

SAINTS OR SINNERS:

WHICH ?

BY

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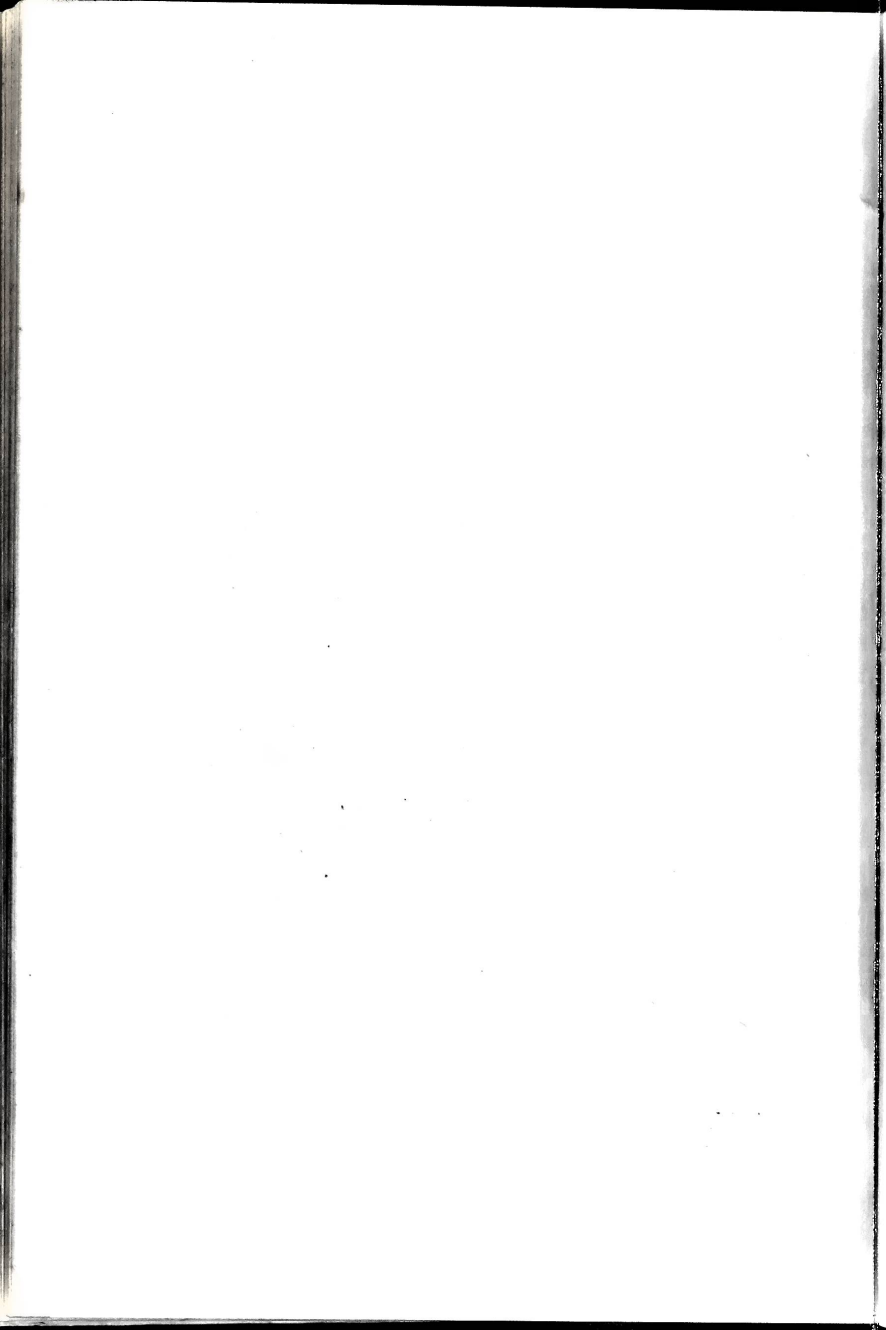
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WHICH ?

SAINTS and sinners are not two selected from the numerous classes to be met with in the world, with which in every-day life we come in contact. They comprise the entire population of the globe. This is the one broad and essential division which includes all mankind. There are black races and white ones ; but, then, there are also the intermediate red, olive, and dusky. There are tall men and short ones, heavy men and light ones ; but not to the exclusion of those of middle height or weight, which stand somewhere between the two. Even the terms "virtuous" and "vicious" will not serve for an exhaustive distinction, for there are probably none so virtuous as to have no vices, and none so vicious as to be destitute of all virtue ; while a great number are either so indifferent to both sides that they can hardly be said to belong to one class or the other, or to have the good and evil so balanced in their character that neither adjective will describe them accurately. In all other matters without exception gradual shadings may be detected, by which one class merges into the other, to say nothing of the fact that they will be frequently found overlapping each other. In reference to Saints and Sinners, however, we have a well-marked and perfectly distinct line, which nothing can erase—a gulf which cannot be spanned, a chasm with no bridge possible. The two classes are distinct in species, in genera, and even in order, to use a simile from Natural History. They are separated the one from the other by a line which cannot be wiped out, and no interchange of qualities between them is possible. The human race, according to orthodox theology, is just divided into these two classes, and no further division on those lines is for one moment to be thought of. Some

Saints may come very near being Sinners, and a few Sinners may, by a large stock of natural goodness, a strong will bent in the direction of virtue, and very favourable surroundings, approach remarkably near the line which marks them off from the Saints ; but neither can quite get rid of that which indicates them as distinct beings. There are no gradations, it is said, between Heaven and Hell, and so there are none between those supposed to be destined hereafter to occupy places in these regions. If it be asked, Is such a division logically possible, judging from what is known of human character? the answer is, The distinction is not based on character nor on any human quality whatever. So far as all ordinary classification goes, it is purely arbitrary ; its groundwork is, however, professedly supernatural. In the New Testament the whole race is symbolised as being composed only of sheep and goats, and in all the creeds of orthodox Churches the one distinction drawn is between believers and unbelievers, the converted and the unconverted—in other words, Saints and Sinners. Of course, it is considered possible for a Sinner to become a Saint, or for a Saint to lapse into a Sinner ; but no admixture of the qualities of the two can under any circumstances occur. The instant a man ceases to be a Saint he is a Sinner out and out, and not the smallest vestige of his saintliness remains ; while, on the other hand, the Sinner, however depraved, may, by a kind of spiritual transformation, be changed in the twinkling of an eye into a Saint ; but then he is no longer a Sinner, even in the most infinitesimal degree. The separating agent is the alleged supernatural, and as such defies logic and all human mental analysis. Thus it is useless to urge the question, Is any division of mankind into two classes possible? because the only reply to be received is that it is accomplished by the grace of God, and with God all things are said to be possible ; and there the controversy must end. The real question to be considered, therefore, is, What are the characteristics of each of these classes, and wherein do they differ? Of course, I belong to the Sinners, and it may be said, therefore, that I am incompetent to discuss the Saints. But, then, it may be replied, in the first place, that the Saints are often found discussing the Sinners, and this would, upon such a theory, be equally unfair ; in the second, that, as no person can be both, such discussion must be

altogether futile from this point of view ; and, thirdly, that we have ample material before us from the Saints themselves upon which to form an opinion. It will be my endeavour, therefore, to do ample justice to both Saints and Sinners, dealing with their respective characters and value as delineated in history and known by observation. Here we shall find no lack of material from which to judge of the part they have played, and are still playing, in the ranks of every-day life. It is hardly likely that the members of these two classes will agree in the estimate they form of each other. Nor can they well work together upon any lines where their peculiar qualities will be likely to exercise any sort of influence. They have to keep, therefore, largely apart. The Marquis of Salisbury once, in the House of Lords, describing Church parties, provoked a good deal of laughter by an Irishism, called a bull. He said : " A congregation may be divided among themselves into two parties ; yet, if there were any means of separating them, they would both go on happily together—I mean," he added, " apart." Well, the Saints and Sinners are separated ; but we can go on very happily together—I mean apart.

Saints and Sinners : what are we to say of them ? The Saints are holy, the Sinners unholy ; the Saints are righteous, the Sinners unrighteous ; the Saints celestial, the Sinners infernal ; the Saints are the children of God, the Sinners the offspring of—well, " the Evil One," as the Revised Version has it. The Saints are to sit on clouds and sing psalms through all eternity ; the Sinners to gnash their teeth in endless woe for ever and ever, and, as Lorenzo Dow says, for five or six everlastings on the top of that. The Saints are regarded as the " goody-goody " people, not on account of their own intrinsic worth, but in consequence of their professed allegiance to a special faith ; the Sinners are those denounced by the Church as unregenerated members of society, because they prefer fidelity to conviction rather than to creeds and dogmas born of a cruel and mind-degenerating theology. The Saints are those who, thinking they lack the power of self-improvement, rely upon an external " Saviour " for their moral elevation ; the Sinners are those who depend upon the potency of an enlightened and cultivated humanity for the inspiration to ethical advancement, feeling assured—

“ That within yourselves deliverance must be sought :
Each man his prison makes.”

In discussing Saints we come at once upon a sub-division made by themselves. There are Catholic Saints and Protestant Saints. It is by no means certain that one of those classes would admit, except in a very limited degree, the saintship of the other. But each will contend of itself that it comprises Saints *par excellence*. Of course the Catholic Saints differ widely from the Protestant Saints upon most points ; but upon one thing they are agreed—namely, that to be a Saint it is necessary to devote one’s attention especially to matters which relate to the Church rather than to the world, to the supposed future life in preference to the present, to the effort to please God rather than to the desire to ennoble man, and, finally, to the sanctification of the soul rather than to the purification of the body. The method of doing this is not the same in the two cases, but the end is identical. The faith of the Saint in each case is admirably set forth by Lowell in “ The Biglow Papers :”—

“ I du believe in special ways
O’ prayin’ an’ convartin’ ;
The bread comes back in many days,
An’ buttered, tu, fer sartin ;—
I mean in preyin’ till one busts
On wut the party chooses,
An’ in convartin’ public trusts
To very privit uses.

* * * *

“ I du believe in prayer an’ praise
To him thet hez the grantin’
O’ jobs,—in every thin’ thet pays,
But most of all in CANTIN’ ;
This doth my cup with marcies fill,
This lays all thought o’ sin to rest,—
I *don’t* believe in princerples,
But, O, I *du* in interest.

* * * *

“ In short, I firmly du believe
In Humbug generally,
Fer it’s a thing thet I perceive
To hev a solid vally ;
This heth my faithful shepherd ben,
In pasturs sweet heth led me,
An’ this ’ll keep the people green
To feed ez they hev fed me.”

The number of Roman Catholic Saints is so great as to be perfectly bewildering ; and it is quite impossible to remember the names of half of them. The principle upon which men are canonised—and, of course, afterwards worshipped—is very difficult to discover ; but usually it is, I suppose, some kind of service rendered to the Church—very often service of an exceedingly questionable character, judged of from any human standpoint. The members of the Church who are elevated into Saints, upon very much the same principle as the Pagan apotheosis of heroes into gods, are much less numerous to-day than in the past, for reasons which it is difficult to understand, unless the Church is admitted to be degenerating in spiritual power or zeal or holiness, or whatever else may be looked upon as necessary to constitute a Saint. During the first three centuries of the Christian Church nearly every bishop became a Saint ; but in the last three hundred years only one has been so honoured, and he by no means a brilliant example—viz., Pius V., who, according to Lord Acton, was the instigator of a contemplated murder of the English monarch. Ireland, that favoured soil for the Roman Catholic superstition, in which Romanism, with the rank luxuriance of a noxious weed poisoning the very atmosphere of one of the most beautiful countries on the earth, in three centuries added eight hundred and fifty Saints to the calendar, while, according to Father Burke, it has not elevated one since Lawrence O'Toole, who lived seven hundred years ago. It is unnecessary here to enter upon the character of these Saints. History records the fact that, for the most part, they were men guilty of the worst of crimes, and destitute of those grand virtues which exalt and ennoble human character. They were haters of freedom and the greatest enemies of progress that the world has ever seen. The Church which they serve so faithfully, and to which they owe their apotheosis, has crushed out all liberty among peoples by the heavy tread of its iron hoofs, wherever it has been able to hold up its head and send forth its pestilential breath to poison the springs of moral, political, and intellectual life. With these Saints perjury is often a duty when it can serve the purpose of the Church, truth dangerous to the people, murder in the cause of religion a virtue, persecution to death commendable, lying desirable, uncleanness profitable, and every vile abomination on earth sicken-

ing to contemplate defensible on theological grounds. The perfection which saintship implies is frequently a perfection of intellectual subjection and moral degradation, resulting often in the most terrible form of criminality and all the foulness which even bad men of the world would shudder at with horror. The most eminent doctors of the Church may be quoted as not only tolerating every conceivable crime, but even instigating and enjoying it—and, indeed, threatening eternal perdition to those who were not prepared to perform acts at which pure humanity would stand aghast. The history of saintship is written in blood and engraven with fire. To such a history the following words of the poet are exceedingly applicable :—

“ It doth avail not that I speak to thee ;
 Ye cannot change, for ye are old and grey.
 But you have chosen your lot ; your fame shall be
 A book of blood, whence, in a milder day,
 Men shall learn truth when you are wrapped in clay.”

Recently the *Dublin Review* (vol. xx., p. 192), a high-class Roman Catholic authority, thus delivered itself on the question of education :—“ We are very far from meaning that ignorance is the Catholic youth’s best preservative against intellectual danger ; but it is a very powerful one nevertheless, and those who deny this are but inventing a theory in the very teeth of manifest facts. A Catholic destitute of intellectual tastes, whether in a higher or a lower rank, may, probably enough, be tempted to idleness, frivolity, gambling, sensuality ; but in none but the very rarest cases will he be tempted to that which, in the Catholic view, is an immeasurably greater calamity than any of these, or all put together—viz., deliberate doubt of the truth of his religion.” Is it to be wondered at that, with such teaching, the greatest ignorance and the grossest superstition prevail among these people ? To be a Saint evidently is to be an uneducated dolt, an intellectual pigmy, with a dwarfed intelligence and crippled mental powers ; for here is the honest concession of what we have long contended for, that education is calculated to destroy the belief in popular religions and to make men lose their faith in the teaching of the Church and in the creeds of the various theologies that abound in our midst, to the intellectual hurt of the people. One distinction, consequently, between Saints and Sinners lies here,

that the former prefer and defend ignorance and pose as the champions of mental darkness, while the latter are the advocates of culture, freedom, and intellectual light. Is it any marvel that the days when the Saints were supreme in their power over the masses were known as "the dark ages"? Such Saints present a striking contrast to, and cut a sorry figure in the presence of, the Sinners of every-day life. Lord Beaconsfield, once speaking on the subject of Darwinism—which clearly he did not thoroughly understand—contrasted the theory of the descent of man from monkeys with the hypothesis of finding his parentage in angels, and added, "I am on the side of the angels." So we say, We are on the side of the Sinners, and long may they live to rebuke the pretensions and correct the many errors and vices of the Saints, who have been men, as Milton puts it—

"That practised falsehood under saintly show,
Deep malice to conceal, couched with revenge."

Protestant Saints differ very considerably from those of the Catholic persuasion—so much so, in fact, that there are very few points of resemblance between them ; one there is, and that a most conspicuous one—namely, their assumption of superiority over other people. The Protestant Saint is not canonised after death by his Church ; he canonises himself during life. His infallible authority he finds not in popes, cardinals, and priestly conclaves, but between the covers of a book and in theological creeds ; and the source of his inspiration is not a visible Church, but what is termed the direct operation of the spirit of God upon his own mind. Hence he judges individually his own claims of saintship and decides for himself whether he is a Saint or not, independently of any external authority. This, to say the least of it, produces a good deal of confusion, because the claims of one are not unfrequently denied by another. With some the whole question resolves itself into election from all eternity, according to the purpose of God, quite apart from any merits or demerits of the person so chosen. Persons sharing this view consider that the Almighty, for some reason of his own, which to human beings appears perfectly inscrutable, selected from before the foundation of the world certain persons to be his favourites in this world, and the inheritors of everlasting joy in the next, quite regardless of

their character or their acts, while he damned others to perpetual misery, from which there is no way for them to escape, simply because he so willed it. Mr. Spurgeon, referring to this horrible doctrine—in which he is a firm believer—tells an anecdote in one of his published sermons, with great gusto, of an old woman, who said: “If the Lord had not loved me before I was born, he would never have loved me at all; for I am sure I have done nothing since to cause him to do so.” It would not be gallant to deny that this very pious woman formed an accurate opinion of her own character, if a wrong one of the purposes and decrees of her God. Unfortunately, there are some people who go through life without doing much to deserve the love of any one; but, too often, such persons are the victims of orthodox delusions, and not the recipients of Nature’s ever-inspiring affection. As a rule, they allow the usefulness of their careers to be marred by the dreadful idea that—

“Nothing is worth a thought beneath
But how we may escape the death
That never, never dies.”

Thus the value of existence is sacrificed, and the tenderness of humanity is blunted by the worthlessness and harsh teachings of theology.

This election and reprobation theory is terribly repugnant to all human notions of goodness, and even justice. No doubt there is a great truth underlying the doctrine of predestination, although it is, of course, presented in a very false and an excessively repugnant form. It recognises the doctrine of determinism, with which most modern philosophical thinkers agree. The part of it which consigns millions of men to everlasting torture for no other reason than that God so willed it, and that it was his divine pleasure that it should be so, is horrible beyond description. But the great apostle of this dogma, Jonathan Edwards, has given to the world an exceedingly valuable work on “The Freedom of the Will,” which no Arminian has yet fairly answered. We take other grounds on this question than the great Calvinistic writer; but the conclusion at which we arrive is the same. The will is, like all things else, an effect as well as a cause. It certainly counts for something, indeed for much, in human actions; but then it has itself sprung from, and is conditioned by, organisation, environment, and other causes

which it is powerless to control. Man's motives do not arise from his volition; on the contrary, they govern the will. Man is free, of course, in a sense—that is, he is free to act in accordance with his desires; but these desires act independently of volition. And this is all the freedom that is possible, and it is all that any rational person should demand. No man wants freedom to do that which he has no inclination to do, or to act contrary to his desires. His freedom lies in his capacity to obey his impulses; but these impulses the will has no power to create. The will is not an originating cause, but itself an effect, the result of a complication of circumstances, such as external surroundings, the condition of the brain, temperament, age, sex, and heredity. To say that the will is free in the sense that Arminians hold it to be, is to state that which is paradoxical. For, if a person has the power to call up a desire by the will, it is certain that some prior desire induced him to do so. What, therefore, caused that desire? Suppose one individual says he wills to do a thing, and he does it: he must have had an inclination, or he would not have thus willed and acted. Some inclination must, therefore, precede the will, and, clearly, the will cannot be the cause of that which precedes itself in point of time, and to which, in fact, it owes its existence.

But the serious difficulty which arises in reference to this election doctrine is the fact already mentioned, that each person is left to decide for himself as to his being a Saint or a Sinner, and also whether he is one of the favoured ones or not—that is, whether he belongs to the sheep or the goats. The consequence is, that many who are elect Saints, according to their own estimation, are such characters as to lead inevitably to the conclusion that, if God chose them before they were born, he either did not know what sort of people they were likely to turn out to be, or else he displayed a very questionable taste in their election. Other good Saints deny the whole theory of predestination, and maintain that man's spiritual position is the result of his own choice in accordance with the freedom of the will, and that, therefore, whether he be a Saint or a Sinner is a matter of his own individual decision, and, hence, if he remain alienated from God and receive damnation after death, it is entirely his own fault. But how does this idea harmonise with the

notion of God's foreknowledge? According to this doctrine, God knows before a child is born whether it will be saved or lost, and that knowledge renders its state certain. If, for instance, when I was born God foreknew that I should live and die a Sinner and be doomed to eternal perdition after my death, then I cannot escape ; for to urge that I can is to say that God knew and did not know at the same time. Coleridge calls the distinction between decreeing and permitting "a quibble," "and one which is quite absurd when applied to an omniscience and omnipotence perpetually creative." And Coleridge was right ; for to suppose that the "Great Father of all" would either doom or permit any of his children to be doomed before they were born to everlasting misery, while he had the power to arrange otherwise, is to rob him of the attribute of goodness and to charge him with a crime that most human parents would scorn to be guilty of. This, however, does not affect the difficulty under consideration, which is that, according to both the theory of predestination and that of the freedom of the will, the individual man himself decides whether he is a Saint or not. The evidence of saintship is internal, and hence no one else is in a position to form an opinion with regard to it. No Church can sit in judgment on such a person, because he claims that the evidence—and that of an irresistible character—lies within his own breast. The Saints of this class are of various grades, and are very often found disputing the claims of each other. Thus the Mormons declare that they possess such evidence in their own behalf, and that it is of such a nature that it cannot be mistaken—indeed, they claim that they alone possess it, and hence they are Saints *par excellence*—"Latter-Day Saints ;" that is, the only Saints in these latter days. But the rest of the Christian world declare this sect to be heretical in the extreme, and that those who belong to it are wild fanatics, self-deluded madmen, and, in many instances, rank impostors. The internal evidence which, in their own case, they deem conclusive is denied to others to be of the least value. The Shakers are Saints by the same kind of evidence, and it leads them to look upon all relationship of the sexes as of the Devil, and marriage to be a snare and a curse. The Mormons, from the same standpoint, maintain that by polygamy alone can man attain to anything like a state of

happiness here and blessedness in the hereafter ; while the Oneida Creek community, founded by Father Noyes, also composed of Saints the evidence of whose sainthood is within, proclaims one of the fruits of the spirit to be promiscuousness in sexual matters. By some the evidence of saintship consists in immersion, by others in keeping a seventh-day Sabbath in opposition to the first day, and by others in some still more trivial form or rite.

All this, to a Sinner, is a little confusing, and we become somewhat puzzled to know what are the essential qualities of a Saint without which he would relapse into a Sinner. A good story is told of an old woman who said that, if you took away her "total depravity, you took away her religion." This, perhaps, is true of many besides the old woman ; so we will leave them their total depravity, and consider it one of the essential characteristics of a Saint.

Now, we have been pretty well governed by Saints of one kind and the other for a good many centuries, and what is the outcome of it all ? The world is not what we would expect it to be, considering the great pretensions of these holy ones, and the almost perfection of character which they claim, and the superiority to Sinners which they arrogate to themselves. Crime abounds, immorality is found on every hand, vice overflows the land like mighty floods that have burst their dams and are sweeping all before them ; the old modesties and rectitudes of life frequently disappear in these days ; the sacredness of obligations is lightly esteemed, often quite disregarded ; there is an apotheosis of sensuous—not to say sensual—pleasure, which is destructive of the noblest part of man ; falsehood and evasion are almost universal, hypocrisy and cunning are fashionable, drunkenness is common, and vulgar swearing is not infrequent ; there is ostentatious display on the part of the rich, and grinding poverty on the part of the poor, and chaos everywhere. An able modern Christian writer (Dr. Halcombe), after having spoken strongly of the condition of society as regards parents, thus proceeds to deal with children :—"From such parents, what children ? Oftentimes unwelcome visitors, hated and persecuted before birth, neglected afterwards through ignorance, or laziness, or selfishness ; left as much as possible to servants or subordinates, what can we expect ? See what little savages—what early

development of evil and vicious propensities, what cruelty to insects and small animals, what meanness and perfidy to each other, what bickerings, fightings, envyings, vanity, pride, greediness, often uncorrected, unreprieved ; sometimes even encouraged by parents ! Injudiciously petted, injudiciously beaten, maltrained, maltreated, they become prodigies of deceit and dissimulation ; unwatched, uninstructed, driven too early to school or to low associates to be got out of the way, they fall into revolting habits that poison the very springs of life. What follows ? Disobedience, head-strong passions, outrageous tempers, disrespect for parents, quarrels and hatred of each other, false views of life, base motives, low ambitions, concealments, hypocrisies, selfishness and utter worldliness, and so on to manhood and womanhood, to make husbands and wives like their parents and to beget progeny like themselves. And for all this, after eighteen centuries of instruction, the Christian Church is responsible."

This is strong Christian testimony as to the nature of a Church founded, regulated, and controlled by Saints. What picture of the domain of Sinners can be correctly drawn which shall surpass the above confession in all the weaknesses and vices of a debased and degraded humanity ? Evidently saintship is no guarantee for virtue and no protection against the evils that too frequently blight the happiness and nobility of man. Of these Saints we may say with Ophelia :—

" Do not as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven ;
While, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads."

But the classification into Catholic Saints and Protestant Saints is, after all, a broad division into two great parties, and each of these comprises within itself quite a number of varieties. There is the melancholy Saint, who rolls up the whites of his eyes, pulls an exceedingly long and solemn lace, eschews smiles, hates levity, denounces a good hearty laugh as a sound issuing from the bottomless pit, fit only to be indulged in by madmen or fiends. His countenance looks as sour as a crab-apple, his nose points up to heaven, he is knock-kneed and intred, has a big abdomen and small legs, and never looks you in the face while speaking to you. His favourite text, which he never tires of quoting, is, " Man

is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards" (a very curious simile, by the way; for sparks do not always fly upwards, and, if they did, the relationship between them doing so and trouble is not easy to discover); and when he sings it is, in the most hollow and sepulchral tone, the cheerful words of John Wesley:—

"No room for mirth or trifling here,
For worldly hope or worldly fear,
If life so soon be gone."

Just fancy, when one hears those words drawled out as a Methodist of the old school alone can give them forth, what an impression it must make upon the Sinner as to the happy influence of saintly profession! The fact is that, so far as the pious singer is concerned, life might as well not have been at all, and that the sooner it "is gone" the better will it be for his comfort. In this merry, laughing world he is clearly out of place, and could well be spared from the busy haunts of men. The prattle of little children and their frolicsome romps are, to him, the inductions of original sin; and the bleatings of lambs and their gambols while at play only show the necessity for the butcher to bring about that condition in which the addition of mint sauce will be agreeable to the epicure. This kind of Saint abhors a joke, calls a pun a miserable perversion of the meaning of words, hyperbole lying, metaphor absurd, and fiction the quintessence of falsehood. He says he belongs to the "little flock," which is a blessing for which we cannot feel too grateful; for a big flock composed of such as he would make life intolerable to everybody outside their fold. He has no abiding city here, which is a mercy; and he seeks a home in the skies, although he never seems anxious to reach it, but stays in this world as long as possible, a trouble to himself and a nuisance to all with whom he comes in contact. He delights to picture a heaven beyond the skies; but "distance lends enchantment to the view." He is serious while other men laugh, and solemn while they are joyous. He is akin to those ancestors of ours pictured by Charles Lamb, who lived before candles came into general use, and who, when a joke was cracked in the dark, had to feel around for the smile. In his case, however, there would be no smile to feel for, inasmuch as the Saint exclaims: "Woe

unto you who laugh ;” “Blessed are they that mourn ;” “Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness.” One writer says that laziness begets laughter ; but in this Saint’s case it produces the very opposite effect. He is lazy and grim at the same time, robbing life of its beauty and rapture, and ignoring the possible brilliancy of Time to the gloomy anticipations of Eternity. In the language of Byron, he lives and acts—

“In hope to merit heaven by making earth a hell.”

Then there is the zealous Saint, who bores friends and enemies alike about the salvation of his immortal soul. This man is generally fat, greasy, and extremely homely ; his nose is as red as a signal light on a railway, and his eyes resemble two gimlet holes bored in a huge turnip. He is, as a rule, quite innocent of grammar in his speech, of good behaviour in his manners, and seems to keep hell-fire constantly before his eyes. He drawls in his speech, and addresses you in a soft familiar tone as “dear friend,” while his rude and obtrusive conduct would suggest that he was one of your most objectionable enemies. He professes to be more interested in the state of your soul than of all else on earth, and tells you that, unless you pass through a change akin to some theological legerdemain process, you will assuredly be damned. He rejoices in proclaiming, “I tell ye nay ; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” He pesters the life out of those who are unfortunate enough to be his victims, with his cant jargon, with the bundle of leaflets that he carries in his hands for distribution, and with his warnings to flee from the “wrath to come,” till one almost thinks that damnation after all would be a relief to escape him. He informs you that this world “is a vale of tears,” and that all sublunary things will speedily pass away, which certainly would be “a consummation devoutly to be wished” if he were included in the departure. It is very difficult to escape from this Saint. He buttonholes you in the street, on the railway or street car, and at your ordinary occupation. He has made up his mind to convert you, and he leaves no stone unturned whereby he can accomplish his purpose. He tells you that he prays for you night and day, and you may consider yourself lucky if he do not go down on his knees and *prey* upon your patience right there. He is simply a

theological bore, who sacrifices reason to passion, good taste to fanaticism, and common sense to orthodox stupidity.

Then there is the oily Saint, whose words are smooth and soft, and who is very unctuous in his manners, the extreme of affability. He tells you that his soul is full of love for all mankind, that the very worst of them have his sympathy, and that the cardinal virtue is charity. This Saint is lean and threadbare, and will probably end his interview by asking for the loan of five dollars or a gift to some missionary cause, never omitting to add that "God loveth a cheerful giver," and "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord." And, above all, he is particularly anxious to remind you of the words of "our blessed Master," "Lend, hoping for nothing again." This Saint is much more likely to take persons off their guard than any of the others, for he overflows with honeyed words and suave manners. This is the man that all should be especially aware of; his arts are duplicity and deception, and he lives in the very slime of hypocrisy, the very goodness of his nature being counteracted by the evil influence of pious extravagance and orthodox cant. There are other Saints, such as the noisy Saint, the upstart Saint of the noisy Pecksniffian descent, the Saint of dudist manners, the holy Saint who boasts that he has not sinned for forty years, and the female Saint, who is, of course, the most dangerous type of all, in consequence of the persistent fascination of her sex and her natural influence over the majority of men. Then there is a genus who describe themselves as half Saint and half Sinner—"Plymouth Brethren" they are termed in England. They hold that, while the lower part of their human nature may sin, the higher portion remains quite holy, and thus the Saint and Sinner are combined in one person. It is not necessary to discuss these people, because to recognise them will be to spoil the classification of mankind into Saints and Sinners. There is one interesting question, however, which may occur to some minds in connection with these half-and-half people, which is, What will happen to the upper side of their natures if the devil gets the lower side? That, perhaps, is a mystery which no Agnostic should attempt to solve. Enough has here been said to indicate the nature of the various kinds of Saints that abound in our midst; probably there is a place for them in the economy of nature; but in the domestic

circle and in spheres of public usefulness, private purity, moral culture, intellectual advancement, national freedom, and individual liberty, they have failed to do that which would entitle them to the sympathies of a free and enlightened generation. Their natures have been, and are, so contradictory, their conduct so inconsistent, their actions so detrimental to the well-being of society, that one is justified in saying, when thinking of most of them: "I have thought some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well—they imitated humanity so abominably."

Coming to the consideration of Sinners, it may be asked, What is a Sinner? In the regular service of the Church of England, which the devotees of that form of religion go through every Sunday, generally twice, each person confesses that he has "left undone the things which he ought to have done and done the things which he ought not to have done." This continual acknowledgment of misdoing is not very complimentary to the faith which is supposed to influence the conduct of the wrong-doers. By the way, what a peculiar predicament such worshippers would be placed in supposing that, in some one week, they had, by an extraordinary effort, or by having been placed in very favourable circumstances, or by both combined, done what they ought to do, and not done what they ought not to do, then the following Sunday the repetition of these words would really be lying, and, what is worse from their point of view, lying to their God—that is, if the confession be addressed to him, rather than intended for the ears of the rest of the congregation. In such a case what is to be done? The words are there, and must be repeated. Is it not, therefore, necessary for the people to do wrong on the week-day in order that they may speak the truth on the Sunday? They then add, "There is no health in us," and go on to pray, "Have mercy upon us miserable sinners"—or "offenders," which means the same thing. The word "health" here has reference, no doubt, to "spiritual" health, for the entire congregation could scarcely be said to be suffering from some physical disease. Indeed, it is well enough known that "health" and "holiness" are really identical in their signification, having the same derivation, as originally they had the same meaning. Health is harmony; disease is discord, whether of body or mind. "Without artificial medicament

of philosophy," says Carlyle, "or tight-lacing of creeds (always very questionable), the healthy soul discerns what is good and adheres to it and retains it, discerns what is bad and spontaneously casts it off. An instinct from Nature herself, like that which guides the wild animals of the forest to their food, shows him what he shall do and what he shall abstain from. The false and the fantastic will not adhere to him; cant and all diseased incrustations are impossible." The man, therefore, who really feels that there is no health in him confesses himself to be out of harmony with law, an abnormal product in the universe, a morbid accretion on the fair face of Nature, a diseased and withered branch on the tree of life. Such a confession may be fitly indulged in for once when the discovery is made; but to be always doing it is the height of religious folly. For, if there is an intention to put matters right, why is it not done? if no such intention, then why not cease canting about it? Well may such persons call themselves "miserable sinners," for miserable they can hardly help being while they remain at variance with law and order, and are everlastingly lamenting that they are so, and yet make no attempt to amend matters. If we take these people at their own estimate, they are offended, which shows that the confession so glibly made week after week is insincere, to say the least of it—in fact, it is what they themselves would call in others rank hypocrisy. A story is told of John Wesley to the effect that an old woman went to the great preacher and said: "Oh, Mr. Wesley, I am a dreadful sinner." Wesley replied: "Yes, Maam." She repeated: "I am an awful sinner." Wesley nodded assent. "You have no idea," she continued, "how bad I am: I have been a terrible sinner." "Yes," said Wesley, "I can easily understand that you are very bad." At which the old woman glared up and said: "Bad, Mr. Wesley? What do you mean? I am not bad: I'll have you to know that I am as good as you." Now, if you take these people at their word, and describe them in the same terms as they apply to themselves, it will soon be seen how insincere their confession has been.

But what is a Sinner? A violation of the moral law one understands; an infringement of the laws of the land is clear enough. But neither of these is meant when sin is spoken of by religious persons. It means something dif-

ferent from both. True, it may include these ; but it is not necessarily connected with either. It is, in a theological sense, an offence against God, and may or may not involve any wrong to man. Or, if there should be a wrong to a fellow being, it is not that which constitutes the most heinous part of the sin. Sin, we are told, is the violation of law. Well, but what law? Not necessarily the moral law, but some Divine law, which is supposed to be higher than any that can spring from human authority. The questions here suggest themselves, What is this alleged Divine law, and can it be known to man? If it can be known, why has not an intelligent application of it been given to the world? On the other hand, if we are ignorant of its nature, how can it be acted upon? Theology teaches that the human race became Sinners in consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve. But admitting, *pro tem.*, the theory in Genesis to be true, was any sin committed by those primitive progenitors? Samuel Taylor Coleridge says: "Sin must be a state originant in the will of the actor, entirely independent of circumstances extrinsic to that will." The Bible, however, records three circumstances over which Adam and Eve could have had no control—namely, the fruit which was "pleasant to the eyes," the desire to partake of the fruit, and the serpent which tempted the woman to eat that which was "good for food." Is an act upon the part of a person sinful if he or she is compelled to perform it? Besides, this act in the Garden of Eden was intended by God either to be performed or not. If he intended it, there could be no sin ; while, if he did not intend it, he being omnipotent, man could not do it in spite of him. It is no answer to say, "God permitted it." A God all good could not sin, and to give man permission to sin would be admitting that a finite being could do more than an infinite being, and also that which he (the infinite being) was incapable of accomplishing.

Religious opinions have everywhere in the past influenced men's minds on the questions of morality and what should form the basis of ethical codes. No one will deny the fact that the conceptions formed of God will depend largely upon the characteristics of the people among whom the conceptions are formed. The gods of savages simply reflect the feelings and ideas of the race where the god belief obtains. They are cruel, brutal, revengeful, and licentious, according

to the characters of the worshippers ; and the methods resorted to for appeasing them will be just those by which the worshipper would like himself to be approached, and which would afford him some sort of gratification. In Greece graceful harmony, beauty, and the highest development of art were personified in its mythology. As character and culture became elevated, the conception of God becomes more lofty. The different views of God which obtain have modified the conception formed of offences against God—in other words, sin.

The moral law has often been moulded by the religious conception. In ancient Egypt so great a crime was it considered to kill an ibis that whoever did so was put to death. The Spartans were encouraged to steal, it being thought quite moral to do so. Falsehood and deceit were deemed praiseworthy among the members of the early Christian Church. In fact, lying was regarded as a virtue if it were indulged in for pious purposes ; and St. Paul evidently justified such acts. Even to-day lying is deemed to be no sin among some people—the Chinese, for instance. Hundreds of other cases of a similar kind might be given ; but these will suffice to show that the conception of sin among one people is the reverse of what we meet with in another.

It will now be apparent that, in the conventional sense in which the word "sin" is employed, it may be completely dis severed from vice or immorality. Two sets of duties are recognised by religious persons : one relating to God and the other to man. The neglect of the first class is sin, the omission of the other vice. As before stated, the latter are largely influenced by the former ; but still it is the violation of the law arising out of the former that constitutes sin, and the sinner is he who is guilty of such violation. We have, therefore, a class of acts which are right or wrong, independent altogether of any sort of relationship that they may sustain, apart from theology, to mankind, and these acts will be deemed sinful or holy in proportion as they fulfil certain religious conditions. For example, a man planting a few flowers in his garden on Sunday would be held in Canada and Scotland to be guilty of a grave offence against God, although he had not in any way injured his fellow man, or in the smallest degree violated any moral law, except such as was supposed to be involved in the religious code.

The disseverance of the moral and religious duties is not so marked to-day as in the past, simply because religion, as a distinct thing, is less recognised. The intelligent preacher of the present time—at least among the Protestants and outside the ultra-orthodox party—devotes himself to expounding moral duties and enforcing such acts of conduct as, whatever their relationship may be to a future world, have very much to do with the life here. But in the past, and even now among Roman Catholics and the extreme orthodox party, the religious duties greatly exceed the moral ones, and hence sin is more common than immorality, and the Sinner, consequently, much more conspicuous than the vicious man.

By these facts we are able to judge whether Saints or Sinners make the more useful members of Society, and, judged of from a human standpoint, which are the better adapted to the world in which we live. Whether the Saints are more eligible for heaven is another matter. If they are, should they not make the best of their way thither? Many of them on this earth are clearly out of place. The Sinner—that is, the man whose sin is only of the theological kind—may not be fit for heaven; that region he knows not of; but on earth there is plenty of room for him and ample need for his presence. When, in the fulness of his heart and the wide sympathy of his nature, he throws the golden beams of blessedness into a sorrowing and distressed home, sacrificing little comforts himself in order to help his fellows, making the countenances of the sick, the poor, and the suffering light up with a smile of sunshine, where before darkness and gloom had reigned supreme, is he not fulfilling the highest destiny of man, Sinner though he be? Religion, by her most ardent disciples, is portrayed in dark and gloomy colours, as if we had no right to enjoy the beauty and tenderness of the lower world—as if the deepest and purest affections of the heart were unhallowed and unholy; whereas one feels that the noblest and best endeavour should be to delight in the soft mellow light of love in which float all things good and fair. To do this is reserved for the Sinner, irrespective of any saintly influence. Religion may have a place in the world; but it must not usurp the throne of man's affections, the holiest part of his nature. We will not bow suppliantly to any altar if it is to rob those we love

of our heart's warmest devotion, to taint the loveliness of moral greatness and dim the blaze of unsanctified genius. Our love for parent, wife, and children, and, after them, all the human race, must be paramount in our breasts, though we be counted Sinners ten times over. Man is man, and not a religious machine. Too often the Saint lowers himself and then scoffs at and derides those who dare to be themselves. Let him scoff on. With our feet on the earth and our eyes on the stars, we proclaim mankind sublimer than all else in beauty and magnificence. The world has ever yearned for a full realisation of love to man and woman. The great heart of Humanity has sent forth its longings and aspirations, and these have often returned desolate and disappointed. Priests, temples, and altars have stood in the way of the world's improvement. Again and again has the music of Nature's better being burst forth. Saints have whined over the decadence of the race, and the song of beauty has been hushed in the wailing of those who should have been first and foremost in the great work of human amelioration. *But the manifestations will return and burn brighter each time—more brightly than the flame of the altars of Zoroaster or the sacrificial fires of the Jewish priesthood.

Orthodoxy designates all men Sinners who have not been "born again," and condemns them as the enemies to the nobility of mankind. And yet, looking through the long roll of the world's greatest men, the giants of intellect, Nature's nobles, the world's reformers, genius bright as the sun, and disinterestedness of character glowing like the stars are to be found among the Sinners of the earth. Turn over the pages of history, and what characters shall we find standing conspicuously forth among the loftiest of Humanity's children, towering like mighty columns above the rest? Why, those denounced by the Church as Sinners. By whom was the mighty civilisation of Greece, the strength and power of Rome, and the grandeur of yet earlier peoples, from whom even Greece and Rome had much to learn—by whom was all this accomplished? Why, by those designated Sinners. The lofty intellect of Plato, throwing in some instances modern greatness into the shade, the grand moral sublimity of Socrates, the profound thought of Aristotle, the fiery eloquence of Demosthenes, and the subdued

oratory of Pericles, the world's greatest thinkers, at whose feet the scholars of to-day are content to sit ; poets, sages, philosophers, whose writings transcend all that the world had seen before or witnessed since, were all Sinners according to the dictum of orthodoxy. That marvellous strength of will which made Rome the mistress of the world, which enabled that great empire to spread itself over the civilised globe, holding in its hands the destiny of peoples and the fate of nations, whose sons shed an eternal lustre on their age and achieved an immortality of reputation lasting as long as humanity itself—all these heroic acts and glorious deeds are associated with Sinners, not Saints of the Church. Even in more modern lands we discover the names of illustrious Sinners adorning the pages of history. Some unbelievers or doubters of Christian dogmas, some indifferent to all theology, others advanced thinkers of the Deistical, Unitarian, and Agnostic type ; but all Sinners from the orthodox standpoint. From Roger Bacon to Spencer in philosophy, from Priestley to Tyndall in science, and from Lucretius to Walt Whitman in poetry—these, with others of their type, have been denounced as Sinners ; yet, but for the transcendent achievements of such men, we should in all probability have now been groping in mental darkness and the worst kind of moral confusion, surrounded by a state of things so truly described by Pope when he says of Superstition :—

“ She taught the weak to bend, the proud to pray,
 To Powers unseen, and mightier far away ;
 She, from the rending earth and burning skies,
 Saw gods descend and fiends infernal rise ;
 Here fixed the dreadful, there the blest abodes ;
 Fear made her devils, and weak hope her gods :
 Gods partial, changeful, passionate, unjust,
 Whose attributes were rage, revenge, or lust,
 Such as the souls of cowards might conceive,
 And, formed like tyrants, tyrants would believe.
 Zeal then, not charity, became the guide,
 And hell was built on spite, and heaven on pride.”