

presented by preachers and religionists to suit himself. The layman, if he can write well or speak well, is listened to quite as readily as the cleric, the sceptic is given a hearing on equal ground with the pietist or the puritan.

This has some good and some bad results. It has the effect of making almost all men religious, for to be religious one needs little more than that he should think. The only trouble is that there is a great waste of time, and very many mistakes made. Time would be saved if we could only let the archbishops and theologians think out our problems for us and deliver them over to us already cut and dried, then say our prayers for us, and run the whole machinery of religion. But we can't do that any more now, and must accept the consequences. As a result we have theories, and doctrines, and religious views so numerous and so varied, and many of them so absurd, that we begin to wonder if reason is the best guide after all. However, there is no way out of the difficulty. The age of free thought has set in and we must abide by its consequences. Men will not accept nowadays the doctrines and teaching even of Paul himself without at least first passing them through the crucible of their own reason. Criticism stops at nothing and will have nothing but what is reasonable. And that would be alright if men were all wise, but they are not, and when the simpletons, as well as the wise, are determined to follow the dictates of their own reason, there must be many absurdities.

The Puritanism of the ages gone has vanished entirely, so completely indeed that people are inclined to jest now about the petty rules and restrictions that hampered our fathers, and to pride themselves in their liberality of view and their liberty of action. We are so democratic in our views that the religious man can afford to go and drink at the bar with the sport and the gambler, so liberal in our way of thinking that the theologian will almost descend to agree with the sceptic. There will probably be a reaction against this extreme of freedom. Men usually swing first to one extreme, then to the other, and it is only with the return movement they get to a true position. Let us hope it will be so in religion at any rate.

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But this complete democracy is to be noticed in every other line of thought as well as in religion. Books, periodicals, journals, the newspapers, all are so cheap that no one need lack knowledge of the chief topics of the day. It costs so little to get to the collegiate and the university that any poor man's son may work his way through. As a result the uncultured unlettered class is very small, and all men stand more on a level than formerly regarding

public questions. The mechanic can discuss any political question with his employer, the servant girl can talk of the latest news or the last novel with her mistress. It follows that we have on all social, political or religious questions a freedom of expression and of criticism such as the world has never seen. And we are all the better for it. There is such easy access to all nations, and countries, to all the seats of learning that the general knowledge of our people is wider and richer than ever before. As a consequence there is greater freedom, greater liberty in every sphere. There is greater room everywhere for developing character freely according to free principles, and therefore room for more perfect manhood. And there is just as great possibility of developing in the opposite direction. One is free to do very much as he please. External restraints are few. So the good are better, the bad are worse than in any other age. The question is whether the righteousness and goodness and truth that is in the heart of man has attained sufficient strength to stand alone, without any protecting bulwark, against all the forces of evil. The cold-hearted pessimistic religionist doubts such a possibility and thinks the world is going to wrack and ruin. The time has come at any rate when righteousness, and especially Christian righteousness, must stand for what it is worth, a time when the kernel is no more preserved by the husk. And for this every true-hearted man is glad, knowing as he does that the victory of truth is never so certain and so complete as when she stands in the open, face to face with falsehood. And though vice and corruption may seem to have the mastery in great centres like New York or Chicago, yet the robust, strong-hearted optimistic Christian will continue to believe with Tennyson,

"That somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;

That nothing walks with aimless feet,
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete."

ALUMNUS.

THE WORLD'S STUDENT CONFERENCE.

Northfield, Mass., June 25—July 4, 1897.

The recent visit of D. L. Moody to this and other Canadian cities recalls to mind one important feature of the many sided work in which this eminent evangelist is the prime mover, viz., the summer conferences at Northfield. Nor alone at Northfield, but also at Pacific Grove, Cal., Lake Geneva, Wis., Knoxville, Tenn., and other places in