

Symposium.

CURRENT UNBELIEF.

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THIS subject is embarrassingly vague and comprehensive. Unbelief is not defined, and the area over which it spreads, whether in Canada, Germany, France, or elsewhere, is not indicated. Perhaps this is wise, since with modern facilities for the distribution of knowledge, the thoughts and opinions, good and bad, of any one country are speedily disseminated over the civilized world. Nothing can now be done in a corner. What is told in the ear is soon preached on the housetops. Thus faith and unbelief get the fullest publicity, and are more widely diffused at the present day than ever before. And yet Sir William Dawson asks, "can such a thing exist as current unbelief? Unbelief is a purely negative quantity. How can it be current?" The answer is, negatives imply positives. For example, according to an old and much neglected manual of theology, the negative precept, "Thou shalt not kill," "requireth all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life and the life of others." Besides, I venture to suggest that instead of unbelief being "a purely negative quantity," it is an evil spiritual force in man which is quite positive, and impels him to offer opposition to God and His truth. In this sense it is certainly current everywhere, for Jesus says, "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad."

But Sir William adds, "there may be a rapid current in a stream, but scarcely in its dried up bed." True, but this stream of unbelief, sad to tell, has never been dried up. It started in Eden, when the lie of the devil was acted upon instead of the truth of God, and its bed has been deepened and widened ever since in its progress through the ages and with the growth of the human race. One of the most obtrusive facts in the history of unbelief is its unbroken continuity in spite of all that has been done to sweep it out of the world.

It is obviously vital to this discussion to settle definitely what is meant by faith and unbelief because they are directly antagonistic. It is confidently alleged by many that men have boundless faith in science, banks, railways and such like. This is undoubtedly correct, but is quite foreign to the matter in hand. Such faith often co-exists with the most determined unbelief.