

THE SOURCE OF MORAL LIFE.

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THERE can be no question of more momentous importance than that of the true relations of morality and religion. It is not surprising, therefore, that the question whether 'Life is worth living,' without the inspiring and regulative force of religion, should now be attracting the attention of earnest thinkers, and that the controversy should have found its way into the pages of our National Review.

We have had the subject already treated with considerable variety of view, — that of the comparatively neutral observer who, looking back to the close connection of morality and religion in the past, and considering the apparently loosening hold of both in the present, fears the worst consequences to humanity in the crisis towards which he thinks it is being hurried,—that of the Christian who believes that the doctrine of the Cross is still 'the power of God unto salvation,'—and that of the sceptic who apparently denies that there is any vital connection between religion and morality at all.

Whatever be the position we may feel constrained to assume towards this great question, it is not easy to understand how the last writer can ask, as he does, concerning the second position, '—to what practical issue is it, or can it be relevant?' If religious and non-religious beliefs are to stand upon their own merits, one of these must assuredly be the moral tendency of each. To influence men's belief by an appeal to their interests is certainly wrong, when by 'interests' is meant merely the advancement of our

outward life. But in the moral and spiritual region, the case is quite altered, and, to beings constituted as we are, the fact that a certain belief — or faith — tends to advance the truest and highest life of our humanity, is certainly at least a presumption in favour of its truth. The same writer admits this himself in a later paper, naively enough, when he says:—'The early propagators of Christianity had to step forth into a world that was not permeated by Christian sentiment, and had to gain adherents to their cause by arguments drawn from the nature of what they taught.' If the 'early propagators of Christianity' might appeal to 'the nature of what they taught,' and its moral effect — for the two are closely bound together — why may not its modern defenders appeal also to the internal value of that which they hold as man's most precious heritage? If even Mr. Spencer tells us that 'few things can happen more disastrous than the decay and death of a regulative system no longer fit, before another and fitter regulative system has grown up to replace it,' it is, *a fortiori*, the duty of Christians to show most emphatically the disastrous effect of rejecting a system which they hold divinely fitted to be not only the very best regulative system for humanity, but — what is far more — inspiring also, as no merely human system can ever be. No reasonable human being would expect another to believe, without adequate grounds for belief. But the practical importance which we attach to a subject has much to do with the