

THE COMING FAITH.*

By Dr. J. M. Harper, Quebec.

It has never been easy to get the world to pause for a moment amid the bustle of its use-and-wont excitements, to think of the deeper imports of its very existence. But the moment has surely come when society will have to call a halt in its "decline-and-fall" tendencies, as lately set forth by Lord Rosebery in his famous speech, if there be any saving grace in its philanthropies and ethical energies. The great main argument in favor of Church Union is knocking at the door of our civilization to save it from retrogression in any of its phases or elements. What we have of civilization is an evolution of what we have had, and there must be no going back to what was, through the discarding of any ethical force that has been making our civilization what it is. It is a mere truism to say that the civilization which has no religion for a mainstay is more or less a makeshift of despair; and it is a matter of history that whenever society has lost faith in its religion, from its having become tuberculed by self-seeking professionalism, that its tendency has always been towards ethical deterioration even to the point of degradation. The world is not worse to-day than it has been; but Lord Rosebery claims that it is in danger of becoming as bad as it has been; while Mr. Usher, in this new book of his, tries to convince us that the danger comes from the lack of faith in the stability of our religious affections. No civilization has ever attained to the glory of the Christian civilization; and yet this same Christian civilization is in the way of discerning the worm-eating that is going on in its wood-work; and unless it be convinced that the great foundation stone which has given it its name is as stable as ever, there is the threatening decay of an Augustine period staring us in the face, as a fate recurring in its own case. The ready acceptance of the Christian religion by the pagan world looks to us as having something of a miracle about it. The miracle, however, was in the turning of human despair away from the dissipations of the animal life—the life of physical exaltation and amphitheatrical excitements—which had been sought as a retreat from the exposed humbug of religious forms and ceremonies. "Give us an honest religion," exclaimed these mammon-worshippers, or give us none. In a word, the national reason would, then as now, have the truth and nothing but the truth in the methods of their approach to the truth. The superstitions of temple professionalism and pagan symbolism were not of the God of Truth, and, therefore, could have no place in search for truth or the salvation of society. And the pleading was but the ploughing of the field that was to bear its harvest in behalf of a Christian religion and a Christian civilization.

And no other is it with the demands and expectations of the universal mind in man that would guide our present-day civilization aright. Mr. Usher calls his new book an "Interpretation of the Coming Faith," and there are thousands, with no avenging theological brickbat in their hand, who will

want to know what this "coming faith" is to be, by a reading of the book. Mr. Usher tells us how he came to find relief to his soul while examining, during the forty years of his novitiate, the riddle of existence.

"In the forty years that have passed," he says, "I have constantly meditated about this religious problem as being the great enigma. I have sought the truth without any desire except to get at reality. To do this, I studied my own consciousness and my own experiences. I sought to discover a profound meaning in certain words, believing that, if I could clearly reach the true significance of these keywords, it would lead me towards the explanation of the life by which I was surrounded and part of which I was.

"I observed and studied man as he has been and now is, seeking in history and literature the reflected light which might illumine the dark places in my own consciousness. Everything became stimulating, suggestive and interesting. Having willed to know, I found that I had certain feelings and experiences rising from the things I consciously did. About these I thought, seeking the explanation of the mysterious fact that I could thus will, feel, think, and consciously act. I came to accept the conception of an immanent God, and then working along, step by step, relying always on experience and observation, I have reached a solution which at least satisfies me. I have reached a most intimate sense of the constant presence of God as an indwelling force or influence. I am clearly conscious of the presence as power and light of this subtle force, which I call spirit. I do not mean to suggest or imply any trace of what is commonly called mysticism, for I do not move towards the disparagement, but towards the exaltation of the human intellect and the human self. I do not discover any ecstatic states, any incommunicable visions, any overwhelming and self-paralyzing conceptions of God. My personality is not extinguished, but is expanded and developed. I do not give up reason, but use it more and more, get more and more out of it as a spiritual force that links me with God and makes me all that I am. While I doubtless realize the same essential experiences as the veriest mystic, I give them a different interpretation—see them as a result for which my life has long been a preparation: as in part an intuition, in the true mystic sense, but as in a greater degree the product of conscious mental life. God is indeed immediately present through intuition, but this very intuition is essentially intellectual that is to say, it involves insight, use of developed faculties, and comes as the elimination of many experiences and reflections. All intellectual insight is spiritual, and it leads one to see more and more that which is divine in the ordinary life functions, to discover God and the divine presence in much of the life that before had been deemed commonplace. I did not secure any positively new life, but I awoke to the divine significance that had always been in my life while I had been blind to its presence. I awoke to a realizing sense of what had always been surrounding me without recognition from me. I saw how I had been using divine forces and had been under divine influences without knowing it. I merely woke up to the truth which had indeed been implicit in all my daily life during all the years. In a word, all has become alive and real, so that everything that has any value or interest is spiritual. Religion seems, indeed, to be the secret of the highest form of happy and contented living. I am troubled by no doubts or fears, but I am intensely interested in trying to apprehend more clearly and feel more deeply the spiritual forces that environ me, for these seem to be the only realities of life."

Now, in face of all this, the first impulse of some will be to place Mr.

Usher's honesty in a false light. If there be anyone who is ready to throw a noisome brickbat at his originality of thought, as the Pharisees once did to the Master's sanctity of behaviour, the writer would advise such not to read Mr. Usher's book. Those who would seek to trace the Christian doctrine of man's co-heirship with Christ back to a rational basis—as well as the doctrine of the Trinity and other such fundamentals—cannot but find some solace from his presentation of the phenomena of the universal mind while dealing with such topics as Immortality, the Mission of Humanity, the Origin of Evil, Sacrifice and Renunciation, Cosmic Force, the Origin of Life, etc. The whole book is certainly a message to the world, proclaimed with a modesty that has learned with due solemnity to think of humanity and its needs in the matter of the Christian faith. The message comes from the village of Grafton, away up on the shady slopes overlooking the town of Worcester, and within an hour's ride or so from Boston. The world is certainly awaiting some such a message as this, even if it only be a further preparing of the way for the coming faith and saving grace of a Christian civilization that would eliminate from it all traces of an enervating paganism.

J. M. HARPER.

THE REV. JOHN MCNEILL.

The Rev. John McNeill has relinquished the pastorate of Christ Church, Westminster, after a year's trial. The congregation earnestly desired him to remain, but Mr. McNeill has declined to do so, alleging difficulties partly specified, and partly unspecified. We regret his decision very much, for his own sake and for the sake especially of the Free Churches. Mr. McNeill is at the height of his powers, and these powers are very uncommon. He has great physical strength, a true gift of oratory, an immense intellectual fertility, and an unmistakable zeal for the Gospel. But these fine gifts have been largely neutralised by an indisposition to bear the yoke of hard work, continued year in and year out, through shine and rain, through better and worse, through success and failure. Twice Mr. McNeill has put his hand to the plough in London and twice he has looked back. First he undertook the pastorate of Regent-square Presbyterian Church, and after he had been some two years there he threw it up, leaving behind him no very definite mark. Then came a long period of miscellaneous evangelising, apparently less and less effective as the years went on. Then came the invitation to Christ Church and the year's work now ended. Had the matter concerned Mr. McNeill himself merely, we should have said nothing, but for the sake of the Free Churches, and for the sake of Free Church ministers, we register an earnest protest against the abandonment of great tasks because they are difficult. It has been well observed that a difficulty is a thing to be overcome. One of Professor Blackie's favourite mottoes was, "All noble things are difficult." Those who have the true, heroic, and chivalrous spirit of Christianity will not be repelled but drawn by difficulties. They will not look out for what is vulgarly but expressively called a "soft job." Indeed, there are remarkably few of such in the pastorate. Our great London churches present formidable difficulties, but thank God men have been found to meet and confront them year after year without fainting. Mr. McNeill has had successors in Regent-square who have done the work he abandoned. He will have successors in Christ Church who will do the same thing. Dr. Campbell Morgan, when he had at his command the pulpits of the richest churches in England and America, deliberately chose Westminster Chapel without guarantee of any kind, and his example has heightened and brightened the ideals alike of ministers and of laymen.—British Weekly.

* The Greek Gospel, An Interpretation of the Coming Faith, by Edward P. Usher, A.M., LL.B., Grafton, Mass.