

Take toll of all that laugh or weep;
 And far across the centuries' sweep
 The knife yet gleams in lifted hands;
 Though the gray plain
 Have drunk thy stain,
 The Sphynx still gazes o'er the sands.

Still the eternal question waits
 Before the door of Human Birth,
 Relentless as its narrow gates,
 Whereon is graven "Go ye forth!"
 And still the gleaming hope of earth,
 Flames from the altar's awful rust:
 "The gods will yield;"
 The doom is sealed,
 And a new victim dashed to dust.

Lo, all the altars of the world,
 Whereat men kneeling wreath about
 In circles of bent bodies, curled
 For pain, wrest not the secret out.
 Yet—yet—these Druid stones are stout—
 But see! the mosses hurl the stone!
 Shall Faith not wear
 The gods? Lo, there—
 STRIKE! THE LAST OUTGUARD LIGHTS! THE SUN!

HONESTY WITH THE BIBLE,

Two books lie before me which are remarkable for being frank statements concerning the Scriptures, and both come from quarters in which similar utterances were heretofore deemed impossible. One is called *Honesty with the Bible*, (published by the Acme Publishing Co., Morgantown, W. V.) written by the Rev. Prescott White, pastor of the Presbyterian church of Weston, West Virginia, from 1894 to 1904; the other, *What is the Bible?* (published by The Open Court Publishing Co., Chicago), by J. A. Ruth, a man of Christian education, member of one of the orthodox Protestant churches, who passed through life more than three-fourths of the allotted span when for the first time he faced the question "Is the Bible the word of God?" and after a careful examination he came to the conclusion that the Bible is a human production. Both books, so similar in attitude and alike in spirit, are straws in the wind, for they are not attacks on religion and not inspired by any enmity toward the book sacred to all good Christians, but simply follow the course of honesty in confessing the conclusion to which they have been driven against their own wills.

Mr. Ruth begins his book with quoting a prayer from one of the late Joseph Parker's Sermons, ending with the words. "Spirit of Truth, make me sincere!" and similarly Mr White insists that his criticism of the Bible is not literary nor historical, but purely moral and spritual (p.5).

The Rev. Mr. White enters into a comparison of the old standards of morality with modern views and comes to the conclusion that the old Hebrew morality can no longer be regarded as a canon for life but has to make room to higher and nobler conceptions.

Mr. Ruth knows very well that many things which impressed him deeply have been stated by liberal theologians before him, but they have not been made part of the practical teachings of the Church, and as a Christian of an orthodox church he had to grope his way alone. He says in his Preface:

"In some quarters the arguments and evidence I employ may be regarded as antiquated and superfluous. In others it will encounter the unreasoning prejudice which clings tenaciously to preconceived notions regardless of the lack of ground for holding them and in the face of the most positive evidence to the contrary. At the same time I feel sure, also, of a large number who will receive my work in the spirit in which it is done, to whom, I trust, it will prove a key to the solution of some heretofore intricate and troublesome problems. If it shall accomplish this, and if I have removed the rubbish and accretions that encumber the foundation, I shall be content."

The evidence which Mr. Ruth offers is, as he says himself, "but a small part of that available and near at hand"; he simply makes "an effort to separate truth from error" and challenges the contradiction of his co-religionists to disprove the position which he has taken. He is reverent in tone but earnest in his contentions, and the reader feels that there is no gainsaying. Having gone over a heap of evidence, on the Creation and the Fall, the Exodus, Mount Sinai and the Ten Commandments, the Evolution of Hebrew Monotheism, Prophecies, Miracles, Contradictions, etc., Mr. Ruth asks the question: "But what about churches and preaching?" His answer, which extends over a whole chapter entitled "What then?" may be briefly characterised by the following quotation:

"That's easy: Stop teaching error and teach only truth. There is not an orthodox preacher of average intelligence and education but that can adopt all the views set forth in this book and continue preaching right along and find plenty of texts in the Bible to preach from. What is more, not more than one in a thousand of his hearers would know of his change of views if he did not announce it. By this I do not wish to be understood as advising any one to disguise his views. That would be most reprehensible. I simply wish to show how little importance even Christians themselves attach to the erroneous features of Christian theology and how little their omission would be noticed."

He concludes his book with a statement of his creed:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker and preserver of heaven and earth and all that in them is.

"I believe that in His sight and dealing all men are equal, and that He has not nor ever had any peculiar or chosen people, pets or favorites.

"I believe that all men are brothers, and that it is not only the duty, but should be, and under normal conditions will be, man's highest pleasure to do to others as he would have others do to him.

"I believe that the moral law is founded upon the eternal principle of truth, love, justice, and righteousness, and that it is written in the human soul and upon the face of human experience and observation. I believe that the ethical standard is ever in the man, never in the book.

"I believe that whatsoever promotes the individual and general welfare

is right, and that all that has the opposite tendency is wrong; and that this is the true and safe guide for human conduct.

"I believe that 'the truth on all subjects as fast as it becomes known is the sole and sufficient authority for all human belief; that justice is the certain and practicable law of all human conduct; that love is the highest and most effective temper of the human spirit,' and that 'the permanent elements in Christianity are the great religious and moral virtues which Jesus lived and taught.'

"I believe that man is the builder of his own character, the maker of his own destiny; and that these are formed by what he is and does and not by anything done for him.

"I believe in the immortality of the soul—the life everlasting—and that man will reap that which he has sown."

Rev. White attaches great importance to science and scientific inquiry. He says:

"Thus it is hoped this subject, as presented, will help some to see that the phrase 'religion and science' cannot rightly be used. Religion is science. That is, it comes within the domain of scientific study and is a part of the great field of truth subject to scientific methods. After all, all knowledge is knowledge of God and all knowledge is essentially religious. Therefore religion must be science, and there cannot be such a distinction as is implied in the phrase science and religion."

He concludes his book with the sentences:

"The writers of the Bible saw only in part and imperfectly, though they certainly did see in part and in many respects truly. Let us learn to honestly discern the religious truth they saw and taught, and add to its sum the sum of all others, of all times and climes; and ourselves also add to it the little that we can, that it may ever 'grow from more to more.' God is here to teach and inspire us now as much as ever, and even more than at any time in the history of the Hebrew people. He can and will and does still inspire and teach."

"What we want is, to get away from the idea that the Bible is the foundation and source of true religion; and to learn that its true foundations are in the nature of man, and that it is ever a living and growing product of the human soul."

Both books are of significance to all those who take an interest in the psychology of religion. We have to deal here with truthful men who have honestly accepted the divinity of the Bible and who after a careful study have been obliged to abandon their belief, albeit against their own will. Yet their books are not Freethought publications. They are products of a deep religious spirit, and one can feel in every line the seriousness of their authors.

These books are, as we said "straws in the wind" because we know positively that they are typical of many minds of pious Christians who are confronted with the same problem and who have come more or less to the same conclusion. The facts which these books treat are important in themselves but the attitude of both these writers is, in the reviewer's opinion, of even greater importance.

The religious spirit of Mr. Ruth is well characterised in the short article which is contained in the present number of *The Open Court* where it appears under the title "Pure Religion and Pure Gold."