

AN OPEN RELIGION.

A DISCOURSE, BY REV. JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.

"This thing was not done in a corner."—Acts xxi. 25.

THE truly honest teacher conceals himself behind no curtain, mutters no incoherent incoherences, but walks openly in the sunny day and shows his heart alike to the keenest reader and the simplest child. This is precisely the case with Christianity. We are invited by Christianity to look upon disclosures as open as the sky, and to rest upon assurances which are as strong and simple as the rocks. Of Christianity we may say truly, "This thing was not done in a corner." It was not done when men were asleep; it was not huddled up, lest any man should detect a flaw in the process; it was done openly; there was brightness on every side—there was a challenge to every enemy. The holy books are not stowed away in some mouldy chamber, of which a mocking priest holds the rusty key. They are in the hands of the common people; they are written in our mother tongue; they are so cheap that the poorest man can buy them, and so small that the weakest child can carry them. All this I claim as pointing towards an argument in support of Christianity. The practical conclusion which I shall endeavour presently to urge is, that what is true of the doctrine and history of Christianity ought to be equally true of the individual professor, and of the whole body of Christ called the Church. There is to be nothing secret about it, nothing mean and underhanded, nothing curtailed and concealed. All is to be open, visible, transparent, that men can walk about it and see all its bearings. How true it is of the

doctrine of Jesus Christ, that there is nothing concealed and underhanded, let me remind you by a summary of facts, known to every child, but which often lose their weight by being regarded separately, and not in their unity and marvellous accumulation. See through what a process of preparation the world was put. There was no sign of suspicious haste. Promises were sown in the heart as good seed sown in good ground. Sinai itself was turned into a platform, from which the Almighty issued his commandments. Day and night, in the sweet spring and solemn harvest time, there was the reek of blood and the smoke of incense. Again and again men were raised up who could blow the trumpet loud and long and call the attention of the nation to silence and expectation. The mantle of the prophet and the harp of the minstrel were no strange sights in the land which then held the purest civilisation of the world. All this by way of pre-

paration. Men were taught to be in expectancy. As plainly as words could say it, was it declared that a final revelation was about to be made, and the keenest attention of the world was to be upon the alert. Then came the shining star—the star of Bethlehem, of which all other stars are but pale and bashful satellites. Then followed the singing angels, which seemed to fill up the space between earth and heaven, and to make both one. Then the child. Then the man Christ Jesus. Then miracles wrought in the sight of all the people; words spoken in the publicity of the mountain side and the shore of the sea. Secrecy, fear, impatience, self-consideration cannot anywhere be found. Then the Crucifixion under the eyes of the whole nation, mad with the wrath of hell, and the tomb watched as never was watched before the pillow of the dead. Then the Resurrection, which affrighted the stoutest hearts. Then the Ascension, which seemed to suck up with it all the hope of the world! And speedily after, in the midst of the great stillness, the stormy wind and the cloven fire of Pentecost; when men of different and far-off lands each heard in his own tongue the wonderful works of God.

"This thing was not done in a corner." Can any other religion show anything like this in width and splendour of publicity? All this publicity is but the practical side of a great argument, and applies to us in this day. For Christianity now is to be as distinct in its testimony as was the thunder of Sinai, and as obvious in its self-sacrifice as was the Cross of Calvary. There is a kind of publicity which is now happily done away—the publicity of martyrdom. But Christianity has passed even that trial. The miracles having gone, the martyrdoms came—greater works than the olden ones. Christians have suffered themselves to be led forth, to be made a spectacle to men and angels. They have quietly

submitted to be manacled and fettered and tied to the stake, and thrown to the beasts. Christianity has passed that stage, and pointing to it she can say to-day, in pleading before scrutinising and sceptical Agrippas, "This thing was not done in a corner, your majesties! It was done in the sunlight; done in the open spaces of creation." Christ demands of every man open testimony. Jesus Christ does not encourage men, anywhere, to be silent about their faith in Him and their love for Him. Everywhere He insists upon being identified. Nowhere does He lift the hand of deprecation, and say as He lifts it, "Be silent now; somebody is within hearing that will misunderstand your profession and your homage. Do not say anything just now." He says rather, "If ye hold your peace, the very stones will cry out." Again and again He invited men to be very clear in what they said about Him. He does not want any sneaking followers, that have as many faces as



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