



PUBLISHED BY HER MAJESTY'S COMMAND.

Religion in Common Life:

A SERMON PREACHED AT CRATHIE CHURCH, OCTOBER 14, 1855, BEFORE HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN AND PRINCE ALBERT, BY THE REV. JOHN CAIRD, M. A., MINISTER OF ERROLL, SCOTLAND.

"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."—Romans, xii. 11.

To combine business with religion, to keep up a spirit of serious piety amidst the stir and distraction of a busy and active life,—this is one of the most difficult parts of a Christian's trial in this world. It is comparatively easy to be religious in the church—to collect our thoughts and compose our feelings, and enter with an appearance of propriety and decorum into the offices of religious worship, amidst the quietude of the Sabbath, and within the still and sacred precincts of the house of prayer. But to be religious in the world—to be pious and holy and earnest-minded in the counting-room, the manufactory, the market-place, the field, the farm—to carry out our good and solemn thoughts and feelings into the throng and thoroughfare of daily life,—this is the great difficulty of our Christian calling. No man, not lost to all moral influence can help feeling his worldly passions calmed, and some measure of seriousness stealing over his mind, when engaged in the performance of the more awful and sacred rites of religion; but the atmosphere of the domestic circle, the exchange, the street, the city's throng, amidst coarse work and cankering cares and toils, is a very different atmosphere from that of a communion-table. Passing from the one to the other has often seemed as if the sudden transition from a tropical to a polar climate—from balmy warmth and sunshine to murky mist and freezing cold. And it appears sometimes as difficult to maintain the strength and steadfastness of religious principle and feeling when we go forth from the church into the world, as it would be to preserve an exotic alive in the open air in winter, or to keep the lamp that burns steadily within doors from being blown out if you take it abroad unsheltered from the wind.

So great, so all but insuperable, has this difficulty ever appeared to men, that it is but few who set themselves honestly and resolutely to the effort to overcome it. The great majority by various shifts or expedients, evade the hard task of being good and holy, at once in the church and in the world.

In ancient times, for instance, it was, as we all know, the not uncommon expedient among devout persons—men deeply impressed with the thought of an eternal world and the necessity of preparing for it, but distracted by the effort to attend to the duties of religion amidst the business and temptations of secular life—to fly the world altogether, and abandoning society and all social claims, to betake themselves to some hermit solitude, some quiet and cloistered retreat, where, as they fondly deemed, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," their work would become worship, and life be uninterruptedly devoted to the cultivation of religion in the soul. In our day the more common device, where religion and the world conflict, is not that of the superstitious recluse, but one even much less safe and venial. Keen for this world, yet not willing to lose all hold on the next—eager for the advantages of time, yet not prepared to abandon all religion and stand by the consequences, there is a very numerous class who attempt to compromise the matter—to treat religion and the world like two creditors whose claims cannot both be liquidated—by compounding with each for a share—though in this case a most disproportionate share—of their time and thought. "Everything in its own place" is the tacit reflection of such men. "Prayers, sermons, holy reading"—they will scarcely venture to add "God"—are for Sundays; but week-days are for the sober business, the real, practical affairs of life. Enough if we give the Sunday to our religious duties; we cannot be always praying and reading the Bible. Well enough for clergymen and good persons who have nothing else to do, to attend to religion through the week; but for us, we have other and more practical matters to mind." And so the result is, that religion is made altogether a Sunday thing—a robe too fine for common wear, but taken out solemnly on state occasions, and solemnly put past when the state occasion is over. Like an idler in a crowded thoroughfare, religion is jostled aside in the daily throng of life, as if it had no business there. Like a needful yet disagreeable medicine, men will be content to take it now and then, for their soul's health, but they cannot, and will not, make it their daily fare—the substantial and staple nutriment of their life and being.

Now, you will observe that the idea of religion which is set forth in the text, as elsewhere in Scripture, is quite different from any of these notions. The text speaks as if the most diligent attention to our worldly business were not by any means incompatible with

spirituality of mind and serious devotion to the service of God. It seems to imply that religion is not so much a duty, as a something that has to do with all duties—not a tax to be paid periodically and got rid of at other times, but a ceaseless, all-pervading, inexhaustible tribute to Him, who is not only the object of religious worship, but the end of our very life and being. It suggests to us the idea that piety is not for Sundays only, but for all days; that spirituality of mind is not appropriate to one set of actions and an impertinence and intrusion with reference to others, but, like the act of breathing, like the circulation of the blood, like the silent growth of the stature, a process that may be going on simultaneously with all our actions—when we are busiest as when we are idlest; in the church, in the world, in solitude, in society; in our grief and in our gladness; in our toil and in our rest; sleeping, waking; by day, by night—amidst all the engagements and exigencies of life. For you perceive that in one breath—as duties not incompatible, but necessarily and inseparably blended with each other—the text exhorts us to be at once "not slothful in business," and "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."—I shall now attempt to prove and illustrate the idea thus suggested to us—the compatibility of Religion with the business of Common Life.

We have, then, Scripture authority for asserting that it is not impossible to live a life of fervent piety amidst the most engrossing pursuits and engagements of the world. We are to make good this conception of life,—that the hardest-wrought man of trade, or commerce, or handicraft, who spends his days "midst dusky lane or wrangling mart," may yet be the most holy and spiritually-minded. We need not quit the world and abandon its busy pursuits in order to live near to God:—

"We need not bid, for cloister'd cell,
Our neighbour and our work farewell:
The trival round, the common task,
May furnish all we ought to ask,—
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us, daily, nearer God."

It is true indeed that, if in no other way could we prepare for an eternal world than by retiring from the business and cares of this world, so momentous are the interests involved in religion, that no wise man should hesitate to submit to the sacrifice. Life here is but a span. Life hereafter is for ever. A lifetime of solitude, hardship, penury, were all too slight a price to pay, if need be, for an eternity of bliss; and the results of our most incessant toil and application to the world's business, could they secure for us the highest prizes of earthly ambition, would be purchased at a tremendous cost, if they stole away from us the only time in which we could prepare to meet our God,—if they left us at last rich, gay, honoured, possessed of everything the world holds dear, but to face an Eternity undone. If, therefore, in no way could you combine business and religion, it would indeed be, not fanaticism, but most sober wisdom and prudence, to let the world's business come to a stand. It would be the duty of the mechanic, the man of business, the statesman, the scholar—men of every secular calling—without a moment's delay to leave vacant and silent the familiar scenes of their toils—to turn life into a perpetual Sabbath, and betake themselves, one and all, to an existence of ceaseless prayer, and unbroken contemplation, and devout care of the soul.

But the very impossibility of such a sacrifice proves that no such sacrifice is demanded. He who rules the world is no arbitrary tyrant prescribing impracticable labors. In the material world there are no conflicting laws; and no more, we may rest assured, are there established in the moral world, any two laws, one or the other of which must needs be disobeyed. Now one thing is certain, that there is in the moral world a law of labor. Secular work, in all cases a duty, is in most cases, a necessity. God might have made us independent of work. He might have nourished us like "the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field," which "toil not, neither do they spin." He might have rained down our daily food, like the manna of old from heaven, or caused nature to yield it in unsolicited profusion to all, and so set us free to a life of devotion. But forasmuch as He has not done so—forasmuch as He has so constituted us that without work we cannot eat, that if men ceased for a single day to labor, the machinery of life would come to a stand, an arrest be laid on science, civilization, social progress—on everything that is conducive to the welfare of man in the present life,—we may safely conclude that religion, which is also good for man, which is indeed the supreme good of man, is not inconsistent with hard work. It must undoubtedly be the design of our gracious God that all this toil for the supply of our physical necessities—this incessant occupation amid the things that perish, shall be no obstruction, but rather a help, to our spiritual life. The weight of a clock seems a heavy drag on the delicate movements of its machinery; but so far from arresting or impeding those movements, it is indispensable to their steadiness, balance, accuracy: there must be some analogous action of what seems the clog and dragweight of worldly work on the finer movements of man's spiritual being. The planets in the heavens have a twofold motion in their orbits and on their axes,—the one motion not interfering but carried on simultaneously, and in perfect harmony, with the other: so must it be, that

man's twofold activities—round the heavenly and the earthly centre, disturb not, nor jar with each other. He who diligently discharges the duties of the earthly, may not less sedulously—nay, at the same moment—fulfil those of the heavenly, sphere; at once "diligent in business," and "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

And that this is so—that this blending of religion with the work of common life is not impossible, you will readily perceive, if you consider for a moment, what, according to the right and proper notion of it, Religion is. What do we mean by "Religion?"

Religion may be viewed in two aspects. It is a Science, and it is an Art; in other words, a system of doctrines to be believed, and a system of duties to be done. View it in either light, and the point we are insisting on may, without difficulty, be made good. View it as a Science—as truth to be understood and believed. If religious truth were, like many kinds of secular truth, hard, intricate, abstruse, demanding for its study, not only the highest order of intellect, but all the resources of education, books, learned leisure, then indeed to most men, the blending of religion with the necessary avocation of life would be an impossibility. In that case it would be sufficient excuse for irreligion to plead, "My lot in life is inevitably one of incessant care and toil, of busy, anxious thought and wearing work. Inextricably involved, every day and hour as I am, in the world's business, how is it possible for me to devote myself to this high and abstract science?" If religion were thus, like the higher mathematics or metaphysics, a science based on the most recondite and elaborate reasonings, capable of being mastered only by the acutest minds, after years of study and laborious investigation then might it well be urged by many an unlettered man of toil, "I am no scholar—I have no head to comprehend these hard dogmas and doctrines. Learning and religion are, no doubt, fine things, but they are not for humble and hard-wrought folks like me!" In this case, indeed, the Gospel would be no Gospel at all—no good news of Heavenly love and mercy to the whole sin-ridden race of man, but only a Gospel for scholars—a religion, like the ancient philosophies for a scanty minority, clever enough to grasp its principles and set free from active business to devote themselves to the development and discussion of its doctrines.

But the Gospel is no such system of high and abstract truth. The salvation it offers is not the prize of a lofty intellect, but of a lowly heart. The mirror in which its grand truths are reflected is not a mind of calm and philologic abstraction, but a heart of earnest purity. Its light shines best and fullest, not on a life undisturbed by business, but on a soul unstained by sin. The religion of Christ, whilst it affords scope for the loftiest intellect in the contemplation and development of its glorious truths, is yet, in the exquisite simplicity of its essential facts and principles, patent to the simplest mind. Rude, untutored, toil-worn you may be, but if you have wit enough to guide you in the commonest round of daily toil, you have wit enough to learn the way to be saved. The truth as it is in Jesus, whilst in one view of it, so profound that the highest archangel's intellect may be lost in contemplation of its mysterious depths, is yet, in another, so simple that the lisping babe at a mother's knee may learn its meaning.

Again: View religion as an Art, and in this light too, its compatibility with a busy and active life in the world, it will not be difficult to perceive. For religion as an art differs from secular arts in this respect, that it may be practised simultaneously with other arts—with all other work and occupation in which we may be engaged. A man cannot be studying architecture and law at the same time. The medical practitioner cannot be engaged with his patients, and at the same time planning houses or building bridges,—practising, in other words, both medicine and engineering at one and the same moment. The practice of one secular art excludes for the time the practice of other secular arts. But not so with the art of religion. This is the universal art, the common, all-embracing profession. It belongs to no one set of functionaries, to no special class of men. Statesman, soldier, lawyer, physician, poet, painter, tradesman, farmer,—men of every craft and calling in life—may, while in the actual discharge of the duties of their varied avocations, be yet, at the same moment, discharging the duties of a higher and nobler vocation—practising the art of a Christian. Secular arts, in most cases, demand of him who would attain to eminence in one of them, an almost exclusive devotion of time, and thought, and toil. The most versatile genius can seldom be master of more than one art, and for the great majority the only calling must be that by which they earn their daily bread. Demand of the poor tradesman or peasant, whose every hour is absorbed in the struggle to earn a competency for himself and his family, that he shall be also a thorough proficient in the art of the physician, or lawyer, or sculptor, and you demand an impossibility. If religion were an art such as these, few indeed could learn it. The two admonitions, "Be diligent in business," and "Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," would be reciprocally destructive.

But religion is no such art; for it is the art of being, and of doing, good: to be an adept in it, is to become just, truthful, sincere, self-

denying, gentle, forbearing, pure in word, and thought, and deed. And the school for learning this art is, not the closet, but the world,—not some hallowed spot where religion is taught, and proficients, when duly trained, are sent forth into the world,—but the world itself—the coarse, profane, common world, with its cares and temptations, its rivalries and competitions, its hourly, ever-recurring trials of temper and character. This is, therefore, an art which all can practise, and for which every profession and calling, the busiest and most absorbing afford scope and discipline. When a child is learning to write, it matters not of what words the copy set to him is composed, the thing desired being that, whatever he writes, he learn to write well. When a man is learning to be a Christian, it matters not what his particular work in life may be; the work he does is but the copy-line set to him; the main thing to be considered is that he learn to live well. The form is nothing, the execution is everything. It is true indeed that prayer, holy reading, meditation, the solemnities and services of the Church, are necessary to religion, and that these can be practised only apart from the work of secular life. But it is to be remembered that all such holy exercises do not terminate in themselves. They are but steps in the ladder to heaven, good only as they help us to climb. They are the irrigation and enriching of the spiritual soil—worse than useless if the crop be not more abundant. They are, in short, but means to an end—good, only in so far as they help us to be good and to do good—to glorify God and do good to man; and that end can perhaps be best attained by him whose life is a busy one, whose avocations bear him daily into contact with his fellows, into the intercourse of society, into the heart of the world. No man can be a thorough proficient in navigation who has never been to sea, though he may learn the theory at home. No man can become a soldier by studying books on military tactics in his closet: he must in actual service acquire those habits of coolness, courage, discipline, address, rapid combination, without which the most learned in the theory of strategy or engineering will be but a school-boy soldier after all. And, in the same way, a man in solitude and study may become a most learned theologian, or may train himself into timid, effeminate piety of what is technically called "the religious life." But never, in the highest and holiest sense, can he become a religious man, until he has acquired those habits of daily self-denial, of resistance to temptation, of kindness, gentleness, humility, sympathy, active beneficence, which are to be acquired only in daily contact with mankind. Tell us not, then, that the man of business, the bustling tradesman, the toil-worn laborer, has little or no time to attend to religion. As well tell us that the pilot, amid the winds and storms, has no leisure to attend to navigation—or the general, on the field of battle, to the art of war! Where will he attend to it? Religion is not a perpetual moping over good books—religion is not even prayer, praise, holy ordinances, these are necessary to religion—no man can be religious without them. But religion, I repeat, is, mainly and chiefly the glorifying God amid the duties and trials of the world,—the guiding our course amid the adverse winds and currents of temptation, by the star-light of duty and the compass of divine truth,—the bearing us manfully, wisely, courageously, for the honor of Christ, our great Leader, in the conflict of life. Away then with the notion that ministers and devotees may be religious, but that a religious and holy life is impracticable in the rough and busy world! Nay rather, believe me, that is the proper scene, the peculiar and appropriate field for religion—the place in which to prove that piety is not a dream of Sundays and solitary hours; that it can bear the light of day; that it can wear well amid the rough jostlings, the hard struggles, the coarse contacts of common life,—the place, in one word, to prove how possible it is for a man to be at once "not slothful in business," and "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

Another consideration, which I shall adduce in support of the assertion that it is not impossible to blend religion with the business of common life, is this: that religion consists, not so much in doing spiritual or sacred acts, as in doing secular acts from a sacred or spiritual motive.

There is a very common tendency in our minds to classify actions according to their outward form, rather than according to the spirit or motive which pervades them. Literature is sometimes arbitrarily divided into "sacred" and "profane" literature, history into "sacred" and "profane" history,—in which classification the term "profane" is applied, not to what is bad or unholy, but to everything that is not technically sacred or religious—to all literature that does not treat of religious doctrines and duties, and to all history save church history. And we are very apt to apply the same principle to actions. Thus in many pious minds there is a tendency to regard all the actions of common life as so much, an unfortunate necessity, lost to religion. Prayer, the reading of the Bible and devotional books, public worship—and buying, selling, digging, sowing, bartering, money-making, are separated into two distinct, and almost hostile, categories. The religious heart and sympathies are thrown entirely into the former, and the latter are barely tolerated as a bondage