A REASONABLE FAITH: PLAIN SERMONS ON FAMILIAR CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

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BY

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PREFACE.

In California, skepticism among respectable people is much more outspoken than in the Eastern States.

Good men, whose families are in the church, excellent citizens and neighbors, do not hesitate to express with utmost candor their unbelief in revealed religion. There is very little conventional, or merely formal Christianity here, for there is almost no temptation for a man to conceal his real sentiments if he be an unbeliever.

It is just about as respectable to play lawn tennis, or to go duck-shooting of a Sunday morning, as to go to church. This practical irreligion is generally either the efficient cause or the immediate result of the prevailing skepticism; so that, as a rule, the line is sharply drawn between believers and unbelievers.

The frankness of those who deny the truth of Christianity, although rather startling at first to one accustomed to the greater reserve of Eastern unbelief, is not without its advantages both to the unbeliever himself and to the preacher of the gospel. The unbeliever forms the habit of consistency—of acting as he thinks; so that if he can be brought to think rightly, he is much more likely at once to rectify his conduct. The change in his views will be marked by a definite change in his life.

The preacher has this advantage, that he knows what he has to deal with, and can be outspoken and aggressive. The strongholds he must assail are not masked batteries. The guns of the enemy are in full sight. He will, moreover, very soon discover the fact that the prevalent unbelief is, for the most part, neither very profound nor very obdurate, and to meet it and counteract its influ-

ence, he will find a plain restatement of familiar evidences the most effective method.

Unfortunately, however, the people whom he most desires to reach are seldom in church and, in all probability, will not hear the sermons which he has prepared for their especial benefit.

It is in the hope of meeting, in some measure, this difficulty in my own parish that I risk the publication of those sermons. Perhaps there are some who will read them, who would not come to church and hear them preached. I also venture to hope that they may in some slight degree supply a need in other places.

This hope is not based upon any originality in the arguments; certainly not upon any brilliancy of treatment. The arguments are old, and, to those who have given attention to such matters, familiar. The method of treatment and the style of composition are commonplace.