

It may be further observed that while there may be a true spirit of religious earnestness which, because of the diverse and often imperfect development of mental and aesthetic faculties, is apt to express itself and seek nurture by means of crude unsatisfactory forms of thought and emotion, there may co-exist with it a singular unfitness, in a large class of Christians, to deal with the spirit which underlies all these doubtful forms, so that the criticisms indulged in should find scope in more directions than one.

Incapacity is a relative term. The lower type of thought may not rise to the higher, and the higher may have lost capacity for entering into what is true to the lower. There are minds so constituted as to frequently live over again the immature experience of their earlier years, while others become so utterly absorbed in generalized habits of thought as practically to forget their former selves, and so to become devoid of all sympathy with what is elementary in both thought and feeling.

There are penalties and losses of culture and advanced experience as well as honors and gains. That very severity of thought and broad philosophic range which enables a man habitually to live in regions of truth raised far above the sphere of the mere concrete thinker, tend to incapacitate him from appreciating for practical purposes the representations that may be the very bread of life to souls of retarded development. The habitual exercise of a highly disciplined mind in providing religious instruction for thoughtful Christians necessarily impairs whatever capacity there may have been for arousing the attention of minds uninterested in whatever arises above their daily forms of thought. Of course there will always be a large number of professing Christian people who, by reason of enforced or deliberate abstention from reading and thinking, will ever be disposed to listen with unvarying satisfaction to the elementary teaching most suited to beginners in the religious life, and these will furnish a large proportion of attendants on popular services; but there will always be a considerable residuum to whom such teaching will prove most unsatisfactory.

It is, I know, a sound canon of educational and religious practice that we should ever strive to raise what is low, to perfect what is imperfect, and not make tastes and habits of thought and expression which we believe to be crude and unsatisfactory the standard to which we accommodate ourselves. This is doubtless correct. Yet in its application we must not overlook the fact that elementary religious feeling, in itself, is not a crude thing. Conviction of sin, craving for pardon, trust in Christ may be genuine in the most untutored soul, even amidst a wild and almost irrational external excitement. And

what we are to avoid, in our extreme care for correctness and truth of expression and manner, is the danger of creating for ourselves a growing incapacity, aye, and unwillingness, to lay hold of the true elementary earnestness of religious feeling, thus handing its nurture and training over to those whose methods are not, according to our judgment, healthful and sound.

Further, if there be reality in the earnestness which finds scope in movements practically outside the churches, and often in apparent competition with Church organization, there should arise in thoughtful minds the enquiry as to whether the Church as now organized is what it should be, seeing that so much of what is confessedly good is forcing its way into notice and taking shape apart from her direct control. I am not afraid to claim for the Church the inalienable right to lay hold of and develop everything that pertains to the conversion and edification of souls. Our Divine Lord did not form His Church for a partial purpose in relation to His kingdom among men. It never, so far as I can understand the New Testament, was designed for the evangelization of the world, to be carried on by agencies outside and independent of the Churches, as Churches. It is a fearful thing to say or to imply that the Church of Christ, as the Church, cannot do all that is wanted to be done for the spread of His truth and the salvation of men; and to me it seems a most dangerous and disloyal act to turn aside from the Church, as a Church, and set up organizations or carry on agencies of this kind without the direct action, and with a view to admit the control of the church. I prophesy, but I see here the sowing of new seeds—the alienation from the church of energy and feeling which belong to the church must some day shape itself into a national form. I regard with alarm the sentiment that makes a distinction of church relationships, and diverts from the volume of the church's life the energy and devotion that by reason of solemn covenants entered into belong to the church for ever. I know it may be said, and in fact is, that there is not scope in the church for all the energy and zeal many Christian people are conscious of, and that, therefore, by the sheer impulse of their Christian life they go forth and continue, as Christians, *extra ecclesiam*, to make a new and special effort to save mankind. I do not now discuss the whole of this question. My present purpose is to point out to you that in this state of things it becomes our duty as pastors and ministers of churches to pay a very rigorous attention to the condition of the church in respect to its spirit, its agencies, its internal development and its ministry; and see how it is that there should exist such a *prima facie* reason for earnest, good members to come to the conclu-