCH, ALBANY STREET,

ST. PANCRAS.



DEDICATION FESTIVAL,

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Psalms lxxviii. v. 28.—Thy GOD hath commanded thy strength : strengthen, O GOD,
that which Thou hast wrought for us.

The Psalm which we have sung this morning is most poetical, but has difficult passages in it. I shall make use of the words of the S. P. C. K. commentator who follows the common opinion that it was written on the removal of the ark from the house of Obed-edom to the new Tabernacle prepared for it on Mount Zion.

In the Psalm there is dashed off a review of GOD'S conduct of His people through the wilderness, when the cloudy pillar marshalled them their way. There is a reference to such triumphs over the Canaanites as the song of Deborah celebrated. The character of GOD is touched upon : He is not only a GOD of power, but a father of the fatherless, an advocate for the widows. He makes the solitary to dwell in a home ; He brings forth captives into prosperity.

Then the Psalmist passes on to GOD'S choice of Zion as His dwelling-place, and His triumphal entry therein with His Angel-hosts. The literal translation is—the chariots of GOD are myriads twice told, thousands of repetition, *i.e.*, thousands and again thousands, incalculable thousands. The Lord is among them—in the midst of them: they are round about Him. And here the Apostle St. Paul comes in as an interpreter of the old Hebrew poem, and we discover that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who has ascended on high, led captivity captive, and received gifts consisting of men, that even the rebellious may be for the Lord GOD to dwell among. The Psalmist here bursts into praise—"Blessed be the Lord; day by day doth He bear our burden, the GOD who is our salvation." The mighty conqueror, even in His triumph, feels for the daily trials and sorrows of His people, and helps them to bear them.

Observe the confident anticipation of other triumphs—success not in war, but in the conversion of the Gentiles. The Psalmist prays that the Kingdom established on Mount Zion may be extended to all nations, and then concludes with an earnest call to those nations to praise the GOD of Israel.

Now this Psalm is capable of application to the Christian Church, for it celebrates, as Dr. Kay says, "GOD'S presence going before His Church, to guide it to the eternal Resting Place." It is therefore fitly chosen as one of the special Psalms for Whit Sunday, the birthday of Christ's Church. And, as it is suitable for Pentecost, the birthday of the great Universal Church, so it is suitable for this Dedication Festival, which celebrates the birthday of this particular Church, called Christ Church, we may believe, in order that it may be a miniature, as it were, of the whole Catholic Church, called so, too, as a reminder that it should always be true to Church principles, and in order that the same affections may, in a

degree, gather round it, as we bestow on the greater Christian society.

I am glad to take a verse from this Psalm as our motto to-day, a text to furnish the key-note for our thoughts, because this Psalm is the only passage of Holy Scripture which is permanently connected with this Dedication Festival. The Gospels and Epistles vary, the Collects vary, the lessons vary, but this Psalm lxviii. always has been read on the anniversary of the consecration of this Church, and is likely always to be read, being the Psalm for the 13th morning of the month, the day when we keep this Church's birthday—keep it as we do other birthdays. There is a good in keeping birthdays ;—to do so suggests thankfulness for one's having been called into existence, and for having been so long watched over and preserved. A birthday gives an opportunity for self-examination, and for resolutions which should grow out of self-examination. It is an occasion for good wishes and birthday presents. It is a time when a superior, a parent, a teacher, may appropriately volunteer advice.

The observance of such anniversaries cements affection, unites families, and furnishes subjects for happy recollections under altered circumstances, sometimes to those far removed from their home and surrounded by strangers.

I leave you to develop this thought, and to transfer to a *church's* anniversary considerations similar to those which are attached to the birthday of an individual.

To-day I would give you as a motto, one verse of what I will call this church's birthday Psalm—"Thy GOD hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O GOD, that which Thou hast wrought for us." "GOD, who has all power, has given to Israel power over the world. The Psalmist, knowing that GOD alone can keep them in the height to which they have been raised, prays that He would strengthen and confirm His work."

I believe this verse is applicable to the circumstances of to-day. 1. GOD has given this congregation power. 2. He alone can keep this congregation in the height to which they have been raised. 3. We must acknowledge all to be GOD's work. 4. We must pray Him to strengthen and confirm His work. As David in the Psalm reviews Israel's history, so it may not be improper to review briefly the history of this church.

This church was consecrated in 1837, and, of course, was designed some time before it was actually completed. Its career has therefore been contemporaneous with the Church movement, with that revival of distinctive Church principles, which has been one of the chief characteristics of the last half century. This church was, for some time, almost the centre of that movement, at least one of its most conspicuous London centres. Here the first English sisterhood of post reformation times was started. In a general, though, I think, a proper, safe, legitimate way, this church has retained to this day something of its old character.

I think too, that you may give GOD thanks for progress. Two places of worship, St. Mary Magdalen's, Munster Square, and St. Bede's, have been originated through the congregation here. Several important schools have been established. A clergy house has been contributed by a member of the congregation. Pew rents have been relinquished, the free and open system of seating people has been adopted and carried out with much patience, good humour, and mutual forbearance. Many good plans have been imitated from other churches and naturalized here. Perhaps, also, some of your institutions have been imitated elsewhere, and have suggested larger schemes. There has been much admirable lay help furnished, and some remarkable work done among the poor, not merely, as in so many parishes, among women only, but notably here, thank GOD for it, among *men* also.

Owing to the free-will gifts of the congregation a considerable staff of clergy has been maintained, many of whom, though now employed at a distance, in spheres of their own, look back at their connection with this church with pleasure. Then, I think, progress has been shown by an increasing interest in missions to the heathen abroad. Circumstances have made this congregation a considerable power in one corner, at least, of the mission field. Your connection with Ceylon has become a feature in your history. We should think on these things, not to give praise to individuals, but to acknowledge, according to the text, that GOD hath wrought all this. He it is who has brought it to pass. Doubtless there is the greatest room for humiliation, penitence, confession of omissions. Doubtless much less has been effected than might have been accomplished.

Possibly there are still many, as I know there were in my time, dwelling near this church who take no interest in it, who know not that you are to-day keeping its anniversary, many to whom Christ Church is nothing, perhaps they know not even its name.

Let us pray GOD to strengthen that which He has wrought, to give this congregation a renewed grant of power for good, now that this church is entering on a new year of its history. It is His work, and in answer to prayer He will supply what is deficient, correct what is amiss, strengthen what is weak. He is not One to desert the work of His own hands, to begin and not continue. He does not flag in interest, there is no variableness in Him. Rather He delights to make one gift introduce another, "add," He says, "to your faith, virtue," and so on, "Covet earnestly the best gifts." He complains when men are slack in asking. He would have us strike more than thrice. He is not straitened, it is men who faint: it is they who cease to bring vessels, into which to receive His bounty, before He ceases bestowing it.

Great may be the power of a congregation for good. Each congregation has a history, a character, an office, a vocation of its own. In the beginning of the Book of Revelation are epistles to various congregations; there is praise for some, censure for others—rewards for each. There is some danger to be pointed out, some declension to be feared, some heresy likely to intrude. Either they have left their first love, or their zeal has cooled, or there is self-deceit among them. Dear brethren, the eyes of the great unseen Bishop of souls doubtless sees much among *you* that should be different; not as much fervour in prayer as there ought to be, not as much dedication of time, talents, money to the cause of GOD; too much worldliness, too much fault-finding, too much indolence, too much self-indulgence.

O, if GOD would this day stir you up to a revival of zeal, how great might be your power for good! · A congregation is more than the sum total of the individuals composing it. It forms an unit which may have a character, an *esprit de corps*, a force, a weight, of its own. How much does a ship count for in a sea battle?—how much a regiment in a general engagement?—how much a school in its effect on the public? By belonging to a body, men get to know each other, they animate each other, stimulate each other, they have a patriotic, social feeling in maintaining a good name, carrying out a high principle, acting up to an honorable history. If the services in this church are impressively maintained, if there is a deep feeling of reverence and devotion among you, then you will draw in others; strangers in London, dropping in here by accident, will become regular attendants, and attach themselves to your institutions; young men from the country, exposed to the temptations of the metropolis, will be influenced as King Saul and his messengers were by the services conducted by the sons of the prophets in the days of Samuel. Some such effect will be produced as we read of in I Cor. xiv. 24: “If . . . there come in one

that believeth not, falling down on his face he will worship GOD, and report that GOD is in you of a truth." If this congregation is devout and zealous, this church will afford a home to the lonely,—those who toil hard on week days, and have few whom they can speak to in the great city, which seems to them a crowded loneliness ; those who feel homeless amidst a thousand homes, they will have their Sundays brightened, and their sympathies drawn out by good works which they shall find promoted here, and associations to which they shall be led here.

A devout, zealous congregation is a power for good upon many, not least upon their own clergy. A devout congregation raises the tone of all connected with it. O, may GOD pour out His Spirit largely on all in this place, that you may carry out the many Scripture injunctions bearing on this subject ; such as, "Consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

This church is not so old but that some are alive who helped to build it, many have been the earnest prayers put up in it, many the gifts bestowed on its adornment ; some by persons unknown to any now present, some by persons known to but one or two. The donors wished to be unknown and they are unknown. The jewels which adorn your chalice—none of us know by whom they were given, or how they were worn by the young girls whom they originally decked. Since this church was consecrated, the weekly celebration, the daily prayers have never ceased. Consecrated as it was in the first month of the Queen's reign, this church has witnessed the earnest supplications which have accompanied each public event of joy or sorrow that has diversified the last forty-two years ; and now the scene of many precious memories, of much genuine devotion, is entrusted to a younger generation. With few exceptions, the congregation of to-day remembers

little of what took place forty years ago. You have succeeded to the charge, in some sort, of a church of considerable interest. It is not only the clergy, but the whole congregation who may be considered, in some sort, as inheritors of the past, charged to transmit what they have received, to hand it down, not only sustained, but improved.

Progress and improvement are characteristics of the Christian Church, and of all things connected with it. Our hymns improve, our music improves, architecture improves, and you should gradually improve this church. It has been considerably improved, and is susceptible of still greater improvement. It was not improved in time past without the exercise of much self-denial; large gifts were contributed which cost the donors much. It will not be cleaned, decorated, and repaired now without considerable sacrifices. Some will have to give money, some time and trouble to collect from others, but GOD will recompense. That which you do from a pure motive, for His glory, as an offering to Him, He will accept, He will be pleased with, He will repay. GOD has a thousand ways of repaying. He repays not only by bestowing earthly blessings, such as health, means of subsistence, sanity, strength of nerve. He can give better things than these, cheerfulness, contentedness, the respect of our friends, gratitude of children, success of our endeavours. And better still, He has, in His treasure-house, for those whom He cherishes. He can give them a good conscience, a sense of acceptance, untiring zeal, firm faith, clear views, power to draw others in and to influence them for good. Yes, dear friends (I call you such, I am glad to know that I have many old, tried, faithful friends here), let us pray for each other, let us ask the best gifts for each other, I for you, you for me; let us combine in one more good work, as we have combined in many before; let us encourage each other to the immediate work which is in hand now, the work of to-day, the renovating, restoring,

cleansing this Church, the scene of so many mercies, the centre to which so many turn, the place where a witness for GOD has been maintained for many years, and where we have every reason to believe it will be maintained when dynasties shall have changed, and institutions shall have been re-fashioned; for in this changing world, nothing is of equal permanence with the faith of Christ, the Scriptures of Christ, the Church of Christ. These will continue, whatever else is doomed to decay. Happy we, to have a share in *that* which is unchanging, in *Him* who is unchanging—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

He alone has an unchangeable priesthood. The succession of earthly ministers is a mark of their imperfection and inadequacy; here for a little while, and then gone; each had his own little share in a great succession of work; each called to, and so far endowed for, that work, but, inasmuch as each was compassed with infirmity and limited in power, it was needful, so to say, that the time of his exercise of the office should also be limited, that so another should supply his lack of service by other gifts.

It is so in all work, not only the work of the Ministry, but that of District Visitors, Sunday School Teachers, Choirmen; each can contribute something, none can do all things. So it becomes a blessing that they are not suffered to continue, lest only one part of the work should be carried on. What a contrast to the inexhaustible perfection, as well as the everlasting duration, of Him who hath an unchangeable priesthood.

He, "because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood, wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto GOD by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

O dear Church of Christ! O dear Christ Church! "Thy GOD hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O GOD, that which thou hast wrought for us."

HARRISON AND SONS,
PRINTERS IN ORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY,
ST. MARTIN'S LANE.

