

1. That our common Christianity is undoubtedly in imminent peril. The venerable watchman speaks of no imaginary phantoms that startle the timid. His graphic, glowing, we almost said, frightful delineations, are of things that have a real existence, and not of things that rise fantastically on the vision of the aged, when the grasshopper is a burden and desire fails. Every day, such is the rapidity of things, shows men in new and startling light, the power and boldness of Jesuitism and Rationalism—the two extremes, between which lie a broad territory of pestilential error. And the Church of Christ owes gratitude to the man who breaks its peace,—an unthankful task,—by crying aloud, sparing not, lifting up his voice like a trumpet. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

2. That the conflict for all this is hopeful. The discouraging aspect of things arises not so much from God's people falling away as from others who were with them, but not of them, going out from them. It is not that the water is becoming more muddy, but that the sediment by being precipitated is more visible. The light inside the dwelling is not burning less brightly, though without the night is darkening into midnight gloom. Let us hear what another watchman on the tower of Zion says of the night. If Dr. Duff has been forty years in the work of missions, Dr. Robert Hailey has been fifty years in pastoral and professoral work at the centre of Christian thought in England. Speaking of the English Independents, and their progress during the last fifty years, he says:—

“Our fathers looked out of the dim and hazy windows of their old meeting-houses on crowds for whom they felt they could do nothing; and now no man or woman in the courts of this great city is regarded as utterly hopeless, or out of the reach of our city missionaries. You have expended a great deal of money in Sunday schools, and on town and city missionaries, and you have been abundantly compensated in the elevation of the whole moral character of the community. In the last fifty years the change is wonderful.

As to our own denomination, the progress is remarkable. We have done noble work for others, and we are improving ourselves. Don't tell me our preachers are not better than they once were. I believe they preach better, and they are better men. We now preach the gospel more directly, more earnestly, more affectionately and freely. The men of the earlier period used often to dispute with each other—Calvinists with Arminians; and the bitter words of Toplady and John Wesley found utterance among their followers; but Arminians prayed like Calvinists, and Calvinists preached like Arminians. An anecdote is told of Rowland Hill that, after preaching a sermon to prove that it was impossible for any man to fall away from grace, he leant over the pulpit and said, ‘I should not recommend any of you to try it.’ There is less rigidity, less stiffness in the preaching of the present day. Old Congregational preachers used to busy themselves with questions such as those which occupied the thoughts of Jonathan Edwards, Andrew Fuller, and Edward Williams, as though the great foundations of our faith depended on the niceties of metaphysical reasoning. I believe we are preaching more fervently than ever Christ crucified—Christ, the Friend of the sinner, the enemy of no man, the kind Friend—none kinder—that gave his life for his friends. I think little of other matters now; little of controversies, little of old divisions. I think now of one great truth—the preaching of the simple gospel,—Christ crucified to save sinners. Standing here in my old age, I am happy to express my assent and consent to that one doctrine. I refer to no other; and to that I say, Amen and Amen!”

3. That the conflict, though hopeful, is still so serious and perilous as to call for greater zeal and more unity among Christians. Dr. Duff is too wise a man, and altogether of too practical a cast of mind to play the role of an alarmist and to write thus, as the boy cried wolf, simply for the pleasure of seeing people frightened. From beginning to end of his address he has one definite practical object in view. He counts up the numbers of the enemy, he defines their position, he describes their strongholds and their weapons that he may (1) rouse the Christian army, inclined to lethargy, to action, and that he may (2) unite its forces into one general effort for the common defense. The church in which he is a recognized leader was on the verge of