

The Daily Astorian.

ASTORIA, OREGON:

SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 1888

A PRESENT PROBLEM.

Even to this day, Thomas the Doubter is mentioned with disparagement, although the record represents him as one of the most loyal and brave of the disciples. It is certainly not surprising that a cool-headed man, living in the midst of a credulous and insincere people and familiar with the extravagance of Oriental speech, should question the resurrection of a master he had seen crucified. He has been regarded as a type of wicked unbelievers; for it has not been the interest of the church to separate wickedness from unbelief, to discriminate between dissent and rebellion. A saint must be obedient. The noblest canonized are praised most highly for submission to authority.

Now that the gibbet and stake are out of fashion, invective and contumely are the instruments with which dogmatists endeavor to torture the man of independent convictions. So much easier is it to silence an opponent with outcry than to refute his arguments. Skepticism, which is considered synonymous with doubt, is equally in disrepute; although, in the Greek, it merely meant close examination. Hemsterhuis traces it to a word meaning to shade the eyes with the hand. The significance of this derivation is apparent to the traveler blinded by his own lantern, or the astronomer who excludes intercepting rays when studying the stars.

It is generally asserted that skeptics are multiplying. If this is a fact to be deplored, there should be reasons and remedies for it. It is proper, therefore, that ministers and churches should inquire seriously why men doubt and how to meet their doubts. The first question is not difficult to answer. Science withholds her verdicts until searching investigation has been made; and the cultivation of the scientific instinct has made great progress within a half-century. Formerly, the religious teacher said, "Believe it because I say it." The presumption which now requires him to give his reasons would have been perilous if not fatal. Even Calvin condemned Servetus for "luxurious inquisitiveness."

While the ancient intimidations of the church have thus been disarmed, and ancient infallibilities are proved delusive, pulpit argument often appeals to data which reason will not accept. As a result, unbelief is confirmed, not removed. How can thinking men and women forbear distrusting positive and definite statements concerning a heaven no man has visited, a future outside of all human experience, a God no finite mind can comprehend? It is also noticeable that much modern doubt is a reaction against the false teachings of childhood. The child takes everything on trust, but, arriving at man's estate, falls into the fashion of reconsidering the basis of every truth. How, then, shall religion escape the crucible of free inquiry? Nor is such inquiry unwholesome, if it is calm and persistent. Too many go no farther than disillusion and discouragement. This "little learning is a dangerous thing," for even superstition is better than no belief. There are some so-called skeptics, however, who do not scrutinize because they cannot reason. The Australian savage, with whom all numbers beyond three are infinity, can have no perceptions which we would call religious; and there are in Christendom men not far above him, without the capacity to discern or discuss deep spiritual truths.

Shake the confidence of those who judge religion solely by externals, and they have nothing left. When the inaccuracy of Genesis is recognized, they will renounce the New Testament,

because it is bound in the same cover. This class may believe the greatest absurdities, solely because they do not understand them, and will reject truths for the same reason. The ranks both of atheism and superstition are recruited by such. They examine truth as a child examines a toy, destructively, or as a crow examines a watch, with a semblance of sagacity, but without adequate intelligence. Another class who pass for skeptics are actuated by hostility to the good, beautiful and true. They delight in invading sanctities and unsettling belief by the "perverse disputings of corrupt minds." They are the Nihilists of faith, aiming only to disturb the established order and revel in confusion. They are sufficiently numerous; they are not relatively increasing, although modern tolerance renders them more bold. The spirit they exhibit is not skepticism, but downright godlessness. Argument is powerless to reform it; nor will it be affected or reached by anything which preacher or church may do, since appeals which are studiously unheard, arguments which are scoffed at, and denunciations which are disregarded are equally ineffective.

Finally, there is a class more numerous than either mentioned, who, while they cannot be called skeptics or doubters, are certainly not believers, for the simple reason that they have never experienced any deep religious interest. These are liable to make of Sunday merely a day of leisure or pleasure. Together with those already described they constitute a large number, possibly the majority, who are not church goers. If a few attend church, they confess that the services do not move them. The problem before the churches, therefore, is not only how to increase church attendance, but how to make it satisfactory and profitable.

NEW TO-DAY. THE STEAMER MOUNTAINEER.

Capt. Steve Babbidge. Astoria, Or., Cathlamet, W. T., Westport, Or., and intermediate points.

Beginning March 23, 1886. The Steamer Mountaineer will leave Main Street Wharf Daily at half past three o'clock P. M. as follows:

Monday, Wednesday and Friday, for Cathlamet and intermediate points on the Washington Territory side.

Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, for Westport and intermediate points on the Oregon side.

Will leave Cathlamet, W. T., for Astoria, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, at seven o'clock A. M., touching at all way landings on Wash. Ter. side, and return on same side.

Will leave Westport for Astoria on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, at seven o'clock A. M., touching at all way landings on Oregon side, and return on same side.

For Freight or Passage apply on board, or to Main Street wharf.

Dissolution of Partnership. THE PARTNERSHIP HERETOFORE existing between F. E. Shute and Jas. Davidson under the firm name of F. E. Shute & Co., is this day dissolved by mutual consent.

THE PIONEER RESTAURANT! When you feel inclined to take A Square Meal for twenty-five cents

Cheap Lumber! TO CASH CUSTOMERS.

CLATSOP MILL CO To Rent. A FINE SUITE OF ROOMS IN THE ODD Fellows' Building.

Teacher's Examination THERE WILL BE A QUARTERLY Examination for those wishing county teacher's certificates at the court house on Friday and Saturday, the 29th and 27th inst., beginning at nine o'clock A. M.

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By Rev. A. J. JOSLYN, Sunday Evening, March 21st, IN THE METHODIST CHURCH.

The Pastor will Handle with Kindly yet Ungloved Hands the Question: "Should Christian People, Moral People, or Any Other Kind of People, Patronize Theaters, Balls and Card Parties?"

The Negative Side will of course be taken, and something more than mere statement, dogma or pious whine be given as a reason for, and in proof of position taken.

All friends of the question, pro and con, are cordially invited to attend—save such as are afraid of the light or too cowardly to face the actual truth of matters, such need not apply.

Come as early as 6:30, attend the song service and secure seats, which are free to all.

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See that the word CAPITOL is on each sack GEORGE SHIEL, 4 Stark St., Portland Agent. WILSON & FISHER, Astoria Agents.

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