

may be gained, it is needful to have it continually in view that the members and adherents of the Church know their own wants, and that it is the part of those consecrated to the duties of office to bring supplies according to existing need. There is "one body," and we desire for it healthy appetite, with abundance of wholesome nutriment.

Whatever be the special difficulties of the pulpit in our day, there is a stimulating and attractive influence for a Christian teacher in the fresh demands arising in an age of unsettling and transition. It is not that "unsettlement" is in itself attractive, but that the thought stirred and the interest awakened are full of promise. While there is restfulness in calm, advance must involve trouble. This contrast in time and experience belongs to the necessity of life. As it is with night and day, as with sleep and waking, so it is with settled times and unsettled times in the history of the Christian Church. As with the tree, sending its grasp ever firmer into the soil as it is being tossed by the winds of heaven, so it is with the Church in trying times, breaking sorely on the calm. As in the atmosphere the storm is preparing for the calm, so in the life of the Church questioning is preparing for believing, doubt becomes a pathway to faith. A deeper enquiry leads to a firmer faith. "The foundations cannot be shaken." Faith is not by half what it should be when there is misgiving as to this.

At the same time, one part of the result to be noted when belief is challenged by others, and especially by those giving deliberate study to the questions raised, is the awakening of fear in the hearts of many who had previously delighted in contentment. At first sight it is apt to appear as if Christianity were being shaken, when it is only the Christian's experience that is being changed. It becomes chilly when the breezes begin to stir, but the life of the forest is not endangered by this. The laws of the natural world and those of the spiritual have been set in close analogy. Neither in the natural nor in the spiritual need we fear the ultimate results of commotion.

Sure as this is, however, it belongs to those who guide and aid us in personal life to bring us timely help, so as to quiet fear by guiding thought. There is no true help for times of unsettlement save by guidance in facing the difficulties of our life, both practical and speculative. There is grievous misunderstanding of the Christian position if it be supposed that it favours the disposition to turn away from difficulties, as if they were to be let alone, or were to have the go-by. "Oh ye of little faith, wherefore did ye doubt?" This "wherefore" is Christ's balsam for the fresh wound. Enquiry must meet doubt. Doubt must be dislodged by thought that undermines it, finding solid rock beneath shifting sand. This is the Christian method of deliverance. It fixes our duty in times of unsettling. "Search the Scriptures," search, and do not quickly stop; search, and do not be easily satisfied. The pulpit, even by its best efforts, can only give help and encouragement in this; with the Christian himself rests the task of laying his own doubts and fears, by considering the foundations of his own faith. It is not Christianity which is in danger; it is only the condition of a Christian's faith that is being tested. We must neither shun the spirit of unbelief as it sets its forces in motion, nor retreat in view of its approach; we must advance to the fight. The days are not yet drawing nigh when the Church of Christ shall be released from the conflict of faith.

There is good reason that the Church should ask help from the pulpit in such times as these, but there is reason for also keeping clearly in view the restrictions placed on the pulpit in such circumstances as the present. The public teacher must deal frequently with the common difficulties of life, and he must, therefore, be considerably hampered in dealing with the special difficulties of sections of his audience. He will not ignore the difficulties of any, but he can meet special cases only in such measure as is compatible with the common and persistent demands of Christian life. This will be recognized as reasonable. And if, in the days when the spirit of doubt is unusually active, we are tempted to a measure of impatience because the pulpit does not accomplish all we desire it should, it is well to remember that the main body of Christian teaching cannot be apologetic, and that it is not even desirable, in the interests of religious life, that it should become so in a prevailing and conspicuous manner. The Church of Christ never wavers in maintaining that the Gospel is its own witness. However true it may be that the spirit of the time requires adaptation of pulpit teaching to the wants of the age, Christianity itself is for all ages; the urgent wants of men are ever the same, as the grand problems of sin and righteousness stand out before us. "He that believeth will not make haste." The Bible in the hand is the guide of the life—a guide at once simple and profound; simple as are the stories of personal struggle and victory; profound as are the deep things of God. The confidence of the Church will ever find expression in these words of Jesus, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself;" or, as the words are in the revised version, "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself." An open Bible and an enquiring, unprejudiced mind are the main requirements of the times, if we are to deal wisely with difficulties raised in the way of Christian teaching.

Beyond this, and directly in the line now traced, will appear the Church's duty in dealing with current perplexities. The pulpit will seek to understand science and criticism, and even

scepticism itself, in order to have the teaching of Scripture brought into relation with new questions arising. The results of deeper research into the secrets of nature, of wider investigations as to the history of the sacred Scriptures, and of speculative difficulties as to the order and government of the universe are all matters of concern to the Church. The task of the Christian teacher is to understand science, to weigh criticism, to ponder speculative problems, and to estimate what concern the Church of Christ has in all these. It is evident from even these cursory allusions how large is the demand of our day on the ministers of religion. A reference to this demand will serve two ends, on the one hand to moderate expectation in view of the fact that the largeness of the demand is such that no single individual can meet it; on the other, to stimulate expectation, as the true teacher will prove himself one who discerns the signs of the times.

Looking at the matter next from the standpoint of the teacher, striving to meet at once the common wants of men and the special wants of the age, it becomes needful that he too should moderate expectations by reference to the grand central duty of preaching the Gospel of grace simply and fully. The whole Church will sustain him in his solemn and earnest regard to the primary demands of his ministry. But even while engrossed with these, he cannot fail to make account of what is passing around, tending to unsettle many by starting doubts and difficulties which even the most intelligent believers regard with some measure of perplexity. Help for the times, it will be the direct aim of the Christian ministry of our day to supply. And if this is to be afforded from year to year, with wisdom and success, there must be clear apprehension of the limits imposed on pulpit discourse. In some quarters, where unbelief finds favour, there has been a disposition to represent the public teachers of Christianity as the opponents of science. The days are passing away when such a charge can be sustained, or even allowed a measure of favour. By becoming students and expounders of science, the ministry have happily turned aside condemnation and distrust. But there is still need for a clear definition of our expectations and plans in seeking to gain the best results from public teaching of religious truth. The ideal of the Christian ministry is the teaching of the congregation as a whole—the aid of Christian life in every believer, and the guidance of the young into acceptance of the faith which is in Christ Jesus. Out of this view of the grand end arises, as a necessary part of duty, the removal of difficulties, and even more than this, training in facing difficulties, many of which in our days must be connected with matters of faith, as well as with matters of practice. The Christian teacher cannot always profess to remove difficulties; he must often admit that difficulties remain difficulties for himself, as well as for those who hear him. We should be the better for remembering more constantly than we do that the discipline of life implies difficulty for us, both in thought and in action. The more clearly this is recognized, however, the more obvious will become the arduous task of those who are set to be religious teachers and guides. They are to guide through the thicket which they cannot clear away.

In directing attention to the objections of the day against Christian faith, it is necessary to fix in our minds the acknowledgment that the raising of these objections is a necessity, not a misfortune. Christianity has advanced with our race into a period of quickened and intensified intellectual activity; and it has not only all the elements of preparation for such a cheering and hopeful time, but the power to lead in it. This is a distinguishing honour of Christianity, that, as it trains us to trust in God's guidance, so does it train to trust the intelligence God has given, and the revelation He has provided. Christianity will lead wherever intelligence will press forward; it will ever favour the spirit of enquiry—never the spirit of agnosticism. This it is which will inspire the Christian teacher with courage as well as reverence, and with hope even under a deep sense of responsibility. There are, indeed, many able and earnest scientific men who do not see this, and we cannot expect them to admit it. We must be content to wait till they come to know Christianity better. It is the Church's part to make its teaching, and also its spirit, better understood by the whole nation.

The wants of the times, however, need to be pondered that they may be understood. Advance means change, and the true significance of the change is found in understanding the advance. The things that cannot be shaken remain with all generations, as a common inheritance. We, in this rather boastful nineteenth century, are not so greatly in advance of our fathers as we often take ourselves to be; but we have possibilities they had not, and we have responsibilities of the greater measure. The secrets of Nature are being discovered now as never before; the riches of grace found much earlier the fullness of time for their revelation. It is no disadvantage to grace that science has come in behind as a later revelation. That it must be a gain will become daily more clear. The difficulties of the present day are those which belong essentially to a time of awakening. As we rejoice in the awakening itself, so shall we rejoice in the fresh demands on Christian faith, which come with greater breadth of knowledge. In order that the Bible may be for all nations, it must be for all times. It can afford to travel the whole world, and to travel through the ages. It will demonstrate that all can "learn wisdom" by its use. A larger knowledge of Nature has not brought a truer knowledge of man, but has rather obscured some forms of knowledge most valuable for us. The great gain of our age has indeed been its enlightenment; its greatest need is more enlightenment.

The religious perplexities of the age are those which belong to a time of transition. In coming to know Nature more fully, there is temptation to suppose that there is nothing more than Nature to be known. Hence the objection against the supernatural, and therefore against miracle. The objection might as well run farther—against righteousness—and next, against Jesus as the embodiment of righteousness; but this does not seem so easy to maintain. Yet the criticism, which hesitates as to thorough going application, is ready to be turned back. In advancing to the comparison of all languages, and of the condition of all peoples, gathering up the materials of universal history, we bring new tests to bear on sacred history. Hence the objection of the new criticism, that the general knowledge sweeps Christianity into a common lot with other religions, and treats her so-called sacred books as common literature. Again we say, be thorough, for if you cannot reduce Christianity to the level—if you cannot sweep its sacred books into the ordinary history of literature—criticism is helping to establish Christianity, and is preparing its own defeat.

If, when the Christian Church is encountering objections which seem to strike against its special defences, the pulpit is to render fitting help, Christian teachers need to show true intellectual appreciation of the objections—understanding of their source—even a breadth and depth of intellectual life appreciating the deeper meaning of modern progress—going along with it in hearty good-will—able to speak its language, to breathe its spirit, and to discover how Christianity strengthens and ennobles human progress. Occupants of the pulpit—the men of an earlier generation and the men of a later—the men of conservative tendency, and the men eager for advance—must hold together, not merely in outward relations, not merely in sight of the people, but in heart and interest, as truly united in motive and work. We do not say that there is no difficulty in this—we do not deny that there is risk of suspicions and misunderstandings—but the difficulties are to be conquered. The misunderstandings are to be taken away. The men who confer in Presbytery as to order, organization and work, will be wise if they confer freely, in the social gathering, as to the Church's relation to the shifting phases of thought in the age in which our lot has been cast. Intellectual force and courage, and unhampered conference among the ministers of religion, we have to seek. No minister has reason to fear free conference, except the man who has no devotion of heart to the Gospel of Jesus, and who has therefore no title to a place in the pulpit. The Church has, however, reason to shun the appearance of rival groups or sets in the ministry of the Gospel. That is really a divided Church, not a united Church, which speaks of High Church, and Low Church, and Broad Church within its own borders, as the Church of England does. It will be well for us in Scotland if we shun the beginnings of such antagonism. There is ample room for diversity in unity, without antagonisms. There should be no Christian minister who is not progressive, none who is not conservative; and if there be diversities they will have their natural place, and will prove mutually corrective and helpful.

On the other hand, the service to be rendered by the pulpit to the people in these times of unsettlement is a very great service. If progress is not to result in unsettlement, the people must see clearly how progress connects with Christianity; and this must appear from the general drift and tendency of pulpit teaching. Difficulties must be fairly faced. But the work done in this respect must be mainly constructive in method, for we have less to do with refutation of objections, than with revelation of harmonies. We do not so much need to controvert the position of adversaries, as to unfold the teaching of Christ.

At the same time the Church is called earnestly to consider what she owes to the enquiring, the unsettled, the doubting; and very greatly what she owes to the educated and the scientific who are apart from her communion. By intellectual force going wider than the range of ordinary pulpit teaching, she must tell of the strength of reason which holds its place within the circle of her ordinary teaching. All are not equally fitted for doing such work as lies beyond the usual course of Gospel preaching. But the Church has large resources at her command, and there is urgent need for using them all. Representatives of the Christianity of the nation should deal with the difficulties which are being suggested, and being thrown into varied form for ready circulation. Besides the ordinary teaching of the sanctuary, besides the systematic instruction of the Bible class, there is intellectual help to be rendered to thousands by a free handling of the perplexities which are being largely felt. There is, indeed, much evangelistic work to be done—simple telling of the Gospel of peace: there is scope for large sympathy, bringing the treasures of Christian love to bear on the sore struggles which extend themselves sadly in the midst of our modern civilization; and there is, besides, a large place for clear exposition of the basis of Christian faith, for open encounter with the forces of unbelief, for deliberate weighing of the honest difficulties of men and women who want to know and be satisfied—who wish to see how the reason for the faith of the follower of Jesus stands the test of modern criticism—and who wish to be assured that Christianity is at once broader and grander than science and philosophy. The Christian Church has need to set her forces in array, calling the right men to do the right work. Neither the men nor the opportunities are wanting, if only the Churches will consider how needful work is to be done.