



PROGRESS AND PUBLICATION OF TRUTH.

BY HARRIET MARTINEAU.

It is as impossible for a man to prescribe to himself the faith of his future years, as for one age to prescribe the faith of a succeeding age: and for the same reasons. He may in his youth state an opinion in unambiguous terms, and with perfect sincerity, which, if he still hold, he cannot state in the same terms ten years after. The opinion may be substantially the same, and yet have such a bearing upon some other opinion, or may be so modified by some other opinion, that the same form of words may not express it fully, or perhaps correctly. It is yet more probable that the conceptions which are now attached to the terms are enlarged by his improved experience; so that, if he would declare the same truth, he must change his terms; or if he can conscientiously retain the terms, he must have modified his opinion. What enlightened, reflecting Christian understands exactly the same by any one parable, any one axiom, any one fact of Scripture that he did when he first admitted its truth? He believed it then; he believes it now,—but how differently since science has brought new evidence to light, since philosophy has developed its origin and tendencies, since experience has tested its truth, and faith invested it with a hallowed interest and an indelible beauty! How, therefore, is it possible for any one faithfully to engage that his views even of eternal truth shall never be modified? Witnessing, as every reflecting man does, the gradual evolution of truth from the vicissitudes of human experience, and from the successive dispensations and the progressive course of Providence, he may with safety declare that Gospel truth is immutable and divine; but he will avoid the presumption of supposing that all her rictives are already shed into his bosom, that her brightest light is poured upon his feeble eye. He will rather hope that his apprehension will continually become clearer, his powers invigorated, and his capacities enlarged, till his views of religious truth become as unlike what they were when first admitted, as the fair face of nature appears to the new-born infant and to the mighty poet. He will reject, as an infringement of his inalienable rights, every attempt to bind him down to engagements which it may not be in his power to fulfil. He will refuse to promise that his intellect shall remain stationary; and to permit that any individual, or council, or any church, shall usurp that spiritual influence which he trusts shall be immediately dispensed from the fountain of grace and truth. Desiring wisdom, he asks of God; not profaning and annulling his prayer by engaging to receive it only in certain measure; and if any church on earth interfere to prescribe the measure, he rejects the interference as unauthorised by the letter of the Gospel and condemned by its spirit.

Christian liberty comprehends an entire freedom from restraint in the publication of opinions. To his own master every man standeth or falleth, not only in the formation of his opinions, but in the use he makes of them when formed. According to his conscientiousness in seeking for truth, and not according to the accuracy of his judgment, will he be judged by God in forming his opinions; and when formed, he will be responsible, not for the rectitude of his influence, but for the rectitude of his intentions in exerting it. What a man believes to be the truth, it is his duty to declare in the method and degree which benevolence and prudence may point out to be the best. For what but this do we venerate the heroic Stephen, and every other martyr who bore witness to the truth in the early days of Christianity? Yet for what but this have Christians been led to the stake by Christians, age after age, under the pretended sanction of a religion of liberty and brotherly love? For what but this have Catholics and Protestants vied with each other in torturing in body and mind men whose conscience was omnipotent over the love of liberty and life, and who thus showed that, whether their intellect were or were not unfaithful, their souls were true to God? For

what but this are the lovers of truth even yet too often punished, directly or indirectly, for inviting others to participate in the benefits which they believe they have gained. Stephen was stoned because he was a heretic; Paul worshipped the God of his fathers according to a way which was then called heresy, and for which he was persecuted through life and unto death. Peter and John were brought before the high priest and rulers for publishing their heresy, and punished for refusing to cease to publish it. Yet has this their heresy prevailed; and thus shall every new truth prevail, and its promulgators be honoured, in despite of the wrath of man; while the more freely errors are canvassed, the sooner will they be exposed. What was once said with truth in relation to the Gospel of truth—"If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it"—may be said with equal wisdom of every other kind of truth: and the test of investigation is a much surer one than that which is furnished by the prejudices and the passions of men. There is no natural, no Divine law which sanctions the infliction of pain for the exercise of the intellect, or for communicating the results of that exercise; and that any human law or custom should have existed by which injury of mind, body, or estate is made the consequence of the formation and publication of opinions, is a proof that the natural rights of man have not been understood, and that the spirit of Christian liberty has not pervaded Christian society. As long as reproach is attached to the act of promulgating opinions (independent of the manner), as long as the holder of opinions is treated with the same reprobation as the opinions themselves, as long as he is prospectively consigned over to perdition as they are to detestation, as long as ideas of merit and demerit are associated with the convictions of the understanding, or blame is attached to the act of making those convictions known, not only will the subordinate principles of the Gospel remain in part unrecognised, but its essential principles will be violated; for it is clearly a duty of piety to reveal all that is believed to have been discovered of the works and ways of God; and of benevolence to communicate what, being conceived to be truth, is conceived to be intended for the universal benefit of the race.

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A SACRAMENTAL THOUGHT.

It was the Sabbath of the New Year, and the band of believers were gathered round the table of the Lord. A number made profession of their faith, received the water of Baptism and now were to partake of the sacred elements for the first time. A large number of the congregation, not members of the Church, remained during the Communion. Deep silence and solemnity pervaded the whole assembly.

The Pastor reminded them of the deep interest of the occasion. He spoke to the new communicants of the important meaning which this new year must have in their eyes. He then spoke of the warning which the season uttered, and the voice which came from the sacramental table. The beginning year tells of the flight of time and the perishableness of life and all earthly joys. The sacred elements speak of that which cannot die, they are the solemn symbol of the life that is eternal. The years, as they roll, sing the requiem of all human hopes, and mournful indeed must be the sound to those who cannot hear the voice of him who took from time and death the power to wound,—the voice which speaks from the Holy Emblems, with magic power to the believers' heart—"I am the Resurrection and the Life; whose liveth and believeth on me shall never die."—the voice which joins in with the sad dirge of departing years, and turns its sadness into sweet melody.

Hark, Hark! it seems to say  
Turn from such joys away  
To those which ne'er decay  
Though life is ending.

Above and around us hung the festive garlands with which we had but lately

adorned our church in honor of the Lord's Nativity. And while we were partaking the emblems of the body broken, and the blood shed for our sakes, we could not but look with deepest feeling at the memorials of the birth of him whose last supper and death we were now commemorating. The Holy Child appeared before us, as if in the lowly manger. And we thought of the wonderful contrast between the three scenes—the Manger, the Supper, the Cross.

I. THE MANGER.

Here lay the world's Saviour, the Son of God, and yet a weak infant, a child of mortality, and doomed to share the lot of mortals.

For thou wert born of woman! thou did'st come,  
Oh holiest! to this world of sin and gloom,  
Not in thy dread omnipotent array;  
And not by thunders strewed,  
Was thy tempestuous road;  
Nor indignation burnt before thee on thy way.  
But thee, a soft and naked child,  
Thy mother undefiled  
In the rude manger laid to rest,  
From off her virgin breast.

The Earth and Ocean were not hushed to hear  
Bright harmony from every starry sphere;  
Nor at thy presence broke the voice of song  
From all the cherub choirs,  
And seraph's burning lyres,  
Pour'd through the host of Heaven the charm'd  
clouds along.  
One angel troop the strain began,  
Of all the race of man  
By simple shepherds heard alone  
That soft Hosanna's tone.

As we gaze in imagination on the lowly child, shall we not pray that his life may be without sorrow? Shall we not ask of God, that the guileless heart may never know the world's iniquities, that brow may never be furrowed with life's cares, and those lips never be opened to answer any language except that of affection. Shall we not pray that the infant shall soon breathe its last in the arms of his mother, or if his life is to be prolonged, he may not be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?"

No! such should not be our prayer. The child is God's delegated Messiah, and he must go forth to battle with the powers of darkness, and gain the great victory over sin.

II. THE SUPPER.

The lowly child of the manger has gone forth to the work of his mission. He has spoken the word given him to speak, and worked the work given him to do. The heart, so quiet in infancy, has been pained sorely by knowledge of the world's sin; that brow so placid and bright in childhood, now bears the furrows of life's cares, and the pensive shadows of man's unkindness;—the lips, that once replied but to the accents of love, have been often called to speak words of stern rebuke and solemn exhortation. The head, that once rested on a mother's bosom, has felt the storm's rude blast, and has often found no shelter.

But as we contrast the Master at the Last Supper with the Infant in the Manger, shall we mourn at the contrast? No. But rather rejoice.

The Master has known the world's evil, and yet is as unshaken as when an infant upon his mother's bosom. The heart, that has known the world's sins and the might of the powers of death and darkness, is yet blessed by a faith, more deep and joyous than the spontaneous faith of childhood. The brow marked by life's cares and shaded by sad remembrances of unkindness, is yet calm with heavenly peace and shining with a light, not of this earth. The eyes, that have looked on so much wrong and misery are glowing with faith and love. The hand, that before was so helpless in the manger, has never been outstretched in anger or unkindness, and is now breaking the bread of life to the band of disciples. Those holy lips, more blessed than in quiet infancy, are now uttering those words of Heavenly Truth and Love, which have been the joy of the Church throughout the world. No! we will not mourn at the supper of the Lord; as we look at these festive garlands, that celebrate his birth. We will rather ex-

claim, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him."

The Son of God has known the world, and risen above it. With the full experience of humanity and yet the innocence of infancy, he sits in the company of his disciples. We will love these emblems of his Last Supper, more than the glad garlands of his Nativity.

III. THE CROSS.

But as we think of the mournful Cross, shall we not pray that the cup might pass away from him? While we join in the sacred Supper, shall we not lament, that the feast of love was the prelude to his death? While we think of the pangless infant, shall we not shudder at his impending fate, and pray that his feet might be saved from sad Gethsemane and Calvary? No, we will utter no such prayer. We will glory in our crucified Redeemer.

Full mournfully does the vision of childhood's placid hour contrast with that scene of agony—that brow crowned with thorns and wet with blood—those hands, ever stretched forth to relieve suffering, and so lately breaking the bread of life, now mailed to the fatal cross, as if still outstretched to plead for man—those lips, ever speaking words of love, true even in death to their office, commending his mother to his disciples' care, and his enemies to God's forgiveness—the head, that once leaned on that mother's bosom, now bowed in death, and in death radiant with conquering faith, and commending to God the fleeting spirit.

Oh, no! we will not mourn in anguish even at the Cross. Here the great work was finished. Sin vanquished, immortality won. Love is shown mightier than death. The powers of darkness are conquered. Death is found to be the gate to heaven. Truly it is finished. Thoughts of holier joy fill our mind in contemplating the Cross of agony than the Manger of untied innocence, or the Supper of love. Here let us glory in the death of Christ, whose emblems we now partake. Its memory gives new gladness to those Christmas garlands and mystic meaning to this Sacramental hour.

MOSAIC SIN OFFERINGS.

The Mosaic sin offerings were of the nature of a *mutel* or acknowledgment rendered, for unconscious or inevitable disregard of ceremonial liabilities, and contraction of ceremonial uncleanness. Such uncleanness might be incurred from various causes; and while unre-moved by the appointed methods of purification, disqualified from attendance at the sanctuary, and "cut off" "the guilty" "from among the congregation." To touch a dead body, to enter a tent where a corpse lay, rendered a person "unclean for seven days;" to come in contact with a forbidden animal, a bone, a grave; to be next to any one struck with sudden death; to be afflicted with certain kinds of bodily disease and infirmity; unwittingly to lay a finger on a person unclean; occasioned defilement, and necessitated a purification or an atonement.\* Independently of these offences, enforced upon the Israelite by the accidents of life, it was not easy for even the most cautious worshipper to keep pace with the complicated series of petty debts which the law of ordinances was always running up against him. If his offering had an invisible blemish; if he omitted a tithe, because "he wist it not;" or inadvertently fell into arrears, by a single day, with respect to a known liability; if absent from disease; he was compelled to let his ritual accumulate: "though it be hidden from him," he must "be guilty; and bear his iniquity;" and bring his victim.† On the birth of a child, the mother, after the lapse of a prescribed period, made her pilgrimage to the temple, presented her sin offering, and "the priest made atonement for her."‡ The poor leper, long banished from the face of men, and unclean by the nature of his disease, became a debtor to the sanctuary, and on return from his tedious quarantine, brought his lamb of atonement, and departed thence, clear from neglected obligations to his law.¶ It was im-

\* Num. xix. 11-20; Lev. xx. 25, 26; Num. vi. 9-12.  
† Lev. v. 14-19.  
‡ Lev. xii. 1-8.  
¶ Lev. xiv.