

Presidential Address

By Archdeacon W J Günther, Administrator

"I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." "I believe one Catholic and Apostolic Church." Such, my brethren of the Clergy and of the Laity, is our confession of faith in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, and this is the faith of every loyal churchman.

On a most solemn, a thrice solemn occasion, we, members of a branch of that church, the historic Church of England, are gathered together. In the providence of God, who often moves in a mysterious way, our Archbishop, in the full possession of his faculties, was suddenly called to rest, and received his home-call, and the church in this Diocese is bereaved of its head, the Province of New South Wales of its Metropolitan, and the Dioceses in Australia and Tasmania of their Primate.

This is the fifth time that I find myself administering the affairs of the Diocese, but on previous occasions the Archbishop was only temporarily absent. The responsibilities devolving upon me I recognise are very grave and heavy, now that I am formally appointed Administrator of the Diocese - only, I venture to hope, for a very short period. I ask your sympathy, forbearance, and prayers in carrying out the duties entrusted to me.

Our work this evening is clearly stated in the business paper. The question of stipend has been agreed upon, and we enter upon the all-important work of selecting a Chief Pastor, in accordance with the provisions of our Ordinances 1900, 1901, and 1906, one who will faithfully guide the church in calm and storm. Our work will have its influence not only on the present, but on future generations of the people.

On an occasion like this, one is naturally tempted to say something of the history of Episcopacy, the duties and responsibilities of churchmen, the perils and dangers of the church, its triumphs and successes, but I shall not allow myself to be tempted to do so. It is enough for us to be reminded, in speaking of the office of Bishop, that our ordinal declares -

"It is evident unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scriptures and ancient authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these orders of Ministers in Christ's Church, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons."

Though the usual survey of church work in a Presidential address is unnecessary, I venture, in view of the work before us, to make a few general remarks on our position at the present time. We live in a remarkable age, and are constantly hearing of new discoveries of Science, of the progress of education, of useful legislation - especially of a domestic and social character, of the humane treatment of inmates in our institutions for the sad, the sick, the sorrowful, the prisoners, and those appointed to die. We hear much also of the value of arbitration, a most salutary movement for settling national disputes and industrial troubles.

There is much, however, in the moral and religious condition of the people that causes sorrow and anxiety. We grieve over the shameful prevalence of betting, gambling, intemperance, perjury and immorality, the large circulation of impure, mischievous and frivolous literature, the intense devotion to all kinds of pleasure, the worship of athleticism, tricks in trade, the facilities for obtaining divorce under mischievous laws, and the publication of these cases, the new paganism, and the evidences of godlessness that abounds. The social, moral and religious condition of large masses of the people, and also of the classes, as they are called, is saddening, and calls for some extraordinary efforts. They may in some cases profess to honour the Christ, and perhaps say in words attributed to Voltaire that they are overwhelmed at the thought of Christ's holiness, or say with Spinoza that Christ is the best symbol of heavenly wisdom, but in their lives they deny him. Then among many who profess and call themselves christians, what apathy, carelessness and indifference are manifested.

We all recognise that there is great ignorance in our land of the Holy Scriptures, given by inspiration of God, and of the value of the Divine teachings of God's Book in individual, family, and national life.

And how little the history of our church is known - an institution older than the Constitution and the Parliament of England! What she has done to make men like Christ and earth like Heaven, what she has done to promote liberty, to defend the truth of God against hydra-headed errors, to establish schools for all classes, and Universities, to comfort those that comfort want, to propagate eternal truths, and for the evangelisation of the people in different parts of God's earth, is a story that never ought to lose its interest. The facts disclosed are often stranger than fiction. Her influence has been remarkable in moulding the English character and making the English nation. Mr Gladstone has truly said: " To take the Church of England out of the history of England would make that history a chaos without order, without life, and without meaning."

In our efforts to remedy the present condition of things, how little the value of personal influence is generally recognised!

We all exercise an influence, unconscious though it be at times. It is boundless in some cases, but the Christian estimates it not by its extent, but by its kind. Influence is not a criterion of worth, for many of the basest deeds that blacken the page of history have been done through the influence of base but powerful and enthusiastic men. The grandest influence on earth is that exerted by embodied Christianity by the Christ-like - the Christly life. To the personal care of His disciples Christ has committed His Church. By their right exercise of personal influence it is extended and enlarged.

A sad lack of moral courage is also often noticeable - courage in defence of the truth. Men are not brave to proclaim the truth, and to show fidelity in suffering for the truth's sake. Men are too ready to compromise, to worship majorities and to forget that what is morally wrong can never be right. The courage that enabled men - in some cases of heroic faith - to go forth to fire, and fagot, and wild beast, if manifested would attract in a remarkable way, and promote the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

In the degree in which there is any absence of unity among the members of the Church, there is distinctly a hindrance to work. It is right to protect Christian liberty, and the rights and privileges of individuals; but it is not right to forget the needs of the body of Christ and the comprehensiveness of the Church of England. There is Diocesan work in which all should unite, and, in working, men would find the points of attraction were many, and of antagonism few, and an immense impulse might be given to our sustentation and extension work.

We do not plead for toleration of error, or the watering down of truth; but we want men to be careful in their examination of what they call error, and to remember that truth is many-sided. We need to remember that we are members of one body - a Divine Society - and as such have responsibilities to one another. Religion is the greatest binding force on earth, and if united to Christ we are united to one another.

If we went forward unitedly, all one body we, the living agents - so much needed - would soon be found, and our chronic state of financial embarrassment in Diocesan work would soon be removed. Yet again, the social problems of our day, and difficult, complex questions connected with them need more study, time, and thought than is given to them. Unless a solution of some of these grave and important problems is found, disastrous consequences must result. Christ's laws from Heaven for life on earth and the application of Christian principles furnish authoritative helps in carrying on our work. Truly, heavy responsibilities attach to those placed in the position of leaders, and their guiding voice should be heard on the great questions and problems of the day.

In thus speaking I am not unmindful that we have in this Diocese a large body of faithful and devoted clergy and laity helping to remove the hindrances in our work to which I refer spiritual men doing spiritual work. I know well what large contributions of prayer, service, and money are offered, and that many remember their privileges and responsibilities, and ceaselessly draw supplies from the Fountain of all good to distribute to others. I am not a pessimist, but an optimist, and recognise the triumphs and victories of Christ. The Cross is in the field, and the Cross has won the field. Is the Kingdom of God expanding? Is the world really improving? are questions asked very often. Men tell us of the alarming vices of great cities the gilded vices and the sordid vices - the degraded habits of many, and consequent deterioration. They expose and publish abroad not only the immorality that flaunts itself in the highways and byways, but the selfishness, the callousness, and the utter indifference of many to our wounded travellers on the highways of life, and they ask whether any will dare to say the world is improving. Paint the picture in darkest colours. Fill up the catalogue of vices, and I ask how any who take a broad and extended view can say the world is not improving. Our purview must not be limited to particular localities or countries if we are to form a right estimate of this question. However much there is that we must deeply and unceasingly deplore, we believe the world is God's world, is not governed by chance; that Christ lives and reigns, and that though men may hinder progress God's kingdom is expanding. Study the history, for instance, of the English people 200 years ago, and what a saddening history we have of the classes and the masses! What of the people during the reign of the Georges? What great things have been done for God and humanity since then by the clergy and the faithful, by legislators and reformers, by philanthropists and the dutiful sons and daughters of the great All-Father ! Think of the abolition of slavery, of inhuman punishments, of the removal of temptations to evil brought about by Christian influences and by legislation, and think how we have learnt the sacredness of human life, the value of prison reform, of rescue work, of arbitration and co-operation. Think of our splendid charities, especially for Hospitals and our Homes of philanthropy! Think of the progress of education on a Christian basis, and of the various human activities in different departments, worked by those who voluntarily and lovingly give their services and labours of love, of missionary enterprise for the heathen at home and abroad! Think of the

vast sums of money given every by the poor from their poverty! What developments are there in the teachings on the subject of toleration, equality, brotherhood, liberty, and the emancipation of women! Do we not owe this largely to the teachings of Christ and His Church, the greatest and most powerful of all organizations? I believe the Holy Ghost to be with us in our work, and that there shall yet be a golden age for the Church and the world. There is much evidence of progress, though Christianity is not in possession. Christ's kingdom is extending in many parts of God's earth, and in our own Diocese.

These thoughts may help to show the greatness of the work of the new Archbishop. Difficulties many there are. The grace of God will be magnified in overcoming them, and by them men are braced to undertake greater ventures of faith and labours of love. It is the strong man and the expert that is needed in this crisis of our history, not merely the good all-round man, but the man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, like Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures, the man who realizes the mission of the English Church, who has understanding of the times, and knows that extraordinary efforts are needed in our day and generation, one who by careful and wise application of Christian ethics to the questions of the day succeeds in influencing the public life of the people, a leader attractive, brave and sagacious, and one who in his relations with clergy and people is sympathetic, cheerful, courteous, tactful, fair, tolerant, a lover of good men, and ever the man of God.

As we look backward and forward we thank God, and take courage. We have the outline, and a grand outline, to be filled up. We know not, within even a few more years, into what this State and this city of Sydney may develop. The true greatness and the moral grandeur of the people we desire. The foundations of our great Empire must be laid aright, and supported by men actuated by noble principles and motives. We are the guardians of the rights and have to supply the necessities of our great branch of the Catholic Church. We have a great inheritance to guard. The spiritual character of the church, and her divine mission, must ever be present to our minds, a church whose great possession is evangelic truth and Apostolic order. Never was there an age so privileged. Never was there a day of such opportunities and possibilities. The intellectual, the moral, the spiritual wealth, and the experience of the ages is our heritage. We have the memory of God's special mercies to quicken us.

It is our duty now to apply ourselves to the work to which we are called, and our position is one which demands a high sense of responsibility. We lift up our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help. We pray the Holy Ghost, whose advent on the day of Pentecost we commemorate next Sunday, to abundantly bestow upon us His seven-fold gifts. We ask that all hindrances may be removed, and power from on high given that we may be guided, and have a right judgment given to us.

"Lord God of Hosts be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget."

Oh that God, giving us this Holy Spirit, may lead us to serve Him truly in our vocation and ministry, to think and say and do, now and always, all things with a single eye to His glory, the edifying of the church, and the preservation of the faith once delivered to the saints. Let us, having caught the spirit and genius of Christ's life, act in accordance with His will.

In things essential, unity; in things doubtful, liberty; in all things charity.