

A PERSONAL RELIGION.

BY REV. D. W. FAUNCE, D.D.

To cast off Christ's religion would be to leave all the dearest hopes both of our personal advancement and of the world's moral progress. Intertwined with the facts of Christianity are our dearest affections. So that we must say with Paul, if the facts are not as presented in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, "we are of all men most miserable." We hear men sometimes with flippant tone announcing their belief that Christianity is false. But if that be so, say it sadly, and with tears, as you would tell a loving child of the death of the mother that bore it and nourished it and loved it. Say it as the most sorrowful thing that human lips can utter, that the credentials of Christ—his mighty deeds and more mighty words—are not enough, and so never can God give a proven revelation to man. Say it with mourning, that the perfect purity and elevation and stainlessness of Christ's character in the New Testament is all a mistake; that He did not live, or that if He did, His disciples devised his words and imagined his deeds, and that such deception has led the world's enlightenment, and so that we are all a duped race led by dupes, a race of maniacs led by fools and knaves; and yet that these fools and knaves have wondrously helped men to be better, and made men holier, and broadened their views, and informed their intellects, and enriched their moral natures, and made them to live nobler and more self-denying lives, and to die sweeter, holier, happier deaths, looking onward to a still holier state; and yet that all this is deusion, deception, mistake, imposture! In striking at Christianity with iconoclastic hand one strikes at humanity as well as its dearest hopes, its sweetest consolations, its best ideals, its strongest impulses, its most praiseworthy charities and moralities. If it must be said at all, say it with bated breath, that Christianity is untrue; for if untrue, it is the most awful of untruths, and we ought at once to weed it out of human literature, out of common language and common life. We ought to begin with childhood, and stop it in its repetition of the Lord's prayer, to forbid infant lips from ever again uttering the words, "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"; we ought to stop the rites of burial, and cast out of them the words, "I am the resurrection and the life," to tell the mourner, though it will make him twice a mourner, that he has not only lost his friend but his Saviour; we ought to assure age, though it will tremble all the more to know it, that there is some mistake as to the Bible which has been the staff on which it leaned, and that the Heavenly Father did not say, "I will never leave nor forsake thee," nor Christ promise, "He that believeth in me shall never die."

And as with personal hope, so with the inspirations of genius and the progress of art and of learning; for, the support of Christianity gone, there is for them a mournful future. Before the advent of Christianity, how much of art was too abominable for description. But the single conception of the Virgin and her Child, cut in a thousand marbles, painted a thousand times on canvas, in every variety of detail, has revolutionised and elevated art. Nothing blotted out the old ideals until Christianity flooded the realms of painting and statuary with a new and tender beauty. So always through the centuries this religion of Christ is purifying everything it touches, and is doing it exactly as far and as fast as men take into mind and heart the great facts and doctrines which are its distinction and its glory.

Nor art and literature, but the common impulses of common life, would be ruinously affected if the religion of Christ were left as untrue. All the higher motives that lift men from a merely physical condition would droop.* With it would go all higher views of God, of duty, of the nobility of man, of just and humane law; and society must inevitably decline, since the great teachings of morals which have exalted the world's admiration have been connected with a system called Christianity, which the world now leaves because false—and if the one part false, how the other true?

It has been thought by some that we might drop all the

* That this is not a mere speculation in the following quotation from the elder Pliny will show: "The vanity of man, and his insatiable longing for existence, have led him to dream of a life after death. A being full of contradiction, he is the most wretched of creatures, since the other creatures have no wants transcending the bounds of their nature. Among these two great evils the best thing God has bestowed on man is the power to take his own life."

miracles and the doctrines that are distinctive, and still have all the impulses and moralities of Christianity. Yes, if moralities are mere outward things, mere wax flowers from milliners' shops, instead of genuine flowers growing on stems and out of seed and soil as God made them to grow. There is a natural belief in immortality. But it is inoperative aside from the light of revelation. And as it has never been efficient apart from the biblical disclosures, so it never will be for any length of time after the biblical doctrine of it has been left. For a single generation, possibly for two, if Christianity was discarded, there would remain a little of the Christian sap in Deism; but it would soon depart. It is doubtful if mere natural religion would live long enough to draw another breath after the going out from of all that is distinctly Christian in thought and feeling and belief. Says one of the best thinkers and best known educators of our day: "The course of things, if Deism should be the ultimate religion, can be easily foretold. As long as the recollections and influences of Christianity survived its fall, earnest souls would hope on; they would stay their souls' hunger on the milk drawn from the breasts of their dead mother. But a new age would toss about in despair. If a sense of sin remain, the life of all noble souls will be an anxious gloomy tragedy. Or if that burden be cast off, then the standard of character will fall and the sense of sin grow faint, so that pardon will not be needed, and the utmost frivolity be reached in life and manners."[†]

Nothing, absolutely nothing, is given us in return if we surrender either our theoretic belief in Christianity or our practical obedience to it. What else can do anything for the deepest yearnings and largest wants of the soul? Giving up Christianity is giving up the thing that ought to be true, just as there ought to be light if there are eyes, and sounds if there are ears, and air if there are lungs. And as the bodily organs are furnished with that on which they can best thrive, so the faculties of mind and heart can best be developed by the religion of him who came "that men might have life, and might have it more abundantly." For the deepest and most important intuitions man possesses are seized upon by religion and are made clear and influential. The germ of these truths is developed by the Scriptural doctrine, and they are made potent for man's good. All the difficulties are at least as great without as with the Bible; as great in the germ-truth, as in its form of growth and bud and blossom. And then there is the added difficulty of accounting for this fact; how it is that, if Christianity is false it can so singularly, powerfully, beautifully, take up and develop these germ-truths in the mind and these most blessed hopes in the heart, and thus purify, elevate, and ennoble the man who believes and practises it.—*From a Young Man's Difficulties with His Bible.*

SPARROWS.

BY IDA WHIPPLE BENHAM.

A motley crowd had gathered in the street

To listen to sweet words of hope and love;

The city's dust was blown around their feet,

But all the sky was very blue above.

And 'twixt the city's dust and heaven's blue

A flock of soft-winged, twittering sparrows flew.

"God sees the sparrow's fall," the good man said;

And at the word a thousand eyes, upturning,

Gazed on the fluttering wild birds overhead.

With sudden tenderness and upward yearning.

And, even as they looked, a sweet, swift song

Burst from the feathered choir upon the throng.

"And since the sparrows praise, why should not we?"

The preacher said; and straightway, at his word,

The voice of song arose triumphantly;

Men, women, children, singing with the birds

A song of praise so fervent, full, and clear,

I deem the saints themselves had joyed to hear!

At length the choral ceased, and all the throng,

With hushed and humbled hearts, went on their way,

And in some hearts the echo of that song

Made heavenly music till their dying day.

If God a simple sparrow's fall doth see,

Then surely His sweet care is over me!

—*Christian Union*

[†] Pres. Woolsey, in "Religion of the Present and the Future"