

CURRENT LITERATURE.

Of all the works that have appeared during the past month, the one of most interest to our readers is Mr. Hepworth Dixon's "New America." Mr. Hepworth Dixon has been for some time editor of the Athenæum; he has brought to bear on his subject, the recent social and religious phenomena of the great republic, a singularly acute judgment, and an impartiality and a candour rare in delineators of theological parties. To the present condition of some of the most remarkable developments of the religious sects, he devotes considerable space, and the chapters in which his observations on this subject are recorded are among the most interesting in the book. Whatever the sects may be, he gives us their doctrine and usages, word for word, as he has received it from the lips of one of the chief teachers of the sect; and he treats of the strangest and most novel practices, with a toleration which at times might be almost taken for acquiescence. The many remarkable sects which are here brought under notice have this in common, that all owe their existence to a yearning after some visible personal guidance, greater in its authority and sanctity than the more self-constituted ministry of pious men as preachers or ministers. Their adherents belong to a class with whom past history is a sealed book, and they cry out for a living Prophet. Joe Smith is in Elysium, it is true, but Brigham Young lives, and is the strength of Mormonism. The Shakers have lost their founder, Mother Ann, who passed out of this world, not as the first of the "Latter-day Saints," by ordinary death, but by excess of purity becoming so brilliant as to be invisible to mortal eyes. But she is represented by a visible and non-luminous Eldress Betsy. Another striking result of Mr. Hepworth Dixon's observations, seems to be that all of these strange new religions propose as a leading feature in their programme, some alterations in the existing relations of the sexes. They have at least the merit of recognizing and proposing to remedy some great evil connected with these relations. Mother Ann proclaimed, that as incontinence first brought sin into the world, so that entire separation between the sexes is the law of the Redeemer's kingdom, in which it behoves one to live like the angels, neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Strange to say, this doctrine, which stands to the Church's teaching as to marriage, as teetotalism to temperate wine drinking, has attracted a large number of followers. They have a settlement of seven thousand disciples, in Mass., U. S.; their farms are the best tilled, their gardens and cottages the most orderly in the district.

It would be a curious question to establish *a priori* whether the abolition of marriage, or the rehabilitation of polygamy would be most unpopular with the sex which has the chief interest in getting married. Strange to say, both have their adherents! The perfectionists or Bible Christians are a Protestant denomination, who maintain an unlimited private judgment. The second advent, which occurred A.D. 70, according to them, abolished all laws, moral and ritual; each Bible Christian may do as he likes with no fear of future consequences: However, as the unlimited exercise of each Bible Christian's private judgment with respect, for instance, to the eighth commandment, might happen to clash