

## SCEPTICISM IN THE PULPIT.

BY PROF. GOLDWIN SMITH, IN N.Y. "SUN."

ONE eminent clergyman denies the infallibility of the Bible, and treats the Church as an association for general improvement. A second finds in the Bible inaccuracy and worse. A third professes to believe only so much of the Bible as commends itself to his judgment. Mr. Willoughby, in his interesting letter to the *Sun*, rebukes one of them for indiscretion in the publication of truth. At the same time, he says himself that the truth may be rightly told in private conversation. For his own part, he regards church-going as "a moral tonic and a mental bath;" adding, that "it is often not comfortable to get up and take a sponge bath with cold water in a cold room, but lacking better facilities you must do it if you would be decent among your friends and agreeable to yourself."

The eminent clergymen might perhaps be justified in retorting on Mr. Willoughby the charge of indiscreet disclosure. How many churchgoers are there to whom churchgoing is merely a moral and mental sponge-bath, which they take without any definite belief in the doctrine, that they may be decent among their friends and agreeable to themselves? How many are there who, dissembling in public, tell the truth in private conversation? If the number is large, the end cannot be far off, and this hollow crust of outward conformity may presently fall in with a crash all the greater for delay.

Mr. Willoughby is a layman, and has only to sit passive in his pew. But a clergyman has actively to profess and preach the doctrines. If he has ceased to believe them, what is he to do? I never could regard without entire aversion the theory of Renan, which, I fear, was also that of Matthew Arnold, that truth was the privilege of the enlightened few, while tradition was the lot of the crowd. But the most fatal part of the arrangement was, that it dedicated the clergy to falsehood.

Caution and tenderness are most necessary in dealing with religious questions, seeing to how great an extent religion has formed the basis of morality. But scepticism has now spread so far, not only among the learned, but among mechanics, that the policy of silence or dissimulation, supposing it were sound, is no longer possible. There is nothing for it now but perfectly free inquiry and frank acceptance of results. Caution and tenderness will always be in order, but they are not incompatible with sincerity.

What is the consequence of silence or dissimulation on the part of earnest and reverent inquirers? It is the abandonment of free inquiry to reckless and profane hands, with such results as the "Comic Life of Christ," which I picked up in an anti-clerical book-store in Paris. I heard Mr. Ingersoll lecture on Genesis. He was very brilliant and highly effective, but he destroyed reverence as well as superstition.