



TWO church courts recently in session have been handling the dynamite of the newer theological thought. The Montreal Conference of the Methodist Church busied itself with the question whether Rev. Dr. Shaw had libelled Rev. Dr. Workman in crediting him with certain unusual theological opinions; while the Presbyterian General Assembly had a flurry over the appointment of a professor to the Montreal Presbyterian College who was said to have written a book in which he referred to Genesis as a mass of myth and legend. It will be noted that both cases occurred in connection with professors in theological colleges. It does not seem to be the regular pastorate which is breaking new ground, but the scholarly experts in the colleges. The Montreal professor was defended by Dr. Scrimger, principal of the Montreal college, and Dr. Patrick, principal of the Winnipeg Presbyterian College. Dr. Patrick, indeed, said that he always taught the theology complained of, and the plea was put up for the young man that a decision against him would send out the message that the Presbyterian Church was mediaeval.

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Now I confess that my mind will not enable me to see the logic of the position of a church which preaches one set of theological opinions in some of its pulpits and teaches quite another set in its colleges. In fact, theological "opinion" seems to me to be a term which almost amounts to a surrender. Is theology a matter of "opinion"? Is it to be a question of debate, for instance, whether certain prophetic statements in the Old Testament are true, and whether the first book in the Bible is literal history or only "a mass of myth and legend"? Doesn't anybody KNOW anything definite about this Christian religion of ours? An Anglican pastor in the United States has recently questioned the virgin birth of Christ. Next some one will doubt His resurrection. One man will tell you that he only believes in the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount. But why should he believe in these if he has abandoned the miraculous features of Christ's life which enabled Him to speak "as one having authority and not as the scribes"?

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We hear a great deal about the differences of doctrine between the denominations; but these differences seem almost paltry when contrasted with the differences in belief regarding the facts of the Christian religion within the denominations themselves. It is surely a far less important thing whether or not the modern Presbyterian version of predestination be true or the wider Arminianism of the other churches be right, than whether a whole book in the Bible be true or merely legendary. Then when we come to deal with the facts of Christ's life itself, surely we cannot be in doubt here about the smallest item if a belief in the scriptural story of that life is to be requisite to salvation? Yet is the accuracy of prophecy taught in all our theological colleges? Do they all even teach the literal truth of all the miracles? Now I do not enter into the discussion of these points myself. I am not a theologian. But it does seem to me that a church which preaches one thing to its congregations and teaches another to its young "theologues," should hold an inquest into its "opinions" and find out what it really is presenting to the people as the essential

Gospel of the Living God, without which they will be utterly lost.

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A lot of us are getting into a loose mental attitude toward the Christian Church, taking the position that, as the ethics it teaches are sound and as the moral reform energies it directs are effective, it does not really matter much what it believes doctrinally. Now if the Church itself would accept this view of its mission, our acceptance of it would probably work out all right. But the Church does not accept this view. It insists upon our acceptance of its doctrines on pain of being sent to an uncomfortable place hereafter. This may not matter a great deal with people who defy this sort of moral coercion or even to the careless many who simply ignore it; but the very best people in the country are brought to their knees by it and have their whole life influenced by its insistent teaching. This is the basis of the great revivals of religion that we see, which are not based upon ethics or on moral reform, but on the divine revelation of the one true religion.

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Consequently church doctrine is a matter of importance. It makes a difference to us all what the powerful churches in our midst believe. We are all affected by it, whether we worship with that particular communion or not. To ignore doctrinal difficulties on the ground that Christian ethics are all right, would be as if a Chinese city were to ignore the religious purposes of our Christian missionaries on the ground that their medical advice seemed sound. Now, as we are interested in doctrine, we must surely ask that it be made plain what that doctrine is. That there should be differences between the denominations, we expect. These differences weaken the power of Christianity to make progress among "the heathen"; but we have become accustomed to them. That there should be differences within each denomination is too much, however, for even our hardened capacity to overlook mysteries in the matter of religion. The churches should at least agree, each within itself, upon the basic question whether or not the Bible is the Word of God.

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Splendide Mendici; or, the Noble Beggars.

Lord Curzon, as Chancellor of Oxford, has appealed for funds for his University, thus following the lead of his rival, the Duke of Devonshire, Chancellor of Cambridge.—Punch.