

customs of Society tolerate? instead of what does the Lord require?—there is not a violation of a single moral principle that may not by a little familiarity come to be reckoned venial;—prevailing custom will give the tone to prevailing morality, and the divine rule will be suspended or lowered to the degeneracy of the times.

For another illustration of the deadening effect of mere custom upon the conscience, and of the mists which it scatters on the plainest cases of Christian obligation, we might select one or two particular duties resulting from Church-membership.—The church is the Lord's house—the Lord's kingdom—and the question should recur at every point to the children in that house, to the citizens of that kingdom, "What doth the Lord require of thee?"

He requires you to love it—the whole Church Catholic; and, as comprehending the chief sphere of your own duties, the nearest centre of your own affections, he requires you specially to love the particular branch of it with which you are connected by personal fellowship. This duty is declared and implied in such passages as these:—"Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it." "Love one another as I have loved you"—"We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." It is moreover implied in every figure by which the bond of Christian brotherhood is denoted. It is the house of God; love is the grand characteristic of its family. It is the kingdom of God; love is the source of loyalty, obedience, and homage to its king, and of opposition to all his enemies. It is the body of Christ; if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, for we are all members one of another. It is the sacred place in which the wells of salvation are opened; love is due to it, for there we drink

the waters of life, the stream that maketh glad the city of our God. From all this the voice of the Lord is abundantly clear. But what is the voice of custom? To what extent is this love observable in the prevailing practice? Many, doubtless, can truly say, "Lord, I have loved the habitations of thine house, and the people that are called by thy name."

I think of them in my prayers; I consult for their well-being; I rejoice in their prosperity; I am afflicted by every indication of spiritual decline; when contention arises I try to allay it; when disruption threatens I seek for the cement of unity and peace; when work is to be done, I am glad to co-operate; when sacrifices are to be made, I bear my part ungrudgingly; and my affection for the church and the brethren can find utterance in the words of Jewish patriotism, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." Thus some Christians love and express their love.

But these are the exceptions, we fear—the small remnant, the solitary ones, who ask, "What doth the Lord require of me?" The multitude, walking according to custom, are content with a much humbler standard. To come up to the house of prayer, at least once on the Sabbath, with a tolerable regularity; to call for the ordinances of the church when on special occasions they are deemed necessary; to present the annual tribute when it is demanded; is not this nearly the entire sum of obligation which custom owns to the church of Christ? For is it a general thing, even among members of the church, to love it,—its ordinances, its character, its well-being,—even as they love other and far inferior objects on which their affections are strongly