



A Better World.

If more would act the play of life,
And fewer spoil it in rehearsal;
If bigotry would sheath its knife
Till good became more universal;
If custom, gray with ages grown,
Had fewer blind men to adore it—
If talent shone
In truth alone.
The would be the better for it.
—Selected.

Ingersoll to The Clergy.

Truth Seeker Library.

You say that the pews will be empty in the future unless the church meets the intellectual demands of the present. Are not the ministers of today, generally speaking, much more intellectual than those of a hundred years ago, and are not the "liberal" views in regard to the inspiration of the bible, the atonement, future punishment, the fall of man, and the personal divinity of Christ which openly prevail in many churches, an indication that the church is meeting the demands of many people who do not care to be classed as out-and-out disbelievers in Christianity, but who have advanced views on those and other questions?

As to the first part of this question, I do not think the ministers of today are more intellectual than they were a hundred years ago; that is, I do not think they have greater brain capacity, but I think, on the average, the congregations have a higher amount. The amelioration or orthodox Christianity is not by the intelligence in the pulpit, but by the brain in the pews. Another thing: One hundred years ago the church had intellectual honors to bestow. The pulpit opened a career. Not so now. There are too many avenues to distinction and wealth—too much worldiness. The best minds do not go into the pulpit. Martyrs had rather be burned than be laughed at. Most ministers of today are not naturally adapted to other professions promising eminence. There are some great exceptions, but those exceptions are the ministers nearest Infidels. Theodore Parker was a great man. Henry Ward Beecher is a great man—not the most consistent man in the world—but he is certainly a man of mark, a remarkable genius. If he could only get rid of the idea that Plymouth church is necessary to him—after that time he would not utter an orthodox word. Chapin was a man of mind. I might mention some others, but, as a rule, the pulpit is not remarkable for intelligence. The intelligent men of the world don't believe in orthodox Christianity. It is today a symptom of intellectual decay. The conservative ministers are the stupid ones. The conservative professors are those upon whose ideas

will be found the centuries' moss, old red sandstone theories, prehistoric silurian. Now, as to the second part of the question: The views of the church are changing. Orthodox religion is a kind of bo-constrictor; anything it can't dodge it will swallow. The church is bound to have something for sale that somebody wants to buy. According to the pew demand will be the pulpit supply. In old times the pulpit dictated to the pews. Things have changed. Theology is now run on business principles. The gentleman who pays for the theories insists on having them suit him. Ministers are intellectual gardeners, and they must supply the market with such religious vegetables as the congregations desire. Thousands have given up belief in the inspiration of the bible, the divinity of Christ, the atonement idea and original sin. Millions believe now that this is not a state of probation; that a man, provided he is well off, and has given liberally to the church, or whose wife has been a regular attendant, will, in the next world, have another chance; that he will be permitted to file a motion for a new trial. Other think that hell is not as warm as it used to be supposed; that, while it is very hot in the middle of the day, the nights are cool; and that, after all, there isn't so much to fear from the future. They regard the old religion as very good for the poor, and they give them the old ideas on the same principle that they give them their old clothes. These ideas, out at the elbows, out at the knees, buttons off, somewhat raveled, will, after all, do very well for paupers. There is a great trade of this kind going on now—selling old theological clothes to the colored people in the south. All I have said applies to all churches. The Catholic church changes every day. It does not change its ceremonies; but the spirit that begot the ceremonies, the spirit that clothed the skeleton of ceremony with the flesh and blood and throb of life and love, is gone. The spirit that built the cathedrals, the spirit that emptied the wealth of the world into the lap of Rome, has turned in another direction. Of course the churches are all going to endeavor to meet the demands of the hour. They will find new readings for the old texts. They will find that "flat" meant "a little rounding;" that "six days" meant "six long times;" that the word "flood" should have been translated "dampness," "dew," or "threatened rain;" that Daniel in the lion's den was an historical myth; that Samson and his foxes had nothing to do with this world. All these things will be gradually explained and made to harmonize with the facts of modern science.

Advance Toward Truth.

By Dr. L. Buchner.

In his admirable "Essay on Man's Place in Nature," the celebrated anatomist and philosopher, Professor Huxley, compares the process of development by which the human intellect is constantly advancing towards truth, with the periodical moultings of a feeding and growing grub. "From time to time," he says, "the old integument becomes too straitened for the growing animal, it is therefore burst asunder and replaced by a new and larger growth. Precisely the same thing occurs in the history of the intellectual development of man. The human mind, fed by constant accessions of knowledge, grows too large for its theoretical coverings, and periodically bursts them asunder, to appear in new habiliments."

Since the revival of learning in the fifteenth century, there has been an abundance of strong food for the human intellect, the education of which was indeed commenced by the Greek philosophers, but then suffered the interruption of a long intellectual stagnation or sleep of fourteen centuries. I will not stop to inquire, by what influence this stagnation was brought about, although this is clear enough to the eyes of those who are acquainted with true history, and not merely with that substitute for it which has been concocted by theologians and philosophers for their own purposes.

But this revival of science being once set on foot, it was inevitable that a more frequent bursting of the old integuments would take place, and this process of intellectual moulting must be frequently repeated. And so it was in the sixteenth century, by the overthrow of the old astronomical system and the influence of the Reformation! and at the end of the eighteenth century, by the period of intellectual enlightenment and the influence of the great French Revolution!

And now once more the human intellect has received such a quantity of strong and stimulating nourishment by the extraordinary progress of the natural sciences during the last fifty years, that a new and great change and a repeated bursting of the old integuments appears to be inevitable.

Nevertheless, as Huxley remarks in carrying still further his admirable simile, just as these periodical moultings are not effected without superinducing various diseased con-

ditions, disturbances, and general debility in the animal undergoing change,—so also in the intellectual world these metamorphoses are likewise attended with perils and discomforts of all kinds. Therefore, it is the duty of every good citizen and patriot to aid with all the strength and means at his command, (however small they may be) towards the speedy and satisfactory completion of this process or necessary crisis, or at any rate to do what he can to assist in bursting and stripping off the old integuments, and thus give room and liberty to the growing body.

The Wrong Basis.

By John Wilson.

There is another weakness in the theological sanction of morals which the rise of science has created, and which she is destined to increase as time goes on—viz., the liability of the mind towards doubt and disbelief in the fundamental hypothesis of theology. The moral code—as theology puts it—rests entirely on the assumption that God is a man-like being; and its only sanction is the expectation that this God will reward those who by good conduct please him, and punish those who displease him by bad. It is evident that every shade of doubt that passes over the theological mind as to the truth of the theological dogmas must diminish the efficiency of such a sanction, and that total disbelief must entirely destroy it. Those brought up in the belief that the foundation of the moral code is the existence of a man-like God, and that its only sanction is his pleasure and anger, if this belief be once lost, are left without any motive for choosing good conduct and avoiding bad. The nature of things, of course, in time corrects this error. But how many young people are miserably wrecked before they are aware of having left the safe and true course of conduct! Nature is a stern and relentless teacher; those who come into collision with her laws are ground into powder. The lesson is taught that the theological idea of the possibility of breaking the laws of the universe is a terribly false one. In how many instances does this teaching—that we may act and escape the natural consequences—involve the individual who accepts it in destruction!

"The moving finger writes, and, having writ,
Moves on. Nor all your piety and wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wipe out a word of it."