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Poetry.

RELIGION AND DOCTRINE.

BY JOHN HAY.

He stood before the Sanhedrim;
The scowling rabbis gazed at him.
He recked not of their praise or blame;
There was no fear, there was no shame,
For one upon whose dazzled eyes
The whole world poured its vast surprise.
The open heaven was far too near,
His first day's light too sweet and clear,
To let him waste his new-gained ken
On the hate-clouded face of men.

But still they questioned, Who art thou?
What art thou been? What art thou now?
Thou art not he who yesterday
Sat here and begged beside the way;
For he was blind

—And I am he;

For I was blind, but now I see.

He told the story o'er and o'er;
It was his full heart's only lore:
A prophet on the Sabbath day
Had touched his sightless eyes with clay,
And made him see who had been blind.
Their words passed by him like the wind
Which raves and howls, but cannot shock
The hundred-fathom-rooted rock.

Their threats and fury all went wide;
They could not touch his Hebrew pride.
Their sneers at Jesus and His band,
Nameless and homeless in the land,
Their boasts of Moses and his Lord,
All could not change him by one word.

I know not what this man may be,
Sinner or saint; but as for me,
One thing I know, that I am he
Who once was blind, and now I see.

They were all doctors of renown,
The great men of a famous town,
With deep brows, wrinkled, broad and wise,
Beneath their wide phylacteries;
The wisdom of the East was theirs,
And honor crowned their silver hairs.
The man they jeered and laughed to scorn
Was unlearned, poor, and humbly born;
But he knew better far than they
What came to him that Sabbath day;
And what the Christ had done for him
He knew, and not the Sanhedrim.

—Harper's Magazine for May.

Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

THOUGHTS FOR THE TIMES

No. XVI.

EXTREMES.

"In medio tutissimus ibis." That is, the middle path is the safest; if you go on one side or the other, you may fall into a ditch and be bemired; therefore, keep in the middle. And yet, how common are extreme views and extreme courses! The number of moderate men is comparatively small. The tendency to extremes pervades society and affects human character and conduct everywhere.

Were it not for the inspired comment on the transaction, the account of the offerings presented by Cain and Abel might be added. Cain cultivated the land, and presented at the altar the fruits of his toil. Abel kept sheep, and offered a lamb. Neither would take anything from the other's store; each would take his own and nothing else. A superficial observer, unacquainted with the facts of the case, might have thought them obstinate: "Cain might have supplied Abel with vegetables and fruit, and received a lamb in exchange, so that a joint sacrifice might be offered." But we are expressly told that Abel acted "in faith," and that the first recorded death was a murder and a fratricide. There is an addition to the text in the Greek Septuagint which places the narrative in a clearer light. We read (Gen. iv. 8), "And Cain talked with Abel his brother." In the Septuagint it is, "And Cain said to Abel his brother. Let us go out into the field"; and when they were there, out of the sight and hearing of the family, he murdered him.

Peter was a good man, but very impetuous, and apt to get into difficulties in consequence. His supposed succes-

sors call themselves infallible, which was not dreamed of in those days. When he met Gentile Christians at Antioch, he ate and drank with them; but on the arrival of Jewish members of the church at Jerusalem, he took a contrary course and went at once to the other extreme, refusing to take a meal with them. He might have softened it down, and asked them to excuse him; fear, however, prevailed: he "withdrew and separated himself."

Ignatius suffered martyrdom in the early part of the second century. They at that time had adopted a method of church government in some places where Christians were numerous, consisting in the appointment of one of the elders as perpetual chairman. All the elders were bishops, and there were several in each church (Phil. i. 1); but for convenience sake they appropriated the title to the chairman, and he was called "the bishop." Thence sprang mischief. A personal honour came to be regarded as a distinct office. Equality in the ministry was destroyed, and weak men like Ignatius took unwarrantable liberties with the order of the Christian church, magnifying the powers and prerogatives of bishops, and exalting them far above their brethren. The tide flowed on: Metropolitans, Archbishops, Patriarchs, and at length Popes, rose up, resplendent in pomp, and tyrannous in authority and rule.

The manner in which religious opinions are sometimes held may be adduced in further illustration of the tendency now under consideration. When creeds were invented it soon became the fashion to tighten the cords and tie men down to absolute uniformity of expression. Not only must the doctrines be held, but the same words must be used, and even the same syllables, in stating and explaining them. Hence we read of "omovusians," "omovousians," "supralapsarians," "sublapsarians," &c. The evil has descended to modern times. "Some persons, for example, disallow, and do everything to evade, the obvious force of a passage which militates against their opinions. Some even express disapprobation of portions of the Divine Word itself, and call one text legal, another Calvinistic, and another Arminian; under which or similar heads they are no sooner classed, than they are consigned to oblivion as inclination may dictate. While others, as if in despair, make up their minds to maintain some favourite doctrine, and to abandon every thing which is not, or does not seem to be, consistent with their preference." *Hinton's Theological Works, i. 21.*

General "Declarations of faith and practice" are useful—sometimes necessary; but brevity is a great virtue, for it is very desirable that a man should not be made an offender for a word. I once belonged to a Baptist Association in England composed of churches "maintaining the important doctrines of Three Equal Persons in the Divine Essence—Eternal and Personal election to holiness here and eternal life hereafter—the original guilt and depravity of mankind—Particular Redemption by the precious blood of Christ—Free justification by his Imputed Righteousness—Efficacious grace in Regeneration—and the Perseverance of the Saints to Eternal Glory." That was long enough. It satisfied the churches for more than fifty years.

The use of technical phraseology is often carried to extremes. Stiff upholders of orthodoxy will not be content unless you not only agree with them in religious sentiments but express your views in their way. Their modes of expression are sometimes odd enough. I was one day walking with two Baptist ministers, one of whom said to the other, "Does it not seem to you Brother, that the line of election runs very crooked?" The good man meant to say that pious persons sometimes have ungodly children, and vice versa; but he chose to utter his thought in a very uncouth manner.

In treating of personal Christianity there are wide extremes. Some think that if a young person, having been baptized in infancy, has lived a good moral life till manhood, he is eligible for communion at the Lord's table, and should be urged to join the church. Others super-add to this a belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, but nothing more. Others, again, require distinct and full proof of conversion—time—place—manner—deep distress—and instant relief. All forget that while the kingdom of God is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," the methods of Divine operation are very various. There is no stereotyped process. Lydia's heart was opened. The earthquake without symbolised the shaking within the jailor's soul. In the Eunuch's case the change seems to have been wrought through the intellect rather than through the feelings. It is strange that men should be disinclined to let God have his own way.

So of the interpretation of Scripture. One man can see types everywhere in the Old Testament; he will spiritualise the spoons, and the snuff-boxes, and the loops and the taches of the tabernacle. Another refuses to admit them at all. One man finds Christ in all parts of the older volume, and especially in every Psalm, as Bishop Horne did; another, like Grotius, can find him scarcely anywhere. To this writer the Bible is Calvinistic; to that, it is Arminian; while a third can discern no doctrine, nothing but a pure and sublime morality.

When persons change their sentiments they generally go from one extreme to another. Sir Robert Peel was the champion of protection; he wheeled about, and opened free trade in the British Parliament. Sir Francis Burdett was a rabid Radical, and suffered punishment for it; he died a bigoted Tory. Some years ago a young man received education in one of our Baptist Colleges, intending to enter the ministry; he relinquished his purpose, went into trade, and became a Roman Catholic, alleging that he was happy in having found a religion that did not require him to think: the thinking was done for him. The celebrated Robert Robinson published in his early days a treatise on the Divinity of the Lord Jesus: he abandoned that truth, and it was said that the last sermon he preached was a violent attack on it. These theological cases are of a melancholy stamp.

Ritualistic practices may be adverted to. There is so much childishness and folly exhibited in this connection, that it is difficult to restrain one's self to the use of moderate language. The first novelty was the change of the black gown for the surplice in preaching. Then came disputes about the "Eastward position"—the adoption of choral services—the use of the cope—the smoke of incense—the elevation of the elements in the Lord's Supper—and other things too numerous to mention, till at length a large number of clergymen, who began with professed adherence to the Rubric, ended with submission to Rome. All Ritualists should go to Rome. They can be at home nowhere else.

We Baptists, too, must be careful. A great deal is sometimes said about "Baptist usages." We must not confound them with Christ's laws, nor imagine that a strict regard to every particular is of essential importance. There are many things which are indifferent—free—and variety need not be looked upon as unlawful or wrong. A singular case occurred two or three years ago in Ontario. An English Baptist minister came over. He had been twelve years pastor of a Baptist church in England. Having accepted a call from a church in Ontario, it was accidentally discovered that when he was ordained in England there had been no imposition of hands. Our English brethren seldom practise that observance. The great Dr. Gill wrote strongly against it (See his Body of Divinity, Vol. iii. pp. 218-20, London, 1746). But our Canadian brethren

deemed the omission fatal to the validity of the ordination, and the Englishman was actually re-ordained? There is disposition to stigmatise as irregularities such variations in practice as cannot be censured without a breach of charity. There is no Book of Leviticus in the New Testament.

The bias to extremes shows itself in manifold ways among Christians. Here is a man who reads nothing but the Bible: what is called "light reading" is an abomination to him;—while yonder is a young professor who is getting spiritually lean by feeding on literary trash. The constitutional temperament has something to do with it. If a man is of a fretful or timid nature, he is always saying, "All these things are against me," he is like a child who is afraid of being in the dark. On the other hand, the buoyant spirit is ever cheerful and happy, the envy of the miserable ones: his temptation is to levity. The Corinthians, who were a free-and-easy people, abused the Lord's Supper, and turned a devout celebration into a social feast, from which some of them did not go home sober. The Quakers reject the ordinance altogether. Perhaps the devotional element is insufficiently fostered in it, in some Protestant churches. Under the Papacy it is turned to superstition and idolatry:—"this is not to eat the Lord's Supper."

Some persons show their tendency to extremes by the use of Superlatives. If anything is good, it is the best of the kind; if bad, the worst. Every painter is a Raphael; every preacher is a Massillon; every Poet is a Shakspeare, a Milton, or a Burns, according as the taste may be. A plain woman is voted a "fright"; a handsome person is "adorable." It descends even to dress and ornament, as many of my lady-readers know.

There is trouble sometimes when extremes clash. In a certain church the leading men are cool, careful, cautious. They have no enterprise. They are dreadfully afraid of innovation, and inclined to be closefisted. A generation of another spirit rises up among them. They have a large amount of go-a-headitiveness. They call for modern improvements of all sorts. They are likely to be reckless of expenses. For cents they must have dollars: it will be well if sovereigns are not required before long. Such people may find it difficult to work together. It will be a merciful thing if there shall be Christian temper enough to induce brotherly consideration, and promote a yielding give-and-take spirit, the charity which "beareth all things."

Some of my readers will probably remember the story of the travelling monk. He came one morning to the premises of a monastery, and found all the inmates busily at work in the garden. It seemed to him that they were more carnal than they ought to be; so he shook his head at them and said, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth." "Show the brother to a room," said the Abbot, who was standing by, "and let him be supplied with books." There he remained all day. As evening drew nigh he became hungry. Accosting the Abbot, who was superintending the labours of the monks, he said, "Father, don't the brethren eat to-day?" "Oh yes," the Abbot replied, "they have had a hearty dinner." "I was not called," he muttered. "Oh! you are a spiritual brother, you know: you do not need carnal food." "Pardon me, Father," the humbled monk exclaimed: "I see my mistake."

In medio tutissimus ibis.

SEX.

SEE THY HOUSE IN ORDER.

"Died suddenly!" How often these solemn words meet our gaze in the newspapers! They suggest most important inquiries to each one of us. Reader:

1. Is your business in such shape that if you should die to-night it might

be settled by your survivors, without unnecessary loss to your estate? Immense sums in litigation are involved, by improperly kept account-books and the neglecting of full memoranda of unfinished business.

2. Is your will made? In the event of your pulse ceasing to beat before to-morrow morning, would no injustice be done to your heirs, and those objects of Christian benevolence which it is your intention to promote after your death? *Died intestate!* is often the precursor of jealousies and heart-burnings and injustice, which might have been prevented by a few strokes of the pen.

3. Have you paid all your debts? Or have you made arrangements that your creditors shall not be wronged? There may be some balances against you which you acknowledge yourself morally bound to meet, but against which no legal claim can be presented. You intend to pay them after a while. You have the ability now, but you are neglecting them. Take heed lest death, coming when you did not expect him, shall put it forever beyond your power to do justly.

4. Are you on amicable terms, as far as you can be, with everybody? You spoke an unkind word, and wounded a sensitive heart. Have you tried to repair the damage? That brother, that sister, that neighbor, toward whom, in a moment of excitement, you acted an unchristian part, deserves better treatment. You are conscious of having wronged them. Had you better not ask their forgiveness and gain reconciliation now? To-morrow there may be no opportunity. You know not what shall be on the morrow.

5. Have you made God your friend? If not, you have no time to lose. He waits to be gracious now. You will soon stand before Him. "This night thy soul may be required of thee." Take Jesus at once to be your Mediator and Savior. Set thy house in order.—*Christian Intelligencer.*

WHAT A PITY.

Members of a church, reputed pious, too often sever themselves from their church, or absent themselves from its meetings, because of a falling out with some of its members, or some apparent neglect on the part of their pastor. Such, without being aware of the fact, no doubt, afford unmistakable evidence that they are influenced, not so much by the constraining love of Christ, as by their likes and dislikes—more by their carnal passions and propensities than by the pure principles of the gospel of Christ. Such are truly to be pitied, and for such we should devoutly pray, that the Lord would enlighten them by His Holy Spirit, and dispose and enable them to exercise more of that forbearance which characterized their Lord and Savior, who has so long and so mercifully borne with their infirmities and oft-repeated provocations.

LIVING IN THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

I was once expounding the seventh and eighth of Romans to a class of colored Bible-women, deeply experienced as to their hearts, but very ignorant as I supposed in their heads. After I had been talking quite eloquently for a little while, an old colored woman interrupted me with—

"Why, honey, 'pears like you don't understand them chapters."

"Why not, aunty?" I asked. "What is the matter with my explanation?"

"Why, honey," she said, "you talks as if we were to live in that miserable seventh chapter, and only pay little visits to the blessed eighth."

"Well," I answered, "that is just what I do think. Don't you?"

"Laws, honey," she exclaimed, with a look of intense pity for my ignorance, "why, I lives in the eighth."

Easy roads lead to hard places.