

LET US HOLD FAST OUR PROFESSION.

AN ADDRESS FOR 1886.

Being Thoughts on Heb. iv. 14.

BY THE RIGHT REV.

JOHN CHARLES RYLE, D.D.,

LORD BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL,

Author of "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels," "Knots Untied," "Old Paths," "Practical Religion," "Thoughts on the Supper of the Lord," etc.

LONDON:

WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY,
12 PATERNOSTER ROW.

Price Two Shillings per Dozen.

LET US HOLD FAST OUR PROFESSION.

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.”—HEB. iv. 14.

“LET US hold fast!” We should mark well this expression. A careful reader of the Epistle to the Hebrews can hardly fail to observe that the words “*let us*” are found no less than four times in the fourth chapter. In the first verse you will read, “let us fear,”—in the eleventh verse, “let us labour,”—in the fourteenth verse, “let us hold fast,”—and in the sixteenth verse, “let us come boldly to the throne of grace.” We should take note of this.

Now why did the Apostle St. Paul write in this way? He did it because the Hebrew Christians, to whom he wrote, were a peculiar people, and occupied a peculiar position. They were not like Gentile converts who had been brought up to worship idols, and had never received any revelation from God. The Jews were a people who had enjoyed the special favour of God for fifteen hundred years. All through that long period they had possessed the law of Moses, and an immense amount of light, which had not been given to any other nation on earth. These privileges had made them very sensitive and jealous at the idea of any change. They needed to be approached very gently and delicately, and to be addressed in a peculiar style. All this St. Paul, himself born a Jew, remembered well. He puts himself on a level with them, and says, “Let us,—I speak to myself as well as to you, lest I should offend you.”

But this is not all. I might add that the Jewish Christians had very peculiar trials to undergo. I suspect they were far more persecuted and ill-used after their conversion than the Gentile Christians were. No doubt it was a hard thing for a Gentile to turn from idols. But it was a much harder thing for a Jew to profess that he was not content with the ceremonial law of Moses, and that he had found a better priest, and a better sacrifice, even Jesus of Nazareth, and the blood of the Cross. This also St. Paul remembered well, and he cheers and encourages them by placing himself by their side, and saying, “Let us fear,”—“let us labour,”—“let us hold fast,”—“let us come boldly.”—“I am as you are, we are all in the same boat.”

I shall confine myself in this paper to the text which heads it, and I shall try to answer three questions.

- I. What is this profession of which St. Paul speaks?
- II. Why does St. Paul say, “Let us hold fast?”
- III. What is the grand encouragement which St. Paul gives us to “hold fast.”

Before I go any further, I ask my readers to remember that the things we are about to consider were written by inspiration of the Holy Ghost for

the benefit of the whole Church of Christ in every age down to the end of the world. They were meant to be used by all true Christians in England, and by all classes, whether high or low, rich or poor, in London, or Liverpool, or in any part of the earth. The Epistle to the Hebrews is not an old worn-out letter which only suits the Jews of eighteen centuries ago. It is meant for you and me. We all need to be exhorted to “hold fast our profession.”

I. Let us begin by considering *what is meant by “our profession.”*

When St. Paul uses this expression there can be little doubt about his meaning. He meant that public “profession” of faith in Christ and obedience to Him, which every person made when he became a member of the Christian Church. In the days of the apostle, when a man or woman left Judaism or heathenism, and received Christ as a Saviour, he declared himself a Christian by certain acts. He did it by being publicly baptized, by joining the company of those who had been baptized already, by publicly promising to give up idolatry and wickedness of all kinds, and by habitually taking part with the followers of Jesus of Nazareth in all their religious assemblies, their ways, and their practices. This is what St. Paul had in view when he wrote the words, “Let us hold fast our profession.”

Profession in those days was a very serious matter, and entailed very serious consequences. It often brought on a man persecution, loss of property, imprisonment, and even death. The consequence was that few persons ever made a Christian profession in the early Church unless they were thoroughly in earnest, truly converted, and really believers. No doubt there were some exceptions. People like Ananias and Sapphira, and Simon Magus, and Demas, crept in and joined themselves to the disciples. But these were exceptional cases. As a general rule it was not worthwhile for a man to profess Christianity if his heart was not entirely in his profession. It cost much. It brought on a man the risk of a vast amount of trouble, and brought in very little gain. The whole result was, that the proportion of sincere, right-hearted, and converted persons in the Church of the apostle’s days was far greater than it ever has been at any other period in the last eighteen centuries. There was a very deep meaning in St. Paul’s words when he said, “Let us hold fast our profession.”

In the days in which we live “profession” is a very different thing. Millions of people profess and call themselves Christians, whom the apostle would not have called Christians at all. Millions are annually baptized, and added to the rolls and registers of churches, who have little or no religion. Many of them live and die without ever attending a place of worship, and live very ungodly lives. Many more only go to a church or chapel occasionally, or once on Sunday at the most. Many others pass through life

without ever becoming communicants, and live and die in the habitual neglect of that Holy Sacrament which the Lord commanded to be received. Most of these people are reckoned Christians while they live, and are buried with Christian burial when they die. But what would St. Paul have said of them? I fear there can be no doubt about the answer. He would have said they did not deserve to be reckoned members of any Church at all! He would not have addressed them as “saints and faithful brethren in Christ Jesus.” He would not have called upon them to “hold fast their profession.” He would have told them they had no profession to hold fast, and that they were “yet dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. ii. 1). All this is sorrowful and painful, but it is only too true. Let those deny it who dare.

Let us, however, thank God that there are not a few to be found in every part of Christendom who really are what they profess to be, true, sincere, earnest-minded, hearty, converted, believing Christians. Some of them, no doubt, belong to churches in which their souls get little help. Some of them have very imperfect knowledge, and hold the truth in solution, with a mixture of many defective views. But they have all certain common marks about them. They see the value of their souls, and really want to be saved. They feel the sinfulness of sin, and hate it, and fight with it, and long to be free from it. They see that Jesus Christ alone can save them, and that they ought to trust only in Him. They see that they ought to live holy and godly lives, and in their poor way they try to do it. They love their Bibles, and they pray, though both their reading and their praying are very defective. Some of them, in short, are in the highest standard of Christ’s school, and are strong in knowledge, faith, and love. Others are only in the infants’ room, and in everything are weak and poor. But in one point they are all one. Their hearts are right in the sight of God; they love Christ; their faces are set towards heaven, and they want to go there. These are especially those in the present day to whom I wish in this paper to apply St. Paul’s exhortation, “Let us hold fast our profession.” Let us cling to it and not let it go.

Now I cannot forget that we meet thousands of persons in daily life who are always saying, “I make no profession of religion.” They not only say it, but rather glory in saying it, as if it was a right, wise, and proper thing to say. They seem even to despise those who make a profession, and to regard them as hypocrites and impostors, or, at any rate, as weak and foolish people. Now if this paper happens to fall into the hands of any person of this kind, I have somewhat to say to him, and I invite his best attention.

I do not deny that there are many hypocrites in religion. There always were, and there always will be, as long as the world stands. As long as there is good gold and silver coin in the realm, so long there will be forging,

coining, and counterfeit money. The very existence of bad coins is an indirect proof that there is something which it is worth while to imitate, and that there is such a thing as good current money in circulation. It is just the same with Christianity! The very fact that there are many false professors in the Churches is an indirect proof that there are such persons as true-hearted and sound believers. It is one of Satan's favourite devices, in order to bring discredit on Christianity, to persuade some unhappy people to profess what they do not really believe. He tries to damage the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world by sending out wolves in sheep's clothing, and by raising up men and women who talk the language of Canaan, and wear the coat of God's children, while they are inwardly rotten at heart. But these things do not justify a man in condemning all religious profession.

I tell those who boast that they make no profession that they are only exhibiting their own sorrowful ignorance of Holy Scripture. The hypocrisy of some unhappy people must never prevent us doing our own duty, without caring what men may say or think of us. We must never be ashamed of showing ourselves boldly on Christ's side, by honouring His word, His day, and His ordinances, by speaking up for Christ's cause on all proper occasions, and by firmly refusing to conform to the sins and the follies of the children of this world. The words of our Lord Jesus Christ ought never to be forgotten: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke ix. 26). If we will not confess Christ upon earth, and openly profess that we are His servants, we must not expect that Christ will confess us in heaven at the last day.

In short, the very last thing that a man should be ashamed of is the "profession" of religion. There are many things unhappily of which most people seem not ashamed at all. Ill-temper, selfishness, want of charity, laziness, malice, backbiting, lying, slandering, intemperance, impurity, gambling, Sabbath-breaking,—all these are terribly common things among men, and of most of them people do not seem a bit ashamed, though they ought to be! They that habitually "do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. v. 21). But of Bible-reading, praying, holy living, and working for the good of bodies and souls, no one ever need be ashamed. These may be things which many laugh at, dislike, and despise, and have no taste for, but they are the very things with which God is well pleased. Once more, I repeat, whatever men may say, the very last thing of which we ought to be ashamed is our "profession" of faith in Christ, and obedience to Christ.

II. Let us in the second place consider, *Why St. Paul says, "Let us hold fast our profession."* The answer to this question is threefold, and demands

the serious attention of all who hope that they are really sincere in their Christian profession.

(a) For one thing, OUR HEARTS are always weak and foolish, even after conversion. We may have passed from death to life, and be renewed in the spirit of our minds. We may see the value of our souls, as we once did not. We may have become new creatures; old things may have passed away, and all things may have become new. But believers must never forget that until they die they carry about with them a weak, foolish, and treacherous heart. The roots of all manner of evil are still within us, although cut down to the ground by the grace of the Holy Ghost. Whether we like to acknowledge it or not, there are within us, at our very best, latent dislike of trouble, secret desire to please man and keep in with the world, carelessness about our private Bible-reading and our prayers, envy and jealousy of others, laziness about doing good, selfishness and desire to have our own way, forgetfulness of the wishes of others, and want of watchfulness over our own besetting sins. All these things are often lying hid within us, and below the surface of our hearts. The holiest saint may find to his cost some day that they are all there alive, and ready to show themselves. No wonder that our Lord said to the three apostles in the garden, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mark xiv. 38). I have no doubt that St. Paul had the heart in view when he wrote those words, "Hold fast." "Let us, therefore, hold fast our profession."

(b) For another thing, *the world* is a source of immense danger to the Christian soul. From the day that we are converted, we are living in a most unhealthy atmosphere for religion. We live and move and have our being in the midst of a vast multitude of people who are utterly without vital Christianity. In every rank of life we meet with hundreds who, however moral and respectable, seem to care for nothing but such things as these,—What shall I eat? What shall I drink? What can I get? What can I spend? How shall I spend my time? What profit can I make? What amusement can I have? What pleasant company can I enjoy?— As for God, and Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and the Bible, and prayer, and repentance, and faith, and holy living, and doing good in the world, and death, and resurrection, and judgment, and heaven and hell, they are subjects which never appear to come across them except in sickness, or at a funeral. Now to live constantly in the midst of such people, as a Christian must do, is sure to be a great trial to him, and requires constant watchfulness to prevent his getting harm. We are incessantly tempted to give way about little things, and to make compromises and concessions. We naturally dislike giving offence to others, and having frictions and collisions with relatives, friends, and neighbours. We do not like to be laughed at and ridiculed by the majority, and to feel that we are always in a minority in every company into which we go. I fear

that too many are laughed out of heaven and laughed into hell. It is a true saying of Solomon, "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. xxix. 25). I once knew a brave sergeant of a cavalry regiment, who, after living to the age of fifty without any religion, became for the last few years of his life a decided Christian. He told me that when he first began to think about his soul and to pray, some months passed away before he dare tell his wife that he said his prayers; and that he used to creep upstairs without his boots at evening, that his wife might not hear him, and find out what he was doing!

The plain truth is that "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John v. 19), and it is vain to ignore the danger that the world causes to the believer's soul. The spirit of the world, and the tone of the world, and the tastes of the world, and the air of the world, and the breath of the world are continually about him every day that he lives, drawing him down and pulling him back. If he does not keep his faith in lively exercise, he is sure to catch infection, and take damage, like the travellers through the Campagna at Rome, who take the fever without being aware of it at the time. The most perilous and unsanitary gas is that which our bodily senses do not detect. We have reason to pray continually for an increase of that faith of which St. John says, "that it gives us the victory over the world" (1 John v. 4). Happy, indeed, is that Christian who can be in the world and yet not of the world,—who can do his duty in it, and yet not be conformed to it,—who can pass through it unmoved by its smiles or its frowns, its flattery or its enmity, its open opposition or its playful ridicule, its sweets or its bitters, its gold or its sword! When I think what the world is, and see what harm it has done, and is doing to souls, I do not wonder that St. Paul says, "Hold fast." "Let us hold fast our profession."

(c) For one thing more, *the devil* is a constant enemy to the Christian's soul. That great, sleepless, and unwearied foe is always labouring to do us harm. It is his constant object to wound, hurt, vex, injure, or weaken, if he cannot kill and destroy. He is an unseen enemy who is always near us, "about our path, and about our bed," and spying out all our ways, prepared to suit his temptations to the special weak points of every man. He knows us far better than we know ourselves. He has been studying one book for 6000 years,—the book of fallen human nature,—and he is a spirit of almost boundless subtlety and cunning, and of boundless malice. The best of saints has little idea how many vile suggestions in his heart come from the devil, and what a restless adversary stands at his right hand.

This is he who tempted Eve at the beginning, and persuaded her that she might disobey God, eat the forbidden fruit and not die.—This is he who tempted David to number the people, and to cause the death of 70,000 of his subjects by pestilence in three days.—This is he who tried to tempt our Lord in the wilderness immediately after His baptism, and even quoted

Scripture to gain his end.—This is he who opposed our Lord all throughout His three years' ministry, sometimes by possessing the bodies of unhappy men and women in a most mysterious manner, and at last by putting it into the heart of one of His apostles to betray Him.—This is he who constantly opposed the apostles after our Lord's ascension, and tried to stop the progress of the gospel.—This is he of whom St. Paul testifies that even "Satan is transformed into an angel of light," and that false teachers are his agents. (2 Cor. xi. 14.)

Does any reader of this paper foolishly suppose that the devil is asleep, or dead, or less mischievous now than in old time? Nothing of the kind! He is still "walking about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." He is still "going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it." (1 Pet. v. 8; Job i. 7.) It is he who goes among heathen nations and persuades them to shed oceans of blood in the worship of idols, or murderous wars.—It is he who goes to and fro amongst fallen Churches, persuading them to throw aside the Bible, and satisfy people with formal worship or grovelling superstitions.—It is he who walks up and down in Protestant countries, and stirs up party spirit, and bitter political strife, setting class against class, and subjects against rulers, in order to distract men's minds from better things.—It is he who is continually going to the ears of intellectual and highly educated men, persuading them that the old Bible is not true, and advising them to be content with Atheism, Theism, Agnosticism, Secularism, and a general contempt for the world to come.—It is he, above all, who persuades foolish people that there is no such person as a devil, and no future judgment after death, and no hell. In all this fearful list of things I firmly believe that the devil lies at the bottom and is the true root, reason, and cause. Can we suppose for a moment that he will let true Christians go quietly to heaven, and not tempt them by the way? Away with the silly thought! We have need to pray against the devil, as well as against the world and the flesh. In the great trinity of enemies which the believer should daily remember, the devil perhaps is the greatest because he is the least seen. Nothing delights him so much (if, indeed, he can be delighted at all) as to injure a true Christian and make him bring discredit on his religion. When I think of the devil, I do not wonder that St. Paul said, "Hold fast." "Let us hold fast our profession."

Now I suspect that some reader of this paper may be secretly thinking that I am an alarmist, and that there is no need of such watchfulness, carefulness, and "holding fast." I ask such a person to turn with me to the Bible for a few moments, and to consider seriously what that blessed book teaches.

I ask him to remember that Judas Iscariot and Demas both began well, and made a good profession. One was a chosen apostle of our Lord Jesus

Christ, a constant companion of our blessed Saviour for three years. He walked with Him, talked with Him, heard His teaching, saw His miracles, and up to the very night before our Lord was crucified was never thought a worse man than Peter, James, or John. Yet this unhappy man at last let go his profession, betrayed his Master, came to a miserable end, and went to his own place.—The other man whom I named, Demas, was a chosen companion of the Apostle St. Paul, and professed to be of like mind with that eminent man of God. There can be little doubt that for some years he journeyed with him, helped him, and took part in his evangelistic labours. But how did it all end? He gave up his profession, and the last Epistle St. Paul wrote contains this melancholy record; “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. iv. 10). We never hear of him again.—To every one who thinks I have dwelt too much on the Christian’s dangers, I say this day, Remember Demas, remember Judas Iscariot, tighten your grasp, “hold fast your profession,” and beware. We may appear to men to be very good Christians for a season, and yet prove at last to be stony-ground hearers, and destitute of a wedding garment.

But this is not all. I ask every believer to remember that if he does not “hold fast,” he may pierce himself through with many sorrows, and bring great discredit on his character. We should never forget David’s awful fall in the matter of the wife of Uriah, and Peter’s thrice-repeated denial of his Master, and Cranmer’s temporary cowardice, of which he so bitterly repented at last. Are we greater and stronger than they? “Let us not be high-minded, but fear.” There is a godly fear which is of great use to the soul. It was the great Apostle of the Gentiles who wrote these words: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest after I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. ix. 27).

Does any Christian reader of these pages desire *much happiness* in his religion, and much joy and peace in believing? Let him take an old minister’s advice this day, and “hold fast his profession.” Let him resolve to be very thorough, very decided, very watchful, very careful about the state of his soul. The more boldly he shows his colours, and the more uncompromising and firm he is, the lighter will he find his heart, and the more sensibly will he feel the sun shining on his face. None are so happy in God’s service as decided Christians. When John Rogers, the first martyr in Queen Mary’s time, was being led to Smithfield to be burned, the French Ambassador reported that he looked as bright and cheerful as if he were going to his wedding.

Does any Christian reader of these pages desire *much usefulness to others* in his religion? Let me assure him that none do so much good in the long run of life, and leave such a mark on their generation as those who “hold fast their profession” most tightly, and are most decided servants of

Christ. Few men, perhaps, did more for the cause of the Protestant Reformation, and shook the power of Rome more completely in this country, than the two noble bishops who were burned back to back at one stake in Oxford, and would not let go their faith to save their lives. I need not say that I refer to Ridley and Latimer. The careless, thoughtless, irreligious world takes notice of such men, and is obliged to allow that there is something real and solid in their religion. The more light shines in our lives, the more good shall we do in the world. It is not for nothing that our Lord says, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 16).

Let us gather up all these things in our memories, and never forget them. Let it be a settled principle in our minds that it is of immeasurable importance to our happiness and usefulness to "hold fast our profession," and to be always on our guard. Let us dismiss from our minds the crude modern idea that a believer has only got to sit still, and "yield himself" to God. Let us rather maintain the language of Scripture, and strive to "mortify the deeds of our body," to "crucify our flesh," to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," to wrestle, to fight, and live the soldier's life. (Rom. viii. 13; Gal. v. 24; 2 Cor. vi. 1; Eph. vi. 12; 1 Tim. vi. 12; 2 Tim. ii. 3.) One might think that the account of the armour of God in the Epistle to the Ephesians ought to settle the question of our duty. But the plain truth is, men will persist in confounding two things that differ,—that is, justification and sanctification. In justification, the word to be addressed to man is, Believe, only believe. In sanctification, the word must be, Watch, pray, and fight. What God has divided, let us not mingle and confuse. I can find no words to express my own deep sense of the immense importance of "holding fast our profession."

III. In the last place, let us consider *what encouragement there is to Christians to hold fast their profession.*

The Apostle St. Paul was singularly fitted, both by grace and nature, to handle this subject. Of all the inspired writers in the New Testament, none seems to have been so thoroughly taught of God to deal with the conflicts of the human heart as St. Paul. None was better acquainted with the dangers, diseases, and remedies of the soul. The proof of this is to be seen in the 7th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, and the 5th chapter of his Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Those two chapters ought to be frequently studied by every Christian who wishes to understand his own heart.

Now what is the ground of encouragement which St. Paul proposes? He tells us to "hold fast our profession," and not let it go, because "we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God."

That word “High Priest” would ring with power in the ears of a Jewish reader, far more than it would in the ears of Gentile Christians. It would stir up in his mind the remembrance of many typical things in the service of the tabernacle and temple. It would make him recollect that the Jewish high priest was a kind of mediator between God and the people;—that he alone went once every year into the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement, and had access through the veil to the mercy-seat;—that he was a kind of daysman between the twelve tribes and God, to lay his hand on both (Job ix. 33);—that he was the chief minister over the house of God, who was intended “to have compassion on the ignorant and them that were out of the way” (Heb. v. 2). All these things would give the Jews some idea of what St. Paul meant when he said, “Let us hold fast,” because we have got a great High Priest in heaven. The plain truth is, that the Christian is meant to understand that we have a mighty, living Friend in heaven, who not only died for us, but rose again, and after rising again took His seat at the right hand of God, to be our Advocate and Intercessor with the Father until He comes again. We are meant to understand that Christ not only died for us, but is alive for us, and actively working on our behalf at this very day. In short, the encouragement that St. Paul holds out to believers is, *the living priesthood of Jesus Christ*.

Is not this exactly what he meant when he told the Hebrews that Christ is “able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, because He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. vii. 25)? —Is not this what he meant when he told the Romans, “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. v. 10)?—Is not this what he meant when he wrote that glorious challenge, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. viii. 34)? Here, in one word, is the believer’s fountain of consolation. He is not only to look to a Saviour who died as his Substitute, and shed His blood for him, but to a Saviour who also after His resurrection took His seat at God’s right hand, and lives there as his constant Intercessor and Priest.

Let us think for a moment what a wonderful and suitable High Priest is the High Priest of our profession, a million times superior to any high priest of the family of Aaron.

Jesus is a High Priest of almighty *power*, for He is very God of very God, never slumbering, never sleeping, never dying, and eternal. The Jewish high priests were “not suffered to continue by reason of death” (Heb. vii. 23), but Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more. Our great High Priest never grows old, and never dies. (Rom. vi. 9.)

Jesus is a High Priest who is *perfect Man* as well as perfect God. He knows what our bodies are, for He had a body Himself, and is acquainted with all its sinless weaknesses and pains. He knows what hunger, and thirst, and suffering are, for He lived for thirty-three years upon earth, and knows the physical nature of an infant, a child, a boy, a young man, and a man of full age. "He hath suffered now Himself being tempted" (Heb. ii. 18).

Jesus is a High Priest of matchless *sympathy*. He can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. iv. 15). His heart was always overflowing with love, pity, and compassion while He was on earth. He wept at the grave of Lazarus. He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem. He had an ear ready to hear every cry for help, and was ever going about doing good to the sick and the afflicted. One of His last thoughts on the Cross was one of care for His mother, and one of His first messages after His resurrection was one of "peace" to His poor fallen apostles. And He is not changed. He has carried that wonderful heart up to heaven, and is ever watching the weakest lamb in His flock with merciful tenderness.

Jesus is a High Priest of perfect *wisdom*. He knows exactly what each of us is, and what each of us requires. "He will not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear" (1 Cor. x. 13), nor allow us to remain in the furnace of suffering one moment beyond the time that is required for our refining. He will give us strength according to our day, and grace according to our need. He knows the most secret feelings of our hearts, and understands the meaning of our feeblest prayers. He is not like Aaron, and Eli, and Abiathar, and Annas, and Caiaphas, an erring and imperfect high priest in dealing with those who come to Him, and spread out their petitions before Him. He never makes any mistakes.

I challenge every reader of this paper to tell me, if he can, what greater consolation and encouragement the soul of man can have than the possession of such a High Priest as this? We do not think enough of Him in these days. We talk of His death, and His sacrifice, and His blood, and His atonement, and His finished work on the Cross; and no doubt we can never make too much of these glorious subjects. But we err greatly if we stop short here. We ought to look beyond the Cross and the grave, to the life, the priesthood, and the constant intercession of Christ our Lord. Unless we do this we have only a defective view of Christian doctrine. The consequences of neglecting this part of our Lord's offices are very serious, and have done great harm to the Church and the world.

Young men and women in all our churches, and, generally speaking, all new believers, are taking immense damage for want of right teaching about the priestly office of Christ. They feel within themselves a daily craving after help, and grace, and strength, and guidance in running the race set before them along the narrow way of life. It does not satisfy them to hear that

they ought to be always looking back to the Cross and the atonement. There is something within them which whispers that they would like to have a living friend. Then comes the devil, and suggests that they ought to go to earthly priests, and make confession, and receive absolution, and keep up the habit of doing this continually. They are often far too ready to believe it, and foolishly try to supply the hunger of their souls by extravagantly frequent reception of the Lord's Supper, and submitting to the spiritual directorship of some clergyman. All this is little better than religious opium-eating and dram-drinking. It soothes the heart for a little season, but does no real good, and often results in bringing souls into a state of morbid superstitious bondage. It is not the medicine which Scripture has provided. The truth which all believers, and especially young men and women in these days, have need to be told is the truth of Christ's life in heaven, and priestly intercession for us. We need no earthly confessor, and no earthly priest. There is only one Priest to whom we ought to go with our daily wants, even Jesus the Son of God. It is impossible to find one more mighty, more loving, more wise, more ready to help than He is. It is a wise saying of an old divine, that "the eyes of a believer ought to be fixed on Christ in all his dealings with God. The one eye is to be set on His oblation, and the other on His intercession." Let us never forget this. The true secret of holding fast our profession is to be continually exercising faith in the priestly office of Christ, and making use of it every day.

He that acts on this principle will find it possible to serve God and be a Christian in any position, however hard it may be. He need not suppose for a moment that he cannot have true religion without retiring from the world, and going into a monastery, or living like a hermit in a cave. A young woman must not suppose that she cannot serve God in her own family, because of unconverted parents, brothers, and sisters, and that she must go into some "Religious House," so called, in company with a few like-minded women. All such ideas are senseless and unscriptural; they come from beneath, and not from above. At school or in college, in the army or the navy, in the bank or at the bar, in the merchant's house or on 'Change, it is possible for a man to serve God. As a daughter at home, or a teacher in a high school, or an assistant in a house of business, a woman can serve God, and must never give way to the cowardly thought that it is impossible. But how is it all to be done? Simply by living the life of faith in the Son of God, by continually looking back to Him on the Cross, and to the fountain of His blood for daily pardon and peace of conscience, and by daily looking up to Him at the right hand of God interceding for us, and daily drawing from Him supplies of grace in this world of need. This is the sum of the whole matter. We have a great High Priest who is passed into the heavens,

and through Him it is possible not only to begin, but to “hold fast” our profession.

I will now conclude this paper by addressing a few words of direct practical exhortation to every reader into whose hands it may happen to fall.

(a) Do you belong to that huge class of so-called *Christians who make no profession of religion at all*? Alas! it is a pity this class should be so large; but it is vain to shut our eyes to the fact that it is very large. These of whom I speak are not atheists, or infidels; they would not for a moment like to be told they are not Christians. They go to places of worship, they think Christianity a very proper thing for baptisms, weddings, and funerals. They say grace before and after dinner; they like their children to have some religion in their education. But they never seem to get any further; they shrink from making a “profession.” It is useless to tell them to “hold fast,” because they have nothing to hold.

I ask such persons, in all affection and kindness, to consider how unreasonable and inconsistent their position is. Most of them believe the Apostles’ Creed. They believe there is a God, and a world to come after death, and a resurrection, and a judgment, and a life everlasting. But what can be more senseless than to believe all these vast realities, and yet to travel on towards the grave without any preparation for the great future? You will not deny that you will have to meet the Lord Jesus Christ, the Judge of all, when the last trumpet sounds, and you will stand before the great white throne. But where will you be in that awful day, if you have never professed faith, love, and obedience to that Judge during the time of your life upon earth? How can you possibly expect Him to confess and own you in that hour, if you have been afraid or ashamed to confess Him, and to declare yourself boldly upon His side while you are upon earth?

Think of these things, I beseech you, and change your plan of life. Cast aside vain excuses and petty reasons for delay. Resolve by the grace of God to lay firm hold on Jesus Christ, and to enlist like a man under His banners. That blessed Saviour will receive you just as you are, however unworthy you may feel yourself. Wait for nothing, and wait for nobody. Begin to pray this very day, and to pray real, lively, fervent prayers, such as the penitent thief prayed upon the Cross. Take down your long neglected Bible, and begin to read it. Break off every known bad habit. Seek the company and friendship of thoroughgoing Christians. Give up going to places where your soul can get nothing but harm. In one word, begin to make “a profession,” fearing neither the laughter nor the scorn of man. The word of the Lord Jesus is for you as well as another: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John vi. 37). I have seen many people on their death-

beds, but I never met with one who said he was sorry he had made a “profession” of religion.

(b) In the last place, do you belong to that much smaller class of persons who *really profess Christian faith and Christian obedience*, and are trying, however weakly, to follow Christ in the midst of an evil world. I think I know something of what goes on in your hearts. You sometimes feel that you will never persevere to the end, and will be obliged some day to give up your profession. You are sometimes tempted to write bitter things against yourself, and to fancy you have got no grace at all. I am afraid there are myriads of true Christians in this condition, who go trembling and doubting toward heaven, with Despondency, and Much-Afraid, and Fearing in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and fear they will never get to the Celestial City at all. But oddly enough, in spite of all their groans and doubts and fears, they do not turn back to the city from which they came. (Heb. xi. 15.) They press on, though faint, yet pursuing, and, as John Wesley used to say of his people, “they end well”

Now, my advice to all such persons, if any of them are reading this paper, is very simple. Say every morning and evening of your life, “Lord, increase my faith.” Cultivate the habit of fixing your eye more simply on Jesus Christ, and try to know more of the fulness there is laid up in Him for every one of His believing people. Do not be always poring down over the imperfections of your own heart, and dissecting your own besetting sins. Look up. Look more to your risen Head in heaven, and try to realize more than you do that the Lord Jesus not only died for you, but that He also rose again, and that He is ever living at God’s right hand as your Priest, your Advocate, and your Almighty Friend. When the Apostle Peter “walked upon the waters to go to Jesus,” he got on very well as long as his eye was fixed upon his Almighty Master and Saviour. But when he looked away to the winds and waves, and reasoned, and considered his own strength, and the weight of his body, he soon began to sink, and cried, “Lord, save me.” No wonder that our gracious Lord, while grasping his hand and delivering him from a watery grave, said, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Alas! many of us are very like Peter—we look away from Jesus, and then our hearts faint, and we feel sinking. (Matt. xiv. 28, 31.)

Think, last of all, how many millions of men and women like yourself have got safe home during the last eighteen hundred years. Like you, they have had their battles and their conflicts, their doubts and their fears. Some of them have had very little “joy and peace in believing,” and were almost surprised when they woke up in Paradise. Some of them enjoyed full assurance, and strong consolation, and have entered the haven of eternal life, like a gallant ship in full sail. And who are these last that have done so? Those who have not only held their profession between finger and thumb, but

have grasped it firmly with both hands, and have been ready to die for Christ, rather than not confess Him before men. Take courage, believer. The bolder and more decided you are, the more comfort you will have in Christ. You cannot have two heavens, one here, and the other hereafter. You are yet in the world, and you have a body, and there is always near you a busy devil. But great faith shall always have great peace. The happiest person in religion will always be that man or woman who can say, with a true heart, like St. Paul, "The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." In myself I see nothing, but I keep ever looking to Jesus, and by His grace I hold fast my profession. (Gal. ii. 20.)

And now I cannot leave this great and solemn subject without offering to all who read it a parting word of warning about the times in which we live. I will try to explain briefly what I mean.

I believe then that for three centuries there has not been an age in which it has been so needful to urge professing Christians to "hold fast" as it is at this time. No doubt there is plenty of religion of a certain sort in these days. There are many more attendants on public worship all over the land than there were thirty years ago. But it may well be doubted whether there is any increase of vital Christianity. I am greatly mistaken if there is not a growing tendency to "hold fast" nothing in religion, and a disposition to hold everything as loosely as possible. "Nothing fast! Everything loose!" seems the order of the day.

How is it in matters of faith and doctrine? It used to be thought important to hold clear and distinct views about such points as the inspiration of the Scriptures, the atonement, the work of the Spirit, the personality of the devil, the reality of future punishment. It is not thought so now. The old order of things has passed away. You may believe anything or nothing on these subjects, so long as you are earnest and sincere. *Holding fast has given way to holding loose.*

How is it in matters of worship and ritual? It used to be thought important to be content with the plain teaching of the Prayer-Book. It is not thought so now. You must have the Lord's Table called an altar, and the sacrament called a sacrifice, without the slightest warrant in the Prayer-Book, and a ceremonial fitted to these novel views. And then if you complain, you are told that you are very narrow and illiberal, and that a clergyman ought to be allowed to do and say and teach anything, if he is only earnest and sincere. *Holding fast has given way to holding loose.*

How is it in the matter of holy living? It used to be thought important to "renounce the pomp and vanities of this wicked world," and to keep clear of races, theatre-going, balls, card-playing, and the like. It is not thought so now. You may do anything and go anywhere you please, so long as you

keep Lent, and occasionally attend early Communion! You must not be so very strict and particular! Once more I say, *holding fast has given way to holding loose*.

This state of things, to say the least, is not satisfactory. It is full of peril. It shows a condition of Christianity which, I am certain, would not have satisfied St. Paul or St. John. The world was not turned upside down by such vague, loose doctrine and practice eighteen centuries ago. The souls of men in the present day will never receive much benefit from such loose Christianity either in England or anywhere else. Decision in teaching and living is the only Christianity which God has blessed in the ages that are past, or will continue to bless in our own time. Loose, vague, misty, broad Christianity may avoid offence and please people in health and prosperity, but it will not convert souls, or supply solid comfort in the hour of sorrow or sickness, or on the bed of death.

The plain truth is, that “sincerity and earnestness” are becoming the idol of many English Christians in these latter days. People seem to think it matters little what opinions a man holds in religion, so long as he is “earnest and sincere;” and you are thought uncharitable if you doubt his soundness in the faith! Against this idolatry of mere “earnestness” I enter my solemn protest. I charge every reader of this paper to remember that God’s written Word is the only rule of faith, and to believe nothing to be true and soul-saving in religion which cannot be proved by plain texts of Scripture. I entreat him to read the Bible, and make it his only test of truth and error, right and wrong. And for the last time I say, “Hold fast and not loose,—hold fast your profession.”