

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE PROTESTANT OUTLOOK.

(In the Inverness "Courier" of the 2nd January we find the report of an address on the above subject, delivered by Dr. Donald Fraser, of London, in the Free High Church of that town, Dr. Black presiding. It is reproduced here because of the living interest of the subject, and knowing that amongst the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN the learned lecturer has many warm friends who will be pleased to hear from him in this way.—ED. C. P.]

After a few introductory observations, Dr. Fraser proceeded to discuss the nature of the Reformation. The mighty revolution which Milton described as "bright and blessed," but which writers of a different school and a different mental calibre had stigmatised as a rebellion of bad men against the Holy See. He showed that the Reformers were religious men, and that the movement was in its origin a religious movement, although it ultimately affected all departments of social, political, and intellectual life. Moreover, its spirit was not merely negative—it was not a mere protest against Rome—but it was the re-establishment of the Holy Scriptures in their place of authority, and the re-statement of the doctrines of grace and truth therein revealed. He denied the assertion that the force of the Reformation was spent, or that the movement which in its progress was a mighty stream was to waste itself in channels of desultory sectarianism, or to disappear in the dreary sands of unbelief. They had been told that the Vatican Council was to give to Protestantism its *coup de grace*. The Council met and dispersed, and Protestantism never quivered, far less dissolved. Laughter and applause. The only result of it was that the Roman system had been made more autocratic than ever, that it had less support in European Governments, that it was more hated than ever by the democracy, and that the new dogma that was to bring all mankind to the feet of the Pope had only made his claims more incredible and intolerable than ever to modern intelligence. Applause. But passing from this he asked how it now fared with that movement for a Bible-guided Church and an evangelical Christianity which the sixteenth century saw so vigorously begun? He did not identify the word Protestant with non-Catholic; he defined the word as applying to those convictions of divine truth which gave to the Reformation its inspiration and success. He showed how Protestant principles had spread. They were no longer confined to Germany, Holland, Switzerland, France, Scotland, England and Sweden. The field of Protestantism was the world, and it was a very different world from what it was three hundred years ago—more open to receive impressions, ramified with lines and cross lines of opinion and sentiment, and having the whole range of knowledge and criticism marvellously extended. He compared the Protestantism of the present day with that of the past under three heads—first, its Nationalism; second, its Biblicism; and third, its Confessions of Faith. Under the first division he said that the Reformation made much of national life and independence. It emancipated National Churches from the sway of a foreign ecclesiastic, and it delivered rulers from the interference of the same ecclesiastic by his legates and decrees. Hence the patriotic, and if they liked, political complexion of the Reformation. This characteristic of Protestantism, however, had been greatly modified. It was no longer the case that Protestantism was headed by Protestant princes and marshalled under Protestant banners. In some countries and British Colonies there was no National Church; and in others many forms of Protestantism were outside the pale of National Churches. The cause did not now lean upon princes, or follow the vicissitudes of political history. It was no longer either extended or restricted by the will of secular rulers. Here was a great change, and many people lamented the disintegration which had ensued. How was separatism to be cured? He believed it was by seeking to obtain a deeper insight into those principles which formed the real unity of a Church, and by a firm resolution on the part of spiritual minds to discourage disintegrating tendencies, and to endeavour to lead Christian men to a simpler testimony and a larger fellowship. Under the next head—Biblicism—the lecturer repeated that the Reformation had replaced the Scriptures in their place of authority in the Church, and in public and domestic life. It was still the characteristic of Protestantism to adhere to the Bible. No doubt attacks were made upon it by rationalism. Now,

criticism there must be, and there ought to be. Protestantism had just to watch with vigilant eye the conflict between reverential and destructive critics, and on the results of this conflict depended the Biblicism of the future. At such a time of suspense there was great danger that timid believers might fall into a panic and spread alarm without any adequate cause. Because variety of opinion had arisen—and not very lately arisen—regarding the age, authorship, import, and relative value of particular books or parts of books, some were ready to cry out that the whole Bible was discredited, and that the Church was departing from the doctrine of the Reformation regarding the rule of faith. It was an unworthy fear. It was not merely in finance that panics did harm—they could do more harm in moral and spiritual questions. The Bible could not suffer from keen if honest criticism, if the critic was really anxious to discern what the Holy Spirit had written for our learning. (Applause.) The importance of historical perspective had also been too much forgotten. Many questions must be kept in a sort of historical perspective that had to be applied to a series of sacred writings stretching over a long period, and avowedly referring to two dispensations, of which the one was preparatory to the other. There could not be too much investigation, so long as it was conducted with scholarly discrimination and candour, and so long as it was combined with genuine reverence and faith. But there was a kind of criticism that boded ill for Christian truth. There were Protestant sons of Protestant ancestors who declaimed against submission to a book, and there were rationalistic critics who were labouring to cut it up into fragments, and who proposed to relegate it to the position of interesting old sacred literature, placing it on the same shelf as the Veda, the Zendavesta, and the Koran. To this sort of sceptical criticism they would, if well advised, yield not an inch of ground. It became the duty of divines to exhibit the organic unity of Scripture, and to vindicate its claims with careful accuracy of thought and thoroughness of interpretation; but there must be no recession from the old Reformation ground of the authority and sufficiency of Holy Writ. (Applause.) On the subject of Confessions of Faith the lecturer spoke at some length. He pointed out that Confessions were not creeds to be read or repeated in public worship; they were originally drawn up as manifestoes to Christendom. Protestants had been charged with grievous heresy, and they vindicated themselves by full, explicit declarations of the chief doctrines which they held and felt bound to propagate. The Confessions were thus of great importance at the time they were prepared, and they furnished an emphatic answer to the charge that the Reformation was a mere destructive revolt. But what hold had these documents on the Church of the present day—how did they represent existing faith and life? He would say frankly that in his opinion they fitted clumsily. He had seen people going about with their grandfathers' greatcoats, made of very good cloth, but not fitting neatly. (Laughter.) The same was the case with Confessions. He did not think their doctrines were departed from, but they emphasized greatly some matters that we did not think so momentous now-a-days, and they omitted or treated inadequately other matters that had since arisen. Then our age was not so keenly and dogmatically theological as the sixteenth century. It was less polemical, and perhaps less confident. People were not so sure about everything as they once were. Questions were started about primary truths, which people did not find it altogether easy to answer, and therefore they were not ready to assert so stoutly or denounce so roundly as their fathers. Still Churches had not renounced their Confessions, because they did not wish to crumble into fragments or to lose their historical continuity. What they tried to do was to hold them by interpreting them generously—not insisting on every phrase as if it were the best possible, or on every assertion as if it were distinctly inspired, but keeping to the line of the old theology there indicated, while giving to the teaching new settings, new balances, new adjustments, new shadings, and new extensions. It was not easy to see what other course they could follow if they would be loyal both to the past and to the present. He did not dispute that this mode of dealing covered some dangers. All generosity ran risks, but they were not going to give up generosity on that account. It was, however, quite possible that some of the more perfectly organized Churches would endeavour to

harmonize their Confessions more fully with present beliefs. He did not understand what some people maintained that there could be no distinction between secondary and primary truths. Certainly there was such a distinction, and he believed that when the Churches were able to organize themselves on a simpler, but still on a clear and definite basis, a happier state of matters would exist. The result of his survey of the state of Protestantism, the lecturer did not consider on the whole unsatisfactory, and when they looked abroad, and estimated the proportion of Protestants now with the numbers in the Greek and Latin Churches, and thought of the marvellous and steady development of missionary zeal, they had some ground for hope and thankfulness. At the same time there were things which he deprecated and condemned such as the linking together of Evangelical Protestantism with intellectual bigotry and narrowness; the homage paid to mere wealth and worldly position; and the disintegrating spirit to which he had already referred. Protestantism, of course, could not be centralized like Romanism, but such relations should be established between Protestant Churches as would enable each army corps on the same side to salute—(Applause)—and lead each to agree that ground gained from the common enemy anywhere was ground gained for the common good, and ought to be matter of rejoicing to them all. The weakness of Protestantism by disintegration he did not charge on the smaller dissident communities, but on some of the largest Churches in the land. Look for instance at the isolation of Protestantism within the Church of England—not combining with any other Protestantism, but combining with that which was in contradiction to itself. What was wanted in England was less outcry, and more courage and common sense. Let the real Protestants within the Church of England openly make common cause with the Reformed Churches of the world, and they would both receive an impulse and an enthusiasm such as had not been felt for the last two hundred years. In conclusion, Dr. Fraser spoke of another point which he deemed of importance—namely, the adaptation of Protestantism to be the spiritual guide of modern political freedom. There was an irresistible stream of tendency towards government by public opinion as against government by personal will. Any appearance to the contrary was a mere eddy in the stream, and would ultimately effect nothing. Under all forms of government, imperial and regal as well as Republican, the movement was towards democracy—that was to say to the principle of the rule over the people by the people, or by those whom the people select and trust to act for their interests. And what mode of religion was to be associated with that movement so as to give it steadiness and moral safety? Surely not that which had its head at the Vatican. Whatever one might think of the influence of the Vatican at a former period, no one could say that it was fitted to be the counsellor of governments really popular, or the guardian of nations really free. It had, indeed, shown itself to be inveterately hostile to what modern Europe regards as civil liberty. But was Protestantism prepared to march on with the life and hope of progressive nations, and to supply that moral and spiritual element without which society however organized corrupts and perishes? This was a question anxiously discussed in France and Italy, where many people began to see that liberty was not safe either with superstition or with infidelity. France wanted Protestant schools, because there only could children be trained to combine moral convictions and restraints with the love of country and freedom. Therefore they must desire that Protestantism should be invigorated in those continental countries; and in every country it should refuse to ally itself with reactionary policy or to hallow the reign of ancient prejudice. Let Protestantism seek to befriend the onward march of nations in the love of freedom, of righteousness, and of peace. (Cheers.)

SENSATIONALISM IN THE PULPIT.

As we try to formulate that vague conception which we have of the sensational, by putting it into words, we encounter difficulty. For it is immediately discovered that a certain kind and degree of the sensational enter into all eloquence. The orator, whether in the pulpit, or at the bar, or in the senate, seeks to persuade. But in pursuing that main design he uses certain tributaries, all of which are made by him to