

prosperity of our children, for the honor and weal of the nation, we must bestir ourselves to find a

#### REMEDY.

What, then, is the remedy? If the evil be, too great facility of discharge, then the remedy would seem to be to render discharge more difficult. If the granting of discharge were so ordered as to require the unanimous consent of the creditors, great and small; and if it were further encumbered with the unlimited right of the creditors to raise an action for the recovery of their claims, individually or collectively, at any future time in cases where there existed suspicion of fraud, it seems to me that a powerful check would be placed on both inconsiderate incompetency and deliberate rascality—things which are close of kin: generally the fool is first cousin to the knave. If men knew that by venturing into speculation they might be putting their foot into a snare which would probably hold them for life, they would seriously count the cost before venturing on so hazardous an experiment. I take no credit for this suggestion. It was made to me by a gentleman whose name has might in commercial circles. Being neither a lawyer nor a man of business, I do not pretend to speak with authority. The proposed solution may or may not be of value. But I do most earnestly call upon men who, as professors of law, are bound by the very nature of their calling to protect mankind from the evil fruits of well-intended but defective legislation. I call upon all men who desire their own prosperity and the well-being of the country, to devise some measure of remedy for the present state of affairs. It may be possible that no remedy can be found which will not subject some really deserving but unfortunate men to serious risk and hardship. When a man who by long trial has won a spotless reputation, becomes the victim of adverse, and within reasonable limits, unavoidable circumstances, creditors will generally treat him with the respect and consideration due to his character. Suppose, however, that in some instances they should not; suppose that some creditor should vindictively refuse to sign off, or should afterward raise troublesome action, what then? Even then it would be far better that a few good men should suffer than that robbery should be rendered respectable, or be perpetrated under cover of law. You may say you cannot make men honest by Act of Parliament. I freely admit it. You can protect honesty from unfair competition. You can make dishonesty so disgraceful and dangerous as to make men honest as a matter of policy. You can throw around them such influences as will tend to repress the native wickedness of their hearts. This is all that can be done short of the grace of God. But this is much, and as rational and accountable men we are bound to work for righteousness.

But perhaps the working of the insolvency laws is but an indication of a more widely-spread and deeper evil—the emasculation of conscience by lack of training, or its misdirection by defective instruction. That there is abroad in Christendom a fearful deadness of conscience is but too true, whatever be the cause.

Look, for example, at the frequency with which men violate the most sacred trusts. Defalcations and embezzlements are but too frequently reported; and they range from bits of ribbon and occasional half-pence, to millions, and are perpetrated in all ranks, from the shop-boy in a village store to the highly respectable and widely-trusted directors of large banking institutions. Look at the enormous flood of lies which since the introduction and under the protection of the ballot has fairly inundated the country. In too many cases the independent electors have so little moral stamina, so little self-respect, as readily and complacently to promise to vote for both or all the candidates in the field. Both political parties have had, or are likely to have, reason to complain of such treachery.

#### TRADES' UNIONS.

Then, too, the rule of trades' unions, that all journey-men must receive the same wage is but another symptom of the same disease. This rule only formulates the knavish desire to get more for a day's work than a man, considered on his own merits, is fairly entitled to. It is supposed that the really good workmen will rule the market, and that in this way good wages will be secured for all. Practically this rule discriminates against the skilful and industrious to the advantage of the lazy and incompetent. It gives to the better class of workmen only an average wage, which is often less than they could easily earn. It thus represses indus-

try, discourages progress and enterprise, and tends to reduce all to the same dead-level of imperfect performance. But as might have been expected, the rule is of little use to those whom it was designed to serve. In so far as it is of use, however, it is wicked and unjust. If wages are high, those who profit by it rob their employer. If wages are low, they rob their fellow-workman. Thus, in either way, it is a piece of downright wickedness. And yet such legislation represents the average moral tone of the trades' unions. Another example which seems to illustrate the undercurrent of suspicion and uneasiness pervading society is the existence of a company which, for a certain rate, undertakes to guarantee the honesty of employees, and to reimburse employers for the peculations of their servants.

#### THE ROOT OF THE MATTER.

All these facts point in one direction. They indicate in many quarters a decay of that fine sense of truth and honor which after all must and does have its foundation in the immaculate holiness and eternal justice of the living God. I am far from saying that to-day is worse than yesterday, or that the former times were in all respects better than these. I believe there are, to say the least, as many genuinely good men and women on earth now as at any previous period of its history. Nor have I lost one whit of my confidence in the final triumph of righteousness through the Gospel of Christ. My faith in that is unshaken. Much of the present activity may be simply due to the fact that contrasts are usually mutually pronounced. When righteousness is active, sin will be proportionately bold. At the same time I believe that, under God, the final triumph of His kingdom is to be brought about by the use of means. I therefore count it the duty of Christian men to keep a sharp outlook for the signs of the times, that they may adjust their measures to the emergency and bring to bear upon society those aspects of Divine truth best fitted to meet the requirements, and check or cure the evils of the day. I would not regard the future with any degree of anxiety were good men awake and alert. My fear is that it may take something like a day of reckoning to bring people to a proper sense of their duty. Men are apt to let things drift until they become unendurable.

It behoves us, then, to look for the causes which produce the present unhappy state of things.

#### DEFECTIVE EDUCATION.

I.—And first I note the prevalence of a false system of education, which trains the intellect, but neglects the conscience. It is said that knowledge is power. Whether it be a power for good or evil—a power to rejoice in or to dread—depends entirely upon the character of the man who has it. Learning, joined with sterling piety and goodness, makes a man more manly, and vastly increases his power for good. But give learning to a bad man, and you have only made him a devil of more capacious power. If you cultivate the intellect and leave the conscience dormant, you dethrone the regnant power of the soul, and unchain the lower passions, which it is designed to hold in check. Learning thus becomes a power for evil, and enables men to be more skilful and devilish in their wickedness. Mere intellectual training does not improve the morals of a community, and cannot. Yet the tendency of our educational system is beyond question in the direction of pure intellect. It professes to eschew everything relating to morals, and relegates all such teaching to the fireside and the Church. This is by many proclaimed as the glory of the system—as necessary, in order to make it strictly non-sectarian. As if, forsooth, pure secularism were not as truly sectarian as Christianity. I ask you, has it come to this, that in a Christian land there is no alternative between strict sectarianism and practical atheism? If this is what sectarianism has brought us to, things have come to a sad pass.

My own conviction is, that the work of the schools is being carried to an extreme. Not to mention anything else, the amount of work required from our children so taxes both body and mind that there is neither time, strength nor inclination left to study the Scriptures or to prepare for the Sabbath School. Thus the educational system of the country not only excludes moral and religious instruction from the schools, but almost crowds it out of life. In view of the sad consequences which flow from this attempted divorce of reason and conscience, I do not wonder at the outcry against godless schools and colleges nor at the demand

for separate schools. The advocates of separate schools hold, and hold truly, that religious training is indispensable to the well-being of mankind—that a mere secular education develops one portion of our nature at the expense of another, and is alike injurious to the interests of time and eternity. If, then, as a matter of fact, the nation cannot act except under limitations so injurious to the best interests of mankind, it cannot too soon withdraw from the field and hand over education to the piety and enterprise of the people.

#### INJUDICIOUS PREACHING.

A second influence which perhaps has favored the recent drift of opinion is derived from the character of much that passes under the name of Gospel preaching. By this statement I do not mean to insinuate that the great Christian churches are unfaithful to revealed truth or have resiled from their recognized doctrinal standards. This I do not believe. But while formally holding and teaching all Scripture truth, it is possible to throw some portions into such prominence as to overshadow others; and to give such frequent and emphatic utterance to certain doctrines as to make them the staple of preaching to the tacit disparagement of the rest. Truth torn from its place and disproportionately taught, may become as unwholesome as positive falsehood.

For example, it is the clear and explicit declaration of the Scripture that redemption flows to us from the infinite love of God; as John says: "For God so loved the world," etc.; that the meritorious ground of our acceptance with God is the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ; as in Hebrews: "But now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." And it is written for the consolation and encouragement of weak and imperfect saints, that His blood cleanseth from all sin, that is, sin committed after profession of faith as well as before.

And yet the Scriptures also teach that the prime end of redemption is the rectification of the soul unto righteousness: "for He gave Himself that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" and that believers must be holy, for without holiness no man shall see the Lord; and hence the value and necessity of good works. Now, it is clearly possible so to preach these doctrines as that free grace will run into antinomian license, and that evangelical obedience may degenerate into a lifeless nonentity and Pharisaic self-righteousness, both of which are equally perversions of the Gospel and in the end destructive of sound and healthy morals.

If asked for the prominent feature or distinguishing characteristic of modern preaching, I venture to think that it might be described as a too exclusive exhibition of the attribute of mercy in forms which savor strongly of mere humanitarianism.

This form of teaching overlooks the essential and eternal holiness and rectitude of the Divine nature and administration, lowers the sinner's estimate of the heinousness of sin, and leads him to think of himself as an unfortunate victim of circumstances rather than a criminal violator of an intrinsically righteous law—a poor, weak, helpless creature, to be pitied as we pity the subject of St. Vitus' Dance, not a criminal to be punished as we would punish a murderer.

And hence, also, it is apt to be silent on future punishment as revolting to human sensibility, and thus gradually the prime motives for virtue are undermined, the grand safeguards of morality are removed, the conscience is debauched, and the flood-gate of evil is thrown open. The immediate effects are the disregard of parental and family obligations, the neglect of family training and household religion, an increasing spirit of insubordination and irreverence, a tendency to levity, Sabbath breaking, and general looseness, which easily develops into pronounced and unmistakable vice. For this the remedy is a harmonious and proportionate presentation of Divine truth. We must seek to awaken and strengthen conscience in men, and the only way to do this is to create a living conception of the immaculate and immutable holiness of God, of the absolute rectitude and justice of Divine administration, that sin and death are convertible terms, that moral laws are uniform and irreversible in their operation, that they execute themselves on the sinner and in the sinner by lapse into further sin and deeper degradation and misery. Christian people must shake off the gigantic deadness of conscience which enables them quietly to hold the searching and