

Pastor and People.

THE SECRET.

"They looked up to Him and were lightened"—*Pea xxiv.*

I asked the roses, as they grew
Richer and lovelier in their hue,
What made their tints so rich and bright;
They answered, "Looking toward the light."
Ah, secret dear! said heart of mine;
God meant my life to be like thine,
Radiant with heavenly beauty bright,
By simply looking toward the Light
—*Sunday School Times.*

RUTH.

I walked beside the ribboned corn
One sacred, silent Sabbath morn,
The soft wind in the branches stirred,
I heard a single flitting bird,
And far away o'er stream and tree
The distant church bells chimed for me.

And back from childhood's mist and dream
There came a dear and radiant gleam.
I know not why, this day, in south
My thought should stray to that fair Ruth
Who in the barley harvest's sheen
Still walks, still bends the ears to glean,
Still in the dusk of glimmering dawn
Flits homeward ere the dust be gone
And in Naomi's loving clasp
Finds hope and joy within her grasp.

But it is Ruth I seem to see,
Sweet, slender, lissome, beckoning me
To that still time of childish bliss,
Earth's dearest thing, my mother's kiss,
When in a Bible worn and old,
But worth far more than gems and gold,
We little ones on Sabbath day
Would read the stories, spell our way
Through Abraham and Isaac down
To David's deeds of great renown,
And find no lore in all the books
So sure to wake delighted looks
As those old Bible stories did,
Between those leather covers hid.

Ruth and Naomi, deathless pair,
Your voices touch this mountain air;
A vision of you, age and youth,
Naomi grave and smiling Ruth,
Unto my eyes to-day is borne
Here by these fields of waving corn.

—*Margaret E. Sangster, in the Christian Intelligencer.*

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

CHRIST TEMPTED AS WE ARE.

BY REV. CHARLES DOUDIET.

"He was in all points tempted like as we are. . . ." How can that be? The Lord was about thirty-three years old, when the Jews crucified Him. Too early in life, it seems to me, to be weary of life, a temptation common to afflicted old age. Is it a sin to be weary of life? Perhaps not. And yet can we approve of Job's prayer that it would please God to destroy him (Job vi. 9). Paul also confesses to a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better (Phil. i. 23). Both the patriarch and the apostle were old men, both had keenly suffered, both had felt the chafing of the heavy cross on their shoulder, in the long journey of life. At thirty-three, the physical powers of mankind are yet at their best. Hope's sustaining power to the mind has not lost much, if any of its elasticity. But at sixty, and beyond sixty, the body is daily getting weaker, and earthly hopes have nearly lost their influence to encourage to new effort. To many old men, life is a slow martyrdom. The sight grows dim, the hearing is dulled, and motion is pain. Jesus never experienced such a life as they. But could He? Old age is, in one sense, corruption. "David saw corruption, but He whom God raised again saw no corruption" (Acts xiii. 36). From the time that the average man reaches thirty-three, corruption sets in. Death is not only the stoppage of the pulses of the heart. The falling hair, the decayed teeth, the stiffening articulations, are part of the process of corruption. Jesus suffered a violent death, but to my thinking, He never had to experience that slow, gradual decay which often makes old age so painful. Was this the reason that He was cut off so young? Some men live for three generations, Christ lived only one. So to come back to the text which suggested these thoughts, I, an old man, ask: How was He in all points tempted as we are? and as the Christian's faith

gives Him the victory over the temptations special to old age, might there not in this also be found a confirmation of the Saviour's words in John xiv. 12: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father?"

WHAT THEY WANT.

BY C. H. WETHERILL.

There are thousands of people, away from God, out of Christ, destitute of spiritual life, who secretly want to be tenderly, lovingly told of the great concern which Christ has for them. They cannot be scolded into the kingdom. They will not bear harsh denunciations of their sinfulness. These drive them still further away from Christ and the truth. A writer says: "Poor, depraved, full of sorrow and woe, lost men needed the words of hope, and Christ drew them with His tenderness. He told them of the divine love. He told them of a Father who would come forth to meet them, on their penitent return to Him, who would run and fall on the prodigal's neck and kiss him; who would welcome him to the old home and put the best robe on him and make a glad festival of the day of his home-coming. Sinful men wanted such words as these. They struck on their hearts like the tones of inspiring music." Very true. It was only hypocrites and the wilfully perverse sinners for whom Christ had cutting denunciations. But for all low outcasts, however polluted, he always had a hopeful word, a cheering call, a sweet invitation and loving arms. And the most of Christ's appeals to sinners—nearly all of them—were keyed on a very tender scale and touching note. This is our lesson.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

THOUGHTS ON AGNOSTICISM.

BY REV. W. G. JORDAN, B.A.

This is a subject that needs scientific handling by competent persons and it is probable that it is receiving such treatment in various places. Ever since Christianity became a power in the life of the world it has had its outlook upon the realm of thought, and there have been those whose special business it has been to show that things which reason could not discover may be in harmony with the highest reason. Hence the position of apologetics changes with every new generation, and it may be that we are somewhat slow to adjust ourselves to changed conditions and new demands. Leaving that question to those whom it may concern we may remark that there is always the average man's view of things, and he has his thoughts when those who do a good work in popularising physical science seek to do a questionable work in popularising "agnosticism" as the solvent of superstition and the destroyer of atheism. This laying emphasis upon human ignorance may be very good so long as it is used to encourage a spirit of humility in the face of the great problem of life, but when it in turn becomes a dogma which make itself the ally of a shallow secularism and threatens to crush our noblest aspirations then even "common sense" rises in rebellion against it. We will now briefly set forth a few hints along this line. 1. It seems strange to the ordinary man that those who know so little should not only mark out with precision the boundaries of human knowledge—a subject that has exercised the thoughts of the greatest thinkers in all ages—but should also limit the power of God. We know, of course, that the more modest of those who reject revelation state that the only reason is that they find the evidence for it insufficient. In many cases no doubt that is, true but in much of the reasoning on that side there seems to be a subtle presupposition against the possibility of revelation, a view of the "reign of law" which supposes

that man dwells in a closed circle inaccessible to any influences except those which are mechanical, or purely natural. This view narrows human life by settling in an arbitrary manner man's place in nature, and while dwelling upon the nearness of our relationship to the lower creatures shuts us off from the kingdom of God. We cannot help thinking that if it had been possible for men in the past to live in such a close atmosphere, the purest aspirations would have been stifled, and the march of progress stopped. One cannot help regretting such tendencies of thought. It is a high price to pay even for the most brilliant specialism. If a man can not in these days say with Boehm "I have taken all knowledge to be my province," he may gracefully decline to be imprisoned in a small corner marked out by any man. And as for the Divine Life we can still say, "In Him we live and move and have our being, and He is not far from any one of us."

2. A slight reading of history shows us that it is not good to be hasty in putting limits upon the advance of man's knowledge. We concede willingly that the Greek thinkers who despised experiment and spoke slightly of useful inventions were one-sided, and that they suffered even in the realm of thought that was dearest to them by that one-sidedness. Those who first recognized clearly that the natural world is a manifestation of intelligence, and those who taught that "the proper study of mankind is man," have left us words that the world will not willingly let die, but we are not concerned to censure them unduly on account of their limitations, or defend their contempt for natural science. We may learn a lesson from the fact that the apostle of induction who poured such lofty scorn upon them did not fully understand them, and never realized how much he owed to them. Most of us are prepared to admit that it was an evil thing when investigations into the works of nature were stopped by church authority, or scholastic dogmatism or popular prejudice; at present we claim the fullest freedom for experiment, reserving of course the rights of humanity and morality. While this is clearly understood, we are not prepared to give the whole domain of human life and thought into the hands of the physical scientist. This attempt to pin man down to the sphere of sense is another "falsehood of extremes" which will produce a reaction, and of that we can only hope it will not be too severe.

3. Then a very superficial acquaintance with physical science suggests that the attempt to set up a hard and fast line of difference between this and other spheres of thought cannot be justified. True it has the advantage in many departments of sensible experiment, but when it comes to work up particular facts into a body of reasoned knowledge it must avail itself of ideas that are common to all realms of thought. Without dealing now with the nature of our perceptions of the things we do really see, how many of the great things of the physical world are unseen. "Atoms" are unseen things, things which no man hath seen or can see and yet they are very powerful in the world of science. To the chemist they are the great realities of life. If we abolish them and put "centres of force"—whatever they may mean—in their place, we are still dealing with an invisible world. "Ether" as a medium for the transmission of light is not either visible or tangible but it is "a necessity of thought." Now we do not believe that any man is brought to believe in "God," "the world" and "self" by arguments however clever they may be, but we are convinced that when we come to analyse our beliefs in these realities the processes of thought involved are not very much unlike those used by the scientist in his attempt to give a rational explanation of nature. While therefore theology may not be a science in the narrow sense that chemistry is "a science," confining its attention to one body of facts, and their laws, it may be a science in the same sense as the

modern science of anthropology which draws its facts from every department of life and history.

4. It seems one of the strangest things of all that any one should regard agnosticism as an effective weapon to use against superstition. If history teaches us anything it is that it is upon this falsehood that the common man cannot know anything about God or religion that superstitions and dogmatisms have always rested. If the religious instincts could be crushed, or the religious needs satisfied, in some other way, then agnosticism might through scientific education cope with superstition and deliver the human race from the incubus of religion and lead it out into the promised land of nothingness. But things remaining as they are, if man cannot know anything about God, there must be a privileged race of priests and mediators to teach him how to worship and how to live. We have seen in our own time agnosticism made the servant of High Churchism, and those who look carefully may see the same thing in a variety of forms. Even when agnosticism comes as the protector of religion promising to make it so impalpable that its enemies will be compelled to say:

"We do it wrong, being so majestic,
To offer it the show of violence,
For it is as the air invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery."

We still fear the "Greeks bringing gifts," and prefer a religion that will mingle with our common feelings and bear the brunt of life's battle.

5. As the space at our disposal is so brief we must be content with one more thought very roughly presented. The average man must sometimes be amazed and amused at the ambition of those who call themselves agnostics. We need not mention names now as we have no room for detailed criticism, but confine our remarks to a few facts which can hardly be disputed. The most comprehensive system of philosophy ever attempted by any Englishman, comes from "a prophet of evolution" who says that nature is the manifestation of a power that is inscrutable. We cannot now ask how far a power that manifests itself is inscrutable, as that would be to raise the whole question again, we simply note that some of those who accept this statement sit down quickly and write the history of the universe from the time when it was simply a "nebulous haze" up to our own day. It is admitted that there are a few unsolved questions, but it is expected that soon the gaps will be filled up, and the history of matter and of life completed. We are glad to meet such buoyancy of spirit, and vigor of imagination, but with such a depressing doctrine we scarcely expected it. And we are specially interested when one of this school traces with confidence, if not clearness, the passage from "waves of force" through "neutral tremors" into simple sensations and elaborate conceptions, and all this without a soul. Truly it is marvellous, and so agnosticism has solved for her "the problems of life and mind." And yet Professor Tyndal had said "the passage from the physics of the brain to the facts of consciousness is unthinkable." So it is admitted on the highest scientific authority that there is something behind the brain, and we are allowed to call that something "soul," if we remember that we are talking poetry and not science. According to that view of poetry it may be that poetry deals with realities as important as the "facts of science."

"Thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
That they were born for immortality."

It has often been remarked that Tolstoi seems to be unable to make converts by his teachings. There is, however, one exception. Prince Dimitri Khilkow, a rich Russian noble, has given up his estates to his tenants, reserving only a small plot, which he is tilling in person. His influence over the surrounding population is said to be very great, drunkenness and violence have practically ceased. The disciple has evidently greater influence than the master, for Tolstoi is regarded by his tenants with suspicion.