

ATTICUS

The image shows the interior of a Gothic church, likely a choir or apse. It features a high, vaulted ceiling with intricate ribbing and a central decorative finial. Four large, pointed-arch windows with colorful stained glass are the focal point, set within a dark stone frame. The lower walls are covered in detailed Gothic tracery. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the stone and the vibrant colors of the glass.

***OUR CHURCHES
AND CHAPELS:
THEIR PARSONS,
PRIESTS, &
CONGREGATIONS***

Atticus

Our Churches and Chapels: Their Parsons, Priests, & Congregations

**Being a Critical and Historical Account of Every Place
of Worship in Preston**

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Transcribed by Peter Moulding
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OUR CHURCHES AND CHAPELS

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THEIR PARSONS, PRIESTS, & CONGREGATIONS;
BEING A CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL ACCOUNT
OF EVERY PLACE OF WORSHIP IN PRESTON.
BY "ATTICUS" (A. HEWITSON).

'T is pleasant through the loopholes of retreat to peep at
such a world.—Cowper.

Reprinted from the Preston Chronicle.

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TO THE READER.

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The general satisfaction given by the following sketches
when originally printed in the Preston Chronicle, combined

with a desire, largely expressed, to see them republished, in book form, is the principal excuse offered for the appearance of this volume. Into the various descriptions of churches, chapels, priests, parsons, congregations, &c., which it contains, a lively spirit, which may be objectionable to the phlegmatic, the sad-faced, and the puritanical, has been thrown. But the author, who can see no reason why a "man whose blood is warm within" should "sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster," on any occasion, has a large respect for cheerfulness, and has endeavoured to make palatable, by a little genial humour, what would otherwise have been a heavy enumeration of dry facts. Those who don't care for the gay will find in these sketches the grave; those who prefer vivacity to seriousness will meet with what they want; those who appreciate all will discover each. The solemn are supplied with facts; the facetious with humour; the analytical with criticism. The work embodies a general history of each place of worship in Preston—fuller and more reliable than any yet published; and for reference it will be found valuable, whilst for general reading it will be instructive. The author has done his best to be candid and impartial. If he has failed in the attempt, he can't help it; if he has succeeded, he is thankful. No writer can suit everybody; and if an angel had compiled these sketches some men would have croaked. To the generality of the Church of England, Catholic, and Dissenting clergymen, &c., in the town, the author tenders his warmest thanks for the generous manner they have assisted him, and the kindly way in which they have supplied him with information essential to the completion of the work.

Preston, Dec. 24th, 1869.

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OUR CHURCHES AND CHAPELS: THEIR PARSONS, PRIESTS, AND CONGREGATIONS.

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It is important that something should be known about our churches and chapels; it is more important that we should be acquainted with their parsons and priests; it is most important that we should have a correct idea of their congregations, for they show the consequences of each, and reflect the character and influence of all. We have a wide field before us. The domain we enter upon is unexplored. Our streets, with their mid-day bustle and midnight sin; our public buildings, with their outside elaboration and inside

mysteries; our places of amusement, with their gilded fascinations and shallow delusions; our clubs, bar parlours, prisons, cellars, and workhouses, with their amenities, frivolities, and severities, have all been commented upon; but the most important of our institutions, the best, the queerest, the solemnest, the oddest—the churches and chapels of the town—have been left out in the cold entirely. All our public functionaries have been viewed round, examined closely, caressed mildly, and sometimes genteely maltreated; our parochial divinities, who preside over the fate of the poor; our municipal Gogs and Magogs who exhibit the extreme points of reticence and garrulity in the council chamber; our brandy drinkers, chronic carousers, lackered swells, pushing shopkeepers, otiose policemen, and dim-looking cab-drivers have all been photographed, framed, and hung up to dry long ago; our workshops and manufactories, our operatives and artisans, have likewise been duly pictured and exhibited; the Ribble has had its praises sung in polite literary strains; the parks have had their beauties depicted in rhyme and blank verse; nay—but this is hardly necessary—the old railway station, that walhalla of the gods and paragon of the five orders of architecture, has had its delightful peculiarities set forth; all our public places and public bodies have been thrown upon the canvas, except those of the more serious type—except places of worship and those belonging them. These have been neglected; nobody has thought it worth while to give them either a special blessing or a particular anathema.

There are about 45 churches and chapels and probably 60 parsons and priests in Preston; but unto this hour they

have been treated, so far as they are individually concerned, with complete silence. We purpose remedying the defect, supplying the necessary criticism, and filling up the hiatus. The whole lot must have either something or nothing in them, must be either useful or useless; parsons must be either sharp or stupid, sensible or foolish; priests must be either learned or illiterate, either good, bad, or indifferent; in all, from the rector in his silken gown to the back street psalm-singer in his fustian, there must be something worth praising or condemning. And the churches and chapels, with their congregations, must likewise present some points of beauty or ugliness, some traits of grace or godlessness, some features of excellence, dignity, piety, or sham. There must be either a good deal of gilded gingerbread or a great lot of the genuine article, at our places of worship. But whether there is or there is not, we have decided to say something about the church and the chapel, the parson and the priest, of each district in the town. This is a mere prologue, and we shall but hint at the general theme "on this occasion."

Churches and chapels are great institutions in the land. Nobody knows the exact time when the first was thought of; and it has not yet transpired when the last will be run up. But this is certain, we are not improving much in the make of them. The Sunday sanctums and Sabbath conventicles of today may be mere ornate, may be more flashy, and show more symptoms of polished bedizenment in their construction; but three-fourths of them sink into dwarflings and mediocrities when compared with the rare old buildings of the past. In strength and beauty, in vastness of design

and skill of workmanship, in nobility of outline and richness of detail, the religious fabrics of these times fall into insignificance beside their grand old predecessors; and the manner in which they are cut up into patrician and plebeian quarters, into fashionable coteries for the perfumed portion of humanity, and into half-starved benches with the brand of poverty upon them for the poor, is nothing to the credit of anybody.

All the churches and chapels of the land may profess Christianity; but the game of the bulk has a powerful reference to money. Those who have got the most of the current coin of the realm receive the blindest smile from the parson, the politest nod from the beadle, the promptest attention from that strange mixture of piety and pay called "the chapel-keeper;" those who have not got it must take what they can get, and accept it with Christian resignation, as St. Paul tells them. This may be all right; we have not said yet that it is wrong; but it looks suspicious, doesn't it?—shows that in the arena of conventional Christianity, as in the seething maelstrom of ordinary life, money is the winner. Our parsons and priests, like our ecclesiastical architecture and general church management, do not seem to have improved upon their ancestors. Priests are not as jolly as they once were. In olden days "holy fathers" could wear horse-hair shirts and scarify their epidermis with a finer cruelty than their modern successors, and they could, after all that, make the blithest songs, sing the merriest melodies, and quaff the oldest port with an air of jocund conscientiousness, making one slyly like them, however much inclined to dispute the correctness of their theology.

And the parsons of the past were also a blithesome set of individuals. They were perhaps rougher than those mild and refined gentlemen who preach now-a-days; but they were straightforward, thorough, absolutely English, well educated, and stronger in the brain than many of them. In each Episcopalian, Catholic, and Dissenting community there are now some most erudite, most useful men; but if we take the great multitude of them, and compare their circumstances—their facilities for education, the varied channels of usefulness they have—with those of their predecessors, it will be found that the latter were the cleverer, often the wiser, and always the merrier men. Plainness, erudition, blithesomeness, were their characteristics. Aye, look at our modern men given up largely to threnody-chiming and to polishing off tea and muffin with elderly females, and compare them, say, for instance, with—

The poet Praed's immortal Vicar,
Who wisely wore the cleric gown,
Sound in theology and liquor;
Quite human, though a true divine,
His fellow-men he would not libel;
He gave his friends good honest wine,
And drew his doctrine from the Bible.

Institute a comparison, and then you will say that whilst modern men may be very aesthetic and neatly dressed, the ancient apostolic successors, though less refined, had much more metal in them, were more kindly, genial; and told their followers to live well, to eat well, and to mind none of the hair-splitting neological folly which is now cracking up

Christendom. In old times the Lord did not “call” so many parsons from one church to another as it is said He does now; in the days which have passed the bulk of subordinate parsons did not feel a sort of conscientious hankering every three years for an “enlarged sphere of usefulness,” where the salary was proportionately increased. We have known multitudes of parsons, in our time, who have been “called” to places where their salaries were increased; we know of but few who have gravitated to a church where the salary was less than the one left. “Business” enters largely into the conceptions of clergymen. As a rule, no teachers of religion, except Catholic priests and Methodist ministers, leave one place for another where less of this world's goods and chattels predominate; and *they are compelled* to do so, else the result might be different. When a priest gets his mittimus he has to budge; it is not a question of “he said or she said,” but of—go; and when a Wesleyan is triennially told to either look after the interests of a fresh circuit or retire into space, he has to do so. It would be wrong to say that lucre is at the bottom of every parsonic change; but it is at the foundation of the great majority—eh? If it isn't, just make an inquiry, as we have done. This may sound like a deviation from our text—perhaps it is; but the question it refers to is so closely associated with the subject of parsons and priests, that we should have scarcely been doing justice to the matter if we had not had a quiet “fling” at the money part of it. In the letters which will follow this, we shall deal disinterestedly with all—shall give Churchmen, Catholics, Quakers, Independents, Baptists, Wesleyans, Ranters, and Calathumpians, fair play. Our object will be to present a

picture of things as they are, and to avoid all meddling with creeds. People may believe what they like, so far as we are concerned, if they behave themselves, and pay their debts. It is utterly impossible to get all to be of the same opinion; creeds, like faces, must differ, have differed, always will differ; and the best plan is to let people have their own way so long as it is consistent with the general welfare of social and civil life. It being understood that “the milk of human kindness is within the *pale* of the Church,” we shall begin there. The Parish Church of Preston will constitute our first theme.

No. I.

PRESTON PARISH CHURCH.

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It doesn't particularly matter when the building we call our Parish Church was first erected; and, if it did, the world would have to die of literary inanition before it got the exact date. None of the larger sort of antiquaries agree absolutely upon the subject, and the smaller fry go in for all sorts of figures, varying as to time from about two years to one hundred and fifty. This may be taken as a homoeopathic dose in respect to its history:- built about 900 years since by Catholics, and dedicated to St. Wilfrid; handed over to Protestants by somebody, who was perhaps acting on the

very generous principle of giving other folk's property, in the 16th century; rebuilt in 1581, and dedicated to St. John; rebuilt in 1770; enlarged, elaborated, and rejuvenised in 1853; plagued with dry rot for a considerable time afterwards; in a pretty good state of architectural health now; and likely to last out both this generation and the next. It looks rather genteel and stately outside; it has a good steeple, kept duly alive by a congregation of traditional jackdaws; it has a capital set of bells which have put in a good deal of overtime during the past five months, through a pressure of election business; and in its entirety, as Baines once remarked, the building looks like "a good ordinary Parish Church." There is nothing either snobbish or sublime about it; and, speaking after Josh Billings, "it's a fair even-going critter," capable of being either pulled down or made bigger. That is about the length and breadth of the matter, and if we had to appeal to the commonwealth as to the correctness of our position it would be found that the "ayes have it." We don't believe in the Parish Church; but a good deal of people do, and why shouldn't they have their way in a small fight as well as the rest of folk? All, except Mormons and Fenians, who honestly believe in anything, are entitled to respect.

Our Parish Church has a good contour, and many of its exterior architectural details are well conceived and arranged; but, like other buildings of the same order, it has got a multiplicity of strange hobgoblin figure-heads about it which serve no purpose either earthly or heavenly, and which are understood by hardly one out of five million. We could never yet make it out why those grotesque pieces of

masonry—gargoyles, we believe, they are called—were fixed to any place of worship. Around our Parish Church and half-way up the steeple, there are, at almost every angle and prominence, rudely carved monstrosities, conspicuous for nothing but their ineffable and heathenish ugliness. Huge eyes, great mouths, immense tooth, savage faces and distorted bodies are their prime characteristics. The man who invented this species of ecclesiastical decoration must have been either mad or in “the horrors.” An evenly balanced mind could never have thought of them, and why they should be specially tacked to churches is a mystery in accordance with neither King Solomon nor Cocker. The graveyard of our Parish Church is, we dare say, something which very few people think of. We have seen many such places in our time; but that in connection with our Parish Church is about the grimmest specimen in the lot. It has a barren, cold, dingy, unconsecrated look with it; and why it should have we can't tell. Either ruffianism or neglect must at some time have done a good stroke of business in it; for many of the gravestones are cracked in two; some are nearly broken to pieces; and a considerable number of those in the principal parts of the yard are being gradually worn out. We see no fun, for instance, in “paving” the entrances to the church with gravestones. Somebody must, at some time, have paid a considerable amount of money in getting the gravestones of their relatives smoothed and lettered; and it could never have been intended that they should be flattened down, close as tile work, for a promiscuous multitude of people to walk over and efface. The back of the churchyard is in a very weary, delapidated and melancholy

state. Why can't a few shrubs and flowers be planted in it? Why is not the ground trimmed up and made decent? From the time when the Egyptians worshipped cats and onions down to the present hour, religious folk have paid some special attention to their grave spaces, and we want to see the custom kept up. Our Parish Church yard has a sad, forsaken appearance; if it had run to seed and ended in nothing, or had been neglected and closed up by an army of hypochondriacs, it could not have been more gloomy, barren, or disheartening. The ground should be looked after, and the stones preserved as much as possible. It is a question of shoes v. gravestones at present, and, if there is not some change of position, the shoes will in the end win.

About the interior of our Parish Church there is nothing particularly wonderful; it has a respectable, substantial, reverential appearance, and that is quite as much as any church should have. There is no emblematic ritualistic moonshine in any part of it; we hope there never may be; we are sure there never will be so long as the men now at the helm are in office. But let us start at the beginning. The principal entrance is through a massive and somewhat dimly-lighted porch, which, in its time, has necessarily, like all church porches, been the scene of much pious gossip, superstition, and sanctimonious scandal. It is rather a snug place to halt in. If you stand on one side of the large octagonal font, which is placed in the centre of the inner porch, and patronised by about 20 of the rising race every Sunday afternoon, you will be able to see everybody, whilst nobody can distinctly see you. As a rule, many people are too tired, or too ill, or too idle, to go to a place of worship on

a Sunday morning, and at our Parish Church one may plainly notice this. A certain number always put in a regular appearance. If they did not attend the Parish Church twice a day they would become apprehensive as to both their temporal respectability and spiritual welfare. They are descendants of the old long-horned stock, and have a mighty notion of the importance of church-going. Probably they don't care very profoundly for the sermons; but they have got into a safe-sided, orthodox groove, and some of them have an idea that they will be saved as much by church-going as by faith. The members of this class have a large notion of the respectability of their individual pews and seats. If they belonged to a family of five hundred each, and if every one of them had to go to Church every Sunday, they would want their respective seats, Prayer Books, footstools, and all that sort of thing. They don't like to see strangers rambling about, in search of a resting place; they are particularly solemn-looking, and give symptoms of being on the border of some catastrophe, if an unknown being shows any disposition to enter their pews. And some of them would see a person a good deal beyond the ether side of Jordan before they would think of handing him a Prayer Book. We don't suppose any of them are so precise as the old gentleman who once, when a stranger entered his pew, doubled up the cushion, sat upon it in a two-fold state, and intimated that ordinary beards were good enough for interlopers; but after all there is much of the "number one" principle in the devotion of these goodly followers of the saints, and they have been so long at the game that a cure is impossible.

Taking the congregation of our Parish Church in the aggregate it is a fair sample of every class of human life. You have the old maid in her unspotted, demurely-coloured moire antique, carrying a Prayer Book belonging to a past generation; you have the ancient bachelor with plenty of money and possessing a thorough knowledge as to the safest way of keeping it, his great idea being that the best way of getting to heaven is to stick to his coins, attend church every Sunday, and take the sacrament regularly; you have the magistrate, whose manner, if not his beard, is of formal cut; the retired tradesman, with his domestic looking wife, and smartly-dressed daughters, ten times finer than ever their mother was; the manufacturer absorbed in cotton and wondering when he will be able to do a good stroke of business on 'change again; the lawyer, who has carried on a decent business amongst fees during the week, and has perhaps turned up to join in the general confession; the doctor, ready to give emphasis to that part of it which says:- "And there is no health in us;" the pushing tradesman, who has to live by going to church, as well as by counter work; the speculating shopkeeper, who has a connection to make; the young finely-feathered lady, got up in silk and velvet and carrying a chignon sufficient to pull her cerebellum out of joint; the dandy buttoned up to show his figure, and heavily dosed with scent; the less developed young swell, who is always "talking about his pa and his ma," and has only just begun to have his hair parted down the middle; the broken down middle-aged man who was once in a good position, but who years since went all in a piece to pot; the snuff-loving old woman who curtsies before fine folk, who

has always a long tale to tell about her sorrows, and who is periodically consoled by a "trifle;" the working man who is rather a scarce article, except upon special occasions; and the representative of the poorest class, living somewhere in that venal slum of slime and misery behind the church. A considerable number of those floating beings called "strags" attend the Parish Church. They go to no place regularly; they gravitate at intervals to the church, mainly on the ground that their fathers and mothers used to go there, and because they were christened there; but they belong a cunning race; they can scent the battle from afar, and they generally keep about three-quarters of a mile from the Parish Church when a collection has to be made. To the ordinary attendants, collections do not operate as deterrents; but to the "strags" they are frighteners. "What's the reason there are so few people here?" we said one day to the beadle, and that most potent, grave, and reverend seignior replied, with a Rogersonian sparkle in his rolling eye, "There's a collection and the 'strags' won't take the bait." It is the same more or less at every place of worship; and to tell the truth, there's a sort of instinctive dislike of collections in everybody's composition.

The congregation of our Parish Church is tolerably numerous, and embraces many fine human specimens. Money and fashion are well represented at it; and as Zadkiel and the author of Pogmoor Almanac say those powers have to rule for a long time, we may take it for granted that the Parish Church will yet outlive many of the minor raving academies in which they are absent. There is touch more generalisation than there used to be as to the sittings in our

Parish Church; but “birds of a feather flock together” still. The rich know their quarters; exquisite gentlemen and smart young ladies with morrocco-bound gilt-edged Prayer Books still cluster in special sections; and although it is said that the poor have the best part of the church allotted to them, the conspicuousness of its position gives a brand to it neither healthy nor pleasant. They are seated down the centre aisle; but the place is too demonstrative of their poverty. If half the seats were empty, situated excellently though they may be, you wouldn't catch any respectable weasle asleep on them. If some doctor, or magistrate, or private bib-and-tucker lady had to anchor here, supposing there were any spare place in any other part of the house, there would be a good deal of quizzing and wonderment afloat. If you don't believe it put on a highly refined dress and try the experiment; and if you are not very specially spotted we wild give a fifty dollar greenback on behalf of the society for converting missionary eaters in Chillingowullabadorie. We shall say nothing with regard to the ordinary service of the Parish Church, except this, that it would look better of three fourths of the congregation if they would not leave the responses to a paid choir. “Lor, bless yer,” as Betsy Jane Ward would say, a choir will sing, anything put before them if it is set to music; and they think no more of getting through all that sad business about personal sinfulness, agonising repentance, and a general craving for forgiveness, than the odd woman did when she used to kiss her cow and say it was delicious. There was once a period when all Parish Church goers made open confession joined audibly in the prayers, and said “Amen” as

if they meant it; although we are doubtful about even that. Now, the choir does all the work, and the congregation are left behind the distance post to think about the matter. But if it suits the people it's quite right.

There are three parsons at our Parish Church—Canon Parr, who is the seventeenth vicar in a regular line of succession since the Reformation and two curates. As to the curates we shall say nothing beyond this, that one has got a better situation and is going to it, and that the other would like one if he could get it—not that the present is at all bad, only that there are others better. We don't know how many curates there have been at the Parish Church since the Reformation; but it, may be safely said that in their turn they have, as a rule, accepted with calm and Christian resignation better paid places when they had a fair opportunity of getting them. We are not going to say very much about Cannon Parr, and let nobody suppose that we shall make an effort to tear a passion to tatters regarding any of his peculiarities. Canon Parr is an easy-going, genial, educated man kindly disposed towards good living, not blessed with over much money, fond of wearing a billycock, and strongly in love with a cloak. He has seen much of the world, is shrewd, has a long head, has both studied and travelled for his learning, and is the smartest man Preston Protestants could have to defend their cause. But he has a certain amount of narrowness in his mental vision, and, like the bulk of parsons, can see his own way best. He has a strong temper within him, and he can redden up beautifully all over when his equanimity is disturbed. If you tread upon his ecclesiastical bunions he will give you either a dark

mooner or an eye opener—we use these classical terms in a figurative sense. He will keep quiet so long as you do; but if you make an antagonistic move he will punish you if possible. He can wield a clever pen; his style is cogent, scholarly, and, unless overburdened with temper, dignified. He can fling the shafts of satire or distil the balm of pathos; can be bitter, saucy, and aggravating; can say a hard thing in a cutting style; and if he does not go to the bone it's no fault of his. He can also tone down his language to a point of elegance and tenderness; can express a good thing excellently, and utter a fine sentiment well. His speaking is modelled after a good style; but it is inferior to his writing. In the pulpit he expresses himself easily, often fervently, never rantingly. The pulpit of the Parish Church will stand for ever before he upsets it, and he will never approach that altitude of polemical phrenitis which will induce him to smash any part of it. His pulpit language is invariably well chosen; some of his subjects may be rather commonplace or inappropriate, but the words thrown into their exposition are up to the mark. He seldom falters; he has never above one, "and now, finally, brethren," in his concluding remarks; he invariably gives over when he has done—a plan which John Wesley once said many parsons neglected to observe; and his congregation, whether they have been awake or fast asleep, generally go away satisfied. Canon Parr has been at our Parish Church nine and twenty years, and although we don't subscribe to his ecclesiastical creed, we believe he has done good in his time. He is largely respected; he would have been more respected if he had been less exacting towards Dissenters, and less violent in his hatred of

Catholics. Neither his Church-rate nor Easter Due escapade improved his position; and some of his fierce anti-Popery denunciations did not increase his circle of friends. But these things have gone by, and let them be forgotten. In private life Canon Parr is essentially social: he can tell a good tale, is full of humour; he knows a few things as well as the rest of men, and is charitably disposed—indeed he is too sympathetic and this causes him to be pestered with rubbishy tales from all sorts of individuals, and sometimes to act upon them as if they were true. As a Protestant vicar—and, remembering that no angels have yet been born in this country, that everybody is somewhat imperfect, and that folk will differ—we look upon Canon Parr as above the average. He has said extravagant and unreasonable things in his time; but he has rare properties, qualities of sense and erudition, which are strangers to many pretentious men in his line of business; and, on the whole, he may be legitimately set down, in the language of the “gods,” as “O.K.”

No. II.

ST. WILFRID'S CATHOLIC CHURCH.

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It was at one time of the day a rather dangerous sort of thing for a man, or a woman, or a medium-sized infant,

living in this highly-favoured land of ours, to show any special liking for Roman Catholicism. But the days of religious bruising have perished; and Catholics are now, in the main, considered to be human as well as other people, and to have a right to live, and put their Sunday clothes on, and go to their own places of worship like the rest of mortals. No doubt there are a few distempered adherents of the “immortal William” school who would like to see Catholics driven into a corner, banished, or squeezed into nothing; probably there are some of the highly sublimated “no surrender” gentlemen who would be considerably pleased if they could galvanise the old penal code and put a barrel able to play the air of “Boyne Water” into every street organ; but the great mass of men have learned to be tolerant, and have come to the conclusion that Catholics, civilly and religiously, are entitled to all the liberty which a free and enlightened constitution can confer—to all the privileges which fair-play and even-handed justice call give; and if these are not fully granted now, the day is coming when they will be possessed. Lancashire seems to be the great centre of Catholicism in England, and Preston appears to be its centre in Lancashire. This benign town of Preston, with its fervent galaxy of lecturing curates, and its noble army of high falutin' incumbents, is the very fulcrum and lever of northern Romanism. If Catholics are wrong and on the way to perdition and blisters there are 33,000 of them here moving in that very awkward direction at the present. A number so large, whether right or wrong cannot be despised; a body so great, whether good or evil, will, by its sheer inherent force, persist in living, moving, and having, a

fair share of being. You can't evaporate 33,000 of anything in a hurry; and you could no more put a nightcap upon the Catholics of Preston than you could blacken up the eye of the sun. That stout old Vatican gentleman who storms this fast world of ours periodically with his encyclicals, and who is known by the name of Pius IX., must, if he knows anything of England, know something of Preston; and if he knows anything of it he will have long since learned that wherever the faith over which he presides may be going down the hill, it is at least in Preston "as well as can be expected," and likely, for a period longer than he will live, to bloom and flourish.

Our text is—St. Wilfrid's Catholic Church, Preston. This place of worship is situated in a somewhat sanctified place—Chapel-street; but as about half of that locality is taken up with lawyers' offices, and the centre of it by a police station, we fancy that this world, rather than the next, will occupy the bulk of its attention. It is to be hoped that St. Wilfrid's, which stands on the opposite side, will act as a healthy counterpoise—will, at any rate, maintain its own against such formidable odds. The building in Chapel-street, dedicated to the old Angle-Saxon bishop—St. Wilfrid—who was a combative sort of soul, fond of argumentatively knocking down obstreperous kings and ecclesiastics and breaking up the strongholds of paganism—was opened seventy-six years ago. It signifies little how it looked then. Today it has a large appearance. There is nothing worth either laughing or crying about so far as its exterior goes. It doesn't look like a church; it resembles not a chapel; and it seems too big for a house. There is no effort at architectural

elaboration in its outer arrangements. It is plain, strong, large; and like big feet or leathern shirts has evidently been made more for use than ornament. But this style of phraseology only refers to the extrinsic part. Inside, the church has a vast, ornate, and magnificent appearance. No place of worship in Preston is so finely decorated, so skilfully painted, so artistically got up. In the world of business there is nothing like leather; in the arena of religion there seems to be nothing like paint. Every church in the country makes an effort to get deeply into the region of paint; they will have it upon either windows, walls, or ceilings. It is true that Dissenters do not dive profoundly into the coloured abyss; but weakness of funds combined with defective aesthetic cultivation may have something to do with their deficiency in this respect. Those who have had the management and support of St. Wilfrid's in their hands, have studied the theory of colour to perfection, and whilst we may not theologically agree with some of its uses, one cannot but admire its general effect. Saints, angels, rings, squares, floriations, spiralizations, and everything which the brain or the brush of the most devoted painter could fairly devise are depicted in this church, and there is such an array of them that one wonders how anybody could ever have had the time or patience to finish the work.

The high altar which occupies the southern end is, in its way, something very fine. A magnificent picture of the crucifixion occupies the back ground; flowers and candles, in numbers sufficient to appal the stoutest Evangelical and turn to blue ruin such men as the editor of the "Bulwark" are elevated in front; over all, as well as collaterally, there are

inscriptions in Latin; designs in gold and azure and vermilion fill up the details; and on each side there is a confessional wherein all members, whether large or diminutive, whether dressed in corduroy or smoothest, blackest broad cloth, in silk or Surat cotton, must unravel the sins they have committed. This confession must be a hard sort of job, we know, for some people; but we are not going to enter upon a discussion of its merits or demerits. Only this may be said, that if there was full confession at every place of worship in Preston the parsons would never get through their work. Every day, from an early hour in the morning until a late period of the evening, St. Wilfrid's is open to worshippers; and you may see them, some with smiling faces, and some with very elongated ones, going to or coming from it constantly. Like Tennyson's stream, they evince symptoms of constant movement and the only conclusion we can fairly come to is that the mass of them are singularly in earnest. There are not many Protestants—neither Church people, nor Dissenters, neither quiescent Quakers nor Revivalist dervishes—who would be inclined to go to their religious exercises before breakfast, and if they did, some of them, like the old woman who partook of Sacrament in Minnesota, would want to know what they were going to “get” for it. On Sundays, as on week days, the same business—laborious as it looks to outsiders—goes on. There are several services, and they are arranged for every class—for those who must attend early, for those who can't, for those who won't, and for those who stir when the afflatus is upon them. There are many, however, who are regular attendants, soon and late,

and if precision and continuity will assist them in getting to heaven, they possess those auxiliaries in abundance.

The congregation attending on a Sunday is a mixed one—rags and satins, moleskins and patent kids, are all duly represented; and it is quite a study to see their wearers put in an appearance. Directly after entrance reverential genuflections and holy-water dipping are indulged in. Some of the congregation do the business gracefully; others get through it like the very grandfather of awkwardness. The Irish, who often come first and sit last, are solemnly whimsical in their movements. The women dip fast and curtsy briskly; the men turn their hands in and out as if prehensile mysticism was a saving thing, and bow less rapidly but more angularly than the females; then you have the slender young lady who knows what deportment and reverence mean; who dips quietly, and makes a partial descent gracefully; the servant girl who goes through the preliminary somewhat roughly but very earnestly; the smart young fellow, who dips with his gloves on—a “rather lazy kind of thing,” as the cobbler remarked when he said his prayers in bed—and gives a sort of half and half nod, as if the whole bend were below his dignity; the business man, who goes into the water and the bowing in a matter-of-fact style, who gets through the ceremony soon but well, and moves on for the next comer; the youth, who touches the water in a come-and-go style, and makes a bow on a similar principle; the aged worshipper, who takes kindly but slowly to the hallowed liquid, and goes nearly upon his knees in the fulness of his reverence; and towards the last you have about six Sisters of Mercy, belonging St. Wilfrid's convent,

who pass through the formality in a calm, easy, finished manner, and then hurry along, some with veils down and others with veils up, to a side sitting they have. There is no religious shoddy amongst these persons. They may look solemn, yet some of them have finely moulded features; they may dress strangely and gloomily, yet, if you converse with them, they will always give indications of serener spirits. Whether their profession be right or wrong, this is certain: they keep one of the best schools in the town, and they teach children manners—a thing which many parents can't manage. They also make themselves useful in visiting; they have a certain respect for faith, but more for good works; and if other folk in Christendom held similar views on this point the good done would in the end be greater. All these Sisters of Mercy are accomplished—they are clever in the head, know how to play music, to paint, and to sew; can cook well if they like; and it's a pity they are not married. But they are doing more good single than lots of women are accomplishing in the married state, and we had better let them alone. It's dangerous to either command or advise the gentler sex, and as everything finds its own level by having its own way they will, we suppose, in the end.

One of the most noticeable features in connection with the services at St. Wilfrid's is the music. It is proverbial that Catholics have good music. You won't find any of the drawling, face-pulling, rubbishy melodies worked up to a point of agony in some places of worship countenanced in the Catholic Church. All is classical—all from the best masters. There is an enchantment in the music which binds you—makes you like it whether you will or not. At St.