

any other in the world. Yet there is not a virtue for which our Puritan ancestors were renowned, which we do not seek to share. And we pray, as Solomon did, and as Boston does in its motto. "May God be the same to us as He was to our fathers." As I heard this prayer repeated in Boston's late celebration, I could not help thinking how appropriate it is as a motto of our Unitarian faith. New times have brought new thoughts: our intellectual views on all subjects have changed; but those views are only the new form in which we realize the ancient truth, and through which God becomes the same to us as he was to our fathers. It is theology which changes. Religion is the same yesterday and to-day and forever. It is our little systems which have their day; but the religious feeling which relates us to God is as eternal as its object. As it is with the life of Nature and the life of man, so it is with the life of religion. Embodiments change and die, but the life which they embodied puts on other and higher forms: the body passes to its parent dust, but the life, the intelligence, the individual soul, soars away to other destinies in another world. Our Christianity was the new form in which the spirit of the law and the prophets enshrined itself. Our Unitarianism is Calvinism which has died and been raised again, the faith of our Puritan ancestors in its resurrection body. It should do for us what their religion did for them, and something more. It should inspire the same trust, the same dependence, the same unswerving rectitude, the same certainty of help in God, with more joyful views of life and of the world. It should breathe into us the same faith for ourselves and better hopes for others. It should make God the same to us as he was to them."

These are noble words, and must commend themselves to every mind; human nature, with all its powers of reason, cries out for religious light, and theological systems may be called stepping-stones, or in a few cases, halting places of religious progress. All truly religious people must work to build up their Church, and believing as I do in the Unitarian Church, yet I cannot withhold my admiration and respect for the man who truly and fully imbued with the *spirit* of religion, endeavours to advance another. It is necessary for every one, no matter to what church he belongs, to so live as to make his "light so shine before men that they may see his good works." By these will the cause of religion be advanced; by these will faith in the living God be kept alive in this world, and through these will the holy flame of immortality shed its lustre. A person whose religion consists merely of denials and who does not care much to have a religion of his own, is one of the worst stumbling-blocks in the way of religious progress. "A liberalism which destroys the very desire for worship, commits suicide in doing so, and by thus ending the career of inquiry becomes an irresistible argument against entering upon it."

In conclusion, I would say that Unitarians, as a body, believe in the harmony of science and religion, in the grand reconciliation of reason and religion, in the fullest exercise of the human intellect, in the union of the best thought of the present day with all the best hope and faith of ages gone by; and above all, they believe in the transcendental beauty and majestic glory of the Divine One ruling the infinity of worlds, One who is alone indivisible, absolute, not Three in One, nor yet One in Three—but ONE GOD; and that Jesus was His Son.

Sappho.

[* I have allowed the views of "Sappho" to thus appear as an article, but I do not endorse the Unitarian sentiment of it. Nor is there anything particular in it to answer.—ED.]

DOES IT MATTER TO WHAT CHURCH YOU BELONG?

A Discourse delivered in Zion Church, Montreal, by the Rev. A. J. Bray.

For two consecutive Sunday evenings I have been speaking to you on the question: "Does it matter what a man believes?" and to-night I am to speak to the further question: "Does it matter to what church you belong?" The answer generally is: "Not very much, if anything at all." The idea prevails very extensively that the churches are so much alike, so near to each other in doctrine and organization, that it is a matter of little or no consequence whether you attend this or that, or the other. And this is supposed to be taking a broad and comprehensive and loftily charitable view of the subject. It is generally the close of an argument, sometimes the end of an excuse for not entering upon an argument as to the merits or otherwise of any particular teaching and form of religious life. But it will be quite easy to show you that the answer contains a very popular, but very evident fallacy; it is not true in hardly a single case, nor in a single particular. Just analyze the matter a little and you will see it. People go to church—speaking of the church as a whole, and of no particular church—in a general way from the vaguest possible motive. It is in harmony with their surroundings—it is the custom of the community—it is a habit, early contracted and since maintained. Circumstances, conditions, tradition, everything without them, in fact, seem to say "you must go to church on the Sabbath day." But that only indicates the state of church-going society in general; when you leave that and deal with individuals and separate churches you must search for other motives and more defined. And you will find them readily. There may be some people who attend church services from the vague idea and undefined impression that they ought in some way to be identified with the religious belief of the community to which they belong; but you will find only a few of such people. The great mass of them have clear and, to themselves, well defined notions as to why they attach themselves to a certain church, give a nominal assent, at least to the service, and uphold the organization by the paying of pew rent, little or much.

Let us search for these motives and criticise them in turn. But let me

enter an early disclaimer against any hasty denial of the truth of what I shall say. I shall cite what may appear to some of you extreme, if not imaginary cases; but I shall speak from actual knowledge of society, church-going society, and shall give cases, and speak of classes—not of the time of the Apostles, nor of the Middle Ages—those dark times when altar sacrifice represented ignorance and superstition, and the priest was often the minister of vice—nor even of the later times when the Church was the great conservator of some rights and many wrongs—when the priest sold his garment and bought a sword, and then fought for possession of the garment again, and for some other things to make life easy and happy—but of these present times in which we live—of people whom we know—of a state of things with which every one is more or less familiar—perhaps of your very selves sometimes, and your modes of thinking and living.

There are people who go to church, then, for the sake of *social connection*. First of all they are moved by that vague idea I spoke of of just now, which was born of custom, that they must go somewhere—but when the question has to be decided *which* where, discrimination has to be employed before the decisive choice can be made. And then this broad generalising, that it doesn't matter where you go, breaks up and falls to pieces. The desire for the right kind of social connection says it matters a great deal. For churches are graded, just like society. That old and beautiful fiction—so full of the sublimest poetry—that before the altar of the Lord all men are equal—that there are no rich nor poor, no distinctions of masters and servants in God's house, hardly obtains even a distant recognition in these days. Social distinctions are not quite so marked in this new world as they are in the old world across the water. There the squire is quite a different mortal from the tenant farmer, and the tenant farmer is far removed from the mere labourer. You could enter the church and tell the difference at a glance. The squire is quite conscious of his squirarchy, and is sure the clergyman is, and firmly believes that high heaven appreciates the dignity with which it kindly clothed him at his birth. Even in the large centres of population the aristocracy of wealth is far separated from the plebeians of no wealth. I have known lordly manufacturers and wholesale men refuse to shake hands, or in any way recognize even wealthy tradespeople. So there are distinctions in the church, and distinctions between the churches. Some are for the rich, and some are for the middle classes, and some are for the poor. In less degree, but still to palpable extent, it obtains on this continent. The rich and the poor go to church together—only the rich go in carriages. And when a church becomes wealthy it attracts those who are wealthy, and those who desire the company of the wealthy, to its membership. It is the standing argument and last persuasive with some people when inducing their friends to join them in church-going—it is not the ministry, it is not the doctrine, it is not the healthiness of the teaching nor the heartiness of the prayer, but the social connection to be made. The chance of good society is a most mighty incentive—and good society means, not good men and women as to godliness, not influence which shall act as divine inspiration upon the heart making the life blessed and beautiful, but good as to place in the social scale—good as to money, and parties and general social life. Does it matter to what church a man may go? Ask the anxious husband of an ambitious wife; ask the father of grown-up daughters whom he is deeply concerned to settle well in the world; ask the father of sons whom he wants to place well in business; ask the young professional who is hungering for a practice; ask the ladies who are anxious to be among the very best,—and they will tell you as in a chorus that it matters a great deal to what church you may belong. It is a thing to many minds unthinkable that you can attend a poor, that is, unwealthy church on Sunday and be accepted in society where kettle-drums prevail during the week. As the Sabbath is, so is the week-day as a rule. And not only do those desiring good society recognise this rule of life, but society recognises and strives hard to draw all the worthy and keep them within the pale of the sacred inclosure. If you will just look at it from that point of view, you will see that it matters a great deal to what church you may belong.

Then again—and I speak now with some reservation—for I know it does not largely obtain, and I want to make the observation a kind of parenthesis—some go to church for the sake of a *possible business connection*. Remembering how deeply rooted we all are in the soil; how dear to us is the bread we win with hard work and much scheming; how fierce the competition, and how few men can afford to be independent of any and every possible help, we shall not wonder so much at that. The young man I spoke of just now as starting in a professional career must get into society in order to get clients—he must, that is, if he has not original genius and after-culture to force society to come to him—and how can he get there better than by way of the church? A tradesman can hardly afford to trust to the prominence of his sign and the general excellence of his goods, but he himself must make friends to get custom; and a church is a channel well open to him. To be in the same church with large employers of labour ought to be a good thing when a man wants a situation, and has scarcely anything to make a point of—that is, as to ability and character. And although that may not be the case with many, perhaps not with any one here to-night, to those with whom it is a motive it matters a great deal