

ARTICLE IX.

THE NET RESULT.

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THE past two or three decades have witnessed a vast enlargement of knowledge respecting religious truth. They have also witnessed a very considerable shifting of the religious point of view. It is the purpose of this article to examine this enlargement and shifting, to note its gains and losses, and to inquire, what is its net result; and to do this with brevity, comprehensiveness, and large eliminations.

I. THE ENLARGEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE.

1. For purposes of exegesis of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, *Philology*, not only in Hebrew and Greek, but in their cognate tongues, has much better equipped all biblical scholars. The principal details of this better equipment are accessible to all, in a more accurate presentation of the Bible to modern readers. The American Revision of 1901 is, at this moment, the crowning single example of this in our English speech.

2. *Archæology and Historical Research* have thrown floods of light on the beginnings of the Hebrew and of the Christian religion. The actual historical development which both of these religions underwent, and which the Christian religion is still undergoing, was never so well understood as now. We of to-day know Abraham far better than Gamaliel knew him. We know Jesus Christ far better than Origen or Chrysostom knew him.

3. *The Criticism of Scripture Documents and of their As-*

sociated History has modified, in particular, time-immemorial views of order and of impulse, both in the literature and in the events.

This may be illustrated by supposing that a city stands on what are known to be the ruins of two or more buried cities. The remains of the buried cities have long been in some measure excavated and studied; but, always, with the view—ingrained into everybody's historical consciousness and civic theory—that one city was later, and the other earlier; and with the view, also, that high civic impulses alone dominated the erection of both cities.

But now arrives a period of general and systematic excavation and study, which seems to show that the supposed later city was the earlier, and that the impulses in the erection of both cities were composite and varied in character, some of them having been higher, and some lower. This greatly upsets the city's historical society, the arrangement of its museum of archæology, and its teaching of civic history and duty as deduced from the earlier supposed unmixed high civic impulses in the buried cities. And yet not a single fact has been altered by this excavation and study. Only the understanding of the facts has changed. Moreover, the city still stands, and still, through fault and virtue, climbs heavenward, as did the earlier cities in their hitherto unsuspected actual order, and in their hitherto undreamed-of complexity of constructive motive.

4. *The Study of Comparative Religion* has made it clear, how truly, under many religious systems, God has left himself not without witness. We are consequently coming to see religion, not any longer as a peradventure, always in the court either of speculation or of historical evidence; not any longer as something adventitious; not any longer as an intervention amidst the disaster of human affairs; but as a great, vital, uni-

versal reality, the supreme fact and distinction of the race of man. We are coming to see, moreover, that every form of religion which has exercised any appreciable influence on the human mind, has its own contribution to make to the sum-total of religious values. We witness the Parliament of Religions. We behold Phillips Brooks' power, as preacher and inspirer of men, confessedly greatly augmented by his elaborate earlier studies of a religious system almost entirely antithetical to his own, namely, Mohammedanism.

5. *Psychology*—in its modern sense almost an unexploited field thirty years ago—has arrived, and has arrived to stay. We know, at last, a little of what the human body, with its successive stages and epochs of development, with its appetites and passions, with its vigor and exhaustion, with its health and disease, with its virtues and vices, has to do with religion. This explicates for us, at last, the Samaritan Woman, the Woman that was a Sinner, Judas and Simon, Paul and John, and discovers to us therein the supreme insight of the Saviour. We know, as never before, when we have even a little glimpsed its disclosures, what the Saviour's infinite pity and patience toward men meant; why he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden"; and why, in that last great day of the feast, he "stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

6. God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." "Sirs, ye are brethren." So do the ever-wise Scriptures, so do lawgivers, psalmists, prophets, apostles, presage for us that *Sociology*, which has also arrived, and arrived to stay,—the science of man as a social, interdependent being, with the lights and also with the shadows which it throws athwart religion. We have had

consequently, at last, Samuel C. Armstrong, and Arnold Toynbee, and Graham Taylor, and John Mitchell.

7. A more intelligent and better *Ethics* has dawned. In its light, asceticism withers. In its light, Asceticism's twin brother, the Ethics of Negation, withers. "Thou shalt not," decreases. "Thou shalt," increases. Positive, healthful, many-sided, all-round living; the uses of pleasure; the value of sport; the necessity of relating life to this world, as well as to the world to come,—all these as duty, as privilege, as standard, have arrived. Life's duration is already lengthening under it. Sturdier children are being born of it. A stalwart race is coming to people this planet from it. The President settled the Coal Strike. Then he hunted bears. The stamina and freeness of mind for the latter, rendered possible the former. In many quarters this Ethics is, indeed, still an unwelcome or a rejected guest, but it will not be so long. "I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly," the Saviour said, with larger meanings than we once supposed.

8. To mention but one other range of the enlargement of knowledge, we have a better *Philosophy*. It is a philosophy of life, ever and on all sides evolving life. It is a philosophy of the immanent, ever-present, ever-working, ever-loving God. It agrees with Jacob, that "This"—even that boulder heap outside Luz—"is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." It sings

"That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off Divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

Its Fiske has displaced Hamilton. Its Fairbairn and Gordon have displaced Mansel and Park.

About this enlargement of knowledge respecting religious truth, two remarks are in place:—

1. There are, no longer, two parties concerning it. Every intelligent person, in greater or less degree, admits the reality and value of the fresh light from all these sources. The acceptance of such light, indeed, varies. The readjustment to it is far from uniform or complete. There are partisans and protestants at various points. But, thank God! as to the main tenor, all intelligent Christians are far more nearly at one than some would like to admit.

2. Much of this enlargement of knowledge is still in its tentative and provisional stages. It is not to be laid hands on suddenly. It is to be welcomed, rejoiced in, and discreetly used; and yet a certain suspense of judgment in appraising its results, the spirit of testing and proving, and the reflection that further light may perhaps modify or extinguish this, will most wisely be ours, as students and teachers of religion. This is the attitude of the true seeker after truth. This is the attitude of the learner in Christ's school. There have been a great many theories of electricity since Faraday. The molecules of the physics so confidently taught in the colleges a generation ago, are, as a great physicist has said, Gullivers and Lilliputians in the profounder physics of to-day. Let us face the East. Let us rejoice in the light. But let us remember that there is a light, above the brightness of the sun, which shall one day correct, and absorb, and supplant all this.

II. THE SHIFTING RELIGIOUS POINT OF VIEW.

As an inevitable consequence of the enlargement of knowledge respecting religious truth, the past two or three decades have witnessed a very considerable shifting of the religious point of view.

1. The religious thought, which, earlier, was almost ex-

clusively occupied with God, is now more occupied with man. It turns from the source, to the sphere, in which religion exercises itself.

2. It is no longer concentrated mainly on the other world, but on this world. It expects that life, and has glad anticipations of it, but its major energy is devoted to this life. It believes that if life is truly lived here, it will have its necessary unfolding into ampler life there. It considers that that life will be of little worth, except as it has its roots in true blessedness to be freely and amply had in this life.

3. It has largely ceased to be introspective. It turns from inward contemplation to outward activity. The profound solitudes, the searching self-scrutiny, the deep contrition for inner sins, and, likewise, the subjective ecstasies, of an earlier generation, are almost enigmas to it now. One of President Woolsey's most characteristic sermons is entitled, "The Need of the Meditative Spirit in Modern Christianity." If he felt that need in his time, how much more would he feel it now!

4. Its conception of religion, has almost eliminated the idea of cataclysm from it. While it has, in a certain sense, a profound conviction of the sinfulness of sin, it has reconstructed this sinfulness into terms of pedagogy, rather than of disaster. Sin, to its mind, is, to a certain degree, a schoolmaster to bring us to righteousness. It does not take this position lightly. It is appalled before sin. When it beholds Henry Drummond, standing by himself alone, after dealing with certain students, and ejaculating, "How can God bear these men's sins!" it has much the same feeling. But the sense of disaster, of general wreck, of human history as rearranged by God into life-saving enterprise,—and the consequent awe, sense of "amazing grace," and so forth, which flowed from such a view,—is, to say the least, much diminished. "Ought

not Christ to have suffered these things?" it fondly remembers as one of the Saviour's pivotal sayings. It looks upon God as going about his infinite redemptive work with an eagerness and zeal not dissimilar in principle to that which animates the China Inland Mission. In such a sense it still glories in "amazing grace."

5. As a consequence of these and other changed points of view, certain primary Christian doctrines have not, indeed, been emptied of their meanings, but have been thrown into vastly altered lights.

(1) Retribution is still believed in, and apprehension is felt before it; but it stands in such relations to the supposed divine pedagogy of the human race, that it no longer has its former content either of necessarily unbroken duration, or of necessarily extreme severity. It would be a huge mistake to affirm that the dogma of universal salvation has established itself. Such is far from the fact; but, to the prevalent Christian thinking of our time, retributive justice is wonderfully tempered with mercy.

(2) Redemption through Jesus Christ is no longer conceived in the full and literal earlier sense of the doctrine. It is believed that Christ truly gave himself a ransom for many. It is believed that he was made sin for us who knew no sin. The old dogmas of Ransom and Satisfaction are seen to have a certain somewhat figurative, but yet profound, significance. There would be great disinclination to abandon either of them, in their more spiritual senses. Nevertheless, the whole trend of Christian thinking is to construe Christ's redemptive work more vitally, as a present, daily reality; as a work always going on between Christ and the individual soul; as a continual crucifying of Christ afresh in his vicarious daily relation with the life of man.

(3) The Christian Revelation is no whit less believed in and accepted than in an earlier generation, but is viewed more comprehensively. The revelation is conceived to have been primarily a revelation in life, and especially in the life of Jesus Christ. The Book which specially records the revelation is deeply revered; but the reverence is directed toward the great individual and national life which it records, and toward the spiritual flavor of its writings, rather than toward it as an infallible vehicle of the divine thought. Multitudes of devout Christian scholars, and vast multitudes of Christian students of the Bible who may not rank as scholars, will concur in the testimony that the Book never meant so much to them as since it has come to be so construed by them; and yet there is a manifest difficulty in securing for the Book, among readers at large, the same kind of grip which it had under the earlier presupposition. It seems to have made a moral and a spiritual gain in the transition of thought regarding it; and, at the same time, to have made a loss on the more drastic side.

6. As the changed points of view have modified Christian doctrine, so also have they modified Christian activity.

(1) With a more adequate Psychology, a more matter-of-fact approach is had to the deep mysteries of religion. They are perceived to have their analogues in the human frame and mind. The voices of Professor James and Professor Coe are heard in the land. Sin, the New Birth, Justification, Sanctification, and the rest, are viewed more scientifically, however much the mystery of the Divine life impinging on the human life may be recognized and appreciated. Consequently, environment, nurture, education, spiritual diagnosis in a very factual sense; and so forth, are much more empha-

sized in Christian work than would have been dreamed of earlier.

(2) With a more adequate Sociology, studies of the environment, efforts for its amelioration, a thousand devices in a great variety of practical directions, work for boys, work for young children, work for women, the fight against alcohol, the battle with the slums, and much besides, which is everywhere in evidence, are taking the place of older Christian activities.

(3) With a more adequate Ethics, preaching and Christian teaching are becoming, more than earlier, a preaching and a teaching of righteous conduct; and a preaching and teaching of this along broad lines, in which amusement, sports, and the like, are given a place they never occupied before; though there is great emphasis also on what Mr. Roosevelt calls the "strenuous life."

(4) With a more adequate Philosophy, whereas the activities of religion had, earlier, an almost inseparable relation to the mysteries of the soul's life and of the divine life, and to the perils on every hand which beset the soul, and which might readily plunge it to perdition,—mystery, except in its higher metaphysical sense, has almost vanished, and the perils are no longer those of Apollyon and his angels, but those of indigestion, bad heredity, bad sanitation, and a certain psychic misdirection.

This outline, as it will be perceived, is suggestive only. It leaves out much. Concisely stated, the respects in which the religious point of view is shifting are these:—

1. Contemplation less of God, and more of man.
2. Less of the other world, and more of this world.
3. Less of inward things, and more of outward things.
4. Less of cataclysm, and more of pedagogy.
5. Such primarily Christian doctrines as Retribution, Re-

demption, and Revelation, by no means abandoned or emptied of meaning, but very differently interpreted.

6. Christian activity conforming itself to the new Psychology, Sociology, Ethics, and Philosophy.

III. GAINS.

In noting the gains from all this, we may particularize:—

1. The gain of a larger and truer knowledge, and of worthier thoughts, of God. With what comfort, and blessing, and impulse, and inspiration, this knowledge has broken on our time! How we fellowship the heroes who helped evolve the Hebrew faith, and the heroes who helped evolve the Christian faith! How much nearer, dearer, and really greater, God seems, now that his way of working in his universe has become more thinkable and rational! As with the germ theory of disease, and with the antiseptic surgery, we are doubly armed for battle against sickness and death; so are we doubly armed to fight the world, the flesh, and the Devil, through our better historical, psychological, sociological, ethical, and philosophical understanding of realities!

2. The gain of unity. With an intellectual and spiritual comfort how profound, the mind contemplates unity in the universe, unity in the world, unity in our race, unity in the principles which operate in the world of mind and also in the world of matter; unity amidst diversity, amidst diverse systems of thought, races, race aptitudes, and unity among the most diverse human souls! "Oh, that there were a Daysman betwixt us that might lay his hands upon us both!" cried the ancient Seer. His longing was never so completely satisfied, in the range of reconciliations and of unities, as at this hour.

3. Large gains of working knowledge. Take any practical line of Christian activity,—Foreign Missions, Home Mis-

sions, City Work, Temperance Work, Prison Work, Relief Work, Work for Boys, for Young Children, for Women, for Men, as examples,—and how immeasurably better furnished for them we now are, than we were two or three decades ago!

4. The gain of a certain enthusiasm, *esprit de corps*, and optimism. It is impossible to express the sense of all this, like the sense and premonition of victory in a great, fighting army, which has seized upon the mighty Christian hosts, and which is, itself, half the victory. Dr. Alexander McKenzie says that the only man he envies is the Freshman in Harvard College. Dr. Andrew P. Peabody expressed a similar thought along his own high plane, not long before his death. It is a great time to be alive. It is a great time to have a chance to serve Christ. Instead of bemoaning the time, or bemoaning our own small place and chance and opportunity, the thing for every one of us to do is to thank God that we are alive, that we have our reason, that we have what smaller or larger power God may have given us, and that, amidst whatever of limitation he may have hedged us within, we have at least some opportunity for service at this climax of the ages.

IV. LOSSES.

In noting, on the other hand, the losses, we may particularize:—

1. The loss of mystery, the loss of the sense of peril, the loss of the sense of the still very much balanced struggle between the two worlds. We want mystery. We want the enduring of hardness. We want something of such struggles as Donald Menzies, the Highland Mystic of Drumtochty, underwent. The battle against principalities and powers will go on for some time yet. Because we have too largely eliminated this the subtler side of religion, which the Bible

never does, Spiritualism, Theosophy, the utterly absurd metaphysics of Christian Science, and so forth, are captivating multitudes of minds. We have robbed these minds of their heritage of spiritual mystery, and they proceed to devise one for themselves. It is with them as it was with Micah, in the hill country of Ephraim, in the days of the Judges. They consecrate for themselves this sort of priest for their spiritual necessities, in the room of that which God has appointed.

2. The loss involved in a wide-spread and practical disuse of the Bible, with its indispensable supplies for spiritual needs. The Bible has been so placed on the dissecting table—though we are never to forget that the dissecting table has invaluable uses—that it has largely ceased to be the Word of God in that profound secondary sense in which sober modern scholarship still conceives it to be his Word.

3. The loss, too largely, of a Present, Living, Daily Saviour. We have, and very properly, rejected certain inadequate interpretations of his work for men; but we have failed to erect in their place, and to affirm, and to press on the hearts of men, and, above all, to have as resistless forces in our own lives, the sense of that constant, vital, redeeming relation which he holds to our lives, and to all lives which will at all permit him to do so. We need to reënthrone Jesus Christ. We need to swear him an eternal allegiance. We need to lift him up, and to hold him forth, as the supreme need, and the supreme glory, and the supreme power, of daily living.

4. The loss, too largely, of a sense of dependence. The loss, too largely, of the meaning of prayer, save as a worthy and useful psychic exercise. God is the hearer of prayer. He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. We need to bring prayer back to its biblical, to its Christly, to its historical, to its personally experienced, place in every life.

We need the Prayer-meetings. They have them in England. They are rarities here. We need, in the spirit of prayer, to lay hold on the promises. There is a story of an old woman whose Bible was filled with the letters "T," "P," and "T & P." She explained, to someone making inquiry, that "T" stood opposite promises which she had tried but had not proved; that "P" indicated those which she had proved without any special trying; but that those marked "T & P" meant that she had both tried and proved them, and those she liked best of all. Whether we mark the Scriptures or not, every man of us needs, for substance, a Bible like that. Every church that we serve, or are interested in, needs to be full of Christians like that. "According to your faith be it unto you," still remains a primary psychological and practical truth. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith," still remains an inexhaustible fissure vein, full of golden values for human living. It is a dividend-paying proposition, that can never be rejected without measureless loss.

We have attained, and should never cease to thank God for, a better *rationale* of the order of the world and of its history, of the nature of the soul, of the nature of human society, of the true principles of conduct, and of the divine ways of working: but it remains that we are the same human beings, with needs, sins, sorrows, fears, hopes, despairs, defects, triumphs. Nothing that we have learned, nothing of God's more adequately understood ways, nothing of God's ampler mercy, frees us from the necessity of God's help along all of these lines; of God's deliverance of every one of us from our sins and from ourselves; and of a present, living, daily Christ, to be the Saviour, the Redeemer, the Friend, of every one of us. And to this end prayer, and laying hold on the promises of

God, need reinstatement in every life, and in every church; in, indeed, a more intelligent sense, but, also, in an equally real sense with that which they had in the days of our fathers.

5. The loss, too largely, of a sense of the Church as the Body of Christ, as his Reincarnation and Personal Presentment in this world. We have so much sense of unity, we have such appreciation of what Graham Taylor calls "Christianity in solution" among people, that we have almost forgotten that principle of the incarnation which lays upon those whom he has redeemed a priestly function toward the world. "Ye are an elect race," says St. Peter, "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." Not in the sense which many would advocate. Not along lines ecclesiastical and hierarchichal. Our Psychology, and Sociology, and Ethics, and Philosophy, should alike teach us that. But in a larger, vital sense, which the Apostle indicates when he adds: "That ye may show forth the excellences of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

6. Loss, too largely, of the herald's, or prophet's, place, in preaching, and in Christian witnessing. We are about a multitude of things. We are verifying and exploiting our better Psychology. We are experimenting with and applying our better Sociology, in a multitude of special lines. We are exhibiting to the people our Bible as at this particular moment understood to have been made, and our Christ as now explicated. Dean Sanders, in a thoughtful and noble address on "Theological Education," delivered some time ago, indicated, under ten heads, what the men of the Yale Divinity School were then undertaking to do under thirty-two professors.

All of these are important. Rightly pursued, they are valuable and praiseworthy. But, meantime, where is our perspective? Where is our sense of proportion? Jane Addams

tells of a woman in Chicago slums, who said she did not want hygienic food; she wanted "what she'd ruther." Those who work hard, and use up carbon, need fats, ten-penny nails, something, that can feed their cravings, and keep them in strength. The cooking school, they find, does not always do that; and the theological seminary, with all its excellences, falls, too often, alas! under the same condemnation.

This is a hungry world. It wants the Bread of Life. There is an Eternal Gospel. The Angel in Mid Heaven proclaims it. Spurgeon proclaimed it, and Beecher, and Moody, and Brooks—each with his better or worse shibboleth, but each, however imperfectly, in its capacity to meet the soul's needs. They sensed proportion. They had perspective. They did not miss the wheat among the chaff. They had a message. They prophesied. They heralded. Is it so at large, however, at this hour?

Summarizing the gains and losses,—only some of either, as will have been perceived,—we find the gains to have been:—

1. Larger, truer knowledge; worthier thoughts of God.
 2. The gain of unity in our thought of the universe, of the world, of our race, of the world of matter and of the mind, and so forth.
 3. Large gains of working knowledge.
 4. The gain of enthusiasm, *esprit de corps*, and optimism.
- The losses are equally impressive:—

1. Mystery, the subtler, more psychic or spiritual side of religion, largely gone.
2. Wide-spread practical disuse of the Bible, with its stores of spiritual nutriment.
3. Loss, too largely, of a Present, Living, Daily Saviour.
4. Loss, too largely, of a sense of dependence, of the prayer life, of the life of faith.

5. Loss, too largely, of a sense of the church as the Body of Christ, in the noble, biblical sense of the term.

6. Loss, too largely, of the herald's, or prophet's, place, in preaching, and in Christian witnessing.

V. THE NET RESULT.

What, then, is the net result? Incomparable gains. Immeasurably better furnishing. Truer knowledge. Larger thought. God more worthily conceived of. Christ more truly apprehended. The theory and the apparatus ready to our hands.

But at what immense cost! The real thing apt to be missed in the multitude of the details. The deep mystery, and wonder, and infinite inner world of it all, too largely forgotten. The incomparable treasure-house of spiritual riches in the Bible not adequately sensed or seized. The infinite Christ, the supreme fact of the world and of the universe, not seen, and embraced, and loved, and lived, and held forth, as, more than ever (because he is better known and understood), he should be. Human dependence, God's personal power to help, the measureless treasure of his promises, very largely set aside, or disused. The sense of what he meant, when he chose men to be with him, that he might send them forth, very largely relegated to theory only. At the best, the doctrine of "In His Steps," of an imitation, that is to say, of Christ,—which, however, as I very well know from personal intimacy, is not Sheldon's real thought,—rather than the doctrine of "In His Light."

By all the immense gains, by the larger freedom, by the ampler opportunity, and by the living Christ who is holding all these out to us, we need a reawakening, revival, a reinstatement of the great primary religious facts, in their larger and worthier light, to be in all our lives, as life, as power, as in-

spiration. Less method. Less detail. Less running to this eccentricity and that. Less opinionatedness. Less conceit. More humility. More tenderness of heart. More love. More laying hold on the infinite and unaltered, though much more worthily interpreted, verities of our religion. More use of them. More discipline of ourselves in spiritual disciplines. More zeal. More vision. More personal presentment, and living out, on our part, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This that I am saying is not obscurantism. It is not pessimism. It is belief in progress, in the light, in the great and blessed way God is leading the world in our time. We want more of it, not less. But it is a challenge. It is a demand for the highest thing and the real thing to be apprehended in our religion, and to be turned into bone, and sinew, and blood, and force, and life, and conquering power. We want revival in its true sense. We want Christ's life anew in us. We want uniting with him, as the branch with the vine. "Except ye abide in me, ye can do nothing." "Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to the Father."

May we not hope that, in the valleys and along the mountain sides of Wales, this has begun for the whole world?