

CAUSES OF UNBELIEF.

By THE REV. L. G. STEVENS, REC-
TOR OF ST. LUKE'S CHURCH.

A Paper Read before the Sunday-
School Teachers' Association of
the Deanery of St. John, on Tues-
day Evening, Aug. 11.

(Continued.)

But justly excepting these, the beholder witnesses a line of sects, churches and religious circles, each with its own tent pitched and its own banner flung to the breeze, each ignoring common interests, and declining (often haughtily and superciliously) common efforts—each drawing lines around itself, except when it contemplates aggression, invasion and conquest—each fortifying itself behind points and pickets and fiery darts and flaming swords, as if all the others were declared and uncompromising foes; each endeavoring by intimidation, or promise, or purchase, or perchance by stratagem, to multiply its numbers by weakening the ranks of its opponents—in a word, each virtually or directly claiming to monopolize the Infinite God, as its patron, its friend, the declared champion of its peculiar standard, and (greatest anomaly of all) each one placing high upon its warlike banners the name of the pure Prince of Peace, the teacher of brotherhood and love, who enjoined that nothing should be done through strife and vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, each esteeming the other better than himself. And so it is that the observation of the heathen of old, "Behold how these Christians love one another," becomes in the mouth of the sneering sceptic, "Behold how these Christians hate one another."

When we see such theoretical misconception and such practical misapplication of Christ's gospel, it is certainly not surprising, but natural and reasonable, that men who judge of principles themselves by the practices of those who profess them, should raise this question and earnestly demand its consideration, viz., "What advantages would occur to mankind generally; and the working classes in particular, by the removal of Christianity and the substitution of secularism in its place?" This, as some of you no doubt are aware, is a question of late years openly raised by thinking and earnest men in England and Germany, and which, challenging church and clergy, has been publicly discussed before crowded and deeply interested audiences.

IN THE FACE

of a great, practical, comprehensive, fiery question like this, the potty points of sectarian dispute—baptismal regeneration, immersion or sprinkling, priestly confession, early communion, church government by bishops or by elders—these and many other points over which churches have been torturing each other in fruitless controversy, shrink and shrivel into dust and ashes and vanish away like smoke. Yet this and such, as this are all important inquiries, which

churches must come bravely up to meet and answer, in this age of flaming trial, and nothing but the gold and silver of enlightened truth can come out of the furnace purified seven times as in the fire.

I do not think I have over-colored the picture of the attitude of the intellect towards religion at the present day. We hear the assertion boldly made that there is too much faith in the world—we see that opinion lived, if not uttered, by tens of thousands; we see the habitual absence of a large part of our population from any place of worship whatever; we see the popularity of those who deny to the Bible any divine inspiration, who ridicule the church's realization of Jesus' idea of peace and unity.

And yet I am glad to say there are already indications that our church disputants are beginning to appreciate the real issue.

They begin to see many errors and superstitions that must be dispersed, old theologies that must be broken up, comfortable mental habits that must be disturbed, and mental reserve and qualification (that bane of theologians' and preachers' minds) that must be forever renounced. They see a great diversity of forms and opinions among Christians, and yet the thought of "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," is looming up more and more clearly. They see that it is *theology* that makes the din and the discord; while it is the pure unselfish life that should be the bond of sympathetic brotherhood.

In a former part of this essay I introduced the figure of contending churches as occupying hostile camps. At this time, when the whole world, irrespective of national, religious or civil distinctions, is looking with unfeigned interest upon the newly-made tomb of the great Union general—at this time and in connection with the thought of unity on which I am dwelling (perhaps longer than I intended), I am forcibly reminded of an incident in the great American rebellion, in which, as a school-boy, I took a warm and vivid interest.

IT SO HAPPENED

that on one bright, sunny afternoon the armies on both sides were encamped on the banks of the river, on the one side the Union army, across the rebel. And as they lay there in their encampments, the bands on both sides began to discourse music. On the Northern side it was "The Star-Spangled Banner" swelling out upon the breeze, and on the Southern side the bands responded with "Dixie's Land." Then again the Northern side said, in their music, "Hail Columbia," and yet the Southern bands responded with "Dixie's Land." After a while the Northern bands played "Yankee Doodle," but still the sullen response was only "Dixie's Land." And then after an interval, as the sun was going down over the hills upon their wrath, the immortal chords of "Home, Sweet Home" were struck on the Northern side of the stream, but it was not long before

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the bands of the Southern side took it up too, and it was "Home, Sweet Home" on both sides, and every voice of those belligerent brothers responded in perfect harmony, and the strains of those instruments and the great soul of the country breathed amen and amen with the delightful inspiration of the love of home. It was nothing but the common and tender thought of home—home in the little cabin of the wild frontier of the West, or in the busy cities of the East, or on the quiet plantations of the South—but wherever it might be, with loving hearts watching and praying for the absent one—it was only this mutual thought of home that could soften and melt the rugged hearts of those contending soldiers. And so I often think that when no other consideration seems able to soften us toward our brethren and our neighbors, the thought of that home beyond the river, that home which we all hope to enter, that home from which so great a cloud of witnesses look down upon us—God our common Father, Jesus our elder Brother, the holy angels and the spirits of the blessed who have died in the Lord—the thought of that home should make us desire to stop our wrangles and contentions and bitter feuds, and be willing to grasp hands once more as reconciled and united brethren. Then would that grand hymn which is sung in so many churches throughout Christendom describe not something farcical, but something real: "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war (not against each other, but) at the name of Jesus, Satan's host doth flee. Like a mighty army moves the Church of God. We are not divided; all one body we—one in hope and doctrine, one in charity."

Let us, Christian friends, so walk together in our smaller and larger circles of kindred, and intimacy, and acquaintance, that no faith may be broken by us, no love wounded. We are all brethren. As common soldiers against a common foe, let not the sun go down upon our unbrotherly wrath. So shall we verify the words of the Psalmist: "I will lay me down in peace and take my rest, for thou Lord only makest me dwell in safety." So shall we verify in our hearts and

lives the Master's own precious words: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." And then and thus and only so will the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost will be amongst us and remain with us always.

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