

ferent practice. There is as much as an intimation that there is a sort of neutral sphere in which every man, up to a certain point is at liberty to follow the dictates of his own conscience, but must not make his practice a law to others. The modern Pharisee sometimes stretches the law too far, as did his ancient prototype, in pushing ~~influence~~ *influence* too boldly.

Up to the point we have reached we might attribute the errors of the Pharisees to narrowness of judgment, and deficiency of intellectual and spiritual insight. A blind idolatry of the past, a hide-bound traditionalism, a shallow externalism, and a burdensome system of petty prescriptions and restrictions, are scarcely in themselves evils of such moral turpitude as to account for the blighting scorn, and bitter invective which ever blaze forth from Jesus against them. But advance a stage to the results which naturally and actually flowed from these principles, to the sad fruitage of these pernicious roots, and we shall cease to wonder at the terrible thunderbolt flung at the heads of the Pharisees in our text: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers; how can ye escape the damnation of Hell."

IV. *Two hideous vices were born of the system. Its natural Daughters were self-righteousness and sham-righteousness* (if the ugly word may be allowed to describe the ugly thing).

1. First-born is self-righteousness.

A religion which had worked itself to the surface of life under the operation of the causes we have been considering, and clothed itself in a web of outward forms, infallibly led those whose circumstances favoured a considerable success in outward conformity, to compare themselves complacently with others less successful. The consequence was an inflated sense of superior righteousness, and a corresponding contempt of other men. Hence our Lord puts into the mouth of the Pharisee in the temple, as descriptive of the spirit of the class the words: "God I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

Popular sentiment agrees with Scripture in regarding self-righteousness with contempt and abhorrence. The calm self-complacency of the self-righteous man, and his air of lofty superiority are repugnant to all. His supercilious contempt for others is offensive, while there is often a well-founded suspicion that the virtues he so ostentatiously professes are not always real. Such a man stalks about among his fellow-men wrapped in a mantle of self-sufficiency, with every feature and every gesture proclaiming, "I am holier than thou." Nothing more effectually kills out all generous sympathy with humanity, nothing more surely wraps the soul in narrowness and self-conceit.