

The Maccabees and the Church

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The Maccabees and the Church

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THE MACCABEES AND THE CHURCH

OR THE

*HISTORY OF THE MACCABEES CONSIDERED
WITH REFERENCE TO THE PRESENT
CONDITION AND PROSPECTS
OF THE CHURCH*

Two Sermons

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

BY CHR. WORDSWORTH, D.D.

BISHOP OF LINCOLN

RIVINGTONS

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TO THE LOYAL SONS OF

The Church of England

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These Sermons

ON THE PATIENT ENDURANCE AND HEROIC DEEDS

Of Hebrew Martyrs and Confessors

ARE INSCRIBED

I

HEBREWS xi. 35

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better Resurrection.

IT is my purpose to invite your attention to a portion of the Hebrew records, which seems to have fallen into unmerited neglect, and which has a special interest for ourselves in the present times.

I refer to the history of the Maccabees.

In earlier ages of the Christian Church, the acts and sufferings of the Maccabees were celebrated with devout veneration. Their examples were commended to the imitation of the

faithful by the eloquence of holy men (as appears from their extant works), such as S. Gregory Nazianzen¹ and S. Chrysostom² in the East, and S. Augustine³ and S. Leo⁴ in the West. They are eulogized by the Holy Spirit Himself in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who may justly be supposed to be referring to them when He says, "Others were tortured" (literally, were beaten to death on the

¹ S. Gregory Nazianzen: Orat. xv. p. 286, ed. Paris, 1778.

² S. Chrysostom: 'Three homilies (probably delivered at Antioch) on the Maccabees,' tom. ii. ed. Paris, 1718; see also tom. xii. p. 396.

³ S. Augustine: Sermons 300 and 301, ed. Paris, 1838, tom. v. p. 1973; cf. S. Ambrose, "De Jacob. et vitâ beatâ," ii. 10-12; Prosper Aquitan. "de Prædict." ii. 40.

⁴ S. Leo: Sermon 82, p. 167, ed. Lugdun. 1700: "In natali sanctorum septem Martyrum Maccabæorum."

rack¹), “not accepting deliverance” (literally, *the* deliverance proffered by the persecutor, if they would obey him), “that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

A yearly Festival² was instituted for their commemoration, and still holds its place in the Greek and Roman Calendar, and is called the “Birthday of the Maccabees,” because it commemorates their birth by death into the felicity and glory of everlasting life.

Whether because this portion of history lies in the interval between the Old Testament and the New, or whether from an excess of reaction against the authority of the Books commonly called Apocryphal (which might be more fitly

¹ ἐτυμπανίσθησαν. The word *τύμπανον* occurs in 2 Macc. vi. 19, 28.

² On August 1.

termed Ecclesiastical¹), or from whatever cause it has arisen, it surely is to be regretted that the names of the Maccabees have almost passed into oblivion among ourselves.

But, brethren, it would be difficult to find such illustrious examples of holy heroism, as are seen in the history of those who are comprehended by a general term under the title of Maccabees.²

In that history we may behold a specimen of

¹ See Hooker, 'Ecl. Pol.' v. xx.

² The name "Maccabee," perhaps from the Hebrew "Makkâbâh," a hammer, (Gesen. Lex., p. 502,) has passed from the family of Mattathias, the father of Judas Maccabeus, to designate all the martyrs and confessors in the great religious struggle against Antiochus Epiphanes. On the Rabbinical derivation of the word from the supposed inscription on the standard of Judas, see Prideaux, "Connection," pt. ii. bk. iii. on B.C. 166.

unswerving faith and indomitable fortitude in the venerable priest and scribe Eleazar,¹ ninety years of age, who declined all overtures of royal favour, and would not accept the offered deliverance, when he might have escaped death, even if he had made semblance of eating the unclean flesh placed before him by the persecutor; and turned his eyes from the king, and looked upward to Heaven with faith, and went joyfully to the rack, and was beaten to death upon it, rather than disobey the law of God.

Behold, brethren, that other aged priest Mattathias, rejecting the temptations of earthly honour, riches and favour, by which the emis-

¹ 2 Macc. vi. 18-22. He is called by Nazianzen, "Orat. in Maccab." 287, "the first-fruits of those who suffered before Christ for the Law of God."

saries of Antiochus allured him, and refusing to be called "the king's friend;"¹ see him fired with the holy zeal and courage of a Phinehas or a Gideon, for the faith and worship of God, and destroying the idolatrous altar at Modin, and saying "Though all the nations, that are under the king's dominion, obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. We will not hearken to the king's words to go from our religion, either to the right hand or to the left." Behold him, with his dying words giving to his five children a father's benediction, and exhorting them to be loyal to their country and to their God,² and to remember the noble acts of

¹ 1 Macc. ii. 17, 18.

² 1 Macc. ii. 49-70.

Joshua and Caleb, of Elijah and Daniel, and the three children at Babylon,¹ and to give their lives for the covenant of their fathers.²

Contemplate those five sons, obedient to their father's charge, and joining together with one heart and hand. Behold the generous self-sacrifice of the elder among them, submitting to the chieftainship of their younger brother, Judas Maccabeus, whom their father had appointed to be their leader. See that lion-hearted soldier of God, seeking for strength and courage and wisdom, in prayer to God, and in His Holy Word; and rallying a small but faithful band under his standard, and going forth to fight the Lord's battles. Look at his noble feats of holy and heroic daring, during the six years of his career

¹ 1 Macc. ii. 55-60.

² 1 Macc. ii. 50.

in which he vanquished with a scanty force immense armies of Syria in many pitched battles, and recovered the City of Jerusalem, and went up with his faithful followers unto Mount Sion, where they wept when they saw the Sanctuary desolate,¹ and the gates burned up, and shrubs growing in the courts; and they blew an alarm with the trumpets, and renewed the Altar, and adorned the front of the Temple with crowns of gold and shields,² and restored the Candlestick and the Table of Shewbread, and offered up burnt-offerings with gladness, and burnt incense on the golden altar, and cleansed the Temple which had been profaned by idolatry, and celebrated with harps and cymbals the Feast of Dedication, which after-

¹ 1 Macc. iv. 38-40.

² 1 Macc. iv. 56-59.

wards, in the fulness of time, was adorned by the presence of Christ, the Lord of the Temple Himself.¹

Yet further, this history not only presents examples of faith and fortitude and valour in reverend old age, and in ripe and vigorous manhood, in priestly families such as those of Eleazar and Mattathias, but also in tender youth and weak womanhood in secular life. Remember that heroic mother, who—in the presence of the royal persecutor Antiochus Epiphanes, commanding the instruments of torture, the fire and rack, to be prepared² for that fierce trial—encouraged her children to step forth on the burning coals, and to die for the

¹ S. John x. 22; cf. 1 Macc. iv. 55.

² 2 Macc. vii. 20, 21.

Law of God in hope of a glorious resurrection. And when she had seen six of her sons tortured and slain before her eyes, she did not desire to reserve the seventh as a stay to her old age, but calmly exhorted him to "have pity" on her (wonderful words!) who had borne him in her womb and nursed him at her breasts, and not to shrink from the torture or to gain a reprieve from it, as the king urged her to do, by eating the unclean food, but to follow his six brethren and to die joyfully for God, that he might be joined with his brethren in glory, and that she might receive them all again as her own for everlasting life.¹ What, brethren, was this, but to say that life with cowardice and shame is not life but death, that deliverance from death by

¹ 2 Macc. vii. 27-29.

denial or desertion of the truth is worse than all death, and that death for the faith and worship of God is not to be feared, but rather to be gladly welcomed, as that which alone deserves the name of life? The young man gladly obeyed his mother's words, and the mother followed her seven sons, whom she had not lost but had sent before her to God; and thus they all gained together the crown of martyrdom, which they will wear for ever in heaven.

Such examples as these hold an unique place in Hebrew history. The Maccabees did not enjoy the privileges which had been vouchsafed of old to their fathers. In the Patriarchal age God had manifested Himself in dreams and visions. He had talked with Abraham and Jacob at

Shechem and at Mamre, at Moriah and at Bethel, and had quickened their faith and cheered their hopes with personal promises. In the thousand years between Moses and Malachi, there never was a time without a prophet from God to encourage the Hebrew nation with messages from heaven. The Fathers had the Tabernacle and the Pillar of Cloud and Fire in the wilderness, and for many generations the prophetic light gleamed from the oracular jewels in the breastplate of the High Priest; and even when the Jewish captives hung their harps on the willows of Babylon, they were cheered by the prophetic voices of Ezekiel and of Daniel, the "man greatly beloved." The three children who were cast by Nebuchadnezzar into the furnace on the plain of Dura had One walking by their

side like unto the Son of God,¹ Who quenched the violence of the fire; and when Daniel was thrown into the den of lions God sent His angel to stop their mouths,² and the prophet sat unharmed among them. And after the return from Babylon the flagging energies of the Hebrew rulers and people were stirred by the fervent accents of Haggai the prophet and of Zechariah the son of Iddo,³ and were encouraged to build the Temple by glorious visions of Christ.

But in the days of the Maccabees there were no such heavenly visitings as these. The cloud of the Divine Presence had passed away for ever from the Mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies;

¹ Dan. iii. 25.

² Heb. xi. 33.

³ Ezra v. 1; vi. 14.

the voice of prophecy was heard no more ; the light of the Urim and Thummim was quenched. They were left in a spiritual solitude. The God of their fathers, Who had sent His angel to guard His aged prophet in the den of lions, vouchsafed no such heavenly messenger to the venerable priest and scribe Eleazar, to rescue him from the torture, or to that holy family at Modin when beleaguered by the Syrian soldiery. The God Who had raised the child of the widow of Sarepta by Elijah, and of the Shunamite by Elisha, and Who had protected the three children at Babylon by the Presence of the Son of God, despatched no such embassies of love for the deliverance of the seven children of that magnanimous mother in the days of the Maccabees at Jerusalem. They were left

to suffer in silence, and no voice was heard from Heaven to cheer them.

This, brethren, it is which imparts a special interest to their history, and gives it a peculiar value for ourselves. We are like them. We have no visible supernatural helps. No Elijah or Elisha is manifest among us. No Ezekiel or Jeremiah comes forth with a voice of power to strengthen and comfort us. No Haggai or Malachi is sent with prophetic utterances to stimulate us to labour and to suffer for God. No angel from Heaven comes to stop the mouths of the lions in our trials and persecutions. No Son of God walks visibly by our side in the fiery furnace of the sufferings of these latter days. We are left to ourselves like Eleazar the aged priest in the full view of the rack. We

are like Mattathias in the hour of peril which threatened the Hebrew Church. You, my younger brethren, are like his five sons; you are like those seven children of that intrepid mother who encouraged them to suffer for God, and who taught them to live in eternal glory by dying gladly for the faith.

But, thanks be to God, we are like the Maccabees, not only in what we have not, but in what we have. Are we to imagine, brethren, that Eleazar and Mattathias, and Judas Maccabeus and his brethren, and that noble-hearted mother with her seven sons, were less favoured by God than Daniel and the three children at Babylon, because they were not miraculously delivered by Him as they were, but died for His Law? Was God's arm shortened? Had the

power and love of the Eternal and Unchangeable been weakened by time? Surely not. Daniel and the three children were rescued; and thus their history displays not only a bright example of faith and courage, but a practical evidence of the power of God to rescue His faithful and valiant servants in every age. Yet by that deliverance, Daniel and the three children were reserved for other trials, which they afterwards had to encounter. But the Maccabees (let us be allowed to adopt the general name) were delivered by God, not *from* death, but *by* death. They were freed from this death-like life of ours into that glorious life which never dies, and which we hope will be ours on the other side of the grave. They looked upon their death-day as their birth-day, their

birth-day to life eternal, and they rejoiced in it as such.¹

Again; true it is, the Maccabees had no prophets visibly present among them. But they had the written Word of God which lives for ever; they had the abiding voice of prophecy. The Canon of the Old Testament was then completed. They heard it read in the Synagogues; they held it in their hands. It was the living and energizing power of the Divine Word, received into their hearts with faith, which by God's grace enabled them to do and suffer what they did and suffered.

It is not easy to say how it was, but certain it is, that when the entire volume of the Old

¹ The Christian Church well calls it by that name. See above, p. 2, note 4.

Testament was sealed, it beamed forth with new light, caught from the unseen world and from visions of futurity, which cheered the hearts of those who then lived, with hopes sufficient for their need. It is a remarkable fact, clearly displayed in the speeches of the Maccabean martyrs and confessors, that they had a lively faith in the Immortality of the soul and in the Resurrection of the body,¹ and that they looked upon the grave not as a dreary place, but as a bright passage to that blessed region in which they would dwell for ever in glory.

Yet further. The Maccabees had another advantage, which was not vouchsafed in equal measure to their fathers, but is given also to us, and which stimulated them to act

¹ See 2 Macc. vii. 11, 14, 23, 29, 33.

boldly and to suffer patiently and joyfully for the truth.

They had not prophets among them ; but they themselves were the subject of prophecy. The three children in the furnace at Babylon had a Daniel near them, and they had the presence of the Son of God ; and Daniel in the den of lions was protected by an angel from heaven. But their sufferings and trials had not been foretold by ancient prophecy. On the other hand, the Maccabees were not cheered by the personal presence of prophets, but they saw their own sufferings predicted in the sacred pages of Holy Scripture ; they beheld them in the eighth and eleventh chapters of the Book of the Prophet Daniel. There they read the words, that “ many of understanding would fall

by the sword and by the flame," that is, would not be delivered, as the three children and Daniel had been, but would die as martyrs for the truth, and that their sufferings would not be for destruction, but "to try them, and purify them, and make them white,"¹ and that "the people who knew their God would be strong and do exploits."² They read also there, that this trial of persecution would only be for a short season, a time appointed by God, and that the persecutor would suddenly be cut off;³ and that at length the End would come, and that the Judgment would be set, and the Books be opened,⁴ and that many who slept in the dust of the earth should awake, "some to

¹ Dan. xi. 33-35.

² Dan. xi. 32.

³ Dan. viii. 25.

⁴ Dan. vii. 10.

everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt," and that they who were "wise should shine as the brightness of the firmament, and that they who had turned many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."¹

Here then is the answer to the question, How were the Maccabees enabled to act and suffer as they did? It was by faith in those glorious revelations. Their acts and sufferings are explained by the Book of Daniel; they are evidences of its Genuineness and Inspiration. His prophecy fits into their history, and their history fits into his prophecy; the one accounts for the other. They suffered gladly and joyfully the worst tortures, because they saw their own sufferings and victory foretold in that

¹ Dan. xii. 2, 3.

Book, which they knew to be Divinely inspired ; and it is remarkable that the Maccabean confessors, who stood foremost in the struggle, were learned men, Scribes and Priests, such as Eleazar and Mattathias and his family, who were versed in the history of the Canon, and in the criticism of the Text of the Hebrew Scriptures, and whose judgment concerning the Book of Daniel is therefore of more value. They saw there a prediction of the sudden destruction of the persecutor, and beyond all the trials of the persecution, and beyond the term allotted by God to all earthly Empires, which would be broken into fragments by the stone cut out without hands, which is Christ, and be "scattered like chaff of the summer threshing-floor," they beheld in that prophecy a

vision of the everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of Christ. They saw the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven,¹ and the stream of fire issuing from His Throne, and the Resurrection of the dead, and the future Judgment of the World, and the everlasting glory reserved for those whose names were written in the Books, and who had contended and suffered for the truth. Belief in these truths produced the acts of the Maccabees; and therefore the Christian Fathers, in the writings already cited,² do not hesitate to speak of them as martyrs of Christ. They lived and died in faith; faith in the Resurrection of the body; faith in that everlasting bliss and glory which are due to the Incarnation of Christ and to His Passion; and

¹ Dan. vii. 13.

² See above, p. 2.

which having been foreshadowed by types, and foretold by prophecies in the Old Testament, are now revealed in the New. Thus they were martyrs of Christ before Christ came into the world.

This again it is which makes their history to be full of interest and instruction to ourselves.

We also, brethren, who live in the latter days are like them, subjects of prophecy. The same Book, the Book of Daniel, which foretells the trials and persecutions of the Maccabees, foretells also ours. It forewarns us that there will "be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation."¹ And this is not all. It teaches us that the trials of the Maccabees in

¹ Dan. xii. 1.

the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, are foreshadowings of the severer trials of the Christian Church in the last times. In the Maccabees we may recognize ourselves. In their temptations and sufferings we may see a vision of our own; and, if we have their faith, their courage, and patience, their noble contempt of ephemeral opinions, and of earthly honours, and temporal enjoyments, as compared with the Law of God and the glory of the world to come, then, thanks be to Him, in the victories of the Maccabees we may see a type and prophecy of our own victories also.

It is the opinion of the best expositors of the Book of Daniel, that—as the Psalmist in the seventy-second Psalm passes on immediately from Solomon to Christ, and thus leads us to

regard Solomon as a type of Christ, and as our Blessed Lord in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of S. Matthew, passes immediately from a prophetic description of the judgment hanging over the city of Jerusalem to deliver a prophecy of His own future coming, and of the universal Judgment of quick and dead; and by this immediate transition, teaches us to regard the judgment of Jerusalem as a figure of the Judgment of the world—so, in like manner, the Holy Spirit, speaking by the Prophet Daniel in the eleventh chapter, and delivering a prophecy of the trials and sufferings which awaited the Hebrew Church in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, and by proceeding immediately to predict the trials and sufferings which the Christian Church will have to endure

in the latter days, teaches us by this process to regard the former as the type of the latter, and prepares us to see Antiochus Epiphanes reproduced with intensified energy and enlarged proportions in the workings of that Infidel Power which will precede the Coming of Christ, and will be utterly destroyed by it.¹

Therefore the peculiar characteristics of the sufferings of the Hebrew Church in the days of Antiochus, and the various forms of trial which she had to endure, deserve a careful analysis, not only on their own account, but as having an analogical character and a prophetic interest for ourselves. Time does not allow us to examine

¹ S. Cyprian speaks the general language of Christian antiquity when he says, 'De Exhort. Mart.' c. 11, "In Antiocho Antichristus expressus est."

them now ; they must be reserved for consideration in the next discourse.

In the meanwhile, let us put to ourselves the following question—

If the Maccabees, to whom less was vouchsafed of spiritual grace and light than it is our privilege to enjoy, did and suffered what we know them to have done and suffered, can we imagine that there is any danger which they would not gladly have encountered, or any sacrifice they would not cheerfully have made, or any suffering which they would not joyfully have endured, for the sake of the faith which is now revealed to the Church of God? If aged men, and tender children, and weak women, went cheerfully to the rack and to the flames, rather than taste food which was forbidden by

God, how shall we be able to find any excuse or apology for ourselves, if, with our abundant measures of Divine knowledge, and gifts of grace, we fall short of their faith, patience, and courage ; and flag, falter, and faint in our confession of the truth as revealed to the Church of Christ ? They had only the Old Testament ; we have the Old and the New. They had only Moses and the Prophets, whose pages then shone faintly as in a dim twilight. We have Moses and the Prophets illumined by the noonday splendour of the Gospel, and we have Jesus Christ and His holy Apostles and Evangelists. They had Levitical ceremonies ; we have evangelical Sacraments. They had the shadows of good things to come ; we have the good things themselves. They had visitings of

the Holy Ghost; we have the indwelling of the Comforter. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost.¹ They had faith in the Resurrection of the body and eternal Life; and being strong in that belief, they looked tortures in the face and encountered death with joy. They did this before the Coming of Christ, when Sin had not been taken away by the Lamb of God, and when the bars and gates of Death were yet unbroken, and the Grave was an unknown place, and the world beyond it was like an unexplored sea, whence no navigator had returned, to report of its depths and shallows. But we have a chart of the unseen world. We have a compass to steer by. We have One at the helm Who has made the voyage. We have ever with us the pre-

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 17, 19; 2 Cor. vi. 16.

sence of Him Who is the Resurrection and the Life. We have clear proof, and a practical pledge and earnest, of our own future Resurrection to glory, in the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, Whose very members we are.

What therefore, brethren, shall we say ?

We have the example of the Maccabees ; and this example is itself a privilege such as they themselves had not, and which they, and those who have followed them for more than two thousand years, have now bequeathed to us.

They were the proto-martyrs of the Church of God : they led the van of that noble army. We have the assurance of spiritual strength from Christ and from the Holy Ghost. What Christian therefore,—to adopt the words of an

ancient Father¹ preaching at Antioch on their Festival,—can look for pardon from God, if he shrinks from suffering for the Faith? And in the words of an African bishop,² may we not say,—“ If we admire the Maccabees because they refused to touch those meats which Christians may now eat without scruple, but which were then forbidden by God, how much more ought we, who are Christians, to be ready to suffer all things for the sake of Christian Baptism and the Christian Eucharist, and the sign of Christ, inasmuch as the things which the Maccabees possessed were only promises of what was to be fulfilled thereafter, whereas what we possess are evidences of things which

¹ S. Chrys., vol. ii. p. 627, cf. xii. 396.

² S. Aug. ad Faustum, xix. 14.

have been fulfilled already. For whatsoever is still promised to the Church—that is, to Christ's mystical Body—has been already fulfilled in Him Who is the Head of the Church, the Saviour Himself, the One Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.¹ For what are the things still future which are promised to us? What but eternal Life after the Resurrection from the dead? But Resurrection to Life eternal has already been fulfilled in that very human flesh which is worn by Him Who is our Incarnate Lord, and of Whom it is written, "The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us."² In the days of the Maccabees the faith was shrouded with a veil, but now the veil hath been taken away, and the faith is

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5.

² John i. 14.

clearly revealed, and the glory which is promised to the faithful, and will be given to them at the Judgment to come, is already accomplished in Christ, Who came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil.”¹

Therefore, brethren, in times of trial, in days of distress, defection and dismay, let us think of the Maccabees. Let us read our own history there. Let us not consider what the World is saying, or the World is doing, or what the World is promising, or the World is giving, or what the World is threatening. But let us look up to God, Whose Eye is ever upon us. Let us look forward to the future. Let us behold the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven in His glorious Majesty, to judge the

¹ Matt. v. 17.

quick and dead. Let us behold Him Who is “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”¹ Let us look to the great White Throne,² and the Judgment set, and the Books opened, and ourselves called from our graves to stand before Him in the presence of an innumerable company of spectators, of holy Angels and beatified Saints, of Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles and Evangelists, Martyrs and Confessors of every age. And then what will become of the World’s opinions, the World’s honours, the World’s rewards, and the World’s threatenings? The World will be judged by Christ. Therefore listen to His Voice, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the Crown of Life.”³

¹ Rev. xvii. 14 ; xix. 16.

² Rev. xx. 11.

³ Rev. ii. 10.

II

DANIEL xii. 10

Many shall be purified and made white ; but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.

IT was my endeavour last Sunday to commend to your attention the history of the Maccabees. It was observed, that this history exhibits illustrious examples of noble daring and patient endurance for the cause of Divine Truth, and in defence of national Institutions, in days of peril and persecution.

It was remarked, that these specimens of valour and suffering were displayed at a period

of Hebrew history when no prophet arose to strengthen and cheer the drooping spirit of the Nation; and that they were produced by faith in the written Word of God, especially Divine prophecy, by which those sufferings had been foretold; and that they afford evidence of the fulfilment of that prophecy, especially of the Book of Daniel, and thus supply a presumptive proof that his other prophecies concerning the trials of the latter days, and the final triumph of the Truth, and the dread realities of the General Resurrection, and the Universal Judgment of quick and dead, and the awful Majesty of Christ's Coming, and the everlasting glory of the faithful, will be fulfilled also.

Hence the following question arose for our consideration:—

If such were the fruits of the Word of God in the Old Testament, and if Faith in that Word produced such a rich harvest of noble and patient suffering in the Maccabean martyrs and confessors, before the Incarnation of Christ, and when the victory to be achieved, and the glory to be purchased, by His Resurrection and Ascension, were seen only in dim visions of the future; and when the gift of the Holy Ghost had not as yet been bestowed upon the Church; what excuse can be pleaded for those who possess the New Testament as well as the Old and who have the life-giving Sacraments of the Gospel, and the glory of the Resurrection, and Life Everlasting clearly displayed to them in the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, and who show less faith, less courage, less zeal, less

endurance and self-sacrifice for God and His Church, than the Maccabees did in the defence of those things which were but dim foreshadowings of those Evangelical substances which by God's mercy in Christ are now vouchsafed to ourselves ?

It was also observed, that the trials of the Maccabees, as foretold in the Book of Daniel, are prophetic and figurative of the trials which await the Christian Church in the latter days, and that they have thus a special interest for ourselves.

In continuation therefore of this subject, let us now proceed to analyze those trials, and then let us consider what warnings, instruction, and encouragements are supplied by them to us.

The sufferings of the Hebrew Church in the

days of the Maccabees—or, in other words, during the reign of her persecutor, Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria for nearly eleven years, from B.C. 175 to B.C. 164—were without a precedent in her history. They were trials of her faith in her religion. Her religion itself was the object of attack. Antiochus Epiphanes stands forth in the history of the Church of God as the first deliberate and systematic persecutor of His Truth and Worship, and as boldly avowing a design to sweep away every vestige of it from the face of the earth.

The secret springs of this impious purpose it is not easy to discover. We can readily comprehend why an ambitious monarch should invade a neighbouring province, and why a covetous prince should pillage an opulent

Temple in an ancient city, in order to aggrandize and enrich himself: but why, after he had done all this, he should proceed to compel the inhabitants of that province and city, and the worshippers in that Temple (as Antiochus Epiphanes endeavoured to force the Jews) to eat certain meats prohibited as unclean by their laws, and to give up the copies of their sacred books to be burnt, and to partake in idolatrous sacrifices, and to join in idolatrous processions; and why he should forbid them to circumcise their children, and to observe their sabbaths and holy days, and to offer the daily sacrifice; and why he should proceed to torture and to destroy thousands of them,—his own subjects,—if they refused to obey his commands and abandon their religion, and to adopt

heathenism, for which he cared but little, it is not so easy to explain.

For my own part, I frankly confess, that I recognize here the working of the Evil One. We know from the Book of Daniel, that Powers of darkness, called the Princes of Persia and Media (that is, evil angels¹ who claimed dominion in these kingdoms, and who worked in them and by them against the kingdom of God), endeavoured by their means to hinder the restoration of the Temple and of the City of Jerusalem, and for this purpose strove against Michael the Archangel, the Champion of the Church of God. Satan knew that Christ was to come to that City and Temple; and therefore he thwarted the work. The agency of spiritual

¹ See on Dan. x. 13-20; cf. Zech. iii. 1, 2.

Powers warring against Christ and His Church is revealed to us more clearly in the Apocalypse; which is the sequel to, and completion of, the Book of Daniel. And we know from the prophecies of Daniel and S. John,¹ and from other portions of God's prophetic Word, that, as Satan tried to hinder Christ's first Advent to save the world, so he will do all in his power to prevent, or at least to postpone, Christ's second Advent to Judgment, which will be the signal for his own condemnation to his dark prison-house. He will endeavour to corrupt the Church by specious flatteries and worldly

¹ In the second, third, and fourth Seals, Rev. vi. 4-8; see also Rev. xii. 7; cf. 1 Pet. v. 8, where S. Peter ascribes the persecution of the Church in Nero's time to the agency of Satan. See also Matt. xiii. 39; 1 Thess. ii. 18.

temptations, and secular influences, and at length will break out in open rage and furious persecution against the faithful soldiers of Christ.

It may reasonably be supposed, that in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, when the time of the Incarnation was drawing near, the great Adversary of Christ and His Church was eager to wage a deadly warfare against the City and Temple of Jerusalem, to which it was foretold in Hebrew prophecy that Christ would come; and to destroy the sacred volume of the Old Testament, which witnessed of Christ; and to exterminate the Levitical ritual, which in all its offerings and sacrifices foreshadowed the One Great Sacrifice, by which the world would be redeemed.

The times and character of Antiochus Epiphanes were favourable to that design of the Evil One.

The victories of Alexander the Great had diffused the language and literature of Greece. Palestine lay between two Greek kingdoms, Syria on the north, and Egypt on the south.¹ Greek influences filtered from both of them into it. Greek conquests, Greek commerce, Greek philosophy, Greek poetry, Greek rhetoric, Greek arts, Greek religion, with their fascinating allurements, conspired to Hellenize Palestine. Thus, the Hebrew Church and Nation were exposed to a severer, because a more subtle,

¹ Hence in the Book of Daniel (xi. 5-15), the king of Syria is called the "king of the north," and the king of Egypt the "king of the south."

trial than they had to endure from the arms of Assyria under Sennacherib, or from those of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Their Faith and Worship were menaced by dangers similar to those (but far exceeding them in intensity) which threatened the Christian Church in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries after Christ, at Florence and at Rome, in the days of the Medicean Princes and Pontiffs, especially of Leo X., when a refined Paganism, with all the graceful charms of classical literature and ancient art, almost supplanted Christianity, and flung the fair drapery and picturesque mantle of elegant scholarship and artistic beauty over libertinism and scepticism in the Church.¹

¹ See Muratori, "Annali d'Italia," A.D. 1521; tom. x. p. 127, ed. 1735. Tiraboschi, "Storia della Letteratura

Antiochus Epiphanes was a person well fitted to do the work of the Evil One. He had spent seven years at Rome, and seems to have acquired a many-sided versatility from his residence there.¹ On his brother's death he usurped the throne of Syria, which belonged by right to his nephew. He is characterized in the prophecy of Daniel² as "a vile person," or rather, a despicable one. Not that he was deficient in intellectual ability, or in military skill and prowess; but he had no gravity, seriousness, or earnestness, no faith, no enthusiasm, no love of what is grand, noble, beautiful

Italiana," tom. vii. parte 1^{ma}. p. 15-19, ed. Firenze, 1809.

Ranke's "Lives of the Popes," chap. ii.

¹ Liv. Hist. xli. 25, per omnia vitæ genera errans, uti nec sibi nec aliis, quinam homo esset, satis constaret.

² Dan xi. 21.

and true. He was a clever mimic,¹ a witty jester, a scurrilous buffoon; he is described as casting off all royal dignity and common decency, even in religious festivals (especially that magnificent one which he celebrated at Antioch² almost at the close of his life), and as playing the part of a menial lacquey in the crowd, and as capering with ludicrous antics and grotesque pranks and grimaces like an actor of low farces and burlesques, for the diversion of his own subjects. And yet he was a lavish prodigal,³ sometimes showering handfuls of money about him in the streets, a sumptuous exhibitor of

¹ Athen. v. 194.

² Polyb. xxxi. 3, apud Athenæum, v. 194; x. 438. Diod Sic., "Excerpt. Vales," p. 321.

³ 1 Macc. iii. 30; cf. Dan. xi. 24.

splendid shows and gladiatorial spectacles,¹ and withal a sensual libertine, a heartless sceptic and bold scoffer; a sacrilegious spoiler of temples,² and a ruthless persecutor of the Church of God, and exulting in the sufferings of his victims who were tortured to death before his face.

Such was Antiochus Epiphanes.

But he would have had no power against the Hebrew Church and Nation, if their rulers, priests and people had been true to God and to themselves.

¹ Liv. xli. 25: "Spectaculorum omnis generis magnificentia superiores reges vicit." Livy describes the taste of Antiochus for the savage spectacles of gladiatorial conflicts; which probably predisposed him to look with complacency on the sufferings of those Hebrew Martyrs who were tortured by him at Jerusalem.

² He died in a campaign which he undertook into Persia, in order to plunder a heathen temple. 1 Macc. vi. 1, 2.

This had been shewn in the age immediately preceding Antiochus Epiphanes. Ptolemy Philopator, king of Egypt, the conqueror of Antiochus the Great the father of Antiochus Epiphanes, had attempted to enter the Holy of Holies¹ at Jerusalem, but he was encountered and withstood by the vigorous resistance of the priests, encouraged by the exhortations and prayers of the faithful high-priest Simon, and was smitten with paralysis in the attempt.² Enraged by this repulse, he afterwards persecuted the Jews,³ but they remained loyal to God, and were protected and rescued by Him.

Again, in the year before the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes, when a certain time-

¹ B.C. 217 ; 3 Macc. i. 11.

² 3 Macc. ii. 22.

³ 3 Macc. ii. 28 ; iii. 24-30.

serving Jew named Simon, the captain of the Temple, being jealous of the good high-priest Onias, had reported to Seleucus, king of Syria, that a large sum of money had been amassed by the Jews, and was laid up in the Temple, and Heliodorus was sent by Seleucus to pil- lage it, Onias the high-priest stood firm, and gathered the priests and people together to join in prayer to God, and Heliodorus was suddenly seized with panic and alarm, and fled from the Temple in dismay.¹

Thus it had been proved, that if the priests, rulers, and people of the Hebrew Nation had remained faithful to God, the powers of Egypt and of Syria would not be able to harm it.

But at the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes

¹ 2 Macc. iii.

a change came over Jerusalem. The faithful high-priest Onias, the son of the faithful Simon, had two brothers. Both of these were disloyal to their country and their Church. They were allured by the flatteries of the Syrian king Antiochus. Greek influences insinuated themselves stealthily into their moral and spiritual being. The dogmas of the Hebrew Creed, the precepts of the Hebrew Law, the ordinances of the Hebrew Ritual, seemed to them to be galling restrictions of a slavish bondage, and worn-out badges of a superannuated bigotry. There was, they thought, an air of genial freedom, freshness and joyousness, in the atmosphere of Greek civilization. They made up their minds that Jerusalem must be Hellenized, in order to accommodate itself to the spirit of the age.

“Let us go,” they said, “and make a covenant with the heathen that are round about us.”¹ They who were her priests would shew their so-called superior illumination, and would set the example. One of them called Joshua, or Jesus, laid aside his Hebrew name, and assumed the Greek appellation of the Argonautic hero Jason: his brother Onias adopted the high-sounding name of the Lacedæmonian chief Menelaus.² Another example of the same Hellenizing process displayed itself afterwards in his successor in the priesthood, Joachim, who Grecized his name into Alcimus. The first of these three high-priests, Jason, supplanted his own brother, the virtuous high-priest, by means

¹ 1 Macc. i. 11.

² Joseph. : “Ant.” xii. 5, 1; xii. 9, 7.

of bribes to Antiochus.¹ He set at nought the Divine Law concerning succession and ordination to the Hebrew Priesthood, and in order to ingratiate himself with the Syrian king, he requested permission to erect a Greek gymnasium at Jerusalem, and to train the Hebrew youth in its exercises;² and he assured Antiochus that the Jews were weary of their own national laws, and wished to give up their Hebrew franchises and to be enrolled as citizens of Antioch. Many of the priests had no longer any heart to serve at the Altar, but forsook

¹ 2 Macc. iv. 8.

² Joseph. : "Ant." xii. 5. "In quo scilicet adolescentes discerent non tantum gentilium fabulas, item digladiari, certare cursu, saltu, disco, sed etiam omnem luxuriam, etiam contra naturam." Corn. à Lapede in 1 Macc. i. 15; cf. 2 Macc. iv. 12.

their sacred calling and apostatized from their religion, and adopted the fashions of the heathen. Many of the people denied their circumcision.¹ The high-priest of Jerusalem, Jason, made a public display of his so-called freedom from the trammels of prejudice, by sending an embassy to Phœnicia, to communicate with the Tyrian Hercules by an offering to that deity, at a religious quinquennial festival which was celebrated there by Antiochus. The example of Jason was imitated by his brother Menelaus, who, being employed by Jason to convey his tribute to Antiochus, availed himself of that opportunity for supplanting Jason in the high priesthood, by a larger bribe to Antiochus, as Jason had sup-

¹ 1 Macc. i.; cf. on 1 Cor. vii. 18.

planted his more virtuous brother Onias.¹ One priestly concession and compromise was followed by another. Jason had opened the City of Jerusalem to Antiochus, but Menelaus led him into the Temple itself. The king plundered it of its sacred vessels and treasures, and profaned the Sanctuary with the sacrifices of unclean animals.²

And what, brethren, was the consequence? Almighty God forsook the Temple, which had been betrayed by its own priests, and He punished them by means of that heathen power which they themselves had courted and caressed.³

¹ 2 Macc. iv. 20-25.

² Joseph. : "Ant." xii. 5, 4 ; cf. 1 Macc. i. 21-28 ; 2 Macc. v. 11-21.

³ See 2 Macc. iv. 15, 17, where it is said that "not setting by the honours of their fathers, they liked the glory of the

Antiochus having been driven from Egypt by the Romans (as Daniel had foretold¹), and being vexed and exasperated by this indignity, wreaked his fury on the Jews. Apollonius, his treasurer, whom he had sent to spoil the city, took many captives and made great havoc in Jerusalem, and planted a Syrian fortress there, and laid waste the Sanctuary.² A certain Athenian was sent by Antiochus to force the Jews to forsake their religion,³ and he changed the name of the Temple of the Lord

Grecians best of all ; by reason whereof sore calamity came upon them, for they had them to be their enemies whose customs they followed so earnestly, and unto whom they desired to be like in all things, for it is not a light thing to do wickedly against the Law of God."

¹ Dan. xi. 30. Joseph.: "Ant." xii. 5, 3.

² 1 Macc. i. 31-39 ; 3 Macc. v. 25.

³ 2 Macc. v. 1, 2.

and dedicated it to Zeus Olympius, and defiled it with revelry and license. The Priests had Hellenized themselves; why should not the Greeks imitate them and Hellenize the Temple also ?

Antiochus himself came to Jerusalem, and endeavoured utterly to uproot its faith and worship. He burnt the copies of the Scriptures, and put to death those who possessed them;¹ he forbade the Jews to observe the Sabbaths and Festivals, and prohibited circumcision, and slew mothers who circumcised their children,² and took away the daily sacrifice, as Daniel had prophesied,³ and commanded them to eat unclean meats on pain of death for

¹ 1 Macc. i. 56, 57.

² 1 Macc. i. 60.

³ Dan. xi. 31.

refusal; and to walk in processions bearing the ivy-tufted thyrsus in honour of Dionysus,¹ and erected heathen altars in the streets of Jerusalem, and placed an idolatrous altar on the Altar of Jehovah itself, and offered heathen sacrifices on that Altar, and thus fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel,² that he would set up the “abomination of desolation;” that is, an abomination which made the Temple desolate, by driving devout worshippers from it, and by depriving it of the Presence of God.

Then it was that those noble examples of holy heroism were displayed, which were described in the last discourse.³ Then Eleazar

¹ 1 Macc. i. 54-64; 2 Macc. vi. 7. Joseph.: “Ant.” xii. 5, 4.

² Dan. xi. 31; 1 Macc. i. 62.

³ See above, p. 4-11.

the venerable Scribe and Priest—ninety years of age—went boldly to the rack, in defence of the Law of God.¹ Then that courageous mother exhorted her seven sons to choose life eternal and a glorious resurrection by dying for that Law, rather than accept the offer of a death-like life of shame by breaking it.² Then the valiant priest Mattathias, on his deathbed charged his five sons to be loyal to God and their country. Then one of those five sons, Judas Maccabeus, with a scanty band,³ did glorious feats by faith in God, and by prayer and fasting and meditation on God's Word, and routed the armies of Antiochus, and recovered Jerusalem, and cleansed the Sanctuary, and set

¹ 2 Macc. vi. 18-31.

² 2 Macc. vii.

³ The "little help" of Dan. xi. 34.

up the Altar anew, and celebrated the Feast of Dedication with great joy and gladness.¹ This was in the winter of the year B.C. 165. In the following spring the Persecutor himself was suddenly cut off. In the prophetic words of Daniel he was "broken without hand,"² that is, not by human power, but by the visitation of God; he died a wretched and loathsome death in a far-off land, racked by tortures of body and soul.

Such was the end of Antiochus Epiphanes.

The priestly instruments of his crafty policy and cruel persecutions shared a like wretched fate. The high-priest Jason fled to the Ammonites, and afterwards died an exile in

¹ 1 Macc. ii. 16-28, 49-70, iv. 41; 2 Macc. x. 1-9.

² Dan. viii. 25; 1 Macc. vi. 1, 2; 2 Macc. ix. 1-12.

Greece, without a friend to mourn for him or bury him.¹ The high-priest Menelaus was put to death by the son of Antiochus himself, with a punishment suited to sacrilege.² The high-priest Alcimus, who had thwarted the valiant Judas Maccabeus, and accused him as a traitor,³ was suddenly smitten by palsy when pulling down the wall of the Temple, and opening the Sanctuary to the heathen.

Such was the end of these renegade priests who betrayed the cause of God and His Church.

Brethren, let us apply these things to our-

¹ At Lacedæmon. 2 Macc. iv. 26, v. 9, 10.

² 2 Macc. xiii. 3, 4.

³ 1 Macc. vii. ix. ; 2 Macc. xiv. 26 ; Joseph. : " Ant." vii. 9, xii. 10.

selves. Sacred prophecy leads us to expect that the times of Antiochus Epiphanes will be reproduced in the latter days. The Prophet Daniel, having foretold the one proceeds at once to speak of the other; he joins them together in one grand prophetic picture; the one forms the background of the other. He does not conceal from us that the trials of the former will be intensified in the latter. "Then," he says, "there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation."¹ Our Blessed Lord and His Apostles confirm this testimony.²

What then shall we say?

In reading the history of the Maccabees let us observe that all the miseries of the Hebrew

¹ Dan. xii. 1.

² Matt. xxiv. 21, 22; Luke xxi. 25; Rev. vi. 12—17; xvi. 18.

Church and Nation were from *within*. As long as they were true to God, He helped and defended them. The attacks of Philopator and Seleucus recoiled upon the aggressors. The Jewish priests and people overcame their foes by faith. But a spiritual degeneracy ensued. It began with the priests. They were fascinated by the attractions of worldly popularity, ease and luxury, and by the allurements of a specious secularism and spurious liberalism. They loved to make ingenious compromises between the Church and the World. They wished to be priests of the former and yet votaries of the latter; they would assimilate the one to the other. The consequence was that God withdrew His grace from them, and darkened their intellectual and spiritual

vision. Then their faith in their religion languished, their moral courage failed, their inner life was blighted, cankered and withered; they were ashamed of the great and glorious doctrines of the old Hebrew Creed, and were weary of the prophetic ordinances of the old Hebrew Ritual; they longed to cast them aside as trammels of a servile vassalage and as relics of an obsolete superstition; and they endeavoured to accommodate themselves with elastic pliancy to the ideas and fashions of Syria and Greece. They Grecized their own names and desired to Hellenize Hebraism. They had no belief in their own priestly office; no heart for the solemn worship in which they were appointed to officiate; no reverence for the Holy Scriptures which they held in their hand;

no relish for the sacred prayers and praises which they uttered with their lips. They were lovers of the world and of themselves rather than lovers of God; they craved the applause of the world rather than His approval. They sought to promote their own interests rather than His glory. They endeavoured to ingratiate themselves with a secular and heathen power for their own aggrandizement; and after a series of cowardly compromises, in which they sacrificed the doctrine, the discipline, and the ritual of the Church of God, they at last openly communicated with heathenism itself.

No wonder that God forsook the sanctuary which His priests had profaned, and gave it up to the heathen. As Daniel the prophet had

foretold "the transgressors had come to the full."¹ In the words of the same prophet, Antiochus "had intelligence with those who forsook the holy covenant,"² and by their means "he prospered, and practised and destroyed the holy people."³ God punished the apostasy of the priests by the agency of him whom they had flattered. The Syrian king raged against the Hebrew Church with ruthless fury, and set up the abomination of desolation in the Temple of Jerusalem, and endeavoured utterly to extirpate the faith and worship of the Most High.

Here are warnings for ourselves. Our dangers are from within. If the Priests of God's Church stand firm, nothing can harm her, she

¹ Dan. viii. 23.

² Dan. xi. 30.

³ Dan. viii. 24.

will be safe against her enemies, as the Hebrew Church was safe against Syria and Egypt in the days of her faithful high-priests, Simon and Onias. Suffer therefore the questions,—Are we prepared, with God's help, to maintain the faith of Christ, whole and undefiled, and to contend earnestly for it? Are we looking to Him for strength? Do we act in the belief that “every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights?”¹ Do we rely on God's grace vouchsafed to the faithful in prayer, public and private, and in devout meditation on His Holy Word, and in the reception of the Blessed Sacraments? Do we labour for His glory as the paramount aim and end of our being? Do we live and move in

¹ James i. 17.

the atmosphere of a clear persuasion that the world's wisdom¹ is different from God's wisdom, and that we must become as little children if we are to enter His Kingdom;² and that "he that winneth souls is wise;"³ and "they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever?"⁴

Such questions as these might not unfitly be addressed to the whole English Church. But time does not allow us to take so wide a range. Let us limit our field of view. Gathered together here to-day in the Church of an ancient University, let us inquire in a spirit of dutiful loyalty and reverential love,

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 19.

² Matt. xviii. 3.

³ Prov. xi. 30.

⁴ Dan. xii. 3.

Do we, who are priests of God's Church, and are set here as watchmen in Israel, regard our own sacred office as a solemn trust from Him? Have we faith in that office? Do we believe Christ's promise that He will be alway with His Church, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her,¹ and that He will send the Holy Ghost to abide with her for ever,² and that she is Christ's Body and Spouse,³ the Pillar and ground of the Truth?⁴ Do we look to the sacred services of our College Chapels as the sources and well-springs of our moral and spiritual and intellectual strength? Have we faith in the Holy Scriptures which we there read, and in the Holy

¹ Matt. xxviii. 20; xvi. 18.

² John xiv. 16.

³ Ephes. v. 24, 25; Col. i. 18.

⁴ 1 Tim. iii. 15.

Sacraments which we there administer, and in the Creeds and Prayers in which we there join? Or are we like those recreant priests of Jerusalem, Jason, Menelaus, and Alcimus, ready to barter away the sacred doctrines and the holy ritual which are committed to our charge, and which are treasures far more precious than all the silver and golden vessels stored in the Temple at Jerusalem, which they surrendered to Antiochus? Are we ashamed of the Christian heritage received from our pious forefathers as if it were a badge of slavery or vestige of superstition? Are we eager to Hellenize ourselves? Are we ready to destroy the fences of our Christian faith and discipline, and to remove those religious safeguards which guarantee the Christian character of these

venerable Institutions, and protect the rising generation of England against the pernicious teaching of heresy and unbelief?¹ Are we

¹ The allegation that religious tests may be abrogated in our Colleges and Universities because they are taken by some who do not hold the doctrines expressed by them, might be urged equally well against all subscriptions to Creeds, Articles, and Confessions of Faith in the Church itself, and if carried out to its legitimate consequences would, under the pretence of liberty, degrade the congregations of the Church of England to a state of slavery, and expose them to the danger of being tyrannized over by a freethinking Clergy.

If religious tests are taken by freethinkers, there is this beneficial result at least from the tests, even in their case, that the freethinkers who take them are self-condemned, which is the proper penalty of heresy (Titus iii. 11), and they make shipwreck of their moral character, and thus their influence for evil is neutralized. Besides, though some freethinkers may be hypocrites, yet all are not so, and many are prevented by the restraining action of religious tests in Colleges from instilling their sceptical tenets into the minds

prepared to subvert the foundations of the Christian priesthood, and to hold communion with unbelievers, as the high-priest Jason

of those who are sent by their Parents to the English Universities in the confident hope that they will be there trained in the Christian Faith. If religious tests are abrogated in our Colleges, Parents will have no guarantee that the sons sent by them to English Universities may not be required to listen to lectures on divinity from the lips of unbelievers, or on the Greek Testament from some who may use their position as a vantage-ground for shaking the faith of their hearers in the Godhead of Christ and in the Inspiration of Holy Scripture. The history of theological teaching and biblical criticism in the Universities of Germany may warn us of our own dangers in this respect. The real questions at issue are—Is there such a thing as Religious Truth? and are the Universities bound to teach it? If so, then the present prevalence of Unbelief is the trial of the faith of the believer; and will exercise and prove his moral courage in endeavouring to maintain those religious tests which remind the Universities of their duty, and which help them to perform it.

did, and to unite in the most solemn mysteries of Christian worship with those who deny the Godhead of Christ, and who teach others to do so? Are we ready to imitate the high-priest Menelaus, who opened the Sanctuary to the enemy and allowed him to profane it? Are we willing to follow the example of the high-priest Alcimus who disparaged the holy valour of Judas Maccabeus as impolitic zeal, and censured his heroic piety as disloyalty to the secular power? Are we inclined to imitate him, and to pull down the wall of partition which separates the Church from the World, and to change our seminaries of sound learning and religious education into mere literary and scientific Athenæums, and to transform these spiritual

Gymnasia, in which for many generations the youth of Christian England have been trained in holy discipline, and have been anointed with the spiritual unction of the Holy Ghost, in order that they may be able to wrestle¹ against principalities and powers, and against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places, and to win unfading crowns of heavenly glory—into mere secular Palæstras, like those of the Syrian Antioch, which the high-priest Jason set up beneath the shadow of the Temple at Jerusalem, and which, though adorned with fair painting and sculpture, and embellished with the bright imagery of earthly beauty, had no visions of Divine Truth, no

¹ Eph. vi. 12.

light from Heaven, and no hopes of Immortality.

Alas for us, brethren, if this be so! The results of such a secularizing process are not difficult to conjecture. We, who are God's priests, may flatter the World, and the World for a time may flatter us, in order to win us to itself. It will deal with us as Antiochus dealt with Jason and Menelaus, and as his son dealt with Alcimus. When it has gained us, it will despise us. In the wretched end of those unhappy priests¹ we may see our own. God will withdraw His grace from us, He will chastise us by means of that antichristian World which we have courted and caressed. He will raise up some modern Antiochus to persecute

¹ See above, p. 62, 63.

the Church which we have betrayed and secularized, and to take away the daily sacrifice, and to set up an abomination of desolation in the Sanctuary of our Jerusalem.

But, God be thanked, this history of the Maccabees has not only its warnings but its encouragements. It not only displays to us disloyal and treacherous priests, such as Jason, Menelaus, and Alcimus, but it also exhibits to us true-hearted and valiant priests, such as Eleazar, Mattathias, Judas Maccabeus and his brethren. In the words of Daniel,¹ "they were holpen with a little help." Here is a comfort for us. God can save by a few. "How often," says a great English statesman of the last century,²

¹ Dan. xi. 34.

² Burke, Letter to Wm. Elliot, Esq. ; Works, vii. 366.

“has public calamity been arrested on the very brink of ruin by the energy of a single man! I am as sure as I am of my being, that one vigorous man, confiding in the aid of God, with a just reliance on his own fortitude, would first draw to him some few like himself and then that multitudes hardly thought to be in existence would appear and troop around him. Why” (he adds) “should not a Maccabeus and his brethren arise to assert the honour of the ancient law, and to defend the temple of their forefathers, with as ardent a spirit as can inspire any innovator to destroy the monuments, the piety and the glory, of the ancient ages?”

Yes, my younger brethren, Judas Maccabeus and his faithful band, though they were few in number, overcame the vast forces of the enemy

and delivered the Church of God. And though some of them fell on the field of battle, yet they were more than conquerors. They did not estimate glory by ephemeral applause, and by temporary success in this world; they overcame in death and by death, they conquered death itself, because they had faith in God's word spoken by Daniel that their sufferings were appointed them by Him to purify them and make them white,¹ and to prepare them for a glorious Resurrection and a Blessed Immortality.

So may it be with us. Our times were foreshadowed by theirs. They are described by Daniel; "There shall be a time of trouble," he says, "such as never was since there was a

¹ Dan. xii. 10.

nation." But, he adds, "at that time shall thy people be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the Book.'

Let us then not be staggered by the present prevalence of Unbelief. Unbelief ought to strengthen our faith, for it is foretold in Holy Scripture; "When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?"² Let us not be perplexed by the popular impatience of Creeds and Catechisms, and Formularies of Faith. This too ought to strengthen our belief; for this also is foretold in Scripture; "The time will come," says S. Paul, "when men will not endure sound doctrine, but will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and shall turn away their ears from the truth."³ Here

¹ Dan. xii. 1.

² S. Luke xviii. 8.

³ 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

then is another reason for belief in Scripture and for obedience to its commands, "Hold fast the form of sound words, fight the good fight of faith."¹ Remember also that Daniel foretold the sudden destruction of the persecutor of the Hebrew Church, whom the world called Epiphanes, or "illustrious," but whom Holy Scripture calls 'a vile or despicable person.'² The world's Epiphanes is God's vile one. What is "highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God?"³ "Many that are first shall be last."⁴ Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled in him; you know his wretched end.⁵ And the same prophet has foretold the utter

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

² Dan. xi. 21.

³ Luke xvi. 15.

⁴ Matt. xix. 30.

⁵ 2 Macc. ix. 5-12.

destruction of all enemies of Christ. He has revealed to us the glory and the majesty and the victory of His Second Coming, and the everlasting bliss of those who have remained faithful to Him in times of trial, and have suffered gladly for Him.¹

Lastly, the heroic mother in this history, who encouraged her seven sons to die joyfully for the truth, and who gladly followed those seven sons whom she had sent before her to God, has been well compared by an ancient Christian Father,² to the Church of Christ, exhorting her children to contend valiantly, and to suffer patiently, for the Faith. “O my sons, have pity on me,” said that courageous mother—“have pity on me who have borne you in my womb

¹ Dan. viii. 27, xi. 35, xii. 3. ² S. Aug.: Ser. 301.

and nursed you at my breasts." So says the Church to you. Do not forsake her. Do not desert those who have gone before you in the path of suffering and of glory. Do not prefer a shameful life of cowardice and treachery to the unfading crown of Martyrdom for God. Do not prefer popular errors to unpopular truths. The Faith's worst defeats are far more glorious than the World's noblest victories. Whenever the Antichristianism of these latter days endeavours to allure you with its smiles, and beguile you with its flatteries, or appal you with its menaces, or wither you with its scorn, or persecute you with its fury, be not moved thereby, but raise your eyes calmly upward with faith and prayer to God; see Christ your loving Saviour standing at His right hand to

succour you and to receive you to Himself. Behold Him coming in the clouds of Heaven to raise the dead from their graves and to call the world to Judgment. See the Books opened, and the great White Throne set, and yourself standing before it. And may the gracious promise be yours that was vouchsafed to Daniel the "man greatly beloved," "Go thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." ¹

¹ Dan. xii. 13.

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