

ing. As a church we have already been called upon to lift up a testimony in a declining day for Christ's name and prerogative, and never was the necessity for faithfulness more urgent than now. In the prospect of trials that are coming, the martyr-memories of our fathers are precious. We unfurl again the blue banner of the covenant—and our banner God has given us to display because of the truth. We call upon you then, ye covenanted sons of covenanted sires, come up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. In the name of God we will display our banner. And may the Spirit of God give us grace to be faithful unto death.

3rd. This is a time for watchfulness. Let us watch and be sober. This is a time to watch against sin and error—to watch as those who must give an account. There are some who would tolerate a little sin in practice, and a little error in doctrine. Watch against this time-serving. Watch over your hearts and mind, and words and ways. Watch against slothfulness, and pride, and bitterness, and evil-speaking. Watch, remembering that every sin is as it were another thorn pressed upon the holy brow of Jesus, another nail driven into his bleeding hand.

4th. This is a time for prayer. This is a time to pray that God would remember Zion.

There is nothing that would so paralyze all the movements of Christ's enemies, as to see the whole Church prostrate before his throne of grace, pleading for the Divine blessing. Let all the faithful, let every man, woman and child, who wrestleth with the Angel of the covenant, cry mightily, that when the enemy cometh in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord may lift up a standard against him. Pray that the church may be graciously prepared for that day of trial, and that according to Christ's promise, for the elect's sake, it may be shortened and the millennium hastened.

D. I.

INFLUENCE OF AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF OPINION.

Such is the title of a lecture delivered before the Mercantile Library Association, Montreal, on the 25th November, by the Rev. D. Fraser, A.M., Minister of the Presbyterian Church, Coté Street, in that city. The lecture has been well received, and is a work of merit, but by no means suits the taste of the Popish organs, who have been at much pains to misrepresent and controvert the author's arguments. In the first department of their work they must surely have succeeded to their hearts' content. Their success in the latter is less complete. The denial by the Rev. lecturer, that human infallibility exists, has been construed into an attack upon the Pope and the Romish Church. Well, if they be infallible, let it be proven; certainly the burden of proof lies with those who hold the dogma, not with those whom the word of God, the exercise of their own reason, and the facts of history, have made more than sceptical on the subject.

We cannot give the whole lecture for want of space. Perhaps we have done the author injustice in our attempted abridgment.

To think, to reason, to judge—that is the dignity of man. Our fleshliness, our carnality is our feebleness; but our mentality, and higher still, our spirituality, is our strength. I have a body with wants and appetites. I call this only *mine*; I cannot call it *me*. I have an intellect, a soul, I call that *me*—that is my essence, that is my nobility, that is my responsibility too. "Man, said Pascal, is but a reed, but a reed possessing thought. It needs not that the universe should arm itself to crush him. A breath, a drop of water, suffices to destroy him. But,

were the whole universe thus to rise against him, man is yet greater than the universe, since man *knows* that he dies, and though the universe prevail against him, still that universe *knows* nothing of its power."

The cognitive faculty is incessantly active, and finds on every side, and in all departments of the speculative and the actual, abounding subjects for its exercise. Man has *understanding*, and therefore, must form notions, ideas, conceptions. He has a *judgment* too, which acts with more or less independence according to the healthy state of the mind, and whose province it is to construct opinions and come to a certain discrimination and decision in regard to the various propositions submitted to its view. Higher still, man is gifted with *reason*, which apprehends pure and speculative truth, and which, in its relation to spiritual truth, grows up into *faith*.

Our opinions being invested with a grave and serious value, it is wise to inquire in what manner they are formed. And one is startled to discover how small a proportion of those are founded on any actual personal investigation. By far the larger proportion are received ready-made; are imbibed from authority. Such, of necessity, are most of the sentiments of children. Such are the opinions of the illiterate, derived from their fathers, or from the desultory maxims which float through society. Common men do not think much for themselves. They think with their traditions, or their party. They find it easy to go with the current; to consider and judge, and believe in the mass. Aye! and men of culture too, are compelled to take many opinions on trust, without investigation, for sheer lack of taste and time, to master more than their favourite branch or branches of study. And the man of culture, when he is also a man of candour, will say, of many questions, "I am not able to form an independent opinion." "I am not sufficiently *informed*," "I have not time to get up the requisite materials." This becomes more obvious every day. Man's time is limited, so is man's capacity. But the field of knowledge, and truth, is immense, and enlarges constantly. It is vain for any one, now, to dream of traversing all the circuit of investigation for himself.

What is our resort in this dilemma? Must we blindly take things for granted? Not so; we take them on authority. And this may reach us and sway us from different quarters, and in different forms. Let us specify some of these, to wit: early education, the voice of antiquity, current maxims, favorite authors. All these influence, and in some sort command the individual mind.

Of Education. A large proportion, not of our ideas merely, but of our sentiments and opinions, we derive from the impressions of our educator's mind. And this begins very early. The first educator, naturally, is the mother; and it pertains to her, not only to mould the disposition, but also in good measure, to guide the judgment of her child:—

"Now a child is in the new world, and learneth somewhat every moment;

His eye is quick to observe, his memory storeth in secret,

His ear is greedy of knowledge, and his mind is plastic as soft wax;

Beware, then, that he heareth what is good, and that he feedeth not on evil maxims,

For the seeds of first instruction are dropped into the deepest furrows."

Then comes the professional teacher; and he, too, inculcates opinions, and impresses them on the plastic mind. It must be so, though in some departments much more than in others. It must be so. It is impossible to state important truths to the young susceptible mind without giving an impression, an inclination favourable or unfavourable—in fact, forming the judgment while you inform the understanding and the memory

And, perhaps, some sentiment that in life we vehemently advocate, that we have made thoroughly our own, was, if we could trace it to its origin, first lodged in the mind by one felicitous impression on the lips of an admired teacher in academic halls. Further, the whole character or tone of an educational institute tells on the opinions of its alumni, wherever they go. The student of Cambridge has one pair of mental scales, the student of Oxford a second, and the student of Edinburgh a third. Their opinions will, in large measure, and almost unconsciously, follow the traditional sentiment of the place where their knowledge was acquired.

An influence, which has great sway over the individual mind, is to be found in the current maxims of the place and time, or what is called "public opinion." It is quite wonderful to see what bondslaves the most intelligent men often are to conventional usages and popular ideas, so that innovation seems the greatest of crimes.

In civilized society, it is especially the function of the press to develop, to form, and to utter the public mind. Such a function involves the exercise of immense practical power. We do not complain of this; rather we see in it manifest advantages, for, though much of the influence of the press now runs in erroneous and noxious channels, yet from the increased facility and rapidity with which public opinion is formed and public movements are extended, we perceive, that when the tide is fairly turned in favour of things true, honest, pure, lovely, and of good report, it will sweep over the minds of men with a noble impetuosity and success. Meantime all men who have weight among their fellows, and who have power of utterance, either in print or by word of mouth, ought conscientiously to remember the importance of forming a correct standard of public opinion on all points, but especially on points affecting moral rights and liberties—because public opinion is to a large extent, the authoritative teacher of private opinion.

We must needs fall, to a certain extent, under the authority of mind as it writes itself in books. My counsel, therefore, is—see to it that it be the authority of a first-class mind, a large perception, a sound judgment, and, so far as can be found, a pure heart. Be not guilty of the affectation of idolizing obscure or mystic authors.—With scarce any exceptions, the names that stand brightest and longest on the roll book of fame, are the worthiest. It is infatuation to follow a blind soothsayer; he may *speak* most luminously, but remember, he may lead you blindly into the ditch. Give me the writer of clear insight, and lucid expression, and sound principle. I am not ashamed to follow minds that are worthy to guide, in my own or other days. I put not an absolute but yet a copious confidence, in their sufficiency of knowledge, their processes of enquiry, their accuracy of judgment. And verily one of the main secrets of intellectual progress is well placed confidence.

This is true of society. It is, of course, true of the individual also. Here, I shall say, is presented to me what is called a promising young man. But if I would conjecture to what this young man will attain, I must know not only what are his powers, but what are his predilections. He reads six hours a day—but *what* does he read? Under what influence does he elect to place himself? Even should he be quite ignorant of classical lore, I judge most favourably of his intellectual prospects, if I find that he can enjoy the essays of Lord Bacon, or the *Pensees* of Pascal—if the pages of Addison, and Burke, and Foster, and Hallam, and Macaulay, are not unfamiliar to his eye—if for yet more serious thought, he has made the friendship of Leighton, and Butler, and Edwards, and Chalmers, and Whately, and Vinet—or if in the region of poetry (and no mind is complete without poetry) he admires the sustained magnificence of Milton, the charming vigour of Cowper, the meditative richness of Wordsworth, the exquisite fancy of Tennyson, or