

subject to the one Supreme Head, the Vicar of Christ, and all of them derive all their power and authority from the Supreme Invisible Head, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. They can say in the words of St. Paul, 'For Christ we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting through us.'

The Great Commission.

And what are the terms of the commission which He has given them? We are so accustomed to the words that we find it difficult to realise their meaning. In the Gospel we are told that after the Resurrection of our Lord, the eleven Apostles went into Galilee unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and Jesus coming spoke to them, saying—'All power is given Me in heaven and on earth, going therefore teach ye all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.' Here we have the nature and terms of their commission most clearly defined. Everything is indicated—the place, the time, the persons, the object of the commission, the extent of the powers conferred, and the promise of His divine assistance in the fulfilment of this commission. The place is a mountain in Galilee where our Lord had told the Apostles to meet Him. The time was after His Resurrection before He ascended into heaven. The persons who received the commission were, not all the followers of our Lord, but the eleven Apostles. The object of the commission was the teaching of all nations in all things whatsoever He had commanded. The extent of their power is unlimited. It is divine. It is the same power which He Himself possessed, 'All power is given Me in heaven and on earth. As the Father sent Me I also send you. He that heareth you heareth Me.' It is unlimited as to space for they are to go into the whole world, to all the nations. It is unlimited as to time, for it is to continue in their successors to the consummation of the world. He promises that He will be with them, not merely at first, not merely for a few centuries, not merely from time to time, but all days even to the end of the world. Finally, He commands all men to accept their teaching for 'he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned.'

Obstacles.

Fortified by this divine commission, the Apostles went forth as the ambassadors of Christ to convert the nations, and to found the Kingdom of God. To the eyes of human wisdom no undertaking could be more foolish. Who were those men that were sent to accomplish this gigantic work? What qualifications had they? What means at their disposal? They had absolutely nothing at all to recommend them in the eyes of the world. They had no human learning. They had no armies or fleets to support them. They had not even the necessities of life. They were sent without scrip or staff. They had left all things to follow their Divine Master. They lived on alms. Their only weapon was truth, their only defence, meekness. They were sent as lambs among ravening wolves, and when smitten on one cheek they were told to present the other. Truly, the foolish things of this world hath God chosen to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the strong. Such were the ambassadors sent by Christ to teach the nations, and the nations, at that time, were not in a mood to accept the teaching of such men. It was the Augustine age of literature. It was the age of Virgil and Horace, and Livy and Cicero. Moreover, the doctrine they had to teach was most repugnant to the refined and cultured Greek, and to the proud and luxurious Roman. The idea of a crucified God was to them the sheerest nonsense. 'We preach Christ Crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Gentiles folly,' are the words of St. Paul. Besides the doctrine of the Crucified proclaimed a universal war against all the fostered passions of those proud and luxurious peoples. It commanded absolute purity, even in thought, to a generation that had temples erected everywhere to the goddess of impure love. It proclaimed that all men were equal before God in an age when the vast majority of the human race were abject slaves, who had no more rights than the cattle of the field, and

whom the master could torture or put to death at his will. It proclaimed the forgiveness of injuries in an age when vengeance was regarded as one of the principal virtues. It proclaimed universal charity in an age when those of all other nations were regarded as enemies. It preached humility to men who had not the slightest idea of the meaning of the word, and regarded all manifestations of it as abject baseness. Yet it was to these very peoples that the ambassadors of Christ were sent to teach them the Gospel virtues, to cleanse them from the leprosy of sin and luxury in which they were steeped, and to mould them into a universal empire under the standard of the Cross. History tells us that universal empire has been the dream of the mightiest nations of the earth. In the ancient world Nineveh and Babylon attempted it. For a time each seemed to have succeeded, but for centuries the sands of the desert have covered their ruins, and it is only quite recently that their sites have been identified. Alexander the Great attempted it. His mighty army conquered nation after nation so that the whole known world lay at his feet, or as Holy Scripture says: 'The earth was quiet before him.' He is said to have wept because there were no more worlds for him to conquer. He advanced his conquering legions even to the banks of the Ganges. But his hour had struck. He returned to Babylon, where he died in a drunken debauch, and the vast empire he had founded was shattered into fragments. Imperial Rome attempted it, and held universal sway for some time over the nations of the earth. But the rude barbarians from the steppes of Asia and the northern forests of Europe burst upon her like a deluge, overwhelmed her armies, and laid waste the Imperial City, so that, as St. Jerome writes, 'the howling of foxes could be heard at night amid the ruins of the golden palace of the Cæsars.' Napoleon the First attempted it. It was the dream of his life and the goal of his ambition. The monarchs of Europe trembled before him, 'the bend of his eye did awe the world.' He even laid hands on the Vicar of Christ, made him a prisoner, and despoiled him of his territory. But his hour came also, and the conqueror of kings and emperors, despoiled of everything, died a dishonored prisoner on the lone island of St. Helena, and the memory of his conquests only serves as a theme for school boys. Such were the results of the mightiest nations and conquerors that strove to found a universal empire. All their victories, glories, triumphs, spoils, shrunk into abject disaster. They passed like a vision of the night, and their place knows them no more at all for ever. But the wonder of wonders is that where all those mighty powers, backed up by all the resources the world could supply, failed so signally, the humble ambassadors of Christ have succeeded. The fishermen of Galilee, with absolutely nothing but their divine commission to support them, did actually found a universal empire, and after nineteen centuries that empire stands to-day in spite of all the powers of earth and hell arrayed against it, and what increases the wonder is that this empire rules not merely over the bodies of men but over their hearts, and souls, and consciences. The struggles they and their followers had to endure in fulfilling their commission were appalling. For three hundred years the Roman Empire endeavoured by every means to crush them. The vilest calumnies were circulated about them. They were looked on, according to Tacitus as 'the enemies of the human race.' The hatred of the people was inflamed against them. They were despoiled of their property, they were subjected to the cruellest tortures. They were covered with tar, tied to iron stakes, and lighted as torches in the gardens of Nero. They were devoured by wild beasts in the Flavian Amphitheatre. And all this went on for three hundred years, and instead of exterminating them only increased their numbers. 'The blood of martyrs became the seed of Christians.'

Triumph.

At length the triumph came. We are this year celebrating the sixteenth centenary of that triumph. In the year 313 Maxentius, a cruel tyrant and bitter persecutor of the Christians, ruled at Rome. Constantine, yet a pagan, marched to Rome to dispute his title as Roman Emperor. As he was approaching the Im-

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