

PRACTICAL PAPERS.

WHAT IS PLYMOUTHISM?

BY THE REV. JAMES CAMERON.

ITS ORIGIN.

There lies before me, as I write, a little book, which is, I fancy, rarely seen in Canada. Its title is "Journal of Mr. Anthony N. Groves, Missionary, during a Journey from London to Bagdad (in 1830) through Russia, Georgia and Persia, also a journal of some months' residence at Bagdad."

Mr. Groves, while a student at Dublin University, formed the acquaintance of a few earnest Christians belonging to the Episcopal Church. Dissatisfied with the lifeless formality of their own Church these earnest "believers" formed themselves into an association something like the "Praying Societies" that kept religion alive in many a parish in Scotland during the dark days of Prelatic ascendancy, or like the "re-unions of edifications," as the French call them to-day. The sole aim in these private conferences was prayer, reading the Scriptures, and religious conference. From Dublin, Mr. Groves, who was the leading mind in these gatherings, removed to Plymouth, where he fell upon a very lucrative practice as a surgeon-dentist. Filled with an earnest desire to work in the service of the Lord Jesus, Mr. Groves resigned his professional work in Plymouth to go on foreign mission service under the Church of England. Finding himself unable honestly to sign the thirty-nine Articles of that Church, he refused ordination and came to the conclusion that he ought to go out to Persia on his own account, and depending on his own earnings and the contributions of private friends. With these views he set out for Bagdad in 1829 accompanied by his wife and two children, his sister and another lady, a young Scotch missionary, and a deaf and dumb boy "of great talents" who had the special charge of the two little boys. The deaf and dumb boy of "great talent" was none else than he who, afterwards, became famous as Dr. Kitto, who, it seems, thus owed his education, training and knowledge of Bible lands to Mr. Groves. It is interesting to find such references as these in the journal to the boy Kitto. "K.'s connection with the dear little boys appears most promising and leads us to feel assured that he really is sent us by the Lord for that very end and others important to the mission. I feel that K. has a deep sense of neglect, or apparent want of respect. May all things be so ordered that he may not feel this. I feel his heart is worth winning, even on natural grounds, for he has affections that are strong and true: but on spiritual grounds it is our duty, and it may be felt also by us that it is our privilege."

In Mr. Groves' journal, from which the above interesting extracts in regard to Kitto are taken, we find much that is commendable in good sense, deep piety, and large charity, though here and there we find cropping up those incipient aberrations from the old paths that have since been pushed to such unhappy extremes by Mr. J. N. Darby and the Dublin Section of *Brethrenism*.

THE NAME.

It often happens that a religious body or a religious movement receives its name from an accidental association rather than from any essential feature in itself. It is so in the case in hand. There were two societies of the "Brethren," one in Dublin and one in Plymouth. After Mr. Groves' departure to Persia, the Rev. B. W. Newton, formerly a clergyman of the Church of England, became leader in Plymouth, while the Rev. J. N. Darby remained leader in Dublin. In the course of time an attempt was made at Plymouth to set up something like a modified Presbyterian code, Mr. Newton acting as presiding elder for the purpose of preventing disorder and unprofitable discourse at their open meetings. When overtures were made to the first brethren to sanction this movement towards the recognition of a regular ministry, Mr. Darby replied: "We will not be overruled by the Plymouth Brethren." According to Dr. Reid, whose book on Plymouthism is now before me, this incident explains the origin of the term "*Plymouth*" as applied to the Brethren. But the designation is always repudiated by them. "I do not own the name," says Dr. Davis, a Brother from Aberdeen; "I am a brother of every believer in the Lord Jesus: and if I lived in Plymouth the Elder might call me a Plymouth Brother: but I do not live there; hence I do not own the name."

TENDENCY TO EXTREMES.

We have just seen that Plymouthism had its origin in a revulsion of earnest pious minds, from that ceremonialism, clerisy, ritualism which has been developing so fast, of late, into Puseyism in the English Church. Dr. John Duncan, one of the acutest thinkers of our day, and one whose thoughts have often the pith and terseness of oriental proverb, has put the whole history of the movement in six words. "*Puseyism a carcass: Plymouthism a ghost.*" These two opposite, contending religionisms did not at once assume the extreme form attributed to them by Dr. Duncan; but no sound, intelligent Protestant, no matter what Church he belongs to, can fail to see that as the tendency of Puseyism is to eliminate from the Church individual life, energy, independence, thus perverting it into a *soulless carcass*; so the tendency, on the other hand of Plymouthism is by eliminating organization, order, rule, government, to pervert the Church into a *bodyless ghost*. There is no doubt, as every year that passes is clearly showing, that in the direction indicated above there lies the inevitable development of these two opposite poles of the religious thought of our day—extreme formalism and extreme spiritualism.

Mr. Groves little suspected what seed he had sown in Plymouth and to what wide and baneful issues it would grow when he with the self-denial characteristic of the early Christians set out for Persia. On his return to England in 1836, he found to his grief that the Brethren had abandoned their original ground. "In a letter to Mr. Darby he deeply deploras this, and predicts that 'a step or two more in advance' was all that was needed to 'see all the evils' among themselves of the systems they denounced."

The separatist principle, in the society had made so much progress, indeed, that the men who began their career by protesting against *sects* and *denominations* were fast becoming the strictest of sects and the most bigoted of denominations. "The Sects," Mr. Groves remarked, with a sad heart, "have changed their position from being witnesses for truth to be witnesses against error." They who had begun with the tenderest love among each other, showed, alas, how it often happens that the sweetest wine when it once spoils becomes the sourest vinegar. In the emphatic words of Mr. Groves, "out of theories implying the greatest spirituality and heavenly-mindedness has been developed a system wherein the worst vices of human nature—those defiling things that proceed from the heart of man—are brought into exercise and sanctified in being made the foundation of union and communion at the Supper of the Lord,—a system that accuses godly men with blasphemy and then makes the acceptance of such charges a ground of Christian fellowship."

Thus does it often happen that the virtues of the child are belied in the faults of manhood; and often the sun that rises in a cloudless sky advances on its course in darkness accompanied with storms that destroy many a fertile field.

The Evangelical Churches devote considerable attention to one extreme—Ritualism,—its doctrines, its progress, its evils; but towards the other extreme,—Plymouthism,—(which is a more threatening evil in Canada within the bosom of congregations than the former), the eye of the Church is less wakeful, and its attitude less watchful. It has, however, more than once happened to the Church that while crowding all sail to clear Scylla it has run into Charybdis. Safety lies in the golden channel of middle ways. "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

THE ORIGIN OF THE TIDES.

All bodies attract each other; the power of the force exerted depending upon the weight of the bodies and their distance from each other. The weight of any body is, in fact, the force with which the earth attracts that body to itself. The celestial bodies are all chained together by this force of attraction. The sun and the moon both exert an attractive influence on the earth, inducing our planet to approach to them; this attraction being counterbalanced by the centrifugal force, we describe a curve, which is the resultant of these two forces. But the surface of the earth consists of fluid and solid; the former, owing to its mobility, exhibits a greater tendency to obey the attractive influence, and therefore rises to meet the sun or the moon. The sun on account of its enormous bulk

exercises a much greater attractive force on the earth than the moon, but the solar tide is much less than the lunar tide, for this reason—that the moon being nearer the earth, attracts the surface of the sea far more than its solid bed, and, therefore, the water rises in a heap underneath the satellite. The sun, on the other hand, being so distant, exerts nearly as much force on the ocean bed beneath as on the surface, and, therefore, lifts up the water but very little. The identically same effect is produced on that part of the earth most distant from the sun and moon, only in this case the ocean bed is drawn towards those bodies more rapidly than the water, which is, in fact, left behind. When the sun and moon are either in conjunction or opposition—that is, when the line joining them passes in the neighbourhood of, or directly through, the earth—then their attractive forces being united, the tidal wave will be at a maximum, forming "spring tides." If they be in "quadrature" that is, if the lines drawn from their centres to the earth's centre form a right angle then the tides will be at a minimum, or "neap tide" will result. It will be evident, then, that if the earth were a world of waters, each tidal wave would pass completely round the earth in twenty-four hours. The existence of continents materially modifies its transit, and it is driven from its course, and consequently retarded. The great tidal wave takes its rise in the deep Antarctic Ocean. As it traverses the ocean the water is not raised above a few feet; but when it enters a shallow sea, or an estuary, where the tide finds itself in a sort of funnel, then the rise is sometimes as much as seventy-feet, as is the case in the Bay of Fundy. The wave is not a wave of transmission, but one of motion, and if the particles of water were destitute of all cohesion or friction among themselves, they would only rise and fall into the same place after the attraction had passed. A wave of this nature is illustrated by throwing a stone into a pond; the wavelets expand from the point of disturbance, but do not carry to the shore anything which floats on the surface of the water, such bodies only rising as it were to allow the wave to pass beneath them; this proves that the water had only an upward and downward movement as it formed the wave.

MISTAKES ABOUT TURKEY.

One of the greatest errors, writes Dr. Hamlin, current in the West about Turkey and the Moslems, and the most fruitful source of misjudgment as to the possibility of reform, is the notion that the sole Moslem law is the Koran; and that, consequently, it never can be changed. It would be almost as true to say that Christian law is the Old Testament. When the Sultan put forth his decree to prevent the execution of "the Christian who is an apostate," adding, "neither shall Christianity be insulted in my dominions nor shall Christians be in any way persecuted for their religion," the subject was widely discussed in the Moslem and Christian world. It was asked, can the Sultan set aside a law of the Koran? It was proved, first, that the law was not in the Koran; and, second, that the Koran is not law. And yet it is constantly asserted, as beyond all doubt, that the Koran is the law of the Mussulmans, and that it is administered by priests! "The most respectable reviewers assert it almost every month. Mr. Boswell Smith, an ardent friend of the Mussulmans, and Mr. Freeman, an ardent enemy, both received it as true. Both are guilty of the same degree of ignorance. The Mussulman code of law, as reduced by Ibrahim Hnleby, by direction of Solyman the Magnificent, is accepted as law by all Mussulmans. With its accepted commentaries, it forms several volumes, each one larger than the Koran, and treating of scores of subjects not referred to in the Koran. The Koran has but little in it that is capable of being law."

AUTHORITY, custom, or chance are, in fact, the great sources of law in primitive communities, as we know, not contract.—*Maine*.

"FALSE teachers have ever abounded in the Church. All the apostles were called upon earnestly to oppose them. Witness the Epistles of Paul, John, Peter, and James. Especially bear in mind the warnings of Jesus against false prophets which should arise."

THE human mind needs the kindling of a great faith, an inspiring love and worship, to set its spiritual mechanism at work. Give it motive power and it will overcome temptation and achieve seemingly impossible results. Christ does not begin at the duty end but at the faith end.—*Evangelist*.