

IS THERE A REALITY IN RELIGION?

BY W. A. SAWYER, M. D.

To answer this question many will say is a very easy matter. Does religion consist of forms and ceremonies? of creeds and rituals? Neither the one nor the other. May a man be skeptical and still be the possessor of pure and undefiled religion? I answer, Yes, provided he is intelligent enough to exercise that right. How are we to distinguish between error and truth, unless we examine critically the teachings of the churches? How may I know which is the true faith, the Roman Catholic or the Protestant? Skepticism need not necessarily lead any to deism or infidelity. If any arrive at either one it is the fault of a diseased and perverted mind, and such a one never possessed a grain of true and undefiled religion. Was Dr. Newman a skeptic? How long did it take him to find out that the Protestant Church of England into which he was born was not the true Church? If I lack charity I hope to be forgiven, but I do not believe any man of such magnificent attainments and natural ability after having preached for many years in a church that has the semblance of religion, and after all, leaving it for a bundle of superstitions and traditions, ever had one spark of true, vital religion. . . . Is that put too strong? I cannot help it. There is one thing, however, that shall sustain my verdict, "By their fruit ye shall know them." And there is also a redeeming feature; whatever I might say in this relation can have no possible ultimate bearing on any one.

"Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion." So says the Cardinal. He meant toleration in religion. He did not mean liberalism at all in the sense accepted by most men. I am no liberal, according to my definition. Liberalism is what is the matter with Drs. Beecher, Swing, Thomas and many others, some of them, or perhaps all, very good, if we accept the doctrine, that whatever a man believes is right.

"But that one creed is as good as another," continues Cardinal Newman. Creeds are nothing. Vital, practical religion does not consist of creeds. They may, as we believe, be essential as a rule of faith, and for the conduct of the church, but as an integer in the Christianity of our blessed Saviour they do not enter. Nothing but a second birth, a consciousness of the forgiveness of our sins, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the living a devoted life entirely to the cause. These are some of the things that go to make up the religion taught by the Apostles. Oh that the world possessed more of this kind of Christianity.

Organizations there are in which children are born and become Christians by inheritance as it were. Nothing is necessary further than to endorse the creed on arriving at a proper age, and they become regular members of the church in good standing. These, many of them, are the kind of Christians who are going with Cardinal Newman, Dr. Chase, and Rev. Wm. Roberts. They probably never knew the name of our blessed Redeemer, because if they had they would not be going over to a church devoid of any redeeming quality so far as Christianity is concerned. The fact that Jerusalem had a See with a Bishop and no church or even a congregation, was what shattered his faith in the Anglican Church. Ah well! that was a heavy blow. Had he gone to his closet and prayed for Jerusalem; hid himself behind the cross like good mother Phoebe Palmer, he would never have thought of Rome.

As for the High Church party, it matters but little how soon it goes over in a body to Romanism. It is only one short remove from it already, and I know not but the day is not far distant when the Protestant Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches will in common acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope of Rome. At any rate the tendency is in that direction.

AN AMBITIOUS TEXT.—The parsons do, after all, tell the best stories. Rev. Dr. — is responsible for the following: "In the early part of his ministry a very eminent clergyman of his own denomination visited him and spent a Sabbath with him. Of course he invited him to preach for him, and, to his great satisfaction, he consented. Rev. Dr. — is tall, and his pulpit was rather high, to accommodate his manuscript to his sight: his visitor was short, rather stout, and had a shining bald head. Rev. Dr. — proposed to lower the pulpit a little, but his friend declined, and, on the contrary desired that it should be raised higher. It seemed that he was near sighted, but for some reasons preferred not to wear spectacles. The desk being raised, he proceeded to pile upon it the closed pulpit Bible, two hymn books, a pile of about a dozen sermons, and finally his manuscript and then his bald head just glimmering over the top of his extempore fortification, he announces his text—"Thou shalt see greater things than these."—Harper's Magazine.

A LIVING QUESTION.

Every pastor that glances at the scant stock of our books in the average Methodist home is penetrated with the conviction that a system of colportage is demanded. Many reasons may be assigned for this dearth of our literature: The loss of books during the war, and the difficulty of getting volumes in the interior. At any rate, the households of the majority of Methodists are destitute of even Disciplines.

Our people in the country hear a sermon on some moral duty once or twice a month. The preacher cannot well discuss from the pulpit the history and polity of our church. Seldom the doctrines are set forth.—What must be done? Shall our people remain in ignorance, the prey of proselyters? A doctrinal paper, book or tracts of another church gets among our members. It passes from house to house. It unsettles the mind of many. The antidote is absent.

The other churches have their agents. They visit family by family, and sometimes our own people.—They show their books, interest the household, and sell their doctrinal works. They are read, establishing the faith of their owners, and then loaned to confuse the belief of our members.

Go where you will in our bounds, the ominous fact stares you in the face that ten thousand on ten thousand of our people do not read a Methodist book or journal.

It is a matter of gravity. Our very members, with the miserable fraction of readers of our literature among them, are our shame. Our self-respect is at stake.

It is a matter that concerns the Eldership. The overseers must look well to it. Skidmore would order a canvass and load with his big box of books under his sulky.

A thorough visitation, member by member, with a supply of our publications, would be the best Home evangelization. The Conference is wise enough to furnish the money, if the elders find the men. We have spent hundreds and hundreds that had far better been used on a system of energetic colportage.—Exchange.

AGREEING WITH EVERYBODY.

It is utterly impossible for a man to agree with everybody, or to avoid making enemies, in some sense. If he has no opponents, it necessarily follows that he is either a hypocrite or a cipher. Some persons are so destitute of any real strength of character that no one cares what they think, and so no one takes the trouble to disagree with them. A person of strong convictions and sound moral sense must arouse opposition in a world not yet in a millennial condition. Such is the variety of tastes and opinions, such is the sincere difference of belief, even on the most fundamental subjects, such as the nature of God and the distinction between right and wrong; such is the heterogeneous character of even the smallest social world, that no sincere person can avoid disagreement with a large number of those with whom he associates. If he seems always to agree with all, he is in the nature of things guilty of falsehood toward some. That constant courtesy which is always a duty need never be hypocritical. Servility and deceit are not courteous; they are in reality gross insults. He who professes agreement with opinions utterly divergent, practices deceit, throws a large share of his influence on the side of error, and weakens his own character. As George Elliot says, "His mind is furnished as hotels are, with everything for occasional and transient use."

Because we must deplorably fail if we attempt to agree with everybody, it by no means follows that we should show our independence by disagreeing with everybody. The perpetual cynic is as repulsive and injurious as the perpetual sycophant; for if the latter flatters the bad, the former denounces the good. The right method is to pursue a course of personal independence, remembering the old maxim which reminds us that Christ's service is true liberty. His is the only approbation we need. If we agree with Him and His laws, we must agree or disagree with men and measures just as they seem to us right or wrong. We should praise what we can, and blame what we must. If we are honest men, those who disagree with us will give us their respect, which is better than their liking. If we are dishonest, in order that we may say we have not an enemy in the world, we shall be likely to make good men our enemies, and to cause bad men to despise us.

It was not the clay and the spittle that cured the blind man, but Christ anointing his eyes with it.

If there is anything in this life that will give one a foretaste of hell, as some represent it, that thing is Neuralgia. It is the refinement of torture. But there is a simple and inexpensive remedy for it. Johnson's Anodyne Linctus snuffed into the head will give instant relief.

WEBSTER OVERTMATCHED.

Lawyers sometimes resort to questionable methods in order to destroy the effect which the testimony of a truthful and intelligent witness has upon a jury. Mr. Webster once tried in an ungallant way, to break down a woman's evidence, and he met more than his match. It was in the somewhat famous case of Mrs. Bogden's will, which was tried in the Supreme Court. Mr. Webster appeared counsel for the appellant.

Mrs. Greenough, wife of Rev. Wm. Greenough, late of West Newton, a tall, straight queenly-looking woman, with a keen black eye, a woman of great self-possession and decision of character, was called to the stand, a witness on the opposite side from Mr. Webster.

Webster at a glance, had the sagacity to foresee that her testimony, if it contained anything of importance, would have great weight with the court and jury. He therefore resolved, if possible, to break her down. And when she answered to the first question put to her, "I believe," Webster roared out:

"We don't want to hear what you believe; we want to hear what you know!"

Mrs. Greenough replied, "That is just what I was about to say, sir," and went on with her testimony.

Notwithstanding his repeated efforts to disconcert her, she pursued the even tenor of her way, until Webster, becoming fearful of the result, arose apparently in great agitation, and drawing out his large snuff-box, thrust his thumb and finger to the very bottom and carrying the deep pinch to both nostrils, drew it up with gusto. Then extracting from his pocket a very large handkerchief, which flowed to his feet as he brought it to the front, he blew his nose with a report that rang distant and loud through the crowded hall.

Webster—"Mrs. Greenough, was Mrs. Greenough a neat woman?"

"I cannot give you full information as to that, sir. She had one very dirty trick."

"What was that, ma'am?"

"She took snuff!"

The roar of the court-house was such that the Defender of the Constitution sat down, and neither rose nor spoke again until after Mrs. Greenough vacated her chair for another witness, having had ample time to reflect upon the inglorious history of the man who had a stone thrown at his head by a woman.

Fellows Syrup of Hypophosphites, by restoring strength to the nerves and muscles of the stomach cures dyspepsia, which is but the result of loss of nervous strength, followed by muscular relaxation.

STORY FOR LITTLE FOLKS.

CURIOSITY PUNISHED.

The fifteenth of May was a day of great interest to Madame Lisbelle, it being the anniversary of the birth of two cherished daughters, Leonore and Delphine.

Toward the close of April she began to make preparations for celebrating this happy day for the fourteenth time, desiring to render it more gay than any preceding it, because the sisters, then entering girlhood, were more capable of appreciating its worth.

She planned one of the most agreeable surprises for them. A portion of her park, long since abandoned, seemed to her a fit place for the accomplishment of her design. Her children never entered this side of the enclosure, for it, being uncultivated, offered no attraction to them. Her chief difficulty would be to conceal from them the preparations which would be required for this festival.

Madame Lisbelle sent to Paris for skilful workmen, who were to bring with them all the decorations necessary for the embellishment of a pavilion, which was to be constructed in this place. She took every precaution not to arouse the curiosity of Leonore. This child, although possessing many good qualities, always wished to pry into everything which they sought to conceal from her, and what was quite natural, after having discovered a secret, she would tell it in confidence to every one who would listen to her, hoping they would admire her tact and skill in detection. Her mother had hoped that reason would correct this fault; but she found that her indulgence had permitted this habit to become so deeply rooted that finally it would be necessary to impose upon her the most severe punishment the first time she yielded to this fault, for which she had been so often reproved.

They had only been at work four days on this pavilion, when this curious little girl suspected something very mysterious and extraordinary to be going on in the house.

Madame Lisbelle disappeared from time to time without any one knowing the cause of her absence. The workmen, whom she wished to conceal from all eyes, took their meals in the place where they worked. These repasts being prepared in the kitchen, this young lady was never wanting a precept to

enter there; and, seeing the quantity of food, concluded it was to be sent to some strangers. Tormented by a desire to learn more, she thought all the day and dreamed at night; she wearied the servants with questions, but they had learned to keep the secrets of their mistress—Leonore not being a favourite, because of her incessant prying. She was in despair of being able to discover anything, when, walking through the garden, she perceived little Lubin, the son of the gardener, running from the side of the park with all his might, holding something in his hand, which he placed in his pocket the instant he saw her. This movement increased her desire to know what it was. She called Lubin, who ran more quickly to avoid her; but Leonore, taking a cross-path, arrived before him at the gate, and there detained him by extending her arms. The little boy was much vexed; he dared not use any force with a young lady of the house, and he had not a moment to lose. The waiting-maid of Madame L., who had followed her mistress into the park, had been taken suddenly ill, and they had sent Lubin to bring some medicine to revive her.

"Let me go now, Miss Leonore. My father will whip me if I don't make haste, and maybe the servant will die, too, if I don't get back soon."

"Oh! you make me shudder," screamed Leonore. "Who will die? Where have you come from? What did you put in your pocket? Tell me this, and I will allow you to go at once."

"No, no; I will not tell you anything. I am too much afraid of the whipping my father will give me if I tell a single word."

Leonore, whose curiosity was redoubled by so much resistance, drew from her purse twenty sous, and offered them to the child, if he would only tell.

"No, Miss," said Lubin, pushing aside her hand, "I should be disobeying my father, whom I love, although he corrects me so often. All your riches could not repair the evil this would do me."

"Ah! well since you will not tell, you can remain my prisoner."

"Indeed, Miss, I think you are very wicked! But if you want to know what your mamma is trying to hide from you, you have only to follow me. I will not tell you anything, but I cannot hinder your steps."

Leonore, laughing at the simplicity of the child, gave him his liberty; but he disappeared so quickly, that in a moment she entirely lost sight of him. Becoming very much vexed, she advanced into the park toward the side where he had disappeared, and found herself at the wild place she had feared to approach. Not finding a path, only a thicket of briars and thorns, she hesitated whether to return or proceed; but her curiosity, stronger than all obstacles, determined her. At each step she tore her dress, or scratched her hands in pushing aside the thorns; several times she fell over old stumps, and bruised her limbs; but still keeping on, she at last discovered through the branches a beautiful octagon pavilion, gayly painted and gilded, with eight windows glazed with stained glass. She approached softly, walking on tiptoe, holding her breath, while she concealed herself behind a large oak, and saw, through an open casement, her mamma giving orders that nothing should be wanting in this festival to combine all kinds of pleasure. Her maid wrote, according to her dictation, the list of young ladies and gentlemen who were to be invited. The confectioner gave a detail of all the refreshments, and a footman from Paris assured her that the musicians should arrive two hours before the opening of the festival.

Leonore not only possessed the joy of having discovered this interesting secret, but was very eager to impart it to her sister and young friends. When she thought she had learned all, she carefully retraced her steps to the house, bathed her face and hands, changed her dress, and then ran to seek Delphine.

"Oh! my dear little sister, I have charming news to tell you. You cannot imagine the secret mamma has endeavored to conceal from us with so much care! I know it all, and will tell you every word."

"Sister Leonore, do you not respect the secrets of our mother? It is wrong; and I should be very much displeased to hear it. If she has concealed anything from us, we ought to think she has good reasons for it. If you have discovered her secret, I hope you will be at least sufficiently discreet not to tell any one."

"Oh! I do not intend that any one shall know it but you. You are my best friend."

"Sister, I will not hear it, I tell you positively!"

Leonore persisted in relating to her the adventure in the park, until Delphine was obliged to leave her, and fasten herself in her room.

Leonore was becoming impatient at being forced to be silent, when three young ladies, who dwelt at a neighboring castle, arrived with their mamma. The indiscreet little girl found means

to inform each one of them in particular of the fine festival which was being prepared, assuring them they were to be invited, for their names were on the list; but she took great care to enjoin secrecy upon them.

They kept the secret like herself, and the next day it was known in all the neighborhood that there was to be a charming soiree at the house of Madame Lisbelle, refreshments, an illumination, fireworks, and a number of other amusements. They knew minutely the embellishments of the new pavilion; and the hope of causing a pleasant surprise was destroyed.

Madame Lisbelle learned very soon that her secret had been divulged. She was much less pained at her disappointment than at the vexation she felt at seeing her daughter persist in so shocking a fault.

The night before the festival, which promised so much pleasure, Leonore went to bed in the gayest humor, but regretting that there were so many hours to be passed in sleep. Her mother's waiting maid entered at six o'clock, and said to her, very seriously:—

"Miss Leonore, you must arise, and make haste in dressing. Your mamma has sent me to tell you that you are to go with me to your aunt Derlac's, where you will pass the day. I have four miles to go and return; you see I have not a moment to lose."

Poor Leonore was so shocked by this announcement that she had scarcely strength to reply. Her conscience whispered many things, for which she had to reproach herself. She recalled instances where she had abused the patience of her mother, and the mean guilts of which she had been guilty in order to satisfy her curiosity. Then she agreed with herself that she was justly punished, yet she was none the less afflicted.

The servant was much affected at the many tears she shed. "I am sorry," she said, "to cause you so much trouble, but the orders of your mamma are positive."

"My good Victoria, can I not obtain my pardon? I wish to throw myself at mamma's feet to ask her pardon, show her my penitence, and implore her forgiveness. Can it be that she will send me from home on my birthday?"

"Alas! Miss Leonore, for that reason I dared to ask your pardon of my mistress, but she replied: 'There is no day in the year in which my ungrateful daughter does not fear to offend me; neither is there one in which I ought not to punish her for her disobedience. Do as I bade you, and at seven o'clock she must leave home.'"

Leonore was so much grieved at these words of her mother, that Victoria was obliged to finish dressing her, and carried rather than conducted her to the coach, which they found ready to depart.

The ride was a very sad one. She sobbed all the way. The servant carried a letter from her mistress to Madame Derlac. This lady, after having read it, cast a sorrowful glance at her niece, and, addressing herself to the servant, said:

"Leave immediately. My sister has great need of your assistance. Tell her I share her vexation. I beg her not to think to-day of the one who has caused her so much pain, and only to occupy herself in making happy the daughter who remains at home, and whose birth has been a blessing from heaven."

Leonore, who was as much humbled as vexed, wept bitterly; but in the midst of her grief she never murmured against her mother, for she felt she justly merited all her indignation. Her mind, naturally just, made many good suggestions, which had a fine influence over all her life.

"What good will it do me," said she to herself, "thus to grieve and torment my imagination with pictures of the pleasures my sister and friends are enjoying at this moment? I had better endeavour to repair the past, to make such strong resolves for the future that I never again will fall into a like fault, for the impression this has made will never be effaced—no, never!"

This was the case. When she returned to her mother, she showed such true repentance as to merit her pardon and entire forgetfulness of the fault. Delphine, who was very sorry for her sister, loaded her with caresses, and never mentioned the festival, which had lost all charms for her, by the absence of one for whom it had been given.

Leonore, by continual watchfulness, overcame her fault. It is the happy privilege of the young to destroy easily evil tendencies, which become unconquerable when they permit them to grow with them.

Whenever she felt a desire to be curious, she fled to her room, where a pleasant book, a pretty piece of music, or some other amusement, would put to flight the habit which she wished to overcome. When hearing two persons conversing in an undertone, she would instantly withdraw; or, if by chance she discovered a secret, she would keep it in her heart as something sacred.

This conduct merited the esteem of every one, and the admiration was so much more just because this change had cost her so many efforts.

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