

than he who is free to move about at will and correct and enlarge his ideas by a change of standpoint. With a *national* church, however, it is different. The thought-repressing influence of sectarianism which ever tends to petrification of existing forms of truth, however imperfect, is awaiting. There is in consequence a greater elasticity of movement, and the possibility of more extensive progress. A spirit of toleration is engendered, under the influence of which new ideas are viewed with less suspicion. Claiming to embody, as well as to nourish, the spiritual life of the nation as a whole, the Church of Scotland has, therefore, been much more tolerant of change and differences of thought within its pale than any of its neighbours. Prosecutions for heresy have, of late years, at least, been less frequent. The new ideas to which the general intellectual activity of the age has given birth, have found ready entrance and a home within its pale. And the liberal leaders have adopted the true method of reform. Unlike the fanatic, or one-idea man who rushes noisily to the front, eager to convert the Church or world to his side all at once, or become a martyr for the truth, they have been content to work in quiet, scattering seeds that should by and by bear fruit. The deeper intellectual activity shared in by the more cultured of the ministry and laity rarely finds adequate expression in an ecclesiastical assembly where the ignorant prejudice of the *profanum vulgus* not seldom reigns supreme. Not impatient of results, therefore, unshaking yet unrelenting, the leaders of the new movement have pursued the true method of reform, that from within outwards. And, as summing up into a single sentence our view of the present state of religious thought in the Church of Scotland as indicated by "Scotch Sermons, 1880," it may be said that what apparently is the function of the criticism of this century has been there accomplished—*i. e.*, the separation between Religion and Dogma, the demonstration of the unchanging and eternal nature of the former, and the continually changing and temporal character of the latter. "The sphere of religion is spiritual; the sphere of theology is intellectual; the sphere of ecclesiasticism is political—and it is fatal to real life and progress in religion to identify with it, or to substitute for it, either the one or the other. Religion is in no sense dependent upon any special phases of doctrinal belief, or upon any peculiar forms of ecclesiastical institutions." Preaching, we are told, should no "longer confine itself to one set of ideas, and these of a bygone age, but, studying the world that lies around it, should address itself to the problems, moral and intellectual, that are pressing on the present. With open and sympathetic mind it should turn towards the highways of every-day life, and gather from its scenes and incidents the materials of a finer eloquence than the study of books can give. The love and sorrow that are in poor men's dwellings, the labour that fills the day, and the rest that comes with evening, the laughter of children, and the brow laden with care, earth's sunlight and starlight, the noisy stir of life, and the mystery of death,—these are the things that, passed through the fire of Christian thought, have power to move mankind. And the true office of the preacher in modern society is to be a revealer of the beauty and the deep meaning which lies in such common phenomena, but which the world, engrossed with its business, has neither time nor faculty to discover. Then our religious life, fed from fresher and more numerous springs than hitherto, would become robust and manly, not a thing to shun the noontide struggle of the world and walk in shady places, but that which stands forth to hallow toil, and make business pure, and all intercourse sweet, and give the State an ennobling policy."

Into the proximate and final issues of this great movement in the religious thought of Scotland we cannot now enter. Both ecclesiastically and theologically it must be attended with most important results. Amidst the din and smoke of conflict it is, however, premature to attempt to forecast with any degree of precision the course events will take. One thing at least is certain: a profound change must be effected both in the ecclesiastical constitutions and the creeds and confessions of the Scotch churches.

THEATRICAL REFLECTIONS.

What is the proper life? Carlyle says, Work! and that the thinker is nothing but a lichen; but if the thinker gives expression to and interchange of his thought it is surely action. Knowledge of life is not of any practical use or benefit unless acted upon; an observer of social and political problems effects but little good unless his observations are disseminated and made subject to criticism by those affected. Whither all this intellectuality of the present day is tending, who can say? The attendance at churches has declined, perhaps owing to the advanced position of the press, and the sermons are listened to with more submission than study. In fact, to a great many, the idea of attending a church in these days is repugnant; just as some are bitterly opposed to theatres.

There are signs of an abatement of this stern and long-continued opposition to theatres. A meeting of the British Social Science Congress took place some time since at Manchester. It is curious that, at this meeting, more than one clergyman advocated the claims of the theatre as a beneficial agent, instead of following the usual custom of abusing it to an extreme degree. An essay

was read by a clergyman advocating the establishment and support of a National Theatre in order to provide rational amusement. I have read somewhere that, in London, comparatively uneducated people support the legitimate drama at Sadler's Wells; whilst educated 'West-Enders' require farces, and ballets. This seems to support the statement that intellectuality has been the cause of the decline of the drama. The statement that when the Shakspearian drama is well-acted it is well-supported is not correct, as all the revivals of Shakespeare have been quickly abandoned, and only attracted for a time by their pageantry. The success of Miss Neilson is due not solely to her playing Shakspearian characters but to her beauty and natural grace; her success would be fully as great if she took other characters; of course her abilities are great, otherwise, her reputation would never have been what it is. As to the immorality of modern plays and players, the plays are what the public demand, the players are neither better nor worse than members of other professions. Very few sensible persons object to theatrical representations; and those that do, object for the reason that the associations connected with them are pernicious and are too exciting on the youthful mind. If the effect is for good it can hardly be too exciting, and if the associations are bad, the theatre itself is not culpable but rather those attending it, thus showing that the onus of proof rests on those who assert that the theatre is immoral. A bishop, at the Social Science Congress in Manchester, said that immoral plays were supported by the aristocratic classes, and that the taste and morals of the middle classes were much purer, and that he believed the theatre to be a powerful instrument for good; he said that an archdeacon, an acquaintance of his, had acknowledged that he had been saved from a gambler's fate by witnessing the play of the 'Gamester.' When we think that for years the clergy have, with bigoted zeal, endeavoured to make people think that theatres were hot-houses of sin, it is extremely pleasant to read such sentiments as the above, coming from the lips of high dignitaries. On the other hand, it will be said that for one example of good effected, a great many may be given showing that a great deal of harm has been done. I think, if these cases be carefully examined into, it will be found that the evil has come from the abuse of theatrical pleasure, or over-indulgence, or, perhaps, the persons upon whom it has had an evil effect were immoral otherwise and merely 'took in' the theatre in their course of dissipation. Recently the aldermen of the city of Montreal, in a fit of what we suppose would be called by sentimental moralists righteous indignation, met with the purpose of endeavouring to prevent a dramatic representation from taking place on Christmas Day. A minister of that charitable (?) persuasion, the Methodist, also in a cowardly manner attacked the private character of a defenceless woman—he spoke without knowledge and without charity, and must now be assured that his attack has only reflected discredit upon himself. It is evident that many are straining at gnats and swallowing camels—the desecration of the Sabbath is no novelty here.

Those who are stained with gross moral defects, are sometimes, perhaps very often, possessed of noble qualities; and it is questionable whether they do not really exert a greater influence upon men than those whose morals are of the milk-and-water type. It seems to be the case that there are characters in whom the proportions of morality and immorality are perhaps about equal; and these characters conceal their immoralities and show their moralities as prominently as possible to the world in an unctuous sort of way. The unobservant and careless spectator does not discriminate between this moral hypocrisy and the true moral life. The appearance is taken for the reality. We have all met with, in everyday life, the person who, by a dignified reserve and a solemn face, together with a few expressive gestures, succeeds in gaining a reputation for extreme cleverness, erudition, and intellectuality. Any attempt made by one suspicious of his abilities is baffled by the dignified reserve of this superior being. He may manage to go through this life without discovery; but he leaves no impress upon his time—he will be unknown to posterity. The resemblance between this individual's career and that of the previously described moralists is very close—the moralist specimen being more common. This is a sad evidence of the superficiality of the present age. An intellectual man developed has been defined as 'one who knows everything of something and something of everything'; a moral man may be defined as one who knows not bigotry and practises charity. Those who deny any rights to the drama cannot properly lay claim to come within either of these definitions. They refuse to examine or criticise the merits or demerits, and, by lowering the position of the theatre, think that they elevate themselves—rather a pharisaical mode of argument. The individual critic or scientist in these days is not so prominent nor so influential as he was; theories, problems, and literary successes, come in what may be called oases of plenty; and it would appear, in fact it must be the case if we believe in any sort of theory of progression, that these oases are dependent upon and are the natural effects of antecedent causes. Just so sure as dissipation brings physical ruin, do bigotry and mental oppression bring revolt; and it is sad to think what evil bigoted human actions have caused in this way, though the persons who performed them were actuated by good motives, but, through perverted vision, mistook the cruelty of a bigot for the zeal of a hero. 'Tis a curious study in psychology that a man sincerely wishing to do right does wrong.

Sappho.