

This booklet is an unassuming little publication, but it is important as a symptom of the times. It was written by the late Mr. James Freeman Clarke many years ago as a series of papers for the *Christian Inquirer*. Yet it is well that they should not be forgotten and the lessons contained therein should be heeded by the clergy as well as the laity of this country. It is an attempt to make religion practical and to point out the true direction in which church-life has to develop.

There is a great truth in the general complaint made throughout the world that the religion of civilised mankind, especially Christianity in the shape it exists at present, has lost its life, its influence, and its usefulness. Our religious views must be transformed, they must be reconciled with the principles of science and must be adapted to the real needs of the people. The problem is, how to do it.

If a solution of the problem shall be found, it is certain that it will be first put into practice in the United States of America ; for here the church is free. The many different churches of our country, with few exceptions (the Roman Catholic Church is perhaps the only one) are in principle churches of the people. A change of opinion, of belief, of religious conviction among the people will result in the appointment of such pastors and leaders as are in agreement with their congregations. Clergy and laity form here one organic body. The clergy are not imposed upon their congregations by the state ; they are the exponents of their congregations, the representatives of the religious ideas (perhaps upon the whole of the conservative religious ideas) of their churches.

How different things are in Europe, where the state-churches of England and Germany, for instance, prevent all progress in religion, theology, and church-life.

Mr. Clarke's book, if read with these considerations in mind, shows the agencies that are at work in this country and that will (as we confidently hope) result in a new phase of religious life. Among the chapters of the book we note the following titles : "The way we helped our minister to write good sermons" ; "Aim of Life" ; "Temptation of Jesus" ; "The Miracles" ; "The Sermon on the Mount" ; and others. The spirit in which the book is written is not exactly rationalistic, yet it shows in every line a strong monistic bias. For instance, the usual definition of miracles as a suspension of the laws of nature is discarded ; and yet it would be erroneous to suppose that the style of the book is marked by a radical tendency. Not

at all. Every faithful Christian can read it line for line without feeling the least offence. But it is plain that herein lies the author's force. The book is popular, but behind its popularity, unusual depth of thought is noticeable. In a similar way St. Paul gave milk to his followers because they were babes in Christ, and could not bear heavier food. Mr. Clarke's book is written especially for babes in Christ, yet every one who has given any serious thought to the religious problem will appreciate at once the difficulty and the importance of such an undertaking. KPC.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.