

Which is The Better Man?

One of the questions left unsolved at the recent religious conference at Northwestern University (mentioned in a previous Bulletin) was the following: "Why is it that men who go to church are no better than men who don't?" And it was stated that the implication of this question is contained in another: "Does religion do any good?"

Putting aside the debate frequently indulged in between Protestants and Indifferentists as to whether church-going and religion have anything in common, we would like to set down a few observations on the point raised, with the preliminary declaration that by religion we understand all the ties that bind man to God. And we will begin with a modern parable:

A certain man had two sons and he loved them both. One was respectable and sedate, and the other was big-hearted but thoughtless. To both of them he gave a college education and a financial start in life that enabled them to set themselves up in business and establish their own homes in their father's city.

The big-hearted son found companions at times who led him into evil ways. Three times his father bailed him out of jail where he was booked as drunk and disorderly. Each time he was profuse in his expressions of regret; each time he took a pledge never to drink another drop. And to show his father how much he loved him he used to drop in daily for a little visit on the way home from work, and once a week he brought his family to his father's home for a feast and a romp.

The respectable son belonged to all the best clubs and attended the social functions of the best people and gave his donations regularly to the approved charities; he was never drunk in his life, and never by any public act disgraced the father who bore him. But he never visited his father or gave him any sign of recognition when he passed him on the street; the world, indeed, always thought of him as an orphan.

Which of these was the better man?

Private interpretation of Scripture is reaping its fruit. It has produced so much confusion of thought that it is quite common nowadays for people to forget that there are Ten Commandments; they begin with the Fourth, "Honor thy father and mother," and feel that if they keep that and the other six, they need not bother about God. But Our Lord summarized the Commandments into two (as Moses had done before) and declared: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. -- This is the greatest and the first Commandment." -- Matt. 22. Furthermore, one should not forget that the love of his neighbor which is not based on the love of God is but natural virtue, for which there is only a natural reward -- and that natural virtue is quite inadequate. Harvey Wickham (The Impuritans, p.89) has some interesting observations of this point:

"It has been said that it pays to be good, and that everybody will be happier if everybody behaves. But if I am not devoted to anything outside of myself, how are you going to make me behave? I may admit that the individual flourishes when the party or class to which he belongs flourishes as well. But it is a tedious process, this of benefiting a whole group, or race, or species. In practice I shall always be seeking a short cut, a special privilege, a little more than my share of the general happiness. And you, my dear sir or madam, may go hang."

Prayers.

Frank Carr lost his father Sunday. Fred Schoppman and Henry Frey ask prayers for relatives who are ill. Five special intentions.