

VAGUE EVANGELISM AN OBSTACLE TO TRUTH.

"The increase of profession is not conclusive proof that piety increases. A religious age is not necessarily an age of religion."—
MARSDEN.

"If nations are to perish in their sins,
'Tis with the Church the leprosy begins."
COWPER.

If anything more effectually than downright ignorance paves the way for the aggressions of Rome, it is the vague and indefinite evangelism which at present so widely prevails. Some one has justly said, that there is a great difference between a "free Gospel" and a "faithful Gospel." Even wicked men like, in one sense, the idea of a *free* Gospel, as something upon which they may always fall back with confidence. It is a faithful Gospel from which they shrink; it is when the Gospel is applied to the condemnation of their peculiar sins that they exclaim, in dislike, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!" If this truth were duly considered, it would go far to explain what to many in the present day is a mystery, that there is very much preaching and little practical improvement; the wide circulation of a certain class of evangelised publications, and yet the headlong course of society—even professedly Christian society—towards evil, towards covetousness, cheating, lying, Sabbath-breaking, ungodliness, and oppression; and the steady progress of Romanism under the fostering care of Government, and with the tacit occurrence of the great mass of professing Christians. Somehow or other, the salt has lost its savour; and what is the cause?

The class of sermons and publications to which we refer profess to maintain a very high spiritual tone, and at the same time be adapted to all classes of people. The Bible is so adapted; but there is this wide difference, that the Bible, whilst proclaiming a free Gospel, does not shun to declare the whole counsel of God—it cries aloud against all evil; whereas the publications and sermons in question avoid all reference to matters, both of theory and practice, by which any considerable class in the so-called religious world might be offended, upon the plausible pretext that these are matters of doubtful disputation. Union is cried up

as the great desideratum—union at almost any price. Now, union is a matter of unspeakable importance; and there are many subordinate matters which ought not to stand in the way of the union, or, at all events, of the cordial united action, of true Christians; but this union must never be purchased by the sacrifice of vital and essential truth. Some one has said there are two kinds of union—the union of *freedom* and the union of *fusion*. Frost will unite as well as fire—it will unite all sorts of incongruous elements, but without expelling dross and rubbish; whereas the heat of Divine love, which is the only true element of Christian union, will, in the very act of uniting, tend to expel everything unworthy. The people of Christ are one in Him, but being one in Him, they all breathe His spirit. This is something very different from the compromising and calculating conforming to which we have referred—whose uppermost question is not, "What saith the Lord?" but, "How much of what the Lord says is it expedient for me to preach or publish?" The sovereignty of God, for example, in the salvation of sinners, is carefully shunned, because considerable classes of professing Christians might be offended. Original sin and eternal punishment are slightly treated. The kingly authority of Christ, which forms the very basis of the Apostolical Commission—"All power is given to me in heaven and upon earth: go ye, therefore, and teach all nations"—is cautiously avoided, out of regard to gainsayers who may hear the sermon or read the publication. For the same reason, the sin of allowing unsound or impure ministers and members to remain within the Church is seldom touched upon; the sin of worldly conformity; of the cruel oppression of the working classes by professing Christians in the rural and manufacturing districts; the sin of countenancing Parliamentary grants to Popery; of fraud and chicanery in commercial life: these are scarcely or never touched upon, so that the consciences of large classes of culprits who may hear the discourse or read the publication are never really probed. Is it unfair to say that this line of policy is dictated mainly by financial considerations—by a consciousness that an outspoken faithfulness in