

in Protestant lands, Romanism appeared to be satisfied with quiet and undisturbed toleration.— But that day is past, and notwithstanding the weakness of the Men of Sin, so far as temporal dominion and political power are concerned, he is now putting forth the most strenuous efforts to extend his spiritual authority. And what is more to be deplored, the soul-deluding errors of Romish superstition are propagated, not merely by the open and avowed adherents of that system, but by some who ought to feel themselves bound by the most solemn obligations to vindicate the great doctrines of the Protestant Faith, and to lift up a decided testimony against the corrupt and fallen Church of Rome. The doctrines to which we allude (called sometimes Puseyite or Tractarian) are propagated with extraordinary zeal. They are proclaimed from the pulpit; they are published through the medium of the press, they are supported by the weight of Episcopal authority; and these efforts have not been in vain, for, while not a few ministers of the Protestant faith have sought refuge in the Church of Rome, there is too good reason to believe that multitudes of their people have taken the same step—have renounced the faith we delivered to the saints, and have adopted the errors and delusions of Popery. And it is to be feared that many more are infected with the spirit and tainted with the leaven of Popery. For the great object of Popery is to hide Christ, to obscure the great doctrines of the Gospel, to substitute the Church and its ordinances for the Saviour and his work, to interpose something between God and the sinner, and to bring down the authority of God's Word and exalt the authority and power of man. And it is much to be feared that many have imbibed the spirit of such doctrines, while they are strangers to the power of the Gospel.— When we mention these things let it not be said that we are speaking of what does not concern ourselves. We have to do with whatever concerns the Church of Christ at large, or any branch of it in its spiritual character as a Church. We seek not to be busy-bodies in other men's matters, nor in the matters of other churches; but we feel that we are concerned in whatever is connected with Gospel truth. As individuals it becometh us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. And it surely becometh us as Churches to sympathise with each other, to rejoice when the truth is maintained, and not to be indifferent and silent when it suffers, or when its interests are compromised. But we, ourselves, are exposed to these very dangers and errors. Romanism is busy in our own land, and many who hear us know that efforts are not wanting, both secret and more open, to gain proselytes to their views, and to spread in our own congregations the leaven of Popish and Puseyite errors. When we think, then, of the progress of these errors, and consider how diametrically they are opposed to the doctrines of the Gospel, we may well tremble for the Ark of God. Some, in their wisdom, may affect to think lightly of the progress of these errors, but no one, in our humble judgment, can attentively view them in connection with the past history of Popery without anxious thoughts, and without being led to tremble for the Ark of God.

3. We may with good cause tremble for the Ark of God, when we reflect upon the low state of spiritual religion among our people, and our own unfaithfulness in the service of our Lord and Master. We have already alluded to the wide prevalence of vice and immorality. But although for these things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience, these are not the only things which draw down the anger of Jehovah. Even where there is no outward departure from scriptural doctrine, and no remarkable immorality, there may still be spiritual coldness and deadness. There may be a form of godliness where its power is not felt. The faith of the Gospel may be professed, while it has no place in the heart, no hold of the affections, no influence

on the principles. Now, such a state of things is to be regarded as highly displeasing to God, and peculiarly calculated to draw down his holy indignation. This was the state of the Lutheroan Church. We do not find that it was charged with any open departure from the faith, or with any special immorality. But the members of that Church were lukewarm; they were in a state of spiritual insensibility and deadness, and on this account they incurred the indignation of God. And is not this peculiarly the state of the Church in our day and in our own land? Even where ordinances are dispensed with regularity, is there not a lamentable want of spiritual life and of true religion? Do not many of our congregations resemble the People's Valley of Dry Bones? There may be the outward elements of a church, but the vital principle is scarcely perceptible. The preaching of the Word is to a great extent without fruit.— Lukewarmness and deadness seem to have settled upon those who profess to be the disciples of Christ. Family and personal devotion, missionary zeal, and Christian love are in most quarters at a very low ebb, and worldliness is so prevalent, that from an outward inspection of the conduct and practices of individuals, it could scarcely be told who were the professed followers of Christ, and who were still the avowed votaries of the world.

And Fathers and Brethren, can we, whom God hath put into the ministry, free ourselves from all responsibility in this matter? Have we not great cause to mourn over our unfaithfulness and guiltiness as Christian ministers? With what readiness have our preparations for our work been often conducted? With what formality have we often engaged in our work? How little wrestling with God has there been with us?— What fear of man has there been on the one hand, and what self-seeking on the other?— what want of love and tenderness has there been in our warnings and exhortations?— how low has been our standard of personal holiness and devotedness? And in our solemn meetings in a presbyterial and synodical capacity, how little have we done to exhibit the influence of the Gospel, and to show how sweet and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity? Alas, the cause of our Lord and Master has suffered grievously at our hands. In many ways we have grieved the Holy Spirit of God. And when we call these things to remembrance, we may well tremble for the Ark of God amongst us. It was, no doubt, chiefly a sense of guilt, a remembrance of his own sins that made Eli tremble. And, when we contemplate the spiritual darkness around us, and think of our own guilt in the sight of God, have we not good reason to tremble, and to fear lest the great Head of the Church reject us, and withdraw from us entirely the light of his countenance?

4. Other things might be mentioned calculated to make us tremble for the Ark of God, but we shall not occupy your time with an enumeration of them. But before passing from this part of our subject, we may allude to one thing which may be justly regarded as a ground of apprehension for the cause of truth at the present day.— we have reference to those errors on the subject of the atonement and other kindred subjects, which are prevailing so much at the present time. The present is peculiarly an age of free inquiry. Intellect is unlettered, and every subject is discussed with unrestrained freedom. Many advantages have no doubt resulted from this spirit of the age. But it is to be lamented that in not a few quarters, there is a tendency to remove or unsettle the old landmarks, and to deviate from the good old paths into ways that are supposed to be more smooth and easy. There is a tendency in many quarters unduly to extend the province of reason in judging of revealed truth, and to bring down every doctrine to the level of the human intellect. Of late years, the great scriptural doctrines concerning the nature, design, and extent of the atonement, have been either boldly rejected or ingeniously explained away, and another Gospel set forth than that which the Apostles

taught and the Reformers preached. It has been taught, but, not merely in regard to the intrinsic value and sufficiency, but in regard to its design and effect, the atonement of Christ is of universal extent,—that all are placed in what is termed a salvable state, and that nothing is required to make us partakers of salvation but the exercise of our own inherent ability to believe, even without any subjective work of the spirit. These are in themselves errors, and grievous errors; and they bring in others in their train of a still more serious nature, and present new views of the work of Christ, of the operations of the Holy Spirit, and of the natural state of man. And they are at the same time peculiarly dangerous. They flatter the pride of the self-conceited, who imagine that no extent of knowledge is too high for them. And they have attractions also for perplexed and anxious enquirers, who are assured by the advocates of these views, of a short and easy way to the attainment of spiritual peace and comfort. These views are propagated with unflinching zeal and fervour. But when we reflect that their natural and direct tendency is to exalt man, to make him independent of the influences and operations of the blessed Spirit, and to make him in a sense his own Saviour, we cannot but tremble for the result, if they are extensively received.

11. Having thus pointed out some grounds that we have for trembling for the ark of God, we would now proceed in the second place to point out some of the duties which peculiarly become the faithful servants of God in the times and circumstances in which we are placed. And we shall not trespass long on your attention, but will content ourselves with offering a few brief hints for the consideration of those who hear us. If we are indeed the true and faithful servants of God we cannot but feel a deep interest in everything connected with the welfare and safety of the Church; and it ought to be a serious question with us all, what are our peculiar duties in the circumstances in which in the providence of God we are placed. In endeavouring to give an answer to this question we would observe in the first place that it becometh us all to be deeply humbled before God, on account of the state of religion amongst us. If religion is in a low state, if error and vice abound, we have all some degree of responsibility. And if we really belong to the people of God, we will be led to sigh and cry for all the iniquities and abominations that are committed amongst us as a community. But it becometh us not only to sigh and cry for the abominations committed by our fellow-creatures, but to mourn for our own sins. We have all personal sins to confess and to mourn over before God, sins as ministers, office-bearers and members of the Church. Have we not in many things offended and come short of the glory of God?— Have we not been careless in keeping our vineyards? Have we not all by our unfaithfulness grieved the spirit of God? Surely if the danger of the ark of God recalled to Eli's mind the recollection of his personal guilt, the critical circumstances of the Church in our day should call our sins to our remembrance, and lead us to deep humiliation and earnest self-examination.

2. But, secondly, it becometh us and all the faithful servants of God, by a steadfast adherence to the Gospel truth, and faithful performance of all incumbent duties, to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the Saints. If like Eli, we feel deeply anxious for the ark of God, our anxiety will be manifested by corresponding conduct. Sometimes anxiety and fear have the effect of paralyzing all the powers and faculties of those who are under their influence. But it must not be so with us. It becometh us not to fold our hands and sit down in indolence and inglorious ease, when the cause of God is in peril, but as the soldiers of Jesus Christ, to gird on our spiritual armour and fight the good fight. While on the one hand we must take heed lest Uzziel-like we give a wrong touch to the ark, we must