

MODERN APOLOGETICS.

Dr. Ed. de Pressense, Paris, in an address on the above subject at the Presbyterian Council, said: Allow me to offer first of all to the Presbyterian Council the respectful salutations of the Free Evangelical Churches of France, more and more attached to the Presbyterian type in its breadth, and which endeavour in their weakness to realize its principles, while they try to offer everlasting Gospel to their countrymen. Having been requested to bring before you a subject of Apologetics, I have chosen (in order not to dwell on generalities) one of the points the most often attacked to-day in the Christian field. I am anxious to answer this objection, that Christianity is but a product of the religions which have gone before it. Great strides have been made in recent times in the study of the history of the religions of the Old World. New access has been gained to the original sources, to the sacred books of the ancient East. "The Book of the Dead" in Egypt, Greek and Latin Epigraphy, the discovery and interpretations of sculptured hieroglyphs, all have contributed to resuscitate the great religious part of humanity. It has been asserted that these investigations lead to the conclusion that Christianity was the natural outgrowth of the past, and that it is easy to discern what it borrowed from the great dead religions, blending all in one vast synthesis. Our aim is to point out briefly the decisive objections to this view of the question. In the first place, let us define what we mean by Christianity. Christianity is not essentially either a doctrine or a Church or a book; but a great fact, the manifestation in a person of the love of God reaching out to save a lost world. Christianity is Jesus Christ. This is the witness of its most authentic documents. Herein consists its originality, its essential difference from all the religions of the past, even the best and purest. It may exhibit analogies of teaching with some of these, but there always remains between it and them just the interval which separates the idea from its realization, while the idea itself shines out in the atmosphere of Christianity with new unalloyed brightness. In the second place, between Judaism and the Gospel the analogies are numerous, for the one was the direct preparation for the other—but even between them there is scarcely measurable distance that separates the stage of preparations from that of fulfilments. Moreover, the institutions of Judaism were designed for the education of a particular people, and all that was exclusively national and sacerdotal in them was destined to disappear with the accomplishment of the work of redemption. It is impossible, therefore, to identify the Judaism of the decline with primitive Christianity. Between the two rise the cross and the Apostolate of St. Paul. The more scientific study of Christianity in recent times has only vindicated its originality and unlikeness to anything going before. In the third place, the religions of the Gentile world have their dim foreshadowing of the religion of Christ, but they only succeeded in raising an altar to the unknown God, a symbol at once of their aspirations after him who was to come and their powerlessness to evolve a salvation for themselves. In their teaching they never shook off the fetters of Dualism, and always regarded mind and matter as inherently opposed to one another, like good and evil. They never rose to the conception of a holy God distinct from His creation, though some glimpses of this truth seem to have been gained by their great philosophers. Their aspirations far outran their intellectual conceptions. Groping in darkness they sought and cried aloud for the unknown God, and tried to appease Him by their religious rites, in which sacrifice occupied the foremost place. The moral consciousness bore its unwavering testimony through all the ages to the reality of evil and the necessity of redemption. From the pathetic penitential psalms which rise from the Plains of Chaldea down to the choruses of the Greek Tragedies, we catch the same sorrowful wail of a burdened conscience. Hence the attitude of expectancy common to all religions. But this inward prophecy never fulfilled itself. In spite of all the burning desire for reparation and salvation the moral decadence went on in the ancient world. Thus, both the analogies which it revealed between the human soul and Christianity, and by the picture it draws of man's abortive efforts to save himself, the silence of religion is a commentary on what Tertullian calls *Testimonium anime naturaliter Christiane*.

The more our conception of Christianity is freed from the scholasticism of all the creeds, and centres in the fact of redemption and in the Person of the Redeemer in His divine humanity; the more we recognize that no formula, no mere symbol, can contain this living Truth, the more shall we be convinced of the originality of Christianity as compared with all antecedent religions, and, at the same time, of that responding to the deepest needs of the human soul which is the truest analogy. In this part of Apologetics, as well as in the whole of our discipline, the important fact is not so much demonstrating Christ as showing forth his influence in the lives of Christians and in that of the Churches. Christ living in us is the master-thought of the Gospel, which thus becomes a living experience in us.

The third paper on the subject before the Council, and dealing with the above branch of it, was read by the Rev. Dr. Marcus Dodg, Glasgow. Having first laid down the propositions that "scepticism is the price which each generation has to pay for growth in knowledge," and that "each newly discovered truth demands to be admitted into and to be assimilated to the body of that truth already believed," he said that they had happiness and responsibility of living in a time when the most powerful and various solvents had been applied to religious beliefs, and when new truths had with unusual rapidity been brought to light, so that it could not be wondered at if the Church was slightly in arrears in the checking and admission of these truths. The allied studies, literary criticism and historical research, had been pursued with unprecedented intelligence, ardour, and success, and much had been brought to light which considerably modified their view of past times and of ancient documents. The Bible lay within the field of this fresh light, and they understood better what the Bible was. That scepticism should exist in this as in other ages need not surprise them, but the question for them was this. Is the Church in any degree responsible for the present scepticism; and is there any alteration we can make in our attitude towards it or in our methods of dealing with it which may be expected to abate its violence and diminish its extent? It could not, he thought, be doubted that the Church might have given a more distinct idea of Christianity, and of what the true Christian is. Not only in the lower class of freethinking journals, but in writers of the culture and knowledge of the late Cotto Morrison there was exhibited an almost unaccountable ignorance of the spirit and aims of Christianity. For the misrepresentations that had been made the Church was responsible in so far that it had not produced a type of Christianity which would make these misconceptions impossible. What Christ Himself required in His followers should be enough for the Church to require. What Christ required was that men should follow Him. He did not require them to accept a number of propositions about Him, but to prove their belief in Him by accepting Him as the true ruler of their life. They had no right to put bars on the doors of His fold which He did not put. The *differentia* of the Christian, that which distinguished the Christian faith from every other form or opinion or belief, was the one conviction that Jesus is at this moment conscious and supreme. The question which separated men into the two great classes of Christians and sceptics was this—Did Christ rise from the dead? (Applause.) If He did, then there is a spiritual power stronger than the mightiest physical forces in nature—a spiritual power which could compel natural laws to subserve spiritual purposes. (Applause.) E, His resurrection they were put in possession of God and immortality. But if, on the contrary, He still lay in His grave in the "lone Syrian town," if death terminated His living touch with this world, and if now He was helplessly separated from it, then the religion of apostles and martyrs was no more, and, for aught that Christianity could say to the contrary, nature is God, and beyond the limits she imposed we have no outlook at all. Secondly, the Church was responsible for the present scepticism by producing the impression that the Bible must either be accepted as throughout infallible or not at all. It was the duty of the Church to make it plain that faith in Christ was not bound up with faith in the infallibility of Scripture. (Hear, hear.) The Church was also responsible for not having yet formulated a doctrine of revelation which enabled inquiring minds to understand what the Bible is, and to account for all its character-

istics. Finally, their general bearing and attitude towards sceptics might probably bear improvement. As Plato long ago remarked, "It is a pity, if one-half of the world goes mad through godliness, the other half should go mad with indignation at them." (Cheers and laughter.) One important practical conclusion will certainly be gathered by thoughtful persons on this subject—that it was the unbelief within the Church which was mainly responsible for the unbelief outside. (Applause.) Were the members of the Church leading a supernatural life, unbelief in the supernatural would become impossible. (Hear, hear.) Were the supreme, living, present power of Christ manifested in the actual superiority of His people to earthly ways and motives, it would be as impossible to deny the power as it was to deny the power of the tides or the sun. (Applause.) Offences came and sceptics were made chiefly by the worldliness and unreformed, poor lives of professed believers. Christ's words were very awful—"Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." If any conduct of theirs, or if the tenor of their life or infirmity be gradually impressing on the mind of some child or youth or wavering person that there was little reality in religion, no duty more urgently pressed upon them than inquiry into their conduct, and strenuous endeavour to make their religion more real than ever.

A NAVAL ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY.

Ocean voyagers can judge for themselves whether the following incident narrated by the *Christian Leader* is as rare as it ought to be. A captain must be master in his own ship; but his despotism should be tempered by discretion. The recent outcry about gambling on board some transatlantic liners illustrates how power can be misused. It also can be disgracefully abused. A steamer has just brought from New Zealand one of the most notable clergymen in that Colony as a saloon passenger. He was no crude boy, just ordained, but had been in office forty years, presided over one of the largest churches of the colony for thirty years, and was coming home for his health. He wished to have service in the saloon; and, as is the usual custom, would have liked the other passengers to join in it. Not only did the captain refuse his permission for the second and third class passengers to join the first in worship and, when service was conducted in the second cabin, forbid those in the third to attend—a most unusual proceeding, though possibly within his right, but he also strained his authority so far as to preclude his venerable passenger from preaching in the saloon itself. Not that there was no service at all, for the captain did read prayers from the English liturgy. But the worst is to come, this courteous captain had the effrontery to inform this clergyman that he might have preached had he been an Episcopalian, but it was an English vessel and he was only a Presbyterian! Such snobishness ought to be brought to the notice of the directors. At present we will simply say that the vessel is the *Kaikoura* and the clergyman none other than Dr. D. M. Stuart, of Knox Church, Dunedin—one whom all men delight to honour except a man who is neither a perfect Christian nor a perfect gentleman.

THE *Christian Leader* rejoices to learn that an influential committee representing the Christian organizations of Scotland has been formed to make arrangements for a vigorous missionary campaign in the chief cities and towns in the northern kingdom. Drs. A. T. Pierson, of Philadelphia, and A. J. Gordon, of Boston, have agreed to remain for some months in Scotland to co-operate with representatives of various organizations in spreading the missionary spirit throughout the land. At a great gathering held in the Synod Hall, Edinburgh, on a recent Sunday evening under the presidency of Principal Sir William Muir, these distinguished divines were urged to render this service; and when the request was put to the meeting the audience rose *en masse*. There can be but one opinion as to the reception which our transatlantic visitors will receive in Scotland; and their appeals are sure to stimulate still further that spirit of missionary enterprise which is now more than ever a distinguishing note of modern Christianity.