

Plain Sermons by Contributors to 'Tracts for the Times'
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SERMON LXXXI.
OBEDIENCE THE CONDITION OF KNOWING THE TRUTH.
(PREACHED ON ST. MARK'S DAY.)

ROM. xii. 2.

"Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of GOD."

THE festivals of the blessed Evangelists and Apostles of our LORD are so ordained in our Church, as not only to be days of thanksgiving for the mercies vouchsafed to us through them, but also to convey lessons of duty to us. That of this day is, in what way we, who in GOD'S holy Church have been instructed in "the heavenly doctrine of His Evangelist St. Mark," may not be "carried about with every wind of doctrine," but "may be established in the truth of CHRIST'S holy Gospel;" following, in our measure, the firmness and steadfastness of this blessed Saint, who, having by his preaching, his life, his labours, the miracles wrought by his hands, planted the Gospel widely and deeply, yielding fruits of a strict holiness, at last, in this our Easter season, resisted unto blood, striving against sin, yielded his body to be mangled by the enemies of the Cross, his spirit to join the white-robed army of Martyrs, evermore to praise his LORD.

And yet St. Mark was naturally unsteadfast; it is thought that he records against himself, that he was the young man, who, when his LORD was taken, "fled away naked;" again, when Paul and Barnabas were "separated for the work," he shrunk back in time of difficulty, and "went not with them to the work;" yet, at last, he was fitted by GOD for more than ordinary difficulties, preached the Gospel amid tribes the most savage, founded the Church of Alexandria, of all the strictest, and so the most resolute also in maintaining the faith, and yielded his life in a bold resistance to sin by a lingering martyrdom,—an encouragement to us, that however weak or irresolute we may by nature be, our SAVIOUR'S strength may be perfected in our weakness, and we too fitted to bear our SAVIOUR'S Cross, and follow HIM.

And this lesson of steadfastness is of much moment in these days, in which there is so much conflicting opinion, and persons are tempted to leave the Church, wherein they were made "children of GOD and members of" their SAVIOUR, some in one direction, some in another; some to the manifold forms of Dissent, others to Romanism; and even within the Church, people are at times distracted, which of opinions they hear of is the truth, which practice they are to follow, and others make a plea of this difference to be indifferent to all.

In the Epistle for the day, one primary condition is given, that we seek the truth in the Church which GOD founded, and as HE founded it. "HE" (i. e. our ascended LORD, Who from the right hand of GOD shed down His gifts upon men) "gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;" i. e. HE formed a Church with a regular ministry, some ordinary, some extraordinary, that in it those whom in it HE hath called to be saints, might be gradually trained up unto perfection, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying" or building up "of the body of CHRIST," until the whole were perfected.

And in this Church, the Apostle speaks of one great means of abiding in the truth, "the unity of the faith," i. e. that "one faith" which he elsewhere unites with the "one Baptism," that "one faith" in the Holy and Ever-Blessed TRINITY, which was confessed in our names, when we were baptized into Their saving Name; which we confessed with our own lips, when in Confirmation we were received into the full privileges of Christians, and in whose Name we were then anew blessed, and in which we hope to die; our belief in the Holy TRINITY, as contained in the Apostles' Creed, being proposed to us in the solemn service for the Visitation of the Sick, as that whereby we "may know whether we believe as a Christian should or no."

Thus far we have ground only for praising GOD, that HE has, in His great mercy, assigned us our happy lot in a pure and Apostolic Church, whose Bishops have received their commission through a long unbroken line from the "Apostles" whom "HE gave;" and that in this Church the pure faith is confessed as HE delivered it, neither adding to it, as in the Church of Rome, nor taking from it as others.

Thus far all is well, for all is GOD'S mercy; but it still remains to ask, how is it with us individually? do we, as a matter of course, understand our Bibles, because we read or hear them? do we ourselves, of course, know the will of GOD, because it has been made known to us? because we have been all called to the knowledge of the troth, do we therefore all know it? because the Church has the truth, have all its members?

To judge from people's way of speaking, it would seem as if this were so; as if it were an easy thing to know GOD'S will, and knowing it, to do it; only they speak differently at different times, and contradict themselves. Thus, when it is the question about giving account of themselves to GOD, nothing is more common among the poorer than to hold themselves excused, because they "are not learned," as though the reason why they fell short of doing GOD'S commands, was only that they did not know them; and as if, had they known them, they would have done them: with these it is thought a hard thing to know GOD'S will; and yet on inquiring more closely, one finds that they do know all saving truth, the doctrine of the Holy TRINITY, and all which They have wrought and do work for man's salvation; the Commandments, and what is comprised therein; they do know (and, blessed be GOD! it is "revealed unto babes") "what they must believe and do for their soul's health." But, again, it would seem, from others, as though it were easy to know the truth, and that whatever is not easily known to be such, is not such; the

Bible, they allege, is a book which “whoso runneth” may “read;” to doubt of it, is to take away from the dignity of GOD’S Word; and so, if any one does not readily perceive any truth or duty in Holy Scripture, these forthwith decide that it is not there. If, for instance, they are told about fasting, or self-denying charity, or the duty of cleaving to the Church; or, in cases of sadder error, of the truths of the Athanasian Creed, or even of the Divinity of “the Great GOD and our SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST,” they do not believe them, because they do not find them plain to them. Take again the variety of ways of thinking and acting among persons calling themselves after “One LORD;” how people not only believe not the high mysteries of the Faith, but even the plainest rules of common duty; how impossible it is to persuade some not only to act up to their duty, but even to see things to be a duty or a sin, which are yet on the very face of GOD’S word; how impossible, for instance, to convince many that it is a sin to return unkind angry words, though our LORD commands us, “bless them which curse you,” and by His Apostle, not to “render railing for railing.” Is there no one truth? no one will of GOD? is it alike whether a person belong to the Church or forsake it; fast or fast not; give alms liberally or withhold them; be baptized or unbaptized; be meek and peaceable, or cast back angry words, so he be persuaded in his own mind? or how come people to act thus differently?

Holy Scripture, many ways, tells us that the light does indeed shine abundantly around all, but is seen by those only who have eyes to see; that a certain character of piety, and duty, and love, and humility, towards GOD and man, is necessary to enable us to see; that they who have not this, though they think they see, are blind, nay are the more blind, because they say, “we see;” that GOD reveals His wisdom unto babes, but hides it from the “wise and prudent.” It has been observed, that no one text of the Old Testament is more frequently brought before us in the New, than that solemn one which speaks of persons “hearing but understanding not, seeing but perceiving not.”

“The secret of the LORD,” says the Psalmist, “is with them that fear HIM, and HE will show them His covenant.” His covenant was with all Israel; all were His people; but the veil was upon their hearts, and they saw not into it; they had but the shadow, not the substance; it was still a secret thing, imparted to those who feared GOD, as from a Friend to His friends. It was a secret hidden intercourse, which they who feared not GOD knew not of.

“If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of Myself.” Whoso would do the will of the FATHER, should he able to judge of the doctrine of the Ever-Blessed SON HIMSELF, whether it came from the FATHER; such—being, by obedience to the FATHER, brought into unison with His thoughts and will, in a degree after the pattern of the SON HIMSELF; yea, being by obedience true, though imperfect, sons,—should understand the words which the FATHER spake by the SON, should recognise them as the FATHER’S voice. For the FATHER HIMSELF should make HIMSELF known to such. “I thank THEE, FATHER, LORD of heaven and earth, that THOU hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, FATHER, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.” This is the

hidden voice, which our LORD says His sheep shall hear in the way of obedience, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow ME.” He first knoweth His sheep, and maketh HIMSELF known to them; and they hear His voice, and follow HIM, and learn to distinguish His voice even in its lower indistincter tones, as a man knows the whisper of a friend. And hence in GOD’S own language of the Old Testament, the same word signifies to hear, to hearken, and to obey; they only really hear who obey, and they only who obey can really hear. This is the promise of the new covenant, “they shall all know ME, from the least unto the greatest of them,” for (there went before) “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” This is the way in which our eyes shall see our teachers, “Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.” This the hidden wisdom, and strength, and nourishment, and privileges, given to “him that overcometh,” “To him that overcometh,” our LORD says, “will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new Name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.”

And on the other hand, in those sad cases, in which persons become blinded to the will, or truth, or ways of GOD, by disobedience, by preferring the creature to the CREATOR, they dull the eye of faith; by not seeing, they cease to be able to see; by not hearkening, they lose the power to hear; by making their heart gross, they lose the capacity to understand; for, which is the worst of all, by these refusals to hear, and see, and understand, they gradually grieve away the good and tender SPIRIT of GOD, Which “will not alway strive with man,” and by Which alone can any see, or hearken, or perceive.

“The natural man,” i. e. one who has a soul only, endued only with the natural powers of the reasoning soul, but not with the SPIRIT of GOD, “receiveth not the things of the SPIRIT of GOD; for they are foolishness unto him; neither *can* he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;” i. e. the things of GOD, being a SPIRIT, are seen only by the SPIRIT, (“for the SPIRIT searcheth all things, even the deep things of GOD;”) he then who hath not the SPIRIT, either not having had HIM, as the heathen, or grieved HIM away, as the unfaithful Christian, as long as he is such, *cannot* know them; he has no capacity to receive or contain them.

And our LORD says to the unbelieving Jews, “Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear My word.” And He subjoins why; “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do;” they were bent on pursuing those desires inspired into them by their father, the devil, and so the words of GOD sounded by their ears, but they could not hear them. And again, “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and not the praise which cometh of GOD only?” Our LORD, in His former words, seemed to marvel at their unbelief; yet the source of His loving surprise was that they should be such, not that, being such, they could not believe. On the contrary, it were strange that they could hope to believe. They thought to believe, if they had the “sign from heaven,” as modern unbelievers have asked for the tokens of GOD’S will to be written in the sun; they thought to follow GOD (as so many now do), if they did

but see His will, and our LORD warns them and us that the fault was in themselves; that while they remained such, they could not believe. “How can ye believe?” It is impossible. Whoso believeth in GOD, must believe in HIM only, trust in HIM only, seek their all from HIM, lay up their all with HIM. They, then, whose life, whose thoughts, whose hopes, whose rewards are here, in the praise of men, how should they believe in the unseen GOD, and an unseen reward?

And so St. Paul, when recounting those frightful sins to which the heathen world was abandoned, premises, in each stage of their decay, that they did not act up to the knowledge which they had; “knowing GOD, they glorified HIM not as GOD, neither were thankful,” and therefore “was their foolish heart darkened;” they “professed to be wise” (without GOD), and therefore “they became fools;” “they changed the glory of the incorruptible GOD into images like the corruptible” creature, “*wherefore* GOD gave them over to uncleanness;” “as they did not like to retain GOD in their knowledge, GOD gave them over to an undistinguishing mind.” In each case, sin was a rejection of GOD; in each, GOD, Whom they had rejected, withdrew HIMSELF from them, until, in His final abandonment, HE left them to their own undistinguishing mind, without any light in them, (since they were without HIM, the True Light,) until, contrary to their natural conscience, which condemned the sin as “worthy of death,” they not only had pleasure in the sin, but in its very commission, apart from its pleasure. And so he says in another place, They “had the understanding darkened, in that they were estranged from the life of GOD,—because of the blindness of their heart, having given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness;” the heart was first blinded by passion and sin, and then the understanding became darkened.

In like way, it is prophesied of a falling away among Christians in the last days, that some should “depart from the faith,—having their conscience seared with a hot iron;” their moral sense should first be deadened by sin, and so should they fall away; as St. John says, “they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us;” they were carried away by the wind of false doctrine out of the barn-floor, because there was no soundness, no stability, in them; they were not wheat, but chaff. And Anti-Christ shall, with “lying wonders,” work “with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, *because* they received not the love of the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” All unrighteousness is a lie, a lie in itself, as unreal, a lie against GOD as the Truth; and so, as the just punishment of loving a lie, GOD turneth them into it.

And, as in the fall, so in the recovery. Throughout prophecy, the restoration of light and holiness are promised together; and St. Paul’s commission to the Gentiles was “to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto GOD.”

Yet was “the Gospel hid to them who were lost, in whom the god of this world had blinded the minds;—lest the light of the glorious Gospel of CHRIST should shine unto them.” Their minds had first been blinded by the misty love of this present world; and in these earth-born clouds they had so closed themselves around, that the light of the

Gospel, which would have shone unto them, could not; the light was there, but not to them; “it shined in darkness, but the darkness admitted it not.”

Or, again, in those fearful cases of judicial blindness, which GOD has recorded as tokens and way-marks, lest we tread in their steps; Pharaoh hardening his heart by disobeying GOD, GOD HIMSELF hardened it afterwards, so that he saw not, (what his servants saw) that Egypt was destroyed, saw not the folly of pursuing those whom he had entreated to be gone: the very miracle of the waters of the Red Sea parting, and standing on either side as a heap, opened not his eyes; he saw not until in the midst of the sea, that the LORD fought for Israel. The chief priests and Pharisees blinded themselves by their hypocrisy, so that, though they saw and felt the miracles, and “could not deny” them, they could not believe; but by shedding their REDEEMER’S blood, brought on themselves the earthly destruction which they thought, by shedding it, to avoid: covetousness blinded the eyes of Judas, so that he saw not what even the Pharisees saw, that he was “betraying the innocent blood,” and that it would be shed.

All this people will readily admit in the main, of such as Pharaoh, as the scribes and Pharisees, and as Judas, of the betrayers and murderers of the JUST ONE, Whom we worship. In these cases Holy Scripture has lifted the veil off the histories, and has laid bare to us, not what we see on the surface, men acting in a certain way for a certain end, and compassing it with worldly wisdom, men wise in their generation, and whose own end we do not yet see; it shows us things as GOD sees them, the hidden springs of their actions and the misery of their end, and the blindness of their long-sightedness, and the folly of their wisdom, because they were wise only about this world of sight, and foolish about the things of eternity: we see them, not only as they at the time seemed, had in reputation of all the people, obtaining the praise of men, which they sought; but we see them more as we shall see all things in us and around us, at the Day of Judgment; as having had their reward, and so having to look only for the wrath of GOD; as having opposed GOD, and so to be rejected by GOD; as being guilty of that Blood, through which alone can we be cleansed from all guilt. And so because Scripture has laid bare what is commonly hidden, too often even in ourselves from ourselves, people come to think of those whom it speaks of, as other men, instead of being ensamples of us, and warnings to us, men like ourselves, and to whom we, whether in the way to obtain blessing or misery, whether growing in holiness or unholiness, obeying or disobedient, cherishing the life of GOD in us, or becoming estranged from it, seeking our portion in this world or the next, the praise of GOD or of man, Heaven or hell, are like.

But the things remain the same, our nature and natural temptations remain the same; the things which blinded them were common every-day things, around us still; the love of man’s praise; the fear of man’s blame; thinking of man’s judgment rather than of GOD’S; the love of the things of this world; covetousness.

If then the love of man’s praise hindered men from believing then, can they who now love it, feel confident that they believe aright? If the love of gifts blinded the eyes of Balaam then, will people now be able to see who, like him, love “the wages of

unrighteousness?” If the god of this world, the love of this world, its pomps, its vanities, its lusts, hindered the light of the glorious Gospel from shining into men’s hearts then, will they admit it now? or did people lose their everlasting salvation then, through things which we may give way to and yet be saved? Is there no world, no pomps and vanities, which we have renounced, and yet which are everywhere around us, which we are tempted to, which people give way to or resist, and by yielding to they are blinded, and being blinded, yield to yet further, and go more and more astray, and perish!

Yet they see it not! Nor did those of whom Scripture speaks! and this is the very misery and hopelessness of their case. “If ye were blind,” saith our LORD, “ye should not have sin; but now ye say, ‘we see,’ therefore your sin remaineth.” It is the very misery of such cases, that people go on as in a dream, seeing, speaking, acting, having their enjoyments or their sufferings, succeeding or being baffled, but it is all the while unreal; “they walk in a vain shadow,” and mistake all the while the shadow for the substance; and that which alone is substantial, the things which shall continue for ever, are to them but as a dream; they are asleep to their real life, taken up with their dream, as if it were their life and their end, losing the time in which they might have done what really concerned them; and when they awake, as men do after a toilsome feverish dream, exhausted and wearied, where is all, about which they have thus toiled, toiled often as men do whether waking or sleeping, half-conscious that it is vanity? where are they? where will men be, if they wake but at the end or after the close of this life? “as a dream when one awaketh, so in the awakening,” [i. e. at the Resurrection,] “shalt Thou, O LORD, despise their image;” because they have borne only the image of the earthy, and not been conformed on earth to His image in which they were re-born, the image of the heavenly. “It is even as when the hungry dreameth, and behold he eateth, but he awaketh, and his soul is empty.” Such have fed all their life long on husks, or ashes, not on “the Bread of Life, which giveth life to the world;” they awake, and their soul is empty; empty of His Life which they received not, empty of His Spirit which they grieved away; empty of goodness, which without HIM they could not have; of treasure, which they “laid up in this life, and were not rich toward GOD;” empty of offerings to GOD, and so they now “appear before GOD empty,” and, as empty, cannot abide. They are “chaff, which the wind driveth away,” as it followeth in the same Psalm, “therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the Judgment.” “The rich man lift up his eyes, being in torments;” they had been closed then before, as in sleep; had been fixed on the earth, while he was “clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day,” so that he could not lift them up to GOD above, or see the end of his life, or HIM Whom in Lazarus he might have relieved, and so he “lift them up,” but “in torments.”

And yet they thought they saw! Dives thought that he had the only true substantial enjoyments, the riches and pleasures of this life; he saw Lazarus, it may be, full of sores, and turned away from him, as men do, with loathing; he saw all which could be seen in the world of sense; he only “saw HIM” not “Who is invisible.” These things have a seeming substance, though not a real one, since they continue not; they fill man’s empty

soul, though it is but with wind, which puffs up and distresses, but satisfies not nor nourishes; they stop its cravings, like savages, with clay, and so “hungering” not, such cannot be “filled” with that “meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” The rich man “said to his soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for thee for many years;” it is men’s misery that they see too plainly the things of this life, their perishable enjoyments, ends, honours; and seeing these only, think these alone are to be seen. Yet they are not the less confident. The rich man was confident that he had chosen the happy part. With what awful confidence do the Jews say to our LORD, “*Say we not well* that THOU art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?” “Now we *know* that THOU hast a devil.” “Behold, we have heard His blasphemy.” “For a good work we stone THEE not, but for blasphemy, and because THOU, being a man, makest THYSELF GOD.” They accuse the SON of blasphemy, because HE declared HIMSELF equal to the FATHER, with Whom HE is One! They say, “HE hath a devil,” Who came to destroy the works of the devil! they condemn as guilty of death, HIM before Whose Judgment-seat they must themselves appear! and yet, which is the most terrible, they have no misgivings, no doubts; the very truths which they do hold, lead them the more into error. They believe the law, so solemnly delivered, and which their fathers set at nought. “Hear, O Israel, the LORD thy GOD is One LORD;” and therefore they reject our “One LORD,” Who with the FATHER is “One GOD.” They believe that the Messiah shall come in great glory, and so reject HIM when HE cometh in great humility, that they may be rejected of HIM, when HE cometh in His glory; they neglected to seek HIM, when HE might have been found, where they taught others to seek HIM, at Bethlehem, and so, knowing it not, they rejected His miracles, because HE was also of Nazareth! They knew that “His goings forth were of everlasting,” and that “of His kingdom there should be no end,” and therefore they rejected HIM, because they “knew whence HE was; but when CHRIST cometh, no man knoweth whence HE is.” “We have heard out of the law that CHRIST abideth for ever; and how sayest THOU, the SON of MAN must be lifted up? who is this SON OF MAN?” Caiaphas even prophesied as high-priest, and declared the Mystery “that One Man must die for the people, that the whole nation perish not;” and yet understood his own words only in the carnal sense of the removal of our LORD lest “the Romans should take away their place and nation.”

And yet what other than these Jews do they now, who because our LORD is man, deny that HE is also our GOD, One GOD with the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST, and therewith “deny the LORD Who bought them,” which is yet one chief plea for a deadly heresy sadly common among us? What else do they who, because the HOLY GHOST is One with the FATHER, deny that HE is, in the mysterious way of the Divine Existence, also distinct from the FATHER, and so deny the truth of the HOLY TRINITY, wherein we were baptized? What else, in their degree, do they who reject the Baptism with water, which our LORD ordained, because He promised that we should also be baptized with the Spirit? or who deny that in His holy Supper HE giveth us His Body and Blood, because what we see are His creatures, not HIMSELF? What else do they who refuse obedience to the Church which our LORD bid us “hear,” because the HOLY GHOST teacheth, that the

“Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation?” or because Scripture declares that we are “justified by faith,” deny that we are justified through Baptism? or deny that the Bishops receive their commission through the Apostles from our LORD, or that fasting is a duty, because they find other things spoken of more prominently, even as the Jews found more of the glory of our LORD, than of His humiliation?

No, my Brethren! it is not whether we are ever so surely persuaded that what we hold is in the Holy Scriptures, upon which all depends, but whether it is there; not whether we share an error with many or few, or hold the truth with the few or with many, but whether what we hold be the truth of GOD, or the invention and error of man; not whether what we do be “right in our own eyes” (for “there is a way which seemeth right unto a man,” Scripture twice repeateth, “but the ends thereof are the ways of death,”) but whether it be right in the sight of GOD; not whether we “think we see,” but whether the light within us be darkness or light; whether we be “walking in the light, as HE is in the light,” or “walking in darkness, not knowing whither we are going, because darkness has blinded our eyes.”

And for this, Scripture gives us but one rule, one test, one way of attaining it, i. e. whether we are keeping GOD’S commandments or no, whether we are conformed to this world, or whether we are, by the renewing of our mind, being transformed into His image, Who died for us that we might live to HIM. It is not what we believe (the devils also believe), what we feel (this may be the morning dew which passeth away), what we know (knowledge alone puffeth up), what we speak even in His Name (some who prophesy in His Name HE will bid depart, as workers of iniquity), but what we do,—whether by patient continuance in well-doing, we are seeking to have His image retraced in us, and ourselves, through His renewing Spirit, day by day, made less earthly and more heavenly. “Be not conformed,” says the Apostle, “to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, *that* ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of GOD.” The knowledge is not in our own power to attain; it is the gift of GOD, vouchsafed or withheld by HIM, and each more or less, according as man becomes conformed to the world and to things earthly, or to GOD and things divine. It is in vain that men seek to obtain or to retain their belief in things divine, while they draw to things of earth. “Whoredom (both spiritual and bodily, the idolatry of the flesh and that of spirit in loving aught besides GOD,) and wine, and new wine,” saith the Prophet, “take away the heart.” It is in vain (though it is a sad sight) that people will even strive to retain a belief in high and holy things, while their life is wrong; they will strive to convince themselves, but it is vain; will study, but it is of no use. They will even strive to work themselves up to believe them, strive to believe them, but they cannot; as their thoughts are more and more occupied with the world, holy truth becomes fainter and fainter, even while they regret it and wish to retain or recover it; they look back mournfully to the belief of their childhood, but cannot recal or re-trace it. Our LORD says in the same way, “ye cannot serve GOD and mammon,” and “ye cannot believe,” “how can ye believe?” His warns us that we cannot believe both or serve both; whom we serve, him we believe; whose wages

men receive, to him they look, and he is their god; we cannot be serving the world and believing in GOD. It has commonly been observed, how worldly persons are wont to take up with low and carnal views of religion; how money-getting and Socinian heresy go together; how the easy, opulent, and self-satisfied take up with an easy religion and become victims to a deadly heresy, because their thoughts being engrossed in the things of this world, they cannot raise them to HIM, Who would be their SAVIOUR, at the right hand of GOD! It is sadly common to see how people, who mean well in a way, and think well of themselves, leading moral but common-place lives, even get a dislike of any thing which is not such, any thing mysterious in doctrine, or self-denying in practice. It is even much to be feared, that many have no real belief in saving truth, who know not of it; that many are, unawares to themselves, Socinians. There have even been cases, in which persons, while reading their Bibles, have drawn error from the source of truth; deadly heresy has seemed to them the most natural, the most conformable to the Bible, because, while living worldly lives, lives merely human, they have lost the power of perceiving things Divine.

And as in doctrine, so in practice; there seems nothing so degraded, which man may not reconcile to himself, if he lose the life, and with it the light of GOD. Loss of natural affection is one of the sins which St. Paul recounts in his heavy list. "Even their sons and their daughters have they sacrificed to devils;" and even their sons and their daughters do parents still sacrifice to devils, tempting them oftentimes to sin, making their sin the instruments of their earthly comfort, educating them (in less gross cases) for the world, and so for Satan. And most of us can too sadly recollect a time (happy they to whom it was a very early time!) in which, though Christians, they lived to the world which they had in Baptism renounced, if by GOD'S mercy not wholly, yet at least in part; were serving Satan, while they thought they were serving God; or were even careless about GOD, while they were hoping all the while to go to Heaven, i. e. to live with and to GOD for ever. Alas! most of us can too sadly recollect their having indulged in things unlawful and displeasing to GOD, without knowing them to be such; why? but because "darkness had blinded our eyes," and one sin had dulled our sight to others, so that we no longer knew or felt it to be sin. And as in sin, so in holiness; the fall is by disobedience, the restoration must be by obedience; the fall, by love of the world conforming us to it; the restoration, by being drawn off from the world, that so we may be capable of being transformed unto GOD. Every act of charity, of parting with the world, of self-denying love of man, of obedience to GOD, of humility, of prayer, is so far a preparation to open our hearts again for His Presence, Who will "lead us into all truth," in faith, and in life. Our sight becomes gradually dimmer or clearer; we perceive less of sin or more of duty; we cannot quicken our own sight; there is no way, whereby at once to increase our faith, or knowledge of our duty; but if we be faithful and humble, GOD will enlarge our hearts, and open our eyes, and cause the scales to fall off from them, and we shall at first see indistinctly, "men as trees walking;" and HE will increase our faith by enabling us to obey more faithfully, and strengthen our sight by enabling us to do what we now see, and

as in our daily walk we come nearer towards Heaven, HE will open to us more of Heaven; and we shall see less of the earth, and be less drawn to it, and more of HIM, Whose Face His holy Angels ever behold, and Whom “the pure in heart shall see,” and Whom they who purify their hearts here see, in proportion as they are purified. And so the veil which sin lay upon our sight being taken away, “we all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the LORD,” studying His Countenance, watching Its looks, seeking to have His gracious and compassionate look cast upon us in the midst of our frailties and infirmities, we too may, like Moses, catch some faint reflections of Its brightness, and be changed into the Image whereon we gaze, which we love, which, in our weakness, we would long to copy and transfuse into ourselves—may be “changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the SPIRIT of the LORD.”

This change is endless, to be carried on through life, ever beginning in this life; the rudiments on and faint outline to be formed here, to be traced more fully and more deeply in the endless gaze of eternity. To be conformed to this world is to be like the beasts which perish, or like the brutish among men; to be transformed, what is it but to be changed by the life-giving SPIRIT into the Form of HIM Who is GOD; by His indwelling SPIRIT to be made like HIM, as St. Paul again says, “that the new man is” in the course of “being renewed after the Image of its CREATOR.” Between these two extremes we must all be, losing by sin our heavenly likeness, into the first mould of which we were cast in Holy Baptism, or by actual obedience tracing it deeper upon every action of our lives, every will of our hearts, every thought of our souls, and “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of CHRIST,” until nothing rebel, and our whole bodies, souls, and spirits are presented, as the Apostle bids, “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto GOD,” all offered as a whole burnt-offering upon His altar, nothing kept back from HIM, no desire, no longing after the world, but all offered to HIM, to be consumed (if, for the sake of “the LAMB without blemish and without spot,” HE deign to accept our sin-bespotted sacrifices), to be consumed by the fire of His love.

And in each stage of this course heavenwards, we know not what is beyond us; we must, at the first, be contented to grope our way amid the blindness brought on us by our past negligences and sins, often in perplexity even as to what our duty is, wishing to do it, but not knowing what it is, wishing to do what will best please GOD, but afraid lest we be mistaken; “walking in darkness, and having no” or faint “light.” But let us hear the Prophet, “who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the Name of the LORD, and stay upon his GOD!” To the godly there shall rise up light in the darkness; the stars, as he gazes heavenwards, shall unfold themselves mere and more to him; the day, which he longs for, shall at length dawn upon him; even thus his “path” shall “shine more and more until the perfect day.”

Only in whatever stage we are, let us beware of judging or disputing about things or practices which we have not tried; it is one sore evil of the age in which we live, that it disputes about every thing, whether it understand it or no; or rather it disputes against

holy duties and practices, because, not having tried, it does not understand them, and so disputing, cannot understand them. The truth of GOD is a solemn thing, and to be treated reverently; for most of us, it is dangerous to speak even against error, lest with the tares we root up the wheat also, the truth with the error; lest we injure our own minds by speaking in a common way of things which GOD hath hallowed; how much more, if what men ignorantly speak against, be, after all, a part of the truth of GOD, and they be found haply to fight against GOD. GOD is a GOD of peace, not of confusion, and to be sought not in eager debates and strifes, but in the secret chambers of our own hearts. The promise that we “shall know of the doctrine whether it be of GOD,” is to such as “do His will;” let us earnestly set ourselves to act up to what we know, to draw our affections off from this world, and set them upon HIM; to be less concerned about this world’s good, less desirous of its gains, honours, pleasures, ease; let us practise ourselves in foregoing them, see that we do each action of our lives as having GOD’S eye upon us, and having to give an account of each to GOD; labour to do them so, that we may offer each, our lying-down and our rising up, our daily bread and our daily task, our daily toil and our daily suffering and Cross, as an acceptable sacrifice to HIM; and HE will, at least after HE has tried us for a while, make our way plain before us, and “guide us by His counsel, and in the end receive us to His glory.”

It is this, as we trust, increasing holiness in our Church which gives us good hopes that GOD’S good Hand is with her, and that the distractions which at present harass her, will gradually give way, and we shall again “understand one another’s speech,” and speak “one language;” it is when, individually, amid our manifold infirmities, we yet hope to have ground to trust that we are seeking “not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind,” that we may hope also that we are in the way to “prove” and learn more deeply “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of GOD.” It is thus that we whose life is more advanced may hope to be kept unto the end; thus, that the young may hope to be guided in these difficult days, “to know and believe what is for their souls’ health.” Seek we then especially in this our Easter season, to rise with our risen LORD, that we may ere its close with HIM thither ascend, where HE dwells at the right hand of GOD, preparing a place for us, and by the secret gifts of His HOLY SPIRIT, preparing us for His Holy Place; seek we, with hearts fixed on HIM and stayed by HIM, not to conform ourselves to this world, not to act upon its maxims, not to be carried away by its sweeping tide, not to seek our joy in its joys, not to entangle ourselves with its cares, its pomps, its vanities, not to desire its praise, not to shrink from its reproach, but to fix our eyes on HIM, Who as at this time rose from the grave and gate of death, that we having been raised from the death of sin, might live to HIM, fear nothing but His wrath, hope for nothing but His praise, grieve for nothing but what grieves HIM, seek for nothing but to serve HIM, and to be owned by HIM as His in the Great Day, so shall HE shine more and more into our hearts, lighten our remaining darkness, give sight to our blindness, be HIMSELF our Light and Life, until HE bring us thither, where there is no night, that heavenly Jerusalem, which “the glory of GOD doth lighten and the LAMB is the

Light thereof, and the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it,” and so shall we for ever “in His light see light,” and ourselves be filled with the Light we see, and become light, freed from the darkness of sin and error and corruption, our spotted selves cleansed with His Blood, and all radiant with His glory and holiness and incorruption and truth; to which HE of His infinite mercy bring us all, pardoning our defilements, and having pity on our misery.