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"Trying or Trusting —Which?"

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“Trying or Trusting— Which?”

AN OFFICER'S MISTAKE.

“I TRIED to be religious for three days, and became so thoroughly sick of it that I gave it up,” said a gay young brother-officer once to me.

“I wonder that you tried for so long,” I replied.

“How so?” said he; “I thought you were religious, too.”

“Yes,” I said, “but mine is not a religion of *trying*. It is, and has been for many happy years, one of *trusting*. An immense difference!”

My gay young friend, had, no doubt, been sickened by sin. Gaiety, instead of satisfying, had nauseated his soul and burdened his conscience. The pleasures of sin (and they are admitted by the Bible itself) are not only short-lived, but they leave their scar and stain behind them; so that, disgusted by the positive wretchedness they produce, the soul has recourse to *religion* in order to find, in its reputed comforts, the relief that its burden demands.

The pity is that such people do not first ask themselves, “*What is religion?*”

Now that is a fair question. The word “*religion*” means an adherence to certain rules; and the more strictly you adhere to these rules, the more religious you are. The world contains thousands of religions,—that is, thou-

sands of classified rules for the observance of the worshippers. These rules may be good or bad; they may be Christian or cannibal; they may be true or false;—no matter, they form a religion; and obedience to them is the duty of the religionist. Such is the meaning of the word "*religion*."

Then, does it follow that religion, as such, comforts the mourner, restores the fallen, or saves the sinner? Certainly not; it may but add to his misery. There may be a change of diet, so to speak, but it is only a change of poison. And if you observe the faces of people who are thus religious, you will see poison written on their every feature. They show the presence of an indwelling bondage. They are enslaved. Yes, the Bible speaks of the "pleasures of

sin,” but never of the “ pleasures of religion.” Never ! In fact, it is a question whether the devil may not lead more to hell by the regulated road of “ religion,” than he does by the slimy slough of sin.

“ Sick of *religion*,” after three days’ fair trial ! Most intelligible ! Looked at from this point of view, three days was a long period for a wild young spirit to remain in fetters, for fetters they were.

“ Legion ” tried the same, and added to his fetters a good deal of penance beside ; he cut himself with stones ; he cried day and night in the mountains and tombs, and was one of the most miserable men on earth (see Mark v. 1-9).

The fact is that “ *religion* ” is not the secret. Well, if not, can it lie in *infidelity* ? Would not the throwing up of the whole thing, and disbelieving the existence of God, and judgment, and hell, bring relief to the conscience ? No ! Infidelity is but a cold negation, and signally fails to meet the sob of the poor, distracted, sin-laden bosom, or brighten the clouded heart of fallen man. Sin cannot thus be cleansed away.

Ah ! what yonder prodigal wanted as he lay destitute and friendless by the swine-trough of sin, was a friend who had a hand of pardoning mercy. Did such exist ? Was there a **Father** ? Granted *that*, and all would be well. We remember the lovely story as it fell from the lips of Jesus, the Friend of Sinners—how, with a father’s kiss on

his brow, and arms of love thrown around his sin-worn shoulders, the repentant prodigal poured out, by willing constraint, all the dreary tale of his sins, and how forgiveness was followed by the robe, and ring, and sandals, and the fatted calf, and the glad hospitality of the father's love, and how they began to be merry ! (see Luke xv. 18-24).

Merriment ! Yes, indeed ! Every want was supplied, and every craving met. Three days of this religion, and the merriment continued. Mercy and merriment are a standing contrast to rules and wretchedness. The law passes a curse. Grace, reigning through righteousness, creates everlasting joy. The prodigal was never “ sick ” of this “ religion ” ! Never !

You may call Christianity a “religion” if you please, and say that it has rules and commandments, too; but it tells of a Father, who loves; of a Saviour, who died and rose; of a Spirit, who dwells within the believer, filling him with joy and peace.

This is life and liberty !

Let me urge you, dear reader, to “*rise and come to the Father.*” “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John iii. 16).

“Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Psalm ii. 12).

J. W. S.