

Messenger and Visitor

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THE EMOTIONAL IN RELIGION.

On another page of this paper will be found an article from the pen of Dr. J. H. Saunders, which deals in an intelligent and interesting way with a phase of religious experience which has found large expression in the history of our own churches in this country as well as in that more general religious movement with which our early history stands closely connected. We direct attention to the article as one that is particularly well worth reading. We are pleased to learn that Dr. Saunders has been devoting considerable attention to this very interesting subject and that the results of his studies are likely to be embodied in permanent form.

The question as to the proper scope and influence of the emotional element in religious experience is one not only of deep interest but of great importance. That the emotional has some legitimate place in religious experience we suppose that no one will care to deny, for emotion is as truly an essential human endowment as is reason. Every day from childhood to old age we are continually experiencing and expressing emotions. Our contact with nature and our intercourse with our fellow men constantly inspire such experiences, and no one thinks of contending that in all the sphere of our social and intellectual life the expression of emotion is not legitimate. To certain things the normal human nature will respond in emotions of surprise, fear, aversion, admiration, love, joy, sorrow, anger etc., and it is natural and right that these emotions should find expression. The expression in particular cases may be extravagant or it may be inadequate or ill-timed, or otherwise imperfect, but no one will think of contending that men and women, as well as children, must not be expected to have emotions and to express them. More than this it is the experience and expression of emotions that give zest to life and force to character. The person who most strongly attracts and influences us is not the listless being who feels little and expresses little, but the person whose response to the facts of human experience is strong in feeling and in expression.

If this is true in reference to the plane of man's contact with nature and humanity, there surely can be no room for question as to there being a legitimate place for the emotional in that sphere of human experience where man draws near to God. On the other hand we must surely expect to find here the profoundest experience of emotion and its strongest, noblest expression. The acceptance of the barest essentials of the Christian faith gives ground for the profoundest exercise of a man's emotional nature. How can a man believe in God, the Father, and in Jesus Christ, His Son, in the need of human redemption, in a crucified Redeemer, in an enlightening and sanctifying Holy Spirit, in a church of God on earth, in a resurrection from the dead and a life everlasting, how can one believe in these and talk about an unemotional religion as a possibility?

There can of course be no question as to there being a legitimate place for the emotional element in religion. The question, so far as there is a question, is rather as to its legitimate expression and its relative value. For in religion, as in other spheres of human experience and conduct, emotion is not everything. It has its place indeed, but it must not be permitted to crowd out other things of equal importance. It must not usurp the throne either of faith or of reason. It is sometimes most valuable as prompting men to action, but it can never be safely accepted as a substitute for action. As Dr. Saunders has well shown, the weakness of that development of Christian experience which found expression in the Newlight movement and in the early history of our own churches in these Provinces was a failure to apprehend clearly the legitimate sphere of the emotional. In its higher or extreme expressions it was attainable only by persons of a highly developed emotional nature, and the tendency to make these ecstatic experiences enjoyed by some the tests of spirituality, led to the simulation of such emotions in some and to a deep dependency in others. It was a type of religious experience that was grounded in a vivid apprehension of the relation of sin-

ful men to a just and holy God, and to the Divine mercy expressed in the atoning death of the Son of God. It embodied much that was true and wholesome and beautiful, and its effect upon the unbelieving was often strong and salutary. But like all other types of human religious experience, it lacked something of perfection, for it is true of such experiences, as of men, that they have the defects of their qualities.

The tendency at the present day in religious experience is not to make too much of the emotional element, but to make too little of it. Indeed, one might almost say that in some quarters there is a tendency to make nothing of it. One finds so prominent a Christian man as President Hyde of Bowdoin College, in an article in the *Independent*, earnestly commending the example of a pastor who had brought into his church seven young men who are described as "normal, healthy, vigorous, athletic fellows, fond of all outdoor sports and all phases of youthful social life." Just what "normal" may mean in this connection we do not know. The other points of the characterization are tolerably plain, but certainly imply nothing of spiritual experience. Dr. Hyde thinks it doubtful if any one of these young men had ever been in a prayer-meeting and certain that none of them had ever "taken part" in a religious meeting of any kind. Nothing in the way of introspective or emotional piety was expected or required of them. Evidently nothing had been said particularly to these young men about their religious experience. It was not thought necessary that they should have had any personal experience of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no question of a supreme love to God or a personal surrender of their lives to his service. "The minister," we are told, "presented to these young fellows the simple fact of the church and what it stands for in the lives of their parents, their homes and the community, and asked them to take sides for or against it: either to lend to it their strength and influence, their time and work in such ways as might be natural and helpful or to stand outside in selfish isolation." And Dr. Hyde thinks that the hope for the Congregationalist churches of the United States is in persuading young men to come into them on such conditions. To oppose the admission of persons of such character and on such profession—or lack of profession—into the church would be in Dr. Hyde's phrase, to set up pharisaic tests of church membership.

Certainly, if President Hyde's plan for recruiting the churches' membership is followed there could be little danger of too much emotional religion. His young men would no doubt have emotions which would find expression at football and base ball matches, in ball rooms and theatres and political meetings, but there seems no reason to suppose that they would have emotions arising from a spiritual experience to express.

A DANGEROUS COMBINATION.

The common saying that no falsehood is so much to be dreaded as a half truth, is true. If a theory is wholly false, it is not likely to deceive many persons for any great length of time, but if it incorporates a specious blending of truth and error, the deception may be widespread and dangerous. It is thus that that curious medley of truth and error, strangely called Christian Science, has come to have so strong an influence over the minds of many persons. Convinced, and rightly so, that it possesses certain elements of truth, and fascinated by its assumptions of human superiority to sin and disease, they leap to the conclusion that it is all true, without waiting to apply to it the logical and common sense tests that are within easy reach.

So far as this teaching emphasises the immediate relation of the human soul to God, as the supreme fact of life, it is true and helpful in its influence, and so far as it exalts the name of Jesus Christ as the world's great teacher and healer, it is also true and helpful. But when it proceeds to deny the reality of matter, and accordingly, any true relation of the human soul to matter, when it denies the reality of sin and disease and therefore the need and the fact of a suffering Saviour, it not only involves itself in hopeless inconsistencies but becomes a delusion and a snare to its devotees.

An instance of the lame logic by which the claims of Christian Science are sought to be supported is found in the following statement of one of its prominent advocates, contained in a lecture delivered the other day before a St. John audience: "As the years have come and gone," said the speaker, "you have so many times said with Paul, 'In God we live and move and have our being,' which is simply saying and only saying, 'in God we have life, health and immortality. Yet you have gone away from every such declaration to the doctor, the druggist or climate, for the life and health which you declared that you had, and had only, in God.' That is to say that all that ministers to life and health, according to this new doctrine, is to be sought directly in God and through no secondary means. God does nothing for us through nature or through men. No healing art is worth anything, and as for climate, the Pontine marshes are as healthful as the Riviera. But why did the lecturer not pursue his theory to its logical conclusion? If we must not go to the physician or to nature in time of need, why go to the baker and the butcher and the clothier and the collier?

What of science is this that in the presence of certain bodily ills will bravely deny the existence of matter, assert the unity of the human soul with God and its independence of all things material, but in the presence of cold, hunger and the ordinary needs of humanity collapses helplessly? To use the lecturer's own phrase—"Religious belief in God cannot be ascertained from human speech. What you do, not what you say, determines the status of your real belief in God." Let the disciples of Mrs. Eddy practice what they preach in respect to this gospel of the non-reality of matter and the entire independence of the human soul of the things called physical and material, and then they may with good assurance demand our acceptance of what they preach. But so long as they respond to a prick or a pinch, in empty stomach or a frigid temperature just as ordinary mortals do, so long as they get hungry and eat, get thirsty and drink, get weary and sleep, get cold and warm themselves, and in short act continually for the most part just as people do who believe in the reality of the material and the physical, we must certainly decline to take them and the doctrines which they preach seriously. It is quite certain however that if these good people should live logically up to their own promises there would soon be none of them left either to preach or to practice.

The lecture to which we have alluded above furnishes a good example of the fast and loose way in which what is called Christian Science deals with the New Testament and the historical Christ. While professing to be in harmony with the Christian religion, it ignores its most essential features. It has much to say of God as the source and support of the life of men, and of Jesus Christ as the healer of disease, but it ignores sin, it apparently ignores entirely the fact and the redeeming work of the suffering Saviour. "Have you ever thought for a moment," asked the lecturer of the tremendous import of the fact that Jesus never preached but one sermon in all his life and never repeated that?" One hardly knows how to characterize such a statement, but it certainly indicates anything but a candid and ingenious spirit in dealing with the records of our Lord's life. Readers of the Gospel narratives do not need to be told that Jesus continually preached the Gospel during the years of his ministry, and that his preaching of the word was not an incidental thing, but that rather his works of healing, important as they were, were secondary to his work of preaching the good-tidings of the Kingdom.

Editorial Notes.

Speaking of the Alaska Boundary Commission and the desirability of a speedy and amicable statement of the questions involved, the *Congregationalist* says: "Should the Commission in session fail to agree on a verdict, and deadlock—there are three representatives of each nation—then the matter should be promptly taken to the Hague Tribunal." This is a proposition which, in the event supposed, would doubtless be acceptable to Canada, as it would have been in the first place. Unfortunately there is little reason to suppose that it would be acceptable to the United States.

It will be remembered that a year or so ago there was a movement on the part of Queen's University, of Kingston, Ont., looking for connection with the Provincial Government. This policy was however negatived by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada at its recent session. Growing out of this action of the Assembly, a conference was held a few days between the trustees of Queen's and a Commission appointed by the Assembly, to consider the future relations of the University to the Church. As an outcome of the conference a resolution was passed declaring that "this conference recognizes the desirability of continuing the connection between Queen's University and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and of preserving the broad Christian and liberal spirit of the institution unimpaired." As a result of further conference between the trustees and the commissioners, the latter agreed to appoint a committee to act with the trustees in an endeavor to secure an additional endowment for the University sufficient to yield an annual sum of \$20,000, and to commend this and all other interests of the University to the generous aid of the members of the Church.

From Halifax.

The Rev. L. G. Donaldson, rector of Trinity church, some time ago preached a sermon from the text, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, etc." According to the census, Mr. Donaldson said, there are only about 133 people in Halifax who are not Christians. To the question, who is a Christian, he replies: "A Christian is one who is in Christ."—"A new creature." Christians are those who have been "born again" into God's family: "We may say," continued Mr. Donaldson, "that the Christian has consciously done two things—he has taken Christ as his Saviour from sin. He trusts in his finished work for his full and free forgiveness;—he has taken Christ as his King."

Of the Episcopal church, Mr. Donaldson says: "Mere church attendance and financial contributions give a man a vote at parish meetings and also makes him eligible for the offices of churchwarden and vestryman. It is true, he must