

every day what good they can, with their own means and with their own hands. But the prevalent mode of benevolence is a great refinement on this old way. It seems to be the fruit of a species of altruism much more highly developed than any known to our fathers. The blessedness of giving is assumed to be the highest blessedness; we want our neighbors to enjoy this blessedness to the full. Why should we selfishly deprive them of any portion of it? If there is any giving to be done, then let us urge them to do it; so shall we most effectually promote their happiness. Thus has arisen the great system of vicarious benevolence whose line has gone out into all the earth, and whose circulars arrive by every mail.

It is beautiful to see how quickly the promptings of this new kind of charity spring into the mind when any human need arises. The first thought of most men seems to be not "How much can we do toward relieving this need?" but rather "How much can we get other people to do?" Each man begins to think of other men who can be induced to contribute; each neighborhood looks, at once, beyond its own borders to other neighborhoods upon which it may confer the blessedness of bearing its burdens. Mr. Hale's motto, "Look out and not in," finds in this habit of mind one of its most striking illustrations: for when there are contributions to be made the modern philanthropist begins at once to look out for contributors, and not to look into his own pocket at all.

If there is a church debt to pay, a hospital to build, an orphanage to found, immediately the thoughts of those who stand nearest to the project, and who are to be most deeply benefited by it, are turned to distant places, inquiring how they may obtain this good thing at the smallest possible cost to themselves. Those benevolent gentlemen who have had large experience in the work of raising church debts testify that the people who have contracted these debts and are responsible for their payment are almost always well content to sit and wait, in the expectation that other people, somewhere and somehow, will lift their burden for them.

The church that confronts a deficit in its annual budget turns instinctively to this unfailling resource. "Go to!" say the financiers; "let us arrange a lecture course; there are a number of benevolent gentlemen who go about delivering gratuitous lectures for the benefit of impecunious societies; doubtless we can impress them into the service, and it would be a pity to put ourselves out to pay these bills and thus deprive them of the privilege and pleasure of serving us for nothing." It is not alone the poor who have discovered this new way to pay old debts; those who are well-to-do often resort to it. From rich and prosperous communities applications are all the while coming to publishers of books and periodicals for gifts of their publications to incipient libraries and reading-rooms. They do not beg these books because they are unable to buy them; they do it spontaneously, because this great principle of vicarious benevolence has become so firmly rooted in their natures. In a financial point of view the advantages of this method are not always apparent; for it is evident that people often spend much more time and labor in getting others to pay their debts or perform their charities than it would cost them to earn the necessary

money by their ordinary vocations; but money is of small consequence when compared with the moral and spiritual benefit conferred on those to whom they thus transfer their obligations. What a blessed day it will be when everybody sees somebody else bearing the burdens that naturally fall to him, and when nobody finds any good thing to do that he cannot get somebody else to do for him!

Seriously, however, it begins to be a question whether this double-distilled altruism is not becoming overstrained,—whether, in short, it is not turning out to be something very like rank selfishness. The disposition of multitudes to fasten their own burdens upon the shoulders of those who can hardly be called neighbors—of utter strangers, indeed—is becoming slightly exasperating. Into every great city pours a constant procession of solicitors with causes to present; and every man who has ever been detected in any sort of charity finds them always at his doors. There are colleges and schools to build or to endow, churches to aid, philanthropies of all sorts to promote. Many of these are deserving charities; not a few of them have a right to present their claims in New York and New England, for they represent causes that can obtain no adequate local support. But there is plenty of evidence that communities which are abundantly able to establish and maintain their own schools and churches, send their agents off to beg in distant places. "Of course," writes a shrewd and experienced donor, "there are two sides to this question. Some colleges in the West and South must be founded and sustained by people at a distance. But, in some cases, I am inclined to think that ten thousand dollars subscribed for any given work by the people in the locality would be worth more to the community than a hundred thousand dollars got from a distance. Is it not part of the work that educated men ought to do in connection with the colleges they are planting, to stimulate and develop the grace of liberality among the people of their own neighborhood?" It is surely a question whether communities, as well as individuals, may not be permanently injured by the formation of a mendicant habit; and whether the awakening of local pride and of a disposition to support their own institutions and take care of themselves would not be an immense gain to the people of some localities.

One thing is certain: this business of vicarious benevolence is seriously overdone. A great amount of money has been gathered in the East during the last fifty years by all sorts of solicitors; but the onset of this army is becoming so overpowering that there is great danger of a reaction which shall dry up these streams of benevolence altogether. It makes little difference whether the goose that laid the golden egg is killed outright or worried to death.

#### Vagrant Parsons.

THE children of light are not yet so wise in their generation as they might be; if they were, ministerial vagrants would not abound and flourish as they do. It is evident that a good share of the saints yet deserve, if they do not covet, the appellation of "the Lord's silly people." The way in which churches here and there are victimized by clerical adventurers argues ill for the discretion of church authorities.



We are frequently hearing of questionable characters who have suddenly come from nobody knows where, and have hoisted themselves into vacant pulpits, where, for awhile, they subsist, feeding the flock with such moldy fodder as they can manage to scrape together, borrowing all the money they can, often robbing the weak and unwary of that which money cannot restore, and finally going away, usually in some haste, leaving the churches thus possessed and debauched in the condition of the boy in the New Testament out of whom the demon was cast.

Many of these ministerial tramps have no ministerial standing, and make no distinct claim of any; they usually pretend to be connected with some religious body not well known in the neighborhoods where they are operating, but they show no papers; their only credentials are a glib tongue, a sanctimonious tone, and a brazen face. Almost always they make great pretensions to orthodoxy, and their notions of conduct are apt to be extremely rigid. By these professions they gain the confidence of the more austere among the church officers, and contrive to secure a hearing.

Worldly-minded people are inclined to say that any church which suffers an unknown man, bringing no credentials and vouched for by nobody, to vault into its pulpit and to gain access as a clergyman to the homes of its people is unfit to be the custodian of any important trust, and cannot too soon be rent asunder and blotted out. Extinction is, indeed, the just penalty for such stupid infidelity. But in the infliction of this penalty precious interests suffer and innocent persons are injured. *THE CENTURY* goes to many readers in those distant parishes which the ministerial adventurers generally infest. Let them lay to heart this admonition. Let them impress upon all those who have the care of these churches the danger of harboring such persons. Let them see to it that a stringent rule is adopted in every church, by which no man shall be suffered to stand one moment in its pulpit unless he can give a clear account of himself and present to its officers ample and unquestionable evidence, indorsed by persons well known to them, of his good standing in the ministry.

The official lists of clergymen published by the various denominations ought to guarantee the good standing of all whose names are found in them. Certainly, a man who cannot show his name in one of these official lists ought not to be employed by a church until he can clearly explain why it is not in any of them. But, unfortunately, the presence of a name in one of these ministerial rolls is not always conclusive evidence that the person bearing it has a right to be recognized as a minister of the gospel. Ecclesiastical

bodies are sometimes extremely careless in admitting ministers to their fellowship; the vilest men sometimes get in on the flimsiest credentials. A few years ago a man who had figured in a disgusting scandal, and who had been summarily expelled from the ministry of his own denomination, appeared at the doors of a respectable ecclesiastical body in the North-west and sought admission. It had been but four or five years since he was driven out of the pulpit, and the details of his villainy had been in all the newspapers, East and West; but with unblushing effrontery he undertook to reinstate himself in the ministry of another denomination. He had no papers, save an honorary degree of master of arts conferred on him before his downfall by a too-confiding college, and some similar documents, but he contrived to get an invitation to preach before the body. His fluency and fervor captivated his hearers, and in a burst of confidence they admitted him to their membership and put his name upon their roll. Armed with this certificate he was soon standing as a candidate in the pulpit of one of the leading churches of the West. Here again his smooth tongue won him many adherents, and it was by a mere accident that his true character was discovered in time to prevent the church from calling him to its pastorate. The indecent haste with which this notorious fellow was admitted to membership in a dignified ecclesiastical body, and thus duly accredited as a preacher of the gospel, seems incredible; but the story is an instance, not so rare as it ought to be, of the way things are sometimes done in religious assemblies.

Before us lies a formal confession, by a Presbytery at the West, of the manner in which it placed upon its roll the name of a man almost equally notorious, whose credentials were equally unsatisfactory. There is call for far sharper scrutiny into the character of candidates for ministerial fellowship than some of the ecclesiastical bodies are wont to exercise. Their doctrinal beliefs are apt to be carefully looked into; any variation from the creed of the church is speedily discovered and not readily forgiven; but the question whether the candidate has a good character and a clean record has been asked with much less urgency.

There seems to be no way of insuring the churches against wicked men and deceivers, but if the denominations would exercise proper care in keeping the names of disreputable men out of their ministerial lists, and if the local churches would rigidly refuse to have any dealings with men whose names do not appear in the latest of these lists, the path of the ministerial vagrant would be much more thorny than he now finds it.

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## OPEN LETTERS.

### What is the New Theology?

THE arrival of a new theology is currently reported, and many have been running to and fro with tidings about it, but without greatly increasing our knowledge

of its form or content. At last a man has come who seems to know what it is not, which, when you are studying theology, is the first thing you want to know, and also what it is, which is the last thing you are likely to find out. Mr. T. T. Munger's book of ser-