

DR. SPALDING'S REASONS FOR ENTERING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

REV. JAMES FIELD SPALDING, D. D., for the past twelve years rector of Christ Episcopal church, Cambridge, retired from the ministry of that church Sunday, Nov 29th and publicly announced his conversion to the Catholic faith.

Dr. Spalding has been a prominent and influential member of the Episcopal clergy, and the news of his change of religious faith has created widespread interest. His letter resigning the rectorship of the church was read to his congregation four weeks ago. Since that time the services have been conducted by other clergymen, Dr. Spalding not caring, in view of the step he was about to take, to continue in the practical work of the rectorship.

Sunday the church was crowded to the doors. At the close of the regular services, which were conducted by visiting clergymen, Dr. Spalding advanced to the front of the chancel and began his statement. It consumed fifty minutes in its delivery. It was spoken in a clear, firm voice, and in a manner that testified to the earnestness and sincerity of the speaker. The congregation listened with the deepest interest, drinking in every word which fell from the speaker's lips; and at the close of the service many of his old parishioners waited to take Dr. Spalding by the hand and assure him of their best wishes for the future.

Dr. Spalding's statement was as follows: I have not come here this morning to preach a sermon, and I do not formally announce a text; but if there were any words of scripture which I would like to put as an introduction to what I have to say, they would be those of St. Paul at his conversion.

"Who art thou, Lord?"

"Lord, what will thou have me to do?"

I have promised to tell you to-day my reasons, "personal and imperative," for resigning the rectorship of the parish. If this statement is somewhat long, bear with me patiently; it will be my last time of speaking to you. If I say some hard things I ask you beforehand to forgive me. Only for some weighty cause could I have brought such trouble upon myself; only for some weighty cause, loving and esteeming you as I do, would I have brought such distress upon you.

But, having done this, I must, as a duty to you and to myself, speak plainly to-day. Further, the very nature of the issue raised by my unexpected conduct is such that I realize that I am speaking, not only to you my parishioners, but to all whom my voice and words can reach.

To begin with, I would not have you suppose I have been hasty in taking the step of resigning, or in reaching the condition which I have in my own mind, and of which I am now about to tell you. I must be ready for the risk of misunderstanding, or even of aspersion, on this point. Some even now will think me hasty, others slow; and I must not wonder if the one class call me foolish, and the other hypocritical. I only quietly reply, in the words of the late Robert Isaac Wilberforce, in similar circumstances: "The mind, like the body, has its time of crisis, which it is not altogether in our own power to regulate." But I cannot call myself hasty in arriving at conclusions which it has taken me so many years to reach.

RATIONALISM, LIBERALISM AND FREETHINKING.

1. I will say at once that what first set me thinking in the direction which has resulted thus far in my giving up the rectorship was the rationalism, the liberalism, the freethinking, the unbelief in the Episcopal church and in the entire Anglican communion.

You must know that I would expect to find this rationalistic spirit existing in any body of Christians to some extent; for it is the working of human nature; and I have no such idea of the church as to suppose that the wheat and the tares would not be growing together. But when I came into the Episcopal church from Congregationalism, I did expect there would be stronger safeguards against the inroad of this spirit. For I believed I was coming into the true church of Christ, a true branch of the church. I was always from that day a high churchman. I believed in the divinely appointed ministry handed down by succession from the apostles, in the grace of sacraments, in the infallibility of the church; further, I accepted, in their entire fulness all the articles of the ancient creeds, and accordingly, believed with all my heart, in the Catholic doctrine of the incarnation, in the deity of Jesus Christ, in all the gospel record of the life of Jesus—His teaching, His miracles, His voluntary death of expiation for sin, His resurrection and ascension; and so, in general, in the presence and power of the supernatural in the world, and in Christianity, in all these ways thus understood, as the way and the only way of salvation for all to whom its message comes. And I may say just here, that I have never been permitted to doubt any of the great truths of the Christian faith, and I am most thankful that I can affirm to-day that I know nothing of the darkness of doubt—of the sense of drifting helpless upon the wide sea of intellectual scepticism—of willing or unwilling admission that there is no divine revelation to man, no church, no God! I have always believed firmly in all these; and in all connectedly; in God—in His many revelations to

himself—and in the church of Christ the climax of them all, wherein "God hath spoken to us in these last days by His Son."

The rationalistic spirit belongs, in a good sense, to us all. We have our intellect, our reason, as God's gift and we are bound to use it, in its legitimate sphere. If we had no supernatural revelation, we might truly say we are only to grope after God and find him as we could, by natural reason and conscience. But having such a revelation from God, in His church—the history of which is its own best witness to the world—we are not left to our own varied and conflicting thoughts of God and of ourselves, and in deciding the great question of belief and duty. The rationalistic spirit, in its bad sense, is the action of human reason, conscience, will, perverted and warped ever since the fall—that "terrible aboriginal calamity," as one calls it—and this action proceeding independently of God's supernatural revelation—variously opposing itself to the authority of God speaking in His church.

This rationalistic spirit, then, I think we all would own, has become greatly and increasingly prevalent in the Episcopal church. I say nothing now of other religious bodies; but it was the wonderful growth of this rationalism right among us, which some years ago set me thinking against all authority. Herein, as I have just tried to explain, is its root principle. It is utter freedom; it is individualism that will not be guided, and we all have seen it in this church, spreading and growing and branching out into the worst forms of latitudinarianism, even to the denial of the very foundation truths of Christianity. And the point with me was that it was unchecked; and so it went on from triumph to triumph. Whether I refer to the scouting of the doctrine of apostolic succession, or the so called higher criticism of holy Scripture, or the weakening of the doctrine of the incarnation, or the out and out denial of the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of our Lord, or making these truths only "matters of interpretation"—all, I claim, are in the same line—of liberalism. And I run no risk of being refuted, when I give it as my opinion, though with deepest sorrow, that these and other forms of liberalism are very widely received in the Episcopal church to-day; are becoming the standard teachings of schools of theology; are proclaimed from the pulpits of a multitude of our churches, and thus are taking possession of the hearts and minds of thousands of our people. Why is it not checked in common with many others I have asked again and again. Why do not the bishops, particularly, as the teaching power of the church, check these inroads, unless some of them themselves hold such ideas; or unless, as a body, they feel that they have no sufficient authority to prevent the tearing down of the ancient landmarks of the faith?

GIVING AWAY THE FAITH.

I might give many cases in proof of the march of this rationalistic spirit. I might cite writings by prominent English or American churchmen ranging in opinion all the way from Mr. Gore's essay in "Lux Mundi" to Canon Freemantle's "The World the Subject of Redemption," which entirely does away with church and ministry; or Howells' "The Broad Church; What is Coming?" which exalts in the promise of the near future, of an entire restoration of Christianity; or Heber Newton's books upon the Bible and the creed, which are so recent and well known that I need not characterize them here. Utterances, moreover of eminent men in sermons and lectures, and often on marked occasions, have been abundant and outspoken. Again and again have I heard a prominent clergyman of our church utter such sentiments as seemed to me to be generously giving away the faith. I remember hearing one say to a gathering of students: "We have a creed to-day: we may have none to-morrow"; or again, later compare the creed, in its use, to the last plank which saves the drowning man. I have heard a clergyman of largest influence among us declare that "there is no particular grace of the Holy Spirit given in the laying on of hands."

I have heard the whole notion of grace sneered at in a meeting of clergymen; and verily the example may have been found in a well-known book, written by one of our leading doctors of divinity, where grace is spoken of as "an impersonal thing or substance," which St. Augustine put into the place of the living Christ, to the "degradation of Christian theology." You remember, on the other hand, how St. Paul speaks of grace. I have heard, from a source which you would, perhaps, little think, the statement that "the grace of God was just as much given to Luther and Calvin for their work as to the holy apostles for theirs."

Some of you listened to a sermon at an ordination of deacons in June 1889, in which the idea of any sacred character conferred by ordination—by "the touch of the hand"—was ridiculed. And there sat the bishop in the chancel, ready to do what he had just been told he could not do!

In a course of lectures before a certain theological school, last year, we are reliably informed that the reconstruction of religious thought was boldly entered upon, in setting aside from the doctrine of the atonement all such crude conceptions as substitution and expiation; in doing away with the orthodox idea of the work of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the Bible; and in giving place to the prophetic utterances of many "uncanonical" inspired writers of the nineteenth century!