

THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS.

RELIGIOUS RESTRICTION.

A friend remarked lately to the writer that he could not be religious because it would "bind him too closely." The speaker was not one specially prone to wrongdoing; on the contrary he has a reputation for being straightforward in all his dealings. But he has paid no particular attention to religious matters, and is a fair representative of a class of people who fancy that obedience to the laws of heaven means a restriction of the rights and privileges which they are justified in exercising.

Such a view is not in harmony with truth and justice, and it shows a lack of comprehension of the divine will. The laws of nature are God's laws; they control in time and in eternity, in mortality and in immortality. If there is anything that produces good, that brings permanent joy and satisfaction, or that adds to the intelligence of men, it is in harmony with divine law, and therefore is a part of true religion. Whatever retards progress or results in evil is contrary to the will of God, and therefore is non-religious. In this view of the subject it may be easily understood that while religion forbids all wrongdoing it does not bind man too closely for his own protection and benefit.

There are, however, unholy desires that are possessed by men. These are antagonistic to the true religious condition, and are the outgrowth of false traditions and improper actions. The appetite shown by these should be overcome. There are propensities in mankind which, in moderation, are good; when they attain an abnormal growth they are the opposite. For instance, the desire to possess this world's goods is commendable so long as it is within the bounds of justice; but when it passes beyond that and covets the property which belongs to another it operates to the injury of those who are actuated by it, because its nature then is to infringe upon the rights of others. If a man is gluttonous and eats more food than his system requires it results in an injury to his physical being; while he who restrains an abnormal appetite and is controlled by nature's laws removes the unnatural desire, and receives health and strength as the blessing for doing the Lord's will in this regard. In the sphere of religion this proper control over the actions of men is exercised; no more, no less. If they insist on giving way to abnormal appetites or unholy desires in any direction, religion condemns the act, and is thoroughly restrictive in that regard.

All truly religious principles, all the commandments which the Almighty has given, are beneficial in their nature. They act as a restriction only in cases of departure from that which produces good. They deprive us of no right; they do not limit us in the exercise of any privilege that will improve or benefit. They warn us to avoid that which in its very nature results in evil, and they indicate to us the means of living in harmony with the forces that control in the physical

and spiritual worlds and of reaping the benefits of such a life.

Of course, from a worldly point of view, sacrifices must be made in submitting to the requirements of the Lord. Yet every law and ordinance of the Gospel, when properly conformed to, works a lasting benefit to the individual. When seed time comes we spare a portion of our store of grain for planting; it passes from our possession, and to those who do not know of the subsequent processes it might seem lost in the earth. But in the soil it germinates, and in due time brings forth many fold for our sustenance. Thus it is with the sacrifices which we make in accord with the Lord's will; they produce more abundantly of the blessings of heaven for our enjoyment. The sacrifices responsive to religious requirements should be voluntary in their nature, that through intelligent conformity with law they may be fruitful in blessings. If they are not freely made, it is like taking seeds that need soil for their germination and development and scattering them amid the rocks or on the waters; they die and are lost to us, because the conditions which combine to maintain life are not made to exist. Upon the same principle that the harvest succeeds the planting so the blessings of heaven follow acceptable sacrifice. If we spread the seed of good words and work among men they bear a natural increase of fruit; if we give freely to the poor it is the planting of seeds that produce many fold; if we pay willingly of tithes and offerings to the Lord, His blessings will return abundantly to those who have faith to conform to this law. Thus it is with all sacrifices conformable with true religion, therefore they are made freely and joyfully by those who comprehend the workings of the unchangeable law which controls them.

The work of religion in this life is that of preparing us for the future which is steadily, surely closing in upon us. It cultivates all the capabilities of man to the utmost of his benefit; it eliminates or restricts in all that would retard or injure him. From the standpoint of self interest all mankind should be religious. This does not mean sanctimonious or gloomy; these are not religion, which is a cheerful compliance with universal laws under the direction of the superior intelligence of the Creator who would guide us into the next world as properly cared for persons were guided into the present sphere—in the full possession of all the faculties essential to their welfare.

The necessity of appropriate preparation for the future should be apparent to every thoughtful person who takes into consideration the lessons of the present. In this probation the child develops into the man by the natural, unyielding process of time. To qualify him for association with intelligent adults, he is subjected to a system of training by which his mind is cultivated and his judgment matured; by the time this is accomplished he is accounted a child no longer and takes

his place among the men of his generation. By the inexorable law of nature all men go hence. Those who would be prepared for association with the Ruler of the heavenly worlds must receive the training necessary to fit them for that condition. The system of education which will give the perfect training required to qualify men for that exalted station is the religion or Gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings the flesh into submission to the will of the spirit, and teaches its disciples to follow the example of the Savior of the world and do the will of their Father in heaven, that in His presence they may enjoy the perfection of peace and love. Such a religion possesses naught of repulsion to the good and the pure but when properly understood exerts for them an attraction beyond all the powers of mortality.

ON SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION.

It is noticeable that there is a strong tendency at present among Biblical exponents to give to sacred texts a figurative interpretation. Particularly is this the case with regard to narratives, the incidents of which seem incomprehensible to human reason. Recently President Harper of the university of Chicago characterized it as "nonsense" to suppose that the account of the Garden of Eden had any historical or geographical reality. The whole story, he maintained, is imaginary, intended to illustrate the writer's idea of the origin of sin. In a similar spirit a rabbi in San Francisco in a lecture on superstition, asks whether the account of Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt is meant to convey a historical fact or not? And he repeats this question in regard to numerous other Old Testament events. To explain the Scriptures as being in the main oriental poetry, full of grand figures of speech, void of substantial facts, something akin to the imaginary phantoms of Arabian Nights, seems to be the drift of the latest rationalistic schools.

There is nothing entirely new in this. The Gnostics of the early ages maintained that there was a hidden meaning in the word, which was known only to the select few, while the literal sense, absurd as it was pronounced to be in some instances, was good enough for the common people who knew no better. Origen, although not a Gnostic, is famous for his allegorical and symbolical interpretations, many of which are utterly absurd. But the remarkable thing is that these modern interpreters have advanced no farther than the celebrated church father of the second century. His argument ran something like this: What edification can be derived from the history of Abraham's sin, for instance in the matter of Sarah and Abimelech? Or, how can the apparent discrepancies be reconciled? Either these things are true in a spiritual and allegorical sense only, or we must reject the claim that the Scriptures are divinely inspired. This is substantially the argument of today. But its validity has already been tested throughout the ages and found wanting. The sacred Scriptures have come out from the test, like the children in the burn-