

taken by so-called agnostics, with the general decline of faith which may be expected as a consequence, there is imminent danger of a 'moral interregnum.'

Mr. Goldwin Smith himself indicates a reason which to many people who accept life as a fact, with whatever mystery it may be surrounded, seems a sufficient ground for deciding that life must have its source in God. Assuming the correctness of the agnostic position, that the intellectual difficulties of belief and unbelief are equally balanced, we necessarily look elsewhere for a ground of decision. The main object of Mr. Smith's article is to shew that by the belief in God human character gains in moral height, while in the absence of that belief, human character deteriorates. Many a Christian can add to Mr. Smith's historical retrospect the testimony of his individual experience. 'Let a man,' says Dr. Arnold, 'live on the hypothesis of its falsehood (*i.e.*, the belief in God), the practical result will be bad; that is, a man's besetting and constitutional faults will not be checked; and some of his noblest feelings will be unexercised, so that if he be right in his opinions, truth and goodness are at variance with one another, and falsehood is more favourable to our moral perfection than truth; which seems the most monstrous conclusion which the human mind can possibly arrive at.' Surely with such a practical test as this at hand, not only in history but in the facts of daily observation, a man may follow the course of modern thought, with the resolve 'to be absolutely loyal to the truth,' and still not deem it necessary to be agnostic.

Mr. Goldwin Smith is evidently a sincere believer in Christianity as a power for righteousness in the world, but he apparently considers that 'fresh assurances of our faith' are needed. 'Christianity, though it may cease to be accepted as a miraculous revelation, remains the central fact of history, and as such, in connection with other religions, seems to call for an examination which it has not yet received.' The faith of 'free inquirers' in, amongst other things, 'the history of the New Testament, so far as it is miraculous or inseparably connected with miracles,' has been destroyed. However Mr. Smith is probably of opinion that in the New Testament sanctions are to be formed for the 'hypothesis that we are in the

hands of goodness' which are not to be found elsewhere.

Any one who has read the 'Lectures on the Study of History,' and the appreciative remarks there upon the type of character presented in the Gospels, will have some idea on what the author, unless he has found reason to change his views, would probably base the argument from Christianity in favour of Theism. It is possible that a conscientious thinker might find it difficult to give credence to the records of miracles in the New Testament, and still remain convinced that the character of Christ can only be explained as a manifestation of Deity. But, however intellectual and high-minded men, educated in the atmosphere of Christianity, might be confirmed in their belief in God, and aided in their efforts towards holiness, by the contemplation of a divinely beautiful type of character, I have no doubt whatever that a Christianity which offers no more than this, has no power to seriously influence the average man, and keep the world from becoming altogether corrupt.

It is the fashion in some quarters now-a-days to claim that modern 'culture' understands Jesus 'better than the men who were chosen by Him to be His companions, and preach His Gospel. Various efforts have been made by writers of this school to revive the so-called Jesus of History, but none of these attempts, as far as I am aware, commend themselves to sober judgment. The fact is that, if we refuse to accept the unaffected story of the Evangelists as substantially accurate, the Founder of the Christian religion becomes the merest myth. The Christ who stands out from the Gospel pages with such marvellous vividness and consistency, the most real Man in history, to many a follower of His, loses all distinctness of outline, fades away from sight, becomes but a voice uttering a few rather impracticable maxims for conduct. The Jesus of the Evangelists is a Man, with a power, over those who realize the meaning of His life and mission as His companions interpreted it, which is not to be explained on merely human principles. The Jesus of those who consider the greater part of the Gospels as quite unworthy of credence, is necessarily as impersonal as the Delphic oracle. To such a Christ, it is hard to conceive any one rendering a conscious personal allegiance.