

SOME THOUGHTS ON TRADITION.



HERE is nothing so much to be relied on as sound tradition, and nothing so much to be avoided as that which is false. But how are we to judge? how distinguish between true and false tradition?

In matter of religion the distinction ought to be and is easily found. The Jewish law was indeed a strict and heavy law. It was made heavier still by the false traditions which the Pharisees and other sects heaped upon it. But was there not a Priesthood whose essential duty it was to guard the law and provide that nothing untrue should be admitted? There was, indeed, such a Priesthood and by divine appointment. But it proved unfaithful, no promise having been given that it would be preserved against error. So completely had it betrayed its trust that its divine founder declared that it was acceptable to him no more, and that he would no longer have sacrifice or service from its hands.

As to tradition in secular matters it must be held to be true or false, must be accepted or rejected, according to the grounds of credibility which it presents.

Let us come now to that religious tradition which is a living voice in the Church. In order to appreciate this tradition we must consider it in its origin and its progress through the centuries. In its origin surely it was pure, having begun with the Apostles and Apostolic men in the Apostolic age. If it has come down to us untainted through so many centuries, we owe this wonderful preservation to the care and promise of our great Teacher, who is the *way, truth, and life*. He instituted a Priesthood that was destined to live and be true to its sacred trust throughout all time. This permanency and fidelity were secured by our Lord's unerring word which declared that he would be with the ministry which he founded *all days, even till the end of the world*, and that the gates of hell, that is, the powers of darkness, *should never be able to prevail against it*. In this ministry, therefore, we have a sure and faithful

guardian and interpreter of the word of God. Its necessity as an interpreter cannot be denied, for *no Scripture is of private interpretation*, and there are many things in the written word *that are hard to be understood, and which the unlearned and the unstable wrest to their own perdition*.

There are some points in our religion the knowledge of which we owe entirely to tradition. There is no warrant in the written word of God for the practice of baptizing infants. This practice, nevertheless, is universal. It is in honour not only among Catholics, who accept tradition, but also among all separated denominations excepting a sect called "*anti-pedobaptists*," or, more commonly for brevity's sake, "*Baptists*." To tradition, also, is due the custom, common to all who profess to be Christians, of keeping holy the first instead of the last day of the week. It is well known that Saturday was the Sabbath day when the command was given to sanctify the Sabbath, and continued to be so until Christianity was established. There is nothing in the New Testament to shew that this commandment was revoked and Sunday, the first day of the week, appointed to be observed. That such change was made in the Apostolic age, in honour of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, we know by tradition, and, as surely, as if it were written on every page of the sacred book.

It would appear from certain words in the New Testament that Christians are bound to abstain from the flesh of animals that are not thoroughly bled. From tradition we learn that there is no such obligation. They who reject tradition, therefore, ought to deal with the Jews for their supplies of animal food, or like the Jews, kill their own sheep and bullocks.

What respect must we not have for tradition and how confidently must we not rely upon it when we call to mind that it comes to us through such venerable fathers of the early Church as Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory the Great, Saint John Chrysostom and Athanasius, Origen, Tertullian, Saint Ignatius the