

## ON SOME SUPERSTITIONS.

By FULTON SMITH.

IT is said somewhere that "man is a superstitious animal." Certainly history reveals to us the strange, weird fancies which possessed the minds of men, and which were incorporated in an unaccountable manner with their religious belief; and a careful study will exhibit this remarkable coincidence, that the superstitions of all nations are identical with each other in most of their elements. The gods and goddesses of peace, war, virtue, etc., etc., which peopled the mythological world of ancient Greece, Egypt, and the East are strangely accordant with the *genii* which entered largely into the fabled traditions of more northern latitudes—for example, the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, and Scandinavian races. The priests of Druidism and of the varied forms of Pagan and Fetish worship are responsible for the huge impostures played upon the credulities of an ignorant age, but in this they were merely taking advantage of a weakness in human nature, namely, the love of the fantastic and the mysterious. While superstitious awe pervaded the religion and worship of the ancients, it extended its potent influence in almost every detail of social life, and omens good or evil were opined from the veriest trivialities of daily occurrence. The spilling of salt, the influence of the evil eye, the horse-shoe on the stable-door, and many other charms and auguries with which we are all familiar, were looked upon with suspicious dread or pleasant surprise, according as they boded good or ill. Ignorance lent a too ready aid for the receptive belief of superstition, and it would seem we have still to lament the prevalence of this absurd sentiment, based, as it is, upon the illogical. In these days of enlightenment in the "march of intellect," the many have progressed, while there are still some few remaining who cling to the formularies and the beliefs of former times. And what is most to be deplored is, in too many instances, these beliefs partake of the religious element. When the history of this present time comes to be written, it will be seen how far superstition has operated upon the mind in our various forms of religious worship—the notable deteriorating influences of the Romish persuasion as seen in unhappy Ireland, the unabashed, insinuating Romanising tendencies of Ritualism in England, and the strangely political aspects, showing themselves in Scotland's Presbyterian worship.

There is, however, another element of superstition which is to be found in various phases in these islands. We cannot now refer particularly to some of the English forms of superstitious belief to be met with in almost every village and hamlet, but in Scotland, which lays claim to its time-honoured traditions as pre-eminent among the histories of nations, we find extraordinary notions, which have become so indelibly impressed on the minds of some as to render them quite invulnerable to all attacks of reasonable argument and persuasion. We frequently hear grown-up people say "How altered the times are from these in which we were brought up." Then comes a long narration of how they were compelled at school to learn whole chapters of the Bible by heart, and repeat these on stated occasions, and to commit to memory the questions and answers in the Catechism compiled by the Westminster Assembly, the Confession of Faith, and so on; and the earnestness with which they impress upon one the fact of having accomplished the feat at some far-off period leads us to suppose, and with good reason, that their hope of salvation and faith are actually pinned to this act of service. Their acquisition of Scripture knowledge is evidently by rote, as its teachings are not by any means reflected in their life and conversation. Of what avail is it to be able to "run off," as we would unwind so many yards from a bale of cloth, any one of the Gospels from beginning to end, or so many of the Psalms of David, if our conduct does not accord with the lessons contained therein? Why, it is only the "vain repetitions" of which the Apostle Paul writes, and the "traditions of the fathers," to which our Lord Himself referred. While not despising, but the rather encouraging, the benefits to be derived from a constant perusal, and the committing to memory of passages of Holy Writ, we would warn the tendency to err on the other side of believing this act as "a service well-pleasing to God."

Dr. Hall gives it as his opinion, that it is far more important to care for converts, than to make it the sole aim of Church activity to convert sinners.

## THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD.

BY REV. DR. TALMAGE.

WHEN a cloud of mercy breaks over a city, and hundreds and thousands are saved, the man who does not acknowledge the especial presence of God, must be a stupid ingrate. But there are places where there needs a delicate watching of symptoms in order to discover the gracious working. There are two or three unfailing tests.

When God is unusually present, it is manifest in the praying circles. The dullest thing on earth is a dull prayer-meeting—long prayers, long exhortations, long chapters, long hymns. I notice that men are protracted in their prayers just in proportion as their hearts are cold, and they have really nothing to say. What our public prayers most need is to be cut off at both ends, and set on fire in the middle! When the church is all full of coldness, three prayers will take up the whole meeting; but when the Spirit of God mightily appears, you can have fifteen prayers and fifteen exhortations in an hour and a half, and not be crowded.

When God's Spirit is unusually present, it is seen in the Sabbath congregations. There may be no larger audience; but there is a tenderness of feeling all through the house. It is as much as to say, "I am bereaved; give me some comfort. I am awfully tempted; help me out." And the minister of Christ, instead of addressing the people in a perfunctory way, and talking because he is expected to talk, speaks as a brother addresses a brother in some time of peril and anxiety. Oh, what a scene!—a congregation brooded over by the Spirit. Penitents weeping; backsliders bowing the head, imploring recovery; hearers pale with emotion; deep silence, broken only by sigh and sob, and outcry of anxiety; the Spirit calling: the devil tempting; Christ inviting; Sinai beating with all its thunders; Calvary proclaiming its love; angels of light contending for the soul's redemption; spirits of darkness fighting for its overthrow.

Do you wait for an outpouring of the Holy Ghost? Would you like to have a great multitude pressing into the kingdom? Would you like to hear the song of many thousands of delivered captives? You may. There is bread enough for the famished, and heaven has diadems enough to crown all the people as the sons and the daughters of the Lord Almighty!

If you see any encouraging symptoms, rouse yourselves to the settling of old grudges, and the extirpation of all animosities. There are, of course, at times, antagonisms of belief. Independent natures most certainly will have a difference of opinion about different things, but there should be in the house of the Lord no room for fighting Christians. Spiteful saints are an incongruity. When two drops of dew, born of the same cloud, assault each other from the grass-blades; when hedge-flowers, fed on the same soil, and kissed of the same sun, and watered of the same shower, thrust at each other with venom and hate, then can people of God, born of the same Spirit, and on the way to the same heaven, indulge in feud, and spleen, and squabble. Oh, if there be a man with whom you have not shaken hands for a long time, because you do not like him, give him your right hand to-day. You say he is in the fault. Perhaps he is, but I know very certainly you are in the fault, or you would have long ago forgiven him. Bury all your animosities underneath the cross of the Son of God, who died for you. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

Still further, rouse up to the work of visitation and exhortation. When you have your heart full of the love of God, and you go and talk about Christ's salvation to a man, he will listen. The reason we so often fail is because our own hearts are not right. Go from house to house, and commend Christ to the people, not only with heart on fire, but with common sense and tact. I stood beside a man who was very worldly, talking to him on secular subjects, when a very good man came up to him and said—

"John, what is the first step of wisdom?"

And John answered, "Every man to mind his own business."

It was a rough answer, but he had been roughly accosted. If you come with common-sense, and tact, and Christian stratagem to a man, and express to him your interest in his immortal soul, he will not only listen, but thank you right heartily.