

Pastor and People.

JESUS ONLY.

[The following lines, expressive of deep devotional feeling and humble trust in Jesus only, are from the pen of the late Professor Elliott, D.D., of Lafayette College:—]

Jesus, engrave it on my heart
That Thou alone most needful art;
I could from all things parted be,
But never, never Lord from Thee.

Needful art Thou to make me live,
Needful art Thou all grace to give,
Needful to guide me lest I stray;
Needful to help me every day.

Needful is Thy most precious blood;
Needful is Thy correcting rod;
Needful is Thy indulgent care;
Needful Thy all-prevailing prayer.

Needful Thy presence, dearest Lord,
True peace and comfort to afford;
Needful Thy promise to impart
Full life and vigour to my heart.

Needful art Thou to be my stay
Through all life's dark and stormy way;
Nor less in death Thou'lt needful be,
When I yield up my soul to Thee.

Needful art Thou to raise my dust,
In shining glory with the just;
Needful when I in heaven appear
To crown and to present me there.

CURRENT UNBELIEF.

BY REV. PRINCIPAL MACVICAR, D.D., LL.D.

This subject is embarrassingly vague and comprehensive. Unbelief is not defined, and the area over which it spreads, whether in Canada, Germany, France, or elsewhere, is not indicated. Perhaps this is wise, since with modern facilities for the distribution of knowledge, the thoughts and opinions good and bad, of any one country are speedily disseminated over the civilized world. Nothing can now be done in a corner. What is told in the ear is soon preached on the house-tops. Thus faith and unbelief get the fullest publicity, and are more widely diffused at the present day than ever before. And yet Sir William Dawson asks, "can such a thing exist as current unbelief? Unbelief is a purely negative quantity. How can it be current? The answer is, negatives imply positives. For example, according to an old and much neglected manual of theology, the negative precept, "Thou shalt not kill," "requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life and the life of others." Besides, I venture to suggest that instead of unbelief being "a purely negative quantity," it is an evil spiritual force in man which is quite positive, and impels him to offer opposition to God and His truth. In this sense it is certainly current everywhere, for Jesus says, "He that is not with Me, is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth abroad."

But Sir William adds, "there may be a rapid current in a stream, but scarcely in its dried up bed." True, but this stream of unbelief, sad to tell, has never been dried up. It started in Eden, when the lie of the devil was acted upon instead of the truth of God, and its bed has been deepened and widened ever since in its progress through the ages and with the growth of the human race. One of the most obtrusive facts in the history of unbelief is its unbroken continuity in spite of all that has been done to sweep it out of the world.

It is obviously vital to this discussion to settle definitely what is meant by faith and unbelief because they are directly antagonistic. It is confidently alleged by many that men have boundless faith in science, banks, railways and such like. This is undoubtedly correct, but is quite foreign to the matter in hand. Such faith often co-exists with the most determined unbelief. Such faith is natural to man, indigenous to the human heart, and in no sense the outcome of the saving grace of God. It is quite compatible with the utmost contempt for the person and work of Jesus Christ, and is useless to deliver men from the power, the pollution and penalty of sin and to fit them for eternal blessedness.

No scriptural definition of saving faith can be framed which ignores the Incarnation of the Son of God—the fundamental miracle of Christianity—and His vicarious obedience and sacrifice as the ground of a sinner's justification before God. "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God; and this is that spirit of antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

Faith, in one sense, is persuasion of the truth. In this form it terminates in propositions, and usually spoken of as the assent of the understanding. This faith does not save. We are not saved by propositions or creeds, but by a divine Christ. The acceptance of biblical facts and of the facts of science and secular enterprises is not sufficient for salvation. Men are constantly deceiving themselves in this respect. Demons believe in this sense, but are lost notwithstanding. They are not ignorant of Christ's redemptive work. The devil and his angels saw much of Jesus during His sojourn among men; and the Apostle James says (ii. 19) that their faith in the existence of God made them shudder, but it does

not restrain them from the most malignant and persistent opposition to Christ and His kingdom. The mere intellectual acknowledgment of the possibility of miracles, or the acceptance of the truth of the Gospel narratives comes far short of real Christian faith.

The faith that saves and that is antagonized by current unbelief, is distinctively trust in Christ, and this trust is not natural to the carnal mind. It is begotten by the Spirit of God in connection with the truth, and worketh by love and purifieth the heart. This is the only kind of faith that overcometh the world, and the unbelief which is antithetical and hostile to it is that with which we are concerned. In other words, the unbelief which consists in withholding confidence from God as having undertaken and accomplished human redemption, and which seeks to undermine and overthrow the kingdom of grace in the hearts of men.

Now this unbelief is current in many forms, and it may be difficult or impossible to say how much of it is in the Church and in the world. These two communities suffer from it, and they are so closely allied and so much intermingled of late that the same modes of thought and courses of conduct are found in both. So much is this the case that persons of pessimistic tendencies have abandoned the task of drawing a line of demarcation between them. Church people, they allege, are swallowed up of the world, they practically abjure their faith, and deserve to be classed with unbelievers, and the only safe course is to abandon their communion, to come out from among them and be separate.

This is unwise and unjust. Saints may come short of the ideal standard, and of being in all respects "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." We are all far from being what we should be, and what we shall be "when that which is perfect is come." Our theology, our preaching, our piety, our practical activity, our views of science, of government, of Inspiration, and of many other subjects may be greatly at fault, but still it is quite within the limits of truth to say that the Church universal in all her Protestant branches is much better than the world that "lieth in the evil one."

We do not deny that there is unbelief in the Church, often showing itself in cunning unmanly ways that are paralyzing her spiritual vigour and efforts. But unbelief in the world is of a grosser type. It is noisy, boastful, and undignified. Its agents are usually coarse lovers of notoriety. Like the hypocrites of Christ's day, when they have any special performance to go through, they "sound a trumpet before them," and their numbers and influence are often unwisely estimated by the fuss they make. They claim to be leaders of advanced thought, while they are only reproducers of exploded errors.

I cannot but regard current unbelief as chiefly, while not exclusively, the unbelief of the past in slightly altered forms. This is the case as it shows itself in the departments of Apologetics, Dogmatics, philosophical speculation, and practical conduct. Physicists have in some measure opened fresh fields of controversy, but for the rest a dreary monotony is observable. The spirit of unbelief has survived the wreck of the old forms it once animated, and hence there is not very much that is out-and-out original, at least in principal, in the scepticism of our day. Its advocates have drawn upon all the centuries from the days of the apostles to the present moment. Celsus, Porphyry, Lucian, and later, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Hume, and others furnished the data which they have wrought into new combinations.

Many imagine themselves clever inventors of startling objections to sacred truth because they are ignorant of what their predecessors of a similar spirit did centuries ago. They forget or never learned that the ruler of the darkness of this world frequently returns by crooked ways and under new names, sometimes transformed into an angel of light, to do his old work of deceiving men and persuading them to accept his lies instead of the truth of God.

Deism, for example, as it flourished in England during the last half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century has passed away, but its spirit of antagonism to the fundamental truths of Christianity is still potent. We have latent or disguised Deism, not pronounced and outspoken except as Socinianism which also drops the old name. The nomenclature and methods of attack are changed, but the enemy is the same.

That was pre-eminently the age of reason, when it was thought that there was nothing higher or truer than the five senses of man and his intellect. The supreme effort then was to eliminate everything from religion that transcended the compass of reason. What refused to yield to this test, and to become luminous, simple, and satisfactory to the carnal mind was rejected. Theologians and unbelievers were largely at one in this decision. The preaching of the day was deeply permeated with rationalism. It dwelt upon mere morality, cold abstraction, metaphysical subtleties, and doubtful casuistry, and left out the saving message of the Gospel. This was true in a large degree of the writings and sermons of Hooker, Chillingworth, Taylor, Cadworth and others. The enemies of the truth then, as now, received no small help and comfort from those who professed to be its friends and defenders.

Lord Herbert's special mission was to displace Christianity, or render it unnecessary by emphasizing natural religion which he condensed to five points, namely, belief in the existence of God, the obligation to worship Him, the cultivation of piety or virtue, forgiveness solely on the ground of repentance, and, finally, rewards and punishments in the future state. The doctrines of the Trinity, of the Divinity and Incarnation of the Son of God, the atonement, the Holy Spirit and everything distinctively Christian were carefully excluded from this creed.

One cannot help feeling that this was very much in line with the demands of the present day. Abbreviated creeds are now emphatically called for, as if truth were not worth being formulated and held at any great length. Liberty is craved to believe less than heretofore, and to hold even the little that is accepted with the utmost uncertainty. Practically the "Higher Criticism" aims at giving us an expurgated Bible with very many parts left out which we have been accustomed to believe. To be a doubter in the estimation of many, is to be an honest man, and to hold truth, especially a biblical doctrine, with unmistakable strength of conviction, is to be a hypocrite or an ignorant dogmatist and obstructionist trying to stop the progress of knowledge. The determination appears to be to enlarge the human and minimize the Divine element in the Bible. But what is the practical effect of this view? The more it prevails the less reliable and authoritative the book becomes. The Lord's Word within its pages is diminished. God speaks little and man much, and thus the probability if not the absolute certainty of error in its contents is indefinitely increased. The Lord's voice ceases altogether to be heard in many parts of it and they contain nothing but the fallible utterances of man.

According to Principal Grant it is a dangerously erroneous view to make Inspiration "cover every subject referred to in the Bible, such as geography, geology, astronomy, history, antiquities, as well as the revelation of the character of God and the character and destiny of man." And, as it surprised that any should hesitate to accept this doctrine, he adds, "One would suppose indeed that by this time the lesson might have been learned that the divine element in the Bible does not extend to the knowledge of science, natural history or physical geography possessed by the writers, but that on all such matters they occupy the same platform as other men of their class and time, and were subject generally to all ordinary human limitations." (*College Journal*, November, 1891, pp. 6, 7)

That is to say Inspiration gave the sacred writers no aid in certain matters. Other men blunder in these, and so did they. Teaching of others showed much ignorance and error, and so did theirs. They occupied the same platform, and were characterized by what is meant by this conveniently indefinite phrase—"all ordinary human limitations." It follows that the geography, geology, astronomy, history and antiquities of the Bible are more or less unreliable. The learned principal does not tell us the precise extent to which this is the case, but he dwells with stirring animation upon the terrible consequences which he thinks have flown from the non-recognition of the fact. This indeed is the only cause of unbelief upon which he expatiates. One would think that but for the conduct of the "priest, the pulpit, the dogmatist and the schoolman" in propagating "views of Inspiration similar to those entertained by orthodox Hindus with regard to the Vedas and Puranas, and by pious Mahomedans with regard to the Koran" (p. 6) the world would be delivered from a great measure from unbelief. I have not met with the advocates of the monstrous views complained of, and have no wish to stand between them and the chastisement they deserve. It would be interesting, however, to see the ipsissima verba of their statements, and thus to be in a position to judge intelligently in the matter. If there are ministers in Canada whose teachings on this question are even better than the utterances of Hindus and Mahomedans, they should certainly be disciplined; and if the people are in this benighted state they should be at once enlightened. No wonder if unbelief should prevail among them if they are under the care of such teachers.

(To be continued.)

THE ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

There was a large attendance at the spring meeting of the Executive Commission of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System, Western Section, which was held on Thursday morning, April 14, in the Scottish Church, Fourteenth Street, New York. The chairman, the Rev. Dr. T. W. Chambers, presided, and nearly all the several Churches connected with the Alliance in the United States and Canada were represented. From among the founders of this Alliance it was pleasant and profitable to note the presence of Drs. McCosh and Schaff, helping to arrange for the Fifth Quadrennial Council to be held in Toronto this fall, September 21-29. Much important business was transacted in preparation for the approaching Council, chief of which was the adoption of the programme on which the Committees of the Eastern and Western Sections have been engaged for the year past. Both in topics and speakers it promises a meeting of great interest. It was thought the presence of an executive officer from the missionary societies would add to the interest and value of the discussions on missionary topics, and it was resolved to recommend that, without specially inviting them, if any such should be present at the Council in September, they should be accorded seats as corresponding members. The Committee on Work on the European Continent called attention, through Dr. Cattell, its chairman, and Dr. Hale, both of whom have lately visited Bohemia, to the great value of sympathy and help to the struggling Reformed Churches among the Czechs.

In the evening the Presbyterian Social Union of New York gave a reception to the Executive Commission in the assembly room of the Metropolitan Opera House. It was admirably managed, and was an enjoyable occasion. Leading representatives of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches well filled the spacious room, nearly one-half being ladies. Mr. John Paton, the President of the Social Union, presided, and felicitously introduced the speakers. These were the Rev. Dr. James I. Goad, of the German Reformed Church of Reading, Pa., who spoke on "Presbyterianism on the European Continent"; the Rev. Dr. E. T. Corwin of the Reformed Dutch Church of New Brunswick, N. J., President of the General Synod, who spoke on "Presbyterianism in its Polity"; the Rev. Dr. L. C. Voss, of the Presbyterian Church South, of Savannah, Ga., on "Presbyterianism in its Doctrine"; and the Rev. Dr. D. H. McVicar, of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and Principal of the Presbyterian College, Montreal, who spoke on "Presbyterianism and Education." The addresses were interspersed with admirable singing by the Schumann Quartette. After these exercises the doors were opened into the supper-room, and further sociability was promoted by the usual collation.