

ALLOY IN RELIGION.

Belfast Witness.

We are all familiar with the fact that pure gold does not work well, it must be mixed with an alloy of harder metal in order to stand the wear and tear of practical every-day use. Now is there anything similar in the realm of religion? Let us see. From the earliest times in the Church's history schools or sects have arisen, such as the Montanists of the second century, founded on the principles of abstract purity. There were Puritans long before the seventeenth century, there were reformers long before the Reformation. Time and again a few earnest souls endeavored to restore a rigorous life. All of them had a certain success. Those movements for Apostolic faith and worship, plain living, and humble holiness, drew after them a considerable following, and helped to keep alive the ideals of New Testament religion. But as they tried to work with pure gold, the gold of an ideal without alloy, they never obtained world-wide success, nor a permanence in human history. These purist schools and societies and communions were gradually absorbed into the prevalent Church which contained sufficient practicable and human alloy to render it workable in every-day life amongst average people.

Just look at a few facts. Every traveler in Italy who knows his Bible knows and sees that the Waldenses are much nearer the pattern of primitive Apostolic Christianity than the Romanists. But Romanism has mixed in with the Gospel a great amount of other elements, both good and bad. In the result Rome captures and holds the aristocracy and the peasantry, politicians and professionals, fine ladies and village maidens; it has great corporations and large funds; it has architecture, music, and painting; it recognizes the many-sided human nature; while all these years the Waldenses are a scattered remnant, a select few, believing what St. Paul believed, and practicing what St. John would have them practice. Nor does there appear to be any probability that these conditions will be reversed, so that pure Christianity may prevail, and the great basilica of St. Peter ring with Gospel preaching, and the Vatican be the home of a poor but pious Pastor. Come nearer home. When George Fox started his mission the Church of England was dead or dying. Many of the clergy lived worldly lives—some worse than worldly; spiritual religion had ceased to operate, and was scarcely visible in one parish out of a hundred. Fox and his Quakers, with all their limitations, endeavored to restore spiritual life and practice, and they made their mark on England and the United States. But they excluded music, the regular ordained Ministry, and the symbolic Sacraments. So they never gained ascendancy, and are now a fast dwindling minority. It might be supposed that the Presbyterian Church would long ere this have won universal acceptance. It founds on the Word of God both as to faith and worship, as to polity and practice. Its ambition has ever been to keep the most fine gold pure from all admixture of other elements. It holds the great doctrines of Catholic truth; it preserves, or at least endeavors to preserve, the primitive worship of the Apostolic age. Mr. Bryce, historian and Irish Secretary, said the other day that a visit to the Catacombs would convince anyone that no existing modern Church entirely preserves the features of primitive Christianity. That may be admitted, and partly it is because no modern Church can perfectly reproduce the earliest conditions. But an unprejudiced observer must confess that Moravians, Waldenses, and Presbyterians are much nearer to the original Christian society than (for example) the Greek Church in Russia to-day, or the Latin Church in Italy and Spain. He would be a hardy controversialist who should at-

tempt to defend the opposite. Yet neither the Moravian nor the Presbyterian Communion commands half the adherents of the Greek or Latin Religion. In Ireland at one time the Presbyterian Church was the largest Protestant Communion here; it is not so now; why? If we visit the United States of America, that free held, with no favor to any, with no State Establishment or endowment, where every system has enjoyed an equal chance to work out its own success, there Presbytery stands indeed high—morally and intellectually very high—but in numbers and popular vogue it is only third in that country. In England, as we showed recently, Presbytery offers many attractions to Englishmen who like an educated and ordained Ministry, with simple Scriptural worship, with a Christian atmosphere of clarity and good works. Yet Presbytery has a hard task in England, and makes way rather slowly. As with Churches, so it is with religious literature, worship, and other things. Every man with a poetical faculty and literary taste knows and feels that Sankey's hymns are very inferior, and in some cases quite unfit, for use in Christian worship. Yet in most places these songs have displaced not only the Psalter, but the best hymns of Wesley, Toplady, and Ray Palmer. The pure hymn, like the pure gold, does not get into such wide use as that which is mixed with a considerable alloy.

The conclusion seems to be something like this—The world at large is not yet able to appreciate the pure gold, the pure gold is not yet workable amongst the masses of mankind. High music is not enjoyed in the majority of populations, nor lofty poetry, nor correct and thoughtful preaching, nor a simple Scriptural Church Order, nor a pious, sane and practical, without sensationalism. Well, the Church of Christ cannot consent to any mingling of that which is evil. We must not admit, as the Roman Church has admitted, mixtures of sheer Paganism and Judaism. The Church must continue to keep on the lines of New Testament teaching and Apostolic practice. The task of the modern Church is therefore, a very difficult one. But the best things are always difficult, and difficulty is a spur to noble natures. The Church's task is to hold up before the people the purist and highest ideals of religion, and yet win the consent and adherence of the general population. That can only be done by a holy sagacity and sanctified adaptation to the conditions of the problem. If the Church lays itself out to meet the wants and religious instincts of mankind as mankind, it will become the church of mankind; otherwise it becomes the religious preserve of a sect or limited society. Christianity itself was in danger of becoming a limited Jewish sect, that was averted by the universalism of St. Paul, who wisely taught its adaptation to be the religion of the world. Some persons there are who seem much too ready to accept such a limitation; they talk of "the little flock," and that "Many are called, but few are chosen," and such like. But if Christ set before us the ideal of a world evangelized and saved, the Church must never sit down satisfied with any lower and less result. The very least we can do is to make sure that the universal expansion of the Church is not hindered by any want of adaptableness and human workableness in the means and methods of all our Christian effort. That is evidently a lesson which the Evangelical Churches of the world (including our own) have got to learn. A broader sympathy, a wider humanism, concession in things non-essential, the holy and wise guile of Apostolic fisherscraft that "catches men," winning all classes and all races, and building them up into a living temple in the Lord.

If you are a Christian, the devil will never get in front of you unless you turn round.

THE SADDUCEES.

By Rev. Robert Johnston, D.D.

The fundamental characteristics of the Sadducees, was that they stood, as a party, opposed in doctrine and practice to the Pharisees. It is altogether likely that they had their origin, as a party, in a revolt from Pharisaic practice and teaching. This revolt was originally social and political, rather than religious; and the Sadducees formed, therefore, at first, a political party, not a religious sect. The influence of Greek thought and life in, and subsequent to, the time of Alexander the Great, was powerful in Israel, while wealth flowed into the land, with its temptation to luxury and ease. The stricter Jews urged a policy of resistance to everything that savored of foreign influence; but others, both from a desire of rest and quiet, and, perhaps, from a desire to enjoy much that foreign life brought to them, urged a policy of non-resistance to their Gentile conquerors and to their methods of life. To this latter party the Sadducees belonged; indeed, it may be said this party they formed.

Politics and religion are always (appearances sometimes to the contrary), and were particularly in Israel, closely associated. It became, therefore, necessary for this new political party to find a religious warrant for its position. The Pharisees appealed to tradition and the teaching of the rabbis; the Sadducees, therefore, developed, as one of their outstanding doctrines, the rejection of oral tradition, professing to base their beliefs directly on the written word of God, though, as our Lord showed, they sadly misinterpreted its teachings and spirit.

In carrying out this principle, perhaps also in their sympathetic study of Greek philosophy, and in their desire to emphasize their opposition to their opponents, the Pharisees, they developed three distinctive doctrines, all of them negations:

(1) They denied the resurrection, personal immortality, and retribution in a future life. (2) They denied angels, spirits and demons,—in general, a spirit world. (3) They denied predestination as it was taught by the Pharisees, and asserted the freedom of every man to choose good or evil, and to work out his own happiness or the reverse.

The influence of the Sadducees in the state was due to their social position, rather than to their numbers. Their disciples belonged chiefly to the aristocracy of Israel, and were in sympathetic association with the court life. They praised morality, but ridiculed the religion that found its life in ritual. Their own religion was negative rather than positive, and, therefore, lacked the life and warmth and power that make for growth and permanence. In their protest against Pharisaic narrowness, they had gone to the other extreme, and had abandoned that simplicity and separateness of life belonging to their character as a peculiar people, as God's chosen representative nation on earth. They mingled freely with the heathen, affected the culture of their conquerors, adopted their luxurious habits, and were prepared to submit without protest to the subjugation of their land to foreign powers. With a decline of religious fervour had come also a decline of patriotic zeal. The Sadducees, in a word, formed a party among the Jews, characterized by scepticism, indifference and worldliness; a party whose interest in religion was speculative rather than real, of the intellect rather than of the heart. It is not surprising that in the hearts of such men the words of Christ, characterized as they were by earnestness and reality, awakened no response.

A great office cannot cure a contemptible nature.