

Pastor and People.

MODERN UNBELIEF.

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

Various methods are employed by unbelievers in propagating their views, and more especially there is a preference shown for elementary and higher education being made intensely secular, and for teachers and professors who ignore the voice of God in revelation. Unfortunately, these enemies of truth are, in many instances, aided by the exercise of a spurious liberality, or by the power of sectarian bigotry, making it impossible for the Churches to agree among themselves upon the elements of Christian instruction which should be included in the work of public educational institutions.

Advocates of the old sensualistic philosophy of France are now engaged in degrading man to the level of the brutes, in persuading him that he was the offspring of creeping things, all body, and no soul. Materialists, Positivists and Pantheists all agree in confounding physical, moral and spiritual laws, thus sapping the foundations of morality as well as of religion; while another school of thought professed to regard all forms of religion as having the same origin, being simply the product of the human mind, by a process of natural evolution. Thus everything that was divine and truly distinctive of Christianity was ignored. The enthusiastic disciples of this philosophy lived and moved in a sort of incandescent fog of liberality, and delighted in vague meaningless statements about science, æstheticism, agnosticism, and the like.

Sceptics were roused to do their worst by the very success of the Gospel, whose progress during the last century had been unprecedented. With increased facilities for disseminating truth Christianity has infused its spirit, more or less, into the literature and science of all the great progressive races of the world.

Among the triumphs of the truth may be instanced the abolition of slavery, the reformation of the criminal codes of the civilized nations, the elevation of woman, the observance of the Lord's Day as a season of rest, the establishment and direction of educational and humane institutions of every description, the improvement of international relations, lessening the horrors of war, and teaching nations to settle their quarrels by rational arbitration.

In view of such triumphs it was not surprising that the enemy was busy in propagating unbelief. With regard to the question, viz., the best method of counteracting modern unbelief, the answer was: Nothing but the revealed truth of the living God, accompanied by the Holy Ghost, could accomplish this task.

1. We should seek to make a full and loving proclamation of God's saving message to all men, and this should comprehend a clear and systematic course of instruction in all the great doctrines of grace. Nor should the ethical and devotional teachings of the Bible be withheld, for truth accurately formulated and earnestly proclaimed was the proper antidote of error. But more than dogma was needed. Men might be sound and at the same time cold and dead; and a wavering, theorizing, dead ministry was unquestionably one of the most potent causes of unbelief, while men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost were the most effective in banishing it. Hence the duty of all believers at this time to be earnest and importunate in prayer that God would call and inspire with heroic faith and courage a great army of strong men, who, with honesty of purpose and personal conviction of the truth, would beat back the advancing hosts of unbelief: men who are not set upon lofty, sacerdotal pedestals, and who do not require to expend their energies in maintaining ecclesiastical forms and dignity, and who, without any feigned condescension, can come down to the homes of the people in the true spirit of the Master, to seek and to save the lost.

2. To meet prevailing unbeliefs, we required critical books on Apologetics, covering all the points of modern attack, and specially adapted to our own day. This difficult undertaking needed much sanctified skill and learning. The Church must carefully train her own sons to be scientists and critics, not in any narrow, bigoted spirit, or apart from the great universities of the world, but rather by enabling them to participate in the life and culture of those institutions, and to be fully acquainted with the investigations and discoveries of the age.

3. We required more thorough Biblical instruction in the family, where the foundations of true piety and Christian stability were laid, and where persons were fortified against the deadly assaults of unbelief.

4. The spirit of Christianity must be infused more fully into colleges and all institutions for higher culture. There should be in all such places men who are not afraid or ashamed to call themselves Christians, and who can speak of Christ and Christianity, of the facts and principles of revelation, with as much naturalness and decision as others talk about the "trata of the earth or the stars of heaven."

5. We required to put forth missionary efforts commensurate with the wants of the world.

6. The thought of Christian stewardship with respect to money and money's worth must occupy its true place in the Church. Sordidness, meanness, and appalling untruthfulness with respect to what men can or cannot afford to do for the Gospel's sake are characteristic sins of Christendom at this moment.

In combating unbelief, men must learn that the strongest parts of their creeds were those which they held along with all Christians, and the weakest parts those which they held alone. The unity of the mystical body of Christ must be maintained. It must be unmistakably apparent that they were all one in Christ, with one heart and one mind, pleading for the presence and the power of His Spirit, that when the victory was gained, as assuredly it would be at last, all the honour and glory might be to His name.

SLEEP.

"So He giveth His beloved sleep."

He sees when their footsteps falter, when their hearts grow weak and faint;

He marks when their strength is failing, and listens to each complaint;

He bids them rest for a season; for the pathway has grown too steep,
And folded in fair green pastures, "He giveth His loved ones sleep."

Lake weary and worn-out travellers that sigh for the day
light's close,

He knows that they oft are longing for home and its sweet repose;

So He calls them in from their labours ere the shadows at midnight creep,
And silently watching o'er them, "He giveth His loved ones sleep."

He giveth it, O so gently! as a mother will hush to rest

The babe that she softly pillows so tenderly on her breast.
Forgotten are now the trials and sorrows that made them weep;

For many a soothing promise, "He giveth His loved ones sleep."

He giveth it! Friends the dearest can never this boon bestow;

But he touches the drooping eyelids and placid the features grow;

Their foes may gather around them and storms may aroun' them sweep;

But, guarding them safe from danger, "He giveth His loved ones sleep."

Weep not that their toils are over; weep not that their race is run;

God grant we may rest as calmly when our work, like theirs, is done!

Till then we would yield with gladness our treasures to Him to keep,

And rejoice in the sweet assurance, "He giveth His loved ones sleep."

LAW, DEATH- GOSPEL, LIFE.—II.

Sin, by occasion of the resisting command, breaks out the more fiercely. Hence the law is only the occasion, and sin dwelling in us is the cause, as the shining of the sun is the occasion why a dunghill sends forth its filthy savour; it is the corruption and putrefaction therein that is the cause; so here the light of the law shining and discovering sin and duty is the occasion of sin's irritation and increase; but corruption itself is the cause.

The man that is under the law, joined to it as his head, hath no strength for his work, and the law gives him none and so he cannot live unto God; but the believer can say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Others have no strength to produce spiritual actions; sin domineers over them, and they have no ability to shake off the yoke of sin, their strength being but weakness. The believer has strength in his Head. "All things are possible to them that believe." Oh believer, be strong in the grace that is in Christ. Oh, it is strange, the grace that is in Him, is in thee, as the life that is in the heart is in the toe, the foot, the utmost members! There is a communication of vital strength and influences from the heart and the head to all the members. The believer's grace is in Christ; and the grace in Christ is in the believer. Here is a mystery to the world; but yet that mystery is wrapt up in that word, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"; "My grace shall be sufficient for thee, and My strength shall be perfect in thy weakness."

In Christ, his new Head, he hath liberty. Under the law the man is under bondage, severe bondage to the command of perfect obedience upon pain of death and damnation, and so under bondage to the curse of the law, and fear of God's everlasting wrath, and therefore he can do nothing. He hath neither heart nor hand to serve God; but in Christ he hath liberty. "If the Son make you free, you are free indeed." This is the glorious liberty of the children of God, begun in time, whereby they are not in case to live unto God. Now he is at liberty to serve spiritually, hopefully,

acceptably. "His labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." "He is accepted in the Beloved."

Our Head having performed perfect obedience, the whole body is reputed as having done it. His doing is ours, because we are in Him, as our Head, "accepted in the Beloved." Oh, what sweet liberty is here! What a sweet foundation for spiritual and acceptable service and living unto God!—*Ralph Erskine.*

WHAT WE OWE TO FOREIGN MISSIONS.

It is the fashion in some quarters to scoff at missionaries, to receive their reports with incredulity, to look at them at best as no more than harmless enthusiasts, proper subjects for pity, if not for ridicule. The records of missionary work in South Africa must be a blank page to those by whom such ideas are entertained. We owe it to our missionaries that the whole region has been opened up. Apart from their special service as preachers, they have done important work as pioneers of civilization, as geographers, as contributors to philological research. Of those who have taken part in this, Moffat's name is not the best known. Moffat, it may be said, has laboured and other men have entered into his labour. Livingstone has come after him, and has gone beyond him, and has linked his memory forever with the records of the South African Church. Speke and Stanley have become household names where Moffat has been unknown or has been forgotten. In his own simple words it never occurred to him, while coming among the Bechuanas, that he should obtain the applause of men. His one care was for those among whom he had cast his lot. He was an enthusiast of course—a man would be worth little for missionary enterprise if he were not this at all events. But he was an enthusiast with a clear sense of the right means to employ for the accomplishment of his unselfish task. He had a message to deliver of love and of peace, and he must prepare men to receive it by instructing them in the arts of peace. The progress of South Africa has been mainly due to men of Moffat's stamp. In him, as in David Livingstone, it is hard to say which character has predominated, that of the missionary proper or that of the teacher and guide. Certain it is that, apart from the special stimulus they felt as proclaimers of the Gospel message, they would never have thrown themselves as they did into the work to which their lives were consecrated. It was by no zeal for the spread of civilization on its own account that they passed weary years labouring and teaching among savage tribes, amid dangers of every kind, amid privations of which they themselves made light, but which only a sense of their high spiritual mission could have prompted them to face and undergo.—*London Times.*

SET THE YOUNG MEN TO WORK.

In an article on the relation of young men to the work of the Church, the *Nashville Christian Advocate* says: "The modesty that is often the accompaniment of merit prevents young men of the finest quality from thrusting themselves forward. It is only when the conviction of duty is very powerful that they will come to the front with the offer of volunteer service. So unusual is it in some localities for a young man to exhibit openly a desire for earnest and aggressive Christian work, that the moment one does manifest such an aspiration and purpose it is said on all sides: 'He is called to preach.' The idea of a truly earnest and active Christian life on any other basis seems to be inconceivable to some persons. The conservative principle, carried to an extreme in this matter, becomes harmful to the Church. It drags along in the well-worn ruts of a changeless routine. There is no infusion of fresh blood, no accession of new force. Conservatism is pushed to such lengths that it comes to pass, as the dull decades sweep by, that little or nothing is left to conserve. Deeply sunken in this miry road, there is just strength enough left for chronic grumbling, but not enough to pull out or prize out and make a new departure.

The pastor who knows how to enlist, organize and employ the young men in his charge has learned one of the secrets of success in his high vocation. But how to do this is the question that many will ask—a question more easily asked than answered. But we offer our suggestion:

Put them to work. Simply that; put them to work. You want the dignity and wisdom that belong to age and experience in official position, and you want also energy and enthusiasm. An infusion of young blood into an official board may give new life to the whole body. Among young men who have been truly converted you will find some who possess force without forwardness, who combine the modesty that becomes their years with the merit that qualifies them for efficient official service. This sort of young man will not push himself; but may be safely called upon to help carry the burden of official service.

An effort is being made to raise \$5,000 to procure an annuity for the widow of Paxton Hood, who is left in narrow circumstances. Mr. Samuel Morley heads the list with \$250.