

PRIESTLY USURPATION,

ITS CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCES :

A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. THOMAS'S, BIRMINGHAM,

FEBRUARY 11TH, 1845,

ON BEHALF OF THE

CHURCH PASTORAL-AID SOCIETY,

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF

THE CLERGY AND OTHERS OF THE CONGREGATION

ASSEMBLED ON THAT OCCASION.

ALSO PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH, CHELTENHAM,
ON SUNDAY, MARCH 30TH, 1845.

BY REV. F. CLOSE, A. M.

LONDON :

HATCHARD AND SON, PICCADILLY ;

HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO. PATERNOSTER ROW.

1845.

PIRATED BY THE AUTHOR

THE GREAT AND FORTHRIGHT

AN SERMON

PREACHED AT ST. THOMAS'S CHURCH
ON SUNDAY THE 14th
OF APRIL IN THE
YEAR 1784

BY THE REV. JOHN AINSWORTH

AND PUBLISHED BY THE REV. JOHN AINSWORTH
AT THE END OF THE SERMON
ON THE 14th OF APRIL 1784

AND PUBLISHED IN THE GREAT BRITISH EMPIRE

BY J. J. HADLEY

Advertisement.

THE following Sermon was in substance preached at St. Thomas's, Birmingham, on the evening of the 11th of February, 1845, on behalf of the Funds of the Church Pastoral-Aid Society. It would not have been given to the public in the present shape but at the special request of the Clergy and others who formed the Congregation on that occasion.

The Author feels that it is due to those who have thus so kindly expressed their wish to see in print what they heard from the pulpit—that he should state most explicitly that he can by no means certify that the following pages are identical, except in principle, with what he then preached ; and consequently those who have requested it to be published cannot be held responsible for its contents. It was quite impossible for him to attempt to prepare this Sermon for the press until Easter was passed—and even now he has been constrained to write under many disadvantages arising from parochial cares and public duties.

Anxious however for the truth only—he commits this Sermon to God, in the full conviction that the subject matter of it is agreeable to His revealed word—humbly praying that it may be “accepted of Him”—and that He may bless it to the souls of His people, and make it in some small degree tributary to His glory !

PREFACE

The following German was in substance forwarded to me
by the Hon. the Secretary of the Admiralty on the 11th of January
1841, on behalf of the Lords of the Admiralty, and the
it would not have been given to the public in the present shape
but at the special request of the Admiralty and of the Lords
of the Admiralty on that occasion.

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kindly expressed their wish to see in print what they have done
in the subject—that he should state most explicitly that he can
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in principle with what he has presented, and consequently those
who have reviewed it to be published cannot be held responsible
for its contents. It was quite impossible for him to attempt to
prevent this because for the press will have been presented—and
even now he has been constrained to write under many dis-
advantages arising from hurried views and public notice.

London, January 11th 1841.

PRIESTLY USURPATION,

ITS CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCES.

JEREMIAH v. 30, 31.

“A WONDERFUL AND HORRIBLE THING IS COMMITTED IN THE LAND:
“THE PROPHETS PROPHECY FALSELY, AND THE PRIESTS BEAR
“RULE BY THEIR MEANS, AND MY PEOPLE LOVE TO HAVE IT SO:
“AND WHAT WILL YE DO IN THE END THEREOF.”

THESE words form a remarkable climax at the conclusion of a very fervid prophecy. Jeremiah had been upbraiding the people in the name of the LORD, and urging many heavy and grievous charges against them. “Not a man could be found among them, that executed judgment, or sought the truth,”---one such person should have saved the city! But they were hardened under chastisement (v. 2.) “refused to receive correction, and made their faces harder than a rock.”---The poor were “foolish,” “the rich had broken the yoke and burst the bond,” they were all idolaters, and many were adulterers; (v. 7---9.) “they had dealt treacherously,” “belied the LORD,” rejected the faithful prophets---were without understanding---they had eyes and saw not, ears and heard not; “this people, hath a revolting and rebellious heart---they are revolted and gone;” (v. 23.) they had “overpassed the deeds of the wicked” nations around them, so that the LORD exclaimed respecting them (v. 29.)

“ Shall I not visit for these things ? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this ? ” And yet, after reviewing all the atrocious crimes of the nation, and the abominations of the people---here is something adduced even more appalling, more deplorable, more fatal---“ A WONDERFUL THING,” calculated to excite the deepest astonishment---“ AN HORRIBLE THING,” one that must call down especial vengeance from on High---and what can this be ? Can any thing be more dreadful than idolatry, rebellion, treachery, falsehood, adultery ? “ A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land---the Prophets prophecy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so ; and what will ye do in the end thereof ? ”

The fountains of instruction were polluted---no wonder the streams were foul ! The sources of knowledge were darkened, it was not surprising that ignorance prevailed ; lying prophets taught error---arrogant priests lorded over the minds of the people, who willingly submitted to the degradation, and what result could be expected ?

The condition of Judah was lamentable indeed at this period ; but similar evils are deplored by men of GOD in successive ages of that Church. The prophets, it should be remembered, were the principal instructors of the people---their office was not merely to predict things future, but to guide the minds of the people into the truth. The sacerdotal office under that dispensation, was chiefly sacrificial, and intercessory ; that is, the priests performed the offices of the temple worship, offered sacrifices---interceded for the people---and occasionally read the law : but oral instruction appears to have devolved on prophets,

and seers, and men of God, sent from time to time to the people. And hence it was Satan's policy to imitate this sacred mission---not so much by sending prophets of Baal, or those who openly attempted to draw the people to worship false Gods, as by commissioning men who should profess to speak in the name of the LORD, and wear the garb of his servants, while they prophecied lies, taught falsehood and error, and hardened the hearts of the people against the messages of the true prophets.

This device of the wicked-one is complained of by almost all the inspired men in successive ages, throughout that dispensation. "Oh! my people," exclaimed the Lord by the prophet Isaiah,* "they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths." And again, "The leaders of the people cause them to err, and they that are led of them are destroyed."† "Woe to the foolish prophets," saith Ezekiel,‡ "that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing; they have seen vanity and lying divination:" &c., and Zephaniah declares that in his day "the prophets were light and treacherous persons."§ The character of the teachers of the people in the times of the Messiah has been fixed by himself---"they were blind leaders of the blind." Thus was DOCTRINE corrupted by the false prophets, and the priests availed themselves of the ignorance and error which consequently prevailed, to establish their own influence; priestly domination naturally springing out of false doctrine and the spiritual degradation of the people. The priesthood being then partly a civil and partly a religious institution, absolute power was thus thrown

* Isaiah iii. 12. † Isaiah ix. 16. ‡ Ezekiel xiii. 1-6. § Zephaniah iii. 4.

into the hands of this body; and how grievously they abused it, and how they trampled on the rights, consciences, and liberties of the people, every page of Jewish history declares. Thus the degradation of this people became complete---“they loved to have it so”---both false doctrine and priestly domination agreed with a carnal and worldly heart---they pursued their gains, and followed their pleasures, glad to leave others to think for them; and to be the keepers of their consciences and of their souls.

These things, however, conspired on two occasions to overthrow the Jewish polity---their religion, and their independence as a nation. “What will ye do in the end thereof?” Let the Babylonish captivity, and the second and more terrible destruction of their temple, city and country, yield the sorrowful reply. False prophets---arrogant priests---and the popular degradation twice contributed to overwhelm them with calamities!

Although idolatrous crimes committed many years before, were declared of GOD to be the remote cause of the first destruction of Jerusalem, the proximate occasion of that calamity was just this---that the people, instigated by the false prophets and the priests, would not listen to the faithful warnings of Jeremiah and the LORD’s messengers---but obstinately rejected them and perished accordingly. And all who are in the least acquainted with the deplorable events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, know how eminently these same causes conspired to produce the same effects, and aggravated the unparalleled sufferings of the inhabitants of Zion:---the fanaticism of false prophets, and the intrigues of arrogant and ambitious priests, combined to madden the people, until they provoked retaliation from their besiegers, appalling to contemplate.

The baneful operation of these principles, so solemnly denounced by the LORD's prophet, might easily be illustrated at length, by carefully perusing the History of GOD's ancient people---but it is believed that this would be greatly to narrow the subject. Students of the universal history of GOD's church and people in all ages, and under different dispensations, pursuing their enquiry by the light of Holy Scripture, will discover here the development of great general principles--the exhibition of errors which are continually appearing as the wheels of time revolve :---discovering themselves, it may be, in a diversity of forms, assuming a variety of shapes, but easily identified in their operations. Not in Jewry, nor under the mosaic economy only, did these causes produce these effects, but under the Christian dispensation, in all countries where the Gospel has come, the order of decay, and the progress of error has been identical---THE CORRUPTION OF DOCTRINE, preceding and making way for PRIESTLY DOMINATION---the PROSTRATION OF THE MINDS OF THE LAITY following---and these united causes bringing about national, ecclesiastical, and popular degradation, until wrath comes upon the guilty church or nation !

These are subjects worthy of all consideration in the present crisis of our own church :---let us earnestly pray that they may now be so handled that slumbering minds may be aroused---the indifferent, awakened---and honest and conscientious persons guided into the path of present duty.

I. Let us examine this question, whether THE CORRUPTION OF DOCTRINE HAS NOT GENERALLY BEEN THE PRECURSOR OF PRIESTLY USURPATION.

It is surprising that any persons with the Holy Scriptures in their hands, should either doubt the early introduction and diffusion of error in the primitive Christian

church, or that they should think it necessary to have recourse to the doubtful and conflicting testimony of tradition on the subject. While yet the spirit of inspiration lingered in the bosoms of the holy men who were themselves among the "foundation stones" of the Christian church, erroneous principles were extensively advocated ---and both our LORD himself and his Apostles predicted that immediately after their departure false and soul destroying doctrines would be taught and believed. It would be easy to establish this assertion by almost innumerable references. Let the testimony of St. Paul, of St. John, and of the risen and glorified LORD himself, suffice. "I know," said St. Paul, in his farewell address to the Elders of Ephesus---"I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your ownelves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."* And the venerable St. John, viewing the condition of the church universal, not long before he terminated his pilgrimage on earth, testifies, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, EVEN NOW THERE ARE MANY ANTI-CHRISTS, whereby we may know that it is the last time---they went out from us but they were not of us,"† &c. And again he warns the Church---"Beloved, believe not every spirit---but try the spirits whether they are of GOD BECAUSE MANY FALSE PROPHETS ARE GONE OUT INTO THE WORLD."‡ The solemn addresses of the glorified head of the church to the angels, or pastors of the seven churches of Asia, as recorded in the book of Revelation, afford the most affecting proof of the fearful progress of false doctrine and the early departure from the truth in

* Acts xx. 29, 30.

† 1 John ii. 18-20, 22.

‡ 1 John iv. 1.

some of the most distinguished congregations of the great christian community.

And here it is most important to observe, that the errors denounced in all inspired scripture are chiefly DOCTRINAL, and have reference to the very fundamentals of the faith---affecting the person and offices of CHRIST, and the mode of a sinner's acceptance with GOD. I am not aware of any new-testament evidence which proves that the ministers of JESUS or the pastors of the flock had arrogated to themselves any sacerdotal dignities, or assumed the qualifications of Jewish Priests: it may be PREDICTED that they would do so, but they are no where charged with having done so: no,---DOCTRINE must first be corrupted---error must be widely disseminated---the popular ear must become familiar with departures from the simplicity of the faith, before the great mystery of iniquity can be developed---the very essence of the superstitious principle---the USURPATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD.

After the departure of the blessed Apostles, and the cessation of inspiration---doctrinal errors multiplied surprisingly---and ere long church history records the gradual rise of that ecclesiastical despotism which ultimately settled down upon the christian world. The student may discover, if he will, the contemporaneous and coincident growth of false doctrine---and the obscuration of scriptural truth and knowledge---along with the successful aspirations after power in the order of the Priesthood. The incipient principle of Judaism denounced by the Apostle Paul soon gathered strength; "THE CHURCH---THE CHURCH," by which men were soon taught to understand the CLERGY---placed herself on the throne of CHRIST, and superseded the authority of the Holy Scriptures---extravagant notions of the sanctity of places

---of vestments---and of church furniture, became prevalent---christian FAKIRS, impostors, and workers of lying wonders abounded---until the PRIESTLY USURPATION chose for itself a visible head, and presented itself to Christendom---the very personification of the superstitious and sacerdotal principle in the person of the Pope! This could not take place until doctrine had been effectually corrupted---until the minds of the people had been blinded, and truth had well nigh been extinguished. Thus the "CORRUPTION OF DOCTRINE," introduced the "USURPATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD."

This was fully illustrated at the time of the blessed and glorious Reformation. No sooner had the circulation of the Book of GOD and the faithful preaching of the Gospel, diffused sound doctrine, dissipated the delusions of ages and taught men that they were responsible beings and must answer for themselves at the bar of GOD---then the whole system of priestly domination was dissipated as the dew of the morning! The doctrine of justification by faith, exploded the priest's doctrine of justification by baptism---stripped of the confessional, intercession, sacrifice, penance, &c., the office of the ministry of the word was reduced to its scriptural character and dimensions: and for a time at least, the superstitious principle almost disappeared.

That this baneful influence has again revived and widely extended itself through our beloved Church in these last days can hardly be denied. It is a mysterious, undefined, romantic and rapidly progressive influence, which seems by some unconscious process to affect in A MEASURE AND DEGREE ALMOST EVERY MIND. Its uniform and manifest tendency being to restore the USURPATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD!

It is important then to trace the origin and rise of this principle. As in all other cases, it has been preceded by a WIDE CORRUPTION OF DOCTRINE. Fifteen or twenty years ago such a feeling had no existence, certainly no perceptible influence amongst us: the public mind seemed to be strongly biassed by the very opposite tendency---to incredulity, liberalism in church matters, and contempt for all established religious customs. Then it was that the Oxford Tractarians commenced their baneful labours: they assailed one fundamental doctrine of God's truth after another---they laid the axe at the root of the tree when they attempted to deny or pervert THE RULE OF FAITH: teaching that the Scriptures alone were not a sufficient guide or authority; and associating tradition, or the Church as of equal authority with the inspired Word of God. The present design will not allow space for an enumeration of the particular links in the great chain of corrupt doctrine that was forged in this foundry of error: but it is well known that those tracts are prolific in unscriptural statements---that baptismal justification---the authority of tradition---the duty of confession to a priest---the doctrine of reserve---the depreciation of oral instruction and many other collateral and dependant errors issued forth from this source; until the maximum of sophistry was displayed in Tract 90,---a theory since practically illustrated in the open avowal of Popish tenets by persons still holding orders and preferment in the Protestant Church of England.

These opinions have been diffused with a zeal, and ability, and at a cost, worthy of a better cause; and to their wide diffusion alone can be traced not only the Romanizing tendencies of some, and the actual apostasy of others, but what is most to be

deplored and dreaded that air of SUPERSTITION which more or less affects nearly all persons!

A careful perusal of any or all of the writings of the Tractarians, will discover that as surely as all the lines in a picture, by the laws of perspective, must tend to one point, so the speculations and practices of these men all conspire to one result, THE SUPERSTITIOUS AND UNSCRIPTURAL EXALTATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD. Witness the revival of the system of mediæval architecture and church decoration! Their holy of holies---the sacarium---the sedilia---the exclusion of the laity from the chancel---the elevation of the altar and its adoring priests above the people---sacred garniture---in all the abundance of its Popish details, to which of late the public mind, has been specially directed :---all these and such like practices and theories only tend to one object, the extravagant, and popish exaltation of THE HOLY CASTE ! Hence the attempted exclusion of the Laity from the exercise of private judgment in church matters---the haughty tone assumed by some ecclesiastics respecting them, as though divine knowledge, wisdom, intelligence, and understanding, were monopolized in the sacred line, and were the heir-loom of those who had received "the laying on of hands!" The distinct and avowed inculcation of the dogma that the clergy with the bishops are the Church---that they and they alone are to decide upon matters both doctrinal and ceremonial ---and that the very utterance of the lay voice is schismatical, and a guilty intrusion into things holy---such are some of the theories now propagated. The bare fact that such monstrous clerical presumption as this is not put down at once by the indignant voice of public opinion, is a proof of the wide-extended influence of the spirit of superstition. It might be expected that a system that

APPEARED to aggrandize the Clergy, and to inculcate passive submission to episcopal authority, might offer a too flattering temptation to human nature in the clerical garb to be immediately put down by the spiritual powers ---although the hollowness of such abject professions of clerical obedience has since been sufficiently exposed by the refractory conduct of certain popishly inclined malignants. But we should have expected that the childish absurdities of the decorative parts of the system, and the obvious popish tendency of the whole, would have awakened alarm in the breasts of all Protestant laymen, as soon as its tendencies were developed :---but no---the religious atmosphere had become so gradually tainted, the poison was diffused with such subtlety---truth was so ingeniously mingled with error, right and wrong were so confounded, that the result has been a far more general reception of the real VIRUS of the system than common observers perceive, or will be persuaded to admit.

But all this could not have been, EXCEPT DOCTRINE HAD FIRST BEEN CORRUPTED ! The SUPERSTITIOUS PRINCIPLE vegetates only in proportion to the corruption of the soil in which it grows---the aggrandizement and intolerance of the priesthood can be borne only by a people from whose eyes the truth has been withdrawn---or who have, at least in a measure, departed from the guidance and supreme authority of the written word. And just in proportion as the mind is stored with scriptural truth---feels its power, and is enlightened, sanctified and taught by the Spirit of God, just in that proportion will it be enabled to discover the falsehoods that lie beneath this deceitful surface---just so much will it detect truth from error, the precious from the vile---light from darkness, and like the giver of that spirit himself--“ it will know how to refuse the evil and choose the good.”

It is no part of my present purpose to shew the divine origin of a Christian ministry---nor to mark the just limits which scripture and the Reformed Church appear to put to the exercise of its authority :---I am not now called to vindicate an enlightened and scriptural episcopacy. I am contending against the exaggerated opinions so generally held on these subjects on the present day---endeavouring to prove that this is the real evil to be apprehended, and tracing it to the previous departure from doctrinal truth. And allowing me a personal allusion for a moment, I would apply to those who would represent me as opposed to the principles of the Church of England as they were universally received and adopted when I entered her holy precincts, the language of the Apostle when opposing very similar errors-- "Are they Hebrews? So am I! Are they Israelites? So am I! Are they ministers of CHRIST? So am I!" Born and nurtured in the bosom of our scriptural Church, devotedly attached alike to her sound confession of faith, to her scriptural orders, and to the simplicity of her ceremonial---I hope to live and die within her pale :---but if the loyalty of my attachment to her is to be questioned because I protest against those who would take from her the simple garments in which she has ministered for three hundred years, and cover her again with the meretricious decorations which she then renounced---who would again rivet the chains of priestly tyranny upon the hands of the Laity, and transform her ministering servants into Popish or Jewish, sacrificing and interceding priests---then am I content to bear the odium! yea, I would rather glory in it! I will only add that the MINISTRY which St. Paul committed to Timothy and Titus, from all we can find in Holy Scripture, is as little like the pretended figment claimed

by the Tractarians, as it is to the order that issues from the Vatican, or the rites of the ambitious school of the Jesuits themselves!

But we hasten now to consider II. That PROSTRATION OF THE MIND OF THE LAITY, which is the natural result of the corruption of doctrine and the usurpation of power by the priesthood. In the middle ages of the church this prostration was almost universal---haughty churchmen placed their feet on the necks of kings! Rome Pagan never obtained a wider sway, nor ever exercised such despotic power as did Rome Papal! Men dared not think for themselves---the Clergy monopolized what learning was suffered to exist---and the mass of the people were the victims of a degraded, superstitious, corrupt and absolute ecclesiastical despotism! Mind became entombed in superstition---and the energies of men were fettered and palsied by the mysterious invisible power that had gathered around them and settled down upon them. Ages of corrupt doctrine, prepared the way for centuries of superstition; a state of things which nothing but the revival, and restoration of sound doctrine could interrupt. "The people loved to have it so"---they were content to be saved by proxy---to hand over to the priesthood their consciences and their souls in life, and in the intermediate state, which they were taught to believe was purgatorial. The grand spectacles of a pompous and gorgeous ceremonial pleased the eye---and the occasional austerities enjoined were compensated for by the preceding or subsequent indulgencies in all the pleasures of the world.

In this state do those parts of the Romish world still continue which have not been visited or purified by Protestant truth. In Spain, in Portugal---of course in the dominions of the Pope---in South America---and as

grossly as anywhere else, IN IRELAND itself, the superstitious principle---the domination of the spiritual power---the absolutism of the priesthood is still fully and perfectly displayed. Mind is prostrate before the Church! The will of the priesthood is the law of the people---passive, unreasoning, unmurmuring obedience to the infallible injunctions of their spiritual guides, is exacted and obtained from a population into whose minds a ray of scriptural truth is not allowed to enter; doctrine is effectually corrupted---the mind of the Laity is proportionably enslaved!

That a state of things approximating to this could ever occur again in this country---or that principles in the least degree akin to these should ever again take hold of the mind of the people of Great Britain, would a few years since have been deemed chimerical and impossible. That infidelity and liberalism might have assumed a bold front, and carried away many converts after them, might not have been deemed improbable---but that in this great country, celebrated for the intelligence, activity and independance of its inhabitants---where learning, science, intellectual cultivation, and the pursuit of natural philosophy and the liberal arts have greatly revived---that in such a country as this, and at such a period in her history as ours, any considerable portion of the people should show favour to a system so foreign to our laws, our constitution, our habits and our religion, appears to be a thing wholly incredible! But we have not calculated upon the congeniality of false doctrine with the natural heart of man in all ages---we have not remembered that the religion of sensation and of visible and tangible objects has always had affinity with the unconverted heart. The very austerities of such a system are welcomed if they be connected with

worldly indulgence. The lenten fast, however rigid, will be observed by thousands, if you will give them a carnival before it, and a maypole festival after it:—"THE ROYAL BOOK OF SPORTS" and "the temptations of St. Anthony," are more nearly connected than superficial thinkers imagine.

There is much too that is captivating to the youthful mind, especially in the adjuncts of the system, its subordinate decorations, and in the method of its diffusion. Poetry, music, painting, architecture, romance, fiction, legend, genius, learning—imagination—everything but TRUTH—has lent its aid to bewilder and fascinate the minds of too many who were ill instructed in the faith of their Protestant forefathers, and little acquainted with the word of GOD. An education chiefly conversant with heathen mythology formed a poor barrier against the Christian mythology of the early Church: as the transition in those days from the worship of Jupiter and Venus, to that of the Virgin Mary and St. Peter, was not found difficult or rare—so neither does imagination find it difficult in these days to pass from the fables of heathen poets and historians to those of men wearing the mask of Christianity. However this may be, certain and lamentable it is that the spirit of superstition has again enthralled the minds of many, and those by no means the uneducated and the ignorant. Laymen may be found of birth, and station—of fair talents, and much cultivation of mind, whose spirits are to an extraordinary degree bowed down by credulity and superstition. Some even in professions in which the free operation of the intellectual faculty is especially required—and who display its power in ordinary and secular affairs, appear in religion to be palsied, and rendered mentally imbecile! not venturing to think, or to reason—but blindly

surrendering themselves to the guidance of the Church—THAT IS TO THE CLERGY—guidance which upon all other matters they would probably utterly repudiate, if not despise. That this prostration of the mind of the laity is the very object and design of the section of the clergy whose tendency is Romeward cannot be doubted—but that any educated laymen should be weak enough to submit to it, is surprising.

It is however matter of profound thankfulness to Almighty GOD, that this disposition has not as yet appeared in the great body of the Laity of this country: it cannot yet be said by the GOD of this land—“MY PEOPLE LOVE TO HAVE IT SO!” It is confidently hoped that there is among the people at large a great body of sound, intelligent, scriptural Protestants—not a few who are imbued with those scriptural doctrines of evangelical truth from which they will not be easily diverted.

It has pleased GOD that before “this pestilence which walketh in darkness,” was let loose among us, many holy men and faithful teachers should have been raised up—our Scotts and Venns, and Simeons, and such as these, who for the last fifty years have been inoculating the public mind with spiritual truth—the people have appreciated their labours, and thousands have laid hold of the hope of the gospel, received the truth in the love and power of it—“know the joyful sound,”—and these men having fed on bread, will not be satisfied with a stone—having possessed the wheat, they will not be satisfied with the chaff,—having drank deep of the old wine of gospel grace, they will not be satisfied with the new wine of Romanism—nor will they submit to see their christian teachers meta-

morphosed into popish priests: neither in doctrine nor in ceremony will they submit to alteration, nor to the introduction of ancient novelties.

Had this poisonous Upas Tree been planted in our land fifty years sooner, when priests and people were too much alike indifferent, careless, and lukewarm, the results would have been far more terrible—but now the antidote is more widely diffused than the poison—and as far as the great body of the people are concerned, little fear of the prevalence of the superstitious principle need be entertained. Far be it from any good man to countenance popular commotion, or to sanction the ebullition of ungovernable, riotous, and disorderly feelings—but all who believe in the dangerous character of the evil in question, and who perceive how feeble an opposition is offered to it by the Clerical body at large, must rejoice in witnessing the calm, dignified, and determined aspect which LAY PROTESTANTISM has assumed. Woe be unto us, if this spirit be restrained or bridled! Woe be unto us if the Clergy range themselves in an attitude of hostility against the people—an instructed, intelligent, pious, and protestant Laity—who are awaking to a sense of their religious rights and privileges; and who have been driven by the intolerance of a few to examine into these things, and have discovered that they are an integral part of the body of CHRIST'S church:—and they are now respectfully teaching the Clergy that though they may be the head, or the more honourable members, yet they are not the body, but only a PART of the body, which is CHRIST'S holy universal church. Upon the wisdom, firmness, discernment, and consistency of the pious Laity, the safety of the Church of England, chiefly, under God at this moment depends. Every shade of superstition

is discoverable in the minds of the Clergy—in some the obscuration is already complete, they have submerged under the Romish apostacy—many others are more or less clouded in their views on the subject of sacraments and sacerdotal authority—the value of apostolical dissent, and the efficacy of the episcopate—the faithful and enlightened feel themselves hampered in many ways by difficulties unknown even to conscientious laymen; and therefore upon Christian laymen the chief responsibility must practically be thrown by the peculiarities of the times. This however will be further manifest by considering the stirring question of the text “WHAT WILL YE DO IN THE END THEREOF?”

III.—THE PERILS OF THE CHURCH AND NATION IN CONSEQUENCE OF THESE THINGS.—And who shall venture to give an answer to this question? Who can calculate the issue of that strife of principle which is now maintained in the bosom of the Church of England itself? The prophetic spirit alone could say “what shall be done in the end thereof?” But this much we may argue—that what has been, may be again. Such causes have produced such effects—similar causes will produce similar results! Look, we then, at the past. Gaze for a moment on the land of the nativity of Christianity! Cast your eyes eastward, to the shores of the Levant—let them wander northward and southward. Contemplate the once fair surface of Asia Minor—from Antioch in Syria, along the travels of St. Paul to the Hellespont—where are the famous Churches of Smyrna—Ephesus—Laodicea, and their sister towns? Where are those of Northern Africa, celebrated for their pious and venerable bishops? Mouldering amidst the dust of Islamism! Decayed, faded away, destroyed!

The sun-light of truth has set on them, and rising upon us, has left them in total obscurity! and whence was all this? It was nought but the corruption of doctrine making way for the usurpation of the Priesthood, accomplishing together the prostration of the minds of the people, until error and wickedness so prevailed that GOD withdrew from them—took away his truth—and there is the result which speaks to all who have ears to hear!

Why should not the same process ultimately produce the same results in modern times? Is there not a general expectation among prophetic students of all classes that something of this kind is predicted in the latter days? However this may be, we may teach with the authority of inspiration and of infallibility, that any Christian State or Church, which throws itself into the arms of Popery, must perish ultimately in the horrible embrace! If Great Britain descend from her high vantage ground, and bit by bit deserting her Protestant principles, endow, cherish, foster, and by her Government uphold Popery—she is doomed—there is no escape—she is implicated in the “Plagues,” recorded against that anti-Christian power, and must share its destiny! If our Church, purified with the blood of martyrs, who were devoured in flames kindled by the Roman tyrant, again pollute herself with its abominations—she too will be involved in the destined calamities! These truths may seem as the raving of fanaticism to those who are as little acquainted with the Word of GOD, and with the abominations of Popery, as we are with the mysteries of state intrigue; but their ignorance, indifference, or contempt, will not alter GOD’S truth, which has ever been despised and neglected by the

world against which it testifies! May God in mercy avert from our highly-favoured church and nation the judgments which they most righteously have deserved: and may He show to us our duty in this important crisis!

Passing therefore from speculations of the future, to the urgent responsibilities of the present—we may change the words of the text a little, and give them a more practical turn. To GOD alone belongs the future—He alone can tell what shall be done in the END thereof:—but it is for us to ask what shall we do now? What can we, each one of us do, according to our station and ability to avert the coming dangers.

OUR FIRST GREAT DUTY IS TO LOOK WELL TO OUR OWN SOULS: no man will ultimately withstand this sweeping torrent of superstition except he be strengthened from on high, unless his own heart be fortified by sound Christian principle. It is not the mere adoption of scriptural doctrine, nor a quick perception of error that will save us, we must be personally, individually imbued with the effectual grace of GOD—we must each and all of us be the subjects of true and deep repentance—we must have a personal interest in the finished work of CHRIST, by faith—we must walk with him in love, in secret prayer, in holy affections, drawing out of his fulness grace for grace—daily evincing by the conformity of our life and conversation to his holy law, that it is indeed written in our hearts—such, and such only will be able “to stand in the evil day!” Their feet are on the rock even CHRIST—and firmly planted on him, they shall not be removed though heaven and earth pass away.

But while our first and most important duty now, as at all times, is to make our calling and election sure—

and to look well to the foundations of our own faith and hope in CHRIST—the peculiar lesson of the times appears to be this, “that no man must live to himself and no man must die to himself.” The selfish principle is our great enemy—engendering sloth and indifference to the interests of others, and of the country at large. Men forget that they are citizens as well as Christians—and that they owe something more than passive duties to the state—that by petitioning the legislature, and influencing their representatives in every lawful and honourable way they are bound to show themselves for the truth, and to rescue their country from being sold to Antichrist. Many are hindered from discharging these pressing duties by the cry of moderation and expediency. Let it never be forgotten that there is the moderation of timidity—the moderation of indecision—the moderation of indiscrimination—aye, and the moderation of TREACHERY too—and that not all are to be trusted who cry out—“be cautious, be prudent, don’t go too far”—which often means nothing more nor less than yielding the vantage ground to the world, or to the emissaries of the great enemy of souls: false prophets “crying peace, peace, when there is no peace.”

But there is yet another, and still more urgent class of duties which press upon us all in times like these—viz: THE VIGOROUS SUPPORT OF ALL THOSE INSTITUTIONS FOR THE SPIRITUAL BENEFIT OF OUR FELLOW CREATURES WHICH ARE PLEDGED TO CONDUCT THEIR PROCEEDINGS UPON SOUND PRINCIPLES. In the time of war, any ship which will not show her colours is dealt with as an enemy or a pirate—so in critical times like the present, it behoves all religious societies to let their principles be honestly known, otherwise they will be regarded as a “suspicious sail.” Now the Institution which we are this evening met

to support, has nobly unfolded her banner, and honestly fought under it for the truth. The CHURCH PASTORAL AID SOCIETY is simple and scriptural in her object, and consistent in her mode of accomplishing it. She remembers the distinctive characteristic of Christianity as given by its divine founder—"TO THE POOR THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED." All her efforts are directed to benefit the poor—the thousands and tens of thousands of poor, who by reason of the Church's deficiency and inadequacy, have no pastor to tend them. Her object is to multiply pastors, under the guidance and direction of existing parish clergymen, who shall "preach the Gospel to the poor"—but her chief care is, THAT WHAT THEY PREACH SHALL BE THE GOSPEL. She is not, nor can she be satisfied in times like these, with the ordinary guarantee afforded by the discipline of our Church; how can she be, when avowed Papists with all their Protestant oaths upon them, lurk in her bosom? The least she can do is to take care that those whose salary she supplies "preach none other doctrine"—"contend earnestly for the truth"—and "know nothing among the people but JESUS CHRIST and him crucified." If any of her servants fail in this, she simply withdraws her pecuniary support—did she do otherwise she would be faithless to her sacred trust, and to those subscribers who support her entirely on this ground, that they feel secure of the principles of the agents whom she employs.

Nor is the Pastoral Aid Society unimportant for another consideration: it has honestly upheld the LAY principle in the Church: in strict accordance with the apostolic customs, it has from the first employed certain carefully chosen persons (not however SELECTED, but only APPROVED by the society) who have filled the office of scripture readers and district visitors, under the direc-

tion of the clergyman of the parish, assisting him in such duties as a layman can properly perform. These pious persons have been found useful and efficient auxiliaries to pastors who are overwhelmed with the pressure of their spiritual charge. It need only be added that the funds of this admirable, scriptural, and truly Church of England Society, are not equal to the demands which are made on them—several grants are at this moment withheld from some most neglected districts, simply for this reason: £20,000 per annum, is necessary in order to keep up the present staff of labourers, and there is now a deficiency of NEARLY £3,000.

If then we value our civil and religious liberties—if we love the scriptural doctrines, and primitive customs of our Church—if we dread the inroads of scarcely concealed Popery—if we would save our beloved Church out of the hands of those who would betray her to Rome, then let us cheerfully and liberally give of our substance, our influence, and our prayers, towards the support of a Society so truly biblical, Protestant, and eminently useful as that which this day solicits our bounty. And may God effectually bless “our work of faith and labour of love!”

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