

Symposium.

CURRENT UNBELIEF.

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AS a professor of Apologetics, I am in the habit of passing in review, annually with my students, all the phases of unbelief, past and present. I derive my information concerning these largely from books and from other public expressions of opinion by men whom I have little seen. Thus my Apologetic, like that of most teachers, is largely theoretical. But, in the good providence of God, there is a practical side to it. Though not gifted beyond my fellows with self-assertiveness or evangelical gush, I have, for many years, and especially of late, been sought out by people who had made temporary shipwreck of their faith. Young men come to my study, young women to my drawing room : others write to me, find me in railroad cars or on steamboat decks ; some talk to me as we walk by the way, as I sit at their firesides, as together we lounge beneath the canvas in summer time. Their talk is free and unconstrained ; it is of religion, of the Bible, of vital trust in God. Like every other Christian minister I want to help them, but, before I can do so, I have to hang my head in shame.

These enquiring doubters make me ashamed of what I have said in the pulpit and what I have been. Three and twenty years I have been in the ministry, abundant time for maturing views of truth ; but, in view of the great problem of faith and unbelief, I feel like a little child, yet like a child who has begun to think, and who knows that he has long played the fool, in heartlessly and parrot-like repeating by rote the lesson taught him by his venerable grandmother. Some of my doubters have been Spencerian Agnostics, Darwinian Evolutionists, Emersonian Pantheists, Destructive Critics following Strauss and Ingersoll ; but these were the few. Most of them have been men and women that I, and preachers like me, have, by our preaching and conduct, driven away from church doors and from the fellowship of the people of God. It is not pleasant to have to say this ; it is worse to know that it is true. These doubters have no scruples in telling me how they were