

A SLEEPY CHURCH.

ZEAL without knowledge is a thing to be deplored. It often forms the burden of a charge brought, sometimes, we fear, not without reason, by the cool and cautious, against more active men, whose well meant blundering exhibits energy without discretion. But, in the present day, we hear so much of zeal without knowledge, that we are in danger of losing sight of the fact that there may be knowledge without zeal, and that the latter may be even more sinful than the former. There is a great deal of zeal in working which is highly—and may be properly—commended amongst us, whilst the kind of zeal commanded in the Epistle of Jude,—to “contend earnestly for the faith,”—is condemned as contrary to Christian charity, and destructive of the peace of the visible Church, the fact being overlooked that many wolves have crept into the fold, and are “corrupting” souls “from the simplicity that is in Christ.” Our critics tell us that such “contentious zeal will do no good: ’twere better to preach the truth and leave it to drive out the error.” Far be it from us to disparage the preaching of the truth, or to question the power of the Word, when wielded by faith as “the sword of the Spirit;” but we are led to ask: Is that the only weapon in the spiritual armoury? and, Has it hitherto produced the predicted result? We know full well that the tares and the wheat are to grow side by side in the field, until the harvest; but we cannot think that Scripture applies to the toleration of false teachers: that the patience of the Church is to be shown in “bearing them that are evil,” and in neglecting to “try them which say they are Apostles, and are not.” We do not so read the Lord’s message to the Church of Ephesus. This idea of letting things alone, for the sake of peace, has a soporific tendency. If Satan can only lull men to sleep with this narcotic, which produces a most pleasant kind of drowsiness, he knows that his work will go on apace, and the Epistle of Jude, or one verse of it, may be dropped out of the Bible. But, we believe,—and we thank God we can say it,—the heart of these well-intentioned Christians is awake, though the head be sleepy. Let us hope they may be soon thoroughly aroused, even though it require a rough shaking to do it. We speak, of course, of those who have spiritual life, and not of those who merely work from a higher state of nature than others. The lowest state of grace, however sunk in sleepiness, is better than that. We would further remind those who take an interest in controversy, that one sign or result of sleepiness in the Church, is the little power which the preaching of the Word has. Both pulpit and pew suffer alike; both seemed clouded and draped with this sleepy mantle. There is no unction in the sermon. No vibration of the soul at the name of JESUS. Instead of the fragrance of that name, as of ointment poured forth, there is simply the faintest shadow of perfume. There is little reality,—is there any?—in the transactions between the soul and God. Out of Church religious duties may be

carried on, but without any close walking with God. A little worldliness—it may be religious worldliness—creeps into the heart; obedience seems to spring more from a dry sense of duty than from the warmth of the first love; pride and ambition come in; pride—which shews itself, may be, in criticising others, who are unable to help in carrying out certain plans of work prescribed by the critics, because it would involve the abandonment of other work clearly prescribed by the providence of God. The spirit of slumber is apt to beset us all; we shall all do well to beware of it: it is an awful temptation. It is so easy to indulge the idea that the work, and the way we like best, is the right work for us to do, and the way which God marks out. There can be no contending earnestly for the faith when this is the case; though there may be plenty of preaching,—in the pulpit, and out of it,—in season and out of season. We believe there is abundant reason why we should take this warning to heart. Our position is critical. The wolves are busy—very busy in the fold, but the under shepherds take up the work they like best, rather than take the trouble of helping to drive them out. This may go on for a while, but ere long the mischief will become apparent, and perhaps irreparable. Pause a moment, and think: “What will ye do in the end thereof?”—*St. James Chronicle.*

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THE FESTIVALS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

IN the course of a thoughtful article on ‘Easter Week’ the *Methodist Recorder* says:—“It is not pure gain that our Christian festivals are times of national holiday. Holidays need not, it is true, cease to be holy days, but the cessation of regular work and increased opportunity for recreation is not, as a rule, favourable to devotion. Three out of four Bank Holidays of the year occur in connexion with the Christian festal seasons of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, and are chiefly associated with closed shops, crowded trains, and an unwonted difficulty of locomotion. Some churches will probably be fuller than usual, at least on the two former of these festivals, but for the greater part of the population these brief breathing spaces are not regarded as valuable because they allow larger facilities for church-going. We cannot wonder at this; we are not about to complain of it. The life of the factory, the shop, the office, is close, confining, and uninteresting. There are few enough opportunities for many who are employed in them to get away into the country for two or three days together, and religion “never was designed to make our pleasures”—such pleasures as these, at least—“less.” The happiness of domestic life at Christmas, the joy in the opening spring-time at Easter, the delight in the bloom and fuller life of nature at Whitsuntide, may all be made an offering to God, which the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will not disdain to accept. The keeping of days which is characteristic of High Churchmen,

whether Roman, Greek, or Anglican, is part of a system of religion which, in many of its aspects, does not commend itself to us. Ours is the freedom of the spirit, not the bondage of the letter; and we are in no danger of recording in our diary, as Mark Pattison tells us that he did in his Newmanite days, “Saint Remigius was transferred to-day.” St. Paul would have occasion still to say of many who call themselves Christians, “Ye observe days . . . I am afraid of you.” But is there not a danger among English Nonconformists of another extreme, a danger lest these Christian festivals should become merged in national holidays, and the higher associations of these sacred seasons be overborne by, and lost in, the rush after recreation? In a large proportion of Dissenting chapels no Divine worship is conducted on Good Friday. In many, a service will be held, but, instead of a devotional one, to pray,—

“My spirit to Calvary bear,
To suffer and triumph with Thee,”

it is found to be a miscellaneous, and not very orderly, “tea-meeting.” Without drawing a too hasty induction from partial observation, we think it not unnecessary to draw attention to the importance of a due, reverent, intelligent use of these great days in the Church year, great days as they ought to be in the calendar of every believer in the Christian verities. Ours is an historical religion. As such it is now constantly assailed; as such it must be no less vigorously defended. It will go ill with the time and the people when Christianity is regarded as a mere philosophy. There is nothing so stable, nothing so easily apprehended, as facts in history; nothing more significant, fruitful, far-reaching in its issues, than the facts of history upon which Christianity is based. The proportion of articles in the Apostle’s Creed which are of this character shows how the early centuries regarded the religion of Christ, and on the simple lines of that creed all our more elaborate ecclesiastical “symbols” are drawn up. Most wisely has the Church Catholic insisted upon the due commemoration of the great truths of our religion; and if Protestant bodies have found it needful to protest against some superstitious additions to the truth, if Dissenting bodies have found it needful to dissent from rites and practices of which they could not approve, neither protest nor dissidence is in place here. The history of the Presbyterian congregations in England in the last century, so many of which passed through Arianism to extreme Socinianism, teaches a lesson the moral of which is not far to seek. Now there may seem to be slight connexion between doctrinal heresy and a failure fully to observe Easter, and we have no desire to exaggerate the importance of our theme. But for the purposes of practical religion, these seasons should be made the most of by ministers and people. As the Lord’s Day is set apart that the spirit of service to God should rule the six days, so one Lord’s Day in the year is set apart that we may have an Easter Day in every week. It is not so easy for us to rise with Christ and set our