

Fail to do that, and you will cast away your faith and quench the light of hope, sinking deeper and deeper down in shadow, and silence, and night.

2. The next source of danger I would mention is that of indifference. And here I have to speak of quite another type of character—yet a very common one. For every anxious, earnest seeker after what is true, you will find ten who are content that things shall remain as they are. They never think of going down to the foundations of their faith to see what is there. To criticise an old creed, or lay a finger on an ancient institution, is an act of impiety. The law of progress is their deadly foe. They don't believe in any changes, any reforms, any action that will threaten the old order of things. These are the men to whom religion is just a piece of machinery, working in a very simple and regular way. Once or twice in the week they make their way to some religious service. They were born in the Episcopal Church, and attend there, read the prayers, join the others in the confession of sins they never feel; or they were born in some other Church, and remain so without ever having taken the trouble to enquire into the why and the wherefore of it, attend service there, and go home well satisfied that they have done their duty. I am not exaggerating or over-stating the case. Just look round upon the so-called Christian community and you will find that the vast majority have just put their mill down by the stream of life, and they go grinding on with no more true and conscious vitality than a water-wheel has got. They attend the sanctuary, but are as dull as the cushions they sit upon. They take no Saviour away with them, no strength and no shining of beauty. The service is a kind of entertainment; the hymn is to be joined in because it is music, the minister is to be looked at while he prays, and the sermon is to be criticised or slept through; the whole affair a little more respectable than a play, and not quite so lively as a concert. The duty of giving is met and satisfied by putting the smallest amount possible into the plate when it comes—only when it comes, and others are looking on. Conscience, and right, and justice are outside of it altogether. They pay a yearly tax to some society, and that is a full discharge of their duty to the poor—and they don't object to the sentiment when prayer is offered for all sorts and conditions of men. Do they believe? Oh, yes—anything that is five hundred years old, or more. Are they respectable? Oh, very—the pink of respectability; they never commit any sins that society can notice, and never fall into any blunders. I am not indulging in cynicism; I say this with profound sorrow. Men have grown to treat religion and religious matters with perfect indifference. It is a thing for the spare hours of the week, and must give way to worldly pleasure or profit. If they found that churches hindered instead of helped this growth; if they found that narrow creeds and inelastic forms of worship were not conducive to their moral and spiritual welfare; if they could bestow their charities with more effect outside of our organizations, and could work with more freedom—then I for one would applaud the course they take. But it is not so. It is simple indifference, and only that. They want things made comfortable; they want no stir, no event, no catastrophe, but a smooth way, going by an easy gradient into heaven. And I regard that as a most fruitful source of danger. Better almost anything than that calm indifference—better active infidelity. It means a slow process of apostacy, a gradual petrification of the soul; not a violent wrench that leaves all the being conscious of its loss and pain, but an insensible sinking to dust. Better anything than that. Do you look with sorrow and dismay upon the various and varied assaults that are being made upon the Christian faith? I confess to you that they give me great joy. I thank God for anything and everything that comes along to disturb what is conventional. I thank God for Rationalism. I thank God for the attacks men of science are making on religious beliefs. I am not afraid of controversy—of war; but I am afraid of stagnation, for that means death. And it seems to me just what we are most in danger of now. There is controversy, but it is about beliefs; and the majority of the people say, It is a matter for the men of science and the men of theology—let them fight it out among themselves. There is no demand as of old for courage, no call to heroism, no sacrifice of home and goods, no pains and no penalties; it is all easy and humdrum. There is no rising of waves, no howling of storm, no swirl of black rushing water; and so the ship of life is allowed to drift, on, on, to the rock and wreck. Brethren, beware of that. You are in greater danger from contentment than from enquiry. You are more liable to fall through being satisfied with your creeds and modes of life than from your distrust of them. The church is not a club to which you may go for comfort and convenience; it is the place where you are to get strength and skill for the war against evil and on behalf of the good. Beware of routine; beware of conventionalisms; beware of adopting current opinions because they are current, without enquiry, without interest, without any effort of the soul; orthodox because it is orthodox, or heterodox because it is the fashion to be heterodox. If you are going to live you must have a living interest in religion; the passion of the soul must be for light and progress, for Christ and God. You must not fall into a dead, Pharisaic, conventional form of religion, but have a living, individual and conscious union with the life of God. Some may tell you not to enquire, lest you should doubt; not to think, but to accept blindly the doctrines of the Church, lest you should end in scepticism. Those, come from whom they may, backed by I care not how much of learning and

eloquence, are counsels of cowardice and faithlessness, and are calculated to produce a sleep of the soul ten times worse than any form of scepticism. You want no weak, untried faith, accepted on the word of others; but a faith which is secure, because you have won it by conquest of objections, have reached it through the overthrow of doubts, have proved it in trial and found it strong. Indifference chokes all the springs of life; it produces a conventional religion, which is a whited sepulchre, a religion of words and forms only,—ending in blindness, superstition, stagnation and death. Beware of the treacherous thing.

3. There is one other source of danger which I will do little more than mention now; it is that of allowing the animal to usurp the place of the spiritual, and the temporal the place of the eternal. Esau is a type of the character to which I refer; the man who held the narrow present more dear than the vast unbounded future; the man who cared more to satisfy his hunger than to hold his birthright. And many a man is doing that now. I don't refer to the crowds of the ungodly who make no pretence to religion, and who declare that they live but for themselves. I refer to the people who are gathered into the life of the Church; people who worship in our sanctuaries; people who believe in God and Jesus Christ; in heaven and hell. And they, like Esau, are selling their birthright for a mess of pottage. I mean that they are working only for the present; only to be rich, or powerful, or comfortable. There are few sadder sights upon earth than that. I mean the men who do not become profligate and turn to evil ways, but the men who drift into a state of complete and utter worldliness. When they were young they had dreams of religion, and great thoughts of God; their young hearts swelled with strong desires after the greatness of goodness, and the heroism of faith, as they heard the story of men who by strength have conquered the world. They learnt to pray and to hope in God. It was the morning of life, shining bright with the beauty of promise. Then came the time for work in the world, and the cares of a profession or a business absorbed all their energies. The culture of the mind is neglected first. There is no more converse with the great and the good, who being dead do yet speak living words to the living; no more care to store the mind with facts of history and life, but the day's hard work is followed by an evening's amusement. Then the Sabbath services become irksome; the morning is given up to what is called rest, and the evening service follows—for they learn to dine late in the day—and the hardening process goes on. And keeps going on, until business and pleasure are the gods of life; until Mammon's shrine is the place of their worship; the interest table is their creed; their paternoster, and their decalogue; the only thought is to get on; the only purpose to prosper; and the conscience dies in them; the natural sentiment of justice giving way to a base policy of life, and the heart becomes petrified. It is awful. And yet it is common as an experience. My brothers, are you going that way? It is the way to apostacy and death. You can deny God without broad insolent phrases. You can do it by casting thought of Him out of your life, and recognition of Him out of your daily deeds. I call you from the path that leads to that awful doom. You care a little for God and Christ and holiness now. You have some concern for your conscience, and yet, caring for the world as you do, seeking but pleasure as you are, you are in a fair way of becoming petrified. Rouse yourselves to escape that danger. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

THINGS IN GENERAL.

THE FATE OF WEDDING PRESENTS.

Duplicates and superfluous wedding presents are a good source of annoyance to many a newly married pair in England as well as America. In the latter country, however, with characteristic cleverness, they have known how to turn even this fact to account; and there are reported to be at present at least half a dozen persons in New York alone who have engaged in the business of purchasing or exchanging wedding presents. Of course, the transactions must be carried on in the most private manner, and with no little ingenuity, so as to avoid giving pain to the kindly donors. Half a dozen opera glasses, biscuit boxes, butter dishes, or sugar bowls, is no uncommon number; and as for smaller articles of electro-plate, they pervade every collection of wedding presents to such a dreadful extent that the poor bride positively groans over the sight.

The method of conducting the new business is of itself ingenious. The buyer or exchanger watches the marriages as their respective announcements are published in the daily papers, and collects the names and residences; and when the wedding is that of well known people a list of presents is invariably given; this list is carefully read and thought over, and about three months after the wedded pair have settled down in their new home a gentlemanly stranger makes his appearance, and inquires for Mrs. So-and-so, at the same time sending in his card. The lady repairs to her drawing room and gives audience to her visitor, who opens his business in the most circumspect manner; for, of course, until he knows with whom he has to deal the bare suggestion may be considered offensive. Generally, however, women are very weak where bargains are