

COMING EVENTS

AND

PRESENT DUTIES.

BEING MISCELLANEOUS SERMONS

OF

PROPHETICAL SUBJECTS.

ARRANGED, REVISED, AND CORRECTED, BY

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PREFACE.

THE volume now in the reader's hands requires a few introductory words of explanation.

It contains little that is entirely new. It consists of eight sermons, delivered on public occasions, at various intervals during my ministry, and afterwards published in the form of tracts. Of these sermons, one or two have perhaps obtained a greater circulation than they deserved, while one or two, in my humble judgment of more real worth, have received comparatively little notice. They are now brought together in their present form, for the convenience of those who wish to have a manual of my views of prophecy, in a compact state.

At the very outset I warn the reader of these pages that he will find here nothing deep or abstruse. I have purposely avoided everything that can be called speculative or conjectural. I have strictly confined myself to a few great prophetic principles, which appear to me written as it were with a sunbeam. I have not attempted to expound such portions of God's Word as Ezekiel's temple, or the symbolical visions of Revelation. I have not ventured to fix any dates. I have not tried to settle the precise order or manner in which predictions of things to come are to be fulfilled. There is nothing I dislike so much in prophetic inquiry as dogmatism or positiveness. Much of the discredit which has fallen on prophetic study has arisen from the fact that many students instead of expounding prophecy have turned prophets themselves.

If anyone asks me what my prophetic opinions are, I am quite ready to give him an answer. Cautious and doubtful as I feel on some points, there are certain great principles about which I have fully made up my mind. I have held by them firmly for many years, and have never had my opinion shaken about them. I have lived in the belief of them for more than a third of a century, and in the belief of them I hope to die. The older I grow, the more do I feel convinced of their truth, and the more satisfied am I that no other principles can explain the state of the Church and the world.

One thing only I wish to premise, before making my statement. The reader must distinctly understand that I do not put forth my prophetic views as articles of faith, but only as my private opinions. I do not say that nobody can be saved who does not agree with me about prophecy. I am not infallible. I am very sensible that holier and better men than myself do not see these subjects with my eyes, and think me utterly mistaken. I condemn nobody. I judge nobody. I only ask liberty to hold and state distinctly my own views. The day will decide who is right. It is the new heart, and faith in Christ's blood, which are absolutely necessary to salvation. The man who knows these two things experimentally may be wrong about prophecy, but he will not miss heaven.

The following, then, are the chief articles of my prophetic creed:—

I. I believe that the world will never be completely converted to Christianity by any existing agency, before the end comes. In spite of all that can be done by ministers, churches, schools, and missions, the wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest; and when the end comes, it will find the earth in much the same state that it was when the flood came in the days of Noah. (Matt. xiii. 24-30; xxiv. 37-39.)

II. I believe that the wide-spread unbelief, indifference, formalism, and wickedness,

which are to be seen throughout Christendom, are only what we are taught to expect in God's Word. Troublous times, departures from the faith, evil men waxing worse and worse, love waxing cold, are things distinctly predicted. So far from making me doubt the truth of Christianity, they help to confirm my faith. Melancholy and sorrowful as the sight is, if I did not see it I should think the Bible was not true. (Matt. xxiv. 12; 1 Tim. iv. 1; 2 Tim. iii. 1, 4, 13.)

III. I believe that the grand purpose of the present dispensation is to gather out of the world an elect people, and not to convert all mankind. It does not surprise me at all to hear that the heathen are not all converted when missionaries preach, and that believers are but a little flock in any congregation in my own land. It is precisely the state of things which I expect to find. The Gospel is to be preached "as a witness," and then shall the end come. This is the dispensation of election, and not of universal conversion. (Acts xv. 14; Matt. xxiv. 14.)

IV. I believe that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is the great event which will wind up the present dispensation, and for which we ought daily to long and pray. "Thy kingdom come,"—"Come, Lord Jesus,"— should be our daily prayer. We look backward, if we have faith, to Christ dying on the cross, and we ought to look forward no less, if we have hope, to Christ coming again. (John xiv. 3; 2 Tim. iv. 8; 2 Peter iii. 12.)

V. I believe that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be a real, literal, personal, bodily coming; and that as He went away in the clouds of heaven with His body, before the eyes of men, so in like manner He will return. (Acts i. 11.)

VI. I believe that after our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, the earth shall be renewed, and the curse removed; the devil shall be bound, the godly shall be rewarded, the wicked shall be punished; and that before He comes there shall be neither resurrection, judgment, nor millennium, and that not till after He comes shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. (Acts iii. 21; Isa. xxv. 6-9; 1 Thess. iv. 14-18; Rev. xx. 1, etc.)

VII. I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own land, and converted to the faith of Christ, after going through great tribulation. (Jer. xxx. 10, 11; xxxi. 10; Rom. xi. 25, 26; Dan. xii. 1; Zech. xiii. 8, 9.)

VIII. I believe that the literal sense of Old Testament prophecies has been far too much neglected by the Churches, and is far too much neglected at the present day, and that under the mistaken system of *spiritualizing and accommodating* Bible language, Christians have too often completely missed its meaning. (Luke xxiv. 25, 26.)

IX. I do not believe that the preterist scheme of interpreting the Apocalypse, which regards the book as almost entirely *fulfilled*, or the futurist scheme, which regards it as almost entirely *unfulfilled*, are either of them to be implicitly followed. The truth, I expect, will be found to lie between the two.

X. I believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the great predicted apostasy from the faith, and is Babylon and antichrist, although I think it highly probable that a more complete development of antichrist will yet be exhibited to the world. (2 Thess. ii. 3-11; 1 Tim. iv. 1-3.)

XI. Finally, I believe that it is for the safety, happiness, and comfort of all true Christians, to expect as little as possible from Churches or Governments under the present dispensation,—to hold themselves ready for tremendous convulsions and changes of all things established,—and to expect their good things only from Christ’s second advent.

The student of prophecy will see at a glance that there are many subjects on which I abstain from giving an opinion. About the precise time when the present dispensation will end,—about the manner in which the heathen will be converted—about the mode in which the Jews will be restored to their own land,—about the burning up of the earth,—about the first resurrection,—about the rapture of the saints,—about the distinction between the appearing and the coming of Christ,—about the future siege of Jerusalem and the last tribulation of the Jews,—about the binding of Satan before the millennium begins,—about the duration of the millennium,—about the loosing of Satan, at the end of the thousand years,—about the destruction of Gog and Magog,—about the precise nature and position of the new Jerusalem,—about all these things, I purposely decline expressing any opinion. I could say something about them all, but it would be little better than conjecture. I am thankful that others have more light about them than I have. For myself, I feel unable at present to speak positively. If I have learned anything in studying prophecy, I think I have learned the wisdom of not “making haste” to decide what is true.

I am well aware that the views I have laid down appear to many persons very gloomy and discouraging. The only answer I make to that charge is this:—Are they Scriptural? Are they in accordance with the lessons of history and experience?—To my mind they certainly are. I see human failure and human corruption stamped on the conclusion of all dispensations preceding our own. I see much in the present state of the world to make me expect that the present dispensation will not end better than those which have gone before. In short, there seems an inherent tendency to decay in everything that man touches. There is no such thing as creature perfection. God is teaching that lesson by all His successive modes of dealing with mankind. There will be no perfection till the Lord comes. The Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian dispensations all tend to prove this. Those words of Scripture shall yet be verified, “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him.” (Ezek. xxi. 27.) When the Lord Jesus comes back to earth, and the tabernacle of God is with men, then will there be perfection, but not till then God will have all the glory at last, and all the world shall confess that without God man can do nothing. God shall be “all in all.” (1 Cor. xv. 28.)

The one point on which I desire to fix the eyes of my own soul, is the second personal coming of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To that “blessed hope and glorious appearing,” I wish, by God’s help, to direct all who read this volume. God forbid that anyone should neglect present duties! To sit idly waiting for Christ, and not to attend to the business of our respective positions, is not Christianity, but fanaticism. Let us only remember in all our daily employments, that we serve a *Master who is coming again*. If I can only stir up one Christian to think more of that second coming, and to keep it more prominently before his mind, I feel that the volume will not have been published in vain.

If anyone ask me why I have chosen this particular period for the re-publication of

these prophetic tracts, I think it is sufficient answer to point to the times in which we live. I do not forget that we are poor judges of our own days, and are very apt to exaggerate their importance. But I doubt much whether there ever was a time in the history of our country, when the horizon on all sides, both political and ecclesiastical, was so thoroughly black and lowering. In every direction we see men's hearts "failing for fear, and for looking for those things that seem coming on the earth." Everything around us seems unscrewed, loosened, and out of joint. The fountains of the great deep appear to be breaking up. Ancient institutions are tottering, and ready to fall. Social and ecclesiastical systems are failing, and crumbling away. Church and State seem alike convulsed to their very foundations, and what the end of this convulsion may be no man can tell.

Whether the last days of old England have really come,—whether her political greatness is about to pass away,—whether her Protestant Church is about to have her candlestick removed,—whether in the coming crash of nations England is to perish like Amalek, or at length to be saved, and escape "so as by fire,"—all these are points which I dare not attempt to settle: a very few years will decide them. But I am sure there never was a time when it was more imperatively needful to summon believers to "cease from man," to stand on their watch-towers, and to build all their hopes on the second coming of the Lord. Happy is he who has learned to expect little from Parliaments or Convocations, from Statesmen or from Bishops, and to look steadily for Christ's appearing! He is the man who will not be disappointed.

J. C. RYLE.

*Stradbroke Vicarage,
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P.S. The reader of this volume will probably observe that some of the thoughts and ideas are occasionally repeated. They will kindly remember that this arises from the sermons which comprise it having been delivered at different places, and at long intervals. I have thought it best and wisest, for many reasons, to reprint them without alteration.

IDOLATRY TO BE DESTROYED AT CHRIST'S COMING.*

"The idols He shall utterly abolish."—ISAIAH ii. 18.

THE time here spoken of will be plain to all who take the prophecy of Isaiah in its literal meaning. It is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,—the day when "He ariseth to shake terribly the earth." The event is part of that mighty purification which will then take place in His professing Church—the abolishing of all idols; and the principal subject which claims your consideration in the text is idolatry.

Without further preface, I desire to ask your attention to the four following points:—

I. *The definition of idolatry.* WHAT IS IT?

II. *The cause of idolatry.* WHENCE COMES IT?

III. *The form idolatry assumes in the visible Church of Christ.* WHERE IS IT?

IV. *The ultimate abolition of idolatry.* WHAT WILL END IT?

I feel that the subject is encompassed with many difficulties. Our lot is cast in an age when truth is constantly in danger of being sacrificed to toleration, charity, and peace falsely so called. Nevertheless, I cannot forget that I am a minister of a Church which has given no uncertain sound on the subject of idolatry; and, unless I am greatly mistaken, truth about idolatry is, in the highest sense, truth for the times.

I. Let me, then, first of all set before you *the definition of idolatry*. Let me show you WHAT IT IS.

It is of the utmost importance that you should understand this. Unless I make this clear, I can do nothing with the text. Vagueness and indistinctness prevail upon this point, as upon almost every other in religion. The Christian that would not be continually running aground in his spiritual voyage, must have his channel well buoyed, his mind well stored with clear definitions.

I say then, that "*idolatry is a worship, in which the honour due to God in Trinity, and to Him only, is given to some of His creatures, or some invention of His creatures.*" It may vary exceedingly. It may assume exceedingly different forms, according to the ignorance or the knowledge—the civilization

* This Lecture was one of a course delivered during Lent, 1851, at St. George's, Bloomsbury.

or the barbarism, of those who offer it. It may be grossly absurd and ludicrous, or it may closely border on truth, and admit of being most speciously defended. But whether in the adoration of the idol of Juggernaut, or in the adoration of the host in St Peter's at Rome, the idolatrous principle is in reality the same. In either case the honour due to God is turned aside from Him, and bestowed on that which is not God. And whenever this is done, whether in heathen temples or in professedly Christian Churches, there is an act of idolatry.

You must bear in mind that it is not necessary for a man formally to deny God and Christ in order to be an idolater. Far from it. Professed reverence for the God of the Bible and actual idolatry are perfectly compatible. They have often gone side by side, and they still do so. The children of Israel never thought of renouncing God when they persuaded Aaron to make the golden calf. "These be thy gods," they said (thy Elohim), "which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." And the feast in honour of the calf was kept as a "a feast unto the Lord" (Jehovah). (Exod. xxxii. 4, 5.) Jeroboam, again, never pretended to ask the ten tribes to cast off their allegiance to the God of David and Solomon. When he set up the calves of Gold in Dan and Bethel, he only said, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy Gods, O Israel (thy Elohim), which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." (1 Kings xii. 28.) In both instances, you will observe the idol was not set up as a rival to God, but under the pretence of being a help—a stepping stone to His service. But, in both instances, you know well, a great sin was committed. The honour due to God was given to a visible representation of Him. The majesty of Jehovah was offended. The second commandment was broken. There was, in the eyes of God, a flagrant act of idolatry.

I ask you to mark this, my brethren. I ask you to dismiss from your minds those loose ideas about idolatry, which are common in this day. Think not, as many do, that there are only two sorts of idolatry—the spiritual idolatry of the man who loves his wife or child or money more than God; and the open, gross idolatry of the man who bows down to an image of wood, or metal, or stone, because he knows no better. Depend upon it, idolatry is a sin that occupies a far, far wider field than this. It is not merely a thing in Hindostan, that you may hear of and pity at missionary meetings; nor yet is it a thing confined to your own heart, that you may confess before the mercy-seat upon your knees. It is a pestilence that walks in the Church of Christ to a much greater extent than many of you suppose. It is an evil that, like the Man of sin, "sits in the very temple of God." (2 Thess. ii. 4.) It is a sin that we all need to watch and pray against continually. It creeps into our religious worship insensibly, and is upon us before we are aware. Those are tremendous words which Isaiah spoke to the formal Jew—not to the worshipper of Baal, remember, but to the man who actually came to the temple (Isa. lxvi.

3): “He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense as if he blessed an idol.”

This is that sin, remember, which God has especially denounced in His Word. One commandment out of ten is devoted to the prohibition of it. None of all the ten contain such a solemn declaration of His character and of His judgments against the disobedient: “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me.” (Exod. xx. 5.) None, perhaps, of all the ten is so emphatically repeated and amplified, and especially in the fourth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy.

This is the sin of all others which has brought down the heaviest judgments on the visible Church. It brought on Israel the armies of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. It scattered the ten tribes, burned up Jerusalem, and carried Judah and Benjamin into captivity. It brought on the Eastern Churches, in later days, the overwhelming flood of the Saracenic invasion, and turned many a spiritual garden into a wilderness. The desolation which reigns where Cyprian and Augustine once preached—the living death in which the Churches of Asia Minor and Syria are buried—are all attributable to this sin. All testify to the same great truth which the Lord proclaims in Isaiah, “My glory will I not give to another.” (Isa. xlii. 8.)

Gather up these things in your mind, beloved brethren. Be very sure that idolatry is a subject which in every Church of Christ that would keep herself pure, should be thoroughly examined, understood, and known.

II. Let me show you, in the second place, the cause to which idolatry may be traced. *WHENCE COMES IT?*

To the man who takes an extravagant and exalted view of human intellect and reason, idolatry may seem absurd. He fancies it too irrational for any but weak minds to be endangered by it.

To a mere superficial thinker about Christianity, the peril of idolatry may seem very small. Whatever commandments are broken, such a man will tell us, professing Christians are not very likely to transgress the second.

Now, both these persons betray a woeful ignorance of human nature. They do not see that there are secret roots of idolatry within us all. The prevalence of idolatry in all ages among the heathen must necessarily puzzle the one,—the warnings of Protestant ministers against idolatry in the Church must necessarily appear uncalled for to the other, since both are alike blind to its cause.

The cause of all idolatry is the natural corruption of man’s heart. That great family disease, with which all the children of Adam are born, shows itself in this, as it does in a thousand other ways. Out of the same fountain from which “proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts,

covetousness, wickedness, deceit,” and the like (Mark vii. 21, 22),—out of that same fountain arise false views of God, and false views of the worship due to Him; and, therefore, when the Apostle Paul tells the Galatians (Gal. v. 20) what are the “works of the flesh,” he places prominently among them “idolatry.”

A religion of some kind man will have. God has not left Himself without a witness in us all, fallen as we are. Like old inscriptions hidden under mounds of rubbish,—like the almost-obliterated underwriting of Palimpsest manuscripts,—even so there is a dim *something* engraven at the bottom of man’s heart, however faint and half-erased,—a *something* which makes him feel he must have a religion and a worship of some kind. The proof of this is to be found in the history of voyages and travels in every part of the globe. The exceptions to the rule are so few, if, indeed, there are any, that they only confirm its truth. Man’s worship in some dark corner of the earth may rise no higher than a vague fear of an evil spirit, and a desire to propitiate him, but a worship of some kind man will have.

But then comes in the effect of the fall. Ignorance of God, carnal and low conceptions of His nature and attributes, earthly and sensual notions of the service, which is acceptable to Him, all characterize the religion of the natural man. There is a craving in his mind after something he can see, and feel, and touch in his Divinity. He would fain bring His God down to his own crawling level. He would make his religion a thing of sense and sight. He has no idea of faith and spirit. In short, just as he is willing to live on God’s earth, but until renewed by grace, a fallen and degraded life, so he has no objection to worship after a fashion, but, until renewed by the Holy Ghost, it is always with a fallen worship. In one word, idolatry is a natural product of man’s heart. It is a weed, which like the earth uncultivated, the heart is always ready to bring forth.

And now does it surprise you, when you read of the constantly recurring idolatries of the Old Testament Church,—of Peor, and Baal, and Moloch, and Chemosh, and Ashtoreth,—of high places and hill altars, and groves and images,—and this in the full light of the Mosaic ceremonial? Cease to be surprised. It can be accounted for. There is a cause.

Does it surprise you, when you read in history, how idolatry crept in by degrees into the Church of Christ,—how little by little it thrust out Gospel truth, until, in Canterbury, men offered more at the shrine of Thomas á Becket, than they did at that of the Virgin Mary, and more at that of the Virgin Mary, than at that of Christ? Cease to be surprised. It is all intelligible. There is a cause.

Does it surprise you, when you hear of men going over from Protestant Churches to the Church of Rome, in the present day? Do you think it unaccountable, and feel as if you yourself could never forsake a pure form of

worship for one like that of the Pope? Cease to be surprised. There is a solution for the problem. There is a cause.

That cause is nothing else but the deep corruption of man's heart. There is a natural proneness and tendency in us all to give God a sensual, carnal worship, and not that which is commanded in His Word. We are ever ready to frame for our sloth and unbelief, visible helps and stepping-stones in our approaches to Him, and ultimately to give these inventions of our own the honour due to Him. In fact, idolatry is all natural, down-hill,—easy, like the broad way. Spiritual worship is all of grace, all up-hill, and all against the grain. Any worship whatsoever is more pleasing to the natural heart, than worshipping God, in the way our Lord Christ describes, “in spirit and in truth.” (John iv. 23.)

I, for one, am not surprised at the quantity of idolatry existing both in the world, and in the visible Church. I believe it perfectly possible that we may live to see more of it yet, than some have ever dreamed of. It would never surprise me, if some mighty personal Antichrist were to arise before the end,—mighty in intellect, mighty in talents for government, aye, and mighty perhaps in miraculous gifts too. It would never surprise me to see such a one as him setting up himself in opposition to Christ, and making an Infidel combination against the Gospel. I believe that many would rejoice to do him honour, who now glory in saying, “We will not have this Christ to reign over us.” I believe that many would make a god of him, and reverence him as an incarnation of truth, and concentrate their idea of hero-worship on his person. I advance it as a possibility, and no more. But of this at least I am certain, that no man is less safe from danger of idolatry, than the man who now sneers at every form of religion; and that from Infidelity to credulity, from Atheism to the grossest idolatry, there is but a single step. Think not, at all events, beloved brethren, that idolatry is an old-fashioned sin, into which you are never likely to fall. “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” Look into your own hearts. The seeds of idolatry are all there.

III. Let me show you, in the third place, the forms which idolatry has assumed, and does assume in the visible Church. WHERE IS IT?

I believe there never was a more baseless fabric than the theory which obtains favour with many, that the promises of perpetuity and preservation from apostacy, belong to the visible Church of Christ. It is a theory supported neither by Scripture, nor by facts. The Church against which the gates of hell shall never prevail, is not the visible Church, but the whole body of the elect, the company of true believers out of every nation and people. The greater part of the visible Church has frequently maintained gross heresies. The particular branches of it are never secure against deadly error, both of faith and practice. A departure from the faith,—a falling away,—a leaving of first love in any branch of the visible Church, need never surprise a careful reader of

the New Testament.

That idolatry would arise, seems to have been the expectation of the Apostles, even before the canon of the New Testament was closed. It is remarkable to observe how St. Paul dwells on this subject in his Epistle to the Corinthians. If any Corinthian called a brother was an idolater, with such a one the members of the Church were not to eat. (1 Cor. v. 11.) “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of our fathers.” (1 Cor. x. 7.) He says again, “My dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.” (1 Cor. x. 14.) When he writes to the Colossians, he warns them against “worshipping of angels.” (Coloss, ii. 18.) And St. John closes his first Epistle with the solemn injunction, “little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (1 John v. 21.) It is impossible not to feel that all these passages imply an expectation that idolatry would arise, and that soon, among professing Christians.

The famous prophecy in the fourth chapter of the first Epistle to Timothy contains a passage which is even more directly to the point: “The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” (1 Tim. iv. 1.) I will not detain you with any lengthy discussion of that remarkable expression, “doctrines of devils.” It may be sufficient to say, that our excellent translators are considered for once to have missed the full meaning of the Apostle, in their rendering of the word translated as “devils” in our version, and that the true meaning of the expression is, “doctrines about departed spirits.” And in this view, which, I may as well say, is maintained by all those who have the best right to be heard on such a question, the passage becomes a direct prediction of the rise of that most specious form of idolatry, the *worship of dead saints*.

The last passage I will call your attention to, is the conclusion of the ninth chapter of Revelation. We there read, at the twentieth verse: “The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues, yet repented, not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils” (mark, this is the same word as that in the Epistle to Timothy, just quoted), “and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.” Now, I am not going to offer any comment on the chapter in which this verse occurs. I know well there is a difference of opinion as to the true interpretation of the plagues predicted in it. One thing I venture to assert, that it is the highest probability these plagues are to fall upon the visible Church of Christ; and the highest improbability, that St. John was here prophesying about the heathen, who never heard the Gospel. And this once conceded, the fact that idolatry is a predicted sin of the visible Church, does seem most conclusively and for ever established.

And now, if we turn from the Bible to facts, what do we see? I reply unhesitatingly, that there is unmistakeable proof that Scripture warnings and

predictions were not spoken without cause, and that idolatry has actually arisen in the visible Church of Christ, and does still exist.

The rise and progress of the evil in former days, you will find well summed up in the admirable Homily of our own Church, on Peril of Idolatry. To that Homily I beg to refer you, reminding you once for all, that in the judgment of your own Thirty-nine Articles, the Book of Homilies “contains a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times.” There you will read, how, even in the FOURTH CENTURY, Jerome complains, “that the errors of images have come in, and passed to the Christians from the Gentiles;” and Eusebius says, “We do see now that images of Peter and Paul, and of our Saviour himself be made, and tables be painted, which I think to have been derived and kept indifferently by an heathenish custom.”—There you will read, how “Pontius Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, in the *fifth century*, caused the walls of the temples to be painted with stories taken out of the Old Testament; that the people beholding and considering these pictures, might the better abstain from too much surfeiting and riot—But from learning by painted stories, it came by little and little to idolatry.”—There you will read how Gregory the First, Bishop of Rome, in the beginning of the *seventh century*, did allow the free having of images in churches.—There you will read how Irene, mother of Constantine the Sixth, in the *eighth century*, assembled a council at Nicæa, and procured a decree that “images should be put up in all the churches of Greece, and that honour and worship should be given to the said images.” And there you will read the conclusion with which the Homily winds up its historical summary,—“that laity and clergy, learned and unlearned, all ages, sorts, and degrees of men, women, and children of whole Christendom, have been at once drowned in abominable idolatry, of all other vices most detested of God, and most damnable to man, and that by the space of 800 years and more.”

This is a mournful account, beloved brethren, but it is only too true. There can be little doubt the evil began even before the time just mentioned by the Homily writers. No man, I think, need wonder at the vice of idolatry in the primitive Church who considers calmly the excessive reverence which it paid, from the very first, to the visible parts of religion. I believe that no impartial man can read the language used by nearly all the Fathers about the Church, the bishops, the ministry, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the martyrs, the dead saints generally—no man can read it, without being struck with the wide difference between their language and the language of Scripture on such subjects. You seem at once to be in a new atmosphere. You feel that you are no longer treading on holy ground. You find things which, in the Bible, are evidently of second-rate importance, are here made of first-rate importance. You find the things of sense and sight exalted to a position in which Paul, and Peter, and James, and John, speaking by the Holy Ghost,

never for a moment placed them. It is not merely the weakness of uninspired writings that you have to complain of; it is something worse: it is a new system. And what is the explanation of all this? It is, in one word, that you have got into a region where the malaria of idolatry has begun to arise. You perceive the first workings of the mystery of iniquity. You detect the buds of that huge system of idolatry which, as the Homily describes, was afterwards formally acknowledged, and ultimately blossomed so luxuriantly in every part of Christendom.

But let us now turn from the past to the present. Let us examine the question which most concerns ourselves. Let us consider in what form idolatry presents itself to us as a sin of the visible Church of Christ in our own time.

I find no difficulty in answering this question. I feel no hesitation in affirming that idolatry never yet assumed a more glaring form than it does in the Church of Rome at this very day.

And here I come to a subject on which it is hard to speak, because of the times we live in. But the whole truth ought to be spoken by ministers of Christ, without respect of times and prejudices. And I should not lie down in peace, after preaching on idolatry, if I did not declare my solemn conviction, that idolatry is one of the crying sins of which the Church of Rome is guilty. I say this in all sadness. I say it, acknowledging fully that we have our faults in our own Church; and practically, perhaps, in some quarters, not a little idolatry. But formal, recognized, systematic idolatry, I believe we are free from at all events. While, as for the Church of Rome, if there is not in her worship an enormous quantity of systematic, organized idolatry, I frankly confess I do not know what idolatry is.

To my mind, it is idolatry to have images and pictures of saints in churches, and to give them a reverence for which there is no warrant or precedent in Scripture. And if this be so, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

To my mind, it is idolatry to invoke the Virgin Mary and the saints in glory, and to address them in language never addressed in Scripture except to the Holy Trinity. And if this be so, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

To my mind, it is idolatry to bow down to mere material things, and attribute to them a power and sanctity far exceeding that attached to the ark or altar of the Old Testament dispensation; and a power and sanctity, too, for which there is not a tittle of foundation in the Word of God. And if this be so, with the holy coat of Treves, and the wonderfully-multiplied wood of the true cross, and a thousand other so-called relics in my mind's eye, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

To my mind, it is idolatry to worship that which man's hands have made,—to call it God, and adore it when lifted up before our eyes. And if

this be so, with the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the elevation of the host in my recollection, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

To my mind, it is idolatry to make ordained men mediators between ourselves and God, robbing, as it were, our Lord Christ of His office, and giving them an honour which even Apostles and angels in Scripture flatly repudiate. And if this be so, with the honour paid to Popes and priests before my eyes, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

I know well that language like this jars the minds of many. Men love to shut their eyes against evils which it is disagreeable to allow. They will not see things which involve unpleasant consequences. That the Church of Rome is an erring Church, they will acknowledge. That she is *idolatrous*, they will deny.

They tell us, that the reverence which the Romish Church gives to saints and images does not amount to idolatry. They inform us, that there are distinctions between “latria” and “dulia,” between a mediation of redemption, and a mediation of intercession, which clear her of the charge. My answer is, that the Bible knows nothing of such distinctions; and that, in the actual practice of the great bulk of Roman Catholics, they have no existence at all.

They tell us, that it is a mistake to suppose that Roman Catholics really worship the images and pictures before which they perform acts of adoration; that they only use them as helps to devotion, and in reality look far beyond them. My answer is, that many a heathen could say just as much for his idolatry;—that it is notorious, in former days, they did say so;—and that in Hindostan many idol-worshippers do say so at the present day. But the apology does not avail. The terms of the second commandment are too stringent. It prohibits *bowing down*, as well as worshipping. And the very anxiety which the Church of Rome has often displayed to exclude that second commandment from her catechisms, is of itself a great fact which speaks volumes to a candid observer.

They tell us that we have no evidence for the assertions we make on this subject; that we found our charges on the abuses which prevail among the ignorant members of the Romish communion; and that it is absurd to say, that a Church containing so many wise and learned men, is guilty of idolatry. My answer is, that the devotional books in common use among Roman Catholics supply us with unmistakable evidence. Let any one examine that notorious book, “*The Garden of the Soul*” if he doubts my assertion, and read the language there addressed to the Virgin Mary. Let him remember that this language is addressed to a woman, who, though highly favoured, and the mother of our Lord, was yet one of our fellow-sinners,—to a woman, who actually confesses her need of a Saviour for herself. She says, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” (Luke i. 47.) Let him examine this language in the light of the New Testament, and then let him tell us fairly, whether the

charge of idolatry is not fully made out. But I answer, besides this, that we want no better evidence than that which is supplied in the city of Rome itself. What do men and women do under the light of the Pope's own countenance? What is the religion that prevails around St. Peter's and under the walls of the Vatican? What is Romanism at Rome, unfettered, unshackled, and free to develop itself in full perfection? Let a man honestly answer these questions, and I ask no more. Let him read such a book as Seymour's "Pilgrimage to Rome," or Alford's Letters, and ask any visitor to Rome if the picture is too highly coloured. Let him do this, I say, and I believe he cannot avoid this conclusion, that Romanism in perfection is a gigantic system of Mary-worship, saint-worship, image-worship, relic-worship, and priest-worship; that it is, in one word, a huge organized idolatry.

Brethren, I know not how these things sound to your ears. To me it is no pleasure to dwell on the shortcomings of any who profess and call themselves Christians. I can say truly, that I have said what I have said with pain and sorrow.

I draw a wide distinction between the Church of Rome and the private opinions of many of her members. I believe and hope that many a Roman Catholic is in heart inconsistent with his profession, and is better than the Church to which he belongs. I cannot forget the Jansenists, and Quesnel, and Martin Boos. I believe that many a poor Italian at this day is worshipping with an idolatrous worship simply because he knows no better. He has no Bible to instruct him. He has no faithful minister to teach him. He has the fear of the priest before his eyes if he dares to think for himself. He has no money to enable him to get away from the bondage he lives under, even if he feels a desire. I remember all this, and I say that the Italian eminently deserves our sympathy and compassion; but all this must not prevent my saying that the Church of Rome is an idolatrous Church.

I should not be faithful if I said less. The Church of which I am a minister has spoken out most strongly on the subject The Homily on Peril of Idolatry, and the solemn protest following the Rubrics, at the end of our Communion Service, which denounces the adoration of the sacramental bread and wine as "idolatry to be abhorred of all faithful Christians," are plain evidence that I have told you no more than the mind of my own Church. And in a day like this, when some are disposed to secede to the Church of Rome, and many are shutting their eyes to her real character and wanting us to be reunited to her,—in a day like this, my own conscience would rebuke me if I did not warn men plainly that the Church of Rome is an idolatrous Church, and that if they will join her they are "*joining themselves to idols.*"

But I may not dwell longer on this part of my subject. The main point I wish to impress on your minds is this, that idolatry has decidedly manifested itself in the visible Church of Christ, and nowhere so decidedly as in the

Church of Rome.

IV. And now let me show you, in the last place, the ultimate abolition of all idolatry. WHAT WILL END IT?

I consider that man's soul must be in an unhealthy state, who does not long for the time when idolatry shall be no more. That heart can hardly be right with God which can think of the millions who are sunk in heathenism, or honour the false prophet Mahomet, or daily invoke the Virgin Mary, and not cry, "O my God, what shall be the end of these things? How long, O Lord, how long?"

Here, as in other subjects, the sure word of prophecy comes in to our aid. The end of all idolatry shall one day come. Its doom is fixed. Its overthrow is certain. Whether in heathen temples, or in so-called Christian Churches, idolatry shall be destroyed at the second coming of our Lord Christ.

Then shall be fulfilled the prophecy of our text: "The idols He shall utterly abolish;"—so also the prophecy of Micah (v. 13): "Their graven images also will I cut off, and their standing images out of the midst of thee, and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands—so also the prophecy of Zephaniah (ii. 11): "The Lord will be terrible unto them: for He will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship Him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen;"—so also the prophecy of Zechariah (xiii. 2): "It shall come to pass at that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered." In a word, the 97th Psalm shall then receive its full accomplishment: "The Lord reigneth: let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the people see His glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship Him, all ye gods."

Brethren, the coming and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is that blessed hope which should ever comfort the children of God under the present dispensation. It is the pole-star by which we must journey. It is the one point on which all our expectations should be concentrated. "Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Our David shall no longer dwell in Adullam, followed by a despised few, and rejected by the many. He shall take to Himself His great power, and reign, and cause every knee to bow before Him.

Till then our redemption is not perfectly enjoyed; as Paul tells the Ephesians, "We are sealed unto the day of redemption." (Eph. iv. 30.) Our salvation is not completed; as Peter says, "We are kept by the power of God

through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Pet. i. 5.) Our knowledge is still defective; as Paul tells the Corinthians: “Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; then shall I know even also as I am known.” (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) In short, our best things are yet to come.

But in the day of our Lord’s return every desire shall receive its full accomplishment. We shall no more be pressed down and worn out with the sense of constant failure, feebleness, and disappointment. In His presence we shall find there is a *fulness* of joy, if nowhere else; and when we awake up after His likeness we shall be *satisfied*, if we never were before.

There are many abominations now in the visible Church, over which we can only sigh and cry, like the faithful in Ezekiel’s day. (Ezek. ix. 4.) We cannot remove them. But a day comes when Jesus shall once more purify His temple, and cast forth everything that defiles. He shall do that work of which the doings of Hezekiah and Josiah were a faint type long ago. He shall cast forth the images, and purge out idolatry in every shape.

Who is there among you that longs for the conversion of the heathen world? You will not see it in its fulness until the Lord’s appearing. Then, and not till then, will that often misapplied text be fulfilled: “A man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats.” (Isa. ii. 20.)

Who is there among you that longs for the redemption of Israel? You will never see it in its perfection till the Redeemer come to Zion. Idolatry in the professing Church of Christ has been one of the mightiest stumbling-blocks in the Jew’s way. When it begins to fall, the veil over the heart of Israel shall begin to be taken away. (Psalm cii. 16.)

Who is there among you that longs for the fall of Antichrist, and the purification of the Church of Rome? I believe that will never be until the winding up of this dispensation. That vast system of idolatry may be consumed and wasted by the spirit of the Lord’s mouth, but it shall never be destroyed excepting by the brightness of His coming. (2 Thess. ii. 8.)

Who is there among you that longs for a perfect Church—a Church in which there shall not be the slightest taint of idolatry? You must wait for the Lord’s return. Then, and not till then, shall we see a perfect Church—a Church having neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing (Eph. v. 27)—a Church of which all the members shall be regenerate, and every one a child of God.

Brethren, if these things be so, you will not wonder that we urge on you the study of prophecy, and that we charge you above all to grasp firmly the glorious doctrine of Christ’s second appearing and kingdom. This is the light shining in a dark place to which you will do well to take heed. Let others

indulge their imagination if they will, with an imaginary “Church of the future.” Let the children of this world dream of some “coming man,” who is to understand everything, and set everything right. They are only sowing to themselves bitter disappointment. They will awake to find their visions baseless and empty as a dream. It is to such as these that the Prophet’s words may be well applied: “Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.” (Isa. i. 11.)

But let your eyes look right onward to the day of Christ’s second advent. That is the only day when every abuse shall be rectified, and every corruption and source of sorrow completely purged away. Waiting for that day, let us each work on and serve our generation; not idle, as if nothing could be done to check evil, but not disheartened because we see not yet all things put under our Lord. After all, the night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us wait, I say, on the Lord.

And surely, if these things be so, you will not wonder that we warn you to beware of all leanings towards the Church of Rome. Surely, when the mind of God about idolatry is so plainly revealed to us in His Word, it seems the height of infatuation in any one to join a Church so steeped in idolatries as the Church of Rome. To enter into communion with her, when God is saying, “Come out of her, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues” (Rev. xviii. 4),—to seek her when the Lord is warning us to leave her,—to become her subjects when the Lord’s voice is crying, “Escape for thy life, flee from the wrath to come,”—all this is mental blindness indeed,—a blindness like that of him who, though forewarned, embarks in a sinking ship,—a blindness that would be almost incredible, if our own eyes did not see examples of it continually.

We must all be on our guard. We must take nothing for granted. We must not hastily suppose that we are too wise to be ensnared, and say, like Hazael, “Is Thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?” We who preach must cry aloud and spare not, and allow no false tenderness to make us hold our peace about the heresies of the day. You who hear must have your loins girt about with truth, and your minds stored with clear prophetic views of the end to which all idol-worshippers must come. Let us all try to realize that the latter ends of the world are upon us, and that the abolition of all idolatry is hastening on. Is this a time for a man to draw nearer to Rome? Is it not rather a time to draw further back and stand clear, lest we be involved in her downfall? Is this a time to extenuate and palliate Rome’s manifold corruptions, and refuse to see the reality of her sins? Surely we ought rather to be doubly jealous of everything of a Romish tendency in religion,—doubly careful that we do not connive at any treason against our Lord Christ,—and doubly ready

to protest against unscriptural worship of every description. Once more, then, I say, remember that the destruction of all idolatry is certain, and remembering that, beware of the Church of Rome.

And now it only remains for me to conclude what I have been saying, by mentioning some safeguards for your own souls. You live in a time when the Church of Rome is walking amongst us with renewed strength, and loudly boasting that she will soon win back the ground that she has lost. False doctrines of every kind are continually set before you in the most subtle and specious forms. It cannot be thought unseasonable if I offer you some practical safeguards against idolatry. What it is, whence it comes, where it is, what will end it, all this you have heard. Let me point out how you may be safe from it, and I will say no more.

(1) Arm yourselves, then, for one thing, with a thorough knowledge of the Word of God. Read it more diligently than ever. Become familiar with every part of it. Let it dwell in you richly. Beware of anything which would make you give less time, and less heart, to the perusal of its sacred pages. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit;—let it never be laid aside. The Bible is the true lantern for a dark and cloudy time;—beware of travelling without its light. I strongly suspect,—if we did but know the secret history of those secessions from our Church to that of Rome, which we deplore,—I strongly suspect that in almost every case one of the most important steps in the downward road would be found to have been a neglected Bible,—more attention to forms, sacraments, daily services, primitive Christianity, and so forth, and diminished attention to the written Word of God. The Bible is the King's highway. Once leave that for any by-path, however beautiful and old and frequented it may seem, and never be surprised if you end with worshipping images and relics.

(2) Arm yourselves, in the second place, with a godly jealousy about the least portion of the Gospel. Beware of sanctioning the slightest attempt to keep back any jot or tittle of it, or to throw any part of it into the shade by exalting subordinate matters in religion. It seemed a small thing that Peter did when he withdrew himself from eating with the Gentiles, but Paul tells the Galatians, "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." (Gal. ii. 11.) Count nothing little that concerns your soul. Be very particular whom you hear, where you go, and what you do, in all the matters of your own particular worship. Care nothing for the imputation of squeamishness and excessive scrupulosity. You live in days when great principles are involved in little acts, and things in religion, which fifty years ago were utterly indifferent, are now by circumstances rendered indifferent no longer. Beware of tampering with anything of a Romanizing tendency. It is foolishness to play with fire. I believe that many of our seceders began with thinking there

could be no mighty harm in attaching a *little* more importance to certain outward things than they once did. But once launched on the downward course, they went on from one thing to another. They provoked God, and He left them to themselves. They tempted the devil, and he came to them. They started with trifles, as many foolishly call them. They have ended with downright idolatry.

(3) Arm yourselves, last of all, and above all, with clear, sound views of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the salvation that is in Him. He is the image of the invisible God,—the express image of His person,—and the true preservative against all idolatry, when truly known. Build yourselves deep down on the strong foundation of His finished work upon the cross. Settle it firmly in your mind, that Christ Jesus has done everything needful in order to present you without spot before the throne of God, and that simple, childlike faith on your part is the only thing required to give you an entire interest in the work of Christ. Settle it firmly in your mind, that having this faith, you are completely justified in the sight of God,—will never be more justified if you live to the age of Methuselah and do the works of the Apostle Paul,—and CAN add nothing to that complete justification by any acts, deeds, works, performances, fastings, prayers, almsdeeds, attendance on ordinances, or anything else of your own.

And oh! keep up, keep up, I beseech you, continual communion with the person of the Lord Jesus. Abide in Him daily, feed on Him daily, look to Him daily, lean on Him daily, live upon Him daily, draw from His fulness daily. Realize this, and the idea of other mediators, other comforters, other intercessors, will seem utterly absurd. “What need is there?” you will reply; “I have Christ, and in Him I have all.”

Brethren, let the Lord Christ have His rightful place in your heart, and all other things in your religion will soon fall into their right places also;—Church, ministers, sacraments, ordinances, all will go down, and take the second place.

Except Christ sits as Priest and King upon the throne of your heart, that little kingdom within will be in perpetual confusion. But only let Him be all in all there, and I have no fear for you. Before Him every idol, every Dagon shall fall down.