

AMERICAN ORATORY OF TO-DAY

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L.C.

SOUTH-WEST PUBLISHING COMPANY

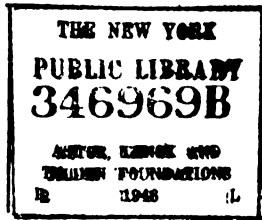
AUSTIN, TEXAS

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The Plimpton Press Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

“THE NEW RELIGION”: A CRITICISM

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(Extract from a sermon delivered in the Madison Square Presbyterian Church, New York city, October 24, 1909.)

ANY man who knows anything, unless he knows it in a very modest way, is liable to think that he knows more than he does. Human nature is peculiar, and we all have it.

This tendency, illustrated by the distinguished ex-president of Harvard University, of attempting to sound the depths of spiritual reality with the plumb-line of scientific thought, is not a new one, and proceeds upon the false assumption that there is nothing in the world too fine to escape the detection and the appreciation of disciplined intellect. There is a great deal that comes into life which never entered there along any logical roadway of refined and exquisite thinking. The heart too has reasons of which the brain knows nothing. Discipline of a certain kind disqualifies, more than it qualifies, for the discovery of the best which life has to give and the best which it is competent to receive. There is a close kind of ratiocination which, while it opens the smaller doors of discovery, slams to with a bang doors that are larger. A man whose principle function of discernment is of the cerebral order will create for himself and for others a world whose very flatness makes it easily intelligible and the simplicity of whose arrangements makes

facile appeal to the unambitious sense of what is systematized and methodical; but such a world is not an interesting world. It is not a world that nourishes long thoughts, high aims, and the sweetest nobility of life. It takes clouds as well as transparent sunshine to make out God's world, and stars to glimmer in the firmament as well as candles and lanterns to shed ambiguous patches of light on the ground, in order to complete a universe that will measure up the requirements of the soul. In the natural world the best part of any landscape is that point along the edge of the world where the things that are visible shade off and melt away into the unseen.

The fault with the kind of religious philosophizing to which we have recently been treated is that it imprisons the spirit within a horizon that is near and that is so sharply lined as to discourage suspicion that there is much of anything beyond the horizon. And a small flat world makes small, flat souls. A world furnished with no broad ocean transforms human spirits into patches of Sahara. It is therefore that history, when it has moved forward, has moved under the shepherding guidance of men and women whose presentiments outran the slow pace of analytical thought, and whose experiences were able to maintain themselves at an altitude to which unwinged logic was incompetent to soar. The great things of the past centuries have been done at the impulse and inspiration of convictions and experiences for which there is no place allowed in the four-cornered scheme of the Cambridge oracle. Our Teutonic ancestors were brought out of the woods into civilization by men whose consciences grasped upon a higher law than any enacted by the legislature of nature and whose fealty was to the

same Christ that transformed Saul into Paul, and that has been the presiding genius of those souls that have shone with the warmest fervor and the purest light during all these centuries.

With as hard, bloodless, and visionless a philosophy as has just been oracularly offered to our acceptance we should have no Young Men's Christian Associations, no Salvation Army, no missionaries wearing out their lives on the frontier or making their blood an offering on the altar of Christian sacrifice. Said to me, recently, the secretary of one of our foreign missionary boards, "We have thousands of missionaries that leave home and comforts behind them to go abroad and preach a Christed gospel, but I have no record of anyone who has the enthusiasm to go to the heathen and proclaim to them a Christless philosophy." A tree is known by its fruits. The test of value is its producing energy. The sweetest thoughts embalmed in literature, the finest lives recorded in the annals of human biography, the most thrilling passages in the progress of the world's history, have been God's gift to the world through His son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. By every argument deducible from the past, by every reason derivable from the tenderest and strongest experience of those whose vision has pressed most deeply into the mysteries of the spiritual world, our loving faith cannot falter in its loyalty to the Divine Christ. By Him we stand and to Him will we continue to render the tribute of our love and confidence, our service and our praise.