

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS.

Study to be quiet, and to do your own business. 1 Thess. iv. 11.

A VERY good rule, or rather, two good rules! We all have our own business; most of us need to be told to mind it,—to give our minds to it and do it as it ought to be done. People all round us have their business, with which we have no right to meddle; most of us need to be warned back to our business. We are too ready to let our minds, and wills, and powers of one kind or another be abroad doing mischief, rather than at home doing useful work. After all, the rule may be said to be but one: for we have plenty of our own business to keep us at work, and if we mind that, even in any decent way, there will be no time, or strength left for interfering with our neighbours.

One word, to guard against mistake. It is not meant that any may live a selfish life, with no care for those who, with him, struggle through the difficulties of a hard world. It is part of our business to do all the good we can for others. When we help those in need, cheer the sad, and do what we are able, to make the lives of all good and hopeful for time and eternity, we mind a very real and important part of our business. This is part of our duty, and our training, meant to make us fit for higher trust hereafter. This is not forbidden, but commanded by the rule.

Perhaps, like many people, you spend a great deal of time and labour in finding out and talking over your neighbour's faults, and even harmless oddities. Sometimes you think you act from real interest in your neighbours, and wish for their good. Most often there is not even this pretence to give a fair name to what is mere impertinent meddling. How very much better to mind your own business! You have plenty of failings of your own, that unkind people laugh at, or blame you for, and which you might correct, so as to become pleasanter and happier. Mind your own business. Search out your own faults, and talk about them to your conscience and God, and perhaps to some wise guide, that you may mend them.

Perhaps you are fond of what is called controversy. You like to undermine the faith of others, and make them feel unsettled. Meanwhile, your own faith is perhaps weak, and sorely needs to be built up. Your first "business" is to see well to the foundation and state of your own faith. Men are indeed bound, if they can, to help others to gain full knowledge of the truth; but the best way to do this is to show that their faith is of God by the purity and gentleness it gives to their character and lives. "Mind your own business" is a good caution for those who would win converts. It does not tell in favour of any doctrines, that they make those who hold them scornful and offensive in words and manner.

When you go to church, what do you go for? Make up your mind about this, and mind your own business. You have quite enough to take up all your thoughts, and the whole force of your spiritual being. If you have sense enough to know anything of the meaning of going to church, you will own this. You come, face to face with God, Whom, by the very act of thus seeking His presence, you ask to look at, and to listen to you. You profess to have something to say to God, and to do before Him, and that you seek from Him, some gift for your soul. If you do not feel this, or something like it, or feel that you ought to feel this, and in an honest way, try to do so, you had far better go back from the church door. But, if you go in, mind your own business. Turn your eyes in upon your soul and up to God. Keep your thoughts fixed. The business is real, and unless you give your whole "mind" to it, you cannot do it to any good purpose. It is not your business to watch the people coming in, and to note what they wear. It is no business of yours to watch how they act in worship. They are before God, not before you. If they use more signs of outward reverence than you, that is not your business. Your business is to blame yourself, if you are so careless of what you are about as to see and remark them, and to take care that all you do, and say, and sing, comes from the heart, and has a meaning in God's ears. If they seem less outwardly reverent than you think right, you cannot see their heart, and if you could, it would be no business of yours to judge them. Be reverent yourself. What others do, or fail to do, need not distract you. Mind your own business, and you will have enough to make you too much occupied to be hindered. So, when you are in a strange church, and the clergyman does not stand, or look, or speak as you like, you are not come to watch him. Mind your own business.

So on in countless ways. What a world this might be, if each one felt that he had some business to mind, and minded it! There would be fewer complaints of failure in life, of worry and care. There would be far more work done, far more peace, and comfort, and religion. The secret of happiness and usefulness is indeed summed up in the simple advice, "Know what is your own business, and mind it."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS BEFORE ADULT BAPTISM.

I. You know the first question and its answer. The Church bids us renounce or forsake or give up three spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. We must "renounce them all." One of them is our spiritual and generally invisible enemy the devil or the host of evil angels. A harder duty is to forsake the companions in the world who lead us astray, to reject and keep ourselves safe from the evil influence, which comes to us, by way of precept or example, in our life at home, our school, our play, our work of every day. And the hardest of all is to give up the evil that is nearest of all, the "van thoughts" that "lodge within us" and even dwell there, the desires of our flesh, the sin that we would commit of ourselves, even without temptation from another. Yet all these three enemies in all their varied forms of assault we must forsake, and that in two ways,—we must not "follow them" when we see them before us or within our reach; and we must not be led by them, when they come to us, and try to get us into their power.

So far, you will observe, all is preliminary: it is a mere "beginning." The disciple has not yet entered into the school of Christ: he has only begun to reject other masters. And the impulse leading him so far may not be a clear sight of Christ as better than other lords that have had dominion over him. It may be that as yet he only feels that "the way of transgressors is hard," that sin is dangerous, that it produces sorrow here and threatens destruction hereafter.

II. The next question goes a step farther. The candidate is taught the doctrine of Christ as it is contained in the Creed. He learns to believe that God his Father made him, and, in spite of his sin, is his Father still, desiring his salvation, sending a Saviour. He learns that the Son of God has come to save him, a sinner, and that all things are now ready for the work of his salvation. He learns that the Holy Ghost has come to apply the work of salvation to him, by making him a member of Christ's Body, the Church, and giving him a share of the blessings named in the concluding words of the Creed.

"All this I steadfastly believe." Here is the expression of a true faith. The penitent does not "choose his own religion;" he believes "all;" he does not take the faith on trial, intending to seek afterwards for something better: he believes "steadfastly."

And with this faith repentance grows. A new experience of repentance is developed. It is now not only a renouncing of sin because of its own apparent evil, but on account of the goodness of God Who condemns it. The sight of sin as it is in the world leads naturally, in those that open their eyes, to "the sorrow of the world"—a gift not to be despised, though in itself imperfect, and, if it does not grow, working not life but "death." As the body without the spirit is dead: as faith without works is dead: so the sorrow of the world without godly sorrow is dead also. But as the body and the spirit are joined together by God; as man must not put asunder faith and works: so the two sorrows must come in their turn, and the first is of no avail without the second.

Thus it is the work of faith to complete the work of repentance. And when these two questions are answered with sincerity—when the penitent renounces all his sin and steadfastly believes all the truth—then is surely laid the doctrine of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God. It is well to have "so learned Christ."

III. The third question of the Baptismal service is this:—"Wilt thou be baptized in this faith?" And the answer is:—"That is my desire." Observe the attitude of the penitent now. He has all the qualifications necessary for admission as a "disciple." Now, "who can forbid water?" We must make him a disciple by "baptizing him," according to the Lord's instructions. He is fit for the next part of the learning of Christ, "the doctrine of baptism and of laying on of hands."

It is a momentous change. Before this, in the questions relating to repentance and faith, the penitent, though led by the Spirit doubtless, spoke of himself and of his own doings—I renounce, I believe. There is something in all this of man's work, disguise it as you will. But now if he says, "I" it is only to express a desire for something he has not: he no longer asserts what he is or what he has. He says not what he feels or does: he simply opens an empty hand to receive something which is beyond and above all human feeling and doing. He is simply answering the Lord's own question, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" And his answer is this, "Lord, that I may receive thy sight," I desire to be baptized, or as the Bible word for baptism is in one place, "illumination."—Hebrews x. 32.

It is done. "Darkness" is still on that soul, even though the Spirit of God be moving on the face of the deep waters. Faith and repentance! What can they do? Can such works save a man? Are they not, by reason of that which is human in them, mere

cords of vanity that cannot save them alive that are going down into the pit? Such cords indeed may be, nay by God's ordinance are, of use in "desiring" and seeking the blessing. But that blessing, when it comes, is of God and not of man in any sense.

Of what use are they, then? We shall see. "Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts, and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine arm-holes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so."—Jer. xxxviii. 11, 12.

Thus may we, thus must we, "sew pillows under all arm-holes," and with cords and clouts prepare for our rising to life. All our righteousness, it is true, are as filthy rags; all our faith and repentance, and all our other good works, are not to be called "good" in the highest sense; "for none is good but one, that is God;" and nothing is good but that which is His, and His alone. Yet with the help of such "old rotten" things as these must we give evidence of our own preparation for God's deliverance. They say, as plain as words can utter it, "That is my desire."

Burn no incense, then, to the net that draws you, with its cords and rags, out of the pit; but confess the power of the hand that does all the work. The Ethiopian Ebed-melech "changes not his skin;" Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And every day that any penitent comes to the waters of Baptism, Jesus Christ receives a disciple of His school, a sheep of His fold, a member of His Body.

IV. The fourth question follows naturally: "Wilt thou then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?" The answer is: "I will endeavour so to do, God being my helper."

Consider the meaning of this reply. It speaks of two things, man's endeavour and God's help.

We have seen something of man's endeavour already. By the mercy of God this endeavour has been shown chiefly in two things, faith and repentance. These endeavours must continue, and must result in acts of obedience.

But God's help, a special help must be added. Man needs "strengthening and refreshing" in his best estate, and that help God will give him. It will come in many ways, but chiefly in the Blessed Sacrament wherein God comes near to man's soul, and suffers man to draw near to Him. And it is at such times as this that the disciple learns most of Christ. By partaking of this Living Bread he is enabled to walk in the right way all the days of his life.

A SAD MISTAKE WITH CHILDREN.

The grand blunder which almost all parents and house-maids commit is that, when a child takes a whim against what he is wanted to do—will not eat his bread and butter, will not go out, will not come to lessons, etc.—they lay hold of him, and drag him on to his duties; whereas a person of tact will almost always attract the child's attention from its own obstinacy, and in a few minutes lead it gently round to submission. Many parents would think it wrong to break down the child's self-will by main force, to come to battle with him and show him that he is the weaker vessel; but my conviction is, that struggles only tend to make his self-will more robust. If you can skilfully contrive to delay the dispute for a few minutes and draw his thoughts off the excitement of the contest, ten to one he will give in quite cheerfully, and this is far better for him than tears and punishment.

A WAY TO BRING UP CHILDREN.

A VENERABLE lady now living in New York, who had ten children, all reared in cities, and brought up nine of them, all living at the present moment, having reached the adult age, never allowed any of them as children to eat anything between meals except dry bread, although she was wealthy and could just as easily have pampered every whim. Her constant reply was, when any of them demurred, "My dear, you are not hungry if you cannot eat dry bread." Now it is very certain that her children did not inherit remarkably robust constitutions, and under ordinary pampering of mothers, it is fair to suppose that many of them would have died or become puny men and women. When a child knows by experience that he can have nothing but bread between meals, he will not ask for it unless he really needs it, and then he will not take enough to destroy his keener appetite for the good things at the table, while, if he is allowed fruits and pastry, as so many children are, he will seldom come to his meals with a fine relish for food, and taking it without that relish, it fails to be rapidly assimilated, if indeed it does not enfeeble or derange the digestive functions.