

"CAUSES OF UNBELIEF."

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A Paper Read before the Sunday-School Teachers' Association of the Deanery of St. John, on Tuesday Evening, Aug. 11.

(Continued.)

There is yet another class of unbelievers who are such because of a wrong educational bias, given to their minds by unbelieving parents, teachers or associates. But one of the saddest of all sights is that of a man who is an unbeliever through the inconsistencies, the bad and hypocritical life of professed believers. When we see valuable lives wrecked and ruined by such false lights on the shore, we feel that that terribly reiterated denunciation of Jesus: "Woe unto you, hypocrites, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell," only voices the "wrath of God which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

And so from all these causes we see an active, daring scepticism abroad. We see the Bible questioned in all its books and chapters as fearlessly as any other book. Its statements of historical and scientific fact are questioned. Inspiration is questioned. The miracles are questioned. Church observances and obligations of the Sabbath are questioned. Nothing can escape this searching spirit; nothing is sacred against its bold and unblushing intrusion. And this movement will undoubtedly go on. It is the intellectual drift of the age. We can no more effectually resist it than we can hold back the stars in their courses. We live in an age of restless inquiry, of suspicion and unbelief. But let us not fear the result. The great temple of Christianity will not be levelled to the ground. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid." Why? Because if we believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, the power of the Omnipotent will not suffer the work of the Son to be undone. "He must reign till he hath put all things under his feet." We may adopt the strong metaphor which Jesus himself used: "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, and on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder."

Again, we cannot fail to see that the most eminent leaders in this mental tread of the age, the thinkers and writers in literature, philosophy and religion whose names are world-wide known, are not hostile in spirit to Jesus Christ; they do not wish to see him dethroned. For the most part they are serious and earnest, if not devout, men,

THEY DO NOT SCOFF.

And while they do not profess to be his humble followers, they are manly enough to acknowledge a just appreciation of his character as the ideal man of these nineteen centuries.

And then, if we look at some great men in our modern day who are humble followers of Jesus the

Christ, we need not be ashamed of their deliberate and public action. At the recent Tercentenary celebration of the foundation of Edinburgh University (to quote from an eye witness) "there was brought together a galaxy of talent such as has not been witnessed anywhere in modern times. To the Scottish capital, and to do honor to one of the grandest seats of learning in the world, — science, art, literature, statesmanship, had sent their leading representatives. Much interest was centered in the student's meeting. Here the excitement was brought up almost to a white heat by the addresses of Minister Lowell, of Count Sacifi, of Helmholtz, of Laveleye, of Pasteur, and of Virchow. It was something to see these great masters. It was more to hear them speak. Helmholtz uttered a word of warning against what he called "false rationalism," in science; Laveleye reminded the students that their first duty was to seek the kingdom of God, but Virchow was the chief attraction, he surprised, astonished and produced a perfect furor of excitement when he proclaimed with emphasis that "evolution had no scientific basis." The Darwinian theory, he said, might be true, but what he demanded was proof, not hypothesis. Such testimony from the greatest anatomist, the greatest master of science now living, it was felt was a real triumph for religion. The general conviction produced by Virchow's utterance is that the tide has turned against infidelity. When such men can so testify, let no one's heart fail him.

And when we see such other men as Tyndall, Huxley, Darwin, Spencer and Haeckel, honest in their doubts, pure and upright in their morals, struggling to gain a fuller knowledge of the truth, let us not superciliously sneer at them, but pray that He who is the source of all truth will surely and safely lead them into that truth which alone can make them free.

A short time ago I read Herbert Spencer's dictum on "Religious prospect and retrospect." Though much in the essay was unsatisfactory, I was very thankful to read his concluding words: "But amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty that man is ever in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed." Even to such a materialistic mind as Mr. Spencer's, there is an amazing quality in that "force," which has toiled always and everywhere, now fixing the stars and the planets in their courses, now starting multitudinous forms of life, and we need not be surprised that in making up his estimate of this force his heart should have persuaded his logic to suspend its laws for an instant and admit the large words with capital letters, "Infinite" and "Eternal." In this "Infinite and eternal energy" of Herbert Spencer we recognize the "eternal mind" of Plato, the "Eternal" of the Hebrews, the "many gods" of the Egyptians, the "Great Spirit" of

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our red men, and the "Heavenly Father" of the Christian. According to Spencer, who represents a large amount of the most thoughtful unbelief of the present day, there is one absolute certainty, viz.: an "Infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed." Having made such an admission, all the premises of the New Testament are simple and easy. For such words from such men let us thank God and take courage.

THE LAST CAUSE.

of unbelief on which I would dwell is the differences and divisions of Christendom. A quite different aspect might Christendom have now worn, had societies and churches bearing the Christian name made it the chief object of their researches and efforts to ascertain and imitate the mind of Jesus. But it is with a heavy heart that every lover of peace and truth must turn to the pages of ecclesiastical history. A learned Church historian has said: "The early Christians, being Hebrews, Greeks and Romans, each division retained more or less of its theology, and each endeavored to bring the others to a regard for its peculiarities, as to times, places and modes of worship. In order to secure the desired consideration, they began to arrange and systematize their peculiarities both of modes and opinions, of forms and of faith. As nominal Christians increased in number and became allied with civil government, each system of opinions and forms, more or less perfected, sought after a legal and privileged pre-eminence," and thus the unholy and unbrotherly strife has continued century after century, leaving the volumes of Church history for ages down to this hour, little more than a mournful record of divisions, wars, persecutions, censoriousness and enmity among those who, in common, claimed to be the special teachers of a religion of peace, fraternity and love. Even now, in this very noon-tide of intelligence throughout many portions of Christendom — what is the burden of proclamation in the religious denominational newspapers and often from the Christian pulpit?

Is it the practicability, the duty and the excellence of lowliness of

mind, of doing nothing through strife and vainglory, each esteeming the other better than himself? Is it to this mind of Jesus that the old, the young and the whole thinking, acting world of mankind are constantly pointed? "So far from this, it is still to the necessity of faith or belief in certain schemes of redemption, or plans of salvation, or means of grace, prescribed or interpreted by various, varying and contending sects and churches; and this, too, while the laity are too much impressed with the real questions of to-day — the family problem, the labor problem, the educational problem, the temperance and social questions — to take much interest in "doubtful disputations" about nice points in purely abstract theology, scholastic theories of atonement, of inspiration, or of the future.

LET US ASCEND

to the highest accessible point of observation and survey impartially the condition of what is called the religious world. What does the beholder witness: Is it a spacious field of unwearied industry, of various and harmonious exertion, each one in his sphere laboring successfully, and all, without conflict co-operating peacefully toward individual and general good? Whatever scenes may yet in coming time await the observer, certain it is that no such gratifying and inspiring sight now salutes his longing vision. I thankfully acknowledge the advances in Christian brotherhood, the fraternal greeting at synod and session, which various great bodies in the Christian Church have made. Still things are not what they ought to be. Painful as it sometimes is to perceive the truth, it becomes us to acknowledge and to utter it, though it be as much in sorrow as in love. Despite all the advance it is a melancholy sight which the observer, and especially the doubtful observer sees in the religious world to-day. Noble spirits there are, moved by noblest impulses, in every party, sect or circle; large hearts there are, with ever enlarging sympathies, toiling and hoping for the world's welfare and striving to break away from the restraints which associations throw around them.

(To be continued.)