

The Church Guardian.

Upholds the Doctrines and Rubrics of the Prayer Book.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."---Eph. vi., 24.
"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."---Jude: 3.

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THE LONDON "TIMES" ON THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

WE see no sort of reason, therefore, to despair of the future of the Church. It has of late years, we repeat, immensely gained in public estimation and respect. Its militant ranks are now filled from the highest to the lowest grades with men mainly formed in a new and better mould than those of bygone times, though it will be wise more earnestly to maintain the standard of learning. The old disreputable type of "parson," insincere, careless, and more given to port wine than to piety, exists only in novels of Fielding's day. The Church clergyman of the Victorian era is almost universally a gentleman, a scholar, and a most faithful servant, according to his lights, of his Divine Master, and of the people with whom his lot is cast. In hundreds of country parishes and city districts he is the friend, the adviser, and unwearying guide of people who but for him would hardly even catch a faint gleam of the light which shines on cultured minds. The work that is done among us by clergymen over and beyond their strict professional duties is, we believe, at the present date prodigious and invaluable. It is wrought for the most part unnoticed and unrewarded, and is, no doubt, rather of the character of moral than ecclesiastical teaching. But its influence for good is reflected upon the Church itself, and it might astonish many to know how vast a body of voluntary helpers among the poor follow the lead of this gentle and devoted propagandism. Hundreds of high-born ladies and well-to-do young men render a constant self-devotion among the most lowly and ignorant of the land, enrolling themselves agents of this great modern philanthropic movement, in which the Church is, no doubt, imitated and assisted by other religious bodies. The fruit of such a co-operation may some day be the reconciliation of sects; but, if that be a hope too rational to seem reasonable, at least we discern no cause why the Church—Established or Disestablished—should lose her lead in this most noble crusade. Those, truly, who know so little of humanity as to think that man can ever live without religion, and those who have so imperfectly followed science as to believe that her utmost discoveries may some day take the place of the Bible, are equally at liberty to dream of a time when no creed will exist and no moral teacher will be needed in society. Better instructed minds, however, are well aware that mankind must always have a faith higher than the vastest conception of science, and a hope Diviner than her brightest dream. Of such a faith and such a hope the English Church remains a chief depository, and in her growing capacity to interpret them with an ever-widening love and wisdom, lies, we believe, the secret of the destinies which await her in the future.

IS UNBELIEF INCREASING?

A MORE important question than is propounded by the heading of our article can scarcely be conceived. Certainly it has a deep interest for all sorts and conditions of men. It affects the cultured scholar, the brilliant philosopher, and the clever but sceptical scientist,—in a word, all men of genius, and those of no genius, who pretend to despise Christianity, and who seek its overthrow.

It touches still more vitally the hearts of the great majority among all ranks to whom the religion of the Christ is dear, and who, though they look at times with dread on the wide breach between modern culture and Christianity, have still firm faith in the Church's future, and in the glorious promises of the Redeemer's Kingdom.

It is, we know, by no means unusual for men to look back with longing eyes on the golden past, and to enquire, as some did nearly three thousand years ago, "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" There is a natural tendency in most minds to exalt the days that have passed away at the expense of the present, and to look back regretfully as on some fond dream on former years, especially as men draw near the close of life's journey.

Many a Jeremiad is uttered on all sides, regarding the present condition of Christianity and the boldness of its foes. Not a few urge that the power of scepticism is so great, and the increase of rationalism and agnosticism so widespread, that the Church is in imminent danger of destruction, and some affirm that the Ark of God is rapidly sweeping onward to the vortex of despair.

For ourselves, we confess we have but little faith in those "good old times," of which so many seem enamoured. We believe there is much that is evil around and about us, but we question, if, after all has been thoughtfully considered, the present age can for a moment compare with the immorality, the cruelty, the licentiousness, the irreligion and the open vice of certain periods in the past history of our own nation.

However, we do not wish to anticipate an answer to our question. We purpose examining the matter in a series of short articles. We desire to look into the present condition of Christianity and the aspect of unbelief, so far as the brief space we can allot to the subject will allow. In such a wide field we perhaps cannot glean full information but we shall at least "nothing extenuate nor ought set down in malice." And it may be that our enquiries shall help to the better understanding of the whole subject, and shall in some measure, advance the cause of truth.

First, then, to survey our field, following the wise maxim of Spinoza, "Human things are neither to be laughed at nor wept over; our duty is to understand them." At the outset we must admit the foes of Christianity are numerous and untiring. A perpetual war has been waged against the gospel from the beginning, and the end is yet far off. Deep-seated mistrust of the Christian faith exists in many lands. Some of the most important doctrines of Christ's religion have been quietly put aside by thousands, or are boldly dissolved in the crucible of a Hobbes, a Hume or a Voltaire. It is, in fact, considered a sign of superior intelligence to be sceptical. And not a few are ready to repeat the axiom of Diderot: "True religion is to have none at all!"

To devout and pious minds it is no doubt painful to dwell upon the assaults made with such increasing bitterness on the faith once delivered to the saints. We should remember, however, what the experience of the past assures us has ever been the case, that the more powerful has been the development of Christianity, the stronger has been the opposition to it, and the more untiring and unscrupulous its foes. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that if Christ's

religion is founded on absolute truth, and if His promises are to be fulfilled, every attack made upon it must bring out still more clearly its real character, and tend to establish it more firmly. Open and honorable antagonism will always intensify and enrich those truths on which the Church is founded. Therefore the louder the opposition and the hotter the conflict, the greater will be the gain and the nearer do we approach the hour of complete and final victory.

The present opposition to Christianity is due to many and varied causes, on which we have neither time nor space to dwell here. But we must at least before closing mention one prolific cause of unbelief, and that is the evil within the Church itself. As a well-known German theologian writes, "the outbreak of heresies goes hand in hand with the loss of spiritual life in the Church at large." Widespread corruption among her members, fruitless controversies and stern anathemas against opponents, these things have robbed the Church of many who might have been retained within her fold, and have through the Church's own fault, largely swelled the number of unbelievers.

The absence of all spiritual life and fervor, the coldness and deadness witnessed among vast numbers of professing believers, the harsh dogmatism of the pulpits, the neglect of real theological training in schools of divinity, and the stupid opposition made by the Church to what is true science and undoubted fact,—these have all contributed their quota to the increase of scepticism.

In considering the question with which we set out, it would be folly to shut our eyes to the real state of affairs. This we have no desire to do. But, while we admit the audacity of the foes of Christianity, and notice their strenuous efforts in opposition to it, we must also give the Church credit for making wondrous strides in all genuine deeds of piety and charity within the last hundred years. To this subject we shall revert in a subsequent issue.—Communicated.

THE YOUNG.

THE Bishop of Exeter, in forwarding to the clergy a copy of his recently delivered charge, draws particular attention to that portion of it relating to the young. "I am," he says, "more and more convinced, as every year goes by, that upon our dealing with the young depends the future of the Church. In the critical times through which we are passing, and the still more critical times which are certainly approaching, the character and fortunes of our Church for generations to come will depend on what we now do for religious education. There is need that the clergy generally should take an increasing interest and an increasing part in the actual work to be done; that our aim should be clear and our diligence unremitting; that we should frequently take counsel together and loyally co-operate with each other; but meanwhile the machinery now in use is a necessity. We cannot maintain our religious education in an efficient state with anything like the requisite steadiness and completeness if we let down either the inspection or the training school. The need of both, indeed, is increasing upon us every year. I am confident that no money that we spend in the service of the Church is better spent than our Religious Instruction Fund."