

church life, and society generally reputed Christian. We profess too much ; nay, we pretend. We carry more sail than ballast, and with very disastrous consequences to the ship. We have too much religion. "But, how is that," exclaims the reader in astonishment ; "can we have too much of the Spirit of Christ ; too much virtue, too much nobleness of character, too much sympathy for man?" If to the great majority of people religion were synonymous with these things, we could not have too much of it ; but is this so? With ninety people out of every hundred religion means the creed of their church, and its ritual and sacraments, and the sum total of their own attendance thereon ; frequently so by way of penance as a good, and that they ought to get special credit for, while their own spiritual experience and character are but hazy notions, floating in an unsettled condition on the confines of religious ground, and they have a strong impression that it would be sacrilege to class such things with religion on any showing. The voyage of life is thought of as an opportunity of crowding on so much sail, never mind the cargo. We want a religion that will show, and if possible strike. We are great on letting our light shine. This is the reason why the theological disease known as "hankering after a creed" breaks out now and again among weak-kneed Christians. Creeds are so handy as polemical weapons ; they cost so little and they go so far in proving to others our theological respectability. It is so assuring to get a smile of recognition from our creed-loving brethren of other denominations, who are conscious of the theological hump on their own back, and look coldly upon us when we enter their presence in the form that God made us in. As we do not like to be singular, we get a few articles together, just enough to make a modest theological protuberance, and there you are as orthodox as the rest. It is not intended that the creed is understood or necessarily believed in—but it looks well. Like Quaker guns in the field battery, it will at least deceive the enemy at a distance. This sort of thing is mostly theological pretence. And the serious thing about it for the people belonging to the church that formally imposes the creed, is that it deceives them and makes them intellectual hypocrites. They flatter themselves that because they belong to such a church the creed of that church is theirs. They do not intend to make the most distant effort to understand the English grammar of its sentences, they are content to hear of its philosophy as mysterious, and its spiritual meaning is considered to be the peculiar property of priests and pastors ; but it is their creed. When will we turn honest and bold enough to tell the people they cannot have a ready-made creed any more than a ready-made character? Is a church made more religious by adopting a creed? No! not one whit ; but she can make a better show of it before the world. Do not

let us deceive ourselves ; our creed is just what we have agonized over in our own mind, patiently and trustfully received into our own heart, and are seriously trying to reduce to practice in our daily life. Anything else is too much religion. But how will these ideas apply to religion as understood by ritual and sacraments and special meetings? Can we have too much religion in that sense? Yes, and among our Protestant evangelical churches this is the sphere in which we have far too much religion. Whenever our attendance at divine service, and sacraments, and gospel meetings outruns our soul's growth and real character, we have too much religion. These formal services at church or meeting, however sincere in our intention, are not religion ; they are mere devout acts in which religion expresses itself. Now, says the mistaken religionist, I am done with that for one week, at least no one can say I have not performed *my religious duties*. And he drops a dollar into the box for converting the Buddhist who turns a prayer-wheel to perform *his religious duties*. Then we have our mistaken Christian who measures the reality and power of the church's life by the number and vehemence of exceptional services. But who are the men whose life sustains the church and tells upon the community? The man who for every profession he makes has a deed behind it. Character, that is what our churches want in the present day ; deeds, not pretence—for much of our complacent church life is swollen with wind and the rank mist it draws from this desire to appear other than it is. Character—the virtues that spring out of sincerity—that is the gold coin of the mint of heaven ; the professions are but promissory notes with a very questionable signature. Among business men a loud profession of religion means "look well after that man!" "Did you hear of—again?" says one to the other. "No, what is it now?" "Oh, not much, only he was seen going up to the penitent form again at the special meetings." "Well, look out, somebody will pay for that," says the other. These men do not despise religion ; their respect for it is really to be seen from the measure of disgust at this pretence. I remember a good old professor of divinity in the north of Scotland who was very religious, but a little near in money matters. "He is a pious man, the doctor," said a neighbour to one of his domestics one day. "Oh, aye, it is a very religious house—long prayers and short suppers." Too much religion! D. BEATON.
Newfoundland.

DISTINGUISHED STRANGERS FROM A DISTANCE.

Not very long ago a venerable father of the church when leading in prayer in the General Assembly asked that the members might be enabled to conduct them-