

The following ministry was delivered by the late Angel of the church in Edinburgh in 1937, and is now reprinted as being very appropriate in these days

MINISTRY

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke xii. 34 to xiii 9

IN some of our Lord's sayings it seems as if He recommended prudence rather than faith. For instance, in the Lesson just read, He says, "When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him" — do not run a risk, do not trust that all will be well, but make sure. So in next Sunday's Lesson we have the parable of the Unjust Steward, who was commended by his lord because he had done prudently: and *our* Lord takes occasion to advise us to use equal wisdom in providing for the future. We are indeed told to cast all our care upon God, for He careth for us; but that does not mean that we are to be careless.

In fact, prudence and faith go together, even in worldly affairs; it is hard to decide which goes first. The man who invests what he can spare in an annuity for his declining years, acts prudently; but he acts in faith also, for he *trusts* that the insurance company will be able and willing to fulfil its obligations. Every preparation for the future involves an exercise of faith. If there were not a reasonable expectation of the harvest, no seed would be sown.

In these days many have lost faith in the world. No institution seems to be safe: so, they ask, what is the use of making provision for days to come? In a few years the world may be organized in a new order, in which there will be no use for money, and perhaps no place for us. We may as well enjoy what we can while we can; "let us eat and drink, for

to-morrow we die." In such conditions there is no room for prudence.

There are also many who firmly believe that after the threatened revolution, all things will be arranged better than they are now. The prudence that is founded on that faith will urge them to prepare themselves for a place in the new world, and also to do what they can to hasten its coming, and to avoid anything that might keep it back.

With a difference, we share that belief: with an enormous difference. As we read the signs of the times in the light of God's revealed purpose, we conclude that the nations, the institutions of men, the Church itself, are ripe for judgment, and that no wisdom of man can avert a crash. What then is the way of prudence for us? Quite plainly, we must not and cannot put our trust in the world or in man; and we must learn to trust wholly in our God. Then, in all our doings, and in all our relations to men and things, we should be guided by that trust and faith.

There should be no need to say that *our* prudence cannot be selfish. *Our* salvation is only part of God's purpose to save the world and perfect the Church. Even the unjust steward saw that he could only secure his own interests by taking consideration for others: this is still more true of our spiritual interests, only we need not make others partakers of any dishonesty. We have to seek the good of all God's Church and people, that we may share in it; it might be better to say that we must seek our own salvation in order that all our brethren may share it.

We are therefore deeply concerned with the efforts that are now being made to restore the visible unity of the Body of Christ; not as spectators only. It is a loss and a hindrance to us that we are sepa-

rated from any of our brethren; it is our desire, it is the Lord's desire, that we should all be joined in bearing one witness to Him, and that we should as one Body enter into His rest. But we must insist that the reunion may not be brought about by any dishonesty, by any dissimulation, by any undervaluing of the truth. Our brethren do see that, and they find their chief difficulty there; when they meet in conference, they realise more and more that they ought to be one, but they cannot see any honest way to accomplish it.

It is good that, for example, Presbyterians and Episcopalians should be able to meet peaceably, and earnestly try each to discern the good that is in the other's possession. It is very much better than the age-long way of searching for the other's faults; and if it fails, we might well despair, unless indeed there is another still better way; and there is.

Let each sect or party try to find out, not what is wrong with its neighbours, not what is good in its neighbours, but what is wrong with itself. Then it is not likely that there would be any temptation to inquire where the greatest wrong is to be found: for it would become clear that all are alike defective in the same point. Common repentance, then, would lead first to reconciliation with God; and reconciliation between brethren would come of itself.

We may boldly say that honest and prayerful self-examination would lead Episcopalians and Presbyterians, and even Romanists, to the conclusion that what they need above all is the ministry of Apostles. Especially when they desire to see the Church reunited, they would recognise that the only ministry that can accomplish that end is the same that was given in the beginning to secure it. Then they would have to confess that their fathers have

rejected it and themselves have despised it; they have given the honour which belongs to it into the hands of bishops, or presbyters, or popes, or earthly sovereigns: and they have been content with the measure of holiness which can be wrought by these lower means.

Do we then make an exception of ourselves? By no means. It is true that we have not rejected Apostles; but we have lost them, and that through our own sin, inasmuch as we did not profit by their ministry so far as to be fit for presentation by them to the Lord. If we have now any advantage over our brethren, it is this, we realise the lack of the blessing which we have once known. We must join in the common confession; we must make it for ourselves, even though others stand aloof; and we must pray that God will show us all how far we have fallen, that we may truly repent and cast ourselves on His mercy.

Do we find it hard to humble ourselves so far, while any remnant of our privilege remains? Then we can understand how hard it is for others. But God is working by His Spirit and by His providence to bring us all down to the depths, that He may lift us up. So we may go forward in confidence, though with fear and trembling; not for a moment imagining that we are able to endure the evil days, but submitting to our Father's chastisement and guidance. That is the only way of prudence; for it takes account of things as they really are, and puts the will and purpose of God in their proper place, which is above all strength and wisdom or imagination of man.