

I. The attacks of free thought were undoubtedly the occasion and the immediate cause of the apologetic works which they called forth,—works which have gradually built up and which form to-day an impregnable defence to the Christian faith. It was the attacks of Lucian, Celsus, Porphyry, Julian, Hierocles and other infidel writers which called out in defence the splendid works of Ambrose and Jerome, Eusebius and Apollinarus Cyril, Justin Martyr, Augustine and many others. The onslaught of Deism was hurled back by apologetic works of Locke, Browne, Bentley, Tillotson, Gardner, Conybeare and Warburton, and more especially by those works of enduring worth, familiar I am sure, to many of you—the Evidences of Paley and the Analogy of Butler, which rise above their contemporaries as yon mountain towers above the plain beneath. So, too, in the case of German Rationalism, it was Bauer's attack on the early origin of the Gospels that led Tischendorf to write "When were our Gospels written?" When the irreverent "Leben Jesu" of Strauss was first issued some men argued that it should be suppressed by law, but Neander said "No, we'll answer it," and answer it he did in his imperishable History of the Christian Church; and following in his footsteps has come the splendid schools of Kurtz and Giesler, of Lange and Tholeck and Dorner, whose works seek to harmonize reason and faith, and are equally marked by great erudition, enthusiastic loyalty to truth and fervent piety. Such works as these are a contribution to Christian literature, a means of instruction in Christian truth, a solvent of the perplexities of Christians and a weapon of defence both of the present and the future, and we owe the production of them to the attacks of free thought.

II. Rationalism has largely destroyed superstition. It were long to point out the prevalence of superstition up to the middle of the eighteenth century. The exaggeration of the mysterious, the belief in magic, in sorcery, in witchcraft, in charms, in alchemy and astrology was once well-nigh universal. This superstition led at times to epidemics of terrorism such as the dancing mania of the Netherlands, the Bianchi and the Flagellants. The fear engendered by these beliefs caused a constant and almost incalculable amount of suffering, especially to women and children. Worse than this, it led to the judicial murder of thousands of people suspected of sorcery. At Toulouse 400 of these were put to death in a single day. In the small town of Treves 7,000 victims of this accusation were burned to death. Such statistics might easily be multiplied. What has delivered us from these degrading fears and still more degrading cruelties? Christianity was founded partly on a belief in the supernatural. Superstition is an exaggeration of this belief. For Christianity to attack it, would seem to the ignorant of those days to be attacking its own foundation. This service was