

THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS.

FAITH AND RESPONSIBILITY.

The "News" is in receipt of Mr. Dwight H. Olmstead's pamphlet on "Protestant Faith or Salvation by Relief," a brief reference to which has been made previously in these columns. It is a philosophical treatise, very readable, dealing with a much discussed question of the true relation between faith and salvation. The author maintains in the first place that the hope of salvation is no proper incentive to duty; in fact, virtue is no virtue if it does not disregard expediency. In the second place, he argues that all belief is involuntary, and that, consequently, no one can be held responsible for his unbelief or expect reward for his particular belief. The questions are of interest because of their bearing upon revealed truth.

As to the first of these propositions it is sufficient to say that the highest ideal, no doubt, is that which sees in virtue itself the motive for devotion to it. Do right, because it is right, is sufficient for all morally perfect beings, but the fact is that religion appeals to beings naturally inclined to "love darkness more than light." Its purpose, therefore, is not merely to point out what is right, but to prove why and to supply the regenerating force that enables man to do right. With this in view it explains the consequences of wrong-doing and well-doing, appeals to men to turn from sin, in order to escape "the wrath to come" and points out how to obtain the power to perform righteousness. Religion deals with human beings on the lines followed by all practical instruction of rational persons. By explaining the results of transgression and its opposite it furnishes the reason for the existence of the laws to be observed, giving the strongest possible force to its appeal for unselfish virtue. In fact, the world has never produced any instances of self-sacrifice and God-like devotion to duty for its own sake, surpassing those of believers in Christ Jesus. There is not the slightest ground for the intimation that true religion fosters a morality which must break down under the power of temptation. On the contrary, it makes a man "sound at heart" and therefore strong. It saves him from "sin" and not merely from its consequences.

The second proposition that faith or belief is involuntary and therefore carries with it no responsibility is at variance both with the Scriptures and philosophy. It is readily admitted that we are responsible only for that which is voluntary, but the unbelief that condemns is not a result of lack of evidence, or inability to judge about the evidence presented, but of a refusal to give attention to such abundant evidence. This is the condemnation, that the light has been given, but people prefer darkness to light, on account of their love for that which is evil. It is an established fact that both faith and affection are influenced by examining truth and by communion with the objects that deserve and claim our admiration and love. If we neglect this, and as a consequence remain in unbelief, this unbelief is justly counted against us. The Scriptures represent that the humble, prayerful attention to the testimony of the Gospel is a gift of the Holy Spirit; that a clearer understanding of the truth follows and that the ultimate result is holy affection for things divine, and that these gifts are withheld only when voluntarily rejected, in consequence of a preference for error. To say, then,

that faith is involuntary is only partly correct, and therefore not correct at all. It is voluntary from the moment man is placed in a position to accept it, or reject it.

There would be less doubt on this subject, perhaps, were the true nature of faith, as set forth in sacred writ, better understood. Many authors see no more in it than a credence or assent to a doctrine, antecedent to an effort on the part of the believer to do right as near as he can. But it is vastly more than this. It is first of all a personal reliance on the Deity; the acceptance by the awakened soul of the Elder Brother, as the Mediator, the Surety of the new covenant. It is a bond of union between man and the Captain of his salvation, and its results are holy motives that have a bearing on all our acts and habits. Understood in this light, the question of responsibility for faith must be discussed on other grounds than those presented by Mr. Olmstead and the school of philosophers he represents.

CALLED BACK TO LIFE.

A strange story is related in the Buffalo Times concerning what appears to be the resurrection of a dead person. A young man, William Graham, living in the southern part of Santa Monica, Cal., apparently died of consumption recently. He had been ill for months, and at last expired in the presence of many friends and his weeping wife. An undertaker was called to prepare the body for its last resting place and the widow was led away from the room in agony and grief. Soon, however, she tore herself from her friends and rushed back into the death chamber. Here she threw herself on the corpse and called in a voice full of agony to her loved one to return. There was a slight tremor in the body. The watchers noticed it and so did Mrs. Graham. She rubbed the face and limbs and within an hour the man had recovered sufficiently to speak.

The paper states that there were in the room people of wide experience who declared that the man was dead, and William Graham himself says that he went out of life and journeyed into another country, one that was far more beautiful than this. He believes he was in heaven, heard wonderful strains of music and saw angels.

The narrative reminds in some particulars of the beautiful story of the resurrection of the son of the Shunammite by Elisha. In this instance it is stated:

"And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm."

Skeptical persons sometimes ask why does not the Almighty permit people to return from the other side and bear testimony to the fact of a life after this and the conditions of such a life? The objection was met by our Lord, who stated that if they do not believe the Scriptures; neither will they believe the statements of a person risen from the dead. There is a natural reason for this. The actual status of a life beyond probably is so different in every respect to the preconceived notions of men, that a testimony from that world generally would be considered incredible. The value to skeptics of such evidence has repeatedly been demonstrated. In the case of the incidents recorded in the Bible, the reply

always is that they are mere fables, poetic fiction at most; possible modern claims to miraculous rescue from death are silenced by the explanation that it was not death, only "suspended animation." Miraculous evidence for immortality always was of more value to believers than to skeptics.

WHEN DOES THE CENTURY BEGIN?

An exchange regards it as a mysterious peculiarity of the human mind that so much uncertainty exists regarding the true beginning of the twentieth century. There is probably not a newspaper in the country that does not at regular intervals receive a well worded request to "kindly publish in your valuable paper the date of the commencement of the next century," and some periodicals find it necessary to publish the proper reply to this question every week. In the same way, in any company of persons there are almost sure to be some who will argue that the next century begins on the first of January, 1900.

There can be no doubt upon this point. The first century commenced with the year 1 and ended with the year 100; the next century began with the year 101 and ended with 200, and in analogy with this the nineteenth century ends with the year 1900 and the next commences with 1901. If ocular demonstration is needed, the inquirer might arrange two thousand marbles or beads, or silver dollars if they should happen to be more handy, in twenty piles, one hundred in each, and he would find that it would not occur to him in counting them, to begin the twentieth pile with the last dollar or marble of the nineteenth pile. It is only in counting years and centuries that this to some occurs as the correct proceeding.

The reason is probably to seek in the fact that the years between 1800 and 1900 are the nineteenth century, and since all the years commencing with 18 (except the first) belong to the nineteenth pile, it appears plausible that all the years that begin with a 19 should be classed in the twentieth. There is where the confusion arises, and not in any peculiarity in the mental make-up of man. One moment's reflection is sufficient to convince any one that, since it takes 100 years to complete a century, the present century cannot expire and the next cannot begin, until the last day of the year 1900 has passed away.

CURE FOR POVERTY.

A contributor to the Century, discussing the causes of poverty, points out that the chief of these is established by nature, which makes "bread so dear and flesh and blood so cheap," that is, which makes the sustenance of life generally speaking dependent on one continual struggle. Nature and not society, he thinks, is responsible for the misery of human beings. Another cause is the vast improvements in the methods of production. The world has not yet learnt to avoid the alternative of highly stimulated and deeply depressed industry. Periods of activity and stagnation alternate and the producers who are limited to trade and place suffer. Another cause is found in the bad habits of the working men. It has been calculated that not less than a hundred million pounds are annually wasted, or worse than wasted, by the laboring classes of Great Britain. The author concludes that the proper remedy is practical education and that time alone can remedy the evil complained of. And in the meantime philanthropy must continue its noble work of alleviating the suffer-