

FEATURES OF THE TIMES.

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The following, from the pen of the Rev. Dr. Fraser, appears in the January number of the *Messenger and Missionary Record* of the English Presbyterian Church. There is so much that is common in the circumstances of the two countries, and in the events that are transpiring on both sides of the Atlantic, that we are sure the remarks made by the writer will be felt to be quite appropriate to ourselves:

"A quaint preacher is said to have divided his discourse into three parts—retrospection, circumspection, and anticipation, so as to give himself free scope and range of speech over all things past, present, and to come. The opening of a new year invites us to all these lines of thought, but we propose to take up the second only, and briefly to put before our readers the result of our survey and circumspection. The time we live in appears to us—

"1. *A time of severe mental conflict.* It is true that in our country there is no hot political strife, and the sound of battle is unheard. We are in tolerably good humour at home, and at peace with all the world. Nevertheless it is a time of great intellectual agitation. On every side the minds of men are unseated or perplexed. Nothing escapes question. Conventional ideas are roughly handled, and hereditary beliefs are rudely shaken. The world is ill at ease, and in a strange impatient mood. Two tremendous battle are being fought.

"1. The struggle between Priestism and the spirit of civilised society. The former abates no jot of its lofty pretensions; and opposes all modern ideas, the liberty of the press, the freedom of worship, the rights of individual reason and conscience, in a spirit as arrogant, exorbitant, dictatorial, and intolerant as in any former age. The resistance to this comes more and more from the whole habit of thought which has grown up in civilised communities; and, accordingly, though there is no very marked progress in the more strictly religious antagonism to sacerdotal claims, we perceive with some pleasure that those claims excite a feeling of growing disgust and a spirit of scornful resistance in the breast of modern society, and especially among men of the largest intellectual calibre and widest political influence.

"2. The contention between unbelievers and believers for the very foundations of the Christian faith. It is not merely the inspiration of Scripture that is in dispute: it is the very existence of the Supernatural and Divine. The possibility of miracles, the reality of prophecy, the alleged discrepancies of sacred story, have long been under debate; but now the battle rages round the very person of our Saviour. Well that it is so; for the spears of controversy are sure to break when they touch Him. It baffled men to account for Him when He lived on the earth. Their witness against Him "agreed not together." And so now, the writers against our Lord are at variance with each other. Even if there were a scarcity of orthodox replies, which there is not, these writers would to a large extent neutralize one another; while many of them are producing a salutary reaction towards faith by their frank disclosures of the dreary negative of hope and joy to which unbelievers doom themselves. The outlook on the whole is reassuring to the Church; and never was a time when so many hearts believed and were sure that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.