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"Theology and Insanity."

Sceptics have sometimes tried to make out that religion drives men mad, while many devout people have declared that, if it were not for the hope that religion throws upon life's mystery, and the consolation it gives in sorrow, neither body nor brain would stand the strain of the burden and battle. Recently the Bishop of Rochester delivered a lecture to the students of St. Thomas' Hospital, London, on the above subject, in which he attempted to disprove the popular idea, that religion is or has been, one of the principal exciting causes of insanity, and that, indeed, religion is "a force which makes for sanity." This lecture no doubt called forth a variety of comment; for the present we confine ourselves to the review of it in the January number of the North American Review, by John H. Girdner, M.D. It is interesting to place the views of the doctor alongside of those of the minister. The one is apt to be regarded as a mere apologist for religion, while we are sometimes inclined to suspect the other of materialistic tendencies. This opening paragraph shows that the subject is to be treated in a sympathetic spirit.

"Every one who has had experience in the care of the insane, and who is familiar with the history of this branch of medical science, will agree with the Bishop that the true religion of kindness, sympathy and love, as taught by Christ, is a powerful force, which makes always for mental peace counts in the New Testament of the so-called casting-out of devils, illustrate the power by which Jesus of Nazareth soothed perturbed minds by His presence and quelled outbursts of disordered brains by His words."

The doctor is of the opinion that the expressions "religious mania," "religious insanity" are met with sufficiently often throughout all literature to justify the prevalence of the idea that religion has in some way been an important factor in dethroning human reason, but he contends that "a careful study of the history of the mental disease amply proves that not the religion of Christ, but the theologies of man, have caused so many minds to give way and develop settled delusions and hallucinations of a so-called religious type. The Christian religion has been charged with producing insanity, because of the very common mistake of confounding the two very dissimilar terms, viz.: religion and theology." This article handles reverently but critically,

the question of diabolical possession, and is therefore worthy of careful attention; the following passage will show the mode of treating this subject as it affects the gospel record.

"The miracles of healing which were performed by the Master and His Apostles seem to indicate that it was the custom to diagnose those cases of disease which presented no pathological changes in the body appreciable by the senses as cases of possession by one or more devils, or evil spirits, or unclean spirits; and the act of restoring them to health was viewed as the casting out of these spirits. In this group was naturally included most diseases of the brain and of the nervous system; for these are either functional—that is, they have no morbid anatomy at all—or the changes are only to be detected after death and by microscopic examination."

The cases traced to possession were, on this view, the cases of mystery; that is, the morbid conditions for which no physical cause seemed to be present. Thus insanity was not, as now, regarded as a disease; and the insane were cruelly treated to drive the devils out of them. We cannot discuss these points now further than to note that this authority regards the action of this and other dogmas upon weak minds as a cause of aggravation of insanity. The strain of life, theological or material, overpowers those who are lacking in clear intelligence and steady faith. This, of course, is only one branch of a great subject; there are many causes of mental disorder that are not touched here, as the title shows the limitations of the discussion. This is not supposed to be specially a theological age, and yet we are afraid that, in many civilized communities, insanity is on the increase; it would appear then from the following paragraph that theology is not responsible. So much for the fact as the form of this strange disease.

"The insane are not now tormented by the devil and his imps, but telephones and phonographs are continually ringing in their ears. Others suppose they have steam-engines in their heads, and many imagine they are persecuted by men of large fortunes or of great political power. Formerly those who were afflicted with delusions of grandeur were prone to imagine themselves to be the Saviour of the world, or the Virgin Mary, or some eminent saint. Now they are more apt to think themselves to be great inventors or powerful politicians, or the possessors of untold wealth. As already intimated, the delusions of the insane always take their form and color from the questions and problems which are most absorbing at the time."

All this is quite true; but we accept the point upon which the Bishop and the doctor are agreed, viz., that true religion makes for sanity, that many men who have fought a good fight would have broken down under life's great strain but for the relief of prayer, and a childlike faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who bids us "cast all our care upon Him because He cares for us." When we turn to the Bible there is nothing that strikes us more strongly than the sanity of the truly great prophets and apostles. They passed through great spiritual ordeals, they were moved by great enthusiasm, they could tell of wondrous raptures, but their lives were healthful and their minds well-balanced. They denounced the trickery of sensation-seekers and warned

men against morbid excitement. Their religion could not have been the great power it was, if it had not taken strong hold upon them; but the result of the influence was the quickening and purifying of their noblest powers so that when the cold worldling thought them "mad" they could utter the protest which after ages have confirmed that they were merely speaking with unusual power: "words of truth and soberness."

The Examination for License.

That the present method of Presbyterian examination for license is unsatisfactory is universally granted. It will not make it more satisfactory to make the Presbytery merely presiding examiner while the candidate writes his answers to a set of questions prepared by an Assembly committee, as a metropolitan Presbytery is proposing. When a candidate presents a degree from a university of good standing and a diploma from a reputable Theological College, may we not accept these as good evidence of his literary attainments? The information desired is rather that of character.

Three years ago, the man who now seeks license declared his motives for entering upon a course of Theological study in preparation for the Gospel ministry, and the Presbytery declared them worthy. He has now completed his preparatory training and desires permission to enter upon active work. Is he fully prepared? His literary attainments are satisfactory, but what is the resultant in character of the years of training through which he has passed? What is his conception of life? What is his outlook upon it? What forces are impelling him to step out into it, and what allurements does he follow? He asks to be permitted to enter upon this work, what estimate has he formed of his relation to it, and of his ability to satisfy it?

To learn these things the examiner must meet the candidate face to face, and with the utmost skill and patience invite and win his confidence. Instead of asking six men, selected at random while the Court is sitting, to meet with candidates and examine and report within an hour, let the Presbytery select three of its wisest and most spiritual members, and ask them, during the month preceding the meeting of the Court, to meet with the candidates, one by one, and by the most kindly yet searching examination, be prepared to report upon the worthiness of the men, as men, to receive the imprimatur of the Church to preach as ambassadors of Christ.

Such an examination should be sufficient for all purposes. There need be no preliminary or subsequent examination. The certificate of the Theological College from which he has received his diploma should suffice for the one, and the certificate of license would suffice for the latter.