

The Church Guardian.

Upholds the Doctrines and Rubrics of the Prayer Book.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."—Eph. vi. 24.
"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."—Jude: 3.

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THE ASSUMPTIONS OF MODERN SCEPTICISM.

The scepticism of all ages, and especially that which parades itself before the public to-day, is made up largely of assumptions. Its defenders deceive the world by first deceiving themselves. We do not charge them with hypocrisy or with dishonest motives. Their worst sin, like that of the earlier Phariseism, is blindness.

We call attention to two of its assumptions, and we select these two, not because they are the chief or the most illogical, but because they are the ones most likely to deceive the unthinking, and to work harm in any country like this, where men are wont to follow the opinions of others.

I. The first of these assumptions is that the Church created the doctrines which she professes and teaches. Scepticism asserts that these doctrines are the product of human thinking; that the "shaping spirit of a credulous imagination fashioned them from nothing, or developed them out of a series of ordinary events." This we deny. The postulate which scepticism asks the world to accept, and on the ground of which the Church is advised to modify its teachings, is an unproved hypothesis, a bold and glaring assumption.

Until it has been shown just how this natural creation or evolution of a supernatural belief took place, scepticism has no rational ground on which to stand. Those who profess to desire that Christianity should adapt itself to the present condition of thought and to the demands of "modern culture," ask the Church to drop, gracefully and quietly, its belief in miracles, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, and in the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Ghost, and thus to rid its creed of all preternatural mysteries. After this has been done, it is claimed, all that is essential in Christianity will still remain.

Much of the world's current literature abounds in advice of this sort. It constitutes the burden of most of the religious teaching which is furnished by some secular newspapers. But the chemist is not asked to give up his particular beliefs.—The political economist is permitted to hold, unchallenged, certain principles pertaining to his science. The astronomer can continue to assert what he alone surely knows, and can clearly prove.

Christians believe in a supernatural system, in a spiritual world, in a divine economy, and in a heaven which lies beyond the telescope's range, but which "God hath revealed by His Spirit." This belief rests upon the basis of fact. When scepticism demands that Christians resign or modify that belief, it is, in reality, though probably not consciously, asking that they shall give up either altogether, or in part, that over which they have no control. The Church cannot deny her faith before it has been disproved. Every clearly ascertained fact is rooted beyond the power of man to disturb it. Men can indeed change what plainly lies within their assigned jurisdiction. They can, for example, amend the civil constitution which they have framed; but they cannot repeal the laws of nature; nor can they make the facts in the revelation of Jesus Christ other than what they are. The Church is the child, and not the parent of the Gospel. It is, therefore, just as absurd to talk of casting aside its ancestral faith, as it would be for a boy to deny that he is the son of his mother.

II. Another assumption of scepticism is that the majority of thinking men are coming over to its side; and that, if the Church expects to retain any

portion of her influence in human society, she must conform her teachings to the dictates of this "progressive spirit." Such advice is, likewise, based upon the merest hypothesis—the blindest kind of a guess. No statistics on this point have as yet been collected. Christianity and civilization are linked together. Wherever the light of the gospel has spread, and is now shining, there are progress and culture. The overwhelming majority of Christians believe in the literal truthfulness of the Nicene Creed, and accept, without question, the supernatural facts to which that Creed bears witness. The proportion of those who have rejected the divine mission of Christ is one in ten thousand. It is, therefore, but a manifestation of ignorant bluster, or of culpable blindness, when this or that misbeliever says that the orthodox believers are in the minority.

But even if they were, that fact would, of itself, furnish no reasonable warrant for the Church changing its faith. The reality of that faith does not depend upon popular suffrage. It was not voted into existence; and nobody, not even the whole world, can vote it out of existence. If Columbus had conformed his belief to the opinions of the age in which he lived, he never would have set sail for the West.

If the men who rail at the Church, because of its persistent clinging to the faith first delivered, and who lament what they call its "narrowness," will open their eyes and extend their vision beyond the little corner which they inhabit, they will find that genuine catholicity is synonymous with a belief in the supernatural character of Christianity. All teaching to the contrary is but the fringe of a misty assumption.

We therefore, advise them to examine carefully the evidence, which has, for nearly two thousand years, commended Christianity as a supernatural religion to the reason, as well as to the faith of the world's wisest, most profound and "best cultured" people.

And we warn the public not to be deceived by any mere assumption which scepticism may happen to display. The Church does not fear investigation concerning the credibility of its claim.—*The Churchman.*

MINOR CHURCH OFFICES.

We have pointed out many times, and quite recently in commenting on the success of the Salvation Army, that a very large part of the success of Dissent with a certain stratum of the population is due to the considerable number of petty posts it creates for distribution amongst the members of each society, so as to indulge to the uttermost feasible extent the craving of most men for some measure of authority to wield, and for exercising influence within their own immediate sphere of action.

It was the rule in the Church of England, till within living memory, to confine the minor office-bearers practically to the Churchwardens, the schoolmaster or mistress, the parish clerk, and the sexton; while it was not usual for two or even three of these posts to be filled by a single person. The earliest improvements on this condition of things were the enlistment of Sunday school teachers and the institution of district visitors. The spread and popularity of musical services in parish churches led to the enrolment of choirs in a multitude of places, but this change does not represent advance

so much as recovery, for the village orchestra was a familiar feature in our grandfathers' time, and was unwisely swept away in favor of an organ, or later, a harmonium, played by a single performer, usually the school-mistress or one of the ladies of the parsonage. There has been thus very little scope provided for such as desired to be actively employed, and not merely passively acquiescent, members of the Church. It seemed as if there were nothing for them to do, or at any rate that the clergy of the Church were inclined to throw cold water upon offers of service, if not actually to resent them as the outcome of conceited officiousness. The snubbed and rejected postulant saw that friends and acquaintances of his own, with no greater aptitude for work of an ecclesiastical kind than he felt in himself, were eagerly welcomed by the Dissenting organization to which they happened to belong, and were provided with work which gave scope to their energies, and satisfied their modest ambition to be of some recognized use in the cause of religion. And the result was in too many cases that men of this stamp transferred their allegiance where it was thought of some value, or sank into cold and disaffected membership, as unprofitable as open hostility towards the society which had refused to utilize them.

The Catholic Revival has made further breaches in the old system of isolation, for the guilds and confraternities it has multiplied over the country provide outlets for the longing after association and office which are permanent factors in the minds of active and intelligent men.—*Church Times.*

SUCCESSION AND THE EPISCOPATE.

"As we believe the flowers of the field to be, each in its line, the legitimate successors of the originals, as they bloomed first from the Creator's hand, although we are quite unable to trace the succession back to the miraculous beginning; as we are sure that the line of believers has never failed in happy succession, back to the Disciples who first sat at the Master's feet, although we are entirely unable to trace the line through the centuries gone by; as we know the Bible to be a true copy of a copy of another copy still, back to the inspired pen of Moses and Matthew, although we are equally unable to trace the lineal succession; so we are certain, that the present Bishops or Apostles, are the rightful successors of Apostles who succeeded others, in unbroken chains, back to the hands of the adorable Master." (Rev. F. S. Mine's "Presbyterian Looking for the Church," 300.)

"Recollecting the exceeding care taken by the Primitive Church that the Ordination of the Bishops should not be done in a corner, (see Apost. Canons I.), it seems very unlikely that there should be any invalid Episcopal Ordination; and it certainly seems strange that any ordained Priest should seek to lower his high office, by suggesting doubts as to the reality and soundness of that link, which binds him in a mystical tie to the Apostles themselves, and so upward to the Saviour." (Bishop Nixon, Lectures on Catechism, 351.)

"As, breathing the breath of natural life into the first man, God gave him, by a single act, a power thenceforward physically transmissive through the whole immense series of the human race, so, with evident allusion to that act, breathing on the Apostles the Holy Ghost, our Saviour conferred, once for all, a spiritual power, analogously transmissive, to innumerable, spiritual successors." (Rev. Archer Butler's Sermons, I. 439.)