

what church they belong. The man who sells wines would hardly choose a church and congregation of teetotalers. A young lawyer in want of clients would scarcely be so unwise as to attend a church where the people were remarkable for their peaceable demeanour toward each other and all men. A young doctor would know better than unite with people who, if any got ill, would be sent direct to the hospital. A merchant tailor, with an eye to business on Sunday as well as in the week, would find it difficult, if not impossible to commune with men whose coats are bought ready-made and cheap, and whose other articles of wear are made at home. A fashionable shoemaker would not find many customers in a congregation of workingmen. So that where business enters into the idea and motive it matters much to what church you belong. I need not stay here to remark that this is a low, poor and miserable sort of church going, and that it rarely prospers in the thing whereunto they seek—that it demoralises a man's nature, and often imperils that very success which he would have achieved by fair and manly means. But more of that anon.

Some again go to a particular church for the sake of *peace at home*. I speak now of men, more especially, and of men whom you and I know very well. It is a common thing to hear men apologise for their connection with a church, by saying that they only go because the wives and families are attached to the people there, and to attempt to break off the connection would mean trouble. Now, I am intensely in love with the thing we call family peace. I know, no man better, thank God, what it is to turn from the heat and noise of the great jarring, jangling, fighting world to the quiet glad home, where those sacred relations are fostered which never shall perish, and where those true affections which make us glad and noble abide in perpetuity. I know how needful it is that a man subdue and repress himself to preserve that quiet of the home, but I do want to say here, and to say it earnestly, that this connection with a church which is maintained simply for the sake of family peace is an unwise and ruinous thing. It does more harm than good, even in the family. For the insincerity of it becomes apparent to all. When the minister has ventured upon a discussion of scientific matters in relation to religious dogma, and you go home and laugh at all his findings; when he ventures to speak dogmatically of mathematics, and his speech betrays his ignorance of the nature of this exact science; when he takes some ancient reading and insists upon the ancient interpretation, and you sneer at the man and his teachings, what good do you think you effect? I know men who have not one particle of respect for the ministry which they attend. I speak as to teaching, and not as to character; they talk of poor old so and so, who is very good as a man, and a capital visitor, but as to his preaching? well that is so and so also. They say that their ministers are impracticable men as to their theology; that they do not trouble to give any reasoning, and do not deal in the article called "common sense;" that they are prosy, and dreary, and dry, and that it is hard work to drag out the Sunday services under them; but, they don't like to disturb things; don't like to break up old family connections; don't like to inaugurate changes; don't like to disturb the peace in fact, for the wives and the daughters appear to be satisfied and are at home in the old place, and while they do not admire the ministry to the point of enthusiasm, do not complain against it. Now, does it matter whether a man is in that condition or not? I maintain that it matters vastly. Would you take that position with regard to any other thing in life? A milkman has been supplying your house for twenty years—but he begins to water the milk and it gets thinner; do you say, well never mind, he has become an institution now, and it is hardly worth while to change the connection, if we get less milk to the quart, we get water, which is quite harmless! No; I think you would say it is milk we want; and milk you would have, even though wife and family had formed a liking for the old cart and the tin pans. If you have been buying boots for yourself and family from a particular factory, and by and by the hands are changed and the stuff used is inferior, and the work is bad—do you keep up the connection still? No, you want *boots*, and not to support a certain factory. When any of your family is ill, do you send for the old doctor, when you have no faith in his skill or medicine, and call him an old fogey, and wanting in common sense, when the lives of those children are put into his keeping? And yet, there are men who care less for the mind of their families than for their boots; they take less concern about their soul than about their doctor. "It doesn't matter to what church one goes," you say, and smile loftily, or get angry, as the case may be. It does, however. If the preacher does not preach what is common sense to you, he does not preach what is common sense to your family; if it is false science to you, it is false science to them; if his deductions are absurd, they are absurd, and cannot be made anything else; if his dogmas are preposterous, they are no more true for your wives and daughters than for you. I hold it a wrong. I hold it a shame and sin for men to attend a church services and a man's ministry when they have no respect for either, and talk loud disrespect for both. They appear to countenance, and do support a man in teaching what they call nonsense; they put on a respectful demeanour before him in the church, and next day ridicule the sermon. They subscribe to the funds of the church, and openly talk of it as money wasted. To whom does this do good? Certainly to no one, but harm to all concerned. It does harm

to those very children for whom you make the sacrifice. You fill their minds with doubts and negations faster and more effectually than the minister can fill them with answers and affirmations; you teach them to hold those things lightly which they should hold as sacred; you encourage them in playing with their religious sensibilities, and toying with their deepest convictions. Oh, yes, you say, our minister is a good man, very earnest, and means well, but he belongs to the old school, and all his ideas are antiquated; he makes attacks upon the assumptions of modern science, which to us, who know better, are very amusing; he believes and teaches doctrines which thinking men have agreed to discard as impossible and absurd, but what does it matter? it does us no harm, and suits the women and children! And you do not hesitate to say that in the hearing of those women and children for whom you are so superciliously careful. Careful? No, let me change the word to be exact—*careless* rather. Can you care much for them when you purchase a little freedom from friction and trouble now at the cost of much future unhappiness? They will learn to believe you probably, for they give their ears to you more than to any minister now, and they will begin, if they have not already begun, to enquire whether you are right, with a decided bias in your favour; and while they examine that particular minister in the light of your criticism, and all else they can find, they will imagine that they are examining *all* the ministry and every kind of religious teacher. And if it should happen that you are right in your judgment—that the teaching they hear is merely old and not venerable, and not supported by common sense and ascertained facts, they will come to the conclusion that all churches and all teachers, and perhaps all religion are but based on shifting sand, and when the floods and storms of criticism beat upon it, it will fall, and great will be the fall thereof. If I wanted to make my children dislike the Christian Church and Christian doctrines; if I wanted them to become in every way indifferent and altogether atheistic; and if I wanted to banish all religious susceptibilities from my life, and deaden my own mind to all true and just thinking: and if I wanted at the same time to spread this moral blight abroad in society, I should attend a church and a ministry for which I had no kind of intellectual respect, and I should spare no opportunity of sneering and jeering at both. I should laugh at it, and scoff at it, and shrug my shoulders and say: It doesn't matter anything, I get no harm, and the women and children like it. Nothing can be more effectual, depend upon it, as some of you will know by and by. For you are not only denying your own intellect by appearing to accept what you reject with contempt; you not only prolong the days of doctrines and forms which you consider do harm and not good in the world, but you lead those who hear you by subtlest way and with authority into the awful abyss of atheism.

But now—what are the true motives which should take a man to church? I answer first of all—to know Truth, to commune with Truth—that is to say with God. The service is a help to his thoughts; upon the wings of holy psalm and fervent prayer his soul mounts upward until it gets away from the noise and dust of this material world, and looks with gladness on the face of God. The deeper, profounder instincts of his nature get an hour's satisfaction—it reminds him that he belongs to two worlds, earth and heaven—that he belongs to time, and no less to eternity. Appeal must be made to his spiritual motives—he must be told not to be satisfied with an opinion, but only with a deeprooted, intelligent faith—he must have not merely views about God, but desires after God—he must be taught to cry, not "give me true opinions," but, "create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within"—he must hear how to turn amid the evil and darkness here, to the hope of a glorious hereafter. To cherish and feed that blessed hope—to nourish the soul's longing after spiritual good—to inspire a sense of shortcoming, and an earnest desire to be worthier—to find that which will leaven all the life with heavenly influences—to find a true inspiration for all the work and duty of life—to find great thoughts and purposes which shall dignify labour and take the sting out of disappointment, and strengthen every noble desire, and make sublime the lowliest office; to find a Saviour from evil thoughts, evil habits and evil ways and a very Captain of Salvation—that is the one object and aim with which men should go to church.

But the man who is true to himself and to truth will seek more than that even. While I hold that we must have clear and well defined convictions as to religious matters—that a man without a creed is very likely to become a man without faith, and that the lights and shadows on the intellectual picture must be sharp and distinct—I also hold that the true minister will not ignore the great questions which new modes of thinking and new discoveries in science force upon the people. Instead of standing in the way and barring progress he will be in the van, a stout hearted, daring leader. It is worse than folly to dogmatically close down upon the discussion of religious matters. All the truths of Religion are from the very nature of them open to doubt. In Geometry or Mathematics we have necessary truths—facts that are demonstrable—but we have no such necessary truths in Religion. They never pass the limits of the probable. They rest upon something outside of ourselves—and there is nothing outside of ourselves that we do not at times doubt. That doubt should be respected—the spirit of earnest free inquiry should be encouraged, and the minister should be a help and not a hindrance to thought.