

**THE HOMILIST; OR, THE  
PULPIT FOR THE PEOPLE.  
NO. VIII, OCTOBER**

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**DAVID THOMAS**

**THE HOMILIST; OR, THE  
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THE  
**HOMILIST;**

OR,

THE PULPIT FOR THE PEOPLE.

CONDUCTED BY THE

REV. DAVID THOMAS,

AUTHOR OF THE CRISIS OF BEING, ETC.

No. VIII.

OCTOBER.

Price 6d.



*"I know well I ought not to have any design for myself, which admits not of subordination to the interest and honour of the Great God and my Redeemer, and which is not actually so subordinated."*

JOHN ROWLE.

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### [NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS.]

THE Editor gratefully acknowledges Communications from the following Gentlemen, who have exerted themselves to increase the circulation of "The Homilist," and who earnestly urge its continuance:—Rev. C. M'BECHNIE, Stanhope; C. SIMPSON, Wolsingham; J. STOKOE, Bilston; C. SIMPSON, Kelty; D. M. STUART, Falstone Manse, Hexham; D. M. EVANS, Manchester; D. SALMON, Trowbridge; T. DAVIES, Crediton; RICHARD JONES, Manchester; H. P. BOWEN, Middlesborough; W. LOVEJOY, Worthing; M. THOMAS, Wooton, Bassett; M. LEWIS, Abergavenny; ALEXANDER HANNAY, Dundee; D. G. WATT, Northwick; HENRY MARLEN, Incumbent of All Saints, Liverpool; THOMAS REES, Beaufort, Abergavenny; JOHN PRICE, Aberdeen; J. H. IRWIN, Luton; W. FERGUSON, Blooster. Also from Messrs. W. WALTON, S. T. SMITH, M. K. SALWAY, H. H. CULLIS, HOUSEY, Featherstone; C. CECIL, Frome, &c., &c.

In reply to many inquiries about the continuance of "The Homilist," the Editor would state, that, being from home, he is unable to make determinate plans. From the Communications he has received, he hopes that its friends have placed it beyond danger. This, however, will not be known until the demands for the present number are ascertained. As it is not deemed expedient to proceed farther until arrangements are made to make it permanent, it is probable that the next number will be deferred until the 1st of January, when we trust it will appear with new elements of attraction, and a constitution fitted for the labor of years.

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\*.\* *All Communications to be addressed to the Rev. DAVID THOMAS,  
Loughborough Park, Bristol.*

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## A HOMILY

ON THE

### Wants of the World, and the Weakness of the Church.

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"And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation," &c.—Matt. xvii. 14—21.

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THERE is a touching interest in this narrative. Every part glows and throbs with some deep passion of our common souls. It is a scene where opposite sympathies play their part with all the simplicity of nature, and the fascination of charm. Christ has just descended from the Mount of Transfiguration. The mystic lustre perhaps still lingers around his person. Peter, James, and John, who on the quiet hill had witnessed the ecstatic vision, are at his side: they meet a turbulent multitude on the way, and the other disciples are in their midst. One of their number, a father, is the object of general notice and common sympathy. He has a son, the subject of a malady under whose paroxysms he foams and tears himself, seeking self-destruction by attempting to plunge sometimes into the fire, and sometimes into the water. The unhappy father bends his knee to Christ, and earnestly prays for help. The disciples had tried their power, and failed, and the scribes and Pharisees are exultant at their non-success. With their wonted uncharitableness and hate, they seize, perhaps, the failure as another opportunity to denounce them and their Master as impostors, and to turn upon them the contempt of the multitude. Christ reproves them in language

breathing the mingled feelings of indignation and tenderness. He orders the father to bring his lunatic son into his presence, and demands of him personal faith as the necessary condition of cure. The son appears; the condition is met; and the disease is forthwith removed. Humbled by their failure, the disciples approach Jesus apart from the multitude, and inquire why they could not cast him out. The significant reply is, "Because of your unbelief."

Such is the short but wonderful piece of history before us. It comes not within our plan to investigate the nature of the malady to which the young man was subject,\* nor to reconcile formal discrepancies, which the critical eye of a sceptical mind may discover between the histories of the different evangelists. All this would necessarily occupy considerable space, and draw the mind too far into the region of logic and letters for spiritual and practical ends. We select the narrative because of its aptitude to illustrate a subject which presses heavily on our hearts, and urgently claims the attention of all earnest men. That subject is, *The wants of the world, and the weakness of the Church*. In making this application of the scene before us, we would, at the outset, disclaim all sympathy with the practice of "spiritualizing" God's word—a practice which we regard as violating all acknowledged laws of interpretation—ministering to the most morbid sentiments of the human soul—spreading a mystic haze over the book of sublimest reason, and thus clouding the light of the world. All we do is, use the narrative as Jesus used the flowing wells, the fruitful vineyards, and the fields of waving corn—make it the organ through which to speak great truths to human hearts.

The first truth is, *that the world requires a great work from the Church*. It was no trivial request that the father of this raving demoniac made upon the disciples. To remove the enraging malady—or, if you will, to exorcise the furious fiend that had gained an absolute mastery over all the faculties

\* Let those who desire to go philosophically into the question study the thoughts of the great Neander on demoniacal possession, as given in his "Life of Christ."



and organs of his son, to restore him to physical health and mental sanity, and make his existence once more a blessing to himself and a comfort to his family—was a work warranting all the earnest solicitude which the father had displayed. But greater, far greater, than this is the work which the world requires of the Church. To say that the world is possessed of *devils*—that men are moral demoniacs—is not showy rhetoric, but solemn scripture. Judged by the everlasting laws of moral reason, the conduct of the world is as reckless and irrational as that of the miserable lunatic who foams and raves, and, in frantic madness, plunges into perils. The *moral* fiends that possess its soul, inspire its energies, and direct its movements, are conspicuously manifest. They are not like the “horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” on the mountains of Dothan, seen by none but the prophet—they are visible to all.

Let me mention two or three of the most potent and prominent of the evil spirits that possess society. There is *selfism*. This is a corruption of self-love—a principle prompting men to act ever from personal consideration—to make self the centre and circumference of all plans and operations. A selfish man is one who holds all interests cheap in comparison with his own; who receives readily but gives reluctantly, unless it be with the hope of the donation flowing back with interest to his own coffers. He views all questions in their aspect upon himself. “Loss and gain” are the fundamentals of his moral system. He weighs everlasting principles in the balance of lucre, and all is visionary and Utopian—chaff that tells not in the scales. The laborer may toil and sweat—the shopman wear away his health—the mariner hazard his existence—the warrior dye continents in blood, and tread empires in the dust;—compunction he has none, if results are favorable to his interests. Such is selfishness; and is it not the presiding genius of the world—the very mainspring of society—producing and perpetuating the motion of almost every wheel?

There, again, is *sensualism*. The apostle divides mankind into two classes—the “*carneal*” and the “*spiritual*.” The great

distinction between them in their relation to the body is this: the spiritual attends to fleshly appetites *as the necessities of his nature*, the carnal *as the sources of his pleasure*. If seeking pleasure from the senses is carnality, how fearfully prevalent is it! "Fleshly lusts," not spiritual impulses, move, mould, and master the bulk of the race. Esau's appetites governed his conscience—impelled him to barter away his birthright for a mess of pottage, and reduced him to beggary and tears. In his foolish conduct you have a picture of the world; in his wretched destiny you may read its doom. Amongst savage hordes, and in rural districts where education has not gone to wake the intellect to thought, and to touch the conscience into life, the reign of this power might have been expected; and there it is in its grossest forms and most disgusting aspects. But, lo! amidst civilized communities of men has it not a wide dominion? The luxurious in living, the gay in dress, the material in wealth, the animal in pleasure—where are these not coveted? where are they not sought? Sensualism is, verily, a mighty spirit amongst us. It plays a prominent part in the merchandise of the world. Art, in its highest forms, ministers to it: sculptor, painter, singer—the loftiest geniuses—stand waiting at its side, and move at its behest. It is the inspiration of theatres and the fascination of amusements. It is sung in taverns, and has its music in drawing-rooms. It is the chief element in the literature of the masses. It breathes in the ballad of the beggar, and is bound in the volume of the peer. It is the talk of the vulgar in the streets; it is the reading of *refined* ones in their quiet chamber, and, in the bright days of summer, on the beach. Will any keen observer of society pronounce this exaggeration, or hesitate to admit that it falls far beneath a full statement of the case?

There is also *scepticism*. I do not mean mere intellectual scepticism. God knows, this is fearfully spreading amongst us. We have all classes of infidels: there is the anti-theist, who declares there is no God; there is the anti-biblist, who admits a God, but denies the divinity of the Bible; there is the anti-supernaturalist, who admits the divinity of the Bible in the

same sense as he admits the divinity of any other true book, but who denies to it any supernatural feature; and there is the anti-propitiationalist, who professes to believe in the supernaturalness of the Bible, but denies the great doctrine of atonement. Intellectual infidelity in these various forms is working busily in our midst. It has its clubs, its platforms, and its press. Philosophy and poetry, logic and eloquence, are pressed into its service. It has the tongue of the orator and the ear of the populace. But it is not of this scepticism that I speak. I refer to something deeper, broader, and mightier far—the *spirit* of which all intellectual infidelities are the effects and forms—the soil from which they spring. The scepticism of the heart and life, which no *argument* can meet, is the evil demon which oppresses me. Does not this spirit possess men? Where is the faith of the heart? I see this spiritual scepticism everywhere; not merely in the manners of the millions who sail down your rivers, travel your railroads, saunter through your streets, crowd your taverns, and perambulate your parks on the holy day of God, but in your cathedrals, your churches, and your chapels, with heartless spathy repeating its *beliefs*, muttering its prayers, and singing its psalms. It haunts our temples, it kneels in pews, and speaks from altars. “Verily, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth.”

There is, finally, *superstition*. The strongest native element in the soul is the religious. In the right development of this element is man's well-being—in its perversion is his ruin. When it is clouded with ignorance, and inspired with fear; when it bows at the shrine of a false deity, and worships through the intervention of priests; when it moves by blind impulse rather than by enlightened conviction, it becomes superstition: and superstition has ever been, and still is, a mighty spirit of evil in our world; it reigns with an undisputed sway over the vast domain of heathenism, and is the empress of more than one-half of professing Christendom.

These are some of the chief spirits that possess society. How much of the phenomena of the general history of the