

of course, a growth in every living ministry; a growth from the weak uncertainty of infancy to the confirmed strength of perfect manhood; a growth in knowledge, comprehension, power, skill, insight, faith, and love; but whilst there is growth on all sides in a living ministry, growth is not in the dead. The increase of corruption is there the only change. This is, indeed, the enemy's sad mockery of growth; the development, within each false ambassador of Christ, of the character of Antichrist; ministry continues in its leading character as it commences. There is, the full ripening and perfecting of selfishness, in one of its various forms of covetousness, or lust, or worldliness, or utter sloth and carelessness; the contracting and the hardening of the soul; the dulling of all conscience, till it sleeps, to awake only in the terrible form of the worm which dieth not.

This, I say, is the ordinary law and rule of an unfaithful ministry. Instead of the man being made better, as the tempter whispers to you he will be, he is made worse by his careless rushing into Holy Orders. With them come new temptations and new requirements; new risks, that is, on both sides; and he has grace for neither; and so he falls, and falls lower than other men; falls, as perhaps he never would have fallen as a layman—falls, certainly, into deeper gulfs of sin and wo than he could otherwise have reached. God's Word, with which he must have some familiarity, like daily handled fire, hardens utterly his soul; God's message spoken, but not listened to, makes deaf his ear; the visions of judgment and of peace, on which he has gazed unfeelingly, have turned his sense of sight to blindness. And even if he reach not this depth of wo, there are many lesser woes for him who has entered with thoughtlessness upon this great charge. All—even the most thoughtful and prepared—find, it may be, as they go on, that they knew not whither they should be led, when first they began thus to be followers of Christ: His net caught them, and they were taken; His voice lured them, and they followed Him; but they knew not at first how verily they should be made like Him, made to drink of His cup and to baptized with His Baptism; on to this He leads them step by step; for this, day by day, His grace enables them; and so upheld, they can endure all things. But who can paint the bitter anguish through which they must pass, who, without a full trust in Him, and well-nigh without His presence, are met by these temptations, and overtaken in this storm? It is most commonly with a heart almost broken that such men pass to life: it is as by fire that they are saved. Surely, then, this is an awful answer for any of us to pronounce; and one concerning which it becomes us to search with all diligence whether we can make it with anything of Christian confidence and truth. Let us, therefore, for a few minutes go on to the consideration of this question,—When may we trust that we are inwardly called by the Holy Ghost to undertake this office.

Now it will help us to answer this question aright, if we first clear away some of the manifestly insufficient grounds on which men are led to make this choice. Clearly, then, it is not enough to choose it as men