

remarks to these, it is not at all my intention to depreciate the importance of the religious education of the humbler members of the community. But while their instruction is in some degree provided for, those of whom I speak are, I fear, in this direction, to a large extent at all events, the neglected classes. These have not about them the visible halo of misery and want which lends a pathetic interest to the poor: nor does the question of their religious instruction involve those questions of political and ecclesiastical rivalry which, in the case of others, awaken an enthusiasm which might otherwise be wanting. And yet I firmly believe that it will be only at the risk of the faith of thousands of young Englishmen and Englishwomen, and at the great peril of our Church, that we can continue to ignore or to neglect the urgent need which exists for making permanent and general provision for the definite, accurate, and systematic instruction in Holy Scripture, and Church History of the young persons to whom I refer.

No one who is at all acquainted with the existing conditions of our modern English life can be ignorant of the fact that there is an unusual amount of disbelief, at all events of indifference and unbelief. The extremely low standard of morals which is at least acquiesced in, and sometimes gloried in by English society, the character and style of the literature which is so fatally popular with nearly all classes, the increasing indifference to the observance of the Lord's Day—these are all ominous indications of the waning power, and the weakening of the influence of religious principles in the consciences and in the conduct of large numbers of the community. Now this is, to a considerable extent, the outcome of a vague and oftentimes undefined feeling that the authority of Holy Scripture has been shaken, and that the Bible is no longer the supreme standard of life and morals.

The scathing, sometimes perfectly honest and candid, sometimes utterly scrupulous criticism, to which the Bible and the doctrines of Christianity have been subjected, has weakened the faith of some, and has impregnated the whole atmosphere of Christian life with an overhauling influence. The faith of many professed believers has degenerated in a half-hearted opinion that, after all, Christianity may be true. But the fair fabric of the Christian faith cannot rest upon a "Perhaps."

I am deeply convinced that the first and best remedy for this state of things, the surest security for the faith of our young people, is an accurate and intelligent knowledge of the Holy Scripture. Half the objections against the Bible, which have for our young men the fatal fascination of novelty, are not really arguments against the written Word itself, but against some ignorant and merely traditional interpretation of it—objections, sometimes perfectly sound and true, not to what is in Scripture, but to what is said of it. Half the moral difficulties which are urged against certain of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity—even against the Atonement itself—are attacks, and sometimes deserved attacks, not upon the doctrines themselves, as expressed in Holy Scripture or in the Creeds, but upon merely human explanations which explain nothing, and popular illustrations which illustrate nothing. These would lose altogether their disturbing power if people were intelligently acquainted with the teaching of the Holy Scriptures themselves, instead of being content with what are sometimes merely popular travesties of them.

Now let us ask what opportunities exist, as a rule, for such sorely needed instruction? There are, of course, in some churches Bible readings. These, however, are generally, and perhaps necessarily, of quite a different character from the kind of teaching to which I refer. These

reading contain so much purely spiritual teaching and exhortation that they can rarely be described as systematic, technical and detailed instruction in the books and in the text of the Bible. They fulfil the purpose, but that purpose is not the particular one to which I am venturing to direct attention now. There is again a possibility perhaps of such teaching being given in the home. The large extent, however, to which foreign governesses are employed, the general ignorance, and the lamentable indifference of parents themselves, render home instruction in religious knowledge a very remote contingency. I do not know a single mother of the upper classes (with one illustrious exception) who has made anything like the same provision for the religious education of her family as she has done for their instruction in music or languages, or even dancing. We can scarcely hope for any striking results in this direction.

There remains the time of preparation for Confirmation. I pass by the obvious fact that its brevity makes it quite inadequate for the purpose. Apart from this difficulty, my own not very limited experience has led me irresistibly to the conclusion that, to fulfil its main object, preparation by the Clergy for Confirmation should be as far as possible purely spiritual. It is a great and a unique opportunity to kindle and to strengthen the spiritual nature in young persons just entering upon the greater responsibilities and temptations of life. There is a great danger lest they should come to imagine that their fines for Confirmation is established by their passing a kind of examination, or answering a string of questions. Yet we all know how the exigencies arising from former neglect compel us to devote much time to mere instruction, and thus let slip the higher value of the opportunity and so deprive the preparation for Confirmation of much of its deeper spiritual value for the candidates themselves. How this difficulty is to be met is a subject which, at all events, demands the consideration which this resolution respectfully suggests. Whatever may come out of the investigation, of one thing I am certain, that it will have in some way to be dealt with by the clergy themselves.

If, however, systematic religious instruction be so added burden, it will also have an enormous advantage. There is, I fear, a general idea in some directions that we clergy are the "stupid party" of the present day, that we know little of the doubts and difficulties which modern criticism and scientific research have suggested. We are sometimes supposed to regard all inquiry as "wicked." This is to a large extent undeserved. It is perhaps only the result of the tone adopted by a small class who used to think that a sarcasm about "uneducated intellect" was a sufficient answer to all "modern thought"; and forgot that if uneducated intellect was objectionable, there was also such a thing as uneducated stupidity, which was hardly less dangerous. The serious matter is that when young people have doubts, they are often afraid to come to their clergyman—who will only, they imagine, regard them as very wicked—and then instead of dragging out their difficulties to the light of day, and meeting them candidly and fearlessly with the systematic help of their pastor, they hide them away in their hearts as if they were guilty secrets to do their deadly work.

Therefore there will be much gained, both directly and indirectly, by the development, in some way or another, of the strictly teaching functions of the ministry.

A similar line of argument applies to instruction in Church history. There is extraordinary ignorance amongst otherwise well-educated people on this subject. The prevalence of this ignorance is an opportunity of which the Church of Rome and Dissenting sects in this country largely, and, from their point of view, quite wisely, avail themselves. The

other day a member of the society which facetiously calls itself the Liberation Society said to me that he had never met a layman of the Church who seemed to know anything about or care anything for the distinctive characteristics of the Church as such. This is, in some directions only too common. If the upper and middle classes were really instructed in the general outline and the essential incidents of Church history, they could do much to spread a knowledge of those facts in place of the gross caricatures and the imaginary romances which are, to the Church's detriment, designedly scattered broadcast among the masses.

I have ventured to bring forward these questions, and to urge them, I fear, at undue length, but I hope not with undue earnestness, because I am persuaded that the maintenance of the faith in this country depends largely on our showing the people of high and low degree that we are not afraid of truth from wherever it may come, that the living Word of God stands in no need of a stupid intolerance or an almost criminal ignorance to maintain its supremacy. And also the future of our Church, or the National Church of the country, will largely turn upon the extent and accuracy of the knowledge possessed by the people as to her origin, her history, her policy, and her work.

We have nothing to fear, we have everything to gain from the spread of true and accurate knowledge regarding the rights and the position of the English Church. All we have to fear is complacent ignorance, on the one side and wilful misrepresentation on the other. Around the Church of our fathers has clustered in the past all that is noblest and best in the art, the literature, the philanthropic enterprise, the practical Christianity of centuries of Englishmen; and if only we, at any personal risk or trouble, spread a knowledge of those principles on which she has been established, and maintain the doctrines which she has been Divinely commissioned to teach, she will still continue, as I fondly believe, to evoke the enthusiasm, to kindle the genius, and to preserve the purity of generations of Englishmen yet unborn.—*Family Churchman*

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