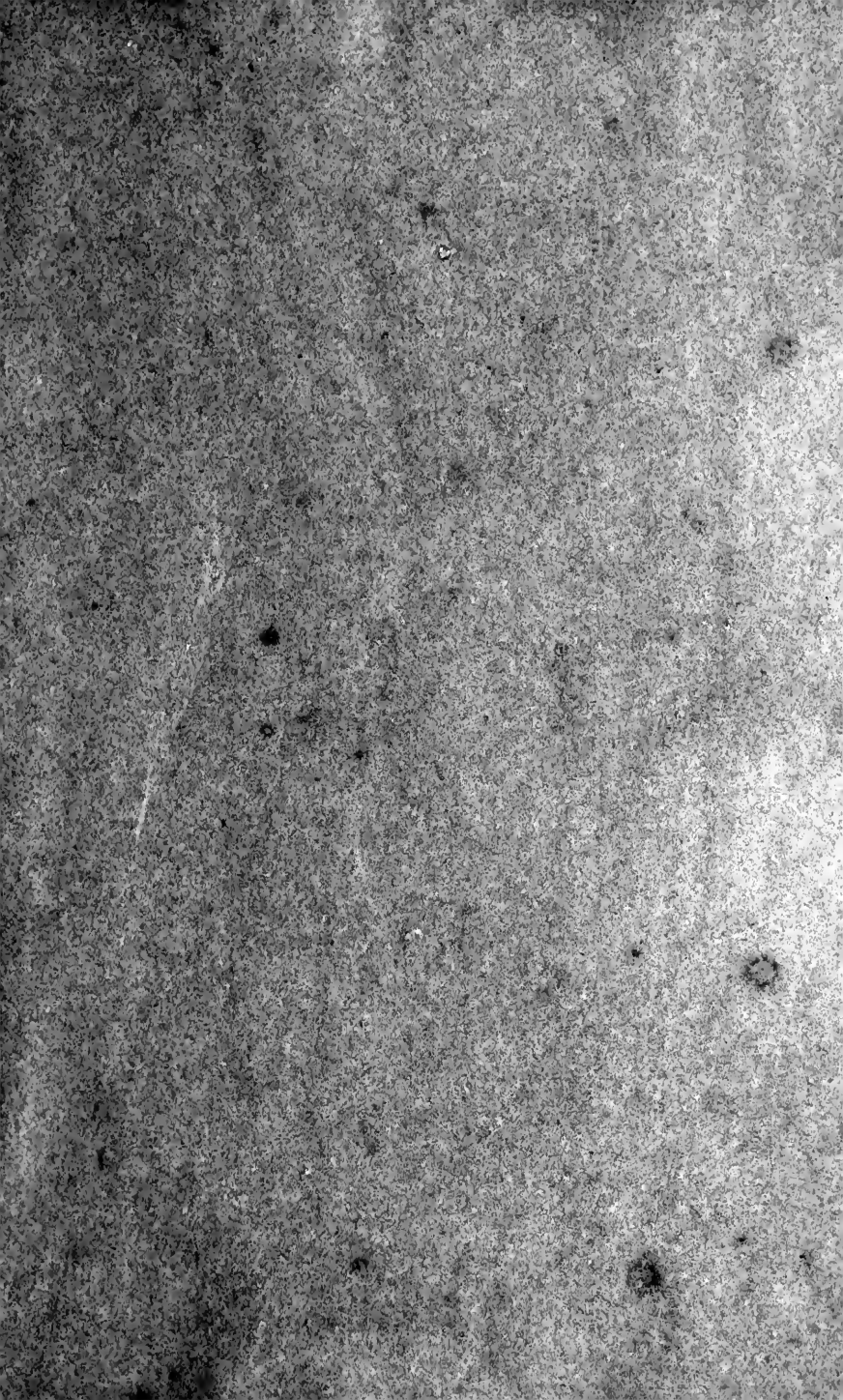




LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS



A CHARGE,

TO THE CLERGY OF THE

ARCHDEACONRY OF THE EAST RIDING

AT THE

ORDINARY VISITATION,

A. D. 1845.

BY

ROBERT ISAAC WILBERFORCE, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF THE EAST RIDING.

JOHN MURRAY, LONDON ;

R. SUNTER, YORK.

[*Price Six-pence.*]

TO THE CLERGY
OF
THE ARCHDEACONRY OF THE EAST RIDING,
THIS CHARGE,
PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED.

A C H A R G E.

My Reverend Brethren,

We may commence our yearly business with the less reference to political events, inasmuch as our internal polity has enjoyed an unwonted respite from parliamentary enactments. The denial indeed of the nearly unanimous prayer of the Clergy for the preservation of one of the most ancient Sees in this Island, we have all probably witnessed with regret. One gratifying circumstance, however, has attended the discussion, not only that none of our Prelates expressed themselves favourable to a step, against which the Church so generally protests, but also that one of the greatest deficiencies in our ecclesiastical system—the small number, namely, of its higher functionaries—has been publicly lamented by those whose position gives them opportunity to amend the evil. The signal mischief which this deficiency has inflicted upon the Church, it were needless to state to persons who like yourselves are conversant with its practical wants. What greater impediment for example obstructs our pastoral efficiency than that infrequent ministering of confirmation which is its necessary result. Were confirmation ministered every year, as it would doubtless be, if the powers of our Bishops corresponded to their wishes, we should not have to lament that young persons leave our schools, and are lost amidst the occupations of life, without being dedicated to God's service by the public ratification of their Baptismal covenant. And what is still more material, we should not be compelled to the painful alternative, either of admitting those who want the knowledge, or the seriousness, which would bring them as meet communicants to the Lord's Table, or else of rejecting persons who before another opportunity occurs may have yielded to some less hallowing influence. The Church of course designs that none should be confirmed who are not meet to be communicants. And to admit to Confirmation without such preparation of heart as should bring persons to the Lord's Table, is either to undervalue the rite or to profane it. Hence the small estimation

in which Confirmation is held in the present day: since it does not practically involve that seriousness of mind, which ought to accompany it. No wonder if men are found who despise an ordinance, which is too often approached in a careless and inconsiderate state. And yet this evil can never be remedied till the recurrence of Confirmation at the least every year gives opportunity of deferring without altogether abandoning it.

The Clergy ought not to lose sight of another measure which has been submitted to the Legislature, but to which small attention has been given by the public—the Bill for consolidating Ecclesiastical Courts. Of its worldly effects it is not to my purpose to speak, but one most serious objection of a religious kind deserves your notice. The Bill proposes, virtually, to substitute a Royal Court in the place of those heretofore held by Bishops, and to vest in it their testamentary and matrimonial jurisdiction, while that jurisdiction which, strictly speaking, respects the punishment of sins, is to be extinguished in name as it is already in operation. Now it has long been the opprobrium of our Spiritual Courts, that the solemn sentence of excommunication, whereby men are severed from the spiritual blessings of the Church of God, has been used by them as a mere weapon of carnal policy. The excuse for this perversion has been that disobedience to the Church's Courts is a practical rejection of her authority, and that the sentence is justified by the nature, if not by the amount of transgression. The defence might easily be shown to be invalid; and Bishop Gibson long since complained that the sentence of excommunication had lost its awe, by being prostituted to unworthy uses. But by the Bill now before the Legislature, it is proposed to perpetuate this greatest abuse of Courts Ecclesiastical, although its sole palliation has ceased to be applicable. Excommunication was allowed to be an improper sentence in the secular transactions, even of a Bishop's Court; it was justified because the Court which inflicted it, was that of a Bishop. But by the 55th section of the present Bill, her Majesty's Court of Probate is in similar cases to pronounce sentence of excommunication, although its employment is neither justified by the source whence it is derived, nor the occasions on which it is exercised. Of course such sentence would be illusive and visionary, for spiritual

power can be derived only from spiritual sources, but the public voice should be raised against so profane an abuse of expressions the most holy.

Another question of a religious nature, in which you must all feel interest, has occupied no little portion of public attention; but however fitting it may be that we should express our opinion on the subject, its consideration seems out of place, when we meet to transact our own business, and discuss our own duties. So much only may be said, that the government measure respecting Irish Education contains a principle by which no party would be so greatly benefitted as the Church of England. For it seems designed that henceforth the several religious interests which divide the nation should be allowed free scope to evolve for themselves their inherent tendencies. On this principle indeed the annual grants for home education have for some time been apportioned, and it is a proof of the exertions made for Church schools that of the sum of £80,000. which was expended last year, 7-8ths was allotted to their share. Not that pecuniary aid is asked for by the Church, her endowments were never derived from the state, neither does she desire to be enriched by public money; her sole want is expressed in one word—liberty. Now this boon can be less consistently refused by a Legislature, which is indifferent to the nature of the opinions entertained by its subjects. Yet allow the Church the opportunity enjoyed by all other societies of adapting her laws to her situation, and her means to her wants, and her innate vitality would soon effect all those great reforms, which the public exigencies demand. If she continues unequal to the mighty task before her, the blame is theirs who from interest or policy consent to fetter those powers, which might make head against the increasing tide of infidelity.

To some this may seem a visionary confidence. But I am unable to renounce my deliberate conviction that the Church of England contains within herself ample means for that work of reconstruction which evidently awaits her. We live in an age in which the principle of voluntary confederation has taken the place of that compulsory union, in which the minority was compelled to subordinate itself to the general will. The world, henceforth, is to consist of parties, not of nations. Our wisdom then must be to heal those internal

divisions, which interfere with the free development of the Church's life. For this end much may be done by private efforts; by more constant reference to the Church's laws for our own guidance, and by the suasion of a mild and evangelic charity towards those who oppose us. Our great work is at home—the building up of our own flocks, the quickening of our own graces, the increase of love and concord with one another. These are efforts which cannot fail us, because they depend for their effect, not on the opinions of men, but on God's favour. As to the members of other bodies, it is a compensating circumstance that every increase of their institutions is in one respect an augmented security for our own. For proscription can never befall one portion only of the community, and the contributors to the Centenary Fund have entered into unconscious recognizances to respect the more ancient landed subscriptions of the Church of England. This is one consequence of that principle of toleration, which however paradoxical in theory, is in practice adapted by God's providence to the circumstances of the world, and which those, who, like myself, believe it most favourable to the development of truth, must desire to see carried out in its extremest latitude.

But it is time to turn from these more general topics to our immediate duties. Considerable progress has been made during the last year in the great work of restoring our ancient edifices. This is the first subject which suggests itself; for though new Churches are wanted in several localities, yet their erection would in general be useless, unless endowments could be found for the support of fresh clergymen. But in numberless parishes we have structures, often of great interest and singular beauty; yet gloomy, damp, sordid, they bear witness to centuries of neglect. To render them fit places, wherein to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, is clearly our first work. This has been done during the past year in the most commendable manner at Full Sutton, where through the exertions of two individuals, for one of the meanest has been substituted one of the most satisfactory village Churches in the Riding. The Rev. T. F. R. Read, the main agent in this good work, also deserves our thanks for procuring the erection of a school at Eastington, in Harthill West, in which Deanery he has acted as Secretary

to the Board of Education. His recent removal from among us would be a subject of great regret, were it not for the hope that the larger parish into which he is transplanted, will afford him a wider field of usefulness. Another equally satisfactory work, now approaching its completion, is the re-erection of All Saints' Church, at Rise, through the wonted liberality of Richard Bethell, Esq. The new Church is a beautiful specimen of early English architecture, its spire will be a fresh feature in the neighbourhood, while its inward arrangement will afford better opportunity than was formerly supplied for the collective worship of Almighty God.

Among partial improvements, must be noticed the restoration of the beautiful Chancels of St. Mary's, Etton, and St. Augustine's, Hedon. In each of these parishes the Clergy have made most laudable efforts, and it may be hoped that in each structure the ancient character will in time be fully developed. The great work of the year, however, is the internal re-arrangement of the two magnificent Churches of the Holy Trinity, Hull, and of St. Mary's, Cottingham. The result will, no doubt, repay the Vicar of Cottingham, and the Vicar and Churchwardens of the Holy Trinity, Hull, for the difficulties which they have had to surmount. And the example of Churches, in which public worship can be properly conducted, cannot be inoperative. I am far from regarding this as a mere question of taste, inasmuch as the due arrangement of our Churches is subservient to a higher end—the full participation, namely, in common worship. Let me seize the occasion to say a word to those lay representatives of the Church, whom I have the pleasure of seeing around me. We have heard something this year of the rights of the laity. The claim is one which I delight to recognize. The true rights of the laity consist in their title to take part for themselves in God's worship, to offer up their own prayers as a portion of that collective sacrifice which their minister as the public servant of the congregation presents to God. In this respect, their situation contrasts most favourably with that of God's ancient people, who were limited to a distant place, and a deputed worship, while none but the more favoured sons of Aaron might draw near to the Divine Presence, and kneel before it with the solemn assurance of accepted prayer. Your privi-

lege on the other hand is to have access with confidence to those courts, where the Great King takes up His dwelling, while the Christian Priesthood—no longer a separate caste and kindred,—is sufficiently honoured in being taken from the congregation to offer that homage towards which all contribute. Let me entreat you then not to allow the rights of the Christian laity to slumber in your hands. Do not leave us of the Clergy to lift up our voices alone in the midst of the congregation, as if you had no sacrifice of prayer and praise to render, and might not freely intermingle in the service of God. Do not suffer us to kneel before you, while you sit silent and withdrawn, as though self-condemned to a Jewish isolation. Especially may this be said to those whose Churches have been lately freed from the inconvenient and unsightly partitions, by which they were hitherto incumbered. You may have been debarred hitherto from doing justice to the collective character of the Church of Christ; but why forget any longer that you are yourselves members of that one family of the Christian Israel, which should bear common part in prayer and praise?

Another important subject is the increase of schools. A large school-house has been this year erected in connexion with St. James's Church, Hull; a roomy and convenient building of the same kind has been raised at Hornsea; and school-houses, respecting which I cannot speak from personal inspection, at Eastington and Sutton on Derwent.

During the past year Rural Chapters were held in North and South Holderness, Harthill South, North and West, and in Buckrose. In the Deanery of Dickering the session of the Rural Chapter was prevented by the illness of the Dean.

So much respecting the incidents of the year. Let us now give a few minutes to one of those general topics, to which it has been usual to advert on similar occasions. And in doing so, my wish is to build as little as may be on individual judgment, but rather to draw attention to some of those deep principles, which have been enshrined in the hallowed wisdom of our ancient formularies. We may not, indeed, forget that this Court has authority to deal with all questions which come lawfully before it. Such jurisdiction belongs to it of course, an inferior degree, under appeal to the higher authority of the Bishop. But while neither the

Archdeacon nor his superior have any legislative authority, which according to the Canons of our Church resides in convocation alone, to expound the law after the manner of other Judges, is inherent in the nature of the inferior as well as of the superior Court. Wherein there cannot be a better model than the practice of the sages of the Common Law, who sustain their decisions by constant reference to the principles and precedents of our happy constitution. In the same manner shall some remarks be made on a very important subject—the best manner of giving instruction from the pulpit. On former occasions your attention has been drawn to the due celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as to the immense consequences which might be anticipated, if public worship were to become in fact what it is in name, the collective sacrifice of the people. The topic which seems naturally to remain is that of preaching. Herein then my wish is to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. Nothing but God's grace can touch the heart; unless there be this preparation, the words of remonstrance and exhortation would be alike in vain; but those who are spiritual will not reject advice, which is tendered in the spirit of love.

The importance of the ordinance of preaching, it is needless to say, can hardly be over-rated. Remember that we have the great mass of the people of England brought together every Lord's day;—under circumstances singularly favourable to quiet consideration,—and during such period as is desired, we may inform, inflame, and admonish them. What better opportunity could be opened to earnest men? The popular attention besides, bespeaks much of the feeling so well expressed by Hooker, that the discourses which they shall hear “can have public audience but once,” so that “if they be let slip for the present, what good soever they contain is lost, and that without all hope of recovery.” True it is that preaching would be far more effectual if a due attention to Catechetical instruction had prepared our people for the mysteries of the faith; yet, as it is, what mighty effects might attend it? Perhaps its importance cannot be more clearly illustrated, than by the selection of an individual case. Suppose a Clergyman to hold private discourse with a parish-

ioner who was to appear the very next day in GOD's presence. How earnest and affectionate would be his exhortations; how anxious would he be that the soul, which was committed to his trust, should not pass unwarned before the awful tribunal. And yet we never ascend the pulpit without addressing those to whom God's house may be opened for the last time. And what reason is there why our advice should be less earnest, because it is addressed in common to many? If we would in this manner individualize our people; would select a few as representing the wants of several classes, and set forth such truths and such exhortations as seemed likely to go to their hearts, not only would our manner gain more life, but our words would gain more reality. We should be in no danger of feeding our people with such sermons as unhappily were usual in the last century, and which rather deserve the title of moral essays, than of practical admonitions to dying men. This style of preaching, it is to be hoped, is now nearly abandoned. Much excellent advice may no doubt be found even in the pages of heathen moralists, and before the light of gospel truth had visited the earth, its importance may be readily admitted. It was the faint reflection of those glorious mysteries, which the Jewish covenant in a measure gathered together, that in the fulness of time they might be bodied forth in the Divine realities of the Christian revelation. He who gave two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, He gave the stars also. But what madness were it to walk by the feeble and glimmering rays of natural reason, or even by the reflected light of the earlier dispensation, now that the glorious Lord of Day has ascended the heavens.

If however it were unwise to rest satisfied with mere moral preaching, it would scarcely be more reasonable to make our sermons controversial. As the Church of England indeed pursues a middle course between the superstitions of Popery on the one side, and the irreverence of Latitudinarianism on the other, our people must of course be guarded against those dangers, which beset them on the right hand and on the left. But whatever exceptions may be involved by particular times and places, a controversial style of preaching is neither adapted to produce right results, nor founded on any deep philosophy. The attainment

which we should desire for our people consists not in notions but in conduct : it is important that they should *be*, not be called, Christians : and further, we should regard them not as judges of argumentation, but as men who require to be fed with the sincere milk of the word. Now a controversial style of teaching would be too apt to harden the heart, and thus to defeat that greatest of all objects of our ministry—the winning of souls to Christ.

If, then, our wisdom consists neither in the exhibition of mere formularies of natural morality, nor in the argumentative handling of controverted doctrines, it follows that our preaching should be such as would rest the practical inculcation of a holy life upon the acknowledged principles of the Christian covenant. What is this but to say, that our preaching is to be Evangelical, and that it is to the office of Evangelists that we are called. This is no doubt the true mode of preaching ; to set forth the Gospel in its fulness and freedom, as dependent on the character and offices of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the efficacy of this teaching we have His own promise : “ I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” But then it must be done in reality, not by the bare reiteration of certain phrases, but by the actual leading men to Him whose example must be engendered by His grace. And the necessary steps will be manifest from an unbiassed estimate of the real condition of our people. Is it possible to doubt that we shall find men among them, who are wholly indifferent to the truths which we communicate ? We stand up on the Lord’s day. They listen to our words. But follow them to their week-day employments. Are they truly leavened by Christian principles ? Is chastity, temperance, and honesty predominant in their lives ? Has the aspect of the world been so far changed by the religion of the Cross, that men can trust one another in their dealings, apart from the restraints of the law, or the opinion of society ? Do servants obey their masters as in the Lord ? Are masters mindful of the religious good of their dependents ? Do they strive to acquit themselves of their great responsibility, as those who must themselves give answer before their Master above ?

Now in such cases what less is needed, than that total change

of purpose, which from the slaves of Satan may make men the servants of Christ. They need in short to be *converted*. They need to be turned from their old to new objects. This must be the basis of all instruction. Till men are disposed to give serious attention to what we propose, our arguments and advices are frivolous. What use in explaining to them how to serve God, while they have no mind to serve Him. To convert the sinner from the error of his ways, to induce him to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life,—this is the beginning of all improvement. But it may be well to notice a difficulty, by which this essential duty may seem to be embarrassed. To preach conversion may be deemed in some way inconsistent with that assertion of the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, which is so plainly made in the Prayer Book. A notion this, which must be equally injurious, whether it blinds men to the great blessing which Holy Scripture teaches us to look for in Baptism, and which the Church so emphatically acknowledges, or whether it induces an unreal tone in dealing with the actual condition of mankind. But in truth, the two principles present not the slightest inconsistency. In asserting as she does the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, our Church is bearing her testimony against the Pelagian Heresy, which would represent men as able to serve God of themselves. In opposition to this ancient error she maintains that children not only imitate, but inherit evil. From the earliest dawn of reason they have a corrupted nature to oppose. And yet we exhort them from the first to a life of holiness. The Church System of Education, developed in the Catechism, is to deal with the first lisplings of understanding, as though they might be directed to God's service, to teach the scarcely conscious infant to return thanks for having been brought into a state of salvation, to pray for its continuance, and to strive after full obedience to the commandments of God. To say that children could do all this of themselves were rank Pelagianism. Unless they gain some new relation towards Almighty God, what power have they of serving him in this world, and what covenanted assurance of acceptance in the next. By those indeed, who deny children to be fit objects of religious teaching, Baptismal grace is naturally contemned, but the Catechism enforces upon us a different course,

and though there may be individuals whom a happy inconsistency saves from the logical result of their own principles, yet history teaches that no body of men has ever lost sight of the truth of Baptismal Regeneration, without final declension through the various stages of Pelagian error into the chilling rationalism of Socinus.

Against such errors the Church is naturally on her guard. But why should this prevent us from telling men who live in sin that they need conversion? The grace which has been given to them in Baptism will not save them unless they use it. Nay, rather, the abuse of God's gifts will only increase their condemnation. Is not the change total from a life of sin to a life of holiness? Why not imitate then our ancient worthies in calling the Baptized sinner to conversion? The omission of such a topic will tend more than anything else to give the appearance of unreality to our teaching. No doubt it is to be regretted that our discourses must be so indiscriminate: no doubt it were better, if according to the ancient model we could give to each his 'portion of meat in due season, if there were separate times to reason with the careless, and to build up the faithful; but taking our opportunities as we find them, we can hardly look upon our flocks, without seeing those who are plainly in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Let us seriously lay to heart then their miserable condition. Let us bethink ourselves what they want. Let us endeavour by God's help to give utterance to the advice which they require. This will impart a meaning and reality to sermons, for which human eloquence would be a poor substitute. Let a man speak as though he himself deeply felt the danger of sin, as though under a lively impression how fearful it was to go contrary to that holy will which rules the universe, as though heaven and hell lay open before him; and he saw the souls of his fellows taking eventful flight towards their irrevocable destiny—and he will knock at the door of men's hearts with an importunity which it will be impossible to refuse.

Here, however, there is need of another caution: what men want is a *real*, not an *apparent* conversion. To see a person turn his attention to what has been heretofore neglected, to see him renounce some sins to which he was addicted, to see an appearance of interest in the service of

God, and in the words of public exhortation—these are such changes that it is no unnatural conclusion perhaps that all the work is done, that the danger is now over, and that the converted man has nothing more to do than to be thankful to Him who hath called him out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Now if it be of primary moment to warn the wicked of the necessity of conversion, it is not less material to remember that conversion is not all that is required. The very weight which is properly attached to seriousness of mind may make men think that seriousness is sufficient. Whereas it is the road to a holy life; and not itself holiness. “Resolution,” as Bishop Taylor remarks, “is an imperfect act, a term of relation, and signifies nothing but in order to the actions; it is as a faculty is to the act, as spring to the harvest, as eggs are to birds, as a relative to its correspondent, nothing without it.” “Resolutions therefore, are but the gate and portal towards pardon; a holy life is the only perfection of repentance.” Now it is in testing the reality of penitence, that we may derive especial help from those ancient formularies, which lend themselves to no partial theory, and serve, therefore, as landmarks, to assure us that we tread the path in which saints and martyrs have preceded us. Some practical hints are required as to the means of dealing with men’s consciences. Our business is to suggest such principles of self-examination as may open the eyes of the self-deceiver, and obviate that worst species of hypocrisy, which by means of a few honied phrases imposes upon itself. In what part of our Book of Common Prayer are we to look for such directions? There is a time when all men need to scrutinize the reality of their faith, when the hollow pretensions of a party zeal and a worldly decorum are alike insufficient to appease the mind, when we are forcibly recalled to the recollection of past deeds, and the anticipation of future judgment. At that awful season of sickness, when “death and eternity appearing at the door occupy the whole field of vision,” how does the Church meet the penitent. Let us hear her own words. “Now, therefore, taking your sickness, which is thus profitable for you, patiently, I exhort you in the name of God to remember the profession which you made unto God in your Baptism. And forasmuch as after

this life there is an account to be given unto the righteous Judge, by whom all must be judged, without respect of persons, I require you to examine yourself and your estate, both towards God and man, so that accusing, and condemning yourself for your own faults, you may find mercy at our heavenly Father's hands, and not be accused and condemned in that fearful judgment. Therefore, I shall rehearse to you the Articles of our Faith, that you may know whether you do believe as a Christian man should or no."

This first portion of the sick man's examination is not altogether that which modern theories, or modern practice would suggest. The Church does not of course suppose that mere intellectual assent to certain dogmas is a passport to salvation, but her words are equally at variance with the current notion that the excellence of faith depends exclusively on its earnestness. It is not the warmth of feeling with which men believe, but the reality of the truths accepted, to which she gives the *first* place. Salvation by faith does not mean, according to her teaching, that men's sole work is to persuade themselves of their acceptance and safety, a view of things, according to which a Mahometan would have at least as good a claim to Heaven as a Christian, but that satisfaction having really been made for the sins of men by the one sacrifice of Christ our Lord, and our acquittal depending on the merit of His work, not on that of ours,—therefore, our first step must be to profit by all those external but unseen realities, which are set forth as constituting the Gospel covenant; that these have a real outward body and actual existence, but for which there could be no holy life, and no Christian end. And that which gives to belief its peculiar prerogative, is that of all these things not sense but faith informs us. Yet to determine which among all the truths of the world unseen are of primary importance, to know what are those hidden realities which are involved in the belief in Christ, which Scripture speaks of as necessary, to learn what is meant by that "Catholic Faith," without keeping which "whole and undefiled," men will "without doubt perish everlastingly"—these are points on which we obviously need some guidance, respecting which, no thoughtful man would wish to be left to the dictates of his own fancy, or the reasonings of his own understanding. Here it is,

therefore, that we have such assistance from the formularies of the Church. Do we ask what are the essentials of salvation? The Church has settled them, not merely by making them the Articles of Communion, but by setting them before every one of her sons, in that most awful crisis of his mortal destiny, as the criterion whereby he is to decide, whether he does believe as a Christian man should or no. This is a discrepancy from the practice of the Church of Rome, by which undoubted belief in all her declarations is declared essential either to communion or safety, whereas the Church of England adds nothing to that ancient Creed, which from the first has been held to contain the essentials of salvation. Those whose office it is to teach, are required indeed, and most fitly, to declare their mind on many other subjects, which in modern days have been controverted or mistaken. Such is the purpose of course of the thirty-nine Articles, to which the clergy are required to subscribe. But the thirty-nine Articles are not made terms of communion, they are not set forth as fundamentals of belief like the Articles of the Creed. For to these alone does the Church require men to consent at their Baptism, esteeming no terms necessary for communion with her, which are not necessary for communion with Christ: and with these she closes the eyes of the dying believer.

Now in noticing the unprofitableness of controversial preaching, it was of course never meant that attention to doctrines was superfluous, or that these fundamentals of belief could safely be neglected. But it is one thing to preach the Gospel without reserve, and another to preach controversy. The first consists in the establishment of truth, the second in the demolition of error. To exhibit the Trinity in Unity in all its offices, to set forth Christ as truly present among us through the medium of holy things, to show the acting of the Divine Spirit, by which that one superhuman society, the Church of God, is distinguished from all earthly and voluntary communities, to trace its efficacy and influence in the communion of holy men, and the communication of supernatural blessings, to lead men therefore to discern their ascended Lord in word and sign, in prayer and sacrament,—all this is to be done without lapsing into controversial language, and with the least possible reference to those un-

happy errors, by which the present times are overcast. This is surely the more important, because there are some points on which we shall lie open to the imputation of magnifying ourselves, even while our object is to magnify our office. In such cases what could be so repulsive as the controversial tone of a party disputant? Only let us keep close to that fundamental verity, which the Church inculcates. The Articles of the Creed, all of them, are essentials of belief. They must be built up as actual realities in the conviction of our people. If any be omitted, an opening will be left for the intrusion of heresy. Discretion in the manner of teaching we are allowed, but we dare not practise such reserve in setting forth the Gospel, as not to aim at the gradual communication of all its tenets. For the Church to which we have vowed obedience, not only exacts an admission of them from each of her members, but requires us also to commend them all to the belief of the dying.

And here it is impossible to overlook that singular assistance in teaching the doctrines of the Gospel, which is afforded by the progressive arrangements of the Christian year. The seasons of Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Whitsuntide, the feast of the Epiphany, of our Lord's Ascension, and of the Blessed Trinity, are occasions which of themselves inculcate all the main truths of Theology. What need we then, save to adopt the tone, which these seasons suggest, and the great mysteries of our Faith will be brought in the most interesting, as well as instructive method before our people. In this manner the benefits of novelty will be combined with those of uniformity, and what is read from the desk will be consonant in tone with what is spoken from the pulpit. A sermon which would be equally fitting during the forty days of fasting, which precede Easter, and the forty days of triumph which follow it, may be assumed at once to be wanting in that appositeness, which gives to advice its greatest efficacy. And what would be a still greater evil, that practical regard to His destiny and actions, whose earthly course has left its traces in all conditions of life, and sanctified every circumstance of humanity, on whom the Church yearly waits from the hour of His birth to the hour of His triumph, that sun of the Christian system, from whom all its æras of time com-

mence, whose betrayal, death and resurrection we commemorate in the services of every week, would by such negligences be weakened or effaced.

But it is not only in elucidating a right belief, that the service for the Visitation of the Sick assists us, it proceeds to say further, "then shall the minister examine whether the sick person repent him truly of his sins, and be in charity with all the world: exhorting him to forgive from the bottom of his heart all persons that have offended him; and if he hath offended any other to ask them forgiveness; and where he hath done injury or wrong to any man, that he make amends to the uttermost of his power." After which there shortly follows, "here shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter." And then comes the Form of Absolution, dependent of course upon that power of the keys, which has always been exercised by the Church. On this portion of the service I will only say that it appears inconsistent with the opinion which has been attributed, perhaps unjustly, to certain parties, that there is no assurance of the forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism. Of course any return to sin increases the difficulty as well as the need of repentance, while at the same time it should diminish our confidence in the reality of professions of repentance, which former experience would furnish reason to suspect, but to deny to "them that truly repent, that Remission of Sins" which Almighty God "has left commandment to His ministers to pronounce," to call in question not man's sincerity, but the mercy of God, would seem to be the very mistake which was long ago condemned by the Universal Church in the person of Novatus. Our present business, however, is only with the tests which this service supplies for ascertaining the reality of conversion. Now here we meet with two of primary moment, confession and compensation. Let us take them in order. In respect to confession, it is left to the discretion of the penitent in what degree he shall avail himself of the opportunities of confidential communication with the minister, but that in some way or other he is to canvass his individual acts, and to scrutinize the several parts of his conduct, is of neces-

sity involved in that true repentance of his sins, which is required of him.

Here, then, the thing to be borne in mind is, that it is material that men should confess their sins, rather than confess their sinfulness. Nor can there be a more important function of preaching than so to open men's eyes to the holiness of GOD's law and the blackness of their own conduct, as that the long forgotten offences, which have gradually died away from the memory, should come forth in their true colouring, as they will one day appear before men and angels. What new meaning would such a process give to the words of our service, "But Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare Thou them, O GOD, which confess their faults; restore Thou them that are penitent: according to Thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord." A strange notion prevails in the present day, that to confess the general sinfulness of man's nature, and our own participation therefore in the common guilt, is a work of peculiar difficulty and intrinsic merit. Whereas, what does it cost a man to confess what is common to humanity, who knows not that it is the very nature of mankind to take pleasure even in the exaggeration of their common ills? But to have a deep feeling of those particular points, in which he has been himself culpable, to lay his finger on the individual faults, whether of lust, anger, covetousness, or ambition, by which he has himself offended against Almighty GOD,—this is truly humbling to the pride of man, and is an evidence of that broken and contrite heart, which GOD will not despise. Is there a single Clergyman, who has visited men in their last hours, without finding an abundance of persons, who expressed readily enough their general sense of sinfulness, but replied to more searching questions, that no particular sins troubled their minds? It is of course improbable that men should pass through life without committing some faults, for which they ought to be peculiarly penitent. And in many cases the testimony of others leaves no room to doubt, that the absence of any recollection of specific sins arises rather from the supineness than from the purity of their conscience. Now what can be more fatal than such a state of things? Here are persons who turn the truth of GOD into a lie, by making His mercy the

excuse for their impenitence. Surely we shall be guilty of the blood of souls if we do not use every effort to deliver men from the fatal delusion which would substitute a mere general expression of faith and repentance, so readily made when there is nothing to renounce, for that individual self-examination, and that heartfelt penitence which give reason for hoping that the remembrance of men's sins is grievous, and the burthen of them intolerable.

For this purpose that injunction of our service is peculiarly useful which exhorts men "where they have done injury or wrong to any," to "make amends to the uttermost of their power." What is peculiarly important in this advice is that the criterion which it proposes to men is of such practical applicability. It would not be difficult probably to find persons who suppose that their professions of faith in Christ are of a kind to be accepted, although their neighbours have injustice or unkindness to complain of, for which there has been no attempt to make retribution. Here is a means then of ascertaining the reality of men's words. Their conduct towards GOD does not admit of the same easy appreciation as their conduct towards their brethren. Their neighbours are often at hand to accept their humiliation, or to profit by their honesty; for our sins against GOD we cannot compensate. Probably it is on this account that the Church lays such stress on this part of duty: not only is it of primary importance by itself, but it affords a test or scale by which the nature of that more general repentance, which we owe to GOD, may be best appreciated.

For if we bear in mind the preparatory service through which the Church leads us to the Lord's Table, we shall see a distinct purpose to suggest that individual examination of our acts towards GOD, which would harmonize with this survey of our conduct towards our neighbours. We are reminded that "it is requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion but with a full trust in GOD's mercy, and with a quiet conscience." And what subjects are especially brought before us to suggest the topics, with which the consciences should be conversant? Not the general necessity merely of the conversion of the heart to GOD; this, however requisite, would not be sufficiently particular. Our attention is called therefore to the Ten Commandments, as containing so many

heads, under which the several offences against God's law may be classified. This was an addition to our Communion Service at the Reformation, when the practice of confession to God's ministers ceased to be compulsory, and the penitent was invited instead to render individual confession to God Himself. The service is built therefore on the principle that to lay the constituent parts of God's law before men is an essential requisite for that momentous task to which they are called. Whether our people are fully alive to the importance of this examination of their individual actions, whether they diligently try and examine themselves, and that not lightly and after the manner of dissemblers before God, but by a serious scrutiny of each particular of their conduct, is a thing which may well be doubted. And probably there is no course which the minister could more profitably adopt when he visits a sick bed than to read over in order the Ten Commandments, as the best means of examining whether men "repent them truly of their sins," pausing upon each for a few moments, and asking the sick man to consider seriously whether those extended topics which each Commandment suggests do not furnish some subjects of self-condemnation. This is nearly the method adopted in Bishop Wilson's *Parochialia*, the best book probably for the guidance of a young clergyman. Its employment would make his visits to the sick a serious and profitable inquiry into the real disorders of their spiritual being, instead of that mere friendly gossip, which may be suitable enough for a casual visitor, but not for those who have care of souls. One grand difficulty in the present day is to make this point duly felt; to keep alive the feeling that our responsibility for men's souls is not confined to the limits of a public exhortation, but that it extends to that individual dealing with the consciences of men, which can be best discharged singly and in private. Here, as elsewhere, the pastoral care, which in former days was armed with compulsion, must now be effected by persuasion. We make no attempt to compel men to save their souls, but our work will be most inefficiently performed if they do not feel that we are invested with an authority by God, that we visit them to call their sins to remembrance, and to produce such strict inquiry into their

real state as may anticipate the awful revelations of the day of doom.

Private communications of this kind would suggest the considerations, by which our public formularies require to be elucidated. To those therefore, who, like myself, are convinced that our Prayer Book contains that view of religious truth which is consonant to the mind of God's spirit, and to such a belief we are all solemnly pledged, there can be no safer or more obvious course than to use simply and in its integrity that service by which the Church speaks to the sick and dying, and to found our ordinary advice on the principles which are adapted to these seasons of exigency. Should it ever happen indeed that the Clergy used such portions of the Liturgy as the law compelled them to retain, but declined into other paths the moment obedience ceased to be compulsory, should they be content with eulogizing the Prayer Book instead of employing it, it were idle for them to expect that men would think them sincere members of a Church, which they were unwilling to obey, or that they were honest in praising those Reformers, the pressure of whose moulding hand she still exhibits. The employment therefore of the Service for the Visitation of the Sick; its constant employment; the employment of the whole of it, or at least of so much as time or occasion requires—this is not only essential if we would ourselves be honest men, but is of primary moment as suggesting the topics and principles of our public teaching.

I will conclude with one further subject, the most important after all, the most difficult, fraught with the greatest blessings to our people, to ourselves the real secret of tranquillity and hope. I have reminded you, my Reverend Brethren, on former occasions that your example was of more moment than your teaching; that words were outweighed by actions. Let me now put the same subject in a different form; let me remind you that the most material qualification for the preacher's office is a regenerate heart. To speak of subjects which we do not relish, of conflicts, in which we have not been conversant, of practices which we have not tried, must always be an insipid and lifeless task. Its incredible weariness to a man's own heart must ever make it wearisome to others. And therefore, the truly godly man will always be the best

preacher. He may lack the endowments of talent and oratory, he may have none of those qualifications which shake the market place, and rouse the popular mind to phrenzy, but the deep experience of his own struggles cannot fail to interest those who are conversant with the same trials. Do we want guidance along a dangerous track, we refer ourselves not to the man of ability and eloquence, but to one, by whom it has been habitually traversed. Thunder and lightning may dazzle and amaze, but it is the gentle rain from heaven which replenishes the earth.

This is no doubt the reason why sermons are so often unprofitable. Those who write them have not lived enough in the habit of prayer and meditation ; they have not fasted and wept for the sins of themselves and their brethren ; they do not feel the incalculable value of immortal souls, and the fearful hazard of making shipwreck of salvation—how, then, should they speak to men as ambassadors of Christ or stewards of the mysteries of God. It was no light estimate of the importance of souls which led the Lord of all to exchange the glories of heaven for the manger and the cross, neither will any man really preach Christ who does not follow Him. For this reason has our Church enjoined us to make every Friday, the weekly anniversary of our Lord's death, a day of fasting and self-denial, that this perpetual recurrence of seasons of devotion might deepen our impression of things divine, and that the impress of our Master's example might hallow our daily life. I am aware that there are some who scoff at this command of our Church, and more who neglect it. But the approach of public dangers, or even those private visitations, age, pain, and sickness, may teach men lessons in which the instructors of the people are yet untaught. Above all, I rest in that grace of God's spirit, which I ask for you, which I entreat you to ask for me, that we may be guided amidst the doubts, and armed against the dangers of our ministry.

Would we gain then the power of kindling other men's devotion ; the first qualification is to be ourselves devout. Never spake our great Herbert with profounder truth than when he reminded us that "the Parson's library is a holy life," for that "the temptations with which a good man is beset, and the ways which he used to overcome them, being told to another, whether in private conference or in the Church, are a sermon." Do we feel, therefore, that our

work is hard to perform, that our progress is less than could be desired, that men's hearts are not influenced as they should be, that the ordinances of the Church are undervalued, that is, the blessings of God's grace neglected, we have our remedy, that personal advancement, which is the true method of benefitting our brethren, which will draw down God's blessing not only on ourselves but on our land. "O my people, enter into thy closet and shut thy doors about thee."

The aspect of public affairs certainly is not such as to give satisfaction to considerate men, albeit that faith is incompatible with fear. But sure I am that all improvements in the mind and temper of the age must begin with those who stand nearest to the altar. So long as they are bound to devotions, which they do not care to render, and to self-denials, for which they seek an excuse in the incogitancy of others, what marvel, if the stream be as turbid as its fountain. Our course, therefore, my Reverend Brethren, is clear. It is one of private happiness, not less than public good. Let us live upon our blessings. In prayer, in the use of God's public ordinances, in self-examination, in self-denial, let us seek God's favour for ourselves and our people. This course will unlock the treasures of His bounty, who holds the hearts of all men in His hands. For the praise of men, as we ought not to desire, so will it be indifferent whether we gain it. But we shall gain what is more material, peace of conscience, a heart exercised in God's service, the sense of His presence in whom is the fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there is pleasure for evermore.







