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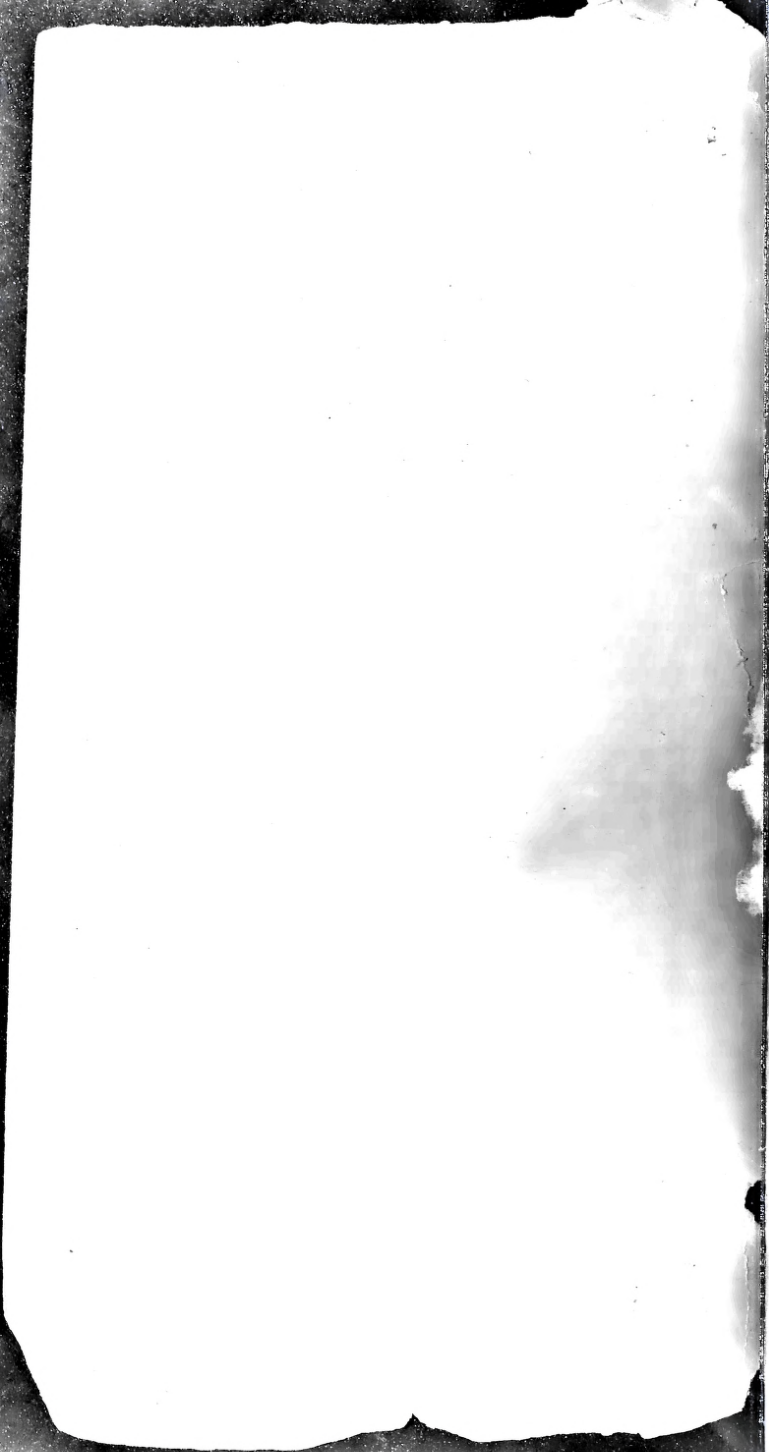
GOSPEL

OF

COMMON

SENSE

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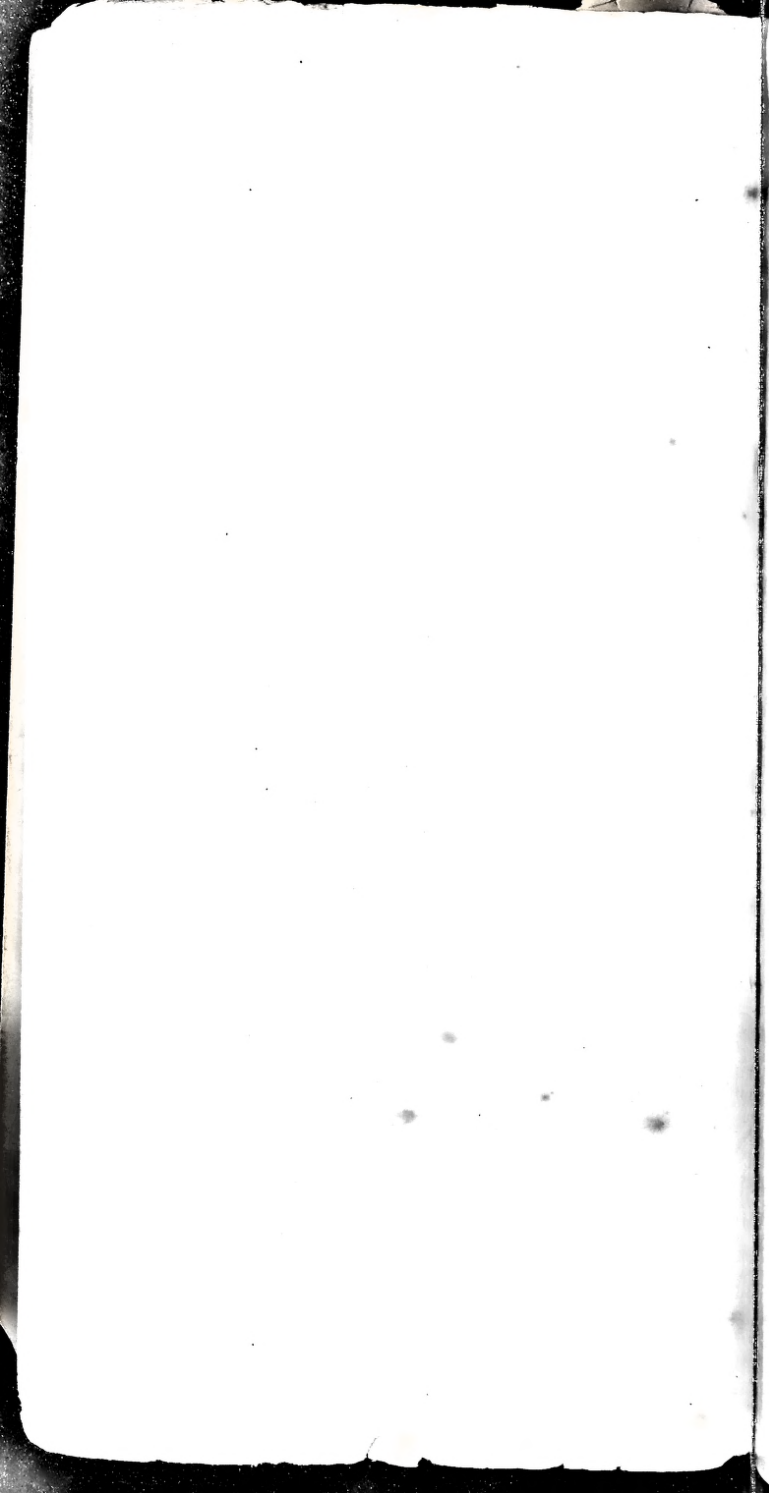


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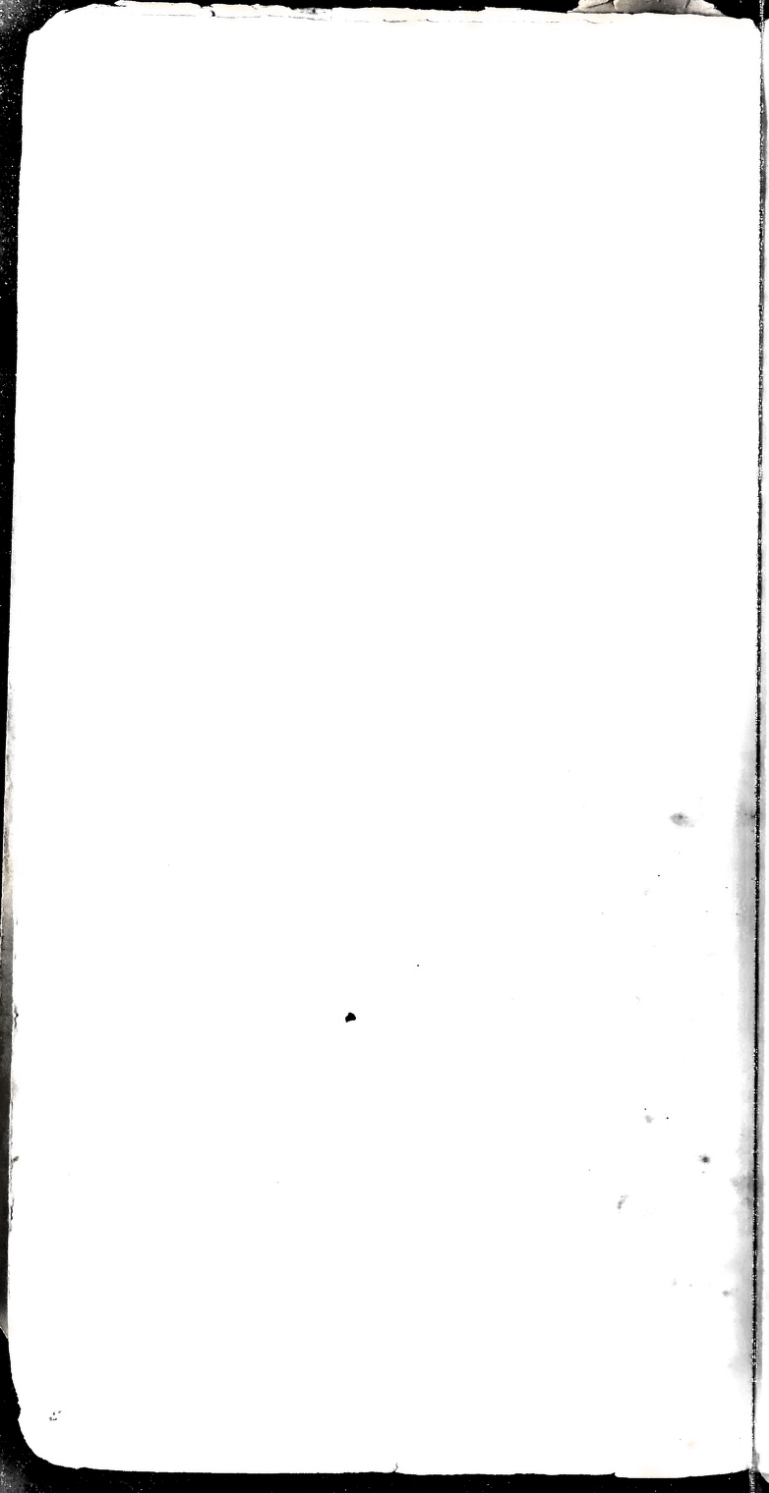


THE GOSPEL
OF
COMMON SENSE

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INTRODUCTION.

THE writer does not claim that there is anything new in these pages. Common sense is as old as the everlasting hills, but it is to the lifting of this quality into a virtue of vital importance that the present effort is directed. This little boat is launched with feelings of intense reverence for the Divine authority over all things. The Almighty is, to the writer, a living, energising reality, of whom he has never lost hold, although he may have wandered in the fields of honest doubt and floundered hopelessly among the creeds. But he ranks among those who no longer consider it an honour to be classed as a Christian. If there is to be labelling at all, he would rather be designated as one who is seeking honestly and fervently to take up all the duties of life as they present themselves. He has been led to

this state of mind by the utter unreasonableness of many religious teachers, and the absence of any striking virtues in not a few professors of exceptional piety.

This, to some, may seem a startling position. In the never-ending strife between the many forms of religion, dogma and creed hold so absorbing a place that the loop-hole into which the element of common sense can creep does not seem a large one. The religious teachers of all sections appear to be so anxious to do the thinking for their several communities, that it will be described as a bold effort to break away from this recognised order of things. It is not enough to say that mankind should go to the clerics for their religion, as they go to the doctor for medical help and to the lawyer for things with a legal bearing.

Life is such an intensely real thing, and to many thousands of both sexes it is full of sadness. The whole of our existence is a complex mosaic. The uncertainties and

unrealities of what has been taught with regard to a future existence are so apparent, that whatever may cause thought and heart-searching is deserving of consideration, however much that attempt may depart from the old grooves and forms of expression.

Everything in life, or appertaining to life, is the result of growth, and growth so gradual that we lose sight of the principle in the shibboleths of parties and sects. Growth, it is acknowledged, is only another name for evolution, but evolution is a process rather than a principle, and that is why the term growth is used. It is in the acute realisation of growth that the heart warms to the Father heart, and feels that the lot of the individual is a small speck in the economy of time which may be measured by millions of years.

Paul, at Athens, fixed his keen intelligence upon the temple devoted to the worship of the unknown God. The devotees accustomed to gather in that temple may have been nearer

in thought and aspiration to the true God, than were the eager worshippers in the temple of Delphi, waiting to learn the report of the oracles. These oracular utterances, there is no doubt, were nothing more than the tricks of priests.

The critics will be good enough to remember that the writer accepts the biblical records as they stand. He is at variance with the custom of literal interpretation which prevails, and the insistence upon a particular view being accepted as attaching to a particular passage or incident. He claims that it is perfectly justifiable to deal with the records as we have them in the Bible, exactly as we should with any other old record or book. It is not improbable, that had the destruction of books in the early centuries not taken place at Alexandria and Constantinople, we should have been in possession of literature which would have changed the whole current of the world's thought.

THINGS ETHEREAL.

Nature holding the Balance.

It is extremely doubtful whether the balancing power in Nature, as a force in human life, has been sufficiently recognised. The ever-present elements of Conservatism and Liberalism, Socialism and Individualism, Sacerdotalism and the search after simplicity in worship, extreme religionism and growing agnosticism are always at war with each other. These provide the elements which give the balances to life, and make human thought and energies so very gradual in their influences and effects. Were it not for these balancing powers being ever present, improvement in any department of life would become the despair of humanity, either in being too stationary on the one hand, or too revolutionary on the other hand. Nature gives

something for all, and the leaders of every school of thought are at all times ready to see gleams of encouragement as current events present themselves to their particular point of view.

All history records the same fact. The golden age of Greece gave us its Solon and its tyrants immediately followed. The centuries during which the power of Rome was on the wane were filled with opposing forces, which to many must have seemed to make the real decay of the great power of Rome an event beyond the range of possibility. By the side of the growing Saxon predominance of centuries ago were the sapping powers of excessive religious imagination. At the time of the Reformation there were intellects battling for the mastery over thought, and others striving for personal freedom of action in religious matters. So at whatever period attention may be directed, the advancing and the retarding streams are found running together side by side, now

intercepting each other, and now overwhelming each other, in the effort to gain the dominating power.

These conflicting forces were scarcely ever more potent than is the case at the end of this century. The priest for the moment is very much in evidence, and the ever-widening dislike towards the priest and all his works is causing many to look with distrust upon what the man of form and ceremony is endeavouring to build up. The strife is inevitable, and the priest would like to stifle this war among conflicting forces. And out of this heterogeneous warfare mankind is realising some of its best thoughts and most vitalising energies.

Thought and effort are at issue with the priest, and the present attempt is merely to take stock and to see how the land lies for the coming days of the new century.

The preacher is, like the poor, always with us. He comes in with the cradle years of infancy, and he remains until the eventide of age, when the things of vanity and vexation are

put aside for the quiet of the grave. Whether the good man really helps or hinders us is the question into which inquiry is to be made. There is no desire to be unnecessarily harsh, but while in the ordinary departments of life average discretion is exercised in the selection of men, it is too much absent in the selecting of men for the Christian ministry, no matter what the sect may be. Judging from numerous specimens of the genus, it would appear that any one seems good enough to show people the way to the kingdom of heaven.

There is no desire to attack a class or combination of classes. Some of the dearest friendships in the life of the present writer have been among the class frequently referred to in these pages. It would be manifestly unfair to withhold credit for the exceedingly useful social work done by the large and ever-extending body of clergymen and ministers of all denominations. Homes and individuals have been cheered, and the sad and distressed everywhere have, by their

ministrations, had the burdens of life lightened and made more bearable. Whether charity has been abused, and indolence and dishonesty encouraged, by the profuse distribution of blankets and soup, is another matter.

To premise then. Fault is found with the man and his methods, or rather with the class and their pretentious claims. It is alleged against him that he frequently stifles and harasses, when he, in point of fact, seeks to guide and to aid.

If there was any purpose in the creation of the human mind, that purpose was to give the intellect the freest play and the widest latitude for its development. Man in the image of his All-wise Creator is so in his intellect, if at all. That ever-present and ever-working marvellous machinery which compasses the universe in its operations, as represented by man, comes nearest in heart and brain to the full-souled Father of the beginnings of all things. The priest hides this Father, and gives humanity but

a poor caricature of Him. And he does this not wilfully, but with a perpetual mental twist, the inevitable result of which has been universal distortion, and man driven farther and farther away from the sheet-anchor of all that goes to make up the sum total of life and thought.

It is a far cry from a cadet of the Salvation Army to the newest owner of a cardinal's red hat. Between the silence of the Friends' meeting-house and the gorgeous ritual of Lincoln Cathedral, there lies a sea of life so vast that it is impossible not to be awed in the contemplation of it. But from the one end to the other of ministerial preparation and after work mistakes are made, from which the preachers of all denominations rarely ever wholly recover. Theology is not an exact science, and the supposition that its laws and principles are as rigidly discoverable as are the laws and principles attaching to mathematics, chemistry and all the other sciences, is a mistaken one. The text-books of the ministerial colleges in use everywhere

start their teaching from this supposition, and seek to close every avenue that would tend to encourage independent thought in any direction. It is this violation of a natural law, perpetrated during his education, from which the average cleric, be he established or unestablished as classification goes, never seems to fully recover.

He rather appears to take it out of humanity by treating him as a plaster cast of some intricate piece of mechanism, which requires its proportions of fuel, occasional applications of oil, and the constant attention of the engineer to keep him in due working order.

The present writer finds fault with this cast-iron view of theology. Is there in all the wilderness of theological teaching a single dogma, creed or assertion which is absolutely and unalterably beyond the range of question and doubt? The universal acceptance of a Creator is a fact and not a dogma.

If the purely evangelical view of religion were so capable of proof as

is claimed by its professors, would the nations of the universe be so insane as to turn a deaf ear to it? By "evangelical view" is meant the mechanical process of so much sin, original or otherwise, so much repentance, and so much eternal salvation, giving the believer ecstatic joy and continual days of happiness here below, and a positive claim for these blessings in a larger form in the world to come. The vitalising force of the evangelical view of things is at once admitted, and is in fact the only prevailing power among the theologians. Why it should be so is not easy to see.

The place and influence of the rhapsodist have never been absent. Simon Stylites, with his nearly forty years of life on his sixty-foot high pillar of three-foot diameter, had his latest descendant, on the religious but not the ascetic side, in the singularly beautiful life of the late C. H. Spurgeon. Both believed implicitly in the rigidly exact view which gave to man his fall and his salvation. The rhapsody of both was

very much on parallel lines, and in the age of either, a countless number have been the willing believers of the teaching. It would thus be folly to deny to the rhapsodist not only that he has filled a large place in religious thought, but that the very existence and propaganda of religion demanded his presence. That he is a creation of the priest for his own purposes would not be so readily conceded.

The present effort is a plea for natural religion and the ever-widening love of the great First-cause, by whatever name He may be known. Man does not require the theologian to teach him this, and these truths would have been evident irrespective of all theological teaching. The plea is that theological teaching has rather beclouded than made these facts clear, and has driven humanity rather away from them, than brought him, in many cases, to a clearer view of either one or the other.

The theologian is the last to be reformed in all the universe. He

seems to come absolutely at the tail of everything. In the orthodox genesis of things, first was created the world, then man, followed by woman, and after these came the priest, and he has been after them ever since, and seems doomed to never overtake them.

He resents criticism, and has his own peculiarly polite way of dealing with his critics. But when his fuming is over, the fact remains that after every other class have absorbed and assimilated changes and reforms, the cleric remains in his concrete form, almost unchanged and unchangeable. He is ever the figure in armour, spluttering about with his weapons, fighting in an imaginary tournament, chiefly of his own creation. The ages jog on, and leave him stranded very dry out of the water, gradually, but surely, accepting, when no other course is left, every modification of belief which he has protested that he never would accept. No, never, he reiterates again and again, will he ever accept the changes, even were the last ditch

in sight, and the figure in armour were to die there in presence of his beloved flock, especially the feminine part of his community. He ever remains the figure dragged at the tail of every movement. He never leads unless he makes a hash of it, as in educational matters, and is only impelled along because he cannot resist the current which drives him forward. His pretentious claims have become a by-word. His arrogance knows no limits, and his intelligence is very often the result chiefly of his denominational newspaper, and the current opinions of the female members of his congregation.

Had he the power, he would again bring into use the thumbscrew and the stake. And did he in reality hold the keys of the kingdom of heaven it would go hard with humanity. Mankind owes to him no branch of human progress, but has cheerfully submitted to feed and clothe him as a parasite upon its organism. He is the greatest gigantic body corporate of the day. As a social factor he has no

peer, and in his aggregate form could become, and has on a few state occasions become, a veritable Polyphemus.

In his days of youth, when he is supposed to be acquiring his ministerial training, he is indeed a nondescript. Were it not that there is around him a double-barred castle composed of ladies, he would be laughed out of society in scorn. Those dear creatures, who do so much to make life happy and joyous, would look with scorn upon their non-clerical male friends, were they so insufferably conceited, and so contemptibly mean, as the average student undergoing his ministerial training.

No other class in society receive so much homage with so little intellectual power to support it, as do the clerical party. True, the adulation is not what it was even some few years ago, and this is a cause for great lamentation among the select circles composed chiefly of their own cloth.

When the time of incubation is over and the marrying time comes, what a serious business, for them, it becomes! Wealth and beauty lay themselves at the feet of the wearers of white ties. From the pulpit there fall thunders against the love of filthy lucre, and the preacher comes down from his pedestal and marries the richest woman upon whom he can set eyes. The average member of the male persuasion stands no chance whatever if a parson is in the running. He is the upper crust of the matrimonial market. "I used to positively venerate ministers," said a lady once in the hearing of the writer, "until I married one, and then I didn't." At a tea-meeting, on one occasion, a speaker stated that it seemed to him remarkable how many ministers had married rich wives, and shortly afterwards become afflicted with a sore throat, and had retired from pastoral work to a position of independence. He knew, he said, of three such cases in their county. At the close of the meeting one present taxed the speaker,

who made the statement, with being unnecessarily hard upon ministers who had married rich wives. "May I ask if you married a rich wife?" "Well, yes, I had some money with my wife." "And have you resigned your pastorate?" "Yes ——" "Ah! you are a fourth. I did not know of you."

Are these gentlemen, who are supposed to live very near heaven, so much better than ordinary mortals? He would be a bold man who claimed that they were better in any respect whatever. They are no better than other men, and in many cases are not nearly as good, notwithstanding their comfortable and enviable surroundings. In their relations with each other, clergymen and ministers are notoriously mean and captious. It would be interesting to tabulate the opinions about lay preachers held by the regulars. They have rarely, when off the platform, a generous word for a ministerial brother. The quantity of praise distributed among each other at public meetings leaves nothing to

be desired in that direction. But in private the bickerings and jealousies among the brethren of white tie insignia would discredit the green-room of a theatre. In truth, the chief claim to any holiness at all, in far too many instances, lies in the particular costume which these gentlemen assume.

Eighty Thousand Sermons,

it is estimated, are preached every Sunday all the year round. To claim that a tithe of this Sabbath eloquence represents a stream of wisdom would cause general amusement. If on any subject in the whole range of literature so much triviality and common-place drivel were talked, as is uttered under the name of a sermon, the whole process would be laughed out of court. But they are sermons: the object, it is argued, must of necessity be good, and it is, say some, no great hardship to bear so much infliction. God made the preacher for a man, and his sermon is intended as a contribution towards human poverty, therefore let him

pass for a man, and think kindly of his homily.

The Cords of Conventionality

are more firmly tied round the neck of clergymen and ministers than is the case with any other section of the community. There are some excellent gentlemen among them, whose nobility of soul is as transparent as glass, who chafe under the existing conditions and environment of their work. This is, for that particular section, very unfortunate. It is furthermore never easy to work freely when surrounded by so many great expectations. Those over whom he ministers are jealous of the pastor's reputation, not only as to his orthodoxy, but for general things. Consequently the poor man hears at once if his gown is not on quite straight, or his wife's go-to-meeting bonnet is a little too showy. Congregations are notoriously exacting. A political constituency is as child's play to keep all the parts going smoothly, when compared with the

whims which an average shepherded flock will display. This atmosphere of conventionalism is responsible for much of the feeling of having to work in chains which does prevail in not a few minds. Why there is not enough inherent strength among the fraternity to throw off this yoke and make a bold stand for liberty of personal thought and action, it is not easy to conceive. That the usual course of procedure has led to a good deal of lack of honesty is clear. So many pastors, it is reasonably to be feared, do not preach what they believe, and a large number of others do not believe what they preach. The mental reservation with regard to certain tenets to which some have to subscribe is too often taken as sufficient salve for the conscience. The prevailing absence of mental honesty is indeed alarming.

Fictitious Value of Paraded Piety.

Surely it is high time that there was a new price set upon the head of advertised piety. Some of the most

rampant humbug ever inflicted upon mankind, has been done, and is being done, under the guise of piety. Why it should be expected that much prayer and imaginary fasting should make the individual more worthy of trust, it is hard to say. Shop-keepers are known to mix pious expressions with the sale of soft goods. A master builder has looked earnestly upwards, and at the same time defrauded his men out of as much of their wages as he could succeed in keeping. These classes are not put forward as worse than others. The fault seems to lie in a sort of general feeling that there is a demand for expressions of piety, and the supply is quite equal to the demand. The churches have fed this feeling, and still feed it so lavishly that one well known to the investing public, in his intervals of company promoting, presents a prominent church with a gold communion service, upon which is duly inscribed his name, and was afterwards confirmed by leading ecclesiastics, who seem ever ready

to lend their services for this sort of show business.

It is time that this fictitious value thus attached to paraded piety should receive a check. If a man or a woman is a greater fraud than usual, the chances are that they rank amongst the most obviously pious. Soft-heads and impracticable people generally, who harass and clog the wheels of life, are striking examples of fluency in public prayer and regular attendance at religious services. Any man of experience, and who is scarcely yet up to middle life, has been fortunate if he cannot call to mind instances of this character.

Religious Drunkenness.

This excessive parade of piety has produced its corollary of religious intoxication. The May meetings and church congresses are prolific in the number of cases of religious drunkenness, of which they are the immediate cause. The rushing from meeting to meeting, the following of a favourite

pastor about from place to place, and hanging in rapt adoration upon his very adjectives, are the common sights of the month of May, and are again repeated when the autumn days come along. Alack-a-day for many a man and his children, if he and they are afflicted with a wife and mother who suffers from periodical spells of religious drunkenness.

The place of the revivalist in religious life is a very mixed one. Converted colliers, prize-fighters, and the rest of the family must have made really a very handsome thing out of revival meetings. The choice language, home-made words and illustrations of these gentlemen are decidedly fetching. One distinguished lady of this persuasion, whose fees vary from two to ten guineas a service, is warranted to fetch tears on any occasion. In seafaring life freight ships which take occasional journeys are dubbed as tramps, and are not much loved by the regular services. Why the regulars in clerical life should tolerate this select body of speakers it is not

easy to see. The writer remembers a converted pugilist on one occasion taking off his coat, and going for a supposed opponent, strutting about the platform during the process like an enraged bantam. This was all done with the idea of making people see the error of their ways, and coming to a right mind.

The Clerics in Educational Matters.

Could this absence of common honesty receive any stronger proof than it does in educational matters? It is dogma and creed first, clerical influence second, and education a long way last. Our national system of education ought to be a thing too sacred for the petty jealousies of creeds. The men of the street pay the piper in the form of rates, and the clerics call the tune, and the tune they would set to the narrowest and most rigid dogmas that ever blasted humanity, and destroyed the vigour of the individual intellect. The average man does not know what

to make of these preachers of honesty who themselves set such a poor example of common honesty.

The clerics never will know how deep the iron has entered into men's souls over this education question, and the spirit which has been displayed by the clerical section. The men who pay the bills, and are asked to leave control to the clerics, are full of dismay, and will never again wholly trust, either with regard to this life or the life to come, the so-called leaders who have played them false, and to whom the child to be educated is merely the pawn on the religious chess-board.

**The Catch Phrases in Early
Religious Instruction.**

The inner heart of the writer stands still when he looks backward across many days to the religious terrorism of his young years. Time after time has it been his lot to go to bed in abject and quaking terror at the dreadful things he heard from the pulpit of a village place of worship.

Thank God! that has become a thing of the past, and the youth of to-day little recognise how great for them has been the gain. The pet and favourite phrase so commonly heard about "giving one's heart to Christ" had to the writer always the meaning, that it represented a willingness and a desire to die. He never heard the expression without associating it with this interpretation. It is all very well for the preacher to assert that *he* never meant this, but the fact remains as related, and this is only a sample of many others which could be quoted.

It is the Revulsion of Feeling

which leaves so many scars behind. Having to unlearn what has been learnt from these teachers, and to learn over again, is a process so very disastrous that now the advice of the wise father to his child of inquiring mind is, to be fearless in search for truth. Fear not, my boy or my daughter, he says, in effect, what the honest search for truth compels thee

to recognise. Only be sure that the search is a truly honest one. Look conclusions straight in the face, and fear no consequences in the upsetting of previously cherished convictions.

The Age of the World.

That which has been the cause of much mental doubt and trouble in the human mind, is the limited duration of time given as the age of the world. The clerics gave, years ago, some 6000 years as the period of time covered by everything. All, according to them, was in due chronological order, from the date of the apple business down to the beginning of the new era. There is nothing the preacher likes so much as the chart, imaginary or otherwise, outlining for him where each event falls, and its full sequence and effect on all other occurrences. The march of intelligence has caused him somewhat to drop this 6000 years' estimate, now that he finds he is not believed, as he has so frequently dropped other teachings when he

discovered that they were received with doubt. Still the ill effects of the teachings have been left behind, and it requires an almost lifelong education to realise the full meaning of the age of the world. There is a consensus of opinion that the world is millions of years old. Scientists give as their reasons how long it would take for the earth to cool down from a heated mass to freezing-point. It is not enough to say that this calculation is purely speculative, for the earth has been always losing heat. A period of time has been estimated for this, of from 15,000,000 to 30,000,000 years.

In general terms it has been estimated that the world has been in existence 100,000,000 years, and that there have been human beings on it for 1,000,000 years. Whether this be so or not is not vital to the present argument. All that it is desired to emphasise is that the few thousand years, formerly accepted as the period of time since the creation of the world took place, are

really but the merest drop in the ocean of time that has elapsed since things began to take form.

A new theory, not generally known, may be mentioned here, although it has no immediate bearing upon the matter, and that is, that the human body is surrounded by an invisible fluid, or, as some physiologists term it, a magnetic fluid. Nothing definite has been known of this until recent experiments have made the fact clear that this is really the case. A scientist has been at work for some years on this question. In a laboratory illuminated by a red light only, he placed a plate at the bottom of a tray containing hydrochinone developer. At the end of twenty minutes the plate, upon which the extremities of a man's fingers had been held, revealed not only the marks of the fingers but also round each mark a luminous zone, which was clearly indicated.

Science has never been antagonistic to right views of God. It may have clashed now and again with the strained theories of the Almighty

which have been advanced, and clashed it certainly has with some of the assertions put forward by over-zealous religionists.

The Advocates of Verbal Inspiration

do not seem to have had a very good time during recent years. To claim full and direct intercourse with the Almighty for the writers of the Old and New Testaments is a system of logic peculiar to itself. Some of these friends will scarcely admit even varieties or grades of inspiration, notwithstanding that the difference all the way through the books is so very apparent. The actual spoken word of the Almighty Father is recorded, say they, from cover to cover, and many of them honestly believe that this is the case. To question this at all may lead, they are fond of repeating, to a Sahara in the opposite direction. Suppose that a collection of some passages and narratives were withdrawn from their setting and issued in a separate form, what would be the result? And yet

these very same passages and records are shown surreptitiously from youth to youth of both sexes. There is belief implicitly in the principle of inspiration. But it should apply to every great and good writer who has added to the world's wisdom, and given it thoughts that breathe, and words that burn into the human mind, to make it the better and the holier for the work done.

It is only of late that the revised version is entering into more general use in the pulpit. The people, say the clerics, were not prepared for the changes made in the translation. That is the reason, it is to be supposed, why still greater and more numerous changes were not made by the revisionists. The people are in ignorance, and let them remain so, is in effect the verdict of the good friends who have this life and the next under their especial charge.

Literal Interpretation

has followed the teaching of verbal inspiration as a natural sequence.

And we have been landed in chaos, worse confusion, by literal interpretation. To be informed that we are to take the records as they stand, without any question or thought whatever, is an insult upon human intelligence. These good teachers who claim to know so much of the inner workings of the mind of the Almighty Father, speak of its being dishonouring to God to give utterance to any query which seeks light where there now appears darkness. Herds of swine smitten with madness, bushes which burn and are not consumed, and Jericho walls crumbling at the blast of the human voice, must, forsooth, remain as they stand to puzzle the generations to come as they have puzzled the ages that have gone, because, say they, these are part of the everlasting pillars of truth. Men begin to doubt whether some of these records and incidents are among these pillars of truth, and are no longer afraid to state their reasons why they so doubt.

The Tyranny of Texts

is a natural child of literal interpretation. It is delectable to meet the man or the woman of texts. No matter what the circumstances or conditions of life may be, out comes a text as pat as a little slice of butter from the hands of the dairymaid. The whole universe, according to these "unco guid" folks, is governed by texts, and some of them verily believe that the Creator is Himself subject to texts.

Ecclesiastical Conundrums.

The bewildered layman may fairly ask for some respite from the religious conundrums which are ever filling the air. At one time it was the great question of the eastern position. Now it is candles on the communion table, and it is hard to say when the matter is to be settled and never heard of again. The conflict is between the High Church and Low Church, and a solemn judgment was given recently in the Consistory Court, to the effect that the aforesaid

candles may be placed at each end of the table, but must only be lighted when it is too dark to see without them. The delightful thing is that the extreme section of the Establishment finds so many petty ways of evading great ecclesiastical decisions. The Church has never been without these conundrums. Some of the most characteristic panoramas of word-painting that are to be found in Gibbon are in his chapters descriptive of the internal conflicts of the early Churches. The controversy which raged a few years ago, in and around the diocese of Lincoln, roused to a fever heat the whole of the Anglican ecclesiastical world. The judgment which filled many columns of a day's issue of the largest daily paper, was the finest masterpiece of casuistry ever published, and has never yet been equalled by the sacred college of the Jesuits. There is nothing that the cleric loves so much as ecclesiastical nuts to crack. Heresy-hunting is such a delightful pastime, and there is no telling what it may pro-

duce, or to what point the controversy may lead. Hair-splitting lifted to a science, is what some of these discussions might be labelled. A state of white heat, merely in the preliminary talk as to the definition of terms, is a common occurrence, and woe to the ministerial brother who does not toe the line. The first duty of a parson is to talk, and he does it with a persistency which completely obscures the small percentage of men in parliament, who are ready at a moment's notice to advise the nation at length upon any subject under the sun.

What has been the gain from these everlasting ecclesiastical conundrums is not very clear. The wearied layman hopes that some day he may be less troubled with them. He is perhaps under the impression that there are in life things more important than the burning of candles, the wearing of caps, and the gymnastics of a gorgeously attired sweet young man who has, perhaps for the first time in his life, just left his dear

mother's side. What is to be the ultimate outcome of the numerous secret societies of the ritualistic clergy, time alone will reveal, but the presence of these societies does not betoken good for the nation.

The military authorities might be excused if they suggested a counter attraction to these ecclesiastical conundrums. The time may come when the defence of old England will become a real necessity. Or if not this, when the absence of the trained troops will leave home defence to the civil powers. Why should there not be a parsons' corps? As champion cricketers and tennis-players they are supreme. It is only a step from this to the handling of a rifle. These gentlemen are so accustomed to the adjustment of the niceties between profession and action that they could quickly bridge the apparent incongruity of men of peace undergoing a state of preparation for war. A present is made of the suggestion to those who govern the powder and shot of the nation. One thing is be-

coming clearer, as the march of events brings the changes in the kaleidoscope, that the defence of home and nation is not beyond the range of possibility. When that time arrives the clerical party will no doubt be found engaged in the congenial task of splitting straws and not in shouldering a musket.

The Biblical Records.

Preachers are rarely very definite in their exegesis as given to their people. How remarkably few are the preachers who relate anything beyond the commonplace facts as to how the particular record under their observation came to be written, how many years after the incident happened that the record was written, and follow on with some of the less known characteristics of the writer! Biblical students do not fully realise that, with the exception of Luke, every other writer, so far as ordinary information goes, was a Jew. The Jew, as historian and recorder, has not at all times been the guile-

less creature that he claims for himself. He looks at everything through intensely Jewish eyes. The Jew is first and foremost to the Jew, and the non-Jewish world has, in all ages, been material for the contempt of his race, who are the blessed of Jehovah. To the Jews of the early centuries and especially to the Jews who wrote the biblical records, the Almighty was simply a highly magnified Jew. His favoured people have always been the Jews—in Jewish estimation. The Jew had but to lift up his eyes to heaven, and blessings rained on his devoted head. Did he long for personal or national gain, it was all the same. So vastly is everything steeped in this feeling that the biblical records, in their eternal adulation of the Jew, often pall upon the Gentile mind, and give the reader a longing for something less Hebrew in context and tone.

The presupposed Jewish nationality of the Creator accounts largely for the Jew's way of looking at things. Seven-eighths of his life, his aspirations

and feelings were saturated with supernaturalism. He would far rather explain the most ordinary and natural things of life as being of the miraculous than their being of the nature of ordinary everyday occurrences. Of two methods of describing an event, the simple matter of fact and the introduction of the miraculous element, he would always select the latter. The Jew, in his most simple characteristics, is very imaginative, but the besetting sin of the Oriental Jew has been threefold imagination, which made it impossible for him to look at anything from a natural point of view. This is a vital factor in the survey of records, and the writer holds that preachers never touch upon this matter, and become indignant when questions are put upon the trustworthiness of the records.

Prayer.

Prayer should be the earnest resource of the human soul. The heart, in its deepest sadness and affliction, turns its desires to a source other than

human. In its best and healthiest aspects it should be the truest form of naturalness known. Yet to judge from the torrent of prayers uttered in public it would seem to be the constant and first resource of mankind. The gates of heaven have to be stormed, and the Almighty is told many things that He must be exceedingly amazed to hear. The immediate effect of very many public prayers, were they effective, would be to cause a series of miracles to be worked. It would appear to be the impossible things of life which are most in request, judging from numerous samples of public prayers.

It is possible to meet occasionally the man who seems, from his own point of view, to have made a bargain with the Almighty. The supposed bargain has the appearance of so much commercial success for so many prayers and so much money given for charity.

The greatest religious lack of the day is that of reverence, and preachers are responsible for its absence. The familiar way in which they speak of,

and address the Almighty, has produced this disastrous result.

Oh that more reverence in all mankind might dwell! The simple heart which can—in the garden among the birds, or in the field, in any place where the works of Nature are, and that means everywhere—take off the hat, bow the head and bend in honest reverence, cannot surely be long unblest. The stream of chatter running through the Churches cannot produce this feeling, or give much aid in the cultivation of it. The garden of reverence is indeed the Lord's own, and the soul must go direct to the Almighty for its supplies of pure and unalloyed heart-felt joy.

So many of what are usually termed means of grace are merely perfunctory observances, which are not looked upon as privileges but as a duty, and these same means of grace are not mended in the process.

The Place of the Jew In Life.

The Jew has through all ages occupied so large a place in history

that there is much excuse for introducing him here. He represents a nationality without a nation. Whenever he has been the outcast of nations, he has taken indirectly, when opportunity has presented itself, a terrible revenge. Always the same in all ages in his pursuits and idiosyncrasies. Never the hewer of wood and drawer of water since the old Egyptian and Babylonian days. Even then it is likely that he was the jeweller and silversmith. But to find him, since that period or the time of his captivity, as a stonemason or engineer, would be to discover a curiosity. He is never a trouble as a citizen. But for dirt, selfishness, sensuality, prevarication and the capacity for corrupting, he has few equals. No other nationality of which we have any record would have required the Levitical law in order to keep clean in himself bodily, and in his surroundings, as did the Jew. The minuteness of those instructions is a monument of the needs of the Jew. Had he not been told that out of the

mouth of Jehovah there came the law that he was not to step more than a few yards away from his bed without washing himself, he never would have washed himself, until absolute need required the operation. But why he should have been allowed to dominate the intelligence of the universe and govern its thoughts, is one of the mysteries of the centuries. In his own estimation, when Jehovah his God has not given him lands and countries to possess, He has given him the minds of nations to order and to control. The promise of the land of Canaan to the Jew is one of the prettiest fictions in all Christendom.

And yet what a part this plays in all history since those memorable days, and how everything of importance since then is overshadowed by these family troubles of the Jew!

When in the fulness of time he was to possess the said land, and spies were sent to prospect, they straightway find their way to the

house of Rahab the harlot. Their geographical knowledge of Jericho was evidently extensive and peculiar, like Dick Swiveller's knowledge of London, and the Oriental Jew could scarcely have given, to the generations that have followed, a more striking proof that he has always been amongst the most unclean of humanity. It is argued that this gives proof for not accepting as absolutely veracious everything that the Jew has been pleased to throw at the door of human thought and inquiry.

Miracles.

The great stumbling-block of Christian evidences is that of the miracles. Do the everlasting truths which relate to life in all its aspects need the proof of miracles to support them? The craving for the supernatural in the Oriental mind at the time of Christ was an unnatural and vitiated one. The one great fact of the universe is that of human life, and yet after centuries of thought it remains as much a mystery to-day as it was in

the beginning. Miracles are a species of fungus growth. If they ever really happened they are utterly useless as props for truth. Greater than any miracle which ever could be conceived is natural law by which everything is governed. There is nothing which so fills the contemplative mind with awe and reverence as to see around on every hand the evidences of the supernatural wisdom and wonderful love so clearly expressed. The minutest insects, the simplest species and varieties of flowers, and the mammoth creatures of the universe, alike show this amazing dominant force, and yet a force so silent that it seems completely lost in the blaze and confusion of the religious sects. The love of the Creator, evidenced in the working of these natural laws, is so clear, that the wonder is a sect of natural-law worshippers have not established themselves long ago, and to-day are not as numerous as are the Fire Worshipers. A love so Divine and flow-

ing like an everlasting stream that knows no beginning or ending, must send the devout worshipper to his knees. Is it not reasonable to suppose that the Almighty Father, who could endow the universe with this proof of His power, would, had there been any necessity, have indeed worked miracles in reality, and would not have left the recorded miracles standing on such a flimsy foundation? It is very possible that there may be forces in Nature that are not now understood, and which, when we do understand them, will make the so-called miracles perfectly clear to the ordinary mind. But then, when those new forces are thus captured, the incidents will cease to be looked upon as miracles.

Electricity is not a new force, but it has remained for modern times to capture it and reduce it within the scope of natural laws. Hypnotism is not a new force; but the merest rudiments of the power are not yet understood. When that understanding does become possible the

miracles of healing may become clear to all.

The modern miracles of Lourdes and Holywell are really as wonderful as some of the New Testament miracles. Pent-up enthusiasm, gigantic faith, and actual healing waters, accompanied by careful and constant massage have accomplished wonders. These are events which may be simply repeating themselves, just as in every other section of life, events and incidents repeat themselves.

That wise law-giver, Moses, one of the greatest Jews, as well as one of the truest leaders of men ever known, was, as every great hero has been, a man greatly in advance of his age. He knew the need of vivifying his power as well as magnifying the authority which was associated with the hidden prophet. The whole of the plagues of Egypt, it is contended by the writer, are explainable by natural causes. The burning bush was the great central burning thought of the man's mind which absorbed every interest and every spark of enthusi-

asm of the man's passion for his nation. Was there not a burning bush in the mind of Buddha, Socrates, Christ, Alfred, Savonarola, Luther, William the Silent, and Cromwell? These names are grouped together with all reverence. The striking of the rock for water may have been the work of the earliest water-finder of which we have any record. The modern water-finder with his wand is a reality, who will, for his usual fee, tell where there is water, and what course the water takes. The last plague of all is possibly explainable on the ground that the Israelites may have been exempt from some terrible epidemic which afflicted the Egyptians, and especially attacked the elder part of the community. The simplicity of life, wholesome diet, abstinence from pork may, had we only the complete details, explain much. Trichinosis would be known as a disease then as now, only the system of therapeutics was much more limited than now.

The whole contention of the writer

is that it requires such unlimited faith to accept these incidents as miracles, and so much has been taken for granted. It is infinitely more satisfactory to try and discover whether, after all, there is not some natural law underlying the whole series of events. This can be done without any excessive attempt to merely explain away. The entire records are accepted implicitly, but it is argued that the details are incomplete, and this being the case we are not bound to look upon them as miracles, in the usual sense of the term.

The young mind is staggered on the very threshold of inquiry and belief if these events are to be taken as miracles. Far preferable and wiser, it is urged, is the plan of keeping as close to Nature and Nature's methods as it is possible to keep.

Attention is reverently turned to the miracles of healing of Him who delighted to call Himself the Son of Man. All disease, the Jew thought and taught, was just punishment for sin. Whatever was being suffered

was deserved, said the priest, and he urged that there was no right in trying to get rid of it, or to get away from the affliction. This was perhaps the most high and mighty dogma or doctrine that the high priest, with his satellites the Pharisees, had to enforce, and they did it with a brutal directness which was bound to make them ultimately the most despised of men. Of human, tender sympathy for suffering from man to man there was none in public. Go down to your grave in pain, said they, and anathema to the One who came with soft and gentle touch to ease the lot of the suffering, and assuage the paroxysms of pain. Oh those sleek and well-fed rulers and teachers of the Jews! The tenderest human voice ever known was heard amidst this din and inhuman religious teaching. Instead of harshness there was softness and helpfulness. Instead of damnation there was blessing. The mystic power of human sympathy sweeps over that part of the earth, and joy takes the place of weeping. Surely

with such a change as this the wonder would have been had miracles of healing not taken place.

The Claim of the Blood Sacrifice.

There is no part of this little book that the writer approaches with more fear and trembling than the present section. The Christ is to him so infinitely real in His aspect as the Son of Man that he cannot imagine any need for that sacred person to be classed in any loftier capacity. Son of God He unquestionably was, but as every true hero has been, who has bowed his head to the yoke and enriched humanity with his life.

The private report of Pilate to the Roman Emperor, discovered in the Vatican archives, and made public in the autumn of 1897, did not add much to biblical information, whether the document is a genuine one or not. It gave a very matter-of-fact account of the proceedings, such as might have been written by the Roman governor.

The fabric of the fall of man required a strong corner-stone to com-

plete the structure. The element of blood sacrifice, flowing through the ages and pervading the old religions, is exactly like the thin red cord which runs through every naval rope, to show, as long as that rope shall last, its national and royal use.

An angry and enraged Deity requiring to be appeased with the shedding of blood is not by any means found only in the Christian religion. The late king of Benin knew something of the same doctrine with, let us say, a different Deity. Does it truly lift the estimation of an ever-loving Almighty in the human mind that He should, with that massive tenderness which is pictured as an attribute, have shown less love for His Son, than a very average mortal would show for his offspring in the present century? Does the net-work of the centuries absolutely need the theory of the blood sacrifice, outside the fabric of clerical necessity for propaganda purposes?

It would indeed have been wonderful had Christ not paid with His

life for His open and vigorous defiance of the entire circle of Jewish law and order. The Master's enthusiasm for humanity was bound to bring this punishment upon His sacred head. The high priest, in his communion with the Divine in the holy of holies, could not admit of a competitor. The kernel of Christ's work was to bring mankind back to a loving Father. The priests had clouded the majesty and goodness of the Almighty. The Nazarene Teacher tore away the clouds and gave humanity such a glimpse behind the holy of holies of which the high priest in his cloisters had never dreamed. This work He sealed with His life, and the work, taking it on its national and human level, could not have been complete without the shedding of His life's blood.

Sacred head, wounded for His fellows! Yes, ten thousand times deeper and truer than the creed of shedding His blood to appease a Father's heart, ever helps us to realise. That there was haste in the

burial owing to the nearness of the Sabbath, is admitted by the records. It is within the range of possibility that resuscitation followed this premature burial, and so gave us the theory of the resurrection through the minds of followers who, under the accepted rule, went infinitely farther than their Master, in the claims made on His behalf.

The theory of the Divine conception is inseparably linked with the foregoing. They were bound to be indissolubly connected. To accept both theories without question of any kind is the simplest way out of the difficulty. To adopt this course is to need the faith which is to remove mountains. How much faith has never been defined! A human mother and not a human father, must inevitably be a serious problem to many adults. The children of the gods in the old religions form a numerous company.

Many things might have been different, had Christ left behind some of His own writings.

The Ministry of Hymns.

The one man service in religious worship, unless that one man be a man of many and varied gifts, often becomes very trying. There is much cause for doubt whether the ministry of hymns fills the place in public religious worship that should be the case. By this it is not meant merely the singing of hymns, for of singing there is enough. What is meant is that the thoroughly spiritual hymns should be lifted into a prominence which would cause them to fill naturally their place as prayer hymns. Some of the best known hymns have a power within them of expressing the longing of the innermost heart. They are often far sweeter to the devout soul than are the dreamy extempore prayers of the preacher. The Havergal, the Whittier, and many other hymns, are among the most divinely inspired of religious writings. They give the individual soul glimpses of the eternal which may become the most acceptable, as well as the most helpful part, of the

entire service. Passages from some hymns could be named, that are among the loftiest thoughts ever uttered by man or woman.

How rarely any but the most perfunctory place is given in the service to hymns! Batches of verses are sometimes omitted, and whatever is read of the hymn is too often read in the most slovenly way possible. Yet the history attaching to a large range of hymns would afford material for a number of sermons, and material more interesting than much of the composition so frequently heard. To take one as a sample, and that, perhaps, the best known of all hymns. Few hearts cannot but be stirred by the grand strains of "Rock of Ages." This hymn was originally written at the end of an article on the national debt. It was used as an illustration to show the magnitude of man's debt to God. Toplady, the writer of it, born in 1740, was a Calvinist, and waged constant wordy wars with Wesley, and Toplady could utter some scorching things. It is the whole pathos of the Gospel

reduced to a poem, and it forms a glorious prayer. There are few languages into which it has not been translated. Toplady's life covered a brief span of existence, but no man ever raised a finer monument to his own memory than did the writer of these familiar verses. Some of the sweetest hymns known have been written by Unitarians.

A plea is put in for the prayerfulness of hymns, a little less of the preacher and a little more of somebody else. The ministry of the prayer hymns, and the devotional character of our sacred poems, are deserving of more attention at the hands of our religious leaders.

The Ministry of Nature.

There are days in each of the seasons when all Nature seems to demand the worship of mankind. Foliage, verdure, the song of birds, water, hills and valley make all Nature full of a Divinity so real that to doubt the presence of a Creator would be to doubt one's own actual existence.

If religious services could only be

held at such seasons out of doors, how straight from the heart on many occasions would be the worship. Linnæus fell on his knees on seeing a field of gorse all in golden splendour. A rose garden, a bank of heather, a field of ripe corn, an orchard, or, in fact, any section of Nature, is well calculated to arouse similar feelings in all but the most deadened minds and hearts. It is the marvellous variety in Nature which takes possession of the mind. This can only be fully grasped by close attention to some department of Nature, such as insect collecting, flower or fern growing, or some other section of natural science. Then the truth comes home with vivid realism, and this not alone to the enthusiast, but even to the one who takes only an indifferent interest in these matters.

The sanctification of the hobby-rider would form a capital text, and has often done so for many a clergyman who is himself a hobby-rider. Among the finest rose growers in the world are some country clergymen. The man without a hobby is indeed a

man to be pitied, as it is the finest safeguard against moping ever invented. Hobby-riders do not very frequently display a suicidal tendency.

Nature keeps her secrets to be dug out by the student or ardent admirer, and when she begins to reveal, she fills the soul of her devotee with a passion for her handiwork which is ever expanding. Her lessons are absolutely limitless. It is easy enough to begin at one end of the study of any given subject in natural science, but one never reaches the other end.

Thank Heaven for something that can fill a longing heart, and this is done by dear mother Nature, which simply teems with evidences of the abounding love of an ever-existent Deity.

The Ministry of Common Things.

The old teaching of the religionists used to be, that nobody could claim entrance to the kingdom of heaven unless they brought in their trail

some other soul they had been instrumental in saving as a brand from the burning. This idea is now tapering down somewhat, but still prevails in some communities. Many more unlikely things may happen than being abruptly questioned, in a railway carriage or other public place, as to the welfare of your soul. The members of the Salvation Army are greatly given to this sort of thing, and the person not ready with satisfactory answers may have a very bad ten minutes. Much is made, as a rule, of the making use of the regular means of grace, and this, by a freak of the parson's, always includes the systematic giving of contributions towards public worship.

Many a sad and weary heart, buffeted and badgered by surrounding circumstances, is among the most saintly to be found anywhere. Heaven help humanity if church membership is the only entrance to the state of being blessed. Life seems to get sadder as the years creep on, and after a certain period

of years there ceases to be a surprise at whatever happens. The only antidote to this is the personal ownership of some Pandora's box, to be opened in secret it may be, to give renewed strength for another round of the same humdrum duties, the same trials and vexings of spirit which become the common lot of mankind. The aged, who have become grey in trying to pay their way, and who have again perhaps in late years to take up the burdens of life for grandchildren,—the mother, full of the cares of the household, and who does not get the help she should get from the partner of her life,—the husband, keeping business worries and life's strain all to himself because he has an unsympathetic and unhelpful wife, to whom it is no use telling them,—the maid with her longing to be loved, and looking in vain for the love that never comes,—the man, younger or elder, animated by strong feelings, and who has left a place in his mind for the new commandment, Thou shalt not:—these and many other types

may be included in the ministry of common things in daily life, which become so common that they seem to be overshadowed by the appeals for the heroic one hears at times from the pulpit.

Were it possible to gather statistics of the lives that have been saddened, the homes made unhappy, by a too persistent absence of the father or mother at religious meetings and kindred gatherings, there would indeed be surprises. It would be a new doctrine to hear in some discourse that there were possibly some among the hearers who would best serve the Almighty by remaining at home, rather than in attending worship. And yet this would be the simple truth in more instances than it would be pleasant to chronicle.

The poet's "Psalm of Life" is responsible for a good deal of misconception. The sublimity of a mother mending a pair of juvenile trousers, or a father rolling across the floor with his child, may not be of a distinctive order. But never-

theless some of these trivial things do leave behind them along the sands of time the sweetest recollections of faithful love, which attach themselves to one's life.

The grandeur of simplicity, in life and conduct, is deserving of more attention. There is oftentimes more strength of character in those whose voices are never heard outside their own limited circle, than there is in those who, for ceaseless chatter at meetings, whether for prayer or talk, would merit a first prize.

The good qualities of the unprominent and the undistinguished, are the things to which attention is called. A fresh handful of flowers from the Master's lips for the weary and heavy laden is what the writer would like to bestow. The charmed circle of church members absorbs so much of the blessing, that there is none left for the still larger circle outside.

An elder was once heard to say that he never knew what devilry was until he became a member of the diaconate of a large church, and had seen

exhibitions of it within that board of management. But this is by the way. It is sacrilege to hint at such a thing. The breaking of a pastor's heart by heartless and cruel deacons—the deliberate wrecking of a church by a mediocre but disappointed parson, never could, of course, happen anywhere. These things have, however, happened, and will happen again.

The old Greeks ran their races in the national games for simple crowns of laurel or parsley. The laurel and the parsley would need to be widely distributed, if those received their due share who are simply good, and who try to do their best although they may often stumble and fall, and this under difficulties which, if they were generally known, would astound the flippant users of texts whose talk is so frequently full of fiery illustrations.

Natural Religion.

A cursory acquaintance with literature shows how the professors of re-

ligious systems are reluctant to devote much attention to natural religion. They will not admit that there is much to lament in the teaching of some Christian circles, where the idea of God has been degraded by childish and little-minded views. In the most elementary of civilisations there is some idea of a God, of a being beyond and out of themselves, whose wrath is to be appeased or who is to be worshipped. The heart of man, says the Book, is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. But when this is granted, there is much in the heart of man, in its better moments, which turns to things higher and that which is holier than itself. Whether this natural religion is helped or hindered by much of the creed and dogma of the day is a question open to discussion.

Leaders of Christian thought are a little too much given to describing any school of thought which differs from their own as antagonistic to religion. One distinguished man spoke of positivism lately as a "once

clamant and pretentious rival of the Gospel." The positive philosophy has never pretended to be a rival of the Gospel. This is not by any means a treatise issued on behalf of positivism, but justice should be done, and justice to opponents is not a striking virtue with the leaders of Christian thought. The same speaker went on to refer to the coarser forms of secularism and the assertive schools of materialism. From this he proceeded to say that the decay of these systems had issued in the spread of agnosticism, "which, like the general weakness of the body, is more difficult to treat than positive disease." This is very pretty, but the most ingenious part of the whole address was when he proceeded to reconcile science and faith. Here he took credit to the Christian Church for its having gradually accepted and incorporated truths which were at first denounced as subversive of the faith, and learned, though with culpable tardiness, how to extract from criticism the elements of reconstruction. The

whole address—and it was delivered in the autumn of 1897 before an important section of the free churches—was an amazing example of Christian apologetics. The despised “systems” which have never been or even sought to be rivals of the Gospel, have, it is clear, accomplished some good, if only to gain a confession that the best of their teaching has been tardily assimilated into Christian beliefs.

These same despised “systems” have kept clearly in view the natural religion within man, and have insisted upon the cultivation of this, not by means of creeds and dogmas, but in a keener grasp of the realities of life. It is not enough to say that a merely natural religion has not strength enough for the part it is called to fulfil. It has strength enough to bring a man closer to his God, and there is much to be heard in the Churches and seen in the lives of the saints of to-day, which it would be a great charity to suppose led one very far in his search for God and truth.

Heaven.

The book of Daniel and the book of Revelation are responsible for the unhinging of many minds. The spirit of prophecy and the spirit of revelation were inborn in the Oriental Jewish brain. The especial department of the devout Jew was to become the mouthpiece of the Almighty. The school of prophecy was peculiarly his own, prior to the Christian era. Far be it from the writer to undervalue this. It has had many uses, and literature and history would be the poorer were there not those weird lamentations and prophecies of Jeremiah, the beautiful poems of David, the depths of wisdom displayed by Job, and the truly national zeal of the father of diplomatists—Daniel. All these, and much else that could be named from the pages of Holy Writ, have had a utility for the whole world which is rarely ever touched upon by preachers. The adapting of the prophecies, uttered hundreds of years previously, to the events of the first century of the

present era was inevitable, but the doing so is chiefly made up of assertion unaccompanied by much direct proof.

No part of religious teaching has become more changed of recent years than the views promulgated with regard to heaven. The heaven of our childhood was a very real place, and as Wordsworth beautifully says, heaven lies about us in our infancy. The white robes, pearly gates, golden streets, and the strains of harps and hallelujahs were all as tangible as were the descriptions of a city we had never seen. The rapid success of Christianity in the early centuries owed much to this teaching. The daily life of its adherents had little of joy in it, and the world in which they had to live their life was at the best a burdensome place, out of which they were eager to get at the earliest opportunity. Martyrdom afforded the readiest and most glorious exit. Thousands then, as they would to-day, readily lay down their life in order to merit the glorious

hereafter, which has for ages been pictured in terms so entrancing, that there is a natural disinclination to part with a single one of the beautiful ideas regarding this place prepared for the blessed. There is the same feeling about parting with the stories of the fairies. Life has not much imagination in it, and all admit that the culture of the imagination has its uses, but it should not be done at the expense of truth.

Now the preachers dwell less and less with the book of Revelation, and the dreams of the spiritually-minded John in Patmos. Heaven, they say, is a condition of mind and not a place.

The kingdom of God is within you, taught the deep-souled Christ; and so gradually a new order of thought is taking the place of the old. This is certainly a gain, and childhood is indebted for so much.

It would be folly to suggest any new theory in a field which is so completely one of conjecture. That man has within him some immortal part is quite clear. The loving

Father would hardly inflict upon His children such a terrible schooling below, merely that it should end with death. Out of all apparent death there comes a new life of some kind, and even a bundle of dead leaves illustrates this axiom. What that immortal part is, will probably never be fully known, and the old discussions as to whether it is mind or matter, are now vanishing.

That there are other worlds than our own, and worlds which have no possible use to our planet, or this world to them, has long ago been shown us by astronomers. That they may have some use as new worlds for departed spirits, is not improbable. There is no desire to advance theories of Swedenborg or to defend the nirvana in the teaching of Buddha. Both are in themselves beautiful, and may have touched a higher plane of probability than is generally acknowledged. Man is such a little speck in the wide expanse of time behind us, and possibly in the still wider expanse of

time in front of us, that the preachers have committed no more serious error than in seeking to limit so precisely the plans of the Almighty in their teachings about heaven.

Slow and imperceptible growth is the all-pervading law. The beginning in a new world, wherever that may be, at exactly the point we leave off in this world, in the progress and discipline of the soul, is not mere chimera. The distribution of natural gifts, and the wide diversion which rules the possibilities, longings and achievements of the individual mind and soul, are so real, that some such prospect is worthy of consideration. Nature, at the same time, is scrupulously fair to her children, giving to all in some way or other, and at some time or other, a chance; and this is why Nature may be better trusted than may the clerics, who desire to so microscopically prescribe her aims and ends.

Hell.

The old teaching that we should be good in order to escape hell and so gain heaven, is to appeal to the very lowest and most trivial motives in the human soul. When the old divines sounded the blasts of hell terrorism could go no farther. Everlasting torment and punishment was a picture in which they positively revelled. The writer has, on more than one occasion, heard an Irish Roman Catholic priest secure obedience and respect by threatening to send a child to hell. Realism could not one whit surpass what it has achieved in its descriptions of hell. To be cast out of the synagogue was the highest form of punishment that could be inflicted on the rebellious Jew. The Gehenna outside the city walls had a corresponding place in his mind. Here the dead and the filth of the city lay, and that to him was hell.

In this lies the basis of the dogmas about hell, and the bogey of the devil is capable of just as simple an

explanation. That there is a spirit of evil as well as a spirit of good within man and in the world, requires neither theory nor dogma to substantiate, but the preachers might, with a little thought and more honesty, have spared some of the terrors in the childhood of those who are the middle-aged of to-day.

Thank Heaven for the gospel of hope and of love which is slowly permeating the Christian Church. For this we are indebted, first to the poets, and after them to Non-conformity, for giving voice to gentler and more humane teaching.

THINGS MUNDANE.

The Social Revolution.

That a complete social revolution is gradually coming about is patent enough.

In the home there is the never-ending trouble with regard to those who serve. In business life it looks very much as if a maximum of pay and a minimum of work governed the action of the majority. There is an increasing difficulty in securing the services of trustworthy people. The employer is too often looked upon merely as the figure-head of the ship, and as one who is of no more importance than the youngest clerk in his employ. He is often regarded as one fattening on the labour of those around him, and some do not hesitate to call him a stealer of other men's labours. Labour is primary and capital secondary. The god of

some newspapers is the working man in his aggregate form. He it is who is to save the world, and with his eight hours' day and enlarged intelligence he is to usher in the reign of peace and plenty, and so prepare mankind for the millennium. How he is misled by his so-called leaders recent events only too well illustrate. Some assert that the new woman only exists within the covers of works of fiction. But although the specimens may not be so pronounced as the novelists' characters, she does actually exist, although in a modified form, in the home and social life. Man has ruled so long, say they, that it is time woman had a turn. Man, they are good enough to assert, has used his power with such gross unfairness that the only way to bring him to his senses will be to deprive him of his power altogether. To reduce the general statements made into plain English, the husband and head of the house is simply the poor creature who pays the bills. When he has performed that function he has

carried out the purpose of his existence.

All this is becoming increasingly evident, and there is in each instance the usual corollary of result—smaller houses are taken, in order to require fewer servants; employers buy goods more constantly from abroad, rather than have the trouble incident to manufacturing; a marked disinclination to marriage on the part of men is proved by the returns. And so on all through, the social revolution is permeating our national life, and no amount of preaching will stem its current. The old feeling of mutual interest between employer and employed, whether in the home, the workshop, or the counting-house, is disappearing, and is giving place to a merely pounds, shillings and pence view of everything.

Parsons pretend to be close readers of the signs of the times. But the handwriting must sink deep into the wall before they can read it, in order to do something that will tend, in a serviceable way, to aid and direct

the better and deeper currents of our national life. The charge is that the preachers live in too artificial and unreal an atmosphere to influence materially the everyday life of the people. The particular cut of a surplice or a waistcoat is of so much vaster importance than the encouragement of the smaller virtues of life.

Man must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, whether as applied to religion, commerce or politics. He will get precious little help from the benefited or unbenefited clergy. The plain fact is that being a parson is very much of a business, just as much of a business indeed as being a pawnbroker or a grocer. The Lord's call is an interesting fiction in too many instances. The Lord would have to call a long time if there were not some solid advantages in what presents itself at the other end of the call. Possessing, as the preachers do, enormous facilities and gigantic power to become a factor in the nation's life, it is not easy to define whether that

power is in a helpful direction or otherwise.

Several of the old revolutions may have to be fought over again. The struggle against priestcraft, the abolition of duties known as the Free Trade war, and other old causes may recur, and shake society to the roots.

Waste.

One of the greatest evils of modern times is that of waste. Nature provides bountifully of everything, and man, in his superior wisdom, wastes on all hands. Were there no waste anywhere, there is not a single person on the face of the earth who would be without food or would go without a single real want unsatisfied. The Churches, which ought to lead, are themselves the most prolific of wasters. Waste in words, waste in work, waste in buildings, and waste follows their steps along the whole route of religious effort and activity. To begin with, the colleges of each denomination, established or unestablished, are

greatly in excess of the need. Four or five of these institutions for a meagre supply of students, and the whole machinery of study provided for tens when there are only units to be instructed. Almost everywhere this is the case with denominations of every conceivable shade and name. The churches rear their spires, and compete with each other, not for the uplifting of the whole community, but to strive for the mastery of the saved. Man deserves punishing with want, for this fearful waste, and until he gathers up the fragments and stops the leaks of life everywhere, he will be greatly to blame. This much of his salvation, however, he will have to accomplish without the help of the parsons.

The A B C of Life.

By this is not meant the origin of life—that greatest of all mysteries. What was the origin of life is mere conjecture, but there ought to be sufficient diffidence on the part of

preachers to prevent them giving too much of the Adam and Eve interpretation of the beginnings of life. It is perhaps a daring speculation that life itself may have been brought to the earth by an aerolite. But science has given us many new facts which have been scouted at first by the preachers, and then accepted by them when they could no longer deny them. Some who read these pages will be old enough to remember the howl that went up on all hands when Colenso's theories about the Pentateuch first became public. The same people will vividly recollect how Darwin was scoffed and rebuked for his boldness; and from the pulpits everywhere there came denunciations against this earnest student of the A B C of life. Darwin's grave, in that poem in stone, Westminster Abbey, should ever remain a rebuke to preachers, but it is doubtful whether it ever presents this lesson to them.

By the A B C of life is meant that the early lessons to children

should have a truer hold on the origin of life, and also as to the meaning of life with all its various purposes—that this life is something more than a preparation for another life.

The parent is not wise who gives his child a shambling and shuffling answer, or, worse, a lying answer to the puzzling questions put to him. The child learns by asking questions, and untold mischief has been done by the giving of answers which have had to be unlearned in later life. The catechism is a fruitful source of mischief. Much of it requires re-casting, but such a task would be undertaken in fear and trembling, and so what was practicable and teachable enough in the generation before the passing of the Elementary Education Act is considered good enough for the children of to-day. It is not right to teach children so-called truths about this life and the next, whatever that may be, as if everything had been absolutely settled beyond the range of question and doubt. Assertions are made in the teaching of children

with regard to these matters as if a new truth or a new light upon an old truth never could be put forward.

Life's Energies.

What has the Church to say, in a practical way, of that which concerns every human being in the land? True, it fulminates about purity, but does little to really help towards reaching that desirable end. Everywhere there are traces of the serpent. Where groups of boys, or groups of girls, live together or work together, the same story could be told. And the dear mother Church holds its tongue, as, forsooth, these things must be talked about with bated breath. Why cannot simple lessons in physiology, especially bearing upon the sexual functions, be given? The forces within are part, and probably the most important part, of a beautiful whole in the human frame. Their bearing upon health is incalculable. They are, in fact, health itself, or at all events the physical thermometer of the absence of, or presence of, health.

Some wholesome and common-sense teaching in this direction would be a national boon. But generations go on staggering and stumbling in the dark. The youth of both sexes drop into habits which may become most disastrous. The absence of knowledge leads in so many cases to an entire change in the current of the individual life, and this change is often for the worse instead of for the better.

Youth must and will learn, and, sad to relate, the newspapers, illustrated and others, take care that at all events plenty of information on one side of the subject shall be disseminated. The cry is for more light—that the human frame shall be taken as a perfect whole, and the youth be as familiar with the relations of all the parts of the body as he is with the laws of football or tennis. The young of both sexes should be taught the faculty of taking care of themselves. If they cannot do this when a certain age is reached, and they have to go out into the world with its numerous pitfalls, their elders

cannot undertake the task on their behalf.

The Relations of the Sexes.

Men and women have never had greater capacity for being companionable than is at present the case. The English girl, when she is free from the "new woman" nonsense, is the sweetest, healthiest, most lovable and most companionable being on the face of the earth. It is lamentable to think how many of them must go through life unmated, and to whom there will not come the love of husband and the clasp of her own child's hands. Bubbling over with vitality, and with the feelings of motherhood overflowing to a point little understood, this is a prospect which it is not pleasant to contemplate. All these softer feelings are part of her own dear self, and yet in the harnessing and subduing of them she may become harsh, cynical and ungentle. Does Nature really mean all this? It may be questioned whether the purpose

of the Almighty is fulfilled when the stereotyped injunctions of the preacher, who is often the least qualified to give these injunctions, are uttered.

A visit to the West Indian Islands, or some other part of the world where the life of the native is unfettered, is a curious eye-opener to the observant mind. Without a want unsatisfied, the coloured population seem to live the happiest and fullest life of any individual in the entire universe. They are the merriest beings to be found anywhere. The simple fruits and vegetables of the earth give them food in abundance, clothing is not dear and lasts long, and all the shelter they require is from the rains and the cold air of the night, and this is easily afforded by a wooden hut.

The effect of seeing all this is to sometimes wonder whether civilisation is an unmixed blessing. Civilisation is bound to win, but there are not a few who are beginning to ask

whether all the chains which the religionists have forged need to be worn with civilisation.

Where the ordinary preacher comes in when a practical solution of problems of this nature is desired is not very clear. He has little to say about them, and is disposed to let the problems solve themselves. So long as his pleasures of all kinds are assured, the rest of mankind may take care of themselves.

The Spanish Roman Catholic priest, probably the most unclean morally of any class of men on the face of the earth, has settled this matter very conveniently for himself. His method of life was very neatly put by a guide in a Spanish city, who said to the writer, in referring to the priests, "They have no wives but many womens." Far be it from the writer to suggest any such solution as this, for it would only lead to worse confusion than at present exists. He simply asks that in the attempt to solve this question common sense shall play a part, and that

things shall not be taken so much for granted as we are asked to do. Mother Nature, on the one hand, has endowed humanity with pressing needs; yet, on the other hand, the preacher comes in and defies mother Nature and all her ways, and these ways are to be seen everywhere in the natural world.

Marriage.

The writer believes fully in the sacredness of marriage. The home life of dear old England is its finest national trait, and may Heaven spare this to us! But it is to be regretted that so much mischief has been caused by erroneous teaching. It has been a terrible shock to many to find that after all marriages are not made in heaven. Whether the other place has anything to do with a good many marriages is another matter. That the married state is capable of producing the highest happiness which the heart of man or woman can conceive, is undenied, but somehow or other the assortment is bad,

and thus some who naturally expect happiness in this state have to be content with either very little or an experience the reverse of joyous. The writer has heard both husbands and wives, married to partners of a distinctly religious tendency, say that if there is to be a knowledge of each other when the wearing of white robes and the walking of golden streets comes along, they would rather there should not be. And even, if necessary to avoid it, they would prefer another place, as there would be probably better company to be found.

How little chance there is of the sexes really and truly knowing each other before marriage. Years of courtship cannot do what a single week of living together will accomplish. For two to know each other in any useful way they must live under the same roof or work together for a time. Such a plan is, however, impossible under the existing conditions of society.

Alas for the aching hearts among both husbands and wives,—the un-

mated and uncompanionable couples who have, willynilly, to live their lives together, with as much toleration as they are able to muster! The United States, with its youthfulness, has perhaps unwisely settled this matter very drastically, by permitting divorce on the ground of incompatibility of temper. The old country adheres to its rigid laws about this matter, and the Church trembles with dismay when any alteration in the law of divorce is suggested.

The union of two soul-knit beings in marriage is as near the Divine as anything on this lower world can reach. Every couple think that this must be the state they are destined to reach, but the percentage which actually does reach it is indeed small. Surely a larger number might reach it if the whole theory of life, conduct, and habits were made clearer from earliest years.

Parentage.

There is no gladder sight in all the range of life than the happily married

English girl nursing her first baby. Sad must be the life that cannot be moved at such a scene. Yet it is mournful to think how little knowledge there is about the duties and privileges of parentage. How much longer it will take to annihilate the doctrine that the Almighty is responsible for the existence of every child born into the world, it is hard to say. It is a fraud upon mankind to teach him that this is so, and it is a contemptibly mean attempt on the part of man to shift his responsibility from his own to other shoulders. The preachers are much to blame for the gross misconception which prevails about this matter, beginning as it does on the very threshold of life itself. What a startling thing it would be to tell congregations that the disposition of children, the temper of children, and much that appertains to life are largely within their own control. In the breeding of pigs and horses man will take infinite pains, but when it comes to the birth of a human soul, he often cares less than

he does about the next brood of chickens in his poultry-yard.

The solemnity of parentage is a text needing more than the orthodox three heads in order to make it clear, and to cause the truths attaching to it to be learned in a way they will never be forgotten. Parentage is the holiest function of man or woman. It is only by being a father or a mother that we can understand the depths of the Divine heart. Thank God for the cradle, and for the sweet faces that lie there, or have been there in years gone by.

Amusements.

There ought to be profound admiration for the work done for the nation by the Puritans during the days of the Stuart contamination. It will be readily granted that the Puritans ran to excess in the opposite direction to the Royalists. But there was every reason why this should be the result of their way of viewing things and course of action. Still, in the attempt to crush the natural gaieties

of the human heart, they gave to the generations that have followed a legacy which has only very gradually been put aside. An inevitable necessity for everybody is relaxation in one form or another, and rational amusements are as essential as is food. The attitude of many preachers against the theatre is, very possibly, natural. But there are theatres and theatres, and a few could be named which really might be classed as educational institutions as well as places of amusement. The dramatic instinct is inborn in man. To imitate is as natural as is sleep, and whatever is part of human nature must surely be right and safe to cultivate. Let young people see the best of plays, and, it is urged, a standard of excellence will be imperceptibly formed in the mind, and plays of a lowering character will cease to attract. It has remained for the Victorian era to witness the national pride and true appreciation of our glorious Shakespeare. It should be impressed upon the juve-

nile mind that some passages, which to us are coarse, in the works of our great poet, must be taken as the form of language in common use at the time. This ought to suffice with the average intellect for a proper interpretation being placed upon such passages. The mere fact that now we express ourselves differently, shows the national advance which has been made. Wise fathers and mothers will accompany their young people to the theatres of select and special reputation. Whatever interests sons and daughters during the teens should interest parents. No greater mistake can be made than to treat young people from fourteen and upwards as children. Youngfolks should be taught the proper use of money, amusements, and everything appertaining to life. No defence is here put forward of all amusements and all theatres. A vital difference exists, and discrimination is necessary. Actors and actresses might be mentioned whose work is elevating, and whose love for their

art has made them geniuses of the first rank. Numerous provincial towns and rural districts cannot of course have these advantages. A good play lifts the mind from its cares and worries, and gives freshness and new vigour. The place of amusement in life is not a question which becomes settled when the preacher has described all theatres as being the gates leading to perdition. More music, more pictures, more soundly good plays introduced into life, and these with many other advantages will enable this dear old land of ours to hold its own for an unlimited number of generations to follow. The croakers in the religious bodies who talk about the decay of the British nation are on the increase. More help to render this decay impossible may be asked of them.

Excess of Zeal.

There is ample room in the world for the enthusiast. But it will be a sorry time if the world is ever

governed exclusively by enthusiasts. Although the author writes as an abstainer, it is impossible to deny that among the advocates of temperance some of the most intemperate in language are to be found. It will be readily acknowledged by many friends of this movement that the very object for which they are working has often been anything but helped by the unreasonableness of those possessing an excess of zeal. The cold water treatment makes sometimes a very distressing bath, and national sobriety, for an exceedingly thirsty nation, would be better served if there were not so manifest a disposition to treat all who do not quite side with temperance advocates as fools or drunkards, or even a mixture of both.

The companion to the just-named advocate is the anti-vaccinator, anti-smoker, and the vegetarian, and often all four are to be met with in one and the same person. The opinion of the whole medical faculty added together is as nothing when com-

pared with the opinions of the one who defies Jenner and all his works. It is utterly useless to argue with these friends. They simply attack an opponent with a zeal that does not give a chance for a word by way of reply.

Others who suffer from excess of zeal are the anti-opiumites and the opponents of what are known as the C. D. Acts.

The writer has no intention of discussing either one or the other of these questions. The whole desire is to point the moral that often a little fuller information, or a blazing sidelight, will give an entirely different view of a question affecting the community, and prevent an excess of zeal. What close inquiry has done in numerous instances is to cause one to doubt whether some of these agitations, begun and conducted by those belonging to the religious communities, have not done more harm than good. Take, as an example, the view that an exclusive rice diet of the native populations of India requires an antidote, and that

they find that best antidote in opium, which is taken for this purpose, and not for its other purposes, so glowingly pictured by the good friends who champion the movement on the public platforms.

The association for preserving the Sabbath, and others which could be named, may also be placed under this class.

There is another matter closely allied to this question. If there does not exist in the country a peace-at-any-price party, there does exist in the Churches a party who would rather see old England down on her knees and degraded than that she should fight. The lads' brigades scattered throughout the United Kingdom are an abomination to these friends. It is cultivating the military spirit, say they, at the expense of the finer elements of character. The time may come, and come sooner than the Churches think, for England to enter into the stiffest fight either by land or sea that she has ever had. There is no spirit of prophecy in this state-

ment. The heads of both political parties know well that the dangers which surround us are far more real than are generally imagined. The Englishman or the Englishwoman who cannot be roused at the bravery and entire absence of fear that have been displayed by our troops in India, whether British or native, lay themselves open to be pitied.

How common is the experience that the radicalism of one's youth gives place to a more sober view of things when middle life is reached. Excess of zeal leads the young to the feeling that they can settle every question under the sun in a ten minutes' talk. Later life brings with it the less rosy aspect of things—that it is not so easy to dissipate difficulties, and the mind becomes humbled and readier to listen to opposite views, with a greater willingness to learn.

The writer has cause to think that, scattered throughout the Churches, there are men and women who have to acknowledge to themselves that they do not see eye to eye with their

teachers as was formerly the case. It would be sacrilege to attempt to disturb the beliefs of the aged. But there are many young people who, with the advancing strides of education, are unable to accept without question the faith of father and mother. It is not that there is any less belief in religion. But it is the excrescences of the creeds which they find it impossible to retain in their minds, without asking the why and the wherefore of these things. True religion is something so solemn, real, and important, that to lose hold of it would be a disaster to the individual. All honour to the pastors who recognise these facts, and who have honestly tried, as far as they dared to do so, to combine with their teaching some of the more reasonable views which now prevail. The progress in this direction is, however, slow, and during the process some may lose hold altogether of the sense of the Divine in life.

Within the limits of a small book it was manifestly impossible to deal fully

with many matters which have been simply touched upon. Should there be need, the questions here raised will be considered at length in a future volume.

The writer finishes, as he began, with the belief that the best interests of religion and religious teaching will be served by a fearless but reverential attempt to treat difficulties as they present themselves, rather than to pass them over in silence.

