

OPEN LETTERS.

Family Religion.

THE increase of divorce has become a matter of great popular concern, and many have taken in hand to set forth the causes and the remedies of this social disorder. Disorder it surely is; to this even the evolutionists bear witness. The monogamous household is the social organism that has been developed out of all sorts of social experiments; this one has survived because it was fittest to survive; because in societies so organized the strongest and best men were bred; in the struggle for existence they prevailed. To attempt to reorganize society on the basis of polygamy or polyandry, or any sort of promiscuity, would be, therefore, to revert to a worn-out type,—to bring back a form of social life which Nature herself has discarded. Thus evolution confirms revelation. Any loss of sacredness or permanence suffered by the monogamous family is, therefore, a social calamity. No wonder, then, that the truest instincts and the strongest convictions of the most thoughtful men are in arms against the foes of the household now so numerous and so strenuous, and for the time being so successful in their warfare.

The reasons of this insurrection against the family are not easily expressed. Some of the more obvious among them have been frequently mentioned, but it is not at all clear that this ominous phenomenon has been fully accounted for. One of the more apparent causes is the decay of home life among the people of our cities. The proportion of married people who live in homes of their own has been steadily decreasing. The growing difficulty of obtaining competent domestic service partly explains this; the new fashion of commerce, which keeps a great army of salesmen constantly on the road, is a more important reason. The burden of housekeeping falls heavily upon the wife, when the husband is but an occasional visitor in his own house.

To a great multitude of the active business men of this country no true family life is possible under the present conditions. The steady rise in the scale of domestic expenditure makes it difficult also for young people of the middle classes to begin housekeeping. To set up an establishment that would seem at all adequate would require an outlay that is far beyond the means of many of them. They lack the courage to begin in a homely and frugal way; they are not ready to be dropped from the circles in which they have been moving. Confronting this problem which baffles their wit and breaks their resolution, many young men and women indefinitely postpone marriage; most of those who venture betake themselves to boarding-houses. Veritable caves of Adullam are many of these boarding-houses; those that are in distress and those that are in debt and those that are discontented find refuge in them; the woman who cannot afford to keep house, and the woman who has been worsted in the warfare with inefficient servants, and the woman whose husband spends his life on the highway, and the woman who is naturally indolent and inefficient, and the woman

whose soul is satisfied with reading Ouida and retailing gossip,—all these and various other types are thrown together in a promiscuous way for many idle hours, and brought into association every day with all sorts and conditions of men. Who could expect that the family life would be healthfully developed under such conditions? Who can wonder that the family bond is often sorely strained and finally broken?

Nothing is more evident than that family life requires for its best development the shelter and the privacy of the home.

If the Divorce Reform Leagues could secure the depopulation of the boarding-houses and the hotels, and the return of the families now herded together in them to some kind of home life, they would probably find their reform making considerable progress. It is not the solitary, in these days, that need to be set in families, so much as it is the flocks and droves of human beings that are losing, in their too gregarious life, those essential virtues which take root and flourish nowhere else but in the safe inclosure of the home.

To restore the home life, then, so far as it can be done; to give to it, in our teaching and our testimony, the honor and praise that belong to it; to discourage the breaking up of homes through indolence; to bestow our heartiest commendation on those young people who have courage to begin housekeeping in a small way, and to show them that they gain rather than lose respect by such a brave adjustment of themselves to their circumstances,—this is the duty of the hour. But the rehabilitation of the home in our social life will not be complete and permanent until some deeper sense of its sacredness shall be impressed upon the minds of the people. The foundations of the home must be laid in religion. The relations that constitute the home deserve the sanction and the consecration of religion. Marriage may not be a sacrament of the church, but it is the sacrament of the home; and what is begun with prayer ought to continue as it is begun. The solemn obligations of parentage—who can assume them without the divine guidance? It is in these relations of the home, when we turn away from the competitions of the world and enter the realm of unselfish affection, that we feel the power of those deeper motives through which religion appeals to us. In this human love, as in a mirror, darkly, we begin to discern something of the glory of the divine love. How strongly all this is said in a noble passage of Dr. Martineau's:

“All the pathetic appeals and reverent usages of life, the patient love, the costly pity, love shed on sorrow and infirmity, all the graceful ceremonies of the affections at the birth, the marriage, and the funeral assume that everywhere more *is* than *seems*; that whatever happens has holier meanings than we can tell; that the characters written on the screen are flung out by light behind. Take away the divine symbolism from our material existence, and let it stand only for what it can make good on its own account, and what is there to redeem it from selfishness and insignificance? The home sinks into a house, the meal into a mess, the grave into a pit; honor and veracity are appreciated chiefly as instruments of trade;

purity and temperance as necessities of health; justice as the condition of social equilibrium; mercy as the price of a quiet time. Does this literal aspect really satisfy you? Does it give any adequate account of your natural feeling towards these several elements of life? If this were all, would they stir you with such passion of love, of awe, of admiration, as sometimes carries you off your feet? No; we are not made upon this pattern; and in our composition are colors mingled which are native to no earthly clay."

Now, it is in the home more clearly than anywhere else that the good man perceives the pattern on which his life is made, and feels the force of those intimate impulses which move him to lay hold on things unseen and eternal. A home that is destitute of all this "divine symbolism," of which Dr. Martineau speaks; in which life has no holier or deeper meanings than those common utilities which appear upon the surface of it; in which no word of prayer is ever heard, and no recognition of the Giver from whom all bounty comes, lacks the strongest bond of permanence. This exclusion of religion from the family life is in the deepest sense unnatural. It is only by a willful repression of the holiest instincts of our nature that it can be accomplished. The fatal effect of this exclusion may be seen in many broken households; and they who desire to preserve the home and to make it a source of lasting benefit to the household and to society should seek to emphasize those holier meanings by which all its relations are sanctified, and to keep the fire always burning on its altar. Family worship — is the phrase old-fashioned? Even so, it describes a custom by which the life of every household should be consecrated. Doubtless the failure to maintain it is due, not seldom, to a feeling of diffidence on the part of the heads of the family, — to a fancied inability to express with propriety and clearness the daily wants and aspirations of the household. For these there are manifold helps, — the beautiful volume, entitled "Home Worship," lately published by A. C. Armstrong & Company of this city, in which Scripture and comment and song and prayer are happily combined, being one of the best. The reverent use of some such manual daily would introduce into many homes an element in which they are now sadly deficient; it would make the family discipline easier to maintain; it would lighten the inevitable trouble; it would strengthen the bond by which the family is held together. The only radical cure for the evils that now threaten the foundations of society is that which makes the home the temple of pure and undefiled religion.

Washington Gladden.

Political Education: What It Should Be.

A DEEPER study of political subjects is clearly shown by the present state of affairs in this country, and, indeed, throughout the world. There has never been a time when so many important questions were presented for thought, and so many problems for solution, as now; and these questions and problems go down to the very depths of social life, and involve the most important interests of humanity. Some of them are strictly political in character, while others are rather moral and religious; yet even these latter must eventually influence, in various ways, the politics of the world. Some of them, too, are of such a kind that

an early solution is urgently needed; for, so long as they remain unsettled, they must continually disturb the peaceful current of affairs.

Again, while such matters require treatment at the hands of our public authorities, the men who wield authority have thus far shown themselves little capable of dealing even with the simpler questions of the time; and the disparity thus revealed between the work to be done and the agents we have for doing it, is fitted to awaken solicitude in the minds of thoughtful men. It must be remembered, too, that it is in this country, probably, that the political problems of the future will have to be solved; for it is here that the forces now at work in society are most untrammelled in their action. For these reasons I heartily agree with those who call for a deeper study of the social sciences and the problems of practical politics.

But I cannot but think that those who have undertaken to supply the demand show an inadequate sense of the work needing to be done. The courses of political study that have been opened in some of the colleges consist mainly of constitutional history and political economy, — subjects of great importance, no doubt, but forming but a small part of political or social science. Economical questions, indeed, can hardly be studied too thoroughly, and I would by no means detract from their importance; but I think there are other aspects of affairs more important than the economical which our political educators are in danger of neglecting. The moral aspect of every question is by far the most important, and moral considerations are entitled to the precedence in all political action; hence, it would seem that the study of politics should be based on moral philosophy.

It may be urged, perhaps, that there are different schools of moral philosophy, who disagree as to what the foundation of morals really is, and that the young student would only be confused by the study of such conflicting theories, without obtaining from them any guide to practical action. But, though writers on ethics are not agreed as to the ultimate basis of morals, they all agree substantially as to the chief duties of man, both public and private; and it is only by studying the subject philosophically that one can arrive at a clear perception of moral principles and a realizing sense of their supreme importance in political affairs. To neglect such study, therefore, and give the precedence to economical science, is to place the material interests of society above the moral, the very thing which the colleges ought especially to avoid doing.

Again, the study of history, if properly pursued, is one of the most essential parts of political education; but if confined, as it is apt to be, to the history and analysis of political institutions, its usefulness must be very materially diminished. Such studies have their interest and their importance, but they are by no means the most essential parts of historical science, nor have they much connection with the practical questions of the time. We Americans are not likely to make any essential change in our form of government, and whatever changes we do make can only be in the way of further developments of our present system; and hence the study of older systems, or those of foreign countries, is of little use to us for