

#### Characteristics of the Four Gospels.

It has pleased God to give us the record of His Son, not in one, but in four narratives, and from this fact arises the great probability that we are intended to study the perfect life of the Incarnate Saviour; first from the point of view of one Evangelist, and then from that of another. In this way we are led to form a truer conception of the whole, as a man does who looks at the majestic pile of a cathedral not from one position only, but from different points of the compass. The simplest reader of the Gospels is able to notice some of the special marks which distinguish the narrative of each Evangelist from the others, and the most learned and diligent is never able to say that he has exhausted the process of these differences and observing their wondrous harmony. All labourers in this field are far from the end of their work, and it is easier to say how much they have done, and in what way they have done it, than to reckon how much remains for them to do.

#### The Ambition of Young Men.

It is a matter for serious thought the life which young men aspire to live. It has for years been observed that the candidates for Holy Orders, in England, have decreased. That falling off has not been local or exceptional, whether the result of an increasingly secular education or the attractions of other pursuits, the fact exists. From a recent history of the University of Yale, which was largely a theological school, we find that for the first one hundred years, from 1704 to 1803, about forty per cent. of the graduates studied for the ministry: "The average fraction of a class that studied theology remained fairly constant, at between one-quarter and one-third, from the middle of the last to the middle of this century; since the forties, however, that fraction has permanently and rapidly declined below one-tenth. The proportion of a class, which enters one of the learned professions—law, the ministry, medicine, teaching and science—has fallen from 80 or 90 per cent. during the first third of this century to nearly 60 per cent. in later years." This change in the necessities of the student has brought about a change in the curriculum. Ancient languages and mathematics still hold their place of prominence, philosophy following nearly in the old order; but these have been supplemented by modern languages and natural science and in later years by history and English.

#### Two Ideas of the Church.

If all the conflicting ideas in regard to the Christian Church are brought to a logical analysis, it will be found that these ideas finally resolve themselves into two great theories, which may be called, the "Human" and the "Divine."

#### The Human Theory.

The first of these theories is that held by all the great Protestant denominations, and assumes that the Church on earth is merely a human or voluntary organization, in which men are gathered for the purpose of mutual

help, and for the practical benefits which accrue, when a large number of persons are thus joined together for the pursuit of any common object. This voluntary organization is called a Church. Those who believe in this idea do not think it matters whether the Church be one or many. The only demand upon such a body is, that its members shall be actuated by a sincere desire for holiness and shall seek to be taught of God. In accordance with this idea, that the Church is a mere voluntary organization for the pursuit of holiness, any man or body of men have a right when dissatisfied with existing conditions, to found and organize a new Church, which shall accord more nearly with their peculiar ideas of Divine truth. It is considered that this new organization is as good as any other Church in existence, and it is a common expression to hear people say, "It does not matter to what church a man belongs, if only he seeks to do what is right."

#### The Foundation of Protestantism.

This theory is that upon which the various Protestant bodies are founded, bodies which have been organized in comparatively recent times, because of the alleged carelessness, coldness, or wrong doing of the ancient Church; or because of some peculiar idea of some man or body of men which has caused them to go out and start a new organization that might more fully represent and teach their ideas of Divine truth. It may be seen that the ultimate result of this theory is that in all matters of religion the individual conscience is supreme. The Church ceases to be the Body of Christ, setting forth with authority the Word of God, and is reduced to the position of seeking to please her adherents, for if she does otherwise any man considers that he has a perfect right to secede and found a new organization.

#### A Growing Danger.

But an ever-increasing danger is confronting Protestant Christendom by its adherence to this theory, not only from the loss of power which inevitably follows divisions, and the scandal that has arisen from a divided Christianity, but from the fact that men to-day are going further and questioning the necessity of belonging to any Church organization. For if the Church is merely a voluntary association, what claim has it upon the allegiance of mankind? If the individual conscience is the final judge of what is right in all matters of religion, if each one is at perfect liberty to choose his Church according to his own individual tastes, or if he cannot find any already existing which satisfies his personal ideas of what is truth, is at perfect liberty to found some other organization, why belong to any Church at all? Can he not be just as good outside of any Christian body? Many deny that they receive any benefit from their Church membership, which, they say, is a shackle upon their freedom of thought and action. They state they can be just as good Christians without belonging to any Church. What benefit can they or do they derive by being members of

these voluntary societies? They say, with a smile, that they belong to the big Church; after all, they add, it does not matter as long as they do their best. This, of course, is a step further in Protestantism and affirms that as all Christian Churches are but voluntary associations, so when the individual sees no benefit to be derived, there is no necessity of becoming a member. The final court of appeal is the human feeling.

#### Societies Other than Churches.

In accordance with this theory men in ever-increasing numbers are leaving the churches or neglecting to become members of them, preferring to join some secret or beneficiary society. They feel the need of association, but think that their organization can offer them more than the churches. They know that their society is seeking to do good, and the beneficiary feature is certainly excellent. Many of these organizations have some form of religious service. Is not this as good as any other? Why should these persons undertake the burden of Church membership? What can the churches offer them more than their society? The pursuit of holiness? They deny that they can obtain this better in the regular churches. They are doing their best now. What can the Protestant bodies say to these men? They cannot say that salvation comes only through membership in the Body of Christ. Their only answer can be an appeal to the emotions. A revival is started and some leading Divine seeks by his eloquence to get his hearers to join the Church.

#### The Practical Outcome.

The practical outcome of this idea, that the Church is but a human organization, is that over one-half of the people belong to no church, and are rapidly drifting into infidelity or into an indifference but one degree removed from unbelief, and have broken into a thousand warring, jarring, discordant fragments, and the extension of the Kingdom has been seriously hindered, if not jeopardized. Every small town or hamlet has its three to a dozen handfuls of worshippers, who are presenting a more or less weak front to the common enemy, in the place of one powerful Church surrounded by the Christian hospital, almshouse and homes of beneficence.—The Kingdom of God.

#### REUNION.

Of late years the movement for the reunion of Christendom has been often discussed by Church people, and advances made to other religious bodies without any appreciable success. But although to our great regret these bodies are not meeting us half way, reunion is coming about in ways which were not expected. The union of the two large dissenting bodies of Presbyterians, in Scotland, is in other countries attracting attention, and the means by which the ecclesiastical difficulties were overcome seem so simple that they may be followed. The principles which the Free Kirk had been formed to maintain had become antiquated, and