

ing on to know the Lord." The article should have appeared as a supplement to that by the same author which is published this week. The article taken in this amended order will preserve the proper sequence.

The Minister's Trap.

It is easily possible to entertain at the one time, principles utterly at variance with each other. One may believe in the truth of christianity and be an advocate of principals fundamentally opposed to christianity. Materialism is thoroughly inconsistent with religion of any and every kind. Yet there have been those who believed in the supernatural and at the same time were advocates of the principles of materialism. Priestly was avowedly a materialist. He nevertheless attained sufficient faith in the supernatural to continue, to the last a Unitarian. Hartley derived all knowledge from sensation and defined sensation to be the result of vibrations in the nervous system. Yet throughout his lifetime he accepted the fundamental truths of christianity. These and similar instances go to show that in the one mind there may lie, side by side, principles thoroughly opposed to each other.

It was this that a certain Reviewer had in mind when he described Benjamin Kidd's famous publication: "Social Evolution," as the ministers trap, the not very complementary title implied that the work, while of such a character as will commend it to the christian minister and to christian people generally, involves principles thoroughly antagonistic to christianity. This doubtless is a grave charge. The question how ever is, can the charge be sustained.

A cursory reading of the book will discover that the author does not write as an advocate of christianity. It will also discover that he does not write as an opponent. His purpose is purely scientific. He writes in the interest of social science. Consequently he limits his investigation to the varied social phenomena that present themselves.

In dealing with social phenomena, however, the author discovers, as every observer will discover, that in every age religion is of the most prominent constituents of social phenomena. He also discovers that in western civilization, christianity is one of the most prominent constituents. This makes it necessary to examine in their social bearings religion in general and christianity in particular. It is while conducting this examination that the author gives his estimate of christianity.

What the author thinks of christianity may be summed up in three statements. It may be said first of all that he regards christianity as the life of Western Civilization, the evolving force that in the course of the centuries developed western civilization out of primitive barbarism. He admits that other forces have done something to produce modern civilization. He claims however that christianity is by far the most effective of these forces and without which western civilization could not have been produced.

Another position that he holds is that christianity has produced this result in virtue of its ethical system. The ethics of christianity are, as he says, altruistic. Christianity is, therefore, a strong altruistic force. At the beginning of our era it introduced into history a mighty altruistic force. By virtue of this force christianity has in the course of the ages transformed primitive barbarism into modern civilization. It abolished slavery. It has secured political equality. It will secure "equality of opportunity." All this it has done and will do because of the distinctively altruistic character of its ethics.

The third position that he may be said to hold is that the altruistic ethics of christianity are such a mighty elevating force because they are sanctioned by

a supernatural religion. Christian ethics he holds have their root in a supernatural religion. It is because of this, he contends, they have been able to produce so great and so happy a result. There are those who say that christian ethics would have produced western society without the sanction of a supernatural religion. The author examines this view coming to the conclusion that it is altogether false, that christian ethics would be largely powerless to produce such a result were it not that christianity is a supernatural religion.

These three positions sum up what the author positively teaches in regard to christianity. With each of these the orthodox believer will cordially agree. Indeed these are some of the positions which the church persistently claims for christianity. And the devout christian can hardly fail after reading the book, to be abundantly thankful that such a powerful and persuasive advocate has been found to plead these claims in its behalf, and the fact that the author pursues the course of his argument in a spirit thoroughly independent without prejudice or prepossession will only go to intensify this feeling.

There are other views evidently held by the author which the devout believer can hardly accept; some indeed which he must decidedly reject. For instance it would seem that while the author makes so much of the supernatural character of christianity it is with him a matter of indifference whether the supernatural be objectively valid or not. It is true that as a scientist dealing with social development, what he has to consider is the evolving power of the idea of the supernatural lodged in mind and heart. As he says himself: "The question is not whether any section of persons however learned is of opinion that these beliefs are without foundation in reason, but, whether religious systems have a function to discharge in society." It is also true however, that unless the idea of the supernatural were objectively valid it would cease to be an elevating and evolving force. The author should therefore have made it sufficiently distinct to subdue all suspicion that with him supernatural religion was not only subjectively but also objectively valid. If he had said distinctly that it was not objectively valid every orthodox believer would immediately part company with him. The complaint made is that he seems to regard the subjective validity as the only important matter and consequently that he does not inform the reader what his view is, in reference to the objective validity. He would almost make the reader suppose that he maintained the objective validity of the religions of Greece and Rome as much as he did that of Christianity.

The book certainly contains very defective views in regard to the relation of religion and reason. He definitely holds that reason cannot justify belief in the supernatural. He believes that the idea of the supernatural will always exercise a large elevating influence over the race. Somehow the idea has taken possession of our human nature and it will always hold possession. He denies however that it can be shown that there is a real supernatural corresponding to the idea. In other words christianity doubtless is what it is said to be. This however cannot be proved. In this view no orthodox believer can follow the author. Such a view is altogether antagonistic to christianity. The intelligent christian will unhesitatingly admit that the truth of christianity cannot be established with mathematical certainty. He will however most emphatically claim that its truth can be established with moral certainty, in other words, that the evidence advanced is of such a character that reason will justify faith in christianity as a supernatural religion. The church has always made this claim and must continue to make it. To admit that reason cannot justify belief in the supernatural is to admit what, if true, would ultimately overthrow christianity.

It would thus seem as if there was truth in the charge implied in the phrase: "Minister's Trap."