

late visit to Athens, begged a piece of rock taken from some part of this eminence, which, as he said, he would like as a foundation of his new pulpit. Of course, Mr. Talmage does not believe in such doctrines as Divine authority, or inspiration. Oh, no, he is far above such crude ideas. The texts of Scripture which teach these doctrines have no meaning for him. Still, no doubt, he does believe that a rock taken from somewhere within a mile of where Paul stood more than eighteen hundred years ago will add something of authority to his own teachings. We have heard of men of aldermanic proportions imagining that their brains were in proportion to their girth; but this is the first time probably that modern society has heard of a man believing that the inspiration of Paul was communicated to a whole hill, so that eighteen centuries afterwards another man standing on a fragment of that hill carried to another hemisphere would still feel that influence coming up through his boots.

As Archdeacon Farrar quaintly observes, "We are standing on the threshold of a new era." It is not merely that commercial life is awakened as it never was before, or that the sciences have made advances never dreamed of in the past, but likewise religious thought is developing in a direction which many are not aware of. The rigid theology and sharp sectarian controversies of fifty years ago have little interest for the people now-a-days. The masses are beginning to perceive the blindness of their religious teachers and are thinking for themselves.

A remarkable example of this is shown in the rapid sale of Mrs. Deland's religious work, "John Ward, preacher." It is scarcely twenty months since it first issued from the press, yet the numerous editions it has passed through since then, and the many thousands that have been bought and read attest the deep interest which this book has awakened. In fact, it might very appropriately be called the "Uncle Tom's Cabin" of religious slavery, showing most forcibly the hideousness of sectarian theology and the longing of honest souls to know the truth. John Ward, the hero of the story, is a blue Presbyterian of the most rigid school; his wife Helen is a woman of liberal sentiments and warm sympathies; and a controversy soon arises between them concerning eternal punishment. At last matters come to a head over the death of Tom Davis, a poor drunkard, whom the predictions of future punishment could not keep sober during life. This man, after a heavy bout of drinking, perished in an attempt to save a child from death by fire. John, the preacher, confessed that Tom had "died like a brave man," but he could not hold out any gleam of hope to the distracted widow concerning Tom's eternal welfare. Helen, on the other hand, blowing away the cloud of absurdities and contradictions that make up the Calvinistic creed, was able to

offer a better consolation to the disconsolate widow. "Mrs. Davis," Helen said at last, "I'm so sorry." It was a simple thing to say, but it caught the poor woman's ear. It was so different from anything that she had yet heard. The neighbors had sighed, and groaned, and told her it was "awful hard" on her and pitied Tom for his terrible death; and then Mr. Dean had come, with fearful talk of justice and of hell. When Mrs. Davis heard Helen's words, a big tear rolled down her cheek and with quivering lips she said, "Thank you, ma'am." Then she made a pretense of turning toward the one small window to obtain more light, and continued her work. When she spoke again, her voice was steadier, as she said: "Elder Dean, 'tows I oughtn't to be sorry. He says I ought to be resigned to God's justice. He says good folks ought to be glad when sinners go to the bad place, even if they are their relations. He 'tows I oughtn't to be sorry no how."

"I am sure you have a right to be sorry that Tom is dead," said Helen, "but I do not believe that Tom is in any place now that need make you sorry. I do not believe what Elder Dean said about—hell."

Mrs. Davis looked at her, a faint surprise dawning in her tired eyes, and shook her head. "Oh, I'm not saying God isn't right. I'm not saying Tom ain't in the bad place, nor that it ain't justice. I want to be a Christian woman; Tom wasn't a Christian. I know; still, he was as good as any one could be when he wasn't full of drink; he was good in his heart, Tom was. I'm only saying"—meanwhile knotting her tremulous hands together—"I'm only saying that I can't love God no more! Him having all the power; and then look at Tom, and me." Helen tried to speak, but Mrs. Davis would not listen. "No," she cried, "yer the preacher's wife, but I must say it. He never give Tom a chance, an' how am I going to love him now? Tom"—she pointed a shaking finger at the coffin in the next room—"born as you might say drinkin'. His father died in a drunken fit, and his mother gave it to her baby with her milk. Then what schoolin' did he get? None at all except his mother lickin' him. Tom's often told me that. He hadn't learned no trade neither—just rafted with men as bad as him. Is it any wonder he wasn't good?"

"I know all that," Helen began to say gently; but Mrs. Davis could not check the torrent of her despairing grief.

"He didn't have no chance, an' he didn't ask to be born either. God put him here, and look at the way we had to live; look at this house; see the floor, how the water runs down into that corner; it is all sagged and leanin'—the whole thing is rotten. Look at that one little window up against the wall, not a ray of sunshine ever struck it. And here is where we have had to live—six of us, now that the baby is come. Children was the only thing we were rich in; but we hadn't food

enough to put in their mouths, or decent clothes to cover them. Look at the people around us here—livin' in this row of tenement houses—lying, swearing, drinking. What chance had Tom? So I can't love God, missus, I can't love Him—Him who had all the power and yet let Tom's soul go down to hell; for Tom couldn't help it and him livin' so. I ain't denying religion, nor anything like that, only I can't love Him, so there is no use of talking, I can't love Him!"

She turned away and moved toward the stove. Helen followed her and put her arms across the thin bent shoulders, her eyes full of tears, though the widow's were hard and bright.

"Oh, Mrs. Davis," Helen cried, "of course you could not love a God who would never give Tom a chance, and then punish him; of course you could not love Him. But Tom is not punished by being sent to hell; indeed, indeed he is not. God is good, he could not be so cruel as to give a soul no chance, and then send it to hell. Don't ever think that Tom, brave fellow, is there! Oh, believe what I say to you!"

Mrs. Davis seemed stupefied. She looked up into those beautiful, sympathetic brown eyes, and her dry lips moved. "You don't think," she said in a hoarse, hurried whisper—"You are not saying, are you—that Tom isn't in hell?" "I know he is not," exclaimed Helen, "I know it! Justice? Why, it would be the most frightful injustice, because, as you say, Tom had no chance, so God would not punish him eternally for being what he had to be, born as he was and living as he did. I don't know anything about people's souls when they die—I mean about going to heaven—but I do know this: As long as a soul lives, it has a chance for goodness, a chance to turn to God."

The few extracts that are here given will indicate the nature of Mrs. Deland's work. No wonder that the worthy Dean of Westminster says: "It is the most powerful religious fiction that has appeared since the days of John Bunyan."

The careful Bible student, however, cannot help wishing that the good-hearted, sympathetic Helen had not read to Mrs. Davis the words of the Savior to the dying thief: "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," and the words that the Savior said to Mary just after His resurrection: "Touch me not for I am not yet ascended to My Father;" and then again the words of the Apostle Peter, which tells us plainly where the Savior had been during those three days while His body lay in the tomb. "For Christ also suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but quickened by the Spirit; by which also He went and preached to the spirits in prison." Ah! yes, one cannot help wishing that Helen had read these words to the disconsolate widow. What a flood of light it would have thrown upon the great work of redemption. How these words of Holy Writ would