

eration, and when its forms are innocent and pure. But how many fail to realize the obligation to be temperate in all things, even in what is in itself harmless; and how many more fail to apply the Christian test, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," to the pleasures in which they allow themselves. The consequence is, that in many cases the heart gradually loses its interest in divine things, its love to the Saviour, its sense of nearness to God, if it does not contract defilement from debasing associations. There is one fact of ominous significance in this connection, the existence in a city numbering not more than seventy or eighty thousand people, of two large theatres, with other smaller and probably even more questionable places of amusement. These are not kept open during the greater part of the year, amid a population so inconsiderable, without the support of a portion of the professedly Christian people, and without a large influence on the religious life of the community. Now, although indisposed to take up any extreme position on this subject, having neither right nor inclination to pronounce judgment on the piety of any man who frequents the theatre, and claims that he can do so with a good conscience in God's sight, one may challenge Christian men to say that its influence is on the whole a good one, that it does anything but lower the tone of religious feeling, if it does not corrupt the morals, as I believe in numberless cases it does. The question is not what would be the influence of a pure theatre; the question is, what is the effect on religion and morality of the theatre as it exists? One can have no hesitation in saying it is pernicious. Religious life in the community is suffering, and cannot but suffer, from the wide patronage which it receives.

Then, in instances not a few in which religious life is not debased by intemperance, nor dissipated by frivolity, it is chilled and secularized by engrossing attention to worldly interests. Devotional reading of the Scriptures, secret prayer, meditation, are necessary to preserve it in a healthful and vigorous state. Without these, religious feeling necessarily declines, as physical strength does when the body is deprived of its proper nourishment. But in many cases business is pushed to an extent which leaves little time for these indispensable exercises, or the time that is available after its demands are met, is turned to a different account altogether. The influence of the daily newspaper, with its great amount and variety of news, from the nature of the case mostly secular, laid upon the breakfast table every day, cannot be overlooked in this connection. It is not necessary to question the great ability and enterprise, and the generally excellent moral tone of the daily press of this city, nor to deny the pleasure which its perusal is fitted to give to readers wearied with toil of hand or of brain, but just as little possible is it to shut our eyes to the fact that it may very easily displace the Bible at the morning hour, or crowd into a corner the exercises which should give tone to the soul throughout the day. Useful for the information which it affords, valuable for the public opinion which it reflects and moulds, enjoyable even, the daily morning paper is not an inconsiderable factor in the forces which are at work to give that strongly secular character to much of the religious life of our day, which all thoughtful people observe, and which many confess and deplore as respects themselves.

We close our enumeration of the influences by which religious life among us is unfavourably affected by a reference to the wide prevalence of sceptical thought in our day. This is, in many respects, the most powerful hindrance with which it has at present to contend. The press teems with suggestions of doubt, or with direct attacks on the Christian religion. The claim to the supernatural in any form is confidently, sometimes scornfully repudiated; and if the existence of God is not as yet explicitly denied to the same extent, the effort is industriously made to render a Ruler of the world, if not a Creator, superfluous. The periodical literature, itself in the extent in which it exists almost a creation of the last quarter-century, is especially unsettling to faith in its general tone. In journals of the highest respectability and widest circulation, every subject important in a religious point of view, is treated as an open question. No truth is regarded as too sacred for discussion; no question as too firmly settled not to be reopened. Believing and unbelieving thought finds equal and impartial expression in them. As a consequence the readers of these journals become accustomed to the association of un-

certainly with the foundation truths both of religion and morality. They are startled, or rather the thing has become too common to startle, they are shocked or gratified as the case may be, to find the central facts of the Christian religion, the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ, resolved into myths, or discredited after some other fashion, and its central doctrine, the atonement, declared to be unworthy of the character of God, repulsive to right human feeling, if not absolutely incredible.

The influence of this literature, especially on younger minds among us, is to weaken in many cases the sanctions of religion, to shake faith in the Gospel, and in instances not a few, to upset it altogether. I do not wish to speak in an alarmist tone, or to be regarded as at all doubtful as to the ultimate issue. The infidelity of to-day is neither as bold nor as wide-spread as it has been at some previous periods in the Church's history as it was, for instance, towards the end of the previous century and I trust we may claim that it is now confronted by a deeper and purer religious life; but everything would seem to point to the fact that a day of trial is before the Church of Christ such as it has not seen at least in our time, or since this century commenced.

We have reason to bless God that much of the trained intellect and ripe scholarship of this city is devout and believing, but it is, at least, as important that we should recognize the fact that there are considerable numbers, especially among our younger men, and these in every class, who are deeply infected with the naturalistic and unbelieving teachings of the day; some of them thoughtful and disquieted by the weakening or the absolute loss of faith; others, to whom religion was never anything else than a restraint, not pained to be relieved of it. There is no doubt that this is the cause of the absence from the Church's communion of not a few, and the hesitating allegiance to it on the part of others. All true Christians will surely hear in such a fact as this a summons to hold the truth for themselves more intelligently and more firmly, to make more sure that the life is led under its influence, and that its heavenly character is reflected in speech and conduct. However it may have been at other times, a weak and hesitating testimony to the Saviour, an undevout and worldly Christianity is treason to the truth of God in such days as those in which our lot is cast.

REMINISCENCES.

BY WM. HAMILTON, D.D.

[One of the addresses delivered at the first meeting of the Toronto Ministerial Association in 1881.]

Subject.—The Spirit of the Age as regards the Inter-course and Coöperation of the various Evangelical Denominations.

My distinct recollections of Church matters extend back more than half a century. In my early days, which were spent in the north of Ireland, I remember the domineering spirit of the Protestant Church Establishment, the abject and cowed submission of the down-trodden Romanists, the Gospel-hardened formalism of the Presbyterians, and the modest, but rising energy of the Methodists, who had not yet separated from the Episcopal Church and set up for themselves. There was some coöperation in the management of Sabbath schools between the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians. My eldest brother, while still very young, more than sixty years ago, joined with the Rector's daughter in establishing the first Sabbath school in our village. It assembled in the parish church; and the classes were taught, some in the pews and some on the steps of the platform of the communion table, which was not in those days called an altar by Protestants, nor was the teaching even of the alphabet to little children on those steps considered any profanation. That, indeed, was, I confess, my vocation.

Leaving my native village in the year 1823, I was sent to Belfast to prepare for college. It was the era of Union Sabbath schools. Young men and women of different denominations had begun to unite in opening Sabbath schools, chiefly in the public school buildings. Instruction was not in all cases confined to the Scriptures; spelling and reading were taught as means for attaining higher instruction. Denominational interests began, however, to prevail; the union schools were disintegrated, and the congregational system of Sabbath schools was adopted.

About 1830 the subject of temperance was first in-

troduced to the notice of the British public by the letters and labours of Dr. John Edgar of Belfast, who derived his first ideas regarding the Temperance Reformation from Dr. Penny of Rochester in the United States. This great work offered an excellent opportunity for renewed coöperation among evangelical Protestants. Through the labours of Father Mathew also the Roman Catholics came under similar, but separate influence.

I have already referred, incidentally, to the hardened formalism of the Irish Presbyterians. It had lasted long, and it had borne its natural fruit in the rise of Arianism. Many Presbyterian pulpits were occupied by pastors who believed in Jesus only as a *first created being*. A long and bitter controversy between the orthodox and heterodox, resulted in a separation. The belief in the supreme divinity of Jesus became the foundation of reconstructed Irish Presbyterianism. Meanwhile the Methodists had set up for themselves; and coöperation, in Temperance work especially, became more frequent among the Dis-senters.

The controversy in Scotland respecting the spiritual independence of the Church awakened intense interest in the north of Ireland. The Irish Presbyterians were unanimously in favour of the Free Church; and when the Disruption occurred in 1843 many Irish ministers went over to Scotland, and were settled in Free Church congregations.

The movement also extended to Canada. The Church of Scotland had established and supported many congregations in these provinces. The spirit of the times was for Disruption, and a *needless* breach was, therefore, made in this country. The Church of Scotland had never claimed ecclesiastical control over the Presbyterian Church in Canada; but it was deemed necessary by some that the churches here should declare themselves on the one side or the other; and, therefore, in the spring of 1844 a formal separation effected. In the latter end of that year I was myself ordained by the Presbytery of Belfast and commissioned by the Free Church of Scotland as a missionary to Canada. During the winter of 1844-45 I travelled 1,500 miles in this country, labouring with some success in the cause of Free-churchism. After a brief pastorate at Picton in Prince Edward District, I removed to the United States. The Disruption of the Presbyterian Church in that country had taken place ten years before, in 1837. The reason for that event was, in some degree, difference of doctrine, but much more the gradual introduction of Congregationalism or Independency. When I asked a *quondam* fellow-student, who was then a minister in Philadelphia, what he thought was the chief cause of the Disruption, he said, in his impulsive way, "Why, man, they were sending as representative elders to the General Assembly men who had never been ordained." Both the New School and the Old School professed to hold by the Westminster standards; and when the Congregationalists withdrew from their connection with the New School, it was the most natural thing in the world that the separated but similar portions of the Presbyterian Church should be re-united on the basis of the old subordinate standards, "pure and simple."

After a ministry in the States of nearly a quarter of a century, I returned in 1878 to Canada; and what do I find in this country? The three bodies of Presbyterians, including the United Secession, are here united, and form one body. But that is not all. Mr. President, in this good city of Toronto we have a most influential Ministerial Association, composed of different denominations, in which we can discuss with good temper, without any breach of brotherly kindness, the question of all questions, in which we must, for the present, agree to differ. I claim, sir, that the members of this Association have given an example of the spirit of the age, in regard to the inter-course and coöperation of evangelical denominations. We can discuss controverted questions calmly, and ascertain wherein we agree and wherein we differ, as was shewn in that admirable "Irenicon" read by Mr. Blackstock at the close of our discussions. When any matter of public interest for the promotion of Christ's kingdom, or for the overthrow of Satan's kingdom, comes before us we can take united and harmonious action, by which the catholicity of evangelism is demonstrated and the welfare of the world in some degree is secured.

May this spirit be a true harbinger of the millennium! It is perfectly true, at the same time, that a