

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### A PLEA FOR POPULAR INSTRUCTION IN THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE ENTER WELLINGTON MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION AND THE WELLINGTON COUNTY S. A. ASSOCIATION, BY THE REV. JAMES MIDDLEMISS, ELORA.

(Continued.)

If the views that have now been presented are, as we all believe, in accordance with Scripture, and borne out in human experience, they fully warrant a certain very definite and decided mode of procedure or style of utterance on our part in relation to the infidelity that is current. In particular, I would say that both in our public teaching and in our private intercourse, as we may be called or have opportunity to refer to the subject under consideration, we should have no hesitation or dubiety in pressing three things: 1. That the root of all infidelity in relation to Christ and His teaching is in the will, and not in the intellect—in the heart and not in the head. If a man lacks learning he is not at any disadvantage, and if he is possessed of learning it gives him no superiority, in so far as the attainment of a full persuasion of the divine authority of Christian doctrine is concerned. In the one case as in the other, the acceptance with full conviction of the claims of Jesus depends on a moral qualification which both are equally bound to possess. "If any man," learned or unlearned, "is willing to do the will of God," he shall surely come to a persuasion of the divine authority of Christ's teaching. It follows from this, that if he does not attain such a persuasion it can only be on account of his being unwilling to do the will of God. He may not allow that he is so. He may think he is not; and we may not be able to convict him of his unwillingness. But such is the judgment of Christ Himself; and that is enough to determine our judgment, and to warrant our pressing the charge on men's consciences. The man may not be immoral in the ordinary sense of the term; but there are other ways besides immorality in which unwillingness to do the will of God operates. And I have no doubt that if such a man were honest with himself in taking note of his own spirit and ways, he would see that the root of his infidelity is his unwillingness to do the will of God. With the judgment of Christ to sustain us, we should have no hesitation in affirming that, notwithstanding the pretensions of fanaticism and hypocrisy, there is a state of mind in which a man can recognize the voice of God when He speaks, and no hesitation in largely discrediting the current talk about honest doubting as being, to a very great extent, the cant of infidelity.

2. We should have no hesitation or dubiety in pressing the criminality of infidelity. If a persuasion of the divine authority of Christian doctrine depended on qualifications which few men can possess, then the great majority of men would be excusable in having no such persuasion. But when it depends on a qualification which all ought to possess; when, that is, the true cause of infidelity is unwillingness to do the will of God, infidelity can be nothing short of criminal. We shall afterwards refer to the perplexity of mind in relation to Christian truth that may be engendered by the utterances of the sceptic or the scoffer; but no sympathy that we may have with such as are perplexed, should lead to hesitation in the maintenance of the position that when the man, who is allowed on all hands to be the moral wonder of human history, puts the full proof of his claim as a divine messenger to the test of such a simple issue, no estimate can be formed of the criminality of the man who declines the issue, and fails to obtain satisfaction, for the sole reason that he is unwilling to do the will of God.

3. We should urge, and that not unfrequently, as required by the circumstances of the present time, the need that there is for advancement in that great attainment which is the privilege of all true Christians—the capacity to recognise the voice of God when He speaks. For the vast majority of believers, this must be their great safety in relation to Christian truth and duty, in these days when every peculiar truth of the Gospel is assailed, and every distinctively Christian duty discredited by plausible reasonings. Our people should be constantly reminded that while the natural man cannot receive or even know the things of the Spirit of God, can neither rightly apprehend nor truly believe them—there is a power of spiritual discernment possessed by believers, in which it is their duty and privilege to grow—a power in the exercise of which

they can discriminate between the voice of God and that of the father of lies.

While impressed in accordance with the views now presented, with a conviction of the supreme value of the internal evidence of Christianity, we are not disposed to overlook the importance of the external evidence. On the contrary, we believe that, while it is of such a nature as to be peculiarly attractive and interesting to some minds, it possesses a force which only strong prejudice can resist, and that it can be presented to any one of fair intelligence in such a way as to exhibit its force and make a powerful impression on his mind. And we cannot but think that while there has always been, and ever will be, a verification in men's experience of the saying of Christ which we have so largely dwelt upon, there has been a serious neglect of the external evidence in connection with popular religious instruction; and that, while comparatively few can make a thorough study of the historical evidence it is possible, and not at all difficult to convey to our people such an apprehension of it as may be of great use to them. We have not merely to consider the personal safety of true believers, as infallibly secured by the word of God and through its instrumentality; we have to consider also their comfort and usefulness, which in these times especially are in danger of being greatly hindered, and are, no doubt, greatly hindered in many instances by the difficulties and perplexities that are occasioned by the constant reiteration of doubts, honest or dishonest. And I am persuaded that many sincere Christians whose safety is assured, might not only have their own perplexities removed, but be very helpful to others if they only had a distinct apprehension of the way in which the facts of the Gospel history are established in common with other historical facts, and that by an amount of proof far exceeding that which can be adduced in favour of the other facts of ancient history. In the belief that our people generally, including at least a considerable proportion of our Sabbath scholars, are perfectly capable of such an apprehension, I would submit as a practical suggestion that their attention should be concentrated upon our Lord's resurrection in connection with the divine authority of His teaching. I make this suggestion because, while His resurrection is of the essence of the Gospel, and at the same time a fact whose acceptance carries with it the acceptance of the whole Christian system, it is a fact on which the light of historical evidence shines much more fully than any other miraculous fact of the Gospel history. Now, surely, it cannot be difficult to make it plain to any one of ordinary intelligence that our confidence in the testimony of a man, of whom we may otherwise know nothing, is inversely as we see that his own interests are promoted or injured by the testimony that he gives; and that, therefore, the testimony of the Apostles and other early martyrs, being not merely disinterested, but given at the expense of every interest of a temporal nature, is the highest kind of testimony possible, and above all suspicion. Nor can it be difficult to make it plain to an ordinary understanding, that these primitive martyrs do not belong to the same class as those who have in all ages evinced their sincerity by suffering for their religious beliefs or opinions, whether right or wrong; but that they suffered as witnesses of a fact respecting which, according to their own showing, they could not have been mistaken; or in other words, it was not as sincerely holding certain religious opinions that they suffered the loss of all things, but as the witnesses of a fact within the compass of their own personal observation. Nor, again, can it be difficult to make it plain to an ordinary understanding, that the universally current assumption of the more modern infidelity that any reported fact of a miraculous nature, such as the resurrection of Christ, is to be at once discredited and set aside, without any consideration either of the proof by which it may be sustained, or of the possible end it may have been designed to subserve, involves nothing less than the assumption of man's competency and capacity to sit in judgment upon God, and to determine the procedure proper for Him in all possible circumstances; whereas, repudiating an assumption so monstrous, the Christian assumption is simply that of our competency to judge of our own human nature, by the knowledge we have of it from actual experience and observation. Nor, once more, can it be difficult to make it plain that it is unreasonable to expect, as the current infidelity insists, that God's revelations of Himself should be accompanied by such an amount of

evidence as would carry conviction to the minds of all men indiscriminately; however they may be affected towards God; and that the most important moral purposes may be designed, as we can clearly see they are actually subserved, by God's giving just so much light as he does give and no more.

These, and the like issues raised by infidelity, while of immense importance, are few and simple—much less numerous and far simpler than is generally supposed; so that we cannot but think that much good might be done, and much evil prevented, by a little systematic instruction bearing upon them. Sooner or later, the objections to Christianity involved in these issues come to be presented to our young people; and the question is, shall they, as they grow up, first hear of these objections from those who first led them astray, or shall their religious instructors anticipate the efforts of the destroyer? Is it not far better that their minds should be preoccupied, by their being made acquainted with the way in which these objections can be met, than that their first knowledge of them should come to them in such a way as to lead them to think that they have been imposed upon with fables? However assured we may be of the safety of the genuine Christian, it can hardly be questioned that the great majority of our young people do not grow up so surrounded by an atmosphere of piety as to make their early conversion likely; and that accordingly the great majority of them do not give a very satisfactory evidence of their possession of genuine piety. At the same time, there are very many of these, unconverted though they are, for whom much has been done in the way of instilling good principles into their minds; and if, with the training of their conscience and their sympathies in connection with Christian truth, there were combined appeals to their understanding in relation to the important issues above referred to, their minds might be so intelligently prepossessed on the side of Christianity, that they would not be injuriously affected by assaults before which many succumb, and would also be helpful in preserving others.

### THE WALDENSES AND THEIR VALLEYS.

My last letter gave a general description of the Waldensian valleys, and of the work of evangelization which the Waldenses are carrying on throughout the kingdom of Italy. I shall now supplement what was then said by a somewhat fuller account of the valleys themselves, and of the work, educational and ecclesiastical, which is being done in them. Of the three principal valleys, St. Martin, Angrogna and Luserne, the last named is the most southerly, the most fertile and the most easily visited. Through the

#### VALLEY OF LUSERNE

which is about twelve miles in length and about two miles in width, flows the Pelice, whose waters irrigate the meadows on its banks, and keep them fresh and green. There is also a good country road as far as Bobbio, where Dr. Revel long laboured as a pastor, before he was called to the professor's chair. Between Bobbio and La Tour is the village of Villarò, which also had its church, its manse, and its school. At the entrance to the valley, where the torrent of Angrogna, rushing down from the valley of the same name, falls into the Pelice, stands the capital of the valleys,

#### LA TOUR

known here as Torre Pelice. Amongst its buildings are the college, normal school, synod hall, grammar school, museum and Vaudois hall (places of worship in the valleys are called temples) and near by is an orphanage for Vaudois girls. For several of these fine buildings the town is largely indebted to the late Dr. Gilly, of Durham, who was the first in late years to bring the inhabitants of the valleys prominently before the people of England, and for others of them to General Beckwith, one of the best friends the Waldenses ever had. These two names are everywhere met with, and associated with them is the name of Dr. Robert Stewart, of Leghorn, who happily still lives to help the Vaudois by his counsels, and to secure for them material aid from Christian people in all lands. General Beckwith was an English officer who lost a leg at Waterloo, and who, becoming interested in the Vaudois, took up his abode at La Tour about 1830; and here and at Turin he continued to reside until 1872 when he died at the age of seventy-three. He was a man of great energy and enlarged liberality, and devoted himself to the cause of education in the valleys, building comfortable school houses