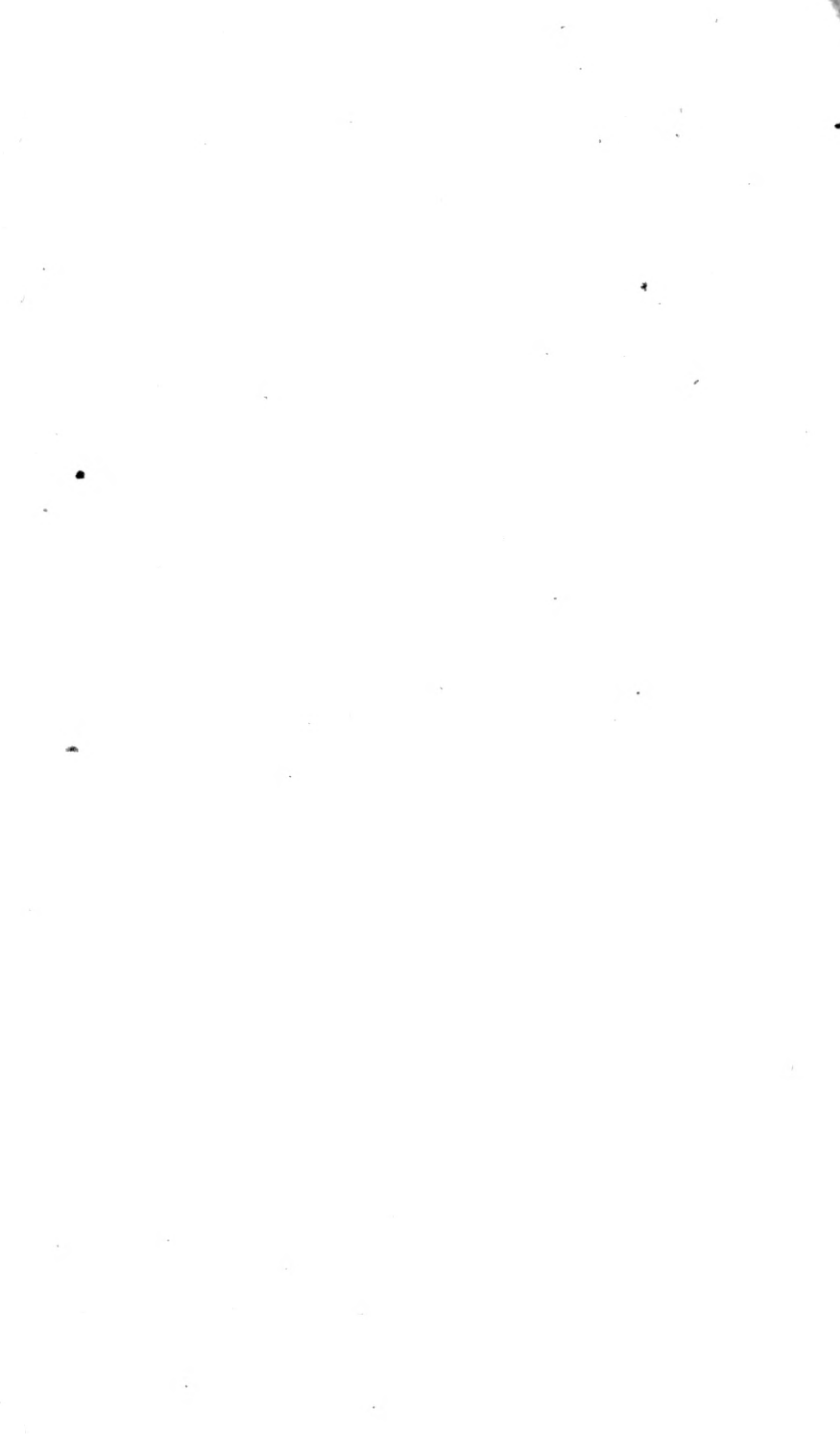




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TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR.

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A

SERMON,

WITH A PREFACE ON SOME OF THE EXISTING  
CONTROVERSIES IN THE CHURCH.

BY

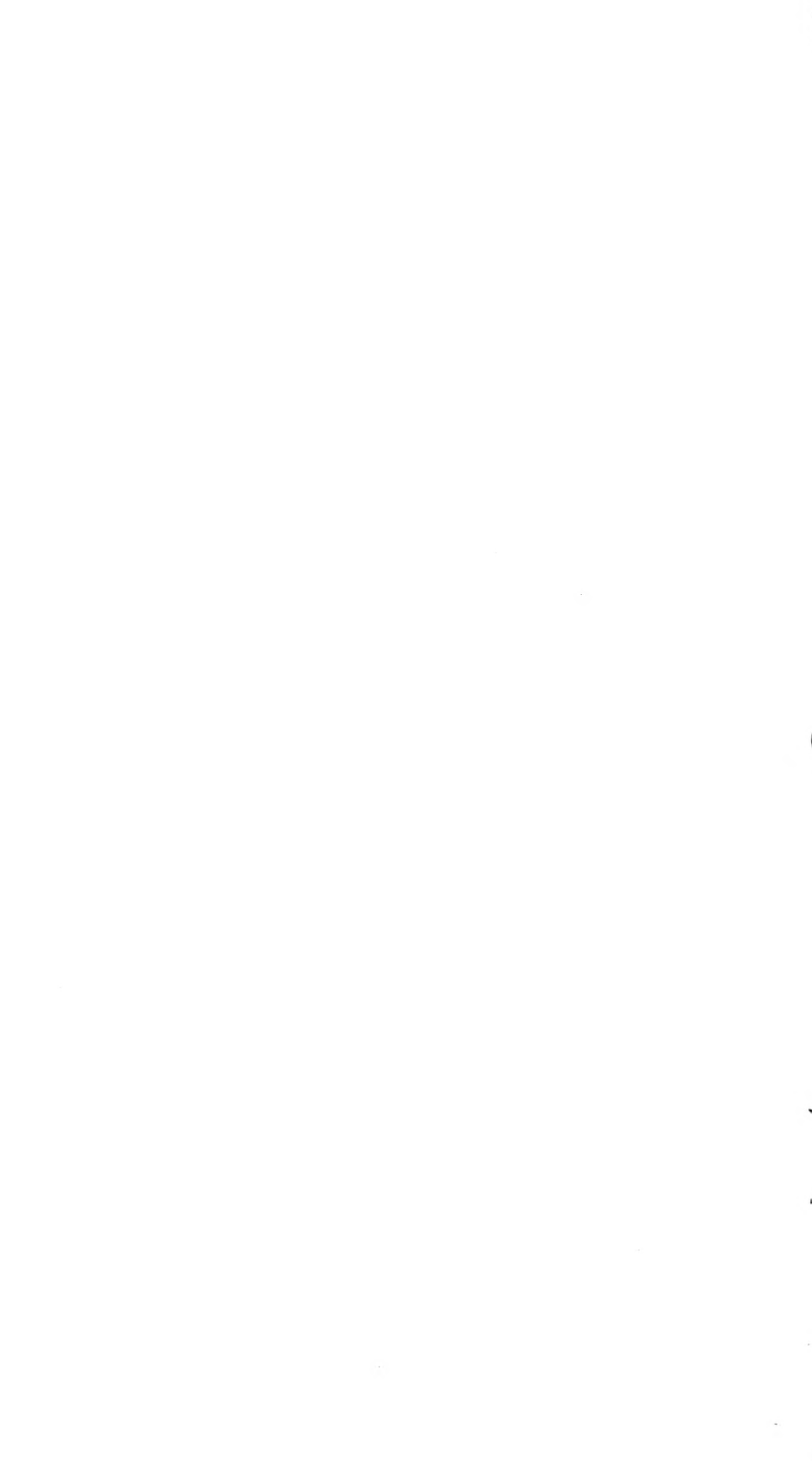
WALTER FARQUHAR HOOK, D.D.  
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1844.



## PREFACE.

The following Sermon was written and preached five years ago, as a caution against ultra-protestantism. It has been lately delivered again from the pulpit, since an attempt has been made,\* in an opposite quarter, from which one did not expect a bitter and insidious attack upon Church-of-England theology, to unsettle men's minds, and to lead them to suppose that we have no definite rule for the interpretation of Scripture, but must either on the one hand adopt that licentiousness of private judgment which is peculiar to ultra-protestants, or else have recourse to that doctrine of developments by which the modern Romanists seek to justify all the corruptions of popery; as if there were no alternative between these two systems, one of which makes the individual a pope to himself, the other denying him the use of his reason altogether.

The three tests to which all theological questions must be referred are Scripture, Church authority, and Reason. Each of the three has its proper place and office: Scripture supreme; Church authority our guide to the sense of Scripture; Reason not to question, but to apprehend the fulness of the truths so taught. To leave out all reference to authority is to act the empiric in theology, just as a man would in law, who should pretend to give his opinion from the statutes, without regard to custom or precedent, and the cases in the reports. It is dealing with the most worthy of all sciences in a way that is not to be tolerated in the most

\* See "Ward's Ideal of a Christian Church."

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ordinary of all. And in fact it is counteracting a law of Providence, which has made this the prescribed way of informing the reason of us all in our childhood; and to the majority of mankind a way that is intended to regulate their course through life.

But if this be so, we admit that it is necessary for us to shew what Church authority really is. Anglicans refer to something definite, the doctrine and practice of the primitive Church, as embodied in our Book of Common Prayer. Papists *reject the testimony of antiquity*,\* and mean by Church authority the decisions of their Church at the present time, whether accordant or not with Scripture, or with the doctrine received by our Fathers, as the faith once and once for all delivered for the saints. This was openly asserted when, in the Council of Constance, the cup was withheld from the laity. Romanists and Romanizers, as may be seen on reference to Mr. Ward's Book, are as much opposed to primitive doctrine, as ultra-protestants can be; they use indeed precisely the same arguments against Anglo-Catholics.

That there are some few, very few, members of our Church at the present time, who may possibly before long become apostates, and go over to the Church of Rome is much to be feared. Of the friend of one of these persons the writer enquired the cause of discontent, and received for answer, that the discontent arises "from our internal state united with our isolated position."

As regards our internal state they are appalled by what they suppose to be "an indifference to heresy and truth on the part of our spiritual rulers." "Sabellian

\* See the author's Sermon "The Novelties of Romanism, or Popery Refuted by Tradition."



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heretics," it is asserted, "have been advanced to high places in the Church without any protest on the part of our ecclesiastical superiors; dignitaries of the Church have published, unrebuked, the most offensive rationalism; five or six hundred clergymen have openly and heretically denied the grace of the Sacraments, besides attacking other doctrines of the Prayer Book, and their conduct has not been noticed; and in more instances than one Nestorian heretics, instead of being censured, have been treated with honour."

How far these charges be or be not correct, it is not necessary to enquire; the charge brought against the rulers of our Church, is that of "indifference to heresy," and it is the justice of this general charge that we deny. They may have overlooked heresy in some persons, they may have acted unjustly to others; they may or may not have put a favourable construction upon words which are thought to have an heretical meaning: they may or may not be chargeable with many other offences; it is not the business of the present writer to defend them; all that he maintains is, that their zeal against the heresies of *Romanism*, as distinguished from *Catholicism*, a zeal which, as the very persons who bring the charge against them complain, amounts almost to a spirit of persecution,—*this* exonerates them from a feeling of "*indifference* towards heresy." In every age of the Church, the attention of its rulers has been chiefly directed to the suppression of the *prevalent* heresy, whatever it may have been; and the most deadly heresy of the present day is the Mariolatry and Idolatry introduced by Romanism into the Church.\* No

\* It seems scarcely possible to acquit the maintainers of the Council of Trent of Pelagianism.

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heresy can be worse than this, which introduces an idolatry more offensive than that of which the kingdom of Israel was guilty, into the temple of God.\* Against this, the prevalent and most deadly heresy of the day, our spiritual rulers take their stand, and our Church, by standing aloof from Rome, utters her protest. If the facts are as stated above; if the God-denying heresy of Sabellianism has crept into high places; if one or two dignitaries have published rationalistic books, there may be a want of sufficient vigilance on the part of our ecclesiastical superiors, or their attention may not have been called to the fact, or they may be guilty of injustice, but this does not prove them to be "indifferent to heresy." Nor can the charge be fairly brought against them by the advocates of the Romish Church, the rulers of which notoriously tolerate practices and tenets of which, in controversy, they express their disapprobation.

As to "our isolated position," if by this be meant our standing apart from idolatrous Rome; it should be remembered that the Romish communion does not embrace the majority of Christians, the Eastern Church, like the Church of England, holding no communication with the Roman see. And instead of being surprised at our "isolated position," we should look to the prophetic Scriptures, and from them we may be led to the conclusion that ere the end cometh, the true Church will be so reduced in numbers, that faith, true Christian faith, will scarcely be found on earth. Our God forewarns us in 2 Thess. ii. 3—11:

"Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that Man of Sin be revealed, the Son of Perdition;

\* See the author's Sermon on "Peril of Idolatry."

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who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped ; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming : even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish ; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.”

Upon this and parallel passages, Bishop Horsley, that painful student of prophecy, remarks that the “ Son of Perdition is to rise out of an apostacy, “ *a falling away,*”—not a constructive apostacy, never understood to be such by those to whom the guilt has been imputed,—but an open undisguised apostacy. The Son of Perdition, who shall be neither a Protestant nor a Papist, neither Christian, Jew, nor Heathen ; who shall worship neither God, Angel, nor Saint ; who will neither supplicate the invisible Majesty of Heaven, nor fall down before an idol. He will magnify HIMSELF against every thing that is called God and worshipped : and with a bold flight of impiety very far above his precursors and types in times of paganism,—the Sennacheribs, the Nebuchadnezzars, the Antiochuses, and the Heathen Emperors, *will claim divine honours to himself exclusively,* consecrate an image of himself. I doubt not,” adds Bishop Horsley, “ but this monster will be made an instrument of that pruning which the vine must undergo.”\* “ The Church of God,” remarks the

\* Quoted by Burgh on the Second Advent. p. 99.

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same most learned prelate, mighty in the Scriptures, “the Church of God on earth will, according to prophecy, be greatly reduced in its apparent numbers, in the time of antichrist, by the open desertion of the powers of the world. The desertion will begin in a professed indifference to any particular form of Christianity, under the pretence of universal toleration; which toleration will proceed from no true spirit of charity and forbearance, but from a design to undermine Christianity, by multiplying and encouraging sectaries. The *pretended* toleration will go far beyond a *just* toleration, even as it regards the different sects of Christians. For governments will pretend an indifference to all, and will give a protection in preference to none. All establishments will be laid aside. From the toleration of the most pestilent heresies they will proceed to the toleration of Mahometanism, Atheism, and at last to a positive persecution of the truth of Christianity. In these times the temple of God will be reduced almost to the Holy Place, that is, to the small number of real Christians who worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and regulate their doctrine and their worship, and their whole conduct, strictly by the word of God. The merely nominal Christians will all desert the profession of the truth when the powers of the world desert it. And this tragical event I take to be typified by the order to St. John, to measure the temple and the altar, and leave the outer court, (national churches,) to be trodden under foot by the gentiles. The property of the Church will be pillaged, the public worship insulted and vilified by these deserters of the faith they once professed, who are not called apostates, because they never were in earnest in their profession. Their profession was nothing more than a compliance

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with fashion and public authority. In principle they were always what they will now appear to be, Gentiles. When this general desertion of the faith takes place, then will commence the sackcloth ministry of the witnesses; there will be nothing of splendour in the external ministry of the Church, as it will then be: it will have no support from governments, no honours, no emoluments, no immunities, no authority but that which no earthly power can take away, and which they derived from Him who commissioned them to be His witnesses.”\*

It is rather, then, for the purity and the perfecting, than for the unity of the Church, that we must labour. Whatever divine work has once been destroyed by man, can never by man be reconstructed, and the restoration of unity in the Church we can hardly expect before the coming of our Lord. Let us seek to prepare our own Church, that *she*, “amid the faithless may be faithful found,” when the apostacy is almost universal; let us seek to prepare her children, by an increase of holiness and of true religion, for the impending persecutions of antichrist; let us seek to prepare her that she may be the “Holy Place” where faith may still be found when our Lord shall come; perhaps as the “Daughter of Tyre” she is herself the subject of prediction; may she be “ready with her gift” when her King shall appear, and may he “have pleasure in her beauty.”†

That this ought to be our immediate object we may gather from the signs of the times; for certain signs are provided in Scripture by which the faithful may infer the approach of the Son of Perdition. “This know,”

\* Bishop Horsley's Letters in the British Magazine, 1834.

† Psalm xlv.

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saith our God, 2 Tim. iii. 1. 6., "that in the last days perilous times shall come; for men shall be

" Lovers of their own selves, selfish;

" Covetous, φιλάργυροι, lovers of money;

" Boasters;

" Proud;

" Blasphemers;

" Disobedient to parents;

" Unthankful;

" Unholy;

" Without natural affection;

" Truce breakers, (covenant breakers;)

" False accusers;

" Incontinent, (unbridled;)

" Fierce;

" Despisers of those that are good;

" Traitors;

" Heady, highminded;

" Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;

" Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

How far these signs are applicable to the present age, each man will decide for himself; but this is evident, that we certainly live in an age distinguished both for *selfishness* and for the love of money; *boastful of itself*; too *proud* to brook restraint, or defer to authority; when some *blasphemies*, such as Arianism and Socinianism, have been legalized as parts of a tolerated system of religion, and when the circulation of blasphemous publications is unrestrained, because it is found impossible to restrain it, *blasphemy* being openly preached in our streets; when the Factory System, spreading through Europe, is reversing the order of nature, by making

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children to labour for their parents, from whose discipline they soon learn to revolt, while their *insubordination to parents* prepares them to resist all civil restraints; when the object of public writers is not to make men *thankful* for what they have, but to make them discontented for what they have not; we are so far *unholy* as to supesede God's Sacrament of Baptism by man's law of registration, thus preparing the way for entirely unchristianizing the country; we live in an *unholy* age, when marriage is made a civil contract, and a patient continuance in well doing is represented as mere legality almost inconsistent with personal piety; when Sacraments, though said by the Church to be necessary to salvation, are despised, and acts of devotion are accounted superstition: when we find the *natural affection* no longer prevailing, which ought to subsist between the employer and the employed, the ruler and the ruled, the master and the servant; when families are scarcely formed ere they separate, and the members of which, when separated, care little for each other; when it is thought a mark of genius, by *covenant breakers*, to evade a law as soon as it is enacted; when the father of lies, the accuser of the brethren, has more agents at work than at any other time; when *false accusations* are malignantly invented and carelessly propagated against all who are distinguished in any department of life; when charity has so evidently ceased to be part and parcel of Christianity, that each opponent imputes to his adversary motives the most corrupt, predicating of every other man, the abomination of which he is himself conscious; when the sensual and the malignant passions are *unbridled* and unrestrained; when the fierceness of even religious partizanship is such as would disgrace a heathen; when *treason* is, if successful, accounted

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no crime; when there is *a form of godliness*, much talk of religion, but when religion is seen to evaporate in feeling or mere formality, and is not permitted to display itself in works; a suspicion being suggested that a good man *may*, by possibility, trust in his own righteousness, instead of relying on the merits of Christ, and the accuser of the brethren arguing that what *may* be the case in some instances, must be so in all.\*

Such being the word of prophecy, and such the condition of the world, it seems, as I have said, more expedient for us of this generation to be putting our own house in order, than to be indulging in vain desires to put together again the broken fragments of the church universal.

In the isolated position of their Church, Anglicans, therefore, see no difficulty; however they may lament the fact that Rome, by her idolatries, has caused a division in Christendom; for, the guilt of the schism we charge upon Rome. But while Anglicans are as strongly opposed to the Church of Rome as ever, they are as fully persuaded now, as they always have been, that the cause of Rome can only be successfully opposed by displaying the excellence and restoring the discipline of the Church of England. If to make manifest the spiritual capabilities of the Church of England, were at any time necessary, it is so especially at the present time, when earnest and ardent minds are craving for somewhat on which to fix the longings of their souls, and to which our own dear Church can so fully give scope, if only justice

\* See on this subject "THE LAST DAYS; a Discourse on the Character of our Times by Edward Irving:" in which he shews how this prophecy is applicable to the religious world as well as the profane. This most powerful, most interesting and eloquent work, is but slightly tainted with the doctrinal errors of the author, and may be read with profit by every English Churchman.



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be done to her. When all is cold and lifeless ; when the forms of the Church are adopted, not in the fulness of their meaning, but in the spirit of the conventicle, one can hardly wonder that weaker brethren, looking only to one side of the question, and disgusted by the unreality of ultra-protestantism, and by that demoralizing system which supersedes the divine doctrine of justification by faith, by the human figment of justification by the feelings, should be found to yield to those allurements which the Church of Rome holds out ; for every one will admit that the Church of Rome has a bright side as well as a dark one ; and, indeed, the fault of the Romanizers is, that they look only to what she retains of Catholic doctrine and practice, and close their eyes to those anti-scriptural novelties and damning heresies by which she has overlaid, and obscured, and mutilated the truth.

It has been observed of the Church of England that although she is chaste and pure, she is cold, repulsive, and without accomplishments : whereas the Church of Rome is affectionate, considerate of all her children, and full of accomplishments, enlisting in the service of religion all the arts and sciences, and seeking to interest the imagination as well as the affections : her allurements, then, are to some minds great : but those whom she seeks to allure are repulsed, because, by her idolatries, she proves herself to be an adúlteress. But, as it is undoubtedly true that in the object of our affections, we require something more than chastity, that we desire some accomplishments and much warmth of affection, the true-hearted sons of the Church of England may be pardoned when they seek to infuse something of devotional warmth into her services, and to provide for penitent and faithful hearts, the high spiritual comforts which result from

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ceremonial worship. These things are not to be forced by an overbearing clergyman on an unwilling people, but when, from the spirituality of a flock, the comfort resulting from ceremonial observances is demanded, the demand ought surely to be met, as our Church permits ; since, while the more pious will be gratified, wrong can be done to no one, if care be taken to do only what the Church prescribes. On this subject the author has expressed his opinions elsewhere :\* and here he may be permitted to remark, that he has always been the consistent opponent of popery on the one hand, and of ultra-protestantism on the other, as may be seen on reference to his various publications during the last twenty years ; and he has perceived nothing in later controversies to induce him to change that position in the *via media* which it has been his happiness hitherto to occupy, and in which he hopes to die.

If, as is sometimes stated, the preaching of the truth as held in the Church of England has led some persons on to popery ; let it be remembered that the preaching of ultra-protestantism has hurried many more into the Sabellian or Socinian blasphemies : and if the argument here used to silence those who preach “ the truth as it is in Jesus,” be worth anything, it must cause the Bible itself to become a sealed book, because the “ unstable wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction.” 2 Pet. iii. 17.

\* See “ a Sermon on Mutual Forbearance in Things Indifferent ;” and “ a Sermon on the Moderation of the Church of England.”

## A SERMON.

“Take heed what ye hear.”—MARK iv. 24.

OF the great importance of the ordinance of preaching, it must, in these days, be unnecessary to speak. That its importance ought not to be exaggerated, so as to elevate it, out of proportion, above other ordinances of religion, must be evident to all. To shew you precisely its value, will be, by God's blessing, my purpose this day.

It is to be feared that many entertain an exaggerated notion of the importance of this ordinance, owing to the prevalent custom among some persons of applying to the delivery of sermons, those passages in Scripture which speak of preaching. But the slightest consideration must convince you that the character of oral preaching must have been very different *before* the Scriptures were written, from what it has been since. Faith could come by hearing, and by hearing only, before the Scriptures of the New Testament were delivered;—at that time an Apostle either went himself, or sent a bishop, priest, or deacon, to tell the people | what? precisely what inspired men afterwards wrote, and *we* now read, in the Holy Scriptures. The preachers were *then* infallible men, moved by the Holy Ghost to declare to the people the way of salvation. And the people were directed to place implicit reliance on what they heard, just as we are now to place implicit reliance on what we *read* in the Bible, so that if an impostor was to come, with whatever pretences of wisdom or knowledge, he was to be rejected, if he spake contrary to what had been preached. Though we, or “an angel from heaven,” says the Apostle, “were to preach

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any other Gospel to you than that we have preached, let him be accursed ;” an anathema which no modern preacher, I presume, whether romanist or ultra-protestant would venture openly to *declare*, though, alas ! it is *insinuated* by too many. You see,—*before* the Bible was written, and *while* the preachers (whether an Apostle, like St. Paul, or apostolical men, like St. Mark and St. Luke) were miraculously *inspired*,—preaching supplied the place of the Scriptures of the New Testament, and instead of referring to the New Testament, which was not written, men could only refer to the preaching of these infallible teachers. So that, *strictly* speaking, what those teachers, moved by the Holy Ghost, uttered, was *the Word of God*.

But the case was different when by these inspired men the several Books of the New Testament were composed, when miraculous inspiration was withdrawn, and the canon of Scripture had been arranged and authenticated by the Church. Then the only *real* word of God was the Bible,—the only true preaching of the *Gospel*, in the scriptural sense of the word, was the reading of the Bible to the people. And thus we find that among the very earliest Christians, after the departure of the Apostles, the service of the Church consisted, not in the delivery of sermons, as among us, but in the devout reading of Scripture, (which they regarded as the true preaching of the Gospel,) with prayer, and with the administration of the Eucharist. They attended Church regularly to hear the word of God, as preached in his infallible Scriptures, they prayed for all those things which were necessary for their souls, as well as their bodies, and they sought for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, through the appointed means of grace.

And this deep reverence for Scripture is still retained in the Church of England. During the middle ages, the practice of thus making the reading of Scripture a prominent part of divine service fell into disuse. At the

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Reformation this office was restored to its primitive prominence and importance. While by the two hostile extremes, by romanists through their legends, and by ultra-protestants through their exclusive devotion to sermons, the reading of Scripture, *i. e.* the preaching of the pure unadulterated Gospel, is nearly if not entirely set aside. By the Church of England four chapters of the Bible are appointed to be read every day, while provision for sermons is only made once in the week; all additional sermons being a free will offering on the part of the clergy to the people, and a freewill offering, which ought not to supersede what is of equal or even greater value, catechetical instruction. So prominently does the Church of England, like the primitive Church, bring forward the Scriptures.

But this preaching of the pure unadulterated Gospel; this scriptural preaching, without any admixture of human inventions; this reference to Scripture and to Scripture only, will not alone suffice. At a very early period, the delivery of sermons, also, explanatory of Scripture, was found to be necessary. For heretics appeared, who drew conclusions the most erroneous from Scripture, and under the seeming sanction of holy writ, doctrines the most iniquitous were propagated. Hence it became necessary for the clergy not only to read the Scripture to the people, but in order to guard against the sophistry of heretics, to explain it to them, by pointing out the precise meaning attached by the universal Church to the portion of Scripture they had heard. They said, first hear the plain unadulterated word of God, and next hear the sense in which it has always been understood from the beginning; and this was the origin of preaching by the delivery of sermons. Sermons were intended, not to *supersede* Scripture, but to *explain* Scripture. And such was the general character of the sermons delivered in the primitive Church. The

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sermons of the Fathers are almost entirely expositions of the Scripture, and this it is which renders these writings so peculiarly valuable: they shew with respect to every passage of Scripture of which the meaning is ambiguous or doubtful, the sense in which it was understood from the first days of Christianity. Hence it is that you hear the Fathers so loudly declaimed against by those who would introduce novelties into religion, or adhere to human system; hence it is that you find them respected by all who obey the Scriptures and ask for the old ways that they may walk therein; for we know that the Christian Religion was once and once for all delivered to the saints, and that whatever is new must be erroneous.\*

If at an early period of the Church, this kind of preaching (preaching by the delivery of sermons) became necessary; it is *as* necessary, or even *more* necessary in our own times, when all kinds of false doctrines are promulgated under the pretence of being scriptural. A most important ordinance, then, is this of preaching. I am not wishing unduly to decry the ordinance of preaching, but I merely wish to prevent you, from applying to modern sermons all that is said of preaching in the Bible, which refers to the preaching of infallible men, and thus from elevating preaching above Scripture,—human inventions and traditions, above the inspired word of God. I would have you to make a clear distinction between Scripture and man's interpretation of Scripture; I would have you to remember that what Scripture says is infallibly true; but man's interpretation of Scripture,—(and preaching, in the modern sense of the word is this and merely this)—is fallible; I would warn you against the common practice of saying this man does, or this man does not, preach the Gospel, for *he* only preaches the Gospel who reads to you the plain words of

\* Bishop Pearson, Preface to Exposition of the Creed.

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Scripture, just in the order in which we find them in holy writ ; what is added *may* be a scriptural interpretation, or may *not* be scriptural interpretation, it may be a *true* interpretation, or it may be a *false* interpretation ; but still it is only an interpretation or explanation and nothing more ; and to speak of this explanation or interpretation, as of necessity the preaching of the Gospel, (because you happen to think that what the preacher says is conformable with Scripture,) to the exclusion of any *other* interpretation, is not only the height of arrogance, but is a mere begging of the question ; since the dispute between two preachers, who both of them appeal to Scripture, but deduce from Scripture very opposite conclusions, is, which of the two declares in very truth the mind of the Spirit ? to take upon yourself then to decide this, is to arrogate to yourself the office of judge, before you have proved your competency, or received your authority to act as such. All such modes of thinking and of acting, are, I repeat, of a very injurious tendency ; because it leads people to confound two things which are in themselves perfectly distinct,—two things which ought to be *kept* perfectly distinct,—the infallible word of God and man's very fallible comment thereupon ; the genuine Gospel of Christ, with some religious system of man's devising, which you may *think* to be consistent with Scripture, which you may *think* that you can prove from Scripture, but which, after all, since you are but fallible creatures, may *not* be consistent with Scripture : but which it is at all events most dangerous to speak of *as* Scripture, since it may bring upon you the punishment denounced on those who handle the word of God deceitfully.

Now if this be so, you see, my brethren, the need there is to warn men that they take heed what they hear. Suppose, just for the sake of argument, that there were no other obligations to induce a conformity to the Church of England ; suppose, for the sake of argument, (what

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we can, by no means, suppose as a real fact,) that we were to regard instruction as the main thing to be thought of in attending a place of worship, and that we were at liberty to select our place of religious instruction, it would become a question of the most solemn nature, warned, as we are, to take heed what we hear, to ascertain the precise measures adopted by the preacher, whose teaching we should determine to attend, in order to ascertain in all instances, the real meaning of the Bible; for though he *says* he preaches the Gospel, he may not really do so. Some preachers assert that they explain Scripture according to the system of Calvin; but why should Calvin's system be more right than the system of any one else? Some assert that they explain Scripture according to the system of Arminius; but why should Arminius be more right than Calvin? Different sects take for their denomination the names of their founders, to announce the system they adopt in the interpretation of Scripture. Now all these parties, though they preach the most opposite doctrines, assert of these opposite doctrines, that they are each of them Scriptural, and declare of themselves that they preach the Gospel. But among these oppositions of doctrine, how shall you decide which is in the right? Each claims Scripture to be on his side; each quotes Scripture; and how are you to determine what is of necessity the true meaning of Scripture, more than another? Some person perhaps will say that he has prayed to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and therefore he is sure that his interpretation is the true one. But such person ought in charity to admit that he to whose interpretation of Scripture he is opposed, may have prayed likewise to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit; and if he has done so, what gain we by this position? Wesley we know prayed and pronounced himself to have been assured by the Spirit, and consequently to be infallibly certain, that Whitfield was wrong; and Whitfield prayed and felt as infallibly assured and certain that Wesley was



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wrong. Even Socinus prayed and thought that his God-denying heresy was infallibly right.\*

It is, indeed, essential that on this point we should have a clear notion. That the assistance of the Holy Spirit is necessary to them that would understand Scripture aright, who that knows any thing of man's evil heart can for one moment doubt? who can doubt, who has the slightest acquaintance with Scripture itself? The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. The promise is made that His children shall be taught by God Himself. And in vain, my brethren, will you give your nights and your days to the study of Scripture, unless the Holy Ghost be thus present with you, to write the truths of holy writ upon the tablets of your hearts; in vain will you read unless likewise you pray; and most assuredly those who (being communicants) pray earnestly for the enlightening of the Spirit while they read, will have the Holy Ghost for their Helper, for, to them, for their crucified Saviour's sake, he has promised his assistance. But here comes the question,—What *kind* of assistance has he promised? Has he promised to make the illiterate man a skilful critic? Has he promised to confer the gift of tongues on those who are unable to read the Scriptures in their original language? Has he promised to enable those to read who have never learnt to read? These things he does *not* do, and by not doing these things, he declares that it is *not* to our intellectual, but to our *moral* nature, that he promises his assistance. The Holy Spirit will inspire the prayerful Christian with a spiritual perception of the truths which he has intellectually discerned, *i. e.* with such a view of them as shall

\* See also the awful instance of the deistical writer, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, in Leland's *Deistical Writers*, Vol. 1. 470.

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produce a suitable impression upon his mind, and a corresponding effect upon his heart and life; but he will *not* inspire a man to know precisely the meaning of this or that particular passage of Scripture. He *will* inspire a man with a wish to believe and to do whatever Scripture reveals or ordains, with the wish and the ability to eradicate the corrupt passions and prejudices which make him hostile to the truth; but he will not bestow upon him the abilities of a critic, a linguist, and an antiquarian, so as to enable him dogmatically to decide between two systems of doctrine, *both* claiming to be scriptural, which is *really* so. That the intellect is clearer, when the moral temper is good is doubtless true, and thus indirectly he may be said to influence the intellect; but further than this we go not, and they who refer to some favourite commentator or preacher, as if in his interpretation of Scripture he *must* be correct, act clearly on the principle of the papists when they refer to the pope as an infallible interpreter of holy writ.

How, then, shall plain men act, who have not time or ability for a critical investigation of Scripture, but who are aware that they ought to take heed what they hear? Let them hear the Gospel, as the Church delivers it. Let them *hear*, with the Prayer Book as well as the Bible in their hand; let them study their Prayer Book thoroughly, not only the Morning and Evening Services, but *all* the Offices, the Baptismal Office, the Office for the Holy Communion, the three Creeds, and the Ordination Offices. Let a man take his Prayer Book as his guide in the interpretation of Scripture, and with respect to the meaning of Scripture he cannot greatly err.

But I have alluded before to the absurdity of taking for our guide any *human* systems, and here the objection may be retorted upon me, that I am myself enforcing a human system in the Prayer Book. In answer to this, let me remind you of what our Prayer Book is.

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The English Prayer Book is not the composition of a few reformers who lived a few centuries ago, but it is the translation and re-arrangement of Greek and Latin Rituals of the remotest antiquity, such as have been in use throughout the Church universal from time immemorial. Our Prayer Book was in all its essential parts in use here in England from the earliest ages, long before the Reformation. But during the middle ages, through papal influence, certain innovations and superstitious observances had crept into it, and all our reformers did, was, after comparing the liturgy then existing, with the ancient liturgies, with Scripture, and with those interpretations of Scripture which the Fathers have handed down to us, as the interpretations received from the very foundation of Christianity, to cut off from it all innovations, which had been ignorantly adopted by some, or introduced with bad designs by others, and then to translate it into English. And thus the value of the Prayer Book, considered as a guide in the interpretation of Scripture, consists in its having embodied the doctrines which were carefully preserved by the early Church, as the very doctrines received from the Apostles, when the inspired Apostles preached by word of mouth, before the Scriptures of the New Testament were composed, and which were handed down from age to age, with the most jealous accuracy, until by the intrigues and jealousy of the popes of Rome, the unity of the Church universal was destroyed. This is our strong point against the Romanist, that we have kept "the faith once delivered to the saints," without diminution and without addition. And is it not a probability amounting to a moral certainty, that when we find that, like the two parts of a cloven tally, these doctrines thus preserved correspond entirely with Scripture, we have, then, ascertained the precise determinate sense of Holy Writ? that when, for instance, the tradition of the Church universal, preserved in our Prayer Book, and traced up

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for its origin to the inspired Apostles, tells us of the Divinity of our Lord, we are amply justified in applying *all those passages* in Scripture to prove his Divinity, to which Socinians would attach a different meaning? that when this tradition, preserved in our Prayer Book, sanctions the practice of infant Baptism, we have a right to quote in favor of our practice those passages of Scripture which relate to the Baptism of households and of nations, let Anabaptists say what they will? that we may prove in like manner the lawfulness of our making the Lord's day to supersede the Sabbath? The Prayer Book, like the tradition it embodies, adds nothing to the doctrines received in the Bible, for woe be to us if we add thereto or take therefrom; the Prayer Book reveals no new doctrine, but it is of indispensable use as explanatory of Scripture, as rendering definite the *meaning* of Scripture, as unfolding to us the great system which the Bible has made known.\*

\* The reformed Church of England, in short, claims for her own, that rule of faith, which the ancient Church ever professed before the times of division between east and west, and the erection of the papal power. "Anathema to him," said St. Ambrose, "who adds anything to the Divine Scriptures, or diminishes aught from them." (Council Aquil. § 36.) "But we condemn those also," said his brother Bishops, "who are adversaries to the truth as it was established at the Nicene Council." (Ibid § 58.) So speaks the Church of England, taking the Nicene Creed, and the other two Creeds of the primitive Church, as true expositions of "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." The ancient Church every where received the decisions of the four first general councils as entitled to the greatest deference, composed as they were of delegates from all the Christian world, and each in strict accordance with each other. This peculiar deference was paid to them by the early English Church, before the popes had intruded their canon-law, and asserted their rights to supreme civil and ecclesiastical power. So that on this point the doctrine of Ælfric's time was in perfect unison with the statute determining heresy, drawn up with the advice of the Bishops of the reformation. (Ælfric's Past. Epist. § 23. 29. Stat. 1 Eliz.) And what can be more intelligible in itself, or more consistent

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The Church then, you will observe, has the Scripture itself read in all her services, which is, strictly speaking, Gospel preaching; she directs that in the interpretation of Scripture, as delivered from the pulpit, deference shall be paid to the Prayer Book; and the wise layman, who studies his Bible with the light of his Prayer Book, will certainly never fall into dangerous error, never be guilty of heresy, as embodying the doctrine and discipline received from apostolic times:—And why? Because this is the rule, to which the Scripture itself has promised the blessing of inward satisfaction and peace of mind. “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, which is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls:” rest, in the resting-place of truth; safety, from the paths of the destroyer!

And thus, my brethren, I have laid before you a rule of the wisdom of which you will be the more and more persuaded, the more you reflect upon it. It is a rule, by the observance of which you will be kept steady to your profession, and not be among those who are carried about by every wind of doctrine; as must be the case with all who, not taking heed of what they hear, run first to one sect and then to another, thinking that because in some points all are agreed, there can be no material difference between any. Among the trials of our present probationary life, this is one, that we acquire the knowledge of the truth slowly and gradually. We are therefore through life to be reading and meditating on our Bible, to gain a nearer insight into the truth; we

with right reason, than this rule, which the Prayer Book every where embodies? Who can hope to gain credit even with reasonable men, who sets himself not only against the faith of the present Church, but against the general consent of the Church from the time of the Apostles? For a fuller account of the primitive and Anglican doctrine on the use of tradition, see the author's “Five Sermons before the University of Oxford.

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ought daily to be adding to our spiritual knowledge, as well as our spiritual experience.

It is not sufficient to say, (as I hope you all can do,) I believe in the Lord Jesus, I rely for salvation on the alone merits of the crucified Lamb of God, I seek for sanctification only by his Spirit, and through his Ordinances and Sacraments; I hold the foundation, and that is enough. Upon that foundation you ought to build gold, and silver, and precious stones; you *may* build thereon wood, hay, stubble. But what says the Apostle? If the former be the case, you will have your reward, if the latter, you will suffer loss. It is into *all* the revealed council of God that we are to enquire, as it is *all* his commandments that we are, in intention, to obey. Nay, it ought to be our wish, in all, the very *slightest* particulars, to seek to discover the Divine Mind. Yes, if we really love the Lord Jesus, this will be our desire in small things as well as in great; in all things: If we do indeed, and with all our hearts, believe in all that he did and suffered to achieve our salvation; if we are accustomed to contemplate him, as in his glory, so in his humiliation, as at the right hand of power, so also in the cradle, and amidst his enemies and persecutors and slanderers, and in his passion on the Cross; if we are accustomed to hold communion with him in his Eucharist, and being one with him by a living faith to partake of his Spirit; then our's will be no *niggard* service; then we shall not divide our duties into the essential and the non-essential; even in the slightest particular we shall delight to shew our devotion, love, and gratitude to the Lord Christ; we shall dread the charge of irreverence far more than that of superstition: we shall not only worship him, but seek to worship in the very manner in which the first Christians worshipped him, since that manner received the approbation of the inspired Apostles: nay, we shall, being in communion with the saints of God, both those who are departed and those who are still in the flesh, wish to

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agree in all their recorded practices, so that, as I said before, we ought to be continually enquiring, continually adding to our faith knowledge, and passing on from one degree of spiritual knowledge to another ; and since our duty is this, since it is our inclination encouraged by the Spirit of God, since we are, for this purpose, both to read Scripture and to hear sermons, the rule becomes indeed an important one—*take heed what and how ye hear.*

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