

recognise phenomena, and the actual instincts and appetites of the people. I do not deny that we have abundant proof of the depravity of human nature, but I hold that the mark of the Divine image in which man was made is more deeply impressed upon him than the mark of the beast, and that human nature does not naturally and instinctively prefer what is gross and vicious to what is pure and holy. And I do not understand it when I am told that amusements must be given up or Christianity must be lost. I can understand the love for good music and singing, even when found in a Jesuit Church. I can understand the love for the drama. It is natural, and to many, if not to most minds, it is just another view of true, deep poetic sentiment. A dramatic representation offers satisfaction to a taste which in its own nature is perfectly pure, and which might be made a most important agent in promoting the work of popular education. What might we not have; what might we not hope for if the stage were pure, and powerful by reason of its purity. Two great and strong voices sounding out upon the ears of the people—tragedy and comedy; tragedy exciting toward the attainment of the highest virtues, and warning against the hollow attractions of evil; provoking tender emotions, kindling the sympathy until it glows, and breaks out, a passion of love, and bracing the man to play a noble part in the drama of life; and comedy, holding up to laughter and ridicule and scorn the vices and follies of the people—if that were done society would be the better for it. But the stage is impure, you say, and vicious. I know it is; and I know that it ought not to be. If I were to take up a fiddle to play, I should bring nothing but discordant noises out of it, but that would be no fault in the fiddle, but in my lack of skill. The stage is impure? no wonder—for we have handed it over to the devil. Time was when the Church used it; made great and powerful appeals to the people by means of it; the scenes of Scripture moved before their eyes, just like the Ammargau passion play which is still so popular—but the Church changed her mind and attitude—took to uttering condemnation on all but the most insipid kinds of recreation—withdrew all sympathy from the stage, and shut its doors against all actors; condemned, abused, denounced the theatre in sermons, and councils, and platform speeches, and tracts. The Church has refused to extend towards these who live by the drama that love which alone gives infinite meaning to the cross of Christ; has refused to extend that sympathy which is the heart of the Gospel of peace. It is well to be alive to the evils that lurk, or unblushingly laugh, in our popular methods of recreation. Corruptions do exist in them. What shall we do then? put the good and the evil, the natural and the unnatural, the necessary and the unnecessary away together? No. You need not try, for you cannot succeed; but put the evil away and cleave to whatever is good. The theatre has been handed over to corrupt audiences, who have demanded corrupt plays, and the supply has not been wanting. And a great force is allowed to run to waste—that which should do good is doing evil. Search into history, and into humanity, and you will not find that the drama is in its essence an evil. But evils have entered into it, and sore wasting plagues; face the evils and put them away; create a sound, healthy, popular sentiment that will frown them down, and give to the people a sound and healthy recreation. Hard, stern, unsmiling Puritanism, with its strong words and strong right hand, is good as a revulsion and a recoil—good as a protest and a revolution—just as the wild, sweeping storm is good to break up poisonous vapours and drive malaria away. But men do not live by the storm, it is abnormal. And we could not do with Puritanism for long together; it is not a thing to live by. But the Church has said, you must live by it; you may play charades, but you must not go to see a dramatic representation, however good and pure it may be; you may skip or jump, but dancing is a deadly sin. Why, I remember being told when a boy, that those who played cricket on earth, would toss balls of fire to each other in hell. And I believed it, being only a boy, and not over wise at that—believed it until it chilled the blood in my veins, and the marrow in my bones. Don't read works of fiction, I was told; they will corrupt you, and kill you for ever; read the nice books you will get at the Sunday-school, and when you get older you can read John Wesley's sermons. And so I did, being only a boy, as I said. There are evil things in works of fiction, and a certain class of them are simply doing the work of most deadly poison. But all fiction is not an evil. The books of Walter Scott and Charles Dickens have done more good and lasting work for the people, in my opinion, than all the sermons issued from the press during this nineteenth century. And, if the Church is going to do her right work in the world; is going to send her sweet influences farther abroad in the world; is going to warm greater numbers with the fire of her heart, and illuminate the multitudes with the light that shines from good works; she must enlarge the limits of her sympathies; must throw out the circle of her life and power; must recognize that the evil, the disease which is working waste and ruin in the mind and heart of society is not functional, but organic; cannot be cured by simply lopping off recreations, but only by bringing the grace of God, the purity of God, the truth of God to heal and sanctify all the nature together. Because a thing, good in itself, has got perverted, we must not put away the thing, but remove the perversion, and put the thing to its right use again. Human nature has got perverted; has got twisted into doing evil, but God does not wage war against human nature, and condemn it, but only against the wrong that is in it. Recreations are good in themselves; they are needful to the satisfaction and development of our mental and physical nature. Evils have entered into them, corruption; save them, use them, by casting the evil out. Let Religion be bright; let it be cheerful; let the Church be more human; let it be like a great organ with many stops; let it have its water for the thirsty, and the shadow of a rock for the weary, and fields for the playful, and cloisters for those who would contemplate, tears for the sorrowful, and laughter for the glad; let the Church reveal God as Paul saw Him when he spoke of the "blessed God," or as it should read, "the happy God," bending over all with a whole heaven of love, smiling upon all, and rejoicing in all joy, and then, one powerful reason will be removed "why people do not go to church."

I shall only speak of one other class of non-church-goers—those who are unbelievers. But I must subdivide them; for to put them all under one general head would be wrong. There are first of all those who do not believe in the theology of any of the churches—will not, because they cannot accept any of our dogmas—but believe as firmly as we do in God, in truth, in morality, and the binding obligation upon every man to think right, and speak right, and do right. They have got to believe, perhaps, that the story of Eden is less to

be relied upon as the Genesis of the world than the theories of Darwin; that Moses was not so wise as some masters of this age; that Colenso has demonstrated the historical and arithmetical inaccuracy of the Pentateuch; that Strauss has dismissed the "old faith" by which our fathers lived and died; that Renan has given the true "life of Jesus"; that Huxley has formulated a correct biology; and that Matthew Arnold has blessed the world of culture with a new gospel of "sweetness and light." And many of those who hold these things are sober, earnest men and women. Atheists? No more atheists than you are, many of them. The time has gone by when with reason and honesty we could write atheism under the names of men who do not accept the dogmas held by the churches. We may think that our theology is religion, but it is not, any more than the theory of light is the sun, or geography is the earth. I am sure that there is a good deal of conceit among those of whom I am speaking, and a good deal of bigotry too. For the worst kind of bigot is your free-thinking bigot. The man who is sure that all orthodoxy is wrong, and all orthodox people fools and blind; the man who will read books written to oppose our doctrines, but will not read the answers to them; the man who thinks he has destroyed all the facts on which the church has built her life and hope; no bigot so fierce and intolerant as he. But there are others who honestly disbelieve our doctrines, and can find no strength in them, who are not bigotted nor intolerant. They search in earth and ocean and sky for the truth of life and of God. And I for one would be careful how I flung rash epithets about. There may be more true prayer in the stroke of the geologist's hammer than in the muttered "amen" of a great congregation. A man's effort to do right is more honouring to God than the correctest creed in Christendom. Character is righteousness, and not doctrines of the faith; and in the judgment the question will be, What have thy works been—what *art* thou? and not, What is thy creed?

But there are others who have lost their hold upon all things religious—have drifted away almost unconsciously in mind and heart, but still went to church, until the unreal Christianity of Christians broke the link and severed the connection. There are many men who feel that their actual life is so out of harmony with all the teachings of the church that they had better be honest and give up the church. Said a man in this city the other day, "My friend says grace at meals thus: 'Lord, sanctify this to our use and us to Thy service.' To the first part I have no objection; but as to the second, we couldn't afford that the Lord should answer the prayer—our business would go from us." He is right, as I can testify. Sanctification to the service of the Lord would change the character and greatly lessen the quantity of their business. And many more feel like that, and do not choose to act a lie before the face of the All-seeing God. They are not charmed by a ritual, nor drawn by eloquence, nor led by reasoning; they must live, and work to live; and the work, well—it is not religious in the matter of truth and uprightness. That they are kept away is the fault of the church. Heroism, self-denial on the part of Christians—that is, honesty in politics—though it be a bar to promotion; truth in commerce—though it be a synonym for poverty, would inspire them with reverence for the church which can teach such principles, and help men to achieve such great, heroic manhood. But to see Christians joined in the squabble for honour, and the fight for money, repels them; and they say the church is nothing at all—has no facts of life, no principles of conduct, or else no power to enforce them; the church is of no use. They leave us, and no wonder. For if the age is anything it is real. Shams are detested, if not put away. The imperative demand is that institutions be, first of all, useful. And to be that they must be true to the life of to-day, and not simply true to tradition; they must be of service to men for the daily work of life. When Christians have brought, or have made an honest effort to bring, their politics and their commerce up to the requirements of religion, then the church will be recognised as a great and noble institution; and many whose hearts never warm to her now, and who never seek help from her prayers or sermons, will in weariness and want throng to her altars to find rest.

To be plain and honest, I mean that we must put away that practical atheism which we have covered with the robe of religion and given a place in the church. To be guilty of corruption, of bribery, of jobbery, of making false promises in political life for the sake of honour and power and place—and yet to sit in the church with the look of a saint on the face—what is that? To dishonestly fail in business, pay a few cents in the dollar, get legally discharged, and then start again with plenty of money—it having been secured somewhere, made over to the wife perhaps—what is that? To be on 'Change during the week speculating with other people's money, and outdoing Satan himself in lying—and then at Communion on the Sunday, with a devout look bending over a devout book—what is that? I am not speaking of momentary errors. I think you know that I am more charitable than most men in these matters, perhaps because I have more need than most men. But to organise lying and corruption, that is detestable and deadly. Offences are one thing; but the theory that makes offences—that is a baser thing; it is practical atheism, which is the death of all heroism, all manliness, all beauty, all love, and the blight of the whole Christian Church.

There are in the world some speculative atheists—men who will give an absolute denial to the existence of any God—men who have not simply rejected the Hebrew conception of God, and the Christian conception of God, and the Mahometan idea of God, but who deny *all* ideas of God, deny the *genus* God. They say: Man is body without a soul; earth has no heaven, time no eternity, and hope dies down with the coming of death: The world is a fortuitous concourse of matter—there is no Cause of man and his life; no Providence: The universe is drifting in a void inane, knowing not its whence nor its whither; and man is drifting in the universe with no power to guide and direct him: Death is the end of all things as it comes to each man; the end of all sorrows and joys; the tears which burnt deep furrows on the cheek, the unrequited heroism, the virtue unrewarded—all have perished—gone down to the eternal silence. There are a few such men in the world—but only a few, thank God. Not many men dare have a realizing sense of atheism—for not many men could bear up and live under the shadow and chill of that black cloud, which has destructive thunder in it, but no light beyond, not even a star; and not many men would venture to work and love before those long shadows that come on, every hour deepening into the inky black of unending night: they would lose heart,