

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### THE NOBLER LESSON.

Christ was of virgin born, and, being slain,  
The credists say, he rose from death again.  
O futile, age-long talk of death and birth!—  
His life, that is the one thing wonder-worth:  
Not how he came, but how he lived on earth.  
For if gods stoop, and with quaint jugglery  
Mock their own laws, how shall that profit thee?  
The nobler lesson is that mortals can  
Grow god-like through this baffled front of man.

DON MARQUIS.

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### ETHICAL INSTRUCTION.

*To the Editor of The Open Court:*

I submit to the readers of *The Open Court* a plan for the establishment of religious, or ethical institutions. It was long fervently hoped that the churches would adapt themselves to the needs of the times, but this hope has not been realized and there is no promise that it will be realized. Nearly all the denominations are dominated by the sectarian rather than the religious spirit, and they have so long refrained from a progressive policy that an adequate adjustment at this late day would amount almost to a subversion of their most cherished principles and ideals; hence the idea of an adjustment is even more repugnant to them than the certainty of further decline and ultimate extinction.

The main functions of religious institutions are, the progressive formulation and promulgation of ethical precepts, the employment of practical means to induce men to obey these precepts, and the organization of the moral energy of the people.

The ethical code should comprise all those conditions of character and forms of conduct which experience and observation prove are in accord with the nature and environment of men considered as members of a progressive humanity.

The possession of energy is perhaps the most pronounced characteristic of human nature, and scarcely less pronounced is the desire to exert this energy so that the results may contribute to and be conserved with the achievements of the race. Ethics must treat of the conditions and means of attaining this end.

There are duties that are incumbent on all men; there are duties that

are incumbent on certain classes; but all are parts of one system. Individuals in general should not be required to formulate their moral principles, for the task presupposes a comprehensive conception of humanity and a systematic knowledge of the relation of all the different forms of conduct to the environment and to the movement of civilization. The individual, if very intelligent and sincere, can, with sufficient time and effort, arrive at a system correct in the main, but the masses are hopelessly prejudiced by selfish interests. In the investigation of moral truths, special equipment and disinterestedness are indispensable, and the only way to secure these qualifications is to make a profession of the work. Now, there are men and women who are inclined and talented in this direction; let them do the work and let society maintain them.

Religious institutions, like educational institutions, concern the whole people and should therefore be authorized and controlled by the common will of the people—or in other words, by the State. My solution, specifically stated, is as follows:

Let the different States establish departments in the universities for research work in ethics. It is true there is still radical disagreement among ethical investigators, but let a practical field be opened and it would then be a matter of satisfying human needs. Let courses be established for the purpose of training prospective ethical preachers in the knowledge of ethics, in oratory, and in methods of ethical influence. Let a suitable building be provided in every community where people could assemble regularly to hear addresses and participate in any other forms of devotion conducive to morality. There ought to be ethical hymns that would express in modern terms the great religious truths contained in the older ones. Also books of "prayer" whereby the masses who lack fluency could express their feelings of repentance, aspiration, etc. All these practices would have a strong tendency toward elevating moral conditions.

The control and financial support of the system here proposed could be very similar to those of public education and, like public education too, the work should be kept out of politics. The two systems should, however, in my opinion, be kept entirely separate. There is not space here to discuss the question of ethics in the school-room, but the history of religious institutions plainly shows that it is mainly over adults that such institutions exert their direct influence.

HARRISBURG, PA.

CYRUS H. ESHLEMAN.

#### EDITORIAL COMMENT.

Mr. Eshleman's idea of having Ethical Institutions officially managed by State authorities is obviously prompted by the dearth of sound moral principles manifest in both public and private life. But whether such State institutions are feasible in our own country,—they would practically amount to an Ethical State Church,—is more than doubtful, and it would be very difficult, if they existed, to have them administered by the right kind of men and in the right spirit of a non-partisan and inter-denominational morality. We publish his proposition as a suggestion that may give food for thought.