

ply something useful and edifying. But too many, it is to be feared, go to Church for quite another purpose than to derive spiritual benefit from what they hear. Proud of what knowledge they may have acquired, or what shrewdness they believe themselves to possess, they delight far more to be accounted good judges of sermons, and to let it be understood that in matters of religion they are as wise as their teachers, than desire themselves to be fed with the sincere milk of the word. Falsely regarding a sermon as a mere oratorical display, and the preacher little better than an actor, they are led to erect a wrong standard of judgment and to overlook the main object of all preaching. In this respect however, it must be confessed that there is too much reason to fear that the conduct of some clergymen would seem to countenance, in some degree, such false notions of pulpit ministrations. By such teachers, whatever in religion is deemed obscure, curious, or out of the way, is diligently sought out, and made the theme of discourse. The Gospel is by such men decked out in the most gaudy colors—the world of nature ransacked for startling images and illustrations, and the truths of Christianity, so tricked out with meretricious ornament, that a St. Paul, were he alive at the present day, would scarcely recognize it as that in which he gloried, and by which the world was crucified unto him, and he unto the world. Amid such an imposing display of the wisdom of words, the real purpose and object of preaching must be altogether lost sight of. And wherever this exists, it must be acknowledged that it is a truly lamentable state of things, and a return to the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus is, in such circumstances, by all sincere Christians, a thing much to be desired.

6. If men would receive a blessing from the Lord, when they hear his word preached, they should pray to him, both before, in, and after every sermon, to endue the minister with power to speak and to grant them a will and ability to put in practice what he shall show to be their duty.

Without all this religion is vain. It degenerates into an empty, lifeless ceremony. The hearer should come to the house of God prepared as well as the preacher—prepared by suitable meditation, in order really to profit by what is said. Without this, as says our great national Bard, Scotia's own Burns, who, after all, had more sound views of Christianity than many who make greater pretensions—without this.

The Deity incensed the pageant will desert

The pompous train, and sacerdotal stole

But haply in some cottage, far apart,

May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul,
And in the Book of Life its minutes poor enrol.

THE CHURCH AT HOME.

Errors of the Day.

The two most dangerous and most destructive errors of the present day are Popery and Infidelity. That Popery is spreading there can be no doubt, but that it is spreading among those whom our popular polemics and lectures teach, I do not believe. We are all too prone to regard it in one aspect merely, as an exploded and crumbling system of superstitious hummeries, which no sensible man can possibly adopt, and of which the only distinctive characteristics are, the withholding the Bible from the laity, the worship of images, and those indul-

gences and absolutions by which an easy way to heaven can be bought. But is this the only phase of Popery which we have to encounter or fear? It is futile to say that Popery is unchanged. It may be in its essence, but who will say that it is so in its developments? Nay, the very strength of Popery consists in its marvellous power of adapting itself to every varied phase of human weakness and corruption.—Who will say that there is no difference between the morality of the Papal ecclesiastics of the age of Leo X. and that of those of the present day,—between Teitel selling indulgences, and the fervid zeal and self-sacrificing earnestness of many of the Jesuit missionaries, or of men like Wiseman, and Newman, and Manning, laboring with all the powers of their acute intellects and vast learning? To speak, then, of Popery as merely a system of absurd and childish superstition, which no man can embrace without almost forfeiting his claim to be accounted a rational being, is to miscalculate its strength. It is not a religion merely, it is a polity, and it has attractions and work for all the varying tastes, habits, and prejudices of mankind. We should, therefore, never forget its wide and varied adaptation to wants ineffaceable from the human heart,—its wonderful fusion of the supernatural with the natural,—its prodigious versatility combined with so much fixity,—its unvarying aim pursued with such ever-varying expedients,—its matchless dexterity in weaving together truth and error,—its faculty of concealing the deadliest weapons in the most attractive sheath,—its power of decoying a man into the most appalling slavery by offering to the restless discontented mind the bait of a haven of peace, to be found only in its communion, and its vast resources for a powerful hold on the conscience,—for if we do so we underrate its power, and mistake the quarter in which it is most likely to prevail which is not among the ignorant, but among the intellectual and the imaginative. We ought, therefore, to prepare ourselves for encountering this error in all ways, and not in one way merely, so that we may not give ground for the assertion that “prejudice and ignorance are the sole supports of the Protestant view.” Our coarse polemics are apt to do more harm than good. We should be prepared to meet it on its own speculative heights in the wide field of historic research and Scriptural exegesis, we should seek to trace its errors to their source, to shew how they arise, and how completely they are at variance with the teaching of Christ.

But Popery is not the only error we have to combat. A still more dangerous enemy is Infidelity, which is at present working such havoc. Education is advancing with such rapid strides, that now, instead of hearing, as we might have done sixty or seventy years ago, of the dangers of instructing the people, we hear of nothing but the dangers of ignorance. Then, the preacher was almost the only instructor,—for newspapers and books were scarce and dear. But reading is now universal, and books and papers deluge the land. This is well. But, like every other good it has its accompanying evil, for this literature, which circulates amongst the masses, is too often of the most pernicious description. In much of it “murder is openly advocated, all property declared to be robbery, marriage a dream of dotage, and law a mere device for enslaving mankind.” The consequence is, that in some of our large towns, many of the operatives and artisans openly profess infidelity. I speak not of the proletariat merely, of the dangerous classes,—I speak of the working classes, of

men who think, whose aspirations after knowledge are aroused, and who must find satisfaction of some kind. In proof of what I say, it is notorious that in Leeds, in Glasgow, and elsewhere, there have of late years been various public discussions, lasting for six or eight nights, in which the question discussed was, “What advantages would accrue to England generally and the working classes in particular, by the abolition of Christianity and the substitution of Secularism?”—that is atheism,—and we know that the affirmative has been maintained by a man of some powers and considerable fluency, and the applause of thousands of admirers.

The literature, too, more or less connected with infidelity, has an enormous circulation. Mr. Knight calculates that the publications of a decidedly noxious character amount to at least 29,000,000, annually, while in one manufacturing town alone there are sold 23,000 copies a-week of a blasphemous penny periodical. And let us not imagine that the infidelity of the present day is all of the same character as the coarse and vulgar blasphemy of Paine and Voltaire. A far more dangerous class of works is now in circulation. You have Strauss' life of Jesus, published in weekly penny numbers, the most dangerous works of F. Newman, Parker, and Hennel, sold in a cheap form as Tracts for the Times. These, remember, are the works of earnest men, who have canvassed the evidences of Christianity in a calm and philosophical spirit, eminently fitted to entangle the unwary and half educated. But the cheap periodical press is perhaps the most dangerous of all the foes of Christianity. In millions of its publications, religion is denominated a sham, a mere engine for keeping down the poor. The Bible and Christianity are represented as the enemies of all social and political reform, the Church as a contrivance for keeping the people in ignorance,—and the clergy as mere state tools, who care not for the poor. Socialism and secularism are held up as levers by which the working classes may be freed from their present hardships, and obtain a fair share of those profits of which they are at present defrauded. The aristocracy and the clergy, masters and capitalists, are represented as combining to enslave and to starve them. The writers, too, speak of themselves as the people's best and truest friends. Thus has infidelity gone among the working classes, loud in its sympathies, liberal in its professions, offering them deliverance from the hardships they suffer in this age of fierce and unscrupulous competition. They have thus secured a channel for the propagation of their infidel notions, and they have organized associations to which infidel lecturers declaim week after week unchecked and unanswered.

Now, these are facts which we must not ignore, nor must we forget that a great gulf separates the Church—I do not mean the Established Church only, though perhaps wider in regard to it, but all churches—from the masses. In London for example, the neglect of public worship by the working classes is almost universal. One city missionary tells us, that in a large district, he knew only twelve regular attenders at church, and another reckons them at twelve families out of a thousand. The Census confirms these lamentable statements regarding London and other large English towns. Nor in Scotland are we much better. We see from the Census, that there is a population of more than half a million which rarely enters a church door, and it shows us that this population resides chiefly in our large towns and in our manufacturing and mineral