

Symposium.

CURRENT UNBELIEF.

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THE title is suggestive. It seems to imply, as we hear it often implied or asserted, that unbelief is one of the characteristics of our day, that it is more general and deeply rooted. There is an unfortunate tendency always to think that the former days were better than these, and the Preacher may say to us as he said long ago, "Ye do not inquire wisely concerning this." There is not less belief today, but more. There is less formal belief; less make-believe; but more real belief. The world is not getting worse, but better. The Kingdom of God is not going backward, but forward. And the problem before the defenders of the Faith today is not so much how to account for or meet the unbelief of the times, as rather how to account for and meet the restlessness of belief. It is not so much that belief has died, but it has been made to shift its ground; some of its foundations have been severely tested and sorely shaken; many of the grounds on which it was insecurely and thoughtlessly resting have been called in question, and it has been asked more than in any previous age to give a reason for itself. We do not need to seek for evidences, they are around us everywhere, of the restlessness of belief. What has caused it? Is it mainly the result of attacks from without the Church, or of the failure or foolishness of the defence adopted by the Church? Many of us can probably look back to a time when the Bible was implicitly and unquestioningly received by us, when it had for us no mystery. We then had the faith of childhood. But since then we have come into contact with some of life's difficulties, with some of its dark problems, and we feel that if we are to stand strong, we must have a faith fuller and deeper, able to sustain itself under severest pressure. We feel that the Bible, if it is to remain to us the Word of God, must be the Book of Life. We may begin life and get on very well for a time with a faith we have simply inherited, but the faith by which we are to live and die must be our very own, must be won by us, and for most men it can only be won by being tried. It is a vain and useless dream to wish back again what Browning calls that dear middle-age which noodles praise, when all believed—man, woman, child.

"How you'd exult if I could put you back
Six hundred years; blot out cosmogony,
Geology, ethrology, what not,
And set you square with Genesis again."

It cannot be. If the Bible is to remain our Book of Life, its truth must stand in the clear light of all material revelations—of all science, and all