

IS THERE "FAITH" ON THE EARTH?

Amid the signs which portend danger to the creeds of orthodoxy may be ranked the addresses of two eminent Canadian Presbyterian delegates to the Pan-Presbyterian Synod. These worthy men advocated the necessity of a complete revision of the church standards; evidently without perceiving that in a mere change of the "faith," by which salvation is supposed to be effected, no permanent cure will be found. Even the popular clerical subterfuge at present prevalent—that it is only salvation *by means of* "faith" which these standards teach—cannot long satisfy the reviving life of the various sects. The fact thrust upon us by experience must be acknowledged, viz., that it is by works that true knowledge, true intellectual belief, can alone be reached. An ounce of experiment, *i. e.*, experience, is worth several pounds of doctrine. To cease to injure others—"to cease to do evil"—is the human or negative side of "learning to do well." Fidelity of purpose to shun evil to others wrought out into act is the only "faith" in which common-sense, to say nothing of religion, can see any prospect of salvation, physical, moral or spiritual. Thus to merge self in that "pure river of the water of life" in which Jehovah has manifested Himself—thus to be borne along by the Divine life of our Lord in His Infinite current of usefulness, is to receive in our finite degree that Infinite Love which lives in Infinite Wisdom, and continually acts out into deeds Infinite gentleness, healing, and help.

That the foremost men in the Presbyterian Church, so rigidly Calvinistic in its creeds, should begin to be smitten with a sense of its incomplete grasp of truth is merely a sign which foreshadows changes that may alter its whole intellectual landscape. The theological idea of "faith" which is mental assent to a series of dogmas which are but mountains of falsity commemorative of the state or condition of heart and mind of past ages, must be entirely overthrown by the working out towards the surface of the internal life derived from above, till something like a moral earthquake is observable, and men begin to see "faith," not in its theological and man-derived meaning but in its Biblical intent, viz: fidelity of heart or will to the promptings of conscience. "Faith" is not truth; neither the assent that a fact is a fact. "Faith" is the fidelity of the whole nature of man to its several parts, created to co-operate voluntarily each with each. The combination of will, thought and act in usefulness is "faith," because that is fidelity to the natural, spiritual and celestial laws on which man's constitution is based. Not one of these, separated from the other, has any element of fidelity or "faith" within it. Can it be truly called "faith" to will to shun evil, and not to seek and find, by the intellect, a means to do it? Can that be "faith" which sees a means of avoiding evil, and neither wills to avoid it, nor ceases to commit it? What kind of faith is that which, desiring to avoid evil, and knowing how to do it, does not cease its evil actions? How then can a man be saved from sin by simply believing that he is, against the evidences of his senses and his own intimate knowledge of himself and his actions? And how can Jehovah, whose Infinite Love and Infinite Wisdom are such that He ever preserves His creatures in that similar freedom of will to His own which constitutes them men, save them from the consequences of their transgressions, unless they, in their freedom, desire to be saved from the transgression itself? His own Divine Laws, the constitution which the Infinite Wisdom of His Infinite Love has seen best, and most blessed ultimately, for men, would need to be reversed ere any such process of legerdemain could possibly be effected. "Made in His image," we cannot be unmade by Him without destroying utterly our free will, our free life which, like "every good and perfect gift, cometh down from the Father of Lights" whose Wisdom is ineffable, whose Light is the Light of Eternal Truth.

It is indeed true that Calvinistic and Presbyterian creeds were not only revised but openly acknowledged as erroneous—that salvation is not from the consequences of sin but from the sin itself—that salvation is not by assent to a form of sound words but is a gradual process of regeneration—that regeneration is the gradual overcoming, by the Lord, of our evil with His good if we but consent by desiring honestly and showing earnestly to cease to do evil. Regeneration is but the return of man to the orderly life for which man's being is alone fitted, but which cannot be effected even by the Lord (with all reverence be it spoken) unless by a voluntary cessation on our part of disorderly desire, thought and deed. The leading minds of the various sects dimly perceive already that such truth is seen to contain within it true life by those who are not of the outward and visible "church" but shall rank themselves as of the "world." It is the supposed mission of the "church" to save the "world." Instinctively they feel that the process is being reversed as far as outward appearances go. All honour to them that they try to urge the church not to forsake its charge.

An equally significant sign is the attitude assumed towards creeds and sects by men of high intellectual culture. The *Bystander* is right in its recent assertion that scientific men, and philosophers such as Herbert Spencer, seek the unknowable and entertain a reverence for Him which is not inspired by any delineation yielded by our existing creeds as by conventional religious law established.

Nor are other and lower, more merely natural, signs lacking. These form perhaps the strongest reason why the churches should again face the

question of creeds. That arch-heretic, Colonel Ingersoll, is actually beginning to build up as well as tear down. His last lecture on "What shall we do to be saved?" is almost as constructive as it is destructive. He bases his teachings of morality, or right living, on the words of our Lord and Master, those words of His which every rational man must see can safely be taken in their literal sense as the highest and best precepts for the guidance of daily life. Some of our Lord's divine utterances can indeed be only spiritually discussed. These he naturally, as yet, coolly discards as interpolations of a more recent date. These views of the Colonel display a state of mind and heart which will find its echo in many a hungry soul in this our day. Yet none save those in whom charity is an unknown quantity can fail to rejoice that already this arch-heretic has begun to preach the gospel of love to man and love to God, so far as he understands it in its literal or natural sense, to a large class of hearers whom our churches do not reach, and cannot reach so long as they hold to creeds which have become mental monstrosities neither possible nor desirable to work out into act in this enlightened age. It is not necessary to particularize. The weak spots are well known to the orthodox and heterodox. Col. Ingersoll's broad charity towards sects of all grades is worthy of imitation. He admits cheerfully that men may and do live kindly, honest, useful lives even although they may give their assent to an absurd creed. Are there none of these bold enough to imitate his Catholic spirit and invite him to address their people under the walls of their church? It is unnecessary to make any apology for the suggestion. His last lecture if delivered in any orthodox church would in itself be a sufficient apology to any intellectual congregation who are glad to see truth natural or spiritual acknowledged by those whom they consider "out of the way." The contrast between this lecture and his "oration on the gods" or his "mistakes of Moses" is a sign of progress in thought which ought to delight all who seek the welfare of Col. Ingersoll as well as their other brethren. And in so far as it is a psychological fact that thought is not the origin of life but the result of it, there is no reason to doubt that such progress in thought is caused by a growing purity of will or life.

Quotations from his lecture would be out of place here. Enough has been said to show those who care to see that the "world" outside of the "church" still receives of the Lord's life and gives it expression in thought, word or deed in the manner best suited to its own needs. The outward and visible "church" may help but it cannot hinder. It would be better if it had charity enough within it to enable it to cease to hinder. Then possibly it might be taught of God how to help. Beliefs are various and tend to separate. They are the formative principle—not the life principle. Love is life, therefore charity is a one in all and tends to unity, because life in all is from the One Divine Source. It is charity which constitutes a church. Therefore there is a "church" in the "World."

LAND AND LORDS.

In the issue of the *SPECTATOR* of October 2nd will be found an article by "Saxon," in which several discrepancies occur. It is somewhat amusing that "Saxon" should imagine that satire is argument, and when he informs us that "immoral designs presented in the guise of wholesome measures of reform are to reckon among those forces which seem constantly tending towards revolution," he forgets that describing "measures of reform" as "immoral designs" is not proof that they are so, and he also forgets that "reform" is usually considered "wholesome." He is therefore somewhat mistaken in regarding "reform" and immoral designs as synonymous. His view of the land question is also superficial, and it is not to be regarded as forming a question to be decided by the land-owners alone. We are well aware of the adverse vote with which "The Irish Disturbance Bill" was met, though we doubt "Saxon's" statements as to the "attenuated majority," but knowing as we do that this "adverse vote" was given by parties fully as much interested in their own selfish principles as in the rights of humanity, we cannot but regard this adverse vote as an index of the personal feelings of the representatives, and not by any means as a gauge of the feelings of the constituents. The Liberal party was elected through the wonderful oratory of Mr. Gladstone, combined with the understanding that it was to redress the land wrongs. This was the case in the agricultural districts, while on the contrary in the cities, the Conservatives did not lose their previous majority in anything like the same ratio.

That the charge of selfishness is untrue is maintained by "Saxon," who argues that those representatives who are landowners are known to be "humane, chivalrous and honourable; loyal to their sovereign and country, and in purity of life quite the equals of any other class of Her Majesty's subjects." This may all be very true; but the other classes within certain limits may make the same claim, and with as good a show of justice—so that we find the other classes, who are in the majority, are of the opinion that the land laws need reform, and we are justified in claiming that these laws ought to be examined into and altered, if need be. We also agree with "Saxon" that the noblemen are loyal to their country, and we also think they are extremely loyal to the land. To speak of a measure for preventing useless and cruel eviction as one involving confiscation of the plainest rights of property is a statement