

**ETHICAL
ADDRESSES.
FIRST SERIES.**

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VARIOUS

**ETHICAL
ADDRESSES.
FIRST SERIES.**

ETHICAL ADDRESSES.

FIRST SERIES.

BY THE
LECTURERS OF ETHICAL SOCIETIES.



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PREFACE.

THIS volume consists of the lectures given before Ethical Societies which have already been issued separately in *ETHICAL ADDRESSES*, a monthly publication. The first paper "What Do We Stand For?" originally appeared under another title in *THE FORUM*, and has been republished through the courtesy of the editor of that journal. A limited number of copies in this more permanent form are offered to the public.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
WHAT DO WE STAND FOR? <i>Felix Adler</i>	1
AN ETHICAL VIEW OF LIFE. <i>Wm. M. Salter</i>	17
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE RELIGIOUS, AND WHAT IS RE- LIGION? <i>W. L. Sheldon</i>	37
THE RELIGION OF ETHICAL CULTURE. <i>M. M. Mangatarian</i>	69
THE MODERN SAINT. <i>Felix Adler</i>	91
MORALITY—WHAT DOES IT MEAN? <i>Wm. M. Salter</i>	109
TRUE LIBERALISM. <i>W. L. Sheldon</i>	125
TEACHING AND TEACHERS. <i>M. M. Mangatarian</i>	143
PRAYER AND WORSHIP. <i>Felix Adler</i>	159
THE HIGHEST RULE OF LIFE. <i>Wm. M. Salter</i>	177



WHAT DO WE STAND FOR?

By FELIX ADLER, NEW YORK.

It is the object of these pages to give a brief account of the aims and purposes, more particularly of the American Societies for Ethical Culture,* and of their relation to modern religious tendencies. Their general aim, as the name indicates, is simply ethical culture; neither more nor less. The term "ethical" was chosen in place of "moral" on the ground that "moral" connotes rather the external side of conduct, the conformity of actions to the standard of the moral law, while "ethical" refers more to the inner side of conduct, to the motives from which alone right acts derive their worth, to the source in the character from which right motives flow. It is, of course, the object of the ethical societies to promote both the good act and the good motive. There is at the outset an objection which has frequently been stated and requires to be met. What need can there be, it is asked, of a new association for the object mentioned? Is not every church a society for ethical culture? Is

* The Society for Ethical Culture was founded in the city of New York in 1876. There are similar Societies in the cities of Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis. There are two Ethical Societies in London, England. There is one general Society for Ethical Culture in Germany, having its headquarters in Berlin, and branches at Frankfort on the Main, Strasburg, Kiel, Magdeburg, and elsewhere. Of the German Society, Professor Förster, the astronomer, is President. There is in France an ethical movement similar in important respects to that which has been started in the United States, and a propaganda having the same objects in view has lately been begun in Belgium. The impulse which started these transatlantic movements has come from the United States.

there any necessity for an ethical movement outside the churches? Nay, is it not a waste of effort to attempt to do on the outside that which can be done within with far greater efficacy and more lasting results?

To this objection we are bound to answer in the first place that there are many thousands and tens of thousands of men and women at the present day whom the Church, for one reason or another, does not reach, on whom the teachings of religion have lost their hold. And in this class of persons are included not only many eminent professors of science, many leading writers and artists, many of those practical men who have achieved commanding success in commercial and industrial pursuits, but multitudes of the working-class, especially in our large cities. It has long ceased to be true that religious indifference is confined to the so-called upper class. It has gained ground and is daily gaining more and more ground among the people generally. The times have mightily changed since Goethe wrote his famous aphorism, "He who has science and art has religion; he who has not these two—let him have religion." Even the first of his two statements is true only of the select few among the followers of science and art, of those rare personalities to whom the love of truth and beauty has become an overmastering passion. The great majority of so-called scientists and artists are mere craftsmen, devoid of all high idealism, and derive no religious equivalents from their daily work. The second of his statements, whereby he remits those who have not science and art to the care of the churches, has even to a greater extent lost its point.

Whatever may have been the situation half a century ago when Goethe wrote, to-day a wave of sceptical opinion is passing over the masses of the people in all

civilized countries, so that the number is exceedingly large of those who neither have the idealism of science and art to support them, nor are willing or able to accept the current creeds, and who are therefore allowed simply to drift as best they may, wholly uncared for on the moral or spiritual side of their natures. The question therefore arises, and it is one which cannot be shirked in view of the moral dangers with which we are threatened, in view, for instance, of the alarming progress of the divorce movement, in view of the growing corruption of our politics, in view of the ever-increasing unrest and discontent of the laboring classes which it will tax the moral forces of society to the utmost to appease,—the question arises whether some effort should not be made to build up the moral life of those whom the Church has ceased to influence, to develop the moral instincts of children, to fortify the character of the young against the temptations of intemperance and licentiousness, to cherish the love of justice and the capacity of self-sacrifice.

Now, if the acceptance of a creed were an indispensable condition of the moral life, the problem of reaching the unchurched could not be solved. For it is precisely the acceptance of the current creeds that has become impossible to many honest thinkers. And if morality and religious belief must stand and fall together, then the outlook into the moral future of the human race would be dark indeed. But it is at this point that the Ethical Societies have taken a new departure. The gospel which they preach is essentially this: that the good life is possible to all without the previous acceptance of any creed, irrespective of religious opinion or philosophic theory; that the way of righteousness is open and can be entered directly without a previous detour through the land of