

Fifteenth Annual Episcopal Address
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DEAR BRETHREN:

For the first time, in my Episcopate, of nearly fifteen years, I shall be absent from the meeting of the Diocesan Convention, and the fact gives me pain, although it has been caused by events of pleasure to myself, and of some importance in the advancing cause of Catholic Unity. My anxiety is for my own responsibility alone; for I am well assured that, in the present harmonious and vigorous condition of the Diocese, everything pertaining to its advance and order will be faithfully regarded by the wisdom and brotherhood of the Convention.

In spirit I shall be with you. The Church which you have honored for successive years, by making it the place of your meeting; the well-loved Surpliced Brethren that gather round its Altar; and the faithful others greet you in my stead, and minister the Holy Sacrament. *Remember me*, Beloved, as a Christian Bishop may best be remembered—in supplication; that my “going out and coming in” may be accepted to the glory of God and the good of His Church; and that all I learn, enjoy, and do, may make me more worthy of your confidence, support and affection.

The accounts which I have received, assure me constantly of the well-being and steady progress of the Diocese, under the Ecclesiastical Authority vested in the Standing Committee, and with the valuable services in confirmation rendered by my brethren in the Episcopate, the Bishops of Michigan and Iowa, and the Assistant Bishop of Indiana. Reports will be prepared and laid before you, touching both of these administrations.

During my stay in Paris, in the close of December and the month of January, I officiated frequently in the Church which, you are aware, is consecrated in that city to the Discipline and Worship of our American branch of the Church. It is under the charge of The Rev. W. O. LAMSON, who is equally known as the faithful minister in his official position, and the attentive friend to his brethren and countrymen who visit the attractive capital. In addition to many ordinary pastoral functions, I twice held Confirmation. On the first occasion, five were presented, who had been previously prepared, in expectation of my visit; and on the second, six, who were moved to solicit the privilege, from the impression caused by witnessing the first. Among the candidates were representatives from our own Diocese, and from each of the parishes to which my ministry had been devoted—St. Luke’s, Rochester, and St. Thomas’, New York,—a coincidence of singular interest, grouping, as it were, in a foreign land, the ministry of my life.

While in Madrid, at the request of Sir JOHN CRAMPTON, Her Majesty’s Ambassador at that court, and of the Chaplain, The Rev. W. ADDERLY CAMPBELL, I consecrated the Cemetery belonging to the English Government in that city. The services, attended by the whole congregation, were impressive and affecting, as we surrounded “God’s acre” with psalmody, and committed to the keeping of the Divine Presence, with prayer and holy offering, the bodies that sleep there, away from kindred and home. In that walled waiting-place of the dead, repose some of our own countrymen.

In Rome, I confirmed two persons in the Chapel of our Embassy, where services are regularly sustained by the zealous labors of the Rev. Dr. LYMAN; and also on the following Sunday, by request of the acting Chaplain, the Rev. CANON LEE, I preached and confirmed in the English Church, situated outside of the Porto del Popolo, and wher I had officiated, as a Presbyter, nearly thirty years before.

In Messina, Sicily, several times in Naples and in Florence, I preached, and administered the Holy Communion in those cities, as well as in Paris and Rome.

In Italy, where civil liberty has so wonderfully advanced, the Reform Movement in the Church is of deep interest from the progress it has made, as well as the difficulties and hazards which surround it. In various ways I have been in contact with the leading actors in this great work, especially while in Naples. In confidential intercourse I was able to testify our sympathy with all real efforts for the Reformation of the National Church, and to venture words of counsel and encouragement. The Bishop of Pennsylvania has been engaged in the same work, and as a member of the Committee of the General Convention has rendered effective aid, and accumulated information for the Church at home. The Bishop of Gibraltar and Clergy of the Church of England, among whom is foremost in devotion and influence the Rev. LEWIS M. HOGG, judiciously sympathize with the struggle, so that it cannot be doubted that we and they will be ready to do all that sister Churches can properly do to guide and help the Church in Italy, to cleanse herself from errors and corruption, and return to the faith and practice of the early centuries.

It is not easy to overrate the importance of the experience and working of the Reformed Catholic Church in the United States on struggles like those in Italy against corruption and despotism, and in the changes which every branch of the Ancient and Reformed Church in Europe is destined to experience. Our freedom from all connection with the State; the support of religion by voluntary means; our Ecclesiastical government, at once so conservative and yet infused with the full spirit and order of Republicanism; the active authority of the Laity; the simplicity and dignity of our Ritual; our ancient Creeds—the Apostles and Nicene—used with correlative authority; our ministry so unimpeachable in its Apostolic Succession; our judicious deference to primitive tradition; the election of Pastors and Bishops by the people; the careful training of our Clergy; the strict ideal of ministerial character and the practical flexibility of pastoral labor; our contest for the Historic and Visible Church in the midst of all varieties of sect and opinion—these and other relations make our influence important and adaptive, and enable us to exercise it in Catholic love and freedom. All I have observed has made me believe our own branch of the Church to be the purest in Christendom, and vested, in God's providence, with power to do more than any other for the upholding of the primitive Faith and Order, and the restoration of a demonstrative Catholic Unity. May our blessed Lord, who has thus endowed, fill us with His Spirit "to think and do always such things as are right!"

In the winter I was honored with a commission from the Bishop of London, to visit, during the summer in his behalf, the English congregations in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In fulfilling this, at Copenhagen, Gothaberg and Stockholm I was welcomed with the utmost kindness and respect. My official acts of preaching, Confirmation and Communion, the private intercourse with the refined and devout Chaplains in charge, and with the hospitable Laymen who bestowed upon us such grateful courtesies, have not only filled my own heart with grateful esteem, but, I trust, have tended to make our Church better known, and cement more closely the brotherhood between the Church of England and our own.

At Stockholm, I was favored by affectionate intercourse with the venerable Swedish Church. The presence there of many of the Bishops in attendance on the Diet, exercising for the last time the important legislative functions which they have enjoyed for the last six hundred years, afforded me an opportunity which could only thus concur. The special courtesy and Christian sympathy of His Grace, the Archbishop of Upsala, assisting at our services, partaking at our Altar and folding me in many relations of confidence and love,—the correspondent action of several of the Bishops, the legislative action in the Pastoral Letter commending their emigrant members to our Bishops and Clergy, have enlarged the personal intercourse into a real fellowship between the Church of Sweden and our own in the United States.

My Northern visitation was rendered more pleasant and effective by the assistance, as my honorary Chaplain, of the Rev. F. S. MAY, of London. His accurate learning, industry and zeal have long been freely given to the Scandinavian cause; and to his practical energy the whole Church is largely indebted for what she now knows and feels on the subject of Northern Christianity, in faith, doctrine and discipline, and the favorable movements for Inter-communion.

I cannot close this glance at the important incidents of my Swedish tour, without the expression of the grief with which I have just heard of the decease of the Bishop of Maine. Bishop BURGESS was Chairman of the Committee on “Friendly Relations with the Church in Sweden,” and from his hands were sent the documents which prepared the way for my own reception with such marked results. His sound and practical qualities of head and heart, cultivated taste, systematic diligence, independent judgment, and quiet manners with the unction of a consistent piety, have made him influential and beloved. The work of the Church and the Council of its Bishops will miss his reliable power.

During my long stay in Russia, and especially in Moscow, where we were detained a month by the serious illness of my son, I have enjoyed opportunities for a familiar acquaintance with the Russo-Greek services, and occasions of full and intimate conference on the state and relations of our respective Churches. In these respects I owe everything to the unwearied kindness of His Eminence Bishop LEONIDE, Vicar of the Metropolitan, which left me nothing more to desire in personal and official recognition. It would, of course, be wrong to draw any inference from such attention, of formal relation between the Russo-Greek Church and our own, for which neither side can be yet prepared, and which certainly no intercourse of individual Bishops could involve. Yet, I think I may venture to say, that it has mutually impressed our minds with delightful conviction of soul communion in the life of God, and a hope of Ecclesiastical Comity for which we can with patience wait.

I send you, Beloved Brethren, these hasty lines in token of my respect and affection. I would fain have you believe that I nowhere forget my office, and great interests of the Church of God, to which we have pledged our hearts and lives.

The time may come when, in more fullness and deliberation, I can place before you the facts and conclusions involved in the incidents at which I thus cursorily glance. To my own heart they bring assurance of honor, influence and clearer unity for the Historic Kingdom of Christ. But everywhere, with preminitions of struggle, danger and hardship; the breaking up of old reliances, and the exposure to untried powers of social experiment and material progress. It will be the strange characteristic of the latter as well as of the earlier day that through “much tribulation” will the Kingdom come.

But never before, have I realized so clearly, amid all its diversities, estrangements and even fatal corruptions, the grand, substantial unity of the Church

Catholic in the preservation of Ministry, Creeds, Liturgies, Sacraments and fundamental principles of a Holy Life; and how much exists of objective identity and subjective sympathy through which the “Spirit poured from on high” can draw together the children of God, and cause the Zion which now witnesseth in sackcloth, and moans apart in her many voices, to put on her beautiful garments of joy and praise, and lift her crowned head for the coming Bridegroom.

Brethren! In the love of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—I bless you and yours; and beg you to remember in your prayers,

Your absent, but attached Bishop,
Henry J. Whitehouse.

St. Petersburg, August 8th, 1866.