

WILL CULTURE OUTGROW CHRISTIANITY?

THIS is the question asked by Professor Upton in his thoughtful address to the students of a Theological College which has just entered on its second century of existence—Manchester New College. It is certainly a very fundamental question for theology to propose, for if it is answered in the affirmative, a Theological College will be concerned with explaining a creed which it can only offer, and of course with more and more of diffidence, to the acceptance of those who appear to be *unfitted* to survive in the conflict for existence. There may be men who can teach with energy and eloquence a doctrine which they fully expect to find less and less acceptable to the majority of mankind; but if there be such men, they must combine to a very singular degree personal energy with despair of the victory of truth. As a rule, the teacher who believes that the permanent current of men's thoughts is against him, will either distrust his own teaching, or despair of the learning capacity of ordinary men—and either condition of mind will be fatal to his power as a teacher.

Professor Upton, however, does not think that culture is destined to outgrow Christianity. He thinks that the tide of naturalism is beginning to ebb, that the belief in a being who, to use Mr. Spencer's phrase, is *above* personality rather than below it (whatever that may mean), is returning even to the high priests of evolution—nay, that, in Professor Upton's own happy phrase, it is simply absurd to expect "the sublime process of evolution to end in the melancholy fiasco of the generation, as its highest product, of a being utterly unsuited to his surroundings; a being who hungers and thirsts for satisfactions which

Nature is powerless to provide, and who in pessimistic despair longs at length to shuffle off the hated burden of existence."

But while Professor Upton chooses strong ground when he uses the very conception of evolution to refute the view that this process should have produced a religious being only to disappoint cruelly all the religious instincts it had fostered, he seems to us to ignore in some degree the strength of the evidence that for some time back culture has been so far outgrowing Christianity as to deprive a much larger portion of the cultivated world of its Christian faith than ever was deprived of that faith by culture, at least since the revival of learning. Bishop Butler, indeed, testifies to the existence of a fashionable world in the time of George II. when it was not so much as considered worth while to regard the truth of the Christian revelation as even deserving investigation—and some of the divines even of Butler's day were probably rationalists of the Deistic type. But even then it was not culture which had produced this decay of belief half so much as general torpor of conscience and worldliness of habit. Where life and thought were most vivid; belief revived. It was not then as it is now—the abundance of thought, the rush of fastidious criticism, the perplexity of the intellect among the multitude of counsels, the giddiness of speculative earnestness, the bewilderment engendered in the throng of competing opinion, which paralyzed men's faith. It was less culture than cynicism which paralyzed Christian feeling. But now it may be said in a very real sense that it is culture which endangers Christianity—the consciousness of the wideness of the field of knowledge,