

Editorial.

PROSPECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

There are few men in our day better qualified than Dr. Duff to answer, with regard to the Christian Church, the question, "Watchman, what of the night?" He is a man of long experience in Christian work. He is a man of varied experience. He is a man of extensive travel over Europe, Asia, Africa and America. He is a man of large acquaintance with the leading men in the different Protestant Churches of the world. In the Providence of God he occupies, therefore, the position of the watchman on the fire-watcher's tower, under whose eye the whole city is, and at whose voice men ought to awake.

From his vantage height, Dr. Duff, in his "Crisis of the Christian Church," from which we made extracts in our August number, looks first *backward* over the past, and from his rapid historical survey, deduces what he calls the "downward law of degeneracy."

"Man's nature," he says, "once infected with the disease of sin, or moral evil, immediately came under the fell influence of its ever downward tendency—a tendency so strongly marked, and so invariable, that it may well be designated the *law*, the inflexible downward *law of degeneracy*, ending, if not arrested, in hopeless decay, corruption and death, as regards true religion and pure morals."

This statement, the existence in other words of this law of degeneracy, he proves by citing instances such as the apostasy of the Church at the time of the flood, at the time of Abraham, at the time of the Babylonish captivity, at the time of the destruction of the Jewish nation, at the time of the Reformation. In the face of such instances and other facts that might be adduced, it cannot be denied that the tendency of

men, of society, of nations, of churches, is away from God, and downward, excepting in so far as God by special means arrests this downward course. This law is so notorious that a heathen poet—Virgil—notices it in his famous words;—

Facilis decensus Averno; &c.

"The descent to hell is easy," he says, "but to retrace one's steps, to regain the lost position, this is work, this is hard toil."

Having thus surveyed the past, and established from it this sorrowful law, Dr. Duff then looks *around* and asserts that under the influence of this law the Christianity of our day is on the borders of perilous times. In his view the fatal, downward tendency that has so often brought the cause of God to the verge of extinction, has once more set in with alarming force, threatening, unless timeously arrested, a widespread apostasy from Christian faith and Christian virtue.

"It looks," he says, "as if the whole legion of known or possible evils previously pent up, had been suddenly let loose to embroil the whole world of humanity in tumult and confusion."

After specifying the various evil agencies at work—Popery, infidel literature, licentiousness, avarice, spirit of lawlessness, he concludes, "that it has come to pass that the world, with the whole of which we have to do, and it with us whether we will or no, has been brought into a state of crisis,—an oecumenical or world-wide crisis,—such as it has never been in before, since Christianity itself was born in the manger cradle of Bethlehem."

Now with regard to this conclusion, so like in many respects to the estimate Paul made of the Christianity of his closing days—"They shall turn away from the truth and be turned into fables," II. Tim. 4, 4. We remark:—