

The Coming Day.

JUNE, 1891.

OUR JUSTIFICATION.

[SPOKEN BY JOHN PAGE HOPPS AT THE OPENING OF A UNITARIAN CHURCH AT BOURNEMOUTH; MAY 6TH, 1891.]

IN adding another to the many churches which offer a religious home to mankind, it is our duty to justify that. I say "justify" because everything which divides is bad. The ideal would be—one faith, one brotherhood, one mighty psalm of praise. We expect it in heaven: we long for it upon earth; but it seems impossible. Perhaps it is necessary for the education of mankind that there should be many forms of faith, many points of view, many religious experiments. But it is certain that they are not to be avoided—at present.

We who are here gathered together are forced to do what we are doing. We deeply and painfully feel that we cannot happily and honestly make our religious home in the ordinary churches. Reason forbids; conscience forbids; humanity forbids—ay! reverence for God forbids. It seems almost an audacity for such a handful as we are to say it, but we declare before God and man our profound belief that the Church of Jesus has wandered away from the simplicity of Jesus: and, though we are charged with not believing in him, we claim that we are rediscovering his teachings, and making a stand for the real Jesus, long hidden behind a veil.

We claim to-day that this is a church, a Christian church;—as truly a church as any temple in the land;—consecrated, indeed, not by human authority and human hands, but by the faith and hope and love of God's children, and by the deep desire to be loyal to the inner self, to the truth, to God and man. I know no truer consecration than this.

But, before I offer our justification based upon our differences, it is important to remark that in some great essentials this church does not differ at all from other churches. Its main object is the same,—to

BRING MEN AND WOMEN NEARER TO GOD AND NEARER TO ONE ANOTHER.

The only difference is that we express our object and seek it in different ways. Think of it;—"to bring men and women nearer to God, and nearer to one another:"—could anything be added to that? "Nearer to God"—that we may understand Him, surrender ourselves to Him, trust Him, love Him, leave all to Him:—that is our first main object. Then "to bring men and women nearer to one another":—a sore need in the world. O, to make the church the rallying place of the divided—divided in work, in education, in politics, in society, but here one as the children of the Great Father, comrades and wayfarers, passing on along these dusty roads below to the green pastures and the still waters above.

To offer help in this always hard battle of life,—to give the sense of sympathy, the light of divine explanations, good cheer and a glorious hope:—ah! what a haven the church might be! Listen to this, from one of the toiling many in a great town;—“I want to understand how to live correctly; how to tell the good and keep to it; how to be content with my life, when it is a round of working, eating, growing tired, sleeping, and waking to begin it all over again; how to bear trials calmly, and understand how it is the Father gives some of His children pain and suffering and others so much joy and worldly prosperity. Perhaps you can help me. As one of the great army of wage-workers, one comes to feel, in this jostling, hurrying, bustling city life, that there is no longer any feeling of human brotherhood; and the desert could not be more solitary.” What a divine vocation, for a church to answer such appeals as that! The church should be the helper of the world’s joy, and the brightener of its hope. Never to give in to a fear; never to despair; never to lower the flag; never to accept the taint and the degradation;—this should be the splendid message of the church to the world. A church which should be true to this ideal would earn the delightful description of one who said; “What a handsome thing is worship;— offering of love and deep inwardness of life! Your worship is a branch of the angelic service.”

In all these matters, then, we in no wise differ from the churches around us: nay, if possible, we would, with more simplicity and singleness of heart, make these things manifest. But there are differences,—grave differences—differences which necessitate and justify our separate existence. And, of course, the first of these relates to

THE VITAL SUBJECT OF GOD.

The ordinary churches have inherited thoughts concerning God which appear to us to be seriously defective or unworthy. In dissenting from these, we are not in revolt against God, we are really making a stand for Him and His infinite perfections against the sadly degraded ideas of the past. The old creeds are based upon three almost shocking errors;—the *failure* of God in the creation of the world; the *injustice* of God in framing a way of salvation according to which guilt is transferred, the punishment of it being inflicted on the innocent; and the *cruelty* of God in the perpetuation of a purposeless because hopeless and eternal Hell. We must dissent from all this;—and, in dissenting from it, we are confident that we are only pioneers: and there are many signs on every hand that all the churches will follow us before long. We believe in the “Our Father” of Jesus, not in the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and not in the cruel God of the middle ages: and it is because we want a pure worship, in harmony with the better spirit of our day, that we provide this haven of refuge for sensitive souls,

Of course, too, we are kept apart by

OUR THOUGHTS CONCERNING JESUS.

He is not our God: he is our brother. He said so himself, and consistently behaved as a dear trusting child and servant of God. That God was manifested in him, we do not deny; but then God is manifested in all things, for in Him all things “live and move and have their being.” As Paul taught, Jesus is one “among many brethren,” and we know that he who told us to say “Our Father” said “Our Father” too: nay! but he expressly said—“He is my Father and your Father, my

God and your God." We take him at his word: we see in him our brother; and we worship the only God—not him. That of itself is a grave reason why we should separate ourselves until the Brotherhood come back to his side, and unite with him in the worship of the Being whom he called "the only true God."

These thoughts of God and of Jesus determine

OUR THOUGHTS CONCERNING MAN.

The story told in the Book of Genesis becomes less and less probable. Man is not a fallen, he is a rising creature. He is not painfully trying to remedy a fearful failure; he is slowly moving on to a great success. He is not toiling at the wreck of a Paradise; he is engaged in creating one. He has a future to win, not a past to mourn. He is not a broken monument of fallen greatness; he is the beautiful growth of a far-reaching process. He did not begin as an angel, and then sink into a beast: he began as a beast, and is surely marching on to the angel: and it is the great Creator, the great Teacher, the great Harmoniser of the universe who is leading him out of darkness into marvellous light:—a glorious process, involving many sorrows—the birth-pangs of the race; but worth it, worth it a thousand times; and the end is sure.

And what we believe as to man's present, we believe also as to his future existence. The process of development here, we regard as a process that will be continued hereafter. The beautiful steadfast law that led him below will lead him on above:—no hopeless failure, no final doom, no changeless verdict, no eternal hell: but the open way, and helping hands, and wise teachers, and loving saviours,—more there than here! Do you not see how these views of the origin and destiny of man vitally affect our attitude as worshipers; and how this also naturally demands a religious home of our own?

Something else, too, is important. We differ from most other churches in

OUR OUTLOOK UPON RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

We do not believe in a closed and final revelation. The discovery of religious truth occupies the same place in the history and development of man as the discovery of scientific truth. Man is at school, and at school in relation to everything; and it is manifestly a part of the divine plan that man's enlightenment shall be the result of man's exertions. We say of every creed of the past that it was an expression of man's thought at the time; and that it is fatal to let one man's creed be the grave of another man's soul. In the Established Church it is absolutely certain that creeds are recited which are no longer true for the Church: and, all along the line, even in the Nonconformist Churches, the free spirit of to-day, which God would lead on to better things, is fettered and partially blinded, by survivals of ancient guesses which ought never to have been put on the throne as inspired finalities. We believe in the living God, the inspiring God, the ever-present God: and we hold that this is the really religious faith. We want, then, a receptive church, having its faith for to-day, but free to go wherever light, and love, and conscience lead—keeping itself free from the dead hand of the dead theologian, and attentive to the voice of the living God. And to get that, we come here.

One thing, then, is clear. No one can accuse us of being vague, or negative, or colourless. We are

THE MOST AFFIRMATIVE OF ALL CHRISTIANS.

And another thing is clear,—that it is the intensity of our convictions which brings us here. There can be no other motive. Think what we give up!—the going with the multitude—always an exhilarating thing; the noble buildings and delightful music of the conventional churches, the open doors to work in which we should delight, and to men and women we could love. We have deliberately foregone these delightful things, and are John the Baptists in the wilderness. But we are content if we can only be the forerunners of the true Christ.

We do not deny that other churches have their glorious uses: and we may even admit that what to us are semi-barbaric beliefs have had, and perhaps have, their uses, but that is no reason why we should halt or hesitate;—that is no reason why we should not reach up to the higher stages, and push on to the highlands of faith and hope and love. What if we also have our special uses—if, indeed, it is given to us to be the pioneers? I do not know. It seems too wonderful: but it may be so; and sometimes it seems so. It seems so to-day. There are signs all round that we are voicing the spirit of the coming day—that

WE ARE PIONEERS.

If so, to us Walt Whitman's cry comes home, for our work and sphere:—

“ We cannot tarry here,
We must march, my darlings, we must bear the brunt of danger,
We the youthful sinewy races, all the rest on us depend—
Pioneers! O pioneers!”

“ Have the elder races halted;
Do they drop and end their lesson?
We take up the task eternal, and the burden, and the lesson,
Pioneers! O pioneers!”

“ See, my children, resolute children,
By those swarms upon our rear, we must never yield or falter,—
Ages back in ghostly millions, growing there behind us urging.
Pioneers! O pioneers!”

“ O, to die advancing on!
Are there some of us to droop and die? has the hour come?
Then upon the march we fittest die: soon and sure the gap is filled,
Pioneers! O pioneers!”

“ Till, with sound of trumpet,
Far, far off, the day-break calls:—hark! how loud and clear I hear it wind!
Swift to the head of the army! swift! spring to your places!
Pioneers! O pioneers!”

Do you want encouragement? Look around. In every church in Christendom

WE ARE BEING JUSTIFIED.

The testimony of our forerunners is whispered or shouted all through the land; and the defenders of the old Gospel of dread are the subjects of almost tragic searchings

of heart. Inside of the Established Church, some of its very foremost men, like Dr. Momerie, are saying all we have to say. In the Congregational Union, presidents of local Associations addresses the ministers on "The old faith and the new." In the Baptist Union, the advance of rational religion forces even so strong a man as Mr. Spurgeon to the outside. Even the Wesleyan Conference revises its catechism for children in exactly the direction suggested by a Unitarian, dropping out the survivals of medieval views of Hell. Why, there is no church in Christendom which is being so justified as this Unitarian Church which once hardly got leave to live!

And why do I take note of these things? Is the point of interest this;—that, at last, we are the victors in an old debate? Is it only an argument, or a string of propositions, we have been contending for? What a degradation if that were all! No, but what is involved in all this is the interpretation of life and the dearest hopes of man. This dear faith of ours makes all things new, from the cradle to the grave. For us, the little child is no longer "born in sin"; and the dying pilgrim no longer passes on to a great uncertainty; and life, with all its multitudinous interests, is all aglow now with the thoughts, and meanings, and disciplines of God. Ah, no: it is not for an argument about doctrines that we stand, but for the tremendous explanations which give the clues that lead to God, and reveal the origin, the duty, and the destiny of man.

And now, only one thing remains to be said to-day. We have embarked to-day upon

A SERIOUS BUSINESS.

You are in, not for a pleasure excursion, but a campaign. I was once told of an American who said a significant thing at one of the Ober Ammergau performances. After the second or third scene, he turned to a stranger who sat next to him and said; "Sir, I came here for pleasure; but this is getting a very serious business." That is just your case. You have now a church on your hands; and it means a great deal:—patience, loyalty, simplicity, self-surrender, love. But what it demands will be as good for you as for it; for that is the joy and wonder and glory of the Church, that all its demands on us are means of grace and growth.

But the seriousness of the matter lies most in the direction of service. This also is to be a saving church,—not merely a critical theological church: for, though we have no urgent motive based on the saving of the soul from hell, we have endless saving possibilities in our hands.

Did you ever read the charming story of the pitiful little Elsie, whose angel-heart was wiser and diviner than even her good father and mother? Across the street from Elsie's home lives a family with whom her father and mother do not care to associate, nor do they wish their little girl to play with the small boy over there. One morning Elsie chanced to overhear her parents lamenting the godless state of this family, and her little soul was filled with pity and dismay. Running out to the front gate, the little missionary called out, with sweet entreaty, to the benighted little neighbour across the way; "Oh, poor little boy, come over to our house and go

to Heaven with us!" Is nothing of that possible for us? O shame on us if we even think so! Why there are hundreds of neglected and neglectful men and women whose hearts would warm at the touch of

OUR DELIGHTFUL HOPES.

But, beyond these, there are others,—not the "godless" nor in any sense the degraded, but the bright, thoughtful, sceptics—the honourable and human agnostics of our day. For these we have toleration and even sympathy; and to these we can offer explanations. The majority of them have been made sceptics by coming into sharp intellectual contact with the unbelievable doctrines of the conventional creeds; and we could do much for them. Said one of these, once; "I am shunned by my neighbours as an infidel: have not heard a sermon in ten years. I see God in everything, in the waving fields of grain, the grass in the sunshine, and the glorious sunsets, the poor man's picture gallery, with God for the artist. Still, I am a social being, and long for congenial companionship in matters of religious life and thought." For these also we have a Gospel, a haven and a home.

Yes; it is a serious business you have before you: but you have got bright examples to follow, innumerable unseen helpers to trust, and the dear heavenly Father to obey. At nightfall, when you close for ever these poor earthly eyes, the recollection of what you do now, and all that may come of it, may be among the dearest consolations left you by the departed day.

THE BIBLE A HUMAN BOOK.

A VOICE FROM SCOTLAND.

THE frank and honest—let us say, the emancipated—view of the Bible is that it is a human book, the product of human pondering and experimenting—the outcome of human hope and fear,—that it is no more divinely inspired than the *Meditations* of Aurelius, or the *In Memoriam* of Tennyson—though often rising to heights and sounding depths not yet reached by any other records. This is a view of the Bible which even some Unitarians may shrink from accepting, and which would have been shocking to perhaps the majority of Unitarians fifty years ago. But what has happened? In effect—though not in actual frank expression, this view of the Bible is found in high places in all the churches. The critics, the scholars, the rational 19th century preachers, are all touched with it, or possessed by it.

Here is a case in point.

In the *Christian World Pulpit*, a steady orthodox publication, is a Paper read by the Rev. Angus M. Mackay, B.A., before the Aberdeen Diocesan Clerical Society, on Inspiration,—read in Scotland, of all places in the world, and before a meeting of ministers—and printed in a ministers' journal! This Paper is noteworthy, not because the opinions expressed are a novelty, but because its frankness and simplicity are, in a way, naive and refreshing. It only microphones what is being whispered everywhere.

The writer of this Paper, in his very first paragraph, goes right to the root of the matter in the assertion of the principle that whatever inspiration is it is not something lying "outside the ordinary operations of law, and alien to our common methods of thought and experience." The Bible, therefore, does not stand by itself as a unique book containing the exceptional, miraculous and final Word of God. He says—"It has often struck me that if we would investigate the nature and method of inspiration in theology by an analogy drawn from the other sciences and the arts, which, remember, are just as much revelations from God as theology itself, we should find all the difficulties with which the subject is beset melt away; we should exchange our present misty and confused notions on the subject for clear and definite ideas; and, without destroying the pre-eminence of theology, we should bring it into line with all other human knowledge, instead of leaving it to be looked upon as something unnatural, abnormal, outside the ordinary operations of law, and alien to our common methods of thought and experience."

It follows from this that God's revelation to man is not restricted to one age, one nation, one sphere, one book. On the contrary, it follows that the ever-living and ever-present God is unceasingly influencing, directing, and inspiring His children, in every field of human thought and activity. This is admitted by our delightfully rational divine. He says: "It follows that Revelation has been progressive, and that in its beginning it was very defective. Religion is not the only knowledge God has given to man. He has taught men also Painting, and Sculpture, and Poetry, and the Useful Arts and Sciences. I say God did this. Of course, we may deny it. We may hold that Jehovah was merely a tribal God. Just as the Pagans held Minerva to be the goddess only of Learning, and Apollo only the God of Poetry, so we may think of Jehovah as being the god only of a single nation—the Jewish—and a single book—the Bible. This is what, practically, most people do think. But, of course, if God is omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent, as we profess to believe, then He must have been as much concerned in the training of the Greeks as in the training of the Jews; He must have inspired the genius of Homer as truly as that of Isaiah. Unless we are going to cut human history up into sections, and exclude God from certain parts of it, we must acknowledge that every branch of knowledge is as truly a revelation from God as religion is. Now, concerning every other branch of knowledge we find—do we not?—that it had its origin in very imperfect and defective notions of the subject; that its growth was gradual; and that only after long ages has the knowledge approached completeness. So it was with Art: first, men made rough forms in stone and clay, bearing but slight resemblance to the things imitated, and only after ages had rolled away do we reach Phidias and perfection. So with Painting: from the scratched figures found on the implements of the Stone Age on to Raphael and Turner. So with Music: beginning with a reed and ending with the violin and the grand organ; beginning with the monotonous intonation of the savage and ending in the Sonatas of Beethoven. So with Astronomy, Chemistry, and the Useful Arts—there is no exception. God's work, indeed, so far as we can judge, is always gradual. From the germ to the fruit; from the first gleam of consciousness in the infant to the wisdom of old age; from the faint stirrings of Spring to the golden harvests of Autumn; from the rude polity of the semi-barbarous class to the advanced civilization of a powerful

State, always we see that God's work is slow and progressive. . . . Now what reason have we to suppose that God would forsake this universal method in giving a revelation of Himself? If in Him is no variableness nor shadow made by turning, why does He change His method of working here? I venture to say there is no change. If men had not come to the Bible with a ready-framed theory as to its nature, they would have seen how close is the analogy between the defective beginnings of other branches of knowledge and of Revelation."

This is really a revolutionary admission, that the Bible contains a revelation from God just as art, and the science of government, and the physical sciences tell of revelation from God. In short it amounts to this—that revelation is the result of the ceaseless developing energy of the divine spirit working in the human spirit, in harmony with the unfolding of our natural powers. Man begins low down, akin to the brutes,—in the hands of the great creative and transforming power as clay is in the hands of the modeller. And, through all the generations, the creative, transforming, inspiring work goes on, and goes on everywhere; no more in regard to religion than in regard to science and art; and the product everywhere—the natural product everywhere—is revelation, always partial, always liable to inconsistency, always open to change: this being as true of the Bible as of everything else: the Bible being really a record of man's voyages of discovery in search of God, but no more final and supernatural than those other voyages of discovery which began in the scooped trunk of a tree, and have ended, for the present, in an Atlantic liner. So that the Bible is, above all things, the word of man and not the word of God. Thus understood, the Bible is all precious. Once give up the theory that the Bible is all true, all infallible, all on a level as the miraculous word of God: once admit that it records the gropings and thoughts of man; and then the very parts we have assailed will become precious to us; interesting and instructive as the early attempts of man to solve the problems of all time:—as the perfect word of God, quite inadmissible; but, as the graduated speech of man, most delightful. As this writer says; "In the British Museum may here and there be seen some curious archaic sculptures—queer figures with big heads and small bodies and misproportioned limbs. They are among the most valuable possessions of the Museum: without them you could never understand the history of Greek art. They would only become mischievous if some learned professor, following the example of our ingenious commentators, were to argue that big heads and small bodies are beautiful, and that both eyes on the same side of the nose are really better than the normal arrangement." That is an exact analogy; and it helps us to see how we are to regard some of the crude descriptions of Jehovah in the Old Testament, many of which are no more true of the real God than are the archaic sculptures true of the real man.

The members of this clerical Society were plainly told that "Israel resembled other nations in this—that it begins history with legend and myth;" that God's permanent inspiration of man never guarantees infallibility but only help; and that this process of helping never ceases.

The conclusion to which this leads us cannot be escaped: and the writer of this Paper does not try to escape it. On the contrary, he faces it with perfect frankness. He says, "one word as to what this theory of inspiration teaches concerning God's

present dealings with the world. It corrects the grievous faithlessness into which we have fallen concerning the work of His Holy Spirit. We are all apt to feel that God was with Israel in some special sense in which He is not with the British race ; that He inspired prophet and psalmist as He does not inspire men now ; that the lives of the saints of old had a grandeur and a meaning which no modern life can have. God left off communing with mankind about the year A.D. 90—that is the common notion ! Of course, if the view of inspiration I have tried to put before you is correct, all this is false. It is again the old story of a sectional God. If God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, if in Him is no variableness nor shadow made by turning, as the Bible and science alike declare, then He must be still inspiring men, still revealing Himself as truly as in the days of Moses and Isaiah.

What was God's work wrought by Israel compared with the work wrought by England, which rules over a fourth of the world's inhabitants, and whose colonies are dotted over the face of the whole earth ? What can be more faithless in Christians than to ascribe the overthrow of Sennacherib's army to a Divine interference, and to see nothing of the kind in the destruction of the Spanish Armada ; to say that God raised up David to reign over Israel, and not King Alfred to reign over England ; to pretend for one moment that Sampson, or Jephthah, or any one of the heroes of Israel is comparable to our own General Gordan ? The saints our own country has produced will, I believe, compare favourably with any we can read of, even in the Bible. The work of ritual restoration accomplished by Ezra and Nehemiah of old has been paralleled by the work of the Oxford leaders, so far as their influence was good, in our own century ; and the higher work of the Hebrew Prophets, in bringing to light the neglected spiritual elements of religion, has been carried on in these latter days by Maurice and Robertson of Brighton, and many another saintly writer. And so with all kinds of literary inspiration. No one will persuade me that the *Te Deum* is not in every way as truly inspired as even the noblest of the Psalms, or that God has not sent messages by Browning and Tennyson no less than by those who wrote the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes and the Book of Esther. The only difference is this, what is inspired is not now gathered up into a single book."

That is the latest note from the so-called "orthodox" camp. It leaves nothing to be desired. The rankest Unitarian goes not a step farther ; though, with a feeling of amused wonder and pardonable exultation, he may well look on to see the justification he is receiving, and the company he is in.

A SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF BELIEF IN A FUTURE LIFE.

V.

The limitations of the senses.

ONE of the greatest services rendered by modern Science is its singularly vivid presentation of the fact that all our senses are extremely limited in their range,—a fact which is all important in our inquiry into the possibility of an unseen Universe. It is a common and very natural mistake, that we see all there is to see, and hear all

there is to hear. We have all our lives been accustomed to the five tiny windows through which all sensations come, and we inevitably fancy that they are adequate : but a very decided effort ought to be made to overcome the delusion,—very natural, I repeat, but very misleading,—that we now see and hear and touch all that there is to be seen, heard, and touched. Our five senses are all we have, and they measure only our poor range ; they do not measure the boundless reaches of being far far beyond our ken. We can easily imagine that our senses might have been fewer than they are—that the sense of smell, for instance, might have had no existence. In that case, we should have had no conception of odour ; and, though the subtle causes all existed around us as now, we should for ever have been oblivious of them. Why may it not be that the lack of some sixth sense is hiding from us some still more subtle reality ? From everything that *grows*, there are physical emanations, and, as our sense of smell is acute or dull, we perceive some of these as odours. Why may there not be, from everything that *thinks*, mental and moral emanations ? and why might there not be a sense that would detect and distinguish these ? Nay, may not the rudiments of that sense be actually active in our unaccountable feelings and instincts of attraction and aversion ? and why may we not conclude that it is this very sense which has made some sensitives thought-readers and seers ? Here again, we are on the very threshold of spirit-life ; and the great suggestion is forced upon us, that when we get beyond the hidings of the body we shall develop mental, moral, and spiritual senses that will enable us to see and know one another in our inmost selves, and as we really are. Very wisely has Isaac Taylor said :—

“ The ancient philosophy supposed there to be four elements, or perhaps a fifth ; but we now reckon fifty :* and, in like manner, as we now think of five species of perception, hereafter we may become familiar with a hundred, or a thousand.” “ The senses, such as they are under the present animal organization, in no instance go further than to give us information concerning the last product of certain combined qualities or conditions of matter. Thus, for example, we perceive colours, but we know nothing (by the sense of sight) of that state of the surface of bodies, the effect of which is that they imbibe some of the elements of light, and throw off others. . . . It is conceivable that this INNER FORM of matter, as it has been termed, may, as well as the external species, be perceptible, so that the specific cause of solidity, fluidity, crystallization, decomposition, colour, taste, smell, musical relations, and other states, movements, and transitions of matter, may be as immediately perceptible as are now the ulterior products of those states. . . . Instead of looking only at the dial-plate of nature, and of noting the hands and the figures, we should be admitted to inspect the wheel-work and the springs.”

The greatest of all illusions, then, is the common illusion that we see, hear, and touch, all that might be visible, audible, and tangible. The truth is that we are all living as on the outer rim of an unfathomable realm of existence, and that all our faculties are adjusted to that narrowed range. Beyond that limit we feel and know that tremendous forces and a multitude of objects exist, of which we are able to perceive only a minute part.

As we proceed, I shall give several illustrations of this limited range of our ordinary senses ; but may now just name two very simple ones. When we look, from a little distance, at a bush of sweet brier, we see nothing between it and us, but we smell its fragrance ; and if we reflect upon it we may be sure that all the distance between it and us must be pervaded by something which we call the odour. The

* Now over sixty.

probability is that if we could see that something, the million vibrating points of fragrance, like countless waves of coloured lights, would be even more delightful to the eye than is the odour to the nerves of smell. Or watch a magnet at work. From a distance, or through some dense substance, it can attract a solid bar of iron. You can see nothing, but you are sure there is something between them: and if your eyes were keen enough you would probably see an aurora with lines of flashing flame answering to the lovely lines revealed when iron filings are dusted around the magnet. But all this is on the mere surface of our earthly globe, on which we creep like tiny creatures; and the thin veil of atmosphere folds us in, at once our preserver and our prison; and what there is in the infinite beyond we know not, only the more we know the more we see there is to know, and the more is the seen dwarfed in comparison with the unseen. What we call the solid globe itself is really a tremendous assemblage of atoms inconceivably small—so small that no eye can see, no instrument reveal them: and all these myriads of millions of atoms are not at rest, but in endless motion, so that the solidest granite rocks themselves are tremulous with ceaseless vibrations at the very heart of every atom of them. What we call the vacant air is filled with light, and sound, and subtlest flashing forces, flooding every tiniest space with music and beauty and ever flowing energy. “The air,” says one, “is filled with visions that we cannot see, tremulous with music that we cannot hear. Of the great world-drama, we can behold still but one act, and, of all the melodies of that grand orchestra, our ears perceive a single tune. But shall we deny the music of the spheres because it lies an octave higher than our dull senses, or doubt of ‘the light that never was on land or sea’ because our scanty spectrum will not shew it?” So true is this that it would only require a readjustment of our senses to make a new heaven and a new earth around us, and to demonstrate, even in our common streets, that “things are not what they seem.”

(To be continued.)

THE RATIONAL RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE.

THE Conference of Unitarian and kindred Christians, held in London in April, was very successful in many respects—notably as a fine social gathering. There was a noble sermon by Mr. Stopford Brooke,—and there were a few Papers on subjects of real interest: but there was very little conferring, and nothing was heard from the Churches beyond a Report which was presented at the fag-end of the meetings, the main drift of which, properly construed, drove home the conviction that the attempt to organise a new sect out of a series of free churches can come to nothing.

It is a little difficult to see the precise vocation of the Conference, beyond its very admirable and useful calling as an organiser of a delightful gathering of friends. In America, a similar Conference does most serious work bearing directly upon the enterprises of the Unitarian Churches all over the States. Here, beyond the creation of a “Sustentation Fund” for ministers, the Conference has let the Churches scrupulously alone. Perhaps it is wise.

THE NEW BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.

A THOUGHTFUL correspondent sends us the following :

For many years I was a constant subscriber to and a great admirer of *The Truthseeker*, and looked forward with pleasure to *The Coming Day*, but it seems to me the Book of Common Prayer does not run on the same lines as your general teaching. The prayers are constructed on the lines of special inspiration and special interposition: for example: 'Subdue in us all impurity of thought and desire, all pride and hypocrisy,' &c.; thus asking God to do for us what we should do for ourselves. Your general teaching is on the lines of 'natural law' and 'natural religion,' and prayers constructed on those lines would express the same desires thus: May we so cultivate and use the higher faculties of our nature that all impurity of thought and desire; all envy, pride, and hypocrisy; all falsehood and deceit; all malice and anger, may be subdued; *then* shall all our thoughts, affections, and desires be in accord with Thy will, O most holy Father.

Since our happy "Truthseeker" days, we have, if possible, become more definitely believers in "natural law" and "natural religion": and (will it seem strange to say?) that has made us more inclined to "walk with God." The good in us is somehow God in us; and the appeal to Him is an appeal to that good. If we ask God to do spiritual things for us, we only side with Him in His workings in us. That wonderful saying of Paul's explains it all; "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (*i.e.*, with anxiety), for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Prayer, then, is helping God to help us, in the mysterious arena of spirit-strife within.

Another correspondent has strong doubts about the prayer which begins page 44. He says that it plays into the hands of the sacerdotalists. We do not think so. It does not even say that the Church is the only divine institution; and certainly it does not recognize the sacerdotal theory. God "founds" and "calls" all good things, and the Christian Church is as much a tree of His planting as is the English nation. If, then, one speaks from within the Christian Church, it is right to speak of it as founded by God, just as, when speaking from within the nation, it is right to speak as a patriot. The recognition of the work and call of God in the founding of the Christian Church by Jesus Christ does not exclude the recognition of His work and call in other directions and for other ends. Besides, the recognition of the Father's Holy Spirit, as the governing, directing and sanctifying power, and of His "faithful servants" as the Church, shuts out the priest with his sacerdotal magic and his commanding claims. The real question is; Did the ever-present God work through the man Jesus to found a church, as He has worked through other men to found a nation, or to grow a crop of barley? and does He, by His Spirit, govern, direct and sanctify, the hearts of His faithful servants?

The Prayers in May number were almost entirely selected from the late Dr. Rowland Williams' "*Psalms and Litanies.*"

A NEW BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.

VI.

ANOTHER six days' work is done ;
Another Sabbath is begun :
Return, my soul, enjoy thy rest :
Improve the day which God hath blest.

O that our thoughts and thanks may rise,
As grateful incense, to the skies ;
And draw from heaven that sweet repose,
Which none but he that feels it knows !

This heavenly calm within the breast
Is the dear pledge of glorious rest,
Which for the church of God remains,
The end of cares, the end of pains.

In holy duties let the day,
In holy pleasures, pass away :
How sweet, a Sabbath thus to spend,
In hope of one that ne'er shall end !—
Amen.

(*By the Minister, all standing.*)

We meet in this house of prayer to offer adorations and thanksgivings to our heavenly Father, who is very merciful to all who turn from their iniquity, and seek pardon and peace from Him. As we bow before Him this morning, thankful for His many mercies to us, let us with all sincerity repent us of whatever sin we have committed during the past week, in word, thought, or deed. Then, as we open our hearts to Him, with the humility of children, His peace will be with us ; and, with spirits renewed and comforted by His love, we shall be made stronger for the work we have to do. Let us, then, with sincere hearts, unite in earnest prayer.

(*All kneeling or seated.*)

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father, teach us how to pray to Thee as we ought. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be now and always acceptable in Thy sight. Thou knowest our hearts and lives. By Thy Holy Spirit's power, purify and renew them. Remember, we pray Thee, our weakness and blindness ; and uplift and enlighten us. Deepen within us every feeling of shame for the wrong we have done, and of regret for the good we have left undone, and help us to amend our lives according to Thy holy will, so that in the days to come we may serve Thee with a perfect heart. Make our worship a real help to us in our daily lives, and in bearing the burdens of sin and sorrow which may yet await us. Show us the path of duty, and help us to walk in it. Let nothing turn us back from Thee ; and evermore cheer us with a sense of Thy presence. *Amen.*

ETERNAL GOD, who knowest neither dawn nor night, but who givest to Thine earthly children the mercies of darkness and of day : even as Thou hast lifted the curtain of night from our abodes, so take the veil from our hearts, that in Thy light we may see light. Rise, as the morning, on our souls ; and when every light of earth must fail us, may the light from beyond the veil shine brighter and brighter, unto the perfect day. *Amen.*

EVER-BLESSED and ever-blessing God, for

us all, let this be a day of rest, but of rest that prepares for better service. May the hopes we cherish here broaden and deepen the whole current of our lives; add sanctity to sorrow, and consecration to joy, and dignity to labour, and beauty to all common things. May our prayers blossom into actions, and our praises ripen into deeds. So may life itself become a ceaseless prayer, and toil itself be a continual psalm: and, amid all life's dark and troubled ways, may the light of a pure love shine and the music of a heavenly purpose be heard. *Amen.*

To Thee we lift up our hearts, O gracious Giver of every good and perfect gift; for we are Thine, and Thine are the treasures of the fruitful earth. It is Thy generous hand that fills the world with plenty, blessing the meadows with verdure, and clothing the valleys with corn. The beauty of the hills, the sweetness of the sea, and the joys of all nature, are of Thee. Is not all this natural beauty of earth, and sea, and sky, Thy gift to the pilgrims of earth? is it not the token of Thy love—a revelation from the infinite mercy that is striving to make itself known? What must that mercy be where no blindness mistakes it, where no transgression mars it, where no folly disregards it!—what must it be where holy and harmonious souls find all their heaven in finding Thee! Give us grateful hearts—hearts to love Thee, to serve Thee, and evermore to confide in Thee: and, even as the earth yields to Thee its fruits and flowers, so may we, in our lives, give sweet and gracious returns for all the gifts of light and mercy we receive.

But what shall we render unto Thee, O Lord, for all Thy goodness? and how shall we best serve Thee for Thy constant care? In days of old, Thy children brought Thee sacrifices of blood, hoping

to purchase the mercies of heaven with the sorrows of earth. But Thou delightest in the yielding up of the heart to Thy will, and the consecration of the obedient life to Thy ways. May we find it not hard to make this surrender of ourselves to Thee; but gladly follow on in the footsteps of those who have passed into the world of light beyond. Father; guard and guide us, keeping our souls from stain and our feet from falling, till we also pass to those purer atmospheres and behold those brighter skies. *Amen.*

(By Minister and people.)

OUR Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name: Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven: Give us this day our daily bread: and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us: and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The love, and peace, and light of God be with us evermore. *Amen.*

BLESSED is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the LAW of the Lord: and in His law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be as a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.

His leaf also shall not wither: and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of

the LORD is | sure, · making | wise · the | simple :

The statutes of the Lord are RIGHT, re- | joining · the | heart : || the command- | ment of the LORD is | pure, · en- | -lightening · the | eyes :

The fear of the Lord is CLEAN, en- | -during · for | ever : || the judgments of the Lord are TRUE and | right · eous | al · -to- | -gether.

Moreover by THEM is Thy | ser · -vant | warned : || and in keeping of THEM | there · is | great · re- | -ward.

Who can UN-der- | -stand · his | errors ? || CLEANSE Thou | me · from | se- | -cret | faults.

Keep back Thy servant also FROM | presump- · tuous | sins ; || let them NOT | have · do- | -min · -ion | over me :

THEN shall | I · be | upright, || and I shall be inno-CENT | from · the | great · trans- | -gression.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be accepta-BLE | in · Thy | sight, || O Lord, my STRENGTH, and | my · re- | -deemer. . A- | -men.

LIGHT ON THE PATH.

IRELAND'S TRAVAIL.—The following is an extract from a letter to a friend who had written, bewailing the turmoil in Ireland, and hoping soon to see the advent of a reconciling man, and, with the help of Mr. Balfour, to hear the last of "those sickening and strife-stirring words 'Home Rule'".—"It was the most gentle soul who said ; 'I came not to send peace but a sword';—not that he wanted the sword, but that he saw what *must* be. But your ideal man—or men—will come, in time. Nations are not born to the sound of lutes, but far otherwise : and the present scourging and purifying are going to do great good. Fine lessons in heart-searching, discrimination and self-control, are being learnt;—but there *must* be trouble and tears—and redemption *must* always involve crucifixion. Balfour has his uses, but he is not even a John the Baptist. He is being shamed into something like amateur philanthropy, but that touches not the trouble. Your reading of the Irish character only shews once more how difficult it is to see the same thing even when we look at the

same thing. The Irish appear to you to be "like a nursery of babies in revolt." To me they appear to be a tenacious nation holding on to its own. You think that "to be an Englishman is honour enough." But an Irishman cannot be an Englishman, and *ought not to try to be*. For myself, I love God's variety ; and when I spoke to 5000 Irishmen in Dublin, I said—"Don't try to be like us : don't lose your peculiarities, don't be content that we should rule you. Be what God meant you to be, and determine to learn and carry your own responsibilities."

RESCUE AND CHEER.—If any one has anything to give away, send on to Mr. Charrington, The Great Assembly Hall, Mile End, London. He and his helpers are doing a heavenly work in keeping the heads of the East End pocr above water. His great Hall is a haven of rest, and the abode of "sweetness and light," for thousands of strugglers ; and its connected institutions give many a help on the dismal way.

NOTES ON BOOKS.

Historic Memorials of Barton and Melbourne General Baptist Churches, including their numerous offshoots since 1760. By J. R. Godfrey. London: E. Stock. A homely subject, but one that has more to do with the real history of England than many which win wider recognition. These modest meeting-houses of England, where sturdy farmers and milkmen, and independent-minded labourers and shopkeepers have met, for generations, to worship God and cherish a wholesome God-fearing life, have developed that "nonconformist conscience" which it is the fashion to half sneer at, but which has really been at the bottom of every Reform Bill—and many a Bill which had to be passed, Pall Mall never knowing why. It is an enlightening though very homely book, and one that even great historians might look at with profit. It takes one behind the scenes, and shows us a good deal which explains the play.

"The way out of Agnosticism: or the philosophy of free Religion." By F. E. Abbot, Ph.D. Boston (U.S.): Little, Brown & Co. A tough book but an instructive one;—the vocabulary often difficult, but the thought always strong. It has always seemed to us that "Agnosticism" is only a phase of the necessary revolt against "Orthodoxy," for which revolt Heaven be praised! But it will throb itself out, and have its day. The true heart and brain of the world will never content itself with even a reverential and modest "I don't know"—still less with a thin and indolent "I don't know." Mr. Abbot shows that

adherence to facts and reason, is strangely hazy and unreasonable.

"Life of Dorothea Lynde Dix." By Francis Tiffany. Boston (U.S.): Houghton, Mifflin & Co. The story of a really great life, greatly uplifted and inspired from the first,—beginning, not in a happy child-life, but in a precocious maturity ripened by loveless severity. Very early Miss Dix had to defend herself, and she soon learned to feel for others; but, only after long suffering and many approaches to "the valley of the shadow," found her work and the power to do it:—and that work lay in the prisons and asylums of America. This sensitive, weak and comparatively lonely woman faced and grappled with the apparently hopeless task of reforming the chaos and cruelty of American prison and asylum life forty years ago. It is said that, under the worst conceivable conditions, she travelled 10,000 miles in three years, visiting prisons and lunatic asylums, memorialising legislatures, arguing with authorities, entreating the wealthy, "fighting with beasts"—and nearly always triumphant in the end. Then, when her gigantic work seemed done, the war broke out; and the brave soul, at sixty, began all over again, became organiser and head of an enormous amateur nursing commission, with even more than the old chaos to grapple with, and came out, not unscathed but once more "more than conqueror." But we cannot tell here the pathetic and noble story: we only desire to say enough to commend this book to those who feel specially interested in devoted lives that help us to understand the real or ideal Jesus Christ.