

READING this anonymous book is like overhearing one end of a telephone conversation carried on by an unseen person. It is an aggressive debate with an unnamed and unheard High Church Anglican clergyman, and in its temper and form enough of an attack upon his views to justify the title, which, being Anglicized, is "The Defendant Being Absent." Just what the absent defendant, the unheard talker at the other end of the telephone, says in defense of himself and his views, we are not told, and can only infer from what the anonymous talker at this end is saying to him, part of which is manifestly reply and rejoinder. Evidently, the man at the other end is at times a vigorous and tenacious contender. The man at this end is not having his own way in the argument unresisted. The book is thoughtful and thought-provoking, in many things wise and penetrating, in everything stimulating. The general object seems to be to force wider views upon the mind of a narrow, bigoted, and belated ecclesiastic. It is not all in the polemic form and tone; some of it has the Bensonian temper and style of sweet and gentle meditation; all of it is earnest and reverent. There is plenty of plain talk to this Anglican shepherd concerning the condition of his flock. This, for example: "I have the very gravest fears that there are many ways of saying, 'Lord! Lord!' and remaining outside of the Christian salvation—ways which are so familiar to us that we have ceased to notice them. In my opinion yours is a parish largely lost. Your well-to-do parishioners hold, I suppose, that to believe in Jesus Christ and call him Lord involves at least the faithful endeavor to walk in his footsteps. And where are their own footprints? They wend to clubs, where the highest enthusiasm seems to be evoked by grumbling at the taxes, where idle men wax most energetic when arguing that the 'lower' classes 'should learn and labor truly to get their own living.' They wend to the golf course, not for recreation from toil but to find occupation, and there they manufacture wastrels by teaching idleness to boys who ought to be learning a trade. They wend to dinners whose price would educate an orphan. They wend to church where they call themselves 'miserable sinners,' and where they cultivate those sentiments which make them most indignant when any other voice than their own suggests that they are not righteous! Now, let us have no confusion. I am not saying that this sort of life is not a proper one for an English gentleman—that is a matter of opinion with which I am not just now concerned. But to hold that these are the footsteps of Christ is a position intellectually rotten. If they do not know this their ignorance reflects on the church. In this age such a lax view of belief in Christ certainly cannot be held without decay of the reasoning faculty, and, as Mr. Inge has well said, 'our faculties are the appointed organs of communion between God and man.' What is decaying cannot be brought to the altar of Christ! The very altar recedes before it, and is no altar to the would-be giver. The Holy Grail vanishing in the moral darkness must be re-sought." We hear the man at this end of

the telephone telling the rector over the wire that "Piety is the most penetrating biblical critic. The Bible of the simplest saint is well worn and thumbed, perhaps actually torn, at the Psalms and in the Gospels, while the pages are quite clean in Leviticus and Esther. That is because the simple saints are instinctive critics. They might not acknowledge in words that there are degrees of inspiration in the Bible; but the markings in their Bibles make it perfectly plain that in effect they do." And we hear this: "Our Lord did not choose to put his teachings in writing. He chose to write on the hearts and in the lives of the men who were with him and around him. The records which we have were written later to give magnificent testimony to the fact that his writing on the lives of men was a success. It *worked*; and the ideals of Jesus of Nazareth *worked*; and the companionship with the risen and invisible Christ *worked*; and trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit *worked*. In the man Christ Jesus, living meteor from a higher world had struck humanity with tremendous impact, sending forth potent vibrations; and human lives, attuned to these vibrations, were transfigured. He made all things new, and life looked totally changed to the early Christians; and the difference was so attractive, so joyful, that everywhere hearts opened themselves like flowers to receive the transmitted vibrations of this force which was well called 'the light of life.' It is by lives that carry out Christ's ideals, carry them from the heart outward into the recreation of society, that Christianity will be potent and successful in any given spot." One interesting passage sets forth the way in which the ancient Jews came to their conviction of immortality, and illustrates in a homely way how the sense of God's presence may affect a man: "The Jews learned to enjoy God here and now, and in the immense satisfaction that they learned to experience in his presence on earth, in the knowledge of his heart and character which they gained from delighting in him here and now, they came gradually to say to themselves, 'If God is so good to us here, if he loves us so much, he cannot bring our existence to an end, he must want to keep us for ever.' This way of arriving at the belief in immortality produced something better for the world than the Greeks ever produced. Carry this idea to the Psalms, and you will find there the foundations of our Christian heaven. They chronicle the period in which the Jews were learning to rejoice in God, not only mid earthly blessings but apart from them, and before they had begun to realize that death would not separate them from him. What tremendous and very human delight they took in the sense of God's presence! 'In thy presence is satiety of joy' (Psa. 16. 11). 'I will sacrifice in his tent sacrifices of shouting; I will sing and make melody unto Jehovah' (Psa. 27. 6). See the whole of Psalm 43, especially 5. 4: 'God, the gladness of my joy!' 'With thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light' (Psa. 26. 9). 'O taste and see that Jehovah is good: happy is the man that taketh refuge in him' (Psa. 34. 9). 'In him our heart is glad' (Psa. 33. 21). 'Thou didst loose my sackcloth and gird me with gladness, to the end that my glory might make melody unto thee' (Psa. 30. 11, 12). 'I love thee fervently, O Jehovah, my

strength' (Psa. 18. 1). 'My soul looketh for the Lord more than watchmen look for the morning' (Psa. 130. 6). Our fathers missed the liberal exhilaration of these words because the traditional explanation was that the psalmists were talking about some future and heavenly state. They were not. They were able to sit down here and now, in prosperity or adversity, and take delight in the practice of the presence of God. Shut up your terrier; withdraw your presence from him; you know the gloom that will fall upon him. You know how he will listen to each sound of your passing step, what his agony will be when he hears you go out across the fields without him. That is a picture that suggests what the Jew thought he would suffer after death, where God was not. Then, as to the sunshine of his inward life, the sense of upholding in God's presence, I think you may get a suggestion as to that from this same source. Do you remember, last summer, how, when I was walking with you, we loitered just inside the gate of a ten-acre field because the dog wanted exercise and would not remain without you? We saw him, a white speck, darting in and out of the farthest hedge, dashing hither and thither, now nothing but the quivering tail seen in the depth of hedge or ditch, now racing frantically round large areas of the pasture on the trail of the happy rabbits he never caught—mad with delight, in harmony with the sun and the wind, and all the growth and animation of the field, its flowering ditches and deep hedgerows. You explained that, whenever you could, you stood within the gate—perhaps making up your accounts, or reading—in order that the dog might have his game with nature. When we could no longer loiter we came out of the field. You did not call; the dog was at the farthest corner, his head almost buried in the hedge; and yet he could no longer enjoy himself. You had not withdrawn your presence more than a minute before he observed that you had gone, and was beside us, a sober wayfarer. You pointed out to me that to this and other fields he had access always if he had chosen, but that he never took the least pleasure in them unless you were within the gate. Sometimes, when he could not be with you, he trotted out alone, and on such occasions he never frisked or showed any signs of delight which all things gave him when in your company. You remarked, too, how touching it was that, when his foot was crushed and he refused to eat and seemed only to desire to die, he seemed to experience contentment in your presence. These things are surely written in nature for our instruction. You will, perhaps, say that my illustration is profane, that there can be little in common between a dog's delight in his master and the human soul's delight in God. Well, but what I am telling you is that if you so train people that they can delight in God even as much as that, if his presence somewhere in the field of their consciousness, even when they are fully occupied with hedgerows and rabbits, even when they are wounded and despairing of life, gives them the satisfaction that your dog takes in you, then nothing that any infidel may prove, or think that he proves, concerning their religious authorities, can dismay them." It is suggested in this book that if the churches could simplify their creeds so that all the now iso-

lated spiritual values of the different denominations should be synthesized around some such motto as "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly," there would be constituted such a church as no man could reasonably excuse himself from entering. Religion is feeling and purpose and life. Superabundance of life is its aim and result. The world needs better character, better behavior, better work, better art, better laws, better business, better literature; and a fuller religion is the only door to betterment of any kind; the fuller life comes only from God. "But," says the author, "this fuller religion implies getting into the mountains of the soul at night time and meeting there with God, going out a great while before it is day into the solitudes of the spiritual life." This book, apparently the work of a layman, possibly of the Anglican communion, closes with some remarks on Christian missions. It was once the author's duty, years ago, to read missionary magazines from end to end to an invalid. He found the task monotonous because the magazines were all written in one style and reported the same class of activities. (That was in the last century, and in the great quickening of missionary zeal and intelligence and enterprise in this century the author's criticism of missionary literature no longer applies.) But in all his reading one fixed fact impressed him, and that was that, whenever any missionary was in doubt, he betook himself to prayer and was quickly satisfied that he had a practical answer. The same fact is found in the earliest missions, in the lives of the great and small reformers, and in every record of Christian enterprise from the Acts of the Apostles onward. Furthermore, the author noticed in all his reading the gradual conformity of every diverse sort of Christian missionary work to the same principles of loving adaptability, unflinching endurance, statesmanlike organization, efficient, practical management, and unceasing enterprise. This seemed to him proof positive of the influence of one Master Mind, the mind of Christ, upon men of diverse temper and training in different organizations, and in every degree of isolation. He also noticed in missionaries an intensifying sense of the communion of saints and of the presence and potency of the unseen powers of good and evil—a sense of moral battle raging in which they themselves were participants. The author emphasizes the fact that the one supreme and decisive proof of the power of Christ in the world is seen in the transformation of character and the conquest of human lives. "Where," he asks, "is the church most manifestly mighty and glorious?" And he answers: "On the mission-field and in the slum. The enterprise, the zeal, the statesmanship, and, above all, the love of God and humanity, with which the missionary work has everywhere gone forward in the hands of men whose natural endowments are not above the average, is the one miracle which attests the truth of the word. Of course present, like past, history is always interpreted with a prepossession; yet I, who did not start with a prepossession in favor of Christian missions, but rather felt at first that every religion was almost as good as another, and that martyrdom was only worth while in the cause of liberty, have gradually come to believe that the facts of missionary enterprise in our

age are the best explanation, the best criticism, the only means to adequate appreciation, of all church history; and that the proof of the constant willingness and unique power of our Lord to translate the eternal love and wisdom to the humblest creature who will use his force for the love of humanity, lies in the triumphant aggressions of Christianity, not only where religions of a lower type prevail, but in the worse heathenism of the city slum. The force of this aggression consists not in the number of converts who accrete themselves to this or that form of mission worship, but in the lives of such converts as compel imitation." This is the conclusion of a highly educated man convinced, by fuller knowledge of facts, not exactly against his will, but against his prepossessions and former adverse beliefs.

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